

BY LARRY BARROWS

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 the old saying,  
"The more things change,  
The more they stay the same."

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

We're coming to the end of the Reagan Presidency,  
And some wistful 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  
Are only a physical manifestation  
Of the demons  
That have been eating us for years —  
Centuries even.  
Millennia 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's 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.

There'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And is somewhat outdated.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  
And most of everybody 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



PETIER BREUGEL, 'EVERYMAN' (1558)

## DIRE DAY'S LAST WORDS

As a tribute to KMUN Radio Free Pacific's 19th birthday on April 17 (five days after its home city Astoria's 191st birthday April 12) we go back more than a dozen years (into the previous century/millennium) to the spring of 1988. Every Thursday night at 7p.m. for 119 weeks the KMUN audience heard, "Hello listeners. I'm Dire Day, and the show is 'Words, Words, Words'." On March 31 that year Dire Day (aka Larry Barrows) spoke his last words. This is what he said.

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 better than an 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 King 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  
Oliver Hazard Perry said —  
"Never give up the ship!"  
And I remember what the 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 democracy.  
As of last year  
The poorest 20% of our population  
Received 4.6% of the national income,  
The lowest 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.

