

WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE DRAMATIC POETRY OF JUAN MAYORGA¹

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Abstract || This article aims to show the way in which the underlying theoretical framework behind Juan Mayorga's theatrical poetics is determined by the influence of the philosophical thought of Walter Benjamin. The following presents an analysis of a selection of essays produced by Mayorga in which the author explores the influence of some of Benjamin's ideas regarding the concepts of historical translation, victims and shock, as well as the presence of Benjamin's conceptual metaphors and images such as ellipsis, constellations and swarms.

Keywords || Juan Mayorga | Walter Benjamin | Theatre | Philosophy

0. The philosophical education of Juan Mayorga

The study of philosophy occupies a central place in the intellectual education of Juan Mayorga. Along with mathematics and theatre, philosophy is the permanent object of his research and reflection; in 1997 Mayorga wrote his doctoral thesis on the work of Walter Benjamin, Ernst Jünger, Georges Sorel, Donoso Cortés, Carl Schmitt and Franz Kafka, entitled *La filosofía de la historia de Walter Benjamin*. Ever since then, Mayorga has continued to publish essays and theoretical articles on a philosophical theme in academic journals such as *Isegoría y Éndoxa*, has given classes on drama and philosophy at the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático and has lectured on philosophy in various countries.²

In the field of scientific research, Mayorga's work has been linked to the project "La Filosofía después del Holocausto" led by Professor Reyes Mate at the Institute of Philosophy of the Superior Council of Scientific Research. There he organized the permanent "Seminario Memoria y Pensamiento en el Teatro Contemporáneo", with the purpose of combining philosophy and theatre. Mayorga's scientific work in the field of philosophy has been closely linked to his theatrical work: dramatic texts such as *Job*, *Primera noticia de la catástrofe*, *La lengua en pedazos*, *El Gran Inquisidor*, *Natán el sabio* and *Wstawac*, rewritings and versions of classic works that were written for use in various discussions of the Cátedra Santo Tomás organized by Reyes Mate. These texts were published as first editions in the collection "Pensamiento Crítico / Pensamiento utópico" of the editorial *Anthropos*, alongside philosophical essays by the participants of these meetings. This was an interesting point in Mayorga's publishing history, as the texts were published in the field of philosophical argument, whereas his later theatrical productions, such as the recent *La lengua en pedazos*, have been purely theatrical works.

The most relevant work published by Juan Mayorga within the field of philosophical essay writing is *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria: Política y memoria en Walter Benjamin*, the result of his doctoral research. The study lies within the field of philosophical considerations of history. Many of the ideas on Benjaminian thinking contained in this study have been the source of various articles and lectures on theatre that Mayorga later published: some with titles and themes focused on Benjamin's writing, such as *Elipses de Benjamin*, *Experiencia*, *Shock* and *Violencia y olvido*, which focus on concepts and ideas taken from the philosophy of Benjamin that Mayorga applied to his theatrical conception; as well as others, such as *Misión del adaptador*, *Entre Venus y Marte* and *La humanidad y su doble*, which through briefly citing Benjamin open

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1 | This study was undertaken during a research placement at Heidelberg University funded by a Förderlinie I with a grant supplied by the Centre for Latin American Studies (IAZ) of Heidelberg University in collaboration with Santander Universidades.

2 | Some of these have been translated into German and English: *El estado de excepción como milagro. De Donoso a Benjamin*. "Éndoxa" No.2 (1993a), pp. 283-301. Translated into German by R. Markner: *Der Ausnahmezustand als Wunder. Von Juan Donoso Cortés über Carl Schmitt zu Walter Benjamin*; in: K. Garber (ed.), *Global Benjamin*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1999, pp. 1017-1031; *De Nietzsche a Artaud. El retorno de Dioniso*. In «El Cultural» (24 July 2001), p. 43; in «(Pausa.)» No. 24 (July 2006), pp. 13-15; English version: «(Pausa.)» No. 24 (July 2006), p. 190.

up a wealth of references that enrich the principal idea of the essay.

