

Reading the Margins

Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán and
Francisco de Miranda (1801)

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I study the connection between the act of reading and the circulation of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán's *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos* (1801). Drawing from a perspective that regards materiality as a central element to understanding the relationship between readers and texts, I explore Francisco de Miranda's intervention as editor of the letter in relation to notions of authenticity, authority, identity, and culture in the context of colonial discourse. Specifically, I argue that Miranda's additions to the text provide an opportunity to trace his reading of the text, showing the complicated history of how Viscardo's letter has been constructed as a text while positing reading as a creative and productive act.

Introduction

THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE ACT OF reading and the circulation of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán's *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos* (1801). It posits reading as a productive act that challenges notions of authenticity, authority, and identity as foundations of the relationship between texts and readers at the threshold of the nineteenth century in Spanish America. Reading, as Roger Chartier has argued, is a practice "that only rarely leaves traces, that is scattered in an infinity of singular acts, and that easily shakes off all constraints" (1994, 1–2). In that sense, I propose to explore an even more ephemeral act — that of the first documented reading of a text, and how the intervention of a reader can impact its circulation and public reception. Specifically, I will explore Francisco de Miranda's mediation, as editor, in Viscardo's letter, a

task mentioned by almost every study about this letter, but seldom studied further in the context of the actual relationship between text and reader.¹

The *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos* has been described as Miranda's "personal manifesto and favorite propaganda tool" used to support the Spanish American wars of independence (RACINE 2003, 130). Scholars who have studied the letter in terms of ideology and intellectual history agree on what Karen Stolley has deemed three key themes to explain the "rhetoric of immediacy and urging" that the letter displays: 1) "a sense of history", 2) "a sense of enlightened self-interest and duty that compels Spanish-Americans to mature examinations and deliberation of their present circumstances", and 3) "a sense of ownership and investment in the new world" (2007, 337–38). A supporter of the British intrusion to help Spanish America gain independence, Viscardo wrote the letter in 1791 in the hope that British soldiers could carry the text with them and circulate it throughout Spanish America.

The letter has a complicated textual history. Viscardo first drafted it in Spanish and then translated it into French (SIMMONS 1989, 165). Unfortunately since the letter was lost, the formatting and textual details of this first Spanish version are unknown.² There are, however, two different manuscripts in French, one of which Miranda edited and published eight years later, in 1799, bearing a false Philadelphia imprint.³ He then translated a third French version into Spanish and published it in London in 1801. The first English version, supervised by Miranda as well, appeared in

1. Although the presence of Miranda is almost ubiquitous in scholarship about Viscardo's letter, the same cannot be said about Viscardo's relevance in scholarly writings about Francisco de Miranda. Take, for instance, two recent articles on Miranda by Joselyn M. Almeida and Andrey Iserov. In the first case, Almeida offers a compelling case to read Miranda's works within the larger context of Latino writing in the United States. There are no mentions of Viscardo in the main text; just a brief and anecdotal reference in the endnotes. In the second, Iserov provides readers with a careful account of Miranda's travails to disseminate his pro-independent agenda through the Americas. Viscardo's letter, in this case, is just one of the many episodes in the larger story of Miranda's failed independentist ambitions.
2. Burton Van Name Edwards offers a detailed account of the textual history of the letter in the "Bibliographical Note" at the end of the modern English edition by David Brading (2002, 87–93).
3. According to Karen Racine, this false imprint was intended to "avoid antagonizing Pitt" (2003, 147). Here, she refers to William Pitt, prime minister of Great Britain from 1783 to 1801, whose help both Viscardo and Miranda had sought to get financial and military support for Spanish American self-determination.

1808; the second, translated by William Walton, in 1810. Miranda's intervention in the letter is most notorious for the set of ten footnotes that he added to the 1799 French edition, and which he later translated and reproduced in the 1801 Spanish version. The fact that all versions differ from each other has created a particular type of anxiety over which copy constitutes Viscardo's original text. Burton Van Name Edwards, for instance, argues that "ironically, since Walton's translation eliminated two of the longest passages added to Viscardo by Miranda in 1799, this second English translation in a certain sense is the most faithful reproduction of Viscardo's original text" (2002, 92). But the dissimilarities between versions are just one among many other factors that lead the reader's response toward a context in which notions of authenticity and authority are valued as the primary tools for approaching the text. These annotations are the primary concern of this study: it is in this framing to the letter that I locate the material presence of Miranda.⁴

Francisco de Miranda undertook three main tasks in relation to Viscardo's letter: first, as translator, he partook in the production of the text; second, as scribe, he preserved it; and third, as editor, he attempted to control its circulation and its meaning. This essay is primarily concerned with the latter. The intervention of the reader thus transforms the text and calls into question the idea of reading as a "private act with replicable meaning for strangers dispersed through space", as Michael Warner suggests in his critique to histories of reading (2002, 304 n51). I am interested in reading as a practice as much as an event. This allows me to shift the attention from the alleged replicable meaning of reading (which I also contend) to the complex and diverse set of practices that the act of reading involves.⁵

4. Strictly speaking, the first recorded reader of the letter is James Bland Burges, Undersecretary of State and a member of the British Parliament. Thanks to Merle Simmons's documentation of the epistolary relationship between Viscardo and Burges, we know that the first version was written in Spanish and sent to Burges in a French translation on September 15, 1791 (1989, 165). However, my study concerns Francisco de Miranda, as his reading is traceable by the footnotes he added to the text. Facsimile editions of the 1799 French version, the 1801 Spanish one, and the French manuscript can be found in Viscardo y Guzmán (1998, 219–342).
5. In their influential book *Beyond the Lettered City*, Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins have made a case for understanding literacy as a practice that involves much more than deciphering alphabetic writing. To them, the written word relates to extraliterate practices that took many forms in colonial times: ceremonies, performances, visual experiences. As they put it, "Literacy, whether alphabetic or visual, is an intimately physical practice that involves the human

In doing so, I build upon Roger Chartier's idea of how the interaction between reader and text is always mediated by materiality; or as he puts it, in how readers "manejan o reciben formas cuyas organizaciones gobiernan su lectura (o su escucha), es decir, su posible comprensión del texto leído (o escuchado)" (1992, 107).

