A Narrative Vaivén: Lucha libre and the Modern Nation Unready-to-hand in Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La sirvienta y el luchador*

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Conferrer of anonymity and mystique, the luchador's mask is the most sacred of symbols in lucha libre of Mexico and Central America. In "La hora de la máscara protagónica," Carlos Monsiváis credits the silver mask of El Santo, the sport's most iconic luchador, with the longevity and vitality of his career: "En la perdurabilidad del Santo, intervienen sus méritos y, de manera notable, las aportaciones de la máscara (no ocultadora sino creadora de su identidad)" (128). Heather Levi discusses how the lucha libre mask grants power to its bearer, and, conversely, how the act of "demasking" results in dishonor and humiliation (115). Consequently, the mask is one of the central motivating objects in a lucha libre performance. In Honduran-Salvadoran novelist Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La sirvienta y el luchador* (2011), I show how the lucha libre mask is associationally transposed to the narrative in the form of "el pañuelo"—a handkerchief or bandana. Initially portrayed as an innocuous part of daily life in pre-civil war El Salvador, the bandana gradually shifts associational valence when it is deployed as a face mask during rebel attacks. As civil society gives way to civil war in the narrative, the bandana begins to function like the lucha libre "máscara protagónica," a sort of motivating piece of equipment that drives the epoch-shifting violence of the narrative.

Below, I return to "el pañuelo" in *La sirvienta y el luchador*, but this brief treatment of its role in the narrative serves to elucidate

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the "vaivén" proposed in this study's title. Inconstancy, a swaying, or an unexpected change: vaivén derives from the Spanish verbs *ir* and *venir* and designates the "[m]ovimiento alternativo de un cuerpo que después de recorrer una línea vuelve a describirla en sentido contrario" ("Vaivén"). I draw on this concept to show how *La sirvienta* is characterized by a formal narrative vaivén that makes visible the shifting societal norms of El Salvador on the brink of civil war. I maintain that this vaivén is indicative of an epoch-changing sociopolitical dynamic: from an ostensibly functioning national community to a complete breakdown in state legitimacy due to extrajudicial violence. The above discussion of the mask also introduces one of the central thematic elements of interest to the present study: the symbolic role of lucha libre in the novel.

I analyze the narrative deployment of lucha libre in the text, in which the maid of a wealthy Salvadoran family investigates the disappearance of her young employers while a state police officer and former lucha wrestler abducts and tortures Salvadoran citizens as part of a counterinsurgency campaign. My reading attends to the symbolic role of lucha libre—which is yoked to the Salvadoran state in the text—in order to take up the question of a broken social contract. I examine the breakdown of the sport's symbolic register in the novel, which parallels a similar collapse in the legitimacy of the Salvadoran state. Lucha libre is a highly allegorical, spectacular sport that culminates—at the end of a match, a series of matches, or across a season—in an outcome that restores the equilibrium of *justice*. Castellanos Moya's novel renders visible the artificiality of justice in lucha libre and, in a parallel manner, the growing impossibility of security and justice in El Salvador.

This reading leads to the core of my analysis, which is a consideration of how the world presented in the narrative is further indicative of a changing sociopolitical dynamic. World in this context denotes a Heideggerian sense of the term, and I read the novel alongside Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), specifically his theory of the "broken tool." In this theory, which is treated in depth below, Heidegger gives an account of Dasein's primordial relationship to a given object—what he calls objects' readiness-to-hand. When Dasein uses an object as equipment, that is, when Dasein interacts with the object skillfully and it functions well in a utilitarian manner, that object becomes essentially invisible (or phenomenologically transparent) to Dasein as the object withdraws into the work it is used to complete. Heidegger explains that this "kind of Being which equipment pos-

sesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call '*readiness-to-hand*'" (69/98 original emphasis).[1] But equipment malfunctions, may be lost, or breaks, and when equipment is not immediately "ready-to-hand," Dasein's primordial relationship with it is interrupted. In these instances, the equipment is rendered "unready-to-hand" to Dasein (74/103), becoming visible and obtaining a "Thing-like" quality in its brokenness.

I read this twenty-first-century Salvadoran novel alongside Heidegger to two ends. First, Heidegger is one of the foremost thinkers on the conditions, forms, and limits of modernity. His understanding of how modern existence is manifested through our dealings with things in the world provides an instructive frame through which to think El Salvador in the twilight of modernity. Likewise, as Leslie Paul Thiele has emphasized, Heidegger's conceptualization of "the human being as a being-in-the-world-with-others" (484) points to the social nature of humans, and it is the state that gives form to the social in modernity. I delve into the importance of this social world ("we-world") below. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it is instructive to think Heidegger, indeed, to think the project of modernity and the ways in which the nation state is manifested, through El Salvador—to consider what this Central American nation can reveal about the shortcomings and contradictions intrinsic to the project of national modernity as conceived by foundational thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and Jacques Rousseau. By considering the institution of the nation state not through its most functional exemplars in Europe and North America, but rather through the prism of its most Thing-like entities (Latin American, and more particularly, Central American states), the contradictions behind the terms upon which national modernity is founded—Subject, Sovereignty, Security—are laid bare.

Utilizing Heidegger's theory, the present study considers how objects in *La sirvienta y el luchador* lose their readiness-to-hand, which renders them phenomenologically conspicuous to the reader, disturbs the world of the narrative, and makes visible how the modern nation state is coming undone. Set in an unspecified moment of early civil conflict El Salvador, in *La sirvienta* the perspective shifts back and forth between the titular characters with the effect of demonstrating the increasing "unreadiness-to-hand" of everyday items—bandanas,

[1]This pagination is standard in Heideggerian scholarship, with the first page number referring to the original German text and the second page number indicating the location in the English translation.

city buses, brooms, and hospitals—encountered as the social contract breaks down.

