

## Education and Women's Contribution to Society

### Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso

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#### Abstract

The article compares the ideas in some of the writings of Ellen Key (1849-1926) and Italian writer and educator Paola Lombroso (1871-1954), daughter of famous physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso. Paola Lombroso was the author of *Saggi di psicologia del bambino* [Essays of the psychology of the child] (1894) and in 1904 she published *La vita dei bambini* [Children's life], four years after Ellen Key's *Barnets århundrade (The Century of the Child)* (1900). Of particular interest are Key's book *Kärleken och äktenskapet (Love and Marriage)* (1903) and Lombroso's book *Caratteri della femminilità* [Characters of femininity] (1909) which was dedicated to Ellen Key. It is clear that the two writers had many ideas in common and that Lombroso admired Key highly. While Key was more polemic and outspoken, Lombroso, daughter to a famous man who claimed to scientifically have proved that women are inferior to men, found herself in an ambiguous position. Nevertheless she also wanted to upgrade women's contributions to society.

**Keywords:** Ellen Key, Paola Lombroso, children, education, women, society.

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#### Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ellen Key (1849-1926) was famous in Italy, where her books were read and her ideas discussed (Åkerström, 2013) as in the rest of Europe. She was particularly appreciated in Germany because of her thoughts on education and children's rights. According to her Swedish biographer Mia Leche-Löfgren, Key was known in Italy as "the great prophetess" (Leche-Löfgren, 1930, p. 208). The feminist writer Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1960), who was to become famous for her autobiographical novel *Una donna* (1906), presented Key in 1905 in *Nuova Antologia*. The year after Aleramo wrote about *The Century of the Child* in the same

journal. This book was, according to Aleramo, “the expression of one of the strongest contemporary female intellects”<sup>1</sup> (Aleramo, 1906). She and Key became friends in 1907 and in their following correspondence they discussed the choices of the main character in Aleramo’s novel, who like the author had lived in a suffocating marriage and subsequently left her husband (Åkerström, 2012).

When Ellen Key and the 22-year-younger Paola Lombroso (1871-1954) met, Ellen Key was thus a well-known writer and pedagogue. Paola Lombroso, daughter of the famous physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, was a journalist and writer with a great interest in children’s development and psychology. It is not known exactly when they met for the first time, but in a letter to Sibilla Aleramo sent from Gargnano the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June in 1907, Ellen Key tells her younger feminist friend that she has been to Turin where she has given Paola Lombroso a photograph of Aleramo, because Lombroso “has great sympathy” for her: “I have received your letter and the two photographs in Turin, and since Paola Lombroso is very fond of you, I gave her one. (She is very kind, more to me than to you [...])”<sup>2</sup> (Åkerström, 2012, p. 65).

We can thus presume that Key met Lombroso, and probably also other members of the Lombroso family, during her visit to Turin some days previous to the letter. In Turin Key had held a lecture in French the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1907 with the title *La maternité et la société*. Two days earlier she had given the same speech in Milan. Both occasions were organized by the *Unione femminile nazionale* and were reported in the press afterwards. For example Nino Caimi, director of the fortnightly magazine *La donna*, described her as an interesting lecturer, even if he didn’t agree with all of her ideas:

Ellen Key uses logic to expose truths and paradoxes. This reveals that she is a strong and profound agitator of ideas. We don’t share all of her convictions, but there is in her conception of the mission of woman and in that very high of motherhood, such a grandeur of dreams, such beauty of sentiments, that the numerous and elected audience who listens to her while she speaks, easily and repeatedly finds itself to agree when they applaud<sup>3</sup> (Caimi, 1907).

In a letter to Key written in the autumn the same year, the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1907, Paola Lombroso expressed her disappointment that Key was not coming back to Turin as she had promised, despite the fact that there was a guest room waiting for her in the Lombroso-Carrara home (Lombroso, 1907). Lombroso also mentions a visit to the *Museo di Torino*, where Key seems to have acted as a guide.

However, the focus of this article is not the personal relationship between Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso. Instead the intention is to compare the ideas in some of their writings which deal with children, education and women’s place in society.

Lombroso was the author of *Saggi di psicologia del bambino* (1894) (“Essays on child psychology”) and in 1904 she published *La vita dei bambini* (“Children’s Life”), four years after Ellen Key’s *Barnets århundrade* (1900), (in English translation *The Century of the Child*, 1909). The content of these three books will be examined, but of particular interest in this article will be Key’s book *Kärleken och äkten-skapet* (1903), (in English translation *Love and Marriage*, 1911) and Lombroso’s book *Caratteri della femminilità* (1909) (“The Characteristics of Femininity”). The latter was dedicated to Ellen Key and in the preface Paola Lombroso clearly expresses her admiration for Ellen Key and how important the Swedish writer’s ideas had been for her. The purpose is therefore also to investigate the influences between them, and in particular Key’s influence on Lombroso.

