

Popol Vuh



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DENNIS TEDLOCK

After receiving his Ph.D. from Tulane University in 1968, Tedlock dedicated his life to studying the Mayan peoples of Central America. With his wife, Barbara Tedlock, he conducted many trips to Guatemala and wrote extensively about his findings, much of which concerned translating hieroglyphic Mayan texts into English. His translation of the *Popol Vuh* earned the PEN Translation Prize in 1986, and he and Barbara jointly received the American Anthropological Association President's Award in 1997. Tedlock taught English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. In the 1980s he was a leading proponent of dialogical anthropology, which sought to give the native peoples in question (in this case, the Mayans) a more prominent voice in Western anthropological writings about them. To this end, Tedlock's translation of the *Popol Vuh* is notable because it uses interpretation and commentary from a modern Quiché daykeeper, Andrés Xiloj. Though Tedlock's translation of the *Popol Vuh* is the most common version today, he didn't write it: the *Popol Vuh* existed as an oral story and as a story recorded in hieroglyphs prior to being recorded in phonetic Quiché around 1550. It survived the Spanish conquest of Central America thanks to the Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez, who translated the text into a two-column version beginning around 1701. One column featured phonetic Quiché; the other recorded the story in Spanish. Ximénez's text now resides in the Newberry Library in Chicago.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Quiché people were a tribe that made up part of the Mayan empire in what is now Guatemala and southern Mexico, on the Yucatan Peninsula. Though documentation of the Quiché kingdom began around 1200 CE when foreigners from the Mexican Gulf Coast conquered the local tribes, tribes had been in the area since 600 BCE. Those foreigners are, presumably, what the *Popol Vuh* mentions as the first humans: they included the three Quiché lineages and four other tribes, all of which the book lists. The foreigners also brought the god Tohil with them. Beginning around 1495, the Quiché kingdom fought sporadically with the Aztec empire, which was then at its height. Around 1510, the kingdom finally became a vassal to the Aztecs. When the Spanish arrived in Guatemala, rival tribes aligned themselves with the Spanish and asked for assistance in defeating the Quichés. The Spanish army defeated the Quiché forces in 1524, and quickly set about subduing more rural communities. They set up missions, imposed Christianity on the surviving natives, and sought to destroy as much of the local

non-Christian religion as they could. Because of this, there are only four known copies of the *Popol Vuh* in existence, and other pre-conquest books are rare. More recently, excavations of tombs have turned up what appear to be more books from before the Spanish conquest, but the books weren't well preserved and are often unreadable.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The *Popol Vuh* is one of only a few surviving texts from the Mayan people of Central America, alongside the *Chilam Balam* (a collection of books that record traditional Mayan medical, religious, and historical knowledge in Latin) and the play *Rabinal Achí*. The *Popol Vuh* is considered an “ex nihilo” creation myth, a subgenre of creation myths in which the world is created out of nothing. The Bible falls into this subgenre, as do the creation myths of the Egyptians and the Māori people. In that the *Popol Vuh* deals with the European conquest of the Americas, the book also shares thematic similarities with N. Scott Momaday's [The Way to Rainy Mountain](#), which tells the history of the Kiowa people and includes their difficult relationship with the United States government. Other books that tackle early colonialism and European contact with native populations include Kate Grenville's [The Lieutenant](#), which takes place in Australia, and Joseph Conrad's [Heart of Darkness](#).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life
- **When Written:** The *Popol Vuh* existed as an oral story and was recorded in hieroglyphs prior to its translation to phonetic Quiché sometime in the 1550s
- **Where Written:** The Quiché kingdom, modern-day Guatemala
- **When Published:** The translation used in this LitChart was published in 1985
- **Literary Period:** Postconquest
- **Genre:** Creation Myth (Ex nihilo)
- **Setting:** The Quiché kingdom (modern-day Guatemala), from a pre-human time period to the Spanish conquest of the kingdom in 1524
- **Climax:** The sun rises for the first time
- **Antagonist:** Seven Macaw and his sons; the Xibalbans, specifically One Death and Seven Death; the unnamed human tribes; the Castilians
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Scary Stories. When Francisco Ximenez translated the *Popol Vuh* into Spanish in 1701, what he read scared him so much that he included a preface warning the reader that they were going to come close to being in contact with the devil. He even included a prayer for the reader to recite to protect themselves.



PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator explains that the tale that follows is the origin story of the ancient Quiché and Mayan world, though this version has been secretly recorded during Spanish rule. The narrator and their fellow scribes are recording the story because there's no longer a place to see the original Mayan text.

In the beginning, there's only sky and sea. Three gods—Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt—descend from the sky and address Sovereign Plumed Serpent, a god who lives in the sea. They decide to empty the sea to create land, and also decide that they must then create humans so that there's someone to praise the gods' work. Land suddenly rises out of the water, and Sovereign Plumed Serpent creates animals. When all this is done, the gods ask the animals to praise their creators—but the animals only make unintelligible noises. The gods condemn the animals to be food for future humans. Next, the gods attempt to create a human out of mud, but the mud human melts. After this setback, the gods approach Xmucane and Xpiyacoc for advice about carving humans out of wood. Xmucane supports creating wood people, and they miraculously spring to life. However, the gods are again disappointed, as the wood people forget their creators. Hurricane brings a flood down on them, and the wood people turn into monkeys.

Because the sun has not yet risen, everything is still dark. Despite this, a god named Seven Macaw decides to impersonate the sun and moon so he can give light to the wood people. He decorates his face with turquoise and precious metals that reflect light and create the illusion of sunlight. The twin boy gods, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, understand that Seven Macaw and his sons, Zipacna and Earthquake, are evil, as they all "magnify themselves." One day, the boys hide under Seven Macaw's tree and shoot him in the jaw with their blowguns. When Seven Macaw falls and Hunahpu runs to pick him up, Seven Macaw rips Hunahpu's arm off and flees with it. Xbalanque and Hunahpu enlist the help of Great White Peccary and Great White Coati, suggesting that the two pose as grandparents and bonesetters to trick Seven Macaw. When the four walk past Seven Macaw's house later that day, Seven Macaw is yelling in pain. He inquires with the "grandparents" as to what they're doing, and when they explain they're bonesetters and dentists, Seven Macaw pleads for help. The grandparents simply pluck out Seven Macaw's turquoise teeth

and his precious metals. Seven Macaw dies of shame, and Great White Peccary and Great White Coati reset Hunahpu's arm.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque next turn their attention to Zipacna. One day, as Zipacna bathes, a group of gods called the Four Hundred Boys drag a log to their hut. Though Zipacna offers to help the Boys, his strength worries them. They invite him into their hut, but Zipacna declines the Boys' hospitality. The Boys decide to trick Zipacna and kill him, so the next day they ask Zipacna to help them dig a deep hole. When Zipacna is at the bottom of the hole, the Boys throw a huge log down after him—but Zipacna, a skilled trickster himself, takes shelter in a side tunnel he dug. Three days later, Zipacna escapes his prison and kills the Four Hundred Boys by destroying their hut. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque learn of this, they build a fake crab and sneakily starve Zipacna for two days. When they lead Zipacna to the crab, which is tucked under a mountain, Zipacna wiggles into the space and the mountain comes to rest on his chest. He turns to stone.

Next, Hurricane instructs the twins to make Earthquake sit down in the east. When the twins find Earthquake destroying mountains, they tell him about a massive mountain in the east. Earthquake is thrilled to be able to bring down such a huge mountain and follows Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who shoot birds along the way. When they stop to rest, the twins coat one bird in plaster and decide that it will be for Earthquake. Earthquake eats the bird, soon loses strength, and the twins bury him.

The narrator goes back in time to tell the story of Hunahpu and Xbalanque's father and uncle, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. They spend their time playing a ball game with One Hunahpu's sons, One Monkey and One Artisan. The ball game is disruptive to the lords of Xibalba (the underworld), so the high lords One Death and Seven Death summon One and Seven Hunahpu to play ball with them. One and Seven Hunahpu agree. On the way to Xibalba, One and Seven Hunahpu reach the Crossroads. They follow Black Road until they reach the council place of the Xibalban lords, where they greet the lords—though the first two seated "lords" are actually just wooden manikins. The lords laugh and send their guests to a house called Dark House. One and Seven Hunahpu are instructed to keep two cigars and a torch lit overnight, but they fail at this task.

In the morning, the Xibalban lords kill their guests. They decapitate One Hunahpu and place his head in a tree, which soon bears fruit. A young maiden, Blood Moon, approaches the tree. One Hunahpu spits in her hand and she becomes pregnant with Hunahpu and Xbalanque. When Blood Moon's father, Blood Gatherer, realizes she's pregnant, he instructs the owl messengers to cut out her heart. The messengers instead help Blood Moon escape Xibalba, and bring back a "heart" made of tree sap for the lords. Blood Moon approaches Xmucane—who is One Hunahpu's mother—for help, though

Xmucane is wracked with grief and doesn't believe Blood Moon's story about her pregnancy. Xmucane sends Blood Moon to gather **corn** as a test, and Blood Moon passes by making many ears of corn out of corn silk.

When Xbalanque and Hunahpu are born, their older brothers, One Monkey and One Artisan, are resentful. They try to kill their little brothers, but the twins thrive anyway. One day, Hunahpu and Xbalanque ask their older brothers for help retrieving birds out of a tree. When One Monkey and One Artisan climb the tree, the tree grows, traps them in it, and the brothers turn into monkeys. Later, Hunahpu and Xbalanque try to call their monkey brothers with music, but Xmucane's laughter scares the monkeys away.

Xbalanque and Hunahpu assure their grandmother Xmucane that they'll take care of things, and so they take over gardening duties. Their tools cultivate the land magically, though when the twins return to their garden the next day, they find that the trees and bushes have reclaimed the land. When the twins keep watch that night, they see all the animals singing for the land to reclaim the garden. The boys capture a rat, who tells Hunahpu and Xbalanque that their father's ball playing equipment is hidden in Xmucane's house, and they make a plan to retrieve it. Hunahpu and Xbalanque send their grandmother away while the rat cuts down the equipment, and from then on, the boys spend their days playing. The noise bothers the Xibalban lords, and they summon the twins to play in Xibalba. Xmucane receives the summons, and she sends a louse to carry her message to her grandsons. Hunahpu and Xbalanque agree to accept the summons, but they plant two ears of corn in Xmucane's house to act as a signal for whether they're alive or dead.

When Xbalanque and Hunahpu reach the Crossroads, they send a mosquito ahead to bite all the lords and learn their names. Thus, the twins are able to greet all the lords by name. One and Seven Death send the twins to Dark House with the lit cigars and torch, and Hunahpu and Xbalanque make their items appear lit by using macaw feathers and fireflies.

In the morning, the lords are perplexed but they play ball anyway. When a knife flies out of the Xibalbans' ball, Hunahpu and Xbalanque threaten to leave, and the lords agree to use a regular ball. The lords ask that if they win, the twins should bring them bowls of flower petals as a prize. The boys agree and allow themselves to lose. The Xibalbans send the boys to other trick houses for the night, and the boys employ cutter ants to raid the Xibalbans' garden. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque present the petals in the morning, the lords look pained. The rest of the day proceeds with a ball game and another trick house that night, where a snatch-bat bites off Hunahpu's head. Xbalanque fashions a new head for his brother out of a squash, and in the morning they again play ball. Xbalanque tricks the lords and Hunahpu reclaims his head, and the twins win the match. The twins know that they must die,

however, so they summon two seers and tell them to grind the boys' bones and scatter them in the river.

The next day, One Death tries to engage Hunahpu and Xbalanque in a game of jumping over a large oven, but the boys jump right in and die. The seers do as they were told and five days later, Hunahpu and Xbalanque crawl out of the river as vagabonds. They perform great tricks that attract the attention of One Death and Seven Death, and the lords summon the "vagabonds" to perform for them. During the performance, Hunahpu and Xbalanque sacrifice One and Seven Death—but the Xibalban lords don't come back to life. The twins then attempt to reassemble their father and uncle, but decide to leave them buried. Finally, the twins enter the sky as the moon and sun, and the Four Hundred Boys become the stars.

Going back in time again, Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Xmucane grind corn to create the first four humans: Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar. These men are too perfect, however, and the gods decide to partially blind them so that the humans can't become divine. The gods create wives for the men, and humans flourish. The humans travel and establish citadels. At their second citadel, the humans are given the gods Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz to worship. Not long after, the first sunrise comes. The gods turn to stone, and the humans give thanks. Soon, Tohil instructs his followers that the neighboring tribes will begin hunting him. The first four men begin offering animal sacrifices to Tohil, who turns into a real boy.

The men start hunting and killing the tribes, and the tribes devise a trap to kill Tohil. They send Wailing Woman and Lust Woman to tempt the boy gods, but the gods send the women home with enchanted cloaks. When one of the tribal lords dons a cloak decorated with wasps, the wasps come alive and sting the lord. After this, the tribes decide to attack. Tohil instructs the four men on how to set a trap using manikins, stolen armor, and wasps, and the trap is successful. Even the men's wives can kill the tribes, and the tribal people who survive become vassals. After this victory, the first four men disappear, leaving their sons a Bundle of Flames. The sons treat the bundle as a memorial to their fathers.

From then on, the Mayan people flourish. They engage in war and experience prosperous times, and the Quiché house becomes the most powerful. The narrator lists the most important people from several family lines, and explains that the Quiché lords become great through devotion and through studying the Council Book. Finally, the narrator declares that this is the end, as there's no longer a place to see the people or the book now that the Castilians have invaded.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hunahpu – Hunahpu is one of the hero twins in the *Popol Vuh*. With his brother, Xbalanque, he rids the pre-human world of all manner of villainous gods, including Seven Macaw, Zipacna, One Death, and Seven Death. Hunahpu is a skilled trickster and is referred to by the narrator as genius. Though the twins are physically strong and are skilled at physical pursuits such as playing ball and shooting birds with blowguns, their genius is their most important asset and is the primary reason why the twins are so successful in ridding the world of evil. Hunahpu's genius is apparent even before his birth, when the narrator suggests that he and Xbalanque are responsible for leaving signs that allow his grandmother, Xmucane, to understand that Blood Moon is telling the truth about the twins' immaculate conception. Their father is One Hunahpu, and the twins are conceived when he spits into Blood Moon's hand. After the twins sacrifice One and Seven Death, they ascend to the sky with the Four Hundred Boys to become the moon and sun.

Xbalanque – Xbalanque is one of the hero twins in the *Popol Vuh*. He and his twin, Hunahpu, dedicate their lives to taking down any characters who seek to "magnify themselves" and attempt to appear more powerful than they actually are. The twins are very strong and excel in their physical pursuits. In particular, the boys are very good at playing a traditional Mesoamerican ball game, just like their father and uncle One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu were before their deaths. Despite this, however, Xbalanque and Hunahpu's greatest assets are their smarts and their ability to lay traps and tricks for others, while also seeing through their adversaries' tricks. In particular, this is how Xbalanque and Hunahpu best One Death and Seven Death. After this, the boys leave earth for the sky, where they become the moon and sun.

One Hunahpu – One Hunahpu is Xmucane and Xpiyacoc's son, and the father of Hunahpu, Xbalanque, One Monkey, and One Artisan. He and his brother, Seven Hunahpu, love to play a traditional Mesoamerican ball game. However, because the ball court is on the road to Xibalba, the sounds of the game irritate the lords of Xibalba. When One Death and Seven Death summon One and Seven Hunahpu to play ball in Xibalba, One and Seven Hunahpu fall for the Xibalban lords' tricks and are killed because of it. Though One Hunahpu isn't the most skilled trickster, he is exceptionally loyal to his family members. When he descends to Xibalba, he instructs his sons to entertain and care for Xmucane in his absence.

Seven Hunahpu – Seven Hunahpu is One Hunahpu's brother; his parents are Xmucane and Xpiyacoc. Though One Hunahpu fathers children, Seven Hunahpu never takes a wife and, according to the narrator, remains "a boy" and a mere uncle figure to his four nephews. He and his brother are very good at a traditional Mesoamerican ball game, and Seven Hunahpu spends most of his time on earth playing. He dies when One Death and Seven Death summon him and One Hunahpu to Xibalba for a match, and he and his brother fall for all the tricks

of the Xibalban lords. After Hunahpu and Xbalanque's victory, they ask Seven Hunahpu to name the parts of his face so that he can "be put back together again" after his death. Though Seven Hunahpu can only name a few parts of his face, the twins leave their father and uncle buried in the ball court so they'll be able to be appropriately worshipped.

Xmucane – Xmucane is one of the oldest deities in Mayan theology. She's known as the grandmother and the midwife, and is sometimes referred to as "plate shaper, bowl shaper." Xmucane is the mother of One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, and raises One Hunahpu's children, One Monkey and One Artisan. Though she's very wise, she's also exceptionally cautious: when Blood Moon arrives on Xmucane's doorstep claiming to be pregnant with twins by One Hunahpu, Xmucane refuses to believe Blood Moon's story until Blood Moon manages to pass a test and Xmucane finds evidence in **corn** that Blood Moon is telling the truth. Xmucane is also an essential parental figure to Hunahpu and Xbalanque, though she joins her other grandsons in neglecting them until One Monkey and One Artisan become monkeys. After this, she takes her role more seriously. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque descend to Xibalba to avenge their father and uncle, they plant corn in the middle of Xmucane's hut, which is supposed to let her know if the twins are still alive depending on whether the corn grows or dies. Later, when Sovereign Plumed Serpent approaches Xmucane about creating humans again, she personally grinds the maize with which to make them nine times.

One Death – One Death is one of the most powerful lords of Xibalba, along with Seven Death. Both lords enjoy their peace and quiet, which leads them to summon One Hunahpu, Seven Hunahpu, Hunahpu, and Xbalanque to Xibalba in attempts to sacrifice them after they make too much noise playing their ball game. One Death is also a skilled trickster, and sets many traps for his potential victims. He does, however, attempt to magnify himself far beyond what he deserves, and this is his downfall. He dies when he's too entranced by Xbalanque and Hunahpu's return as minstrels to understand that they're actually going to kill him.

