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José Lezama Lima's Paradiso: Knowledge and the Labyrinth

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Dedication

In memory of my father

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José Lezama Lima's Paradiso: Knowledge and the Labyrinth

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In this study Lezama's Paradiso is "the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image," a metaphor for his search for ultimate enlightenment--knowledge of super nature toward the Highest Good. The Preamble introduces the novel Paradiso as his poetic sum of knowledge generated by the Cognitive Eros like an encyclopedic narrative with revelation at the center. Chapter One presents labyrinth fundamentals and the mythic method to analyze the novel. It identifies a heightened perception or sensation, cognition, and imagination as "new" senses "beyond reason" needed to read this "new other" novel. It also explains how the author's clues aid comprehension, how the poetic word illuminates a fourfold method for interpretation, and how the double structure of the narrative superimposes a circuitous pathway of multicursal storylines and descriptions of Old World images upon a linear unicursal surface narrative. Chapter Two examines three cognitive images in Lezama's labyrinth: Confluence analyzes how multiple streams of thought and images flow from chaos into order in the poet's mind and how the

labyrinth's principle of opposition represents the convergence of contradictory images whose combination will inspire other images. Androgyne or Oneness illustrates the nature of creativity--how symmetrical opposite images unite or copulate to germinate other imagery. Figure and Revelation show Lezama's use of Scriptural figura to represent the prefigurative sense of his writing. Chapter Three interprets Lezama's own labyrinthine method and steps for interpreting Paradiso derived from his scrutiny of "the other" analogous novel, Julio Cortázar's Rayuela. The study concludes that Paradiso delivers Lezama's Delphic Course, a systematized literary orientation based on the belief that each text transmits wisdom. The protagonist/reader undergoes Anthropophany, is transformed into a learned interpreter and a higher self toward manifestation in the image of the Word/God. With the author-protagonist as mentor Paradiso proclaims Lezama's ideal program of cultural, intellectual, ethical, and spiritual formation of the individual after the classic Greek Paideia, parallel to the way of purification and redemption achieved through the Paideia of Christ. Finally, the text embodies Lezama's crusade to restore Cuba as a bridge for cultural exchange and development between the Old World and the New World.

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PREAMBLE.

**LEZAMA'S CIRCLE OF KNOWLEDGE,
THE LABYRINTH, AND PARADISO**

The eros of knowledge transmits a totality . . . (El amor de conocimiento transmite una totalidad . . .)¹

Paradiso has much of poem. . . . In my poetry, essay and novel form part of the same digging into the marrow of the elder tree. (Paradiso tiene mucho de poema. . . . En mi poesía, ensayo y novela forman parte del mismo escarbar en la médula del saúco).²

Like a summa--what Paradiso really is--as said in the Middle Ages, I thought I had to achieve a novel . . . (Como una súmula--lo que en realidad es el Paradiso--como se decía en la Edad Media, creí que debía llegar a una novela . . .).³

. . . it is an obligation to take poetry to the labyrinth where man confronts and overcomes the beast. In short, the total victory of poetry against all the intercrossings of chaos. (. . . es una obligación llevar la poesía al laberinto donde el hombre cuadra y vence la bestia. En fin, la total victoria de la poesía contra todos los entrecruzamientos del caos).⁴

José Lezama Lima

¹ "Plenitud relacionable," Tratados en la Habana, José Lezama Lima: Obras completas vol. 2 (México, D.F.: Aguilar, 1977) 478.

² Cartas a Eloísa y otra correspondencia (1939-1976) (Madrid: Verbum, 1998) 141.

³ "Interrogando a Lezama Lima," Recopilación de textos sobre José Lezama Lima, ed. Pedro Simón (1970; Madrid: Casa de las Américas, 1995) 19-20.

⁴ Cartas a Eloísa 141.

For over half a century the life and works of the Cuban poet, editor, essayist, theorist, storyteller, novelist, critic, and mentor José Lezama Lima (1910-76) have attracted the interest of intellectuals but not the attention of the general public.⁵ The general audience ignores expressiveness like his. His breadth is too cosmopolitan, his meaning is too diffuse, his vision is too peculiar and his system of thought is too complex. But his works, published from the nineteen-thirties to the seventies, have stimulated much scholarly analysis and criticism in Hispanic and comparative letters.⁶ Few figures in the canon of contemporary Latin-American letters have inspired as much amazement, acclaim, perplexity, resistance, and revalorization. Perhaps our only point of agreement is that he and his work are difficult.

⁵ Note: Hereafter I refer to the author as Lezama and use the abbreviation JLL. In quotations from foreign publications the translation appears first, the original text follows in parentheses. When a translation is not available I provide my own version. In general, my sources for Lezama's major works are: essays, the Aguilar JLL: Obras completas mentioned above, noted as OC II; poems, JLL: Poesía completa, ed. Eliana Dávila (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1994), noted as PC; novels: the critical edition of JLL: Paradiso, coord. Cintio Vitier (Paris: ALLCA/UNESCO Archivos, 1988), noted as Paradiso (plus the chapter in Roman numerals); and JLL: Oppiano Licario, ed. César López (Madrid: Cátedra 1989), noted as OL (plus the chapter in Roman numerals). I also cite from the English version of JLL: Paradiso, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), noted as P-Rabassa. When my analysis of the novel requires a more exact rendition, I depart from Rabassa's translation and enclose my own in brackets.

⁶ Studies of the author and/or his texts include: Brett Levinson, Secondary Moderns: Mimesis, History and Revolution in Lezama's American Expression (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1996); Aída Beaupied, Narciso hermético: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz y JLL (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool UP, 1997); Ben A. Heller, Assimilation / Generation / Resurrection: Contrapuntal Readings in the Poetry of JLL (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell UP, 1997); Virgilio López Lemus, La imagen y el cuerpo: Lezama y Sarduy (La Habana: Unión, 1997); a chapter pertaining to Lezama in Alan West, Tropics of History: Cuba Imagined (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1997); a reading manual, Remedios Mataix, Paradiso y Oppiano Licario: Una "Guía" de Lezama (Alicante, España: U de Alicante, 2000); and a perspective of the author relative to comparative letters, César Augusto Salgado, From Modernism to Neobaroque: Joyce and Lezama Lima (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2001). In addition: Iván González Cruz, ed., Archivo de JLL: Miscelánea, (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Ramón Areces, 1998); Iván González Cruz, ed., Diccionario: Vida y obra de JLL (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 2000); Iván González Cruz, ed., JLL: La posibilidad infinita. Archivo de JLL (Madrid: Verbum, 2000); Carmen Berenger Hernández y Víctor Fowler Calzada, eds., JLL: Diccionario de citas (La Habana: Abril, 2000); and Cacheiro Varela, Maximino, dir., et al., Diccionario de símbolos y personajes en Paradiso y Oppiano Licario de JLL (Vigo, España: U de Vigo, 2001).

Lezama was formed in the early decades of the twentieth century but thought and wrote according to earlier paradigms. According to Gustavo Pellón, Lezama's modern ingenious and cultured style keeps the ingenuousness and coarseness associated with painter Henri Rousseau,⁷ so that he can give modernity to Rabelais and Góngora. Lezama shares with some a penchant for a crude vision and expression of sexuality and with others a penchant for the sublime or dignified. Explicit representation of sexuality, sexual acts, and sexual bodies can thus be expressed in high style and elevated form, according to a cultural aesthetic characteristic of an earlier or a more modern time.⁸ These excesses made his discourse contradictory, ostensibly illogical, and awkward. But they also gave him the power "to dissolve dichotomies and to embrace the totality of existence" in an effort to provide visions of "the other side of things."⁹

Lezama's poeticizing is on par with Mallarmé's notion that "[t]he frame of mind essential to the reader of much modern poetry [modern prose] is that of an experimentalist for whom speculation and hypothesis proceed continuously, [. . .] and for whom certainty is the remotest and least practical of goals."¹⁰ Consequently Lezama is as skilled in the "arts of tangential thinking and oblique, suggestive utterance" as was the

⁷ Pellón compares the distinctive styles of the two artists in "Conclusion: The Henri Rousseau of the Latin American Boom," José Lezama Lima's Joyful Vision: A Study of Paradiso and Other Prose Works (Austin: U of Texas P, 1989) 85-118.

⁸ See Allison Pease, Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000).

⁹ Pellón 96. The critic interprets Julio Cortázar's assessment of Lezama's ability to see what lies beyond reality.

¹⁰ Malcolm Bowie, Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 4.

symbolist poet.¹¹ Lezama observes and meditates and inscribes his visions as if they were descriptions of the empirical process. Much like his French predecessor, he is also receptive to instances when “familiar meanings” disperse and the abyss or a “blur of potential meanings” fills the void; his poetry and prose also offer “gaps, elisions, discrepancies and unannounced shifts of register” in “the interplay between their units of sustained sense.” Refusing to be “absolute in his search for cohesion, he interrupts the development of an idea in medias res “in order to explore” its components or to give similar or contrasting ideas “their say in the matter.”¹² Thus in his style an “untrammelled pursuit of images sacrifices the flow of narrative.”¹³ Indeed,

Lezama’s aesthetics place the highest value on the production of a stream of images and analogies that flow from each other by association, pushing the readers to the limits of their interpretive faculties. The privileged role he accords to imagery necessarily leads Lezama to favor the descriptive element over the purely narrative element.¹⁴

Though some consider Lezama’s praxis of discontinuities, disruption, and excessive description of images to be a defective and primitive form, the author’s approach is intentional and innovative.¹⁵ His style aims toward a classic but primitive form: the labyrinth. Through that form, he can write in a style of aporiai (Greek for impassable paths, self-contradictions, paradoxes, oxymorons). The style of “simultaneous

¹¹ Bowie 4.

¹² Bowie 5.

¹³ Pellón 1.

¹⁴ Pellón 1.

¹⁵ Pellón 85, 116.

affirmation of antinomies” or aporia is the style of the labyrinth as a form.¹⁶ And I contend, as Bowie does for Mallarmé, that Lezama’s “capacity for the manipulation of dramatic hiatus, [or aporia, because Lezama favored Greek terms over Latin] within his texts is one of [his] vital strengths as a thinker.”¹⁷ His ways of thinking and seeking truth and knowledge by means of certainty-uncertainty in labyrinthine form transforms him into a philosopher, similar to those of early Greece. The path of certainty-uncertainty in a labyrinth leads him, in turn, into the beliefs and mysteries of early Greek theology, the most diffused throughout the Mediterranean. The author provides us time and again with unpretentious statements of his desire to attempt the impossible: the knowledge of the Greatest Good (Summum Bonum). Even though Lezama suggests that this is undertaken as a journey into “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” (“el misterioso laberinto de la imagen cognoscente”)¹⁸ his interpreters have circumvented his words, not giving them their proper signification. In his quest for cognitive images--images that know or are in the act of knowing--and their interpretation, Lezama is constantly moved by Tertullian’s credum: “Certum est, quia impossibile est” (“It is certain because it is impossible.”)¹⁹ In effect,

Lezama’s style insistently seeks difficulties; it persists in battering the darkness. Strangely, however, his quest for hermeticism is not motivated

¹⁶ Penelope Reed Doob, The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages (1990; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 9.

¹⁷ Bowie 5.

¹⁸ P-Rabassa 436; Paradiso XIV 429.

¹⁹ Pellón 13.

by the postmodern pessimism that sees language as a prison house, but by a mystical belief in the miraculous power of words to discover and to communicate truth. [His] poetic practice consists of the search for images that will illuminate and gradually lead to ultimate enlightenment.²⁰

Lezama describes a twentieth-century journey in the terms and form of early Greek theology. He journeys in a belief and because of a belief, his certainty based on the impossibility that the end of his journey will produce a vision of his Greatest Good.

We must go beyond characterizing his work as a “literary monstrosity” and be confounded, rather, by the fact that his perspectives are not fixed or final. To comprehend his works calls for a new intellect, as he insinuates in the quotations prefaced to this dissertation: 1. “The eros of knowledge transmits a totality;” 2. “Paradiso expresses ‘a summa, a totality;” 3. “Paradiso has much of a poem;” 4. One must “take poetry to the labyrinth where man...overcomes the beast . . . the victory of poetry against the intercrossings of chaos.” Unbiased readers and enlightened scholars follow these four steps of Lezama’s conception and vision. Like his, their new understanding will surpass the “natural” condition and walk toward the knowledge described as “hypertelic” (“hipertélico”) or “beyond the limits.”²¹

Of course, Lezama is identified with the difficult. His style of representation--representation as if in a journey through a labyrinth--is difficult. He himself tells his readers that his work is difficult. “Only the difficult is stimulating;” he says, “only the resistance that challenges us is capable of extending, provoking, and maintaining our

²⁰ Pellón 13.

²¹ Emilio Bejel, José Lezama: Poet of the Image (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1990) 83-84.

capacity for knowledge [. . .]” (“Sólo lo difícil es estimulante; sólo la resistencia que nos reta es capaz de enarcar, suscitar y mantener nuestra potencia de conocimiento [. . .]”).²² Lezama recognizes the difficult as the path or bridge to knowledge. The process of attaining knowledge is not a smooth linear process; it is circular and convoluted. The process does not follow a direct, linear path but one marked by doubling back between trial and error, certainty and uncertainty. Trial and error involve circular movement. One goes around and around the same problem until one solves it. The achievement of a tidbit of knowledge represents the beginning of a new cycle of learning. A most appropriate image for learning is the labyrinth. “Few if any images of a planned path through ignorance to understanding are better than the labyrinth.”²³ The convoluted paths of the labyrinth and the labor required to orient oneself--find the way--requires much circumambulations (from the Latin for “walking around in circles”) and much observation (from the Latin for “keeping notes of what’s in front of me”).

Lezama’s works represent--literally “make present again for the reader”--the search for knowledge which is driven by what he calls the “Cognitive Eros” (“the Eros Cognoscente”), the “eros that transmits the totality.” This is Lezama’s Platonic concept for the driving desire or devouring appetite for knowledge that responds to the instinct to develop to a higher level. If the labyrinth signifies the method for the acquisition of knowledge, and if Lezama and his works represent the attainment of such knowledge,

²² “Mitos y cansancio clásico,” *La expresión americana*, ed. Irelemar Chiampi (1957; México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993) 49. This statement of obsession with the difficult is a preamble to Lezama’s concept of the historic image.

²³ Doob 57.

then he and his works are labyrinthine. Then readers and critics appropriately label the author and his works not “monsters” but “labyrinths.” He and they are complicated, chaotic, hermetic, and mysterious, almost bordering on the monstrous. The epithet is appropriate, for the word literally means hard labor from within: Laberinthus dicitur de labor et intus, i.e., spelled “labor” together with the adverb “within” (intus).²⁴ “The hard labor from within” is essential to the goal. The eros stimulates “labor from within” toward an impossible but believed goal “beyond the limits.” This etymology of labyrinth signifies both a poetic (creating out of criss-crossing chaos) and a philosophic (literally “loving ... wisdom”) quest for truth, where wisdom (Gk. sophia, Lat. sapientia or Sp. saber to the extent of sabor as if wisdom were a “taste” derived from the senses) is the greatest consolation for the toils of the search. Lezama’s quest for knowledge is a philosophical process, derived from the sensations activated by the Cognitive Eros.

The attainment of such wisdom is Lezama’s goal, the goal being at the center of his labyrinth. Circular paths surround this central image, “wisdom,” the object inspired by “eros.” Lezama’s labyrinth, particularly that of his novels, represents the process and the product, the parts and the “totality,” a summa of knowledge. This novelistic endeavor recovers the medieval form or genre that Thomas Aquinas develops in the three parts of a philosophic-theological form--Summa Theologia--and Dante’s terza rima renders in the one hundred cantos of a tripartite poetic form--the Divine Comedy. As Mazzota explains

²⁴ Nicholas Trevet, Commentary on Boethius’s “Consolation of Philosophy.” Cited in Doob 95.

Lezama in terms of Dante, Lezama's vision also claims poetry, albeit in poetic narrative prose, to be the foundation of all possible knowledge.²⁵

As much as Dante, Lezama pursues the circle of knowledge to such a degree that Lezama entitles his Summa with the Italian word Paradiso instead of the Spanish Paraíso.²⁶ Indeed, Dante's and Lezama's "primary model for the representation of a unified totality is the encyclopedia."²⁷ The Gk. paideia (teaching) and enkuclios (in a circle) is the derivation of "encyclopedia," the same called in Latin a Summa or De Universo ("About Everything"). The terms designate a "round learning," the learning that makes "rounded" persons, because they have "run through" (Lat. curricula) the "steps" (Lat. gradus) in "the cycle of education in the diverse disciplines of the curriculum."²⁸

And just as Dante's Divine Comedy is "primarily a critical reflection on history" and "Dante's sense of history [is] the ground and the core of the Divine Comedy,"²⁹ the same holds for Lezama. First, Lezama situates his image of the historical Cuba at a historic pinnacle, just as Dante locates Florence. (Lezama's statement above, "only the difficult is stimulating" refers to his vision of the image in history as we shall see below).

²⁵ Giuseppe Mazzotta, Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 3.

²⁶ Mazzotta offers an insightful study of how Lezama's creative process involves Dante's in "'Paradiso' en el 'Paraíso'" Cuba: Un siglo de literatura (1902-2002), coord. Anke Birkenmaier y Roberto González Echevarría (Madrid: Colibrí, 2004) 147-189.

²⁷ Mazzotta, Dante's Vision 4.

²⁸ Mazzotta, Dante's Vision 4. Further, the Gk. term "paideia" includes the concepts of education and the development of the intellect for the ethical formation of the individual as a process of enhancement of the culture. For an acute analysis of how Lezama enacts the process of paideia in Paradiso see César A. Salgado From Modernism 108-128 and "El periplo de la paideia: Joyce, Lezama, Reyes y el neohelenismo hispanoamericano," Hispanic Review 68 (2001): 72-83.

²⁹ Mazzotta, Dante's Vision 3.

Second, Lezama's work assembles a history from the foundation of Cuba to the "present time" of the novel. Thus Lezama's work reflects Cuban history in an image. The image, participating in the summa of Cuban history, is at the center or core of his every endeavor. Of course, that historical image for Lezama is crafted with the distinctive American expression that arises from the fertile "gnostic space" that engenders new knowledge from its own cycle and manifestation. The prolific space of the Americas is impregnated with extraneous or foreign knowledge coming to its shores and this fertile space becomes a womb that gives birth to new knowledge. In abstract terms, Lezama conceives of this process of germination as a difficult phenomenon of reconstructing historical visions woven by the image actively participating in history:

[...] but, in fact, what is the difficult? The submerged, if only, in the maternal waters of darkness? The original without causality, antithesis or logos? It is the form in formation in which a landscape goes towards a sense, an interpretation or a simple hermeneutics, to go later towards its reconstruction, which is definitely what marks its effectiveness or disuse, its organizing force or its dull echo, that is its historical vision. [...] The historical vision, that is that counterpoint or weave given by the image, by the image participating in history

([...] pero, en realidad, ¿qué es lo difícil? ¿lo sumergido, tan sólo, en las maternas aguas de lo oscuro? ¿lo originario sin causalidad, antítesis o logos? Es la forma en devenir en que un paisaje va hacia un sentido, una interpretación o una sencilla hermenéutica, para ir después hacia su reconstrucción, que es en definitiva lo que marca su eficacia o desuso, su fuerza ordenancista o su apagado eco, que es su visión histórica. [...] Visión histórica, que es ese contrapunto o tejido entregado por la imago, por la imagen participando en la historia.)³⁰

³⁰ "Mitos y cansancio clásico," La expresión americana, ed. Chiampi 49.

Lezama, like Dante, captures the difficult phenomenon of germination compiling and linking images of knowledge into an encyclopedic, poetic, and epic narrative. An epic is a heroic quest for achievement which is engraved in myth and legend. Lezama's Paradiso layers the epic of the soul in spiritual ascension over the epic of the artist in poetic ascension. The labyrinth is mythical and legendary and its image represents these mythical and legendary quests. The encyclopedia is a suitable metaphor for the labyrinth because it is primarily used as an instrument for obtaining old knowledge of the human being and the universe leading to new knowledge of the beyond which is revelatory. The being in the labyrinth undergoes an education while walking (reading/rewriting) the circular paths of the labyrinth, i.e., "learning in circles" (encyclopedia). The walking can be conceived as poeticizing, that is, walking in measured steps (as in Gk. for "metrics"), sometimes "turning" (as in Lat. verso), sometimes "standing" (as in It. stanza), sometimes "achieving" (as in Fr. à chef, Lat. ad caput, English "to a head") a clear summation of events thus far, always "ending" (Lat. finis, Gk. telos), for a poem or summa always has a conclusion even though the end or conclusion may be left open. If the knowledge sought is "total," then "encyclopedic" is the right image. If the knowledge is simultaneously linear, circular, spiral and cyclical, and if the learning process follows a unicursal path or a multicursal one, then "labyrinth" is the proper image.

Thus this preamble threads the foundation for this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE.

TOWARD A COMPREHENSION BEYOND REASON

Paradiso will be comprehended beyond reason. Its presence will accompany the dawn of the new senses (El Paradiso será comprendido más allá de la razón. Su presencia acompañará el nacimiento de los nuevos sentidos).

José Lezama Lima¹

ONE. OVERVIEW OF LEZAMA AND HIS WORKS AS LABYRINTHS

To study Lezama's labyrinths is an arduous challenge, for Lezama's labyrinthine paths traverse a vast and webbed panoply of ideas and deeds that are profoundly rooted in Cuban, American, and universal philosophy, religion, history, and culture. His visionary and diverse thoughts converge to produce a complex discourse distinguished by a confluence of faith (as in syncretism), and an intricately interlaced design that embodies a varied and metamorphosing ideological process. His style of writing follows the mannerist and contrastive pattern of the labyrinthine meander, the winding discourse made complex with the use of versatile language, allusion, symbolism, parody, intertextuality, myth, irony, transformation, and the proliferation of images.

¹ "Dossier I. Manuscritos de Lezama: Apuntes para una conferencia sobre Paradiso," included in Paradiso Archivos critical edition coordinated by C. Vitier, 714.

Avid in the search for the critical sum of that which is American, Lezama valued universal culture like Borges did. In Lezama Cuban and Latin-American cultural expressions partake of universal origins and developments while maintaining their autochthonous significance.² This is why the archetypal, universal labyrinth is a constant in his imaginary, except the labyrinth is evenly turned indigenously Cuban. The maze-like image appears in Lezama's first collection of verses, Inicio y escape (written before 1937 but published in 1983). A full labyrinthine course runs through the sinuous and classic stanzas of his Muerte de Narciso (1937), and thereafter the labyrinthine idea informs his critical and theoretical essays, permeating his entire bibliography and creative process. "To follow the thread of such creative process," states a critic, "implies burrowing oneself into a labyrinth replete with blind exits, clues of very difficult interpretation, and criss-crossing pathways" ("Seguir el hilo de tal proceso creativo implica adentrarse en un laberinto pleno de salidas ciegas, pistas de muy difícil interpretación y senderos que se entrecruzan").³ The maze's manifestation reaches its apex in the novel's first part, Paradiso (1966), is sustained throughout his last verses, Fragmentos a su imán (1977), and Paradiso's sequel, Oppiano Licario (1977).⁴

² This search is the subject of Lezama's collection of essays, La expresión americana (1957; 1993).

³ Emilio de Armas, "Introducción," JLL: Poesía (Madrid: Cátedra, 1992) 19.

⁴ In addition, Lezama published a Coloquio con Juan Ramón Jiménez (1938). The poetry collections: Enemigo rumor (1941), Aventuras sigilosas (1945), La fijeza (1949), Dador (1960), and various single poems, such as "Oda a Julián del Casal." The essay collections: Tratados en La Habana (1958), La cantidad hechizada (1970), Las eras imaginarias (1971), Introducción a los vasos órficos (1971). Moreover, he used the pen also to promote the work of other poets: Antología de la poesía cubana (1965). Recompilations contain Obras completas, 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Aguilar) 1975 and 1977 [which excludes

Thus the novel achieves the perfect harmony: the two in the one.

New senses also demand that we recognize the vastness of Lezama's foundations. Lezama's creation of a mytho-theological work rests on a remarkable achievement: founding, publishing, editing and interpreting some of the most inclusive and progressive intellectual journals produced in the Havana of the first-half twentieth-century.⁵ He describes his "intellectual friendships" as "labyrinthine," ever "advancing and receding;" friendships paralleled the fecund nature of the maze.⁶ Equally maze-like and legendary were his magisterial conferences and his mentoring system. He named the latter with the mythical phrase "Delphic Course" and configured it after the Paideia, the ideals that organized the formation of individual citizens according to the classical Greek tradition.⁷

some poetry collections, essays, and the novel, Oppiano Licario]; Poesía completa (1970; La Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1994); Cartas: 1939-76, ed. Eloísa Lezama Lima (Madrid: Orígenes, 1979).

⁵ Lezama founded, published, and edited the journals Verbum (1937), Espuela de Plata (1939-1941), Nadie parecía (1942-1944), and Orígenes (1944-1954). Literary historians have acknowledged the latter for its singular contribution to the diffusion of literature, philosophy, and culture throughout the Hispanic-speaking world. Orígenes was labeled be "the most important journal of the [Spanish] language" of its time (Jean-Michel Fossey, Entrevista, "Interrogando a LL," Recopilación de textos sobre JLL, ed. Pedro Simón (1970; Madrid: Casa de las Américas, 1995) 15-16).

⁶ Lezama professed that the friendship network nurtured his production and that of his coetaneous artists and spoke candidly about the circle of artists involved in Orígenes and the "Orígenes" Group. See "Interrogando a LL" Recopilación, ed. Simón 15.

⁷ Lezama gave conferences and lectures at various venues, including the University of Havana, Havana's National Institute of Culture, and the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba. For Lezama's mentoring program, see Manuel Pereira, "El curso délfico" in "III. Historia del texto," in Paradiso Archivos critical edition, 598-618; and José Pratts Sariol, "El curso délfico," Revista Casa de las Américas, 152 (1985): 20-25. Lezama's source for the classical Greek tradition of formation was Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford UP, 1945).

Lezama incorporated the representation of the classical Greco-Roman ideals into Modernist aesthetics, as did Alfonso Reyes and James Joyce.⁸

The copious and nearly labyrinthine academic analytical and critical works about the author and his texts promote our understanding of the Lezama phenomenon.⁹ Still, the myriad approaches, emphases, and contradictory plurality of the scholarship demonstrate that much of the author's extraordinary vision, unbridled style, confluence of ideas, and constellations of images remain distant and indefinable. Studies prove that Lezama and his works resist classification; commentaries acknowledge his many aspects, but yield only partial images, some saying either too little or too much about the man and his works.¹⁰ Although a few studies cover the mythical vein in the author in some form or fashion, the investigation presented here, even if partial and flawed, addresses how the author's work embodies the idea of the labyrinth and its significance in the overall content and structure of his accomplishments. The assurance that there is much to be learned about Lezama and his works compels me to expand the academic knowledge.

⁸ Again, for a study of the Greek Paideia in all three authors see César A. Salgado "El periplo de la paideia: Joyce, Lezama, Reyes y el neohelenismo hispanoamericano," Hispanic Review 68 (2001) 72-83; and his From Modernism 108-128.

⁹ The bibliography on Lezama runs in the hundreds of entries. Various anthologies of critical studies include their own bibliographies. Among others, see Pedro Simón, ed., Recopilación de textos sobre JLL (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1970); Justo C. Ulloa, JLL: Textos críticos (JLL: Critical Texts) (Miami, FL: Universal, 1979); Cristina Vizcaíno, ed., Coloquio internacional sobre la obra de JLL, (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1984); Eugenio Suárez-Galván, ed., JLL. Ser. El escritor y la crítica (Madrid: Taurus, 1987); Cintio Vitier, coord., "III. History of the Text" and "IV. Readings of the Text," Paradiso Archivos critical edition, 537-696; and Araceli García Carranza, ed., Bibliografía de JLL (La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1998).

¹⁰ Pellón 1-12.

To study Lezama himself as both the creator of a textual labyrinth and as a labyrinth is to stand on firm and fertile, albeit primordial ground, since, from its beginnings, the labyrinth myth refers to “primary, foundational materials.”¹¹ The construct of the labyrinth represents human dynamics; the model, therefore, signifies a myth as “vital” or “alive” as myths were/are. Since myth “shapes and ‘in-forms’ a culture directly and immediately,”¹² a reasonable and sensitive look at our society’s ethos reveals that the motif is strikingly attentive to the cultural and intellectual arena of this new century, attracting the renewed attention of artists and scientists for its utility to organize ideas, images, and processes within the symbolism of creation. The prevalence of the labyrinth and the plentiful bibliography (hundreds of entries) on its many aspects from Antiquity until the present times manifest its vitality and perseverance.

Various twentieth-century studies explain how literary labyrinths pictorialize disrupted, interrupted, completed or eschewed journeys, real or imaginary, early or contemporary. After Homer, Plato, Virgil, Ovid, Boethius, Dante, Chaucer, Góngora, Sor Juana, Goethe, Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Mann, Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Cortázar, and Eco, to name a few, Lezama laid out a labyrinth of language in order to attain and communicate knowledge through his unremitting thoughts and visions in an open-ended teleology and theology.

¹¹ William G. Doty, Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals (University, AL: U of Alabama P, [c. 1986]) 8.

¹² Doty 8.

When Latin Americanists think of labyrinths, their thoughts lead to Borges. Because the labyrinth is so ubiquitous in his works, it can be said that Borges and his stories epitomize the image. An association between Borges and Lezama as labyrinth-makers makes sense here but a comparative study is beyond the scope of this project. However, a brief contrast of the two mythographers compels me to say that Borges' labyrinths might lack the comprehensibility of Lezama's. Thinking of Borges' story "The Aleph" my perspective is that many of Borges' labyrinths portray the inextricability of the maze as they leave the intricate labyrinthine situation unresolved, in suspension; "The Immortal" is left forever suspended in life. His journey narratives involving labyrinths such as "Death and the Compass" that portray the process of life often lead to death; whereas "The Garden of Forking Paths" does not end but the garden forever multiplies.¹³ One could say that Borges' labyrinths enact the in malo, or "bad," end. On the other hand, Lezama's labyrinths enact both the in malo and in bono ("good" end) to illustrate a wider range of possibility. As we shall see, his labyrinth of the poet's initiatory journey in Paradiso ends in a death (the mentor Licario's) but also an implied resurrection (the incipient poet Cemí embodies/gives body to Licario) and this encounter marks a new beginning, a rebirth.

To our knowledge there was no overt communication or written correspondence between Borges and Lezama. Evidently Borges ignored the Cuban author while Lezama

¹³ For a concise and comprehensive analysis of Borges' labyrinths see Wendy Faris, Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988) 88-120.

keenly observed, read, and responded to Borges' composition and ideas. Indeed, Lezama engaged the fabricated or "Other I" of Borges in a lifelong, unilateral dialog over the real Borges' depiction of universal ethos, myth, and labyrinth in his essays, poetry, and short stories. The authors' antagonistic vision of the novel in relation to the accomplishments of Joyce's novels supports this hypothesis.¹⁴ While Lezama celebrated and revolutionized the genre of the novel by renovating it as the dynamic center, path, dimension, concretion, and abstraction of a labyrinth, in contrast Borges recognized the novel only for its demise. The labyrinth permeates Lezama's general creation and informs and gives substance to his novels, just like his poetry informs and gives substance to his novels. A concern with Lezama's Paradiso is that it does not conform to the norm or reasonable form of the novel, so that in attempting to interpret the text we must exceed the analytical parameters of the genre. Notwithstanding the genre controversy, the author argued for the conception of Paradiso as a "poem-novel":

Undoubtedly, it is a poem-novel in the sense that it sets apart from the habitual concept of the novel. Paradiso is based on metaphor, on the image; it centers on the abolition of time, negation of accidents, and, in that sense, its recourses of expression are almost essentially poetic. I do not, have never considered myself to be a novelist. The poem has always been my form of expression; but there came a time when I saw that the poem was inhabited, that it was configuring itself into the novel, that there were protagonists that acted in life as metaphors, as images; I saw how those subjects would interconnect, how they got integrated, how they diversified themselves, and then I understood that the poem could be extended as a novel and that in reality every novel was a great poem.

¹⁴ Whether Borges ever read Lezama is a matter for speculation. A contrast of their labyrinths is wanting. See César A. Salgado From Modernism, particularly pp. 33-47 for a comparative study of Borges' and Lezama's reflections on Joyce and their antagonistic readings of the novel genre in relation to Joyce's aesthetic.

(Indudablemente que es una novela-poema en el sentido en que se aparta del concepto habitual de lo que es una novela. Paradiso está basado en la metáfora, en la imagen; está basado en la negación del tiempo, negación de los accidentes y en ese sentido sus recursos de expresión son casi esencialmente poéticos. Yo no me puedo considerar, no me he considerado nunca, un novelista. El poema siempre ha sido mi forma de expresión; pero llegó un momento en que vi que el poema se habitaba, que el poema iba configurando en la novela, que había personajes que actuaban en la vida como metáforas, como imágenes; vi cómo se entrelazaban, cómo se unían, cómo se diversificaban y entonces comprendí que el poema podía extenderse como novela y que en realidad toda novela era un gran poema).¹⁵

Given the complexity of the Paradiso as a hybrid text, explanations or exegeses of Lezama's labyrinthine approach and frame of mind in the narrative remain cursory, general, and partial even though the narrative of the novel in theory establishes a nation and its people in written testimony and gives them a unique identity. Hence the intricate and all-inclusive quality and quantity, the uniqueness of Lezama's labyrinths begs explanation. This study is in response to the need for a thorough understanding of the labyrinth as motif and as Lezama used it.

A study by de Armas identifies labyrinthine aspects in Lezama and traces his "poetry of the cognitive Eros" ("poesía del Eros cognoscente") to "the conducting force" ("la fuerza conductora"). De Armas finds the strong filament (Lat. filum, thread) that threads Lezama's poetic labyrinth: the cognitive Eros is "the clue of intricate threads that [weaves] Lezama's writing" ("la madeja de intrincados hilos que [teje] la escritura

¹⁵ "Entrevista con Margarita García Flores," "Interrogando," Recopilación ed. Simón 26.

lezamiana”).¹⁶ We must recall from the labyrinth myth that the “clue” is the ball of thread that Daedalus the labyrinth-maker gives Ariadne who then gives it to Theseus (the challenger of the Minotaur) so that it can lead him (and the reader/walker) out of the labyrinth. De Armas uses the clue and the thread to connect Lezama’s images (clues) to the inspiration of his cognitive Eros. Yet the study does not explain how the clue and labyrinth are mimetic artifices, inspired by Lezama’s poetic endeavor (“cognitive Eros”) to achieve wisdom (“beyond the limits”) by means of diffuse knowledge (various “clues” or “threads” or “filaments which attain and diffuse knowledge”). Indeed:

One of the most compelling currents that nurtures Lezama’s poetry arises from Eros, with volition for germination and knowledge, assumed in a dimension that transcends—and incorporates—what is specifically erotic and even sensual, in order to capsize into reality as a possessive outpouring of the self.

(Una de las más poderosas corrientes que alimentan la poesía de Lezama proviene, con voluntad de germinación y conocimiento, del Eros, asumido en una dimensión que trasciende—e incorpora—lo específicamente erótico y aun sensual, para volcarse en la realidad como un vertimiento posesivo del ser.)¹⁷

On the other hand, Salgado compares Lezama’s “narrative technique” in Paradiso to Joyce’s “technic of the labyrinth,” as Joyce used myth for “the orchestration of stray, apparently disconnected stories in an interlacing, multiple narrative layering [. . .] operating, [. . .] in the novel as a whole.”¹⁸ Salgado finds Lezama adopting Homeric

¹⁶ See De Armas, “Introducción,” JLL. Poesía 11-64.

¹⁷ De Armas 20.

¹⁸ From Modernism 103.

parallels in narration in imitation of Joyce. In so doing, Salgado explains, Lezama assumes “Joyce’s research strategy--the thorough and precise recreation of antiquity encoded or encrypted underneath an anecdotal surface [. . .], as if the text were an archaeological site.”¹⁹ Thus Salgado’s interpretation confirms the labyrinth in Lezama as an instrument for the recovery of the historical image. Instances of the labyrinth in Lezama’s Paradiso, i.e., passages where Lezama “encodes or encrypts antiquity underneath an anecdotal surface,” are the narrative technique. Salgado identifies three instances in Paradiso that demonstrate Lezama’s technique of the labyrinth: one, where the narration replicates stories in alternating rotation that give them the illusion of being simultaneous; two, where the technique intertwines seemingly disconnected narrations which eventually merge and detangle at the center of the textual labyrinth; and three, where multiple storylines converge in the same pathway through the labyrinth. Salgado shows how multilayered, entangled narrations in the novel flow together through a convoluted, confusing, and difficult passage or path toward a smooth resolution at the center of the labyrinth; and in the end, proclaims the labyrinth as the narrative technique that structures the totality of the novel.²⁰

However, the fundamentals of the labyrinth image in Lezama--its origins and elements--which to me elicit far reaching interpretations of the labyrinth in Lezama have yet to be addressed, necessarily so because Lezama’s text, as much as Joyce’s, is an

¹⁹ From Modernism 105.

²⁰ From Modernism 103-104.

“archeological site.” Unquestionably, the archaeology and archetype of the labyrinth that thoroughly permeates Lezama’s massive narrative is based on origins. Origins are essential elements of Lezama’s “poetic system of the world” (“sistema poético del mundo”), the vision that the world is poetic and can be known, interpreted, and understood poetically since its inception. As Salgado recognizes, in order to create Paradiso, (and, in my view, in order to achieve all of his creation) Lezama investigates the past through the vessels or storehouses of knowledge.²¹ He is, after all, a member of the “Orígenes” Group that established the fundamentals for pure poetry based on interpretation of the Beginning. It follows that Lezama pursues many “origins” or “etymologies” of words to pictorialize what he knows and interprets in his writing. Yet these “origins” remain understudied in Lezama’s labyrinths.

There is more to the representation of the labyrinth in Lezama than technique. For Lezama’s writing is experimental and does not spouse a specific technique, or at least a fixed one. Technique is method. Techne, a term that Lezama often used, refers to Form (Gk. Techne, Lat. Forma). But techne and “form” refer to the whole shape of the work, the Paradiso. The form of the labyrinth is Lezama’s literary artifice, the structure he imposes upon a chaos of diffuse narration and images: the artifice is a summa. We have already seen that a summa is both a product (the “totality”) and its parts, (the process or progress toward the whole--the “labyrinth”). How the technique and form develop into a “labyrinth” or summa or “whole” is obviously a major part of the labyrinthine process

²¹ From Modernism 105.

that needs to be explained. We now regard Paradiso as a whole or “totality” derived from “chaos,” the result of the “victory of poetry over the beast.”

The significance of the labyrinth derives from a long tradition of concrete (archaeological) and abstract (literary artifices) evidence. Archeology and archetype clarify what is meant by the labyrinth as symbol, its signs, and its fundamental elements, yet literary critics ignore the evidence. Oddly enough what was evident to Pliny the Elder, Isidore of Seville, and Dante about the circumambulating figure of the labyrinth seems to escape the moderns. For example, in order to interpret the labyrinth, we need to know that the circumambulating image with twists and turns, the meander that informs the labyrinth’s circuitous process is described by the Lat. ambages, which is related to ambo (‘two,’ ‘both’) and ambiguitas (‘equivocation,’ something with a double sense). The root ambi- (‘around,’ ‘roundabout’) implies “the dual potentiality that characterizes so many aspects of the labyrinth.”²² This characteristic manifests itself in circuitous opposition: wandering to and fro, changing in direction; thus any double situation such as dark-light, digression-regression, chaos-order, reality-no reality is a labyrinthine situation.

In studying Lezama’s labyrinth, we must keep in mind that the fundamentals of the labyrinth are essential to his labyrinthine cosmo-vision. These have not been studied in Lezama. What has been studied is the image of the labyrinth as an entangled process, and protagonists have been identified with mythical characters that stem from the

²² Doob 53.

tradition of the labyrinth myth, such as Cemí-Theseus or Oppiano-Icarus. Still, perhaps a brief review of the labyrinth story is relevant. The labyrinth myth involves Daedalus as artificer; Minos of Crete the Patriarch-King; Pasiphae the lustful Queen that after mating with the bull of Minos engenders the hybrid Minotaur hidden by Minos inside the treacherous labyrinth enclosure; Theseus' quest into the labyrinth in order to overpower and slay the Minotaur; Ariadne's present to Theseus of Daedalus' thread as unraveling guide to exit the labyrinth; the escape of Daedalus and his son Icarus by means of wings in flight; the fall of Icarus for flying near the sun; Daedalus' escape to another island away from the fury of Minos.²³ Finally, from a subsequent myth relevant to interpreting Lezama, we recall Daedalus' achievement of threading a conch shell through its many whorls by tying an ant's leg with the thread and luring the ant to walk to the exit, in pursuit of a drop of honey.²⁴ We know that the artificer of the labyrinth relates honey to wisdom, thus replicating an association that was a commonplace in Antiquity.

Because Lezama interprets the labyrinth in terms of its anthropological fundamentals, we ought to have at least a cursory knowledge of its developments. First, the labyrinth is a primordial Western symbol whose meander image developed in the Southwestern part of Old Europe in prehistoric times, beginning in the Neolithic, in the matriarchal stages of prehistoric European society. Further, the labyrinth meander originates in water, from the crest of the wave; thus its fertility symbolism signals

²³ The source for the myth is Ovid's Metamorphoses Book VIII.

²⁴ Apollodorous, Epitome Book I. Later unidentified myths mention the honey.

creation out of chaos, origins. It was originally used in the cult of the prehistoric Great Goddess or Bird Goddess depicted as an androgynous figure with the buttocks of a bird and the neck and head of the phallus. Rituals for this water divinity included the Geranos or Crane Dance, the labyrinth dance of purification and celebration for communion with the deity.²⁵ Subsequently the classical image spread throughout the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe and east of the Mediterranean through commerce and cultural exchange, eventually reaching the New World. This implies that the labyrinth encompasses designs and meanings ranging over 5,000 years.²⁶ Being one as symbol of the divinity, the labyrinth comprises the perfect two in one that gives it a characteristic duality. The potential for communicating with the Lady in the Labyrinth (the divinity) implied that humans were made in the image of the divinity, thus the concept of the androgynous divinity of human origins (Adam and Eve as “one flesh,” the Kabbalistic Adam Kadmon) is preserved in creation myth and theology.

Besides the myth and the fundamentals of the image thus summarized, Lezama uses all of the symbolism and elements of the labyrinth across its history. These symbols and elements include the cross, the circle, the square, and the triangle with the elements of water, fire, earth, and air. In his application of the labyrinth symbolism to his imagery, Lezama searches for harmony. He uses the copula as a major image leading to the perfect

²⁵ For these archaeological-anthropological fundamentals see Marija Gimbutas in, The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500 - 35000 BC, Myths and Cult Images (1974; London: Thames and Hudson, 1982) 11-150. See Jeff Saward for the origins of the image, “Geranos,” Caerdroia 12 (1983) 23-37.

²⁶ For the historical account of the classical labyrinth see Hermann Kern, Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings Over 5,000 Years (1982; Munich: Prestel, 2000).

one. He absorbs the idea of the labyrinth as an all encompassing image which happens to agree with the sum of meanings of the labyrinth across time.

Contemporary connotation restricts the labyrinth to “A structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in bewildering complexity, through which it is difficult or impossible to find one's way without guidance; a maze.”²⁷ To many moderns the word labyrinth refers to architecture and garden design, but these readers do not reflect about etymology. “Architecture” refers to the beginning (from the Gk. for “arche,” beginning), and the “text” (Lat. tect, covering). The term originally referred to the beginning text, i.e., both the structure as well as its covering (whether a physical covering or written covering). Likewise, “garden” refers to “Paradise,” the place of human origin described in Genesis. Lezama is indeed a modern but he is also an etymologist. Indeed he encodes a surface anecdote with significances laden with antiquity.

²⁷ Oxford English Dictionary 2nd ed., prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989). Also in the updated OED Online.

TWO. THE METHOD OF THIS DISSERTATION

To trace the clue or thread in the labyrinth of Paradiso is no easy undertaking, for the author has conjoined the diffuse images/narratives (the techne or form)--elements of the archetypal labyrinth--into the summa or “totality” with Paradiso at the center. Both the elements and the “totality” are the Paradiso. Moreover, the elements and the “totality” are, as it were, the surface of a modern narrative encoded with “antiquities”: the ancient significances of images and meanings of words hidden underneath the modern anecdote. My problem is to literally “labor inside” the text to relate the concrete and true elements of the labyrinth (the structure and course of the text) to the abstract labyrinth (the whole of the artifice) in order to discover the “wisdom” of Paradise, to be understood as “beyond the limits.” Deciphering involves hard work and an extended time because, briefly here, “labyrinths or mazes (the words have different etymologies but mean the same thing) are characteristically double. [. . .] Thus mazes encode the very principle of doubleness, contrariety, paradox, concordia discors [. . .].”²⁸ The typical accord and disagreement result in a labyrinth design distinguished by “planned chaos,” an “artistic elaboration that baffles or dazzles according to the beholder’s perspective (and the architect’s skill).”²⁹ Experiences portrayed in Paradiso are perpetually taking different forms and moving disarray. Lezama’s Modernism--and modern texts in general--present

²⁸ Doob 1-2.

²⁹ Doob 52.

a seemingly confused or disorderly text. He, as author-architect, and the reader inside must understand the content, structure, process, and motif; he or she must put the whole jumbled circuitous mass in order, and so by taking advantage of transient moments of insight and guidance. Chaos and order, pleasure and terror, confusion and clarity, control and bewilderment--the same aspects of life, the human experience, and the reading and writing processes--are summed up and symbolized in the principle of sustained paradox or contradiction that characterizes labyrinths.

This project ignores the fear of many readers of Lezama, the fear that they will get lost in the many meanings of Lezama's words. His works are not botched and futile, as would reason those who argue that "the term 'labyrinth' is most commonly applied pejoratively to failed art, art that is too complex for its intended audience and purpose."³⁰ I shall illustrate that, labyrinthine aesthetic and qualities "are privileged in literary theory and practice,"³¹ and serve as practical means to clarify a complicated author and his language, even if the labyrinth were "remote" from his approach and "probable intention."³² What I see in the text guides my critical approach. My method fits, for the word "labyrinth" is visibly inscribed in Lezama's thought and writing. The word recurs with almost the same frequency as the word "paradox" in Lezama's imaginary.³³ And

³⁰ Doob 7.

³¹ Doob 7.

³² My perspective follows an accepted convention. See Doob 9.

³³ González Cruz lists 58 entries for "paradox" and 50 for "labyrinth" in the "Índice crítico general" of excerpts from Lezama's writings. JLL: Diccionario 615, 630.

although Lezama's accomplishments are deemed significant to Cuban society, we still discover how he enhances the interaction between the culture and literature of the New World and that of the Old. For Paradiso narrates the surface of modern Cuba and at the same time "coats" the surface with the "antiquities" of Cuba. "Cognitive eros" impels me to inquire into Lezama's universe with the "temerity" that he saw as the "audacity" of New World "inquisitiveness."³⁴

Like a student of his Delphic Course, I take the route of Lezama's Paradiso, guided by the stellar light of his labyrinth. But a clarification is now most important: the term "Paradiso" not only refers to Lezama's novel but addresses all of his labyrinthine processes and creations. Since Paradiso is the sum of Lezama's endeavors, it is indeed a metaphor, an allegory of Lezama's enterprise and the means to disseminate it: the word, the expression, the way of writing, the poetry and its craft, his system of thought, the joy of his visions, the exuberance of his semantics and his syntax. Paradiso refers to Lezama's other enigmas: his critical essays, his Delphic Course, the knowledge and principles he shared with the "Orígenes" Group and with fellow writers like Julio Cortázar, Octavio Paz, and Alfonso Reyes. The Paradiso metaphor encompasses the edition of the journals in which Lezama collaborated, the convergence of universal letters and culture upon the pages/proofs he revised. Naturally, Paradiso includes the island, Cuba at the crossroads, la Ciudad de La Habana and the community in which Lezama

³⁴ See JLL, "La curiosidad barroca," La expresión americana, ed. Chiampi, 79-106.

lived, plus the many places that he inhabited physically and spiritually through illustrations and letters. Paradiso is Lezama's image, the process and the product, of the circle of knowledge obtained through the labyrinth.

In sum, the expression that I explore and explain in this dissertation is Paradiso expressed in its entire splendor. Splendor formae, Lezama's phrase and its meaning, guides my examination and moves my imagination. I invoke his words to animate the metaphor of my study:

After poetry and poem have formed a body or a being, and armed this with the metaphor and image, and formed the image, the symbol, and the myth—and the metaphor that can reproduce in figure its fragments or metamorphoses—, we realize that one of the most powerful networks that man possesses has been integrated in order to capture transitory things and the animism of the inert. Making the most of the birth of being, because of its possible prolongation and germination, [the being] can grasp in metaphor, which in itself is the metamorphosis of that being, its own vicissitudes until the splendor of the form is attained.

(Después de que la poesía y el poema han formado un cuerpo o un ente, y armado de la metáfora y la imagen, y formado la imagen, el símbolo y el mito—y la metáfora que puede reproducir en figura sus fragmentos o metamorfosis--, nos damos cuenta de que se ha integrado una de las más poderosas redes que el hombre posee para atrapar lo fugaz y para el animismo de lo inerte. Aprovechando el nacimiento del ser, por su posible prolongación y sucesión del germen, puede captar en la metáfora, que es en sí las metamorfosis de ese ser, sus vicisitudes hasta alcanzar el splendor formae).³⁵

The “splendor of the form” is discernible in the concurrent metamorphoses of the metaphors involved in all of Lezama's Paradiso. The constellation of images provides clues to this inquiry, revealing the web of idea, image, symbol, and myth of the labyrinth

³⁵ “Las imágenes posibles,” OC II 179.

in samples of his work. Scrutiny of the traces or clues Lezama left us results in real discovery, for, again, a “clue” is something like a ball of thread used to guide any one in threading her and his way into or out of a labyrinth. The various meanings of “clue” and its associations in reference sources³⁶ make it clear that Lezama’s clues are figurative, and run the gamut of the notion of figura. So the word splendor sends me into the orbit of meaning of the word. Where does “splendor” meet “paradiso” in a figurative relationship? Which other Lezama clue is associated with these two?

The search is difficult for Lezama’s clues are varied and numerous. Images charged with meaning are clues to more complex images. For instance “the hand” is associated with events that mark Cemí’s rites of passage: the finger of his father’s hand is a clue to safety and salvation when the child is saved from almost drowning in Chapter VI; the incident is a guide to understanding the future poet Cemí as the being for resurrection. In Chapter II, the white chalk that Cemí carries to a wall is transformed into a hand that scribbles on the wall; this is a clue that leads to Cemí’s eventual discovery of poetic language and writing. Other clues are to labyrinthine elements, like the clue that guides to Minos in the detail that the Basque grandfather Cemí “had the neck of a young bull” in Chapter IV; or a clue to the Minotaur in “the decapitated head of a bull” on the gearshift pinion of the bus in Chapter XIII. These clues, when seized and followed guide the reader in threading his/her way through Lezama’s labyrinth. The perplexity and

³⁶ For instance, the Oxford English Dictionary here.

difficulty of the clues yield to pressure and illumine the information the reader seeks to organize the text.

Retaking the connection between “splendor” and “paradiso,” because Lezama treats the text of Paradiso as if it were scripture, one comes to terms with the notion of figura in the sense of scriptural revelation. This results in the identification of important religious commentaries of Jewish scripture, The Book of Splendor or Zohar. I argue that the connection Paradiso-Splendor-Zohar, is based on the tradition of four ways and meanings of interpretation of scripture, which comprise the acronym pardes that stands for “Paradiso,” “Paradise” in the Zohar.³⁷

Lezama juxtaposes these four ways of interpreting texts with the four skills of language communication of speaking, listening, reading, and writing with the meanings in the word pardes. It is important to note that the four categories of interpreting scripture “were first collectively given the acronym pardes (literally, “garden”) by Moses de Leon,” in late thirteenth century Spain, understood as: “the peshat or literal meaning [...], the remez or allegorical meaning [...], the derash or hermeneutical meaning [...], the sod or mystical meaning [...]”³⁸ “This fourfold exegetical division was apparently influenced by the earlier yet similar categories of Christian tradition (literal, moral, allegorical, mystical)”³⁹ developed by the Church Fathers Clement and Origen in the third century CE. The number four is a complete number and leads to the four letters of the name of

³⁷ I thank Professor Ernest Kaulbach for this reference.

