SEXUAL DEVIATIONS IN JOSÉ LEZAMA LIMA'S novel *Paradiso* are represented as dead ends from which it is impossible to issue to the golden region of poetry, the space of Gnosis, where creation, death and resurrection can occur. The concept of the golden region is explained in Chapter IX as follows: "La compenetración entre la fijeza estelar y las incesantes mutaciones de las profundidades marinas contribuyen a formar una región dorada para un hombre que resiste todas las posibilidades del azar con una inmensa sabiduría." Reaching this golden region is both an ethic and aesthetic goal for Cemí, since in Lezama's view ethics and aesthetics are inseparable. Homosexuality with madness and suicide (the three are associated throughout *Paradiso*) are seen as the most dangerous detours faced by Cemí in his years of poetic apprenticeship.

Since the publication of *Paradiso* in 1966, the significance of homosexuality in the novel has elicited polemics where both extraliterary and critical concerns have been addressed. However, the curious connection made in the novel between madness and homosexuality has yet to be examined in the context of Lezama's philosophical system in *Paradiso*. This is the problem I will attempt to elucidate.
Enrique Lihn’s “Paradiso, novela y homosexualidad” argues convincingly for the ambivalent horror and fascination that the sin contra natura exerts on the “casto e inocuo voyeur, Cemí” and Lezama himself. Ambivalence notwithstanding, Lihn correctly assigns a negative value to homosexuality in the novel: “el discurso valorativo de Paradiso, ...y la historia (el destino de Foción entre otros) condenan y castigan a la homosexualidad, intentan quizá exorcizarla, le contraponen ‘una categoría superior al sexo’, la androginia perfecta y creadora de Cemí,” and sees the hesychastic rhythm achieved in the realm of androgyny by the young artist at the conclusion of the novel as an antidote to homosexuality.

It is now generally accepted that Cemí, Fronesis and Foción, besides being metaphors that became characters (as Lezama has explained) are indeed aspects of one personality. Thus in this triad of friendship, Fronesis, whose name in Greek, phronesis, meaning “prudence” aludes to the prime virtue of the Stoics, represents order, a life guided by a telos, heterosexual intercourse, and an expansive or diastaltic style. Foción embodies chaos, a life without a telos, homosexual intercourse and a contracting or systaltic style. Cemí, as we have already seen, incorporates the essential aspects of Foción and Fronesis, chaos and order in a life guided by hypertelia, androgyny and characterized by an appeasing or hesychastic style.

I believe that the three friends are also echoed by the three objects Foción always describes when someone visits his room: the bronze statuette of Narcissus (Foción), the flute player on a Greek vase (Fronesis), and a statuette of Lao-tse, “el viejo sabio niño” riding a buffalo (Cemí). Foción defines or characterizes each one of the three objects in the following manner:

Señalaba el Narciso y decía: “La imagen de la imagen, la nada.”
Señalaba el aprendizaje del adolescente griego, y decía: “El deseo que conoce, el conocimiento por el hilo continuo del sonido de los infiernos.” Parecía después que le daba una pequeña palmada en las ancas del búfalo montado por Lao-tse y decía: “El huevo empolla en el espacio vacío.” (pp. 410-411)
Significantly only Lao-tse, who symbolizes Cemí, survives the fury of the red-haired boy: “Dentro del cuarto de Foción, el búfalo, tripulado por el maestro del vacío del cielo silencioso, se sintió de nuevo dueño de la montaña y del lago y del oeste impulsado por el sonido de las colgadas placas de nefrita, la piedra sonora” (p. 415). The sound of the nephrite chimes seems to be an allusion to the hesychastic rhythm, the rhythm of androgyny and poetic self-sufficiency.  

