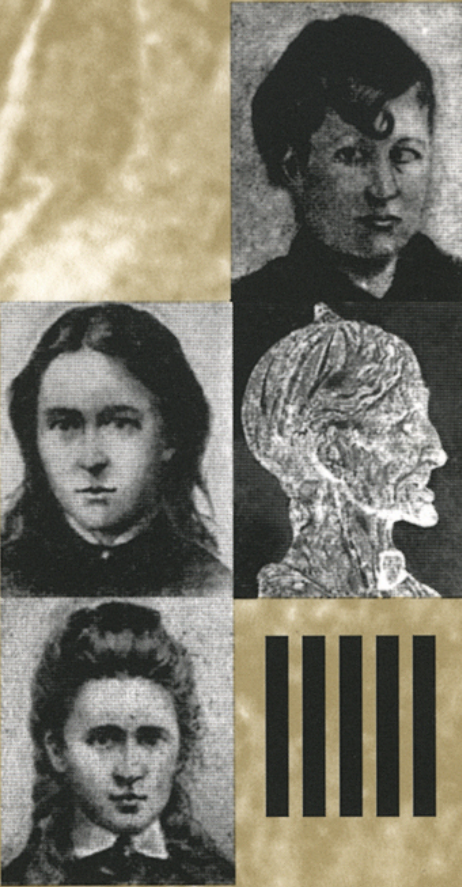


**Criminal
Woman,
the
Prostitute,
and the
Normal
Woman**

**Cesare Lombroso
and**

Guglielmo Ferrero



Translated and with a new introduction by

Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson

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Mary Gibson

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Nothing too severe can be said of
Lombroso's lack of critical judgment
and historical insight and accuracy;
one forgives it all because he has
opened up so many new lines of
investigation and set so many good
men to work.

HAVELOCK ELLIS, in an 1892 letter
to John Addington Symonds

Scientific discoveries carefully choose
their discoverers, and not the opposite.

LUIGI GUARNIERI, *L'atlante*

criminale: Vita scriteriata di Cesare

Lombroso (Criminal atlas: The hair-
brained life of Cesare Lombroso)

In memory of Anne Barbara Gibson

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Acknowledgments

When we began working on this project in the early 1990s, fewer than half a dozen people worldwide had close familiarity with Lombroso's major works, which had become nearly inaccessible; and yet nearly everyone familiar with Lombroso's name confidently dismissed him as a figure of scientific fun. Thus our initial task was to persuade people that new translations of his criminological works would prove worthwhile. Peter Becker of the European University Institute in Florence, Piers Beirne of the University of Southern Maine, and Frances M. Heidensohn of Goldsmiths' College, University of London, immediately understood the value of our project and spent long hours explaining it to others. Without them, this book might have never seen publication. Frances Heidensohn also contributed valuable material to the introduction on Lombroso's influence on British criminology in the 1960s and 1970s. Bernard Cohen, Simon Cole, Steven Hughes, Dario Melossi, and Graeme Newman similarly encouraged us, endorsing our odd project vis-à-vis unbelieving others. Once we found him, Raphael Allen, our editor at Duke University Press, quickly grasped the significance of Lombroso's work and its relevance for a variety of audiences. His faith in our concept and our scholarship, and his old-fashioned vision of what an editor should be and do, sustained us—sometimes when we weren't even aware of his efforts on our behalf. There is still an ideal editor in the world, and his name is Raphael.

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According to Lombroso, women, being naturally weak, need male support. Although we are unaware of gender debilities, we are nonetheless immensely grateful to Robert Hahn and James Cohen for the many ways in which they came to our aid during the preparation of this book.

**Criminal Woman,
the Prostitute,
and the
Normal Woman**

Editors' Introduction

This volume offers a new translation of Cesare Lombroso's *La donna delinquente*—*Criminal Woman*—a work coauthored with Guglielmo Ferrero and originally published in Italian in 1893. This was the book—and not Lombroso's celebrated *L'uomo delinquente* (*Criminal Man*)—that in an early translation introduced American and British readers to work by the Italian criminal anthropologist who claimed to have discovered a new human subspecies: the born criminal. *La donna delinquente*'s significance also lies in its extraordinary impact on the study of female crime. This work, more than any other book in Western history, determined directions taken in that field of study, albeit in recent decades by providing a backdrop against which feminist criminologists have lobbed very different ideas. The translation presented here gives most readers their first full view of Lombroso's text. It also constitutes the first new English edition of *La donna delinquente* in over a century and the first new English edition of any work by Lombroso in close to one hundred years.

Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) is widely recognized as one of the first people (some would say the very first person) to bring scientific methods to bear on the study of crime. A physician, psychiatrist, and prolific author, Lombroso is best known as the founder of criminal anthropology—the study of the body, mind, and habits of the “born” criminal. Lombroso's theory of the atavistic offender, a throwback to a primitive stage in human evolution, dominated criminological discussions in Europe, North and South America, and parts of Asia from the 1880s into the early twentieth century. His central idea of the born or genetic criminal continues to attract adherents, and the main legal implication of his work—that some offenders are not fully responsible for their acts—remains key in criminal jurisprudence. Today, Lombroso is becoming a basic reference point

for historians of gender, race, law, and science. He is being recognized as one of the most fertile, if uncritical, thinkers in nineteenth-century Europe, and a man whose work marked a turning point in conceiving of the body as a sign of human worth.

La donna delinquente's significance to the Anglo-American world came partly from its rapid publication in English. In 1895, just two years after its original Italian publication, *La donna delinquente* appeared in English as *The Female Offender*. This was a full sixteen years before the release of an English translation of *Criminal Man*. Frequently reprinted in both New York and London, *The Female Offender* for many years formed one of the main bridges over which Lombroso's ideas passed from Italy to English-speaking countries.¹

Although *The Female Offender* is today less well known than some of Lombroso's other writings, it actually had a greater long-term impact on the study of female crime than *Criminal Man* did on theories of male crime. For decades, there existed no other book on the causes of female crime and, indeed, very little other material in any form. *The Female Offender* continued to influence interpretations of female crime until the 1970s; it became the classic text in its field. In contrast, by 1911, when *Criminal Man* finally appeared in English, Lombroso's born criminal theory was already going out of vogue as an explanation of male crime. The dominance of *The Female Offender* led to the long-term emphasis on female crime as biological in nature. It led, as well, to a particularly heavy stress on sexual and psychological factors in explanations of female crime. Its influence persists into the present, moreover, due to the fact that Lombroso's pronouncements on female crime have become—rightly or wrongly—a much-discussed symbol of all that is wrong in methods and goals with criminology.

This new edition differs so radically from the original *The Female Offender* translation as to form an entirely different book. While Lombroso's original consisted of four major parts, *The Female Offender* translated only one part and bits of another. While Lombroso had titled his book *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, *The Female Offender* omitted much of the material on prostitutes and all of the commentary on "normal" women—material crucial to Lombroso's argument because it established the general inferiority of women to men. It also omitted nearly all the material on the sexual characteristics of female criminals, such as lesbianism, virility, menstrual abnormalities, and anomalies of the breasts and genitals. In good Victorian fashion, moreover, it completely sanitized Lombroso's language and thought, for example by changing the phrase "a criminal lesbian" into "a woman" and dropping material on lasciviousness as a cause of crime. Reading *The Female Offender*, one would never guess that Lombroso had

a keen interest in sexual pathology and contributed to the development of sexology as a field of study. This new edition includes all four parts of the original text and restores the sexual material excised and bowdlerized in *The Female Offender*. Following Lombroso's original, we have titled this new edition *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*.²

Goals of the New Edition

This new edition of *Criminal Woman*, and its forthcoming companion edition of *Criminal Man*,³ has a twofold purpose: to provide, for the first time, adequate English translations of Lombroso's criminological work and to lay foundations for an emerging new generation of Lombroso scholarship.

Research on Lombroso's criminal anthropology has become very difficult due to the virtual inaccessibility of his texts in both the original Italian and in translation. Few of the Italian originals exist in the United States, and, in any case, due to their age it is almost impossible to borrow them through interlibrary loan offices. (To work on this translation, we had to begin by obtaining a microfilm copy of the original and Xeroxing from that.) Not only have Lombroso's criminological works never been adequately translated into English; even the previous translations are out of print. Scholars working in English have had no way to follow the unfolding of Lombroso's ideas. Research has tended to be misleading because it has been based on incomplete or garbled records. And criminology students have had no way to get a clear overview of Lombroso's work, despite its fundamental importance to the field.

Misunderstandings of Lombroso's work are so widespread as to constitute a distinct mythology. Some commentators have ridiculed Lombroso's work as a pseudoscience; others, misled by abbreviated editions, have mistakenly assumed that Lombroso was a political reactionary. In the early twentieth century, when the English prison physician and statistician Charles Goring set out to critique Lombroso's theory, he had only a few, inadequate English-language resources to work from and thus only a vague, inaccurate idea of the work he was determined to refute.⁴ Later in the century, when the distinguished American evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould set out to critique Lombroso's thought, he failed to recognize the complexity of Lombroso's central ideas, implying in *The Mismeasure of Man* that Lombroso's born criminal theory derived primarily from the nineteenth-century concept of recapitulation.⁵ Lombroso's daughter Gina Lombroso-Ferrero contributed to the confusion by including in her 1911 edition of *Criminal Man*—which became the standard reference text—emendations that cannot be distinguished from her father's text.⁶ Even some of her bibliographical

information is inaccurate. For much of the twentieth century, Lombroso existed only as a distant and unapproachable figure—extraordinarily famous, widely ridiculed, and largely misunderstood.

