

Love Day (Preview, Feb. 2019)

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This is not a final version. Text may change in subsequent editions.

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I. Introduction (Overture)

Help me project into your mind's eye, an Emetic Zeit, a throw-up-time. A Hundred-year canker with everyone chewing on it, and fear and blight and spoilage spreading to Europe, to Ireland, to the many elsewheres outside Albion's brain. There is a time-mind of forgotten doubt, for years of loathing and a sense of weakness in your knees and legs and upper arms, and an ache at the base of my skull. An abyss so deep in the time-mind. It makes my bowels crawl and my sphincter will loosen, so I can taste it in my mouth, and I feel deeply lonely. Dying England.

Worse, it is an ennui of soil and life. So let's Kill England! I just want to get rid of it. So much. So, this time we're talking about (incidentally, the 100 Years' War, not that you would have known) is a time of selective amnesia, very spottily covered in the historiography. But important: the politics of the era bind together not only England's domestic factions, but those of the continent. What we know presently of the Disappearing Era (the *jouhatsu* of an entire nation) comes from a vast aggregation of incidental sources as much as it comes from organized, deliberate attempts at historical writing. And when they are available, these sweeping, general "histories," often written hundreds of years after the fact, are seldom as accurate as they purport, more resembling propaganda than modern historical text. The truest accounts come from records, bills, letters, receipts and the other bureaucratic paraphernalia of the onward march of history, and so we see our history through the stained glass windows of an old colonial house - sparse, colourful, untrustworthy. We know, for example, that Henry V travelled from Dover to Harfleur in July of 1415, as we can distinguish from letters and records of naval preparations that their fleet were present at Dover in June, and that the space once occupied by the docked fleet was emptied by August. We cannot, however, discover on what day the vessels shipped, nor how many days it took for them to arrive at the Norman coast. So we are doomed to see our object through this glass very darkly. To this end, accumulating the following text has been a difficult and arduous affair, as is the work of anyone who seeks to induce respiration in the corpse of old days. The Dead are a Gas of Mystery. The Dead are Not Here. Satan may have them in their bosoms, but we cannot love them, in *our* way... so read on... let me be your "crypt-keeper..."

I have been told before that to teach history through biography, or, as I prefer, a "life-history," (for history is not confined to the body, but the episteme - and the soul), is to teach history fallaciously; I disagree strongly with this notion. If you are reading this book, it is worth assuming that you think similarly, or at least that you are accepting enough of the possibilities of the style of "life-history," and open enough to concepts foreign to you, that you are prepared to treat the medium to a rigorous trial-by-fire. My choice to describe the history of a Zeitgeist (of a spiritual era) through the story of a single personage is not unique - other history-writers who have gone before me have done precisely the same. To defend my choice of muse, one Philip Houldie, please allow me a moment to describe my reasons for choosing this hotly debated style. Firstly, love-theory. Secondly, time and time again history-writers have returned to this period in history from a topical perspective; they envision the period by way of the events they are already familiar with: the Great Peace, the invasion of France, the death of Henry V, the battle of Agincourt, the battle of Blore Heath, the battle of etcetera and the great acts of etcetera. Carlyle-ism, at its most nauseous. By viewing history through the life of a single individual, particularly an individual of such grandiose importance to the progression of English history, yet as understated in the literature and peripheral to the general milieu, as Philip Houldie, I believe it is possible to eschew our dogmatic belief in

what history “is,” and rather view it *as it truly occurred*, without the interference of our ignorant preconceptions. Thirdly, “life-history” provides us not only with a greater degree of truth about the events as they occurred, but also furnish with an understanding of life generally. We are drawn away from great events to seemingly inconsequential events. We engage, As Artaud would put it, with the “metaphysics” of the act; I engage, I think, with no less care and deliciousness than Ruysch approaches painting a vase of flowers, every drop, sweet water and the sound of the petal’s eye, no less vital than the taste of it in your mouth, bitter and blue.

Another “creative” decision I will have to defend on this whimsical, fancy-free route to our text proper is the general lack of citation. In the interest of legibility, and of the most likely audience for this text (viz. the lay-person), “I’ve omitted all references to technical debates. I don’t mean to suggest that I’ve ‘dumbed down’ my presentation. Not at all. What I’m writing here is as intellectually rigorous as anything I’ve written,” (that’s nabbed directly from David Schweickart, successor-theorist). Footnotes and citations have been limited to illuminating asides and suggestions for further reading.

Selecting this particular subject was naturally a struggle. Determining the precise train which would best lead the reader through the era, allowing them to witness all of the greatest events of the 15th century, its triumphs and blunders, was not an easy task. Which is perhaps why the volume you hold in your hands may well be slimmer than average. I confess that I have pared down events by selecting to follow only a single figure through their life and eventually to their grave. Many biographers before me would balk at this nasty partiality. In truth, I believe I find myself deeply affected by this story. I am in love with it. I admit that sometimes I wonder... are they alive... At first I was indifferent. In time, my feelings changed, and I found I softened. I wonder sometimes if perhaps I have done them an injustice, and missed the true oeuvre of their lifetime entirely; am I a Pharisee - to history? To their *histoire*?

I encourage the reader therefore to approach this text, and indeed all texts, with a prying eye, and welcome any objections which the reader might have. Small inconsistencies, such as in time or placement of persons, have more than likely entered this text naturally, though I have tried as carefully as possible to remove these prior to publication.

Ideal musical accompaniment for this novel include, but are not limited to:

The New York Dolls, *New York Dolls*, (1973: Mercury Records)
Stan Getz, Antonio Carlos Jobim & Joao Gilberto, *Getz/Gilberto* (1964: Verve Records)
Alfred Schnittke, “Violin Concerto No. 1”; (reader’s choice)
Brian Eno, *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978: Editions EG)
...And any other accompaniment which is an improvisation on these general themes.

Ideal environmental scents:

Myrrh, Patchouli or Lavender incense
Any natural wood or floral

Houldie’s life evokes in us a great sense of closeness to an unfamiliar ethical episteme. It may help you to reach your own, unique and profound personal spirituality. I challenge the reader particularly to consider the story in the context of contemporary ethical philosophy. You may even wish to read this book with these materials available, in order to compare and contrast. Try focusing on important topics, and seeing how these apply. I encourage you to think, and consider, love as it appears in this work. I sincerely believe that the reason we read about L’Angleterre Infer is the same as the reason for which we make films about the World Wars; whether they are *important* or *relevant* has nothing to do with it. I love their deliciousness... like fascists, or Nazis, etc., which seem to be all for nothing. Like in Indiana Jones, their hideousness is a beneficent amoeba-fungus on a microscopic slide, as long as we remember to laugh at the exploding BMW motorcycles. So let’s get started in a way which fits this literary schema: in

operatic fashion, as many life-writers do, through an anecdote of vital significance to the great arc of the present history.

On March 25th, 1458, London was curled on the bank in the moist summer like a pillbug. The day was cloudy, but hot nevertheless, with intermittent showers. The gardens at Hampton had come recent into bloom, just in time, allaying fears of having to shipping open blossoms from Flanders. The city was dressed in its best for a momentous occasion. Having gathered outside Christ Church in Turnham Green, a great procession was on the march. A diplomatic retinue of both Lancastrian and Yorkist supporters had arrived on this auspicious day for what was perhaps greatest political event in the decades since the beginning of the bloody feud. Once separated by a mutual claim to the rule of England, the offending Yorkists, lead by the great general of England, Richard of York, and their once-foes in the capital, the ruling House of Lancaster, from which descended the present king Henry VI, had at last laid down arms after the battle of St. Albans, for a time bringing an end to the Wars of the Roses.¹

The event had arranged by one Thomas Bourchier, the freshly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and a rare arbiter of peace who had for years condemned the civil war on humanitarian grounds - pure naivete, I'd fancy... Henry VI, who too mourned the blood and bile in their streets, had emphatically supported the bid for peace, and what had once been a modest assembly of the families of the victims of St. Albans became a multi-purposed peace-making carnivale, wherein the negotiations between the two sides would finally be settled. Unlike their father Henry V, the new King had not previously been known for theatrics; but for this event they drove the royal court to new lengths of extravagance. Henry dubbed the great celebration, which had been arranged to fall on Lady Day,² their "Love Day."

The route of the procession led through various locales on a winding path encompassing Blackfriars, Hampton and St. Paul's, all of which were dressed up in white, like idiots. Parks, royal offices, sites of leisure and all buildings lining the immediate path of the procession were decorated in the appropriate colour at the locals' expense, including sheets of white vellum hung from windows and eaves by the guilds. White was the colour du jour; this had been declared explicitly by Henry, in deference to the Yorkists (white being the colour of their house), as dressing the city in Lancastrian red may well have been taken as a sign of reticence to the peace. The petty bourgeois were advised to bedeck their homes in intricate displays of white regalia, and in the streets footmen in white livery distributed bushels and planters of white tulips and carnations, two extremely fashionable flowers acquired at great cost from Dutch merchants in Bristol. Every member of the procession was to be dressed in white, and for those who had come unprepared, white costume jewelry was specially produced en masse for their use.

