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# Routine Appropriation: Women's Voices and Women's Experiences in the 1641 Depositions

**Barbara Fennell**

The 1641 Depositions is the name given to a collection of manuscripts held by the Library of Trinity College Dublin, which contains approximately 1.2 million words recording the experiences of witnesses to the Irish Rebellion that started as an attempted coup d'état in October 1641, but quickly escalated into widespread, often vicious and bloody episodes of violence, theft and criminal damage, pitting native Irish Catholics against Protestant settlers.[1] The manuscripts were digitized between 2008 and 2010 by a team of researchers – mostly historians with the aid of computer scientists – from Trinity College, Dublin, the University of Aberdeen and Cambridge University. A number of different types of account are represented in the depositions. Some are fairly immediate witness reports collected in the early years of the uprising, 1641 – 1642, by commissioners assisted by a variety of clerks. During the 1650s, however, further records were drawn up, based on the interrogation of witnesses and suspects, with a primary purpose of ascertaining the identity of individual wrong-doers and bringing them to justice. Thus, while the intent of the first commission was to document the material losses sustained by the Protestant settlers, later commissions were convened to gather evidence on violent and other serious crimes: murders, massacres and apostasy.[2]

In the course of a one-year AHRC-funded project, *Language and Linguistic Evidence in the 1641 Depositions*,[3] an interdisciplinary team led by the author of this article[4] had occasion, amongst other things, to examine closely,

[1] See Jane Ohlmeyer (ed.), *Ireland from Independence to Occupation 1641 – 1660* (Cambridge, 1995).

[2] See Aidan Clarke, 'The 1641 Depositions', in: P. Fox (ed.), *Treasures of the Library Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin, 1986), 111 – 122.

[3] The grant was funded as part of the AHRC Scheme: 'Digital Equipment and Database Enhancement for Impact' (DEDEFI). It was for a total of £334,000 AHRC contribution, £418,000 full economic cost and was for a period of twelve months from 1.3.10 – 28.2.11.

[4] The Aberdeen 1641 team comprised Barbara Fennell, PI, Project Management/ Sociohistorical Linguistics/Discourse Analysis; Dee O'Regan, Software Developer; Nicci Macleod, Forensic Linguistics/Discourse Analysis; Mark Sweetnam, Early-Modern Prose/Religion/Politics; Elaine Murphy, Early-Modern History/Depositions

both manually and with the aid of computers, the nature of the language documented in the 1641 Depositions and some of the significant features of seventeenth-century linguistic usage. Members of the Aberdeen 1641 Depositions team have published a number of articles and presented papers elsewhere illustrating what they have been able to document about language and language use in this particular quasi-legal seventeenth-century context and about the analysis by computers of linguistically relatively unstable text.[5] Given the theme of this current volume of the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies,* however, I wish to focus less on what the depositions can tell us about the formal characteristics of the legal language they contain, and more on what they reveal about seventeenth-century perceptions of status, authority/voice and credibility, with particular reference to the testimony of female deponents.

The language of the 1641 Depositions falls squarely into the period historians of the language refer to as late Early-Modern English (1500–1650/1700), with all of the variability that the language at that time displayed, as the following sample text from the collection amply illustrates:

**Deposition of Joane Linge**
815373r425[6]

> **Joane the Relict of Samuell Linge late of Rahinderry** in the Queens County **Chapman sworne and examined saith** That about Candlemas 1641 her said husband and she at Rahinhinderry aforesaid, were forceibly **deprived robbed & dispoiled** of their meanes **goodes and chattells** worth at Least **100 li.** and hadd their howse and Corne burned by *& by the meanes of* the Rebells Brian Dempsy a great Comander of *them* and his souldiers and complicees being very many that *alsoe*

Digitisation; Shay Lawless, Digital Humanities/Digitisation/CULTURA; Senara Naismith, Research Assistant.

