FRANCES SHANNON: 'A LADY OF PECULIARLY FASCINATING MANNERS' NEGOTIATING HER WAY THROUGH LATE REGENCY ENGLAND

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Introduction

Frances Shannon was a minor literary figure of the final decade of the Regency, who has never been accorded the recognition due to her. Her most important work was as the main librettist for John Barnett's opera, *The Mountain Sylph*, of 1834, perhaps the most iconic opera of the era entitled English Romantic Opera. She also contributed other librettos, plays and stories. Her sexual transgression cost her a cossetted married life and forced her and her new family into poverty that she surmounted through her determination and resourcefulness eventually to achieve, once again, comfortable circumstances.

Life

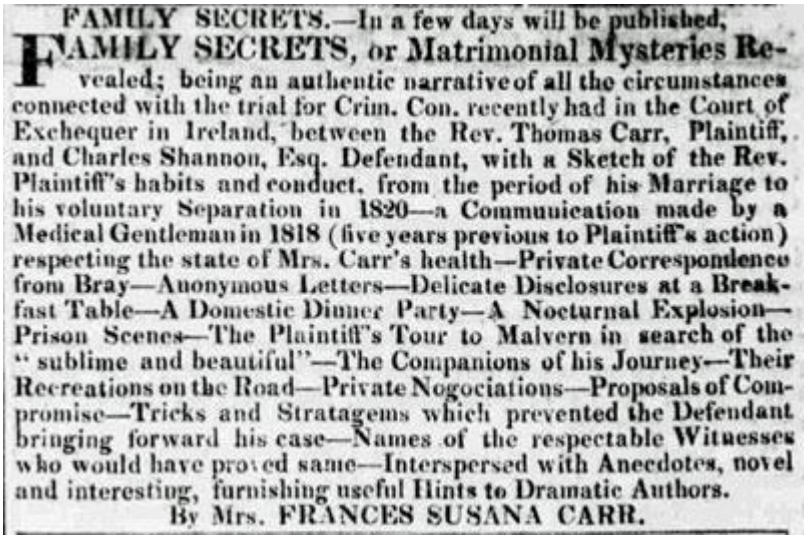
Frances Susanna Mongan was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, on 24 November, 1791. Her father, a doctor, died in 1803 and her uncle, Terence Charles Mongan Warburton (1754-1826), became her guardian. Warburton eventually became Bishop of Cloyne, a senior position in the Protestant Church of Ireland. Frances highlighted this connection publicly on at least two occasions. Her grandfather was a noted blind harpist, Dominic O'Mungan.

In 1812, she married the Reverend Thomas Carpenter Carr. Carr was a man of some wealth and provided a comfortable life for his wife giving her an allowance of £200 a year (possibly increased later to £450) and jewels worth £1,000, according to a later court case.[1] They had four surviving children. However, in 1816, Carr overstretched himself financially when building a glebe house and ended up imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea in London for two years from around the end of 1818. Even so he left his wife well provided for with £300 a year. She took advantage of his absence to run off to Wales with their four children and Charles Shannon, a Dublin barrister. On his release, Carr caught up with them and took back the four children, probably in the second half of 1821. By this time, Frances had borne one of Charles Shannon's children, although baptised Florence Matilda Carr, Shannon temporarily having added Carr to his name. It seems likely that this pregnancy, in the light of Carr's impending release, is what precipitated their flight. They went on to have five children.

On 13 June, 1823, Carr sued Shannon for what was quaintly called criminal conversation with his wife and it is this court case that provides some of the early information on her life. Carr asked for £6,000 damages, getting on for a million pounds today. In the event he was awarded £500. The lawsuit described Frances at the time of her marriage to Carr as young, handsome and accomplished and as a 'lady of most peculiarly fascinating manners'. Unfortunately, it did not elaborate. Nor is there any known photograph or portrait.

Early the following year an advertisement appeared in the *Globe and Traveller* (Jan. 12, 1824) announcing a forthcoming book by Frances that claimed to elaborate on Carr's history, activities and acquaintances including "his voluntary Separation in 1820". No publisher was named although publication was claimed to be "in a few days" and no further advertisement

or other trace of the supposed publication has been found. Almost certainly it was intended to paint Frances in a better light than the bald facts of the case did and to warn off Carr from pressing too hard to claim his damages from Charles Shannon unless he wanted to risk more public embarrassment, a ploy made possible by the loose libel laws of the time.[2]



