



**One Flew Over
the Cuckoo's Nest**
Ken Kesey



SIGNET

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

(Drama) (1975)

© 1999 by Raymond Weschler

Major Characters

- Randle Patrick McMurphy ('Mac').....Jack Nicholson
A rebellious prisoner who is sent to a mental hospital in order to be "evaluated for mental illness."
- Nurse Mildred Ratched.....Louise Fletcher
A cold and strict nurse who is responsible for the patients at the hospital.
- Dr. John Spivey.....Dean R. Brooks
The head of the hospital, who tries to find out if McMurphy is truly sick, at least by the standards of modern psychology.
- Chief.....Will Sampson
An American Indian patient who everyone thinks is deaf and dumb.
- Billy Bibbit.....Brad Dourif
A young, gentle patient who has a bad stuttering problem ("To stutter" is to speak with an uncontrolled repeating of sounds).
- Harding.....William Redfield
A highly educated patient who is terribly depressed about the relationship he has with his wife.
- Martini.....Danny Devito
A patient who is apparently mentally retarded, but kind and gentle.
- Charlie Cheswick.....Sydney Lassick
A patient who often acts like a young child.
- Washington.....Nathan George
A worker at the hospital who is responsible for security.
- Candy.....Marya Small
A girlfriend of McMurphy's who lives near the hospital.
- Rose.....Louisa Mortiz
A friend of Candy.

Turkle.....Scatman Crothers

A night time worker at the hospital who is supposed to make sure that no one gets into trouble when the rest of the staff is away.

Plot Summary

This film is the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, a man who has been sentenced to prison for having sex with a 15 year old girl. McMurphy is a rebellious but almost comical person, who, in the summer of 1963, at the age of 38, ends up in an Oregon state mental hospital because he refuses to work while in prison. It is not clear if McMurphy intentionally tried to convince prison officials that he is crazy, but regardless, he soon finds himself in a place filled with men who most of society would consider insane or mentally ill. Even more challenging for McMurphy is the fact that the hospital is run by Nurse Ratched, who is determined to maintain absolute control over the hospital and its patients.

Soon after his arrival, an increasingly tense battle grows between them. McMurphy is determined to challenge the daily routine of these men's generally sad and boring lives, but Nurse Ratched is equally determined to keep the institution as peaceful and predictable as it had been before. Yet over the course of several months, McMurphy begins to win over the hearts of the various patients, and in their bitter struggle over such things as the right to watch baseball on TV, it soon becomes clear that the hospital and its emotionally repressive ways might be as insane as McMurphy, or any of his supposedly crazy friends.

A Background Note: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is based on Ken Kesey's critically acclaimed 1962 novel of the same name. The movie is considered by some critics to be one of the greatest films ever made, and in fact, it was only the second film in history to win all five of the most important Academy Awards---Best Movie, Best Director, Best Actor (Nicholson), Best Actress (Fletcher), and Best Screenplay.

Words and Expressions that You man not Know

***Jack McMurphy arrives at the hospital,
to change the lives of everyone there...***

[Cuckoo].

A "cuckoo" is a type of bird, but it is also a colloquial word for a foolish or crazy person.

Medication time.

“Medication” is a more official word for medicine, and thus this is the time each day when the patients are supposed to take their pills.

The Jack of Clubs.

When discussing card games such as “Blackjack” (also called “21”), you need to know that the four suits of cards are called clubs, spades, hearts and diamonds. After the numbers 1-10, the various levels are jacks, queens, kings and aces.

What’s the bid?

A “bid” is a gambling word for the amount one wants to bet.

Come on, Martini!

Here, meaning hurry up, but probably the most semantically versatile phrasal verb in English, meaning different things in different contexts.

Get a grip on yourself!

An interesting way to say calm down, or “stop being so emotional.”

That’s a hell of a fish.

A common expression added before nouns to show extra emotion or emphasis.

Isn’t that a dandy?

“Dandy” is an old-fashioned slang word for something good or fun.

It took every damn bit of strength I had.

A slightly crude but common adjective which is used to add emotion or intensity.

You didn’t weigh the chain?

“To weigh” is to measure the weight of an object.

That was the first Chinooker I ever caught.

A type of large fish found in Washington and Oregon.

It says you’ve been belligerent, talked when unauthorized, and been resentful in attitude toward work.

“Belligerent” is an educated word for aggressive or hostile. If someone is “resentful,” they are angry or bitter about something.

They wanted you to be evaluated to determine if you’re mentally ill.

“To evaluate” something (or someone) is to study it in order to make an educated analysis. If someone is “mentally ill,” they could be emotionally disturbed, and perhaps more colloquially, crazy.

As near as I can **figure it out**, I fight and fuck too much.

“To figure out” something is to understand it, usually after seriously thinking about it.

In the **penitentiary**?

An official word for prison.

You’ve had at least five arrests for **assault**.

A legal word: “To assault” someone is to physically attack them.

Rocky Marciano.

A famous boxer from who fought in the 50s and 60s.

You went in for **statutory rape**?

A legal term that usually applies to situations where men have sex with girls who are under 18. Actual force or violence is not implied.

She was 15 going on 35.

A grammatically common way to describe a person who appears to be much older than they really are.

I practically had to sew my pants shut.

McMurphy’s way of explaining that he actually resisted the girl’s sexual advances.

That little red **beaver**.

This is a very crude and silly way to refer to female sexual organs.

Now they say I’m crazy because I don’t sit there like a goddamn **vegetable**.

Note that a “vegetable” can refer to those people who are so mentally damaged that they pass their time staring aimlessly into space, doing nothing all day long.

If that’s crazy, then I’m senseless, **out of it**, gone down the road **wacko!**

If someone is “out of it,” they are not mentally alert. “Wacko” is a great little slang word that means completely crazy, insane or strange.

They think you’ve been **faking** it to get out of **work detail**.

“To fake it” is to pretend that something is what it is not. “Work detail” refers to the manual labor, such as doing the laundry, that prisoners or others are required to do during the day.

I’m a goddamn **marvel** of modern science.

A “marvel” is an interesting word that refers to anything that causes amazement, fascination or wonder.

I'm going to cooperate with you 100%, because we ought to get to the bottom of R.P. McMurphy.

"To get to the bottom of" something (or in this case, someone) is to study it completely so that it can be completely understood.

Mac gets to know his new and crazy roommates.

You'll wear yourself out!

This is a useful alternative to "exhaust yourself."

His wife made him uneasy because she drew stares from others on the street. If someone is "uneasy," they are probably nervous or emotionally uncomfortable. If someone "draws stares," this means that other people are looking at them, perhaps because they are so pretty.

Mr. Harding has been heard to say to his wife "You've betrayed me."
"To betray" someone is a powerful verb which means to turn against or harm them, often after they have shown great trust or loyalty.

Does anybody care to touch on this further?

"To touch on" something is to briefly make comments about it.

Yes, I suspect her, but I can only speculate as to the reasons why.

"To suspect" someone is to believe that they have done something wrong, without knowing for sure. "To speculate" is to guess.

She doesn't meet your mental requirements.

A way of saying "She isn't smart enough to keep you interested in her."

The juxtaposition of one person to another.

An educated word that means the act of comparison, usually when two things or people are placed side by side.

Harding, why don't you knock off the bullshit and **get to the point**.

When someone tells you to "knock off the bullshit," they are often telling you to stop saying nonsense or lies. "Get to the point" is an excellent way of telling someone to tell you only the most important or critical thing that they have to say to you.

I can't seem to get that through to you.

"To get through" to someone is to make them understand.

I'm talking about interrelationships!

An educated word for the relationships between two or more people.

You're so **fucking dumb** I can't believe it.

"Fucking" is noted here for its use as an adverb (Yes, an adverb!), to show intensity of emotion. "Dumb" is a great alternative to stupid.

It makes me feel very **peculiar** when you **throw in** something like that.

"Peculiar" is an interesting word that means odd or strange. Note that people often "throw in" unexpected comments during a conversation.

Are you trying to say that I'm **queer**. Is that it?

"Queer" used to be a very pejorative (negative) word to describe homosexuals, but it is now often used by gays to describe themselves.

Mr. Harding, they're all crowding in on you, **ganging up** on you.

"To gang up" on someone is to have several people begin to physically or orally attack a person, who is often weak or vulnerable.

Take it easy and **stay off of my side**.

If someone is "on your side" during an argument, this means that they are supporting you.

The other day you made such **allusions**, not **illusions**.

An "allusion" is an indirect or subtle comment about something.

An "illusion" is a belief about something that is untrue or mistaken.

If you're trying to tell me something, **you got another thing coming**.

A slangy way of telling someone they are badly mistaken about an idea.

I think you're some kind of **morbid** asshole or something.

"Morbid" is a powerful adjective that refers to an obsession with disease or death. This sentence is obviously a strong insult.

She's on your mind and **blah blah blah**.

This is a great colloquial way to finish a sentence when you do not feel like continuing to name all the details of the topic you're talking about.

We're talking about my wife. **When are you going to get that through your fucking head?!**

A crude and interesting way of asking "When are you going to understand this?"

It's a lot of **baloney** and I'm tired.

"Baloney" is a type of sandwich meat, and, as here, a way of saying "nonsense."

Recreation time.

A general word that refers to sports, games and other fun activities.

All non-restricted patients please report to the bus.

Someone who is “restricted” is not allowed to do certain things, such as in this case, to leave the hospital to go into town on the bus.

Mac decides to bring sports into the lives of the group.

Chief, that’s your spot.

A “spot” is both a physical marking, and as here, a particular physical space.

You’ll crush the air out of it.

“To crush the air out of a ball” is to squeeze it so hard that all the air escapes and it becomes flat.

See, it don’t hurt him.

Note that many people use ‘don’t’ when 3rd person ‘doesn’t’ is correct.

Jump up and dunk it in. Stuff that son of a bitch in there.

“To dunk” is to shoot a basketball through a basketball hoop. “To stuff” the ball, in this case, means the same thing. “Son of a bitch” is a crude insult that is usually used for people, and not as here, a basketball!

Hit me Chief, I got the moves.

In a basketball context, “hit me” means “throw me the ball.”

If someone has “the moves,” they know how to score in the game.

Where the fuck are you throwing it at?!

Note that in this case, “fuck” functions as a noun preceded by a definitive article! A crude but common way to show emotional emphasis, or perhaps anger or frustration.

Fast break! Hit me, Chief! Put it in the basket!

A common term in basketball where one team tries to get to the other side of the basketball court as fast as possible.

It’s a dime, Martini. ∴ I bet a nickel.

A reminder: The major US coins are penny, nickel, dime, and quarter.

Ten to Billy to match his wang and the dealer gets a three.

A “wang” is a silly slang term for penis. The “dealer” is the person who distributes the cards during a card game.

What do you do? Hit or sit?

In a card game context, “to hit” is to take a card, and “to sit” is to decline to take any more cards.

Ok, you're busted.

If a person is busted at blackjack (21), they have gone over the limit and lost the game.

I can't hit you, Jesus Christ!

A curious expression of anger, frustration and other emotion.

You got 20 showing!!

In blackjack, the cards "showing" are those that all players can see.

Who is pitching the opener?

In baseball, the "pitcher" is the person who throws the ball to the batter. "The opener" refers to the first game of a particular series of games.

Jesus Christ almighty!

An exaggerated and old fashioned variation of "Jesus Christ."

"Almighty" literally means powerful, though it's almost never used.

Do you nuts want to play cards or do you want to jack off?

"Nuts" is a colloquial noun and adjective that refers to people who are considered crazy. "To jack off" is a common way of saying masturbate.

Do you think we might ease it down so we wouldn't have to shout?

"To ease down" the volume is to turn the sound a little lower.

We have a lot of old men on this ward.

A "ward" is a section or division of a hospital.

Your hand is staining my window.

"To stain" something is to make it dirty or spot it, and is often used when discussing clothes.

What's in the horse pill?

A funny expression for a pill that is so big that it's hard to swallow.

I don't want anyone to try and slip me a saltpeter.

If someone tries to "slip you" something in your food, they are trying to secretly place it in the food so that you will eat it without noticing.

"Saltpeter" is a type of drug that's given to kill a person's sexual desire.

You'd like that, wouldn't you hard-on?

Jack refers to Mr. Harding as "hard-on," which is a common slang term for a hard (or erect) penis.

Tell me lover boy, why didn't you tell her to go fuck herself?

Note that you can tell someone "fuck you" directly, or you can tell a third person to deliver the message for you! Either way, it's very crude!

God almighty, she's got you guys coming and going.

Slangy way to say "You guys are so scared you'll do anything she says."

I thought you were the **champ**.

A short version of "champion," referring to boxers and other athletes.

I bet in one week that I can put a bug so far up her ass that she won't know weather to shit or wind her wrist watch.

This is McMurphy's way of saying that he will soon drive Nurse Ratched crazy. Crude and ridiculous.

Note "to wind" is the verb used when you set a watch.

Bet a **buck**!

The most common way to refer to a dollar.

Mac and Nurse Ratched have their first of many battles.

There's a couple things that I'd like to get off my chest.

"To get something off your chest" is to talk about something that has been bothering you, but that you have been hesitant to discuss.

Today is the opening of the World Series.

This is the championship series of games between the two best baseball teams in the United States, which is played every October.

If you change the schedule now, they may find it very **disturbing**.

"Disturbing" is a powerful word that means troubling, or unsettling.

Fuck the schedule! They can go back to the schedule after the World Series!

Note that you can use "fuck" as an imperative verb, followed by a noun, to mean that the noun in question is actually not important.

This is no way to proceed about this.

"To proceed" is an educated verb meaning to go ahead, advance, or move forward.

Let the majority rule!

A fundamental rule of democracy!

What is this crap?

A crude but excellent word meaning lies or nonsense.
A noble cousin of the great word “bullshit.”

Even when I was in the cooler, they’d have it there.

A slang term for prison.

OK, hot dice!

The six sided cubes with one to six dots, used in gambling games.

Mediterranean Avenue. Boardwalk.

Places that are found in the famous board game “Monopoly.”

Play the game and knock off the bullshit.

Again, a crude but excellent way to say “Stop the nonsense.”

What the fuck are you picking on me for?

“To pick on” someone is to treat them
badly, or even to threaten to hurt them.

I can be pushed just so far.

“There are limits to what I will accept before I fight back.”

Damn lunatic.

An interesting word for a crazy person.

Anybody want to bet, chicken shits!?

A “chicken shit” is a crude term for a coward, or
one who is always scared in dangerous situations.

Maybe I’ll just use your thick skull and knock a hole in the wall.

A person’s “skull” is the hard surface of the top of their head.
“To knock a hole” in a wall is to use a hard object to make a hole.

My head would squash like an eggplant.

“To squash” is to crush or flatten. An eggplant is a purplish vegetable.

Me and my buddy Cheswick are going to go downtown,
sit down in a bar, wet our whistles and watch the ball game.

“Buddy” is another word for friend. “To wet one’s whistle”
is to drink a beer or other type of liquor.

Get out of my way. You’re using my oxygen.

The main chemical substance found in air.

Give up? :: No, just warming up.

“To give up” is to surrender, or decide to no longer try.

“To warm up” is to be just getting started in a long effort.

And on the mound, the left hander, Al Downing.

This refers to the “pitching mound” in baseball stadiums, where pitchers stand when they are throwing the ball during a game.

Wasn't that the first time you tried to commit suicide?

Note that “commit” is the only verb that goes with “suicide.”

Why are you pressing him? Why can't we go on to some new business.

“To press” somebody is to insist that they do something.

The business of this meeting, Mr. Chadwick, is therapy.

A critical word in modern psychology which refers to the process of helping people with their problems by having them discuss their lives.

Yes, it will satisfy me.

“To satisfy” someone is to please them, or perhaps make them happy.

Which one of you nuts has got any guts?

“Guts” are literally stomach intestines, and colloquially, courage.

Only nine votes? It's a landslide!

A key political word that describes an election that is won by a large number of votes.

You have to have a majority to change ward policy.

In this case, “policy” refers to the ways of doing daily activities.

Come on in, pal, this could be a big moment.

“Pal” is another word for friend.

“Oh say, can you see, by the dawn's early light?”

These are the first words of “The Star Spangled Banner,” which is the American National Anthem, which is sung at every baseball game.

Gentleman, the meeting is adjourned.

“To adjourn” a meeting is to officially end or close it.

Isn't there one of you fucking maniacs who know what I'm talking about?

A “maniac” is a common and useful word for a person who is crazy, or perhaps obsessed with one specific subject.

You can bring up the subject again tomorrow.

“To bring up” something in a conversation is to discuss it.

There's got to be one guy here who is not a total fucking nut!
A funny line, and McMurphy's way of saying there must be
at least one normal or sane person in the hospital ward.

You're going to pull that henhouse shit now?
Note that in this context, to "pull" something means to do something
that is considered unfair or wrong. Although never used in this way,
a "henhouse" is the place where hens (farm birds) live.

Koufax is in big fucking trouble!
A reference to the great baseball pitcher Sandy Koufax.

Curve ball. It's a long fly ball to deep left center.
These are baseball terms. A curve ball is a pitch that is thrown in such a
way that it curves. Left center is a part of the playing field for the game.

Somebody give me a fucking wiener before I die!!
This is a funny colloquial word for a hot dog, which is
a very popular food at all American baseball games.

Mantle swings; It's a fucking home run!!
A reference to the great baseball player Mickey Mantle. A "home run"
is made when a ball is hit so hard it lands past the fence in the field.

Nurse Ratchet is one of the finest nurses we got in this institution.
Another way to say one of the best.

I don't want to break up the meeting, but
she's something of a cunt, aien't she doc?
"Cunt," is considered by many to be the most vulgar word in the
English language. A truly crude noun for female sexual organs, and
for a mean or unpleasant woman. "Doc" is a slang word for doctor.

She likes a rigged game.
If a game is "rigged," it has been fixed so that there will be a certain
outcome, most likely so that people can gamble on the game and be
sure to win.

I don't see evidence of mental illness.
A medical or clinical term for people who are considered crazy.

I think you've been trying to put us on, all this time.
"To put on" someone is to try and fool them, or possibly tease them.

“A rolling stone gathers no moss.”

An old and famous expression, meaning it’s hard to grow on something that is always moving. “Moss” is a type of green algae.

“Don’t wash your dirty underwear in public.”

Another famous expression, this time meaning people should keep their personal problems to themselves.

Where do you suppose she lives?

“To suppose” is a slightly dated verb meaning to think or believe.

Mac decides to take the boys out for a little fun and relaxation.

All right, grab the fence.

“To grab” is to seize or hold on to.

Come on you guys, get the lead out!

This is a very slangy way to say “hurry up!”

Hey, what the hell is going on here?!

Added to Wh questions in order to show emotion or emphasis.

You all crazies?

Here, “crazy” is used as a plural noun, but this is almost never done.

What the heck is going on here?

“What the heck” is a more polite version of “what the hell, ” but in fact it sounds a bit too conservative, and therefore dated.

We chartered this boat, we are going to go fishing, and that’s all there is to it.

“To charter” something is to rent it for a set period of time. “That’s all there is to it” is one way of saying “there is nothing more to discuss.”

You better quit this or they’ll throw you in the can again.

In this context, “the can” refers to prison.

They’ll just take us back to the feeb farm!

This is slang that I’ve only heard McMurphy use. Someone who is “feeble minded” might be retarded or mentally ill, and thus the “feeb farm” is McMurphy’s way of referring to the mental hospital.

Aye, aye, Sir. I mean, yes, Mac.

This is a way to say “yes” when serving in the military.

Have you ever driven one of these things?

Hold it steady and go straight as an arrow.

Note that the past participle of “to drive” is driven. If you “hold something steady,” that means it doesn’t shake or move.

This is the bait. Little fishes.

“Bait” is anything that is used to attract and trap another fish or animal.

Despite the dialog here, the plural of fish is fish, not fishes!

You’re not a goddamn loony now. You’re a fisherman.

A loony is a yet another slang word for a crazy person.

Take the bottom hook and push it through his eyes. Good eye work!

A hook is small curved metal device used to catch or hold something.

That little devil isn’t even going to feel the sting.

This is McMurphy’s way of affectionately referring to the fish.

The son-of-a-gun is going to bite you.

A more polite but dated way of saying son-of-a-bitch.

Billy, fishing don’t grab you?

If something doesn’t “grab you,” this probably means you don’t like it.

I’m going to give each and every one of you a rod.

A pole or stick, and in this case, a rod used for fishing.

“I’m Popeye the Sailor Man.”

Popeye is a famous cartoon character who is a sailor.

Get the fuck back up there!

A grammatically intense way to simply say “go back.”

Hey Harlin, I’m the skipper on this boat!

A “skipper” is the leader of a boat, but as a rank, it is below captain.

Home safe and sound!

What one might say after returning safely from a dangerous trip.

They’re going to be trolling this place for six months looking for bodies.

“To troll” is to search underwater by using tools such as fishing rods.

I don’t think he’s overly psychotic.

“Overly” is an adverb which means “too.” A person who is “psychotic” is considered very mentally disturbed.

I'd like to send him back to the work farm.

A colloquial term for the prison where McMurphy had been staying.

Anybody on your staff that can relate to him?

"To relate to" someone is to understand them at an emotional level.

This is a widely used and useful colloquial expression.

If we send him to Pendleton or to disturbed, it's one more way of passing our problem to somebody else.

"Pendleton" is the name of a prison, and here, "disturbed" refers to the part of the prison system that deals with emotionally disturbed people.

Mac soon discovers the high price of fun.

Hey Mac, time! Time!

In a sports context, "Time out" is a way of asking to stop the game clock. Sometimes, as here, this is shortened to just "time!"

Mac, I'm open!

In a sports context, to be "open" means to be free from defenders, so that another player should consider throwing the ball to that person.

Stop dribbling the goddamn ball!

"To dribble" is to bounce a basketball while moving up the court.

You were covered! :: I wasn't covered.

If a player is "covered," this means that they are being closely guarded by the other team. The opposite of "open."

The ball is in play!

One way of saying the game is continuing, and that the game clock has started once again.

Oh fuck that shit!

A very crude and classic way of saying "that's ridiculous."

By the time you get out of here, you'll be too old to get it up.

If a man can't "get it up" he can't get a (sexual) erection.

You're with us sucker, and you'll stay with us.

"Sucker" is a somewhat dated way to refer to any person that could be seen as a fool or loser in any given situation.

You can keep me here until you're good and ready to let me loose.

"To let loose" someone is to release them, or let them go where they want.

You let me go on hassling Nurse Ratchet, knowing how much I had to lose!

"To hassle" is a critical verb meaning to aggressively bother or annoy.

I'm voluntary here. I'm not committed.

In this context, "voluntary" patients are at the hospital because they want to be, while "committed" patients are forced to stay there.

He's bullshitting me, right?

"To bullshit" someone is a classic and crude colloquial verb, meaning to lie or distort.

Few are committed. Some of the chronics, and you.

A "chronic" patient (or medical condition) lasts indefinitely.

You ought to be in a convertible, bird dogging chicks and banging beaver.

A "convertible" is a car that does not have a roof (in order to let the sun in). The last part of the sentence is McMurphy's way of saying to have sex, but outside "chicks" for girls, these words are rarely used.

Those are very challenging observations, you made Randall.

This is Nurse Ratchet's way of saying McMurphy's comments are probably not liked or appreciated.

I want to know why the dorm is locked during the day and on weekends.

A "dorm" is a building (or part of a building) where people sleep.

Time spent in the company of others is therapeutic, but time spent brooding alone only increases feelings of separation.

If something is "therapeutic," it is either emotionally or physically helpful to a person. "To brood" is an excellent verb meaning to sit around in a bad or angry mood.

Look, I'm not running a charity ward.

A place to help people who cannot help themselves, often supported by voluntary donations of money and time.

I lost my head. I'm sorry.

If a person "loses their head," this often means that for just a few moments, they became too emotional or irrational.

You lost a tidy sum of money to Mr. McMurphy.

One way of saying "a relatively large amount."

That's why your cigarettes have been rationed.

"To ration" something is to let only a small amount be bought at any given time. Governments ration many things when there is a war.

Piss on your fucking rules, Miss Ratchett!

A very crude and insulting way to express anger about something!

Mac learns the truth about the deaf and dumb Indian.

Would you keep an eye on these two?

"To keep an eye" on something is to watch over or guard it.

Juicy Fruit.

A famous brand of chewing gum.

You sly son-of-a-bitch, Chief!

A great adjective meaning clever or smart, in a secretive sort of way.

Can you hear me? Yeah, you bet.

An interesting way to say "of course."

You fooled them all!

"To fool" a person is to trick them into believing something which isn't true.

Canada? We'll be there before the sons-of-a-bitches know what hit them.

In this context, if something "hits you," it means you suddenly realize.

Just a little leak.

The escape of water or other liquid.

A light shine, and send the specimen to nurse Ratched.

A "shine" is short for shoe shine, or the polishing of shoes.

A "specimen" is a small sample, often of blood or urine.

A little dab will do you.

An old fashioned way of saying "all one needs is just a little bit."

How about it?! You creeps, lunatics, mental defectives!

A "creep" is a good word for an unpleasant person. A "lunatic" is crazy and a "mental defective" is probably mentally retarded or stupid.

The feeb's brigade, you ding-a-lings!

A "brigade" is a group of people, in this case feeble minded people.
"Ding-a-ling" is an old fashioned word for a silly or stupid person.

They were giving me 10,000 watts a day and I'm hot to trot!

"Watts" is a unit of electricity. If someone is "hot to trot," they are energetic and ready to do whatever needs to be done.

The next woman who takes me on is going to light up like a pinball machine and pay off in silver dollars.

This is McMurphy's way of saying that he has so much energy that he will be able to sexually satisfy any woman. "To take on" someone is to engage or challenge them.

Please proceed.

"Please continue."

A church bombing in Alabama killed three Negro children.

Note that in 1963, people used the word "Negro" instead of black.

They're being held on a misdemeanor charge.

A "misdemeanor" is a legal term for a crime, but it is not as serious a crime as a "felony."

Mac arranges a party for the boys.

It's on tonight. Get a car.

In this context, if something is "on," that means it's going to happen.

I don't give a shit. Steal one if you have to!

A classic, common and crude way of saying "I don't care."

Don't forget to bring some booze.

"Booze" is a slang word for liquor.

I can't take it no more.

Note the double negatives, which you should avoid.

You're about as big as a goddamn tree trunk.

The base of a tree, which supports the branches.

Every time he put the bottle to his mouth, he didn't suck out of it, it sucked out of him...

This is the Chief's way of describing the damage of alcoholism.

...until he was so wrinkled and yellow that even the dogs didn't know him.
"Wrinkles" are the lines that grow on peoples faces as they grow older.

They just worked on him, the way they're working on you.
In this context, "to work on" somebody is to slowly drive them crazy.

McMurphy, stop all this holly roller shit and get your ass back in bed!
Note the use of "shit" as a noun, here to mean unacceptable behavior.
("Holly roller" is dated and never used).

No, it don't send me.
"To send" someone used to mean to attract them, but this is very dated.

Keep it down!
"Keep quiet!"

Take a load of these tubs!
"Take a load" is no longer used. But if you say "Get a load" of something, this is an excellent colloquial expression in which you tell someone to look at something that is interesting or amazing.

Rose was married to a maniac once up in Beaverton.
A "maniac" is a crazy person. "Beaverton" is a city in Oregon.

I'm going to take Candy for a stroll.
A nice little word for a walk.

The night time spirits are here to get you high.
"To get high" is the goal of people who take drugs such as marijuana.

That's right, Mr. Martini, there is an Easter bunny.
A fictional rabbit associated with Easter, much loved by children.

Join Mr. McMurphy around the side in the executive lounge.
A relaxation room for the top executives of a company.

Aien't this a bitch! You're trying to get my ass really fired?!
The first sentence is a very colloquial way of saying "This is horrible!"
"To get someone's ass fired" is a very slangy way of saying to get someone in so much trouble that they lose their job.

Oh shit, the supervisor!
A "supervisor" is a person in charge of an office or building.

Why didn't he answer? :: He's jerking off!

"To jerk off" is a classic colloquial expression meaning to masturbate.

A man gets awfully lonesome at night.

Noted here for the use of the adverb "awfully," meaning "very."

Get your behind out of here and go back to bed! Move it!

"Behind" is one more way to say ass, rear end, butt, derriere, etc...

Get out of here, you slim motherfucker!

A truly colorful insult! "Motherfucker" is, of course, extremely vulgar, yet "slim" is simply a nice little word that means thin.

Good night! Don't let the cooties bite!

"Cooties" is a word that children use to describe lice (bugs), germs, etc...

Settle down, Charley.

This is a useful way to tell someone to calm down, or to stop being so emotional.

Don't "nothing" me.

Noted as an odd grammatical construction. One way of saying "Don't tell me that there is nothing wrong," but other words can be used, if they had been said previously in the conversation.

Do you want a date with her?

A "date" is usually a social event out at the movies or a restaurant, but McMurphy uses it here to simply mean sex.

God, I must be crazy to be in a loony bin like this.

A "loony bin" is a funny little slang expression referring to a home for crazy people, which is often called an insane asylum.

The kid's cute, isn't he?

A critical adjective meaning attractive or charming, or perhaps sweet.

I got \$25 that says you are going to burn this woman down.

McMurphy's way of saying that he would bet \$25 that Billy will sexually satisfy Candy.

Back off. I'll show you some card tricks.

This refers to magic tricks or illusions that are done with playing cards.

Deck of cards.

All 52 cards together are called "a deck."

Out of sight, man!

This is a dated and 1960s way of saying great, or colloquially, “cool.”

Show this woman the way out of the hospital.

Note that to “show” someone the way out (or perhaps to show them the door) can be a gentle way of telling them to leave.

Get your ass over here and bring Dracula with you.

“Dracula” is a famous fictional character who is known for sucking people’s blood.

***Nurse Ratched returns to restore order,
and the battle with Mac soon leads to tragedy for all.***

Did Billy leave the grounds of the hospital?

In this case, “the grounds” refer to the hospital building, as well as the various yards and outdoor play areas that surround it.

My cap.

A small head covering, often used to show rank or profession.

What worries me is how your mother is going to take this.

If you ask “How is your mom taking this?,” you are usually asking how she is emotionally dealing with news that is very bad or stressful.

Don’t you think you should have thought of that before you took that woman in that room?

Noted here primarily to show a good use of the past conditional tense.

She dragged you in there by force?

“To drag” something is to pull it, often by using a lot of physical energy.

Let me through!

One way of saying “Let me get past,” when people are blocking the way.

The best thing we can do is go on with our daily routine.

A person’s “daily routine” refers to the usual things they do every day, such as waking and taking a shower, going to work, eating lunch, etc...

And the bets are placed.

In card games like blackjack, note that you “place a bet” for each round.

He sticks with a four.

If you “stick” with the cards you have, you refuse to take any more.

That's a queen. I think you're busted.

Here, "busted" means the player has gone over 21, and loses the hand.

Deuce to the dealer.

A "deuce" is another word for a "2" card.

McMurphy beat up two of the attendants and he escaped.

"To beat up" someone is a widely used phrasal verb which means to physically attack and hurt them.

He's upstairs and he's as meek as a lamb.

"Meek" is an interesting adjective meaning shy, submissive or gentle.

Jack Dumphy is full of shit.

This is crude, but a very common and useful expression. If someone is "full of shit," they're usually telling lies, distortions or other nonsense.

I wouldn't leave you here this way. You're coming with me.

In this context, these words are a very "spiritual" thing for Chief to say.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. Was McMurphy really mentally ill?
2. Was he admirable? Dangerous? Both?
3. What are the goals of a mental hospital?
4. Was Nurse Ratched's version of "therapy" helping the group before Mac arrived?
5. How would you have reacted to Mac if you had been a voluntary patient at the hospital when he showed up?
6. Was the hospital's solution to the "McMurphy problem" justified? Would that happen today? In your country?
7. In the Ken Kesey novel, the story is not told from the point of view of Mac, but from another one of the characters; Can you guess which one?

Ken Kesey

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

... one flew east, one flew west,
One flew over the cuckoo's nest.

-Children's folk rhyme

part 1

1

They're out there.

Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them.

They're mopping when I come out the dorm, all three of them sulky and hating everything, the time of day, the place they're at here, the people they got to work around. When they hate like this, better if they don't see me. I creep along the wall quiet as dust in my canvas shoes, but they got special sensitive equipment detects my fear and they all look up, all three at once, eyes glittering out of the black faces like the hard glitter of radio tubes out of the back of an old radio.

"Here's the Chief. The soo-pah Chief, fellas. Ol' Chief Broom. Here you go, Chief Broom. ..."

Stick a mop in my hand and motion to the spot they aim for me to clean today, and I go. One swats the backs of my legs with a broom handle to hurry me past.

"Haw, you look at 'im shag it? Big enough to eat apples off my head an' he mine me like a baby."

They laugh and then I hear them mumbling behind me, heads close together. Hum of black machinery, humming hate and death and other hospital secrets. 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. If my being half Indian ever helped me in any way in this dirty life, it helped me being cagey, helped me all these years.

I'm mopping near the ward door when a key hits it from the other side and I know it's the Big Nurse by the way the lockworks cleave to the key, soft and swift and familiar she been around locks so long. She slides through the door with a gust of cold and locks the door behind her and I see her fingers trail across the polished steel-tip of each finger the same

color as her lips. Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron. Color so hot or so cold if she touches you with it you can't tell which.

She's carrying her woven wicker bag like the ones the Umpqua tribe sells out along the hot August highway, a bag shape of a tool box with a hemp handle. She's had it all the years I been here. 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 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 ...

She dips a nod at me as she goes past. I let the mop push me back to the wall and smile and try to foul her equipment' up as much as possible by not letting her see my eyes-they can't tell so much about you if you got your eyes closed.

In my dark I hear her rubber heels hit the tile and the stuff in her wicker bag clash with the jar of her walking as she passes me in the hall. She walks stiff. When I open my eyes she's down the hall about to turn into the glass Nurses' Station where she'll spend the day sitting at her desk and looking out her window and making notes on what goes on out in front of her in the day room during the next eight hours. Her face looks pleased and peaceful with the thought.

Then ... she sights those black boys. They're still down there together, mumbling to one another. They didn't hear her come on the ward. They sense she's glaring down at them now, but it's too late. They should of knew better'n to group up and mumble together when she was due on the ward. Their faces bob apart, confused. She goes into a crouch and advances on where they're trapped in a huddle at the end of the corridor. She knows what they been saying, and I can see she's furious clean out of control. She's going to tear the black bastards limb from limb, she's so furious. She's swelling up, swells till her back's splitting out the white uniform and she's let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times. She looks around her with a swivel of her huge head. Nobody up to see, just old Broom Bromden the half-breed Indian back there hiding behind his mop and can't talk to call for help. So she really lets herself go and her painted smile twists, stretches to an open snarl, and she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor pulling too big a

load. I hold my breath and figure, My God this time they're gonna do it! This time they let the hate build up too high and overloaded and they're gonna tear one another to pieces before they realize what they're doing!

But just as she starts crooking those sectioned arms around the black boys and they go to ripping at her underside with the mop handles, all the patients start coming out of the dorms to check on what's the hullabaloo, and she has to change back before she's caught in the shape of her hideous real self. By the time the patients get their eyes rubbed to where they can halfway see what the racket's about, all they see is the head nurse, smiling and calm and cold as usual, telling the black boys they'd best not stand in a group gossiping when it is Monday morning and there is such a lot to get done on the first morning of the week. ...

"... mean old Monday morning, you know, boys ..."

"Yeah, Miz Ratched ..."

"... and we have quite a number of appointments this morning, so perhaps, if your standing here in a group talking isn't too urgent ..."

"Yeah, Miz Ratched ..."

She stops and nods at some of the patients come to stand around and stare out of eyes all red and puffy with sleep. She nods once to each. Precise, automatic gesture. Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils-everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it.

The men are still standing and waiting to see what she was onto the black boys about, so she remembers seeing me and says, "And since it is Monday, boys, why don't we get a good head start on the week by shaving poor Mr. Bromden first this morning, before the after-breakfast rush on the shaving room, and see if we can't avoid some of the-ah-disturbance he tends to cause, don't you think?"

Before anybody can turn to look for me I duck back in the mop closet, jerk the door shut dark after me, hold my breath. Shaving before you get breakfast is the worst time. When you got something under your belt

you're stronger and more wide awake, and the bastards who work for the Combine aren't so apt to slip one of their machines in on you in place of an electric shaver. But when you shave before breakfast like she has me do some mornings-six-thirty in the morning in a room all white walls and white basins, and long-tube-lights in the ceiling making sure there aren't any shadows, and faces all round you trapped screaming behind the mirrors-then what chance you got against one of their machines?

I hide in the mop closet and listen, my heart beating in the dark, and I try to keep from getting scared, try to get my thoughts off someplace else-try to think back and remember things about the village and the big Columbia River, think about ah one time Papa and me were hunting birds in a stand of cedar trees near The Dalles. ... But like always when I try to place my thoughts in the past and hide there, the fear close at hand seeps in through the memory. I can feel that least black boy out there coming up the hall, smelling out for my fear. He opens out his nostrils like black funnels, his outsized head bobbing this way and that as he sniffs, and he sucks in fear from all over the ward. He's smelling me now, I can hear him snort. He don't know where I'm hid, but he's smelling and he's hunting around. I try to keep still. ...

(Papa tells me to keep still, tells me that the dog senses a bird somewheres right close. We borrowed a pointer dog from a man in The Dalles. All the village dogs are no-'count mongrels, Papa says, fish-gut eaters and no class a-tall; this here dog, he got insteek! I don't say anything, but I already see the bird up in a scrub cedar, hunched in a gray knot of feathers. Dog running in circles underneath, too much smell around for him to point for sure. The bird safe as long as he keeps still. He's holding out pretty good, but the dog keeps sniffing and circling, louder and closer. Then the bird breaks, feathers springing, jumps out of the cedar into the birdshot from Papa's gun.)

