

Interview with the Worm

In County Durham, where this sort of thing can occur,
a sinkhole appeared. Its bottom couldn't be seen.
A seventy-one-year-old retired sales trainer warned:
'With more rain coming, we could see a lot more of the hole'.
There followed the usual talk of pits and mineshafts.
But when I went to look I ended up listening
to the Lambton Worm, long thought sectioned and swept
beyond cold Sunderland. This is what it said

and is, in truth, less interview, more audience.
The worm had things to say, by turns animated
and angry. I got the sense it had nursed grudges
for centuries, and *my* role was to record them.
It spoke, as you'll hear, for the polity of earthworms,
and with an impressive breadth of informed opinion,
shy of my microphone at first, but relaxing
when sure it was *not* a device for chopping up worms.

'A rippling powered by five pairs of hearts,
though nobody chills to songs of the saddled earthworm.
Topsoil worms outweigh the beasts of the field
though you don't accord them legendary status.
Did Noah take just the one? Us being hermaphrodites.
If Edward Thomas fought for *literally, this*
[the poet crumbling soil between his fingers]
then he fought for all the grateful worms of England.

'Childhood is fair worm time. Earth is closer.
You learn to tie your laces watching blackbirds
pulling worms from lawns on wet mornings,
perform your crude anatomies with penknives.
You get to know our moon and rain movements,
throw sheets of soapy water on the grass
and watch us rise, flushed by your Fairy Liquid.
Your basic bait. Your simple angleworm.

'Northern confectioners saw fit to cast
our form in sugary gelatin, next to the white mice,
and are vindicated. Closest we came to art.
Nothing on the walls of caves, nothing from Antiquity,
nothing in the Mediaeval, unless those serpents
and dragons are worms that turned under the pressure
of ergot or lead paint. The Renaissance: silent.
Between Pliny and Michelangelo, the Laocoön

was a marble reef for worms in their underworld.
Roland Barthes would have written well on us worms
and what might Jean Luc Godard have done if all
he'd needed to make a movie was a gun and a worm?
Some say only you poets are paying attention
being children, anglers and lovers of the dance
between this world and that, the words passing through
the length of you in long bodily shivers.'

I fast-forward the tape. It said so many things.
It talked of the journey home from the German Ocean,
each eel-stump, blind, and wriggling through the slime
by moonlight, avoiding the gannets' zone of interest.
It thanked all poets and asked me, as its proxy,
to pass this on, which I'm doing by reading you this.
Holes are appearing. Livestock is going missing.
It's started raining. It's bringing an army next time.