

An Analysis of Authority, Insanity and Rebellion as the Major Themes in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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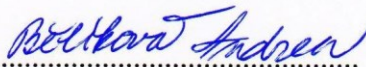
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje tři hlavní témata, související s konformní společností po druhé světové válce v knize Kena Keseyho *Vyhod'me ho z kola ven*. V první polovině se práce zaměřuje na hodnoty a postoje Beat Generace a hnutí Hippie vůči tehdejší americké společnosti a zejména vůči společenským konvencím. Jako styčný bod mezi oběma proudy je uveden samotný autor Ken Kesey, který byl členem těchto hnutí. Práce rovněž nastiňuje stav psychiatrických léčen. Druhá část práce se skrze daná témata snaží zachytit problém vytěsnění ze společnosti a ztráty individuality na několika mužských postavách, které se nejeví jako choromyslní jedinci, ale jsou spíše oběti konformismu a rigidních společenských pravidel. Kesey zároveň kritizuje nelidské podmínky a metody, kterým musí pacienti v psychiatrické léčebně čelit. Práce dochází k závěru, že vzpoura proti společenské mašinérii je klíčem k boji a nalezení vlastní individuality.

Klíčová slova: Ken Kesey, moc, šílenství, vzpoura, Beat generace, hnutí Hippie, konformismus, společenské konvence, psychiatrická léčebna, individualismus

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses three major themes connected with conformist society after the World War II in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In the first part the thesis concentrates on values and attitudes of the Beat Generation and the Hippie movement towards the post-war American society and social conventions. Ken Kesey as the author is depicted as the link between these two movements since he was part of them. The thesis also describes the condition of mental institutions. Second part of the thesis analyses the issue of being excluded from the society and the problem of losing one's individuality on several male characters, who does not appear to be insane but rather they are the victims of conformism and rigid social rules. At the same time, Kesey criticizes the inhuman conditions and methods patients face in the mental institution. The thesis concludes that rebellion against the social machinery is the key to combat and to discover one's individuality.

Keywords: Ken Kesey, Authority, Insanity, Rebellion, Beat Generation, Hippie movement, conformism, social conventions, mental institution, individualism

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INTRODUCTION

In 1950s and 1960s the American society ascribed greater importance to various rules, restrictions and measures in order to constitute a solid and secure unit. To begin with, after America recuperated from the Second World War, another threat assailed the nation. It was mostly the fear of nuclear weapons development and spread of communism. America desired to forestall the Soviet Union from becoming the leading superpower. Many strict measures and arrangements were made to avert the possibility of communist interference with the American territory. As a consequence, the defensive reaction heavily limited civil liberties.

Per contra, actions by the government caused that the economy began to flourish. Companies produced more goods and banks decreased the rate on mortgages. People and especially middle class people climbed the social ladder and subsequently they could afford a house together with many appliances and devices. It seemed to be a strategy of the American government. The economical uplift engendered a better way of life and therefore the omnipresent fear relatively diminished. The material lifestyle served as an anchor to make the society malleable. Families represented a crucial part in the defensive strategy. It was salient to maintain the sense of unity. Although the life seemed to be satisfying, many Americans experienced intense inner dissatisfaction.

The roles for each person were clearly defined in the society. Women were bound to be the housewives, offspring were sent to a boarding school in order to receive high education, and men were assigned a role of the 'family provider.' People were forced to give up their dreams, desires and personal goals in order to yield completely to the domesticity. Thus, they were forced to become conformists, which meant to live and follow certain rules and patterns. The repressive regime aroused huge frustration and displeasure which consequently transformed into rebellion. The Beat Generation and the Hippie movement intensively rebelled against the mainstream, conformist society. Ken Kesey was part of these activist movements and he openly criticized morally corrupted society in the book *One Flew over the Cuckoo's*.

This thesis is going to prove that Ken Kesey used a mental institution as a metaphor for the American post-war society which dehumanized and suppressed people's individuality and that he criticized the American conformist society through the interconnected themes of authority, insanity and rebellion.

1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF POST-WAR AMERICA

After the World War II, America got a chance to reform the nation.¹ The war ended well for the United States. Yet, the nation was not able to stay unanimous due to the evolving threats. The most dreaded one was in all probability the communism, although development of nuclear weapons, racism and homosexuality played a part as well.²

Despite the fact that few years after the World War II America became a prosperous country in 1950s and 1960s, immediately after the war the times were far from being ideal. People were afraid that the Great Depression would strike again. The unemployment rate was quite high as well as the inflation. The country needed to adjust to the piece after the war. The 1950s served as an ice breaker and from that point America began to prosper.³

The economy flourished under the presidency of Eisenhower. He proclaimed America to be “the military-industrial complex.”⁴ Companies produced more goods and most people raised more money for which they were able to purchase the goods. Americans were the customer base for the companies. People were willing to spend money on almost anything companies offered. And that is what the market needed – susceptible people who were able to bolster the economy. A majority of Americans indeed succumbed to the social machinery.⁵ And that is how America turned into the Consumers’ Republic in 1950.⁶

Stagnating demand and saturated market could become a threat to the society. A solution for the possible problem was a market segmentation which represents a division of the market into segments, each one involving specific criteria. Every segment was then adjusted to the particular social class.⁷ The economical uplift had an impact on a division

¹ See Warren Susman., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19.

² See Christopher Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2008), <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjtaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

³ See Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 26.

⁴ Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner’s Guide*, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjtaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

⁵ See Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties* 127–128.

⁶ See Lizabeth Cohen, “A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 1 (2004): 238.

⁷ See Cohen, “A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America,” 238.

of social classes. Nickles acknowledges that the welfare of working-class people began to resemble one of the middle-class as the wages considerably augmented.⁸ The market promptly adapted to it and consequently the mass production led to mass consumption.⁹

1.1 The Post-World War II Paradox

The postwar era had a bright side as well as a dark side. On one hand Americans were living almost fairy tale lives, on the other hand fear and paranoia tormented them. The new world disrupted an omnipresent anxiety. Due to the fear of communism and Cold War afflicting the United States, even some political members became paranoid.¹⁰ In 1947 Truman as the president made a policy known as the Truman Doctrine which announced protection measures to shield the country internally.¹¹ It strived to completely eradicate the communism and as Miller and Nowak claim “This policy pledged the nation to the Cold War.”¹² Little by little it led to mass hysteria and frequent controls. By 1952 almost 6.6 million people were questioned and accused of disloyalty.¹³ Anti-communistic organization HUAC (The House Un-American Activities Commission) together with FBI, were keeping an eye on anyone indicating sympathy with communists. Hence many writers, actors and artists were the target of the political chase.¹⁴ The fear and worries deteriorated as soon as Americans found out that the communism spread to the East of the world.¹⁵

Moreover, the fright caused that many Americans turned their backs on one another. In 1954 a national survey exposed that more than fifty per cent of the nation stated that all people revealed to be communists should be immediately put in jail. Seventy-eight per cent inclined to reporting their neighbors or anyone looking suspicious. As a consequence,

⁸ See Shelley Nickles, “More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America,” *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2002): 584.

⁹ See Cohen, “A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America,” 237.

¹⁰ See Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner’s Guide*,
<https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjtjaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

¹¹ See Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties*, 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ See Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner’s Guide*,
<https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjtjaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

¹⁵ See Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties*, 27.

people could be accused of being communists without any evidence. The ‘witch hunting’ therefore inflicted more harm than good.¹⁶

The United States and the Soviet Union were the exact antipoles and their ideologies contradicted. According to Miller and Nowak anticommunism was in part based on the American greatness, uniqueness and independence.¹⁷ Typical features defining America throughout the ages are “democracy, individualism, godliness, and free enterprise.”¹⁸ By contrast, communism was proclaimed by America to be “a despotic, collectivist, godless, alien ideology.”¹⁹

Not only did Americans want to transcend the Soviet Union, they also wanted the whole world to see their power. These two nations were eager to be the leading superpower.²⁰ In order to beat the Americans, Soviets gained access to the first nuclear weapon which led to “breaking the American monopoly.”²¹

Another issue America faced in postwar society was racial segregation and prejudice about sexual orientation.²² The beliefs of America were partly an illusion as they often behaved in contradiction to those beliefs. It made the society hypocritical. In this respect, they stood for the democracy, although they did not perceive black people and homosexuals as being equal.²³ Black people were discriminated and white people were generally privileged. Considering social life, white people tended to move from a city to a suburb. They wanted to escape from the black community.²⁴ In virtue of largely unoccupied cities, black people “were identified as the destroyers of cities.”²⁵ African American women faced various stereotypes such as being women of unrestrained behavior.

Additionally, sexual orientation was also an emblem of conventional stereotype. Homosexual people posed a threat to the American society. They were symbol of evil and

¹⁶ See Ibid., 22–23.

¹⁷ See Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Christopher Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner's Guide*, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXEK&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjtjaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

²¹ Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties*, 26–27.

²² See Ibid., 196.

²³ See Warren Susman., *Recasting America*, ed. Lary May, 25.

²⁴ See Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties*, 197.

²⁵ Ibid., 197.

danger and they were often imprisoned.²⁶ Potential communists, homosexually-oriented people and African American people basically could not be fully integrated into the American Dream, if at all.

1.2 Social Conventions

America was transforming into technically and industrially developed country. Lots of Americans were now dependent on automobiles and various appliances. Standard of living was a synonym for luxury for many people. The materialism served as a governmental illustration of the prosperity aiming at both America and the Soviet Union.²⁷

One of the trends in postwar American society was that the residents got married considerably young followed by an early childbearing. Filing for divorce rarely occurred.²⁸ By 1965, a huge number of Americans preferred life in a suburb to life in a city centre. In comparison with the situation in 1940, when forty-four per cent Americans owned a house, a decade later the percentage raised to sixty-two per cent. Because of the low interests guaranteed by bank institutions the housing was affordable.²⁹ Furthermore, this era celebrated domesticity and family life. Families together with consumerism symbolized a sense of protection, tradition and stability.³⁰

Teenagers in 1950s were expected to follow in their parents' footsteps. Parents wanted their descendants to live an identical life. Another way of social uplift was an education.³¹ Parents pushed their children to achieve great results at school in order to get to a university. High education was apparently a guarantee of high-level job position.³² Consequently, teenagers were frustrated and often depressed as they were pushed to something they did not fancy. The role of women in the society was relevant only in a household. Women played a part of a housekeeper, a wife and a mom. Their potential

²⁶ See Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., introduction to *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 9–10.

