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## Wasted Words

Packaging in the '90s" and "Demographics & Discards," in *Garbage* (Dec. 1992-Jan. 1993), Dovetale Publishers, 2 Main St., Gloucester, Mass. 01930.

*America the Wasteful* could be the title of a hit song on the environmentalist jukebox. The lyrics would tell how Americans in 1990 each threw away about four pounds of solid waste—about a pound more apiece than they had discarded 20 years earlier. The villain of the piece: excessive packaging, especially plastic packaging such as the foam clamshells McDonald's used to use to hold hamburgers.

Discarded packaging does make up one-third of the nation's waste, the editors of *Garbage* note, but much of it consists of items used in shipping, such as pallets, crates, stretch wrap, and cardboard cartons. It is strictly functional and reduces waste due to breakage. Even consumer-product packaging, the sort which so arouses the ire of environmentalists, usually serves legitimate purposes. "Certainly, offensive packaging exists, and it gets the lion's share of attention," the editors write. "But most packaging is both necessary and efficient, the result of years of improvement." Packaging, for example, protects meat and dairy products from bacterial contamination and helps keep the spoilage rate of food in the United States extremely low—less than three percent.

So why is packaging regarded as an environmen-

tal crisis? Because it is assumed that it is growing by leaps and bounds, "that we will be buried in plastic microwave trays if we don't do something." But the assumption is incorrect. The increase in garbage during recent decades, the editors assert, is due not to packaging but to demographics.

Between 1972 and 1987, the U.S. population increased 16 percent, but, thanks to delayed marriages, more divorces, and the growth of the elderly population, the number of households increased 34 percent—and total discards (after recycling) went up 28 percent, according to a study by Franklin Associates. More households meant more grass clippings and other yard waste, a big component of garbage (up 34 percent), more junked dishwashers, refrigerators, and washing machines (up 74 percent), and more home-furnishing discards (up 80 percent between 1970 and 1988).

The massive entry of women into the workplace, along with the shift toward a service economy, also had a large impact on garbage, the editors point out. Office paper increased 87 percent and copier paper, 150 percent. With less time for cooking and cleaning, Americans increased their consumption of time-saving products, such as dishwashers and prepackaged food.

Even so, the editors say, the weight of food packaging and utensils in the nation's trash was up only seven percent during the years its population rose by 16 percent. Reduced packaging and recycling apparently made a difference. Now that may be something to sing about.

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## ARTS & LETTERS

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### *Democracy's Portraitist*

"Rembrandt Peale: Citizen Portraitist of the New Republic" by Stephen May, in *American Arts Quarterly* (Winter 1993), P.O. Box 1654, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10276.

Art historians traditionally have looked upon Rembrandt Peale (1778–1860), son of the early American artist Charles Willson Peale, as little more than a solid, competent craftsman. But

lately his stock has been rising. The National Gallery of Art paid a record \$4.07 million in 1985 for *Rubens Peale with Geranium*, an 1801 portrait of Peale's brother. The painting, in the view of art historian John Wilmerding, is "one of the most original images in the history of American art" and has "the power of a profound national icon." More recently, the National Portrait Gallery mounted an exhibition of some 75 works selected from Peale's massive oeuvre of more than 1,200 paintings and drawings. The exhibition's catalogue, by Lillian B. Miller and



Rubens Peale with *Geranium* conveys the intellectual and scientific bent of Peale's brother and suggests the New World's fertile environment.

Carol Eaton Hevner, was the first full-length study of the artist. "It is now clear," Washington-based writer May says, "that over many decades of painting Rembrandt Peale produced an outstanding portrait gallery of his generation of Americans."

As a young boy in 1787, Peale watched with fascination as his father painted a portrait of George Washington, under whom the elder Peale had served. Under his father's tutelage, Rembrandt at age 13 did his first oil painting, a self-portrait; three years later, he was a professional painter. In 1795, Peale joined his father for another session with Washington. "Charles, filled with sentiment for his old friend, depicted Washington as a dignified and benevolent hero," May writes, "while his son, intent on portraying exactly what was before his eyes, painted a direct, vivid likeness of an aging subject with a lined face and uncomfortable teeth."

In 1800, supporters of Vice President Thomas Jefferson's presidential aspirations asked Peale to produce a portrait of the candidate that showed him to be other than the wild-eyed radical of Federalist imaginations. Peale obliged with

a "simple but sophisticated likeness conveying Jefferson's calm intelligence and commanding presence," and copies of the portrait were used in the successful presidential campaign. Peale's empathy for his subject was manifest. For Jefferson's second inaugural, in 1805, Peale did another portrait, this one "depicting the President as a contemplative sage ready to continue national leadership."

It has sometimes been said that Peale did all of his best work around 1800, but "[a] series of strong, perceptive portraits, executed in the 1830s, gives the lie to [that] notion," May says. Portraits of Senator John C. Calhoun and Chief Justice John Marshall, done in 1834, show the officials as "wise and controlled statesmen capable of managing the affairs of a dynamic republic."

When Peale's subject was someone who seemed to stand for "what he admired most in his native country," art critic John Russell wrote, "his talents took wing. When he wasn't, he often came on like a privileged journeyman." At his death in Philadelphia at age 83, several unfinished portraits of George Washington were on his easel.

## A Classics Controversy

"Classics Illustrated" by Donna Richardson, in *American Heritage* (May-June 1993), 60 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

"Mutilations!" howled critic Fredric Wertham in 1954. The object of his ire was *Classics Illustrated*, 15-cent comic-book versions of such classics as Homer's *Iliad* and Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*. The controversial series was launched in 1941 by Albert Kantor, a Russian immigrant who believed that it would be a way of "wooing youngsters to great books." Sales peaked during the 1950s but petered out by the 1970s, done in by paperbacks and television. Now the series is being revived—and so is the controversy. Do these comic books, asks Richardson, an English professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland, get kids to read classics or "merely help students avoid tough reading assignments"?

Officials at First Publishing of Chicago—best-known for introducing *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*