

Chapter 3

HABITATIONS OF CRUELTY

A True but Brief Account of our Losses sustained since this Cruel and Mischievous War began, take as follows:

In Narraganset not one House left standing.

At Warwick, but one.

At Providence, not above three.

At Potuxit, none left.

Very few at Seaconicke.

At Swansey, two, at most.

Marlborough, wholly laid in Ashes, except two or three Houses.

Grantham and Nashaway, all ruined but one House or two.

Many Houses burnt at Springfield, Scituate, Lancaster, Brookfield and Northampton.

The greatest Part of Rehoboth and Taunton destroyed.

Great Spoil made at Hadley, Hatfield, and Chelmsford.

Deerfield wholly, and Westfield much ruined.

At Sudbury, many Houses burnt, and some at Hingham, Weymouth, and Braintree.

Besides particular Farms and Plantations, a great Number not to be reckoned up, wholly laid waste, or much damaged.

And, as to Persons, it is generally thought, that of the English there hath been lost, in all, Men Women and Children, above Eight Hundred, since the War began: Of whom many have been destroyed with exquisite Torments, and most inhumane Barbarities; the Heathen rarely giving Quarter to those that they take, but if they were Women, they first forced them to satisfy their filthy Lusts and then

murdered them; either cutting off the Head, ripping open the Belly, or skulping the Head of Skin and Hair, and hanging them up as Trophies; wearing Men's Fingers as Bracelets about their Necks, and Stripes of their Skins which they dresse for Belts. . . . Nor have our Cattle escaped the Cruelty of these worse than Brute and Savage Beasts: For what Cattle they took they seldom killed outright: or if they did, would eat but little of the Flesh, but rather cut their Bellies, and letting them go several Days, trailing their Guts after them, putting out their Eyes, or cutting off one Leg, etc.

—NATHANIEL SALTONSTALL,
July 22, 1676

Nathaniel Saltonstall's "True but Brief Account of our Losses" is a standard portrait of New England during King Philip's War, a landscape of ashes, of farms laid waste, of corpses without heads.¹ A place where three-legged cattle wander aimlessly, dragging their guts after them, and Indians strut through the woods wearing belts of human skin and necklaces of rotting fingers. It is difficult to imagine a scene that could do more to assault English notions of order.² Towns have been razed and blood spills everywhere. Nearly all that was English has been destroyed—English houses, English farms, English crops, English livestock, English bodies. The tamed wilderness has become wild once again. English husbandry and agriculture have been ruined, leaving only scars on a landscape they once marked with fences and barns and fields of hay. Thousands of colonists have suffered; hundreds have died. As one frantic colonist reported, "Many of our miserable inhabitants lye naked, wallowing in their blood, and crying, and whilst the Barbarous enraged Natives, from one part of the Country, to another are on Fire, flaming forth their fury, Spoiling Cattle and Corn and burning Houses, and torturing Men, Women, and Children; and burning them alive." "I am greatly afflicted," Thomas Whalley lamented, "to see the danger we are in and the Confusion and sad disorder that we are fallen in." And, as Saltonstall wrote, "Nothing could be expected but an utter Desolation."³

Many colonists, sheltering themselves in garrisoned houses, could do little but watch as their towns were destroyed. While the people of Rehoboth looked on in horror, the Indians "fell presently to firing of empty houses & burnt about 35 houses that had families belonging to them besides four other vacant houses that had no inhabitants & Barnes." "Thay burnt our milles, brake the stones, ye, our grinding stones," John Kingsley reported, "& what was hid in the erth they found, corne & fowles, kild catel & tooke the hind quarters & left the rest, yea, all that day . . . they burnt cartes wheelles, drive away our catel, shipe, horses." "In a word," Kingsley summarized, "had not the Lord restrayned [them] thay had not left won to have tould of our

woful day." Having pitched camp at the edge of town, the Indians "rose up at day light the next morning," walked over to Providence, "& there did likewise." "The buryall of the slaine," the town minister wrote, "tooke us 3 days."⁴

Such terrifying ravages strained even the most eloquent colonists' powers of description. Philip Walker called the war a "dredffull bludy shouer," and Edward Wharton said the Indians had made of the English settlements "a burdensome and menstruous cloth" that, having fouled, they might now cast out of the land.⁵ Benjamin Tompson believed depicting this cruelest of wars required more than bloody metaphors, more, even, than the formidable skills of a poet. Since words alone could not suffice, Tompson wished a painter might "overtrack" his "pen." Of the Indians, Tompson urged, "Linn them besmeared with Christian blood & oiled / With fat out of white human bodies boiled. / Draw them with clubs like mauls & full of stains, / Like Vulcans anvilling New England's brains." Of the damage, "Paint here the house & there the barn on fire, / With holocausts ascending in a spire." Of loss, "Draw there the pastor for his bible crying, / The soldier for his sword, the glutton frying." And of torment, "Let here the mother seem a statue turned / At the sad object of her bowels burned."⁶ Tompson, with the help of his "painter," presented a strikingly gruesome panorama, but Mary Rowlandson, unaided, provided perhaps the most arresting image of all. "Thus were we butchered by those merciless heathen, standing amazed, with the blood running down to our heels."⁷

Not only the colonists but their land, too, was bleeding, as Edward Wharton put it, like "a burdensome and menstruous cloth." What happened to English people, in the colonists' eyes, happened equally to English property, and the separation of the one from the other was counted among the greatest devastations of the war. Draw confusion everywhere, Benjamin Tompson instructed his artist, and paint the goddess of disorder ruling over all New England.

Let Araxy be mounted on a throne
Imposing her commands on everyone . . .
One she bids flee, another stay, a third
She bids betake him to his rusty sword,
This to his treasure, th'other to his knees,
Some counsels she to fry and some to freeze,
These to the garrison, those to the road,
Some to run empty, some to take their load:
Thus while confusion most men's hearts divide
Fire doth their small exchequer soon decide.⁸

If, as Elaine Scarry has argued, there are three arenas of damage in war—bodies, possessions, and political identities—then New England's colonists conflated the three time and again.⁹ Colonial writers understood the destruction of houses as a blow not only to their property but also to the very Englishness of the landscape. Meanwhile, nearly any attack could be understood metaphorically as an assault on the human body. "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system," the anthropologist Mary Douglas has written. "Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious."¹⁰ And the cultural proclivity to exploit the body as a symbolic system reaches its fullest expression during times of war when, by definition, boundaries are being breached. In the seventeenth-century world, war itself was even understood, by some, as "chirurgury" undertaken on the body politic to heal a "wound," or breach of the body's boundary of skin. But surgery, like war, was itself invasive. "Warre is alwayes a Physick too strong," Anthony Ashcam wrote in 1648, "which entring the body with a force greater then the infirmity, must needs increase the distemper, and like thunder purging the bad qualities, corrupt the good."¹¹

Nearly all of the damage to the English during King Philip's War—the burning of houses, the spilling of blood, the English becoming Indianized—was understood as attacks on bounded systems. While disorder threatened to rule New England, military strategists sought means to draw a line to keep Indians—and chaos—out. In Massachusetts, alarmed colonists even debated building an eight-foot-high wall of stone or wood all the way from the Charles River to the bay, "by which means that whole tract will [be] environed, for the security & safty (under God) of the people, their houses, goods & cattel; from the rage & fury of the enemy."¹² But the concern with barriers was not limited to physical, geographical boundaries. It extended also to violations of English bodies, and, perhaps most terrifyingly of all, to Algonquian encroachments on English culture. Everywhere, there were barbarians at the gate.