FAMILY SECRETS.—In a few days will be published,

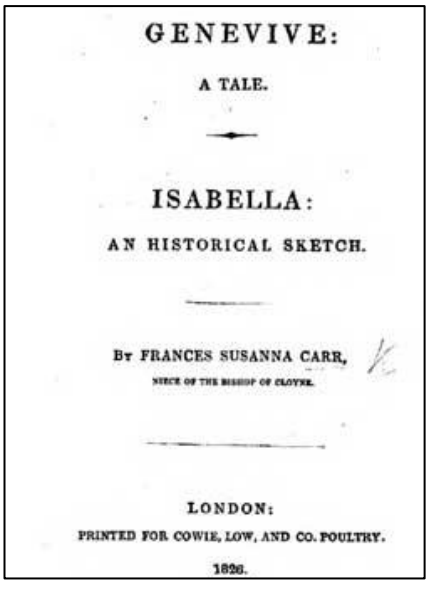
FAMILY SECRETS, or Matrimonial Mysteries Revealed; being an authentic narrative of all the circumstances connected with the trial for Crim. Con. recently had in the Court of Exchequer in Ireland, between the Rev. Thomas Carr, Plaintiff, and Charles Shannon, Esq. Defendant, with a Sketch of the Rev. Plaintiff's habits and conduct, from the period of his Marriage to his voluntary Separation in 1820—a Communication made by a Medical Gentleman in 1818 (five years previous to Plaintiff's action) respecting the state of Mrs. Carr's health—Private Correspondence from Bray—Anonymous Letters—Delicate Disclosures at a Breakfast Table—A Domestic Dinner Party—A Nocturnal Explosion—Prison Scenes—The Plaintiff's Tour to Malvern in search of the "sublime and beautiful"—The Companions of his Journey—Their Recreations on the Road—Private Negociations—Proposals of Compromise—Tricks and Stratagems which prevented the Defendant bringing forward his case—Names of the respectable Witnesses who would have proved same—Interspersed with Anecdotes, novel and interesting, furnishing useful Hints to Dramatic Authors.

By Mrs. FRANCES SUSANA CARR.

Frances's first literary foray was in April, 1826, when she published a book that included a story, *Genevive*, and an historical sketch of Isabella of Spain. She used the Carr surname, although by the July she had switched to Shannon when baptising her daughter, Selina, even though she was and remained married to Carr.[3] She also signalled the Cloyne connection, advertising herself as the Bishop's niece both here and in press advertisements for the book.[4] The story based on the medieval legend of Genevieve of Brabant, who was wrongly accused of adultery, seems a rather odd choice given Frances's circumstances. It ended:

> May her life inculcate lessons of piety and resignation, which can alone alleviate the pangs of sorrow, and prove a support under the reverses of fortune. May it inspire that confidence in Divine Providence which converts grief into joy, and draws from the abyss of misery all who place their hopes in heaven.[5]

Perhaps Frances was finding her new life rather different from what she had expected but if she was hoping that Bishop Warburton would be sufficiently impressed or sufficiently embarrassed to engineer some solution, she was to be disappointed as he died a few months later. Frances was clearly fascinated by Isabella's history and while decrying her inauguration of the Inquisition also saw it as an example of her integrity. She highlighted the fact that Isabella 'obliged her husband [Ferdinand] to make Castile his residence, to pay obedience to her will, and to respect the rights, the laws, and customs of the monarchy', an action alien to the contemporary English marriage where many of a wife's rights were ceded to her husband, a point to which we will return.[6]



GENEVIVE:

A TALE.

ISABELLA:

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH.

By FRANCES SUSANNA CARR,

NIECE OF THE BISHOP OF CLOYNE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR COWIE, LOW, AND CO. POULTRY.

1826.

Around 1827, the Shannons went to Paris possibly to avoid paying the debt to Carr or because of social pressures or just to live more cheaply, all of which would have become more urgent if they had been hoping for help from the Bishop. Charles Shannon appears to have had a sister living in Paris, which might have encouraged their move.[7] Following their move to France, Charles or Frances hit upon the idea of providing London theatres with translations of plays that had gone down well in Paris. The first successful effort, published under Charles's name, was *The Youthful Queen*, which was first staged at Drury Lane on 24 October, 1828. This was a translation of Jean-François-Alfred Bayard′s *Christine ou La Reine de Seize Ans* about Queen Christina of Sweden. Frances almost certainly contributed and the list of plays published by John Dicks many years later included them both as authors. Given its subject of a queen ruling alone and her past interest in Isabella, she may well have been the instigator. Charles, and presumably Frances, then worked with Thomas James Thackeray on adapting a number of French works for the English stage, the best known being a 'petite comedy' titled *My Wife, or My Place* that was premiered at the Haymarket on 20 August, 1831.