[5] Barbara Fennell, 'Framing the Evidence: Linguistic Features of the 1641 Depositions'; paper presented at the University of Aberdeen Irish Scottish Academic Initiative Conference, 31 October 2009; Mark Sweetnam and Barbara Fennell, 'Natural Language Processing and Early-Modern Dirty Data: Applying IBM LanguageWare to the 1641 Depositions', *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 27 (2012), 39–54; Nicci Macleod and Barbara Fennell, 'Lexico-Grammatical Portraits of Vulnerable Women in War', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics,* 13 (2012), 259–290.

[6] The number and letter sequences provided here are the identifiers used for individual depositions in both the Aberdeen University CLRLE web research interface for the 1641 depositions: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/1641-depositions/ and the TCD digitized version of the depositions http://www.1641.tcd.ie

beseeged the Castle of Ballylynan **And further saith that an old woman vizt the wife of Tho: Gosslin** being not able to fly to the said Castle to saue her life was by the Rebells murthered in this deponents garden And about the same time another old woman was alsoe in the same towne murthered

This example illustrates that, on top of the formal differences in the language of the depositions (orthography, lexicon, morphology and syntax) we need to take into account the fact that, as *depositions,* they are a special type of text, not representative of general Early-Modern English, but written in legal or quasi-legal language that is very often stylized and constrained by both context and purpose.

Throughout the depositions there occur predictable features that are typical of the legal English of the period, including the following:

1. Lexical doublets/multiples
   a. **deprived robbed** or otherwis **dispoyled** of their
   b. **goodes & chattells**
2. Formulations
   **Joane the Relict of Samuell Linge late of Rahinderry** in the Queens County **Chapman sworne and examined saith**

3. Abbreviations
   100 **li.**

4. Passive constructions
   her said husband and she at Rahinhinderry aforesaid, **were forceibly deprived robbed & dispoiled** of their meanes goodes and chattells

5. Complex syntax
   Joane the Relict of Samuell Linge late of Rahinderry in the Queens County Chapman sworne and examined saith That about Candlemas 1641 her said husband and she at Rahinhinderry aforesaid, were forceibly deprived robbed & dispoiled of their meanes goodes and chattells worth at Least 100 li**. and** hadd their howse and Corne burned by *& by the meanes of* the Rebells Brian Dempsy a great Comander of *them* and his souldiers and complicees being very many that *alsoe* beseeged the Castle of Ballylynan

Though the above text is typical of the depositions, there are copious other features of legal English which are not present in this extract but appear elsewhere in the depositions (such as specialist terms from Latin and French; e.g. *Copia vera Exr per Valentinu Savage Dep Clin Corone* (840016r007)). These formal features clearly characterize the depositions generally as legal texts, and as depositions they represent out of court oral accounts of witnesses reduced to a written form. But unlike typical depositions of the present day, they were not simply intended for later use as evidence in a court of law, as we said in the introduction: they were used first as a kind of inventory of losses and injustices, when it appeared there might be the chance of indemnification, while the 1650s depositions were used rather for the purpose of identifying wrongdoers and to justify retaliation and suppression of the Irish Catholics by Oliver Cromwell. Another significant feature of the 1641 depositions is that they contain many complementary or competing 'voices' and scribal 'hands'. Indeed, given that many of the witness accounts were recorded several years after events actually took place, we can hardly consider them as verbatim or spontaneous retellings of events, adding to our scepticism about their credibility.

I have written elsewhere on the issue of whether the accounts of witnesses to the events of the Irish rebellion give us clues as to whether they are hearsay or eye-witness evidence, based on the language used to introduce reported episodes.[7] However interesting the question of the validity of third party evidence may be from a legal and historical point of view,[8] the ways in which credibility, authority and authenticity are encoded in these texts are equally compelling from a socio-historical and historical pragmatic standpoint, since they provide insights into the social order and generalized social behaviour of the time and reveal institutionalized means of indicating status, credibility and authority – or the lack of it – in the socially transformative conditions of seventeenth-century Ireland. In other words, looking beyond these more formal Early-Modern English legal and linguistic characteristics, a number of other characteristics of the depositions provide glimpses into social and legal behaviour and the general world view prevalent in Ireland in the seventeenth-century, taking us into the realms of custom, usage and ideology.