²⁷ See Christopher Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner's Guide*, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjtjaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

²⁸ See June Sklar and Beth Berkov, "Teenage Family Formation in Postwar America," *Family Planning Perspectives* 6, no. 2 (1974): 83.

²⁹ See Cohen, "A Consumers' Republic," 237–238.

³⁰ See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 26.

³¹ See Miller and Nowak, *The Fifties*, 271.

³² See *Ibid.*

almost always remained unfulfilled and their desires were ignored.³³ However, women sympathizing with the Beat Generation, which was a group of novelist and poets opposing social norms, weakened the social convention of being primarily the housewives.³⁴

1.3 Mental Health Policy in 1950–1960

On a long-term basis America almost always struggled with difficulties in providing a proper care for people who suffered from any form of mental illness.³⁵ After the World War II mental health policy in America substantially changed.³⁶ With new drugs and technologies on the market the treatment for mentally ill people began to improve.³⁷ After the war in United States doctors desperately searched for something that would contribute to emptying the asylums as there were too many admissions. In 1946 more than 250,000 patients were admitted to state asylums and one hospital attendant had to provide proper health care to 250 patients. It was crucial to reduce the number of patients and to find cheaper and more effective method of treatment.³⁸ After 1950, mental institutions showed to be overcrowded as well. As too many patients occupied the wards it was almost impossible to devote proper care to each patient. It escalated to such extent that mental hospitals could have been easily mistaken for prison camps. A violence among the patients emerged. It was inevitable to make a change.³⁹

Community Mental Health Centers were the solution. These established centers were supposed to serve as day and emergency hospitals. The main purpose was to permanently substitute mental hospitals for community health services. Up to a certain point the system worked.⁴⁰ A major advantage was that the number of patients decreased in most of the

³³ See Ibid., 160.

³⁴ See Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., introduction to *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America*, 10.

³⁵ See Richard G. Frank and Sherry A. Glied, foreword to *Better But Not Well: Mental Health Policy in the United States Since 1950* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

³⁶ See Gerald N. Grob, "Community Mental Health Policy in America: Lessons Learned," *Israel Journal of Psychiatry* 53, no. 1 (2016): 6.

³⁷ See Frank and Glied, *Better But Not Well*, 26.

³⁸ See Mary De Young, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics, 1750-1950s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 287.

³⁹ See Jonathan Engel, *American Therapy: The Rise of Psychotherapy in the United States* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), https://books.google.cz/books?hl=cs&lr=&id=YIVfJt-JkvMC&oi=fnd&pg=PT31&ots=vDMZKANQf6&sig=gtX5Q8i4QzDmLxuPHbO5iiDx7rk&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴⁰ See Ibid.

hospitals in America. Nonetheless, a few problems occurred. Lack of preparation resulted in partial failure of the system.⁴¹ Patients with mild mental issues needed a different type of care than those suffering from a severe mental disorder. Other unfortunate consequences of community-oriented policy appeared, such as homelessness, higher crime rate, social isolation or revolving door syndrome. As a result, the erstwhile policy can be considered as rather idealistic. The reform was also known as deinstitutionalization.⁴²

Paradoxically, the public refused to accept mentally ill people within the community.⁴³ People with some mental disorder were being judged. They evoked fear resulting in rejection. It may have stemmed from the lack of knowledge. In addition to the limited contact with mentally ill people, specialized doctors working in mental institutions acquired a negative label as well. Later on, this conception gradually diminished but from 1950 to 1960 the illusion was one of the aspects which characterized the community attitude.⁴⁴

Osborn asserts that radical procedures were mainly concern of the second half of nineteenth and first half of twentieth century. "Some of these new therapies included insulin therapy, electroshock therapy ..., hydrotherapy, psychotherapy and lobotomy."⁴⁵ The lobotomy is closely connected with the story of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, as it was performed on the main protagonist of the book. The lobotomy, better known as prefrontal lobotomy, is a psychosurgery developed by Egas Moniz, nevertheless, Walter Freeman was the one who assimilated it into the system. He insisted that the procedure of lobotomy was functional, even though it was the cause of several failures and even deceases.⁴⁶ Young defines lobotomy as "the surgical severing of the neural connections to and from the prefrontal cortex, the anterior part of the brain's frontal lobes."⁴⁷ After the World War II lobotomies were performed more frequently than in previous years.⁴⁸ Mainly people suffering from schizophrenia were sent to the prefrontal lobotomy. Doctors

⁴¹ See Lawrence A. Osborn, "From Beauty to Despair: The Rise and Fall of the American State Mental Hospital," *L.A. Psychiatr Q* 80 (2009): 228–229.

⁴² See Grob, "Community Mental Health Policy in America: Lessons Learned," 6.

⁴³ See Osborn, "From Beauty to Despair: The Rise and Fall of the American State Mental Hospital," 228.

⁴⁴ See Jo C. Phelan et al., "The Public Conceptions of Mental Illness in 1950 and 1996: What is Mental Illness and Is It to Be Feared?" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41, no. 2 (2000): 188–189.

⁴⁵ Osborn, "From Beauty to Despair: The Rise and Fall of the American State Mental Hospital," 228.

⁴⁶ See Ibid.

⁴⁷ Young, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics*, 281.

expected to cure the mental illness by this radical procedure. The results were not satisfactory. A small number of patients were cured completely, few patients were cured only partially and many patients did not cure at all, the other way round their mental state even deteriorated.⁴⁹

As far as nursing profession is concerned, in 1950s nurses had to perform their job in the atrocious environment for low pay which came to lack of qualified nurses.⁵⁰ As the expansion of new drugs continued, nurses began losing their role fast. For that reason, it felt as if the patients and doctors were blind to their competences and responsibilities. In 1960s the government planned on solving this matter. The importance of nurses was about to enhance.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴⁹ See *Ibid.*, 285–286.

⁵⁰ See Peter Nolan, *A History of Mental Nursing* (Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes, 1998), 119.

⁵¹ See *Ibid.*, 123–124.

2 ANTICONFORMISM OF THE BEAT GENERATION

“I think the reward for conformity is that everyone likes you except yourself.”

– Rita Mae Brown

In the postwar American society gender roles were clearly defined. Men were expected to be the workers taking care of the family financially. Visible signs of resisting these conventions were slowly showing up before 1950s. Many American men were dissatisfied with their mundane, home-centre life and with their tedious, white-collar jobs. To free themselves from the commitment, many of them deviated to explore the world. McDowell asserts that breaking the construction of an ideal home and family was a form of rebellion and provocation.⁵²

San Francisco and New York were the main centers of the Beat Generation. Among the original Beats belong Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Céline Young, Edie Parker, Joan Vollmer and Lucien Carr. A circle of people gathered around Columbia campus in 1944 which shaped the beginning of the movement. And that is when the Beat Generation including Ken Kesey appeared to take a stand against the conformity and materialism. Conformism was a reality that was demanded by local authorities. The Beats stepped out of the crowd and did not fear to express the disagreement with the fixed values defining the disciplined American society. On logical grounds, it was a form of rebellion against the authorities of the society. The Beat Generation dared to protest against the social machinery as they wished to be perceived as individualists rather than an obedient unit.⁵³

In 1948 in an interview John Clellon asked Kerouac to define what it actually meant to be ‘Beat.’ He uttered that ‘Beat’ is associated with being raw or beaten down and with going against the tide. It symbolizes roughness, free mindset and individualism.⁵⁴ Jack Kerouac was one of the leading figures of the Beat Generation and he is well-known for his second novel *On the Road*. In part, the book was one of the aspects which brought fame to

⁵² See Linda McDowell, “Off the Road: Alternative Views of Rebellion, Resistance and “The Beats,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, no. 2 (1996): 412–418.

⁵³ See Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner’s Guide*, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjtaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

⁵⁴ See John Clellon Holmes, “This Is The Beat Generation,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 1952.

the Beats.⁵⁵ Thanks to the literary art they subsequently became internationally known and praised by many supporters even though very few people took the Beat literature seriously at the beginning. The Beat literature influenced many future artists, though. It was partially the literature, by which they voiced their unique attitudes and conviction.⁵⁶ Per contra, the Beat Generation is known by many people due to their revolutionary attitudes and so the literature merit is sometimes sidelined.⁵⁷ Moreover, some people tended to confuse the narrative genre of the Beat authors. They often mistook *autobiographical narrative* for *biography*. Biography offers a view on someone's life written by someone else. By contrast, autobiographical narrative offers a first person perspective of the person experiencing events in life. The erroneous perception resulted in plenty of incorrectly presented characteristics of the Beats.⁵⁸

The Beats were not considered to be the anti-conformist heroes all the time. They often experimented with psychedelic drugs which was also the case of Ken Kesey. Further research revealed that Beats were often labeled as pseudo-writers and as such, they received a nickname "Beatniks" which indicated rather negative connotation.⁵⁹ Another negative perception of the Beat Generation is connected with Edgar Hoover, who was the first Director of FBI in United States. He accused the Beat Generation of being a threat to the nation, however, the Beats did not want to endanger the country. They just wanted to get out of the rut to demonstrate that there are other ways of interaction and living in the society.⁶⁰ This raised the issue of people changing their perception of the society and their own values, which is why the Beat Generation was presented as a threat.⁶¹ On top of that, Beats were often stereotypically depicted as people keen on poetry in conjunction with

⁵⁵ See Peter Tamony, "Beat Generation: Beat: Beatniks," *Western States Folklore Society* 28, no. 4 (1969): 274.

⁵⁶ See Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner's Guide*, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=T5VtuSimSXE&printsec=frontcover&dq=beat+generation&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjtjaHT8t7RAhWZHsAKHRBdABkQ6AEIOzAD#v=onepage&q=beat%20generation&f=false>.

⁵⁷ See Kurt Hemmer, ed., introduction to *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature*, ix.

⁵⁸ See "What are the Differences Between an Autobiographical Narrative & a Biography?" Seattle Pi, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://education.seattlepi.com/differences-between-autobiographical-narrative-biography-5018.html>.

⁵⁹ See Tamony, "Beat Generation: Beat: Beatniks," 277.

⁶⁰ See Gair, *The Beat Generation: A Beginner's Guide*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2008).

