

Your Girlfriend is a Witch!: Contextualizing Jovellanos's *Aquelarre*

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While he was a comrade and mentor of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, whose *El Aquelarre* (1798), Black Paintings, and *Caprichos* (1797-99) fill the cultural imaginary at the end of Spain's eighteenth century with witches and demons, the poetic work of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744-1811) is decidedly *not* populated with magical acts or witchcraft. Indeed, while his poetic output is highly respected, he is mostly known as a statesman involved in educational and agricultural reform; his most influential writings belong in that sphere. The word 'witch' (bruja/o/s), in contrast, appears in only two texts, both poems, within his complete works. And yet, almost half of one of these, his first published epistle, often cited as his manifesto on neoclassical poetry —“Jovino a sus amigos salmantinos” [Jovino to his Salamancan Friends] (1776)— is a detailed dream sequence in which a personification of Envy leads a coven of naked witches in the preparations for a wicked spell that will make those eponymous Salamancan friends forever the slaves of love, thereby curtailing their potential of creating a new era of epic, serious, didactic poetry.

The 'Salamancan friends' to whom Jovellanos writes this epistle are members of the Escuela Salmantina, one of the most productive poetic groups in eighteenth-century Spain. Its members, who included José Cadalso, Juan Meléndez Valdés, Fray Diego Tadeo González, and Fray Juan Fernández de Rojas, had cultivated among other genres a style of poetry that drew on the Anacreontic tradition, and wed neoclassical forms with playful, escapist, debauchery and romance. Jovellanos, with his more serious focus on the utility of the arts in the service of Enlightened ideals, wrote the “Jovino a sus amigos salmantinos” with the goal of dissuading these poets from dedicating themselves to what he saw as frivolous verses, suggesting to each a genre that they ought to pursue instead (epic, religious, tragic).

It is in this context that Jovellanos enters with ghoulish delight into a nocturnal scene — drawing on both the classical tradition and Pre-Romantic aesthetics— that uses witchcraft as a fearsome framing for the dangers of spending too much time thinking about love. By his creation of a “maléfico coro” [malignant chorus] of witches who curse the future production of three young poets, Jovellanos brings the trappings of magic —spellcraft, the distillation of poisons, the profanation of sacred spaces— into his construction of gendered power. Such a construction, then, offers a fruitful affective counterpoint for another of his main constructions of femininity, the future-looking critique of consumer culture that appears, for example, in his satire “A Arnesto.”

This paper will further place the “Carta a sus amigos Salmantinos” within the trajectory of cultural representations of witchcraft in the period, from literary responses to the 17th-century Zugarramurdi witch trials in the Basque Country, to philosopher Benito Jerónimo Feijoo's debunking of various types of witches and supernatural beings in his *Teatro Critico Universal* (1726-39), and the comic, flatulent witches of his contemporary Diego Torres Villarroel, bringing this solitary coven within the oeuvre of Gaspar Melchor Jovellanos into dialogue with the other

sources for the series of witch paintings that Goya would produce for the Duke and Duchess of Osuna at the cusp of the nineteenth century.