### **Biographical notes on Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso**

Ellen Key, born in Småland in the south of Sweden in 1849, was deeply concerned with the education of children from her own early years<sup>4</sup>. In *The Century of the Child* she later wrote that she had thoughts about the education of her own future children when she was as young as five years old. She was the oldest daughter with five younger siblings: her sisters Ada and Hedda and brothers Emil, Mac and Carl. Their parents Emil Key and Sophie Posse seemed to have been a loving couple and their apparently happy marriage later functioned as an ideal for Ellen Key when she described how a harmonic relationship should be between man and woman. Yet the upbringing that Ellen Key and her siblings received seems to have been rather severe. They lived in the countryside in the Sundsholm mansion and their mother was an aristocratic woman; thus the education of the children was a mixture of Spartan and aristocratic ideals with a rustic agricultural upbringing.

The education of the Key children was supervised by governesses and private tutors from Germany and France. Sophie Posse Key taught her eldest daughter English and provided her with interesting books, many by female authors, thus supporting her process of intellectual formation. The only formal school education that Ellen Key had was during some winter semesters in a school for girls in Stockholm, where she also taught for a period during 1874. Key, being the eldest child, felt great responsibility for her sisters and brothers and acted like their “little mother”, as they were often left by themselves by their parents. She also acted as teacher for her younger sisters.

During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ellen Key worked as a school teacher in Stockholm. At the same time she held lectures on many different subjects. Many of these lectures were published and she became famous as a debater in Sweden and abroad. The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was prolific for Ellen Key. She published some of her most famous works, including those treated in this article, and she spent

long periods travelling in Europe. She was especially popular in Germany, where she held many lectures. In 1910 she moved into her new home Strand, where she remained until her last days. In these last years she was active in the pacifist and suffrage movements.

Both Key and Lombroso were daughters to men who had, it seems, a great influence on their education. Key's father Emil Key, a radical parliamentarian, appears to have had great faith in his daughter's abilities and she worked for a period as his assistant. Lombroso's father may have had an ambiguous view of his two daughters' education; his ideas of women's intellectual inferiority are well described in his *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (1893). Nevertheless both his daughters engaged successfully in intellectual activities. Paola Lombroso was born as the first child of her parents Cesare Lombroso and Nina De Benedetti. Her sister Gina later became a physician and writer, and they had three younger brothers, Arnaldo, Leo and Ugo. The Lombroso children were brought up in Turin in the Hebrew tradition that valued in a particular way intellectual education and work and in their case the positivistic ideas that informed their upbringing (Dolza, 1990). Since their father wanted his children to grow up without prejudices and without being frightened, he did not want them to read children's books or fairy tales, but gave them instead literature that would strengthen their characters, such as *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, Plutarch's biographies and *My Prisons* by Silvio Pellico. The children were not very happy with this, and Paola Lombroso started to write her own fairy tales and short stories, which she read to her younger siblings (Dolza, 1990). Thus it is not surprising that later in life she had a prolific career as a writer of children's literature.

The Lombroso children were sent to ordinary primary school, but as Gina later admitted, it did not have much influence on them. Paola Lombroso could never adjust to school, although she loved to study and was avid to learn. Therefore she received much of her education from private tutors at home. The Lombroso household was open to new ideas and the famous socialist and feminist Anna Kuliscioff (1857-1925), one of the first women to graduate in medicine in Italy, was a frequent guest in the Lombroso home in the late 1880's. She was an early important role model for the Lombroso sisters, showing them a female lifestyle that was unknown to them, as an emancipated and independent woman (Dolza, 1990). Both sisters started to collaborate at an early age as assistants to their father helping him to gather statistics, and taking care of his correspondence, articles and reviews. They also worked with his psychiatric archive, *Archivio di psichiatria*, which was founded in 1880.

Paola Lombroso never went to university like her sister Gina, but she pursued a career as a journalist and writer. Like Ellen Key, she was deeply interested in pedagogical questions. Since psychology at that time was a young scientific discipline which was very close both to the pedagogical and philosophical traditions, it is not

surprising that Lombroso's interests went in these directions. In 1899 Paola Lombroso married her father's assistant Mario Carrara, and the couple had two children. They also worked together, and in 1911 they published *Nella penombra della civiltà (da un'inchiesta sul pensiero del popolo)* ("In the shadow of civilisation (from an enquiry on the ideas of the popular classes)"), a socio-anthropological study based on interviews with poor people. Other books of Paola Lombroso in this period are *I segni rivelatori della personalità* (1902) ("Revealing signs of personality") and *Il problema della felicità* (1907) ("The problem of happiness").

As a journalist, Paola Lombroso collaborated with for example *Fanfulla della domenica*, *La Gazzetta letteraria* and *Il Giornalino della domenica* and had a crucial role in creating *Il Corriere dei piccoli*, the special edition for children of *Il Corriere della sera* (Fava, 2015). She had a special column under the name of *Zia Mariù* and she also wrote children's books and organized the project *Bibliotechine rurali di Zia Mariù* ("Small rural libraries of Aunt Mariù") which donated books to small schools in Italy for many years (Fava, 2015). Babini (2003, p. 151) points out that Lombroso's career as a popularizer of scientific studies on the human psyche and that of infants was a way for her to unite the two worlds that she moved in, the scientific one and the one of the middle class for whom she wrote.

