

The Single Woman Traveller, Latin America

England's frostbitten fields laid out like circuit boards.
Ice-filled bomb craters, north of Leeds,
write a long sentence to the coast, spelling out
the O, O, O distress call of men at their own throats:
abandoned payloads of a long-past war
which had your mother, at six, dreaming bananas.

Silver seams of lights across the southern States,
earth rumped below, make your flight
the zig-zag mend of a woman's knuckles,
a woman who hums to her porch as mosquitoes
fizz her children's blood onto the glass of the bulb,
sticking there, like dropped stitches.

Your Spanish turns out to be useless.
At Arrivals, you side-step the locals,
their wreck mock-taxis. The high-priced bar,
you discover, translates into brothel.
Waiters don't ask what you want to drink,
but "¿Para tomar?": *for to take?*

Take care. The night is done up like a corset,
and kittens with prominent spines
teeter, oblivious, over the gullies.
Take this language that falls apart under the tongue
like fruit dropped from a market stall
undressing itself beneath the moon's glare.

Take the eyes of the Robert Mitchum lookalike,
which sleep through his nightlies on the desk,
waking only to push up the hem of a passing dress.
A shift away, pregnant turtles reject the Atlantic
to oar up the black volcanic grit of the beach
and bury their futures: wet, delicate, out of reach.

ROS BARBER