



Henry of Wyrmlands slays the
Laidly Worm & rescues his lover
the Princess Moonbug ◊

HMLTD - ‘The Worm’

I. Introduction

‘The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make, and could just as easily make differently.’

1. Imagination is a radical political and spiritual act. Through imagining other worlds, you draw attention to the contingency of your own, and unveil it for what it truly is: imagined. Everything changes when you see that the order is imagined; that the great and terrible Oz is just a man behind a curtain. To imagine is to dream another world, and is the first step to creating one. In the face of ecological, spiritual and structural collapse under capitalism, more than ever before, this duty is urgent.

2. ‘The Worm’ is a story about human struggle; both personal, spiritual struggle - and the struggle of individuals trapped inside systems of power that they cannot comprehend and are powerless to change. It is both a political polemic, and a spiritual parable about the struggle to overcome the worm inside of you, whatever that may be - to live in the light and let love in. Two years in the making, and featuring 47 musicians including a gospel choir and 16-piece string orchestra, ‘The Worm’ is our canticle - a tribute to the power of dreaming.

II. Struggle and Salvation

‘The mind is its own place and, in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven.’

3. Inside of each of us, there is a Worm. In the Abrahamic religions, this Worm is often called Satan, and it is that which compels you to sin - that which leads you to destroy yourself. In short, human weakness. The Worm is experienced both as something separate, something foreign acting upon and controlling you from without, like those parasitic worms that transform their hosts’ psychology while feeding upon them, and which must be expunged or overcome at all costs; and - the biological reality of both parasites and weakness - as part of us; something which we exist within in a relationship of mutual reliance and must live with. Weakness is part of life. Existence is struggle.

4. Faced with this worm - in the form of worthlessness, hopelessness, depression, narcissism - that is constantly experienced and yet somehow never *seen* - the narrator of ‘The Worm’ projects it into a literal, physical, gargantuan Worm that swallows England. Unable to conquer his inner demons, he transfuses them in a schizophrenic episode into something physical, real: conquerable.

5. Much of the album takes place within this meta-narrative, where the narrator leads a subterranean guerrilla rebel militia (The Grunters) fighting against this Worm King through the English countryside, eventually fulfilling the hero’s destiny and slaying it.¹ The world created in the album recalls the tales of Old English folklore in which giant worms terrorise villages, before being slain by a gallant knight, the most famous being The Lambton Worm.

6. Combining this medieval world with the contemporary, the England imagined in the album - or as it’s renamed under the all-conquering Worm Emperor, ‘Wyrmlands’ - is one collapsed in time: the Medieval and Old English existing alongside the modern and the sci-fi. Steam trains jostle alongside town criers in a future England returned to feudalism under the all-swallowing Worm King.

¹ Following the torus structure of an Ouroboros Worm, wherein the universe begins at its own end point, this occurs in the first song of the album.

7. By externalising the inner Worm into this giant one - like the monsters of Greek mythology- our hero creates a fictional world in which he is actually able to slay The Worm; to conquer his own weakness, and to save himself and everyone he loves who is trapped inside of it - to achieve salvation. True salvation however, turns on whether and how the narrator can conquer the inner Worm that birthed this delusion in the first place, and learn to live and love.

8. This narrator is essentially me. I created 'The Worm' to escape my reality; to deal with a world which I've never felt able to comprehend, let alone master. To slay the worm I couldn't. This album is a projection of the The Worm(s) inside of me: self-doubt, envy, hatred, and most of all depression; the worm that has been more or less ever-present in my adult life. Like the giant Worm projected in the album, these Worms are powerfully destructive. It is thus, in some sense, not a fiction at all, but a partly autobiographical album about my own struggles; my battle to overcome them, and simultaneously learning to accept them as part of life as a way to achieve salvation and inner peace. I hope that - in this universalizable symbol of The Worm, each listener can see their own particular, personal experience of struggle embodied.

9. Parts of the album break this fourth wall, directly implicating me - and my own struggles with The Worm - in the story; acknowledging that the story is playing out in real time as the album is being made. Fiction and reality collide violently.

10. Outside the fourth wall, worms become something else: a portal to childhood, and the innocence of that world which we have lost both as a society and individuals. To a time before the Worm entered the world, but where worms were everywhere. In our adult lives, we never see worms anymore. Do you remember how when you were a child, they were everywhere? Let us return to the mud.

11. In the album itself, salvation is achieved through kindness and acceptance of The Worm(s) that live deep inside us; the parts that aren't monstrous and supernaturally evil, but rather weak, fragile - which nonetheless twitch and yearn for more life for us and more love from us - even when burrowed deeply in the bleakest of muds, there is room for faith.

'This morning, our cat walked into the kitchen and dropped a worm at my feet. Its claws had ripped the small pink thing in two: two worms, now racing each other back to the garden door, and the mud. I kneeled down at the side of the small twitching things and gathered them in my hands. I walked out into the garden and lowered my hands to the wet earth. 'Life is beautiful' I said. Life is very beautiful. Then I opened my hands and the worm crawled out. And then I opened my eyes.'