Seven Death – Seven Death is a powerful lord of Xibalba who works primarily with One Death. The lords are skilled ball players, though they detest when non-Xibalban gods play ball, as it makes a great deal of noise in Xibalba. This leads One Death and Seven Death to summon ball players to Xibalba with the intention of putting an end to the noise. One and Seven Death are successful in tricking and killing One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, but they are outsmarted time and again by One Hunahpu's sons, Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

One Monkey and One Artisan – One Monkey and One Artisan are the sons of One Hunahpu and Egret Woman. These two dedicate their lives to becoming great artists, writers, and musicians. Both brothers are also very skilled at a traditional

Mesoamerican ball game, and they spend much of their time playing with their father and their uncle, Seven Hunahpu. When the boys' father and uncle descend to Xibalba, they charge One Monkey and One Artisan with entertaining and caring for Xmucane. When Blood Moon gives birth to their younger brothers, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the older brothers are jealous and incensed, even though the boys are aware that their brothers will be very important heroes. They attempt to orchestrate their baby brothers' deaths, but fail to do so and are finally tricked into becoming monkeys. Though this fate isn't construed entirely positively, One Monkey and One Artisan's monkey forms become the patron gods of artisans, writers, and musicians.

Seven Macaw – Seven Macaw is a bird god who "magnifies himself." Before the first dawn, he decorates his teeth with turquoise and places gleaming metals around his eyes. His nest is also made of metal, which casts light around his tree—though he believes that the light from his nest and from his face are capable of lighting the entire world, and he therefore tries to impersonate the moon and sun and become an object of worship for the wood people. Hunahpu and Xbalanque understand that this self-magnification is evil, so they shoot Seven Macaw in the jaw with their blowguns. They then trick him into allowing Great White Peccary and Great White Coati to pull his turquoise teeth and pluck out the metal from around his eyes, depriving him of the things that made him a lord. Seven Macaw then dies of shame. His two sons, Zipacna and Earthquake, are similarly boastful and self-important.

Zipacna – Zipacna is the first son of Seven Macaw and Chimalmat. Like his father, he believes that he's extremely important. He outsmarts the Four Hundred Boys when they try to kill him by burying him in a deep hole, and when they're too drunk to fight back, Zipacna brings their hut down on them and kills them all. Hunahpu and Xbalanque take revenge by starving Zipacna for two days, and then setting a trap for him by placing a fake crab under an overhang at the foot of a mountain. When Zipacna wiggles into the small space to get the crab, the mountain rests on his chest and he turns to stone.

Earthquake – Earthquake is the second son of Seven Macaw and Chimalmat. Like Zipacna and Seven Macaw, Earthquake has an overblown sense of his own importance. With a tap of his toe, he can bring down entire mountains, and he spends his days wreaking havoc on the land. Hurricane instructs Hunahpu and Xbalanque to trick Earthquake into sitting down somewhere in the east, which the twins do by telling Earthquake that there's a massive mountain in the east. As they travel, Hunahpu and Xbalanque coat a bird in plaster and give it to Earthquake to eat. This causes Earthquake to lose the strength in his arms and legs, and the twins bury him in the earth.

Blood Moon – Blood Moon is Blood Gatherer's daughter, and the mother of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. She's overwhelmingly

good, pure, and resourceful. When she hears that the calabash tree bore fruit after One Death and Seven Death placed One Hunahpu's head in the tree, she's extremely curious and goes to investigate. There, One Hunahpu spits in her palm and she conceives the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque. After the owl messengers help her escape her father's wrath and leave Xibalba, Blood Moon convinces Xmucane that she's truly pregnant with Xmucane's grandchildren. She's able to do this because of her honest and true intentions.

Sovereign Plumed Serpent – Sovereign Plumed Serpent is one of the most powerful gods in Mayan theology. He's also known as the maker, modeler, bearer, and begetter, and is a part of the group of gods known as Heart of the Lake and Heart of the Sea. Sovereign Plumed Serpent is responsible for creating the world, the first iterations of humans, and finally, working with Xmucane to create the first humans out of **corn**.

The Owl Messengers – The Owl Messengers are the four messengers of Xibalba. They are Shooting Owl, One-legged Owl, Macaw Owl, and Skull Owl, but they always function as a group. They're tasked by One Death and Seven Death with inviting One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu to play ball in the underworld, and they later help Blood Moon escape Xibalba by agreeing to not cut out her heart as they were commanded to do. Instead, they take a "heart" made of tree sap back to the lords, which blinds the lords when they roast it over the fire.

Jaguar Quitze – Jaguar Quitze is the first human created by Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Xmucane out of **corn**meal. He is handsome, devout, and at first, all-knowing. With his wife Red Sea Turtle, he becomes the progenitor of the Cauac line of Mayan people, who worship the god Tohil. Jaguar Quitze is instrumental in orchestrating the tricks against the unnamed tribes and insuring a Mayan victory. When he decides that it's time, he and the other three first men simply disappear rather than die. Upon his departure, he leaves his son the "Bundle of Flames," which is a mysterious package that future generations never open but treat as a memorial to the first four men.

Jaguar Night – Along with Jaguar Quitze, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar, Jaguar Night is one of the first men created out of **corn**meal by Xmucane and Sovereign Plumed Serpent. Jaguar Night and his wife, Prawn House, begin the Greathouse familial line of the Mayan people. The Greathouses are given the god Auilix to worship.

Not Right Now – Not Right Now is the third man created from corn by Xmucane and Sovereign Plumed Serpent. He and his wife, Water Hummingbird, go on to found the Quiché line of Mayan people, which is the specific familial group that records this version of the *Popol Vuh*. The Quichés worship the god Hacauitz and their insignia is comprised of wasps and yellow jackets. Like the other three first men, Not Right Now is extremely devout and a great thinker. He fasts for days at a time to give thanks to the gods.

Dark Jaguar – Dark Jaguar is the fourth man that Xmucane and Sovereign Plumed Serpent create out of **corn**. Though they also make him a wife, Macaw House, the couple only has daughters and therefore do not found a lasting family line. Dark Jaguar is somewhat of an auxiliary figure to the first four men; though he participates in the fight against the unnamed tribes, he doesn't design a trick cloak and is only mentioned as participating in some of the meetings. Similarly, though his family is given the god Middle of the Plain, their god is never mentioned again after being given to the family.

The Tribes – The tribes refer to a number of allied, unnamed groups that exist in the mountains when the first men are created. The tribes are open about their distaste for Auilix, Tohil, and Hacauitz and therefore work to wage war against the first men and their families. However, the tribes fall for every trick orchestrated by the gods or the first men, and they lose spectacularly. After they lose the battle, the first men take them on as vassals, servants, and tributes.

Blood Gatherer – Blood Gatherer is one of the lords of Xibalba. He has a virgin daughter, Blood Moon, and is enraged when he realizes she's pregnant. Because he believes that her children will be bastards, he, One Death, and Seven Death command the owl messengers to take her into the woods and cut out her heart.

The Four Hundred Boys – The Four Hundred Boys are a group of boy gods. When they try to trick Zipacna and kill him, they fail miserably: Zipacna ends up tricking and killing them. Hunahpu and Xbalanque avenge the boys' death and later, they ascend to the sky along with the twins to become the stars.

Xpiyacoc – Along with Xmucane, Xpiyacoc is one of the oldest gods in Mayan theology. He's known as the grandfather, and sometimes is referred to as "plate shaper, bowl shaper." Xpiyacoc helps create the world, but is largely absent from the narrative after that. With Xmucane, Xpiyacoc has two sons, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu.

The rat – When Xbalanque and Hunahpu hide themselves to figure out what's destroying their garden, the rat is the only guilty animal they're able to catch. The twins burn the rat's tail (which is why rats' tails are bald) and squeeze him by the neck (giving rats their bug-eyed appearance), but the rat goes on to help Hunahpu and Xbalanque retrieve their father's ball-playing equipment. As payment, the boys tell the rat that stored or scattered dry goods will be his food.

Tohil – Tohil is the god given to Jaguar Quitze's family after the first humans are created. He is the only god able to make fire at first, and he tricks the tribes without fire into agreeing that they will allow Tohil to kill them when they ask how they can earn fire. When the first dawn arrives, Tohil turns to stone.

Lust Woman and Wailing Woman – Lust Woman and Wailing Woman are two daughters from the tribes who are sent to trick the boy gods Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz. Though the two women

follow instructions, they also fall for the gods' tricks, which leads to the defeat of the tribes. Because of this, the tribes blame the women for their defeat, and Lust and Wailing Woman become the first sex workers.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Xulu and Pacam – Xulu and Pacam are two Xibalban seers. Hunahpu and Xbalanque summon the seers and instruct them to grind their bones and throw the bones in the river when the twins "die."

Tamazul – Tamazul is a toad who fails to follow through on a promise to carry a message quickly. Because of this, all toads after him are destined to be food for snakes.

Zaquicaz – Zaquicaz is a snake who offers to swallow Tamazul to help him get his message to Hunahpu and Xbalanque more quickly. Zaquicaz is subsequently swallowed by a falcon, which is why birds of prey eat snakes.

Egret Woman – Egret Woman is One Hunahpu's wife; she dies when her sons One Monkey and One Artisan are children.

Chimalmat – Chimalmat is Seven Macaw's wife. She dies when he does.

Great White Peccary and Great White Coati – Great White Peccary and Great White Coati are two gods who assist Hunahpu and Xbalanque in bringing down Seven Macaw. They agree to pose as the twins' grandparents and pull Seven Macaw's turquoise teeth out, which they then replace with **corn**.

Red Sea Turtle – Red Sea Turtle is Jaguar Quitze's wife. Sovereign Plumed Serpent creates her, and she and her husband create the nine Cauec houses.

Prawn House – Prawn House is Jaguar Night's wife. She's created especially for him, and they become the ancestors of the Greathouse line.

Water Hummingbird – Water Hummingbird is Not Right Now's wife and is one of the first four women. She and Not Right Now's descendants become the four Quiché houses.

Macaw House – Macaw House is Dark Jaguar's wife. The two only have daughters and therefore don't create an enduring family line.

Auilix – Auilix is the god given to Jaguar Night's tribe when the first humans reach the citadel called Seven Canyons. When dawn arrives, Auilix turns to stone.

Hacauitz – Not Right Now's tribe receives Hacauitz as a god at the citadel called Seven Canyons. He turns to stone when the first dawn comes.

Middle of the Plain – Middle of the Plain is the god given to Dark Jaguar's tribe.

Newborn Thunderbolt – One of the first three gods living in the sky, along with Hurricane and Sudden Thunderbolt.

Together with Sovereign Plumed Serpent they draw the land from the sea and create the first plants and animals.

Sudden Thunderbolt – One of the first three gods living in the sky, along with Hurricane and Newborn Thunderbolt. Together with Sovereign Plumed Serpent they draw the land from the sea and create the first plants and animals.

Hurricane – One of the first three gods living in the sky, along with Newborn Thunderbolt and Sudden Thunderbolt. Together with Sovereign Plumed Serpent they draw the land from the sea and create the first plants and animals.

Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord – The sons of the first men. After Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar die, these three go east and receive the gift of writing. Then they return and become great lords.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



ORIGINS, CUSTOMS, AND THE MAYAN CULTURE

It's important to consider the *Popol Vuh* as the guiding cultural and religious document that it was for the Mayan people, and specifically the Quiché tribes that recorded it. For much of history, the story existed as an oral story as well as one that was recorded hieroglyphically; it was only written down phonetically after the Spanish invasion. Quiché leaders and seers used the text in its oral and hieroglyphic forms to guide how they were supposed to rule and arrange dates for events and festivals (the forward by the translator notes that the *Popol Vuh* is a narrative representation of the Mayan calendar, and someone familiar with the calendar will be able to use the story to track celestial events). At its heart, however, the text tells a Mayan reader how to be properly Mayan, and situates this image of a proper Mayan person that encompasses both divine and human history. Essentially, the text suggests that if one wants to understand who and what a person is, and why that person is the way they are, it's necessary to first understand where that person came from.

As the origin story of all Mayan people, the *Popol Vuh* explains how the seven tribes that made up the Mayan civilization in Mesoamerica came to exist, and why they came to exist in the first place: the gods created humans so they would have people to worship them and tend to the land, and the gods created them out of **cornmeal** and other staple foods that would then

go on to keep the people fed and healthy. By answering both the how and the why of the origins of people, places, and animals, the story seeks to explain the workings of the entire universe, from a scale as large as the sky down to small-scale daily customs of people, including why hearthstones are arranged the way they are and why worshippers burn specific substances for the gods. This sets out the idea that everything has a purpose and nothing is arbitrary, which in turn teaches the reader to look for these logical connections as they piece together how the world works within this particular culture.

This sense of logic and order is particularly noticeable when the story discusses the natural world. Animals are essential characters in the *Popol Vuh*, as they function as messengers, guards, and antagonists in turn. Similarly, the *Popol Vuh* provides the reasoning behind the geological landscape, from the origins of the mountains to the reason the land is so dry. Deer and rabbits, for example, have short tails because Hunahpu and Xbalanque pulled the tails off of deer and rabbits when they found the creatures destroying their garden. Similarly, whippoorwills have short feathers because cutter ants chopped off their plumage, and they have gaping mouths because they love to sing. In this way, the book offers the reader a way to understand the entirety of the Mayan world and to understand that everything has a place and a purpose to carry out.

Because the story of the *Popol Vuh* isn't told in a strictly linear fashion, it tells some stories twice from slightly different perspectives, or returns to the past to describe a different story that happened simultaneously. In doing so, the *Popol Vuh* makes it abundantly clear that history itself isn't strictly linear; history happens to multiple people at the same time through many differing experiences. This idea is especially important when considering the origins of the sun, moon, and stars, celestial bodies that guide the entirety of Mayan civilization by dictating their calendar. The story first mentions that after their final victory over One Death and Seven Death, Hunahpu and Xbalanque ascend to the sky to become the sun and moon, while the Four Hundred Boys follow them to become the stars. This happens at the end of Part Three, before any mention of the final iteration of humans. Part Four then plunges the reader back into darkness prior to the creation of humans and follows the first humans as they wait for, pray for, and finally watch the first dawn. This nonlinear format is in part due to the fact that this version of the *Popol Vuh* was collected and arranged by modern, non-Mayan translators with the help of Quiché daykeepers: this version has been edited and arranged to make more sense to modern audiences, and the original was even less linear. However, the nonlinear format also stresses the importance of understanding that history is made up of many different experiences, both divine and human. Essentially, this story in particular crystallizes the idea that the origins of the Mayan people aren't just divine or just human. The Mayans

derive their existence and their customs from both divine and human elements and actions, and through this interplay their culture develops a richness that can only come from acknowledging these multiple perspectives.



HEROISM VS. VILLAINY

Because the *Popol Vuh* follows several generations of both divine and human heroes, it offers a number of heroic and villainous characters for consideration as it explores what it means to be a hero.

Overwhelmingly, the story ties heroism to three qualities: familial loyalty, religious devotion, and cunning trickery. All the heroes are adept and successful tricksters, loyal to their family members, and particularly in terms of the human heroes, they're overwhelmingly devout. By tying heroism to these qualities, the *Popol Vuh* provides important insight into the Mayan people themselves and what they value as a society.

It's important to remember that the *Popol Vuh* was a text that showed Mayan rulers how to rule properly and become heroes themselves. This turns the text into a teaching tool first and foremost, as its intent is truly to teach Mayan people how to be properly Mayan. It does this by offering an extensive cast of characters, some of which are easily and inarguably heroes, while others are heroic to a degree, but possess major faults. One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu fall into this second category: they fall for the tricks of One Death and Seven Death, and ultimately die because of it. However, the book implies that One Hunahpu in particular is redeemed in part because he fathers Hunahpu and Xbalanque: his inability to outsmart One Death and Seven Death is outweighed by the fact that his sons go on to do just that, reinforcing the importance of family within the definition of a Mayan hero. Hunahpu and Xbalanque are able to outsmart One Death and Seven Death, unlike their father and uncle, and upon their victory, they reassemble their maimed father so that he can be worshipped properly. This set of twins is very nearly faultless, which situates them as the most heroic heroes of the tale (and the most important celestial elements later, as they become the moon and sun).

Overwhelmingly, the text identifies villains by their hubris, or overblown pride and an exaggerated belief in their abilities. Most importantly, this quality is what makes villains susceptible to the heroes' tricks. Seven Macaw, for example, allows Hunahpu and Xbalanque to remove his turquoise teeth and the beautiful metal around his eyes because his vanity blinds him to the fact that Hunahpu and Xbalanque aren't actually there to help him; they're there to knock him out of his unearned and false role as the sun and moon. This plays out in the human world as well: the unnamed tribes believe wholeheartedly that they'll be able to overthrow the early Mayans because of their numbers and military skill, but they fail to recognize every single trick the Mayans play on them. With this, the text shows that though the Mayans certainly value familial loyalty and

devotion, the true indicator of heroism is intelligence, cunning, and the ability to be a successful trickster—while the lack of these abilities, coupled with an overblown sense of pride, is the mark of villains.

Though this idea appears in all the stories told in the *Popol Vuh*, nowhere is it more apparent and weighty than in the framing story and the historical context of the *Popol Vuh* itself. The fact that the *Popol Vuh* was recorded illegally in phonetic Quiché by Quiché scribes is evidence of a successful trick on the part of the Quiché people under Castilian rule: it's proof that the greater Mayan civilization, and the Quiché tribes specifically—the heroes of the *Popol Vuh*—were able to trick their Spanish captors and break the law under their noses. With this, the text brings its exploration of heroics full circle, as the Quiché scribes use cunning and trickery to showcase their loyalty to their ancestors by listing names going back twelve generations, and their devotion to their gods by making sure their stories remain so that future generations have the tools to learn what makes a true Mayan hero.



NAMES, POWER, AND MEMORY

Naming, both the naming of other things and the naming of oneself, is how characters in the *Popol Vuh* gain power. The Heart of the Sky and the Heart of the Sea gods want humans to be able to "name their names," and when humans and gods are victorious, announcing their names to their adversaries is often a part of their victory. Because this relationship between naming and power applies to an extensive cross section of characters in the text, the *Popol Vuh* insists that the greatest power comes from knowing and sharing one's own name and the names of other powerful individuals.

