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Power and control in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se bude věnovat románu amerického autora Kena Keseyho *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* [česky *Vyhoďte ho z kola ven/Přelet nad hnízdem kukačky*]. V úvodu práce student stručně charakterizuje tvorbu zvoleného autora, zařadí jej do dobového literárně-kulturního kontextu a nadefinuje pojmy, s nimiž bude ve svých analýzách pracovat. Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraného románu, v níž se student soustředí mimo jiné na téma moci, kontroly, manipulace, genderu, světa psychiatrického oddělení jako mikrokosmu (a v tomto světle nahlédne i metody psychiatrické léčby zmiňované v díle). Zhodnotí rovněž použité literární techniky a jejich účinnost vzhledem k tématu románu. Své analýzy bude student vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Román může porovnat s filmovou adaptací. Může se rovněž zamyslet nad vhodností českých překladů názvu románu.

Závěrem student své analýzy shrne a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěr o tematice Keseyho díla.

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**Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's One flew over the Cuckoo's nest - Daniel J. Vitkus**

**Operation of Ideology in Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest - Sima Farshid**

**Origin and Authority in One flew over the cuckoos nest - Thomas Scally**

**Postmodernism and Modernism in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**

**Madness, Power and the Media - Class, Gender and Race in Popular**

**Representations of Mental Distress - Stephen Harper**

**The Third Space in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's - Barry Ryan**

**The Vanishing American Identity Crisis in Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest - Elaine Ware**

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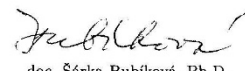
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## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis examines the illustration of power and control in the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey. The theoretical part introduces the historical and literary situation in America during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and briefly presents the author's life and work. The primary aim of this thesis is to highlight and analyze every illustration of power and control in the novel and their connection to Kesey's social criticism.

## **KEYWORDS**

power, control, manipulation, gender, emasculation, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,

## **NÁZEV PRÁCE**

Moc a kontrola v díle Kena Keseyho *Přelet nad hnízdem kukačky*

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá ilustrací síly a moci v knize *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem*, od autora Kena Keseyho. Teoretická část této práce představuje historickou a literární situaci v Americe v pozdních letech dvacátého století a také prezentuje autorův život a jeho tvorbu. Hlavním cílem práce je vyznačení a následná analýza všech ilustrací síly a moci v díle, a vyslovení jejich spojitosti s autorovou kritikou americké společnosti.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

moc, kontrola, manipulace, pohlaví, emaskulace, *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem*

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## INTRODUCTION

Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* contains illustrations of many different issues of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century America. This bachelor thesis focuses primarily on the illustration of power, manipulation, and gender in the novel. The aim of this paper is to perform a detailed analysis of all these issues in order to clearly formulate the novel's general theme.

This thesis contains a theoretical part as well as a practical part. Each chapter consists of theoretical information such as providing historical background and defining the key concepts that are essential for performing the following analyses that serve as the practical part.

A part of this introductory chapter is a brief description of the socio-cultural situation in America during the 1950s and '60s. This description helps the reader to better understand Ken Kesey's reason for writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. This description is situated at the end of this chapter.

The first chapter following the introduction presents Ken Kesey's life and work. It focuses on how Kesey's life experiences influenced his work and highlights the most important events in his career as a writer. After introducing Kesey and his life, the story of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and its primary message are also included. The chapter is finished with a brief analysis of the literary techniques used in the novel to best express the author's idea.

The second chapter deals with the primary analytical objective of this thesis, which is the illustration of power and control in the novel. It closely follows the novel's storyline and examines in detail each demonstration of power, control, and manipulation. The chapter begins with the definition of psychological manipulation, which is followed by an analysis of the characters who exercise this manipulation as well as the characters affected by it. Apart from the characters representing the issue, other features such as the setting of the story and the different tools used by the characters to achieve power are also examined.

The following chapter continues in carrying out the analysis but focuses primarily on the illustration of gender in the novel. This chapter highlights the female supremacy and the many illustrations of active emasculation of men portrayed in the novel. It also examines the issue of sexuality displayed on numerous characters and connects it to Ken Kesey's critique of modern society's stance on the individual difference. The story and the characters are analyzed in the same manner as in the previous chapter, but this time from a different point of view.



The fourth chapter tries to answer what was Ken Kesey's main motive for writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The primary focus of this chapter is to define what exact real-life events happening in America during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century does Kesey point to in his novel.

After these four main chapters, a conclusion of the thesis comes next and is followed by resumé written in Czech language and a bibliography.

Now, as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the brief sociocultural summary of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America follows.

The situation in America between the years 1950 and 1963 is generally labeled as “the best years.” At the beginning of this time period, some people were still affected by the tragic consequences of The Second World War, but the overall situation in America was improving enormously, especially in the economic sector. To set an example, Thomas C. Reeves states in his book *Twentieth-Century America* that, “Between 1945 and 1960, per capita disposable income went from \$500 to \$1,845 for every man, woman, and child.”<sup>1</sup>

During this time, the mass production was in full swing — cars, TVs, electrical appliances and even housing became affordable to majority of the population. America entered the postindustrial era with the introduction of automatization into many fields of society. This action increased manufacturing productivity and thus led to an increased quality of life and naturally also to the rise of the middle-class population. Marriage, birthrate, and education were also on a steady increase during this time.

Apart from the presence of uncertainty about the future caused by the ongoing Cold War with The Soviet Union and the lingering fear of communism from the Second Red Scare originated in the 1940s, the American people were generally very satisfied with their lives.

Entering the new era of American capitalism did not please everybody. Despite all the benefits this new age offered, some people saw it as the coming of an end to the true American freedom and individuality. This skeptical approach to the new society caused birth to new cultural and literary movements, namely The Beat Generation and The Counterculture Movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas C. Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156.

The Beat Generation was a literary movement concerned mainly with the American post-war situation of the 1950s. This movement was exploring new experimental ways of writing, including the excessive use of explicit language and drug-influenced stories.

The Counterculture movement in America has a much broader definition. Many writers of the beat generation are also described as active promoters of the counterculture. The main reason for the birth of the counterculture movement was peoples discontent with the materialistic and conformist nature of the new capitalistic America. This movement was at its peak during the 1960s but was fairly active until the mid-1970s. This movement is also often connected to the hippie subculture. The counterculture is further described in the following chapter in connection to Kesey's own work.

To illustrate a couple examples of such writing during this period — Ray Bradbury and his novel *Fahrenheit 451* published in 1953 criticized the expansion of television and with it connected decline in knowledge acquired by reading. Allen Ginsberg, a writer and a poet of the beat generation criticized the materialistic nature of this era in his poem *Howl* published in 1956, and another famous member of the beat generation Jack Kerouac gives his honest opinion on the late 20<sup>th</sup> century America in his semi-biographical novel *On the Road* published in 1957. Ken Kesey and his novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* does of course also serve as an example of successful countercultural writing.

# 1 AUTHOR'S LIFE AND WORK

Ken Kesey is considered one of the most influential American writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As said by Bruce Carnes, Kesey's work reflected some of the major social concerns of his time and the critical nature of his work has also made him one of the most critically acclaimed and controversial authors in America. The main reason for his success was the perfect mixture of his relatable opinions on modern society and the noticeable reflection of his life experiences in his work.<sup>2</sup>

Ken Kesey was born in September 17, 1935, in a small city of La Junta, Colorado. At the age of 11, he moved to Springfield, Oregon with his parents, where he later earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Oregon in 1957. During his years at Oregon University, Kesey was a football player, a wrestler and an amateur actor.<sup>3</sup> Jack Hicks describes him during this time as "a minor campus celebrity."<sup>4</sup> After graduation from Oregon University, he continued to study writing at Stanford University from 1958 to 1959. There, he started to get influenced by the Beat writers, namely Jack Kerouac. He also met his lifelong friend and a writer Ken Babbs, who would later become his business associate.<sup>5</sup> During his studies at Stanford, Kesey participated in the government's medical experiment as a test subject for new types of drugs, mainly lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and mescaline. After finishing the experiment, he applied for a part-time job as a night shift attendant at a local mental hospital. Both the drug experiment and the part-time job heavily influenced Kesey's outlook on life and inspired the story of his first published novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1962.<sup>6</sup> Ken Babbs states, that during one of Kesey's night shifts, Kesey was drinking peyote tea (LSD infused tea) and started hallucinating. Kesey has allegedly seen a tall Indian man with long black hair who then turned into a salmon, which led to his creation of Chief Bromden's

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Carnes, *Western Writers Series: Ken Kesey* (Caldwell: Boise State University, 1974), 5.

<sup>3</sup> "Ken Kesey Biography," The Oregon History Project, last modified March 17, 2018, <https://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/biographies/ken-kesey-biography/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Hicks, "The Truth Even If It Didn't Happen: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 68.

<sup>5</sup> "Ken Kesey (1935-2001)," The Oregon Encyclopedia, last modified March 17, 2018, [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/kesey\\_ken/](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/kesey_ken/).

<sup>6</sup> Hicks, "The Truth," 68.

character in the novel. Ken Babbs further states that situations like these, where Kesey's drug-influenced mind affected the story of his novel, were definitely not uncommon.<sup>7</sup>

Before his successful publication of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey wrote numerous essays, short stories, one-act plays, poems and one unpublished novel about college sports called *End of Autumn*. Unfortunately, none of these were too successful. In 1964, two years after the publication of *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey published *Sometimes a Great Notion*, a novel with a similar theme about the fight between individuality and conformity. His third major work was *Kesey's Garage Sale*, a collection of essays serving as a biographical depiction of Kesey's life experiences, published in 1973.<sup>8</sup>

Kesey is by many considered a founding father of the 1960s counter-culture movement. *Dictionary.com* defines counterculture as, "the culture and lifestyle of those people, especially among the young, who reject or oppose the dominant values and behavior of society."<sup>9</sup> To Christopher Gair, authors who represented the counterculture in America were the ones who:

...tended to appeal to what they identified as genuine "American" values, such as individual freedom of choice, as alternatives to corporate capitalism that they perceived to be corrupting American ideals.<sup>10</sup>

This definition accurately captures the main message of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Many critics claim, that the message was so powerful, that this book served as a manifesto for the counterculture movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

Jack Hicks confirms that Kesey also lived the countercultural life. His love for individualism and his practice of experimenting with drugs led him to creating a band called Merry Pranksters, which enforced the use of LSD as a method of achieving a liberation of the mind. The band called this practice "acid test" which later became an inspiration to Tom Wolfe and his non-fiction book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, depicting Kesey's band and their drug-influenced bus trip across America. Kesey's eccentric lifestyle also caused a lot of problems with the law. Kesey was charged with possession of Marijuana, to which he reacted by staging his death and temporarily escaping to Mexico. On his return to America in 1965, he was caught and imprisoned for six months. After serving his sentence, Kesey moved to a farm

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<sup>7</sup> Kurt Anderson, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," September 20, 2013, in *Studio 360: American Icons*, produced by Public Radio International, podcast, MP3 audio, 52:41, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/american-icons-one-flew-over-the-cuckoos-nest/>.

