



A Narratological Approach to Witchcraft Trial: A Scottish Case¹

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Abstract

This article is a microstudy of a Scottish witchcraft document from 1662, focusing of the case of a woman accused of witchcraft in Bute. It emphasizes the various “voices” that are possible to “hear” in the material—for example, the voice of the scribe, the witnesses, or the accused person. It argues on linguistic grounds that the way the story was told by the scribe influences the interpretation of this document, since the scribe had the authority over the contents of the text. This narratological analysis is finally put in a broader historical context, adding factual information about the woman accused of witchcraft and her final fate. Methodologically, this article crosses the border between literature and history, working in a new way with regard to interpretation of historical documents and is an empirical example of the fruitfulness of cross-cultural studies.

Keywords

Witchcraft trials, Scotland, seventeenth century, narratological approach, discourse analysis

Introduction

This article is a microstudy of a particular Scottish witchcraft case from 1662, using narratology—the study of structures in narrative texts—as a technique of analysis. The analysis via narrative pays careful attention to the language and the way of telling of a story, thus giving access to shades

¹ For their helpful responses to this article I would like to thank Dr. Julian Goodare, Mr. Peter Graves, Dr. Arne Kruse, and Lorna Pink, all at University of Edinburgh. In addition I would like to thank Mr. Ronald Black for commenting on the Gaelic words and folklore. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Journal of Early Modern History* for their fruitful comments.

of meaning that would otherwise have been overlooked. Methodologically the study is based on Gérard Genette's book *Narrative Discourse*.²

I certainly agree with Stuart Clark in emphasizing the necessity of beginning with language if one is to make any kind of sense of the witchcraft beliefs of the past.³ Clark underlines that historians are interpreters, "and that historical understanding is achieved by approaching the past in much the same manner as a reader confronts a text—that is, by exploring patterns of meaning rather than causal relationships."⁴ In my view, the variety and richness of the sources will be taken care of in a fruitful way by close-readings inspired by narratology. As stated frequently among the ranks of narratologists, for example by Monika Fludernik, the researcher wishes to examine not only *what* a text means, but *how* it means.⁵ However, it should be emphasized that an analysis based on language structures does not deal only with the formal structures of a text; semantics is implied as well. The manner in which a text is expressed is of the greatest importance with regard to the contents conveyed, a knowledge by now generally accepted within academia.⁶ The extra insight which a narratological approach delivers is the understanding of how specific qualities characterize the "voices" coming to the fore in the text. Singling out and getting close to the various "voices" in this way gives a possibility of broadening the understanding of the discourse at stake; the verbal interaction taking place. Such an approach is to a certain extent similar to the one taken by Laura Gowing in her interesting study of narratives of slander litigation in Early Modern London.⁷ Also, Garthine Walker's study of narratives of violence in Early Modern Cheshire focuses on narrative conventions used by women in the legal

² G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca NY, 1983), orig. *Discourse du récit* (Paris, 1972).

³ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), 3.

⁴ Stuart Clark, "Introduction," in *Languages of Witchcraft. Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (New York, 2001), 8.

⁵ Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Languages and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London, 1993), 13.

⁶ Liv Helene Willumsen, "Narratologi som tekstanalytisk metode" ["Narratology as Text-analytical Tool"], in *Å begripe teksten [To Understand the Text]*, ed. Mary Brekke (Kristiansand, 2006), 69.

⁷ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), 232-276; idem., "Language, Power and the Law: Women's Slander Litigation in Early Modern London," in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker (London, 1994), 26-47.

courtroom.⁸ However, while Gowing and Walker concentrate on narrative skills characterizing the discourse of a group of women, a narratological approach methodologically gets closer in touch with the abstract “voices” that come to the fore separately: whether it is the voice of the accused, the witnesses, the scribe, or the law. In that respect, a narratological approach may get closer to the spectrum of meanings that are generated out of a complex situation, due to the attempt to uncover narrative strategies on different textual levels. Another close-reading of a historical witchcraft narrative is Emma Wilby’s *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, where the author tried to reconstruct, in a very detailed manner, the interrogation and confessions during a witchcraft trial, while analyzing shamanistic and demonological elements.⁹ However, methodologically this study differs from a narratological approach particularly because it is drawing on a wide range of knowledge from different subject fields, instead of treating the document text as the object for analysis, wherein the discourse interaction in itself is regarded as the aim of the analysis. So much said, I would like to underline, however, that when analyzing historical source material, the principle of autonomy of text—making the text in itself the sole object of the analysis—is not satisfactory. It is, in addition, necessary to go to the historical context in order to understand the meaning of the text, although this kind of contextualization is restricted to the contemporary historical frame and does not include the wide range of subjects exemplified in Wilby’s study.

This narrative perspective has attracted the attention of historians to an increasing degree. Alison Rowland’s study of German witchcraft trials 1561-1652 and Natalie Zemon Davis’s study *Fiction in the Archive: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* are just two examples which come to mind.¹⁰ Davis, especially, focuses on the interests held by the narrator as well as the audience in the storytelling event, and she emphasizes the importance of cultural framework when undertaking historical interpretation. She is also concerned with the “structures’ existing

⁸ Garthine Walker, “Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire” (Ph.D. diss., University of Liverpool, 1994), 46-74; idem., “Women, Theft and the World of Stolen Goods,” in *Women, Crime and the Courts*, 95-97.

⁹ Emma Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Eastbourne, 2010).

¹⁰ Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652* (Manchester, 2003); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1987).

prior to that event in the minds and lives of the sixteenth-century participants: possible story lines determined by the constraints of the law and approaches to narrative learned in past listening to and telling of stories derived from other cultural constructions.”¹¹ This is an important point especially when investigating the opportunities demonological ideas had to take hold within the oral world of the community. In addition, Davis has some interesting perspectives related to the textual analysis of historical documents, saying that her focus is not on formal mechanics of literary structure, but rather she wants to see how sixteenth-century people told stories and “how their stories varied according to teller and listener and how the rules for plot in these judicial tales of violence and grace interacted with wider contemporary habits of explanation, description, and evaluation.”¹² The approach suggested by Davis is exemplary, as it takes into consideration the archival text as well as the wider cultural context.

The awakening interest among literary scholars in the reading of witchcraft documents from a linguistic perspective resulted in several studies during the 1990s and 2000s, among them works by Marion Gibson and Diane Purkiss.¹³ Purkiss’ study comprises historical documents and literature and she draws attention to textuality and the way in which things are said—asking questions related to narration and genre. However, as her approach is clearly one of feminism and gender, she is highlighting the workings of ideology in discourse: “to understand those elements of stories which refuse to be rewritten . . . These elements of story fashion their teller as their teller fashions their story.”¹⁴ This caveat against allotting the storyteller total control over the tale told is sound when it comes to historical narratives. For example, with the interpretation of witch-narratives, among other things the high level of repetition has to be taken into consideration, as these narratives connect to popular beliefs. As for analysis of witchcraft documents, the cultural context also has to be taken into consideration. Gibson works with English witchcraft pamphlets, and emphasizes that since they are only representations of events, “they need to be studied structurally, with traditional literary inquiries into their construction, as

¹¹ Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London, 1997); Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches* (London, 2000), *idem.*, *Reading Witchcraft* (London, 1999), *idem.*, *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750* (New York, 2003), *idem.*, *Women and Witchcraft in Popular Literature, c. 1615-1715* (Aldershot, 2007).

