

The Clash Between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the
Cuckoo's Nest*

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1. Introduction

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest written by Ken Kesey and published in 1962, is considered one of the most important works of American fiction in the 20th century. The novel recreates the story of a group of mentally ill patients and their medical treatment at a psychiatric hospital in Oregon, which is led by the head nurse Ratched. The narrative serves as a study of institutional processes and the human mind as well as a critique of psychiatry and a tribute to individualistic principles.

The narrative presents a microcosm created and ruled by the head Nurse, who wields an unchallenged authority until the novel's protagonist arrives at the psychiatric facility. This thesis will focus on the clash between the Nurse and the newly arrived patient named Patrick McMurphy. It will analyze the reasons for their confrontations and the collateral effects on the other patients. It will assess the effects of the totalitarian leadership and the rebellion led by McMurphy. The analysis will be based on the approaches of New Criticism.

1.1 Ken Kesey's Biography

Kenneth Elton Kesey was born in La Junta, Colorado on September 17th, 1935, and grew up in Springfield, Oregon. He was an American novelist, essayist, and countercultural figure during the Beat Generation in the United States during the middle of the 20th century. He got married in 1956 and had three children. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Oregon's School of Journalism in 1957, he attended Stanford University's Creative Writing program, where he was tutored by Wallace Stegner, an acclaimed novelist, and short-story writer.

He began writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1960 following the completion of the graduate fellowship in creative writing at Stanford University. The novel became a commercial and critical success when published in 1962 in the midst of the civil rights movement and deep changes to the way psychology and psychiatry were being approached in America.

Kesey volunteered to take part in what turned out to be a CIA-financed study under the aegis of Project MKULTRA, a highly secret military program, at the Menlo Park Veterans' Hospital where he worked as a night aide. The project studied the effects of psychoactive drugs, particularly LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, cocaine, AMT, and DMT on people.

The inspiration for the novel came while working at the mental health facility where Kesey spent time talking to the patients, sometimes under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs. While talking to them he reached the conclusion that the patients were not insane but rather that society had excluded them aside because they did not fit the conventional ideas of how people were supposed to act and behave.

After *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published, he moved to La Honda, California where he hosted "happenings," which were events where artists gathered. These parties, also known as Acid Tests, integrated the consumption of LSD with multimedia performances.

He started a group called the Merry Pranksters, which was comprised of comrades and followers who lived communally at his houses in California and Oregon. With this group, he promoted drug use as a path to individual freedom. Kesey and the Merry Pranksters are famous for the sociological significance of a lengthy road trip they took in the summer of 1964, traveling across the United States in a psychedelic painted school bus called Furthur, organizing parties and giving out LSD.

In 1964 he published his second novel *Sometimes a Great Notion*, which also addresses the idea of individuality as a way of claiming freedom. Kesey regarded this novel as his masterpiece.

In 1965 he was imprisoned for five months for drug possession. After he was released, he moved to Pleasant Hill, Oregon, where he lived a family-oriented lifestyle and taught at the University of Oregon.

Kesey was diagnosed with diabetes in 1992, and in 1997 his health declined. He had surgery on his liver to remove a tumor and died of complications on November 10th, 2001, at the age of 66.

1.2 Author's Literary Influences

An early influence for Kesey was Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), a work that explored drug-induced mental states. Another influence was Aldous Huxley, especially his essay "The Doors of Perception" (1954), which describes the experiences of mescaline and the mental state of people with schizophrenia. Huxley believed that drugs reduce the filters of reality and open the doors of perception.

William Faulkner was another significant influence for Kesey and also his favorite writer. Faulkner's *Light in August* and Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* both address the way the past can influence and form or deform an individual's behavior. For example, both Chief Bromden in *Cuckoo's Nest* and Benjy from *The Sound and the Fury* fixate on past experiences which pushed them away from the present.

Kesey also adopted some elements of Ernest Hemingway's writing style, such as allowing the reader to make assumptions about situations in the story by not fully explaining the context so that they connect different hints throughout the text to draw conclusions. For example, in "Indian Camp," Hemingway does not explain the husband's suicide, and in *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey leaves unexplained the history behind why the patients are hospitalized. Furthermore, the wife in Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and Big Nurse in *Cuckoo's Nest* share the presence of matriarchal authority. Furthermore, Big Nurse's pseudonym in *Cuckoo's Nest* also hints at the influence of Orwell's *1984*, a story of a totalitarian society dominated by Big Brother with a protagonist who opposes the regime just as McMurphy does in *Cuckoo's Nest* (Calle P, 2014).

To address Ken Kesey's literary influences, it is also necessary to talk about his involvement in the Beat Generation, a literary movement whose work influenced American culture in the post-World-War II era. The central elements of Beat culture are the rejection of traditional narrative values, the embrace of spiritual quests, the exploration of American and Eastern religions, the condemnation of materialism, and an experimentation with psychedelic drugs and sexual liberation. The Beat Generation members developed a reputation as new bohemian hedonists who celebrated non-conformity and spontaneous creativity. The core group of Beat Generation authors – Herbert Huncke, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr, and Jack Kerouac – met in 1944 in and around the Columbia University campus in New York City. Later, in the mid-1950s, the central figures ended up together in San Francisco, where they met and became friends of figures associated with the San Francisco Renaissance. In the 1960s, the expanding Beat movement elements were incorporated into the hippie and larger counterculture movements. As the driver for Ken Kesey's bus Further, Neal Cassady was the primary bridge between these two generations (Rahn, 2011).

Allen Ginsberg's work also became an integral element of early 1960s hippie culture. In the world of literature and art, the Beats stood in opposition to the clean, antiseptic formalism of the early twentieth century Modernists. They fashioned a more bold, straightforward, and expressive literature than anything that had come before. Time has proven that the Beat writers' cultural impact was far from short-lived, as their work's influence continues to be widespread.

