

(RE)PRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTABLE:
STAGING THE HOLOCAUST IN JUAN MAYORGA'S *HIMMELWEG* (*CAMINO DEL CIELO*)

John P. Gabriele
College of Wooster

A little garden
Fragrant and full of roses.
The path is narrow
And a little boy walks along it.

A little boy, sweet boy,
Like that growing blossom.
When the blossom comes to bloom,
The little boy will be no more.

Franta Bass, "The Garden"

Authors, artists, and film directors alike seek to spark the consciousness and conscience of their audiences through evocative characterization, images, sounds, and action. Whether bold or subtle, artistic works are conduits for a deeper understanding of historical, social, and political reality, both past and present. This fact is particularly true in the case of the past events that are ideological referents or markers for the present. Even the most comprehensively and thoroughly documented occurrences of the past have been reconsidered and reevaluated over the years, but never more so than in the postmodern era, which views the past as unfinished or incomplete rather than stable or fixed. Postmodern artists, as Lionel Gossman reminds us, "conceive of their work as explorations, testing, creation of new meanings rather than as disclosure or revelation of meanings already in some sense 'there'" (38-39). His observation is particularly applicable to events with far-reaching and long-lasting universal consequences such as the Holocaust. As Dora Apel puts it, the Holocaust "refuses to be historicized as an event safely ensconced in the past, and continues to drive a compulsion toward forms of reenactment" (Apel 4).¹

Those who have theorized about the representation of the Holocaust are in agreement that contemporary artists who turn to the event as a theme do so with two objectives in mind. First, they wish to provide their audience with an image of an event they hope will never happen again. Second, they believe that retelling the past in juxtaposition to the social, political, and cultural conditions of the present results in a deeper understanding of both the past and the present (Simon *et al.*, Rothberg, 1-15, van Alphen 16-64). More importantly, according to Ulrich Baer, one should never categorically dismiss any past event, especially the Holocaust. To do so, as he states, might convey the "illusion that we might

somehow be able to assimilate the Holocaust [and similar acts of violence] fully into our understanding” (177). To dismiss any traumatic event of the magnitude of the Holocaust as an “aberration,” argues Baer, is to jeopardize the hope of a better “future” (181). The Holocaust, and events like it, transcend time and space. While connected to a specific time and to concrete places and peoples, what it symbolizes is neither historically, geographically, nor culturally confined.

The Holocaust plays a crucial role in modern history. It is a historical truth, an undeniable reality. Yet it defies accurate retelling, precise recollection, and straightforward representation because no single or authoritative perspective prevails. To quote Anton Kaas, the “impossibility of adequately comprehending and describing” has become “a *topos* of Holocaust research” (207). Like postmodernity itself, the event eschews a single concept of reason, a totalizing sense of logic. Consequently, it is not at all surprising, as Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg have aptly demonstrated, that contemporary critics and authors have insisted on the centrality of the Holocaust in understanding the postmodern human condition. Nor it is surprising that Juan Mayorga (1965), one of Spain’s most important contemporary playwrights, would turn to the Holocaust as a theme for his *Himmelweg* (*Camino del cielo*), which was written in 2003 and which premiered on November 18, 2004 in the Teatro María Guerrero (Centro Dramático Nacional).

The Holocaust provides Mayorga with a unique opportunity to explore historical truth through postmodern form. It permits him to resort to the aesthetic and ideological principles that characterize his dramaturgy: the rejection of an underlying or permanent truth, the problematic relationship between presentation and representation, the exploration of the incompatibility of the structure and the story, the rejection of all absolutes, the contingency of texts, spatial and temporal confluence, and the dissolution of the subject. It also allows him to bring together the three themes that most frequently characterize his theatre (history, memory, and the abuse of power) in the service of the overarching subject matter of his theatrical production: violence. Not physical violence *per se*, but violence more in line with Antonin Artaud’s definition of the concept, as a conscious, “lucid [...] kind of rigid control” as opposed to the “gratuitous pursuit of physical suffering” (102).²