Lucha libre as Symbol and Allegory

El Salvador has been ruled by an oligarchic class for much of its national history. *Las catorce familias*, an agricultural oligarchy, have wielded power both economically and politically since the 1870s, when the principal export crop in the country shifted from indigo to coffee (White 65). In order to encourage more coffee production, the government gave tax breaks and redistributed collectively owned lands to individuals who agreed to produce coffee for export rather than dedicate the land to subsistence farming or less lucrative crops. These benefits generated an oligarchy that has purchased political power for decades. For much of the twentieth century, various military regimes—usually with the backing of the oligarchy—controlled El Salvador, and the country was plagued by coups d'état, human rights violations, persistent inequality, and rigged elections. In the 1970s, El Salvador began to experience high inflation and worker dissatisfaction in the agricultural and industrial sectors (Almeida 148–49). Consistent electoral fraud and labor unrest were exacerbated by increased state repression in the late 1970s, and, in 1980, five Leftist guerrilla groups joined forces to form the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in order to consolidate efforts in the name of "el triunfo de la lucha popular" ("Manifiesto"). Castellanos Moya's novel is set in this tumultuous milieu immediately preceding the civil war.

Written from the postwar and published well into the epoch of neoliberal globalization, *La sirvienta y el luchador* revisits the violent history of El Salvador to revealing ends. Postwar Central American narrative fiction has often been read as a disillusioned, cynical literature that has abandoned the political commitment of earlier genres, such as testimonio and poesía de protesta. Beatriz Cortez's *Estética del cinismo* (2010) has been foundational in its identification of "la sensibilidad de posguerra," which relates to the failure of revolutionary projects; the privileging of individual reason above collectivity; and a persistent aesthetic disenchantment that has supplanted the hopeful utopian sensibility that dominated Central American literature of the revolutionary period (25). In their survey of postwar Central American fiction, Werner Mackenbach and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner echo this shift, observing that, from the 1990s on, Central American texts no longer promote a political-ideological agenda, and instead "las reali-

dades ficcionalizadas se encuentran articuladas a una presencia velada de la violencia cotidiana normalizada en las relaciones sociales y las vidas de los personajes" (85). They go on to observe that the spaces represented in these narratives, "los espacios urbanos," take on the role of a sort of protagonist, which provides insight into the daily and seemingly ubiquitous violence of the postwar milieu (86, 93).

La sirvienta y el luchador takes up a similar task, bearing witness to the diffusion of violence into every aspect of society. *La sirvienta* is the fourth of six novels in the Aragón saga, which tells the story of twentieth-century El Salvador through the lens of the Aragón family's political commitments and personal setbacks.[2] *La sirvienta* takes place in the span of a few days preceding the most recent Salvadoran civil war (1980–1992). The narrative most likely occurs in early 1980, given that Padre Oscar Romero, the recently beatified (May 2015) Catholic Priest who was murdered while giving a homily at his church's altar in March 1980, is still alive and broadcasting on the radio in the novel's pages. The text paints a vivid picture of the state of the country at the outbreak of the civil war, what Salvadoran poet Miguel Huezo Mixco describes as the "tres *v*" of Salvadoran society: "violenta, vil, vacía. Sí, muy vacía. Vacía y vil. Pero, sobre todo, violenta" (54). The novel unveils this empty, vile violence through an unorthodox detective story involving the two titular characters.

The luchador, el Vikingo, is a sixty-five-year-old man that was once a lucha libre fighter and has worked for the state police for decades. El Vikingo assists in the kidnap, torture, and disappearance of Albertico and Brita Aragón, who are deemed "Communist subversives" and suspected of involvement with the revolutionary Left. The *sirvienta*, María Elena, is a sixty-year-old woman and long-time employee of the Aragón family. She is to begin her first day as the housekeeper for Albertico and Brita when she learns of the young couple's disappearance. María Elena and el Vikingo know each other from the days in which she worked for Pericles Aragón, the patriarch of the Aragón family and a Leftist journalist whom el Vikingo tailed during the 1950s and 1960s. After Albertico and Brita disappear, María Elena is determined to find them, deciding that the best way to do so is to track down el Vikingo and enlist his aid in locating the young couple.

El Vikingo's past as a lucha libre fighter plays a central symbolic role in the narrative. Arguably the most iconic sport in the Mexican and

[2]To date, the Aragón saga is comprised of *Donde no estén ustedes* (2003), *Desmoronamiento* (2006), *Tirana memoria* (2008), *La sirvienta y el luchador* (2011), *El sueño del retorno* (2013), and *Moronga* (2018).

Central American contexts, lucha libre has a long history of symbolizing and dichotomizing Good versus Evil. Monsiváis has called lucha libre "el muy complejo espectáculo que es deporte que es, de nuevo, espectáculo" (6). In line with Monsiváis's observations, Roland Barthes describes professional wrestling, *lucha*'s Anglophone counterpart, as "the most intelligible of spectacles" (6), a sport replete with easy to read external signs. From the athletes' costumes and facial expressions to their gestures and physiques, wrestlers excessively perform "the great spectacle of Suffering, of Defeat, and of Justice" (7–8) for the audience. In his reading of *La sirvienta y el luchador*, Guatemalan author and critic Dante Liano echoes Monsiváis and Barthes, concluding that the "mundo reducido [de la lucha] no albergaba intermediaciones conceptuales. O se era técnico (bueno) o se era rudo (malo)" (514). Lucha libre, as spectacle and sport, creates a set of expectations about "good guys" and "bad guys" and is saturated with associations such as justice and an equilibrium between Good and Evil. The "good guy," rule-abiding wrestlers, *los técnicos*, battle the "bad guy," rule-breaking wrestlers, *los rudos*, in a series of matches that endeavors to restore order and justice by the end of a season.

I argue that the Salvadoran state of *La sirvienta* exploits the symbolic signification of lucha libre in order to purloin the associated values of justice, Good, and legitimacy. By casting el Vikingo, a former *técnico* in the world of lucha libre, as the representative of the anti-communist Salvadoran state, *La sirvienta* synecdochally instills in the state a similar associational valence to that of lucha libre. According to this analogy, the state police are the good guys—*los técnicos*—whereas all who challenge the national order are the bad—*los rudos*. Pertinently, professional wrestling has historically had a particular political valence. As Barthes notes, the combat between Good and Evil is "of a parapolitical nature, the 'bad wrestler' always being presumed to be a Red" (12). In this way, the allegorical charge of professional wrestling resonates with the ideal myth of Western democratic capitalism. This is even more meaningful during the Cold War: the masked bad guy must surely be a communist insurgent while the beleaguered good guy strives tirelessly for democracy and justice.

