Testifying to the self: nuns' narratives in early modern Venice

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In the summer of 1614, scandal erupted at San Zaccaria, the oldest and most aristocratic of the Venetian convents. Laura Querini, a noble nun in her mid-forties, was found guilty of having had sexual intercourse, repeatedly, with a young nobleman in a store-room situated on the edge of the nunnery. Testifying before Patriarch Francesco Vendramin, the head of the Venetian Church, Laura Querini told her story from the very beginning:

I came to this convent as a little girl during the time of plague [1575–77] . . . ; and then I was sent as a boarding-girl to another convent, San Vido on the island of Burano, where I stayed for five or six years until I was accepted as a nun back at this convent – I must have been about fifteen years old. I took my initial vows at the ceremony of clothing; then I made my profession; but I spoke with my mouth and not with my heart. I have always been tempted by the Devil to break my own neck.¹

Laura revealed that she first met her lover – whom she called by the pseudonym of Zuanne Cocco – six years before her fall into scandal. He was introduced to her by a woman called Donna Cipriana, who over the years had supplied the noble nun with a series of 'friendships'. Laura stated that, during the course of these liaisons, 'I never did anything wicked, that is, I never lost my virginity'.² But with Zuanne, a young man about twenty years her junior, things were different. Not satisfied by their occasional meetings in the convent parlour, Laura pursued Zuanne with absolute determination:

I fell in love with him, and I induced him to love me. I used every means to make him love me, including diabolical methods, that is, spells and superstitious prayers invoking devils, and I paid Donna Cipriana to provide me with these things.³

Young Zuanne, however, was wary of the risks that he ran. Less than a decade earlier, in 1605, the Venetian government had passed a stern new law, which

prescribed capital punishment for any man found guilty of visiting a nun illegally.⁴

Dangerous as the situation was, Laura devised a plan which would enable the lovers to consummate their relationship. She identified a small store-room on the canal side of the convent, and – with the help of another nun, Suor Zaccaria – set about bashing a hole in the wall. The nuns were committed and resourceful. They wrenched a piece of iron from the window-grille of Laura's cell, and used it as a crowbar. It took them more than a month to break their way through the wall, which was six stones deep.⁵ In order to obscure the gaping hole they had made, the nuns pulled a large stone across the outside and smeared it with terra cotta; on the inside, they used black and white lime to fill in the cavity.⁶ At last, the two nuns achieved their goal. Zuanne Cocco arrived, accompanied by his cousin Zorzi, who would be Zaccaria's lover:

The two men came in a boat, and put a plank across. We unblocked the hole, and they entered through it, and they stayed with us for two or three hours, while they had intercourse with us.⁷

Underlining the supremely sacrilegious nature of this encounter was the fact that it took place in Lent, the time of year expressly designated by the Catholic church for fasting and sexual abstinence. Using language heavy with sexual overtones, Laura told of how Zuanne had returned alone, after Easter, to penetrate the convent once more:

The said Cocco entered through the same hole, and he concealed himself within the store-room for ten or twelve days, nor did he ever leave that place; meanwhile, I went around the public spaces of the convent, ensuring that I was seen by the other nuns; and then when everyone was asleep, I went alone to be with him. Nor did I ever take lunch or dinner with him, except on just one occasion, but of course I brought him his food.⁸

With almost gratuitous honesty, Laura added: 'And all those nights that Cocco stayed in the nunnery, he had intercourse with me.'⁹ This rich piece of first-person testimony, laden with autobiographical and cultural detail, was spoken in the vernacular. Laura Querini was on trial for her transgressions, yet she seems to have been determined to confess the full enormity of her errors. The drama of the unfolding narrative, and the highly personal nature of Laura's revelations, make for compelling reading. It is qualities such as these which have made trial records a favourite source among social and cultural historians – early modernists in particular. Some of the most renowned examples, such as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, and Judith Brown's *Immodest Acts*, are microhistories, studies which throw an intense spotlight on a particular person, event, or place, in order to reveal broader truths about the society and culture in which

they were situated.¹⁰ Trials have also provided the evidence for more macro-historical studies, for example Laura Gowing's *Domestic Dangers* (a study of gender in early modern London, based on defamation suits), or Stephen Haliczer's *Sexuality in the Confessional* (based on the trials of Spanish confessors brought before the Inquisition for soliciting penitents).¹¹ Both kinds of history have used trial records to recover voices from the past, from the whole spectrum of social and educational backgrounds, voices which would often otherwise be lost to oblivion.¹²