The leading paradigm of madness in Paradiso is Foción, who loses his reason (his logos) because of his deviant eros, and particularly because of his frustrated desire for Fronesis. Cemí encounters Foción at the very moment of his mental crisis which is precipitated by the realization that the mother of the red-haired boy has been encouraging Foción's homosexual relationship with her son in order to avert a greater evil, her son's incestuous advances. Foción remarks: “Me rogó que buscara a su hijo, ...Le parecía normal que su hijo se abandonase al Eros de los griegos, con tal de que no fuera monstruosamente incestuoso,” and adds with bitterness: “Lo único que hace siempre el homosexualismo, ...es evitar un mal mayor, ...no me he suicidado, pero creo que me he vuelto loco” (p. 495). When Cemí next sees his friend, Foción is in the ward for mental patients at the same hospital where Augusta, Cemí’s grandmother, is dying:

Al lado del álamo, en el jardín del pabellón de los desazonados, 
vio un hombre joven con un uniforme blanco, describiendo incen-
santes círculos alrededor del álamo aterrador por una raíz cui-
dada. Era Foción. Volvía en sus círculos una y otra vez como si el álamo fuera su Dios y su destino. (p. 518)

Cemí has no difficulty interpreting Foción’s inexorable cir-
cling of the tree. The poplar is Fronesis, who is both Foción's 
God (Logos) and destination (telos): “Cemí supo de súbito 
que el árbol para Foción, regado por sus incensantes y enlo-
quecidos paseos circulares, era Fronesis” (p. 519). Cemí’s 
grandmother dies the next day, having opened her eyes for 
the last time the previous night during an electric storm. Dur-
ing that storm the poplar is struck by lightning, and Cemí 
discovers after his grandmother expires that Foción is gone:
"El rayo que había destruido el árbol había liberado a Foción de la adoración de su eternidad circular" (p. 520).

The revelation of Foción’s fate and liberation acquires the nature of a warning for Cemí, particularly in the context of his last conversation with Augusta. This conversation re-enacts the famous scene of Chapter IX where Cemí’s mother consecrates him to the poetic search that will earn him salvation and differentiates between the danger undertaken by the sick, a danger without epiphany and the necessary danger that will lead to transfiguration (pp. 320-322). On her deathbed, Augusta approvingly marks Cemí’s progress, and contrasts his gift for observing “ese ritmo que hace el cumplimiento, el cumplimiento de lo que desconocemos, pero que, ...nos ha sido dictado como el signo principal de nuestro vivir” (p. 518), with the sterility of persons who disrupt, “favorecen el vacío” (p. 517), persons like Foción.

The association of madness with sexual deviance and ceaseless circular movement drawn by Foción’s fate is both prefigured and repeated in other episodes of Paradiso, but nowhere with the richness of symbolism found in the story of Godofredo el Diablo told by Frónesis to Cemí at the end of Chapter VIII. As in the case of the passage that we have just examined, the story itself gains in significance from the context in which it is told, Cemí’s first private conversation with Frónesis. The story of Godofredo’s loss of reason comes to complete the triad, filling the future place of Foción, whom Cemí has not yet met. Godofredo’s beauty is immediately described as being dominated by a fury similar to that of the Tibetan bear, also known as the Chinese demon, “que describe incesantes círculos, como si se fuera a morder a sí mismo” (p. 302). This fury already foreshadows Foción’s circling of the poplar.

Godofredo’s sexual deviance (voyeurism) and his madness in turn reflect those of Father Eufrasio whose study of concupiscence in St. Paul, “la cópula sin placer, le había tomado todo el tuétano, doblegándole la razón” (p. 305). The priest’s sexual obsession, “Cómo lograr en el encuentro amoroso la lejanía del otro cuerpo y cómo extraer el salto de la energía suprema del gemido del dolor más que de toda inefabilidad
placentera, le daban vueltas como un torniquete que se anillase en el espacio, rodeado de grandes vultúridos” (p. 305), is also described by a circular movement, the turning of the tourniquet which is both the symbol of his madness and the prosaic instrument of his deviant eroticism.

