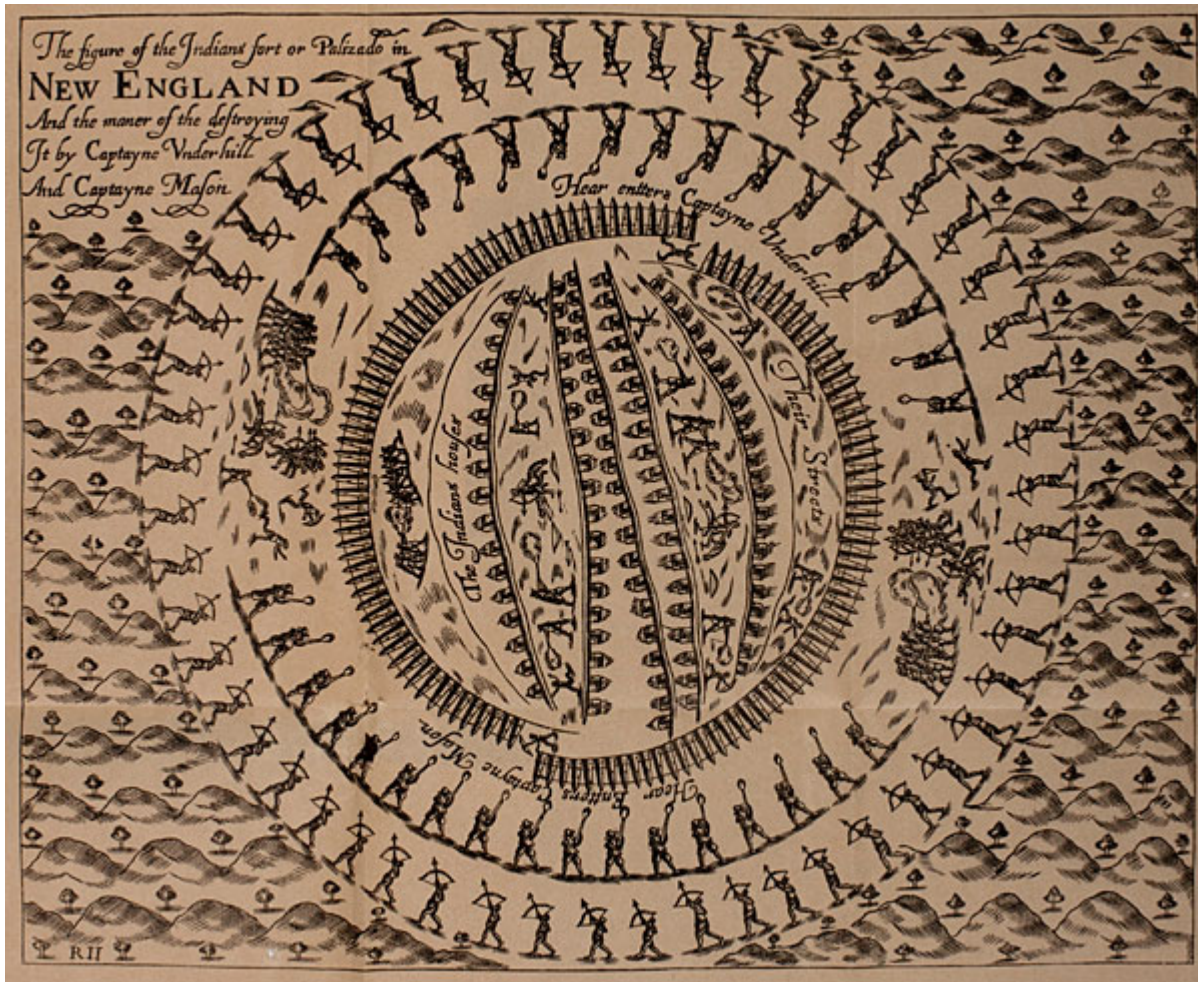


# King Philip's Hand



## Prologue

I had begun so many times.  
With snow, with leaves, with wind and rain,  
with a white initial A of sail,  
with a woman's voice recalled, with syllables  
stilled centuries ago, with faces in the trees,  
in the windows, in the fog.

I had begun so many times  
before the tiny rubric of the crab's claw appeared  
in my palm, curling out from its scavenged shell,  
just before the fog.  
Before the cold rain began in my shoulders.  
Before the fog.