2. Theoretical Framework

New Criticism emerged as an interpretive approach that does not define literature essentially as the artist's self-expressive product or as an evaluative reflection filtered by its cultural history (Hickman, 2012). It interprets a work of literature by exploring its meaning by analyzing its formal unity. New Criticism recognizes that a literary work is a concrete entity like Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." It is a concrete object that can be analyzed to discover its true meaning independent of its author's intentions or emotional state or its author or its reader's values and beliefs (Bressler, 2007). That is to say, the text itself contains all the necessary information to arrive at an interpretation. Instead of relying on biographical or historical data, New Criticism focuses on the work as a self-contained object, wholly autonomous and self-determining, accessible and verifiable (Calle P, 2014).

According to New Criticism, the writer is an organizer of the content of the human experience who structures the text around contradictory experiences of life. The writer crafts its text to move its readers' emotions and make them reflect upon the text's content. During the creative process, the writer's mind serves as a catalyst that brings together the experiences of his personality (not his personality traits or attributes) into an external and new object. The text, then, is about the author's experiences that are similar to those of people in general, and by structuring these experiences, the text itself allows us to examine them objectively. Since it is based on human experience, the reader does not need any external knowledge to give meaning to the text (Bressler, 2007).

New Criticism searches for meaning within the text structure by finding the tensions and conflicts that are eventually resolved. To examine *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, this thesis

will analyze the antecedents, causes, and consequences of the conflicts between the main characters by interpreting the words, phrases, paradox, ambiguity, use of irony, and figures of speech. This methodology will show that, ultimately, the text is an organic and whole unit in which all parts are connected and support the novel's main idea.

The thesis will also address the concept of singularity, which by definition is the state, fact, quality, or condition of being unique; that is, the quality or character of a particular person or thing that distinguishes them from others of the same kind.¹ Singularity can then be described as the quality that a person or a living being may possess in order to differentiate him or herself from the rest of his or her peers. In this sense, a person is singular or has the quality of singularity when distinguished from his peers in aspects such as behavior, manners, ethics, customs, way of speaking, dressing, hairstyle, and many others. In many ways, today's globalized society strongly nullifies the possible singularities that each individual can develop. Therefore, a singular person could easily be that person who does not let himself be carried away by the common people, by what brands, governments or companies dictate, but rather by what he truly feels and believes (Bembibre, C., 2012).

In synthesis, the concept of singularity is the uniqueness in intersubjective and intrasubjective relationships (Villarreal T. 2000). It is on the level of sensibility and singularity where the individual's most radical differences dwell. Only the individual knows how to express that unique being that the homogenizing culture has tried for centuries to underestimate and deny

¹Singularity. 2011. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/singularity>

(Restrepo L.C., 1998). In this thesis, singularity will be examined as a series of personality traits that make a person different from his counterparts, which make him unique and unreplicable.

3. Main Essay

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is a novel that presents a conflict between the two main characters, McMurphy and Nurse Ratched, who are opposites in a constant confrontation. Nurse Ratched is the voice of total authority. She attempts to take away McMurphy's freedom and personality, but he is the voice of rebellion who will not let it happen. The collisions occur throughout the novel, affecting not only these two characters but everyone at the facility.

The novel takes place in a psychiatric hospital in Oregon. The patients are interned there, according to Dr. Spivey, "because of their proven inability to adjust to society" (129). The ward's policies, including the strict schedule, are designed to control the patients' activities. Dr. Spivey claims that "it is entirely for your own good that we enforce discipline and order" (155). This is where Nurse Ratched and McMurphy face off.

On one side is Nurse Ratched, who, through manipulation, words, actions, and the use of policies in her favor, seems determined to take away all the patients' singularity to keep them under control, "happy" and without complaining. On the other side is Randall McMurphy, who, through example, words, situations, risks, and actions, is determined to keep his singularity and inspire others to fight for theirs in order to be free.

The story is narrated through the eyes of a patient called Chief Bromden. He has been in the ward for the last ten years, and it is believed by everyone to be deaf and dumb, though he is not. His nickname on the ward is "Chief Broom" because the staff takes advantage of his "inabilities" to make him sweep the facility at their will. This situation makes Chief a perfect narrator because he has access to places and conversations nobody else has. "They don't bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I'm nearby because they think I'm deaf and

dumb." (4), says Chief. He gives insight into the two main groups that inhabit the ward: the patients and the staff, which helps understand what happens inside the ward.

Chief is described as a half Indian from his father's part. He says, "Papa was a full-blood Columbia Indian - a chief" (10). His mother "was a town woman from The Dalles" (169).

Throughout the novel, Chief uses the terms "big" and "small" to refer to size and power. Chief explains that his mother and father are huge: "he was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size" (169). It means the mother is or becomes dominant in the relationship due to her "size." Another evidence is that Chief-Father allows the mother to give her last name to his son, and that is one of the reasons Chief-son always describes her as a "big woman," which means she gathers more and more power over time.

Everybody describes Chief as a "big guy" around seven feet tall but his time inside the ward makes him feel "little," as he explains to McMurphy in their first conversation, during which Chief talks for the first time in years; "I used to be big, but not no more. You're twice the size of me" (169). Chief feels weak or "little" even though he is one of the strongest men on the ward. Thus, it suggests that the staff is affecting the patients to such a level that they cannot even recognize themselves. "Hoo boy," McMurphy replies. "You are crazy, aren't you? The first thing I saw when I came in this place was you sitting over in that chair, big as a damn mountain" (169). McMurphy is astounded to hear those words from a person he has to look up to speak with. He tells the Chief, "I lived all over Klamath and Texas and Oklahoma and all over around Gallup, and I swear you're the biggest Indian I ever saw" (169). Chief has been humiliated and belittled for many years; he believes he has physically shrunk. However, Chief also refers to "big" as

someone independent, forceful, tenacious, and resilient who defends himself. These are qualities that, at this time, he feels he lacks completely.

Chief also describes Nurse Ratched as big: "I'm mopping near the ward door when a key hits it from the other side and I know it's the Big Nurse" (4). Chief recognizes these two characters as fearless, influential, or in his words, "big." It gives a hint of the magnitude of the two main characters, where this clash will lead, and how it will affect all the patients and staff in the psychiatric hospital.