I have divided this paper into three sections, each one dealing with a particular topic that highlights the presence of Miranda in Viscardo's letter. By focusing on the materiality of Viscardo's letter, I aim to propose an argument of how the colonial discursive space relates to the printed space of the page. Reading, I would argue, constantly disputes textual authority and, in doing so, enables the reader to exercise a certain control over the text, a type of social empowerment that both Viscardo and Miranda aimed to trigger with their political message.

Viscardo/Miranda: Authority and Authorship

On September 24, 1810, just a few days after Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's proclamation known as the "Grito de Dolores" launched the Mexican War of Independence, Viscardo's letter was prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition in New Spain. The two *calificadores* ruled its thirty-six pages "subversivas del buen orden y tranquilidad pública" (CARRASCO AND BÁRCENA 2004, 114). What I find relevant about fray Luis Carrasco and fray José Bárcena's *dictamen* are the terms in which they condemn the letter:

[B]astará decir que la carta toda es falsa, temeraria, impía y sediciosa, injuriosa a la religión y al Estado, a los reyes y a los pontífices: tan acre y mordaz, tan revolucionaria y sofística, que si el Santo Tribunal no aplica desde luego toda su actividad para sofocarla, pereceremos sin duda a la fuerza de los engaños jesuíticos, y de la conjuración que se intenta con el título de la humanidad y del patriotismo.

(110)

According to Juan Poblete's study on reading practices in Latin America, "the most important reason for banning the reading and circulation of

body in a series of learned, though largely unconscious, activities: the position in which the reader or writer sits, grasping the book or the pen; the distance at which one must stand to view artwork; the act of crossing oneself when approaching certain images or when swearing as a signatory to a document 'in the name of the cross'" (2001, 219).

works of fiction was that they might contaminate the colonial discursive formation” (2004, 181). As we can learn from the Inquisition edict, this applies not only to fiction but to all kinds of genres. In this context, the term ‘falsa’ does not refer to something fake, but misleading. However, the main argument against the letter develops from a certain sense of dubiety towards an assertion of the text’s inauthenticity.

While Viscardo advocates for the rights of the many Jesuits banished from the Spanish Empire in 1767, the *calificadores* dismiss as barely plausible (“Apenas creíble”) “el que después de tantos años de la expulsión de jesuitas, dure aun tanto la memoria de éstos, y que México se halle tan infamado en esta materia que no duda creer originarse los males actuales de la Europa por castigos de aquella expatriación” (CARRASCO AND BÁRCENA 2004, 110). The letter, to them, is just an “injerto de desatinos y repetición de calumnias ya muchas veces refutadas” (111) that contaminates the colonial discourse in terms of collective memory. The sense of history that Viscardo displays in the letter by denouncing the expulsion of the Jesuits as yet another example of the greediness of the Spanish crown and, more importantly, as evidence of the vulnerability that Spanish citizens constantly endured in the Americas goes against what the *calificadores* can see as permissible and, thus, free to circulate.

The Inquisition’s willingness to debunk the letter goes beyond Viscardo’s arguments, as an attack against his sources ensues: “Desenvuelve estas ideas perniciosas paralogisando y repitiendo las mismas impiedades y mordacidad de Montesquieu, de Voltaire, de Sidney, de Lipsio, de Gottlob, de Boulanger, Noblet y Lact, tantas veces proscritos y reprobados” (111). But there is one source that draws the *calificadores*’ attention, a French translation of Bartolomé de las Casas:

[S]e acuerda del libro apócrifo atribuído falsamente al venerable Casas sobre la destrucción de los indios, libro recogido por el Santo Tribunal: libro falso escrito por un francés, como lo demuestran los críticos, y, como se evidencia, también por otro verdadero y genuino que escribió el mismo obispo de Chiapa impreso en Sevilla el año de 1552, con el título de *Tratado comprobatorio del imperio soberano y principado universal que los reyes de Castilla y León tienen sobre las indias*.

(111–12)

The presence of Las Casas will prove relevant to the analysis of the letter, as his text forms part of Francisco de Miranda’s many annotations. Suffice it to say for now that it helps the *calificadores* set the tone for a general

interpretation of the letter as illegitimate. Their underlying rationale goes as follows: if the author uses such apocryphal information to support his arguments, why should we not think the letter itself to be as dubious and fraudulent as its sources? After all, the fact that the letter did not include the author's name on the title page, but rather in a brief preliminary note by Miranda, itself is cause for suspicion, not to mention the false Philadelphia imprint, which the *calificadores* did not pick up on. A comparison with similar inquisitorial *dictámenes* from the same period shows that falsehood was a fairly common label against what were seen as dangerous documents, but not that frequent as a justification for censorship. That the *calificadores* used this argument against the distribution of the 1801 edition of Viscardo's letter in Mexico shows that it was indeed a matter of concern to them, and a possible justification of the prohibition against the document's circulation.⁶

Of course, the assumptions regarding Las Casas's authorship are completely deceiving. The book that Miranda quotes in his tenth footnote is a 1697 French edition of works by Las Casas titled *La decouverte des Indes occidentales, par les espagnols. Ecríte par Dom Balthazar de Las-Casas, Evêque de Chiapa*. Chartier has studied this book as part of what he calls the "lives of the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*", which is included in this French translation of Las Casas's work. As Chartier argues, authenticity was a value that Las Casas emphasized in the edition of his works, even though his treatises lacked all the common censorial approvals (2015, 108–09). Moreover, the work that the *calificadores* offer as proof, published in 1553 without a license, does not argue against the main argument of Miranda's footnote, namely, the extermination of the indigenous population by the greedy Spaniards. Despite its title, the *Tratado comprobatorio* condemns Spanish violence, albeit in milder terms than Miranda does, and makes Spanish supremacy over America dependent on the power of the Pope (LUPHER 2006, 126–30).