³⁸ Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (1974: New York: Meridian-Penguin, n.d.) 172.

³⁹ Scholem 173.

God, the Tetragrammaton, and the four letters in the name of the first man, Adam. It also implies the symbolism of wholeness and universality which is associated with the cross. It encompasses other universal significations such as the four cardinal points, the four winds, the four corners of the universe, the phases of the moon, etc. The number four symbolizes the earthly and totality of things created and revealed.⁴⁰

Thus, the Daedalian thread, i.e. Lezama's clues, together with the all-encompassing pardes interpretation of texts enable me to map out how the labyrinth functions in the artist's reason and imagination and to determine the purpose that the image serves in his intellectual and humanitarian concerns. My intent is to ascertain in what ways the idea of the labyrinth informs Paradiso. Applying an existing inquiry to Lezama, I seek an answer to the same scholarly question: "How did the idea of the labyrinth, both literary and visual, generate metaphor, and what are the consequent metaphorical uses of the sign?"⁴¹ My quest is to discover what the universal labyrinth means within, outside and beyond the confines of Lezama's discourse and how the labyrinth awakens the "new intellect" that he heralded as essential to interpreting the sum of his knowledge, equal to the sum of the poetry of cognition represented in his Paradiso. Thus my study responds to Lezama's quest for universality; the findings shall expand the critical approaches to his literary universe in the wider context of world literature.

⁴⁰ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, trans. John Buchanan-Brown, A Dictionary of Symbols (1969: Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1994) 402.

⁴¹ Doob 4.

There are infinite potential journeys through the labyrinth, since Lezama's Paradiso is commensurate with the potens.⁴² Lezama defines potens as the “unconditioned conditioning” or “the infinite possibility” of images that arises out of the interchange between the “oblique living experience” (“vivencia oblicua”) and the “suddenness” (“súbito”). As such, the potens is “the possible in infinity” (“el posible en la infinitud”), nothing less than art, poetry itself.⁴³ The method of this dissertation attempts to provide a foundation for the discovery of fresh thresholds and alternate paths, the thresholds and paths archived in the past and made new by Lezama. The surface narrative has such a potens.

Since Paradiso represents both the summation of Lezama's poetry and prose and the application and illustration of his theoretical essays and ideals of formative education, we need to know the surface narrative; i.e., the beginning, middle, and conclusion of this summa. Paradiso is a Künstlerroman that portrays the growth of the fatherless protagonist, José Cemí, from childhood to a stage of consciousness or maturity where he recognizes his artistic destiny by means of his mastery of poetry. In the beginning his mother, Rialta, aids the protagonist in his rites of passage, as do later in his youth his

⁴² See his “Preludio a las eras imaginarias,” OC II, 816-817.

⁴³ Furthermore, according to Bejel,

the ‘súbito’ (suddenness), [is] the instance in which fragments of the Image appear through a metaphor, and the ‘vivencia oblicua’ (indirect experience), the moment when a metaphor tries to grasp a fragment of the Image. This relationship between ‘súbito’ and ‘vivencia oblicua’ traces a constant, decentralized ellipsis that seeks, through the comparative effect of metaphor, the universe of the total Image, a world that Lezama calls the ‘esferaimagen’ (sphereimage). (Poet of the Image 66-7)

Uncle Alberto and the friends Fronesis and Foción. Eventually Cemí encounters Oppiano Licario, the man assigned by his father on his deathbed to be his future mentor. In the course of life, the protagonist strives to fill the absence of his father with creation through the word. His apprenticeship of poetry develops along with his journey of life, and both processes involve the acquisition of knowledge (cognition). The ultimate aim of the protagonist is to become the best that he can be by achieving a total confluence of knowledge and wisdom, realized as a summa poetica. The fictional argument mirrors Lezama's lifelong quest for communicative harmony in his ample creation.⁴⁴

In the story, the imagery of Cemí's search for knowledge moves from an empty state (pre-potency) to the states of consciousness, cognition, enlightenment, and art (potency). The constant that runs through this arduous process of transformation in the pursuit of knowledge is a vigorous desire or sensuality, the "cognitive Eros" ("Eros cognoscente"), Lezama's idiom for the unremitting desire to know. He desires to know excessively and transgressively. His appetite, akin to the "el afán fáustico" (Faust's urge) or "el plutonismo" (knowledge of the Underworld), impels him. The impulse which begins, the agent of the impulse and the thread which sews the process to know all together is the "Eros Cognoscente" (Eros knowing--like "imagen cognoscente" or "cognitive image").

From the outset, the potential artist faces risk and difficulty in undertaking the pursuit of knowledge with such eagerness, because the "cognitive Eros," the medium

⁴⁴ "Interrogando a LL," Recopilación, ed. Simón 20.

chosen for the passage, desires fulfillment by creation of the word. Paralleling the creation of poetry with the creation of life and the formation of the self, the complex process is synthesized in the “poem-novel” that the protagonist writes, which in turn inscribes him into the poetic word and intellectual world.

The word both lives (e.g., “In the beginning was the Word) and is written (e.g., the text of John’s Gospel, 1:1, just quoted). The word both affirms (labyrinths give wisdom) and denies (labyrinths are failed artifices). Paralleling the creation of poetry with the creation of life and the formation of the self, Lezama synthesizes this complex process in the “poem-novel” that the protagonist writes (Paradiso), which in turn inscribes him into the poetic word and intellectual world.

Midway in the course of his career, anticipating his labyrinth of words as a poetic novel that would be the sum of his poetry, indeed an encyclopedic summa, much like Dante’s poetic summa, Lezama provided this new rationale:

Everything will have to be reconstructed, invented again, and the old myths, in reappearing anew, will offer us their conjuration and enigmas with an unknown face. The fiction of myths is new myths, with new weariness and terrors.

(Todo tendrá que ser reconstruido, invencionado de nuevo, y los viejos mitos, al reaparecer de nuevo, nos ofrecerán sus conjuros y sus enigmas con un rostro desconocido. La ficción de los mitos son [sic] nuevos mitos, con nuevos cansancios y terrores).⁴⁵

This was Lezama’s response to the apathetic and infertile intellectual circumstance in Cuba (and Latin America) in the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties. He

⁴⁵ “Mitos y cansancio clásico,” La expresión americana, ed. Chiampi 58.

knew that innovations in the way of writing fiction were absolutely necessary in his part of the world. The novel of the land and the documentary novel had exhausted the tradition. What Lezama proposed in Paradiso was not new to the modern form of the novel but new to Cuba, an alteration, a renovation, and a rebirth, indeed a new literary “light” from the New World, a Hispanic work of fiction written on American soil. The “light” would travel from here to over there, to Europe, particularly to Paris. The modern Paris, the “City of Light,” where enlightened ideas created several labyrinthine novels, was the ancient Roman “Lutetia Parisiorum” (“Midwater Dwelling of the Parisians”). Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-27), Joyce’s Ulysses (1922), and Cortázar’s Rayuela (1963) “lit up” Havana, the city between the waters. Lezama was sending back to the Old World a new light, a surface narrative whose underneath was encoded with Old World images and narrative.

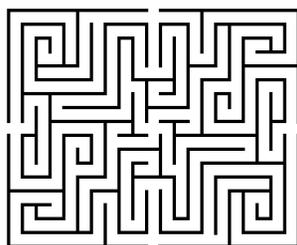
In mid-twentieth century, as the new novel (Cortázar’s) was in process, Lezama proceeded to demonstrate a steady faith in the potential of the labyrinth as a cultural and aesthetic instrument associated with the change, the learning, and the growth of ever-difficult conceptual articulation of this hemisphere’s culture. In selecting the labyrinth to portray the difficult Lezama was responding to demands in the system of thought of the modern tradition that thrived in the poetry of the Symbolists (Baudelaire, Nerval, Hugo, Mallarmé); in the novels of Joyce; and in the short stories of Borges. In narrative Lezama flourished with a change from the aesthetic paradigm of realism to a new expression of modernity. On the whole his style is compound, transfigured, and transformative, fusing or conflating the real with the abstract, the serious with the comic, the object-subject with

the myth-symbol, the modern with the ancient. In creating with the old and the new, Lezama and the “Orígenes” group are, perhaps unknowingly, analogous to labyrinthine artists in search of the knowledge, main beliefs, traditions, and expressions of every man belonging to the continuum of time.

In Lezama’s poem-novel, Paradiso, there is a double argument. One tells a surface story in a straight or linear narrative in the unicursal labyrinthine form, depicted below with the Classical Seven circular labyrinth--the common graphic design across the ages extant in the public domain:



The other argument tells the same story but in a spiral or cyclic descriptive narratives interspersed with many descriptions that result in suspension and disorientation in the reading process, which result in trials and errors, false turns, and confusion in the attempts to follow the right clues that complete each story. This style of narration follows the multicursal labyrinthine form, which is the form adopted in literature since the beginning, where there is no visible center or the center is constantly displaced, here illustrated with a possible imaginary example in the shape of a square labyrinth or maze:



In other words, out of one novel, Lezama conceives two styles for telling the story. They are both encyclopedic, but one goes directly from entry A to B to C and advances in linear fashion. The other advances “paideically,” that is, it represents everything in entry A before disclosing anything in letter B and so forth. However, this style allows for leaps out of linear sequence, say from letter A the story skips to any other letter of the alphabet. This double manner of narrating and describing, linear or unicursal and spiral, convoluted, or multicursal progression is labyrinthine in nature; it results in difficult labor for the being in the labyrinth (writer, reader, protagonist) and justifies why the labyrinth is the best instrument for Lezama. Paradoxically, Lezama’s visions of the labyrinth reinforce the notion that everything is Paradisiacal in his universe of thought: it is possible because it is impossible. A further paradox: a meaning of the labyrinth identifies it as the Garden of Paradise.

Since its inception in prehistory the labyrinth accommodates all manner of contradiction. Lezama knew that the prototype labyrinth not only reflects, it also refracts, and is a hermetic symbol of contrariety blending into unity. As a result, the author adopted the idea of the labyrinth organically, joyfully, and meaningfully for the transference of his thought system into language art. He made the labyrinth into a symbol of his time, a tool for the interpretation of the concrete and complex situations in life, and

a catalyst for his community. He used the labyrinth as a metaphor for his fiction, a technique for his writing, an aesthetic ideal for his conceptual world of images. Although he followed a long-standing tradition dating from early Antiquity to the present day, the suitable choice was costly: once labeled a labyrinth, Lezama or his work remains difficult and confusing. A non-labyrinthine work is difficult because it needs much effort or skill to compose and to interpret. A labyrinthine work adds to the confusion because the difficulties, problems and hindrances are represented or written in disorder. Chaos and disorder are true of Lezama's works and compound the difficulty in reading his texts. The characteristics of disorder or paradoxical encoding make narratives hard to follow and the thread to the end of a story or novel hard to find. On one hand Lezama's works effect the astonishment and praise of readers who willingly strive to comprehend some or all of the sinuously inscribed pathways of his pages. On the other hand, readers are compelled to resist and to avoid drifting off the discourse. Bewildered and confined, readers are confused and lost within the walls of his relentless, obscure metaphorical edifice.

Obviously, the author chose the labyrinth to parallel his modern cosmovision because hard labor is required to understand the "sustained contradiction" that lies "at the very core of Lezama's aesthetics."⁴⁶ Most effective readers would agree that contrapuntal composition is as essential to Lezama's poiesis as counterpoint is fundamental to the art of the fugue. He develops a generating theme and then different voices or parts, Lezama's "successives" ("sucesivas"); i.e., his chains of metaphors

⁴⁶ Pellón 13.

literally “fly” (fuga is the Latin word for “flight”) or enter into the imitative composition, following one another, as if in pursuit of each other. Contradiction parallels the tense but harmonious duality of two hands playing the one melody in various registers. The fugue-labyrinth is a compositional procedure that seeks symmetry and balance, but balance and symmetry reached by differentiated hands (different keys), each expressing the “right” and “left” of the one and same path so that symmetry is the result of one hand responding to the other. Lezama uses the particular “literature of the fugue” much as Bach did, because he also “allies the strictest economy of [metaphoric] language to a relative freedom of form.”⁴⁷ Lezama’s creation represents the art of counterpoise and complement.⁴⁸

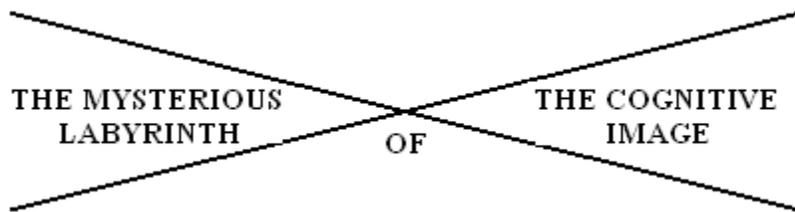
Such bipolar correspondence reverberates in Lezama’s Paradiso. Hence, this modern Cuban labyrinth of words, both the protagonist and the writer/reader undergo an equivalent activity in the act of “walking” (writing/reading) through the pages of a text. “Tracing the complexities of a maze’s paths may lead to an appreciation of its magnificent design, to new knowledge facilitated by experiencing and then transcending confusion.”⁴⁹ Thus as one, protagonist and writer/reader accomplish the author’s artistry, while undergoing a strenuous labor of learning and transformation through the experience

⁴⁷ “fugue.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 12 Mar. 2007 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9110133>>.

⁴⁸ Ben A. Heller’s Assimilation / Generation / Resurrection (1997) cited earlier analyzes Lezama’s contrapuntal compositional procedure.

⁴⁹ Doob 57.

of managing, comprehending, assimilating, and ordering (ordering/reordering, and even writing/re-writing) the vast and complex array of images that form the massive discourse of a text. The fiction represents the process of knowledge acquisition in real life, as it were, a “thread” or guide into the labyrinth. The reader/reading mirrors the writer/writing, in essence rewrites the text as he/she reads, follows the thread or clue of creation, and acquires knowledge. Again, Lezama best expresses this process of achieving knowledge through the circular paths of his discourse as through “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” (“el misterioso laberinto de la imagen cognoscente”). Lezama’s axiom is diagrammed here in a balanced diagonal arrangement:



His axiom is utterly symmetrical and central to Lezama’s thought. It is an equation: labyrinth = cognition, knowledge. How this equation relates to Paradiso is what I endeavor to explain in this dissertation.

THREE. AWAKENING THE NEW SENSES

Poetry? A nocturnal snail-shell in a rectangle of water (¿La poesía? Un caracol nocturno en un rectángulo de agua).

José Lezama Lima⁵⁰

Labyrinth: A place in the form of a shell.

Hesychius of Alexandria⁵¹

When we comprehend Paradiso, we will comprehend by means of new senses (“sentidos”). “Sentido” refers primarily to the “sense” taught by the text. But the reader, taught by the “sentidos” in the text will come out of the new senses with a new sensuality, a new imagination, and a new cognition. Since Paradiso is a labyrinth throughout, the “sentidos” in the first chapter of the novel, befuddle the reader who has no “new” senses. In the first chapter, the “labor-from-within” begins, both in the “sentidos” of the text and in the “sentidos” of the reader. The labyrinth is an allegory for Lezama’s labor and for the reader’s labor. The author’s or architect’s labor diffuses images throughout the text, as if the images were a planned chaos. Images are, of course, the primary means of knowledge--things seen, touched, smelled, tasted, heard, spoken. These are scattered throughout the text, the planned chaos, the labyrinth. Readers labor

⁵⁰ “Playas del árbol,” Tratados en la Habana, OC II 510. For an analysis of Lezama’s poetry see Fina García Marruz, “La poesía es un caracol nocturno,” Coloquio Internacional sobre la Obra de JLL: Poesía, ed. Cristina Vizcaino y Eugenio Suárez-Galván (1982; Madrid: Fundamentos, 1984) 243-275.

⁵¹ In his Lexicon, published in the 5th Century CE.

from within to put the chaotic images in some sort of order. They “see,” “touch,” “smell,” “taste,” “hear,” and pronounce the words/images--looking for some kind of pattern in the discourse. Lezama and the architecture of his creation are labyrinthine. If we do not want to labor from within ourselves to acquire new “sentidos,” we should avoid Paradiso. Here we labor. We labor to comprehend how the architect and the architecture awaken new senses.

The “presence” of Paradiso “will be comprehended beyond reason.” So the “new senses” emanate from “beyond reason.” I argue that theology is related to the awakening of the new senses, but not necessarily the traditional Catholic theology taught by the Christian clergy. We know that Lezama and the “Orígenes” Group had as colleague, friend, collaborator, and mentor Father Ángel Gaztelu, a poet and a priest of the Archdiocese of Havana, an active, well-respected voice both in intellectual circles and in the community. And we notice how Lezama describes what he learned from Gaztelu:

Therefore a Cuban generation, by the presence of Father Gaztelu, had the incomparable grace to see the hierarchy and the terrible thing, as he bears with himself every sacerdotal office like a secret that opens and a mystery that closes, in strength proportionate to charity, in grace communicated by the prestige of the sonnet, in joyful arrival at the symbol of the union of the two circles and the successions. Privilege of a generation to have within reach of the mystery of his body, the office of all the mysteries brought by a breath that circulates in its own root of its festivals and auguries

(Así una generación cubana, por la presencia del padre Gaztelu, tuvo la gracia incomparable de ver la jerarquía y lo terrible, y todo oficio sacerdotal lo conlleva como un secreto que se abre y un misterio que se cierra, en fuerza proporcionada a la caridad, en gracia comunicada por el prestigio del soneto, en alegre arribada al símbolo de la unión de los dos círculos y las sucesiones. Privilegio de una generación tener al alcance del

misterio de su cuerpo, el oficio de todos los misterios traídos por un aliento que circula en la propia raíz de sus festivales y augurios).⁵²

Lezama is one in a “Cuban generation” enlightened by Gaztelu’s rounded seminary education “to see the hierarchy and the terrible thing”--he can distinguish orthodoxy from heterodoxy; the angels from the demons. Such is the result of the teachings of the priest, the pastor of the “Orígenes” Group who practices his priestly “office” in such a way that “secrets” are “opened” and “mysteries” “closed by the “charity” of his sonnets.⁵³ The sonnets, in turn, signify the union of “circles” and “successions,” a totality. This is a “privilege” (Lat. private law, given to a few) given to the “Cuban generation”: to have present Gaztelu and his body of knowledge, his services that speak of “mysteries” inspired in the roots of church feasts and rituals. Lezama insinuates that his “Cuban generation” received their pastor’s mythopoetic theology, i.e., a ritual theology built on Church practices and festivals which found their origins in primitive Greek, Latin and indigenous rituals. The awakening of the new senses comes from a theology learned, shared, and practiced with Father Gaztelu in Havana. The theology is purely Cuban, concerned with literature, with circles and successions, with the early roots of ritual in Cuba--Greek, Latin, indigenous--back to the origins.

Lezama valued his friend’s enthrallment at learning, the product of a seminary education. Gaztelu seems to be an apt model for Fronesis, the protagonist that stands for

⁵² “El Padre Gaztelu en la poesía,” Tratados en La Habana, OC II 755. A critical inquiry of the Gaztelu-Lezama association is needed.

⁵³ See Ángel Gaztelu, Gradual de laudes (La Habana: Unión, c. 1977) and particularly Lezama’s published homage to his friend in JLL, Gradual de laudes. El padre Gaztelu en la poesía (La Habana: Orígenes, 1955).

sound judgment, prudence, and wisdom in Paradiso. Lezama time and again tells of his unpretentious enthusiasm to achieve charisma and erudition to an impossible degree--the fulfillment of an earnest desire for knowledge of holy mysteries, cognizance of the underworld and of the daemon, apprehension of the empyrean and of the Highest Good. Toward the end of Paradiso, the Cemí-Licario-Lezama triad gives us a clue that so much potential obtains through “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image.” Here “Cognitive” modifies “image”--“imagen cognoscente”--not the reader. Lezama’s “image” knows. The reader has to work hard at knowing what the image knows. Only then can he/she become Lezama’s “metaphoric subject” or poet. New senses are taught to the learner by the image.

Our author does more than to surpass the prevalent Cuban literary spirit of his generation. Outrageously, he theologizes the Cuban literary spirit and revivifies it. Paradiso defines, mystifies, mythifies, and mysticizes the unknown, the obscure, the other/Other. His labyrinth is both “hierarchic” (structured) and “terrible” (monstrous for containing a monster). His reliance on the labyrinthine aesthetic confirms him as a mythopoet, a mythographer; indeed, an anachronism. Here is a modern poet and storyteller who explains the human condition, society, religious belief, ritual and tradition, and natural phenomena by attributing to poetry supernatural potency. Lezama’s worldview is “the application of critical perspective to mythological materials [. . .], a study in the history of ideas.”⁵⁴ His images of other images, other things put Lezama at a

⁵⁴ Doty xiii.

distance. Still, that space is necessary so that the man and his texts can disclose to us the atmosphere and the fundamentals with which he forged his words to portray the world:

There is a disjointedness with the everyday, a strange-making quality about mythic figures that gives us distance upon them, and this is an important distance, necessary so that the figures/incidents can remain ‘out there’ as models, as possible developments for what we know ‘in here.’⁵⁵

Lezama may be “foreign” to us but he is “functional,” for he could “reveal to [us] parts of [ourselves] or [our] society that [we] might otherwise ignore.”⁵⁶ “Myths and rituals have a way of disclosing us to ourselves, either as we are or as we might be—and as we might be in either a negative or a positive light.”⁵⁷

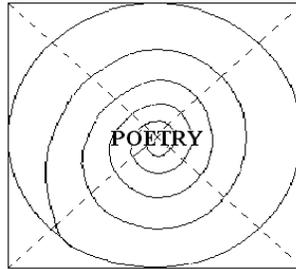
Thus myths reveal the double nature of characters or situations. For instance, the myth of the Fall reveals that the only way one can now is by transgression, for original sin ensued after Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in defiance of God’s law. Hence wisdom is the knowledge of the good derived from an experience of evil. Poetry achieves wisdom (light) through the process of transgression into the beyond outside the realm of reason (dark). Lezama’s definition of poetry as a “snail-shell” in a “square of water” and the etymology of the labyrinth as a “shell” indicated in the epigraphs that open this section imply that poetry is a double-edge sword, characteristically double--it is good and bad, and what it achieves is also good and bad.

⁵⁵ Doty xvii-xviii.

⁵⁶ Doty xviii.

⁵⁷ Doty xviii.

The following is a graphic interpretation of Lezama's definition of poetry as "a nocturnal snail-shell in a rectangle of water":



As we can see from this graphic representation, in Lezama's definition, poetry symbolizes the union of Heaven and Earth, the divine and the profane. For poetry approaches perfection, since the circle is the symbol of primordial unity, Heaven, and the invisible, completeness, eternity, and creation.⁵⁸ And framed in the square of water poetry attempts to reach God from Earth; for in the temporal realm the square is the symbol of Earth and the created universe as opposed to the uncreated one. The square in its relationship to the number four implies the name of God, the Tetragrammaton.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the circle within the square is a Kabbalistic symbol of the spark of divine fire, a sign of light or wisdom.⁶⁰ Poetry is nocturnal because the night communicates a confluence of images from the other or uncreated universe that the poet has the potential to transform into the created universe. Basically the night represents a two-fold aspect--

⁵⁸ See Chevalier and Gheerbrant 195-200.

⁵⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 912-918.

⁶⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 197.

darkness and the prelude to light, the period of gestation or germination that culminates in life [poetry] in the light of day.⁶¹

To better understand the double significance of poetry in the narrative, we must recall the myth of Daedalus after the labyrinth, where Minos, looking for the fugitive Daedalus, proposes what we consider the riddle of poetry that Lezama uses: the threading of a snail shell. This action would identify the artificer, the one that knew how to solve the riddle. Myth has it that Daedalus put honey at one end of the snail shell to lure an ant that had a thread attached. The ant solved the riddle: in pursuit of the honey, it threaded the labyrinth and achieved the sweet reward. Thus the wisdom achieved through hard labor (as a laborious ant) within the labyrinth is symbolized with honey. This was a philosophical and Christian commonplace in Antiquity. For instance, Proverbs 24.13-14 say “Eat honey . . . because it is good. . . So also is the doctrine of wisdom to thy soul.” Honey is the hope of wisdom. Wisdom may sometimes destroy, but the hope of it shall not perish.

Lezama makes this image of knowledge present, communicating and participating in history: In Paradiso José Cemí, Lezama’s protagonist who seeks the wisdom of poetry has “honey” for a label and seeks wisdom through the agency of his Cognitive Eros. “Cemí” is the Taino term for “god” or “icon.”⁶² Lezama arranged this because he

⁶¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 701.

⁶² See Fernando Ortiz, Nuevo catauro de cubanismos (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985) 137.

undoubtedly knew from the lore of the indigenous peoples of Cuba that to the Tainos, a branch of the Arawak peoples of the Antilles,

Night and sweetness [. . .] are essential qualities of the sacred domain. That is why the Lokono [Arawak] shaman is denominated *semichichi*, for he possesses the qualities of the sacred and magic: sweetness, honey. Thus the three-pointed objects known as *cemíes* are so called because of their sweet/honey qualities, which are exclusive to the sacred. The supernatural forces are collectively designated as *cemí* (*zemi*, *semí*) for the same reasons.⁶³

In the last analysis, the new senses awakened from honey put at the center and end of stories in the Paradiso narrative by Lezama. The honey (“miel”) is Lezama’s wisdom. “Miel” and the honey industry feature prominently in the chapters related to the formation of Cuba in the novel. Honey or wisdom obviously is beyond reason, beyond traditional theology. This is mythopoetic theology, concerned more with origins and hypertely than with orthodoxy.

The details and many faces of the characters and events Lezama includes in his representation are important. Being both poets and labyrinths Lezama and his characters are double; some typically are made of two parts (Cemí is a demigod, half human, half divine); some portray the good and the bad, the daemon and the angel or two opposing faces of the same being. To assess Lezama as a monster-author as it were, a “Minotaur-author,” is not to fear the architecture of his labyrinth but to be in awe of its master-mind. After all, Daedalus the labyrinth-maker was the foremost artificer of his time; Minos’ was the dynasty of a formidable civilization; the bull was a manifestation of Zeus. In turn, the

⁶³ José R. Oliver, Note 1, “The Taino Cosmos,” The Indigenous People of the Caribbean, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Gainesville: Florida UP) 152.

Bull of Minos, the Minotaur, represents the Father of the Gods, the generator of Minos and of humans. Such considerations of joined greatness and grotesque put the Cuban artist in line of not only Mallarmé but also Joyce and Góngora. The parallel is especially viable not only because Lezama both admired and critiqued the latter, but also since some coetaneous critics of the Baroque Spanish artist dubbed Góngora “the angel of darkness” (“el ángel de las tinieblas”) due to the artifice and complex objectivity--read “obscurity”--of his verses.⁶⁴

As a daemon Lezama is a troubleshooter; as an angel, a messenger of the divine. The world of letters profits from both intercessions, and the Cuban author is established among the group of complex and polarized classic Hispanic geniuses that we continue to know. An equal to Góngora and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Lezama is also on the same level as other difficult but valued Hispanic classics like Garcilaso, San Juan de la Cruz, Gracián, Quevedo, Cervantes, and Lope de Vega.⁶⁵ With Góngora Lezama shares not

⁶⁴ Góngora’s “hard” or “obscure” verses are those of his “second epoch,” the long poems produced after 1612: *Soledades* and *Polifemo*. See Miguel Artigas, *Don Luis de Góngora y Argote. Biografía y estudio crítico* (Madrid, 1925) 227-8. Also see Dámaso Alonso, *Góngora. Obras completas* (Madrid: Gredos, 1972). Lezama belonged to the generation of poets active after the Cuban Group of *Avance* that in 1927 replicated the efforts of Spain’s Group of 27 for the recovery and revalorization of the Góngora’s *poesis* as the emblem of their quest for a new, pure poetry. See Francisco Ichaso, *Góngora y la nueva poesía* (La Habana: *Revista de Avance*, 1927). Lezama admired Góngora’s accomplishments and used them in his arguments for a conception of the American expression originating from the reconciliation of the Iberian Baroque, the florid innate expressions of the autochthonous civilizations (which paralleled the European), and the exuberant nature of the New World. In 1953 he published “Sierpe de don Luis de Góngora,” *Analecta del reloj*, *OC II*, 183-213.

⁶⁵ Lezama also wrote essays on most of these classic figures. For studies of the affinities between Lezama and Golden Age poets see, among others, Aída Beaupied (1997); Mark Richard Couture, “Secret Accomplices: Jorge Luis Borges and JLL Read the Poetry of the Spanish Golden Age,” *diss.*, Duke U, 1995; Roberto González Echevarría, “Apetitos de Góngora y Lezama,” *LL*, Ser. El escritor y la crítica, ed. Eugenio Suárez-Galván (Madrid: Taurus, 1987) 294-311; and César A. Salgado, “Finezas de Sor Juana y Lezama,” *Actual* 1.37 (Mérida, Venezuela: U de los Andes, 1997) 75-102.

only the affiliation to Baroque aesthetic but also the Baroque foundation of the hybrid nature of the American expression.⁶⁶

Lezama's "la expresión americana," the cycle of conferences that he dictated in the Liceo de la Habana in 1957 describes the "Baroque Curiosity" present throughout the formation of the American consciousness toward the development of its own identity discourse occurring along with the development of its culture and society. Like Sor Juana Lezama works the "machinery" of the Baroque curiosity in search of universal knowledge. In fact, the achievement of the erudite nun prefigures Lezama's enterprise; it serves him as example for his recourse to the summa of knowledge tradition.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Lezama's relation to Lope "the Phoenix" ("el Fénix") is particularly distinctive, since Cervantes, "the One-handed of Lepanto" ("el Manco de Lepanto") labeled Lope "a monster of nature" ("un monstruo de naturaleza") because of his multifaceted modality, prodigal production, and abundant creativity.⁶⁸ Add to that a shared concern with eschatology, the extreme realization of death, judgment, heaven, and hell; and with scatology, the tendency to inscribe repugnant situations, distasteful gestures, and unrefined situations in the depiction of individual circumstances.

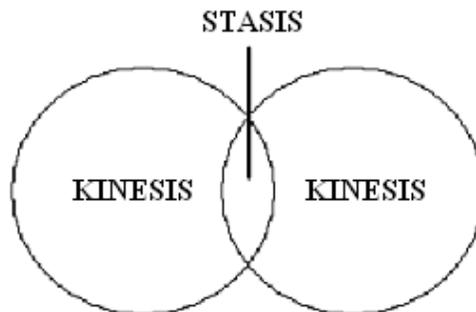
⁶⁶ See Salgado, "Hybridity in New World Baroque Theory," Journal of American Folklore 112.445 (1999): 316-331.

⁶⁷ See Rubén Ríos Ávila, "Las vicisitudes de Narciso: Lezama, Sor Juana y la poesía del conocimiento" (Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 19, 1992) 395-410.

⁶⁸ Cited in Ángel del Río and Amelia A. de del Río, Antología general de la literatura española: Desde los orígenes hasta 1700, vol. 1 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) 467.

More bewildering than his association with literary monstrosity and the truly confounding is the fact that Lezama's perspectives are not fixed or final. The "planned chaos... baffles or dazzles according to the beholder's perspective (and the architect's skill)," we recall. His discontinuities, disruption, and excessive description of images are not signs of defective technique, lack of sophistication or primitive form. These are not defects but innovation. He deliberately suspends a connecting thought or image and so introduces into his text "unpassable paths, self-contradiction, paradox"--what early Greek philosophers call aporiai. In turn, such a "path" introduces the labyrinth, again, the text of "paradox" and "antinomies."

He is a poet of the image, and all his labor and creation gravitate around the means and ends. Difficulty is inherent in his thought and his creation because poetry is the means and the end in order to capitalize on an instant of stasis to capture the fixedness (the fixed image) from the active kinetic confluence of potential images that overflow in his mind. The following is a graphic representation of the moment of apprehension of the fixedness of the poetic image:



We can see that Lezama's creation represents the fixed image at the interstice (stasis) of two or more moving images (kineses) resulting from the relentless confluence of potential images. Senses must be able to grasp these moving images. So, "new senses" involve a new intellect that meets and appreciates the challenge of the moving images. Unbiased readers and enlightened scholars of the past and of this century ought to assimilate Lezama's vision and conception and, like him, surpass the "natural" condition toward the infinite that he envisions: "Hypertely is a phenomenon that exceeds its finality, a decoration" ("La hipertelia, es un fenómeno que rebasa su finalidad, una decoración."⁶⁹ Paradiso goes beyond the limits and becomes a Summa Poetica, a summation of all the knowledge accumulated in his memory. Again, all knowledge is universal so his approach to knowledge is thus universal-- "catholic" (Gk. Universal). His poetry summarizes the ethos of universal culture, the characteristic spirit or prevalent sentiment of a people or community, Lezama embraces the ethos of cultures of all times: This in turn, is the expression that originates from his Paradiso metaphor which makes it a great novel. And Lezama believes that all great novels are sums. For example, all great novels like the Quijote are not one novel but many novels, sums of novels, and so is Paradiso.⁷⁰

Awakening new senses means that we readers start with an avid desire to know, a potens, something which impels us to read difficult and diffuse prose with an urge that

⁶⁹ JLL. Diarios [1939-49 / 1956-58], ed. Ciro Bianchi Ross (México, D.F.: Era, 1994) 76.

⁷⁰ In "Dossier I. Manuscritos de Lezama: Apuntes para una conferencia sobre Paradiso," included in the Archivos critical edition, 711.

forces us to go on through the text. The urge, the “cognitive Eros” or “cognoscent Eros” makes us go through a welter of images--always changing--until we perceive a pattern in them: same-different, affirmative-negative, sublime-infernal, chaotic-planned, angelic-bestial. The images and their arrangement speak to us as if they were “cognitive images” (“*imágenes cognoscentes*”). From their speech comes our awakened new sense, out of which comes a new understanding (we’re in a labyrinth in ourselves working hard to understand what is meant). Out of the new understanding comes a glimpse of the artifice: the labyrinth.

Out of the artifice, we take the clue (the ball of thread unraveled throughout the labyrinth). Out of the clue, the sense of the beginning (the first circle of thread), the crawling along like the ant threading the snail shell (“*caracol*”) and the approach toward the end (the “honey” or wisdom).

CHAPTER TWO.
COGNITIVE IMAGES:
CONFLUENCE, ANDROGYNE AND FIGURE

Cognitive or teaching images (“*imágenes cognoscentes*”) link the three ideas presented here: 1) confluence expresses the coming together of images flowing from the labyrinth into the mind of the reader; 2) androgyne or oneness expresses the balance or symmetry of opposing images joined together into a unity toward the center or end of the labyrinth, in the mind of the reader; 3) figure expresses the process of shaping the opposing images which flow together and join together. Figure expresses both the process of and the whole structure of representation. “*Imágenes cognoscentes*” involve confluence, opposition/balance, and figure. The three provide a logical connection for interpretation of the text.

ONE: CONFLUENCE

We begin with Lezama's memory before he composes Paradiso. As bits of such images converge in Lezama's intellect, he associates them with another storehouse of images. He connects images from the New World to images from the Old World, images of a New Paradise associated with images of the "Old" Paradise. As architect of the labyrinth, he activates a new, third Paradise from these opposed images by letting them reveal themselves in an old-world-new-world context. Then he configures the images into a winding shape, as if he were threading them in a snail-shell (a labyrinth) so that the reader follows the thread and finds the honey--the third Paradise, wisdom-- at the other end of the shell. The style favors description-by-images more than by narration.

Description sets the historical images into a motion of diffusion and opposition, from which come new images, conjoined from the former opposition. Description fixes the images at certain interstices in the thread. The roundabout wanderings of the mind in the process of comparing images represent an endless cycle. The acquisition of knowledge, at the given interstices, represents the circle of knowledge. As learning is obtained in circles, the process represents the encyclopedic labyrinth of learning (on the part of reader) and of teaching (on the part of the cognitive images and the author).

Confluence, oneness, and figure are three aspects of poetic joining or copula:

“Knowledge, monstrous or simple, is presupposed as copula” (“El conocimiento, monstruoso o sencillo, como cópula se presupone”).¹

The labyrinth as symbol of human restoration parallels the poet’s image of man in exile after the Fall from Paradise:

My work will always offer a difficulty, relativity of an obstacle if you will, after varied interweavings, of labyrinths that arose from a persecution that became incessant, of provocations in a point that were solved in the most opposite latitudes, one arrived at the occupation by man of his image in exile, of man without his primeval nature. By the image man recovers his nature, overcomes exile, acquires the unity as resistant nucleus between that which ascends towards form and that which descends into profound depths.

(Mi obra ofrecerá siempre una dificultad, relatividad de un obstáculo si se quiere, después de variados entrelazamientos, de laberintos que surgían de una persecución que se hacía incesante, de provocaciones en un punto que se resolvían en las más opuestas latitudes, se llegaba a la ocupación por el hombre de su imagen del destierro, del hombre sin su primigenia naturaleza. Por la imagen el hombre recupera su naturaleza, vence el destierro, adquiere la unidad como núcleo resistente entre lo que asciende hasta la forma y desciende a las profundidades.)²

The poet is “the causal being for resurrection;” the poem, the testimony or image of man’s redemption:

Only the poet, owner of the act operating in germination, that notwithstanding continues being creation, gets to be causal, to reduce, by the metaphor, to comparative matter the totality. In this dimension, perhaps the most boundless and powerful that one can offer, the ‘poet is the causal being for resurrection’. The poem is the testimony or image of that causal being for resurrection, [. . .]

(Sólo el poeta, dueño del acto operando en el germen, que no obstante sigue siendo creación, llega a ser causal, a reducir, por la metáfora, a

¹ “La dignidad de la poesía,” Tratados en la Habana, OC II 763.

² In letter to Armando Álvarez Bravo, 19 December 1964, Cartas a Eloísa 333.

materia comparativa la totalidad. En esta dimensión, tal vez la más desmesurada y poderosa que se pueda ofrecer, el ‘poeta es el ser causal para la resurrección’. El poema es el testimonio o imagen de ese ser causal para la resurrección [. . .].³

Opposed images of life and of death (“saturnine extension”) flow together toward a oneness:

Of that incomprehensible defeat of the saturnine extension before the desert, there remains like a residue of the previous challenges in the one. Formed by a reduction of the double in the identity and by the tree of the desert. The one is the beginning that returns to the saturnine extension, to death.

(De esa incomprensible derrota de la extensión saturniana frente al desierto, queda como un residuo de los retos anteriores en el uno. Formado por una reducción del doble en la identidad y por el árbol del desierto. El uno es el comienzo que vuelve a la extensión saturniana, a la muerte).⁴

This vision combines the image of the “one” that can die a “second death” (man) with the image of the infinite “One” (God). Man is one with “Ultimate Being” or “First Cause,” not only immanent, omnipresent and pervasive, but as well transcendent, superior and distinct from man. All manifestation originates in and returns to God.⁵ Like Saturn, God is the supreme agricultural and fertility divinity, the ruler over the Golden Age, the deity of sowing and seed. But man also sows seed for the fertility of the earth, so all sign and symbol originates in and returns to man. The duality or opposition in this thread instances a tripartite treasure, at least: the soil is under man, nature is under man, and nature yields this form, this figure of “oneness.” In such a logical link, confluence, androgyne

³ “Preludio a las eras imaginarias,” La cantidad hechizada, OC II 819-820.

⁴ “Preludio a las eras imaginarias,” La cantidad hechizada, OC II 807.

⁵ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 719-720.

(oneness), and figure illuminate much of the high and low, intricate and simple, coherent and disjointed working of cognitive images in the labyrinth.

Lezama's poet is destined "to make a configuration from a confluence" ("hacer de una confluencia una configuración").⁶ Images must flow together ("confluence") into a unified configuration ("figure"). To bring about the effect, Lezama conceives the process in poetry. Metaphor, image, poetry, poem, and poet flow all together. One may create a verb for the process--"conflow." Confluence creates infinity, and this is certain because it is impossible, according to Lezama's faith.

The universe is an infinite unity, whose creator-poet is the parental productive force, the sower of the seed, in Lezama's terms, the generator by/of/through images, "el genitor por la imagen." He calls this universe "The Poetic System of the World." Hence Lezama's world is manifested as a conception, a poetic universe that has as its base the poem, the poet, the metaphor, the image. There poetry, poem and poet form a trinity whose world soul or universal breath startles, rouses, or stirs up all parts with electrical current:

Poetry is a universal pneuma [Gk. spirit]. All that is created, transformed transforming is poetry. Poem is the concretion in time of that spirit that appears from the origins floating on the waters. And poet is the electrical discharge that passes through between poetry and poem, as if the poet felt suddenly, in the solar plexus, the electricity that both extremes of the hands communicate to him.

(La poesía es un pneuma universal. Todo lo creado, transformado transformante es poesía. Poema es la concreción en el tiempo de ese espíritu que aparece desde los orígenes flotando sobre las aguas. Y poeta

⁶ Lezama's words quoted from "Sucesivas o las coordenadas habaneras: XXXIX," Tratados en La Habana OC II 644.

es la descarga eléctrica que se establece entre poesía y poema, como si el poeta sintiese de súbito, en el plexo solar, la electricidad que le comunican los dos extremos de las manos).⁷

Lezama (or Licario, Fronesis, Foción, or Cemí) build a world of correspondences where an existing entity (one) relates to and opposes a second (its counterpart), seemingly unrelated and distant from the first in space and time. Then Lezama or his poet intervenes between the two as “genitor”. He makes the two flow into one, creates a unity from their opposition and uses the unity to begin a new vision, a new opposition, a new confluence and again a unity-- all flowing together toward the infinity of a “super-nature” (“sobrenaturaleza”) outside the limits of the known. New forms, new images announce themselves to Lezama and his poet, continuously flowing between what was and what is to come. Nothing of consequence is new because everything comes from the same origin. Everything is recognizable, previously experienced, albeit in different forms and various degrees.

The principle that everything comes from the same origin appears to govern Lezama’s ideology. Innovation in thought or belief, at first original and unusual, turns out to be a lost tradition now regained. This “new” truth has depth and counterpart:

What is only novelty becomes extinguished in elemental forms. But both Fronesis and Cemí knew that the new truth is a fatality, an undeniable complement. The profundity relatable between the wait and the call, in the greatest of contemporary creators, is fulfilled in an annunciation that distinguishes for them what is nature that must grow as great as super-nature, what is derivation that must again manage to be creative.

(Lo que es tan sólo novedad se extingue en formas ornamentales. Pero tanto Fronesis como Cemí sabían que lo verídico nuevo es una fatalidad,

⁷ Cited in Iván González Cruz, ed., Diccionario, vida y obra de JLL, 490.

un irrecusable cumplimiento. La profundidad relacionable entre la espera y el llamado, en los más grandes creadores contemporáneos, se cumple en una anunciación que les avisa [qué] es naturaleza que tiene que crecer hasta sobrenaturaleza, [qué] es derivación que tiene que lograr de nuevo ser creadora).⁸

As a result, the author makes the factual grow with the imaginary and the contemporary thoughts and ideas augment with those of old times. To show this logic in his writing, Lezama's diction signifies not only contemporary meaning but also etymological or archaic meaning. For instance, Lezama makes the old Taino word "Cemí," (which again denotes a supernatural being and an idol among the Indo-Antillean peoples) reappear as a "new" word in Paradiso. Lezama undoubtedly extracted this word from the chronicles of the discovery of the New World, the sources of origin for Cuba in the Western imagination. Lezama's "Cemí" now has the contemporary meaning as the last name of an incipient poet who seeks wisdom in "supernature," as if the Cemí of Paradiso were destined to become one with his ancestors by returning to their and the island's beginnings. Likewise, the label "honey" that in Antiquity denoted wisdom now converges with the Lokono meaning of Cemí as honey. So from a confluence of sources the contemporary word "Cemí" carries in it an allegorical sense based not only on the etymologies "demigod" and "idol," but also "wisdom" and "honey," all significant words that originated in the past. Thus confluences of images which create new words are the result of a rebirth, the figurative second birth of ancient words from diffuse civilizations and cultures.

⁸ P-Rabassa 329; Paradiso XI, 326. Logically, the two "que" that I underline in Lezama's text ought to be accented; they are indirect interrogatives meant to identify what is nature and what is super-nature. Naturally Fronesis and Cemí are part of the "nature that must grow as great as super-nature," as Rabassa interprets.

In the world of thoughts and ideas such as Lezama's, confluence is the union of various streams of thought and the junction of many forms of expression running in different courses. The centripetal force in the labyrinth of the mind attracts everything toward the center. This recalls Lezama's foremost image of confluence, "fragments to their magnet," ("fragmentos a su imán"), where the labyrinth, configured as the magnet for the confluence of images emerges as a tokonoma, "the pavillion of the void" ("el pabellón del vacío"), a cave-like place where the poet's body vanishes from existence but where the recesses of his poetic mind convert into a point at the center of the abyss filled with the silence of light,⁹ which, in my interpretation, is, filled with incoming bits of knowledge. Immediately, the centrifugal force moves everything in the gallery of the mind away from the center of the labyrinth into new configurations of images. Movement-away evokes Lezama's concept of "distance" ("lejanía"). Visions and words run together into unexpected currents in his memory and discourse. The confluence forms one continuous moving mass of thought. Ideas blend together or pass into each other without marked lines of division.

The excessive flow of images emanating from Lezama's imagination is problematic for readers who cannot perceive the fixedness of the images in the rapid processing of ideas and the production of abundant discourse. A solid Lezaman image may last only the instance of an allusion and may not be apprehended in fixed, firm, or stable form by a passive reader. This is why Lezama's texts beg to be read out loud and

⁹ The metaphor is the title for JLL's posthumously published collection of poems, Fragmentos a su imán (1977). See PC 391-493 for the collection; and specifically 491-493 for the poem, "El pabellón del vacío."

slowly, with intuition and imagination, savoring each word, every enunciation, as if to shape its form in the present space no matter how perplexing the imagery.

We have already seen that Lezama pursues what he calls “the splendor of the form” (“la splendor formae”), which is the illumination of the image or the word in all its radiance of possibilities. Now we see why Lezama admires Mallarmé in his pursuit of the difficult: the absence in the act of creation. In a crisis of sterility, Mallarmé despairs because of the void implied by the presence of his poem--his poem creates nothing, creates no presence. Lezama observes,

When Mallarmé indicates to us one of his own limitations in telling us that he suffered from the impossibility of not being able to proceed to the act, remaining negative in virtual wealth, he was indicating the resistances, the distances of the darkness where it showed its formal splendor.

(Cuando Mallarmé nos señala uno de sus propios muros al decirnos que poseía la imposibilidad de no poder pasar al acto, de permanecer negativo en la riqueza virtual, nos señalaba los contrastes, los lejos de sombra donde asomaba su esplendor formal).¹⁰

To Lezama, Mallarmé’s despair is an illumination. Lezama sees in what he calls “distance” (“lejanía”, again) that the absence or nothingness of things reveals an existence. In fact, his faith in the power of poetry to reveal an existence out of the void moves him to create the uncreated with poetic words. For instance, the absence of the father motivates Lezama and his protagonist Cemí to compose poetry.

¹⁰ In “Prosa de circunstancia para Mallarmé,” Analecta del reloj, OC II 265.

FIRST IMAGES OF CONFLUENCE: THE IMAGE OF CEMÍ IN PARADISO I

Lezama searches to fill Mallarmé's void. He finds spiritual fulfillment in the "word" of Scripture as a guide and rule for his faith. Faith underlies the first confluence in the first chapter of Paradiso in the episode where the narrator describes the ritual of healing and purification that the ailing child Cemí receives from Baldovina, Zoar, and Truni, the servants in Colonel Cemí's home. The narrative describes a syncretistic ceremony performed by this trinity. The ceremony combines various religious rites, orthodox and heterodox Christian and Jewish, along with Shamanism, to save Cemí from an attack of asthma (lack of spirit or pneuma) and from an allergic reaction to ant bites (ants, symbols of laboring, here are trying to pass the thread through the labyrinth of Cemí's body so that he can find honey-wisdom within his body). Zoar makes a cross on the front and on the back of Cemí and the other two members of the trinity offer "ancestral remedies" consisting of kisses and prayers. The passage appears Scriptural, although Lezama describes a chivalrous scene told in the manner of the Spanish Romancero. Baldovina, the Spanish housekeeper of the parental household-- modeled, some say, after Baldomera, Lezama's beloved family housekeeper--tries a treatment of wax running from a candelabrum onto the welts on the asthmatic child's chest. Lezama gives us clues. A seasoned household servant would know that honey is a most effective domestic remedy for breathlessness, and beeswax is a natural sealant. Yet, paradoxically, even though she has the right cure in hand, in her anxious state Baldovina does not see the beeswax working immediately on the child's welts and ignores the therapeutic properties of the traces of honey in the beeswax to restore the breathing. Moved by faith

she instead summons the servants Zoar and Truni for any remedy that they might possess to help cure the child.

Within the anguish of the moment the narrator both gravely and amusingly describes and defines the three servants as a trinity with Zoar as God the Father, Baldovina as the Daughter and Truni as the Holy Ghost (a heterodox Trinity-as-family: father, mother, child).

[. . .] Baldovina, fleshless, arid, weepy, looked like a sixteenth-century flagellant. Zoar's broad torso loomed like a wardrobe with three mirrors; it seemed to belong to some bigger species, placed like a box between his arms and legs.

Truni's real name, Trinidad, defined the ritual and the rite: Zoar as God the Father, Baldovina as the daughter, and Truni as the Holy Ghost. Baldovina, diabolical acolyte, contributed her shrunken face of a Peruvian marmoset to the crisis, sweating and muttering upstairs and down, incessant commands seeming to enter her ears, lending her perpetual motion.

The three cast their slow, heavy-lidded glances on the boy. They avoided looking at each other, to hide their helplessness. Nonetheless, all three were prepared to offer ancestral remedies, willing to try anything to stop the panting and the welts.

([. . .] Baldovina, descarnada, seca, llorosa, parecía una disciplinante del siglo XVI. El torso anchuroso de Zoar, lucía como un escaparate de tres lunas y parecía el de otro animal de tamaño mayor, situado como una caja entre las piernas y los brazos. Truni, Trinidad, precisaba con su patronímico el ritual y los oficios. Sí, Zoar parecía como el Padre, Baldovina como la hija y la Truni como el Espíritu Santo. Baldovina, como una acólita endemoniada, ofrecía para el trance su reducida cara de tití peruano, sudaba y repicaba, escaleras arriba y abajo, parecía que entraban en sus oídos incesantes órdenes que le comunicaban el movimiento perpetuo.

Los tres disparaban sus lentas y aglobadas miradas sobre el garzón, aunque no se miraban entre sí para no mostrar descarnadamente sus inutilidades. Sin embargo, los tres iban a ofrecer soluciones ancestrales, lanzándose hasta lo último para evitar el jadeo y las ronchas).¹¹

¹¹ P-Rabassa 7-8; Paradiso I, 7-8.

The name “Zoar” is important. It suggests a transmutation of another religious order in the trio’s search for the cure. I argue that Zoar the Galician is the “Man of Zohar” to evoke the Zohar: The Book of Splendor. Presumably an initiate in the Kabbalah, Lezama’s Zoar studies the situation and performs an ancient rite of the cross while Baldovina prays and Truni kisses the child’s chest. Baldovina’s zeal to revive Cemí induces the priestly-like servants and child to exhibit the three attributes of God as known in Jewish theology. Zoar is the Splendor or God the Father, the one who speaks by performing the cross on the child; Truni is God the Holy Spirit, who with her kisses corresponds to the life that comes out of the insufflated word; the child Cemí is God the Logos, the word that is spoken. Zoar opens a veritable Portae Lucis, a passage, portal or door of light, for the manifestation of God’s light:

Zoar stretched out and the bed shrieked all over. He took the child and pressed the small, trebling chest against his own, crossing his huge hands over his back. Zoar then pressed the small back against his seemingly limitless chest, and crossed his hands again.

Truni had pulled his blanket over her head and as the exorcism began she metamorphosed into a Russian priest of the time of Ivan the Terrible. Each time Zoar crossed his arms, she hovered closer and with hieratic unction kissed the center of the cross. The ceremony was repeated until Zoar’s powerful arms showed signs of turning into lead, and Truni’s frequent kisses became repugnant. Zoar leaped from the bed, a witch doctor transformed into one of those giants found in the circuses of western Europe who with executioner’s arms lift railroad tracks and support on one extended biceps a working-class couple complete with daughter sucking a vanilla ice-cream cone. Neither of the two looked at Baldovina or the boy again, and Zoar took Truni by the hand and led her off to their end of the house.

