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*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

By Ken Kesey

Thematic study

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the  
Especially Merciful

(وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْذَوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ  
الْعُلَمَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ). (فاطر: ٢٨)

**(Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who  
have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might  
and Forgiving) (Fatir: 28)**

صدق الله العلي العظيم

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## **Abstract**

### **Aims**

1. How do institutions oppress people and how control them ?
2. How is that inhumanity embodied in the novel? Particularly in the hospital .

This paper is going to analyze the importance of individuality, and the dignity of personhood. Society exists as a force to oppress people, and punish anyone who does not follow what it wants. The renowned author, Ken Kesey in his novel *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* addresses the unethical workings of the Combine. Kesey's purpose was to illustrate how the Combine<sup>1</sup> affected certain individuals in the society that could not fit their standards. He adopts a sympathetic tone in order to portray the inhumanity that the patients must suffer under the Combine, as well as a rebellious tone to show how the patients try their hardest to beat the system.

This paper consists of three chapters, the first chapter deals with the biography about American author Ken Kesey's Life and Work , places and rooms of Hospital. the second chapter clarify Major Characters and Minor Characters. The last chapter will show seven themes. Power and Control, Institutional Control vs. Human Dignity, Women, Insanity, hippie, Counterculture of the Late '60s and the Antipsychiatry Movement. The paper ends with a conclusion, why this novel called one flew over the cuckoo's nest ? Who is going to escape from the mental hospital ?

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<sup>1</sup> The Combine: is what Chief Bromden calls society at large, a giant force that exists to oppress the people within it.

## introduction

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, novel by Ken Kesey, first published in 1962. At a Veterans Administration hospital in Menlo Park, California Kesey had been a paid volunteer and experimental subject, taking mind altering drugs and recording their effects, and this experience and his work as an aide at the hospital served as fodder for this novel, his best-known work, which is set in a mental hospital. The book's film adaptation (1975) starring Jack Nicholson as the main character, became the first movie since *It Happened One Night* (1934) to win all five major Academy Awards. (Bell, 2010)

Ken Kesey's novel depicts a mental asylum in which repeated attempts to diagnose the patients as insane are conceived as part of a larger scheme to produce pliant, docile subjects across the United States. A key text for the antipsychiatry movement of the 1960s, it addresses the relationship between sanity and madness, conformity and rebellion. (Bell, 2010)

*One flew over Cuckoo's Nest* is a classic of modern U.S. literature. It is argued here that Kesey's representation of the "psychiatric patient" as rebel was not only reflection of some the changing societal attitudes in postwar America, but it also helped to shape them. The challenge to the asylum system was thus cast in terms of questions of the civil rights of a marginalized group. The main themes of the novel reflect those of protesters against the abuses of the asylum system—the social isolation of the patients, poor physical care and abuse, and the use of ECT and psychosurgery. (McFarland, 1994a)

LSD : abbreviation of lysergic acid diethylamide, also called lysergide, potent synthetic hallucinogenic drug that can be derived from the ergot.Are

regarded as experimental. In the 1960s LSD was proposed for use in the treatment of neuroses, especially for patients who were recalcitrant to more conventional psychotherapeutic procedures. LSD also was tried as a treatment for alcoholism and to reduce the suffering of terminally ill cancer patients.(LSD Britannica:2019)

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1 American author Ken Kesey's Life and Work

Ken Kesey most often is characterized as the literary Character who bridged the Beat movement of the 1950s with the 1960s counterculture. This fame springs from his literary themes of revolt against societally imposed repression, which links him with the Beats, and his personal experiences as a volunteer in the U. S. government's experiments with psychotropic and hallucinogenic drugs. These latter experiences, connected with his tendency for communal living and rock music, ensure his status as a preeminent spokesperson for the 1960s counterculture.

( Kesey : 2015)

Kesey was born in La Junta, Colorado, in 1935. While he was still a child he moved to Oregon with his family. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1957, Kesey enrolled in the creative writing program at Stanford University. It was during his student tenure at Stanford that Kesey volunteered as an effective participant in the testing of the psychotropic LSD and the hallucinogens mescaline (derived from the mescal or peyote cactus) and psilocybin (mushrooms) at the Veterans' Administration Hospital. Kesey's close-knit group of friends lived communally at his home and became known as the Merry Pranksters. (Kesey : 2015)

