

**“Thus Did God Break the Head of That Leviathan”:  
Performative Violence and Judicial Beheadings of Native Americans in Seventeenth-  
Century New England**

Ian Edward Tonat

Gaithersburg, Maryland

Bachelor of Arts, Carleton College, 2011

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

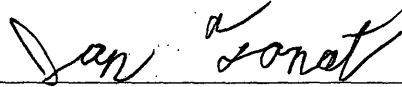
Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary  
May, 2014

## APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

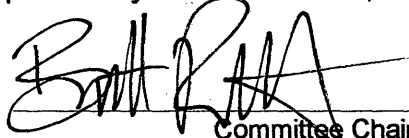
Master of Arts



---

Ian Edward Tonat

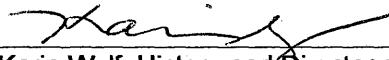
Approved by the Committee, November, 2013



---

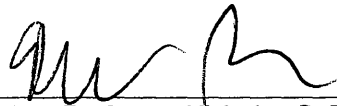
Committee Chair

Associate Professor Brett Rushforth, History  
The College of William and Mary



---

Professor Karin Wulf, History and Director of the Omohundro Institute  
The College of William and Mary



---

Assistant Professor Nicholas S. Popper, History  
The College of William and Mary

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the judicial beheadings of Native American men by New England officials in the seventeenth century. It argues that these decapitations were the result of a form of judicial trophy hunting, a novel practice created by officials in New England in response to warfare with Algonquians. Through judicial trophy hunting, colonial officials enacted impressive executions that produced an icon – the head – that evidenced the fact of the execution through its display in order to reassure colonists frightened by the prospect (and reality) of war with Algonquians. Judicial trophy hunting was an attempt by New England officials to leverage the preexisting meanings of beheading as a form of performative violence by modifying previously separate (though related) practices of beheading as a legal punishment and as an act of war. New England officials delegitimized the beheaded Indians as enemies by categorizing them as rebels. Doing so enabled colonial officials to justify treating their Algonquian enemies as guilty of treason. New England officials further altered legal practices under the simultaneous influence of military practices, such as the perpetration of atrocities, trophy hunting, and unconventional punishments against enemies, which lessened restraint and increased violence. New England officials thus recombined the preexisting practices of decapitation as a legal punishment and as an act of war in order to use beheading as a form of performative violence to communicate the preexisting cultural meanings associated with it, in a new way that fit the needs of their situation. Examination of these beheadings, along with the contexts they occurred within, demonstrates how New England authorities entangled and combined legal and military conceptions and institutions, as well as how colonial society changed as a result of contact with Native Americans, and not just the other way around. Finally, an examination of these beheadings demonstrates the important role that performative violence played in relationships between Native Americans and English colonists, as these relationships shaped and were shaped by local practices of such violence.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
“Thus Did God Break the Head of That Leviathan”	1
Bibliography	58

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much like a good execution, a good thesis is the product of cooperation between all parties involved. Without cooperation, the inevitable result is a mess that is thoroughly unpleasant for all involved and truly horrible to look upon. I must first thank my advisor, Professor Brett Rushforth, who offered invaluable guidance and advice, and who proved a tireless and necessary enemy of the passive voice and the verb “to be” in all its forms. I am also grateful to Professors Karin Wulf and Nicholas Popper, the other members of my committee, whose thoughts and perspectives made this thesis much deeper, broader, and better than it would have been without them.

Thanks also go out to my fellow students, whose peer reviews were invaluable to the final product, and whose various events and get-togethers were a necessary distraction from it.

I must also thank my parents, Kevin Tonat and Martha Foulon-Tonat, who nurtured my lifelong love of learning and offered the moral and material support I needed to complete this thesis. Without them I would not be here, for all definitions of “here.”

Finally, I owe a very special thanks to the brilliant Laura Ansley. She read and critiqued multiple drafts from the perspective of an outsider, reigning in my worst tendencies as a writer and encouraging my best. Even more critically, she was calming when I was frustrated, understanding when I was confused, happy when I was successful, and always an uplifting presence. Without her help and support, this thesis would have been less coherent, and the process of writing it much less pleasant. Thank you all.

On October 30, 1639, an executioner in New Haven cut off the head of an Indian named Nepaupuck, afterwards setting it on top of a pole in the town's marketplace. Nepaupuck had been brought before the court two days earlier, accused by a number of neighboring Quillipeck Indians of having participated in a raid on the town of Wethersfield during the recently ended Pequot War. Specifically, the court accused him of murdering a number of English colonists, including one Abraham Finch, cutting off some of their hands to present to Sassacus, the leader of the Pequots, and abducting an English child into captivity. One of Nepaupuck's kinsmen, Mewhebato, who had come to testify in his favor, changed his testimony to guilty when the magistrate admonished him to tell the truth. When Nepaupuck appeared before the court, he claimed mistaken identity, saying that a man named Nepaupuck was indeed guilty, but that he was a different person. At this, Mewhebato and the Quillipecks returned to affirm to Nepaupuck's face that he had committed the murders and that there was no other person by that name. Upon this he "confessed he was the man namely Nepaupuck, and boasted he was a great captaine, had murdred Abraham Finch, and had his hands in other English blood, he said he knew he must dye, and was nott afraid of itt, butt layd his neck to the mantletree of the chimney, desireing that his head might be cutt of, or that he might dye in any other manner the English should appoynt." Two days later, citing "he thatt sheds mans blood, by man shall his blood be shed," the New Haven General Court obliged him.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles J. Hoadly, ed., *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, From 1638 to 1649* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1857): 22-24; (Quotations 23, 24).

I have chosen to retain the original spelling and capitalization present in the documents. However, I will expand unfamiliar contractions and abbreviations in the interest of clarity. I have also chosen to use only one name and spelling to refer to Algonquian individuals, who often had numerous names and aliases, which were inconsistently spelled by English writers.

In addition to being the first act of the New Haven General Court after its constitution, Nepaupuck's execution was the first legal beheading in New England. Between 1623 and 1676, the year in which Metacom was killed, colonial authorities in New England legally executed one hundred and twelve people. Of these, they beheaded about eight, all Native American men.<sup>2</sup> By beheading these Native American men – and no one else – colonial officials deviated from normal practices established in England by enacting a form of execution that was rare and entangled in seemingly unfitting meanings. Given the availability of other more common and less culturally fraught methods of execution, a full account of these beheadings requires an explanation that demonstrates why officials chose to behead these men and what ideas and practices influenced their decisions. By examining these decapitations and their influences more closely we can thus gain a better understanding of how colonists and Indians viewed and related to each other, how colonial authority functioned, and how performative violence reflected, mediated, and shaped interactions between New England colonists and Algonquians.

There are several possible explanations for such a deviation. The first is that New England officials enacted these beheadings without serious thought as to the meanings involved; they simply needed to execute these men, and decapitation was an available means. The second is that they intended these beheadings and their associated meanings to be identical to beheadings in England. If this is the case, then

---

<sup>2</sup> Number of overall executions from David Allen Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England: A Comprehensive Reference, 1623-1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999). I have chosen the most conservative figure, with all executions examined documented to have involved beheading by multiple sources. The inexactness of the number of beheadings is addressed in more detail in note 21. By "New England" I mean the English colonies in southern New England, i.e. Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, New Haven, and Rhode Island (though no judicial beheadings occurred in Rhode Island and it is thus not discussed in detail), along with the lands of the Algonquian people they most interacted with.

the rarity of judicial beheadings in New England is the result of a lack of cases that called for it. These explanations, however, are not satisfying. The first does not fit because English people ascribed a great deal of importance and meaning to execution, especially beheading. The second is inappropriate because the circumstances of these decapitations differ significantly from judicial beheadings in England. There is a third possible explanation, however, that colonial officials altered the preexisting practice of judicial beheading in order to evoke new meanings, which were nonetheless grounded in previous ones, in order to respond to new situations and contexts.

Seventeenth-century New England authorities responded to the hostility and resistance their colonial mission faced from neighboring Algonquian groups by reconfiguring preexisting ideas and practices surrounding beheading in order to justify and enact impressive executions on those Algonquians who participated in violence against colonists that officials found especially notable, visible, or threatening. Colonial officials combined and altered these ideas and practices, which jurists, civilian authorities, and military officials had established in England and Ireland, and which contemporary English people accepted as legitimate and normal, to produce a novel manifestation of beheading that did not operate according to the usual English practices. New England officials delegitimized the beheaded Indians as enemies by categorizing them as rebels. Doing so enabled colonial officials to justify treating their Algonquian enemies as guilty of treason. New England officials further altered legal practices under the simultaneous influence of military practices, such as the perpetration of atrocities, trophy hunting, and unconventional punishments against enemies, which lessened restraint and increased violence. New England officials thus

recombined the preexisting practices of decapitation as a legal punishment and as an act of war in order to use beheading as a form of performative violence to communicate the preexisting cultural meanings associated with it in a new way that fit the needs of their situation.

New England officials used this recombination of ideas and practices to institute a form of judicial trophy hunting, whereby they attempted to enact impressive executions and produce an icon – the head – that evidenced the fact of the execution through its display in order to reassure colonists frightened by the prospect (and reality) of war with Algonquians. Judicial trophy hunting was thus an attempt by New England officials to leverage the preexisting meanings of beheading as a form of performative violence by modifying previously separate (though related) practices of beheading as a legal punishment and as an act of war. Authorities meant to reassure colonists frightened of Native Americans, and of warfare with them, through impressive and lasting displays of violence and the dismemberment of Indian bodies. These beheadings thus change our understanding of English colonists and Algonquians in New England and how they related to each other. First, they demonstrate how New England authorities entangled and combined legal and military conceptions and institutions, as well as how colonial society changed as a result of contact with Native Americans, and not just the other way around. Finally, an examination of these beheadings demonstrates the important role that performative violence played in relationships between Native Americans and English colonists, as these relationships shaped and were shaped by local practices of such violence.

Historians have addressed the relationships between New England Algonquians and their English colonial neighbors extensively, including how those relationships were mediated by legal systems, warfare, and violence. In recent years, historians have shown that New England courts could function simultaneously as sites of cultural negotiation and colonial control. Though the latter function has a long history of scholarship, in the last decade and a half historians have characterized New England courts as place where English and Algonquian people solved disputes between differing views of justice, which nonetheless held certain values, such as reciprocity, in common. This negotiation prevailed until a breaking point – such as King Philip’s War or the Stuart Restoration – caused the English to reconsider. The analysis in the present study, with its focus on executions during wartime, necessarily has a different emphasis, as it examines the courts’ role in enforcing English control over Algonquians at the expense of Indian lives, rather than negotiations over trespasses that people and authorities of both cultures found transgressive and disruptive. This puts the present study more in line with the examinations of legal relationships between colonists and New England Algonquians that argue the results legal proceedings were contingent upon colonial interests and goals, along with studies that emphasize the courts as means through which the English attempted to control or exploit Native Americans.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> On legal relationships between New England Algonquians and English colonists, see James P. Ronda, “Red and White at the Bench: Indians and the Law in Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 110 (1974): 200-215; Yasuhide Kawashima, *Puritan Justice and the Indian: White Man’s Law in Massachusetts, 1630-1763* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Katherine Hermes, “Jurisdiction in the Colonial Northeast: Algonquian, English, and French Governance,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 43, no. 1 (January, 1999): 52-73; Katherine Hermes, “Justice Will be Done Us: Algonquian Demands for Reciprocity in the Courts of European Settlers,” in *The Many Legalities of Early America*, eds. Christopher L. Tomlins and Bruce H. Mann (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). For more comprehensive looks at the

Beyond examinations of how legal mechanisms mediated relationships between Algonquians and English colonists, scholars have examined how warfare and violence shaped and structured cross-cultural interactions. Wayne E. Lee and Ronald Dale Karr highlight the extreme violence that occurred in wars between Europeans and Native Americans and explain it as the result of different military cultures unable to agree on standards of practice. Jill Lepore and Peter Silver, meanwhile, emphasize the critical role that conflict and violence between Native and colonial people played in forming the self-identities of those involved and their role in shaping society.<sup>4</sup> Alan Galloway, Ned Blackhawk, Michael Leroy Oberg, Karr, Andrew Lipman, and Lepore examine relationships between Indians and Europeans through acts or systems of violence and argue that violence helped to structure those relationships.<sup>5</sup> The present study seeks to build on these works by synthesizing

---

relationships between colonists in New England and Algonquians see Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* 3d. ed. (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> For the importance of conflict with Indians to colonial identity formation see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) and Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008). For examinations of how Native and English people conducted warfare in America see Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Wayne E. Lee, "Early American Ways of War: A New Reconnaissance, 1600-1815," *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (March, 2001): 269-289; Wayne E. Lee, "Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare, 1500-1800," *The Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 (July, 2007): 701-741; Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Galloway's study focuses on the trade in Indian slaves in the North American Southeast and how it bound all the people living in the region into a single system that prompted changes for all involved. However, as it was system predicated on violent raids and warfare, his arguments are applicable to more general studies of violence and its structuring effects. Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Michael Leroy Oberg, *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Ronald Dale Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?': The Violence of the Pequot War," *The*

perspectives on legality and violence, and showing how New England officials used beheading to demonstrate and enforce their preferred vision of their relationship with New England Algonquians.