(Se extendió en la cama que chilló por todos los lados, como si los alambres de su trenzado se agitasen en pez hirviendo. Cogió al niño y colocó su pequeño y tembloroso pecho contra el suyo y cruzó sus manos

grandotas sobre sus espaldas, después puso las espaldas pequeñas en aquel pecho que el muchacho veía sin orillas y cruzó de nuevo las manos.

Truni se había echado la manta sobre la cabeza y al comenzar a ayudar el conjuro parecía un pope contemporáneo de Iván el Terrible. Cada vez que Zoar cruzaba los dos brazos, ella se acercaba y con mayestática unción besaba el centro de la cruceta. La ceremonia se fue repitiendo hasta que los poderosos brazos de Zoar dieron muestras de emplomarse y la frecuencia del beso de Truni llegó hasta el asco. Saltó de la cama y ahora el hechicero parecía uno de esos gigantes del oeste de Europa, que con mallas de decapitador, alzan en los circos rieles de ferrocarril y colocan sobre uno de sus brazos extendidos un matrimonio obrero con su hija tomándose un mantecado. Ninguno de los dos miró de nuevo a Baldovina o al muchacho, y cogiendo Zoar por la mano a Truni la llevó al extremo de la casa donde estaba su pieza).¹²

The transformations that occur during the religious rite-turned-fun-fair are of theatrical quality, circus-like. Yet the carnivalesque scene is loaded with signification. In the spectacle Truni becomes a priest of Ivan the Terrible, Baldovina looks like a Peruvian titi monkey (one who could be doing the “see no evil, hear no evil and say no evil”--“ver, oír y callar”) pantomime, while in a labyrinthine chain of transformations Zoar becomes a priest, St. Christopher, a shaman, a giant, a hooded executioner, an Atlas, and a father. The routine is typical of Lezama’s serious-comic approach to representation. However, the confluence of disparate images in Zoar’s metamorphoses has a particular relevance according to the Golden Legend’s account of the life of St. Christopher, “the bearer of Christ,” summarized as follows:¹³

Christopher was born a heathen in Canaan or Arabia with the name Offerus or Reprebus. He used his extraordinary size and strength (a giant) to serve the strongest and

¹² P-Rabassa 8; Paradiso I, 7-8.

¹³ Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno, 1969) 377-382.

the bravest. He served kings and evil but found them unworthy of his service. A hermit instructed him in the faith of Christ, named him Christopher (Gk. “carrier of Christ”) and guided him to the new occupation of transporting people across raging streams for Christ’s love. One day Christopher was transporting a child whose weight grew continually heavier, so that he felt he was carrying the whole world on his shoulder (as Atlas or Lezama’s “Zoar”). When Christopher complained about the weight, the child told him that he carried upon his back the world and the creator and redeemer of the universe. To certify the truth of what he revealed, the child had Christopher plant his staff in the ground. The next day the staff had become a palm tree bearing fruit, and the miracle converted many to Christ.

At this point in the novel, the confluence of Lezama’s chain of transformations and the thread of legend become treasure troves of interpretation. First, the full name of the capital of Cuba is San Cristóbal de La Habana. The saint is the city’s patron. The name La Habana presumably highlights its magnificent deep-sea bay with a sheltered harbor. Given the island’s topography, geography, and history I speculate that the city’s name was likely coined after the language of seafaring peoples. From the beginning the name could have stood for “haven,” a rich association to the amateur philologist in Lezama. Or it could have derived from the Old Norse root HAF and old English HAEF (hæf) for sea.¹⁴ At any rate, the name is an alliteration of Heaven and Haven and thus La Habana or Havana symbolizes a refuge, the port of Paradise or the gate of Heaven. The

¹⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary.

motif of La Habana as a door to the light, the Portae Lucis metaphor, is recurrent in Cuban tradition since La Habana was the key to the New World from colonial times, and a beacon of light after crossing the dark waters of the Atlantic Ocean. La Habana is figuratively the key to an afterlife in bliss.

In addition, the national tree of Cuba is the royal palm tree. In its many varieties, the palm tree has no branches and its mass of large fan-shaped leaves at the top resembles an open hand. Its leaf is a symbol of victory, ascension, regeneration and immortality.¹⁵ It is used in Jesus' celebrated entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to cover the ground of His triumphal entry into His earthly kingdom. Waving the palm branch in Jewish law signifies Sukkoth, the day when God's people dwelt in tents in the Promised Land. Of course, the palm is also the inner surface of the hand and so it shares many of the same symbolisms of the hand--ideas of action, power, dominion, royalty, transfer of energy.¹⁶ Needless to say, the palm and the hand are common motifs charged with meaning in Lezama's works. The first confluence shows the humble Galician Zoar unchaining a splendid array of Cuban and Lezaman images from the past that are made present, all of which are vividly associated in the author's memory, recorded concretely and abstractly in the mind.

In this first confluence, the cleansing ritual concludes with Cemí being literally revived from his comatose state and figuratively reborn. He can finally breathe and receive poetic pneuma and he can set the ants in motion to thread the labyrinth. Not

¹⁵ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 734.

¹⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 466-479.

obvious in a first reading, all the confluent images of faith and the rituals of faith, diffuse as they are, join into a rich pathway. The thread is discovered with much “labor from within.”

Cemí’s subsequent urination--he becomes submerged in his “own” waters--symbolizes his baptism. The sum of knowledge of the “Trinity” applied to the sick child heals the boy and he is saved with the sacrament achieved by this bath in his own urine. Lezama invokes a divine illumination, recovers a ritual from legendary epic, and revitalizes the adventuresome occurrences of the same. The whole scene evokes the Romancero ballads of the age of Spanish chivalry as much as the cultural mixture (“mestizaje”) in ceremonial activity and representation of the “Barroco de Indias” that Lezama memorializes in the American Expression (La expresión americana).

Lezama recovers the tradition of the Cemí (his use of the figure from the Taino cosmology) to narrate Cemí’s rebirth. Lezama engineers the rebirth of this image from the past since he, as poet, is the “causal being for resurrection.” Further, the narrative replicates this rebirth in Cemí’s labyrinthine journey of initiation into poetry. The labor in the labyrinth of life and letters makes him whole, consecrated and holy (Engl. “hale, healthy;” Gk. holos--whole). The recovery of Cemí’s breath (pneuma) outside the narrative and in the narrative suggests the Holy Spirit’s (Gk. Pneuma) insufflation into his soul. The image recaptures the creative power of Logos, the memory of God, the memory of things, and therefore the restoration of meaning. Faith and theology are key protagonists in Lezama’s work. José Cemí is an image, a figure of Jesus Christ, the redeemer who saves man from sin and the effects of the Fall. We recall that “Cemí” is the

figure of an idol, a demigod to the Tainos, and as “J.C.” Cemí stands for the son of God in human form. Lezama’s connection of Cemí to the splendor of the word (Logos) is patent. We are compelled to revisit the Zohar once again for its significance in the narrative. After all, it is after the illness or “Fall” of Cemí that the process of his regaining Paradise is enacted.

The brightness behind the acronym pardes, “la splendor formae” (“Zohar” means “splendor”), emerged from confluent cultures in Spain which Lezama translates into the Paradiso named Cuba. Lezama’s poem-novel is filled with syncretism and faith. Jewish faith, Christian faith, indigenous faith all flow together in their rites, their saints, their palms, their triumphal entries. This is what I mean by confluence of “imágenes cognoscentes,” the planned chaos of images teaching the reader, mostly by description, of the syncretistic oneness in the labyrinth. We read Lezama’s one poetic novel at multiple levels. The reader must consider the literal and non-literal senses of the narrative, keeping in mind the four meanings as suggested by the Jewish pardes: literal (historical, factual, oral), the allegorical (the philosophical metaphors), the mystical (the totality of Kabbalistic commentaries), and the moral (ethical) senses.¹⁷

According to this psychology of knowing, the reader’s mind remains in potency (inert) until it actually knows an object. The act of knowing brings the mind into action. The “imágenes cognoscentes” bring the reader’s mind from potency to act by suggesting new confluences from opposed images. This mind-in-act, configuring a series of

¹⁷ Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah 172. Christians have the same “fourfold” levels of interpretation of sacred texts.

confluences, assimilates itself to God, who is “Pure Act” and “Highest Good.” The self-actualized readers achieve the highest good, God, signified in Lezama’s text as the perfection or achievement of the Summa poetica. The act of intellect, that is, the faculty of reasoning, knowing, and thinking, is the highest good, because it perceives the highest good through revelation and moves toward it.¹⁸ Lezama portrays the labyrinthine process or the attempt to reach the highest good or highest knowledge in a total poetic confluence. One can detect this attempt by correlating it with his own concept of potens and its path, which is the circuitous process of developing the potential of the image, crafted with words, for revelation of the Word.

Thus in Lezama confluence implies the convergence of allusions stemming from culture, myth, theology, scripture, and literature. The meaning of the text is not only given by the textual movement of the author and the reader, who in the act of reading rewrites the text, but also by the dialogue between the writer and the reader. The rewriting of the text by the reader is affected by the memory of past experiences but also by the memory of the cultural environment.

Memory is the ability to force thought and images out of the chaos in an old-new culture (Lat. cogito, to force out of memory). Out of the chaos that is a confluence of all things, some order brings experience and therefore that knowledge to light. Sometimes memory forces order-out-of-chaos through the interpretation of dreams. The confluence

¹⁸ This is Aristotelian, as expressed by Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologiae, Part 1, Question 14, Article 2, (God as Pure Act), Article 6 (God as Pure Act and Highest Good), Article 8 (God’s Intellect as the Pure Act/Cause of Things). I thank Dr. Ernest N. Kaulbach for providing the reference and exegeses of these theological tenets.

of the subconscious, represented as water, activates the memory to put the currents in order. Sometimes memory uses the four levels of meaning as numerology. Such a method posits unity or wholeness or completion inherent in the symbolism in the number four, where the four ways of interpretation originate from the notion of the four elements (air, water, fire, earth), recognized in philosophy as those that formed the cosmos. Always, Lezama's images take our memories back to etymologies and origins,--Orígenes, Genesis, Zohar, etc.

IMAGES OF CONFLUENCE: THE MEANINGS OF "PARADISO"

Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of the God moved over the face of the waters. Water was the first element--it has a primary generative power. Everything was fluid until God made a firmament to separate the waters above (rain) from the waters below (rivers and oceans). Just as the four elements come from primordial water, so images of confluence come from fluidity. Lezama constructs everything from the fluidity of the poetry surrounding Cuba. Cuba, like Paradise, is an island surrounded by water. Cemí is described like a sponge in water, like an island. The incident in the novel cited above where Cemí wets his bed, represents him figuratively as an island in the middle of water. There the presence of water makes possible his purification or regeneration. The child's illness is a malady or effect of the Fall-into-sin that requires the purification ritual performed by the nurse attempting to heal his wounds. After the Fall, Paradise moves or relocates. Some say it is located in today's Damascus (plains of Syria), others in today's Baghdad (intersection of Tigris and Euphrates), others to the East in Ceylon ("Adam's

bridge” leading from Paradise just above India to Ceylon), others to the West of Europe in the middle of the waters (perhaps the New World, the Antilles, Cuba). Cemí--fallen--is in Cuba, in the middle of the waters: in Paradise (middle of the waters) but fallen (asthmatic).

Lezama thought that water is the element “most remembered in the [poetic] mind” (“el agua más recordada”).¹⁹ Water is a prominent element in Paradiso. The narrative represents the relationship between water, the acquisition of knowledge and the creative processes. All this is connected to the relevance of water in the origin of the labyrinth. The nexus of water, island, and origin with the flowing together of images and ideas in the discourse is evident. We can associate water, island, and origin with the ebb and flow of language, with body, family, friendship, apprenticeship, the Ciudad de La Habana in the middle of the water--all confluences of water in the novel’s discourse. My hypothesis is that the confluence is linked with the flow of consciousness and the development of the spirit and cognition of the artist, which are all part of the acquisition of knowledge. The confluence occurs when the artist’s regard, gaze, contemplation, meditation, reflection, reverie, dream and narration have fixed all associations in one summary image. The result is a poetic mysticism.

The word “Paradiso” has many meanings. My theory is that one meaning, pardes, announced by the name “Zoar” in the novel’s first chapter, is prominent, because it does occur at the beginning of the labyrinth. Again, “Zoar” from Zohar: The Book of Splendor

¹⁹ From a verse in “Ah, that you escape” (“Ah, que tú escapes”) from the collection Enemigo Rumor. In JLL: PC 17.

does “splendid” deeds (cures Cemí of asthma and allergy attack), splendid because the deeds allow Cemí to be inspired and construct the thread for the labyrinth. Pardes allows Zoar to do deeds with four levels of meaning (associated with the four rivers in Paradise). Zoar makes a cross because the four rivers make a cross. Zoar baptizes because the four rivers merge into a fountain of youth. Clearly, Zoar’s Paradise is located in Cuba, because Cemí is Cuban, an “Indian” (not only Taino “Indian” after Columbus’ encounter with the West Indies, but also like the inhabitants of Paradise when the latter was thought to be located in Ceylon-India). Undoubtedly, Lezama’s Paradiso represents the confluence of old and new Paradise, past and present Paradise, East and West Paradise, Heaven-on-earth Paradise. Making the old and new “conflow,” Lezama’s confluence forces readers to think (again, to “cogitate” is to force old images into union with new images), to pay attention to the historical context in which new images are described; in short, to etymologize, to search the origin of old words, to invent new ones.

Meanings of “Paradise” from the past include strange etymologies not known by the contemporary reader, in “potential” and “laboring from within” with all this detail. In addition to what we have already seen, there is more to the possible confluence of “imagines cognoscentes” teaching us readers about the meaning of “Paradise.” Xenophon calls it the garden or park of Persian kings and nobles in ancient worlds (Gk. Paradeisos).²⁰ “Eden,” a Sumerian word meaning “plain,” used in Genesis 2 came to mean the “place where all knowledge was leveled and balanced,” the place being

²⁰ From the Greek paradeisos, originally an Oriental word first used by Xenophon in reference to the parks of Persian kings and nobles. (Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon; Crane, Gregory R. (ed.) The Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, 31 August 2003).

Damascus. Dante's "Paradiso" (an island) is a clear model for Lezama. But Dante's model, Virgil's "fields of Elysium" ("champs d'Elysées") is less clear to the laboring reader but also important for Lezama's imagery because he uses Paris, "city of light" or "island in the middle of the water" as a confluent image of old-world Paradise to signify to Cemí, the indigenous pilgrim or Aeneas to find his cultural identity in the New World "city of light"--La Habana.

Before examining other meanings of "Paradiso" we have to face several questions: Why should a contemporary reader connect the title Paradiso to Lezama's axiom, "the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image"? Does the title indicate a pleasurable experience that readers will receive when they finish the text? The title of the novel attracts, the text repels (too many images, jumbled, contradictory, monstrous, etc.). To answer the question, we have to say that we have the "faith" of Lezama instead of the "absence" of Mallarmé: we expect to understand "things unseen" in Paradiso by the time we reach the end of the labyrinth.

Religious faith underlies his text. Lezama was a Catholic "Origenista," albeit his Catholicism is heterodox. Orthodox faith believes in Paradise as the initial heaven for the first man and woman created by God, lost by their fall from grace and expulsion. Yet Providence designs another Paradise for Christians, and their imitation of Christ and faith will lead them there. We readers ask: are the faith and labor worth the effort? Considerable "labor" is needed to get "into" the text. "Paradiso" not only draws attention to a Hispanic narrative (Lezama's novel) but puts the work among Dante and Virgil, the masters of European poetry, a mighty ambition for a Cuban author. But, Lezama has

faith. His title evokes the European faith of 500 plus years ago when the explorers thought they had found Paradise. Five hundred plus years ago, in all his linguistic hybridism, an amazed Christophoro Colombo likely pronounced the utterance upon envisioning the New World. His expression was afterwards inscribed by Las Casas as “the Earthly Paradise” (“el Paraíso Terrenal”).²¹ Actually, historical relations reveal that after apprehending their pristine splendor through “the idealized landscape of the European imagination,”²² Columbus, notwithstanding his essential faith in the providential nature of his endeavors, expected the newly discovered lands to be “the dreamed-of paradise gleaming with gold.”²³ In effect, in the Admiral’s evolving imagery during the second voyage, Cuba is fancied as “the land of gold,” which in medieval times

²¹ Columbus’s linguistic complexity and ambiguity has long been established with the concordance of his transcribed writings and the glosses he penned on the reference texts that survive him. His notes are homogeneous as far as thought processes, idiom, and common graphic execution. Even so, he wrote the way he spoke, with a characteristic economy of language and a form that could be understood in most tongues. In his own way he spoke Latin, Castilian, Portuguese, and obviously Italian. Being a mariner, he quickly absorbed the voices and dialects of the places he visited. See Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela, “Introducción,” Cristóbal Colón: Textos y documentos completos, ed. Consuelo Varela, 2^a ed. (Madrid: Alianza Universitaria, 2003) 15-88.

According to Las Casas’s autographed copy, the final lines in the entry for Thursday, 21 February 1493 in Columbus’s Diary of the first voyage read: “In conclusion, the Admiral says that the sacred theologians and sage philosophers had rightly asserted that the Earthly Paradise is situated at the end of the Orient, because it is an extremely temperate place. So those lands that he had just discovered, is—he says—the end of the Orient” (“Concluyendo, dize el Almirante que bien dixeron los sacros theólogos y los sabios filósofos que el Paraíso Terrenal esta en el fin de Oriente, porque es lugar temperadísimo. Así que aquellas tierras que agora él avía descubierto, es—dize él—el fin del Oriente”). In Cristóbal Colón: Textos y documentos completos, ed. Consuelo Varela 212, my translation.

Naturally, I presume that Columbus most likely would have used his native expression “Paradiso.”

²² J. H. Elliott, The Old World and the New: 1492-1650 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970; Canto Ed. 1992), p. 19.

²³ Antonello Gerbi, Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, trans. Jeremy Moyle, (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P), p. 13.

was known as “the land of griffins” connected with Ophir and King Solomon’s mines: Columbus thought he had seen griffin footprints on Cuba in 1494.²⁴

In any case, Paradiso the novel triumphantly celebrates Cuba’s beginnings in Western fiction and joyfully reclaims its original status. Lezama’s designation heralds content and a form conceived in a mind’s eye experienced with the learned vision of a native son and the old-world perspective informed by biblical, mythical, classical and traditional sources. Of course, “Cuba is Lezama Lima’s paradise. But not only the Cuba of earth, sun and water that lies anchored in the Caribbean Sea. It is as well a Cuba surmised through recollections that have been altered by a hallucinating poetic vision” (“El paraíso de Lezama Lima es Cuba. Pero no sólo la Cuba de tierra, agua y sol que yace anclada en el Mar Caribe. Es además una Cuba vislumbrada a través de recuerdos que han sido alterados por una alucinante visión poética”).²⁵

It is after the confluence of the Old World and the New in Columbus’s discovery of Cuba that Lezama envisions the metaphor of birth, that is, new life and the umbilical cord that unites Europe with the New World. The offspring is in the Caribbean: Cuba, the largest and, to him, the primordial island of the Caribbean. Thus, Lezama emphasizes the role that the Mediterranean plays in the dissemination of knowledge of Paradise. The crossing, the intersection, the mirror of all thoughts is an umbilical cord that connects knowledge from all parts of the world with Lezama on his island. I argue that Lezama’s

²⁴ Crónica de los Reyes Católicos 128 (p. 321), cited in Gil and Varela, “Introducción,” CC, Textos y documentos completos 51.

²⁵ José Juan Arrom, “Lo tradicional cubano en el mundo novelístico de JLL,” Revista Iberoamericana 41.92-3 (July-December 1975) 470.

notion of “el cordel mediterráneo” is related to his conception of the labyrinth.²⁶ First, “the vast majority of ancient labyrinths has been found in the Mediterranean Basin” and that is the area where some scholars look for the origin of the labyrinth.²⁷ With the Mediterranean umbilical cord metaphor, Lezama linked the knowledge of all the great mother civilizations of antiquity that converged into the Mediterranean region which he and Cuba absorbed. That is why the Egyptian, the Minoan, the Greek, the Roman, the European, and the Oriental cultures and religions feature prominently in his writing. The Mediterranean is the main ocean sea into which flowed all the knowledge from the rivers of the surrounding regions. The Mediterranean regions in turn shared, processed, collected, and extracted and reflected the unknown from the known in different forms. In this sense, the power of water is to collect all the knowledge and serve as a conduit for new solutions. Water makes those new solutions transparent and illuminates extreme views and insights. Thus, through the “looking glass” of the Mediterranean, Lezama restores the historical images communicated by the ancient civilizations that flowed into the sea.

Like a child in amniotic fluid about to be born, the fluid converging upon Lezama’s memory and his island allows him to develop new knowledge and new ways of expressing that knowledge. Therefore Lezama’s discourse gives prominence to water as

²⁶ Lezama uses the image of the “cordel” in the context of the labyrinthine intellectual friendship between the members of the “Orígenes” Group, but it can be used to signify the labyrinthine cultural relationship between America and Europe. See “Interrogando a LL,” *Recopilación de textos*, ed. Simón, 15.

²⁷ See Kern 26-27.

life-sustaining element; as mirror water is the means and the medium where his thoughts come to life and are borne into words in the form of images, as we have seen.

Nature and the Tainos' poetic interaction with the island are the Cuban poet-novelist's paradise according to Lezama:

Among us paradise is as nature, not as symbol or archetype. The primitive man who inhabited our lands is one of the human mysteries nearer to the angelic that might have ever existed; he was, we could say, the first choral modality of what I have called the genitor by the image.

(Entre nosotros paraíso es como naturaleza, no como símbolo o arquetipo. El hombre primitivo que habitó nuestras tierras es uno de los misterios humanos más cerca de lo angélico que hayan existido; fue, pudiéramos decir, la primera modalidad coral de lo que he llamado el genitor por la imagen).²⁸

The imagery of Cemí or of Zoar or of any other native Cuban is the imagery of Paradise, the picture of a literal speech--not only symbolic or archetypal. Cemí or the other narrators are "genitors by image"--creators. Cemí, the protagonist, is at the center because he is the indigenous poet. Paradiso narrates the Cuban identity and nation in a labyrinthine novel that domesticates chaos: "For a writer who has already fulfilled his days and practices, the center of Paradise is the novel: it organizes the chaos, it extends it under our hands so we can manipulate it (Para un escritor que ya ha cumplido sus días y sus ejercicios, el centro del paraíso es la novela: ella ordena el caos, ella lo tiende bajo nuestras manos para que podamos acariciarlo").²⁹

The Paradise (Paradiso) of a novel is begotten--indeed procreated--by the image,

²⁸ In Eugenia Nieves, "Entrevista con JLL" Árbol de letras 2.11, Julio 1969, 21.

²⁹ In Entrevista con Tomás Eloy Martínez, "Interrogando a LL," Recopilación, ed. Simón 24-5.

just as man is created in the image of God. The protagonist of the novel and his creator are the primal poets, members of the “choral modality” of angelic beings. Protagonist and creator are hybrids of mixed blood, mixed civilizations, mixed cultures. They are Westerners, Cuban-Europeans. José Cemí speaks for his hybrid family; he writes the narrative Paradiso as testimony for his family and the indigenous peoples of Cuba. By naming the protagonist José Cemí, where, again, “cemí is the [Taino] word that designated the gods and also the images that represented them” (“cemí es la palabra [taína] con la cual se designaba a los dioses y también a las imágenes que los representaban”),³⁰ Lezama alludes to their ancestral paradise and declares the aboriginal Antillean myths as a foundation for his writing.

With the cemí metonymy the author memorializes his indigenous ancestor, his own roots, his place of origin, and the soil and matter that form his island. Likewise, he identifies and asserts himself and his novelistic character as autochthonous metaphoric subjects--beings that create by images as gods do. José Cemí is an image of Jesus Christ. The allusion is appropriate when considering the function that the protagonist and author of the novel share as members of the hierarchy of angels that Lezama brings to mind.

³⁰ J. J. Arrom, “Lo tradicional cubano” 470. Fernando Ortiz explains cemí as “A supernatural being and idol among the Indoantillean, of the Taino civilization. It was also styled zemí. The word is found in all of the first chroniclers of the discovery (Ser sobrenatural e ídolo entre los indoantillanos, de civilización taína. También se escribió zemí. El vocablo se encuentra en todos los primeros cronistas del descubrimiento”). Nuevo catauro de cubanismos (1974; La Habana: Ed. Ciencias Sociales, 1985) 137.

THE DOUBLE AXE IMAGE: THE JOINING OF KNOWLEDGE WITH MIRROR AT THE CENTER

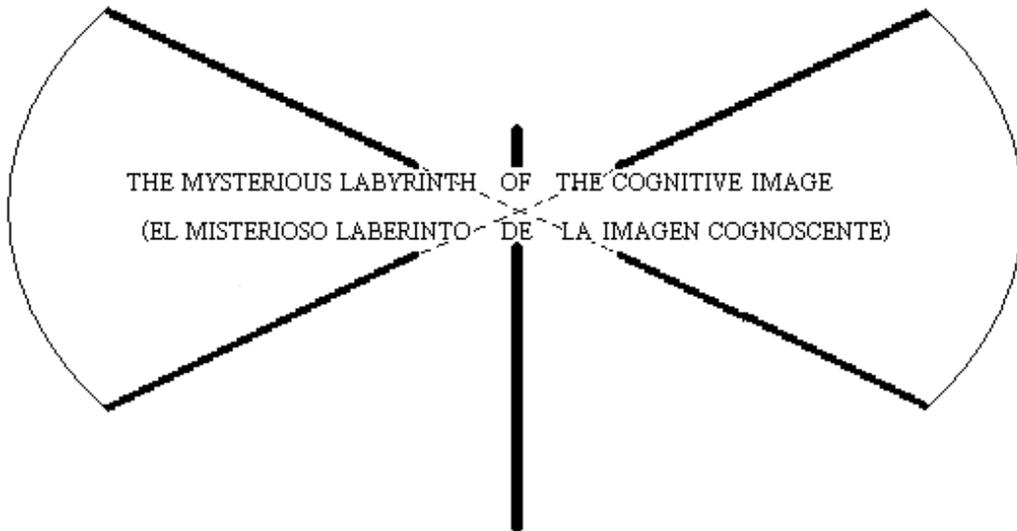
The “tortuous path” or the labyrinth winds through images which are doubled; this doubling is either balanced (two sides represented as equal but separate) or conjoined (two sides formerly opposed but now confluent). Earlier I described this as a “double-edged sword,” but in the next diagram it appears as a double axe or labrys (a figure representing the upright and inverted horns of two bulls [4 points] united at the base [1]), a recurrent symbol in the form of an “X” with the sides depicted as axes widely associated with the labyrinth.³¹ Since “the mysterious labyrinth” mirrors “the cognitive image,” or “imágenes cognoscentes,” we ask: how is the image configured in the labyrinth? How does a doubled image lead readers to know, i.e., to thread their way through the labyrinth? How are the cognitive images doubled and why?

As all bodies originate from the four cardinal points of the universe, they follow a fourfold arrangement of chaos, so language and knowledge originate from the four points of the double axe. The same image is called by Logicians the “square of opposition,” which follows the form of “X.” The four points on the sides of the square signify “all are”/ “some are” (left side) and “none is”/“some are not”. When the top left crosses to the bottom right (“all are”/ “some are not”) and the top right crosses to the bottom left (“none is”/“some are”), the points are formed into an “X” signifying “contradiction” or

³¹ To some early theorists the word “labrys” was associated etymologically with the word labyrinth. The labrys symbol occurs frequently in the Palace at Knossos, so it was believed by its discoverer, Sir Arthur Evans to be the Cretan labyrinth, the House of the Labrys. The labrys or double axe is connected to the cult of the bull; the labrys and the bull are signs of Zeus. See W. H. Matthews, Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of their History and Developments (London, 1922; Detroit: Singing Tree P, 1969) 29-36.

“opposition.”³² So images of the X or double axe teach logic, the knowledge of Logos, the precursor of speech. Obviously, the four points of the X are the “cognitive image” for elemental logic. The four elements make up the body which, in turn, makes the image seen. The X illustrates the contradictory as well as confluent images: it teaches a basic logic--same, different, part, whole, is, is not, no.

A diagram of the elements of Lezama’s axiom, drawn in the form of a double axe shows how the labyrinth and the cognitive image are related:



Either axe is an opposed image, such as Foción (L), Fronesis (R); the center joins the images, such that Foción and Fronesis join into Cemí. The center of the axe or “X” provides the confluence or union of the two opposites into one.

But now we see that the figure “X” refers also to number and numerology. The most common labyrinth forms are the circle (which can stand for interior architecture, the

³² “The Traditional Square of Opposition,” [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/square/); <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/square/>; accessed 20 August 2007. Modern logicians have changed the figure from a square rectangle into an “X” or axe.

soul) and the square (which can stand for exterior architecture, the body). The circle refers to three, as we shall soon see: the same (I), the different (II) and the conjunction of the two (III)--(I and II are connected, united by the mediation of III: III is to I as II is to III; III mediates I by means of II; and III mediates II by means of I). The square refers to four: long (I), wide (II), high (III), thick (IV). The whole of the edifice is III (soul) and IV (body). The classic form of the labyrinth is the Classic Seven--VII (III soul, IV body), which begins with the four cardinal points crossing each other at the center of the building, the "X" diagrammed in Chapter One with Lezama's axiom and here repeated. The exterior "X" (IV of the building) marks where the interior "X" (III of the soul) begins or originates. Obviously, the cross or "X" is the foremost symbol of confluence. The exterior "X" in the text marks the interior "X" of knowledge. We learn in circles as in "encyclopaideia." Lezama's text is an encyclopedia. At this point readers should know that the drawing of the graphic image of the Classic Seven or Cretan type labyrinth begins with the cross.³³

The cross at the center of Lezama's Paradiso evokes an image of the protagonist's father, the Colonel José Eugenio Cemí in the prime of his life, but in agony, then in death, from the influenza apparently caught in the epidemic of 1918. The father's early death prevents him from fulfilling his potential destiny as father to all three children and as leader of the Cuban troops in WWI. In an alternate representation, the mother Rialta represents an X--the crossing of the mother and father figures, the two in one. She carries the cross to and through the various stations of her journey of life with the support of her

³³ See Kern, Through the Labyrinth 34.

children and her mother, Augusta. In turn, the children's grandmother Augusta represents another X: as her name implies, she is matriarchal and patriarchal, as she provides maternal sustenance and has the patrician quality of stalwartness needed to overcome the demands of the most trying life experiences (bereavement, the death of her son Uncle Alberto, the widowhood of her daughter Rialta, her illness). Just as the cross is a synecdochic figura of Christ (XP), the initials of José Cemí's name indicate that he embodies the cross as a part that represents the whole image of Jesus Christ (JC).

Still more examples of "X": the triangle is formed by the bivia in intersections and crossings. Here the "V" represents the "Y" or "via" dividing into two directions--the bivia; the "V" on top of an upside down "V" signifies criss-crossings, up and down. Half of the "X" is "V," not the Roman numeral five but the figure of a triangle, e.g., the figure of the three friends (Foción, Fronesis, and Cemí), the three children (Violante, José, and Eloísa), the three father-figures (the Colonel Cemí, Uncle Alberto, and the Mentor, Licario) and the three mothers (Doña Cambita, Doña Augusta, and Rialta), to name a few. The square is most vividly depicted by the instance of Rialta and the three children playing jacks. The four as a symbol is an eminent protagonist in all Lezama creations. Lezama achieves the most poignant circle with the phenomenal image of the father surrounding the mother and the three children in their game of jacks. This is a recurrence of the circle of knowledge at the most intimate level. This instance is revelatory--it represents the family's full recognition that they are one with the father.

Finally there is a confluence of IV and III in Lezama's best known definition of poetry, "un caracol nocturno en un rectángulo de agua." That is, poetry is the dark

(“nocturno”) manifestation of the circle (“caracol”), the labyrinth, in the rectangle (exterior building) “of water” (the exterior building is Cuba housing the circle of the poetry labyrinth). The figure of the snail-shell in Chapter One gives a diagram of Lezama’s image of poetry.

Since the young aspiring poet José Cemí develops artistic sensibility in a labyrinth, Paradiso is a novel of formation. The formation is both fictive and factual, as the reader emerges a different individual, reformed with the new senses that Lezama anticipated. Perhaps a more suitable descriptor for the man, his works, and his ideals--more apt than the simple “labyrinth” metaphor--is his own epigram: “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” (“el misterioso laberinto de la imagen cognoscente”).³⁴

Still another example of “X” is Lezama’s adaptation of Neo-Platonism to his work, represented in the novel with the fact that Cemí, like Fronesis “had been led by the impassioned reading of Plato to polarize his culture” (“la apasionada lectura de Platón lo había llevado de la mano a polarizar su cultura”).³⁵ The X refers to the “Pneuma,” the world-soul or spirit in Plato’s Timaeus.³⁶ According to Plato, the architect of the world divided the “energies” of the world-soul into two and crossed them at the middle in the shape of the letter “X.” He bent them into two concentric circles, one outer moving to the

³⁴ P-Rabasa 436, Paradiso 429. This metaphor guides my project. The quotation appears in Chapter XIV in the narrator’s elaboration of Oppiano Licario’s “Poetic Syllogistics”--his system for apprehending reality through poetry. Critics who have commented on the labyrinth in Lezama Lima have basically missed the metaphor’s relevance to Oppiano Licario-Lezama Lima’s poetic system.

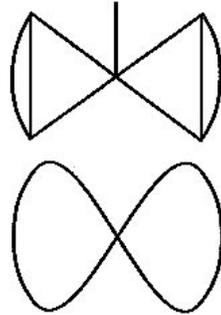
³⁵ P-Rabassa 328; Paradiso XI 325.

³⁶ Timaeus, section 34c-36b; cross (X) on 36b.

right, the other inner moving to the left, united at the center by the “Pneuma,” the world-soul or spirit. The two touch each other at “axes,” an axis north and another south, and so look like an X or double axe, although a concentric double axe. Movement to the right is opposed to movement to the left, but “Pneuma” joins them into the famous “conjunction of opposites,” the “X.” Beyond the “X” is the splendor of the image outside what is visible--“hypertelia,” beyond reason, we recall. Lezama called this “lo informe,” that which has no form, or “the unconditioned” that the poet must create or condition with words.

A figure which opens up and depicts infinite apertures to the unknown, the hypertely of the cross or X is the lemniscate. This is a closed-curve that resembles the figure of the labrys or double axe that is closely associated with the labyrinth. As in the Timaeus, one end opens to the right (east), to the light, and one to the left (west), to the darkness of night. Hypertely (Lezama’s “hipertelia” meaning “beyond the limits”) can be diagrammed like the lemniscate-like figure commonly used as symbol for infinity.

The labrys or double axe is diagrammed in the upper part of the figure below; in the lower part of the figure is the lemniscate-like figure commonly used as symbol for infinity:³⁷

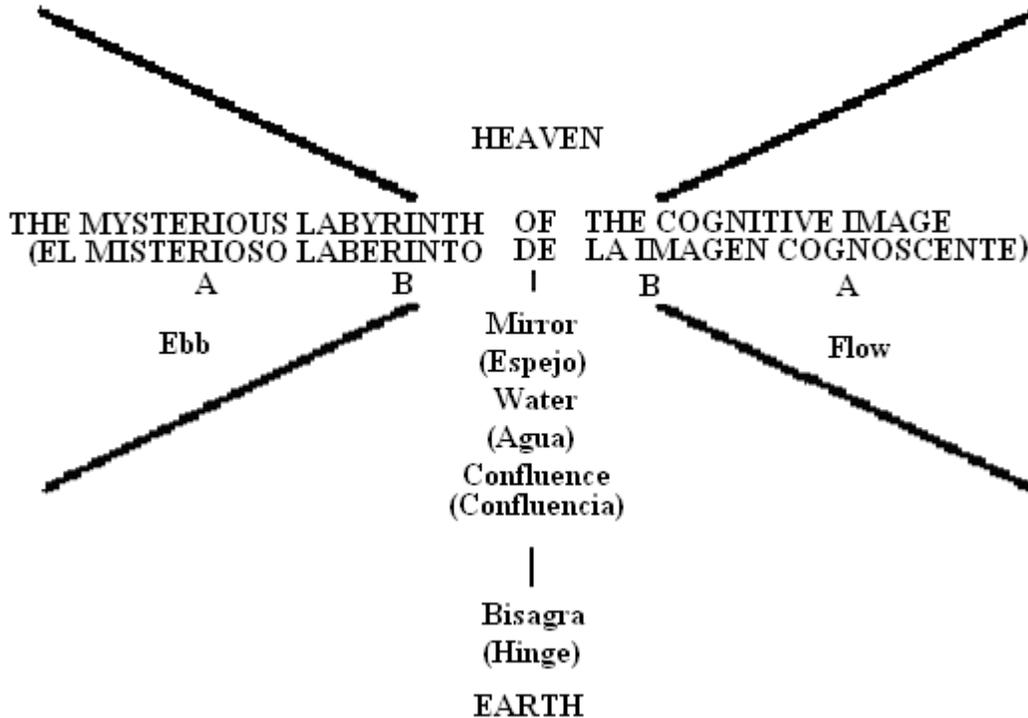


Much like the labrys and the chiasmus, the lemniscate resembles two sets of bull horns, where one set of bull horns is placed upright, the other one inverted below. From the beginning of time the bull was the principal sacrificial animal related to the drama of new life and its head and horns were symbols of creation and regeneration. In the Neolithic the bullhead and horns are present in shrines associated with the religion of the androgynous Great Goddess of fertility.³⁸ It appears that Lezama made the connection of the X, double axe, labrys and lemniscate with the bullhead and horns because of his belief in their symbolic potential for the generation and regeneration of images into infinity.

³⁷ “The Labrys and the Lemniscate. The labrys (above) resembles the shape of the lemniscate ∞ , which is often used to indicate infinity.” Sig Lonegren, Labyrinths. Ancient Myths and Modern Uses, Revised and Updated Fourth Edition. (Glastonbury: Gothic Images Publications, 2007) 110. (With permission).

³⁸ See Marija Gimbutas, The Language of the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 265-269.

Regeneration or birth occurs in water. In addition to the double axe, cross, X and lemniscate, we see another “cognitive image,” drawn from the X and now known as the chiasmus. At its center is water which reflects and in reflecting becomes a mirror:



Any reader immediately sees how Paradiso works. “The mysterious labyrinth” (text) is set in the midst of a rectangle of water. “Rectangle” signifies “four” (elements) or bodies (made of elements) or images (memories of bodies stored in the imagination). The water, a mirror, “mirrors” as if a snail shell; the snail shell represents the cognition as circular because the logic of the “the cognitive images” “conflows” from their union. The eye of the mind sees what the water replicates in the sight of the text: X’s of connected images flowing together in circles. The relationship between the reader’s circular acts of knowing (recognizing the same image, a different image, a third image joint into same-

different) and the exterior text (chaos of opposed “cognitive images”) progresses into a gradual accumulation. The reader/rewriter as a laborious ant threads the way, and the thread accumulates a storehouse of images (contemporary use of images joined to etymologies of images). Confluences of cognitive images merge into a unity. The unity configures. The configuration, the ebb and flow of mirror images through the circles of the labyrinth, teaches Cemí and the reader the universal identity of the Cuban people inhabiting a Paradise in the middle of the waters.

The schema of Lezama’s axiom, “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” reveals that the components could be reversed as follows: “The mysterious image of the cognitive labyrinth” or “The cognitive labyrinth of the mysterious image;” it also shows that the meaning in versions [A] and [B] is the same as the original. Lezama’s double and converted vision is rendered in a paradoxical expression that opposes one against the other, where one element doubles back upon the other. This expression is exemplified by the chiasmus. The chiasmus indicates the process of going from the subconscious to the conscious. Also, chiasmus is “the criss-cross placing of sentence members that correspond in either syntax or meaning, without exact verbal repetition.”³⁹ The Lezaman phrase in question is another form of X called chiasmus. “These figures [of chiasmus] all manifest rhetoric’s multileveled and synchronous functions in the text.”⁴⁰ In this way, Lezama demonstrates how word play, or the “simple inverted parallelism in

³⁹ In The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger et al, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 184.

⁴⁰ The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 184.

chiasmus can achieve economically a relatively complex effect.”⁴¹ Hence with the chiasmus, Lezama is in essence constructing multilevel and multidimensional labyrinths of language.

An important chiasmic relationship exists in Lezama’s acknowledgment of his artists’ inclination to favor the contemporary creative sensitivity that counterpoises the past with the future. The “revival of the past as a search for the unknown” (“reavivamiento del pasado como de búsqueda de un desconocido”) allows Fronesis and Cemí to create anew with a restoration of the treasured contents of early printed books in ancient libraries (the incunabula) that provide creative elements not yet configured. Along with Foción, Fronesis and Cemí create by “bringing the new gods, the word without breaking, in its pure yolk yellow, and the combinatorials and the proportions that could trace new games and new ironies” (“trayendo los dioses nuevos, la palabra sin cascar, en su puro amarillo yeminal, y las combinatorias y las proporciones que podían trazar nuevos juegos y nuevas ironías”).⁴²

THE CHIASMUS CEMÍ-SEMA: INDIGENOUS SPEAKER/WRITER OF COGNITIVE IMAGES

Lezama names the protagonist of Paradiso Cemí because he is a supernatural being in the figure of a demigod from Taino cosmology that is perfect for the representation of the Cuban poet’s journey of consecration as a whole and holy (free from

⁴¹ The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 184.

⁴² P-Rabassa 329; Paradiso XI 326.

sin and healed) creator of new words (poetry) for the process of symbolizing the recovery of Paradise. Only by being perfect in the image of God the Creator by the Word (Logos) can the poet repair the ill and sinful (fallen) nature of man. It is significant that his poet is an indigenous, autochthonous being, a native to Cuba, essentially Cuban who can create with a confluence of old words (from the Taino past) and foreign words (European and universal) on Cuban soil in the image of God-Logos. Essentially, the term Cemí in the original language of the Tainos is charged with meaning that coincides with the Catholic theology of Logos as healer of humanity's ills, manifested in Jesus Christ, God the son as half human and half divine. This confirms the syncretistic basis for Lezama's use of the name for his half human, half divine protagonist. We reiterate that,

the term Cemí, or semi, is etymologically related to the Lokono terms seme and semehi, which mean "sweet" or "having the taste of honey." Lokono apply this root to the term semichichi, which means "shaman," "medicine man," or "cure."⁴³

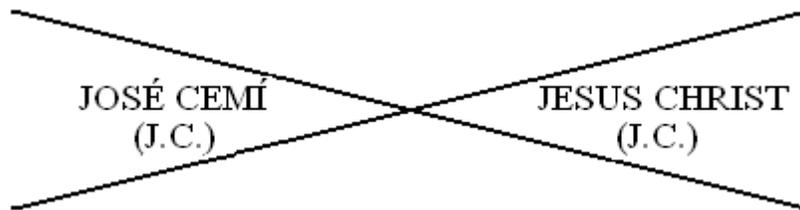
In effect, the word "Cemí" is related to "shaman" or "medicine man" the equivalent of healer of humanity's ills or redeemer of humanity's original sin.

As creator with and through words, Cemí also speaks words as "sema" (signifiers). Cemí is sema, signifier. Cemí as "semen" is a fluid in which the spoken/written images are mirrored, converge together, and are fused into form. The tripartite being sema-Cemí-semen speaks old-world etymologies in a new-world modernism and creates a "seminal" language, the language of poetry. Cemí's interaction

⁴³ John P. Bennett, "An Arawak-English Dictionary with an English Word List." Archaeology and Anthropology 1989, 6 (1-2): 39, cited in N. 1, José R. Oliver "The Taino Cosmos," The Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1997) 152.

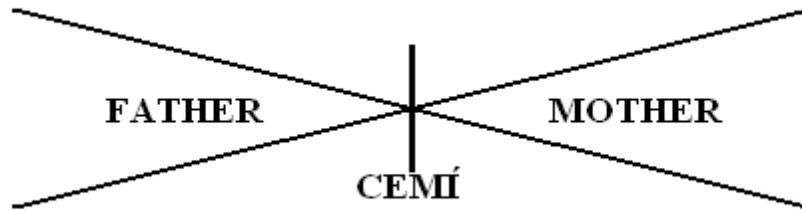
with family, friends, and community simulate copulative encounters that engender images. Cemí is a semiotic image that recreates Lezama's syncretic language and thought, a blend of oral, oracular writing.

Once consecrated, deified, as creator by the word Cemí incarnates the Logos Spermatikos, the spermatic God, Logos of the world,⁴⁴ that is Verbum or Logos, "the seed-giving Word" in whose image God formed man. In Genesis 1:2, "God Spoke and it was so," and John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word," both concepts flow together into a spermatic Logos whose biological Word is the seed for a mental-Word-become-poetic language. The old world Word is Jesus, spoken by Cemí with new sema (significance) to refer both to himself (J.C.) and to Jesus Christ (J.C.). Jose Cemí is Jesus Christ. The X begotten from this pneuma is obviously



Cemí is the Word that engenders other words. Cemí is like Christ, a demigod. In this new world Trinity of Paradiso, there is God Father (Creator), God Mother (Pneuma) and God Logos (Jesús – Cemí):

⁴⁴ "spermatikos l[ogos]." Liddell-Scott-Jones. Lexicon of Classical Greek. Crane, Gregory R. (ed.) The Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, July 9, 2000; as in Zeno, Stoic fragments, I.28.



Cemí is at the center of the labyrinth, because he is the New World Logos inspired by Pneuma, the world-soul or breath. Cemí is a man and Man creates like God creates with the Word, as the first man, Adam, named all the creatures that were placed before him. This world-soul or breath is the Spirit that gives life to words.

Now we recall that Cemí originates a new language made up of old world words and new world words. Lezama writes etymon (Gk. meaning “original”), the true words whose original meaning has been forgotten. His etyma bring the classical meanings of the words into the present of his writing. The result of this is a writing and a style that is remarkably strange or unusual, attractive to some but bizarre to other readers. Lezama and his protagonists are not speaking only in contemporary denotation and context. As “Origenistas” they are creators of new values, new forms, and the agents that hail a new creative vitality, the “disclosers” that reveal, indicate or make known the ideas obscured by the passage of time yet preserved in the cradle or beginning of the written word.

Again, as we have seen, the three protagonists-friends of Paradiso have an affinity for the incunabula, the revival of words printed in ancient books comprising old forms, uses and meanings. For them ancient forms and senses rescued from books of old are without discontinuance from the past. Ideas and thoughts cast with old words are means and ways of configuring a new contemporary wisdom. Old books are perfect “treasure” islands, as

words in their original form and meaning are restored to general use become veritable utopias for learning. We recall, Lezama revives “the past as a search for an unknown” (“de reavivamiento del pasado como búsqueda de un desconocido”) and this gives his speech animation, the principle of life.

Aptly or humorously, the apathy or suspension of motive towards the practice of animation Lezama terms “lethargyrations” (“letargirias”).⁴⁵ He uses the term aptly if he means that readers, like souls about to re-cross Lethe into a new world, that is into new light (Aeneid, Bk.6), have forgotten everything from their previous old world; humorously if he means “lethargic” or too lazy to learn the origins of words in the old world. (The word “lethargy” comes from the Latin lethargia, which in turn comes from the Greek for “forgetful.”) “Lethargyration” means being inert in the process of gyrating, i.e., going through the motion in circle or spiral around a fixed center (Lat. gyrare). Lezama’s neologism has a sound rationale. The reader, in the labyrinth of the text, has either forgotten or never acquired the new language: he/she has forgotten old world etymologies (never read “The Classics”) or new world etymologies (never known there are indigenous languages). He/she is too lazy to learn Cemí’s new language by threading his/her way through Paradiso.

In the Divine Comedy as Virgil guides Dante and is amazed at Dante’s neologism --that is, the Latin converted into the eloquence of Tuscan Italian. As Dante is guided through the Inferno under Paradise, so Lezama is guided or guides Cemí or both guide

⁴⁵ P-Rabassa 329; Paradiso XI 326.

readers as “Pilgrims in the Gyre,” as Freccero has so eloquently explained.⁴⁶ The amazing association of “lethargyration” with the labyrinth is confirmed by the fact that in conchology, a gyration is one of the turns, coils, or convolutions of a spiral shell. Lezama’s readers are learning a new literary language in Paradiso.

Yes, Lezama’s narrative composition seems disjointed and becomes fragmented because he uses words foreign to the reader and he describes or focuses on one aspect of a situation, breaks that cycle, and goes to another one. He goes and returns to other subjects, parts, or different points in the issues and events in the narration or description. This gives his writing has the quality of errancy. Not only does he, or his narrator, lose the train of thought but errs in the autography and rhythm of the discourse. Lezama’s language rambles, roams, wanders and goes astray from the path or line of direction. He indicates the notion of failing or erring in judgment, logic, and opining and makes inferences to ideas that appear to be blunders or mistakes. The errancy results from the synchronicity of thought, the confluence of meanings. The reader-pilgrim is the itinerant, or traveler, in the labyrinth of his words in the quest for knowledge. Readers and pilgrims walk, make the errors in speech that the writer makes, and make errors in interpretation. They are like foreigners or newly arrived immigrants in this land. Path and pilgrim (reader) double back and go in the opposite directions. It takes trouble and effort--labor from within is a meaning of labyrinth, we recall--to get to the center and the end, and to avoid false doors in the pathway.

⁴⁶ Freccero, John. Dante, The Poetics of Conversion, Ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986) 70-92.

SYNCRETISM: A NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA FROM THE OLD ENCYCLOPEDIA

Syncretism originated in Crete, says Plutarch who “tells how the Cretans were often engaged in quarrels among themselves, but became immediately reconciled when an external enemy approached. ‘And that is their so-called Syncretism.’”⁴⁷ Roman Catholics add that it “is sometimes used to designate the fusion of pagan religions” that came about when the Grecian and Oriental civilizations were brought into contact when the East was Hellenized under Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC.⁴⁸ Further, according to the Catholic view,

A modern tendency in the history of religions sees in the Biblical revealed religion a product of syncretism, the fusion of various religious forms and views. As regards the Old Testament, the Chanaanite myth, the Egyptian, Old Babylonian, and Persian religions are regarded as the sources of Israelitic religion, the latter itself having developed from Fetichism and Animism into Henotheism and Monotheism. It is sought to explain the origin of Christianity from the continuation and development of Jewish ideas and the influx of Brahmanistic, Buddhist, Græco-Roman, and Egyptian religious notions, and from the Stoic and Philonic philosophy; it is held to have received its development and explanation especially from the neo-Platonic philosophy.⁴⁹

Thus, syncretism means the “attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, esp. in philosophy or religion.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Opera Moralia", ed. Reiske, VII, 910, cited in "Syncretism," Catholic Encyclopedia. Klemens Löffler, transcribed Douglas J. Potter, The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XIV. (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14383c.htm>

⁴⁸ "Syncretism," Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14383c.htm>

⁴⁹ "Syncretism," Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14383c.htm>

⁵⁰ Oxford English Dictionary.

Jaeger's last work Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (1961) well explains the symbiosis of all theology and all philosophy in the Mediterranean world as seen in Lezama's thought. We recall Lezama saying that he was connected to the Mediterranean and certainly the Greek paideia through the Mediterranean umbilical cord. Lezama obviously understood the reception of the Greek paideia into the early Christian world. The content of Paradiso demonstrates that Lezama understood the syncretism that Jaeger traces in his study, here summarized in general and simplistic strokes: how the Greek civilization exercised a profound influence on the Christian mind, from the use of the Greek language for the New Testament, to the adoption of the principles of the Greek paideia for the paideia of Christ ushered under Clement and Origen of Alexandria, the Christian Church Fathers that founded the Christian philosophy-theology in the third century CE. How in the fourth century, the Cappadocian Fathers of the Christian Church, particularly Gregory of Nyssa continued to transfer throughout Asia Minor, the Near East and to the Latin-speaking West the system of belief of the Greek world into the incipient religion, including the symbiosis of Christ-Theseus for the institution of Christian humanism, or the idea of man's dignity and reformation and rebirth through the Spirit.⁵¹

I believe that one reason why Lezama thinks about faith in syncretistic terms is that at the time of his writing the sociopolitical atmosphere in Cuba had created a sterile environment for cultural creativity based on the use of the imagination. Naturalism or realism abounded in letters in Cuba instead. Lezama's "Orígenes" Group responded to

⁵¹ See Werner Jaeger, Early Christianity and the Greek Paideia (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961).

that situation with their theology of origins. Thus Lezama reconfigured his beliefs into a system less rigidly Roman Catholic. In the early years after the Cuban Revolution, Lezama expected a new imaginary creativity to form. As the revolution oppressed free thought and expression counter to it, Lezama and the “Origenistas” kept their syncretistic faith, which wasn’t rigidly Roman Catholic but wasn’t Marxist either.