However, throughout the narrative, lucha libre becomes a meaning-fraught allegory of Good versus Evil gone awry. The titular luchador, el Vikingo, is a member of the state police who is steeped in the morality of Good versus Evil due to his past as a popular professional wrestler. His lucha libre persona "pertenecía al bando de los técnicos, de los limpios, aunque comportara como un rudo" (245). This is

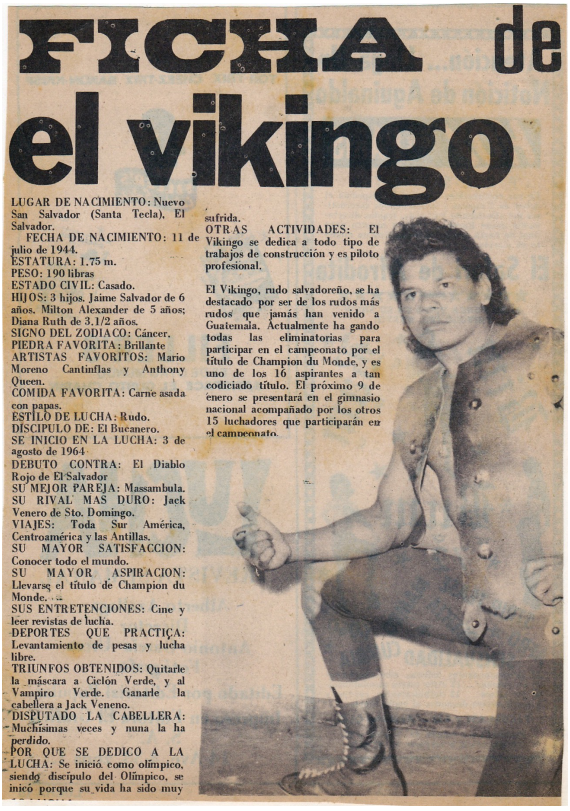
problematic, given that the symbolic system of lucha libre comes with particular challenges. As Barthes observes, unlike the fans of sports such as boxing, spectators of professional wrestling know that the event is a performed, "fake" affair, and the audience expects a degree of verisimilitude in the rendering of justice. In turn, this justice acts as a sort of societal catharsis, much like Ancient Greek tragedy was performed for cathartic ends (5).

Throughout the novel, two fractures related to the symbolic register of lucha libre emerge. First, much like el Vikingo's persona—the lucha hero who is supposed to behave as *el técnico bueno*, but instead acts like an immoral *rudo*—his role on the national police force is corrupt and unscrupulous, as he takes part in frequent killings, kidnappings, rapes, and torture. The victims of these state crimes are increasingly difficult to classify as societal *rudos*, which of course means that el Vikingo is simply one of the bad guys.[3] If lucha libre, as an allegory of Good versus Evil, must present a credible spectacle to the audience, then the Salvadoran state of Castellanos Moya's novel that has coopted the symbols of lucha libre must likewise abide by its rules to be credible. However, the declared *rudos* (accused insurgents) are not always easily identifiable as "bad," and the ostensible *técnicos* (the police) undeniably do evil deeds. The intelligible allegory of Good versus Evil proves nothing more than a fiction in both contexts, as the state fails as a believable system of Good and cannot produce an acceptably coded spectacle.

There was, in reality, a luchador named el Vikingo in El Salvador during the time of the narrative present (see figure 1). Unlike the fictional Vikingo, the real-life lucha libre wrestler was a true *rudo* rather than a (perceived) *técnico*, and he was deemed to be "de los rudos más rudos" by the magazine *Lucha* ("Ficha de el Vikingo"). In this way, Castellanos Moya borrows from reality, but twists that reality in order to maximize the good-evil inversion.[4] As with the fictional Vikingo's wres-

[3]This is not to say that Castellanos Moya represents the Leftist revolutionaries as *los buenos*. On the contrary, the text refuses to "take sides" and instead hold both sides accountable for the political conflicts of twentieth-century Latin America.

[4]This real-life Vikingo was the Salvadoran successor of an earlier Mexican Vikingo, and thus there is a series of lucha libre personas named el Vikingo that likely form the basis of the luchador from Castellanos Moya's text. The original Vikingo was one of the most despised *rudos* in lucha libre history. Born in Chihuahua, Mexico, he was a protégé of el Bucanero, who is mentioned in Castellanos Moya's text in reference to the fictional Vikingo's most glorious win. According to the real-life Mexican wrestler El Silencio, a contemporary of the original Mexican Vikingo, "El vikingo le dio la arrastrada de su vida al Santo el cual se enojo [sic] al verse humillado. Nunca un rudo se había atrevido a tratarlo tan mal, a ridiculizarlo delante del publico [sic] que lleno [sic] la Arena México" ("Biografía").



FICHA de el vikingo

LUGAR DE NACIMIENTO: Nuevo San Salvador (Santa Tecla), El Salvador.
FECHA DE NACIMIENTO: 11 de julio de 1944.
ESTATURA: 1.75 m.
PESO: 190 libras
ESTADO CIVIL: Casado.
HIJOS: 3 hijos. Jaime Salvador de 6 años. Milton Alexander de 5 años; Diana Ruth de 3.1/2 años.
SIGNO DEL ZODIACO: Cáncer.
PIEDRA FAVORITA: Brillante
ARTISTAS FAVORITOS: Mario Moreno Cantinflas y Anthony Queen.
COMIDA FAVORITA: Carne asada con papas.
ESTILO DE LUCHA: Rudo.
DISCIPULO DE: El Bucanero.
SE INICIO EN LA LUCHA: 3 de agosto de 1964
DEBUTO CONTRA: El Diablo Rojo de El Salvador
SU MEJOR PAREJA: Massambula.
SU RIVAL MAS DURO: Jack Venero de Sto. Domingo.
VIAJES: Toda Sur América, Centroamérica y las Antillas.
SU MAYOR SATISFACCION: Conocer todo el mundo.
SU MAYOR ASPIRACION: Llevarse el titulo de Champion du Monde.
SUS ENTRETENCIONES: Cine y leer revistas de lucha.
DEPORTES QUE PRACTIÇA: Levantamiento de pesas y lucha libre.
TRIUNFOS OBTENIDOS: Quitarle la máscara a Ciclón Verde, y al Vampiro Verde. Ganarle la cabellera a Jack Veneno.
DISPUTADO LA CABELLERA: Muchísimas veces y nuna la ha perdido.
POR QUE SE DEDICO A LA LUCHA: Se inició como olímpico, siendo discípulo del Olímpico, se inicó porque su vida ha sido muy sufrida.
OTRAS ACTIVIDADES: El Vikingo se dedica a todo tipo de trabajos de construcción y es piloto profesional.