Godofredo secretly observes Father Eufrasio exercising his mania with Fileba, and causes her husband’s suicide by making him witness the act. While fleeing from the dreadful results of his voyeuristic intrigues, Godofredo is blinded in one eye by one of the snake-like vines, “se curvaban como serpientes verticalizadas,” which we are told, “le hizo justicia mayor, retrocedió, tomó impulso y le grabó una cruz en el ojo derecho, en el ojo del canon” (p. 309). It is then that the red-haired Godofredo also loses his reason: “Sus caminatas describen inmensos círculos indetenibles, cuyos radios zigzaguean como la descarga de un rayo” (p. 309).

This story of punished voyeurism, which seems to be a warning directed at the innocuous voyeur, Cemi, contains all the topoi which Lezama links to sexual deviance in Paradiso. The deviant eroticism of Godofredo and Father Eufrasio is linked to their madness and to the suicide of Fileba’s husband. Godofredo’s circular walks, the image of the thunderbolt, and Godofredo’s red hair, which foreshadows that of the incestuous red-haired boy, all forecast the episode of Focion’s madness. The three alternatives Focion outlines in the café: suicide, homosexuality and madness are already present in the story of Godofredo, although dispersed among several characters.

Upon closer examination the allusion to the canonical eye in the story of Godofredo, which on the surface appears to be an impertinent digression, reveals another important nexus. The significance of the “ojo del canon” is partially explained in the story itself:

El ojo de nublo era el derecho, el que los teólogos llaman el ojo del canon, pues al que le faltaba no podía leer los libros sagrados en el sacrificio. El que no tuviese ese ojo jamás podría ser sacerdote. Parecía como si inconscientemente Godofredo supiese el valor intrínseco que los cánones le dan a ese ojo, pues se conten-taba con ser Godofredo el Diablo. (p. 302)
Beyond the fact that the loss of his eye makes him an outcast and leads him to opt for evil, there is an additional sexual significance to Godofredo's blinding. Since he is a voyeur, his eye can be considered to be his sexual organ and his blinding may be seen as a symbolic castration. The sexual meaning of the loss of the canonical eye is reinforced when we recall that canon law traditionally proscribed a man who "caret aliqua membrorum" from holy orders.  

In Paradiso, as we shall see, homosexuality is associated with castration (p. 344), blindness (p. 492) and with exclusion from the "priesthood" which leads to poetry and salvation. This exclusion of homosexuals and eunuchs from Paradise and/or Resurrection, based on St. Thomas Aquinas's characterization of homosexuality as a sin of bestiality rather than lust, is discussed by Cemí in his answer to Foción's defense of homosexuality in Chapter IX (pp. 376-378). Godofredo's tale incorporates all the major potential dangers which Cemí must overcome in order to achieve the hesychastic rhythm.

The endless circling of Foción, Godofredo el Diablo, and Father Eufrasio, and the snake-like vine that pierces Godofredo's eye recall one of Lezama's favorite topoi, the ourobos, the snake that swallows its own tail. In fact the first description of Godofredo is an allusion to the ourobos: "como si se fuera a morder a sí mismo" (p. 302). In the context of Lezama's novel, the ourobos signifies both the sin contra natura and its punishment. Foción's etymological games with the name of Anubis (the jackal-headed god who conducts the dead in the Egyptian underworld) shortly before losing his reason, reveal both the meaning of Godofredo's blind eye and the new meaning Lezama attaches to the ourobos. Foción describes the anus as the eye of Anubis by playing on the pun: ano/Anobis. He then characterizes it as a blind eye, and sodomy as "la anía [pun on ano and manía] del dios Anubis, que quiere guiar donde no hay caminos, que ofrece lo alto del cuerpo inferior, el ano, el anillo de Saturno, en el valle de los muertos" (p. 492). Sodomy, then, recreates the symbolic gesture of the ourobos; "el serpentin intestinal" (p. 343) described in the Leregas — Baena Albornoz episode of Chapter IX swallows "la serpiente fàlica" (p. 493) of the gods who ac-
company Anubis in Chapter XI.