Current scholarship on Viscardo's letter still carries suspicion over what should be considered the 'original' text. In a recent edition for the Biblioteca de Traducciones Hispanoamericanas, hosted in the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, Georges L. Bastin acknowledges the translator

6. Cristina Gómez Álvarez's and Guillermo Tovar y de Teresa's book *Censura y revolución* (2009) offers a window into the vast, complex world of Inquisitorial censorship in Mexico at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries; see pages 77 and 268 for Viscardo's case.

and editor participation, but refuses to believe that all footnotes are by Francisco de Miranda, labeling them as “too important” for the general argument of the letter (2012, 4–5). In a similar vein, Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero regards Miranda’s footnotes as support or reinforcement for Viscardo’s argument. Hence, in his edition of the letter, he chooses not to include any footnotes at all in order to “respetar el original de Viscardo” (2007, 328).

The Inquisition *calificadores* were not troubled by Francisco de Miranda’s intervention — his name is not even mentioned in the document — but modern scholars are. This is due to a clear difference in the understanding of authorship between then and now. To the inquisitors, if they even thought about it, the role of Miranda probably entailed nothing more than the dissemination of the letter. Only in modern times have the roles of translator, editor, and publisher been taken to play a significant role in the creative, intellectual, and material process of how texts come to life. Stolley, for instance, emphasizes Miranda’s role as “agent/editor/translator for Viscardo” (2006, 347), and Karen Racine has coined the term “the Viscardo-Miranda message” (2003, 130) to talk about the dissemination and circulation of the letter through Trinidad, Venezuela, the United States, Argentina, Mexico, Bogota, Chile, and Peru. However, rarely has Miranda’s intervention been considered beyond the shared ideology with Viscardo — whom Racine describes as “the precursor to the Precursor” (2003, 130). This erasure of Miranda as the creator of a new text creates a twofold conundrum: the first one deals with the ancillary relationship between footnotes and text, and the second grapples with the act of reading as an actual productive and creative event.

Reading Miranda’s notes in the Margins of Viscardo’s Letter

In his attempt to define what is a public, Warner has raised relevant questions in relation to the ideology that usually constrains the definition of publics as uniform and unified entities: “The public is thought to exist empirically and to require persuasion rather than poesis” (2002, 115). He argues that the same happens when we think of reading as a replicable and transparent practice. Miguel Dalmaroni goes even further, suggesting that the historical consideration of reading as a cultural and social practice has overshadowed a theoretical perspective that deems the act of reading an

individual and nonreplicable event. Viewing reading as a universal process has led to a disregarding of the intervention of Francisco de Miranda in Viscardo's letter.

Reflecting on Miranda's additions, Stolley argues, "While the changes did not alter the fundamental thrust of the document, Miranda clearly hoped to strengthen the letter's denunciatory effect by invoking the infamous Black Legend and by enumerating the victims of the Spanish expulsion of the Jesuits" (2006, 344). Stolley is specifically speaking about footnotes five and ten, the two longest additions by Miranda. As I will offer a close reading of each in a following section, for now I just want to point to Stolley's idea of a 'fundamental' text that, despite Miranda's intervention, has not been affected or distorted. This point of view stands on the above-mentioned idea of originality, but also arises from a perspective that does not conceive of materiality as a significant part of the production, circulation, and reception of a text. The Inquisition *calificadores* did not see Miranda as a textual problem. To them, Viscardo y Guzmán stands as the sole author.⁷ When the Inquisition banned Viscardo's letter, the prohibition went against the author, his ideas, and the text itself:

El Inquisidor fiscal en vista de la carta, o cuaderno impreso en 36 páginas, dirigida a los españoles americanos por uno de sus compatriotas, y de la proclama que comprende con el título *Americanos, bajo el yugo español*, dice que los PP. calificadores a cuya censura pasaron, juzgan que deben prohibirse por subervibas del bueno orden y tranquilidad pública.

(CARRASCO AND BÁRCENA 2004, 114)

The complicated textual history of the letter calls for reflection on the nature of Miranda's intervention within the larger context of how texts are framed. Let me offer a couple of examples using marginalia and footnotes as cases in point. While I am well aware of the differences between them, I aim to show that marginalia, either in print by the author/editor/translator or by a reader, call our attention to a dynamic of authority over the meaning of the text. From the point of view of their production, marginalia are usually seen to arise out of an act of independence of the reader over the text. From the point of view of their reception, however, annotations in

7. Michael Foucault has already paired the development of authorship with censorship; to him, the function of author "is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses" (1980, 130).

the margins seem to undertake the completely opposite task by controlling the reader, no matter how irrelevant or meaningful they might be: they are there, and we readers are faced with the choice of looking at them or else skipping them knowing that we are missing something. In Robert Hauptman's view, "Functionally, they seduce with their immediate demand: Only a complete and unequivocal commitment to the text would allow a reader to skip over a marginal note" (2008, 74).

Nevertheless, this twofold and dynamic component of marginalia and footnotes usually stands second to the text to which they belong. In her book on marginalia, Heather Jackson argues that "as long as the notes are permanently attached to the text, the text stands as a reminder of the source and a corrective check on the interpretation" (2002, 88). It is no coincidence that the relationship between annotations and text is usually articulated in terms of genealogy, leaving annotations and footnotes in a secondary place, always subordinated to the text. As Hauptman puts it when speaking about glosses, marginalia, and notes: "Formally they are contiguous with their progenitors" (2008, 74). Marginalia, from this point of view, become the black sheep of the family, seen as "pariahs who live in the borderlands [. . .] that cannot survive in the body of the work but thrive in the margins as antisocial articulations and images" (2008, 110).

