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The Early Reception of *Romeo and Juliet* in Spain[1]

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Abstract:

The tragic story of the star-crossed lovers of Verona was first presented to Spanish theatergoers during the early decades of the nineteenth century. During this period Shakespeare was largely unknown to the general public. The article examines the early reception of Shakespeare in Spain focusing on one iconic play, *Romeo and Juliet*, and its earliest adaptations: Dionisio Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803) and Manuel Bernardino García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* (1817). At a time when the Spanish public was captivated by the allure displayed by adaptations of *Othello*, this article argues that the adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* composed by Solís and García Suelto also enjoyed popularity, as evidenced by their several revivals and the prestige of some of the actors and actresses who intervened in the productions. The article examines the historical, political and sociocultural factors that contributed to the composition and popularity of *Julia y Romeo* and *Romeo y Julieta*. Historical contextualization is combined with an analysis of the sources and main features of each adaptation. The article also offers a detailed account of the reception and performance history of both plays on the Spanish stage from 1803 to 1836. These neoclassical versions remain –up to this day– largely unknown texts, but they deserve close attention since both plays strongly contributed to the gradual dissemination of Shakespeare and his work in Spain.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; nineteenth century; reception; performance

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1. Introduction

René Weis, editor of the latest Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, affirms that "Shakespeare's play about Romeo and Juliet of Verona is probably the most famous story of doomed young love ever written" (2012, 1). Nowadays, very few individuals would disagree with this statement. Nonetheless, in the context of early nineteenth century Spanish culture, while the story of "Romeo and Juliet of Verona" was not entirely unknown, hardly anyone at the time associated the tragic lovers of Verona with Shakespeare. This article focuses, precisely, on the early reception of *Romeo and Juliet* in Spain at a time, the early decades of the nineteenth century, when the Bard was a largely unknown figure. The play selected is particularly relevant to Spanish culture because, as Pujante and Gregor observe, "after *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* is, with *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's most translated play in Spain" (2017a, 102).

The main aim of this article is to offer a detailed analysis of the different circumstances –historical, political, socio-cultural and literary– that played a decisive role in the early reception of the story of the lovers of Verona in Spain, focusing on two largely unexplored texts: Dionisio Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803) and Manuel Bernardino García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* (1817).[2] Both neoclassical plays constitute the earliest adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* written for the Spanish stage. As adaptation studies has shown, searching for the adequate term to refer to an adaptation is not always a straightforward task. The list is never-ending: rewriting, imitation, appropriation, remediation, hypertext, version, afterlife, etc. The most appropriate category to define Solís's *Julia y Romeo* and García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* is *refundición*, a term typically used in Spanish theatre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kirby describes it as follows: "a *refundición* is a play based on and inspired by a certain text, from an earlier period, that a given author has rewritten with such modifications that it results in another" (1989, 1005).[3] This definition is perfectly suitable to describe

2 Even though this article focuses on the early reception of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the story of the lovers of Verona, derived from the Italian sources of the play, was present in Spain during the Golden Age: *Castelvines y Monteses* by Lope de Vega (composed between 1606-1612), *Los bandos de Verona* [The Factions of Verona] by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla (first performed in 1640; published in 1645), and *Los amantes de Verona* [The lovers of Verona] by Cristóbal de Rozas or Rosas (published in 1666). For further information on the circulation of *Romeo and Juliet* in Europe see: *Romeo and Juliet in European Culture* (Cerdá, Delabastita, and Gregor 2017), and "The story of what might have been: Interrogating Romeo and Juliet under the Portuguese dictatorship" (Rayner 2021).

3 All translations are mine. "Una refundición es una obra basada e inspirada en cierto texto de una época anterior en la cual un autor determinado ha rehecho la obra con tales

the neoclassical adaptations *Julia y Romeo* and *Romeo y Julieta*. Neither Solís nor García Suelto used Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as a source text. Instead, the adaptors borrowed –and altered– themes, characters and ideas from previous rewritings of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, originating two plays which can be clearly identified as new versions of the story of Romeo and Juliet of Verona.

As Hutcheon asserts, "adaptation is a form of intertextuality" (2006, 8). Nowadays, any reference to *Romeo and Juliet* inevitably brings to one's mind Shakespeare's tragedy. Nonetheless, in Spain, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, hardly any individual would have been able to relate *Romeo and Juliet* –either the play or the characters– to Shakespeare. Not even the first authors who rewrote the play for the Spanish stage, Solís and García Suelto, had read Shakespeare's tragedy. Instead, their *refundiciones* draw on eighteenth-century versions of *Romeo and Juliet* directly derived from the Continent. In fact, neither Solís's *Julia y Romeo* nor García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* can be considered self-conscious rewritings of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. As Genette observed, "any text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms" (cited in Sanders 2016, 15). In the context of early nineteenth-century theatrical culture, the hypotext, that is, the source text, is never a Shakespearean play. And yet, "through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" –as Hutcheon (2006, 8) remarks– we can regard both *Julia y Romeo* and *Romeo y Julieta* as adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*.

