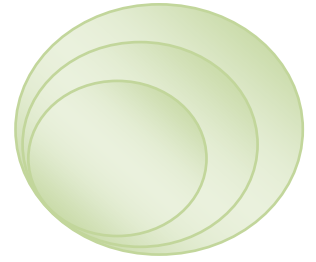


# Felicia Hemans's "The Coronation of Inez de Castro" (1830): Feminine Romanticism and the Memorialisation of Woman

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As Martin Nozick states, "There are certain characters in literature which exercise a perennial and self-renewing fascination on the creative mind" (330); although originated in different countries, they seem to belong to world literature. The inherent dramatic interest of the story of Inez de Castro, in particular its romantic, idealistic qualities, and the pity, admiration and horror it arouses, has fascinated countless authors, calling not only for epic treatment but also for a lyric one. The late Romantic woman poet Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans (1793-1835) has been one of the first female authors to appropriate this European myth of love beyond death in her poem "The Coronation of Inez De Castro", inserted in her volume *Songs of the Affections* (1830). Hemans had her own personal and artistic motives for appropriating this Portuguese story. She sets many of her poems in situations of conflict between the private and the public realms, namely between "individual desire as a personal absolute and the intrigues and power relations of a monarchic court" (Kelly, "Death and the Matron" 201-202), thus challenging Romantic historiography and art.

The story of Inez Pérez de Castro (ca. 1320-1355), the fourteenth-century Galician lady-in-waiting at the Portuguese court, first appeared in Portuguese history in the *Crónica de El-Rei Dom Pedro I* of Fernão Lopes (1330-1460). However, what is left of Lopes's work concerns itself only with events after Inez's



death. We do not have from his own hand the account of the beginning of the so-called *grande desvayro* (great madness) – the meeting of the lovers Inez and Dom Pedro (heir to the Portuguese throne), the development of their passionate liaison, and the difficulties they encountered, including her brutal execution in 1355.<sup>1</sup> This part would be appropriated by Ruy de Pina (1440-1552) and eventually reworked in an inferior manner in Chapter 44 of the *Crónica de D. Afonso IV*.

However, Lopes does give us a full account of how, years after Inez's death and a cruel and bloody revenge, Pedro, now king (1357), claimed that he had married her secretly and that she was his rightful Queen.<sup>2</sup> Although many, including the historian, doubted the authenticity of these reports, subsequent legend has it that Pedro ordered Inez's body exhumed from her grave, seated on the throne, crowned and, in a macabre final gesture, forced the entire court to swear allegiance to their new queen by kissing the corpse's hand. Inez would only then be reburied, this time in the Monastery of Alcobaça, in an extraordinary religious and stately ceremony (April 1361), duly chronicled by Fernão Lopes. According to him, Dom Pedro had expressly ordered a tomb of white wrought marble, finely surmounted by her lying crowned statue.<sup>3</sup>

The national commotion and the aura that was created around these dramatic events were such that they could not go unnoticed by European writers and artists, who through the centuries celebrated the tragedy of Inez, and her memory, in epic and lyric poetry, novels and dramas, paintings and music.<sup>4</sup> And, in fact, the royal mistress took leave of her life to become an eternal muse. Among the earliest Portuguese writers who were inspired by the story, we can find Garcia de Resende and his *Songs / Troves to the Death of Donna Inez de Castro* (fourteenth century), Luís de Camões and his passage in the epic poem *The Lusiads* (sixteenth century), António Ferreira and his tragedy *A Castro* (sixteenth century) and the eighteenth-century lyrics of poet Barbosa du Bocage.<sup>5</sup>

In England, the romantic, sentimental elements of Inez's story appeared to the full in a novel, *Agnes de Castro* (1688), by the celebrated Mrs Aphra Behn (seventeenth century), which thoroughly distorted the traditional version, but became the basis for some tragic plays.<sup>6</sup> Among the houses that staged the story of



