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Discourse, Power, and Conviction: A Foucauldian Study of the Martha Carrier Trial in *The Wonders of the Invisible World*

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Abstract

This paper studies the trial of Martha Carrier, a woman accused of witchcraft in Salem, as documented in *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. It examines how the judicial and religious frameworks made people believe she was a witch, even though there was no real evidence. This study is based on Michel Foucault's understanding of power, discourse, confession, and regimes of truth and argues that Martha was convicted not because she actually did something wrong but because of a web of rumors, confessions and people's perception of "strange" body movements as evidence of magic. Through a close textual analysis of Cotton Mather's account, the article explores how repeating a story over and over gains testimony, how confession stabilizes accusation, how physical suffering is explained as visible evidence of invisible crime, and how legal and religious institutions transform these narratives into judicial certainty. This reading presents how truth was created and distributed within a discursive system and makes conviction look both agreeable and inevitable. This article introduces a new understanding of Salem as a site where power had hold not merely upon judgment but upon the conditions in which reality could be accessed, too.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Power and Knowledge, Discourse, Martha Carrier, Confession, and Truth.

1. Introduction

The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 were a complex issue in early New England. Those trials had religious, legal, and social aspects. In the history of America, those trials are described as among the most well-documented mass executions. These trials, in the area of research, are still giving rise to interesting questions about the nature of belief, evidence, and authority in pre-modern legal frameworks. There are a number of modern narratives regarding this issue. Compared to them, *Wonders of the Invisible World* by Cotton Mather is the most important. Because this writing, along with the documentation of the trials, also works to validate them. Mather (1693) claims that witchcraft was a reality rather than a perceived one. It is also noted by him that witchcraft, in that context, was an objective one based on theology. He not only posits his opinions but also defends them with evidence, confessions, and testimony. One of the most important examples of this is the trial of Martha Carrier. This example can be taken into consideration to observe how guilt was constructed, how the stories of the people were disseminated, and how the power of the court influenced them. There are a number of studies on the Salem witch trials, and the opinions regarding them have evolved in various ways. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (1974) consider local tensions, factional conflict, and economic anxiety as the causes of these trials. Carol

F. Karlsen (1987) focuses on the accusations formed by patriarchy and gender. Mary Beth Norton (2002) gives a psychological and cultural interpretation. She thinks that trauma, war anxiety, and frontier instability are the causes of this crisis. Thinkers like David D. Hall (1990) and Richard Godbeer (1992) emphasize the dominance of Puritan cosmology. For them, the belief in witchcraft was more than silly superstition-it was a theological and epistemological belief.

Recent studies have elaborated on these explanations. Emphasis has been given to legal, spatial, and discursive regulatory patterns. They are taken into account as they relate to the exercise of authority. For instance, James A. Tyner (2025) theorizes through feminist legal geography to demonstrate how demonology, jurisprudence, and religion all played a role in the emergence and definition of legitimate knowledge, credible evidence, and juridical truth in the Salem witch trials of colonial New England. A complementary legal analysis is provided by Leonard M. Niehoff (2020), who writes about the evidentiary logic of the trials, which concerns issues of justice present at the same time in relation to irregularities in the trials, the use of hearsay evidence, and weak standards of proof. His study of the legal aspects of testimony, deposition, and proof reveals that the convictions at Salem were not just the products of social or theological pressure; they were also the products of some kind of mistaken evidentiary reasoning. All of these interventions together are a major step forward in shifting from the question of why the accusations arose to how the accusations have been received as truths in the institutional setting and through the legal forum. But this growing volume of scholarship has received relatively little attention to the discursive processes, in trial narrative itself, by which accusation serves as the authoritative truth. As scholars have explored the social, cultural and theological histories of Salem, little exploration of the way these factors-testimony, confession, pain, and institutional validation-worked together to produce judicial certainty has occurred, especially in readings of *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. What is more relevant is not just the content of the accusation, but how it is organized with statements, the body, and interpretive processes that make up coherent knowledge which can support conviction. This article fills that void by using the theories of Michel Foucault, who developed the idea of power/knowledge when referring to the relation between discourse, power, and truth. Foucault (1980) claims that the production of knowledge and the production of power are mutually constitutive; knowledge is generated by power, which in turn serves to reinforce and legitimate power. In this context, truth is not seen as a thing that exists in the real world and can be discovered, but as something that is produced in time by means of discourse, institutional practices, and regimes of a certain type of validation (Foucault, 1972). Foucault's concepts of discourse, confession, regimes of truth, and the body as a site of the inscription of meaning and the making of knowledge are particularly relevant to this study. Among them, the concept of the body as a site upon which power inscribes meaning and renders knowledge visible is most relevant in the context of the Martha Carrier trial, since Foucault (1977) argues that "the body now serves as an instrument or intermediary" through which systems of power operate and produce knowledge. This concept is strongly relevant with regard to the discourse of witchcraft, which depended on bodily distress, the making of physical gestures, and the assumption of spoken confessions to construct and validate truth by institutional authority.