Once assembled into a single, long train, the procession stretched far longer than had been prepared for. In Hampton, the bailiff had organized for an armed civilian force (also in white) to be assembled and prepared to police the city in shifts under the purview of three aldermen. The number of temporary watchmen numbered in excess of two thousand, with an additional four hundred to act as night watch. These had been arranged for to deal with the excessive retinues, largely men-at-arms, which named noble participants had refused to exclude from the celebrations. When the time eventually came, well over a third of the retinue entered the city mounted on horseback, to the exasperation of organizers. Others walked on foot in formal wear (white), waving to the vast crowds of laity who crowded the streets, bringing all commerce to a halt. The worst offenders were the those who had served at arms in the feud; though Richard of York himself arrived with a mere forty horsemen and guards, their half-brother the Earl of Salisbury brought a full four hundred, many of them minor gentry,³ as well as eighty knights and

¹ A pretty name for a transcendental bowel movement. I think so, anyway.

² A Catholic liturgical day celebrating the Virgin and the first of the four Quarter Days

³ For those not familiar with the terminology, "gentry" herein refers to the typically land-owning ("landed") and armigerous - or coat-of-arms-possessing - families, which do not possess any title of nobility, as opposed to "nobles" or "nobility," who do. "Peers" (sometimes "Lords") are those legally entitled to non-sovereign control of a region or group, typically vassal to a King. The author acknowledges that terms of nobility are often overly broad and non-

assorted squires, which they were forced to house at their own inn on Dougate Hill (now the site of Cannon Street Station). Others brought with them as many as six hundred. Nor did the Lancastrian side back down from this “battle” of conspicuousness: John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset is recorded as having attended with no less than two hundred and thirty persons; all said, over one thousand, five hundred were in attendance.

The former combatants had expected to become the day’s entertainment for the now unoccupied labourers. Many swept up the loose tulips and carnations to toss into the crowd from horseback, evoking some mixed excitement. Others tossed small prepared parcels of money, cheese or other goods. A cavalcade of Percys (a rural pedigree) even succeeded in gathering a troupe of players by the time they had reached St. Paul’s.

The first stop of the procession was to be at Blackfriars (currently the location of the station by the same name). Some suggest that the Peace Council occurred not here, but at Whitefriars on Fleet Street, several blocks in the opposite direction. Tossspots. A council of combatants was to meet, and, under the auspices of the King, make amends for the tragedy of St. Albans, consecrating terms of the peace by participating in a mass dedicated to the corpses. The procession would then continue to St. Paul’s cathedral for the performance of a second mass, performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, who succeeded, somehow, in convincing the first twenty ranks of assembled nobles to walk the intervening mile and a half with arms linked, pairing each former Lancastrian with a Yorkist, to symbolize the reunification of England. Thus the trip was made in double-file: at the fore came the royal vanguard, and at approximately the center of the parade, the royal party, where Richard of York personally escorted Queen Margaret of Anjou, followed by the Duke of Somerset with the Earl of Salisbury; the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Exeter; the Archbishop Bourchier and Edmund, Earl of York; and so on down the line, with the King proceeding alone on horseback in the robes of state, carrying a yew branch to symbolize the mandate of God.

At this time, St. Paul’s Cathedral would have been far larger than what it is presently. The new building, built on the ruins of the old after the Great Fire of 1666, never reached the stature of its predecessor, reflecting a strictly Enlightenment-era modesty. The great procession entered the cavernous, gothic structure via the main façade, in file, taking their seats front-to-back, and leaving the entire north transept for the anticipated arrival of the royal party. Lesser gentry and honourable men-at-arms began to fill the front of the cathedral, fitting as many individuals onto the pews as possible to permit the enormous assembly.

Unnoticed in the transepts, Philip Houldie - 2nd Earl of Stafford, Deacon of Westminster Church, and a veteran of the campaign in Normandy, where they had served beneath Henry’s father against the Orléanists - brooded with their boys like a fungus. Behind a low oak screen, a space which typically housed a lavish reliquary, and two files deep behind the altar in a well-hidden arcade... a motley assortment: cultish zealots, Houldie’s retinue, Danish hired guns, and a saucy mix of deadly others. With the help of an embittered deacon-cum-caretaker with debts to be expunged and certain convenient satanic affiliations, Houldie’s sickness seeped into this sacred ziggurat long before the sun had risen, in shifts, by means of the abbey. To the assembly, the double-row of malignants would have been indistinguishable. High above, in the eaves, a similarly sized detachment of men-at-arms leered at the accumulating nobles. These too were Houldie’s.⁴

representative, so take it with a grain of salt. For further reading, see: Peter R. Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

⁴ How precisely the Earl managed to hire enough spare murderers to flesh out the attack is a sticky wicket to disentangle. Fiscal records which might lead back to Houldie’s accounts criss-cross, and given the general unscrupulousness of the church’s financial dealings at the time, nothing is entirely off the table with regards to embezzlement. In their desperation, Houldie most likely leveraged any source of monies available - companies, holdings, church funds, etc. were all potential sources of raunchy dosh. A disastrously mismanaged stock split, in which certain church interests which had been diversified into joint public-private ventures in 1434 were subjected to even more financial strain, may have provided Houldie with a seed fund - which would suggest that, for the Earl, a clandestine military operation had been at least on some level a political possibility for over two decades.

As the Cathedral reached roughly two-thirds capacity (why they did not wait until the Cathedral was full is unknown, though it is extremely likely they did so to avoid harming the king himself, who rode in the back third of the procession), Houldie gave the signal to begin the most infamous,⁵ massacre of the century. Two ranks of footmen swarmed over the altar-space, and stepped over the low barrier separating the altar and the congregation. Several accounts confirm that no shot were fired until the altar was cleared; instead, following orders to the letter, the footmen used butts, elbows and blows to scatter the no doubt flabbergasted clergy. Their holinesses were spared no brutality - one account describes a prone lay-priest's jaw cracked open like a jackfruit with a jackboot, and those that didn't clear out post-haste were subdued with yet more paramilitary pleasure. Machine-guns propped on top of the first row of benches to minimize recoil and maximize cover, they then fired into the first row, mowing down gentry, indiscriminate as to rank, gender, or affiliation. Unsurprisingly, the crowd began hysterically to flee for the back of the Cathedral. In the arcades, their comrades unsheathed swords and poleaxes to lay into the mob, flanking them but failing to cut off their flight. Bloodied gentlemen and ladies poured out of the Cathedral's doors into the streets (eyes rolling, tongues lashing filthy horror-fumes, and so on, and so on), clashing with the back third of the procession, frustrating armed royal attendant's attempts to enter. Their ammunition spent, the gunners drew arms and marched on the congregants.

In spite of their organized approach to the slaughter, the assailants failed to achieve even a fraction of the casualties which Philip Houldie had likely intended, making poor progress through the crowd with their weapons even as the forces in the eaves bombarded the nobles nearing the doors with secondary gunfire. One reason was no doubt the bizarre demands of Houldie prior to the massacre that the soldiers on the ground attack their victims with sword in one hand and bill in the other, allegedly to produce a deliberate cross-shape, as they aimed for the mouth or eyes in a symbolic gesture recalling the violent conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus, borrowed from the Book of Acts (9:1-9). Though this was abandoned as it became clear that the advantage was being lost, nevertheless the corpses of the dead and dying gentry formed an almost impenetrable barrier between the assailants and their victims, allowing many to escape under the cover provided by those less lucky or light of foot; some even held these over themselves "piggy-back" in hopes of absorbing bullets from above. Toward the far end of the abbey, the sheer volume of nobles who crowded the portal, effectively clogging their own route of escape and preventing outside combatants from entering, turned the struggle back to the assailants advantage - but by that time, many had escaped to freedom.

