

## **The Polymer Paradox: Valuable Essences and Harmful Excesses Of Plastics In Greg Mbarjiorgu's *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Extant studies on plastics in Nigeria are carried out by organisations and scientists with their discussions focusing mostly on the negative dimensions and attributes of plastics which include the causes, risks, abuse and environmental consequences occasioned by their mismanagement. However, this study takes a literary perspective and argues that creative writers and literary critics equally address polymer issues through their humanities-based engagements. Applying the literary theory of Ecocriticism, it analyses issues on the use and abuse of plastics as portrayed in the poetry collection entitled *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*, written by a Nigerian poet, Greg

Mbajiorgu. Acknowledging plastics to be products of polymer technology which have paradoxical underpinnings that serve useful purposes to humankind while their misuse poses a great danger to humans and their environment, the study examines the positive values and negative implications of plastics in Nigeria. It concludes that although Nigerians cannot completely do away with plastics at the moment, great care and caution should be taken in handling plastics while Nigeria should emulate other countries that have adopted stricter measures that have helped them to reduce the negative impact of the use of plastics on their environment.

**Keywords:** Polymer paradox; Plastics; Useful values; Harmful effects, Nigerian Poetry; Ecocriticism

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one of the leading plastic users and waste generators in the world. According to a United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) report, Nigeria generates over 32 million tonnes of waste annually with plastic accounting for 2.5 million tonnes, making Nigeria to qualify to be enlisted among the highest waste generators in Africa (Onoja 2023, 1). The rise in urban development in Nigeria and the need for easier ways of packaging water, goods and materials necessitated the relatively high increase in the demand and use of plastics. However, there is a kind of ambivalence in the attitude of Nigerians towards plastic materials. While they are quick to use plastics in packaging food, water, good and other things, they are very reluctant to follow appropriate ways of properly disposing the plastics after use. This disposition has gone a long way in exacerbating the problem of plastic pollution in Nigeria.

From the waterbodies to the gutters, from the streets to playing fields, from public places to private homes, plastic materials are used and carelessly disposed. Most times, when it rains, these plastic materials block gutters, drainages and waterways causing avoidable flooding which destroy people's property. In some instances, water collects in some of misplaced plastic containers and insects like mosquitoes breed in them and increase the rate of diseases and infections. Most water bodies in Nigeria are riddled with plastic containers and the so called "pure water" sachet bags. This poses a great danger to the survival of the aquatic creatures that inhabit the seas, rivers and streams. Also, when plastic materials are indiscriminately littered around the environment, they deface and disrupt the beauty and aesthetics of the natural human habitation.

Conversely, it is not everything about plastics that is bad and dangerous to the human environment. On its own, plastics are polymer products that are technologically developed. An entry on the meaning of plastic in Plastic Europe.org (2025:1) asserts that "The term plastic is derived from the Greek word 'plastikos' and the Latin 'plasticus', meaning 'fit for moulding or being capable of being moulded into various forms. This refers to the material's malleability or plasticity during manufacturing which allows it to be cast, pressed, or extruded into various shapes, such as pipes, bottles, boxes, cartons and films." The entry further affirms that "[W]e use plastics in products to help make our lives cleaner, easier, safer and more enjoyable. This is because plastics are

extremely versatile and are ideal for a wide range of consumer and industrial applications” (Plastic Europe.org 2025: 1). Plastics are useful to humans in healthcare, electronics, sports and leisure, building and construction, energy, agriculture, mobility and transport, packaging among other numerous areas. However, inasmuch as plastics are valuable to human existence, most of them are not biodegradable (they cannot decay through the action of any microorganism) and as a result, their wanton accumulation on the environment poses a great risk to humans. This hinges on the focus of this paper which is the polymer paradox or the valuable and non-viable dimensions of plastics as represented in Nigerian poetry.

### **ON PLASTICS SCHOLARSHIP IN NIGERIA**

Most scholarship on plastics in Nigeria tilt towards highlighting the negative dimensions as well as the effects and impact of plastic use. Nwabuisi and Ihenetu’s (2022:5) research focuses on the state of plastic pollution in Nigeria and measures to curb it. They observed that “Nigeria’s plastic industry is experiencing rapid growth as a result of massive investment” and there is the increase in Nigerians’ demand and use of plastic as they would prefer to wrap food products with plastic rather than using natural materials like leaves. But the researchers observed that such habits expose Nigerians to pathogens which are harmful to the body. They suggest the introduction of alternative biodegradable substitutes for wrapping of food products such as raffia-based materials, palm-frond-woven-baskets, jute bags and natural leaves as well as the mounting of intensive sensitization and orientation to inform Nigerians of the value of natural wrapping and packaging materials.