¹⁴ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 74.

well as considered in a more historical way as databases of ‘facts’.¹⁵ She argues for “closer attention to the structure of the texts at the heart of our understanding of witchcraft.”¹⁶ I agree with Gibson that several layers of the text are to be found in the witchcraft records and I share her point of view that it is necessary to pay close attention to the structure of the texts. However, she interprets the writing of witchcraft pamphlets as a multiple authorship, with the court clerk representing only one of several layers of input in a given account, alongside with victim, questioner, witch, shorthand writer, author, editor, and printer.¹⁷ Some of these layers of input, like author, editor, and printer, came into play because the pamphlets are printed material, and would not appear for handwritten manuscript sources. In my narratological approach to analysis of witchcraft documents, I see the scribe as playing a more important role in the writing of documents, as the other voices heard to a large extent are filtered through this voice in the records or minutes written down. This holds true for sources like court records as well as minutes from church sessions, which often document the first stages of a witchcraft trial in Scotland. From a narratological point of view, an interpretation of the voices heard in a witchcraft document hinges on the importance of the scribe in the process of writing down the event. I therefore disagree with Gibson in downplaying the influence of the scribe when interpreting court records, and I think primary sources as texts necessarily have to be considered different from pamphlets in certain important respects.¹⁸

In his study of testimonies during English witchcraft cases, Peter Rushton focuses on the structure of the text more than the contents, in particular looking at the witnesses’ narratives. His analysis shows that the type of narrative we hear from the witnesses: “depends on a number of shared understandings,” all intended to persuade about signs of the diabolical.¹⁹ On structural grounds, these linguistic findings tend to create a pattern. Rushton’s reminder that “‘Bewitchment’ is constituted in the depositions themselves, we cannot go behind the testimonies to find another source,” is important to bear in mind in what follows.²⁰ Even if my analysis deals

¹⁵ Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁷ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 3, 5.

¹⁸ Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 22.

¹⁹ Peter Rushton, “Texts of Authority: Witchcraft Accusations and the Demonstration of Truth in Early Modern England,” in *Languages of Witchcraft*, 31.

²⁰ Rushton, “Texts of Authority,” 35.

with the voice of the accused person as much as the witnesses, questions like who is the speaker and the intention and motivation of the narrative will be central.

The following close-reading will focus on listening out for different “voices” heard in the document: the voice of the scribe, the voice of the accused person, and the voices of the witnesses. While bearing in mind the pitfalls of reading a witness testimony as unbiased when it was filtered through the hand of the scribe, my analyses will aim to examine the way in which a certain witchcraft document is crafted and how the meaning is expressed through these narrative structures. In addition, the document will be placed in a historical context.

The Bute Document

In *Highland Papers* we find a verbatim transcription of records connected to charges of witchcraft in the parish of Rothesay, Bute, in 1662.²¹ Bute is located on the west coast of Scotland. The Bute witchcraft paper documents that six women were accused of witchcraft and questioned between January and February, 1662. The inquiry took place in one of the remote parts of Scotland, but the activity was nevertheless part of a nationwide witchcraft panic of 1661 to 1662, which has generated a great deal of scholarship on its own.²² The witch-hunt in the beginning of the 1660s was the last of five major witchcraft panics in Scotland; from 1590 to 1591, in 1597, from 1628 to 1630, in 1649, and finally from 1661 to 1662.²³ This last panic was the one with the broadest geographical range. In Scotland, a total of 3,219 persons were accused of witchcraft during the period 1561 to 1727.²⁴

²¹ “Papers Related to Witchcraft, 1662-1677,” in *Highland Papers*, ed. J. R. N. Macphail, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1920), 2-30. The document was placed at the disposal of the Scottish History Society by His Grace the Duke of Argyll.

²² Brian P. Levack, “The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662,” *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980): 90-108; Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981); P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *An Abundance of Witches: The Great Scottish Witch-Hunt* (Stroud, 2005), to name but a few.

²³ Julian Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Panic of 1597,” in *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare et al. (Manchester, 2002), 51.

²⁴ Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” www.arts.ed.ac.uk/witches (archived January 2003, accessed February 2007).

I have chosen this document for analysis because it allows important aspects of interest for witchcraft research to be discussed. As for language, it comprises several layers for exploration. At first glance it appears as a fragmented document, clearly demonstrating the challenge for a modern witchcraft scholar when it comes to trying to put bits and pieces together in order to obtain a text sufficiently coherent for interpretation. In addition, it is possible in retrospect to place this document in context and recreate a wider frame of the persecution from other historical sources. The Bute document as a whole is a web of smaller stories, each focusing on one woman. It is a pre-trial document, most likely addressed to members of the Privy Council of Scotland, a central institution with the authority to appoint a commission in order to try suspected witches in local courts. It was very important for witch-hunters all over Scotland to convince the Privy Council that such an authorization was necessary, requiring a delegation from the community to travel to the Council “complaining of witches in their community, and ask for a commission that would provide the authority to try them. They would then be given a commission.”²⁵ Julian Goodare has in several articles written about this legal procedure, and he states: “Most witchcraft trials were in special local courts held by virtue of commissions of justiciary . . . A commission of justiciary was a document issued by the Crown, normally under the signet, empowering the recipient to hold a criminal trial for a specific crime.”²⁶ Such a judicial contract granted by the king or Privy Council to local elites who then held trials in the local community was the easiest and cheapest way of trying a witch.²⁷ A general commission was limited as to geographical area and time period, but they “could try as many accused witches as they wished without any further consultations with higher authorities” during the course of the writ.²⁸ The same procedure apparently took place in Bute. It was therefore of uttermost importance for the interrogators to get a confession from each of the women questioned. When the inquiry had come to an end, the

²⁵ Michael Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches: The Curtailment of Witchcraft Prosecutions in Scotland, 1597-1628,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 82, no. 213 (April, 2003), 22.

²⁶ Julian Goodare, “The Framework for Scottish Witch-hunting in the 1590s,” *The Scottish Historical Review*, 81, no. 212 (October, 2003): 240-241.

²⁷ Julian Goodare, “Witch-hunting and the Scottish State,” in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 122-145.

²⁸ Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches,” 22.

document was sent to the Privy Council of Scotland in order to get a judicial commission for the trials.

I have chosen to follow one of the six women accused in Bute, Janet Morrison, through several weeks in January, 1662, a period that eventually turned out to be fatal for her. The document's concentration on women reflects the uneven distribution between men and women during the period of historical witchcraft trials.²⁹ The issue of gender and witchcraft in Scotland is treated by Julian Goodare, but statistically, among the persons accused of witchcraft in Scotland, we find 83.9% women and 14.5% men.³⁰

Seen as a text, the Bute document is a third-person narrative. The scribe has, to a certain extent, the same role as the narrator in a fictional text, being the voice structuring and uniting the whole story. However, the frame being an interrogation with a specific aim, this certainly put restrictions on the scribe, as was the case in all historical narratives intended to convey certain contents. This means that the scribe could not decide what elements he was to write down. As a professional he was bound by all efforts to give a record as complete as possible of the interrogation, and this made the position of the scribe a lot different from a narrator of fiction. In the following analysis, attention is drawn towards the functioning of a discourse in which different persons are involved.

The women in Bute were accused mostly by neighbors, who gave their depositions. The important role of neighbors in putting forward accusations leading to witchcraft trials is emphasized in witchcraft studies by Robin Briggs, among others.³¹ This argument seems to fit in well with what happened with the suspected women in Bute. However, this is just the first step to a witchcraft trial. In order to start and continue a trial, several men from the local elite would have to take an interest in the prosecution of women suspected of practicing witchcraft. In this case, we see that the minister and leading men, possessing formal positions in the local community, played an active and decisive part in the questioning of the women.