Thackeray, cousin of the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, was an author, agriculturalist and Francophile who campaigned vigorously for authors' rights at a time when they were almost non-existent.[8] Although Thackeray had apparently produced some plays independently of the partnership, at least one of them, *Force of Nature* produced on 4 August, 1830, at the Haymarket, was later claimed by Frances to have been written by Charles.[9] Thackeray's main responsibility was to hawk the Shannons' work around the London theatres, negotiate terms and make any changes required; if Charles's debt to Carr was still outstanding then he would have wanted to avoid coming over himself, not to mention the cost.

Charles died in Paris in 1832 but the family continued to live there and Frances continued to work anonymously with Thackeray.[10] She later claimed to have written *Gustavus of Sweden or The Masked Ball*, an adaptation of Daniel Auber's *Gustave Trois*, which briefly held the stage at the Royal Victoria Theatre (Old Vic) premiering on 7 November, 1833.[11] As was usual when adapting continental opera for the London stage at that time, Auber's through composed opera was broken down into dialogue interspersed with songs much in the manner of a modern musical. Even if Frances was mainly responsible for the adaptation, Thackeray almost certainly added the lines having Gustavus decry the theatre monopoly as that was a cause close to his heart. It was Thackeray's name that appeared on the libretto.[12]

Matters might have continued in this vein with Thackeray arranging matters in London and taking the credit for authorship while paying off Frances, but for Barnett's opera *The Mountain Sylph*. This premiered on 25 August, 1834, at the English Opera House (The Lyceum) to considerable acclaim. The librettist then, and often now, was said to be Thackeray, Barnett specifically acknowledging him in the 1834 vocal score.[13] Frances must have got wind of this success and realised that she should have been paid rather more than the £30 she received from Thackeray. He probably received between £150 and £200 and most likely towards the top of that range.[14] She complained to the Dramatic Authors' Society, whom she said forwarded her some money that she used to bring her family to England.[15]

Around a year after the premiere, on 9 August, 1835, *The Satirist* wrote the following:

> We, in common with others, have at different times awarded high praise to Mr. Thackeray for the manner in which *The Mountain Sylph* is dramatised; if, however, the communication of a correspondent be correct, the merit is to be

> attributed to a different source. “Mr Thackeray” says our informant, “never wrote a line of that piece; it was written by Mrs Shannon, a lady residing in Paris. Mr. Thackeray professed to be her friend, and in a friendly way took upon himself the honours of authorship, and sent Mrs Shannon 30l [£], as her share of the profits arising from the piece”. Verily this seems a short and easy mode of acquiring fame; and no wonder Mr. Thackeray soon got admitted as a member of the Dramatic Authors' Society. On a discovery of the affair he was expelled and Mrs. Shannon elected in his stead.[16] We may also state, in justice to Mr. Thackeray, that he has been induced to refund some further portion of his gains, arising from the success of the opera.

The Observer (5 Mar. 1837), the *Theatrical Observer* (6 Mar. 1837) and *The Analyst* (Dec. 1839), 494, also made similar statements supporting Frances. When Duncombe later published her play, *Jealousy*, in 1838, Frances was described as author of *The Mountain Sylph*. It also credited her with being an honorary member of the Dramatic Authors’ Society. As a woman, honorary membership was all that she could achieve.

Given the inadequate copyright laws of the time, not to mention the costs and her questionable marital status, Frances would have found it nigh impossible to take legal action.[17] Her being in France with a family to look after only emphasised this weakness and Thackeray was no doubt rather surprised and chastened when she appeared in England and publicly asserted her authorship. Frances was quite courageous in taking on Thackeray, given he was a widely respected figure in the London literary world at that time and her actions seemed to have proved pretty effective in gaining recompense. It was ironic that Thackeray found himself in this position given that he was a determined torch bearer for fairer rights for authors but, as his later attempted burglary of Lady Lytton Bulwer showed, he was perhaps not a man of unimpeachable judgement or rectitude.[18]