In light of the above, this paper attempts to provide a larval approach to the study of the weight that the philosophic thought of Walter Benjamin has had on the essays and dramatic works of Juan Mayorga, an influence that is essential, from my point of view, to understanding in detail the intellectual coordinates that define his work in theatre. To do this, we will attempt to explain some of Benjamin's philosophical concepts that figure in Mayorga's essays on theatre in order to determine how the thought of the German philosopher has built the theoretical scaffolding that supports the theatrical poetry of Juan Mayorga.³

1. Walter Benjamin's concepts in the essays of Juan Mayorga

Translation. Translation is a key topic in Mayorga's essays and dramatic works. The concept is based on Benjaminian theory. In a text entitled *Conservación y creación: Respuesta diferida a un actor chino*, presented at the conference "Institucionalización de la Cultura y Gestión Cultural" held in Madrid between 14 and 16 November 2007 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Mayorga reflects on the opportunity that Benjamin saw in translation to achieve pure language.⁴ In his doctoral thesis, Mayorga places the Benjaminian idea of "un lenguaje absolutamente otro" at the centre of the horizon of Benjamin's philosophy, which aspired to write through a language free of all subjectivity that would not perpetuate the violence that dominates in current language. Benjamin postulated a "lenguaje original" in the theological sense, that is, stripped of its mythical baggage. A "lenguaje nombrador", the model for which can be found in *Genesis* in the Bible, which deals directly with objects and lacks all communicative intent. Ideal translation based upon this completely other language claimed by Benjamin could take place if the source language and the target language converge to become "la lengua de la verdad, el fin mismo de la filosofía" (Mayorga, 2003d: 34).

It is through translation that, as well as being a way to perpetuate the original artwork, Benjamin sees the opportunity for languages to converge into a true language. The translation model, therefore, is that capable of transferring "el lenguaje puro" from the source language to the target language, widening it if the latter is incapable. For Benjamin, "la mejor traducción entre dos idiomas es aquella capaz de hacer que ambos se reconozcan como fragmentos de un lenguaje superior" (Mayorga, 2003d: 34). This Benjaminian notion of an absolutely other language affects Mayorga's reflections on his conception of the theatrical fact: every meeting between two

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3 | Except for the brief studies by García Barrientos, "El Holocausto en el teatro de Juan Mayorga", and by Barrera Benítez, "*Angelus Novus* de Juan Mayorga", and with the exception of those that have addressed the subject of the Holocaust and its victims, albeit more from a historical perspective than philosophical one for the most part, few works have studied the effect of the work of Walter Benjamin on the theatre of Juan Mayorga. Of these, one of the most important is the article by Gabriela Cordone published in the 37th edition of the journal *Estreno*, entitled "*La tortuga de Darwin*, de Juan Mayorga: hacia una lectura benjaminiana de la historia", which further analyses Benjamin's influence.

4 | The referenced text is unpublished. Some of the essays referred to in this work are unpublished materials provided by the author. In cases in which quotations belonging to any of these essays have been cited, no reference will be given at the end of each citation. The titles of the works will appear in the bibliography.

characters, every theatrical encounter between the work and the audience, should give rise to a third character, a third person that is born of the two previous subjects but that changes them.

In Mayorga's work, the idea of the importance of the untranslatable in the task of the translator derives from Benjaminian thought: committed to making the task of translating an act of discovery of what has been left at the margins of tradition. If for Benjamin translation is a process from which another language arises, for Mayorga it is the arrival of a third time period: translation should not comfort the present but destabilize it, it should question the conquered past and transform it into the unpredictable. Following the Benjaminian maxim that translation that only seeks to reproduce what an original work communicates is a failure, since languages are constantly changing, Mayorga only grants value to a translation if it enriches through experience.

This idea of translation was initially sketched out in one of Mayorga's first plays, *El traductor de Blumemberg*, published in 1993. One of the central issues raised in the work is a reflection on the transmission of evil through the translated word. Given that Blumemberg, the main character in the play, speaks in German (for a Spanish-speaking audience) in several scenes in the play, it is of interest here to recall Mayorga's words in a presentation entitled "Estatuas de ceniza" on 27 June 1996 at the University of Malaga, which explain what he had wanted to achieve in *El traductor de Blumemberg*:

[...] el conflicto entre la palabra que entendemos y la ininteligible. Usar las lenguas como colores: una marca los volúmenes que la otra llena. La lengua propia se alumbra a la sombra de la que no comunica; se torna otro lenguaje (distinto de sí mismo, o por él mismo, nuevo otra vez después de tanto usarlo); de modo que ninguna de sus palabras pase desapercibida; porque ninguna dejará de ser traducida, salvada de otro modo, en escena.

