

*Writing Back to Empire:  
Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán's  
'Letter to the Spanish Americans'*

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**J**UAN PABLO VISCARDO Y GUZMAN'S 'Letter to the Spanish Americans' (1791) begins with this stirring invocation to his 'brothers and countrymen':

Our near approach to the fourth century since the establishment of our ancestors in the New World, is an occurrence too remarkable, not seriously to interest our attention. The discovery of so great a portion of the earth is, and ever will be, to mankind, the most memorable event in their annals; but to us who are its inhabitants, and to our descendants, it is an object of greatest importance. The New World is our country; its history is ours; and it is in the latter, that duty and interest oblige us to examine our present situation with its causes, in order to determine us, after mature deliberation, to espouse with courage, the part dictated by the most indispensable of duties towards ourselves and our successors.<sup>1</sup>

Viscardo here alludes to several key themes that will be developed throughout the letter: a sense of history (more than three hundred years of New World history link Spanish Americans to the

1. Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, *Letter to the Spanish Americans: A Facsimile of the Second English edition* (London, 1810), introduction by D. A. Brading (Providence, R.I.: The John Carter Brown Library, 2002), 62–63. All quotations are taken from this facsimile edition.

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ancestors who preceded them and the successors who will follow); a sense of enlightened self-interest and duty that compels Spanish Americans to mature examination and deliberation of their present circumstances; and a sense of ownership and investment in the New World (we are struck by the repeated use of the collective possessive pronouns—our, ours, us, ourselves).

Viscardo's exhortation to his Spanish American brethren is carefully constructed through what we might call a rhetoric of immediacy and urgency that serves not only as a call to arms but also attempts to erase any trace of geographic and linguistic distance between the writer and his readers. Scholars have argued that Viscardo is an ideological precursor of Spanish American independence, and his letter has been enshrined as a text written by a Spanish American for Spanish Americans about Spanish America. At the same time, it is worth noting that Viscardo's writings are a prime example of the way in which key texts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were written, revised, translated, and disseminated in a complex context of cross-cultural interpretation and influence that the American Antiquarian Society's book history conference, 'Liberty/Egalité/Independencia: Print Culture, Enlightenment, and Revolution in the Americas, 1776–1826,' was organized to address. The trajectory of Viscardo and his letter—from Peru to Italy to England to France and back to the Americas—reminds us that, as Elizabeth Dillon has suggested, creole (or *criollo*) cosmopolitanism is as much part of the story of American independence as creole nationalism.

Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán was born in Arequipa, Peru, in 1748 to a family of modestly wealthy *criollos*, descendants of a Spaniard who had settled there in the early seventeenth century. His grandfather had served as lieutenant to a local *corregidor*, and the family (like many other *criollo* families) was related by marriage to Indian *kurakas*. Viscardo and his younger brother, who had both professed minor Jesuit orders, were forced into exile in

Italy after the 1767 expulsion of Jesuits from all Spanish territories. For years Spain held out to exiled Jesuits the possibility of returning to their homelands in exchange for the renunciation of their vows. But Viscardo's frequent entreaties to be able to return to Peru were rejected by Spanish authorities, and he grew increasingly disillusioned and bitter.<sup>2</sup>

He subsequently sought to affirm his Peruvian roots by developing connections with like-minded Europeans who were interested in the cause of Spanish American emancipation. After meeting John Udney, English consul in Livorno, Viscardo wrote him in 1781 to send news of the Tupac Amaru rebellion in the Andean highlands.<sup>3</sup> Viscardo's tone is that of a concerned and 'in the know' observer: 'Very much concerned to inform you completely about the situation and disorder in Peru, I take the liberty of adding to the news I have already communicated to you additional information I've garnered since returning from that city. Most is taken from a letter from America that I was able to read a short time ago, after careful investigation that I did in order to know its content which was hidden with much mystery.'<sup>4</sup> Viscardo goes to great lengths here to erase the distance that separates him from the actual events, and he bolsters his own involvement by referring to his investigations of unspecified mysteries. Viscardo quotes at length from the letter, stressing that Tupac

2. Carlos Deustua Pimentel, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán* (Lima: Editorial Brasa, 1994), 11-13. There is, however, no mention of Viscardo in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World. Historiographies, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001).

