

Institution: Newcastle University
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: Informing the Public Perception of Marriage, Family Life and Inheritance in the Pre-Modern Era
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Newcastle research has informed public perceptions of marriage as an institution in Britain and abroad by: (i) challenging cultural values and social assumptions about marriage; (ii) expanding the sensibilities of individuals on this subject; and (iii) extending the range and improving the quality of evidence pertaining to the history of marriage and through this enhancing public understanding of sexual health issues and informed marriage equality debates.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning historical research conducted by Helen Berry (Professor of British History, 2000 to present) explores the changing social context and legal framework of marriage and inheritance from the Reformation to the modern period, specifically the transition from control by the church to control by the state over people's private lives. The research has provided new insights into previously-hidden histories of private and family life in the pre-modern period, particularly in relation to the history of masculinity and the family (1-4).</p> <p>Since 2005 Berry has utilised archival material located in national collections in Britain, Ireland, Italy, and the United States, specifically family collections, legal documents, art history, and printed sources (e.g. newspapers). The research interrogated the family history and life course of men who did not father children, and explored the strategies for procuring heirs among the never-married, or among men who remained childless after marriage. Located within the broad context of feminist scholarship since c.1970, the underpinning research challenged the assumption that marriage in Georgian England was a socially and sexually consistent construct positioned within a largely Protestant cultural, social and religious world view. It analysed the patriarchal presuppositions that supported marriage in the eighteenth century as a social institution that sought to control women's sexuality and labour, and that positioned supposedly normative heterosexual marriage as the crucial keystone to a stable society.</p> <p>In the process of utilising queer theory to complicate the establishment of marriage as social stabiliser, the research uncovered a previously-unknown history of a castrato marriage which is unique in British history (1, 2). The arrival in England of Italian castrati – male singers who had been castrated as boys to preserve their unbroken voices – provoked debates amongst the English, which led to some published commentaries of themes which were often otherwise unrecorded, particularly in relationship to gender and sexuality, i.e. whether castrati were 'real' men (3). Research into the life and marriage of opera singer (and castrato) Guisto Ferdinando Tenducci offered a fascinating insight into the world of opera and the history of sex and marriage in Georgian England. Using archival documents relating to the legal case examining the marriage between Tenducci and Dorothea Maunsell, the research revealed that despite the legitimacy of their union being in question due to Tenducci's status as a castrato, the couple were widely accepted as being married by polite society. This reveals the fluidity and flexibility of these supposed social norms, the extent to which society in the eighteenth century would accept alternative unions, and the implications of this for public understanding of marriage as an institution in the twenty-first century (1, 2).</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>1. Berry, H., <i>The Castrato and His Wife</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2011), 310pp. <i>Published by OUP's trade press.</i> REF2 Output: 153697.</p>

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2. Berry, H., 'Queering the History of Marriage: the Social Recognition of a Castrato Husband in Eighteenth-Century Britain', 11,000-word article in top-10 peer-reviewed journal, *History Workshop Journal*, 74(1): 27-50 (Autumn 2012). REF2 Output: 177631.
3. Berry, H., 'Gender, Sexuality and the Consumption of Musical Culture in Eighteenth-Century London', in Hindle, S., Shepard, A. and Walter, J. (eds.), *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England* (Boydell and Brewer, 2013), 10,000-word chapter. *Invited contribution to collection of essays by leading scholars in field of early modern English history*. REF2 Output: 156597.
4. Berry, H. and Foyster, E. (eds.) *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) – including 8,000 word introduction and 10,000 word chapter by Berry and Foyster, 'Childless men in early modern England' (50% authorship each). Available from HEI.

Berry has not received additional research support from any other organisation. Crucial to enabling this research, however, was institutional support for it; namely a sabbatical in 2008/9, and an additional semester's teaching relief that year funded by a Faculty Research Support grant.

