

SOME SAMPLES FROM *PLASTIC OCEAN*

Plastic Scenes In Jest & Gyre

Isn't it beautiful? What does it mean? —Mary Hartman in *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*

by D.S. Black

We grow up sucking plastic: the fake teats descriptively called "pacifiers," followed by any number of toys that break and are replaced in ever shortening product cycles. Polycarbon followed by high index lenses—my eye glasses never have been made with actual glass.

A critique of the cool, bakelite world of our parents was beautifully ironized in the 1967 film *The Graduate*. When an avuncular family friend offers the fruit of his business acumen to the newly-minted Graduate, a rather confused young man, he is met with generational disbelief.

Mr. McGuire: I want to say one word to you. Just one word.

Benjamin: Yes, sir.

Mr. McGuire: Are you listening?

Benjamin: Yes, I am.

Mr. McGuire: Plastics.

Benjamin: Just how do you mean that, sir?

—*The Graduate*

The word may be loaded with promise, but it needs qualification or risks becoming an infinitely malleable cipher, a deadly utopiate.

Plastic is a substance that not only pushes our buttons, it is the medium making buttons possible: to • push •

What if all buttons have the same fatal effect, regardless of how, if and when they are pressed, simply by virtue of being *plastic*? For plastic is rarely localized, and today we begin to see the extent to which it has metastasized as a massively distributed doomsday device fast approaching the failsafe point.

After cars and soaring carbon release, with power grids pulsating sympathetically in tune with a mortal medusa frequency, plastics are an all-pervasive symptom of a world poisoned by the abuse of a no longer abstract finitude: fossil fuels.

Besides global warming, weird weather, and resource exhaustion, the soup we're in is larded with plastics that are a durable and prolific pollutant. After less than 200 years of burgeoning omniplasticity, plastic refuse threatens to overwhelm large ecosystems. In the North Pacific Gyre (between 135° to 155°W and 35° to 42°N) marine waste is concentrated at record levels, with the predominant substance befouling the surface water plastic in its many forms.

Predicted in a paper published by the NOAA in 1988, and observed by Charles Moore and described in his work with oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer in 1999, this synthetic subcontinent-sized cesspool of plastics is a symptom of a life-threatening nature.

Situated between Los Angeles and Hawaii is an ever densifying jumble of discarded material, with parts small enough to be mistaken for *plankton*. Plastic debris swirls nebulous but lethal, in an area vast as Texas. It's big and perhaps you don't *want* to mess with it...but to ignore this mess is to court disaster.

Beyond here there be monsters captioned the amorphous area on maps of old as *Terra Incognita*. With GoogleEarth now serving up an eye in the sky view of our planet, it is tempting to think there can no longer be anywhere *new* under the sun, leastwise not under the phototropic dome of Planet Earth—the Terra we recognize by the wreckoning of our dreams.

A new world is forming, arising out of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, each new plastic bag adding to the polymer tag cloud of a time toxic inside and toxic out. It is an asteroid belt of land masses, not really solid, comprised of technogenic crap. Also known as the Eastern Garbage Patch, it is a soup, a stew of junk, more goulash than bouillon, suspended in a collaborative spin of ocean currents. The gyre of circular motions is a vortex that sucks in any flotsam

and jetsam that blow from landfills and wind up in a thickening gumbo of nurdles, sixpack loops, waterbottles, shopping bags, and other material witnesses of reckless abuse of this our only planet.

In eighth grade geography class on the environment, I learned that *everything is connected to everything else* and *everything must go somewhere*. Most memorable was the kicker, *There's no such thing as a free lunch* —although I preferred Heinlein's folksier version with "ain't" allowing it to be acronymed TANSTAAFL! in his novel of lunar revolution, *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress*. Decades later, the straightforward logic of these aphorisms is inescapable. When I think back on all the plastics that have wrapped my lunches, I shudder, wondering: where did those countless gossamer shrouds go?

New substances call for new words. The plastics industry gave us Polystyrene, Parkesine, Celluloid, Cellophane, Bakelite, Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), Rayon, Cellulose Acetate, Polyethylene, Polyurethane, Polytetrafluoroethylene (Teflon), Nylon, Neoprene, Polyester, Liquid Crystal Polymers, and so whiter.