What this system does, in essence, is mark for the reader who is worthy of remembrance. By offering individual names, the text insures that the reader has the language to speak about individuals and their deeds specifically, which in turn gives those individuals power in the real world. By creating this link between naming, power, and memory, the text implies that it's a worthy goal to accomplish deeds that will lead one to be named as an individual. For the gods, this means that they'll be able to be worshipped, particularly when they also get to name what kinds of sacrifices they want as well. For humans, this means inclusion in the final sections of the text, where the authors list twelve generations of revered Mayan leaders and officials.

This system is especially important because it functions on a deep structural level within the text. In most cases, the heroic victors are individuals who state their names when they win a victory. Their adversaries, however, are often named as groups, not as individuals, as with the human conflict between the first four humans (Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar) and groups of people who are simply referred to

as "the tribes." During the divine conflicts, this deviates somewhat: though groups are still named as groups (as with the Xibalbans, the people of the underworld), the leaders of the Xibalbans are named specifically. By naming One Death and Seven Death as individuals, the text acknowledges that as gods, those two individuals are powerful—just not as powerful as the heroic gods Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the victors of this particular conflict. In turn, this reinforces the hierarchy that dictates that human foes such as "the Castilians" or "the tribes" are infinitely less powerful than heroic individuals or are simply unworthy of being named at all, while divine antagonists occupy a unique role wherein they're worthy of individual remembrance because of their divinity.

Throughout the final sections of the *Popol Vuh*, which concerns human activities and historical events, this system expands to include not just people, but places as well. As the human tribes, led by various named individuals, move around the Quiché kingdom and establish citadels, they name those citadels and the landforms they pass. In these situations, the humans assert their own power (by taking land), the power of their gods (by creating a place to worship those gods and remember their names), and finally, assert their power over the land (by naming that land and preserving those names for future generations). The success of those individuals is evidenced by the inclusion of maps in the text: the names of those places have persisted for nearly a thousand years, exactly because the Mayans named them and recorded the names in the *Popol Vuh*.

However, this is all thrown upside down with the framing of this particular version of the *Popol Vuh*. The text was written by Quiché people in Latin not long after the Spanish invasion, though recording their native stories was a crime and they had to do so anonymously to protect themselves. In this way, by refusing to identify themselves, the writers stand up to their Castilian conquerors and show that even this system set out by the bulk of the *Popol Vuh* isn't one that's entirely infallible. The definition of power must necessarily change with the times in order to ensure that these stories are remembered, so that these anonymous individuals can continue to identify those who are powerful, and make sure their names live on.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

Because one of the primary problems the gods face is the question of how to create humans, the *Popol Vuh* is necessarily concerned with discovering what makes humans humanlike, gods godlike, and what makes either humans or gods into the best version of themselves. At the beginning of the *Popol Vuh*, after the gods draw land out of the ocean, they decide that they must next create humans to take care of the land, multiply, and worship them. These qualities become the defining qualities of humanity, and beings' success in completing those tasks offers the gods a way to decide if the beings they've created are appropriately human or not.

The gods first create animals as stewards of the land. Though the text implies that the animals will be able to care for the land, they fail miserably when the gods ask them to speak and praise their creators: all they can do is chatter and squawk. After this failure to praise the gods, the gods relegate the animals to being food for the humans they'll later create. Next, the gods create a human out of mud, which is a failure on all fronts, and then carve reasonably successful humans out of wood. The wood humans are able to both care for the land and multiply, but like the animals, they fail to worship their creators and acknowledge their origins when asked. The way that both the wood people and the animals are considered failures at humanity illustrates just how important worship is to the Mayan conception of what it means to be human: per the logic of the text, the wood people in particular are human in every way *except* in their inability to worship, which automatically categorizes them as not-human. This also suggests that per the gods' list of appropriately human attributes, the state of being human is a state of service. The gods desire human beings to perform acts of service for the land, for each other, and for the gods themselves. With this firmly established as an absolute necessity, the gods abandon their quest for a period of time while they go about shaping more of the world.

When the gods finally create the first four humans, the humans are described as perfect: they talk, they listen, they work and walk around. They're handsome and are able to see the entire world, and when asked, the humans thank their creators for making them. However, the gods quickly find a problem with these first four humans: unlike their other creations, these people are *too* perfect because they understand everything. To the gods, this suggests that these humans have the capacity to become divine themselves, which would therefore keep the humans from being properly devout. To fix this flaw, the gods blind them "as the face of a mirror is breathed upon," limiting the humans' sight and understanding. This means that the humans will need to spend their lives searching for meaning and understanding through their devotion to their creators, and by extension, through the study of the *Popol Vuh* itself. With this, the text declares that to be human is to not know, and to consequently strive towards understanding.

Through the gods' quest to create humans, the *Popol Vuh* doesn't just offer a simple recipe for humanity. Because the gods spend much of the book trying and failing to create humans in addition to their other trials and tribulations, the *Popol Vuh* also humanizes the very creators of humanity. In this way, though the *Popol Vuh* maintains that humans must be devout, care for the land, and multiply, it also makes it abundantly clear that to be human is to search, to try, and to ask questions about the world and one's role in it.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



CORN

Prior to the creation of humans, the gods established corn as a symbol of the cyclical nature of life, but in human form, it truly comes to represent life itself. Unlike the gods, who used corn only as a symbol, for humans, corn is very literally what makes them human—Xmucane shaped humans' bodies out of corn, which ties human life to the gods. In a practical sense as well, corn literally keeps the Mayan people alive as one of their most important staple crops. This further reinforces the link between corn and life, as life would be nearly impossible without corn.

where they came from, even as the local language is pushed out by European languages. By memorializing the stories in the *Popol Vuh*, the text seeks too to give those stories the power they once held in Mayan culture, but that were at the time too dangerous to even speak about. Finally, this situates the *Popol Vuh* itself as one of the Mayan people's greatest tricks: the following story makes it very clear that as a culture, they value cleverness and tricks, and recording the *Popol Vuh* in phonetic Quiché when doing so would've been illegal is a way for the Quiché people to trick their captors and preserve their own history.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Popol Vuh* published in 1996.

Part One Quotes

☞ We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now. We shall bring it out because there is no longer a place to see it, a Council Book, a place to see "The Light That Came from Beside the Sea," the account of "Our Place in the Shadows," a place to see "The Dawn of Life,"

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator(s) situate themselves and their situation for the reader: though they are Mayan writers, they're writing under Castilian rule after the Spanish invasion of Central America. When they lament that they're writing this text because there's no longer a place to see a "Council Book," they reference the fact that Castilian invaders tried very hard to destroy as much native writing as they possibly could with the end goal of establishing Christianity as the primary religion in the area.

By recording the *Popol Vuh*, the narrators ensure that their descendants will have a way to learn about their history and

☞ "It must simply be tried again. The time for the planting and dawning is nearing. For this we must make a provider and nurturer. How else can we be invoked and remembered on the face of the earth? We have already made our first try at our work and design, but it turned out that they didn't keep our days, nor did they glorify us.

Related Characters: Sovereign Plumed Serpent (speaker), Hurricane

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

After creating animals and realizing that the animals are incapable of praising the gods, Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Hurricane vow to try again to create humans that can care for the earth, praise the gods, and multiply. It's important to note that creating humans is a pressing problem for the gods because "the time for planting and dawning is nearing": this indicates that the gods need beings on earth in order to care for it. In turn, this situates the state of being human as a state of service to the land, and creates an important link between the later successful humans and the land they inhabit. Finally, the gods ascertain that the animals were unsuccessful beings exactly because they couldn't praise their creators, which suggests the belief that another part of being human is praising one's creator. This in turn implies that those who cannot give thanks to their creators, or who can't remember where they came from, are less than human.

☞ So this is why monkeys look like people: they are a sign of a previous human work, human design—mere manikins, mere woodcarvings.

Related Characters: Xpiyacoc, Xmucane, Hurricane, Sovereign Plumed Serpent

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that when Hurricane destroyed the wood people because they were inadequate humans, those carved wood manikins became monkeys. By making this connection, those who originally composed the *Popol Vuh* endeavor to, first of all, create a link between modern humans and their natural surroundings. This in turn reinforces the idea that humans were created to care for the earth—which, like humans themselves, was created by the gods with very specific goals in mind. Second, this is very much an origin story of monkeys, which reinforces the emphasis that the *Popol Vuh* places on the necessity of understanding one's world and one's history in order to become a competent and successful person.

Part Two Quotes

☞ "In earth we must cook it, and in earth must be his grave—if the great knower, the one to be made and modeled, is to have a sowing and dawning," said the boys.

"Because of this, the human heart will desire a bite of meat, a meal of flesh, just as the heart of Earthquake will desire it."

Related Characters: Xbalanque, Hunahpu (speaker), Earthquake

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

As Hunahpu and Xbalanque plan how they're going to trick the god Earthquake into sitting down in the east so he can be punished for self-magnification, the twins also make plans for future humans. Earthquake is a character who is characterized as evil because he believes himself to be more powerful than he actually is, and more practically, because he spends his time destroying mountains with a tap of his foot. Because of this, Earthquake must die because practically, humans wouldn't survive on earth if he were still wreaking havoc on the world. By conflating Earthquake's orchestrated desire for meat here with future humans' desire for meat, the narrative offers a word of warning to its Mayan readers. The humans were able to exist because

Earthquake is finally taken down, but it's also not difficult for humans to embody Earthquake's villainous qualities and act poorly in the world.

Part Three Quotes

☞ After that, his son is like his saliva, his spittle, in his being, whether it be the son of a lord or the son of a craftsman, an orator. The father does not disappear, but goes on being fulfilled...

Related Characters: One Hunahpu (speaker), Xbalanque, Hunahpu, Blood Moon, Seven Hunahpu

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

After spitting in Blood Moon's hand, the head of One Hunahpu tells her that by having children, a father can live on through them. He does this to explain that she is now pregnant with his children, the hero twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque. This monologue provides one of the reasons why the *Popol Vuh* and the Mayan people placed such emphasis on familial loyalty. A loyal child will remember their parents, thereby keeping their parents alive through memory. In this way, the narrative links having children to the *Popol Vuh* itself: the written text includes the names of lords going back generations and therefore becomes a visual, recorded memory of these families. It thus becomes yet another way for children to remember their parents and other ancestors, and allow them to live on.

☞ But Hunahpu and Xbalanque aren't turning red with anger; rather, they just let it go, even though they know their proper place, which they see as clear as day.

Related Characters: Xmucane, One Monkey and One Artisan, Xbalanque, Hunahpu, Blood Moon

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 105



Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that One Monkey and One Artisan treated their younger brothers horribly: they didn't save

them any food, and never showed them any affection. Hunahpu and Xbalanque took all of this abuse with a smile because they're aware that they're the true heroes of the story. This suggests that when someone knows they're heroic or have a great deal of power, it's possible to endure all manner of abuse—and doing that can become a trick of sorts. Because the twins never chafe against their poor treatment, eventually tricking One Monkey and One Artisan into becoming howler monkeys isn't a difficult thing to orchestrate. Hunahpu and Xbalanque's assurance of their own heroism also stands as evidence that one can become great through knowledge and study, which allow one to be able to predict the future. This ties into the overarching purpose of the *Popol Vuh*. Known as the Council Book, the *Popol Vuh* laid out everything for Mayan leaders and allowed them to predict the celestial future, thus also helping them to plan accordingly to become heroes themselves.

“Our elder brothers will be remembered. So be it: they have lived here and they have been named; they are to be called One Monkey and One Artisan.”

Related Characters: Xbalanque, Hunahpu (speaker), Xmucane, One Monkey and One Artisan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

When it becomes apparent that One Monkey and One Artisan aren't going to ever return to human forms or return to their grandmother, Hunahpu and Xbalanque assure Xmucane that One Monkey and One Artisan won't be forgotten. By specifically saying that "they have been named," the text very clearly draws a relationship between naming individuals or places and memory. It insists that by recording something, especially in a text like this that was passed down in multiple forms for many generations, anyone who makes it into the text itself won't be forgotten. Further, it's worth noting that One Monkey and One Artisan become the patron gods of musicians, artists, and writers, which offers more ways to remember them: they show up often in Mayan artwork and would've been invoked by artists and craftspeople, further insuring that they won't be forgotten.

“And such was the naming of their names, they named them all among themselves. They showed their faces and named their names, each one named by the one ranking above him, and naming in turn the name of the one seated next to him.”

Related Characters: Blood Gatherer, Seven Death, Xbalanque, Hunahpu, One Death

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

This is an explanation that follows a block of dialogue that tracks the Xibalban lords as a mosquito bites them, one after the other, causing the lords to use other lords' names as they ask what's wrong. In offering both the dialogue and especially this assessment of what happened, the narrators make the importance of naming abundantly clear. It associates naming with knowledge by pairing the names of the lords with their faces, which suggests that one's name is as intrinsic a part of one's identity as their face. Later, knowing the Xibalban lords' names is what allows Hunahpu and Xbalanque to triumph, as it gives them more knowledge and robs the lords of the upper hand in any tricks. This naming is also the product of a trick that Hunahpu and Xbalanque play on the lords, showing that trickery like this affords one more power in the grand scheme of things.

“Where might you have come from? Please name it,” Xibalba said to them.

“Well, wherever did we come from? We don't know,” was all they said. They didn't name it.

Related Characters: Seven Death, One Death, Xbalanque, Hunahpu

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Before the first ball game between Hunahpu, Xbalanque, One Death, and Seven Death, the Xibalban great lords recognize that there's something different and powerful about their guests, and ask Hunahpu and Xbalanque to share who they are. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque refuse, they also refuse to allow One Death and Seven Death the power that they would gain from knowing that they're dealing with the hero twins (and the sons of their old victim,

One Hunahpu). This then becomes a trick that Hunahpu and Xbalanque play on Xibalba. They go on to keep their names and origins a secret until after their victory, and the logic of the text suggests that their victory is earned in part precisely because they keep their names secret.

“Listen, we shall name our names, and we shall also name the names of our fathers for you. Here we are: we are little Hunahpu and Xbalanque by name. And these are our fathers, the ones you killed: One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu by name. And we are here to clear the road of the torments and troubles of our fathers.

Related Characters: Seven Hunahpu, One Hunahpu, Xbalanque, Hunahpu

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 138


Explanation and Analysis


After they sacrifice One Death and Seven Death, Hunahpu and Xbalanque address the terrified and crying Xibalbans and finally name their own names. This is how the twins assert their power, as it implies that the twins' names are already common knowledge and further, associated with immense power. This shows that the twins earned this victory over Xibalba without the power afforded to them by naming their names, and in fact partly because they kept their names a secret as a kind of trickery, which further reinforces the fact that these two are destined to be great heroes.

Further, the twins came to Xibalba with the express intention of taking revenge for their father and uncle's death. This demonstrates their loyalty to their father and uncle, who they've never known but nonetheless feel an important connection with and responsibility to. This tells a reader that honoring one's parents, especially one's father, is extremely important, and further suggests that the things one's father did or didn't do eventually become the responsibility of the children. Here then, Hunahpu and Xbalanque have finally made up for what happened to their father and uncle, and can now go on to be truly great heroes.

“And this was when their grandmother burned something, she burned copal before the ears of green corn as a memorial to them. There was happiness in their grandmother's heart the second time the corn plants sprouted. Then the ears were deified by their grandmother, and she gave them names...

Related Characters: Xmucane, Xbalanque, Hunahpu

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

This passage goes back in time to explain what Xmucane did while Hunahpu and Xbalanque were in Xibalba, dying and coming back to life again. When the twins planted corn in Xmucane's house, they established corn as very literally a symbol for life and death, given that whether the corn was alive or dead was supposed to correspond to the fate of Xbalanque and Hunahpu.

This passage also establishes several precedents that are important for the next section, when the gods create humans. First, Xmucane deifies the corn and burns copal (a type of resin) for it. Several of the first humans burn copal for gods as a sign of devotion and sacrifice, and this passage offers the origin story and the reasoning behind why people burn copal. Then, the deification of the corn by Xmucane reinforces the divinity of humans' creation in general. By deifying the corn, Xmucane paves the way for the invention of humans in such a way that will later, for the humans themselves, act as a reminder that they were created by gods.

“They put Seven Hunahpu back together...He had wanted his face to become just as it was, but when he was asked to name everything, and once he had found the name of the mouth, the nose, the eyes of his face, there was very little else to be said.

Related Characters: Seven Hunahpu, Xbalanque, Hunahpu

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis



After Hunahpu and Xbalanque emerge victorious over the Xibalban lords, they go to the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice to


reunite with their father and uncle. There, they encounter Seven Hunahpu, who cannot be truly put back together because he can't name the parts of his face. This situation becomes a metaphor for the text's underlying logic that a person cannot be a full person without knowing who they are. Further, the text ties self-knowledge to being able to name oneself, as well as one's ancestors. When Seven Hunahpu can't name the parts of his face, it shows that he doesn't truly know who he is anymore. However, because Xbalanque and Hunahpu know who Seven Hunahpu is, they can make sure that he's included in the *Popol Vuh* so he can be remembered by others, since he's part of Mayan history—even if Seven Hunahpu cannot remember himself.

Part Four Quotes

☞ It was staples alone that made up their flesh.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Xmucane

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

After the narrator explains how Xmucane and Sovereign Plumed Serpent created humans, they stress the fact that humans were created out of staple foods, especially corn. This first reinforces the intended connection between humans and the land—and one of the major reasons the gods wanted to create humans in the first place was to care for the land, which the humans would do by cultivating crops. In this way, the text creates a very visible connection between humans and the land by creating humans out of what will eventually be the thing that keeps them alive. Then, the creation of the first humans by Xmucane is able to happen because Xmucane deified corn in the previous section. In this way, the corn also serves as a sign for the humans that their origins are divine, in turn reminding them that one of their other primary purposes on earth is to give thanks to the gods, their creators.

☞ "What should we do with them now? Their vision should at least reach nearby, they should see at least a small part of the face of the earth, but what they're saying isn't good. Aren't they merely 'works' and 'designs' in their very names? Yet they'll become as great as gods, unless they procreate, proliferate at the sowing, the dawning, unless they increase."

