

Note / Nota

*Jicotencal: An Enigma is Solved*¹

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In 1826, the first historical novel written in Spanish, *Jicotencal*, was published in Philadelphia.² The exact circumstances surrounding its publication have remained unclear. The mystery is partially attributable to the decision of the author to remain anonymous. Given the literary and historical import of the book, there have been abundant scholarly conjectures about who was the author of the *Jicotencal*. A number of theories coalesced eventually in three kinds of reeditions of the novel: one that keeps the author anonymous and two that attribute the authorship to, respectively, Félix Varela and José María Heredia.

Beyond these theories, to solve the apparent unsolvable issue, it is necessary to delve into the editorial history of *Jicotencal* with the help of primary and secondary

¹ The author wishes to thank the team at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, and Eri Mizukane, at the Kislak Center for Special Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania, who allowed access to copies of *Jicotencal* for this research.

² *Jicotencal* (Filadelfia: Imprenta de Guillermo Stavely 1826) copy available at the Rare Book and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, call number 819.6 J56.

sources contemporaneous with the publication. This article identifies for the first time the real author, Cayetano Lanuza, and the true editors of the book, the New York firm of Lanuza, Mendía & Cía, on the basis of documentary evidence.

The main source of evidence is the novel itself—the two volumes of the editio princeps of *Jicotencal*. A number of copies are extant, safeguarded in collections of universities and institutions of learning in the Americas and Europe. Three paratextual details of these volumes are fundamental: the imprint, the copyright notice, and the distribution and publication announcements that appear at the end of the book. By supplementing these details with secondary sources, the links of *Jicotencal* with the house of Lanuza, Mendía & Cía become evident.

The distribution note mentions that *Jicotencal* was available in the houses of F. Merino and J. Laval, in Philadelphia, and the house of Lanuza y Mendía, in New York. The publication note is even more relevant, since it establishes the books in stock found in the house of Lanuza, Mendía & Cía with a list of titles published by that firm. *Jicotencal* appears at the end of the list. The fact that the book has been published by Lanuza, Mendía & Cía is made evident by such inclusion:

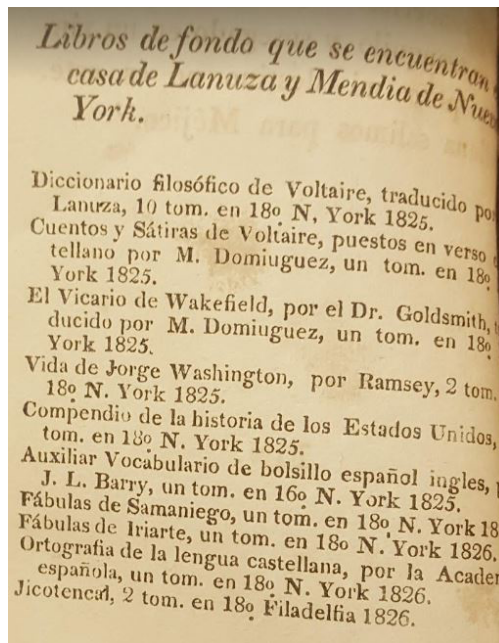


Fig. 1—Books in stock at Lanuza, Mendía & Cía, last page of *Jicotencal*.

The data in the imprint seemingly contradicts this assertion, stating that the novel was published in Philadelphia, in 1826, in the “Imprenta de Guillermo Stavelly” (“Printing house of Guillermo Stavelly”). However, this contradiction is just a mirage. A common belief about books published in the early nineteenth century states that the printing

shop noted in the imprint is the publishing house responsible for the book. This is not always true, as the example of *Jicotencal* proves.³ William Stavely acted in its regard simply as a printer. The real editors are Lanuza, Mendía & Cía, a fact that is confirmed not only from the mentioned list of books included in the volumes, but also from two previously unknown documents.