In recent years, as more has become known about the intellectual context in which Lombroso worked, it has become clear that he built on concepts widely held by nineteenth-century scientists and that in many ways he was a liberal and even progressive thinker. In addition, recent work on the history of science and the relation of science to society has erased the formerly easy distinction between “science” and “pseudoscience.” Instead of dismissing criminal anthropology as a naive or aberrant science, scholars are beginning to locate it in the context of the production of scientific knowledge in the late nineteenth century. Thus the time is ripe for reissuing Lombroso’s major works. To provide students and scholars with sound, complete, and accessible editions of Lombroso’s key criminological texts is the first aim of our new editions.

Even with the inadequate resources presently available, Lombroso’s ideas have been the focus of a number of recent studies. Nicole Rafter’s *Creating Born Criminals* investigates Lombroso’s influence on U. S. criminology and the U. S. eugenics movement, while Mary Gibson’s *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* documents his influence in Italy. Richard Wettzell’s *Inventing the Criminal* does the same for Germany.⁷ Another sign of the reawakening interest in Lombroso lies in *Criminals and Their Scientists: Essays on the History of Criminology*, a collection centered on Lombroso and his impact.⁸ Between 1975 and 2000, ten books on Lombroso were published in Italian⁹ and another six in languages other than Italian and English.¹⁰ Clearly, an international explosion of interest in Lombroso’s thought is already underway. To provide the new generation of Lombroso scholars with adequate tools is the second main aim of our new editions. The new editions are likely to prove particularly relevant to biological theories of crime. Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in such theories, in part due to work on the Human Genome Project and popular interest in DNA identification of offenders. The new editions will help scholars relate Lombroso’s work to these developments and determine the degree to which he served as their forerunner.

While these new translations provide material for new research in criminology and the history of science, future Lombroso studies are likely to branch out in other directions as well. Lombroso was a multifaceted and exceptionally innovative thinker, and his work proves relevant to a wide range of fields. For example, in both his museum of criminal anthropology and in his book illustrations, Lombroso preserved examples of prisoner art and prison artifacts (graffiti,

slang, tattoos, and wall drawings), work that qualifies him as one of the first cultural anthropologists. Better Lombroso resources also offer fertile ground for art historians and artists—as already demonstrated by exhibitions on the visual strategies of biological theories of crime¹¹ and a book on criminological museums.¹² Recognizing Lombroso’s pioneering role in scientific applications of photography as well as the power of his visual rhetoric, *Criminal Woman* includes thirty-two reproductions of Lombroso’s art work. (Another forty images will appear in the new edition of *Criminal Man*.) Lombroso’s work will also likely figure in future histories of law and medicine. As a physician and psychiatrist who wrote extensively about legal medicine, moral insanity, epileptic criminality, and psychiatric jurisprudence, Lombroso helped accomplish the shift in authority from keepers who punished crimes to medical professionals who treated criminals. Other signs of Lombroso’s broad relevance can be found in recent studies of women’s history and anti-Semitism, a topic in which Lombroso, as a Jew, took special interest.¹³ In retrospect, one can see that Lombroso worked along major intellectual fault lines in the contested areas where various trends in social thought collided. Tensions between, for example, feminism and antifeminism, racism and antiracism, and liberalism and conservatism characterize his life and work.

These new editions, then, aim at facilitating Lombroso scholarship in fields as diverse as anthropology; art history; criminology; and rhetoric; Italian and European history; the history of science, medicine, and psychiatry; law and legal history; studies of race and ethnicity; and gender studies.

Lombroso’s Explanations of Female Criminality

Lombroso wrote *Criminal Woman* to reiterate and reconfirm his riveting theory of the born criminal, according to which lawbreakers constitute throwbacks to earlier evolutionary stages—atavisms whose primitive nature dooms them to violate the laws of civilizations in which they unwittingly find themselves. Having previously applied this theory to the criminal man,¹⁴ Lombroso now tested it on female offenders.

The Female Born Criminal

Lombroso devotes over one-quarter of *Criminal Woman* to demonstrating that offenders are scarred by physical imperfections and abnormalities—the “stigmata of degeneration” that simultaneously signify and prove their primitive natures.¹⁵ He proceeds by comparing the number and type of stigmata in three groups of women: criminals, prostitutes, and “normal,” that is, law-abiding, women. In the chapter “The Skull of the Female Offender,” for example, he reports that “pros-

titutes have the smallest cranial capacity of all,” followed by criminal women, while “in average and above-average capacity, honest women and even lunatics surpass both criminals and prostitutes.”¹⁶ Similarly, “The lower jaw of female criminals, and still more of prostitutes, is heavier than in moral women.”¹⁷ Elsewhere he observes that “anomalous teeth, present in only 0.5 percent of normal female subjects, are to be found in 10.8 percent of criminals and in 5.1 percent of prostitutes.”¹⁸ Summarizing such data, Lombroso concludes that “almost all anomalies occur more frequently in prostitutes than in female criminals, and both classes have more degenerative characteristics than do normal women.”¹⁹ In other words, there is a female criminal type. It appears in only 18 percent of female criminals. (In comparison, 31 percent of male offenders fall into the born criminal category.) If we widen the lens to include prostitutes, however, as Lombroso insists we must, we find that “37.1 percent of prostitutes exhibit the complete type.”²⁰ Female born criminals, Lombroso explains, “have a passion for evil for evil’s sake . . . an automatic hatred, one that springs from no external cause such as an insult or offense but from a morbid irritation of the psychical centers which relieves itself in evil action.”²¹