From a methodological perspective, the present study is a close reading of the testimony, confession, body evidence, and institutional authority that appeared in Mather's account of the Martha Carrier trial. The analysis of this article is not about substantiating or invalidating the factual claims behind the statements but about the ways in which certain statements gain credibility, how bodily harm can be used as evidence of hidden acts of crime and how legal and religious institutions formalise and structure these claims into an authoritative system of meaning. In this article it is contended that the conviction of Martha Carrier is a pretty good example of a process whereby discourse eventually turns into truth, which is then legitimated by institutional power, and then subsequently translated into conviction by the power of the courts. In this process guilt is not verified by an empirical check, but by repetition, telling the story, expanding the confession, embodied signs, and the endorsement of the institution. Thus, it is no accident that the Martha Carrier case exemplifies a regime of knowledge ("truth" as Foucault calls it), one that is historically

grounded and characterized by a network of power relations. In this respect, the study entered into the scholarly debates about the discursive formation of truth in the Salem proceedings, not only because of its new reading of Mather's text, but also because it shed light on the general issue of how institutions produce authoritative knowledge, control interpretation, and make judgement intelligible. In so doing, it allows to rethink Salem as not only a historical event of persecution, but as also a representative site of production of truth, of discourse and of power.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on the ideas of Michel Foucault, which radically reconstruct the concept of power, knowledge, and truth. Foucault theorizes power not solely as repressive or as something located outside, but as productive, dispersed, and within discursive networks. Within this formulation, power and knowledge go together: "power produces knowledge…[and] directly imply one another" (Foucault, 1980, p.109). Therefore, truths of a society are the products of historically specific discursive practices. At the heart of it is the notion of discourse, which Foucault (1972, p.49) conceives of as a system of statements "which constitutes the object of which they speak". For Foucault, (1972) discourse is not just about what is said, but how things are said, the conditions within which the act of saying occurs, or the conditions under which it is possible to say something. Discourse in the history of witchcraft serves as an apparatus that establishes a coherent field of demonological language, one that, through such terms as "devil," "specter," and "bewitching," does not simply reflect pre-existing realities, but produces them, rendering them intelligible and unquestionable. As seen in *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, the intense use of devices such as the presence of diabolical agency and the existence of supernatural causes helps to create witchcraft as an organized and true-enunciable phenomenon (Mather, 1693). Very intricately linked with discourse is Foucault's (1980, p.131) concept of "regimes of truth" as "the types of discourse which [a society] accepts and makes function as true". A regime of truth is not just a set of beliefs, but also a set of institutional authorities, such as the legal system, religious institutions, and expert testimony. It is important to note, as Foucault (1980, p.6) has said, that the judicial system is a "state apparatus… [and] instrument of class power". The role of the court and of the clergy are vulnerable agents in establishing and retaining such a regime in the Salem trials. Their power allows them to accept some forms of knowledge as legitimate, e.g., spectral evidence or confession of witchcraft, and to rule others out or make them incomprehensible. Thus, truth is consolidated on the institutional level and not by empirical verification.