The least black boy and one of the bigger ones catch me before I get ten steps out of the mop closet, and drag me back to the shaving room. I don't fight or make any noise. If you yell it's just tougher on you. I hold back the yelling. I hold back till they get to my temples. I'm not sure it's one of those substitute machines and not a shaver till it gets to my temples; then I can't hold back. It's not a will-power thing any more when they get to my temples. It's a ... button, pushed, says Air Raid Air Raid, turns me on so loud it's like no sound, everybody yelling at me, hands over their ears from

behind a glass wall, faces working around in talk circles but no sound from the mouths. My sound soaks up all other sound. They start the fog machine again and it's snowing down cold and white all over me like skim milk, so thick I might even be able to hide in it if they didn't have a hold on me. I can't see six inches in front of me through the fog and the only thing I can hear over the wail I'm making is the Big Nurse whoop and charge up the hall while she crashes patients outta her way with that wicker bag. I hear her coming but I still can't hush my hollering. I holler till she gets there. They hold me down while she jams wicker bag and all into my mouth and shoves it down with a mop handle.

(A bluetick hound bays out there in the fog, running scared and lost because he can't see. No tracks on the ground but the ones he's making, and he sniffs in every direction with his cold red-rubber nose and picks up no scent but his own fear, fear burning down into him like steam.) It's gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys-and about McMurphy. I been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my God; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen.

2

When the fog clears to where I can see, I'm sitting in the day room. They didn't take me to the Shock Shop this time. I remember they took me out of the shaving room and locked me in Seclusion. I don't remember if I got breakfast or not. Probably not. I can call to mind some mornings locked in Seclusion the black boys keep bringing seconds of everything-supposed to be for me, but they eat it instead-till all three of them get breakfast while I lie there on that pee-stinking mattress, watching them wipe up egg with toast. I can smell the grease and hear them chew the toast. Other mornings they bring me cold mush and force me to eat it without it even being salted.

This morning I plain don't remember. They got enough of those things they call pills down me so I don't know a thing till I hear the ward door open. That ward door opening means it's at least eight o'clock, means there's been maybe an hour and a half I was out cold in that Seclusion

Room when the technicians could of come in and installed anything the Big Nurse ordered and I wouldn't have the slightest notion what.

I hear noise at the ward door, off up the hall out of my sight. That ward door starts opening at eight and opens and closes a thousand times a day, kashash, click. Every morning we sit lined up on each side of the day room, mixing jigsaw puzzles after breakfast, listen for a key to hit the lock, and wait to see what's coming in. There's not a whole lot else to do. Sometimes, at the door, it's a young resident in early so he can watch what we're like Before Medication. BM, they call it. Sometimes it's a wife visiting there on high heels with her purse held tight over her belly. Sometimes it's a clutch of grade-school teachers being led on a tour by that fool Public Relation man who's always clapping his wet hands together and saying how overjoyed he is that mental hospitals have eliminated all the old-fashioned cruelty. "What a cheery atmosphere, don't you agree?" He'll bustle around the schoolteachers, who are bunched together for safety, clapping his hands together. "Oh, when I think back on the old days, on the filth, the bad food, even, yes, brutality, oh, I realize, ladies, that we have come a long way in our campaign!" Whoever comes in the door is usually somebody disappointing, but there's always a chance otherwise, and when a key hits the lock all the heads come up like there's strings on them.

This morning the lockworks rattle strange; it's not a regular visitor at the door. An Escort Man's voice calls down, edgy and impatient, "Admission, come sign for him," and the black boys go.

Admission. Everybody stops playing cards and Monopoly, turns toward the day-room door. Most days I'd be out sweeping the hall and see who they're signing in, but this morning, like I explain to you, the Big Nurse put a thousand pounds down me and I can't budge out of the chair. Most days I'm the first one to see the Admission, watch him creep in the door and slide along the wall and stand scared till the black boys come sign for him and take him into the shower room, where they strip him and leave him shivering with the door open while they all three run grinning up and down the halls looking for the Vaseline. "We need that Vaseline," they'll tell the Big Nurse, "for the thermometer." She looks from one to the other: "I'm sure you do," and hands them a jar holds at least a gallon, "but mind you boys don't group up in there." Then I see two, maybe all three of them in there, in that shower room with the Admission, running that

thermometer around in the grease till it's coated the size of your finger, crooning, "Tha's right, mothah, that's right," and then shut the door and turn all the showers up to where you can't hear anything but the vicious hiss of water on the green tile. I'm out there most days, and I see it like that.

But this morning I have to sit in the chair and only listen to them bring him in. Still, even though I can't see him, I know he's no ordinary Admission. I don't hear him slide scared along the wall, and when they tell him about the shower he don't just submit with a weak little yes, he tells them right back in a loud, brassy voice that he's already plenty damn clean, thank you.

"They showered me this morning at the courthouse and last night at the jail. And I swear I believe they'd of washed my ears for me on the taxi ride over if they coulda found the vacilities. Hoo boy, seems like everytime they ship me someplace I gotta get scrubbed down before, after, and during the operation. I'm gettin' so the sound of water makes me start gathering up my belongings. And get back away from me with that thermometer, Sam, and give me a minute to look my new home over; I never been in a Institute of Psychology before."

The patients look at one another's puzzled faces, then back to the door, where his voice is still coming in. Talking louder'n you'd think he needed to if the black boys were anywhere near him. He sounds like he's way above them, talking down, like he's sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He sounds big. I hear him coming down the hall, and he sounds big in the way he walks, and he sure don't slide; he's got iron on his heels and he rings it on the floor like horseshoes. He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart, and stands there with the guys looking at him.

"Good mornin', buddies."

There's a paper Halloween bat hanging on a string above his head; he reaches up and flicks it so it spins around.

"Mighty nice fall day."

He talks a little the way Papa used to, voice loud and full of hell, but he doesn't look like Papa; Papa was a full-blood Columbia Indian-a chief-and hard and shiny as a gunstock. This guy is redheaded with long red

sideburns and a tangle of curls out from under his cap, been needing cut a long time, and he's broad as Papa was tall, broad across the jaw and shoulders and chest, a broad white devilish grin, and he's hard in a different kind of way from Papa, kind of the way a baseball is hard under the scuffed leather. A seam runs across his nose and one cheekbone where somebody laid him a good one in a fight, and the stitches are still in the seam. He stands there waiting, and when nobody makes a move to say anything to him he commences to laugh. Nobody can tell exactly why he laughs; there's nothing funny going on. But it's not the way that Public Relation laughs, it's free and loud and it comes out of his wide grinning mouth and spreads in rings bigger and bigger till it's lapping against the walls all over the ward. Not like that fat Public Relation laugh. This sounds real. I realize all of a sudden it's the first laugh I've heard in years.

He stands looking at us, rocking back in his boots, and he laughs and laughs. He laces his fingers over his belly without taking his thumbs out of his pockets. I see how big and beat up his hands are. Everybody on the ward, patients, staff, and all, is stunned dumb by him and his laughing. There's no move to stop him, no move to say anything. He laughs till he's finished for a time, and he walks on into the day room. Even when he isn't laughing, that laughing sound hovers around him, the way the sound hovers around a big bell just quit ringing-it's in his eyes, in the way he smiles and swaggers, in the way he talks.

"My name is McMurphy, buddies, R. P. McMurphy, and I'm a gambling fool." He winks and sings a little piece of a song: " '... and whenever I meet with a deck a cards I lays ... my money ... down,'" and laughs again.

He walks to one of the card games, tips an Acute's cards up with a thick, heavy finger, and squints at the hand and shakes his head.

"Yessir, that's what I came to this establishment for, to bring you birds fun an' entertainment around the gamin' table. Nobody left in that Pendleton Work Farm to make my days interesting any more, so I requested a transfer, ya see. Needed some new blood. Hooee, look at the way this bird holds his cards, showin' to everybody in a block; man! I'll trim you babies like little lambs."

Cheswick gathers his cards together. The redheaded man sticks his hand out for Cheswick to shake.

"Hello, buddy; what's that you're playin'? Pinochle? Jesus, no wonder you don't care nothin' about showing your hand. Don't you have a straight deck around here? Well say, here we go, I brought along my own deck, just in case, has something in it other than face cards-and check the pictures, huh? Every one different. Fifty-two positions."

Cheswick is pop-eyed already, and what he sees on those cards don't help his condition.

"Easy now, don't smudge 'em; we got lots of time, lots of games ahead of us. I like to use my deck here because it takes at least a week for the other players to get to where they can even see the suit. ..."

He's got on work-farm pants and shirt, sunned out till they're the color of watered milk. His face and neck and arms are the color of oxblood leather from working long in the fields. He's got a primer-black motorcycle cap stuck in his hair and a leather jacket over one arm, and he's got on boots gray and dusty and heavy enough to kick a man half in two. He walks away from Cheswick and takes off the cap and goes to beating a dust storm out of his thigh. One of the black boys circles him with the thermometer, but he's too quick for them; he slips in among the Acutes and starts moving around shaking hands before the black boy can take good aim. The way he talks, his wink, his loud talk, his swagger all remind me of a car salesman or a stock auctioneer-or one of those pitchmen you see on a sideshow stage, out in front of his flapping banners, standing there in a striped shirt with yellow buttons, drawing the faces off the sawdust like a magnet.

"What happened, you see, was I got in a couple of hassles at the work farm, to tell the pure truth, and the court ruled that I'm a psychopath. And do you think I'm gonna argue with the court? Shoo, you can bet your bottom dollar I don't. If it gets me outta those damned pea fields I'll be whatever their little heart desires, be it psychopath or mad dog or werewolf, because I don't care if I never see another weedin' hoe to my dying day. Now they tell me a psychopath's a guy fights too much and fucks too much, but they ain't wholly right, do you think? I mean, whoever heard tell of a man gettin' too much poozle? Hello, buddy, what do they call you? My name's McMurphy and I'll bet you two dollars here and now that you can't tell me how many spots are in that pinochle hand you're

holding don't look. Two dollars; what d'ya say? God damn, Sam! can't you wait half a minute to prod me with that damn thermometer of yours?"

3

The new man stands looking a minute, to get the set-up of the day room.

One side of the room younger patients, known as Acutes because the doctors figure them still sick enough to be fixed, practice arm wrestling and card tricks where you add and subtract and count down so many and it's a certain card. Billy Bibbit tries to learn to roll a tailor-made cigarette, and Martini walks around, discovering things under the tables and chairs. The Acutes move around a lot. They tell jokes to each other and snicker in their fists (nobody ever dares let loose and laugh, the whole staff'd be in with notebooks and a lot of questions) and they write letters with yellow, runty, chewed pencils.

They spy on each other. Sometimes one man says something about himself that he didn't aim to let slip, and one of his buddies at the table where he said it yawns and gets up and sidles over to the big log book by the Nurses' Station and writes down the piece of information he heard-of therapeutic interest to the whole ward, is what the Big Nurse says the book is for, but 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.

The guy that wrote the piece of information in the log book, he gets a star by his name on the roll and gets to sleep late the next day.

Across the room from the Acutes are the culls of the Combine's product, the Chronicles. Not in the hospital, these, to get fixed, but just to keep them from walking around the streets giving the product a bad name. Chronicles are in for good, the staff concedes. Chronicles are divided into Walkers like me, can still get around if you keep them fed, and Wheelers and Vegetables. What the Chronicles are-or most of us-are machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired, flaws born in, or flaws beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was bleeding rust in some vacant lot.

But there are some of us Chronicles that the staff made a couple of mistakes on years back, some of us who were Acutes when we came in, and got changed over. Ellis is a Chronic came in an Acute and got fouled

up bad when they overloaded him in that filthy brain-murdering room that the black boys call the "Shock Shop." Now he's nailed against the wall in the same condition they lifted him off the table for the last time, in the same shape, arms out, palms cupped, with the same horror on his face. He's nailed like that on the wall, like a stuffed trophy. They pull the nails when it's time to eat or time to drive him in to bed when they want him to move so's I can mop the puddle where he stands. At the old place he stood so long in one spot the piss ate the floor and beams away under him and he kept falling through to the ward below, giving them all kinds of census headaches down there when roll check came around.

Ruckly is another Chronic came in a few years back as an Acute, but him they overloaded in a different way: they made a mistake in one of their head installations. He was being a holy nuisance all over the place, kicking the black boys and biting the student nurses on the legs, so they took him away to be fixed. They strapped him to that table, and the last anybody saw of him for a while was just before they shut the door on him; he winked, just before the door closed, and told the black boys as they backed away from him, "You'll pay for this, you damn tarbabies."

And they brought him back to the ward two weeks later, bald and the front of his face an oily purple bruise and two little button-sized plugs stitched one above each eye. You can see by his eyes how they burned him out over there; his eyes are all smoked up and gray and deserted inside like blown fuses. All day now he won't do a thing but hold an old photograph up in front of that burned-out face, turning it over and over in his cold fingers, and the picture wore gray as his eyes on both sides with all his handling till you can't tell any more what it used to be.

The staff, now, they consider Ruckly one of their failures, but I'm not sure but what he's better off than if the installation had been perfect. The installations they do nowadays are generally successful. The technicians got more skill and experience. No more of the button holes in the forehead, no cutting at all—they go in through the eye sockets. Sometimes a guy goes over for an installation, leaves the ward mean and mad and snapping at the whole world and comes back a few weeks later with black-and-blue eyes like he'd been in a fist-fight, and he's the sweetest, nicest, best-behaved thing you ever saw. He'll maybe even go home in a month or two, a hat pulled low over the face of a sleepwalker wandering round in a simple, happy dream. A success, they say, but I say he's just another robot

for the Combine and might be better off as a failure, like Ruckly sitting there fumbling and drooling over his picture. He never does much else. The dwarf black boy gets a rise out of him from time to time by leaning close and asking, "Say, Ruckly, what you figure your little wife is doing in town tonight?" Ruckly's head comes up. Memory whispers someplace in that jumbled machinery. He turns red and his veins clog up at one end. This puffs him up so he can just barely make a little whistling sound in his throat. Bubbles squeeze out the corner of his mouth, he's working his jaw so hard to say something. When he finally does get to where he can say his few words it's a low, choking noise to make your skin crawl-"Fffffffuck da wife! Fffffffuck da wife!" and passes out on the spot from the effort.

Ellis and Ruckly are the youngest Chronics. Colonel Matterson is the oldest, an old, petrified cavalry soldier from the First War who is given to lifting the skirts of passing nurses with his cane, or teaching some kind of history out of the text of his left hand to anybody that'll listen. He's the oldest on the ward, but not the one's been here longest-his wife brought him in only a few years back, when she got to where she wasn't up to tending him any longer.

I'm the one been here on the ward the longest, since the Second World War. I been here on the ward longer'n anybody. Longer'n any of the other patients. The Big Nurse has been here longer'n me.

The Chronics and the Acutes don't generally mingle. Each stays on his own side of the day room the way the black boys want it. The black boys say it's more orderly that way and let everybody know that's the way they'd like it to stay. They move us in after breakfast and look at the grouping and nod. "That's right, gennulmen, that's the way. Now you keep it that way."

Actually there isn't much need for them to say anything, because, other than me, the Chronics don't move around much, and the Acutes say they'd just as leave stay over on their own side, give reasons like the Chronic side smells worse than a dirty diaper. But I know it isn't the stink that keeps them away from the Chronic side so much as 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.

(Everybody on the ward is proud of the way the patients cooperate. We got a little brass tablet tacked to a piece of maple wood that has printed on it: CONGRATULATIONS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE SMALLEST NUMBER OF PERSONNEL OF ANY WARD IN THE HOSPITAL. It's a prize for cooperation. It's hung on the wall right above the log book, right square in the middle between the Chronics and Acutes.)

This new redheaded Admission, McMurphy, knows right away he's not a Chronic. After he checks the day room over a minute, he sees he's meant for the Acute side and goes right for it, grinning and shaking hands with everybody he comes to. At first I see that he's making everybody over there feel uneasy, with all his kidding and joking and with the brassy way he hollers at that black boy who's still after him with a thermometer, and especially with that big wide-open laugh of his. Dials twitch in the control panel at the sound of it. The Acutes look spooked and uneasy when he laughs, the way kids look in a schoolroom when one ornery kid is raising too much hell with the teacher out of the room and they're all scared the teacher might pop back in and take it into her head to make them all stay after. They're fidgeting and twitching, responding to the dials in the control panel; I see McMurphy notices he's making them uneasy, but he don't let it slow him down.

"Damn, what a sorry-looking outfit. You boys don't look so crazy to me." He's trying to get them to loosen up, the way you see an auctioneer spinning jokes to loosen up the crowd before the bidding starts. "Which one of you claims to be the craziest? Which one is the biggest loony? Who runs these card games? It's my first day, and what I like to do is make a good impression straight off on the right man if he can prove to me he is the right man. Who's the bull goose loony here?"

He's saying this directly to Billy Bibbit. He leans down and glares so hard at Billy that Billy feels compelled to stutter out that he isn't the buh-buh-buh-bull goose loony yet, though he's next in luh-luh-line for the job.

McMurphy sticks a big hand down in front of Billy, and Billy can't do a thing but shake it. "Well, buddy," he says to Billy, "I'm truly glad you're next in luh-line for the job, but since I'm thinking about taking over this whole show myself, lock, stock, and barrel, maybe I better talk with the

top man." He looks round to where some of the Acutes have stopped their card-playing, covers one of his hands with the other, and cracks all his knuckles at the sight. "I figure, you see, buddy, to be sort of the gambling baron on this ward, deal a wicked game of blackjack. So you better take me to your leader and we'll get it straightened out who's gonna be boss around here."

Nobody's sure if this barrel-chested man with the, scar and the wild grin is play-acting or if he's crazy enough to be just like he talks, or both, but they are all beginning to get a big kick out of going along with him. They watch as he puts that big red hand on Billy's thin arm, waiting to see what Billy will say. Billy sees how it's up to him to break the silence, so he looks around and picks out one of the pinochle-players: "Handing," Billy says, "I guess it would b-b-be you. You're p-president of Pay-Pay-Patient's Council. This m-man wants to talk to you."

The Acutes are grinning now, not so uneasy any more, and glad that something out of the ordinary's going on. They all razz Harding, ask him if he's bull goose loony. He lays down his cards.

Harding is a flat, nervous man with a face that sometimes makes you think you seen him in the movies, like it's a face too pretty to just be a guy on the street. He's got wide, thin shoulders and he curves them in around his chest when he's trying to hide inside himself. He's got hands so long and white and dainty I think they carved each other out of soap, and sometimes they get loose and glide around in front of him free as two white birds until he notices them and traps them between his knees; it bothers him that he's got pretty hands.

He's president of the Patient's Council on account of he has a paper that says he graduated from college. The paper's framed and sits on his nightstand next to a picture of a woman in a bathing suit who also looks like you've seen her in the moving pictures-she's got very big breasts and she's holding the top of the bathing suit up over them with her fingers and looking sideways at the camera. You can see Harding sitting on a towel behind her, looking skinny in his bathing suit, like he's waiting for some big guy to kick sand on him. Harding brags a lot about having such a woman for a wife, says she's the sexiest woman in the world and she can't get enough of him nights.

When Billy points him out Harding leans back in his chair and assumes an important look, speaks up at the ceiling without looking at Billy or McMurphy. "Does this ... gentleman have an appointment, Mr. Bibbit?"

"Do you have an appointment, Mr. McM-m-murphy? Mr. Harding is a busy man, nobody sees him without an ap-appointment."

"This busy man Mr. Harding, is he the bull goose loony?" He looks at Billy with one eye, and Billy nods his head up and down real fast; Billy's tickled with all the attention he's getting.

"Then you tell Bull Goose Loony Harding that R. P. McMurphy is waiting to see him and that this hospital ain't big enough for the two of us. I'm accustomed to being top man. I been a bull goose catskiner for every gyppo logging operation in the Northwest and bull goose gambler all the way from Korea, was even bull goose pea weeder on that pea farm at Pendleton-so I figure if I'm bound to be a loony, then I'm bound to be a stompdown dadgum good one. Tell this Harding that he either meets me man to man or he's a yaller skunk and better be outta town by sunset."

Harding leans farther back, hooks his thumbs in his lapels. "Bibbit, you tell this young upstart McMurphy that I'll meet him in the main hall at high noon and we'll settle this affair once and for all, libidos a-blazin'." Harding tries to drawl like McMurphy; it sounds funny with his high, breathy voice. "You might also warn him, just to be fair, that I have been bull goose loony on this ward for nigh onto two years, and that I'm crazier than any man alive."

"Mr. Bibbit, you might warn this Mr. Harding that I'm so crazy I admit to voting for Eisenhower."

"Bibbit! You tell Mr. McMurphy I'm so crazy I voted for Eisenhower twice!"

"And you tell Mr. Harding right back"-he puts both hands on the table and leans down, his voice getting low-"that I'm so crazy I plan to vote for Eisenhower again this November."

"I take off my hat," Harding says, bows his head, and shakes hands with McMurphy. There's no doubt in my mind that McMurphy's won, but I'm not sure just what.

All the other Acutes leave what they've been doing and ease up close to see what new sort this fellow is. Nobody like him's ever been on the ward

before. They're asking him where he's from and what his business is in a way I've never seen them do before. He says he's a dedicated man. He says he was just a wanderer and logging bum before the Army took him and taught him what his natural bent was; just like they taught some men to goldbrick and some men to goof off, he says, they taught him to play poker. Since then he's settled down and devoted himself to gambling on all levels. Just play poker and stay single and live where and how he wants to, if people would let him, he says, "but you know how society persecutes a dedicated man. Ever since I found my callin' I done time in so many small-town jails I could write a brochure. They say I'm a habitual hassler. Like I fight some. Sheeut. They didn't mind so much when I was a dumb logger and got into a hassle; that's excusable, they say, that's a hard-workin' feller blowing off steam, they say. But if you're a gambler, if they know you to get up a back-room game now and then, all you have to do is spit slantwise and you're a goddamned criminal. Hooee, it was breaking up the budget drivin' me to and from the pokey for a while there."

He shakes his head and puffs out his cheeks.

"But that was just for a period of time. I learned the ropes. To tell the truth, this 'sault and battery I was doing in Pendleton was the first hitch in close to a year. That's why I got busted. I was outa practice; this guy was able to get up off the floor and get to the cops before I left town. A very tough individual ..."

He laughs again and shakes hands and sits down to arm wrestle every time that black boy gets too near him with the thermometer, till he's met everybody on the Acute side. And when he finishes shaking hands with the last Acute he comes right on over to the Chronics, like we aren't no different. You can't tell if he's really this friendly or if he's got some gambler's reason for trying to get acquainted with guys so far gone a lot of them don't even know their names.

He's there pulling Ellis's hand off the wall and shaking it just like he was a politician running for something and Ellis's vote was good as anybody's. "Buddy," he says to Ellis in a solemn voice, "my name is R. P. McMurphy and I don't like to see a full-grown man sloshin' around in his own water. Whyn't you go get dried up?"

Ellis looks down at the puddle around his feet in pure surprise. "Why, I thank you," he says and even moves off a few steps toward the latrine before the nails pull his hands back to the wall.

McMurphy comes down the line of Chronics, shakes hands with Colonel Matterson and with Ruckly and with Old Pete. He shakes the hands of Wheelers and Walkers and Vegetables, shakes hands that he has to pick up out of laps like picking up dead birds, mechanical birds, wonders of tiny bones and wires that have run down and fallen. Shakes hands with everybody he comes to except Big George the water freak, who grins and shies back from that unsanitary hand, so McMurphy just salutes him and says to his own right hand as he walks away, "Hand, how do you suppose that old fellow knew all the evil you been into?"

Nobody can make out what he's driving at, or why he's making such a fuss with meeting everybody, but it's better'n mixing jigsaw puzzles. He keeps saying it's a necessary thing to get around and meet the men he'll be dealing with, part of a gambler's job. But he must know he ain't going to be dealing with no eighty-year-old organic who couldn't do any more with a playing card than put it in his mouth and gum it awhile. Yet he looks like he's enjoying himself, like he's the sort of guy that gets a laugh out of people.

I'm the last one. Still strapped in the chair in the corner. McMurphy stops when he gets to me and hooks his thumbs in his pockets again and leans back to laugh, like he sees something funnier about me than about anybody else. All of a sudden I was scared he was laughing because he knew the way I was sitting there with my knees pulled up and my arms wrapped around them, staring straight ahead as though I couldn't hear a thing, was all an act.

"Hooeee," he said, "look what we got here."

I remember all this part real clear. I remember the way he closed one eye and tipped his head back and looked down across that healing wine-colored scar on his nose, laughing at me. I thought at first that he was laughing because of how funny it looked, an Indian's face and black, oily Indian's hair on somebody like me. I thought maybe he was laughing at how weak I looked. But then's when I remember thinking that he was laughing because he wasn't fooled for one minute by my deaf-and-dumb

act; it didn't make any difference how cagey the act was, he was onto me and was laughing and winking to let me know it.

"What's your story, Big Chief? You look like Sittin' Bull on a sitdown strike." He looked over to the Acutes to see if they might laugh about his joke; when they just sniggered he looked back to me and winked again. "What's your name, Chief?"

Billy Bibbit called across the room. "His n-n-name is Bromden. Chief Bromden. Everybody calls him Chief Buh-Broom, though, because the aides have him sweeping a l-large part of the time. There's not m-much else he can do, I guess. He's deaf." Billy put his chin in hands. "If I was d-d-deaf"-he sighed-"I would kill myself."

McMurphy kept looking at me. "He gets his growth, he'll be pretty good-sized, won't he? I wonder how tall he is."

"I think somebody m-m-measured him once at s-six feet seven; but even if he is big, he's scared of his own sh-sh-shadow. Just a bi-big deaf Indian."

"When I saw him sittin' here I thought he looked some Indian. But Bromden ain't an Indian name. What tribe is he?"

"I don't know," Billy said. "He was here wh-when I c-came."

"I have information from the doctor," Harding said, "that he is only half Indian, a Columbia Indian, I believe. That's a defunct Columbia Gorge tribe. The doctor said his father was the tribal leader, hence this fellow's title, 'Chief.' As to the 'Bromden' part of the name, I'm afraid my knowledge in Indian lore doesn't cover that."

McMurphy leaned his head down near mine where I had to look at him. "Is that right? You deaf, Chief?"

"He's de-de-deef and dumb."

McMurphy puckered his lips and looked at my face a long time. Then he straightened back up and stuck his hand out. "Well, what the hell, he can shake hands can't he? Deef or whatever. By God, Chief, you may be big, but you shake my hand or I'll consider it an insult. And it's not a good idea to insult the new bull goose loony of the hospital."

When he said that he looked back over to Harding and Billy and made a face, but he left that hand in front of me, big as a dinner plate.

I remember real clear the way that hand looked: there was carbon under the fingernails where he'd worked once in a garage; there was an anchor tattooed back from the knuckles; there was a dirty Band-Aid on the middle knuckle, peeling up at the edge. All the rest of the knuckles were covered with scars and cuts, old and new. I remember the palm was smooth and hard as bone from hefting the wooden handles of axes and hoes, not the hand you'd think could deal cards. The palm was callused, and the calluses were cracked, and dirt was worked in the cracks. A road map of his travels up and down the West. That palm made a scuffing sound against my hand. I remember the fingers were thick and strong closing over mine, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power: It blowed up near as big as his, I remember. ...

"Mr. McMurry."

It's the Big Nurse.

"Mr. McMurry, could you come here please?"

It's the Big Nurse. That black boy with the thermometer has gone and got her. She stands there tapping that thermometer against her wrist watch, eyes whirring while she tries to gauge this new man. Her lips are in that triangle shape, like a doll's lips ready for a fake nipple.

"Aide Williams tells me, Mr. McMurry, that you've been somewhat difficult about your admission shower. Is this true? Please understand, I appreciate the way you've taken it upon yourself to orient with the other patients on the ward, but everything in its own good time, Mr. McMurry. I'm sorry to interrupt you and Mr. Bromden, but you do understand: everyone ... must follow the rules."

He tips his head back and gives that wink that she isn't fooling him any more than I did, that he's onto her. He looks up at her with one eye for a minute.

"Ya know, ma'am," he says, "ya know-that is the ex-act thing somebody always tells me about the rules ..."

He grins. They both smile back and forth at each other, sizing each other up.

"... just when they figure I'm about to do the dead opposite."

Then he lets go my hand.

4

In the glass Station the Big Nurse has opened a package from a foreign address and is sucking into hypodermic needles the grass-and-milk liquid that came in vial in the package. One of the little nurses, a girl with one wandering eye that always keeps looking worried over her shoulder while the other one goes about its usual business, picks up the little tray of filled needles but doesn't carry them away just yet.

"What, Miss Ratched, is your opinion of this new patient? I mean, gee, he's good-looking and friendly and everything, but in my humble opinion he certainly takes over."

The Big Nurse tests a needle against her fingertip. "I'm afraid"-she stabs the needle down in the rubber-capped vial and lifts the plunger-"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."

"Oh. But. I mean, in a mental hospital? What could his ends be?"

"Any number of things." She's calm, smiling, lost in the work of loading the needles. "Comfort and an easy life, for instance; the feeling of power and respect, perhaps; monetary gain-perhaps all of these things. Sometimes a manipulator's own ends are simply the actual disruption of the ward for the sake of disruption. There are such people in our society. A manipulator can influence the other patients and disrupt them to such an extent that it may take months to get everything running smooth once more. With the present permissive philosophy in mental hospitals, it's easy for them to get away with it. Some years back it was quite different. I recall some years back we had a man, a Mr. Taber, on the ward, and he was an intolerable Ward Manipulator. For a while." She looks up from her work, needle half filled in front of her face like a little wand. Her eyes get far-off and pleased with the memory. "Mistur Tay-bur," she says.

"But, gee," the other nurse says, "what on earth would make a man want to do something like disrupt the ward for, Miss Ratched? What possible motive ...?"

She cuts the little nurse off by jabbing the needle back into the vial's rubber top, fills it, jerks it out, and lays it on the tray. I watch her hand reach for another empty needle, watch it dart out, hinge over it, drop.

"You seem to forget, Miss Flinn, that this is an institution for the insane."

The Big Nurse tends to get real put out if something keeps her outfit from running like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine. The slightest thing messy or out of kilter or in the way ties her into a little white knot of tight-smiled fury. She walks around with that same doll smile crimped between her chin and her nose and that same calm whir coming from her eyes, but down inside of her she's tense as steel. I know, I can feel it. And she don't relax a hair till she gets the nuisance attended to-what she calls "adjusted to surroundings."

Under her rule the ward Inside is almost completely adjusted to surroundings. But the thing is she can't be on the ward all the time. She's got to spend some time Outside. 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. She was already the Big Nurse in the old place when I came in from the Outside so long back, and she'd been dedicating herself to adjustment for God knows how long.

And I've watched her get more and more skillful over the years. Practice has steadied and strengthened her until now she wields a sure power that extends in all directions on hairlike wires too small for anybody's eye but mine; I see her sit in the center of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, know every second which wire runs where and just what current to send up to get the results she wants. I was an electrician's assistant in training camp before the Army shipped me to Germany and I had some electronics in my year in college is how I learned about the way these things can be rigged.

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

year she accumulates her ideal staff: doctors, all ages and types, come and rise up in front of her with ideas of their own about the way a ward should be run, some with backbone enough to stand behind their ideas, and she fixes these doctors with dry-ice eyes day in, day out, until they retreat with unnatural chills. "I tell you I don't know what it is," they tell the guy in charge of personnel. "Since I started on that ward with that woman I feel like my veins are running ammonia. I shiver all the time, my kids won't sit in my lap, my wife won't sleep with me. I insist on a transfer-neurology bin, the alky tank, pediatrics, I just don't care!"

She keeps this up for years. The doctors last three weeks, three months. Until she finally settles for a little man with a big wide forehead and wide jewly cheeks and squeezed narrow across his tiny eyes like he once wore glasses that were way too small, wore them for so long they crimped his face in the middle, so now he has glasses on a string to his collar button; they teeter on the purple bridge of his little nose and they are always slipping one side or the other so he'll tip his head when he talks just to keep his glasses level. That's her doctor.

Her three daytime black boys she acquires after more years of testing and rejecting thousands. They come at her in a long black row of sulky, big-nosed masks, hating her and her chalk doll whiteness from the first look they get. She appraises them and their hate for a month or so, then lets them go because they don't hate enough. When she finally gets the three she wants-gets them one at a time over a number of years, weaving them into her plan and her network-she's damn positive they hate enough to be capable.

The first one she gets five years after I been on the ward, a twisted sinewy dwarf the color of cold asphalt. His mother was raped in Georgia while his papa stood by tied to the hot iron stove with plow traces, blood streaming into his shoes. The boy watched from a closet, five years old and squinting his eye to peep out the crack between the door and the jamb, and he never grew an inch after. Now his eyelids hang loose and thin from his brow like he's got a bat perched on the bridge of his nose. Eyelids like thin gray leather, he lifts them up just a bit whenever a new white man comes on the ward, peeks out from under them and studies the man up and down and nods just once like he's oh yes made positive certain of something he was already sure of. He wanted to carry a sock full of birdshot when he first came on the job, to work the patients into shape, but

she told him they didn't do it that way anymore, made him leave the sap at home and taught him her own technique; taught him not to show his hate and to be calm and wait, wait for a little advantage, a little slack, then twist the rope and keep the pressure steady. All the time. That's the way you get them into shape, she taught him.

The other two black boys come two years later, coming to work only about a month apart and both looking so much alike I think she had a replica made of the one who came first. They are tall and sharp and bony and their faces are chipped into expressions that never change, like flint arrowheads. Their eyes come to points. If you brush against their hair it rasps the hide right off you.

All of them black as telephones. The blacker they are, she learned from that long dark row that came before them, the more time they are likely to devote to cleaning and scrubbing and keeping the ward in order. For instance, all three of these boys' uniforms are always spotless as snow. White and cold and stiff as her own.

All three wear starched snow-white pants and white shirts with metal snaps down one side and white shoes polished like ice, and the shoes have red rubber soles silent as mice up and down the hall. They never make any noise when they move. They materialize in different parts of the ward every time a patient figures to check himself in private or whisper some secret to another guy. A patient'll be in a corner all by himself, when all of a sudden there's a squeak and frost forms along his cheek, and he turns in that direction and there's a cold stone mask floating above him against the wall. He just sees the black face. No body. The walls are white as the white suits, polished clean as a refrigerator door, and the black face and hands seem to float against it like a ghost.

Years of training, and all three black boys tune in closer and closer with the Big Nurse's frequency. One by one they are able to disconnect the direct wires and operate on beams. She never gives orders out loud or leaves written instructions that might be found by a visiting wife or schoolteacher. Doesn't need to any more. 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.

So after the nurse gets her staff, efficiency locks the ward like a watchman's clock. Everything the guys think and say and do is all worked

out months in advance, based on the little notes the nurse makes during the day. This is typed and fed into the machine I hear humming behind the steel door in the rear of the Nurses' Station. A number of Order Daily Cards are returned, punched with a pattern of little square holes. At the beginning of each day the properly dated OD card is inserted in a slot in the steel door and the walls hum up: Lights flash on in the dorm at six-thirty: the Acutes up out of bed quick as the black boys can prod them out, get them to work buffing the floor, emptying ash trays, polishing the scratch marks off the wall where one old fellow shorted out a day ago, went down in an awful twist of smoke and smell of burned rubber. The Wheelers swing dead log legs out on the floor and wait like seated statues for somebody to roll chairs in to them. The Vegetables piss the bed, activating an electric shock and buzzer, rolls them off on the tile where the black boys can hose them down and get them in clean greens. ...

Six-forty-five the shavers buzz and the Acutes line up in alphabetical order at the mirrors, A, B, C, D. ... The walking Chronicles like me walk in when the Acutes are done, then the Wheelers are wheeled in. The three old guys left, a film of yellow mold on the loose hide under their chins, they get shaved in their lounge chairs in the day room, a leather strap across the forehead to keep them from flopping around under the shaver.

Some mornings-Mondays especially-I hide and try to buck the schedule. Other mornings I figure it's cagier to step right into place between A and C in the alphabet and move the route like everybody else, without lifting my feet-powerful magnets in the floor maneuver personnel through the ward like arcade puppets. ...

Seven o'clock the mess hall opens and the order of line-up reverses: the Wheelers first, then the Walkers, then the Acutes pick up trays, corn flakes, bacon and eggs, toast-and this morning a canned peach on a piece of green, torn lettuce. Some of the Acutes bring trays to the Wheelers. Most Wheelers are just Chronicles with bad legs, they feed themselves, but there's these three of them got no action from the neck down whatsoever, not much from the neck up. These are called Vegetables. The black boys push them in after everybody else is sat down, wheel them against a wall, and bring them identical trays of muddy-looking food with little white diet cards attached to the trays. Mechanical Soft, reads the diet cards for these toothless three: eggs, ham, toast, bacon, all chewed thirty-two times apiece by the stainless-steel machine in the kitchen. I see it purse sectioned lips,

like a vacuum-cleaner hose, and spurt a clot of chewed-up ham onto a plate with a barnyard sound.

The black boys stoke the sucking pink mouths of the Vegetables a shade too fast for swallowing, and the Mechanical Soft squeezes out down their little knobs of chins onto the greens. The black boys cuss the Vegetables and ream the mouths bigger with a twisting motion of the spoon, like coring a rotten apple: "This ol' fart Blastic, he's comin' to pieces befo' my very eyes. I can't tell no more if I'm feeding him bacon puree or chunks of his own fuckin' tongue." ...