An analysis of Solís's *Julia y Romeo* and García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* – both on the page and on the stage– is crucial to understand the relevance of neoclassical adaptations in the making of *Romeo and Juliet* and, in turn, Shakespeare in Spain. Indeed, as this article seeks to demonstrate, adaptations played a fundamental role in the dissemination of Shakespeare. Therefore, this article aims to contribute, not only to the study of the reception of Shakespeare in Spain, but also to the larger ever-growing field of the European reception of Shakespeare outside English-speaking countries.

2. Shakespeare on the early Nineteenth-Century Spanish Stage

The early decades of the nineteenth century in Spain were governed by instability in the political sphere and dominated by Neoclassicism in the arts. Political instability began with the invasion of Napoleonic troops during the so-called War of Independence (1808–1814). Six years after the military conflict had come to an end, the reign of the Bourbon monarch King Ferdinand VII (1814–1833)

modificaciones para que resulte ser otra." The term *refundición* is often used to refer to rewritings of Golden Age Spanish plays.

was interrupted in 1820 by the three-year revolutionary experiment named Constitutional Triennium, which ended in 1823 with the restoration of King Ferdinand VII and his absolutist regime. The reception of Shakespeare and his work in Spain had a timid start, partly as a result of the tumultuous political situation.

Since the latter decades of the eighteenth century, France had acted as the main cultural referent. As a result, Neoclassicism prevailed at the turn of the nineteenth century. As it happened around the Continent, the neoclassical dramatist Jean-François Ducis played a decisive role in the introduction of Shakespeare into Spanish theatrical culture. It is worth remarking that Ducis barely knew English. His knowledge of Shakespeare's work mostly derived from what he was told, and from the plot summaries published by Pierre-Antoine de La Place (Pujante and Gregor 2017b, 29). Ducis's rewritings were heavily altered adaptations, compared to Shakespeare's plays, suited to neoclassical conventions. The French playwright cunningly opted for the convenient option of publishing his rewritings under his own name. Indeed, as Schwartz-Gastine observes, Shakespeare "was completely omitted from the books or theatre bills" (2003, 225). Thus, Ducis's adaptations can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of Shakespearean appropriation.

The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable interest in *Othello*, since the 1802 premiere of Ducis's *Othello, ou le More de Venise* (1792); first performed in Spain following a translation carried out by José María de Carnerero (Gregor 2010, 17).[4] The enormous success that the play acquired, particularly in Madrid, gave rise to an unprecedented phenomenon in the reception of Shakespeare in Spain defined by Calvo (2008) as "Othellomania". After *Hamlet* (1772), *Othello* (1802) and *Macbeth* (1803), *Romeo and Juliet* was the fourth Shakespearean play produced for the Spanish stage.[5]

3. Melodrama and Sentimentality: Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803)

In December 1803 the city of Madrid welcomed the first adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* on the Spanish stage. The play has been preserved in two manuscripts, one belonging to the Municipal Historical Library of Madrid and the other one to the

4 For more information on the early reception of *Othello* in Spain see *Otelo en España: la versión neoclásica y las obras relacionadas* (Pujante and Gregor 2020). For a broader picture on the European reception of *Othello* see *Othello in European Culture* (Bandín, Rayner, and Campillo Arnaiz 2022).

5 For more information on the early reception of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* in Spain see the following: *Hamlet en España: las cuatro versiones neoclásicas* (Pujante and Gregor 2010), *Macbeth en España: las versiones neoclásicas* (Gregor and Pujante 2011) and *Romeo y Julieta en España: las versiones neoclásicas* (Pujante and Gregor 2017b).

Spanish National Library. Neither manuscript contains references to the date nor the name of its author. However, according to Pujante's recent findings: "although the critics have not agreed on its authorship, one can propose with considerable certainty Dionisio Solís, pseudonym of the poet, dramaturg and translator Dionisio Villanueva y Ochoa (1774–1834)" (2019, 148).[6] Despite being relatively unknown nowadays, Solís was, as Gies states, "one of the most admired poets and dramatists of the day" (1994, 58). A prolific writer, Solís authored more than fifty plays, including original works, *refundiciones* (rewritings) of Golden Age drama and translations, most of which were performed (Herrera Navarro 2020).