Related Characters: Xmucane, Hurricane, Sovereign Plumed Serpent (speaker), Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

After the gods create the first four humans, they realize that the humans are flawed because they see and know too much. This would allow them to become divine themselves. With this assessment, the story begins to consider the differences between men and gods. It again reinforces the purposes of humans (to procreate, to praise the gods, and to care for the land), activities that the gods themselves are exempt from for the most part. This also drives home the fact that humans were created, rather than just existing like the gods do. Thus, by thinking about the purpose of humans and the ways in which these first humans aren't perfect, the gods actually come to a better understanding of what it means to be human. By stating again the qualities that make a good human, the text enables a reader to remember these qualities so that they can go on to embody them in their own lives.

☞ They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon. Their vision flickered. Now it was only from close up that they could see what was there with any clarity.

And such was the loss of the means of understanding, along with the means of knowing everything, by the four humans.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze, Xmucane, Hurricane, Sovereign Plumed Serpent

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 148



Explanation and Analysis

In order to fix the problem of their too-perfect humans, the gods partially blind the first four humans, robbing them of

their intense knowledge and sight. By blinding the humans, the gods assert a fourth important quality of humans: that the state of being human is a state of seeking and not knowing. Taking away the humans' sight and understanding means that the first four men will spend their entire lives searching for meaning and knowledge in their world. Though the *Popol Vuh* itself is a tool to combat this loss of sight and understanding, it can't entirely restore full understanding to readers. Instead, it allows a reader to reconnect with their origins and be able to see through writing the entirety of the Quiché kingdom, just as the first four men once could, though in a format that relies on memory rather than sight. In turn, this offers another aspect to the importance of memory. By committing knowledge of the land and of the gods to memory, a person can work towards achieving some degree of the knowledge that the first four men had, though they can never escape their fate of constantly searching for meaning and understanding.

There were countless peoples, but there was just one dawn for all tribes.

Related Characters: Xbalanque, Hunahpu, Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis


After the tribes spend an unspecified amount of time traveling, praying for the sun, and multiplying, the sun finally rises. When it does, it reminds the reader again that the different storylines in the different sections of the *Popol Vuh* overlap, reinforcing the idea that history is experienced differently by different people. For Hunahpu and Xbalanque, their experience of the first sunrise is of ascending into the sky after defeating the Xibalbans and attempting to put Seven Hunahpu back together, while for the first humans, the sunrise comes after, presumably, many years of traveling and waiting. This also makes it especially clear that the human events and the divine events in the story aren't strictly separated by time or space. Human events inform some of the divine happenings and vice versa, as evidenced by the presence of human Xibalban vassals, for example. Finally, the specific language of this phrase reinforces the fact that all Mesoamerican peoples came from the same place, per Mayan theology. They all experienced the same first dawn because they all have the

same roots, which in turn bolsters the power of the Mayan gods.

"It's just a coyote crying out," and "Just a fox."
"Just a puma. Just a jaguar."

In the minds of all the tribes, it was as if humans weren't involved. They did it just as a way of deceiving the tribes; that was what their hearts desired.

Related Characters: The Tribes (speaker), Hacauitz, Auilix, Tohil, Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

After Tohil cautions the first four men that the unnamed other tribes will try to hunt him, Auilix, and Hacauitz down and destroy them, he instructs the men to begin playing a trick on the tribes. The first four men impersonate predators in order to scare them. When the tribes refuse to acknowledge that the predators they hear are anything but animals, it shows that they're acting very much like Seven Macaw did. They're magnifying themselves and appear to believe that they're too important and powerful to be taken down by the first four men, who are characterized as being inherently good just as Hunahpu and Xbalanque were. Further, when the tribes don't question what they hear, it shows that they don't accept the power of names like the Mayans do. In refusing to accept the power of names, they also forfeit their ability to win this battle against the first four men.

These three had sons, but Dark Jaguar had no son. They were all true penitents and sacrificers, and these are the name of their sons, with whom they left instructions.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

As Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark

Jaguar prepare to leave their families and die, the narrator records the names of the sons of the first three. However, because Dark Jaguar doesn't have any sons, he becomes a much less important figure, and his family disappears through the rest of the text. This shows again that Mayan lineages are traced through male lines, as One Hunahpu explained when he impregnated Blood Moon. Like One Hunahpu, Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, and Not Right Now are able to live on and be remembered because they have sons specifically. This leaves a final suggestion that if one wants to truly be remembered, one must have sons who will be able to carry on their father's name and memory.

Part Five Quotes

☛ On yet another occasion he would make himself aquiline, and on another feline...on another occasion it would be a pool of blood; he would become nothing but a pool of blood.

Truly his being was that of a lord of genius.

Related Characters: Not Right Now

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains the feats of one of Not Right Now's descendants, a man named Lord Plumed Serpent. Specifically, the narrator implies that Lord Plumed Serpent was great because he was a genius. Per the logic of the text, Lord Plumed Serpent became such a genius through studying the *Popol Vuh* itself. In this way, the story presents a historical character who took the past, as described in the *Popol Vuh*, and used the lessons embedded in the stories of the gods and the first people in order to make himself a powerful, revered, and clever lord. The emphasis on genius also ties into the story's link between cleverness, tricks, and heroism. Lord Plumed Serpent's shape-shifting can be seen as tricks, which in turn tell the reader that this man is a true hero.

☛ Whether there would be death, or whether there would be famine, or whether quarrels would occur, they knew it for certain, since there was a place to see it, there was a book. Council Book was their name for it.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar

Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator recounts how the great lords, all descendants of the first four men, knew how to properly govern. Those lords were great because they dedicated a great deal of time and energy to studying the Council Book, which is the name the Mayans use to refer to the *Popol Vuh* itself. This draws on the fact that the *Popol Vuh* is a narrative version of the Mayan calendar. One familiar with the Mayan calendar could use the *Popol Vuh* to track celestial events, as each character corresponds to a star or other celestial body, and their interactions with other characters detail how the different bodies interact in the sky. Thus, this passage drives home the importance of the calendar to the Mayan people, and the importance of studying it in order to make oneself into a skilled, competent, and prepared ruler.

☛ They were great in their own being and observed great fasts. As a way of cherishing their buildings and cherishing their lordship, they fasted for long periods, they did penance before their gods.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator continues the explanation of the ancient Quiché leaders. In this passage, however, the narrator begins to consider the way in which being great humans to begin with in turn made those lords great leaders. When the lords observe the fasts and do penance before the gods, it shows that they're truly embodying the qualities of perfect men. Creating beings who would revere their creators was one of the primary concerns when Sovereign Plumed Serpent was attempting to first make humans, and these humans are proof that the gods were successful in their endeavor.

Further, these perfect humans function as examples for other humans who want to better themselves and make themselves more like their forefathers. This shows that the



best way to do that is through honoring the gods.

☛ Three Deer and Nine Dog, in the twelfth generation of lords...They were tortured by the Castilian people.

Black Butterfly and Tepepul were tributary to the Castilian people. They had already been begotten as the thirteenth generation of lords.

Don Juan de Rojas and Don Juan Cortés, in the fourteenth generation of lords. They are the sons of Black Butterfly and Tepepul.

Related Characters: Dark Jaguar, Not Right Now, Jaguar Night, Jaguar Quitze

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

As the narrator lists generations of lords from the different houses, they inevitably reach the point in time when the Spanish invaded Mesoamerica and conquered the Mayan peoples. By including this event and these people in this version of the *Popol Vuh*, the narrators commit this atrocity to memory and ensure that these sacrificed individuals won't be forgotten by future generations. This also reinforces the importance of the text itself. The Spanish tortured the Mayans in order to assert their dominance and spread Christianity, while also taking action to stamp out as much local religion as they possibly could. This included burning books, including hieroglyphic copies of the *Popol Vuh*, so that the Mayan people wouldn't be able to revisit their history in its written form. By recording the text in

Latin, the narrators make sure that the story will live on for future generations, and the true desires and implications of the Castilian invaders won't be forgotten.

☛ This is enough about the being of Quiché, given that there is no longer a place to see it. There is the original book and ancient writing owned by the lords, now lost, but even so, everything has been completed here concerning Quiché, which is now named Santa Cruz.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator finishes the story by insisting that there's nothing more to say about the Quiché place or people, given that the original *Popol Vuh* or Council Book is no longer in existence. The tone here is somewhat sad and wistful, which suggests that the end of this book signals the end of an era of Quiché domination over Central America. Because of this, it's possible to read this record of the *Popol Vuh* as a last-ditch attempt to preserve the Quiché culture for future generations, so that the Spanish invaders don't entirely win—though it's also worth noting that when the narrators mention that they're writing in “Santa Cruz,” it's an acknowledgement that the Quiché names for places are no longer legitimate or widely used. This expresses a hope then that someone could use the text to reassign the Quiché names to places, but it does admit a defeat of sorts by committing the Spanish name for the place to memory in the book.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART ONE

The narrator explains that what follows is the beginning of the ancient world in the place called Quiché. It will be an account of how the world was created by Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Xpiyacoc, and Xmucane. The narrator mentions that they're recording this story "amid the preaching of God," or after the Spanish invasion. They say that they're doing this because there's no longer a place to see this text, which is known as the Council Book. The person responsible for reading and making sense of the book has a hidden identity.

In the beginning, there is nothing under the sky. There are no people, no animals, no landforms; there is only the sky and the sea. Sovereign Plumed Serpent is in the water, and the group of gods known as the Heart of the Sky are in the sky. Those three gods, Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt, descend from the sky to speak to Sovereign Plumed Serpent. They wonder what the dawn should look like, and they decide to empty out the sea to create land. However, there will be no one to praise their work until they create humans.

With this, land suddenly rises out of the ocean. The gods pull mountains out of the land, and trees grow on the mountains. Sovereign Plumed Serpent addresses Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt, and says that he's pleased with their work. Sovereign Plumed Serpent goes on to create rivers, and only then do the gods worry about creating beings to populate their new world.

Sovereign Plumed Serpent creates animals and distributes them throughout the mountains. When he realizes the animals need guardians, the deer and birds step forward. Sovereign Plumed Serpent settles the deer in canyons along rivers and tells the birds that their nests are in trees and bushes. He instructs the deer and birds to multiply.

The framing of the story to follow indicates that recording the story is probably illegal, though it's absolutely necessary in order to preserve it for future generations. By refusing to name names of those who are writing the text and of the person responsible for reading and interpreting the text, the writers guard against persecution should a Spanish invader discover this copy.



Even at this point, when the world is only an idea to the gods who will create it, a central concern of theirs is who will praise their work. This places worship and praise at the very heart of Mayan theology, and also shows that being able to worship is one thing that makes humans human. Per the logic of the story, humans were created for this exact purpose.



When the gods don't have to do anything but think about creating a land mass in order to do so, it stands as an early indicator that the Mayan people place a great deal of emphasis on thought and the power of the mind. Later, this notion manifests as the idealization of characters who are successful tricksters.



When Sovereign Plumed Serpent recognizes that the animals need guardians, the story begins to suggest that there's a need for hierarchy among all the characters and beings in the Popol Vuh. This is another way of creating a logical system of organization for the world and the culture to come.



Finally, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt instruct the animals to talk to each other and to praise their creators. The animals, however, only chatter and howl in different languages. The gods are perplexed and declare that their work is subpar. They address the animals and say that since the animals cannot speak, the animals must accept that they will one day be food for the humans. With this, the gods demote the animals from their role as guardians of the land.

Next, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Hurricane, Sudden Thunderbolt, and Newborn Thunderbolt decide to try again to make humans, as the first dawn is quickly approaching and they need humans to cultivate the land. They decide to attempt to create humans that will be able to praise and respect the gods. The gods make a body out of mud, but the body doesn't hold together and the being speaks nonsense before dissolving into the water. The gods allow the being to dissolve and then discuss how they might make a better human. They decide to call on the gods Xpiyacoc and Xmucane for help.

Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Hurricane ask Xmucane and Xpiyacoc if they should mold humans out of wood. Xmucane and Xpiyacoc reply that wood is a fine medium, but they caution the gods of the Heart of the Sky to not deceive Sovereign Plumed Serpent. With this, the wood humans come into being. They multiply, but there's nothing in their hearts, nothing in their minds, and they don't remember their makers. They walk the new earth with no purpose.

Because of this, the wood people are considered to be just an experiment for humans. Though they look like humans, they have no blood, sweat, or fat. Promptly, Hurricane creates a flood to wash out the wood people. Resin rains from the sky, and several gods descend to gouge out the wood people's eyeballs, eat their flesh, and tear them open. Animals enter the wood people's houses, and inanimate objects come alive to crush their former masters. The animals and the inanimate objects tell the wood people that the tables have turned, and they will now eat and destroy the wood people.

When the stones from the hearths begin flinging themselves at the wood people's heads, the wood people race out and try to climb on top of their houses to escape the flood, but the houses fall. When they try to climb the trees, the trees throw them off. The wood people try to enter caves, but the caves shut themselves and won't allow the wood people in. The narrator says that this is how the monkeys came into being: the wood people were left on earth with crushed faces, and are a sign that there were once other kinds of humans.

Again, asking for praise shows that worship is essential to being properly Mayan. Further, the fact that the animals cannot praise the gods is what makes them subhuman, and what dictates how the hierarchy is organized going forward. Animals' lowness on the hierarchy is evidenced by the fact that they're already placed below currently nonexistent humans.



Now, the gods reveal another quality that will make humans human: the ability to cultivate and care for the land. When considered in tandem with the necessity of worship, this situates the state of being human as a state of constant service to the surrounding world. This also begins to allude to the importance of community to the Mayan culture, which is reinforced when the gods call on their community (as represented by Xpiyacoc and Xmucane) for help.



Given the way the wood people are described, they can be seen as a metaphor for current, real humans without a purpose in life. These wood people go through the motions of life on earth, but their lives are small and meaningless because they don't recognize that they're a part of something bigger.



The fact that absolutely everything turns on the wood people—from the gods to inanimate objects and the natural world—suggests that there are major consequences both for upending the hierarchy (by not worshipping the gods) and for not properly caring for the land. Essentially, being improperly human leads to upending the entire world order.



By turning the wood people into monkeys, the narrative creates a very visible reminder of the consequences of not properly worshipping the gods. This also adds to the sense of logic in regard to the world order: monkeys exist for a reason, and their existence isn't arbitrary. This allows a Mayan reader to be able to better understand the world around them, and thus better understand their place in it.



At this time, everything is still dark; there is no sun. However, a god called Seven Macaw "magnifies himself" and impersonates the sun and moon, giving light to the flooded wood people. He declares that he's greater than the wood people and will therefore dictate their calendar. Seven Macaw decorates his teeth with turquoise and other jewels and arranges beautiful metals around his eyes, and his white beak shines like the moon. His nest is made of metal and "lights up the earth" when he sits in front of it—but the narrator explains that this isn't true, and the light from Seven Macaw's nest only reaches the area right around it. The true sun, moon, and stars haven't risen yet, but Seven Macaw continues to think of himself as a great god.

Seven Macaw's comment about dictating the wood people's calendar is a reminder to contemporary readers that the Popol Vuh is a narrative representation of the Mayan calendar. All the gods represent celestial bodies, and their interactions in the story show how the stars move in the sky. Here then, by believing he dictates the calendar, Seven Macaw insists that he's the most powerful being around. When he tries to embody a great god for the failed wood people, however, it reinforces for the reader that his power only exists in his mind—monkeys don't need a calendar.



PART TWO

Two twin boy gods named Hunahpu and Xbalanque understand that Seven Macaw's self-magnification is evil, so they decide to try to take him down. The boys are adept at shooting with blowguns, so they decide to shoot Seven Macaw while he's eating and then take away all of his jewels and shiny metal.

Seven Macaw's reliance on the jewels and metal alludes to the role of those jewels and metals in Mayan culture: possessing them is one of the things that signifies a great ruler. By this logic, simply depriving One Macaw of these things will return him to his rightful place.



Seven Macaw has two sons with his wife, Chimalmat: Zipacna and Earthquake. Zipacna spends his time building up mountains, while Earthquake moves and softens the mountains. They do this to magnify themselves, just like their father. Zipacna declares that he's the maker of the earth, while Earthquake exclaims that he brings down the sky and turns the earth into an avalanche. Just as with Seven Macaw, Hunahpu and Xbalanque see that these are evil acts, and so the twins plan to kill Zipacna and Earthquake as well.

Notice that Hunahpu and Xbalanque don't appear to have any motive to take down these villainous characters except the recognition that what those characters are doing is wrong. This begins to suggest that goodness is something inherent to these two, which situates them as the true heroes of the story (but also makes some of their more drastic actions somewhat inexplicable).



The narrator describes Seven Macaw's tree, where the bird god eats. One day, Hunahpu and Xbalanque hide under Seven Macaw's tree and wait until he comes to eat. When he does, Hunahpu shoots his blowgun at Seven Macaw, breaking his jaw. Hunahpu runs after Seven Macaw when he falls out of the tree, but Seven Macaw rises before Hunahpu can grab him. Seven Macaw rips Hunahpu's arm off and flies home to Chimalmat. When Chimalmat asks in horror what Seven Macaw has, he explains that the "tricksters" shot him and dislocated his jaw. He declares that once he begins roasting Hunahpu's arm over the fire, the twins will come to try to retrieve it.

While Seven Macaw has a vague plan as to how to do away with Hunahpu and Xbalanque, there's nothing particularly tricky about it. This continues to cast Seven Macaw as a villain, as trickery is a skill that's associated primarily with heroes. When Hunahpu loses his arm, it clearly shows that he's not infallible or exempt from such bodily harm. This begins to humanize the twin gods and make them more relatable as heroic characters.



As Seven Macaw schemes, Hunahpu and Xbalanque make plans of their own. They ask two gods, Great White Peccary and Great White Coati, to pose as their grandparents and travel with them to Seven Macaw's nest. They instruct the gods to tell Seven Macaw that they're nothing but useless and misbehaving orphaned children, and Great White Peccary and Great White Coati agree.