I

ON SEPTEMBER 9, 1675, George Ingersol heard three guns go off in the distance, and noticed "great smoke up in the River above Mr. Mackworth's." He sounded an alarm but could not assemble enough men to investigate safely. The next day, with reinforcements, Ingersol followed the smoke to what had been Thomas Wakely's home. "When I came to the place, i found an house burnt downe, and six persons killed, and three of the same family could not be found. An old Man and Woman were halfe in, and halfe out of

the house neer halfe burnt. Their owne Son was shot through the body, and also his head dashed in pieces. This young mans Wife was dead, her head skined." The young woman, Ingersol reported, "was bigg with Child," and two of her children, "haveing their heads dashed in pieces," were found "laid by one another with their bellys to the ground, and an Oake planke laid upon their backs." The three missing family members, Ingersol later discovered, had been taken captive.¹³

Here is a family murdered: a pregnant woman scalped, her children mauled, their grandparents burned alive. Everyone died badly. Only the young man was shot, but even his corpse is in disarray, "his head dashed in pieces." All of the bodies have been mutilated, their physical integrity spoiled by the seepage of blood and brains. A tableau worthy of Benjamin Tompson's painting. Here, too, is a house destroyed, its beams and floorboards charred and crumbling. The house, built to shelter this family, has become, in a sense, its coffin. The two small children have been pressed underneath "an Oake planke laid upon their backs" while their grandparents are "halfe in, and halfe out of the house," their bodies "neer halfe burnt."

This house, whose ashes cover the old couple and whose torn planks entomb the children, is a crucial element in George Ingersol's account. More than the state of the corpses, the house, in a sense, explains the scene. Ingersol would have been confused to come upon these six bodies in the middle of the woods, but the house supplies the context for him to understand that this is an English family, killed by marauding Indians while seeking protection within their house. Ingersol is careful to note which bodies are inside the house and which are outside, since these details help him reconstruct the events that took place there. One imagines, for instance, that when the Indians first arrived the young man stepped outside to fend them off, only to be shot dead. Next, the Indians set the house on fire, forcing the pregnant woman and her children to run out to escape the smoke and flames. There they were quickly killed or taken captive. Meanwhile, the old man and his wife stayed inside almost until the very end, when finally, burning, they crawled halfway through the doorway and died.

If the house explains this scene, it also gives it its particular pathos—its utter failure to protect the family. Thomas Wakely, the old man, might have saved himself and his family if he had been willing to leave his house much earlier. He had been criticized for settling too far from his neighbors, too far away to get their help, and, when the war began, they must have urged him to seek protection in a nearby garrison. Surely Wakely himself must have considered leaving in early September when Thomas Purchase's house was plundered just a few miles away. But Wakely refused to abandon his homestead,

perhaps thinking he and his son could defend it. He may have clung to this belief even as the Indians approached, when it was already too late for escape. Even at the very end, Wakely was too attached to his property to abandon it.¹⁴ Still, this kind of attachment was not at all uncommon.

Thomas Wakely's "neer halfe burnt" corpse and his "burnt downe" house have a complicated relationship. The notion of property, of things that could be owned, was central to seventeenth-century Anglo-American culture. Property was, in a sense, foundational to culture, since English political economy rested on the private ownership of land, and the political economy, in turn, largely structured social relations. With the development of capitalist markets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, private property had become increasingly important, and revolts against this change, like the Digger protests of the 1640s and 1650s, were met with violent censure. Gradually property became the defining character of social relations, the defining character, even, of an individual's identity.¹⁵ By 1689 John Locke would be able to elaborate a theory of government based on the idea that "every man has a property in his own person."¹⁶ If, at the level of political theory, identity would soon be defined as ownership of one's self, property had already become identity at the level of popular belief—what one owned defined who one was. As England moved away from a feudal land system and kinship-based social relations, this idea provided the basis of class relations in the emerging capitalist economy. In New England it would eventually play the same role, but in the decades of settlement leading up to King Philip's War, the idea of property as identity had much more to do with distinguishing an Indian from an Englishman than a merchant from a servant.

When the English first arrived in New England, they found the land to be "spacious and void," a place where the Indians "do but run over the grass, as do also the foxes and wild beasts" and the colonists had not "any houses or much less towns to repair to." "The country is yet raw," Robert Cushman wrote in 1621, "the land untilled; the cities not builded; the cattle not settled." Francis Higginson argued that "The Indians are not able to make use of the one fourth part of the land; neither have they any settled places, as towns, to dwell in; nor any ground as they challenge for their own possession, but change their habitation from place to place." Or, as John Josselyn observed, "Towns they have none, being always removing from one place to another for convenience of food." The Algonquians' perceived nomadism, and their failure to "improve" the land, formed the basis for English land claims. New England, John Winthrop argued, was a *vacuum domicilium*, since only land that is fenced in, tilled, and built upon can be owned. Indians could not own the land, "for they inclose no ground, neither have they cattell to maintayne

it, but remove their dwellings as they have occasion."¹⁷ The English, then, could claim the land simply by improving it. (The concept of improvement even makes an appearance in Thomas More's sixteenth-century Utopia: "They consider it a most just cause for war when a people which does not use its soil but keeps it idle and waste nevertheless forbids the use and possession of it to others who by the rule of nature ought to be maintained by it."¹⁸)

Establishing "plantations" in New England, colonists chopped down trees, built houses, erected fences, and planted crops. When they first settled, English colonists built hurriedly, and usually lived in sparsely furnished wattle-and-daub huts, so similar to the woven-mat buildings Algonquians constructed that they were called "English wigwams." By the middle of the seventeenth century the colonists rejoiced that such temporary—and to them inferior—dwellings had been largely replaced with more permanent, and more thoroughly English, architecture: "The Lord hath been pleased to turn all the wigwams, huts, and hovels the English dwelt in at their first coming into orderly, fair, and well-built houses, well furnished many of them."¹⁹ By the 1670s, at the start of King Philip's War, the English could boast that "by their great industry," they had "of a howling Wilderness improved those Lands into Cornfields, Orchards, enclosed Pastures, and Towns inhabited."²⁰

But during the war it seemed to many colonists that all that had made them English and all that had made the land their own—their clothes, houses, barns, churches, cattle, and crops—were being threatened. For most colonists, the loss of habitations became the central crisis of the war. Horrified by the devastation around him, Increase Mather asked himself, "How are we spoiled?" and could only answer, "We are greatly confounded because our dwelling places have cast us out." "Certainly," Nathaniel Saltonstall insisted, "it cannot but deserve both Wonder and Commiseration, that these Parts which were not many Moneths since hardly to be Parralleld for Plenty and Security, are now almost destroyed and laid Waste by the savage Cruelties of a Bloody (and sometimes Despicable) Enemy." Saltonstall no doubt believed that the best way to convey the extent of the devastation of the war, given such astounding losses, was with numbers, and he was not the only colonist to take this approach. "We Judg according to our best Computation," Samuel Symonds reported to the king's secretary in April 1676, "that Since the beginning of this Warre there hath been Slaine of his Majesties Subjects above five hundred," although "the houses burnt [are] not easy to be Numbered."²¹ Whenever they could, English accountings of the war's casualties, like Saltonstall's "True but Brief Account of our Losses," tallied houses first, then people. (By contrast, Saltonstall's reckoning of Indian losses tallied people first—six thousand killed, enslaved, or subdued—and only briefly mentioned

the loss of "vast Quantities of their Corn, Houses, ammunition, and other Necessaries.") And so the colonists recorded, for instance, that "at New Dartmouth . . . they burnt all their houses but one, viz. 29, and slew several persons. In Middlebrough the Indians burnt 21 houses. In Taunton they burnt ten houses and killed ten persons." Or, "the Indians burnt 17 houses & killed one man at Deerfield." Or again, "they Burnt near thirty Houses in Dartmouth . . . killing many People after a most Barbarous manner." Some reckonings also included cattle and crops: "They Burnt Twenty three Houses at Swansey, and killed many people there, and took much Cattle, as also Burnt the hay and Corn in great Quantities." Some figured in whether the Indians had "pulled down Fences."²²