<sup>8</sup> Hicks, "The Truth," 69.

<sup>9</sup> "Definition of counterculture," *Dictionary.com*, accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/counterculture>.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 26.

near Eugene, Oregon with his family and worked as a professor of writing at the University of Oregon. In 1992, he published his third and last novel *Sailor Song*. Ken Kesey died in 2001 at the age of 66 due to complications following his surgery for liver cancer.<sup>11</sup>

Before continuing to the next chapter analyzing the individual issues illustrated in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a brief introduction of the novel and its success is essential.

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is in its core a story about the fight between individuality and a system requiring complete conformity. The story is situated in a mental asylum somewhere in Oregon during the late 1950s. The narrator of the story Chief Bromden describes a battle between a swaggering gambler Randle Patrick McMurphy representing the free and careless part of the human character and Nurse Ratched, representation of the evil authority demanding total conformity to the system. Kesey uses the mental asylum as a microcosm for American society. Patients of the hospital are illustrated as helpless and vulnerable, with no power against the staff that tries to eliminate their individual differences.

In 1963, a year after its publication, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was adopted into a Broadway play by the American playwright Dale Wasserman. A movie adaptation of the novel directed by a Czech director Miloš Forman has also been made and premiered in 1975. Although the movie adaptation achieved great success and won many awards, Ken Kesey disliked it very much. Anderson notes that the main reason for his critique of the movie was because it completely ignored Chief Bromden's side of the story and focused mainly on the character of McMurphy.<sup>12</sup>

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* also holds the 49<sup>th</sup> place on *America Library Association's* Top 100 Banned books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which only proves how powerful the book's message must have been. Throughout the years from 1971 to 2000, it was banned from the educational institutions in 9 different American states for reasons such as stating it was pornographic, glorifying criminal activity and including torture and death.<sup>13</sup>

It is also important to define the different literary techniques used to express the novel's powerful message most efficiently.

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<sup>11</sup> Hicks, "The Truth," 71.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, "Studio 360."

<sup>13</sup> "Top 100 banned novels of the 20th century," American Library Association, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bbwlinks&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=136590>.

The story uses first-person narration, which as Kesey states in his letter to Ken Babbs, was really difficult for him to implement, “The book I have been doing is a third person work, but something was lacking, . . . so I tried something that will be extremely difficult to pull off.”<sup>14</sup> The problem with the narrator of the story Chief Bromden is that he is an unreliable narrator. He suffers from schizophrenia and thus portrays the story according to his own perception of his surroundings: hallucinatory and hyperbolic.<sup>15</sup> This forces the reader to use his own critical thinking and decide for himself what is real and what is only an exaggeration. A good example of his hyperbolic narration is his description of McMurphy as a big, muscular and strong man, which can be interpreted as Bromden only romanticizing his idol instead of describing his real appearance. Zubizarreta states that in case the reader omits the intricacy of the narrator's unreliable point of view, the novel becomes a straightforward hero narrative, which is exactly the result of Miloš Forman's movie adaptation of the novel.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Daniel Viktus notes that Bromden's imaginative narration is what makes the novel:

A tour de force of first-person narration. The Chief sees a whole analogical system that serves, metaphorically, to define the inhumanity of a society that demands total conformity.<sup>17</sup>

Bromden's narration also displays a stream of consciousness perspective — most of the book's narration is in the form of his immediate thoughts and feelings.

To conclude this point, the novel is full of metaphors, hyperboles, and overstatements, which are used by Kesey to achieve the most surreal and shocking impression on the reader.

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<sup>14</sup> John Zubizarreta, “The Disparity of Point of View in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1994): 63.

<sup>15</sup> Zubizarreta, “The Disparity,” 64.

<sup>16</sup> Zubizarreta, “The Disparity,” 65.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Viktus, “Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 1, no. 14 (1994): 72.

## 2 ISSUE OF POWER AND CONTROL

Issue of power and control achieved by psychological manipulation and other techniques is clearly one of the main themes of the novel. The powerless atmosphere and the state of subordination are expressed all throughout the work, both in the narrator's thoughts and the story itself. Ken Kesey illustrates this problem mainly through the characters of Miss Ratched, McMurphy and their influence on the patients of the ward.

Psychological manipulation is defined by *The American Legal Dictionary* as a type of social influence used by a person or a company to control a behavior of other people. To achieve the control, psychological manipulation uses techniques such as psychological abuse, brainwashing, bullying, and emotional blackmail.<sup>18</sup>

The ultimate representation of manipulation and power abuse is introduced by the narrator Chief Bromden at the beginning of the novel as the Combine. Daniel Viktus notes in his analytical paper of the novel, that Combine is an enormous system of machinery converting human flesh and individuality to a world of machines with freedomless conformity.<sup>19</sup> Barry Ryan also defines the Combine in his essay, "At the beginning of the narrative the Combine is viewed by Bromden as being an elusive entity that has the power to permeate and control everyone."<sup>20</sup> From the story, it is apparent that Chief Bromden suffers from a mental disorder, likely schizophrenia or a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and his negative point of view on the whole asylum is rather exaggerated. He views the psychiatric hospital as, "a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is."<sup>21</sup> From this piece of text from the novel, it is clear, that Chief Bromden views the asylum as a tool of modern society to "repair" any individual not conforming to its standards and thus create an ideal product suitable for its needs. Sima Farshid summarizes the intention of the asylum in her academic research paper as the following:

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962) narrates the story of some people who apparently suffer from mental problems and are thus treated in an asylum whose frontage of mental-health care conceals a callous controlling system whose major plan

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<sup>18</sup> "Definition of Psychological Manipulation," US Legal Dictionary, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/p/psychological-manipulation/>.

<sup>19</sup> Viktus, "Madness," 73.

<sup>20</sup> Barry Ryan, "The Third Space in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," *Moderna språk* 105, no. 2 (2011): 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 1.

is to induce and sustain submissiveness among patients rather than solving their problems.<sup>22</sup>

After introducing the creeping and ever-present power of the Combine inducing conformity on its broken products, a closer analysis of the life inside the psychiatric ward is essential in order to define all the tools and methods used to achieve power and control as well as their influence on the patients.

To begin, the setting of the story itself is an ideal illustration of a controlled area. The psychiatric ward is a clean, sterile place with set times for every part of the day. The daily routine of the ward is never disrupted, everything is in order and following strictly set rules. Every patient wears the same type of clothing, wakes up and goes back to bed at the same time and takes the same medication every day. The medication and the daily routine both achieve control over the patients by numbing their individual senses. To maintain the power on the ward and to keep the patients following all the rules, effective management of power must be available, because a careful and detailed division of power achieves its goal most efficiently. Ryan Barry summarizes the management of power used in the hospital in the following excerpt:

The systemic division of power stratifies the hospital into different departments. The staff is organized into groups of Black Orderlies, Nurses, Doctors and the wards are divided into groups of patients and staff.<sup>23</sup>

The head member of the staff managing all the power in the hospital is in the novel introduced as Nurse Ratched, by the patients called “The Big Nurse.” She represents the ideal executor of the Combine’s will and is described by the narrator as the most suitable individual for the job of fixing up the broken products of society. This character is the main antagonist of the story and the primary illustration of power imposing and manipulative person. Miss Ratched is further portrayed as a middle-aged lady, not too old and not too young, with an army background and a passion for power, control, and manipulation. She is a master of deception, hiding her emotions behind an expressionless face. What is the primary motive for her actions is not directly mentioned in the novel, though many critics think her character means well and is unaware of her destructive actions. With the use of her abilities, she runs the most efficient ward in the hospital, controlling the most patients with the least amount of staff, which only confirms how good of a manipulator she is, Ryan Barry notes.<sup>24</sup> Chief Bromden describes her

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<sup>22</sup> Sima Farshid, “Operation of Ideology in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (October 2014): 25.

<sup>23</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 39.

<sup>24</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 39.



as a mysterious evil machine, which proves how well she hides her true self behind a well-thought-out act. She is excellent at her job and each of her actions has its precise purpose. Sima Farshid states that Miss Ratched, “represents the authorities of the institution which in turn stand for the governing power of the society which forces people to conform to their standards of behavior.”<sup>25</sup> Following this description, it can be stated that Miss Ratched represents Ken Kesey's criticism of authorities blindly following the government's orders and forbidding their individual sense of what is right and wrong. The narrator further describes Miss Ratched's controlling abilities as well as the true intention of her actions in the two following pieces of text from the novel:

She has the ability to turn her smile into whatever expression she wants to use on somebody, but the look she turns it into is no different, just a calculated and mechanical expression to serve her purpose.<sup>26</sup>

What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren't Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronicles with catheter tubes run direct from every pantleg to the sewer under the floor.<sup>27</sup>

Her mechanical and calculated behavior is designed to appear to the patients as a professional approach with good intentions, while her true character and her intentions remain unseen. Farshid describes her refined style of persuasion in the following text:

She never rejects an idea directly, but by a special choice of words persuades the patients to believe that their needs are in the center of her concerns, and thereby turns them into submissive subjects.<sup>28</sup>

To Chief Bromden, who as previously mentioned suffers from schizophrenia, she appears as a literal machine made of electric parts and running on oil, with her own mechanical control panel capable of producing a thick fog and manipulating time. These attributes from Bromden's point of view make her a godlike entity with the ability to control and manipulate everything. To also appear godlike and superior to the other patients of the ward, Miss Ratched uses different instruments and techniques to impose her power. Apart from her skill of hiding emotions and always appearing as the one in power of the situation, she has many more weapons in her

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<sup>25</sup> Farshid, “Operation of Ideology,” 20.