When Great White Peccary, Great White Coati, Hunahpu, and Xbalanque pass by Seven Macaw's house, Seven Macaw is yelling in pain. When Seven Macaw sees the "grandparents" walking, he inquires as to where they're headed. They tell him that they're "making their living," and explain that the children with them are their pitiful grandchildren. Seven Macaw struggles through the pain to respond and asks the grandparents if they can possibly cure his pain. They explain that they're bonesetters and dentists, and agree to help Seven Macaw. Seven Macaw grouses that he hasn't slept or eaten since the twins shot him, and the grandparents declare that Seven Macaw just has a worm gnawing at his teeth. They explain that they need to pull his teeth and replace them.

Seven Macaw asks if that's actually a good plan, since his status as a lord is dependent on his beautiful turquoise teeth. Great White Peccary and Great White Coati assure him that they'll absolutely replace his teeth with ground up bone, which they show him--but the narrator explains that this "ground up bone" is actually white **corn**. Seven Macaw finally agrees, and the grandparents pull out his teeth and fill the holes with corn. The grandparents then pluck the metal from around Seven Macaw's eyes, and he simply watches, ashamed, as his greatness disappears. Then Seven Macaw dies, as does Chimalmat, and Hunahpu gets his arm back. The grandparents set Hunahpu's arm, and it heals perfectly.

The story shifts to Seven Macaw's son Zipacna. One day, as he bathes on the shore, the Four Hundred Boys pass by dragging a log to build their hut. When Zipacna asks the boys what they're doing, they explain that they're struggling to carry the log. Zipacna offers to carry it for them, and he takes it right to the entrance of their hut. The Four Hundred Boys offer Zipacna shelter, but he refuses. They ask him for help with carrying the logs the next day, and Zipacna agrees to help.

Unlike Seven Macaw, the twins have a plan to actually trick their adversary--which in turn situates them as the rightful heroes. Xbalanque and Hunahpu often pose as orphaned characters with no names, which offers a clue as to why the writers of the story didn't offer their own names: they're not just protecting themselves, they're emulating Hunahpu and Xbalanque.



Seven Macaw is too caught up in his pain and thinks of himself as being too important for someone to take advantage of him, and both of those thoughts actually facilitate this trick. This cautions the reader to remain humble about their status, and also suggests that one should behave more like the one-armed Hunahpu than Seven Macaw when faced with pain like this. This also suggests in a more overarching way that pain has the power to make people susceptible to trickery.



The way that the text conceptualizes Seven Macaw's relationship to power as being dependent on his jewels and metal sets up an important distinction between those who are actually powerful and those who merely pretend to be. For Seven Macaw, the jewels are what make him powerful. Later, in the human parts of the story, jewels are a byproduct of power that already exists. This continues to situate power as something inherent to individuals, not something that's obtained by possessing material goods.



Part of what makes Zipacna (who is generally considered a caiman, or kind of crocodile) a less than ideal character here is that he refuses the hospitality of the Four Hundred Boys. It's also suggested that he is too strong for his own good, and uses this strength to "magnify himself."



After Zipacna leaves, the Four Hundred Boys speak amongst themselves. They decide that what Zipacna does is evil, and they should kill him. The boys devise a plan to dig a hole, get Zipacna to get into the hole, and then throw a log into the hole to bury him alive. The next day, they carry out their plan. When they ask Zipacna to help them dig their deep hole, Zipacna agrees—but instead of continuing the hole the Four Hundred Boys began, Zipacna digs a tunnel to the side so he won't die. When Zipacna is safe in his side tunnel, he calls out that he's surely dug deep enough.

The Four Hundred Boys throw another massive log down into the hole and then hide themselves. They reason that Zipacna will cry when he dies, and Zipacna indeed cries out. The boys celebrate their victory and go on to make their "sweet drink," which takes three days to make. They watch Zipacna's hole and wait for ants to bring up parts of Zipacna's body, and they're not disappointed. The narrator, however, explains that Zipacna is actually still alive at the bottom and is cutting his nails and hair for the ants to carry up. He hears the Four Hundred Boys say when their drink will be done.

On the day that the Four Hundred Boys' drink is finished, the boys all get drunk and lie languidly throughout their hut. Zipacna emerges from his hole and brings the boys' hut down on them, killing all of them. The narrator notes that it's possible the boys ascended to the sky and became a constellation called Hundrath, though the truth of that is unknown.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque are very sad to hear that their friends, the Four Hundred Boys, are dead. They decide that since Zipacna is greedy and spends every day eating fish and crabs, they'll create a fake crab to trick him and exact revenge. Hunahpu and Xbalanque make the crab out of flowers and rocks and place the crab under an overhang at the base of a mountain. Once the trap is set, the boys walk along the water until they find Zipacna. They ask Zipacna what he's doing, and Zipacna explains that he's just looking for fish and crabs to eat. He adds that he hasn't eaten in two days, and he's dying of hunger.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque "remember" that they saw a massive female crab down in a canyon. They explain that they tried to catch the crab, but it just bit and scared them. Zipacna asks the twins to show him where the crab is, but they insist they're too scared. They say that if Zipacna follows the river to the bottom of the canyon, he'll find the crab. Zipacna insists that the boys come with him, and explains that if they accompany him, he'll show them a place where there are birds to shoot. Hunahpu and Xbalanque agree.

Here, the story begins to offer the possibility that Zipacna is a less villainous character than the Four Hundred Boys believe, because he appears to be entirely capable of outsmarting the boys. This creates some room for characters to not be just heroic or just villainous. It places characters on more of a spectrum, which offers a much more realistic look at human nature as represented by these fickle and human-like gods.



The "sweet drink" is likely a type of mead called balché, which was a sacred drink for the ancient Maya. It was often used for ceremonial purposes, which explains why the Four Hundred Boys make it to celebrate their "victory" over Zipacna. It's possible that the text doesn't name the drink because of some greater historical context: the Spanish didn't like the drink and therefore banned it.



The narrator's aside here makes it abundantly clear that this text might not include everything. As such, it reinforces that the Popol Vuh was an oral story, and the many iterations of it in its oral form leave room for many different fates for the Four Hundred Boys.



Once again, the reason why Zipacna is considered a villain within the logic of the story is that his habits don't foster community, let alone acknowledge others: he's greedy and monopolizes important food sources, which tells the reader that this is a bad thing to do. By plotting to do away with Zipacna, Hunahpu and Xbalanque then are acting in a way that will allow communities to flourish because they're preserving food sources.



Here, by assuming the guise of two young, terrified, nameless boys, Hunahpu and Xbalanque actually gain power when they don't share their names. This suggests that though names carry power, it's entirely possible to manipulate this system in order to trick others—just as the writers of the story are doing by not recording their own names.



As they walk, Hunahpu and Xbalanque explain that the crab bit them mercilessly. They say that they first entered the crab's cave on their stomachs, but when they tried entering the cave on their backs, the crab got scared. They suggest that Zipacna should enter the cave on his back, and Zipacna agrees. When they arrive at the crab's hiding spot, however, Zipacna hastily enters the cave face down. The crab, however, gets on top of him with her back down, and Zipacna cannot get ahold of her. He crawls back out and concedes that Hunahpu and Xbalanque were right about it being better to enter the cave on his back. Zipacna wiggles into the cave until only his lower legs are showing and sighs as the mountain comes to rest on his chest. He promptly turns to stone, defeated by the genius of Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

Next, Hurricane speaks to Hunahpu and Xbalanque about Earthquake. Hurricane explains that Earthquake also needs to be defeated because what he does to the earth is emphatically bad, especially since he's becoming so physically large. He tells the boys to lure Earthquake into sitting down in the east. Hunahpu and Xbalanque agree. Meanwhile, Earthquake continues to bring down mountains. He can destroy them simply by tapping his foot.

When Xbalanque and Hunahpu come upon Earthquake, they ask him what he's doing. He explains that he's breaking mountains, and he says that he doesn't recognize the twins. When Earthquake asks the twins their names, they explain that they're nameless orphans who hunt and trap. They tell Earthquake that they've been looking for birds at a mountain that's exceptionally tall, and there were no birds to be found there. They ask how it's possible that Earthquake destroys mountains when this mountain still stands. Earthquake is extremely interested in this mountain, and begs the twins to take him to it. They lead him to the east and walk on either side of him so they can shoot birds with their blowguns. The narrator explains that instead of shooting clay pellets, the twins shoot only air out of their blowguns—and they still kill birds. Earthquake is very impressed.

When Xbalanque and Hunahpu have several birds, they make a fire and roast the birds. They coat one of the birds with plaster and decide to give that one to Earthquake when he gets hungry. They reason that they must cook the bird in the earth, since the earth will be Earthquake's grave. They also declare that this is the reason why future humans will desire meat, just as Earthquake does.

It's worth noting that the translator's forward to the Popol Vuh mentions that this scene includes a thinly veiled sex joke: when Zipacna has to jockey around to position himself so that he can best the female crab, it presents some physical comedy that shames him for both his food-related greed and the need to be in a particular position to "take" this female creature. It's also interesting to note that neither Hunahpu nor Xbalanque engage in romantic pursuits in the Popol Vuh, which suggests that romantic relationships aren't necessarily part and parcel with perfect heroism.



While Zipacna and Seven Macaw were bad because they were simply greedy and thought too highly of themselves, Earthquake is more of a problem because he's creating lasting damage to the land. This means that he'll also be a problem for future humans if he's not reined in. Taken together, this reinforces the gods' hope that beings will be able to care for the land, not destroy it.



Again, when Hunahpu and Xbalanque omit the fact that they're the most powerful heroes of the story, it allows them to more easily trick Earthquake into trusting them, because he simply doesn't have the opportunity to make the connections between their names and their power. They do allude to their degree of power here by not shooting clay pellets and just shooting air. To someone less self-involved, this might indicate that the twins aren't what they seem, but Earthquake is too intent on proving himself and showing off to acknowledge that others also have powers.



With this particular line of reasoning for why humans eat meat, the text creates an even more compelling link between future humans and their relationship to the earth. It essentially reinforces the idea that beings are connected to the earth, in this case by divine intervention, which in turn has a lasting impact on humans' lived experiences.



Earthquake becomes hungry when he smells the cooking birds. He asks Hunahpu and Xbalanque for a bite, and they give him the plaster-coated bird. He eats the entire thing and the threesome continues eastward. As they walk, the bird causes Earthquake to lose strength in his arms and legs. When they reach the great mountain, Earthquake can't do anything about it. Hunahpu and Xbalanque bind Earthquake's wrists to his ankles and bury him. The narrator explains that Hunahpu and Xbalanque's deeds on earth are countless, but it's now time to explain their births.

Earthquake's origin story as a whole explains the presence of earthquakes: the fact that he rests in the earth shows that people recognize that earthquakes as geological events come from the earth itself, not from anything above ground. Tied up and in the ground, Earthquake has much less power than he did as an actual being, though he can still cause the ground to shake.



PART THREE

The narrator raises a toast to the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, and explains that the story will now give a partial account of his exploits. The twins' father is One Hunahpu, brother of Seven Hunahpu. One and Seven Hunahpu are the children of Xmucane and Xpiyacoc, and One Hunahpu has two other sons, One Monkey and One Artisan, with his wife, Egret Woman. Seven Hunahpu remains single, but he is just as knowledgeable, good, and heroic as his brother and nephews. One and Seven Hunahpu teach One Monkey and One Artisan to be musicians, artists, craftsmen, and writers.

The fact that the text feels the need to make it clear that Seven Hunahpu is just as good of a god as One Hunahpu despite not being married indicates how important marriage and family are to the Mayan people. It suggests that to a Mayan reader, there would be the implication that Seven Hunahpu would be lesser because he's a bachelor.



One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu spend their time throwing dice and playing a ball game, often with One Monkey and One Artisan. Their ball court is midway between the sky and Xibalba, the underworld. As such, the highest lords of the underworld, One Death and Seven Death, can hear the players stomping and yelling as they play. One and Seven Death speak with their lords and discuss that this noise is extremely disrespectful.

Little is known about the Mesoamerican ball game (including the actual name for it), but it's clear from Mayan artwork that it was both recreational and a religious or ceremonial activity. This explains why the game is such an important motif for the gods throughout the Popol Vuh: it explains its later shift to becoming ceremonial.



There are a number of lesser lords under One Death and Seven Death. Scab Stripper and Blood Gatherer make people bleed, while the Demon of Pus and the Demon of Jaundice make people swell. Bone Scepter and Skull Scepter make people emaciated and then kill them. Demon of Filth and Demon of Woe make people die suddenly of fright, and Wing and Packstrap cause people to die suddenly in the road after vomiting blood. As these lords speak with One and Seven Death, they decide that they'd like to acquire One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu's gaming equipment to put an end to the noise.

With these underworld gods, the reader gets a sense of how the Mayan people sought to deal with the bad parts of their world that couldn't be explained without a modern understanding of disease. Notice too that it's people specifically that these lords target. That's another clue that the story is being told out of order, as it suggests that there are humans on earth at this point, even though the text hasn't revisited the idea of creating humans yet.



One Death and Seven Death send their messenger owls to summon One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu to play ball in Xibalba. They instruct the messengers to flatter One and Seven Hunahpu and to ask them to bring their equipment, especially their ball. When the owl messengers arrive at the ball court, they repeat their message, naming all the lords of Xibalba as they do so. The owls offer to accompany One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu to Xibalba, but the brothers insist that they must tell Xmucane where they're going first. When they reach Xmucane's hut, they explain the situation and learn that Xpiyacoc has just died. Rather than take their ball, they tie it up in Xmucane's roof and promise to return to play again. They tell One Monkey and One Artisan to entertain their grandmother. Xmucane bursts into tears, and her sons assure her that they're not going to die.

The owl messengers guide One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu down the road to Xibalba, which winds down a steep hill to the bottom of a canyon. They pass through a place called Scorpion Rapids, but none of the scorpions sting them. They also cross a river called Blood River and a river filled with pus, but they don't drink. Finally, they come to the Crossroads, which is where the downfall of One and Seven Hunahpu begins.

There are four roads—Red Road, Black Road, White Road, and Yellow Road—and Black Road speaks to One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. It says that it's the lords' road, but it's actually the Road of Xibalba. It leads One and Seven Hunahpu to the council place of the Xibalban lords. The narrator tells the reader that the "lords" seated there are actually just manikins, not the actual lords. One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu greet the manikin lords, and the real lords laugh and laugh, as this means that they'll triumph.

Finally, One Death and Seven Death address their guests. They tell One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu that tomorrow they'll play ball, and they offer them a bench—but the bench is a burning hot rock. One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu sit anyway, burning themselves, and the lords and all the beings of Xibalba laugh at them again. Finally, One and Seven Death instruct One and Seven Hunahpu to enter a house called Dark House. Once they're in the house, the Xibalbans talk amongst themselves and decide to sacrifice their guests the next day. They decide to kill them with a ball that's actually a spherical knife, coated in crushed bone to make it smooth.

One and Seven Hunahpu exhibit familial loyalty here by tasking One Monkey and One Artisan with caring for their grandmother while they're gone. This also cements the role of grandparents as important figures in Mayan culture, suggesting that a Mayan conception of family and community includes more than just the nuclear family. Though it's unclear exactly why One and Seven Hunahpu don't bring their ball, it can be read as another show of familial loyalty (in that it becomes a token of their promise to return).



By naming the locations and landmarks in Xibalba after scorpions, blood, and pus, the text plays on a reader's previous knowledge that those things are evil as it begins to create a picture of the underworld. Essentially, it draws on a reader's knowledge and memory from outside the text to give the sinister places power.



The idea that naming things is powerful is brought to the forefront here, as One and Seven Hunahpu's inability to name the Xibalban lords is what tells those lords that their guests won't make it out alive. Further, One and Seven Hunahpu are falling for tricks instead of tricking others, which marks them as less heroic in the grand scheme of things.



Notice that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are trying to be good and polite guests by doing as their hosts ask them to. Because they're failing miserably at surviving their time in Xibalba, this begins to suggest to the reader that it's often more important to be on the lookout for tricks and to protect oneself from them than it is to just be a polite guest.



Once One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu enter Dark House, a bearer brings them one lit torch and two lit cigars. The bearer tells One and Seven Hunahpu that they must return the torch and cigars in the morning, and they must look exactly as they do now. One and Seven Hunahpu let the torch and the cigars burn down, though, which brings about their defeat. The narrator explains that Xibalba is a place full of tests, though One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu don't even get to move on to the other test houses: Rattling House, which is filled with cold things; Jaguar House, filled with jaguars; Bat House, where bats are trapped inside; and finally, Razor House, a house filled with slashing blades.

In the morning, when One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are brought back before One Death and Seven Death, they explain that they finished the torch and the cigars. One and Seven Death declare that One and Seven Hunahpu will die and be sacrificed. They bury One and Seven Hunahpu at their ball court, though they cut off One Hunahpu's head first and put it in the fork of a tree by the road. Once his head is settled in the tree, the tree bears fruit. This tree is the calabash tree, and the narrator explains that it wouldn't have borne fruit if One Hunahpu's head hadn't been placed there.

The tree's fruit amazes and troubles One Death and Seven Death. The fruit is so abundant, it's impossible to tell where One Hunahpu's head is. The Xibalbans decide that nobody should pick the fruit or go close to the tree, but a young maiden named Blood Moon soon breaks this rule. Her father, Blood Gatherer, tells her about the tree, and Blood Moon is curious. She wonders if the fruit is sweet, so she goes to the tree. Blood Moon reasons that the fruit shouldn't go to waste and decides to pick one, but One Hunahpu's head speaks to her. He tells her that she doesn't want the fruit, saying that the fruit is just bones, but Blood Moon insists she does want it.

One Hunahpu's head asks Blood Moon to stretch out her hand where he can see it. Then he spits in her hand, but when Blood Moon looks at her hand, she doesn't see anything. One Hunahpu explains that by spitting in her hand, he gave her a sign. He says that his head is just bone now, while flesh is what made him and other lords look like lords. One Hunahpu continues, saying that when a man dies, his sons are like his saliva: they go on living and make it so that the father doesn't truly disappear. He tells Blood Moon that by spitting in her hand, this will happen for him too. He instructs her to leave Xibalba and assures her that she won't die.

Finishing the cigars and the torch points to a running motif of light versus dark and good versus evil: these objectively good characters plunge their immediate surroundings into darkness, which is aligned with villainous characters. This shows that it's exceptionally important for the characters to consistently work towards making sure there's light in the world that comes from a positive source (unlike Seven Macaw, for example).