The beheadings themselves took place from 1639, at the close of the Pequot War, to 1676, the year Metacom was killed and King Philip's War ended in southern New England. New Haven officials executed the first two men – Nepaupuck in 1639 and Busheage in 1644. The next beheading, that of Young Matoonas, occurred almost thirty years later, in 1671. The majority of the beheadings took place in 1676, when officials decapitated the rest of the Indians – Canonchet, Keweenam, Old Matoonas, Annawon, and Tispaquin. Civilian courts decided the cases of Nepaupuck, Busheage, and Keweenam in normal trials, while civilian authorities executed Young Matoonas, Old Matoonas, Annawon, and Tispaquin after summary judgments. Military officers put Canonchet to death. While executioners killed the three Indians they tried in normal civilian courts by decapitation, the others (with the possible exception of Annawon, whose means of death were not recorded) were subject to a sequence of violence as their various executioners shot (or in the case of Young Matoonas, hanged) them first and decapitated them post-mortem.<sup>6</sup>

---

*Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December, 1998): 876-909; Andrew Lipman, "'A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather': The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War," *WMQ* 65, no. 1 (January, 2008): 2-28; Lepore, *The Name of War*.

<sup>6</sup> Hearn, *Legal Executions*, 8-9, 11, 45, 49-53. On Nepaupuck see Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 22-4. Busheage Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 135, 146; John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*, eds. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 534-5. Young Matoonas see Simon Bradstreet, "Simon Bradstreet's Journal, 1664-1683," ed. James B. Thornton, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 8, no. 4 (October, 1854): 325-333, esp. 328; William Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports on King Philip's War: The Second William Harris Letter of August, 1676*, ed., Douglas Edward Leach (Providence, RI: *The Rhode Island Historical Society*, 1963): 82; William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England, from the first planting thereof in the year 1607, to this present year 1677. But chiefly of the late Troubles in the two last years, 1675. And 1676. To which is added a Discourse about the Warre with the Pequods in the year 1637*, (Boston: John Fosler, 1677): 101; and Anonymous, *A*

An understanding of the relationships between New England colonists and neighboring Algonquians, along with preexisting English ideas about execution, is vital to understanding why these executions were so unusual and in beginning to explain why colonial officials chose to behead these Indian men. The periods of warfare that existed between New England Algonquians and colonists during the seventeenth century, particularly King Philip's War, during which most of the executions took place, are the most illuminating phases of Native-colonist relationships with regard to these beheadings.<sup>7</sup> Just as the New Haven General Court executed Nepaupuck for actions relating to the Pequot War, so did various colonial courts, civilian authorities, and military officials behead seven other Indian men for similar acts committed during wars between colonists and Native Americans, such as Kieft's War and especially King Philip's War. Most of the connections are obvious. Courts, civilian authorities, and military officials beheaded six Indians – Nepaupuck,

---

*True Account of the Most Considerable Occurrences that have hapned in the Warre between the English and the Indians in New-England, From the Fifth of May, 1678, to the Fourth of August last; also of the Successes it hath pleased God to give the English against them: As it hath been communicated by Letters to a Friend in London* (London: Benjamin Billingsley, 1676): 8. Canonchet see Nathaniel Saltonstall, "A New and Further Narrative of the State of New-England," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913): 77-99, esp. 90-91; Anonymous, *A True Account*, 2; Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 50; J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, (Hartford, CT: F. A. Brown, 1852) 2: 432; Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67. Keweenam see Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (Boston: Press of William White, 1856) 5: 204-6. Old Matoonas Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 80-82; Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101; Samuel Sewall, "Diary of Samuel Sewall. 1674-1729: Vol. 1. 1674-1700," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Series 5, Vol. 5: 15; Increase Mather, *The History of King Philip's War*, ed., Samuel G. Drake (repr. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1990; Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1862): 184-5; Anon, *A True Account*, 8. Annawon and Tispaquin Benjamin Church, *Diary of King Philip's War, 1675-76*, ed., Alan Simpson and Mary Simpson (Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975): 169, 173, Quotation 173; Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 107, 108-9.

<sup>7</sup> For recent interpretations of the Pequot War and its violence see Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996) and Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?'" For recent interpretations of King Philip's War see Lepore, *The Name of War*; Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, "Amerindian Power in the Early Modern Northeast: A Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, vol. 61, no. 1 (January, 2004): 77-106.

Canonchet, Keweenam, Old Matoonas, Annawon, and Tispaquin – for actions they carried out as active participants in ongoing (or in the case of Nepaupuck, recently ended) wars between Indians and the New England colonies. Another, Busheage, was not executed during such a war, but it is likely that his crime was a misdirected attack on the Dutch during Kieft’s War in 1644. More importantly, New Haven officials clearly thought his motive for the killing was his desire “to begin a warr against the English,” and took the threat seriously enough that they convened a council to prepare for such a war, demonstrating that even if Busheage did not intend his attack as an act of war, the people responsible for his execution perceived it as such.<sup>8</sup>

Only the case of Young Matoonas (son of Old Matoonas) is ambiguous in its connection to a war between Indians and English colonists. Officials in New England – specifically New Haven – had already judicially beheaded two Indians, and the practice had thus entered the realm of the possible. It is therefore feasible that Boston officials merely beheaded him in an imperfect imitation of their counterparts in New Haven, without connecting his actions to warfare. However, the circumstances of Young Matoonas’s execution suggest that Boston officials may have made the same assumption about him as New Haven officials had about Busheage. Boston authorities executed Young Matoonas in the summer of 1671 for the murder of a colonist, though there is no record of an official trial and accounts differ as to the identity of his victim (which may indicate that officials tried him summarily or simply forced a conviction). But the summer of 1671 was a time of high tension

---

<sup>8</sup> On Nepaupuck see Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 22-4; Canonchet see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67; on Keweenam see Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records* 5: 205-6; Matoonas see Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 184-5; Tispaquin and Annawon see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 107, 108-9; Busheage see Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 135.

between the New England colonies and the neighboring Indians, especially Metacom's Wampanoags. Simon Bradstreet, in the same diary entry as the one in which he described Young Matoonas's execution wrote, "there was a great Stirre about ye Indians in Plimouth Colony who threatened & plotted to Cutt of ye English there." The Plymouth colonists feared that Metacom ("King Philip") was plotting against them and, in a treaty signed at Taunton, had attempted to get his consent to surrender his guns. After signing the treaty, Metacom made no effort to turn in his arms and so Plymouth convened a council of war and in September 1671 sent a force to retrieve the Wampanoag sachem and force him to disarm, acknowledge himself subject to the King of England and the Plymouth government, and pay a fine of one hundred pounds. To New England colonists, wary of Native conspiracies in the best of times, such actions constituted a clear threat of war, as demonstrated by the actions taken in Plymouth. Though Young Matoonas was a Nipmuc and executed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, colonists likely saw the killing of an English person by an Indian in this context as a potential act or provocation of war, as it had been by New Haven in 1644.<sup>9</sup>

These executions demand explanation because of their rarity, their divergence from normal practice, and the importance the people – Algonquian and English –

---

<sup>9</sup> On Young Matoonas see: Simon Bradstreet, "Simon Bradstreet's Journal, 1664-1683," ed. James B. Thornton, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 8, no. 4 (October, 1854): 325-333, esp. 328; William Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports on King Philip's War: The Second William Harris Letter of August, 1676*, ed., Douglas Edward Leach (Providence, RI: *The Rhode Island Historical Society*, 1963): 82; Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101; and Anonymous, *A True Account of the Most Considerable Occurrences that have hapned in the Warre between the English and the Indians in New-England, From the Fifth of May, 1678, to the Fourth of August last; as also of the Successes it hath pleased God to give the English against them: As it hath been communicated by Letters to a Friend in London* (London: Benjamin Billingsley, 1676): 8. For quotations see Bradstreet, "Journal," 138; On treaties and tensions see Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records*, 63, 73, 76, 79. This man's name is never given in the records, and is only identified as the son of Matoonas, who was also beheaded five years later. I have therefore elected to call him Young Matoonas, in order to identify him and distinguish him from his father.

involved ascribed to execution and how one died. New England courts hanged almost all those sentenced to death, and even during periods of warfare the various courts in New England more commonly implemented alternatives to beheading as punishments in cases of Native Americans who took up arms with the colonies. Judicial and military officials ordered a number of Indians (at least eleven) engaged in King Philip's War shot to death, while they sold many others (including women and children) into slavery. The rarity of judicial beheadings and the presence of frequently used alternatives to them thus raise the question of why authorities chose to execute these people in this manner.<sup>10</sup>

There is another, even more vital reason that these beheadings need to be explained. If these executions were rare but nonetheless held to established patterns an explanation would not be necessary. However, this is not the case. In the legal culture of England, the culture the New England colonists' own ideas about legality emerged from, the courts only implemented execution by beheading for nobles convicted of treason (or by special dispensation); non-nobles were generally drawn and quartered. This does not fit the executions at hand because, most obviously, none of those beheaded in New England had any claim to nobility (with, perhaps, the exception of Canonchet, who was a sachem) and because, when discussing the crimes committed by the beheaded Native Americans, officials nearly always referred to

---

<sup>10</sup> For number of executions see Hearn, *Legal Executions*. For hanging as the primary method of execution see Alan Rogers, *Murder and the Death Penalty in Massachusetts* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008): 16; for firing squad executions see Samuel Sewall, "Diary of Samuel Sewall. 1674-1729: Vol. 1. 1674-1700," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Series 5, Vol. 5: 15, 17.

them as “murder,” and never specifically referred to treason in the case of these individuals.<sup>11</sup>

That beheading was rare and deviated from expected practices is important because the people ordering decapitations believed it to be so. English people in general, and puritan colonists in New England in particular, found death and how one died to be deeply meaningful, ideas that were shared by Native Americans as well.<sup>12</sup> Given the importance all people involved ascribed to death in general and execution in particular, it is highly unlikely that officials used this aberrant method accidentally or without thought. Seventeenth-century New England residents of all cultures saw deep meaning in how a person was put to death, and authorities leveraged this to communicate their power and triumph to as many people as possible through acts of performative violence such as public execution. They then perpetuated this message through time and to even larger audiences through the display of dismembered body parts. Beginning later in the seventeenth century, notable preachers would issue execution sermons. They preached these sermons on the day of the execution in order to explain to those assembled what they should learn from the condemned’s death, and later this message might reach an even wider audience, as many execution sermons were published and distributed.<sup>13</sup> It is precisely because officials chose to

---

<sup>11</sup> On beheading in England see Simon Webb, *Execution: A History of Capital Punishment in Britain* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011), chap. 1; and Richard Clark, *Capital Punishment in Britain* (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allen Publishing, 2009), chaps. 3 and 4. “Murder” see Harris, *Rhode Islander Reports*, 82; Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 175-6, 184; Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records*, 205; Hoadly, *Records of New Haven* 22-3, 135, 146.

<sup>12</sup> For information on English and Algonquian views and practices relating to death and their intersection see Erik R. Seeman, *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 12-16, 38-45, 144-180.

<sup>13</sup> On execution sermons, none of which exist for the cases examined here, see Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

express these cultural meanings through aberrant executions, a forum meaningful to all involved, that examining these beheadings, along with the meanings associated with them, can tell us so much about the people of New England, both Native and English, and it is for this reason that they demand explanation.

In order to explain these executions, it is essential to note that the New England officials who ordered these beheadings were, by and large, attempting to leverage meanings associated with beheading as a form of performative violence that had already been well established in England through centuries of use. However, in order to communicate those meanings, New England officials altered existing practices to suit their changed contexts and goals, in the process creating a new and different practice of beheading. While these executions do not perfectly fit the established legal situations that call for beheading, they do show influences from them, along with military practices regarding beheading. These preexisting ideas and practices of beheading as a legal punishment and beheading as an act of war, already complicated and prone to exceptions in England, intermingled and influenced each other in the minds of New England officials to create a less well-defined, but nonetheless observable, new practice, judicial trophy hunting, which attempted to evoke the old meanings of beheading as an act of performed violence in new ways. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these beheadings and define the new pattern that emerged, it is necessary to examine these ideas and practices in greater detail.