The text of *Julia y Romeo* was first published as late as 2017 in *Romeo y Julieta en España: las versions neoclásicas* (Pujante and Gregor 2017b).[7] The play is significant for several reasons. On the first hand, as Pujante and Gregor (2017b) have examined, its main source text was not one of Ducis's neoclassical adaptations, but instead *Romeo und Julie* (1768), a German sentimental or domestic drama by Christian Felix Weisse (or Weiße). Hence, Solís broke with the established pattern, whereby earlier Shakespearean adaptations had been mediated by Ducis's rewritings. The main difference between Weisse's domestic drama and Shakespeare's tragedy is the shift of focus from the feud between the rival families –rechristened Capellets and Montecchios– to the "relationships within the family, in this case between parent [Herr von Capellet] and child [Julie]" (Williams 1990, 61). This departure from Shakespeare was the result of Weisse's wish to remain more faithful to the Italian sources of the Elizabethan play. Secondly, Solís's adaptation introduces a significant innovation: the possibility of a happy ending. *Julia y Romeo* offers two alternative endings: one tragic and one comic. In an 1832 revival, the play was advertised in the press as a "tragicomedy" (*Diario de Avisos de Madrid* 1832b, 88). Apparently, the happy ending was favoured in performance. Thirdly, Solís's adaptation foregrounds the character of Julia, who becomes the true protagonist.

Julia y Romeo constitutes a perfect illustration of Lanier's concept of the Shakespearean rhizome: "the vast web of adaptations, allusions and (re)productions that comprises the ever-changing phenomenon we call Shakespeare" (2014, 29). Considering that Solís was "the acknowledged master of the *refundición* in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century" (Gies 1994, 88), one can point towards *Los bandos de Verona* [The Factions of Verona] (1645), a tragicomedy written by

6 "Aunque los críticos no se han puesto de acuerdo sobre su autoría, se puede proponer con bastante certeza a Dionisio Solís, pseudónimo del poeta, dramaturgo y traductor Dionisio Villanueva y Ochoa (1774 – 1834)."

7 All textual quotations from Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803) and García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* (1817) derive from this critical edition.

the Golden Age dramatist Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, as a probable source text. Similarities are evident since the first scenes. Both plays begin with the character of Julia crying in despair as a result of her love for Alejandro Romeo (in *Los bandos de Verona*) and Romeo (in *Julia y Romeo*). In both opening scenes Julia appears in the company of her close confidante; named Elena in the Golden Age play, and Laura in the neoclassical rewriting. Another similarity is the preference for diegesis over mimesis during the exposition of the previous meetings between the young lovers; events narrated by Julia rather than shown onstage. Also, coincidentally –or perhaps not– both plays provide a happy ending.

Solís could easily have had first-hand access to Rojas Zorrilla's play, either by reading one of the six printed editions of the text published in the eighteenth century, or merely by attending a performance. The latter possibility could have taken place in 1797, when the play was staged in Madrid under its alternative title, *Montescos y Capeletes*. Pujante suggests that this production may have inspired the creation of the happy variant (2019, 152). Therefore, there is evidence that attests to a probable influence of Rojas Zorrilla's Golden Age tragicomedy.

As a translator Solís "mastered French, Italian, English, and Greek" (Herrera Navarro 2002, 333).[8] In fact, Solís did not read Weisse's *Romeo und Julie* (1768) "in the German original, but in its French rendering by Georges-Adam Junker" (Pujante and Gregor 2017a, 106). Pujante and Gregor (2017a; 2017b) also point towards two other possible sources: d'Ozicourt's *Roméo et Juliette, drame en cinq actes & en vers libres* (1771) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Les tombeaux de Vérone* (1782). This assumption implies that all the foreign material that Solís may have consulted prior to the composition of *Julia y Romeo* was in French. However, as Pujante and Gregor highlight, "*Julia y Romeo* is a free version and not a rigorous translation of its source [*Romeo und Julie*]" (2017b, 20).[9] In spite of the allusions, borrowings and intertextual references to earlier adaptations, Solís's own creativity as an adaptor must not be undermined. An examination of the sources and possible influences of *Julia y Romeo* reflects, as Lanier asserts, that "the Shakespearean text is an important element but not a determining one" (2014, 29) when analysing the complex nature of Shakespearean adaptations.

The play's title is *Julia y Romeo. Tragedia urbana en cinco actos* (Julia and Romeo. Urban Tragedy in Five Acts). It constitutes an almost word-to-word translation of *Roméo et Julie, tragédie bourgeoise en cinq actes*, the title provided by Junker in his French translation of Weisse's play. The popularity that the genre of the *tragédie bourgeoise* –also known as *tragédie populaire* or *domestique*– had acquired in earlier decades, particularly in France, persisted in Spain at the turn of the century.

8 "Dominaba los idiomas francés, italiano, inglés y griego."

9 "*Julia y Romeo* es una versión libre y no una traducción rigurosa de su fuente."

Nonetheless, Solís's play is not labelled as a *tragédie bourgeoise*, but instead as a *tragedia urbana*, a well-established category in eighteenth-century Spanish drama. In 1793 the theorist Díez González defined the characters depicted in such tragedies as follows: "individuals must not be as elevated as those of heroic tragedy, nor vulgar or ridiculous as those of comedy. They must be citizens distinguished by their honourable birth, or by a notable virtue" (cited in Checa Beltrán 2012, 71).[10] Furthermore, as Checa Beltrán asserts, an urban tragedy "differs from tragedy in that it must have a happy ending" (2012, 71).[11] This second aspect is particularly relevant to Solís's adaptation, whose comic variant eludes the tragic deaths of the protagonists, and it further explains the choice of the category *tragedia urbana*.