Together they produced art and pursued a counterculture lifestyle exemplified by the cross-country road trips they took on a psychedelic painted bus they named Further. The first trip they took was meant as a celebration of the publication of Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The success of his novel enabled Kesey to buy a farm outside-La Honda, California. His and the Merry Pranksters' increasingly public experiments with LSD led to legal investigations into their activities. His



continued mock of U.S. drug enforcement policies led him to flee to Mexico to avoid prosecution and then return to face prison. Upon his freeing, he returned to his family's farm in Oregon, where he raised four children with his wife, whom he married in 1957. Kesey died on November. (Kesey : 2015)

- **Beatmovement:** In 1948 that Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes stated that the period after the Second World War should be called the Beat Generation. American social and literary movement originating in the 1950s. Its adherents, self-styled as “beat” (originally meaning “weary,” but later also connoting a musical sense, a “beatific” spirituality, and other meanings. They advocated personal release, purification, and illumination through the heightened sensory awareness that might be induced by drugs, jazz. (Nguyen, 2019)

## 1.2 Places

**The Acutes:** The name used to describe the ill persons that the crew still felt have a hope of being cured. The Acutes were ambulatory for the most part and could handle normal functions. This included Harding and Billy Bibbit, as well as most of the major characters of the novel; Chief Bromden is one exception. (Jeremy, 2008)

- **The Chronics:** The name used for patients that the crew felt desperate of they being cured. A large number of these were Vegetables<sup>2</sup>, men who were so far gone they were almost brain dead. Chief Bromden considered a Chronic, because he had been on the ward so long and everyone thought he was deaf and dumb. Peter Bancini was a

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<sup>2</sup> Vegetables: The chronics are patients who will never be cured.

Chronic because he was unable of doing anything except screaming that he's tired. (Jeremy, 2008)

**The Ward:** The nursing home , and the place in the hospital where the Big Nurse Rules superior. It housed all the characters in the novel, and was ran by the Big Nurse, her Three black aides, Doctor Spivey, and an undisclosed number of other men and women. The ward was insecure. If patients acted out violently, they were sent to Disturbe. (Jeremy, 2008)

**The Disturbed ward:** The intimidated destination of any patient that caused too much problem .Inmates came down from Disturbed quite changed, quiescent because of their experiences. The nurse who ran the place, a small Japanese woman, was gentle and smart. (Jeremy, 2008)

**The Control Panel:** Kept in the hydrotherapy room, it was powerful and formerly used to control the water directed at the patients. McMurphy tried to lift it and didn't able. Bromden lifted it three times: first to see if he could did it, then to gain bet for McMurphy, and lastly to throw it through a window and escape the ward. (Jeremy, 2008)

**Shock Shop:** Where patients were sent to take electro-shock therapy. Supposedly a form of curing, but used in the novel by the Big Nurse as a form of punishment to anyone who got too away out of line.(Jeremy, 2008)

## Chapter two: Major Characters and Minor Characters

### 2.1 Major Characters

1. **Chief Bromden** : The novel's narrator, a tall, half-Indian patient in the room, Chief Bromden has been in the institute the longest, who claimed to be deaf and dumb. He was done it so well that no one suspected it was an act until McMurphy arrived on The ward. Bromden came from a reservation in Canada, which was headed by his father. This was why he was called chief. The government Eventually bought out the reservation so it could install a hydroelectric dam. The Chief played football in high School, and was in the army for a period of time. His exact type of mental illness was never diagnosed (possibly paranoid<sup>3</sup> schizophrenia), but he tended to see things in terms, of literal metaphors. For example, when someone got mad or did something strong, their size increases. When he sank into a mental stupor in order to escape from the real World, he saw it as being lost in a fog that the Big Nurse created with a machine in the nurses' station. By the end of the novel, however, Mcmurphy had brought him back to himself, and taught him how to be strong. He stopped pretending to be deaf and started speaking; he even fought alongside McMurphy. When McMurphy was brought back Lobotomized, Bromden throttled him, because the real McMurphy is no longer alive.(Huffman, 2002)

2. **The Big Nurse** : middle-aged nurse who controlled the institute where McMurphy sentenced. Also known as Nurse Ratched. She ran the ward, as had been doing so longer than anyone could recall , even before Chief Bromden came, and she was maniac with keeping things as neat and efficient as possible. She was a doll-faced woman, prim and proper on the outside. Her only distinguishing quality is a pair of large breasts, a badge of

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<sup>3</sup> Paranoia: a mental condition characterized by delusions of persecution.

femininity that seemed out of place on her. The Big Nurse was close to the president of the hospital. As a result, it was virtually impossible to get her fired. She used guilt, manipulation, and disapproval to keep the men in line. When they turned violent, she sent them for shock treatment, and occasional lobotomies. (Huffman, 2002).

