

Courting Wisdom: Silence, Solitude and Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Spain

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The notion of silence is not one that is usually associated with the Spanish eighteenth century, or its literature. This was an age of reason, marked by new ideas, technologies, literature and fashion, but also by friendship, sociability and the importance of sharing knowledge. Many of the dominant trends of the period were the very antithesis of silence and solitude; new royal academies were founded, as were *sociedades de amigos del país*, and the periodic press became an essential vehicle for dissemination of new ideas.¹ Social customs like the *cortejo* and the *tertulia* grew in popularity and importance, while exaggerated social figures like the foppish *petimetres*, or the pedantic *eruditos a la violeta* became common in satirical literature. Silence and solitude would seem relegated to the sidelines during what was a decidedly *social* century, and have been largely neglected by scholarship. Nonetheless, they are concepts that appear time and again in Spanish eighteenth-century literature. The focus of this article is to explore the representation and function of these two concepts, as well as their relationship with the culturally dominant ideals of friendship and wisdom. I argue that silence and solitude are not only *not* antithetical to friendship and sociability, but that they are in fact productive, complementary activities necessary for the acquisition of wisdom. I will begin by contextualizing the importance of friendship before analyzing depictions of silence, absence, and solitude in representative works by Juan Pablo Forner (1756-1789), Leandro Fernández de Moratín (1760-1828), José de Cadalso (1741-1782), Nicasio Álvarez de Cienfuegos (1764-1809), Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744-1811), and Juan Meléndez Valdés (1754-1817).

Few concepts have become quintessentially linked to a time period as friendship has to the eighteenth century. To speak of *amistad* is to conjure up a host of social institutions such as *tertulias*, *sociedades económicas de amigos del país*, *academias*, as well as a vast list of works that extol the virtues and necessity of friendship, which Cadalso famously called the “madre de todos los bienes sociables” (127). The Spanish eighteenth century was undeniably concerned with speaking, writing and communicating, and as such, friendship and sociability were on the mind of Spanish authors, artists and thinkers, as they grappled with the epistemological and sociopolitical sea change that was the European Enlightenment. Friendship was viewed as one of the core virtues of the ideal citizen, and became linked to social change, progress, and patriotic living. As Cadalso, Jovellanos, Meléndez Valdés and so many others stressed, friendship was a social virtue above all others, fomenting equanimity and cultural exchange, as well as solace in times of hardship, and joy in times of happiness. It was, as David Gies reminds us, the “espina dorsal” of true patriotism and a quintessential virtue of the *hombre de bien* (452). As Cadalso describes in his *Cartas marruecas* (1789), the ideal *hombre de bien* is first and foremost a social being, a citizen, and must be actively engaged within society, as “ser buen ciudadano es una verdadera obligación de las que contrae al hombre al entrar en la república” (209).² Scholars have also pointed out the relationship between friendship and sensibility, the latter being a key ingredient in virtuous relationship between friends.³

Most importantly, friendship was considered to be an essential component in the acquisition and dissemination of wisdom. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rise of the *tertulia* in this period, from the famous and influential groups in Salamanca and San Sebastián, to the *tertulias caseras*, the more humble groups that met in cafés and private salons. Similarly, the century witnessed the rapid growth of the *sociedades económicas de amigos del país*, social institutions that often arose from *tertulias*, and were devoted to stimulating intellectual and economic progress. Cécile Trojani sees in the *tertulias* and *sociedades de amigos del país* not only the socialization of friendship, but also a metaphor for the country as a whole, and its growing interest and need for socialization (281). Similarly, Andreas Gelz maintains

that the *tertulia* is one of the most important factors in the cultural development of modern Spanish culture (101). These spaces of conversation, be they semi-formal *tertulias*, or more structured institutions like the various *sociedades de amigos*, all arose out of necessity. As Álvarez Barrientos argues, the lack of institutional framework for the dissemination of ideas meant that eighteenth-century writers, intellectuals and scientists from Spain had no choice but to create the networks by which to share knowledge: “écrivains et scientifiques – qu’ils soient ou non au service des autorités – sont confrontés à l’absence de conditions nécessaires à son existence; ils vont donc créer des institutions et des espaces qui les fédèrent et les représentent” (“Écrivains” 56). These social and intellectual networks quickly and efficiently supplanted universities as centers of erudition. Much has been written about the sorry state of Spanish universities in this period, their “profunda clericalización”, and their plummeting enrollments (Saavedra and Sobrado 50).⁴ In this climate, the *tertulias* and *sociedades de amigos* quickly became the *de facto* seats of knowledge, and were driven by social interaction.