The eight characters from Weisse's play are further reduced to seven: Julia, Madama Capelio, Capelio, Romeo, Bentivoglio, Laura and Pedro. Following Weisse –although present also in d'Ozicourt and Mercier (Pujante 2019, 150)–, *Julia y Romeo* begins *in media res* with a brief soliloquy uttered by Julia. The audience finds her crying in despair because Romeo, whom she is already in love with, has been banished from Verona. The miserable lady acquaints her confidante Laura with the main events that have taken place up to that point in time, including her first meeting with Romeo at a masked ball, the balcony scene and the death of Teobaldo. The remaining part of the plot closely resembles Shakespeare's play. Julia is told that she must wed Count Paris. In order to prevent such an unfortunate event, the heroine seeks the help of a doctor named Bentivoglio. He is the one who will provide the harmless liquor that ought to make her appear dead, so as to later allow Romeo to rescue her from the family vault.

Julia y Romeo constitutes a perfect illustration of the dominant presence that Neoclassicism exercised in Spain at the turn of the nineteenth century. Spanish Neoclassicists eventually failed in their strong efforts to renovate the stage and modify public taste. Nevertheless, their postulates influenced plays such as *Julia y Romeo*. Following Weisse the play unfolds in twenty-four hours, and centres the action on the conflict between Julia and her progenitors. The unity of place is less rigidly observed, as the last act transfers the scene from Julia's chamber to the family vault. Whereas Solís copied Weisse in his decision to remain as faithful as possible to the neoclassical unities, he did not, however, maintain the original metre. Instead, Weisse's prose text was transcribed into rhymed octosyllabic lines, the measure typical of Spanish romance. The metre stands out as a fully autochthonous element.

10 "Las personas no han de ser tan elevadas como las de la tragedia heroica, ni vulgares y ridículas como las de la comedia. Deberán ser ciudadanos distinguidos por su honrado nacimiento, o por alguna notable virtud."

11 "Difiere de la tragedia en que su final debe ser feliz."

Strongly influenced by Weisse's domestic drama, *Julia y Romeo* is characterised by its melodramatic and sentimental tone –excessive at times– which approximates the play to the sentimental genre. The opening lines set the tone:

> JULIA *alone.*
> It is already midnight and
> in distress Romeo has me.
> Heavens, how long the hours are
> for those who wait!
> He ought to come. All
> sleep in tranquil slumber,
> and I alone weeping
> bitter tears stay awake.
> (I. i. p. 59)[12]

From that moment onwards, there is a constant flow of tears that permeates the characters' speeches, especially those delivered by Julia. The opening scene also serves to reveal who the true protagonist is: Julia. Following Weisse, Solís centred the action on the miserable and pitiful lady, stressing the conflicting relationship that Julia has with her tyrannical father, who strongly resembles Weisse's Herr von Capellet. Not only does Julia open the play, but she also appears in a significantly higher number of scenes than Romeo. With the exception of act IV, in which neither appear, Julia intervenes in all the remaining acts. In total, she is present in nineteen scenes. In contrast to Romeo, who only intervenes in acts I and V –as in Weisse's *Romeo und Julie*– and is included in seven scenes. In other words, Romeo is notably absent. Empathy for the tormented lady increases, as spectators witness the deep anguish that Julia experiences due to her sweetheart's banishment and the consequential threat of eternal separation.

Since *Julia y Romeo* was not published until 2017, the factor which saved the play from becoming an unfortunate case of reception without dissemination was its first production and subsequent revivals. Based on existing records *Julia y Romeo* was taken to the stage in six productions between 1803 and 1836. The premiere took place on the 9 December 1803 at the Teatro de la Cruz in Madrid. According to the *Diario de Madrid* [Madrid's Diary], it was performed on five successive nights between the 9 and the 13 December (1803a; 1803b; 1803c; 1803d; 1803e). This was an acceptable achievement. Indeed, as Pujante

12 JULIA. *sola*. Ya es media noche y me tiene / con sobresalto Romeo. / ¡Qué largas son las horas / para quien espera, cielos! / Ya debiera venir. Todos / duermen en tranquilo sueño, / y yo sola derramando / lágrimas amargas velo.

remarks in relation to the period: "in those years, when [a production] was an absolute failure, it would not even reach three [performances]" (2019, 236).[13] It is also worth highlighting that the company managed to collect 9,197 *reales* (the currency used) and 9,231 *reales* on the first and third nights, respectively (*Diario de Madrid* 1803c, 1.388; *Diario de Madrid* 1803e, 1.396). Furthermore, the takings on the door for each night were always higher than the amount collected by the afternoon production taking place, simultaneously, at the Teatro de los Caños del Peral (*Diario de Madrid* 1803d, 1.392; *Diario de Madrid* 1803f, 1.400; *Diario de Madrid* 1803g, 1.404). The takings on the door, together with its five-night run, evidence that the first performances of *Julia y Romeo* were successful.