In a recent article on the social order of the 1641 Rebellion, Eamon Darcy discusses the relationship between status and credibility, and particularly the

[7] Barbara A. Fennell, 'Dodgy Dossiers: Hearsay and the 1641 Depositions', *History Ireland*, 19 (2011)..

[8] See John H. Wigmore, 'The History of the Hearsay Rule', *Harvard Law Journal,* 17, (1904), 437–458.

credibility of hearsay evidence, in the depositions:[9]

> Debates over the reliability of the depositions began almost immediately. Understanding contemporary perceptions of their reliability should not focus simply on the eye-witness versus hearsay debate. Those involved in their collection were keen to stress that some hearsay evidence came from reliable sources. These were either people of higher rank, or those who had been taken prisoner by the rebels. In his preface to the *Irish Rebellion*, a history that substantiated its arguments through providing printed (and edited) abstracts of the 1641 Depositions, John Temple, the author, described the standing of the deponents: "The persons examined were of severall conditions, most of them British, some of Irish birth and extraction, very many of good quality, and such as were of inferior rank were not rejected if they were known sufferers, and came freely in to declare what they speak of their owne knowledge … The Confederation of Kilkenny charged Jones and his colleagues with "taking every hearsay as positive truth"; Jones responded (albeit privately) that 'neither do we take hearinge for positive truth to but leave to the reader to consider of it as is presented; neither are all hearsays to be cast off, especially being delivered by credible persons and upon oath'.[10]

Darcy discusses Temple's further assertion in the introduction to his account, that deponents often heard what had been described as hearsay 'out of the Rebels own Mouthes while they were in restraint among them',[11] thus indicating that either social rank or personal experience were considered sufficient to render hearsay evidence credible. Indeed, in my own reading of Temple, I have come across examples that suggest that persons of good standing in the community who had themselves been held captive were deemed particularly trustworthy:

> How far their Madness, Fury, and most implacable Malice, did, after the Manner of Brute beasts, transport them towards the Destruction

[9] Eamon Darcy, 'The Social Order of the 1641 Rebellion' in: Eamon Darcy, Anne Margey, and Elaine Murphy (eds), *The 1641 Depositions and the Irish Rebellion* (London, 2012), 97–112.

[10] Ibid., 107.

[11] Ibid.

> of those miserable, harmless Souls they detained among them, doth clearly appear by several Particulars expressed in several Examinations. I shall here insert some of them taken upon trust from Persons of good Quality and Credit, who were long Prisoners among them.[12]

Darcy goes on to say that in this colonial period in Ireland social rank was not always easy to determine, as the social order was based upon sometimes competing old and emergent systems. Given, then, that so much evidence was 'credibly reported', what made this testimony credible and are there indicators of how status and authority are encoded in the language? My primary focus here is on the testimony of women, in order to determine the particular ways in which their words and experiences are framed and appropriated by the legal authorities, by commentators on the rebellion, and by the women involved themselves. In doing this, I hope to shed light on the ways in which the ideology surrounding women and women's place is encoded (most often routinely and unselfconsciously) in the text of the depositions and texts derived from them, and what this tells us about the validity of women's testimony and the uses to which it is put.

## Marital Status and Credibility

The depositions illustrate how women's marital status and credibility are inextricably bound together. Most male deponents are identified in the transcripts according to the formula:

> **Name, Geographical Provenance, Occupation,** [sworn (deposeth) (and) saith]

This reflects the fact that a man derives his status and standing in the community from where he comes and from what he does for a living and this, alongside the fact that he has sworn a sacred oath, forms the basis of his credibility as a deponent.

