

*Pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia:*  
 magic, witchcraft and Church in early  
 eighteenth-century Capua

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The following discussion is concerned with accusations of magic, which were formalised as denunciations heard by the Inquisition of the Archdiocese of Capua, a city twelve miles north of Naples, during the first half of the eighteenth century. What the following discussion will not be doing is providing a detailed socio-cultural exploration of the magical practices and the ecclesiastical attitudes towards them, as has been done so ably by David Gentilcore.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it will examine the stylistic and rhetorical mechanisms that emerge from the documents. It will approach the records as texts rather than as accusations.<sup>2</sup> In this way it is possible to define a narrative that, within its own rules of creation and moulding, resulted in a specific social transaction.<sup>3</sup> It is also possible to explore the cultural models pre-dating the narrated events, which determined the narrative lines of the formal record.<sup>4</sup> Conducting a semiotic textual analysis allows us to individualise a hypothetical replicable level, and an equally hypothetical logic of possible narratives.<sup>5</sup>

Marc Bloch commented that documents do not just show up here and there by the will of God. Their presence or absence in an archive or a library depends on human activities which are open to analysis in different ways.<sup>6</sup> Thus even the problems connected with their transmission are matters of historical interest. These issues were highlighted in all their importance by Foucault, who expressed his perplexity about the idea of the document as inert matter, through which historians reconstruct what other people have said or done.<sup>7</sup> He propounded the idea of a documentary texture where it is necessary to insulate, assemble, make relevant, relate and cluster a multitude of elements. History transforms documents into monuments, suggested Le Goff.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the document is not neutral.<sup>9</sup> It is the result of a conscious or unconscious construction made by history. The document, from this point of view, is an attempt by those in the past to impose on the future a certain image of themselves. According to Le Goff, therefore, every document is a lie. This is why it is necessary to deconstruct the document as a cultural artefact with the purpose of analysing the nature of its production.

### Writing as aporia (expression of doubt)

The Inquisitional documents used in the following discussion consist of narratives describing instances of magical practices, and the reasons why people decided to denounce others who were involved in such activities. Before examining their content, it is necessary to consider the conditions of production via which the denunciations were recorded. It is a banal statement but my analyses would not be possible if the events were not recorded in writing.<sup>10</sup> In this context it is crucial to bear in mind that these written documents purport to replicate the words of people who were unable to write – as is clear from the fact that they signed their denunciations with a cross. Obviously, then, an author, a transcriber, acts as an intermediary between us the modern readers and the people whose narrative is recorded. The identity of the author – whether a parish priest, archbishop's secretary or a notary – is, therefore, of considerable significance. According to Ong, 'writing is imitation of speaking'.<sup>11</sup> One could add further that it is an imitation full of ideological and cultural distortions because of the transcription process from oral to literary record. The possibility of authorial interventions in these denunciations is considerable. We are dealing with copyists extraneous to the events being orally narrated. Sometimes those transcribing the denunciations were priests, the local representatives of the formal and informal power of the Church, with whom the denouncers almost certainly had a reciprocal though unequal relationship. Sometimes it was the vicar-general, whose relationship with the denouncers was probably distant and whose persona was more strongly authoritarian, or likewise maybe an inquisitor. In each case, it is somebody that occupied a more meaningful role in the social hierarchy and it is somebody motivated by a specific ideology, lacking neutrality with respect to the denounced events. Because the accusations made before the above officials were transcribed oral narrations, they were strongly influenced by standardised models of transcription. In this sense the final document was a real collective enterprise, reflecting the bonds and antagonisms between the cultures of the participants. The author of the text – and by author I do not simply mean the writer, but also the guarantor of the semiotic constitution of the text, the manufacturer and promoter of a new textual construction<sup>12</sup> – used the communication codes belonging to his own cultural group. It is possible, therefore, to identify a competitive negotiation between those who denounced orally and those who transcribed.

The following example will hopefully clarify what has been said so far. First, though, it is necessary to introduce another complicating factor in the semiotics of these narratives. It is almost impossible to provide a precise translation of these inquisitorial documents in English. They are written in a mixture of Latin, archaic Italian, bureaucratic slang and local dialect. I shall

present only raw translations to provide an understanding of events and an idea of the structure of the documents.

Day 10 April 1694

In front of the Reverend judge in Capua in the archbishop's building Nicolaus Mauriello son of Domenico of Capua wishes to exonerate his own conscience by reporting in writing the following things:

Magnificent Lord, you must know that because I was sick, starting from the month of September, and because I used many ways to cure myself and because they didn't work, one day, because I work as *vaticale*, I brought my horses loaded with hay to Teverola, and here unloading this hay I mentioned above, a woman, Peppo Barretta's wife, said to me, because I was so sick, that I should see some skilled women because my disease was the evil eye, coming back to Capua, I called Francesca, nicknamed Resecutta, wife of Giuseppe Cervo, and I communicated my disease to her, and what they told me, and the above mentioned Francesca said to me that she was not able to do anything, but a certain Claudiella, living in San Martino, she was able to cure fear and evil eye. I, curious to be cured, allowed in my home the above mentioned Claudiella, and as soon as she understood my disease she told me that my disease was fear and that it was her deal to cure me, and indeed the same day, that I do not remember but it was the same month of September the above mentioned Claudiella in my above mentioned home ordered me to bring a plate and she put water inside and after she put the plate over my head and she also wanted a wax candle blessed during the Candelora [2 February] and holding over head the above mentioned candle and holding the above mentioned plate with water over my head she said words that I didn't hear then she damped the above mentioned candle in the above mentioned water and she told me to watch inside that water that I could see the figure of a man and I watched and indeed I saw then she licked my belly, then she wanted blessed incense and palm and she told me that the following night I would be cured, and that is what happen, that I was sick and the day after she made the same things and she told me I was safe and I would never be sick again and indeed my fever disappeared I felt fine and I still feel fine. I didn't consider this thing as superstition but today because I went to confess myself I started to think that what Claudiella did it could be a superstitious thing and I asked the priest to order me to confess so he could absolve me. I obey because he orders me in this way and I say more that when Claudiella did to me those things I was sick, I was thinking she was a good Christian, without any blasphemy but today I knew that I was in sin that I detest and denounce to you.<sup>13</sup>