It is evidently at this point that the Houldie forces broke into two general camps: the gunners in the galleries, largely consisting of mercenaries and PMC, (principally the Dansk sikkerhedshandlings Netværk, or DSN) with small contingent of Houldie-loyalists (sleeper-cell candidates, one or two magistrates) present to ensure accountability (call this the "rogue division"); and the bulk of the forces in the arcade. Having little incentive to stay long enough to ensure maximum casualties, the DNS began extraction partway through the operation (if the chaos in the Nave could be called an operation, and not a killing-table). The primary extraction-point was abandoned out of hand, as both lateral portals were barred to prevent fleeing noble from breaking through the lines and escaping. A secondary extraction had evidently been agreed upon in a broadsheet circulated by DNS scrivener-administrators as early as February 26, but as the hand was faded and many of the "security" personnel illiterate, this easy route to egress via the abbey was ignored. While Houldie's more ideological followers continued the barrage, the PMCs abandoned their stations, following a back staircase adjoining the ambulatory, evidently dispatching two deacons with an epee on the stairs, which slightly impeded progress. Upon exiting in the aisle connected to the choir, The gallery-forces clashed with the main force. As the bulk of the force had moved down the length of the nave to pursue the crowd at melee-range, a small barrage of suppressing fire was enough to clear an exit on the far side of the transept. "Clear," in this case, may be a rather optimistic use of language. An exit-report from the firm, preserved in the Danish national archives, describes the scenario more sweetly than I could possibly describe it: "Everything was very nasty. The smell was already very strong, it was like like offel and faeces mixed together. To move was very

⁵ Though by no means deadliest!

precarious. First, the floor was very slick, and falling was easy. Second, the English had gathered together very much, as they were trying to escape, so when they died, they formed heaps. Being alive, they fled for the portals and doors and windows. Being dead, the obstructed exits.... The Lord's Table [archaic form of "altar"] was overturned, and the monstrance was also knocked down. And it seemed to me that this puckering receptacle [viz. the monstrance] was like a popish devil's asshole. Out of the asshole came parts of popish Christians, and brains and the matter of bodies all in heaps and piles, and still filling up to a good proportion all of the church... I saw that the reliquaries had fallen out of the altar also. A skull and two fingers were fallen loose. I thought also that perhaps the devil's asshole was in the skull, like it lives in the brain... the old reverent brain was broke open... and those appendages made it look like [it was] crawling on the ground. ...Maybe the altar and the monstrance and the bones were all of the same body, crawling out of the earth, and also shitting backwards. So we moved some English and went out the back."

The massacre concluded without a great deal of fanfare; like the Danish Mercenaries, the remainder of Houldie's forces began to disperse almost as soon as they had begun. All told, it was a virtuosic theatrical performance - an act of paramilitary vaudeville complete with choreography, maudlin politico-religious symbolism and all the brutality of the Grand Guignol. It sticks in the mind's eye like an eyelash under the lid, doesn't it? The climax, it seems, was the initial offensive, after which morale and discipline deteriorated rapidly. By the time "order," if one can call it that, was restored in the Nave, the murderers had largely dispersed, as the ecclesiastical entrances and exits proved easier to clear than the main portals. A broadsheet preserved in the National Archives reports a total of seven persons of name captured, which would suggest a total of 49 persons including coterie, but this is likely an exaggerated figure, as no records exist of any subsequent trials. Three hangings for "treason" appear to have taken place the following week, likely related.

The effects on the psychic makeup of English society were far more pronounced. Subsequent outbreaks of violence seem to have taken place for months, if not years, afterward. In some cases, these involved acts of violence, not always fatal, between the remaining belligerents on the two sides of the war. In other cases, a ritualistic character seems to have been involved. Two guild laypersons wearing white robes beat in the skull of a merchant in Leicester Square, possibly in retaliation for price-gouging; several unnamed persons on horseback killed two bystanders with batons, whilst making the same cross-shape with their weapons which had been demanded of the assailants at the cathedral; two ewes dressed in the colours of the two sides at the Battle of Barnet were drained of blood and hung in public in what appears to have been a satanic ritual re-enacting the slaughter at the Cathedral. There is also some evidence of a psychic corollary developing in Rennes, Caen and Amiens (possibly related to their tragic history of conflict), where a number of incidents with unusual similarities to the massacre appear to have taken place over the Summer of 1458 and into the Winter, involving assailants wearing white sheets, random acts of violence, and other events with compelling, if vague, aesthetic similarities.

Richard of York escaped from the melee with only an arrow-wound to the side of their neck; their Yorkist companion Warwick with a bludgeoning wound to their side. Later that year, a transcript of an anonymous address to parliament decries the massacre at St. Paul's as "...the most Fearfulle Calamitie ever to Obstruct Rightfull Government, and the Greatest Offensse ever perpetrated against its Master, Oure Lorde and Sovereigne, in the Goodlie Length of Goddes Kingdome of England." And that's one way of putting it, but it isn't very thoughtful, or yummy, for that matter. How about this:

...Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people,
Whiles yet my soldiers are in my command;
Whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil and villany.
If not, why, in a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand

Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverend heads dash'd to the walls,
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.
What say you? will you yield, and this avoid,
Or, guilty in defence, be thus destroy'd?
-Henry V, Act III, Scene III

That's better, I feel. Yumminess is... essential? A more thoughtful writer would have put this in the epigraph. "A battle must obey the unities..." Or:

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.
-T.S. Eliot, Burnt Norton

I would be fooling myself (or us?) if I didn't admit that my first manuscript (in 2012) wasn't essentially limited in scope to the above: a proto-postmodern disemboweling of Narrativist Historiography and the whole history-as-narrative schema, with, I suppose, Hayden White in particular in the crosshairs, though I might not have realized it at the time (nor have I just realized it - how much of this from wikipedia?). "Disturbing the dust on a bowl of Rose-Leaves." How thoughtful. My old self was doing just that, weren't they... an impotent expression, and throwing words into the vacuum of brains, or just finger-tips, which had already eaten their fill of this particular thesis. That's not nearly as pretty as Thomas's way of putting it. And my 2012-self, I think, if I'm remembering just right, only really settled on that thesis in the writing. I remember many very vague thoughts about "failure," and about a Sisyphean narrative of an author in pursuit of the actualization of... something... history, or historic "truth" through literary artifice, the intent being to depict not an achievement of metaphysical reality through historiographic half-truth, which is Hayden's ideology, but rather a gruesome caricature of the mess of historical non-truth and self-aggrandizement narrativist "history" presented in my mind. I believe, at the time I was in pursuit of a particular aesthetic of a pathetic (that's double-entendre) author being very very bad at writing very simple statements of mutually agreed-on academic "reality."

Why am I trying to revive it...? There's a very obvious ideological disconnect between a 2012-self and a 2019-self, not just experience, but also the chasm of... a resurgent neoliberal fascist nation-state? A melting of my old, sad needs, like for proximity to fame, shared understanding, I've sort of... descended into hermitage. The revival of an old manuscript is an inherently opportunistic behaviour, one might even say anti-Marxist in its insistence that time and effort be converted into a commodity, that is,

that something should come of something on which one spent effort, even if it is inherently something with less value than something new one could be writing instead of editing. In the intervening years, my interests have inclined more dramatically toward a sort of socialist-zen, an act of creation which in its deliberate slowness and self-observation defeats the impulse to treat it as a commodity, by treating it as a way of being. If I'm going to keep writing in this playfully nasty, brutality-thirsty character, I suppose it's essential that I divest myself of its more facetious elements, before we get started. I'm an avowed pacifist. I don't think I would write like this today, not at all. It is... Mmmhmm, it's more the first two lines of the Eliot epigraph, more about... unredeeming time. If you come with me, read this bad book, I want to be the bowl of rose-leaves. That's too poetic. The point is, I would like to be transparent about the effort this book represents but my intentionality is dead-ending against the nature of an open work. You can hold my hand, if you like, or try to imagine its weight and warmth, in any case. But consider this optional.

II. Wales to Harfleur (1390-1415)

It is a popular misconception among those relatively few with any real interest in the history of the Houldies, and even among scholars, that the family was Welsh by birth. It is true that the family made its name in Wales, and that the Welsh chapter of their history extends somewhat further back than the English chapter, and even that a Welsh arm of the family existed well into the 17th century; but the origins of the Houldie name lay in England. The emigration from England to Wales dates to the early 13th century, with the arrival of one "Houldie of Bath," a wealthy diamond wholesaler coaxed to the north by an emerging Welsh nouveau-riche. The Houldies did not in fact enter into the nobility until the early 14th century, with the marriage of Constance of York into the line, though why a member of the royal family would marry into that of a line of Welsh bourgeois is difficult to ascertain. It is possible that the gesture was made to quell the rebellious spirit among the Welsh merchant class, the cohort of English nobles behind the marriage hoping that enfranchisement into the English nobility would make the Welsh powers complacent to foreign rule; however Welsh history in general would lead one to believe this had little effect. On the other hand, it was not a poor choice of strategic marriage in other respects; to be a Houldie was to be rich and close to power. In the mid-13th century, the Houldies became powerful moneylenders, and by the end of that century had extended substantial loans to the Marcher Lords appointed by the Edward I, and enjoyed the benefits and gratitude of the nation's most desirable debtors. Juggling new ventures with old empire, a second strategic marriage to a wealthy Flemish merchant placed the Houldie family at the command of a small nautical empire to boot. Nor was the mid-14th century a time to cool the family's heels, as new connections lead to yet another source of income: military personnel. The family became a major supplier of Flemish mercenaries to the new generation of Welsh rebels, stocking the standing armies of nobles concerned by an unstable political climate with tools of bodies, skin and skull, and some weaponry. Even Edward of Woodstock, the English Prince of Wales, was rumoured to be a recipient of Houldie materiel. This would prove however to be the last apex of the Houldies' achievements in Wales, and things very much went downhill from there.