And not just towns but families, too, counted people, possessions, and property when measuring their losses. A grieving William Harris reported, "I have lost a deer son, a diligent ingenious just man temperate in all things, whome the Indians lay in waite for by the way & kild him, and A negro man." (It is difficult to know if Harris counted his African slave as a person or a possession.) Not only that, Harris continued, but they "burnt our houses, & drove away aboute fifty head of Cowkind Cattell, and fourseore horse kinde of ours, & carryed away some goods, & burnt more than fifty load of hay."²³ Seeing a town and its houses destroyed was extraordinarily painful. On finding Springfield burned, John Pynchon wrote to John Russell, "We came to a lamentable and woeful sight. The town in flames, not a house nor barn standing, except old Goodman Branch's, till we came to my house and then Mr. Glover's, John Hitchcock's, and Goodman Stewart's burnt, some with barns, corn, and all they had. . . . They tell me 32 houses and the barns belonging to them are burnt, and all the livelihood of the owners, and what more may meet with the same stroke the Lord only knows." The next day Russell reported to the Massachusetts Council that Springfield's "habitations are now become an heape."²⁴

Colonists who were spared this fate gave abundant thanks. "Wee are yet in our habitations thro' Gods marsi," John Sharpe wrote to Thomas Meekins in April 1676, "but we are in expectation of the enimi everi day if God be not the more marsiful unto us."²⁵ Meanwhile, soldiers could be punished for abandoning the protection of houses too soon, and many colonists believed that it is not "for the safe gard of a people to forsake their places, but rather to keepe their stations, and listen to Gods calling of them forth to stand together as one man."²⁶ When families fled from their homes, whole towns were likely to be destroyed. In Springfield, "the Indians being too numerous," the town's inhabitants "were forced to Leave their houses & goods to the enemy (or rather) the rage & cruelties of the enemie: soo that towne is almost wholly lost."²⁷

There were plenty of good reasons for the English to count their cattle,

crops, and houses among their losses. Without these, they could not survive, especially during the harsh New England winters. Dismay at losing one's home is certainly a genuine expression of a very real, very devastating, and very practical loss. But there was more to the colonists' concern than simple practicality: English possessions were, in a sense, what was at stake in the war, for these—the clothes they wore, the houses they lived in, and the things they owned—were a good part of what differentiated the English from the Indians. These were not simply material differences, they were cultural, for every English frock coat was stitched with threads of civility, each thatched roof rested on a foundation of property rights, and every cupboard housed a universe of ideas.

II

WHEN JOHN PYNCHON returned to Springfield to find the town nearly burned to the ground, his property stripped of its buildings, he felt that he had himself been stripped naked: "Oh, that I may sensibly say with holy Job: naked came I and naked shall I return and blessed be the name of the Lord."²⁸ The connection between English property and English identity was so strong that many colonists employed a common metaphor for the loss of both, the metaphor of nakedness. All over New England, English bodies were said to have been left to "lye naked, wallowing in their blood," and English land, too, was left "naked," stripped of its buildings (as when, for instance, the Connecticut Court ordered towns to build garrison houses to cover "the nakedness of each and every place").²⁹ In images like Nathaniel Saltonstall's "True but Brief Account of our Losses," wartime New England had been stripped of its churches, houses, fences, and barns, while its people had been stripped of their clothes, their skin, even their heads and fingers (these were now "worn" by Indians).³⁰ As the colonists perceived it, their world had been made bare. Left naked, English bodies and English land were no longer recognizable—naked men, after all, were barbarians, and naked land a wilderness. It was, in fact, the "nakedness" of America and of its native peoples—signaling the land's vacancy and the Indians' savagery—that had made English colonization possible in the first place.³¹ To the English who settled there, America had been naked land and, their descendants feared in 1675, it would soon be naked again. In establishing plantations in the wilderness, the English settlers had sought to mark the land as their own, to clothe the ground as they clothed their bodies, but King Philip's War undid their work, denuding both the landscape and its colonists.

Before the war, "naked Englishman" would have been almost oxymoronic. While the colonists clothed themselves in skirts, bodices, doublets, cloaks,

breeches, caps, and boots, they perceived Indians as "wholly naked."³² This distinction caused Roger Williams to wonder

what should be the reason of this mighty difference of One mans children that all the Sonnes of men on this side the way (in Europe, Asia and Africa) should have such plenteous clothing for Body, for Soule! and the rest of Adams sonnes and Daughters on the other side, or America . . . should neither have nor desire clothing for their naked soules, or Bodies.

Like Williams, English colonists perceived bodily nakedness as signaling both cultural and spiritual depravity, marking the Indians as doubly lacking. Thus the move "from Barbarism to Civilitie" could only be accomplished by the Indians' "forsaking their filthy nakedness."³³

Algonquians, for their part, were keenly aware that the English dressed differently: the Narragansett word for European (English, Dutch, French, or Scotch) is "*Wautaconaug*," or, literally, "Coatmen," deriving from "*Wautacome*," meaning "one that wears clothes."³⁴ The distinction seems to have had a metaphoric appeal for both cultures, even if it was not true that Indians were "wholly naked." Before Europeans arrived, Algonquians in New England commonly wore breechcloths and, especially in winter, leggings and cloaks of skins and furs. By the time of King Philip's War many had begun to wrap themselves in dyed wool blankets and other European fabrics and even to wear English clothes. Christian Indians, especially, commonly forsook their "nakedness," replacing traditional apparel with English dress.³⁵ And during the war, Algonquians stripped dead colonists of their clothes to wear them themselves, or to trade them for food and weapons.³⁶ (When Mary Rowlandson was a captive, Philip himself asked her to make a shirt and cap for his son, and before the war, Philip visited Boston wearing a coat, buckskins, beads, and a belt.³⁷)

In other words, the meaning of nakedness as a marker distinguishing civilized men from barbarians or Englishmen from Indians was not entirely stable. Nonetheless, as John Sassamon's story demonstrates, both peoples considered fully clothed Indians confusing and dangerous. Mary Rowlandson reeled with horror after she mistook a group of clothed Indians for Englishmen:

My heart skipped within me, thinking they had been English men at the first sight of them, for they were dressed in English apparel, with hats, white neckcloths, and sashes about their waists, and ribbons upon their shoulders: but when they came near, there was a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians, and the foul looks of these heathens.³⁸

Meanwhile, the idea of a naked Englishman, even one who was only spiritually naked, was always extremely disturbing. As Roger Williams wrote, "the best clad English-man, Not cloth'd with Christ, more naked is: Then naked Indian."³⁹