This example is used to highlight the 'extraordinary fact' and to declare the absolute partiality of the document. Nicolaus Mauriello is in the Archdiocesan

building in Capua, sitting in front of a *magistrus* (judge) after the confessor has demanded that he make a denunciation in order to obtain spiritual absolution. Nicolaus did not consider what he had done as something 'superstitious', but to obey orders on the day of his appearance before the authorities he suddenly recognises it as sinful and claims to detest what he did. Is Nicolaus really the author of the denunciation? Perhaps in narratological terms it is incorrect to consider it in this way. The context of the production of the story, its transformation from an oral to a literary format, and above all the cultural contexts of reference will influence or better determine its textual formalisation. The document is, I repeat, a real collective enterprise, where what emerges is cultural interrelation or at least cultural co-presence, as is clearly attested by the linguistic separation that the document displays. Thus the *deve sapere* ('you must know') pronounced by Nicolaus is preceded by a sequence in Latin, expressed in the first person by the judge.

Is it possible to individualise what can be called the stylistic-rhetorical mechanisms of the denouncer? Comparisons with other texts will give more definitive evidence, but the example above already provides us with some signs. The 'extraordinary fact' is exposed with particular formality. The iterations *detto, detta* (meaning 'above mentioned') are noticeable, as is the step-by-step progression of the narration, detaining Nicolaus on each step before he climbs on to the next:

the above mentioned Claudiella in the above mentioned my home ordered to me to bring a plate and she put water inside and after she put the plate over my head and she also wanted a wax candle blessed during the *Candelora* (2 February) and holding over head the above mentioned candle and holding the above mentioned plate with water over my head she said words that I didn't hear then she damped the above mentioned candle in the above mentioned water and she told me to watch inside that water that I could see.

These mechanisms will now be explored in greater detail using further examples.

### The formal structure of the actions of denunciation: The incipit<sup>14</sup>

Day 2 February 1733, in the hamlet of Capua named S. Maria Majoris spontaneously has come before me Don Giuseppe de Rienzo, so I could listen and write down this special denunciation I am writing for the Reverend vicar in Capua. Jacobus Sparanus, living in S. Maria Majoris Capua, son of Lauretjij, 55 years old, under judgement, after touching the holy gospels, to exonerate his own conscience, reported that:

Around the middle of November, 1732, Giovanni Capodoglio, who lives in the square and Tomaso N., that is a servant of M. Costanza dello Balio, called on me saying that in my home there was a treasure. After a few days he came with somebody from Casa Nova, called Nicola Argentiano, almost 45 years old and Pietro Manzo, also from

Casanova, diocese of Capua. They came in to my home during the day and entered the cellar, where they made a Circle, they placed a little map, with paper writing I don't know what, then they ask us to leave them alone. After we entered again with a young girl, who came with them, they asked us to kneel and holding a little carafe full of water, with a candle behind, he said that the young girl was seeing inside the carafe a jar full of money. Nothing else happened. After few days, two men from Naples called, one of these was a monk, and the other a layman. They entered the above mentioned cellar and the layman threw out a string with a weight attached to it, I mean a string with a leaning weight, the weight was moving by itself over the floor and they were saying that wherever the weight stopped there we could find the treasure. Then they held an empty glass and the weight was hanging perpendicularly inside the glass, touching the glass and they said that the treasure was deeply buried in the ground as many palms as there were the touches. Then the monk started to write a spell and he read for a long time, almost 4 hours in the night then we start to dig and they said that this was the duty

*INT.* [*question*]: About the name, last name of the layman and monk?

*RTA* [*answer*]: The layman is named Januario Soreca, from S. Maria, but now he lives in Napoli, and once was a page of M- Costanza del Balzo. About the monk, I don't know.

*INT.*: About the habit and form of the mentioned above monk?

*RTA*: He was wearing the habit of Saint Catherine, I mean Zoccolate. He was very old, about 65 years. His face was ugly and villainous, very skinny, white hair and average height.

*INT.*: He named, in his spell, the devil?

*RTA*: He said some blessing and I heard some Saints names.

*INT.*: What were they used to doing?

*RTA*: They were scoundrels, with no art, even if we dug a lot we didn't find anything. They left after 4 days. We dismiss the declaration after the vow of silence and after he signed this form, with his hand.<sup>15</sup>

In this example the narration of events that constitutes the denunciation is contained within a highly formalised scheme, which is not unusual considering the specific destination of use. The presence of what Genette would define as the 'thresholds' of the narration are obvious.<sup>16</sup> Consider the preliminary text that introduces the story:

Day 2 February 1733, in the hamlet of Capua named S. Maria Majoris

spontaneously has come before me Don Giuseppe de Rienzo, so I could listen and write special denunciation I am writing for the Reverend vicar in Capua. Jacobus Sparanus, living in S. Maria Majoris Capua, son of Lauretj, 55 years old, under judgement, after touching the holy gospels, to exonerate his own conscience, reported that ...

This constitutes a preface in that, as with any kind of liminar text, authorial or not, it is produced with regard to the text that follows or precedes it. Such a definition justifies the use of the term out of its usual contexts.<sup>17</sup> The form of the preface is that of a highly formalised prose discourse, and its author is the official who received and/or transcribed the denunciation (*ad recipiendam et scribendam infrascripta denunciatione specialis pro R. mo Generalem Vicarium Capua*). He writes it in Latin, underlining an important formal separation from the transcript of the story, which is in Italian. This is usual for the period and the purpose. The authority, depositary of the official language, gives space to the enunciation and comprehension of those giving testimony, granting them the use of the Italian language.<sup>18</sup> The function of the preliminary text is certainly connotative, because it contextualises the ulterior story, pronounced in a datum moment, in front to a determined recipient, with precise purposes and functions.