## Historical background

The repercussions of the French Revolution and the following social disturbances in the 19th century were among the reasons that led to an increased interest in the education of children in the whole of Europe. The lack of education for working-class children in Sweden was seen as a central social problem, while the ruling classes feared that insufficient education could lead to revolutions like that in France. At the same time liberal demands on civil rights and obligations required an increased level of knowledge. Therefore schools were started to fill the gaps in education and to make all children, not only the wealthy but also the poorer ones, share the values that were considered most important for the development of society, such as morality and religion (Sandin & Sundkvist, 2014). These are some of the reasons that led to the Swedish school reform which created the "folkskola" in 1842, an elementary compulsory school in which all children could learn the basics of reading, writing, counting, history, geography etc. In Italy, after the unification in 1861, the young nation faced great challenges with illiteracy and with a population which spoke mostly in different dialects. There was a great need to unify the nation not only politically, but also socially. Primary school, which became compulsory in 1877, had an important role in these efforts.

Children's education was also linked to the prevention of criminality and social problems. Very important in Europe were the ideas of the German pedagogue Frie-

drich Fröbel, author of *Die Menschenerziehung* (1826) (in English translation *The Education of Man*, 1885) and his foundation of various *Kindergarten*. His thoughts about the importance of education, schools and kindergartens were of great significance in Italy, where already the theologian Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858), a pioneer of children's education in schools, had evolved his pedagogical method (Ferrari, Berti & Sideri, 2015). Among his followers were the Agazzi sisters, Rosa (1866-1951) and Carolina (1870-1945) (Altea, 2011), and in particular Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and her famous approach in the *Case dei bambini* from 1907, an important development in scientific pedagogy (Quarfood, 2005). It is in this context that the works of Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso and their ideas about pedagogy and children's development have to be seen, and by extension their thoughts on the relationship between man and woman, women's place in society and female emancipation.

### Essays on Child Psychology by Paola Lombroso

Paola Lombroso's book *Saggi di psicologia del bambino* ("Essays on Child Psychology") was published in 1894, when she was only 23 years old. She was not without experience, having worked as her father's assistant for a long time. The book was preceded by some articles on the same subject in the journal *Pensiero italiano*<sup>5</sup> (Dolza, 1990, p. 257). *Saggi di psicologia del bambino* was dedicated to Lombroso's mother Nina De Benedetti with a preface written by her father Cesare Lombroso. In the preface, "To my Paola", he expresses how worried he had felt when he had known that she was about to leave her career as a story-writer and dedicate herself to psychology, a subject that he had at first thought was not suitable for a woman. But then, he writes, he realized that his daughter had managed to perform her task very well:

But you have found a compromise which has permitted you to make a series of original and modern research, without taking off that delicate feminine mantle and without tiring your hands with heavy and boring instruments. You have chosen the small world that has always smiled at you and made you happy: and when you study their psychology, you have not used anything but those same direct, minute observations of the words, the gestures, the writings that you used earlier when you embroidered your little short stories<sup>6</sup> (Lombroso, 1894, p. VIII).

The kind words of the father reflect his vision of the female sex as inferior to men, as is clearly shown in his famous work *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* which was to be published the year after the *Saggi*. Lombroso's attitude to the differences between the two sexes was not unusual at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; on the contrary it was a common perception at that time. The interesting is-

sue in our context is how he at the same time as he thought women inferior, encouraged his daughters in many ways to be active as intellectual individuals.

Paola Lombroso herself is quite modest in her introductory *Nota*. She explains why she had chosen to call her book *Essays*, finding it too far from the completeness of a true monograph. Instead, she writes, her observations are not more than “isolated” and “fragmentary”. She describes her research method as that of “direct observation”: “with the naked eye rather than the accurate and precise investigation with the lens, it has drawn me to study rather the exterior manifestations and the details of the infant’s psyche, and not to throw the sounding and determinate its bone structure in a solid way” (Lombroso, 1894, XI)<sup>7</sup>.

The book consists of three parts and an appendix. The first, which is entitled *Saggi sullo sviluppo mentale del bambino* (*Essays on the mental development of the child*), contains three chapters in which the child’s first steps of speech, the child’s first ideas and its development of reflection and reason are examined. The second part is called *La morale dei bambini* (*Children’s moral*) with three more chapters in which the child’s vanity, moral sense, dissimulation (chapter IV), affectivity and sensibility (chapter V) and children’s love (*Amore nei bambini*, chapter VI) are treated. The third part, *Altre manifestazioni intellettuali del bambino* (*Other intellectual manifestations of the child*), investigates children playing (chapter VII), their first writing (chapter VIII), imagination, sense of truth and the aesthetic sense in children’s writing. The last chapter is a summing-up and is followed by the appendix in which the author describes twelve children (nine girls and three boys) and their behaviour. The children who are observed, described and analyzed by Paola Lombroso are all from her own environment, middle-class families among their friends and relatives. As Dolza (1990) points out, they are nevertheless presented simply as “children” or “the child” without any socio-historical connotations (pp. 72-73). In her text, Lombroso makes various references to scholars like Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Luigi Ferri, William Thierry Preyer and many others, and to writers like George Sand, Leo Tolstoy, Alfred de Musset etc. In the last chapter, Lombroso sums up her study, and stresses one principle that she thinks of particular importance, “la legge del minimo sforzo”, the law of minimum effort, which she says is a key to the understanding of the development of the child (pp. 170-172). This concept, which according to Lombroso rules all manifestations of sociology and psychology, is explained with the image of a small plant that orients on its own. Like a plant, the child is sustained by instinct with an extraordinary sense of itself and tends to achieve development by using a minimum of force.