While Hauptman regards footnotes as an evolved version of the "medieval gloss and extreme marginal annotation" (2008, 112), it is not difficult to trace a relationship between body and footnotes within a context of authority, as Grafton explains in his study of the historical footnote: "Historical footnotes resemble traditional glosses in form. But they seek to show that the work they support claims authority and solidity from the historical conditions of its creation" (1990, 32). This is probably why modern critics of Viscardo's letter explain Miranda's footnotes in terms of validation, approval, or ideological support.

There is, however, a different perspective that points to a more disruptive relationship between footnotes and the body of a text, a side of the story we are all familiar with now in the era of endnotes, in which cohabitation between notes and body no longer exists, and the reader needs to leave behind the body of the text to read the annotations. This fight for the reader's attention also comes with an authority contest, just as Jacques Derrida claims when he posits footnotes not as pariahs, but as the primary organism of the text: "if I wanted to make sure that my reply or my attack will be read and not passed by — indeed read even before the main text — I put it into a footnote, conferring on it the principal role, so that what is apparently the main text would become an auxiliary pretext for the

footnote” (1991, 198). While Derrida emphasizes the autonomy of the footnote, he also concedes that the relationship between body and notes never ceases to exist, creating the possibility of new meanings: “neither annotation nor the footnote is *stricto sensu* a digression; the digression takes place as a detour within the narrative or demonstrative discourse that one has no intention of either abandoning or interrupting, even for an instant” (1991, 195).⁸

This creative relationship between annotation and textual body is indeed the case for the *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos*. Although it is true, as Raúl Coronado suggests, that the letter “was written in a discursive vacuum”, in the sense that “there was no uncensored Hispanophone public sphere in which the *Letter* could have been published and debated” (2013, 171), its development and constitution as a text is not an isolated case. It is my intention to situate Viscardo’s letter within a larger context of the relationship between colonialism and print culture. I thus use the term ‘margin’ in the title in two senses: first, as the blank space surrounding the text in which a reader can write notes; second, as the edge or limit of a specific historical period, in this case the period in which pro-independence thought begins to gain traction in Spanish America against European hegemony. In this context, the printing and distribution of pamphlets — either to be read in private, or aloud in public — played a pertinent role in the circulation of pro-independence ideas.⁹

Miranda’s intentions to circulate Viscardo’s letter as part of his political and military campaign to fight for Venezuela’s independence can be read along with the development of print culture in the Americas. As Cristina Soriano has argued, “The lack of printing shops, the absence of formal booksellers, and the significance of smuggling activities along Venezuela’s long coast made efforts of controlling and censoring readings much more difficult” (2017, 282). I have chosen to focus on Miranda’s role as editor and annotator of Viscardo’s letter to show how the added layer that he provided to the text impacted how the text was constituted and how it circulated. The ability to read Viscardo’s message along with Miranda’s notes allows me to elaborate on the act of reading as a practice with a certain “element of contest or struggle, [. . .] an oscillation between surrender and resistance”

8. Derrida goes further, suggesting that “[t]he footnote is also a text unto itself, rather detached, relatively decontextualized or capable of creating its own context, such that one can read it quickly and directly for itself” (1991, 194).

9. See Soriano (2018, 47–76) for a study on the relationship between printing technologies and the circulation of pro-independence information.

(JACKSON 2002, 85–6) that goes against what Chartier (1994) has called the order of books, that is, the urge of print materials to direct and restrict the meaning they are supposed to transmit.¹⁰

Identity and Genealogies on the Printed Page

In his groundbreaking book on the life and works of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, Miguel Batllori begins with the question of how to correctly spell the Jesuit's name: “¿Viscardo o Vizcardo? ¿Viscardo y Guzmán?” (1953, 17). Clearly, this was not a problem in the early nineteenth century, when the spelling of names was not standardized. Batllori quickly acknowledges the correct spelling, but the fact that one of the most important books on Viscardo dedicates its first lines to this consideration could be read as a signpost to the role that identity plays in understanding Viscardo's work. Speaking specifically about the *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos*, identity is built on the concept of genealogy.

At the beginning of his letter, Viscardo aims to summarize the state of Spanish America in four words: “*ingratitude, injusticia, servidumbre y desolación*” (2004, 73). In very short order, the text develops genealogy as a key concept to explain and understand all of them, from the very first words — “*Hermanos y compatriotas*” (2004, 73) — to the last ones — “*una sola grande familia de hermanos*” (2004, 94). Viscardo's arguments in favor of independence offer a peculiar genealogy that overlooks mestizos as well as indigenous peoples, and presents creoles as legitimate descendants of the first Spaniards that came to America. In his view, the injustices the Spanish crown did to the conquistadors were equal to the injustices that creole elites had endured throughout years: “*Consultemos nuestros anales de tres siglos, y allí veremos la ingratitude y la injusticia de la corte de España, su infidelidad en cumplir sus contratos, primero con el gran Colón, y después con los otros conquistadores, que le dieron el imperio del Nuevo Mundo*” (2004, 79).

As Viscardo explains it, one of the biggest problems is the clash of interests of two lineages, the Spanish and the Spanish Americans, and the constant neglect from the former to recognize and honor the rights of the latter. David Brading summarizes it in the following terms:

10. “The book always aims at installing an order, whether it is the order in which it is deciphered, the order in which it is to be understood, or the order intended by the authority who commanded or permitted the work” (CHARTIER 1994, viii).

His manifesto expressed the interests and sentiments of a colonial nobility which had been denied its birthright, the governance of the country conquered and settled by its ancestors. But this traditional plaint was matched by an equally vehement insistence on universal natural rights and topped by a Utopian expectation that Spanish America was destined to become the resort of all humanity. It was precisely this unstable compound that rendered the *Letter* such a potent political instrument, since it spoke in different voices to different readers.