El Vikingo, rudo salvadoreño, se ha destacado por ser de los rudos más rudos que jamás han venido a Guatemala. Actualmente ha gando todas las eliminatorias para participar en el campeonato por el título de Champion du Monde, y es uno de los 16 aspirantes a tan codiciado título. El próximo 9 de enero se presentará en el gimnasio nacional acompañado por los otros 15 luchadores que participarán en el campeonato.

Figure 1. A profile of the original Salvadoran Vikingo found on the blog Lucha Libre Guatemala, accompanied by the caption, "aquellos aficionados de antaño recuerdan gratamente a el [sic] Vikingo, un rudazo de la hermana república de el Salvador, personalmente lo vi luchar varias veces tenia [sic] gran carisma" ("Ficha de el Vikingo").

tling persona—the *técnico* that behaved like a *rudo*—the line between good and evil in El Salvador is represented as having begun to break down. From the first moments of the novel, when members of the state police taunt a female restaurant owner and lasciviously flirt with her fourteen-year-old daughter,[5] the "goodness" of the self-professed "good guys" is in doubt. El Vikingo and his colleagues deploy a rhetoric that parallels the noble goals of lucha libre—the state police promise

[5]The mother of the Marilú, "la gorda Rita" is vigilant against the possibility of rape, because Marilú is the result of Rita's own rape (and subsequent forced prostitution) as a fourteen-year-old girl (189).

to maintain national security, protect the citizenry, and guard against communist subversion—however, a narrative dissonance arises when their actions do not align with the virtuous, justice-seeking norms of lucha libre. This dissonance points to the breakdown of justice and the social contract in pre-civil war El Salvador.

Above, I discussed the importance of the lucha libre mask to the prolific career of the luchador El Santo, as well as to the spectacle of lucha libre performances generally. The humiliation that results from the "demasking" of a luchador is central to the narrative arc of a given fight, as the demasked luchador must seek vengeance—either immediately or in a future fight—in retaliation for the humiliating gesture. In *La sirvienta y el luchador*, the lucha libre mask is associationally transposed to the narrative in the form of two face coverings. First, like a lucha mask, el Vikingo puts on his Ray Bans each time he heads out on a mission, with the sunglasses becoming a prosthesis to state violence in the novel.[6] Second, just as Barthes asserts that the "bad guys" in professional wrestling are parapolitical representations of "Reds," the communist revolutionaries of *La sirvienta* are set apart by donning a figurative mask—the bandana—whenever they go out on a mission. The bandana, which is an innocuous part of daily life in pre-civil conflict El Salvador, functions as a "máscara protagónica" in the unstable milieu of the novel, becoming a motivating piece of equipment that induces the epoch-shifting violence of the narrative.

My use of the term "equipment" here is not accidental, and I employ the word in the Heideggerian sense. As I shift away from an examination of the symbolic valence of lucha libre, this question of equipment is central to my reading of *La sirvienta*. Before discussing the implications of reading Heidegger alongside this text, however, it will be useful to explicate how equipment and (un)readiness-to-hand relate to the overall project of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), as well as to clarify three key terms: Being, Dasein, and world.

[6]The Ray Bans are directly linked to el Vikingo's old lucha costume, as he affirms that he only cares about two possessions: "sus gafas Ray Ban de aro dorado; su amuleto, lo más le pesaría perder. Y, claro, la calzoneta de cuando fue luchador que yace envuelta en papel de regalo en una caja en su habitación" (20). It is of note that a key element of el Vikingo's identity is a U.S.-founded brand of sunglasses, thus pointing to the role of the United States in funding, training, and propping up the Salvadoran authoritarian state.

Being, Dasein, World, and the Theory of the Broken Tool

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes to approach the question of Being from ontical (the fact of existence), ontological (the structure of existence), and phenomenological (what is encountered in existence) perspectives, given that these forms of knowledge and relations are always already based on "the average understanding of Being in which we always operate and *which in the end belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein itself*" (8/28 original emphasis). Literally translated as "being there" in German, "Dasein" is a well-known entity of fundamental import to Heidegger's project. Dasein is "the inquirer" that seeks to understand the question of Being (8/27); Dasein is "man himself—an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (12/32 original emphasis). Dasein seeks to understand its Being, and this questioning or inquiring means that Dasein is always already pre-ontical and pre-ontological, particularly in that Dasein's understanding of itself is grounded in the world in which Dasein exists, because that world is "reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted" (16/37).

This concept of "the world" is integral to Heidegger's formulation of both Dasein and Being and is key to the following analysis of Castellanos Moya's novel. The world is a constitutive part of Dasein's ontical structure, as it comprehends the environment in which Dasein exists, which in turn is primordial to Dasein's understanding of its own Being, as well as to the entities that Dasein encounters phenomenologically in the world (13/33). In "The Worldhood of the World," Heidegger differentiates between the various uses of "world." As an ontical concept, "world" signifies the totality of entities present-at-hand in the world and may also refer to the communal—what Heidegger calls the "we-world"—or the public world in which Dasein lives (65/93). As an ontological term, world signals the Being of entities in the ontical world, or the Being of objects that exist in the communal world (65/93). Finally, the use of world that most concerns the present study is as an ontological-existential concept that refers to worldhood. According to Heidegger, to discover this ontological-existential worldhood, or environment, we must undertake a phenomenological examination of the everyday Beings-in-the-world—put simply, objects—closest to Dasein. This is to say that we must consider Dasein's *dealings* in the world (67/95 original emphasis). These dealings are not just perceptual, but rather are constituted by those entities that Dasein manipulates and puts to use in Dasein's environment (67/95).