²⁹ For instance, in Iceland and Poland more than 50% of persons accused of witchcraft were men.

³⁰ Julian Goodare, "Women and the Witch-hunt in Scotland," *Social History*, 22 (1998): 288-307; for the statistics, see Liv Helene Willumsen, "Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2008), 37.

³¹ Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford, 2002).

Janet Morrison was the first of the six women questioned subsequently in Bute. The inquiry into her took place from January 15 to 29, 1662, on eight separate occasions. On four of these days she was questioned both in the morning and in the afternoon. Apparently she was questioned first in her home on January 15, where she gave a deposition. Then she was taken to the tolbooth on January 18, and questioned morning and afternoon. On January 19 she again was said to have been questioned at home, although this was probably a scribal error, because she was already imprisoned. On January 21, Janet Morrison gave a declaration in front of eleven men, on January 22, she sent for the minister and was questioned both morning and afternoon, on January 23 she was questioned twice, before the minister and the provost and on January 29 she was questioned again by the minister. The frequency of the interrogations reveals a tremendous pressure on Morrison, with steadily less time between each questioning, and until January 21 with an increasing number of men taking part in the questioning.

The investigation of Janet Morrison always took place before a group of men. Representatives of the clergy clearly were central in driving the sessions of inquiry later in January, supported by local officials. The minister, John Stewart, was mentioned seven times as a participant in the interrogation; once he was the sole questioner. Twice it was recorded that she herself sent for the minister “to speik with her.”³² The provost of Rothesay, John Glass, questioned her six times. The other persons mentioned participating in the examination of her were several burgesses of Rothesay and the bailiff.

The Voice of the Scribe

The scribe of a historical document had, to a certain extent, the power to influence the story—being able to color the narrative, to portray persons according to his wish, and to describe situations and events accordingly. However, this type of scribe did not have full authority over the way of telling the story compared to the narrator of fictional texts; as a professional his main task was to render the events in a trustworthy way. Still, an analysis of the narrator’s voice may bring insights that would escape an ordinary thematic textual reading. The scribe’s voice, as we hear it in the

³² “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 20.

document, had a register of different accents. One of these accents was the accent of a clerk, briefly reporting dates, names and places; a second accent was the short, but pointed, rendering of the declaration of the witnesses; a third was the slightly colored accent when rendering the confessions of the suspected persons; including short portrayals of the women's state of emotion during the confessions; a fourth was the accent of the scribe as the one handling a case in progress—in the structure of the text there was even a meta-level in which he was communicating with himself as if in a note book or a diary.

The scribe gave precise information about the names of the witnesses and their family relations—just like Rushton underlines, the meaning of archival text is “bound up with the context of their production and use,” and thus contain far more than the printed word.³³ His term “textualization of social life,” meaning techniques of recording the events of personal life in records, points, to “the impact on literacy of self-identification, particularly in the early modern period.”³⁴ This impact is clearly seen in the Bute document, as the scribe detailed the passage of time for the reader since an event happened. This held true for both the declarations of the witnesses and the declarations of the accused person, for instance “about twa years sine,” “about a fortnight afore halountayd³⁵ last,” “about three nights before Hallowday last,” “one frayday thereafter being the liventh [eleventh] of January 1662,” or “in summer last being gathering herbs.”³⁶ Also, the scribe included place, for instance: “Shee declared that on a tyme heirefter being cuming from Kilmorie in the evening.”³⁷ This careful establishment of a time-line and the connection of the events told by the suspected person to well-known geographical surroundings tended to add credibility to the records. It sounds plausible that this chain of events really had taken place, something which must have been convincing for the group of men listening to Janet Morrison, as well as for the members of the Privy Council, who in due time were going to read the document. In the Bute witchcraft document, the inclusion of orally transmitted elements in a written account gave the feeling that an event really had taken place. Thus, when transmitting Morrison's confession to paper, the scribe recorded

³³ Rushton, “Texts of Authority,” 22.

³⁴ Rushton, “Texts of Authority,” 23.

³⁵ “Hallowday,” or October 31.

³⁶ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 3, 24, 24, 21, 22, respectively.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

a certain authenticity within her deposition, and thus increased the chances for having a commission of justiciary awarded. The connection to the oral field is an interesting one, for we see a similar effect in seventeenth-century English legal documents, where the lawyer as narrator left his stamp upon the proceedings just as much as the scribe did. M. T. Clanchy emphasizes that long after the art of writing documents had begun to be practiced, the emphasis on hearing remained strong. This did not mean that the contents of a document stemmed directly from oral tradition, “but that reading continued to be conceived in terms of hearing rather than seeing.”³⁸ In the Bute document, this oral element comes to the fore in several places, and certainly puts its stamp on the whole document.

Sometimes the Bute scribe wrote down explanatory comments within brackets, like: “Shee declared (*after being challenged at the Session*)” and “she declared *over againe*.”³⁹ Thus the writer in a way commented upon Janet Morrison’s situation, giving information supplemental to her declaration, emphasizing both what has gone before her statement and that this is still another declaration in a long series of them. Also the use of “etc.” is an interesting comment on the part of the scribe’s style, “quairin she promised to be his servant *etc*.”⁴⁰ My interpretation of “etc.” here is that the scribe, and also, as he assumes, the reader of the document, knew well enough what came after “his servant.” This was clearly a reference to the ritual of entering into a pact with the Devil, a ritual in which a woman received power from the Evil One to perform evil deeds. Such a pact was considered to be very dangerous by witch-hunters all over Europe, as it was the proof that the woman belonged to a hidden army of the Devil’s allies on earth. Such women had turned away from God and the pact of baptism and become the Devil’s servants. Such demonological confessions were frequent during Scottish witchcraft trials from the very beginning in the 1590s. By the 1660s, the demonological elements of a confession had become more or less standard phrases, an argument underlined by Christina Larner.⁴¹ The abbreviation “etc.” might also be used to underline the obscurity of the declaration for the Privy Council, the probable recipient

³⁸ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1993), 268.

³⁹ My italics.

⁴⁰ My italics. “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 22.

⁴¹ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland*, (London, 1981), 130.

of the document, denoting that the business of healers and charmers—such as the accused women were—was a dangerous and mystical affair.

For the Bute document as a whole, the aspect of ethnicity comes to the fore. Bute is situated in the Highlands, and people in this area spoke Gaelic. In the Bute document, the scribe chose to render some phrases of the charms in Gaelic as quotations from the confessions of the accused women. Even if these quotations are not directly related to Janet Morrison, they added some interesting perspectives on the Highlanders as a group on the part of the scribe. The quotations in Gaelic might have been used to underline the obscurity of the text, denoting that the business of the accused women allegedly was dangerous and mystical, and so was their language. There might also have been an assumption that the power of the words would be stronger when uttered in Gaelic. By rendering some oral expressions in Gaelic, the Highlanders were in a way established as “the others” in the text, compared to the rest of the Scots, a fact that may have made their practice of witchcraft more likely. It may be noted that King James’ *Demonology* mentions that the Devil “commonly counterfeits God among the ethnics” (pagans).⁴²

We also see that the writer summarized what had happened earlier, when he stated: “Quhilk day she repeitted severall particulars of her former declarations *viz.* her meiting with the devil severall tymes and her trysting with him, her covenant with him . . .”⁴³ In the same way as the use of “etc” discussed above, the scribe here referred to particular elements—including the ritual of entering the Devil’s pact—and the use of “*viz.*” was obviously related to the presumed knowledge of the contents of the Devil’s pact on the part of the document’s reading audience. The use of the abbreviation “*viz.*” also shows that the writer on his own behalf had authority enough to make a short summary of the main point in Janet Morrison’s declaration so far.