There is also the study by Yalwaji, John-Nwagwu and Sogbamu (2022:1) where they acknowledge that “plastics are emerging pollutants requiring urgent intervention for its management” and aver that evidence abound to indicate that plastic management in Nigeria is scanty. Their study’s focus was to systematically evaluate evidence on the distribution, sources, biological effects, research gaps and policy-needs of plastic pollution in Nigeria. Reviewing most articles written on plastics across the globe and identifying the ones that are based on Nigerian plastic situation, the study discovered microplastic sources in Nigeria and some research gaps on plastic use and distribution in Nigeria. Highlighting policy needs of plastic management in Nigeria to include “stakeholders’ education, polymer replacement, recycling, tax and incentives to support the sustainability of life below water and on land (Yalwaji, John-Nwagwu & Sogbamu 2022: 2), they suggest the need for a plastic pollution policy in Nigeria to help galvanise support from various stakeholders in the Nigerian manufacturing and plastic use and disposal chain.

Raji’s (2021: 3) study sees plastic pollution as a collective responsibility. First, it highlights how plastic solution affects humans by indicating that it lowers the quality of air humans breathe in especially when plastics are burnt. It also identifies flooding which is caused by the blockage of gutters and drainages by plastic materials and other health challenges that are caused when the chemicals in plastics percolate into human tissues through the ingestion of food or soft drinks that

are packaged with plastics and are exposed to fire or the sun. It proffers solutions such as a deposit-refund-system where people are compensated for their proper handling of plastics as is the practice in countries like Germany and the use of plastic wastes as green technology to pave (build) roads. This will help Nigeria resolve its infrastructural deficit and ensure proper disposal of plastics as well. Related to this is a city-based policy study by Environmental Rights Action or Friends of the Earth Nigeria on how plastic waste impacts the Nigerian environment especially water and land (2021: 1). The study makes suggestions on how to mitigate the impact of plastic waste on the city of Benin in Southern Nigeria. Another study is strictly an impact study on plastic pollution and the global ecosystem which sees plastic pollution as a ubiquitous phenomenon that impacts both the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Providing a background assessment on the adverse effects of plastic pollution, the study by Kumar et al (2021:5) suggest that certain innovations are needed to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover plastic products' life span or to find an eco-friendly replacement for plastics.

Yet another is the study by Randhawa (2024:1) which sees plastics more as a global nuisance as it asserts that “plastic was introduced to improve performance, reduce cost, and make our lives easy, but under the prevailing circumstances, plastic has become a global nuisance.” Averring that the nuisance nature of plastics is more pronounced in Nigeria, the study highlights the socio-economic and political implications of plastic use and abuse and concludes that the presence of plastics in Nigeria is gradually destroying Nigerians as well as the Nigerian environment. The review of related studies on plastics and the Nigerian situation can go on interminably. However, our paper takes a different perspective by embarking on a kind of balanced discourse where plastics is viewed not really as a total nuisance product but that which serves some human values. Thus, it is premised on the useful values of plastics as well as their negative effect or impacts as portrayed by a Nigerian poet, Greg Mbajiorgu, in his poetry collection *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*. The motives are to have an insight into the interchange between artistic expression and the realities of the Nigerian environment as well as to broaden the discourse on the role literature plays in efforts geared towards having a robust view of certain human activities and their impact on the environment. In this case, the issue is plastic use and its dual position of serving some useful human purposes as well as impacting negatively on the human environment.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

Ecocriticism is the framework selected to provide the guiding principles for the discussions in this paper. William Rueckert is renowned to have first used the term “Ecocriticism” in his 1978 essay entitled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” According to Jonathan Bate (1991: 8), “Ecocriticism began in consciousness raising”. It raises environmental consciousness through the agency of literature and literary analysis. It is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment and it “alerts us to how human activities pose a threat to our natural environment and raises consciousness to the dangers inherent in living carelessly with nature”

(Oluseye 2020:11). This research is additionally anchored on Glotfelty and Fromm's assertion that "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture. Understanding how nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other is essential to an informed ecocriticism" (xix). According to Agofure, (2016: 23), the term "'Ecocriticism' implies 'the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature'" (23). By the early nineties, many scholars had started showing great interest in the theory. Scott Slovic (2015: 161-162) describes the theory as "the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any text". It then means that the business of any eco-critical study is not just the state of the environment but also its relationship to the human and natural species that inhabit such environments.