In addressing Dasein's environment, Heidegger differentiates between Things—those entities that we encounter in the world pre-ontologically—and equipment—the entities that we encounter with concern due to our dealings with them (68/97). For instance, we have equipment for writing, cooking, building, or transportation. The quintessential example that Heidegger proffers in *Being and Time* is the hammer. When Dasein picks up the hammer as equipment to use in construction, the functioning hammer becomes phenomenologically transparent to Dasein. In deploying an entity as equipment, that entity is primordial to Dasein—it is encountered as ready-to-hand, which makes it equipment with an ontological purpose rather than a phenomenologically curious Thing. So, when Dasein grasps the hammer's handle and strikes a nail, the hammer withdraws into the work it is used to complete, and essentially becomes invisible to Dasein when it functions as expected.

However, if the handle cracks upon impact, suddenly, the invisible equipment is rendered "Thing-like" due to this malfunctioning, which interrupts Dasein's primordial relationship to the object. Rather than invisible equipment, the broken tool is now a conspicuous Thing (73/103). The malfunctioning of equipment is useful for an inquiring Dasein, given that an object rendered unready-to-hand makes visible the assignment (towards-which) of the object. As Heidegger shows, the result of this disturbance to Dasein's dealings in the world is significant:

> [*W*]*hen an assignment has been disturbed*—when something is unusable for some purpose—then the assignment becomes explicit. Even now, of course, it has not become explicit as an ontological structure; but it has become explicit ontically for the circumspection which comes up against the damaging of the tool. When an assignment to some particular "towards-this" has been thus circumspectively aroused, we catch sight of the "towards-this" itself, and along with it everything connected with the work—the whole 'workshop'—as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself. (75/105 original emphasis)

Having clarified the Heideggerian terminology of import to my analysis—Being, Dasein, equipment, and world—I now examine the ways in which *the world announces itself* in Castellanos Moya's *La sirvienta y el luchador*. I argue that broken or misused objects—equipment rendered Things in the Heideggerian sense—are deployed in the text in order to index a breakdown in civil society, a malfunctioning in the social contract between the nation state and its people.

The World Announces Itself in Narrative

Misha Kokotovic posits that *La sirvienta y el luchador* indicts not political institutions or people, but rather the era, and that individuals find themselves trapped in a predetermined process that they cannot control or comprehend (137). He observes that the disillusioned register of the novel strongly contradicts the utopian sentiment of the time and, written from the postwar, this disenchantment also marks a positionality toward the present, namely, that the novel proposes no viable alternatives to contemporary inequalities and injustices. Kokotovic notes that the novel critiques not only el Vikingo, who serves as a torturer for the authoritarian state, but also Joselito, the grandson of María Elena, whose leftist militancy is motivated by a desire for power, adventure, and the affections of a woman rather than by ideological commitment (145). Thus, Kokotovic finds that the novel offers a narrative denunciation of both the Left and the Right in its treatment of the early civil war period.

The below analysis is similarly interested in the epochal dissolution that is marked throughout *La sirvienta*. As the narrative unfolds, the city of San Salvador unravels into a warzone. Areas of the capital are cordoned off by state forces and insurgents. Barricades block the city streets, city buses are weaponized, and apartment complexes and hospitals are turned into battlegrounds. *The world announces itself* in the novel in a pendulum-swing movement. The pendulum swings between El Salvador as an ostensibly functioning state—the world in which María Elena lives as housekeeper to the Aragón family; as mother to Belka, a nurse at a small private hospital; and as grandmother of Joselito, a university student in the humanities—and El Salvador as a state waging a dirty war on its own citizens—the world in which María Elena acts as a detective in the disappearance of her employers, as the mother of a nurse employed by a military hospital that tortures its victim-patients, and as the grandmother of a budding revolutionary. The vaivén between these two worlds unveils the slow coming undone of the former—and how the equipment of that world is persistently rendered unready-to-hand to national subjects that do not enjoy the promised political security and stability of a functioning state.

One of myriad examples of this narrative vaivén is found in "La primera parte," told by a third-person narrator and focalized through the perspective of el Vikingo, in the shifting instrumentality of the broom as equipment (understood from here on in the Heideggerian sense). The narrative opens with the rape of a prisoner in *el Palacio Negro* (the National Police headquarters), where suspected insurgents

are taken to be interrogated, tortured, and eventually murdered and disappeared. El Vikingo enters one of the cells in the basement with the intention of raping one of the recently arrived female captives. He spits on her anus and penetrates her with his fingers, and when she cries out, he threatens to thrust the length of a broom into her body if she defecates on him (23–24). This episode is followed in "La segunda parte" by María Elena going about her day as a housekeeper in the home of Albertico Aragón, who, unknown to her at this narrative moment, has been kidnapped and taken to the Palacio Negro along with his Danish wife, Brita. When María Elena reaches for her broom and begins sweeping the kidnapped couple's home (55), the everyday cleaning object is endowed with a harrowing, uncanny aura. In the world of the narrative, the broom no longer functions as a mere cleaning device, but has become an implement of torture as well.

This is one of many instances of a narrative vaivén between everyday objects ready-to-hand as innocuous equipment (the broom as cleaning implement) and objects that have lost their readiness-to-hand and been rendered conspicuous Things (the broom as torture device). As María Elena progresses through the narrative, she interacts with various items in their expected, phenomenologically transparent manner, but time and again *the world announces itself* when the objects become unready-to-hand and, instead, emerge as instruments of violence. For instance, as María Elena makes her way to Albertico and Brita's home for her first day of work, she is bothered by a developing blister on her heel due to a new pair of sandals (52). This detail is wholly unexceptional until the first time that she is sucked into the violence of emerging civil war. In this later episode, while riding a bus she is caught in a shootout between state forces and insurgents, and a stray bullet casing grazes her arm, burning her elbow. A blister begins to develop due to the burn, and María Elena is compelled to look at it on multiple occasions, most notably as she stands next to the dead body of a fruit vendor following the shootout (96). A blister, which pages earlier was simply the uncomfortable manifestation of new shoes, now serves as an indication of the violent world that is becoming commonplace.