However they went about actually beheading people, officials in New England sought to use beheading as a form of performative violence in order to communicate the cultural meanings associated with the head and its removal in order

to demonstrate their power to whoever saw the execution enacted, as well as those who viewed the dismembered and displayed head in the months, years, or even decades after its removal. Algonquians understood and practiced performative violence, including decapitation, as well, and though the practices and meanings associated with them varied, there was enough overlap that English people and Algonquians found this communication through violence mutually intelligible. The meanings associated with decapitation that New England officials attempted to draw on had long been established in England, and they reproduced them closely. The primary exception to this is that English people (and Europeans in general) saw beheading as a form of legal punishment as the most humane and honorable form of execution. However, there is no evidence that New England officials were attempting to exalt, ennoble, or show mercy to the Algonquian men they beheaded. Indeed, the sources seem to indicate the opposite.

Colonists carried the methods of judicial decapitation as practiced in England with them to New England and used them to form the basis of their own practices. Executioners acting within English legal practice achieved decapitation through two primary means: the axe and the sword. English executioners used the axe and block method much more frequently than the sword, which was more popular on the European continent. There were, additionally, two sorts of blocks that could be used in conjunction with the axe. The high block was about two feet high and more frequently used. When executed by this method, the condemned would kneel before the block and rest their neck on it, exposing the back of the neck and head to the executioner, who would swing the axe to strike off the victim's head, hopefully in one

blow. The low block was less than a foot in height and required the condemned to lie down to rest his or her neck on it, and authorities generally chose to use it when they were concerned that the person to be executed would not cooperate willingly, as in the case of Charles I. The advantage of the axe and block method was that it was cheap and did not require a particularly skilled executioner, though a misplaced blow or a blunt axe could result in a lengthy or gory scene.<sup>14</sup>

The other method, used frequently in continental Europe but rarely in England, was decapitation by sword. In this case the condemned would sit or kneel upright, holding very still, and the executioner would swing a heavy sword at the victim's neck. A well-executed decapitation using this method would result in a very clean cut followed by a quick death, but it required the condemned to remain perfectly still and the executioner to be very skilled to avoid a botched execution. After the executioner had removed the head by either method, he would pick it up and show it to the crowd, after which the head might be treated to preserve it and then displayed on a pole in a prominent place, where it could remain for years.<sup>15</sup>

Authorities created and performed beheadings and the rituals surrounding them in the context of deep cultural meanings surrounding the head and its removal. English people believed that the head was the seat of the soul and personality – and, in the case of nobles, of honor as well. It was also where one displayed the most obvious symbols of their status: hats, wigs, and even crowns. Removal of the head thus not only caused death, but also separated a person from the very things that made them who they were and, for nobles, the qualities that made them worthy of respect.

---

<sup>14</sup> Webb, *Execution*, 10-13; Clark, *Capital Punishment*, 35-6.

<sup>15</sup> Webb, *Execution*, 10-11, 19, 24; Clark, *Capital Punishment*, 35, 42.

Mutilation, especially decapitation, had consequences beyond the end of life for people who believed they would be physically resurrected on the Day of Judgment: How would one rise to meet their maker without a head? The display of the severed heads dehumanized the victim, showcasing an object that resembled the living while being drained of life and creating a disturbing figure between life and death. To the victors, such a display signified their triumph and demonstrated their power in the most graphic way imaginable, appropriating the literal face of defiance to showcase their victory over it. Increase Mather reflected this when he described Metacom's dismembered and displayed body parts as being "hanged up as a monument of revenging Justice." He used even more vivid terms when discussing the effect it had on the people of Plymouth, "Thus did God break the head of that Leviathan, and gave it to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."<sup>16</sup>

The head and beheading themselves thus contained potent meanings of their own. Though English people and jurists generally considered beheading the most dignified and honorable means of execution, having one's head removed and subsequently displayed were paradoxically degrading and dehumanizing. The rituals surrounding the head's removal contributed to the simultaneously exalting and degrading elements of decapitation and had in their own meanings as well. Though elements of both aspects are present in all parts of the beheading ceremony, it seems that English people considered death by beheading to contain the exalting aspects, while the mutilation and display contained the more degrading ones. Through the

---

<sup>16</sup> Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 123; Thomas Bartholine, *Bartholinus Anatomy* (London: Peter Cole, 1663) 3: 127, 133-5; Webb, *Execution*, 25; Patricia Palmer, "'An headlesse Ladie' and 'a horses loade of heades': Writing the Beheading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 25-57, esp. 41-2; "hanged up" Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 195; "Thus did God" *ibid.*, 197.

execution the state demonstrated its power and ability to restore order. The condemned contributed to this in an important way by acquiescing to and willingly participating in their own death. This was an essential part of the English execution ritual, demonstrating that the punishment was just and making public executions ritualized dramatic events. Officials and spectators expected the condemned to confess their crimes and repent, both to demonstrate the justice of the execution and to ensure their own salvation. Beheading required an even greater degree of practical cooperation, without which the execution might turn more painful and ugly than intended. Movement or poor posture could result in the executioner missing his mark and taking multiple blows. This cooperation went so deep that executioners often allowed those about to be beheaded to give a signal when their speech was over and they were ready for the blow.<sup>17</sup>

The condemned had more than practical reasons, such as ensuring that the blow landed cleanly, for cooperating. English people in general and puritans in particular were deeply concerned with how someone died said about them and their chances for salvation. The final speeches confessing and repenting their crimes and forgiving their executioners were not meant merely to justify the state's actions, but also to ensure that the condemned would die with a clean slate. Confession and repentance were not the sole means of evidencing that one was dying in grace, the physical circumstances and the attitude of the person dying signaled whether it was a good or bad death. A good death was important to English people and could be evidenced by dying with calm certainty. A bad death seemed to signal that the dying

---

<sup>17</sup> P.J. Klemp, "‘I have been bred upon the Theater of death, and have learned that part’: The Execution Ritual during the English Revolution," *The Seventeenth Century* 26, no. 2 (October 2011): 323-345, esp. 323-4, 329-30, 335; Webb, *Execution*, 12.

person had not been saved (theologians considered people especially vulnerable to the temptations of the Devil while dying) and spectators believed that such actions as railing against the executioners or maintaining innocence signified a bad death. The physical circumstances of death were also vital in determining whether it was good or bad. By cooperating with the executioners and the scripts associated with executions, the person to be executed could ensure they had a good death that evidenced their salvation.<sup>18</sup>

New England officials attempted to communicate these same meanings and associations through the performed violence of the judicial beheadings of Native Americans. By attempting to maintain key parts of the execution ceremony – its public nature, the cooperation of the condemned, and the display of the severed head<sup>19</sup> – New England officials tried to adhere quite closely to the English practice of beheading as performed violence, and thus to the meanings associated with it, though they altered the circumstances and means by which they implemented it to suit their own context. The most striking exception to this similarity is in the absence of any exalting or honorable aspect to the beheading. Whereas English courts saw beheading as an honorable and merciful form of execution for the nobility, there is no mention of similar ideas in New England. The executed Indians had no claim to nobility recognized by the English, and Canonchet was the only truly high-status individual to

---

<sup>18</sup> Klemp, "Theater of death," 330-334; Rogers, *Murder and the Death Penalty*, 1, 18-19; Seeman, *Death in the New World*, 38-44.

<sup>19</sup> For continuity, see especially the executions of Nepaupuck, Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 24; and Busheage, Winthrop, *Journal*, 534-5. There were certainly many cases where executions were performed differently than they would have been in England, and in all cases the circumstances differed, but the commonalities indicate that the meanings officials were attempting to leverage remained the same.

be executed by beheading.<sup>20</sup> Further, there is no language in the records that suggests that New England officials (civilian or military) considered the station of the Indians in deciding their method of execution. On the contrary, William Hubbard, in his *Narrative*, describes Matoonas as a “malicious Caitife,” that is, cowardly and despicable, and says calls Canonchet a “damned wretch,” who suffered an “ignominious death.” Nathaniel Saltonstall, meanwhile, described an Indian man, executed during King Philip’s War for similar actions to those beheaded (though this man was hanged), as having a “Dog-like Death,” which was “good enough.” Additionally, while Metacom was not executed, but killed in battle, he did not receive any sort of respect after his death either. Benjamin Church, after dragging his body out of the swamp, described him as a “doleful, great, naked, dirty beast,” and Church’s executioner, when ordered to behead and quarter Metacom, said he “would now chop his ass for him.”<sup>21</sup> Finally, this disregard may be why officials executed a number of the men examined here, such as Canonchet, Tispaquin, Matoonas, and his son, by shooting or hanging before removing and displaying their heads. Officials thereby ensured that these men received all of the humiliations associated with beheading – dehumanization through removal of the head and subsequent display – without the benefit the mercy and honor associated with it as a means of execution. So while in many ways the English meanings that surrounded beheading as a form of

---

<sup>20</sup> Nathaniel Saltonstall, “A New and Further Narrative of the State of New-England,” in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913): 77-99, esp. 90.

<sup>21</sup> “Malicious Caitife,” Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101; “damned wretch,” Hubbard, “A Postscript,” *A Narrative*, 8; “ignominious death,” *ibid.*, 6; “Dog-like Death,” “good enough,” Nathaniel Saltonstall, “The Present State of New-England with Respect to the Indian War,” in *Narratives of the Indian Wars*, 25-50, quotation 41; “doleful, great, naked dirty beast,” Benjamin Church, *Diary of King Philip’s War, 1675-76*, ed., Alan Simpson and Mary Simpson (Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975): 155; “would now chop his ass,” *ibid.*, 156.

performative violence continued to be important in New England, it appears that New England officials only sought to evoke the degrading aspects of beheading.<sup>22</sup>

English ideas about beheading and its practice as a form of performative violence were not the only ones present in New England during the seventeenth century. They existed alongside and in conversation with Algonquian ideas and practices. Performed violence was a significant part of Algonquian culture and warfare, and left a great impression on the English colonists they encountered. English sources show a particular fascination with (and fear of) the Algonquian practice of torturing captives to death. Hubbard related one instance that occurred towards the end of King Philip's War, when a group of Mohegans and colonists captured a Narragansett man. Hubbard described the scene that followed, in which the Mohegans, with the permission of the English (some of whom joined in) put the man to death:

Making a great Circle, they placed him in the middle, that all their Eyes might at the same time, be pleased with utmost Revenge upon him; They first cut one of his Fingers round in the joynt; at the Trunck of his hand, with a sharp knife, and then brake it off... then they cut off another & another, till they had dismembered one hand of all its digits, the blood sometimes spirting out in streams a yard from his hand... his Executioners... dealt with the Toes of his feet, as they had done with the Fingers of his hands; All the while making him dance round the Circle and sing, till he had wearied both himself and them. At last they brake the bones of his Legs, after which he was forced to sit down, which 'tis said he silently did, till they had knockt out his brains.<sup>23</sup>

Algonquians used such acts of performative violence to reference the alternation between death and renewal, as well as provide a cathartic act of communal revenge against an enemy. This act demonstrated the victory and power of the victorious

---

<sup>22</sup> On Canonchet see Saltonstall, "A New and Further Narrative," 90-91; Tispaquin see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 107; Old Matoonas see Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 184-5; Young Matoonas see Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 82 and Anonymous, *A True Account*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Hubbard, "A Postscript," *A Narrative*, 10.

community, provided an approved place for an outpouring of violent grief, and bound the community together through the performance of dismemberment.<sup>24</sup>

A critical aspect in Algonquian rituals of performative violence, as in English beheadings, was the behavior of the person to be killed. In English judicial beheadings the condemned was supposed to die well by being accepting and cooperative. Similarly, Algonquians who were tortured to death were to remain stoic and even defiant in the face of their torment to show their bravery and acceptance of their death. When the Mohegans asked the abovementioned prisoner – as they dismembered his hands and forced him to dance – how he liked the war, he responded that “he liked it very well, and found it as sweet, as the English men did their Sugar.”<sup>25</sup> Performative violence was thus an important part in both English and Algonquian culture and society, and in many ways fulfilled similar purposes.

New England Algonquians also practiced beheading, though it seems to have had less resonance as a punishment and more as an act of trophy hunting. Hubbard claims that in 1643 the Narragansett sachem Miantonomoh (father of Canonchet) killed and beheaded a Mohegan who had accused him of plotting against the English. Later that same year, when Uncas, the Mohegan Sachem, captured Miantonomoh in a battle, Uncas killed him on the advice of the commissioners of the United Colonies, which Hubbard claims Uncas accomplished by beheading. Much more common was the practice of trophy hunting, which often took the form of exchanging severed heads to foster ties between allies. Algonquians also recognized the power of display,

---

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 226; Lee, “Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge,” 730; and Lipman, “A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather.” Lee also argues that torture functioned as a method of restraint in warfare, by satisfying the desire for revenge.