Indeed, the “criminal propensities” of female born criminals “are more intense and perverse even than those of their male counterparts.”²² Although “female born criminals are fewer in number than male born criminals, they are often much more savage.” Like normal women, they are “by nature less sensitive to pain than a man,” and like children, they are “deficient in the moral sense,” leaving them “vengeful, jealous, and inclined to refined cruelty when they take revenge.” All things considered, “women are big children; their evil tendencies are more numerous and more varied than men’s, but usually these remain latent. When awakened and excited, however, these evil tendencies lead to proportionately worse results.”²³ As a consequence, “The born female criminal is, so to speak, doubly exceptional, first as a woman and then as a criminal. This is because criminals are exceptions among civilized people, and women are exceptions among criminals. . . . As a double exception, then, the criminal woman is a true monster.”²⁴

The Nature of Female Crime

A second major purpose of *Criminal Woman* is to explain the nature of female crime. Lombroso shows little interest in the details of female offending (Are women likely to be burglars or murderers? Accomplices or initiators?), but instead wants to create a typology of female offenders and, above all, to explain why women have relatively low crime rates. Despite the primitive state of late-nineteenth-century crime statistics, it was widely known that women were ar-

rested and convicted far less frequently than men. Lombroso was particularly concerned to explain this phenomenon.

Here Lombroso encountered an intractable problem. His born criminal theory pointed toward an obvious explanation: Women have lower crime rates because they are less atavistic than men. However, that argument contradicted another idea to which Lombroso was deeply committed—the inferiority of women to men. Thus Lombroso assigned himself the very difficult task of arguing that women were less criminal than men because of their inferiority to men. And he set out to demonstrate this scientifically. He did so by using a control group—perhaps the earliest example of this procedure in criminological history. Lombroso's control group consisted of the normal women to whom he devotes the entire first part of *Criminal Woman*. "Criminal women could not have been understood," Lombroso reminds us in his preface, "if we had not also had a profile of normal women." Compiling information on this control group called for enormous effort, Lombroso admits: "When we searched for such information, we found nothing (certainly very little that was definite)." Thus he painstakingly collected data on normal women from published studies and by corresponding with gynecologists and other experts. Without the facts they provided, it would have been "impossible to determine where the normal state ends and the pathological begins."²⁵ *Criminal Woman* offers a glimpse of one of the earliest efforts to define deviance scientifically and to identify the boundary between normality and abnormality.

Lombroso starts *Criminal Woman* at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, using his first chapter to explain that in the most primitive forms of sexually differentiated life, females dominate: "As soon as differences between the two sexes become apparent, the female is superior to the male in size, strength, and number." Moreover, "as we go up the zoological scale, the female's superiority in size and strength recurs frequently."²⁶ However, "in the higher orders, males' struggle with one another—a struggle rooted in their stronger sexual desire and perhaps also in their larger numbers—has led to their development of greater size and force than females, and to their superior physique. . . . The male, then, is a more perfect and more variable female through the greater development of secondary sexual characteristics."²⁷ Females—retarded by their passive role in courtship, their reproductive apparatus, and their maternal functions—remain less evolved than males into the present.

The following chapters of part 1 comprise a multifaceted, systematic exposition of female inferiority, starting with the basics ("In human races the woman is nearly always inferior to the man in height and weight"),²⁸ moving on

to the senses and intelligence (“Woman . . . feels less, just as she thinks less”),²⁹ and ending with the moral sense (“Lying is habitual and almost physiological in woman”).³⁰ By the end of this opening section on the normal woman, Lombroso has established two broad kinds of comparison—the first between types of women and the second between women and men. He has shown that two general categories of women exist, one bad, primitive, and masculine in nature, the other law-abiding, civilized, and feminine. He has also demonstrated repeatedly that both types are inferior to men. While the original purpose of the control group was to establish yardsticks against which the criminal woman could be measured, it ultimately served to undergird Lombroso’s subsequent pronouncements on the nature of female crime and to suggest that all women are to some degree deviant.³¹

