Over the course of history, the wild man has taken many forms in the human imagination across modes of representation. Its embedded presence in the cultural production of the West has been an immensely useful tool for scholarship across disciplinary perspectives; in the esteem of cultural anthropologist Roger Bartra, “the wild men of Europe zealously guard the secrets of Western identity,” ever-present as they “watch over the frontiers of civilization” (Artificial 1). The language of marginality proves inherently useful to express this idea differently. Wildness itself is a concept that serves to demarcate the ideological margins of civilization in a given socio-historical context as that which looms in the symbolic forest beyond the reach of civilized society. According to Hayden White, terms associated with wildness and its corresponding qualities “are not used merely to designate a specific condition or state of being but also to confirm the value of their dialectical antithesis,” namely, “civilization” (4). Therefore, wildness provides a means by which to discern the “governing relationship” between dominant notions in a particular context “of the normal or familiar” (4) and any entity that deviates from those values. Over time, however, those borders shift to form new margins on the periphery of a re-centered hegemony that supplants what came before it.

Although scholarship has utilized the wild figure as a tool for charting those types of paradigmatic shifts in the Western worldview from antiquity to the present, studies to date have yet to situate the wild figure of the Spanish comedia accurately within that larger history of the representation of wildness. Because wild folk enjoy such an immense popularity on the Spanish
stage throughout the Baroque, they offer critics a considerable body of evidence to observe how the ideological commitments maintained by a dominant culture change within a period (the Baroque, in this case), thereby supplementing the macro-transitions studies have tended to emphasize (i.e. the medieval versus the Renaissance wild man, etc.) In this paper, I will trace the trajectory of the theatrical wild figures of the Spanish Baroque to demonstrate their participation in the ascendency and decline of the culture in which they thrived. To accomplish this task, it will first be necessary to identify the literary and dramatic traditions playwrights, chiefly Lope de Vega, drew from to produce the earliest examples of the wild figure in the *comedia* whose qualities would serve as the basis for the conventional aspects of later iterations.

Bartra draws heavily from Bernheimer’s seminal study on the wild figure in medieval Europe in his view that the chivalric and sentimental romances are the principal forebears of Renaissance and Baroque wild folk. He goes on to specify the differences between the wild man of medieval chivalry who “offered society an abnormal model for behavior,” and the noble protagonists of the sentimental romances who fall into a state of wildness as a result of lovesickness. These lovesick courtiers take on the physical attributes of the wild man to provide an outward manifestation that reflects the chaotic state of their inner passions. It is out of this tradition that characters like Cervantes’s Cardenio and Ariosto’s Orlando emerge, who exemplify the representations of wildness in the Renaissance as “the wild delirium of the lovesick courtier” begins its decline as the dominant representation of wildness in the cultural production of the West. Bartra credits chivalric and sentimental literature as the primary influences for the wild characters that appear in the drama of Lope de Vega,¹ but this assertion emphasizes prose and

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other non-dramatic sources without considering the equally pervasive examples of wild folk in the paratheatrical spaces of Medieval and Renaissance court pageantry and folk ritual.

In fact, the predominant representation of wildness on the Spanish stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries develops out of those paratheatrical court and folkloric traditions that ran parallel to the development of the sentimental fiction and chivalric cycles, and should be understood as its direct progenitors. Somewhat ironically, Bartra claims that “the great absentee at the banquet of civilization is the wild man” (Looking Glass 145), but in the medieval period, it is precisely during banquet feasts at court when a masked figure, often times dressed as a Wildman, would burst into the hall, interrupting the festivities to perform a short skit or a choreographed dance. At the end, the masked performers unveiled their identities, conventionally to reveal the original interrupting player as a member of the royal family, usually the heir him or herself.\textsuperscript{2} These paratheatrical festivities would continue to be popular into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the Habsburg court, as Lobato indicates (261). While there were many motives for royal celebrations that included masques, dances, and interludes, there was one time of year such events could be expected: Carnival. Lobato stresses the prevalence of paratheatrical revelry at court that occurred during this time of year: “si un tiempo del año fue especialmente proclive para este ambiente lúdico, hay que destacar Carnaval, el cual afectó no solo las celebraciones populares sino también, y muy especialmente, a las fiestas en la corte de los Austrias” (261). However, not only had the wild man long been an integral character in paratheatrical court pageantry in the medieval and Renaissance Iberian court, wild folk simultaneously played a crucial role in folk ritual during the same time of year.