Seven-thirty back to the day room. The Big Nurse looks out through her special glass, always polished till you can't tell it's there, and nods at what she sees, reaches up and tears a sheet off her calendar one day closer to the goal. She pushes a button for things to start. I hear the wharrup of a big sheet of tin being shook someplace. Everybody come to order. Acutes: sit on your side of the day room and wait for cards and Monopoly games to be brought out. Chronics: sit on your side and wait for puzzles from the Red Cross box. Ellis: go to your place at the wall, hands up to receive the nails and pee running down your leg. Pete: wag your head like a puppet. Scanlon: work your knobby hands on the table in front of you, constructing a make-believe bomb to blow up a make-believe world. Harding: begin talking, waving your dove hands in the air, then trap them under your armpits because grown men aren't supposed to wave their pretty hands that way. Sefelt: begin moaning about your teeth hurting and your hair falling out. Everybody: breath in ... and out ... in perfect order; hearts all beating at the rate the OD cards have ordered. Sound of matched cylinders.

Like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys ...

Seven-forty-five the black boys move down the line of Chronics taping catheters on the ones that will hold still for it. Catheters are second-hand condoms the ends clipped off and rubber-banded to tubes that run down pantlegs to a plastic sack marked DISPOSABLE NOT TO BE RE-USED, which it is my job to wash out at the end of each day. The black boys anchor the condom by taping it to the hairs; old Catheter Chronics are hairless as babies from tape removal. ...

Eight o'clock the walls whirr and hum into full swing. The speaker in the ceiling says, "Medications," using the Big Nurse's voice. We look in the glass case where she sits, but she's nowhere near the microphone; in fact, she's ten feet away from the microphone, tutoring one of the little nurses how to prepare a neat drug tray with pills arranged orderly. The Acutes line up at the glass door, A, B, C, D, then the Chronics, then the Wheelers (the Vegetables get theirs later, mixed in a spoon of applesauce). The guys file by and get a capsule in a paper cup-throw it to the back of the throat and get the cup filled with water by the little nurse and wash the capsule down. On rare occasions some fool might ask what he's being required to swallow.

"Wait just a shake, honey; what are these two little red capsules in here with my vitamin?"

I know him. He's a big, griping Acute, already getting the reputation of being a troublemaker.

"It's just medication, Mr. Taber, good for you. Down it goes, now."

"But I mean what kind of medication. Christ, I can see that they're pills-"

"Just swallow it all, shall we, Mr. Taber-just for me?" She takes a quick look at the Big Nurse to see how the little flirting technique she is using is accepted, then looks back at the Acute. He still isn't ready to swallow something he don't know what is, not even just for her.

"Miss, I don't like to create trouble. But I don't like to swallow something without knowing what it is, neither. How do I know this isn't one of those funny pills that makes me something I'm not?"

"Don't get upset, Mr. Taber-"

"Upset? All I want to know, for the love Jesus-"

But the Big Nurse has come up quietly, locked her hand on his arm, paralyzes him all the way to the shoulder. "That's all right, Miss Flinn," she says. "If Mr. Taber chooses to act like a child, he may have to be treated as such. We've tried to be kind and considerate with him. Obviously, that's not the answer. Hostility, hostility, that's the thanks we get. You can go, Mr. Taber, if you don't wish to take your medication orally."

"All I wanted to know, for the-"

"You can go."

He goes off, grumbling, when she frees his arm, and spends the morning moping around the latrine, wondering about those capsules. I got away once holding one of those same red capsules under my tongue, played like I'd swallowed it, and crushed it open later in the broom closet. For a tick of time, before it all turned into white dust, I saw it was a miniature electronic element like the ones I helped the Radar Corps work with in the Army, microscopic wires and grids and transistors, this one designed to dissolve on contact with air. ...

Eight-twenty the cards and puzzles go out. ...

Eight-twenty-five some Acute mentions he used to watch his sister taking her bath; the three guys at the table with him fall all over each other to see who gets to write it in the log book. ...

Eight-thirty the ward door opens and two technicians trot in, smelling like grape wine; technicians always move at a fast walk or a trot because they're always leaning so far forward they have to move fast to keep standing. They always lean forward and they always smell like they sterilized their instruments in wine. They pull the lab door to behind them, and I sweep up close and can snake out voices over the vicious zzzth-zzzth-zzzth of steel on whetstone.

"What we got already at this ungodly hour of the morning?"

"We got to install an Indwelling Curiosity Cutout in some nosy booger. Hurry-up job, she says, and I'm not even sure we got one of the gizmos in stock."

"We might have to call IBM to rush one out for us; let me check back in Supply-"

"Hey; bring out a bottle of that pure grain while you're back there: it's getting so I can't install the simplest frigging component but what I need a bracer. Well, what the hell, it's better'n garage work. ..."

Their voices are forced and too quick on the comeback to be real talk-more like cartoon comedy speech. I sweep away before I'm caught eavesdropping.

The two big black boys catch Taber in the latrine and drag him. to the mattress room. He gets one a good kick in the shins. He's yelling bloody

murder. I'm surprised how helpless he looks when they hold him, like he was wrapped with bands of black iron.

They push him face down on the mattress. One sits on his head, and the other rips his pants open in back and peels the cloth until Taber's peach-colored rear is framed by the ragged lettuce-green. He's smothering curses into the mattress and the black boy sitting on his head saying, "Tha's right, Mistuh Taber, tha's right. ..." The nurse comes down the hall, smearing Vaseline on a long needle, pulls the door shut so they're out of sight for a second, then comes right back out, wiping the needle on a shred of Taber's pants. She's left the Vaseline jar in the room. Before the black boy can close the door after her I see the one still sitting on Taber's head, dabbing at him with a Kleenex. They're in there a long time before the door opens up again and they come out, carrying him across the hall to the lab. His greens are ripped clear off now and he's wrapped up in a damp sheet. ...

Nine o'clock young residents wearing leather elbows talk to Acutes for fifty minutes about what they did when they were little boys. The Big Nurse is suspicious of the crew-cut looks of these residents, and that fifty minutes they are on the ward is a tough time for her. While they are around, the machinery goes to fumbling and she is scowling and making notes to check the records of these boys for old traffic violations and the like. ...

Nine-fifty the residents leave and the machinery hums up smooth again. The nurse watches the day room from her glass case; the scene before her takes on that blue-steel clarity again, that clean orderly movement of a cartoon comedy.

Taber is wheeled out of the lab on a Gurney bed.

"We had to give him another shot when he started coming up during the spine tap," the technician tells her. "What do you say we take him right on over to Building One and buzz him with EST while we're at it-that way not waste the extra Seconal?"

"I think it is an excellent suggestion. Maybe after that take him to the electroencephalograph and check his head-we may find evidence of a need for brain work."

The technicians go trotting off, pushing the man on the Gurney, like cartoon men-or like puppets, mechanical puppets in one of those Punch

and Judy acts where it's supposed to be funny to see the puppet beat up by the Devil and swallowed headfirst by a smiling alligator. ...

Ten o'clock the mail comes up. Sometimes you get the torn envelope. ...

Ten-thirty Public Relation comes in with a ladies' club following him. He claps his fat hands at the day-room door. "Oh, hello guys; stiff lip, stiff lip ... look around, girls; isn't it clean, so bright? This is Miss Ratched. I chose this ward because it's her ward. She's, girls, just like a mother. Not that I mean age, but you girls understand ..."

Public Relation's shirt collar is so tight it bloats his face up when he laughs, and he's laughing most of the time I don't ever know what at, laughing high and fast like he wishes he could stop but can't do it. And his face bloated up red and round as a balloon with a face painted on it. He got no hair on his face and none on his head to speak of; it looks like he glued some on once but it kept slipping off and getting in his cuffs and his shirt pocket and down his collar. Maybe that's why he keeps his collar so tight, to keep the little pieces of hair from falling down in there.

Maybe that's why he laughs so much, because he isn't able to keep all the pieces out.

He conducts these tours-serious women in blazer jackets, nodding to him as he points out how much things have improved over the years. He points out the TV, the big leather chairs, the sanitary drinking fountains; then they all go have coffee in the Nurse's Station. Sometimes he'll be by himself and just stand in the middle of the day room and clap his hands (you can hear they are wet), clap them two or three times till they stick, then hold them prayer-like together under one of his chins and start spinning. Spin round and around there in the middle of the floor, looking wild and frantic at the TV, the new pictures on the walls, the sanitary drinking fountain. And laughing.

What he sees that's so funny he don't ever let us in on, and the only thing I can see funny is him spinning round and around out there like a rubber toy-if you push him over he's weighted on the bottom and straightaway rocks back upright, goes to spinning again. He never, never looks at the men's faces. ...

Ten-forty, -forty-five, -fifty, patients shuttle in and out to appointments in ET or OT or PT, or in queer little rooms somewhere where the walls are

never the same size and the floors aren't level. The machinery sounds about you reach a steady cruising speed.

The ward hums the way I heard a cotton mill hum once when the football team played a high school in California. After a good season one year the boosters in the town were so proud and carried away that they paid to fly us to California to play a championship high-school team down there. When we flew into the town we had to go visit some local industry. Our coach was one for convincing folks that athletics was educational because of the learning afforded by travel, and every trip we took he herded the team around to creameries and beet farms and canneries before the game. In California it was the cotton mill. When we went in the mill most of the team took a look and left to go sit in the bus over stud games on suitcases, but I stayed inside over in a corner out of the way of the Negro girls running up and down the aisles of machines. The mill put me in a kind of dream, all the humming and clicking and rattling of people and machinery, jerking around in a pattern. That's why I stayed when the others left, that, and because it reminded me somehow of the men in the tribe who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotized by routine ... I wanted to go out in the bus with the team, but I couldn't.

It was morning in early winter and I still had on the jacket they'd given us when we took the championship—a red and green jacket with leather sleeves and a football-shaped emblem sewn on the back telling what we'd won—and it was making a lot of the Negro girls stare. I took it off, but they kept staring. I was a whole lot bigger in those days.

One of the girls left her machine and looked back and forth up the aisles to see if the foreman was around, then came over to where I was standing. She asked if we was going to play the high school that night and she told me she had a brother played tailback for them. We talked a piece about football and the like and I noticed how her face looked blurred, like there was a mist between me and her. It was the cotton fluff sifting from the air.

I told her about the fluff. She rolled her eyes and ducked her mouth to laugh in her fist when I told her how it was like looking at her face out on a misty morning duck-hunting. And she said, "Now what in the everlovin' world would you want with me out alone in a duck blind?" I told her she could take care of my gun, and the girls all over the mill went to giggling

in their fists. I laughed a little myself, seeing how clever I'd been. We were still talking and laughing when she grabbed both my wrists and dug in. The features of her face snapped into brilliant focus; I saw she was terrified of something.

"Do," she said to me in a whisper, "do take me, big boy. Outa this here mill, outa this town, outa this life. Take me to some ol' duck blind someplace. Someplace else. Huh, big boy, huh?"

Her dark, pretty face glittered there in front of me. I stood with my mouth open, trying to think of some way to answer her. We were locked together this way for maybe a couple of seconds; then the sound of the mill jumped a hitch, and something commenced to draw her back away from me. A string somewhere I didn't see hooked on that flowered red skirt and was tugging her back. Her fingernails peeled down my hands and as soon as she broke contact with me her face switched out of focus again, became soft and runny like melting chocolate behind that blowing fog of cotton. She laughed and spun around and gave me a look of her yellow leg when the skirt billowed out. She threw me a wink over her shoulder as she ran back to her machine where a pile of fiber was spilling off the table to the floor; she grabbed it up and ran feather-footed down the aisle of machines to dump the fiber in a hopper; then she was out of sight around the corner.

All those spindles reeling and wheeling and shuttles jumping around and bobbins wringing the air with string, whitewashed walls and steel-gray machines and girls in flowered skirts skipping back and forth, and the whole thing webbed with flowing white lines stringing the factory together-it all stuck with me and every once in a while something on the ward calls it to mind.

Yes. This is what I know. The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is. When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch him sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they're just now digging trenches along the street to lay pipes for city water. He's happy with it. He's adjusted to surroundings finally. ...

"Why, I've never seen anything to beat the change in Maxwell Taber since he's got back from that hospital; a little black and blue around the eyes, a little weight lost, and, you know what? he's a new man. Gad, modern American science ..."

And the light is on in his basement window way past midnight every night as the Delayed Reaction Elements the technicians installed lend nimble skills to his fingers as he bends over the doped figure of his wife, 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.

When he finally runs down after a pre-set number of years, the town loves him dearly and the paper prints his picture helping the Boy Scouts last year on Graveyard Cleaning Day, and his wife gets a letter from the principal of the high school how Maxwell Wilson Taber was an inspirational figure to the youth of our fine community.

Even the embalmers, usually a pair of penny-pinching tightwads, are swayed. "Yeah, look at him there: old Max Taber, he was a good sort. What do you say we use that expensive thirty-weight at no extra charge to his wife. No, what the dickens, let's make it on the house."

A successful Dismissal like this is a product brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart and speaks good of her craft and the whole industry in general. Everybody's happy with a Dismissal.

But an Admission is a different story. Even the best-behaved Admission is bound to need some work to swing into routine, and, also, you never can tell when just that certain one might come in who's free enough to foul things up right and left, really make a hell of a mess and constitute a threat to the whole smoothness of the outfit. And, like I explain, the Big Nurse gets real put out if anything keeps her outfit from running smooth.

5

Before noontime they're at the fog machine again but they haven't got it turned up full; it's not so thick but what I can see if I strain real hard. One of these days I'll quit straining and let myself go completely, lose myself in the fog the way some of the other Chronicles have, but for the time being I'm interested in this new man-I want to see how he takes to the Group Meeting coming up.

Ten minutes to one the fog dissolves completely and the black boys are telling Acutes to clear the floor for the meeting. All the tables are carried out of the day room to the tub room across the hall-leaves the floor, McMurphy says, like we was aiming to have us a little dance.

The Big Nurse watches all this through her window. She hasn't moved from her spot in front of that one window for three solid hours, not even for lunch. The day-room floor gets cleared of tables, and at one o'clock the doctor comes out of his office down the hall, nods once at the nurse as he goes past where she's watching out her window, and sits in his chair just to the left of the door. The patients sit down when he does; then the little nurses and the residents straggle in. When everybody's down, the Big Nurse gets up from behind her window and goes back to the rear of the Nurses' Station to that steel panel with dials and buttons on it, sets some kind of automatic pilot to run things while she's away, and comes out into the day room, carrying the log book and a basketful of notes. Her uniform, even after she's been here half a day, is still starched so stiff it don't exactly bend any place; it cracks sharp at the joints with a sound like a frozen canvas being folded.

She sits just to the right of the door.

Soon as she's sat down, Old Pete Bancini sways to his feet and starts in wagging his head and wheezing. "I'm tired. Whew. O Lord. Oh, I'm awful tired ..." the way he always does whenever there's a new man on the ward who might listen to him.

The Big Nurse doesn't look over at Pete. She's going through the papers in her basket. "Somebody go sit beside Mr. Bancini," she says. "Quiet him down so we can start the meeting."

Billy Bibbit goes. Pete has turned facing McMurphy and is lolling his head from side to side like a signal light at a railroad crossing. He worked on the railroad thirty years; now he's wore clean out but still's functioning on the memory.

"I'm ti-i-uhd," he says, wagging his face at McMurphy. "Take it easy, Pete," Billy says, lays a freckled hand on Pete's knee.

"... Awful tired ..."

"I know, Pete"-pats the skinny knee, and Pete pulls back his face, realizes nobody is going to heed his complaint today. The nurse takes off her wrist

watch and looks at the ward clock and winds the watch and sets it face toward her in the basket. She takes a folder from the basket.

"Now. Shall we get into the meeting?"

She looks around to see if anybody else is about to interrupt her, smiling steady as her head turns in her collar. The guys won't meet her look; they're all looking for hangnails. Except McMurphy. He's got himself an armchair in the corner, sits in it like he's claimed it for good, and he's watching her every move. He's still got his cap on, jammed tight down on his red head like he's a motorcycle racer. A deck of cards in his lap opens for a one-handed cut, then clacks shut with a sound blown up loud by the silence. The nurse's swinging eyes hang on him for a second. She's been watching him play poker all morning and though she hasn't seen any money pass hands she suspects he's not exactly the type that is going to be happy with the ward rule of gambling for matches only. The deck whispers open and clacks shut again and then disappears somewhere in one of those big palms.

The nurse looks at her watch again and pulls a slip of paper out of the folder she's holding, looks at it, and returns it to the folder. She puts the folder down and picks up the log book. Ellis coughs from his place on the wall; she waits until he stops.

"Now. At the close of Friday's meeting ... we were discussing Mr. Harding's problem ... concerning his young wife. He had stated that his wife was extremely well endowed in the bosom and that this made him uneasy because she drew stares from men on the street." She starts opening to places in the log book; little slips of paper stick out of the top of the book to mark the pages. "According to the notes listed by various patients in the log, Mr. Harding has been heard to say that she 'damn well gives the bastards reason to stare.' He has also been heard to say that he may give her reason to seek further sexual attention. He has been heard to say, 'My dear sweet but illiterate wife thinks any word or gesture that does not smack of brickyard brawn and brutality is a word or gesture of weak dandyism.' "

She continues reading silently from the book for a while, then closes it.

"He has also stated that his wife's ample bosom at times gives him a feeling of inferiority. So. Does anyone care to touch upon this subject further?"

Harding shuts his eyes, and nobody else says anything. McMurphy looks around at the other guys, waiting to see if anybody is going to answer the nurse, then holds his hand up and snaps his fingers, like a school kid in class; the nurse nods at him.

"Mr.-ah-McMurry?"

"Touch upon what?"

"What? Touch-"

"You ask, I believe, 'Does anyone care to touch upon-' "

"Touch upon the-subject, Mr. McMurry, the subject of Mr. Harding's problem with his wife."

"Oh. I thought you mean touch upon her-something else."

"Now what could you-"

But she stops. She was almost flustered for a second there. Some of the Acutes hide grins, and McMurphy takes a huge stretch, yawns, winks at Harding. Then the nurse, calm as anything, puts the log book back in the basket and takes out another folder and opens it and starts reading.

"McMurry, Randle Patrick. Committed by the state from the Pendleton Farm for Correction. For diagnosis and possible treatment. Thirty-five years old. Never married. Distinguished Service Cross in Korea, for leading an escape from a Communist prison camp. A dishonorable discharge, afterward, for insubordination. Followed by a history of street brawls and barroom fights and a series of arrests for Drunkenness, Assault and Battery, Disturbing the Peace, repeated gambling, and one arrest-for Rape."

"Rape?" The doctor perks up.

"Statutory, with a girl of-"

"Whoa. Couldn't make that stick," McMurphy says to the doctor. "Girl wouldn't testify."

"With a child of fifteen."

"Said she was seventeen, Doc, and she was plenty willin'." "A court doctor's examination of the child proved entry, repeated entry, the record states-"

"So willin', in fact, I took to sewing my pants shut."

"The child refused to testify in spite of the doctor's findings. There seemed to be intimidation. Defendant left town shortly after the trial."

"Hoo boy, I had to leave. Doc, let me tell you"-he leans forward with an elbow on a knee, lowering his voice to the doctor across the room-"that little hustler would of actually burnt me to a frazzle by the time she reached legal sixteen. She got to where she was tripping me and beating me to the floor."

The nurse closes up the folder and passes it across the doorway to the doctor. "Our new Admission, Doctor Spivey," just like she's got a man folded up inside that yellow paper and can pass him on to be looked over. "I thought I might brief you on his record later today, but as he seems to insist on asserting himself in the Group Meeting, we might as well dispense with him now."

The doctor fishes his glasses from his coat pocket by pulling on the string, works them on his nose in front of his eyes. They're tipped a little to the right, but he leans his head to the left and brings them level. He's smiling a little as he turns through the folder, just as tickled by this new man's brassy way of talking right up as the rest of us, but, just like the rest of us, he's careful not to let himself come right out and laugh. The doctor closes the folder when he gets to the end, and puts his glasses back in his pocket. He looks to where McMurphy is still leaned out at him from across the day room.

"You've-it seems-no other psychiatric history, Mr. McMurry?"

"McMurphy, Doc."

"Oh? But I thought-the nurse was saying-"

He opens the folder again, fishes out those glasses, looks the record over for another minute before he closes it, and puts his glasses back in his pocket. "Yes. McMurphy. That is correct. I beg your pardon."

"It's okay, Doc. It was the lady there that started it, made the mistake. I've known some people inclined to do that. I had this uncle whose name was Hallahan, and he went with a woman once who kept acting like she couldn't remember his name right and calling him Hooligan just to get his goat. It went on for months before he stopped her. Stopped her good, too."

"Oh? How did he stop her?" the doctor asks.

McMurphy grins and rubs his nose with his thumb. "Ah-ah, now, I can't be tellin' that. I keep Unk Hallahan's method a strict secret, you see, in case I need to use it myself someday."

He says it right at the nurse. She smiles right back at him, and he looks over at the doctor. "Now; what was you asking about my record, Doc?"

"Yes. I was wondering if you've any previous psychiatric history. Any analysis, any time spent in any other institution?"

"Well, counting state and county coolers-

"Mental institutions."

"Ah. No, if that's the case. This is my first trip. But I am crazy, Doc. I swear I am. Well here-let me show you here. I believe that other doctor at the work farm ..."

He gets up, slips the deck of cards in the pocket of his jacket, and comes across the room to lean over the doctor's shoulder and thumb through the folder in his lap. "Believe he wrote something, back at the back here somewhere ..."

"Yes? I missed that. Just a moment." The doctor fishes his glasses out again and puts them on and looks to where McMurphy is pointing.

"Right here, Doc. The nurse left this part out while she was summarizing my record. Where it says, 'Mr. McMurphy has evidenced repeated'-I just want to make sure I'm understood completely, Doc-'repeated outbreaks of passion that suggest the possible diagnosis of psychopath.' He told me that 'psychopath' means I fight and fuh-pardon me, ladies-means I am he put it overzealous in my sexual relations. Doctor, is that real serious?"

He asks it with such a little-boy look of worry and concern all over his broad, tough face that the doctor can't help bending his head to hide another little snicker in his collar, and his glasses fall from his nose dead center back in his pocket. All of the Acutes are smiling too, now, and even some of the Chronicles.

"I mean that overzealousness, Doc, have you ever been troubled by it?"

The doctor wipes his eyes. "No, Mr. McMurphy, I'll admit I haven't. I am interested, however, that the doctor at the work farm added this statement: 'Don't overlook the possibility that this man might be feigning psychosis to

escape the drudgery of the work farm.' " He looks up at McMurphy. "And what about that, Mr. McMurphy?"

"Doctor"-he stands up to his full height, wrinkles his forehead, and holds out both arms, open and honest to all the wide world-"do I look like a sane man?"

The doctor is working so hard to keep from giggling again he can't answer. McMurphy pivots away from the doctor and asks the same thing of the Big Nurse: "Do I?" Instead of answering she stands up and takes the manila folder away from the doctor and puts it back in the basket under her watch. She sits back down.

"Perhaps, Doctor, you should advise Mr. McMurry on the protocol of these Group Meetings."

"Ma'am," McMurphy says, "have I told you about my uncle Hallahan and the woman who used to screw up his name?"

She looks at him for a long time without her smile. She has the ability to turn her smile into whatever expression she wants to use on somebody, but the look she turns it into is no different, just a calculated and mechanical expression to serve her purpose. Finally she says, "I beg your pardon, Mack-Murph-y." She turns back to the doctor. "Now, Doctor, if you would explain ..."

The doctor folds his hands and leans back. "Yes. I suppose What I should do is explain the complete theory of our Therapeutic Community, while we're at it. Though I usually save it until later. Yes. A good idea, Miss Ratched, a fine idea."

"Certainly the theory too, doctor, but what I had in mind was the rule, that the patients remain seated during the course of the meeting,"

"Yes. Of course. Then I will explain the theory. Mr. McMurphy, one of the first things is that the patients remain seated during the course of the meeting. It's the only way, you see, for us to maintain order."

"Sure, Doctor. I just got up to show you that thing in my record book."

He goes over to his chair, gives another big stretch and yawn, sits down, and moves around for a while like a dog coming to rest. When he's comfortable, he looks over at the doctor, waiting.

"As to the theory ..." The doctor takes a deep, happy breath.

"Ffffuck da wife," Ruckly says. McMurphy hides his mouth behind the back of his hand and calls across the ward to Ruckly in a scratchy whisper, "Whose wife?" and Martini's head snaps up, eyes wide and staring. "Yeah," he says, "whose wife? Oh. Her? Yeah, I see her. Yeah."

"I'd give a lot to have that man's eyes," McMurphy says of Martini and then doesn't say anything all the rest of the meeting. Just sits and watches and doesn't miss a thing that happens or a word that's said. The doctor talks about his theory until the Big Nurse finally decides he's used up time enough and asks him to hush so they can get on to Harding, and they talk the rest of the meeting about that.

McMurphy sits forward in his chair a couple of times during the meeting like he might have something to say, but he decides better and leans back. There's a puzzled expression coming over his face. Something strange is going on here, he's finding out. He can't quite put his finger on it. Like the way nobody will laugh. Now he thought sure there would be a laugh when he asked Ruckly, "Whose wife?" but there wasn't even a sign of one. The air is pressed in by the walls, too tight for laughing. There's something strange about a place where the men won't let themselves loose and laugh, something strange about the way they all knuckle under to that smiling flour-faced old mother there with the too-red lipstick and the too-big boobs. And he thinks he'll just wait a while to see what the story is in this new place before he makes any kind of play. That's a good rule for a smart gambler: look the game over awhile before you draw yourself a hand.

I've heard that theory of the Therapeutic Community enough times to repeat it forwards and backwards-how a guy has to learn to get along in a group before he'll be able to function in a normal society; how the group can help the guy by showing him where he's out of place; how society is what decides who's sane and who isn't, so you got to measure up. All that stuff. Every time we get a new patient on the ward the doctor goes into the theory with both feet; it's pretty near the only time he takes things over and runs the meeting. He tells how the goal of the Therapeutic Community is a democratic ward, run completely by the patients and their votes, working toward making worth-while citizens to turn back Outside onto the street. Any little gripe, any grievance, anything you want changed, he says, should be brought up before the group and discussed instead of letting it

fester inside of you. Also you should feel at ease in your surroundings to the extent you can freely discuss emotional problems in front of patients and staff. Talk, he says, discuss, confess. And if you hear a friend say something during the course of your everyday conversation, then list it in the log book for the staff to see. It's not, as the movies call it, "squealing," it's helping your fellow. Bring these old sins into the open where they can be washed by the sight of all. And participate in Group Discussion. Help yourself and your friends probe into the secrets of the subconscious. There should be no need for secrets among friends.

Our intention, he usually ends by saying, is to make this as much like your own democratic, free neighborhoods as possible—a little world Inside that is a made-to-scale prototype of the big world Outside that you will one day be taking your place in again.

He's maybe got more to say, but about this point the Big Nurse usually hushes him, and in the lull old Pete stands up and wigwags that battered copper-pot head and tells everybody how tired he is, and the nurse tells somebody to go hush him up too, so the meeting can continue, and Pete is generally hushed and the meeting goes on.

Once, just one time that I can remember, four or five years back, did it go any different. The doctor had finished his spiel, and the nurse had opened right up with, "Now. Who will start? Let out those old secrets." And she'd put all the Acutes in a trance by sitting there in silence for twenty minutes after the question, quiet as an electric alarm about to go off, waiting for somebody to start telling something about themselves. Her eyes swept back and forth over them as steady as a turning beacon. The day room was clamped silent for twenty long minutes, with all of the patients stunned where they sat. When twenty minutes had passed, she looked at her watch and said, "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?"

That triggered something, some acoustic device in the walls, rigged to turn on at just the sound of those words coming from her mouth. The Acutes stiffened. Their mouths opened in unison. Her sweeping eyes stopped on the first man along the wall.

His mouth worked. "I robbed a cash register in a service station."

She moved to the next man.

"I tried to take my little sister to bed."

Her eyes clicked to the next man; each one jumped like a shooting-gallery target.

"I-one time-wanted to take my brother to bed."

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

"I lied about trying. I did take my sister!"

"So did I! So did I!"

"And me! And me!"

It was better than she'd dreamed. They were all shouting to outdo one another, going further and further, no way of stopping, telling things that wouldn't ever let them look one another in the eye again. The nurse nodding at each confession and saying Yes, yes, yes.

Then old Pete was on his feet. "I'm tired!" was what he shouted, a strong, angry copper tone to his voice that no one had ever heard before.

Everyone hushed. They were somehow ashamed. It was as if he had suddenly said something that was real and true and important and it had put all their childish hollering to shame. The Big Nurse was furious. She swiveled and glared at him, the smile dripping over her chin; she'd just had it going so good.

"Somebody see to poor Mr. Bancini," she said.

Two or three got up. They tried to soothe him, pat him on his shoulder. But Pete wasn't being hushed. "Tired! Tired!" he kept on.

Finally the nurse sent one of the black boys to take him out of the day room by force. She forgot that the black boys didn't hold any control over people like Pete.

Pete's been a Chronic all his life. Even though he didn't come into the hospital till he was better than fifty, he'd always been a Chronic. His head has two big dents, one on each side, where the doctor who was with his mother at horning time pinched his skull trying to pull him out. Pete had looked out first and seer. all the delivery-room machinery waiting for him and somehow realized what he was being born into, and had grabbed on to everything handy in there to try to stave off being born. The doctor

reached in and got him by the head with a set of dulled ice tongs and jerked him loose and figured everything was all right. But Pete's head was still too new, and soft as clay, and when it set, those two dents left by the tongs stayed. And this made him simple to where it took all his straining effort and concentration and will power just to do the tasks that came easy to a kid of six.

But one good thing-being simple like that put him out of the clutch of the Combine. They weren't able to mold him into a slot. So they let him get a simple job on the railroad, where all he had to do was sit in a little clapboard house way out in the sticks on a lonely switch and wave a red lantern at the trains if the switch was one way, and a green one if it was the other, and a yellow one if there was a train someplace up ahead. And he did it, with main force and a gutpower they couldn't mash out of his head, out by himself on that switch. And he never had any controls installed.

That's why the black boy didn't have any say over him. But the black boy didn't think of that right off any more than the nurse did when she ordered Pete removed from the day room. The black boy walked right up and gave Pete's arm a jerk toward the door, just like you'd jerk the reins on a plow horse to turn him.

"Tha's right, Pete. Less go to the dorm. You disturbin' ever'body."

Pete shook his arm loose. "I'm tired," he warned.

"C'mon, old man, you makin' a fuss. Less us go to bed and be still like a good boy."

"Tired ..."

"I said you goin' to the dorm, old man!"

The black boy jerked at his arm again, and Pete stopped wigwagging his head. He stood up straight and steady, and his eyes snapped clear. Usually Pete's eyes are half shut and all murked up, like there's milk in them, but this time they came clear as blue neon. And the hand on that arm the black boy was holding commenced to swell up. The staff and most of the rest of the patients were talking among themselves, not paying any attention to this old guy and his old song about being tired, figuring he'd be quieted down as usual and the meeting would go on. They didn't see the hand on the end of that arm pumping bigger and bigger as he clenched and

unclenched it. I was the only one saw it. I saw it swell and clench shut, flow in front of my eyes, become smooth-hard. A big rusty iron ball at the end of a chain. I stared at it and waited, while the black boy gave Pete's arm another jerk toward the dorm.

"Ol' man, I say you got-"

He saw the hand. He tried to edge back away from it, saying, "You a good boy, Peter," but he was a shade too late. Pete had that big iron ball swinging all the way from his knees. The black boy whammed flat against the wall and stuck, then slid down to the floor like the wall there was greased. I heard tubes pop and short all over inside that wall, and the plaster cracked just the shape of how he hit.

The other two-the least one and the other big one-stood stunned. The nurse snapped her fingers, and they sprang into motion. Instant movement, sliding across the floor. The little one beside the other like an image in a reducing mirror. They were almost to Pete when it suddenly struck them what the other boy should of known, that Pete wasn't wired under control like the rest of us, that he wasn't about to mind just because they gave him an order or gave his arm a jerk. If they were to take him they'd have to take him like you take a wild bear or bull, and with one of their number out cold against the baseboards, the other two black boys didn't care for the odds.

This thought got them both at once and they froze, the big one and his tiny image, in exactly the same position, left foot forward, right hand out, halfway between Pete and the Big Nurse. That iron ball swinging in front of them and that snowwhite anger behind them, they shook and smoked and I could hear gears grinding. I could see them twitch with confusion, like machines throttled full ahead and with the brake on.

Pete stood there in the middle of the floor, swinging that ball back and forth at his side, all leaned over to its weight. Everybody was watching him now. He looked from the big black boy to the little one, and when he saw they weren't about to come any closer he turned to the patients.

"You see-it's a lotta baloney," he told them, "it's all a lotta baloney."

The Big Nurse had slid from her chair and was working toward her wicker bag leaning at the door. "Yes, yes, Mr. Bancini," she crooned, "now if you'll just be calm-"

"That's all it is, nothin' but a lotta baloney." His voice lost its copper strength and became strained and urgent like he didn't have much time to finish what he had to say. "Ya see, I can't help it, I can't-don't ya see. I was born dead. Not you. You wasn't born dead. Ahhhh, it's been hard ..."

He started to cry. He couldn't make the words come out right anymore; he opened and closed his mouth to talk but he couldn't sort the words into sentences any more. He shook his head to clear it and blinked at the Acutes:

"Ahhhh, I ... tell ... ya ... I tell you."

He began slumping over again, and his iron ball shrank back to a hand. He held it cupped out in front of him like he was offering something to the patients.

"I can't help it. I was born a miscarriage. I had so many insults I died. I was born dead. I can't help it. I'm tired. I'm give out trying. You got chances. I had so many insults I was born dead. You got it easy. I was born dead an' life was hard. I'm tired. I'm tired out talking and standing up. I been dead fifty-five years."

The Big Nurse got him clear across the room, right through his greens. She jumped back without getting the needle pulled out after the shot and it hung there from his pants like a little tail of glass and steel, old Pete slumping farther and farther forward, not from the shot but from the effort; the last couple of minutes had worn him out finally and completely, once and for all-you could just look at him and tell he was finished.

So there wasn't really any need for the shot; his head had already commenced to wag back and forth and his eyes were murky. By the time the nurse eased back in to get the needle he was bent so far forward he was crying directly on the floor without wetting his face, tears spotting a wide area as he swung his head back and forth, spitting, spitting, in an even pattern on the day-room floor, like he was sowing them. "Ahhhhh," he said. He didn't flinch when she jerked the needle out.

He had come to life for maybe a minute to try to tell us something, something none of us cared to listen to or tried to understand, and the effort had drained him dry. That shot in his hip was as wasted as if she'd squirted it in a dead man-no heart to pump it, no vein to carry it up to his

head, no brain up there for it to mortify with its poison. She'd just as well shot it in a dried-out old cadaver.

"I'm ... tired ..."

"Now. I think if you two boys are brave enough, Mr. Bancini will go to bed like a good fellow."

"... aw-ful tired."

"And Aide Williams is coming around, Doctor Spivey. See to him, won't you. Here. His watch is broken and he's cut his arm."

Pete never tried anything like that again, and he never will. Now, when he starts acting up during a meeting and they try to hush him, he always hushes. He'll still get up from time to time and wag his head and let us know how tired he is, but it's not a complaint or excuse or warning any more-he's finished with that; it's like an old clock that won't tell time but won't stop neither, with the hands bent out of shape and the face bare of numbers and the alarm bell rusted silent, an old, worthless clock that just keeps ticking and cuckooing without meaning nothing.

The group is still tearing into poor Harding when two o'clock rolls around.

At two o'clock the doctor begins to squirm around in his chair. The meetings are uncomfortable for the doctor unless he's talking about his theory; he'd rather spend his time down in his office, drawing on graphs. He squirms around and finally clears his throat, and the nurse looks at her watch and tells us to bring the tables back in from the tub room and we'll resume this discussion again at one tomorrow. The Acutes click out of their trance, look for an instant in Harding's direction. Their faces burn with a shame like they have just woke up to the fact they been played for suckers again. Some of them go to the tub room across the hall to get the tables, some wander over to the magazine racks and show a lot of interest in the old McCall's magazines, but what they're all really doing is avoiding Harding. They've been maneuvered again into grilling one of their friends like he was a criminal and they were all prosecutors and judge and jury. For forty-five minutes they been chopping a man to pieces, almost as if they enjoyed it, shooting questions at him: What's he think is the matter with him that he can't please the little lady; why's he insist she has never

had anything to do with another man; how's he expect to get well if he doesn't answer honestly?-questions and insinuations till now they feel bad about it and they don't want to be made more uncomfortable by being near him.

McMurphy's eyes follow all of this. He doesn't get out of his chair. He looks puzzled again. He sits in his chair for a while, watching the Acutes, scuffing that deck of cards up and down the red stubble on his chin, then finally stands up from his arm chair, yawns and stretches and scratches his belly button with a corner of a card, then puts the deck in his pocket and walks over to where Harding is off by himself, sweated to his chair.

McMurphy looks down at Harding a minute, then laps his big hand over the back of a nearby wooden chair, swings it around so the back is facing Harding, and straddles it like he'd straddle a tiny horse. Harding hasn't noticed a thing. McMurphy slaps his pockets till he finds his cigarettes, and takes one out and lights it; he holds it out in front of him and frowns at the tip, licks his thumb and finger, and arranges the fire to suit him.

Each man seems unaware of the other. I can't even tell if Harding's noticed McMurphy at all. Harding's got his thin shoulders folded nearly together around himself, like green wings, and he's sitting very straight near the edge of his chair, with his hands trapped between his knees. He's staring straight ahead, humming to himself, trying to look calm-but he's chewing at his cheeks, and this gives him a funny skull grin, not calm at all.