The summation of all poetry and all poets in Lezama’s works represent poetic syncretism as well. The poet and critic Coleridge, a favorite of Lezama, vowed in his “Preliminary Treatise on Method” (1817) that in the Encyclopædia Metropolitana, which he was proposing to create, “our great objects are to exhibit the Arts and Sciences in their Philosophical harmony; to teach Philosophy in union with Morals; and to sustain Morality by Revealed Religion.” His intent was to convey methodically “the pure and unsophisticated knowledge of the past . . . to aid the progress of the future.”⁵² This is the enterprise that Lezama performs in life with his Delphic Course and his writing, which are syncretistic activities, based on the encyclopaideia, that is, the learning of sums of knowledge.

As inspired spiritual beings, Cemí and Lezama are attendants and envoys of their source, God, or ultimate being. They serve as “messengers” or mediators between the realm of the divine and the domain of the human. The term “angel” is derived from the Greek angelos, used by the Septuagint as the equivalent of the Hebrew mal’ak-yehowah, “messenger of Jehova.” From the beginning angels were spiritual, supernatural beings

⁵² "Encyclopaedia." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-32016>>.

given the function of revealing knowledge from the holy or sacred to the profane pertaining to man's identity or true nature, origin, and destiny. Their identity was established by "their functional relationships to the holy or sacred and their performative relationships to the profane [human] world."⁵³ The novel is the message from the sacred sphere, and through this message-novel Cemí and Lezama attempt to reveal truth, the path of knowledge that opens the way to Paradise. Lezama gives Cemí the combined triadic condition of human, angel, and god,--a status encompassing spiritual, functional, and ontological characteristics. Lezama's dual focus on the transcendent realm as well as the temporal dimension serve to activate the new meanings that Lezama prescribes as required for the communication in Paradiso to take place. Lezama's mixing of old and present images to create new ones results in new meanings. New senses, new meanings, are set off when Lezama takes his faith, myth and archive, anachronism and etymology along with contemporary belief and practice in order to confer to his modern invention an unprecedented balance. Lezama is a "poet of the image," his sacred function is poetry. Lezama's work indeed epitomizes his own "imaginary era," and his era appropriately coincides with a historical revolution in the intellectual and political sense. As Vitier summarizes, "for Lezama there is no other reality than poetry, as there is no other history than that caused [literally engendered] by the image" ("para Lezama no hay otra realidad

⁵³ "angel and demon ." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9109404>>.

que la poesía, como no hay otra historia que la engendrada por la imagen”).⁵⁴ The pages of his novel substantiate and actually are testimony of Lezama’s own “imaginary era.”

In order to create the poetry of redemption, the poet as redeemer requires consecration. The Taurobolium is a name applied to the ritual of ablution that includes the sacrifice of a bull and a bath in bull’s blood before the consecration can take place in mystery religions.⁵⁵ It is related to the labyrinth for its relations to the bull, Minotaur, and the horns. In Paradiso, the voyage through Havana aboard the bus in chapter XIII by Cemí, Licario and the members of the “cuarterón” prefigures the cleansing ritual that Cemí undergoes in the presence of Licario and the witnesses. The purification is portrayed by Cemí’s act of returning the coins stolen by Martincillo to their rightful owner, Licario. Upon this sign of purity, Licario secretly beckons Cemí to visit him at his house by deliberately leaving an invitation card in the young man’s pocket, unbeknownst to Cemí.

In contrast, the omophagia is an orphic/dionysiac ritual that consists of the eating of raw flesh for the purpose of union with the divine.⁵⁶ The ritual of eating the manatee in the orgy of fertilization of Juana Blagalló, the infertile wife of Elpidio Michelena, in Paradiso III, is a ritual that imitates intake of a fertility pill. The manatee meal is the Host that nourishes the desirous woman. The manatee (thought to be a bull) is a water mammal

⁵⁴ “Un párrafo para Lezama,” Para llegar a Orígenes, Revista de arte y literatura (La Habana: Letras cubanas, 1994) 63.

⁵⁵ See Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, Classical Mythology (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1995) I-40, 135-136.

⁵⁶ Morford and Lenardon I-33, 238.

native of the Caribbean waters. The pregnancy of Juana would be obtained by synecdoche where the breasts of the manatee are the symbols of sexuality and the eating of the manatee in place of the Host or communion is a metaphor for Juana's copulation with the host of the orgy, her husband Elpidio. So again, the manatee appears in Lezama with sexual references. He recovers Columbus' comments in the chronicle of Indies that he saw the manatees as sirens. The conversion of Juana Blagalló into the manatee Isolda or the operatic Isolda, transfers the character of the hero of the northern mythology and epic ballad and opera into Juana and coats the episode of sexual orgy into an episode of love everlasting.

The communion or ingestion of the manatee's flesh foreshadows and represents the union between Cemí and Licario at the end, where Cemí "embodies" or "gives body" to ("corporiza") Licario. The "communion" (the eating of the host) between Cemí and Licario enacts the belief in metempsychosis. This is the transmigration of the soul of Licario into Cemí's body and of Cemí's body into the soul of Licario. This occurrence is the representation of none other than a reincarnation, as metempsychosis is the Greek word for the same. Metempsychosis is reincarnation. Cemí incorporates many incarnations. The presence and the absence of a body, be that of a human being or a body of poetry converge in him just as the poem that Fronesis gives him reminds us of his many reincarnations. As Salgado has explained, the verse in the poem "Su nombre ES también Thelema Semí..." indicates Cemí is Thelemachus, Ulysses' son, who searches for his lost father through the world whereas Cemí searches for his father through the

word.⁵⁷ The verse, “Fue fiel a Orfeo y a Proserpina”, takes Cemí out of his place and time. It reveals that Cemí will have already descended to hell, in search of poetry (Eurydice) and return to life just as Proserpina did. The Roman Proserpina or Greek Persephone or Kore, is the goddess of the budding grain, wife of Hades, and daughter of Demeter, the goddess of vegetation and agriculture.⁵⁸ The myth of the mother and daughter represent a variation of the fundamental and recurring theme of “the death and rebirth of vegetation as a metaphor or allegory for spiritual resurrection;” the two goddesses are involved in the Eleusinian Mysteries that included mysteries of initiation of a belief in the afterlife and whose celebrations had to do with fertility.⁵⁹ The advent of the poem as a most noble gesture asserts the analogy of Cemí as water beyond the physiological--he has inner springs that now flow together into a discourse of images: “Fronesis’s face was fixed for the rest of his life in Cemí’s interior waters.” (“El rostro de Fronesis se fijó para el resto de su vida en las aguas interiores de Cemí”).⁶⁰

This event reveals that Cemí is now capable of achieving the fixedness of the image--his poetic sensibility is now more developed; the mortal young man is well on his way to becoming the immortal poet. The confluence that occurs upon Cemí here opposes fluidity to solidity. The fluidity of Cemí’s interior waters is associated with the transitoriness of life and therefore mortality. The solidity is associated with Cemí’s

⁵⁷ See From Modernism 126.

⁵⁸ Morford and Lenardon, 251-270.

⁵⁹ Morford and Lenardon, 263, 264-270.

⁶⁰ P-Rabassa 339; Paradiso XI 335.

apprehension of the fixedness of the poetic image (Fronesis' face) in his memory, which denotes the permanence and stability of the image in poetry and literally its inscription in the immortality of letters.⁶¹

In sum, Cemí is the “central” or “center figure,” the cross (X) where everything converges. He is the quintessential figure of confluence: “Cemí no es tanto el personaje central como el personaje-centro (tal como lo había sido igualmente su padre): en él confluyen y se trascienden mutuamente los influjos de sus dos amigos, Fronesis el apolíneo, Foción el demoníaco.”⁶²

We recall that Cemí is borrowed from the Taino people's developed faith in Zemí's. The Zemís or Cemís were idols of religious spirits and were represented in pottery, wood, or in polished stone. Some zemí idols are portrayed as stones with three corners depicting their supreme god working the land and the soil.⁶³ On these stones, the image of the meander, a symbol of the labyrinth, appears. Lezama's idea of the Cuban island and nation and everything Cuban as fertile soil and place originated from the mythology, the culture of the indigenous ancestors; their cosmology, religious beliefs, their agricultural civilization. The etymology of the name of Cuba is believed to be

⁶¹ See Pellón JLL's Joyful Visions 16 for the opposition of fluidity to fixedness as a recurrent topic in Cemí's poetic and spiritual progress.

⁶² Guillermo Sucre, “El logos de la imaginación,” in Eugenio Suárez-Galbán, ed., Lezama Lima, El escritor y la crítica (Madrid: Taurus, 1987) 320.

⁶³ See José Juan Arrom, Mitología y artes prehispánicas de las Antillas. (México: Siglo veintiuno, 1975) 19-43.

primitive, indigenous, meaning “land, terrain or territory” in Arawak, and “land or province” in Taino.⁶⁴

The Taino civilization was highly developed and religious belief was as important as political or economical knowledge. They placed an important role on knowledge and people. They believed that their destiny was providential and they exercised an organized religious cultural system:

For the Taino, religion was not a body of knowledge separate from that of politics, or economics, or even the knowledge derived from the observation of behavior in nature. Theirs was an integrated, interactive universe within which all things and persons had an important role to play. Yet the very fact that they were chosen by the divine and placed at the center of the civilized universe was a serious burden and responsibility. By accepting such function in the universe, they also assumed the awesome responsibility of making it work for all generations to come.⁶⁵

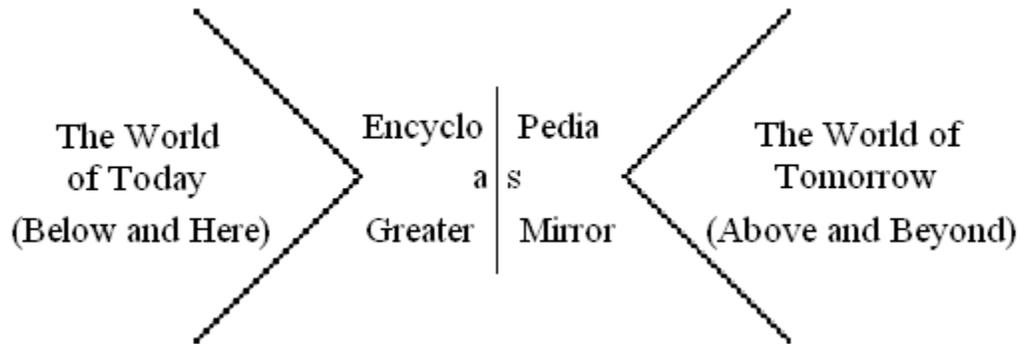
This belief coincided with Lezama’s that a conglomeration of factors enhanced Cuba’s role and condition as a place for civilization and a conduit for cultures (paideia). He assumed the responsibility for forwarding the ideals of the Cuban civilization.

For Lezama it is important that images of former times participate actively in the history of the present. Lezama’s mirror sees the ideas recorded in the storage houses of the past and mingles them with the ones of the present. Thus he recovers the historical significance of encyclopedias, etymologies and dictionaries of the past. Following the Speculum majus of Vincent of Beauvais, he alludes to the sense of speculum that implies

⁶⁴ See José Juan Arrom, “El nombre de Cuba: sus vicisitudes y su primitivo significado,” Estudios de lexicología antillana (San Juan: U de Puerto Rico) 18.

⁶⁵ See José R. Oliver, “The Taino Cosmos,” in Samuel L. Wilson, The Indigenous Peoples of the Caribbean (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1997) 151-152.

since medieval times that the encyclopedia contains (mirrors) the world and explains (mirrors) what the world should become:⁶⁶



As intended by the encyclopedists, Lezama activates the contribution of these compilations, to him poetic summations of knowledge for the acquisition of further knowledge, the progress of the human intellect, and the improvement of civilization. The encyclopedia is confluence because it is a summation of things. All kinds of ideas converge into the encyclopedia. People learn the continual referral to related topics creating a web of accumulated information in the form of a circle of knowledge (now in the form of links, where one entry directs the reader towards many others). In medieval times the encyclopedias were written by clergymen and physicians. The professions were instituted to heal from the maladies of the Fall. First was cleansing from original sin, a second was healing. For example the profession of Law was instituted to heal the weakness of will, that of Medic to heal the weakness of the body, the Liberal Arts to heal the weakness of the mind, and the Clergy to heal the weakness of the soul. When Adam and Eve fell from Paradise their knowledge was erased. They were sinful and dirty. The

⁶⁶ See "Encyclopaedia." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-32016>>.

Fall symbolizes dirt and weakness of appetites. So, the labyrinth of Paradiso implies a process of healing from the Fall to regain Paradise. The Fall is alluded to in the submergence in water of the child protagonist, his illness, his dreams as voyages to the Underworld. The healing of the human being is connected to Cemí's acquisition of pneuma and the ascension implied in the name Licario (Icarus)--the poet that does not die but resurrects. The purpose of the narrative is to portray the resurrection and recovery of Paradise. Lezama attempts to inspire a hermeneutics--developing knowledge by interpreting his text in more ways than one, with four ways being the completion.

Therefore Lezama makes the distinction of the encyclopedia as en-cyclo-paideia as the circle of knowledge. Thus Lezama has an affinity with poets or writers of the encyclopedic tradition such as the great encyclopedists Hesychius and Isidore of Sevilla, Beauvais, Diderot and poets such as Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Góngora, and Joyce who produced encyclopedic epics. Lezama consolidates in the narrative of Paradiso the long standing tradition of encyclopedic narratives that replicate the forms, meanings, and functions of the encyclopedia as a labyrinth of knowledge. The epic poems of antiquity are deemed encyclopedic because they collected in their verse all the extant knowledge either directly or by allusion. For example, Homer's Iliad gives encyclopedic descriptions of the weapons of war and the uses of those weapons. Dante in his Divine Comedy collects all of the knowledge that he has acquired in his erudite mind. Readers of James Joyce situate him among the encyclopedic authors. The list goes on.

To recapitulate, Lezama's "the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image," the analogy of the "cognitive Eros" with the productive and creative spirit of poetry is

justified. His suggestion of a labyrinthine connection between the power of the “cognitive Eros” and the “cognitive image” for the creation of poetry is captivating without delving into deeper and more intriguing connections. One can see that since the knowing being is an image of a god who is also not god, thus the being and the god/not god are also “labyrinths”.

The Eros Cognoscente is a mirror of Lezama’s means to the acquisition of knowledge. Eros is a symmetrical, confluent image. On one side there is emotion and on the other reason with equal intensity to capture the potential and power of breath as logos. So he uses both emotion and reason (the left brain, the right brain) in his unrelentless search for knowledge.

TWO: ANDROGYNE OR ONENESS

The Confluence Section presented the connection between the labyrinth and confluence in that parts, things, or discourses that are/were fragmented or separated come together in one agglomeration, flow together into one unity, one discourse. That section explained how the labyrinth, denoted by the image of the labrys or double-axe (X) is replicated by the rhetorical image of the chiasmus (X) to symbolize the copula needed for the creation and diffusion of new images with language. A similar principle applies to the connection of the labyrinth with the concept of the Androgyne where two things that are opposite and separate are joined together to produce new images.

In Androgyne, one separated pair, male and female--the potens in the two polarities--comes together or copulates; the coming together or copulation produces the spark of creation. The same principle refers to “the One which contains the Two; namely, the male (andro-) and the female (gyne).”⁶⁷ As an archetype, it is that which in unity, oneness, wholeness, completeness or totality before any separation was made, e.g., Adam and Eve “in one flesh.” Here, we say that confluences pursue unity, a unity of balance, of symmetry, of plenitude of plot, of a conjunction of opposites, especially of Lezama’s protagonist who seeks to become complete or androgynous.

A doubleness, represented in the labyrinth, eventually flows together into oneness. The way to unity through this duality is the path to knowledge and light symbolized by the journey through the labyrinth. Again and again, two opposites are

⁶⁷ June Singer, Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1977) 6.

conflated, conjoined by a copula (Lat. copula, join). The copulas are elaborated verbally (with the linking verb “to be”), logically (“A=C,” deduced from the dual premises “A=B,” “B=C”), sexually (“copulate”), biologically (male-female), mystically (“ecstatic union beyond the limits”), epistemically (“I know that..., as if knowledge is one with me”), iconographically (what Lezama called the “sphere-image”):

In Christian iconography, [...] The passing from sphere, circle or arch to rectangular shapes also symbolizes the incarnation [. . .]. The same Person partaking of the two natures, human and divine, provides the link, bridge or marriage between Heaven and Earth. The reverse process, the passing from the square to the circular, symbolizes the return of the created to the uncreated, of Earth to Heaven: the wholeness of fulfillment or the perfection of the completed cycles.⁶⁸

And syncretistically (Jesus Christ transformed into José Cemí, demigod in Taino theology, combined with Eros; also Adam Kadmon, the primordial or perfect man of the Sefirot (Zohar, The Book of Splendor), pictured as a reversed cosmic tree: his head is down in the earth, even though he reaches through the other “splendors” (“sefirot” or rays of the divine attribute) toward the infinite Unknown God [“Ein-Sof”]).⁶⁹

Among the many examples of copula in Paradiso, after a short introduction I will briefly discuss only four examples in this section: 1. the copula between Fronesis and Lucía; 2. Rialta (the bridge) as an androgyne in the act of creating, literally engendering another copula, the joining of Cemí’s sensual drive to his language drive, the search for the “Word;” 3. the mystic copulation between Cemí and Licario at the end of the novel where Cemí “incorporates” Licario; and, 4. Cuba as a conjunction of opposites.

⁶⁸ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 901-902.

⁶⁹ Scholem 105-107. Scholem identifies The Zohar, The Book of Splendor as the central work in the literature of the Kabbala, 213.

As if to mitigate the deviant sexual activity of the school boys in Paradiso VIII,⁷⁰ Fronesis' explanation of the Androgyne in a dialogue in Paradiso IX portrays man at a level superior to sex:

Because of the urging of the androgynal myths, because of the remembrance of an organism perfected by passing through the whole animal scale, the prodigious concurrence of which manifests itself in his body, and results from his enchanted place between fallen angel and resurrected body, man has never been able to find any thought that would destroy him, thus surpassing the creation of the demiurge. In his essence he is the One Uranus, like the dyad of complementaries; thus he has a horse's lungs to permit him to make a forced march from the plain of shouts to the city of dialogues; a short neck like the tortoise, which by turns endows his face with avaricious astonishment or indifference. His sleep, like a sea gull, assimilates in its depths the measured swells, supports the immense plain of the temporal, which touches his body and with the charge from that point retreats, its menace continuing in the motionless distance.

(Por la presión de los mitos androginales, por la reminiscencia de un organismo utilizado por todo el recorrido de la escala animal de la que su cuerpo se constituye en un centro de prodigiosa concurrencia, por el encantamiento de su situación entre el ángel caído y el esplendor de la resurrección de los cuerpos, el hombre no ha podido encontrar ningún pensamiento que lo destruya, superando así la creación del demiurgo. Está en su naturaleza el Uno Urano, como la diada de los complementarios, de la misma manera que tiene pulmones de caballo, que le permiten ir a marcha forzada desde la llanura de los gritos hasta la ciudad de los diálogos; cuello corto como la tortuga, que le autoriza al rostro por instantes el asombro avaricioso o la indiferencia; o su sueño, como la gaviota, asimila en su profundidad el compás al oleaje, soporta la inmensa llanura de lo temporal que toca su cuerpo y retrocede con la carga de aquel punto que sigue en su misma amenaza en la lejanía inmóvil).⁷¹

⁷⁰ For a detailed analysis of Lezama's representation of deviant sexuality and homosexuality in Paradiso, see Gustavo Pellón, "The Ethics of Androgyny: A Sexual Parable," in JLL's Joyful Visions 28-44.

⁷¹ P-Rabassa 261; Paradiso IX 262.

Thus Fronesis defines Androgyne as much more than homosexuality: the androgynous God of the Sky is in its nature. The Androgyne is biological (“organism”), zoological (“animal”), mythological (“horse’s lungs”[earth], “tortoise neck”[water], “sea gulls”[air]), psychological (“senses”) and theological (“Uranus..., dyad of complementaries”).

Thus the youngsters involved in homosexual acts in Paradiso have yet to “pick up a shred of the breeze” and realize “vice” in their activities. In Platonic terms, their “concupiscible appetite” (erotic love in the genitals, or sexual appetite) has yet to be governed by “irascible appetite” (higher love / hate in the heart) and “rational appetite” (higher love of good / avoid evil in the head). They have yet to see that the beauty comes from the soul (“breeze”) flowing into such homosexual activities. These boys, like Greek boys in the antique gymnasia--learning through paideia--are impelled by Eros in the opening stages of “cognitive Eros.”

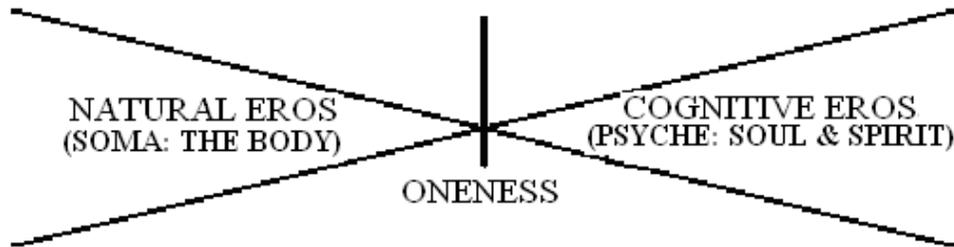
Whether “cognitive Eros” leads to hetero- or homo-sexuality is not as crucial as that it leads to knowledge. In the concept of the Androgyne, Eros encourages the love of beauty and knowledge; man pursues the highest goals through “the sensual and sublime impetus of Eros.”⁷² Thus like Plato Lezama talks about love between men who use beauty of the body to find revelation in eroticism, i.e., the beauty of the soul.

Sexual copulation of any orientation begins the process of cognitive Eros. Following the copula structure, the two in the one, the double or the union of opposites, Lezama observes the analogy between procreation through the coitus and the flow of

⁷² Morford and Lenardon 150-151.

semen, exercised by the copula, and the creation of language through the seme, the smallest unit of meaning. With the recovery of previous meanings of words and the harmony of the poetic word, poetic composition, and music, he creates new words based on sound and the reciting of poetry. Paradiso shows this process of creation by narrating how Cemí arrives at poetic discourse. In Paradiso Lezama represents at least three levels of creation: at the level of the copula, physical and semantic; at the level of poetry with rhythm; and at the level of Cemí's discourse. Lezama rhymes semen, seme (the smallest unit of meaning), with Cemí, and in this character's name conflates all with the potens (force) of creation and representation. A sick child with asthma and troubled breathing, through poetry Cemí shall become healthy, whole and holy with a cleansed rhythm of breathing. He indeed shall become a creator through the word (Logos). Lezama binds together these definitions and acts of Cemí and invents new meanings for this sign.

The search for new balance and symmetry is conducted through experiences that are analogous to the search for new knowledge. Again, the agent of the action is the Eros or natural desire, the process of natural growth. Concupiscence is the stage of awakening of desire, the blossoming of Eros as sexual desire. To exercise the Eros is parallel to acquiring new knowledge. Thus Lezama coins the term Cognitive Eros as a junction between body and spirit:



Puberty, which Lezama calls “the awakening of the origin (“el despertar genesíaco”) awakens the pure Androgyne, as by the impetus of an all encompassing divinity. The One, in the beginning of time, in Genesis awakens “Origin”: “lo genesíaco.” Origin, the generative, awakens concupiscence in the human being, the development of sexual appetite that corresponds to the growth of the sexual organs. Eventually in the narrative, Cemí and his young comrades develop the irascible appetite for love and hate. This is the desire that develops in the heart. Cemí goes through friendship with Fronesis and filial love for his mother, and these feelings are manifestations of appetites in the heart. Later, Cemí attains the fundamental level of rational appetite, which is love and hate that occurs in the development of the mind. This rational appetite helps the mind distinguish between the good and the bad. Cemí can differentiate between the good and the light in Fronesis and the bad and the dark in Foción. He likes the former and dislikes the latter.

It is obvious that at the same time that Cemí develops all these bodily and rational appetites he is acquiring a love for words and enjoying the knowledge of letters that stems from a plethora of sources that include his Uncle Alberto’s letter and Cuba’s cultural cornucopia: the production of honey, the cultures of tobacco, sugar, coffee, and cotton for lace-making that the women in the family engage in; also the fruits of the sea,

and the culinary lore of Grandmother Augusta and the other family cooks. In addition, his mother Rialta becomes an important source for Cemí's development when, upon contemplating and describing her surgically-removed womb tumor ("fibroma") with rich analogies of different codes Cemí discovers the creative language and harmony that leads to his poetic mission.⁷³ Lezama calls all these sources the "literary banquet." And these nourishing substances assimilated from the exterior world are in confluence in Lezama's memory, in his mind. They are also present in the oral tradition of the Cemí and Olaya families which the author (Cemí-Lezama) renders into the written tradition.

Normally the natural rites of passage of young people correspond to the rites of initiation into the society and its culture. The need for the portrayal of sexual development in growing children befits the normal course of growth and this is why Lezama underscores this process in the narrative. Although Paradiso portrays the discovery of Eros in homosexual acts one can see these acts as performed by the female and male parts of the participating partners to imply the copulative nature of the primordial Androgyne. In this sense these acts and their innuendos are innocent because they precede the instance of differentiation between good and bad, female and male, and the body and its image. Thus Lezama explains that after Cemí attends primary and secondary school and the university in Paradiso and Oppiano Licario, "the character is acquiring his fullness, his maturity, and his Eros is becoming an Eros of the distance, in the evocation of Oppiano Licario" ("el personaje va adquiriendo su plenitud, su madurez,

⁷³ See Gustavo Pellón for the tumor episode as an emblem of Lezama's prose style in Chapter 2, "The Aesthetics of Excess: The Novel as Fibroma," JLL's Joyful Visions 13-27.

y su Eros se va convirtiendo en un Eros de la lejanía, en la evocación de Oppiano Licario”).⁷⁴ The Eros is fully fulfilled in the spiritual copulation between Cemí and Licario at the end of the labyrinthine narrative.



So that the coming together of Cemí’s developing cognitive eros and Oppiano’s accomplished cognitive eros undergoes a journey of circumambulations, errors, and errancies that readers should associate with the labyrinth. It is the same journey of Eros that impelled Minos, Pasiphae, Minos’ bull, the labyrinth built by Daedalus to hold the Minotaur, Daedalus’ flight, Minos’ riddle of the snail-shell-as-labyrinth, Daedalus solution (honey), Minos’ death, and Daedalus’ trek to higher knowledge.

1. The Copula between Fronesis and Lucía

This episode, which occurs in Paradiso Chapter X is central to the novel because it reintroduces the ancient image of the ouroboros, the snake biting its own tail, but in its positive aspect of creation. Whereas Lezama had previously used the negative aspect of the ouroboros to symbolize the “sin against nature” inherent in the sterile homosexual act

⁷⁴ “Interrogando a JLL,” Recopilación de textos 23.

and its punishment,⁷⁵ here Lezama presents it in its positive aspect based on the image's circular shape.

Ouroboros--A serpent biting its own tail symbolizes a closed cycle of development. At the same time this symbol enshrines ideas of motion, continuity, self-fertilization and, consequently, of the eternal homecoming. The image's circular shape gives rise to another explanation--the marriage of the chthonian world, represented by the serpent, and the celestial world, represented by the circle. Confirmation of this interpretation might be found in some examples in which the ouroboros is part black and part white. It would thus bear the meaning of the marriage of opposing principles, Heaven and Earth, night and day, the Chinese yang, and yin, and of all the properties possessed by these opposing elements.⁷⁶

The circle means perfection, and as the symbol of Heaven, Lezama's insistence on the circular form of the serpent highlights its celestial symbolism of life-giving force in relation to Earth. In this positive aspect the ouroboros signals the power of creation. Thus here the ouroboros symbolizes the copula, the beginning of creation, and becomes an image of the creating Word. The sexual act recreates this positive symbolic nature of the ouroboros at the same time that it replicates the beginning of "cognitive Eros" and the oneness or completeness of the Androgyne.

Snakes are androgynous, Lezama claims: "the serpent is an astute androgyne who counts on assimilating himself into the shadow of a tree, subject to the vegetable matrix" ("la serpiente es un andrógino astuto que depende de su asimilación a la sombra de un árbol, sometida a la matría de los vegetales").⁷⁷ In interpreting the serpent as the two-in-

⁷⁵ Pellón 42.

⁷⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 728-729.

⁷⁷ P- Rabassa 353; Paradiso XI 348.

the-one Androgyne, Lezama includes the ouroboros, with its circularity implied in the serpent's naturally coiled position under the shadow of a tree.

In the episode in question, Lezama's omniscient narrator describes a copula-in-potency. In the beginning, in the first sexual attempts between Fronesis and Lucía, neither can perform the sexual act. This male and female cannot know cognitive eros nor merge into the primordial Androgyne because of an obstacle. This obstacle is described as the "toothed wheel," a slightly different replication of the ouroboros, where the mouth of the snake has teeth, and makes the swallowing of its own tail painful. Fronesis' vision implies more than castration anxiety the fear of engaging in the sexual act in an unproductive way, the way that caused Adam and Eve's fall from Eden and generated original sin. In Fronesis' imagination Lucia's vagina has teeth;⁷⁸ it is presented as his "delicious enemy." Yet in a creative act that utilizes the circular image of the ouroboros, Fronesis cuts a circle of fabric from his undershirt, makes a circular hole in it and uses that to cover Lucía's vagina before the copula can take place. Thus the image of the androgynous ouroboros serves to counteract the difficulty, fear or danger inherent in this labyrinthine rite of passage and opens up a new route to knowledge.⁷⁹

As Pellón interprets,

Heterosexual coitus is seen as a loss of immortality, but that very loss is the source of creativity [. . .] Coitus between man and woman ends the paradise of childhood and re-enacts the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden, but

⁷⁸ The "dented vagina" that Lezama retrieves from literary archives is a commonplace medieval image in Christian-Catholic books of prayer used to deter the desire for sexual consummation. See The Hours of Catherine of Cleves, ed. John Plummer, plate 42, "The Mouth of Hell with Tormented Souls."

⁷⁹ P-Rabassa 287-289; Paradiso 286-288.

the *felix culpa* must be repeated. Paradoxically, mortality must (as in Christianity) be embraced in order for creation and a true hypertelia of immortality (resurrection) to be possible.⁸⁰

Thus a different and new union between Lucía and Fronesis evokes the primordial union of the male and female in the concept of the ancient Androgyne. Cemí comprehends that Fronesis' union with Lucía is equivalent to the attainment of light. God is light, the ultimate knowledge, and the rational soul receives that intelligible light by means of illuminated figures of plenitude such as the copula that replicates the Divine Androgyne.

2. Rialta (the bridge)

Cemí's mother Rialta (named after the bridge in Venice) is his bridge from sensual eros to a higher erotic desire: the desire to speak and write. He is portrayed as a child in search of a surrogate father. In that capacity, his Uncle Alberto continues to teach him the wonders of language. In Paradiso Chapter VII, in the letter that Alberto writes to his Uncle Demetrio (Augusta's brother) describing the types of fish, their migration habits in the coastal topography, and their mating behavior, Alberto uses an ebullient style: rich language of nature, exuberant description and artifice of allusion. Alberto's words take on a new substance and their meaning oscillates in a creative way-- the language of fish in the letter conceals a double meaning for human sexuality. As read by Demetrio out loud, Cemí senses in the letter for the first time the jubilant quality of oral

⁸⁰ JLL's Joyful Visions 43.

language (verbal parade) and realizes that language can be used in other ways: language takes on a new substance, becomes alive in a new extension and words transfer their meaning when lured out of their original territory into a new realm.

But Alberto also dies so Cemí is left again in the feminine world of the mother, sister, and grandmother. He learns all of the feminine characteristics and points of view and in doing so develops an “androgynous” sensibility. But we note that the women fending on their own in a patriarchal society survive in that society by developing patriarchal skills. They are inventive, very strong, powerful in word. They have all of the traditional female skills and abilities but also develop male skills. They are androgynous.

Paradiso’s first few chapters represent the foundation of the nation through the portrayal of the family. In the family circle there are banquets of not only nourishment but also of language, words, textures, smells. The sensuality of the whole individual is being awakened through a totality of stimuli, from cooking to art to music to the description of the fruits of Cuba. Later, in chapter VII, where Cemí is now a teenager, Augusta (his grandmother) prepares a banquet--Doña Augusta’s famous banquet--and Cemí describes the meal and the conversations with all of the members of the family. This conversation could be called dialectical because it occurs in a cave (that of the dining room), like the dialectic in Plato’s Republic. All the participants use culinary, scientific and philosophical language along with comical turns in the conversation. The women talk like men do. They introduce Cemí to the world of the word, complementing Uncle Alberto’s letter that awakens Cemí’s senses to the wonder of language and metaphor.

As portrayed in Paradiso IX, years later Cemí at the university is involved in the 1930's political manifestation. Rialta fears for her son; she prays the rosary, a circular artifact that evokes the labyrinth because one walks the rosary like a labyrinth. When Cemí comes back safely, she expresses her anguish but is very proud of his involvement. After having prayed and meditated, Rialta adopts a patriarchal position and now commands him what to do. In Chapter IX, Rialta sends Cemí in the pursuit of the difficult. A mother acting like a father, she becomes an androgynous bridge; true to her name she is Rialto/the bridge/Rialta, and Cemí has to heed her words to go to the Father. Her exhortation is divinely inspired--she prays and asks for inspiration with words from God and the Holy Spirit before pronouncing the discourse:

Listen to what I'm going to tell you: Don't reject danger and always try what is most difficult. There's a danger that [we confront] in the form of substitution, there's also a danger that sick people seek out, a sterile danger, the danger without epiphany. But when a man throughout his days has tested what is most difficult, he knows that he has lived in danger, and even though its existence has been silent, even though the succession of its waves has been peaceful, he knows that a day has been assigned to him in which he will be transfigured, and he will not see the fish inside the current but the fish in the starry basket of eternity.

(Óyeme lo que te voy a decir: No rehúses el peligro, pero intenta siempre lo más difícil. Hay el peligro que enfrentamos como una sustitución, hay también el peligro que intentan los enfermos, ese es el peligro que no engendra ningún nacimiento en nosotros, el peligro sin epifanía. Pero cuando el hombre, a través de sus días ha intentado lo más difícil, sabe que ha vivido en peligro, aunque su existencia haya sido silenciosa, aunque la sucesión de su oleaje haya sido manso, sabe que ese día que le ha sido asignado para su transfigurarse, verá, no los peces dentro del fluir, lunarejos en la movilidad, sino los peces en la canasta estelar de la eternidad).⁸¹

⁸¹ P- Rabassa 228; Paradiso IX 231.

During this speech, Rialta the matriarch transforms herself into the patriarch. She is in essence a bridge between the son and the father, between her son and God. She explains her own transformation:

Your father's death might have confused and destroyed me by leaving me without an answer for the rest of my life, but I know that I would not fall ill, because it always seemed to me that such an absolute event would cause a darkness that had to be illuminated with the transfiguration that is reached by habitually seeking the most difficult. Your father's death was a profound event, I know that my children and I will give it depth while we are alive, because it left me with a dream that one of us would be a witness to our transfiguration in order to fill that absence. I also attempted the most difficult, that is to disappear, to live only for the potential act of my children's lives. For me, the event, as I told you, your father's death, left me with no answer, but I've always dreamed, and those dreams will always be the root of my being alive, that it would be the profound cause of your testimony, of your seeking difficulty as transfiguration, of your answer.

(La Muerte de tu padre, pudo atolondrarme y destruirme, en el sentido de que me quedé sin respuesta para el resto de mi vida, pero yo sabía que no me enfermaría, porque siempre conocí que un hecho de esa totalidad engendraría un oscuro que tendría que ser aclarado en la transfiguración que exhale la costumbre de intentar lo más difícil. La muerte de tu padre fue un hecho profundo, sé que mis hijos y yo le daremos profundidad mientras vivamos, porque me dejó soñando que alguno de nosotros daríamos testimonio al transfigurarnos para llenar esa ausencia. También yo intenté lo más difícil, desaparecer, vivir tan sólo en el hecho potencial de la vida de mis hijos. A mí ese hecho, como te decía, de la muerte de tu padre me dejó sin respuesta, pero siempre he soñado, y esa ensoñación será siempre la raíz de mi vivir, que esa sería la causa profunda de tu testimonio, de tu dificultad intentada como transfiguración, de tu respuesta).⁸²

The mother's exhortation reminds Cemí of the Gospels, the teachings or revelations of Christ. The Mother's Gospel ("Word") impels him to search the difficult through the testimony of poetry. The Gospels provide the way to God. Through examples

⁸² P- Rabassa 228; Paradiso IX 231.

and experience they are the road to knowledge and God. The narrator reaffirms them. Thus, whatever is at the center of the labyrinth forces one to confront a turning point. You face and retrace your steps; to see what went wrong and where you went wrong, obtaining more knowledge along the way. The only way to the correct path and exit is through the error, the problem, the difficult.

Likewise, about to die (Chapter XI), the grandmother reviews for Cemí the family's purpose. Their purpose is to exercise the gift "to grasp [the] rhythm of growth for nature" ("captar [el] ritmo de crecimiento para la naturaleza"). Augusta reminds Cemí that they have been "dictated" to give the "rhythmic interpretation of the higher voice" ("la rítmica interpretación de la voz superior"). In other words, she tells him that in writing he is predestined to give the testimony of their lives, that he is the keeper of their legacy, their family history and cultural tradition.⁸³ Besides this, she prepares Cemí for some patriarchal role or function. Rialta and Augusta prefigure each other.

3. The Mystic Copulation of Cemí to Licario

When Cemí's father was dying, he asked Oppiano Licario to meet and act as mentor to his son, who was ten years old. Cemí briefly saw Oppiano's face then and encountered him a few times during his adolescent years. Now a young man in Chapter XII Cemí sees an image symbolizing Licario in a dream sequence. In Chapter XIII, awake, Cemí boards a peculiar bus that is surreally propelled by the decapitated head of a

⁸³ P-Rabassa 370-371; Paradiso XI 365.

bull which is “detained by the breakdown of the bullhead on the pinions” (“detenido por la avería de la cabeza del toro en los piñones”⁸⁴) after the head moved in the same direction for more than two hours. The bullhead obviously signals the Minotaur and the labyrinth. Cemí enters the bus after the bullhead has been replaced with a freshly decapitated one. The bus is full and has several people that Cemí has met throughout his life. He glances at Licario, doesn’t recognize him but sees Martincillo steal a bag of antique coins from Greece that Licario had just bought and carried in his pocket. Cemí rescues the coins from the young man and returns them to Licario. Licario puts an invitation card in Cemí’s pocket--the card thus makes a connection which will guide Cemí back to him for their definite meeting or copula. There is a merging here between Licario and Cemí’s father. Cemí is now looking for Licario but doesn’t have his address.

Licario is a reincarnation of Daedalus, the creator of the labyrinth. Licario has feminine and masculine qualities. He is very influenced by his mother and sister and has an enthusiasm for gastronomy. Besides his knowledge of numismatics and Ninevite art and antiquities, Licario studies music, philology, and the metrics of sonnets. He’s especially interested in the Pythagorean harmonics of the planetary spheres (tones of the musical scale--the three keys of ancient Greek harmony). After they meet, he teaches Cemí the rhythm in words: one word intones a diastolic style to exalt the mind; another a systolic style--active, searching, to contract or depress the mind--to trigger tumultuous passions. Another, the hesychastic style, is used to appease the mind and attain spiritual

⁸⁴ P-Rabassa 413; Paradiso XIII 406.

equilibrium.⁸⁵ (Hesychism teaches a very simple ritual in which clergy and laity-- untrained--chant one word or phrase with such intensity that they move to heightened awareness where they communicate with the divinity). Licario is teaching Cemí new knowledge and Cemí is obtaining a new sense of awakening. His senses are allowing new meanings that go beyond his normal limits.

In Chapter XIV Cemí goes searching for Licario again. It is night and late. Cemí is tired and when he approaches Licario's home, all he sees are lights but Licario is not to be seen. He is greeted by Licario's sister, Ynaca Eco, who informs him that Licario has died. Licario has bequeathed to him a poem in a folded page. After watching Licario's body in the open coffin, Cemí goes to a coffee shop, sits down, and is about to fall asleep sad and tired. He thinks about Licario being dead. The rhythmic tap of the spoon on the cup reminds Cemí about the hesychastic ritual and evokes, transformed, Licario's words: "rhythm of hesychasts, now we can begin" ("ritmo hesicástico, podemos empezar."⁸⁶ Here Cemí becomes one with Licario and listens to the rhythm that sustains the world and the Word.

Through memories of a paternal figure, inspired to do the difficult ("hacer lo más difícil") by his mother, Cemí resolves to go down to the cavern of death in order to connect with Licario. He hears syllables beneath the rhythms in the coffee shop. He hears a muffled Licario. He is impelled by this sound of the syllables slowly saying "Let's begin."

⁸⁵ See Pellón JLL's Joyful Visions 30-31.

⁸⁶ P-Rabassa 466; Paradiso XIV 459.

Cemí has been initiated into the world of letters, philosophy, and poetry. Cemí will become everything that Licario will teach him. Cemí will transform into a new knowledgeable Cemí incorporated with Licario. Going back to the Father by way of the Mother, crossing the river: this all resembles Aeneas's journey with one big difference. Cemí's sibyl (the one who allegedly teaches, the Sibylline "Oracle") is his Mother. The way to the new life is to visit the Father by crossing the bridge of the Mother.

4. Cuba as Androgyne

Cuba is a cavernous island. Its capital, San Cristóbal de La Habana resembles a circular labyrinth. Lezama learned its artifice and figured out ways to transform their urban labyrinth into literature by walking its streets. Cemí walks them over and over again. City and island are on water and surrounded by water. The island and the city have underground rivers that Cemí figuratively crosses to see Licario. Cemí's relatives, the Tainos who work the earth, inhabited the island; so did the Ciboney, Arawak for "cave dwellers."

In the narrative the mother, the island, and the land are one and the same: the Mother's womb stands for the island's caves. As we have seen earlier, in Chapter X, Rialta has a tumor surgically extracted and held in a jar. Lezama describes Cemí's meditation while watching this "organ" extracted from his mother. In a hesychastic trance, Cemí describes the shape, the color and the organization of the tumor as if he were extracting meaning out of the cavity in his mother's body. The tumor as an umbilical cord connects Lezama with the Mother. The Mother, through her womb,

resembles Cuba's caves.⁸⁷ Cuba is the Motherland and the Fatherland. Cuba is the Mother's womb. In that womb flows the fertile fluid for creation.

In much of his writing, Lezama uses language related to the system of caves and caverns that makes up a large part of the geological structure of the island. The cave formations of stalactites and stalagmites are metaphors in his fiction. The ideas that come from above are like the stalactites that hang like female breasts from the ceiling or sides of the cavern. The thoughts that come from below, from hell or the underworld are like stalagmites that rise from the floor of the cavern like erect phalluses. Stalactites and stalagmites are formed from deposits of minerals formed from a solution by slowly dripping water. They both share the same drip water source although not every stalactite has a complementary stalagmite. The pair relation exists where the continual elongation of the protruding formations may eventually resolve in the union of both deposits and the formation of columns. The conditions that favor the deposits that become stalactites and stalagmites are rocks, water, passage ways for the water and air space. All of these conditions must come together for these creations to be formed.⁸⁸ This is once again another form of confluence in the natural world that elicits an idea of literary and androgynous confluence in Lezama.

Lezama uses these metaphors to form a columnata for his language, metaphysical piers underpinning his thoughts. The image of a network of deposit formations is alluded

⁸⁷ Again, see Pellón for the fibroma episode, JLL's Joyful Vision 13-27.

⁸⁸ "stalactite and stalagmite." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 23 July 2006 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9069376>>.

to in Lezama's brief and sketchy but important mention in Paradiso of the honey industry on the island in the episodes of family and nation formation. Honey, of course, is valued for its therapeutic attributes in the treatment of asthma and is a relevant topic for the condition of the protagonist, José Cemí. In Chapter IV Doña Munda explains that the Mendez Ruda family had a tobacco and honey farm in the western province of Pinar del Río. Through Doña Munda, Lezama explains the difference in the production of safe honey from bees at work on the blue flower in contrast with the unsafe production of honey from bees' work on the palm tree:

The bees suck only on the blue flower and produce a honey that competes with the most splendid Mediterranean varieties. Palm honey, on the other hand, is made by exchanging the comb for the hollows in certain varieties of palm. The bees leech off the palm's circulation, sink into its currents to draw out the ambrosia. [. . .] Palm roots stretch out like threads and require time to purify the climbing lymph; the extension of a palm calls for a light humor, one sufficiently filtered to be able to rise up within. Those roots extend themselves to corrupt lands, where the humus has endured, mellowing and becoming more submissive to the invasion of those threads seeking its poison.

Las abejas sólo libaban en la flor azul y producían una miel que competía con las de más espléndidas tradiciones mediterráneas. La otra miel, la de palma, estaba hecha reemplazando el panal por la oquedad que hace algunas palmas. Las abejas libaban en la propia circulación de la palma, se hundían en sus corrientes para extraer la ambrosía. [. . .] Las raíces de la palma se prolongan como hilos, tienen que tardar en purificar la linfa que va a ascender, pues la extensión de la palma requiere un humor ligero, muy filtrado, para que pueda trepar por dentro. Esas raíces se extienden a las tierras corrompidas, donde el humus ha permanecido ablandándose y haciéndose más rendido a la invasión de aquellos hilos que buscan su veneno.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ P-Rabassa 67; Paradiso IV 69.

The reference to the bees evokes the analogy of the honeycomb in Lezama's architecturally ornamented language:

[...] also called honeycomb work, Arabic al-halimat al-'uliya ("the overhang") pendentive form of architectural ornamentation, resembling the geological formations called stalactites. This type of ornamentation is characteristic of Islamic architecture and decoration. It consists of a series of little niches, bracketed out one above the other, or of projecting prismatic forms in rows and tiers that are connected at their upper ends by miniature squinch arches.⁹⁰

The critics have recognized this honeycomb ("filigrana") work in Lezama's language and composition and labeled it his "filigree writing." Excessive ornamentation poses the danger of stretching the limits of imagery and the intertwining of storylines to the breaking point of chaos and difficulty. Thus, Lezama's type of writing appears to have ornamental labyrinthine connections, with bulls, bees, double axes, ladies of the labyrinth, genitals.⁹¹ What might appear to be Lezama's eccentric fantasy is in fact an inherited art: from Moorish Spain and from indigenous Cubans. Again, Lezama's mention of honey on the island in the episodes of family and nation formation in Paradiso actually associates an indigenous honey industry with the etymology of "Cemí:"

The term *cemí*, or *semi*, is etymologically related to the Lokono term *seme* and *semehi*, which mean "sweet" or "having the taste of honey." Lokono apply this root to the term *semichichi*, which means "shaman," "medicine man," or "cure" (Bennett 1989, 39). The Tainos, for example, establish in their myths a close relationship among guavas (that is, "sweetness") and hog plum (*jobo*) trees –as well as the bats that eat their fruits –and the supernatural spirits of the nonliving (*opía*) that roam the forest at night. Night and sweetness then are essential qualities of the sacred domain. That

⁹⁰ "Stalactite Work". Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 23 July 2006 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9069377>>.

⁹¹ For figures of bulls, bees, beehives and ladies of the labyrinth in early indigenous art, see Marija Gimbutas, Language of the Goddess (New York: Harper & Row) 265-275.

is why the Lokono shaman is denominated *semichichi*, for he possesses the qualities of the sacred and magic: sweetness, honey. Thus the three-pointed objects known as *cemíes* are so called because of their sweet/honey qualities, which are exclusive to the sacred. The supernatural forces are collectively designated as *cemí* (*zemi*, *semí*) for the same reasons.⁹²

The salt water lagoons of Cuba are called “milk lagoon” or “leche.” A milk lagoon is formed by a confluence of natural channels that connect it to the Atlantic Ocean. The waves and movement of the sea disrupts the natural deposits of the bottom, giving it its milky appearance. Part of the legend says that there was a bridge--the platform on which the island of Cuba sits is thought to be part of that ancient bridge--that connected Atlantis with the knowledge or civilization of the classical time.

Lezama is a Platonist and he does not only collect the idea of the ideal citizen but embodies it. He is the ideal citizen of noble character and erudition who labors to contribute to the common good of the polity and edifies the Republic.

In Lezama’s vision, islands are sponges that absorb knowledge. Cuba is at the cross roads of the New World and the Old World. The island’s rhythm is counterpointed by ebb and flow. It absorbs new or old knowledge, processes it, transforms it, and sends it back to sea, creating tides of culture that eventually reach other shores. Under the land there are rivers that converge in Cuba’s underworld which replicate the same confluence of land.

⁹² José R. Oliver, “The Taino Cosmos” Note 1, The Indigenous People of the Caribbean 152.

THREE. FIGURE AND REVELATION

The term “figure” means form or representation, the image or likeness of an abstract idea or concrete thing. Yet more appropriately to Lezama’s conception of the cognitive image,--flowing from knowledge and revealing knowledge--for our interpretation we will recover the etymology of the word, the Latin figura, to give it the revelatory sense that Lezama used. We know that figura is an image which foreshadows a future event, person or thing from Auerbach’s study of prophetic annunciation and the figural interpretation of Scripture by the Christian Church Fathers.⁹³ In addition to this meaning, in Lezama’s system, figure/figura refers to an incipient image which, after confluence with other images, will be complete or one or androgynous.

Like the Kabalistic pardes Lezama’s Paradiso has at least fourfold levels of interpretation, all of which “prefigure”: the literal is the path to the figural interpretation of the historical or factual content; the hermeneutical is the path to the ethical commentary imbedded in the discourse; the allegorical comprises the path to the commentary of philosophical truths; and the mystical is the path to the unlimited mysterious and enigmatic symbolic sense of words and writing. This mystical sense has a higher significance level; it is spiritual or anagogical by virtue of a connection with God and Divine speech which transcends human understanding. The observable aspect of figural interpretation--the literal or historical-- is essential to Lezama because of the

⁹³ Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian, 1959) 11-76.

consideration he attaches to the historicity of an image and what it signifies. The other layers of meaning reveal themselves only to a deeper, more penetrating power of insight but the literal or historical is the most accessible to the reader.⁹⁴

Prefiguring is an important part of interpreting, so also for Lezama

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the second coming.⁹⁵

Thus prefiguring in Paradiso is establishing a figure in a text that will have a recurrence (transformed or transfigured) in a later part of the text or even beyond the text. Faith plays an essential part when either the reader “laboring from within” or the author “writing from without” the labyrinth-text makes the spiritual connection between the two figures.

In the manner in which sacred writings define and identify a people, record their history, and lay the foundation for their dogma, Lezama’s Paradiso records the country’s history that becomes the backdrop for the protagonist’s story. The formal unity of the language, style, and content of the narrative define and identify its protagonists as Cuban

⁹⁴ Scholem 172-173.

⁹⁵ Auerbach 53.

and Lezaman. The language of Paradiso particularly shapes a figura meant to define, identify, and serve as the foundation for the nation and the author. According to Lezama:

Until the language does not acquire its formal unity, in the sense of visibility, the society cannot presume of its existence in history, a fact transmissible by the existence of a ceremony, by its dominion over spatial similarity, that gives a style in living, and by the subtle ways in which that miracle, of form and ceremony, of language and society, decides to organize its resistance before the temporal overflow. Few societies can assume to have reached a form, a visibility in language. The form reached by the French or the Chinese expression, assures in its great moments--le grand age or the era of Confucian compilations--the mask of a ceremony, that can be mundane, or severe, erudite or vindictive, arielesque or messianic, that organically defines the society, situates it in the kingdom of culture and traces the contours or palisades where that society exhales an intense necessity for language, for signs, where the root offers the equivalent joy of its foundation.

(Hasta que el lenguaje no adquiere su unidad formal, en el sentido de visibilidad, la sociedad no puede presumir de su existir dentro de lo histórico, hecho transmisible por la existencia de un ceremonial, por su dominio sobre la semejanza espacial, que da un estilo en el vivir, y por las sutiles maneras en que ese milagro, de forma y ceremonial, de lenguaje y sociedad, se decide a organizar su resistencia frente al aluvión temporal. Pocas sociedades pueden presumir de haber alcanzado una forma, una visibilidad en el lenguaje. La forma alcanzada por la expresión francesa o por la china, asegura en sus grandes momentos--le grand age o la era de las recopilaciones confucianas--la máscara de un ceremonial, que puede ser mundano, o terrífico, erudito o vindicativo, arielesco o mesiánico, que define orgánicamente a la sociedad, la sitúa en el reino de la cultura y traza los contornos o empalizadas donde esa sociedad exhala una violenta necesidad de lenguaje, de signos, donde la raíz ofrezca la dicha equivalente de su fundamento.⁹⁶

In Lezama the word is like a visible figure of language, analogous to a geometric solid--it conveys a reality with three dimensions: distance (measure of extent), breadth (broad effect), and resistance (power, capacity of opposition).