Friendship had thus become one of the social engines by which wisdom was disseminated during the course of the eighteenth century, and when Jovellanos, in his “Epístola heroica a sus amigos”, refers to his friends and members of the Sevilla *tertulia* as “alumnos de Sofía”, he is conflating their friendship with a reference to the Greek name for wisdom (142). The conversation that is produced by friendship, as Cicero writes in *De Oratore*, is essential to the well-being of society, and distinguishes humans from animals: “what greater enjoyment can there be in time of leisure, what greater intellectual treat than the brilliant discourse of a perfect scholar?” (I: viii 32-33). Widely read in Jovellanos’ time, Cicero’s arguments were of particular relevance to the salon and *tertulia* culture of a sociable century that began to value social leisure time as potentially productive and important as work. The conjugation of leisure, good taste, friendship and conversation was the result of a social gathering, the *colloquium inter nos*. Conversation was “además de una forma de esparcimiento, un modo de pensar”, which was the catalyst to many literary works (Álvarez Barrientos, *Los hombres de letras* 108). The sensible, rational and wise *hombre de bien* is, after all, also a good friend to both country and individuals. This is the model laid out by Cadalso in his *Cartas marruecas*, by Jovellanos in his poetry, and in the myriad *comedias* that flooded the stage in the last decades of the century, each offering a variant on the same story. In these plays, friendship, in concert with wisdom and reason, saves the day, preventing unhappy marriages and ruined lives. And yet, as we shall see, silence and solitude lay present, just beneath the didactic surface of many of these works.

Let us consider a play by Juan Pablo Forner, one of the many authors who wrote plays dedicated to the virtues of good friendship. *La escuela de la Amistad, o el filósofo enamorado* (1792) received a lukewarm reception from critics and the public, angering the famously hot-tempered Forner, prompting a strongly-worded apologia of his play in the *Diario de Madrid*, and again in his essay “Apología del vulgo”, which accompanied the 1796 edition.⁵ *La escuela de la amistad* is a straightforward and predictable tale of two suitors: the Marqués de Espina is wealthy and unlikable, while Fernando is the quintessential earnest-yet-penniless *galán*, both men competing for the hand of beautiful young Inés. She is of course in love with Fernando, but her interests are controlled, *in loco parentis*, by her greedy older brother. Unique to this play, however, is the third male suitor, the titular character, Felipe the *filósofo enamorado*. Felipe is a rich, reclusive philosopher, convinced by his good friend Fernando to pretend to fall in love and ask for Inés’ hand, also seducing her brother with his riches and his wisdom, thereby removing the unlikeable Espina from the equation. As can be expected, Felipe falls in love for real, yet in the end forsakes his own passions in the name of friendship, instead letting the two lovers Inés and Fernando find married bliss, while he returns to the peace of his books. As various critics have noted,⁶ the moral of the play is anything but subtle: true friendship means controlling one’s emotions, acting rationally, and sacrificing for the common good.

Yet if we look beyond Forner’s seemingly boiler-plate encomium to friendship and focus on Felipe, we discover a dynamic more nuanced than it would first appear. Forner articulates another,

very different, representation of wisdom, one that does not place emphasis solely on sociability and friendship, but rather on solitude and silence. It is easy to dismiss Felipe as only a necessary ingredient of what is essentially a *comedia de figurón*: he is described by his friend Fernando as older, wealthy, honorable, but also “tan raro y extravagante, / que entre sus libros envuelto, / vive para sí, ignorando / del mundo” (4). While it would appear that Forner is setting up Felipe to use him as a ridiculous, bumbling and absent-minded set piece, he quickly makes it clear that despite the rough edges, Felipe is to be esteemed. After learning that he has shunned all contact with women and has never had any dealings—sexual or otherwise—with a member of the opposite sex, Inés’ governess comes away impressed and proclaims: “Grande hombre! de estos hay pocos” (4). Similarly, Inés’ greedy brother Silvestre regards him as “aquel sabio tan celebrado de todos [...] y por el retiro austero que observa” (15). Felipe clearly does not fall into the same category as the pedants, *pseudoeruditos* and *petimetres* that populate the pages of Cadalso’s *Los eruditos a la violeta* or even Diego de Torres Villarroel’s (1693-1770) *Visiones y visitas* (1751).