## The Century of the Child by Ellen Key

While Paola Lombroso *Saggi* is a scientific study of psychological observation of the development of the child, Ellen Key's famous book *The Century of the Child* from 1900 is a book of ideas, where parts of the argumentation are based on the works of other scholars and writers, some of them the same as in Lombroso's book. *The Century of the Child*, which subsequently would be translated into 26 languages (in Italian and in English in 1909), is divided in two separate parts, where the first part is a polemical pamphlet and a contribution to the debate about the protection of motherhood and child labour. From the first chapter called *The Right of the Child to Choose his Parents* Key goes on to the following chapters: *The Protection of the Child and of the Mother*, *Women's rights and the Protection of the Mother*, *Women's Right to Vote and Children's rights*<sup>8</sup>. As it is clear from these titles, the aim is for Key to argue for a better world for children. This it is of vital importance to improve also the condition of women, according to Key, as well as to many contemporary feminists. She argues against child labour and sees the family as the most important part of society. The father is supposed to be employed outside the home, which is the place for the mother. She should have a wage guaranteed by society. The children should be at home or at school. Key also wanted protection for women and children, who she saw as victims in the new industrial society. In this new world the old patriarchal society should give a place to a new form of matriarchy, and therefore women's right to vote is crucial (Ambjörnsson, 2012).

In the second part of the book Key discusses her pedagogical vision for school children and their education as a central issue. She deals with many topics in the various essays: education, the school of the future, religious instruction, "soul murders" in the schools, homelessness and books. As in Lombroso's book, pedagogy is based on a middle class perspective, even if Key also deals in some way with the conditions of working-class children. The chapter *Education* is, as Ambjörnsson (2012) describes it, "a long essay which, like most of Ellen Key's texts, moves in a winding reasoning where some thoughts return and vary: the decisive role of the home, the strong emphasis of individuality, the criticism of corporal punishment. An overall perspective is also evolutionism, Spencer is the name most often mentioned beside Rousseau"<sup>9</sup> (p. 198).

In the chapter "A retrospect and a survey", Key follows a pedagogical timeline that starts with the 16<sup>th</sup> century thinker Montaigne, and continues with Rousseau, Locke and Spencer and others, moving on to the contemporary research in child psychology and education. Some projects of reform schools in different European countries are also described and examined.

As we have seen, the interest in Spencer and Darwin is shared by both Lombroso and Key. The two English evolutionists are often mentioned together and it was



probably their ideas on individualism and evolution that attracted Lombroso and Key, Spencer with his model of evolution regarding human society and Darwin with his ideas on evolutionary biology.

*The Child of the Century* is an *opus* so rich in discussion, analysis and argumentation that it is almost impossible to summarize it in a few lines. It appears nevertheless quite clear that it differs considerably from Paola Lombroso's *Saggi*, even if some of the literature they both refer to is the same. While Lombroso's book is a research project which aims at better understanding the child's development, Key's book is an analysis of education historically and contemporarily, at the same time as it is a pamphlet meant to be a contribution to the many political debates of her time.

### Children's Life by Paola Lombroso

Paola Lombroso's next book on children, *La vita dei bambini* ("Children's Life") was published in 1904, ten years after her own *Saggi* and four years after *The Century of the Child*. During this decade, she married the physician Mario Carrara, assistant and successor to Cesare Lombroso, and they had had two children, Enrico born in 1900 and Maria Gina in 1902. It is probable that Paola Lombroso at this point had lacked the opportunity to read *The Century of the Child*, which was translated into Italian in 1906 and in French 1910. Theoretically, she could have read Key's book in German (the German translation *Das Jahrhundert des Kindes* was published in 1902), but it has been impossible to verify whether Lombroso knew that language. Instead, she shared another very important experience that influenced her deeply. In 1896 the Lombroso sisters had established the foundation *Scuola e famiglia* (School and family), suggested to them by Anna Kuliscioff, who knew about similar institutions in Milan (Denza, 1990). This establishment was a kind of afterschool programme for children in elementary schools in Turin, which was supposed to help both families and schools regarding the education of children and by keeping them from roaming the streets in idleness after school. Instead children would learn simple manual work and occupy themselves with physical exercise, drawing and music etc. The project was immensely successful and many schools were added to it, eventually all elementary schools in Turin under the direction of the municipality of the town. Paola Lombroso's organizing skills were crucial to the success of the project, which gave her invaluable input for her subsequent research in the area of child psychology and development. Meeting children from the working classes widened Paola Lombroso's horizons and she saw more clearly the connection between the social background and intellectual development of children, as is shown in her observations and

analyses. According to Dolza (1990) the project gave the two sisters “a fundamental experience”<sup>10</sup> (p. 71). This is obvious in *La vita dei bambini*.