Numbers are used in front of each paragraph in Janet Morrison’s confession. This might indicate some leading questions that the witch-hunters would have asked during the interrogation, the most important one being the confession to the Demonic Pact.⁴⁴ Use of numbered catalogues—in

⁴² *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, ed. Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (Exeter, 2000), 414 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 3); 419 (*Daemonologie*, Book 3, ch. 5).

⁴³ My italics. “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 23.

⁴⁴ Larner, *Enemies of God*, 107.

German called “Fragenkatalogen”—is for instance known from witchcraft persecutions in Germany.⁴⁵ There is no indication in Scottish witchcraft research that similar questionnaires or catalogues had been used in Scotland.⁴⁶ However, the numbers might indicate itemizing. Many Scottish ditties have “Imprimis” or “Item” to indicate a new point, not numbers—but they serve a similar function.⁴⁷

The question “Who were the witch-hunters?” is an important one within witchcraft research, as the personal factor was crucial for starting and continuing witchcraft cases and cannot be overlooked. In the Bute area, the language in which the depositions were given should also be taken into consideration when interpreting the sources. Most likely, the accused persons gave their confessions in Gaelic, or at least could speak Gaelic, simply because this was the language spoken in that area.⁴⁸ In a contemporary geographical context Bute was mentioned as belonging to the Highlands; it was said that one of the imprisoned women escaped from the tolbooth of Rothesay and fled to the Lowlands.⁴⁹

In the case of Janet Morrison, it is of importance to know who was in charge of the questioning, and a close-reading of two sentences in the document in fact bring us very interesting information. In Janet’s declaration, we find a direct comment related to this, and also a relationship between one of the questioners and the scribe. The first sentence said that Janet Morrison had “sent for Mr. John Stewart to speik with her at her own

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland* (München, 1995), 279-81; Rita Voltmer, “Netzwerk, Denkkollektiv oder Dschungel?” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 34, no. 3 (2007), 486-7; Rita Voltmer, “Hexenjagd im Territorium der Reichsabtei St Maximin vor Trier,” in *Quellen zur geschichte des Rhein-Maas-Raumes*, ed. Winfried Reichert, Gisela Minn, and Rita Voltmer (Trier, 2006), 249-50.

⁴⁶ Cf. Lerner, *Enemies of God*, 103-119; *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland*, 95-289; *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, 54-72, 146-165; Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland* (New York, 2008), 15-33, 81-97; *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (Hampshire, 2008), 26-50; Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials,” 135; Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie*, 76-80.

⁴⁷ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials,” 125.

⁴⁸ C. W. J. Withers, “Gaelic in Scotland before 1609,” in *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981: The Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh, 1984), 16-41; C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988), 34-7; P. McNeill and R. Nicholson, eds., *An Historical Atlas of Scotland c.400-c.1600* (St. Andrews, 1975), 178.

⁴⁹ John Cameron and J. Imrie, eds., *The Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles 1664-1705*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1949-69), 1, 20.

house the 19 January 1662 before John Glas proveist of Rothesay, Mr. John Stewart minister there and Johne Gray burgess in the said Burgh.” Thus, we have three people meeting her. The second sentence goes like this: “. . . and *being enqueired be us* if she knew quhat that man was.”⁵⁰ [The pronoun “us” indicates that one of the questioners was the scribe. The scribe would then have to be one of the three persons mentioned above. This fact points to John Stewart, the minister, who was able to question her in Gaelic and simultaneously could record in Scots. He had a thorough knowledge of Gaelic, because he had translated the scriptures into Gaelic.⁵¹ In addition there is information that the minister was sent for by Morrison herself. It is likely that she sent for him because he was able to understand her. Further, Stewart participated in the majority of the sessions in which Morrison was interrogated. As for interpretation of Morrison’s declaration, the last sentence also reinforced the interrogators’ obsession with the Devil’s pact, as “the man” in question hardly can be other than the Evil One.

The Voices of the Witnesses

Those who bore witness against Janet Morrison were two neighbors. The first time Janet Morrison’s name was mentioned was in a declaration given by her neighbor Robert Stewart. His testimony described a scene of a quarrel between his wife and Janet Morrison. In the text, the conversation between the two women was rendered with the comments of Stewart’s wife in indirect discourse and the comments of Janet Morrison in direct discourse. The participants were vividly portrayed like actors on a stage, thus showing the insight of a good story-teller, who knew how to put small dramatic episodes into his story. Apparently the two women used strong and rather violent language. When she did not get what she deserved from the other woman, Janet uttered, “I garne to have it and I will garr yow rue it or it be longer” (“I am going to have it or I will make you regret it”). The accusation against Janet Morrison by Robert Stewart was that his wife “was going in the byre felt something strik her there, the whole house darkened which continued a long space with her.”⁵² The wife complained that it was Janet Morrison who knocked her out. Apparently, in spite of such a vague

⁵⁰ My italics. “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 20.

⁵¹ H. Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, rev. ed., 8 vols. (Edinburgh, 1915-50), biography of John Stewart.

⁵² “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 3.

accusation, this seems to have been enough to initiate the case and imprison Janet Morrison. There were no signals in the way Stewart's testimony is rendered that would imply that the scribe doubted Stewart's words or that his testimony was not a convincing one. Obviously, Robert Stewart had not been a witness himself; under ordinary legal prosecution such a position as witness would tend to weaken and diminish the range of his testimony. Because he only could refer to what his wife had said, "she still complains that," his statement lost authority. Also, if one looks at his testimony structurally, another textual layer is inferred when the wife's story was included in Stewart's testimony. The strength of being a witness who had experienced and seen the scene of crime was reduced to something he had heard from another person. Still, under the contemporary circumstances Stewart's accusation apparently was considered to be valid enough to lead to further inquiry, and this indicates a harsh climate with regard to witchcraft persecution. It is worth noting that women's testimony was not usually accepted in criminal trials in Scotland, but after 1591 an exception was made for witchcraft.⁵³

The basic structures of a narrative are revealed in Robert Stewart's short testimony; among others the sequence of events, where effort was made to place one event after another coherently on a linear time-line. Stewart started his testimony in this way: "Declares that about *two years sine*. . . *Quhen* his wife said to her . . . the said Jonet said . . . *within a quarter of ane yeir ther after*. . . *as she was going in the byre* felt something strik her there . . . she *still* complains that it was Janet Morrison that did it."⁵⁴ It seems to have been important for Stewart in his testimony to reinforce a particular order of events, and at the same time important for the writer to get this down on paper. The chronological way of presenting the events underlines another dimension of Stewart's testimony, namely the fact that there was a cause-effect-connection at work. First the two women quarreled, then, as a consequence, the wife was struck. The end of Stewart's declaration, that his wife was still accusing Janet Morrison of this, was nothing more than an assertion. Nothing was proven, but certainly Stewart thought that emphasizing the connection between the events strengthened his testimony—and thereby his wife's accusation against Janet Morrison. The more the basic narrative structure came to the fore in the way of telling the story, the more obvious it is that the contents of what

⁵³ Wasser, "The Privy Council and the Witches," 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, my italics.

was told seemed to be the opinion of the witness as well as the scribe. The special type of logic that may be read out of Stewart's story points to the conclusion that Janet Morrison was guilty of what she was accused.