Forner does not seek to ridicule Felipe’s erudition, much less his propensity for quiet, solitary study. The titular *filósofo enamorado* does serve a dramatic function as the incongruous, ironic suitor, but his wisdom eventually supplants whatever comic utility he might have had. While Felipe may elicit a few laughs, he never strays from two core values: his solitary pursuit of wisdom, and his friendship with Fernando. The latter is the main thrust of the play, and his sacrifice in the name of friendship is one half of the bipartite definition of wisdom that Forner suggests with this text. When Fernando is surprised that his philosopher friend has genuinely fallen in love, Felipe counters by saying that philosophers have feelings too, but that controlling these emotions is what makes them wise: “el que sabe sujetarlas, es Filósofo; al que no, será solo como los mas, alma baxa” (25). The power of love was at first overwhelming, forcing Felipe to doubt even the worth of his years of solitude and study, but in the end his control over his passions and his steadfast devotion to his friend win out. Happy with the outcome, he retires to his books: “viviré huyendo del mundo”, he proclaims, but he is also happy to know “que son por mí venturosos / dos corazones que pagan / con la virtud, los deseos / de un amigo que los ama” (36).

Felipe, as a quintessential *sabio*, has led a life of solitary study, and throughout the play sings the praise of such a lifestyle. “El retiro, la soledad y el sosiego nos niega a las contingencias de ser vanos, lisonjeros, ambiciosos, disolutos” (9). Solitude is a bulwark against the corrupting influences of society “en soledad nadie es malo: en el trato hay pocos buenos” (10). These words echo Plutarch’s, who had stressed in his *Morals* that “[W]e have men to teach us to speak but the gods are they that teach us silence” (230). Speech and society have the potential to corrupt and to misguide individuals, and Felipe serves as a contrast to the dangers of greed and unchecked sociability.⁷ Silence and solitary retreat from society in *La escuela de la amistad* are not presented as a burlesque element in a facile caricature of the archetypal absent-minded philosopher. Felipe is described as rustic, yet his social gaffes are innocent because he remains honest, virtuous and generous to his friends, and is “es ajeno a toda culpa por su candidez” (Palomo 478-479).⁸ Felipe’s desire to return to the peace of his library belies a correlation between wisdom and contemplative solitude. The enamored philosopher might sacrifice his chance at love, but Forner reminds the reader time and again that what makes Felipe respectable and wise are his dual virtues: his steadfast friendship and his silent, solitary pursuit of knowledge.

Juan Pablo Forner is not the first to make use of the archetypal wise old man, withdrawn from society and its vices. This figure has been used in literature since antiquity, from *Oedipus’* Tiresias to *Star Wars’* Obi-Wan Kenobi, and is usually portrayed in the form of a sage, a wise hermit, a wizard, an oracle, a guru, a grandfather and of course an absent-minded professor. Jung delineates the characteristics of what he terms the wise old man, or *Senex*, and which he classifies as one of the developmental archetypes, often contrasted with *puer*, the boy. Jung described the wise old man as “the superior master and teacher, the archetype of the spirit, who symbolizes the pre-existent meaning

hidden in the chaos of life” (35). The dichotomy between life’s chaos and the wisdom all humans seek hinges on the individual’s ability to retreat from the stochastic frenzy of the world, and like the wise old man, on seeking silent, solitary contemplation. While this archetype was not new, Forner and his contemporaries found themselves faced with the delicate task of translating this worthy role-model, emblematic of wisdom and virtue, to a century that seemed to view conversation, sociability and good friendship as the new founts of knowledge. Forner and others would instead offer an interpretation of wisdom that reconciles solitude and silence with active friendship. As with Felipe—who is both a dedicated friend to Fernando,⁹ and also a quiet, reclusive scholar—a new model of wise man takes shape, one that seeks both the social and emotional rewards of friendship, as well as the productive tranquility of silence and solitude.

This new ideal is not confined to *La escuela de la amistad*. Neoclassical theater was fertile ground for depictions of virtue, *hombria de bien* and of course, friendship. Leandro Fernández de Moratín, arguably the most influential playwright of the period, penned plays that engaged with this dichotomy between friendship and solitude. In the closing moments of *La comedia nueva* (1792), the virtuous Don Pedro, an archetypal *hombre de bien*, disabuses Don Eleuterio, the aspiring playwright, of his literary ambitions. Don Pedro advocates, time and again, against vacuous and superficial chatter, favoring quiet confidence over verbal histrionics: “Porque no vengo a predicar al café. [...] jamás debe hablar en público el que sea prudente” (114). Most importantly, his solution advocates retreat from society as well as silence. He will pay off Eleuterio’s debts, and offers that the young man leave Madrid for one of his estates in a metaphorical retreat from the social hubbub of the city (let us not forget the entirety of the play occurs in a café), where he will learn under Pedro’s *mayordomo* (an extension of Pedro, the wise old man character).