After the first introductory chapters the book deals thematically with different issues: children's self-preservation (chapter I), their mentality and the law of minimum effort (chapter II), the evolution of ideas of children (chapter III), imagination and fairy-tales (chapter IV) and children's drawings (chapter V), with many examples of children's own pictures. Sometimes she quotes from writers like George Sand, Francesco De Sanctis, Leo Tolstoy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Hector Berlioz, with passages from their various memoirs. The last chapter focuses on the psychology of poor children and their ability to adjust, and the concluding words are about them and their future:

And when you study this whole little world dedicated to a childhood in misery to which follows fatally a whole life of sufferings, of passive work and subjection, and one finds there so many germs of initiative, courage, independence and human dignity, one feels truly not only pity for the injustice of the blind destiny that keeps them in its clutches, but also the regret that most of these precious energies will be unused and squandered by a vicious social constitution<sup>11</sup> (Lombroso, 1904, p. 204).

This mild critique of society is nothing compared to the polemic attacks of Ellen Key. Yet the quotation shows that Paola Lombroso strongly disliked social injustice. Her own work and efforts also show that she wanted to act to help create a better environment for children and that she had become more conscious of the different conditions they meet in life.

## Love and Marriage by Ellen Key

As we have seen, both Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso independently of one another showed great interest in children's development and education. The choice of subject is not strange per se, since historically it was always seen as natural for women to take an interest in such issues. The subsequent step, to analyse the female condition, love and marriage, is not therefore surprising. Ellen Key's *Love and Marriage* was published for the first time in Swedish in 1903 and it was translated into Italian and published in 1909, the same year as Lombroso's *Caratteri della femminilità*, both by the same editor, Fratelli Bocca in Turin. Previously *Love and Marriage* had been translated into French in 1906. This is of importance because like most educated Italians Paola Lombroso knew French and she probably had read Key's book before writing her own. After a short glance at *Love and Marriage*, we will see if the ideas of Key are reflected in Lombroso's *Caratteri della femminilità*.

*Love and Marriage* was at first written in a series called *Lifslinjer (Lifelines)*, where it constituted the first part, followed by *Människan och Gud (Man and God)* (1905) and *Lyckan och skönheten (Happiness and beauty)* (1906). In *Love and Marriage* Ellen Key discusses the relationship between men and women, problems regarding their life together and the importance of the concept of “love”. Important for Key is to acknowledge that women, as well as men, are in possession of a sexuality. Therefore men and women must have the right to meet in freedom, but they have to change in order to be able to love both with body and soul. She has to become a “new woman”, and he a “new man” (Ambjörnsson, 2012). Key sees individualism as a problematic issue, since it can make love more difficult, at the same time as it can also help to deepen love. In a long essay about divorce she argues for the legal right to obtain it, and sees it as a right for couples to be able to split up if there is no longer love, in order to be able to create new, more loving, relationships. Therefore in another essay Key formulates a proposal for a new law of marriage, in which both parents share equal rights to provide for their children and to have the same authority regarding their upbringing. There should be special training for women in housework and childcare in order to make that kind of work more professional, and mothers should be granted a wage from society for the education of the children. A very important part in the book is the essay about *social motherliness*, which is the concept Ellen Key used to explain why women should have the right to vote and take a more active part in politics and society. She imagined with a quite utopian vision that women's participation in social life was important to create a different and better society, because they would bring with them new attitudes and priorities in politics. Key's thoughts were seen by many as highly immoral and she was by some of her many opponents viewed as a danger to society, as her ideas were seen as threatening marriage as an institution and women's morality (Lindén, 2002, pp. 130-135).

### **Characters of Femininity by Paola Lombroso**

*Caratteri della femminilità* (“Characters of Femininity”) was, as we have seen, published in 1909. Scardino Belzer (2010) mentions that the book became very popular in Italy and that it was translated into other languages<sup>12</sup>. According to Scardino Belzer, “the ideas expressed by Paola Lombroso in *Caratteri* concisely depict the ideal type of woman popular in the prewar years: the *donna brava*” (p. 26). This book was dedicated to Ellen Key. The preface starts with the question “Do you know Ellen Key?”, and is immediately followed by Lombroso's personal view of her:

I don't know a soul that is more pure or adamantine, who possesses so much idealistic spirituality and at the same time a vision that is so clear, realistic of life's necessity – I don't know a person that is more objective and at the same time more pas-

sionate, so prompt to indicate people's lacunas, not because of an obsession of criticism, but of a wish to correct and elevate. The days we were together, last March, in more than one discussion incidentally I heard Ellen Key complain about the "bad effects" of feminism. – I would be very curious to know from you, I said to her one day when I finally took courage, – who is seen as one the most fanatic and propagandistic advocates of modern ideas, which are the bad effects of feminism. – It's an idea – she answered – of which I'm convinced, no matter what rages and marvels it will arise in the whole feminist world. Feminism is not at all a new phenomenon neither completely invented now – as the feminists think<sup>13</sup> (Lombroso, 1909, pp. V-VI).