According to Abrams and Harpham (2012: 87-88), ecocriticism explores the link between literature and the biological and physical environment. It is a study carried out with a clear awareness of the havoc being wreaked on the environment by sundry human activities. By this, the theory helps in discussing the link between man and his natural surroundings with special leaning on literature. Corroborating this, Cheryll Glotfelty (2014: xviii) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". Explaining this, Chukwu R. Nwoma and Onyekachi Eni (2021: 4) observe that "ecocriticism is a product of the late twentieth-century environmental activism that seeks to give prominence to environmentalist principles through the medium of literature". It is in view of its projection of environmentalist tenets that Aghoghovwia (2014: 3) sees it as "a broad area of literary scholarship which has elicited combative debates on how nature and environment is – or ought to be – reflected in literature and literary criticism". This is because the environment is so important now and even in the future to the extent that Ruecket (1978: 7) remarks that the "application of ecology and ecological concepts in the study of literature [...] has the greatest relevance to the present and the future". To justify the application of the theory of Ecocriticism in the article, it is obvious that the emergence and use of plastics have both positive and negative impacts on human life and the environment.

Another theory that is implicated in this study is Environmentalism which according to Davis: (2009: 1) refers to "a theory that emphasizes the importance of environmental factors in the development of culture and society" and emerged "to promote particular environmental philosophies and practices or ways of living, to protect and improve environmental quality." It encapsulates all actions aimed at protecting the environment and acknowledges the role of the environment in the development of humankind. An entry in *Marketing Dictionary* observes that the theory captures "public concern over protecting, enhancing and improving the environment which include conserving natural resources, eliminating pollution and hazardous substances and materials, historic preservation, and preventing the extinction of plant and animal species." Environmentalism is based on the principles of preservation and conservation of our environment with the hope of solving most environmental crisis by controlling the human acts that impact

negatively on the environment (Reghu 2019: 54). As Singh (2024) notes, “Environmentalism ... explores the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world, addressing ecological concerns, sustainability and the impact of human activities on the environment.” Both theories are strongly interwoven, so with them this paper unravels the environmental essences of Greg Mbajjorgu’s *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere* by highlighting the environmental implications of the use and abuse of plastics as highlighted by the poet. It underscores the relationship between literature and the human ecosystem, thus projecting literature as an instrument not only deployed to advocate for the good and wellbeing of the people but that which also sets the state and condition of human ecosystems as agenda for critical discourse. In essence, the environmental impact of plastics is assessed while also highlighting its few notable values.

### **CRITICAL AND POETIC ANALYSIS**

#### **Valuable Essences of Plastics in Greg Mbajjorgu’s *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere***

In the “Introduction” to the poetry collection, Austine Amanze Akpuda notes that: “Before the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA)’s recent campaign in 2019 on the proper use of plastics, Greg Mbajjorgu had delved into the bio-chemical and economic implications of the production of plastics as well as [the] welfare needs that [the] plastic industry offer[s] mankind.” He further observes that one notable thing about the poetry collection is the global perspective adopted by the poet in highlighting the plastics prospects and problems in Nigeria. Commenting further, he adds that the collection has two dominant profiles. The first is the irresistible charm and value of plastics in the human march towards numerous technological feats while the second is the horror which the abuse of plastic products have unfortunately turned the human environment into. This is what this paper regard as the “Polymer Paradox.”

Similarly, in his “Foreword” to the collection, Madu (2020: xii) observes that “Greg Mbajjorgu has in the amazing work documented the invaluable uses and the problems of plastics in our world. In this collection titled: *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*, [Mbajjorgu] uses poetry as a strategy for bringing our attention to the frightening menace of plastic waste.” This implies that the collection does not only focus on plastics but also touches on the double-barrelled dimension of plastics as useful products that are also environmentally destructive. Another review is that of Uzor Maxim Uzoatu (2020: 26) which began with this confessional statement: “What took hold of my mind once Greg Mbajjorgu’s *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere* got into my hands were the words of the “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge to wit, “Water, water everywhere/nor any drop to drink.” Relating the above line which is culled from one of the Romantic poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to the present global condition, he avers that “not unlike the sailor on the becalmed ship surrounded by water, our world today has been completely taken over by plastics.” To properly link his review with the collection’s focus on plastics, Uzoatu (2020: 26) gives a brief narration of the origin of plastics: “It may surprise a lot of people that plastics was not in existence in the world until February 8, 1909 when in New York, Leo Baekelite

invented the first synthetic plastic called Baekelite.” He further added a stunning caveat by saying that “ever since, plastics has taken over the world, for good or ill.” His statement above, strikes a chord on the plastic debacle which makes it an invaluable nuisance. Then commenting on the poet, Uzoatu (2020: 26) asserts that “Greg Mbajiorgu is a socially conscious artist who over the years has distinguished himself as a mono-dramatist, eco-dramatist, environmental poet and much-sought-after performer. His social concerns are given gravitas in *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*” (5).

Also, in an interview he granted to the “Art and Culture” Reporter of *Tribune Newspaper*, Mbajiorgu gives an inkling into why he writes environmentally friendly and advocacy poetry: “I am fascinated by the environment because it is key to our survival. We often do not care about it because we fail to realise its importance to us. Without a clean and sustainable environment, we are doomed.” It is based on this view that he writes *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*, to draw attention to the utilitarian value of plastics as well as their overwhelming deleterious impact on the environment.