The first of these documents is a handwritten note inscribed in the first volume of the copy of *Jicotencal* kept in the collections of the University of Pennsylvania. The note reads: “Mr. Duponceau with the editors best regards Lanuza Mendía & Cía.” The person to whom this dedication is addressed is the scholar Pierre-Étienne Du Ponceau (also known as Peter Steven Du Ponceau) a resident of Philadelphia at the time:⁴

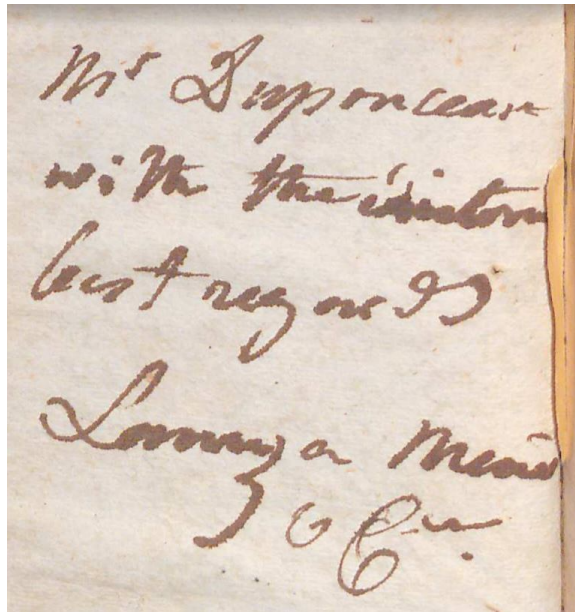


Fig. 2—Handwritten note in front leaf of *Jicotencal*, University of Pennsylvania libraries.

Another document corroborates the same fact. An advertisement published in 1827 includes a list very similar to that of the 1826 “books in stock,” and confirms that the house of Lanuza, Mendía & Cía has published *Jicotencal*.⁵

³ Another good example is the book *La independencia de la Costa Firme justificada por Thomas Paine treinta años ha*, by Manuel García de la Serna. For more than two centuries the printers, T&J Palmer were considered as its editors, whereas its true publisher was the bookseller and librarian Jean Louis Fernagus de Gelone. Vid. María Helena Barrera-Agarwal, “Fernagus y La independencia de la Costa Firme”, accessed on September 15, 2018. <http://www.mediato.com.ec/opinion/mhbarrera-fernagus/>

⁴ *Jicotencal* (Filadelfia: Imprenta de Guillermo Stavely, 1826) copy available at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Rare Book Collection, University of Pennsylvania, call number 868 J563.

⁵ “Advertisement”, *The National Gazette*, No. 2335 (1828): 3.

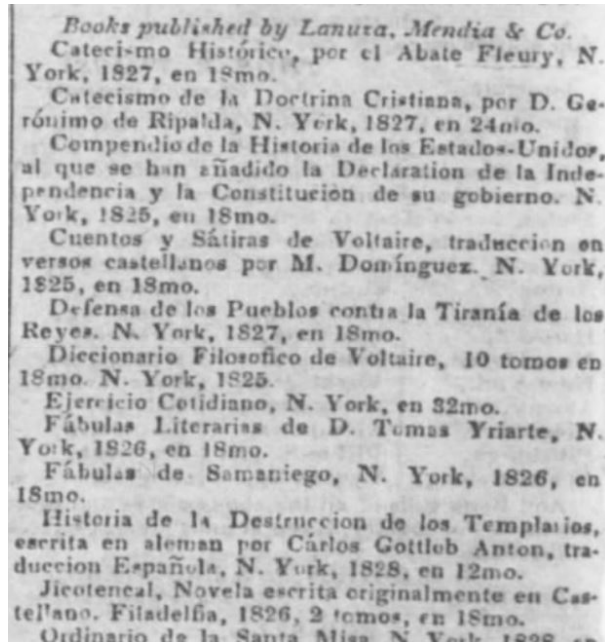


Fig. 3—Lanuza, Mendía & Cía advertisement in *The National Gazette*, 1828.

The link with Lanuza, Mendía & Cía is also confirmed by the copyright notice of the book. It states that it was registered by Frederick Huttner, before the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, on August 18, 1826. The presence of Huttner has always been considered a mystery, due to the absence of evidence linking him to Stavely’s establishment or another printing or publishing house. That mystery is solved in this article: Huttner was a partner with Lanuza, Mendía & Cía, as proven by the notice of dissolution of the partnership, published in 1829:⁶

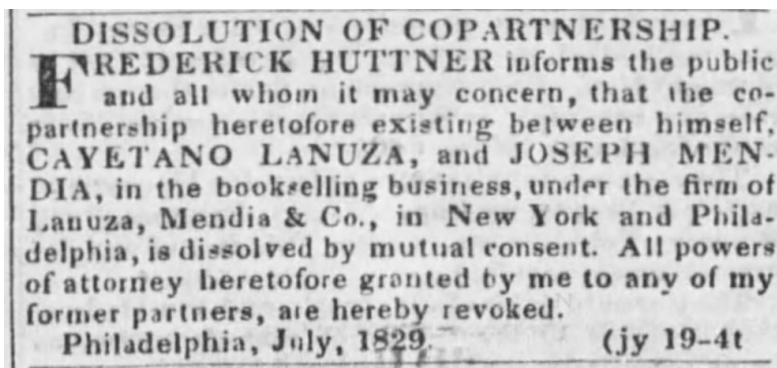


Fig. 4 Dissolution of partnership legal notice, *The National Gazette*, 1829.