Women's testimony, on the other hand, is typically framed by extra information about their position in society. The most important determiner is their status vis-à-vis men, that is, as a wife, late wife, widow, relict, spinster,

[12] Sir JohnTemple, *The Irish Rebellion* (London, 1646), 217.

daughter or mistress. This marital status renders the first part of the typical formula for identification of women as follows:

Name, Marital Status, Geographical Provenance

The following extracts illustrate the various manifestations of this formula:

**WIFE**

8732204

Anne Dukes the wife of William Douckes of Kilnacorra in the parishe of Dyne in the Countie of Cavan yeoman who lyeth her in ~~this Towne~~ *Dublin* Extreame sicke, who beinge dewly sworne deposeth and sayth

834004

Elizabeth Hankin wife to james Hankin of dundalke sadler ~~which said James was killed in Trim with Thomas Pressick~~ sworne & examined sayth

**RELICT**

833081

Joane Baylie the relict and wife of Edward Baylie of Drumlum within the Barrony of Glankie County of cavan sworne and examined deposeth and

**LATE WIFE**

832188

~~I~~Grace Carinton *aged fforty yeares or theireabouts* late of the parish of drvmlane in the County of Cavan & late wife vnto Richard Carinton whoe as hee was Travelling vp Towards Dublin was stobed striped & Killed by the Ireish Rebells of the County of Cavan, And the said Grace being Duely sworne & examyned saith that…

832191r182

Jane Bordman late wife of Thomas Bordman Weaver an English protestant lately dwelling upon the half pole of Carry=crenah of Mr Castletons proportion in the parish of Urnay 7 county of Cavan deposeth that

**WIDOW**

834006

Luce Spell of Drogheda, in the County of Lowth ~~widowe~~ sworne and examined deposeth and saith

834030

The Examinacion of Margarett Cesar widdowe taken the 26th day of Aprill 1653

The said Margarett Cesar aged 48 yeares or thereabouts being duly sworne & examined by virtue of her oath saide That

**SPINSTER**

834108

Elizabeth Northope late of the parish of Clownish and County of Monaghan Spinster in the behalfe of her ffather in law Richard Squyre of the same parish lately & about Alhollantide last past most inhumanely slayne by the Rebe{lls} being duely sworne sayth

**MISTRESS**

838189r235

The Examination of Mistrisse Anne Fitzsymons being aged about fauty foure years taken the 6th of June 1653

Who being dewly sworne sayeth

While a woman/wife's status is normally linked to that of her husband, a daughter's status is usually marked in relation to the mother (or father):

**DAUGHTER**

834150

The Examinacion of Anne Bull the younger Daughter to Anne Bull alias ffergusson taken the 23th day of Aprill 1653

The said Anne being aged 17 yeares or thereabouts and being duly sworne & Examined by vertue of his oath saieth

839105

Jeane Pebles daughter to the aboue deponent dwelling in the same towne with her mother being likewise duely sworne saith

Although the majority of women are defined in terms of their relationship to a man, there are occasions when they are defined only by their dwelling place:

**DWELLING PLACE**
832812
An Borrell of Curgarra in the parish of Ballyhayes and County of Cavan deposeth that

Finally, there are strikingly few examples of women who are only identified by their name and geographical provenance, or whose status is indeed not qualified at all; these constitute exceptions to the overall formula used in the depositions, and they often occur when the woman is corroborating the assertions of others, not making her own independent assertions:

**WOMAN'S NAME ONLY**
838143r292
The examination of Felice Waller who sayethe that as she did hear by the report of the country about Charlemon this above wreten deposition of Turlache o Hamill is trew & further she sayethe not

Mary niGuirke of Glanavy being lykewayes examjned [dothe] affirm bY report of the country that the examination is trew & further she sayes

In many of the depositions by women, their status is in fact defined twice in relation to their man; that is, first by their marital status, and then by their husband's occupation which is also embedded in the qualification:

