

The laughing man by j.d salinger essay sample

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



I. Introduction

Context and Environment

The Laughing Man is one of the J. D. Salinger's stories which was published in The New Yorker on March 19, 1949, and it was included in his book called Nine Stories, his second book (Salinger, Jerome David 1953). Nine Stories was the collection that introduced and killed Seymour Glass—the brooding figure that gave rise to the Glass family dynasty, the fictional subject that held Salinger's attention until he stopped publishing in 1965. It was with this book that Salinger's art and life intersected best, where his Zen interests coalesced with his emerging themes, where he gave new life to the American short story. The stories dealt with genius, spiritual integrity, moral corruption, and the occasional ability of innocence to transform our lives. If there was social angst over the morality of America's youth then Salinger couldn't have disagreed more—seven of the nine stories feature children, all of whom stand on higher moral ground than their adult guardians. (Smith, Dominic 639-640)

34 years have passed in Salinger's life by the time Nine Stories came out, and he was already popular because of his previous novel The Catcher in the Rye (Salinger, Jerome David 1951)

Idea and Structure of the Story

The Laughing Man can be very roughly said to have the pleasure of hearing boy-hood stories involving Chinese bandits and emerald vaults. The story is made up of 3 major characters. First of them, Narrator's name is not known,

He belongs to a organization called Comanches. He is nine years old when the story is told. There is another key character , besides the narrator, " the Chief was John Gedsudski, of Staten Island. He was an extremely shy, gentle young man of twenty-two or -three, a law student at N. Y. U., and altogether a very memorable person." and " he was a stocky five three or four-no more than that. His hair was blue-black, his hair-line extremely low, his nose was large and fleshy, and his torso was just about as long as his legs were. In his leather windbreaker, his shoulders were powerful, but narrow and sloping.

At the time, however, it seemed to me that in the Chief all the most photogenic features of Buck Jones, Ken Maynard, and Tom Mix had been smoothly amalgamated"(p 1). The Chief is the bus-driver of the Comanche team, he is loved and respected by the boys who belong to the club. In every-afternoon in the bus, he tells a story of his in installments, thus creating a story-in-a-story. This story is the basis of " The Laughing Man". Lastly, there is a Mary Hudson, a student at Wellesley College who is describe as both very beautiful and something of a tomboy and most probably the girl-friend of the Chief.

This story-in-a-story has a anti-hero protagonist whom the narrator calls The Laughing Man, and an antagonist named Marcel Dufarge. The anti-hero can be described as an isolated and desolate young man, but still strong and curiously has a enormous life-energy despite many things. The Chief's story-within-a-story describes The Laughing Man as the child of missionaries but kidnapped by bandits in China, grotesquely deformed in his face and obliged

to wear a mask, but profoundly athletic and possessed of a great Robin Hood-like charm and the ability to speak with animals.

II. Analysis of the Story

Implied Meanings And Atmosphere

In *The Laughing Man* Salinger is interested in the impact (oral presentation included) the story makes on the reader. Indeed, such a text can arouse both fear and admiration: "Actually I was not the only legitimate living descendant of the Laughing Man. There were twenty-five Comanches in the Club... And always waiting, waiting for a decent chance to strike terror and admiration in the nearest mediocre heart." (p. 71) (Imaeva Z. 3).

In "The Laughing Man," the Chief uses his own defeat to push other toward enlightenment. He suffers from a breakup with a long-time girlfriend, and he uses the series of stories about the Laughing Man that he tells to his Comanches, young children for whom he provides recreation on weekends and holidays, to teach them not to expect too much from life. The Chief is able to transcend his own suffering to help others in their own spiritual journey (French, Warren). For the Chief, the story provided a way of dealing with issues in his own life, as his hero was a larger-than-life alter ego who tackled problems in ways the Chief himself could not. For the young narrator, the story provided a starting point for his imagination, a way of framing his view of the real world. His victories became the Laughing Man's victories and his struggles seemed more manageable with his hero by his side. As an adult, the narrator sees the story as a reference point, a way of defining his

childhood. Salinger often uses pieces of literature this way, as reference points for his characters. (Ricke, Alexandria 1)

Salinger tries to create an atmosphere of lust for adventure and desire for heroic achievement in the words of Narrator as he retells the story of the lonely Laughing Man. The Dreamy tone of boyish interpretation, however, ends with a direct submission to guardians of the Narrator: " I arrived home with my teeth chattering uncontrollably and was told to go right straight to bed." (p. 8) The inescapable contrast between the Narrator's imagination and reality and Chief's idolization of The Laughing Man as a escape from his hard moments with Mary Hudson construct an austere but still dreamy atmosphere.

Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters and Seymour An Introduction was a 1963 book by J At once tomboyish and feminine, Mary is both a young lady of striking beauty and a player in the troop's baseball games. She enters the story as a sort of action-woman icon in the eyes of the young boys, and ends it with an essentially female act — the inception of motherhood.

In the last scene of the story, Narrator gets out of the bus, just to see a petal mask lying on the ground. This may be a implication that The Laughing Man was once a Comanche member.

III. Conclusion

It appears that the emotional problems Salinger experienced during the war impelled him to look for a way to recapture the lost innocence of childhood and adolescence.(Bercovitch, Sacvan 171). By destroying the Laughing Man,

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Salinger presents his characters with their own mortality: if the Laughing Man is at heart the boys' own story, then his death reminds the listeners that their boyhood will end one day, and they will need to step from the world of innocence and fantasy and face the real world before them.

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