⁶¹ See Justin Quinn, et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, Praha: Karolinum, 2013.

having a tendency to cultural rebellion.⁶² At last, the period of the Beat Generation presumably never fully ended. It simply evolved into the underground movement of Hippies.⁶³

2.1 The Countercultural Movement of Hippies

The Hippie phenomenon was one of the symbols of 1960s. The Haight-Ashbury was said to be the heart of Hippie movement in the United States. Allen Ginsberg, who was one of the Hippie members, was regarded as the father of the hippies. The Beat Generation as the predecessors contributed in shaping the Hippie subculture. Their attitudes and opinions resembled those of the Beat Generation.⁶⁴ Two points of view exist on whether the Beat Generation and Hippie culture differed or were rather similar. Evidence exists on both theories. John Howard subscribed to the point of view that the Beat Generation and Hippie culture shared the same values while their attitudes towards the society varied. In the approach taken here, it may be the reason why hippies had a stronger impact on the society. They highlighted more how the American society was often shallow.⁶⁵

First impulse in shaping the hippies was an activism of students in 1960. The members of the Hippie culture were mainly young people dissatisfied with current situation in American society. The Hippie culture ascribed great importance to nature, art, music, drugs, sex and even vandalism.⁶⁶ For conservative Americans such rebellious behavior was unacceptable.⁶⁷ Hippies opposed the political stands and the authorities. The Hippie communes simply did not identify with the American values that emerged in the postwar society. Moreover, they were fans of various drugs and they were not afraid to experiment.⁶⁸ Besides their own pleasure, they used drugs to build up the community.⁶⁹

⁶² See Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., introduction to *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America*, 10.

⁶³ See Kurt Hemmer, ed., introduction to *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), xii.

⁶⁴ See Micah Lee Issitt, preface to *Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), xii.

⁶⁵ See John Robert Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (1969): 55.

⁶⁶ See Timothy S. Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 13.

⁶⁷ See Gary Schwartz, *Beyond Conformity Or Rebellion: Youth and Authority in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.

⁶⁸ See Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 13.

⁶⁹ See Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," 45.

Hippies gathered mainly on rock festivals as it massively helped them to unite.⁷⁰ At the same time, America was dealing with racism but in the Hippie commune few African Americans appeared. Within their commune African Americans had an equal status.⁷¹

Several types of Hippies existed, although Issitt maintains that many features were interconnected.⁷² One group of Hippies was called visionaries and they started the movement, intending to create a community of free spirits. They assumed their lifestyle would attract other people and for that reason they would join them. On the contrary, drug-oriented Hippies were fans of marijuana, LSD or hashish and what they cared for the most was the psychedelic mania, whereas visionaries went far beyond that.⁷³

Most Hippies refused to be the sheep like many other residents of America. An impressive number of Hippie people argued that one will be set free as long as he or she decides to. Some people stated that although Hippie opposed and criticized the political situation, they were not concerned to seriously step in. They thought that for freedom it is essential to stay out of any political engagement.⁷⁴

The criticism of the society rooted from the fact that American society emphasized the role of money, career and success. The exaggerated materialism made a contribution to dehumanization. The consumerism jeopardized the human spirit and therefore the Hippie 'cult' challenged this. In particular, the hippie culture resided in breaking the barriers both moral and financial which separated people in the society. Some of the Hippie members chose living in poverty over yielding the power of money and assets. Another demonstration of rebellious activism is the one of dropping out of school, which somehow corresponded with the values of Hippies. Naturally, the system put emphasis to higher education for teenagers as it should provide basis for future career, where a person would earn one's living, for which people could buy items that were ticket to being well-off. Hippies undermined the system by living a life instead of buying one.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ See Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 49.

⁷¹ See *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷² See Issitt, preface to *Hippies: A Guide to an American Subculture*, xii.

⁷³ See Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," 48.

⁷⁴ See Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 91.

⁷⁵ See Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," 45–46.

2.1.1 Ken Kesey as the Link between the Beat Generation and the Hippie Counterculture

Ken Elton Kesey was an American author who may be clearly associated with the era of 1950s as well as 1960s. He was born in 1935 in Colorado and later on he moved to Oregon, and coincidentally, it is a setting in two of his novels. Kesey was born as a second son of dairy farmers. He studied at the University of Oregon and he married his high school friend, Norma Faye Haxby, with whom he had four children. Before he discovered his passion for writing, he loved wrestling and acting. However, literature was the major field he became keen on.⁷⁶

In 1959 he participated in writing seminars at Stanford University where he met certain writers who helped him to develop his writing talent. Kesey initially focused on writing short stories but shortly after, he wrote a novel which was never published. Critically acclaimed book that brought Kesey fame is a postmodern novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It was published in 1962 when Kesey was twenty-six years old.⁷⁷ No other book by Ken Kesey was so highly praised as *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Another book of the author is called *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964). It was somewhat an achievement but it was incomparable to the previously mentioned one. *Sometimes a Great Notion* is a novel set in Oregon displaying family of individualistic loggers. Among his other novels belong *Sailor Song* (1992), *Last Go Round: A Dime Western* (1994), *Garage Sale* (1973), *Demon Box* (1986), *The Further Inquiry* (1990) where he described his memories of Merry Pranksters, who represents a group of people travelling in a bus in 1960s, testing various drugs, but mainly, they are known for their opposition and hatred towards the social conventions and authorities.⁷⁸ He even wrote books for children – *Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear* (1988) and *The Sea Lion: A Story of the Sea Cliff People* (1991).⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See Peter Fish, *Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1984), 1–2.

⁷⁷ See Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Ibid., 3–4.

⁷⁹ See “Ken Kesey, Author of 'Cuckoo's Nest,' Who Defined the Psychedelic Era, Dies at 66.”

The famous book *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* reflects the social background in postwar America.⁸⁰ The book would have perhaps never existed if it was not for drug experiments and Kesey's experience in a mental hospital for veterans. This experience was surely the main inspiration behind the story of the novel. A friend of Kesey helped him to get to the *Menlo Park Veterans Administration Hospital* as a volunteer. Kesey was curious about the effects and side effects of various drugs and about the environment where the patients lived. He tested the effects of LSD. As he wished to go further, he applied for a job in the institution. He gained access to all kinds of drugs and therapeutic procedures. He was not afraid to test them on himself. He even underwent an electroshock therapy to see what it feels like. A vivid resemblance was between the patients in the hospital and the patients from the novel. He embedded the real characters into the fictional ones. It was his experience in the institution that convinced him the patients were merely puppets manipulated by the system and that their stay was far from being therapeutic.⁸¹

Besides being an author, he might be also defined as a person with controversial and unpredictable behavior. He is well-known for his positive attitude to drugs. As Christopher Lehmann states, Kesey is sometimes called the guru of psychedelic age. Furthermore, he was a symbol of rebellion with different perspective on life. He is ascribed to be the link between the Beat Generation and the Hippie counterculture.⁸² The Beat Generation as well as the Hippie movement exposed the two-faced society and they sharply criticized social conventions, materialism, war policies, and in case of Kesey, also the conditions of mental institutions.⁸³

Not only Kesey gave life to many characters in books, he became one himself. He was one of the characters in Tom Wolfe's non-fiction book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* published in 1968. Among other characters belong Neal Cassady, Dean Moriarty and Jack Kerouac.⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac served as a great inspiration for Ken Kesey and he yearned to

⁸⁰ See Kingsley Widmer, "THE POST-MODERNIST ART OF PROTEST: KESEY AND MAILER AS AMERICAN EXPRESSION OF REBELLION," *The Centennial Review* 19, no. 3 (1975): 123.

⁸¹ See Fish, *Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 3–4.

⁸² See Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Ken Kesey, Author of 'Cuckoo's Nest,' Who Defined the Psychedelic Era, Dies at 66," *New York Times*, November 11, 2001, accessed January 23, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/11/nyregion/ken-kesey-author-of-cuckoo-s-nest-who-defined-the-psychedelic-era-dies-at-66.html>.

⁸³ See Sterling Lord, "When Kerouac Met Kesey," *The American Scholar* 80, no. 4 (2011): 3, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/901350628?accountid=15518>.

⁸⁴ See "Ken Kesey, Author of 'Cuckoo's Nest,' Who Defined the Psychedelic Era, Dies at 66".

meet him personally. The dream came true when Kerouac joined the Merry Pranksters on their trip throughout the country.⁸⁵ Tom Wolfe described the culture of Hippies and Merry Pranksters in his book. As it was already demonstrated, the Hippies were not contended with politics and consumerism and they were not afraid to openly fight against it.⁸⁶ Kesey's view of the society was negative before he took part in a bus trip with the Merry Pranksters.⁸⁷ The cross-country journey confirmed and strengthened Kesey's prior viewpoint. The trip built a broader notion on how would an ideal society look like. Kesey portrayed the idealistic vision based on the experience he had during the journey. He enjoyed the freedom, the activities they indulged in. He observed that his 'fellows' had a similar mind-set as they dreamt about harmony and freedom. Thereupon he desired to adjust the social norms.⁸⁸

Kesey gave rise to the psychedelic revolution and he spread a notion of LSD among people. He attempted to discover what lies beyond the consciousness after using a drug.⁸⁹ Mills points out that in that manner in 1960s many people perceived Kesey's activities more than his literary achievements. Consequently, many people rarely identified him as an author.⁹⁰ As it was mentioned, Kesey protested against the social and political norms. His rebellious behavior broke the social conventions and few times even the law. At some point, he indulged in various protests, scandals and several arrests. He collected his memories from the jail from which a book *Kesey's Jail Journal* (2003) was edited and published. The rebellious behavior particularly aimed for the redirection of the mainstream society.⁹¹ Kesey attempted to send a message via his writing, although he anticipated it would be insufficient. Lashin contends that Kesey was neither a teacher, nor a leader and that his vision sustained only in a limited circle of people who surrounded him.⁹²

⁸⁵ See Lord, "When Kerouac Met Kesey," 110–113.

⁸⁶ See Elliot M. Zashin, "POLITICAL THEORIST AND DEMIURGE: THE RISE AND FALL OF KEN KESEY," *The Centennial Review* 17, no. 2 (1973): 199-213.

⁸⁷ See Fish, *Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 3–4.

⁸⁸ See Zashin, "POLITICAL THEORIST AND DEMIURGE: THE RISE AND FALL OF KEN KESEY," 200.

⁸⁹ See "Ken Kesey, Author of 'Cuckoo's Nest,' Who Defined the Psychedelic Era, Dies at 66."

⁹⁰ See Nicolaus Mills, "KEN KESEY AND THE POLITICS OF LAUGHTER," *The Centennial Review* 16, no. 1 (1972): 82.