And then Lombroso continues to discuss Key's views on women and feminism. It is not totally clear in the text to whom the words really belong, but it seems to be a kind of account of Key's thoughts filtered through Lombroso's interpretation. The preface goes on to give a brief summary of women in history, from the Greek hetaeiras and priestesses, via the middle ages and women in the *salons* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with comments on the development of the personality of women, a process which in the text is not seen as entirely positive, since it also leads to a neglect of their natural destiny:

the development of one's own individual personality became for woman the supreme intent and supreme ambition and she did not anymore think about subordinating it to the essential destiny of her nature<sup>14</sup> (Lombroso, 1909, p. VIII).

This desire to dedicate oneself to one's own interests explains the choice of some women not to marry and not to have children:

And thus the very few women who have children leave them to mercenary hands, to *colleges*, to *crèches*: and so very many women prefer to live in *boardinghouses* or in *pensions*, rather than having the bother and the troubles and the responsibilities of a house to manage and children to foster! and all this to be able to dedicate oneself entirely to the most important task of writing articles for newspapers, working with chemicals or medicine, or holding *meetings*!<sup>15</sup> (Lombroso, 1909, p. IX).

According to the preface, the development of one's own person had become the dominating thought for women, and this is seen as the harmful side of feminism. Even if a woman must try to elevate and cultivate herself and become more noble and conscious, she must not forget her real destiny and her functions and tasks as a woman, which are to procreate, educate and not delude oneself that it's better to write a book than to nurture a child. In the last part of the preface, it is clear that

Lombroso speaks again, as she talks about Key and addresses her in the last sentence:

I have not had the potent and synthetic vision of Ellen Key, but by studying sincerely and scrupulously certain characters of femininity I have examined here and there some of the phenomena and facts, against which the great Swedish educator rightly aims her criticism – and it is because of this that I gather courage to present this volume of mine to her. So here it is for you, dear Ellen, the volume of your morning swallow with short wings<sup>16</sup> (Lombroso, 1909, p. X).

The book is divided in six chapters, in which Lombroso discusses various aspects of what she understands as “femininity”: *The fortitude of the weak sex, Woman's literary faculties, Beauty, The deficiencies of the two sexes, Morals and civilizing coquetry and Woman's moral strength*<sup>17</sup>. The titles give an idea of which topics Lombroso examines and the aspects which interest her most. She can be defined as a “difference feminist”, convinced as she is that there are certain biological differences between women and men that are of crucial importance regarding their tasks in life. This in an attitude that she shared not only with Ellen Key, but also with many contemporary feminists. In Italy, as in other countries, there were, roughly, two interpretations of feminism. The first type was the feminism that was “gender neutral” and fought for equal rights for men and women. The other type, the most common in Italy, was represented by the so-called “social feminism” or “practical feminism”. This is the type that often today is identified as “difference feminism”. The social feminists wanted to create female citizens, not just citizens who happened to be female. According to this type of feminism, the difference between the sexes means that there are certain experiences that are gender related. For women, motherhood was seen as the most important experience, which led to “the culture of the maternal” that was dominating in the emancipation movement from the 1890's and many decades after (Buttafuoco, 1991, pp. 178-179). It is quite easy to see that both Key and Lombroso sympathized with this kind of feminism, and that could also explain the Italian feminists' interest in Key's ideas.

At the same time as *Caratteri* speaks of the differences between the sexes, the book is a defence of women and their abilities. In the first chapter women's “inventions” are discussed, and according to Lombroso among these we find domestic life, home, cooking, the textile industry, agriculture and the domestication of animals. Regarding the question of industrialization, she thinks that it has created a problem for women, since it has deprived women of many traditional tasks, since so many have been taken over by machines. This is, writes Lombroso, the explanation to why emancipation has arisen, that is as a result of these changes which have caused an enormous revolution in society. But Lombroso foresees a further development; the

men, who have taken over some of the women's tasks, should realize what useful collaborators and allies women are, and a new systematization will bring back many of the professions to women, for which they are more apt. In a minor way, these ideas could relate to Key's *social motherhood*.

Regarding literature, Lombroso is forced, as Dolza (1990) puts it, "to recognize, in deference to the tradition of thought with which she identifies, the intellectual superiority of man"<sup>18</sup> (p. 195). Thus Lombroso thinks that many genres like drama, poetry and novels are not quite suited for a woman's intimate nature. The only female poet worthy of her name is Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Of particular interest are also the pages in this chapter dedicated to the Swedish writer Anne Charlotte Leffler (1849-1892), since she was a great friend of Ellen Key. It is very likely that Key had talked to Lombroso about her friend Leffler, who was not very well known in Italy, even if Benedetto Croce, who was a great friend of Leffler's husband, the mathematician Pasquale del Pezzo, had tried to help her with her career before her death in 1892. Later some of her short stories were published in Italian, among which *Gusten obtains the pastorate* (in Swedish *Gusten får pastoratet*). Paola Lombroso retells the content of the story, which was translated into Italian in 1895 (Lokrantz, 2001), commenting that its thirty pages are so "dense, real, human that they remain sculptured in one's memory with the evidence and the clearness as if things and persons were seen with our own eyes" (Lombroso, 1909, pp. 53-54)<sup>19</sup>.