<sup>26</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Farshid, “Operation of Ideology,” 18.

arsenal. Ryan Barry notes that, “Ratched’s modes of power and control are her gaze, insinuations, and Black Orderlies that perform ‘her bidding.’”<sup>29</sup>

The black orderlies together with other nurses working at the hospital are all at her command, making the staff one of her most effective control-assuring tools. The staff has been carefully picked over the years to be the closest to her ideal picture of a good and submissive crew. The three black men who work on the ward to ensure a safe and clean environment are also abusing their power over the patients. They are portrayed as aggressive, rude and in the enjoyment of any wrongdoing carried out on the patients, as Bromden illustrates, “I can call to mind some mornings locked in Seclusion the black boys keep bringing seconds of everything - supposed to be for me, but they eat it instead.”<sup>30</sup> The head doctor is also under Miss Ratched’s control and has no freedom of choice. There is a moment in the story where Miss Ratched uses her power mode of insinuation to make the doctor agree with her suggestion of keeping McMurphy on the ward even though the doctor is of a right opinion that McMurphy is not mentally ill. She claims that she believes he indeed is mentally ill, and that she can rehabilitate him, while her true intention is to destroy him and thus strengthen her power status on the ward. The power superiority and yet another victory of Miss Ratched is well summarized in the following excerpt from the book:

Just sitting there, smiling up at the ceiling and not saying anything, she has taken control again and made everyone aware that she’s the force in here to be dealt with. If these boys don’t play it just right they’re liable to finish their training up in Portland at the alky hospital.<sup>31</sup>

From the text, it is evident the act of power domination is not performed only on the patients, but also on Miss Ratched’s staff. She is the ultimate power with control over everyone in the hospital and all of her orders are expected to be executed perfectly.

Next one of her tools of power and control briefly mentioned before is the medication. The patients are expected to take their daily dose of medication in the form of pills without asking any questions. At the beginning of the novel, McMurphy demonstrates what seems to the other patients to be unusual and yet is a completely standard act of requiring information on what pills are being handed to him. The nurses refuse to inform him and McMurphy is pressed into taking the medication without any rational explanation other than it is a ward policy. This is yet another instance where power over the patients is illustrated, the patient is deprived of

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<sup>29</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 40.

<sup>30</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 118.

such a primitive human right as to ask questions. It is not mentioned in the novel what exactly the medication is, but it is quite likely it is some sort of a mind-numbing substance to make the patients easier to control.

Another one of Miss Ratched's power-assuring tools is a logbook established on the ward. The logbook is wrongfully represented to the patients as a therapy tool to help them realize the cause of their mental problems. The patients are required to write any dehumanizing information about their fellow inmate's past to be later discussed at a group therapy meeting in exchange for benefits such as being able to sleep little longer the next day. If the patient does not write anything in the log book, Miss Ratched expresses her disappointment and makes him feel guilty. In reality, the logbook is a method of eliminating trust and sense of togetherness among the patients in order to make them easier to control. The patients are essentially forced to spy on each other, and all the gathered information is used in Miss Ratched's next power establishing tool, the group therapy meetings.

During the group therapy meetings, all the patients sit in a circle with nurses and the doctor present. These meetings are also portrayed to the patients as a form of therapy. They are to discuss issues they might have to find any possible reason or a solution to their struggle. The true intention of these meetings is to find a weak point in each patient, to collectively bully him and bring him down until he has no dignity and self-esteem left. Miss Ratched is of course in charge of these meetings and manipulates the group discussion toward her goal of breaking the patient. She performs the manipulation with the help of personal questions, to which there are no other answers than essentially accepting the patient's inferiority and thus submit himself to her power. McMurphy compares these group meetings to a so-called peckin' party:

The flock gets sight of a spot of blood on some chicken and they all go to peckin' at it, see, till they rip the chicken to shreds, blood and bones, and feathers.<sup>32</sup>

The control is further maintained with the help of many strict rules, so-called ward policy. These rules are set to ensure an inescapable control over the patients disguised as a necessity for establishing discipline and order in the ward. As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, every little thing in the daily life of the patient is carefully planned and any disruption of this plan is unacceptable. The ward policy consists of such rules as limited rationing of cigarettes and toothpaste, set times for watching TV and possibly anything else that would empower the patient's free will. McMurphy often mocks the extreme limitations of the ward

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<sup>32</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 44.

policy. An example in the text below is from a scene where he meets Miss Ratched while leaving from his morning shower:

He looks down at the part of the towel she's eye to eye with, and it's wet and skin tight. "Towels against ward policy too? Well, I guess there's nothin' to do exec -"33

Regardless of how ridiculous the ward policy might be, Miss Ratched makes sure each and every one of her patients follows it religiously. This is achieved by applying different levels of punishment for breaking the policy. The first and least dangerous of these punishments is limiting the patient's freedom on the ward even more than it is a standard there. Denying a visitation of the patient or just Nurse Ratched's public humiliation of the patient are the base punishments on the ward. If a patient is obedient, she makes him feel as "a good boy" for spying on his friends or enduring a public humiliation. If a patient misbehaves, and a definition of misbehavior has a much broader meaning on the ward, it means an overall state of activity the staff does not know how to react to, it is time for a real punishment.

This type of punishment is again wrongfully introduced to the patients as a form of treatment. It is in the novel called an Electro Shock Therapy (EST). *The American Psychiatry Association* talks about Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as a brief electrical stimulation of the brain used to treat major depression or bipolar disorder.<sup>34</sup> According to the narrator Chief Bromden, EST is essentially sending electricity directly to the brain, causing a brief unconsciousness. Its purpose is to execute "a hard-reset" of the brain, like is the case with computers, to treat a patient's cause of mentioned misbehavior. Even though the staff might be of an opinion that this treatment is effective, none of the patients think so. To the patients, this type of treatment serves only as a brutal punishment for breaking the ward policy and as a tool of Miss Ratched and the Combine to eliminate their individuality and thus make them conform to their role in a society. One of the patients on the ward, Mr. Harding explains the end-result of such "therapy" method:

Enough of these treatments and a man could turn out like Mr. Ellis you see over there against the wall. A drooling, pantswetting idiot at thirty-five. Or turn into a mindless organism that eats and eliminates and yells 'fuck the wife,' like Ruckly. Or look at Chief Broom clutching to his namesake there beside you."<sup>35</sup>

The final level of punishment imposed on the patients is called a lobotomy. *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines lobotomy as, "A surgical procedure in which the nerve

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<sup>33</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> "Definition of ECT," American Psychiatric Association, accessed April 16, 2019, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ect>.

<sup>35</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 53.

pathways in a lobe or lobes of the brain are severed from those in other areas.” The encyclopedia also states that this procedure was used during its time as a measure to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.<sup>36</sup> This form of a punishment means no possibility of a return. Once a lobotomy is performed on a patient, he loses all of his individual qualities and becomes so-called "vegetable" simply existing and able to perform only basic human actions such as breathing and walking. The patient has no longer the ability to think for himself, he loses its humanity and thus is ultimately defeated by the power authority, the Combine.

After analyzing all the main tools used to assure power and control illustrated in the book, the following text analyzes the main characters of the story in connection to their struggle in a fight against the authority.

The first and most important character on which the fight against control and manipulation is illustrated is the narrator, Chief Bromden. He is a tall man of mixed descent. His father was an actual chief of a Native American tribe of Chinooks named in the Indian traditional way “The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain” and his mother a modern white woman named Mary Louise Bromden. Elaine Ware states in her paper on American identity crisis illustrated in the book, that Chief Bromden suffers from an identity crisis due to his desire to keep his Indian heritage and the necessary need of being accepted by the dominant white culture.<sup>37</sup> She also states that, “Rather than a participant in two cultures, Bromden as a halfbreed becomes an outsider to both.”<sup>38</sup> Bromden describes his childhood in his memories as an idyllic Indian life filled with hunting, fishing and admiring the mature nature. As a child, Bromden views his father as a giant, big and powerful man who takes good care of his tribe. Bromden mentions the size of a person in the novel on numerous occasions. He is not talking about the psychological size but uses the size as an analogy for describing how powerful someone's character is. After Bromden's mother forces his father into selling his tribal lands to the white man hands, Bromden states that his father's size decreased as his mother's power over him increased. He says: “He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size.”<sup>39</sup> His father's size does eventually shrink to nothing in the cause of the white culture pressure followed by an addiction to alcohol. Bromden remarks this fact in the text below:

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<sup>36</sup> “Lobotomy,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/lobotomy>.

<sup>37</sup> Elaine Ware, “The Vanishing American: Identity Crisis in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” *Oxford University Press* 5, no. 3 (Autumn – Winter, 1986): 95.

<sup>38</sup> Ware, “Identity Crisis,” 97.

<sup>39</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 169.

They stood out in front of our door all holding those checks and they wanted him to tell them what to do now. They kept asking him to invest for them, or tell them where to go, or to buy a farm. But he was too little anymore. And he was too drunk, too. The Combine had whipped him. It beats everybody.<sup>40</sup>

Because of what happened to Chief Bromden during his childhood, he matures into a submissive man with low self-esteem, who paradoxically sees himself as extremely small while standing 6,7" tall. The act of the white modern culture taking away his homeland serves as a yet another example of power supremacy illustrated in the novel. As Elain Ware states, Chief Bromden's childhood is set by Ken Kesey to 1920s and '30s, a time when the American government was deciding between letting Native Americans keep their land and traditions or forcing them to adapt the dominant white culture. She further analyzes the connection between Chief Bromden's character and Ken Kesey's view on the situation of Native Americans in U.S. history. She connects the situation with Chief Bromden's father to Ken Kesey's issue with The Dawes Act of 1887, when American government reduced the tribal land holdings and instead allocated about 160 acres of land to the individual Indian chiefs. This act represented the government's failure to integrate Native Americans into modern American culture. As a result, many Indians who sold their lands and were not accustomed to the management of money quickly lost their monetary possessions, fell into debts and turned to drinking in order to numb their feelings of shame and lost pride.<sup>41</sup>

The power supremacy of the white culture over the Indians continues to be illustrated in a part of the novel where in Bromden's memories as a kid, a white man with intention of buying the Indian land comes to their village and openly insults, among other things, their housing, "I, for one, am not going inside that hovel,"<sup>42</sup> In this example, Ken Kesey portrays how the white man's culture is taken as more important and thus supreme, instead of viewing the Indians as a culture with different values, but equal.<sup>43</sup> On another occasion, the white supremacy is again illustrated, when Bromden's grandmother dies and his family is forced to bury her according to the white culture custom instead of burying her high in the trees as is their Chinook tradition. In this case, the Bromden's family defeats the power authority by later digging her from the grave and finally burying her in their own traditional way.