⁹¹ See Widmer, "THE POST-MODERNIST ART OF PROTEST: KESEY AND MAILER AS AMERICAN EXPRESSION OF REBELLION," 121–122.

⁹² See Elliot M. Zashin, "POLITICAL THEORIST AND DEMIURGE: THE RISE AND FALL OF KEN KESEY," 204.

Once the wild era of Kesey's life finished, he settled with his family in a farm to live an 'average' life. Kesey was somewhat a two-faced man. On one hand he revolted against the social conventions, on the other hand he claimed to be a family man. Later on, Kesey was diagnosed with liver cancer and he died of complications during a surgery in 2001.⁹³

⁹³ See "Ken Kesey, Author of 'Cuckoo's Nest,' Who Defined the Psychedelic Era, Dies at 66".

3 ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

The story of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is set in a mental institution in Oregon. It is a first-person narrative and it is narrated from the perspective of Chief Bromden, who suffers from schizophrenia, therefore the information which readers obtain may or may not be reliable.

Patients on the ward are divided into Chronics and Acutes. The ward is under direct rule of an authoritarian Nurse Ratched, often referred to as the Big Nurse. She controls the ward, as well as all patients, at least until the arrival of a rebellious man, Randle Patrick McMurphy. He attempts to set his own rules and that is where the conflict arises.

McMurphy's influence over other patients gradually increases. He intends to defeat the Big Nurse and restore patients' individuality and freedom. He succeeds progressively and fights to the death for himself and the patients. In the end Nurse Ratched commands to perform a lobotomy on McMurphy by which she ends the ongoing war. He turns to a Chronic, Vegetable patient, becomes paralyzed and he can no longer walk or talk. Eventually, he dies in the mental hospital after Chief Bromden has mercy upon his suffering and smothers him with a pillow. Chief Bromden escapes from the hospital and finally relishes freedom.

The book serves as a metaphor for the American conformist society enjoying the economic prosperity and at the same time, it heavily criticizes the internal system of mental institutions. As it was already said, Kesey personally witnessed, how badly are patients treated in mental hospitals and so he set the story in a fictional one. Kesey also openly criticized the American conformism and for that he used a fictional character of McMurphy.

In the mental institution patients were robbed of their freedom, free will and human features not only owing to immoderate amount of medical interventions such as lobotomy or electroshock therapy. Dehumanization appeared to be a huge problem. To dehumanize a person means to shatter his independence, individuality, spirit and soul. In the outside society people were robbed of their freedom and independence and they were told how to live their lives. They were symbolically losing their human features as almost all families had an identical life, where grown-up men earned their living in a white-collar job position, women represented a 'jewelry' of the household taking care of children and the descendants were expected to have higher education and to follow their parents' footsteps. Consequently, people behaved as robots rather than human beings. A majority of people

submissively lived the automated lives, on the other hand many people craved for the independence, their own values and dreams. A few people were courageous enough to stop dreaming and start acting. Rebellious individuals began to undermine the solid and secure social system.

Some readers may be surprised about the diction involving profane language, vulgarisms and offensive names. It reflects the attitudes of the Beat Generation as they were not afraid to express themselves explicitly and their writing style was greatly authentic. McMurphy rebels by his actions as well as by using a strong language by which he overtly expresses his disagreement.

In the following chapters three major themes will be analyzed. The themes of authority and rebellion are represented by the characters of Nurse Ratched and Randle McMurphy. The theme of insanity is represented by individual inmates and it serves as the link and the intermediary between the foregoing themes.

3.1 The Process of Dehumanizing of the ‘Insanes’

One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest provides a lifelike depiction of patients on the ward. Their language, values and habits reflect their coexistence within the asylum.⁹⁴ Moreover, it may arouse considerable sympathy towards them as the readers are provided with many vivid details within the story. As Sutherland suggests, the book is highly humanizing⁹⁵ despite the fact that it deals with such dehumanizing issues. The world of patients inside the mental institution is controlled and manipulated by a strict head nurse Ratched and they are forced to face many dehumanizing procedures administrated by her.⁹⁶

As it was already mentioned, on the ward inmates are divided into two groups of patients. One group is called Acutes who are still considered to be sick and who need a proper treatment. On the contrary, Chronics are the second group of patients who are said to be the renegades of society. Hospital employees admit that these are people with a little chance on recovery and that they were placed into the hospital so they would not “[give] the product a bad name.”⁹⁷ The ‘product’ points to the outside society where these people

⁹⁴ See Janet R. Sutherland, “A Defense of Ken Kesey’s “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” *The English Journal* 61, no. 1 (1972): 28.

⁹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁷ Ken Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (New York: Signet, 1963), 15.

would noticeably create a negative image as they mismatch the perfect model required by the country. Furthermore, Chronics consist of three subcategories, which are Walkers like Bromden, Wheelers and Vegetables and their health condition is the worst. Patients fill their free time by practicing arm wrestling, playing cards tricks, writing letters and telling jokes without laughing aloud, though. Nobody dares to laugh since it would provoke Nurse Ratched to immediately investigate such deviation from normal behavior. According to this description, it probably looks like a commonplace where patients heal their psyche and in the mean time they participate in various entertaining activities, but if one digs deeper, the viewpoint may highly differ.

Few patients became Chronics only after they entered the hospital. That is the case of a patient called Ellis, who is now a 'Vegetable' due to the 'Shock Shop,' which refers to the electroshock therapy. He was affected by an immoderate amount of it, which literally destroyed his brain. Now he is nailed to a wall like a plunder hovering between life and death. Ellis represents Nurse Ratched's trophy proving how twisted and heartless she was in a position of the institution's authority. Another patient, Ruckly, is an illustration of badly done lobotomy. Lobotomy is defined as a brain surgery in which nerves are disconnected in a brain's lobe through the eye sockets. Before the surgery, Ruckly had untamed, wild character. After the lobotomy, he had never talked, smiled or walked again. Ruckly and Ellis are a perfect demonstration of the dehumanizing processes within the mental institution. Bromden perceives Ruckly as "another robot for the Combine."⁹⁸ 'Combine' refers to the outside society which mentally enslaved people just like Nurse Ratched did. The hospital is merely a tiny part of the whole society operating nearly on the same principle. Chief Bromden further explains this idea by saying: "The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in schools and in churches, the hospital is."⁹⁹ When a patient tends to be too rebellious and insubordinate, the authority is able to remodel him into an obedient, submissive person.

Nurse Ratched gradually builds her own army of easily controlled people as she dehumanizes the men by these radical procedures. This can be seen as a metaphor for the whole postwar American society which constructed an environment full of pliant people

⁹⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

living according certain rules. Just like Nurse Ratched, the new American policies gradually created easily manipulated, docile population.

Nurse Ratched is definitely abusing her power on the inmates. She could send them for electroshock therapy whenever she desired and the electroshocks were not used to heal the patients. It was used when a divergence in their behavior emerged and more importantly, when an individual freedom became involved. The conclusion to be drawn is when a man attempts to display personal feelings or show displeasure, he is being punished straight away by damaging one's brain. If a patient goes completely out of control, the brain and mind are enslaved by an intervention in form of a lobotomy. Kesey used the mental hospital as a point to express how society treated people who 'differed.' Some of these broken units were sent to the hospital so as to be fixed. Kesey set the story in the mental institution as it was another subject of his criticism. Kesey witnessed the procedures and unorthodox methods used in a mental institution in person, which encouraged him to point out to both issues in this book.

Moreover, patients need to follow relatively strict regime during the day and especially in the morning. Early in the morning they are expected to "polish the wall, clean the floor, empty ash trays and clean secretions after Vegetable patients."¹⁰⁰ After that, Acutes align alphabetically in front of a mirror for a purpose of shaving. On that occasion, Chief Bromden tends to hide somewhere as there is a chance he will be taken to the Shock Shop for an electroshock therapy. After that, a breakfast is served where some patients need to be fed as they are unable to do it themselves owing to their bad health condition. At half past seven patients are taken to a day room and at that moment Nurse Ratched "pushes a button for things to start."¹⁰¹ Each patient plunges into his fixed position which repeats every day. Nurse Ratched manipulates with the inmates as if they are puppets. Everybody is coordinated just like a flock of preset robots: "Everybody come to order. Acutes: sit on your side of the day room and wait for cards. [...] Ellis: go to your place at the wall, hands up to receive the nails. Pete: wag your head like a puppet. [...] Everybody: breath in...and out...in perfect order; hearts all beating at the rate the OD cards have ordered. Sound of matched cylinders."¹⁰² At eight o'clock patients are obliged to take medication and it often

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰² Ibid.

happens that they do not know what kind of medicaments they are taking and for what purpose. If someone defies taking it, he is chastened once again. That was the case of Mr. Taber who showed to be a rule-breaker and he dared to ask about his medication. After a short argument Nurse Ratched tamed Mr. Taber by commanding her assistants to violently strike Mr. Taber with needle into his anus and she also sent him for a dose of electroshock. This example nicely demonstrates how a slight indiscipline sufficed in order to ‘deserve’ punishment.

When Nurse Ratched succeeds and vanquishes patients’ resistance and finally turns them into a repaired unit, she enjoys that moment with unaffected pleasure. That person may return into the society since he is finally adjusted and meets the conditions: “When a completed product goes back out into the society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse’s heart. [...] He’s adjusted to surrounding finally...”¹⁰³ Patients’ freedom is suppressed substantially as they have to follow commands of somebody else. In a society the situation was the same as it was closely analyzed in chapter 1.2 and 2. People needed to adjust to the surroundings even though it led to losing their individuality. They were instigated to live by certain ideals to such extent that it burst into a social uprising.

3.2 The Deceitful Image

Apart from Chief Bromden, men on the ward do not fully realize they are being manipulated with until the arrival of Randle McMurphy. In order to bring these men under Nurse Ratched’s control and to achieve obedience, she wears a mask of a decent, caring person under which she hides her true, vicious self. The split personality indicates her elaborated manipulative strategy. In the hospital hall Bromden once witnesses Nurse Ratched screaming at two African-American male nurses for not doing their job properly. Only after the patients start coming out of their rooms, she immediately soothes and Bromden comments on the situation: “She has to change back before she’s caught in the shape of her hideous real self [...] all they see is the head nurse, smiling and calm and cold as usual.”¹⁰⁴ Kesey’s perception of Nurse Ratched matches his perception of the American society being full of superficial, two-faced people pretending something they are not. For

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

that he blames the American authority which stimulated inhabitants to feign to live deceitfully 'perfect' life.