(2002, 37)

While Brading stresses the ultimate openness of Viscardo's message, it is the genealogical roots of the text that interest me the most. Viscardo creates a discursive space in which he looks back and forth to analyze the injustices that the Spanish crown has perpetrated on the Spanish American ancestors, that is, the conquistadors, and the impact these injustices would have on their descendants: "Todo lo que hemos prodigado a la España ha sido pues usurpado sobre nosotros y nuestros hijos; siendo tanta nuestra simpleza que nos hemos dejado encadenar con unos hierros, que si no rompemos a tiempo, no nos queda otro recurso que el de soportar pacientemente esta ignominiosa esclavitud" (VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN 2004, 74). The question I want to pose regarding this genealogy and Miranda's intervention to the letter is: on behalf of whom is Viscardo arguing for American independence? Or to put it in other words: we who?

Genealogies depicted in the letter have not gone unattended by scholars. Coronado, for instance, contends, "By insisting on the Spanish tradition of rights via the medieval *cortes*, Viscardo in effect offers a placeholder for the future. He plants the seed for a different genealogy of rights originating in the Spanish tradition, but onto which would be grafted what was becoming already the dominant Anglo-Protestant tradition of possessive individual rights" (2013, 173). Stolley, on the other hand, has proposed another kind of genealogy regarding the use of Inca Garcilaso's *Comentarios reales*: "Here Viscardo was able to forge a link between sixteenth-century Spanish abuses and the recent uprising of Tupac Amaru in Peru" (2006, 349). In both cases, there is an agreement on the significance that genealogies hold for the sense of history displayed by Viscardo.

Although most of his arguments deal with the economic burden that Spain poses for Spanish America, Viscardo offers the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish America in 1767 as a clear indication that the Spanish crown has betrayed its own people. Interestingly enough, a Jesuit in exile

himself, Viscardo prefers the use of terms such as “ciudadanos” to refer to Jesuits, a label that he uses only once. Anthony Pagden has studied this rhetoric, concluding, “This aspect of Viscardo’s thought seems, however, to have been unnoted by those who read him. The language of citizenship, and with it, of course, the republicanism which Viscardo was eager to avoid, would only be appropriated some years later by Simon Bolivar” (1990, 129).

Miranda’s fifth footnote, however, is a counternarrative to this ellipsis, as it presents a list of 313 Jesuits living in Italy at the time.¹¹ I am not proposing that the footnote argues for a different interpretation of the relevant role of Jesuits in Spanish America as presented in Viscardo’s letter. What I mean is that Miranda is not shy in naming and highlighting what Viscardo clearly tries to disguise by using other terms, such as “ciudadanos”, instead of calling them “Jesuits”. It is the absence of the term in Viscardo’s letter, and the emphasis that Miranda places on the same matter, that interests me. The list is introduced by a brief note that reads: “En el año de 1785 existían en Italia los exjesuitas siguientes, nativos de la América española. Esta lista es sacada del registro general en Roma, cuando don Francisco de Miranda viajaba en aquel país” (VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN 2004, 95). Whereas Viscardo stresses the belonging of the Jesuits to the Spanish Empire in their role as citizens, Miranda presents them in exactly the opposite terms: as a group on their own linked by their belonging to the order and living far away from home, rather by their alignment to the Spanish monarchy. By doing this, Miranda not only interferes with Viscardo’s genealogy, but he in fact breaks into the letter by introducing a list that takes almost all the space available for three and a half pages¹² (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 1a).

11. Although at the end of the list Miranda states that the list adds up to 333 Jesuits, there are actually only 313 names on the list.
12. The footnote is placed after the following words by Viscardo: “La muerte ha librado ya, a la mayor parte de estos desterrados, de las miserias que les han acompañado hasta el sepulcro. Los otros arrastran una vida infortunada y son una prueba de aquella crueldad de carácter que tantas veces se ha echado en cara a la nación española, aunque realmente esta mancha no deba caer sino sobre el despotismo de su gobierno” (2004, 81).

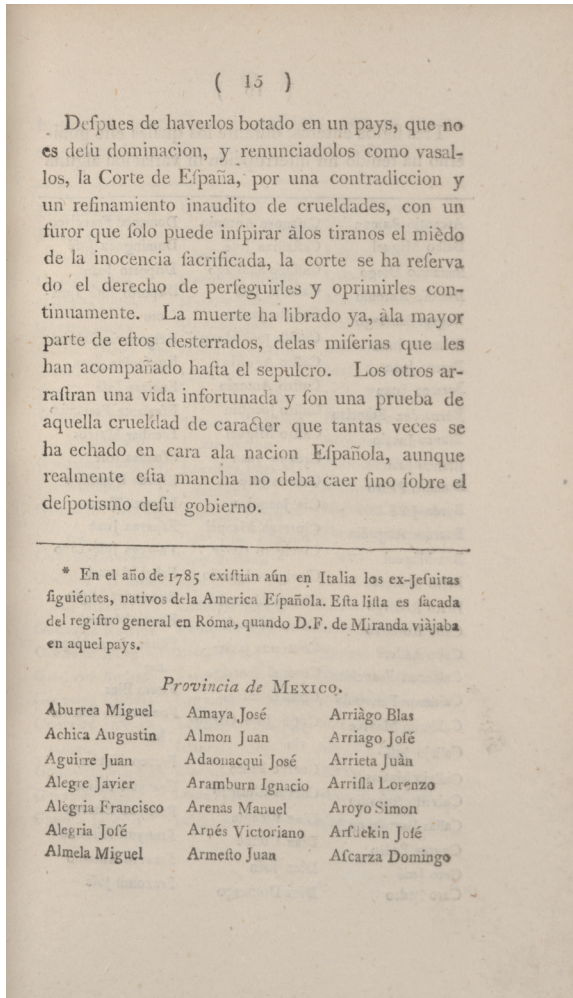


Figure 1. Miranda's fifth footnote to the letter, where he includes the names of 313 Jesuits living in Italy at the time. Foyles Special Collections Library, King's College, London.