Himmelweg, set in 1942, is a profoundly moving play that deals with a day in the Terezin Concentration Camp. It is based on a true event.³ A delegate from the Red Cross visits Terezin, where he is deceived by the commander, who leads him to believe that nothing evil is taking place.⁴ He disguises the camp as a fictitious city whose inhabitants, the prisoners, have been instructed to assume specific roles. “Himmelweg,” which literally means “road to heaven,” was the sinister euphemism used by the Nazis to refer to the access ramp that led to the gas chambers. The title of the play conveys linguistically the subterfuge and manipulative tactics the commander exercises at the level of text to mask the truth and create an illusion that he passes off as real. Mayorga employs the theatre as the lens through which he posits his specular representation of the Holocaust. The staged reality, what the Red

Cross delegate witnesses during his visit to the camp, is at once the cause and effect of the play. Text, context, and pretext are one and the same in *Himmelweg*. Part documentary, part metatheatre, part testimonial, Mayorga melds several dramatic forms into a single text to underscore the fragmented manner in which memory operates when recalling or depicting disturbing historical events and how they are forever mired and steeped in ambiguity and uncertainty. The playwright integrates reality, fantasy, life, art, fact, fiction, and subterfuge to dramatize the fact that what one perceives, no matter how real it appears, is not necessarily true.

The play begins when a Red Cross delegate returns to the original site of the Terezin Concentration Camp, now an overgrown wooded area. He recalls the humanitarian work he did for the Red Cross in Berlin, where he and others occupied a house that belonged to a Jew. Interested in the fate of the family, whose portraits still hung on the walls, the Red Cross representatives decided that one of them should “visitar los campos de internamiento civil” (31). The delegate recalls the numerous checkpoints he had to pass before arriving at the camp to meet with the commander. Although the commander was not informed of his visit in advance, the delegate notes that “tuve la impresión que me esperaba.” This observation and a comment that his interchange with the commander was noticeably artificial—“Se trataba de [...] hacer teatro” (32), as he puts it—are the first signs that Mayorga’s text adheres to one of the basic theoretical tenets of documentary drama, that of challenging “the concept of objectivity” (Paget 47). Through the delegate’s recollection of his arrival and his meeting with the commander, Mayorga deftly juxtaposes what the delegate will observe during his visit and political and social skepticism about that same reality. As he does in all of his plays based on historical events, Mayorga invites his audience to define or re-define what he portrays in light of what has been accepted as truth.

The delegate tells how the commander accompanied him to meet Gershom Gottfried, the mayor of the city, who escorts him during his visit, and who resembles the man whose portrait hung in the house in Berlin: “Lo que me desconcertó fue que aquel hombre sonriente, Gottfried, me recordaba al hombre del retrato de la casa de Berlín” (32). In time we learn that Gottfried was not the man in the painting. However, the drawing of our attention to this particular imagistic coincidence or overlap, no matter how briefly, is a reminder of the (dis)connection that characterizes the recollection of all traumatic events, among which the Holocaust occupies a unique place. While identity is a persistent trope in postmodern works as a means “for exploring the nature and the consequences of . . . the relationship between the fictive and the real” (Malina 8), uncertainty regarding the identity of specific individuals is typical of works that focus on the Holocaust (Eaglestone 101-33). As passing as it may be, the conflation of subjects contextualizes what the Red Cross representative will observe when he tours the camp: prisoners who have assumed roles and who thereby deny their true identities to project a reality that is false.

The commander and Gottfried insist that he take pictures. The delegate is amazed by what he sees and captures for posterity: “Fotografié aquellas calles asfaltadas y limpias. El quiosco de música en que tocaba la orquesta, en el centro de la plaza. El parque, lleno de columpios, con formas de animales. Los globos de colores.” Despite what he sees, he notices a sense of anxiety among the inmates. “La gente me miraba con extrañeza. Tenía la molesta sensación,” he recalls, “de que me evitaban” (33). The feeling of unease is particularly prevalent in the behavior of Gottfried, whose explanation of the history of the clock at the train station is not convincing. “Me resultaba raro,” recalls the delegate, “el modo de hablar del alcalde Gottfried. Era como si estuviese hablando de memoria. No sólo ahora, cuando me explicaba el movimiento del reloj, también al conversar sobre el tiempo o al ofrecerme pan. Gottfried hablaba como un autómeta” (33-34).