<sup>25</sup> Hubbard, “A Postscript,” *A Narrative*, 10. See also Lee, “Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge,” 730.

as evidenced by their tactic of leaving severed heads on poles in places English people were sure to discover them.<sup>26</sup> Though this seems to indicate that Algonquians were more interested in demonstrating their power to their enemies – or, through trophy exchange, their allies – rather than their own community, beheading, performative violence, and the meanings those who used them attempted to communicate appear to have been understandable across cultural boundaries.

The case of Busheage best demonstrates the intersection and mutual intelligibility between Algonquian and English cultures of performative violence as expressed through judicial beheading. New Haven officials executed Busheage in 1644 for murdering a Stamford woman. In June of that year Busheage entered the woman's home – she was alone except for her infant child – struck her on the head with a lathing hammer, and stole some clothing. The woman survived long enough for the magistrate to bring a number of Indians before her to identify and she picked one, but he escaped from prison while awaiting execution. In August a group of Indians brought in a different man, Busheage, whom they claimed had committed the murder. He confessed and brought along the stolen clothes as proof, whereupon he the court put him to death. The General Court in New Haven took great interest in the case, as they feared it signaled, “thatt the Indians being so bolde and insolent are misceivously bent to begin a warr against the English,” and convened a council of war to prepare for that eventuality. The court may have been justified in its nervousness – Busheage's actions were likely linked to the ongoing conflict, known

---

<sup>26</sup> On Miantonomoh see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 6. On trophy hunting see Lipman, “A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather,” and Bragdon, *Native People*, 226. For examples of Indian display of heads, see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 19 and Daniel Gookin, *An Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England, in the Years 1675, 1767, 1677* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 480. See also Lepore, *The Name of War*, 179-80.

as Kieft's War, between local Algonquians and the Dutch colonists of New Netherland, which was just over the border from Stamford, a colonial distinction that may not have meant much to Busheage. New Haven officials thus sought to make an example of Busheage, to prevent the perceived war at its inception.<sup>27</sup>

Though there is no detailed description of the lead up to his beheading, after the court had issued the sentence, the executioner would have taken Busheage to the place of execution, where the assembled people of Stamford watched as “the executioner would strike off his head with a falchion, but he had eight blows at it before he could effect it, and the Indian sat upright and stirred not all the time.”<sup>28</sup> That the executioner chose to use a sword, rather than an ax, is especially interesting because it required more specialized equipment and a more skilled executioner, one or both of which New Haven apparently lacked. Despite these shortcomings, the magistrate and executioner in Stamford seem to have recreated an English judicial beheading as closely as they were able, which indicates that they sought their audience to draw the same associations as their English counterparts. Through their beheading of Busheage, New Haven officials attempted to demonstrate to their own people that they were dealing with the potential threat of Indian warfare, while at the same time communicating (in an impressive and gory fashion) to other Algonquians that they would not tolerate aggression. Further, Busheage's actions at his execution, passively and stoically accepting his own death, were crucial both to English conceptions of how a condemned person could die well and how Algonquians were

---

<sup>27</sup> Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 135, 146; Winthrop, *Journal*, 534-5. It appears that the actual record of the trial have been lost. There is also some confusion as to the fate of the woman, as the trial was for murder, but Winthrop claims that the woman did not die, but did lose her senses.

<sup>28</sup> Winthrop, *Journal*, 534-5.

supposed to react in the face of torture. Indeed, the scene was inadvertently more in line with Algonquian expectations, as the executioner subjected Busheage to the torment of repeated blows, rather than the merciful single stroke intended by English authorities.<sup>29</sup>

It is crucial that the practice of beheading as performative violence was mutually intelligible, as performative violence is ultimately an attempt to communicate. In this instance, the people engaged in this bloody discourse found this communication to be comprehensible across cultures. This not only enabled Algonquian and English people to understand each other across cultures, but also strengthened the message that colonial officials sought to communicate to their own people through these judicial beheadings. The cooperation and acceptance of the condemned was a vital part of legitimizing the state's participation in the execution (as it had been in England) and the decapitated Algonquians' own tradition of accepting death with stoic calm helped to make sure that these beheadings occurred according to plan, which in turn bolstered their legitimacy – along with the officials' own. Though the meanings English people associated with beheading remained largely the same when transported from England (with the exception of its honorable aspects, which colonial authorities seem to have abandoned or discounted) the specifics of how and in what circumstances officials performed these beheadings changed drastically. English authorities beheaded people as a legal punishment or act

---

<sup>29</sup> Eight blows, especially with the sword, would have been an outrageous number. Multiple strikes often led to mob violence against the incompetent executioner, and in some German towns an executioner would be forced to die in the condemned place after three strikes. See Joel F. Harrington, *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century* (New York: Faber, Straus and Giroux, 2013) 87-8.

of war, but in New England, the executions of these eight Indian men had aspects of both.

English legal precedent had well established and codified beheading as a legal punishment when groups of English men and women first left to create colonies in North America. These colonists brought with them the practice of beheading as a legal punishment, but it functioned quite differently in New England. As previously mentioned, English courts reserved execution by beheading for members of the nobility who had committed treason, along with individuals granted special dispensation by the monarch. English people saw beheading as the most honorable and dignified means of being put to death and, despite the goriness and cruelty that may jump out to the modern reader, considered it the most humane option available. The courts hanged common criminals, not using the methods later devised to break the neck with a drop, but by stringing them up and leaving them to suffocate, a death that could take up to half an hour. Common male traitors endured the even more horrific punishment of drawing and quartering, in which the executioner hanged the prisoner, cut him down before he died, then castrated and disemboweled him, and threw the parts on a fire in sight of the prisoner. Finally the executioner decapitated and cut the prisoner's body into four parts. Courts burned common women convicted of treason at the stake. Given these alternatives, it is not difficult to see how decapitation would have been preferable, and indeed, a number of the Indians beheaded in New England were subject to sequences of violence comparable to quartering.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Webb, *Execution*, 9, 33, 80-81; Clark, *Capital Punishment*, 26, 35, 78.

The English saw their limited use of decapitation as exceptional and emblematic of their approach to justice, which they considered to be less brutal and more conducive to liberty than those of other European nations. Raphael Holinshed, in describing the punishments used in England, claimed that English courts punished common felonies by hanging and “For other punishments used in other countries we have no knowledge or use,” which he suggests contributes to England having “so few grievous crimes committed with us as else where in the world.” After discussing drawing and quartering for treason, Holinshed clarifies that “when soever anie of the nobilitie are convicted of high treason by their peeres... this maner of their death is converted into the losse of their heads onelie.” Despite listing a litany of punishments including drawing and quartering for treason, burning alive for women who kill their husbands, being boiled to death in water or lead for servants who kill their masters, the pillory and branding for perjury, amputation of one or both ears for numerous crimes, removal of hands for sheep stealing and “carting, ducking and doing of open penance in sheets” for “harlots and their mates,” Holinshed claims that “to use torment also or question by paine and torture in these common cases with us is greatlie abhorred,” and that English people naturally refuse to “yield [their] bodies unto such servile halings and tearings as are used in other countries... for our nation is free stout hautie, prodigall of life and bloud... and therefore cannot in anie wise digest to be used as villanes and slaves, in suffering continuallie beating, servitude, and servile torments.”<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Quotations from Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: Printed by Henry Denham, 1587) vol. 1: 184-5.

Holinshed's account of English punishments, though published almost fifty to ninety years before these judicial decapitations took place, reveals that English people viewed their system of justice and punishment as exceptional and emblematic of their liberty as English people. Most strikingly, Holinshed seems to view torture and gory punishments as beneath English people, suitable only for "villanes and slaves"<sup>32</sup> – this despite the numerous examples of judicial torture (sometimes accompanying execution) that he chronicles. Why then would New England colonists deviate from a system they viewed as central to their identity as English people? Holinshed seems to indicate that English legal punishment was the province of worthy people, and that deviation from this norm applied only to lesser people. This may explain why New England officials chose to behead Indians: they viewed them as lesser, and therefore subject to torments and gory displays that the English were not. It also may demonstrate how colonists separated the degrading aspects of beheading from the ennobling ones. In any case, Holinshed demonstrates how English courts used beheading as a legal punishment and what its place was in the greater context of early-modern English punishments.

How well, then, do the executions at hand fit the English practice of beheading as a legal punishment? The most obvious connection is that all of these executions were judicial beheadings, carried out with the force of law, as previously mentioned. Some followed court trials, while others followed military or less formal trials, but nonetheless officials saw them all as administering justice under the law. They also fit, somewhat uneasily, into English legal practices that reserve beheading

---

<sup>32</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 1:184.

as punishment for treason. Though their executioners did not explicitly accuse or convict the victims of these decapitations of treason, they were members of groups who officials considered to be in rebellion. Due to treaties the various New England colonies had signed with the Native American groups living within and nearby the lands they claimed – especially Metacom’s people, the Wampanoags – the colonies believed that Indian groups were subject to them. In one such treaty, which Metacom was forced to sign after Plymouth had compelled him to disarm, the sachem acknowledged himself and all his people “subjects to his majestie the Kinge of England, &c, and the gouerment of New Plymouth, and to their laws.” With the backing of these treaties – and in some cases charters that they believed gave them legal claim to the land these Indians lived on – these colonists felt comfortable claiming that Metacom and his allies were, “in open rebellion against our souereign lord Kinge Charles... expressed by raising a crewel and unlawfull warr.” Another author, writing to England about the war, made it explicit that Metacom, his father Moonam, and his grandfather Massasoit had all voluntarily acknowledged themselves subjects to the King of England, while still others referred to the Indians fighting against the English as “Revolters.”<sup>33</sup>

Given theses justifications for asserting that any Indian at war with the colonies was in open revolt, it is not hard to see how officials could have judged these beheaded Indians as subject to punishments traditionally reserved for treason. Still, these beheadings do not fit the English practice of beheading as a legal punishment.

---

<sup>33</sup> Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records*, 5: 79, “subjects to his majestie” 244; Anonymous, *A farther Brief and True Narration of the Late Wars risen in New-England, Occasioned by the Quarrelsome Disposition and Perfidious Carriage of the Barbarous and Savage Indian Natives there* (London: J. D., 1676): 12; “Revolters,” Anonymous, *A True Account*, 5 and Nathaniel Saltonstall, “A Continuation of the State of New-England, 1676,” in *Narratives of the Indian Wars*, 73.

First, as mentioned above, records do not mention treason in relation to any of the individuals who received a trial, exactly the place such accusations should turn up if they were part of the legal justification for the executions. Further, none of the victims had any claim to nobility – aside from perhaps Canonchet, who was a sachem. But contrary to what one might expect if this were the case, he received the most ignoble execution of the group, nearly identical to drawing and quartering. Given the victims' lack of claims to nobility, quartering is the punishment that would be expected for treason, but New England authorities did not administer it, at least to these Indians. New England officials were aware of the punishment, as they had carried it out on Joshua Tift, a white man they accused of fighting for the Indians during King Philip's War. This makes their choice of decapitation, if used for treason, curious, even if the executioner administered it after death by firing squad. Why afford one rebel the dignity of beheading while sentencing another to quartering?<sup>34</sup>

This lack of consistency appears elsewhere. It is not only apparent in general, as colonial authorities only beheaded about eight Indians out of hundreds or thousands who killed or fought against the New England colonists, but in specific cases as well. On July 21, 1676, officials had brought three Indians named Woodcocke, Quanapawhan, and John Num, to Plymouth and executed them for the killing of the Clarke family in an attack on their isolated home. Before the sentence was carried out, the three Indians accused Keweenam of informing them that the Clarke home was vulnerable, and of helping them to murder William Clarke, the family's patriarch. Keweenam admitted to having been at the Clarkes' home the day

---

<sup>34</sup> On Tift see Saltonstall, "A Continuation," 67.

before the attack and of having spoken to the other Indians about the vulnerability of the house. The court considered this, along with the fact that he had not warned anyone of the attack, enough to sentence Keweenam to death and beheaded him immediately. This was the only beheading that resulted from an official court trial during King Philip's War.<sup>35</sup> Though the Plymouth General Court tried four Indians for the killings, Keweenam was the only one that the court records specifically state was decapitated. If beheading was supposed to be a uniform legal punishment for a specific crime, why did only one of the people who participated in the crime – indeed, the only person who had not actively participated – receive that punishment?<sup>36</sup>

The continuities and conflicts with English practices of beheading as a legal punishment can be clearly seen in the case of Old Matoonas, a Nipmuc man executed during King Philip's War for orchestrating the attack on Mendham – the first attack in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in King Philip's War – and for leading an ambush that killed Captain Edward Hutchinson and many of his men near Brookfield, Massachusetts. The Nipmuc sachem Sagamore John brought Matoonas into Boston on July 27, 1676 in an attempt to defect to the English, offering up Matoonas as proof of his sincerity. The authorities convened a council on the spot to question Matoonas and summarily sentenced him to death. Then Sagamore John and his men, in order to

---

<sup>35</sup> Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records*, 5: 204-6. Hearn claims that Woodcocke, Quanapawhan, John Num, and a fourth Indian named Wotuchpo, present for questioning at the same time as the first three, were also beheaded. Hearn, *Legal Executions*. However, the records state only that "centance of death was pronounced against them, which accordingly emediately was executed." Because the records do not mention it and these executions occurred on different days, I have not included these four in the total number of executions. This ambiguity, along with the possibility of unrecorded beheadings, is the reason for the inexactness of the count.

