

EPA: Flash Fiction Will Fill Dumps by 2021

by Con Chapman

WELLESLEY, Mass. This upscale suburb west of Boston is home to the only garbage dump ever featured on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, but Superintendent Tony DiFronzo is concerned that the best days of the facility—which goes by the official name of “Recycling & Disposal Facility” to avoid the *déclassé* connotations of the term by which it is more commonly known—are behind it. “In the 80's people were concerned about plastics, then in the 90's it was disposable diapers,” he says as he shakes his head and wipes his brow at the same time, causing him to narrowly miss poking himself in the eye. “Now it's this new stuff,” he says with an expansive wave of his arm, “and frankly I don't know where to put it.”



DiFronzo is referring to “flash fiction,” a literary genre that lies uneasily between a prose poem and a short story, and which has grown dramatically as the attention spans and literary skills of young people have shrunk to the vanishing point. “Your typical

writer of flash fiction lacks the discipline to produce a short story, but also doesn't have the talent for compression needed to write a poem," says Armand Murillo, an adjunct professor of English at nearby Babson College who is studying the phenomenon. "So basically what we are talking about is literary Kleenex."

Because New England is a region with many institutions of higher learning, early warning signs of the inadequacy of solid waste disposal sites to handle the accumulating mass of flash fiction became apparent here before other areas of the country. "You gotta coupla girls' schools like Wellesley, then you got your 'creative' types at places like Emerson and BU," DiFronzo says, making "air quotes" to signal his skepticism. "When you add it all up it makes for a massive flow of high-brow sludge that is gonna overwhelm us unless scientists at MIT can figure out how to turn it into yoga mats and colorful fleece pullovers."



"Hey Mike—I got a combination dream sequence-coming of age vignette stuck in the bucket."

While short fiction has a long history dating back to Aesop's fables in western civilization, latter-day practitioners of "flash" fiction tend to specialize in absurd or nonsensical works that defy explication, analysis or critical comparisons. "If your flash piece veers from your mother to the parrot who died when you were a kid to your yearning desire to right the wrongs inflicted on aboriginal peoples in less than 1,000 words, nobody can say you haven't succeeded," notes Murillo. "You're basically making a word salad, so who cares whether you use ranch dressing or croutons?"



"We're full up. You're going to have to take that to Needham."

Saturday is the busiest day of the week at "the dump" here, which means Wellesley sophomore Caitlin Connors has to stand in line to get rid of her year's worth of flash, but she is undeterred by the wait because she believes she is making the world a better place by disposing of it properly. "I knew it was trash when I wrote it," she says with an abashed smile. "Now that I got my A in creative writing I don't need it."

