**Why Did I Laugh Tonight?**

Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell:  
 No god, no demon of severe response,  
Deigns to reply from heaven or from hell.  
 Then to my human heart I turn at once—  
Heart! thou and I are here, sad and alone;  
 Say, wherefore did I laugh? O mortal pain!  
O darkness! darkness! ever must I moan,   
 To question heaven and hell and heart in vain!  
Why did I laugh? I know this being’s lease—  
 My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads:  
Yet could I on this very midnight cease,  
 And the world’s gaudy ensigns see in shreds.  
Verse, fame, and beauty are intense indeed,  
But death intenser—death is life’s high meed.

—John Keats

**The Demiurge’s Laugh**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| It was far in the sameness of the wood; |  |
| I was running with joy on the Demon’s trail, |  |
| Though I knew what I hunted was no true god. |  |
| It was just as the light was beginning to fail |  |
| That I suddenly heard—all I needed to hear: |  |
| It has lasted me many and many a year. |  |
|  |  |
| The sound was behind me instead of before, |  |
| A sleepy sound, but mocking half, |  |
| As of one who utterly couldn’t care. |  |
| The Demon arose from his wallow to laugh, |  |
| Brushing the dirt from his eye as he went; |  |
| And well I knew what the Demon meant. |  |
|  |  |
| I shall not forget how his laugh rang out. |  |
| I felt as a fool to have been so caught, |  |
| And checked my steps to make pretence |  |
| It was something among the leaves I sought |  |
| (Though doubtful whether he stayed to see). |  |
| Thereafter I sat me against a tree.  —Robert Frost |  |

**Hysteria**

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty green iron table, saying: “If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden . . .” I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

—T. S. Eliot

**Laughter**

That time you laughed

Fell over on the floor laughing   
  
And then my laughter too caught fire   
One blaze of both our laughing   
  
Remembered across distances long after   
  
Not gone not gone not altogether   
Extinguished by the Ice Age of your death.   
  
When you were living   
It lingered in the world   
Among things only put aside   
In cupboards—letters, clothes,   
Photographs taken on that journey   
We went together   
  
All now become   
On one side—yours—pure absence   
On mine, that vacuum   
Nature, we are told, abhors:   
  
Which now the memory of our laughing   
Rushes in to fill.

—Stephen Spender

**The Present**

As they were leaving the garden

one of the angels bent down to them and whispered

I am to give you this

as you are leaving the garden

I do not know what it is

or what it is for

what you will do with it

you will not be able to keep it

but you will not be able

to keep anything

yet they both reached at once

for the present

and when their hands met

they laughed

—W. S. Merwin