Notice here that even though One and Seven Death are cast as villains, they still fall in line with the overarching emphasis on devotion (in this case, through sacrifice). This holds true even though it's unclear who or what exactly they're sacrificing the Hunahpus to; it still shows them devoting themselves to something. Symbolically, the fruit that comes from One Hunahpu's head foreshadows a rebirth of sorts.



When One Hunahpu insists that the fruit is just bones, he's setting a test of his own: the prolific fruit is evidence that the tree is linked to life, as fruit is both representative of reproduction in other beings, and is literally how some trees reproduce. When Blood Moon declines to listen to One Hunahpu, it shows that she sees and believes in the reproductive symbolism of the tree and is therefore herself aligned with creation, life, and light. Also note some parallels here with the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden—these two myths arose separately with thousands of miles (and also possibly years) between them, but both play on the idea of a young maiden being tempted to eat a “forbidden fruit.”



One Hunahpu's speech sheds light on the importance of family for the Mayan people: by having children, a person gets to live on through those children, and becomes immortal in a way. This idea will come to the forefront once the story moves into the human realm, as much of Part Five consists of listing these familial lines (and in doing so, keeping the memory of the forefathers alive). However, it's also worth noting that this is a patriarchal society concerned primarily with fathers, not mothers; the text overwhelmingly gives fathers precedence and remembers very few women.



With this, Blood Moon becomes pregnant with the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque. After six months, Blood Gatherer finally notices that his daughter is pregnant. He's very angry, as he believes that her child is a bastard. When he speaks with the other lords of Xibalba, they suggest that if she won't tell him who the father is, that he should sacrifice her. Blood Gatherer agrees and goes home to question Blood Moon. Blood Moon insists that she's a virgin, but her father won't hear of it. He instructs the owl messengers to take her away, sacrifice her, and bring back her heart.

The owl messengers take Blood Moon by the hand and lead her away. Once they're well away, Blood Moon explains to the messengers that her child was conceived miraculously when she went to go look at One Hunahpu's head in the tree. She begs the messengers to not sacrifice her. The messengers are moved, and they wonder what they could bring back to approximate her heart. They explain that the lords want to personally examine her heart later.

Blood Moon tells the owl messengers that from now on, their home won't be in Xibalba, and they'll no longer conduct sacrifices like this. She gathers sap from different trees and when the sap congeals, it looks very much like a heart with blood on it. Blood Moon blesses the owls, and they send her ahead on the path while they take the "heart" to the lords of Xibalba.

The lords of Xibalba greet the owl messengers and inquire about the success of the sacrifice. One Death inspects the dripping "heart," and then places it over the fire to dry. The aroma of the smoking blood is intoxicating and sweet, and all the lords stand around smelling it. The owl messengers return to Blood Moon and send her out of Xibalba through a hole in the earth, and the smoking heart blinds all the lords of Xibalba.

Blood Moon goes to Xmucane for help. She explains that she's Xmucane's daughter-in-law and is pregnant with her grandbabies. Wrought with grief, Xmucane insists that she has no grandchildren but One Monkey and One Artisan, and laments that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu died in Xibalba. Blood Moon tries again to explain that her unborn children are One Hunahpu's, and that One and Seven Hunahpu aren't truly dead: she says that they've come up with a way to "reveal the light," and have done so by making Blood Moon pregnant.

Again, Blood Gatherer's reaction to believing his daughter's child will be a bastard provides insight into Mayan familial structures and social mores, as it indicates that it's important to have children within a marriage. In Blood Moon's case, the text implies that she's saved from being considered a sullied woman because the father of her children is a god. This is also an example of a kind of "virgin birth," a motif that reappears in the myths of several other cultures as well—particularly when connected to the birth of a hero.



The owl messengers' continued service to the Xibalban lords, even when they don't agree with the lords' rules, emphasizes the importance of service to one's superiors. However, by helping Blood Moon (which is construed as doing the right thing), the text also insists that it's more important to do what's right than to follow directions exactly.



Blood Moon's sap will show up again later as resin that humans burn for the gods. With this, the story more organically offers the origin story of burning sap and resin and explains why it is that this custom exists. By naming the specific trees where she gathers the sap, the story also offers important information about those trees and their qualities.



The fake heart itself becomes a very successful trick: it not only enables Blood Moon to escape, but also punishes all the Xibalban lords for not believing her story. This begins to foreshadow future instances in which the Xibalban lords aren't exceptional tricksters, or fall for the tricks of others.



By saying that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu have come up with a way to "reveal the light," the story continues to explore the association of light with good and dark with evil (especially the reader already knows that these children will go on to be overwhelmingly good and rid the world of evil). Further, insisting that One and Seven Hunahpu aren't truly dead ties into One Hunahpu's speech about how children keep their fathers alive.



Xmucane shouts that she doesn't want Blood Moon, that Blood Moon's babies are bastards, and that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are dead. When Blood Moon insists again, Xmucane sends her to gather a full net of **corn** ears. Blood Moon walks to One Monkey and One Artisan's garden, where she finds only one stalk of corn with only a few ears. She begins to cry that she'll never be able to accomplish Xmucane's task, but she calls upon the guardians of food. After she asks for help, Blood Moon pulls on the silk of the corn and the corn multiplies until she has enough to fill her net.

When Blood Moon returns to Xmucane's hut, animals carry her full net for her. Xmucane is livid that Blood Moon apparently picked the entire garden and she rushes to the garden to inspect the damage. There, she sees the one **corn** stalk still standing, and the imprint of the net in the ground. Xmucane hurries back home and informs Blood Moon that she believes her now, and remarks that Blood Moon's children are already showing signs of genius.

Not long after, Blood Moon gives birth very suddenly to Hunahpu and Xbalanque while she's in the mountains. When she brings the babies into the house they cry loudly, and Xmucane insists that Blood Moon take them outside. One Monkey and One Artisan place their baby brothers first on an anthill and then in some brambles, but the babies sleep soundly.

The narrator explains that One Monkey and One Artisan want their brothers to die, as they're very jealous of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. One Monkey and One Artisan have spent their lives going to great pains to learn about the world and become skilled artisans, and as such, they know how events will turn out. Their jealousy, however, means they keep this knowledge to themselves.

Xmucane, One Monkey, and One Artisan treat Xbalanque and Hunahpu horribly. They don't show them love or feed them. Hunahpu and Xbalanque take all of this in stride; they continue to shoot birds and bring them home, even though they never get to eat them. The narrator tells the reader that those two know their place.

The way the corn multiplies here mirrors the way that Blood Moon herself became pregnant. Because of this association, the story continues to develop the idea that Blood Moon's pregnancy is divine and correct, and it remains that way even though others don't believe her. As a symbol of life, the corn multiplying references the life that will spring from Blood Moon's children, both the lives of the children themselves and those who will come after.



The forward notes that the logic of this particular sign is based on the Mayan day names (net is the name of a day; therefore, Xmucane essentially sees the future in the net's imprint). Because the connection is apparent only for someone familiar with the Mayan calendar, the seeming strangeness of the sign stands as a reminder that this story was created by and for Mayan audiences using specifically Mayan logic.



When Hunahpu and Xbalanque sleep well in the anthill and in brambles, the story reinforces the twins' personal connection to the land and the need for humans to be similarly connected to and in tune with the natural world. Conversely, this also suggests that One Monkey and One Artisan lack that connection.



Note how the text indicates that One Monkey and One Artisan aren't truly evil, as it consistently reminds the reader that they were great artists. This points to the importance of artistic pursuits in Mayan culture, as it's the brothers' connection to the arts that keeps them from being categorized as true villains.



When Hunahpu and Xbalanque show this kind of humility and respect for their elders, the text reinforces the importance of adhering to hierarchy within the family unit. When the narrator condemns One Monkey and One Artisan's behavior, however, it does show that treating inferiors this way is unacceptable.



One day, Hunahpu and Xbalanque return home without birds. Xmucane angrily demands to know why they didn't bring birds, and the boys explain that their birds got stuck in a tree and they need help from One Monkey and One Artisan to get them down. One Monkey and One Artisan agree and follow their brothers. As they walk, Hunahpu and Xbalanque whisper to each other that they're going to defeat their older brothers, since their brothers want them to die and disappear.

When the four brothers reach the tree, Hunahpu and Xbalanque begin shooting birds in the tree. None of the birds fall, so One Monkey and One Artisan agree to climb the tree and get the birds down. As they climb, the tree begins to grow. One Monkey and One Artisan desperately want to get down but can't figure out how, so they call down to Hunahpu and Xbalanque for help. Xbalanque tells them to take off their pants and tie them around their hips so they're able to move better. One Monkey and One Artisan oblige, and the ends of their pants turn immediately into tails. They turn into monkeys and swing through the trees, howling.

Xbalanque and Hunahpu return to Xmucane's hut and tell her that their brothers have become "simply shameless," like animals. Xmucane is suspicious, but Xbalanque and Hunahpu assure her that she'll see One Monkey and One Artisan again. They explain that they're going to "test their brothers' destiny," but say that Xmucane absolutely cannot laugh. With this, Hunahpu and Xbalanque begin to play a song called "Hunahpu Monkey."

When they hear the song, One Monkey and One Artisan come, dancing. When Xmucane sees her grandsons looking so ugly and silly, she laughs. This scares One Monkey and One Artisan, and they run away. Xbalanque and Hunahpu explain that they can only try to call One Monkey and One Artisan four times, and it won't work if Xmucane keeps laughing. They begin playing and again, Xmucane laughs when she sees One Monkey and One Artisan, who retreat. The third time, Xmucane controls her laughter until she sees her monkey grandsons puckering their lips and scratching themselves. At her laugh One Monkey and One Artisan retreat yet again. Hunahpu and Xbalanque play one more time, but their brothers don't come.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque tell Xmucane to not be sad, as she still has them as grandchildren. They explain that One Monkey and One Artisan will be remembered by their names, and will be prayed to by musicians and artisans. The narrator explains that One Monkey and One Artisan were punished for magnifying themselves and abusing their younger brothers. Regardless, they were talented artisans and did great things.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque's plan mirrors the Four Hundred Boys' plan to take down Zipacna. By aligning One Monkey and One Artisan with Zipacna (in that both villains agree to help when asked), the story again shows that characters don't have to be entirely evil to be villainous. Rather, their questionable intentions and their self-magnification is what makes them true villains.



When the tree assists the twins by miraculously growing, the text once again shows that it's extremely important to connect with the natural world and see it as an asset, not as a danger (as One Monkey and One Artisan did when they tried to use the natural world to kill their brothers). Thus, turning One Monkey and One Artisan into monkeys sentences them to a life in this natural world and forces them to become a part of it on Hunahpu and Xbalanque's terms.



By giving the name of the song the twins play, the text provides the origin story for the song itself. This suggests in a wider context that some Mayan music is rooted in stories like this where the music itself had a purpose. Therefore, by playing the song in a contemporary setting, it would become a way to remember this story.



One Monkey and One Artisan become howler monkeys (and are sometimes referred to as howler monkey gods), which situates this as the origin story of howler monkeys in general. Again, by explaining the origins of the natural world around them, the Mayan people assign meaning and logic to the world so that they can more effectively be a part of it and properly care for it.



One Monkey and One Artisan are saved from disappearing because Hunahpu and Xbalanque insist that they'll remember their names. The text again reinforces a hierarchy within the natural world with animals at the bottom, which shows that good behavior is associated with humans while poor behavior is linked to animals.



Now, Hunahpu and Xbalanque can begin their process of becoming truly great. They start by assuring Blood Moon and Xmucane that they'll take over the gardening duties. They pick up their tools and instruct Xmucane to bring them lunch at midday. When Xbalanque and Hunahpu reach the site for their garden, they stick their tools in the ground and the garden cultivates itself. Trees fall and brambles clear. Hunahpu and Xbalanque call a mourning dove and tell it to cry when Xmucane comes, as they're going to go shooting and leave their tools to their work.

When Xbalanque and Hunahpu hear the mourning dove, they race back to the garden and pick up their tools. One rubs dirt on his hands and face, and the other dumps wood chips on himself to create the illusion that they were actually working. When they get home that evening, Xbalanque and Hunahpu tell Xmucane that they're very tired. The next morning when the twins return to their garden, however, they find that the trees and bushes have reclaimed the land. The narrator tells the reader that all the animals put the land back to the way it was overnight.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque again allow their tools to work the land. They head home and tell Xmucane what happened, and inform her that they're going to keep watch overnight. They hide themselves in the underbrush and watch as the animals pour out of the forest and ask the trees and bushes to regrow. Xbalanque and Hunahpu creep towards the animals and finally reveal themselves. The puma and jaguar escape, but the boys grab and break off the tails of the deer and the rabbit.

Incensed, Hunahpu and Xbalanque make a grab at the last animal to try to run away, the rat. They catch the rat and try to burn him over the fire, but they only succeed in burning the hair off of his tail. The rat yells at the boys that he won't die, and further, that gardening isn't the boys' job. He says that there's something else that the boys must do, and the rat promises to tell them if the boys give him food. The rat tells the boys that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu's gaming equipment is hidden in Xmucane's roof, and she doesn't want them to see it because she doesn't want the boys to know that the ball game was how their father died.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque are thrilled to learn the truth about their father and uncle, and they give the rat **corn**, squash seeds, beans, and cacao. They tell the rat that all stored or wasted food is his for the taking. The rat asks what will happen if Xmucane sees him when they try to get the equipment down, and the boys insist that they'll trick their grandmother.

When Hunahpu and Xbalanque garden using magic, it suggests that they're taking over these tasks to perform a familial duty to their mother and grandmother rather than doing it out of an actual desire to garden. Their actions therefore indicate that though they're heroic gods, Hunahpu and Xbalanque aren't perfect. It humanizes them and makes them easier to identify with.



Not even the hero twins are exempt from the consequences of cutting corners. Because the story has already established that events like this are logical consequences or are signs, it leads the reader to look for what the logic in this might be. At this point, it does suggest that the twins might not be as powerful and connected to the land as they thought they were, given that it is revolting against them.



The animals make it exceptionally clear that there are consequences of humans (or gods) cultivating the land; doing so directly affects the animals that once lived there. This reinforces the idea that there should be a sense of balance between humans, gods, and the natural world, and that humans should care for the land as much as they use the land for their own benefit.



In reintroducing One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu's story into that of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the story reinforces the interconnectedness of the world, and specifically of different generations. Now that the twins have more information about their ancestors, they'll be able to accomplish an appropriate task that connects them to their father and uncle instead of wasting their time in an ill-fated attempt at gardening.



Again, the story provides a reader with an origin story for why rats eat what they do, while also suggesting that rats aren't always pests.



When Hunahpu and Xbalanque get to Xmucane's house, they put the rat on the roof and he starts to chew through it to get the equipment. Then, the boys ask their grandmother to make them chili sauce. Xmucane grinds the chili and sets out broth for her grandsons. The boys then command Xmucane to fetch them water. She leaves with her water jug as Hunahpu and Xbalanque continue to eat, though the boys are actually watching the rat in the reflection of their chili. When they see the rat loosening the ball, Hunahpu and Xbalanque send a mosquito to puncture Xmucane's water jar. Xmucane tries, but she cannot plug the hole.

Xbalanque and Hunahpu ask Blood Moon to go help Xmucane since she's taking so long, and as soon as she's gone, the rat lets the ball and the other gaming equipment fall. Then, the boys go to help Blood Moon and Xmucane. They quickly plug the hole in the water jar before leading their mother and grandmother home.

Now that they have the ball game equipment, Hunahpu and Xbalanque clear off the court and play by themselves. Just as before, the lords of Xibalba are quickly annoyed by the noise. One Death and Seven Death decide to summon these foolish ball players to play in Xibalba, and they tell the owl messengers to invite Hunahpu and Xbalanque to a game in seven days. The messengers travel directly to Xmucane's hut where they find only her, as the boys are away playing. They relay their message, and Xmucane agrees to pass it on.

Xmucane's heart is broken. She sobs that she's going to lose her grandsons, just as she lost her sons in Xibalba. As she cries, a louse crawls down and Xmucane picks it up. She asks the louse if it would take her message to Hunahpu and Xbalanque, and the louse agrees. As the louse scuttles in fits and starts, it comes across a toad named Tamazul. When the louse tells Tamazul that it has a message for Hunahpu and Xbalanque, Tamazul offers to swallow the louse and run to the ball court. The louse agrees.

Rather than run like he promised he would, Tamazul hops leisurely in the direction of the ball court. Along the way, he meets a snake named Zaquicaz. When Tamazul explains that he carries a message for Hunahpu and Xbalanque, Zaquicaz offers to swallow him and carry him there. Tamazul agrees. As Zaquicaz slithers towards the ball court, a laughing falcon swoops down and eats the snake.

Though the rat is conceived as a messenger-type character in the Popol Vuh, this particular act of chewing down the equipment explains the origin of rats' less positive qualities. Again, this allows a Mayan reader to make sense of various parts of the world, and provides a humorous story to explain certain facts of life.



By finally coming to Xmucane's rescue, Hunahpu and Xbalanque retain their status as good, loyal grandsons. This shows them essentially atoning for a trick, which suggests that tricking someone isn't always bad for the "victim."



The repetition in this part is certainly linked to the calendar aspects of the story—the human conception of time is made up of cycles that repeat, and this narrative repetition would signal the beginning of a new calendar cycle. For Hunahpu and Xbalanque, playing the ball game is a way to connect with a father and uncle that they never knew, but that nevertheless are important figures in their lives.



Given the cyclical nature of the Popol Vuh, Xmucane's fears aren't unfounded—though she does seem unaware that her grandsons have already proven themselves to be far better tricksters than their father and uncle were, which signifies that they're more heroic and more likely to be successful as they follow in their father's footsteps.



The animals' willingness to help (Tamazul's laziness aside) again reinforces Hunahpu and Xbalanque's close relationship with animals and the natural world. This sequence also goes through a food chain, once again rationalizing why the natural world is the way it is, and providing an entertaining story in the process.