McMurphy puts his cigarette back between his teeth and folds his hands over the wooden chair back and leans his chin on them, squinting one eye against the smoke. He looks at Harding with his other eye a while, then starts talking with that cigarette wagging up and down in his lips.

"Well say, buddy, is this the way these leetle meetings usually go?"

"Usually go?" Harding's humming stops. He's not chewing his cheeks any more but he still stares ahead, past McMurphy's shoulder.

"Is this the usual pro-cedure for these Group Ther'py shindigs? Bunch of chickens at a peckin' party?"

Harding's head turns with a jerk and his eyes find McMurphy, like it's the first time he knows that anybody's sitting in front of him. His face creases in the middle when he bites his cheeks again, and this makes it look like

he's grinning. He pulls his shoulders back and scoots to the back of the chair and tries to look relaxed.

"A 'pecking party'? I fear your quaint down-home speech is wasted on me, my friend. I have not the slightest inclination what you're talking about."

"Why then, I'll just explain it to you." McMurphy raises his voice; though he doesn't look at the other Acutes listening behind him, it's them he's talking to. "The flock gets sight of a spot of blood on some chicken and they all go to peckin' at it, see, till they rip the chicken to shreds, blood and bones and feathers. But usually a couple of the flock gets spotted in the fracas, then it's their turn. And a few more gets spots and gets pecked to death, and more and more. Oh, a peckin' party can wipe out the whole flock in a matter of a few hours, buddy, I seen it. A mighty awesome sight. The only way to prevent it-with chickens-is to clip blinders on them. So's they can't see."

Harding laces his long fingers around a knee and draws the knee toward him, leaning back in the chair. "A pecking party. That certainly is a pleasant analogy, my friend."

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

"So that makes me the chicken with the spot of blood, friend?"

"That's right, buddy."

They're still grinning at each other, but their voices have dropped so low and taut I have to sweep over closer to them with my broom to hear. The other Acutes are moving up closer too.

"And you want to know somethin' else, buddy? You want to know who pecks that first peck?"

Harding waits for him to go on.

"It's that old nurse, that's who."

There's a whine of fear over the silence. I hear the machinery in the walls catch and go on. Harding is having a tough time holding his hands still, but he keeps trying to act calm.

"So," he says, "it's as simple as that, as stupidly simple as that. You're on our ward six hours and have already simplified all the work of Freud, Jung, and Maxwell Jones and summed it up in one analogy: it's a 'peckin' party.' "

"I'm not talking about Fred Yoong and Maxwell Jones, buddy, I'm just talking about that crummy meeting and what that nurse and those other bastards did to you. Did in spades."

"Did to me?"

"That's right, did. Did you every chance they got. Did you coming and did you going. You must of done something to makes a passle of enemies here in this place, buddy, because it seems there's sure a passle got it in for you."

"Why, this is incredible. You completely disregard, completely overlook and disregard the fact that what the fellows were doing today was for my own benefit? That any question or discussion raised by Miss Ratched or the rest of the staff is done solely for therapeutic reasons? You must not have heard a word of Doctor Spivey's theory of the Therapeutic Community, or not have had the education to comprehend it if you did. I'm disappointed in you, my friend, oh, very disappointed. I had judged from our encounter this morning that you were more intelligent-an illiterate clod, perhaps, certainly a backwoods braggart with no more sensitivity than a goose, but basically intelligent nevertheless. But, observant and insightful though I usually am, I still make mistakes."

"The hell with you, buddy."

"Oh, yes; I forgot to add that I noticed your primitive brutality also this morning. Psychopath with definite sadistic tendencies, probably motivated by an unreasoning egomania. Yes. As you see, all these natural talents certainly qualify you as a competent therapist and render you quite capable of criticizing Miss Ratched's meeting procedure, in spite of the fact that she is a highly regarded psychiatric nurse with twenty years in the field. Yes, with your talent, my friend, you could work subconscious miracles, soothe the aching id and heal the wounded superego. You could probably bring about a cure for the whole ward, Vegetables and all, in six short months, ladies and gentlemen or your money back."

Instead of rising to the argument, McMurphy just keeps on looking at Harding, finally asks in a level voice, "And you really think this crap that went on in the meeting today is bringing about some kinda cure, doing some kinda good?"

"What other reason would we have for submitting ourselves to it, my friend? The staff desires our cure as much as we do. They aren't monsters. Miss Ratched may be a strict middle-aged lady, but she's not some kind of giant monster of the poultry clan, bent on sadistically pecking out our eyes. You can't believe that of her, can you?"

"No, buddy, not that. She ain't peckin' at your eyes. That's not what she's peckin' at."

Harding flinches, and I see his hands begin to creep out from between his knees like white spiders from between two moss-covered tree limbs, up the limbs toward the joining at the trunk.

"Not our eyes?" he says. "Pray, then, where is Miss Ratched pecking, my friend?"

McMurphy grinned. "Why, don't you know, buddy?"

"No, of course I don't know! I mean, if you insi-"

"At your balls, buddy, at your everlovin' balls."

The spiders reach the joining at the trunk and settle there, twitching. Harding tries to grin, but his face and lips are so white the grin is lost. He stares at McMurphy. McMurphy takes the cigarette out of his mouth and repeats what he said.

"Right at your balls. No, that nurse ain't some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is is a ball-cutter. I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young, men and women. Seen 'em all over the country and in the homes-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. And the best way to do this, to get you to knuckle under, is to weaken you by gettin' you where it hurts the worst. You ever been kneed in the nuts in a brawl, buddy? Stops you cold, don't it? There's nothing worse. It makes you sick, it saps every bit of strength you got. If you're up against a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger, then watch for his knee, he's gonna go for your vitals. And that's what that old buzzard is doing, going for your vitals."

Harding's face is still colorless, but he's got control of his hands again; they flip loosely before him, trying to toss off what McMurphy has been saying:

"Our dear Miss Ratched? Our sweet, smiling, tender angel of mercy, Mother Ratched, a ball-cutter? Why, friend, that's most unlikely."

"Buddy, don't give me that tender little mother crap. She may be a mother, but she's big as a damn barn and tough as knife metal. She fooled me with that kindly little old mother bit for maybe three minutes when I came in this morning, but no longer. I don't think she's really fooled any of you guys for any six months or a year, neither. Hooowee, I've seen some bitches in my time, but she takes the cake."

"A bitch? But a moment ago she was a ball-cutter, then a buzzard-or was it a chicken? Your metaphors are bumping into each other, my friend."

"The hell with that; she's a bitch and a buzzard and a ball-cutter, and don't kid me, you know what I'm talking about."

Harding's face and hands are moving faster than ever now, a speeded film of gestures, grins, grimaces, sneers. The more he tries to stop it, the faster it goes. When he lets his hands and face move like they want to and doesn't try to hold them back, they flow and gesture in a way that's real pretty to watch, but when he worries about them and tries to hold back he becomes a wild, jerky puppet doing a high-strung dance. Everything is moving faster and faster, and his voice is speeding up to match.

"Why, see here, my friend Mr. McMurphy, my psychopathic sidekick, 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 week. That takes heart, my friend, heart. In fact, I have been informed by sources-I am not at liberty to disclose my sources, but I might say that Martini is in contact with the same people a good part of the time-that she even further serves mankind on her weekends off by doing generous volunteer work about town. Preparing a rich array of charity-canned goods, cheese for the binding effect, soap-and presenting it to some poor young couple having a difficult time financially." His hands flash in the air, molding the picture he is describing. "Ah, look: There she is, our nurse. Her gentle knock on the door. The ribboned basket. The young couple overjoyed to the point of speechlessness. The husband open-mouthed, the wife weeping openly. She

appraises their dwelling. Promises to send them money for-scouring powder, yes. She places the basket in the center of the floor. And when our angel leaves-throwing kisses, smiling ethereally-she is so intoxicated with the sweet milk of human kindness that her deed has generated within her large bosom, that she is beside herself with generosity. Be-side herself, do you hear? Pausing at the door, she draws the timid young bride to one side and offers her twenty dollars of her own: 'Go, you poor unfortunate underfed child, go, and buy yourself a decent dress. I realize your husband can't afford it, but here, take this, and go.' And the couple is forever indebted to her benevolence."

He's been talking faster and faster, the cords stretching out in his neck. When he stops talking, the ward is completely silent. I don't hear anything but a faint reeling rhythm, what I figure is a tape recorder somewhere getting all of this.

Harding looks around, sees everybody's watching him, and he does his best to laugh. A sound comes out of his mouth like a nail being crowbarred out of a plank of green pine; Eee-eee-eee. He can't stop it. He wrings his hands like a fly and clinches his eyes at the awful sound of that squeaking. But he can't stop it. It gets higher and higher until finally, with a suck of breath, he lets his face fall into his waiting hands.

"Oh the bitch, the bitch, the bitch," he whispers through his teeth.

McMurphy lights another cigarette and offers it to him; Harding takes it without a word. McMurphy is still watching Harding's face in front of him there, with a kind of puzzled wonder, looking at it like it's the first human face he ever laid eyes on. He watches while Harding's twitching and jerking slows down and the face comes up from the hands.

"You are right," Harding says, "about all of it." He looks up at the other patients who are watching him. "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."

McMurphy frowns and asks, "What about that little fart of a doctor? He might be a little slow in the head, but not so much as not to be able to see how she's taken over and what she's doing."

Harding takes a long pull off the cigarette and lets the smoke drift out with his talk. "Doctor Spivey ... is exactly like the rest of us, McMurphy, completely conscious of his inadequacy. He's a frightened, desperate, ineffectual little rabbit, totally incapable of running this ward without our Miss Ratched's help, and he knows it. And, worse, she knows he knows it and reminds him every chance she gets. Every time she finds he's made a little slip in the bookwork or in, say, the charting you can just imagine her in there grinding his nose in it."

"That's right," Cheswick says, coming up beside McMurphy, "grinds our noses in our mistakes."

"Why don't he fire her?"

"In this hospital," Harding says, "the doctor doesn't hold the power of hiring and firing. That power goes to the supervisor, and the supervisor is a woman, a dear old friend of Miss Ratched's; they were Army nurses together in the thirties. We are victims of a matriarchy here, my friend, and the doctor is just as helpless against it as we are. He knows that all Ratched has to do is pick up that phone you see sitting at her elbow and call the supervisor and mention, oh, say, that the doctor seems to be making a great number of requisitions for Demerol-"

"Hold it, Harding, I'm not up on all this shop talk."

"Demerol, my friend, is a synthetic opiate, twice as addictive as heroin. Quite common for doctors to be addicted to it."

"That little fart? Is he a dope addict?"

"I'm certain I don't know."

"Then where does she get off with accusing him of-"

"Oh, you're not paying attention, my friend. She doesn't accuse. She merely needs to insinuate, insinuate anything, don't you see? Didn't you notice today? She'll call a man to the door of the Nurses' Station and stand there and ask him about a Kleenex found under his bed. No more, just ask. And he'll feel like he's lying to her, whatever answer he gives. If he says he was cleaning a pen with it, she'll say, 'I see, a pen,' or if he says he has a cold in his nose, she'll say, 'I see, a cold,' and she'll nod her neat little gray coiffure and smile her neat little smile and turn and go back into the Nurses' Station, leave him standing there wondering just what did he use that Kleenex for."

He starts to tremble again, and his shoulders fold back around him.

"No. She doesn't need to accuse. She has a genius for insinuation. Did you ever hear her, in the course of our discussion today, ever once hear her accuse me of anything? Yet it seems I have been accused of a multitude of things, of jealousy and paranoia, of not being man enough to satisfy my wife, of having relations with male friends of mine, of holding my cigarette in an affected manner, even-it seems to me-accused of having nothing between my legs but a patch of hair-and soft and downy and blond hair at that! Ball-cutter? Oh, you underestimate her!"

Harding hushes all of a sudden and leans forward to take McMurphy's hand in both of his. His face is tilted oddly, edged, jagged purple and gray, a busted wine bottle.

"This world ... belongs to the strong, my friend! The ritual of our existence is based on the strong getting stronger by devouring the weak. We must face up to this. No more than right that it should be this way. We must learn to accept it as a law of the natural world. The rabbits accept their role in the ritual and recognize the wolf as the strong. In defense, the rabbit becomes sly and frightened and elusive and he digs holes and hides when the wolf is about. And he endures, he goes on. He knows his place. He most certainly doesn't challenge the wolf to combat. Now, would that be wise? Would it?"

He lets go McMurphy's hand and leans back and crosses his legs, takes another long pull off the cigarette. He pulls the cigarette from his thin crack of a smile, and the laugh starts up again-eee-eee-eee, like a nail coming out of a plank.

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

"Man, you're talkin' like a fool. You mean to tell me that you're gonna sit back and let some old blue-haired woman talk you into being a rabbit?"

"Not talk me into it, no. I was born a rabbit. Just look at me. I simply need the nurse to make me happy with my role."

"You're no damned rabbit!"

"See the ears? the wiggly nose? the cute little button tail?"

"You're talking like a crazy ma-"

"Like a crazy man? How astute."

"Damn it, Harding, I didn't mean it like that. You ain't crazy that way. I mean-hell, I been surprised how sane you guys all are. As near as I can tell you're not any crazier than the average asshole on the street-"

"Ah yes, the asshole on the street."

"But not, you know, crazy like the movies paint crazy people. You're just hung up and-kind of-"

"Kind of rabbit-like, isn't that it?"

"Rabbits, hell! Not a thing like rabbits, goddammit."

"Mr. Bibbit, hop around for Mr. McMurphy here. Mr. Cheswick, show him how furry, you are."

Billy Bibbit and Cheswick change into hunched-over white rabbits, right before my eyes, but they are too ashamed to do any of the things Harding told them to do.

"Ah, they're bashful, McMurphy. Isn't that sweet? Or, perhaps, the fellows are ill at ease because they didn't stick up for their friend. Perhaps they are feeling guilty for the way they once again let her victimize them into being her interrogators. Cheer up, friends, you've no reason to feel ashamed. It is all as it should be. It's not the rabbit's place to stick up for his fellow. That would have been foolish. No, you were wise, cowardly but wise."

"Look here, Harding," Cheswick says.

"No, no, Cheswick. Don't get irate at the truth."

"Now look here; there's been times when I've said the same things about old lady Ratched that McMurphy has been saying."

"Yes, but you said them very quietly and took them all back later. You are a rabbit too, don't try to avoid the truth. That's why I hold no grudge

against you for the questions you asked me during the meeting today. You were only playing your role. If you had been on the carpet, or you Billy, or you Fredrickson, I would have attacked you just as cruelly as you attacked me. We mustn't be ashamed of our behavior; it's the way we little animals were meant to behave."

McMurphy turns in his chair and looks the other Acutes up and down. "I ain't so sure but what they should be ashamed. Personally, I thought it was damned crummy the way they swung in on her side against you. For a minute there I thought I was back in a Red Chinese prison camp ..."

"Now by God, McMurphy," Cheswick says, "you listen here."

McMurphy turns and listens, but Cheswick doesn't go on. Cheswick never goes on; he's one of these guys who'll make a big fuss like he's going to lead an attack, holler charge and stomp up and down a minute, take a couple steps, and quit. McMurphy looks at him where he's been caught off base again after such a tough-sounding start, and says to him, "A hell of a lot like a Chinese prison camp."

Harding holds up his hands for peace. "Oh, no, no, that isn't right. You mustn't condemn us, my friend. No. In fact ..."

I see that sly fever come into Harding's eye again; I think he's going to start laughing, but instead he takes his cigarette out of his mouth and points it at McMurphy-in his hand it looks like one of his thin, white fingers, smoking at the end.

"... you too, Mr. McMurphy, for all your cowboy bluster and your sideshow swagger, you too, under that crusty surface, are probably just as soft and fuzzy and rabbit-souled as we are."

"Yeah, you bet. I'm a little cottontail. Just what is it makes me a rabbit, Harding? My psychopathic tendencies? Is it my fightin' tendencies, or my fuckin' tendencies? Must be the fuckin', mustn't it? All that whambam-thank-you-ma'am. Yeah, that whambam, that's probably what makes me a rabbit-

"Wait; I'm afraid you've raised a point that requires some deliberation. Rabbits are noted for that certain trait, aren't they? Notorious, in fact, for their whambam. Yes. Um. But in any case, the point you bring up simply indicates that you are a healthy, functioning and adequate rabbit, whereas most of us in here even lack the sexual ability to make the grade as

adequate rabbits. Failures, we are-feeble, stunted, weak little creatures in a weak little race. Rabbits, sans whambam; a pathetic notion."

"Wait a minute; you keep twistin' what I say-"

"No. You were right. You remember, it was you that drew our attention to the place where the nurse was concentrating her pecking? That was true. There's not a man here that isn't afraid he is losing or has already lost his whambam. We comical little creatures can't even achieve masculinity in the rabbit world, that's how weak and inadequate we are. Hee. We are the rabbits, one might say, of the rabbit world!"

He leans forward again, and that strained, squeaking laugh of his that I been expecting begins to rise from his mouth, his hands flipping around, his lace twitching.

"Harding! Shut your damned mouth!"

It's like a slap. Harding is hushed, chopped off cold with his mouth still open in a drawn grin, his hands dangling in a cloud of blue tobacco smoke. He freezes this way a second; then his eyes narrow into sly little holes and he lets them slip over to McMurphy, speaks so soft that I have to push my broom up right next to his chair to hear what he says.

"Friend ... you ... may be a wolf."

"Goddammit, I'm no wolf and you're no rabbit. Hoo, I never heard such-"

"You have a very wolfy roar."

With a loud hissing o: breath McMurphy turns from Harding to the rest of the Acutes standing around. "Here; all you guys. What the hell is the matter with you? You ain't as crazy as all this, thinking you're some animal."

"No," Cheswick says and steps in beside McMurphy. "No, by God, not me. I'm not any rabbit."

"That's the boy, Cheswick. And the rest of you, let's just knock it off. Look at you, talking yourself into running scared from some fifty-year-old woman. What is there she can do to you, anyway?"

"Yeah, what?" Cheswick says and glares around at the others.

"She can't have you whipped. She can't burn you with hot irons. She can't tie you to the rack. They got laws about that sort of thing nowadays; this ain't the Middle Ages. There's not a thing in the world that she can-"

"You s-s-saw what she c-can do to us! In the m-m-meeting today." I see Billy Bibbit has changed back from a rabbit. He leans toward McMurphy, trying to go on, his mouth wet with spit and his face red. Then he turns and walks away. "Ah, it's n-no use. I should just k-k-kill myself."

McMurphy calls after him. "Today? What did I see in the meeting today? Hell's bells, all I saw today was her asking a couple of questions, and nice, easy questions at that. Questions ain't bonebreakers, they ain't sticks and stones."

Billy turns back. "But the wuh-wuh-way she asks them-"

"You don't have to answer, do you?"

"If you d-don't answer she just smiles and m-m-makes a note in her little book and then she-she-oh, hell!"

Scanlon comes up beside Billy. "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. The only thing to do is blow the whole business off the face of the whole bleeding earth-blow it all up."

"Well, when she asks one of those questions, why don't you tell her to up and go to hell?"

"Yeah," Cheswick says, shaking his fist, "tell her to up and go to hell."

"So then what, Mack? She'd just come right back with 'Why do you seem so upset by that par-tik-uler question, Patient McMurphy?' "

"So, you tell her to go to hell again. Tell them all to go to hell. They still haven't hurt you."

The Acutes are crowding closer around him. Fredrickson answers this time. "Okay, you tell her that and you're listed as Potential Assaultive and shipped upstairs to the Disturbed ward. I had it happen. Three times. Those poor goofs up there don't even get off the ward to go to the Saturday afternoon movie. They don't even have a TV."

"And, my friend, if you continue to demonstrate such hostile tendencies, such as telling people to go to hell, you get lined up to go to the Shock Shop, perhaps even on to greater things, an operation, an-"

"Damn it, Harding, I told you I'm not up on this talk."

"The Shock Shop, Mr. McMurphy, is jargon for the EST machine, the Electro Shock Therapy. A device that might be said to do the work of the sleeping pill, the electric chair, and the torture rack. It's a clever little procedure, simple, quick, nearly painless it happens so fast, but no one ever wants another one. Ever."

"What's this thing do?"

"You are strapped to a table, shaped, ironically, like a cross, with a crown of electric sparks in place of thorns. You are touched on each side of the head with wires. Zap! Five cents' worth of electricity through the brain and you are jointly administered therapy and a punishment for your hostile go-to-hell behavior, on top of being put out of everyone's way for six hours to three days, depending on the individual. Even when you do regain consciousness you are in a state of disorientation for days. 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. A drooling, pants-wetting idiot at thirty-five. Or turn into a mindless organism that eats and eliminates and yells 'fuck the wife,' like Ruckly. Or look at Chief Broom clutching to his namesake there beside you."

Harding points his cigarette at me, too late for me to back off. I make like I don't notice. Go on with my sweeping.

"I've heard that the Chief, years ago, received more than two hundred shock treatments when they were really the vogue. Imagine what this could do to a mind that was already slipping. Look at him: a giant janitor. There's your Vanishing American, a six-foot-eight sweeping machine, scared of its own shadow. That, my friend, is what we can be threatened with."

McMurphy looks at me a while, then turns back to Harding. "Man, I tell you, how come you stand for it? What about this democratic-ward manure that the doctor was giving me? Why don't you take a vote?"

Harding smiles at him and takes another slow drag on his cigarette. "Vote what, my friend? Vote that the nurse may not ask any more questions in Group Meeting? Vote that she shall not look at us in a certain way? You tell me, Mr. McMurphy, what do we vote on?"

"Hell, I don't care. Vote on anything. Don't you see you have to do something to show you still got some guts? Don't you see you can't let her take over completely? Look at you here: you say the Chief is scared of his own shadow, but I never saw a scarer-looking bunch in my life than you guys."

"Not me!" Cheswick says.

"Maybe not you, buddy, but the rest are even scared to open up and laugh. You know, that's the first thing that got me about this place, that there wasn't anybody laughing. I haven't heard a real laugh since I came through that door, do you know that? Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your footing. A man go around lettin' a woman whup him down till he can't laugh any more, and he loses one of the biggest edges he's got on his side. First thing you know he'll begin to think she's tougher than he is and-

"Ah. I believe my friend is catching on, fellow rabbits. Tell me, Mr. McMurphy, bow does one go about showing a woman who's boss, I mean other than laughing at her? How does he show her who's king of the mountain? A man like you should be able to tell us that. You don't slap her around, do you? No, then she calls the law. You don't lose your temper and shout at her; she'll win by trying to placate her big ol' angry boy: 'Is us wittle man getting fussy? Ahhhhh?' Have you ever tried to keep up a noble and angry front in the face of such consolation? So you see, my friend, it is somewhat as you stated: man has but one truly effective weapon against the juggernaut of modern matriarchy, but it certainly is not laughter. One weapon, and with every passing year in this hip, motivationally researched society, more and more people are discovering how to render that weapon useless and conquer those who have hitherto been the conquerors-

"Lord, Harding, but you do come on," McMurphy says.

"-and do you think, for all your acclaimed psychopathic powers, that you could effectively use your weapon against our champion? Do you think you could use it against Miss Ratched, McMurphy? Ever?"

And sweeps one of his hands toward the glass case. Everybody's head turns to look. She's in there, looking out through her window, got a tape recorder hid out of sight somewhere, getting all this down-already planning how to work it into the schedule.

The nurse sees everybody looking at her and she nods and they all turn away. McMurphy takes off his cap and runs his hands into that red hair. Now everybody is looking at him; they're waiting for him to make an answer and he knows it. He feels he's been trapped some way. He puts the cap back on and rubs the stitch marks on his nose.

"Why, if you mean do I think I could get a bone up over that old buzzard, no, I don't believe I could. ..."

"She's not all that homely, McMurphy. Her face is quite handsome and well preserved. And in spite of all her attempts to conceal them, in that sexless get-up, you can still make out the evidence of some rather extraordinary breasts. She must have been a rather beautiful young woman. Still-for the sake of argument, could you get it up over her even if she wasn't old, even if she was young and had the beauty of Helen?"

"I don't know Helen, but I see what you're drivin' at. And you're by God right. I couldn't get it up over old frozen face in there even if she had the beauty of Marilyn Monroe."

"There you are. She's won."

That's it. Harding leans back and everybody waits for what McMurphy's going to say next. McMurphy can see he's backed up against the wall. He looks at the faces a minute, then shrugs and stands up from his chair.

"Well, what the hell, it's no skin off my nose."

"That's true, it's no skin off your nose."

"And I damn well don't want to have some old fiend of a nurse after me with three thousand volts. Not when there's nothing in it for me but the adventure."

"No. You're right."

Harding's won the argument, but nobody looks too happy. McMurphy hooks his thumbs in his pockets and tries a laugh.

"No sir, I never heard of anybody offering a twenty-bone bounty for bagging a ball-cutter."

Everybody grins at this with him, but they're not happy. I'm glad McMurphy is going to be cagey after all and not get sucked in on something he can't whip, but I know how the guys feel; I'm not so happy myself. McMurphy lights another cigarette. Nobody's moved yet. They're

all still standing there, grinning and uncomfortable. McMurphy rubs his nose again and looks away from the bunch of faces hung out there around him, looks back at the nurse and chews his lip.

"But you say ... she don't send you up to that other ward unless she gets your goat? Unless she makes you crack in some way and you end up cussing her out or busting a window or something like that?"

"Unless you do something like that."

"You're sure of that, now? Because I'm getting just the shadiest notion of how to pick up a good purse off you birds in here. But I don't want to be a sucker about it. I had a hell of a time getting outa that other hole; I don't want to be jumping outa the fryin' pan into the fire."

"Absolutely certain. She's powerless unless you do something to honestly deserve the Disturbed Ward or EST. If you're tough enough to keep her from getting to you, she can't do a thing."

"So if I behave myself and don't cuss her out-"

"Or cuss one of the aides out."

"-or cuss one of the aides out or tear up jack some way around here, she can't do nothing to me?"

"Those are the rules we play by. Of course, she always wins, my friend, always. She's impregnable herself, and with the element of time working for her she eventually gets inside everyone. That's why the hospital regards her as its top nurse and grants her so much authority; she's a master at forcing the trembling libido out into the open-"

"The hell with that. What I want to know is am I safe to try to beat her at her own game? If I come on nice as pie to her, whatever else I in-sinuate, she ain't gonna get in a tizzy and have me electrocuted?"

"You're safe as long as you keep control. As long as you don't lose your temper and give her actual reason to request the restriction of the Disturbed Ward, or the therapeutic benefits of Electro Shock, you are safe. But that entails first and foremost keeping one's temper. And you? With your red hair and black record? Why delude yourself?"

"Okay. All right." McMurphy rubs his palms together. "Here's what I'm thinkin'. You birds seem to think you got quite the champ in there, don't you? Quite the-what did you call her?-sure, impregnable woman. What I

want to know is how many of you are dead sure enough to put a little money on her?"

"Dead sure enough ...?"

"Just what I said: any of you sharpies here willing to take my five bucks that says that I can get the best of that woman-before the week's up-without her getting the best of me? One week, and if I don't have her to where she don't know whether to shit or go blind, the bet is yours."

"You're betting on this?" Cheswick is hopping from foot to foot and rubbing his hands together like McMurphy rubs his. "You're damned right."

Harding and some of the others say that they don't get it.

"It's simple enough. There ain't nothing noble or complicated about it. I like to gamble. And I like to win. And I think I can win this gamble, okay? It got so at Pendleton the guys wouldn't even lag pennies with me on account of I was such a winner. Why, one of the big reasons I got myself sent here was because I needed some new suckers. I'll tell you something: I found out a few things about this place before I came out here. Damn near half of you guys in here pull compensation, three, four hundred a month and not a thing in the world to do with it but let it draw dust. I thought I might take advantage of this and maybe make both our lives a little more richer. I'm starting level with you. I'm a gambler and I'm not in the habit of losing. And I've never seen a woman I thought was more man than me, I don't care whether I can get it up for her or not. She may have the element of time, but I got a pretty long winning streak goin' myself."

He pulls off his cap, spins it on his finger, and catches it behind his back in his other hand, neat as you please.

"Another thing: I'm in this place because that's the way I planned it, pure and simple, because it's a better place than a work farm. As near as I can tell I'm no loony, or never knew it if I was. Your nurse don't know this; she's not going to be looking out for somebody coming at her with a trigger-quick mind like I obviously got. These things give me an edge I like. So I'm saying five bucks to each of you that wants it if I can't put a betsy bug up that nurse's butt within a week."

"I'm still not sure I-

"Just that. A bee in her butt, a burr in her bloomers. Get her goat. Bug her till she comes apart at those neat little seams, and shows, just one time, she ain't so unbeatable as you think. One week. I'll let you be the judge whether I win or not."

Harding takes out a pencil and writes something on the pinochle pad.

"Here. A lien on ten dollars of that money they've got drawing dust under my name over in Funds. It's worth twice that to me, my friend, to see this unlikely miracle brought off."

McMurphy looks at the paper and folds it. "Worth it to any of the rest of you birds?" Other Acutes line up now, taking turns at the pad. He takes the pieces of paper when they're finished, stacking them on his palm, pinned under a big stiff thumb. I see the pieces of paper crowd up in his hand. He looks them over.

"You trust me to hold the bets, buddies?"

"I believe we can be safe in doing that," Harding says. "You won't be going any place for a while."

6

One Christmas at midnight on the button, at the old place, the ward door blows open with a crash, in comes a fat man with a beard, eyes ringed red by the cold and his nose just the color of a cherry. The black boys get him cornered in the hall with flashlights. I see he's all tangled in the tinsel Public Relation has been stringing all over the place, and he's stumbling around in it in the dark. He's shading his red eyes from the flashlights and sucking on his mustache.

"Ho ho ho," he says. "I'd like to stay but I must be hurrying along. Very tight schedule, ya know. Ho ho. Must be going ..."

The black boys move in with the flashlights. They kept him with us six years before they discharged him, clean-shaven and skinny as a pole.

The Big Nurse is able to set the wall clock at whatever speed she wants by just turning one of those dials in the steel door; she takes a notion to hurry things up, she turns the speed up, and those hands whip around that disk like spokes in a wheel. The scene in the picture-screen windows goes through rapid changes of light to show morning, noon, and night-throb off

and on furiously with day and dark, and everybody is driven like mad to keep up with that passing of fake time; awful scramble of shaves and breakfasts and appointments and lunches and medications and ten minutes of night so you barely get your eyes closed before the dorm light's screaming at you to get up and start the scramble again, go like a sonofabitch this way, going through the full schedule of a day maybe twenty times an hour, till the Big Nurse sees everybody is right up to the breaking point, and she slacks off on the throttle, eases off the pace on that clock-dial, like some kid been fooling with the moving-picture projection machine and finally got tired watching the film run at ten times its natural speed, got bored with all that silly scampering and insect squeak of talk and turned it back to normal.

She's given to turning up the speed this way on days like, say, when you got somebody to visit you or when the VFW brings down a smoker show from Portland-times like that, times you'd like to hold and have stretch out. That's when she speeds things up.

But generally it's the other way, the slow way. She'll turn that dial to a dead stop and freeze the sun there on the screen so it don't move a scant hair for weeks, so not a leaf on a tree or a blade of grass in the pasture shimmers. The clock hands hang at two minutes to three and she's liable to let them hang there till we rust. You sit solid and you can't budge, you can't walk or move to relieve the strain of sitting, you can't swallow and you can't breathe. The only thing you can move is your eyes and there's nothing to see but petrified Acutes across the room waiting on one another to decide whose play it is. The old Chronic next to me has been dead six days, and he's rotting to the chair. And instead of fog sometimes she'll let a clear chemical gas in through the vents, and the whole ward is set solid when the gas changes into plastic.

Lord knows how long we hang this way.

Then, gradually, she'll ease the dial up a degree, and that's worse yet. I can take hanging dead still better'n I can take that sirup-slow hand of Scanlon across the room, taking three days to lay down a card. My lungs pull for the thick plastic air like getting it through a pinhole. I try to go to the latrine and I feel buried under a ton of sand, squeezing my bladder till green sparks flash and buzz across my forehead.

I strain with every muscle and bone to get out of that chair and go to the latrine, work to get up till my arms and legs are all ashake and my teeth hurt. I pull and pull and all I gain is maybe a quarter-inch off the leather seat. So I fall back and give up and let the pee pour out, activating a hot salt wire down my left leg that sets off humiliating alarms, sirens, spotlights, everybody up yelling and running around and the big black boys knocking the crowd aside right and left as the both of them rush headlong at me, waving awful mops of wet copper wires cracking and spitting as they short with the water.

About the only time we get any let-up from this time control is in the fog; then time doesn't mean anything. It's lost in the fog, like everything else. (They haven't really fogged the place full force all day today, not since McMurphy came in. I bet he'd yell like a bull if they fogged it.)

When nothing else is going on, you usually got the fog or the time control to contend with, but today something's happened: there hasn't been any of these things worked on us all day, not since shaving. This afternoon everything is matching up. When the swing shift comes on duty the clock says four-thirty, just like it should. The Big Nurse dismisses the black boys and takes a last look around the ward. She slides a long silver hatpin out of the iron-blue knot of hair back of her head, takes off her white cap and sets it careful in a cardboard box (there's mothballs in that box), and drives the hatpin back in the hair with a stab of her hand.

Behind the glass I see her tell everyone good evening. She hands the little birthmarked swing-shift nurse a note; then her hand reaches out to the control panel in the steel door, clacks on the speaker in the day room: "Good evening, boys. Behave yourselves." And turns the music up louder than ever. She rubs the inside of her wrist across her window; a disgusted look shows the fat black boy who just reported on duty that he better get to cleaning it, and he's at the glass with a paper towel before she's so much as locked the ward door behind her.

The machinery in the walls whistles, sighs, drops into a lower gear.

Then, till night, we eat and shower and go back to sit in the day room. Old Blastic, the oldest Vegetable, is holding his stomach and moaning. George (the black boys call him Ruba-dub) is washing his hands in the drinking fountain. The Acutes sit and play cards and work at getting a

picture on our TV set by carrying the set every place the cord will reach, in search of a good beam.

The speakers in the ceiling are still making music. The music from the speakers isn't transmitted in on a radio beam is why the machinery don't interfere. The music comes off a long tape from the Nurses' Station, a tape we all know so well by heart that there don't any of us consciously hear it except new men like McMurphy. He hasn't got used to it yet. He's dealing blackjack for cigarettes, and the speaker's right over the card table. He's pulled his cap way forward till he has to lean his head back and squint from under the brim to see his cards. He holds a cigarette between his teeth and talks around it like a stock auctioneer I saw once in a cattle auction in The Dalles.

"... hey-ya, hey-ya, come on, come on," he says, high, fast; "I'm waitin' on you suckers, you hit or you sit. Hit, you say? well well well and with a king up the boy wants a hit. Whaddaya know. So Comin' at you and too bad, a little lady for the lad and he's over the wall and down the road, up the hill and dropped his load. Comin' at you, Scanlon, and I wish some idiot in that nurses' hothouse would turn down that frigging music! Hooee! Does that thing play night and day, Harding? I never heard such a driving racket in my life."

Harding gives him a blank look. "Exactly what noise is it you're referring to, Mr. McMurphy?"

"That damned radio. Boy. It's been going ever since I come in this morning. And don't come on with some baloney that you don't hear it."

Harding cocks his ear to the ceiling. "Oh, yes, the so-called music. Yes, I suppose we do hear it if we concentrate, but then one can hear one's own heartbeat too, if he concentrates hard enough." He grins at McMurphy. "You see, that's a recording playing up there, my friend. We seldom hear the radio. The world news might not be therapeutic. And we've all heard that recording so many times now it simply slides out of our hearing, the way the sound of a waterfall soon becomes an unheard sound to those who live near it. Do you think if you lived near a waterfall you could hear it very long?"

(I still hear the sound of the falls on the Columbia, always will-always-hear the whoop of Charley Bear Belly stabbed himself a big chinook, hear

the slap of fish in the water, laughing naked kids on the bank, the women at the racks ... from a long time ago.)

"Do they leave it on all the time, like a waterfall?" McMurphy says.

"Not when we sleep," Cheswick says, "but all the rest of the time, and that's the truth."

"The hell with that. I'll tell that coon over there to turn it off or get his fat little ass kicked!"

He starts to stand up, and Harding touches his arm. "Friend, that is exactly the kind of statement that gets one branded assaultive. Are you so eager to forfeit the bet?"

McMurphy looks at him. "That's the way it is, huh? A pressure game? Keep the old pinch on?"

"That's the way it is."

He slowly lowers himself back into his seat, saying, "Horse muh-noo-ur."

Harding looks about at the other Acutes around the card table. "Gentlemen, already I seem to detect in our redheaded challenger a most unheroic decline of his TV-cowboy stoicism."

He looks at McMurphy across the table, smiling, McMurphy nods at him and tips his head back for the wink and licks his big thumb. "Well sir, of Professor Harding sounds like he's getting cocky. He wins a couple of splits and he goes to comin' on like a wise guy. Well well well; there he sits with a deuce showing and here's a pack of Mar-boros says he backs down. ... Whups, he sees me, okeedokee, Perfessor, here's a trey, he wants another, gets another deuce, try for the big five, Perfessor? Try for that big double pay, or play it safe? Another pack says you won't. Well well well, the Perfessor sees me, this tells the tale, too bad, another lady and the Perfessor flunks his exams. ..."

The next song starts up from the speaker, loud and clangy and a lot of accordion. McMurphy takes a look up at the speaker, and his spiel gets louder and louder to match it.

"... hey-ya hey-ya, okay, next, goddammit, you hit or you sit ... comin at ya ...!"

Right up to the lights out at nine-thirty.