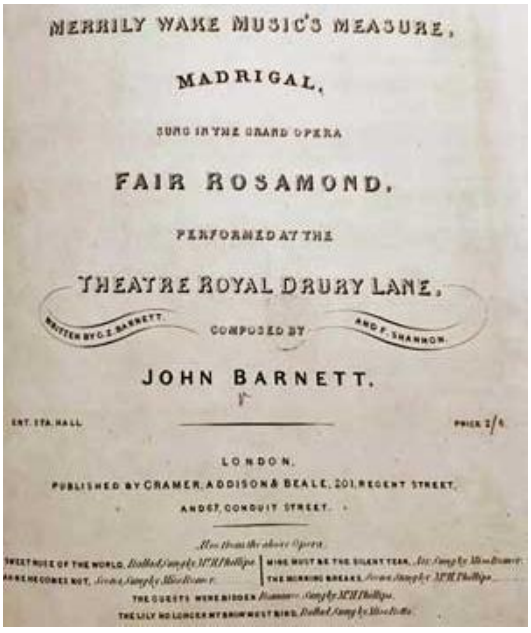
At almost the same time as the *Satirist* published its accusation, *The Naval and Military Gazette* (8 Aug. 1835) credited her with joint authorship with Charles Selby of *The Guardian Sylph*, a fairy operetta, that premiered at the Queen's Theatre on 3 August, 1835. Most sources mentioned only Selby but, given its similarities to *The Mountain Sylph*, Frances’s participation was highly likely. A translation, in 1836, of ‘Li marinari’, one of Gioachino Rossini’s *Les Soirées musicales*, published as *The Mariners’ Duet* was later ascribed to her.[19]

Unfortunately, these various literary activities did not prove sufficient to keep her and her five children, writing for the theatre being a particularly poorly paid profession at that time with payments being small and one-off no matter how popular or profitable performances were. The result was that ‘quantity rather than quality was necessary to maintain any sort of income level’ and Frances was nowhere near prolific enough given her familial responsibilities.[20] She was forced to turn to the Literary Fund (now the Royal Literary Fund) and apply for one of their grants, the first of four such applications. The first letter was dated 30 August, 1836, her file at the Fund noting that she was the niece of the Bishop of Cloyne, even though Warburton had been dead for ten years. In this and an undated follow up letter, she rehearsed her grievances against Thackeray that had been aired in *The Satirist* though making clear that an agreement had been reached and that ‘I do not wish any further ill to Mr Thackeray’. Her application was granted on 9 November, 1836 and a letter of thanks was sent on 10 November. Her next application was undated but rejected because it was within a year of the previous one. Her next successful application was dated 8 December, 1837, and granted on 13 December with a letter of thanks from Frances on 14 December.

This got her released from prison where she had been held for debt. Her final application was on 11 August, 1839 and granted in November 1839 with a letter of thanks from Frances dated 14 November. In all she was awarded 3 separate grants of £10, which was the minimum they gave.[21]

In her first letter, Frances claimed authorship of, *Gustavus of Sweden*, *The Mountain Sylph* and 'many more', indicating that she contributed to, at least, some of the works credited to Charles. Frances also mentioned an opera with music by John Thomson planned for the 1835-1836 season. This was must have been *The Bride of Lammermoor* attributed to Thackeray in *The Satirist* on 2 August, 1835. Perhaps that assertion finally tried Frances's patience as her claim to have written *The Mountain Sylph* appeared in *The Satirist* the following week. It was also the same week that *The Guardian Sylph* was premiered, which she might have thought put her in a stronger position to raise the accusation publicly.

Thackeray never challenged these accusations nor did he publish any dramatic works in English after those that Frances claimed involvement in. In her application to the Literary Fund, Frances forwarded a letter of support from Thomas Serle, who was a founder member of the Dramatic Authors' Society and stage manager at the English Opera House and so was closely involved in the matter. In giving her a grant, the Fund implicitly supported her claims.


MERRILY WAKE MUSIC'S MEASURE,

MADRIGAL,

SUNG IN THE GRAND OPERA

FAIR ROSAMOND,

PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL DRURY LANE,

WRITTEN BY C. BARNETT. COMPOSED BY AND F. SHANNON.

JOHN BARNETT.

ENT. STA. HALL. PRICE 2/6.

LONDON.

PUBLISHED BY CRAMER, ADDISON & BEALE, 201, REGENT STREET,

AND 67, CONDUIT STREET.

Also from the above Opera.

SWEET RUSE OF THE WORLD. Ballad. Sung by Mr. H. Phillips. | MINE MUST BE THE SILENT TEAR. Air. Sung by Miss Romer.

HENRY COMES NOT. Scena. Sung by Miss Romer. | THE MORNING BREAKS. Scena. Sung by Mr. H. Phillips.

THE GUESTS WERE BIDDEN. Romance. Sung by Mr. H. Phillips.