When the falcon arrives at the ball court, he settles at the edge. Hunahpu and Xbalanque pay him no notice, so the falcon cries to get their attention. The boys grab immediately for their blowguns and shoot the falcon in the eye. When they approach the falcon, they ask him what he's after. The falcon explains that he carries a message in his belly, but asks the boys to heal him first. Hunahpu and Xbalanque take some rubber off of their ball and put it on the falcon's eye, which heals it. The falcon promptly vomits up Zaquicaz, who then vomits Tamazul.

When Hunahpu and Xbalanque ask Tamazul to tell them his message, he says that his message is in his stomach. He tries to vomit, but he only drools. Hunahpu and Xbalanque kick Tamazul, crush the bones in his hind end, and finally pry open his mouth. They discover that Tamazul never swallowed the louse—it was only stuck in his teeth. Because of this, and because Tamazul didn't run when he said he would, toads became lowly creatures and food for snakes.

Finally, Xbalanque and Hunahpu ask the louse to relay its message. The louse repeats the summons from One Death and Seven Death to come in seven days with equipment to play ball. He says too that Xmucane is distraught. Hunahpu and Xbalanque hurry to their grandmother. They tell Xmucane that they must obey the summons, but they'll leave her a signal. They each plant an ear of **corn** in the middle of Xmucane's house and explain that when it dries up, it means that they've died, and when it sprouts, it means they're alive. With this, they head for Xibalba.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque step right over Blood River and Pus River and quickly reach the Crossroads. They understand that the Crossroads can be a trap, so they summon a mosquito and ask him to go ahead down Black Road and bite every Xibalban lord. The mosquito agrees. He first bites the two wooden manikins, which express no emotion at being bitten, and then moves on to the next seated lord, One Death. One Death yowls in pain, and the lord sitting next to him uses One Death's name when he asks what's wrong. The mosquito continues down the line of lords, and all the lords state their names as they're bitten. The narrator reveals that the mosquito wasn't really a mosquito: it was actually a hair that Hunahpu plucked from his own leg, and sent to listen to all the lords' names.

Shooting and then healing the falcon is likely the origin story for the falcon's distinctive markings. The process of delivering Xmucane's message grows increasingly convoluted and humorous.



Hunahpu and Xbalanque's violence against Tamazul is, presumably, what gives toads their wide mouths and particular body shape. Tamazul's fate offers up an example of what happens when someone doesn't keep their promises to the gods and serve them appropriately, an idea that will resurface once humans enter the picture later.



When Hunahpu and Xbalanque plant the signal corn for Xmucane, it establishes corn as a very literal symbol for life. Further, it stresses the importance of corn to the Mayan people—successful farming is what kept communities alive, while poor seasons caused them to suffer.



By going in with the understanding that everything in Xibalba has the potential to be a trap or a trick, Hunahpu and Xbalanque are already miles ahead of their father and uncle. In thinking this way, however, they also acknowledge the skill of One and Seven Death in setting these traps in the first place, which is a way to honor them and recognize that even if they're evil characters, they're still great thinkers and tricksters. It's also important to notice that Hunahpu and Xbalanque understand the importance of naming, as evidenced by sending the hair to listen to all the lords' names.



After the hair listens to all the lords' names, Hunahpu and Xbalanque continue their journey until they reach the lords themselves. They tell the lords that the first two seated "lords" are actually manikins, and then they go on to greet each real lord by name. The lords ask Hunahpu and Xbalanque to sit on the bench, but the boys refuse, saying that the bench is actually a cooking slab. Annoyed, the lords send the boys into Dark House, figuring that the boys are as good as dead.

One Death's messenger brings Hunahpu and Xbalanque a lit cigar each and one lit torch. He explains that the lords want them back in the morning, intact. The boys agree, but instead of burning the items, they put bright macaw feathers on the end of the torch and ask fireflies to sit at the tips of the cigars. The watching sentries believe that the torch and the cigars are lit, and they discuss amongst themselves that the Xibalbans' triumph is guaranteed.

In the morning, the lords are distraught. They recognize that there's something different about Hunahpu and Xbalanque, but One Death and Seven Death invite the boys to play ball anyway. The lords ask the boys to name where they came from, but Hunahpu and Xbalanque insist that they don't know their origins. The Xibalbans offer up their ball for the game, and Hunahpu and Xbalanque argue that they should use their ball instead. The Xibalbans insist that their ornate ball is just decorated, but the boys say that the ball is actually a skull. Finally, the boys agree to use the Xibalbans' ball. Hunahpu hits the ball first and the hidden dagger flies out of it.

Xbalanque and Hunahpu yell that the Xibalbans only want to kill them, and threaten to leave unless the Xibalbans play fair. One Death and Seven Death agree to use the boys' ball, and the conversation then turns to what the prize for the winners should be. The Xibalbans ask for four bowls of flower petals if they win, and the boys agree. After some play, the boys allow themselves to lose. The Xibalbans ask for their flower petals to be delivered by morning and then send the boys to Razor House.

In Razor House, Hunahpu and Xbalanque speak to the blades and tell them that animal flesh belongs to them. At this, all the blades stop slashing and stand points down. Then, the boys summon cutter ants to fetch flowers from One Death and Seven Death's garden. One Death and Seven Death had posted a sentry, a whippoorwill, at their garden to guard the flowers. The whippoorwill, however, only flies from tree to tree singing on account of its gaping mouth. It doesn't notice the ants stealing flowers and the birds' tails as well.

Here, acknowledging the lords' true identities makes it so that they have fewer ways to trick the twins. When Hunahpu and Xbalanque refuse to sit on the bench, it also indicates that they understand that self-preservation is more important than acting politely.



Hunahpu and Xbalanque align themselves with goodness and light by keeping the cigars and torch "lit," even if it is just a trick. The bright macaw feathers that represented hubris for Seven Macaw are now used for a nobler purpose.



This moment makes it very clear that there's a significant amount of power to be gained from naming something: The Xibalban lords aren't able to effectively counter Hunahpu and Xbalanque because they don't have all the information that would come with knowing their origins. When the twins insist that the ball is a skull, it harkens back to One Hunahpu's monologue about death and regeneration: the ball is a symbol for death, as it has no "flesh" of rubber on the outside.



In this instance, Hunahpu and Xbalanque achieve the upper hand simply by calling out the fact that One and Seven Death aren't playing fair. In this way, the story shows that naming actions works much the same way that naming people or places does. In the same vein, Hunahpu and Xbalanque have even more power because they don't admit that they're also playing tricks on the Xibalbans.



Once again, when the twins use their words and give the blades a purpose, they're able to take power for themselves and redirect the blades' dangerous power to a more acceptable target. This moment also offers the origins of several more animals in the Mayan world and gives their habits divine origins.



Pages fetch Hunahpu and Xbalanque in the morning and ask that they bring the bowls of flowers. When the boys arrange the bowls at the lords' feet, the lords receive them with pained and sick looks. Afterwards, One Death and Seven Death summon the whippoorwill to ask how it allowed the flowers to be stolen. The whippoorwill insists it has no idea, but draws attention to its botched tail. After the lords scold the whippoorwill, they again play ball with Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The game is a tie, and they all agree to play again in the morning.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque are shown to Cold House, where they're supposed to die of cold. Instead, the boys simply shut out the cold and heat the house with their bodies. When the Xibalbans find the boys alive at dawn, they're amazed at the boys' power. They then show Hunahpu and Xbalanque to Jaguar House. Hunahpu and Xbalanque address the jaguars and say that they have something for them. The boys throw bones at the jaguars, and the jaguars pounce on the bones. The sentries see the jaguars fighting over bones and are pleased, as they believe that Hunahpu and Xbalanque are dead.

In the morning, when Hunahpu and Xbalanque come out of Jaguar House unscathed, the Xibalbans are again in awe. The Xibalbans send the boys to a house filled with fire, but the boys don't die. They make the boys enter Bat House, which is filled with snatch-bats. Snatch-bats have snouts like knives and are deadly creatures. Hunahpu and Xbalanque spend the night in their blowgun to escape the bats. However, when the bats become silent, Xbalanque asks Hunahpu to check and see if it's dawn yet. When Hunahpu sticks his head out, a snatch-bat rips his head off. The narrator reveals that this was planned by the twins.

When Xbalanque realizes that Hunahpu isn't moving, he begins to cry. Hunahpu's head rolls in front of One Death and Seven Death, and all of Xibalba is thrilled at this victory. Xbalanque gathers himself and asks animals to bring him their food. The animals return with wood, leaves, and stones. The coati, however, rolls a squash before him, and Xbalanque uses this to create a head for Hunahpu. Hurricane descends from the sky to give this squash Hunahpu a brain and to help carve his face. Just before dawn, Xbalanque tells Hunahpu that during the ball game, he should lob threats at the Xibalbans and let Xbalanque play mostly alone. Then, Xbalanque calls a rabbit and tells him to sit next to the ball bags until a ball comes to him.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque are drawing on social conventions as they trick One Death and Seven Death: they know that cultural rules guiding politeness and hospitality are what keep the Xibalbans from killing them outright. This suggests that one can find safety in following these conventions when in a situation that's actually quite dangerous.



The experience in Cold House in particular is meant to indicate to the reader that Hunahpu and Xbalanque are divine beyond measure, given that they're simply able to defy the logic of Cold House and bend it to their will. Then, their experience in Jaguar House reinforces the twins' close relationship with nature, given that they're able to easily come to an agreement with a dangerous predator.



"Snatch-bat" can also be translated from the Quiché language as "death bat," and it refers to the actual Mayan bat god named Camazotz. Camazotz is associated with death, night, and sacrifice. When the narrator explains that Hunahpu's decapitation was planned, it suggests that it was a sacrifice of sorts: Hunahpu sacrifices some of his body in order to play a trick on the Xibalbans. As is the case in other parts of the story, a god losing a body part (even a head) doesn't mean it's gone forever.



A coati is a raccoon-like animal, and this passage stands as another explanation for how the natural world works in a logical way. The fact that Hurricane helps Xbalanque create Hunahpu's new head stands as an indicator that one's brain (and by association, tricks, cleverness, etc.) can be obtained through divine assistance. In the human world, this would mean prayers and sacrifices.



A bit later, in the court, One Death and Seven Death drop in Hunahpu's head, and Hunahpu shouts for them to use his head as a ball. The Xibalbans refuse, and set a regular ball into play. Xbalanque hits the ball and sends it bouncing out of the court, where it finally comes to rest by the ball bags. As instructed, the rabbit leaps away from the ball bags. The Xibalban lords pursue him, convinced he's a ball. With One Death and Seven Death distracted, Hunahpu retrieves his head and Xbalanque retrieves the rubber ball. He calls for One Death and Seven Death to come back and finish their game.

One Death and Seven Death are confused when they return, but they resume the game regardless. Xbalanque punts the squash as though it's a ball, and as the squash wears out, it finally breaks and scatters seeds all over the court. The Xibalbans are perplexed, but they allow Xbalanque and Hunahpu to win.

After the game, Hunahpu and Xbalanque summon two seers, Xulu and Pacam. Hunahpu and Xbalanque realize that they must die, and they summon the seers to make plans for their deaths. The twins tell the seers that the Xibalbans will kill them in a stone oven. They tell the seers to pretend to argue over where to dump the bones afterwards, but to finally settle on dumping the bones in the river. They tell the seers to also suggest grinding up the bones like **corn**.

As Hunahpu and Xbalanque predicted, the Xibalbans construct a great stone oven and then summon the twins, promising them a treat. Once the boys arrive, One Death attempts to engage the boys in a game of jumping over the oven, but Hunahpu and Xbalanque simply face each other, grab hands, and jump headfirst into the oven. All of Xibalba celebrates this apparent victory over the twins.

One Death and Seven Death summon Xulu and Pacam, and the seers do as they were told and grind Hunahpu and Xbalanque's bones and scatter them in the river. Five days later, Hunahpu and Xbalanque reappear. They first look like catfish, but when they crawl out of the river they look like two vagabonds. The Xibalbans don't recognize them, but they admire the twins as they dance and perform tricks. The twins set fire to houses and then put them out; they sacrifice each other and miraculously come back to life.

Here, One Death and Seven Death's gullibility mirrors the gullibility of Seven Macaw from Part Two. As it did then, this signals that One Death and Seven Death aren't going to be able to keep up their façade of having the upper hand for much longer. In turn, Hunahpu and Xbalanque's successful trick tells the reader that they're true heroes.



Like corn, squash is another staple food. By using it as Hunahpu's head and later as a ball that signals victory, the Popol Vuh indicates that it occupies an important place in Mayan culture.



By suggesting that the seers grind up the bones like corn specifically, the text creates an even more pronounced link between these gods and the natural world, suggesting essentially that the natural world is very much divine. The river is important in this way too; practically, the presence of water means that people can water their crops and survive.



These divine instances of self-sacrifice lay the groundwork for the human sacrifices that take place later. By showing that these sacrifices bring good things and positive results, the text explains to a reader why sacrifices are necessary.



The reader is aware that this is another iteration of Hunahpu and Xbalanque's ongoing trick on the Xibalbans, but the fantastical nature of this particular trick reinforces their divinity. By setting a precedent for their audience that sacrifice doesn't mean death, Hunahpu and Xbalanque lay the framework for how they can finally best One and Seven Death.



One Death and Seven Death eventually hear about these entertainers and decide to summon them to perform. They send their owl messengers, but first Hunahpu and Xbalanque refuse. They insist that they'd embarrass themselves in front of such lords, but finally, the boys agree. When they arrive in front of the lords, Xbalanque and Hunahpu feign humility and pretend that they're orphans. When One and Seven Death try to discuss payment, the boys say they want nothing, but admit they're scared to perform. The lords reassure them and list the acts they'd like to see.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque begin their dances and soon, all of Xibalba gathers to watch. One of the lords asks them to sacrifice his dog and bring it back to life, and the twins oblige. They then set fire to One Death's home while all the lords are in it, but they quickly put it out, so the lords don't burn. The lords are amazed and entranced, and they ask Hunahpu and Xbalanque to sacrifice a person. The twins cut out the heart of a person, hold it up for all to see, and then bring the person back to life. Finally, Xbalanque sacrifices Hunahpu, and when he brings Hunahpu back to life, the Xibalban lords are in a frenzy of amazement and happiness.

One Death and Seven Death ask Hunahpu and Xbalanque to sacrifice them, and the twins agree. They sacrifice One Death first, and when he doesn't come back to life, Seven Death begins to cry. His vassals (servants) try to escape en masse, but the vassals only keep Seven Death himself from being able to escape. Hunahpu and Xbalanque then sacrifice Seven Death, and the vassals bow to the twins.

With this, Hunahpu and Xbalanque tell their names to the remaining Xibalbans. They say that they're the sons of One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, and they've returned to Xibalba to right their deaths. The twins inform the Xibalbans that they'll kill them, but the Xibalbans all kneel and beg for mercy. They tell the twins that One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are buried at the ball court, and with this information, Hunahpu and Xbalanque decide to not kill the Xibalbans. Instead, they tell them that their descendants won't be great, they will only receive insubstantial gifts, and only guilty and violent humans will worship them.

On earth, Xmucane cries in front of the dry ears of **corn** that signify her grandsons' deaths. Then she burns copal (a type of resin) before the ears, and they sprout and live. She names the ears "Middle of the House" because of where Hunahpu and Xbalanque planted them.

Once again, by withholding their true names, Hunahpu and Xbalanque keep the power of their names for themselves rather than sharing it with their adversaries. Further, because they know the names of One Death, Seven Death, and all the other Xibalban lords, Hunahpu and Xbalanque are at even more of an advantage.



The fact that the reader knows that the performance is a trick doesn't detract from the fantastical nature of Hunahpu and Xbalanque's act. Rather, it only makes the twins seem even greater, especially since the act is setting up for a trick. When all the Xibalbans gather to watch, it mirrors gatherings that would happen in the real world and reinforces the importance of communal worship (even though the Xibalbans aren't aware that this is what's happening).



Here, the reader gets a brief look at how vassals function when their lord is characterized as undeserving: they bring about their lord's downfall instead of helping him. Again, this suggests that there are logical consequences for those who take power and don't deserve it.



When Hunahpu and Xbalanque finally name their own names, it reinforces the power they now have over the lord-less Xibalbans. When the Xibalbans so quickly volunteer information that will help Hunahpu and Xbalanque, it shows again that One and Seven Death's reigns were undeserved.



With this passage, the text goes back in time to explain what was happening at the same time that Hunahpu and Xbalanque were "dying" and coming back to life again. In doing so, it reinforces the importance of corn as a symbol of life and reminds the reader that history is comprised of many perspectives.



Hunahpu and Xbalanque go to the ball court to put Seven Hunahpu back together. They ask their uncle to name all the parts of his face, but he can only list his mouth, nose, and eyes. Hunahpu and Xbalanque decide to leave Seven Hunahpu at the ball court, and tell him that people will pray to him and he'll be remembered. They tell him that they swept away all the pain and loss that the Xibalbans wrought on him. With this, Hunahpu and Xbalanque ascend to the sky to become the sun and the moon, and the Four Hundred Boys climb up as well to become the stars.

In the case of Seven Hunahpu, the fact that he cannot name himself and therefore doesn't know who he is condemns him to remaining dead. This ends the divine parts of the text with the insistence that a person must know who they are and where they came from in order to be truly alive. Essentially, it reinforces the importance of the Popol Vuh as a tool to teach Mayan people where they came from so that they can name themselves.



PART FOUR

Not long before Xbalanque and Hunahpu ascend to the sky, Sovereign Plumed Serpent decides that dawn has come for humans. A fox, coyote, parrot, and a crow bring news that there's **corn** at a place called Split Place, and there, Sovereign Plumed Serpent discovers the staple foods. Then, Xmucane grinds the corn nine times and mixes it with grease and water to create blood and fat.

After Hunahpu and Xbalanque fully explored corn as a symbol for life, it now becomes life itself for the gods' human creations. The specific mentions of blood and fat indicate an understanding that food is what truly makes and fuels the human body and ties it to the earth.



The first four humans are named Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar. These men talk, listen, walk, and work. They're also handsome, and from the very start they understand everything perfectly. Further, they can see the entire world without moving. Sovereign Plumed Serpent encourages the men to walk around, and then the men praise Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Xmucane and thank the gods for creating them. However, Sovereign Plumed Serpent sees that there's a problem: he reasons that with the humans' understanding and sight, there's nothing to stop them from becoming divine. The gods then partially blind the humans so that they can only see things close to them. With this, the humans lose their ability to fully understand their world.