\textsuperscript{2} Court festivals were often described in detail by members of the court not only in their personal correspondence but also in chronicles that were more widely disseminated. For more information on court pageantry, see Ferrer Vals, \textit{La práctica escénica cortesana}, pp. 11-48.
Costumed Wildmen feature prominently in agrarian Carnival rituals even to this day as a symbolic reflection of a time of revelry. In Stern’s analysis of Juan del Encina's Carnival eclogues, she describes the Iberian folk ritual tradition the playwright dramatized in his work. During medieval carnival festivals,

a straw man in ragged attire […] is drawn in a cart to the outskirts of town, where villagers rain blows upon him while a pompous judge recites in mock-heroic verse Carnival's last will and testament. […] Carnival is expelled from the village, and since he is the village scapegoat, the townsfolk believe they have expelled with him all the sins and vice committed during the year. It is obvious, then, that the Spanish ceremony described [in Encina's eclogue] belongs to the widespread European ritual of 'burying the Carnival.' (185)

Encina plays a pivotal role in the development of the wild figure’s importance in later dramatic art in Iberia. The Carnival plays he puts on at court evince the coming together of the two streams of the paratheatrical wild figure found in the court masque and agrarian folk ritual, respectively. The playwright dramatizes folk traditions in the space of the court, and as a result a discernable shift can be seen from the paradramatic representation of the wild figure found in court pageantry and folk ritual to a more fully-developed theatrical phenomenon. Moreover, as Stern argues, his eclogues embody the intersectionality of Encina’s drama at the crossroads of medieval and modern dramatic practice. Encina and those like him signaled the disappearance of the jonglueresque and the rise of the professional actor. His identity as both court entertainer and popular playwright allowed him to draw from two separate wellsprings of paratheatrical tradition, thereby enmeshing those traditions in a single dramatic space in ways that had not previously been done. Wardropper calls attention to the fact that it “was characteristic of the topsy-turvy Carnival season” in medieval and Renaissance Spain that “the shepherds actually
held their Carnival feast *in the royal palace* and parodied the customs of the nobility” (45). In Encina’s eclogue, which was staged as part of the Carnival festivities, professional actors play the role of shepherds creating revelry in the ducal palace for the entertainment of the court. Stern poses a rhetorical question that gets at the heart of the fundamental change in the nature of dramatic representation embodied by Encina’s playwriting: “Are [the members of the ducal court] witnessing shepherds parodying their lord and lady and indulging themselves in the ducal palace, or are they watching professional actors impersonate rustics at their traditional Carnival feast?” (193).

The drama of carnival—in which the allegorical wild monster is nullified by the symbolic removal of the prince’s mask or becomes subject to public banishment—provides an apt framework for understanding the ideological purpose of the *comedia* as a genre in which, appropriately, the wild figure so often appears. Put differently, “the temporary suspension of normal social life” Lobato describes as the spirit of carnival also defines the conventional nature of conflict and resolution in the *comedia*. Reichenberger famously describes the conventional plot structure of the *comedia* as “order disturbed to order restored” (307). I contend that Baroque dramaturgy develops in such a way as a direct result of the influence of dramatic structure of carnival traditions. Just as Lenten sobriety ultimately vanquishes the chaotic revelry symbolically invested in the presence of the wild man, so too does the presence and disappearance of wildness illustrate and reflect the organizing principle of the *comedia’s* fundamental structure based on the disturbance and restoration of order.