3. As Pagden has explained, this was a revolt sparked by Bourbon reforms that aimed to abolish the post of *corregidor* and do away with all taxes and customs dues—a convenient deflation of *criollo* interests and indigenous ones. See Anthony Pagden, 'Old Constitutions and Ancient Indian Empires: Juan Pablo Viscardo and the Languages of Revolution in Spanish America,' *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 127. David S. Shields's discussion of secret correspondence and verbal rumors in early filibusterism (included in this volume) offers insight into Viscardo's remarks to Udney.

4. Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, *Obras completas* (Lima: Banco de Crédito del Perú, 1988), 5.

Amaru had studied in San Martín, one of the premier Jesuit colleges of the region, and that he enjoyed the support of both the indigenous population and Spanish Peruvians: 'They say that he has exhorted the citizens [of Lima] to recognize him spontaneously without obliging him to resort to force of arms, as he would rather that not one drop of blood be spilt. . . .'<sup>5</sup>

Here and in later communications with Udney, Viscardo makes repeated efforts to convince the British consul and his compatriots to intervene on behalf of Spanish American independence. Among Viscardo's many proposals was a British expedition to seize the Peruvian port of Coquimbo, a land attack by a force of six thousand soldiers on Arequipa, and—probably his most celebrated scheme—an attack on the Spanish empire in the River Plate region. Viscardo and his brother eventually moved to London with their travel expenses paid by Udney's superior in the office of the Secretary of State who had been impressed by either the daring or the lunacy of Viscardo's various schemes. This was part of a larger strategy (suggested by Francisco de Miranda to British Prime Minister William Pitt) of recruiting exiled Jesuits both as a source of information about Spanish America and as a means of influencing public opinion.<sup>6</sup> Of course, these disaffected Jesuits had plenty of baggage (despite the fact that they were prohibited by the expulsion edict from carrying much with them into exile). One official from the British Foreign Office reported that Viscardo 'is a very strange and mistrustful man, albeit sincere and honest and appears to be very spoilt and careful of himself.'<sup>7</sup>

5. Viscardo, *Obras completas*, 5.

6. Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816) had left Venezuela in the 1770s to devote himself to revolutionary causes in North America and France. Later, with financial support from British government and in collaboration with James Mills, he tried unsuccessfully to spark revolutionary movements in Spanish America, arguing (like King) that Britain must come to the aid of the Spanish American independence efforts in order to counteract the pernicious influence of the French. See Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda, a Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003); François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias. Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (México: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992)

7. D. A. Brading, intro. to Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans* (2002), 10.

Viscardo lived in London from June 1782 to March 1784, during which time he continued to press his case. But the opportunity for British intervention in Spanish America was lost: Tupac Amaru was eventually defeated, and the 1783 Peace of Versailles ended the war between Spain and England on terms that left the British little disposed to meddle in Spanish affairs. After two years a discouraged Viscardo found himself once again in Italy; however, he returned to London sometime in late 1790 or early 1791 and would remain there until his death in 1798. During those years he wrote continually on the issue of Spanish American politics, and even as he lay dying he received a visit by Rufus King, the American minister in London. King's agenda was that he was that he too was lobbying for Anglo-American intervention in Spanish America (in large part to forestall French meddling). In King's own words: 'if it is not assisted by England, its work will be done by France, who will introduce her detestable principles, divide it into small Republics, put bad men at their head, and by these means facilitate her meditated Enterprises against us.'<sup>8</sup>

The intersection of interests that come together around the deathbed of this odd and passionate Peruvian Jesuit is fascinating (though the triangulation of Spanish, French, and British interests in Europe and the Americas leads to many such scenarios, reminding us that the history of the Americas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries cannot be understood separately from the history of Europe, nor can a single national story be told without linking it to those of other nations and peoples). Before he died, Viscardo entrusted his 'parcel of papers' to King, with 'a request that [he] would have it published for his credit and the happiness of mankind.'<sup>9</sup> King soon after shared the papers with Miranda, the international revolutionary figure and acquaintance of Viscardo's (despite the Peruvian's deathbed fulminations about Miranda's possible treachery to him and to the revolutionary