As the narrative progresses, wor(l)ds shift meaning. Just as the broom is utilized as both torture device and cleaning implement, individual objects and words signify differently depending on the context of their use. The morpheme "opera" proves one of the most revealing examples of this phenomenon, as it is used differently by four of the five narrative perspectives that comprise the novel. Given that this study is concerned with the malfunctioning of objects, the narrative

manipulation of this phoneme is further charged with meaning, as "opera" derives from the verb operar, which names the working of a thing. El Vikingo is in charge of delivering dissidents to "la ópera," where they are made to "cantarlo todo" (24), thus juxtaposing the innocuous opera house with ópera as a space of torture to educe confessions. Later, in a hospital operating room, a doctor performs surgery ("operando") to save the life of a young man, but the hospital as a place of healing is disrupted when the state police arrive to arrest not only the injured dissident, but also the doctor working to save his life (116). The interrupted medical operation is soon followed by Joselito's clandestine "operación" to kill el Vikingo (205). Lastly, the dissident is taken to a military hospital, where, instead of a life-saving operation, he is merely kept alive between torture sessions so that state officials can extract as much information as possible before he dies (219). The meaning of the morpheme "opera" mutates as the narrative progresses, marking the oscillation between normally functioning spaces and spaces of state torture and Left insurgency.[7]

The function of the bandana or kerchief (*pañuelo*) is unique in this narrative vaivén, as it becomes a sort of protagonist in the novel. Levi has shown how the wrestling mask is a central motivating object in a lucha libre performance, given that demasking a luchador serves to halt a fight and sets up a ritual of vindication in subsequent rounds. In *La sirvienta y el luchador*, the bandana invokes the allegorical weight of the lucha libre mask and gains a kind of agency in the text. In these instances, the bandana abandons its role as equipment, which might be worn on one's head or used to wipe one's brow, when it is donned to obscure revolutionaries' identities each time they launch an attack on state forces, thus becoming an object unready-to-hand in a peacetime state. Covering one's face—whether with a bandana, facemask, or scarf—is a ubiquitous symbol of Leftist revolutionary

[7]Examples of "opera" as a shifting phoneme abound in the text: told from the perspective of el Vikingo, the ópera as a place of torture occurs three times: "Pronto vendrán por ellos para llevarlos a la ópera, que es donde cantan sus secretos" (23); "los de la ópera ya vienen por ella; es fiera y tiene que cantarlo todo" (24); "La ópera está al otro lado del patio; ahí sólo van los que tienen que cantar largo y tendido" (31). Later, from María Elena's perspective, "opera" as a verb signifying life-saving surgery is used: "El doctor estaba en el quirófano, operando a un muchacho que había venido herido" (116); ¿Cómo es posible que se hayan atrevido a entrar a una clínica a capturar a un paciente y al médico que lo operaba?" (118). In "La tercera parte," Joselito discusses "el plan operativo" (206) to "montar una operación" (205) to kill el Vikingo. Finally, from the perspective of Belka, "opera" indicates the refusal by military hospital officials to save the life of a suspected subversive, despite her insistence that "Habría que operarlo de nuevo" (220).

forces in twentieth-century Latin American history. Nicaraguan guerrillas of the Sandinista Movement of the sixties and seventies often wore traditional masks to hide their identities when undertaking insurgent operations. In the Zapatista movement in Mexico, participants and leaders (such as Subcomandante Marcos) cover their faces with a scarf to maintain anonymity and avoid personal fame as a means of emphasizing the collective nature of the struggle. Pertinently, in the Salvadoran context, members of the five branches of the FMLN wore bandanas, both as a sign of unity and to hide their identities during operations.

Drawing on this tradition, the bandana gains agency in Castellanos Moya's novel as a motivating piece of equipment that cues the violence of El Salvador on the brink of civil war. Unlike the broom and bus, which shift from innocuous equipment that functions in a non-violent manner to Things unready-to-hand due to their violent implementation, the bandana does not participate in the narrative vaivén as such. Instead, it acts as a signal, cueing the withdrawal of objects' readiness-to-hand and effecting their implementation as equipment of violence. This is most obvious in the case of the revolutionaries, like María Elena's grandson Joselito, who puts on the bandana before each insurrectionary operation and removes it once the act is over (92, 133, 218). However, the bandana also crops up in seemingly innocuous ways just before episodes of violence erupt in the novel, so that even the bandana as equipment ready-to-hand (e.g., a handkerchief for sweat or tears) becomes linked to danger. For instance, after María Elena has entered a church to pray, she brings out a handkerchief (*pañuelo*) to wipe the sweat from her brow (119). As she begins to pray, a group of young people moves furtively toward the Sacristy, and she hastily leaves when she realizes the church is about to be taken over by revolutionaries (120–21). Shortly thereafter, violence erupts when María Elena visits el Vikingo for the second time. As she approaches his home a putrid smell assaults her senses, and she raises the *pañuelo* to cover her nose (124). Almost immediately she hears explosions and sees four revolutionaries run toward a getaway car (125). As if on/a cue, her *pañuelo* emerges just before an insurgent operation is executed.

Tellingly, the bandana materializes in moments when María Elena acts out of character—essentially becoming temporarily unready-to-hand to herself—and takes action in the search for Albertico and Brita despite the possibility of physical harm or detention. For instance, after being injured in a shootout (the above-mentioned blister on her elbow), María Elena pulls a kerchief (*pañuelo*) out of her bag to press

on the wound. As if the *pañuelo* summons violence, she is immediately drawn into an argument with the state police, and nearly arrested, when she defends a fellow passenger accused of being a subversive (96–97). A similar incident occurs after the explosion outside of el Vikingo's home. María Elena rushes inside despite "ganas de salir corriendo, de alejarse lo más rápidamente posible" (126). She finds el Vikingo shot and bleeding, and, holding back sobs, she brings out her kerchief to press to her face. When the authorities arrive, one of el Vikingo's colleagues recognizes her from the earlier shootout and hits her over the head with his gun. In each of these scenes, the bandana emerges just before María Elena is sucked into violence that she desperately tries to avoid.

