

**Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero.  
Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman. Translated and  
with a new introduction by Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson.**

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Widely credited for establishing scientific criminology, yet pilloried by contemporary critics for the inadequacies of his methods and by more recent critics for the misogyny that underpins his analysis of female criminals, Cesare Lombroso and his complex legacy continue to fascinate scholars more than a century after his works first became available in translation to an English-speaking audience. In this, the only English translation since 1895 of his and Guglielmo Ferrero's<sup>1</sup> book, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, Rafter and Gibson provide what they hope will be a more adequate set of raw materials not just for those interested in the history of criminology, but also for scholars of art history, rhetoric, gender studies, anthropology, and other diverse fields. They have wisely chosen the middle ground between reproducing the full 640-page manuscript and focusing on only one of the four parts of the work – the route taken by the 19th-century translators, who also omitted or sanitized key material on the sexual characteristics of female offenders. Lombroso's preface and edited versions of 31 chapters from the four parts of the original text form the core of the volume. Also included are a highly readable editors' introduction; an appendix comparing Lombroso's original text, the 1895 translation of it (entitled *The Female Offender*), and their version; Lombroso's footnotes; the editors' footnotes; and a useful glossary.

The editors' introduction is a must-read; I returned to it after finishing the book and gained new insights by doing so. Rafter and Gibson bring valuable and complementary skills to their collaboration and these are perhaps most obviously displayed in their introduction. (Among other things, Rafter has written on the histories of criminal anthropology, women's prisons, and biological theories of crime; and Gibson has written on the regulation of prostitution in late-19th century Italy and on Lombroso and the origins of biological criminology.) After discussing their aims in this and their forthcoming translation of Lombroso's other major work, *Criminal Man*, they provide a brief overview of what Lombroso set out to accomplish in *Criminal Woman*. Restating his theory of the born criminal and demonstrating its power to account for the nature and lower incidence of female crime were his primary goals, but also presented him with an "intractable problem" (p. 9), as Rafter and Gibson observe. Because he was convinced that women are inferior to men Lombroso was unable to argue, based on his theory of the born criminal, that women's lesser involvement in crime reflected their comparatively lower levels of atavism. This conundrum sets the stage for Part 1, which Lombroso devoted to 'the normal woman' and represents one of the first uses of a control group in criminology, according to Rafter and Gibson. Despite this methodological advance, the comparative logic behind his analysis of 'the normal woman' quickly becomes convoluted, contradictory, and self-serving, as Lombroso struggles to match his science with his obdurate beliefs about women.

In their introduction, Rafter and Gibson discuss this struggle in a section on the tone and strategy of *Criminal Woman*, a section which provides fascinating insights into Lombroso's anxieties over his project. Lombroso's work and its reception – and presumably his anxieties as well – need to be understood in their historical context and so it is appropriate that a substantial section of the introduction describes this context, which included Italian state-building, a nascent women's movement, the spread of scientific methods to new fields, growing opposition to legal theorists of the Enlightenment, and the emergence of sexology. I found this discussion of context particularly valuable, perhaps because I was unfamiliar with so much of it. Others less familiar with the history of research on women and crime will likely find the subsequent section on the impact of *Criminal Woman* both enlightening and perplexing. How do we explain the grip that biologically-based theories of women's criminal behavior have had on criminology when such perspectives were largely abandoned in favor of sociological and psychological accounts of men's criminality? Certainly an important reason, as Rafter and Gibson argue, is that such theories "built on age-old myths about women's nature" (p. 27), but they also acknowledge that the specific reasons for their re-emergence in the 1930s "remains an unsettled issue in criminological history" (p. 25). In concluding their introduction, Rafter and Gibson outline their editing and translation decisions, including the stance they took regarding Lombroso's negative views on women and what they term "the embarrassment factor."

The subsequent 200 or so pages of the book are devoted to their translation of Lombroso's treatise. After reading the seven chapters in Part I ("The Normal Woman"), it is difficult to understand how the original translation could have omitted virtually all of this material for, as Rafter and Gibson note, these "comprise a multifaceted, systematic exposition of female inferiority" (p. 9) and a building block for the subsequent discussion of female crime and criminals. These chapters also introduce readers to the eclectic nature of evidence Lombroso draws on; proverbs, folk sayings, animal anecdotes, and literary representations are interwoven amongst drawings of female genital anomalies and women of genius, and tables ostensibly documenting how females fall short of males in cranial capacity and sensitivity. Part II ("Female Criminology") provides a bridge to the heart of the book as well as some of the more obvious instances where the examples Lombroso presents — for example, in the chapter on crime in the animal world — do not support his conclusions. The chapters in this section also suggest the haste with which Lombroso wrote, as discussions that begin on one topic shift logic and focus dramatically.

Parts III ("Pathological Anatomy and Anthropometry of Criminal Woman and the Prostitute") and IV ("Biology and Psychology of Female Criminals and Prostitutes") will be familiar to many readers, as much of the material in them appeared in the original translation and has been reprinted frequently. But what Rafter and Gibson have added to these sections is crucial. First, they include material on sexual sensitivity, lesbianism and sexual psychopathy that was previously excised or poorly translated. Second, their extensive footnotes provide not only context and commentary that will help readers follow Lombroso's sometimes tortured argument, but also critical analysis of the data he presents, the conclusions he draws from them, and his struggles with contradictions in the logic of his arguments. Indeed, the 25 pages of footnotes by Rafter and Gibson greatly increase the value of the book for teaching purposes. The footnotes do, however, occasionally seem strained – for example, when they refer to Lombroso anticipating 20th-century developments in criminological theory. But this is a minor quibble.

For making the “magnificent tangle of brilliance and nonsense” (p. 31) that is Lombroso’s *Criminal Woman* more apparent and accessible, Rafter and Gibson deserve recognition. They have admirably fulfilled their goals and this volume, along with their forthcoming translation of *Criminal Man*, will no doubt encourage and enable further inquiries into the history not only of criminology but other human sciences that emerged in the late-19th century.

<sup>1</sup> Rafter and Gibson note (p. 33) that “Ferrero’s contribution to *La donna delinquente* was probably closer to that of a graduate assistant than a true co-author” and so refer to “the author” (i.e. Lombroso) rather than “authors” of the book.

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