Down where the ocean melts to a sheen,  
looking back toward dune grass, the charred log

where my family sat, I watched the infiltration of the pines,  
the vanishing of the islet we had planned to explore.  
Then it was upon them,  
or rather it erased us all—it poured through everything,  
until I had just ten yards of water, sand, and white air to see,  
the sun a spun nickel at my shoulder.

I was being brought about again.

Mutterings wavered up, strangers trembled past with awful smiles  
and disappeared.

So now, say it, they said, say what  
you knew of the earth, the where of it, the truth of it,  
what soil, sea, what wind prevailed, what voices in your blood,  
when it was blood, when it was wind,  
when stars sang into your body as you lay there on the stones,  
breathing there, remember, so long  
it came to seem looking out as from the whole  
planet's vast, sloping side.  
What was given you to know?

Ogwhan

Ogwhan

Let the boat drift

Nickquenum nittauke: mishquawtuck  
home to cedar trees.

Wunnagehan sowanniu.

before a southwest wind.

Belong there, settle, claim  
at last the scents and leaves, the moody tidal song  
of channel bells.

You will lose them just this way,  
lose life after life.

I have begun so many times.  
Begin again.

## King Philip's Hand

*In Memoriam E. M. F. 1900-1978*

*It is characteristic then, of what I have called 'angelic' consciousness that it does not develop a separate, hidden, inner world of private thoughts and feelings. These Beings reflect, or pass on, the light they receive from above; and that is their inner life. Or we can put it that they do indeed have an inner life, but do not feel it as being exclusively their own...not in the sense*

of [it] being at their disposal. ...On the occasion of the Fall, all this was changed by the intervention of Lucifer. Lucifer induced man to begin hiding and hoarding his inner life, and to take pride in it—as a ‘room of one’s own’—making it into something separate and detached alike from its outward manifestation (nature) and from the inner world of spirit beings... Man is now started on the long road which ends in his present normal relation to Nature, wherein nature is not merely his own outward manifestation, nor that of the higher Spiritual Beings who shine through him; wherein nature is not a manifestation at all, but an object—a finished work.

Owen Barfield

There they were, dignified, invisible, Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves, In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air, And the bird called...

T.S.Eliot

Everything only connected by “and” and “and.”

Elizabeth Bishop

When the old Plymouth lost its brakes  
on the bridge’s far slope she didn’t say  
a word, just shifted down to an empty lot,  
stopped them short with the parking brake,  
raised a hand to her lips, and smiled at him.

Ten years later, when he’d drive her to market  
or the clinic, and she’d say “Home, James”  
in her amused, quavering voice, he’d recall  
the flicker of triumph on her face that day,  
as though she’d been modestly enjoying  
what she’d have called pluck, what now  
was letting her live out winters alone  
beside the bay. She had a cheerful dignity,  
humorous self-possession, and a streak  
of unpredictable severity, but he could bear  
her gentle admonitions, about speeding,  
sex, seamanship—even her once saying  
she hoped he wouldn’t always be an angry  
young man. So he keeps yearning her back  
across the lost waves, the old moraines,  
longing, and fearing her arrival.

She was interested  
in history, (they were on the way  
to Gilbert Stuart’s house the morning  
the brakes failed), and so one summer

suggested he accompany his cousin  
to the museum, near Philip's last  
stronghold on Monthaup, his people's  
summer home—a spring, the granite throne.  
There they sorted moccasins, and built  
a wigwam with a student of anthropology  
from Brooklyn, a young bearded man  
whose anger took an ironic, Marxist form.

The museum was near the bridge, minutes  
from an estate where they learned tennis.  
No wonder he had them pegged: no hope,  
or worse, the first who would perish  
in the revolution's maw. In their whites  
and sneakers they were helping make a story  
out of items—that gentle catalogue of what's  
presumed an extinct way of life, recalled  
as a romance by those who murdered it.  
Arrowheads and spearpoints, wampum  
and beads—that frail dome of saplings  
and bark they struggled to lash up said more  
about their habits than lost cultures, but their  
lives depended on finishing that hut, upon  
reading labeled items under glass, selected  
and arranged like stones for a path the mind  
might follow down to the waters...

\*

Mud became the shale the glacier  
crushed to stones we heaved as  
children by the hour into whitecaps,  
to become the gravel becoming  
the sand piling at the tidemark. Legend  
says that with the Devil's help, Philip  
could throw a stone from Mount Hope  
a mile across the harbor to Poppasquash...

