

Helen Berry, *The Castrato and His Wife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 312pp. £16.99.

Helen Berry's fascinating book begins with the castration of a prepubescent chorister named Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci (1735-1790) in the remote Italian hill town of Monte San Savino. The business of castrating young boys had developed in Italy during the Renaissance to supply angelic voices to Roman Catholic Church choirs (most notably in the Vatican). By the eighteenth century, the deliberate mutilation of the male body to prevent the onset of puberty and preserve the unbroken voice was proscribed by civil and church authorities across the Continent. Yet even as it distanced itself from the method of supply, the Catholic Church continued to create the demand for castrati. For Tenducci, the son of a lowly servant, castration by an itinerant barber-surgeon in 1748 set him on course for a career beyond the church choir and he became one of the most celebrated opera singers of his time. This book is not intended as his biography but as a 'microhistory' of 'one man's entanglement in a complex web of competing cultural and social forces.' Many of the details of his life have been consigned to historical oblivion owing to a dearth of extant documentation yet Berry has managed to construct an engaging narrative that subtly conveys her exhaustive research.

The narrative hinges on key episodes in Tenducci's professional life which began after his stage debut in Venice in 1753. Five years later, he was invited to perform in London where he commanded a fee of around £700 for his first operatic season at the King's Theatre. Though Italian opera was the preserve of the social elite, Tenducci cultivated a broad fan-base by experimenting with English-language material, singing in a variety of 'popular' venues and using the press to engage his audiences. He was a 'celebrity pin-up' by the mid-1760s but for all his charisma and enterprise, he had little financial acumen. His life was 'characterised by boom-and-bust cycles that took him from luxury to penury and back again on a recurring basis'. Guarantees of substantial remuneration took him to Ireland in 1765 and to Scotland in 1768 yet he had to return to Italy to avoid his creditors for a period in 1771. During his time in Ireland he became embroiled in a notorious scandal involving a young Protestant girl named Dorothea Maunsell. She was the fifteen-year-old daughter of Thomas Maunsell of Co. Limerick, Chief Justice for Co. Cork and later a King's Counsellor in the Court of the Exchequer.

While engaged in Dublin, Tenducci became a regular visitor to the Maunsells' townhouse where he encouraged Dorothea's evident talent for singing (it is uncertain whether or not he was actually employed as her music-master). A well-heeled girl was expected to become proficient at music-making and dancing but these accomplishments were intended to set her up for marriage not a career in the performing arts. A marriage partner was selected for Dorothea in 1766 but she eloped with Tenducci and married him in a clandestine Catholic ceremony in Cork. Berry explores how this unconventional union offered both parties a

means of 'escape' from social and gender constraints and deftly guides the reader through the subsequent press coverage. She analyses the response of Dorothea's father, who swiftly launched a publicity offensive and had Tenducci imprisoned on charges of abduction. Social convention obliged Maunsell to maintain that Dorothea had been seduced and kidnapped because to concede that she had acted of her own free will was to accept that his authority had been undermined. In actuality, she defied both his paternal authority and his legal might, negotiating Tenducci's release from prison and terms that allowed them to (re)marry in a Protestant ceremony in 1767.

Berry contends that matrimony allowed Dorothea to pursue the artistic ambitions she harboured, challenging the social expectations of her gender and class in the process. She sang publicly alongside (and sometimes in place of) her husband and had an account of their relationship published in the form of an epistolary novel – a key primary source of evidence for Berry. Still, Dorothea was constrained by the fact that her husband was a eunuch and she eventually sued for an annulment of their union in 1775. By this time, she had technically committed a crime of bigamy by 'marrying' another man who had given her two children and, more importantly, was acceptable to her father. Thomas Maunsell legitimised his daughter's new situation at the complex annulment proceedings in London and finally redressed the family's public humiliation by successfully arguing that she had been 'falsely called Tenducci' in the first instance. A cache of documents pertaining to the court case provides the substance of Berry's study and includes, among the numerous depositions, the statement of a witness to Tenducci's castration in Italy. This remarkable testimony (a translation of which is presented by Berry as an appendix) provided the requisite proof that Tenducci had been 'rendered totally incapable of the Act of Generation or procreation of children and consequently of consummating Marriage.'

Despite this refutation of his masculinity, Tenducci was associated with rumours of affairs with women for the rest of his life. He remained in England where he was most successful but occasionally performed further afield; W.A. Mozart composed for him while in Paris in 1778. Dorothea's ultimate conformity meant that she was effaced 'from the attention of posterity' but Tenducci commanded the attention of the press until his death in Genoa in 1790. Even so, deficits in the body of historical evidence force the author to admit to a degree of supposition which renders the narrative somewhat judgemental and repetitive in places. At the same time though, the reference notes and bibliography are comprehensive, accounting for about a third of the entire work. The publications of a number of eminent scholars of eighteenth-century Ireland are referenced although it is surprising to find that the works of the musicologist Brian Boydell do not feature among them. The musically-inclined will appreciate the application of musical nomenclature at various junctures including the use of 'prelude' for 'prologue' and 'coda' for 'epilogue'. The object of this dramatic tale of an Italian castrato and his Irish wife is not salacious titillation and the provocative subjects

of castration, sex and marriage which lie at its heart are treated with tact. In so doing, the author has crafted a thought-provoking exploration of social and sexual conformity which ranges across eighteenth-century Europe.

National University of Ireland Maynooth

Karol Mullaney-Dignam

Karol Mullaney-Dignam, *Music and Dancing at Castletown, County Kildare 1759-1821* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 62pp. €9.99.

This study of music and dancing at Castletown House is a welcome addition to the *Maynooth studies in local history* series. It is a novel subject, about which little is known in Ireland, and Karol Mullaney-Dignam is to be congratulated on her scholarship in this endeavour. The book is divided into three chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. The chapters discuss the place of music and dancing in the milieu of Thomas and Lady Louisa Conolly; specific occasions for both activities at Castletown House and, finally, dancing- and music-masters and those involved in the making of musical instruments.

From the time it was built in the 1720s, Castletown House was well-known for the hospitality extended by Speaker Conolly and his wife Katherine, and by the latter during her long widowhood. This continued during Louisa Conolly's time as chatelaine from 1759 to her death in 1821, the dates dealt with in this book. As the author remarks, the Conolly family's long-established relationship with Dublin Castle and the viceroyalty was significant, and it played a large part in the social life at Castletown. Acknowledged as the apogee of Irish hospitality, Louisa's sister, Sarah, described a visit to the house in the 1780s: 'Castletown goes on as usual, always the receptacle for society, comfort and friendship, and very often for innumerable personages'. But the substantial entertainments that had been enjoyed there by many began to decline from the time of the Regency crisis in 1788-9, when Conolly clashed with the lord lieutenant, the 1st marquis of Buckingham, and subsequently refused to attend functions at Dublin Castle. They declined further thanks to the civil unrest of the mid-1790s, the 1798 Rebellion, and the union with Great Britain.

There is much of interest here that the author brings to our notice. Dancing, for example, was a measure of breeding and as such, an activity to be admired by others, and by dancing or performing the minuet, one expected to be not only admired but judged by others – almost as a rite of passage for young ladies entering society. Lady Louisa Conolly was quite knowledgeable on the subject, and insisted that the nieces who lived with her at Castletown, were proficient in this area. Dancing masters were employed from an early age, for which the Conollys paid an enrolment fee of £2. 5s. 6d, and about 3s. 9½d. per lesson. She also prepared her nephew's wife, the new duchess of Leinster, for her presentation at a ball at Dublin Castle in 1775, after which she proudly informed the dowager duchess (Louisa's