Like el Vikingo's Ray Bans, the bandana acquires agency as a sort of lucha libre mask transposed to the narrative. Set in pre-civil war El Salvador, Castellanos Moya's postwar novel catalogs the steady shift from civil society to civil war through this persistent narrative vaivén. As I discuss below, this encounter between Heideggerian philosophy and the Salvadoran state reveals the fissures and contradictions in modern political thought, and the closing section considers foundational texts of national modernity alongside the Salvadoran context.

Things Out of Hand: Broken Equipment, Broken Social Contract

The 1993 Truth and Reconciliation report on the Salvadoran civil war found the state responsible for the majority of the extrajudicial murders of noncombatants, with witnesses "attribut[ing] almost 85 per cent of cases to agents of the State, paramilitary groups allied to them, and the death squads" ("Report" 36). In contrast, only 5% of violence was committed by the FMLN. The representation of violence in *La sirvienta y el luchador* conforms to this reality. Although violent acts are not limited to state forces in the novel, the majority of such deeds, including the most brutal forms of rape and torture, are committed by state actors.

What to make of this state recourse to torture? Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) investigates how problems of pain are intimately tied to problems of power. Scarry's central thesis—"what is quite literally at stake in the body in pain is the making and unmaking of the world" (23)—dovetails closely with the present analysis. Scarry analyzes to what ends torturers utilize everyday items—bathtubs, refrigerators, beds, doors—against prisoners. She maintains that divorcing everyday objects from their common usages

and recoupling them with the infliction of pain constitutes an unmaking of the world of the prisoner, "which is an external objectification of the psychic experience of the person in pain" (45). For Scarry, the torturer unleashes pain in order to gain power and invulnerability (58–59). In many well-known historical instances, torture is enacted upon the foreigner's body, such as in the human rights violations in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, which is justified by naming non-citizen prisoners "enemies of the state" or "terrorists." However, torture may also be unleashed by the state on its own body politic.

From the earliest conceptualizations of the modern nation state, it has been accepted that the state has the right, and even the necessity, to use violence to guarantee the safety of its people. This violence may be in the form of war against foreign invaders, but it may also occur against the very people that comprise the body politic. Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) details various forms of domestic punishment, including the death penalty. Hobbes is clear that each of these forms of punishment may be legitimately deployed by the state, not against innocents, but rather only when a "Subject" transgresses the law (359–60).[8] Likewise, in *Of the Social Contract* (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau outlines how each member of a body politic grants the sovereign the right to take his or her life upon entering the social contract. For Rousseau, in exchange for the state's protection, "we consent to die if we become assassins," and anyone that becomes a "public enemy" of the state may be condemned to death (17). This right to punish citizens by death is likewise guaranteed in "Artículo 168" of the El Salvador's 1962 Constitution,[9] which would have been in force in the narrative present of *La sirvienta y el luchador*: "Sólo podrá imponerse la pena de muerte por los delitos de rebelión o deserción en acción de guerra, de traición de espionaje, y por los delitos de parricidio, asesinato, robo o incendio si se siguiere muerte" (414).

Despite the fact that state violence—even against its own citizenry—is theoretically and constitutionally sanctioned, the occasion for this

[8]This term "Subject" has a particular meaning in *Leviathan*. Hobbes explains that the Subject is any individual that forfeits his right to govern himself upon entering into a covenant under a sovereign authority in order to create a stronger multitude in the name of "peace and defence [sic]" (227).

[9]Intriguingly, the 1983 Constitution, ratified in the midst of the bloody civil war, does away with Article 168. In its place, a modified death penalty asserts "Sólo podrá imponerse la pena de muerte en los casos previstos por las leyes militares durante el estado de guerra internacional" ("Artículo 27" 5). This constitutes a contractual farce given that the 1993 Truth and Reconciliation report concluded that the state employed "a deliberate strategy of eliminating or terrifying the peasant population in areas where the guerrillas were active" (118).

type of violence is limited. Violence may be deployed against a subject by the state only when order and security are threatened. Hobbes states unequivocally that the state is created for the "protection and defence [of man]; *Salus populi* (the people's safety), its *Businesse*" (81 original emphasis and spelling). Similarly, and even more explicitly, Rousseau asserts,

> The sovereign owes its very existence to the sanctity of the [social] contract; so it can never commit itself, even to another state, to do anything that conflicts with that original act . . . I am saying not that the sovereign *ought* not to do such a thing, but that it *cannot* do so—violation of the act of contract-making by which it exists would be self-annihilation. (8 original emphasis)

As shown by these passages and "Article 168" of the 1962 Salvadoran Constitution, the state does not enjoy unlimited right to employ violence ("*Sólo* podrá imponerse la pena de muerte . . . si . . . "), and it cannot utilize violence in any way that it deems fit. Violence that exceeds the confines of guaranteeing security and protection of its people is no longer *legitimate* violence. Considered in light of these caveats, the real-world violence narrativized in Castellanos Moya's novel is illegitimate and contract breaking.

Jean Franco's *Cruel Modernity* establishes that, in the Latin American context, the biopolitical violence exercised by state governments against its own citizenry was propelled by a desire to rapidly modernize. This modernization entailed "civilizing," often via massacre, those who were deemed to be part of backward populations, as well as suppressing dissent, frequently via disappearance and torture of striking workers, student protestors, and political opposition. Franco emphasizes that "the anxiety over modernity defined and represented by North America and Europe all too often set governments on the fast track that bypassed the arduous paths of democratic decision making while marginalizing indigenous and black peoples" (2). The pressure to modernize in order to fit a particular liberal-democratic mold often led Latin American states to the extrajudicial torture and murder of its own citizens.