In the years before King Philip's War began, the illusion that these meanings were stable had become increasingly important. (In the sixteenth century, the English in Ireland had been so plagued by this anxiety that they passed a law designed to draw a sartorial line between the civilized English and the savage Irish, decreeing that "every Irishman shall be forbidden to wear English apparel . . . upon pain of death."⁴⁰) If the principal cultural anxiety behind King Philip's War was confusion of identity (would Englishmen degenerate into Indians?), then the colonists must have taken heart that one thing, at least, seemed more clear than others. One boundary, at least, was rarely breached: even if some Indians sometimes wore clothes, Englishmen and -women were never publicly naked. But during the war, of course, all that changed. While still alive, an English colonist attacked or captured by Indians was very likely to be "stript by them of all but his Skin." If tortured, he or she might not even be left with that, since a common torment involved the slow tearing off of skin and flesh. Many colonists died while Algonquians were "skinning them all over alive, some only their Heads, cutting off their Hands and Feet." And if live Englishmen were likely to be stripped, skinned, or scalped, dead Englishmen fared no better. "Many of the English, when the Natives have killed them, they strip them naked, and leave their bodies to rot upon the ground." After burning Middleborough and Dartmouth, the Indians "barbarously murdered both men and women in those places, stripping the slain, whether Men or Women, and leaving them in the open Field, as naked as in the day wherein they were born." Naked and damaged bodies were often left to rot in highly visible places. After being slain by Indians attacking Groton, one Englishman was "strip'd naked, his Body mangled, and dragged into the High-way, and laid on his Back in a most shameful Manner." A dead man might even be stripped of his burial cloth. After destroying Groton, the Indians returned later to finish their business. "They strip'd the Body of him whom they had slain in the first Onset, and then cutting off his Head, fixed it upon a Pole looking towards his own Land. The Corpse of the Man slain the Week before, they dug up out of his Grave, they cut off his Head and one Leg, and set them upon Poles, and strip'd off his Winding-sheet." Stripping dead Englishmen was so common that Algonquians used English clothing as symbols of their victories. After killing several Englishmen near Deerfield, Indians retreated to the other side of the river, where they displayed "the Garments of the English in Sight of the Soldiers."⁴¹

Naked English bodies had been stripped of the clothes of civility,

stripped, sometimes, of their English skin, just as the land had been stripped of its "improvements." The affinity between English land and English bodies was long-standing. When William Wood surveyed New England in 1634 he claimed that "that part of the country wherein most of the English have their habitations . . . is for certain the best ground and sweetest climate . . . , agreeing well with the temper of our English bodies."⁴² The colonists' sense of the predestination of their settling in New England, their natural affinity with the land, and their cultural proclivity to conflate property with identity, all combined to produce this oneness of bodies and land. And this, in turn, became a vehicle that allowed them to express their concerns with both cultural and territorial boundaries between English and Indians. In the context of King Philip's War, concerns about the boundaries of the body became overlaid onto concerns not only about the boundaries of English property but also about the cultural boundaries separating English from Indian. Bodies were defined in relationship to houses, but houses, too, were metaphorical bodies. The physical integrity of houses could be compromised just as the physical integrity of bodies could. In English anatomical thought, skin, "an unseamed Garment covering the whole Body," was likened not only to clothing but also to buildings: "The Skin it self is the Wall of the Castle."⁴³ Open doors, then, could be like wounds on the body, the people spilling out like blood.

"These are perillous times which we now live in," Increase Mather preached during the war, "when men . . . can scarce look out of doors, but they are in danger of being seized upon by ravening Wolves, who lye in wait to shed blood, when men go not forth into the field, not walk by the way side, but the Sword of the Enemy, and fear is on every side."⁴⁴ The war, it seemed, redefined the physical landscape. No longer did fences mark the boundaries of safety, no longer town limits, but the walls of houses and the skin of bodies. Doors, then, became especially dangerous, deeply symbolic places separating safety from peril, life from death, order from chaos. Employing a common metaphor, the Connecticut Council warned, "an high handed enemy is at our doore." Or, as those in Massachusetts maintained, "God had been provoked 'to stir up many adversaries against us, not only abroad, but also at our own doors (causing the heathen in this Wilderness to be as thorns in our sides, who have formerly been, & might still be a wall unto us therein)." Even Benjamin Tompson made use of the evocative power of doorways, pitying the "Poor people spying an unwonted light," who "Leap to the door to fly, but all in vain, / They are surrounded with a pagan train."⁴⁵

To emphasize the symbolic significance of doors and walls in the writing about the war is not to dismiss the very real protection that houses, especially those that were garrisoned, afforded during Indian attacks. When Brookfield

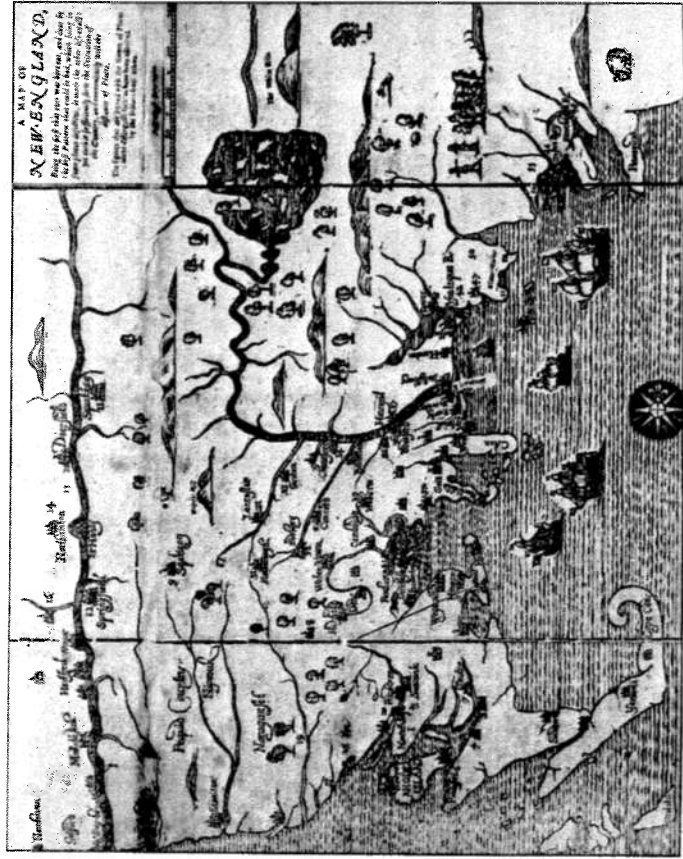
was besieged and some eighty townspeople fortified themselves in a single garrison house, only those who "occasionally stepped out" lost their lives. Thomas Wilson was shot when he went to get water, and Sargent Prichards' son had his head chopped off while running to fetch goods from his father's house. Henry Young never actually left the garrison but merely took a peek "out at a garret window"; for his curiosity, he was shot and mortally wounded. And when Providence was attacked, "all that were in Forts, Men, Women and Children, were Saved," but two colonists died that day nonetheless: Elizabeth Sucklin, who "was preparing to goe from Her own Hous to A Fort, but delaying they Killed Her," and Goodman Wright, who "could not be perswaded to come into any garrison" but remained in his own, unfortified home. (As Roger Williams remarked, "H. Wright would trust God in his own Hous. There they Killed Him with his own hammer.")⁴⁶ Indeed, it was because of these very real hazards that leaving the protection of a house or a garrison, walking out the door, or even sticking a head out a window took on new meaning during the war—it was the most dangerous thing a body could do.⁴⁷ Thomas Wakely's attachment to his property was, in fact, not unusual, and meeting death on the doorstep, as he did, was not an uncommon fate.