Pedro also encourages Eleuterio to stop operating under the illusion that he will become a famous and successful playwright, “es menester olvidar absolutamente esos devaneos” (158), to which the young would-be author responds with a symbolic act of self-silencing, agreeing to burn his manuscript and abandon writing: “Mañana, así que amanezca, hago una hoguera con todo cuanto tengo, impreso y manuscrito, y no ha de quedar en mi casa un verso” (160). The path to wisdom again involved both a retreat from society’s corrupting influence (away from Madrid and the café), quiet study (under the tutelage of the *mayordomo*), and silence (no more writing). Pedro, in this incarnation of the wise old man, adheres to many of the traditional stereotypes. He is solitary, honest to the point of brusqueness, removed from gossip and popular trends, yet as Pedro states, “soy algo áspero en mi carácter, pero tengo el corazón muy compasivo” (158). In Pedro, Moratín (like Forner with Felipe) combines the quiet, withdrawn nature of the wise man with an infallible sense of friendship and social devotion.

We can make many of the same observations about Moratín’s other celebrated neoclassical play, *El sí de las niñas* (1801). Don Diego, originally slated to marry young Doña Francisca, echoes many of the same values as Don Pedro in *La comedia nueva*, and Don Felipe in *La escuela de la amistad*. Diego has led a successful life, and now seeks marriage; he is 59 and Francisca 16, this disparity functions as a constant catalyst with the play. Far from being drawn in by love and passion, Diego is looking forward to the ensuing quiet, virtuous union with Francisca: “he buscado modestia, recogimiento, virtud” (169). While Moratín does not offer a detailed back story to Diego’s character, he clearly falls in line with the wise old man archetype: older, emblematic of contemplative wisdom, his life is one withdrawn from the frenzy of society. Additionally, much of his communication with Francisca, her mother Irene, and his nephew Carlos has been through letters; the epistolary mode again underscoring the distance between the *sabio* and society.

Upon discovering that Francisca is truly in love with Don Carlos, his nephew, Diego chooses a path analogous to that of the *filósofo enamorado*, Felipe. Acting in a rational manner and as an *hombre de bien*, he allows the two youngsters to marry, in the belief that a happy union is in the best interest

not only of the interested parties, but also of the nation. Most telling is his admission that after this rational decision and their happy union, “no temo ya la soledad terrible que amenazaba mi vejez” (251). Reason and self-sacrifice have made solitude bearable, in large part due to the friendship and harmony that ensues. It is worth noting that Diego always interpreted his role as husband more along the lines of friend than lover, “el que ha de ser hasta la muerte su compañero y su amigo” (235). In this ending, which parallels Forner’s to a great extent, Moratín fuses a socially harmonious decision borne out of friendship (Diego allows Francisca to marry Carlos) with his eventual solitary retreat.

The salutary benefits of silence and solitude are not limited to neoclassical plays. While a thorough analysis of this topic in eighteenth-century prose is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that Cadalso’s epistolary novel *Cartas marruecas* offers a number of references to the necessity of silence and solitude that predate the plays discussed above. The young Moroccan Gazel is seduced by the Spanish *tertulia* culture, the easy socializing, and the speed at which Spaniards become friends, prompting Nuño to ask him if he realizes “la molestia que sufre el que quiere por ejemplo pasarse solo una tarde por distraerse de algún sentimiento o para reflexionar sobre algo que le importe” (89-90). Solitary thinking is framed as essential and healthy, as is the desire, need even, to lock one’s self away in one’s room for a day, in order to undertake “una lectura que le haga mejor o más sabio” (90). Cadalso’s objections to hyper-socialization, frequent in eighteenth-century literature,¹⁰ stem from the necessity of quiet study.

Perhaps the most fertile ground for explorations of the function of silence and solitude in the eighteenth century is Spain’s lyric poetry. Old stereotypes die hard, and the period’s reputation as prosaic and rational belies the rich and varied contributions of eighteenth-century poets. Meléndez Valdés, Cadalso, Jovellanos and Cienfuegos—to name but a few—all engaged with both the cultural and literary trends of their day (Enlightenment, Neoclassicism, Rococo and Pre-romanticism) and the relationship between silence, friendship and wisdom. As they explored this dynamic, Spanish poets regularly appealed to the difference between the city, usually emblematic of friendship and sociability, and the idealized countryside, representative of quiet contemplation and wisdom.