In *Frente a Europa* and in *La tortuga en Corea*, Mayorga returns to the Benjaminian concept of translation in order to establish an analogy with theatrical fact. If, for Benjamin, in accordance with the idea of romantic criticism that that which goes beyond the intentions of the author can be discovered in every work, the "otro lenguaje" can emerge in every translation, then for Mayorga the task of the translator must be equated with the process of transmission of the dramatic text: in the chain of displacement that is experienced from the point when the text is translated by the director and the actors up to when it reaches the viewer who translates it based upon their own experiences, the work can acquire meanings that its author had never even imagined, especially if it is staged in languages, theatre systems and societies different to those in which it was created. In this respect, the idea that Mayorga includes in the preface to the book

that summarizes his brief pieces, *Teatro para minutos*, is particularly eloquent:

Cada una de estas piezas quiere ser leída como una obra completa. Ello no excluye que un lector o una puesta en escena descubran pasadizos que comuniquen unas piezas con otras. Quizá algunos de esos pasadizos entre textos sean menos secretos para el lector que para quien los ha escrito. Ultimately a text always knows things that the author does not. (Mayorga, 2009: 5).

In *El sexo de la razón*, Mayorga considers one question: he recalls how, at the beginning of *Goethe's Elective Affinities*, Benjamin notes that his intention was to discover, in the novel by Goethe that exemplifies his essay, aspects unknown to the author of the work. In Benjamin's statement, he warns of the idea that the passage of time offers different readings to texts, and different values to those conferred by the author: "el tiempo subraya y tacha" (Mayorga, 2003b: 52).

Mayorga also uses Benjamin's reflections on translation in order to elaborate his own particular definition of theatrical adaptation, a central issue in his dramatic works as it is one of the more exhaustive facets of his career: in the last 14 years, Mayorga has created versions of more than one dozen classics of Spanish and European literature, some equally successful as his last piece, *La vida es sueño*. Just as Benjamin believed in the futility of searching for equivalence between languages in translation, Mayorga believes, as noted in his essay *Misión del adaptador*, that in the process of theatrical adaptation, "la aspiración a una correspondencia directa está, de antemano, condenada al fracaso" (Mayorga, 2001: 61). The task of the adapter is to make readable a text in which the temporary and linguistic references differ to those from the present. To this end, the adapter must take into account the two time periods that converge during the process of translating a work, the past and the present, in order to allow the viewer to enrich "su conciencia del tiempo" and their own language: "la misión del adaptador es doble: conservar y renovar" (Mayorga, 2001: 66).

Barbarism, experience, shock. A reflection on forms of hidden violence in society is the backbone to Mayorga's dramatic works. He has written essays and articles on the relationship between violence and culture, with particular emphasis on Benjamin's idea that "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin, 1971: 81). In *Respuesta diferida a un actor chino*, Mayorga notes that few thinkers like Benjamin have been able to warn about "la utilización de la cultura para camuflar silencios y olvidos", which "nos enseñó que la cultura puede ser un fetiche enmascarador, una fábrica de fantasmagorías y de mixtificaciones ideológicas". The very idea of barbarism is linked to Benjamin, and

to philosophy of history and tradition. In *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria*, Mayorga notes how Benjamin makes tradition a fundamental part of the struggle against fascism: if we recognize the barbarism in tradition, it makes it necessary to focus the eye towards what has not come to be tradition, that which is opposed to myth, “núcleo de la relación reaccionaria con la historia” (Mayorga, 2003d: 21).