8. Rufus King, quoted by Brading, intro., 3.

9. Brading, intro., 3.

cause). Of all the Viscardo papers that King shared with him, Miranda chose to publish only the 'Letter,' no doubt because its brevity, focus, and exalted tone served his purposes at the time. In an introductory note to the first English edition, Miranda explained: 'The following interesting Letter, from an American Spaniard to his countrymen, is translated from a French copy printed conformable with the manuscript, written by the author himself, who died in London in the month of February 1798. The Translator begs, at this highly interesting moment, to present to the British nation this valuable little tract; which came to his hands only a short time since, and which does equal honor to the writer, as an enlightened patriot, politician, and Christian.'<sup>10</sup> Miranda functioned as agent/editor/translator for Viscardo, disseminating the 'Letter to the Spanish Americans' in a number of forms and venues. The rest of Viscardo's papers ended up back with Rufus King and were donated to the library of the New-York Historical Society, where they languished in complete obscurity until they were 'discovered' by Merle E. Simmons 184 years later (a discovery to which I'll return later).

Miranda began by publishing the 'Lettre aux espagnols américains' as a forty-one-page pamphlet in French in 1799, shortly after Viscardo's death. Until Merle E. Simmons' discovery of the cache of Viscardo papers in the New York Historical Society, it was commonly assumed that Viscardo had originally composed all his works in French, as there were no extant manuscripts in Spanish.<sup>11</sup> This is a surprising assumption, perhaps, but

10. 'Lettre aux espagnols américains' 1799 Francisco de Miranda, 'Review of "Lettre aux Espagnols-Américains, par Viscardo," extracted from the Edinburgh review for Jan. 1809,' *South American emancipation: Documents, historical and explanatory, shewing the designs which have been in progress, and the exertions made by General Miranda, for the attainment of that object during the last twenty-five years*, ed. J. M. Antepara (London, 1810), 96.

11. Merle E. Simmons, 'The Papers of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán in the Library of the New York Historical Society,' *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Literature and Romanticism in Honor of John Clarkson Dowling*, Douglas and Linda Jane Barnette, ed. (Newark, Del: Juan de la Cuesta, 1985), 1-15. Burton Van Name Edwards, 'Bibliographical Note,' *Letter to the Spanish Americans* (2002), 89. Merle E. Simmons, *Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán. Precursor de la Independencia Hispanoamericana* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 1983).

before we attribute it to excessive Francophilia, we should remember that exiled Jesuits like Viscardo moved easily and by necessity among several languages—Spanish, French, Latin, Italian—and had in some cases mastered indigenous languages as well. The original Spanish manuscript of the 'Letter to the Spanish Americans' is missing, but comparative study of various versions of the French text, as well as correspondence between Viscardo and James Bland Burges, the undersecretary of state in the British Foreign Office in the early 1790s, permitted Simmons to conclude that the letter had originally been redacted in Spanish and later translated by Viscardo himself into French.<sup>12</sup>

Translation, then, is an important part of the story of Viscardo's letter, as well as an often-overlooked aspect of the circulation of enlightened thought and revolutionary ideas in the Atlantic world. Silvio Zavala, in his classic work on how America figures in eighteenth-century French thinking and cultural production, stresses the importance of French translations of Spanish colonial histories, both in terms of the information disseminated through those translations and the role played by the prefatory comments of editors and translators, who provided a context for the presentation of the Spanish colonial project to French-speaking readers.<sup>13</sup> Other changes were incorporated into the texts themselves. For example, Miranda's 1799 publication of Viscardo's 'Letter' was a revised version of the French-language text Viscardo had

12. Edwards, 'Bibliographical Note,' 89–91. Edwards also suggests that the 1799 French translation was most likely printed in London by the same press that printed the 1801 Spanish translation (despite the false imprint of Philadelphia as the place of publication, a common strategy at the time).