Gottfried’s conspicuous puppet-like behavior stresses the artificiality of the reality and symbolizes the conflicting situation that is embodied in all the prisoners of the camp. His unnatural behavior is a sign that his social self as a prisoner of the Terezin Concentration Camp is the site of the interplay between reality and illusion. He represents an unstable subject. Like postmodern characters in general and a victim of the Holocaust in particular, Gottfried’s character embodies the dialectic tension between fact and fiction, between truths and lies, between “conflicting discourses,” as Jeanette Malkin would no doubt put it (27). Gottfried, like the other inmates, appears uncomfortable and unnatural because, again to quote Malkin, he and the other inmates are a “cast of characters vying and negotiating for a determination of self” (45). Reality in Terezin is profoundly postmodern in practice and in theory. The artificial aura of the camp is blatantly obvious to the delegate: “¿Estaba dentro de un juguete automático? La pareja del banco, el viejo del periódico, los niños de la peonza, ¿no había algo artificial en el modo en que se comportaban? [...] todo me parecía, de pronto, igual de falso que la voz del alcalde” (34). Like a simulacrum, what he observes is the result of a programmed simulation of the real, an attempt to provide all the signs of the real, but at the same time to mask the real.

The scenes described by the delegate are a reminder that the Holocaust is an event immersed in mystery, ambiguity, uncertainty, and ambivalence. It is a historical event that defies comprehension and description, that is frozen in time and hence forever situated in the present, the past, and the future simultaneously. Not coincidentally, the delegate remembers that the clock at the train station “seguía marcando las seis en punto” (34). Time, like the lives of those interred in the camp, was at a standstill. Although convinced that all he observes at Terezin is false, the photographs he takes suggest otherwise. The implication is that perceived reality and objective reality are eternally locked in a symbiotic but conflictive relationship when it comes to knowing the truth about the Terezin Concentration Camp and the Holocaust in general.

When the time comes for the delegate to leave the camp, the commander accompanies him. The delegate returns to Berlin to write his report. Upon his return he is asked if he saw “los hornos, los

trenes, el humo, la ceniza.” Although convinced of the contrivance of what he saw, he could not prove otherwise: “Escribí lo que vi. No había visto nada anormal” (36). Even now, years later, he rewrites the report over and over again in his head: “Mi memoria vuelve a escribirlo todas las noches” (37). The delegate, like anyone who attempts to make sense of the Holocaust, a reality that defies reason and rational logic, can only retell it, rewrite it, relive it but can never fully grasp its significance. “The painful repetition of flashbacks,” as Cathy Caruth maintains, “can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind” to confront “an unpleasant event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way” (30).

The scenes that comprise Part II, “*pueden*,” according to Mayorga “*acompañar otras . . . procedentes de la narración anterior*.” They are the scenes the Red Cross delegate observes, photographs, includes in his report, and recounts in Part I: “*niños en columpios con forma de animales, un viejo que lee un periódico, un vendedor de globos, la bendición de una comida judía [...]*” (37). The persons in the scenes are generically identified. They are nameless: Chico 1, Chico 2, Chico 3, Chico 4, Ella, Él, La Nina. The suppression of their names, a sign of their anonymity, has two purposes. First, it underscores once again that their identities are as unstable as the historical and ideological discourse that envelops the Holocaust. Second, it implies their metatheatrical existence as actors in the commander’s deceptive scheme. If to use a name, to name characters, “is to totalize an existence” (50), according to Thomas Docherty, then the absence of names emphasizes a fragmented, unstable, and unfixed existence, one that lacks personal, social, and historical grounding in the real world.

Part II is temporally prescient from the perspective of the audience. What transpires in it textually follows Part I but chronologically precedes the delegate’s arrival. It evolves in a distinctly Pirandellian manner. The characters rehearse the parts they will act out on the day of the delegate’s visit. The children the delegate recalls playing with a top in Part I is just one of the scenes that is acted out in Part II. Its metatheatrical quality is indisputable:

CHICO 4.- Es muy bonita. Negra con la cabeza roja, me ha parecido. ¿Me la dejas ver?

