

The Return

I met him early in the morn
Before the dawn, in grey light walking
He seemed as from another time
We fell in rhyme; we started talking.
Listen (he said) the blackbird's song –
For which I long – from Slane is ringing
My home, my love, my native land
Now I shall end at my beginning.

Have you been far away? I asked
For what is past has moved you greatly
Oh, I have been where few may go
Both joy and woe I know innately.
I served my time through sleet and cold
Mending this road in every weather
But I have walked on dead men's bones
When all the stones called out together.

I fought for those who killed my friends
And sought amends for that injustice
Till I was making roads once more
Through mud and gore for King Augustus.
But then I heard one sing of grief
And found relief in sweet compassion
My Ellie of the golden hair
Had never loved in such a fashion.

For she had lived a thousand years
Where no one fears the end of summer
The falling leaf, the fading light
The silent beat of a distant drummer.

Yet she had loved a human heart
Fairer to start than all about her
Who loved her well a hundred years
But then chose age and death without her.

And as I heard her tale of woe
Her quest to know some other lover
I dreamed that love had just begun
My joy was done, my gladness over.

I knew she would return at last
In one fierce blast she drew me to her
In her long-dreamed-of summer land
Till in the end I also flew her.

For at the sighing of the leaves

When all life grieves for light departed
An ancient and a sad desire
Steals in to tire the human-hearted.

I know, I said. You wrote that too.
It came from true and deep devotion
The hundred years that missed your heart
Began to start their wheels in motion
Too late – the friends you long for still
Like Ellie on the Hill are sleeping
And Matty's fiddle no more plays
His tunes from days before the weeping.

But you are now where Age and Death
Can send no breath of change to find you
For, Friend, a hundred years have passed
Since she first cast her spell to bind you.

And you are still remembered well
For your own spell less misbegotten
Fear not. Your words have worked their art.
Your human heart is not forgotten.

Jennifer Brien