13. Silvio Zavala, *América en el espíritu francés del siglo XVIII* (1949; reprint, México: El Colegio Nacional, 1998), 221ss. Zavala cites Oviedo's *Historia natural y general de las Indias*, Cortés letters to Charles V, Las Casas's *Brevísima relación* (of course) and, moving to the eighteenth century, accounts by Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa. These and other observations on Spanish conquest and colonial administration, natural history, the nature of the indigenous and *criollo* population were also translated into other languages such as English, Dutch, and German, permitting a lively debate that spanned several continents and several languages and that continued into the nineteenth century. For an exhaustive account of these debates, see Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (1955; reprint, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

given to King. The revisions included the addition of a passage from the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (legendary defender of America's indigenous population) and a list of exiled Jesuits living in Italy.<sup>14</sup> 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 (among whom, of course, could be counted the author of the letter). Miranda added references to key moments in Spanish American history that resonated with larger themes Viscardo develops, as can be seen in the opening words quoted earlier in this essay. In many instances the circulation of translated documents served, like reprints of newspaper articles, to circumvent Spanish efforts at censorship and must be taken into account in any discussion of emerging print culture.

Miranda also oversaw the letter's translation into Spanish in 1801 and into English in 1808, when it was published along with a brief treatise by a 'William Burke' (probably James Mill) on British policy in South America.<sup>15</sup> This publication was an important element in the collaboration efforts of Miranda and Mill in an effort to persuade the British to intervene in South America—efforts that were to prove futile, as we have seen. When Miranda set sail for Venezuela in 1806 to initiate what would be a failed revolutionary expedition there, he made certain that the '*Leandre*' had a small printing press on board so that he would be able to print copies of a 'Carta a los españoles americanos' for distribution upon landing. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of the Venezuelan coast settlement of Coro, where Miranda came ashore, were for the most part illiterate slaves who were not in a position to fully appreciate Viscardo's fiery prose and even less to read it as

14. The second English edition omitted these additions and is thus more faithful to the Viscardo original than Miranda's version.

15. For a fascinating account of Miranda's relationship with Mill, see Mario Rodríguez, 'Mario Rodríguez, *William Burke* and *Francisco de Miranda*. *The Word and the Deed in Spanish America's Emancipation* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994).

a call to arms.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Viscardo's 'Letter to the Spanish Americans' was read and copied and circulated among its intended audience, who responded to its passionate recapitulation of *criollo* complaints that had been voiced for over a century.

Before I turn to those complaints, I'd like to discuss briefly the critical reception of Viscardo's writing—an interesting story reflecting a number of historical and academic sub-fields. One such sub-field is the history of the Jesuits in the Americas and their 1767 expulsion. Miguel Batllori has studied the Hispano-Italian culture of Jesuit exiles in one important book and tellingly retains Viscardo's Jesuit honorific in the title of yet another: *El Abate Viscardo. Historia y mito de la intervención de los jesuitas en la independencia de Hispanoamérica*. A second sub-field is the canon of Peruvian national history to which Rubén Vargas Ugarte and a host of more recent commentators have contributed.<sup>17</sup> These scholars tend to promote Viscardo as a precursor or promoter of Americanist revolutionary thought, giving him ideological pride of place along with Miranda and Bolívar—perhaps in part to compensate for the belated achievement of Peruvian independence. Finally we have broader considerations of the background for, and evolution of, Spanish American independence movements in the Americas and in Europe by scholars such as Brading.

Here, as I have already mentioned, Merle E. Simmons has played a key role. In a 1985 article and a subsequent book-length study he explains with understandable satisfaction how he located the missing Viscardo papers, for which historians had searched for decades, in Box 81 of the Rufus King Collection in the New-York

16. It was here in Coro that the infiltration of revolutionary ideas from Haiti had led in 1797 to an unsuccessful conspiracy of mulattos and black slaves. See D. A. Brading, *The First America The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 604.

17. See Javier de Belaunde Ruiz de Somocurcio, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán: Ideólogo y promotor de la independencia hispanoamericana* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2002); Deustua Pimentel, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán*; Luis Valera, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán (1748–1798): El hombre y su tiempo*, 3 vols. (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 1999); and Gustavo Vergara Arias, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán. Primer precursor Ideológico de la Emancipación Hispanoamericana* (Lima: La Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1963).