Colourful and copious as this kind of evidence is for the early modern period, an era of rapid expansion in the activity of the law-courts, it has proved to be a methodological minefield for the incautious historian. Among the objections commonly articulated, and relating particularly to the records of criminal trials, the most basic (and the most readily dispatched) can be summarised as follows:

- 1 Trial records are factually unreliable, because witnesses are prone to lie in order to protect themselves.
- 2 They focus on the transgressive and so do not tell us about general experience.
- 3 (And this is a hardline view) they do not, in fact, tell us about the history of crime or the transgressors who appear before the courts, but can only be used to reveal the history of criminal justice, that is the workings, policies and personnel of the courts. This position has been elegantly contested in a published debate between the two Italian historians, Mario Sbriccoli and Edoardo Grendi. While Sbriccoli argues that it is an illusion to believe that we can learn anything from criminal records beyond the history of legal institutions, Grendi insists that they shed light on the social practices which the magistrates seek to discipline.¹³

Interestingly, these problems seem to have been more troubling in the late 1980s than at the time of writing this chapter. All three have been met and countered by influential historians who have set themselves up as the champions of trial evidence. The defence has been carried out most conspicuously from the ranks of cultural historians, who have self-consciously shifted the goal-posts of archival research, rendering those problems which I have outlined pretty much irrelevant. Firstly, they have argued that values, perceptions and strategies may be uncovered from the testimony of court witnesses, regardless of their factual accuracy. Secondly, they have pointed out that a clear sense of what is considered transgressive or deviant enables us to draw the boundaries of the normal. And, thirdly, in so doing they have taken criminal records beyond the domain of criminal history, using trials to reveal more general truths about the society and culture which gave rise to them. A manifesto along these lines was presented by Natalie Zemon Davis in her book, *Fiction in the Archives*.¹⁴ Davis took the use of court records beyond the

conventional realms of criminal and judicial history. At the same time, she tackled the problem of unreliability in court records, articulating a new strategy for coping with the partialities which inevitably characterise trial evidence. Embracing forensic fictions, half-truths and lies, her fascination was with 'how sixteenth-century people told stories . . . , what they thought a good story was, how they accounted for motive, and how through narrative they made sense of the unexpected and built coherence into immediate experience'.¹⁵

But just when we thought the problems were behind us, a new set of criticisms has emerged, engaging the cultural historians more squarely on their own terms. Thomas Kuehn has criticised the microhistorians' reading of narrative representations in trial records, arguing that they are inclined to familiarise the past, 'making the Other into the Same'. His attack is focused upon Gene Brucker's study, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, subtitled *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence*.¹⁶ That book aspires to reconstruct the 'history of a relationship' between a young Florentine male of high social standing and his older mistress of artisan stock. It is based on the trial which ensued when in 1455 Lusanna brought a suit against Giovanni for failure to honour his promises to her. Kuehn's point is that these records do not provide us with the 'history of a relationship'; rather, they provide us with the 'narrative of a trial'. He baulks, for example, at the way in which Brucker mines the testimony of witnesses for personal details about the central couple. Lusanna is described by witnesses on her side as 'strikingly beautiful', but then she would be (claims Kuehn), for Lusanna's legal representative would have suggested such terms to them as supporting her suit.¹⁷ Moreover, Brucker's assertion that Lusanna was 'an extraordinary woman . . . of strong passions . . . prepared to risk dishonour to follow the dictates of her heart', takes no account of the prominent role of her brother, Antonio, in pursuing her suit. In Kuehn's view, the family's desire for revenge and financial compensation may have motivated the case quite as much as the dictates of Lusanna's heart.¹⁸ Kuehn takes these weaknesses of *Giovanni and Lusanna* to be typical of microhistories, perhaps unfairly, since other works in the genre are more alert to the distortions wrought by legal procedures. However, his review article does draw attention to the more general problem of whether or not we can attempt to deduce the character or personality of early modern people from their representations in the courtroom (or come to that anywhere else). In Kuehn's view, microhistorians are particularly guilty of reductiveness in their characterisation of individuals. Thus Arnaud du Tilh (of *The Return of Martin Guerre*) becomes an imposter, Benedetta Carlini (the nun of *Immodest Acts*) becomes a lesbian, Menocchio (*The Cheese and the Worms*) is styled as 'bearer of popular illiterate culture', Lusanna becomes 'a lover' and Giovanni 'a typically exploitative young male'.