Bearing this success in mind, one may wonder which ending was chosen. Absolute certainty regarding this matter is not possible. Par claims, based on information given by the *Diario de Barcelona* (1817), that the company opted for the happy ending (1936, 43). Similarly, Pujante and Gregor (2017b, 26 – 27) point in the same direction. They also suggest that the happy ending "would have been the work of the adapter; a decision possibly made by the leading actor, or even himself" (2017b, 43).[14] If it had indeed been a choice motivated by the leading actor, Juan Carretero would have been responsible for it.

According to the manuscript held at the Municipal Historical Library of Madrid, the leading roles in the 1803 production were assigned to Mr. Carretero and Miss Rita (Pujante and Gregor 2017b, 57). By researching the Spanish scene at the turn of the century, it is possible to assert that the theatre players in question were Juan Carretero (1760–1829) and Rita Luna (1770–1832). Carretero and Luna were forty-three and thirty-three, respectively, in 1803. This peculiarity might shock twenty-first-century theatre audiences, but it was not uncommon at the time. For instance, British theatres had featured mature actors playing Romeo and Juliet since the eighteenth century. Most importantly, since Spanish audiences were not yet familiar with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* one can assume that theatergoers could not have been alarmed by the mature Carretero and Luna.

Rita Luna and Juan Carretero often performed together successfully at the Teatro de los Caños del Peral and the Teatro del Príncipe (Huerta Calvo, Peral Vega, and Urzáiz Tortajada 2005, 132). Rita Luna is described by Par as a "distinguished actress, one of the best that have trodden on the Spanish stage" (1936, 45).[15] Evidence of her great talent can also be found in the critical references that exist –yet scarce– assessing her acting skills and her short theatrical career (n.a.

13 "En aquellos años, cuando el fracaso era absoluto, no se llegaba ni a tres [funciones]."

14 "Sería obra del adaptador, seguramente por decisión del primer actor, o incluso de éste mismo."

15 "La actriz insigne, una de las mejores que ha pisado la escena española."

1832; Díaz de Escovar 1900; Sánchez Estevan 1913; Huerta Calvo, Peral Vega, and Urzáiz Tortajada 2005). The aforementioned sources stress that Rita Luna triumphed as a comic actress. However, she was also praised for being skilled at crying and expressing anguish, qualities which would have helped her in the portrayal of Solís's lachrymose and melodramatic Julia. Carretero also appears to have been an exceptional actor. Par defines his persona as follows: "the best leading man of his time after Isidoro [Máiquez] [...] He was tall, with chivalrous manners, a pleasant voice, although lacking in a very clear diction; studious and a good interpreter of his roles" (1936, 46).[16] It is unfortunate that no reviews have survived that could offer some insight into how this first version of *Romeo and Juliet* was acted and produced. Presumably, the acknowledged talent of the leading actors would have strongly contributed to the warm welcome that *Julia y Romeo* enjoyed during its earliest performances.

Julia y Romeo was not performed again until 1816. The location shifted to Barcelona, where it was staged on three consecutive days from the 18 to the 20 November 1816 at the Teatro de la Santa Cruz (Pujante 2019, 147). The leading roles were assumed –on this occasion– by María Teresa Samaniego and José Infantes; the latter was both the new leading actor of the company and its director (Par 1936, 92). According to Par there were three additional performances of *Romeo and Juliet* in Barcelona, all of which at the Teatro de la Santa Cruz: from the 22 to 23 July 1820 and on 20 January 1821 (1936, 103–104). The cast of the 1820 and the 1821 productions is identical, featuring, once more, María Teresa Samaniego in the title role alongside a new Romeo: José Galindo. Some of the actors who had taken part in the 1816 performances of the play reappeared in these revivals (Par 1936, 102–104). The decade of the 1830s welcomed two final productions of *Julia y Romeo* in its original location, Madrid, both staged at the Teatro de la Sartén –on 21 January 1832 and the 20 April 1836, respectively (*Diario de Avisos de Madrid* 1832a; *Diario de Avisos de Madrid* 1832b; Par 1936, 163). As Rubio Jiménez explains, the repertoire of the Teatro de la Sartén "in those years consisted mostly of revivals of successful plays from the two main theatres [the Teatro de la Cruz and the Teatro del Príncipe]" (2003, 1.811).[17] Therefore, the revival of *Julia y Romeo* at the Teatro de la Sartén, twenty-nine years after its premiere, further evidences the play's success in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

16 "El mejor galán de su tiempo después de Isidoro […] Era alto, de modales caballerescos, voz agradable, aunque de dicción no muy clara; estudioso y buen intérprete de sus papeles."

17 "Su repertorio en aquellos años consistía sobre todo en reposiciones de obras de éxito de los dos teatros principales."