In order to transcend the merely physical analogy between the sin *contra natura* and the *ouroboros* and understand the new philosophical significance that Lezama attaches to this ancient symbol, we must first note two relevant stages in its genealogy: its meaning in Gnostic systems and in Alchemy. In the Gnostic systems, the snake had the opposite symbolism that it has in the Judeo-Christian system:

Gnostic snake worshippers, the Ophites...radically reinterpreted Genesis. In their view the snake was divine because he wanted to enlighten mankind with the knowledge of good and evil and give them eternal life, while God...wished to keep men earth-bound and ignorant.\(^1\)

From this snake of the Ophites, giver of eternal life and knowledge, we go to the *ouroboros* as interpreted by the Alchemists. The tail-eating serpent "has no beginning and no end; it devours itself and renews itself. Life and death, creation and destruction, are an unending circular process; out of the one comes the other."\(^2\) In their imagery, the alchemists, unlike the Ophites, dwell both on the positive and negative aspects of serpents: "Serpents (or toads and dragons, which have the same associations) represent base matter, which must be 'killed.' They are 'venomous' and 'evil', but at the same time carry the Philosopher's stone within."\(^3\) The goal of all alchemists is to find the Philosopher's stone and extract it from base matter. Thus for the alchemists the *ouroboros* is a symbol of the eternal cycle of life and death.

In Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* published in 1618 we find an alchemical variation of the *ouroboros*.\(^4\) In this case the cycle of life and death is represented by a woman nursing a poisonous toad. She then sickens and dies so that the toad, who is seen as her son, may live. This emblem leads us back to *Paradiso* where Focion enlists a similar scenario in order to urge the acceptance of homosexuality:

*Cuando Electra creyó que había parido un dragón, vio que el monstruo lloraba porque quería ser lactado; sin vacilaciones le dá*
su pecho, saliendo después la leche mezclada con la sangre. Aunque había parido un monstruo, cosa que tendría que desconcertarla, sabía que su respuesta tenía que ser no dejarlo morir de hambre, pues la grandeza del hombre consiste en que puede asimilar lo que le es desconocido. (p. 348)

Foción’s literary allusion (or Lezama’s) has been radically altered both in content and interpretation to suit the needs of the moment. It is Clytemnestra who in Aeschylus’s “The Libation Bearers” dreams that she gives birth to a snake, suckles it and is horrified when it draws blood with the milk. Orestes, told about the dream, interprets it as a prophecy:

But I pray to the earth and to my father’s grave that this dream is for me and that I will succeed. See, I divine it, and it coheres all in one piece. If this snake came out of the same place whence I came, if she wrapped it in robes, as she wrapped me, and if its jaws gaped wide around the breast that suckled me, and if it stained the intimate milk with an outburst of blood, so that for fright and pain she cried aloud, it follows then, that as she nursed this hideous thing of prophecy, she must be cruelly murdered. I turn snake to kill her. This is what the dream portends.¹⁹

For Aeschylus the nursing snake is a symbol of the horror of matricide, whereas for Foción the nursing dragon signifies the greatness of the human race, its ability to assimilate the unknown. The symbolism attached by Foción to the dragon is diametrically opposed to the role played by the dragon in Cemi’s (and Lezama’s) conception of artistic creation as it is suggested in the description of Rialta’s fibroma at the end of Chapter X, where the dangerous proliferation of the cells becomes an emblem of Lezama’s own style in Paradiso.²⁰ Foción associates the dragon with homosexuality, but for Lezama all sex contra natura falls under the aegis of the ouroboros.