This real historical incipit contains precious information for the historian:

- the date of the narration (*Die 2 febr. 1733*)
- the place of the narration (*in casale S. Maria Majoris Capuae*; now S. Maria Capua Vetere)
- the identity of the receiver of the denunciation (*Don Gioseppe de Rienzo*)
- his relationship with the institution (*ad recipienda et scribendam infrascripta denunciatione specialis pro R. mo Generalem Vicarium Capua*)
- the identity of the denouncer (*Jacobus Sparano ... annora circa 55*)
- the location of the denunciation (*S. Maria Majoris Capue*)
- the procedures of validation of the denunciation (*qui delato sibi prius iuramento de veritate dicenda quod, tactis sacrosantissimis evangelis, petitit, infrascripta, ... denunciavit*)
- the motivation of the denunciation (*pro exoneratione sua conscientia*).

Some of these elements remain constant throughout the corpus of material (the motivation of the denunciation and the procedures of validation), others vary, such as the day and place, the identities of the denouncer and the receiver, and the relationship between the receiver of the denunciation and the institutional referent. Such information is useful not only for quantitative analysis, but also furnishes a preliminary definition of the denunciation

spatially and temporally, which can be defined as ritualistic. The denunciation needs to be made under the auspices of the Vicar of the Inquisition, in order to facilitate the necessary unburdening of the conscience and to receive absolution from the confessor.<sup>19</sup> The way that the denouncer declares his motivation and swears on the Gospel is representative of acts of penitence, contrition and repentance. The act appears more like a sacramental practice than the start of a judicial procedure.<sup>20</sup>

Having chosen to analyse these documents as texts it is necessary to tackle the narrative construction with the necessary analytic tools. If I think of myself as a reader, what I have called the preface can also be viewed as a tale of the first degree, whose narrative appeal is extradiegetic. The story of first degree has the purpose of framing a story according to what is thematically most important, whose narrative appeal is intradiegetic. The narrator of second degree, Jacobus Sparano, addresses his story to somebody present in the story of first degree, don Giuseppe de Rienzo, who acts as a listener, and who will then write down the whole oral narration. The problem of interpretation on a narratological level centres once again on the relations that can intervene between the different narrative appeals and, therefore, on the rules guiding the narrators, their functions and on the narrative game.

### **The formal structure of the actions of denunciation: The explicit (final words)**

Example:

After Thomas said these things we order silence with a vow, and he subscribes the written above denunciation with his own hand.

Me, Thomas de Jordano, I testified as written above with my own hand. The above written denunciation was written for me by D. Francesco Marca, vicar curate, at the Saint Michael Archangel parish church by order of the vicar of Capua, and subscribed and signed by his own hand the above mentioned Thomas de Jordano day, month and year as above D. Francesco Marca vicar curate of Marcianisij, by his own hand.<sup>21</sup>

To be completely formalised, the denunciation needed a redundant confirmation. Therefore, the roles of denouncer and receiver were fixed, as well as the affirmed truthfulness, through the signatures of both actors. We can clearly deduce this from the last two paragraphs. In the first we find ulterior information. Thomas is induced to silence through oath and command. It is another important element contributing to the clear definition of the ritual in space and time. This can have at least two explanations. The first is formal, and has to do with secret enquiry, or rather predisposing the best conditions

for pursuing an investigation without the concealment of evidence. The other, perhaps more general, interprets the secret as ulterior social control, with the purpose of avoiding the growth of denunciations, particularly those motivated by revenge. The analogy with the sacred aspect of the confession is also noticeable. Nothing of what has been said can by definition go beyond the specific place and time of the act of denunciation. In this respect the secular action of denunciation assumes the aspect of the sacramental.<sup>22</sup>

In the above example the formalisation of the explicit reaches its maximum degree, but often it is not so elaborate. Some explicit are basically signatory. Thus the case of Anna Fratte's denunciation, made in April 1710, ends in the following simple way: I, P. father Domenico Civitella, chaplain of Saint Angel parish in Tradisco, an ordinary confessor, as above.

The second form of explicit can be defined as authorial, as the final word lies with the denouncer. The explicit seems to be absent, but only in a formal sense, as it is contained inside the narrative. Here are some examples:

*Die 2 luglij 1703 – Franciscus Capobianco*

*ma non volendone sapere niente sono venuto a venelare quanto ho detto per disgravio della mia coscienza*

[but because I do not want to know anything of those things I came here to denounce what I said to exonerate my own conscience]

*20 settembre 1708 – Gabriele di Pietro Angelo*

*Io Gabriele di Pietro Angelo vinelo ut sopra*

[I, Gabriele son of Pietro Angelo, denounce as above]

*Die 20 dicembre 1708 – Gabriele de Pietro Angelo*

*et in fede di quanto ho inteso ho fatta la presente venela scritta e sottoscritta di mia propria mano*

[and in faith of what I understood I made this written denunciation and I subscribe by my own hand]

*Die 14 Aprile 1718- Gio. Baptista Nardiello*

*e questo e' quanto devo denunciare per scrupolo di mia coscienza*

[and this is what I must denounce because of the scruple of my conscience]

*Die 29 Aprilij 1718- Romualdi di Michele*

*Questo mi ricordo*

[I remember this]

*Maij 1718 – Alexander Fiammentino*

*e questo è quanto devo denunciare per sgravare la mia coscienza*

[and this is what I must denounce to exonerate my conscience]

*Die 20 settembre 1718 – Polijana di Lucia,*

*ne so altro di questo*

[I know nothing else of that]

The formalisations in these examples are evident, though at different levels.



For instance, the final words, 'I, Gio. Batta Roccatagliata, denounced and produced the above', in which the truthfulness of the story is declared and specific responsibility assumed – is expressed in that initial 'I'. It is also evident in the common sentence '*pro exoneratione propria conscientia*', in which the motivation of the denunciation is declared with the sacramental absolution in mind, or by more fading closing formulas like 'I remember this' or 'I know nothing else of that'. But if the formalisation of the explicit (also present) is somehow procedurally infringed, the narrative always reaches its formal conclusion.