This is one significant difference between marginal notes that owe their existence to the space left on the printed page and their independence from the body of the text, and footnotes, which, on the contrary, steal space from the text and sort of fuse together with it. Both genealogies, the one built upon citizenship and the other based on religion, collide in a way that even the graphic display of the letter presents as conflict-

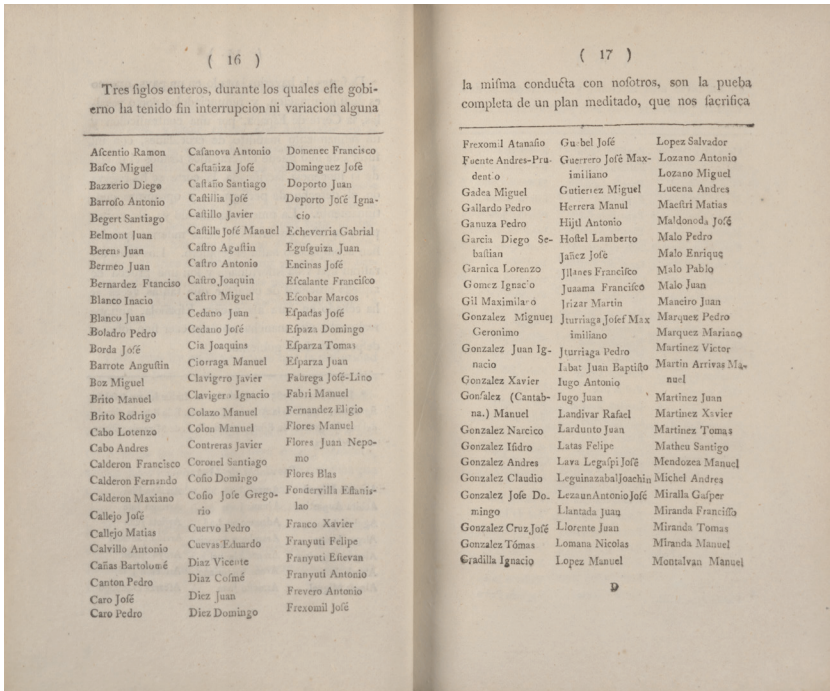


Figure 1a. Miranda's fifth footnote to the letter, where he includes the names of 313 Jesuits living in Italy at the time. Foyles Special Collections Library, King's College, London.

ing. As Sarah Ahmed argues in *Queer Phenomenology*, “Genealogy itself could be understood as a straightening device, which creates the illusion of descent as a line” (2006, 122). To posit text and annotations in terms of progenitors and descendants is to assume a clear and direct line marking origin and destination, with no deviations or anomalies. Viscardo’s *Letter to the Spanish Americans* as we know it defies this assumption, and Ahmed’s study on queer orientations helps us to see these anomalies as part of the oblique nature of the texts. Notwithstanding it is evident that the ten footnotes Miranda added are subsequent to the text, the letter’s textual history including the lost original Spanish manuscript, and the many translations and additions by Miranda, challenge the idea of an origin as much as the concept of text as a straightforward destination.

Something similar happens with footnote number ten, perhaps the most peculiar of all. At the end of his letter, Viscardo foresees a promising future for Spanish Americans, one in which they will not have to endure Spanish

cruelty and greed any longer. It is in this last paragraph that Miranda takes on Bartolomé de Las Casas in what can be seen as a fairly odd example. The last footnote divides Viscardo's last paragraph into two parts: one pertains to the oppression the Spanish crown has inflicted on America, and the other promises a land of happiness and free trade once independence has been achieved: "¡qué agradable y sensible espectáculo presentarán las costas de la América, cubiertas de hombres de todas las naciones, cambiando las producciones de sus países por las nuestras! ¡Cuántos, huyendo de la opresión, o de la miseria, vendrán a enriquecernos con su industria, con sus conocimientos y a reparar nuestra población debilitada!" (2004, 93–4). But it is Spanish ferocity, the first part of the paragraph, that triggers Miranda's utopian ideas about America (see Fig. 2).

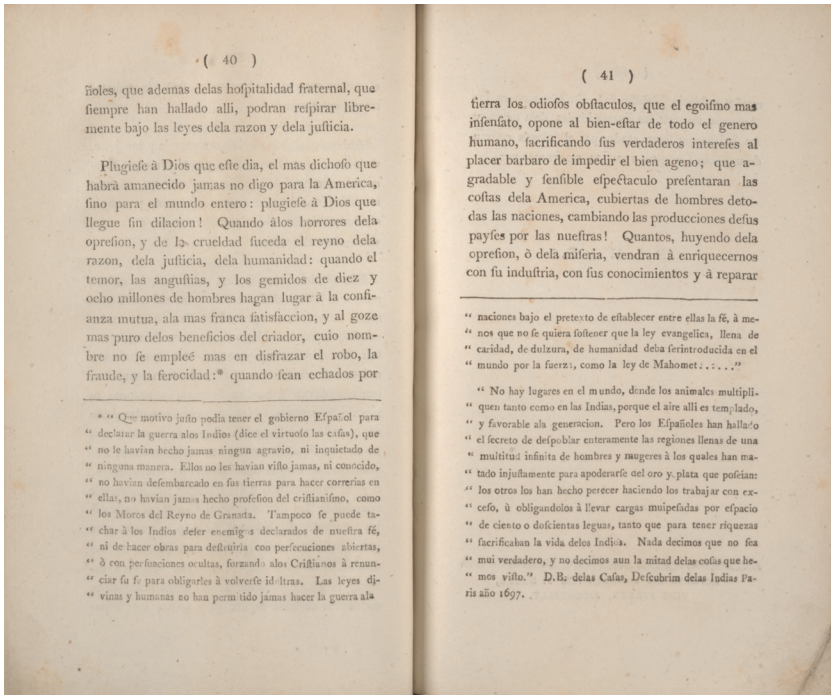


Figure 2. Miranda's tenth footnote to the letter, where he argues against the Spanish "just war" against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Foyles Special Collections Library, King's College, London.