Inez in Britain, there was the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, in 1799, as a musical drama in two acts, and the City of London Theatre, in April 1841, as a tragic play written by Mary Russell Mitford, *Inez de Castro – Tragedy*.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its dubious veracity, the story of “the queen who was crowned after death” soon turned into a myth as enduring as the one of Romeo and Juliet, taking hold of people's souls and imaginations. The devotion to the figure of Inez, though understandable in this context, also seems to belie the crucial historical fact that it was probably her dire sacrifice that allowed Portugal to remain independent from Castile and to retain its sovereignty, as Prince D. Pedro was indeed being progressively influenced by the “Castro clan”.<sup>8</sup>

Portuguese scholar Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa has detailedly traced the influence of this episode in England, having concluded that the adaptations of the story generally distance themselves from Camões's treatment of the subject in Canto III of *The Lusíads*.<sup>9</sup> This is, namely, the case of Felicia Hemans, who in spite of being familiar with the poet's work (by translating not only several sonnets but also the *Adamastor* episode from his epic), remained indifferent to Camões's suggestions. She seems to have preferred to concentrate on the dubious historical episode of the supposed posthumous coronation of Inez, not present in Camões, which had been popularised by the earliest Spanish theatre productions. Hemans may as well have been misled by some European translators of this poet, who constantly refer to the crowned statue of Inez in the Alcobaça monastery.<sup>10</sup>

It is not improbable that she might also have been influenced by the French adaptations through a major figure of French culture at this time, Madame de Staël, whose allusive words to the episode are used by Hemans as the initial epigraph to her poem on Inez.<sup>11</sup> But in accordance with the main tradition or practise in her country, the poet seems to have preferred a more dramatic or “theatrical” representation of the story rather than the traditional Portuguese lyrical vision, which concentrates on episodes such as The Fount of Tears or Inez's pleading to the King. Although the symbolic proclamation of Inez as “queen” does not have to imply a literal coronation, Hemans chose to “literalise” that particular image – more than just to “stage” it, to aestheticise it, to fill it with elaborate and suggestive detail, so



as to be immortalised and memorialised as Staël had suggested, that is, as a “living” *tableau*.

Felicia Hemans, who had by 1825 established herself as a popular poet by writing in part for an expanding market in medievalist literature, while also developing a feminine revisionist poetics, could not help being interested in such a myth. “Drawing from a wide variety of historical tales, legends and contemporary literary figures like Scott and Byron”, as David Rothstein states, “Hemans’s texts helped to fuel Britain’s growing cultural appetite for the fantasy of the medieval past”. But, as he emphasises, Hemans radically transformed this material, “reconfiguring it according to a new domesticated, gendered, [...] and bourgeois-aristocratic class perspective” (Rothstein 49). The poet’s Dissenting family background and education had given her access to a wider culture, inherited from the European Enlightenments and building on a cosmopolitan liberalism and Romanticism.

Adept in a wide range of genres and verse forms, learned, literate, multilingual and imaginative, Hemans fashioned popular themes with an exotic range of subjects, drawing on literatures past and present, English and Continental. During the Peninsular War (1807-1814), the British reading public had become particularly interested in all aspects of Spanish and Portuguese history and culture; Hemans not the least, because, among other reasons, she had both her husband and her brothers doing military service there, as her poem “To my Eldest Brother, with the British Army in Portugal” may testify.<sup>12</sup>

To understand her personal involvement in the historical context, it is necessary to analyse the connection between the suffering caused by armed conflict and national identity, between domestic loss and national sacrifice. As Paul Westover observes in “Imaginary Pilgrimages”, “Hemans reacts to domestic trauma by deferring to national trauma”, that is, “Her valorization of death and sacrifice does not simply bolster nationalism; it reflects a desire to turn personal grief into national sacrifice” (148).

Seeking further acceptably feminine ways of consolidating her career and assuming the role of public poet, Felicia Browne turned to translating poetry from



the modern languages. In 1818, she published *Translations from Camoes, and Other Poets, with Original Poetry*, whose personal theme is “absent or lost love” and whose public theme is “loss of national independence”, thus implying a connection between the two. As in numerous other liberal Romantic writers (Ugo Foscolo, Campbell and Byron), these themes are linked: thwarted love is implicitly an effect of the hostility of an unreformed social and political world, producing alienation and exile.

