

Ode to Garbage Collectors

As deft as surly lumberjacks,

the men in green raze

forests of forsaken waste

with one fell swoop of the axe.

These squires of the alleyways

and barons of the cul-de-sacs,

these curbside collectors of the prosperous and penniless

eclipse astronomers themselves, pundits of parallax

and perspective: for one man's un-treasured trash pays

another man's bills post-haste.

Behold the trashman's all-embracing tax!

These knights in shining work vests, these disciples of routine,

these clandestine foes of rats

and raccoons, these ferrymen of mold

and odors unseen,

with hearts bloodied by invasive glass shards, dutifully keep

America's conscience clean.

Pickup day is judgment day, after all—the bins' contents

shall be assessed, and the collectors' council shall convene,

desperately bargaining with Mother Earth, as diplomats

would, to ease pollution's chokehold.

Lest we forget the mighty men in green!

What do I want to be when I grow up? My kindergarten teacher insists

that I abandon this child's whim, this lousy wish:

“The garbageman's trade lacks

prestige—you'd make a wonderful accountant.” And so I lie through my teeth, as ventriloquists

might; somehow I identify equally with the puppet's plight.

The stage lights dim but the audience's chatter persists,
and backstage I rummage a pile of costumes,
unable to find what I'm looking for. Perhaps it has been discarded by the traditionalists.
Must the show go on? Unseen are the schools of fish
that lick clean the grimy, algae-coated shells of insouciant leatherbacks.
Who thanks the green-clad mutualists?