To clarify, I will speak about the distinction between story-frame (or the tale of first degree) and framed story (or the tale of second degree). The text of the denunciation describes an oral narration (that of the denouncer). The recipient then transcribes the denunciation, and in doing so turns himself into the narrator, telling his version of the story to an ulterior recipient. This could be someone *close* to the action, such as the Sant'Uffizio and his investigator, or someone geographically or temporally *far* from events, such as the historian. The description of the 'extraordinary fact,' employed by the denouncer, constitutes the framed story (second degree), while the recording of the whole denunciation by the receiver – the document that I read – constitutes the story-frame (first degree). Between the two stories there exists an anachrony, a discrepancy between the chronological order of events and their order as related in the narrative, a specific temporal order of the story.<sup>23</sup> Note that every story has a double temporal sequence: (a) the time of the denounced action (tale) and (b) the time of the story. This duality makes possible all the usual temporal distortions in stories; three years in the life of a character in a novel, for example, is described in three sentences. In every story, therefore, the *ordo naturalis* (that is the time of the denounced thing, unfolded according to the order of succession of the events or temporal segments of the story) and the *ordo artificialis* (that is the time of the story, unfolded according to the order of disposition of the same events or temporal segments in the narrative discourse) are comparable.

Where there is discordance between the order of the tale and the order of the story we have an anachrony. One example of this is the beginning '*in medias res*', which follows an explanatory flashback, a *topos* often frequented by the epic gender. The following is an example of this:

Day 2 April 1681

Spontaneously shows up in person in front of me Reverend Vicar of Capua Maria Mendoza daughter of Larentij from the city of Capua in the hamlet of S. Maria Majoris, 20 years old, for to exonerate her own conscience denounces what is written

Being one day in Capua, around the end of the past month of March, in a house of a woman where I sheltered myself from the rain, there

came in the above mentioned house a young man I never saw again and in fact he asked me if I wanted to get married. I said I wanted to follow the wish of God and the above mentioned young man showing me another young man beside him asked me if I wanted him as husband I answered that I knew the above mentioned young man named Ciccio D'Argenio and because he was a good man I could take him as husband, above all because he promised me, and the above mentioned first young man wanting to know my name and last name and name and last name of the above mentioned Ciccio he took a piece of white paper and he warmed it up over the fire and taking it away immediately I saw four red letters, and I was amazed, saying the above mentioned young man said, Tonno Resa of San Cipriano told me after, that the above mentioned Ciccio D'Argenio, would marry me in four days. But I didn't see anything and during the confession the confessor suggested to me to denounce as I am doing.<sup>24</sup>

In this example it is possible to notice how the story of Maria Mendozza has a limited course.<sup>25</sup> In fact the temporal distance with the narrative *now*, which coincides with the date of the denunciation is maybe a few days, maybe a month. Besides this *ampleness* (or rather the duration of the anachrony) it is also contained. This makes such analexis complete, because it fills the time until the narrative *now*. But many other cases exist in which neither the allographic explicit nor the authorial explicit, as already analysed, is present. The following two cases are good examples:

Day 28 May 1708

Spontaneously shows up in front of me Constantino Argiulo, son of Semenij, from the hamlet of Casanova ...

Magnificent Lord you must know that six months ago, I was standing at the home of Cintio Tescione, a fellow villager of mine, where for my business, I took a donkey with me and in the same home was standing a woman called Maria ... from the hamlet of Falciano of Caserta and because I carried this woman on my donkey to her above mentioned hamlet, she asked me if my donkey was having colts I answered that she never had colts, even if she did her duty, and the above mentioned Maria replied that she wanted to teach me a secret to help my donkey have colts, and because I asked her what kind of secret it could be she told me. And this was that when the donkey mounted the above mentioned donkey of mine I should pick the belly of the above mentioned donkey 3 times with a nail so in this way he could be pregnant ...<sup>26</sup>

Day 22 September 1708

Spontaneously show up in front of Reverend Vicar Capua in S. O. room Cassandra Paschalis, daughter of Io: Baptista from the hamlet of Grazzanisij, almost 20 years old, to exonerate her own conscience she asked to be heard

and after we gave her the faculty and under vow of truth made by touching the Holy Bible said and denounced the following things:

Magnificent Lord you must know that during the past month of August because I was sick, with a huge headache, I was told by a neighbour of mine, named Francesco Trotta, that there was a woman called Maria Gentile, living in the above mentioned hamlet, daughter of a certain woman called Bellella, but I don't know her father's name because she is a foreigner, that she knew a spell against the headache, and because my neighbour called her I brought her to my home where I was sick, she ordered to have a Faenza carafe full of water and holding this carafe over my head she took a little tow and lighting it inside the carafe she said words I didn't hear and after she did it so quick she took the carafe from my head and she left my home, and this ceremony was done just once, even if that woman said we needed to do it three times to let it work, and because the above mentioned pain grew I didn't want to do it anymore, not understanding that it was a sin.<sup>27</sup>

In these cases the stories of second degree, narrated respectively by Costantino Argiulo and Cassandra Paschalis, do not reach the narrative *now* that coincides with the date of the denunciation. In such cases it is possible to talk of an authorial explicit with analexis not complete.

### The narrative outskirts

Related to the *incipit* and the *explicit* is another formalised element in these documents: the interrogations that follow the narrative action of the denouncer, and which immediately precede the explicit. In this section of the text the receiver of the denunciation asks for further explanations from the denouncer, such as: if the denounced person called or invoked a demon, or if he let someone else invoke it; if the denouncer knew other magic practices completed by the denounced on behalf of others; if the denouncer knew others that could depose against the denounced; and if the denouncer deposed out of a love for the truth or if he or she was motivated by envy or hate. Besides these recurrent questions, we sometimes also find queries concerning the habits of both the denouncer and the denounced, in particular how frequently they went to confession and communion, or if the magic practised by the denounced inflicted physical suffering on people.