4. Details of the impact

The research's main output, *The Castrato and His Wife* (**1**) was deliberately marketed to reach audiences beyond academia. Its general appeal arises from the wide range of topics it addresses: the history of marriage, family and custom in Europe before modern times; the history of sexuality; music and Baroque opera; and the social and cultural history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. Its print run of 7,000 in hardback in the UK was followed by a US edition (January 2012), Kindle edition, and a paperback edition. Sales (as of March, 2013) are c.5,500 copies (**IMP1**). The book has been reviewed on the Amazon site by 29 customers and is rated with 4.1 out of 5 stars (**IMP2**). Customer review comment extracts include:

"this is a first rate piece of research written in an informative and entertaining style offering not just a very readable biography of a forgotten singer, but a wealth of insight into the period in which he lived. Highly recommendable"

"this book is thoroughly referenced and packs in an astonishing wealth of information about music, morality and sexuality at a time of rapid and profound change. I had my reservations about whether such an obscure subject would hold my interest, particularly since the period is not one that I know particularly well, but I found it an enjoyable and informative read, ideal for those of us who like our history to be thought-provoking as well as rich in human interest. Highly recommended"

"[the book] is real quality, not only telling a great (and true) tale, but touching many contemporary themes, such as celebratory culture, sex, gender, and abuses by the Catholic Church" (**IMP2**).

It is currently under consideration for translation into 9 languages; film rights have also been secured by the Conway Mulcahy Agency (Soho, London) from Oxford University press for development as a general-release movie (under negotiation).

As well as being enjoyed by its readers, the book received outstanding critical acclaim in the national and international media, which demonstrates the reach and significance of its impact. It was selected as Radio 4's 'Book of the Week' (October 2011), read by actress Greta Scacchi, which ensured the book reached c. 7 million listeners in the UK and worldwide via iPlayer soon after publication (**IMP3**).

Reviewed widely in the press, in November 2011 it was long-listed for the Longman/History Today 'Book of the Year Prize', awarded to a book that has "contributed significantly to making its subject

accessible and rewarding to the general reader of history and displaying innovative research and interpretation in its field" (**IMP4**). It was selected as a *BBC History Magazine* 'Favourite Book of the Year' (December 2011) and in its first American coverage was favourably reviewed in the *Washington Post* (January 2012) which stated:

"Berry's meticulously researched yet very readable story of Tenducci and Dorothea resonates across the centuries to our own time. What makes a marriage real? Do we want our celebrities (or spouses) to be "natural" or eccentric? "The Castrato and his Wife" is a fascinating account of how masculinity, femininity and marriage were being reshaped in 18th-century Europe just when modernity was taking shape" (**IMP4**).

The review of *The Castrato and his Wife* in *History Today*, for example, concluded that:

"Berry's fresh look at shifting attitudes to sex, marriage, childhood and the family confounds many of our assumptions about the Enlightenment. This deeply intelligent and sympathetic account of Giusto and Dorothea demonstrates the power of micro-history to cast new light on periods that we thought we knew and understood" (**IMP4**).

The research behind the book has also featured on BBC Radio 4's 'Voices from the Old Bailey' programmes, presented by Professor Amanda Vickery. The programme utilising the research (August 2011) received the fourth highest number of listeners of any programme on Radio 4 in 2010 and 2011, with 2.5 million listeners, with the daily listening figures for the programme normally approx. 1.95 million (**IMP5**). The broadcast is available to download from BBC iPlayer ensuring its continued impact (**IMP4**). Following broadcast of the series, the programme's producers also noted impact on Old Bailey Online [a fully searchable, digitised collection of the Old Bailey Proceedings] which experienced an increase in visitors to the site, "18% higher than the previous month" (**IMP5**).

In 2012 Berry also appeared in a BBC4 television series on restoration women presented by Lucy Worsley, entitled: "Harlots, Housewives and Heroines: a 17th Century History for Girls". Berry discussed women, leisure and consumption (for example, shopping, theatres and opera, drawing upon material featured in *The Castrato and His Wife* (**IMP4**)). The programme was widely reviewed, e.g. in *The Guardian*. The programme was available internationally via the BBC website on iPlayer and is still available online via You Tube (over 13,000 hits to date) (**IMP6**). The impact of the research is further demonstrable through having informed media presentations on British history, including: *The History Show*, an hour-length feature on national radio station, RTE Radio 1 in Ireland, discussing historical biographies (November 2011); and an edition of Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* (March 2012).

