

Two Poems

LOS ANGELES: April 1992

the snake moves
in concentric circles,
in orbits that are decades apart,
with its venom,
an old argument,
always in the center

and when it strikes
the whole city dresses in yellow and orange,
and red, which is the color of rage

there is no reveler in the street,
no child with wreath and olive branch:
they are sleeping in the chamber of the snake's song

the buildings are dressed like widows,
they are wearing black hats of smoke,
the street is a river of glass

it is a night we shall always remember

in the distance, as far as Golgotha,
the sound of hammer has robbed the women of speech;
the sap of all wood is stained.

ETTA BAKER AT THE CHAMIZAL: October 10, 1992

full moon over El Paso
full as a child's step in the grass
as Etta Baker picks on the guitar strings,
and there is a sense of something accomplished
beyond the music, something that redefines the world
in the mind, in the glass,
and the fields once more are safe
for the young girl dancing in the grass.

the eagle above soars, soars
above the sluggish Rio Grande,
carrying the moon in its talons,
the music in its wings,
and below, not far from the Chamizal,
not far from the October crowd and the festival,
a cacophony of human voices at the bridge,
marks the people as they come and go
back and forth between hope and sorrow.

and Etta sits like a sculpted saint
suddenly sprung from an epiphanous fissure in the earth
and picks the music locked
in the metal in the rocks:
strong music that strongly hides the pain,
but remembers the ground where the house stood
before it took the color of the sun.

the music gently rocks the world to waking,
and I wonder does it cry the path that brings us here,
or is it simply a ragged child's window to a beautiful world.

