

Poems, texts and translations on "Prayer – The Songs of Morten Lauridsen"

O Magnum Mysterium

O great mystery, and wondrous sacrament,
that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in their manger!
Blessed is the virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia.

A Winter Come (Howard Moss)

I

When frost moves fast and gardens lose their ground
And gold goes downward in the trees, no sound
Accompanies departures of the leaves,
Except when the wind hurtles into air
Dead shapes the coming winter will inter;
Then the thinnest music starts to stir
A faint, crisp scraping in the startled ear:
The leaves that feed the new leaves of next year.

II

As birds come nearer for a crust of bread
Across the frozen snow, by hunger led
To stamp fine footprints on a scroll of white,
So winter is a world where appetite
Grows bolder by necessity, where the fox
Betrays his fable, and the cold unlocks
Stiff beggars from the doorways. Time grows old
In the knuckles of an old man blue with cold.

III

The racing waterfall that slowed in fall
Has thinned to a trickle or an icicle
And stands as quiet as the rocks it willed
To move. As though expecting it to fall,
A listener stands upon a rim of silence,
Seeing a changed world prepared to change,
The waterfall silent on its breakneck shelf,
And silence a spectacle in itself.

IV

A child lay down in his imagined grave
To see the form he'd make engraved in snow,
But even that feigned hollow filled with snow;
And, rising on a landscape blurred a bit
By shadows of an adumbrated blue,
He came upon two worlds he had not known:
One was his being, one his mind let go
Until the light would take the blue from snow.

V

Who reads by starlight knows what fire is,
The end of words, and how its mysteries
Go running in the flame too quick to see,
As language has a light too bright to be
Mere fact or fiction. By ambiguity
We make of flame a word that flame can burn,
And of love a stillness, though the world can turn
On its moment, and be still. Or turn and turn.

VI

And what of love that old men dead and gone
Have wintered through, and written messages
In snow so travelers, who come too warm
To what may grow too cold, be safe from harm?
They know the fire of flesh is winter's cheat
And how the icy wind makes young blood sweet
In joining joy, which age can never have.
And that is what all old men know of love.

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Ya eres mia (Now You Are Mine – Pablo Neruda)

Now you are mine. Rest with your dream inside my dream.
Love, sorrow, labor now must sleep as well.
The night revolves on its invisible wheels
And joined to me you are as pure as sleeping amber.

No one else, my love, will ever sleep in my dreams.
You go, we go together through the waters of time
No one else will journey through the shadows with me,
Only you, eternally alive, eternal sun, eternal moon.

Your hands unfold their delicate grip,
Their gentle gestures falling aimlessly,
Your hands close on themselves like two gray wings,

While I follow the waters you bear which bear me away:
The night, the world, and the wind unfold their destiny,
No longer with you, I am nothing but your dream.

Translation by Dana Gioia.

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Cuatro Canciones (Federico Garcia Lorca)

Claro de reloj (Pause of the Clock)

I sat down
In a space of time.
It was a backwater
Of silence,
A white silence,
A formidable ring
Wherein the stars
Collided with the twelve floating
Black numerals.

Stanley Read

Noche (Night)

Candle, lamp,
lantern and firefly.
The constellation
Of the dart.

Little windows of gold
Trembling,
And cross upon cross
Rocking in the dawn.

Candle, lamp,
Lantern and firefly.

Jaime De Angulo

La luna asoma (The Moon Rising)

When the moon rises,
the bells hang silent,
and impenetrable footpaths
appear.

When the moon rises,
the sea covers the land,
and the heart feels
like an island in infinity.

Nobody eats oranges
under the full moon.
One must eat fruit
that is green and cold.

When the moon rises,
moon of a hundred equal faces,
the silver coinage
sobs in the pocket.

Lysander Kemp

Despedida (Farewell)

If I die,
leave the balcony open.

The little boy is eating oranges.
(From my balcony I can see him.)

