

porters, and even turned some into bitter foes. On August 3, 1916 he was executed by hanging.

Casement's supporters denied the authenticity of the diaries for some forty years, but in 1959 the texts were finally published as *The Black Diaries*. Examination of the autograph copies proved that forgery or interpolation would not have been possible. Casement was revealed for the judgment of all succeeding generations as a homosexual—as one of those homosexuals whose patriotism, self-sacrifice, and love for humanity could be overshadowed but not obliterated by the malice of their enemies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973; B. L. Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

Warren Johansson

CASTRATI

The castrati were male singers emasculated in boyhood to preserve the soprano or contralto range of their voices, who from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth played roles in Italian opera.

Historical Background. Eunuchs are attested from the dawn of civilization in the Near East, as the Bible and other ancient sources indicate, but at what point in time children began to be castrated specifically for the sake of their voices cannot now be determined. The historian Dio Cassius obscurely refers to such a practice in the reign of Septimius Severus (193–211). However, the adoption of Christianity first provided a genuine motive for their existence, as St. Paul had expressly forbidden women to sing in church (I Cor. 14:34; "*mulier taceat in ecclesia*")—an interdiction that prevailed everywhere until the seventeenth century, and in some places until much later, so that when high voices were required, boys, falsettists, or eunuchs had to be employed. Boys are commonly mischievous, unruly, and troublesome, and by the time they have really

been trained their voices are usually on the edge of breaking; falsettists do not share these drawbacks, but their voices have a peculiar, unpleasant quality, and as a rule cannot attain as high a range as the soprano.

At Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, it appears that eunuchs were constantly in use during the middle ages. Theodore Balsamon, tutor to the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (reigned 912–59) and possibly himself a eunuch, wrote a treatise in their defense in which he speaks of them as habitually employed as singers; while a eunuch named Manuil is recorded as having arrived at Smolensk in 1137 and having sung there. In the churches of the Byzantine capital soloists were censured for interpolating passages of coloratura into their music, as were later the castrati.

Castrati in European Music. The elaborate *a cappella* style, which began to flourish about the middle of the fifteenth century, required a much wider range of voices and a higher degree of virtuosity than anything that had gone before, and for this task the existing singers were inadequate. The first response took the form of Spanish falsettists of a special kind, but by the end of the sixteenth century these had yielded to the castrati, who also dominated the new baroque art form—the opera, which was the principal musical activity of the Italian nation in the next two centuries. Opera was unlike legitimate theatre in that it traveled well; it was the first form of musical entertainment that was both popular and to a certain degree international, so that a star system transcending national borders arose. Leading singers were discussed, criticized, and compared in fashionable drawing rooms from Lisbon to St. Petersburg. Most of the singers who attained such celebrity were castrati. If other nations had some form of native opera, this ranked lower on the cultural scale and was indifferently sung, while the Italian version enjoyed the highest standard of singing that had ever been

known, and will in all likelihood never again be attained. France alone refused admission to Italian singers, and virtually banned the castrati; but Frenchmen, like other Europeans, were full of praise for the opera of Italy.

Character and Status. Since no recording devices existed in the heyday of the castrati, the modern critic has no way of judging the quality of their performance, yet six generations of music-lovers preferred the voices of these "half-men" to those of women themselves and of whole men. A practice that modern opinion would judge both strange and cruel prevailed in part because Christian society tolerated the mutilation of children who in most cases were born of humble parents, since only a family hard pressed for money would consent to such a fate. In this economic stratum, however, it was accepted that any male child who betrayed the slightest aptitude for music should be sold into servitude, just as in modern Thailand children are sold by their parents to labor in factories or serve in brothels. The successful castrato naturally tried to conceal his humble origins and pose as the scion of an honorable family. The singing-masters of that era were responsible for the perfection of the art of the castrati; no one since has rivaled them in perseverance and thoroughness, and in their perfect command of the capabilities and shortcomings of the human vocal organs. They usually worked in a conservatorio, though sometimes they had their own singing schools or tutored pupils on the side.

Since canon law condemned castration and threatened anyone involved in it with excommunication, which could be reinforced by civil penalties, the business had to be carried on more or less clandestinely, and everywhere prying questions brought only misleading and deceitful answers. The town of Lecce in Apulia, and Norcia, a small town in the Papal States about twenty miles east of Spoleto, are mentioned as notorious for the practice, though the castrati themselves came from

all parts of the peninsula. The doctors most esteemed for their skill in the operation were those of Bologna, and their services were in demand not just in Italy but abroad as well.

