



# The Meaning of Death in two essays from *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz

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# Outline

- Research Questions
- Purpose of the Investigation
- Historical Context
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements
- Bibliography



# Research Questions

1. How can “All Saints, Day of the Dead” and “The Dialectic of Solitude” by Octavio Paz help us understand the importance or the significance of death in Mexico?
2. According to these essays, how has the history of Mexico influenced the contemporary and past celebrations of death? According to Paz, is there a correlation between the Day of the Dead and the origin of the country?

# Purpose of the Investigation:

To explore the importance of death in Mexico in two essays by Octavio Paz through a critical analysis of the author's arguments regarding the influence of the country's history on the celebration of the Day of the Dead.



MarsBars. "Day of the dead pottery skull (calavera) votive candles and marigold cempasuchil flowers on black papel picado on teal blue background, Dia de Muertos concept stock photo." 2021. iStock, <https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/day-of-the-dead-pottery-skull-votive-candles-and-marigold-cempasuchil-flowers-on-gm>. Accessed 5 May 2022.



# Methodology

- Essays examined:
  - “The Day of the Dead”
  - “The Dialectic of Solitude”
- Analysis of:
  - Religion
  - Celebrations
  - Mexican identity



Mendez, Mario. "The Bachelor." *Unsplash*, 10 Aug. 2020, <https://unsplash.com/photos/c64AB11j-po>. Accessed 5 May 2022.

# Historical Context

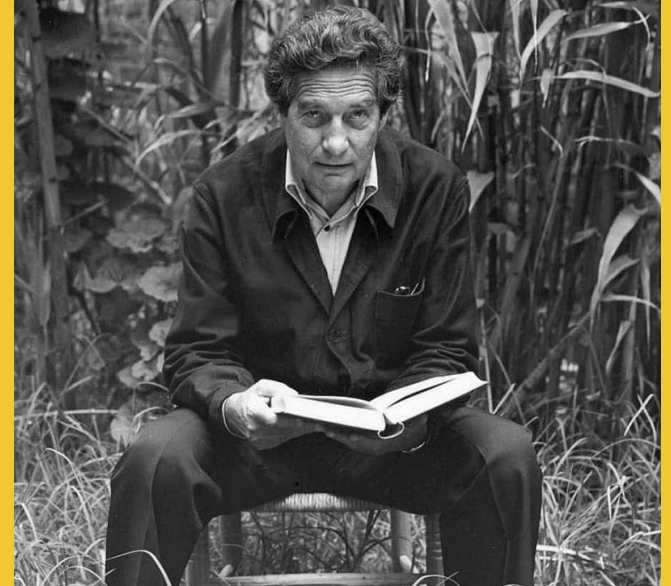
- Influence of indigenous cultures
- The Spaniards
- The Catholic religion



Domenech, Luis. "Aztec Sun Stone." *Unsplash*, 20 July 2021, <https://unsplash.com/photos/eXw5w-4eflU>. Accessed 5 May 2022.

# Literature Review

- Day of the Dead: Prehispanic times
- Day of the Dead: Today
- Octavio Paz: Poet, author, and politician
- *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) and Mexican identity



Beacham, Frank. "Octavio Paz Was Born 108 Years Ago." *Frank Beacham's Journal*, 31 Mar. 2022, <https://www.beachamjournal.com/a/6a01053653b3c7970b02942fa1cf95200c-800wi>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

# Analysis: Death & the Day of the Dead

## “The Day of the Dead”

- Perceptions of death:
  - Prehispanic
    - “Cosmic health; the world, and not the individual, lived thanks to the blood and death of man” (Paz 22).
  - Mexican
    - “He frequents it, teases it, caresses it, sleeps with it, and celebrates it, it is one of his favorite toys” (Paz 22).
- Evolution: All Saints’ Day -> the Day of the Dead





# Analysis: Death & the Day of the Dead

## “The Dialectic of Solitude”

- Solitude and death
  - “It is a punishment, but also a promise of the end of our exile” (Paz 82).
- Death in the form of a celebration
  - “a descendant of the ancient creator deities, dies and resurrects” reflects the  
“fertility...salvation” (Paz 87)



# Analysis: An Identity

## “The Day of the Dead”

- Celebrations mask solitude
  - “Do they forget about themselves, [or] do they show their real self?” (Paz 19).
- Death: a charm and a mockery
  - “If they shall kill me tomorrow, why not kill me now?” (Pazz 22).



# Analysis: an Identity

## “The Dialectic of Solitude”

- Solitude: a universal identity
- “The frequency which now finds this class of solitaries indicates the gravity of our wrongs (Paz 86).”



# Analysis: Solitude

## “The Day of the Dead”

- Religion: Impersonal
  - “The modern masses are agglomerations of lonely people” (18).
- Celebration: A distraction
- Death and life: Lonely experiences
  - “The Mexican closes himself to the world: to life and death” (26).



# Analysis: Solitude

## “The Dialectic of Solitude”

- Everyone feels lonely
  - “Solitude... is not an exclusive characteristic of the Mexican” (82).
- Solitude: The reason love is possible, a cycle
- Celebrations and myths: Ways for one to escape the feeling
  - “By way of myths and celebrations...man breaks his solitude...” (89).



# Conclusion

- Day of the Dead: Combination of religious and indigenous influences
- Death does have a major influence in the life of Mexicans



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