I could of watched McMurphy at that blackjack table all night, the way he dealt and talked and roped them in and led them smack up to the point where they were just about to quit, then backed down a hand or two to give them confidence and bring them along again. Once he took a break for a cigarette and tilted back in his chair, his hands folded behind his head, and told the guys, "The secret of being a top-notch con man is being able to know what the mark wants, and how to make him think he's getting it. I learned that when I worked a season on a skillo wheel in a carnival. You fe-e-el the sucker over with your eyes when he comes up and you say, 'Now here's a bird that needs to feel tough.' So every time he snaps at you for taking him you quake in your boots, scared to death, and tell him, 'Please, sir. No trouble. The next roll is on the house, sir.' So the both of you are getting what you want."

He rocks forward, and the legs of his chair come down with a crack. He picks up the deck, zips his thumb over it, knocks the edge of it against the table top, licks his thumb and finger.

"And what I deduce you marks need is a big fat pot to temptate you. Here's ten packages on the next deal. Hey-yah, comin' at you, guts ball from here on out. ..."

And throws back his head and laughs out loud at the way the guys hustled to get their bets down.

That laugh banged around the day room all evening, and all the time he was dealing he was joking and talking and trying to get the players to laugh along with him. But they were all afraid to loosen up; it'd been too long. He gave up trying and settled down to serious dealing. They won the deal off him a time or two, but he always bought it back or fought it back, and the cigarettes on each side of him grew in bigger and bigger pyramid stacks.

Then just before nine-thirty he started letting them win, lets them win it all back so fast they don't hardly remember losing. He pays out the last couple of cigarettes and lays down the deck and leans back with a sigh and shoves the cap out of his eyes, and the game is done.

"Well, sir, win a few, lose the rest is what I say." He shakes his head so forlorn. "I don't know-I was always a pretty shrewd customer at twenty-

one, but you birds may just be too tough for me. You got some kinda uncanny knack, makes a man leery of playing against such sharpies for real money tomorrow."

He isn't even kidding himself into thinking they fall for that. He let them win, and every one of us watching the game knows it. So do the players. But there still isn't a man raking his pile of cigarettes-cigarettes he didn't really win but only won back because they were his in the first place-that doesn't have a smirk on his face like he's the toughest gambler on the whole Mississippi.

The fat black boy and a black boy named Geever run us out of the day room and commence turning lights off with a little key on a chain, and as the ward gets dimmer and darker the eyes of the little birthmarked nurse in the station get bigger and brighter. She's at the door of the glass station, issuing nighttime pills to the men that shuffle past her in a line, and she's having a hard time keeping straight who gets poisoned with what tonight. She's not even watching where she pours the water. What has distracted her attention this way is that big redheaded man with the dreadful cap and the horrible-looking scar, coming her way. She's watching McMurphy walk away from the card table in the dark day room, his one horny hand twisting the red tuft of hair that sticks out of the little cup at the throat of his work-farm shirt, and I figure by the way she rears back when he reaches the door of the station that she's probably been warned about him beforehand by the Big Nurse. ("Oh, one more thing before I leave it in your hands tonight, Miss Pilbow; that new man sitting over there, the one with the garish red sideburns and facial lacerations-I've reason to believe he is a sex maniac.")

McMurphy sees how she's looking so scared and big-eyed at him, so he sticks his head in the station door where she's issuing pills, and gives her a big friendly grin to get acquainted on. This flusters her so she drops the water pitcher on her foot. She gives a cry and hops on one foot, jerks her hand, and the pill she was about to give me leaps out of the little cup and right down the neck of her uniform where that birthmark stain runs like a river of wine down into a valley.

"Let me give you a hand, ma'am."

And that very hand comes through the station door, scarred and tattooed and the color of raw meat.

"Stay back! There are two aides on the ward with me!"

She rolls her eyes for the black boys, but they are off tying Chronics in bed, nowhere close enough to help in a hurry. McMurphy grins and turns the hand over so she can see he isn't holding a knife. All she can see is the light shining off the slick, waxy, callused palm.

"All I mean to do, miss, is to-"

"Stay back! Patients aren't allowed to enter the-Oh, stay back, I'm a Catholic!" and straightaway jerks at the gold chain around her neck so a cross flies out from between her bosoms, slingshots the lost pill up in the air! McMurphy strikes at the air right in front of her face. She screams and pops the cross in her mouth and clinches her eyes shut like she's about to get socked, stands like that, paper-white except for that stain which turns darker than ever, as though it sucked the blood from all the rest of her body. When she finally opens her eyes again there's that callused hand right in front of her with my little red capsule sitting in it.

"-was to pick up your waterin' can you dropped." He holds that out in the other hand.

Her breath comes out in a loud hiss. She takes the can from him. "Thank you. Good night, good night," and closes the door in the next man's face, no more pills tonight.

In the dorm McMurphy tosses the pill on my bed. "You want your sourball, Chief?"

I shake my head at the pill, and he flips it off the bed like it was a bug pestering him. It hops across the floor with a cricket scabble. He goes to getting ready for bed, pulling off his clothes. The shorts under his work pants are coal black satin covered with big white whales with red eyes. He grins when he sees I'm looking at the shorts. "From a co-ed at Oregon State, Chief, a Literary major." He snaps the elastic with his thumb. "She gave them to me because she said I was a symbol."

His arms and neck and face are sunburned and bristled with curly orange hairs. He's got tattoos on each big shoulder; one says "Fighting Leathernecks" and has a devil with a red eye and red horns and an M-1 rifle, and the other is a poker hand fanned out across his muscle-aces and eights. He puts his roll of clothes on the nightstand next to my bed and

goes to punching at his pillow. He's been assigned the bed right next to mine.

He gets between the sheets and tells me I better hit the sack myself, that here comes one of those black boys to douse the lights on us. I look around, and the black boy named Geever is coming, and I kick off my shoes and get in bed just as he walks up to tie a sheet across me. When he's finished with me he takes a last look around and giggles and flips the dorm lights off.

Except for the white powder of light from the Nurses' Station out in the hall, the dorm is dark. I can just make out McMurphy next to me, breathing deep and regular, the covers over him rising and falling. The breathing gets slower and slower, till I figure he's been asleep for a while. Then I hear a soft, throaty sound from his bed, like the chuckle of a horse. He's still awake and he's laughing to himself about something.

He stops laughing and whispers, "Why, you sure did give a jump when I told you that coon was coming, Chief. I thought somebody told me you was deaf."

7

First time for a long, long time I'm in bed without taking that little red capsule (if I hide to keep from taking it, the night nurse with the birthmark sends the black boy named Geever out to hunt me down, hold me captive with his flashlight till she can get the needle ready), so I fake sleep when the black boy's coming past with his light.

When you take one of those red pills you don't just go to sleep; you're paralyzed with sleep, and all night long you can't wake, no matter what goes on around you. That's why the staff gives me the pills; at the old place I took to waking up at night and catching them performing all kinds of horrible crimes on the patients sleeping around me.

I lie still and slow my breathing, waiting to see if something is going to happen. It is dark my lord and I hear them slipping around out there in their rubber shoes; twice they peek in the dorm and run a flashlight over everybody. I keep my eyes shut and keep awake. I hear a wailing from up on Disturbed, loo loo looo-got some guy wired to pick up code signals.

"Oh, a beer, I think, fo' the long night ahead," I hear a black boy whisper to the other. Rubber shoes squeak off toward the Nurses' Station, where

the refrigerator is. "You like a beer, sweet thing with a birthmark? Fo' the long night ahead?"

The guy upstairs hushes. The low whine of the devices in the walls gets quieter and quieter, till it hums down to nothing. Not a sound across the hospital-except for a dull, padded rumbling somewhere deep in the guts of the building, a sound that I never noticed before-a lot like the sound you hear when you're standing late at night on top of a big hydroelectric dam. Low, relentless, brute power.

The fat black boy stands out there in the hall where I can see him, looking all around and giggling. He walks toward the dorm door, slow, wiping the wet gray palms in his armpits. The light from the Nurses' Station throws his shadow on the dorm wall big as an elephant, gets smaller as he walks to the dorm door and looks in. He giggles again and unlocks the fuse box by the door and reaches in. "Tha's right, babies, sleep tight."

Twists a knob, and the whole floor goes to slipping down away from him standing in the door, lowering into the building like a platform in a grain elevator!

Not a thing but the dorm floor moves, and we're sliding away from the walls and door and the windows of the ward at a hell of a clip-beds, bedstands, and all. The machinery-probably a cog-and-track affair at each corner of the shaft-is greased silent as death. The only sound I hear is the guys breathing, and that drumming under us getting louder the farther down we go. The light of the dorm door five hundred yards back up this hole is nothing but a speck, dusting the square sides of the shaft with a dim powder. It gets dimmer and dimmer till a faraway scream comes echoing down the sides of the shaft-"Stay back!"-and the light goes out altogether.

The floor reaches some kind of solid bottom far down in the ground and stops with a soft jar. It's dead black, and I can feel the sheet around me choking off my wind. Just as I get the sheet untied, the floor starts sliding forward with a little jolt. Some kind of castors under it I can't hear. I can't even hear the guys around me breathing, and I realize all of a sudden it's because that drumming's gradually got so loud I can't hear anything else. We must be square in the middle of it. I go to clawing at that damned sheet tied across me and just about have it loose when a whole wall slides up, reveals a huge room of endless machines stretching clear out of sight,

swarming with sweating, shirtless men running up and down catwalks, faces blank and dreamy in firelight thrown from a hundred blast furnaces.

It-everything I see-looks like it sounded, like the inside of a tremendous dam. Huge brass tubes disappear upward in the dark. Wires run to transformers out of sight. Grease and cinders catch on everything, staining the couplings and motors and dynamos red and coal black.

The workers all move at the same smooth sprint, an easy, fluid stride. No one's in a hurry. One will hold up a second, spin a dial, push a button, throw a switch, and one side of his face flashes white like lightning from the spark of the connecting switch, and run on, up steel steps and along a corrugated iron catwalk-pass each other so smooth and close I hear the slap of wet sides like the slap of a salmon's tail on water-stop again, throw lightning from another switch, and run on again. They twinkle in all directions clean on out of sight, these flash pictures of the dreamy doll faces of the workmen.

A workman's eyes snap shut while he's going at full run, and he drops in his tracks; two of his buddies running by grab him up and lateral him into a furnace as they pass. The furnace whoops a ball of fire and I hear the popping of a million tubes like walking through a field of seed pods. This sound mixes with the whirr and clang of the rest of the machines.

There's a rhythm to it, like a thundering pulse.

The dorm floor slides on out of the shaft and into the machine room. Right away I see what's straight above us-one of those trestle affairs like you find in meat houses, rollers on tracks to move carcasses from the cooler to the butcher without much lifting. Two guys in slacks, white shirts with the sleeves turned back, and thin black ties are leaning on the catwalk above our beds, gesturing to each other as they talk, cigarettes in long holders tracing lines of red light. They're talking but you can't make out the words above the measured roar rising all around them. One of the guys snaps his fingers, and the nearest workman veers in a sharp turn and sprints to his side. The guy points down at one of the beds with his cigarette holder, and the worker trots off to the steel stepladder and runs down to our level, where he goes out of sight between two transformers huge as potato cellars.

When that worker appears again he's pulling a hook along the trestle overhead and taking giant strides as he swings along it. He passes my bed

and a furnace whooping somewhere suddenly lights his face up right over mine, a face handsome and brutal and waxy like a mask, wanting nothing. I've seen a million faces like it.

He goes to the bed and with one hand grabs the old Vegetable Blastic by the heel and lifts him straight up like Blastic don't weigh more'n a few pounds; with the other hand the worker drives the hook through the tendon back of the heel, and the old guy's hanging there upside down, his moldy face blown up big, scared, the eyes scummed with mute fear. He keeps flapping both arms and the free leg till his pajama top falls around his head. The worker grabs the top and bunches and twists it like a burlap sack and pulls the trolley clicking back over the trestle to the catwalk and looks up to where those two guys in white shirts are standing. One of the guys takes a scalpel from a holster at his belt. There's a chain welded to the scalpel. The guy lowers it to the worker, loops the other end of the chain around the railing so the worker can't run off with a weapon.

The worker takes the scalpel and slices up the front of old Blastic with a clean swing and the old man stops thrashing around. I expect to be sick, but there's no blood or innards falling out like I was looking to see-just a shower of rust and ashes, and now and again a piece of wire or glass. Worker's standing there to his knees in what looks like clinkers.

A furnace got its mouth open somewhere, licks up somebody.

I think about jumping up and running around and waking up McMurphy and Harding and as many of the guys as I can, but there wouldn't be any sense in it. If I shook somebody awake he'd say, Why you crazy idiot, what the hell's eating you? And then probably help one of the workers lift me onto one of those hooks himself, saying, How about let's see what the insides of an Indian are like?

I hear the high, cold, whistling wet breath of the fog machine, see the first wisps of it come seeping out from under McMurphy's bed. I hope he knows enough to hide in the fog.

I hear a silly prattle reminds me of somebody familiar, and I roll enough to get a look down the other way. It's the hairless Public Relation with the bloated face, that the patients are always arguing about why it's bloated. "I'll say he does," they'll argue. "Me, I'll say he doesn't; you ever hear of a guy really who wore one?" "Yeh, but you ever hear of a guy like him before?" The first patient shrugs and nods, "Interesting point."

Now he's stripped except for a long undershirt with fancy monograms sewed red on front and back. And I see once and for all (the undershirt rides up his back some as he comes walking past, giving me a peek) that he definitely does wear one, laced so tight it might blow up any second.

And dangling from the stays he's got half a dozen withered objects, tied by the hair like scalps.

He's carrying a little flask of something that he sips from to keep his throat open for talking, and a camphor hanky he puts in front of his nose from time to time to stop out the stink. There's a clutch of schoolteachers and college girls and the like hurrying after him. They wear blue aprons and their hair in pin curls. They are listening to him give a brief lecture on the tour.

He thinks of something funny and has to stop his lecture long enough for a swig from the flask to stop the giggling. During the pause one of his pupils stargazes around and sees the gutted Chronic dangling by his heel. She gasps and jumps back. The Public Relation turns and catches sight of the corpse and rushes to take one of those limp hands and give it a spin. The student shrinks forward for a cautious look, face in a trance.

"You see? You see?" He squeals and rolls his eyes and spews stuff from his flask he's laughing so hard. He's laughing till i think he'll explode.

When he finally drowns the laughing he starts back along the row of machines and goes into his lecture again. He stops suddenly and slaps his forehead-"Oh, scatterbrained me!"-and comes running back to the hanging Chronic to rip off another trophy and tie it to his girdle.

Right and left there are other things happening just as bad-crazy, horrible things too goofy and outlandish to cry about and too much true to laugh about-but the fog is getting thick enough I don't have to watch. And somebody's tugging at my arm. I know already what will happen: somebody'll drag me out of the fog and we'll be back on the ward and there won't be a sign of what went on tonight and if I was fool enough to try and tell anybody about it they'd say, Idiot, you just had a nightmare; things as crazy as a big machine room down in the bowels of a dam where people get cut up by robot workers don't exist.

But if they don't exist, how can a man see them?

It's Mr. Turkle that pulls me out of the fog by the arm, shaking me and grinning. He says, "You havin' a bad dream, Mistuh Bromden." He's the aide works the long lonely shift from 11 to 7, an old Negro man with a big sleepy grin on the end of a long wobbly neck. He smells like he's had a little to drink. "Back to sleep now, Mistuh Bromden."

Some nights he'll untie the sheet from across me if it's so tight I squirm around. He wouldn't do it if he thought the day crew knew it was him, because they'd probably fire him, but he figures the day crew will think it was me untied it. I think he really does it to be kind, to help-but he makes sure he's safe first.

This time he doesn't untie the sheet but walks away from me to help two aides I never saw before and a young doctor lift old Blastic onto the stretcher and carry him out, covered with a sheet-handle him more careful than anybody ever handled him before in all his life.

8

Come morning, McMurphy is up before I am, the first time anybody been up before me since Uncle Jules the Wallwalker was here. Jules was a shrewd old white-haired Negro with a theory the world was being tipped over on its side during the night by the black boys; he used to slip out in the early mornings, aiming to catch them tipping it. Like Jules, I'm up early in the mornings to watch what machinery they're sneaking onto the ward or installing in the shaving room, and usually it's just me and the black boys in the hall for fifteen minutes before the next patient is out of bed. But this morning I hear McMurphy out there in the latrine as I come out of the covers. Hear him singing! Singing so you'd think he didn't have a worry in the world. His voice is clear and strong slapping up against the cement and steel.

" 'Your horses are hungry, that's what she did say.' " He's enjoying the way the sound rings in the latrine. " 'Come sit down beside me, an' feed them some hay.' " He gets a breath, and his voice jumps a key, gaining pitch and power till it's joggling the wiring in all the walls. " 'My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay-ay-aeee.' " He holds the note and plays with it, then swoops down with the rest of the verse to finish it off. " 'So fare-thee-well, darlin', I'm gone on my way.' "

Singing! Everybody's thunderstruck. They haven't heard such a thing in years, not on this ward. Most of the Acutes in the dorm are up on their

elbows, blinking and listening. They look at one another and raise their eyebrows. How come the black boys haven't hushed him up out there? They never let anybody raise that much racket before, did they? How come they treat this new guy different? He's a man made outa skin and bone that's due to get weak and pale and die, just like the rest of us. He lives under the same laws, gotta eat, bumps up against the same troubles; these things make him just as vulnerable to the Combine as anybody else, don't they?

But the new guy is different, and the Acutes can see it, different from anybody been coming on this ward for the past ten years, different from anybody they ever met outside. He's just as vulnerable, maybe, but the Combine didn't get him.

" 'My wagons are loaded,' " he sings, " 'my whip's in my hand ...' "

How'd he manage to slip the collar? Maybe, like old Pete, the Combine missed getting to him soon enough with controls. Maybe he grew up so wild all over the country, batting around from one place to another, never around one town longer'n a few months when he was a kid so a school never got much a hold on him, logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling lightfooted and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed. Maybe that's it, he never gave the Combine a chance, just like he never gave the black boy a chance to get to him with the thermometer yesterday morning, because a moving target is hard to hit.

No wife wanting new linoleum. No relatives pulling at him with watery old eyes. No one to care about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man. And maybe the reason the black boys don't rush into that latrine and put a stop to his singing is because they know he's out of control, and they remember that time with old Pete and what a man out of control can do. And they can see that McMurphy's a lot bigger than old Pete; if it comes down to getting the best of him, it's going to take all three of them and the Big Nurse waiting on the sidelines with a needle. The Acutes nod at one another; that's the reason, they figure, that the black boys haven't stopped his singing where they would stop any of the rest of us.

I come out of the dorm into the hall just as McMurphy comes out of the latrine. He's got his cap on and not much else, just a towel grabbed around

his hips. He's holding a toothbrush in his other hand. He stands in the hall, looking up and down, rocking up on his toes to keep off the cold tile as much as he can. Picks him out a black boy, the least one, and walks up to him and whaps him on the shoulder just like they'd been friends all their lives.

"Hey there, old buddy, what's my chance of gettin' some toothpaste for brushin' my grinders?"

The black boy's dwarf head swivels and comes nose to knuckle with that hand. He frowns at it, then takes a quick check where's the other two black boys just in case, and tells McMurphy they don't open the cabinet till six-forty-five. "It's a policy," he says.

"Is that right? I mean, is that where they keep the toothpaste? In the cabinet?"

"Tha's right, locked in the cabinet."

The black boy tries to go back to polishing the baseboards, but that hand is still lopped over his shoulder like a big red clamp.

"Locked in the cabinet, is it? Well well well, now why do you reckon they keep the toothpaste locked up? I mean, it ain't like it's dangerous, is it? You can't poison a man with it, can you? You couldn't brain some guy with the tube, could you? What reason you suppose they have for puttin' something as harmless as a little tube of toothpaste under lock and key?"

"It's ward policy, Mr. McMurphy, tha's the reason." And when he sees that this last reason don't affect McMurphy like it should, he frowns at that hand on his shoulder and adds, "What you s'pose it'd be like if evahbody was to brush their teeth whenever they took a notion to brush?"

McMurphy turns loose the shoulder, tugs at that tuft of red wool at his neck, and thinks this over. "Uh-huh, uh-huh, I think I can see what you're drivin' at: ward policy is for those that can't brush after every meal."

"My gaw, don't you see?"

"Yes, now, I do. You're saying people'd be brushin' their teeth whenever the spirit moved them."

"Tha's right, tha's why we-"

"And, lordy, can you imagine? Teeth bein' brushed at six-thirty, six-twenty-who can tell? maybe even six o'clock. Yeah, I can see your point."

He winks past the black boy at me standing against the wall.

"I gotta get this baseboard cleaned, McMurphy."

"Oh. I didn't mean to keep you from your job." He starts to back away as the black boy bends to his work again. Then he comes forward and leans over to look in the can at the black boy's side. "Well, look here; what do we have here?"

The black boy peers down. "Look where?"

"Look here in this old can, Sam. What is the stuff in this old can?"

"Tha's ... soap powder."

"Well, I generally use paste, but"-McMurphy runs his toothbrush down in the powder and swishes it around and pulls it out and taps it on the side of the can-"but this will do fine for me. I thank you. We'll look into that ward policy business later."

And he heads back to the latrine, where I can hear his singing garbled by the piston beat of his toothbrushing.

That black boy's standing there looking after him with his scrub rag hanging limp in his gray hand. After a minute he blinks and looks around and sees I been watching and comes over and drags me down the hall by the drawstring on my pajamas and pushes me to a place on the floor I just did yesterday.

"There! Damn you, right there! That's where I want you workin', not gawkin' around like some big useless cow! There! There!"

And I lean over and go to mopping with my back to him so he won't see me grin. I feel good, seeing McMurphy get that black boy's goat like not many men could. Papa used to be able to do it-spraddle-legged, dead-panned, squinting up at the sky that first time the government men showed up to negotiate about buying off the treaty. "Canada honkers up there," Papa says, squinting up. Government men look, rattling papers. "What are you-? In July? There's no-uh-geese this time of year. Uh, no geese."

They had been talking like tourists from the East who figure you've got to talk to Indians so they'll understand. Papa didn't seem to take any notice of the way they talked. He kept looking at the sky. "Geese up there, white man. You know it. Geese this year. And last year. And the year before and the year before."

The men looked at one another and cleared their throats. "Yes. Maybe true, Chief Bromden. Now. Forget geese. Pay attention to contract. What we offer could greatly benefit you-your people-change the lives of the red man."

Papa said, "... and the year before and the year before and the year before ..."

By the time it dawned on the government men that they were being poked fun at, all the council who'd been sitting on the porch of our shack, putting pipes in the pockets of their red and black plaid wool shirts and taking them back out again, grinning at one another and at Papa-they had all busted up laughing fit to kill. Uncle R & J Wolf was rolling on the ground, gasping with laughter and saying, "You know it, white man."

It sure did get their goat; they turned without saying a word and walked off toward the highway, red-necked, us laughing behind them. I forget sometimes what laughter can do.

The Big Nurse's key hits the lock, and the black boy is up to her soon as she's in the door, shifting from foot to foot like a kid asking to pee. I'm close enough I hear McMurphy's name come into his conversation a couple of times, so I know he's telling her about McMurphy brushing his teeth, completely forgetting to tell her about the old Vegetable who died during the night. Waving his arms and trying to tell her what that fool redhead's been up to already, so early in the morning-disrupting things, goin' contrary to ward policy, can't she do something?

She glares at the black boy till he stops fidgeting, then looks up the hall to where McMurphy's singing is booming out of the latrine door louder than ever. " 'Oh, your parents don't like me, they say I'm too po-o-or; they say I'm not worthy to enter your door.' "

Her face is puzzled at first; like the rest of us, it's been so long since she's heard singing it takes her a second to recognize what it is.

" 'Hard livin's my pleasure, my money's my o-o-own, an' them that don't like me, they can leave me alone.' "

She listens a minute more to make sure she isn't hearing things; then she goes to puffing up. Her nostrils flare open, and every breath she draws she gets bigger, as big and tough-looking's I seen her get over a patient since

Taber was here. She works the hinges in her elbows and fingers. I hear a small squeak. She starts moving, and I get back against the wall, and when she rumbles past she's already big as a truck, trailing that wicker bag behind in her exhaust like a semi behind a Jimmy Diesel. Her lips are parted, and her smile's going out before her like a radiator grill. I can smell the hot oil and magneto spark when she goes past, and every step hits the floor she blows up a size bigger, blowing and puffing, roll down anything in her path! I'm scared to think what she'll do.

Then, just as she's rolling along at her biggest and meanest, McMurphy steps out of the latrine door right in front of her, holding that towel around his hips-stops her dead! She shrinks to about head-high to where that towel covers him, and he's grinning down on her. Her own grin is giving way, sagging at the edges.

"Good morning, Miss Rat-shed! How's things on the outside?"

"You can't run around here-in a towel!"

"No?" He looks down at the part of the towel she's eye to eye with, and it's wet and skin tight. "Towels against ward policy too? Well, I guess there's nothin' to do exec-"

"Stop! don't you dare. You get back in that dorm and get your clothes on this instant!"

She sounds like a teacher bawling out a student, so McMurphy hangs his head like a student and says in a voice sounds like he's about to cry, "I can't do that, ma'am. I'm afraid some thief in the night boosted my clothes whilst I slept. I sleep awful sound on the mattresses you have here." "Somebody boosted ...?"

"Pinched. Jobbed. Swiped. Stole," he says happily. "You know, man, like somebody boosted my threads." Saying this tickles him so he goes into a little barefooted dance before her.

"Stole your clothes?"

"That looks like the whole of it."

"But-prison clothes? Why?"

He stops jigging around and hangs his head again. "All I know is that they were there when I went to bed and gone when I got up. Gone slick as

a whistle. Oh, I do know they were nothing but prison clothes, coarse and faded and uncouth, ma'am, well I know it-and prison clothes may not seem like much to those as has more. But to a nude man-

"That outfit," she says, realizing, "was supposed to be picked up. You were issued a uniform of green convalescents this morning."

He shakes his head and sighs, but still don't look up. "No. No, I'm afraid I wasn't. Not a thing this morning but the cap that's on my head and-

"Williams," she hollers down to the black boy who's still at the ward door like he might make a run for it. "Williams, can you come here a moment?"

He crawls to her like a dog to a whipping.

"Williams, why doesn't this patient have an issue of convalescents?"

The black boy is relieved. He straightens up and grins, raises that gray hand and points down the other end of the hall to one of the big ones. "Mistuh Washington over there is 'signed to the laundry duty this mornin'. Not me. No."

"Mr. Washington!" She nails him with his mop poised over the bucket, freezes him there. "Will you come here a moment!" The mop slides without a sound back in the bucket, and with slow, careful movements he leans the handle against the wall. He turns around and looks down at McMurphy and the least black boy and the nurse. He looks then to his left and to his right, like she might be yelling at somebody else.

"Come down here!"

He puts his hands in his pockets and starts shuffling down the hall to her. He never walks very fast, and I can see how if he don't get a move on she might freeze him and shatter him all to hell by just looking; all the hate and fury and frustration she was planning to use on McMurphy is beaming out down the hall at the black boy, and he can feel it blast against him like a blizzard wind, slowing him more than ever. He has to lean into it, pulling his arms around him. Frost forms in his hair and eyebrows. He leans farther forward, but his steps are getting slower; he'll never make it.

Then McMurphy takes to whistling "Sweet Georgia Brown," and the nurse looks away from the black boy just in time. Now she's madder and more frustrated than ever, madder'n I ever saw her get. Her doll smile is

gone, stretched tight and thin as a red-hot wire. If some of the patients could be out to see her now, McMurphy could start collecting his bets.

The black boy finally gets to her, and it took him two hours. She draws a long breath. "Washington, why wasn't this man issued a change of greens this morning? Couldn't you see he had nothing on but a towel?"

"And my cap," McMurphy whispers, tapping the brim with his finger.

"Mr. Washington?"

The big black boy looks at the little one who pointed him out, and the little black boy commences to fidget again. The big boy looks at him a long time with those radio-tube eyes, plans to square things with him later; then the head turns and he looks McMurphy up and down, taking in the hard, heavy shoulders, the lopsided grin, the scar on the nose, the hand clamping the towel in place, and then he looks at the nurse.

"I guess-" he starts out.

"You guess! You'll do more than guess! You'll get him a uniform this instant, Mr. Washington, or spend the next two weeks working on Geriatrics Ward! Yes. You may need a month of bedpans and slab baths to refresh your appreciation of just how little work you aides have to do on this ward. If this was one of the other wards, who do you think would be scouring the hall all day? Mr. Bromden here? No, you know who it would be. We excuse you aides from most of your housekeeping duties to enable you to see to the patients. And that means seeing that they don't parade around exposed. What do you think would have happened if one of the young nurses had come in early and found a patient running round the halls without a uniform? What do you think!"

The big black boy isn't too sure what, but he gets her drift and ambles off to the linen room to get McMurphy a set of greens-probably ten sizes too small-and ambles back and holds it out to him with a look of the clearest hate I ever saw. McMurphy just looks confused, like he don't know how to take the outfit the black boy's handing to him, what with one hand holding the toothbrush and the other hand holding up the towel. He finally winks at the nurse and shrugs and unwraps the towel, drapes it over her shoulder like she was a wooden rack.

I see he had his shorts on under the towel all along.

I think for a fact that she'd rather he'd of been stark naked under that towel than had on those shorts. She's glaring at those big white whales leaping round on his shorts in pure wordless outrage. That's more'n she can take. It's a full minute before she can pull herself together enough to turn on the least black boy; her voice is shaking out of control, she's so mad.

"Williams ... I believe ... you were supposed to have the windows of the Nurses' Station polished by the time I arrived this morning." He scuttles off like a black and white bug. "And you, Washington-and you ..." Washington shuffles back to his bucket in almost a trot. She looks around again, wondering who else she can light into. She spots me, but by this time some of the other patients are out of the dorm and wondering about the little clutch of us here in the hall. She closes her eyes and concentrates. She can't have them see her face like this, white and warped with fury. She uses all the power of control that's in her. Gradually the lips gather together again under the little white nose, run together, like the red-hot wire had got hot enough to melt, shimmer a second, then click solid as the molten metal sets, growing cold and strangely dull. Her lips part, and her tongue comes between them, a chunk of slag. Her eyes open again, and they have that strange dull and cold and flat look the lips have, but she goes into her good-morning routine like there was nothing different about her, figuring the patients'll be too sleepy to notice.

"Good morning, Mr. Sefelt, are your teeth any better? Good morning, Mr. Fredrickson, did you and Mr. Sefelt have a good night last night? You bed right next to each other, don't you? Incidentally, it's been brought to my attention that you two have made some arrangement with your medication-you are letting Bruce have your medication, aren't you, Mr. Sefelt? We'll discuss that later. Good morning, Billy; I saw your mother on the way in, and she told me to be sure to tell you she thought of you all the time and knew you wouldn't disappoint her. Good morning, Mr. Harding-why, look, your fingertips are red and raw. Have you been chewing your fingernails again?"

Before they could answer, even if there was some answer to make, she turns to McMurphy still standing there in his shorts. Harding looks at the shorts and whistles.

"And you, Mr. McMurphy," she says, smiling, sweet as sugar, "if you are finished showing off your manly physique and your gaudy underpants, I think you had better go back in the dorm and put on your greens."

He tips his cap to her and to the patients ogling and poking fun at his white-whale shorts, and goes to the dorm without a word. She turns and starts off in the other direction, her flat red smile going out before her; before she's got the door closed on her glass station, his singing is rolling from the dorm door into the hall again.

" 'She took me to her parlor, and coo-oo-ooled me with her fan' "-I can hear the whack as he slaps his bare belly-" 'whispered low in her mamma's ear, I luh-uhvvv that gamblin' man.' "

Sweeping the dorm soon's it's empty, I'm after dust mice under his bed when I get a smell of something that makes me realize for the first time since I been in the hospital that this big dorm full of beds, sleeps forty grown men, has always been sticky with a thousand other smells-smells of germicide, zinc ointment, and foot powder, smell of piss and sour old-man manure, of Pablum and eyewash, of musty shorts and socks musty even when they're fresh back from the laundry, the stiff odor of starch in the linen, the acid stench of morning mouths, the banana smell of machine oil, and sometimes the smell of singed hair-but never before now, before he came in, the man smell of dust and dirt from the open fields, and sweat, and work.

9

All through breakfast McMurphy's talking and laughing a mile a minute. After this morning he thinks the Big Nurse is going to be a snap. He don't know he just caught her off guard and, if anything, made her strengthen herself.

He's being the clown, working at getting some of the guys to laugh. It bothers him that the best they can do is grin weakly and snigger sometimes. He prods at Billy Bibbit, sitting across the table from him, says in a secret voice, "Hey, Billy boy, you remember that time in Seattle you and me picked up those two twitches? One of the best rolls I ever had."

Billy's eyes bob up from his plate. He opens his mouth but can't say a thing. McMurphy turns to Harding.

"We'd never have brought it off, neither, picking them up on the spur of the moment that way, except that they'd heard tell of Billy Bibbit. Billy 'Club' Bibbit, he was known as in them days. Those girls were about to take off when one looked at him and says 'Are you the renowned Billy Club Bibbit? Of the famous fourteen inches?' And Billy ducked his head and blushed-like he's doin' now-and we were a shoo-in. And I remember, when we got them up to the hotel, there was this woman's voice from over near Billy's bed, says, 'Mister Bibbit, I'm disappointed in you; I heard that you had four-four-for goodness sakes!' "

And whoops and slaps his leg and gooses Billy with his thumb till I think Billy will fall in a dead faint from blushing and grinning.

McMurphy says that as a matter of fact a couple of sweet twitches like those two is the only thing this hospital does lack. The bed they give a man here, finest he's ever slept in, and what a fine table they do spread. He can't figure why everybody's so glum about being locked up here.

"Look at me now," he tells the guys and lifts a glass to the light, "getting my first glass of orange juice in six months. Hooee, that's good. I ask you, what did I get for breakfast at that work farm? What was I served? Well, I can describe what it looked like, but I sure couldn't hang a name on it; morning noon and night it was burnt black and had potatoes in it and looked like roofing glue. I know one thing; it wasn't orange juice. Look at me now: bacon, toast, butter, eggs-coffee the little honey in the kitchen even asks me if I like it black or white thank you-and a great! big! cold glass of orange juice. Why, you couldn't pay me to leave this place!"

He gets seconds on everything and makes a date with the girl pours coffee in the kitchen for when he gets discharged, and he compliments the Negro cook on sunnysiding the best eggs he ever ate. There's bananas for the corn flakes, and he gets a handful, tells the black boy that he'll filch him one 'cause he looks so starved, and the black boy shifts his eyes to look down the hall to where the nurse is sitting in her glass case, and says it ain't allowed for the help to eat with the patients.

"Against ward policy?"

"Tha's right."

"Tough luck"-and peels three bananas right under the black boy's nose and eats one after the other, tells the boy that any time you want one snuck outa the mess hall for you, Sam, you just give the word.

When McMurphy finishes his last banana he slaps his belly and gets up and heads for the door, and the big black boy blocks the door and tells him the rule that patients sit in the mess hall till they all leave at seven-thirty. McMurphy stares at him like he can't believe he's hearing right, then turns and looks at Harding. Harding nods his head, so McMurphy shrugs and goes back to his chair. "I sure don't want to go against that goddamned policy."

The clock at the end of the mess hall shows it's a quarter after seven, lies about how we only been sitting here fifteen minutes when you can tell it's been at least an hour. Everybody is finished eating and leaned back, watching the big hand to move to seven-thirty. The black boys take away the Vegetables' splattered trays and wheel the two old men down to get hosed off. In the mess hall about half the guys lay their heads on their arms, figuring to get a little sleep before the black boys get back. There's nothing else to do, with no cards or magazines or picture puzzles. Just sleep or watch the clock.

But McMurphy can't keep still for that; he's got to be up to something. After about two minutes of pushing food scraps around his plate with his spoon, he's ready for more excitement. He hooks his thumbs in his pockets and tips back and one-eyes that clock up on the wall. Then he rubs his nose.

"You know-that old clock up there puts me in mind of the targets at the target range at Fort Riley. That's where I got my first medal, a sharpshooter medal. Dead-Eye McMurphy. Who wants to lay me a pore little dollar that I can't put this dab of butter square in the center of the face of that clock up there, or at least on the face?"

He gets three bets and takes up his butter pat and puts it on his knife, gives it a flip. It sticks a good six inches or so to the left of the clock, and everybody kids him about it until he pays his bets. They're still riding him about did he mean Dead-Eye or Dead-Eyes when the least black boy gets back from hosing Vegetables and everybody looks into his plate and keeps quiet. The black boy senses something is in the air, but he can't see what. And he probably never would of known except old Colonel Matterson is

gazing around, and he sees the butter stuck up on the wall and this causes him to point up at it and go into one of his lessons, explaining to us all in his patient, rumbling voice, just like what he said made sense.

"The but-ter ... is the Re-pub-li-can party. ..."

The black boy looks where the colonel is pointing, and there that butter is, easing down the wall like a yellow snail. He blinks at it but he doesn't say a word, doesn't even bother looking around to make certain who flipped it up there.

McMurphy is whispering and nudging the Acutes sitting around him, and in a minute they all nod, and he lays three dollars on the table and leans back. Everybody turns in his chair and watches that butter sneak on down the wall, starting, hanging still, shooting ahead and leaving a shiny trail behind it on the paint. Nobody says a word. They look at the butter, then at the clock, then back at the butter. The clock's moving now.

The butter makes it down to the floor about a half a minute before seven-thirty, and McMurphy gets back all the money he lost.

The black boy wakes up and turns away from the greasy stripe on the wall and says we can go, and McMurphy walks out of the mess hall, folding his money in his pocket. He puts his arms around the black boy's shoulders and half walks, half carries him, down the hall toward the day room. "The day's half gone, Sam, of buddy, an' I'm just barely breaking even. I'll have to hustle to catch up. How about breaking out that deck of cards you got locked securely in that cabinet, and I'll see if I can make myself heard over that loudspeaker."