I would call her back, who passed  
such history on to me. But I never  
learned the faith she used to compose  
past and future, that let old portrait  
figures, villains, heroes, plain,  
goodhearted sorts from several  
centuries go about their lives  
and works all at once in her mind,  
as in some busy village Brueghel  
painted. Now as the land she knew

is vanishing, her shadow comes  
in me to belong somehow with Philip's,  
like contraries the mind feels  
obliged to hold together—the strange  
comfort of distinction made and  
overcome at once...

That is not your piping voice, not  
your deliberate passage from the porch  
to the kitchen, not your sigh heaved through me,  
but it is, it isn't merely a gust of southwest wind.  
The cardinal in the big oak isn't answering,  
he is keening twice, then eight bunched,  
rising whistles back to me, three times,  
and then he adds cadenzas, until I cannot  
say it back.

*Cuppyaumen.*

*Pashpishea.*

*Mequaunamiinnea*

*Now you are there.*

*Moonrise.*

*Remember me.*

Memory, no wish to be a hero  
made Philip say *I am determined not  
to live until I have no country.* Even if  
his scattered bones calcified beneath  
this earth, no prayer, no spell, no  
moonrise will bring the lost to voice.  
Salt wind on our skin is not their touch.  
Aloof and disappointed, they only seem  
to wake in episodes of our making, beneath  
the wind-ridden trees, the driven clouds.

*Cowwewonck.*

*Soul.*

*Wunnicheke.*

*Hand.*

*Keesauname.*

*Save me.*

In her last years she wondered aloud  
only whether she would recognize  
her husband. I pretended to remember him  
more clearly than the sharpest recollection  
I have—clinging to his shoulders as  
he swims toward a float. Could I reach  
him, or even Philip in their afterworld,  
I'd ask if they could locate her. And look  
what I have done now, stranding her under  
Matteson, in my life's encyclopedia,  
across from Metacomet, far from her William.  
Surely someone who knew them both to love  
will put this right. And I think she would  
forgive me, having called me more than  
once by her lost son's name, dead suddenly  
at about the age I was when she died.

*Yes, I seek him rowing there among  
a moonlit fleet of boats at anchor. There are so many  
places to look.*

Halyards gently slapping, an unlashd  
tiller

waving slowly. With each  
stroke he takes a pair of whirlpools  
gleam.  
Where is *Trilobite*, his tiny moth-winged  
catboat, where? I cannot tell him, he  
cannot hear me say the hurricane destroyed  
her.

Spirits show across the scrim of present  
spirits; uncannily kindred, he and I,  
in letters we had written her, apologizing  
for tickets we had gotten driving her car,  
some twenty years apart...  
*just the continental wind...*

*The wind is long and shadow-flagged  
and moonstruck. The whole song,  
beginning everywhere and nowhere,  
flute-stopped upon the northwest  
corner of the house. We are all  
within it, all of us, all one. Stand  
beside the winter window, there  
beneath the bookshelf. Closer, in  
the corner with the pestle and  
binoculars. Feel your nape crawl.  
The breath upon your knuckles*

Mere associations  
that's all, dissolving from reverence to humor,  
disappointing hope with common sense.  
My ancestors read and read their holy  
dictionary for signs of their god's will;  
the random verses they lit upon made  
metaphors with practical results—  
destinies, space for English names to creep  
west across the blank, benighted maps.

*The winters here are hard, the bright spaces of the snow as smooth as vellum. Deerprints and sticks look like words I cannot read, just at the dark edge of the forest.*

Listen, poor shadow, whirled among  
the cedars. The bell, whose bird-limed  
clapper we held silent for five minutes  
one moonlit wild night years ago,  
the bell goes on, telling the channel passage  
to the ships, searing the darkness white  
an instant, clanging, clanging.

*This is the passage through, the right of way,  
all else is damnation, a wilderness of death.*

Now that you wander, I know why  
you told us more than once of that  
Longley cousin. Taken, after  
witnessing the slaughter of his parents,  
he begged his captors to let him  
return, just to set his father's cows to forage.  
When he kept his promise and returned  
to the tribe, they adopted him, and when years  
later relatives redeemed him, the story goes  
they had to bring him back by force. Claimed  
by twenty stark Quebec seasons, he had  
wandered, couldn't return to ownership,  
the stonewalled plots of Groton. He grew  
old, of course, and well-to-do (why  
his story survived), but I have always  
wondered what became of his two  
sisters, and if you trembled to think  
of them, or envied how they really  
must have come to know the countryside?