Greg Mbajiorgu may not be the first African poet to engage the complexity of the world of plastics in poetry but so far, he remains the only one to have composed and dedicated an entire poetry collection to the phenomenon known as plastics. *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere* provides a fertile ground for a New Historicist and Ecocritical critique of the value and environmental implications of the manufacture and use of plastics in Nigeria. The poems in the collection emphasise the interplay between historical contexts, technological inventions/innovations, environmental conditions and literary creations. Through an ingenious and insightful poetic exploration of the useful aspects, material make-ups and environmental impact of plastics, Mbajiorgu relates poetry to Nigerian cum global environmental challenges. The collection has thirty-one poems of unequal lines. The poems that are relevant to the discussions in this study are: “Ode to Plastics: A Monologue”, “Plastic Gifts on Our Wedding Day”, “Marine Plastic”, “The Travails of Sea Turtle”, “A World of a Thousand Creams”, “Lulu’s Empty Cans”, Littering, Littering All the Way”, “Those Plastic Tales You Can’t but Read”, “Freeing Our Schools from Plastics”, “Time to Save the Earth”, “Say No to Flimsy Plastics” and “Take Me to the Flora Kingdom.”

The title of the collection “Plastics, Plastics Everywhere” reverberates with the poet’s stupefaction over the near cataclysmic situation caused by the seemingly ubiquitous presence of plastics. It portrays the global plastics situation as one that is extremely overwhelming if not daunting and thus gives the impression that the poet is overly stupefied at the whole plastics debacle. It projects the poet as one who the plastics situation is causing so much anxiety, as it seems to him, that the whole situation is too palpable to be grappled with, considering plastics’ dual essences of being a worthwhile material as well as that which wreaks tremendous environmental havoc. Also, considering the title in line with a similar expression by Coleridge (“water, water everywhere/nor any drop to drink”) in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, the expression “plastics, plastics everywhere” invokes both exhilaration and dejection; it arouses confusion as the poet seems to be

suggesting that the plastics situation all over the world has reached an immensely disproportional state where the stakeholders seem to be at a cross-road on how to tackle this hydra-headed polymer material.

However, upon his anxiety and worry over the real essences of plastics, Mbajourgu, in the collection found some reasons to valorise plastics. This is evident in the poem “Ode to Plastics: A Techno-monologue” where he lauds plastics as a substance of inestimable value:

Hail Polymer!  
Great substance that rules our age  
Most treasured synthetic substance!  
Begotten from crude oil and coal  
Receive our cheerful and laudatory gestures!  
Durable and strong!  
Likeable and famous!  
And yet, so mild (Mbarjiogu 2020 p. 1)

In the above lines, Mbajourgu eulogizes plastics as not only a substance that governs the modern age but also one of the most treasured artificial substances. It poetically traces its source of derivation to crude oil and coal- “begotten from crude oil and coal”, and shower high-powered felicitations on it, “Receive our cheerful and laudatory gestures!” Then dressing plastics in laudatory epithets, the poet additionally showers encomiums on it: “durable and strong!/Likeable and famous!/And yet, so mild.” Having adorned plastics with numerous praise names, the poet highlights its importance to humans which are too numerous to mention. Before doing that, however, he draws attention to the various sources of plastics which is a product of polymer technology that is based on crude petroleum oil or coal:

Dependable substance!  
Unbeatable, extract of crude oil, essence of polymer science  
and engineering. Without you, vessels, plates, spoons, forks,  
cups, films, packaging, toys, hinges, frames, bottles, chairs,  
hangers, clips, bags, linings, construction tools,  
carbonated fibres and engine components cannot be so easily affordable  
(Mbajourgu 2020 :1)

Enumerated above is the value that plastics adds to human life as it plays major roles in the fabrication of kitchen utensils and the packaging of food items and bottling of drinks and making of chairs and hangers and bags and other things that make life easier for humans. Having said that, he delves into the issue of the ability of plastics to take various forms, shapes and sizes, a characteristic that has endeared it to humans:

Only you can easily become flexible  
yielding or elastic at various times and yet, your melt  
transform effortlessly to semi-rigid and rigid substances,  
swaddling into different forms and shapes, or any mould you  
are poured into. (Mbajourgu 2020: 1)

He further harps on the malleability and pliability of plastics, referring to it as an enigmatic substance:

Enigmatic and versatile one!  
You are the phenomenal substance that transforms into a  
multiplicity of objects. Your impervious nature made you the  
finest vessels for storing water, seeds, grains, oil, kerosine,  
diesel, gasoline, heating oil, waxes and distilleries. Your  
inertness also turned you into a choice vessel for stronger of the  
most dangerous acids, bases and other chemicals. (Mbajourgu 2020: 2)