Bromden's life is further influenced by the white people by their stereotypical assumption that Indians are not able to read, write or speak English. This stereotype means

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<sup>40</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Ware, "Identity Crisis," 95.

<sup>42</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 163.

<sup>43</sup> Ware, "Identity Crisis," 98.

people did not really talk to him, and that caused Bromden to gradually stop trying to engage with them. Though not clearly said in the novel, over the course of time, Bromden stopped speaking completely, which led to people viewing him as deaf and dumb. He himself explains, “It wasn’t me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all.”<sup>44</sup> This attribute of Bromden’s is actually his own weapon in the fight against control. As Elain Ware states, “Bromden chooses silence as a survival technique.”<sup>45</sup> and Thomas Scally agrees, “His disguise as a deaf-mute guarantees a certain immunity from the horrors of the ward.”<sup>46</sup> With everybody on the ward, both the staff and the patients, thinking he is deaf and dumb, Bromden also acquires certain privileges such as being allowed to staff meetings to clean. This means he is able to listen to such conversations no patient would ever be allowed to hear.

To move on from Ken Kesey’s illustration of power imposed on Indians by modern American culture, an analysis of Bromden’s own fight against power and control on the ward follows next.

At the beginning of the novel, Bromden is well used to comply and obey the authority without showing any resistance. To set an example of how low he thinks of himself, Chief Bromden never reveals his first name. Elain Ware states that, “Bromden's failure to reveal his first name seems to be an indication of his problems because other Indians including his father emphasize their first name.”<sup>47</sup> Another example of his submission is the name given to him by the staff of the ward, which is Chief Broom. This nickname is given to him by the black boys because they order him to sweep the floor of the ward every morning and he never even contemplates the option to disagree.

Throughout the story, Bromden undergoes a big development of his character. As explained by Barry Ryan, at the beginning of the novel Bromden expresses how the system, the Combine, is an undefeatable power which he fears the most. With the progression of the story, however, Bromden begins to realize with the help of external factors (mainly the character of McMurphy), that the Combine is not much more than just a labeling social process that has its limitations and can be overpowered.<sup>48</sup> The first significant event during which Bromden

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<sup>44</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 161.

<sup>45</sup> Ware, “Identity Crisis,” 97.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Scally, “Origin and Authority: An Analysis of the Relation Between Anonymity and Authorship in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” *Dalhousie Review* 62, no. 3 (1982): 362.

<sup>47</sup> Ware, “Identity Crisis,” 96.

<sup>48</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 41.

realizes the power domination can be fought against is a vote among the patients to change the ward policy and watch the TV in an irregular hour. During this scene, Bromden interacts with the other patients on the ward for the first time in a while, even if it means such a minuscule action as is lifting his hand to vote. At this moment, Bromden realizes he is not that "small" and invisible as he thought, and this realization gives him his first dash of hope on his journey to becoming "big" and strong again. During the vote, he also discovers that it is possible to act against Miss Ratched's will and that the patients as a group can make a difference in her system.

To further continue the analysis of Chief Bromden's liberation from the Combine's usurpation, it is important to introduce the character of McMurphy and Bromden's relationship with him, because this character is mostly responsible for the recovery of Bromden's confidence and self-esteem. Thomas Scally supports this thought as he expresses his opinion on Bromden's journey:

The novel is the story of his movement under undisciplined imagining to the place of narrative, from a kind of speechless terror to the song of his own self-transcendence. It is his affinity with McMurphy, the swaggering gambler and yarn-spinner, which makes this growth and this journey possible.<sup>49</sup>

The character of Randle Patrick McMurphy illustrates an anarchist, gambler and an enemy of authority and order. He is an outgoing "ladies' man" always happy and laughing as well as very smart. His physical appearance is also very different from the rest of the patients. He is strong and masculine, representing the masculinity rest of the patients have been gradually deprived of. It is apparent that he represents the polar-opposite of Miss Ratched. He is, just like her, capable of controlling and manipulating people, but with different intentions. Unlike Miss Ratched, McMurphy sympathizes with the patients and views them as people not any more insane than people in the outside world, "I mean - hell, I been surprised how sane you guys all are. As near as I can tell you're not any crazier than the average asshole on the street."<sup>50</sup> Soon after his arrival at the hospital, he becomes a leader figure to the patients who admire his positive attitude and to them a very different character. Ryan Barry describes his influence on the patients in the following text:

McMurphy changes the relationship between the patients and staff from one of dependency to one of interdependency, whereby the patients become empowered, allowing them to reject the normalizing procedures of Nurse Ratched.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Scally, "Origin and Authority," 359.

<sup>50</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Ryan, "Third Space," 45.



Sima Farshid also notes that McMurphy creates a sense of comradeship on the ward. The patients no longer spy on each other and instead go through a real therapeutic experience. They begin to believe in themselves and are motivated to think and stand up for their rights.<sup>52</sup> One of the patients in the story, Mr. Harding also explains the difference between McMurphy and the rest of the patients:

Mr. McMurphy ... my friend ... I'm not a chicken, I'm a rabbit. The doctor is a rabbit. Cheswick there is a rabbit. Billy Bibbit is a rabbit. All of us in here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees, hippity-hopping through our Walt Disney world. Oh, don't misunderstand me, we're not in here because we are rabbits - we'd be rabbits wherever we were - we're all in here because we can't adjust to our rabbithood. We need a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place.<sup>53</sup>

McMurphy's positive influence on the patients is unacceptable for Miss Ratched, who can see how he disrupts her outreach of power. She, therefore, does all that is in her power to stop and destroy him. What both the characters of the story, Miss Ratched and McMurphy have in common is that they are manipulators, as said by Mr. Harding, they are wolves. They are both quite good at using their manipulative skills to their benefit, which indicates that the main conflict in the novel will be between the two of them and their influence on the rest of the patients (rabbits) on the ward. It can be interpreted simply as a battle between good and evil — two main characters with the same power, only using it for a different cause.

McMurphy is depicted by many critics as the protagonist of the story with Bromden as the narrator, though in Barry Ryan's view both Chief Bromden and McMurphy act as an agentic pair in depicting the fight against power and control. He further explains how they are complementing each other, McMurphy is helping Bromden psychically with his mental support and Bromden is helping McMurphy physically with his strength. This synergy makes them both the protagonists of the story.<sup>54</sup>

Chief Bromden shows his inclination towards McMurphy in many passages of the book. McMurphy is in many ways reminding Bromden his father before the Combine destroyed him: big, strong, and fearless. The quality Bromden admires the most about McMurphy is that he seems to be untouchable by the Combine. Bromden tries to find the reasoning for McMurphy's remarkable resistance to control in the following paragraph:

Maybe he grew up so wild all over the country, batting around from one place to another, never around one town longer'n a few months when he was a kid so a school

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<sup>52</sup> Farshid, "Operation of Ideology," 19.

<sup>53</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Ryan, "Third Space," 42.

never got much a hold on him...keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed.<sup>55</sup>

McMurphy is also the only person on the ward to whom Bromden reveals the truth that he is not deaf, nor dumb. This act shows how much trust Bromden puts in McMurphy, stripping himself of his main defensive mechanism and showing his true self. McMurphy in return promises Bromden that he will make him “big” again, which is in fact the end-result of their relationship. Bromden’s almost love-like affection towards McMurphy is well expressed in a piece of text from the book below:

He’s layin’ awful quiet, I told myself, I ought to touch him to see if he’s still alive ... That’s a lie. I know he’s still alive. That ain’t the reason I want to touch him. I want to touch him because he’s a man. That’s a lie too. There’s other men around. I could touch them. I want to touch him because I’m one of these queers! But that’s a lie too. That’s one fear hiding behind another. If I was one of these queers I’d want to do other things with him. I just want to touch him because he’s who he is.<sup>56</sup>

McMurphy also illustrates numerous examples of actively fighting against power and control. Unlike Chief Bromden, McMurphy does so openly and fearlessly. He uses every opportunity he can get to show the other patients that Miss Ratched is also only a human. He tries to achieve this goal by getting her angry enough to break her machine-like act and reveal her true self. He does so on many occasions: forcing the vote among the patients to change the ward policy, assembling a gambling room in an old shower room originally used for a hydrotherapy (old method of treating mental illness), repeatedly breaking a glass window of Nurse Ratched’s head-office, and finally organizing a fishing trip where he steals a boat. According to Ryan Barry, the window McMurphy repeatedly breaks represents a cultural boundary maintaining order on the ward by separating the staff and the patients.<sup>57</sup>

McMurphy also uses his skill of manipulation on the patients. Although with not such disastrous consequences, he manipulates them for his own good. In the previously mentioned instance where McMurphy forces a vote to change the TV time, not many patients vote for his wish at first, but he uses his popularity among them to finally persuade them to vote. To set another example, McMurphy also uses his gambling skills to win cigarettes from the patients by establishing a gambling room and playing games the patients are not good at as well as constantly proposing bets on which he has an edge. To illustrate this point, “McMurphy talked

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<sup>55</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 46.

them into making the game interesting by paying a penny for every play dollar the bank issues them; the monopoly box is loaded with change.”<sup>58</sup>

After the introduction of McMurphy and his connection to Chief Bromden, the analysis of Bromden’s gradual liberation from the power domination can be resumed.

As previously stated, the first occasion on which Bromden realizes that the Combine’s outreach has its limits is the vote among the patients. The second occasion playing a big role in Bromden’s character development is the fishing trip. McMurphy surprisingly compels Miss Ratched to allow the patients to go on a trip as a supposed form of therapy. A therapy it is indeed because the patients finally get out of the ward and McMurphy shows them the bright side of life. For Bromden this trip is a breaking point in the way he views himself. Apart from having sincere fun and enjoying himself, Bromden learns how to fight the negative forces in life:

While McMurphy laughs. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, spreading his laugh out across the water - laughing at the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier and the bicycle rider and the service-station guys and the five thousand houses and the Big Nurse and all of it. Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy.<sup>59</sup>

Bromden reflects on McMurphy’s actions on his way from the trip back to the hospital, “McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I’d remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid’s poetry to me.”<sup>60</sup> As Ryan Barry states, after this experience Bromden sees McMurphy less as the extraordinary man whom he admires so much and more as a partner with a shared goal.<sup>61</sup> The reader can see this change in a fight scene situated in the shower room, where Bromden finally stands his ground and helps McMurphy in fighting the black boys:

The other one came out of the shower and put a wrestling hold on me - arms up under mine from behind and hands locked behind my neck - and I had to run backward into the shower and mash him against the tile.<sup>62</sup>

The final act that confirms all that McMurphy was trying to tell Bromden all story long is when Bromden sees Miss Ratched having her uniform torn apart, revealing her large breast hiding underneath. This scene happens toward the end of the novel when Miss Ratched uses

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<sup>58</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 193.