The problem has surely arisen precisely because trial testimonies are so seductive, and because the protagonists in long-forgotten courtroom dramas have a continuing ability to engage our sympathies. But then Kuehn is right:

we need to be careful about over-familiarising our historical subjects and effacing the contexts in which they speak. To quote Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen, the editors of an anthology of trial documents from early modern Rome:

... we social historians, in reading vivid documents such as these trials, walk a narrow causeway. On one side yawns an abyss of bafflement, while on the other side there gapes a chasm of complacency.¹⁹

One early modern historian who has been charged with just such complacency is Miranda Chaytor, author of an article on narratives of rape in seventeenth-century England.²⁰ In a published response, Garthine Walker took Chaytor to task over many of her assumptions.²¹ The most basic accusation is that Chaytor, who is informed by psychoanalysis, imposes modern readings on early modern accounts of rape. Walker insists that 'accounts of subjective, personal experiences are produced and made sense of within available collective, cultural meanings'.²² In the context of the courtroom, first-person narratives are shaped by the constraints of legality, by the demands of the audience (in this case, the male officials presiding) and by a concern with reputation (what other people – for example, family members or neighbours – will think). According to Walker, 'accounts of rape found among early modern legal records ought not, therefore, to be analysed as if they were tales told about the self which provided access to a person's repressed memories or their most intimate experiences'.²³

From Florence to the Northern Circuit, there is a new unease about the ways in which we read and understand court testimonies. The new worries are preoccupied not so much with the issues of reliability and typicality (factual distortions and the focus on deviance); they turn instead on our responses to narrative and self-expression, the two concerns of this chapter. Fuelled by the historical vogue for using the methods of psychoanalysis to interpret the past, recent debates are not limited to the uses and abuses of trial records as historical evidence. They reflect upon the more general question of whether – and how – the historian can gain access to subjectivities.²⁴ How does our perspective on the narrative of Laura Querini – a character who may be in some danger of taking up her place in Thomas Kuehn's gallery of microhistorical types as 'the desirous woman' – change when we turn to explore the various contexts in which she presents herself to us?

First of all, taking heed of the admonitions of Kuehn and Walker, we need to consider the legal context. Laura's transgression fell under the jurisdiction of the highest authority of the Venetian Church, the patriarch. The crime of her lover, on the other hand, fell under secular jurisdiction, and was tried by the *Provveditori sopra Monasteri* – the Venetian state magistrates, first appointed in 1521, with special responsibility for affairs relating to the city's numerous convents.²⁵ Laura was interrogated by both authorities, firstly as defendant, secondly as witness. Uncommonly, transcripts from both trials – amounting to nearly one hundred pages – have survived, preserved within

the archives of the *Provveditori*.²⁶ We are therefore able to contrast Laura's forthcoming, confessional mode before the patriarch with her more reticent testimony in the trial carried out by the *Provveditori*. For Laura was hoping to protect the identity of the young men who had been the nuns' lovers, and of the lay accomplices who had helped to bring about the sinful events in the store-room. When she finally admitted the true name of her lover, Andrea Foscari, she begged the *Provveditori* to forgive her for having refused to name him previously, 'because I did not want to be his ruin'.²⁷

While the two authorities of church and state were trying different individuals, they were trying the same crime, or at least investigating the same events, and we need to be sure about how those events were construed as criminal. Clearly, Laura and her lover had committed a heinous deed of sacrilege. Indeed, given Laura's status as Christ's bride, her lover's conduct might be interpreted as cuckolding God himself.²⁸ But if this dimension to the crime was understood, it was not prominent in the rhetoric of either the secular or religious authorities. In the preamble to the trial, the patriarch held forth at some length about the damage wrought by the nuns upon a wall which was six stones deep, before finally revealing that one of the men (Foscari) had stayed within the convent 'for ten to twelve days eating and drinking wine, and [that] he had carnal commerce with Suor Laura'.²⁹ The patriarch's central concern was with the breach of conventual enclosure which had occurred at San Zaccaria, and his remarks about the sexual transgressions which had taken place as a result of that breach appear almost marginal. This preoccupation with walls echoed those Counter-Reformation directives which had emanated from the Council of Trent and from Rome in the 1560s, subjecting all nunneries to strict enclosure, whatever the nature of their rule or customary rights. The same rulings pronounced anathema on anyone who dared to traverse the holy boundaries of enclosure, in either direction, without episcopal permission.³⁰