These narrative outskirts, being less rigid in structure but nevertheless highly formalised, allow an intermediary place for analysis. They also constitute an important moment that I would define as validation. The invocation of the Devil and other magical practices performed by the denounced, which serve to confirm their fame, can increase or decrease the scope of the accusation through the production of confirmations. Such validation contributes

above all to confirm the narrated reality. But if these validations seem to have quantitative characteristics, the relative question regarding the 'love of truth' is moved instead on to a motivational and qualitative level. Here we find out what has pushed the denouncer to produce the accusation. The denouncer evidently needed to make a formal declaration about the motivation of the denounced even if it was redundant, being already contained in the specific formulation *pro exoneratione sua conscientia* in the *incipit*. The denouncer had little option but to declare that he or she bore no animosity towards the denounced. The responses of the denouncers in this respect were highly formalised. All the denouncers, as well as declaring their own love for the truth, individualised the central role of the confessor, who denied the absolution until after the denunciation. The *exoneratione sua conscientia* reveals the formalities of social control employed by the Church through the tool of the confession. Only formal notification allowed the denouncers to receive the spiritual absolution of their own sins, without which their position was similar to that of the excommunicated. It seems to confirm, again, the bond, both real and symbolic, of the denunciations – thanks to their sacramental lines – with the sacrament of the confession.

What it is possible to see here, in my opinion, is an opposition between the written word (that of the investigator) and the dictated word (that aroused by the questions and only subsequently transcribed), and, through this, the cultural comparisons and the use of power intimately connected with them. In other words, the writing shows a discrepancy between the depositaries of a technology and those people that are not familiar with such technology. The use of this procedure inevitably evokes the asymmetrical relationship between those whose role is to induce people to speak, *ex officio*, and those who only have the possibility to talk: the dominant mechanism of the Saint Inquisition on the one hand, and the carrier of a broadly subordinate culture on the other.

### The text of the denunciations

Between the pre- and post-liminals or thresholds already discussed we obviously find the narrations of the 'extraordinary fact' that determined the denunciation in the first place. They consist of a persuasive story corresponding to Cicero's definition of *narratio* as *rerum geestarum aut gestarum expositio*. To be effective the narrations had to respect the requisite qualities of brevity, clarity and above all likelihood. If brevity was infringed (it is not unusual to find very long depositions as a support of the denunciations), if clarity was not always reached, then the authors looked for likelihood. Essential in this respect was the concordance of the *ordo naturalis* with the *ordo artificialis*: the facts are narrated according to their chronological development, their linear progression. For example:

Day 28 September 1710

Sent by Magnificent Vicar of Capua Julius Parente being at the monastery of Capua to accept the written denunciation of Rosana Mattia, daughter of Gaetano, guest of this monastery said she wants to denounce to exonerate her own conscience and after we gave permission she started to denounce the following things.<sup>28</sup>

Then follows:

*Sappia V. S. come have circa un mese Agnese d'Angelo vidua di Giacomo Antonio Pisano similmente commorante nel Conservatorio al fine di maritarsi, mi diede un poco di sale, e mi disse che facesse un fosso dentro del fuoco del focolaro et ivi lo buttasse a nome del diavolo et a nome del futuro sposo, ma io non volli farlo, et lo buttai alla Mondezza, viddi poi suddetta Agnese piglio' il sale e lo butto' nel fuoco, nel modo ho detto che e' quanto devo venelare.*

[Magnificent Lord you must know that almost one month ago Agnese D'Angelo widow of Giacomo Antonio Pisano also living in the monastery waiting to be married she gave me a little salt and she told me to dig inside the fire in the fireplace and there I could throw it naming the devil and naming the future spouse but I didn't want to do it and I threw it in the garbage I saw the mentioned above Agnese take the salt and she threw it in the fire in this manner I have said that which I must denounce.]

In this instance the chronology unfolds in absolute respect of the linear relationship between the *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, between the time of the story and the time of the tale.

Velocity was another aspect of time, which along with linear progression, was a common expedient in the denunciations. By velocity I mean the relationship that intervenes between diegetic or narrative time, which concerns the events of the story, and the time of the tale. In the narration it is in fact possible to compress or to dilate the events that narrate each other. Events can be told that cover the arc of a month in a few lines, or the author can go on for pages describing seconds. These narrative movements constitute the rhythm of the story. They can be categorised as follows:<sup>29</sup>

a) *Summary*. If the time of the story is shorter than the time of the history:

I remember that five years ago I went to Marzano, my country, where I had some discussion with a woman (she died after) and I also asked her to teach me a certain spell that the above mentioned woman used to say.

The tale relates events that have a far greater duration than the few seconds it takes to read it.

b) *Pause*. Where the advancement of the story does not correspond to a chronological advancement, as is the case below (in italics):

She also taught me that writing the subscribed words over the left arm

and sleeping on top she could fall in love with you. The writing was: *Iafeut, Iufael, Astarot, belzebue, Santanas princes of the demons, I call and I invoke to let her – you need to say the name – fall in love with me to follow my wish.*

- c) *Scene*. The dialogue generally constitutes this. Here convention assumes the equality between the time of the tale and time of the history, as in:

The above mentioned soldier Santillo replied to me: *Of course they are superstitious things because you find names of devils and words belonging to the prayer during the consecration of the host.*

- d) *Ellipsis*. The tale omits a part of the story, as in the case of the italicised words:

*After a few days* the same people called two men from Naples, one of these was a monk, and the other a layman.

In the corpus of documents examined the summary and the pause are used all the time, while the scene and the ellipsis are used less frequently. In particular the alternation of the summary with the pause constitutes the distinctive lines of these narrations. It is necessary to add that the summary is usually situated at the beginning of the story while the pause is usually contained within the account of the extraordinary fact.

The events of the narration, ordered according to the chronological order of their enactment, the velocity of the narration with its rhythms based on the alternation between summary and pause, and other rhetorical mechanisms, could be called confirmatory devices of reality. They can be defined as the repetition, adjunction and climax.