834004r004
Elizabeth Hankin wife to james Hankin of dundalke sadler

It should come as no real surprise that women are identified in this way in the mid-seventeenth-century, given that they were at that time regarded as 'belonging' to their husbands along with children, goods and chattels, and given the central role marriage plays in the construction of female identity in that period.[13] In an article on the portrayal of vulnerable women in

[13] Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500–1760*: *A Social History* (London, 1994).

the 1641 Depositions, Nicci Macleod and I examined the role and place of seventeenth-century English women in some detail.[14] We pointed out that in the atrocity propaganda related to the Irish Rebellion Irish women were depicted as barbarous, active and empowered, while the discourse around Protestant women centred around their disempowerment and victimhood: '… in stark contrast to the active construction of Irish women as aggressor … the Protestant settler woman tends to be represented as the passive recipient of the rebels' "despicable" actions'.[15] The focus of that article was on the relative disempowerment or victimhood of Protestant women in the depositions, and their general subordination to men was a given. Here, however, I wish to stress that women's testimony is officially framed by and finds its admissibility at least partly in their marital status and the occupational status of their men, which in itself is an act of disempowerment, at one and the same time recreating and reinforcing women's subordinate role and relegating their testimony to a substitute for men's. Indeed, in a striking number of cases a woman's testimony is prefaced by an explanation about the death or indisposition of her husband, as in the following excerpts, indicating that the woman was only giving testimony because her husband for good reason was not able to:

**HUSBAND'S ABSENCE**

832188

I Grace Carinton aged fforty yeares or theireabouts late of the parish of drvmlane in the County of Cavan & late wife vnto Richard Carinton whoe as hee was Travelling vp towards Dublin was stobed striped & Killed by the Ireish Rebells of the County of Cavan, Ad the said grace being Duely sworne & examyned saith

832204

Anne Doukes the wife of William Doukes of Kilnacorra in the parish of Dynne in the Countie of Cavan yeoman who lyethe her in ~~this towne~~ *Dublin* Extreame sicke, who beinge dewly sworne deposeth and sayth

832210

Jane Gates the wife of Richard gates of Ballinah in the Parish of

[14] Macleod and Fennell, 'Lexico-Grammatical Portraits', 259–290.

[15] Ibid., 261.

> Lurgan Banorie of Castlerane & Countie of Cavan {her said husband being sicke} duely sworne
>
> 834099
>
> Anne Howten of ~~Dartery in the~~ *towne &* parish of Dartery in the County of Managhan whose husband was lately employed in his Maiesties service towards Drogheda, being duely sworne deposeth

This scribal formulation, a routine characteristic of the depositions, encodes the institutional subordination of female witnesses' voices. That this legal formula for introducing women's testimony was standard practice both reflects and enshrines the early-modern Protestant male view of women as adjunct to men both within the legal system and within society in general.

While women's testimony may be regarded as a substitute for men's, their suffering is a further commodity of the rebellion that is appropriated by men and used for their purposes. Protestant English men's retelling of women's experiences of the uprising in pamphlets and books served to advertize the cruelty of the Irish and justify subsequent brutal campaigns to suppress them. In these publications (the prime example beng Sir John Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* (London, 1646) the most lurid and goriest accounts of the treatment of women were reported. Indeed, a number of particularly gruesome examples, of babies being ripped from their mothers' stomachs, of women being killed while in labour and of babies being murdered at their mothers' breasts, persistently recur in the writing of a number of male authors and pamphleteers. In Temple, they are certainly not intended as faithful accounts of the actual facts of the rebellion, but ultimately serve as mythologized symbols of women's suffering and victimhood. In this way, women's traumatic experiences are not recounted for the sake of the women themselves, but are subordinated to the purposes of men:

> … when women's words are taken out of their original context, and incorporated within a male-authored text (especially one with such strong implied male readership), women's experiences come to speak for men and not for women themelves … So even if Temple records women's depositions verbatim, by recording them in his text they come to speak for the trauma of the Protestant men in Ireland. In doing so, women's experiences are appropriated to serve the psychic needs of men. Moreover, Protestant women's trauma is also exploited for