<sup>60</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 198.

<sup>61</sup> Ryan, “Third Space,” 43.

<sup>62</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 212.

her power on one of the patients, Billy Bibbit and essentially causing his suicide. McMurphy then, in a moment of fury, tries to choke Miss Ratched and tears her uniform apart in the process. At that moment, Bromden realizes she is indeed just a woman, not a machine made of electronic parts and tubes. This situation resurrects all Bromden's hope and to use his analogy, makes him big again, bigger than ever.

McMurphy's attempt to choke Miss Ratched to death sadly results in him getting the ultimate punishment, the lobotomy. One of the lead characters of the story is defeated by the enemy only to assure the victory of the other one. Bromden's new position of power is portrayed in his action of suffocating lobotomized McMurphy as an act of mercy. Ryan Barry offers an interesting interpretation of natural human resistance to power in this scene:

A lobotomised and incapacitated McMurphy fights back, showing that fighting for survival is not just a conscious human action, but also an unconscious action of human resistance to domination from the world of others.<sup>63</sup>

The final act showing Bromden's victory over the Combine and thus his liberation from the clutches of power domination is him overpowering a control panel to escape from the hospital. The control panel situated in the shower room has been mentioned by Bromden as a tool of Miss Ratched to control everyone on the ward. Bromden overpowers this panel with his newly found strength and uses it to destroy a thick glass window that stands between him and the freedom. According to Barry Ryan, this action transfers the control panel from a domination tool into a tool of liberation and thus is the main representation of Bromden's metamorphosis. Bromden's final liberation can be explained as him becoming an individual understanding both the natural and the technological worlds, which confirms his readiness for social integration into modern society.<sup>64</sup>

To conclude this chapter, it is evident the issue of power and manipulation is an integral part of the story. The fight of manipulative and power imposing Miss Ratched against the individualistic anarchist McMurphy observed by the Indian narrator Chief Bromden all serve as a complex illustration of control, manipulation and power abuse.

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<sup>63</sup> Ryan, "Third Space," 48.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan, "Third Space," 43.

### 3 ISSUE OF GENDER, MASCULINITY, AND SEXUALITY

*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* offers a lot more than Ken Kesey's criticism of mental institutions and their treatment methods or the novel's illustration of manipulation and power abuse. Taking a closer look at all the negatively portrayed characters of the story, the reader might notice they are all female.

Many critics claim that this novel is a pure misogynistic work. While they might be right, the benefit of the doubt must be given to Kesey and his fascination for counterculture. Kurt Anderson mentions on *the studio 360: American Icons podcast* that women are not portrayed as "the bad guys" just to empower men and their role in a society but are portrayed so because of Kesey's intention to reverse gender roles in the story in order to highlight their core features.<sup>65</sup>

Sonya Alvarado describes the women situation in the novel, "The political structure of the asylum reflects a complete reversal of patriarchal society."<sup>66</sup> The women in the novel become strong-willed and powerful, while the men become weak and fragile under female domination. Ken Kesey explicitly points at this gender role swap by the character of McMurphy and his description of Miss Ratched soon after his arrival on the ward, "I've never seen a woman I thought was more man than me."<sup>67</sup> Women in the novel do not only gain masculinity but also actively try to erase this quality from men. As noted by Daniel J. Viktus, nearly all the women in the story are portrayed as controlling castrators actively emasculating men.<sup>68</sup> These characters are namely Miss Ratched, Chief Bromden's mother Mary, Billy Bibbit's mother, and Mr. Harding's wife. Each of these characters will be further analyzed in more detail.

The first and most successful castrator is certainly Miss Ratched. Apart from being portrayed as a machine-like manipulator, she is also described as a sexless being. Her effort to cover up her female features can be interpreted as hiding her weakness, "A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it."<sup>69</sup> If the patients, all of them being male, saw her as a woman, she would take a risk of being objectified and thus lose her

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<sup>65</sup> Anderson, "Studio 360."

<sup>66</sup> Sonya Yvette Alvarado, "Em'ly in the Cuckoo's Nest," *The Midwest Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 354.

<sup>67</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 57.

<sup>68</sup> Viktus, "Madness," 79.

<sup>69</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 6.

power. Daniel Viktus confirms this point by saying, “The Big Nurse is described as a woman who denies her essential femaleness in order to exercise power over men.”<sup>70</sup> Although Miss Ratched so desperately tries to hide her own sexuality, she teaches new nurses-in-training to flirt with patients to their benefit. This act is an imitation of a typical male behavior pattern, using sexual power only to accomplish one’s personal intention, Alvarado states.<sup>71</sup>

The act of castration and emasculation is illustrated on Miss Ratched on multiple occasions. During the first group meeting in the novel, Miss Ratched openly points at Mr. Harding’s inability to satisfy his wife, “...his wife’s ample bosom at times gives him a feeling of inferiority. So. Does anyone care to touch upon this subject further?”<sup>72</sup> McMurphy with his ability to see through Ratched’s mask later explains her true intention to Mr. Harding, “No, that nurse ain’t some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is is a ball-cutter.”<sup>73</sup> Next significant event on which Miss Ratched displays her fondness of castrating men, is during her charity work on the weekend when she pulls a young lady aside from her work and offers her money for a new dress in order to make her more attractive to other men:

Go, you poor unfortunate underfed child, go, and buy yourself a decent dress. I realize your husband can’t afford it, but here, take this, and go.<sup>74</sup>

Apart from her intention of making the girl sexually attractive, she also insinuates that her man is not capable of providing for her.

Usually, her attempts to emasculate men are successful, but in the case of McMurphy (due to the fact, that he is the masculine hero of the novel) her effort is quite ineffective. Yet she still tries when she subtly notes during one of the group meetings that he is, “Thirty-five years old. Never married.”<sup>75</sup> This little remark of her is showing her effort to portray McMurphy as a man who is incapable of finding himself a woman.

Miss Ratched further illustrates the women supremacy through her relationships with other women. Even though the doctor should generally have more authority over what happens to the patients than the nurse, this fact is false in the case of the asylum portrayed in the novel. The hospital’s supervisor is an old friend of Miss Ratched from her former days as an army nurse, which assures Ratched’s ultimate power over everyone in the hospital as well as

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<sup>70</sup> Viktus, “Madness,” 77.

<sup>71</sup> Alvarado, “Em’ly,” 354.

<sup>72</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 47.

<sup>75</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 34.

strengthens the female domination displayed in the novel. Miss Ratched operating the whole asylum along with her female friend also reverses the “good ole boy” network, where the men as comrades are in the center of power, Sonya Alvarado explains.<sup>76</sup>

Next character, Mr. Harding’s wife castrates men in a different manner. Alvarado notes that the wives illustrated in the novel emasculate their men by either cuckoldry or just by leaving them completely. They intentionally abandon their traditional role in society as mothers and caretakers to pursue their own selfish goals.<sup>77</sup> Mrs. Harding is the best example of such castrating wife, she is portrayed as a very beautiful young woman with large breast. She also further modifies her appearance by wearing a short dress, high heels and painting her nails bright red color. It is clear, that she uses her appearance to humiliate her husband by arousing sexual desires in other men.

The first instance of Mrs. Harding cuckolding her husband is symbolized in a photograph hanging above his bed. On the said photograph, Mrs. Harding is almost naked and flirting with the photographer, while Mr. Harding is in the background, sitting helplessly. This photograph taken on their vacation serves as a great example of how Mrs. Harding views her husband, as a beta-male quietly waiting in the background and not taking any action to control his situation.

Next example of Mrs. Harding’s cuckolding practice is her visitation on the ward to see her husband. Her appearance is again, as attention-grabbing as it can get, Chief Bromden describes:

She’s as tall as he is. She’s got on high-heeled shoes and is carrying a black purse, not by the strap, but holding it the way you hold a book. Her fingernails are red as drops of blood against the shiny black patent-leather purse.<sup>78</sup>

Immediately after Mrs. Harding arrives on the ward, the act of degradation and emasculation begins. Her visit is not during ordinary visitation time, because she uses her appearance and likely also a promise of a sexual favor to the black boys in exchange for an exception. Alvarado notes that the primary goal of her visit is to explore how many ways she can degrade her husband in front of his friends.<sup>79</sup> The main act by which is Mr. Harding reminded of his subordination and sexual inadequateness during this visit is Mrs. Harding’s act of flirting with the ward’s hero, McMurphy. This starts by Mrs. Harding asking her husband for a cigarette, a favor Mr. Harding is unable to accomplish because he lost all his cigarettes gambling with

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<sup>76</sup> Alvarado, “Em’ly,” 354.

<sup>77</sup> Alvarado, “Em’ly,” 355.

<sup>78</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 141.

<sup>79</sup> Alvarado, “Em’ly,” 355.

McMurphy. His wife replies in an unsurprised tone, "Oh Dale, you never do have enough, do you?"<sup>80</sup> and turns her request to McMurphy, whose cigarettes are symbolically placed in his lap. After getting her cigarette, she leans towards McMurphy's lap to get it lit and continues to flirt with him while ignoring her husband. This scene from the novel is one of the clearest illustrations of castration and emasculation. Mr. Harding is openly degraded in front of everyone and yet is powerless to do anything because of her wife's beauty. This example further proves that certain women in the story use their appearance to achieve power over men.

The following character has been already mentioned in the previous chapter. It is Chief Bromden's mother, Mary Louise Bromden. According to Alvarado, this character also illustrates the act of castration and emasculation on numerous occasions. After marrying his father, her first action is refusing his name and instead insisting on him taking the name Bromden. This act can be interpreted as yet another illustration of reversing patriarchal society custom. Mary working together with an old lady on selling the Indian land without Bromden's father knowing is also another illustration of women taking control behind the man's back. She also further degrades her husband by forbidding him to teach his son Indian traditions with an argument that they are not animals.<sup>81</sup> His mother is the main reason Chief Bromden has no trust in women and portrays them as evil manipulators.