As Gary Kelly suggests in his “Introduction” to her poems, Hemans “appropriates earlier literature to this liberal Romantic theme” (23) and, in this sense, the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões seems to represent for her a powerful embodiment of her central dilemma, not just in his national epic but in his lesser known love complaints. Like him, Hemans understood her public role as a poet in a decisive and grand historical moment and wrote nationalistic verse; like him, she became a poet associated to empire. But, like Camões himself, Hemans also confronted and experienced personally the negative effects of empire: separation, loss and exile are thus recurring themes in both. In this sense, the story and figure of Inez de Castro becomes for both a fit symbolic representation / embodiment of the sacrifice of the individual to a nation’s designs.

In Hemans’s next publication, *Tales and Historic Scenes* (1819), the connection between public and private becomes more explicit in a context of post-Napoleonic European crisis. Although these poems are set in various places and times, they describe “moments as experienced by individuals, often women, and always victims, through exacting vengeance in death” (Kelly, “Introduction” 24). Here, and in other historical narrative poems, the forms of “history” and “romance” are not really merged as such but placed in tension, and the centrality of the “feminine” is reinforced by a marked lyrical handling of narration and description. As Kelly states, “the book presents these conflicts from a Romantic feminist viewpoint, showing the deaths of individuals, communities, nations, and empires in the cycles of ‘masculine’ history” (25). Death becomes, thus, a major theme in Hemans’s work, and though she often sees it as a transhistorical fact, it develops rapidly into a “culture of death” that is socially and historically particular.



Hemans's next major work, *Records of Woman* (1828), develops the form and themes of those earlier attempts, showing the costs of "masculine" history (as conflict, war and destruction) to individuals, especially wives and mothers, and emphasising the heroism and sacrifice of women in the face of history as "meaningless death". Paula Feldman refers that Hemans's heroines, who are usually "placed in intensely trying situations [...], evince uncommon strength of character, courage and nobility of spirit" (xviii). "The chronicle", as Susan Wolfson observes, "was meant to elaborate a general plight of gender – of, in effect, 'wrongs' that were readable as transnational, trans-cultural, trans-historical" ("Introduction" xv). One of Hemans's most powerful poems in this collection is "Arabella Stuart", which like the later "The Coronation of Inez de Castro" takes a factually based historical incident of a love forbidden for dynastic reasons, and the oppressed subjectivity is purposely gendered feminine.<sup>13</sup>

But such uncommonness is shown to have a cost, like female fame in the poet's later work. This darker view of the condition of women may, to a certain extent, have been caused by Hemans's difficult personal life at this period, namely the death of her supportive mother in 1827 and her husband's rejection of her proposal for a reconciliation. Feelings of abandonment and isolation appear thus to have determined the theme of loss in the poet's later work. But in the late twenties and early thirties, we find Hemans also "merging the theme of women in history with the issue of female fame or woman in the public sphere" (Kelly, "Introduction" 27), thus reflecting about her own situation as an artist in *Woman and Fame* (1829), a volume which addresses the fundamental and unresolvable conflict between domestic happiness and artistic achievement.

The work that Hemans published in 1830 under the title of *Songs of the Affections with Other Poems*, and which was "affectionately" inscribed to Sir Robert Liston (a Scottish diplomat) "as a slight *memorial* of grateful respect" (our emphasis), contained her poem "Corinne at the Capitol" – a paradigmatic example of that feminine conflict, which results in death. But the volume also contained another poem on woman's fate, with another epigraph by Germaine de Staël herself. The poem, composed of twelve melodious octaves in alternating rhyme, is



“The Coronation of Inez de Castro”, and it seems to constitute an illustration of de Staël’s epigrammatic statement about the union of Love and Death: “Tableau, ou l’Amour fait alliance avec la Tombe; union redoutable de la mort et de la vie”.<sup>14</sup> In the poems of this collection, it is death alone that seems to validate the woman’s significance, namely because the woman has died and in the act of dying is identified with one or another noble cause.