Atavisms and Prostitutes

Here we arrive at the heart of Lombroso’s argument. Female born criminals, he readily admits, are rarer than male born criminals, but this relative scarcity, too, is a sign of their inferiority: “Atavism . . . helps explain the comparative rarity of the criminal type in women.” Like all females, criminal women “are less subject to transformation and deformation by the factors that cause progressive and retrogressive variations in the male.” In other words, the male’s relative abundance of degenerative traits or stigmata betokens superiority. Then too, Lombroso reminds us, among savages the most abnormal women had the least chance of survival, another factor tending to erase evidence of stigmata: “Primitive man not only spurned the deformed woman; he also ate her, preferring to keep at hand those more pleasing to his sexual whims. (In those days he was stronger and had a choice.)” Thus women’s lower crime rates actually provide additional proof of their backwardness. Finally, Lombroso urges us to keep in mind that even female born criminals need to be attractive if they want men to invite them to serve as accomplices or if they want to succeed at such typical crimes as adultery and slander; and this factor inhibits the evolution of a telltale “repugnant face.”³² With this tortured logic, Lombroso accounts for the smaller number of stigmata in female offenders and hence the lower number of female criminals in general and born criminals in particular.

The *prostitute*—a term that sometimes narrowly denotes sex workers but at others refers to all women who experience sex outside of marriage—turns up frequently in Lombroso’s discussions of the female born criminal, just as she does in his more general remarks on the female criminal. Yet it is difficult to pinpoint the prostitute’s precise role in his theory due to Lombroso’s characteristically

rapid and confusing shifts in comparison groups. Occasionally, he declares that among women, not criminals but prostitutes constitute the real degenerates. On such occasions, he treats prostitutes almost as a distinct species, compiling separate tallies of their anomalies. But at other times, instead of comparing female criminals and prostitutes with one another, he groups them together, comparing them collectively with normal women. (Lombroso may have been inspired to include prostitutes in the population of female criminals by Richard Dugdale's *"The Jukes"* (1877), an American work he admired and which equated prostitutes with male criminals. In any case, in Lombroso's book as in Dugdale's, prostitutes swell the population under discussion, making the group of female deviants more significant numerically than it would have been otherwise.)³³ At still other times, Lombroso compares prostitutes with male criminals, at least obliquely, as when he states that "women's natural form of retrogression" is "prostitution, not crime. Primitive woman was a prostitute rather than a criminal."³⁴ In *Criminal Woman* the imprecise term *prostitutes* becomes a rhetorical device, invoked and applied to confirm a point or to help Lombroso escape from a tight logical corner. A clearer term would have had less explanatory power.

Like many other nineteenth-century scientists, Lombroso had a passion for classifying the phenomena of the natural world. He devotes most of the final part of *Criminal Woman* to his classification of female offenders, whom he divides into two main groups, criminals and prostitutes, and several minor categories (suicides, insane criminals, epileptic and morally insane offenders, and hysterical offenders). As in his typology of male offenders, the major categories are then subdivided, yielding chapters on the born criminal, the occasional criminal, and the criminal by passion, and also on the born prostitute and the occasional prostitute. The classificatory scheme proves both descriptive and etiological, with Lombroso using the groupings to profile the types and simultaneously explain their involvement with crime.

Tone and Strategy in *Criminal Woman*

On the surface, the tone of *Criminal Woman* appears dispassionate, clinical, and "scientific," and indeed this is the only tone conveyed by *The Female Offender*, the partial translation of 1895. The full text, however, discloses undercurrents of frustration, self-apology, and even apprehension. Lombroso seems worried about the persuasiveness of born criminal theory, the validity of his research methods, and the book's reception by critics. While he tries to anticipate objections and paste over problems, at times he evidently senses that certain problems remain unsolvable. Moreover, *Criminal Woman* occasionally has an exasperated and be-

leaguered air, especially in passages dealing with normal women. This tone confirms what Lombroso states in his preface: that the writing of this book was at best a “bitter pleasure.”³⁵

Born criminal theory, introduced in the 1876 edition of *L'uomo delinquente*, had attracted immediate attention in Europe and the United States, but it had also encountered stiff resistance. Clergymen and others who associated crime with sin objected that Lombroso's science negated free will and excused criminals as irresponsible beings, driven by defective biology rather than by choice. Prison wardens and others with direct experience of offenders doubted Lombroso's claim that criminals differed physically from law-abiding people. And scientists were put off by Lombroso's uncritical approach to evidence.³⁶ Lombroso's positivist or criminal anthropological school came under heavy attack at the Second International Congress of Criminal Anthropology, held in Paris in 1889, where the French anthropologist Léonce Manouvrier derided Lombroso's statistical naïveté and his failure to use control groups of “honest men.”³⁷ Harsher still was the witticism of Lombroso's former admirer Moritz Benedikt, who pointed out that an enlarged median occipital fossetta (the skull anomaly that originally inspired Lombroso's theory) might just as well be used to hypothesize a predisposition to hemorrhoids instead of criminality.³⁸ Lombroso reacted “scientifically” to such criticisms, modifying his procedures and his theory. Nowhere does his interest in polishing his performance emerge more clearly than in *Criminal Woman*, where he sets out to test his theory on a completely new population and introduces a control group.³⁹ The substance and very structure of *Criminal Woman*, with its long introductory section on normal women, reflect Lombroso's willingness to take criticism to heart.