Public awareness has also been enhanced and its reach demonstrated via Berry's personal website (<http://www.helenberry.net/>), blogs and personal appearances. Berry has shared research insights through the series of personal appearances at literary festivals and guest signings across the UK (Sept 2011-Sept 2012), such as the Lichfield Litfest (audience of c.100); Notes and Letters Festival (King's Place, London); the *Sunday Times* Oxford Literary Festival (audience of c.200); and the Off the Shelf Festival, Sheffield, as well as public lectures, for example in Newcastle (audience of c.200) which continues to be available online (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/events/public-lectures/item.php?opera-passion-and-tragedy-in-georgian-britain-the-curious-history-of-the-castrato-and-his-wife>).

In a workshop 'Equality and Diversity in the History of Marriage: Why Some Things Have Changed More Than You Would Think' at the General Conference of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) in Chicago (1100 delegates, July 2013), Berry used research insights to inform political debates on marriage equality in the US (**IMP7**). Following a presentation 'Could a castrato have sex, and why does it matter?' by Berry to a local lecture club (comprising of public and sexual health promotion officers, youth workers and teachers), one worker commented that it was "a thought provoking and engaging evening and an excellent opportunity to discuss sexual health in a supportive environment. It placed sexual health in an historical context with real relevance for

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modern practice" (IMP8). Public awareness of the research has also been achieved via a series of blogs on the history of marriage, gender and the family, and in particular public discussion of contemporary issues such as the relevance of the royal family and debates surrounding gay marriage (IMP4). A YouTube clip of Berry speaking about the book has been viewed more than 90 times (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4e2Z3hiMUk>).

All this has raised awareness of the research presented in the book and highlights its current and continuing relevance to current public and policy debates. These events have also led Berry to have face-to-face and email discussions with (i) members of the public concerning their own research into family history; and (ii) professionals who are interested in the history of the castrato and marriage, such as curators of private and public museum collections (e.g. the Montagu Music Collection), medical academics (e.g. a Professor of Anatomy and Neurobiology, specialising in treating men with androgen deprivation-related conditions) (IMP8).

As a direct result of the research, Berry was invited to write an entry on Dorothea Maunsell (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/104868?docPos=3>) for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (IMP9), a dictionary used by the general public, educators and students, local historians and genealogists worldwide.

Berry helped to raise £12,000 in sponsorship for the Inspirational Women of the North East (IWNE) Project (<http://www.iwne.org/>), including funding from the Catherine Cookson Foundation. The project, which began in 2012, aims to celebrate, promote and acknowledge the diversity of women of the North East of England, past present and future. Impact within the REF period relates to an enhanced regional and national awareness of women in the North East, through public outreach, training, extensive media engagement (including social media, e.g. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IWNE.exhibit>) and events such as a photography competition. Beneficiaries have included community groups, schools, local residents and 'early career' professionals. The general public were also encouraged to nominate inspirational women for an art exhibition (October-December 2013) ensuring the impact would continue beyond the REF period (IMP10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (IMP1) Sales figures for *The Castrato and His Wife*. Available on request.
- (IMP2) Amazon rating and comments. Available at: http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Castrato-Wife-Helen-Berry/dp/0199569819/ref=reader_auth_dp.
- (IMP3) *The Castrato and His Wife*, Radio 4 'Book of the Week' (October 2011). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b015j711>
- (IMP4) A summary of media coverage of *The Castrato and His Wife*, including reviews, blogs and media engagement. Available on request.
- (IMP5) Email from Assistant Producer, Loftus Audio Ltd ('Voices from the Old Bailey').
- (IMP6) Harlots, Housewives and Heroines: a 17th Century History for Girls (YouTube clip). Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ELNqwsPX4E&feature=relmfuwatch?v=1ELNqwsPX4E&feature=relmfu>.
- (IMP7) MCC General Conference XXV. Helen Berry workshop. Available at: <http://believe.mcccchurch.org/?p=863>.
- (IMP8) Unsolicited email feedback from members of the public and professionals.
- (IMP9) Email from Publication Editor of Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
- (IMP10) Contact: Project Manager, Inspirational Women of the North East (IWNE) Project.