III. Power and Impotence

'We were born deep in the belly of a great Worm, of a Worm that swallows worlds, of a Worm with no way out, there's a Worm in everybody, and we're living in the belly of The Worm inside the man, and the man's inside The Worm'

12. Beyond being a parable of human struggle, The Worm has a deeper political significance. 'The Worm' is also a parable of the experience of impotency felt by individuals trapped inside gargantuan, interlocking systems of power that they cannot comprehend, and are powerless to change. This impotency, and the feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness that it engenders, is the defining modern human condition and is best characterised by the climate catastrophe that forms the backdrop of this album, and the alienation that results from the productization of everything - there is no longer any room for the spirit. Faced with economic, environmental and spiritual collapse, as well as global pandemics and imminent thermonuclear annihilation, we find it impossible to imagine another reality - let alone build it.

13. This experience of cosmic impotence recalls the ancient (and phallic) symbol, found throughout a vast swathe of religions and cultures, from Nordic to Vedic, of a giant worm swallowing its own tail - popularly known as an 'ouroboros'. In many such cultures, this image symbolizes the universe, which is contained inside the worm. Today, we are trapped deep inside the ouroboros worm of capital and spiritual alienation and cannot see outside of it. While we are inside the Worm, the Worm is also inside of us; it has established a colony inside every person. In other words, The Worm is not just an ouroboros but also a parasite - one capable of invading, infesting and transforming the self and its psychology: ideologies and narratives are more than just ideas; they take literal root as physical neural matter in the minds of individuals. The Worm in the album is also this Worm, in both its ouroboros and parasitic forms - and the narrator's escape into the meta-narrative is also an attempt of conquering this Worm that surrounds us; that is totally invisible because it represents itself to us as the universe itself, and that is constantly experienced - in the form of weakness, powerlessness and depression.

14. The Worm as late capitalism: we are stuck inside this Worm, but it is also a parasite inside of us, determining our psychology and actions, in an endless 'mise en abyme' - those images which appear recursively within themselves in an infinite loop. It is also the Ying and the Yang; one plays host to the other, and not only exists within the other but does so fundamentally in a mutually reliant relationship of parasitism to its host.

IV: Man as Worm; Worm as Man

'Father, are we wretched? Are men no more than just worm gods? Aren't our bodies like theirs - soft and pink and feeding off the corpse of the earth? We are Worm God. Man is Worm God.'

15. And yet, like the worm created by the narrator, this Worm is in a sense our own creation. We are inside The Worm because we are in fact the parasite controlling the host. We are at the wheel. 'The ultimate hidden, terrifying truth of the world is that it is something we make, and could just as easily make differently.' The host system which surrounds us and renders us powerless is in fact our own creation; in a twist, we are the true parasites inside of - and controlling - the Worm. The eponymous Worm, is man. Man is Worm God.

16. We fear parasitic worms for their ability to invade and transform the self, but also because they represent our Shadow self. Their bodies are our own: powerfully destructive, mindlessly living off the corpses of others and feeding off the corpse of the earth; and yet, soft, pink, vulnerable - weak. Faced with a powerful, godlike force that we create and yet cannot comprehend and are powerless in front of, this paradox epitomizes the human condition as it exists within modern systems of power. Infinitely destructive and infinitely vulnerable. Almighty and powerless. The human condition is that of Wormdom.

17. Worms confront us with an uncomfortable truth: that we are dancing bags of flesh; sentient meat with a slice of the divine; thrown into our bodies and forced to blindly writhe within them. To struggle. And yet we reach. And we reach further. And we build towers and rockets to reach further still. We reach for transcendence. Man is Worm God: born of the mud and reaching for the heavens.

18. But what good has all this reaching achieved? Every human misery is a tragedy. Every worm must be saved; every worm must be loved. For if we cannot love a worm, how can we love a man? It is too easy to find God in that which looks sublime, bright. The sublime can be temptation; evil. God must be found in that which is weak, powerless, conquered. In that which disgusts us, repulses us. That is where true beauty lies. Where divinity and transcendence must be sought.

19. And therein lies the foundational paradox of a life well-lived; in the beginning, anything that is incommensurable with what we feel is truly part of our deepest self is castigated as a terrifying Other. We bundle up our flaws, shortcomings, sins, and shadows together with the violence of the external world, difficult truths and uncomfortable but necessary steps towards the light as one big terrifying Worm. The first duty, to ourselves and to the divine, is the loss of innocence - the acceptance of the battle with that Other as a life-long pursuit. The second duty is maturity - the equally life-long struggle to differentiate between Worms that necessitate expunging in order to better ourselves and the world around us, and worms that necessitate our love and care as an acceptance of our own fragility, mortality and shortcomings. *In the end, killing the Worm requires the irrational commitment, riddled with doubt and fear, to these two duties.*

20. Life is beautiful. Let us cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence. This album is a hopeful one. Let us try and find a way out of The Worm. Until then, this album is dedicated to everyone who, like us, is still stuck inside of it.

V: Life is Worth Living

21. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf1DkBQRQj4>