But these risks and innovations also meant that Lombroso had a great deal at stake in *Criminal Woman*; he might well have been apprehensive about the results. Moreover, self-criticism did not come easily to him, as we discover in a passage of *Criminal Woman* that acknowledges earlier errors but does so with such caveats, contradictions, and contortions that the final impression is one of responsibility evaded. The passage starts as follows: “When I began studying criminals some thirty years ago, I professed a firm faith in anthropometry, especially cranial anthropometry, as an ark of salvation from the metaphysical, a priori systems dear to all those engaged on the study of Man. I regarded anthropometry as the backbone—indeed, the entire framework—of the new human statue I was attempting to create. But as so often happens in human affairs, use degenerated into abuse.”⁴⁰ Here Lombroso admits that his earlier studies relied too heavily on anthropometry (the measurement of body parts) in general and on cranial anthropometry (the

measurement of the skull) in particular. However, he remains ambiguous about the identity of those whose “excessive confidence” led to abuse of anthropometrical methods and in the next paragraph hints that the responsible parties may have been anthropology professors. At the same time, he claims to have himself recognized some time ago the inadequacy of anthropometry for identification of born criminals. In fact, Lombroso continues, he himself now uses the superior method of “anatomico-pathological investigation” (a term he has not used earlier and does not use again). Had others followed his lead instead of foolishly persisting with anthropometry, they undoubtedly would now be more receptive to his work.⁴¹

After these twists and turns, Lombroso suddenly and astonishingly reverses direction to endorse anthropometry, extolling physical measurements as “the symbol, the flag of a school [criminal anthropology] in whose armory numbers furnish the most effective weapon.”⁴² And then he turns immediately to specific anthropometric studies, reporting their results as solid and significant data. What began as self-criticism becomes self-congratulation, and the fundamental issue—the validity of anthropometrical research—is dismissed as though it made not the slightest bit of difference. Lombroso here seems torn, even paralyzed, by conflicting impulses—ambition, scientific integrity, exasperation with critics, inertia, a sense of superiority, and simple annoyance at the need to acknowledge past mistakes.

Irritation and frustration surface again in *Criminal Woman*’s passages on women’s nature. Lombroso’s beliefs about female inferiority were fairly typical among men of his social class and time.⁴³ (Guglielmo Ferrero, the assistant whom Lombroso credits with coauthorship of *Criminal Woman*, clung fiercely to disdain for women’s abilities well into the twentieth century. Ferrero may well have been the extremist of the pair.⁴⁴) However, as the “pivot” around which his wife and children revolved,⁴⁵ Lombroso may have felt apprehensive about the growing independence of his two daughters, Paola and Gina, who were both approaching the age of twenty at the time he embarked on *Criminal Woman*. Moreover, while he was working on the book, Anna Kuliscioff, a leading feminist, spent a great deal of time with Lombroso’s family, dining with them almost nightly and slipping the girls a copy of J. S. Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*.⁴⁶ (It was Kuliscioff who converted the family to socialism. She first interested the girls, and Lombroso followed in their wake.)⁴⁷ Lombroso’s home life, together with the women’s movement that Kuliscioff represented, may from time to time have led him to view women with annoyance and even trepidation. Criminal anthropology’s biological “proofs” of female inferiority formed part of a reaction against

transformations in women's status. "With the arrival of industrial society," writes Delfina Dolza, "the door opened for some women to the possibility of entering the education and professional system, and some [scientists] found it necessary to delimit, with universal norms, the boundaries that could not be trespassed."⁴⁸

Arguments at the family dinner table over women's status and roles may also help explain why, from time to time in *Criminal Woman*, Lombroso apologizes for his harsh words about women. At the end of the chapter on female intelligence, for example—immediately after remarking that "it is amazing, then, that woman is not even less intelligent than she is"—Lombroso adds a line suggesting that prejudice may contribute to women's lowly condition: "Certainly greater participation in the collective life of society would raise women's intelligence."⁴⁹ Another apology appears in his preface, where Lombroso claims that his emphasis on woman's relatively low crime rates and pathetic qualities should offset "a thousandfold" his conclusions about her inferior intelligence: "If I must show that in mind and body woman is a male of arrested development, the fact that she is somewhat less criminal than he, and a little more pitiful, can compensate a thousandfold for her deficiency in the realm of intellect." Most fulsomely of all, Lombroso later in the preface declares: "Not one line of this work justifies the great tyranny that continues to victimize women, from the taboo which forbids them to eat meat or touch a coconut, to that which impedes them from studying, and worse, from practicing a profession once they are educated. These ridiculous and cruel constraints, still widely accepted, are used to maintain or (sadder still) increase women's inferiority, exploiting them to our advantage."⁵⁰ But these nods to injustices against women clash with the misogynist tone of the book as a whole.