Spends most of that morning hustling to catch up by dealing more blackjack, playing for IOUs now instead of cigarettes. He moves the blackjack table two or three times to try to get out from under the speaker. You can tell it's getting on his nerves. Finally he goes to the Nurses' Station and raps on a pane of glass till the Big Nurse swivels in her chair and opens the door, and he asks her how about turning that infernal noise off for a while. She's calmer than ever now, back in her seat behind her pane of glass; there's no heathen running around half-naked to unbalance her. Her smile is settled and solid. She closes her eyes and shakes her head and tells McMurphy very pleasantly, No.

"Can't you even ease down on the volume? It ain't like the whole state of Oregon needed to hear Lawrence Welk play 'Tea for Two' three times every hour, all day long! If it was soft enough to hear a man shout his bets across the table I might get a game of poker going-"

"You've been told, Mr. McMurphy, that it's against the policy to gamble for money on the ward."

"Okay, then down soft enough to gamble for matches, for fly buttons-just turn the damn thing down!"

"Mr. McMurphy"-she waits and lets her calm schoolteacher tone sink in before she goes on; she knows every Acute on the ward is listening to them-"do you want to know what I think? I think you are being very selfish. Haven't you noticed there are others in this hospital besides yourself? There are old men here who couldn't hear the radio at all if it were lower, old fellows who simply aren't capable of reading, or working puzzles-or playing cards to win other men's cigarettes. Old fellows like Matterson and Kittling, that music coming from the loudspeaker is all they have. And you want to take that away from them. We like to hear suggestions and requests whenever we can, but I should think you might at least give some thought to others before you make your requests."

He turns and looks over at the Chronic side and sees there's something to what she says. He takes off his cap and runs his hand in his hair, finally turns back to her. He knows as well as she does that all the Acutes are listening to everything they say.

"Okay-I never thought about that."

"I thought you hadn't."

He tugs at that little tuft of red showing out of the neck of his greens, then says. "Well, hey; what do you say to us taking the card game someplace else? Some other room? Like, say, that room you people put the tables in during that meeting. There's nothing in there all the rest of the day. You could unlock that room and let the card-players go in there, and leave the old men out here with their radio-a good deal all around."

She smiles and closes her eyes again and shakes her head gently. "Of course, you may take the suggestion up with the rest of the staff at some time, but I'm afraid everyone's feelings will correspond with mine: we do not have adequate coverage for two day rooms. There isn't enough

personnel. And I wish you wouldn't lean against the glass there, please; your hands are oily and staining the window. That means extra work for some of the other men."

He jerks his hand away, and I see he starts to say something and then stops, realizing she didn't leave him anything else to say, unless he wants to start cussing at her. His face and neck are red. He draws a long breath and concentrates on his will power, the way she did this morning, and tells her that he is very sorry to have bothered her, and goes back to the card table.

Everybody on the ward can feel that it's started.

At eleven o'clock the doctor comes to the day-room door and calls over to McMurphy that he'd like to have him come down to his office for an interview. "I interview all new admissions on the second day."

McMurphy lays down his cards and stands up and walks over to the doctor. The doctor asks him how his night was, but McMurphy just mumbles an answer.

"You look deep in thought today, Mr. McMurphy."

"Oh, I'm a thinker all right," McMurphy says, and they walk off together down the hall. When they come back what seems like days later, they're both grinning and talking and happy about something. The doctor is wiping tears off his glasses and looks like he's actually been laughing, and McMurphy is back as loud and full of brass and swagger as ever. He's that way all through lunch, and at one o'clock he's the first one in his seat for the meeting, his eyes blue and ornery from his place in the corner.

The Big Nurse comes into the day room with her covey of student nurses and her basket of notes. She picks the log book up from the table and frowns into it a minute (nobody's informed on anybody all day long), then goes to her seat beside the door. She picks up some folders from the basket on her lap and riffles through them till she finds the one on Harding.

"As I recall, we were making quite a bit of headway yesterday with Mr. Harding's problem-"

"Ah-before we go into that," the doctor says, "I'd like to interrupt a moment, if I might. Concerning a talk Mr. McMurphy and I had in my office this morning. Reminiscing, actually. Talking over old times. You

see Mr. McMurphy and I find we have something in common-we went to the same high school."

The nurses look at one another and wonder what's got into this man. The patients glance at McMurphy grinning from his corner and wait for the doctor to go on. He nods his head.

"Yes, the same high school. And in the course of our reminiscing we happened to bring up the carnivals the school used to sponsor-marvelous, noisy, gala occasions. Decorations, crepe streamers, booths, games-it was always one of the prime events of the year. I-as I mentioned to McMurphy-was the chairman of the high-school carnival both my junior and senior years-wonderful carefree years ..."

It's got real quiet in the day room. The doctor raises his head, peers around to see if he's making a fool of himself. The Big Nurse is giving him a look that shouldn't leave any doubts about it, but he doesn't have on his glasses and the look misses him.

"Anyway-to put an end to this maudlin display of nostalgia-in the course of our conversation McMurphy and I wondered what would be the attitude of some of the men toward a carnival here on the ward?"

He puts on his glasses and peers around again. Nobody's jumping up and down at the idea. Some of us can remember Taber trying to engineer a carnival a few years back, and what happened to it. As the doctor waits, a silence rears up from out of the nurse and looms over everybody, daring anybody to challenge it. I know McMurphy can't because he was in on the planning of the carnival, and just as I'm thinking that nobody will be fool enough to break that silence, Cheswick, who sits right next to McMurphy, gives a grunt and is on his feet, rubbing his ribs, before he knows what happened.

"Uh-I personally believe, see"-he looks down at McMurphy's fist on the chair arm beside him, with that big stiff thumb sticking straight up out of it like a cow prod-"that a carnival is a real good idea. Something to break the monotony."

"That's right, Charley," the doctor says, appreciating Cheswick's support, "and not altogether without therapeutic value."

"Certainly not," Cheswick says, looking happier now. "No. Lots of therapeutics in a carnival. You bet."

"It would b-b-be fun," Billy Bibbit says.

"Yeah, that too," Cheswick says. "We could do it, Doctor Spivey, sure we could. Scanlon can do his human bomb act, and I can make a ring toss in Occupational Therapy."

"I'll tell fortunes," Martini says and squints at a spot above his head.

"I'm rather good at diagnosing pathologies from palm reading, myself," Harding says.

"Good, good," Cheswick says and claps his hands. He's never had anybody support anything he said before.

"Myself," McMurphy drawls, "I'd be honored to work a skillo wheel. Had a little experience ..."

"Oh, there are numerous possibilities," the doctor says, sitting up straight in his chair and really warming to it. "Why, I've got a million ideas ..."

He talks full steam ahead for another five minutes. You can tell a lot of the ideas are ideas he's already talked over with McMurphy. He describes games, booths, talks of selling tickets, then stops as suddenly as though the Nurse's look had hit him right between the eyes. He blinks at her and asks, "What do you think of the idea, Miss Ratched? Of a carnival? Here, on the ward?"

"I agree that it may have a number of therapeutic possibilities," she says, and waits. She lets that silence rear up from her again. When she's sure nobody's going to challenge it, she goes on. "But I also believe that an idea like this should be discussed in staff meeting before a decision is reached. Wasn't that your idea, Doctor?"

"Of course. I merely thought, understand, I would feel out some of the men first. But certainly, a staff meeting first. Then we'll continue our plans."

Everybody knows that's all there is to the carnival.

The Big Nurse starts to bring things back into hand by rattling the folio she's holding. "Fine. Then if there is no other new business-and if Mr. Cheswick will be seated-I think we might go right on into the discussion. We have"-she takes her watch from the basket and looks at it-"forty-eight minutes left. So, as I-"

"Oh. Hey, wait. I remember there is some other new business." McMurphy has his hand up, fingers snapping. She looks at the hand for a long time before she says anything.

"Yes, Mr. McMurphy?"

"Not me, Doctor Spivey has. Doc, tell 'em what you come up with about the hard-of-hearing guys and the radio."

The nurse's head gives one little jerk, barely enough to see, but my heart is suddenly roaring. She puts the folio back in the basket, turns to the doctor.

"Yes," says the doctor. "I very nearly forgot." He leans back and crosses his legs and puts his fingertips together; I can see he's still in good spirits about his carnival. "You see, McMurphy and I were talking about that age-old problem we have on this ward: the mixed population, the young and the old together. It's not the most ideal surroundings for our Therapeutic Community, but Administration says there's no helping it with the Geriatric Building overloaded the way it is. I'll be the first to admit it's not an absolutely pleasant situation for anyone concerned. In our talk, however, McMurphy and I did happen to come up with an idea which might make things more pleasant for both age groups. McMurphy mentioned that he had noticed some of the old fellows seemed to have difficulty hearing the radio. He suggested the speaker might be turned up louder so the Chronics with auditory weaknesses could hear it. A very humane suggestion, I think."

McMurphy gives a modest wave of his hand, and the doctor nods at him and goes on.

"But I told him I had received previous complaints from some of the younger men that the radio is already so loud it hinders conversation and reading. McMurphy said he hadn't thought of this, but mentioned that it did seem a shame that those who wished to read couldn't get off by themselves where it was quiet and leave the radio for those who wished to listen. I agreed with him that it did seem a shame and was ready to drop the matter when I happened to think of the old tub room where we store the tables during the ward meeting. We don't use the room at all otherwise; there's no longer a need for the hydrotherapy it was designed for, now that we have the new drugs. So how would the group like to have that room as a sort of second day room, a game room, shall we say?"

The group isn't saying. They know whose play it is next. She folds Harding's folio back up and puts it on her lap and crosses her hands over it, looking around the room just like somebody might dare have something to say. When it's clear nobody's going to talk till she does, her head turns again to the doctor. "It sounds like a fine plan, Doctor Spivey, and I appreciate Mr. McMurphy's interest in the other patients, but I'm terribly afraid we don't have the personnel to cover a second day room."

And is so certain that this should be the end of it she starts to open the folio again. But the doctor has thought this through more than she figured.

"I thought of that too, Miss Ratched. But since it will be largely the Chronic patients who remain here in the day room with the speaker-most of whom are restricted to lounges or wheel chairs-one aide and one nurse in here should easily be able to put down any riots or uprisings that might occur, don't you think?"

She doesn't answer, and she doesn't care much for his joking about riots and uprisings either, but her face doesn't change. The smile stays.

"So the other two aides and nurses can cover the men in the tub room, perhaps even better than here in a larger area. What do you think, men? Is it a workable idea? I'm rather enthused about it myself, and I say we give it a try, see what it's like for a few days. If it doesn't work, well, we've still got the key to lock it back up, haven't we?"

"Right!" Cheswick says, socks his fist into his palm. He's still standing, like he's afraid to get near that thumb of McMurphy's again. "Right, Doctor Spivey, if it don't work, we've still got the key to lock it back up. You bet."

The doctor looks around the room and sees all the other Acutes nodding and smiling and looking so pleased with what he takes to be him and his idea that he blushes like Billy Bibbit and has to polish his glasses a time or two before he can go on. It tickles me to see the little man so happy with himself. He looks at all the guys nodding, and nods himself and says, "Fine, fine," and settles his hands on his knees. "Very good. Now. If that's decided-I seem to have forgotten what we were planning to talk about this morning?"

The nurse's head gives that one little jerk again, and she bends over her basket, picks up a folio. She fumbles with the papers, and it looks like her

hands are shaking. She draws out a paper, but once more, before she can start reading out of-it, McMurphy is standing and holding up his hand and shifting from foot to foot, giving a long, thoughtful, "Saaaay," and her fumbling stops, freezes as though the sound of his voice froze her just like her voice froze that black boy this morning. I get that giddy feeling inside me again when she freezes. I watch her close while McMurphy talks.

"Saaaaay, Doctor, what I been dyin' to know is what did this dream I dreamt the other night mean? You see, it was like I was me, in the dream, and then again kind of like I wasn't me-like I was somebody else that looked like me-like-like my daddy! Yeah, that's who it was. It was my daddy because sometimes when I saw me-him-I saw there was this iron bolt through the jawbone like daddy used to have-

"Your father has an iron bolt through his jawbone?"

"Well, not any more, but he did once when I was a kid. He went around for about ten months with this big metal bolt going in here and coming out here! God, he was a regular Frankenstein. He'd been clipped on the jaw with a pole ax when he got into some kinda hassle with this pond man at the logging mill-Hey! Let me tell you how that incident came about. ..."

Her face is still calm, as though sbe had a cast made and painted to just the look she wants. Confident, patient, and unruffled. No more little jerk, just that terrible cold face, a calm smile stamped out of red plastic; a clean, smooth forehead, not a line in it to show weakness or worry; flat, wide, painted-on green eyes, painted on with an expression that says I can wait, I might lose a yard now and then but I can wait, and be patient and calm and confident, because I know there's no real losing for me.

I thought for a minute there I saw her whipped. Maybe I did. But I see now that it don't make any difference. One by one the patients are sneaking looks at her to see how she's taking the way McMurphy is dominating the meeting, and they see the same thing. She's too big to be beaten. She covers one whole side of the room like a Jap statue. There's no moving her and no help against her. She's lost a little battle here today, but it's a minor battle in a big war that she's been winning and that she'll go on winning. We mustn't let McMurphy get our hopes up any different, lure us into making some kind of dumb play. She'll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her. She don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours. To beat her you don't have

to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good. And eventually we all got to lose. Nobody can help that.

Right now, she's got the fog machine switched on, and it's rolling in so fast I can't see a thing but her face, rolling in thicker and thicker, and I feel as hopeless and dead as I felt happy a minute ago, when she gave that little jerk-even more hopeless than ever before, on account of I know now there is no real help against her or her Combine. McMurphy can't help any more than I could. Nobody can help. And the more I think about how nothing can be helped, the faster the fog rolls in.

And I'm glad when it gets thick enough you're lost in it and can let go, and be safe again.

10

There's a Monopoly game going on in the day room. They've been at it for three days, houses and hotels everywhere, two tables pushed together to take care of all the deeds and stacks of play money. McMurphy talked them into making the game interesting by paying a penny for every play dollar the bank issues them; the monopoly box is loaded with change.

"It's your roll, Cheswick."

"Hold it a minute before he rolls. What's a man need to buy thum hotels?"

"You need four houses on every lot of the same color, Martini. Now let's go, for Christ'sakes."

"Hold it a minute."

There's a flurry of money from that side of the table, red and green and yellow bills blowing in every direction.

"You buying a hotel or you playing happy new year, for Christ'sakes?"

"It's your dirty roll, Cheswick."

"Snake eyes! Hooeee, Cheswicker, where does that put you? That don't put you on my Marvin Gardens by any chance? That don't mean you have to pay me, let's see, three hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Boogered."

"What's thum other things? Hold it a minute. What's thum other things all over the board?"

"Martini, you been seeing them other things all over the board for two days. No wonder I'm losing my ass. McMurphy, I don't see how you can concentrate with Martini sitting there hallucinating a mile a minute."

"Cheswick, you never mind about Martini. He's doing real good. You just come on with that three fifty, and Martini will take care of himself; don't we get rent from him every time one of his 'things' lands on our property?"

"Hold it a minute. There's so many of thum."

"That's okay, Mart. You just keep us posted whose property they land on. You're still the man with the dice, Cheswick. You rolled a double, so you roll again. Atta boy. Faw! a big six."

"Takes me to ... Chance: 'You Have Been Elected Chairman of the Board; Pay Every Player-' Boogered and double boogered!"

"Whose hotel is this here for Christsakes on the Reading Railroad?"

"My friend, that, as anyone can see, is not a hotel; it's a depot."

"Now hold it a minute-"

McMurphy surrounds his end of the table, moving cards, rearranging money, evening up his hotels. There's a hundred. dollar bill sticking out of the brim of his cap like a press card; mad money, he calls it.

"Scanlon? I believe it's your turn, buddy."

"Gimme those dice. I'll blow this board to pieces. Here we go. Lebenty Leben, count me over eleven, Martini."

"Why, all right."

"Not that one, you crazy bastard; that's not my piece, that's my house."

"It's the same color."

"What's this little house doing on the Electric Company?"

"That's a power station."

"Martini, those ain't the dice you're shaking-"

"Let him be; what's the difference?"

"Those are a couple of houses!"

"Faw. And Martini rolls a big, let me see, a big nineteen. Good goin', Mart; that puts you-Where's your piece, buddy?"

"Eh? Why here it is."

"He had it in his mouth, McMurphy. Excellent. That's two moves over the second and third bicuspid, four moves to the board, which takes you on to-to Baltic Avenue, Martini. Your own and only property. How fortunate can a man get, friends? Martini has been playing three days and lit on his property practically every time."

"Shut up and roll, Harding. It's your turn."

Harding gathers the dice up with his long fingers, feeling the smooth surfaces with his thumb as if he was blind. The fingers are the same color as the dice and look like they were carved by his other hand. The dice rattle in his hand as he shakes it. They tumble to a stop in front of McMurphy.

"Faw. Five, six, seven. Tough luck, buddy. That's another o' my vast holdin's. You owe me-oh, two hundred dollars should about cover it."

Pity.

The game goes round and round, to the rattle of dice and the shuffle of play money.

11

There's long spells-three days, years-when you can't see a thing, know where you are only by the speaker sounding overhead like a bell buoy clanging in the fog. When I can see, the guys are usually moving around as unconcerned as though they didn't notice so much as a mist in the air. I believe the fog affects their memory some way it doesn't affect mine.

Even McMurphy doesn't seem to know he's been fogged in. If he does, he makes sure not to let on that he's bothered by it. He's making sure none of the staff sees him bothered by anything; he knows that there's no better way in the world to aggravate somebody who's trying to make it hard for you than by acting like you're not bothered.

He keeps up his high-class manners around the nurses and the black boys in spite of anything they might say to him, in spite of every trick they pull to get him to lose his temper. A couple of times some stupid rule gets him

mad, but he just makes himself act more polite and mannerly than ever till he begins to see how funny the whole thing is—the rules, the disapproving looks they use to enforce the rules, the ways of talking to you like you're nothing but a three-year-old—and when he sees how funny it is he goes to laughing, and this aggravates them no end. He's safe as long as he can laugh, he thinks, and it works pretty fair. Just once he loses control and shows he's mad, and then it's not because of the black boys or the Big Nurse and something they did, but it's because of the patients, and something they didn't do.

It happened at one of the group meetings. He got mad at the guys for acting too cagey—too chicken-shit, he called it. He'd been taking bets from all of them on the World Series coming up Friday. He'd had it in mind that they would get to watch the games on TV, even though they didn't come on during regulation TV time. During the meeting a few days before he asks if it wouldn't be okay if they did the cleaning work at night, during TV time, and watched the games during the afternoon. The nurse tells him no, which is about what he expected. She tells him how the schedule has been set up for a delicately balanced reason that would be thrown into turmoil by the switch of routines.

This doesn't surprise him, coming from the nurse; what does surprise him is how the Acutes act when he asks them what they think of the idea. Nobody says a thing. They're all sunk back out of sight in little pockets of fog. I can barely see them.

"Now look here," he tells them, but they don't look. He's been waiting for somebody to say something, answer his question. Nobody acts like they've heard it. "Look here, damn it," he says when nobody moves, "there's at least twelve of you guys I know of myself got a leetle personal interest who wins these games. Don't you guys care to watch them?"

"I don't know, Mack," Scanlon finally says, "I'm pretty used to seeing that six-o'clock news. And if switching times would really mess up the schedule as bad as Miss Ratched says—"

"The hell with the schedule. You can get back to the bloody schedule next week, when the Series is over. What do you say, buddies? Let's take a vote on watching the TV during the afternoon instead of at night. All those in favor?"

"Ay," Cheswick calls out and gets to his feet.

"I mean all those in favor raise their hands. Okay, all those in favor?"

Cheswick's hand comes up. Some of the other guys look around to see if there's any other fools. McMurphy can't believe it.

"Come on now, what is this crap? I thought you guys could vote on policy and that sort of thing. Isn't that the way it is, Doc?"

The doctor nods without looking up.

"Okay then; now who wants to watch those games?"

Cheswick shoves his hand higher and glares around. Scanlon shakes his head and then raises his hand, keeping his elbow on the arm of the chair. And nobody else. McMurphy can't say a word.

"If that's settled, then," the nurse says, "perhaps we should get on with the meeting."

"Yeah," he says, slides down in his chair till the brim of his cap nearly touches his chest. "Yeah, perhaps we should get on with the sonofabitchin' meeting at that."

"Yeah," Cheswick says, giving all the guys a hard look and sitting down, "yeah, get on with the godblessed meeting." He nods stiffly, then settles his chin down on his chest, scowling. He's pleased to be sitting next to McMurphy, feeling brave like this. It's the first time Cheswick ever had somebody along with him on his lost causes.

After the meeting McMurphy won't say a word to any of them, he's so mad and disgusted. It's Billy Bibbit who goes up to him.

"Some of us have b-been here for fi-fi-five years, Randle," Billy says. He's got a magazine rolled up and is twisting at it with his hands; you can see the cigarette burns on the backs of his hands. "And some of us will b-be here maybe th-that muh-muh-much longer, long after you're g-g-gone, long after this Wo-world Series is over. And ... don't you see ..." He throws down the magazine and walks away. "Oh, what's the use of it anyway."

McMurphy stares after him, that puzzled frown knotting his bleached eyebrows together again.

He argues for the rest of the day with some of the other guys about why they didn't vote, but they don't want to talk about it, so he seems to give

up, doesn't say anything about it again till the day before the Series starts. "Here it is Thursday," he says, sadly shaking his head.

He's sitting on one of the tables in the tub room with his feet on a chair, trying to spin his cap around one finger. Other Acutes mope around the room and try not to pay any attention to him. Nobody'll play poker or blackjack with him for money any more-after the patients wouldn't vote he got mad and skinned them so bad at cards that they're all so in debt they're scared to go any deeper-and they can't play for cigarettes because the nurse has started making the men keep their cartons on the desk in the Nurses' Station, where she doles them out one pack a day, says it's for their health, but everybody knows it's to keep McMurphy from winning them all at cards. With no poker or blackjack, it's quiet in the tub room, just the sound of the speaker drifting in from the day room. It's so quiet you can hear that guy upstairs in Disturbed climbing the wall, giving out an occasional signal, loo loo looo, a bored, uninterested sound, like a baby yells to yell itself to sleep.

"Thursday," McMurphy says again.

"Looooo," yells that guy upstairs.

"That's Rawler," Scanlon says, looking up at the ceiling. He don't want to pay any attention to McMurphy. "Rawler the Squawler. He came through this ward a few years back. Wouldn't keep still to suit Miss Ratched, you remember, Billy? Loo loo loo all the time till I thought I'd go nuts. What they should do with that whole bunch of dingbats up there is toss a couple of grenades in the dorm. They're no use to anybody-"

"And tomorrow is Friday," McMurphy says. He won't let Scanlon change the subject.

"Yeah," Cheswick says, scowling around the room, "tomorrow is Friday."

Harding turns a page of his magazine. "And that will make nearly a week our friend McMurphy has been with us without succeeding in throwing over the government, is that what you're saying, Cheswickle? Lord, to think of the chasm of apathy in which we have fallen-a shame, a pitiful shame."

"The hell with that," McMurphy says. "What Cheswick means is that the first Series game is gonna be played on TV tomorrow, and what are we gonna be doin'? Mopping up this damned nursery again."

"Yeah," Cheswick says. "Ol' Mother Ratched's Therapeutic Nursery."

Against the wall of the tub room I get a feeling like a spy; the mop handle in my hands is made of metal instead of wood (metal's a better conductor) and it's hollow; there's plenty of room inside it to hide a miniature microphone. If the Big Nurse is hearing this, she'll really get Cheswick. I take a hard ball of gum from my pocket and pick some fuzz off it and hold it in my mouth till it softens.

"Let me see again," McMurphy says. "How many of you birds will vote with me if I bring up that time switch again?"

About half the Acutes nod yes, a lot more than would really vote. He puts his hat back on his head and leans his chin in his hands.

"I tell ya, I can't figure it out. Harding, what's wrong with you, for crying out loud? You afraid if you raise your hand that old buzzard'll cut it off."

Harding lifts one thin eyebrow. "Perhaps I am; perhaps I am afraid she'll cut it off if I raise it."

"What about you, Billy? Is that what you're scared of?" "No. I don't think she'd d-d-do anything, but"-he shrugs and sighs and climbs up on the big panel that controls the nozzles on the shower, perches up there like a monkey"-but I just don't think a vote wu-wu-would do any good. Not in the l-long run. It's just no use, M-Mack."

"Do any good? Hooee! It'd do you birds some good just to get the exercise lifting that arm."

"It's still a risk, my friend. She always has the capacity to make things worse for us. A baseball game isn't worth the risk," Harding says.

"Who the hell says so? Jesus, I haven't missed a World Series in years. Even when I was in the cooler one September they let us bring in a TV and watch the Series, they'd of had a riot on their hands if they hadn't. I just may have to kick that damned door down and walk to some bar downtown to see the game, just me and my buddy Cheswick."

"Now there's a suggestion with a lot of merit," Harding says, tossing down his magazine. "Why not bring that up for vote in group meeting

tomorrow? 'Miss Ratched, I'd like to move that the ward be transported en masse to the Idle Hour for beer and television.' "

"I'd second the motion," Cheswick says. "Damn right."

"The hell with that in mass business," McMurphy says. "I'm tired of looking at you bunch of old ladies; when me and Cheswick bust outta here I think by God I'm gonna nail the door shut behind me. You guys better stay behind; your mamma probably wouldn't let you cross the street."

"Yeah? Is that it?" Fredrickson has come up behind McMurphy. "You're just going to raise one of those big he-man boots of yours and kick down the door? A real tough guy."

McMurphy don't hardly look at Fredrickson; he's learned that Fredrickson might act hard-boiled now and then, but it's an act that folds under the slightest scare.

"What about it, he-man," Fredrickson keeps on, "are you going to kick down that door and show us how tough you are?"

"No, Fred, I guess not I wouldn't want to scuff up my boot"

"Yeah? Okay, you been talking so big, just how would you go about busting out of here?"

McMurphy takes a look around him. "Well, I guess I could knock the mesh outa one of these windows with a chair when and if I took a notion. ..."

"Yeah? You could, could you? Knock it right out? Okay, let's see you try. Come on, he-man, I'll bet you ten dollars you can't do it."

"Don't bother trying, Mack," Cheswick says. "Fredrickson knows you'll just break a chair and end up on Disturbed. The first day we arrived over here we were given a demonstration about these screens. They're specially made. A technician picked up a chair just like that one you've got your feet on and beat the screen till the chair was no more than kindling wood. Didn't hardly dent the screen."

"Okay then," McMurphy says, taking a look around him. I can see he's getting more interested. I hope the Big Nurse isn't hearing this; he'll be up on Disturbed in an hour. "We need something heavier. How about a table?"

"Same as the chair. Same wood, same weight."

"All right, by God, let's just figure out what I'd have to toss through that screen to bust out. And if you birds don't think I'd do it if I ever got the urge, then you got another think coming. Okay-something bigger'n a table or a chair ... Well, if it was night I might throw that fat coon through it; he's heavy enough."

"Much too soft," Harding says. "He'd hit the screen and it would dice him like an eggplant."

"How about one of the beds?"

"A bed is too big even if you could lift it. It wouldn't go through the window."

"I could lift it all right. Well, hell, right over there you are: that thing Billy's sittin' on. That big control panel with all the handles and cranks. That's hard enough, ain't it? And it damn well should be heavy enough."

"Sure," Fredrickson says. "That's the same as you kicking your foot through the steel door at the front."

"What would be wrong with using the panel? It don't look nailed down."

"No, it's not bolted-there's probably nothing holding it but a few wires-but look at it, for Christsakes."

Everybody looks. The panel is steel and cement, half the size of one of the tables, probably weighs four hundred pounds.

"Okay, I'm looking at it. It don't look any bigger than hay bales I've bucked up onto truck beds."

"I'm afraid, my friend, that this contrivance will weigh a bit more than your bales of hay."

"About a quarter-ton more, I'd bet," Fredrickson says.

"He's right, Mack," Cheswick says. "It'd be awful heavy."

"Hell, are you birds telling me I can't lift that dinky little gizmo?"

"My friend, I don't recall anything about psychopaths being able to move mountains in addition to their other noteworthy assets."

"Okay, you say I can't lift it. Well by God ..."

McMurphy hops off the table and goes to peeling off his green jacket; the tattoos sticking half out of his T-shirt jump around the muscles on his arms.

"Then who's willing to lay five bucks? Nobody's gonna convince me I can't do something till I try it. Five bucks ..."

"McMurphy, this is as foolhardy as your bet about the nurse."

"Who's got five bucks they want to lose? You hit or you sit. ..."

The guys all go to signing liens at once; he's beat them so many times at poker and blackjack they can't wait to get back at him, and this is a certain sure thing. I don't know what he's driving at; broad and big as he is, it'd take three of him to move that panel, and he knows it. He can just look at it and see he probably couldn't even tip it, let alone lift it. It'd take a giant to lift it off the ground. But when the Acutes all get their IOUs signed, he steps up to the panel and lifts Billy Bibbit down off it and spits in his big callused palms and slaps them together, rolls his shoulders.

"Okay, stand outa the way. Sometimes when I go to exertin' myself I use up all the air nearby and grown men faint from suffocation. Stand back. There's liable to be crackin' cement and flying steel. Get the women and kids someplace safe. Stand back. ..."

"By golly, he might do it," Cheswick mutters.

"Sure, maybe he'll talk it off the floor," Fredrickson says.

"More likely he'll acquire a beautiful hernia," Harding says. "Come now, McMurphy, quit acting like a fool; there's no man can lift that thing."

"Stand back, sissies, you're using my oxygen."

McMurphy shifts his feet a few times to get a good stance, and wipes his hands on his thighs again, then leans down and gets hold of the levers on each side of the panel. When he goes to straining, the guys go to hooting and kidding him. He turns loose and straightens up and shifts his feet around again.

"Giving up?" Fredrickson grins.

"Just limbering up. Here goes the real effort"-and grabs those levers again.

And suddenly nobody's hooting at him any more. His arms commence to swell, and the veins squeeze up to the surface. He clinches his eyes, and his lips draw away from his teeth. His head leans back, and tendons stand out like coiled ropes running from his heaving neck down both arms to his hands. His whole body shakes with the strain as he tries to lift something he knows he can't lift, something everybody knows he can't lift.

But, for just a second, when we hear the cement grind at our feet, we think, by golly, he might do it.

Then his breath explodes out of him, and he falls back limp against the wall. There's blood on the levers where he tore his hands. He pants for a minute against the wall with his eyes shut. There's no sound but his scraping breath; nobody's saying a thing.

He opens his eyes and looks around at us. One by one he looks at the guys-even at me-then he fishes in his pockets for all the IOUs he won the last few days at poker. He bends over the table and tries to sort them, but his hands are froze into red claws, and he can't work the fingers.

Finally he throws the whole bundle on the floor-probably forty or fifty dollars' worth from each man-and turns to walk out of the tub room. He stops at the door and looks back at everybody standing around.

"But I tried, though," he says. "Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?"

And walks out and leaves those stained pieces of paper on the floor for whoever wants to sort through them.

12

A visiting doctor covered with gray cobwebs on his yellow skull is addressing the resident boys in the staff room.

I come sweeping past him. "Oh, and what's this here." He gives me a look like I'm some kind of bug. One of the residents points at his ears, signal that I'm deaf, and the visiting doctor goes on.

I push my broom up face to face with a big picture Public Relation brought in one time when it was fogged so thick I didn't see him. The picture is a guy fly-fishing somewhere in the mountains, looks like the Ochocos near Paineville-snow on the peaks showing over the pines, long white aspen trunks lining the stream, sheep sorrel growing in sour green

patches. The guy is flicking his fly in a pool behind a rock. It's no place for a fly, it's a place for a single egg on a number-six hook-he'd do better to drift the fly over those riffles downstream.

There's a path running down through the aspen, and I push my broom down the path a ways and sit down on a rock and look back out through the frame at that visiting doctor talking with the residents. I can see him stabbing some point in the palm of his hand with his finger, but I can't hear what he says because of the crash of the cold, frothy stream coming down out of the rocks. I can smell the snow in the wind where it blows down off the peaks. I can see mole burrows humping along under the grass and buffalo weed. It's a real nice place to stretch your legs and take it easy.

You forget-if you don't sit down and make the effort to think back-forget how it was at the old hospital. They didn't have nice places like this on the walls for you to climb into. They didn't have TV or swimming pools or chicken twice a month. They didn't have nothing but walls and chairs, confinement jackets it took you hours of hard work to get out of. They've learned a lot since then. "Come a long way," says fat-faced Public Relation. They've made life look very pleasant with paint and decorations and chrome bathroom fixtures. "A man that would want to run away from a place as nice as this," says fat-faced Public Relation, "why, there'd be something wrong with him."

Out in the staff room the visiting authority is hugging his elbows and shivering like he's cold while he answers questions the resident boys ask him. He's thin and meatless, and his clothes flap around his bones. He stands there, hugging his elbows and shivering. Maybe he feels the cold snow wind off the peaks too.

13

It's getting hard to locate my bed at night, have to crawl around on my hands and knees feeling underneath the springs till I find my gobs of gum stuck there: Nobody complains about all the fog. I know why, now: as bad as it is, you can slip back in it and feel safe. That's what McMurphy can't understand, us wanting to be safe. He keeps trying to drag us out of the fog, out in the open where we'd be easy to get at.

14

There's a shipment of frozen parts come Tin downstairs-hearts and kidneys and brains and the like. I can hear them rumble into cold storage down the coal chute. A guy sitting in the room someplace I can't see is talking about a guy up on Disturbed killing himself. Old Rawler. Cut both nuts off and bled to death, sitting right on the can in the latrine, half a dozen people in there with him didn't know it till he fell off to the floor, dead.

What makes people so impatient is what I can't figure; all the guy had to do was wait.

15

I know how they work it, the fog machine. We had a whole platoon used to operate fog machines around airfields overseas. Whenever intelligence figured there might be a bombing attack, or if the generals had something secret they wanted to pull-out of sight, hid so good that even the spies on the base couldn't see what went on-they fogged the field.

It's a simple rig: you got an ordinary compressor sucks water out of one tank and a special oil out of another tank, and compresses them together, and from the black stem at the end of the machine blooms a white cloud of fog that can cover a whole airfield in ninety seconds. The first thing I saw when I landed in Europe was the fog those machines make. There were some interceptors close after our transport, and soon as it hit ground the fog crew started up the machines. We could look out the transport's round, scratched windows and watch the jeeps draw the machines up close to the plane and watch the fog boil out till it rolled across the field and stuck against the windows like wet cotton.

You found your way off the plane by following a little referees' horn the lieutenant kept blowing, sounded like a goose honking. Soon as you were out of the hatch you couldn't see no more than maybe three feet in any direction. You felt like you were out on that airfield all by yourself. You were safe from the enemy, but you were awfully alone. Sounds died and dissolved after a few yards, and you couldn't hear any of the rest of your crew, nothing but that little horn squeaking and honking out of a soft furry whiteness so thick that your body just faded into white below the belt; other than that brown shirt and brass buckle, you couldn't see nothing but white, like from the waist down you were being dissolved by the fog too.

And then some guy wandering as lost as you would all of a sudden be right before your eyes, his face bigger and clearer than you ever saw a man's face before in your life. Your eyes were working so hard to see in that fog that when something did come in sight every detail was ten times as clear as usual, so clear both of you had to look away. When a man showed up you didn't want to look at his face and he didn't want to look at yours, because it's painful to see somebody so clear that it's like looking inside him, but then neither did you want to look away and lose him completely. You had a choice: you could either strain and look at things that appeared in front of you in the fog, painful as it might be, or you could relax and lose yourself.

When they first used that fog machine on the ward, one they bought from Army Surplus and hid in the vents in the new place before we moved in, I kept looking at anything that appeared out of the fog as long and hard as I could, to keep track of it, just like I used to do when they fogged the airfields in Europe. Nobody'd be blowing a horn to show the way, there was no rope to hold to, so fixing my eyes on something was the only way I kept from getting lost. Sometimes I got lost in it anyway, got in too deep, trying to hide, and every time I did, it seemed like I always turned up at that same place, at that same metal door with the row of rivets like eyes and no number, just like the room behind that door drew me to it, no matter how hard I tried to stay away, just like the current generated by the fiends in that room was conducted in a beam along the fog and pulled me back along it like a robot. I'd wander for days in the fog, scared I'd never see another thing, then there'd be that door, opening to show me the mattress padding on the other side to stop out the sounds, the men standing in a line like zombies among shiny copper wires and tubes pulsing light, and the bright scrape of arcing electricity. I'd take my place in the line and wait my turn at the table. The table shaped like a cross, with shadows of a thousand murdered men printed on it, silhouette wrists and ankles running under leather straps sweated green with use, a silhouette neck and head running up to a silver band goes across the forehead. And a technician at the controls beside the table looking up from his dials and down the line and pointing at me with a rubber glove. "Wait, I know that big bastard there-better rabbit-punch him or call for some more help or something. He's an awful case for thrashing around."

So I used to try not to get in too deep, for fear I'd get lost and turn up at the Shock Shop door. I looked hard at anything that came into sight and hung on like a man in a blizzard hangs on a fence rail. But they kept making the fog thicker and thicker, and it seemed to me that, no matter how hard I tried, two or three times a month I found myself with that door opening in front of me to the acid smell of sparks and ozone. In spite of all I could do, it was getting tough to keep from getting lost.