"You're soaking in it," —Madge, 1970s TV sage of the manicure

If "nurdle" sounds like a word out of Lewis Carroll, it would have confounded him to learn it is a plastic pellet less than 5 mm in diameter. The problem is they are never singular, with 27 million tons produced per year in the U.S. Suspended in water, these colorful blobs are bomblets lobbed against marine life, which can mistake them for food. In Orange County, 98% of beach waste examined in 2001 were nurdles.

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
—Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky"

Watching the film of *The Ra Expedition* as a schoolkid in the early 1970s, I remember the hardened globules of oil Thor Heyerdahl and his sailors continually encountered in the course of their voyage. These frequent reminders of industrial civilization would have been

unknown to the Phoenicians or North Africans, whose reed ships Heyerdahl painstakingly recreated millennia after their heyday.

As I write this (2 September), Roz Savage has arrived after a 99 day voyage rowing herself 2,100 miles through the Gyre from San Francisco to Hawaii. Her idea is to show we all can act as more than just "a drop in the ocean"—and actions count. Her voyage continues to Australia!

Preceding her Hawaiian landfall this summer was another awareness-raising expedition, a Junk raft buoyed by 15,000 plastic bottles commissioned by the Algalita Marine Research Foundation. This intrepid ship of six collected samples and noted "a five fold increase in plastic quantities in the Gyre since Captain Charles Moore began his research in 1997." Both Savage and the Algalita voyages are well documented on the interweb.

21st century argonauts aren't searching for gold, they are emissaries steeped in the evidence of waste. Their risky high stakes task is to gauge the health of the biosphere in a new threatened dead zone.

One substance in particular is implicated. Plastics, especially when alienated from the culture that produced them, represent the range of consumer choice and commodity appetites. They are key indicators, and despite a tendency to move downwind and downstream, they are never really gone.

It's not too late to trip over the true consequences of our actions, the sense of negligence and deadly dereliction implicit in the Gyre's Garbage Patch. Only by tamping down greed and the concomitant effluent of our acquisitive impulses can we hope to pull back from oblivion.

In 2007, San Francisco became the first U.S. city to ban plastic shopping bags. Perhaps just a drop in the ocean, but a step in the right direction nonetheless.

Will dreams help, or have the dream merchants sold us a bill of goods? Celluloid made possible photography and the predigital

motion picture industry, the primary purveyor of dreams in this post-/modern world. The lie that has been sold so effectively is an unspooling infinite reel of the American Dream that transcends centuries and any practical restraint.

One of the earliest strains of plastic, celluloid replaced ivory in the manufacture of billiard balls. If God does not play dice with the universe, as Einstein supposed, it would be disappointing to find we have squandered our future over billiards and its brain-nurdling faith-razed equivalents.

Now, before endless night falls, let's check the lens we've put between us and the world to make sure it doesn't keep us from seeing what needs to be seen, from feeling the soup bubbles of fate rising to agitate our bathwater.

D.S. Black is a hopeful San Franciscan misanthrope who prefers paper to plastic, but usually carries his own bag.

Poem

by Chris Stroffolino
Oakland, CA

1.

the new plastic ocean thing people
have a brand of chicken
called tuna of the land...
a tuna who could walk the land
is courageous as a chicken
who can swim the sea...
to the ocean plastic people things...

the planet they've always called ocean
(they custode),
and the ocean part of it
did you forget to be scared of them?
starving...
coz cookie magoo didn't serve cookies
and foghorn leghorn isn't the easter bunny
and i start looking for that "1903" part of my calendar heart
back in the dirt part of earth they call ocean
during the day part of the night
waving from a raft they'd call the food part of trash
at least for the first half...

2.