Within Lezama’s system of imagery, therefore, the tail-eating snake is not seen as the ultimate symbol of the creative process, since the eternal cycle of life and destruction posited by the ouroboros (a concept borrowed by the alchemists from the Stoic doctrine of the conflagration)²¹ is essentially inimical
to Lezama’s fundamental, if heterodox, Christianity. The progress of the poet in life must, like Christian history, have a moment of rupture like the Parousia, it must reach a stage of transfiguration. This is why for Cemí and Lezama, the ouroboros which is atelic (goal-less) is also atelos (incomplete, imperfect), and must be destroyed, not so that it can return in the same form, but rather in order to precipitate a necessary metamorphosis. The snake must be transfigured into a hybrid, the dragon which here becomes the symbol of hypertelitia, of resurrection:

en los cuerpos que logra la imaginación, hay que destruir el elemento serpiente para dar paso al elemento dragón, un organismo que está hecho para devorarse en el círculo, tiene que destruirse para que irrumpa una nueva bestia, surgiendo del lago sulfúrico, pidiéndole prestadas sus garras a los grandes vultúridos y su cráneo al can tricéfalo que cuida las moradas subterráneas. (p. 453)

To the contracting or systaltic rhythm of homosexuality, the ouroboros, Lezama opposes the tranquility of the hesychastic rhythm of androgyny, the dragon. This all-encompassing rhythm is the goal of Cemí’s poetic apprenticeship, and in the often quoted end of Chapter XIII, Oppiano Licario verifies Cemí’s achievement: “Veo...que ha pasado del estilo sistáltico, o de las pasiones tumultuosas, al estilo hesicástico, o del equilibrio anímico, en muy breve tiempo... Entonces, podemos ya empezar” (p. 589). These very words close and, at the same time, open the conclusion of Paradiso, “ritmo hesicástico, podemos empezar” (p. 645).

As we have seen, for Lezama in Paradiso, madness, the loss of reason (the logos) is equated with the loss or waste of the logos spermatikos (seminal reason) in homosexuality. Lezama repeatedly associates homosexuality with the waste of the seed, sterility and castration. Probably, the clearest example is his description of Leregas’s sexual preference, “su Eros de gratuidad,” as “el fuego del nacimiento malo, de la esperma derramada sobre el azufre incandescente” (p. 342), and although we know from his exhibitionistic adventures in Chapter VIII that Leregas is a “coloso fálico” (p. 278), after
his intercourse with Baena he is described as an “eunuco poseedor” (p. 344).

For Lezama the sterile circularity of the *ouroboros* reflects the waste of the seed in all sex *contra natura*. Those who lose their *logos* are condemned to wander incessantly in Luciferine circles like Godofredo el Diablo, Foción, and even Fronesis’ real mother who likewise suffers from a sexual psychosis, “en forma de dromomanía mitomaníaca, caminaba, caminaba y bailaba por las noches de Viena, en seguimiento de dólmenes viriles” (p. 399).22

To this endless and destructive wandering Lezama opposes Fronesis’ *telos* and order. The configuration of the opposition between Fronesis and Foción represents the equilibrium which will permit Cemí to reach the all-encompassing state of androgyny. Though he is stricken like Foción by the fear of the “vulva dentada,” Fronesis utilizes the *ouroboros* in the form of a circle of cloth cut from his undershirt as an antidote to overcome his fear of Lucía’s “delicioso enemigo.”23 When he throws the undershirt into the sea Fronesis rejects the *ouroboros*: “La camiseta...se fue circulizando como una serpiente a la que alguien ha transmitido la inmortalidad” (p. 417).

Heterosexual coitus is seen in this passage as a loss of immortality, but that very loss is the source of creativity: “era necesario crear al perder precisamente la inmortalidad. Así el hombre fue mortal, pero creador, y la serpiente fálica se convirtió en un fragmento que debe resurgir” (p. 417), once more that fragment is the dragon of hypertelia. Coitus between man and woman ends the paradise of childhood and re-enacts the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden, but 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.

