



Luisa Passerini. *Europe in Love. Love in Europe.* also New York: New York University Press, 1999. vii + 358 pp. \$38.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-6698-9.



Reviewed by Terrance Lewis (History Program, Southern University at New Orleans)

Published on H-Ideas (March, 2000)

Love in Europe, United Europe?

How might the tropes of the legend of Europa and the troubadour ideas on love have influenced the varied writers on European unity in interwar Britain? That is the basic question posed by Luisa Passerini's *Europe in Love, Love in Europe: Imagination and Politics between the Wars*. It is certainly an original question, as the first two themes have little obvious connection with each other, and less in common with the idea of European political unity.

Passerini surveys an impressive amount of now mostly obscure writers of all types from the interwar period, consulting novelists, poets, journalists, Theosophists, socialists, fascists, supporters of the League of Nations, and those who believed the League stood in the way of European unity. Scholars of any aspect of interwar Britain should read this work, if only to be reminded of the breadth of opinion which existed in this period. However, the basic question Passerini raises is never answered. If there were any connection between the tropes of the legend of Europa and the troubadour ideas on love influencing the varied writers on European unity in interwar Britain, it is never really explained.

The most that can be said, on the evidence presented in this work, is that some of the writers who are examined on their opinions of European unity in this period were also interested either in the idea that the troubadours invented (or perfected) the ideal of romantic love, which they believed was unique to modern European culture, or used the myth of Europa in some of their other writings. The myth of Europa comes across as especially tangential, other than in chapter one (concerned primarily with novelist Ralph H. Mottram) and chapter four (primarily concerned with novelist Robert Briffault), although this myth does allow Passerini to introduce and discuss some nice illustrations.

The three chapters dealing primarily with interwar British ideas on a united Europe (chapters two, three, and six) are in effect the basis of a good work on British intellectual and political history. Even though most of the writers come from a wide variety of "fringe" movements, Passerini does show how many of these widely varied authors often ended up writing for each other's journals and coming to similar conclusions from widely diverse political and intellectual starting points. What is missing,

however, is any real evidence that their ideas on European unity were fueled by their beliefs in the troubadour ideal of love or the myth of Europa. How these writers worked and interacted with the larger intellectual atmosphere of interwar Britain, as opposed to the smaller world of those dedicated to European unity, could have made a more valuable work of this monograph.

A group of related points of view which seem glossed over is the anti-semitism, racism, and sexism of many of the writers quoted, some of whose remarks would have been considered extreme even for the period. Robert Tombs, in his review of this work ("Eutopian visions," *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 6, 1999, pp. 5-6), points out how this tendency on Passerini's part also tends to soften the anti-Communist, anti-American (and on occasion, pro-fascist) tendencies of many of the writers Passerini uses in all her chapters.

It is perhaps with chapter four that Passerini comes closest to her goal, for Briffault not only wrote novels using the theme of Europa and works on troubadours (*Les Troubadours* and several chapters in his multi-volume anthropological work, *The Mothers*), but was a strong supporter of European unity in a number of other writings. However, even though Briffault wrote on all these themes, on the evidence presented by Passerini, they rarely showed up in more than one work at a time. Since Briffault never directly linked these ideas, Passerini was left with the job of doing so yet does not succeed. The problem with this well-researched chapter is that Passerini never makes it clear how the themes might have influenced or reinforced each other in Briffault's own work, let alone how these ideas might have come together for any given reading audience. Any connec-

tions these tropes may have had in Briffault's work are left at best implicit.

That is the primary problem with *Europe in Love, Love in Europe*. None of the seven chapters, each well-written in itself, has more than nominal relationship to the other six, and their arrangement seems random. Chapters one and four, for example, are primarily concerned with the idea of Europa, but are totally disconnected from each other. Chapters two, three, and six treat various ideas of a united Europe, and only with the ideas of Europa or the troubadours in passing. While parts of chapter five (on C. S. Lewis' *The Allegory of Love* as well as the idea of courtly love) might be seen as bringing together some hints on these subjects from other chapters, chapter seven (love letters between an English woman and her German husband from the 1930s through World War II) does not sum up the book, but grafts on new material really unrelated to the rest of the monograph. In short, what Passerini offers are three interesting chapters on a wide-ranging fringe movement in interwar Britain (seeking a United Europe from a wide spectrum of perspectives) and four almost totally unrelated chapters. Therefore, while this work is of interest to any scholar of interwar Europe because of its breadth of learning and scholarship, it really does little to add to our knowledge of the period. If there really is any reason to connect Europa and the troubadours to ideas of a united Europe in interwar Britain, that reason remains unexplained in this monograph.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact h-net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-ideas>

Citation: Terrance Lewis. Review of Passerini, Luisa, *Europe in Love. Love in Europe*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. March, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3895>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.