When the gods blind the first humans, it reveals what truly separates humans from the gods: the state of being human is a state of searching for meaning and understanding, while gods are all-knowing and understand everything in the world. This is reinforced by what the reader has already learned about the divine beings, particularly in regard to Hunahpu and Xbalanque. They knew everything and knew full well that they were going to be successful. This is, per the logic of the text, what made them divine.



Next, Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Xmucane create wives for the first men. They make Red Sea Turtle for Jaguar Quitze; Prawn House for Jaguar Night; Water Hummingbird for Not Right Now; and Macaw House for Dark Jaguar. The narrator says that these four couples make up the root of the Mayan people. Soon, the humans multiply. Jaguar Quitze's descendants become the nine houses of the Cauec line; Jaguar Night's descendants develop into the nine houses of the Greathouse line; and Not Right Now's descendants form the four houses of the Lord Quichés. Other tribes also develop, though the narrator only lists the largest houses.

The Popol Vuh indicates that these four men and four women are actual historical figures. This recalls again One Hunahpu's assertion that through having children, a person can be remembered as they live on through their children. Here, the text offers proof that One Hunahpu was undoubtedly correct in his assessment. These people were recorded in the Popol Vuh because their descendants thought it was important to remember their ancestors.



All the people live in the east at first, and it soon becomes crowded. The people look to the sky, though dawn hasn't arrived yet. There are also tribes in the mountains, and those tribes are considered crazy. The first humans, however, praise Sovereign Plumed Serpent and fast often. Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar are great thinkers and are very devout, and they suggest that their families set out to find a god to call their own.

The families of Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar travel to a citadel called Seven Canyons. There, Jaguar Quitze's house is given the god Tohil; Jaguar Night's family is given the god Auilix; Not Right Now is given a god called Hacauitz; and Dark Jaguar receives a god called Middle of the Plain. These four gods are also distributed to other tribes. When the different families leave the citadel, they find that they all speak different languages and can no longer understand each other.

Tohil is the first god to create fire. Jaguar Quitze and Jaguar Night thank the god for fire, and their families sit around it as the other tribes weather rain, cold, and hail. Soon, all four of the first men sit around the fire. The other cold people approach the four men to ask for some of their fire, but they find they cannot communicate now that their languages have changed. Suddenly, a dark figure appears before the other people. He's a messenger from Xibalba. He tells the tribes to ask Tohil directly for fire, and then disappears.

The people again approach the fire. They're so cold that they inappropriately covet the fire and want to steal it. They offer Jaguar Quitze metal in exchange for fire, but Jaguar Quitze addresses Tohil and asks the god what the people should give him in exchange for fire. Tohil insists that the people must agree to allow him to "suckle on their sides, under their arms." Jaguar Quitze relays this message, and the people agree and receive their fire. One group steals fire, and that group survives—but the ones who agreed to Tohil's terms meet their end. Tohil cuts them open and removes their hearts "on their sides, under their arms."

After this, Tohil speaks to Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar and tells them that it's time to leave this place. The god asks the men to give thanks, and so the men cry and sing. They camp along the road as they travel, and finally, they reach a mountain called Place of Advice. There, the four families address other tribes and give them their names. The first men and their wives observe a constant fast.

The first four men very much mimic their divine predecessors in their cleverness and in their devotion (though it's worth noting that devotion is different for gods and humans; while gods overwhelmingly must devote themselves to honoring their elders, humans must honor elders and the gods themselves).



The fact that the languages begin to change after the families leave the place where they received individual gods suggests that though there's commonality in the language of worship when it comes to the greater gods like Sovereign Plumed Serpent and Xmucane, when the particulars of the worship differ, the language of worship necessarily changes as well.



The text is unclear about who exactly the Xibalban figure is, but translators tend to agree that this is another iteration of Camazotz, the bat god. With this knowledge, it becomes clear that his counsel is probably not something the people should trust, as Hunahpu and Xbalanque declared that only "guilty and violent" people will worship or listen to the Xibalban gods.



With this, the story insists that there are major consequences for listening to or following anyone from Xibalba or anyone that the Popol Vuh casts as villainous. The fact that the group who doesn't listen to the Xibalban messenger lives, even though they committed a supposed crime by stealing, reinforces this breakdown.



When considered alongside the importance of music during the divine parts of the story (as in "Hunahpu Monkey"), singing is here again shown to have divine origins and to be one way to demonstrate one's devotion. By naming other tribes, the first four men insure that those tribes will be remembered.



A while later, Tohil speaks again to the first men and asks for them to give him, Auilix, and Hacauitz places to hide, since dawn is quickly approaching. The men pick up their gods and disperse. Jaguar Night takes Auilix to a canyon; Not Right Now takes Hacauitz to the top of a mountain, and Jaguar Quitze takes Tohil to a great forest. Then, the men wait at the top of the mountain named for Hacauitz for the sun to rise. The men cry and cry as they wait for the sun, and they wonder if they did something wrong.

Finally, Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar notice the "sun carrier" (the star Venus) rising in the sky. They unwrap their incense and burn it to give thanks. Finally, the sun rises, and all the animals cry out in joy. The humans kneel, and the earth suddenly dries out from the heat of the sun. At the same time, Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz turn to stone, along with several other icons of animals. The first men are overjoyed, and they build a citadel on the mountain. Then, the first men sing a song lamenting that they left their "brothers," other tribes, when they separated the first time.

The first men go regularly before Tohil and Auilix to thank them for the dawn. However, they burn only resin and marigolds for them. One day, Tohil speaks and instructs the men to not tell the envious neighboring tribes about him. He explains that the tribes are growing and will soon begin hunting him and the other gods. To fix this, he tells the men to sacrifice birds and deer to him, and to use the deerskins to create bundles of skins. Then, when the tribes ask after Tohil, Tohil tells the men to offer them the bundles of deerskins. Finally, he tells them that the tribes must come to embrace Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz.

The men immediately begin hunting birds and deer, and when they place the bloody meat on Tohil's stone, Tohil drinks the blood and speaks. Soon, Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar begin making the sounds of pumas and coyotes when they see people from the tribes, hoping to scare them. The tribes never suspect that they're being hunted. The men return to the gods' stones and spill their own blood, which turns the gods into real boys. Auilix, Tohil, and Hacauitz tell the men that they will win many victories.

With this, the first men begin hunting tribal people. When they kill them, they cut their bodies open for Tohil and Auilix, and then roll the heads into the road for the tribes to find. The tribes believe for a long time that this is the work of animals, but eventually realize that the followers of Tohil are to blame. They decide to follow the tracks to Tohil's followers, but they only find animal tracks and often, the weather takes a turn for the worse and washes the tracks away.

Tohil's request suggests that there's a definite hierarchy among the gods: as Hunahpu and Xbalanque will become the sun and moon, his need to hide indicates that he's less powerful than the hero twins. It's also worth keeping in mind that the timeline of this story overlaps with Hunahpu and Xbalanque's time in Xibalba, reinforcing again that this is a conglomeration of many stories on many timelines.



When the sun rises, the story provides the reason for why some animals are active and vocal at dusk and dawn—it's a way for them to give thanks, and therefore to acknowledge their own divine origins. This also explains the qualities of the region where the Maya made their home, particularly since the fact that they lived in a desert impacted their way of life so much.



Tohil's instructions reintroduce the idea of sacrifice into the religious language of the Maya, while also reminding the reader of Hurricane's assertion that animals would be food for humans. More specifically, the fact that Tohil asks the men to sacrifice deer and birds recalls that those animals were once asked to be the guardians of the earth. Now, they get to reassume a guardian-like role, as it's their sacrifices that will lead to the men's victory.



Becoming real boys insures that Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz won't be forgotten by any means. It keeps them more fully in the forefront of their worshippers' minds, and having physical representations of the gods means that the tribes have what appears to be a more pressing foe than theoretical gods. When the first men begin to stalk the tribes, it shows them starting to lay a trap—evidence of heroism.



The serendipitous weather changes can be attributed to the righteousness of Tohil and his followers. Like the divine villains before, the tribes believe so strongly in their own right to victory that they're blinded to the truth. Essentially, the tribes are "magnifying themselves" just as Seven Macaw and One and Seven Death did.



In their boy forms, Auilix, Tohil, and Hacauitz spend much of their time bathing in a river now known as Tohil's Bath. The tribes catch sight of the boys here and decide to try to defeat them directly. The tribes reason that since the gods present as adolescent boys, they should send two beautiful maidens. They settle on two of their daughters, Lust Woman and Wailing Woman, and the tribes instruct the daughters to give in to whatever the boy gods desire, or they'll be killed upon their return. They ask the daughters to bring back proof that the gods touched them.

Lust Woman and Wailing Woman make themselves look beautiful and then head to the river. They undress and wash laundry in the river and wait until Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz arrive. The gods barely look at the maidens, but they do ask what they're doing at the gods' river. Lust Woman and Wailing Woman explain that they were told to look upon the face of Tohil, and to bring back a sign that they truly saw the gods. The gods agree to send the maidens with tokens, and tell them to wait.

Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz go to Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, and Not Right Now. The gods ask the men to decorate cloaks with their insignias. Jaguar Quitze inscribes a jaguar on his cloak; Jaguar Night draws an eagle; and Not Right Now draws swarms of yellow jackets and wasps. Then, the three men take the cloaks to the maidens and tell them to ask their lords to try the cloaks on.

The tribes are thrilled when Lust Woman and Wailing Woman arrive with the cloaks. The tribal lords try on first the jaguar cloak and then the eagle cloak. When a lord puts on the third cloak, the yellow jackets and wasps come alive and begin stinging the lord. The tribal lords then reprimand the maidens, and the maidens become the first sex workers.

The tribes gather together and decide to invade and kill all of Tohil's followers. The numerous tribal warriors gather all their shields and weapons and plan to attack Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar on their mountain. The tribes decide to attack at night, but instead of marching, they all mysteriously fall asleep. As they sleep, their eyebrows and beards are inexplicably plucked out, and somehow all the metal from their clothing and weapons disappears as well. When the tribes wake up, they're confused as to how someone managed to steal so much metal, but they vow to put their fear aside and take back their metal.

By offering the name of the river, the writers of the Popol Vuh preserve this Mayan name for as long as the Popol Vuh remains. The tribes' plan suggests that they don't view the gods as superhuman, given that they plan to best them by appealing to human nature and attraction. This does, however, provide insight into how the tribes conceptualize humanity as being unquestionably interested in sex.



When the boy gods don't fall into the trap and barely acknowledge the beauty of the women, it reinforces their divinity—not acknowledging human desire sets them apart from humanity. Further, setting what's presumably a trap for the maidens and using them to trick the tribes confirms their superior nature.



This trap recalls the fate of Seven Macaw, as he was punished for adorning himself like a lord. As it did then, this suggests that being powerful and being a lord isn't a state one achieves by wearing beautiful cloaks or by adorning oneself with jewels; it has to do with humility, devotion, and innate power.



The narrative brings down the maidens and their future profession by casting them first as gullible (and linking them to villainy) and then by "othering" them (by insisting that the first sex workers were from these other, crazy tribes, and aren't descended from the perfect first men).



By plucking the tribes' facial hair, the first four men and their followers send a clear message that, like Seven Macaw, the tribes' power came from what was on their faces—and that all of that is easily removed, power and all. This moment also reinforces the importance of metal to Mayan society, as it was very valuable and was accumulated by lords.



Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar make a plan. They build a fence around their citadel and then line the fence with wooden manikins. They dress the manikins and give them the stolen weapons from the tribes. Then, the men ask Tohil what will happen if they die. Tohil tells his followers to use wasps and yellow jackets, and the men place the insects in four large gourds and then arrange the gourds at the four corners of the citadel.

When the tribes arrive and spy on the four men and their families, they're thrilled to see that the "army" isn't large—they don't realize that the army is only manikins. When they're ready, the tribes descend upon the citadel. Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar stand on the mountain and let their children watch the spectacle below. When the tribes get close to the citadel, the gourds open and the yellow jackets and wasps attack the tribes. The tribes tumble back down the mountain, and the men and their wives chase after the stunned tribes and kill them with sticks. Those that don't die ask for mercy, and the men agree to allow them to live as servants.

Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar know that they're going to die eventually, so they leave instructions with their sons. They explain that they're going to return to their own "tribal place," and tell their sons and wives to return to where they came from. Jaguar Quitze leaves his son the Bundle of Flames, a mysterious package, as a sign of his being. No one opens it to discover what it is, and after this, the first four men disappear. The remaining wives and sons burn offerings to the Bundle of Flames and treat it as a memorial to their fathers.

PART FIVE

After a period of mourning, the sons remember that their fathers told them to return to the east. The sons, named Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord, travel east to a lord named Nacxit. Nacxit governs a large population, and he gives the sons the "signs of lordship." With these obtained, the sons then receive writing, and finally return home. Then, the sons gather all their families and tribes, and with their signs of lordship, they become true rulers.

Using the manikins like this ties the motif of wood people and manikins together: it links the tribes again to Seven Macaw, who believed the wood people to be proper subjects, and it also links the tribes to One Death and Seven Death, who turned out to be ineffective tricksters using similar manikins. The four corners of the citadel reflect the language used throughout the text of "the four corners of the world."



The ineffectiveness of the tribes is reinforced by the fact that even women can kill the tribal warriors. This does indicate once again that being male is preferred and considered more powerful within Mayan culture, given that being killed by a woman is conceptualized as an insult here. Then, the narrative offers the first instance of taking vassals and conceptualizing that act as something positive and deserved. This implies that unlike the Xibalban vassals, these vassals will help their new lords become great.



These first men's "deaths" reinforces their link to the divine: other men cannot know how they died because of how they were created, but the first four are allowed to retain some of their divine origins by dying in this way. The Bundle of Flames is an object that's the source of debate among scholars. Some believe it's a way to explain strange celestial phenomena, since it's a mystery even within the narrative itself.



It's important to note that the sons would've received hieroglyphic writing and with it, the ability to record things to remember people and events. This then provides some clues as to the origins of the early iterations of the Popol Vuh; these lords or their scribes possibly recorded it.



After a time, Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord move again to a citadel called Thorny Place. There, their sons and daughters marry, and the three men die there. By this point, there are enough people that they begin to seek a place to found another citadel, and they move to Bearded Place. At the citadel, everything is calm and no one is evil. They begin to dance for the gods, and one tribe, the Ilocs, begins to plot to murder one of the Quiché lords. With this, war begins. Finally, the Quiché people subdue the Ilocs, taking some as slaves and sacrificing others. This is why the Quiché people began sacrificing people to their gods.

When the war ends, the Quiché people become truly great. They become even more devout, which only makes them more powerful in the eyes of lesser tribes. Eventually, they move to the citadel of Rotten Cane. By this time, five generations have passed since the first four men, and people begin building houses for themselves and their gods. Cities develop, which leads to jealousy and fights. Because of this, the three primary tribes separate into nine lineages, which stops the fighting. Finally, the narrator declares, the entire Mayan population can become great.

The narrator lists the titles given to the lords of the Cauecs, the lords of the Greathouses, the lords of Quiché, and the lords of Zaquic. The Quiché in particular flourish, and they decorate their citadels beautifully. The narrator notes that none of this splendor could've come about without the numerous vassals the lords took on. The narrative goes on to list several great Quiché lords.

As the empire grows, the lords decide to appoint sentries to occupy the mountains and watch out for tribes who wish to make war. The sentries soon send back prisoners of war and other spoils, and the lords honor the sentries. Eventually, the lords decide to make the sentries lesser lords to honor them for their service. The narrator then lists the "houses of the gods": Tohil resides at the Great Monument of Tohil; Auilix resides in a building named after him; and Hacauitz also lives in a building that shares his name. The lords and their vassals burn offerings to the gods and offer tribute.

All the lords are geniuses and see everything clearly because they can read everything in the Council Book. They also fast regularly and do penance for the gods for days at a time. They don't sleep with their wives while they fast—they only pray—and in doing so, they help the Quiché people remain prosperous. Because of this, the lesser tribes offer jade, turquoise, and metal as tribute.

As with Tohil's Bath, naming the citadels in the text insures that certain figures and locations will be remembered. At this point in the narrative, after the acquisition of writing, the power of names becomes even more pronounced, as the names aren't just things that exist in the minds of gods or men. Instead, names can be recorded, drawn, carved, and painted so that they remain constantly in a format that can trigger someone's memory.



Here, by linking the success of this culture to the lords' devotion to the gods, the narrator creates an association between naming the gods (as the lords do through their devotion) and obtaining real power on earth. The text also acknowledges the difficulty of governing a vast and diverse group of people.



By acknowledging the Cauecs, the Greathouses, and the Zaquics, the narrator makes it very clear that though the narrative is primarily about the Quiché lines, it's important to recognize the other Mayan lines and note that they were also very powerful.



The sentries earn promotions by embodying the qualities of perfect humans as set out by the gods: they're devout, they care for the land (and the people who rule the land), and they multiply. This shows that though there are religious rewards for being properly Mayan (the protection of the gods), there are also rewards on earth for those who embody the Mayan ideal.



The narrator offers a counterpoint to Seven Macaw here: the lords earn their jewels and metal because they're devout, clever, and take care of their people. Again, the Council Book refers to the Popol Vuh itself, reminding the reader that the Popol Vuh is a text that teaches someone how to be properly Mayan.



The narrator goes on to list generations of lords descended from Jaguar Quitze. In the twelfth generation, two of the lords are tortured by the Castilian invaders, though two more generations follow after the Castilians arrive. Then, the narrator lists the lineages of the Greathouse line and the Quiché line. The narrator declares that this is enough about the Quiché people, because there's no longer a place to see them. The narrator explains that the original book still exists, though it's lost. However, this text contains everything one needs to know, and it was recorded at a place now called Santa Cruz.

The tragic assertion that there's no longer a place to see the Quiché people drives home how important the Popol Vuh is to the Mayan culture: with the disappearance of the book at the hands of the Castilians (who burned Mayan texts), the people themselves disappear because they no longer have access to their history. In this way, this transcription of the book stands as a way to remember Quiché history and retain Quiché identity, even under the destructive thumb of the Castilians.





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