Then I discovered something: I don't have to end up at that door if I stay still when the fog comes over me and just keep quiet. The trouble was I'd been finding that door my own self because I got scared of being lost so long and went to hollering so they could track me. In a way, I was hollering for them to track me; I had figured that anything was better'n being lost for good, even the Shock Shop. Now, I don't know. Being lost isn't so bad.

All this morning I been waiting for them to fog us in again. The last few days they been doing it more and more. It's my idea they're doing it on account of McMurphy. They haven't got him fixed with controls yet, and they're trying to catch him off guard. They can see he's due to be a problem; a half a dozen times already he's roused Cheswick and Harding and some of the others to where it looked like they might actually stand up to one of the black boys-but always, just the time it looked like the patient might be helped, the fog would start, like it's starting now.

I heard the compressor start pumping in the grill a few minutes back, just as the guys went to moving tables out of the day room for the therapeutic meeting, and already the mist is oozing across the floor so thick my pants legs are wet. I'm cleaning the windows in the door of the glass station, and I hear the Big Nurse pick up the phone and call the doctor to tell him we're just about ready for the meeting, and tell him perhaps he'd best keep an hour free this afternoon for a staff meeting. "The reason being," she tells him, "I think it is past time to have a discussion of the subject of Patient Randle McMurphy and whether he should be on this ward or not." She listens a minute, then tells him, "I don't think it's wise to let him go on upsetting the patients the way he has the last few days."

That's why she's fogging the ward for the meeting. She don't usually do that. But now she's going to do something with McMurphy today, probably ship him to Disturbed. I put down my window rag and go to my

chair at the end of the line of Chronicles, barely able to see the guys getting into their chairs and the doctor coming through the door wiping his glasses like he thinks the blurred look comes from his steamed lenses instead of the fog.

It's rolling in thicker than I ever seen it before.

I can hear them out there, trying to go on with the meeting, talking some nonsense about Billy Bibbit's stutter and how it came about. The words come to me like through water, it's so thick. In fact it's so much like water it floats me right up out of my chair and I don't know which end is up for a while. Floating makes me a little sick to the stomach at first. I can't see a thing. I never had it so thick it floated me like this.

The words get dim and loud, off and on, as I float around, but as loud as they get, loud enough sometimes I know I'm right next to the guy that's talking, I still can't see a thing.

I recognize Billy's voice, stuttering worse than ever because he's nervous. "... fuh-fuh-flunked out of college be-be-cause I quit ROTC. I c-c-couldn't take it. Wh-wh-wh-whenver the officer in charge of class would call roll, call 'Bibbit,' I couldn't answer. You were s-s-supposed to say heh-heh-heh ... He's choking on the word, like it's a bone in his throat. I hear him swallow and start again. "You were supposed to say, 'Here sir,' and I never c-c-could get it out."

His voice gets dim; then the Big Nurse's voice comes cutting from the left. "Can you recall, Billy, when you first had speech trouble? When did you first stutter, do you remember?"

I can't tell is he laughing or what. "Fir-first stutter? First stutter? The first word I said I st-stut-tered: m-m-m-m-mamma."

Then the talking fades out altogether: I never knew that to happen before. Maybe Billy's hid himself in the fog too. Maybe all the guys finally and forever crowded back into the fog.

A chair and me float past each other. It's the first thing I've seen. It comes sifting out of the fog off to my right, and for a few seconds it's right beside my face, just out of my reach. I been accustomed of late to just let things alone when they appear in the fog, sit still and not try to hang on. But this time I'm scared, the way I used to be scared. I try with all I got to pull myself over to the chair and get hold of it, but there's nothing to brace

against and all I can do is thrash the air, all I can do is watch the chair come clear, clearer than ever before to where I can even make out the fingerprint where a worker touched the varnish before it was dry, looming out for a few seconds, then fading on off again. I never seen it where things floated around this way. I never seen it this thick before, thick to where I can't get down to the floor and get on my feet if I wanted to and walk around. That's why I'm so scared; I feel I'm going to float off someplace for good this time.

I see a Chronic float into sight a little below me. It's old Colonel Matterson, reading from the wrinkled scripture of that long yellow hand. I look close at him because I figure it's the last time I'll ever see him. His face is enormous, almost more than I can bear. Every hair and wrinkle of him is big, as though I was looking at him with one of those microscopes. I see him so clear I see his whole life. The face is sixty years of southwest Army camps, rutted by iron-rimmed caisson wheels, worn to the bone by thousands of feet on two-day marches.

He holds out that long hand and brings it up in front of his eyes and squints into it, brings up his other hand and underlines the words with a finger wooden and varnished the color of a gunstock by nicotine. His voice as deep and slow and patient, and I see the words come out dark and heavy over his brittle lips when he reads.

"No ... The flag is ... Ah-mer-ica. America is ... the plum. The peach. The wah-ter-mel-on. America is ... the gumdrop. The pump-kin seed. America is ... tell-ah-vision."

It's true. It's all wrote down on that yellow hand. I can read it along with him myself.

"Now ... The cross is ... Mex-i-co." He looks up to see if I'm paying attention, and when he sees I am he smiles at me and goes on. "Mexico is ... the wal-nut. The hazelnut. The ay-corn. Mexico is ... the rain-bow. The rain-bow is ... wooden. Mexico is ... woo-den."

I can see what he's driving at. He's been saying this sort of thing for the whole six years he's been here, but I never paid him any mind, figured he was no more than a talking statue, a thing made out of bone and arthritis, rambling on and on with these goofy definitions of his that didn't make a lick of sense. Now, at last, I see what he's saying. I'm trying to hold him for one last look to remember him, and that's what makes me look hard

enough to understand. He pauses and peers up at me again to make sure I'm getting it, and I want to yell out to him Yes, I see: Mexico is like the walnut; it's brown and hard and you feel it with your eye and it feels like the walnut! You're making sense, old man, a sense of your own. You're not crazy the way they think. Yes ... I see ...

But the fog's clogged my throat to where I can't make a sound. As he sifts away I see him bend back over that hand.

"Now ... The green sheep is ... Can-a-da. Canada is ... the fir tree. The wheat field. The cal-en-dar ..."

I strain to see him drifting away. I strain so hard my eyes ache and I have to close them, and when I open them again the colonel is gone. I'm floating by myself again, more lost than ever.

This is the time, I tell myself. I'm going for good.

There's old Pete, face like a searchlight. He's fifty yards off to my left, but I can see him plain as though there wasn't any fog at all. Or maybe he's up right close and real small, I can't be sure. He tells me once about how tired he is, and just his saying it makes me see his whole life on the railroad, see him working to figure out how to read a watch, breaking a sweat while he tries to get the right button in the right hole of his railroad overalls, doing his absolute damndest to keep up with a job that comes so easy to the others they can sit back in a chair padded with cardboard and read mystery stories and girlie books. Not that he ever really figured to keep up-he knew from the start he couldn't do that-but he had to try to keep up, just to keep them in sight. So for forty years he was able to live, if not right in the world of men, at least on the edge of it.

I can see all that, and be hurt by it, the way I was hurt by seeing things in the Army, in the war. The way I was hurt by seeing what happened to Papa and the tribe. I thought I'd got over seeing those things and fretting over them. There's no sense in it. There's nothing to be done.

"I'm tired," is what he says.

"I know you're tired, Pete, but I can't do you no good fretting about it. You know I can't."

Pete floats on the way of the old colonel.

Here comes Billy Bibbit, the way Pete come by. They're all filing by for a last look. I know Billy can't be more'n a few feet away, but he's so tiny he looks like he's a mile off. His face is out to me like the face of a beggar, needing so much more'n anybody can give. His mouth works like a little doll's mouth.

"And even when I pr-proposed, I flubbed it. I said 'Huh-honey, will you muh-muh-muh-muh-muh ...' till the girl broke out l-laughing."

Nurse's voice, I can't see where it comes from: "Your mother has spoken to me about this girl, Billy. Apparently she was quite a bit beneath you. What would you speculate it was about her that frightened you so, Billy?"

"I was in luh-love with her."

I can't do nothing for you either, Billy. You know that. None of us can. You got to understand that as soon as a man goes to help somebody, he leaves himself wide open. He has to be cagey, Billy, you should know that as well as anyone. What could I do? I can't fix your stuttering. I can't wipe the razorblade scars off your wrists or the cigarette burns off the back of your hands. I can't give you a new mother. And as far as the nurse riding you like this, rubbing your nose in your weakness till what little dignity you got left is gone and you shrink up to nothing from humiliation, I can't do anything about that, either. At Anzio, I saw a buddy of mine tied to a tree fifty yards from me, screaming for water, his face blistered in the sun. They wanted me to try to go out and help him. They'd of cut me in half from that farmhouse over there.

Put your face away, Billy.

They keep filing past.

It's like each face was a sign like one of those "I'm Blind" signs the dago accordion players in Portland hung around their necks, only these signs say "I'm tired" or "I'm scared" or "I'm dying of a bum liver" or "I'm all bound up with machinery and people pushing me alla time." I can read all the signs, it don't make any difference how little the print gets. Some of the faces are looking around at one another and could read the other fellow's if they would, but what's the sense? The faces blow past in the fog like confetti.

I'm further off than I've ever been. This is what it's like to be dead. I guess this is what it's like to be a Vegetable; you lose yourself in the fog.

You don't move. They feed your body till it finally stops eating; then they burn it. It's not so bad. There's no pain. I don't feel much of anything other than a touch of chill I figure will pass in time.

I see my commanding officer pinning notices on the bulletin board, what we're to wear today. I see the US Department of Interior bearing down on our little tribe with a gravel-crushing machine.

I see Papa come loping out of a draw and slow up to try and take aim at a big six-point buck springing off through the cedars. Shot after shot puffs out of the barrel, knocking dust all around the buck. I come out of the draw behind Papa and bring the buck down with my second shot just as it starts climbing the rimrock. I grin at Papa.

I never knew you to miss a shot like that before, Papa. Eye's gone, boy. Can't hold a bead. Sights on my gun just now was shakin' like a dog shittin' peach pits.

Papa, I'm telling you: that cactus moon of Sid's is gonna make you old before your time.

A man drinks that cactus moon of Sid's boy, he's already old before his time. Let's go gut that animal out before the flies blow him.

That's not even happening now. You see? There's nothing you can do about a happening out of the past like that.

Look there, my man ...

I hear whispers, black boys.

Look there, that old fool Broom, slipped off to sleep.

Tha's right, Chief Broom, tha's right. You sleep an' keep outta trouble. Yasss.

I'm not cold any more. I think I've about made it. I'm off to where the cold can't reach me. I can stay off here for good. I'm not scared any more. They can't reach me. Just the words reach me, and those're fading.

Well ... in as much as Billy has decided to walk out on the discussion, does anyone else have a problem to bring before the group?

As a matter of fact, ma'am, there does happen to be something ...

That's that McMurphy. He's far away. He's still trying to pull people out of the fog. Why don't he leave me be?

"... remember that vote we had a day or so back-about the TV time? Well, today's Friday and I thought I might just bring it up again, just to see if anybody else has picked up a little guts."

"Mr. McMurphy, the purpose of this meeting is therapy, group therapy, and I'm not certain these petty grievances-

"Yeah, yeah, the hell with that, we've heard it before. Me and some of the rest of the guys decided-

"One moment, Mr. McMurphy, let me pose a question to the group: do any of you feel that Mr. McMurphy is perhaps imposing his personal desires on some of you too much? I've been thinking you might be happier if he were moved to a different ward."

Nobody says anything for a minute. Then someone says, "Let him vote, why dontcha? Why ya want to ship him to Disturbed just for bringing up a vote? What's so wrong with changing time?"

"Why, Mr. Scanlon, as I recall, you refused to eat for three days until we allowed you to turn the set on at six instead of six-thirty."

"A man needs to see the world news, don't he? God, they coulda bombed Washington and it'd been a week before we'd of heard."

"Yes? And how do you feel about relinquishing your world news to watch a bunch of men play baseball?"

"We can't have both, huh? No, I suppose not. Well, what the dickens-I don't guess they'll bomb us this week." "Let's let him have the vote, Miss Ratched."

"Very well. But I think this is ample evidence of how much he is upsetting some of you patients. What is it you are proposing, Mr. McMurphy?"

"I'm proposing a revote on watching the TV in the afternoon."

"You're certain one more vote will satisfy you? We have more important things-

"It'll satisfy me. I just'd kind of like to see which of these birds has any guts and which doesn't."

"It's that kind of talk, Doctor Spivey, that makes me wonder if the patients wouldn't be more content if Mr. McMurphy were moved."

"Let him call the vote, why dontcha?"

"Certainly, Mr. Cheswick. A vote is now before the group. Will a show of hands be adequate, Mr. McMurphy, or are you going to insist on a secret ballot?"

"I want to see the hands. I want to see the hands that don't go up, too."

"Everyone in favor of changing the television time to the afternoon, raise his hand."

The first hand that comes up, I can tell, is McMurphy's, because of the bandage where that control panel cut into him when he tried to lift it. And then off down the slope I see them, other hands coming up out of the fog. It's like ... that big red hand of McMurphy's is reaching into the fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by their hands, dragging them blinking into the open. First one, then another, then the next. Right on down the line of Acutes, dragging them out of the fog till there they stand, all twenty of them, raising not just for watching TV, but against the Big Nurse, against her trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she's talked and acted and beat them down for years.

Nobody says anything. I can feel how stunned everybody is, the patients as well as the staff. The nurse can't figure what happened; yesterday, before he tried lifting that panel, there wasn't but four or five men might of voted. But when she talks she don't let it show in her voice how surprised she is.

"I count only twenty, Mr. McMurphy."

"Twenty? Well, why not? Twenty is all of us there-" His voice hangs as he realizes what she means. "Now hold on just a goddamned minute, lady-"

"I'm afraid the vote is defeated."

"Hold on just one goddamned minute!"

"There are forty patients on the ward, Mr. McMurphy. Forty patients, and only twenty voted. You must have a majority to change the ward policy. I'm afraid the vote is closed."

The hands are coming down across the room. The guys know they're whipped, are trying to slip back into the safety of the fog. McMurphy is on his feet.

"Well, I'll be a sonofabitch. You mean to tell me that's how you're gonna pull it? Count the votes of those old birds over there too?"

"Didn't you explain the voting procedure to him, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid-a majority is called for, McMurphy. She's right, she's right."

"A majority, Mr. McMurphy; it's in the ward constitution." "And I suppose the way to change the damned constitution is with a majority vote. Sure. Of all the chicken-shit things I've ever seen, this by God takes the cake!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. McMurphy, but you'll find it written in the policy if you'd care for me to-"

"So this's how you work this democratic bullshit-hell's bells!"

"You seem upset, Mr. McMurphy. Doesn't he seem upset, Doctor? I want you to note this."

"Don't give me that noise, lady. When a guy's getting screwed he's got a right to holler. And we've been damn well screwed."

"Perhaps, Doctor, in view of the patient's condition, we should bring this meeting to a close early today-"

"Wait! Wait a minute, let me talk to some of those old guys."

"The vote is closed, Mr. McMurphy."

"Let me talk to 'em."

He's coming across the day room at us. He gets bigger and bigger, and he's burning red in the face. He reaches into the fog and tries to drag Ruckly to the surface because Ruckly's the youngest.

"What about you, buddy? You want to watch the World Series? Baseball? Baseball games? Just raise that hand up there-"

"Fffffffuck da wife."

"All right, forget it. You, partner, how about you? What was your name-Ellis? What do you say, Ellis, to watching a ball game on TV? Just raise your hand. ..."

Ellis's hands are nailed to the wall, can't be counted as a vote.

"I said the voting is closed, Mr. McMurphy. You're just making a spectacle of yourself."

He don't pay any attention to her. He comes on down the line of
Chronics. "C'mon, c'mon, just one vote from you birds, just raise a hand.
Show her you can still do it."

"I'm tired," says Pete and wags his head.

"The night is ... the Pacific Ocean." The Colonel is reading off his hand,
can't be bothered with voting.

"One of you guys, for cryin' out loud! This is where you get the edge,
don't you see that? We have to do this-or we're whipped! Don't a one of
you clucks know what I'm talking about enough to give us a hand? You,
Gabriel? George? No? You, Chief, what about you?

He's standing over me in the mist. Why won't he leave me be?

"Chief, you're our last bet."

The Big Nurse is folding her papers; the other nurses are standing up
around her. She finally gets to her feet.

"The meeting is adjourned, then, I hear her say. "And I'd like to see the
staff down in the staff room in about an hour. So, if there is nothing el-"

It's too late to stop it now. McMurphy did something to it that first day,
put some kind of hex on it with his hand so it won't act like I order it.
There's no sense in it, any fool can see; I wouldn't do it on my own. Just
by the way the nurse is staring at me with her mouth empty of words I can
see I'm in for trouble, but I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires
hooked to it, lifting it slow just to get me out of the fog and into the open
where I'm fair game. He's doing it, wires ...

No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself.

McMurphy whoops and drags me standing, pounding my back.

"Twenty-one! The Chief's vote makes it twenty-one! And by God if that
ain't a majority I'll eat my hat!"

"Yippee," Cheswick yells. The other Acutes are coming across toward
me.

"The meeting was closed," she says. Her smile is still there, but the back
of her neck as she walks out of the day room and into the Nurses' Station,
is red and swelling like she'll blow apart any second.

But she don't blow up, not right off, not until about an hour later. Behind the glass her smile is twisted and queer, like we've never seen before. She just sits. I can see her shoulders rise and fall as she breathes.

McMurphy looks up at the clock and he says it's time for the game. He's over by the drinking fountain with some of the other Acutes, down on his knees scouring off the baseboard. I'm sweeping out the broom closet for the tenth time that day. Scanlon and Harding, they got the buffer going up and down the hall, polishing the new wax into shining figure eights. McMurphy says again that he guesses it must be game time and he stands up, leaves the scouring rag where it lies. Nobody else stops work. McMurphy walks past the window where she's glaring out at him and grins at her like he knows he's got her whipped now. When he tips his head back and winks at her she gives that little sideways jerk of her head.

Everybody keeps on at what he's doing, but they all watch out of the corners of their eyes while he drags his armchair out to in front of the TV set, then switches on the set and sits down. A picture swirls onto the screen of a parrot out on the baseball field singing razor-blade songs. McMurphy gets up and turns up the sound to drown out the music coming down from the speaker in the ceiling, and he drags another chair in front of him and sits down and crosses his feet on the chair and leans back and lights a cigarette. He scratches his belly and yawns.

"Hoo-weee! Man, all I need me now is a can of beer and a red-hot."

We can see the nurse's face get red and her mouth work as she stares at him. She looks around for a second and sees everybody's watching what she's going to do—even the black boys and the little nurses sneaking looks at her, and the residents beginning to drift in for the staff meeting, they're watching. Her mouth clamps shut. She looks back at McMurphy and waits till the razor-blade song is finished; then she gets up and goes to the steel door where the controls are, and she flips a switch and the TV picture swirls back into the gray. Nothing is left on the screen but a little eye of light beading right down on McMurphy sitting there.

That eye don't faze him a bit. 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 in his red hair till he has to lean back to see out from under the brim.

And sits that way, with his hands crossed behind his head and his feet stuck out in a chair, a smoking cigarette sticking out from under his hatbrim-watching the TV screen.

The nurse stands this as long as she can; then she comes to the door of the Nurses' Station and calls across to him he'd better help the men with the housework. He ignores her.

"I said, Mr. McMurphy, that you are supposed to be working during these hours." Her voice has a tight whine like an electric saw ripping through pine. "Mr. McMurphy, I'm warning you!"

Everybody's stopped what he was doing. She looks around her, then takes a step out of the Nurses' Station toward McMurphy.

"You're committed, you realize. You are ... under the jurisdiction of me ... the staff." She's holding up a fist, all those red-orange fingernails burning into her palm. "Under jurisdiction and control-"

Harding shuts off the buffer, and leaves it in the hall, and goes pulls him a chair up alongside McMurphy and sits down and lights him a cigarette too.

"Mr. Harding! You return to your scheduled duties!"

I think how her voice sounds like it hit a nail, and this strikes me so funny I almost laugh.

"Mr. Har-ding!"

Then Cheswick goes and gets him a chair, and then Billy Bibbit goes, and then Scanlon and then Fredrickson and Sefelt, and then we all put down our mops and brooms and scouring rags and we all go pull us chairs up.

"You men-Stop this. Stop!"

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 the baseball game clear as day, and she's ranting and screaming behind us.

If somebody'd of come in and took a look, men watching a blank TV, a fifty-year-old woman hollering and squealing at the back of their heads about discipline and order and recriminations, they'd of thought the whole bunch was crazy as loons.

part 2

16

Just at the edge of my vision I can see that white enamel face in the Nurses' Station, teetering over the desk, see it warp and flow as it tries to pull back into shape. The rest of the guys are watching too, though they're trying to act like they aren't. They're trying to act like they still got their eyes on nothing but that blank TV in front of us, but anyone can see they're all sneaking looks at the Big Nurse behind her glass there, just the same as I am. For the first time she's on the other side of the glass and getting a taste of how it feels to be watched when you wish more than anything else to be able to pull a green shade between your face and all the eyes that you can't get away from.

The residents, the black boys, all the little nurses, they're watching her too, waiting for her to go down the hall where it's time for the meeting she herself called, and waiting to see how she'll act now that it's known she can be made to lose control. She knows they're watching, but she don't move. Not even when they start strolling down to the staff room without her. I notice all the machinery in the wall is quiet, like it's still waiting for her to move.

There's no more fog any place.

All of a sudden I remember I'm supposed to clean the staff room. I always go down and clean the staff room during these meetings they have, been doing it for years. But now I'm too scared to get out of my chair. The staff always let me clean the room because they didn't think I could hear, but now that they saw me lift my hand when McMurphy told me to, won't they know I can hear? Won't they figure I been hearing all these years, listening to secrets meant only for their ears? What'll they do to me in that staff room if they know that?

Still, they expect me to be in there. If I'm not, they'll know for sure that I can hear, be way ahead of me, thinking, You see? He isn't in here cleaning, don't that prove it? It's obvious what's to be done. ...

I'm just getting the full force of the dangers we let ourselves in for when we let McMurphy lure us out of the fog.

There's a black boy leaning against the wall near the door, arms crossed, pink tongue tip darting back and forth over his lips, watching us sitting in

front of the TV set. His eyes dart back and forth like his tongue and stop on me, and I see his leather eyelids raise a little. He watches me for a long time, and I know he's wondering about the way I acted in the group meeting. Then he comes off the wall with a lurch, breaking contact, and goes to the broom closet and brings back a bucket of soapy water and a sponge, drags my arms up and hangs the bucket bale over it, like hanging a kettle on a fireplace boom.

"Le's go, Chief," he says. "Le's get up and get to your duties."

I don't move. The bucket rocks on my arm. I don't make a sign I heard. He's trying to trick me. He asks me again to get up, and when I don't move he rolls his eyes up to the ceiling and sighs, reaches down and takes my collar, and tugs a little, and I stand up. He stuffs the sponge in my pocket and points up the hall where the staff room is, and I go.

And while I'm walking up the hall with the bucket, zoom, the Big Nurse comes past me with all her old calm speed and power and turns into the door. That makes me wonder.

Out in the hall all by myself, I notice how clear it is-no fog any place. It's a little cold where the nurse just went past, and the white tubes in the ceiling circulate frozen light like rods of glowing ice, like frosted refrigerator coils rigged up to glow white. The rods stretch down to the staff-room door where the nurse just turned in at the end of the hall-a heavy steel door like the door of the Shock Shop in Building One, except there are numbers printed on this one, and this one has a little glass peephole up head-high to let the staff peek out at who's knocking. As I get closer I see there's light seeping out this peephole, green light, bitter as bile. The staff meeting is about to start in there, is why there's this green seepage; it'll be all over the walls and windows by the time the meeting is halfway through, for me to sponge off and squeeze in my bucket, use the water later to clear the drains in the latrine.

Cleaning the staff room is always bad. The things I've had to clean up in these meetings nobody'd believe; horrible things, poisons manufactured right out of skin pores and acids in the air strong enough to melt a man. I've seen it.

I been in some meetings where the table legs strained and contorted and the chairs knotted and the walls gritted against one another till you could of wrung sweat out the room. I been in meetings where they kept talking

about a patient so long that the patient materialized in the flesh, nude on the coffee table in front of them, vulnerable to any fiendish notion they took; they'd have him smeared around in an awful mess before they were finished.

That's why they have me at the staff meetings, because they can be such a messy affair and somebody has to clean up, and since the staff room is open only during the meetings it's got to be somebody they think won't be able to spread the word what's going on. That's me. I been at it so long, sponging and dusting and mopping this staff room and the old wooden one at the other place, that the staff usually don't even notice me; I move around in my chores, and they see right through me like I wasn't there-the only thing they'd miss if I didn't show up would be the sponge and the water bucket floating around.

But this time when I tap at the door and the Big Nurse looks through the peephole she looks dead at me, and she takes longer than ordinary unlocking that door to let me in. Her face has come back into shape, strong as ever, it seems to me. Everybody else goes ahead spooning sugar in their coffee and borrowing cigarettes, the way they do before every meeting, but there's a tenseness in the air. I think it's because of me at first. Then I notice that the Big Nurse hasn't even sat down, hasn't even bothered to get herself a cup of coffee.

She lets me slip through the door and stabs me again with both eyes as I go past her, closes that door when I'm in and locks it, and pivots around and glares at me some more. I know she's suspicious. I thought she might be too upset by the way McMurphy defied her to pay any attention to me, but she don't look shook at all. She's clear-headed and wondering now just how did Mr. Bromden hear that Acute McMurphy asking him to raise his hand on that vote? She's wondering how did he know to lay down his mop and go sit with the Acutes in front of that TV set? None of the other Chronicles did that. She's wondering if it isn't time we did some checking on our Mr. Chief Bromden.

I put my back to her and dig into the corner with my sponge. I lift the sponge up above my head so everybody in the room can see how it's covered with green slime and how hard I'm working; then I bend over and rub harder than ever. But hard as I work and hard as I try to act like I'm not aware of her back there, I can still feel her standing at the door and

drilling into my skull till in a minute she's going to break through, till I'm just about to give up and yell and tell them everything if she don't take those eyes off me.

Then she realizes that she's being stared at too-by all the rest of the staff. Just like she's wondering about me, they are wondering about her and what she's planning to do about that redhead back down there in the day room. They're watching to see what she'll say about him, and they don't care anything about some fool Indian on his hands and knees in the corner. They're waiting for her so she quits looking at me and goes and draws a cup of coffee and sits down, stirs sugar in it so careful the spoon never touches the side of the cup.

It's the doctor who starts things off. "Now, people, if we can get things rolling?"

He smiles around at the residents sipping coffee. He's trying not to look at the Big Nurse. She's sitting there so silent it makes him nervous and fidgety. He grabs out his glasses and puts them on for a look at his watch, goes to winding it while he talks.

"Fifteen after. It's past time we started. Now. Miss Ratched, as most of you know, called this get-together. She phoned me before the Therapeutic Community meeting and said that in her opinion McMurphy was due to constitute a disturbance on the ward. Ever so intuitive, considering what went on a few minutes ago, don't you think?"

He stops winding his watch on account of it's tight enough another twist is going to spray it all over the place, and he sits there smiling at it, drumming the back of his hand with pink little fingers, waiting. Usually at about this point in the meeting she'll take over, but she doesn't say anything.

"After today," the doctor goes on, "no one can say that this is an ordinary man we're dealing with. No, certainly not. And he is a disturbing factor, that's obvious. So-ah-as I see it, our course in this discussion is to decide what action to take in dealing with him. I believe the nurse called this meeting-correct me if I'm off base here, Miss Ratched-to talk the situation out and unify the staff's opinion of what should be done about Mr. McMurphy?"

He gives her a pleading look, but she still doesn't say anything. She's lifted her face toward the ceiling, checking for dirt most likely, and doesn't appear to have heard a thing he's been saying.

The doctor turns to the line of residents across the room; all of them got the same leg crossed and coffee cup on the same knee. "You fellows," the doctor says, "I realize you haven't had adequate time to arrive at a proper diagnosis of the patient, but you have had a chance at observing him in action. What do you think?"

The question pops their heads up. Cleverly, he's put them on the carpet too. They all look from him to the Big Nurse. Some way she has regained all her old power in a few short minutes. Just sitting there, smiling up at the ceiling and not saying anything, she has taken control again and made everyone aware that she's the force in here to be dealt with. If these boys don't play it just right they're liable to finish their training up in Portland at the alky hospital. They begin to fidget around like the doctor.

"He's quite a disturbing influence, all right." The first boy plays it safe.

They all sip their coffee and think about that. Then the next one says, "And he could constitute an actual danger."

"That's true, that's true," the doctor says.

The boy thinks he may have found the key and goes on. "Quite a danger, in fact," he says and moves forward in his chair. "Keep in mind that this man performed violent acts for the sole purpose of getting away from the work farm and into the comparative luxury of this hospital."

"Planned violent acts," the first boy says.

And the third boy mutters, "Of course, the very nature of this plan could indicate that he is simply a shrewd con man, and not mentally ill at all."

He glances around to see how this strikes her and sees she still hasn't moved or given any sign. But the rest of the staff sits there glaring at him like he's said some awful vulgar thing. He sees how he's stepped way out of bounds and tries to bring it off as a joke by giggling and adding, "You know, like 'He Who Marches Out Of Step Hears Another Drum' "-but it's too late. The first resident turns on him after setting down his cup of coffee and reaching in his pocket for a pipe big as your fist.

"Frankly, Alvin," he says to the third boy, "I'm disappointed in you. Even if one hadn't read his history all one should need to do is pay attention to his behavior on the ward to realize how absurd the suggestion is. This man is not only very very sick, but I believe he is definitely a Potential Assaultive. I think that is what Miss Ratched was suspecting when she called this meeting. Don't you recognize the arch type of psychopath? I've never heard of a clearer case. This man is a Napoleon, a Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun."

Another one joins in. He remembers the nurse's comments about Disturbed. "Robert's right, Alvin. Didn't you see the way the man acted out there today? When one of his schemes was thwarted he was up out of his chair, on the verge of violence. You tell us, Doctor Spivey, what do his records say about violence?"

"There is a marked disregard for discipline and authority," the doctor says.

"Right. His history shows, Alvin, that time and again he has acted out his hostilities against authority figures-in school, in the service, in jail! And I think that his performance after the voting furor today is as conclusive an indication as we can have of what to expect in the future." He stops and frowns into his pipe, puts it back in his mouth, and strikes a match and sucks the flame into the bowl with a loud popping sound. When it's lit he sneaks a look up through the yellow cloud of smoke at the Big Nurse; he must take her silence as agreement because he goes on, more enthusiastic and certain than before.

"Pause for a minute and imagine, Alvin," he says, his words cottony with smoke, "imagine what will happen to one of us when we're alone in Individual Therapy with Mr. McMurphy. Imagine you are approaching a particularly painful breakthrough and he decides he's just had all he can take of your-how would he put it?-your 'damn fool collitch-kid pryin'! You tell him he mustn't get hostile and he says 'to hell with that,' and tell him to calm down, in an authoritarian voice, of course, and here he comes, all two hundred and ten red-headed psychopathic Irishman pounds of him, right across the interviewing table at you. Are you-are any of us, for that matter-prepared to deal with Mr. McMurphy when these moments arise?"

He puts his size-ten pipe back in the corner of his mouth and spreads his hands on his knees and waits. Everybody's thinking about McMurphy's

thick red arms and scarred hands and how his neck comes out of his T-shirt like a rusty wedge. The resident named Alvin has turned pale at the thought, like that yellow pipe smoke his buddy was blowing at him had stained his face.

"So you believe it would be wise," the doctor asks, "to send him up to Disturbed?"

"I believe it would be at the very least safe," the guy with the pipe answers, closing his eyes.

"I'm afraid I'll have to withdraw my suggestion and go along with Robert," Alvin tells them all, "if only for my own protection."

They all laugh. They're all more relaxed now, certain they've come round to the plan she was wanting. They all have a sip of coffee on it except the guy with the pipe, and he has a big to-do with the thing going out all the time, goes through a lot of matches and sucking and puffing and popping of his lips. It finally smokes up again to suit him, and he says, a little proudly, "Yes, Disturbed Ward for ol' Red McMurphy, I'm afraid. You know what I think, observing him these few days?"

"Schizophrenic reaction?" Alvin asks.

Pipe shakes his head.

"Latent Homosexual with Reaction Formation?" the third one says.

Pipe shakes his head again and shuts his eyes. "No," he says and smiles round the room, "Negative Oedipal."

They all congratulate him.

"Yes, I think there is a lot pointing to it," he says. "But whatever the final diagnosis is, we must keep one thing in mind: we're not dealing with an ordinary man."

"You-are very, very wrong, Mr. Gideon." It's the Big Nurse.

Everybody's head jerks toward her-mine too, but I check myself and pass the motion off like I'm trying to scrub a speck I just discovered on the wall above my head. Everybody's confused all to hell for sure now. They figured they were proposing just what she'd want, just what she was planning to propose in the meeting herself. I thought so too. I've seen her send men half the size of McMurphy up to Disturbed for no more reason than there was a chance they might spit on somebody; now she's got this

bull of a man who's bucked her and everybody else on the staff, a guy she all but said was on his way off the ward earlier this afternoon, and she says no.

"No. I don't agree. Not at all." She smiles around at all of them. "I don't agree that he should be sent up to Disturbed, which would simply be an easy way of passing our problem on to another ward, and I don't agree that he is some kind of extraordinary being-some kind of 'super' psychopath."

She waits but nobody is about to disagree. For the first time she takes a sip of her coffee; the cup comes away from her mouth with that red-orange color on it. I stare at the rim of the cup in spite of myself; she couldn't be wearing lipstick that color. That color on the rim of the cup must be from heat, touch of her lips set it smoldering.

"I'll admit that my first thought when I began to recognize Mr. McMurphy for the disturbing force that he is was that he should most definitely be sent up to Disturbed. But now I believe it is too late. Would removing him undo the harm that he has done to our ward? I don't believe it would, not after this afternoon. I believe if he were sent to Disturbed now it would be exactly what the patients would expect. He would be a martyr to them. They would never be given the opportunity to see that this man is not an-as you put it, Mr. Gideon-'extraordinary person.' "

She takes another sip and sets the cup on the table; the whack of it sounds like a gavel; all three residents sit bold upright.

"No. He isn't extraordinary. He is simply a man and no more, and is subject to all the fears and all the cowardice and all the timidity that any other man is subject to. Given a few more days, I have a very strong feeling that he will prove this, to us as well as the rest of the patients. If we keep him on the ward I am certain his brashness will subside, his self-made rebellion will dwindle to nothing, and"-she smiles, knowing something nobody else does-"that our redheaded hero will cut himself down to something the patients will all recognize and lose respect for: a braggart and a blowhard of the type who may climb up on a soapbox and shout for a following, the way we've all seen Mr. Cheswick do, then back down the moment there is any real danger to him personally."

"Patient McMurphy"-the boy with the pipe feels he should try to defend his position and save face just a little bit "does not strike me as a coward."

I expect her to get mad, but she doesn't; she just gives him that let's-wait-and-see look and says, "I didn't say he was exactly a coward, Mr. Gideon; oh, no. He's simply very fond of someone. As a psychopath, he's much too fond of a Mr. Randle Patrick McMurphy to subject him to any needless danger." She gives the boy a smile that puts his pipe out for sure this time. "If we just wait for a while, our hero will-what is it you college boys say?-give up his bit? Yes?"

"But that may take weeks-" the boy starts.

"We have weeks," she says. She stands up, looking more pleased with herself than I've seen her look since McMurphy came to trouble her a week ago. "We have weeks, or months, or even years if need be. Keep in mind that Mr. McMurphy is committed. The length of time he spends in this hospital is entirely up to us. Now, if there is nothing else ..."

17

The way the Big Nurse acted so confident in that staff meeting, that worried me for a while, but it didn't make any difference to McMurphy. All weekend, and the next week, he was just as hard on her and her black boys as he ever was, and the patients were loving it. He'd won his bet; he'd got the nurse's goat the way he said he would, and had collected on it, but that didn't stop him from going right ahead and acting like he always had, hollering up and down the hall, laughing at the black boys, frustrating the whole staff, even going so far as to step up to the Big Nurse in the hall one time and ask her, if she didn't mind tellin', just what was the actual inch-by-inch measurement on them great big of breasts that she did her best to conceal but never could. She walked right on past, ignoring him just like she chose to ignore the way nature had tagged her with those outsized badges of femininity, just like she was above him, and sex, and everything else that's weak and of the flesh.

When she posted work assignments on the bulletin board, and he read that she'd given him latrine duty, he went to her office and knocked on that window of hers and personally thanked her for the honor, and told her he'd think of her every time he swabbed out a urinal. She told him that wasn't necessary; just do his work and that would be sufficient, thank you.

The most work he did on them was to run a brush around the bowls once or twice apiece, singing some song as loud as he could in time to the swishing brush; then he'd splash in some Clorox and he'd be through.

"That's clean enough," he'd tell the black boy who got after him for the way he hurried through his job, "maybe not clean enough for some people, but myself I plan to piss in 'em, not eat lunch out of 'em." And when the Big Nurse gave in to the black boy's frustrated pleading and came in to check McMurphy's cleaning assignment personally, she brought a little compact mirror and she held it under the rim of the bowls. She walked along shaking her head and saying, "Why, this is an outrage ... an outrage ..." at every bowl. McMurphy sidled right along beside her, winking down his nose and saying in answer, "No; that's a toilet bowl ... a toilet bowl."

But she didn't lose control again, or even act at all like she might. She would get after him about the toilets, using that same terrible, slow, patient pressure she used on everybody, as he stood there in front of her, looking like a little kid getting a bawling out, hanging his head, and the toe of one boot on top of the other, saying, "I try and try, ma'am, but I'm afraid I'll never make my mark as head man of the crappers."