> political ends, with Temple using the experiences of female victims to characterize the perpetrators as monstrous and barbaric, in order to advocate a radical policy that would ensure that Irish Catholics could never rise again.[16]

Indeed not just women's words, but women's bodies, their maternal and biological functions all are used as icons of the rebellion and propaganda tools in the struggle between Protestant English and Catholic Irish men. *Tears of Ireland* (1642) an exaggerated account of the violence of the Irish against the English, features numerous graphic images of naked women with their wombs ripped open or strung up or roasted over hot coals. Even the less lurid written accounts, as in the following examination of Adam Glover, cited by Temple, serve to reinforce women's, and indeed children's, total vulnerability and dependence.

> **Deposition of Adam Glover**
>
> This deponent further saith that he saw upon the high way a woeman left by the Rebells stripped to her smock, sett upon {by} 3 woemen and some children being Irish whoe miserably tore and rent the said poore English woeman and stripped her of her smock in bitter frost and snow soe that she fell in labour in their hands and presence and both she and her child there miserably died. [17]

This process of appropriating women's suffering is by no means unique to the 1641 rebellion: it has been, and still is, observed in the course of many different conflicts throughout the ages and throughout the world. Purkiss argues that 'Such rhetoric was reassuring because it assigned passivity, disorder and dismemberment of the feminine corpse, releasing the male identity of the soldier for military action on her behalf and reassuring him that his own being was different.[18]'

The vulnerability of women and children is thus recorded throughout the depositions and the brutal and usually fatal separating of the dependent infant from its nurturing mother is a recurrent trope:

[16] Naomi McAreavey, 'Re(-)membering Women: Protestant Women's Victim Testimonies during the Irish Rising of 1641', *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, 2 (2010); http:www.northernrenaissance.org

[17] Temple, *The Irish Rebellion,* 66.

[18] Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics during the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 2005), 43.

.826114v121

This Examinant farther saith: That on the first of May 1642, Collonell Tege o Driscol ofin the barony of Carbery with a party in the night forced an house belonging to this Examinant about pistoll shott from this Examinants Castle of Glandore before mentioned, in which were about 30 English who fled thither for refuge, not being inlisted as soldiers in the army who were all put to the sword except about 7 or eight men that & women who breakeing out of a windore escaped to the castle adjoining: & two women & one man who haveing also escaped out of the said house fled to a church adjoining: where being found the next morneing by the rebells, they caried them to Ballerevin about 2 miles from Glandore aforesaid, & leaveing them with the wife of McCarty reagh then there inhabiting, after 2 dayes she caused [] them to be hangd, as this Examinant was credibly informed: & that both those women were greate with child: & one of them had her belly ript up after she was deade, & the child taken out alive. And farther saith not.

835257r280

**Deposition of Ellen Adams**

…. the deponent further saith that the said Rory Magwires Confederates, or some of them (whose names she doth not remember) finding one Tary Brunt the wife of Geo: Brunt at Waterdrum aforesaid, she being bigg with child and at the
very last of her time, did barbarously murther the said Tary, first stripping of her naked and then seriously examining where her mony was, one of the said Rebells draweing his skyne swore a greate oath that vnles she confessed where her cash Lay, he would with his said skyne ripp vpp her belly, which *he* accordingly performed, for he presently vppon that ran the skyne into her body and the child dropped from her gasping Twice or thrice vppon the ground

837091r060

**The Examination of Katherine Bretnogh taken the 9th of June 1653 aged 40 yeers & vpward**

Being duely Sworne sayth
That in May about 9 or 10 yeeres since her husband Patricke mc

