

Lately I have had a sense
Of things closing in,
And closing out.
That is to say
The times,
Once again,
Are a'changin'.
Trouble is,
I have lived just long enough
To have accumulated experiential confirmation
Of that old saying,
"The more things change,
The more they stay the same."

I have a sense that the nation
Is waking up out of a bad dream —
Only to discover that the house is on fire.

We're coming to the end of the Reagan Presidency,
And some wistful and slouching movements
In other directions
Are beginning to manifest.
Nothing that a few covert monkey wrenches
can't fix, though.

And after all, Reagan
Never was the problem.
He and his whole coalition
Of insiders
Are only a physical manifestation
Of the demons
That have been eating us for years —
Centuries even.
Millenia, for that matter.

We've been backing into our future
So long now,
If we were to turn around and face it,
I reckon we would just start walking
Back into the past.
Maybe that is what the Reagan years
Were all about.

Oh well, — Jeremiah never stopped
Jerusalem from getting itself destroyed.

Be that as it may,
I would like to make some observations.
I have felt a deep compulsion
Like the Ancient Mariner
To grab ahold the Wedding-Guest
And say,
"There was a ship."

Now, the Mariner only managed
To stop one of three.
But he did get his story out,
And I reckon one of three
To be a pretty good average.

Poetry does not record
Why the other two didn't stop,
But I can venture a fair guess.
There was a party going on, after all.

When the Mariner said, "There was a ship."
One of the guests probably said
"I doubt it."
And the other probably said,
"Yeah — But so what?"
They both went on to the party.
The third stayed to listen.
Like I say — a pretty good average.

That's a pretty good metaphor, too.
But after all, it does come out of the 18th century
And is somewhat outdated.
I have in mind another idea.
It is as if I was walking
Through the killing fields
with Dame Homo Sapiens
And in her one basket
She is carrying all of her eggs



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PETIER BREUGEL, "EVERYMAN" (1558)

DIRE DAY'S LAST WORDS

EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT AT SEVEN O'CLOCK FOR ONE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN WEEKS WE HEARD ON KMUN-FM FROM ASTORIA, "HELLO LISTENERS. THIS IS DIRE DAY, AND THE SHOW IS 'WORDS, WORDS, WORDS,'" TWO MONTHS AGO, ON MARCH 31, DIRE DAY (A.K.A. LARRY BARROWS) HAD HIS FINAL SAY. THIS IS WHAT HE SAID.

by Larry Barrows

And most of everybody's else's.
And I see with my mystical eyes
This high-powered bullet
On a trajectory due to intersect
With her head.
And I give a pull on her skirt
And I say
"There is a bullet."
And she looks down and says to me —
"Lawsy sakes hon,
Why you always dwellin' on the negative?
Look around.
Look at all the directions
From which no bullets are coming!
Why can't you look on the bright side?"

Well, I pause for a while
And take that into serious account.
After all,
This is Dame Homo Sapiens talking.
But then
I look again, and —
There certainly is a bullet
Traveling on said trajectory,
And I look down into her basket
And I see that
Lots of those eggs are already cracked
And the yolks are dripping out the bottom.

And I pull on her skirt
And I say —
"There is a bullet
And your eggs are cracking, too."

And she yanks her skirt away
And says —
"Go away child, you bother me."
And then I realize —
There is more at work here
Than simple common sense.

And so I take a look
At her head with my mystical eyes.
And I see that her brain's
Already been more than two-thirds
Eaten away by demons
Buzzing around inside her skull
Like little killer bees.

And then I realize that when
That bullet passes through her skull,
There is a better than even chance
That it won't do any damage
To her brain at all. . . .
I find, however,
That this insight gives me no comfort.

So I think to myself,
What shall I do now?
And I remember
What Martin Luther said
About if he knew the world
Was going to end tomorrow
He would still go ahead and plant
A tree today.
And I remember what
John Paul Jones said —
"Never give up the ship!"
And I remember what that famous
Poet said —
"So what if you can't beat 'em —
Do you really, really want to join them?"

And that is why,
Over the life of my radio program
Called "Words, Words, Words"
I have paid increasing attention
To the things that kill and degrade
And endanger us all.
I have visited our economic situation
And pointed to the dangerous and increasing
Concentration of wealth,
Which in the past has often preceded
Economic collapse,
And which usually goes hand in hand
With a diminishing of democracy.
As of last year
The poorest 20% of our population
Received 4.6% of the national income,
The lowest ever,
While the wealthiest 20%
Took in 43.7% of the income,
The highest ever.
I have taken a close look at the environment —
Considered the dangers coming at us
From the greenhouse gases we are
Pumping into the atmosphere,
From acid rain, deforestation, desertification,
From the massive amounts of toxins
We are letting loose into the biosphere —
I have mentioned the incredible rate
At which species are becoming extinct,
A rate of extinction matched only twice before
In the history of life on this planet —
Pointed out the connection
Of all these things
To the unwise use of resources —
Unwise use of energy sources,
Particularly oil, coal, and nuclear power;
Unwise agricultural practices.

As this pattern of unwisdom
Became clear 20 or 30 years ago,
What also became clear
Is that it was all so unnecessary.
It was not a natural and inevitable result
Of the ascendancy of our species
On this planet.
Stopping it all did not mean
Stopping our progress
Toward increased well-being
For an increasing number of people.
Not at all.
There were other routes,
Much more benign,
Waiting only for us to choose them.

But, we haven't.
My concern is that we have missed,
Or have by now
All but missed
A window of opportunity.

It is my perception
That for every dangerous dilemma
We have backed into,
Nature has reserved a solution for us
And that nature has also provided
A leeway — a lag time,
Giving us every opportunity
To resolve the dilemma
So that we may endure and prosper.
It is also my perception
That nature will not suffer folly forever.