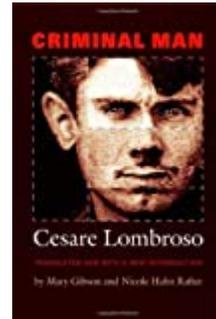




Cesare Lombroso. *Criminal Man*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. xviii + 424 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3723-2; \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3711-9.



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Published on H-German (January, 2008)

Lombroso in All His Complexity

Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter's meticulously edited new edition of Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso's deeply influential *Criminal Man* (1876) is an invaluable contribution to the burgeoning historical scholarship on nineteenth-century criminology. No single scholar of criminality since Cesare Beccaria a century earlier exercised as much influence as Lombroso did in the late nineteenth century. Though always hotly disputed, his methodology and conclusions profoundly shaped the development of scientific attempts to understand the social and biological origins of crime. The fact that his most important work has only been available in English in two books of edited materials published in 1911 is as surprising as it is regrettable for students of criminological history.

What Gibson and Rafter offer is far more than a new translation of a long-inaccessible text. First, by including selections from all five editions of *Criminal Man* (which grew from 256 pages in the original 1876 edition to almost two thousand pages in four volumes in the final, fifth edition of 1896-97), the reader is able to see the evolution of Lombroso's thinking over time, as he developed an ever

more complex classification system for criminals. Especially illuminating in this regard is the way the concept most closely associated with Lombroso—the idea of the “born criminal”—changed over time in his work. The term was in fact coined by fellow Italian criminologist Enrico Ferri a few years after *Criminal Man* was first published, only making its way into Lombroso's text in the third edition. Partly as a response to critics, but also as the result of his own research into new criminal types, Lombroso gradually de-emphasized the prominence of born criminality in his view of crime. By the last edition of the book, he only regarded 35 percent of offenders as born criminals. As Gibson and Rafter point out in their introduction, Lombroso never saw born criminals as the only type of offenders but in fact understood crime as arising from the interplay of social and biological causes. As his classification system grew over time, incorporating increasingly different criminal types, so did “the weight of sociological factors in Lombroso's explanation of the causes of crime” (p. 12). Reading excerpts from all five editions, especially the new material on “occasional criminals” of various sorts in the last two editions, effectively illustrates this point.

Each successive edition of *Criminal Man* incorporated more illustrations, tables, and other representative data, a trend discussed insightfully by the editors in a section of the introduction on “Criminality and Representation” (pp. 21-26). Gibson and Rafter note the unusual variety of visual sources Lombroso utilized, from photographs to handwriting samples to prisoner art (much of which he himself collected), as well as tables, charts, maps, and other such “scientific” illustrations. Though his interpretations of this evidence are almost always problematic, even extending to the unconscious manipulation of pictures of criminals to emphasize physical anomalies Lombroso associated with born criminality, the editors note, “criminal anthropology’s success owed a great deal to Lombroso’s ability to embody his theory visually and embed it narratively” (p. 21). How Lombroso uses them aside, the illustrations of tattoos and other prisoner art, as well as accounts of criminals’ speech and writing, provide a fascinating and valuable glimpse into the social world of the Italian lower classes in the late nineteenth century. Only after reading Gibson and Rafter’s discussion and looking at relevant passages and illustrations from Lombroso’s text did I take seriously Lombroso’s claim to be an *anthropologist* of criminals.

Despite the inclusion of material from all five editions of *Criminal Man*, the editors have managed to keep this book to a reasonable length, chiefly by making two strategic choices. First, in most cases they only include sections from successive editions if they provided significant new material (the chapters that remained largely intact in their original form throughout the five editions appear here only in the excerpt from the first). Second, they abridge material in individual chapters, as they explain in the introduction: “We eliminate many of the countless examples that Lombroso presents in support of every facet of his theory.... These examples are so repetitious and lengthy that it is impractical to include them in a streamlined edition intended to keep the attention of the reader” (p. 34). Though this approach partly obscures Lombroso’s approach to buttressing his argument (that is, by amassing more and more, increasingly heterogeneous, pieces of evidence) and the expansion of certain ideas’ relative weight over the course of the editions, it makes for a much more readable text. I am somewhat uncomfortable with the fact that the reader must rely entirely on Gibson and Hahn’s judgment in this task, more so since there is no indication in the text of where cuts and modifications were made. Nevertheless, I remain confident in their judiciousness and in their stated intention to remain faithful to Lombroso’s ideas. For everyone

but the specialist, these abridgements will most likely be experienced not as a loss but a gain. Indeed, it is striking how readable Gibson and Rafter have made Lombroso’s text; having waded through some of Lombroso’s shorter works in the Italian original, I can testify that this is no mean feat.

