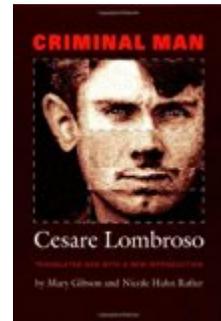




Cesare Lombroso. *Criminal Man*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. xviii + 424 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3723-2; \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3711-9.

Reviewed by Isobel Williams (Department of Italian, Swansea University)
Published on H-Italy (October, 2007)



Criminal Man Rediscovered

Although recognized as the creator of the field of criminology, the name Cesare Lombroso usually produces a *moue* of disapproval amongst Italianists, synonymous as it seems to be with outdated racist and misogynist criminal anthropological theories. But how much truth lies behind that reaction? Lombroso's reputation has suffered both from the tendency of academicians and criminologists to assume that these elements of the *Born Criminal* (1876) are all that there is to Lombroso, and from the inaccessibility of Lombroso's original work to the English-speaking academic, the former probably being a consequence of the latter. The lack of access has also served to prevent proper academic investigation of the full range of Lombroso's work. While Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter declare that their intention is "neither to endorse nor to attack Lombroso's theory" (p. 33), their translation restores him to his proper place as an influential voice at the time of the making of a united Italy.

Lombroso is no stranger to Gibson and Rafter. The two collaborated on the 2004 translation of another of Lombroso's works, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, which he wrote with Guglielmo Ferrero and published in 1893 as *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*. Each author has also written other works, separately and extensively, on both Lombroso and criminal anthropology, and they thus bring unique insight to the introduction to this translation.

L'uomo delinquente (Criminal Man) was published in

Italian over the space of eleven years, with the first edition coming out in 1876, and the fifth and final edition being published in 1896-97. The bulk of the work was never translated into English, although Lombroso's daughter, Gina Lombroso Ferrero, brought out a volume of interpreted extracts in 1911. The third edition of the work was partially translated into German and French, and the latter formed the basis of Henry Horton's 1910 partial translation, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*. It is clear, therefore, that Gibson and Rafter's translation fills a noticeable gap in historical criminal anthropology.

Although called editions, each one was actually an expansion of the previous work, from which nothing was removed, so that the work was constantly enlarged. While the first edition is a slim volume of fourteen chapters, the fifth edition is a work of eighty-one chapters, divided into nine parts and three volumes. From edition to edition, Lombroso would insert new ideas and revisit old ones, expanding and revising them, and sometimes consolidating his opinion with new illustrations or tables of data. The five editions are compared in two appendices of Gibson and Rafter's devising, one which indicates quite clearly the content of each edition and its placement in subsequent editions, and the other performing a similar function for the illustrations.

Because of this repetition, *Criminal Man* takes the form of extensive excerpts, rather than a straightforward translation of all five editions. This method makes for a smooth and readable translation, without the serial duplication present in the original volumes, and with the

newly presented material obvious to the reader. Sequential reading thus reveals the development of Lombroso's thoughts and theories over twenty years, the contradictions that arose because of this development, and the attempts by Lombroso to justify his theories in the light of his own later research. Particularly valuable is the inclusion of Lombroso's own notations and illustrations, as well as the tables of data which he used to support his theories. These are supplemented, where necessary, by the editors' own explanatory notes. As well as the introduction, the translation, notes and two appendices previously described, the book contains a valuable glossary of Lombroso's terms and concepts, a useful bibliography and a good index.

However, what makes this book so especially useful is not just the filling of a conspicuous lacuna, but the editors' introduction, which seeks to explain Lombroso's work clearly and unemotionally. It takes the reader through the five editions, showing how his ideas developed and highlighting the new theories that emerged in each edition. Although the famous tag of "born criminal"—actually coined by another respected Italian positivist, Enrico Ferri—did not emerge until the third edition, Lombroso designated various physical and psychological features as typical of the atavistic criminal in the first edition, and in the second he added the criminal of passion. In the third edition, Lombroso talks about the morally insane, a classification we would recognize today as the psychopath, while in the fourth edition he adds epilepsy as another reason for born criminality. In this edition he also subdivides moral insanity into the alcoholic criminal, the hysterical criminal and the *mattoid* (a term of his own devising used to describe lower-class visionaries and revolutionaries), and introduces a major new category, the occasional criminal. The fifth edition generally has no major new divisions of criminal, but does contain enlarged sections of data and illustrations.