The other key Foucauldian concept explored in this study is the Foucauldian idea of confession, which is defined as a "technique of power." According to Michel Foucault (1978), the process of confession is discursive, which means that it organizes and encourages individuals to say things, to make statements about themselves, and to become "objects of knowledge" and "subjects of control." Confession does not just expose a true state of affairs; confession actually creates truth, and those who interpret, legitimate, and validate the confession have power over those who confess. Confessions, which are often coerced or obtained under duress and pressure, are used during witchcraft trials to prove that somebody is a witch, rather than to confirm the content itself. Such confessions are reiterated and internalized, further outlining the confessions and creating the impression of self-evident truth that hides the discursive and institutional mechanisms of their production. Michel Foucault's (1977) attention to the body as a site of power also sheds light on the practices which can be found in the Salem trials. In *Discipline and Punish*, he shows how power is expressed through regulating, observing, and recording bodies, and how it opens up the possibility of making the body visible and knowable. The afflicted body plays both as a medium for the expression of invisible energies and as a site for the self-representation of discourse in the context of witchcraft discourse. This is a general trend in the logic of punishment, that the body is not being punished but that it conveys something about the person. What Michel Foucault (1977) highlights is that punishment is no longer focused on the body but rather operates "through the body". The subjective experiences are taken as evidence by the physical symptoms (choking, paralysis, or vague pain) and these are accepted as evidence by society. Thus the body is no longer just a site of action that is carried out by power, but it is also a site of pro-

duction and legitimation of knowledge. As a whole, the concepts of Foucault offer an all-encompassing system for examining the interaction between discourse, institutional power, and embodied experience that together create truth in the Martha Carrier trial. This study does not consider the trial as a conflict between belief and reality, but as a discursive formation in which the practices of narration, validation, and repetition generate truth. These concepts of discourse, regimes of truth, confession, and the disciplined body as a technique of power emphasize not only how power works to discipline individuals, but also how it constructs the form of reality within which judgment and punishment become possible.

Constructing Witchcraft through Discourse

The trial of Martha Carrier in *The Wonders of the Invisible World* is one example of how witchcraft is not just supposedly real, but rhetorically framed as a legitimate and reliable reality. The text is neither empirical nor provides factors empirically shown to be true, but rather a matrix of testimonies, confessions, and the assertions of story, which, through repetition and thereby bolstering, constitute self-evident truths. According to Foucauldian (1972) thinking, discourse here does not just mirror reality, but makes it – "creates" the conditions for the possibility of certain statements. It is evident from the beginning that the charges are phrased as if witchcraft exists.

The afflicted people "made the court sensible of an horrid witchcraft committed upon them," charging that "it was Martha Carrier, or her shape, that grievously tormented them, by biting, pricking, pinching and choking of them" (Mather, 1693, p. 4). Especially noteworthy is the term "made the court sensible," which does not refer to establishing a fact but finding an experiential certainty. The sensory verbs used-"biting," "pricking," "pinching," and "choking"-make the attributes of subjective suffering more tangible, bringing them to make palpable physical contact with the reader, thus bridging the gap between subjective suffering and objective proof. Following Michel Foucault (1977), one could say that discourse creates credibility conditions for a statement; in this case, the body's affliction is a discursive device which gives validity to the truth statement. The construction of credibility is supported by reference to the spectral evidence: the repeated occurrence of the "shape" of Carrier is an active agent in this construction. It is reported that "the look of Carrier then laid the afflicted people for dead; and her touch… raised them again" (Mather, 1693, p.4). This sort of talk assumes a theology which gives permission to look beyond the physical into the spectre, but the story itself doesn't treat this ambiguity as a source of skepticism. Rather, it is made an element of the accusation's logic. When deception is only indirectly or tacitly admitted (by the notion that appearances and facts might not be the same), the testimony is still held as able to be true. Richard Godbeer (1992) points out that Puritan belief systems did fit in with such supernatural explanations; but important here is the manner in which this belief is mobilized in a legal discourse to generate certainty, not skepticism. In this way, the Court does not stand in a neutral position, but rather as a "state apparatus" which organizes and implements the territorialisation of discourses of truth (Foucault, 1980; Rahman, 2024).