While everything inside the ward is as Nurse Ratched wants it, it all starts to shatter when McMurphy arrives. When Chief sees him, he thinks, "I know he's no ordinary Admission" (9). McMurphy shows no regard for the standard procedure for new patients. From the moment he enters, everyone notices something different about him. In contrast to other new patients, McMurphy is not nervous and submissive. On the contrary, he is full of energy, laughter, curiosity, and honesty about his feelings and desires. Also, he is not afraid to talk back to the staff: "get back away from me with that thermometer, Sam, and give me a minute to look my new home over." (9). He exhibits a warm, fun-loving, and extroverted personality. He is not there to submit to anyone but rather to enjoy his stay.

Another aspect that shocks everyone is McMurphy's laughter because it sounds genuine, something they have not heard in a long time. It is something that they have even forgotten about, or it is more accurate to say, it is something that the ward has taken away from them. Chief reflects when he hears it; "This sounds real. I realize all of a sudden it's the first laugh I've heard in years" (10). Since the first second, McMurphy attracts attention and brings life and

curiosity to the group. He presents a challenge to the Big Nurse because she wants to reduce the patients' enjoyment and human feeling to make them easier to predict and manage.

McMurphy and Nurse Ratched are described in depth throughout the novel, and their personalities and intentions are shown through their actions at crucial moments in the story. Chief describes McMurphy as a "redheaded guy with curly and really messy hair with red sideburns. He has a broad and hard jaw and body, and big and beat up hands" (10). His sturdy body suggests that he is used to hard labor and forced physical activities; his grooming shows that McMurphy cares more about actions and autonomy than his appearance. It is also an indicator of a relaxed personality. Chief adds, "He also has a scar with the stitches still across his nose and cheekbone, and his most characteristic traits are his broad white devilish grin and his loud as hell voice" (10). The scar reveals his aggressive, violent behavior, his tendency to get into physical fights often. His loud voice suggests hyper-masculinity, and his grin shows that he is cheeky, bold, and cocky.

On the other hand, Chief describes Nurse Ratched as someone who has a "stiff posture, a smooth, calculated, and precision-made face, like an expensive doll" (6). She exhibits an atmosphere of perfectionism and meticulous care in her looks. She has "a blend of white and cream color skin, baby-blue eyes, small nose with pink little nostrils" (6). Everything in her is well-put-together, and this gives the imagery of a very well-structured woman who likes to everything well-planned and under impeccable control. This behavior is displayed in the treatment of her patients.

The patients under the care of Nurse Ratched are classified as the "Acutes," younger patients who are, according to Chief, "sick enough to be fixed" (12). In contrast, the "Chronics"

are not there to be rehabilitated, "but just to keep them from walking around the streets" (12).

"What the Chronicles are - or most of us," Chief remarks, are machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired" (12). This classification made by Nurse Ratched has the intention of segregating the group. Making them think some patients are in better condition predisposes them not to desire to interact with "crazier" individuals from other groups. Furthermore, it creates an aura of competence between them and splits them not to collaborate.

While McMurphy questions the authority of the staff, he treats the patients as equals. Even if they cannot respond, he still shakes their hands and tries to start a conversation. He is social and shows sincere regard for other people's feelings. Therefore, he rejects classifications; he treats all the patients with respect for their humanity, in contrast to the treatment they receive from Nurse Ratched, who makes them feel insane and unsafe.

Not to be upstaged, Nurse Ratched denies McMurphy's singularity, saying, "No. He isn't extraordinary. He is simply a man and no more, and is subject to all the fears and all the cowardice and all the timidity that any other man is subject to" (121). She exudes overconfidence and arrogance. She rejects the possibility of losing control of any situation inside her ward. She feels no character can defy her power. Hence, McMurphy's defiance creates a constant tension between them.

Nurse Ratched's power is similar, on a micro-scale, to totalitarian power. She deploys it in three ways: mental pressure, physical dominance supplied by the staff, and access to privileged information about the patients.

First, she uses psychological manipulation to control the patients. She knows they are vulnerable, and she exploits that flaw by not allowing them to think or reflect on their own.

Through the Log Book and "The Combine," she monitors their movements to the point that they feel she is omnipresent. She and her subordinates wear shoes with "rubber soles silent as mice up and down the hall. They never make any noise when they move. They materialize in different parts of the ward" (24). These circumstances create constant pressure and anxiety in patients. They are "acting" or behaving well all the time because they are afraid to be caught and punished; therefore, they do not have free will to decide. They only pretend.

Second, Ratched also exerts physical control. She forces the patients to adhere to a mandatory routine, giving them no time to rest during the day. Also, she has access to their medicines while they do not have information about what they are taking; however, they have to submit, either voluntarily or by force. An instance of this is an interaction between Mr. Taber and Ratched: "Miss, I don't like to create trouble. But I don't like to swallow something without knowing what it is" (26). She is manipulative and uses sex as another mechanism of persuasion. She uses her status as a woman against the patients to flirt and disarm them by taking advantage of the fact that there are fewer women on the ward. Nevertheless, when her trickery fails to work, she uses power and force. She recognizes that she is powerful and that she has methods to make the patients obey: "You can go, Mr. Taber, if you don't wish to take your medication orally" (26).

Third, She controls all the information inside the ward. She uses it to present herself as an angel or mother by telling patients what they want to hear. In this way, she gains their trust while causing them to distrust other sources. When McMurphy tells the patients that Ratched is destroying their relationships and their manhood, making them hate each other and themselves at the same time, Harding defends her by saying, "You completely disregard [...] the fact that what

the fellows were doing today was for my own benefit? That any question or discussion raised by Miss Ratched or the rest of the staff is done solely for therapeutic reasons?" (45).

To sum up, she has total power over the ward; she wants everything to run smoothly and as she commands. She is egocentric, perfectionistic, manipulative, and totalitarian.

She watches over the patients from the nurse station. Chief says she dreams about a "place with an unbreakable schedule with obedient individuals having everything working with the precision and efficiency of a pocket watch with a glass back (22). "

Consequently, she finds any sign of rebellion disturbing and acts immediately to regain control. Her clash with McMurphy is inevitable because he shares her desire for power and leadership, though he seeks to attain it by different means and to use it in the service of different ends.