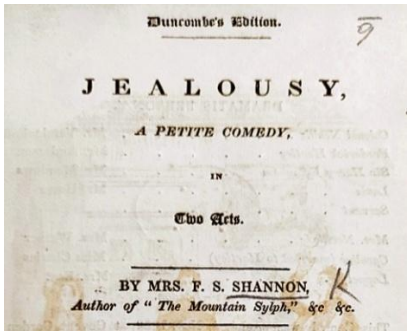
THE LILY NO LONGER MY BROW MAY WEAR. Ballad. Sung by Miss Betts.

Given that Frances had written most of the libretto of *The Mountain Sylph*, it would have been natural for John Barnett to want to involve her in his next opera, *Fair Rosamond*, which premiered on 2 February, 1837. The librettist then, and often now, was said to be Barnett's brother Charles Zachary Barnett. History then appeared to repeat itself. *The Observer* (Mar. 5, 1837) wrote that 'We mentioned some months ago that a lady was the author of the words of Mr. Barnett's new opera of *Fair Rosamond*. This lady is Mrs Shannon'. After mentioning the dispute with Thackeray over the text of *The Mountain Sylph*, it continued 'In the same way it appears that Mrs. Shannon's property in the words of *Fair Rosamond* is disputed by Mr. Joseph Barnett, the brother of the composer'. This looks to have been some garbled rumour. Not only did it identify the wrong brother, as Charles has always been credited and Joseph was a musician rather than playwright, but is unlikely, given that the Barnetts were familiar with the outcome of Thackeray's previous deception. If there was any argument, it was quickly settled as Cramer, Addison & Beale was advertising both names on the published vocal score less than three weeks after the premiere. Thomas Bellamy's 1840 book of *Lyric Poetry of Glees, etc*. only named Shannon, so Frances may have been responsible for the songs and Charles Barnett for the dialogue.[22]

Perhaps it was down to her peculiarly fascinating manners but Frances managed to persuade people to accommodate her and her family despite, seemingly, being unable to pay them. On 24 October, 1836, a Mr W.H. Mennettz wrote a letter in support of Frances's first application to the Literary Fund in which he stated that they had stayed with him and his wife for upwards of a year and that they had been giving them occasional assistance, without which Frances and her children 'would have wanted the necessities of life'. Later when the

family returned to France at the start of 1840, they lodged with a James Agnew who wrote that they would be there until they 'are in a fair way of being able to make themselves independent'. In the summer of 1838, Frances and family moved in with Charles Barnett a few months before his marriage and stayed there for about eighteen months. One has to wonder what his new wife made of it. On 6 November, 1839, Charles Barnett wrote a letter of support to the Literary Fund in which talked of 'her extreme destitution' and that 'she has written and produced several dramas with fair success' and was a 'widow of a gentleman of high literary acquirements and much private worth'.[23] Frances was living in his house while he was writing the libretto for Barnett's final opera, *Farinelli*, of 1839 and thus she might have been involved although he has always been credited with sole authorship. One cannot help but feel that Mannettz's and Barnett's letters were partly in their own interests to get rid of a family that had overstayed its welcome.

Frances's final known work was *Jealousy*, a translation of Bayard and Paul-Aimé Chapelle's *Mathilde ou la Jalousie*, first staged at the Vaudeville theatre, Paris, on June 3, 1835. It was staged at Covent Garden on October 20, 1838, but with little success. Charles Shannon was sometimes named as joint author but he had been dead some years before its Paris premiere. Possibly, his name was added to deflect any animosity towards a female writer or to attract more interest, given that he was better known in theatrical circles and had some name recognition through occasional revivals of *The Youthful Queen*.


Duncombe's Edition.

JEALOUSY,

A PETITE COMEDY,

IN

Two Acts.

BY MRS. F. S. SHANNON,
Author of "The Mountain Sylph," &c &c.



There was a curious incident at its premiere. In the play, Mrs Neville has a son by a first marriage but has neglected to tell her second husband of his existence and her son that she is his mother. Eventually all is put to right and the son welcomed by his stepfather who says to him 'embrace your mother'. At this point, according to the *Sun* (23 Oct. 1838), 'a violent hissing commenced, which lasted after the fall of the curtain'. It is difficult not to think that the 'foppish looking young man' making the noise was Charles Carr, Frances's son by the Reverend Carr, making clear that he would not be embracing his mother any time soon.[24] There was never any reconciliation made between Frances's two families.[25]

No further stage works by Frances are known. The final letter held by the Literary Fund from a James Agnew, dated 22 February, 1840, asked for help in placing a story by her in a London publication but it is not known whether they did and none has been identified.