My ocean is not so plastic
my heart the whirlwind wishbone
torn between priceless and worthless

oh worth, you rhyme with earth
earth not opposite of sea
day not opposite of night
but wider, your heart

Out-take #1 from *Liberty Boys*

By David Lincoln, San Francisco

A few months after my girl friend's disappearance, I started the experiment of going to a meditation group, partly on the advice of her former employer, the blind Ambassador's widow. At first I noticed nothing, sitting with the group, until on the fourth occasion I became aware of a very strange sensation, a current such as I'd never felt before, along my spine, this intense rush of energy that gave my body an entirely new electric feel and dimension. As I focused on it, in fact, I became aware of a body that was outside my normal body, a large strange body of bright red scales and enormous webby feet and fiery wild eyes and grimacing, slime-flecked lips. I had enormous fang-like mandible teeth and a large brow of hard red shell, an exo-skeleton, and sparks that were shooting from my fingers. Large tendrils of thorny skin protruded from my neck and floated, incredibly, at a radius around my shoulders, like jelly fish antennas, sensitive and waving around. What's more, I became aware that this towering swaying creature body could move in ways that I wasn't used to; at one point I felt I could just drop down on all fours and clamor bear-like around the room, or suddenly vanish and re-appear in another building. But the only thing that surprised me was my utter lack of *unfamiliarity* with these sensations, like I had always been this other creature and I really was a demon posing in a human body and not a human in a shell with a demon body wrapped around. Or maybe I was

William Crowley the biographer and also a red scaly monster prowling around on its various missions, and all the paths I ever selected were actually responses to *its* agenda and not the ones I thought. That explained a lot—why I never cared about the usual things, like material success, or why I was a historian who had gone into advertising. It brought to mind a comment my father once remarked—“Who knows if you're even human after all ...” —like he knew and realized this other part of the picture and wasn't too sure of what to do. Curiously enough, as I ran over these secret things I'd unwittingly kept from myself, I understood something was terribly wrong with the monster, despite its red scales and shocking teeth, that something was ailing it; it wasn't really fired up to its purpose; for a monster, it struck a lackluster note. Frankly, it seemed distraught. A monster ought to be flaring those nostrils and snarling in terrifying grimaces those roaring, slime-flecked lips; but instead it was all droopy and flopsy, like a sick monster with all its ferocity blocked. Here it was lumbering through the world all melancholic and suffering from a too-big heart, constantly disappointed by what it came up against, finding a world that didn't live up to its monster standards.

I opened my eyes. I was still sitting on a tangerine meditation cushion, surrounded by others in the circle. Then I closed my eyes again, and the feeling returned, this time even more pronounced.

FETISH EYES

by David Meltzer

ongoing conclusion
finale follies
doomsday delere
kettle drum boom boom
thrums & tolls
rolls around
on the ground
unfounded
get a stick in its mouth

nothing beat the machine
certainly not
rock 'n' roll
certainly not
punk nor beat
never art for free
everything crashed
crunched
hurled back into
pristine troughs
of love for sale

What's On Your Mind

By Gloria Frym

I.

hope you washed your hands before those surgical strikeouts
you're the benchmark of my intentions some verbs stay solid
I may you may he may they may a little bit closer closes
not
believing sky is wave sun skin locked your keys jail the feeders
certain truths not evident crowd pleasers cost rates vary see details
"my will is strong and my won't is weak" smoke murmurs
needs don't fill
they need one another and how is your active shadow today
there in that chair infested
room for improvement a burst of violence
sudden asymmetrical skirts
harbor your grudge, I mean dock it such a tidy no
just who counts their blessings
or the doors of a shelter no more post war ever again war "news" replaces
war for those home dough rises empires fall
and how is your "reality-based community"

not on the menu? ask for it

II.

suspicious components eavesdropping pigeons your call
may will be monitored go to the principal's office who is the
principal
why it's old friend John trying to reach the breach of
centuries erase steerage from
look at the pink geraniums boxed on a 3rd floor window
so *charmant* same color required in every
pot squat or jump in fear or floatshe went door to door
making garden came back weaker and weaker to visit
her babies
a tisket a tasket and green and yellow landfill
untimely wombs
try all possible bodies of water

III.

