

Peter Hammill, Something About Ysabel's Dance

In the new hotel, on Fiesta Night, the staff are bored;
Donna Ysabel dances zombie-like, the guests applaud...
The color is local, the tourists are tanned,
the natives are restless and everything's second-hand.

Places disappear, but the names endure as alibis;
memory's hazy here, no-one's really sure of how time flies...
Well drunk, the bass player cries into his beer
are Ysabel's mother or Ysabel dancing here?

After hours all the couriers are in the bar
round the corner with the drivers in a game of cards...
In bursts Ysabel, her hair let loose, her limbs set free;
on the tabletops she's dancing to a memory
conversation stops and every eye is turned to see...
something about Ysabel's dance.

It's a shrinking world, it's a fun-packed cruise, a museum trip:
skirt the native girl, check the rabid dog, rejoin the ship.
There's no Charlie Mingus, his Tijuana's gone...
this smile for the camera is all just a tourist con.

But after hours all the couriers and drivers know
of a cantina where there's every chance that she might show;
and maybe Ysabel will dance the dance for real again,
her mother's footsteps, vice and virtue, lust and love and pain.
There's something here the anthropologist dare not explain,
something about Ysabel's dance...