CHICO 3.- Quítame las manos de encima.

CHICO 4.- Otra vez.

CHICO 3.- ¿Otra vez? ¿Por qué?

CHICO 4.- Aún no te había tocado. Has dicho “Quítame las manos de encima” antes de que te tocase.

CHICO 3.- ¿Desde el principio?

As the children rehearse their scene again, the stage direction reads: “*Vuelven a las posiciones correspondientes a ese momento del diálogo*” (38). Later we read that “*EL CHICO 4 apunta al CHICO 3 lo que debe decir*” (38). Further on, we read that a young child “*habla como si le costase recordar cada frase*” (39).

Like all metatheatrical characters, the occupants of the Terezin Concentration Camp are conscious of their roles in constructing the drama that unfolds around them. Life in the camp is theatricalized, grounded in illusion. It is scripted and consequently eschews objective reality. Mayorga resorts to metatheatre to convey the difficulty in separating the real and the fictive regarding the Holocaust and to give his audience pause to reflect. He insists that the audience maintain a bifocal vision in order to sustain the dialectic that exists in the camp. In addition to being aware of their roles within a play, metatheatrical characters are also attentive to the technical aspects involved in theatrical performance (Rao 216). The characters of *Himmelweg* are no exception.

Depicting the characters in Part II who pause to correct what was not rehearsed properly and repeat the scene, Mayorga calls attention to their scripted behavior and invites his audience to participate in the action by taking a critical stance. At times, the playwright is more direct with the audience. At one point, for example, La Niña goes so far as to look “*a un espectador, como si lo descubriese*” and “*saluda al espectador*” (39). According to Jeanne-Pierre Maquerlot, actors who break the theatrical frame in any way whatsoever do so “to make everyone—actors and audience alike—feel that the play has momentarily stopped its course to indulge in self-reflexive pause” (48). Mayorga skillfully combines metatheatre and documentary to create a contemplative pause in his audience. As in metatheatre, Mayorga’s characters repeatedly rehearse their roles, are aware of their errors, openly correct them, and break out of their roles. Like documentary theatre, the “dramatic power” of *Himmelweg* “lies in its capacity to show us not that certain events occurred [...] or even perhaps why they occurred [...] but *how* [author’s emphasis] they occurred” (Edgar 182). Consequently, like the Red Cross representative, we have reason to pause and reflect when we come to realize that the surface reality and what lies beyond it are incongruous.

Mayorga makes sure that our perspective aligns itself with that of the delegate. What the audience observes in Part II resonates as the repeated and programmed reenactment of the reality recorded by the delegate, proof that the lines between what is real and what is illusion, what is life and what is artifice, are blurred. We become privy to the machination of the artificial world and the unnatural behavior of which the delegate is painfully aware but unable to prove. Traditional boundaries, both aesthetic and ideological, have been shattered, leading us to view with a more critical eye what is real, what is lived, what is fact and what is fiction regarding the Holocaust.

Part III simultaneously paints a picture of Terezin in the past and in the present. It parallels Part I in that, it too, is meant to convey what reality was like at Terezin when it was a concentration camp. Like Part I, it is also narrated as a recollection of the past. But unlike Part I, it also talks of Terezin as it is today: a tourist site. Here Mayorga resorts to temporal, spatial, and character confluence to underscore the timelessness of the Holocaust. What the tourist guide says and does as he interacts with the visitors echoes what the commander said and did during his interaction with the Red Cross delegate. In this regard, Part III, like the rehearsed scenes of Part II, is also reiterative of what the Red Cross

representative recounts in Part I, but eerily so. By conflating contemporary time, place, and character with historical time, place, and character, Mayorga succeeds in portraying life as an endless series of cycles. His objective is to defeat transience and underscore yet again the transcendental nature of events such as the Holocaust.