Hemans’s poem seems to answer the initial question posed by Elizabeth Bronfen in *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*: “How can a verbal or visual artistic representation be both aesthetically pleasing and morbid, as the conjunction of beautiful woman and death seems to imply?” (x). And, from its beginning (stanza one), the poem seems also to possess a mingled double rhythm: one is “a peal of lordly music”, a “haughty sound” that “spoke of triumph high” (lines 6, 33, 37), which symbolises love but that the poet also critically associates with the regal ceremony and the Portuguese display of power and wealth; the other is the “stern” and “slow” tolling of “The lonely bell, of death”, “a requiem sad and low” that in a levelling gesture calls “Dust with the dust to sleep” (lines 8, 86, 88). In fact, against the natural order of things, the bright coronation rites must, most unusually, give way to the dark burial rituals and mournful lamentation instead of a joyful celebration.

The strangeness and uncanniness of this “mingling in the sky” of two very different sonorities also mark and anticipate the mixed detailed visual descriptions of this impressive scene or “tableau” in stanzas three to five; especially the figure of a dead Inez sitting silently on the throne with a “pale still face”, whose “jewell’d robes fell strangely still [...] So stone-like was its rest” (lines 29-32), a paradox which is duly summarised by the last quatrain of the seventh stanza:

It was a strange and fearful sight,  
The crown upon that head,  
The glorious robes and the blaze of light,  
All gather’d round the Dead!

(lines 56-9)



The usual expectations regarding a “scene of royal state” (line 16) that a coronation implies gradually become subverted by a grotesque and macabre pageantry. The Gothic horror of the scene is further enhanced by the forceful paying of “homage to her hand” of the “encircling band” of noblemen, who despite their martial bravery could not avoid “a faint cold shuddering” as they successively touched the dead queen’s hand (stanzas five and six, lines 38, 40, 42). Even the pale and silent King Pedro, “with white lips rigidly compressed” (line 62) that betray repressed rage, seems to add to this dimension by showing jealousy of his peers (stanza eight). The added fact that he did not dare look at his queen for fear of detecting the only too obvious signs of corruption (stanza ten) signals Hemans’s adherence to a more realistic mode of representation.

In the end (stanza twelve), although Love is proclaimed as “mightier” than Death by the poet, there is a pervasive and inescapable sense of “wasted worth” (line 82) and hollowness, both in those high gestures of bestowing “the crown, the sceptre, / The treasures of the earth, / And” (lines 79-80), last but not least, “the priceless love that pour’d those gifts” (line 81) – Pedro’s love, because through this ceremony Inez could not be brought to life to re-write her “history” and thus, as it may be implied, that of Portugal (stanza eleven).

And the ring of state, and the starry crown,  
And all the rich array,  
Are borne to the house of silence down,  
With her, that queen of clay.

(lines 91-94)

As Inez is finally taken down to her tomb, we realise once again her statue-like and sculptured existence, standing as an aestheticised and perpetuating monument to a nation’s grief. Both her peculiar circumstances and characterisation seem to rehearse in a reversed manner the story of Pygmalion’s Galatea: it is Death itself, no loving spark of life, which in a sense confers immortality to her. Although Hemans may have felt identified with this woman’s predicament, her ironic descriptive lines clearly distance her from the rich aristocratic setting, unlike her own middle-class one, which she probably senses as being not only ostentatious but decadent.<sup>15</sup>





Therefore, the poet's exotic cultural displacement may seem romantically distancing and "derealising" for a contemporary British readership or audience, but its assumed fictionality allows disturbingly familiar themes to emerge in a foreign scene that signals a universal condition for her: feminine sacrifice finally rewarded.

As Paul Westover concludes, "In their engagement with "the dead" and their concomitant interest in historical transport, many of Hemans's poems highlight tensions between ideals of affective proximity and critical distance", exposing "the methodological difficulties of memorialisation" (148), or the wish to confer more protagonism to certain historical women by enhancing their mythical and aesthetic dimensions. The reasons for Inez's demise – be it transgressive love or political intrigue (or both) – are not mentioned, let alone questioned.<sup>16</sup> But the fact that Hemans chose to focus on the public events after Inez's death, instead of the most obviously romantic theme of the love relationship, may reveal not only a distancing attempt from the merely personal but also the poet's feminine romantic revisionist strategy, that is, the one of presenting woman as historically significant and, therefore, as worthy of being memorialised. Anthony Harding explains that

