

FRANK SEWELL

Pen-Names

The Grove 12 (2005)

My heart stopped in my chest tonight.
There, written in black and white

On the back page of an old jotter,
the history of us in crossed-out letters.

First, her name wedded to mine,
The 'Mr' and surname with a line

through them as an afterthought.
Next, in her own sweet hand, she wrote

my name coupled to hers, the 'Mr'
and surname like a scored-out mistake.

After that, nothing, a gap
till somewhere near the bottom, she scraped

the word 'Seule'. A nom-de-plume.
A sign of everything to come.

Wedding-hands bought but never worn.
On her finger, a skull and cross of bone.

Fashion Victim

Once it was booties, baby-grows, all-in-ones,
in size-ranges from naught-to-nine months,
then shorts to parallels to long ‘strides’,
and that was you until your mid-30’s;
your waistband grew as wide as you were old
and you took after your dad or his own
who bloated out like pasta in a pan,
then turned a stick drawing of the man
he was before he looked just like a boy
draped in his father’s jacket. Your auntie Joy –
you saw her go down to skin and bone,
the weight of an infant or a bag of clothes
to Age Concern, Action Cancer, Oxfam...
What’ll you wear when your own time has come?
Forget the shroud, best pyjamas or suit,
and go for your all-time favourite outfit:
the cowboy shirt glued to your back, aged 7,
the red DM’s your first love had you wearing,
the black jeans that went with everything else,
clean jocks and socks, box jacket, a few shekels,
and dander on out all groomed and ready
for a last hot date – with Bella Muerte.

Write-off
The Grove 25 (2018-2020)

My heart stopped in my chest tonight.
There, written in black and white

on the back page of an old jotter,
the history of us in crossed-out letters.

First, your name wedded to mine,
the 'Mrs' and surname with a line

through them as an afterthought.
Next, in your own sweet hand, you wrote

my name coupled to yours, the 'Mr'
and surname like a scored-out mistake.

After that, a dizzying gap,
miles of margin and years of foolscap

until, waiting at the foot of the page,
unseen, unheard for over a decade,

the word 'Seule'. A *nom de plume*.
A sign of all that was to come.

Two gold bands never worn.
On your finger a skull and cross of bone.

Safe House

I'm haunted by the man who got away,
 who pretended he was dead or unconscious.
 After all the punching, kicking and stabbing,
 his attackers must have tired and stopped
 for a smoke, a drink, or maybe a comfort break.
 Whatever it was, yer man leapt to his feet
 and fled the mid-terrace house before
 his captors could say God save the Queen.

It was dark outside, so he ducked down an alley,
 turned a corner into a neighbouring street
 and, seeing a light glowing in someone's window,
 he ran over, tapped softly on the glass
 and asked the woman who opened the door for help.
 She took him in, sat him down and listened.
 'Oh my God,' she said. 'I'll ring a taxi
 for you.' In the hall, she dialled the UDA.

Frank Sewell is Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Irish Literature at Ulster University in Ireland. Among his critical works is *Modern Irish Poetry: A New Alhambra* (OUP, 2001), and he has translated the poetry of Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, Máirtín Ó Direáin, Seán Ó Riordáin, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Mutsuo Takahashi, and the short stories of Micheál Ó Conghaile. His own poems have been published in many journals, including *Books Ireland*, *Cyphers*, *Dandelion* (Canada), *The Grove* (Spain), *H.U./The Honest Ulsterman*, *Irish Pages*, *Orbis*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Staple*, *Stand*; and in the anthologies *New Soundings: New Writing from the North of Ireland*, ed. by Daragh Carville (Blackstaff, 2003), *Magnetic North: The Emerging Poets*, ed. by John Brown (Lagan Press, 2006), and *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland*, ed. by Chris Agee (Wake Forest University Press, 2008, 2011).