Lombroso's anxieties about *Criminal Woman*, his research methods, and the ultimate fate of criminal anthropology emerge most fully in the book's preface. Even before publication, he informs readers, *Criminal Woman* has elicited hostile attention. Some critics have objected to the apparent illogic of his central thesis, according to which women are less criminal than men because they are too weak and stupid to be bad. Others charge that he has been "insufficiently chivalrous" toward women, and still others think it foolish to equate prostitutes with male born criminals. Lombroso uses the preface to reply to these critics, but his tangled defenses sometimes make matters worse.

Criminal Woman in Context

English-language readers have lacked not only good translations of Lombroso's works but also an understanding of their historical context. While major crimi-

nological textbooks routinely cite Lombroso as the “father of criminology,” they rarely mention the major currents of social, political, and intellectual change in nineteenth-century Europe which helped to shape his theories. Even the life of Lombroso himself is little known because all of his full-length biographies are available only in Italian.⁵¹ Both Lombroso’s personal story and his place in Italian history help to explain the passion of his quest to turn the study of crime into a scientific endeavor. We will therefore turn to a series of nineteenth-century contexts within which Lombroso lived and worked: the unification of Italy; the growing prestige of science, specifically Darwinism; the revolt against Enlightenment legal theories; and the birth of sexology.

The Unification of Italy

Lombroso grew up in the ferment of the *risorgimento*, the movement to expel foreign and absolutist powers and unify the Italian peninsula under a parliamentary government. Born in 1835, Lombroso spent his youth in the northern Italian provinces of Lombardy and the Veneto. These constituted the culturally richest and most socially progressive states of the Italian peninsula, in contrast to the more rural and often impoverished areas to the south. The Austrian Empire ruled both Lombardy and the Veneto, however, a fact that inspired Lombroso, like many others of his generation, to support the *risorgimento*. Lombroso’s Jewish background also explains his youthful liberalism. Although never religious, he trusted that the leaders of the *risorgimento*, with their belief in individual rights and a secular state, would remove the discriminatory restrictions on Jews that still characterized parts of the peninsula.

After studying at the universities of Padua, Vienna, and Pavia, Lombroso completed a medical degree in 1858, with an emphasis on psychiatry.⁵² When the long-anticipated war of unification broke out the following year, he volunteered as a doctor in the revolutionary forces.⁵³ Sent to the southern province of Calabria in 1862 as part of the new state’s campaign to suppress brigandage, he was shocked by the population’s poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition. Most people were landless peasants, tending the large estates of noble landlords in a system that reminded him of medieval feudalism. While in Calabria, Lombroso developed a sense of mission to improve the physical and psychological health of the lower classes. He also had the opportunity to examine the soldiers in his unit, thus establishing his lifelong technique of classifying individuals based on physical measurements and interviews. He would later transfer this clinical approach to mental patients and criminals.

After completing his military service, Lombroso spent the rest of his life in

northern Italy, working as a university professor and medical officer in insane asylums and prisons. As a patriot, he continued to be preoccupied with the problems of the new state. In his view, these included the threat to unity and stability posed by people who did not or could not conform to the role of respectable citizen. Rapid population growth was causing mass migration to both northern and southern cities, swelling the ranks of the so-called dangerous classes. The prostitute, a woman seemingly no longer bound by family or morality, emerged as a central figure in the iconography of the dangerous classes. To middle-class observers, the increasing numbers of homeless and unemployed women on urban streets seemed all to be prostitutes. Blamed for the spread of venereal disease, actual prostitutes were placed under police supervision immediately after unification, and they were required to live in state-regulated brothels, so-called closed houses. It thus comes as little surprise that Lombroso found the prostitute more threatening and atavistic than even the criminal woman.

Lombroso's preoccupation with female crime also reflected his anxieties about the growth of the women's movement in Italy during the decades after unification. Although individual female emancipationists had struggled since unification to win equal rights for women, they did not establish formal organizations until the 1880s and 1890s. It is not coincidental that *Criminal Woman* was published during a period when members of the women's movement were vociferously demanding access to education, entrance to the professions, equality within the family, and the right to vote. Politically liberal and a friend of feminists like Kuliscioff, Lombroso did not inexorably oppose all changes in women's legal status and even took a position, radical for his day, in favor of divorce. But the prospect of a fundamental restructuring of gender roles deeply, and perhaps unconsciously, troubled him, as his allocation of the first major section of *Criminal Woman* to proofs of the inferiority of normal women shows. His ridicule of intellectual women and his insistence on maternity as the proper aspiration for all women scientifically affirmed traditional stereotypes and directly challenged the vision of female emancipationists.