During the development of professional theater in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the wild figure of folk ritual becomes coopted into hegemonic discourse (exemplified by Encina’s staging of folk performance for the entertainment of the court). Later, playwrights like Lope de Vega and those of his generation, began to leverage the ideological potential made
possible by the mutual comprehensibility of the wild figure for audiences in the court and corral alike. Once the comedia had supplanted previous forms of dramatic art, the allegorical medieval wild man who represents the indiscrete passions of youth or a time of annual revelry gives way to a more equivocal and essentially theatrical wild figure of the Spanish comedia. The nature of this shift gives credence to Cohen’s “suggestion that cultures can be read based on the monsters they create,” and situates the wild figure within his definition of monster metaphors in general “as a set of symbols that are in constant flux, but whose common thread is their marginality” (cited in Gordillo 3-4). As cultural monsters, these characters are capable of representing a multitude of social ills, the ideological makeup of which hide behind the seemingly objective monstrous essence the wild figure exudes. The major trend that emerges over the course of the seventeenth century, however, suggests that the efficacy of the conservative ideological force understood to underpin the nature of Baroque dramatic art proves increasingly incapable of convincingly restoring the order disturbed in its conflict. Wild figure plays reflect this trend, which transpires as the inability to persuasively eliminate the wildness introduced as the emblem of unresolved conflict in the play.

Lope serves as a point of departure in the trajectory of the representation of wildness on the Baroque Iberian stage. As I have contended, he draws from court pageantry and seasonal folk ritual to set the example of the wild figure for his contemporaries and later generations of playwrights. As the first play in Lope’s corpus to feature a wild figure, El nacimiento de Ursón y Valentín (c. 1588) provides a representative example of the plot structure common to the corpus of wild folk plays that would draw influence from Lope’s example. As has been indicated by Antonucci, when the titular Valentín avenges the affront to his mother’s honor arising out of Uberto’s fabricated claim of an act of adultery, it is never in doubt that he is the play’s villain from the beginning, thereby frustrating the expectation initially presented by the representation
of Ursón as the wild man. Uberto’s treasonous lie against the character of the queen initiates the conflict to be resolved in the play, chiefly queen Margarita’s loss of honor, and the resulting forfeiture of Ursón and Valentín to their royal birthright. This becomes clear during the hunt for Ursón led by Valentín and Uberto (before Valentín realizes Ursón is in fact his brother). In the moment Valentín slays Uberto, his condemnation of the nefarious royal advisor is telling of who the audience is to identify as a monster: “Yo por el monstruo he venido / mas este monstruo es Uberto / muere traidor” (2. 2156-58). From the beginning of the play, Ursón displays few signs of monstrosity, other than his outward appearance of animal skins and the club he wields, which proves what is at stake in the play is the erasure of the space in which appearance belies reality. Egginton calls this the “major strategy of Baroque,” whereby the problem of appearance and reality is ultimately resolved in order to confirm and uphold the established order. In El nacimiento de Ursón y Valentín, that order is put in question by the false accusations against Margarita and her subsequent exile; however, the conflict, this false appearance of her lack of virtue, is resolved beyond a shadow of a doubt precisely through the revelation of her identity—the erasure of that false appearance and the uncovering of her true nature. The same is true of Ursón. His monstrosity is all a false projection; his true nature, displayed by his behavior throughout the work, is ultimately resolved while the “real” monster, Uberto, receives his just punishment.