<sup>36</sup> Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records* 5: 205-6.

further prove their loyalty, either volunteered or were forced to execute Matoonas –accounts differ, though the fact that John fled Boston to hide in the woods soon after seems to indicate the latter. After John and the Nipmucs tied Matoonas to a tree and shot him, the colonists cut off his head and put it on a pole by the gallows, facing the head of his son who had been executed for a murder five years earlier.<sup>37</sup>

At first, Matoonas’s case seems to complicate our understanding of these executions as legal punishments. He was executed summarily by Indians, not after a trial by colonial authorities. However, Massachusetts officials ordered his death as punishment for specific crimes – the attack on Mendham and the ambush near Brookfield – and did so only after he “confessed that he had rightly deserved Death,” which is enough to show that this was a legal proceeding, if not a regular one.<sup>38</sup> However, where Matoonas’s case provides real clarification is in the association of these beheadings with the preexisting English legal practice of decapitation for treason. This is because Matoonas had previously been Christian, or at least “seemed to favour the Praying Indians and the Christian Religion.” What’s more, almost exactly two years earlier, in 1674 Daniel Gookin, the Superintendent of the Praying Indians for the Massachusetts Bay Colony, confirmed Matoonas, who he called “a grave and sober Indian,” as the constable of the new praying town of Pakachoog, which was only twenty miles from Mendham.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> On Matoonas and his execution see Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 80-82; Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101; Sewall, “Diary,” 15; Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 184-5; Anon, *A True Account*, 8. Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 184-5, claims that John and his men volunteered, but other accounts are less clear and his son Cotton Mather, in his account (citation the same) claimed John was ordered by Massachusetts authorities. On Sagamore John’s flight, see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 112-113

<sup>38</sup> Quotation Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> “Seemed to favour,” Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101. On Matoonas’s appointment as constable see Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (Boston: Belknap and Hale, 1792) 52-3.

Here we see the most clear-cut case for treason for any of the beheaded Indians. Matoonas had not merely been party to a (coerced) treaty like the Wampanoags or Narragansetts, but had actually formerly served as the Massachusetts Bay Colony in an official capacity as the constable of Pakachoog, as selected by the members of that community and confirmed by Gookin. Hubbard, in his *Narrative* even calls him “Simon Magus.” Additionally, that the executioner placed his head facing his son’s demonstrates that Boston officials perceived Matoonas and his family as potential leaders or focal points for hostile Native power. By displaying the severed heads of father and son together, Boston officials emphasized the familial disgrace while taking practical steps towards destroying a lineage they perceived as treasonous and threatening. Boston authorities’ fear of Matoonas’s family is further demonstrated by their long-term imprisonment of another son, whom Sagamore John turned over to the English at the same time. Though Matoonas is the clearest case of treason, New England courts and officials applied ideas and practices surrounding treason and its punishment, which sanctioned beheading, to all of the Indians they judicially decapitated.<sup>40</sup>

The preexisting practice of beheading as a legal punishment that the New England colonists inherited from England is clearly an important tool in understanding the intellectual and legal origins of these judicial beheadings. However, given the multiple ways that these beheadings do not fit established practices it is also apparent that legal practices alone are not sufficient to explain these executions. In order to create a fuller picture, practices of beheading originating

---

<sup>40</sup> “Simon Magus,” Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 101. Anon, *A True Account*, 8. Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 184. Neither source mentions if Matoonas had more than two sons, only that the one executed in 1671 was the eldest.

in the military and warfare, especially those relating to the English conquest of Ireland, must also be considered. The practice of beheading as an act of war falls into three broad categories: atrocity, military justice, and trophy hunting.

The practice of beheading as an act of war also informed the officials who ordered the judicial decapitations at the center of this study. Both the English and Algonquians had practiced beheading in warfare prior to their encounters, violent or otherwise, and they continued the practice when they fought each other. The judicial beheadings ordered by New England officials show influence from the preexisting (and, indeed coexisting) practice of beheading as an act of war that was present in both English and Algonquian culture.

The English wars in Ireland in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries provide excellent examples of the preexisting practice of beheading as an act of war that the colonists brought with them to New England. A number of historians have viewed Ireland as a precursor to English attempts to colonize America, especially in their treatment of the Irish as conquered colonial subjects. This is born out by the rhetoric that English colonizers used to describe the Irish, which is strikingly similar to that used to describe Indians. English chroniclers writing about the Irish frequently used words like “wild” and “savage” to describe their subjects. Samuel Gorton, the prominent Rhode Island colonist, made an explicit comparison between the two cultures, and their ways of fighting, in a 1675 letter to John Winthrop, Jr., “I remember the time of the warres in Ireland... where much English blood was spilt by a people much like unto these [Indians].” The Irish wars, like the Pequot War and King Philip’s War, were astoundingly fierce and thus represent an excellent window

into the bounds, rules, and practice of war, and are an especially useful point of comparison because both sides widely practiced beheading.<sup>41</sup>

The beheadings in Ireland were part of a larger pattern of atrocity, which military commanders used widely as a part of warfare in Europe in the early modern era. Early modern European armies purposely used atrocity, here defined as violence in warfare that was excessive or inflicted on illegitimate targets, such as civilians or soldiers outside of or after battle, as part of their overall military strategy. In many cases early modern Europeans accepted actions that modern people would consider atrocities, such as pillaging villages for goods or sacking cities that refused to surrender to a besieging force, as part of the culture and practice of war and thus did not consider them atrocities at all. Military commanders often used this sort of apparently unrestrained and disproportionate violence to accomplish both material goals, such as pillaging the countryside to provide supplies for one side while denying them to their enemies, and more psychological ones, including massacring enemy soldiers or populations to strike terror into the enemy and hopefully make them less willing to resist. In either case, commanders intentionally committed atrocities to break the enemy's will or ability to resist.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> For the usefulness of Ireland as a precursor to the colonization of America and the analogy of English warfare against the Irish to that against Indians see Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976); Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*; Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003): 1-4; Peter C. Mancall, introduction to *Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580-1640* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995): 10-11. For the use of words "savage" and "wild" to refer to the Irish see Palmer, "An headlesse Ladie," 25-7, 30, 33, 50; Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 17. Quotation Samuel Gorton to John Winthrop, Jr., Sept. 11, 1675, *The Winthrop Papers*, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 7, series 4 (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1865) 627-31, quotation 630.

<sup>42</sup> On atrocity, its definition and goals see, Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe*, 53-66; Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 1; Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 34; and, with specific reference to Ireland, Clodagh Tait, David Edwards, and Pádraig Lenihan, "Early Modern Ireland: A History of Violence,"

The most relevant examples of atrocity for this study are the beheadings carried out by the Irish and English soldiers and commanders during England's attempts to conquer Ireland in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Beheading had long been part of the military culture in Ireland, but it was English commanders who escalated the practice to astonishing levels in their attempts to impose colonial authority. Perhaps most infamously, the English commander Sir Humphrey Gilbert ordered the massacre of entire villages and that heads of the slain "should bee cutte of from their bodies, and brought to the place where he incamped at night: and should there bee laied on the ground, eche side of the waie leading into his owne Tente: so that none could come into his Tente for any cause, but commonly he muste passe through a lane of heddes." Gilbert and other English commanders used such beheadings to inspire terror and despair within the Irish population and widely publicized the atrocities in writings and woodcuts, alongside the gorier and more direct methods of display utilized by Gilbert.<sup>43</sup>

English and other European armies, in Ireland and elsewhere, articulated the justifications for such explosions of violence through a code of military justice. Implicit and explicit laws of war that permitted or forbade such acts depending on the circumstances governed the extreme sorts of violence seen in Ireland and elsewhere. For instance, if a city surrendered immediately upon being besieged it the customs of war dictated that the attacker spare the city from violence. However, if the attacker

---

in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, eds. David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007): 9-33; and David Edwards, "The Escalation of Violence in Sixteenth-Century Ireland," *Ibid*, 34-79.

<sup>43</sup> David Edwards, "'Some Days Two Heads and Some Days Four,'" *History Ireland* 17, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2009): 18-21, esp. 20-21; Quotation Thomas Churchyard, *A Generall Rehearsall of Warres*, quoted in Palmer, "An headlesse Ladie," 35; Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 15.

took it only after an assault the customs of war justified nearly any form of violence against the city and its populace. Such extreme measures characterized military law and justice in this era. Generally, the rules of war protected combatants and civilians in certain cases, but once a group fell outside of these specific protections those same rules justified nearly any action against them. In particular, authorities saw those they considered to be in open rebellion, as they did the Irish, as entirely outside of any protection, and considered them traitors and not legal enemies, thus permitting any form of violence against them. In England, the monarch or his or her appointed subordinates could grant martial law commissions to commanders, rendering extreme methods legal. Authorities, then, intended military justice to allow those it empowered to legally suppress disorder by any means necessary. Such tenuous restraints broke down even further when English soldiers and commanders encountered people that had different military cultures, which the English did not understand, and thus the two sides could not agree on the proper limits of war, as was the case in wars between the English and the Irish or Indians.<sup>44</sup>

A final military practice that informed the beheadings at the center of this study was that of trophy hunting. Hardly a standard practice of war, English military commanders occasionally implemented bounties for the body parts of enemies when facing an enemy they deemed inferior, such as the Irish and, later, Native Americans. In Ireland, English commanders instituted a bounty system, called “head money,”

---

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey Parker, “Early Modern Europe,” in *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World*, eds. Michael Howard, Georges J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 40-58, esp. 45-47, 49, 52, 56; Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 20-21; Karr, “Why Should You be so Furious?,” 908-9.

whereby they would put a price on the head of a known rebel, to be paid to the person or group who brought it in.<sup>45</sup>

It is essential to remember that the judicial beheadings at the center of this study existed in the context of beheading as an act of war, which was informed not only by such distant (at least at first glance) examples as the English in Ireland, but also by military practices in New England. While some English authorities in New England ordered beheadings after the action, leaders and fighting men in the field, English and Algonquian, practiced beheading as an act of war, either as part of a pattern of atrocity or through trophy hunting. The immediacy of such practices must have had an impact on the New England officials who ordered judicial decapitations and thereby influenced their decision to implement this form of punishment.

Both English and Algonquian fighting men in the Pequot War and King Philip's War cut the heads off of their fallen enemies in order to intimidate or dishearten their opponents, often displaying the heads afterwards. One of the most celebrated actions of King Philip's War was the decapitation of that slain leader, after which colonists paraded his head, which fortuitously arrived on a day of thanksgiving ordained by the authorities, into Plymouth to the great celebration of the populace. Less famous was the death of Weetamoo, "Squaw Sachem" of Pocasset, who, after drowning in a river while attempting to flee from her English pursuers, was found on the riverbank, "her head being cut off and set upon a Pole in Taunton."<sup>46</sup> Algonquians

---

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, "Some days two heads," 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> On Philip's decapitation see Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 154-6 and Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 195-7. On Weetamoo see Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 191 and Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 102-3, "Squaw Sachem," 102, "her head," 103. Weetamoo is the only woman for whom there is a clear record of beheading. This apparent anomaly in the pattern of officials only beheading Native men engaged in warfare can be explained in two ways. First, officials did not behead Weetamoo as part of a judicial ceremony; instead soldiers removed her head after death as an act of

also engaged in such activity. In addition to the previously related incidence of Wampanoags decapitating slain English foes and putting their heads on poles by the road, sources record numerous other examples of corpse mutilation by Algonquians. In July 1636 an English merchant discovered John Oldham, a trader whose death helped spark the Pequot War, with “his head cleft to the brains, and his hands and legs cut as if they had been cutting them off.” During King Philip’s War a group of Indians hostile to the English killed and decapitated a man named Beard outside of a garrison house and set his head on a pole in sight of the garrison. In other incidents English colonists found their fellows “with their Fingers and Feet cut off, and the Skin of their Heads flayed off,” or after having their “privy Members” removed.<sup>47</sup> Algonquian warriors frequently carried out such actions on their own as part of the pattern and practice of atrocity meant to sap the enemy’s will to fight. However, more often they seemed to have been a part of the rampant trophy hunting and exchange of body parts that was practiced during these wars.