Historical Society. Like most Peruvian scholars, Simmons emphasizes the letter's importance, citing the Mexican Carlos Pereyra, who declared that Viscardo 'wrote a document that could be called the 'Declaration of Independence of Spanish America'.<sup>18</sup> A latter-day Miranda, Simmons functions not only as editor and translator of the 400 manuscript pages found in the King collection, but also as a polemical agent who argues for a central role for Viscardo in the history of Spanish American independence: 'No other manipulator of the pen approximates him whether for antiquity as a conspirator, for the abundance of his writings, or for the richness and variety of his ideas.'<sup>19</sup>

At least one reviewer of the Simmons publication, Timothy Anna, felt that these claims were overstated, even hyperbolic, given that few people seem to have read Viscardo's writings at the time, and even Miranda seems not to have been overly persuaded by them (despite his willingness to pass them out to the unwitting citizens of Coro). Anna argues that Viscardo's faith in Britain was misplaced, and he objects to his characterization of three centuries of colonial rule as 'ingratitude, injustice, slavery, and desolation.'<sup>20</sup> Perhaps more significantly, he questions, 'Does writing down ideas in manuscripts that, unfortunately, end up not being read again for nearly two centuries make one a major figure in the history of ideas?'<sup>21</sup> Anna is right, I suppose, to call into question nationalist histories' obsession with the 'great man' or the founding father, or to point out that Thomas Paine (with whom Viscardo y Guzman has frequently been compared) had a clear revolutionary impact that the Peruvian

18. Merle E. Simmons, *Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán: Precursor de la Independencia Hispanoamericana* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 1983), 5 (my translation)

19. Simmons, *Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán*, 141-42.

20. Here we might respond that Viscardo is writing within the Las Casian tradition of hyperbolic enumeration. Indeed, Anna refers indirectly to the influence of Las Casas when he asks, 'How are we to respond to a polemicist whose primary points added new passion and misinformation to the Black Legend of Spain in America for a British cabinet that already believed the worst allegations?' Timothy E. Anna, 'Review of Merle E. Simmons, "Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzman: Precursor de la independencia hispanoamericana,"' *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65 (1985): 563.

21. Anna, 'Review of Simmons, *Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo*,' 564.

never had.<sup>22</sup> However, in order to appreciate fully Viscardo's importance in the history of Spanish American emancipation, it may be helpful to think about print culture as only one element in the complex process of the production and reception of revolutionary ideas.

I will now turn to a discussion of the salient issues that Viscardo raises in the 'Letter' as he resorts to a number of different strategies to awaken the revolutionary spirit of his fellow Spanish Americans. First, and not surprisingly, Viscardo appeals to a providentialist interpretation of the 1492 'discovery,' but giving it a new twist:

It would be a blasphemy to imagine, that the Supreme Benefactor of man has permitted the discovery of the New World, merely that a small number of imbecile knaves might / always be at liberty to desolate it; and that they should incessantly have the odious pleasure of stripping millions of men, who have given them no cause of complaint, of essential rights received from his divine hand to imagine that his eternal wisdom wished to deprive the remainder of mankind of the immense advantages which, in the order of nature, so great an event ought to procure for them, and to condemn them to wish with a groan, that the New World had remained for ever unknown.<sup>23</sup>

Divine intervention in the discovery of America here represents not a blank check but rather a debt to be repaid through good governance and the procurement of essential rights for its inhabitants. To that end Viscardo proposes a second discovery: 'Let us throw open a second time America to all our brother inhabitants of this globe, from whence ingratitude, injustice, and the most senseless avarice have exiled us; the recompense will not be less to us than to them.'<sup>24</sup>

22. Another reviewer of the Simmons publication concludes: 'The picture of Viscardo which emerges from the pages of these documents seems far more reminiscent of the prototypical "ambivalent revolutionary" of Peru described elsewhere by John Lynch and Timothy Anna rather than the hostile and bitter paranoiac sketched by Father Miguel Batllori among others.' Leon G. Campbell, 'Review of Merle E. Simmons, *Los escritos de Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzman. Precursor de la independencia hispanoamericana*,' *The Americas* 42 (1985): 272.

23. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans* 82-83.

24. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 83.