Nevertheless, even within the corpus of plays by Lope de Vega that feature a wild figure, the restoration of order at the end becomes increasingly ambiguous and dubious, indicating a growing anxiety, albeit subtle, of Baroque order itself. This trend can be seen to an even greater extent over the course of seventeenth-century dramatic production, which reveals a trajectory of social destabilization produced as a function of the overextension of dramatic conventions beyond their capacity to convey meaning. Put differently, distinct social ills produce wild figures
charged with new symbolism that cannot be resolved nor domesticated by the same repeated plot conventions. Therefore, the wild figure, however intentionally or inadvertently on the part of Baroque playwrights, exposes the underlying artificial structures that support the ideological apparatus of the Baroque. In some cases, such as Pérez de Montalbán’s *La Lindona de Galicia* (1642), the play has a conventional ending that restores the status quo, except the destabilizing effect introduced by wild characters like Linda fails to be convincingly erased by her marriage in the final scene. Instead of upholding the status quo through the domestication of Linda’s wildness, the marriage contract is powerless against her dogged refusal to follow social norms, which is an aspect of her character that remains constant even in the final scene when she denies the king’s marriage proposal in favor of another suitor of her choosing. In other examples, as in Bances Candamo’s *La piedra filosofal* (1693), the playwright demonstrates a profound knowledge of the literary and dramatic history of the wild figure by masterfully weaving them together in his complex and ambiguous depiction of Hispalo’s wildness, which he leverages to conceal a subversive critique of the Habsburg monarchy at the end of the seventeenth century. Hispalo’s ability to best a lion in physical combat in the play’s opening scene is a direct reference to his symbolic kinship to the progenitor of Spanish identity, Hercules. After beginning in the mythical past, Bances’s work goes on to traverse the rise and fall of Baroque Spanish cultural identity in three acts. By the end of the play, the allegorical protagonist has lost his grip on reality and suffers from acute psychological distress. He nevertheless assumes the throne in spite of his lingering wildness, in this instance depicted through his descent into madness. His sanity is never resolved in *La piedra filosofal*, which is a reflection of the social disarray and political crisis that defined the state of Spanish affairs in the final decade of the seventeenth century. These three examples illustrate both the symbolic flexibility of the wild character, and also the ideological trajectory of its representation over the course of the seventeenth century,
during which the obsession with wildness mutates into a dramatic virus resistant to the antibiotics of Baroque theatrical convention. It is no wonder that the wild figure became such a popular character in this context; once wildness is given a form in the cultural imagination, it acknowledges a boundary beyond the purview of social order that cannot easily be forgotten. Uebel identifies these types of phenomena as “histories of unthought,” whereby imagining otherness necessarily involves constructing the borderlands, the boundary spaces, that contain—in the double sense, to enclose and to include—what is antithetical to the self. [...] Histories of unthought are thus concerned with the historical reasons for what is socially marginal or liminal becoming symbolically central. (n.p.)

In response to the inability to disavow the existence of this perpetual threat lurking at the margins arose a cultural fixation on the wild figure upon which those fears could be collectively projected and cathartically eliminated.

As a factory of meaning-making, theater provided a space to alleviate cultural anxieties by portraying the satisfactory demise of believable monsters. But then, Lope decides to draw on the wild figure as one such monster, which frustrates the entire enterprise. He unleashed an ideological scavenger that would be difficult—if not impossible—to impede. The wild figure seems to always get away from its author, causing excesses and deformity that would come to be known as a defining characteristic of the Baroque. The replication of the wild figure creates a surplus that cannot be tidily reconstituted into the boundaries of Baroque ideological cartography. Every time it appears, it is more problematic, uncovering a greater cultural anxiety that becomes increasingly more difficult to disavow. In the context of comprehensive social and political decline, the literary and dramatic history of wildness I have traced in this paper provides a framework to comprehend the significance of the extravagant revelry that the court maintained
to keep up appearances through lavish court spectacles and festivals in the final years of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy. The margins dramatized as the symbolic terrain inhabited by the wild figure had been the way the culture of the Baroque imagined threats to social order. The proliferation of these characters on the Baroque stage indicates a simultaneous escalation of the anxieties of a culture in crisis, oblivious to the implications signified by the insatiable desire to imagine monsters solely for the purpose of eliminating them in collective cathartic (and increasingly tentative and short-lived) satisfaction. By the end of the century, the negative relationship between the ideological efficacy of the comedia and the prevalence of the wild figure suggests that the once firm boundary that delineated the margins of social order had become skewed, and the previously peripheral wild figure took on a more central role in shaping social discourse. In this Baroque battle between Carnival and Lent, the sands of ideology shifted, and the margins began to encroach upon the emblematic epicenter of social order—the court—providing access for the wild figure to reach the core of that order and establish the spirit of carnivalesque insensibility exemplified by the monarchy’s displays of festive ostentation to conceal their unmitigated failure to carry out their most principal of responsibilities as stewards of the public good.
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