Just as the commander did in Part I, the guide who greets the group of visitors when they arrive makes them aware of the wide variety of national literatures represented on his bookshelves and the fact that he is multilingual: “Siempre necesitaremos el español para leer a Calderón, el francés para leer a Corneille. Echen un vistazo a mi biblioteca [...] cuando me destinaron aquí, traje conmigo cien libros. Ni más ni menos: cien” (41). Like the commander, the guide repeatedly mentions how well prisoners were treated at Terezin when it was a concentration camp, how quaint and inviting their surroundings were. He notices that the visitors know their way around and immediately realizes that they were prisoners who have returned to visit the camp: “Por eso conocían el camino, porque ya estuvieron aquí.” “Todo ha cambiado un poco,” he tells them. He points out where things used to be: “Allí había columpios, allí estaba el campo de fútbol, allí la sinagoga” (42). “Todo se lo tragó el bosque,” he says, “pero ellos [the prisoners] siguen aquí. Ellos y el reloj de la estación, marcando siempre las seis en punto” (42). Years have passed, but time has stood still at Terezin. The prisoners are gone, but their presence lingers. The memory of what transpired at Terezin is what triggers the interaction between the past and the present, which characterizes this particular part of *Himmelweg*.

The guide’s comment about the perennial presence of the prisoners and the clock prompts a disturbing (con)textual melding that is best described as a case of sinister simultaneity. What follows is a *mise-en-abyme*, what Brian McHale has defined as the “reproduction [...] within the fictional world of the fictional world itself” (155), that functions very specifically as an imagistic homonym whose objective, to quote Mieke Bal, is to: “fictionaliser la relation vie-art” (120). The guide is briefly transformed, metaphorically speaking, into the commander, who repeats *verbatim* what we have heard before: “El objetivo inmediato es reagrupar aquí a todos los hebreos de Europa” (43). The encounter between the guide and the visitors is a reenactment of the meeting between the commander and the Red Cross delegate. Although the guide and the visitors occupy the camp in the present, it is a place that will forever and inevitably be set in the past. The guide insists, just as the commander did, that the visitors take as many photos as they want: “Hagan muchas fotos por favor” (41). “Y así,” he adds, “cuando lleguen a su casa, podrán tomar papel y pluma y escribir un bonito informe” (43).

For a brief moment, the guide/commander and visitors/prisoners are situated in the past and the present at the same time. They are metaleptic characters who exist in a single place but at different times, which suggests that their existence is unrelentingly cyclical. For a brief moment, the return of the prisoners as visitors and their interaction with the guide reproduces or duplicates the encounter between the Red Cross representative and the commander and the reality the latter observed, itself a

representation, a staged reality. At one level, the scene creates a sense of lost absolutes and inherent instability. At another, the stereoscopic superimposition of the characters is meant to create a more penetrating, telling, and in-depth image of reality (Nussbaum). An ambiguous and unstable past can only result in an equally unstable and ambiguous present. It appears that not “todo ha cambiado un poco”, as the guide initially announced. Remembering what Terezin was sets off an interaction of time frames to suggest that when it comes to the Holocaust, the past and present are continually intersecting and giving shape to each other.

The eerie temporal confluence that characterizes Part III is symptomatic of traumatic events. The “disconcerting reversal of past and present” and the “deconstruction of the orders of time and of subjectivity” are, according to Richard Terdiman, “inherent in the interrogation of memory” but especially in the case of traumatic experiences (104). Recollecting traumatic events results in the ambiguity of agency and the shattering of contextual, spatial, and temporal frames. As a result of trauma, the past and the present float within the collective unconsciousness as a place of fragmented identity which, in the case of *Himmelweg*, results in the shattering of the mimetic frame. The guide and the visitors have transcended the mimetic frame as if uncontrollably. Inevitably invaded by the consciousness of their past as inmates in Terezin, the visitors become the memoried beings of their past on Mayorga’s stage in the present. They are forever the prisoners of the Terezin Concentration Camp. Similarly, the guide, who repeatedly insists on the humane treatment the inmates received, is forever the commander, the embodiment of the propagation of the illusion that was Terezin. Because of their relation to Terezin, the visitors and the guide are part of a time-space continuum, as the guide himself suggests when he tells the visitors “hagan memoria” (42), explaining que “todo lo que tenemos ya ha ocurrido dentro de nosotros” (43). If individuals carry within themselves the past, in particular a past that is unresolved and forever incomprehensible, then the (con)fusion of character, time, and space is what results when those same individuals recollect the past.