The dialectic between city and countryside was not new in the eighteenth century, nor was it unique to Spain. Unsurprisingly for neoclassical texts, the representations of these themes often made use of the classical *Beatus Ille* trope.¹¹ Spain’s own golden age also provided inspiration; *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea* (1539) by Antonio de Guevara (1481-1545) is perhaps the best known work explicitly dedicated to this theme, where the bucolic calm of the *aldea* is juxtaposed with the *corte*, characterized as a morass of moral decadence and perversion. There are also numerous fables dedicated to this contrastive pair, with the most famous being La Fontaine’s “Le rat de ville et le rat des champs” (1668), which was most likely inspired by Aesop’s fable “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse” (ca. 620-560 BC) and later emulated by Félix María Samaniego in “El ratón de la corte y el del campo” (1781).

These works share common underpinnings and rhetorical tacks; the decadence and corruption of the city and the court are contrasted with the purity and bucolic rusticity of the countryside. This contrast is of course an idealized one; the depictions of the countryside in eighteenth-century poetry bear little resemblance to what historians have been able to reconstruct about rural Spain in this period. As Saavedra and Sobrado note, in this period the “distancia material, social y cultural” between the rural population of Spain and the wealthy elite was enormous (251). The average Spaniard was far removed from the eloquent, idealized shepherds that often appear in pastoral compositions, and conversely, Spain’s city centers were experiencing a surge in urbanization, urban planning, and institutions such as the *academias*. King Carlos III (1759-1788) was called *el mejor alcalde de Madrid* as he oversaw notable growth and urban planning of the capital. The question arises as to why Spanish poets chose to repudiate the city in their verses, when in fact it was the intellectual and cultural center, in favor of a countryside that, far from being idyllic, was characterized by rampant illiteracy and poverty.

In approaching the poetry that follows, it is important to remember that this apparent paradox is the product of the neoclassical mode, and a renewed interest in the *beatus ille* trope, eclogues and pastoral compositions. What appealed to many poets was also the ability to incorporate sociability, friendship and discourse within a framework that had traditionally favored silence, nature, and solitude.

Nicasio Álvarez de Cienfuegos employs this juxtaposition to set the tone of his famous poem “Mi paseo solitario de primavera”. In an apostrophe to his friend Ramón, he writes that while you (Ramón) “vagas errante entre el insano estruendo del cortesano mar siempre agitado”, I (Cienfuegos) “busco la soledad, y en su silencio, sin esperanza, mi dolor exhalo” (3-6). Far from the chaos and turmoil of the city and the “cortesano mar” (4), our poet lays on the grass and reflects on the pains caused by love, and he time and again resorts to silence to give voice to his inner turmoil, “silencio amante” (29), “silencio humilde” (56). Silence is the balm which will heal him, and in the presence of nature, he banishes the frenzied city life of the courtier and its corrupting influence: “Lejos, lejos, honor, torpe codicia, / insaciable ambición” (105-106). Silence and solitude, bequeathed upon him by his retreat into nature, allow him to conclude his solitary reflection with a renewed call to friendship, saying about his friends that “fuera de vos no hay universo” (137). This poem, oft mentioned as an example of pre-romantic anguish, can also be read as a reflection on the necessity of a retreat, both from the man-made world and from words themselves, and offers a positive representation of absence as a productive concept. This absence, as we shall see in other poets, often serves to regenerate the speaker, imparting a wisdom and a social rebirth which results in a desire to return to the world and to his friends.

It is little surprise that Juan Meléndez Valdés, one of the most prolific and esteemed poets of his century, would yield a virtual repository of references, descriptions and exaltations of solitude and silence. The poetics of silence feature prominently in his epistles, eclogues, and other philosophical poems, in which he also engages with the ideal of friendship and wisdom. In “El filósofo en el campo”, he describes the “sublime soledad” (90) enjoyed by those who flee the city, its noise and vanity. Much like Cienfuegos, Meléndez employs both a “return to nature” conceit as well as an epistolary structure, with the narrator writing from the solace of the quiet countryside to his courtier friend who dwells in a “guardado gabinete” (6). Free from the “temor, sudor y anhelo” of the court (11), Meléndez finds wisdom in the isolated, rustic conditions of the country, which allows him to see the city for what it is: a world of scandalous, sybaritic excess. The quiet and solitary fields are where true virtue is to be found; come, he implores his friend Fabio, “ven y aprende en ellos, / aprende la virtud. / Aquí en su augusta, / amable sencillez / [...] / se ha escogido un asilo, compañera / de la sublime soledad” (85-90). The personification of virtue as seeking asylum alongside solitude is indicative of the value which Meléndez placed on the clarifying qualities of quiet contemplation and simple country living.

