

VIBRATIONS

Unnoticed, the web began to form.
I had passed this way many times
 but in my haste, preoccupied.
My mind saw what I had to do that day,
 but my eyes were not opened.

One must rise early to capture
 the essence of the day--
 to reflect, to see.

The glistening dew drew my attention
 to the intricate lacery
 of concentric arcs

Filaments of gossamer
 bright at its center
 disappearing into the shrubbery
 and the darkness of its frontier.

Arachne loves the light
 until a vibration sends her
 to the shadows for sustenance.

On my desk are letters concerning
 the poor and the homeless
 the imprisoned and the oppressed
 the victims of the world's violence.

From the edges of my world
 come the ripples of a common humanity.

I cannot help but resonate.

--Harry L. Serio

1989

THE PURPOSE OF CATS

There is a black cat that lives in our house.
We call him Othello.
I don't know what he calls himself.
He serves no useful purpose,
But makes demands upon our time.

He never caught a mouse,
Nor did an honest day's work.
He requires us to feed and water him,
To change his litter box and provide a
warm place to sleep.

He no longer wishes to be amused by us.
His only function now is to love and be loved,
And that seems to be enough.
It would be for most people.

--Harry L. Serio

1989

THE MICE OF HISTORY

"History is the lengthened shadows of great men,"
they tell us,
But in the shadows of time
dwell the little ones
who make the final difference.

Kings and queens and generals
move across the chessboard of centuries;
But the mice of history take care of life--
they till the earth and bake the bread
and in the end
they are the ones
whose death is noticed by God.

--Harry L. Serio

March, 1989

CRYSTAL BALL GAZING

A fringed scarf covered the round Chippendale.
The room was always in shadows, except for the light
from the overhead Tiffany where
a stray beam penetrated the dark
through a space where
a purple grape used to be.

The glass ball was always there underneath the light
catching the colors from the lamp above
and tossing them about like
infinite mirrors in a tiny space.

But the movement was my movement as I circled the table,
intrigued by the flashes of light.
Its fascination held me in its spell.
For hours I would look into its depths,
the splinters of light,
the shards of color,
the fragments of imagination
coming together in my mind.

The more I stared into the glass ball,
the more I looked into my own soul.
I saw the future--my future--
the daydreams of a young boy who
would save the world,
feed the hungry masses,
cure the ills of humanity,
and do all those things
that politicians only promised.

But the years have passed.
The glass ball is on the shelf
somewhere where the light does not reach it.
When I look into it now,
I see only what might have been.
The light is still fractured like
the remnants of a shattered life,
the ghosts of people unloved,
deeds undone,
hopes unrealized.

The dark shadows of the past have lengthened
as my light is spent.
I have given up crystal ball gazing.
There's no future in it.

— Harry L. Serio

March, 1989

ENCOUNTER ON FIFTH AVENUE

The Christmas season comes early in Manhattan.
The crowds that gather in Rockefeller Plaza
are wet and cold,
much less festive
than the plastic and tinsel street decorations.
The street vendors in front of St. Patrick's
ply their trade of
warmed pretzels and roasted chestnuts.
An old man huddles in the doorway of the locked church.

It is the season of compassion,
a time of anticipated pity.
The man shivering at the cathedral door
sees me coming, and in a moment
my path is blocked by outstretched hands.

"Hey, Man, you got a dollar to spare for some food?
C'mon, Man, you can afford it.
I gotta have something' to eat...
I'm starving, Man, and I'm freezin' out here."

I looked into his swollen and bleary eyes,
this victim of society's amnesia.
But all I could see was deceit,
and wondered if he had just emerged from his stupor
because he had felt the vibrations of a
possible benefactor.

The irony did not escape me--
the doorway of a church sheltered
this man who preyed on the pray-ers.
Maybe they should call this "St. Patsy's"
--the patron saint of the easy mark,
the gullible visitor to the Big Apple,
the sacrificial lamb that comes to be fleeced.

I looked again into his red and rheumy eyes,
and for a brief moment
wondered who he was
and what his hopes had been
before he came to the Street of the Forgotten Man.
I saw the rags and broken shoes,
the frayed cloth that gloved his hand
but not his fingers.
His face was weathered and stained
with the grime of the city,

But it was the stench that erected
the most formidable barrier
and made me take a step back.

"C'mon, Man, I really need it.
Help me, please!"

Is this the Christ who comes
in the guise of other men
to test our compassion."
Can I call this thing, "Brother,"
who steals my time and
demands my money?
Is this an angel in tatters,
an emissary of God
who walks the way of the forsaken
waiting to be redeemed by humanity?

I gave him five more than he asked for
and wished him well.
I walked away quickly, muttering something
about the "grace of God"
and feeling good about myself.

It was a little later that I saw the man again.
I watched as he came out of the liquor store
and tore the bag from a bottle of J&B.
He saw me, and in his embarrassment turned
to walk across the street.
He turned too quickly and knocked the bottle
against a fender of a truck.
"This is my blood poured out for you
for the redemption of sin."

I watched as his emotions went rapidly
from shock to despair.
"My God, why have you forsaken me?"

I had no pity, for God was just.
Then I saw the tears in his eyes and knew
that he had lost for a time
his only way of coping
with the justice of God.

--Harry L. Serio

DUSK

My cat and I watch the light
fade slowly into approaching night.
It is a time of quietness for us.
While he lies at the window
thinking up new ways of doing nothing,
I let the shadows calm
the frenzied spirit of the day.

There is a slowness and inevitability
to nature that we often miss,
like watching grass grow,
or a flower curl against
the evening chill.

Even the flight of birds at twilight
seems more graceful and unhurried.
The natural world moves at its own pace.
We cannot rush the darkness
nor hurry the light of a new day.

That is as it should be.
We can only wait and rest,
and in the vesper hour,
be grateful for this
time of reflection.

--Harry L. Serio

May 5, 1989

THE BLACK DEATH
(The Curse of the Exxon Valdez)

Not a bomb nor explosive sound;
no rending of the earth's crust,
nor shredding of the canopy of heaven.
But only a dull thud, a crunching of metal,
and a slow, silent death—
an oozing, oily, slippery death
with no loud shrieks of pain
nor rage of battle tumult.

The mournful cry of a heron goes unheard
as she sinks beneath the blackened waves.
The seals cry
for the quick bludgeoning death of hunters' clubs
rather than the slow agony of the poisoned sea.
The sea eagle picks congealed petrol from her breast
but has no appetite for these deadly berries.

It is not a noble death
like a king upon a scaffold
who speaks to the world.
The black death comes at the hands
of a besotted executioner,
and we hear only
the whimpering cries of the innocent—
creatures of earth, sky, and sea
who have no voice,
but who, in the end, will
speak their judgment
upon the human blight.

--Harry L. Serio

May 5, 1989

BEING IN TOUCH

There were many summers
long since gone
when I would seek out
the high meadow.
It was worth the climb
to be alone,
to see the world from another perspective,
to rest.

I had the feeling then
when lying on the earth,
that earth was also
leaning on me.

We felt each other's weight
and sensed that we could not
live without each other,
for we are of the same substance.

We have grown apart these many years.
We need to be in touch again
to feel each other's needs,
to share each other's life.

--Harry L. Serio

May 9, 1989