It is hardly a coincidence that Paola Lombroso chose to praise two female writers that were so important for Ellen Key. There is a strong suspicion that Key had spoken to Lombroso about them; regarding Leffler, it is almost certain. It is also possible that Key had spoken to Lombroso about Barrett Browning. Key highly admired the British poet and had written a long essay in the journal *Tidskrift för hemmet* in 1879-1880, with the title "The Poetess of the Century" (in Swedish "Århundradets skaldinna")<sup>20</sup>. In a later text Key returned to Barrett Browning, discussing her together with her husband Robert Browning. Barrett Browning's epic poem *Aurora Leigh* was very important for Key and she writes that she "has lived" in it since she was a young girl (Key, 1899, p. 126). Lombroso only writes a few lines about Barrett Browning and it is not even clear if Lombroso really had read Barrett Browning. One could speculate about whether Lombroso and Key had talked about poetry and female poets, and if Key had pointed out how exceptional she thought Barrett Browning was.

The next chapter in *Caratteri* is about the deficiencies of man and woman. It is an attempt to pinpoint the characteristics of the two sexes in order to explain why one is more apt to dominate (man) and the other (woman) to be subordinate. At the same time as Lombroso is convinced that both sexes have innate qualities, she does not exclude the possibility that both sexes can change and become better if environmen-

tal and social conditions improve. This is an opinion that she shares with Ellen Key, and that she may have been inspired by. The last chapter is a kind of hymn to women and their abilities. It is a prejudice, writes Lombroso, that women are weak, nervous, fearful, without physical endurance and moral strength. It is clear that Lombroso is not totally comfortable with the subordination of women in society, even if she never speaks against it openly.

## Conclusions

Both Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso struggled with their conceptions of what a woman is and what she is supposed to do. They shared the same ideal image of the family where the woman is mother and wife, but at the same time they were very eager to upgrade the vision of women's contributions to society. As we already have stated, Ellen Key was much more polemic than Paola Lombroso. This may perhaps be one of the reasons for why Lombroso seems to have admired the Swedish writer so much. Paola Lombroso, daughter to a famous man who claimed to scientifically have proved that women are inferior to men, found herself in too ambiguous a position to be able to totally accept, at least in theory, the emancipation of women as it was presented by contemporary feminism (Pironi, 2010). In practice though, she acted against this conviction. Her approach to women's position in society is mostly descriptive, while Ellen Key was a visionary who aimed at changing society. Key's ideas of social motherliness and how it would change politics and create a new world seem to not have been fully adopted by Lombroso. Nevertheless she wanted to upgrade women's contributions to society, describing them as larvae among the working bees who all possess the potentiality to become a queen:

Men should honour the potential queen in that humble larva, light-hearted female creature, who lives next to him and comforts him, who is ready and fearless and passionate at his side, even when his destiny is darker, bitter and painful (Lombroso, 1909, p. 193)<sup>21</sup>.

As far as we know, Ellen Key and Paola Lombroso never met again. In a letter to Key which is undated but appears to have been written in the autumn of 1912, Lombroso talks about family matters and about her project, "Le bibliotechine di zia Mariù". She includes a lecture she had held during a conference in Rome where she had participated, asking Key for her opinion. She also expresses that she is happy that Key is planning to come to Italy in the spring of 1914, so that they can meet and talk to each other again. However, this would not happen. The First World War started and Ellen Key never went back to Italy again.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “L’espressione d’uno dei più forti intelletti femminili contemporanei”. Translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> “Cara Sibilla! Ho ricevuto la tua lettera e le 2 fotografie a Torino, e siccome Paola Lombroso ha molta simpatia per te?, gliene ho data una! (È molto buona, più con me che con te [...])”. Translated by the author.

<sup>3</sup> “Ellen Key si serve della logica per esporre verità e paradossi, che rivelano in lei una forte e profonda agitatrice di idee. Non tutti i suoi convincimenti sono i nostri, ma vi è nella sua concezione della missione della donna e in quella altissima della maternità tanta grandezza di sogno, tanta bellezza di sentimento, che facilmente e ripetutamente mentre lei parla la numerosa eletta e disparata accolta di pubblico che l’ascolta si trova concorde nell’applauso”.

Translated by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding her childhood, see: Ambjörnsson, 2012; Hällström, 2006, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> See: Lombroso, 1892a; Lombroso, 1892b.

<sup>6</sup> “Tu però hai trovato un mezzo termine che ti ha permesso di fare una serie di ricerche originali, moderne, senza svestirti del delicato paludamento femminile e senza affaticarti le mani con strumenti pesanti e noiosi. Hai scelto quel piccolo mondo che ti ha sempre sorriso e rallegrato: e non hai adoperato per studiarne la psicologia che quelle stesse osservazioni dirette, minute, della parola, dei gesti degli scritti che ti servivano prima per ricamare le tue novelline”. Translated by the author.