If building a house on a piece of land makes that land your own, and if the land you own defines who you are, then losing that house becomes a very troubling prospect indeed. With this in mind, Thomas Wakely's willingness to die with his house becomes easier to understand. Separated from his property, Thomas Wakely would no longer be Thomas Wakely, farmer, no longer Thomas Wakely, Englishman.⁴⁸ "Many people in these partes are like soules distracted, running hither and thither for shelter," Samuel Gorton observed with dismay, "whole families together not leaving there houses only, but goods and livelyhood also." By becoming as nomadic as Indians, they had lost not only their property but their identity as well, "blown / From place to place without an home to own."⁴⁹

III

WHEN JOHN FOSTER engraved a map of New England to accompany William Hubbard's *Narrative*, he marked English territory with tiny houses and church steeples, and Indian territory with trees.⁵⁰ And when Benjamin Tompson recruited the assistance of a painter to help him portray New England's devastation, he instructed him to paint the Indians green:

If painter overtrack my pen let him
An olive color mix, these elves to trim;



John Foster's map of New England, 1677. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society

Of such an hue let many thousand thieves
Be drawn like scarecrows clad with oaken leaves,
Exhausted of their verdant life and blown
From place to place without an home to own.

When Tompson turned his attention to the backdrop of his portrait of New England's Indians, he instructed the painter:

Let round be gloomy forests with cragged rocks
Where like to castles they may hide their flocks . . .

Far, far away from the homes and barns and fences and churches of colonial towns, Tompson's Indians are both naked and homeless. They are clad only "with oaken leaves," a symbol of their organic connection to the woods in which they live. In part, Tompson was speaking literally; Algonquians commonly camouflaged themselves with ferns, leaves, and branches.⁵¹ (Mary Pray feared that summer, "when the leaves are green," was the Indians' best time for

fighting.⁵²) But Tompson was also speaking metaphorically when he, like many colonists, portrayed the Indians as if they had no clothes and no homes and suggested, even, that the Indians had no bodies—they blended so well with the woods as to be almost invisible there, indistinguishable from the wilderness around them, more like plants than people or, if animate, more like animals.⁵³ In the first decades of settlement, the Indians' supposed oneness with the woods (and their corresponding lack of ownership of the land) had served the colonists well in claiming New England as a *vacuum domicilium*—during King Philip's War it made those same Indians frightful enemies. "Clad with oaken leaves," Indians could easily ambush English settlers or hide from English soldiers. As Tompson versified it, "The trees stood sentinels and bullets flew / From every bush (a shelter for their crew)." Or, again, "every stump shot like a musketeer, / And bows with arrows every tree did bear."⁵⁴

Swamps made the best cover of all. To the colonists' eyes, Indians were entirely invisible in swamps, disembodied, indistinguishable from the vegetation around them. Swamps were "so full of Bushes and Trees, that a Parcel of Indians may be within the Length of a Pike of a Man, and he cannot discover them."⁵⁵ "How many Indians we killed we cannot tell," wrote one Englishman, "for so thick were the bushes, that hardly one was to be seen."⁵⁶ In the chaos of swamps, the English might even mistakenly shoot one another: "Our Men when in that hideous place if they did but see a Bush stir would fire presently, whereby 'tis verily feared they did sometimes unhappily shoot English Men instead of Indians."⁵⁷ As a result, English soldiers were quite appropriately terrified of swamps. Daniel Henchman and his forces

were not willing to run into the Mire and Dirt after them in a dark Swamp, being taught by late Experience how dangerous it is to fight in such dismal Woods, when their Eyes were muffled with the Leaves, and their Arms pinned with the thick Boughs of the Trees, as their Feet were continually shackled with the Roots spreading every Way in those boggy Woods. It is ill fighting with a wild Beast in his own Den.⁵⁸

To the colonists, swamps were hideous and dangerous places, the most foreign and un-English land in all the New World. The word itself, "swamp," only entered the English language with the first reports from North America in 1624.⁵⁹ And each time the colonists wrote about swamps they saw the need to offer a definition. "A *Swamp*," Nathaniel Saltonstall informed his English readers, "signifies a Moorish Place, overgrown with Woods and bushes, but soft like a Quagmire or Irish Bogg, over which Horse cannot at all, nor English Foot (without great Difficulty) passe." Or, as William Harris put it, a

swamp is "a sorte of watery ground by brookes: or rivers: or pond sydes: very woody, & not pasable for horses, & very troublesome for men to pas." Usually swamps were defined as watery or waterlogged (as we think of them today), but the colonists occasionally used the term to describe simply a "thick wood" or a "Grove of trees and underwoods."⁶⁰ (So often did Indians hide themselves in swamps that the English came to use the word as a verb, as in the description they "in swamped them selves in a great Spruse swamp," or in the order "Apprehend them before they swamp themselves."⁶¹)

Just as the fate of English bodies and English houses was inextricably linked, so Indians were fated to live or die in swamps. And if houses explain scenes of English devastation, swamps explain Indian scenes. The English called swamps the dens of wild beasts, "habitations of cruelty," and "habitations of darkness," but they were also, clearly—and especially in wartime—habitations of Indians.⁶² Algonquians had long used swamps as "Refuges for Women and children in Warr" and as warehouses for corn and other foods to be consumed during winter months; and, from the earliest months of King Philip's War, they also used swamps as hideouts, since the English were particularly inept at navigating through them.⁶³ As Increase Mather declared, "every Swamp is a Castle to them."⁶⁴

Much as men like John Josselyn had insisted, "Towns they have none," Algonquians were not nomads. They lived for most of the year in regular, settled communities, one in summer, one in winter. In summer, families gathered to live in villages near fertile agricultural lands; in winter, they moved closer to hunting grounds, returning to the same place for as many years as the lands could sustain them. Algonquian settlements were generally small, and consisted of a group of wigwams, sturdy buildings constructed of woven mats that could be easily disassembled and transported (and quite similar to the "English wigwams" the colonists had lived in when they first arrived). By the middle of the seventeenth century some wigwam construction included English hardware for doorframes and windows. In general, Algonquian wigwams were much more sparsely furnished than English houses, though many did contain items of English furniture: a chair, bed, table, or chest. What goods Indians owned, European or otherwise, needed to be portable, while the English cherished permanent property most of all. Colonists and Indians alike viewed this, and the temporary nature of wigwam construction, as a fundamental cultural difference. (Moreover, most Algonquians proved unwilling to adopt English ways. In Natick, John Eliot had made it a priority that Christian Indians cease to "live shifting up and downe to other Wigwams," but even when he provided supplies and house lots, Natick Indians rarely built English-style houses for themselves, preferring to live in more traditional homes.)⁶⁵

During a bad year, native communities might move more often, and during war, they might move a good deal. Refugees in swamps lessened the strains of war, allowing women, children, and old men to stay put in safe havens. Yet, whatever their similarities to or differences from English homes, colonists refused to consider Indian settlements in swamps real "towns," or their wigwams true "houses."⁶⁶ Entering Pocasset Swamp, James Cudworth wrote, "the place we found was a hideous dismal swamp; the house or shelter they had to lodge in, contained, in space, the quantity of four acres of ground, standing thick together," but his labeling of a wigwam a "house" was extremely unusual.⁶⁷ More typical was Benjamin Tompson's scorn:

Their myrmidons enclosed with clefts of trees
Are busy like the ants or nimble bees:
And first they limber poles fix in the ground,
In figure of the heavens convex: all round
They draw their arras-mats and skins of beasts
And under these the elves to make their nests.
Rome took more time to grow than twice six hours,
But half that time will serve for Indian bowers.⁶⁸

Here, Indian homes are animal "nests" or, at best, temporary "bowers." Mary Rowlandson came perhaps closer than any other chronicler of the war to considering Indian settlements in swamps analogous to English towns, but she, too, resisted the idea:

When I came to the brow of the hill, that looked towards the swamp, I thought we had come to a great Indian town (though there were none but our own company). The Indians were as thick as the trees: it seemed as if there had been a thousand hatchets going at once: if one looked before one, there was nothing but Indians, and behind one, nothing but Indians, and so on either hand.⁶⁹

Rowlandson at first thought she had come to a "great Indian town" but quickly corrected herself—this scene, too, was one of wild disorder, with Indians not living in settled communities but lurking "as thick as the trees."