**3. Randle Patrick McMurphy:** The champion of the novel, an unruly, lively strong man. An imposing, red-headed Irishman, R.P. McMurphy entered the institution with a history of dispute, rebellion, and a recent conviction for statutory rape. Still, it was obvious from the start that he was a sane man who simply chose to accept institutionalization rather than live on a "work farm" as part of the judge's sentence.

McMurphy was an accomplished gamester and con man who had been in and out of jails all His life. Once in the ward, he took to playing practical jokes and trying to upset the Routine. At first he did this to win bets with the men, but gradually he got drawn into the Fighting for them; mainly because they didn't have the strength to fight for themselves, His fought was directed at the Big Nurse, and in the end he attacked her physically. The Nurse sent him away and they lobotomize him before brought him back to the ward, In effect killed him. McMurphy represented freedom and self-determination versus societal repression—a battle McMurphy ultimately lost in order to pave the way for the rest of the patients to see the light. In many ways, he became a sacrificial lamb for the sake of enlightenment and awakening, both within the novel and for readers. McMurphy's character is remembered as a martyr who inspired real-world social change. (Huffman, 2002)

**4 . The Black Aides :** Their names were Washington, Warren, and Williams but they were seldom ever referred to in the text as individuals. In describing them, the author implied That they were all taken from the same

decay. The Big Nurse chose them for her ward Because of how much they hate, and she trained them to use this hate in keeping the Ward running easily. They made fun of the men whenever they could, especially Bromden because he was deaf and dumb and couldn't hear what they're saying.(Huffman, 2002).

**5. Billy Bibbit :** A youthful man with a falter who lived in scare of his mother. He looked just like a little child, but he was somewhere in his thirties. He was shy around women, and lost his virginity to Candy, a friend of McMurphy's. His mother and Nurse Ratched were close And she kept watch on him through the nurse. Billy lived in terror of disappointing her, and she treated him like a five-year-old. He slashed his throat at the end of the book in Order to avoid her censure of him. (Huffman, 2002)

**6. Harding:** An womanish man with beautiful, dancing hands. He spoke eloquently and an ironic way, and was hounded in group sessions for his feelings of weakness with his Wife. The other men look up to him because he had a college degree. He hinted near the end of the novel that the reason he was driven to the mental hospital was that he indulged in certain activities on which society scowl. When one took into account his manner and his worries of sexual inability with his beautiful wife, it seemed as if the author implied that Harding was homosexual. (Huffman, 2002)

7.

## **2.2 Minor Characters**

**1. Taber:** Taber considered an omen of McMurphy. He also raised a fuss when he was in the ward, going so far as to ask what medication he was taking. His eventual fate also foreshadows McMurphy's: he was lobotomized (Porter, 1995)

**2. Pete Bancini:** The doctor used a pair of forceps to remove him from his mother, when Pete Bancini born .The forceps were pressed too hard

into his temples, leaving him permanently brain-damaged. He had difficulty with tasks that a five-year-old could perform easily, and spent most of his life working at a railway station throwing a switch. (Porter, 1995)

**3. Martini:** Another hospital patient was Martini who lived in a world of delusional hallucinations, but McMurphy included him in the board and card games with the other patients.(Porter, 1995)

**4. Doctor Spivey:** The doctor who worked at the ward. He was frightened of Nurse Ratched as the other of the patients, and took almost all of his cues from her. It took McMurphy's influence to give him a little backbone. (Porter, 1995)

**5. Charles Cheswick:** One of the genius ,who was always looking for someone to back up his ideas. He was one of the first patients to fall in behind McMurphy, and he always helped him. When McMurphy stopped fighting for a while, Cheswick commented suicide. (Porter, 1995)

**6. Fredrickson:** Another epileptic. He took two treatments of medication, his and Sefelt's, because he was so afraid of seizures. (Porter, 1995)

**7. Sefelt:** An epileptic. He gave his doses to Fredrickson because he didn't want the side effect (it makes your teeth fall out), and he thought it also did something to your hair. He was especially nervous about his looks. (Porter, 1995)

**8. Turkel:** The night helper, and the only sympathetic black character in the novel. He was bribed near the end of the book into letting McMurphy's Female friends into the ward. (Porter, 1995)

**9.The Japanese Nurse:** She ran the Disturbed Ward, and was the only loveable female character in the novel who was not a hooker . She

disapproved of the way the Big Nurse.Ran things downstairs, but was helpless to do anything about it.(Porter, 1995)