According to the final letter, the family returned to France around the end of 1839, where they were 'likely to be placed in comfortable circumstances … by their own exertions'- a nice Victorian sentiment. Frances planned to teach English as well as write while a daughter was 'appointed to a very fine position in the family of the reigning prince of Shornbey Lippe'

and a son had gained a 'very good situation in Paris'.[26] Nothing more has been found about Frances until the 1851 census when she was listed as an annuitant staying with her daughter Louisa in London, although it is not obvious where such an annuity might have come from. She died at her daughter Selina's house in Chelsea on 4 March, 1864 and is buried in Brompton Cemetery.

The Mountain Sylph

We now look again in more detail on her most important work, the libretto for *The Mountain Sylph*, as it provides some interesting insights into her views on marriage. The century following *The Beggar's Opera* of 1728 saw very few English operas of any reputation or longevity. However, in 1834, Samuel James Arnold sought to rectify this lack by renaming the rebuilt Lyceum theatre, the English Opera House, and declaring it for "the presentation of English operas and the encouragement of indigenous talent". Thus began a period of 30 years, sometimes referred to as English Romantic opera, in which over 80 new English operas were written and performed.

The second opera that Arnold staged on August 25, 1834, was *The Mountain Sylph* by John Barnett. The opera was very popular over the next three decades and retained some presence throughout the rest of the century. The opera's plot is based on Adolphe Nourrit's scenario for the ballet *La Sylphide*. However, instead of the tragic ending a happy one was concocted as was required in an English opera at this time.

Donald and the Sylph fall in love. In the libretto manuscript submitted to the Examiner of Plays (the censor),[27] when Donald first declares his love, he says that he wants her to be his wife. He explains:

> To be united to me by the most sacred ties – Know'st thou not Hymen's Code? It is to love and to obey only, thro' weal, thro' woe, in both health, in ailing, his, his alone; never to leave, but ever to adore.

In response she sings:

Tho' Hymen's Code all this comprises
Cupid his laws and rules despises
One I'd love – but to obey
And never from his side to stray
Oh! no! – if that's to be a wife
Say not there's joy in such a life.
No! no! no! – I'll be no wife
There is no joy in such a life!

Mine is the gift of roving passion
To escape from care's dominion
When you smile, well pleas'd, I'll stay
But frown and swift I'll fly away
Oh, yes! If free I'll be your wife
Freedom's the charm of married life
Yes, yes, yes – in married life,
'Tis freedom makes a tender wife!

When she asks if wives are happy, the dialogue continues:

Donald Yes, happy in domestic duties, in the sweet cares of a mother

Sylph And pray tell me, what are the husbands doing all the time the wives are so pleasingly employed at home?

Donald Their duty calls them by active labor (*sic*) to provide for those dear objects and, when weary and harassed, how sweet to return for consolation to a beloved companion.

Sylph Or perhaps to vent upon them a little ill humour or caprice – Oh! Yes – now I conceive all the felicity of a wife!

Donald finally has to concede;

Well then, be thou the arbitress of my fate - your wishes alone shall be my laws - be mine, in any way, but be mine!

This section is interesting not only in articulating Frances's view of marriage but in its rarity in a libretto literature wedded to the lazy convention of the happy marriage. It also suggests that her partnership with Charles Shannon had not softened her opinion and is in sympathy with her description of Isabella's marriage mentioned above. Frances, given that she was quite widely read, might have been aware of Mary Wollstonecraft's views on marriage, although tending more towards being in control herself rather than any idea of equality and mutual respect.[28] To judge by the later published libretto, the above section was omitted in performance, probably because the opera's running time was proving too long rather than because of the sentiments.[29]

The Mountain Sylph was much more of an original work than her previous adaptations and, either through her interest in the Sylph or her inexperience of the genre, she rather overdid the Sylph's role, some of which was then omitted. At the same time, to judge from the manuscript submitted to the censor, she failed to provide songs for some of the other singers, so they must have come from other sources, including, possibly, Thackeray. In particular, Thomas Dibdin complained that he had written some of them but had not been paid by Thackeray.[30]