where indignation lives during the pogrom and now again during
the programs occupation pregnant babies delivered into
the terrible clamour bomb the music of metal flashing quick
under branch bowing across
here's an email address for all insurgencies write if you want choose
busfare or bread I can speak out I was inquisitioned
evicted deported exterminated I have some right
don't I I was the boy who
hid under still bodies no animal reveals this yes
tonight I'll eat all my organic peas daddy
speech is widely subject to disbelief when a clerk says
I have no idea I blame the state it doesn't have ideas only greeds
something's on my mind what it is to be human imprisoned
in grownup
like lots of us

IV.

stapling shingles around the block as blasting bombs far far beneath the
sea
if this poem is unhappy the maker thrills when happiness enters
the poem has a mind
of its own and this one's in the middle of long wars not to mention nulled
laws
so there's no rules to stop power from killing when
there's no rules of art it whacks up the near past

and ancient libraries

V.

a mind cleared of deceit free of grudge sure that's the one we
want
but who's kidding whom the sludge has nothing on the ideal
and we live in flawed and stupid inadequate love

VI.

angels left on August 6, 1945

so pictures protect us
with lovely prayer

VII.

God never occurred except written
The gods seemed interesting
One couldn't finish all those assignments

VIII.

Storms torment seismic refugees Russian cabbies
is driving now is going is better
than I couldn't ask what

IX.

Marriage = buying a couch together
such fabric
six months to arrive

And by then all's equivocal
as it was before the order
and they go on they go on

X.

Just what fell off Your shelves during the last big one?
Name the titles of the cups
Book and their mean streaks important little do-dads from far
away

XI.

Now menu is a button on demand no place dishes it out like

serve you until I'm not stating I'm asking
strong minds keep men in line what about
the oceanic current tense
you with me or against
with me for
the tide

From Here to Oblivion

by J. Lee

Hear this song at [www.myspace.com/therabbles.com](http://www.myspace.com/therabbles)

Blasting off here we go
Into the dark of the new moon glow
Anticipating arrival time
Fate and destin-I

At the count of 3
Your are believing
You are receiving
Reach your hands up to the dome
Solitary lone
Our windows are plexy
Uranus is sexy
Off we go into the unknown

Blasting off the heads of state
Didn't give a fuck and now it's too late
On an Odysseyus trip through space
Where we can finally be alone

A people so obscene
We're procreating
We're generating
Bringing all the supplies that we can
And to the promised land
The bast and the brightest
The richest and whitest
To oblivion and hyper speed

Bioremediation, or No Soap in the World

*From "Tell Me the Sky Falls": Sonatas for the End of the World
by Jeff Conant*

A dark bloody hole let out the universe, squawking and
screaming a wet dirty bird. An other bloodshot eye
blinked and went out, a streetlamp bent, shaped like
S for sea, for stomach. Long low tubelike fragrant flowers

fade against the tv, pollen dies atop the tv, manipulated
lambs make enzymes for humans on tv. A bit of
grain is left over like a postcard from the good old days.
Birth is forgotten. Names are forgotten. Sleep burns the back.

Steam sleeps in the grates, rises like a dark opening
over the flowerbeds. Golden rice floods the blackened city gates.
You can clean Hell with a daisy, scrape salt off the asphalt
with a tooth, scrub your face with sand, the grit

of love's last ghost. The record spins out of time, skips and
scratches, *"I ain't gonna fall in love no more."*
No soap in the world strong enough to clean that mess.

7 DAYS IN DARIEN

by Michael Rothenberg

Spanish moss, Live oaks, resurrection ferns
Fort King George Motel
Reading *Baghavad Gita*
Todd reads the turtle news
“Leatherback Nesting on Sapelo Island”
Apple passion fruit juice, peanut butter cookies
Shower, shave, and go to sleep

An American gator drifts down the river
Bottlenose dolphins roil

At 10 a.m meet Sinkey Boone, shrimp fisherman
At the Waffle House for grits

Fishermen and environmentalists talk
About turtle excluder device
By-catch, aqua-culture, sodium dip
Marketing links, Georgia
Sweet browns, whites and pinks

Whelk shell heap glares in the hot noon sun

We visit Fort King George Historic Site
Tidal mills, saw blades, stockades, brick ruins
Guale Indians, French, Scottish, British
The Church fought for control of Altamaha Delta

Corn snake. Indigo snake
Ibis, egret, bunting
Cabbage palm, palmetto and holly

At the Buccaneer Club
Lunch of boiled shrimp
Hushpuppies and French fries

More talk about sea turtle strandings
Sea turtles caught in shrimp nets
Mutilated in Texas, drowned in Georgia
No one has an answer

“It isn’t the fisherman’s fault,” says Sinkey
“We’re sea farmers in Sea Gardens.”