4. A Ducisian Revenge Tragedy: García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* (1817)

In-between the premieres of Dionisio Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803) and Manuel Bernardino García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* (1817), Spain had faced a major conflict with France as a result of the War of Independence (1808–1814). The arrival of Napoleonic troops reinforced the presence and the influence that French culture had exerted over Spain since the late eighteenth century. It was in 1817 during the first years of the absolutist reign of Ferdinand VII, when García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* was first published and performed in Barcelona. García Suelto remains, up to this day, a considerably unknown literary figure. He is absent –unlike Solís– from the list of nineteenth-century Spanish translators included in the digital *Diccionario Histórico de la Traducción en España* [the Historical Dictionary of Translation in Spain] (Lafarga and Pegenaute 2021). His current state of anonymity is corroborated by Pujante, who affirms that "we know little about this adapter, and the little that we know presents him as a classicist aesthetically, and a supporter of the Ancien Régime ideologically" (2019, 155).[18]

García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* is not a translation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. As a matter of fact, it is unlikely that García Suelto had had any contact with the play. The source text is Ducis's *Roméo et Juliette* (1772). Ducis's adaptation departs from Shakespeare's tragedy. The focus does not lie on the love story between Roméo and Juliette, but instead on the political and military conflict that ensues as a result of the family feud, threatening to destabilise the state. García Suelto's translation does not constitute an exact reproduction of Ducis's *Roméo et Juliette*. The play was transformed into a domestic tragedy. This might have been influenced by the contemporary appeal elicited by bourgeois drama, a genre defended by Spanish neoclassicists after the War of Independence. However, it also reflects a deliberate wish to depoliticise Ducis. The Duke of Verona in Ducis's play is coincidentally named Ferdinand, and it appears that García Suelto wanted to avoid any possible connections with King Ferdinand VII (Pujante and Gregor 2017b, 31).

The cover of the 1817 edition of the play reads as follows: "*Romeo y Julieta*. Tragedia en cinco actos. Traducida del francés" [Romeo and Juliet. Tragedy in Five Acts. Translated from the French] (Pujante and Gregor 2017b, 159).[19] Following Ducis, Julieta Capuleto and Romeo Montegón have known each other since their infancy, growing up almost as brother and sister. Julieta's father had raised Romeo

18 "No sabemos mucho de este adaptador, y lo poco que conocemos nos lo presenta como un clasicista en lo estético y un partidario del Antiguo Régimen en lo ideológico."

19 The text of *Romeo y Julieta* that has been consulted is the 1817 edition of the play, printed in *Romeo y Julieta en España: las versiones neoclásicas* (Pujante and Gregor 2017b).

as a son, ever since he managed to escape from the persecution suffered by the Montegón faction at the hands of Rogero (Julieta's uncle). The tragic love story between Romeo and Julieta also acquires less significance. Instead, the plot is centred on Montegón (Romeo's biological father). Twenty-four years prior to the beginning of the action of the play, the rival faction had imprisoned Montegón and his four sons in a tower in Pisa, resulting in the death through starvation of three of his innocent offspring. The play resembles a revenge tragedy, as it mostly evolves around Montegón's return to Verona to take revenge on the Capuletos.

The ending differs from Ducis's *Roméo et Juliette*. In the French adaptation, Juliette learns that Montaigu plans to murder her and her father. Shortly after, both Roméo and Juliette commit suicide. The onstage death of the lovers was the element which mostly troubled Ducis's audiences (Carlson 2012, xvii). The Spanish adaptation takes a different turn. When Capuleto vows to end the age-old enmity, Montegón attempts to stab him. Romeo immediately intervenes and is accidentally killed by his biological father. After witnessing the tragic events in complete despair, a distressed Julieta stabs herself with the same dagger with which Romeo had been murdered. Finally, the vindictive Montegón is sentenced to prison and tortured to death.

Even though the neoclassical project of reform did not eventually succeed, neoclassicism was not completely removed from the stage after the end of the War of Independence in 1814. In fact, Par referred to García Suelto's play as "the best neoclassical rewrite of this period" (1930, 13).[20] Indeed, *Romeo y Julieta* adheres –almost perfectly– to the neoclassical unities. The unity of place is violated in the last act, which transfers the scene from Capuleto's palace to the communal crypt of both the Montegones and the Capuletos. García Suelto introduced textual changes such as a different variety of metre, transforming Ducis's "full-rhymed alexandrines" into "assonant-rhymed hendecasyllables" (Pujante and Gregor 2017a, 110). The names of the main characters were also altered to accommodate them to Spanish. The *dramatis personae* of Ducis's *Roméo et Juliette* contains notable absences in comparison with its Shakespearean counterpart. The number of characters is considerably reduced to the following seven individuals: Ferdinand (Duke of Verona), Montaigu, Capulet, Roméo, Juliette, Albéric (Roméo's friend) and Flavie (Juliette's confidante) (Ducis 1773, 2). In *Romeo y Julieta* the main characters are rechristened as follows: Fernando, Montegón, Capuleto, Romeo, Julieta, Alberico and Flavia.