With a racy language that depicts a speedy effusion of thoughts commensurate with the numericity of the purposes that plastics serve humanity, the poet deploys enjambment or run-on-lines to show the relatedness of the functions and values of plastics to humans. From being the substance used to manufacture storage facilities for various forms of oil that energizes human life, plastics are said to be that used to store and transport powerful hazardous substances like acids and chemicals. From there, the poet launches forward to other useful needs that plastics serve humanity especially in the packaging industry:

In your absence, progress in packaging industries would be  
retarded; you alone ensure safety of fragile goods and  
equipment. Whenever you are lacking there will be no  
electric cables and wall switches, no computers and  
computer accessories, no comfortable trains, cars, ships  
aircrafts, buses and trucks. (p. 3)

In the above lines which are extremely personified, the poet praises plastics for being the product that ensures that fragile goods and equipment are safely moved about with Styrofoam (a substance made from plastics) placed around the cartons to guard them, They are also current-conveying electric wires that are coated with polymer rubber for safe handling. Most automobiles also have their various component parts and accessories derived from plastics and these parts aid in easing movement for humans such that without them human life would, apparently, grind to a halt. He goes further to recount other benefits of plastics to humanity in the construction and engineering sectors:

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We salute you our most frequently endorsed substance  
 Your tenacity, resilience and omnifarious nature has made  
 You the world's most-favoured and affordable material for  
 Casting, moulding, constructing, innovating and inventing  
 (Mbajiorgu 2020: 4)

In another instance, the poet recognises plastics as a material that has become so much infused with human existence that it seems very difficult to do without it. This is the thematic thrust of the poem entitled "Plastic Gifts on Our Wedding Day" where the poet writes that:

Plastics is now our way of life  
 Common in weddings too  
 Synthetic goods are light and cheap  
 So nice when wrapped as gifts (Mbajiorgu 2020: 45)

In Nigeria, it is not unlikely that plastic products constitute important materials around which wedding parties are organised; from synthetic wedding flower bouquets which are often held by the bride to the ones used to decorate the venue, to plastic chairs and tables provided to ensure the comfort of the guests, to plastic plates, spoons and cups deployed to ensure even distribution of food and drinks. All these make wedding ceremonies groovy and enjoyable at little cost. Even wedding gifts which are mostly made of plastic products these days are also wrapped with colourful synthetic plastic foil. In most spheres of modern life, it has become extremely difficult for one to completely avoid the use of plastic products.

### **Hazardous Excesses of Plastics in Greg Mbajiorgu's *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere***

Having highlighted the useful dimensions of plastics, the poet also identified some of its harmful effects on the environment. First, he laments the indiscriminate disposal of plastics that clog the water bodies and destroy many aquatic creatures. In the poem "Marine Plastics", he remarks that there is scarcely any marine body in the world that is not infested with plastic debris. He writes that having gone round some places all over the world, he "...hardly found/A pristine belly of water/With no plastics debris/Or any terrestrial space at all/Where littered waste could not be found" (Mbajiorgu 2020:14). Commenting further he sings:

Not one single aquatic world  
 Or recreational beach  
 Devoid of human-induced junk  
 Of different shapes and sizes

Junk of all kinds and forms  
 Thrown out by humans on land and sea  
 Woe to plastic firms and factories  
 Producing fragile flimsy brands

In the last stanza, the poet becomes critical of plastics manufacturers who produce single-use plastic materials that are randomly thrown away and end up blocking gutters and various waterways causing flooding. This corroborates the outcome of Okolo's (2022: 2) research which identifies the harmful effects of plastic wastes to the soil as they inject toxins that are harmful to organisms and pollute underground water bodies. From there, the poet chastises manufacturers of plastic products:

Shame to those plastic makers,  
Drowning in imperfection wave  
And yet in feign of ignorance  
Like butterflies which think they're birds  
Do see themselves as next to God

And in thick air of grandeur now  
Have created flimsy plastic good  
That type we use and dump at once  
Has formed this huge island of waste (Mbajiorgu 2020: 15)

He goes on to invoke curses upon those who patronise these 'flimsy plastic goods' and wantonly litter them all over the place causing their eventual movement into the ocean where they constitute serious hazards to marine creatures:

Shame to you all, who now rejoice  
in distorting ocean deep ends  
Altering the calm of ocean depth  
With toxic dye from waste plastics  
Pouring its flame retarding flush  
Into the sacred watery zone

Forcing mermaids to moan with tears  
As they watch plastic debris now  
Destroy their deep precious castles  
Poisoning, strangulating all in sight  
Ensnaring all marine essences  
Damaging the serenity of their depth (Mbajiorgu 2020: 15)