A scientist looks for rational explanations of phenomena, because with understanding of the mechanics comes the ability to change, improve, or remove. Much influenced by Darwinian theory, Lombroso sought to apply this to crime. Seeking to determine what made men criminal, he first hypothesized that the tendency to commit crime was mirrored in the physical characteristics, or physiognomy, of the criminal, including such factors as race and color. This he sought to prove with complex tables of measurement, such as the dimensions of the skull or, somewhat oddly, the size of the armpit. Since Lombroso's methods were not rigorous by today's standards, they gave rise to subsequent scientific scorn for

his methodology. Gibson and Rafter examine his ideas not only against the context in which they were written, but also in light of subsequent scientific discoveries and development.

It is true that many of Lombroso's ideas are no longer credible, but conversely, there are some that time is catching up with. As gene research advances, some behavioral traits that were designated as learned are being cast into doubt and reclassified as innate when taken together with environmental factors. Given that alcoholism is now seen as a disease, and that alcohol is often pinpointed as an impetus for crime, perhaps Lombroso was not so far off the mark in looking for biological causes for at least some crime. And, while society has, we hope, advanced beyond condemning a person as a criminal because of jug ears or a low brow, scientists continue to find physical characteristics that mark differing abilities or tendencies.

In the midst of the notoriety of the concept of the born criminal, Lombroso's advanced thinking on other aspects of crime has been lost. While he was prejudiced by the influences of his time to associate criminality, amongst other criteria, with different colors and races, he also had some surprisingly modern ideas and views. Gibson and Rafter rightly draw attention to the fact that Lombroso recognized, early on, the role of social factors and individual circumstances in the causes of crime. For example, although he describes female crime as deriving from inborn female perversity, he attributes infanticide to "social condemnation of women who bore illegitimate children" (p. 398n). More radically for his time, he was not anti-abortion. He anticipated the distinction between the lifelong criminal and the juvenile time-limited criminal. According to Rafter, Lombroso also anticipated the more controversial modern theory of evolutionary criminology in his theory of atavism.[1]

Lombroso's work has a tendency to be compared and contrasted with that of the other Cesare, Cesare Beccaria. Both produced ground-breaking works on criminology, each of which served as the foundation for radical new thought on crime and the criminal. Both published their works at exciting times, Beccaria's *Delle delitti e delle pene* in 1764, at the time of the Rinascimento, and Lombroso at the time of the Risorgimento, and both sought to have an influence on the new order. Lombroso was eager to help to reform the treatment of crime and the criminal in the newly unified Italy. While Lombroso quotes Beccaria in several instances, he differs from him in several respects, especially when it came to punishment,

which, broadly speaking, he felt should be tailored to fit the criminal rather than the crime. He also believed in suspended sentences and parole, and championed asylums rather than jails for the criminally insane. Beccaria was against the death sentence (because he thought it too quick and thus not as effective a deterrent as a lifetime of hard labor); similarly Lombroso also initially rejected the death penalty. In his fifth edition, however, he advocated it for certain classes of criminals on the Darwinian basis of removing them from the gene pool for the common good.

This translation is of obvious interest and value to the criminologist, but it also opens Lombroso's work to new audiences. *Criminal Man* gives an insight into a man of fascinating complexity and contradiction. While asserting in his work that "women, non-whites, the poor, and children [were] physically, psychologically, and morally inferior to white men" (p. 16), in his personal life, the Jewish Lombroso favored such unpopular views as feminism, race mixing, divorce, and land reform, especially in the South. In more recent times he has become the focus of a new body of scholarship, much of it in Italian.

Finally, the difficulty of the translation task has to be recognized. Inspection of the original editions in the British Library confirms, once again, the absence of the short declarative sentence from Italian writing. Lombroso's style, in common no doubt with that of his contemporaries, presents a daunting task to the modern Italian reader, composed as it is of long rambling sentences, full of sub-clauses and out-dated medical terminology. From a huge work, the editors have managed to extract the vital essence. Refreshingly, the temptation to sanitize Lombroso's language has been resisted, leaving intact the etymological evidence of the man and his times.

Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter have produced an excellent book that will be valuable not only to those specializing in criminology, but also to anyone with an interest in Modern Italian history.

Note

[1]. Nicole Rafter, "Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Criminology: Rethinking Criminological Tradition," in *The Essential Criminology Reader*, ed. Stuart Henry and Mark M. Lanier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2006), 38-39.

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

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

Citation: Isobel Williams. Review of Lombroso, Cesare, *Criminal Man*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. October, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13744>

Copyright © 2007 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.msu.edu.