The structure of *Himmelweg* mirrors textually the interplay or melding of reality and illusion on which the play’s action is founded, as Parts IV and V very clearly illustrate. The last two parts of the play chronologically precede the first part and reveal the depth of the deception that the commander of the Terezin Concentration Camp masterminded. Although we saw prisoners rehearsing their roles in Part II, these two parts of the play go further back in time to when the decision was made to create a fictitious reality at the camp. In a series of scenes in Part IV, eleven to be exact, and in the single scene that constitutes Part V, we watch as the commander takes on the role of author and director of his play, choosing actors, revising the script, assigning the parts, and rehearsing with the prisoners. Parts IV and V exemplify what Patricia Waugh has called “the lowest common denominator” of metafiction, namely that the intent of all metaliterary works is “to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction” (6). They represent, as we shall see, the culmination of Mayorga’s illusion-breaking art by

blending illusion with the destruction of illusion. Both parts effectively lay bare the makings of the contrived reality with which the delegate was confronted when the play opened while continuing to draw attention to the *mise-en-abyme*-like construction of Mayorga's text.

When Part IV opens, the commander is in the midst of selecting Gottfried to play his part in the reality he will stage for the Red Cross representative's visit. "Estamos," he tells Gottfried, "a un punto de iniciar un proyecto" (45). He shows him a plan of how the grounds of the camp will be transformed to achieve his goal: "Ésta es la estación, y esto el río. . . . En este punto estamos construyendo un colegio. Aquí habrá un campo de fútbol. Y lea aquí, Gottfried: la sinagoga" (45). As the commander shares his set design with Gottfried, he also explains how his text will evolve: "Consideraremos en principio una composición clásica: Primer acto: la ciudad; segundo acto: el bosque; tercer acto: la estación". The commander's notebook doubles as his script. "EL COMANDANTE lee en la primera página de un cuaderno," writes Mayorga, "que llamaremos 'libreto'". Reading from his notes, he announces the various roles he will assign to the prisoners: "vendedor de globos", "niños de la peonza", "pareja en el banco" (46).

As the action evolves, the metatheatrical construction of *Himmelweg* becomes more pronounced. In scene four, the commander and Gottfried go over in detail how they will instruct the child prisoners to properly wind and release the top. In the following scene, displaying the behavior of a theatre impresario and director, the commander expresses his disappointment with the acting: "Qué desaparezcan de mi vista. Voy a enviar un telegrama a Berlín. 'Misión imposible. Stop. Esperemos nueva orden'". He criticizes the prisoners' performances: "El gordito es pésimo. No sabe vocalizar. Al otro se le entiende mejor, pero ni hay convicción en sus palabras" (47). "El vendedor de globos," he continues, "definitivamente, no sirve. Se va a la izquierda cuando se tiene que ir a la derecha" (48). As his frustration grows, the commander prescribes what he is attempting to achieve, which resonates with Brecht's theory of the stage: "Pero lo más importante es que encuentre un vínculo entre la palabra y el gesto" (48). Like Brecht, the commander is determined to achieve the maximum integration of motivation and action that typifies the German playwright's epic theatre. Later, he quotes Prospero's lines from *The Tempest*: "Somos de la misma materia de que están hechos los sueños, y nuestra pequeña vida se encierra en un sueño" (53). The ultimate goal of Brecht's epic theatre was to get actors to play characters believably without convincing either the audience or themselves that they have become the characters. Ironically, this goal is also Mayorga's, but it is certainly not the commander's, which is more in line with Prospero's contention that art can substitute for life.