Surprisingly, perhaps, considering the customary intransigence of the Venetian republic in response to the dictates of Rome, the State lent its secular arm to the Church in support of the drive to enclose female religious houses. Since the early sixteenth century, the government had busied itself increasingly with matters of conventual discipline. By the time of Laura Querini's trial, the secular legislation on nunneries had reached its zenith. In 1605, the Venetian Council of Ten produced its toughest law to date against unauthorised intruders, for the first time prescribing the death penalty. The wording was as follows: 'And if in future anyone . . . is found [unlawfully] inside any convent, or is accused of having entered, day or night, even if he is not convicted of carnal commerce, once he has been arrested and the truth established, let him be beheaded.'³¹ Unlawful entry to a convent was now punishable by death, regardless of whether 'carnal commerce' had taken place. Engagement in sexual relations with a nun was, in terms of the secular law, an irrelevance.

When we review Laura's apparently open and honest testimony in the context of these legal conditions, we now see why she could afford to be so self-revealing. For she must have been aware that the authorities of Church and State were, above all, concerned to track down her lover and his friend, who – wisely, given the potential severity of the sentence that they would incur – had fled the city. In the event, the two men were sentenced – in absentia – to perpetual banishment, not just from Venice but from the entire Venetian dominion; if they were caught within the confines of the territory from which they were banned, they were to be brought back to the city and decapitated on the scaffold in St Mark's Square.³²

Although there was a clear jurisdictional divide between the patriarch and the Provveditori, there is extensive evidence of cooperation in this case. And while church officials insisted on their unique right to try the nuns, and controlled access of the Provveditori to the nuns, they were also extremely keen to assist in bringing Foscarini and friend to justice. So while Laura refused to name her lover during the course of a month and a half of interrogations, eventually complying under threat of torture, she spoke freely of her own errors, including her claim to have seduced Foscarini with love magic, safe in the knowledge that it was largely irrelevant to the investigation. Also irrelevant was the fact – willingly disclosed – that Laura and her lover had had sexual intercourse repeatedly during his stay at San Zaccaria. Of course her own fate was yet to be decided; but the range of punishments to which female religious could be subjected was very limited. In-house imprisonment, a diet of bread and water, deprivation from the chapter and from the convent parlours were the most common penalties. Given that Laura's guilt was not in dispute, honesty was a tactic which any defence lawyer might have counselled.

That said, honesty is not a neutral commodity, and Laura's confessions are by no means free from artifice. The details which she supplied about her childhood and her unwilling entry to the religious life were clearly designed to win the sympathy of the court. They served to mitigate her errors, placing them in the context of a social problem which was all too familiar to the authorities in Venice: the high incidence of forced vocations. For it was a matter of considerable embarrassment for the Counter-Reformation Church (and a certain amount of discomfort for the government too) that convents played a highly expedient role in the economic strategies of noble families, which – determined to prevent the patrimony being frittered away on costly marriage dowries – dispatched their superfluous daughters to take the veil.³³ Laura's assertion that she made her profession with her mouth and not her heart was something of a cliché among the testimonies of unhappy nuns, and was an inversion of the customary response elicited from female religious during patriarchal visitations: 'I made my profession voluntarily and have always remained content.'³⁴ Nor was there anything original about Laura's suicidal urges, a familiar topos of forced vocation narratives.³⁵ So, in making her testimony, Laura not only took account of the legal construction of her crime, in

an effort to protect her lover; she also emphasised certain aspects of the social context of her transgression, playing upon contemporary anxieties about forced vocations and their disciplinary consequences.