The poet in the last stanza invokes the Igbo myth of "Mammy-water" or the mermaid-spirit which is believed to reside in the innermost depth of most water bodies. The poet in the stanza insinuates that the abuse of single-use plastics in the form of cellophane bags and other packaging materials culminates in its being washed into the rivers and oceans as "massive layers/of ugly garbage discards" (Mbajiorgu 2020:16) that settle on river beds discomfoting these legendary water

creatures. The poet regards such act as a form of “Ecological irresponsibility” by humans who ought to know that they “are mere co-tenants/In a more-than-human-world” (Mbajiorgu 2020: 16). From the destruction of water bodies and aquatic creatures by plastics that are carelessly disposed of which end up being washed into the gutters, streams, rivers and oceans, the poet, in the poem “The Travails of Sea Turtle”, identifies another creature that is seriously affected by the presence of excess plastic garbage on sea-beds - the sea turtle:

At dusk I saw a lone turtle  
So fragile yet astray she swam  
In languid quest to catch a meal  
Which she had lacked all day

And when she reached the garbage patch  
Mere sight of trash that seemed like food  
She slipped her head to grab a bite  
In deadly trap she found herself (Mbajiorgu 2020: 21)

The plastic garbage heap is regarded as a trap to the fragile sea turtle because it is capable of entangling the creature in its labyrinthine web and can also kill it if it dares feed on it as food.

Having projected the menace of plastics to water bodies and the creatures that reside in them, Mbajiorgu in another poem with the title “A World of a Thousand Creams” shift his attention to other dangers imposed by plastics as he recalls that it seems that humans threw away an azure beautiful environment that was their abode the moment they invented and began to use plastic products manufactured from crude oil and coal. He reasoned that “ice creams’ were better when they were sold in natural packs than now that they are packaged in synthetic plastic-take-away cans.

I dream about a perfect world  
Without your plastic take-away bags  
I visualise a pure piles of polythene bags  
I visualise a pure green world  
We chased away a century past

When we enthroned a life of coal  
And crude oil that wrecked our land

....

We’ve totally messed up all we have  
For monstrous wealth we find in crude  
Has created ocean pile of waste  
We find so hard to clean up. (Mbajiorgu 2020: 22-23)

According to the poet, it is appalling that plastics - a product humans created out of crude oil or coal now cause a rising pile of refuse heap that is very hard to evacuate. According to Okolo (2022: 3) there are grave negative impacts of the misuse of plastics in Nigeria and this has caused the rising rate of heaps of plastic wastes in most Nigerian cities, which negates the beauty of the cities. The above lines of the poet can be compared to these scathing comments about the frivolous spirit of partying and how it exacerbates plastic pollution in the poem “Lulu’s Empty Cans”:

Lulu’s gig will hold tonight  
Marked with a million take-away drinks  
Of different shapes and brands  
With excess sugary blend

And when we’ve emptied all of them  
Her lush green grass will wear the garb  
Of polythene bags and plastic tins (Mbajiorgu 2020: 13)

In the above lines, Lulu’s party is estimated to produce an outrageous number of take-away drinks that would cause the littering of the beautiful lawns around the location with polythene bags and plastic tins. Such environmentally-carefree attitude to partying especially in most parts of Nigeria, causes the mindless littering of plastic materials and products that disfigure beautiful landscapes causing considerable nuisance. When finally evacuated into refuse heaps, they are rarely recycled but end up being burnt, thus causing another form of environmental pollution. When they are not burnt, they rarely decay and are left in the refuse heap to breed mosquitoes and other vector-flies which cause diseases. A visit to any refuse heap in any part of Nigeria would reveal that plastics make up a large percentage of the refuse dumped there and the worst thing is that they are not biodegradable and so not only deface the environment but also damage the soil. This is the major preoccupation of another poem, “Littering, Littering All the Way” where the poet writes: “Littering, littering all the way/Cigarette butts and plastic clips/Plastic cans and bottle caps.../Plastic combs, disposable chairs/We cannot even name them all/More deadly too are micro-bits/Micro plastics that fill the air” Mbajiorgu 2020: 26) Then having enumerated various forms and types of plastic materials and products that are found in the society, the poet observed that their abuse is spelling doom for the earth’s agricultural resources:

Our actions rather than save our wealth  
Have turned round to ruin our plants  
And those we dropped some years ago  
Broken plastics like sinking ship  
Have found their way beneath the sea

If littering be our way of life  
And plastic junk suffocates with strife

Our soft rich soil will die  
And then there'll be no cause to dine  
Where viscose plastic grains like rice  
Are now on slow and steady rise. (Mbajiorgu 2020: 21-27).

Then taking a global stand in his poetic excursion on plastics, Mbajiorgu in the poem "Those Plastic Tales You Can't but Read" narrates the dastardly experiences of humans and animals in various parts of the world and their encounter with plastics:

Indian Elephants at garbage dump  
Rummaging through its thick and thin  
Gulping huge scraps of plastic waste  
A poisonous meal for a hefty beast

I've heard of Jakarta  
Its mountain pile of plastic bins  
From tons of tons of plastic waste  
A sign of throw-away lifestyle  
That now define Our Polymer age.