He also invokes the traditional concept of Spanish honor by challenging his compatriots to match the revolutionary efforts of the Anglo-Americans:

The valour with which the English colonies of America have fought for the liberty, which they gloriously enjoy, covers our indolence with shame; we have yielded to them the palm with which they have been the first to crown the New World by their sovereign independence. Add the eagerness of the Courts of Spain and France to assist the cause / of the English Americans; it accuses us of insensibility; let at least the feelings of honour be roused—by outrages which have endured for three hundred years.<sup>25</sup>

Lurking behind much of Viscardo's inflammatory rhetoric, I would argue, is an ever-present sense of outrage stemming from his exile as a Jesuit. In fact, he frequently uses 'exile' as a metaphor to express a general sense of alienation and estrangement among all *criollos* arising from Spanish abuses in the New World. Moreover, Viscardo makes several specific references to the Jesuit expulsions, both in the body of the letter and in a series of footnotes. Here is one such reference: 'The supreme economical power, and the motives reserved in the royal bosom (expressions which cannot fail to astonish posterity) discovery at last the vanity of all the reveries of mankind about the eternal principles of justice, on the rights and duties of nature and of society, have suddenly displayed their irresistible force on more than *five thousand* Spanish citizens.'<sup>26</sup>

Charles III, in the 1767 expulsion edict, had prohibited the exiled Jesuits from writing about the circumstances of the expulsion itself. In response, they recreated Spanish America in their writings as both the earthly paradise from which they have been expelled and a utopian future, ever more sharply differentiated

25. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 83–84.

26. The reference to 'motives reserved in the royal bosom' paraphrases Charles III's expulsion edict. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 75; see also 71. Viscardo also writes: 'The expulsion and the ruin of the Jesuits had, according to every appearance, no other motives than the report of their riches. . . .' (78).

from a European past. For these Jesuits, as we see in Viscardo's letter, *patria* must be a rhetorical construction. According to Miguel Batllori, the New World historiography they produced, tinged by nostalgia and ambivalently positioned between Europe and America, served as a foundation for an emerging sense of *criollo* identity.<sup>27</sup>

Viscardo, exiled and peripatetic, suffered from a condition that is marked by pathos and possibility. In the 'Letter,' he speaks to Spanish Americans in general about all of Spanish America, but with frequent recourse to firsthand knowledge and nostalgia for his native Peru. For this reason, Viscardo's use of history in the letter is often couched in genealogical terms. We see this as he explains the relationship between Spanish Americans and Spain: 'Nature has separated us from Spain by immense seas; a son who should find himself at a similar distance from his father would without doubt be a fool, if in the conduct / of his least concerns, he always waited for the decision of the father. The son is set free by natural right: and out of a numerous people, who do not depend for any thing on another people, of whom they have no need, to be subjected to them like the vilest slaves.'<sup>28</sup> But Viscardo also looked to genealogy and family relations in quoting extensively from the *Comentarios reales*, using El Inca Garcilaso's defense of 'those who were born in this country, of Indian mothers and Spanish fathers' against false accusations of treachery and rebellion.<sup>29</sup> Here Viscardo was able to forge a link between sixteenth-century Spanish abuses and the recent uprisings of Tupac Amaru in Peru. In appropriating and allying himself with

27. Miguel Batllori, *El Abate Viscardo: Historia y mito de la intervención de los jesuitas en la independencia de Hispanoamérica* (Caracas: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1953), 578.

28. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 81–82.

29. Miranda would have been especially interested in Viscardo's references to the Inca past, as his proposal to reestablish the Inca Empire under the protection of British consul laid out in the fragment, 'Projet de constitution pour les colonies hispano-américaines,' is a bizarre mix of medieval governance and Inca imperial practice. See Campbell, 'Review of Merle E. Simmons,' 272; Pagden, 'Old Constitutions and Ancient Indian Empires,' 131.

an indigenous past, Viscardo was performing a sleight of hand used by other eighteenth-century writers such as Clavigero in his ancient *History of Mexico*.<sup>30</sup>