The next woman actively emasculating men in the novel is not a wife, but a mother. Billy Bibbit is a man in his thirties, but somewhat underdeveloped as a man, a perfect example of a man with feminine features. He is portrayed as young looking and very shy. He is also suffering from a severe stutter problem that symbolizes his mental state. For the majority of the story, his stutter makes it very difficult for him to even speak, but towards the end of the novel, after McMurphy boosts his self-esteem by talking one of his female friends into finally taking his virginity, the reader can notice a sudden cure of Billy Bibbit's stutter. The reason behind Billy's child-like mental state and undeveloped manhood in the form of his late age virginity is his mother. She works in the asylum as a receptionist and is a dear friend of Miss Ratched. From the story, it is evident she has severe mental issues herself. She is of a similar age as Miss Ratched but wants to believe she is a young girl. Her delusion is so strong, that she is willing to abandon her son to Miss Ratched, to keep him from growing up, so she can keep denying her own age, Alvarado notes.<sup>82</sup> Her perverted character is well illustrated in the scene, where

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<sup>80</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 142.

<sup>81</sup> Alvarado, "Em'ly," 357-359.

<sup>82</sup> Alvarado, "Em'ly," 360.



Billy freshly charged with McMurphy's optimism comes to tell his mother about his intention to leave the hospital and go to college, only to get his dreams crushed by her response:

“Sweetheart, you still have scads of time for things like that. Your whole life is ahead of you.”

“Mother, I’m th-th-thirty-one years old!”

She laughed and twiddled his ear with the weed. “Sweetheart, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?”<sup>83</sup>

Her character and her disturbing relationship with her son are further described by Bromden in the same scene when she blows a kiss to her son, “. . . I had to admit she didn’t look like a mother of any kind.”<sup>84</sup> From the illustration of his mother in the novel, it is evident that Billy Bibbit is a victim to her rejection of motherhood in order to pursue her selfish goals. The amount of power his mother holds over him is illustrated toward the end of the novel after Billy loses his virginity to one of McMurphy’s friends. When Miss Ratched finds out what happened, her response completely tears Billy’s new-found manliness apart, she castrates him again, “‘What worries me, Billy,’ – ‘is how your poor mother is going to take this.’”<sup>85</sup> Immediately after Billy realizes his mother will be informed of his actions, he starts to stutter again and soon after, out of desperation, slits his throat. This not only illustrates Billy’s enormous fear of his mother but also Miss Ratched’s act of knowingly emasculating Billy and ultimately causing his death.

The only two women not portrayed in the novel as castrating manipulators are the female friends of McMurphy, Candy, and Sandy. Although their influence on the patients of the ward might be interpreted by some as negative (Candy being the one Billy Bibbit lost his virginity to, and thus is partially responsible for his suicide), they are portrayed as generous young ladies. Even though they are illustrated as not so well educated and with poor background, their characters contrast very visibly with the other women illustrated above. They are wearing provocative clothes and are promiscuous as is Mrs. Harding, but they are not trying to emasculate men and replace the patriarchal custom. Ruth Sullivan states in her critical interpretation of the novel, that the reason Candy and Sandy are portrayed as a positive influence is because they are not mature women, but young girls who are undemanding and easy to control.<sup>86</sup> Ken Kesey hints at this fact by Bromden’s description of one of the girls lying

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<sup>83</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 227.

<sup>84</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 227.

<sup>85</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 242.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Sullivan, “Big Mama, Big Papa, and Little Sons in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 15.

in bed with McMurphy, "...I could see McMurphy and the girl snuggled into each other's shoulders, getting comfortable, more like two tired little kids than a grown man and a grown woman in bed together to make love."<sup>87</sup> The main difference between these two ladies and the rest of the women illustrated in the novel is their age. This fact leads to a conclusion that Ken Kesey criticizes only those women, who abandon their natural roles as mothers.

Ruth Sullivan further examines gender roles illustrated in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in her paper called *Big Mama, Big Papa, and Little Sons*. She states that Ken Kesey intended to display Miss Ratched as a maternal figure together with McMurphy as a father and the patients as their sons. She supports her theory by various extracts from the book, such as McMurphy's description of Miss Ratched, "...that smiling flour-faced old mother"<sup>88</sup> and Bromden's description of McMurphy, "the swaggering gambler,... the cowboy out of the TV set..."<sup>89</sup> Miss Ratched plays the role of a strict powerful mother while McMurphy is the drunken father who teaches their sons things the mother does not approve of. They are both caring for their children, but both see the world very differently.<sup>90</sup>

After analyzing the illustration of gender in the novel an analysis of sexuality illustrated in the novel follows. As stated above, Miss Ratched is portrayed as a castrating mother. All the patients on the ward are terrified of her, and that is mainly because of her successfully hiding her womanhood. A complicated debate between the patients initiated by McMurphy deals with finding a way to defeat the matriarchy reigning on the ward. The debate concludes in a statement that the only weapon a man has in such fight is his sexual ability. Mr. Harding states:

Man has but one truly effective weapon against the juggernaut of modern matriarchy, but it certainly is not laughter. One weapon, and with every passing year in this hip, motivationally researched society, more and more people are discovering how to render that weapon useless and conquer those who have hitherto been the conqueror.<sup>91</sup>

McMurphy is thereafter chosen as the "the stud to handle the job"<sup>92</sup> with the ability to strip Miss Ratched of her genderless costume and render her powerless. McMurphy, being the role model of the patients, does want to prove to them that he is capable of such an act but confirms how effective Miss Ratched's disguise is. He states, "I couldn't get it up over old frozen face

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<sup>87</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 238.

<sup>88</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 156.

<sup>90</sup> Sullivan, "Big Mama," 16.

<sup>91</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 54.

<sup>92</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 149.

there even if she had the beauty of Marilyn Monroe.”<sup>93</sup> To which Mr. Harding responds, “There you are. She's won.”<sup>94</sup>

At the end of the novel, McMurphy finally fulfills the patients wish. It has been previously mentioned in the chapter about the issue of power and control illustrated in the book, that McMurphy loses his temper after Miss Ratched indirectly causes Billy Bibbit's suicide and tries to choke her to death. This event is interpreted by Daniel Viktus as rape and thus as McMurphy's final effort to feminize Miss Ratched in order to restore the masculinity of his friends. Undergoing a lobotomy for such misbehavior, McMurphy is then portrayed as a hero, sacrificing his own life for the greater good. Daniel Viktus confirms this theory by saying, “McMurphy becomes a kind of sexual savior, come to restore their collective virility.”<sup>95</sup> Ken Kesey clearly tries to eliminate possible wrong interpretation of this act by Bromden stating the following:

We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting, his big hands driving down on the leather chair arms, pushing him up, rising and standing like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters. It was us that had been making him go on for weeks, keeping him standing long after his feet and legs had given out, weeks of making him wink and grin and laugh and go on with his act long after his humor had been parched dry between two electrodes.<sup>96</sup>

Kesey really tries to put emphasis on McMurphy acting to satisfy the majority, possibly to lighten the perverted nature of this scene. Chief Bromden recounts the event in the following excerpt, but it is important to state that this piece of text is opened to interpretation. Some readers might not even notice the sexual suggestiveness, and some might see it as a clear act of rape:

Only at the last - after he'd smashed through that glass door, her face swinging around, with terror forever ruining any other look she might ever try to use again, screaming when he grabbed for her and ripped her uniform all the way down the front, screaming again when the two nipples started from her chest and swelled out and out, bigger than anybody had ever even imagined, warm and pink in the light - only at the last, after the officials realized that the three black boys weren't going to do anything but stand and watch and they would have to beat him off without their help, doctors and supervisors and nurses prying those heavy red fingers out of the white flesh of her throat as if they were her neck bones, jerking him backward off of her with a loud heave of breath, only then did he show any sign that he might be anything other than

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<sup>93</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Viktus, “Madness,” 78.

<sup>96</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 245.

a sane, willful, dogged man performing a hard duty that finally just had to be done, like it or not.<sup>97</sup>

Whatever impression does this excerpt leave on the reader, its last few lines clearly hint to the previously mentioned debate between the patients and McMurphy, where he has been the one chosen to liberate the ward by asserting his sexual ability. After this significant scene, both McMurphy and Miss Ratched temporarily disappear from the story. The ward is then, especially with the absence of Miss Ratched, more relaxed and the patients finally gain some of their power back. On her return to the ward, Miss Ratched is portrayed as weak and scared, “She jumped back two steps when we approached, and I thought for a second she might run.”<sup>98</sup> It is evident her character no longer holds the power needed to manipulate her patients. Although she tries to hide her identity significantly more than before, the patients no longer fear her. Bromden explains the main reason why, “a new white uniform... in spite of its being smaller and tighter and more starched than her old uniforms, it could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman.”<sup>99</sup> This quotation serves as proof that McMurphy has been successful in liberating the patients by revealing her womanhood.

To continue with the issue of sexuality portrayed in the novel, several more examples are introduced. Although the following examples are of less significance to the story than the “rape of Miss Ratched”, they are interesting illustrations nonetheless. The first example is Chief Bromden and his negative view of homosexuality. He starts the novel by an opening sentence saying, “Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them.”<sup>100</sup> This sentence insinuates the black men have sex with each other in secrecy, an act of absolute disgust to Bromden. Next instance on which Bromden criticizes homosexuality is him questioning his affection towards McMurphy, “I want to touch him because I’m one of these queers!”<sup>101</sup> It is evident these two examples reflect the social view on homosexuality during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in America. The repression of homosexuality is further illustrated on the character of Mr. Harding, who finally reveals the reason behind his troubled relationship with his wife toward the end of the novel.

I discovered at an early age that I was - shall we be kind and say different? It’s a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn’t the practices, I don’t think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me - and

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<sup>97</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 245–246.

<sup>98</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 246.

<sup>99</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 246.

<sup>100</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 171.

the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different.<sup>102</sup>

This excerpt illustrates Kesey's criticism of society and how it views "different" people. Society's negative view of homosexuality essentially led to Mr. Harding's confinement in a mental hospital. His difference led to him being labeled as mentally ill, although he is in the novel illustrated as an extremely smart and completely sane individual. Issue of homosexuality is not Kesey's focus in the novel, it is the individual difference discriminated by the society that is criticized: everything different is labeled by the society as "crazy."

