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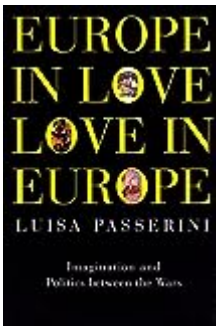

Luisa Passerini. *Europe in Love. Love in Europe.* also New York: New York University Press, 1999. vii + 358 pp. $38.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-6698-9.

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This book represents Luisa Passerini's first full-length study which does not deal with Italian history. It is also not based on oral history, the discipline at the heart of most of Passerini's celebrated previous works, from *Fascism in Popular Memory* (1987) to *Autobiography of a Generation* (1988, in English 1998). As such, this volume represents something of a departure for Passerini, and her readers may find both the subject-matter and the style and organisation of the book more than a touch disconcerting, at first. Perseverance, however, brings its rewards. This is, as with all of her previous books, a profoundly original and interesting work which deals with a theme which may, at first, seem somewhat bizarre – the connections and representations of the idea of Europe and the idea of love in the Britain of the 1930s. Like all of Passerini's work, however, *Love in Europe* works at the margins of historiography, constantly searching for new ways of writing and understanding history and the role of the historian.

Although much has been written on the idea of a united Europe, and much as well on the idea of love and especially courtly love, no study has attempted to combine a study of the two in such an unsteady and traumatic period for Europe as a whole as the 1930s. As a "traditional" account, Passerini's work is least successful when attempting to connect these two themes. In fact, the book as a whole fails to make a convincing case for itself as a work of History. Yet, the "revolutionary" aspects of Passerini's historical method and style mean that, in my opinion, such a criticism of the book is misplaced–it misses the point. The book cannot be understood as a coherent collection of historical reflections in any traditional sense. It is not intended in this way and should not be read in this way (see the fascinating exchange between Timothy Bewes and Passerini in the *New Left Review*, 236, 1999 and 1, 2000. Bewes acknowledges the originality of this approach but is very critical of it).

Let us start then with these methodological questions. Passerini divides the volume into seven chapters – which are duly called "chapters" – but which are overlaid with other (and different) "itineraries" marked out in the introduction. Four of these chapters consist largely of close readings of individual or groups of novels or other works by various British-based novelists and writers of the 1930s: Ralph Mottram (chapter 1); Christopher Dawson (ch. 2); Dimitrije Mitrinovic (ch. 3) and Robert Briffault (chapter 4). Chapter 5 is made up largely of a discussion of the idea of courtly love and its "mythical" roots in Provence based around a reading of C. S. Lewiss *The Allegory of Love*. Chapter 6 looks mainly at political and cultural ideals of a united Europe. Finally, chapter 7 centres around a private correspondence between an English

woman and her German husband before and during the second world war. Interspersed with these readings of texts are historical accounts of various societies set up to promote a united Europe in the 1930s, and the personalities involved in these type of organisations, along with discussions of the effects of psychoanalytic ideas, fascist ideologies and the reception of various novels, articles and histories.

These rich and multi-layered itineraries and chapters are what Passerini says they are – "open-ended and leading to further exploration" (12). They are not intended as the answer to complicated questions concerning Europe, Love and national identity, but as "hints" (12) towards further thought, research and reflection as well as ways of highlighting often obscure but interesting work from this period. As Bewes rightly observes Passerini rejects "the once conventional assumption of historians of the past that the past and the present exist in any sort of continuity, that the past may be used to illuminate the present" (NLR 236, 1999, p. 104). Within this set of itineraries and chapters a series of different methodological approaches are adopted by Passerini which all but ignore the traditional separation between "primary" and "secondary" sources. At times, Passerini adopts a micro-historical methodology taking individual texts as both primary and secondary sources (such as with the discussion of Mottram). Yet, "this approach is not social, as has often been the case with micro-history, but cultural, inspired by psycho-analytical literary theory criticism" (17). Other sections use more conventional historical tools, as with the discussion of courtly love or the cultural and intellectual history of the idea of Europe. Finally, there is the chapter based on the letters which uses a combination of all these methods, but also invents new ways of looking at texts, correspondence and emotions in history. Much of this is also overlaid (or underlaid??) by an attempt to combine psychoanalysis and history, and to draw out some "repressed" themes in this work. This is a pioneering and difficult area which involves the problematic application of what Passerini calls "an interest in the marginal, the unrepresentative, the interstitial" (18). Passerini also calls into question her own role as a historian, inviting us (as well) to read this book as both a primary and secondary source.