With power came infamy, and the English authorities foresaw the potential for Welsh nationalism to erupt into civil war. Having invested vast quantities of the family wealth into the new venture, the Houldies were especially hurt by a xenophobic decree to close Welsh ports to, among others, Nordic, French, Norman and Flemish vessels of all kinds, naturally intended to put an end to the importation of foreign troops by possible itinerants. This effectively curtailed the family's business in importing goods and men alike. Unfortunately for future generations (as we will see), the Houldies chose to respond to the closures with violence, less in hopes of supplanting the English mechanisms of power, than of coercing certain influential households to agree to reopening the ports in exchange for an end to hostilities.

Though the military investments of the house were significant when compared to those of neighbouring households, the Houldies possessed little strategic savvy and fewer friends (an unfortunate side-effect of war profiteering). Though alliances were discussed, only a single friendly household agreed to lend their small military clout to the Houldie's modest rebellion, and this only through the lending of

money, a resource the Houldies would hardly have needed. In spite of this, perhaps acting on hubris alone, the Houldies engaged in a handful of modestly successful skirmishes against carefully selected targets during 1371-2, killing several influential persons on the battlefield, and taking a small number of valuable persons hostage⁶ to be exchanged for monies they obviously did not need. Their success, however, can largely be attributed to the element of surprise. The Houldie forces were easily routed once the wealthy households were alerted to the attacks. Led by William Morgan, a Marcher of lesser repute hailing from Aberystwyth, who had received reinforcement from the Welsh Principality, the Houldies were crushed at Anglesy and Welshpool, where two of the house's three chief inheritors were captured. A notoriously violent man, Morgan immediately ordered the two flayed alive. Their anguished screeching earned the Houldies the dubious title "The Mollies," meaning "The Babies," popularized by a sally of the same name penned by the Earl of Carnarvon towards the end of 1374.

As you might expect, many of their holdings in Wales were confiscated in retaliation. Curiously, the Houldies never the less remained in the good graces of the English court, protected by their connection to the royal line. Good Boy Houldie, the third and surviving heir to the Houldie name (which now counted for relatively little, except for the attached wealth), therefore fled to England, where they could receive shelter from further punishment by the Welsh Principality. Good Boy's father was not so lucky; remaining behind in Wales to conduct a last salvo in hopes of defending the family holdings, they were downed in battle by a lance through their dick and bled to death in the knowledge of having single-handedly brought an end to the family empire.

Family relations in England fortunately purchased Good Boy a far better fate. The late Houldie patriarch had possessed the distinct advantage of being first cousin to Katherine Swynford, the future Duchess of Lancaster and present mistress of John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster and founder of the Beaufort line. Though not yet ennobled by Katherine's future marriage, the Swynfords possessed sufficient powers to secure Good Boy Houldie safe harbour with a close relation, John Beaufort, 1st Earl of Somerset, in whose patronage they would live out the remainder of their life.

Good Boy Houldie seems to have found themselves at odds with a life of ease, and, in spite of having their needs fulfilled by the patronage of the Swynfords, returned to the old family trade of moneylending, and within four years recovered small holdings and an income of their own. Records of the Beaufort household also make mention of a vessel trading in Cymric housecats (a long-haired derivative of the Manx) and gas stoves imported from Holland, both considered status symbols in London before the turn of the early 15th century. A final revival of the family's luck came with Houldie's marriage to Duke of Somerset's Fourth daughter Antigone, suggesting that, despite their scandalous history, Good Boy remained an individual of significant promise, and very much in Somerset's good-boy books. A second stroke of luck soon came, paradoxically, from Henry the IV's declaration in 1404 of their intent to resume the war with France, which renewed the English nobility's paranoid fear of invasion. Though Henry's plans would never come to fruition during their short reign, leaving their son Henry V to resume the fighting in 1415, this warlike climate was an ideal opportunity for Good Boy Houldie to capitalize on their apprenticeship in the art of military supply. Houldie's father's Flemish troops, if they were anything like other mercenary groups, would most likely have required a measure of organization and even basic training. Recruits were unlikely to be trained soldiers, and more likely to be merely opportunistic, violent, outlaws, or merely the unemployed, and some of them weren't even Flemish.

Having Received explicit instructions from Somerset to amass a small force to supplement their own, Houldie went to work with the sickness of the wolverine. The initial corps was small by southern standards, certainly not enough to deter a (purely imaginary) French invasion, had the Armagnacs⁷ ever entertained so much as entertained the possibility. With Somerset's sponsorship, Houldie was able to hire

⁶ According to a small collection of bills of exchange labelled 1375 in the Yale U. Library Manuscripts & Archives, European Conflict Collection.

⁷ Also known as the House of Orléans; in 1402, Louis I, the Duke of Orléans, acquired Luxembourg in the first salvo of the Armagnac-Burgundian War. He lasted about 5 fucking minutes after that s-n-a-f-u, and was murdered in 1407 by John the Fearless of Burgundy.

seasoned soldiers for the first time, via contacts in London and Gloucestershire. The exceeding quality of Houldie's diminutive division impressed Somerset to such a degree that they appointed Houldie head of their own forces, and provided enough funds to swell Houldie's force by acquiring the standing forces of several neighbouring counties.

Good Boy Houldie's techniques focused primarily on developing the fundamentals of hand-to-hand combat, an innovative approach most likely borrowed from the ongoing French civil war. Letters suggest Good Boy was fluent in French, and may have corresponded pseudonymously with fellow war profiteers on the continent. Above all, Houldie is credited for being the first to introduce Norman methods of Tae Kwon Do to the south of England, combining these with styles of Judo currently popular at the English court, producing a potent and unique style of close-quarters engagement characterized by tactical variability and violent evisceration. In addition, Somerset's dojos were known to be the finest outside of Rouen. This combination of facilities and knowledge allowed Houldie to arm their forces not only with the requisite knowledge of pike, sword and archery expected of a man-at-arms, but with other esoteric skills: regular audits found every man in Houldie's command capable of demonstrating techniques for locating an enemy's heart by touch, pointing out 23 pivotal weak points on the body, and breaking the neck of an armoured opponent unarmed from both a standing position and mounted on horseback. Critically, Houldie stressed the necessity for acupuncture, with which one could effectively focus a soldier's qi, and daily transcendental meditation, in Mediaeval warfare. Some acupuntural techniques seem to have led on a few rare occasions to cases of hemorrhage resulting in at least one death by "eruption" in a light cavalry (what this means is uncertain), and one temporary case of partial paralysis in an officer. Much like today, Qi manipulation was a dangerous medical intervention. Most current medical firms have dealt with the matter through liability coverage. It is remarkable that, with only medieval medical knowledge, so few seem to have been harmed by these procedures.

Houldie's marriage to Antigone Beaufort proved to be a veritable coup. Not only did the marriage return the Houldie name to (minor) nobility under the arms of the Duke of Somerset, it even succeeded to some degree in reconciling the family with the English court, although certainly the pedigree was now seen by some as tainted by the affair in Wales. Antigone produced two heirs, Philip Houldie and Good Dick (short for Richard) Houldie, punctuated by a stillbirth whose difficult arrival nearly cost Antigone their life. Good Dick was pestered throughout their life by apparitions of this lost middle child, manifesting as a semi-translucent entity and audible electric static. As was natural, Philip, the elder of the two and thus the inheritor to their father's estate, was trained in the family business, which, by the time they reached manhood, consisted primarily of the military interests, the moneylending element having virtually evaporated. In addition, if we allow ourselves to make an educated guess, Good Boy seemingly went to significant lengths to ensure Philip would receive a cosmopolitan education; Philip's name appears on records suggesting a rudimentary legal education; elsewhere, they seem to have a powerful command of finance; and they seem to have acted as navigator during a voyage to manage the family's Scandinavian affairs, all before reaching the age of twenty-two. Good Dick, on the other hand, received the no less honourable, though somewhat less adventuresome, lot of a second son, and was prepared from an extremely young age for the life of a cleric. To this end, the Houldie's vast wealth provided them with only the best in tutelage. At the age of eleven, Good Dick was moved from the supervision of a prior of Glastonbury to receive personal tutoring from the Deacon Henry Mayhew himself, with occasional visits from the Bishop of Somerset, a personal acquaintance of the Duke. In this way, Good Dick, a precocious student despite the irregular sleep caused by the constant interruptions of the malign spiritual apparition, acquired a knowledge of mathematics, theology and literature. These pre-requisites fed into a marvelous understanding of medieval punch-card computer programming. Mayhew's influential development of the first punch-card system for the cataloguing of manuscript illuminations on the Commodore 64 no doubt inspired the young Houldie to their own eventual successes in applied theological science. Nor was Good Dick ever completely severed from their family's military-industrial life; there are suggestions that the youth spent much time during this period learning from their father's mercenaries.