Commerce is another unifying theme in the 'Letter.' Viscardo complains bitterly about the penury to which *criollos* are reduced as a result of Spanish mismanagement. He quotes Juan and Ulloa on the scarcity of wine that had the effect of limiting the occasions on which Mass could be celebrated—a wonderful example of the convergence of revolutionary and traditional zeal.<sup>31</sup> America's potential for commercial riches was presented as an opportunity for defraying the costs of the revolutionary projects Viscardo is proposing, and also as the glue that will unite an independent America with the larger world: 'We should then alone frequent the ports of Spain, and become masters of her commerce, of her riches and of her destiny.'<sup>32</sup> This is a theme of enlightened political economists that we find elsewhere in Viscardo's writings such as his essay 'Peace and the Happiness of the Next Century,' written just before his death.<sup>33</sup>

Viscardo's challenge is to help his readers imagine and embrace new political identities as familiar and legitimate. To do this he appeals to Spanish medieval tradition justifying popular resistance to an unjust king: 'After the memorable epoch of the arbitrary power and injustice of the last Gothic kings, which brought on the ruin of their empire and of the Spanish nation, our ancestors, in reestablishing the kingdom and its government, thought

30. Abbé Francesco Saverie Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1804). Pagden observes that 'Independence for Viscardo was to be an act of restoration, a restoration of the political values of Castile, a restoration of the culture of the ancient Indian world, and in many cases, a restoration of the Garcilassan project for a multiracial community.' Pagden, 'Old Constitutions and Ancient Indian Empires,' 129.

31. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 66; see Brading, *The First America*, 536.

32. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 80.

33. Onuf explains with reference to Jefferson: 'The notion of reciprocal benefits in mutually beneficial exchange was particularly attractive to colonists who chafed under a mercantilist regime that they believed enriched the metropolitan core at the expense of the provincial periphery.' Peter S. Onuf, "'Empire for Liberty': Center and Peripheries in Postcolonial America,' *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 309. See also Pagden, 'Old Constitutions and Ancient Indian Empires,' 117; Deustua Pimentel, *Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán*, 6-7.

only of guarding against the absolute power to which our kings have always aspired.<sup>34</sup> By privileging medieval constitutionalism, Viscardo is able to trace a continuum from the old to the new and propose revolution not as disorder but rather as a kind of restoration of order.<sup>35</sup>

Moving beyond his immediate audience of Spanish American *criollos*, Viscardo concludes by envisioning a new 'reign of reason, of justice, and of humanity. . .' open to all—even the 'wise and virtuous' Spaniards who will join a host of others:

What an agreeable and affecting spectacle will the fertile shores of America present, covered with men from all nations exchanging the productions of their country against ours! How many from among them, flying oppression or misery, will come to enrich us by their industry and their knowledge, and to repair our exhausted population? Thus would America unite the extremities of the earth; and her inhabitants, united by a common interest, would form one GREAT FAMILY OF BROTHERS.<sup>36</sup>

This is a curious call that combines echoes of Garcilasan universalism and an anticipation of nineteenth-century calls by Sarmiento and Alberdi for European immigration to revitalize and colonize the pampas—reminding us once again of the vital link played by late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers in the evolution of a discourse of Spanish American identity.

In conclusion, I'd like to return to the title of this essay, 'Writing Back to Empire.' I use the phrase 'writing back' in both contestatory and chronological terms, and 'empire' to refer to a number of historical moments. Viscardo wrote back to the British Empire in hopes that it will support him and his fellow 'Spanish

34. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 73.

35. Brading, *The First America*, 539; Onuf argues that Jeffersonian Republicans do something similar by incorporating enlightened thinking on behalf of an antique imperial vision: 'As reform-minded proponents of an idealized world order, made fully and finally compatible with natural rights, free exchange, the progressive diffusion of civilization, and the rights of self-government within and among confederated states, Jeffersonian-Republican imperialists looked backward.' (Onuf, 'Empire for Liberty,' 303.)

36. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 85.

Americans' in their quest for independence from Spain. He wrote back to the Spanish Empire, denouncing its colonial history as one of 'ingratitude, injustice, slavery, and desolation.'<sup>37</sup> But he also writes back to the Inca Empire in search of legitimizing models for the future he envisioned for an independent Spanish America. In doing so, he gave voice to *criollo* aspirations that would continue to resonate until political independence was finally achieved.

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37. Viscardo, *Letter to the Spanish Americans*, 63.

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