As we would expect from a defendant, Laura's testimony was governed by a desire not to incriminate (a concern which applied more to her lay accomplices than it did to herself). She was also driven by a wish to acquit and explain herself in the eyes of society – a matter of honour and reputation rather than of guilt or innocence in a legal sense. But her narrative is not simply about defending and justifying the actions of herself and others. She says far too much for that to be the case. The confidence and eloquence of her testimony (as well as the content of what she says) indicate a keenness above all to speak and to be heard. When we situate Laura within the specific conditions of the Counter-Reformation convent, we must remember how few opportunities she would have had to express herself. For enclosure meant more than the confinement of nuns within impenetrable compounds. It aspired to isolate nuns culturally and emotionally, as well as physically. Endless regulations were issued in the effort to control nuns' contacts with outsiders – neighbours and employees, priests and doctors, family and friends. All correspondence in which nuns participated was to be strictly censored by the abbess; the nuns were not allowed to keep pen, ink, or paper in their cells. Reading as well as writing was restricted, and the inspection of convent libraries was a standard feature of every visitation. As for music, an area which had traditionally offered nuns opportunities for creative expression, the picture was similarly bleak. There was a crack-down on the employment of lay music-teachers to instruct nuns, and female religious were generally discouraged from singing and music-making in church, particularly in the presence of a lay congregation. Ideally nuns were to be rendered inaudible as well as invisible.³⁶

In accordance with the enclosure regulations, Laura's testimony before the authorities of church and state did not take place in an ordinary courtroom. Although the Provveditori applied to the patriarch for permission to remove her to a secular court, their request was denied. And so the judicial authorities of Church and State were brought into the parlour of San Zaccaria, where Laura Querini testified across an iron grille. While the rituals of the confessional had doubtless schooled Laura in the art of presenting her sins, the trial situation presented this noble nun with a rare chance to have her say before the patriarch and the Provveditori, fellow members of the Venetian ruling class. At a time when reformers aspired to block every channel of communication, drastically curtailing nuns' scope for self-expression, female religious developed new strategies for making themselves heard. The space of the trial provided nuns with an opportunity to speak to the outside world; their responses were often strikingly loquacious.

In that last respect, the case of Suor Laura Querini recalls that of Menocchio, the protagonist of Ginzburg's *Cheese and the Worms*. Just as the Friulian miller

apparently relished the opportunity of rehearsing his heretical beliefs in front of an audience of inquisitors, so the Venetian nun enthusiastically regaled the city authorities with her sexual errors. Menocchio paid for his frankness with his life. The legal context in which Laura testified meant that her confessions carried fewer risks. Notwithstanding the differences, these two cases from the early modern period draw attention to the possibilities of the trial as a forum for self-expression.

Such possibilities are, as we have seen, constrained by the conventions and practices of particular courts. And in situations where the courtroom leaves defendants and other witnesses the freedom to say what they want to say, their words may nevertheless be tampered with in the process of transcription. In early modern tribunals, witness statements were sometimes paraphrased, translated into Latin, or formalised in some other way. The trial records examined in this chapter are especially vivid, for they appear to have been transcribed in full, retaining the linguistic peculiarities of the local vernacular. As a means of gaining access to the voices of nuns these documents are precious, since the Counter-Reformation restrictions on female religious recounting their experiences in writing mean that letters or diaries are as elusive for these elite women as they would be for the lowliest members of society.

For Venetian nuns, shut up in convents from their infancy and barred from communication with the outside world, trials afforded a rare opportunity to speak out. Their words cannot be taken to be artless effusions of individual character (whatever that may be). In the case of Laura Querini, we have witnessed the entanglement of the individual in her cultural contexts, the complicated balance between the personal and the rhetorical, the constraints and procedures which conditioned a narrative. And yet it is in the artificiality of her testimony that we find evidence of Laura's determination and purpose. Fashioned to the demands of her audience, Laura's story enabled her to control both the record and, to a certain extent, the result of the trial. Her testimony was an artefact, a creation, not a reflection of her self.

Notes

I am grateful to Jason Scott-Warren, who read and commented upon earlier drafts of this chapter.

- 1 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Provveditori sopra Monasteri* (hereafter PSM), busta 265, S. Zaccaria, 1614, fol. 9r–v: 'Io venni in questo Monasterio putta piccola in tempo del contagio . . . ; et poi fui messa a spese nel Monasterio di San Vido di Buran dove stetti cinque in sei anni fino che fui accettata Monaca in questo Monasterio, che potevo haver intorno quindese anni, et fui vestita, et feci poi la professione con la bocca, ma non col core. Io son stata sempre tentata dal Demonio di rompermi il collo'.
- 2 *Ibid.*, fol. 9r–v: 'et sempre ho havuto per il tempo passato diverse amicitie propostemi, et messemi per le mani da Donna Cipriana, ch'è morta, ma con queste amicitie io non hò mai fatto cosa cattiva, cioe non ho perso la mia virginità'.