Even more surprising is the next testimony, given by Nans [Agnes] Mitchell. She did not meet Janet Morrison, nor quarrel with her, she just saw her in a dream, and shortly afterwards her child fell ill and died. When dreams or other states of consciousness are rendered in fiction, it is a literary device intentionally used to express the character's state of mind.⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, a dream was here used in a legal context to support an accusation. If one considers the structures of the text, it seems clear that narrative structures like linearity, sequential ordering of events, and cause-effect-relations created the textual glue of Mitchell's testimony. Adverbial phrases were used to specify certain events and pronouns emphasized certain persons. All these stylistic devices function to increase the reliability of the testimony:

Nan. Mitchell declares that *about two years syne* she took a dreaming of Janet Morrison *in her bed in the night*, and was afrightened *therewith*, and *within half ane hour after wakning*, her young child took a trembling a very unnaturall lyke disease *quhair* of he died and Janet Morrison being desired to heal *the said child* said it was *twice* shot and could not be healed.⁵⁶

Nan's testimony had to do with *maleficium*; sickness of an adult and death of a child as a result of alleged practice of sorcery. The mention of the child being "twice shot" refers to one of the devices of sorcery in Scotland and elsewhere—the elf-shot, fairy arrows, or elf arrows—a topic dealt with around 1900 by John Gregorson Campbell.⁵⁷ Alaric Hall has more recently argued that caution is needed regarding the interpretation of elf-shot.⁵⁸ In the quotation above, there was an implication that the child died as a result of having been shot by an elf arrow or an elf stone. There seems to have been a widespread understanding in this community, where witchcraft and unnatural death were rampant, that sickness as a cause of death simply

⁵⁵ Cf. Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds* (Princeton, 1978).

⁵⁶ My italics. "Papers Related to Witchcraft," 3.

⁵⁷ John Gregorson Campbell, *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed. Ronald Black (Edinburgh, 2005, orig. 1900-1902).

⁵⁸ Alaric Hall, "The Meaning of Elf, and Elves, in Medieval England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2005).

was not accepted as real, and witchcraft was regarded as both culprit and solution.

The document shows in other places that it was believed that one had to “shoot” a new person in order to free a person previously shot, as can be seen from the following examples. It was suggested by the devil that Janet Morrison should “shoot Niniane Ker baylie” and put him in the dead person Adam Ker’s stead in order to bring home Adam Ker. She even was asked by the devil “to tak the lyfe of John Glas proveists dun horse by shooting him and put him for William Stephen who was lying sick sore payned,” but she refused to do this. The devil also told her that he intended “to tak John Glas his barne.”⁵⁹ She also refused “to tak Walter Stewart, bayly, his lyfe by shooteing him to put him for ane neighbour of his that dwelt in the highlands.”⁶⁰ The victims of these desired shootings were mostly officials, bailies and the provost, while those who gained their life and health were poor people and common people. Thus, social perspective is certainly present in Janet Morrison’s evil-doings.

The testimonies against Janet Morrison seemed to be loosely founded, but were still put forth in a context the witnesses must have known might produce serious consequences. What becomes visible is the fear and anxiety ruling in this community, making it natural for people very easily to draw connections between mischance and certain persons known to be cunning in sorcery. It is interesting to see the accusations in the Bute cases compared to the accusations in the East Anglia cases twenty years earlier, in relation to which James Sharpe points out that “*maleficium*, overwhelmingly involving harm to children, adult humans and cattle, followed the pattern long familiar in England.”⁶¹ From evidence in the East Anglia trials, Sharpe argues that the notion of a polarity between a “learned,” “continental,” and “demonological” set of beliefs held by the elite and a popular concern with witchcraft centered on *maleficium* “is a gross oversimplification.”⁶² Instead, the impression was that of “a jumble of popular and ‘educated’ beliefs which were mobilized into an agitated interaction by the conditions of a mass witch hunt. So we have not just the devil

⁵⁹ A “dun” horse meaning a dull brown one, see W. A. Craigie, *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, 12 vols. (Chicago, 1937-2002); “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 23.

⁶⁰ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 23.

⁶¹ Sharpe, “The Devil in East Anglia: the Matthew Hopkins trials reconsidered,” in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, Gareth Roberts (Cambridge, 1996), 244.

⁶² Sharpe, “The Devil in East Anglia,” 250.

of the demonologists, but also a devil as imagined by the population at large.”⁶³ Also Robin Briggs underlines the combination between folklore and official demonology, and he sees the living notions among the populace as important for witchcraft beliefs to spread.⁶⁴ As for the Janet Morrison case, the accusations clearly seemed to rely upon an assimilation of elite ideas and old folkloric ideas within a broad cultural field.

The Voice of the Accused Person

The most striking parts of the document were the stories the accused women themselves told, stories that give rich access to the folklore and the mentality of the Highlanders, counteracting any kind of stereotype impression. The questioning of Janet Morrison led to her confession, in which ways of performing sorcery were described in some detail. A world of fantastic and realistic elements mingling together was conveyed, rich in details and color. The accused women as well as the scribe seem to be convinced that the fantastic events could have taken place. There were no signs of skepticism in the text, no distancing devices used by the scribe when Janet Morrison’s declarations and confessions were rendered. He was accurate in giving information about what happened during the questioning, but also in giving access to an oral dimension of the text, taking down both elements transmitted orally in folk tradition and everyday expressions into writing. Janet Morrison’s confession contained elements of *maleficium* and healing as well as demonology, and those who had been hit by her sorcery for better or for worse were common people in the neighborhood as well as named well-to-do persons.

In the case of Janet Morrison, several elements in her confession were closely connected to the area of oral folkloric tradition and fairy belief. When elf-shot was mentioned, it was used for harming. So the relationship between her and the elves had evil-doing as its consequences. In their book about Scottish witchcraft, Normand and Roberts argue that by 1590 “any relationship between human and spirit, whether fairy or elf, could be seen only as evil.”⁶⁵ They claim that there was a great difference between 1576

⁶³ Sharpe, “The Devil in East Anglia,” 250.

⁶⁴ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 28.

⁶⁵ Normand and Roberts, “Scottish Witchcraft before the North Berwick Witch Hunt,” in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland*, 80.

and 1590,⁶⁶ due to fifteen years of theological indoctrination by protestant ministers and the experience of other trials: “By 1590 interrogators, and perhaps uneducated people too, were familiar with the rudiments of protestant demonology. When the accused were questioned they had some idea of what was being asked of them.”⁶⁷ Morrison’s confession is in accordance with Normand and Roberts’ argument; knowledge gained from the fairies seems to be used for an evil purpose around 1660.

In Scotland, belief in fairies and popular belief in magic related to witchcraft confessions has been explored by Lizanne Henderson, Edward Cowan, Joyce Miller, and Alaric Hall.⁶⁸ Henderson and Cowan argue that fairy belief was important for Scottish witchcraft trials.⁶⁹ It is correct that fairy belief was mentioned in thirty-eight witchcraft cases, which is a small number of the total cases.⁷⁰ In fact, what we know about seventeenth-century fairy belief mostly derives from witchcraft records. Still, in my view, belief in fairies in itself is insufficient as explanation for the witch-hunt in Scotland. When fairy-belief became of interest for the legal officials during the witchcraft trials, it was because the belief was demonized. In one way or another, the traditional belief in fairies had to be attached to demonological notions to be regarded a dangerous crime.⁷¹ The confession of Janet Morrison contains elements which underpinned this argument that two concepts of witchcraft were melded together during the period of the witch-hunt, something which produced disastrous consequences.