Of North Beirut in Lebanon  
Where plastic garbage drowned a beach  
Few days after a heavy storm  
An awful smell defied their beach

And tales of bridge in Bangladesh  
That once was choked with plastic waste  
Disrupting traffic flow and all  
A terrible and disastrous day!

Ten trillion tons of plastic waste  
Now everywhere in land and sea  
Its garbage pitch deep down below  
Our ocean and sea are hard to clean (Mbajiorgu 2020:28-29)

The above stanzas illustrate the global dimension of plastics deluge starting from India where the wellbeing of rare wild elephants is under serious threat due to the mishandling of plastic waste to Jakarta, Indonesia, where the rising tons of plastic waste indicate the carefree-disposition of people towards their environment to their own detriment. Mention is also made of Beirut, Lebanon where a bout of torrential storm exhumed tons of plastic waste that piled up at a beach thus igniting an

asphyxiating stench that discomfited residents for many days, and of a bridge that collapsed in Bangladesh just because plastic waste blocked the way causing a flood to bring it down resulting to many days of traffic disruption. These are some of the ways the poet highlights the dangerous impact of plastics around the world.

### **Advocacy for Proper Use of Plastics in Greg Mbajorgu's *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere***

To avert a largescale global catastrophe that could be caused by the insensitive use and improper disposal of plastic waste, the poet resorts to widespread advocacy. This is in line with the postulation by Onaji-Benson and Ali (2023:1) that strategies should be put in place to strongly address plastic waste problems and related national policy inconsistencies which hamper efforts to properly address global plastics menace. This they believe could go a long way in tightening plastic policies and engaging stakeholders in effective plastic management in Nigeria. Addressing this issue in his collection, Mbajorgu begins from children as he calls for a generational change of mind-set that incorporates the inculcation of a proper attitude to plastic handling in schools. Such pedagogical advocacy is the crux of the poem entitled "Freeing Our Schools from Plastics" where he chants:

No child is allowed  
To come with plastic bags  
Or anyone be found  
With food in cellophane sheets

Don't bring nylon along  
As improved lunch pack  
No sandwich bag hence forth  
Should come to school with you

All take-away lunch packs  
Are big offence from now  
And whomever is caught  
Will face the wrath alone

....

All straws from now are banned  
Steel drinking cups will do  
Plastic sandals henceforth  
Will not be worn to school

He further advocates the formation of "Plastics-Free Clubs" and "Green Squads" in schools to sensitize students on the best ways of handling plastics and enforcing the rules of green behaviour

among students. These environmentally-friendly directives targeted at children, if implemented, will go a long way in helping to stem the tide of plastics pollution globally.

Having observed the above, the poet also calls for immediate action in a poem entitled “Time To Save the Earth.” In the poem, he reasons that the time to save the earth from the impending socio-economic doom orchestrated by the uncontrolled use and disposal of plastic materials is now:

Our food can spoil  
And water may stink  
And other such things decay  
But polymer lives for evermore  
It never rots nor dies

All things organic  
Bright and pure  
Almighty made them all  
But cellophane  
In markets and malls  
Were made by humankind

Their awful sights  
Defy all nature’s laws  
While natural things  
Degrade for good  
They fail to rot or die.

That’s why right now  
We must find  
A healthier way to manage waste  
To save our world from plagues

For now is just the time  
When we must save the earth  
By banning single use plastics  
Changing lifestyle for good  
(Mbajiorgu 2020: 41-42)

The high point of the poet’s poetry in the stanzas above is its simplicity of structure which is heavily-loaded in meaning but not banal. There is a deliberate effort to make the lines uncluttered and conversational, thus ensuring that the meanings are easily deciphered while the poetic rhythms

are also enjoyed. This simple style of expression is further applied in the poem “Say No To Flimsy Plastics” where the poet’s attention shifts to some light, flimsy or easy-to-get or handle plastics like polythene and cellophane bags:

Say no to flimsy plastics  
Its different types and brands  
As shopping bags or ice cream spoons  
Or branded pliant packs  
Those soda cans or hot drink jar  
We drink and dump in street trash can.

The poet encourages people not to patronise “flimsy plastics’ because of their affordability or alluring appearance: “Don’t give a damn how good they look.../That durable kind may seem pricey/Than flimsy types that can’t endure/Which stay with you for just a while/And litter homes and streets/Though durable brands may cost some more/They serve from age to age/For they are not just used and dumped/They save our world from trash” (Mbajiorgu 2020: 38-39). The poet’s position in the line above is not a condemnation of plastics per se but an advocacy that people should desist from using single-use cellophane bags and opt for more durable bags that can be washed, dry-cleaned and reused many times in order to reduce the rate of despoliation of the environment by patronising use-and-throw-away plastic bags. By so doing, they would be saying no to “flimsy plastics.”