In glorifying the ethic of female self-sacrifice and linking it in many poems [...] with the heroic deaths of women [...], Hemans delivers a new version of the Romantic hunger for transcendence, a version that purports to compensate women for [...] the relative obscurity of their lives [...]. (139)

An article in *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* (of August 1834, one year before the poet's death) seems to constitute irrefutable evidence to the impact of Hemans's retelling of this legend to the early Victorian reading public, who would soon witness, in 1837, the real coronation of a very living and influential Englishwoman: Victoria.<sup>17</sup>

And was not Inez de Castro taken out of her tomb, in order to have her very coffin crowned with a diadem: so triumphant was the memory of her love and beauty over death itself! (Hunt 154)

It was as a *Victorian*, one of the first, that Hemans's influence and significance in literary history would be most profound, namely her analysis of the



high cost of experience to women (be it poetical or political) and her description of poetry as a woman's vocation, as a renovated cult of sensibility.<sup>18</sup> Although chronologically a Romantic poet, as Angela Leighton states, "as a *woman* poet, her perspectives were inherently different from those of her male contemporaries [Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley], making her place hard to fix". The poet "as an imperial quester and ruler of high altitude visionary empires" does not fit her profile and she is not "driven by an apparently supra-social urge for 'self-identity, possession and conquest' " (Leighton 20). It is what Leighton designates as "the excision of the 'I' " (8) that signals her most obvious difference, as well as a very marked gendering and posturing of her poetic voice. Although she distrusts Romanticism's *wanderlust*, as a liberal and republican, she is interested in the *image* of woman as a Romantic exile of some kind: not so much a nostalgic wanderer but, as we have seen, more a victim of imperial history and its Promethean male deeds.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Addendum: "The Coronation of Inez de Castro"**

There was music on the midnight;  
 From a royal fane it roll'd,  
 And a mighty bell, each pause between,  
Sternly and slowly toll'd.  
 Strange was their mingling in the sky,  
 It hush'd the listener's breath;  
 For the music spoke of triumph high,  
 The lonely bell, of death.

There was hurrying through the midnight:—  
 A sound of many feet;  
 But they fell with a muffled fearfulness,  
 Along the shadowy street;  
 And softer, fainter, grew their tread,  
 As it near'd the Minster-gate,  
 Whence broad and solemn light was shed  
 From a scene of royal state.

Full glow'd the strong red radiance  
 In the centre of the nave,  
 Where the folds of a purple canopy  
 Sweep down in many a wave;  
 Loading the marble pavement old  
 With a weight of gorgeous gloom;  
 For something lay 'midst their fretted gold,



Like a shadow of the tomb.

And within that rich pavilion  
 High on a glittering throne,  
A woman's form sat silently,  
 Midst the glare of light alone.  
 Her Jewell'd robes fell strangely still—  
 The drapery on her breast  
 Seem'd with no pulse beneath to thrill,  
 So stone-like was its rest.

But a peal of lordly music  
 Shook e'en the dust below,  
 When the burning gold of the diadem  
 Was set on her pallid brow!  
 Then died away that haughty sound,  
 And from th' encircling band,  
 Stept Prince and Chief, 'midst the hush profound,  
 With homage to her hand.

Why pass'd a faint cold shuddering  
 Over each martial frame,  
 As one by one, to touch that hand,  
 Noble and leader came?  
 Was not the settled aspect fair?  
 Did not a queenly grace,  
 Under the parted ebon hair.  
 Sit on the pale still face?

Death, Death! canst thou be lovely  
 Unto the eye of Life?  
 Is not each pulse of the quick high breast  
 With thy cold mien at strife?  
 – It was a strange and fearful sight,  
 The crown upon that head,  
 The glorious robes and the blaze of light,  
 All gather'd round the Dead!

And beside her stood in silence  
 One with a brow as pale,  
 And white lips rigidly compress'd,  
 Lest the strong heart should fail;  
 King Pedro with a jealous eye  
 Watching the homage done  
 By the land's flower and chivalry  
 To her, his martyr'd one.