The repetition:

22 October 1714

Another time when I was in the above mentioned monastery I recited the above mentioned Crown [charm], praying to the Holy Ghost that he would let me see the above mentioned young man, after one month he came to the above mentioned monastery to meet me. In another situation I recited the above mentioned Crown with the hope that my mother would come to meet me in the above mentioned monastery.<sup>30</sup>

The adjunction:

26 May 1718

Spontaneously appears Alexander Fiammentino, son of Pasqualij from Capua, almost 22 years old that for to exonerate his own conscience denounced:

Almost four or five months ago I lost a stiletto, Rosa Ianniello told me that she was able to do the secret of the sieve and she took a sieve putting scissors inside a pillow saying words I didn't understand and I saw she was moving the sieve whispering as she put it down and after

I don't know what I said to the above mentioned Rosa and this is what I must denounce to exonerate my conscience.<sup>31</sup>

Finally the climax, progressing step by step:

Day 16 September 1737

Anna Spinelli, wife of Paolijs Falaga, almost 70 years old, from Napoli ...

At the beginning of May of this year 1737 I was standing at the window and I saw Agata Giaquinto walking by, who now lives in Capua with another man. Said hello to her, she came in to my home for a while because she was a friend of mine for 20 years. It was while chatting that she asked me when I intended to marry off my niece who was living in my home. I answered her: it is arranged she is to marry mister Todesco, but one day he says to me he wants her, another he says he wants her not. At this she said I am able to do a spell but I need four *carlini*. This is what I gave her.<sup>32</sup>

Everything contributes, with the use of a specific poetic, to the purpose of the denunciation: to convince that what is being told is true. The persuasive story of the *rerums gestarum*, based on likelihood, reaches its primary objective: the construction of a version of reality acceptable to both parties – the believer and the ecclesiastical authority – through highly formalised and consolidated rhetoric practices. Within this structure the co-narrators, the denouncer and receiver of the denunciation, practise the formal rhetorical games in a perfectly synchronic way.

The denunciations in this corpus, therefore, signify the strength of the relationship between those who made the accusations and the receiving institution. The *pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia* seems to delineate deep penitential lines of contrition and of repentance, which are approached as a sacramental practice, and demonstrates the depth and capillary social control of the Church in eighteenth-century Italy.

## Notes

- 1 David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1992).
- 2 It is important to note that I am using the term text in a narratologic meaning and not at all following the historic-positivistic approach. In general and generic terms, a text is a procedure of awarding sense to an event, which in the narration is organised following rules of contextual production.
- 3 B. Herrstein-Smith, 'Narrative Versus, Narrative Theories', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 213–36.
- 4 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987), p. 7.
- 5 See Claude Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris, 1973).
- 6 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien* (Paris, 1941–42), p. 74.
- 7 Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969).

- 8 For the definition of ‘monument’ see the approach of Jacques Le Goff, ‘Documento/Monumento’, in *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin, 1978), vol. 5, pp. 13–14, 38. It is, generally, a sign of the past, everything that perpetuates a memory. It is different from the document (apparently chosen by the historian and for this reason characterised by an imagined objectivity) because it is intentional.
- 9 Le Goff, ‘Documento/Monumento’, p. 46.
- 10 Writing should be viewed as a technology requiring tools. It reduces sound to space and it separates the word from the immediate alive present. The writing is entirely artificial.
- 11 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982), p. 14.
- 12 See Cesare Segre, *Avviamento all’analisi del testo letterario* (Turin, 1985), p. 9. This is the medieval idea of the author as expressed by Dante in *Convivio*, IV, VI, 3–5.
- 13 [Die 10 Aprilis 1694: Comparuit coram Rev. mo magistrus Capuani in Pal. Archiepti Nicolaus Mauriello filius Dominici de Capua, qui sponte pro exoneratione eius conscientia denunciavit infrascripta. Deve sapere V. S. Ill. ma che stando io ammalato dal mese di settembre et havendo io usato molti remedij per guarirmi e poiché mai mi portino buono, un giorno, essendo l’arte mia di Vaticale caricai i miei cavalli e li portai carichi di fieno a Teverola, ivi scaricando detto fieno una donna moglie di Peppo Barretta mi disse vedendomi di male cura, che mi fusse fatto vedere a qualche donna pratica perché il mio male era di occhiatriccio, ritornato in Capua, mi chiamai Francesca per supranome Resecutta moglie di Giuseppe Cervo, alla quale comunicai il mio male, e ciò che mi era stato detto, e detta Francesca mi disse che essa non sapeva fare niente, ma che una tale Claudiella che habitava a San Martino era pratica di fare a paura, et occhiatriccio. Io curioso di guarirmi mi feci venire in casa detta Claudiella la quale saputa la mia infermità, mi disse che era paura e che era peso suo guarirmi, e con effetto nel medesimo giorno quale non mi ricordo ma fu del medesimo mese di settembre detta Claudiella in detta mia casa mi fece pigliare un piatto e dentro vi pose acqua e poi me lo pose in testa, et volle di più una candela di cera della Candelora, e tenendo in capa detta candela e tenendo detto piatto con acqua supra la mia testa disse certe parole che non intesi, e poi smorzò detta candela in detta acqua, e mi disse che avesse guardato dentro detta acqua che ci era una figura d’huomo, ed io mirai e con effetti la viddi e poi leccò con la sua lingua sopra la mia panza, e poi volze incenso e palma benedetta, e postele sul fuoco in mezzo mia casa mi fece saltare tre volte per sopra il foco dove vi era l’incenso e palma benedetti, e mi disse che la notte seguente a questo sarai passato tutto, come con effetto fu, che mi sentii male, il giorno seguente mi fece l’istesso, e mi disse che ero sano, nè sarei stato più infermo, e con effetto mi passò la febbre, stiedi bene e non sono stato più infermo. Io tal cosa non stimai superstizione, ma hoggi essendomi confessato mi è venuto domanda che tal operato di detta Claudiella fosse cosa superstiziosa, e l’ho detta al confessore il quale mi ha obligato a venelarlo che poi mi haveva assoluto. Io per tale incarico ho ubbedito e dico di più che per all’hora che detta Claudiella mi fece tal cosa io era malato, credei però che l’operasse una Christiana, e senza offesa di Dio ma hoggi che ho saputo che sono stato posto in malafede io la detesto et denuncio a V. S. Ill. ma.]
- 14 ‘Incipit’ means the beginning or first words or lines of a treatise or poem.
- 15 [Die 2 febr. 1733 in casale S. Maria Majoris Capuae sponte comparuit coram me Don Gioseppe de Rienzo ad recipiendam, et scribendam infrascriptam denunciatione specialis per Rev. mus Vicarium Capua Jacobus Sparano S. Maria Majoris Capue, filius Lauretij, annora circa 55, ut dixit, qui delato sibi prius iuramento diventate dicenda, quod tactis sacrosantissimis evangelijs, petitit, infrascripta per exoneratione sua conscientia denunciavit: Verso la metà di Novembre del 1732 fui chiamato da Giovanni Capodoglio che è nella piazza e Tomaso N. che sta per servitore presso M. COstanza dello Balio, e mi dissero che nella mia Casa ci era il tesoro. Dopo alcuni giorni mi portarono uno di Casa Nova che si chiama Nicola Argentiano,