The same theme of advocacy is portrayed in the poem “There Shall Be No Gunshots” where the poet campaigns for a climate-friendly war that is fought not with arms and armaments, but with witty thought and words.

There shall be no gunshots in this war  
....  
No nuclear arms and poisoned gases  
Rockets, grenades and bombs  
This rational war for brilliant minds  
Without weapons. Just pen and wit  
Green battle, where mankind prevails  
....  
A war we wage against ourselves  
Against abusive ways of life  
....  
Against habits and noxious norms  
....  
To save our world from trash and dirt  
....

All those so fond of grocery stores  
Avoid all food in plastic wraps  
Or those packaged in nylon packs  
A stay-on-bag is all you need

That kind of bag that stays for years (Mbajiorgu 2020:11-12)

Through these well-crafted solicitations, the poet woos people to shop more with non-plastic bags so as to reduce the rate of rampant littering of the environment with single-use cellophane bags and wrapping materials. In line with such heart-rending advocacy, he yearns to be taken to an environmentally-friendly location. He cites The Pasia Region in Colombia as an example of such a place; a place where there are no plastic wastes and where the use of plastics is prohibited and the environment is frankly azure. This is portrayed in the poem “Take Me To the Flora Kingdom” where he sings:

Take me to Flora Kingdom  
Where there are no oil spillages  
And junk-infested beaches  
No tons of plastic trash  
Just sound and smell of nature

Inspired by pleasant coffee scent  
They sing melodious songs with strings  
Cherishing Landscapes of trees  
In the alluring Paisa Region  
Of countryside Colombia  
That grows the finest coffee beans  
(...)  
There waste plastics cannot be found  
Soft green mountains abound  
Such green highlands are rare to find  
That offer no trash or toxic fumes  
But vast peak land of treasured coffee bush.  
(Mbajiorgu 2020: 9)

With this he highlights the fact that having a plastic-free society is doable and possible as most societies have banned indiscriminate use of non-biodegradable plastic materials. To cap it all, he calls for a global action; inviting everyone to participate in the global “Green War” to rid the world of piles and tons of suffocating waste caused by people’s misuse of plastic materials and products:

Then time has come when all must rise

To clean up ocean, land and sea

All those so fond of grocery stores

Avoid food in plastic wraps

Or those packaged in nylon packs (Mbajiorgu 2020: 11)

Highly irritated by the negative impact of plastics on humans, Mbajiorgu calls for an immediate collective action to clean up the physical and aquatic bodies that are polluted by plastics while pleading for a change of attitude that will encourage circumspective use of plastic products.

Through the analysis of Mbajiorgu's *Plastics Plastics Everywhere*, this paper makes a strong suggestion that manufacturers of plastic products and substances should produce more of reusable and recyclable plastics products while efforts should be intensified to encourage people to reduce their dependence on the use of plastics. There is need for intensive sensitisation on the dangers of indiscriminate use and dumping of plastic products and materials while advocacy should shift to discouraging plastics-dependent lifestyles. Nations and states should develop the political will to enact and implement policies that reduce the manufacture and use of plastics while encouraging individuals and agencies to embrace new technological innovations that encourage the formulation, manufacture and use of alternative materials that can serve the purpose of plastics while maintaining the quality of being utterly biodegradable. Plastics are like necessary evil; humanity can hardly do without them as illustrated from the poetic analysis however, efforts should be geared towards an environmentally-friendly use of it.

## CONCLUSION

The study discussed both the valuable impacts and hazardous effects of plastics as highlighted in Greg Mbajiorgu's poetry collection entitled *Plastics, Plastics Everywhere*. The poetry collection is peculiar in many respects as it is specifically dedicated to plastics and polymer products as well as portrays plastics in both negative and positive lights. The study highlighted the paradoxical nature of plastics as humanly-invented materials or substances that serve useful purposes but cause excessive negative environmental impact if abused and misused. This is against the backdrop of many studies which have focused only on the negative dimensions or pollution-causing aspects of plastics while downplaying the enormous value they add to human life and existence. From the title of the collection that mirrors the overwhelming and disproportional challenges of plastics, to the use of flowery and laudatory epithets to enumerate the usefulness and immense contributions of plastics, to highlighting the physical and aquatic havoc caused by the indiscriminate disposal of plastics and, finally, to a strident advocacy for a reasonable, thoughtful and environmentally-conscious use of plastics, the paper concludes that Mbajiorgu's polymer poetry is not only metaphorical and imagistic but also, especially, portrays plastics as substances with double-edged dimensions as they are useful yet hazardous, beneficial yet harmful, malleable, and pliable, yet non-degradable. This is the polymer paradox.

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