

Two Poems · *Sebastian Barry*

THE ONLY TRUE HISTORY OF LIZZY FINN, BY HERSELF

Starchy cheering burghers of Brighton or Bexhill,
the wintry theatres, clay pipes, wood pipes, Havana puffs,
the roof-fulls of cherubs, brown seaside streets,
my hair with its weights, black bloom, gray bloom.
Then Robert Gibson took me off through the lamp-adoring
Welsh farms, and in the empty stomach of the packet-steamer
he smudged my sharp rouge. The inky sea with furious fishes
was under us, and on his back lay my long white arms
and over us the passengers walked the scrubbed decks
in the night-time, with a big bruised sky, a crushed moon.

I found a world of tobaccos, billiard-tables, calicoes,
giggles between stepping-stones like children's buckets,
shires with fetlocks as shaggy as my stage drawers,
a marriage in Christ Church, the lonely vicars,
lost sparrows in the blueness under the shooting vault,
pressed collars ranked against me at a spanking table,
strolls in sober rain to see the romantic ruins
and Lady Gibson despairing about the jam stains
marking my Sunday linens, and Robert heaving
forever like a sailor on the rope of my drifting.

We had a daughter, a pretty red-skinned daughter
fit to burst her swaddling-clothes, grubby as me.
I joyed to crush her till she wept in my lap
and I tossed her into the sombre slaty skies
when the mower-man showered the granite-chip paths
and that tang of cut grass got into my dreams.
There was everything to do, the cooks to content,
my a's to say long, the box of brimming needle-work
that I couldn't finish fast enough to fit the child.
Her legs shot down, arms out, the stable-clock rattled.

At night I went up to the old house tower.
It was full of the true histories of spiders,
trophies from a war that had clipped a hedge of sons,
stray bits of lawn-sports still saying thwack and pock.
The moon kept it as her house and below me
the slow ratchets of the mansion loosened and whirred.
There in the best light, with my candle shadows,
I hitched my Belfast linens, English and Indian silks,
and showed my starry crotch to the stiff-backed toys
and danced for all ye who carry my whoring pride.

FANNY HAWKE GOES TO THE MAINLAND FOREVER

Ashblue porcelain, straw dolls, child's rocking-chair,
neat farms, boxwood beards, gilded sheaves for prayer,
Fanny Hawke of Sherkin Island, Quaker,
leaving her boundary stones to marry
a Catholic lithographer in Cork City,
no one on the new pier to wave her away,
neither an Easter visit or Market Day.
Only the hindview of a sleepy fox, its brush

showing like a sheaf of sense through bushes.
Goodbye to the baskets in a judged heap
in an angle of the breakfast room,
the sun ignoring the Atlantic and leaping
alone into the midst of her family,
rustle, starch, and grave methods,
to that good hypocrisy, goodbye.
Goodbye little brother with your long face.