**10. Candy:** One of McMurphy's female friends, a hooker from Portland. She visited the ward two times, once on the boat trip and once for a date with Billy. Billy lost his virginity to her. (Porter, 1995)

**11. George:** An genius with a kindness compulsion. He went on the boat trip because he used to sail boats before he hospitalized. When the black aides attackdf him in the shower room, McMurphy came to his defense. (Porter, 1995)

## Chapter Three: Themes

### 3.1 Power and Control

#### Part I

The wing meetings in Chapter Five explain the domination techniques that Ratched used to extend her control. The meeting began with Nurse Ratched selecting a patient and humiliating him by describing his personal and psychological problems, then asked the other patients to comment on the problems she had described.

As McMurphy expressed below:

"And that's just exactly what that meeting I just set through reminded me of, buddy, if you want to know the dirty truth. It reminded me of a flock of dirty chickens."

*"(One flew over the cuckoo's nest , Chapter 5, P. 44)."*

This quote took place after the group meeting with the Big Nurse and the doctor. When McMurphy noticed the way the nurse picked at the Acutes, he angrily compares the group discussions to a pecking party. Just like the first chicken will peck at a spot of blood, the nurse will target weaker patients like Harding. This moment in the chapter set off McMurphy's new "war" with the Big Nurse as he was determined to stand up against her.

McMurphy betted the patients that he can get Nurse Ratched to "crack" or show her sensitivity within a week.(SparkNotes:2019)

#### Part II

He requested from Ratched to permit them watch the World Series, even though it was not the regulation TV time. In order to make up for this, he proposed that they did the cleaning chores at night and watch the TV in the afternoon, but Ratched refused to change the schedule. He proposed a vote



at the Group Meeting, but only Cheswick was fearless to challenge Ratched, since the others were afraid of long-term repercussions. McMurphy, angry, said he was going to escape, and Fredrickson godded him into showing them how he would do it. McMurphy betted them that he could lift the cement control panel in the tub room and used it to break through the reinforced windows .(SparkNotes: 2019)

### **Part III**

McMurphy arranged a fishing trip for himself and ten other patient. Showed them to feel strong and manly as they catch great fish without his help. (" A casebook on Ken Kesey's One flew over the cuckoo's nest," 1992)

### **Part IV**

McMurphy reignited the revolt by getting into a fistfight with the aides to defend George Sorenson. Bromden joined in, and they were both sent to the Disturbed ward for electroshock therapy. McMurphy acted as if the shock treatments did not affect him, and his a renowned hero grew . Nurse Ratched brought him back to the ward so the other patients could see his weakened state. The patients urge McMurphy to escape, but he had arranged Billy's date for that night, and he refused to let Billy down. McMurphy bribed Mr. Turkle, the night aide, to sneak Candy into the hospital, and they had a party on the ward. Billy had sex with Candy while McMurphy and the other patients smoked marijuana and drank. Harding tried to get McMurphy to escape with Candy and Sandy to Mexico, but McMurphy was too lost and fell asleep .("A casebook on Ken Kesey's One flew over the cuckoo's nest," 1992)

### 3.2 Institutional Control vs. Human Dignity

Nurse Ratched was ill repute for her desire to Practice complete control over the men who were under her authority on the psych ward, both as patients and as employees. In doing so, Nurse Ratched became a metaphor for the entire mental institution, the government, society at large—or to put it simply: any and every powerful institution that existed to control, and categorize groups of people. It quickly became clear in the novel that this reform was more punitive and dominant than it was helpful for any mental illness: the shock treatment table, the red pills that caused memory loss, the daily meetings that pitted men against each other, and the list on Nurse Ratched's desk to record and rewarded the men for betraying each other's secrets were all ways to force people to obey, not to make them well. (French, 2013)

### 3.3 women

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the female characters can be classified into two groups: "ball-cutters"<sup>4</sup> and harlots. The former was represented by Nurse Ratched, Harding's wife, Billy Bibbit's mother, and Chief Bromden's mother. Each of these women were intend on dominating men by humiliate them, whereas the harlots Candy and

Sandy devoted to pleasuring men and did what they're told. (*The Role of Women in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 2015)

There was castration<sup>5</sup> of husband and son through the portrayal of Chief's mother. It was through Mrs. Bromden that the government gained rights to the Indian land on which the dam was built. Two white men and a woman came to speak to the Chief's father, but the woman realized that the better approach was to speak first with Chief's white mother. Once Chief's mother

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<sup>4</sup> are cutting tools typically used in milling machines.