di età 45 anni circa e Pietro Manzo pure di Casanova diocesi di Capua. Vennero in mia casa di giorno et entrarono in una mia cantina, dove fecero un Circolo, ci posero una piccola mapa, co una cartella scriva no' so che: poi ci fecero uscire e restarono essi soli. Noi entrati di nuovo co' una figliola portata da essi medesimi, ci fecero inginocchiare e tenendo in mano una carafina piena d'acqua, co' una candela dietro, diceva che la figliola vedeva nella carafina una giara piena di denaro. Nè ci fu altro. Dopo alcuni giorni questi medesimi fecero venire due da Napoli, uno di questi era Monaco, et un altro secolare. Questi vennero nella predetta cantina, et il secolare cavò fuori una cordella co' un peso attaccato, entesa la cordella col peso pendente, il peso da se si muoveva sopra l'astrico e dicevano che dove si fermerebbe ivi era il tesoro. Poi pigliarono uno bicchiara vacuo et a perpendicolo stava pendente dentro il bicchiere quel peso, il quale da se batteva dentro il bicchiere come fossero alcuni tocchi, et dicevano che quanti tocchi dava tanti palmi era abbasso il tesoro. Poi il Monaco cominciò con una scrittura a scongiurare e lesse molto tempo, su le 4 ore di notte e che si cominciò a cavare e dicevano che questo era il comando.

INT. de nomine, cognomine homo Secularis, seu laici et Monachi?

RTA Il Secolare si chiama Januario Soreca di S. Maria, ma ora in Napoli, et era paggio tempo fa di M. Costanza del Balzo. Il Monaco no lo so.

INT. de habitu et forma pred. ti Monachi?

RTA Portava l'abito di Santa Caterina, cioè Zoccolate. Era molto vecchio, cioè da 65 anni. Era di faccia brutta e rustica, molto secco, di capelli bianchi e statura giusta. Esso però diceva che era secolare ma s'avea fatto prestare quell'abito.

INT. Ac in illis verbis coniurationis ordinavit nomina demonis?

RTA Dava alcune benedizioni e sentiva nominare santi.

INT. Ac aliquid invenierat et ubi et quomodo?

RTA Quelli erano birbanti, credo che non sapessero d'arte: hanche si fosse molto cavato, non si trovò niente. E questi dopo 4 giorni se ne andarono.

*Quibus habitis iuratus de silentio dimissus est post qua sua mano subscriptit.]*

16 Gerard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987).

17 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 158.

18 It is necessary to say that the use (concession) of the Italian language is a compulsory operation. Presumably the dialect is the usual communicative tool.

19 The *curia capuana* successfully used the confession as an instrument of notification and denunciation to gather information on heretics and later practitioners of magic in the diocese. See also Pierroberto Scaramella, *Con la Croce al core* (Naples, 1995), p. 19.

20 Alessandro Prosperi, *Il tribunale della coscienza* (Turin, 1996), p. 270. As Prosperi observes, the practice of confession evolved rapidly during the early seventeenth century as the bishops and their vicars exerted increasing control over it. The obligation of the confession and annual communion became not an abstract norm but a diffused social practice, properly recorded and checked.

21 [*Quibus habitis fuit detto Thomas iniunctum silentium cum iuramento er mandatu, ut superscripta denunciationem propria manu subscribat et confirmat, per propria manu subscribit et confirmavit.*

*Io Thomas de Jordano ho deposto ut sopra di manu propria. Superscripta denunciatio fecit per me D. Francesco Marca, Vicario Curati, Collegiata et Parochialis Eccellentissimis Santi Michaelis Archangeli recepta et scripta ex commissione Vicariis Capua et subscripta et firmata propria manu detto Thomas de Jordano die, mense et anno quibus sopra.*

*D. Francesco Marca Vicario Curato Marcianijsij, manu propria.]*

22 Please note the difference between *sacrament* and *sacramental* in the Roman Catholic Church. The former was founded by Christ, the latter by the Church, and while the former produces its effect in virtue of a divine disposition (*ex opere operato*), the latter

acts by virtue of the prayers or other actions of the Church, and by its uses (*ex opere operantis*).