To conclude this chapter, it is important to state that the issue of gender and masculinity illustrated in the novel is closely connected to the issue of power and manipulation. Majority of the women in the story are portrayed as villains emasculating men in order to achieve power over them. These issues are also very clear in reading the story. The reader does not have to analyze the book deeply to notice Kesey's intentions. The issue of sexuality, on the other hand, has more of a subtle illustration, and can easily be overlooked by many readers. All three issues covered in this chapter (gender, emasculation, and sexuality) are illustrated all at once toward the end of the story in the act of McMurphy's attack on Miss Ratched. In this final act, emasculation is portrayed by Miss Ratched's act of castrating Billy Bibbit's freshly regained manhood, and the issue of gender together with the issue of sexuality are illustrated by McMurphy's sexual attack on Ratched in order to reveal her femininity.

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<sup>102</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest*, 237.

## 4 SOCIAL CRITICISM ILLUSTRATED IN THE NOVEL

With the two main chapters of this thesis finished, it is also important to analyze Ken Kesey's primary intention for writing *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It has been previously stated that the novel is full of social criticism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century America, this chapter will examine what exact actions of American society was Kesey pointing at in his novel.

To begin, a question such as — “Was Ken Kesey intentionally trying to criticize modern American society?” is suitable to propose. Stephen L. Tanner includes in his critical essay on given topic Ken Kesey's interview from 1983, where Kesey states the following, “When the reviews came out and as time went by, I realized that I had written a great book. But that didn't occur to me when I was writing it. I had no idea it would be taken like it was.”<sup>103</sup> Later in the same interview, when asked about the reason why he included such a powerful message in his book, he answered, “It is not something I set out to do. It's as though all the angels got together and said, Okay, here's the message that America desperately needs. Now, let's pick him to do it.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the answer to the question is “No”, Kesey did not intentionally try to critique the American society. Ken Kesey was simply drawing from his own life experiences when writing the novel. His love for Native American culture, his experimenting with psychedelic drugs, his “hippie-like” lifestyle and his own experience with working in a mental hospital all worked well together in creating one of the most impactful works of American literature.

Although the author himself did not intend to create such a powerful criticism of modern American society, many readers over the years interpreted it as such. The book accurately predicted the future state of America's social-cultural turmoil as well as translated the nation's fear of substitution of traditional American individualism for the new institutionalized conformity and dehumanizing conformity, Stephen Tanner notes.<sup>105</sup>

The first aspect of American society that is openly criticized in the novel is its government's attitude toward the original inhabitants of America, Native Americans. This criticism is of course illustrated through the narrator Chief Bromden. This issue has been previously mentioned in the description of Chief Bromden's character, but its significance

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<sup>103</sup> Stephen L. Tanner, “The Western American Context of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 162.

<sup>104</sup> Tanner, “The Western,” 161.

<sup>105</sup> Tanner, “The Western,” 161.

requires more detailed analysis. Christopher Leise states in his work *Damming the Columbia River and Traumatic Loss*, that Chief Bromden's life represents Ken Kesey's description of government's poor environmental management that destroyed lives of indigenous people dependent on the Columbia River for their spiritual and economic strength. Leise further analyzes little details about Bromden that inconspicuously continue in criticizing the government's act of destroying the Columbia River. One of these details is Bromden's fear of water and electricity, which can be interpreted as a representation of the Damming of the Columbia River in 1957 (hydroelectricity).<sup>106</sup>

The damming of the Columbia River was a very important event to Kesey because, as his lifelong friend Ken Babbs states, Kesey used to observe the Native Indian tribes fishing and celebrating there during his adolescent years.<sup>107</sup>

The final liberation of Bromden by his act of throwing a control panel through a window can also be interpreted as a critique of the damming. The control panel is a remnant of an old hydrotherapy machine, which again, uses electric power together with water as a form of therapy. Bromden's destruction of this panel illustrates not only Bromden's victory over the Combine but also serves as a metaphor for him finally deciding to stand up for his community (the control panel representing the Dalles Dam built on the Columbia River). As Leise states, the book groups many tragic events happening to the original environment in America, such as the drowning of Cascade Rapids in 1930, the drowning of Colville's peoples' lands by creating Franklin Delano Roosevelt Lake in 1940 and the destruction of Priest Rapids in 1959 into a single example of Chief Bromden's ruined childhood by building of The Dalles Dam.<sup>108</sup>

The criticism illustrated on Chief Bromden's character is only a part of Kesey's discontent with the American society portrayed in the novel. Many critics agree that the Combine described in the novel is mirroring Kesey's view on the modern American way of living. Daniel Viktus notes that, "Kesey's novel contains, in its description of the Combine, a powerful critique of American society and of the function of madness in that society."<sup>109</sup> Kesey clearly did not agree with the modern American capitalism, whether it was the start of mass production, the technologic development, or the increased emphasis on authority. The illustration of routine life on the ward is Kesey's exaggerated view of life in modern capitalist America, "It is a

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<sup>106</sup> Christopher Leise, "Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Damming the Columbia River and Traumatic Loss," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 25, no. 1 (April 2016): 65.

<sup>107</sup> Anderson, "Studio 360."

<sup>108</sup> Leise, "Damming," 67.

<sup>109</sup> Viktus, "Madness," 65.

dehumanizing, tedious, and repetitive pattern which is scientifically measured and automatically scheduled for maximum precision.”<sup>110</sup> The psychiatric ward is a very important medium for carrying Kesey’s criticism. James Knapp states that, “By choosing a mental hospital for his setting, Kesey was able to picture society’s pressure to adjust at its most coldly, and explicitly, coercive.”<sup>111</sup> The way Kesey describes the Combine (society) in the novel is still uncomfortably accurate to this day and awakens critical thinking in many readers. Many critics compare *One flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* to George Orwell’s *1984* due to their similar "chilling" depiction of modern society. To set a clear example of Kesey's criticism, his criticism of mass production in this case, an excerpt from the book follows:

...a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht-pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another hatch. Or things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they’re still linked together like sausages...<sup>112</sup>

The last significant target of Kesey’s critique mentioned in the novel is the treatment used in psychiatric hospitals. His portrayal of lobotomy and electroshock treatments raised a lot of questions about the ethics of mental hospitals. As previously stated, both lobotomy and EST are illustrated in the novel as a form of punishment for misbehavior, not one time are the treatment methods portrayed as an actual form of therapy. ST Harker states on his *Banned Library Podcast* that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* has been the reason mental hospitals stopped practicing such treatment methods.<sup>113</sup> Jon Swaine also describes consequences of the novel’s popularity on the psychiatric treatment system in America in his article for *The Telegraph*, saying, "Huge, spirit-crushing state institutions began reducing their excessive resident numbers and granting patients more rights."<sup>114</sup> He also mentions the novel’s influence on the development of more effective antipsychotic drugs to allow more patients to be treated

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<sup>110</sup> Viktus, “Madness,” 72.

<sup>111</sup> James F. Knapp, “Tangled in the Language of the Past: Ken Kesey and Cultural Revolution,” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 44.

<sup>112</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo’s Nest*, 185.

<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Harker, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest by Ken Kesey,” February 6, 2018, in *Banned Library Podcast*, produced by Jonathan Harker, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:23:51, <http://www.bannedlibrary.com/podcast/2018/2/6/one-flew-over-the-cuckoos-nest-by-ken-kesey>.

<sup>114</sup> “How One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest Changed Psychiatry,” *The Telegraph*, last modified February 1, 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/8296954/How-One-Flew-Over-the-Cuckoos-Nest-changed-psychiatry.html>.



at home.<sup>115</sup> This part of Kesey's critique, although not the most important one, has likely been the most effective considering its following impact.

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<sup>115</sup> The Telegraph, "Psychiatry."

## 5 CONCLUSION

The primary focus of this bachelor thesis was to analyze the illustration of power, control, and manipulation in Ken Kesey's most successful novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

The mental asylum in which the story takes place is clearly a microcosm of American society in the 1950s and '60s. Its daily routine and strict rules closely imitate the new American focus on conformity and order.

The character of Chief Bromden is an illustration of Kesey's opinion on the government's poor environmental decisions which led to the destruction of the original lands inhabited by Native Americans. Kesey illustrates this fact by Bromden's childhood being affected by the building of The Dalles Dam. This act clearly depicts how powerful the government is, its decisions can affect millions of people who have no option to disagree.

The character of Nurse Ratched depicts the authorities with absolute power, who execute the harsh will of the government without any critical thought about its morals and ethics. Ken Kesey deserves a lot of respect for such an exhausting illustration of power abuse and manipulation on the character of Miss Ratched. Her expressionless face, her insinuations and all her other tools used to assure power and control are so perfectly illustrated that the reader immediately starts to think about the danger and the disastrous consequences of power abuse in real life scenario.

The patients are a clear illustration of people living under the government's control. They are vulnerable and helpless, kept under a strict regime programmed to keep them from escaping the control. They evidently represent Kesey's view of ordinary people living in America during his time.

The character of McMurphy is Kesey's illustration of the hero who sacrifices his life for the good of other people. McMurphy is the person who shows the patients how beautiful it is to be free and independent from the system. Through this character, Kesey portrays some of his personality into the story. McMurphy essentially serves as a reminder that an individual still stands a chance against the big, evil system.

The second analytical chapter of the thesis focuses on the illustration of gender, masculinity, and sexuality in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. From the performed analysis

it is evident that Ken Kesey portrays his personal opinion on the new role of women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century into the novel.

Most of the women in the story are portrayed as evil castrators. Miss Ratched is, of course, the main castrator causing the most harm. For the majority of the story, she is hiding her sexuality in order to maintain her power over men. At the end of the novel, however, McMurphy finally reveals his femininity to the patients by tearing her uniform and showing her breast. This act strips Miss Ratched of her sexless disguise and thus liberates the patients from her power. From the analysis of gender illustrated in the novel, it becomes evident that Ken Kesey criticizes mature women who abandon their maternal role in society in pursuit of other, selfish goals.

The issue of sexuality is illustrated in the novel on Chief Bromden's disgust with gay people and the character of Mr. Harding, who will rather be labeled as mentally ill than reveal his homosexuality. From the analysis of sexuality, it is clear, that Ken Kesey connects homosexuality to society's critical view of "different" people.