⁹⁶ In "Ceremonial de lo visible" in Vuelta 9.102 (mayo, 1985) 50. This is a reprint of a survey ("encuesta") originally published in Revista Mexicana de Literatura 7 (1956) 50-52.

A single word with many meanings is like a solid figure contained by many plane surfaces. A word is a joy when its many meanings enrich its potential for representation and an annoyance when its expected meaning is deflected in a labyrinthine arrangement. For Lezama words are treasures of wisdom. In Lezama a word incarnates the “mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” when its utterance changes the course or direction of its regular use and meaning. Like the phenomenon of refraction, the illumination of a word reveals its infinite possibilities of uses and meanings for the creation of images that give substance or make possible the vision of “supernature.” Like a ray of light, the exploitation of a word based on the potens or “possible image” diverts the direction of its contemporary, conventional meaning in an indirect, implied or oblique way when passing from one vision or a means of expression to another one of a different nature.

As a poet Lezama spouses Pythagoras’ theory that words have variants: “There are the simple, the hieroglyphic, and the symbolic word. In other terms, [there are] the verb that expresses, the one that conceals, and the one that signifies” (“Hay la palabra simple, la jeroglífica y la simbólica. En otros términos, [hay] el verbo que expresa, el que oculta y el que significa”). Accordingly, Lezama/the poet uses all the variants of words that Pythagoras identified, but also goes beyond that to express a kind of supra verba that includes a fourth unique dimension: the poetic word. Lezama does not name the word but explains that the word, “based upon the progressions of the image and the metaphor, and in the resistance of the image, insures the body of poetry” (“basada en las progresiones de la imagen y de la metáfora, y en la resistencia de la imagen, asegura el cuerpo de la

poesía”).⁹⁷ The word that incarnates poetry that Lezama refers to is none other than the Word made flesh: Logos.

Thus words are images that reveal knowledge of God as Logos does. In this context of Lezama’s use of the image as a figura for revelation, I can only give brief examples of such figura in order to show how Lezama shapes and how one can read the labyrinth-text: 1. the hand, 2. the city, 3. Cemí’s Basque language, 4. Delphi-Foción, 5. the dream sequence in Paradiso XII.

1. The hand as figura.

The hand is a recurrent image in the narrative of Paradiso. It stands for an essential intuitive faculty, a sixth sense for discovery, perception and communication. Lezama’s “mano” is a derivative from Latin “manus;” a confluent word-image, from “manuscript” (the hand of the scribe plus the writing of text).

For Lezama and Cemí, who experiences insightful nocturnal reveries and dreams, the night is the hand that communicates the mystery of the unknown, what is beyond the limit, the other/Other. Lezama writes about this image (night/hand) in “Confluencias”:

The night has been reduced to a point, which goes on growing until becoming night again. The reduction--that I verify--is a hand. The situation of the hand within the night, gives me a time. The time where the hand could be recognized. [...] Vacillating with fear, with an inexplicable resolve, I slowly advance my hand, as though anxiously traversing a desert, until finding the other hand, the Other.

⁹⁷ JLL in Armando Álvarez Bravo, “Órbita de LL,” Lezama Lima ed. Eugenio Suárez-Galbán (Madrid: Taurus, 1987) 71-72.

(La noche se ha reducido a un punto, que va creciendo de nuevo hasta volver a ser la noche. La reducción--que compruebo--es una mano. La situación de la mano dentro de la noche, me da un tiempo. El tiempo donde se podía reconocer la mano. [. . .] Vacilante por el temor, pues con una decisión inexplicable, iba lentamente adelantando mi mano, como un ansioso recorrido por un desierto, hasta encontrarme la otra mano, lo otro).⁹⁸

The hand-night communicates “the Other” with “the other word” in moments of correspondence, when the poet’s amplified breathing encounters a universal rhythm. And the “other word” that stands for the unknown or occult is what completes man, makes man whole:

I not only waited for the other hand, but also the other word, that every moment is forming in us a continuous fact and an undoing. [...] Knowing that incessantly something comes to complete them, and that by extending the breathing one encounters a universal rhythm. Inspiration and expiration that are a universal rhythm. What is occult is what completes us and is plenitude in the longitude of the wave.

The word at the moments of its hypostasis, the whole body behind a word, a syllable, [...]. The remainder of the stellar thing that was in each word became a momentary mirror. River sand that left letters, indications. A solitary word that became oratorical. The verb was an excessive hand in its transpiration, [...]

Each word was for me the innumerable presence of the fixedness of the nocturnal hand. [...] Larvae of metaphor, developed in unstoppable chain, like a parting and a new coming.

(No solamente esperaba la otra mano, sino también la otra palabra, que está formando en nosotros un continuo hecho y deshecho por instantes. [. . .] Saber que por instantes algo viene para completarlos, y que ampliando la respiración se encuentra un ritmo universal. Inspiración y espiración que son un ritmo universal. Lo que se oculta es lo que nos completa y es la plenitud en la longitud de la onda. [. . .])

⁹⁸ “Confluencias,” La cantidad hechizada, OC II 1209.

La palabra en los instantes de su hipóstasis, el cuerpo entero detrás de una palabra, una sílaba, [. . .]. El residuo de lo estelar que había en cada palabra se convertía en un momentáneo espejo. Una arenilla que dejaba letras, indicaciones. Una palabra solitaria que se hacía oracional. El verbo era una mano excesiva en su transpiración, [. . .]

Cada palabra era para mí la presencia innumerable de la fijeza de la mano nocturna. [. . .] Eran larvas de metáfora, desarrolladas en indetenible cadeneta, como una despedida y una nueva visita).⁹⁹

In Lezama certain parts of speech--verbs, adjectives--are regarded as “hands.” And “[w]hat is manifest can be held or grasped by the hand.”¹⁰⁰ The stellar hand of God touching man yields the power of Logos and ultimate enlightenment to the poet, who in turn uses the hand to write manuscripts that communicate higher knowledge to men:

In both Old Testament and Christian traditions the hand is the symbol of power and of supremacy. To be touched by the hand of God was to receive the manifestation of his spirit. When the hand of God laid hold of a man, the latter received into himself divine strength [...].

St. Gregory of Nyssa regarded human hands as being linked to sight and to knowledge since, ultimately, they were designed for communication. In his treatise on the creation of mankind he wrote that:

A man’s hands are of especial use to him in communication. Whoever regards use of the hands as one of the properties of natural reason is not deceived. All agree, and it is easy to see, that hands allow us to display our words in writing. It is, in fact, one of the marks of a rational being to express thoughts in writing and, in some sense, to talk through the hands which give a permanent form to sounds and gestures.¹⁰¹

Thus the confluent image of God’s hand extended to or touching man will flow together with the other images/ideas of hand to pre-figure a new “manuscript” entitled Paradiso,

⁹⁹ “Confluencias,” La cantidad hechizada, OC II 1210-1211.

¹⁰⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 466.

¹⁰¹ Cited in Chevalier and Gheerbrant 469.

written by Cemí-Lezama, inspired by Cemí-God (Theseus-Christ in Cuba), using words poetically in a “new-old sense” (neologisms), ”signifying “Paradise” in the New World re-born from the Old.

2. City as figura

The city, La Habana, features significantly in Lezama’s thought. He named two works with the city in the title: Tratados en La Habana (1958), which includes his newspaper column, Sucesivas o las coordenadas habaneras.

In Paradiso the protagonist is portrayed as ambulating from one place to another in the city. A labyrinth, the city is a sacred and protected precinct where the protagonist-artist composes order from his images. The streets and intersections of La Habana geographically parallel the various “topics” (Gk. topos, place) or “places” (Lat. locus place) in Cemí’s mind that organize images and thoughts during his walks. Cemí’s apprenticeship to poetry progresses as he walks the city’s streets. As he retraces his steps he acquires new experiences. For instance deciding whether to walk on Obispo Street or on O’Reilly Streets in La Habana Vieja makes a big difference in his thinking.

The Malecón, the thick wall built along the seashore to protect the city from the sea, involves the use of the labyrinth as an amulet to ward off evil. The wall with its promenade is like the outer path of the labyrinth that encircles the city labyrinth. The city provides endless paths/streets for thought/walking because Paradise is here, although in chaos. The city streets yield knowledge and are the means to encounters with people who share their knowledge quest. For instance, Cemí often meets Fronesis in the streets; the

friend extends his hand in a communicative gesture and joins him in strolls while engaging in searching and illuminating conversations:

For the streets unearth their disguises of people: some are lusterless and inexplicable for us, others go ahead, give their hand us, walk to our side, swelling the urns of one well spun conversation [. . .]

(Pues las calles exhuman sus disfraces de personas: unas son mate e inexplicables para nosotros, otras se adelantan, nos dan la mano, caminan a nuestro lado, hinchando los trojes de una bien hilada conversación [...]).¹⁰²

Enclosed in the labyrinth and not yet off the island, however, Cemí leaves the labyrinth, like Daedalus, by flying with his imagination and cognitive Eros to absorb what is outside (the Old World) and what is written there (Old World literature).

The architecture of La Habana is one of contrasts; the baroque and neo classical abound in the old city. Both styles are mingled. Buildings exhibit porticos and the city streets are calzadas lined with portales, and public corridors give access to places of commerce. When Cemí walks on these streets he is literally looking into “urns,” remnants of the Old World in the New: for instance the portales, the Old World columns which give La Habana the nickname “city of columns,” after Alejo Carpentier’s metaphor. These portales are thresholds to knowledge--to the Old World. Within the walled city, Cemí has access to the images of the Old World.

The shape of the city on the island is a figura of the labyrinth itself: an interior circle (reader and Cemí labor from within) within the square of a building (text composed

¹⁰² In “Sucesivas o las coordenadas habaneras” en Tratados en La Habana, OC II 603.

or Paradiso, “island in the middle of the sea”). The colonial city is the visual model for the paths of Lezama’s labyrinth:

When the walls come down in the 1860’s, Havana had already broken out of the confines of the walled city [...]. The economic hub of Havana, though, was concentrated along the streets of Ricla (now Muralla), Teniente Rey, San Ignacio, Obispo and O’Reilly. This retail activity grew thanks to the sugar trade which had made the port of Havana, already a major harbor, one of the most important in the world. Muralla Street served as a major warehousing center, displaying silks, china, silverware and other goods. Only the street of Jesús del Monte had any significant retail trade beyond the colonial core (Aruca 1985).¹⁰³

In the narrative we see Obispo and O’Reilly as paths for thought-images. Another street, Obrapía, offers another way to “meditate,” to walk to the “Park,” the “garden” in Paradise from the Espigón (jetty in the water), according to urges from Cemí’s body (“humors”). The two streets form a “bivia,” a double way to the Park (Elysian Fields). They are not the “right” and “left” “bivia” Aeneas follows to the underworld (Elysian Fields), but the “bivia” of looking patiently by way of “Obispo” and of “cathartic” hurrying by way of “Obrapía:”

When Cemí wanted to get to the Parque Central from the Espigón, he always meditated on the two paths open to his choice, according to his humors and whims. When he wanted to stop to talk or look at a store window, to visit a friend or peruse neckties, to watch lottery tickets being sold or scan the latest books, his accumulative patience would lead him down Obispo. When he wanted to walk faster, annoyed by any interruption, he would go along Obrapía, performing his peripatetic catharsis with fewer parentheses and exceptions. It amazed him that two streets so closely parallel could offer two styles, two anxieties, two manners of going places, so distinct and yet parallel, never able or caring to meet.

¹⁰³ Cited in Segre, Roberto, Mario Coyula and Joseph L. Scarpaci, Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, 1997) 35.

(Cuando Cemí desde el Espigón quería llegar al Parque Central, meditaba siempre en los dos caminos por los que se decidiría, de acuerdo con sus humores y sus fastidios. Cuando quería detenerse en alguna conversación o vidriera, ver algún amigo o las corbatas de moda, oír el pregón de algún número de billete o ver los libros mas recientes, enfilaba su paciencia acumulativa por Obispo. Cuando quería caminar más de prisa, molesto por cualquier interrupción, remontaba por Obrapía, para hacer su catarsis deambulatoria con menos paréntesis y excepciones. Le maravillaba que dos calles, en un paralelismo tan cercano, pudieran ofrecer dos estilos, dos ansiedades, dos maneras de llegar tan distintas e igualmente paralelas, sin poder ni querer juntarse jamás¹⁰⁴

The silent branch of the “bivia,” Obispo, the “silent” street parallel to Obrapía, leads Cemí to a lower place, a café where there is a raucous “Avernal,” as in the Caves of Avernus in Aeneas’ descent, a racket made by an inebriated Foción whose image advances toward him:

The person sitting in that café [Foción] had torn it out of its normal rhythm by his mere presence and words, so that along that silent line, as if cut by shears, appeared several blocks as if they had suddenly masked themselves to enter an Avernian party, which seemed to have risen up from the depths with imperceptible earthly creaks. The masks seemed to take up an island, counseled by the rooted dampness of the spirit of night.

As Cemí went deeper into the damaged portion of the long silent line, he had the feeling that the hard, impenetrable image of Foción was advancing toward him, in so rotund a shape that his shoes sounded on the bridge stretched between the beginning of night and the absence that wanted to support its own double.

(La persona sentada en ese café había sustraído de su ritmo normal toda la presencia gravitante de la asamblea de espíritus de aquel barrio, por el solo hecho de su presencia y de su verba, de tal manera que en aquella línea silenciosa, como cortadas por una tijera, aparecían varias cuerdas como si se enmascarasen súbitamente para penetrar en una fiesta avérrnica, que parecía haber ascendido de las profundidades con imperceptibles crujidos terrenales. Las máscaras parecían ocupar un islote, aconsejadas por el húmedo radical del espíritu nocturno.

¹⁰⁴ P-Rabassa 350-351; Paradiso XI 345-346.

A medida que Cemí fue penetrando en la porción dañada de la extensa línea silenciosa, tenía la sensación de que la imagen dura, impenetrable de Foción avanzaba hacia él, en una forma tan rotunda que sonaban sus zapatos sobre el puente tendido entre el comienzo de la noche y la ausencia que quería sujetar a su doble).¹⁰⁵

Maturity pushes Cemí on. The maturation of his cognitive eros on the “silent” street, although interrupted by Foción’s noisy intrusion, pushes him on the “right” way to the “garden” in the middle of Havana/Paradise, as if Cemí/Aeneas were heading toward poetry, toward his Father in the “Elysian Fields”:

Foción’s back was to the corner, Cemí could have avoided such a challenging encounter. But Cemí already possessed that maturity of instinct that forced him in the presence of danger to continue, to want to penetrate deeper into the divinity become intractable. It was not the vulgar thing that contemporaries call the spirit of adventure which kept him on the corner without retreating, confronting a situation of denouement woven by unknown Parcae. The opposite of that miserable and pornographic spirit of adventure, he knew that to run away from one danger would create another, still more ungraspable, a kind of Jacob’s ladder in reverse where the infernal divinities, as if poured out of a cornucopia of the nocturnal, would disembark incessantly on the troubled earth, which had not prepared a triumphal reception for them.

(Desde la esquina, Foción estaba de espalda, podía haber esquivado un encuentro tan retador. Pero ya Cemí poseía esa madurez de instintos que lo llevaba en la ocasión de peligro a insistir, a querer penetrar más en la divinidad puesta zahareña. No era esa cosa vulgar, el llamado por los contemporáneos espíritu de aventura, lo que lo mantenía sin retroceder en la esquina, frente a una situación de desenlace tejido por parcas desconocidas. Sabía, reverso de ese miserable y pornográfico espíritu de aventuras, que huir de un peligro creaba otro más inasible aún, especie de escala de Jacob al revés, en que las divinidades platónicas, como volcadas por una cornucopia de lo nocturno, desembarcan incesantemente sobre la tierra apesadumbrada, que no les preparó un triunfal recibimiento).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ P-Rabassa 351; Paradiso XI 346.

¹⁰⁶ P-Rabassa 351-352; Paradiso XI 346-347.

Foción is not yet the person who will help Cemí get to the Father by way of poetry. All is figura of other encounters to come later.

3. Cemí's Basque Language as figura

The Basque Grandfather Cemí is a vivid sonorous figura of language whose utterances outline the unique texture and sound of the Euskera: “Concentrated in the Basque’s short neck, his utterances were projected like stone and sand” (“Concentrado en el pescuezo corto del vasco, sus articulaciones se trataban como piedras y arenas”) as he “gathered together all the relatives that his memory offered up, tracing the outermost branches of the family tree” (“[r]eunía toda la parentela hasta donde su memoria le aconsejaba, persiguiendo las últimas ramas del árbol familiar”) in his sugar plantation named “Resolution” (“Resolución”) on “nameless and dateless days of glory” (“día[s] de la gloria sin nombre y sin fecha”) that he dubbed my “family celebration” (“gossá familia), with utterances that “seemed to spring forth from [a] seedbed of accumulated breath” (“parecía brotar de [un] almacigo de acumulado aliento”).¹⁰⁷

The influence of the Basque language on Lezama and Cemí, although ignored, is significant. For example, the figural passage during the family gathering in which Uncle Alberto makes fun of the Basque Grandfather Cemí’s pronunciation of sibilants is charged with meaning: “Señora Rialta’s brother, who in his own peculiar way wanted to join in, made fun of the old man’s peninsular accent: ‘He’s like a bottle of beer, take off

¹⁰⁷ P-Rabassa 15-17; Paradiso I 16-17.

the top and it loses its pop.’” (“El hermano de la señora Rialta, que ya exigirá, de acuerdo con su peculiar modo, penetrar en la novela, decía de él, zumbando las zetas: ‘Es como la cerveza que quitándole el tapón se le va la fortaleza’”).¹⁰⁸ Lezama prefigures the pneumatic speech of Cemí in the sibilants of his Basque grandfather whose speech is, as it were, so “capped” by God that it never loses its hiss; his speech has pneuma, his words are inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit: “But the truth was, as if secretly mocking that expression, the old man never lost his pop, a sure sign that he had been capped by God.” (“Sin embargo, él como para burlarse en secreto de esa frase, no perdió nunca la fortaleza, buena señal de que estaba taponado por Dios”).¹⁰⁹

Another prefiguration is that the Basque language, like Cuba’s, though “subjected over a period of at least two thousand years” and through “borrowings from the romance languages” still has its identity.¹¹⁰ Quite correctly Lezama names the Basque grandfather with the last name Cemí, because he wants the Basque (Old World) identity transformed into an Antillean (New World) name, “Cemí.” As a figura of the coming “Cemí” whose quest will be wisdom metaphorized as “honey” Lezama situates his grandfather in a sugar plantation in Santa Clara. As such, the grandfather represents the Cemí idol in the form of the Taino aboriginal stones mentioned earlier, a stone idol that is represented as working the soil of a sugar plantation. Lezama maintains the idea of language as being inspired,

¹⁰⁸ P-Rabassa 16; Paradiso I 17.

¹⁰⁹ P-Rabassa 16; Paradiso I 17.

¹¹⁰ “Basque Language.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopaedia Britannica Premium Service. 1 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9109819>>.

breathed into by the Holy Spirit. The Basque origin is a figuration of Cemí's (Lezama's) language inspired by the breath of the Logos.

4. Delphi-Foción as figura

Apollo (poetry) came to Delphi after Zeus' two eagles flew from East and West and met in the center of the universe at Delphi, on a lower slope of Mount Parnassus in the territory of Phocis. The spot where they landed was marked by a sacred stone called the omphalos, literally the navel of the earth. The Pytho at Delphi, a snake Apollo killed changed into Pythia, the goddess who spoke Apollo's ambiguous words later recorded by the priests of Delphi.¹¹¹ Before studying this figura, we have to reflect about the confluences occurring here. Old-World-become-New-World requires that Delphi move to La Habana, that Apollo be converted to a Christian-Jewish syncretism of a Logos, that Phocis become Lezama's "Foción," that Mount Parnassus become "the steps to Parnassus," (the Humanities School in the Liberal Arts Curriculum) as taught at Upsilon ("Upsalón")--Lezama's name for the Universidad de La Habana. Pythia here becomes the androgynous poet Lezama-Cemí, and his ambiguous words parallel obscurely the labyrinthine streets and events in La Habana (a circle in a square), and they come together (conflate) into the New World "sibylline oracles," the collection or summa of oracular prophecies written by divine inspiration called Paradiso,¹¹² making priests out of

¹¹¹ See Morford and Lenardon 173-177.

¹¹² The Sybilline Oracles were once part of the Old Testament. See R. H. Charles, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 2 vols.

the readers of the text. Lezama's labyrinth generates ambiguous (Lat. "going both ways") texts. At the center of the labyrinth is the Lady in the Labyrinth, the Minotaur (half man half bull), the demigod Jose Cemí, or Jesus-Christ or Christ-Theseus. The Pythian Sybil, priestess or other prophets give voice (breath) to the word (Pneuma or Spirit) of God. The figuration or configuration is evident.

What is not quite so clear is the relation of "Foción" to Delphi. Ovid's Metamorphoses provides an answer:

Phocis, a fertile land, while there was land,
Marked off Oetean from Boeotian fields.
It was ocean now, a plain of sudden waters.
There Mount Parnassus lifts its twin peaks skyward,
High, steep, cloud-piercing. And Deucalion came there
Rowing his wife. There was no other land,
The sea had drowned it all.¹¹³

Deucalion and his wife are the Greek equivalent of Noah and his wife. Phocis is where they landed after the flood. Mount Ararat is the Jewish-Christian place name for Phocis. Here, presumably, their children learned poetry from Parnassus.

In this reading, the region Phocis transforms into Lezama's Phocion (Foción) and signifies a fertile ground (Gk. "topic," Lat. "place" as in topics or commonplaces) for the

¹¹³ Ovid, Metamorphoses, Trans. Rolfe Humphries (1955, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983) 12-13, Book I, lines 314-322. Phocis is situated between Boeotia to the east and Thessaly to the north.

development of the verbal arts leading to the top of Parnassus (poetry). A place becomes a person and “poetic transformation” becomes identified with the image of Foción.

Again using an exotic name in Cuba, Lezama makes Foción’s character remarkably complex, strange, bizarre. Foción is the third member of the Pythagorean triad of friends, the one that offers extreme views in the Socratic-like dialogs between the three. He is homosexual and heterosexual, and older than Fronesis and Cemí. His first name, Eugenio (Gk. for “well bred”) suggests in an ironic way that Foción’s breeding was orchestrated in order to produce desired characteristics. However, his birth begins a tragic course because his mother Celita had sexual relations with two brothers and it was not clear which of the two was his biological father--Nicolás or Juliano. He was raised by Nicolás, Celita’s husband, a medical doctor who lost his reason and went mad upon finding his wife fornicating with Juliano. Because the doctor with Celita as a nurse practiced a professional life of phantom clients, Foción grew up between “reality and super-reality.” And, being home-schooled by his father, it was not clear if Foción’s own madness was derived from the father or learned. Growing up was a difficult process:

Foción was opening his eyes, surrounded by an interminable exercise of phantoms [...]. He would stroll with his father, chat with his mother, surrounded by madness, he grew up without original sin. His senses didn’t segregate concupiscent material, but data of knowledge that advanced or retreated toward the image, floating like the peduncles of a Gorgon that never learned to decipher the river’s clay.

(Foción abría los ojos, rodeado de un interminable ejercicio de fantasmas. [...] Paseaba con su padre, conversaba con su madre, rodeado por la locura creció sin pecado original. Sus sentidos no segregaban materia concupiscible sino datos de conocimiento que avanzaban o retrocedían

hasta la imagen, flotando como los pedúnculos de una gorgona que no logran descifrar el légamo del río).¹¹⁴

The result was that Foción was always pretending to be what he was not. In some instances, he was true to his nature. The fact that Foción, “was not a student, he worked in a lawyer’s office and liked to study. He was always at Upsalón in his free time, with people who studied there (no era estudiante, trabajaba en la oficina de un abogado y procuraba ser estudioso. Estaba siempre en sus ratos de ocio, en Upsalón y con los que allí estudiaban”) felt dubious to Fronesis and made Cemí feel apathy for Foción.¹¹⁵

Foción is a double, Janus-like figure. He is bisexual but obsessed with homosexuality and excessively interested in seducing Fronesis as partner. He is a demon and an angel and as such the perfect complement for the triad of friend’s search for knowledge. If Fronesis is right handed, Foción is most likely left handed. As a demon, Foción’s malevolent spirit “mediates between the transcendent and temporal realms.” As an angel, he relates to Fronesis and Cemí; as a devil he belongs to the profane world.

In Chapter XI of Paradiso we witness a pivotal moment in Foción’s existence when he is mentally and physically caught in the labyrinth of insanity, walking round and round in circles around a tree. Cemí observes the event while visiting the hospital where his grandmother Augusta is interned:

Beside the poplar, in the mental ward’s garden, [Cemí] saw a young man in a white uniform describing circles incessantly around the poplar, whose size was owed to its well-tended roots. It was Foción. He went round and round in his circles, as if the poplar were his God and his destiny. ‘From

¹¹⁴ P-Rabassa 318; Paradiso X 315-316.

¹¹⁵ P-Rabassa 226; Paradiso IX 229.

the time he gets up,' said an attendant who passed Cemí, 'until he goes to bed, he walks around the tree. Rain and sun have no effect on his circling and recircling of that trunk.'

(Al lado del álamo, en el jardín del pabellón de los desrazonados, vio un hombre joven con su uniforme blanco, describiendo incesantes círculos alrededor del álamo agrandado por una raíz cuidada. Era Foción. Volvía en sus círculos una y otra vez como si el álamo fuera su Dios y su destino. 'Desde que despierta, dijo un enfermero que pasó cerca de Cemí, hasta que se acuesta esta dándole vueltas al árbol. Ni la lluvia ni el sol pueden apartarlo de sus vueltas y revueltas, del círculo completo que le echa a la madera').¹¹⁶

On the day of the death of his grandmother, Cemí looks for the tree where he had watched Foción making his rounds, but

A lightning bolt had pulled up its roots, removing its flesh with its giddy fire. A bench, sunk in the ground, held up the entire length of the blackened trunk as if a hot iron had crossed over to mark it. [...] The lightning that had destroyed the tree had freed Foción from his adoration of circular eternity.

(Un rayo le había extraído las raíces, removiéndole las carnes con su fuego atolondrado. Un banco, hundido en la tierra, soportaba toda la extensión del tronco ennegrecido como si le hubiera pasado un hierro candente para marcarlo. [...] El rayo que había destruido el árbol, había liberado a Foción de la adoración de su eternidad circular).¹¹⁷

In this interpretation, the tree is a center and an axial figure signaling the upward path toward God. It also symbolizes the cosmic tree, the androgynous primal human being. Foción's "adoration of circular eternity" is a ritual ceremony of communion with the divinity. The ritual culminates in Foción's purification by fire when the lightning destroys the tree he is encircling. The lightning of the tree symbolizes a transformation, a

¹¹⁶ P-Rabassa 371; Paradiso XI 366.

¹¹⁷ P-Rabassa 372; Paradiso XI 367.

new world order for Foción. In essence Foción undergoes a figurative death. The lightning frees him from his obsession with homosexuality and heals his madness. His disappearance marks his return to the original Androgyne. He begins a new life, transformed as the embodiment of a true androgynous one. He does not die; he is redeemed and reborn; his offspring eventually marries Cemí's child in Oppiano Licario, the sequel to Paradiso. Consequently, Foción is not only the figura of the "place"--topic, commonplace--where Cemí will write poetry in his ascension toward the Highest Good, but also the figura of Oppiano Licario because, like him, Oppiano does not die but undergoes a figurative death. Foción and Oppiano are reborn, resurrected.

5. Dream as "Figura:" The Dreams of Paradiso XII

Cintio Vitier says that in Chapter XII several dreams are interrupted and revealed, put together as pieces of a puzzle, or as "geometric figures of a dream." He declares the dreams to be "the cumulative sum of the overt terror felt by the protagonist towards the new dimension resulting from the absence of the father."¹¹⁸ The dream is a result of the absence of the father and, as said previously, Cemí's desire to fill this void with poetry. In addition, I propose that all Paradiso XII represents Cemí's confused state of mind, after Fronesis gives him the poem, "Portrait of José Cemí." The poem portrays Cemí as an artist; however, the young man has not yet reached his artistic identity and continues his ritual of passage, impelled by a cognitive Eros to find the "Word." Achieving that

¹¹⁸ See Vitier, "Capítulo XII. La ausencia del padre" in Paradiso Archivos critical edition, 672.

stage will prepare Cemí for the final encounter with his master Oppiano Licario, to begin the mentoring for perfection. The dream in Paradiso XII is a figura for that perfection.

Dreams reveal notions about the ego and the self, confirm tradition, and affirm legitimacy and authority.¹¹⁹ Dreams aim at reconstructing identity. At the center of the dream is a revelation which propels the dreamer/walker to the task of self-discovery. Like labyrinths, dreams conceal their messages beneath images in a world of their own – separate from the dreamer. This doubleness is described in Paradiso XII following Gaston Bachelard’s observations: “In our dreams, we are sometimes a labyrinthine substance, a matter that lives in stretching itself out, in losing itself in its own walking paths. [. . .] the being in the labyrinth is at once subject and object combined in a lost being” (“Dans nos rêves, nous sommes parfois une matière labyrinthique, une matière qui vit en s’étirant, en se perdant en ses propres défilés. [. . .] l’être dans le labyrinthe est à la fois sujet et objet conglomérés en être perdu”).¹²⁰

To understand the revelation the dream gives to Cemí, we must look at the images of separateness, trace the pattern the images provide, and find the thread in the direction of the dream. Cemí undertakes this process exactly by narrating his dream. Four stories make up the dream sequence:

1. The story of Atrio Flaminio, a tribune (captain) of Roman Legions in the Octavian Era (Octavio Augusto, first century B. C. –A. D.);

¹¹⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 312.

¹²⁰ Bachelard, Gaston. La terre et les rêveries du repos. (Paris: Corti, 1948) 211-212 (my translation).

2. The story of the young boy with the Danish vase and the grandmother, María la Luna, whose family has moved from the cold of Canada to the tropics;
3. The story of the nocturnal stroller (walker) (“paseante de la medianoche”) impelled to perambulate around various Havana neighborhoods by the converging forces of “the rocking chair-the spiraling guffaws-the open door” triad and the void in the lunar courtyard; and
4. The story of Juan Longo, the music critic who, in a death-like dream state, is kept frozen in time, immortalized, by the Circean-like efforts of his younger wife, an instructor of physical culture. The music critic is revived and wakes up in his one-hundred and fourteenth year to offer a new theory of dream, time, and their relationship with music.

The four stories are presented in fragments that occur in alternate order four times. The fourfold sequence is explained in a schema drawn by Vitier:

1A -- 2A -- 3A -- 4A

1B -- 2B -- 3B -- 4B

1C -- 2C -- 3C -- 4C

1D -- 3D -- 4D -- 1E

Horizontally, the sequences are all in order until the fourth sequence, when in the second element there is a break at 2D, transferred into a new 1E. Vertically, the sequences break

at 2D. We immediately see the absence of 2D, and know this narrative section is transferred into 1E. Vitier explains:

At once, the Pythagorean square is drawn, the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, the mandala of divinity [...], but with a broken or displaced fulcrum [point of support], that must be, therefore, the one that conceals the principal code. On the other hand, the vertical reading of the schema gives the continuity of each of the dreams, an implicit reading, latent, in a way contextual to the one that the text, obviously 'organized,' offers us.

(A primera vista se dibuja el cuadrado pitagórico, el tetragrammaton hebreo, el mandala de la divinidad [. . .], pero con un punto de apoyo roto, o desplazado, que debe ser, por lo tanto, el que oculta la clave mayor. Por otra parte, la lectura vertical del esquema nos da la continuidad de cada uno de los sueños, lectura implícita, latente, en cierto modo contextual de la que el texto, obviamente 'ordenado', nos ofrece.)¹²¹

I suggest that in the schema of the dreams, the dispersion caused by the broken fulcrum in the square, does not mean destruction for Cemí (as it does, for example, for Lönnrot in Borges' "Death and the Compass," where the detective meets death at the point South of the compass in his search for the fourth letter of the Tetragrammaton). In Lezama's Paradiso XII, the displaced fulcrum symbolizes the search for unity and immortality.

Unity is achieved through the abolition of time and space implied in the fusion of the four stories when the faces of the characters of the stories are interchanged or suddenly metamorphosed into each other. This fusion occurs when the nocturnal stroller witnesses and survives a confluence of metempsychosis in the funeral urn where the music critic is supposed to be. Instead of the face of the music critic that he expected to

¹²¹ In Paradiso Archivos critical edition, Vitier 673. Vitier is obviously quoting Lezama's own explanation of the image of the square which he often created with his fingers to ward off evil. In Note 5 to Paradiso VIII, Vitier quotes Lezama's message to his sister Eloísa on the back of a photograph: "Your brother makes the sign of the Pythagorean square, the Tetragrammaton, God, the supreme essence, [which] is also an exorcism to drive away the bad spirits." (484). The Tetragrammaton is the Hebrew name of God written in four letters.

see in the casket, he recognizes the face of the child with the Danish vase there. He had seen that face alive and well in previous walks, the first time “inside an iron fence around the moat” and the second time at the door of the child’s house when he had delivered the Danish vase. Another transformation at the funeral urn happens when the wife of the music critic sees in the same urn not the face of her husband, Juan Longo that she expected to see but the face of Atrio Flaminio, the captain of Roman legions. These metempsychoses or transformations signal the principle of death and resurrection. At this moment of dreaming and narrating, Cemí has limited poetic art and doesn’t know what the dream means. He is not complete. His unity is not achieved and time is suspended. The dream figurates what is yet to happen.

As we carefully read on in the novel, this hypothesis is proved. We arrange the images, follow their pattern, find the thread that ties them together. We attempt to find unity in the various figures included in the dream:

Image A: Urns, called “orphic vases” by Lezama, which have various forms in the dreams and in the novel. The urn conveys the symbolism of the dwelling or house¹²²; the vase also has the meaning of treasure, spiritual or material. Vases are symbolic of places where miracles, such as birthing occur, parallel to a mother’s womb that holds life and the secret of transmutation¹²³. In the dreams, instances of the urn motif include the Danish vase and the funeral urn or casket of Juan Longo, which function as unifying elements in the four stories. The dream sequence is an urn in and of itself. The

¹²² Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1057.

¹²³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1061.

protagonist/narrator and reader fix their gaze upon these urns to obtain the meaning behind the images.

Image B: The images of gateways and courtyard (“patio”). Open doors, windows, and patio appear constantly, in both the dream and the novel. Doors open upon the mystery of the dreams. Each story or dream is seen through an open window into the unconscious. Gateways symbolize the scene of passing from one state to another, from one world to another, from the known to the unknown, from light to darkness. They indicate a threshold and invite us to cross it and voyage into the beyond. Janus the Roman god of initiation into the mysteries reigns over gateways signaling entrances and exits, and beginning and endings. The “atrium” in Atrio Flaminio stands for a patio flanked by porticos with flames that signal the twilight. The courtyard is like an empty square with a force that attracts the nocturnal stroller to its center and propels him out of its boundaries to walk out through the streets of Havana.

Image C: The orphic persona. In Lezama we have the presence of Orpheus as the pre-eminent musician and the originator of the mystery religions and inspirer of esoteric writing.¹²⁴ The orphic experience of the characters descending into darkness and the occult is enacted in the dreams. The incipient poet José Cemí is a half-human/half-god entity who reincarnates the half-human/half-god Orpheus (Orpheus was the son of Apollo

¹²⁴ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 725.

and the muse Calliope). The Orphic or Orphism in Lezama pertains to the ancient doctrine which sought the knowledge from darkness and the occult.¹²⁵

Image D: The image of the sleeper, Juan Longo. The metaphysical terror of the temporal and the obsession with immortality are decisive motives in the life of the sleeper and other characters. Atrio Flaminio is in search of his future as a warrior, a destiny that was promised but never realized because of his early death due to illness. In such an ironic end, there is a parallel to the fate of Cemí's father. Fear is also what moves the wife of the critic Juan Longo to abolish time by keeping Longo alive through a sleeping spell ("dormición").

Image E: Metamorphosis. There are multiple conversions, fusions or metamorphoses of the characters and objects in the dreams. Subjects become objects. For example, Atrio Flaminio turns into a space, the patio that propels the night stroller to go out into the night, while the nocturnal triad of "the rocking chair-the spiraling guffaws-the open door" merges into the night stroller who begins his march through the streets of Havana.

Other images, elements, motifs, or symbols that intertwine together the four stories into the dream sequence and the chapter into the novel include the following: the revelatory element inherent in the transcription and interpretation of the dreams; the serpent, which conveys many meanings in the dreams and novel, such as positive and negative temptation. Another meaning is that the serpent, like the phallus, has generative

¹²⁵ Tripp, Edward. The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology. New York: Meridian, 1974.

powers. The vertical form or symbol of ascent and descent is also evident; for example, the orphic experience is a descent to Hades; the form of the spears or bars in the stories is also vertical. There is also the tension between sound and silence; that is, the sensual elements of sound, sight, and feeling imbedded within the dream narrative. The narration is in the first and third persons, as in the novel. The act of breathing is a common element in the protagonists: Atrio Flaminio practices breathing exercises to increase the capacities of his lungs; the young boy with the urn suffers from asthma, which replicates Cemí's condition. The music critic has bronchitis. Interestingly, the heaving breaths can be seen as a parallel to fragmentation and rhythm in the discourse. The rhythm of the characters' breathing transferred to the narrative is akin to the attaining of a legendary rhythm. The geometric and numerical Pythagorean principle is also present throughout the narrative. This related cosmic rhythms to numerology, as it was associated with music and architecture. Numerology is a constant in Paradiso, suggesting that Lezama followed Pythagoras' notion that "numbers rule all things" ¹²⁶ or that, as in mythic belief, "God is a geometer and a mystic."¹²⁷

The images all point to something past (urn) as a gateway to poetry (Orpheus), by someone dead early (Atrio Flaminio), searching by night walking for something obscure (oneiros), that something both positive and negative and possibly phallic (serpent), requiring a descent (vertical) to sound/no sound, where the person is both one and not one

¹²⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 707.

¹²⁷ Morford and Lenardon 50.

(narration), but the person has difficulty breathing (“spirit” of poetry), and is in a quandary (numerology of labyrinth as circle [3] in an island in the middle of the sea [4]).

Paradiso XII represents, in some such-like figura done just now, the perfection of erotic cognition: the search for the “Word.” Cemí dreams of immortality in/with the word. I propose that the quest for unity is further confirmed by Lezama’s use of metempsychosis for the representation of the soul’s quest for immortality in Paradiso XII. If Lezama believes that “the poet is the causal being for resurrection,” then Cemí dreams about the immortality of Paradiso.

Transmigration of the soul and rebirth are expiatory, a penalty for sin.¹²⁸ In Dante’s “Paradiso,” a soul struggles with sin, and with celestial help, winning peace.”¹²⁹ There is no rebirth on earth: the pilgrim embraces his Beatrice in the presence of the Beatific Vision in Heaven. In Cemí’s case, the absence of the father, not sin, impels the young man to write, although his ultimate aim through poetry as a cure will be the return to the Father (God), the recovery of Paradise and therefore the abolition of sin. The absence of the father not only allows Cemí the practice of thinking and writing, but writing in a confusing way and with errors, as in a labyrinth. The fourfold sequence of images paraded in Paradiso XII is characterized by the same impulse: a need to substitute poetry for an absent father/Father. Cemí’s poetic metamorphosis engenders new images, combines the old with the new so that he can compose a complete poem: less figural and more complete or androgynous.

¹²⁸ Moore, George Foot. Metempsychosis (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1914) 27.

¹²⁹ Grandgent, C. H. “Introduction.” La Divina Commedia. By Dante Alighieri (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972) xxiii.

Again, the image of the night stroller helps us to grasp the need for substitution. First, the night stroller sees the face of a child behind the iron railing. Then the child appears in his house with the Danish vase. A while later, the night stroller sees the face of the child in the casket of the music critic. Much later, the wife of the music critic sees in the same casket the face of Atrio Flaminio. All of the characters converge into the body of the music critic, indicating an emphasis on art and denoting that Cemí must be an artist. The dream labyrinth here is made of images that stretch themselves, and thus merge or fuse together the narrative, making a circle out of a square. Here the labyrinth abolishes time and arranges the images in a narrative space.

An orphic event, the dream labyrinth is a representation of the descent to hell, exemplified, as we have seen, by Aeneas' visit to Hades and the prophetic encounter with his dead father, Anchises (Book VI of the Aeneid). We recall that Anchises prophesies Aeneas' destiny. The act is both an excursion into darkness in search for knowledge and a coming to terms with issues of identity, since the intention of Aeneas in this voyage is to understand his destiny.

According to Bachelard, it is important to grasp the dream in its "production of images" ("production d'images") and not in a reception of impressions, because the dynamics of the dream is connected to its production of images. And the labyrinth is the history of this production. One has to live the dream in order to see the labyrinth because it does not present itself as a perspective of paths. It is only after awakening, after the return from sleep to reality that the vision of the dream produces images, in the narrated dream ("le rêve raconté") in which the dreamer will speak of the complicated paths or

crossroads in the labyrinth dream. Thus the narration of the dream is analogous to unraveling the clue: “the thread of Ariadne is the thread of discourse [. . .] a thread of return” (“le fil d’Ariane est le fil du discours [. . .] un fil de retour”).¹³⁰

Thus Chapter XII represents a dialog about writing dreams. If, in the cavern of dreams, one lives a dream, then one lives out a dream-reality--the images are surreal and real--and narrates it through those of the images “lived” or experienced in the unconscious reality of dreams. Reality thus merges with fiction in narrative; while the dreamer explores his darkness, that textual narration is difficult. The writer must combine the chaos of his/her images with an orderly exposition. Writing the oneiric experience defines the fame of storytellers such as like Homer, Virgil, Dante or Proust.

The dream labyrinth is like an orphic vase, an urn for the exploration of the soul/artist and the soul’s/artist’s development of its/his latent potentialities. Lezama uses the dream labyrinth to examine and redefine the traditional concept of the quest, writing, space, time, the protagonist’s death, and his life. Lezama construct an intricate pattern of a dream labyrinth which is severely fragmented yet narrated in the straight line of the written word. However, the narration symbolizes the merging of worlds and the abolition of time and space, in the artificial representation of the unconscious. For Lezama, as for Borges, the labyrinth balances questions about chaos and order in the quest for attaining

¹³⁰ Bachelard 214-215.

harmony through art.¹³¹ The “rhythm of the Hesychasts” renovates the exhausted Cuban novels.

Cemí’s dream ends with a twofold figura replicating that of the labyrinth: Atrio Flaminio and Juan Longo as doubles of each other. Their symbiosis configures Cemí’s father, a colonel that mastered the art of war and engineering together with a well rounded education in the Liberal Arts. The theories of numbers, colors, design, music and poetry were his repertoire. The image of Atrio Flaminio (Commander of Roman legions in Cappadocia during the Pax Romana), a martial image, is conjoined with the image of Juan Longo (composer and music critic) and both signal, albeit at a distance, the Colonel, Cemí’s father, in the sarcophagus at the end of the dream. The end of the dream (and end of Paradiso XII) implies Cemí’s attainment of his father’s image in the funeral urn in “lejanía,” and this image of Cemí’s encounter with the father prefigures his final symbiosis with his surrogate father and mentor, Oppiano Licario, known to Lezama as “Eros de la lejanía” at the end of the novel.

Changed to “Paz Octaviana,” the Pax Romana was Caesar’s greatest accomplishment. It was supposed to have ushered in a Paradise, a Golden Age. Lezama and Cemí wish to usher into Cuba a similar Golden Age, perhaps guided by someone like Octavio Paz, presumably another poetic mentor to Lezama. The Flaminio image recalls the annexation of Cappadocia, in the Taurus Mountains, to Rome, and an opening to the East for Roman influence. In “Holy Rome” and the “Pax Romana,” ushered in by the birth of Jesus Christ, Cappadocia was a center of Christianity, the place of birth of the

¹³¹ Wendy B. Faris, Labyrinths of Language 98.

Cappadocian Fathers of the Church. The fourth Century AD Cappadocian Fathers, particularly Gregory of Nyssa, “transferred the ideas of Greek Paidiea in their Platonic form into the life of the ascetic movement that originated during his time in Asia Minor and the Near East and that soon was to display and undreamed-of power of attraction.”¹³² The Flaminio/Paz Octaviana/Cappadocian Fathers ushers in the figura of the labyrinth of knowledge, the Paideia or the Way with a guide or mentor, where death (mortality) may be escaped, with the right guidance. For Gregory of Nyssa, “the labyrinth is primarily that everlasting death from which only Christ-Theseus extricates us”;¹³³

It is impossible to reach the same goal without following the same path. Those who wander, constrained in a labyrinth, know not the way out; but if they find someone who knows the maze well, they follow him through the complicated and deceptive turns of the building to its end. They would never have escaped had they not followed their guide step by step. Reflect: so is the labyrinth of life inextricable for man if he does not follow the path that led Him who once entered outside. This labyrinth symbolizes the inextricable prison of death, where unhappy mankind was once imprisoned.¹³⁴

Gregory of Nyssa frames this concept with Theseus in mind, because he is writing for Greek Christians whose mythopoetic relates the solution of the labyrinth to Theseus. Again, as stated above, the same Cappadocian Father introduces Christian “paideia:”

What in Greek paideia had been the formation or morphosis of the human personality now becomes for the Christian the metamorphosis of which Paul had spoken when he wrote to the Romans, asking them to undergo a process of radical metamorphosis through a renewal of their spirit. In several of his works Gregory depicts the ascent of the soul to the highest

¹³² Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia 99-100.

¹³³ Doob 73.

¹³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, La catéchèse de la foi, trans. Annette Maignan, cited in Doob 73-74.

point of its journey. [. . .] Gregory's theology [. . .] is permeated with the Greek idea of paideia, especially in its Platonic form. Plato derives the paideia of his Laws from the divine nous. Greek philosophical education offered a complete analogy to Christian theology as Gregory understood it. [. . .] He uses the Greek forms as the structural model of a fully developed culture, and by way of comparison he creates for each of them a Christian variant shaped in the classical mold but at the same time clearly differentiated. [. . .] He connects Plato's concept of philosophy as assimilation to God with the Christian concept of man whom God created in his image. Gregory's paideia is the return of the soul to God and to man's original nature.¹³⁵

In Paradiso Chapter XII Juan Longo sleeps the sleep of cataleptics protected from time's erosions and in the temple of music, thus:

He has destroyed the subtle scholastic distinctions among cause, causation, and causality, or among birth, what engenders birth, and birth and its finality, but his nascent act takes place in an infinity traversed by the sleeper at the flying point. He has also conquered time as between, according to the acceptance of some contemporaries, for in his sleep it is impossible to separate time that was from time being created. That between, which seems to be the last dialectical refuge of mortals, the penetration of a blind man into the ephemeral which he believes to be durable, because that between is the negation of all penetration, remaining as an act moving toward a rock, but on reaching it, the act turns to foam, except that from the point of view of temporality, man is not that rock but a useful boulder that seems given by the Danaïdes or Sisyphus, by perverse gods with a sterile scheme.

(Ha destruido el sutil distingo escolástico entre causa, acusación, y causalidad, o entre nacimiento, lo que engendra el nacimiento, y el nacimiento y su finalidad, pero su acto naciente transcurre en una infinitud recorrida por el durmiente en ese punto que vuela. Ha vencido también el tiempo como entre, según la acepción de algunos contemporáneos, pues en su sueño es imposible separar el tiempo que fue del que se está elaborando. Ese entre, que parece ser el último refugio dialéctico de los mortales, penetración de un ciego en la fugacidad que cree duración, porque ese entre es la negación de toda penetración, quedando como un acto que se dirige a una roca, pero al llegar a ella ese acto se ha trocado en

¹³⁵ Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia 97-99.

espuma, sólo que desde el punto de vista de la temporalidad, el hombre no es esa roca sino una roca de utilería que parece regalada por las Danaidas o por Sísifo, por los dioses malditos de un designio estéril).¹³⁶

Atrio Flaminio and Juan Longo as a confluence of the image of Cemí's absent father and the Cappadocians prefigure the new "Paz Octaviana" ushered into Cuba with a new "paideia" written by Cemí in Paradiso. All the dreams in Paradiso XII describe Cemí's descent into himself, his underworld, winning his identity by seeking and finding his father, and narrating the search after his return.

¹³⁶ P-Rabassa 402-403; Paradiso XII 396.

CHAPTER THREE.

LEZAMA'S LABYRINTH AND THE OTHER NOVEL

“Let's say that the world is a figure, it must be read. By read it let's understand generate it” (“Digamos que el mundo es una figura, hay que leerla. Por leerla entendamos generarla”).

Morelli, Hopscotch (Rayuela) 71¹

Chapters One (Toward a Comprehension beyond Reason) and Two (Cognitive Images: Confluence, Androgyne, and Figure) introduce this third chapter: Lezama's Labyrinth. Before I could clearly explain Paradiso as a labyrinth, I had to introduce my readers into the author, his ideas about interpreting labyrinths, his text and some passages where his ideas are somewhat shown. In this chapter, I intend to show how I arrived at the “sense” and the method--confluence of disparate images into one image, as a figure of a coming third image, so that I can defend my thesis: Paradiso (1966) is a “new” or “other” novel, like Rayuela (1963) because it is based upon the figure of a labyrinth.

When reading the world as figure like Morelli, “Let's say that the world is a figure, it must be read,” Lezama vested himself and his works with “labyrinthicity.”² He and Cortázar were kindred spirits, bound by more than the keen interest in each other's

¹ Rayuela (1963) Critical Ed. Julio Ortega-Saúl Yurkievitch, Paris: ALLCA/UNESCO (1991), 311. Hopscotch, trans. Gregory Rabassa, New York: Pantheon-Random House (1966), 379. Hereafter all citations are from these editions, with the translated text identified as Hopscotch and the Spanish version as Rayuela.

² Doob 2. “Labyrinthicity” is “the condition of possessing significant features habitually associated with labyrinths.”

inventions, found in their scant correspondence noted by Lezama.³ Their friendship was supported by sporadic meetings in Cuba, chronicled by Cortázar after Lezama's death.⁴

Their relationship developed at a time when the discussion on the new novel was at its zenith and their narratives aimed at and achieved an innovation of the genre as the new novel of "the other" or "the new other novel." The "new" or "other" novel departed from the social naturalist and realist novel, the Latin-American novel of the land, biography or documentary in the first half of the twentieth century. The "new" was "modern:" abstractions spoke and acted, introspection took the place of act or plot, thought processes were fragmented. Within the novel were discourses about the novel, about the roles of the author and reader, and about the writing and reading process--a dynamic, dialectical relationship among the author, text, and reader. Cortázar's and Lezama's "new" or "other" novel contradicted the "death of the novel" promulgated by José Ortega y Gasset and Jorge Luis Borges.⁵

Recognized as the work that "effectively inaugurated the new moment" known as the Latin-American Literary Boom,⁶ Rayuela in 1963 "updated and synthesized the twin

³ See JLL: Cartas a Eloísa 372-374; and "V. Dossier: II. Cartas" in Paradiso (Cintio Vitier's critical Archivos edition) 715-718.

⁴ Julio Cortázar, "Encuentros con JLL," Coloquio Internacional sobre la obra de JLL. Vol. I: Poesía, May 1982. Centro de Investigaciones Latinoamericanas, Universidad de Poitiers, Francia, ed Cristina Vizcaino (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1984) 11-18.

⁵ For an analysis of the literary and historical circumstances that motivated Lezama's efforts for the rebirth of the novel, see César Augusto Salgado, From Modernism to Neobaroque (cited earlier); also his "Barroco Joyce: Jorge Luis Borges's and José Lezama Lima's Antagonistic Readings" in Transcultural Joyce, Karen Lawrence, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 63-93; and "Lezama y Joyce," La Torre 2.6 (1997) 475-96.