Mayorga's intent in Part IV is to underscore the false pretenses of the reality the delegate recounts in Part I and which he documents in his official report. Part IV is simultaneously prescient and reiterative of what transpires in Part I and also Part II in which the children assume their roles but convey their awareness of being actors in a play. Setting the stage, assigning the roles, rehearsing the parts, referring to Brecht, and citing Shakespeare are devices employed by Mayorga to highlight the dangers of

allowing dramatic illusion to become a metaphor for the “real” world and propagating said “reality” as truth. Seeing to every detail of the reality he will stage consumes the commander. If, as Robert Baker-White has claimed, all that is related to theatrical rehearsal essentially serves as a “special kind of access to truth” and is “the site of truth and authentic knowing” (23), then Mayorga’s intent in dwelling in Part IV on what was done in preparation for the delegate’s visit is meant to unmask the façade and deceptive exterior and reveal that the Terezin Concentration Camp, the Holocaust in general, is nothing more than a vortex where the real and the fictive are locked in an ever-irresolvable opposition and conflictive integration.

What transpires in Part IV projects endlessly forward and backward, echoes and reflects but also refracts scenes we have already witnessed in *mise-en-abyme*-like fashion to create “a series of apparently endlessly overlapping, enclosed networks of conceptual or structural” scenes “which form a kind of labyrinth leading to a shifting, ever-unattainable nucleus or centre” (Cardwell 271). Ultimately, Part IV creates a conspicuous, if not disturbing, ontological confrontation between Mayorga’s fictional world and real-world historical fact. In such a confrontation, truth is nowhere to be found, as the last part of the play deftly illustrates. Gottfried, while practicing his limp, is simultaneously rehearsing with the children who will play with the top and the young child whom the commander is determined the delegate will see playing happily with her doll. The young girl is anxious to play with her doll, to rehearse her part, but Gottfried cautions her: “Tenemos que seguir esperando un poco más. Tenemos que seguir esperando hasta que ese hombre [the delegate] aparezca. Cuando ese hombre aparezca, coges a Walter [the doll] y dices: ‘sé amable, Walter, saluda a este señor’” (56).

The image of the child whom Gottfried cues regarding what to do and how to act when the delegate appears is, not surprisingly, the very first image the delegate will photograph: “En el río una niña jugaba con un muñeco. Yo me detuve a fotografiar a esa niña” (33). The end of Mayorga’s play is the beginning of the commander’s. His contrived reality is set in motion at the very moment Mayorga’s text comes to an end. What ends as rehearsed reality becomes objective reality; what is reality appears suspiciously like illusion; what is illusion appears suspiciously like reality. Sinister simultaneity persists. Life and art are at once retextualizations and reappropriations of each other. The Holocaust, like the postmodern condition, is a conceptual conundrum.

Himmelweg is Juan Mayorga’s attempt to participate in the ongoing debate about the Holocaust and to make sure that such events are not forgotten or dismissed but remembered as instructive referents for the present. The Red Cross delegate’s recollection and report are testimony of the conditions at Terezin, which, in combination with Mayorga’s metatheatrical reenactment and documentary of reality at the camp, are meant to represent a historical event which is, by its very nature, unrepresentable, and invite the audience to define or re-define its relationship to that event. Mayorga’s

intent in *Himmelweg* is to contest the hegemonic understanding of historical heritage regarding the Holocaust, to spark our consciousness and our conscience.

The past, to quote Mayorga himself, “no es un suelo estable sobre el que avanzamos hacia el futuro.” “El pasado,” he maintains, “lo estamos haciendo en cada momento.” He insists that contemplating past historical events, “lo ya visto,” as he says, “desde una perspectiva inexplorada,” has but one goal: “que se vea lo viejo con ojos nuevos” (“El dramaturgo” 10). In *Himmelweg (Camino del cielo)*, Mayorga performs history so that we may relive the past in the present. He invites us to engage in an ideological and aesthetic debate about the Holocaust in order to create an awareness of the complex interaction between fact and fiction in the construction of historical fact. In so doing, the playwright illustrates the theatre’s inherent restorative potential for counteracting, questioning, and exploring authority, whether fact or fiction, real or presumed.

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Notes

¹ The Holocaust has been a recurring trope and theme in world literature and art in general since the end of the Second World War (see Roth and Kremer). It has been a particularly prevalent theme in theatrical works (see Skloot, Patra 15-34, Isser 13-31). No doubt this frequent presence is due to the theatre's unique ability to combine speech, gesture, character interaction, and spectacle into a single performative act to produce a visual life-like image.