In Chapter IX of *Paradiso* we are given two rival interpretations of the term “la hipertelia de la inmortalidad.” Foción, who actually coins the phrase, identifies it with homosexuality:

Todo lo que hoy nos parece desvío sexual, surge en una reminiscencia, o en algo que yo me atrevería a llamar...una hipertelia de la inmortalidad, o sea una busca de la creación, de la sucesión de
la criatura, más allá de toda causalidad de la sangre y aun del espíritu, la creación de algo hecho por el hombre, totalmente desconocido aun por la especie. (p. 351)

But Cemí corrects him, bringing the discussion to the privileged ground of Christian theology. He redefines the hypertelia of immortality as “la resurrección de los cuerpos” (p. 378),24 and characterizes homosexuality as “una falsa inocencia” (p. 372).

Like the snake of the Gnostic Ophites, homosexuality and other sexual deviations offer Cemí the knowledge of good and evil and a form of immortality which is understood as an eternal cycle of destruction and creation.25 Cemí sees this type of immortality as a false telos whose true nature is revealed in the dromomanía, the ceaseless wandering of all the sexual psychotics in the novel. The immortality Foción preaches is precisely the type of danger without epiphany exposed by Rialta to her son Cemí. Foción’s way is well represented by the circle of the ouroboros and by the statuette of Narcissus which he describes as: “La imagen de la imagen, la nada” (p. 410).

By means of his triple protagonist, Lezama gives not one but three portraits of the artist as a young man. The goal-less Foción is the portrait of a failed artist, overcome by darkness. In Fronesis Lezama depicts the opposite: a young man who will perhaps not go beyond an earthly telos because of an excess of light. Cemí is Lezama’s attempt to surpass this dichotomy and to resolve it in an equilibrium which will put an end to all passion and all striving. This is why Cemí is guided not by a telos but an hypertelos. He rejects the goal of immortality but by accepting death he hopes to achieve a form of it through resurrection. Cemí will not wrest immortality through Luciferine pride or through the light of reason, but will yield to the “fijeza” of the hesychastic rhythm and the self-sufficient immobility of androgyny. In this sense José Cemí in Paradiso26 is as much a repository of José Lezama’s dreams as a self-portrait.

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1. José Lezama Lima, Obras completas, II (Mexico: Aguilar, 1975), p. 329. All further references to Lezama’s works appear in the text. The quotations from Paradiso come from Obras completas, I.

2. For these polemics see Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Narradores de esta América, II (Buenos Aires: Editorial Alfa Argentina, 1974), pp. 133-135. He rejects the view that Paradiso is an apology of homosexuality (in the manner of Gide’s Corydon) disguised as a novel. See also the discussion of this issue in the open letters by Vargas Llosa and Rodríguez Monegal, pp. 141-155. Although Rodríguez Monegal correctly stresses the basic formal and ideological differences between Paradiso and Corydon, the dialogues on homosexuality in Chapter IX of Paradiso owe much to Gide’s tract. As in Corydon, the discussion is motivated by a scandal, and zoological, philosophical, historical and moral arguments are employed.


4. Lihn, pp. 16-17.

5. For a different view see Gustavo Pérez Firmat, “Descent into Paradiso: A Study of Heaven and Homosexuality,” Hispania, 59, No. 2, 1976, where he makes a case for Cemí’s homosexuality and argues that “throughout the novel homosexuality and androgyny are identified.” p. 254.


7. See Margarita Junco Fazzolari, Paradiso y el sistema poético de Lezama Lima (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1979), pp. 75-76, “Los tres son parte de la misma personalidad, las divisiones que ocasionó la caída. Son las tres partes del alma según los místicos alemanes: los instintos, la razón y la chispa divina.” See also Lihn, p. 6.

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Stoic concept of *sympathos*, whereas for Foción Cemí clearly experiences the opposite: “Las leyes del apathos de los estoicos funcionaron de inmediato, no, no le cayó nada bien Foción a Cemí” p. 319. The Stoic definition also permits a distinction between *phronesis* and *sophia* which is important in distinguishing the roles of Fronesis and Cemí. *Sophia* (wisdom) will be the province of “el viejo sabio niño,” Cemí; *phronesis* (practical wisdom, according to Aristotle) that of his friend.

