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Carpenter, Victoria ORCID logoORCID:  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3880-6555> (2011) Temporal  
Permutations in Octavio Paz's 'Piedra de sol'. In: Carpenter, Victoria  
ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3880-6555>, (ed.) A  
World in Words, A Life in Texts: Revisiting Latin American Cultural  
Heritage. Peter Lang, pp. 137-160

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The fragment 'Madrid 1937' (302) is one of the three instances of linear or historical time interfering with the cyclic (or, in any case, non-linear) nature of the poem. The other two instances frame this section. First, a self-questioning section about the narrator's past ('¿hacia planes para el verano' – '¿compramos gardenias en Perote?'; 301;<sup>66</sup> identified as timeplane 8 and a part of textbrane 4) places him in Mexico (Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City; Oaxaca, Perote in Veracruz), New York (Christopher Street), and Paris (Hotel Vernet, Bidart). This grounds this part of the poem in objective reality, although a quick change of locations and the narrator's uncertainty about the accuracy of information (suggested by repeated general questions) indicates remembering his past rather than going through actual experiences. The past passes by the narrator in a succession of images and culminates in the most traumatic memory of a bombing of Madrid during the Civil War (timeplane 9, now included in textbrane 4). The rupture of the text is clearly visible here, although the rhythm remains unaffected – the line is still eleven syllables long. Fein suggests that this line 'is in effect a linear division, both of the poet's life and of his poem.'<sup>67</sup> I would further consider this fragment in conjunction with the previous self-questioning section and the following fragment 'las leyes comidas de ratones' – 'de inglés y democracia' (303 – timeplane 11, now included in textbrane 5). This fragment is particularly interesting because its content goes against the rest of the poem: nowhere else in the text do we see 'el burro pedagogo' or 'el escorpion meloso y con bonete' (ibid.).<sup>68</sup> While the repetitive rhythm and the structure of the section are consistent with the rest of the poem, the content appears too surreal, even for 'Piedra de sol'. I propose that the three sections outlined here represent a traumatic event in the fabric of the poem – a collision of two textbranes: one representing objective linear reality and the other representing subjective non-linear reality. The collision is likely caused by the growing discord between lineality and non-lineality as well as between the narrator's dream and reality. When the two collide, they

66 'Was I making plans for the summer?' – 'Did we buy gardenias in Perote?'

67 Fein, 28.

68 'A donkey teacher', 'a schmalzy scorpion in a bonnet'.

rupture the fabric of reality and combine the elements of two worlds in a surreal collage of images in the third section. These images are suggestive of the process of coalescence, as described in the examination of colliding branes in the cyclic model of the universe.

However, we might ask what happens in the third component of textbrane 4 – formerly, timeplane 15, which deals with violent deaths of various historical personages. If we consider it from the same perspective, we could interpret it as the result of 'cooling down' of the first section, where the narrator was unsure of the accuracy of his memory. When talking about the last living moments of Madero, Trotsky or Agamemnon, the narrator should be equally unsure of the exactness of the accounts, yet there are no questions or hesitation in his listing the events. Just as he was sure of his personal experiences earlier in the poem, when he was walking through his lover's body, he is certain of his accounts of historical events. The degree of uncertainty rises the closer we get to the line 'Madrid 1937', and then diminishes as the section of surreal imagery draws to a close with 'las mascararas podridas / que dividen al hombre de los hombres' (304).<sup>69</sup> It should be noted that the third section concludes with the juxtaposition of life and death in 'compartir el pan, el sol, la muerte, / el olvidado asombro de estar vivos' (ibid.);<sup>70</sup> this sentiment will continue in the final section of textbrane 5, as both lives and deaths of historical figures are reduced to the absence of the passing of time. The collision has been completed, and both textbranes return to their original characteristics: textbrane 4 is once again firmly grounded in linear time, while textbrane 5 is characterized by non-linear temporality.

\* \* \*

In his essay 'Some Thoughts on Quantum Mechanics and the Treatment of the Past in Mexican Theatre', Peter Beardsell made two fundamental statements that have inspired and informed the present study. First, he stated that 'science can be in harmony with narratives; art and science

69 'Rotten masks that separate a person from people'.

70 'To share bread, sun, death, the forgotten astonishment of being alive'.