⁶ Gerald Martin, Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century (London: Verso, 1989) 198.

traditions of ‘Joycism’ and Surrealism [. . .] and [. . .] fused them through an intense reading of the ideas and forms explored before [Cortázar] by his compatriot Borges.”⁷ In 1966, Paradiso expressed its author’s theory of “origins” but its distinctive content and style combined modern concerns represented poetically with universal elements from Antiquity and Classicism, Neoclassicism, the Renaissance and the Baroque, Romanticism, Modernism, Surrealism, and the Vanguards. Like Cortázar, Lezama also responded to Joycean and Borgesean ideas and forms in his novel.⁸

The epigraph that opens this chapter, Cortázar’s, describes Lezama’s style: “We must generate the world by figure.” If by “figure,” Cortázar means “image,” then he shares with Lezama, “the poet of the image,” the view that the world is a chain of images.⁹ Although Cortázar might have modeled “Morelli” on authors like Macedonio Fernández, he could have had Lezama as a model, also. First consider that a segment of Lezama’s Tratados en La Habana (1958) forms the text of Rayuela 81; second that Rayuela 60 mentions Lezama by name when Morelli speaks of a “list of acknowledgments” of influential intellectuals that Cortázar never included in his published works; third that Morelli makes several allusions to ideas of the novel by contemporary authors (ideas that parallel Cortázar’s and Lezama’s). In Rayuela 137, Morelli responds to Lezama’s expectation that Paradiso might be a poetic “sum” (summa):

⁷ Martin 198.

⁸ See Salgado, From Modernism to Neobaroque for the presence of Joyce in Lezama and a lucid analysis of Joyce’s shadow in Borges. The study also discusses Lezama’s attentive response to Borges’ unfavorable reception of Joyce.

⁹ See Emilio Bejel, José Lezama Lima: Poet of the Image. (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1990).

If the volume or the tone of the work can lead one to believe that the author is attempting a sum, hasten to point out to him that he is face to face with the opposite attempt, that of an implacable subtraction.

(Si el volumen o el tono de la obra pueden llevar a creer que el autor intentó una suma, apresurarse a señalarle que está ante la tentativa contraria, la de una resta implacable).¹⁰

Cortázar himself cites Lezama in a note pertaining to Rayuela: “Séance du Club / Elogio de Lezama, de Ceferino Piriz, de los locos y cronopios.”¹¹ And, more to the point, Lezama writes to Cortázar, before Lezama publishes his essay on Rayuela that he (Lezama) will correlate his texts with texts in Rayuela:

La vuelta al día en 80 mundos is magnificent and an elucidation as far as possible of the things that you have done. In my essay I will use it frequently, because it is as if Morelli had already published its work, as if some protagonists of Rayuela continued their conversations there. When you read my essay you will see the way [that] it used my texts in direct relation with the novel. In Rayuela it is amazing the accumulation and the ray of intensity that crosses it, but, anyway [. . .] await my essay

(La vuelta al día en 80 mundos es magnífico y un esclarecimiento en lo posible de las cosas que has hecho. En mi ensayo lo utilizaré con frecuencia, pues es como si Morelli hubiese ya publicado su obra, como si algunos personajes de Rayuela continuasen allí sus conversaciones. Cuando leas mi ensayo verás la manera en [que] utilizó mis textos en directa relación con la novela. En Rayuela es asombroso la acumulación y el rayo de intensidad que la recorre, pero, en fin [. . .] espera el ensayo).¹²

Moved by mutual fervor for each other’s work, the writers exchanged meaningful essays of analysis and commentary about each other’s novels and acknowledged their shared insights. Their relationship and their actions on behalf of each other are well

¹⁰ Hopscotch 526; Rayuela 434.

¹¹ Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela, in Rayuela ed. crítica Ortega-Yurkievich 485. In Historias de cronopios y de famas (1962), the “cronopios” are fantastic substances that behave as objects and beings.

¹² In letter of 18 March 1968. JLL, Cartas a Eloísa 372.

documented.¹³ Cortázar wrote “Para llegar a Lezama Lima” (“To Reach Lezama Lima”) in 1966,¹⁴ right after the publication of Paradiso. Lezama composed “Cortázar y el comienzo de la otra novela” (“Cortázar and the Beginning of the Other Novel”) in 1968.¹⁵ Both essays are intricate mazes that provide clues to the other author’s lengthy labyrinth of language and the novels that enact them. Cortázar assuages reservations about Lezama’s extremes: idiosyncratic content and style, eroticism, homosexuality, phallic symbolism, numerous equivocal quotes, incorrect orthography, even editorial negligence, but characterizes Lezama with a unique “ingenuity” and the knowledge and “innocence” inherent in the origin of creation:

Lezama’s case [. . .] is distinguished by a quality that I can only call, for want of a better word, ingenuity. An American ingenuity, insular in both a literal and a broad sense, an American innocence. An ingenious American innocence, opening its eyes eleatically, orphically, at the very beginning of Creation. Lezama Adam before the fall, Lezama Noah identical to the one in the Flemish paintings who sagely directs the file of animals: two butterflies, two horses, two leopards, two ants, two dolphins. [. . .] A primitive, as everyone knows, an accomplished sorbonnard, but American the way the dissected albatross of the prophet of Ecclesiastes did not become a “sadder but wiser man,” even though his science was metempsychosis: his knowledge is original, jubilant, it is born of the water of Tales and the fire of Empedocles.

([E]l caso especialísimo de Lezama se tiñe de un aura para la que sólo encuentro esa palabra aproximadora: ingenuidad. Una ingenuidad americana, insular en el sentido directo y lato, una inocencia americana. Una ingenua inocencia americana abriendo eleáticamente, órficamente, los ojos en el comienzo mismo de la creación, Lezama Adán previo a la culpa, Lezama Noé idéntico al que en los cuadros flamencos asiste

¹³ See Pellón 93-97.

¹⁴ In La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos (N.p. España: Siglo XXI, 1976) 41-81. See also “To Reach Lezama Lima,” Around the Day in Eighty Worlds, trans. Thomas Christensen (San Francisco: North Point P, 1986) 82-108.

¹⁵ In La cantidad hechizada, OC II 1187-1207.

aplicadamente al desfile de los animales: dos mariposas, dos caballos, dos leopardos, dos hormigas, dos delfines [. . .] Un primitivo que todo lo sabe, un sorbonnard cumplido pero americano en la medida en que los albatros disecados del saber del Eclesiastés no lo han vuelto a wiser and a sadder man sino que su ciencia es palingenesia, lo sabido es original, jubiloso, nace como el agua con Tales y el fuego con Empédocles).¹⁶

“Para llegar a Lezama Lima” portrays the Cuban artist as an artificer of legends, a maker of myths, supporting Lezama’s own view: “The fiction of myths creates new myths” (“La ficción de los mitos son [sic] nuevos mitos”).¹⁷ Lezama’s “new” novel is the artifice of a mythographer whose interpretation requires in great part a “mythical method.” Salgado elucidates Lezama’s mythical method, which the artist elaborated after his reflections on Joyce:

As outlined in Lezama’s reading of the Ulysses and as the practice of fiction in Paradiso, the mythical method is an implementation of the “technique of fiction” to negotiate a search, at once reminiscent and creative, of analogies, correspondences and counterpoints across human literary tradition, history, and mythologies.

(Tal como se perfila en la lectura que hace Lezama del Ulysses y como práctica de la ficción en Paradiso, el método mítico es una implementación de la “técnica de la ficción” al agenciar una búsqueda, reminiscente y creadora a la vez, de analogías, correspondencias y contrapuntos a través de la tradición literaria, la historia y las mitologías de la humanidad).¹⁸

Lezama studied how great Modernists, such as Joyce, Picasso and Stravinsky, had rescued the creative potential of dormant forms of expression and knowledge from the

¹⁶ “To Reach LL” 89; “Para llegar a LL” 54.

¹⁷ “Mitos y cansancio clásico,” La expresión americana, ed. Chiampi 58.

¹⁸ César Augusto Salgado, in “Ulysses en Paradiso: Joyce, Lezama, Eliot, y el método mítico,” INTI: Revista de Literatura Hispánica 45 (1997) 228.

T. S. Eliot had elaborated the “Mythical Method” in his work on James Joyce’s Ulysses. In La expresión americana Lezama comments that Eliot’s method was essentially critical, as opposed to a creative method or “technique of fiction” (57).

“submerged regions” of old, such as ancient myths. Lezama upheld a quest for creative nourishment from ancient culture as encapsulated in myths and the “imaginary eras” of history--such as the moments when the Etruscan, Carolingian, and Breton imagination flourished. He followed Joyce in his quest for myths and the Homeric, Medieval, and Scholastic traditions. All these were elements of his modern creative program.

Since Cortázar’s reflections on Lezama reveal much of his own intellectual preoccupations and identification with the Cuban author as an artistic alter ego, his comments on the novelist and his novel constitute a form of self-mythification and self-fashioning.¹⁹ Though Cortázar does not refer to Paradiso as a labyrinth, he does refer to the need for “a more direct path for the encounter of many readers with [Lezama’s] work” (“un camino más directo para el encuentro de muchos lectores con [la] obra [de Lezama]”).²⁰ Cortázar called for the method. Lezama identified the method: interpret Paradiso as a labyrinth by way of Rayuela.

Cortázar’s sponsorship of the Cuban novel and his efforts to orchestrate the Era edition and translations of Paradiso into English and French represent the homage of an established international author to an accomplished poet but neophyte novelist of the Latin-American periphery. Indeed, Cortázar’s efforts and those of intellectuals like Octavio Paz, Carlos Monsiváis and Emmanuel Carballo in Mexico and elsewhere abroad helped advance the dissemination, understanding and acceptance of Lezama’s works

¹⁹ See Pellón 98 for observations concerning the connections between Cortázar and Lezama.

²⁰ Letter from Cortázar to E. Carballo in Paradiso (Cintio Vitier’s critical Archivos edition) 716.

throughout the world; yet it can be said that Julio Cortázar spearheaded Lezama's entrance into the literary canon.²¹

"Cortázar and the Beginning of the Other Novel" ("Cortázar y el comienzo de la nueva novela" is an animated and enigmatic essay that uses the term "labyrinth" to refer to Rayuela. In using this image Lezama promoted the study of the labyrinth in the Latin-American novel.²² The transformation of "hopscotch" into "labyrinth" shows how the figure provides a similar framework for the interpretation of Lezama's Paradiso, since his novel is the "other new" novel.

Like Paradiso, Rayuela explores the big human questions, life, illness, death, the human condition, friendship, reality, art, writing and literature, media, and institutions. Like Paradiso, Rayuela expresses oppositions: opposed consciousnesses, opposed words, opposed images. Rayuela juxtaposes one title, "From the Other Side" ["Over There"] ("Del lado de allá") to another title "From this Side" ["Over Here"] ("Del lado de acá")-- it opposes the parts in their respective literal and figurative contexts. Rayuela also presents the option of supplementing the dual perspective with the "expendable chapters" of the third part, "From Diverse Sides" (De otros lados).²³ Specifically, as "Over There" and "Over Here" are supplemented by "From the Diverse Sides" to create a ubiquitous

²¹ See Pellón 93-95.

²² Wendy Faris sees Cortázar's Rayuela and The Kings as labyrinths of words with symbolic landscape and narrative design in Labyrinths of Language (1988) 144-53.

²³ Martin 200. My interpretation of the triple structure of Rayuela is that the "Over There" comprises Paris, the universe, and the "outside the I" domains, while the "Over Here" encompasses Buenos Aires, the margin or periphery, and the "inside the I" domains. The "From Diverse Sides" part alludes to a ubiquitous domain where the place of action can be anywhere. For instance, as it contains the "Morelliana" or Morelli's reflections on the "ideal" novel this could be the space of the novel per se.

domain, Paradiso accomplishes the same with the labyrinth. For the labyrinth represents two opposites juxtaposed, then confluent, then unified to create a third image which itself suggests “Paradise.” By means of poetry-within-a-novel, Lezama represents a third unique, polyvalent and far-reaching “Paradise” beyond nature. The third component comes from the unity of Lezama’s “imaginary eras;” that is, juxtaposed images from other epochs (time) and cultures (space) whose opposition has the potens to yield unified poetic images whose power could signify the images and metaphors of a new imaginary world “beyond” reality.²⁴ In the previous chapter, we have seen how Lezama juxtaposes contrasting images of various spaces and times and makes them into a oneness. The unrelated or disconnected metaphorical series is, in fact, related, balanced, and harmonic, but only in view of a “distance” (“lejanía”).²⁵

Rayuela and Paradiso represent the gradual individuation of the protagonists and their searches for self-identity and self-realization. Rayuela cycles around “the search for a center, yearning for transcendence, passage (disorder), chaos-cosmos, [and]

²⁴ Briefly, and as Lezama outlined in its simplest form, the “imaginary eras” were historical moments in which a culture “could create a type of imagination” (“logra crear un tipo de imaginación.”) in “Mitos y cansancio clásico,” La expresión americana, ed. Chiampi, p. 58). As Bejel explains, “Lezama develops the idea of ‘imaginary eras’ (‘eras imaginarias’), drawn from a transcendental vision of the human subject [as a metaphoric subject], and from a history that is the Image realizing itself metaphorically in Time.” (JLL: Poet of the Image 130). The concept of “imaginary eras” is part and parcel of Lezama’s “Poetic System of the World.”

²⁵ Besides the meanings of moving away from the center and condition of remoteness or aloofness that the word denotes, Lezama’s “lejanía” also has to do with language, image, and the creative imagination. As Emilio Bejel explains:

Lezama’s term lejanía (“distance”) refers to the basic imperfection of human language. To address this flaw, to bridge this distance, he utilizes the resources of the Image, which is the only testament of a lost Paradise. Therefore, Lezama would suggest, the imaginative act is an artifice, an act made possible in the absence of a pure or perfect Nature. Poetic imagination within this context becomes the expression of a second nature, which in turn subverts the rational order and recovers the mythic sense that Western rationalism had displaced. (JLL: Poet of the Image 47)

disintegration-unity.”²⁶ Paradiso spins around the same ideas. The “new other novels” follow the figures of the hopscotch, the mandala, and the labyrinth.²⁷ Again, since Lezama believed throughout his creative life that “the poet is the causal being for resurrection” and his poem is his “testimony,” he intended to resurrect the novel by incorporating new life into it and make Paradiso the testimony of the “resurrection.”

Rayuela was to be known as “an entire catalog of innovations” earlier, at the right “point of crystallization” of the new genre, in the beginning of the Boom.²⁸ When he wrote “Cortázar y el comienzo de la otra novela,” Lezama was fully aware of the status of Rayuela, and admired the accomplishments of his fellow artist. But the “other novel” alluded to Paradiso, a work designed to “deconstruct the legibility of the text” (“deconstruir la legibilidad del texto”).²⁹ Lezama set up deconstruction so that the reconstruction of the text could ensue, as declared by the “Now we can begin” (“Podemos empezar”) end of his novel. Thus, like other authors of the same literary verve in this century, notably Federico García Lorca, Lezama’s long prose creations give the impression of being works in progress, in the process of development or metamorphosis. The novel is open-ended, seemingly unfinished and unpolished. The circular recycling nature of the labyrinth was the most adequate aesthetic to signal the end of the text as a new beginning.

²⁶ Ana María Barrenechea, “Hopscotch and Its Logbook,” trans. Paula Speck, Review NY 30 (Sept.-Dec 1981): 60-64.

²⁷ Milagros Ezquerro, “Rayuela: Estudio temático” in Julio Cortázar: Rayuela, Archivos ed. crítica Ortega-Yurkievich 622.

²⁸ Alfred MacAdam, cited in Martin 199.

²⁹ Irlemar Chiampi, “Sobre la lectura interrumpida de Paradiso,” Revista Iberoamericana 54.154 (1991): 67-8.

By explaining the labyrinth in Rayuela, Lezama's essay elucidated the form of his own novel. Lezama affirmed that at the center of such a labyrinth, man could be reborn, initiated, educated, self-actualized. In essence, man could manifest himself as wholly human, though still incomplete, in the center of a labyrinth. However, Lezama's intent made the center variable. He showed that the center can be displaced by any quest, e.g., for schoolboy sex at the center, for death of a parent at the center, for Cemí's ignorance of the existence of his mentor (Licario) at the center, for disintegration at the center, for rupture with conventions at the center, for the esoteric line, the "anti-novel" or "other novel," the other being that lives within the customs but does not conform to the culture, at the center. The lack of center or the displaced or ever-changing center makes the reading process more difficult. But, by crafting his labyrinthine novel as a Summa poetica (the sum of his living, philosophical, and esthetical experiences), Lezama put his authorial self into the center of the maze, and became a modern Daedalus: a contemporary labyrinth-maker, who, after being displaced from his creation by Minos, could at least fly to another place to make another labyrinth, leading to Paradise, and perhaps show the reader by his own displacement how to interpret Paradiso.

To summarize, Lezama's essay, "Cortázar y el comienzo de la otra novela" meshes lucid analytical observations with what appears to be nonsense--mind-boggling metaphors and inconceivable associations--so that the student of Paradiso has to learn first to be patient. Painstaking, encyclopedic research on the vague allusions is necessary to begin to interpret the chains of images in the text and to construe meaning from them. Not all of the material is decipherable or workable, but enough substance can be pulled out to form a corpus of ideas. In the midst of the ludicrous, obscure, absurd, and

fragmented discourse, a patient reader can uncover a coherent thread of argument from the labyrinth of words.

We recall that “labyrinth” calls for “labor from within,” “within” referring to the text and also to the reader. Both must labor. The labyrinthine novel requires hard work, plenty of arduous walking, thinking, trying out many ways of imagining. As in the myth, the act of walking or reading Rayuela and Paradiso demands a Theseus who has found a way out, with the help of Ariadne’s thread, here the thread of argument. The mythical character is symbolic of the active, avid walker-reader, willing and able to get to the center of things by following the golden thread of Ariadne provided by the architect-author to make sense of the intricacies of the labyrinth-text. As a reward, the reader will slay the monster or monsters impeding the path to reason and understanding, reach the center, whichever and wherever that might be, and exit (that is, finish the novel) bearing new skills and knowledge. Satisfaction shall ensue with the thought that while interpreting and reconstructing (rewriting) the difficult text with the guide’s help (dealing with the monster at the center), the walker-reader will also wear the poet’s mask. He or she shall descend to the center of the earth and ascend triumphantly to the surface while undergoing an intellectual transformation (or poetic metamorphosis).

To interpret the labyrinth in Lezama’s “new” novel, I shall adopt the “mythic method.” The labyrinth is the model for the structure of Paradiso, and this mythic structure requires a mythic “thread” to follow the argument. If Lezama’s essay on Cortázar’s Rayuela provides that thread, then my explanation of the labyrinth in Paradiso will be based on his own language and explanation of the “thread” of “mythic method” given in his essay on Rayuela.

INTERPRETING LEZAMA'S LABYRINTH OF THE NOVEL:

A WORKING "MYTHIC METHOD"

To establish the working mythic method we identify several elements that function as steps to follow in the labyrinth, outlined in this section as "A" "B" "C," and so on, with the language drawn from Lezama's essay. This is not the only method, of course: the novel is open ended and invites diverse readings. But it is a method. The first step (A) is to know how to use a "Delphic Library" of images, so that we can learn (B) "Anthropophany: Revelation of the Human," or how to perceive the "human" in images from the Library. The revelation provides the next step, (C) "Fulguration of Nexus," the "nexus" to acquire (D) Old World "Mannerisms" to become "Verbal Icaruses" that resurrect to fly out of Cuba over the water to the Old World, capture their Delphic Library and bring it back to the New World "in our imagination." There, we see the next step, (E) "East Meets West," and, finally, we understand the next step, (F) "the Difficult in the Other Novel," where Western "myths" are mixed with Eastern and both are set in the "new" context. Next, we resolve the "Difficult" and begin to look for (G) the "Center of the Labyrinth." In the "center," next, we see (H) an "Aporetic Gallery of Images" and also (I) an "Eleatic Gallery." Next, we use (J) the "Bayezid Test" to determine if we correctly intuit a "center" in the image, i.e., that the image will be "anchored in origin" but stretched. In the event that we fail to find the center in the image, then we step back into (K) "Paideuma," very basic instruction, and, next, re-read the texts in the Delphic Library (L) in order to intuit correctly the image in the "Center." Ultimately, we will perceive the central image in dreams (M) "Oneiric method in the Nocturnal." Next, (N) our correct interpretation of the image will metamorphose the images at the center into

another configuration of images, since oneness or androgyne produces yet another configuration of images. These (O) “Orphic Elements” as next to last step will lead us “beyond the text.” The final step of the method (P) will lead us to a textual self-awareness, i.e., an awareness of how Paradiso has reconfigured our images so that we, like the author, can think and know “beyond the text.”

A. The Delphic Library

If the labyrinth is, as Lezama says in the essay, a “Delphic Library,” then a summa of books underlies the prophetic nature of his utterance in Paradiso. Lezama alludes to the oracle at the temple of Apollo at Delphi, a sanctuary where people of the Pan-Hellenic world and beyond came to the god for responses to questions of every sort, both personal and political. The temple contained the omphalos or navel, an archaic stone shaped like an egg that signified that Delphi occupied the center of the earth.³⁰ The omphalos at Delphi “symbolized the channel of communication between the three worlds, of mortals living on Earth, of the dead dwelling in the Underworld, and of the gods” as well as “the life force which controls [. . .] a rationally structured way of life, [. . .] gained by internal self-control and by a victory over self and not through external aids.”³¹

Lezama declares an analogy justified by the myth: “The omphalos or umbilical center is converted in abode of the gods, as a germinative irradiation or center of the

³⁰ Morford and Lenardon 175.

³¹ Pindar, cited in Chevalier and Gheerbrant 719.

labyrinth” (“El omphalos o centro umbilical se convierte en morada de los dioses, ya como irradiación germinativa o centro del laberinto”).³² Thus the labyrinth of the novel represents the orache, the source for the poetic discourse of revelation. The labyrinths of Paradiso and Rayuela are made up of the indispensable communication and exchange (commerce) of ideas and knowledge expressed in the printed and narrated words which in turn become the well-spring for new images, ideas, and knowledge intended to structure and organize the processes of life. Readers come to the pages of the “new/other novel” for revelation.

In the essay Lezama uses the Spanish term “librería” instead of “biblioteca.” He wants to connote “book” (Lat. liber) rather than “Bible” or “building” (Gk. biblos book; teca building). The wordplay is meant to counterpoise Borges’ famed “library of Babel” and to correspond to the etymology of “biblioteca” as a collection of books, where “Delphic” means a compilation from various sources.³³ “Delphic library” implies a summa of knowledge. We might see “Babble” in the text, but the novel-as-“Delphic Library” is a meaningful literary banquet that contains knowledge of the world and reveals it to nourish the imagination and enlighten the reader. Reader must extract the light (clues), that is “find the necessary texts as terrestrial nourishment of the one thing we can digest, that each one needs to transform in order to grow” (“encontrar los

³² “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1188.

³³ Liddell, Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon. www.perseus.tufts.edu

necesarios textos como alimento terrestre de lo único que podemos digerir, que cada cual necesita transformar para crecer”).³⁴

According to Lezama, intuition “pluck outs” artistic images of old imbedded in the text, as falcons see and seize their prey. Intuition grasps, as it were, “[r]eminders of the ancient falcon parable, a surrounding obscurity and a point in the distance that one must peck” (“[r]ezagos de la antigua parábola del halcón, una oscuridad rodeante y un punto en la lejanía que hay que picotear”). It spots “[t]he light that half-opens in a gleam and the animist parable” (“[l]a luz que se entreabre en una fulguración y la parábola animista”).³⁵

Nonetheless, I found no trace of the “parable of the falcon.” My “Delphic Library” has “halcyon” not “falcon.” Perhaps Lezama meant “halcyon” or Halcyone (Alcyone) or conflated “falcon” with “halcyon.” So we go to a Delphic text: Halcyone’s husband Ceyx drowned, she rushes to the water and sees a floating corpse; then she immediately grows wings and flies to the corpse with new-formed wings; she embraces and repeatedly kisses the body. He comes to life, and, blessed by the gods, the two lovers are changed into birds. For seven days before and after the Winter solstice, they sit with their young on calmed and pleasant waters,³⁶ and originate halcyon days. The Delphic text seems to say that the reader pecks or plucks out “inspiration” out of a dead text, as if a bird looking at a dead mate. Of necessity of love of the text, the reader grows wings, embraces the text and brings it back to life, and the union of the two produces insight,

³⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1190-1191.

³⁵ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1191.

new images, and halcyon (calm, peaceful) days.³⁷ Lezama links this myth to the notion of creation and the origin of poetry--that in quiet and peaceful contemplation of obscure inanimate figures in other texts, the poet can distinguish and pluck some out of the dark in order to create new, transformed, fresh living images. His method is based on animism, the belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe.³⁸

In this “mythic method,” the author and reader both use Delphic Library as a source, even a mistaken or conflated “falcon,” for textual parody: that “paraodos” concept or way of paralleling images together, “a highly reflexive form that celebrates textuality.”³⁹ Cortázar and Lezama believed parody to be “one of the major modes of formal and thematic construction of texts,” and use it to force their readers “to work towards regaining the Western literary heritage (and some of the Eastern as well)” while reading Rayuela and Paradiso.⁴⁰ Lezama does not show any “anxiety of influence,” because his writing is so universally allusive and parodic that no influence appears. Rayuela and Paradiso present animate texts forged from the labyrinthine confluence of a myriad of other texts, celebrating lively and joyful encounters with other previously consecrated authors and their works. Both show that dead models could be brought back

³⁶ The story is found in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Book XI, “The Quest of Ceyx.”

³⁷ Oxford English Dictionary.

³⁸ Oxford English Dictionary.

³⁹ The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics 882.

⁴⁰ The comment applies to T.S. Eliot, who seemed to expect the same of his readers while taking up his The Waste Land. In Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody 2.

to life, if authors and readers grew wings to bring the bodies of dead literature back to life.

B. “Anthropophany (‘Antropofanía’): Revelation of the Human”

The reader’s intuition of textual parody, one image’s imitation of another different image, tends toward grander insights, called “anthropophanies.” Early in the essay on Rayuela, Lezama defines the labyrinths’s primary function: “In the labyrinth one can present an infinite, unrestrainable Anthropophany” (“En el laberinto se presenta una infinita, indetenible antropofanía”).⁴¹ Here Lezama responds to Morelli’s utterance of Cortázar’s neologism in Rayuela 79: “An exceedingly pedantic note of Morelli: ‘To attempt the comic novel in the sense in which a text manages to hint at other values and thus collaborates in that anthropophany that we still consider possible’” (“Nota pedantísima de Morelli: ‘Intentar el roman comique en el sentido en que un texto alcance a insinuar otros valores y colabore así en esa antropofanía que seguimos creyendo posible’”).⁴² “Anthropophany” refers to the creative process which leads the human being to the “Highest Good,” Morelli’s “other values.” This morelliana implies fastidious musings about the novel’s intentions and the dialogic relationship between the author, text, and reader. In the “other novel” (Paradiso and Rayuela), the term “Anthropophany” refers to design: hopscotch, mandala, or labyrinth of words, whether the intent is the “Highest Good” or “comic.”

⁴¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1186.

⁴² Hopscotch (396), Rayuela (325).

The suffix “-phany” parodies the suffix in Gk. “epiphany” meaning “manifestation,” the feast day of the revelation of the Christ child to the Magi or wise men from the East, or any manifestation of a god or demigod. Thus for Lezama, “Anthropophany” is the manifestation of man as divine. Genesis 1:27 prophesies such a manifestation: “And so God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

The Latin fanum refers to a holy place consecrated to a divinity where the divine is discernible, better known as “profane” to Morelli, a place where holiness ought to be and is not present. “Anthropophany” is a hybrid image, referring both to the modernist “romans-comiques” expounded by James Joyce and to the “romans-mystiques” expounded by Cortázar and Lezama, “manifesting” while being “profane.”

“Anthropophany” refers both to the reader’s insight and to the image’s revelation of its “oneness,” we recall. “Anthropophany” refers to “transcendence,” as we have seen also. Pellón shows how Joyce’s “epiphany” differs and applies to Lezama:

The unbelieving Irish author looks upon epiphany as a surrogate for religious revelation. Literary knowledge and religious knowledge are irreconcilable, competing systems for Joyce, while for Lezama they are complementary. Joyce’s literary epiphanies substitute a secular mysticism for that of religion. Lezama’s literary epiphanies instead purport to be a bridge between art and religion. Joyce’s heterodoxy is clear on this score despite Lezama’s attempts to assimilate him.

There are, nevertheless, three principal factors that mitigate Lezama’s [and as a corollary, Cortázar’s] ‘creative assimilation’ of the Joycean concept of epiphany. The Irish and the Cuban writer both share: a view of the epiphany as a moment of grace, a belief in the guiding power of epiphanies, and an essential subjectivism that frequently renders their epiphanies inaccessible to their readers.⁴³

⁴³ Pellón 78.

I understand “anthropophany” to refer to the revelation of what being “human” is all about: the disclosure of purpose to a person. Such transcendent revelation can come about through mystical insights into daily events, historical events, and spiritual experiences.⁴⁴ Since revelation implies the rise and expansion of human consciousness, “anthropophany” can signify a comic and yet purposeful process, occasionally imbued with “the mystical faculty of perceiving transcendental reality.”⁴⁵ Further, mystical experiences are so individual and unique that the expression of them is unique and somehow poetic, for example Don Quixote’s “quest.” “Anthropophany” involves effects of the spirit--“breath” or “soul”--trying to express itself in insufficient language, and trying to “inspire” (“breathe into”) the reader.

Self-revelation is at the heart of the attainment of human potentiality. The “image” of God in man is only a potentiality that Lezama calls potens. In the “new” and “other” novels, the creative efforts (narratives) of Rayuela and Paradiso portray how man is revealed to himself in writing as a parallel to how God reveals Himself in the Scriptures. For at the beginning of the process of anthropophany man exercises his potential as God in image. The novels are organized in cycles around the subject of knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge provides the relationship between the

⁴⁴ “[R]evelation in religion, [is] the disclosure of divine or sacred reality or purpose to mankind. In the religious view, such disclosure may come through mystical insights, historical events, or spiritual experiences that transform the lives of individuals and groups.” (“Mysticism.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 18 April 2000 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=117397&sctn=4>>.

⁴⁵ “Mysticism.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 18 April 2000 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=117397&sctn=1&pm=1>>.

human and the divine. The representation of this complex process is facilitated by the symbolism of the labyrinth.

On the whole, Cortázar like Lezama bases his representation in theology. Both authors inquire into the sacred and the profane with their art. Of necessity like Lezama's, Cortázar's approach is hybrid, accomplished with the tools of literary trade and the clues of religion and myth. Rayuela and Paradiso portray man's quest for self-actualization. This is the achievement of anthropophany, the attainment of the highest good. Again, the act of intellect (the faculty of reasoning, knowing, and thinking) is the highest good, because it perceives the highest good through revelation.⁴⁶ In the essay, Lezama's dictum on anthropophany emphasizes his unfailing poetic faith.

Lezama writes the "new" and the "other." He advocates that the word mediates the anthropophany, but the mediation occurs in a labyrinthine novel. Man can approximate the Word through the crafted word: art imitates Artificer. But he creates as the Artificer created: out of chaos (Genesis 1:2, "earth was in chaos"). Lezama changes Cortázar's "hopscotch" to the labyrinth but keeps his "self-actualization." So the labyrinth becomes the planned chaos where the human being's self-actualization to God's image is portrayed. He assumes that the labyrinth is the medium through which the fragmented components of creation can be magnetized and fused back into the original whole. He believes that through the labyrinths of life and words the fallen and

⁴⁶ Aristotle is expressed by Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologiae, Part 1, Question 14, Article 2, (God as Pure Act), Article 6 (God as Pure Act and Highest Good), Article 8 (God's Intellect as the Pure Act/Cause of Things). I thank Dr. Ernest N. Kaulbach for providing the reference and exegeses of these basic theological tenets.

fragmented man can be initiated in a rite of reintegration and redemption with his image in the likeness of God.⁴⁷

“Anthropophany” refers, then, to the “sacred” revelation of a human being, situated in the profane. The “new” novel is like Scripture, but it is not scripture. The text of the labyrinthine novel is the profane space, posited as sacred for the ritual of re-initiation. Lezama assumes that the human being’s labor in the labyrinth results in some type of deification: “Destiny proposed by the gods, when man undertakes [the labyrinth] by fate, he becomes equal to the gods” (“Destino propuesto por los dioses, por la fatalidad al asumirlo [el laberinto] el hombre, se iguala con aquéllos”).⁴⁸ The declaration conveys the philosophical belief that a fate-to-be-divine is built into the human being. Fate forces humans to be in chaos-labyrinth, they have no choice but to find their way in and out of their labyrinth.

Designing the labyrinthine novel’s discourse as a temple for revelation means that the sacred space (“sacred” text) is laid out (inscribed) for the ritual or process of trial and error to the attainment of the way in and out the labyrinth. As knowledge is acquired through revelation, the “Anthropophany” refers to the human being’s progressive attainment of the highest wisdom, which can also be interpreted as the process of becoming “chosen,” meaning “sacred” or “holy.” By means of the novel and through the experience of revelation in the labyrinth, the human gradually realizes self-actualization toward the Divine image in him/her.

⁴⁷ To expand on this concept, one is directed to the study of meaning in Lezama’s collection of poems, Fragmentos a su imán (1977).

⁴⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1186.

C. The “Fulguration of a Nexus”

Lezama knew that, contrary to common belief, the labyrinth irradiates light, not darkness. To make sense of this notion one must simply recall the mythical labyrinth as “the house of Asterius.” That is, the labyrinth is the house of the Minotaur (dark beast) named “Asterius” (star). His name denotes “the ‘star being,’ who is represented by Greek vase painters with a body speckled with stars.”⁴⁹ The source for this expression is not Borges, who has a poem with this title. The source is the myth itself in another tradition, an alternate version that has Asterius as the half-brother of Ariadne where the latter “possessed a starlike radiance that was reminiscent of her half-brother Asterius. She became known as ‘the utterly pure one’ and ‘the utterly clear and bright.’”⁵⁰ Lezama uses this myth when referring to a reader’s potential to spot in the dark images of the labyrinth clear and brilliant flashes of the intellect. The reader as “God-in-image” and images-in-the-text as labyrinth (both Minos and bright Asterius) both together make a “nexus:”

It is the possible step [in the scale of images], the nexus, that the labyrinth establishes. The fulguration of that nexus has achieved not only the matching [of images], but a new possibility. It appears that the labyrinth awaits us, it is the other world that is achieved between an activity, a game with spiders, and something that comes toward us . . . with respect to which we are as in a dream . . . We accomplish an act over a point, but this engenders another act point over us. We discover and are discovered. . . . [The] labyrinth interrogates from the steps devised between creating and thinking. ‘Only God can create, tells us a disquieting Cartesian affirmation, man can only think, but everything that God has created, man can think.’ The demiurge sees the labyrinth from creation, man sees it from thought. That is to say, man can confront the beast, death, through the intersected Cretan corridors.

⁴⁹ Helmut Jaskolski summarizes this argument of the myth across time. In The Labyrinth: Symbol of Fear, Rebirth, and Liberation (Boston: Shambhala, 1997) 16.

⁵⁰ Jaskolski 17.

(Es el peldaño posible, el nexus, el que establece el laberinto. La fulguración de ese nexus ha logrado no tan solo el emparejamiento, sino otra nueva posibilidad. El laberinto parece que nos espera, es el otro mundo que se logra entre un activo, jugar con las arañas, y algo que viene hacia nosotros . . . Realizamos un acto sobre un punto, pero esto engendra otro acto punto sobre nosotros. Descubrimos y somos descubiertos. . . . [El] laberinto interroga desde los peldaños trazados entre crear y pensar. ‘Sólo Dios puede crear, nos dice una inquietante afirmación cartesiana, el hombre sólo puede pensar, pero todo lo que Dios ha creado el hombre lo puede pensar.’ El demiurgo ve el laberinto desde la creación, el hombre lo ve desde el pensamiento. Es decir, el hombre puede cuadrar la bestia, la muerte, por los cruzados corredores cretenses).⁵¹

Though Lezama does not specify how the flashing or fulguration of an image generates the next step image in the narrative, he implies that new images are manifested or revealed during flashes of text and flashes of intellect. The paradigmatic process of revelation by means of such figurae is one way in which that corresponding expansion of images takes place in his writing. I suggest that what Lezama means by “fulguration of the nexus” results in “figural interpretation.”

This is a logical step to follow. In the essay on Rayuela Lezama eagerly seized on the idea of gradual discovery by means of figurae precisely because he had conceived Paradiso with the same configuration. Decades later, Ana María Barrenechea confirmed this design in her study of Rayuela’s Logbook: “The result,” she observed, “is a novel that is also a search for a way of writing that achieves the miracle of revelation—always imminent and always deferred, according to Borges—the gradual revelation of a

⁵¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo”1191-2.

Figure.”⁵² However, the connection between figura and revelation has been well established by the Kabbalists and Christian exegetes, known to Lezama, as already noted.

“Anthropophanies” occur when there is a flash of light. The light forms a nexus and the nexus forms a figura. I propose that the figura expressed by Cortázar is the same profound treatment of figural interpretation that Lezama uses in Paradiso, where Lezama places figura in Christian-Jewish-Eastern (Tao) cognition and prophecy.

The figural designs of Borges, Cortázar and Lezama arise from parallels between two different figures, where one figure prefigures or even “causes” the other to happen. In Cortázar the figura develops from the theme of the double, says Boldy, who defines the figura as “the structural relationship between episodes, between sets of characters in different places or times; the repetition of previous texts in the constellation of events or in the psychology of the characters.”⁵³

In general the figural model is concerned with the repetition and understanding of an event, a person, a person’s own acts or those of others in the past. Examples of figural associations in Rayuela include Oliveira’s behavior in Buenos Aires as a replication of his experiences in Paris, and Oliveira and Traveler’s awareness of their almost chemical figural connection. Stating that “Cortázar allows us to see how two characters who are not acquainted with each other can counterpoint a novel” (“Cortázar nos hace visible cómo dos personajes sin conocerse pueden contrapuntar una novela,”) Lezama evokes

⁵² Barrenechea, “Hopscotch and its Logbook” 64.

⁵³ Stephen Boldy, The novels of Julio Cortázar (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 8.

the Fata Morgana and Breton's Nadja as heralds of La Maga.⁵⁴ The author's invocation of the Fata Morgana as a figure of La Maga suggests his assessment of Rayuela's central feminine character as something illusory and unattainable existing only as a delusion in Oliveira's imagination. His discernment of Breton's Nadja as a figura of La Maga signals the surrealistic formation of the Uruguayan character in Rayuela. On the other hand, Fata Morgana is the Sicilian name for Morgan Le Fay, "the fairy enchantress of Arthurian legend and romance." In Sicily "the term Fata Morgana is still used to designate a mirage sometime seen in the Strait of Messina."⁵⁵ But Lezama judges that "La Maga . . . is brought in by a somnambular thread of prophecy" ("La Maga está traída por un hilo sonambúlico de profecía") and casts the female protagonist as a unique mirage and surrealist figure.⁵⁶ Yet he also classifies Circe as a precursor of La Maga.⁵⁷ Oliveira's substitution of Talita for La Maga, his subsequent kissing of Talita in the morgue, and the pair's climb upstairs from the basement room symbolizes a rescue. Figura here means a syncretism of the double figura of La Maga (Morgana plus Nadja) with Talita, again converted into a new triad when both conflate with the figura of Circe.

The death of Rocamadour foreshadows the mother's evaporation. Lezama declares: "La Maga is transfigured into the death of her son and then she herself disappears by death" ("La maga se transfigura en la muerte de su hijo y luego ella misma

⁵⁴ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1189.

⁵⁵ "Morgan Le Fay." Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 17 May 1999 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=55069&sctn=1&pm=1>>.

⁵⁶ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1189.

⁵⁷ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1191.

desaparece por la muerte”).⁵⁸ The figura of the child’s death and the remorse that Oliveira endures anticipate his alienation. The protagonist’s desire to destroy the false aspects of his humanity sets him in the path of self-destruction—the pre-requisite for his search of a new, whole self. Oliveira can’t but throw himself into a contrasting, tangled course of destruction and reconstruction. Lezama defines the character’s plight of estrangement thus: “To search for the compensatory pendulum. Acceptance of the imaginary in order to transform it into reality, in a parallelism of contraction and dilation accepted as rhythm in Taoism” (“Buscar el péndulo compensatorio. Aceptación de la irrealidad para convertirla en realidad, en un paralelismo de contracción y dilatación aceptado como ritmo en el taoísmo”).⁵⁹ He means that to embrace the Tao is to separate from the Western world order. Nevertheless Lezama finds restoration in such chaotic move: “Alienation works in part as discovery, as a form of liberated recognition, of reason, as if the disconnection or chance connection might cast more light than the chains of causation” (“La enajenación actúa en parte como anorexis, como forma de reconocimiento liberado, de la ratio, como si lo inconexo o la nexitud al azar proyectase más luz que las cadenas causales”).⁶⁰ Thus he explains how alienation obtains reason:

The contemplation of the still vault of the Taoists in order to pull out or detach the word arrives at the Parmenidean world of unity that sets reason aside. Seven flashes of lightning for our seven intuitions. In a desperate situation La Maga and Oliveira speak: ‘There are also metaphysical rivers, Horacio. You are going to jump into one of those rivers.’ ‘It would have to be the Tao,’ said Oliveira.’

⁵⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1194.

⁵⁹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1194.

⁶⁰ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1194.

(La contemplación del cielo silencioso de los taoístas para arrancar o desprender la palabra, llega al mundo parmenídeo de la unidad prescindiendo de la ratio. Los siete relámpagos para nuestras siete intuiciones. En una situación desesperada hablan la Maga y Oliveira. ‘-- También hay ríos metafísicos, Horacio. Vos te vas a tirar a uno de esos ríos.’ ‘--A lo mejor--dijo Oliveira--eso es el Tao’).⁶¹

Oliveira thinks that decorum and propriety are trivial; he feels as a Taoist, for “[t]he Taoist thinks little of the ways of the world, [. . .] his outlook rather encourages a laissez-faire policy toward the world and even withdrawal from its affairs.”⁶² Nonetheless the Taoist prospect of plenitude concurs with the possibility of Anthropophany in Christian philosophy. So, Lezama recognizes, Taoism heralds Christianity and vice versa. Indeed,

Taoism claims that the wise man will constantly seek harmony and rapport with Tao (the Way), which at one and the same time, is the way for men to follow if they would reach blessedness and the principle that underlies and sustains the world. As a concept that is both moral and cosmological, Tao has a logical status similar to that of the Logos (or Word, the active principle of God in creation and revelation) in Christian philosophy.⁶³

To follow the Way of the Tao is akin to “walking with God” and carrying the “Anthropophany” into effect. The figurae of “The Way” and “The Walk” lead to the union with the Godhead (center). These conceptual figurae guide the individuals’ way to the center and their action is connected to man’s search for a center that lies beyond space

⁶¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1198.

⁶² “Philosophy of Religion.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 20 April 2000 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=115094&sctn=27&pm=1>>.

⁶³ “Philosophy of Religion.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 20 April 2000 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=115094&sctn=27&pm=1>>.

and time. Boldy's analysis of Cortázar's novelistic characters corroborates Lezama's view:

The aim of the individual characters is to fulfill the possibilities offered by the figura to reach a personal 'centre', while a metaphysical centre is achieved by the author in destroying time. This in turn ratifies, metaphysically, the quest of the characters.⁶⁴

Whether they are conceptual or concrete, figural relationships and their interpretations enrich the structure and meaning of the texts while providing endless possibilities of imagery in writing. As we have seen in the Figure Section in Chapter II, Paradiso exhibits a variety of such correspondences.

Remarkably, the function of figurae in the Cuban novel is adequately explained in the Morelliana of Rayuela 116:

Morelli adds: 'To accustom one's self to use the expression figure instead of image, to avoid confusions. Yes, everything coincides. But it is not a question of a return to the Middle Ages or anything like it. The mistake of postulating an absolute historical time: there are different times even though they may be parallel. In this sense, one of the times of the so-called Middle Ages can coincide with one of the times of the Modern Ages. And that time is what has been perceived and inhabited by painters and writers who refuse to seek support in what surrounds them, to be 'modern' in the sense that their contemporaries understand them, which does not mean that they choose to be anachronistic; they are simply on the margin of the superficial time of their period, and from that other time where everything conforms to the condition of figure, where everything has value as a sign and not as a theme of description, they attempt a work which may seem alien or antagonistic to the time and history surrounding them, and which nonetheless includes it, explains it, and in the last analysis orients it towards a transcendence within whose limits man is waiting'

⁶⁴ Boldy 23.

(Morelli añade: ‘Acostumbrarse a emplear la expresión figura en vez de imagen, para evitar confusiones. Sí, todo coincide. Pero no se trata de una vuelta a la Edad Media ni cosa parecida. Error de postular un tiempo histórico absoluto: Hay tiempos diferentes aunque paralelos. En ese sentido, uno de los tiempos de la llamada Edad Media puede coincidir con uno de los tiempos de la llamada Edad Moderna. Y ese tiempo es el percibido y habitado por pintores y escritores que rehúsan apoyarse en la circunstancia, ser ‘modernos’ en el sentido en que lo entienden los contemporáneos, lo que no significa que opten por ser anacrónicos; sencillamente están al margen del tiempo superficial de su época, y desde ese otro tiempo donde todo accede a la condición de figura, donde todo vale como signo y no como tema de descripción, intentan una obra que puede parecer ajena o antagónica a su tiempo y a su historia circundantes, y que sin embargo los incluye, los explica, y en último término los orienta hacia una trascendencia en cuyo término está esperando el hombre).⁶⁵

Morelli makes the same distinction of figura from imago that Lezama does. Imago refers to the “transcendent within whose limits man is waiting” (the full self-realization), figura refers to the process toward the “transcendent,” for example, the “modern” who uses Medieval motifs as figurations of something transcending the “modern.” Lezama and Cortázar use of figures of old to capture what is modern and to signify what is beyond modern.

Because “the figura is formed by a repetition and demands at least two terms, a pre-figuration (umbra, imago), and a repetition or fulfilment (veritas),” the dual or parallel structure gives way to other geometric figures in writing, as Boldy observes.⁶⁶ Circles, triads, triangles, or tripartite organizations, as well as rectangular or quaternary configurations of material, sensory, or intangible relationships are part of the novelistic design of Rayuela and Paradiso.

⁶⁵ Hopscotch 479-480; Rayuela 396-397.

⁶⁶ Boldy 83.

Geometric shapes, two terms, the distinction between figura (process) and imago (end or transcendent), the use of figurae to reach a “center” in the Taoist sense, the two disparate figurae of Fata Morgana and Nadja united, figura taken by Lezama in the additional context of religion--all these elements lead us back to the beginning of this “step” in the method of interpreting Lezama’s “mythical method” to, in turn, interpret Paradiso. In this step, we are looking for “Fulguration of Nexus,” that flash of light which connects two disparate figurae, which lead to “manifestation” or “anthropophanies.” What we have seen is that the figurae are indeed two and indeed disparate, although they can be geometric shapes (circles or squares or triangles), or characters, or plots of stories, or terms, or simply images. The reader makes the nexus in this planned chaos of chained images which, when taken as a one, become figurae.

Lezama and Cortázar undertake the labyrinth of words to portray the search for spiritual understanding through the quality of epiphany in writing. Emanating from the perception of an absurd, chaotic world, their discourses express a desire for the original existence, nostalgia for the lost paradise, the possibility of a new order of things. As Daedalian authors configuring the word in inscribed art through the visualization of revelational images, i.e., the crystallization of illuminating metaphors and allegory, they purport to restore order by replicating the supreme act of creation that elevates the human being to the level of the Creator: imago (man) developing from potency into actuality to Creator. This is the ultimate figura arrived at by a series of nexus.

D. “Mannerism” and the “Verbal Icarus”

Lezama valorizes language and style as primordial instruments of the labyrinth. He eagerly associates the labyrinth with the development of style in language and makes an analogy between the labyrinthine “mannerism” (manierismo) of the Baroque and that of the “new” novel. The “new” novel will be written in codes like those of the Baroque mannerism.⁶⁷ The imbroglios (entanglements) and complicated metaphors of Gracián’s seventeenth-century labyrinths,--complicated images or “conceits” (“conceptismo”) or audacious expressions--did, like a “verbal Icarus” (“ícaro verbal”), crash dead upon the “waxen” incomprehension of modern readers. In the interval between the Baroque and Modern times, Lezama says, there was a “schism between what was said and what was desired to be said” (“escisión entre lo dicho y lo que se quiso decir”); however the spirited word of labyrinthine mannerism soon “[e]ngendered fine and dreadful equivocations” (“[e]ngendraba ya primorosas y pavorosas equivocaciones”). The fabrication, alteration and distortion inherent in those equivocations stretched the limits of the verbal expression and helped navigate the gulf “between the spirit breathed upon the word and its configuration in visibility” (“entre el aliento insuflado en la palabra y su configuración en la visibilidad”). Lezama declares, in summary, that Cortázar’s novel began to fill the abyss caused by conventional literature since the Baroque times.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See César Salgado’s “Hybridity in New World Baroque Theory” in Journal of American Folklore 112.445 (1999) 316-331. The essay explains how Lezama, along with Alejo Carpentier and Severo Sarduy define in their theoretical writings and novels a “New World Baroque” hybrid aesthetic that is parallel yet distinct from European sources.

⁶⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1187.

But the author-critic is prompt to proclaim his labyrinth as an ideal systematizing vehicle of language. “In the labyrinth every sign is converted into word, into organizing verb” (En el laberinto todo signo se convierte en palabra, en verbo ordenancista”), Lezama declares.⁶⁹ By implication, he gives the labyrinthicity of language a spiritual undertone, suggesting that the work of a labyrinthine author is not chaos but order, in replication of the Supreme Author’s work. This labyrinth will not have Icarus’s words falling upon waxen ears because the conceits are Baroque expressed in modern form. Lezama intends to revivify the “spirit” underlying both “Mannerist” imbroglios and modern figurae in his conception of the Caribbean Neobaroque.

Then again, following the poetic syllogism that is paradigmatic of his composition, Lezama states that words replicate the Word, Logos; the word is the noun of the verb, Verbum; then Logos and Verbum are Christ. Through the manifestation of anthropophany in the labyrinth man is revealed to himself as “God in image,” after the image of God, through Christ. Therefore, the labyrinth is a most ideal, transmutational, and mediatory instrument of creation, cognition and communication.

In essence Lezama suggests that God breathed the spirit of life in man to transform him into a living soul capable of naming all the created things and beasts. By assuming the labyrinth of language man can also breathe the spirit of metaphor into the word and create in the likeness of God.⁷⁰ Lezama intends to breathe new life into imbroglios and make them fly like Icarus should have. The Old World conceits would be

⁶⁹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1188.

⁷⁰ See Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7, 2:19 for the creation of man and man’s ability to create the word in the likeness of God.

brought back into the New World on the wings of Icarus, because Lezama calls his foremost poetic character Licario, who dies but is resurrected by poetry.

E. “Point of Coincidence of the Orient and Occident: East Meets West”

To Lezama the labyrinth of the novel is

an ideal space that does not depend on addition or growth, neither on spatial observation or temporal suspension. It will forever be the point of coincidence of the Orient and Occident. Ophir or the remote Samos, the Orplid or the Incunabula.

(un espacio ideal, que no depende de adición o de crecimiento, tampoco de reconocimiento espacial o detención temporal. Será siempre punto coincidente entre Oriente y Occidente. Ofir o la remota Samos, la Orplid o la Incunnábula).⁷¹

This step, “coincidence,” is best understood by Lezama’s own terms “concurrence” and “confluence,” the two disparate images flowing together and converging, as if the images of fiction converged with the images of reality “beyond the text.” An image of Samos, a historic Aegean island at the center of Mediterranean commerce, flows together with fabulous Ophir, an unidentified region whose fine gold found its way to Solomon’s treasury. By juxtaposing the two places, one real and the other unknown, Lezama’s textual labyrinth makes the known historical past and the historical unknown past concur, right here and now in his text.

Then Lezama introduces Orplid, an image that he describes as “a species of magic city where the real is confounded with the unreal” (“una especie de ciudad mágica donde

⁷¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1188.

se confunde lo real con lo irreal”),⁷² and, according to Vitier, a “cultural image” that Lezama recreated of an ingenious “dialectical reading” of archival images.⁷³ Orplid like Atlantis is a fantastic labyrinth of and for the imagination: “a city of stalactites, where legend and proximity, the real and the unreal, stellar and telluric, obedience and reality . . . form a point that flies the line of the infinite” (“una ciudad de estalactitas, donde la leyenda y la cercanía, lo real y lo irreal, lo estelar y lo telúrico, la obediencia y la realidad . . . forman un punto que vuela la línea de lo infinito”).⁷⁴ We note that Orplid’s “stalactitites” flow into the “stalactites” in the caves under Havana and the island. West (Havana) meets East and the concurrence or confluence produces a figura, a point where the lightning of nexus occurs.