But on the face he look'd not  
 Which once his star had been:  
 To every form his glance was turn'd,  
 Save of the breathless queen;  
 Though something, won from the grave's embrace,  
 Of her beauty still was there,  
 Its hues were all of that shadowy place,  
 'Twas not for him to bear.



Alas! the crown, the sceptre,  
 The treasures of the earth,  
 And the priceless love that pour'd those gifts,  
 Alike of wasted worth!  
 The rites are closed—bear back the Dead  
 Unto the chamber deep,  
 Lay down again the royal head,  
Dust with the dust to sleep.

There is music on the midnight—  
 A requiem sad and slow.  
 As the mourners through the sounding aisle  
 In dark procession go,  
 And the ring of state, and the starry crown,  
 And all the rich array,  
 Are borne to the house of silence down,  
 With her, that queen of clay.

And tearlessly and firmly,  
 King Pedro led the train—  
 But his face was wrapt in his folding robe,  
 When they lower'd the dust again.  
 —'Tis hush'd at last, the tomb above,  
 Hymns die, and steps depart:  
 Who call'd thee strong as Death, O Love?

Mightier thou wert and art!

Source: Kelly, Gary (ed). *Felicia Hemans. Selected Poems, Prose and Letters*. Peterborough and Ormskirk: Broadview Press, 2002 (my underlining).

<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, Inez's execution is interpreted as lawful or judiciary, probably due to the allegations of impending threat to national sovereignty.

<sup>2</sup> See chapters XXVII to XXXI of the *Crónica* (125-149), in which Lopes successively refers to King Pedro's official declaration, the witnesses that he gathered, the scepticism of more informed individuals and, finally, the persecution, torture and death of those who had killed Inez.

<sup>3</sup> In chapter XLIV of the *Crónica* (199-202), Lopes comments on the great love of Pedro for Inez, which becomes materialised in an impressive tribute to her memory: a stately reburial fit for a queen and the erection of a monumental tomb. The fact that the tomb's statue representing Inez had a crown on its head would later on give rise to the legend upon which Hemans's poem is based.

<sup>4</sup> Apparently, more than a hundred operas were created about this story in Italy alone. The most famous was the one by Giovanni Paisiello in the eighteenth century and later, in 1830, a ballet entitled "Pietro di Portogallo" (see Anonymous "Ines de Castro in Opera and Ballet" 18).

<sup>5</sup> More recently, names as those of Teixeira de Pascoaes, Fernando Pessoa, Miguel Torga, Agustina Bessa-Luís, Natália Correia, Ruy Belo, Herberto Helder and Fiama Hasse Pais Brandão have perpetuated the figure and story of Inez de Castro.



<sup>6</sup> Behn's novel, *The History of Agnes de Castro, or the Force of Generous Love*, appears to have been a translation into the English language from another work, *Agnès de Castro, Nouvelle Portugaise* by a French novelist, J. B. de Brillhac (Amsterdam, 1685), thus confirming that this version of the story had an earlier French reception. Mrs. Behn's version appeared in *Modern Novels*, Vol. IV, and was dramatised in 1696 by Mrs. Catherine Trotter. Rather than simply telling a love story, Behn's novel follows the basic historical facts and reproduces a political intrigue.

<sup>7</sup> Mitford's play could not have influenced Hemans's poem because it was performed six years after the latter's death. It is more probable that Hemans may have heard about or read Walter Savage Landor's tragedy of Inez de Castro of 1828.

<sup>8</sup> Pedro's love for Inez brought the exiled Castilian nobility very close to power, with Inez's brothers becoming the prince's friends and trusted advisors. Thus, the influence of Inez and her two brothers on the Prince had provoked hostility at the Portuguese court. Some of King Afonso IV's advisors believed that a member of the Castro family could plot to kill Fernando, Constanza's and Pedro's heir, to promote Inez's sons to the throne.

<sup>9</sup> See Sousa, "Episódio Camoniano" and *Inês de Castro*. It is normally classified as a lyric, thus distinguishing it from the more common war episodes. The episode discusses destiny, and leads the action to its tragic end. The nobility of the characters is also emphasised, in a way that is intended to create feelings of sympathy when the protagonist suffers. This technique is used most strongly when Inez fears the orphaning of her children more than losing her own life, and she begs for the commutation of capital punishment for an exile in Siberia (Cítia) or in Libya in order to have an opportunity to raise her children, and she is compared with "the young beautiful Policena". Strophes 134 and 135 are written to evoke this pity.