García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* was first staged in Barcelona on the 29 and 30 September 1817 at the Teatro de la Santa Cruz (Par 1936, 97). The production was highly acclaimed in the *Diario de Barcelona* (29 September

20 "El mejor arreglo neoclásico de este período."

1817), which stressed that the characters, and the play as a whole, had improved in comparison with *Julia y Romeo* (Par 1936, 97). The protagonist and director was Andrés Prieto, who played Montegón. Par describes him as follows: "the best actor that Barcelona had in those times; he was not such a great thing but, after all, he was Máiquez's disciple and understudy" (1936, 96).[21] Little is known about the Catalan actress Juana Galán, leading lady of the company that year, and responsible for playing Julieta (Par 1936, 97). As for the actor who possibly played Romeo, Par (1936, 97) simply provides his surname: "Galindo". It does not coincide with the surnames of any of the major actors of the period. Consequently, one can only assume that the role was interpreted by a second-rank actor. According to Par the reception that the play had was "nothing beyond ordinary" (1936, 101).[22] Nevertheless, this assumption or perception, as it can only be interpreted as such, does not prove useful. In the absence of figures indicating the (approximate) number of attendees or the takings on the door, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the production was successful. Nevertheless, the revival of the play in Madrid, merely a year after, points towards the assumption that the production must have been positively welcomed.

García Suelto's tragedy was performed in Madrid at the Teatro del Príncipe from the 14 to the 16 December 1818 (*Diario de Madrid* 1818a; *Diario de Madrid* 1818b; *Diario de Madrid* 1818c). The production had a different cast, with the exception of Andrés Prieto, who undertook, once again, the roles of both director and male lead (*Diario de Madrid* 1818a, 834). The roles of the young lovers were played by Bernardo Avecilla and Manuela Molina; no information has been found on the actors in question. Gies informs that in 1817 Prieto "had taken over from [Isidoro] Máiquez at the Príncipe Theatre" (1994, 61); a detail that ought not to be overlooked. It is worth remarking that Máiquez was one of the most important figures in the theatrical scene of the period. Hence, if Andrés Prieto had substituted him, and was now in charge of the most important theatre in Madrid, he must have been particularly careful in the selection of the plays to be produced to continue guaranteeing the prestige of the Teatro del Príncipe. The decision to produce García Suelto's adaptation a second time, on this occasion in the nation's capital, can be interpreted as an indication that the previous performances of the play in Barcelona must have had a warm reception. The only apparent surviving review dates from ten years later, when the play was revived in the same theatre. It attests to the enormous success that the 1818 production had: "its plot merited the most satisfactory welcome from this illustrious public

21 "El mejor actor que tuvo Barcelona por aquellos tiempos; no es que fuese cosa mayor, pero al fin y al cabo era discípulo y segundo de Máiquez."

22 "No pasó de regular."

when it was first performed in the year 1818" (*Diario de Avisos de Madrid* 1828, 812).[23] The anonymous reviewer ignored, possibly due to the change of location, that the first production had actually taken place in 1817.

Romeo y Julieta would be performed again in 1828. The reason for its revival was not given, but there are different circumstances that seem to have strongly influenced its reappearance on the stage at this precise point in time. First of all, there is the successful precedent of the 1818 production in Madrid, which delighted critics and contemporary audiences alike. Secondly, García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* did not only enjoy a promising life on the stage, but also in print, as in 1828 there were already two editions of the text published (dated 1817 and 1820), confirming that the tragedy still elicited interest. Thirdly, 1828 constitutes an important year in the reception of Shakespeare in Spain because, as Calvo stresses, "Madrid was swept in 1828 by *Othellomania*" (2008, 112). On the other hand, 1828 coincides with the premiere on 18 April of Ventura de la Vega's *Shakespeare enamorado*, a translation-adaptation of Alexandre Duval's one-act comedy *Shakespeare amoureux* (1804). This text initiated an interest in the consumption of plays featuring Shakespeare as character (Gregor 2010).

The story of the star-crossed lovers of Verona also captivated Italian composers of opera, the medium that in Spain "would come to be the most enthusiastically followed entertainment in the 1820s and early 1830s" (Gies 1994, 93). Furthermore, as Calvo highlights, "the success of *Otelo* and *Romeo y Julieta* in Madrid is partly the result of the success of opera, as Rossini and Bellini helped to make these two Shakespeare tragedies well known in Spain" (2008, 116). The year 1828 also coincides with the publication in Spanish of *Julieta y Romeo –Giulietta e Romeo* in the original–, a two-act Italian opera with a libretto by Felice Romani and music by Nicola Vaccai. The name of the translator is unknown, but the cover indicates that the opera "is to be represented at the Teatro de la Cruz of this court" (Romani 1828).[24] All of the aforementioned factors clearly demonstrate that there was an evident interest in Shakespeare and his work in 1828, which must have contributed to the revival of García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta*.