In 1407, at the age of 23, Philip Houldie was ordained at Wells Cathedral in the neighboring county of Exeter (Devon) and began a ministry in the area of applied biological science. This is one of the

better documented periods of Philip Houldie's life, as their uncanny gift for the sciences and impeccable record of optimal worship of Almighty God distinguished them from their peers. This greatly helped Wells Cathedral, which recently been under-performing. With the additional contribution of a handful of other outstanding clergy, Wells assumed a small but significant role in the religious ministrations of the Church at large. In only four years of prayer and ministry, Houldie succeeded in producing through husbandry, biological engineering and an experimental process of transfusion of the Corpus Christi, a previously nonexistent strain of Lincoln sheep weighing between two and three hundred pounds and producing yields of wool weighing approximately seventy to eighty pounds per fleece, as much as eight times that of its derivative species. Combined with the already notorious ability of the Lincoln breed to produce a thick and lustrous, if somewhat distressingly human-like, wool, this advance in biological theology promised a new source of income which swoll the previously strained coffers of the Cathedral and vastly expanded the wealth of local merchants. The new process also promised further innovations to come, with similar liturgical rituals having the potential to produce improvements in phylogenetically similar agricultural species. An initial public offering of the animals to the local merchant farmers, at an enormous price, went smoothly after a tour of the pasture produced much excitement from the reticent class. However, it also produced a startling backlash from local laity. Accusations that the transfigured blood used in the process was in fact of a satanic origin nearly lead to a peasant revolt against the monks in 1411. Local leadership was fortunately easily calmed once convinced of the species' divine nature and its potential to produce profit for the community at large. A demonstration of the ritual components of the transfusion process clarified to the authorities that the blood and body employed was indeed a by-product of Eucharist, and thus clearly divine in nature.

Aside from their academic pursuits, Houldie also succeeded in winning the approval of the diaconate of Wells. A letter between senior clergy describes the young Houldie as "intelligent and pious," whereas others describe the youth as "smartly charismatic, possessed with all of God's good graces and easily coaxed to raucous laughing." A liturgical history written several years later in London makes reference to their work in supporting the reordering of the masses (a proposition previously championed by many but never implemented), proving that word of their work at one time had reached far as the capitol. Numerous visiting clergy make reference to the conviction of their sermons and to their incessant commitment to the improvement of church affairs.

Houldie's reputation also succeeded in earning them their share of less desirable attention from their fellow clergy. This includes an event known of today only because of certain informal records, suggestion, and a great deal of innuendo. During their formative years in the church, Houldie was very likely the unwilling recipient of the advances of an unnamed prior whose lasciviousness had made them infamous in Gloucester years previously. Though details are scarce, Houldie appears to have handled the event with impunity, escaping with little or no discredit officially attached to their name, likely because disciplinary affairs were conducted with extreme discretion, if and when they occurred at all. On the other hand, *unofficially*, the emotional, psychological and social toll of the event would be difficult to understate; to be spared an official enquiry, was not to be spared contempt, or possibly even retaliation. No doubt being victimized by their superior was a double crime. Once, the abuse; twice, the suspicion of one's fellow clergy.

Some tenuous, and still unconfirmed, accusations also vaguely connect Houldie to an unusual event in the winter of 1409, involving an outbreak of *cordyceps sinensis*, an endoparasitic fungus, in the abbey of Wells Cathedral, leading to several nasty gruesome deaths over a six months period. The strain of this carnivorous species of fungi (known as Yartsa Gurbu in Tibet, or more commonly as caterpillar fungus) is an extremely unique and invariably life-threatening parasite. It is also surprisingly popular as a food product, and inert forms of the fungus can be found today in many import stores. Infected individuals would have experienced, in order, symptoms of: disorientation, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, and jaundice during the fungus' early stages of development. What distinguishes the strain particularly from other fungal parasites is the method by which it ensures the effective distribution of spores; in addition to the above, the monks would have experienced a slow but persistent loss of sensitivity to light resulting from phlebitis and consequent cell death in the optic nerve. In most host species, which dwell in

the fungus' native rainforest, this would be intended to force the infected individual to climb ever higher into the forest canopy, where the light from the sun is brighter and less obscured by foliage, depositing the animal's cadaver high in the trees when it eventually dies of malnutrition. Within hours, the fruiting body of the fungus, growing rapidly and consuming the dead or dying host for energy, emerges from the infected individual, forming upright growths as long as two feet in vertebrate hosts, to distribute batches of buoyant spores into the air. Said spores are thus given the advantage of descending across a wide area, and are capable of infecting others from as far as a kilometre away, given ideal wind conditions. An account by the Deacon of the Cathedral describes first the infected monks being moved to the Eastern tower of the Abbey during the day, so that they could continue their clerical duties in better light, followed by the horror of the discovery of the fruiting corpses, once they had laid "in state" for the usual four to seven days before burial. The discovery that proximity to the cadavers invariably ended in contamination prompted the abbot to require that the dead be disposed of immediately, regardless of cause. In several cases bodies were hurled unceremoniously from the windows of the cloister, effectively resolving the crisis. Present day medical history classifies the event as completely unique in the history of England, and suggests that the strain was most likely carried to Exeter by Spanish sailors on pilgrimage. No other outbreaks exist with which to corroborate this hypothesis. The connection to Houldie seems to be a facetious accusation. Their work required the importation of biological specimens, and some fungi (according to financial records), but nothing in the *sinensis* family.

(It's like a mind-virus, isn't it, like Burroughs' language-virus. I mean the idea of the cordyceps. In 2012 I had heard of cordyceps fungus, and was in the minority, but today it is an essential piece of cultural mythology. Perhaps not for everybody, but certainly for the trivia-loving (in other words, the pedantic) part of the anglosphere. The metaphorical resonance is pretty obvious, isn't it. Only five years, obscurity to fullness, a population explosion. Cordyceps' glorious debut was probably when it was featured on Planet Earth, Season 1, Episode 9, aired 19 November 2006. Clever then, but cliché now. It was central to the plot of a popular videogame. Is it okay to accuse myself of being cliché? It feels old, like, unproductive, a paroxysm of 20th century self-hatred. Why punish myself for participation in the popular culture? I shouldn't stigmatize the familiar for being familiar. After all, when a cultural metaphor takes hold of our shared brain, it is because it fits there. It deserves to be examined, by someone. I know that I felt trapped in wage labour, at the time. This is like a fruiting body grafted to your spine. And I still feel that way.)

Ultimately, Houldie's charisma, their genius and, of course, their fanatical devotion to Christ, seem to have expunged all the scandals. In 1412, at the age of 28, Houldie was ordained prior of Wells Cathedral at the insistence of Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who was a personal acquaintance. The appointment was short lived, though not due to another scandal; word of Houldie's exceptionalism had reached even further than expected, and they were eventually promoted out of the position. After contributions from the crown⁸ Wells' largest patron was John Holland, 2nd Duke of Exeter. Holland's contributions in the year before Houldie's appointment totalled more than a third of the cathedral's income. The lavishness and personal quality of Holland's gifts, as they're described in Wells' accounts, suggest a deep connection to the Church and a strong Christian nature, including icons of St. Mary, the funding of a fresco constituting one of the first "Noli me Tangere" scenes to enter the Church, a surprisingly accurate precognitive image of Marie Antoinette painted after a vision by a monk at Exeter, as well as a gilt image of the Agnus Dei and other items for a new apse. These, however, certainly weren't *only* result of a pious soul. By and large, these contributions were made to purchase blessings pardoning their family for the family patriarch's rebellion against the King during the "Epiphany Uprising" of 1399, for which, having been caught at Pleshy Castle in the act of retreat, Holland's father, John Holland the Elder, had been executed by order of the King. Curiously, the family had not suffered an attainder⁹ for the crime, allowing the present Holland to inherit their father's title; this is particularly

⁸ Due to massive amounts paid to the church for blessings as a religious compensation for the atrocities committed by the state during conflict, the crown was invariably any church's foremost patron.

⁹ Dispossession from hereditary titles and possessions.

unusual given that a Royal Issue describes the quartering scattering of Holland the Elder's body, so as to foil their revival at the second coming.¹⁰

Wells was not the only recipient of Holland's patronage. Holland's choice to shower most of their attentions on Wells was likely due to the cooling of the family's relationship with the much larger Exeter Cathedral, to which the Hollands had been a significant patron in previous generations. Whether out of pity or rectitude or financial need, the clergy of Exeter refused to cut ties with the family in 1399.

Merely being tolerated was not enough for Holland. "Fuck this noise!" they must have said: so in early 1413, they declared the construction of a new abbey of their very own¹¹ next door to their own residence. The Abbott of the new abbey would be selected from Wells and transferred to Exeter to await the end of construction. Thus, Holland would profit not only from possessing from their own, private church, but, in the mean time, by selecting a trustworthy ally from Wells, they would have a liaison at Exeter to represent their interests against their clerical opponents in Exeter and abroad. Houldie was an obvious choice. Their arrival was announced in April, 1413. Extending an olive branch of sorts to the new institution, the recently translated Bishop of Exeter anointed Houldie with the purely symbolic title "Giorgius," meaning "tiller of the soil," presumably alluding to Houldie's upcoming transfer to the soon to be completed abbey. At no other time in Houldie's life is there written evidence of the title being used, which is why it is absent from the present text.