<sup>10</sup> The merging of different traditions or versions of the story became more or less stabilised by the nineteenth century, period in which the literal coronation is generally accepted.

<sup>11</sup> The story was well-known in Europe mainly through French tragedy, beginning with Houdard de la Motte's tragedy of 1723, which created a sensation in Paris. De Staël must have been not only closely aware of its popularity but also herself sensitive to it.

<sup>12</sup> An early work of hers, appropriately written in heroic couplets, called *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808) represents, in Gary Kelly's words, "Britain's engagement as a renewal of the nation's libertarian traditions, derived from classical republicanism" ("Introduction" 21). Its openly political theme may have been one of the reasons why the republican and pacifist Percy Shelley wrote to her with the pretext of dissuading her from the support for war and belief in a god (*ibidem*).

<sup>13</sup> Arabella Stuart (1575-1615) was the daughter of Charles Stuart; her descent from Henry VIII's sister, Margaret Tudor, placed her in the line of succession to Elizabeth I of England. Many argued that her title was preferable to that of James because she was born on English soil. Her marriage was prevented in Elizabeth's reign, but after James's accession (1603) to the English throne, Arabella secretly married (1610) William Seymour, who was also of royal descent. They were arrested and imprisoned but escaped; however, Arabella was recaptured (1611) and died in the Tower of London. Gary Kelly comments in his chapter "Death and the Matron" that "Hemans often represents female subjectivity oppressed unto death by masculine history [...]" and also that "Court monarchy's subordination of individuals to the requirements of power was a commonplace 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century political and social critique [...]" (202-203).

<sup>14</sup> With her novel *Corinne: or Italy* (1807), notable French woman of letters Germaine de Staël would recover the cult of sensibility for the woman writer. Her story of an independent, free-spirited woman improviser and poet would bring "the feeling woman out of the home and put her on a public platform to perform" (Leighton 31). Hemans's "Corinne at the Capitol" significantly reproduces the famous early scene in that novel, where Corinne is crowned, like Petrarch, at the Capitol in Rome. But this crowning, like that of Inez de Castro, is meant to carry a heavy price for the woman: either the loss of happiness or of life itself. Fame, conferred either by art or by love, is somehow shown to be fatal for these women.



<sup>15</sup> Felicia Hemans's family was part of the earnest, prosperous and cosmopolitan merchant class of Liverpool, including religious Dissenters and republicans, who disapproved as much of aristocratic excesses as of the religious ostentation of Catholicism.

<sup>16</sup> The poet's intention is not so much to denounce or criticise the injustice or inhumanity of her character's situation, who is historically a victim of both male lust and ambition, but to finally render that dead woman public and present her as a symbol of someone sanctified or canonised by love. Nevertheless, as an inanimate and aestheticised object she is constrained to act as a mere puppet for the sake of male institutionalised grief.

<sup>17</sup> It would be interesting to analyse in more detail the connections between the historical and literal coronations of both Inez de Castro and Princess Victoria, as queens, to the symbolic or metaphorical crowning of both de Staël and Hemans's "Corinne" and Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh", as poets.

<sup>18</sup> Hemans's influence on later Victorian women poets, namely on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Brontës and Christina Rossetti, would clearly position her as a precursor. But her centrality on the feminine would also condition and affect male poets as canonical as Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning.

<sup>19</sup> As Angela Leighton points out, the highly "imaginative landscapes of Romanticism" seem to be "constantly subjected to the critical and social bias of the woman", and Hemans puts her imagination "to the service of all the mothers, daughters and wives who have been deserted by the Romantic male's intrepid idealism" (21). To further analyse this feminine perspective of male history, namely Charlotte Brontë's poetic dramatisations of the Romantic hero and the woman as a victim of the imperial male's abandonment, see my article entitled "Representations of Power and Transgression: The Idea of Byron and the Byronic Character in the Poetry of the Brontës".

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