Conclusions

Frances Shannon deserves a place in the history of 1830s drama and opera, so why has her visibility been so slight? Women writing for the theatre at that time (and many would say even now) faced much prejudice and even outright hostility, as when Catherine Gore won the prize for a national drama in 1844.[31] According to the writer, Barbara Hofland, the actor, Charles Macready, had commented on Mary Mitford's *Rienzi* of 1828, that 'it was a wonderful tragedy—an extraordinary tragedy "*for a woman to have written*"'.[32] She went on 'The men always make that reservation, my dear; they cramp us, my dear, and then reproach us with our lameness'. Despite this, women writers, such as Joanna Baillie earlier in the century and Mitford, had successful plays produced. The year following *The Mountain Sylph*, the English Opera House billed Mitford as the librettist for Charles Packer's *Sadak and Kalasrade*. Librettists were not usually named on the playbill but in this case the management clearly assumed that her involvement would be an attraction to see it. Even so, working in the male dominated theatre world was very difficult, particularly when women had no family or professional connections. This predicament was felt by Frances. She was offered tickets for

her to resell in lieu of money but declined, writing to the Fund 'how would a solitary female without the means of advertising turn these to account'.[33]

Some women struggled with the tension between the roles of public author and private lady and opted for anonymity or, as Baillie did, maintained a distance from their work by using men as a surrogate to negotiate terms, attend rehearsals and make any last minute changes.[34] Frances with five children in tow and possibly embarrassed by her marital situation was essentially forced into this way of working, particularly when living in France. In such cases, men's more conspicuous involvement, for example at rehearsals, would easily have resulted in their being assumed to be the author if they made no effort to contradict it.

Perhaps more importantly at this time, there was little interest in who wrote particular plays or librettos.[35] Between around 1820-1860, the middle classes often shunned the theatre and the intellectual standing of drama as a genre was at its lowest ebb.[36] There was usually no acknowledgement of authors on playbills (the Mitford mention was very much an exception) or on the manuscripts submitted to the censor. Press mentions were few, scattered and inconsistent. Even the printed librettos or vocal items, which were usually sold at performances, rarely named the librettist. If an identification was made, there would have been little interest in re-examining it, either then or later, leaving any wrong attribution to be repeated so adding to its apparent authority.

Frances Shannon's sexual transgression moved her from a comfortable, conventional, life into having to confront, for much of the time on her own, a theatre world, which, although more tolerant of her situation than society in general, still had many difficulties to be confronted. Her initial anonymity and limited success meant that she did not attract the animosity that some women writers provoked but rather had to deal with the more mundane problem of the appropriation of her rightful dues. This she addressed with confidence, intelligence, courage and, occasionally, a streak of ruthlessness notwithstanding her disadvantages and was an illustration of her recognisably modern belief that women should have agency on their own account and not just through their husband. A more thriving theatre world might have left her room to earn a decent living but, when it did not, she was still able to hold her family together, to provide for them and to give them a future, often using her powers of persuasion, 'her peculiarly fascinating manners', to rally others to her cause.

My thanks to the Royal Literary Fund for permission to reproduce material from the Frances Shannon file and to Elaine Hopper for background on the Carr family.

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[1] According to a family history, Carr was known as 'Tom of the money bags' and was hardly a diligent priest supposedly having 'only preached one sermon'. Elizabeth Rennick, *A Family Portfolio: An Account of the Ireland, Rowe, Hay, and Ruffy Families and Others* (Armadale, Vic.: E. Rennick, 1996), 83.

[2] Thanks to Elaine Hopper for pointing out this reference. A few years later, journalists like Barnard Gregory in *The Satirist* made a living out of agreeing to be paid off for withholding scurrilous stories.

[3] Divorce would have been a difficult and costly business requiring an Act of Parliament and, in any case, possibly unthinkable for a clergyman.

[4] *Globe*, 21 Apr. 1826.

[5] Frances Susanna Carr, *Genevive / Isabella* (London: Cowie, Low, and Co., 1826), 122-3.

[6] Carr, *Genevive / Isabella,* 142.

[7] Ros Escott, 'Frances Susanna (Mongan) Carr (1791 - 1864)', https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Mongan-140 (accessed 15 January, 2025).

[8] Thomas James Thackeray, *On Theatrical Emancipation and the Rights of Dramatic Authors* (London: C. Chapple, 1832).

[9] British Library, MS Coll. Loan 96, RLF 1/864, Letter from Frances Shannon to the Literary Fund, 9 Nov. 1836.

[10] A Charles Shannon was recorded as having died in Paris in 1832. As nothing further was heard of Charles after 1832 and as their last child was born in 1831, it seems certain that it was the same man..

[11] The opera became better known when Eugène Scribe's libretto was set by Giuseppe Verdi as *Un ballo in Maschera* in 1859.

[12] Christine Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 184, gives other examples of his contributions; Thomas James Thackeray, *Gustavus of Sweden* (London: R. Wilkes, 1833). Even today *Grove Music Online* only cites Thackeray.