McMurphy is indeed a peculiar case in the ward because he is suspected of faking mental illness to escape hard labor. As he states, "The court ruled that I'm a psychopath. And do you think I'm gonna argue with the court? [...] I'll be whatever their little heart desires." (11). He has no regard for rules unless he finds them beneficial. He takes every opportunity to get an edge over others. He is a player, and he is not ashamed to admit why he is there: "I came to this establishment to bring you birds fun an' entertainment around the gamin' table" (10). He refers not to a card game but to his role in that place, which is to gain the patients' trust to help him achieve his desires.

McMurphy displays a dominant character. When he arrives, he starts looking for the patients' leader: "Who's the bull goose loony here?" (15). Discovering that it is Harding, he shows his intention to dethrone him from the "boss" position. McMurphy has the mentality of a

leader; he does not want to be subservient to anyone. This characteristic leads him to defy Big Nurse, the second in command on the ward.

Nurse Ratched hosts the ward's Group Discussions. Patients are supposed to share their thoughts and problems with both patients and staff to receive feedback for therapeutic benefits. However, Nurse Ratched uses the information she gathers from the "log book" to expose patients' problems and shame them in front of the others. This tactic undermines the patients' confidence and sense of well-being.

McMurphy observes this and reacts by subverting and mocking her: "You ask, I believe, Does anyone care to touch upon" (34). Ratched answers, "Touch upon the - subject, Mr. McMurry, the subject of Mr. Harding's problem with his wife" (34). He responds, "Oh. I thought you mean touch upon her - something else" (34). He wants to expose and exasperate her, challenge her authority, her presumptuousness, and her ethics.

Nurse Ratched pretends to be unfazed by McMurphy's antics. To retaliate, she reads his profile in front of the group: "McMurry, Randle Patrick. Committed by the state from the Pendleton Farm for Correction. History of street brawls and barroom fights and a series of arrests for drunkenness, assault and battery, disturbing the Peace, repeated gambling, and one arrest - for rape." (34). She attacks his credibility to convince the other patients that he is taking advantage of them.

McMurphy "just sits and watches and doesn't miss a thing that happens or a word that's said" (37). He calculatedly bides his time and prepares his next move. He continues to win over the other patients with his charisma and vitality. Though he exposes the nurse's true nature, the patients remain afraid of her and convinced that she cannot be beaten. McMurphy likes a

challenge. "I like to gamble," he says. "And I like to win. And I think I can win this gamble, okay?" (57). His confidence intrigues the patients. "Any of you sharpies here willing to take my five bucks that says that I can get the best of that woman - before the week's up - without her getting the best of me?" (56).

McMurphy trusts in himself. He is a man who knows who he is. He has a singularity he does not want to lose and, especially to Nurse Ratched. However, he understands that if he does not help all the other patients fight for who they are and embrace their singularities, he will lose his own. He knows that society attacks those who are different. Restrepo L.C. (1993) affirms, "Every ecosystem is at the same time a set of singularities different from each other; these singularities depend mutually on each other for their subsistence" (p. 68). That is to say, every person in the ward is different, and not acknowledging this or respecting each other's individuality creates a risk for the existence of all of them. It is a must in a society, even a micro-society, to respect and recognize every individual's difference to co-exist and be free.

McMurphy does not take the rules of the ward seriously. He finds them arbitrary, often justified by saying, "It's ward policy, Mr. McMurphy, tha's the reason" (72). From the moment he wakes up, he affirms his individuality by doing what he pleases, in a humorous, sexual, creative way, like walking around almost naked when all patients have to wear the same uniform or brushing his teeth with soap because the toothpaste is not allowed until a specific time of the day. He is not afraid to confront Ratched. Actually, he enjoys getting on her nerves. For example, when she tells him, "You can't run around here - in a towel!", he is unapologetic; he embraces his sexuality and masculinity, responding, "Towels against ward policy too? Well, I guess there's nothin' to do exec" (75). "Stop!" she says. "Don't you dare. You get back in that dorm and get

your clothes on this instant!" (75). McMurphy discovers that anything related to sex disconcerts Nurse Ratched. She feels uneasy with the display of masculine traits, which is why she tries to belittle every man in the ward to the point of emasculating them.

When McMurphy makes any move against Ratched or the staff, he is loud. He gets everyone's attention to show them by example and make them see it is possible to live without fear. McMurphy suggests that he is not different from any of them, which means they should be able to do the same. These situations can be considered small wins for him. Nevertheless, he helps the others overcome their past failures to stand up to Nurse Ratched. For example, when she and her staff, whom Chief calls "the combine," control Pete in front of the group, she uses drugs (needles) when the situation gets out of hand. This procedure can be expected in a psychiatric facility to control behavior. However, she does not stop when calm is established. They continue applying control when Pete cannot even stand by himself: "She'd just as well shot it in a dried-out old cadaver" (42). This is not therapy; these procedures are not for anyone's benefit. They are just a show of power for all the spectators. They give the patients a direct message of what can happen if they even imagine doing something similar. "Pete never tried anything like that again, and he never will." (42), Chief remarks after seeing Pete return to the ward after several days.

Nurse Ratched controls with violence and fear, which leads to dehumanization. Restrepo. L. C (1995) contends that "Violence is significant insofar as it robs us of joy, of confidence in our beliefs and values, of the possibility of a democratic culture. Instantly, what a violent action seeks is to take away the strength of the victim in order to obtain a political advantage, a dominance in the field of power" (p. 2). Violence is Ratched's control method, which gives her

confidence that, even with small victories, McMurphy will not defeat her. As Chief says, "She don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours" (88).