The Growing Prestige of Science

A second context for Lombroso's theories was the growing prestige of science, and specifically Darwinism, in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Italy, science became especially important as a weapon against the traditional hegemony of Catholic thought. The wars of unification directly challenged the church when revolutionary armies conquered the lands ruled by the pope in central Italy and finally Rome in 1871. Withdrawing into the Vatican, Pope Pius IX condemned

the new Italian state and forbade Catholics to participate in its political institutions. Supporters of unification, mostly members of the middle classes, therefore had to find a new philosophical basis for national identity. Science offered the fledgling state a discourse compatible with its aspirations to liberalism and secularism and signaled its transition from feudalism to modernity. Lombroso, with his year of medical school in Vienna, readily conceptualized his own research as part of a wider European endeavor to spread the methods of science to new fields.

To emphasize the importance of applying science to the study of crime, Lombroso and his followers labeled themselves the positivist school. As a general term originally coined by Auguste Comte, *positivism* held that inductive reasoning based on empirical evidence was superior to the deductive method of philosophers. Enthusiasm for positivism swept Italy in the last half of the nineteenth century, spreading from the sciences to social theory and even to humanistic research in history and literature. As the “lay faith” of academia,⁵⁴ positivism promised to apply a modern empirical approach to solving Italy’s social problems. It proved, moreover, compatible with socialism, a political movement that sought to analyze economic inequality based on material facts. Lombroso, like many of his followers, joined the Italian Socialist Party after its establishment in 1892 because the liberal government’s inability to improve the lot of the poor left him disillusioned. Thus he never lost the humanitarian impulse that had inspired his work during his military service in Calabria.

Lombroso had already read *The Origin of Species* before its translation into Italian in 1864.⁵⁵ He became an immediate proponent of Darwin’s theory of evolution in opposition not only to the spiritualism of the Catholic Church but also to the rival evolutionary theory of polygenism, which held that the white, yellow, and black “races” constituted different species.⁵⁶ Noting the similarities between the brains of monkeys and humans, Lombroso instead endorsed the Darwinian mechanisms of the struggle for existence and natural selection as responsible for the emergence of the black race and, from it, the yellow, and finally the white.⁵⁷ His conviction of the nonhuman animal origins of human life helps to explain why Lombroso included patently ridiculous chapters in *Criminal Woman* on theft, infanticide, and sexual licentiousness among mammals, birds, and even insects.

Despite Lombroso’s defense of monogenism, or the common ancestry of all human beings, he nevertheless posited a racial hierarchy stretching from African blacks at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder to European whites at the top. He believed the superiority of whites to be legible from their bodies, which exhibited “the most perfect symmetry.”⁵⁸ Black Africans, on the other hand, seemed clearly

to bear the imprint of their animal origins in what he characterized as misshapen bodies and inferior intellect. In his appropriation of Darwin to delineate and rank racial groups, Lombroso typified late-nineteenth-century thinkers.⁵⁹ His “scientific” racism was innovative, however, in its equation of criminals with what he referred to as savages, members of nonwhite races. Throwbacks on the evolutionary scale, European criminals exhibited physical and psychological features that he believed were anomalies for the white race but normal for lower, less civilized races. This constitutes the fundamental message of Lombroso’s first criminological book, *Criminal Man*.

In *Criminal Woman*, Lombroso again uses Darwinist terms, this time to naturalize gender differences. Among lower races, he writes, women resemble men in their strength, intelligence, and sexual promiscuity. Through sexual selection, however, males—whether animal or human—choose mates for feminine qualities like beauty, modesty, passivity, and domesticity. Evolution, therefore, increasingly differentiates the sexes, with men dominating the public sphere of politics and work and women relegated to motherhood in the home. Again, Lombroso was not unusual for his time in turning traditional gender stereotypes into supposedly scientific categories. But his work presented an enormous problem for the nascent Italian women’s movement, which saw science as a potential ally in the struggle against the restrictive gender roles endorsed by religious and conservative thinkers. With the publication of *La donna delinquente*, however, supporters of women’s rights were instead faced with a book purporting to present modern empirical proof of women’s inferiority. Written by a well-respected intellectual of the left, *Criminal Woman* weakened the Italian women’s movement in its quest for expanded legal and political rights for women.

Revolt against Enlightenment Legal Theories

The development of legal thought in Europe since the Enlightenment offers a third context for understanding Lombroso’s intellectual efforts. By labeling his work *criminal anthropology*, or the study of criminal man, Lombroso consciously demarcated his approach from that of the eighteenth-century classical school, which dominated Italian legal thinking into the late nineteenth century. The principles of the classical school, originally laid out in the famous treatise by Cesare Beccaria entitled *Of Crimes and Punishments* (*Dei delitti e delle pene*), included equality before the law, presumption of innocence, and proportionality between crime and punishment.⁶⁰ Such principles would apply to all citizens because all were presumed born with the same inalienable rights and to exercise free will when committing crimes. As European nations reformed their criminal laws in