In *Cultura global y barbarie global*, Mayorga reflects on the culture-barbarism duo with respect to globalization. In his opinion, culture is the epitome of human experience, and as such, the culture of each community represents only a fragment of this experience. To reject this cultural limitation and to confuse particular experiences with general culture is push a community towards barbarism. Mayorga questions whether the so-called “global culture” is but “una experiencia particular que, desconociendo su propia limitación, se presenta como la suma de todas las experiencias” (Mayorga, 1999b: 61). If so, cultural forms that are considered unsuitable for the market, often by the creators of culture, are doomed to disappear, endangering areas such as tradition and creation. Mayorga considers that “Un hombre al que se educa en la aceptación acrítica de la cultura está siendo educado para la barbarie. Está siendo educado para ser dominado o para dominar.” (Mayorga, 1999b: 62).

The Benjaminian idea of the weakness of the border between culture and barbarism is exposed manifestly in dramatic texts such as *Himmelweg*: the character of the Commander exhibits before the Delegate of the Cruz Roja who is visiting the concentration camp the great library of European classics that owns. He boasts of the vast culture which he claims to have, at the same time as ordering the execution of hundreds of Jews, an idea recognizable in the following words by Mayorga:

Después del Holocausto, contraponer cultura a barbarie es una peligrosa ingenuidad. Se puede escuchar la mejor música por la mañana y torturar por la noche. Se puede llorar de emoción ante un cuerpo pintado o esculpido y contemplar con indiferencia el dolor de un ser humano. Una sociedad de lectores, una sociedad que llene los museos, una sociedad que abarrote los teatros, puede aplaudir el genocidio. (1999b: 62).

For Mayorga, only a critical relationship with culture, that is, the creation of a space for the exchange of experiences, of an area for relationships among equals that removes all practices of domination, is able to impose itself on barbarism. It is the responsibility of the community to create a critical culture, to fight against the “narcisismo de los productores de cultura” (Mayorga, 1999b: 62), those potential champions of barbarism. Mayorga returns to this idea of the development of critical relationships with culture as a responsibility of citizenship in another of his essays, *Idea de la enseñanza*, on

the awarding of the National Prize for Dramatic Literature to José Sanchis Sinisterra in 2004:

La imagen de profesores y alumnos desentrañando juntos los secretos de un texto teatral y poniéndolo en pie me hace pensar en aquella idea de la enseñanza que defendía Walter Benjamin. Según éste, la escuela no ha de ser el lugar donde una generación domine sobre otra, sino el espacio donde dos generaciones se encuentren. El encuentro de dos generaciones en torno al texto de Sanchis tiene un valor especial, derivado del carácter asimismo especial de dicho texto, en que se condensa el esfuerzo de memoria —no hay memoria sin esfuerzo; la memoria siempre viaja a contracorriente— de un español nacido en 1940. (Mayorga, 2004a: 36)

In Benjamin's writings, the idea of barbarism is closely related to reflections on the loss of experience and its replacement with the experience of shock in modern individuals. According to Mayorga, Benjamin "describe su época como un naufragio de la cultura humanista"; "es un tiempo de barbarie el que se abre, pues ninguna experiencia liga ya a los hombres y a la cultura". In *On some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin confirms that neither narrative nor lyric poetry remain intact when experience is lost. He then highlights the importance of cinema in terms of the industrial production of dreams, the only compensation for the "tristeza y el desánimo" that accompanies life in times of barbarism, times in which experience is unable to unite human beings with educational and cultural goods.

Mayorga takes the Benjaminian ideas of experience and shock from his philosophical essays and translates them to the arena of theatre. In *Experiencia* and in *Shock*, he introduces the subject based upon the quotation by Benjamin, "men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience", in relation to the soldiers of the First World War, "el primer hombre expuesto masivamente al shock" (Mayorga, 1998a: 124). The soldier works as a paradigm of modern man, whose experiences have been conquered by technology and dominated, as a "trabajador/consumidor contemporáneo", by times of shock: "El "shock" es un impacto violento que colma la percepción de un hombre y suspende su conciencia; una conmoción que deja una marca indeleble en su memoria y, sin embargo, no crea ni recuerdo ni historia" (Mayorga, 1998a: 124). The loss of experience, already read by Benjamin in Kafka's work in relation to the private man, reaches the masses: memory and experience are irreconcilable with the effects of living through shock that suspend the conscience of the individual in society and isolate it from history, tradition and community.