The passage he chooses for his tenth footnote, from Las Casas's *La découverte des Indes Occidentales par les espagnols* (1697), forcefully denounces the unjust war and slavery waged on the indigenous peoples and condemns the massacre of natives just for the sake of gold:

Qué motivo justo podía tener el gobierno español para declarar la Guerra a los indios — dice el virtuoso Las Casas —, que no le habían hecho jamás agravio, ni inquietado de ninguna manera. Ellos no les habían visto jamás, ni conocido, no habían desembarcado en sus tierras para hacer correrías en ellas, no habían jamás hecho profesión del cristianismo, como los moros del Reino de Granada. Tampoco se puede tachar a los indios de ser enemigos declarados de nuestra fe, ni de hacer obras para destruirla con persecuciones abiertas o con persecuciones ocultas, forzando a los cristianos a renunciar a la fe para obligarlos a volverse idólatras. Las leyes divinas y humanas no han permitido jamás hacer la guerra a las naciones bajo el pretexto de establecer entre ellas la fe, a menos que no se quiera sostener que la ley evangélica, llena de caridad, de dulzura, de humanidad deba ser introducida en el mundo por la fuerza, como la ley de Mahomet[.]

(VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN 2004, 97 n13)¹³

This first part of the long footnote comes from pages 244–45 of the 1967 Paris edition of Las Casas's works. The book includes the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, excerpts from the *Octavio remedio*, the *Treinta proposiciones muy jurídicas*, and finally, the *Disputa* between Las Casas and Sepúlveda, from which Miranda is quoting in this footnote. An important particularity of this book is the title displayed on its pages, different from both the title page and the separate treatises included: *Voyages des Espagnols dans les Indes*. As Chartier suggests in his study of this copy of the *Brevísima*, the atrocities committed by the conquistadors that fuel Las Casas's defense of the indigenous peoples appear here in the context of travel narratives (2015, 107–42). However, as attenuated as the outrageous Spanish behavior might seem within this new generic frame, for a letter whose central argument is based on the debt the Spanish crown owes to

13. The endnotes in the 2004 edition of the Spanish version of the letter mix Miranda's footnotes and the modern editor's notes to the text; this is why this note is marked as the 13th even though it is the 10th in Miranda's 1801 version.

the sons of the conquistadors, the addition of Las Casas's agenda does not fit at all.

Once more, Miranda introduces a new narrative to the letter. By quoting Las Casas, he twists Viscardo's depiction of the conquistadors as victims of the avarice of the Spanish crown, and the conquistadors' sons as the original owners of the Americas, and provides a new context of violence and vicious appropriation of the land to this genealogy. The second part of the footnote, from page 302 of the French edition, follows the same path; even though it goes along with what Viscardo presents as hopeful market possibilities after being emancipated from Spain, references to the conquistadors' atrocities interfere with the general argument of a letter that posits natural rights to the land for those descended from them:

“No hay lugares en el mundo donde los animales multipliquen tanto como en las Indias, porque en el aire allí es tamplado y favorable a la generación. Pero los españoles han hallado el secreto de despoblar enteramente las regiones llenas de una multitud infinita de hombres y mujeres a los cuales han matado injustamente para apoderarse del oro y plata que poseían los otros, los han hecho parecer haciéndolos trabajar con exceso, u obligándolos a llevar cargar muy pesadas por espacio de cien o doscientas leguas, tanto que para tener riqueza sacrificaban la vida de los indios. Nada decimos que no sea así el verdadero, y no decimos aún la mitad de las cosas que hemos visto” Don Bartolomé de las Casas, *Descubrimiento de las Indias* (París, 1697).

(VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN 2004, 97 n13)

The first and last words of the letter — “hermanos” — frame the whole exhortation within a genealogy twisted by Miranda's additions that create a whole new set of references, a new family tree in which Viscardo's brothers might not share the same origin with the editor and translator of the text.

This mediation, however, also creates a new discursive space in which neither of the two voices can be isolated from each other. The front page of the letter provides an example of this: by omitting the author's name, Miranda clearly links anonymity to the circulation of the text, highlighting the relevance of the letter in relation to its ideas. The author, in principle, is important in as much as he shares the same status of “compatriota” as the possible readers of the letter. Anonymity, in this case, broadens the possibility of the public to identify with Viscardo's arguments rather than with him. However, this gesture is immediately reversed on the following page, “Advertencia del editor”, where Viscardo is acknowledged as the

author and Miranda hides behind the category of editor. His name, in fact, appears just once, in footnote number five, before transcribing the list of the ex-Jesuits living in Italy by 1785. Referring to the title page (see Fig. 3), Racine argues that by quoting Virgil's verse "Vincet amor Patriae", Vis-