Within this discourse, witches and their actions are further strengthened by an accumulation of testimonies recounted as narratives that constitute a pattern of premeditated harm. For instance, in the testimony of Benjamin Abbot, it is posited that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between Carrier's speech and his suffering. She threatened that he would "repent of it afore seven years came to an end"; he was then "taken with a swelling in his foot," was "greatly tormented," and was "brought unto death's door," but recovered since Carrier's arrest (Mather, 1693, p.4–5). The apparent causality, the 'narrative structure,' uses a retroactive meaning to render the events of the narrative a proof of cause and effect. Such processes help to constitute the subject of knowledge, and such individuals are judged not only for what they do, but also in terms of what they are, "not only for what they do, but also for what they are" (Foucault, 1977, p.18). Similarly, in the case of cattle deaths, several witnesses testified that a number of cattle which previously had been healthy died "without any known cause" (Mather, 1693, p.5–6) on the basis of her previous outbursts of anger. As Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (1974) argue, accusations may be related to social tensions, but from the Foucauldian point of view the main purpose of it is its discursive organising. When a thing is repeated in various witnesses, there is coherence; and the coherence is

the proof. These statements are not necessarily made to show a pre-existing unity, but rather, as Foucault (1972) terms it, a "population of dispersed events" being organized retrospectively to make them coherent.

In this process of truth-making, confession is still more effective. The text also details how Carrier's children "frankly and fully confessed not only that they were witches themselves, but that this their mother had made them so." They also provide details of "journeys, meetings and mischiefs" (Mather, 1693, p.4). An emotional, not empirical, qualifying language is used to make these confessions credible, and is characterized as tremendous repentance and great demonstration of truth. Michel Foucault (1978) suggests that confession is not just a disclosure of "hidden" facts but a technique of the production of truth in power-constitutive relationships. In this context, the confessions gain status not from evidence, but from being in line with the discourse of witchcraft and because they're supported by institutional powers. The expansion of judgment is in line with Foucault's (1977, p.19) remark that in modern systems judgment increasingly and progressively becomes an interiority of the subject: "the judges have gradually… taken to judging something other than crimes, namely the 'soul' of the criminal".

Further, the narrative demonstrates how contradictory content is accepted without undermining it. This is an example of a process that is much broader: the movement from the visible use of force to the internal and controlled use of knowledge, the movement from spectacle to systems of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1977). The book states that evidence from Carrier's children "was not produced against the prisoner at the bar… in as much as there was other evidence enough to proceed upon" (Mather, 1693, p.4), but this does not detract in any way from the case. Rather, it is used to create the impression that all the existing mass of evidence is enough to maintain the charge in spite of evidence to the contrary. Such dynamics are typical of a regime of truth, whereby truths are not necessarily "proved" by looking to empirical evidence, but by establishing accord or consistency with a set of rules, institutional courses of action, and forms of validation (Foucault, 1980). In such a context, contradiction may not undermine the discourse; instead, it can be either underplayed or omitted when the overall context of the discourse may lead to a certain conclusion.