Mayorga sees in shock a constituent of hegemonic modes of expression; he, therefore, believes it essential that every artist considers how to respond to shock. And, in particular, every theatre

writer must do so, given that “desde que existe, el mejor teatro ha recogido y dado experiencia”. He warns of the risks of writing a theatre piece using technology in which all human experience is replaced by a scene devoid of it, a piece of theatre which, just like Benjamin’s soldiers of the First World War, is poor in experience, with nothing to communicate. Technology has made possible the propagation of a culture of shock that is opposed to a theatre of memory, to the further detriment of the poetic word. Thus he commits himself to the moral and political commitment of theatre artists who build awareness and memory through their creations, and to the poetic word as an eidetic element in dramatic construction. He advocates for “organizar el pesimismo”, according to Benjaminian expression that he recalls in *Filosofía en el campo* - for a theatre aware of its marginality in respect to the domination of shock that regains its words and confronts the “lenguaje del imperio”. In the difficult task of disrupting the thrust of shock, Mayorga sees “el drama del teatro de nuestro tiempo” (Mayorga, 1998a: 124).

Angelus Novus. Victims of history. Walter Benjamin’s angel of history is one of the most famous images from *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: the angel who hopelessly contemplates the ruins of history destroyed by the hurricane of progress from which it cannot escape and which drags it towards a frightening future built on the ashes of humanity. *Herida de ángel* is a brief introductory essay written by Mayorga for *Sonámbulo*, a rewrite of poems from *Sobre los ángeles* and the biblical *Book of Tobias* that gave rise to a show by Ur Teatro, directed by Helena Pimenta, which premiered at the opening of the eighteenth 18th Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz on 16 October 2003, to commemorate the centenary of Rafael Alberti. In the text, Mayorga uses the Benjaminian image to signify the angels who star in the piece:

En una noche de insomnio y pesadilla, la alcoba del poeta es invadida —brutal, violentamente— por ángeles. Pero estos ángeles de Alberti no traen esperanza, sino desesperación. No traen plenitud, sino ausencia. Son ángeles de la pérdida y del destierro. En lugar del sentido del mundo, proclaman su absurdo. No portan mensaje alguno o dicen un mensaje ininteligible. Son ángeles modernos, como los de Benjamin o Klee: ángeles impotentes. Ángeles de una tradición vaciada que el hombre moderno contempla con más angustia que nostalgia. Ángeles del hombre deshabitado. (Mayorga, 2003a: 26)

It is not only the protagonists of *Sonámbulo* to which Mayorga gives symbolic weight based upon the Benjaminian image. The only one of Mayorga’s texts that has not been published, although it is represented, has a revealing title: *Angelus Novus*. While the reference to Benjamin is not explicit, the well-known fondness of Benjamin for the painting done under the homonym of Paul Klee, on which he meditated in depth and retained almost until his death,

is an indicator of the relationship between these two realities. If one delves into a comprehensive analysis of *Angelus Novus*, one can track ideas of Benjaminian philosophy such as that of progress, state of exception or messianism which, although they do not expressly appear, confirm the relevance of the title of the work.

Associated with the image of the Benjaminian angel is that of the ruins of history. Again in *Herida de ángel*, Mayorga evokes this image in the form of metaphor to explain the loss of identity suffered by the Poet, one of the characters in *Sonámbulo*, resulting in the failure of a language that is foreign to him. The Benjaminian idea of a completely other language, referred to in previous paragraphs, is also present here:

Y, sin embargo, un lenguaje nuevo se le anuncia entre las ruinas de las viejas palabras. Las antiguas imágenes han sido destruidas, pero otras quieren elevarse de entre los escombros. Así como en otras alcobas, en otras noches de insomnio, otros hombres —pintores, músicos, cineastas...— están buscando a ciegas un nuevo arte para un mundo nuevo. Es un tiempo de pesadillas, pero también de grandes sueños. El mundo burgués parece extinguirse y algo desconocido —bello o monstruoso— anuncia su llegada. Y el arte se cree capaz de estar al frente de la gran transformación. (Mayorga, 2003a: 26)

The image of the ruins of the history also appears in Mayorga's essay *La humanidad y su doble*: "Nuestro tiempo es un momento privilegiado del teatro, el momento de su ruina. La ruina de un edificio —según nos explicó Walter Benjamin— revela mejor que el edificio mismo el sentido de éste" (1994: 17). It uses the image of ruins to talk about the eternal crisis of theatre. As noted in *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria*, with respect to the ruins contemplated by Benjamin's angel, how the salvation of mankind can consist in rebuilding from the ashes, he proposes that we consider the idea that the ruins of theatre will return it to its present fullness.