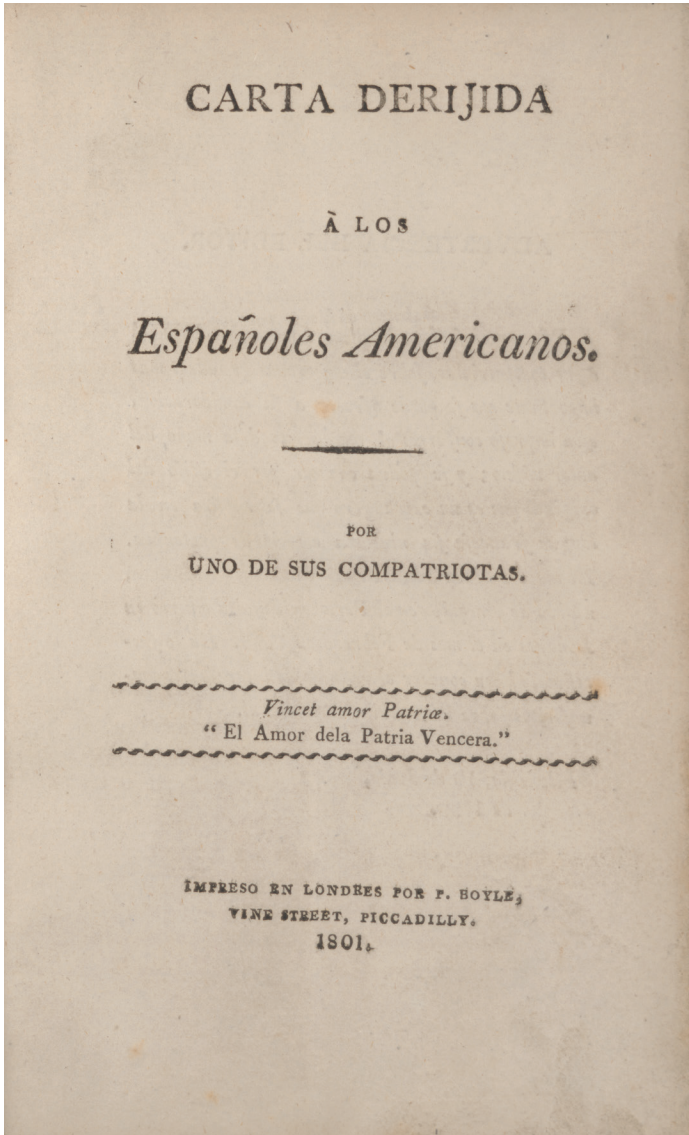


Figure 3. Title page, "Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos".
Foyles Special Collections Library, King's College, London.

cardo “assigned himself a place in the long historical lineage of banished freedom-lovers” (2016, 148). It is unclear, however, whether this reference comes from Viscardo’s hand or from Miranda’s intervention; nevertheless, it makes a point about how to read and understand the text within a new discursive space in which two lineages reflect on the same theme, albeit not in the same manner at all times.

Conclusion

By providing an analysis of Miranda’s role in the 1801 edition of the letter, I have tried to make a point about the relevance of materiality in relation to notions of authenticity, authority, and identity in relation to the many ways we make texts signify. I have paid special attention to the framing that Miranda provides to the letter, and I have focused on what can be said about the relationship between both. In doing so I have kept in mind what Ernst Gombrich famously stated about framing shapes: “The framing shapes transform the meaning of the object they enclose” (1979, 169). In this final section, I take on Gombrich to address one last issue regarding one of my theoretical concerns in relation to Viscardo’s letter — surface reading.

Even though Gombrich’s emphasis on the importance of framing goes so far as to suggest that “it is certainly possible to focus on a printed page without attending to it, and therefore without reading it” (1979, 96), I have advocated for the importance of doing both. This difference between seeing and reading lies behind current debates on the general task of the humanities, and literary studies in particular, where seeing is related to contemporary approaches such as surface and distant reading, as opposed to reading in relation to more traditional ways of literary criticism such as hermeneutics.¹⁴ While trying to trace the role of Miranda as reader of Viscardo’s letter I have left aside one important point: that neither the title

14. Since its appearance in 2009, the concept of “surface reading” has provoked debates around how humanities disciplines position themselves in the current neoliberal university. Critiques of Best and Marcus’s work point to the idea of how, in an effort to elude the search for deep meaning in a text, they sideline the political and ideological aspect both of texts and of literary and textual criticism. While I agree with this critique, in this work I envision a path to finding a compromise between the textual aspects of Viscardo’s letter and its political and ideological sphere. Jeffrey J. Williams (2015) offers a good analysis of what the concept of surface reading entails, and the valid critiques that it has received. In

page, the “Advertencia del editor”, or the footnotes were likely to play a significant role in one of the ways the letter circulated — by being read aloud — leaving materiality in an apparent second and less important place in comparison to the letter’s ideological and political relevance. Reading, in this sense, is much more than the relationship between people and the printed word. It is a bodily experience that involves the performance of reading aloud, the proximity to the others listening to the reading, and their reactions to such a performance.

Commenting on Miranda’s expedition to Coro, Venezuela, Ángel Grisanti recounts that “to further propagate the Viscardo-Miranda line, he ordered the *Carta* to be read daily in all churches and town meetings, and even had a copy placed in the central plaza of Coro along with other patriotic symbols: a flag, a coat-of-arms, and a portrait of Miranda himself” (1948, 119). There is a curious and contradictory message between reading Miranda’s intervention from his footnotes in the text, and from the location of his portrait in the central plaza of Coro. In one case, he operates in the margins as a shadow that is carefully controlling the impact of Viscardo’s words; in the other, his presence explicitly dominates the whole scene, signaling his intervention as not just the editor or translator, but as the carrier of the pro-independence message.¹⁵

The analysis in this study centers the printed circulation of the letter from the point of view of the production of the text. If surface reading advocates that we no longer assume that the meaning of texts lies in what they do not say, in what they hide or repress, my interest has been to emphasize that the surface of Viscardo’s letter points to the process of how it has been constituted and recreated as a text. If, by following Poblete, it is possible to affirm that “to read a text is to construct it, to make it signify within a social space” (2004, 179), this study has undertaken the task of pushing this assumption to its limits so as to show how a recorded, traceable reading can in fact construct a text, as opposed to the idea of a text as something that is already given.

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her latest book, Rita Felski (2015) traces these two approaches within the field of literary studies.

15. Both SORIANO (2018, 147) and RACINE (2003, 147) comment on the fact that when Miranda reached Coro, in 1806, he found the town almost empty. The daily readings, then, were probably more a plan rather than an actual event. For a recent review of Miranda’s failed expedition (known as the *Leander Expedition*) see ISEROV 2019.

Acknowledgments

All images are from King's College London, Foyle Special Collections Library.

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