I remember poaching loggerheads
in Everglades National Park 35 years ago
Butchered on the sand spit at night
The bloody heart and gutted carapace

Survey soft sand hills with Sinkey
Slash pine forests and cypress swamp
Find alligator skeleton and teeth
Todd roots and turns rotted wood
I sit on the banks and twirl a doodle-bug stick

Lake ripples lap the shore willows
Sand-fleas bite my bare ankles
Orange velvet ants investigate the ground
Herons wade. Mulletts leap
A small bird with a pretty song
No one can identify

Mangrove seeds drift over oyster beds
Smilax thickets and bald cypress
Tangles of Muscadine vines
We climb a big old tree to look over
Miles and miles of cord grass marshlands

On the shrimp boat "Bertha"
Equipped with Turtle Excluder Device
The captain cooks us Certified Turtle Safe™ sea bobs
Pinches off their heads
Adds a bottle of medium hot salsa
Squirt of liquid margarine
Salt and pepper
Boil until pink
The shells pop right off
We eat four pounds

St. Simon's Island Festival
Washboard thumping, bass singing, "Oh, When the Saints..."
Deviled-crabs, barbecued ribs, smoked mullet
And sweet potato pie

We visit the vacant pond habitat of Wally
A pet alligator shot in the face by vandals

Bright blue tailed skink species
expecatus or *fasciatus* iridescent in a wood pile

Vultures on turtle carcass hill
Pink sunset splash

At Day's Inn in Jacksonville
Waves of discovery and no answers
I think we ought to boycott shrimp
Todd disagrees
The next day fly to Boston
Leave a note for Todd, "Save the Turtles"
Remember Darien

Of Bears' Sleep,
by Rich Alley

he'd studied-up by browsing Nature texts. Read about the winters, the fur, sustaining fats. He gave up on his razor, bought nuts in plastic cans.

On his first attempt, he woke up, as always, with the sun. Tried taping garbage bags to the windows in his den. More blankets for the burrowing into his leather couch.

When he next awoke, three months of cave-sleep had passed. The bags across his windows sagged as if fatigued. Outside, his melting yard smelled so new he had to blink.

Mini Mall

By Sam Sebren

Guns Loans
TVs Tools

DVDs Loans
Cameras Jewels

Shoes Cellphones
Pizza JiffyLube

Ductape WalMart
Copy Center Mini Mart

World
of
Fashion

Expecting a refund?

Don't wipe the tears you cried
for him on my good white shirt

we sleep naked

by Sara Wallace

on a Zen mat
in a Motel 6 just north of Tucson with a bulletproof plastic-windowed check-in desk
on an army base at Fort Drum

we sleep naked

in a rental car parked out in the Black Rock Desert
in a hospital, where you were taken for observation after you saw angels on the F train
under pigeon-encrusted telephone lines

we sleep naked

after having tripped on acid and you saw me as lava bubbling
as a blue hooded cobra
as shapes jagged glass and scattered lit-up jewlrey

we sleep naked

with the crime bars pushed open to car alarms and bats
with the telephone's red eye blinking
with the friend who always stroked me with one hand and punched me with the other

with stoplights illuminating empty intersections
with the strewn litter of stars
with the night like a tarry parking lot emptied of paying customers

we sleep naked

our dreams tucked away in boxes like old shoes
our dreams wrapped in plastic like old coats

