

# Quantum Mechanics and Literature: An Analysis of El Túnel by Ernesto Sábato

Paul Halpern, Victoria Carpenter



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We examine the nature of divergent timelines in El Túnel by Ernesto Sábato, focusing on three key incidents: the viewing of a scene in the protagonist's painting 'Maternidad,' an excursion to the beach, and a letter. We explore ambiguities in these events and connections between them, commenting on the range of possible interpretations. Employing quantum mechanics as a metaphor, we show how temporal discrepancies in the order and interpretation of these pivotal occurrences can be modeled as bifurcations of reality into different wavefunctions, which collapse only upon observation. We discuss how the Copenhagen and Many Worlds Interpretations of quantum mechanics, along with the idea of branes in M-theory, represent distinct ways of representing alternative narratives. We show how Sábato's readings of physics and of the writings of Jorge Luis Borges may have influenced his shaping of the timelines in the text. Taking the painting's title as a clue, we also explore the role of maternity and mother figures in the novel. We conclude that Sábato's triumph in crafting El Túnel was leaving it open to such a rich range of alternative interpretations.

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