More evidence continues to help develop this discursive network. For example, Phebe Chandler's account mentions that Carrier's voice told her that she was going to be poisoned, followed by the "bodily afflictions," and later had various ailments that Chandler "can give no account how it came" (Mather, 1693, p.6). In the same way, other people talk about the meeting of her "shape" or the "witch-meeting" and the "diabolical sacrament[s]" (Mather, 1693, p.6–7). The same is true with other witnesses – they describe meetings with Carrier's "shape" or being involved in "witch-meetings" and "diabolical sacrament[s]" (Mather, 1693, p.6–7). The statements are consistent as a whole, and supernatural causes are the only possible explanation for them. Such accusations are part of social and cultural fears in their wider context of society, as Carol F. Karlsen (1987) and Mary Beth Norton (2002) have demonstrated, but on their own cannot explain the fact that they are considered truths. For that to happen, they are required to be transformed into a legal version of truth within the discursive matrix that organizes, authenticates, and makes credible the results of the investigation. It is also an expression of the centrality of discontinuity in historical analysis noted by Foucault (1972), in which different systems of knowledge are governed by rules other than an "historical continuum of truth".

In sum, the trial evidences the way that witchcraft is constituted, which emanates from a complex matrix of discursive activities that shape subjective experiences, conflict, and forced confessions into authoritative information. These confessions create a regime of truth through repetition, validation, and institutional endorsement, where guilt is self-evident, making conviction inevitable. In this way, the Martha Carrier trial is illustrative of the Foucauldian understanding of the production of discourse, which does not simply reflect reality, but also creates it, and thus knowledge and judgment.

Testimony and Confession as Production of Truth

In the case of Martha Carrier, the truth is not verified but established through a process of testimony and confession. What makes this process unique is not

only the use of multiple voices, but also the fact that their consensus is accepted as a given and is not subject to critical analysis. Mather (1693, p.2) very clearly writes this reasoning, as he demands that "all the rules of understanding human affairs are at an end, if… we must not believe the main strokes wherein those confessions all agree". This idea is about a decisive epistemological change in which the criterion of truth is not empirical verification, but rather the factors which determine what can be considered valid knowledge in the discursive field. Agreement between statements, whatever their source or circumstances of production, is enough to ensure their truth-value. In this sense, the trial does not just interpret evidence but organizes it, making statements units of knowledge (Foucault, 1972), which are given authority by their place in an organized field that "defines unities" and "describes relations" (Foucault, 1972), rather than by empirical verification. Later, in the Foucauldian (1980) context, it can be viewed as a regime of truth, where knowledge is accepted as true when it fits the institutionalized procedures, authorized forms of validation, and discourse rules.

The narratives are set up in a way that supports this coherence. Witnesses give repeated accounts of earlier events, demonstrating how contact with Carrier brings bad fortune to people in retrospect. For example, Samuel Preston reports that Carrier had a bone of contention with him and predicted that he would soon be brought low, and "accordingly" another cow "without any known cause quickly fell down and died" (Mather, 1693, p.6). The evidentiary logic of the narrative here is not overt but retrospective: it attempts to assert cause after the event, and repeated actions like this across the testimonies suggest a systematic intent. It is not so much a matter of whether these events are independently verifiable, but that they follow a discursive regularity in the accusation and the process of witchcraft. This production of truth is augmented by the production of detailed narratives that extend and stabilize the discourse through the process of confession. Other confessions-those of Foster and Lacy, for example-place Carrier in a larger context of witchcraft, claiming she was at "witch-meetings" and enticed "them into the snare of the devil" (Mather, 1693, p.6–7). These accounts do not just confirm the previous accusations, but extend the domain of knowledge, adding elements such as rituals, gatherings, and hierarchical roles, thereby making the discourse deeper and more complicated. Most importantly, these confessions are accepted as true in spite of their outlandishness. Nevertheless, the possibility that "the devil should not get in some of his juggles, to confound the discovery" (Mather, 1693, p.3) does not destroy confidence in witchcraft, but instead contributes to the whole as merely a small irregularity. This is in line with what Foucault (1972) calls the structuring mechanism of discursive formations, by which they do not resolve contradictions but rather constitute a space of statements in which rules are introduced to govern the way statements are validly located in relation to one another, so that coherence can emerge out of what ought to be a dispersion of statements. Moreover, confession itself is performative, and it plays a significant role in the credibility of the statements it makes. Confessors show remorse and good behavior, telling authorities what they want to hear. They do not just narrate events, but play a part in establishing a truth of which they themselves are a part, and which in turn implicates them and others. Confession, as Michel Foucault (1978) has insisted, is a technique that gives the individual an opportunity to confess truths within a regime of power and knowledge. In the trial, this is manifested in the way one confession prompts others to confess as well, creating a spiral of accusation.