The outside world does not know anything about the cruel practices within the mental institution. Instead, a man employed in Public Relations department organizes events for school teachers to explore the hospital, where he boasts how the cruelty had vanished from asylums for eternity. It is obviously a lie and a false image presented to the outward society. The inmates are forced to pretend they live in a cheerful environment to strengthen the impression that the system is not amiss. Kesey refers to the shallow, spurious image which the American society created as well. Just like the inmates, Americans had to live a life someone else determined them. They accepted their fate because they felt it was a right thing to do. However, many of them only pretended to rejoice in this way of living which strengthened the society's position.

3.3 Fixed Roles and Rules

The Chronics and the Acutes remain separated in the day room. Each group of patients is strictly placed to their own side of the room. It is one of Nurse Ratched's tactics in how to inconspicuously alert to the Acutes that one day, they may end up similarly provided they breach of the obedience and rules:

"They don't like to be reminded that here's what could happen to them someday. The Big Nurse recognizes this fear and knows how to put it to use; she'll point out to an Acute, whenever he goes into a sulk, that you boys be good boys and cooperate with the staff policy which is engineered for your cure, or you'll end up over on that side."¹⁰⁵

Kesey most probably alludes to the strictly given roles within the society. The day room may represent the whole society where each person's role was firmly determined. The whole system could start collapsing provided one dared to swerve from his or her role.

Furthermore, Nurse Ratched and her team are proud of their success to keep the patients in obedience to the hospital's rules. Similarly, the American authorities were surely blissful about their success to maintain people's obedience. In the hospital the success is substantiated in form of a wooden board hanging right in the middle part of the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 18.

day room between Acutes and Chronics reflecting their devoted cooperation. The board represents material reminder of Ratched's determination in observing the rules. As the hospital had its own reminder of achievements, the American society had their own as well. It was money, for which people acquired furnishings into their lovely homes and that was the material portrayal of their adaptation. As it was stated, the wooden board is also used as a metaphor for a clear distinction between two groups of people. Correspondingly, a similar line was drawn in the society as well. The American culture in 1950s and 1960s determined gender roles. As the families made their houses homely with the relatively expensive items, it was quite clear, who is going to use them the most. Women were expected to manage household, on the other hand men were bound to obtain money by which the household could be equipped.

Kesey portrays the absurdity of rules and restrictions on an occurrence in the novel when McMurphy is having breakfast and after he finishes it, he decides to leave the dining room. The male nurses block his way saying that all patients are allowed to leave the room strictly at seven-thirty. McMurphy is absolutely stunned replying derisively: "I sure don't want to go against that goddamned policy."¹⁰⁶ Another example heading a similar direction is when McMurphy wants to brush his teeth in the morning but the rules dictate that he cannot do that whenever he wants to. He cynically purports: "What you s'pose it'd be like if evahbody was to brush their teeth whenever they took a notion to brush?"¹⁰⁷ He also mocks that the staff keeps toothpastes locked in a cabinet. Through McMurphy, Kesey ridicules the paranoia of the American society where people were afflicted by an omnipresent fear and anxiety that the European adversary would destroy the collective existence of the American nation. McMurphy's rebellion of brushing his teeth was even more important than the information that one of the patients died over night.

3.4 Insane or Not Insane

Concerning the character of Chief Bromden, he is a victim of racism, as he is a half-blood Columbian Indian, for what he "has been systematically ignored and abused all his life to the point of madness."¹⁰⁸ As a consequence, he suffers from hallucinations and paranoia.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 103.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁸ Sutherland, "A Defense of Ken Kesey's "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," 29.

His mind is unstable and often filled with frightful images. From all patients, Bromden is the one who lives the longest in the mental hospital, more specifically since the Second World War ended. His state of health improves little by little on the grounds of an interaction with McMurphy.¹⁰⁹ Throughout the story Chief Bromden is building a friendship with McMurphy and he discovers McMurphy's true self and vice versa. McMurphy contributes to the development of Chief Bromden as a character and also to improvements in his mental condition. Bromden perceives reality differently at the end of the story and he reaches the final stage of his personal growth by realizing and accepting his own identity of being an American Indian. Additionally, Bromden manages to overcome the tormenting memories by learning how to laugh.¹¹⁰ McMurphy's attitudes and amiable approach towards Bromden decreased a degree of his mental disorder more than any therapeutic sessions with Nurse Ratched. McMurphy has neither a high education nor an experience in medicine, yet he instantly uncovered Bromden's secret of not being deaf and dumb. McMurphy evinced to be tremendously perspicacious person for he often noticed things that other people either did not notice or chose to ignore.

Furthermore, Chief Bromden seems to have a major advantage over other patients on the ward, as he is the only person who is well aware of many concealed secrets and treatment methods of Nurse Ratched. These affairs remain undisclosed to other patients. As Bromden reveals: "they don't bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I'm nearby because they think I'm deaf and dumb. Everybody thinks so. I'm cagey enough to fool them that much."¹¹¹ By 'they' Bromden refers to all hospital attendants including Nurse Ratched. She partly misjudged Bromden's health condition and therefore blindly believes her private matters are safe even if he knows about them. By Chief Bromden's caginess and rebellious pretence, he unintentionally becomes an unconscious confidant of the ward's supervision. Although he gave Nurse Ratched a false sense of security, he did not dare to make an actual use of the opportunity as he was terrified of the Big Nurse.

At the beginning of the story, Chief Bromden implies that he is regularly sent to a room where an electroshock therapy is performed on him. In these tense and stressful situations, Bromden escapes in his mind to the childhood memories of living with his

¹⁰⁹ See Sutherland, "A Defense of Ken Kesey's "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," 28-29.

¹¹⁰ See Ibid., 29.

¹¹¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 3.

father. These memories ease his fear and assist in Bromden's accelerated recovery after the therapy. After the electroshock therapy is over, a patient is usually taken to a place called Seclusion Room, where he can recover under the supervision of male nurses. Chief Bromden loses notion of what is happening on the ward when he is locked in the Seclusion Room and therefore he loses his advantage in that moment.

Not being able to fit into the society was perceived almost as an illness therefore Ratched treats the patients as insane cases: "You men are in this hospital [...] because of your proven inability to adjust to society."¹¹² For instance, a character of Harding, who is revealed to be a homosexual, entered the hospital as the society disapproved his existence there. The reality was that most of the patients entered the hospital with a stable mental health and only after they underwent many procedures and seeming treatment, their mental health became damaged.

3.5 Authority as the Powerful Force

As it was already indicated, Chief Bromden appears to be a highly perceptive person as he thoroughly observes the world inside the mental institution. He had noticed some of Nurse Ratched's behavioral patterns and he compares her to a perfectly set machine. Instead of personal belongings, she carries various tools inside her wicker bag: "It's a loose weave and I can see inside it; there's no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, she's got that bag full of a thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today—wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter, tiny pills that gleam like porcelain, needles, forceps, watchmakers' pliers, rolls of copper wire. . ."¹¹³ She comes to the hospital fully equipped and prepared to use her tool in case she spots a deflection in patients' behavior. Nurse Ratched experiences a paroxysm each time something is thrown into disarray.

From the story we do not know much about Ratched's personal life except that she is a spinster and we have no notion of how she behaves at home. However, once she enters the hospital, attributes of a woman start resembling those of a machine. All this considered, an authority in the hospital is particularly represented by a despotic, oppressive Nurse Ratched who treats her patients as objects and broken components rather than human beings. The proof that the head nurse resembles a machine more than a human being is even her body

¹¹² Ibid., 167.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.

language: “She nods once to each. Precise, automatic gesture.”¹¹⁴ Her appearance supports this view as well: “Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision made [...] everything working together [...]. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would otherwise been a perfect work.”¹¹⁵ Ratched is compared to being manufactured. It may refer to the consumerism occurring in the society. Many people were purchasing various items and so they were making precise, automatic moves, thus they behaved mechanically like the devices they were incessantly buying. As Barsness proclaims: “Oppressive, conformist, regulatory, civilization is the suppressor of individual freedom and the mindless slave of a material goal.”¹¹⁶

Kesey portrays Nurse Ratched as a person obsessed with power, order and neatness. Her behavioral scheme suggests that she suffers from obsessive-compulsive behavior.¹¹⁷ The symptoms of this mental disorder are obsessive, irritating thoughts causing compulsive behavior. Ratched’s compulsive behavior involves exaggerated sense for cleanliness and order. It may be connected to people living outside the hospital. Kesey may have imposed this condition on the authority to depict the behavioral scheme of people within the society as they were pushed to compulsively maintain order. For Ratched it is an automatic thing and the conformist society became accustomed to behave identically.

Even in the outside world it was crucial to find the proper manipulative strategy to achieve what was desired. With solid stimuli people were eventually prevailed upon to accept their roles. This approach is similar to Nurse Ratched’s one. To achieve obedience, she does not hesitate to use resolute techniques to subjugate the men. Over the years, Nurse Ratched’s power in adjusting was progressively rising and she enhanced the way she used her power. She is slowly building the web of stratagems and she knows exactly what to do to achieve desired results.

Moreover, during her career many different doctors worked for the hospital and each of them lasted maximum of three months as she shattered their authority and declined their suggestions for improvements. Mostly, they were terrified of her and they would do

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

¹¹⁶ John A. Barsness, “Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress,” *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 23, no. 1 (1969): 28, accessed March 30, 2017.

¹¹⁷ See Philip A. Kalisch and Beatrice J. Kalisch, “The Image of Nurses in Novels,” *American Journal of Nursing* 82, no. 8 (1982): 1224.

anything to leave that place as soon as possible. That shows how extremely powerful Ratched was. Eventually she found a perfectly malleable doctor who evinced traces of submission and passivity – two attributes she wished to achieve with everyone including the inmates and especially McMurphy. Her three African American assistants were chosen with precision as well. They are hateful and wicked just like Nurse Ratched and they are adjusted to her needs. It can be said that the assistants represent a man version of Nurse Ratched: “They are in contact on a high-voltage wave length of hate, and the black boys are out there performing her bidding before she even thinks it.”¹¹⁸ She uses them to spy on the patients but she does not have to command them any more as they are trained for discipline and they share a similar mindset.