The New England colonists encouraged this trophy hunting in their various wars against Algonquians in the seventeenth century. During the Pequot War, New England officials encouraged their Native allies to send them the dismembered body parts, and especially heads, of killed Pequots. Colonial authorities frequently, though not universally, rewarded such grisly tokens with bounties of wampum or coats.

Payment, however, was not the primary function of the exchange of body parts.

---

battlefield atrocity, and thus her decapitation does not fit in to the ideas and practices surrounding judicial beheadings. Second, as the leader of a group of hostile Native people, Weetamoo fits the profile for a victim of beheading fairly well, especially because, as a war leader, English people would have perceived her as fulfilling a masculine role.

<sup>47</sup> On the heads by the road see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 19; “his head cleft,” quoted in Cave, *The Pequot War*, 104; on Beard see Hubbard, “A Narrative of the Trouble with the Indians in New-England, From Pascataqua to Pemmaquid,” *A Narrative*, 22; “Fingers and Feet,” Saltonstall, “The Present State of New-England,” 29; “privy Members,” Saltonstall, “New and Further Narrative” 82.

Rather, it was the meanings associated with the body parts and their exchange that those involved valued. The English valued the trophies for the dominance over a defeated enemy they demonstrated, while their Algonquian allies saw the exchange of body parts as a means of affirming and strengthening alliances. Colonial officials further encouraged trophy hunting during King Philip's War, when they instituted a standing offer of a coat worth ten shillings per Indian scalp and twenty coats for Metacom's head. Indeed, Connecticut officials rewarded the Indians that brought in Canonchet's head with a coat each. However, the binding aspects of trophy hunting and exchange were still present among Algonquians. One Christian Indian, loyal to the English, managed to exploit the importance of trophy hunting to escape from a sachem associated by Philip by claiming to switch sides and then saying, "Philip knows me, and that I fought against him... and he will not believe me, that I am really turned to his side, unless I do some notable exploit first, and kill some Englishmen and carry their heads to him." This man, named James, was then able to leave the custody of the sachem, ostensibly to pursue English heads, and made his escape. Both in Ireland and New England, then, the English saw trophy hunting as a useful means of encouraging the prosecution of war and saw the trophies generated by it as potent symbols of victory, dominance, and allegiance.<sup>48</sup>

The judicial beheadings of Native Americans show a number of apparent influences from the pre- and coexisting practice of beheading as an act of war. As previously shown, colonial authorities saw them all as explicitly tied to war or the

---

<sup>48</sup> Lipman, "'A Meanes to Knitt them Togeather,'" 17; John Easton, "A Relacion of the Indyan Warre," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913): 7-23, esp. 14; Saltonstall, "The Present State of New-England," 30, 34; "Philip knows me," Gookin, *Historical Account*, 488.

possibility of war, many through crimes that were perpetrated as deliberate acts of those wars. Additionally, officials beheaded four of the Indians without a trial. The most obvious case is that of Canonchet, sachem of the Narragansetts and their leader during one of the largest confrontations of the war, the Great Swamp Fight. In April 1676 a group of Connecticut soldiers under Captain George Denison, along with allied Mohegans, Pequots, and Niantics (the last of whom had gone against their sachem Ninnicroft, who was neutral) under Uncas, the Mohegan sachem, captured him. Canonchet refused to make peace in exchange for his life and was taken to Stonington where Denison gave the order to kill him and “that all might share in the Glory of destroying so great a Prince, and come under the Obligation of Fidelity to each other, the Pequods shot him, the Mohegins cut off his Head and quartered his Body, and the Ninnicrofts Men [Niantics] made the Fire and burned his Quarters.” Denison then sent his head to Hartford, where the General Court awarded each of the Indians who had brought it a coat.<sup>49</sup>

Though Denison, a military official, executed Canonchet, civilian officials beheaded Old Matoonas and two other Indians in ways that line up well with the practice of military justice. In November 1676, after John Alderman, a Christian Indian, shot and killed Metacom in battle, Captain Benjamin Church captured, at different times, his “lieutenants” Annawon and Tispaquin. Both surrendered to

---

<sup>49</sup> Saltonstall, “A New and Further Narrative,” 90-91, “that all might share,” 91; Anonymous, *A True Account*, 2; Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 50; J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, (Hartford, CT: F. A. Brown, 1852) 2: 432; The exact details of the execution are unclear. Some sources indicate that he was executed at Stonington, others at New London. While Hubbard identifies a group of anonymous Pequots and Mohegans as the executioners, Harris claims that it was Uncas, the Mohegan Sachem, and his son, while Saltonstall claims it was an even larger group. I have attempted to present the most corroborated story, i.e. he was executed after the fact in Stonington.

For the importance of the exchange of body parts to maintaining alliances see Lipman, ““A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather.””

Church under the condition that they be spared – Tispaquin even volunteered to change sides – and he took them to Plymouth, after which he left for Boston.

Tispaquin had apparently claimed that he was invulnerable to bullets, and the officials at Plymouth decided he would only be granted mercy if this were true and shot him to death. As for Annawon, after he confessed that he had killed, captured, and tortured Englishmen, they put him to death as well. When Church returned to Plymouth, “he found to his grief that the heads of Annawon, Tispaquin, [had been] cut off.”

Authorities did not accuse them of specific crimes, did not give them an official trial, and executed them summarily and with little ceremony. Indeed, officials carried out the executions during King Philip’s War in a climate in which the Massachusetts Bay Colony had sanctioned the indiscriminate slaying of any Native American found outside of a select few towns, reminiscent of the broad powers granted by martial law commissions. These characteristics speak to the influence of military practices and ideas when attempting to explain these judicial beheadings.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the characteristics these executions share with the preexisting military scripts relating to beheading, there are a number of attributes that demonstrate the inability of military practices to explain these decapitations on their own. The first and most glaring is that most of the beheadings were subject to a large degree of restraint compared to what would be expected under martial law. Nepaupuck, Busheage, and Keweenam received trials in civilian courts, and while Annawaon, and Young and Old Matoonas, did not receive court trials, they were questioned by civilian councils in legal ceremonies and put to death by civilian officials, while

---

<sup>50</sup> On Old Matoonas see Mather, *History of King Philip’s War*, 184-5; On Annawon and Tispaquin see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 107-9; and Church, *Diary of King Philip’s War*, 169, 173, Quotation 173; For Massachusetts sanctioning the killing of Indians see Saltonstall, “Present State of New-England,” 32-3;

civilian officials gave Tispaquin a sort of trial by ordeal when they ordered him shot. Only Canonchet's death fits squarely into the practice of military justice.<sup>51</sup>

Equally problematic is the fact that the New England colonies lacked any coherent system of military justice and no colony issued martial law commissions during this period. This lack of definition led to confusion and even conflict between military and civilian authorities over what to do with enemy captives, and even over who qualified as an enemy, during King Philip's War. Such disputes seemed to surround one Captain Samuel Mosely, a popular commander and inveterate Indian hater. For instance, the Massachusetts General Court had appointed John Hoar of Concord the guardian of a group of fifty-eight Nashobah Indians. However, the residents of that town soon found the presence of the Nashobahs to be intolerable and sent for Mosely, who, with the help of his company of soldiers and some of the residents of Concord, broke down Hoar's door and escorted the Nashobahs to Boston and thence to the internment camp on Deer Island, despite the Nashobahs official protection under the aegis of the General Court.<sup>52</sup> Mosely again illustrated this conflict when, of his own accord, he rounded up fifteen Christian Indians, allies of the colonists, from Okonhamesittsand and marched them to Boston, where the court found all but three innocent and had to release the acquitted Indians at night to avoid a mass lynching.<sup>53</sup> Daniel Gookin, Superintendent for the Praying Indians for the

---

<sup>51</sup> On Nepaupuck see Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 3; Busheage see Winthrop, *Journal*, 534-5; Keweenam see Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records* 5: 205-6; Young Matoonas see Harris, *A Rhode Islander Reports*, 82 and Anonymous, *A True Account*, 8; Old Matoonas see Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 184-5; Annawon see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 108-9; Tispaquin see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 107; Canonchet see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Jenny Hale Pulsipher, "Massacre at Hurtleberry Hill: Christian Indians and English Authority in Metacom's War," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (July, 1996): 459-486, esp. 471-2;

<sup>53</sup> Saltonstall, "The Present State of New England," 40-41; Pulsipher, "Massacre at Hurtleberry Hill," 479.

Massachusetts Bay Colony and noted (and therefore hated) supporter of Christian and friendly Indians during King Philip's War, lamented such actions and the attitude that surrounded them, arguing against having "[Christian and friendly] Indians put to death by martial law, and not tried by a jury," because "they were subjects under English protection." He even called Mosely "mutinous," and accused him of "setting up a military power in opposition to the chief authority of the country," as a result of his actions.<sup>54</sup> The actions of Captain Mosely and his conflicts with the General Court of Massachusetts demonstrate the confusion and even conflict regarding which Indians qualified as enemies and who had jurisdiction over their punishment between military commanders and civilian authorities, which in turn demonstrates that there was no settled standard for military justice in the New England colonies during King Philip's War. They also show that in many cases, the civilian authorities in the colonies sought to impose a degree of restraint with regards to actions taken against Indians. That is to say, they wanted to ensure that those Indians who did receive a punishment "deserved" it and that civilian courts and authorities would determine who did or did not deserve punishment, which contradicts the usual indiscriminate violence – authorized and enacted by military officials – associated with military justice.

Even Canonchet's execution, the most explicitly military of the judicial beheadings, cannot be wholly explained by influences from beheading as an act of war. Denison and his allies did not perform the decapitation on the field or on a corpse, as such prominent examples of beheading as atrocity as the mutilations of

---

<sup>54</sup> "Martial law," and "they were subjects," Gookin, *Historical Account*, 459; "mutinous," *ibid.*, 502; "setting up a military power," *ibid.* 496.

Metacom and Weetamoo had been. Rather, Connecticut and allied forces first took Canonchet prisoner and transported him to the Connecticut town of Stonington, where it seems likely the execution had an audience composed of people on the side of the executioners, rather than on the side of the executed. Denison did not order Canonchet's corpse left to intimidate Narragansetts, but ordered his Indian allies to destroy it, to "more firmly engage" them to the English, while two Indians took his head to Hartford to demonstrate his death.<sup>55</sup> All of these fit poorly into the practice of beheading as an act of war and seem to fit better with the practice of beheading as a legal punishment.

The practice of beheading as an act of war, then, is also not sufficient to explain the judicial decapitations of Native Americans that took place in seventeenth-century New England – though such beheadings did take place. The civilian authorities were too concerned with maintaining legal justification for the deaths and restraining some of the more indiscriminant actions that characterized the prosecution of military justice, which was even more ill defined in the colonies than it was in England, leading to conflicts between military and civilian officials. However, when we look at the ways that military and legal practices and ideas interacted with each other, we can begin to see a new pattern that, while it does not fit comfortably into either set of scripts on their own, bears the marks of influence from each.

In the seventeenth century, officials in New England sought to communicate the long-established meanings associated with decapitation as a form of performative violence. However, rather than merely reproducing preexisting practices, officials

---

<sup>55</sup> On Metacom and Weetamoo, see Church, *Diary of King Philip's War*, 154-6; Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 191, 195-7; and Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 102-3. "More firmly," Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67;

enacted a new practice that was a reconfiguration of the preexisting practices of beheading as a legal punishment and as an act of war. This new practice can be characterized as a form of judicial trophy hunting, which colonists directed towards the heads of Native Americans whom they perceived as rebellious enemies. As the name suggests, this judicial trophy hunting operated through the legal system to label particular Indian men as criminals, guilty of rebellion. It then relaxed the procedures and guidelines that were usually necessary to justify a judicial beheading in order to inflict an impressive punishment and generate a trophy – the head – that authorities could display as evidence of justice. Though officials relaxed the restrictions on what justified a judicial beheading by doing away with the requirement that the condemned be noble – and often by removing the necessity of a court trial – they did not do away with such restrictions entirely. Some form of legal ceremony and justification were necessary, and the condemned had to be suspected of killing (or of having helped to kill) an English person. Due to treaties various Algonquian groups had signed with the New England colonies, colonists construed these wartime killings as rebellion, which justified the loosening of restraints, a process characteristic of military justice.