*As we know it now. Disaforested, routed, claimed,  
a prospect of some acquiring mind. The dead have always known  
what they, what you have done.*

*Fear their smiling. I was a teller of  
stories. I am a story now.  
The living suppose the stories belong to them.*

But you seemed to bless my reverence  
for waves and stars and trees. Because  
it was your nature to love kinships,  
affinities, or just the apt and lovely names  
of things, I thought you left mere causes

and effects to the sententious...

*It is not as you suppose. I pass freely in the light between the worlds.  
No one needs to hold the quahog shut, answer the bird, fasten the blossom  
underneath the apple.*

*We can hear the sad improvisations inside the silent one, the snarl within  
that one's smile, all the threnodies of resignation, shame, desire,  
but we cannot connect them, only listen.*

When you spoke your hand would  
undertake a gentle dance, fingers  
tamp your thumb, drumming  
syllables out upon a chair's arm,  
a table, your lap. When you lay  
down beneath a shawl on the daybed  
under the window, your eyes  
would strangely drift and close  
while you spoke, but your hand  
would flutter up with remembrance,  
as if in the chambers of the years  
to choose, cherish, caress what those  
chambers would contain.

Items.

Exhibits. Evidence. That way of taking  
the world was old and well in New England,  
brought here like the germs thrashing  
inside the Pilgrims, before they were the land's...  
Exempla, symbols, wonders, the argot of god.  
*Divers Indian baskets filled with corn...*

Today, on the way to cross  
the Mount Hope Bridge we paused  
beside the old stone walls near the north end  
of the road. Hooves that forever changed this  
soil (trampling the maize of Satan's children)  
stamped in the clover, while my sons counted  
the black, fly-tormented backs.  
And I saw that all I can give to them  
are curiosities, assembled under glass  
or foggy legend: the sachem's jawbone  
Cotton Mather kept, the black stone Philip  
hurled across the harbor, the brass button  
he tore from the emissary's coat, saying  
this, *this*, is what your English religion  
means to me, the Tyrian whorls inside  
the quahog shell, the vile self-regard  
of believers in the mirror of their faith,  
the scalp's hot, moist peeling from



forehead to nape, the word of twenty  
natives valued as that of one who prayed,  
the mourning dove's doxology, the sachem's  
son, nine years old, spared, to be sold  
in the Indies. Items. Dis-rememberment.

Poor shade, walker, old woman I loved,  
gone now with all the lost, lost one, you  
didn't say this land you gave us once  
belonged to Church, deeded him in  
gratitude by the magistrates he saved  
from *the great, doleful, dirty, naked beast*.

Their holy war came down to musket balls  
and butchery, but the tale's essence isn't  
cruelty, gross injustice, nor ferocious  
piety. It's how fitting was the payment  
made to the one who betrayed the sachem's  
whereabouts to Church, and how he displayed  
the wonder of it all around New England,  
surviving on the coins he charged to view it.  
And they didn't fear it, all those avid  
readers of signs and wonders...

Now in my imagination a kindred  
habit lives—gorging on remorseful  
supposition, sometimes with the terror  
of one holding closed a grievous wound,  
it works at telling the world back whole  
as it knew, beginning with the accidental  
talismans, details that almost cohere,  
but will not comfort. How naturally  
it seemed to come to you, a dominion  
I would covet if it still seemed possible—  
whatever flower, bird, fish, or person  
found dead or living, named, gathered in...

whose bodiless curse would be a thousand  
times more terrible than any word to me...  
I cannot revive the song that water and wind  
and your old house sang in me, nor  
the sons you lost, the son I was when we  
played evening checkers, your ancient,  
waist length, wild hair, drying in firelight,  
nor that terror when I found you waiting  
up past midnight on the stairs, to warn me,  
frighten me, look right through my after-  
glowing rapture with some girl...

All I picture now  
is your hand upon the tablecloth—  
liver-spotted, translucent skin, the palm  
pale, vulnerable, the fingers beating  
gently beneath your words. Your hand.  
And Philip's hand, Metacomet's stiff,  
burled hand, cured in a pail of rum.