In her deposition, Janet Morrison mentioned a dead person called Adam Ker several times. Apparently he was killed by means of sorcery and figured as a spirit possible to bring back to life, which was what Janet Morrison wanted. One evening, she had met “a black rough fierce man who cam to her and desired her till go with him.” In return he promised her to “give the a Kayre⁷² and make the a Lady.” She agreed to meet the man and he repeated his promise, “I’ll make the a Lady and put the in a brave castall

⁶⁶ The 1576 reference is the Bessie Dunlop trial; the year 1590 refers to the first of the North Berwick trials.

⁶⁷ Normand and Roberts, “Scottish Witchcraft,” 81.

⁶⁸ Lizanne Henderson and Edward B. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief* (East Linton, 2004); Joyce Miller, “Cantrips and Carlins: Magic, Medicine and Society in the Presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, 1600-1688” (Ph.D. diss., University of Stirling, 1999).

⁶⁹ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*.

⁷⁰ *Idem.*, 217.

⁷¹ Willumsen, “Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft trials,” 258.

⁷² Means: cart, a wagon pulled by horses, see *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*.

quhair thou shalt want nothing and I will free the of all the poverities and troubles thou art in and learn the a way how to bring home Adam Ker." The second time she met with the man, who was the Devil, she made a covenant with him, wherein he promised to give her anything she desired and to teach her how to bring home Adam Ker, "quhairin she promised to be his servant etc."⁷³ This link between a dead person, a spirit, and the Devil has been discussed by Emma Wilby, who states: "On a popular level there was often little difference between a fairy and an angel, saint, ghost, or devil."⁷⁴ Included in this was also the relationship between the English familiar and the Devil, discussed by several witchcraft researchers.⁷⁵ As a reminder of living folklore elements and their importance for assimilation of elite ideas, Wilby points to the connection between fairies and the dead in Scottish tradition.⁷⁶ This merging of ideas is most relevant in the case of Janet Morrison.

The confession of Janet Morrison was a narrative of temptation, which followed the pattern of most Devil-pact confessions. First, the woman was reluctant to enter the pact, but then, after a while was persuaded, especially when wealth was offered. Demonological elements were frequent, among them the renouncing of baptism as a part of the ritual. After Janet Morrison had made the covenant, she was baptized by the Devil, also a common element in Scottish witchcraft cases.⁷⁷ Her new baptism was clearly a religious counteraction, "he asked quhat was her name and she answered Jonet Morisoun, the name that God gave me, and he said believe not in Christ bot believe in me. I baptize the Margarat."⁷⁸ In response to the direct question, "if she knew what man he was," she answered that "she knew him to be the divill and at the first she grew eery."⁷⁹ When asked what his name was, the devil answered "Klarenough." He was portrayed as "a black rough fierce man," "a mane naked with a great black head." This somewhat odd name of the Devil reflects the fact that words and phrases were written down directly as the accused person pronounced the word, thereby giving

⁷³ "Papers Related to Witchcraft," 20-22.

⁷⁴ Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, 2005), 17.

⁷⁵ Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, 51-58; Sharpe, "The Devil in East Anglia," 248-250.

⁷⁶ Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, 18.

⁷⁷ Willumsen, "Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials," 70-71.

⁷⁸ "Papers Related to Witchcraft," 22.

⁷⁹ Means: affected by fear or dread, see *The Concise Scots Dictionary*.

it a double meaning, even a bit humorous. Use of humor is an aspect known from traditional tales about the Devil, and it gives a somewhat strange stylistic flavor to this document. It might have been that in Janet Morrison's words, the Devil had answered that it was "clear enough" who he was, but the scribe took this down as the Devil's name. The reason why this point was noted in the records might be that the name of the Devil was seen as important information to know, as was his physical appearance. It should be noted that Morrison's name of the Devil, "Klarenough," was an English phrase, which may suggest that she deliberately used English in contrast to Gaelic to emphasize certain aspects of her confession.

During Morrison's first meetings with the Devil, he was alone, but once she met him together with "a great number of men that she asked at him quhat were these that went by who answered they are my company and quhen she speared where they were going he answered that they were going to seek a prey."⁸⁰ An image like this was frightening, suggesting that all people could be haunted and followed by evil spirits, witches, and others, roaming about, and that anyone might be the next casual victim of the Devil's company. Another occasion where the Devil was present as a sole figure was the witches' meetings. Getting additional names of suspected witches seems to be one of the typical questions on the witch-hunters' agenda, and confessing to participating in witches' meetings meant getting closer to further denunciations. To this end, Morrison said that she had seen "the devil and a company with him comeing downe the hill side underneath Brod chepell."⁸¹ On this occasion she mentioned eight persons who were in company with the Devil, declaring that all of them were witches.

Also of interest to Morrison's confession was that the Devil's presence often was accompanied by practicing *maleficium*, which was traditional sorcery, and did not have its origin in learned demonological notions. She mentioned several persons she had seen in company with the Devil, describing in detail the ways in which these people had performed sorcery, which led to the death of William Stephen, Adam Kerr, and Alester McNiven. In addition, they took the life of cows, threw spells on horses, and stole milk from cows. Their method was mostly an amulet, or "pock of witchrie," placed somewhere inside or outside the house or in the barn, thus using physical objects when performing sorcery. The witches

⁸⁰ "Papers Related to Witchcraft," 3.

⁸¹ "Papers Related to Witchcraft," 24.

mentioned were McLevin, Margaret NcWilliam, plus two daughters of Margaret NcWilliam, Katharine and Elspeth, among others. Janet gave an interesting account of how they all took the life of Adam Kerr by using harmful sorcery. During this event Margrat NcWilliam had run away from the place so that she should not be suspected. Kerr was brought down when they had taken the power “of his side from him by making two onsets on him for he was a man little worth and he hade little ill in him so he had also little good that therfor they got overtane of him.”⁸² The last sentence might imply that attacks with elf-shot were effective on people who were either very good or very bad, but not so effective on people of “little worth” one way or the other.⁸³ A more straightforward reading would be that they could harm him because he had “little good,” meaning that his faith was not strong enough.

Janet Morrison had a reputation as a healer and was used by the people in the community to heal sick persons. Long before the witchcraft questioning started, she was mentioned in various sources related to practice of healing, among other places in the Rothesay Church Session Book for 1660.⁸⁴ It seems clear that people sought Janet Morrison’s help to cure diseases and mental illness. Therefore, she was vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. The first mention of Morrison had to do with the treatment of a young girl, who, after being sick with the pox, could neither speak nor see. Janet Morrison, being called by the girls’ father, “came to her house and bound up her head and gave her a piece salvets rub to her breast.”⁸⁵ The churchmen warned the servants who were in the house regarding this behavior, among them Janet Morrison. At the next church session, Janet Morrison declared that she did nothing more than binding up the head of the girl, and she was supported by two witnesses’ testimonies. Janet Morrison was mentioned again in May 1661, this time suspected of charming. She turned up at the church session, “being challenged for certain speches whilk she spoke to Elspeth Spence anent the said Elspeth her daughter that was lying sick viz.”⁸⁶ Even if Janet Morrison denied the charge, it seems clear that she was fetched to cure the sick. In the next session, June 6, she received a warning after two people testified against her: “the session did

⁸² “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 25.

