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Because your voice was at my side

I gave him pain,

Because within my hand I held

Your hand again.

There is no word nor any sign

Can make amend –

He is a stranger to me now

Who was my friend.

*

Notes

This was No. 17 in the 1907 edition.

After the frivolity of the green wood and the playfulness of the wind-blown waves, the next two poems move into darker territory – betrayal and the loss of friendship.

Ellmann felt this lyric was about Joyce's break with his friend / rival Oliver St John Gogarty, represented as Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*. The critic Robert Boyle discerns an allusion to the breaking friendship broached in the Shakespearean sonnet sequence. In either case, it depicts the first in a long line of Joycean 'rivals' and betrayers.

There is ambiguity here, however; is the lover being blamed or thanked for the loss of male friendship? Is there a seed of dissatisfaction or impatience in that 'again'?

The reference to words and signs – in particular to their failure – is an early instance of Joyce's life-long obsession with the limits (and the limitations) of language.