> Gillugh haueing bene out with the Irish in rebellyon was received into Protection by Captain Wooll then comanding in Arglasse in the County of Downe and after he had remayned about a Weeke in Arglasse and serued the said Captain Wooll for two or three dayes in leading out wracke to donnge his land, that uppon the Sabbath day three Or ffoure of the said Captain Woolls souldiers came into the house and slew her said husband then lying by her in their bed The cause of her knowledge of her husbands protection as shee sayth Is that her husband tould her soe ffurther shee sayth the said Captain Wooll tooke from her after her husbands death two Cowes which was all her stocke and that her brother & a child then sucking at her breast therby dyed for want of ffood ffurther shee sayth not

While there is undoubtedly a basis of truth in many of these narratives of suffering, there is also clear evidence of exaggeration: Temple himself does not shy away from recounting tales of ghostly apparitions and supernatural experiences, all of which add to the mythology surrounding the rebellion and women's roles in it:

> Master George Creighton, Minister of Virginia, in the County of Cavan, deposeth, among other Particulars in his Examination, 'That divers Women brought into his House a young Woman almost naked, to whom a Rogue came upon the Way, these Women being present, and required her to give him her Money, or else he would kill her, and so drew his Sword; her Answer was, You cannot kill me unless God give you Leave, and his Will be done: Whereupon the Rogue thrust three Times at her naked Body with his drawn Sword, and yet never pierced her Skin; whereat he being, as it seems, much confounded, went away and left her; and that he saw this Woman, and heard this Particular related by divers Women, who were by, and saw what they reported'.[19]

By concentrating on this appropriation and mythologizing of women's experiences in the 1641 Rebellion by men I do not wish to imply that female deponents were never allowed to speak for themselves; nor will I claim that women themselves were not complicit in developing and spreading the myths

[19] 833227r167 – cited in Temple, *The Irish Rebellion*, 215.

surrounding the more extreme episodes associated with the rebellion. There are many examples of female deponents narrating gruesome stories about women killed in labour, babies murdered and ripped from their lactating mothers, etc. And a number of female deponents' accounts suggest that they were aware that they were witnessing attempted genocide of the English by the Irish:

> 816228r142
>
> **Deposition of Ann Painter**
>
> And further saith that the Rebells after they hadd about Christmas 1641 suffered some of the English to goe out of the towne of Navan aforesaid seemed to bee very sorrowfull for the same: Saying that thenceforth noe English man shold passe from them nor Live: Becawse they shold not ryse nor joyne with the rest of the English against them And therevpon they the Rebells most cruelly fell vpon her said husband & her sonn as aforesaid and murthered them & 4 more English Protestants at Navan aforesaid: And the Rebells alsoe killed one Mr Robert ffisher Register of the Consistory of Meath as he was comeing towards Dublin. This deponent further sayth that she hath heard the Rebells commonly say that they repented they suffered any English to passe safe to Dublin for that thay then hoped that the stripped English would have gone directly toward England and not joyned together in a body to fight against them

Indeed there is ample evidence that women told and retold the same atrocity tales many times, often relaying the experience of other women.[20] But it would appear that this kind of storytelling perhaps served a different function for women than it did for men. McAreavey suggests that depositions containing such vivid atrocity narratives might be regarded as a form of therapeutic event for the female Protestant victims of the rebellion (and indeed she notes the absence of such opportunities for Catholic women to work through their trauma by telling their violent experiences to an official third party). Naiomi McAreavey argues that the overall value of women's stories from the

[20] Nor indeed could I argue that women are not (consciously or subconsciously) perpetuating the dependence of women on men for their standing in the community. Elizabeth Price refers to an Englishwoman involved in the Portadown atrocity as 'an Englishwoman nere [th]e bridge of Portadown … by name the wife of one Arnold Taylor' (836101r054).

depositions is not as fact or eye-witness truth, but rather as trauma narratives that develop in response to women's suffering. She emphasizes 'Protestant women's fundamental role in the creation and circulation of stories of the dismembered female, and argues that for these women they represent complexly gendered post-traumatic responses to their experiences during the rising'.[21] Linking with the work of Kali Tal,[22] McAreavey argues that if we look at the depositions as 'literature of trauma' (as 'cultural representations of psychic trauma', in Tal's words),[23] we can 'bridge the gap between literary and historical approaches.[24]