McMurphy becomes increasingly aware that Nurse Ratched is obsessed with taking away everything that makes the patients human. She treats them like machines in the hopes of turning them into robots. The patients only have one place to speak without the distortion of loud music, and these are the meetings she hosts. Instead of allowing them to share stories and feelings to foster connections and create strong friendships, she uses the meetings to diminish them. Then she ends the session by saying, "'Good evening, boys. Behave yourselves.' And turns the music up louder than ever" (61). She does not want them to connect at all except when she is there to moderate and manipulate them. She isolates them together, and this contradiction confuses the patients and does not allow them to understand what is happening to them. Nurse Ratched turns them against each other to divide them and make them more vulnerable to her power. In contrast, McMurphy wants them to forge strong relationships, become a team, and be empowered through unity.

McMurphy uses his social skills. He listens carefully and uses the information he gathers to further his plan. An example of this is how he goes to the director to lobby for a separate room for the Acutes to gather without the interference of the loud music played by Nurse Ratched. Dr. Spivey tells the nurse, "McMurphy mentioned that he had noticed some of the old fellows seemed to have difficulty hearing the radio. He suggested the speaker might be turned up louder so the Chronics with auditory weaknesses could hear it" (87). McMurphy learns from his mistakes and changes the approaches to adapt and get the results desired. He uses Ratched's own

words against her to appear to Dr. Spivey as a hero who thinks first about the weak and not about himself.

Even though McMurphy's request is made partly in self-interest (enjoying playing cards and winning the other patients' money, he helps the others gain freedom, have fun, and develop comradery. Through example, he helps them develop the mental and emotional acuity that Nurse Ratched is determined to suppress. They can feel his sincerity. He treats them as individuals worthy of respect and understanding. He assumes the role of spokesperson to express their needs and complaints.

The attitude of Dr. Spivey after his interview with McMurphy illustrates this point: Uncharacteristically, he attends a group meeting and announces: "In the course of our conversation, McMurphy and I wondered what would be the attitude of some of the men toward a carnival here on the ward?" The patients speak out and, for once, express their ideas and feelings. "'Good, good,' Cheswick says and claps his hands. He's never had anybody support anything he said before." (85). This action also creates a feeling of camaraderie between the patients. McMurphy applies the classic antique greek warcry, "United we stand, divided we fall." Since their arrival, they finally feel they can work and trust each other to accomplish a common goal.

Throughout the meeting. Nurse Ratched is unusually silent. She knows that losing Dr. Spivey's support would diminish her authority. McMurphy presents a challenge to her. She recognizes that he is thoughtful and careful about what he does and is winning all the patients to his side. He has now become a leader for them whom they trust and follow. She knows he has acquired too much power. She fears losing control over him. As she explains, "They would never

be given the opportunity to see that this man is not an - as you put it, Mr. Gideon - 'extraordinary person' (121). She understands that it will make McMurphy a hero, and controlling the patients will be a challenging task after that event. Therefore, she decides to confront him by showing his real intentions, that he is no different, and that he has his own vulnerabilities.

This is revealed when he attempts to change the daily schedule. Although the ward has a fixed schedule, it is purportedly a democratic environment where any rule or policy can be discussed and modified if there is a mutual agreement or a majority vote. McMurphy's unsuccessful attempt to win a majority vote to allow the men to watch the World Series triggers him's childish side. He does not like losing. He feels betrayed because few of the patients supported him in the voting. He lashes out at them. However, while there is a selfish reason behind his desire to alter the schedule, he also wants to teach them to take action. "It'd do you birds some good just to get the exercise lifting that arm" (95), he tells them. To illustrate the importance of being assertive, he challenges them to a wager that he can lift the cement control panel in the tub room. The patients know this is impossible, but McMurphy makes such a great effort that they begin to believe that it might not be out of the realm of possibility. "But I tried, though," he says. "Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?" (98). He gains their allegiance by inspiring them instead of diminishing them.

The ward's ostensible democracy is exposed as a sham with McMurphy's call for a second vote. When a majority vote is attained, Nurse Ratched refuses to acknowledge it. "There are forty patients on the ward, Mr. McMurphy. Forty patients, and only twenty voted. You must have a majority to change the ward policy" (110). At this injustice, McMurphy loses control, perhaps Nurse Ratched's intention. "You seem upset, Mr. McMurphy. Doesn't he seem upset,

Doctor? I want you to note this" (110). Yet, this injustice is not lost on the patients. Emboldened by McMurphy's passion and courage, they are more eager to confront it.

The ward is a microcosm, and McMurphy and Nurse Ratched's clash symbolizes the reluctance to facing power due to fear of retribution. Harding expresses this when he says, "It's still a risk, my friend. She always has the capacity to make things worse for us. A baseball game isn't worth the risk" (95).

McMurphy challenges the patients to leave their comfort zones because he needs them to develop their character if they all, including him, want to be free. He wants the patients to understand that there is no growth without sacrifice. Avoiding conflict because of potential risk allows Nurse Ratched to maintain her unchallenged totalitarian power.

The patients gain confidence after tasting victory for the first time. They start to complain and express their dissent towards the ward policies. Nevertheless, McMurphy becomes more cautious when he realizes Nurse Ratched has the power to keep him in the facility as long as she desires. She tells him, "You're committed, you realize. You are ... under the jurisdiction of me ... the staff. [...] Under jurisdiction and control" (113). McMurphy feels betrayed because nobody told him about his status. Also, he discovers that all the patients except for him, Chief, and Tabor [TK1] are there voluntarily.

McMurphy stops supporting the patients' protests. He goes under the radar; he does not want to attract attention to himself anymore. He does not explain this change to anyone, which confuses them. Nurse Ratched is able to regain control. McMurphy's self-interest becomes clear, even if justified. His encouragement and then abandonment of his mates have put them at risk.

He becomes an accomplice of Ratched's totalitarian system by surrendering to her and publically revealing his defeat.

Cheswick is a victim of this situation. Believing that he has the support of the patients and, most importantly, of McMurphy, he summons his courage and starts his confrontation against Ratched about the access to cigarettes. However, nobody backs him up, and Nurse Ratched sends him to the Disturbed Ward. Chief is surprised by Cheswick's actions; he says, "He never had looked big" (133). Cheswick has never stood up for himself to confront Nurse Ratched. And now, when he finally does it, he is left alone. This situation affects Cheswick on a deep psychological and physical level. Psychological because he loses his will to live. He felt alive when all the patients supported him before and when he supported McMurphy. Cheswick says, "We want something done about it, ain't that right, Mack? and waited for McMurphy to back him up, all he got was silence" (133). This sudden change destroys his hope. An average healthy person may overcome this situation, but it can be devastating for a person suffering from a mental illness. It results in Cheswick's death.