- 3 *Ibid.*, fol. 9v: 'et finalmente già sei anni mi fu fatto vedere da detta Donna Cipriana, che all'hora viveva, un Zuanne Cocco giovane all'hora de XX anni in circa il quale è venuto qualche volta à vedermi nascosamente alli parlatorii in maniera, che io mi innamorai in lui, et lo indussi ad'amarmi, et usai ogni arte etiam diabolici per indurlo ad'amarmi cioè sconiuri et orationi superstitiose, invocando diavoli, et hebbi queste cose da detta Donna Cipriana, per forza de danari'.
- 4 ASV, PSM, bu. 1, fols 39r–41v: decree of the Council of Ten, 7 February 1604. The date given in the records conforms to the Venetian style of dating, in which the new calendar year began on 1 March. In the text, I have converted the year to 1605, in accordance with the modern calendar.
- 5 ASV, PSM, bu. 265, 1614, S. Zaccaria, fol. 3v.
- 6 *Ibid.*, fol. 5v.
- 7 *Ibid.*, fol. 10r: 'Vennero tutti due in un copano con una tavola à traverso, et noi sbloccassimo il buso, et loro entrarono dentro per esso, et essendo stati due ò tre hore insieme hebbero commercio carnale il Cocco con me, et la detta suor Zaccaria col Zorzi, in detto luogo separatamente.'
- 8 *Ibid.*, fol. 10r: 'il detto Cocco entrò per il buso medesimo, et si fermò in detto luogo diese in dodese giorni ne mai è uscito di quel luogo mentre io me ne andavo per li publici luoghi del Monasterio per farmi vedere; et poi come tutte erano à dormire io andavo à star con esso mi sola nè mai ho disnato, et cenato con lui altro che una sola volta, ma ben gli hò portato il suo vivere'.
- 9 *Ibid.*, fol. 10v: 'et tutte quelle notti, che esso Cocco stette in Monasterio, egli hebbe da far con me'.
- 10 C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore and London, 1980); N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983); J. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1986).
- 11 L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996); S. Haliczer, *Sexuality in the Confessional: A Sacrament Profaned* (New York, 1996).
- 12 On the importance of trial records as a means of recovering lost voices, see T. Cohen and E. Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials before the Papal Magistrates* (Toronto, 1993), p. 4; U. Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1999), p. 3.
- 13 M. Sbriccoli, 'Fonti giudiziarie e fonti giuridiche. Riflessioni sulla fase attuale degli studi di storia del crimine e della giustizia criminale', *Studi storici*, 29 (1988) 491–501; E. Grendi, 'Sulla "storia criminale": risposta a Mario Sbriccoli', *Quaderni storici*, 73 (1990), 267–75.
- 14 N. Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1988). Among those who have been influenced by the approach of Davis, see G. Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York, 1993), pp. 18–19, and Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 52–3.
- 15 Davis, *Fiction*, p. 4.
- 16 G. Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley, 1986); T. Kuehn, 'Reading microhistory: the example of *Giovanni and Lusanna*', *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989), 512–34.
- 17 Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, p. 15; Kuehn, 'Reading microhistory', 519–20.