There is no doubt that the *authority* of a survivor narrative as accurate fact is often more questionable than its *authenticity* as experience. Many of these vivid accounts of atrocities that appear in the depositions are more indicative of survivors attempting to convey the danger of death and the extreme violence of the situations in which they found themselves, rather than an attempt to provide an accurate, factual account–appealing to authenticity, not accuracy. Most sociolinguists would be sympathetic to such an appeal: William Labov developed a technique for eliciting unguarded, more spontaneous 'authentic' language from informants who were being observed and recorded.[25] It involves asking the 'danger of death' question: 'Have you ever been in a situation in which you were in serious danger of being killed?' Informants are consistently found to be so involved in convincing the speaker of the danger of the situation that they pay little attention to the formalities and accuracies of speech. McAreavey cites Tal as saying that 'literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it "real" both to the victim and to the community'. Given all the conventions we have observed in the gathering and dissemination of depositions, it would not be going too far to suggest that authenticity was perhaps a much more valued characteristic of evidence in the mid-seventeenth-century than it is today, and suggests that. our preoccupation with accuracy is perhaps misguided and inappropriate at such a far temporal remove.

In general, then, the emphasis of both the deponents and the users of their testimony would appear to be on authenticity of experience, rather than accuracy of report. Although we might use the digitized corpus to work out,

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[21] McAreavey, 'Re(-)membering Women', 3.

[22] See Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge, 1996).

[23] Ibid., 30.

[24] McAreavy, 'Re(-)membering Women', 4.

[25] William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia, 1972), 209.

for example, whether an individual perpetrator could have been in places A and B on the same day or not, and therefore whether a particular account is reliable, such evidence would, in a sense, miss the point of the reported narrative. Our preoccupation with accuracy and reliability, so prominent in contemporary legal processes, would appear to be inappropriate in the context of the depositions, where both style and content are used to confirm atrocity narratives not as unique events but as confirming narrative patterns that were widely circulated in Europe at the time, and which, in their published versions, were often accompanied by illustrations taken from European publications.

The fact that women themselves told and retold stories of extreme atrocity would suggest that they, too, were not above appropriating testimony for different ends than simply telling the truth. Rather, they were used to illustrating suffering, indicating common experience and with it solidarity with fellow sufferers, and in some cases also perpetuating men's versions of events.

Another therapeutic aspect of women's retelling of trauma narratives in general, however, is the way in which it reinforces their solidarity with other women and allows them to put their own traumatic experience into context, often recognizing that they survived where others did not, or were not hurt as badly as others, rationalizing their experiences, making them more 'bearable' and imbuing the women with a sense of personal strength. The therapeutic power and potential for peace-making of women's narratives are very much recognized almost 400 years after the Irish rebellion, particularly in war-torn areas of the world and those where women are the victims of violent and oppressive male-dominated regimes. Journals such as *Critical Half*, particularly in its special edition *Women's Narratives, War, and Peace-Building* (Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall, 2007), stress the potential role of women as agents of social change and the transformative power of their stories of violence and survival. The trauma narratives included in the depositions of the female victims of the 1641 rebellion were indeed appropriated by men as a justification for further bloodshed and violence, but one can also see glimpses of their use for other, more positive purposes: narratives of survival and courage, of healing, miraculous escape and of faith and resilience in the face of adversity:

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> She further saith that they also attempted to kill her this deponent, but god spared her so as they spared her life, takeing all she had & let *letting* her goe. She farther saith that the chiefe of the said Rebells who acted the said murther with the rest was John Barry one of

the Lo: of Muskerry party & of Captain Maho troope *as he himselfe told her* & that this Examinant about five weekes since did mee{t} the said Barry at Carigadruit & chalenged him of the said fact, who thereupon tooke her out of Company, & as{ked} her whether the man then slaine were her husband she answered noe: then (said he) do not you take a{ } my life for I saved youres.

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