

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Carpenter, Victoria (2011) Temporal Permutations in Octavio Paz's 'Piedra de sol'. In: Carpenter, Victoria, (ed.) A World in Words, A Life in Texts: Revisiting Latin American Cultural Heritage. Peter Lang, pp. 137-160

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/1425/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

http://www.peterlang.com/download/datasheet/58957/datasheet_430273.pdf

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

belong to the same realm'; secondly, '[t]he laws of physics may be applied to artistic creations and historical works because they are integral parts of the same system.'⁷¹ These affirmations offer an intriguing opportunity to see whether a combination of literary and scientific theories creates a theoretical framework capable of explaining (or, at least, expanding the existing explanation) some of the more enigmatic literary works. Although there are many studies of Octavio Paz's masterpiece 'Piedra de sol', the reader is left with the feeling that there is yet more to uncover in this poem.

The present essay has applied current findings in quantum physics to the examination of the interaction of different (and often, seemingly disparate) text fragments, or branes, to use a quantum physics term. By combining basic rhetoric of string theory and M-theory, I have defined another way of interpreting the depiction of what has been termed 'multi-dimensionality of Mexica mythical time'. And by applying this theoretical framework to the analysis of cyclic temporality in 'Piedra de sol', I have concluded that the cyclicity of the poem is not a surrealist quirk, nor an obligatory nod to the pre-Columbian view of the world.

A new structure emerges as a result of changing the theoretical foundation for the analysis. Instead of nineteen visible timeplanes and one timeplane outside the poem, I have identified five visible textbranes, held together by ten strings. The strings are represented in the poem by the repetitions of 'instante', 'no pasa nada' and eight Sun Stone calendar words. Former timeplane 20 is now similar to the bulk, since it houses the branes; words and phrases repeating throughout the text reveal a closed string of Aztec calendar framework linking the five folded textbranes. Textbranes can remain static or collide with each other, producing ripples in the fabric of the text. For example, the collision of textbranes 4 and 5 creates a ripple in the fabric of the poem's reality, which manifests itself in the erasing of borders between realities.

In short, this approach has clarified the relationship between various sections of the poem, its interdependent temporalities and the complex nature of multiple realities embedded in the text. The mechanism of

⁷¹ Beardsell, 32.

intratextual development is now understood as the interaction between textbranes through the strings of repetitions embedded within the textual bulk. And what does this add to our interpretation of 'Piedra de sol' and, possibly, other pieces of poetry and prose encumbered with complex temporality?

I propose that for such works the existing body of theories is not sufficient if we seek deeper understanding of the mechanisms which create and guide the text. If we take textual cyclicity (or, in more general terms, non-linearity) as a key element of the meaning of the text, it is important to attempt to decode it in order to get to the bottom of the text itself. By understanding temporal permutations of a text we will be able to avoid the unfortunate analytical caveats of the narrator's insanity or the text's incomprehensibility.⁷²

Bibliography

- Almere Read, Kay, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998)
- Beardsell, Peter, 'Some Thoughts on Quantum Mechanics and the Treatment of the Past in Mexican Theatre', in *(Re)Collecting the Past: History and Collective Memory in Latin American Narrative*, ed. Victoria Carpenter (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)
- Bernard, Judith, 'Myth and Structure in Octavio Paz's Piedra de sol', *Symposium* 21:1 (1967), pp. 5-13
- Blake, W.W., *The Aztec Calendar* (Mexico: Blake and Fiske, 1906)
- Carpenter, Victoria, "'¿Dije ya?': Textual Fragments and Repetitions in *Obsesivos días circulares* (1969) by Gustavo Sainz', Spanish American Literature and the Scientific Conference (University of Oxford, 5 July 2010)

⁷² See, for example, analyses of the narrator's insanity in Gustavo Sainz's *Obsesivos días circulares* (1968) – Decker 1977, Morrow 2006. An apparent incomprehensibility of the novel can be explained (at least, partially) if string theory is used to examine overlapping text fragments that comprise the novel (Carpenter 2010).