This is a turning point in the novel because it makes McMurphy realize his mistakes. The first one is that his submission to Ratched's power plan makes him a collaborator to her system. The second one is that until this point, he has been motivated by self-interest. He becomes aware of his role in this micro-society and responds by giving the men "the courage and the capacity to face up to their difficulties, to construct a renewed sense of self, and begin the vital process of "actualization (Scerri, 71). He is willing to return to the struggle, only this time, the stakes are higher. Recognizing the personal risks, he decides to lead them.

When Ratched and the Combine rescind the second room privileges of the Acutes, McMurphy goes into action. His clashes with Nurse Ratched are psychological. His primary weapons against her are his humor and his magnetic personality, which win him allies. The tension grows to the point of physical violence when he breaks the nurse's station window with his own hands. This outburst reveals two new aspects to the rebellion. First, McMurphy recognizes Ratched's power as being like crystal; rigid, polished, almost invisible though always present, but breakable. Second, he is not afraid of getting cut by the glass, which shows his fearlessness to fight, not only for himself but also for the other patients.

The broken glass is a symbolic victory for McMurphy and the patient. The nurse's station is a privileged vantage point for her; it represents her power and omniscience. She cannot tolerate a stain on the glass. "And I wish you wouldn't lean against the glass there, please," she tells McMurphy. "Your hands are oily and staining the window" (83). As Chief points out, "The Big Nurse looks out through her special glass, always polished till you can't tell it's there" (25). However, McMurphy's action shows the patients that, though nearly invisible, it does exist and that it is breakable.

The next clash between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched involves the idea of masculinity against femininity. McMurphy is an advocate for expressing sexuality as a way of reaffirming masculinity. As Meloy, M. (2009) puts it, "The novel thus suggests that men who do not have an outlet for their masculine sex drive will go mad ... will cease to be men" (p.11). However, sexuality, sex drive, or sexual desire can be seen as a personality component. All these traits are not masculine but human. It is part of human biology. Therefore, expressing or not expressing

sexual desire does not reaffirm a person's masculinity or femininity, but having the freedom to choose whether they express it or not reaffirms their humanity.

Nurse Ratched represses all types of personal expression by the patients. Furthermore, as Muncan B. (2017) points out, "She attempts to keep all of her patients repressed, in a quasi-dictatorial attempt to control them; sexual repression by any means is part of Ratched's master plan" (p. 1234). Sexuality plays a principal role in the novel. McMurphy describes Ratched as a "ball-cutter," but he does not address this nickname because she is a woman, as he clarifies later, "I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young, men and women" (46). McMurphy contends that Ratched is the type of person who "wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger" (46). Nevertheless, Darbyshire, P. (1995) argues that Ratched is satanized in the novel because she is a woman:

But Big Nurse's crime is far worse than general obstructiveness, for what she is obstructing and controlling are the men's traditional and seemingly only ways of being men. She prevents them from smoking, drinking, reading pornography and from watching the World Series baseball on television (p. 200).

However, seeing sexuality as a personality component helps understand that changing Ratched for a male nurse would not change the totalitarian "ball-cutter" type of character the nurse represents in the ward. Because for Nurse Ratched repressing sexuality is a calculated tactic to weaken and dehumanize the patients in order to control them.

In contrast, McMurphy seeks to empower the patients by offering them fresh and enriching experiences. He proposes a trip outside the ward out of the reach of Ratched. This

situation creates a clash for two reasons: first, McMurphy uses his influence on Dr. Spivey to authorize the trip. Second, Nurse Ratched is unable to stop it.

McMurphy wants the patients to remember and re-experience life outside the psychiatric facility, while Big Nurse wants to make them fearful of the outside world, dependent, and impotent. Nurse Ratched's only weapon to stop the fishing trip is to make the patients not want to go. Therefore, she starts sabotaging it. As Chief describes her actions, "the nurse started steadily bringing in clippings from the newspapers that told about wrecked boats and sudden storms on the coast" (161). She knows the patients are insecure, and bringing written public corroboration of her claims will terrorize them no matter what McMurphy says to the contrary. McMurphy struggles to fill all the spots, but he finally succeeds, convincing Chief and George Sorenson.

McMurphy's actions, personality expressions, and jokes have helped Chief to regain confidence and self-reflection. Chief feels "everything coming to him just as natural as drawing breath, and I'd quit worrying about the Big Nurse and the Combine behind her" (124).

McMurphy's individuality impacts Chief because McMurphy is unshackled. He does what he feels is right and expresses himself without worrying about what other people think. Chief realizes that McMurphy is a normal human being with feelings, worries, and insecurities. This awareness helps Chief understand that McMurphy's individuality is what makes him "big" or extraordinary and not his physical or rugged appearance. He reflects, "How could a man who looked like him paint pictures or write letters to people?" (125). Also, Chief concludes that the answer to that question is that McMurphy "hadn't let what he looked like run his life one way or the other" (125). This reflection makes Chief look at himself and long to be "big" again. It is why

he decides to trust McMurphy with his recovery, keep his secret about not being deaf and dumb, and attend the fishing trip.

After convincing Dr. Spivey, McMurphy and the patients leave the ward and distance themselves from Nurse Ratched. The patients feel freedom for the first time in years. They do not have anyone to tell them what to do, any orders to follow, or any judgemental stare that makes them feel guilty. McMurphy succeeds in taking the patients out of their habitually monitored routine. However, he faces two difficulties because of this.

First, The patients feel like zoo animals when they are released into the wild. They have been kept under control for so long that they do not know how to behave. This situation makes them feel afraid of not belonging, to the point of wanting to return to their cage. As Chief points out, "Everybody was thinking how easy it would be to return to the ward, go back and say they decided the nurse had been right" (181). Even though they are outside, Nurse Ratched is still in their heads, and the uniforms they wear are a reminder of her and how sick they are supposed to be.