One vulgarism or verbal assault is sufficient for Nurse Ratched to label a patient as being ‘Potential Assaultive.’ These patients are then sent either to the ‘Disturb ward’ or to the ‘Shock Shop’ where no one on the ward wants to end up. Although the authority was authorized to administrate these procedures on highly mentally disordered patients, in actual fact, the authority commonly used its power in unauthorized cases. Patients acquiesce to respect Ratched’s rules as they are terrified even with the idea of experiencing the EST – Electro Shock Therapy:

“It’s a clever little procedure, simple, quick, nearly painless it happens so fast, but no one ever wants another one. Ever. [...] Five cents’ worth of electricity through the brain and you are jointly administrated therapy and a punishment for your hostile go-to-hell behavior [...] [After that] you are unable to think coherently. You can’t recall things. Enough of these treatments and a man could turn out like Mr. Ellis you see over there against the wall.”¹¹⁹

Ratched enslaves the men both physically and mentally. She also mentally blackmails the patients and therefore her power and authority is enforced. McMurphy decides to stop the torment by “[beating Nurse Ratched] at her own game.”¹²⁰

Not only Ratched controls patients, she also controls the time inside the hospital. She accelerates and decelerates time as she desires by manipulating the clock on the wall. She callously messes with patients’ heads. Ratched attempts to have every aspect under her

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 73.

control the same way as the American government persisted in controlling the society in 1950s.

Regarding the internal administration, the authority was hypocritical by saying that all suggestions for improvements are more than welcomed. The actual realization never happened as Nurse Ratched always found plenty of excuses and reasons why a certain thing is undoable. The false impression of democracy uncovered the fact that order was something which had to be unconditionally preserved. When McMurphy suggested that he wishes to have a game room where he together with other patients could enjoy their free time playing cards, Nurse Ratched instantly argued that the hospital lacks space capacity and it does not have enough staff to monitor the game room. It reflects how change in any form was greatly inappropriate and undesired.

4 REBELLION AS AN ABRUPT CHANGE

“You don’t lead by pointing and telling people some place to go. You lead by going to that place and making a case.”

– Ken Kesey

Many Americans were willing to live according to the set rules only to a certain extent. As the social pressure intensified, many of them started to realize that they do not want to spend the rest of their lives in a pretentious society. The members of the Beat Generation were the primal inducement for an abrupt change. They understood that people have their own beliefs and dreams, and that they should live according to their own ideals rather than to follow a conception of someone else. Behaving like an individual self fits into the McMurphy’s strong belief. His admission on the ward was already a presage of the forthcoming change in the institution: “This morning the lockworks rattle strange; it’s not a regular visitor at the door.”¹²¹ The very first sign of a rebellious act is represented by a polite refusal of McMurphy to have a shower. Also, he did not behave as a usual admission and he somehow disrupted the routine. His arrival was underlined by laughter. It resounded through the whole ward and a new chapter in the men’s lives began.

Genuine laughter was something which was not common on the ward as it did not fit into the nurse’s scheme. Bromden himself uttered: “I realize all of a sudden it’s the first laugh I’ve heard in years.”¹²² McMurphy’s intention was to overrun the ward and to bring joy and laughter. Before he could explore the ward, he was determined to make a change. He hit the ward like an unrestrained hurricane smashing the routine to smithereens: “[...] I’m thinking about taking over this whole show myself [...]”¹²³ Laughter was also something which was not very common in the society as people were used to be highly reserved and aloof. Their apathy is understandable as they mostly lived a life which somebody else dictated them. People often internally suffered since they craved for happiness and personal satisfaction.

The reason McMurphy became a soul mate of the patients so quickly might be explained from a psychological perspective. If an individual easily identifies with another

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

¹²² Ibid., 12.

¹²³ Ibid., 19.

person who has a certain aim in mind, then there is a higher probability that others would begin to share the same goal and values.¹²⁴

In reality, McMurphy was not an insane person. He merely pretended insanity in order to be transferred from a Pendleton Work Farm to this mental institution, as he found conditions on the work farm unsuitable for him. As regards the causes for this, McMurphy became embroiled in a dispute with his colleagues on the farm and the court pronounced a judgment against McMurphy stating he is a psychopath. Apparently, a psychopath was defined as a person who fights on a regular basis and as a person who has an excessive need to have a sexual intercourse. It can be seen from the above analysis, that the authority sometimes tended to misjudge legal cases. A possibility of ending up in a mental institution occurred regardless of one's actual mental health problems.

McMurphy's main avocation is definitely gambling and card games. Perhaps his rebellion resembles a game with his own rules. He loves winning and a part of him may have acted out of egoistic reason. However, with each week his affection for the men intensifies and so his actions appear to be rather of unselfish, altruistic origin. Even though the inmates are separated in the room and Nurse Ratched distinguishes between them, McMurphy treats all of them equally. He proved it when he acquainted with each of the men: "And when he finishes shaking hands with the last Acute he comes right on over to the Chronics, like we aren't no different."¹²⁵ One of the philosophies of the Hippie movement was that all people are equal and they proved that by accepting anyone regardless of his or her gender or ethnicity.¹²⁶

McMurphy challenged the head nurse from the very beginning just like many rebels began to challenge the status quo within the American society. McMurphy tested Ratched's limits and he speculated how far he can go and what will be the impact. The Beat Generation chose a similar approach as they wondered what will be the outcome of crossing the boundaries. Nevertheless, McMurphy did not incessantly act heroically. He had his doubts and he knew he incurs the risk of being sent to electroshocks or lobotomy. Eventually, he realized that he has become the spiritual leader of the patients and he

¹²⁴ See Judith N. Cates, "Conflict Resolution in the Mental Hospital," *Journal of Health and Human Behavior* 7, no. 2 (1966): 138.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁶ See Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 49.

plucked up the courage to complete his ‘mission.’ McMurphy certainly became a leader of the patients. Nevertheless, the position of a leader has already been occupied by one of the patients, Harding. He was a respected, educated man, yet he was incapable to rebel against Nurse Ratched and so he remained passive just like his comrades. Many people within the society blended in with the crowd as well as Harding did in the hospital.

At first sight, McMurphy was able to recognize that the majority of the men were far from being insane. And McMurphy made quite an impression on the men as they were amazed by his appearance, attitude and boldness in his behavior. To compare it with the Beat Generation, they did not reform the nation completely but they made a first step and they succeeded in a partial amendment of the situation as well. Simply, their life philosophy attracted scores of people and their nonchalant but seditious approach caused that many Beat Generation sympathizers became involved.

4.1 Breaking the Rules

McMurphy decided to rebel against the authority and he underwent several battles with Nurse Ratched. One of McMurphy’s battles was when a group meeting took place in the asylum and the inmates were granted a privilege to vote in a matter of changes in the entertainment field. McMurphy proposed to change a television watching time. He preferred to be allowed to watch the television during the day, since the World Series were held at that moment. Other patients consented to that suggestion, but Nurse Ratched strictly spurned the idea of profound intervention to the order and generally to the daily routine cycle. It is evident that any intervention or attempt for change was not welcomed which also applies for the American society. Once the authority resolved to observe the rules, it was extremely difficult to enforce the change. Yet it was possible to systematically violate the conventions. The following excerpt demonstrates that McMurphy was not discouraged by nurse’s disapproval at all. As Sutherland asserts, it was a fight over whose will is going to win. In this case, McMurphy’s will beat Nurse Ratched’s will and thus he scored against the authority in this battle.¹²⁷ For that he did not have to officially break any of Ratched’s rules, therefore he could not be punished. Instead, he shrewdly handled the situation in his own way:

“To tell the truth, he don’t even let on he knows the picture is turned off; he puts his cigarette between his teeth and pushes his cap forward [...]. Then Cheswick goes and gets him a chair, and then Billy Bibbit goes, and then Scanlon and then Frederickson and Sefelt [...] and we all go pull us chairs up. [...] And we’re all sitting there lined up in front of that blanked-out TV set, watching the gray screen just like we could see baseball game clear as day, and she’s ranting and screaming behind us.”¹²⁸

The combat of wills was instituted as soon as Nurse Ratched realized that McMurphy is going to be an extraordinary case. During a conversation with another nurse, Miss Flinn, Ratched admits that she realizes the potential threat carrying the name of Randle Patrick McMurphy. There is however a further point to be considered. Ratched accuses McMurphy of craving for power and respect. She regards him as a master manipulator aiming at the disruption of the institution: “[...] that is exactly what the new patient is planning: to take over. He is what we call a ‘manipulator,’ Miss Flinn, a man who will use everyone and everything to his own ends.”¹²⁹ To put it in different words, the archetype of a manipulator was according Nurse Ratched an individual within the society, who is so influential and rebellious that people would follow his footsteps. Such fellowship jeopardizes the rigorously set rules and the whole system as well. This statement is loaded with irony as Nurse Ratched, herself is a person responsible for manipulating with people around her, which makes the authority hypocritical. Some people may claim that the so-called manipulators in the society were people, who were either members or supporters of the rebellious Beat Generation movement or the Hippie movement. These movements, together with Ken Kesey, subversively worked on at least some social change as their antipathy towards the American society escalated. Kesey conveyed the conservative activism into the story of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* where the mental institution represents the machinery of the outside world being called the ‘Combine.’

McMurphy starts the day on the ward in his own way. He disrupts the routine by singing which leaves everybody speechless. Singing falls into the category of uncommon things. McMurphy ventures to act impudently and Bromden interprets his behavior as a liberated act. Bromden cogitates why he dares to act so freely and he comes to a conclusion

¹²⁷ See Sutherland, “A Defense of Ken Kesey’s “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” 31.

¹²⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 144-145.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

that “the Combine missed getting to him soon enough with controls. Maybe he grew up so wild all over the country, [...] [he was] on the move so much that the Combine never has a chance to get anything installed [...] because a moving target is hard to hit.”¹³⁰ It is a clear reference to the prim way of life within the society. If one is strong and immune enough, there is a chance for an independent life. McMurphy is a freethinker who minds only about himself: “No wife wanting new linoleum. [...] No one to care about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man.”¹³¹

McMurphy’s uprising against Nurse Ratched did not rise in revolt only in order to defeat her. On top of that, he also planned to turn her ‘army of machines’ back to human beings by showing them what it feels like to have a real friendship and by awakening their individuality. To remind them they are worth understanding and independence, McMurphy was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his dejected comrades. His fiery temperament entwined with his sanguine heart. McMurphy’s philosophy is to ‘stay single’, live freely and independently. As Bromden states, “He [didn’t] let Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit.”¹³² He also remarks that his freedom has always been violated as people did not let him be free: “but you know how society persecutes a dedicated man.”¹³³ McMurphy criticizes the outside society repressing one’s individuality. Most of the men paradoxically escaped from the society to the mental hospital since they struggled living their lives in a world full of pretence and hypocrisy. What they did not anticipate was that the hospital was merely a fraction of that world and so basically they reached a dead end. They got themselves into a vicious cycle from which it was almost unfeasible to escape from.