The temporary nature of Houldie's stay at Wells eventually drove a wedge between them and their fellow clerics. Houldie was to regard himself as an outsider, a peripheral member of the local clergy, and indeed they had little or no influence over clerical decisions in the diocese. Houldie also seems to have developed an attachment to Holland, despite and apparently "vulgar" nature, to whom they considered themselves indebted for their recent promotion. The two outcasts developed a friendship, or at least a friendly cleric-to-benefactor relationship, with Holland frequently providing additional finances for pilgrimage, studies in Christian sciences, etc. Houldie seems to have been academically active during this period, but as to what exactly they studied, it is difficult to guess without any journals of science preserved from this region and time. Holland's financials also reveal bupkis on this point.

It is very possible that this friendship was fostered by Houldie's rather unusual, though nevertheless remarkably practical, role on the Holland estate as informal military advisor. Houldie had on their hands vast, even humiliating, amounts of leisure time at their increasingly meaningless clerical position. They became a frequent visitor at Holland's estate, splitting their time evenly between their academic work - some evidence arises here of a dalliance with Kabballic sorcery - and accompanying their host in the inspection and maintenance of a substantial standing army, easily rivalling those of estates far closer to the crown. Houldie's military upbringing furnished them with perhaps the best mind for strategic combat in Southern England, and, though they lacked the managerial skills of their brother and father, their prowess as a military commander easily outstripped that of Holland's command. Houldie can be credited with a number of innovations in structure and deployment methods which would distinguish Holland's troops as an innovative, modern mediaeval corps. Among these were techniques of close-quarters engagement, largely jujutsu, inherited by Houldie from their father's methods, though for lack of their father's resources, use of these techniques had to be developed in a haphazard way through practical skirmishing, and much was often left to be desired when compared to the expert ninjas in Somerset's regalia.

In order to make up for these shortcomings, Houldie's strategic inventions had to be just as brilliant as their father's. Combining their unique position as both a military expert and a specialist in "metaphysick" and "philosophie,"¹² Houldie independently developed numerous techniques of

¹⁰ This would hardly prevent an anti-Lancastrian holdout in Dartmoor from reviving John Holland's severed left arm in 1430; necromancers can be like that sometimes.

¹¹ Of course, a private patron could not "own" an abbey; but complete financial proprietorship was not so different.

¹² Scientific designations of course varied widely in mediaeval Europe from what they are today. As mentioned before, Houldie's primary fields were biology, mysticism, arithmetic; but clerical science was wide-ranging, and no specific field was entirely off the table for a talented researcher.

engagement which, like the Romans' invention of concrete, would not re-emerge in Europe for centuries, including an order of troop-arrangement symbolizing the Canonical Gospels (billmen at back symbolizing the crucifixion, archers the ascension, cavalry the Bull of Mark, etc.) in order to strategically maximize mystical potentialities and foster psychic coordination. A fortunate byproduct of this arrangement, a detachment armed with polished tungsten shields could, by arranging themselves in a 7-simplex octagon (for aerial foes), or by standing on each other's shoulders twelve high (terrestrial), could produce a potent solar laser capable of causing fatal burns in even armoured opponents. Despite being less effective in general than the standard yew longbow, this provided a much-needed artillery solution, at a time when the yew self- or longbow, while still available, was a costly commodity.¹³ Holland's willingness to forge shields from tungsten, rather than steel, speaks volumes to their commitment to developing a force unrivalled in England; precious metals had to be shipped from mills in Ireland, at significant cost.

It is a common misconception that the life of a mediaeval cleric meant a life of advocating non-violence. For many clerics, an agnostic take on the use of violence was a political impossibility; an abbey was a potentially defensible location in conflict, one with many potential resources inside, and it often fell to the occupants defend the grounds, or face a massacre. Likewise, in France, ideological pacifism would place one at odds with John the Fearless and Pope Boniface IX's crusade against the Ottoman Turks. There is also a more mystical argument for clerical bloodthirstiness: do you think that, maybe, to really understate the mystery of Christ - right? - to really get it, you have to identify. I mean, identify with a glorious personage, the tripartite personage, in the sense of perichoresis (the doctrine of simultaneous "envelopment" of all three members of the trinity; based in a common interpretation of John 14-7) who was so... natural, in their bloodiness. Never mind the eucharist - chewing on their body at its most beautiful is like a kind of cruel bite, and I always imagine wafers with the texture of boiled chicken. I suppose it should be mentioned here, I have no real religious background, except in terms of occasionally studying religious history as a component of other pursuits. (I've never taken the eucharist) To sculpt the narrative of your life around that agonizing thing... if you're truly like God, I guess, "sculpting" is literal, not sociological or metaphorical... isn't that to legitimize it? If you accept that brutality, that bite, to be inevitable, or reparative, to have qualities, not in itself, but in its causal manifestations, in its "contingency," which are beneficent, you would have to believe that, in certain contingent situations - maybe even a lot of them - it could be over again. It's all victimhood and instigation, mixed up, into an atemporal thing, like this all-the-time body you're biting. So when I imagine the tripartite body, when I imagine Christ, I picture this cruel, pig-faced fighter, with big gleamy white gnshrs, big fat teeth and flexing masseters. A nasty bloodlust could bring you closer to Christ, and it could even give you special powers. Which brings us to an essential question, maybe tangentially related: do I feel Houldie had supernatural powers? It's difficult to say, but probably not. Powers, yes; powers of violence and organization, but not necessarily of wizardry, or anything along those lines. The evidence at least is not sufficiently whole on that subject to make such an extreme leap of logic.

That aside, Houldie was a nasty nasty show-off. It seems they had no intention of allowing their prowess as a man-at-arms to atrophy, cleric or no. Semi-formal audits of the training process frequently mention them taking to the field to demonstrate techniques with sword, polearms and various other arms. A financial document reveals a dinner held by Holland in honour of Houldie's successful beheading of six living targets from horseback, simultaneously, using only their bare hands; as well as funds surrendered to Houldie by Holland, evidently because they had lost a bet that Houldie could not kill more than five. An

¹³ A "self bow" is a projectile weapon made from a single piece of wood. In order to achieve the necessary combination of tension and compression, yew longbows, which were necessarily self bows due to a lack of technological alternatives, had to be precisely cut from the mature yew tree, producing lengths of $\frac{1}{3}$ sapwood, and $\frac{2}{3}$ hardwood. Not only did this require an experienced woodworker, it lead to a shortage of mature yew trees. Ecological historians estimate that by the turn of the 17th century, the yew tree was approaching extinction in Europe.

intercepted telegram between the barracks at Exeter and Bath seems to include a version of the beheadings.¹⁴

...taxi, taxicab I don't know should we call them should we call them one no you don't understand me STOP. Cold thrity degrees and NNW STOP. Yes I'm doing it STOP. You dont really know right now I can't are they there STOP. They showed up STOP. It was like we were you remember up and down the walk just up and down all day in those cham they called those chamoises you know all damn day just marching up and down STOP. And the LAA [Lieutenant at Arms] they just come up to me and says you and what and then they point at next to me them next to me and "turnne and face, to the righte, in line and readdy" and I didn't know like then ten other guys they says over this way I'm worrying mostly I'm like what maybe some bread or something STOP. There's sarge and those other two and I'm like no is a hearing what did I do you know what did I do STOP. I thought I was going to lose my job I guess STOP. They're arguing one of them points to us and then I think they decide on something and STOP. I don't know STOP. I don't know STOP. And they come over and they say get in a line so we get in a line STOP. I don't know are you on are you off STOP. I don't come back STOP. Tell them about the inline STOP...

...and they say put your heads together side by side and I'm like weird this shit is weird STOP. We do it we're lined up put a cap on it we no do the cap STOP. There's a horse over there they get on it and then we're all lined up an he's going towards the guy and the head of the line cover this cover this... shit I think oh shit oh shit I don't know know oh shit I was gonna die I don't know shit STOP... exploded like a balloon five or six... six by final count...

There are reasons to believe the Abbey was never intended to reach completion; it was a vanity project, after all, and such projects often lasted for decades, longer than Holland's remaining years. In any case, Henry V's declaration of war on France in 1415 would have brought an end to that. Holland immediately recognized the financial and political potential of the conflict. With some luck, a virtuoso performance could even restore the family's name at court. This may not have been in reach in a few years before, but Henry IV's death in 1413 had opened the door to opportunists - Henry V was less picky, more ambitious, more prepared to wheel, to deal, to "get nasty and fuck." The Crown's supply of battle-ready companies was virtually drained. The "Second Peace" of 1389-1415 had no been so peaceful after all. There had been revolt in Wales. There had been revolt from the Lords Appallent.¹⁵ There had been piracy and renewed challenged from sea-beasts in the Channel. Beginning with the licensing of privateers, a shift had been underway from state armies and vassalage to mercenary forces. Even traditional commissioned troops¹⁶ were more and more motivated by the possible gain, and less by fealty or proto-nationalist feeling. Henry, familiar with the extensive nature of Holland's military assets and with the issue posed by raising enough troops to pose a threat to the French mainland, issued an official commission to Holland immediately.