The 1828 production is particularly significant because the day it premiered (21 July), the *Diario de Avisos de Madrid* advertised the play, acknowledging Shakespeare –for the first time in Spanish history– as the author of *Romeo and Juliet*: "In the Príncipe [Theatre] at 8 o'clock at night. First, a symphony: shortly afterwards, *Romeo y Julieta*, tragedy in five acts by the immortal Shakespeare, adapted to the Spanish

23 "Su argumento mereció de este ilustrado público la acogida más satisfactoria cuando se representó por vez primera en el año de 1818."

24 "Se ha de representar en el Teatro de la Cruz de esta Corte."

stage" (*Diario de Avisos de Madrid* 1828, 812).[25] This new production is also of great importance owing to the professionals that intervened. The cast features two of the most renowned theatre players of the nineteenth-century Spanish stage, Carlos Latorre (Romeo) and Concepción Rodríguez (Julieta); the former owned the company. Of equal importance was the director of the Teatro del Príncipe at the time, Juan de Grimaldi (1796–1872), who had taken control of the theatre in 1824 (Gregor 2010, 31). As impresario, stage director and playwright Grimaldi left a permanent and influential mark on the Spanish stage. Therefore, Grimaldi's role as director cannot be overlooked, as he surely contributed to guaranteeing that the performance complied with his high standards of excellence. The genius of a talented man of the theatre (Grimaldi), accompanied by a talented ensemble could only merit success, as evidenced by a detailed review published on 23 July, a day after the last performance of *Romeo y Julieta*, which attests to "the good success of the performance" (*Correo literario y mercantil* 1828, 3).[26]

Unless new evidence emerges, there was only one last performance of García Suelto's *Romeo y Julieta* –retitled *Julieta y Romeo, o Montegones y Capuletos*– on 20 September 1830 at the Teatro de la Santa Cruz in Barcelona (1936, 111). This fourth revival denotes the success that the play had enjoyed since its first performance at that same theatre back in 1817. The Catalan actress Juana Galán played Julieta, once more, whereas Romeo was played by an unknown actor named Antonio Valero (Par 1936, 111). Unfortunately, no reviews have been found.

5. Conclusions

The early decades of the nineteenth century coincide with the early reception of Shakespeare in Spain. During these years Shakespeare is gradually –yet timidly– presented to Spanish audiences. Indeed, few spectators –if any– would have been able to draw the connection between the popular neoclassical adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* and Shakespeare's own *Romeo and Juliet*. However, as Sanders affirms, "an experience in and of itself of the adaptation need not require […] prior knowledges [of the original sources]" (2016, 57). This also applies to the adaptors themselves, Solís and García Suelto, who did not consult Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* while composing their own rewritings of the play. Consequently, what can now be identified as clear examples of Shakespearean adaptations are the result of a complex process of intertextual connections with earlier texts, in

25 "En el del Príncipe a las 8 de la noche. Se dará principio con una sinfonía: enseguida *Romeo y Julieta*, tragedia en cinco actos del inmortal Shakespeare, acomodado a la escena española."

26 "[E]l buen éxito de la función."

which the Shakespearean original could be said to have been secondary or, even, irrelevant to the resulting literary products.

Solís's *Julia y Romeo* (1803) stands out as the most influential neoclassical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, owing to its important contribution to the Shakespearean canon. *Julia y Romeo* features two innovative elements that will resurface in subsequent adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* written in Spain: the centrality of Juliet and the possibility of a happy ending. Possibly influenced by *Julia y Romeo* the majority of nineteenth-century adaptations that were to follow were titled *Julieta y Romeo*, rather than *Romeo y Julieta*. The tragicomic nature of the play's genre is not a feature unique to the nineteenth century stage. Since the Golden Age Spanish theatregoers and, in turn, playwrights, had shown a clear preference for comedy over tragedy. At the turn of the nineteenth century public taste had barely altered in that regard. During Franco's Dictatorship (1939-1975) a happy ending will be the preferred option in most adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* written for the Spanish stage.

Romeo and Juliet enters the nineteenth-century stage shaped by the rigid template imposed by Neoclassicism, making it difficult to establish the connection with Shakespeare. The final years of the absolutist period mark the beginning of change in that direction when, in 1828, a review acknowledges –for the first time in Spanish history– "the immortal Shakespeare" as the legitimate author of the play. The decline and eventual failure of the neoclassical project for the reform of the Spanish stage does not imply the end of the interest in *Romeo and Juliet*. On the contrary, the allure elicited by Shakespeare's tragedy will continue to increase as the century advances. As the reign of Ferdinand VII draws to an end, a change of aesthetic will gradually permeate Spanish literary culture with the late arrival of Romanticism and its new ideals. The tragic story of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its recurrent references to death and its gloomy settings, will be viewed by new adapters as being perfectly suited to the Romantic taste, opening a whole new chapter in the reception of the play in Spain.

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