Greg Grandin makes a similar claim, observing that twentieth-century counterrevolutionary violence in Latin America rose to excessive, sometimes genocidal levels, in order to guarantee a liberal-democratic future that revolutionary ideals threatened (4–5; 30). Reviewing the many conflicts that plagued Latin America as insurgent groups fought increasingly authoritarian state forces over the political and economic future of the region, he shows how "the steady accretion of state and

planter agrarian violence to unbearable levels, combined with an aborted period of anticipated political reform on the national level, pushed peasants to revolt" to which "the government would respond with murderous violence" (18–19). In El Salvador, the cycle of unacknowledged political demands, rebellion, and reactionary excessive state force, culminates in the civil war that Castellanos Moya's novel revisits.

La sirvienta provides a synecdoche of this modernizing drive in the figure of Belka, María Elena's daughter (and Joselito's mother), who falls prey to the motivating agency of the facemask. Belka receives a promotion and generous raise to serve as head nurse in a military hospital. Her new position is contingent on her performance in a trial run; she is picked up by her boss, ordered to put on a blindfold (*antifaz*), and taken to a secret location to work on a wounded patient. Unbeknownst to her, the patient is the young man that María Elena saved alongside the ambulance, who was later detained on the operating table in the civilian hospital. The patient, who "[p]odría tener la edad de Joselito" (220), is unconscious and near death. Belka examines him and tells the hospital officials that he needs to be taken to an ER so that doctors might save his life. They refuse and instead task her with merely keeping him alive for future torture. She gives him an IV with fluids and an antibiotic, and then she turns to leave, having done as much as possible without proper surgical instruments. She reaches for the blindfold and quiets an inner desire to insist once more that they take the young man to the hospital. With the blindfold nestled over her eyes, her superior whispers "Bienvenida" in her ear (221). Belka turns a blind eye, literally in this case, to her role in the torture that the young man will soon endure, and the *antifaz*, as "máscara protagónica," at once initiates her into and symbolizes her complicity in the brutalization of a human being for political ends.

Once again, the narrative vaivén shifts an innocuous, and in this case life-saving practice—IV fluids and the ministrations of a nurse—into an instrument of violence and torture. What is noteworthy in the case of both Belka and María Elena is that, unlike Joselito and el Vikingo, these women are not explicitly engaged in the insurgent/counterinsurgent struggle. Yet they are sucked into the violence of the epoch despite their ostensible neutrality. The violence of everyday objects in *La sirvienta y el luchador* infects participants and bystanders alike. Belka's compromise—violating the Hippocratic oath in order to better her stature and pay—stands as a synecdoche of sorts for the actions that Latin American nations have taken in the name of progress and modernization.

In *La sirvienta*, physical pain inflicted upon El Salvador's own citizens leads to the unmaking of the world (El Salvador as protector state) as promised in the 1962 Constitution. The torture and murder perpetrated by the state occurs not only against the communist subversives who might constitutionally fall under the designation of internal enemies, but also against innocent citizens. In this way, the Salvadoran state abandons its role as guarantor of security and justice, and with this betrayal, the nation state—a place where political subjects expect to be secure or, in the event of abuse, trust that the state will seek out and punish the perpetrators—becomes unready-to-hand. In its place is a society in which crimes are committed with impunity and state actors are the perpetrators of violence against its own citizenry. Castellanos Moya's *La sirvienta* creates a narrative *world that announces itself* as the site of civil war by unmooring objects from their uses as equipment, thus rendering them unready-to-hand in a functioning civil society.

The unstable instrumentality of objects in Castellanos Moya's novel is indicative of shifting sociopolitical dynamics, and the formal narrative vaivén indexes an epochal disjointedness in the violent misuse of objects. The world as theorized by Heidegger in *Being and Time* is a place in which objects—the way they are used and their phenomenological (in)visibility—disclose something about that world and Dasein's existence in it, and *La sirvienta y el luchador* manipulates the (un)readiness-to-hand of objects to expose symptoms of a shifting epoch. The novel deploys a narrative ebb and flow between a recognizable, phenomenologically transparent world—the world of brooms as cleaning implements, buses as transportation, bandanas to wipe away sweat, and hospitals as places of healing—and the Thing-like nature of objects rendered unready-to-hand in an unfamiliar world—that of brooms as torture devices, buses as mobile weapons, bandanas that summon violence, and hospitals as torture chambers and battlegrounds.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger asserts that the work to which a given piece of equipment is put to use by Dasein tells us not only about Dasein's Being as the entity that manipulates the equipment, but, most importantly, it tells us about the very world in which we exist: "Thus along with the work, we encounter not only entities ready-to-hand but also entities for which, in their concern, the product becomes ready-to-hand; and together with these we encounter the world in which wearers and users live, which is at the same time ours" (71/100). Castellanos Moya's novel tracks the shifting instrumentality of objects, indexing how this violent work appears, at first, unready-to-hand to María Elena as Dasein. However, the towards-which of equipment can

shift, and that which is unready-to-hand and Thing-like may become everyday equipment. The novel makes visible how indiscriminate violence threatens to become the dominant work of objects once the social contract fails—a reality that is borne out in the ensuing twelve years of civil war. Castellanos Moya's postwar novel revisits the violent history of El Salvador to lay bare how the seeds of civil war were already present in the internal contradictions originary to the project of the modern state.

La sirvienta y el luchador closes with one final narrative vaivén. The titular characters are not present, and el Vikingo's police force colleagues, el Gordo Silva and el Chicharrón, are tasked with driving out to the countryside to bury Albertico, Brita, and the unnamed dissident tortured on the operating table earlier in the narrative. The men have a brutal conversation while they drive to the intended burial site, blithely discussing rape, torture, and the top-down cover-up of political assassinations (261). They reach their intended destination, toss the bodies from the truck onto the ground, and prepare to dig a hole to bury them. At this point, they realize they have forgotten shovels. There, in the dark, surrounded by mutilated bodies with blood dripping from the bed of the truck, they find themselves without the everyday equipment—the shovel—that they would use to bury the bodies. The shovel is unready-to-hand, unavailable to them as equipment for digging, reflecting the ways in which their world has been rendered one of mere violence work only. At this point, they look at one another and ask "¿Y ahora?" (267). With these final words, Castellanos Moya's novel leaves unanswered what the future holds for the neoliberal present built on the exposed ruins of national modernity.

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