One problem with such a multi-faceted approach is the loss of a broader picture, the lack of conclusions, the lack of something for the reader to grasp hold of. Amidst the fascinating fragments of this book the reader can lose his or her way quite easily, and the introduction needs to be read with great care, and returned to again and again. Without this close reading of the introduction, there is a danger of "misreading" the book. For a particularly superficial example see Robert Tombs' review in the *TLS* (6.8.1999) and the exchange of letters with Passerini, ibid., 22.10. 1999 and 29.10.1999). Without using this "method" of reading the volume, Passerini's study could appear to be a series of essays lumped together into a volume, with little to bring them together beyond the broad (and complicated) ideals of Europe and Love. This is a book which demands a lot of the reader if it is not to be read as a set of purely descriptive accounts of various texts. Yet, a careful reading of the book allows a number of important conclusions to emerge which Passerini hints at in her introduction.

First, there are the dangers of the idea of a united Europe, from ethnocentrism right through to straightforward fascism. The very utopianism of the European ideal also seems to inspire authoritarian tendencies. A second point involves the gender aspects of the Europe-Love connection – ever present in this volume and most elegantly brought out in the chapter based on letters, which stands out as a near-masterpiece of modern historical narrative. Finally, there are the psychoanalytic questions of repression, underlined by Passerini with relation to the constant images associated with Europe by a series of writers – particularly what Passerini calls "the myth of Europa and the Bull" (18).

Many of the texts discussed by Passerini are looked at from a whole series of angles – from that of the writer, the critics and the reading public. Thus, we are given an overall picture of the impact of these books and not just a detailed analysis of the text as an end in itself. The intention here is to bridge the gap between the "personal" and the "political" – "between the world of feelings and emotions to which the novel belonged on the one hand, and the world of politics and socially and politically committed intellectuals, on the other" (49). This nexus is brought out vividly through the discussion of the declining fortunes of British writer Robert Briffault, who was himself caught up in the traumas of war in occupied France and whose hugely successful book, *Europa* (1935) was followed by a decline into near-oblivion. The whole German edition of *Europa* was burnt by the Nazis after their entry into Vienna in 1938. His "life-story was one of brilliant and successful nomadism which turned into tragic and desolate self-exile" (183). The personal level of both Europe and Love, and the tragedy of war, are also at the centre of chapter 7. Passerini tells the story of the courtship and marriage of a rich German man and society English woman through an analysis of their correspondence over

a period of 15 or so years. This marvellous chapter deals with a whole series of issues, from the rigid codes of marriage in that period (the German man asks his future wife for proof of the absence of "Jewish blood" in her family) to the separations imposed by war and the difficulties of an English woman in Germany during the conflict. But there are also painful insights into the disintegration of a relationship, the sexual problems experienced by both partners and the use of language, codes and hidden emphases in the letters. The letters are, once again, both a primary and secondary source. They tell us some of what happened but also reveal more than just the "facts" of the relationship in the way they are written and not written.

The book's epilogue deals with the personal odyssey of Frank Thompson (the brother of E.P. Thompson) who fought in the British Army and then with the Bulgarian partisans in 1944. He was executed by the pro-axis government there in the same year. Thompson's story is used to present a new idea of Europe, born from the resistance to fascism across the continent. The semi-mythical figure of Thompson "symbolises a period when the hope for the unity and regeneration of Europe was not yet broken by disillusionment about Russian communism" (316). This book, then, should not be seen as a "history" book in any conventional sense. If it is seen in this way, it is a failure – and to criticise the book on these grounds (that it is not something it never intended to be), as Bewes does, is to miss the point completely. The connections between the texts analysed and the arguments made are too loose and confusing for the volume to succeed in this way. However, as I have argued already, Passerinis work cannot be placed within this oeuvre of "history" and the methodological innovations of the book preclude such as location. Taken as a new way of writing and understanding history Europe in Love represents an important step towards a different way of understanding historical research and writing.

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