In the quotation above, Lezama-Daedalus conflates to the West-meets-East image (“Ophir-Samos-Orplid”) yet another image which creates another nexus--the image Incunabula (cradles for old books and for ships being repaired). The old books, “books printed during the earliest period of typography--i.e., from the invention of the art in Europe in the 1450s to the end of the 15th century,”⁷⁵--are another obvious point of confluence. Lezama’s vision is that the labyrinth, the place where the “other novel” begins, is a cradle of old books which holds the “new” novel in its infancy. The novel,

⁷² Lezama, in letter to Gregory Rabassa quoted in C. Vitier, Endnote 5 of Paradiso Chapter III, Archivos critical edition, 468.

⁷³ C. Vitier, Endnote 5 of Paradiso’s Chapter III, Archivos critical edition, 469.

⁷⁴ Eloísa Lezama Lima, Note 9 of Paradiso, Cátedra edition, 158. According to Cintio Vitier, Lezama’s sister erroneously attributed the invention to Plato, placing the source in Critias. See his Endnote 5 of Paradiso’s Chapter III, Archivos critical edition, 468-9.

⁷⁵ “Incunabula.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 17 May 1999 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=43213&sctn=1&pm+1>>.

being repaired by Lezama and Cortázar, is a ship being repaired, and the cradle holding it up is Lezama-Cortázar's Old World "Delphic Library." Such a collection of incunabula holds up the realist Cuban novels (insular novels of documentary and narrative) while they are being refitted into the "new" novel.

This rich language of the labyrinthine novel assembles in a flash a palatial array of words of all origins, etymologies, ages, styles and usages, consolidated in an Oriental dictum that Lezama states as: "in an instant [the labyrinth or the being in the labyrinth] traversed all the mansions" ("en un instante recorría todas las mansiones").⁷⁶

And there are more nexus and more "flashes." In Lezama's language, ancestral languages flow together with contemporary languages, and eradicate linguistic anachronisms and incongruities.⁷⁷ Lezama describes the effect as an "Esperanto," a universal language:

The labyrinth is traversed by an inherited language that comprises the utterances of the tribe's chief, and an 'Esperanto,' a universal language of codes and roots that is extracted from the first through analytic transference. In the ancestral language there is an interpretation, the accumulation of verbal immediacy, [but] behind the communicative words some are hidden or half-opened that weigh as much as the other external verbal manifestations. Stifled beats, contractions, creaks, breathe secretly behind a visible and extended verbal mass. The other language, a universal 'Esperanto,' the philological salad of the late Joyce places an infinite scenography behind the verbal immediacy, a dilated concentrism that proceeds by expanded irradiations.

(Ese laberinto se deja recorrer por un idioma ancestral, donde están los balbuceos del jefe de la tribu, y un esperanto, un idioma universal de claves y raíces, que se reduce del primero por una decantación analítica. En el idioma ancestral hay una interpretación, la acumulación de lo

⁷⁶ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1188.

⁷⁷ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1192-1193.

inmediato verbal, detrás de las palabras de comunicación, se esconden o se entreabren otras que pesan tanto como su otra manifestación externa. Secuestrados latidos, contracciones, crujimientos, que respiran secretamente detrás de una extendida y visible masa verbal. El otro idioma, un esperanto universal, aquella ensalada filológica del último Joyce, que coloca detrás de lo inmediato verbal una infinita escenografía, un dilatado concentristo que procede por dilatadas irradiaciones).⁷⁸

Language is transmitted and derives from that of the parents or other transmitters.

Authors derive their knowledge and language of labyrinths from their own and alien cultures and tongues as if the authors were new colonists. The languages of the tribes and “colonists” (whoever they might be) influence the language of the novel by virtue of language contact. In effect, authors inherit a sort of “Esperanto.” This metaphor stands for a universal, artificial and invented language whose syntax produces the metaphors and figurae of the “new” novel.

This nexus makes a very valuable point, useful to the study of literature right now: poetic language is inherited, derived and difficult but necessary. While everyday language is familiar and easily understood and trite, worn out by constant trampling, the other (poetic language) is “foreign,” concealed, and vague and creative. The connection of the old has no flash. The “new” labyrinthine expression is illusory, dense, irreverent, and flexible, but has a burst of light. Multiple verbal confluences muddle the “plot” of the novel, but the muddling creates new methods for reading, new illuminations.

⁷⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1192-1193.

F. “The Difficult”

The muddling, obviously, makes the “new” novel difficult to read. The “new” novel has no traditional progression of acts, a plot. The plot is “agitated,” stopped by perplexing difficulties if not jumbled in the shapes of hopscotches, circles, and circles in squares. The language comes from a myriad of places and sources: Old World, New World, Classics, East, Bible, Zohar, myths, libraries, books, literature, art, neologisms, etc. Of course, Lezama’s labyrinth is as difficult as a Baroque conceit, a rebellion against easy plots and weary language, a “beast” like a lynx:

The labyrinth is a project of the difficult and the reluctant, [as] for the Baroque the act of combing [the entanglements] must be taken with the acceptance of disassembling the labyrinth. The tracing of the labyrinth is rebelliousness for the easy itinerary or weary language. One has to conquer the beast, death, anticipate the exit. It symbolizes that man has to attack with all his reason and all his emotion, with a very acute and violent reason, with a passion of diffused fire, as the quality of wine is justified with an even-handed robust constitution, the tickling sensation with the eyes of the lynx.

(El laberinto es un proyecto de lo difícil y lo renuente, [como] para el barroco peinar [los enredos] ha de tomarse en la acepción de deslabyrinthizar. El trazado del laberinto es una rebeldía para el itinerario fácil o el lenguaje cansado. Hay que vencer la bestia, la muerte, la salida por anticipado. Es un símbolo de que el hombre tiene que atacar con toda su ratio y todo su pathos, con la razón agudizada y violentísima, con una pasión de fuego repartido, como la calidad del vino justificada por su equitativo reparto muscular, el cosquilleo con ojos de lince).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1194-5.

Lezama deliberately chose a labyrinth to counteract the creative crisis caused by worn out novels. The reader has to “attack” the innovation “in which a word or phrase is shifted from its normal use to a context where it evokes new meanings.”⁸⁰

Rayuela and Paradiso structure their hopscotches and labyrinths with geometries of thought (e.g., “chiasmus,” “circle in a square”) and dialectic (square of opposition--two contradictory readings that are in balance) to exacerbate the difficulty. “New” means “different” and “different” means “complex.” Daedalian authors, nevertheless, provide the keys to reading and deciphering their texts:

Cortázar has indicated to us the skills to penetrate in his numeral labyrinths, since Rayuela offers in itself her own groupings or electromagnetic archipelagos. Successive whirls with figurative rhythms achieve their highest points in the rotation. A café or a street accident forms a chain with jazz interlacing the conversations of the Serpent’s Club.

(Cortázar nos ha indicado las destrezas para penetrar en sus laberintos numerales, pues Rayuela ofrece en sí misma sus agrupamientos o archipiélagos electromagnéticos. Sucesivos remolinos con ritmos traslaticios logran sus vértices en la rotación. Un café o un accidente callejero forman cadeneta con el jazz entrelazando las conversaciones del Club de la Serpiente).⁸¹

Mixed cultural content makes for difficult reading. Lezama’s and Cortázar’s philosophical training and cultural world form or shape currents of the day into already dense paragraphs. When other cultures are added on--Eastern, Indigenous, European--the difficult is made more difficult. Yet Lezama and Cortázar follow an established tradition of difficulty well represented in Hispanic letters with Gracián, Cervantes, Góngora, Sor

⁸⁰ The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics 760.

⁸¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1200.

Juana. Their difficult arrangements are poetic, comparable to Mallarmé's since their art spans general themes and approaches such as "open metaphysical questions," "speculative states of mind" and "philosophical uncertainties" coupled with "tangential thinking and oblique, suggestive utterance," "sensuous complexity," "verbal inventiveness," "attacks on . . . [the] commonsensical" and "semantic breakdown."⁸² Likewise, their "compelling imaginative strokes often portray disruptions and discontinuities within the operations of the mind" and their arguments and imagery have "gaps, elisions, discrepancies and unannounced shifts of register."⁸³ The ambiguity in their syntactic and semantic patterns results in astounding suspensions and breaks in meaning that might "leave the reader in mental disarray."⁸⁴ But arduous and unrewarding reading is paradoxically enriching:

[as readers] move from word to word [they] are obliged to leap the wide gaps which separate their fields of association--to leap from the physical to the moral, from the spatial to the temporal, from the outward to the inward. At each word-boundary [they] have to re-think [their] previous route and make new guesses at the way ahead.⁸⁵

Readers have to work and think. They also have to "create." Certainly another difficulty of the labyrinthine text lies in the figural interpretation expounded, where the darkness or distance between the imago and the fulfillment of the image compounds the density of the relationship, making it initially incomprehensible. If image "A" is initially

⁸² The terms are borrowed from Bowie's *Mallarmé* x-5.

⁸³ Bowie 5.

⁸⁴ Bowie 5.

⁸⁵ Bowie 7.

united with its opposite, image “B” and there is no connection given between the two, and then image “B” is united with image “C” similarly, and then the conclusion of the poetic syllogism occurs some pages later,-- image “A” is image “C”--, the syllogism is almost incomprehensible. Previously we have seen that syllogisms (where the major premise is A is B; the minor premise is B is C; the conclusion is A is C) are part of the Classics and poetic syllogisms are ancient. Now we are seeing that poetic syllogisms in the modern “new” or “other” novel are very difficult to interpret, because they refer to a large part of the work (*figurae*) or the whole work (labyrinth).

The “difficult” refers to a paradoxical, hybrid mannerist style, the “new” refers to labyrinthine structure and language. Semantics are stretched, “Ophir” to “Orplid” possible even to “Orphic,” and stretch the language into distortion. The difficult language seeks to create new imagined meanings out of the sound and configurations of old words (e.g., “old words” sounds like “Old Worlds”). The labyrinthine novelist thus creates verbal art formed of “intensified speech,” extended above the prosaic or everyday level. The result is that much of the language of the labyrinthine novel is poetic because, as poetry, it “conveys heightened forms of perception, experience, meaning, or consciousness in heightened language, i.e. a heightened mode of discourse.”⁸⁶

But, to clarify again, we now understand why Lezama’s labyrinthine language intends what it intends: to revert back to the “genesis of the word” and have Adam-Cemí create a new Adamic language inspired by the Word or Spirit (*Pneuma*). Lezama as “man-image-of-God” creates a labyrinthine text in imitation of the Divine Wordsmith:

⁸⁶ The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics, 938-939.

contemplation (observation) and utterance, where the latter is conformed of breath and sound, with breath being the life-giving source or animating force. Lezama insists on words being “inspired” because they utter spiritual qualities. His and Cortázar’s novelistic creation approaches a poetic tradition that “seeks to naturalize its signs.”⁸⁷

The writer and apprentice reader walk slowly through a labyrinthine text, stumbling over new meanings intended, and lose their way, until both slowly discover (as if by revelation or nexus or anthropophany) a point of concentration, (a center of comprehension), a refracting light. The text acts and “manifests” itself. The sudden unity of images lights up the imagination which, in turn, generates a thought which, in turn, goes beyond the text. Now, again, author and reader understand “supranature:”

Therefore, this [Latin] American novel depends on the manner of poetry, [. . .] because only poetry achieves the destruction of the antithesis reality and irreality, forming an expected marrow of elder tree. Metaphor as reality that uproots and incorporates and irreality of the image in the new body of the novel.

(Por eso, esta novela americana ha dependido de la manera de la poesía, [. . .] pues sólo la poesía logra destruir la antítesis realidad e irrealidad, formando una esperada médula de saúco. Metáfora como realidad que arranca e incorpora e irrealidad de la imagen en el nuevo cuerpo de la novela).⁸⁸

An example of walking, stumbling, deviating and finding a sudden flash of unity in the labyrinth of Rayuela is the language of Gliglish (‘glíglico’) that La Maga and Oliveira invent to speak about eroticism. Ezquerro gives a valuable explanation:

This absolute ‘idiolect’ is a kind of chimera: it conserves the syntax and some Spanish words but invents the rest of the expression. The Gliglish is

⁸⁷ The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics 940.

⁸⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1199.

not completely intelligible to the reader or protagonists. Nevertheless it ‘signifies,’ not with clear and precise concepts, but through approximations and polysemic intuitions. This result is obtained with the union of two resources: on one hand the conservation of usual elements (the grammatical voices, in a general manner), and on the other hand, the process of invention of lexical terms, made up of a phonic association with extant Spanish words. That way the invented word evokes in a cloudy way an object, a notion, or a feeling. Like those terms whose meanings we do not know, but which evoke certain impressions, the Gliglish words open semantic fields and, therefore, speak more to the imagination than the intellect

(Este idiolecto absoluto es una especie de quimera: conserva la sintaxis y algunas palabras del español, e inventa el resto del léxico. El glíglico no es propiamente inteligible ni para el lector, ni siquiera para los personajes que lo usan, sin embargo ‘significa’, no mediante conceptos claros y precisos, sino mediante intuiciones aproximativas y polisémicas. Se consigue este resultado gracias a la unión de dos recursos: por una parte la conservación de elementos usuales (las voces gramaticales, de modo general), y por otra parte el proceso de invención de las voces lexicales, construidas por asociación fónica con palabras españolas existentes. Así la palabra inventada evoca de modo borroso e impresivo un objeto, una noción, un sentimiento. A semejanza de esas voces cuyo significado preciso no conocemos, pero que nos evocan ciertas impresiones, las palabras del glíglico abren campos semánticos y, de esta manera, hablan más a la imaginación que al intelecto).⁸⁹

Gliglish as possibly a Babel-like assembly of words is not deciphered in the usual manner of reading. The text is perceived (intuited) by the “awakening new senses” of the reader, as if in a labyrinth of confusing words, confronted with a “beast,” the different text of a “new” novel (discussed in Chapter One). The new Daedaluses or Ariadnes thread the labyrinth figurae which provide “flashes of nexus,” so that the reader emerges through new illumination “beyond the structure” (“Confluence” discussed in Chapter Two).

Thus Lezama reiterates that the labyrinth must be glasslike:

⁸⁹ Milagros Ezquerro, “Rayuela: Estudio temático” in “V. Lecturas del texto,” Archivos edition of Rayuela, 623.

Must also be a hyaline space, all our vertebrae lean on the flying point that traverses the entire labyrinth, which opens and closes it. It is a challenge of the obscure, but we penetrate it through the instantaneous progressions of light.

(Tiene que ser también un espacio hialino, todas nuestras vértebras se apoyan en el punto volante que recorre todo el laberinto, que lo abre y lo cierra. Es un reto de lo oscuro, pero lo penetramos por las instantáneas progresiones de la luz).⁹⁰

This means that the text must be interpreted by the intellect through illumination and study.

G. “Co-centrism” or “Toward the Center via the Surroundings”

The thread to the labyrinth is to be found at shifting points in the path, the points called “centers,” the term Lezama borrows from the labyrinth and from Tao (Chinese, “Way”) to express another step in this “mythic method.” Lezama’s essay declares: “Rayuela unfolds in an electric and Eleatic co-centrism” (“Rayuela se desenvuelve en un eléctrico y eleático concentrismo”).⁹¹ By “electric” he means that the narrative presents “flashes,” as if from the electrical “circuits” or circles in the labyrinthine text: the charged particles of a “current,” of energy in the text, for example, “curriculum,” “water,” “concurrence” of images. The language and style of the text “electrify” because they create “new senses.” There is a harmony between the sound of “electric” and “eleatic”, and concludes that the “new” intends all this charge to the “oneness” associated with Eleatic philosophy:

⁹⁰ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1188.

its doctrine of the One, according to which all that exists (or is really true) is a static plenum of Being as such, and nothing exists that stands either in contrast or in contradiction to Being. Thus, all differentiation, motion, and change must be illusory. This monism is also reflected in its view that existence, thought, and expression coalesce into one.⁹²

The labyrinth represents a search for the center through the pursuit of unity, symmetry, and balance.

In Rayuela, Oliveira's opening question, "Where would I find la Maga?" ("¿Encontraría a la Maga?"), begins his sense for the center. The use of the conditional expresses the supposition, contingency and possibility of finding La Maga and confirms Oliveira's strong desire to find her.⁹³ As we have seen, "centrism" or the search for a center in the labyrinthine novel is characterized by the continuous displacement of the center, caused by the rejection of each defined centrism. So Oliveira muses:

It's a terrible job, splashing around in a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, to use the language of scholasticism. What is being searched for? What is being searched for? Repeat it fifteen thousand times, like hammer-blows on the wall. What is being searched for?

(Terrible tarea la de chapotear en un círculo cuyo centro está en todas partes y su circunferencia en ninguna, por decirlo escolásticamente. ¿Qué se busca? ¿Qué se busca? Repetirlo quince mil veces, como martillazos en la pared. ¿Qué se busca?)⁹⁴

⁹¹ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1200.

⁹² "Eleaticism." Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 27 May 2000. <http://www.britannica.com/b...ticle/printable/2/0,5722,115422,00.html>.

⁹³ Boldy 31.

⁹⁴ Hopscotch 496; Rayuela 409.

Lezama believes that the center is the cloud formation charged with the force of life or death represented by La Maga. He writes:

Cortázar considers La Maga as a concretion of nebula that brings the vital and the vitalist together in a communicative song by Schumann. She lives in the recurrence of the day and enjoys a prophetic [cumulus] accumulation. [. .]. She lives in reality, but her displacements are the entire novel, she lives in the negation of a conceptual world, and therefore she remains alive and open. The novel extinguishes when she disappears, afterwards there appear figurative situations, distrusts, Morelli's incessant auto-interrogations, carefully contemplating words, wishing to establish infinite and relative communications. La Maga was the only unbreakable fulcrum. Her limitation was a temporal synthesis, a reminiscent accumulation, the infinite link. [. . .] La Maga is the one who has a more profound relation with the entire Serpent's Club. She is a better analogy, she catches and allows herself to be caught, her profundity is in her cosmic continuum. There is something in her like a larvate sense of sanctity. One must observe her transpiration, the evaporating body, and her breathing assimilating the square of air

(Cortázar considera a la Maga una concreción de nebulosa que trae lo vital y lo vitalista en una comunicativa canción de Schumann. Vive en la perennidad del día y disfruta de una acumulación en la profecía. [. . .] Vive en la realidad, pero sus desplazamientos son toda la novela, vive en la negación de un mundo conceptual, por eso permanece viva y abierta. La novela se extingue cuando ella desaparece, después aparecen situaciones figurativas, desconfianzas, incesantes autointerrogaciones de Morelli, mirando cauteloso a las palabras, queriendo establecer infinitas y relativas comunicaciones. La Maga era el único apoyo inquebrantable. Su limitación es una síntesis temporal, una acumulación reminiscente, el enlace infinito. [. . .] la Maga es la que guarda una más profunda relación con todo el Club de la Serpiente. Hace mejor análogo, pesca y se deja pescar, su profundidad está en su continuo cósmico. Hay en ella como un larvado sentido de santidad. Hay que fijarse en su transpiración, el cuerpo evaporando, y en su respiración asimilando el cuadrado del aire).⁹⁵

⁹⁵ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1197-1198.

La Maga represents a center that means everything and moves about everywhere, although she is “displaced” in the text. The search for her is an active exercise of the “cognitive Eros” (“Eros cognoscente”), because as circular serpent (good and evil) she belongs to the “Serpent’s Club” in a square (“square of air”), and so geometrically and biologically exudes a oneness (“larvate sense of sanctity”). The confluence of images leads to the oneness: La Maga as serpent encircles the labyrinthine novel. As “La Maga,” she is “Magician;” as “Lucía,” she is “Light.” In a third confluence of images, her “light” is associated with the Minotaur’s name “Asterius,” the “stellar light” in the beast, the labyrinth.

Meditating upon her meandering, Lezama declares a syllogism: Thesis: La Maga is the one that keeps a more profound relationship with the entire Serpent’s Club” (“La Maga es la que guarda una más profunda relación con todo el Club de la Serpiente”).⁹⁶ Antithesis: “In reality the novel is coincident chance falling upon the Serpent’s Club” (“En realidad la novela es el azar coincidente en el Club de la Serpiente”).⁹⁷ And the resulting synthesis, “the absorbent serpent” (“la serpiente absorbente”) thus stated:

To intuit as a central continuum of the novel the absorbent serpent, called lampalagua, which swallows an air like a charm and attracts the distant and monstrous to the instantaneity of its transmutative dream.

(Intuir como continuo central de la novela a la serpiente absorbente, llamada lampalagua, que traga un aire como de imán y atrae lo lejano y monstruoso a la instantaneidad de su sueño transmutativo).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1197-1198.

⁹⁷ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1198.

⁹⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1207.

Lezama places the Serpent's Club in the center of the "new" novel and Horacio Oliveira there also, with the opening question "Where would I find LaMaga?" The recurrent image of the Club as a serpent seeking its own development or evolution through multiple transmutations is that of a line, sometimes coiled, sometimes stretched, reflecting the behavior of the vertebrate creature. Cortázar's serpent metaphor for the circle of friends serves to portray the uncommon, enigmatic, and perplexing aspects of human beings. The commentary suggests that Lezama understands the merit of the metaphor, knowing fully well the symbolic potential of the serpent. On one hand, he knows that the circle of friends gathered as the "Club de la Serpiente" replicates the positive aspects of the ouroboros (discussed in Chapter II). On the other hand, Rayuela's "Club de la Serpiente" represents the counterpoise of the same symbol.

Cognizant that the natural image of the serpent is that of a line, Lezama clearly understands the line's infinite possibilities of representation: "[L]ines have neither beginning nor end and, once they come alive, they become capable of depicting whatever you like or of changing into any shape."⁹⁹ Lezama celebrates the ample uses of the line symbol, for he also knows that the serpent has a dual aspect and is linked to the human soul and libido, as well as to the primordial forces of nature. On one hand the serpent represents the beneficent principle of life, fertility, creation, and renewal, and, as such, an emblem of knowledge and the powers of prediction, healing, and the imagination. On the

⁹⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 844.

other hand, the serpent represents the maleficent principle of seduction, destruction, and death.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the meandering comings and goings, and the constant, convoluted mind games in search for truth and meaning in life performed by the members of the Club de la Serpiente are like lines with winding shapes and movements that signify the infinite potential and contradictory symbolic powers of the serpent. Their actions replicate the symbolism of the line/serpent, which translates into a never ending search for an ambiguous, displaceable, permeable and transmutative center. The activities of the members of the club suggest that the representation of the serpentine process of activity (like the quest in the labyrinth) is a far richer, strenuous, and important occupation than the actual attainment of the end or center. Since in the instance of manifestation the serpent is believed to be “the sacred made manifest” and “the manifestation of the holiness of nature,” it is regarded as the “causal and a-temporal, lord of the life-principle and of the powers of Nature.”¹⁰¹ For Cortázar and Lezama the labyrinthine search for a center is a demonstration of the ritual quest for plenitude in the union with the divinity of the life-principle. The fact that Cortázar thought of calling his novel “mandala” before settling on the name of the children’s game, “rayuela” for the title corroborates this assumption.¹⁰² Indeed, “[t]he mandala is the spatial symbol of the presence of the godhead at the centre of all things,”¹⁰³ and the labyrinth is a symbol of the mandala. Since

¹⁰⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 142-145, 844-858.

¹⁰¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 845.

¹⁰² See Cuaderno de Bitácora de Rayuela 117. In the critical edition of Rayuela p. 501.

¹⁰³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 632.

the “traditional Hindu mandala determines through ritual orientation the central holy area comprising altar and temple,”¹⁰⁴ the hopscotch, like the labyrinth, is a spatial symbol where the human being’s ritual process from fragmentation to unity or and plenitude takes place. In the hopscotch, the mandala, and the labyrinth takes place the anthropophany, the ritual of the human being’s manifestation in the image of God.

H. “‘Aporetic’ Gallery” (“galería aporética”)

If we resolve the “difficult” in the new novel by concentrating on the center which focuses on the “one,” and if the “one” comes from flashes or nexus of confluent images, as it were the thread or clue written in the labyrinth of ambiguous words, then “galería” makes a picture out of the “aporia,” the doubtful, paradoxical, ambiguous, and “difficult.” The text of the labyrinth entitled Paradiso is, as it were, a gallery of images in “aporia,” doubt. The reader’s “Eros cognoscente” questions what the link between the images is. With the metaphor “gallery,” Lezama assembles various functions of the labyrinth. First, he compares the labyrinth to a “gallery” or edifice united by corridors and colonnades, a long and narrow strait, or a subterranean passageway in a cave, perhaps those caves under Havana and the island. The simile implies a room or building (a text) devoted to the exhibition of works of art. This recalls Sir Arthur Evans’ accounts of the Palace of Minos. In it, artifacts and frescoes painted on the walls seemed to have served as an art

¹⁰⁴ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 632.

gallery for the labyrinth.¹⁰⁵ Second, Lezama presents a gallery of puzzles and difficulties in the labyrinth, in the manner of an “aporia,” in imitation of Plato’s short dialogues on ethical problems¹⁰⁶ and Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics, Book H.¹⁰⁷ Since Lezama follows Aristotle’s maxim, “the solution of a difficulty is the discovery of truth,”¹⁰⁸ and “aporia” now means “difficulty encountered establishing the theoretical truth of a proposition, created by the presence of evidence both for and against it,”¹⁰⁹ Lezama’s “Aporetic Gallery” describes this step in the interpretation of his method: the arrangement of the images and figurae in the colonnades of the labyrinth.

Lezama suggests such a gallery in Rayuela. The gallery begins at the particular juncture where Cortázar identifies the center of Oliveira’s search for individuality. Then Cortázar suspends the scene and shifts to other scenes. Then Oliveira returns and the gallery begins again where Oliveira is “suspended” from participating in the “Club de la Serpiente.” Then, other scenes follow until the scene where French police detain Oliveira when he is found with the clocharde Emmanuèle. Finally, after other intervening scenes, Oliveira literally is flown, suspended in the air during his extradition from Paris to Buenos Aires. Back in the port city, Oliveira’s mind is suspended in madness, but that madness may or may not really exist. Even Oliveira’s intended act of “self-

¹⁰⁵ See Sir Arthur Evans’ The Palace of Minos at Knossos, 1921+

¹⁰⁶ “Plato.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 13 April 2000
<<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=115123&sctn=11&pm=1>>.

¹⁰⁷ Book VII, Chapter 1, 1145b 1-8.

¹⁰⁸ Nichomachean Ethics, Book VII, Chapter 4, 1146b 7-8.

¹⁰⁹ Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary.

defenestration"--throwing himself out the window, a possible end to the novel--is brought to doubt, to a standstill, as the "table of instructions" ("tablero de dirección") sends us yet to another chapter, where the character's madness is likely cured as he is nursed back to health.¹¹⁰

In addition to this doubtful series of suspended scenes, we can follow a second colonnade of aporetic images in the same gallery. La Maga's behavior is supposed to be central to Oliveira. She, however, vanishes, having either killed herself or having been figuratively or intentionally "eradicated" by Oliveira. But the search for her continues. She becomes a gallery of images in Oliveira's memory, doubtful, not able to be put together, suspended, because he goes mad--he cannot put coherence into his images of her. She is lost in the "Over There" of Paris, at the center of Western culture. Her image reappears "Over Here," in the Latin-American side of culture, the domain of deficient consciousness and peripheral alienation in Buenos Aires.

From "Over Here" Oliveira's continued search for La Maga is propelled into the beyond. As the search for what lies beyond reality is, in theological terms, the quest for the ultimate reality--the Godhead--La Maga's utility may be that of a mirage, not a mirror image of the divinity per se. La Maga serves as a dynamic labyrinth in its feminine phase. La Maga and her double, Talita, are the feminine symbols of bridges and even underground connecting tunnels, perhaps indices of the way out, or directions toward the crossings. The dual La Maga-Talita ascends and descends in a spiral, never quite up, never quite down, because there is no center in this labyrinth, unless the dual finds its

¹¹⁰ Boldy 94. "Self-defenestration" is Boldy's term for Oliveira's attempt to jump from the window to his death. Besides this possible ending, there are other seemingly contradictory endings to the novel.

way out, toward God. Inside the madhouse of Oliveira, and in the midst of the mixed heap of the Argentinean civilization, there is no center for a mad Oliveira whose center is a misplaced Maga, both “There” and “Here” but vanished in doubt: by suicide or authorial eradication.

Both Rayuela and Paradiso are “many books” in one--they invite many readings. The end of Paradiso’s surface narrative contained in the unicursal labyrinth-text that represents Cemí’s development of poetic sensibility exhibits an aporia, a contradiction--the end is a beginning. Yet the ending is logical, since it clearly represents a new beginning in the protagonist’s upward-spiral cycle within the circle of learning. However, Rayuela’s endings are good examples of aporetic impasses because their doubt is magnified: at best there is no end to the possible textual readings. For example, in the reading of the “second book,” the arranger directs us in the “Table of Instructions” to begin in chapter 73 and end in chapter 131 after following the “hopping” order indicated at the foot of each chapter. But this “order” leads us to a suspension of judgement because chapter 131 sends us to chapter 58 and this one back to chapter 131. The repetition of Chapter 131 leaves the reader held in a perplexing difficulty, held back and as it were even engaged in the absurd content of the chapter, participating in Oliveira’s image, the endless praying of the monks “that must combat all spiritual evil.”

But more importantly, in Rayuela’s chapter 56, at the end of the “simple” reading of the “first book” the final episode casts an exemplary image in the gallery of doubt. We do not know what happens to Oliveira in the end. Boldy’s recognition of the aporia is convincing: “Oliveira’s self-defenestration is pointed to with the preterite indicative ‘it was all over’ (se acabó) and questioned with the pluperfect subjunctive ‘would have

been' (hubiera sido)."¹¹¹ The critic recognizes the "new" logic indicated by the "novum organum" represented in the plot, as suggested in Rayuela's "dispensable" chapter 147: "To jump is equivalent to the final abandonment of Western rationality and the recognition of a possible novum organum, as can be seen from the 'dispensable chapters.'"¹¹² The new logic throws out not only the characters (Oliveira) but also the window the character leaps through ("defenestration") because the "window" is old, it does not work. This means that our traditional viewpoint ("window") will not work, it is not appropriate to go with the "new." We need a new "window," a new vision. To interpret the "new" novel requires the acquisition of Lezama's heralded "new senses."

I. The "Eleatic Gallery" ("Galería eleática")

Lezama takes a parallel step now into another gallery of images, in order to find a true center, the real, underlying nexus joining all images together. This is the "Eleatic Gallery," which he introduces in the essay for the role of philosophy in the new labyrinthine novel. For philosophy, like the spiral figure, tries to pursue wisdom, to divide what is true/good from what is false/evil by way of a "logic," a mental figure, the "X" that we have seen, which assesses evidence and arguments.¹¹³ Although the

¹¹¹ Boldy 95.

¹¹² Boldy 94.

¹¹³ Philosophy is the attempt to give an account of what is true and what is important, based on a rational assessment of evidence and arguments rather than myth, tradition, bald assertion, oracular utterances, local custom, or mere prejudice. Popkin, Richard H., "Origins of Western Philosophic Thinking," The Columbia History of Western Philosophy, ed. Popkin (New York: Columbia UP, 1999) 1.

“Gallery” might be located in the “Delphic Library,” we are not looking at myths or narratives or images, but for unity, a nexus.

Eleatics opposed their predecessors, both the Pythagoreans, who asserted plurality as the principle of the world, and Heracliteans, who tried to solve the problem of the One and the Many as the principle of the world through a doctrine of “Unity in Diversity, Identity in Difference.” Eleatics say that the One, causing the illusion of sense and motion, is the True and Real, revealed only by Thought:

The Eleatics, . . . deny the reality of multiplicity and motion. There is one principle, Being, which is conceived of as material and motionless. They do not deny, of course, that we sense motion and multiplicity, but they declare that what we sense is illusion: it is mere appearance. True being is to be found, not by sense but by thought, and thought shows that there can be no plurality, no movement, no change.¹¹⁴

Lezama wants “unity” at the “center,¹¹⁵ because he most certainly wants his perplexed readers to think, to work out their way through the maze of images, to find the real thread, to reach the “honey” (wisdom) at the other end of the snail shell, the labyrinth Paradiso.

Underlying this Eleatic gallery, there is unity, a place in the mind where thought, through flashes of a “new” logic, makes harmonious agreement and harmonious concurrence of the grotesque and incongruous with the natural and congruous. The

¹¹⁴ Copleston, Frederick. A History of Philosophy, Vol. I, Part I, 64-77.

¹¹⁵ The one-sided doctrines of the Eleatics and Pythagoreans were unacceptable to thinkers, as was the philosophy of Heraclitus to do justice to the One and the Many. This gave rise to the “compromise-systems” of philosophy, which tried to weld together the thought of their predecessors. In revising the various philosophical schools, likewise Lezama appears to compromise in his system of thought. See Copleston 64-77.

Eleatic labyrinth has a “new” vision. We see contrary images at the same time: the confluence or union of “what was” with “what might have been,” aberrant coincidences between the present and the past, the real and the unreal. The labyrinth conjures up images of the past for which the reader has no memory and unites them with current images of now to form images that previously did not exist. Since the reader has no memory of those past and new images, the memory, says Lezama, is inhabited by “non-existent galleries.” The Eleatic Gallery of Rayuela and Paradiso make those images visible. Lezama states:

[The Eleatic gallery] makes visible historical situations of tangents or concurrences. Memory is inhabited by non-existent galleries. It is Arnolfini’s hat that sits on the mantelpiece or thalamus. From the regions of perpetual snow arrive the cuddled nocturnal beings in ‘The kitchen,’ of Velásquez. Characters descend from the painting in order to take the elevator. How what is sculpture precipitates itself over life and how life crouches as a beast with an endless back to receive the caress

(La galería eleática] hace visibles situaciones históricas de concurrencias o tangencias. La memoria se puebla de galerías inexistentes. Es el sombrero de Arnolfini sobre la repisa o la cama matrimonial. Van llegando de la Región de las nieves perpetuas los acurrucados nocturnos en La cocina, de Velásquez [sic]. Personajes que descenden del cuadro y cogen el elevador. Cómo lo que es escultura se precipita en la vida y cómo ésta se agazapa como una bestia de interminable lomo para la caricia).¹¹⁶

Lezama exemplifies “non-existent galleries” by digressing on two paintings of former times, Jan van Eyck’s 1434 famous painting, “The Betrothal of the Arnolfini,”¹¹⁷ and, in my interpretation of “La cocina” de Velásquez, his famous “Las Meninas” (1656)

¹¹⁶ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1190.

¹¹⁷ “Eyck, Jan van. ‘The Arnolfini Marriage.’” WebMuseum, Paris. 15 May 2000.
<<http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/paint/auth/eyck/arnolfini/>>
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/eyck/arnolfini/> 29 July 2006

possibly because both paintings include a mirror with a witness in the background. He says that art, like an elevator going down, has taken the “now” of life and only “caresses” the “beast” of life. Lezama wants to create new life with extant art.

He uses the Arnolfini example because the artist, Jan van Eyck, made a “now” out of Arnolfini’s past matrimonial contract. The “now” is in the painting, where Van Eyck declares his “presence” in two unusual ways: first, as a notary, he signed his name “Johannes de eyck fuit hic” (Jan van Eyck was here); second, in the mirror at the back of the room, where the outsider sees the wedding from behind and, there, in front of the couple, a picture of Van Eyck and another witness. Van Eyck’s “new way of painting” meant that “[f]or the first time in history the artist became the perfect eye-witness in the truest sense of the term.”¹¹⁸ Whereas the Flemish artist painted the Italian merchant wearing a prominent hat and standing next to his bride in the act of matrimony, the “Eleatic Gallery” of the mind makes possible the unification of a sequential image after the ceremony. Lezama’s successive, imagined, “painterly” figure depicts Arnolfini’s hat on the mantelpiece, presumably after the merchant has taken off his hat in what appears to be a logical step in the consummation of the wedding contract. Lezama can transpose the sequel of the painted image into an image through words. The resulting imagery is centered in a “slice-of-life” continuance.

On the other hand, Velázquez’s “now” in “Las meninas” visually centers the front rooms of the royal court but really makes a “now” out of an image in the background: the

¹¹⁸ “Eyck, Jan van. ‘The Arnolfini Marriage.’” See Pioch, Nicholas, 16 February 1996. [WebMuseum](http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/paint/auth/eyck/arnolfini/), Paris. 15 May 2000.

artist-witness is depicted retreating to a rear room, perhaps the hearth of the kitchen, were savor (wisdom) and certainly the creative power was (is) generated.

The Eleatic step, the nexus of oneness (unity) follows: the characters in the painting take the “elevator” down (to the labyrinth), precipitate themselves over life who, as a beast (Minotaur), is soothed (petted on the back). Lezama gives us a stretched “slice of life.” It is not in the “past” as in memory. It’s in a “now” which stretches back to the “past” because of the “now” of the image which uses memory only as a point of comparison, not as a “real.” “Real” is only “now.” “Now” is more than images. The “labyrinth” is merely an artifice and the Daedalian artificer, Lezama, the creator of this fantastic art, the colonnades of illusory Eleatic images which elicit from a reader a suspension of disbelief. The readers should not believe the images (they “suspend disbelief”), but they should believe “the beyond” which the text signifies.

What Lezama calls “concurrent chance” (“azar concurrente”) connects here as elsewhere odd unities in these pictures, in the characters in them, in the events portrayed, in a planned chaos which magnetizes them by a centripetal force. To provide another illustration of this Eleatic “unity” signified through “concurrent chance,” Lezama remarks on the adventitious occurrence of two artists of the same origin converging into the Europe of the 60s.¹¹⁹ One was Cortázar, then living in Paris and writing Rayuela. The other, identified at great pains from obscure allusion, was the porteño Alberto Ginastera, a talented composer from Buenos Aires. Ginastera was then visiting Italy and experiencing the exotic gardens of the Orsini Palace in Bomarzo, Italy, a 16th century

¹¹⁹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1186.

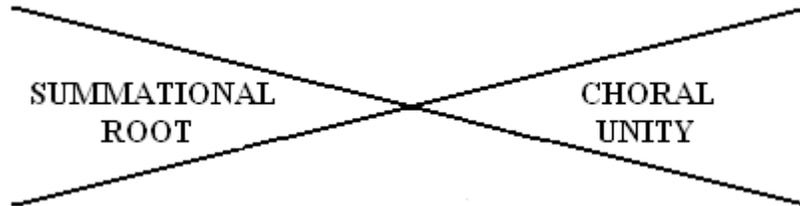
marvel of European mannerism whose park is a distorted labyrinth.¹²⁰ That experience would become the source of inspiration for Ginastera's cantata (1964) and chamber opera (1967) named Bomarzo. Lezama celebrates Ginastera and Cortázar's alleged confluence into the Old Continent by juxtaposing their significant achievements. First, these coetaneous artists shared a special ability for compositional synthesis and unique and eclectic techniques (dissonant and consonant) in music and literature.¹²¹ Second, the two artists from the American Southern Cone realized their full creative potential in the grand urban centers of Europe and North America. Both Spanish-American artists became universal, partaking of collective language and culture, but each remained essentially grounded in the national culture of his country, complying with the universal patrimony of the Argentineans that Borges had proclaimed as a corollary for all artists. Rayuela and Bomarzo present equal achievements, judges Lezama, with the peculiarity that "both are nourished by the inexhaustible paideuma of childhood."¹²²

¹²⁰ Gustav René Hocke, Labyrinthe de l'art fantastique. Le maniérisme dans l'art européen, trans. Cornélius Heim (1957; Paris: Gonthier, 1967) 92-5.

¹²¹ The compositional techniques of music and extemporizing with other musicians appear prominently in the thematic argument, rhetoric, and musical verbosity of Rayuela and Paradiso. Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) was born in Buenos Aires and died in Geneva. He traveled the world's greatest cities developing his style. His complex compositional techniques blended highly dissonant scores with traditional forms. Specifically: "His synthesis of techniques is unique and eclectic, and he makes use of microtones (smaller than half tones), serial procedures (basing works on selected series of pitches, rhythms, etc.), and aleatoric, or chance, music as well as older established forms." ("Ginastera, Alberto (Evaristo)." Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 17 May 1999 <<http://search.eb.com/bol.topic?eu=37590&sctn=1&pm=1>>.

¹²² "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1187. According to Leo Frobenius, the Paideuma of childhood is the degree of culture acquired from infancy to puberty. Frobenius' theory and the function of the childhood Paideuma is discussed in a subsequent section.

The Eleatic unity in Rayuela and Paradiso is manifest in that the cumulative roots of the novels is balanced with the choral unity presented by the numerous characters that populate their texts:

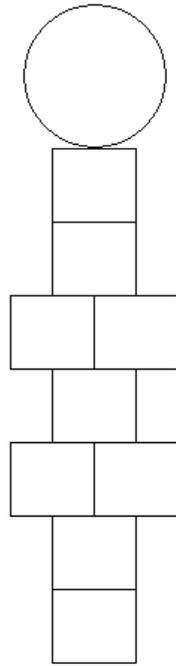


Lezama observes: “The summational root of the novel needs that choral unity. La Maga, Babs, Gregorovious, Etienne, Oliveira, form the constant evaporation that is arranged and disarranged in the extension of the powdery mass” (“La raíz sumular de la novela necesita esa unidad coral. La Maga, Babs, Gregorovius, Etienne, Oliveira, forman la evaporación constante que se ordena y desordena en la extensión de la masa harinosa”), the substance of the narrative.¹²³

Lezama implies that the labyrinthine novel is produced with the creative and unifying energy of water, and water is the principal unifying and generating energy in the labyrinth. Just as labyrinths were erected upon sites with water, so in Chapter II, we have shown that the “stream” of discourse in Paradiso is formed by the confluence of many streams, flowing from one “eros cognoscente.” The aporetic galleries and the Eleatic galleries only show how many images (aporetic gallery) visualize one central thread (Eleatic gallery).

Opposed energies create one dynamic in one discourse. The labyrinth in Rayuela and Paradiso is the magnet for unity. Here is Cortázar’s narrative in diagram:

¹²³ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1199.



“Hopscotch” lays out the narrative structure in the arrangement of squares, one, another one on top, another paralleled, a single, then another paralleled, and on, toward a final circle. The corresponding narrative, opening with the question, “Where would I find La Maga?” goes into squares (suspensions: “Over Here,” “Over There,” “From Either Side”) concluded by a circle (really, no ending). Paradiso has the same Eleatic figure arranged in circular threads of images. The “mythic method” goes around in circles, and expands the recurring images into transtemporal and transcultural discourse, without any loss of individual identity (Cuban) or cultural connection to the artist’s autochthonous nation or place of origin (Cuba).

J. The “Bayezid Test”

How does the reader distinguish the images in the aporetic gallery from the images in the Eleatic gallery, so that he/she is sure of the “center” or thread of images-ideas? Lezama introduces as a next step what he calls “the Bayezid test” (“la prueba de Bayaceto”).¹²⁴ The reader must understand the name to understand the logic of the labyrinthine “mythic method.” This Ottoman Emperor Bayezid I (1354-1402) conquered Asia Minor, occupied Eastern Europe at the height of the Ottoman Empire, and defeated the Christian crusaders in Nicopolis (1396), before he was himself defeated and taken prisoner by Timur (Tamerlane) near Ankara (1402). Bayezid I founded the first centralized Ottoman state based on traditional Turkish and Muslim institutions and stressed the need to extend Ottoman dominion in Anatolia in order to expand trade with the East, as Anatolia was (is) regarded the portal to Asia.¹²⁵

The term “Bayezid” seems to mean that the “new” novel must remain anchored to its origins but use its design to stretch its original locale to places beyond (up, down, parallel) and times (before, during, future). Like Bayezid, the Latin-American labyrinthine novel must conquer new heights (new knowledge), conduct new campaigns (the ceaseless correspondence between arms and letters), and control vast new territories (attain an awareness, an understanding even, of the other, the unknown, the unimaginable). The author explains how the “prueba de Bayaceto” applies to the Rayuela and by extension to Paradiso:

¹²⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1190.

¹²⁵ “Bayezid I.” Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 14 July 1999 <<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?idxref=213166&pm=1>>.

Rayuela has been able to destroy a space in order to build a space, decapitate time so that time sets out with a new head. It is a very American novel that does not depend on an American space-time. Paris or Montevideo, the moment of exit from a concert or the hour of dawn, spin, roll and ensure the equal concurrence of chance. The Earth evaporated an American space that does not depend of a location marked by crossed stakes in our continent. Through the stellar descends a quantity that is the temporal, final ocean where everything concurs to an appointment

(Rayuela ha sabido destruir un espacio para construir un espacio, decapitar el tiempo para que el tiempo salga con otra cabeza. Es una novela muy americana que no depende de un espacio tiempo americano. París o Montevideo, la hora de la salida del concierto o la hora del amanecer, giran, ruedan y aseguran la igual concurrencia del azar. Evapora la tierra un espacio americano que no depende de una ubicación cruzada de estacas en nuestro continente. Por lo estelar descende una cantidad que es lo temporal, océano final donde todo concurre a una cita.)¹²⁶

Here Lezama's juxtaposition of Paris with Montevideo and not Buenos Aires may be because the Uruguayan capital, like Paris, is to the East of the Platte River, where the sun rises, whereas the Argentinean port city lies to the West, where the sun sets. He possibly mentions the Uruguayan capital because La Maga's place of origin is Montevideo. The American space is a "cross" or "X" not marked by geography but by knowledge, by a "stellar." The stellar, referring to Asterius or Ariadne, creates the place, the surrounding water, and the appointed place toward which everything flows.

The labyrinthine novel navigates in waters charted by "the stellar" ("lo estelar"). It might sail the foreign oceans of the imagination, yet remains attached to its source and identity. The result is to create a narrative of distance ("lejanía") far removed in space, time and tradition in order to produce an enthralling exoticism for informed

¹²⁶ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1189-1190.

contemporary audiences. So the novel must fluctuate from the Occident to the Orient and back, from the known to the unknown, and around full circle. All of this “superabundance” sets free a current of energy that germinates in new revelations, new wisdom. Like a magnet, such narrative draws the stellar, brings it down to us, allows us to transcend consciousness and turns us toward the other, freeing us from the here and now.

According to Lezama, the “X” or “site marked by two crossed lines is the Bayezid test, exemplified by Racine:

When the genius of Racine, absolutely French, situates his characters in Constantinople and in the times of Suleiman. Everything continues inalterably French of the Golden Age. In an equal manner a very powerful current is unleashed in the novels, when upon a site marked by two crossed lines, enter Yugoslavians, Chinese, and Uruguayans, but polarized by La Maga and Oliveira, the result is a lucidity and a somnolence totally Argentinean in nature. It has something of the Persia of the eighteenth century, or of the Baghdad of Harun Al Rachid, it is of course a liberation of the ‘here,’ but men enter and exit, one dies at dawn, there is hunger

(Cuando el genio de Racine, absolutamente francés, sitúa sus personajes en Constantinopla y en la época de Solimán. Todo sigue inalterablemente francés del gran siglo. De igual manera una corriente muy poderosa despierta en las novelas, cuando en un sitio señalado por dos líneas cruzadas, van entrando yugoslavos, chinos y uruguayos, pero polarizados por la Maga y Oliverio [sic], la resultante es una lucidez y una somnolencia totalmente argentinas. Tiene algo de la Persia del siglo XVIII, o de la Bagdad de Harún Al Rachid, es desde luego una liberación del ‘aquí,’ pero entran y salen hombres, se muere al amanecer, hay hambre).¹²⁷

To emphasize how the mingling of elements succeeds in the labyrinth of words, Lezama links Racine to the Bayezid test because of Racine’s thematic and stylistic achievement in

¹²⁷ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1190.

the play Bajacét (1672). Based on the life of the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople, the play belongs to the “now” of Racine’s prestigious second period of classical tragedies (1664-1677). In those tragedies the French dramaturge enacted crises, loves, separations and alienations, in simple plots, elevated by simple speech put into a scene not French and not the “now” of Racine.¹²⁸ Racine’s simple and natural speech, mots de situation in charged settings, gave dramatic value to regular speech, and charged the texts with thrills and shudders.¹²⁹

Invoking Racine as an example, Lezama declares that the labyrinthine novel’s language achieves the same effect. Daily speech resounds with grandeur; the prose attains élégance de l’expression after the French dramaturge. That is to say Lezama’s simple language, “insufflated” with expressive but foreign metaphor, achieves an odd grandeur, e.g., Ophir-Orplid, Falcon-Halcyon, “X”- nexus, the plain word harmonized with the subtle music of the other “foreign” word. The protagonists of Paradiso speak with the elegance of educated Greeks. Except for Lezama’s neologisms and hermetic terminology, much of the difficulty with his language and syntax does lie not in the vocabulary but in the distant analogies and multiplicity of images that the words convey, while they acquire their complicated connections in suspended arrangements of thought.

With “the Persia of the eighteenth century” Lezama recalls Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes (1721), both a report and a social satire of life in Paris during the latter part of

¹²⁸ “Racine, Jean.” Britannica Online. Vers. 1994-2000. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 16 July 1999 <http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?artcl=62376&seq_nbr=1&page=n&isctn=2&pm=1>.

¹²⁹ Morris Bishop, A Survey of French Literature Vol. I. Rev. Ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1965) 174.

Louis XIV's reign of repressive despotism.¹³⁰ Just so, Rayuela satirizes life in the Paris of the early sixties, as Paradiso portrays life during various dictatorships and revolutions in Cuba. In Cortázar's novel, observations and reflections are given through the eyes of the porteño Oliveira and his coterie of friends. In Paradiso the narration and description are in the eyes of the beholder, the human and otherworldly Cemí who provides inquisitive, witty and intelligent visions through the various protagonists intended to reveal the way of life and the human condition in La Habana across time.

Montesquieu [Cortázar] is enabled to shift his point of view, to describe the familiar with wide-eyed wonder, to reveal the unreasonableness of . . . conventions, to treat the normal as fantastic and the fantastic as normal, to suggest, in short, that all . . . beliefs are habits and that . . . truth is something relative and local.¹³¹

To say that Rayuela or Paradiso has “something of the Baghdad of Harun Al-Rashid” means that the novels at once entertain with the magic of storytelling and legend but also startle everyone by showing the somber side of life, as does The Arabian Nights. Harun Al Rashid, fifth caliph of the ‘Abbasid dynasty (786-809) who ruled Islam from Baghdad at the zenith of its empire was memorialized in the Thousand and One Nights framed by a seamy situation--the “new” wife had to tell stories to save her life because of the immorality of the first wife.¹³²

¹³⁰ Bishop 338.

¹³¹ Bishop 338.

¹³² As explained,

The fabulous descriptions of Harun and his court in The Thousand and One Nights are idealized and romanticized, yet they had a considerable basis in fact. Untold wealth had flowed into the new capital of Baghdad since its foundation in 762. The leading men, and

The seamy face of Rayuela includes the tale of La Maga's rape by the protagonist herself, the untimely death of Rocamadour due to negligence, and scenes from marginal life in Paris as well as from a mental hospital in Buenos Aires. In Paradiso there are dark scenes of death, rape, homosexual acts, sadomasochism and insanity. "Something of the Baghdad of Harun Al Rashid" implies that the fictitious in Rayuela and Paradiso is framed by fact. In Rayuela or Paradiso, we have "passages" or "corridors" giving us short exits from "nocturnal ebullience," zones of "X", visible and revealing "Good" and "Evil" as if "flooding space":

'Everything remits to a passage, to a corridor,' a momentaneous exit from that nocturnal ebullience. Language of elevators, of electric stairwells, that Cortázar searches and interprets, situating himself in that zone of crossings, where the low and the high, the ascent and descent, the concave and convex form part of the same sphere, [. . .] Those magnificent pages, written with a simple fear, clarify as much as possible his returns to the day and to the anticipated taste of death. [. . .] It is a space that is filled of an invisible and unknown substance. Suddenly it becomes visible and lets itself be revealed. It continues to be El and Mal [Good (God) and Evil], an undeterred spirit that can acquire a face, but continues flooding space [. . .] It is the presence of cosmic evil [. . .]

still more their wives, vied in conspicuous consumption, and in Harun's reign this reached levels unknown before. His wife Zubaydah, herself a member of the 'Abbasid family, would have at her table only vessels of gold and silver studded with gems. Harun's palace was an enormous institution, with numerous eunuchs, concubines, singing girls, and male and female servants. He himself was a connoisseur of music and poetry and gave lavish gifts to outstanding musicians and poets. The brilliant culture of the court had certain limits, however, since, apart from philology, the intellectual disciplines were in their infancy in the Arabic world. There was also a rougher and more somber side. Instead of listening to music, Harun might watch cocks and dogs fighting. As caliph he had power of life and death and could order immediate execution. In the stories of his nocturnal wanderings through Baghdad in disguise, he is usually accompanied by Masrur the executioner as well as friends like Ja'far the Barmakid and Abu Nuwas, the brilliant poet. . . . Harun was neither a great ruler nor a man of prepossessing character, though he was a lavish patron of the arts. He owes his fame to the wealth and luxury of his court, surpassing anything previously known, and to his place in Arabic legend. ("The Thousand and One Nights." Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 13 April 2000 <<http://search.eb.com/bol.topic?eu=74151&sctn=1&pm=1>>.)