our dreams stacked in boxes like old magazines

we sleep naked

in our socks and hats

in our transparent spangled nylon

in our graduate school t-shirts

in our superman underwear

with our pierced bejeweled nipples

we sleep naked

always sleep naked

Quantum Foam

by Terri Carrion

Is a celestial lubricant found in wormholes, which some scientists claim can help man slide forward or backward through space and time, like stepping on a banana peel or coating a finger with butter to remove a too tight wedding ring. Skeptics say, like most rational people, that time travel is impossible, that time overlaps, so while I'm writing this sentence, it has already been rewritten, so to look back or forward and figure out how the words assembled themselves on the page is pointless, like trying to understand daily life back when the light bulb meant electricity, back when I was still invisible and dry and my own quantum foam (which I assume is like an iridescent aura) had not yet achieved the effervescent quality needed for my body to slither through these suburban milkyways and repel strip-mall meteor showers. But what I want is to imagine this aural foam fully formed, a body halo or shield allowing me to hopscotch through the universe without erasing my own chalk lines. Sooner or later, when my foam is replaced by tar or glue, my body will wait to hurl itself into oblivion like a dying star, and I will leave behind a faint spark, a glint in the night, which will cross a stranger's sight as they stare up into the sky and make a wish. Then, Q-tips will unravel and the joy of crossing birth control off the long list of things I have to think about will become an endless knot of meditation or a spotless counter-top or too many hours spent yanking slot machine arms on Ladies Night at Seminole Bingo. My principles are not negotiable. If you need me I will be in the bathroom, on my knees, coating myself with a thick layer of moisturizer and playing Scrabble with the moon.

Historical note:

In the winter of 2008, the company I work for was faced with a serious dilemma regarding their vending machines, as detailed below. A fierce interoffice email debate ensued. Through luck, I was able to obtain copies of confidential emails sent to the human resources department. These emails will form the basis for all the lyrics in my next concept album "The Problem with the Soda Machine". A curated sampling of these emails appears below in the form of found poetry.

The Problem with The Soda Machine
by Jess Rowland
www.jessrowland.com

I.

I am aware of the problem with the soda machine.

II.

The Vending Machine
Company has reported
to me that they are losing
money on us
because
insufficient product is sold

WE ARE FACED
WITH A CHOICE
ABOUT THE FUTURE
OF THE MACHINES.

III.

If they would take the trouble to put in things that people want, they might make a go of it. In fact, they do the reverse, they consistently REMOVE any popular items that sell well! I asked several people to stock Twix, for example, but I was told that they are "seasonal", and they are almost never available. I think you should take a vote and see first if everyone wants to keep the machines, secondly if the consensus is to keep the machines then get everyone's input on what they would like to have in the machines, that way everyone will be happy and the vending machine company won't be losing any \$\$\$.... do they have a list of snacks that they can send us and you can ask people what they might buy from the list? BUT, the vending company needs to be willing to take the raw data (ie, you just forward emails to them) and fill the machine with the most popular items and try it for a few weeks.

IV.

The most used
products in the vending
machine
are the chips
and the candy.

No one buys the soup
or the tuna
n
crackers
or the gum.

V.

Thanks
for taking it on.
I'm reminded of
the famous statement
in an essay by Sir Francis Bacon:
"By pain, do some come unto greater pain."

VI.

KEEP

the vending machine

PLEASE.....

I don't know if i could

survive

with

out

it.

VII.

remove vending machines, but not contents

more mayonnaise!

easier to understand microwave ovens

windows

VIII.

I'm happy to have a snack machine, but I would like to keep up the pressure to fill it with snacks that people actually want. In my observation, this includes Twix, Grandma's oatmeal cookies and nuts and raisins (without yogurt chips). Most other things are too sweet for our clientele, although I think that Snickers do pretty well. The last person that I asked about these items told me that they are available on a seasonal basis! (I kid you not). I imagine that we are more choice sensitive and less price sensitive, so one option is to say we want what we want at a higher price - if they resist.

IX.

To be brief:

Machine - stay!

X.

HI!

JUST TELL THEM
IF YOU HAVE ANY
PLANS,
THAT
ALL

IS

GOING

SMOOTHLY,

ETC.

