

One for the Worms

On my lunch hours,
I visit them in the museum.
They call me back every day.
I can't quite explain it.

They're in a sealed case,
two glass babies, scarred,
their plump white bellies
swollen with worms.

I'd like to write
a poem about them,
but I cannot.
I think it is because

of an infant I knew
when I was a boy,
a friend's baby brother
who didn't make it past

being a baby.
I woke last night
crying because
I remembered.

I hadn't thought of it
in thirty-five years,
and I don't want to
think of it again.

So here's a poem for the worms,
hardworking and unsung,
erasing organs and entrails,
faces and hands,

and for the bacteria,
invisible and everywhere at once,
who do not shun even
the smallest morsel,

and the mortician,
draining
and pickling
and patching up,

and all things
that work in harmony
to keep death out of sight,
sprays and disinfectants

that cover up stray whiffs,
and all the folks
who air the rooms
and strip the sheets

and throw away the flowers.
I don't want to see,
to understand
or be reminded.

Leave them in their case,
the glass babies,
swollen with worms.
Dear Lord,

have mercy on your creation,
most of which will rot.
Hide from us the things
that taint the time we've got.

And blessed be
the man
who digs the hole
and fills it in again.