After performing the analysis, it became apparent that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* clearly reflects Ken Kesey's critical opinion on many different aspects of American society in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se soustředí především na rozbor románu *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem*, jejímž autorem je americký spisovatel Ken Kesey. Hlavním cílem této práce je analýza moci, manipulace a pohlaví ilustrovaných v díle a následné vyslovení spojitosti těchto ilustrací s americkou sociální a kulturní situací ve dvacátém století.

Tato práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teoretickou část představuje charakterizace historické a kulturní situace v Americe v průběhu padesátých a šedesátých let dvacátého století a také představení života autora a jeho tvorby. Praktickou částí práce se rozumí samotná analýza románu, která je rozdělena do dvou hlavních kapitol. První analytická kapitola se zabývá ilustrací síly a moci v románu, zatímco druhá kapitola se soustředí na ilustraci pohlaví a sexuality.

Spisovatel Ken Kesey se narodil 17. září roku 1935 v malém americkém městečku La Junta ve státě Colorado. V jeho jedenácti letech se Kesey společně s jeho rodinou přestěhoval do města Springfield ve státě Oregon, kde vystudoval střední i vysokou školu. V roce 1957 Kesey obdržel svůj bakalářský titul z oregonské univerzity v oboru umění a poté pokračoval své studium na stanfordské univerzitě, kde studoval především psaní a literaturu. Během studia na této univerzitě se Kesey přihlásil do lékařského experimentu jako testovací subjekt nových drog, zejména LSD a meskalinu. Po skončení tohoto experimentu se Kesey také dostal k práci jako noční hlídač v místní psychiatrické léčebně. Tyto dvě životní zkušenosti bezpochyby změnili Keseyho pohled na svět a z velké části také ovlivnili jeho tvorbu. Kesey se poté stal zastáncem halucinogenních drog jako látek prohlubující vědomí a založil hudební skupinu, se kterou cestoval po celé Americe a provozoval takzvané „LSD testy“. Keseyho charakter je známý pro jeho lásku k americké přírodě, indiánské kultuře a rekreačním užíváním halucinogenních drog. *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem* napsal Kesey v roce 1959 a román byl poté publikován v roce 1962.

V době, kdy Ken Kesey pracoval na jeho románu *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem* byla Amerika po sociální i ekonomické stránce ve stádiu rozkvětu, a proto se toto období mezi roky 1950 až 1963 nazývá jako „skvělá léta“. V těchto letech byla do různých odvětví amerického průmyslu představena automatizace, což vedlo ke zvýšení produktivity a poklesu cen většiny amerických produktů. To vedlo k masové produkci automobilů, televizí, a dokonce také k hromadné výstavbě cenově dostupných domů. Tento technologický pokrok a masivní zvýšení

výroby vedlo americkou společnost k záměně americké individuality za stejnorodý a materialistický způsob života. Tento nový způsob života zapříčinil zrod nových kulturních hnutí, zejména beatnické generace a takzvané protikultury. Tyto hnutí projevovali jejich nesouhlas s novou americkou společností jak mírovými protesty, tak kritickou literaturou. Ken Kesey a jeho dílo *Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem* je dodnes považováno jako ústřední dílo protikultury.

*Přelet nad kukaččím hnízdem* z velké části odráží Keseyho životní zkušenosti a také jeho kritický pohled na americkou společnost. Román se odehrává na psychiatrickém oddělení a jeho vypravěčem je míšený indián trpící schizofrenií. Z tohoto úvodu je již patrné, že se v knize promítá Keseyho život. Román vypráví o životě vypravěče náčelníka Bromdena a jeho vnímání psychiatrického oddělení, kde vládne vrchní sestra Ratched. Příchodem nového pacienta jménem McMurphy se v románu rozpoutá jeho hlavní zápletka. Román ilustruje zejména souboj výstředního anarchisty McMurphyho se sestrou Ratched, která usiluje o kompletní kontrolu a manipulaci jejích pacientů.

První analytická kapitola této práce zabývající se ilustrací moci a manipulaci v díle nejdříve definuje pojem psychologické manipulace a poté rozebírá jednotlivé charaktery příběhu.

Psychologická manipulace je společenský vliv, využívaný k ovlivnění chování cílených osob. K docílení této manipulace se využívají různé techniky, jako například psychologické týrání, vymývání mozku, šikana a emocionální vydírání.

Prvním charakterem příběhu podrobený analýze, je náčelník Bromden, který slouží v příběhu jako ilustrace člověka pod absolutní kontrolou. Bromden je ten nejvyšší a nejsilnější ze všech pacientů celého oddělení, ale paradoxně se vidí jako ten nejmenší a nejslabší. Bromden vnímá psychiatrické oddělení jako továrnu s účelem zbavit společnost všech jedinců, kteří nesplňují její požadavky. Náčelníkově nízké sebevědomí a jeho celkový labilní stav je důsledkem americké vlády a jejím činem odkoupení původní indiánské země za účelem vystavění přehrady na řece Columbia River. Tímto popisem náčelníka Bromdena je zřejmé, že Ken Kesey naráží na skutečné události americké vlády, které zapříčinili zničení původního života indiánských kmenů a také znemožnili jejich následné začlenění do moderní americké společnosti. Tato skutečnost je dále ilustrována v knize na náčelníkově předstírané sluchoněmosti, ke které ho donutili bílí lidé, kteří ho po celý jeho život ignorovali.

Dalším charakterem analyzovaným v této kapitole je sestra Ratched. Jak již bylo zmíněno, jejím cílem je absolutní kontrola a moc na jejím oddělení. Aby této kontroly docílila,

využívá k tomu velké množství nástrojů. První z těchto nástrojů je její maska. Radched nepoužívá doslovnou masku, nýbrž má vždy kamennou tvář, chladný tón, a každý její záměr je vykonán s mechanickou precizností. Tyto vlastnosti mají za důsledek to, že Radched připadá pacientům jako stroj, a nikoliv jako člověk. Její další nástroje použité ke kontrole a manipulaci je její personál, zápisový deník a skupinové terapie. Pokud je pacient i přes její snažení stále sám sebou, je poté potrestán elektrickým šokem nebo lobotomií. Ilustrací sestry Ratched a všech jejích manipulačních nástrojů naráží Ken Kesey na způsoby moderní společnosti, které nutí člověka k nedobrovolnému zapojení do systému. Kesey tímto také kritizuje všechny autority vykonávající vůli systému bez ohledu na její správnost či etičnost.

Dalším charakterem je McMurphy, který představuje Keseyho ilustraci jednotlivce odhodlaného bojovat proti nesprávnému systému za každou cenu. McMurphy je v románu jediným charakterem, který zatím není systémem poražen. McMurphy využívá své vlastní vůle a jasně vidí všechny nelidské způsoby kontroly, které jsou na pacienty uváděny. McMurphy je na konci románu systémem poražen, a to podstoupením lobotomie. Po této operaci se McMurphy stává člověkem bez schopnosti myslet a klást odpor. Touto akcí Kesey ilustruje, kam až je společnost schopná zajít, aby eliminovala lidskou odlišnost.

Z této analytické kapitole je zřejmé, že Ken Kesey využil ve svém románu psychiatrické oddělení, jako mikrokosmos pro americkou společnost ve dvacátém století.

Druhá analytická kapitola provádí výzkum románu stejným způsobem, ale soustředí se na ilustraci pohlaví, mužnosti, a sexuality.

Na začátku kapitoly je čtenář seznámen s faktem, že drtivá většina žen ilustrovaných v románu je zobrazena velice záporně. Stereotypické zobrazení pohlaví je v tomto románu zcela převráceno, což znamená, že ženy nabývají drsných mužských vlastností, zatímco muži jsou znázorněni jako pomlouvační slaboši.

Rozbor žen ilustrovaných v románu začíná opět sestrou Ratched. Na jejím charakteru je zdůrazněna její vysoká snaha zakrýt všechny rysy, které dávají najevo její ženství. Tato snaha je v díle vyjádřena především zakrýváním jejích nevšedně velkých ňader. Sestra Ratched, stejně jako několik dalších žen v díle, je také úspěšný kastrátor všech mužů, ke kterým se dostane. Tento proces kastrace je v románu znázorněn při mnoha příležitostech, například ve scéně, kde Ratched nabídne mladé slečně peníze na nové šaty s připomínkou, že si to její manžel určitě nemůže dovolit. Ratched podlamuje sebevědomí jejích pacientů a nepřímou naznačuje jejich neschopnost uspokojit ženy.

Další žena, která je v díle zobrazena jako kastrátor je matka vypravěče Bromdena, Mary Louise Bromdenová. Ta donutila jeho otce, aby si po jejich sňatku přivlastnil její příjmení, což přispívá k faktu, jsou zvyky společnosti v díle převráceny. Jejím dalším činem kastrace je přiměnění jeho otce k prodeji jeho domovské krajiny i přes vědomí, že ho tato akce zničí. Náčelník Bromden popisuje její nadvládu nad jeho otcem tím, že jí vnímá jako o mnohem větší bytost než jeho otce, který je samozřejmě fyzicky o mnohem větší. Tento popis pouze potvrzuje, že role pohlaví jsou v tomto románu zcela převráceny.

Další takovou ženou je manželka jednoho z pacientů, Pana Hardinga. Tato žena kastruje svého manžela tím, že neustále flirtuje s ostatními muži a pravděpodobně svého manžela i podvádí. Paní Hardingová nosí vyzývavé oblečení a dále upravuje svůj vzhled pro její maximální přitažlivost, z čehož je evidentní, že používá svůj vzhled jako nástroj pro kastraci svého manžela.

Posledním charakterem podrobeným touto analýzou je matka jednoho z pacientů, Billyho Bibbita. Ta sama trpí jistou mentální poruchou, protože si v jejích pozdních letech myslí, že je mladá dívka. Tato její milná představa vede k uvedení jejího třicetiletého syna do psychiatrické léčebny, protože mu upírá možnost dospět.

Po pečlivém přezkoumání těchto charakterů je jasné, že všechny ženy, které jsou v románu ilustrovány jako zlí kastrátoři, jsou ženy ve vyspělém věku, které potlačují svou mateřskou roli kvůli svým osobním sobeckým důvodům. Tímto je zřejmé, že Kesey ve svém románu kritizuje nově nabytou roli žen v moderní americké společnosti.

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