To help guide the reader through Lombroso’s alterations from the first to the fifth edition, the editors have included an enormously helpful appendix comparing the chapters of all the editions of *Criminal Man*. Perusing this appendix helps clarify Gibson and Rafter’s rationale for including the material they did from each edition; it would have been more helpful if the chart itself indicated which chapters from each of Lombroso’s editions appear in Gibson and Rafter’s edition, especially since the editors in the body of the book number the chapters sequentially across Lombroso’s editions, rather than keeping to Lombroso’s original chapter numbering (which is what is shown in the appendix). Another appendix, comparing the illustrations in the different editions, reveals how (and how much) Lombroso expanded the visual element of the work.

Gibson and Rafter annotate the text itself in very useful ways. They offer a short foreword before the selections from each of Lombroso’s five editions, in which they describe what material he added and how his interpretations changed from the previous edition. Their extensive endnotes provide abundant information, from explanations of specific terms, events, and people to historical contextualization of political and criminological practices alluded to by Lombroso to explication of the meaning and significance of specific passages. Illustrations in the text receive their own editorial commentary after their original captions from Lombroso. Gibson and Rafter’s lengthy glossary of key terms helps familiarize the reader with specific terminology Lombroso employs (such as “atavism” or “cephalic index”) as well as his understanding of general terms in relation to his theories (for example, “alcoholism,” “prostitute,” “savages”).

In their masterful introduction, Gibson and Hahn adroitly place Lombroso in historical context and approach his major work from a number of angles: Lombroso’s explanation of the causes of crime; his practical proposals for legal and penal reform; the role of sex, race, age, and class in his theory of crime; and his narrative and representative strategies. What emerges from Gibson and Hahn’s account is a more complete picture of Lombroso and his project than the simplistic caricatures often drawn of him. Even in the cases of his most egre-

gious claims, Lombroso was very much a product of his time. The editors note, for instance, that Lombroso's biological determinism, troubling to most modern readers, was broadly shared in his era; what chiefly marked Lombroso apart from the French criminologists who so vehemently criticized him was not his attribution of crime to biological factors, but his emphasis on atavism rather than degeneracy as a root of crime. Lombroso's positivist faith that simply assembling a mass of "facts" that spoke for themselves would lead to an accurate explanation of crime's causes was likewise typical of his era. Of course, his racism and sexism also placed him within the mainstream of European society, though his attention to gendered differences in criminal behavior, as Gibson and Rafter note, was very unusual.

Without soft-peddling his racism, sexism, biological determinism, poor scientific method, internal contradictions, or sloppiness, they show Lombroso as a man devoted to putting criminology on a scientific rather than purely philosophical basis, with the goal of improving society. While his prescriptions for dealing with born criminals were draconian (permanent incarceration or, in some cases, the death penalty), he argued for a more sympathetic treatment of occasional criminals and an understanding that poor social conditions bred preventable crime. He also advocated for punishments that took into account a criminal's individual circumstances and sought to curb the danger of recidivism. As wrong as Lombroso was on many scores, Gibson and Rafter also point to "a number of significant parallels between the ideas of criminal anthropologists and present-day biocriminologists," including distinguishing between habitual and occasional offenders, tracing social behaviors to human evolutionary development, and emphasizing hereditary tendencies toward behaviors that might lead to crime (pp. 31-32). Though these parallels may or may not be reassuring, they show that Lombroso was not merely a crackpot pseudo-scientist, but a man engaged in a serious ex-

ploration of the problems of his day, even if the methods and results of his work seem in many ways misguided or even absurd today.

Why, in the end, should we read Lombroso's *Criminal Man*? The answer suggested by this edition of the book seems to me twofold: first, his works offer a vivid portrait of the complex and contradictory nature of the emergence of modern social science, which embraced a faith in the scientific method and its ability to illuminate the workings of society through scholarly study while also purveying a mass of assumptions, prejudices, and inaccuracies at odds with its aspirations; second, Lombroso's ideas left an indelible mark on the fields of criminology and penology, not only in terms of his theories of criminality, but also in how he framed the problems of crime and sought to solve them. This work is thus of great potential interest to intellectual and cultural historians, social scientists, and criminologists, as well as students in these fields.

It is hard to imagine a better edition of this book. Gibson and Rafter are among the foremost experts on nineteenth-century criminology, and Lombroso in particular, knowledge that they bring to bear in many ways to illuminate this text. Their introduction alone is an engaging and insightful contextualization of Lombroso's larger project and of *Criminal Man* specifically. Their translation, editing, and annotation all enrich the reader's understanding of the text, which comes to life in a remarkably accessible fashion. Though over four hundred pages long, this book is reasonably enough priced that it could be used as an undergraduate course text even if the whole book were not assigned. This edition of *Criminal Man* will surely remain the definitive one for the foreseeable future, allowing a variety of scholars and students to approach Lombroso's work, and the whole world of late nineteenth-century social science, with an appreciation for all its complexities and the historical context in which it emerged.

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Citation: Elun Gabriel. Review of Lombroso, Cesare, *Criminal Man*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

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