² Mayorga is very clear about the ultimate objective of his theatre. Whether his theme be national or international history, as in *Siete hombres buenos* (1989), *El hombre de oro* (1996), *El sueño de Ginebra* (1996), *Primera noticia de la catástrofe (A partir de Bartolomé de las Casas)* (2006); memory and the recollection of one's personal past, as in *Concierto fatal de la viuda Kolakowski* (1994), *El jardín quemado* (1997), *Sonámbulo* (2003), *El chico de la última fila* (2006); the abuse of power, as in *Más ceniza* (1992), *El traductor de Blumentberg* (1992), *Cartas de amor a Stalin* (1998), *Amarillo* (1998), *Últimas palabras de Copito de Nieve* (2004), *Hamelín* (2005), *La paz perpetua* (2008), or some combination of all three themes. He is concerned primarily with making his audiences aware of the surreptitious ways in which society and individuals unjustly treat other individuals. "La violencia," insists Mayorga, "me preocupa mucho" and "está en alguna medida en todos mis textos. Entiendo por violencia la dominación de uno sobre otro o de una realidad sobre un ser humano, sea hombre o mujer". It is not the physical aspects of violence that most concern Mayorga. His humanitarian outlook is much more spiritually driven: "La violencia es intentar matar a otro pero no a través de la muerte física sino a través de algo que pueda ser mucho más perverso, que es la muerte moral, la humillación, la aniquilación moral de algún ser humano" ("Entrevista" 1097).

³ Mayorga, like other members of his generation—Lúisa Cunillé (1961), José Ramón Fernández (1962), Antonio Álamo (1964), Laila Ripoll (1964), Luis Miguel González Cruz (1965), Borja Ortiz de Gondra (1965), and Itziar

Pascual (1967), to name a few—frequently bases his plays on true events, a practice which helps to blur the line between reality and illusion and to explore the operative dynamic between life and art that characterizes all postmodern art, especially theatre. *Cartas de amor a Stalin*, *Primera noticia de la catástrofe* (*A partir de Bartolomé de las Casas*), and *El chico de la última fila*, for example, are based on true events.

⁴ For a detailed first-hand account of life in Terezin, the cultural activities that took place, the tactics employed by the Germans to create a façade of civility, the propaganda film that was made of the so-called “Paradise Town,” and the visit of the Red Cross, see Zdenka Fantlova-Erich, Jana Renée Friesová, and Melanie Oppenheim. Based on these sources, a very cursory history of the Terezin Concentration Camp follows in order to illustrate the extent to which Mayorga draws from historical fact in *Himmelweg*. Terezin was a Nazi concentration camp established in the fortress of the city of the same name, located in what is now the Czech Republic. Many educated Jews were inmates of the camp, which was publicized by the Nazis for its rich cultural life. Although Terezin was used as a transit camp for European Jews en route to Auschwitz, Hitler presented it as a model Jewish settlement, a representation that was a mask to conceal the horror of the place and fend off objections and criticism. Notable artists, writers, scientists, jurists, diplomats, musicians, and scholars were sent there. There were enough musicians in Terezin to make up two full symphony orchestras. Chamber orchestras played at various times. Stage performances were produced and attended by camp inmates. It was here that the Jewish artists were sent after having been caught stealing paper and other supplies with which they produced writings that recorded daily life in Terezin. It was their work that eventually allowed the outside world to know about life in Terezin. These artists also stole materials so the children could secretly create their works of art and other inmates could express their innermost feelings, as in the poem that appears as the epigraph to this study. A film was made to show this mythic, idyllic city. The Red Cross was allowed to visit Terezin once. The camp was spruced up for the occasion. Certain inmates were dressed up and told to stand at strategic places along the specially designated route through Terezin. Shop windows along that carefully guarded path were filled with baked goods and other staples for the day. As a result, the Red Cross reported that life at Terezin was acceptable, despite the ravages of war, and concluded that the Jews were being treated humanely.