Swamps, where "the Indians were as thick as the trees," were also the places where the English inflicted the most damage and practiced the greatest cruelties. Yet, in refusing to consider Algonquian settlements in swamps homes, the colonists absolved themselves of any possible violation of the laws of war in destroying them. English notions of just conduct dictated that sol-

diers were not to "plunder and burne houses, drive away the inhabitants, breake open the doores, and commit such like outrages," and it was just these violations that most alarmed colonists whose towns were thus destroyed.⁷⁰ But in swamps, English soldiers again and again mimicked Indian "outrages."⁷¹ When the English managed to find a hidden, "enswamped" Algonquian camp, they usually burned the Indians' wigwams, just as the Indians burned English houses. Samuel Moseley reported in August 1675, "we did find A parsell of wigwoms beond the Swaimp about 20 which we burnt &c."⁷² Often enough, the chief difference between English and Indian "cruelties" was simply the words they used to describe them: since Indian homes were "wigwams," not "houses," their settlements "camps," not "towns," fights in swamps were "courageous battles," not "massacres."

This particular manifestation of the moral vocabulary of warfare is best seen in the English attack on the Narragansetts' Great Swamp on December 19, 1675. On that day, a coalition of English soldiers from each of the United Colonies, aided by an Indian guide, entered the Great Swamp (near present-day South Kingstown, Rhode Island), where they found a palisaded fort sheltering hundreds of wigwams and, by some estimates, as many as three thousand or four thousand Narragansetts. Most were women and children hidden in the swamp for protection during the war, along with storehouses of winter supplies. English soldiers first set fire to the wigwams and then waited as the Narragansetts began fleeing over the palisade and through its doors and windows. Then the soldiers "ran on the very musles of thyr guns, up to the Indeans port holes: & fyred in at them, & leped over thyr brest workes, & run into theyr forte, & beat them out: & slew many of them." The fury of the English was so great that, rather than preserve the wigwams for their own shelter, or save the food, they burned everything and were forced to march back out of the swamp all through the night and the next several days, in driving snow, during which many English soldiers froze to death.⁷³

The English attack on the Great Swamp has all the elements of an Indian assault on an English town, or upon a house like Thomas Wakely's: setting fire to buildings to drive the people out; then, as they fled the smoke and flames, killing them on their doorstep, or "port holes"; and finally, destroying all who had remained inside. Surely this fight violated several English codes of just conduct during warfare, not least among them the rule that "To cut off a few nocent, wee are not to cut off multitudes of Innocents, such as are Weomen and Children (as in sieges, and other depopulations) of whom the one is to be spared for sex, the other for want of age."⁷⁴ Still, no English account of the "Great Swamp Fight" noted this inconsistency. Instead, most English accounts emphasized the justness of the attack and celebrated it as

one of the few "fair" contests of the war: "The English Souldiers played the men wonderfully; the Indians also fought stoutly, but were at last beaten out of their Fort." Upon entering the fort, "It did greatly rejoice our Men to see their Enemies, who had formerly sculked behind Shrubs and Trees, now to be engaged in a Fair Field." Joseph Dudley noted the "great courage" of the English soldiers who "valiantly scaled the fort." And Benjamin Tompson wrote:

Here English valor most illustrious shone,
Finding their numbers ten times ten to one.
A shower of leaden hail our captains feel
Which made the bravest blades among us reel.

Sundry the flames arrest and some the blade
By bullets heaps on heaps of Indians laid.
The flames like lightning in their narrow streets
Dart in the face of everyone it meets.
Here might be heard an hideous Indian cry,
Of wounded ones who in the wigwams fry.

Bravery and valor thus overwhelmed the "hideous Indian cry," but even Tompson paused to recognize the extent of the slaughter: "Had we been cannibals here might we feast."⁷⁵

IV

WHAT THE Reverend Noah Newman would have thought of the Great Swamp fight remains a mystery, but what he saw and heard in the town of Medfield horrified him. "The sight of this poore people was very astonishing," Newman recalled, and "the cry of terrified persons, very dreadful." More dreadful still were the yells of the enemy, "shouting so as the earth seemed to tremble." Newman probably shivered to remember that day, when more than three hundred Indians attacked the town, but since his friend John Cotton had asked him for "the Hystory of the medfield tragedy," Newman was determined to give "the best account I can." Still, Newman could not recall the day without pain. "Oh what an Indian calamity was this," he said with a bitter sigh.⁷⁶

A party of Nipmucks had infiltrated Medfield during the night of February 20, hiding in trees and barns, with the intention, Noah Newman surmised, "to take persons at their first Looking out at their doors in the morning." "Which," Newman admitted tersely, "accordingly they did." Thomas Wight's

son, apparently an early riser, was "one of the first that was killed in that manner." Then the Indians threw pellets at Timothy Dwight's house "to provoke him to Look out & when he did Look out shot him through the shoulder." Soon Joshua Fisher's grandson, "going out at the door was shot att, the bullet passing through some flesh about his chollar bone." And when Henry Adams "stept but over the threshold," he "was shot through the windpipe & fell downe dead." So it continued throughout the morning. In listing the casualties, Newman soon dispensed with his description of the wounds and wrote, simply, "Goodman Bowers & his son was killed. Thomas Mason & his son kild."⁷⁷ All those who looked out, or, worse still, stepped out, were bound to be met with a volley of bullets and arrows. All of these, like Thomas Wakely, died in their doorways. The boundaries separating English from Indian had been breached.

