



CHICAGO JOURNALS



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"Giovinetta Peregrina": La vera storia di Laura Peperara e Torquato Tasso by Elio Durante; Anna Martellotti

Review by: Emiliano Ricciardi

*Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 1258-1259

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of the [Renaissance Society of America](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/664125>

Accessed: 10/01/2012 12:44

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Elio Durante and Anna Martellotti. "*Giovinetta Peregrina*": *La vera storia di Laura Peperara e Torquato Tasso*.

Biblioteca Dell' "Archivum Romanicum": *Serie I*: Storia, Letteratura, Paleografia 371. With CD containing "Madrigali per Laura Peperara." Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2010. 350 pp. index. append. bibl. €35. ISBN: 978-88-222-5981-3.

Durante and Martellotti are well known to scholars of late Renaissance music for their thorough archival studies on the Ferrarese court. In this book they reinforce their reputation by shedding light on the chronology of the relationship between Torquato Tasso and Laura Peperara, a Mantua-born singer and a central figure of the Mantuan and Ferrarese courts. In so doing, they reassess Peperara's biography, changing our understanding of her role in the history of late sixteenth-century music.

Around 1900, literary scholar Angelo Solerti claimed that Tasso wrote a *canzoniere* for Peperara consisting of seventy-five poems. According to him, some of these were from the summer of 1563 or 1564, when Tasso visited his father in Mantua and supposedly fell in love with Peperara. This implied that she was at least in her early teens at the time, her birth dating from around 1550. Although Solerti himself expressed skepticism about these claims, scholars have not questioned them. As Durante and Martellotti show, however, a close reading of documents from Mantua's State Archive and of Tasso's poems demonstrate how unreasonable Solerti's speculations were.

In the absence of Mantuan baptism registries until 1570, the authors have been able to establish a *terminus post quem* for Laura's birth by discovering that her parents did not get married until September 1559. This dismantles Solerti's hypothesis of a relationship between Laura and Tasso in 1563-64 and clarifies why several accounts of Peperara's arrival at Ferrara in 1580 portrayed her as a *giovane* (a teenage girl). By examining Tasso's "Vaghe Ninfe del Po," Durante and Martellotti propose a more exact dating for Laura's birth. In this poem, Tasso seems to reminisce about being in Mantua at the time of Laura's birth. Based on this, the authors suggest that she was born in the summer of 1563 or 1564, when Tasso was in Mantua visiting his father.

While the first four chapters lay out the authors' findings about the chronology of Peperara's birth, the following chapters explore the implications thereof. For example, chapter 7 illustrates the circumstances that prompted the Filarmonici of Verona to compile a musical-poetic anthology for her in 1579. Her young age casts this event in a different light. She was not an independent professional, but

a talented girl whose career was still in other people's hands. Durante and Martellotti's findings have an even greater impact on the so-called *canzoniere* for Peperara. As they point out in chapter 10, some of the poems contain references to the 1560s, invalidating a dedication to Peperara. Since in the sources these poems address a generic Signora Laura, the authors conclude that this was either an actual woman of unknown identity or a poetic persona.

According to Durante and Martellotti, the poems that Tasso did address to Peperara dated from 1581–86, when they were both in Ferrara. In chapters 11 to 19, the authors elucidate under what circumstances Tasso wrote for Laura. They reconstruct Peperara's role at the court and the tense relationship between Tasso, in Ferrara's prison at the time, and the Estensi, showing how he wrote for her to regain their favor. In these chapters Durante and Martellotti provide an astonishing amount of information, though at times diverting from the topic under examination, a tendency that appears also in other parts of the book. They also offer thought-provoking proposals on several issues, such as the meaning of two musical-poetic anthologies, *Il lauro secco* (1582) and *Il lauro verde* (1583), in the compilation of which Tasso played a key role. Several scholars have maintained that both anthologies referenced Peperara. She, however, was not explicitly mentioned in *Il lauro secco*, an anthology that negatively recounted a past love. Based on this, the authors claim that in this work Tasso referred to the Laura of his early poems, whose negative portrayal served to emphasize the positive one of Peperara in *Il lauro verde*.

Durante and Martellotti's book is an in-depth study of Peperara's career and a stimulating contribution to scholarship on Tasso's lyric poetry. The CD with recordings of madrigals for Peperara adds to its value. It is recommended to all musicologists and literary scholars interested in the late Italian Renaissance.

EMILIANO RICCIARDI  
Stanford University