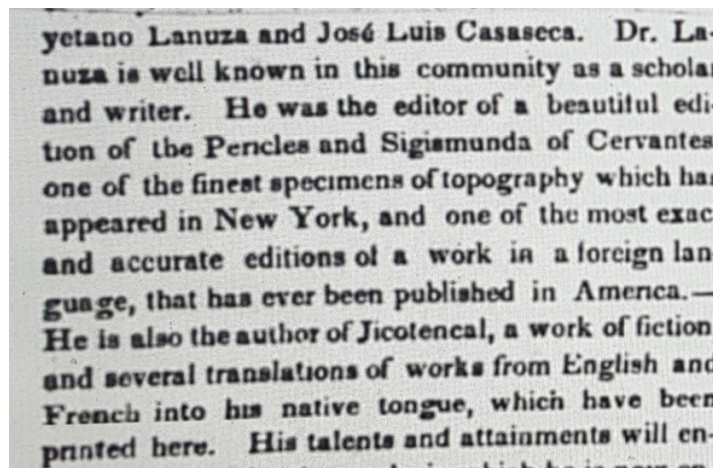
The editorial responsibility of Lanuza, Mendía & Cía. is, therefore, clear. In order to attribute the authorship of *Jicotencal* to Cayetano Lanuza, one of the partners of the firm,

⁶ “Dissolution of Copartnership”, *The National Gazette*, No. 2626 (1829): 3.

it is necessary to recourse to the testimony of one of his contemporaries, William Cullen Bryant. Almost all the studies about *Jicotencal* remark how, in 1827, Bryant published the first review of the novel in the *United States Review and Literary Gazette*.⁷ Two documents, whose existence and importance are made public for the first time in this this article, must be noted in this regard.

The first document is a letter sent by Bryant to his friend George Folsom, dated in New York, on November 9, 1826. In it, Bryant states: “For your next I shall have an article on ‘Jicotencal a Mexican Tale’ by a Spaniard of this city.”⁸ From that brief mention, related to the review that was to be published by Folsom, it is apparent that Bryant was aware of the identity of the author of *Jicotencal*.

Twelve years later, in 1838, that knowledge is made public on the editorial page of the *New York Evening Post*, of which Bryant is editor at the time. The occasion that gives rise to the text is a note on the expected publication of a new magazine, *La Mariposa*, that Cayetano Lanuza was editing in Cuba along with José Luis Casaseca. Commenting favorably on this news, the note states that “Dr. Lanuza is well known in this community as a scholar and writer. [...] He is also the author of *Jicotencal*, a work of fiction”:⁹



yetano Lanuza and José Luis Casaseca. Dr. Lanuza is well known in this community as a scholar and writer. He was the editor of a beautiful edition of the *Pericles and Sigismunda* of Cervantes one of the finest specimens of topography which has appeared in New York, and one of the most exact and accurate editions of a work in a foreign language, that has ever been published in America.— He is also the author of *Jicotencal*, a work of fiction and several translations of works from English and French into his native tongue, which have been printed here. His talents and attainments will en-

Fig. 5—Note about *La Mariposa* publication, *The Evening Post*, 1838.

Although the note is not signed, the fact that it appears on the editorial page of the newspaper edited by Bryant allows a reasonable inference that he was the author. The

⁷ William Cullen Bryant, “*Jicotencal*”, *United States Review and Literary Gazette*, No. 5 (1827): 336-346.

⁸ William Cullen Bryant, *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*, Volume 1, Ed. by Thomas G. Voss, New York: Fordham University Press, 1975, 224.

⁹ “Note”, *The Evening Post*, No. 11038 (1838): 2.

case that presents Cayetano Lanuza as the author of *Jicotencal* is thus formulated. Unlike the attributions of authorship to Varela and Heredia, this attribution is based on clear, consistent, and verifiable documentary evidence. This attribution makes it indispensable to bring to light the memory and life story of Cayetano Lanuza, scholar, translator, and editor, one of the many forgotten pioneers of the Spanish book trade in the United States.

Works Cited

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- “Note.” *The Evening Post*, No. 11038 (1838).