The people of Medfield did not expect this tragedy. As Reverend Newman remarked, "few when they lay downe" the night before had "thought of such a dolefull morning." The town, after all, was occupied by more than a hundred colony soldiers and as many local militiamen. The nearby town of Lancaster (where Mary Rowlandson lived) had been destroyed a week before Medfield was attacked, and John Wilson, fearful of his town's meeting a similar fate, had written to the Massachusetts Council begging for help. "Now the rode from Nipmuck is fair for these caniballs, be pleased for God's sake to remember us, and let some considerable sufficient force be sent to us for our speedy reliefe, before it be to late, by the soonest, by the soonest that possibly can be, lest Medfield be turned into ashes and the smoke of it amaze such that shall behold it."⁷⁸ These, as it turned out, had been prophetic words. Although the council quickly sent in two companies, twenty horsemen and eighty foot, to add to Medfield's militia, the troops were scattered about town on the night of February 20. When morning came "they could not get together into a body to repel the enemy" (John Wilson estimated there were as many as a thousand), who showered arrows "into the bosome of the Town."⁷⁹

Medfield had been particularly vulnerable to Indian attack because it was a frontier town, close to Indian "wilderness" and not yet fully "improved." As William Hubbard would later write, "Most of those inland Plantations being over run with young Wood (the Inhabitants being every where apt to engross more Land into their Hands than they were able to subdue) as if they were seated amidst of a Heap of Bushes."⁸⁰ John Foster's map suggests the extreme vulnerability of such frontier settlements. (Each number on the map corresponds to the site of an Indian attack.) On Foster's map, Medfield stands perilously close to ominous-looking trees. Other frontier towns also suffered for their woodiness. At Scarborough, Major Philips was trapped in his house

because "the bushes being thick within shott of his house could not at first See an Indian." "Our woods," Edmund Browne wrote from Sudbury, "are pestered with Indians." In Rehoboth, the townspeople were similarly trapped: "Wee are shut up in our garisones," John Kingsley reported, "& dare not goe abroad far to our outlandes." "They are like wild Deare in the Wilderness," John Hull complained, who "will Never stand to maintaine any fight but come upon some of our out plantations & burne some of the remote houses & kill one or two & take there scalps & get away that our souldiers can rarely find any of them."⁸¹

In Medfield, the fighting probably lasted most of the morning, as more and more Nipmucks jumped out from their overnight hiding places. After the initial shooting, the townspeople tried to hide in their houses, but soon their "dreadful hour" came, as it had come for the Narragansetts at the Great Swamp in December, and for Mary Rowlandson in Lancaster just days before. In Lancaster, Rowlandson and her family had endured two hours of shooting before considering leaving the protection of their house. Finally the Nipmucks succeeded in setting the house on fire. "Now," wrote Rowlandson, "is the dreadful hour come. . . . Some in our house were fighting for their lives, others wallowing in their blood, the house on fire over our heads, and the bloody heathen ready to knock us on the head, if we stirred out. Now might we hear mothers and children crying out for themselves, and one another, Lord, What shall we do?" "But," she resolved, "out we must go, the fire increasing, and coming along behind us, roaring, and the Indians gaping before us with their guns, spears and hatchets to devour us." (On the first night of her captivity, Mary Rowlandson's captors camped near a deserted English house. "I asked them whither I might not lodge in the house that night," Rowlandson recalled. But the Indians replied, mocking her, "What, will you love English men still?" Rising the next morning, Rowlandson recognized her fate: "I must turn my back upon the town, and travel with them into the vast and desolate wilderness, I knew not whither.")⁸²

Similarly, in Medfield, while some Nipmucks had been shooting down people in their doorways, others had been busy setting fire to the houses and barns they had so recently hidden behind. Driven out by smoke and flames, still more townspeople were killed. In all, some fifty houses were destroyed and thirty inhabitants killed or taken captive. As William Hubbard wrote, "some were killed as they attempted to fly to their Neighbourhoods for Shelter: some were only wounded, and some taken alive and carried Captive; in some Houses the Husband running away with one Child, the Wife with another."⁸³ If doors marked liminal spaces between inside and outside, order and chaos, and houses represented the English body, those same houses also represented

the English family—a house destroyed was a family destroyed. To leave the house was to risk tearing the family apart, a husband running in one direction, his wife in another. And a family torn asunder was yet another sign of chaos. As Increase Mather asked rhetorically, "Is it nothing that Widdows and Fatherless have been multiplied among us? that in a small Plantation we have heard of eight widows, and six and twenty fatherless children in one day? And in another of the Villages of our Judah, of seven Widows an about thirty fatherless children, all at once?" But to stay in a house was to risk being destroyed along with it and learning the gruesome lesson that the family that stays together is slain together. When Indians attacked William Clark's house in Plymouth, "the Indians destroyed them all, root and branche, the Father, and Mother, and all the Children. So that eleven persons were murdered that day, under one roof."⁸⁴

In Medfield, Thomas Thurston's wife had been lodging at Seth Smith's house when the Nipmucks began their attack. She must have left the house early on, for soon she was "stricken dead to the enemys apprehension," upon which "they stript her & tooke off[er] her head cloths." Goodwife Thurston, alas, had not quite expired. On the contrary, she soon "came to her selfe, went into the house got a blanket & run to Mr. Wilson." But, as John Wilson later told a friend, this bloody and nearly naked woman was "a frightfull spectacle." When she arrived at Wilson's doorstep, even her closest neighbors failed to recognize her, "they not knowing who she was her hair hanging downe & her face covred with blood."⁸⁵ As she stirred to consciousness, Goody Thurston may have come "to her selfe," but her "selfe," it seems, was no longer obvious. Stripped, bloodied, and disheveled, she had lost her identity. No doubt she looked like the people Mary Rowlandson encountered on the streets of Lancaster, "Christians lying in their blood, some here, and some there, like a company of sheep torn by wolves. All of them stripped naked by a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranging and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out." One of her neighbors, who had been "chopped into the head with a hatchet, and stripped naked," was still alive, and Rowlandson watched him "crawling up and down" in front of her.⁸⁶ No longer Englishmen and -women, the townspeople of Lancaster had become deranged sheep.

On that day in Medfield, Goodwife Thurston was unrecognizable partly because her face was covered with blood and her hair was "hanging down." Probably her attackers had begun to scalp her but had been unexpectedly interrupted. Stripping the skin off the head, or scalping, was a common practice among New England Indians: "When ever they wound, and their arrow sticks in the body of their enemy, they . . . follow their arrow, and falling upon the person wounded, and tearing his head a little aside by his Locke, they in the

twinkling of an eye fetch off his head though but with a sorry knife."⁸⁷ Having stripped Goodwife Thurston and taken off her bonnet, or "head cloths," her attackers may have been pulling at her hair and cutting away at her forehead when they were unexpectedly attacked or otherwise interrupted in their work. Still, even an unfinished cut to the head would have bloodied Goodwife Thurston's face considerably. In their haste, or perhaps deliberately, they may have stripped the skin off part of her face; scalping often involved this type of "skinning." "Such also is their Inhumanity," Increase Mather commented, "as that they flay off the skin from their Faces and Heads of those they get into their hands."⁸⁸

Either way, Goody Thurston's face was covered with blood and hair. To her neighbors, she was "a frightfull spectacle," mostly, no doubt, because of her own panicked aspect and her terrible injuries, but partly also because she had been shorn of all emblems of piety, civility, and Englishness. English faces were especially endowed as markers of English national superiority: as Edward Chamberlayne had written in 1671, "The complexion of the inhabitants . . . excells all other nations."⁸⁹ The idea that English bodies were physically distinct, and somehow purer than other peoples' bodies, gained considerable favor in the seventeenth century. In the shape of their noses, the fineness of their hair, the suppleness of their skin, Englishmen and -women were encouraged to think of themselves as closer to God's image, unaltered versions of the model of humankind, while foreign peoples, with their tanned skin, strange body piercings, tattoos, and mutilations, had distorted, artificially altered bodies.⁹⁰ The face, the English believed, "is a special glass wherein the glory and Image of God doth shine forth and appeare," and to obscure it in any way was an offense against God. Long hair in men, or wayward hair in women, was considered excessive, "when it is so long, that it covers the eyes, the checks, the countenance, &c God hath ordeined those parts to be visible." Long hair was considered "a badge of cruelty and effeminacy" and was even vaguely associated with cannibalism.⁹¹ Long or loose hair also, of course, distinguished Indians in New England from their English neighbors, making it possible, for instance, for short hair to be used as a disguise, as when, late in the war, "Phillip had cutt off his haire to disguise himself."⁹²

