

*To Robert, on Sunday night, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015.*

*Today the gorgeous autumn light called back  
The mellow fruitfulness of your first poem  
When you dreamt of sun-drenched being  
Of sounds as of fruit lush-ripe dropping from tree,  
Although you felt the lash of thwarted love,  
The aching pain of mocking footfalls  
That turned the young lover  
Rocked on a tide of young delight  
Into shrewd reader of Donne's sad-sweet change.  
Your heart and brain so long untouched,  
In age went on dreaming of sun-drenched youth  
Still welcoming the day as a new dawn  
When birds sing in every vein,  
Although aware as an intimation  
Of dawn-like splendour of another world.  
Even the pain that invades nerves and brain  
Granted you your last wish,  
In the fullness of self-denying love, and last endearing smiles,  
For what the Prince of essayists called  
"A death all mine".*

*Weaving in and out your poems and your prose  
These past two weeks was like  
The blissful days reborn when I listened*

*To earthly beauty upgrading high  
Through Spenser's Hymns, till on tiptoe  
I dared approach to share in your concern  
For time and death and self  
Caught in the tangled tragic mesh,  
Going my own ways with your kind help.  
While forever you looked your still unchanging self,  
Though intent, forever prospecting, on the watch  
For the least fleeting change in self-awareness  
In Montaigne, or in Donne, in Herbert, or Shakespeare,  
Charting out their venture into modernity.  
Year after year, and still so recently,  
Barely a few weeks past,  
Defeating age, and the pain of sickness,  
Unswervingly,  
You did rewrite from French into English  
Your Montaigne et Shakespeare,  
Still intent on the emergence  
Of modern self-consciousness,  
Your latest conclusion still a renewed approach  
To their seizing alike  
The newly discovered instability of the self  
Against the discovery of continuity.  
Yet a poem could have silenced the ostinato voice,  
So long ago,  
Now ends eternity unborn,  
Telling the threat of inner betrayal,*

*When your own self, you felt, was threatening*

*To shrink to nothingness*

If ever the light of consciousness withdrew,

Absence within and emptiness without

*Found out* a double nothing makes up man.

*Yet negative capability was at work*

*To deny the devastating sense of waste,*

*Bridging the gap from Eliot back to Donne.*

*Back to this grammar of the unsettled self*

*When negation meant assertion*

*Without ever being assertive,*

For the sole self ends not

Nor ends the passionless soul's passion

Though hope unfuelled die.

*Montaigne had worded it and you made it your own,*

*The twofold self in one, through sense or intellect,*

*Through sense and intellect together bound,*

*Sensing the difference*

Between the I and me: the self is not

unless I make its being actual

whose essence else were mere opacity.

*Reading you is learning again in mellowed memory*

*How much you cared for what you never showed,*

*From the waste land a voice arose*

*A poet spoke from the poem,*

*In Herbert-like simplicity:*

“The knot I tied with bloody hand,

Hand tied upon the knotted tree,

Tie not in curious knots of sand,

The maze of old philosophy.

Upon thy self no longer pore,

For none is I but Me.

Act still. Who acts but I? No more

Desire to know, but be.

*The unselfish I would prevail*

*In the reflexive yielding to a faith*

*That meant feeling it through his own senses.*

*You anticipated by so many years*

*This morning's yielding --*

Death opens many doors, turning upon dark hinges

Of dullness, pain and sharp anxiety,

Yet letting in the light untellable

And dawn-like splendour of another world.

Now could I wish for what the Prince of essayists called

“A death all mine”, cradled in perfect harmony.

*Gisèle Venet*