¹⁴ Punctuation and capitalization added for clarity. Records of telegraph communications circa the 15th century often contain informal banter between operators, simply doing their best to brighten up a tedious job. In this case, the traumatized speaker seems to be trying to communicate their brush with death after being named the lucky 7th or 8th target in line. Only one side of the conversation has been recorded. The reader may also struggle with inconsistencies and fragments introduced by dictation. Communicating by dictation was common, given that to become a telegraph operator, one must be both literate, and trained in morse code. Operators were thus rare, and were often recruited from low-ranking clergy.

¹⁵ (I'm not even going to fucking get into this)

¹⁶ Troops hired by a sovereign from vassals, lords or other feal nobles.

It is another commonly held misconception these days that clerics in the 14th and 15th century possessed little or no social mobility, being somehow prevented from leaving the church to lead a political life, or to join the bourgeoisie, or to balance another line of work with their clerical duties. On the contrary, many persons in the church were great multi-taskers. One could even remain an ordained member of the church with all its privileges while leading a life abroad. Military-clerical careers were uncommon, but not impossible. For example, one Sister Jane of Saxony is known to have led the defence of Hatherop castle, despite being extremely elderly at the time. Some clerics had financial management experience. Many churches took part in managing taxation on behalf of the local magistrate; in fact, a prior with little or no business savvy would inevitably find their diocese bankrupt if they were to refuse to manage interests outside of the church.

Without hope of receiving their own abbey, as they had been promised, and with few ties to Exeter Cathedral, Houldie found himself with no prospects for advancement in the church. Meanwhile, Holland, without Houldie, would have had to deploy their troops without their chief military advisor. Hence it should come as no surprise that Houldie simply transitioned from a primarily clerical career to a primarily military one. Nor should this be taken to mean Houldie renounced their clerical status – throughout their time in Normandy, they remained a member of the English church, and regarded themselves as such, frequently taking part in clerical duties such as providing qualified men-at-arms with confession on the eve of battle, and even delivering mass on the field. Later, their return to the church was made seamlessly as well, with no issues having ever been raised by their fellow clerics with regard to what today would have been regarded as extremely irreligious and immoral conduct. A cleric at war would receive pardon by the same method that any soldier would receive it: through the crown's purchasing of penance from the church. In this way, the church would perform on the King's behalf all penance which would otherwise be required of each individual soldier to recover (spiritually) from the cardinal sin of murder, as well as of the King himself for conspiring to bring these sins about. It was not uncommon for a cleric at war to find themselves performing the very penance they and their fellows had incurred, once they returned to the church.

STOP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Before we go on, we should probably review the history of Henry V, the *very* newly minted King of England, viz. this glorious proto-fascist phlegmhole which is very much giving me a headache. From this point on, they will be something of a major player, obviously. At the time of their declaration of the second phase of the war on France, (or the end of the peace - same, same, same, always ending, always starting) Henry V had occupied for a mere two years. They were something of a greenhorn. Coronated in 1913 at Westminster Cathedral following the death of their father, the IV, Henry V was inheritor to a rather dubious claim to the throne. Their claim was received through their grandfather, Henry of Monmouth's deposition of Richard II, the last of the "main-line" Kings of the House of Plantagenet. The coronation possessed all of the pomp and circumstance of deliberate propaganda, including the anointment of the new king with a combination of Christ's Blood and a small quantity of grape seed oil allegedly given to Thomas Beckett by the Virgin herself, with the claim that no king anointed with it would be denied their inheritance. The new Henry carried a sample of this concoction with them constantly for much of their life, in a small phial in the shape of a hawk.

The modern myth of Henry's "riotous youth," like most of the cultural footprint of Henry's reign, can be attributed to Shakespeare, who, in the 16th century under a Tudor government, was not at all opposed to indulging in a bit of propaganda himself. In reality, the King's youth was neither a perpetual orgy, nor particularly serene; raised during the years before the Second Great Peace, Henry V came of age during a time of significant civic strife. Their father, the IV, found themselves daily embroiled in a political battle against the many supporters of the deposed line of Richard II, as well as against numerous opportunistic factions hoping to leverage their own tenuous claims to the throne in order to implant a status quo more amenable to their particular interests, essentially, a mediaeval take on modern political "rent-seekers." By 1410, Henry IV nearly quashed the Epiphany uprisings which had begun in 1400, in which leading nobles had plotted the assassination of both them and their heirs. The rebellions led by the Percys in 1403 ended violently at the Battle of Shrewesbury on the 21st of July, where the Percys were all obliterated and their eldest son, Sir Henry "Hotspur" Percy, was captured wounded in the face with an

arrow. Several other plots also aimed to usurp the crown, too complicated to cover here. These culminated in the execution of Richard Scrope in 1405, and later the Archbishop of York in 1408; as well as a short-lived rebellion by the Earl of Northumberland, who was also executed in the same year.

This enormous accumulation of political casualties also had the curious effect of allowing Henry IV to be the first to indulge the royal family's notorious habit of necrophilic fascination. Though they offered little or no explanation for their actions at the time, Henry IV's retainers were rigorous and consistent in their treatment of the corpses of their more prestigious political executees, evening going so far as to refuse important executions the traditional death of beheading by sword and instead opting for lethal injection via potassium solution to improve preservation. Cryogenic preservation seems to have been the destination for these remains, which were most likely stored in a chamber at Windsor castle, in a sub-basement of St. George's hall constructed around turn of the century, though further archaeological research suggests they may also have been housed beneath the Spiceries gatehouse. A 2004 excavation even revealed foundations dating c. 1400 beneath the royal apartments, though it is more likely this served as a storage spice for liquor and preserved goods, as the date of demolition does not match with storage records for the chambers. The exact identity of the corpses inhumed in the King's decadent, specially-built gilt stasis-chambers are difficult to say with confidence; their *exhumations* however provide a somewhat accurate catalogue (although in most cases the corpses are left deliberately anonymous) totalling less than ten in all. All likely candidates for the gallery were of high social and/or political status, mainly nobility and high-ranking clerics. What is known is that several of these would have had to be reassembled after beheadings or other causes of death – with one gruesome exception, when the young Sir Henry Percy is believed to have been preserved and exhumed alive. In the few allusions made publicly by Henry IV to this “gallery,” the only apparent justification, made near the end of their life, refers enigmatically to a conviction that they were likely to be found “desirous” at a later date, by themselves or their inheritors. Some contemporary historians take this to mean the creation of the “gallery” was no more than a bizarre sexual fetish, though this is generally refuted. The religious resonance of this personal ritual is another possible explanation; cryogenic preservation is not so different from incorruption. (To this day, official designations of “incorruption” are occasionally handed down to unusually well-preserved corpses by officiants of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church. These typically require

Henry V is known to contemporary historians for being obsessed with their alleged inheritance of the Crown of France, through their father's marriage. Though there are those who suggest this fixation was no more than a clever ploy to force France to restore England's former Norman holdings, certain incidents strongly suggest Henry's claim was in earnest. Records exist, for example, of the discovery by looting of two crowns - one of England, and another of France - stowed with the King's goods at the battle of Agincourt, apparently intended for use in a purely symbolic coronation to be held for Henry at the traditional site of Reims. And then... curiouiser & curiouiser & curiouiser... a third! Consisting of three removable parts bearing respectively the arms of England, France and Spain, stored with an accompanying breastplate bearing an “atlas”¹⁷ of the known world with Jerusalem at center. These articles have been tentatively related to a correspondence with the King recorded by Sigismund, King of Hungary in which Henry allegedly expresses a conviction to eventually become “a new earth-prince.”

Likely, Henry V was also goaded into action against France by their rights of inheritance to the territories in France ceded to Edward III by John II of France in the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, following their capture at the battle of Poitiers in 1356; these were somewhat more legitimate, to say nothing of practical, than their claim to the whole of France. These included an enlarged Guienne, Poitou (formerly Poitiers), Ponthieu and the March of Calais.

¹⁷ The “atlas” was a common decorative motif of the time; these maps were typically allegorical, though they have never the less lead to the misapprehension that mediaeval Europeans had a very limited understanding of the geographic world. On the contrary, maps for navigation were comprehensive and accurate. Maps for metaphorical pedagogy often contained references to Gog and Magog, Jerusalem, and other fantastical elements.