There are two approaches to this obstacle. Dr. Spivey, although unintentionally, denies the singularity of the group by lying to the service-station man; he says, "Yes. No, I mean. We, they are from the asylum, but they are a work crew, not inmates, of course not. A work crew" (182). He lies in front of the patients, reinforcing their thought of not belonging. As Chief confirms, "The doctor's lying made us feel worse than ever - not because of the lie, so much, but because of the truth" (182). This approach teaches them to repress their singularity to fit into society, as Ratched shows them in the ward.

However, McMurphy's approach does the opposite. He teaches the patients to express their personality with great force and embrace all its aspects, even those they believe are negative. As he exaggerates their mental illness, "The doc wouldn't lie like that about just any patients, but we ain't ordinary nuts; we're every bloody one of us hot off the criminal-insane ward" (183). McMurphy makes them understand that their weakness can be their strength if they use it correctly. This approach fills the patients with confidence and makes them feel powerful; as Martini says, "Never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power [...] perhaps the more insane a man is, the more powerful he could become." (184). McMurphy allows the patients to acknowledge their "insanity" as a superpower and even change the lousy connotation they have of their uniforms into their super suits. As Chief confirms, "everybody was feeling cocky as fighting roosters and calling orders to the service-station guys" (184).

McMurphy's second difficulty comes from the fact that the patients have become dependent on him to act. They feel more powerful, free, and comfortable with themselves than before, but they cannot ignite this confidence when McMurphy is not present. It is seen at the docks with the men that were bullying them when McMurphy left. As Chief reflects, "We weren't the cocky bunch that was back at the service station" (187). After the ship is out of the docks, McMurphy adopts a different behavior. He relaxes and acts uninterested in the patient's needs and claims. They call him when things get complicated, "McMurphy, we need some help!" (192). He never answers and watches them while laughing. His attitude addresses the problem of patients' dependence. He wants them to understand that being free also means to stand by themselves in any situation. As they eventually do, "Harding finally saw McMurphy wasn't going to do anything, so he got the gaff and jerked my fish into the boat" (192). This

strategy is successful and helps the patients' individuality grow because they manage to solve the problems independently and celebrate their success (in the form of the big fish), regaining not only their confidence but also the respect and admiration of the men at the docks.

When they return to the ward, Nurse Ratched and the staff witness the change in the patients. She notices the patients and the doctor are more loud and confident and that this adventure has made them bond with each other, but most worryingly for her, she sees the change in McMurphy.

She understands this is a big menace for her methodology of control, and she immediately tries to mitigate this damage by attacking the trust the patients have in McMurphy. She reveals all the patient's financial statements to show how McMurphy's funds have increased while theirs have decreased. Her purpose is to change the image the patients have of McMurphy and destroy their trust in him.

After the trip, McMurphy adopts a more reserved attitude than before because he seems low on energy, thoughtful, and worried. As Chief describes McMurphy's expression, "he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and frantic" (199). McMurphy's childhood memories and the responsibility he feels about facilitating the patients' recovery are overwhelming him and wearing him down. This behavior is why Big Nurse's strategy works and undermines McMurphy's image significantly. Even the patients closest to him, like Chief, start wondering about his real intentions. They begin to doubt him and talk behind his back. As McMurphy realizes later when he has a conversation with Chief, "What's wrong with me around here all of a sudden? You birds act like I'm a traitor to my country" (207). Chief explains to McMurphy that they thought he had helped them regain their confidence and

singularity because of goodwill and not for "winning things!" (207). Thus, Nurse Ratched's plan accomplishes her goal of downgrading him from a hero into a greedy egoist.

The next confrontation addresses the idea of "sane" versus "insane." Nurse Ratched and McMurphy have different ideas about it. McMurphy describes a "sane" person as someone free to decide for himself and express what he wants or desires. Just as Rogers, C. (1951) states that "we feel free when choices are available to us." and a "fully- Functioning person acknowledges that feeling of freedom and takes responsibility for his choices." whereas "insane" is the total opposite, someone who betrays his beliefs and values to satisfy the desires and needs of others only to fit in or to be liked, such as, at the beginning of the novel, when Harding submits to Nurse Ratched with the excuse that he "was born a rabbit. Just look at me. I simply need the nurse to make me happy with my role" (50). McMurphy only refers to the patients as crazy when they adopt a submissive rabbit-like position. The rest of the time, he encourages them and tries to convince them of "how sane you guys all are. As near as I can tell you're not any crazier than the average asshole on the street" (50).

On the other hand, Nurse Ratched describes a "sane" person as an obedient person who does what she says and an "insane" one as someone who breaks the rules (even if they are arbitrary) or does something she does not like. This can be seen when she orders a cleansing for all the patients who went on the fishing trip because being outside the ward and not following her ways means being "insane."

Nurse Ratched uses her previous control mechanisms to ensure the patient's submission: fear and physical force. She applies fear to subjugate the patients who went on the trip by affirming they could have gotten sick or brought pests that can put at risk the health of all the

ward members. She is not big or strong, but she applies physical force through the Combine's power (the three black boys), who are extensions of her power. She is aware that George suffers from a cleanliness phobia, which is a weak point she can use to create a conflict, and she is not hesitant to use it.

Thanks to McMurphy, the patients' confidence is strong enough to resist Ratched's tactics of fear. They have grown and loosened up to the point of laughing and joking about the cleansing and the Combine. As one of the black boys reflects, "This wasn't the way things used to be before that damned redhead came around" (208). The patients are no longer afraid of the aids; they feel invulnerable. They finally understand that their role in this micro-society can be active, that they can participate instead of only being passive spectators. However, the abuse the aids administer to George, following instructions from Ratched, succeeds. McMurphy's frustration has built up from hearing Chief say that his actions have always been for his own benefit. Also, his weariness from being a leader and a support for the patients combined with George's helplessness cause him to lose his calm and make the mistake of reacting physically.