Not only was Goodwife Thurston's face covered with blood and hair, but also her body was naked but for a blanket. Still, Goody Thurston's neighbors, however confused, must have very quickly realized she was an Englishwoman in great need, even if they didn't know exactly who she was. Two Thurston children died that day, and at least one was taken captive, but their mother is not listed among the casualties. When she arrived at John Wilson's doorstep,

having just recovered consciousness after suffering a brutal attack, Goodwife Thurston probably did not speak clearly. She may have shrieked, or spoken in gibberish, or she may have been unable to speak at all. But, after a moment, she may have begun to speak clearly, and then her neighbors would have recognized that she was speaking English. (She told her neighbors that "all her afflictions was swallowd up in the loss of her poore child gone into Captivity."⁹³) Speech was somewhat more reliable than appearance, as it could pierce through any darkness or disguise.⁹⁴ During another skirmish, "at the very instant" that an English soldier was about to start shooting at three Indians, "a child with them in the habit of an Indian papoos" cried out that "he was an English boy" and the soldier held his fire. Immediately, "the child ran to the English and escaped." On another occasion, fellow Englishmen "were ready to have shot at" Wheeler and his men, "till we discerning they were English by the Majors speaking."⁹⁵

Language, in this story, may have been the final marker of Englishness. Like so many chroniclers of the war, Goodwife Thurston may have told her tale both as a way of making sense of her experience and as a way of reclaiming her identity. If the colonists' Englishness had been compromised before the war by becoming more Indian in their ways, it was further compromised during the war by the loss of their homes and clothes and, most of all, by their killing mercilessly and abandoning the codes of "civil nations." By telling about the war, and most especially by writing about it, the colonists could reclaim civility, could clothe their naked war with words. The writing itself would "dress" the English back up; it would undo the damage of the war by making clear once again who was English and who Indian, and what made a massacre and what a victory. All of this depended, however, on denying the possibility that the Indians might themselves "dress" the war with their own words. But that, alas, was a mistaken assumption.

V

WHILE THE TOWN of Medfield burned and Goodwife Thurston calmed down enough to speak English clearly and tell her neighbors who she was, a retreating Nipmuck, very possibly James Printer, hastily wrote a note and tacked it to a tree probably just a stone's throw from John Wilson's house:

Thou English man hath provoked us to anger & wrath & we care not though we have war with you this 21 years for there are many of us 300 of which hath fought with you at this town[...] we haue nothing but our lives to loose but thou hast many fair houses cattell & much good things.⁹⁶

At the war's end, William Hubbard would scoff at the threat, remarking only that the Indians "fell short of their Expectation by nineteen [years]," but at the time the people of Medfield must have been terribly shaken by it. In just two short sentences the note offered an analysis that the colonists had failed to consider in any of the hundreds of letters and dozens of accounts they themselves had written about the war: that Indians attacked English towns for reasons other than the pure pleasures of wanton cruelty.

What the Medfield note suggests is that the Algonquians knowingly directed their attacks against the English acquisition of land and the introduction of livestock (their "fair houses cattell & much good things"), developments that dramatically undermined traditional Algonquian subsistence practices. English livestock strayed onto Indian land, ate Indian crops, dug up Indian clam beds, and always compelled colonists to take more and more Indian land for pasturage.⁹⁷ As a Narragansett man had explained to Roger Williams: "You have driven us out of our own Countrie and then pursued us to our Great Miserie, and Your own, and we are Forced to live upon you."⁹⁸ (While some Algonquians, including Philip himself, took to keeping livestock themselves, they kept only hogs, the wildest of all English domesticated animals, and retained their animosity toward other kinds of English livestock, especially cattle.⁹⁹) As Philip and his counselors complained to John Easton, they had "thoft when the English boft land of them that thay wold have kept ther Cattell upone ther owne land," but even if they moved thirty miles from English settlements, "thay Could not kepe ther coren from being spoyled" and "the English Catell and horses still incresed."¹⁰⁰

Most importantly, the Medfield note called attention to the Nipmucks' vehement rejection of the English conflation of property and identity: "We haue nothing but our lives to loose but thou hast many fair houses cattell & much good things." If this, as Noah Newman feared after reading the note, "is the summe they warr from," it was not an unwarranted calculus. It was, after all, this "computation" that the English themselves relied on in tallying up the damage of the war, counting burned houses, killed cattle, and toppled fences.¹⁰¹ The precious few notes and letters written by warring Indians prove that the connection between English property and English lives was not lost on their enemies. "You know, and we know," one Indian wrote in a letter negotiating the release of captives, "you have great sorrowful with crying: for you lost many, many hundred men, and all your house, all your land, and woman, child, and cattle, and all your things that you have lost."¹⁰² Not only notes but also rites of cruelty and the verbal taunts that often accompanied them attacked the English attachment to land. While burying several English captives alive, a group of Algonquians mocked English agriculture (and curi-

ously echoed Samuel Gorton's fear that the Indians were trying to "root out the English"): "You English since you came into this Countrey have grown exceeding above the Ground, let us now see how you will grow when Planted into the Ground."¹⁰³ (Meanwhile, Algonquians had always celebrated their detachment from goods and property. The Narragansetts traditionally engaged in a ritual in which participants offered "almost all the riches they have to their gods, as kettles, skins, hatchets, beads, knives, etc." and threw them "into a great fire."¹⁰⁴)

Almost without exception, the English interpreted Algonquian assaults, and the taunts that accompanied them, as expressions of mindless savagery or as divine retribution rather than as calculated assaults on the English way of life. Indian attacks on English livestock, for instance, appalled the colonists, who frequently reported finding the enemy driving away or "killing off Cattle."¹⁰⁵ (Edward Randolph later reported that the English had lost "eight thousand head of Cattle" during the war.¹⁰⁶) On occasion Algonquians might even "torture" English livestock: "They took a Cow, knocked off one of her horns, cut out her tongue, and so left the poor creature in great misery. They put an horse, ox &c. into an hovel, and then set it on fire only to shew how they are delighted in exercising cruelty." As the English perceived it, the Indians did so only to "to shew what barbarous creatures they are."¹⁰⁷ But clearly, attacks on English livestock were attacks on the English practice of keeping livestock, animals who often ruined Indian crops and took over Indian hunting grounds.¹⁰⁸ When Joshua Tift was taken captive and brought to the Great Swamp, the Narragansetts who captured him brought along "5 of his Cattell and killd them before his face." Tift was "forc't to be Silent," but he nonetheless "praid the Sachim to Spare the rest," to which the sachem answered, "What will Cattell now doe you good?" The next day, the Narragansetts sent for the rest of Tift's cattle and killed them all before his eyes, symbolically suggesting that Tift, as a captive, must now turn his back on English ways and accept Indian ones.¹⁰⁹ Interpreted in this light, the reasons for killing Tift's cattle are clear enough, but not, it seems, clear enough for the colonists. As their voluminous writing about the war demonstrates, most colonists were either unwilling or unable to place Indian "cruelties" within the broader context of Algonquian culture, instead labeling them "barbarous" violations of English ideas of just conduct in war, or understanding them only, and somewhat ironically, as messages from a brutal and furious God.