- 23 Gerard Genette, *Discours du récit* (Paris, 1972), p. 83.
- 24 [Die 2 Aprilis 1681: Comparuit sponte personaliter coram Rev. mo Vicario Capua Maria Mendozza filia Laurentij civitatis Capua incola [?] in Casali S. Maria Maioris etatis sua annora 20 que pro exoneratione eius conscientia infrascripta deposuit et denunziavit  
Ritrovandomi un giorno in Capua verso la fine del passato mese di marzo, in casa di una donna dove per la pioggia mi ricoverai, venne in suddetta casa un giovane mai piu' da me visto et di fatto mi disse se io mi volevo maritare. Io disse che ero per fare il volere di Dio e detto giovine dimostrandomi a lato un altro giovine mi disse se voleva quello per mio marito, io li replicai che detto giovine chiamato Ciccio D'Argenio lo conoscevo, et perche' era un buon giovine mel'haveria pigliato, tanto piu', che me l'haveva promesso, et suddetto primo giovine volendo sapere il mio nome e cognome, et nome e cognome di detto Ciccio piglio' un pezzo di carta bianca, et la riscaldo' sopra il foco, et levatela subito viddi che vi erano formati quattro versi di lettere rosse, del che io mi meravigliai, dicendomi detto giovine chiamato per quanto mi disse poi Tonno Resa di S. Cipriano, che detto Ciccio D'Argenio di la a quattro giorni mi haverebbe pigliata per moglie. Al che io non vedei et essendome confessata sono stata astretta dal confessore a venelarlo come fo.]
- 25 Genette, *Discours du récit*, p. 96.
- 26 [Die 28 Maij 1708: Comparuit sponte coram me Constantino Argiulo filius Simeonij de Casali Casanova ... Deve sapere V. S. come haverà sei mesi stando io nella casa di Cintio Tescione mio paesano, dove per miei affari, mi portai una bestia e nella medesima casa vi stava una donna per nome Maria ... del Casale di Falciano di Caserta e perché me la portai a cavallo di detta mia bestia nel detto suo casale, mi dimandò se detta mia bestia faceva figli e li risposi che mai in vero have fatto figli non ostante che haveva fatto la diligenza, e detta Maria mi rispose che mi voleva imparare uno segreto per farli fare figli, et havendoli dimandato che segreto fusse me l'imparò. E fu questo, che quando il ciuccio li staria sopra alla detta bestia havessi punto alla panza seu trippa di detta bestia tre volte con un chiodo perché l'haverebbe ingravidata et havendolo fatto e riuscito nel mio desiderio senza dire parole alcune.]
- 27 [Die 22 Septembrij 1708: Comparuit sponte coram Rev. mo et Ill. mo Vicario Capua in aula S. O. Cassandra Paschalis filia Io: Baptista Casalis Grazzanisij etatis annora 20 circiter que pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia petiit audiri et data ei facultate ad iuramento de veritate dicenda tactis Sacris Scripturis venelavit et denunciavit ut sequitur  
Deve sapere V.S.Ill. ma come nel prossimo passato mese di agosto ritrovandomi poco bene di salute, con dolore di testa fiero, mi disse un mio vicino per nome Francesco Trotta, che vi era una donna per nome Maria Gentile habitante in detto Casale figlia una tal donna chiamata Bellella, atteso non so come si chiama suo padre per esser forastiera, che sapeva un remedio contro il mal di testa, et havendola chiamata detto mio vicino la portai in mia casa dove stavo inferma, questa ordino' che si fusse pigliato uno teano et uno arciolillo di Faenza pieno d'acqua e posto detto teano sopra la mia testa con detto arciolillo dentro piglio' un poco di stoppa, et appicciatola ad una candela la quale la pose li' appiccata dentro lo arciolillo, e diceva alcune parole quali non intesi, e fatto cio' a capo di un pater mi levo' di testa detto tiano et arciolillo, e se ne ando', e questa funzione fu fatta una volta, benchè diceva detta donna che doveva farla tre volte per giovare, e poiche' detto dolore piu' mi aggravò non volli farlo piu', non sapendo che cio' fusse peccato.]
- 28 [Die 28 mensis settembrij 1710: De mandato Ill. mi Vicarij Gentilij Capuani Julius Parente accetti ad conservatorium Convertitar a Capua ad affectum infrascriptis Rosana Mattia filia Gaetani commemorantem in esto Conservatorio que dixit habere denunciationis pro exoneratione sua conscientia, et data facultate incipit venelare modo quo sequitur.]
- 29 There is another narrative movement, the extension, where the time of the tale is

longer that the time of the story. The rhythmic effect is a deceleration. I did not find any examples of this in the corpus.

- 30 [22 ottobre 1714: *Un'altra volta mentre stavo in detto Monasterio recitai detta Corona, pregando lo Spirito Santo che mi avesse fatto vedere detto giovane, questo doppo un mese venne in detto Monasterio a trovarmi. In altra congiuntura recitai detta corona accio' fusse venuta mia madre a ritrovarmi in detto monasterio.*]
- 31 [26 Maij 1718: *Comparuit sua sponte Alexander Fiammentino filius Pasqualii de Capua, 22 annora circiter qui pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia denunciavit: Havera' da quattro in cinque mesi che havendo io perduto uno stile, mi disse Rosa Ianniello che essa sapeva fare un segreto del setaccio e pigliava lo setaccio e vi ficco' una forbice allo coscino e diceva certe parole che io non intesi, e viddi moveva lo setaccio e mormorava e lo posava, e poi non so come dessi detta Rosa, e questo e' quanto devo denunciare per sgravare la mia coscienza.*]
- 32 [Die 16 settembre 1737: *Anna Spinelli uxor Paolijs Falaga, annora 70 circa, civitatis Neapolij ... Sul principio di maggio di questo anno 1737 mi trovai affacciata alla finestra e viddi passare Agata Giaquinto hora dimorante in Capua assieme con un altro huomo. Salutatala sali' un poco in mia casa, per haverci havuto amicizia di 20 anni a dietro. Ci forono su di noi certi discorsi, o sia l'altri mi domando' quando havessi maritata mia nipote che io haveva meso in mia casa. Li risposi: sta in atto di maritarsi e piglia un Sig. Todesco, pero' hora mi dice cha la vuole, hora che no. A questo essa Agata soggiunse io so fare una danazione per la quale ci vogliono carlini quattro. Questa io ce li diedi.*]