⁸³ Mr Ronald Black, personal communication e-mail 11.03.2006.

⁸⁴ National Archives of Scotland, Church Session Book of Rothesay 1658-1661, CH2/890/1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, CH2/890/1/80.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, CH2/890/1/100.

discharge the said Janet Morrison in time coming to use the giving of any Physick or herbs to any body under the certification that she shall be esteemed a witch if she do so.”⁸⁷ This was the first time the threatening term “witch” was used about her, and only seven months before the more serious prosecution of her starts. It seemed to be a short step between having a reputation as a healer and having a reputation as a witch. That those who were practicing healing might easily have come into focus as a suspected witch may be due to the merging of notions from traditional folk belief and new demonological ideas at this time.

In Janet Morrison’s confession, the element of healing is mentioned in this way: “She declared that in Summer last being gathering hearbs to heall Patrick Glas daughter who was laying seick of a very unnatural disease.”⁸⁸ She was later asked “anent her heiling of Mcfersoun in Kere-toule his dochter who lay sick of a very unnaturall disease without power of hand or foot both speechless and kenured [?]”⁸⁹ and “her heiling of Alester Bannatyne who was sick of the lyk disease answred that he was blasted with the fairyes and that she heiled him thereof with herbs.”⁹⁰ The use of herbal healing seems to have been combined with the use of charms, a well-known combination in traditional healing practice. As for the herbs that were used, they “seem to have been quite typical of herbal medicine in general”.⁹¹

Among the questioners there seems to have been a particular interest in “shooting” and “blasting.” In one of her declarations Janet Morrison said that “John Glas his bairne quhilk he hade in fostering was shot at the window.”⁹² Janet Morrison, “again being inquired” as to what was the difference between shooting and blasting, answered that: “quhen they are shott ther is no recoverie for it and if the shott be in the heart they died presently bot if it be not at the heart they will die in a while with it yet will at last die with it.” Blasting, she explained, “is a whirlwinde that the fairies raises about that persone quhich they intend to wrong and that tho ther

⁸⁷ Ibid., CH2/890/1/102.

⁸⁸ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 22.

⁸⁹ A question mark is written in the transcribed document behind the word “kenured,” stating that the scribe did not know the meaning or was unsure of the meaning. The meaning of this word is not known today either. However, is likely that it refers to one of the senses, as it is juxtaposed with “speechless.”

⁹⁰ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 22.

⁹¹ Joyce Miller, *Magic and Witchcraft in Scotland* (Musselburgh, 2004), 29.

⁹² “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 28.

were tuentie present yet it will harme none bot him quhom they were set for.”⁹³ Blasting was possible to heal either by herbs or by charming. It seems clear that it was important for the questioners to acquire knowledge they did not possess, and the inquiry about blasting and shooting was undoubtedly seriously meant. Apparently, Janet Morrison had been asked this question several times, signaling that outsiders were eager to get to know the secrets of a witch, like what kind of objects they used, where the pock of witchcraft was placed, and what might be the results of the sorcery. For instance, Janet Morrison said that “Nclevin did put a pock of Witchcraft in the east roof of Finley Mcconochie in Ballicailes stable above the horse on the north side of the house.”

Important to an understanding of the tensions among the women who accused each other and denounced each other was the quarrelling and threatening words that were often used between them. This gives a glimpse of a tense atmosphere within the network of women who were accused of witchcraft. Janet Morrison referred to a remark made by Jonet NcNicoll, “that day quhich she was challenged at the Sessione, that Jenet NcNicoll came to her in Patrick Rowans house and said Jenat, Look that the fyle none bot yourself.”⁹⁴ Sorcery seems to have been rooted in the disagreements of daily life. Janet Morrison declared that NcWilliam and her daughters took the life of Alester McNiven by using witchcraft, “the quarrel was that because he craved sorely some malt silver that Katrine Moore [one of the NcWilliam daughters] was owing him.”⁹⁵ Getting hold of Janet Morrison’s knowledge about sorcery and acquiring her knowledge of the network of operating witches were two major themes during the investigation of her. At the very end of the questioning, the task of getting additional names of suspicious persons continued on the part of the interrogators, something which shows that the urge to continue the case in the pursuit of demonology was strong. Even if there was an interest in *maleficium* and in healing, demonological elements were obviously considered as the most dangerous.

The meeting between popular belief and more learned ideas is a difficult area to deal with because of the lack of sources for the seventeenth century. The idea that popular beliefs were important in European witchcraft cases has been discussed for several decades, for instance by Richard Kieckhefer,

⁹³ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 27.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Papers Related to Witchcraft,” 25.

Keith Thomas, and Carlo Ginzburg.⁹⁶ Traditional belief and witchcraft as they relate to Scotland have recently been discussed fruitfully by Julian Goodare and Joyce Miller.⁹⁷ For this study, it is natural to look at Janet Morrison's confession as a document which could show the *mentalité* of the peasantry. The distinction between the extent to which the confessions were remnants of old folk belief, or more recent "news" taken on board by the accused through oral transmission, is in my opinion a very difficult one. The confessions were most likely a fusion between old traditional folk beliefs and recently imposed demonological ideas. The accusations and testimonies of witnesses may have expressed ideas about what harm witches were able to do, and they were also expressions of traditional patterns of belief, a topic discussed by Julian Goodare.⁹⁸

The Witches' Final Fate

The Bute questioning had its consequences. A commission of justiciary was granted by the Privy Council on May 7, 1662 for four of the women mentioned in the Bute paper on witchcraft, among them Janet Morrison.⁹⁹ The Bute document does not contain any records from the trial, which must have taken place after May 7. There is no information about the final fate of the accused women in the Bute document. But a later source retrospectively throws light on their destiny, namely the Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles.¹⁰⁰ Here it was stated that one of the women mentioned in the Bute document, but not in the commission, Jonet McNicoll, was tried later on, in 1673. She managed to flee to Kilmarnock in 1662:

she being apprehended anno 1662 foresaid and imprisoned within the tolbuith of Rothesay and *fearing to be putt to death with the rest who suffered at that time*, It is true

⁹⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* (London, 1976); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971); Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (New York, 2001).

⁹⁷ Julian Goodare, "Scottish Witchcraft in its European Context," in *Witchcraft and Belief*, 26-50; Joyce Miller, "Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse," in *Witchcraft and Belief*, 144-65.

⁹⁸ Goodare, "Scottish Witchcraft in its European Context," 28.

⁹⁹ *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, ed. P. Hume Brown, Third series, vol. 1, A.D. (Edinburgh, 1908), 208.

¹⁰⁰ John Cameron and J. Imrie, eds., *The Justiciary Records of Argyll and the Isles 1664-1705*, vol. 1, no. 12 (Edinburgh, 1949-69).

and of veritie that she brake ward and escaped out of the said tolbuith and fled to the Lowlands quher she remained in Kilmernock and other places ther about these twelf years'.¹⁰¹

Thus Jonet McNicoll escaped the trial in Rothesay in 1662, but was rearrested in 1673, tried locally, and executed. However, "the rest who suffered at that time" must refer to the other women mentioned in the Bute document. The final fate of Janet Morrison was execution.