These military practices modified the usual legal practices surrounding beheading due to the special fear that English colonists felt towards war with Indians. Such fear was pervasive throughout New England in the seventeenth century; colonists almost constantly suspected that their Native neighbors were conspiring against them. When war actually erupted such fears reached a fever pitch and rumors of Indian attacks and atrocities tore through the colonies. Samuel Sewall, living in Boston during King Philip's War, recorded many of these rumors in his diary. He also

reported on an incident illustrative of this fear. In October 1676, Sewall's brother told him that a young man had been fowling by a pond near Salem. While there the young man saw a person with black hair, which was enough to frighten him so badly that he shot the dark-haired person and ran, fearing that the person he had just killed was an Indian and that more would follow. The next day a search party went out and discovered that the victim was in fact a black-haired Englishman.<sup>56</sup>

Such fear motivated colonists to adopt practices normally associated with military justice, which facilitated the erosion of restraint and allowed them to institute novel and extreme punishments, such a beheading. Daniel Gookin's chronicle of the history of the Christian Indians during King Philip's War demonstrates this panic and its effects. Gookin consistently mentions the hatred, born of fear, many people in Massachusetts held towards Algonquians as a result of the war. He claimed that "some men were so violent that they would have had these Indians put to death by martial law, and not tried by a jury, though they were subjects under English protection, and not in hostility with us," thus showing how the populace allowed the fear of Indian war to alter their ideas about how judges and magistrates should administer justice. Indeed, Gookin recalls an incident in which the authorities in Boston imprisoned a Christian Indian, despite his possession of a pass that identified him as friendly to the English and allowed him to travel, solely to "satisfy the clamours of the people." In another incident, a lynch mob forced officials to hang an imprisoned Indian immediately in order to prevent the mob from doing the job for them. For opposing such changes to how jurists justified and enacted legal

---

<sup>56</sup> Sewall, "Diary," 24, for examples of rumors see 12-17, 23 (the murderer was subsequently arrested); On colonial fears surrounding Indians see Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 40-41.

punishment, Gookin was widely hated by the English colonists, such that his name became “a Byword among Men and Boys,” and “he was afraid to go along in the Streets.”<sup>57</sup> Such incidents demonstrate how the fear of war with Native Americans, and the rage it created, allowed officials to incorporate practices more associated with the military and warfare into legal procedures and create judicial trophy hunting.

Another factor that facilitated the creation of this new practice of beheading was the attempt by Puritans to reform English legal practice. Puritan magistrates and judges in New England saw English law as excessively formalized, with too much Latin jargon that was impenetrable to the layman and too many restrictive rules for punishment. Puritan legal theorists believed that a godly magistrate could best decide the punishment deserved in a specific situation and would only be hindered by strict rules that necessitated particular punishments for particular crimes. It is notable that two of the three beheadings involving court trials occurred in New Haven, where Puritan attempts at legal reform were most radical.<sup>58</sup>

Taken together with the desire of many legal officials to reform legal practices, the existence of a pluralistic legal environment in seventeenth-century New England is another crucial factor that enabled the emergence of judicial trophy hunting. New England legal officials acted in a time and place characterized by the emergence and confluence of multiple different sources of legality. Naturally, New England jurists drew on English common law, which they often modified with

---

<sup>57</sup> Gookin, *Historical Account*, 449-50, 453, 466, 477, 482, 494; “some men,” *Ibid.*, 459, “satisfy the clamours,” *ibid.*, 481; “a Byword,” Satlonstall, “Present State of New-England,” 40, “he was afraid,” *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>58</sup> On Puritan legal reform see Rogers, *Murder and the Death Penalty*, 1-2, 8-9; Richard J. Ross, “The Legal Past of Early New England: Notes for the Study of Law, Legal Culture, and Intellectual History,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (January, 1993): 28-41; On New Haven in particular see Cornelia Dayton Hughes, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society on Connecticut 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 27-31.

precepts from Biblical law and their own ideas about reform. However, their specific location in time and space led them to draw from other sources as well. Being at war, they drew from English traditions of military justice, which generally ceded legal authority to the commanders in the field and countenanced extreme measures. They were also exposed to Algonquian ideas about justice based on reciprocity. Though influence from Native American conceptions of justice are present in some civil cases involving Native Americans, there does not seem to be any direct influence in the instance of judicial trophy hunting. Finally, the New England officials who ordered these executions lived in a time characterized by the concept of the emergence of the laws of war.<sup>59</sup>

The new thinking on the laws of war, largely inspired by Hugo Grotius's *On the Laws of War and Peace*, translated into English in 1654, held a number of concepts that may help explain the actions of New England authorities. The most important concept it could have provided these officials was the just-war doctrine, which at its absolute most basic level stated that "a just war was a war waged for the enforcement of right and the eradication of evil." This way of thinking made war essentially a law-enforcement operation, which ties war up into a system of legality and thus implies that observers could not see a just war as a conflict between legal or moral equals; one side fought for the restoration of justice, while the other was necessarily criminal and in the wrong. Grotius, in *On the Laws of War and Peace*, describes three types of just causes for war, the most relevant of which for the

---

<sup>59</sup> Rogers, *Murder and the Death Penalty*, 1-2, 8-9; Richard J. Ross, "The Legal Past of Early New England"; Hermes, "Justice Will be Done Us"; Karr, "'Why Should You Be So Furious?"; Stephen C. Neff, *War and the Law of Nations: A General History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Richard Tuck, Introduction to *The Rights of War and Peace* by Hugo Grotius, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005).

purposes of this study is war for the infliction of punishment for past wrongdoing. This is especially vital for the case at hand because the two wars that inspired the majority of these beheadings were in large part punitive. New England authorities justified the Pequot War as revenge for the murder of English traders, while they justified King Philip's War as a response to Metacom's provocations, including the murder of Christian Indian John Sassamon and Metacom's subsequent refusal to accept Plymouth's jurisdiction. Particularly important is that in Grotius's influential interpretation of just war the severity of punishment that the justified party could inflict in a punitive war was determined by the degree of the wrongdoer's moral turpitude, not the amount of loss suffered by the victim. Given the way that many New England officials wrote about their Native enemies, it is easy to see how they could have classified atrocities and beheadings under the heading of just actions in a just war.<sup>60</sup> In an environment where ideas and practices from multiple legal traditions applied and circulated, New England officials drew from the ones that made the most sense and best helped them to accomplish their goals.

It was these contexts of war, fear, reform, and legal confusion that led New England officials to modify their normal legal procedures with elements of military justice and trophy hunting. War with Indians, and the fear the colonists had of it, led them to alter their existing legal system by incorporating military methods; extreme situations justified extreme measures. The desire of puritan magistrates to reform the English legal system by implementing flexible, ad hoc judgments, along with the pluralistic legal environment they inhabited, helped to facilitate this, while still

---

<sup>60</sup> Neff, *War and the Law of Nations*, esp. 57, 97; "a just war," *ibid.*, 49. Tuck, Introduction to *The Rights of War and Peace*.

keeping the new, eased restraints under the umbrella of the legal system. Other factors contributed to the maintenance of legal restraint in the face of military extremity as well. The most critical was the New England civilian authorities' continued desire to maintain control and a sense of justice and equity. Puritan legal authorities saw all people as equal before God and thus the law. Many puritan authorities, such as the previously discussed Daniel Gookin, sought to maintain their values of legal equity and reciprocity in the face of war and the abandonment of restraint it could entail.<sup>61</sup> These conflicting impulses and officials' attempts to maneuver between them resulted in apparently contradictory actions, as New England officials executed and sold massive numbers of Native Americans into slavery during the Pequot War and King Philip's War, while at the same time feuding with such advocates of extremity as Samuel Mosely.

These contradictory impulses – towards extremity on the one hand and restraint on the other – gave rise to judicial trophy hunting, which embraced both. Its implementors attempted to maintain what they saw as the rule of law and enacted it only a few times against individuals that they saw as clear criminal threats. Plymouth officials articulated their attempts at restraint when they sentenced Keweenam and his compatriots to death, noting that, “it was fully made knowne to such Indians as were then present that the said engagement was to be understood with exception,” that is, that the choice of this punishment and, more broadly, legal action to punish an act of war, was a result of this special case.<sup>62</sup> However, colonial authorities accomplished

---

<sup>61</sup> On Puritan ideas of legal equity and reciprocity and attempts to maintain it during war see Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 148; Hermes, “Justice Will be Done Us”; Pulsipher, “Massacre at Hurtleberry Hill”;

<sup>62</sup> Shurtleff, *Plymouth Colony Records*, 205.

this attempt to maintain restraint and the rule of law by, as the Plymouth official noted to the other Indians present at Keweenam's execution, bending and altering the normal practices and rules regarding decapitation, a form of punishment meant to be as impressive as possible.

New England officials drew on the existing cultural meanings of decapitation as a form of performative violence, along with the inherent gory spectacle of a public beheading, to ensure that they emphasized the action in the most impressive way possible. Even more crucially, they perpetuated the act for years by displaying the heads as trophies in public places. Young Matoonas's head remained on the Boston gallows long enough for the executioner to position his father's head facing it five years later, while Plymouth officials displayed Metacom's head on a pike for at least twenty years, long enough for Cotton Mather, the son of Increase Mather, to remove "the jaw from the exposed skull of that Blasphemous Leviathan," which he did "not long before" writing *Magnalia Christi Americana*, published in 1702.<sup>63</sup> The display of heads was a vital part of the decapitation ceremony that showcased to more people than could be present at the event itself that authorities had managed to execute justice. When New England officials displayed the heads of the Indians they executed, they demonstrated the triumph of their justice and showed that the threat, at least the one posed by a particular Indian, had been eliminated. These displayed Indian heads functioned as a final humiliation to the executed and an emphatic, gory period, signifying that their story was over.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> On Matoonas see Anon., *A True Account*, 8. On Metacom see Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 197.

<sup>64</sup> Lipman, "A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather," 14; Palmer, "An headlesse Ladie," 32-4.

As such, where military or civilian officials chose to display the heads can tell us a lot about what the purpose of these executions was. The New Haven General Court displayed Nepaupuck's head on a pole in the New Haven marketplace. Young and Old Matoonas, the father and son pair, were reunited when the executioner displayed their heads next to each other on the Boston gallows. Though we do not know where exactly Hartford officials chose to display it, we do know that Canonchet's head was taken from Stonington sixty miles away to Hartford, the seat of government for the Connecticut colony, while Plymouth kept Metacom's head on display for decades.<sup>65</sup> These were all public places in the heart of English settlement where English colonists were likely to see them and hostile Indians were not. It is therefore clear that New England officials intended to use these impressive executions and the trophies they generated to demonstrate as graphically as possible to the English colonists that justice had been done and to reassure them in the face of war against an enemy they feared, while still attempting to maintain law and justice. That the severed heads may have also served to intimidate hostile Algonquians was a much less important byproduct.

These beheadings were an expression of judicial trophy hunting; a novel combination of preexisting ideas and practices that had previously characterized decapitation as a form of performative violence, a legal punishment, and an act of war. New England officials sought largely to maintain the meanings communicated through beheading as an act of performative violence (with the exception of its ennobling aspects), but did so by creating a new practice that was influenced by

---

<sup>65</sup> On Nepaupuck see Hoadly, *Records of New Haven*, 24; on Young and Old Matoonas see Anonymous, *A True Account*, 8; on Canonchet see Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67; On Metacom see Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 197.

previous practices of decapitation as a legal punishment and as an act of war, but did not precisely fit either. Authorities incorporated ideas and practices surrounding treason, punishment, military justice, and the use of atrocity in new ways in seventeenth-century New England, merging them into this novel form as a result of the wars with neighboring Algonquians. New England officials, intent on maintaining some form of restraint but pushed to extreme measures by fear, beheaded these eight Indian men and displayed the resulting trophies to reassure other colonists in the face of war and the fear that went along with it. It is to this reassuring use of judicial beheading that Increase Mather referred to when, writing about the arrival of Metacom's head at Plymouth on the day of thanksgiving held to commemorate the sachem's death, he said, "Thus did God break the head of that Leviathan, and gave it to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."<sup>66</sup>

Despite their relatively small number, these beheadings reveal a number of things about how Algonquian and English cultures interacted during the early phases of sustained contact. First, these beheadings demonstrate that English thoughts and practices – specifically those regarding violence, punishment, and justice – changed as a result of contact with Native cultures and actions. When English people encountered Native Americans, in this case violently, both cultures needed to adapt their previous ideas and practices in order to respond to their new contexts. Contact, and the changes it wrought, was thus a two way street and just as Native societies had to change in response to the presence of European ones, so to did European societies have to adapt to the presence of their Native neighbors. In this case the interactions

---

<sup>66</sup> Mather, *History of King Philip's War*, 197.

that prompted that change were violent, and colonists responded to the threat of war with Indians – and the fear it instilled in them – by developing judicial trophy hunting to display their mastery of the situation through acts of performed violence and thus reassure themselves that they were able to eliminate threats.