Linked to Benjamin's image of the angel and the idea of progress, the figure of the victims of history emerges, the figure of the vanquished, that Mayorga appropriates and situates at the core of his theatrical reflections. In *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria*, Mayorga establishes a link with Benjamin's idea which relates to his own poetic conception of historical theatre: "el Angelus Novus ejecuta una enorme abreviatura, al poner en constelación las víctimas del pasado con las del presente. Hacia allí debe orientar sus alas el ángel —y el escritor, su escritura—: hacia las víctimas de la historia" (Mayorga, 2003d: 85). In *Cultura global y barbarie global*, Mayorga reflects on the place occupied by historical theatre in today's society based on Benjaminian considerations of progress: the society that defines itself as cultured dedicates certain resources to commemorating artistic works from its past that record

the progress of history as an evolutionary process, without realizing that those cultural forms that fall outside the official narrative are doomed to oblivion: “En ese museo, las víctimas del progreso sólo son mostradas en la vitrina de los sacrificios necesarios” (Mayorga, 1999b: 61).

In his essay *El dramaturgo como historiador*, Mayorga asserts the relevance of the creation of a “teatro histórico crítico”, which would frame his dramatic work, based upon ideas linked to Benjaminian thinking on inclusion in the history of the forgotten: the questioning of tradition, the emergence of the victims of the present if it enters into constellation with the oppressed past or the depositing of the hope of humanity upon the vanquished:

Hay un teatro histórico crítico que hace visible heridas del pasado que la actualidad no ha sabido cerrar. It makes resound the silence of the vanquished, who have been away from all tradition. En lugar de traer a escena un pasado que conforte al presente, que lo confirme en sus tópicos, invoca un pasado que le haga incómodas preguntas (Mayorga, 1999a: 10).

During this reflection on historical theatre, Mayorga raises the debate of how to dramatize the Shoah and contemplates the immorality of representing the victims. In *La representación teatral del Holocausto*, Mayorga states that theatre, as an art of politics and assembly, is an ideal artistic medium for building memory and experiences in communities. In his considerations of critical historical theatre as an anchor for two different historical times that appear and challenge the present of the viewer, there are the underlying Benjaminian ideas of constellation and remembrance of the vanquished. Just as Benjamin refused to deliver tradition to the victors, Mayorga refuses to give in to theatre deniers or revisionists who perpetuate the official narrative of progress and do not take into account the victims of history. For Mayorga, critical historical theatre must be aware of the past that has been silenced. As he describes in his essay *El miedo de los muertos*, paraphrasing the famous quote from Benjamin that “[e]ven the dead will not be safe”, Mayorga picks up another Benjaminian idea that places the spotlight on considerations of the victims of history and says that, in his view, any current meditation on violence should begin by remembering these victims.

2. Images and conceptual metaphors of Benjamin in Mayorga’s work

Ellipse, constellations, swarms. There are at least three images that Mayorga takes from Benjamin’s writings and includes in his own reflections on theatre: first, the ellipse; second, the constellation;

and third, the swarm. In *Elipses de Benjamin*, Mayorga explain this geometric concept, including a graphic representation, with regard to the choice of this motif by Benjamin to analyze Kafka's work:

La elipse es el lugar geométrico de los puntos tales que la suma de las distancias a dos puntos fijos llamados focos es una constante. En el (mal) esbozo de abajo, los puntos A y B pertenecerían a una misma elipse de focos F_1 y F_2 si $a_1 + a_2$ (suma de las distancias respectivas de A respecto de dichos focos) valiese lo mismo que $b_1 + b_2$ (suma de las distancias de B medidas respecto de los mismos focos). (Mayorga, 2010a: 372)

In his view, the image of the ellipse is useful for understanding the way in which Benjamin would read: it manages to reveal the relationship between two unconnected motifs that, by coming together, give rise to new questions. For Mayorga, "observar el objeto como foco de una elipse [...] rodearlo de un modo más productivo que trazando a su alrededor una circunferencia, en que los puntos de vista a ocupar son equidistantes de la cosa observada" (2010a: 373). He believes that Benjamin observed each concrete object "como posible foco de elipses", i.e., by imagining or remembering it in relation to another object. Through this connection, new insights arise that would not be generated from an analysis of the two objects separately and on their own. The greater the distance between the two, the greater the richness of this new open field.