Even though this mistake gives an excuse to Ratched to send him to the disturbed ward and undergo electroshock, his action also shows the patients that McMurphy can risk himself for their well-being, which helps regain their trust. The sacrifice also convinces Chief of his own recovery, and he demonstrates it by helping McMurphy face the Combine. After acknowledging his confidence and strength, Chief frees himself from the control and "fog" produced by Nurse Ratched and everything looks easier. He reflects, "So I picked him off and threw him in the shower. He was full of tubes; he didn't weigh more'n ten or fifteen pounds" (212). Chief always refers to the orderlies as "the big black boys," but he sees them as petite and insignificant after he

regains his individuality. After this event and the electroshock therapy, Chief feels fully recovered and ready to leave the ward.

This clash is resolved by a face-to-face confrontation between the main characters. Nurse Ratched tells McMurphy that "All he has to do is admit he was wrong" (216). She offers him an option to avoid electroshock therapy. However, this option means admitting that defending the respect of George's singularity was a mistake, and it would also be a surrender in front of all the members in the ward. It would mean admitting that his rebellion was wrong and setting back all the patients' progress up to this point. McMurphy decides to become a martyr by replying, "And why don't you add some other things while you're at it [...] like how I think life on your ward is the sweetest goddamned life this side of Hawaii" (216). Moreover, before receiving electroshock therapy, he compares himself and evokes the imagery of Jesus Christ by asking for his "crown of thorns" (218). This comparison foreshadows his decision to die for his people, and it is the introduction to the novel's concluding confrontation.

The final showdown can be seen in terms of rebellion versus totalitarianism. The separation and the lack of information accelerates the patients' imagination and tell stories about McMurphy heroism. This situation obliges Nurse Ratched to bring him back from the disturbed ward to show them that he is no hero, but rather a weak human being under her control. The patients, however, have become more rebellious, as is seen in their escape plan for McMurphy: "We'd wait until dark, set a mattress on fire, and when the firemen come we'll rush him out the door" (225). Without McMurphy's leadership or any other support, the patients prove how confident and independent they have become. They have recovered and are now singular people who wish to protect McMurphy's singularity without fear of Ratched or the consequences.

The totalitarianism perpetuated by Big Nurse limits freedom and completely eradicates enjoyment. That is why McMurphy expresses throughout the novel many types of rebellion; he uses humor, sex, dialogue, civil disobedience, adventure, freedom, and even physicality. However, their last and maximum expression of rebellion against the totalitarian power of Nurse Ratched is the "going-away party," where they are "drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold!" (235). The McMurphy-inspired rebellion succeeds, and the result is a powerless Nurse Ratched. She becomes a spectator in what becomes a microcosm of drunk and disorderly but singular and free patients.

Before the party is over, the patients and McMurphy share a final moment of reflection, which confirms the immense growth and rehumanizing they have attained. As Harding explains to McMurphy, they are "just like all of us. They're still sick men in lots of ways. But at least there's that: they are sick men now. No more rabbits, Mack" (237). As Harding points out, he does not heal them from their mental problems, but he helps them to find the will to recover. Most impressively, as Harding confirms when McMurphy proposes that he escape with him, "No, you don't understand. I'll be ready in a few weeks. But I want to do it on my own, by myself, right out that front door" (237).

The showdown ends with Nurse Ratched guilt-tripping Billy Bibbit for his actions; she exploits his weakness to the point of crushing his will to live, her methodology of control throughout the novel: having dead-inside patients who do not care about recovering. This action is also her way of retaining power and subduing the rebellion. Nevertheless, McMurphy forfeits his life by attacking Big Nurse to ensure she cannot undo all their progress. Furthermore, Chief

ends McMurphy's life to make sure Nurse Ratched cannot use him as a symbol of fear to keep her totalitarian regimen: and by doing that, he assures McMurphy forever portrays a symbol of rebellion for the other patients.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a microcosm of a totalitarian society inside a psychiatric hospital under Nurse Ratched's authority. A new patient, Randall McMurphy, inspires the patients to break the pattern by showing them that they are individuals with singular traits, hopes, flaws, and dreams.

The confrontations between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched increase in tension throughout the novel. Nurse Ratched segregates the patients by labeling them according to the severity of their condition, while McMurphy treats them as his equal. He rejects classifications and respects their differences. He changes the paradigm of the ward from competition to collaboration.

While Nurse Ratched exerts control through psychological pressure, physical dominance, and manipulation, McMurphy gains the patients' trust and shows them a different approach to life. Big Nurse imposes her leadership while McMurphy earns the role. Even though both seek power, they differ in the ways to attain and use it.

Nurse Ratched undermines the patients by exposing their secrets, problems, and vulnerabilities to destroy their self-confidence and to pit them against one another. In contrast, McMurphy teaches them not to take themselves seriously; he teaches them to accept their flaws with pride and use them for their advantage.

Nurse Ratched uses force to dehumanize the patients. She systematically deprives them of joy, confidence, and privacy. The patients have no alone time to reflect, and when they are together, Big Nurse prevents them from connecting through mechanisms such as playing loud music. On the contrary, McMurphy uses his social skills to humanize and empower the patients.

He teaches the patients by example. He expresses his desires and wills unapologetically, and he speaks out on their behalf. This kind of behavior inspires the patients, and when they begin to change, Nurse Ratched feels that her power is being threatened. She attempts to sabotage any projects or activities, using fear to compel their obedience.

Sexuality plays a principal role in the novel. Big Nurse tries to repress the patients' most primal instincts, whereas McMurphy encourages them to express their sexuality and embrace their singularity.

Another key topic is sanity versus insanity. McMurphy maintains that a sane person expresses and protects his free will, while for Ratched, sanity is defined by unquestioning obedience and submission.

Thus totalitarianism is perpetuated by depriving the individuals' singularity expressions and enjoyment, while McMurphy's rebellion takes the form of humor, sexuality, dialogue, civil disobedience, adventure, freedom, and even physicality. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, McMurphy, the voice of rebellion confronts Nurse Ratched's control through repression.

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