Nurse Ratched wants to crack McMurphy’s influence on patients. She inculcates in patients’ mind that McMurphy has a negative impact on them and that he only avails their comradeship to benefit himself financially. He loves gambling and winning and he constantly makes bets with patients. Ratched perceives McMurphy as a ‘disturbing factor’ and she tries her best to push him into making a mistake in order to send him to the electroshock therapy. She besmirches his reputation, however, McMurphy’s comrades

¹³⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 162.

¹³³ Ibid., 22.

never betrayed him as they were gradually becoming stronger to withstand Ratched's coercive means. Owing to McMurphy patients were continuously acquiring their personal independence and individuality.

Ratched could immediately send McMurphy to the 'Disturb Ward' but she is disgusted by the idea that McMurphy would be a martyr and a hero to other patients. She yearns to relish her victory alongside with having the label of being the good one. Her strategy is based on convincing the patients that McMurphy is nothing more than a loser. She is well aware of her power. She can keep McMurphy on the ward as long as she needs to, because she is the one who decides whether a person will be discharged or not, and it gives her a huge advantage.

At one point, McMurphy intentionally imitates Ratched's manners and behavior. He wants her to see that he is a huge rival in their willpower 'game.' He temporarily follows the rules, cooperates with her, he uses sophisticated language when communicating with her. The more something boils his blood, the more polite he becomes. He is doing it to beat Ratched in her own game, and most of the time, he seems to be successful. McMurphy intends to destroy the barriers that keep the men from sensing their individuality.

4.2 The Concordance of the Two Worlds

The situation inside the hospital is a vivid reflection of the world outside as it operates on the same principle:

“[...] it's not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it's the whole Combine, the nationwide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them.”¹³⁴ Both inside and outside intensively endeavor to adjust these worlds: “Under her rule the world Inside is almost completely adjusted to surroundings. [...] So she works with an eye to adjusting the Outside world, too. Working alongside others like her who I call the 'Combine,' which is a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside, has made her a real veteran at adjusting things.”¹³⁵

For instance, Mr. Taber is one of the patients who were released from the hospital which would sound well but he came back as somebody else. His name remained the same but his

¹³⁴ Ibid., 192.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 28.

identity, personality and behavior substantially changed. The authority impelled him to live a life according to their conception and so he did and he did not even care due to his brain being already washed out at that point. Nurse Ratched releases patients partly in hope of spreading the adjustment process to other people so as each person can be the same: “[...] his two little girls just four and six, the neighbor he goes bowling with Mondays; he adjusts them like he was adjusted. This is the way they spread it.”¹³⁶ By this point Kesey denotes that the social adaptation and lethargy disseminates like a contagious disease spreading from one person to another one.

4.3 Control and False Accusations

Another serious issue the American society had to face was the regular, continuous control over people’s lives. People were carefully monitored whether somebody does not deviate from the routine. Every precaution was taken to keep the impression of togetherness. Another motive behind the supervision was the dread of communism, especially after it began to spread to Eastern parts of the world. Economic, social and political pressure was placed on American population. People felt that it is an obligation to report every single suspicious person to local authorities. It was necessary to collectively cooperate for the common good in order to undermine the imminence of communistic ideology.

The cost for the pedantic protection measures was an imbalance between personal freedom and sense of security. The imbalance is nicely depicted in the story, where patients are so tampered by Nurse Ratched over the years that they automatically disclose information on one another. They write the discrediting information down to a book which is placed near the Nurses’ Station. The Big Nurse claims it has its therapeutic purpose but Chief Bromden’s opinion differs: “I know she’s just waiting to get enough evidence to have some guy reconditioned at the Main Building, overhauled in the head to straighten out the trouble.”¹³⁷ Anyone who provides the secret information is properly rewarded afterwards by receiving a star to his name and he is allowed to sleep longer the next day. Nurse Ratched is well aware of the power she has over the patients and she knows how to benefit from it. The book violates patients’ privacy and it serves as a method in setting them against each other.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 15.

Considering the authority of Doctor Spivey, he is just as powerless as all patients. Although he is officially superior in his function to Nurse Ratched, in reality his decisions represent a negligible part. The nurse is a close friend to the main supervisor of the institution. They served together as nurses in army. If the doctor obstructed her plans, she would eliminate him with a single phone call insinuating he is a drug addict. Kesey communicates an idea of the authority being an extremely strong and almost an unbeatable force. Nurse Ratched was able to make the patients confess to something they did not do. Similarly, many people in the society were confronted with a false accusation and they were urged to confess to something they did not do or think. Doctor Spivey does not dare to oppose Nurse Ratched as he does not feel comfortable in her company and he knows that she can easily endanger his job position: “[...] just like the rest of us, he’s careful not to let himself come right out and laugh.”¹³⁸ McMurphy violates his seriousness with his witty comments but Doctor Spivey knows he cannot countenance himself to express his viewpoint. Doctor Spivey also mentions that the ward is a democratic system reaching on independent decisions of patients. He also admits that the hospital is designed as an imitation of the external world involving many obstacles. Then Nurse Ratched intervenes and her ‘game’ during the ‘Group Meeting’ begins. She exploits the men’s past to emotionally blackmail them. As Nurse Ratched points out “Am I to take it that there’s not a man among you that has committed some act that he has never admitted? She reached in the basket for the log book. Must we go over past history?”¹³⁹ Two sentences were enough to activate the wave of confessions which is another evidence of how strong the Big Nurse was in a position of authority.

“[...] I robbed a cash register in a service station.”

She moved to the next man. [...]

“I killed my cat when I was six. Oh, God forgive me, I stoned her to death and said my neighbor did it.” [...]

“So did I! So did I!” [...]

It was better than she’d dreamed. They were all shouting to outdo one another, going further and further, no way of stopping [...] The nurse nodding at each confession and saying Yes, yes, yes.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

‘Group Meetings’ are part of Ratched’s strategy. These meetings are held regularly on the ward. The Group Meeting is supposed to prepare patients on living in a society which would be a nice idea if it was not for nurse’s aim to get the person to an exact position she desires. Sensitive, personal problems are discussed on such meetings. Men are sitting in a row and Nurse Ratched together with the malleable doctor Spivey sit ahead of them. Everyone is fearful to even glance at Nurse Ratched except for McMurphy who sharply watches all of her moves. He is determined to observe the situation in order to draw a personal conclusion of what is happening there. At this particular meeting, Nurse Ratched chooses to analyze troubles of Mr. Harding. Harding represents the group of the patients who are completely sane and who just cannot cope with the world outside. Moreover, Harding faces difficulties with his wife as she is being quite promiscuous.

After the therapy the men are always full of remorse as they have just interrogated each other and behaved like vultures attacking a prey: “They’ve been maneuvered again in to grilling one of their friends like he was a criminal and they were all prosecutors and judge and jury.”¹⁴¹ On these occasions McMurphy precisely observes the situation and it gives him the ultimate impulse to start acting rebelliously. The author points to the issue of using repressive techniques by American government in order to hear a confession from people who were accused of sympathizing with their enemy.

The lamentable part is that Harding did not blame anybody after the Group Meeting and instead, he thought he deserved the bombardment of insidious questions. McMurphy endeavors to enlighten otherwise intelligent Harding that what has just happened was far from being a medical treatment. What McMurphy suggests is that Nurse Ratched is an oppressor and that he ascertained the revelation after a few minutes of being in a contact with her. Harding arguments that such virtuous, pure woman cannot be what McMurphy claims. However, Harding secretly knows that McMurphy is right in his judgment. Harding buried his true belief as Nurse Ratched made him by using her power. It is visible that the authority was tremendously great in manipulation. Therefore Harding yielded to the idea that “our Miss Ratched is a veritable angel of mercy and why just everyone knows it. She’s unselfish as the wind, toiling thanklessly for the good of all, day after day, five long days a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

week. That takes a heart, my friend, heart.”¹⁴² As McMurphy insists that Nurse Ratched is a tyrant rather than a genuine angel, Harding finally recalls the real perspective out of his subconscious. McMurphy constitutes a signal which awakens the inmates from their involuntary hypnosis: “No one’s ever dared come out and say it before, but there’s not a man among us that doesn’t think it, that doesn’t feel just as you do about her and the whole business—feel it somewhere down deep in his scared little soul.”¹⁴³ Kesey again heavily connects these ideas with the postwar American society. Through the characters, he presents his intransigent attitude to the society as it tried to debilitate individuals to make them stick to their invented rules. As McMurphy utters “I’ve seen a thousand of ‘em [...] People who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to.”¹⁴⁴ Thanks to the rebels who started revealing the negative side of conformism from behind the surface, many people were liberated from the disillusionment and were less afraid to set their own rules.

Harding’s stance towards the society is that the world belongs to the strongest, toughest individuals and he claims it is the law of nature. He compares the strong and weak individuals to animals where weak rabbits are fearful of the strong wolf. It mirrors the society being the wolf intimidating feeble beings: “This world...belongs to the strong, my friend! The ritual of our existence is based on the strong getting stronger by devouring the weak. [...] Failures, we are—feeble, stunted, weak little creatures in a weak little race.”¹⁴⁵ McMurphy disagrees with his idea. On the contrary, he urges the men to fight for themselves to prove their manhood and their position in the society because their lives matter, regardless of their flaws. McMurphy leads them to recognize and appreciate their eminent personality, although he could not redeem everyone as one of the patients eventually committed suicide. Harding also suggests that he was already born to be the oppressed, weakest part. The truth is that nobody is born in any way. The ambient surroundings are fundamentally what shapes each person. In this case, the postwar American society occurred to be the genesis of all adjusted rules and measures, which is something that Kesey disdained the most. The thing is that many people beaten by

¹⁴² Ibid., 61.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 64-67.

conformism struggled, not because they had to adapt, but because it was not in their power to become the ultimate protector of the family, and the breadwinner, and a man who needs to bolster his home financially. They were not able to even pretend they can do it. The society saw them as the weakest link lacking masculinity. As a consequence, these people, such as Harding or Billy Bibbit, let themselves to be locked in the asylum voluntarily, as it was less harmful for them than living in the society with a constant notion of being a failure and a renegade.