So, the trial of Martha Carrier shows that truth is formed through repetition, agreement, and institutional approval. Testimony and confession are not "neutral" sources of information, but rather ways of organizing and producing knowledge through power. The closer these statements become to one another, the more they become unquestionable reality; suspicion becomes certainty.

The Body as Evidence of Invisible Crime

In the Martha Carrier trial, the body is one of the main sources that work to make witchcraft believable and legally convincing. The bodily symptoms, like the pain, the paralysis, the choking, and others, are not described as possibilities or mysteries. These symptoms are presented as evidence of an invisible crime. In this case, the empirical facts are not that significant, but rather the capacity to fit the symptoms of the body into a pre-existing model of supernatural causes. In the description of Martha Carrier's trial, there are a number of references to

suffering that is said to occur "without any known cause" (Mather, 1693, p.5–6), and this works as another form of evidence for witchcraft. This phrase, "without any known cause," does not diminish the accusation; it reinforces it, because the unexplained is immediately taken to be caused by the supernatural. This interpretive logic is then carried over into speech-to-body logic. Carrier's threats are then outlined as causal agents, and the afflictions are seen as material evidence of these threats. In this way, language becomes an enactment, and the body the obvious "surface" where intention is "read" afterwards. It is then through the reconstruction of events, rather than observation, that causality is produced in the narrative (Faysal and Rahman, 2021).

The use of spectral evidence also amplifies this process by resolving the issue of physical absence. The notion that suffering is caused by Carrier's "shape" allows invisible agency to be felt as a body, and for sensory disruption to be recognized as an encounter with an absent Carrier. Examples like the paralysis of the aforementioned Allin Toothaker and his sense of the "shape of Martha Carrier" leaving his body (Mather, 1693, p.5) show how an individual's inability to move is distinctively redefined in terms of confirming accusations. In the Foucauldian notion, this process is a regime of power/knowledge in the sense that the bodies are not literally inscribed by power, but can instead be viewed as becoming objects of interpretation within historically specific rules of truth formation. It is only possible to make sense of the afflicted body in the context of a framework that is able to interpret the symptom, make the body part of the evidence, and subject it to juridical rules. Finally, the body becomes evidential by being repeated in testimonies.

The repetitive pains, paralyses, and deaths without explanation create a coherence that serves as validation in and of itself. The trial thus represents a form of punishment that does not focus on the body as sign and display, but on the production of knowledge about the individual, and is part of an "economy of suspended rights" (Foucault, 1977). From this point of view, the body acts like discourse: each iteration makes the intelligibility of witchcraft as an explanatory system more credible, not in the sense of being empirically verified, but from a structured, regular point of view.

Authority and Institutional Power

Just as testimony and confession create the subject matter of truth, so institutional authority stabilizes and legitimizes it. The court, the magistrates, and religious discourse do not just pass judgment on evidence in the Martha Carrier trial; they are all devices that make certain statements "knowledge." The court functions very apparently in framing and receiving testimony. In multiple instances, Mather (1693, p.3) represents the court as a place of procedural control: he quotes procedures from the court papers, states that he "collected" the account from the court papers, and provides it so that the reader may "take the truth, just as it was". This assertion of the documents' fidelity places them within an institutional space that pre-authorizes their truth value. The court itself does not appear as a place of contestation, but as an authoritative structure that creates procedural credibility, making doubt difficult. This is further supported by magisterial authority. The investigation and treatment of the guilty take place under the guidance of people whose judgments are assumed to be reliable. For example, the afflicted were "relieved" as a result of the "binding of Carrier" (Mather, 1693, p.4), performed by official authority and interpreted as immediate evidence of healing. In this way, the intervention of magistrates turns interpretation into action and action into confirmation, creating a feedback mechanism in which authority confirms the phenomena it plays a role in constituting.