9. The diastaltic, systaltic and hesychastic styles are the three keys of ancient Greek harmony. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definitions: *diastaltic*, “Applied to a style of melody fitted to expand or exalt the mind;” *systaltic*, “Applied to a style of melody having the effect of ‘contracting’ or depressing the mind;” *hesychastic*, “Applied to a style of melody which tends to appease the mind.” In *Paradiso* Lezama never mentions the *diastaltic* style but his characterization of Fronesis fully warrants the association I suggest.

Roberto González Echevarría has underscored the importance of the concept of *hypertelía* in Lezama. See the essay “Apetitos de Góngora y Lezama” in *Relecturas: estudios de la literatura cubana* (Caracas: Monte Avila, n.d.), p. 113, “Lezama aspira en su obra al milagro — a la encarnación del verbo... Esa resurrección no refleja únicamente el notorio catolicismo de Lezama, sino que representa lo más radical de su estética. La resurrección es el mundo de la poesía ‘substanciada’, de la *hypertelía* (más allá del fin) a que se refieren los personajes en varias de sus discusiones, la superfundidad a que hemos aludido.” González Echevarría stresses here the significance of hypertelía in Lezama’s aesthetic system. In the present article I am primarily interested in the ethical dimension of hypertelía in *Paradiso* where both Foción and Cemí propose rival definitions of the concept.

10. For a discussion of Taoist symbols in *Paradiso* see Pérez Firmat, p. 255.

11. The meeting of Foción and Cemí in the café at this crucial moment suggests a confrontation of ideologies. Suicide, homosexuality and madness, the three alternatives which Foción perceives as his lot in life are opposed to the heterodox Catholicism of Cemí who sees poetic epiphany as the means to salvation and resurrection. The series of alternatives presented or implied in this episode recall the three choices which according to André Gide are available to modern man: suicide, homosexuality or Catholicism.

Lezama not only fuses his concept of Catholicism with poetic revelation, but following Dante associates homosexuality with violence done to art. The essay “Plenitud relacionable,” a Lezaman *salto moríale*, which characteristically attempts to metaphorize the essential philosophical stance of Dante, Gide and Claudel, explicitly makes this link between homosexuality and violence towards art:
El más paseador y sombrío de los gibelinos [Dante] pareció prefigurar arduas relaciones contemporáneas. En el séptimo círculo, recinto tercero, puesto a la moda por ciertas indiscreciones de Gide, [Corydon] los violentos contra la naturaleza aparecen nive...lados con los violentos contra el arte. Obras completas, II, p. 475.

The essay is ultimately an attack on what Lezama calls the contemporary “self-destructive fervor” which he sees as frivolous and superfluous. Addressing Mallarmé, Valéry and Gide, he rejects the concept of randomness, and siding with Claudel concludes: “el católico sabe que ninguno de sus actos es inconsecuente, tiene gratuidad, sino que aun en la revelación tiene composición” p. 479. This gratuitousness rejected by Lezama is also that of Gide's Corydon, who uses his characterization of sexuality as “luxe” and “gratuité” to refute the view that homosexuality is “contre nature.” See André Gide Oeuvres complètes, IX (n.p.: N.R.F., 1932), pp. 226-227.  

12. Souza interprets the passage as follows: “The tree is a dual image. On the one hand it represents Foción's obsession with Fronesis, and, on the other, it could represent the tree of life that embodies all the positive and negative aspects of existence. Foción's incessant circling of the tree reveals his attempts to control the chaos of his life and...to resolve the enigma of existence...The bolt of lightning that releases Foción indicates the sudden gaining of an illumination and insight that frees him from his obsessive anguish” p. 64. The only objection I find to Souza's interpretation concerns the lightning. If it signifies illumination, it is Cemí who benefits truly, and Foción's enlightenment would seem to be merely transitory.