In his philosophical ode “El invierno es el tiempo de la meditación”, he describes the experience of solitary meditation in wintertime, where his mind “corre a ti, oh celestial filosofía, / y en el retiro y soledad se agrada” (19-20). As with “El filósofo en el campo”, Meléndez relies on the personification of attributes and concepts to illustrate the yearning for a quiet meditative retreat. Here, his mind turns to wisdom, finding pleasure in solitude and retreat, and concludes with an apostrophe to philosophy itself, the object of his mind’s desire: “Tu rayo, celestial filosofía, / me alumbre en el abismo misterioso / de maravilla tanta: / muéstrame la armonía / de este gran todo, y su orden milagroso” (155-159). The delineation of wisdom in this poem (as well as many others) underscores the deist framework of much of Meléndez’s philosophy, and equates nature’s grandeur with a divine order that only reason can elucidate.¹² The poet’s longing for the silence and solitude afforded by the natural world thereby takes on the dimensions of a religious pilgrimage. Silence and solitude acquire divine dimensions, calling to mind the earlier citation by Plutarch.

Meléndez would similarly imbue silence with spiritual connotations in his ode “La presencia de Dios”, where his instincts cry out to him that the creator is omnipresent, “tu inmensidad lo llena

todo, Señor” (25), and can paradoxically be found in his silence and his apparent absence: “en este misterioso silencio mora” (47-48). The divine is conflated with the seemingly opposed concepts of omnipresence and absence, yielding an intimate relationship with the poet. This emphasis on absence would seem to indicate a departure from the metaphysics of presence, which from Plato to Heidegger and Derrida, has privileged the present and presence over absence. Building on this idea, his poem “La noche y la soledad” is devoted almost entirely to the notion of peace, solitude, and the philosopher’s retreat from the world. It begins with an apostrophe to solitude itself, “Ven dulce soledad, y al alma mía / libra del mar horrisono, agitado / del mundo corrompido” (1-3). Solitude is very clearly delineated as a sanctuary and purifying force, again invoked as a remedy for the ills caused by society and its corruptive influences. Meléndez Valdés marshals forth the usual epithets: “sublime soledad” (12), “augusta soledad” (27), “silencio augusto” (v, 51), before focusing on the archetypal sabio. The truly wise man, much like Felipe in Forner’s play, retreats from the world, “de todo se retira” (64), “de los hombres huyendo” (172), to a realm of silence, and “paz gloriosa” (66).

It might seem paradoxical, or at the very least ironic, that these poets would idealize and write about silence and solitude, about the act of *not writing*. Yet the purpose of this sabio’s retreat is not escapist or utopist, a quality that is often found in pastoral compositions.¹³ While the “return to nature” trope is undeniably present in these works, it is important to stress that in virtually all of them, the countryside serves the function not of a final destination, but of a temporary asylum from the rigors of life. Cienfuegos, Meléndez Valdés and others were not advocating for poets to burn their manuscripts, abandon their craft and live an ascetic life. In fact, Meléndez goes on in this same poem to describe how the philosopher, revitalized by his retreat to nature, is then able and willing to face the “ciego porvenir” of life (69). The poem’s deist undertones are hard to miss, and Meléndez equates solitude with divinity, describing how the unhappy soul yearns for the “divina soledad” in which it will be able to unite and admire with the “gran Ser” and creator (218-220). The philosopher recognizes in nature the essence of the deist God, which can only be contemplated in silence, devoid of the “estrépito y varios menesteres, / las inútiles hablas” which blind the soul (268-270). Silence is framed as a *productive* absence, as the poet’s surrendering of superfluous gossip and chatter becomes in itself a speech act, designed to purify, elucidate and clarify.

The last stanzas of the poem return to the topic of friendship, and remind the reader that the “dulce amigo”, so often the addressee in these poems, is the one who understands the “valor de la meditación” and quiet contemplation’s ability to mitigate the “turbulentas voces” of the world (313-316). The friend is paradoxically absent and present at the same time, his physical absence enabling the poet’s ruminations, while remaining very much present in the poet’s thoughts and as recipient of this epistolary poem. The poem concludes by underscoring not only the sublime beauty of Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-1745), which inspired Meléndez, but also the manner in which solitude becomes a shared act between the poet and his friend.¹⁴ Friendship, so often represented in this period as a social, communicative and verbal act, is here depicted as being alone together. Come, he asks, “y con Young silenciosos nos entremos / en blanda paz por estas soledades” (320-321). Meléndez also makes ample use of apostrophe throughout the poem, which underscores and reveals the communicative aim of his poem. He begins by addressing solitude itself, then shifting to the deist creator, then speaking to Jovellanos briefly, before turning back to the heavens and to solitude, finishing with his stanza to Jovellanos. In so doing, our poet conflates three entities: solitude, the divine, and friendship. All three appear to provide the solace Meléndez seeks from the anguish which he famously called “fastidio universal” (“Elegía moral” 47).

