

**Carthusian Priory Ruins
Mount Grace, Yorkshire**

I

I cannot write the peace
That yet enfolds this place.
So full, intense, entirely still;
As in their cloistered terrace
Alone with worlds of people, each
Lived inside his own stone walls,
Learning not to know where he ran out
And God began: their scraps of garden
Places for the sun's light to land.

II

Between the bell's continual knellings,
The industry of bees
Without apparent noise:
Or is it full of sound, with senses
So completely tuned to listen, and to hear?

III

This grassy choir feels still full-habited.
It is not strange that lives spent striving
At such depths should leave their mark,
Signed in silence upon stone and tree.
How much of this potency was that
Which drew them here, how much
The testament of what they left behind?

IV

I marvel at the roots
Such white-robed watchers
Anchored in their soil:
That when it came to facing knife and rope,
Xylem and phloem,
Drawn from their vows, their earth
And from these favoured skies,
Sustained them, singing, through their chained
And rat-dark miseries,
Right through their Tyburn parting,
And beyond.

Michael Woodward

Something Understood

I have yet understood nothing.
The mystery only deepens,
Though it's true
That the scent slips through of
Jasmine, sandalwood and lotus
Mingled with decay.

There is a rest beyond words
When thoughts cease to clamour
And I am held, embraced
By one whose touch is absence.

But how short a time it is
Before the smooth surface
Buckles into furrows
And the demons seek me out again.

Michael Woodward