Religious authority exists next to the legal authority, and brings the proceedings into the theological sphere, making them "morally" and "cosmologically" necessary. In Mather's (1693, p.2) greater story, Mather's trials take place in the context of a threat from the supernatural: "an army of devils… broke in upon the place", thus rendering the community into a contested space belonging to God. The identification and punishment of witches is no longer a judicial process, but a religious one. Doubt is not only irrational, but also might be impious when it comes to both the legal and theological parts of the discussion. It is crucial to keep in mind that these institutions are powerful enough to establish the conditions of intelligibility in the discursive formation. The argument is not broken when Mather (1693, p.2-3) doubts whether deceptions are involved in confessions, but rather, they are part of the prevailing interpretation. In this way, institu-

tional power works by establishing boundaries for what can be considered to be true or false. This is in accordance with the Foucauldian (1980) notion of the functioning of power within institutions in the production and stabilization of knowledge. Truth is not autonomous; it is supported by the mechanism of laws and procedures that make a difference between true and false. The clergy and the court, in the Martha Carrier case, are just such devices that set the parameters for what can be said to be true. The authority does not merely sanction the truth, it is the actualization of the conditions of truth itself. Institutional power, in other words, does not simply constitute the "factualization" of a previous collection of testimonies and confessions, but sets the conditions under which accusations turn into "fact". Institutions express and validate these claims, circulate them, and in doing so, provide them with meaning, authority, force, in a field of governed truth.

From Discourse to Conviction

The trial of Martha Carrier is a clear example of a process of discourse that ends in conviction, and a process of language, witness and institutional validation that ends with the judicial verdict. It is not an empirical verification as a standard of truth, but rather it is a process of collecting and organizing statements that are consistent with a framework of accepted knowledge. At the first stage, the interpretive field in which events are interpreted is set by discourse. Witchcraft language is a synthesis of language related to the agency of the devil, the presence of the spirit and the causation of the supernatural, which determines what is said and known as meaningful. In this respect, additional evidence and confessions do not contest for significance, but can be included with the rest of the story, which is already coherent. In this context, the subsequent testimonies and confessions are not considered isolated and independent statements, but parts of an intelligible account. Next is institutional authority, which makes this truth official. If you have multiple accounts, the agreement between the accounts is more probable than any one of them. Repeated causes of affliction, threat or spectral encounter lead to coherence, and coherence is a process of confirmation with regard to the rules of discourse. Next comes institutional authority, which makes this truth official. The court recognizes these statements, organizes them and validates them, thereby establishing them as actionable, legitimate knowledge. Importantly, this is without any independent empirical evidence. Many are explicitly claimed to have "no natural cause" (Mather, 1693, p.5–6), and this does not detract from the case, but it does accentuate the need for a supernatural explanation. Lack of material evidence is not, therefore, a weakness but an "event situation" that is made meaningful in an ongoing discourse. The final stage, conviction, is the logical phase that arises from this process. The verdict is not questionable or debated, but seems to be a logical application of a truth already known. The consequences of the testimony, confession and institutional affirmation are a certainty that cannot be resisted. This is a good example of a productive use of power, in Foucauldian terms. Conviction is not discovery, but a regime of truth is established, where guilt is felt (Foucault, 1980). It is in this sense that Michel Foucault says that knowledge and power are co-constituted: that is, knowledge is the result of institutional action, and it is also that which makes it possible. In the course of the trial, discourse defines the truth, institutions define legitimacy, and the judiciary system defines enactment. It's obvious, then, that the shift from accusation to punishment is not based on evidence, in the modern empirical sense. Rather, it is shaped by a system of discourse that structures experience, affirms some types of learning, and denies others. This is a system that concludes with a conviction, and this conviction is not the result of objective proof, but is the result of power/knowledge.