The operation itself was no guarantee of future success, as sometimes the voice did not display itself, or the child proved to lack a natural aptitude for music. The educational practice of that day did not spare the rod, and the lessons were often lashed into the castrated boy. The curriculum entailed much hard work, and was thorough and comprehensive; as much attention was given to the theory of singing as to its actual practice. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty, a castrato who had retained and embellished his voice, and passed the various tests with greater or lesser distinction, was considered ready for his debut. On contract to some opera house, he would often first be seen in a female part, for which his youth and fresh complexion would particularly suit him. His looks and unfamiliarity would perhaps gain him greater success than his art would have merited, to the rage and envy of his senior colleagues. Once his name was made, he would have his clique of admirers who attended en masse his every performance and extolled him as their idol; aristocratic ladies and gentlemen would fancy themselves in love with him and manipulate a piquant interview. Backstage, the rivalry with other singers could rage with intense virulence; and a castrato who was too vain and insolent might be assassinated by the hirelings of a rival's protector. If, however, the performer did not please his audience, he would be doomed to touring small provincial opera houses, or to performing in a church choir. Dissatisfied with his situation, he could set off for Bologna, the marketplace for the musical profession in Italy, to better his fortunes.

The castrati came in for a great amount of scurrilous and unkind abuse, and as their fame increased, so did the hatred of them. They were often castigated

as malign creatures who lured men into homosexuality, and there were admittedly homosexual castrati, as Casanova's accounts of eighteenth-century Italy bear witness. He mentions meeting an abbé whom he took for a girl in disguise, but was later told that it was a famous castrato. In Rome in 1762, he attended a performance at which the prima donna was a castrato, the minion of Cardinal Borghese, who supped every evening with his protector. From his behavior on stage, "it was obvious that he hoped to inspire the love of those who liked him as a man, and probably would not have done so as a woman." He concludes by saying that the holy city of Rome forces every man to become a pederast, even if it does not believe in the effect of the illusion which the castrati provoke.

The Catholic Church does not permit eunuchs, or those known to be impotent, to marry; and this rule was applied to the castrati, so that they had no hope of heterosexual married life. The principle that marriage was solely for procreation barred any concession to a husband who could not father offspring. Hence the castrati were officially stamped as asexual beings, even if they clandestinely gratified their own and others' homosexual impulses.

Opponents of castration have claimed that the practice caused its victims an early loss of voice and an untimely death, while others have affirmed that castration prolonged the life of the vocal cords, and even that of their owner. There is no solid evidence for either contention: the castrati had approximately the same life span as their contemporaries, and retired at roughly the same age as other singers. The operation appears to have had surprisingly little effect on the general health and well-being of the subject, any more than on his sexual impulses. The trauma was largely a psychological one, in an age when virility was deemed a sovereign virtue.

Aftermath. Toward the end of the end of the eighteenth century castrati went out of fashion, and new styles in musical composition led to the disappearance of these singers. Meyerbeer was the last composer of importance to write for the male soprano voice; his *Il Crociato in Egitto*, produced at Venice in 1824, was designed especially for a castrato star. Succeeding generations regarded their memory with derision and disgust, and were happy to live in an age when such products of barbarism were no longer possible. A few castrati performed in the Vatican chapel and some other Roman churches until late in the nineteenth century, but their vogue on the operatic stage had long passed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1956.

Warren Johansson

CASTRATION

See Eunuchs.

CATAMITE

The Latin common noun, *catamitus*, designating a minion or kept boy, is usually derived from the Greek proper name *Ganymede(s)*, the favorite of Zeus. Another possible source is *Kadmilos*, the companion of the Theban god *Kabeiros*. The word entered English in the sixteenth century as part of the Renaissance revival of classical literature, and has always retained a learned, quasiexotic aura. The term could also be used as a verbal adjective, as "a catamited boy."

In modern English the termination *-ite* tends to be perceived as pejorative, as in *Trotskyite* (vs. *Trotskyist*) and *sodomite*. Hobo slang records a turn-of-the-century expression *gey cat*, for a neophyte or young greenhorn, of which the second element may be a truncated form of *catamite*, though this is uncertain. In keeping with the Active-Passive Con-