<sup>5</sup> means distortion

convinced her husband to sell the land in order for her to be able to return to advancement country, both husband and son began to lose their identities.(The Role of Women in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, 2015)

### **3.4 Insanity**

McMurphy and the men had planned to watch the World Series as per their democratic decision, but Nurse Ratched cut the power, so they had to make do with a blank screen.Quarrel reigns supreme. Bromden rightly observed that the men's behavior appeared illogical at first look, but McMurphy had contrived a situation in which he won his bet by prompting Nurse Ratched to lose her cool. His success demonstrates his proficiency and logic. Nurse Ratched, on the other hand, shouted like a psychiatric patient in her own ward.(One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Quotes: Sanity | SparkNotes, n.d.)

### **3.5 Counterculture of the Late '60s**

Sexual liberty, experimenting with drugs, wild hippies and their strange appearance, these were some of the factors that tied up in 60's counterculture and became emblems of the decade. After World War II, Americans were looking for a brighter future. They went to college, bought new houses, and had babies in order to achieve the American Dream ("A Nation").As the babies grew older, some of them were known as Hippies, and they were given a voice and a chance to rebel against the elder generation's traditions and lifestyles.(Jack, 2014)

### **3.6 Hippie**

Hippie, sometimes written hippy, a member of a countercultural movement that challenged the mores of mainstream American culture in the 1960s and 1970s.The term "hip" was obtain in the 1950s to describe the Beat Generation, which included Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who were widely regarded as hippies' forerunners.Hippies preached nonviolence and

love, and one of their catchphrases was "Make love, not war," for which they were dubbed "flower children." They championed tolerance and openness as alternatives to the constraints and regimentation they observed in middle-class society.(The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017)

### **3.7 The Antipsychiatry Movement**

In the 1960s, the word "antipsychiatry" was coined to characterize a broad-based movement that questioned the validity of traditional psychiatric theory and practice, as well as general modalities of treatment.(Crossley, 1998)

Anger against the perceived arbitrariness of psychiatric diagnostic practice, as well as outrage at the apparent inhumanity of certain treatments, such as electroconvulsive therapy and long-term compulsory hospitalization, fueled the antipsychiatry movement.(Crossley, 1998)

Psychiatrists spearheaded the early antipsychiatry movement, many of whom despised the term "antipsychiatry" and advocated on reform rather than revolution inside the profession. R. D. Laing, Thomas Szasz, David Cooper, and Franco Basaglia are the most well-known of these individuals. (Szasz, 1960)

Cultural critiques of psychiatry in the form of disturbing fictional depictions of mental hospitals and psychiatric treatment, most notably Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, fueled the early antipsychiatry movement. (Kesey, 2016)

## Conclusion

When Nurse Ratched found Billy with Candy, she threatened to tell Billy's mother. Billy became uncontrolled and committed suicide by cutting his throat. McMurphy attacked Ratched, ripped open the front of her dress and attempted to strangle her. In retaliation, she had him lobotomized, and he returned to the ward as a vegetable. However, Ratched had lost her dictatorial power over the ward. The patients transferred to other wards or checked themselves out of the hospital. Bromden suffocated McMurphy in his bed, enabling him to die with honor rather than live as a symbol of Ratched's power. Bromden, having recovered the immense strength that he had believed lost during his time in the mental ward, escaped from the hospital by breaking through a window. (SparkNotes: 2019)

Finally, we must always be brave enough to speak up for ourselves and avoid becoming rabbits and live in a dark cuckoo's nest. The role of rabbits in nature is used to highlight how governments and powerful institutions utilize force, brutal capitalism, and violence to punish people who are weak rabbits who cannot conform to society in one flew over the cuckoo's nest. During their debate over Nurse Ratched, Harding made this analogy to McMurphy. (One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest Capitalism Analysis | Ipl.org, n.d.)

As Harding expressed below :

" Mr. McMurphy . . . my friend . . . I'm not a chicken. I'm a rabbit."

*"One flew over the cuckoo's nest .Chapter 5 , P. 49."*

Chief's insight into what makes people human and what makes life worth living is related in the novel's end. We concluded it was Chief Bromden who had gotten away. It didn't matter who fled in terms of significance. The key thing to remember was that freedom wasn't fully gone—it was still

available to those who were willing to risk it.(One Flew Over the Cuckoo's  
Nest What's Up With the Title? | Shmoop, . d

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