Social Control and Fear

The discursive construction of witchcraft in the Martha Carrier trial is not limited to conviction, but as well in its attempt to govern the social body as a whole by orchestrating and operating fear. It is not a "crisis" story in just any way; it is a story that structures and magnifies the crisis makes it a condition of vulnerability, a generalized problem. Cotton Mather (1693, p.2) creates a picture that is more like an invasion of "an army of devils… broke in upon the place" in order to create a threat that is diffuse, mobile, and inherently uncontainable. Fear then ceases to be a reaction to particular things and transforms into a structuring situation of perception. In this context, skepticism is considered as 'moral deviance' and 'epistemic deviance'. When the testimony is called into question, or when confession

is called into question, it is a challenge to the order which defines truth. Taking after Michel Foucault's (1980) idea, the regimes of truth set up the conditions in which the issuing of statements can be recognized as valid. The fear is thus a mechanism that produces boundaries, limits interpretations, and solidifies the prevailing modes of knowledge. The circulation of confession reinforces this in several ways, one of which is the spread of the perceived threat. The references to widespread admissions "More than one and twenty have confessed" (Mather, 1693, p.2–3) and to "a dreadful knot of witches" (Mather, 1693, p.2-3) transformed the notion of witchcraft into a collective condition within the community. It is this kind of framing that undermines social trust and forces the speech and actions of individuals to conform to social norms and expectations in a state of moral coercion. In that way, confession does not so much tell us what, but is rather a practice in which a subject maps himself onto a field of intelligibility already available.

Meanwhile, the need for something to be invisible guarantees that fear never gets solved and continues to be productive. Harm is attributed to invisible forces, and these forces cannot be substantiated or disproved, and therefore ordinary events such as illness, misfortune, interpersonal conflict can be reinterpreted as evidence of witchcraft. This kind of openness of the interpretation produces a permanent state of vigilance; it permeates everyday life. The result is a system, where fear also serves as a productive force in a network of power/knowledge. The narrative can influence perceptions, define understandings, and create conformity with dominant expectations, which is the foundation for the maintenance of authority outside of legal mechanisms. Social control is therefore not only a matter of institutional intervention, but also of the institutionalization of the circulation of meanings that make it rational and necessary to comply.

2. Conclusion

It is through the exploration of The Martha Carrier trial that truth was actively produced instead of simply discovering through evidence. It has not inquired why the accusations were made but rather emphasized on the way they became acceptable within the social & institutional sphere of Salem. There is an interconnected system of language, testimony, confession, physical suffering and judicial authority through which the trials operated. All these functioned at a time to turn suspicion into conviction. It is demonstrated that witchcraft is not empirically verified. Accusations are repeated and validated by authoritative institution. The suffering body of the afflicted turns into a visible sign by which an invisible crime is explained. Legal and religious authorities shape the framework in which certain experiences are recognized as true. From Foucauldian perspective, the Martha Carrier trial is a part of a historical system where power and knowledge are deeply intertwined. Apart from the exercise of judicial authority, the trials create a social reality where discourse, fear and institutional power reinforce one another. Here conviction is not the result of objective proof; but the consequence of a discursive system which has made judgment look logical and unavoidable. This study has contribution to Salem scholarship moving beyond social, psychological, or theological explanations. Its emphasis is upon the epistemic processes using which authority legitimizes its newly constructed knowledge. In a broader sense, this study reflects how truth is shaped by institutions across different historical and cultural setting through which societies are governed and regulated. The historical events themselves as well as the continuing relationship between discourse, authority, and the production of truth constitute the lasting importance of Salem.

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4. Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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