[13] When the score was reissued many years later with revisions by Barnett (London: Boosey & Co, c.1880), he did not include any name.

[14] Barnett complained that the theatre manager, Samuel Arnold, refused to pay composers a fee, *The Times*, 12 May 1835. Arnold responded that they got sufficient reward from selling the rights to a music publisher and that Barnett would have received £300-£400 but for promising to share it equally with his librettist.

[15] *The Morning Post*, 22 Sept. 1834, reported a Mrs Shannon landing from France. If this was Frances, there would hardly have been time for her version of events.

[16] Leman Thomas Rede, *The Road to the Stage* (London: J. Onwhyn, 1836), p. 71, recorded Thackeray as being a member but has no mention of Shannon. This could be a result of when he made the list.

[17] She would have needed her husband's permission to proceed, something the Reverend Carr would have been extremely unlikely to give.

[18] The *Morning* Post, 23 Mar. 1840. Thackeray and his accomplice were attempting to steal documents to support Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer in his dispute with his estranged wife.

[19] Published by Augener & Co. in 1865.

[20] Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991),143, gives some examples and contrasts the poor rewards with those available for fiction; Susan Mumm, 'Writing for their Lives: Women Applicants to the Royal Literary Fund, 1840-1880' (Unpublished PHD thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1989), 94, pointed out that 'constant interruptions were normal for women, often because their writing was not viewed as serious work'.

[21] Mumm, 1989, 11, £30 was the average grant..

[22] Thomas Ludford Bellamy, ed., 'Lyric Poetry of Glees, Madrigals, Catches, Rounds, Canons, and Duets' (London: Bellamy, 1840), 264-265, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d9/Lyric_poetry_of_glees,_madrigals,_catches,_rounds,_cannons,_and_duets.._(IA_lyricpoetryofgle00bell).pdf (accessed 15 Jan. 2025)

[23] She was not a widow as Carr did not die until 1850 but, presumably, people overlooked or did not know her exact relationship to Shannon. Such arrangements were hardly uncommon in the theatre world.

[24] *Morning Post*, 22 October, 1838.

[25] Rather curiously, the three youngest Carr children added around five or more years to their birthdates making them in the early 1820s, according to their death notices. Perhaps they sought to show that it was not their mother who absconded with Charles Shannon by claiming to have been born during that period.

[26] This was probably the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe.

[27] British Library Manuscript Add MS 42927, ff.453-479.

[28] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), originally published in 1792.; Ruth Abbey, 'Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Hypatia*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Summer 1999), 78-95.; Sylvana Tomaselli*, Wollstonecraft: Philosophy, Passion, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 197-203.

[29] *The Mountain Sylph* (London: J.Duncombe & Co., 1834). Available at https://books.google.co.uk/books?vid=BL:A0019549243

[30] *The Observer*, 15 Sept. 1834, wrote that Thomas Dibdin claimed 'authorship at least of the songs, if not the whole of *The Mountain Sylph* … complaining that Thackeray employed him to write it and has not given him any part of the remuneration'. However, Dibdin did not write the whole opera nor all of the song but may have contributed a few.

[31] Laure Bakare, 'Sexism and gender divide ingrained in UK theatre, study claims', *The Guardian*, 27 Jan. 2020.; Booth, *Theatre*, 141, gave a rough, probable underestimate of 12% of plays being printed or produced by women in the nineteenth century with the numbers skewed towards later in the century.; Catherine Gore's play faced enormous hostility from the losing playwrights and from critics with the first night in uproar. Gore never published another play, Ellen Donkin, 'Mrs. Gore gives Tit for Tat', Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (eds), *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain Illustrated Edition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 54-74. Their book gives several other examples of the prejudiced faced by women playwrights.

[32] W.J. Roberts, *Mary Russell Mitford* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1913), 278-9. The italics are in the original.

[33] British Library, MS Coll. Loan 96, RLF 1/864, the second letter from Frances Shannon to the Literary Fund, undated.

[34] Mary Poovey, T*he Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 183. Mitford was quite happy to attend in person, Roberts, *Mary Russell Mitford*, 321.

[35] Richard Pearson, *Victorian Writers and the Stage*: *The Plays of Dickens, Browning, Collins and Tennyson. Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5, talked of 'the "invisibility" of the author … [who was] often excluded from the public gaze'.

[36] This assessment still holds true today, see David Barrett, 'Play Publication, Readers, and the 'Decline' of Victorian Drama', *Book History*, Vol. 2 (1999), 173-87.