“La noche y la soledad” is not an isolated example. Many of Meléndez Valdés’ eclogues, odes, and philosophical poems make use of this interplay between silence, solitude, friendship and wisdom, often commingling them with neoclassical tropes. Meléndez repeatedly mentions “el sabio Elpino”, which was the poetic surname given to Eugenio de Llaguno y Amírola (1724-1799), but also became

an idealized pastoral archetype. Elpino features prominently in Meléndez's first eclogue, "A Batilo," in which Arcadio and Batilo revisit the classical trope of *Beatus Ille*, engaging in an unbridled pastoral defense of country living. The wise Elpino, having fled the city to settle in the country, regales Arcadio and his peers with sordid tales of deaths, jealousy, "doncellas vendidas por sus madres", and other goings-on from the big city (274-298). The countryside, on the other hand, is where "todos vivimos en unión perfecta" (336); sunshine, love and friendship ensure a happy life, and as Batilo retorts, the glorious solitude goes hand in hand with the purity of both landscape and people. "¡O Soledad gloriosa!" (365), he proclaims in beginning his description of the idyll that is the countryside, before cataloguing its virtues: equality, purity, peace, and quiet (especially as contrasted with the city and its "tristes cuidados y ruidos") (424-425). Elpino is clearly a neoclassical repurposing of the aforementioned wise old man, and in these poems fulfills the role of pastoral and philosophical exemplar.

The works I have briefly outlined are but a few representative examples of a larger trend, and they raise a critical question as to why authors in this period equated wisdom with solitude and silence while undeniably also underscoring the importance of friendship and sociability. What might seem to be at first a contradiction is indicative of a number of trends at play. There is no doubt that the examples I have mentioned today are largely influenced by classical models—these are after all *neoclassical* works. The bucolic discourse surrounding blissful country living is a clear descendent of Horace's second epode and its trope of *Beatus Ille*, Virgil's eclogues, as well as Renaissance Europe's Neoplatonic pastoral literature.¹⁵ An idyllic, rustic setting, alternately escapist and political themes, as well as songs of love and poetry—which are also present in the popular eighteenth-century revival of Anacreontics—these are not the only concepts from which Meléndez Valdés and his cohorts would draw inspiration, though they are the most studied.

I argue that in the works presented we may observe a brand of neo-*pythagoreanism*, based largely on the romanticized view of Pythagoras as *Magister silentii*, the silent master. Pythagoras was often represented as a fish, as Sor Juana reminds us in her *Neptuno alegórico*, due to his reputation as an ascetic who favored silence (781), and the Pythagorean school, stressed *echemythia*, the vow and ability to remain silent. Pupils purportedly began as listeners, and after three years could become students, where they supposedly carried out five more years of quiet study and contemplation. Though there is much debate among classical historians as to the accuracy of these details, it is undeniable that Pythagoras has, for many centuries since his death, become an embodiment of the Jungian wise old man.

The characters I have discussed, starting with the wise, reclusive Felipe, are descendants of this archetype, which produced the subsequent idealization of what Bertrand Russell called "the contemplative ideal" (34). The history, legends and half-truths that swirl around Pythagoras of Samos and his school established a positive relationship between silence and wisdom. The pervasiveness of this model becomes apparent when we look at the numerous anti-models in the Spanish eighteenth century: *petimetres*, *pedantes*, bad authors and other satirical archetypes feature an inversion of the Neopythagorean ideal: they are superficial, both physically and intellectually, self-important and vain, materialistic and far-removed from ascetic self-control, and most of all—they talk too much. Cadalso's *Eruditos a la violeta* (1772) drives the point home with verve and wit, and Moratín in the aforementioned *La comedia nueva* serves up one of the most memorable pedants in Don Hermógenes.