<sup>7</sup> “A occhio nudo piuttosto che della accurata e precisa indagine colla lente, mi ha trascinato a studiare più le manifestazioni esteriori, la dermatografia della psiche infantile, che non a gettarlo scandaglio e a determinarne solidamente l’ossatura”. Translated by the author.

<sup>8</sup> The titles of the chapters were added in the second edition of *Barnets århundrade* (1911-1912) (Lengborn, 1977, pp. 11-12).

<sup>9</sup> ”Uppfostran är en lång essä som, likt de flesta av Ellen Keys essäer, rör sig i ett vindlande resonemang där vissa tankar återkommer och varieras: hemmets avgörande roll, det starka framhävandet av individualiteten, kritiken av agan. Ett övergripande perspektiv är också evolutionismen, Spencer är det namn som oftast nämns vid sidan av Rousseau”. Translated by the author.

<sup>10</sup> “Un’esperienza basilare”. Translated by the author.

<sup>11</sup> ”E quando si studia tutto questo piccolo mondo votato ad un’infanzia di miseria a cui seguirà fatalmente tutt’intera una vita di sofferenze, di lavoro passivo e di soggezione, e vi si trovano tanti germi di iniziativa, di coraggio, di indipendenza e di dignità umana, si sente veramente non solo la pietà per l’ingiustizia del cieco destino che li tiene nelle sue grinfie, ma anche il rimpianto che la massa di queste preziose energie vada inutilizzata e sperperata da una viziosa costituzione sociale”. Translated by the author.

<sup>12</sup> Scardino Belzer mentions French, English, German and Dutch, but we have only been able to verify the translation into Dutch (Lombroso, 1909).

<sup>13</sup> “Io non conosco anima più pura e adamantina, che possieda tanta spiritualità idealista e nello stesso tempo una visione così chiara, realistica della necessità della vita – non conosco una persona più obbiettiva insieme e più appassionata, così sollecita di segnalare le lacune degli uomini non per mania di critica, ma per speranza di correggere e di elevare. Nei giorni in cui eravamo insieme, nel marzo passato, in più d’un discorso avevo incidentalmente senti-



to Ellen Key lamentare i “cattivi effetti” del femminismo. – Io sarei molto curiosa di saper da lei – le dissi un giorno finalmente prendendo il coraggio a due mani, – da lei, che passa per una delle più fanatiche e propagandiste delle idee moderne, quali sono i cattivi effetti del femminismo. – È un’idea – mi rispose – di cui sono convinta per quante siano le ire e le meraviglie che solleverà in tutto il mondo femminista. Il femminismo non è niente affatto un fenomeno nuovo né inventato di sana pianta ora – come credono le femministe”. Translated by the author.

<sup>14</sup> “Lo sviluppo della propria personalità individuale diventò per la donna il supremo intento e la suprema ambizione senza che essa pensasse più a subordinarlo al destino essenziale della sua natura”. Translated by the author.

<sup>15</sup> “È così che le pochissime donne che hanno figli li affidano a mani mercenarie, a dei *colleges*, a delle *crèches*: è così che moltissime donne preferiscono vivere nelle *boardinghouses* o nelle *pensions*, piuttosto di aver le noie e i grattacapi e le responsabilità di una casa da dirigere e di figli da allevare! e tutto questo per darsi interamente all’importantissimo compito di scrivere articoli per i giornali, di fare la chimica o la medicina, di tenere dei *meetings!*”. Translated by the author.

<sup>16</sup> “Non ho avuto la visione potente e sintetica dell’Ellen Key, ma studiando sinceramente e scrupolosamente certi caratteri della femminilità ho sviscerato qua e là qualcuno dei fenomeni e dei fatti, contro cui si appunta la giusta critica della grande educatrice svedese – ed è per questo che mi faccio ardita ad offrirle il mio volume. Eccole dunque, gentile Ellen, il volume della sua rondine mattutina dall’ala breve”. Translated by the author.

<sup>17</sup> “La forza del sesso debole”, “Le facoltà letterarie della donna”, “La bellezza”, “I difetti dei due sessi”, “La civetteria morale e civilizzatrice” and “La forza morale della donna”.

<sup>18</sup> “È costretta a riconoscere, in ossequio alla tradizione di pensiero con cui si identifica, la superiorità intellettuale dell’uomo”. Translated by the author.

<sup>19</sup> “Dense, reali, umani che restano scolpite nella memoria con l’evidenza e la nettezza come di cose e di personaggi veduti dai nostri stessi occhi”. Translated by the author.

<sup>20</sup> The essay was published in five consecutive numbers of *Tidskrift för hemmet*: N. 4, 1879, pp. 169-197; N. 5, 1879, pp. 212-226; N. 6, 1879, pp. 259-272; N. 1, 1880, pp. 20-32; N. 2, 1880, pp. 92-108.

<sup>21</sup> “Nell’umile larva, nella creatura femminilmente spensierata, che vive accanto a lui, l’uomo dovrebbe onorare questa regina potenziale, consolatrice, ch’egli troverà pronta e intrepida e appassionata al suo fianco, quando il destino gli sarà più oscuro, amaro, doloroso”. Translated by the author.

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