A note on Peace: the First Great Peace between England and France had been broken by the French side, under Charles V, the Second later instituted by Richard II and cemented with their marriage to Charles VI's daughter, Isabella. Henry the IV's father's deposition of Richard II therefore, in theory, constituted the breaking of the peace, even before Henry V's declaration of war. Likewise, on the French side, the Orléanists had begun to make obvious preparations to expel the English from their French territories. In 1415, the Orléanist faction dominated the French throne through influence and intimidation, led by John the Fearless and Philip the Bold. Their actions were tantamount to those of France. Thus, in a way, the declaration of war was not a cause, but as symptom of an underlying illness. There is a structural element to conflict during this period: legitimacy through acts of expansion, the crystallization of early nationalism, and nationalism's constant companion, imperialism. As a nationalistic entity defined by its relations to neighboring military powers, England's sole vector of self-aggrandizement, and thereby self-definition, was accretion, and therefore territorial conflict. The so-called Peace was an oxymoron: without territorial conflict, England was only a linguistic construction. A true peace meant a return to feudal polities and lordships, with no overarching military structure to bind the counties together into a nation. That is why the war never ends, forever and ever.

Though Henry's obviously egotistical justification, the war was a popular one. The English territories in France had developed a reputation among the common people as a necessary bulwark against the threat of French invasion, which many regarded as an inevitable catastrophe which the Great Peace had only temporarily delayed. The thought of the French reclaiming this necessary failsafe, and thus being able to launch an attack by sea at any moment, stirred the English people into a veritable frenzy. The French Threat became the subject of a campaign of xenophobic outrage, aided by royal propaganda. On March 24, 1415, the Duke of Gloucester delighted the English court at Windsor Castle by erecting a meticulously crafted statue of Louis de Valois, carved by collaboration between a royal portraitist and master butcher, entirely out of beef and pork (somewhat ironically, it was displayed where the statue of Charles II of England stands today). To much popular applause and shouting from the assembled English courtiers, the statue was then ceremoniously thrown to the ground. Nor would this be the last of many popular anti-French demonstrations in London, several of which ended in violence against bystanders and innocents, such as when demonstrations of arms went awry, or men-at-arms, foaming at the mouth and chewing their tongues, mistook crowds of looky-loos for French, and opened fire or cut into the crowd with poleaxes.

On June 8, an official proclamation was made stating that negotiations, which had never taken place, had been futile, and ordering "Alle maner of lords, knyghtys, and squyers, that y ben y pointed to goo with oure liege Lord the Kyng in this present viage, drawe hem home in to here contrees, and make hem redy to be with oure liege Lord the Kyng at Hamptone, the Munday afor Myssomers-day next come," (viz. June 22nd). Commissions were issued to officers¹⁸ by telegraph the day after. Numerous delays, however, stalled the campaign until early August, not least of which was the need to issue a second summons, as not all of the intended troops arrived on the given date, nor for several weeks after. The troops which *did* arrive, flooded London with a military presence which had not been seen in the city since the days of Edward III. Henry V, a virtuoso of public relations, took these months as a propaganda opportunity. Companies were encouraged to march in the streets in file at least once daily under the supervision of their lords, and were outfitted with the iconic red and white livery of the house of Lancaster, producing a perpetual display of intimidating military might.¹⁹ Brightly coloured posters

¹⁸ In the case of mediaeval military rank, an "officer" is any individual in command of a company, usually a lord or estate-holder. A "commissioned officer" is an officer commissioned by a sovereign, usually the Crown, to fight on their behalf. The "company" is the basic unit of non-differentiated military troops. It may consist of infantry, cavalry, men-at-arms, artillery, or any other troops, and may be subdivided into units, platoons, or etc. "Warranted officers" may also be present, representing companies of mercenaries, craftsmen, or other support requested by the sovereign.

¹⁹ This was a point of contention. Companies would typically have been arrayed in the colours of their arms. Removing these to wear a sort of "federal uniform" was controversial. It was abandoned soon after departure.

covered the city, featuring vital English youths entreating civilians to war and advertising the superiority of the English war-machine, whilst soldiers were invited to carry arms and perform random atrocities, declaring citizens at random to be French Devils, and executing them summarily. The symbolic effect was very much appreciated by the populous, who could be counted on to cheer the killings on.

The eventual departure, though grand, was a mixed success, including a speech from the King given beside two live lions, symbolizing the Lions of England. The overly long presence of the English troops in London no doubt betrayed to the common people that the process of national war would be messy and haphazard. Though the final turn out of companies was larger than expected, uncertainty plagued the war effort throughout these early phases. If one couldn't even be sure whether enough troops would indeed keep their word and arrive for the campaign, how could one feel assured of victory? And of course, Henry's opponents at home had not simply evaporated. More on this later.

Fortunately, luck was on Henry's side in 1415-10. Late arrivals who joined the campaign between after the official departure swelled the numbers enormously, and the English army was fit by late summer. Also to Henry's distinct advantage, the French defence was no less haunted by confusion and disorganization the English offensive. France was a nation at political odds with itself, and so assembling troops and provisions, materiel, artillery and heavy weapons was a grave burden.

Harfleur to Calais (1415-1416) (Preview)

Much like their opponents, the French campaign to assemble a defence seems to have been characterized by confusion and disorganization. Clear attempts were made to adequately garrison the Norman coast, particularly to the north, where the desperate Orléanists would have perhaps their sole stroke of luck, successfully predicting the English landing-site: Harfleur. To reinforce their numbers, a decree was distributed inciting all peasants, particularly professional archers, soldiers and members of all other professions involving the use of arms, living in Normandy and the North, to assemble at Rouen for a forced march to meet with the coastal forces. The muted response of the Norman people reflects a general disbelief in the military clout of their king common in the early days of the invasion.

A mere 300 men, largely sailors and prospective men-at-arms seeking employment, assembled in Rouen on the ordained date; of these, some 50 would abandon the march before reaching Harfleur. Other levies were met with silence. Far greater than this is the number of peasants who would choose to flee their homes, from Montevillier to Caudebec, fearing equally the looting and pillaging of their own forces as that of the English, a common source of collateral damage in 15th century warfare. French confidence was at a notable low along the Norman coast. In spite of this, the main French force succeeded in mustering some several hundred machine-gun emplacements along the north-western coast, though often sacrificing the expected two-man team - one to aim, and the other to feed the iconic azure and fleur-de-lis belt – for a single man, risking technical faults in the heat of battle.

This is not to say that the entire French campaign of recruitment was a loss. Significant headway was made in the battle to win over the peasantry through the “aggressive” strategies of Robert de Braquemont, Seigneur of Granville. Braquemont, a soldier by upbringing and, some said, by pleasure, was used to under-staffing from a previous command during the civil war, and familiar with innovative methods for raising troops. His campaign in the north consisted primarily of intimidating displays of force and violence, not only illustrating Paris's willingness to force service on the people, but demonstrating military prowess, efficiency, and ruthlessness. Braquemont chose strategically to employ for his bullying two reserves of a unique, new French unit of cavalry, the arbalester, a mounted force employing grenades and laser weapons for tactical, high-casualty rural-urban combat. Oddly enough, this violent campaign seems to have redoubled the French people's confidence in their “defenders” abilities. The toll of this national self-flagellating, however, was significant – in the process of recruiting an army, Braquemont reduced both the towns of Bernay and Longuean to rubble.

[...]

To the surprise of both parties, English troops arrived on French soil with very little difficulty, despite notoriously treacherous waters. A mere two ships were lost in the crossing to sea-beasts, known

off the Bay of Biscay to be capable of downing half a fleet. Of the two, one is generally described as being lost to a manatee several miles off the coast of Alderney, whereas the other, according to contemporary investigations, was most likely drowned by Leviathan, the satanic “colossus of the sea” described in the book of Job. Henry V, displaying his trademark sense of theatricality, had specifically arranged the journey so that his momentous landing would occur in late August on the day of the Vigil of the Assumption, and the monarch disembarked in high fashion, dressed in violet, the appropriate liturgical colour for the occasion, to oversee the performing of appropriate rites on solid ground. This landing however was of the king’s vessels alone; most would deploy directly into the line of fire, transporting troops directly to land, making the battle on the shores near Harfleur the largest amphibious invasion in world history.

Four beaches near four port towns had been carefully selected in advance as being the most receptive to invasion: S. Romain, Orville, Traquerville and Montivilliers. To their distinct disadvantage, the English armada had been spotted off the coast of Boulogne before their arrival, reported by fishers. As a result, all four landings were met with heavy machine-gun fire manned in part by relocated troops. The weather on the day of the landing also seemed to conspire against the English, clear and bright, providing excellent visibility for the French machine-gunners and allowing them temporarily to compensate for the superior English numbers. This provided only a temporary reprieve; the quick-thinking English command recovered immediately, developing a counter-strategy which would better use the English numbers. The French line was soon broken at S. Romain and Montivilliers, the English pushing through with a rush under cover from naval gunnery to engage and slay peasant archers and machine-gunners with sword and pike and preventing a retreat by setting fire to homes and buildings on the far side of the village via firebombs released by glider.