For Mayorga, the image of the ellipse should be applied as a strategy for reading Benjamin's own texts: the greater the distance between Benjamin's work and the seemingly unrelated motifs to which it relates, the greater the enrichment of his critical thinking. Therefore, in *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria*, Mayorga explains the concept of Benjaminian progress based upon the image of the ellipse, with foci placed upon Benjamin and Kafka on the one hand, and Jünger, Sorel and Schmitt on the other:

Todos ellos se distancian de una concepción de la historia como escenario del progreso. En sus obras cabe reconocer, sin embargo, distintos gestos del hombre actual hacia la historia: el que une revolución y reacción y la mirada revolucionaria al pasado fallido. (Mayorga, 2003d: 16)

Mayorga's use of the image of the ellipse goes beyond critical commentary on Benjamin's works. The influence of his language is notable in Mayorga's own discourse that incorporates the image in order to reflect on matters unrelated to Benjaminian reflections. In *Hacia una justicia general anamnética*, Mayorga uses the image of the ellipse to discuss a piece by Reyes Mate, *Tratado de la Injusticia*:

Reyes Mate explora desde hace tiempo ámbitos poco atendidos por las corrientes principales de la conversación filosófica. En los últimos

años ha probado su capacidad para, desde esos ámbitos excéntricos, interpelar a dichas corrientes centrales, criticarlas e incluso presentar ante ellas posiciones alternativas. De modo que si su nombre sigue apareciendo asociado a la reivindicación de filosofías marginadas — de matriz judía, en particular—, se ha ido haciendo claro que esas indagaciones le preparaban para enfrentarse a problemas filosóficos en absoluto marginales. Antes que situarlo en Jerusalén frente a Atenas, cabe decir, utilizando una imagen benjaminiana, que el pensar de Reyes Mate se despliega en una elipse cuyos focos son Atenas y Jerusalén. (Mayorga, 2011a: 716)

In *Elipses de Benjamin*, Mayorga used the image of the ellipse to reflect on the mission of the artist, historian, mathematician or philosopher. They should observe the world through a dual perspective: that of the object seen and that of the memory of another to which it is linked. Like the strolling Benjamin, the *flâneur*, that “en cada rincón de la ciudad ve dos ciudades, la hoy dominante y esa otra de la que no hay sino huellas fugaces” (2010a: 373), Blanca, a character from Mayorga’s text *El cartógrafo (Varsovia, 1:400.000)*, runs through the current Warsaw tracing the remains of the ghetto.

A similar thing occurs with another image of Benjaminian origin that Mayorga uses to reflect on theatre: the constellations. Benjamin supports the construction or the transmission of history through the assembly, citation or constellation of images (Hernández-Navarro, 2012: 49) in contrast with the historicist method that reproduces the inherited account written by the victors. In a text on *George Tabori*, he writes:

Tabori explota a fondo la capacidad del teatro para hacer que espacios lejanos se yuxtapongan y tiempos distantes se vuelvan simultáneos. De modo que en el escenario, como en los sueños, no rija el tiempo lineal y mecánico del reloj, sino una trama de flujos y reflujos, de aproximaciones y rodeos, de asociaciones imprevistas, de constelaciones —por decirlo en lenguaje benjaminiano.

Mayorga praises the handling of the spatial and temporal structure of Tabori on stage which he describes through the image of the constellations. If Benjamin, in *On the Concept of History*, supports the consideration of the present as current time which, under the Messianic model, builds constellations of the past and the present, bringing to the present a damaged yesterday, Tabori sets in dialogue distant times that become simultaneous, from which appear “una trama de [...] asociaciones imprevistas” that breaks the temporal continuum and interrupts it in a constellation with the past.