- 18 Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna*, p. 84; Kuehn, 'Reading microhistory', 514–15.
- 19 Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds*, p. 6.
- 20 M. Chaytor, 'Husband(ry): narratives of rape in the seventeenth century', *Gender and History*, 7 (1995), 378–407.
- 21 G. Walker, 'Rereading rape and sexual violence in early modern England', *Gender and History*, 10 (1998), 1–25.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 4–5.
- 24 For a validation of the use of psychoanalytic theory in the interpretation of early modern subjectivities, see L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil* (London, 1994); some reservations are offered by S. Greenblatt, 'Psychoanalysis and renaissance culture', in P. Parker and D. Quint (eds), *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts* (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 210–24.
- 25 I. Giuliani, 'Genesi e primo sec. di vita del Magistrato Sopra Monasteri, Venezia, 1519–1620', *Le Venezie Francescane: Rivista storica artistica letteraria illustrata*, 28 (1961), 42–68, 106–69.
- 26 The patriarchal records of investigations into the 'crimes of nuns' were lost during the nineteenth century, and all that remains at the Archivio della Curia Patriarcale di Venezia is an index, entitled 'repertorium criminalium monialium'.
- 27 ASV, PSM, bu. 265, S. Zaccaria, 1614, fol. 39v: 'Questo è stato Andrea Foscarini . . . et la prego à perdonarmi, se non l'ho nominato innanzi; perche non volevo esser la sua ruina'.
- 28 For an elaboration of this interpretation of sexual crimes involving nuns, based on legal discourses in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Venice, see G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1985), pp. 70–88.
- 29 ASV, PSM, bu. 265, S. Zaccaria, 1614: fol. 3v: 'che vi si fermò 10 in 12 giorni, magnando, e bevendo vini, et hebbe commertio con S. Laura'.
- 30 The tridentine ruling, passed in 1563 at the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council, reenacted the 1298 bull *Periculoso* of Boniface VIII, insisting on the maintenance of enclosure or its reintroduction 'where it has been breached (*ubi violata fuerit*)', and forbidding professed nuns to leave the convent 'save for some lawful reason which must be approved by the bishop (*nisi ex aliqua legitima causa, ab ipso episcopo approbanda*)'; J. Alberigo et al. (eds), *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, II (Freiburg, 1962), pp. 777–8. With the bull *Circa pastoralis* of 29 May 1566, Pius V confirmed and clarified the universal application of the Council's decree, asserting that all professed nuns, by virtue of their profession, were bound to strict enclosure, regardless of their customary rights or dispensations; *Bullarium diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum*, (24 vols, Turin, 1857–85), VII, pp. 447–50. For a full discussion of these measures and their implications, see R. Creytens, 'La riforma dei monasteri femminili dopo i decreti tridentini', in *Il concilio di Trento e la riforma* (Rome, 1965), pp. 45–84.
- 31 ASV, PSM, bu. 1, fos 39r–41v: decree of the Council of Ten, 7 February 1604 Venetian style, Consilio X: 'Et se alcuno nell'avenire . . . , sarà trovato dentro di alcun Monasterio, ovvero sarà accusato di esservi stato, così di giorno, come di notte, etiam che non fusse convinto di comertio carnale, essendo retento, et giustificata la verità, gli sia tagliata la testa, si che si separi dal busto, et muora'.

- 32 ASV, PSM, bu. 265, S. Zaccaria, 1614; decree of the Council of Ten, 22 August 1614.
- 33 On the social causes of forced vocations in renaissance and early modern Venice, see P. Paschini, 'I monasteri femminili in Italia nel Cinquecento', in *Problemi di vita religiosa in Italia nel 500* (1960), p. 58; G. Spinelli, 'I religiosi e le religiose', in B. Bertoli (ed.), *La chiesa di Venezia nel Seicento* (Venice, 1992), p. 194; S. Chojnacki, 'Dowries and kinsmen in early renaissance Venice', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975), 576; V. Hunecke, 'Kindbett oder Kloster. Lebeswege venezianischer Patrizierinnen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 18 (1992), 460–1.
- 34 See, for example, the responses of the nuns at Santi Biagio e Castaldo in the patriarchal visitation of 1593; ACPV, *Visite pastorali*, 1452–1730.
- 35 For other examples of nuns claiming suicidal urges, see the cases of two escapee nuns: Suor Crestina Dolfin, who ran away from Spirito Santo in 1561 (ASV, PSM, bu. 263), and Suor Faustina, who escaped from San Giovanni Lateran in 1555 (ASV, PSM, bu. 263).
- 36 For the proliferation of ecclesiastical rules and regulations regarding the enclosure of Venetian convents, see Lorenzo Priuli, *Ordini & avvertimenti, che si devono osservare ne' Monasteri di Monache di Venetia, sopra le visite et clausura* (Venice, 1591), and Antonio Grimani, *Constitutioni et decreti approvati nella sinodo diocesana, sopra la retta disciplina monacale* (Venice, 1592). On the restriction of nuns' musical activities, see C. Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley, 1995) and R. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford, 1996).