While friendship, sociability and the archetypal silent master might seem incompatible, the texts themselves prove otherwise. The eighteenth-century wise old man explored in this essay is a neopythagorean re-imagining of the archetype, and while this wise philosopher does value solitude and quiet contemplation, he never forsakes the bonds of friendship. Quite the opposite, Felipe's sacrifice in *La escuela de la amistad* is borne out of love for his friend, not simply his desire to run back to his books. These wise old men have been reformulated and repurposed in order to better serve the ideals of a century that valued friendship and *hombria de bien*. This is the case in many of Meléndez

Valdés' poems, where the poet and narrator yearns for both silence *and* friendship as a salve for his weary soul. It is precisely solitude which allows him to rediscover his voice: "en tu abismo, inmortal naturaleza, / olvidado y seguro, / tu augusta majestad y tu belleza / feliz cantar procuro" ("Oda XIII" 85-87). Silence and solitude are depicted time and again as productive conditions, serving as muses to these authors, and reminding us of Renato Poggioli's assertion that the "retreat" to nature to find solace and happiness is the psychological root of pastoral literature (1). In a similar fashion, Spanish authors cultivated the neopythagorean wise man and the solitary journey, as they sought to balance literary past and eighteenth-century realities. This time the wisdom borne out of solitude and silence was in turn used to help friends, and to work towards the betterment of society.

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Notes

¹ For more, see Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1958.

² The *hombre de bien* became the quintessential eighteenth-century archetype for the virtuous man. Noble, thoughtful and intelligent, the *hombre de bien* always put the well-being of society ahead of his own. Cadalso's interpretation of this role model in *Cartas marruecas* indicates that it's not enough to be virtuous, a good father and husband, one must also give back to society, for the betterment of all.

³ For more, see David T. Gies, "Ars amicitiae", poesía y vida: el ejemplo de Cadalso" in *Coloquio Internacional sobre José Cadalso*. Albano Terme: Piován Editores, 1985. 155-71. Let us also remember the number of enthusiastic paean to friendship in this period, such as the verses written by Meléndez Valdés, especially his second "Elegía moral" to Jovellanos, to appreciate the synchrony between sensibility and friendship: "¡Ay, Jovino! ¡Ay, amigo! ¡Ay de mí! Tú sólo a un triste leal, confidente en tu miseria extrema, eres salud y suspirado puerto" (27-30).

⁴ For more on this topic, see Richard Kagan, *Universidades y sociedad en la España moderna*. Madrid: Tecnos, 1974.

⁵ As Gies notes, the first representation is thought to have occurred in 1792, probably in Sevilla or Cadiz, with a Madrid premiere in 1795 and publication in 1796 (450).

⁶ For more, see María Jesús García Garrosa, "Originalidad-imitación en *La escuela de la amistad, o el filósofo enamorado*"; David T. Gies, "Forner, la amistad y la patria: *La escuela de la amistad o el filósofo enamorado*"; José Antonio Palomo, "Las enseñanzas de *La escuela de la amistad* o el filósofo heroico". All three can be found in *Juan Pablo Forner y su época (1756-1797)*, Ed. Jesús Cañas Murillo and Miguel Angel Llama, Mérida: Regional de Extremadura, 1998.

⁷ This theme is common in a number of "friendship" plays from this period. In Gaspar Zavala y Zamora's two-act play, *El perfecto amigo*, the idealized remote and rustic countryside provides the backdrop for a tale of friendship between the Emperor of Germany, who being lost, seeks and finds solace in the humble dwelling of Ricardo, a miller. Greed and ambition lose out to humility and pastoral solace.

⁸ There are various examples of Felipe speaking too loudly, for example, or lacking social graces.

⁹ It is never explained how young Fernando became such close friends with a reclusive, older philosopher. Far from being realistic, this play clearly stresses the actions of Felipe more than any sort of social verisimilitude.

¹⁰ The moralizing tone of many neoclassical works would often chastise unchecked socializing and frivolity. Tomás de Iriarte's *La señorita malcriada* and *el señorito mimado* both direct their criticism at misguided youths tempted by superficiality and over-socializing. The figure of the pedant is an eighteenth-century commonplace, brilliantly satirized in Cadalso's *Eruditos a la violeta*.

¹¹ The *Beatus Ille* trope comes from Horace's second *Epode*, and stresses the virtues of country living, far from the city and its dangerous, tempting ways. It became one of the most common literary tropes of Renaissance literature (along with the famed *Carpe Diem*), and found some success in the eighteenth century.

¹² For more on Meléndez's deism, see Matthieu Raillard, "Deism, the Sublime and the Formulation of Early Romanticism in Juan Meléndez Valdés and José Cadalso" in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 39 (2010).

¹³ For more, see Juan Cano Ballesta, "Utopismo pastoril en la poesía dieciochesca: la 'égloga' de Tomás de Iriarte", *Anales de literatura española* 7 (1991): 9-26.

¹⁴ Jovellanos is the friend in this poem.

¹⁵ There are many examples of pastoral literature in this period, from Ronsard to Cervantes, but perhaps the most celebrated and influential work is Jorge de Montemayor's *La Diana* (1559), the first pastoral novel written in Spanish.