Also, during one conversation McMurphy is confused why the patients do not resist Nurse Ratched. He thinks they do not need to answer her combative questions. One of the patients, Scanlon, promptly replies that silence is an excellent signal for Nurse Ratched as it represents a confession: “If you don’t answer her questions, Mack, you admit it just by keeping quiet. It’s the way those bastards in the government get you. You can’t beat it.”¹⁴⁶ Silence was often regarded as a misconception concerning an accusation of a person and pronouncing him or her guilty was then quicker and easier.

Furthermore, at one point during the day, the ‘lucky’ patients receive a letter. The letters are ripped open and checked before they are handed to the patients, which is a further proof of infringement of patients’ privacy. Not only Kesey was an opponent of conformism, he despised the idea of limiting personal freedom in any form. He greatly criticizes how the government interrupted people’s privacy. Due to its increasing paranoia, people occurred to be under the thorough supervision of the state.

4.4 Embracing One’s Individuality

At first, Bromden seems to be skeptical about McMurphy’s heroism. He mentions that there is a little chance McMurphy would beat Nurse Ratched: “She’ll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her.”¹⁴⁷ Bromden believes that if one becomes a rebel, the society would never let him win as it is powerful that much. After a lapse of time Bromden witnesses how McMurphy wins one battle after another one and his negative conviction transforms into an optimistic one: I’d think he was strong enough being his own self that he would never back down the way she was hoping

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 113.

he would. [...] He's not gonna let them twist him and manufacture him."¹⁴⁸ With this observation he slowly gains self-confidence and hope that one day he will follow McMurphy's footsteps. Bromden admits: "He's pleased to be sitting next to McMurphy, feeling brave like this."¹⁴⁹ A strong leader, who challenges the paradigm, may foment feeble individuals to rebel as well. In the book it was McMurphy and later on several other patients who found courage to become non-conformists, on the other hand in the society it was the Beat Generation and the Hippie movement who stood out in the crowd.

Approximately after a month of McMurphy's stay, Nurse Ratched got tougher in her approach. She comments on the situation in front of the patients that she is shocked and petrified how McMurphy destroyed the ward to disabuse them of the illusion about McMurphy. It does not work and later on McMurphy and Bromden brawl with two of the male nurses and Ratched instantly sends them to an electroshock therapy. She prescribes McMurphy several electroshocks to make him obedient and to make him admit he made a mistake. It is again a battle of wills and both McMurphy and Ratched are not going to give up. McMurphy is so determined that he rebels even during the therapy itself as he is singing while the doctors place electrodes on his temples. Ratched is furious because "she saw that McMurphy was growing bigger than ever while he was upstairs where the guys couldn't see the dent she was making on him, growing almost into a legend."¹⁵⁰ After McMurphy returns to the ward, Ratched proclaims during the Group Meeting that McMurphy does not react to the treatment and therefore he needs an operation. She suggests more drastic measure – a lobotomy.

Additionally, McMurphy went even further in his rebellion. One day he decides that it is time to go for a trip to the outside world. He put his wish on a request list so Nurse Ratched could either approve or disapprove it. Surprisingly, McMurphy succeeds and the fishing trip is about to happen with the supervision of doctor Spivey. Notwithstanding his achievement, Ratched still intrigues against him. She scares the patients with rumors about the deadly sea displaying clippings of shipwrecked boats on a notice board in order to discourage them from the trip.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 161.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 291.

The fishing trip was an important occurrence in the novel. Kesey seized it to clearly demonstrate his perspective on the society through Bromden. During the trip Bromden observes how the society had changed since the end of the war. Now the society is filled with men wearing identical suits heading the same direction for work and then coming back to their identical houses: “A train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insets.”¹⁵¹ Kesey compares people to insect to express how identical they were. In this manner, he notices a prep school ‘St. Luke’s School For Boys’ and he notes that the students are younger version of their fathers as they are wearing an identical school uniform chasing after an education so they can work on the same job position in the future. These were youngsters who were expected to live the same rigorous life like their fatherly models. Both the hospital and the outside society represent ruled, mechanized world with a stereotypical daily routine. Kesey even ridicules the situation by saying: “All that five thousand kids lived in those five thousand houses, owned by those guys that got off the train. The houses looked so much alike that, time and time again, the kids went home by mistake to different houses and different families. Nobody ever noticed.”¹⁵²

As Bromden starts to see the world differently, he wishes he could stop with pretending to be deaf and mute. But he knows that by the force of circumstances he needs to keep pretending it, as Ratched would send him for the surgery if she found out. The society did its best to keep suppressing one’s individuality. An individual struggled with many obstacles and difficulties to become the real self. Moreover, Bromden realizes that it was the society which compelled him to start pretending at first place: “[...] I wondered if I could ever act any other way again. But I remembered one thing: 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.”¹⁵³ He accepted his phoney role that the society assigned him. Generally it was the same with other people within the society. They were all assigned phoney roles by which they were supposed to act in order to make the system functional.

On the fishing trip the men experienced what freedom feels like. It was an extraordinary experience for them: “They could sense the change that most of us were only

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 210.

suspecting; these weren't the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouses [...]."¹⁵⁴ It bolstered their self-confidence and they sensed the transformation into mentally strong individuals.

Few days after the fishing trip, McMurphy hosts an undercover party with patients and two prostitutes over the night. The party signifies the final resolution. Patients together with McMurphy get drunk and enjoy themselves. Thanks to McMurphy they finally feel strong, brave, free, and they accept themselves just the way they are. Even Harding accepts his identity of being a homosexual. McMurphy helped the men to uncover their individuality. They won internal battle with the authority and several of them were even released from the hospital:

“I had to keep reminding myself that it had truly happened, that we had made it happen. We had just unlocked a window and let it in like you let in the fresh air. Maybe the Combine wasn't all-powerful. What was to stop us from doing it again, now that we saw we could? Or keep us from doing other things we wanted?”¹⁵⁵

In the morning Ratched comes into 'devastated' ward catching the patients wallowing in their newly gained freedom. Ratched spoils the moment by driving one of the patients into committing a suicide. McMurphy attacks Nurse Ratched and he chokes her and exposes breasts by ripping off her uniform. He symbolically reveals the evil Ratched represents. By this act her power ceases to mean as much, yet she is not defeated completely: “She was losing her patients one after the other.”¹⁵⁶ She wreaks vengeance on McMurphy by administrating him to the lobotomy.

McMurphy becomes a wreck, however, Bromden is being a strong individual now. Therefore he manages to complete McMurphy's uprising. He knows McMurphy would not want to be displayed like a trophy on the ward and so he smothers him with a pillow. Fick states that “McMurphy's death is a direct consequence of his successful efforts to establish a community of [strong] men.”¹⁵⁷ Bromden's act constitutes his prime triumph against

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 254.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 305.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 321.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas H. Fick, “The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in “One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 43, no. 1/2 (1989): 26.

Ratched. He has won his own war and in the end he escapes from the hospital to finally relish the freedom: "I was flying. Free."¹⁵⁸

Even though McMurphy dies, his rebellious spirit lives on in his comrades. Although it may seem that McMurphy officially lost the war, he has won several battles with Nurse Ratched and Bromden successfully finished the uprising for him. McMurphy's loss represents a victory for the individual inmates.¹⁵⁹ To develop the idea, McMurphy bequeathed his legacy which can be found in the inmates.¹⁶⁰ Thanks to him, the majority of patients discovered the courage to try to integrate into the society and to become whoever they desire to be. Fick argues that "McMurphy's therapy for the inmates consists as much of talk as of action; he teaches them to replace an imposed identity with an imagined identity of their own creation."¹⁶¹ McMurphy proved that by the act of rebellion, it is possible to make a change. The men were no longer fearful of becoming self-assured individualists.

¹⁵⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 324.

¹⁵⁹ See Fick, "The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier," 21.

¹⁶⁰ See *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze three major themes in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. These themes were chosen to reflect on the situation in the post-war American society.

The first part of the thesis characterized the historical and social background of America in 1950s and 1960s. The end of the World War II positively contributed to America as the economy was invigorated. Paradoxically, the image of the American Dream disrupted the ubiquitous fright of communistic expansion which interfered into the steadily working system. In order to live a well-balanced life, people needed to adjust to certain rules and paradigms. This thesis focused primarily on the frustration and defiance of middle-aged men. The overwhelming pressure took its toll. The situation fomented rebellion of many people among whom belong the author Ken Kesey and other members of the Beat Generation and later on, the Hippie movement. Furthermore, chapter 1.3 also provided an outline of the mental health policy as the story of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is set in a mental institution and the insanity constitutes one of the major themes.

Conformism was something that authorities demanded. Men were labeled as the breadwinners and providers for the family. They were expected to go to their mundane work and after that to come back to their houses and spend time with their family. Also many men were excluded from the society as they were not able to adjust to these rules and they had neither a family nor a house. The story aptly depicts the despair of these men as they preferred to live in a mental institution instead of failing to integrate into the society.

A majority of people truly succumbed to the social pressure, although to live a life full of pretence was exhausting to such extent that many of these men decided to go against the major tides. People were indoctrinated an idea that the rules were set for greater good regardless of the fact that it heavily suppressed people's individuality. Kesey despised the artificial society and therefore he created a seminal literary figure called McMurphy. The authority is represented by an oppressive, mechanized Nurse Ratched who treats her patients as objects and torments them both physically and mentally. As a result, McMurphy rebels against Nurse Ratched in order to beat the authority and liberate the men.

The aim of this thesis was to prove that Ken Kesey used a mental institution as a metaphor for the American post-war society which dehumanized and suppressed people's individuality and that he criticized the American conformist society through the interconnected themes of authority, insanity and rebellion. A detailed analysis affirms the

hypothesis. It leads to the conclusion that most of the inmates appear not to be insane. Instead, they are people for whom it was impossible to live by established ideals and to succumb to the social machinery. It also leads to the conclusion that by the rebellion, McMurphy gradually led the men to self-awareness and acceptance of their own identity. He uncovered their individuality and shifted his free spirit on them. As a consequence, the rebellious, liberated individual beat the rigorous, repressive authority.

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