Conclusion

As the narratological analysis of the Bute document has shown, analyzing the different voices heard in the document separately makes clearer not only the contents of the accused women's narratives, but also what the investigation was about and what attitude the scribe had towards the story which was told. It is of importance to consider what kind of information was given by the scribe, and what kind of information was given by the accused persons and the witnesses. The voice of the scribe had authority in the way that he might choose what to write down and what to leave out. Still, I would like to underline that the voices of the accused persons and the witnesses seem to be truthfully rendered, with individual features coming to the fore in confessions and testimonies. It would not be correct to say that in the Bute document, even if it is dated to the 1660s, we find only stereotyped renderings of accused persons' and witnesses' discourse, where they all are given similar formulations by the scribe. Instead we see a spectrum of folkloric ideas and much interesting details relating to traditional belief as well as demonology. There is no reason to doubt that these notions and formulations really came from the common people involved. Thus, there was no filter used by the scribe to erase the contents of, for instance, the confessions. On the contrary, the manner of recording seems to support that what we hear really are the voices of the persons involved in the case. There was no indication that the witchcraft confessions, not even the demonological elements, were given as the result the interrogators putting these words in the mouths of the accused persons. The accused persons seemed to know these elements before the interrogation started.

¹⁰¹ My italics. *Ibid.*, 20.

Moreover, at a certain level, an instability may be traced in the text. This instability is created mostly from the tension between the scribe's wish to order the text and the magical contents of the confessions; these textual elements were basically impossible to order. This would be the case in all documents comprising witchcraft trials, simply because the "crime" in these trials, which were treated by the legal authorities as criminal trials, was impossible to prove by any ordinary type of evidence. Even using circumstantial evidence, the "crime" of practicing witchcraft could not be proved. What makes it hard for a reader today to interpret a text like the Bute document, and what made it difficult for the scribe to record the interrogation, is that the border between reality and imaginary events was blurred. In this context, it is interesting to note Jonathan Barry's comment to Keith Thomas' work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*: "Keith Thomas may have underplayed the fictive aspect so central to his subject,"¹⁰² thus pointing to Thomas' success in making witchcraft beliefs seem plausible and rational.

In addition, there are numerous examples in the discussions above that the instability regarding interpretation of the document's contents was countered on the structural level of the text by the witnesses' adherence to the basic structures of a narrative when they give their testimonies, emphasizing order, coherence, and linearity. The same was applied to the accused person's confession, with the result that the confession, which was a narrative, gained credibility. Thus the manner in which the testimony was given exhibited strong stabilizing features, even if the contents of what was related was absolutely fantastic. Through the use of textual-structural devices the cause-effect connection was strengthened so that it seems likely that there was a connection between, for instance, the uttering of charms and a disaster occurring later on. Those who listened to a testimony related in this way would interpret the situation as one event following another, even if indications other than order were lacking when it came to connecting these events. The conclusion was that the practice of witchcraft led to sickness and death for humans and animals. With regard to a "crime" like witchcraft, the emphasis on ordering of events, as well as mentioning well-known place names and persons' names, were used in witnesses' testimonies and in accused persons' confessions in a convincing manner as for any audience.

¹⁰² Jonathan Barry, "Introduction," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 45.

The scribe's attitude to Janet Morrison seems to be basically one of respect, not one of contempt. In the document it is possible to trace, although in a modest degree, a specific accent of his voice through evaluating judgments, emotive words, and specific colored ways of portraying her person. He seemed to believe her confession, and was eager to get to know as many details as possible when it came to her practice of sorcery. Still, an ambivalence can be traced. Janet Morrison is described as a woman who on one hand is respected for her skills in healing, on the other hand considered as a threatening person due to her magical powers. This ambivalence, certainly underlying the strong fear of witches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, seems to permeate the Bute document.

For a historian reading the Bute document, the question of the final fate of the women is an intriguing one. Here the scribe's accuracy has been of great value for searching other sources in order to find an answer. The task of the scribe in a document like this was, to a certain extent, to be a recorder, taking down information that was supposed to be necessary for the document's further use. The analysis above has shown that the scribe of the Bute document was reliable when it comes to factual information; there is no evidence that he was trying to "cheat" the readers. The scribe gave concrete information about the participants over the course of the investigation. In other words, he was functioning as a neutral reporter. The Bute document leads the researcher to church sessions' records and legal sources as complementary information—and thereby also to the answer of the question what happened to these accused women in Bute.

On a more general basis, close-reading of the interrogation of Janet Morrison has thrown light on an important question related to witchcraft research, namely: how did a woman get the stigma of a suspected witch? The role of the church session as the first step to be taken, as well as the active roles of the minister and some of its members, is clear. The importance of her being a healer is also clear. Part of the examination of Janet Morrison had to do with her activity as a trusted and intelligent person in the community. However, at the same time as the interrogators were eager to know about healing practice, they regarded demonological elements, related to the Devil's pact, as the most dangerous. The document gives very interesting information about the mingling of elements from *maleficium* and demonology during a late witchcraft case. The Rothesay Church Session Book tells us about what was happening in the community before Janet Morrison was imprisoned. The records from the church session

documents repeated accusations against her connected to her activity as a healer. As soon as the word “witch” was used, a connection was made between traditional healing, ideas of “cunning people” inherited from folklore, and the concept of devilish witchcraft and demonology. The scribe did not question the connection between healing and demonological witchcraft, which was presupposed.

What also becomes clear through the close-reading of this document is that the continuous pressure on Janet Morrison at the end was successful. The interrogators got to know what they wanted to know. Looking at the case of Morrison, it is easily seen that frequent questioning over time would have contributed to her confession. So would threat of torture and the varieties of pressure to which she was exposed. She willingly confessed everything she thought the interrogators desired, all she knew about healing, the Devil, and witches’ meetings. She denounced a long list of people from the local community, whom she knew. It is very plausible she was giving all this information out of fear of the consequences should she refuse to confess. Most often it is very difficult to prove torture in witchcraft cases, as it was rarely mentioned directly in the records. Thus, this case is a good example that even if the word torture was not mentioned, threat and different types of pressure might have been enough to make Morrison confess.

Another question often posed within witchcraft research is about the identity of the witch-hunters. Here close-reading of the Bute document on witchcraft, in addition to church session minutes, gives certain indications. Several members of the Church Session of Rothesay, who took an active part in questioning her, were appointed a few months later by the Privy Council to the Commission of Justiciary and permitted to try witches in Rothesay. Among them were the minister, John Stewart, and the provost, John Glass. It is important to bear in mind that out of the Commission of Justiciary’s nine persons, “any fyve of them” were able to take legal action. In the Bute case of 1662, it is possible that four of the five persons who would act as judge during the trial, could in fact be the Elders in the Church Session of Rothesay, because four of them were appointed to the actual Commission of Justiciary. So the witch-hunters in Bute seem to be closely connected with the leading members of the church and the persons possessing authority within the bureaucracy of the burgh.

In my view, a narratological approach to witchcraft research is a fruitful approach as long as it is seen in connection with other contemporary historical sources. A close-reading of a historical document with the intention

of carrying through a discourse analysis, making the voices of the different participants as distinct as possible, may contribute to clarity as for interpretation of the document as a whole. The contribution of a narratological reading may enrich and function as complementary to other types of interpretation. Today, researchers of witchcraft trials agree about the complexity of this historical phenomenon. New light may be thrown on this topic from several methodological angles as well as from several fields of research. As has been demonstrated above, close-reading of a witchcraft document focusing on discourse combined with a broader historical approach may be one contribution to the field. Either way, the aim will still be a better understanding of this dark period of history.