(‘Todo se remite a un pasillo, a un corredor’, momentánea salida de ese bullir nocturno. Lenguaje de los ascensores, de las escaleras rodantes, que Cortázar persigue e interpreta, situándose en esa zona de entrecruzamientos, donde lo bajo y lo alto, el ascenso y el descenso, lo cóncavo y convexo forman parte de la misma esfera, [. . .] Esas páginas magníficas, escritas con un miedo sencillo, esclarecen en lo posible sus vueltas al día y al sabor anticipado de la muerte. [. . .] Es un espacio que se llena de una sustancia invisible y desconocida. De pronto se hace visible y se da a conocer. Sigue siendo El y Mal, un espíritu indetenible que puede adquirir un rostro, pero sigue inundando el vacío [. . .] Es la presencia del mal cósmico [. . .]).¹³³

The significant presence of other Oriental systems of beliefs in the novel’s discourse lead Lezama to compare Cortázar’s work and his own Paradiso as distant parallels to the ancient Oriental web of stories. Just as each of Sheharezade’s narratives ends incomplete, to be completed the following night in order that he may spare her life, just so Rayuela and Paradiso defy an end.

K. Source in and Storehouse of Paideuma

Lezama recognizes “Paideuma” as an inexhaustible source of nourishment for the artistic labyrinth.¹³⁴ Paideuma is the subject of instruction, the things taught to the beginning scholar or pupil, studied by Leo Frobenius, “the cultural phenomena [that are] conceived as expressive forms of an independent organism” (“los fenómenos culturales [que] son concebidos como formas expresivas de un organismo independiente”).¹³⁵

¹³³ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1195-1196.

¹³⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1187.

¹³⁵ Leo Frobenius, La cultura como ser viviente: Contorno de una doctrina cultural y psicológica, trans. Máximo José Kahn (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1934) 95.

Lezama was impressed with Frobenius' discussion of the concept of Paideuma as an organic system, "the cultural phenomena [that are] conceived as expressive forms of an independent organism" ("los fenómenos culturales [que] son concebidos como formas expresivas de un organismo independiente").¹³⁶ Independently alive, this organism "is not created by mankind, but only lives 'on man,' 'through' man" ("no está creada por hombres, sino que sólo vive 'sobre el hombre', que 'vive a través' del hombre")¹³⁷ and "manifests itself in steps":

The Paideuma has its own life as absolute entity. It manifests itself in steps, or 'intuitively,' in the demoniac [character] surrounding infancy (cultural and spiritual life of the childhood years); then 'ideally' in the ideal world (cultural and spiritual life of youth), and finally, 'mechanistically' in the world of 'deeds' (cultural and spiritual life in the mature years)

(El paideuma tiene como entidad absoluta su vida propia. Se manifiesta por gradas, o sea 'intuitivamente', en lo demoníaco del derredor infantil (vida cultural y espiritual de la edad infantil); luego, 'idealmente' en el mundo ideal (vida cultural y espiritual de la edad juvenil), y por fin, 'mecánicamente' en el mundo de los 'hechos' (vida cultural y espiritual en la edad viril).¹³⁸

As stated earlier, the steps of the hopscotch and the labyrinth teach a Paideuma. The squares and circle of the hopscotch game are early Paideuma, independent of man and living on in men. Likewise, labyrinthine passages represent the gradual steps of acculturation and education (Lat. gradus, step, grade, class, value). The steps and passages reflect the fact that at every stage of life, man acquires more knowledge of

¹³⁶ Frobenius 95.

¹³⁷ Frobenius 95.

¹³⁸ Frobenius 95.

human life as he/she learns by different experience a more profound or vast meaning of the culture in the “now.” If we choose “hopscotch,” we view experience in terms of the children’s game. We toss an object (a small stone) into spaces in a diagram scratched or drawn on the ground with chalk. The drawn spaces are aligned and numbered consecutively from one to ten, and they must be hopped in order. Two pairs of numbers, the four-five and the seven-eight are paired and are traversed astride simultaneously. The number ten is drawn as a circle at the head of the figure. If the stone lands fairly, we hop on one foot to the next space, or two feet in the paired spaces, and so on, taking turns. That is, having retrieved the stone, we hop back through the figure without leaving the marked spaces. We have reached the circle and returned without error. We have not landed the stone on a line, stepped on a line, played out of turn, touched the single spaces with both feet (or double spaces with one foot), lost our balance, landed outside the lines, or fallen down.

The rayuela game is also known as “Pilgrim” or “Pilgrimage” (“Peregrina” or “Peregrinaje”) in some areas of the Spanish-speaking world.¹³⁹ The number ten is, for example, “Heaven.” The porteño character “Traveler” (Horacio Oliveira’s double in the “Over Here”) indicates that Rayuela has something to do with a personal pilgrimage. Cortázar himself speaks of the ritual origin: “On their own . . . the games of hopscotch, as almost all children’s games, are ceremonies that have a remote mystical and religious origin. Presently they are secularized, of course, but in their disposition they maintain remnants of their ancient sacred value” (“Por su parte . . . ‘las rayuelas’, como casi todos

¹³⁹ The game is known as “Peregrina” in El Salvador.

los juegos infantiles, son ceremonias que tienen un remoto origen místico y religioso. Ahora están desacralizadas, por supuesto, pero conservan en el fondo algo de su antiguo valor sagrado”).¹⁴⁰ But the rayuela is inconclusive.

If we choose “labyrinth,” the game is dangerous and forced: we have no choice but to undergo transformations. “Anthropophany” will occur if successful. “Like an amphitheater covered by layers of sand” (“Como un anfiteatro cubierto por capas de arena”) is the labyrinth, says Lezama,¹⁴¹ an entombed cultural and historical artifact archaeologically and anthropologically restored. The protagonists buried under the labyrinthine sand emerge performing after the winds of analysis and interpretation blow the layers of sand away.

L. “Delphic Library”

If the reader gives up and gets lost in the labyrinth, then he or she begins where he/she started. There is no choice but to pick up the “new” novel and start again with the first step, reading in the “Delphic Library.” Paradiso is not the “library of Babel” but one that is oracular, revelatory. It is a library where the three worlds, earth, underworld, heaven, communicate and put order and rationality into a chaotic text. We are beyond the Paideuma; we are instructed in the basics of Lezama’s “mystic method” now. We’re seeing the “literary banquet” in the Library, right next to the “aporetic gallery” of images. We heed Lezama’s words on assimilating the content in books: We readers must extract the light--clues that Lezama gives, that is, “find the necessary texts as terrestrial

¹⁴⁰ Quoted by Lezama in “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1193.

¹⁴¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1189.

nourishment of the one thing we can digest, that each one needs to transform in order to grow (encontrar los necesarios textos como alimento terrestre de lo único que podemos digerir, que cada cual necesita transformar para crecer.”¹⁴²

M. Theater of the Nocturnal and the Oneiric

Having gone from the galleries to the “Bayezid test,” the central image anchored in the New World but stretched to other times and places, we take the next crucial step in the labyrinthine “mythic method.” We descend into the nocturnal and oneiric, dreams and “flashes of nexus” which put the central figure at the center. The night is a passage from darkness to light that achieves communication. We recall “night” and “hand” as images of communication, and nocturnal experiences and dreams as visualized by consciousness. In Lezama’s terms: “The compass of time, so loved by the designers of labyrinths is what directs those nocturnal steps, since the oneiric is the only possible magnet of that compass” (“La brújula del tiempo, tan amada por los diseñadores del laberinto es la que orienta esos pasos nocturnos, pues lo onírico es el único imán posible de esa brújula”).¹⁴³ He asserts: “[Cortázar’s] labyrinth is not a training of matutinal Sunday or nocturnal row. It is primarily a Jacob’s ladder, a dense oneiric current between the telluric and the stellar” (“[El laberinto de Cortázar] no es un entrenamiento del domingo matinal o de la ringlera nocturna. Es, en primer lugar, una escala de Jacob, una densa corriente onírica entre lo telúrico y lo estelar”).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1197.

¹⁴³ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1197.

¹⁴⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1192.

Lezama refers to Genesis 28:12: “He [Jacob] dreamed he saw a ladder standing on the earth, with its top reaching up into the heaven; a stairway for the angels of God to go up and come down [...] The Lord Himself leaned down and spoke to Jacob.” The “rayuela,” the shape of the squares on the ground with the circle at the end is as “A distance between Heaven and Earth, traversed and caressed by the symbolism of the numeral progression, like an infinite arborescence derived from the children’s game” (“Una distancia entre cielo y tierra, recorrida y acariciada por el simbolismo de la progresión numeral, como una infinita arborescencia derivada de la rayuela infantil ”).¹⁴⁵ Each one of the squares is, as it were, a section; each with its own message/angel (“angel” means “messenger”); each leading to and returning from the circle (“Paradise” or Heaven from which God speaks). Anthropophany now refers to each section, each center, each unity of the figurae, and, of course, the central “rock”--Jacob’s dream started with the rock he first used as a pillow, then as a sacred vessel--conflated with the stone of Omphalos in the “Delphic Library.” Lezama recognizes the syncretism. In Judaeo-Christian liturgy the rock signifies the dedication of the church or a temple; the rock is Christ and the Christian church. The “rayuela’s” squares are like rungs in the ladder, each leading to a “manifestation,” provided that the reader does not miss a step or the missing rung or link to the Godhead.

The association of the rayuela-labyrinth with the tree (“arborescencia”) piles another figure on the hopscotch shape: the “tree of man,” or “X,” the shape of the human

¹⁴⁵ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1192.

soul and the shape of the World Soul. Human roots are “telluric” and human growth is “stellar,” as it were, a “spinal column which supports the human body, the temple of the soul.”¹⁴⁶

Lezama’s characterization of the labyrinthine novel as a “current” of dreams perhaps relates to the interplay between the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious activity in the creative process inasmuch as dreams are the product of the unconscious but are processed and organized by the conscious when synthesized in the act of writing and/or recounting the dream. It is believed that the “synthesis of conscious with unconscious psychic activity is the very essence of creative mental work.”¹⁴⁷

Like the night, dreams cause a confluence of knowledge to flow into the mind of the dreamer. Dreams are mental activities that channel information while the dreamer is unaware: “Dreams express that innate mental activity which thinks, feels and receives impressions, and engages in speculation on the fringes of our everyday activities at all levels, from the most carnal to the most spiritual, without our being aware of it.”¹⁴⁸ Dreams are makers of symbols to the extent that they are catalysts for revelation of human desires, for “dreams express the individual’s most cherished aspirations and, incidentally, become an infinitely valuable source of all orders of information.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1027.

¹⁴⁷ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 313.

¹⁴⁸ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 311.

¹⁴⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 311.

In addition, “[d]reams may be regarded as personalized mythology.”¹⁵⁰ They also “raise the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious to a higher level and improve their channels of communication. Thus, for this reason alone, dream or symbol analysis is on the psychological plane a method of personality integration.”¹⁵¹ This integrative function of dreams coincides with the purpose of the labyrinth to serve as an arena for the regeneration of the fragmented human being into a whole, complete being.

The labyrinthine novel “is then a dictation from the logos okulos, the cause in the distance and what one can critically see of that trajectory” (“luego, es un dictado del logos okulos, el móvil en la distancia y lo que se ve críticamente de ese recorrido).”¹⁵² Lezama’s neologism, “logos okulos,” again returns us to the beginnings of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world. As said often, “logos” is Greek for word, speech and reason, and stands for the Word, God, Christ. Lezama has made the Latin “oculus” into the Greek-looking “okulos,” so that “eye” (“oculus”) looks Greek. He refers to the “oculus Christi,” Christ’s eye¹⁵³ that sees and dictates. As we have seen, some words have a reciprocity; for example “image” is “Image” of God in man, also God in “image” of man. “Dictation” has that reciprocity. By “dictation” Lezama implies that enlightenment is the result of authoritative instruction from God. But “dictation” also implies that the authoritative instruction comes from man, is also telluric as is the rock that Jacob used in

¹⁵⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 313.

¹⁵¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 313.

¹⁵² “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1192.

¹⁵³ Oxford English Dictionary.

the desert. These images, at any rate, are authoritative and are metamorphosed in dreams. The “mythic method” of the labyrinth employs many dreams.

N. Metamorphoses into Confluence and Unity

If the labyrinth of words is “a Jacob’s ladder, a dense oneiric current between the telluric and the stellar,” then the labyrinth of words also transcribes or narrates a “transmutative dream.” Lezama means that the labyrinth of words is like a nocturnal theater with changes of scene, costumes, characters, and situations. It is like a script, a scenario for transformation, the space where metamorphoses occur in the thematic, stylistic, and structural planes. Change, transformation, and transmutation belong to the present time, they happen in the here and now, not in the past. The “new” novel refers to now, a difficult “now.” Lezama’s narrated dreams enact order into the recalled dreams that show constant movement or flow of energized fragments of the protagonists and their activities. Interpreting fragments is as difficult as interpreting dreams.

Besides metaphors, the labyrinthine novel is the space where metamorphoses are visualized and materialized. Everything incurs a change of form; the discourse itself enacts a process of change. Images are transformed into other images, provoking a chain of alterations. Characters and conditions change constantly, from expected transformations to aberrant and grotesque transfigurations, assisting in the development of cognition. In fact, Lezama observes, transformation shapes the discourse of the novel and facilitates the infusion and the diffusion of knowledge:

The café and the corner, transformed into a household gathering or temporary instrumental dolmen [monolithic tomb], open themselves like

dripping gargoyles in Rayuela. Oliveira finds himself in a corner and suddenly changes it into a metaphysical category, into a fountain of knowledge.

(El café y la esquina, metamorfoseados en tertulia casera o en temporal dolmen orquestable, se abren como goteantes gárgolas en la Rayuela. Oliveira está en una esquina y de pronto la trueca en categoría metafísica, en fuente de conocimiento).¹⁵⁴

“Dripping gargoyles” are places of confluence where water comes in and flows out. As grotesques of human and animal forms, gargoyles channel and funnel water off buildings, walls, projecting the water as fountains. Lezama implies that gathering places are like caves (grottos) that project comical or repulsive, unnatural, incongruous, ludicrous, and absurd images. As if from a place, “corner,” metamorphosed into another place, a “monolithic tomb,” Rayuela pours out a confluence of images. The labyrinthine text reproduces the phenomenon of water springing from sources of knowledge that become the source of other images, the images becoming transformed because of the channeling (confluence).

O. Orphism and the Descent to Hades

When Lezama mentions Eurydice in the essay,¹⁵⁵ he is obliquely directing us, with typical circumambulation, to Orpheus and the symbolism attached. The allusion is significant because this mythical character is reputed to be the son of Apollo, the God of Poetry and Prophecy. He is known as the archetypal poet and musician that descends to the Underworld to rescue his beloved wife, Eurydice, herself an alleged symbol of poetry.

¹⁵⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1201.

Here we emphasize that Orpheus is a religious teacher and the presumed founder of Orphism, the mystery religion of creation and salvation that flourished in the early centuries of our era.¹⁵⁶ Because Orpheus is associated with the Hellenic Apollo and the Oriental Dionysus, also the founder of a mystery religion,¹⁵⁷ Lezama syncretizes Orphism and Christianity, following the example given by medieval mythography.¹⁵⁸

With Orphism, Lezama can talk about the place where the labyrinth of words takes the reader and where the act of reading/walking the labyrinthine text really occurs: in the reader's unconscious and in Hades. Lezama's essay valorizes the protagonist's descent to the Underworld. Lezama speaks of Oliveira's descent to "the freezer of the dead" (the morgue) in Rayuela as a new mark in the new American art of the novel.¹⁵⁹

Orpheus's return from the Underworld is equivalent to a return from death. Syncretistically or figuratively, Orpheus's return is like Christ's resurrection from the dead, or like Dionysius' resurrection or Theseus' emergence from the labyrinth. Even though life after death was a relatively common belief in the first century CE among the Greeks and Romans and the followers of the mystery religions, the resurrection of Jesus

¹⁵⁵ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1204.

¹⁵⁶ Morford and Lenardon 298-311. See also Larry J. Alderink, Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁷ Morford and Lenardon 304.

¹⁵⁸ To this effect, Morford and Lenardon write:

The correspondence between Christianity and the other mystery religions of antiquity are perhaps more startling than the differences. Orpheus and Christ share attributes in the early centuries of our era; and of all the ancient deities, Dionysus has most in common with the figure of Christ. (307)

¹⁵⁹ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1204.

was striking:¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the point Lezama relates to is the extraordinary characteristic of Jesus's resurrection as the beginning of life. Lezama alludes to Orpheus' return to invoke this extraordinary resurrection, not only of one person but of an entire reading community reading the "new" Cuban novel.

According to Lezama, the outcome of the descent into the chamber of death, the depths of the novel or book of the dead, if you will, rewards the reader-walker with a formation, as solid as the formation of igneous rock. Oliveira is so formed. Lezama explains: "From that descent to hell, [Oliveira] will retain a certain plutonic replay, like pitching the sparkles of his cigarettes over the squares of the hopscotch" ("De ese descenso a los infiernos, le quedará cierto rejuego plutónico, como lanzar las chispas de sus cigarrillos sobre los cuadrados de la rayuela").¹⁶¹ Oliveira goes toward the "underworld," the circle at the end of the hopscotch; that is "plutonio." The "sparkles" in the fire of his cigarettes keep him safe. He turns, throwing out more sparkles and wins the game at the end. As an igneous rock, as eternal fire, Oliveira "can accompany time in a complete orgy of atemporality" ("Así acompaña al tiempo en plena orgía de atemporalidad").¹⁶² "Later," estranged and isolated by insanity "in the house of alienation," Oliveira (or the reader/walker) finds himself in situations "already free of any parallelism, antithesis, or categorial and causal world" ("Después, en la casa de la enajenación, es cuando se van ofreciendo situaciones liberadas ya de todo paralelismo, de

¹⁶⁰ The Complete Bible Handbook 364-5.

¹⁶¹ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1205.

¹⁶² "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1205.

toda antítesis, de todo mundo categorial y causalista).”¹⁶³ It is in this world outside of reason, outside of the mind, that the reader/walker along with “Oliveira is able to situate himself in a perspective where La Maga continues to live, where she has attained liberation from mortality” (“Oliveira logra situarse en una perspectiva donde la Maga sigue viviendo, donde se ha logrado liberarse de la mortalidad”).¹⁶⁴ That world of space and time without definition is when and where the labyrinth novel allows one to become in the image of the divinity: “And that anthropophany that [the novel] offers us will have to begin there, where... existing is not an illness in the purity of non-being” (“Y esa antropofanía que [la novela] nos brinda tendrá que empezar por ahí, donde el existir no sea, [...] una enfermedad en la pureza del no ser”).¹⁶⁵

Lezama makes metamorphoses happen when his characters descend to the the Plutonian world, Hades, Underworld, the place of the dead. Here the god is named the “Unseen One” or “Rich One” (for the Underworld is “symbolically, the site of mineral wealth, metamorphoses, transitions from death to seed and from seed to life”)¹⁶⁶ for us readers the “Unconscious” or “Unseen.” The ascent or return signifies “new,” “new” life, “new” knowledge, “new” perspective, “new” novel. The reader emerges from the the labyrinth newly transformed into Orpheus-Dionysus-Theseus-Christ, able to lead those

¹⁶³ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

¹⁶⁴ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

¹⁶⁵ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

¹⁶⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 491.

willing to follow to a new, sacred life: the “holy” reader who completes the “paideia” begun in the Delphic library.

Lezama’s conclusion is transparent: This reading achieves new senses that bring out a self-actualization, the seeming consecration of man:

From this point forward there appears in Rayuela a new sense for a novel absurdity, because those new senses will bring the new consecration of man, that is to say, the anthropophany or man as the owner of the center of his labyrinth.

(Por todas partes aparece en Rayuela un nuevo sentido para una nueva absurdidad, pues esos nuevos sentidos traerán la nueva sacralización del hombre, es decir, la antropofanía o el hombre dueño ya del centro de su laberinto).¹⁶⁷

The successful completion of the novel, the exit from the labyrinth, results in the Orpheus-Dionysus-Theseus-Christ-reader overcoming the monster-author, that is, his creation of the “monstrous” or “the difficult.” The two opposing figures of the reader and author are now fused and transformed into a new hybrid creature with a visionary mission:

The reader hops over the author, a new man of Zoar, and [the two] form a new centaur. The reader, punished and favored by two gods at once, is blinded, but given prophetic vision.

(El lector salta sobre el autor, nuevo hombre de Zoar, y forman un nuevo centauro. El lector, castigado y favorecido por dos dioses a la vez, se queda ciego, pero se le otorga la visión profética).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

¹⁶⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205-6.

As seen in Chapter One, Lezama considers the reader-author as a “new man of Zoar.” He refers to a Kabbalist, an “Adam Kadmon,” a “new” man, a reader dazzled, instructed, and enlightened by the mysticism and wisdom of the secret writing permitted to only a few syncretists. This “new man” has been initiated into the esoteric “tradition” (Kabbalah means “tradition”) of Old World Literature and “New World Orality,” (Cemí’s indigenous culture). The “new” Kabbalah, Paradiso, has shown him/her how to use a “Delphic Library” to scrutinize and observe the “path” or “way” of the “difficult.” The “new man” is aware by “flashes of nexus” of “centers” uniting images into figurae. Zoar implies that he/she knows “Sefirot” (the divine “lights” or “paths”), the ten emanations from “the Hidden One” (God as “EinSof”). He/she has virtue, has conquered vice. In Lezama’s synthesis, a man of Zoar is one who has entered the Paradise-Paradiso successfully; one that is capable of interpreting the Paradiso by means of at least the hermeneutic prescribed in the Zohar: the pardes, meaning the fourfold, or complete interpretation: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the mystical.

He/she has followed also this “mythic method,” the explanation outlined in this chapter. Since “method” means “the way,” the way outlined in this chapter has been Greek, beginning from the “rock” near Delphi and the “Delphic Library. At times, after an “original” and “central” image was “centered” or “intuited,” the “way” was stretched to include Eastern “Tao” (“tao” means “way”), the “method” being the same except it is Eastern.

Lezama’s invokes “Zoar” because his reader is “centered” finally. “Zoar” signifies the reader’s return to his/her state before the Fall. Zoar is like an oasis in the desert of evil; in Genesis 13:10, 14:2, 8, 19:18-30, Zoar is a city near the Dead Sea where

Lot fled to escape the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁶⁹ Zoar-Zohar lives in a Paradise-Paradiso. “Zoar,” I think, is a central image for Paradiso as a labyrinth.

The Cuban author distinguishes the transformation of the reader into a visionary centaur as a logical consequence to the act of reading, rewriting, and comprehending the dual nature of the labyrinth novel. The centaur is a hybrid male and female being, “[a] monstrous creature of Greek mythology, with a human head, arms and torso and the body and legs of a horse.”¹⁷⁰ Two families of centaur are accounted for in legend: those who represented “blind, ignorant, and brute force” and those who, like Chiron, epitomized “strength and nobility in the service of right.”¹⁷¹ So the victorious reader resembles Chiron, the noble and wise centaur, who “taught Achilles, Jason, and Asclepius,”¹⁷² and, as a friend of Herakles (Hercules), fought the other (evil) centaurs in battle.¹⁷³ After reading (walking) the labyrinthine novel successfully the female/male reader exhibits the double image represented by the centaur, half human and half beast (like the Minotaur, now redeemed) thus also half human and half divine (like the androgynous Cemî). Lezama suggests that the willing reader exercises his/her desire, the cognitive Eros in the struggle with the text, assimilates the knowledge in the text, and learns to counterbalance the elemental forces (difficulties) with spiritual strength. The triumphant accomplishment of the labyrinthine novel is akin to the sheer victory of virtue over vice.

¹⁶⁹ The Complete Bible Handbook 502, 513.

¹⁷⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 173.

¹⁷¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 173.

¹⁷² In Note 1 Morford and Lenardon 644.

¹⁷³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant 173.

P. Textual Self-awareness

Although the Kabbalah seems now central to the interpretation of Paradiso, we have seen how religious syncretism abounds in Lezama's writing. Lezama's comment that the reader is "punished and favored by two gods at once" implies that the reader is punished and redeemed. This is symbolic of the actions of the gods of Christianity and Paganism seen at parallel levels. The syncretism brings about the desired anthropophany, the "manifestation," after the reader emerges from the labyrinth of Paradiso into light, fully consecrated, reincarnated into ideal man and transformed into his original state, a creator in the perfect image of the Creator. The "labor from within" reiterates and re-enacts the cyclical process of life and death.

Cortázar and Lezama associate the anthropophany in the labyrinth of words with the continuous nature of creation and the unending creative process: "In this manner, the anthropophany that Cortázar [Lezama] proposes presupposes that man is incessantly created, that he is ceaselessly creator" ("así, la antropofanía que nos propone Cortázar, presupone que el hombre es creado incesantemente, que es creador incesantemente").¹⁷⁴ What is created is "being" and what is in the process of creating and being created is "not being," and because of the mirroring, becomes an incongruous congruence: "Being and not being form in man an absurd unity" ("existir y no existir forman en el hombre una cómica unicidad").¹⁷⁵ The process is such, says Lezama, that "[a] word takes on airs [is

¹⁷⁴ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1206.

¹⁷⁵ "Cortázar y el comienzo" 1206.

inspired] next to one that was not uttered, the body marches next to a non-existent corpse” (“una palabra humea al lado de una palabra que no fue dicha, el cuerpo marcha al lado de un cuerpo inexistente”).¹⁷⁶ “We gaze,” he continues, “and inside the vision a wall tumbles down, a point that rises on top of the vertical water spout is the stellar vault that collapses (“miramos y dentro de la visión un muro se derrumba, un punto que se levanta en lo alto de la agujeta del surtidor es la carpa estelar).”¹⁷⁷ This recurrent image refers to the caves with stalactites and stalagmites in Cuba and under Havana, united in a confluence of waters, just as the unconscious of readers is united by a confluence of water.

“The novel meditates upon the novel” (“La novela medita sobre la novela”) asserts Lezama of the labyrinthine novel.¹⁷⁸ Paradiso seems to meditate upon Rayuela, to be a “fiction about fiction.” Lezama conjures up a figure, a labyrinth, to meditate upon Rayuela. The labyrinthine “labrys” or “X” corresponds to the doubles in the squares of the hopscotch--two of the vertical doubles, followed by horizontal doubles make an “X” more like two “T”s.” In Rayuela’s arrangement, two or three parts with an alternative chapter sequence as outlined in the “table of instructions” parallels the arrangement of Paradiso: the whole is aware of its parts, because the parts are doubles (contrary images of the same center), as if the parts were the galleries we have seen: “aporetic images” because the “center” is not located; “Eleatic,” because the “center” has an underlying “unity;” “Bayezid,” because the “central” image underlying the whole is stretched. Both

¹⁷⁶ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1206.

¹⁷⁷ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1206.

authors deliberately make the “center” the “difficult.” Lezama’s disconnected structure of the labyrinthine novel (“planned chaos” of images) corresponds to completeness in the same way that a section of the labyrinth mirrors the fullness of the image. Lezama produces a “chiasmus” to prove the symmetry, balance, and completeness of the labyrinthine novel: “See from an extreme of the lens and the novel is surprised by a plenitude. [. . .] See from the other extreme of the lens and it is now a plenitude surprised by a novel” (“Mira por un extremo del anteojo y la novela es sorprendida [sic] por una plenitud. [. . .] Mira por el otro extremo del anteojo y es ahora una plenitud sorprendida por una novela”).¹⁷⁹

Lezama’s series of chiasmuses could be drawn as a series of “X’s” joined together by nexus’s, points of flashing light signaled by a unity of images into a figura. Lezama’s “X’s” make a nexus with other worlds. His labyrinth, journeying through a spiral of “X’s” gradually getting bigger because of the journeys into other worlds, becomes a mirror for the reader. Unlike Oliveira’s “defenestration” (jumping out of his limited “window”), this window/mirror pairs up possibilities and creates new associations which concur into yet a third, or more, confluence toward unity. For instance, the image of a hinge allows something joined to be opened or closed, allows discovery for the opener and “revelation” to the discovered. The “hinge” can be both the agent and the object disclosed. In the snail-shell labyrinth, the hinge occurs naturally: the shell can add shells by making “new” attached to the old shell. By facilitating the connection with other

¹⁷⁸ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

¹⁷⁹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1206.

possible worlds, associated, as it were, in the manner of shells in a snail, Lezama fabricates hinges out of confluences of sound, image, thought, pattern, so that his snail shell labyrinth shows the balance and symmetry similar to a progression of chiasmuses.

The shape of the letter “X” parallels the novel’s discourse. For example, in Rayuela, the sound of flowing water conjures up the image of La Maga-Talita’s unification. Lezama seizes the elegiac moment, Oliveira’s search of La Maga-Talita seen as at the search of the poet for union with the feminine (poetry), and parallels it with chiasmic poetic prose:

the image of the body and the body of the image coincide in the unity of the mirror. The image in the river and the image in the mirror, the mirror replaces the river, but we [as Oliveira] continue like errant ghosts after the unity of the image”

(“la imagen del cuerpo y el cuerpo de la imagen coinciden en la unidad del espejo. La imagen en el río y la imagen en el espejo, el espejo reemplazando al río, pero seguimos como fantasmas errantes tras la unidad de la imagen”).¹⁸⁰

The left side of the “X” in prose is “image” on top left and “body” on bottom left; on the right side of the “X” in prose is “body” on top right and “image” on bottom right; the complete “X” in prose is both the X and its reverse, as if seen in a mirror where the images are reversed. Lezama’s poetic “X” generates a bedazzling picture, the reflexive and the reflected, both so poised into the figure of chiasmus that the reader cannot tell whether the figure “X” opens a door for further meaning or closes a door in chaotic perception. The “X” becomes an “image in a river”--it goes into a confluence-- and the

¹⁸⁰ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1205.

same “X” occurs: reflexive and reflected. We readers caught in the “hinge” wander around “like errant ghosts” looking for the “hinge,” the point in the “X” where the images are joined. The reversed “X” proves that mirrors picture transformations of “the common and solemn” images of the human condition (“left” top and bottom of the “X”) into “the absurd and grotesque” (“right” top and bottom of the “X”), where the center of the “X” joins, balances and equalizes the two polarities.

Only a rupture will allow one to go beyond the bounds set by convention and the limits of the human being in order to discover and seize the possible other world(s). “Only the absurd will be able to conquer the Otherness” (“Sólo lo absurdo podrá vencer la otredad,”¹⁸¹ declares Lezama, as testimony to his and Cortázar’s laboring toward the formation of the structure of the “new” novel. Only with the absurd novel, that is, the reversal of the realistic novel could Cortázar and Lezama represent the anthropophany that they wanted. Only the chiasmic labyrinthine structure permits the novelistic representation of the serious-smiling perspective for the attainment of the anthropophany. Their use of the chiasmus in the design of their novels demonstrates that creativity is the result of imaging, of managing, and evenly distributing the tension and dynamics of all forces of creation in order to produce a balanced output. If their final artistic objective is the search for balance and symmetry, then, because of its dual nature, the labyrinth is most befitting as a symbol and paradigm of the new novel centered on that search. In synthesis, the labyrinth is an instrument composed of corresponding parts and counterbalancing virtues that qualify it as uniquely appropriate for the representation of the tension between good and evil, chaos and order, reason and emotion that humans experience in their process of becoming.

¹⁸¹ “Cortázar y el comienzo” 1202.

To conclude this chapter, I want to say that my exegesis of the method represented in Paradiso, extracted from Lezama's essay on Cortázar, more than proves both authors' comprehensive knowledge of the labyrinth or hopscotch as models for "Paradiso or Rayuela. The "other novel," the labyrinth novel, orchestrates the narrative and descriptive representation of the ordering of chaos, the reintegration of fragments, the return of the human being to his/her whole and holy origin, the recovery of the lost Paradise. The labyrinth enables Lezama and Cortázar to render a profound vision of the process where the full manifestation of the human being is set in motion in all its magnificence. For Lezama "the center of paradise is the novel: it organizes the chaos, it puts it in our hands so that we can sense it" ("el centro del paraíso es la novela: ella ordena el caos, ella lo tiende bajo nuestras manos para que podamos acariciarlo").¹⁸²

Lezama is an artificer of a whole body of works. I would call them all together "domus Daedali," the house of Daedalus. Rayuela's many achievements notwithstanding, this study demonstrates that Paradiso, being the quintessential other labyrinthine novel of its era, ought to be a model for the serious, contemporary Hispanic novel for it reincarnates many Old Worlds in the "New."

¹⁸² "Interrogando a JLL" Recopilación de textos ed. Simón 24-25.

CONCLUSIONS. LEZAMA AT THE CROSSROADS

The Preamble to this dissertation explains how the search for the “difficult” in Lezama’s every endeavor, particularly in his novel Paradiso, results in an assemblage of knowledge characteristic of an encyclopedia or encyclopedic narrative of achievement. Lezama attains this confluence of knowledge through the agency of the Cognitive Eros and the medium of poetry (poetic prose). Indeed, Paradiso testifies to Lezama’s faith in the potential of the image of poetry (poetic prose) as the basis for the summation and diffusion of all possible knowledge. The labyrinth is a primordial image of communication with the divinity, a symbol of initiation and of mythical and legendary quests. Lezama’s opportune use in Paradiso of the labyrinth metaphor for the acquisition, process and product of extant knowledge for the attainment of knowledge of the beyond is thought to be providential. Because Paradiso interprets “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image” its message is oracular in nature; its structure, language and style signal the revelation of wisdom. Thus the triangle of knowledge, labyrinth, and Paradiso represents a unity-totality comprising Lezama’s circle of knowledge for spiritual enlightenment and divine inspiration. Because Paradiso layers the epic of the soul in spiritual ascension toward the Highest Good over the epic of the artist (Cemí) in poetic ascension, the circle of knowledge, labyrinth and Paradiso represents the potential for revelation through Logos/Word/the poetic word. Paradiso enacts Lezama’s belief in the poet’s ability to attain and disclose knowledge of the beyond toward the Highest Good,

the poet's consecration as free from all contamination of disease, evil, sin; and his transformation into the being for resurrection and the recovery of the lost Paradise.

Chapter One. Toward a Comprehension beyond Reason, has three sections. Section One. Overview of Lezama and His Works as Labyrinths, takes Paradiso to be mythic, to be labyrinthine in the manner of Daedalus' artifice, Theseus' quest, Aeneas' descent, and Dante's pilgrimage. Critical studies demonstrate that Lezama gives a broader range of possibility to the labyrinth metaphor. The section identifies the need to examine the ancient history (archaeology) and uses (anthropology) of the labyrinth in order to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of Lezama's concept. Consequently, the section includes fundamental details of the labyrinth from its origins to two versions of the Daedalian labyrinth myth.

Section Two. The Method of this Dissertation, briefly explains the paradox inherent in the structure of Paradiso: how the text narrates by way of description, and how it describes by way of circuitousness and circumlocution or digression. The reader is literally in a literary labyrinth. "Labyrinthus" means "labor" from "within" (Lat. "intus"); we readers must find an ingeniousness or cleverness (Daedalus means "ingenious" and Lezama's artifice is an "ingenious" accomplishment needing a high intellectual capacity) to put chaos in order and to find our way out of the labyrinthine text. The section explains how "ingenious" artificers leave "clues," threads of signs and hints intermingled in the architecture and literary artifice; and how the poet uses metaphor, image, symbol and myth to create a poetic network that, in Lezama's own words, is capable of capturing the transitoriness and the animism of inert things. Lezama's faith is such that the poetic

being, because of his/her ability to reproduce and create can capture the splendor of the form. Subsequently, the figural relationship between “splendor” and “Paradiso” leads us to the discovery of a scriptural method of interpretation enunciated in the Zohar or The Book of Splendor with the acronym pardes that stands for Paradise/Paradiso. The Zohar prescribes a fourfold exegetical method for interpreting a scriptural text--literal, moral, allegorical, mystical. Lezama’s Paradiso portrays a paradox: the title and higher content of the novel convey the appearance of sacred Scripture yet the text is a profane fiction. Because the hybrid text involves the supernatural, religious belief and ritual, and truth (exaggerated or not), Lezama proposes the compound interpretive method of the labyrinth based on myth, philosophy, and spiritual enlightenment. This plus the wholeness and universality inherent in the symbolism of the four in pardes lead to the infinite potential for interpretation of the text, replicated by unlimited portals of light, the boundless illumination in the path toward totality and completion in union with God.

After a brief summary of the content, the section identifies the double argument in Paradiso’s poetic narrative. The roundabout path or movement in the literary labyrinth threads two seemingly disjointed series of outwardly opposing narratives: a “modern surface narrative” and a parallel underlying narrative, covering the surface narrative with multiple images from the antiquity of the Old World. The surface narrative is a linear circuit that corresponds to the unicursal model of the labyrinths, whereas the covering narrative conforms to the multicursal labyrinth model, offering various storylines that leave the reader with choices and various topics for interpretation in the reading experience. Both unicursal and multicursal labyrinthine models of the text are

deliberately arranged in a “planned chaos” of disjointed images and suspended narrative parts. To repeat, these structures are “difficult.” With work from within, however, the reader’s “flash” of insight begins to make a “new” sense out of the chaos. He/she uses the clue or ball of thread that Lezama or his narrator provides (in the manner that Daedalus gave Ariadne a clue to guide Theseus out of the labyrinth) to construe meaning out of a whole labyrinth of disjointed parts, and to discover knowledge at the constantly displaced or uncertain center of the seeming chaos. Again, Lezama expresses this process in the novel as “the mysterious labyrinth of the cognitive image,” which establishes the correspondence “labyrinth = knowledge = Paradiso.”

Section Three. Awakening the New Senses, examines Lezama’s encouragement to develop “new” senses in order to read “new” novels. “New senses” imply the development of new uses of the senses, a new faculty of perception or sensation (intuition), a new cognition (new knowledge, new consciousness), a new imagination. New senses are needed because, Lezama says, Paradiso is to be comprehended beyond reason. It introduces the “new” sense that Cemí’s New World search is to find words to express his Cuban “faith,” a belief system based upon Old World antiquity. The “new” New World theology combines indigenous Cuban belief with Old World belief. The linear narration is layered with Old World “aporiai” (doubts, opposed images) and requires “new” sense because the “new” theology is mythographic, based upon primitive Greek, Latin and indigenous myths and rituals. Cemí tries to find words to articulate this question: How is Cuba “Paradise”? Following his surface journey, articulated in Old World theological images, we readers are asked to find a “new” faith at the end of

Paradiso, recognized as an “anthropophany” (the manifestation of mankind-as-Christ, as a divinity to the Old World). To create this “new sense,” again we follow the mythographic method suggested by the author in his definition of poetry: “Poetry is a snail-shell in a rectangle of water.” Thus as readers, like the ants used by Daedalus to take the thread from the beginning of the snail shell (labyrinth) to the center/end, we follow because we are imitating Cemí (his name means “honey”) and the thread leads to wisdom--“honey”--on the “Other Side” of the novel, “Paradise” (“the land of milk and honey”). We’re looking for the “wisdom” in “anthropophany,” the revelation of “new” mankind, of higher knowledge to man.

Chapter Two. Cognitive Images: Confluence, Androgyne and Figure, takes up the process used by the “ingenious” Lezama to plan the “difficult:” the process of writing and arranging the “planned chaos” of images we encounter. We follow the method Lezama suggests: be patient with the disjunction; look for confluence of disjointed images; recognize how unity (androgyne) comes from confluent images to a figure that signifies meaning “beyond the limits,” while acquiring the “new” senses for “new” reading. The “new” sense is difficult--one must be patient with disjunction, look for disconnected images flowing together, look for the unity in confluence, look for the figure in the unity, look for the significance of the figure beyond the text of Paradiso. The discussion progresses toward the “new” faith: Cuba is the “new” Paradise, political events notwithstanding. The reader, like Cemí (meaning “honey”) acquires a breadth in the “new” reading skills (“senses”) because he has acquired “wisdom” looking for the “new” island in the middle of the sea, Cuba, the “land of “milk and honey.”

Section One: Confluence, explains how in Lezama's universe there is a flowing together of various streams of thought, a union of word-forms or forms of expression originally running distinct or in different courses. The centripetal force of the labyrinth attracts everything toward the center while the centrifugal force moves everything away from the center into new configurations of images. The section offers various images of confluence: the cleansing ritual of the young Cemí and the multiple meanings of "Paradiso/Paradise," for instance. It explains how the labyrinth, denoted by the image of the labrys or double-axe and the rhetorical image of the chiasmus symbolize the union or copula needed for the diffusion of new images. It portrays the joining of knowledge with mirror at the center and provides samples of chiasmus, syncretism, and the encyclopedia as mirror of the world, among others, to illustrate how the new configurations flow forth from the chaotic confluence of multiple images in the mind of the poet.

Section Two: Androgyne or Oneness, explains the principle of "the Two in the One," how the unity of the male (andro-) and the female (gyne) is an archetype for the original pattern of oneness, wholeness, completeness or totality, before any separation was made. Adam and Eve in "one flesh" represent the confluence of opposites conjoined by a copula. The section discusses the portrayal of the discovery of Eros in homosexual acts and interprets them as acts performed by the female and male parts of one being, which replicate the copulative nature of the primordial Androgyne. Thus the acts are innocent because they precede the instance of differentiation. The section offers the example of the copula between Fronesis and Lucía as a creative act whose consummation is mediated by the androgynous ouroboros in the form of a circular piece of fabric that

Fronesis uses to cover up the mortality inherent in the image of the “toothed vagina” that he envisions in Lucía. The teeth signal the knowledge that the act replicates Adam and Eve’s fall from Eden but the use of the androgynous ouroboros implies the higher knowledge that the act is innocent because it is necessary for creation and resurrection (“the hypertelia of immortality”) to occur. Other examples of androgynous images include Rialta as mother and father; the mystic copulation between Cemí and Licario at the end of the novel; and Cuba as an androgynous figure made up of mountains and caves, stalactites and stalagmites.

Section Three: Figure and Revelation, explains that “figure” means the image or likeness of an abstract idea or concrete thing that flows from knowledge and is revelatory of knowledge. Yet the interpretation regains the etymology of the Latin figura to signal the revelatory sense that Lezama used. This figura foreshadows a future event, person or thing, based on the prophetic annunciation and figural interpretation of Scripture by the Christian Church Fathers. The language of Paradiso shapes a figura meant to define, identify and serve as the foundation for the nation and the author. In Lezama the word is a visible figura of language that makes possible the shaping of the labyrinth-text.

Lezama’s figurae for revelation discussed in this section include the hand which prefigures the night that communicates knowledge of “the Other” and the beyond, which in turn prefigure the manuscript Paradiso. The city as figura focuses on the streets of the Colonial section of Havana, La Habana Vieja whose corners are like silent branches of the Pythagorean bivia --the forking paths of the streets are in the shape of the Y that signifies choice. An instance of choice of streets prefigures Cemí taking the right path

heading to the garden or field of poetry, or the left, the path of error and danger of chaotic disorder in the streets. Cemí's inherited Basque language prefigures his poetry as pneumatic speech insufflated with the breath of the Holy Spirit. Other figural interpretation samples deal with Cemí's poetry, Delphi-Foción, and the dream-sequence in Paradiso XII.

Chapter Three. Lezama's Labyrinth and the Other Novel, expands the "mythic method," outlined in Lezama's essay on Rayuela. We parallel this method to specific passages in Paradiso to understand--at last-- why this "new" novel is "difficult." Lezama himself suggested the labyrinth method to unravel the "difficult" in his novel in the essay he wrote on the other "new" novel, Rayuela (Hopscotch). That "difficult" narrative, like his, skips from one scene to another, presents opposites without explanation, shows no continuous sequence of events, but does follow the figure in the title, "hopscotch." Lezama associates the "hopscotch method" of interpreting the difficult narrative with a "mythic method." His essay on Rayuela introduces this method in Paradiso: interpret Paradiso as a literary labyrinth, a multicursal or circuitous figure with multiple paths where the "direction of movement is constantly shifting, now here, now there, as the wanderer's choices and the maze's paths lead him."¹ But this literary labyrinth represents a clash of paradigms in that it is also linear or unicursal, like Lezama's snail-shell ("caracol") whose "structural basis is a single path, twisting and turning to the point of

¹ Doob, The Idea of the Labyrinth 46.

desperation but entailing no dead ends or choices between paths.”² Such twofold paradigm explains the meanderings of Theseus toward the Minotaur, Virgil and Dante toward a “Paradise,” Cemí toward Oppiano Licario and toward Paradise as the summa of poetry or knowledge. This dissertation comprises the interpretation of the “difficult” Paradiso with the double difficult method of the literary labyrinth.

We start with the “thread” used to get in and out of the text-as-snail-shell (labyrinth), as it were, the stone called the “Delphic Library.” We use the “thread-stone” to learn “anthropophany” at the end, the “manifestation” (“epi-‘phany’”) of what it is to be human (“anthropo-”), but human as the original “image of God,” the Adam-Eve humanness. It is “desire to know” that pushes us to continue--Lezama’s “cognitive Eros-- to the “fulguration of nexus.” The “nexus” between “Delphic” and “anthropophany” of ourselves occurs when we, like Daedalus, fly “in our imaginations” out of Cuba to learn the “Delphic Library” and bring it back to Cuba, in order to understand and articulate our “identity” (Cemí) or “new” senses. While there in the Old World, we see how Europeans as “West” united with Asians as “East” in language and culture, and finally understand the “difficult” posed by our author’s “ingenious” labyrinth--Cemí and we are learning how the “central” Delphic Library is stretched, like a central image is stretched. The “difficult” is that we and Cemí must find how and why an image is “central,” and having discovered the centrality by intuition (“nexus,” or “thread” or “stone” near Library), stretch the image to include other Old World, Eastern World, New World figurations. So we have resolved the “Difficult” and begin to look for the “Center of the Labyrinth,”

² Doob 48.

located in stretched “Aporetic Galleries” of images and Eleatic Galleries of unity – the unity of images. Next we use Lezama’s “Bayezid Test” to determine whether the one image is “central.” If it is not, then we return to “Delphic Library” and “Paideuma” (basic education in the “new senses”), and try again, until we can “sense” the centrality of the image in our (Cemí’s) descent into our memory or unconscious. This Orphic unity will lead Cemí to express himself in w(W)ords and we to read with a “new” understanding, a “wisdom” making “manifest” (“anthropophany”) our membership in a society at one and the same time “Cuban” and “cosmopolitan”--belonging to the “city” (Gk. polis) of the world (cosmos). We can think “beyond the text” of Paradiso.

Thus the chapter explains the myth of Daedalus underlying the “mythic method.” The circuitousness of Daedalus’ artifice covers and underlies the linearity of Paradiso’s surface plot, Cemí’s replacement of a lost father with a “new” faith, a “new w(W)ord to express his Cubanness (“search for the w(W)or(l)d”). We begin to interpret the confusion of linearity and circuitous covering by means of a stone near the “Delphic Library” (not the stone that is thrown into the squares of the hopscotch before the player hops; but the stone which houses the Oracle and Library) and move on to a labyrinthine course which Lezama envisioned variously as “Paideuma,” “Paideia,” “Encyclopaideia,” or “Delphic Course,” an obvious literary education. We use the stone not like “hopscotch” but like pilgrims seeking the concretion of an oracle at Delphi and going, as it were, through a New World labyrinth imitative of Old World labyrinths (Daedalus, Virgil, Dante). “Delphic Course” tells us politely that we do not know how to read; at any rate, read “new” novels. We, like Cemí, have lost the fathers who usually tell us about the past and

the Old World. We want an identity, a nationality, a sense that we are “new,” and we want to write about the process of discovery of our experience. We’re in a quandary--a labyrinth, at the beginning. At the end, like Cemí, we have found the father substitute who helps us (Oppiano Licario), and we do finally learn how to write, as if our “Paradise” were Cemí’s--transformed with images and thoughts from the Old World which help us to describe our “Cuba” and “Cubanness.”

We think beyond the text at this point in the conclusions and meditate on Lezama’s legacy to the universal reader. His legacy has to do with the thread or process linking “quandary” to “identity,” the thread called the “Delphic Course” that defines and identifies the reader as an accomplished interpreter of texts. Lezama explains the processes of his “mythic method” through his Delphic Course, a literary orientation that he systematized for Cuban intellectuals based on the principle of oracular knowledge in which each book is considered as a form of revelation.³ The first stage of the course is “opening reading aloud”--opening of a speech sound or articulation (“Obertura palatal”) to identify and develop the sense of “taste” (“gustación), the awakening of the palate for curiosity for the books that leave a creative memory always searching for a response. The second stage is the “Delphic Gallery (“Galería délfica”) or Delphic Course itself “the “study in detail of the history of culture” (“estudio en detalle de la historia de la cultura”),

³ See the articles by José Pratts Sariol and Manuel Pereira on “El curso délfico” indicated in Chapter One Note 7.

followed by the stage that he calls “of Eleatic aporias” (“de las aporias eleáticas”) represented in literature by games (“juegos”) between culture and intelligence.⁴

In Paradiso Cemí follows the Delphic course in his own way, attending morning lectures in the University, studying and reading all afternoon in the library. He also receives the course from Oppiano “beyond the text,” as Editabunda attests: “Licario transmitted to Cemí knowledge that he called Delphic Course” (“Licario le transmitió a Cemí un conocer que él llamaba curso délfico”).⁵ In Oppiano Licario Lezama outlines the three steps of Oppiano’s “Curso Délfico” through Editabunda’s speech to Fronesis: The first stage or palatal aperture opens a continuous, insatiable curiosity for books that give the reader the grace of wisdom by making them one’s own. The second stage comprises the “transmutative oven” or “stomach for knowledge,” the transformative process that gives the creative assimilation of books germinative powers. The third stage of reading involves passing from the transmutative oven to an aporetic and Eleatic time, a stage that has to do with logic and games of time and space. This stage is understood as achieving a poetic syllogism where two images that undergo a chance encounter or copula engender a third unknown image. Finally, the aim of the Delphic Course is not to accumulate but to extract the essence of knowledge transmitted by generations through the written word, so that the transformation achieved with knowledge can lead us to the revelation that

⁴ JLL, cited in González Cruz Diccionario 102, my translation.

⁵ JLL Oppiano Licario IX, ed. César López. (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989) 425, my translation.

through the exercise of creative assimilation the potential for creation is alive in ourselves.⁶

In summary, Lezama's Paradiso represents an archive of civilization at a critical time in Cuba's history. It is an encyclopedic narrative of identity, formation, and summation at the intellectual and cultural level of the individual and society. Lezama develops and establishes his enterprise for the performance and dissemination of an ideal system of culture and edification of the individual and society based on Paideuma, Paideia and the Delphic Course. He embodies and moves a crusade for the reinstitution and restoration of Cuba as a bridge to cultural exchange and development between the Old World and the New World.

These threads conclude my dissertation on the "difficult" in Paradiso. I'm sure I have not discussed many things I could have. I have missed many "fulgurations of nexus." I could repeat the "Delphic Course" many times and still not know much about Cuban identity revealed in cosmopolitan "anthropophany." Though somewhat illiterate and still confused, I have nevertheless been through Paradiso. I've had enough wandering and--even more difficulty--finding the right words to explain what I have concluded. Having reached the end, I shall again do as Lezama says in the last two words of Paradiso, "Let us begin" ("Podemos empezar").

⁶ Oppiano Licario IX 425-430, my translation.

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Vita

Gloria del Carmen Díaz grew up in Central America. She made her home in the US in the seventies and since then divided her occupation between academia and industry while being involved in the community. She enjoyed diverse activities, places, and cultures and studied here and abroad. She acquired professional practice in marketing, training, banking, and foreign language education. In the course of her graduate studies she participated in student leadership, gave national and international conferences, co-edited student journals, and published some of her work. She has taught Spanish at the college level for eighteen years.

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