The reaper is harvesting the wheat.
(From my balcony I can hear him.)

If I die,
Leave the balcony open!

W. S. Merwin

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Dirait-on (So They Say – Rainer Maria Rilke)

Abandon surrounding abandon,
tenderness touching tenderness...
Your oneness endlessly caresses itself,
so they say...

Self-caressing through
its own clear reflection.
Thus you invent the theme
of Narcissus fulfilled.

A Backyard Universe (Harold Witt)

Girl

Girl in a world that now begins to spin,
twirling on toes, in tights, your first ballet,
girl in a whirl of equilibrium,
revolving stormy planet blue with moon
that, copernican, turns around the sun;
sauntering daughter who can also run
meadows of morning or by the evening sea
leave in fading sand your shadow feet,
who fall and try again in a small room
lessons of limitation, danilova discipline
of rigid digits, an alphabet that tends,
curved like a clock or turning world, toward Z,
moving through Junes of sun to winter moons
and then curves back to April A again,
girl in a world that is not flat but bends—
the dancer, not the dance, begins and ends.

Three

My son is three today, in walnut shade
ten children blow harmonicas, balloons
roll like airy fruit from a tree of air,
September's pastel petals falling down
drift on the lawn and gleaming jetplanes scream.

Time that turned him three has turned the leaves,
has turned me thirty-four who yesterday
toddled with toys among such boys as these
and girls in bows, the mothers of such boys
playing London Bridge while butterflies

escape their hands to taste brief dahlia joys.
The caterpillar eating on the rose
will strangely change but not as strange as he,
seeing his son or daughter turning three
while what inventions split his skies with noise.

Delightful child, stay forever three,
forever bend to blow these leaning flames,
beguile with smiles, and when you skin your knees,
cry the soon dry tears of honesty
in a safe world of answerable whys.

Boy

Comedian of love, my wind-willed boy has entered
the bees' abode, the danger yard of roses,
his second spring to toedance with the wasps.
Now apple boughs explode their buds of odor;
like emerald toys the leafy guns go off.

A hush of thrushes cautious in acacias
eyes him sidewise, turns on instinct strings,
twitching censure, arrives at some decision—
outmoded parents imprisoned in their wings.
But, small individual, he will seize the sun

from puddles and ring the call bells although
their only music is a thud of moisture,
taste oozing snail and raw butterfly
until in liberal morning, a stern conservative,
the tamest cats are tigers to his touch.

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Where Have The Actors Gone (Morten Lauridsen)

Where have the actors gone?
The play has ended, the curtain drawn.
There's no applauding now-
No cheering crowds, no autographs, no curtain calls.
An empty stage, a silent hall.

Where have the actors gone?
I guess their show just had played too long.
They took the marquee down-
And packed their bags and said goodbye, and took their props,

And walked away, not knowing why.

Where have the actors gone?
They knew their lines by heart, they never missed their cue.
Where have the actors gone?
They just rewrote their parts to play for someone fresh and new.

They played their parts too well.
They found the last act just wouldn't sell.
The play was much too real to mask the tears with cardboard smiles,
The mixed reviews not worth their while to carry on.
They brought the curtain down.

Prayer (Dana Gioia)

Echo of the clocktower, footstep
in the alleyway, sweep
of the wind sifting the leaves.

Jeweller of the spiderweb, connoisseur
of autumn's opulence, blade of lightning
harvesting the sky.

Keeper of the small gate, choreographer
of entrances and exits, midnight
whisper traveling the wires.

Seducer, healer, deity or thief,
I will see you soon enough –
in the shadow of the rainfall,

in the brief violet darkening a sunset –
but until then I pray watch over him
as a mountain guards its covert ore

and the harsh falcon its flightless young.

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Sure on this Shining Night (James Agee)

Sure on this shining night
Of starmade shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
 Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night
I weep for wonder
Wand'ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

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