The swarm is another of the images that Mayorga uses which may also have originated in Benjamin’s writings. While it is true that in the work of the German author could find different meanings for this concept (in *Revolución conservadora y conservación revolucionaria*,

Mayorga reproduces the quotation by Benjamin that “el ideal da la fuerza de la rememoración; el esplín, por el contrario, moviliza el enjambre de los segundos” (Mayorga, 2003d: 140) concerning the Messianic conception of time developed by Benjamin in *On the Concept of History*), perhaps the reference text by Mayorga entitled *Quiero ser enjambre* is the expression that Benjamin uses in *Hacia la imagen de Proust*:

Y cuando Proust, en un pasaje célebre, ha descrito esa hora que es la más suya, lo ha hecho de tal modo que cada uno vuelve a encontrarla en su propia existencia. Muy poco falta para que podamos llamarla cotidiana. Viene con la noche, con un gorjeo perdido o con un suspiro en el antepecho de una ventana abierta. Y no prescindamos de los encuentros que nos estarían determinados, si fuéramos menos proclives al sueño. Proust no está dispuesto a dormir. Y sin embargo, o más bien por eso mismo, ha podido Jean Cocteau decir, en un bello ensayo, respecto de su tono de voz, que obedecía a las leyes de la noche y de la miel. En cuanto entraba bajo su dominio vencía en su interior el duelo sin esperanza (lo que llamó una vez “l’imperfection incurable dans l’essence même du présent”) y construía del panal del recuerdo una mansión para el enjambre de los pensamientos. (Benjamin, 2007: 328)

Quiero ser enjambre, a short piece read by Mayorga on a Catalan radio programme, consists of a report of wishes formulated in an anaphoric structure of “Quiero + infinitive” that recalls that Benjaminian “swarm of thoughts”:

Quiero bailar tango con Soren Kierkegaard.
Quiero pasear París con Walter Benjamin.
Quiero jugar al parchís con Martin Heidegger y hacerle trampas.
[...]
Quiero ser una rama de la hipérbola.
Quiero ser el foco izquierdo de tu elipse.
Quiero ser número imaginario —raíz cuadrada de menos uno, si no se lo ha pedido nadie—.

Despite the apparently playful tone of the piece, which is one of Mayorga’s essay writings that was recently added to his collection of short pieces, the text can be read as a summary of many of the political and cultural coordinates that define the intellectual education of the author. Between the wishes there is no shortage of references to philosophy and, in particular, to the figure of Benjamin and his concept of the ellipse.

3. Conclusions

The influence of Benjamin’s writings on Mayorga’s essays does not end here. I have discussed the issues related to theatre, but concepts such as “odio moral” in the Mayorga’s essay entitled “Bulgákov: La necesidad de la sátira”, reflections on the Benjaminian expression “fire

alarm”, and, of course, considerations of the Baroque also deserve attention. Mayorga’s theatrical concept cannot be understood in depth without an attentive reading of Benjamin’s works. Reflections on the victims of history, the relationship between art and politics, and the construction of civic consciousness and memory constitute the axes of his dramaturgy and in them the influence of the German philosopher is more than evident.

In 2006, a brief piece by Mayorga entitled *JK* was published. The piece is a monologue by a character akin to the Nazi regime who recounts his pursuit of a Communist Jewish intellectual who tried to cross the French border. His suicide in Port Bou, in addition to other evidence, suggests that the aforementioned character is a copy of Walter Benjamin. In his particular theatrical tribute to the thinker whose work constituted one of the cornerstones of his intellectual education, Mayorga takes care of one of the fundamental ideas that Benjamin asserted: that hope for humanity lies in the desperate, the history of mankind must be written by the vanquished:

Tuve que registrar todo el cuarto hasta dar con el maletín. Dentro de él encontré este manuscrito. La última anotación, que seguramente hizo aquella noche con su letra pequeña y apretada, dice: “Ni siquiera los muertos están a salvo del enemigo”. Al conocer la noticia de su muerte, la policía española decidió abrir la frontera, y las mujeres y el chico pudieron pasar. Sé que llegaron a Lisboa y dos meses después fueron vistos en Buenos Aires. (Mayorga, 2009: 78)

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