These judicial beheadings can also be examined to reveal how colonial authorities functioned in seventeenth-century New England. As a result of their governing philosophy and the pluralistic legal environment they inhabited, colonial authorities seem to have had a great deal of leeway in modifying their legal system to better respond to the situation they found themselves in. However, they were constrained by what their constituents wanted and would accept, as the public anger towards all Indians and the attempted responses of officials show. Most strikingly, the practice of judicial trophy hunting demonstrates that in seventeenth-century New England officials conflated judicial and military power, such that the legal system served to pursue the military goals of the colony while the colonial military forces acted to enforce colonial laws. The governments of the New England colonies thus formed a sort of legal-military complex, which criminalized Native action against colonists as treason, and then used both the military and legal system in tandem to enforce their conception of justice on Native Americans, in this case through judicial trophy hunting, which was an expression of both legal and military power.

Finally and most critically, these judicial beheadings illustrate the role of performative violence in seventeenth-century New England. First, they show how its practice by the colonists changed compared to its practice in England, though officials on both sides of the Atlantic still beheaded people to demonstrate the same

things and evoke the same meanings. But more critically, these cases of judicial trophy hunting reveal how performed violence mediated and structured relationships between Algonquians and New England colonists. Performative violence is, at its heart, a form of communication, and so by examining these executions we can determine what New England officials were attempting to communicate. To that end, New England authorities used performative violence to separate Indians from themselves, putting Indians apart from and underneath the English. English colonists used performative violence, both Algonquian and their own, to separate their two cultures and place Native Americans in an inferior position, morally and politically. While New England authorities ordered these beheadings they simultaneously wrote about how they abhorred Algonquian practices of performed violence, and used their different methods to separate their cultures and characterize Indians as barbaric. The previously discussed account of Mohegans torturing a captured enemy to death, with English people present, demonstrates this perfectly. Hubbard used the incident to demonstrate that Mohegans (allies of the English) had a “Cruel Genius of Revenge, in which brutish and divlish passion they are most of all delighted.” He used his account of this incident of performed violence to contrast Indian and English practices and thus show them to be separate and morally inferior. While the Mohegans practice their “barbarous and unheard of Cruelty,” the English, who were “not delighted in blood,” were “not able to bear, it forcing Tears from their Eyes.”<sup>67</sup>

Here, Hubbard contrasted the claimed violence and bloodthirstiness of Native Americans, as demonstrated through their method of performative violence, with the

---

<sup>67</sup>Hubbard, “A Postscript,” *A Narrative*, 9-10. Lepore provides a similar account and interpretation of this same incident, Lepore, “Prologue: The Circle,” *Name of War*, 3-18

purportedly civilized, restrained, and violence-abhorring nature of the English. But the judicial beheadings at the center of this study reveal how New England authorities used performative violence to demonstrate and reinforce their desired political relationship with Native Americans as well. First, and most obviously, by sentencing these Algonquian men to a traitor's death for making war on the English, and then demonstrating English power on their bodies and displaying their severed heads as evidence, colonial authorities attempted to exhibit to all involved – Native Americans and their own people – that these Indians were subject to English rule, and that resistance was illegitimate and would not be tolerated.

Such expressions of dominance applied not only to Indian enemies, but to friendly Indians as well. Both Native and English people used shared participation in performative violence to create bonds between allies. In two of the beheadings – those of Canonchet and Matoonas – English officials ordered Indians to carry out the executions, which officials did explicitly “the more firmly to engage” them to the English. But in both cases, there are undertones that suggest that they did not intend this to be a bond forged between equals. The Mohegans, Pequots, and Niantics who carried out Canonchet's execution did so on the “advice of the English Commanders,” while Sagamore John and the Nipmucs who executed Matoonas did so to prove their submission to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In these instances, then, English authorities, military and civilian, seem to have ordered Indians to participate in these executions to demonstrate their bonds as subjects to the English. That Sagamore John fled from Boston soon after he was forced to execute Matoonas

seems to indicate that Native people were not always comfortable with such an arrangement.<sup>68</sup>

By examining the instances of judicial trophy hunting in seventeenth-century New England, we see that performative violence was an important means through which Native and English people structured and demonstrated their relationships. In addition to using different methods of performative violence to demonstrate the boundary that separated English people from Algonquians, colonial authorities communicated their dominance over their Indian neighbors, either by killing and displaying the heads of their enemies, or by forcing their allies to participate in executions. Thus violence, and especially performed violence, was an essential means in structuring and demonstrating relationships between colonists and Native Americans in seventeenth-century New England, and the means through which colonial authorities demonstrated their power to both the Indians they claimed to rule and the colonists they sought to reassure.

---

<sup>68</sup> Hubbard, *A Narrative*, 67, 101, 112-3; Mather, *History of King Philips War*, 184-5. Quotations Hubbard, 67.

## Bibliography

### Primary

- Anonymous, *A farther Brief and True Narration of the Late Wars risen in New-England, Occasioned by the Quarrelsome Disposition and Perfidious Carriage of the Barbarous and Savage Indian Natives there* (London: J. D., 1676): 12.
- Anonymous, *A True Account of the Most Considerable Occurrences that have hapned in the Warre between the English and the Indians in New-England, From the Fifth of May, 1678, to the Fourth of August last; as also of the Successes it hath pleased God to give the English against them: As it hath been communicated by Letters to a Friend in London*. London: Benjamin Billingsley, 1676.
- Bartholine, Thomas. *Bartholinus Anatomy*. London: Peter Cole, 1663.
- Bradstreet, Simon. "Simon Bradstreet's Journal, 1664-1683," edited by James B. Thornton, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 8, no. 4 (October, 1854): 325-333.
- Church, Benjamin. *Diary of King Philip's War, 1675-76*. Edited by Alan Simpson and Mary Simpson. Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975.
- Easton, John. "A Relacion of the Indyan Warre," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*. Edited by Charles H. Lincoln. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913: 7-23.
- Gookin, Daniel. *An Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in New England, in the Years 1675, 1767, 1677*. New York: Arno Press, 1972.
- Gookin, Daniel. *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England*. Boston: Belknap and Hale, 1792.
- Gorton, Samuel to John Winthrop, Jr., Sept. 11, 1675, *The Winthrop Papers, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 7, series 4. Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1865: 627-31.
- Harris, William. *A Rhode Islander Reports on King Philip's War: The Second William Harris Letter of August, 1676*. Edited by Douglas Edward Leach. Providence, RI: The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1963.
- Hoadly, Charles J., editor. *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, From 1638 to 1649*. Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1857.
- Holinshed, Raphael. *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Volume 1. London: Printed by Henry Denham, 1587.
- Hubbard, William. *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England, from the first planting thereof in the year 1607, to this present year 1677. But chiefly of the late Troubles in the two last years, 1675. And 1676. To which is added a Discourse about the Warre with the Pequods in the year 1637*. Boston: John Fosler, 1677.
- Mather, Increase. *The History of King Philip's War*. Edited by Samuel G. Drake. Repr. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1990; Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1862.
- Saltonstall, Nathaniel. "A Continuation of the State of New-England, 1676," in

- Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*. Edited by Charles H. Lincoln. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913: 51-73.
- Saltonstall, Nathaniel. "A New and Further Narrative of the State of New-England," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*. Edited by Charles H. Lincoln. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913: 77-99.
- Saltonstall, Nathaniel. "The Present State of New-England with Respect to the Indian War," in *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675-1699*. Edited by Charles H. Lincoln. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913: 25-50.
- Shurtleff, Nathaniel B. *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*. Boston: Press of William White, 1856.
- Trumbull, Hammond, editor. *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*. Hartford, CT: F. A. Brown, 1852.
- Winthrop, John. *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*. Edited by Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

### Secondary

- Baker, Emerson W. and John G. Reid. "Amerindian Power in the Early Modern Northeast: A Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, vol. 61, no. 1 (January, 2004): 77-106.
- Blackhawk, Ned. *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Bragdon, Kathleen. *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.
- Canny, Nicholas P. *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976.
- Cave, Alfred A. *The Pequot War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Clark, Richard. *Capital Punishment in Britain*. Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allen Publishing, 2009.
- Cohen, Daniel A. *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Edwards, David. "'Some Days Two Heads and Some Days Four,'" *History Ireland* 17, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2009): 18-21.
- Edwards, David. "The Escalation of Violence in Sixteenth-Century Ireland," in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*. Edited by David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007: 34-79.
- Gallay, Alan. *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Grenier, John. *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Harrington, Joel F. *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century*. New York: Faber, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

- Hearn, David Allen. *Legal Executions in New England: A Comprehensive Reference, 1623-1960*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999.
- Hermes, Katherine. "Jurisdiction in the Colonial Northeast: Algonquian, English, and French Governance." *The American Journal of Legal History* 43, no. 1 (January, 1999): 52-73.
- Hermes, Katherine. "Justice Will be Done Us: Algonquian Demands for Reciprocity in the Courts of European Settlers," in *The Many Legalities of Early America*, edited by Christopher L. Tomlins and Bruce H. Mann. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Hinderaker, Eric and Peter C. Mancall. *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Hughes, Cornelia Dayton. *Women Before the Bar: Gender Law and Society on Connecticut 1639-1789*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Karr, Ronald Dale. "'Why Should You Be So Furious?': The Violence of the Pequot War," *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December, 1998): 876-909.
- Kawashima, Yasuhide. *Puritan Justice and the Indian: White Man's Law in Massachusetts, 1630-1763*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986.
- Klemp, P.J. "I have been bred upon the Theater of death, and have learned that part': The Execution Ritual during the English Revolution," *The Seventeenth Century* 26, no. 2 (October 2011): 323-345.
- Lee, Wayne E. "Early American Ways of War: A New Reconnaissance, 1600-1815," *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (March, 2001): 269-289.
- Lee, Wayne E. "Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare, 1500-1800," *The Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 (July, 2007): 701-741.
- Lee, Wayne E. *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1860*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Lepore, Jill. *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Lipman, Andrew. "'A Meanes to Knitt Them Togeather': The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War," *WMQ* 65, no. 1 (January, 2008): 2-28.
- Mancall, Peter C. Introduction to *Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580-1640*. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995: 10-11.
- Neff, Stephen C. *War and the Law of Nations: A General History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Oberg, Michael Leroy. *The Head in Edward Nugent's Hand: Roanoke's Forgotten Indians*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- Palmer, Patricia. "'An headlesse Ladie' and 'a horses loade of heades': Writing the Beheading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 25-57.
- Parker, Geoffrey. "Early Modern Europe," in *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World*. Edited by Michael Howard, Georges J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994: 40-58.

- Pulsipher, Jenny Hale. "Massacre at Hurtleberry Hill: Christian Indians and English Authority in Metacom's War," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (July, 1996): 459-486.
- Pulsipher, Jenny Hale. *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Rogers, Alan. *Murder and the Death Penalty in Massachusetts*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.
- Ronda, James P. "Red and White at the Bench: Indians and the Law in Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691." *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 110 (1974).
- Ross, Richard J. "The Legal Past of Early New England: Notes for the Study of Law, Legal Culture, and Intellectual History," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (January, 1993): 28-41.
- Ruff, Julius R. *Violence in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Salisbury, Neal. *Manitou and Providence: Indians Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Seeman, Erik R. *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Sewall, Samuel. "Diary of Samuel Sewall. 1674-1729: Vol. 1. 1674-1700," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Series 5, Vol. 5*.
- Silver, Peter. *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Starkey, Armstrong. *European and Native American warfare, 1675-1815*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.
- Steele, Ian K. *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Tait, Clodagh, David Edwards, and Pádraig Lenihan. "Early Modern Ireland: A History of Violence," in *Age of Atrocity: Violence and Political Conflict in Early Modern Ireland*, edited by David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan, and Clodagh Tait. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007: 9-33.
- Tuck, Richard. Introduction to *The Rights of War and Peace* by Hugo Grotius, ed. Richard Tuck. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005.
- Vaughan, Alden T. *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* 3d. edition. Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1995.
- Webb, Simon. *Execution: A History of Capital Punishment in Britain*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011.