14. For a complete discussion of the history of the irregularities which bar men from the priesthood see “Irregularités,” Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1927). The major scriptural source cited by popes and councils of the Church is Leviticus 21, 16-20: “None of your descendants, in any generation, must come forward to offer the food of his God if he has any infirmity — no man must come near if he has an infirmity such as blindness or lameness, if he is disfigured or deformed, if he has an injured foot or arm, if he is a hunchback or a dwarf, if he has a disease of the eyes or of the skin, if he has a running sore, or if he is a eunuch.” Jerusalem Bible, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966). Another source is Deuteronomy 23,2. According to The New Bible Commentary Revised, eds. Guthrie et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 223, “The exclusion of emasculated persons was a protest against heathen cultic practices.” In the early Church, the exclusion of eunuchs from the priesthood (particularly voluntary ones) was also an
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attempt to discourage imitation of the Church Father Origen, who castrated himself in order to escape temptation. The ghost of that heterodox Church Father, whose name in Spanish furnished the double meaning (origin/Origen) of Lezama’s famous review, *Orígenes*, seems to haunt these pages of *Paradiso*.


21. For a discussion of this doctrine see Arnold, pp. 190-192.
23. Junco Fazzolari has already identified the undershirt with the *ouroboros*, p. 90. Souza, instead, has discussed the passage in terms of geometric symbolism as a movement from “inner confusion to inner unity... The sexual act becomes then one of many manifestations of the search for meaning in life and the control over chaos,” pp. 61-62.
25. Junco Fazzolari sees in Foción’s defense of homosexuality, “el querer prolongar, con una falsa inocencia, una inmortalidad que se ha perdido irremediablemente con la Caldwell” p. 86. In Foción’s concept of homosexuality as a lost innocence I see a re-statement of Corydon’s argument: “Tout comme je crois, excusez mon audace, l’homosexualité dans l’un et l’autre sexe, plus spontanée, plus naïve que l’hétérosexualité” p. 280.
26. I stress *Paradiso*, because *Oppiano Licario*, Lezama’s posthumous novel, presents a somewhat more active José Cemí.
“Deal gently with the young man”*: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain

By Norman Roth

Medieval Hebrew secular poetry apparently had its beginning in Muslim Spain under the direct influence of secular Arabic poetry, which reached its zenith in Iraq and continued to develop in al-Andalus. The secular Hebrew poetry produced elsewhere, in Egypt, North Africa, and Italy, was very likely influenced by the poetry written in Spain. This development of secular poetry was part of a conscious renaissance of the Hebrew language, itself a reaction to Muslim influences. Hebrew poetry and literature in Spain was not, of course, confined to the Muslim period, but its greatest peaks of development occurred then. Accordingly I shall concentrate on that era, giving particular attention to the four greatest Hebrew poets of Spain: Samuel Ibn Nagrillah, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi.

Medieval Hebrew poetry demands of the modern reader a monumental effort of patience and erudition; the language is difficult, the imagery highly allusive. This is particularly true of the poetry written in Spain, not least because the Bible was so well known there. As is evident from a variety of sources, knowledge of the Hebrew Bible by heart was far from uncommon, and not only among the highly educated. The most ordinary documents are replete with direct biblical citations and allusions. A text like the Song of Songs, elsewhere allegorically interpreted if cited at all, was commonly known in Spain and understood also on the literal level. Even in the late fourteenth century, for example, Isaac b. Sheshet, rabbi of Saragossa, received a query about Song of Songs 1:2, “for your love is better than wine.” Every schoolchild knows the passage, he was told; why then was it necessary for Rabbi Akiva to be questioned about its meaning in the Talmud (Avodah Zara 29b)?

* 2 Sam. 18.5
2 See the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra in standard editions of the rabbinical Hebrew Bible (i.e., with commentaries), and in the critical edition with English translation by Henry J. Mathews (London, 1874); and particularly Joseph b. Judah Ibn ‘Aqnin, Hitgallot ha-sodot ve-hofe’at ha-mesorot, ed. (Judeo-Arabic) and trans. (Hebrew) A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1964), a commentary that has undeservedly been ignored.
3 Responsa of Isaac b. Sheshet Perfet, No. 284.

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