Once he wrote something on a slip of paper, strange writing that looked like a foreign alphabet, and stuck it up under one of those toilet bowl rims with a wad of gum; when she came to that toilet with her mirror she gave a short gasp at what she read reflected and dropped her mirror in the toilet. But she didn't lose control. That doll's face and that doll's smile were ' forged in confidence. She stood up from the toilet bowl and gave him a look that would peel paint and told him it was his job to make the latrine cleaner, not dirtier.

Actually, there wasn't much cleaning of any kind getting done on the ward. As soon as it came time in the afternoon when the schedule called for house duties, it was also time for the baseball games to be on TV, and everybody went and lined the chairs up in front of the set and they didn't move out of them until dinner. It didn't make any difference that the power was shut off in the Nurses' Station and we couldn't see a thing but that blank gray screen, because McMurphy'd entertain us for hours, sit and talk and tell all kinds of stories, like how he made a thousand dollars in one month driving truck for a gyppo outfit and then lost every penny of it to some Canadian in an ax-throwing contest, or how he and a buddy slick-tongued a guy into riding a brahma bull at a rodeo in Albany, into riding him while he wore a blindfold: "Not the bull, I mean, the guy had on the blindfold." They told the guy that the blindfold would keep him from getting dizzy when the bull went to spinning; then, when they got a

bandanna wrapped around his eyes to where he couldn't see, they set him on that bull backward. McMurphy told it a couple of times and slapped his thigh with his hat and laughed everytime he remembered it. "Blindfolded and backwards ... And I'm a sonofagun if he didn't stay the limit and won the purse. And I was second; if he'd been throwed I'd of took first and a neat little purse. I swear the next time I pull a stunt like that I'll blindfold the damn bull instead."

Whack his leg and throw back his head and laugh and laugh, digging his thumb into the ribs of whoever was sitting next to him, trying to get him to laugh too.

There was times that week when I'd hear that full-throttled laugh, watch him scratching his belly and stretching and yawning and leaning back to wink at whoever he was joking with, everything coming to him just as natural as drawing breath, and I'd quit worrying about the Big Nurse and the Combine behind her. I'd think he was strong enough being his own self that he would never back down the way she was hoping he would. I'd think, maybe he truly is something extraordinary. He's what he is, that's it. Maybe that makes him strong enough, being what he is. The Combine hasn't got to him in all these years; what makes that nurse think she's gonna be able to do it in a few weeks? He's not gonna let them twist him and manufacture him.

And later, hiding in the latrine from the black boys, I'd take a look at my own self in the mirror and wonder how it was possible that anybody could manage such an enormous thing as being what he was. There'd be my face in the mirror, dark and hard with big, high cheekbones like the cheek underneath them had been hacked out with a hatchet, eyes all black and hard and mean-looking, just like Papa's eyes or the eyes of all those tough, mean-looking Indians you see on TV, and I'd think, That ain't me, that ain't my face. It wasn't even me when I was trying to be that face. I wasn't even really me then; I was just being the way I looked, the way people wanted. It don't seem like I ever have been me. How can McMurphy be what he is?

I was seeing him different than when he first came in; I was seeing more to him than just big hands and red sideburns and a broken-nosed grin. I'd see him do things that didn't fit with his face or hands, things like painting a picture at OT with real paints on a blank paper with no lines or numbers

anywhere on it to tell him where to paint, or like writing letters to somebody in a beautiful flowing hand. How could a man who looked like him paint pictures or write letters to people, or be upset and worried like I saw him once when he got a letter back? These were the kind of things you expected from Billy Bibbit or Harding. Harding had hands that looked like they should have done paintings, though they never did; Harding trapped his hands and forced them to work sawing planks for doghouses. McMurphy wasn't like that. He hadn't let what he looked like run his life one way or the other, any more than he'd let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit.

I was seeing lots of things different. I figured the fog machine had broke down in the walls when they turned it up too high for that meeting on Friday, so now they weren't able to circulate fog and gas and foul up the way things looked. For the first time in years I was seeing people with none of that black outline they used to have, and one night I was even able to see out the windows.

Like I explained, most nights before they ran me to bed they gave me this pill, knocked me out and kept me out. Or if something went haywire with the dose and I woke up, my eyes were all crusted over and the dorm was full of smoke, wires in the walls loaded to the limit, twisting and sparking death and hate in the air-all too much for me to take so I'd ram my head under the pillow and try to get back to sleep. Every time I peeked back out there would be the smell of burning hair and a sound like sidemeat on a hot griddle.

But this one night, a few nights after the big meeting, I woke up and the dorm was clean and silent; except for the soft breathing of the men and the stuff rattling around loose under the brittle ribs of the two old Vegetables, it was dead quiet. A window was up, and the air in the dorm was clear and had a taste to it made me feel kind of giddy and drunk, gave me this sudden yen to get up out of bed and do something.

I slid from between the sheets and walked barefoot across the cold tile between the beds. I felt the tile with my feet and wondered how many times, how many thousand times, had I run a mop over this same tile floor and never felt it at all. That mopping seemed like a dream to me, like I couldn't exactly believe all those years of it had really happened. Only that cold linoleum under my feet was real right then, only that moment.

I walked among the guys heaped in long white rows like snowbanks, careful not to bump into somebody, till I came to the wall with the windows. I walked down the windows to one where the shade popped softly in and out with the breeze, and I pressed my forehead up against the mesh. The wire was cold and sharp, and I rolled my head against it from side to side to feel it with my cheeks, and I smelled the breeze. It's fall coming, I thought, I can smell that sour-molasses smell of silage, clanging the air like a bell-smell somebody's been burning oak leaves, left them to smolder overnight because they're too green.

It's fall coming, I kept thinking, fall coming; just like that was the strangest thing ever happened. Fall. Right outside here it was spring a while back, then it was summer, and now it's fall-that's sure a curious idea.

I realized I still had my eyes shut. I had shut them when I put my face to the screen, like I was scared to look outside. Now I had to open them. I looked out the window and saw for the first time how the hospital was out in the country. The moon was 'low in the sky over the pastureland; the face of it was scarred and scuffed where it had just torn up out of the snarl of scrub oak and madrone trees on the horizon. The stars up close to the moon were pale; they got brighter and braver the farther they got out of the circle of light ruled by the giant moon. It called to mind how I noticed the exact same thing when I was off on a hunt with Papa and the uncles and I lay rolled in blankets Grandma had woven, lying off a piece from where the men hunkered around the fire as they passed a quart jar of cactus liquor in a silent circle. I watched that big Oregon prairie moon above me put all the stars around it to shame. I kept awake watching, to see if the moon ever got dimmer or if the stars got brighter, till the dew commenced to drift onto my cheeks and I had to pull a blanket over my head.

Something moved on the grounds down beneath my window-cast a long spider of shadow out across the grass as it ran out of sight behind a hedge. When it ran back to where I could get a better look, I saw it was a dog, a young, gangly mongrel slipped off from home to find out about things went on after dark. He was sniffing digger squirrel holes, not with a notion to go digging after one but just to get an idea what they were up to at this hour. He'd run his muzzle down a hole, butt up in the air and tail going, then dash off to another. The moon glistened around him on the wet grass, and when he ran he left tracks like dabs of dark paint spattered across the

blue shine of the lawn. Galloping from one particularly interesting hole to the next, he became so took with what was coming off-the moon up there, the night, the breeze full of smells so wild makes a young dog drunk-that he had to lie down on his back and roll. He twisted and thrashed around like a fish, back bowed and belly up, and when he got to his feet and shook himself a spray came off him in the moon like silver scales.

He sniffed all the holes over again one quick one, to get the smells down good, then suddenly froze still with one paw lifted and his head tilted, listening. I listened too, but I couldn't hear anything except the popping of the window shade. I listened for a long time. Then, from a long way off, I heard a high, laughing gabble, faint and coming closer. Canada honkers going south for the winter. I remembered all the hunting and belly-crawling I'd ever done trying to kill a honker, and that I never got one.

I tried to look where the dog was looking to see if I could find the flock, but it was too dark. The honking came closer and closer till it seemed like they must be flying right through the dorm, right over my head. Then they crossed the moon-a black, weaving necklace, drawn into a V by that lead goose. For an instant that lead goose was right in the center of that circle, bigger than the others, a black cross opening and closing, then he pulled his V out of sight into the sky once more.

I listened to them fade away till all I could hear was my memory of the sound. The dog could still hear them a long time after me. He was still standing with his paw up; he hadn't moved or barked when they flew over. When he couldn't hear them any more either, he commenced to lope off in the direction they had gone, toward the highway, loping steady and solemn like he had an appointment. I held my breath and I could hear the flap of his big paws on the grass as he loped; then I could hear a car speed up out of a turn. The headlights loomed over the rise and peered ahead down the highway. I watched the dog and the car making for the same spot of pavement.

The dog was almost to the rail fence at the edge of the grounds when I felt somebody slip up behind me. Two people. I didn't turn, but I knew it was the black boy named Geever and the nurse with the birthmark and the crucifix. I heard a whir of fear start up in my head. The black boy took my arm and pulled me around. "I'll get 'im," he says.

"It's chilly at the window there, Mr. Bromden," the nurse tells me. "Don't you think we'd better climb back into our nice toasty bed?"

"He cain't hear," the black boy tells her. "I'll take him. He's always untying his sheet and roaming 'round."

And I move and she draws back a step and says, "Yes, please do," to the black boy. She's fiddling with the chain runs down her neck. At home she locks herself in the bathroom out of sight, strips down, and rubs that crucifix all over that stain running from the corner of her mouth in a thin line down across her shoulders and breasts. She rubs and rubs and hails Mary to beat thunder, but the stain stays. She looks in the mirror, sees it's darker'n ever. Finally takes a wire brush used to take paint off boats and scrubs the stain away, puts a nightgown on over the raw, oozing hide, and crawls in bed.

But she's too full of the stuff. While she's asleep it rises in her throat and into her mouth, drains out of that corner of her mouth like purple spit and down her throat, over her body. In the morning she sees how she's stained again and somehow she figures it's not really from inside her-how could it be? a good Catholic girl like her?-and she figures it's on account of working evenings among a whole wardful of people like me. It's all our fault, and she's going to get us for it if it's the last thing she does. I wish McMurphy'd wake up and help me.

"You get him tied in bed, Mr. Geever, and I'll prepare a medication."

18

In the group meetings there were gripes coming up that had been buried so long the thing being griped about had already changed. Now that McMurphy was around to back them up, the guys started letting fly at everything that had ever happened on the ward they didn't like.

"Why does the dorms have to be locked on the weekends?" Cheswick or somebody would ask. "Can't a fellow even have the weekends to himself?"

"Yeah, Miss Ratched," McMurphy would say. "Why?"

"If the dorms were left open, we have learned from past experience, you men would return to bed after breakfast."

"Is that a mortal sin? I mean, normal people get to sleep late on the weekends."

"You men are in this hospital," she would say like she was repeating it for the hundredth time, "because of your proven inability to adjust to society. The doctor and I believe that every minute spent in the company of others, with some exceptions, is therapeutic, while every minute spent brooding alone only increases your separation."

"Is that the reason that there has to be at least eight guys together before they can be taken off the ward to OT or PT or one of them Ts?"

"That is correct."

"You mean it's sick to want to be off by yourself?"

"I didn't say that-"

"You mean if I go into latrine to relieve myself I should take along at least seven buddies to keep me from brooding on the can?"

Before she could come up with an answer to that, Cheswick bounced to his feet and hollered at her, "Yeah, is that what you mean?" and the other Acutes sitting around the meeting would say, "Yeah, yeah, is that what you mean?"

She would wait till they all died down and the meeting was quiet again, then say quietly, "If you men can calm yourself enough to act like a group of adults at a discussion instead of children on the playground, we will ask the doctor if he thinks it would be beneficial to consider a change in the ward policy at this time. Doctor?"

Everybody knew the kind of answer the doctor would make, and before he even had the chance Cheswick would be off on another complaint. "Then what about our cigarettes, Miss Ratched?"

"Yeah, what about that," the Acutes grumbled.

McMurphy turned to the doctor and put the question straight to him this time before the nurse had a chance to answer. "Yeah, Doc, what about our cigarettes? How does she have the right to keep the cigarettes-our cigarettes-piled up on her desk in there like she owned them, bleed a pack out to us now and again whenever she feels like it. I don't care much about the idea of buying a carton of cigarettes and having somebody tell me when I can smoke them."

The doctor tilted his head so he could look at the nurse through his glasses. He hadn't heard about her taking over the extra cigarettes to stop

the gambling. "What's this about cigarettes, Miss Ratched? I don't believe I've heard-"

"I feel, Doctor, that three and four and sometimes five packages of cigarettes a day are entirely too many for a man to smoke. That is what seemed to be happening last week-after Mr. McMurphy's arrival-and that is why I thought it might be best to impound the cartons the men purchased at the canteen and allow each man only one pack a day."

McMurphy leaned forward and whispered loudly to Cheswick, "Hear tell her next decision is about trips to the can; not only does a guy have to take his seven buddies into the latrine with him but he's also limited to two trips a day, to be taken when she says so."

And leaned back in his chair and laughed so hard that nobody else could say anything for nearly a minute.

McMurphy was getting a lot of kick out of all the ruckus he was raising, and I think was a little surprised that he wasn't getting a lot of pressure from the staff too, especially surprised that the Big Nurse wasn't having any more to say to him than she was. "I thought the old buzzard was tougher than this," he said to Harding after one meeting. "Maybe all she needed to straighten her out was a good bringdown. The thing is"-he frowned-"she acts like she still holds all the cards up that white sleeve of hers."

He went on getting a kick out of it till about Wednesday of the next week. Then he learned why the Big Nurse was so sure of her hand. Wednesday's the day they pack everybody up who hasn't got some kind of rot and move to the swimming pool, whether we want to go or not. When the fog was on the ward I used to hide in it to get out of going. The pool always scared me; I was always afraid I'd step in over my head and drown, be sucked off down the drain and clean out to sea. I used to be real brave around water when I was a kid on the Columbia; I'd walk the scaffolding around the falls with all the other men, scrambling around with water roaring green and white all around me and the mist making rainbows, without even any hobnails like the men wore. But when I saw my Papa start getting scared of things, I got scared too, got so I couldn't even stand a shallow pool.

We came out of the locker room and the pool was pitching and splashing and full of naked men; whooping and yelling bounced off the high ceiling

the way it always does in indoor swimming pools. The black boys herded us into it. The water was a nice warm temperature but I didn't want to get away from the side (the black boys walk along the edge with long bamboo poles to shove you away from the side if you try to grab on) so I stayed close to McMurphy on account of I knew they wouldn't try to make him go into deep water if he didn't want to.

He was talking to the lifeguard, and I was standing a few feet away. McMurphy must of been standing in a hole because he was having to tread water where I was just standing on the bottom. The lifeguard was standing on the edge of the pool; he had a whistle and a T-shirt on with his ward number on it. He and McMurphy had got to talking about the difference between hospital and jail, and McMurphy was saying how much better the hospital was. The lifeguard wasn't so sure. I heard him tell McMurphy that, for one thing, being committed ain't like being sentenced. "You're sentenced in a jail, and you got a date ahead of you when you know you're gonna be turned loose," he said.

McMurphy stopped splashing around like he had been. He swam slowly to the edge of the pool and held there, looking up at the lifeguard. "And if you're committed?" he asked after a pause.

The lifeguard raised his shoulders in a musclebound shrug and tugged at the whistle around his neck. He was an old pro-footballer with cleat marks in his forehead, and every so often when he was off his ward a signal would click back of his eyes and his lips'd go to spitting numbers and he'd drop to all fours in a line stance and cut loose on some strolling nurse, drive a shoulder in her kidneys just in time to let the halfback shoot past through the hole behind him. That's why he was up on Disturbed; whenever he wasn't lifeguarding he was liable to do something like that.

He shrugged again at McMurphy's question, then looked back and forth to see if any black boys were around, and knelt close to the edge of the pool. He held his arm out for McMurphy to look at.

"You see this cast?"

McMurphy looked at the big arm. "You don't have a cast on that arm, buddy."

The lifeguard just grinned. "Well, that cast's on there because I got a bad fracture in the last game with the Browns. I can't get back in togs till the

fracture knits and I get the cast off. The nurse on my ward tells me she's curing the arm in secret. Yeah, man, she says if I go easy on that arm, don't exert it or nothing, she'll take the cast off and I can get back with the ball club."

He put his knuckles on the wet tile, went into a three-point stance to test how the arm was coming along. McMurphy watched him a minute, then asked bow long he'd been waiting for them to tell him his arm was healed so he could leave the hospital. The lifeguard raised up slowly and rubbed his arm. He acted hurt that McMurphy had asked that, like he thought he was being accused of being soft and licking his wounds. "I'm committed," he said. "I'd of left here before now if it was up to me. Maybe I couldn't play first string, with this bum arm, but I could of folded towels, couldn't I? I could of done something. That nurse on my ward, she keeps telling the doctor I ain't ready. Not even to fold towels in the crummy old locker room, I ain't ready."

He turned and walked over to his lifeguard chair, climbed up the chair ladder like a drugged gorilla, and peered down at us, his lower lip pushed way out. "I was picked up for drunk and disorderly, and I been here eight years and eight months," he said.

McMurphy pushed backward from the edge of the pool and trod water and thought this over: he'd had a six months' sentence at the work farm with two months finished, four more to go-and four more months was the most he wanted to spend locked up any place. He'd been close to a month in this nuthouse and it might be a lot better than a work farm, what with good beds and orange juice for breakfast, but it wasn't better to the point that he'd want to spend a couple of years here.

He swam over to the steps at the shallow end of the pool and sat there the rest of the period, tugging that little tuft of wool at his throat and frowning. Watching him sitting there frowning all to himself, I remembered what the Big Nurse had said in the meeting, and I began to feel afraid.

When they blew the whistle for us to leave the pool and we all were straggling toward the locker room, we ran into this other ward coming into the swimming pool for their period, and in the footbath at the shower you had to go through was this one kid from the other ward. He had a big spongy pink head and bulgy hips and legs-like somebody'd grabbed a balloon full of water and squeezed it in the middle-and he was lying on his

side in the footbath, making noises like a sleepy seal. Cheswick and Harding helped him stand up, and he lay right back down in the footbath. The head bobbed around in the disinfectant. McMurphy watched them lift him standing again.

"What the devil is he?" he asked.

"He has hydrocephalus," Harding told him. "Some manner of lymph disorder, I believe. Head fills up with liquid. Give us a hand helping him stand up."

They turned the kid loose, and he lay back down in the footbath again; the look on his face was patient and helpless and stubborn; his mouth sputtered and blew bubbles in the milky-looking water. Harding repeated his request to McMurphy to give them a hand, and he and Cheswick bent down to the kid again. McMurphy pushed past them and stepped across the kid into the shower.

"Let him lay," he said, washing himself down in the shower. "Maybe he don't like deep water."

I could see it coming. The next day he surprised everybody on the ward by getting up early and polishing that latrine till it sparkled, and then went to work on the hall floors when the black boys asked him to. Surprised everybody but the Big Nurse; she acted like it was nothing surprising at all.

And that afternoon in the meeting when Cheswick said that everybody'd agreed that there should be some kind of showdown on the cigarette situation, saying, "I ain't no little kid to have cigarettes kept from me like cookies! We want something done about it, ain't that right, Mack?" and waited for McMurphy to back him up, all he got was silence.

He looked over at McMurphy's corner. Everybody did. McMurphy was there, studying the deck of cards that slid in and out of sight in his hands. He didn't even look up. It was awfully quiet; there was just that slap of greasy cards and Cheswick's heavy breathing.

"I want something done!" Cheswick suddenly yelled again. "I ain't no little kid!" He stamped his foot and looked around him like he was lost and might break out crying any minute. He clenched both fists and held them at his chubby round chest. His fists made little pink balls against the green, and they were clenched so hard he was shaking.

He never had looked big; he was short and too fat and had a bald spot in the back of his head that showed like a pink dollar, but standing there by himself in the center of the day room like that he looked tiny. He looked at McMurphy and got no look back, and went down the line of Acutes looking for help. Each time a man looked away and refused to back him up, and the panic on his face doubled. His looking finally came to a stop at the Big Nurse. He stamped his foot again.

"I want something done! Hear me? I want something done! Something! Something! Some-"

The two big black boys clamped his arms from behind, and the least one threw a strap around him. He sagged like he'd been punctured, and the two big ones dragged him up to Disturbed; you could hear the soggy bounce of him going up the steps. When they came back and sat down, the Big Nurse turned to the line of Acutes across the room and looked at them. Nothing had been said since Cheswick left.

"Is there any more discussion," she said, "on the rationing of cigarettes?"

Looking down the canceled row of faces hanging against the wall across the room from me, my eyes finally came to McMurphy in his chair in the corner, concentrating on improving his one-handed card cut ... and the white tubes in the ceiling begin to pump their refrigerated light again ... I can feel it, beams all the way into my stomach.

After McMurphy doesn't stand up for us any longer, some of the Acutes talk and say he's still outsmarting the Big Nurse, say that he got word she was about to send him to Disturbed and decided to toe the line a while, not give her any reason. Others figure he's letting her relax, then he's going to spring something new on her, something wilder and more ornery than ever. You can hear them talking in groups, wondering.

But me, I know why. I heard him talk to the lifeguard. He's finally getting cagey, is all. The way Papa finally did when he came to realize that he couldn't beat that group from town who wanted the government to put in the dam because of the money and the work it would bring, and because it would get rid of the village: Let that tribe of fish Injuns take their stink and their two hundred thousand dollars the government is paying them and go some place else with it! Papa had done the smart thing signing the

papers; there wasn't anything to gain by bucking it. The government would of got it anyhow, sooner or later; this way the tribe would get paid good. It was the smart thing. McMurphy was doing the smart thing. I could see that. He was giving in because it was the smartest thing to do, not because of any of these other reasons the Acutes were making up. He didn't say so, but I knew and I told myself it was the smart thing to do. I told myself that over and over: It's safe. Like hiding. It's the smart thing to do, nobody could say any different. I know what he's doing.

Then one morning all the Acutes know too, know his real reason for backing down and that the reasons they been making up were just lies to kid themselves. He never says a thing about the talk he had with the lifeguard, but they know. I figure the nurse broadcast this during the night along all the little lines in the dorm floor, because they know all at once. I can tell by the way they look at McMurphy that morning when he comes in to the day room. Not looking like they're mad with him, or even disappointed, because they can understand as well as I can that the only way he's going to get the Big Nurse to lift his commitment is by acting like she wants, but still looking at him like they wished things didn't have to be this way.

Even Cheswick could understand it and didn't hold anything against McMurphy for not going ahead and making a big fuss over the cigarettes. He came back down from Disturbed on the same day that the nurse broadcast the information to the beds, and he told McMurphy himself that he could understand how he acted and that it was surely the sharpest thing to do, considering, and that if he'd thought about Mack being committed he'd never have put him on the spot like he had the other day. He told McMurphy this while we were all being taken over to the swimming pool. But just as soon as we got to the pool he said he did wish something mighta been done, though, and dove into the water. And got his fingers stuck some way in the grate that's over the drain at the bottom of the pool, and neither the big lifeguard nor McMurphy nor the two black boys could pry him loose, and by the time they got a screwdriver and undid the grate and brought Cheswick up, with the grate still clutched by his chubby pink and blue fingers, he was drowned.

Up ahead of me in the lunch line I see a tray sling in the air, a green plastic cloud raining milk and peas and vegetable soup. Sefelt's jittering out of the line on one foot with his arms both up in the air, falls backward in a stiff arch, and the whites of his eyes come by me upside down. His head hits the tile with a crack like rocks under water, and he holds the arch, like a twitching, jerking bridge. Fredrickson and Scanlon make a jump to help, but the big black boy shoves them back and grabs a flat stick out of his back pocket, got tape wrapped around it and covered with a brown stain. He pries Sefelt's mouth open and shoves the stick between his teeth, and I hear the stick splinter with Sefelt's bite. I can taste the slivers. Sefelt's jerks slow down and get more powerful, working and building up to big stiff kicks that lift him to a bridge, then falling-lifting and falling, slower and slower, till the Big Nurse comes in and stands over him and he melts limp all over the floor in a gray puddle.

She folds her hands in front of her, might hold a candle, and looks down at what's left of him oozing out of the cuffs of his pants and shirt. "Mr. Sefelt?" she says to the black boy.

"Tha's right-uhn." The black boy is jerking to get his stick back. "Mistuh See-fel'."

"And Mr. Sefelt has been asserting he needs no more medication." She nods her head, steps back a step out of the way of him spreading toward her white shoes. She raises her head and looks round her at the circle of Acutes that've come up to see. She nods again and repeats, "... needs no more medication." Her face is smiling, pitying, patient, and disgusted all at once—a trained expression.

McMurphy's never seen such a thing. "What's he got wrong with him?" he asks.

She keeps her eye on the puddle, not turning to McMurphy. "Mr. Sefelt is an epileptic, Mr. McMurphy. This means he may be subject to seizures like this at any time if he doesn't follow medical advice. He knows better. We'd told him this would happen when he didn't take his medication. Still, he will insist on acting foolish."

Fredrickson comes out of the line with his eyebrows bristling. He's a sinewy, bloodless guy with blond hair and stringy blond eyebrows and a long jaw, and he acts tough every so often the way Cheswick used to try to do-roar and rant and cuss out one of the nurses, say he's gonna leave this

stinkin' place! They always let him yell and shake his fist till he quiets down, then ask him if you are through, Mr. Fredrickson, we'll go start typing the release-then make book in the Nurses' Station how long it'll be till he's tapping at the glass with a guilty look and asking to apologize and how about just forgetting those hotheaded things he said, just pigeonhole those old forms for a day or so, okay?

He steps up to the nurse, shaking his fist at her. "Oh, is that it? Is that it, huh? You gonna crucify old Seef just as if he was doing it to spite you or something?"

She lays a comforting hand on his arm, and his fist unrolls.

"It's okay, Bruce. Your friend will be all right. Apparently he hasn't been swallowing his Dilantin. I simply don't know what he is doing with it."

She knows as well as anybody; Sefelt holds the capsules in his mouth and gives them to Fredrickson later. Sefelt doesn't like to take them because of what he calls "disastrous side effects," and Fredrickson likes a double dose because he's scared to death of having a fit. The nurse knows this, you can tell by her voice, but to look at her there, so sympathetic and kind, you'd think she was ignorant of anything at all between Fredrickson and Sefelt.

"Yeahhh," says Fredrickson, but he can't work his attack up again. "Yeah, well, you don't need to act like it was as simple as just take the stuff or don't take it. You know how Seef worries about what he looks like and how women think he's ugly and all that, and you know how he thinks the Dilantin-"

"I know," she says and touches his arm again. "He also blames his falling hair on the drug. Poor old fellow."

"He's not that old!"

"I know, Bruce. Why do you get so upset? I've never understood what went on between you and your friend that made you get so defensive!"

"Well, heck, anyway!" he says and jams his fists in his pockets.

The nurse bends over and brushes a little place clean on the floor and puts her knee on it and starts kneading Sefelt back to some shape. She tells the black boy to stay with the poor old fellow and she'll go send a Gurney down for him; wheel him into the dorm and let him sleep the rest of the

day. When she stands she gives Fredrickson a pat on the arm, and he grumbles, "Yeah, I have to take Dilantin too, you know. That's why I know what Seef has to face. I mean, that's why I-well, heck-"

"I understand, Bruce, what both of you must go through, but don't you think anything is better than that?"

Fredrickson looks where she points. Sefelt has pulled back halfway normal, swelling up and down with big wet, rattling breaths. There's a punk-knot rising on the side of his head where he landed, and a red foam around the black boy's stick where it goes into his mouth, and his eyes are beginning to roll back into the whites. His hands are nailed out to each side with the palms up and the fingers jerking open and shut, just the way I've watched men jerk at the Shock Shop strapped to the crossed table, smoke curling up out of the palms from the current. Sefelt and Fredrickson never been to the Shock Shop. They're manufactured to generate their own voltage, store it in their spines and can be turned on remote from the steel door in the Nurses' Station if they get out of line-be right in the best part of a dirty joke and stiffen like the jolt hit square in the small of the back. It saves the trouble of taking them over to that room.

The nurse gives Fredrickson's arm a little shake like he'd gone to sleep, and repeats, "Even if you take into consideration the harmful effects of the medicine, don't you think it's better than that?"

As he stares down at the floor, Fredrickson's blond eyebrows are raised like he's seeing for the first time just how he looks at least once a month. The nurse smiles and pats his arm and heads for the door, glares at the Acutes to shame them for gathering around watching such a thing; when she's gone, Fredrickson shivers and tries to smile.

"I don't know what I got mad at the old girl about-I mean, she didn't do anything to give me a reason to blow up like that, did she?"

It isn't like he wants an answer; it's more sort of realizing that he can't put his finger on a reason. He shivers again and starts to slip back away from the group. McMurphy comes up and asks him in a low voice what is it they take?

"Dilantin, McMurphy, an anti-convulsant, if you must know."

"Don't it work or something?"

"Yeah, I guess it works all right-if you take it."

"Then what's the sweat about taking it or not?"

"Look, if you must know! Here's the dirty sweat about taking it." Fredrickson reaches up and grabs his lower lip between his thumb and finger, pulls it down to show gums ragged and pink and bloodless around long shiny teeth. "Your gungs," he says, hanging onto the lip. "Dilantin gnakes your gungs rot. And a seizure gnakes you grit your teeth. And you-

There's a noise on the floor. They look to where Sefelt is moaning and wheezing, just as the black boy draws two teeth out with his taped stick.

Scanlon takes his tray and walks away from the bunch, saying, "Hell of a life. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. Puts a man in one confounded bind, I'd say."

McMurphy says, "Yeah, I see what you mean," looking down into Sefelt's gathering face. His face has commenced to take on that same haggard, puzzled look of pressure that the face on the floor has.

20

Whatever it was went haywire in the mechanism, they've just about got it fixed again. The clean, calculated arcade movement is coming back: six-thirty out of bed, seven into the mess hall, eight the puzzles come out for the Chronicles and the cards for the Acutes. in the Nurses' Station I can see the white hands of the Big Nurse float over the controls.

21

They take me with the Acutes sometimes, and sometimes they don't. They take me once with them over to the library and I walk over to the technical section, stand there looking at the titles of books on electronics, books I recognize from that year I went to college; I remember inside the books are full of schematic drawings and equations and theories-hard, sure, safe things.

I want to look at one of the books, but I'm scared to. I'm scared to do anything. I feel like I'm floating in the dusty yellow air of the library, halfway to the bottom, halfway to the top. The stacks of books teeter above me, crazy, zig-zagging, running all different angles to one another. One shelf bends a little to the left, one to the right. Some of them are leaning over me, and I don't see how the books keep from falling out. It goes up and up this way, clear out of sight, the rickety stacks nailed

together with slats and two-by-fours, propped up with poles, leaning against ladders, on all sides of me. If I pulled one book out, lord knows what awful thing might result.

I hear somebody walk in, and it's one of the black boys from our ward and he's got Harding's wife with him. They're talking and grinning to each other as they come into the library.

"See here, Dale," the black boy calls over to Harding where he's reading a book, "look here who come to visit you. I tole her it wun't visitin' hours but you know she jus' sweet-talk me into bringin' her right on over here anyhow." He leaves her standing in front of Harding and goes off, saying mysteriously, "Don't you forget now, you hear?"

She blows the black boy a kiss, then turns to Harding, slinging her hips forward. "Hello, Dale."

"Honey," he says, but he doesn't make any move to take the couple of steps to her. He looks around him at everybody watching.

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

"Hey, Mack," Harding calls to McMurphy, who's sitting across the room, looking at a book of cartoons. "If you'll curtail your literary pursuits a moment I'll introduce you to my counterpart and Nemesis; I would be trite and say, 'to my better half,' but I think that phrase indicates some kind of basically equal division, don't you?"

He tries to laugh, and his two slim ivory fingers dip into his shirt pocket for cigarettes, fidget around getting the last one from the package. The cigarette shakes as he places it between his lips. He and his wife haven't moved toward each other yet.

McMurphy heaves up out of his chair and pulls his cap off as he walks over. Harding's wife looks at him and smiles, lifting one of her eyebrows. "Afternoon, Miz Harding," McMurphy says.

She smiles back bigger than before and says, "I hate Mrs. Harding, Mack; why don't you call me Vera?"

They all three sit back down on the couch where Harding was sitting, and he tells his wife about McMurphy and how McMurphy got the best of the Big Nurse, and she smiles and says that it doesn't surprise her a bit. While Harding's telling the story he gets enthusiastic and forgets about his hands, and they weave the air in front of him into a picture clear enough to see, dancing the story to the tune of his voice like two beautiful ballet women in white. His hands can be anything. But as soon as the story's finished he notices McMurphy and his wife are watching the hands, and he traps them between his knees. He laughs about this, and his wife says to him, "Dale, when are you going to learn to laugh instead of making that mousy little squeak?"

It's the same thing that McMurphy said about Harding's laugh on that first day, but it's different somehow; where McMurphy saying it calmed Harding down, her saying it makes him more nervous than ever.

She asks for a cigarette, and Harding dips his fingers in his pocket again and it's empty. "We've been rationed," he says, folding his thin shoulders forward like he was trying to hide the half-smoked cigarette he was holding, "to one pack a day. That doesn't seem to leave a man any margin for chivalry, Vera my dearest."

"Oh Dale, you never do have enough, do you?"

His eyes take on that sly, fevered skittishness as he looks at her and smiles. "Are we speaking symbolically, or are we still dealing with the concrete here-and-now cigarettes? No matter; you know the answer to the question, whichever way you intended it."

"I didn't intend nothing by it except what I said, Dale-"

"You didn't intend anything by it, sweetest; your use of 'didn't' and 'nothing' constitutes a double negative. McMurphy, Vera's English rivals yours for illiteracy. Look, honey, you understand that between 'no' and 'any' there is-"

"All right! That's enough! I meant it both ways. I meant it any way you want to take it. I meant you don't have enough of nothing period!"

"Enough of anything, my bright little child."

She glares at Harding a second, then turns to McMurphy sitting beside her. "You, Mack, what about you. Can you handle a simple little thing like offering a girl a cigarette?"

His package is already lying in his lap. He looks down at it like he wishes it wasn't, then says, "Sure, I always got cigarettes. Reason is, I'm a bum. I bum them whenever I get the chance is why my pack lasts longer than Harding's here. He smokes only his own. So you can see he's more likely to run out than-

"You don't have to apologize for my inadequacies, my friend. It neither fits your character nor complements mine."

"No, it doesn't," the girl says. "All you have to do is light my cigarette."

And she leans so far forward to his match that even clear across the room I could see down her blouse.

She talks some more about some of Harding's friends who she wishes would quit dropping around the house looking for him. "You know the type, don't you, Mack?" she says. "The hoity-toity boys with the nice long hair combed so perfectly and the limp little wrists that flip so nice." Harding asks her if it was only him that they were dropping around to see, and she says any man that drops around to see her flips more than his damned limp wrists.

She stands suddenly and says it's time for her to go. She takes McMurphy's hand and tells him she hopes she sees him again sometime and she walks out of the library. McMurphy can't say a word. At the clack of her high heels everybody's head comes up again, and they watch her walk down the hall till she turns out of sight.

"What do you think?" Harding says.

McMurphy starts. "She's got one hell of a set of chabobs," is all he can think of. "Big as Old Lady Ratched's."

"I didn't mean physically, my friend, I mean what do you-"

"Hell's bells, Harding!" McMurphy yells suddenly. "I don't know what to think! What do you want out of me? A marriage counsellor? All I know is this: nobody's very big in the first place, and it looks to me like everybody spends their whole life tearing everybody else down. I know what you want me to think; you want me to feel sorry for you, to think she's a real bitch. Well, you didn't make her feel like any queen either. Well, screw you and 'what do you think?' I've got worries of my own without getting hooked with yours. So just quit!" He glares around the library at the other patients. "Alla you! Quit bugging me, goddammit!"

And sticks his cap back on his head and walks back to his cartoon magazine across the room. All the Acutes are looking at each other with their mouths open. What's he hollering at them about? Nobody's been bugging him. Nobody's asked him for a thing since they found out that he was trying to behave to keep his commitment from being extended. Now they're surprised at the way he just blew up at Harding and can't figure the way he grabs the book up from the chair and sits down and holds it up close in front of his face-either to keep people from looking at him or to keep from having to look at people.

That night at supper he apologizes to Harding and says he don't know what hung him up so at the library. Harding says perhaps it was his wife; she frequently hangs people up. McMurphy sits staring into his coffee and says, "I don't know, man. I just met her this afternoon. So she sure the hell isn't the one's been giving me bad dreams this last miserable week."

"Why, Mis-tur McMurphy," Harding cries, trying to talk like the little resident boy who comes to the meetings, "you simply must tell us about these dreams. Ah, wait until I get my pencil and pad." Harding is trying to be funny to relieve the strain of the apology. He picks up a napkin and a spoon and acts like he's going to take notes. "Now. Pre-cisely, what was it you saw in these-ah-dreams?"

McMurphy don't crack a smile. "I don't know, man. Nothing but faces, I guess-just faces."

The next morning Martini is behind the control panel in the tub room, playing like he's a jet pilot. The poker game stops to grin at his act.

"EeeeeeaahHOOoomeerr. Ground to air, ground to air: object sighted four-oh-sixteen-hundred-appears to be enemy missile. Proceed at once! EeeahhOOOmmmm."

Spins a dial, shoves a lever forward and leans with the bank of the ship. He cranks a needle to "ON FULL" at the side of the panel, but no water comes out of the nozzles set around the square tile booth in front of him. They don't use hydrotherapy any more, and nobody's turned the water on. Brand-new chrome equipment and steel panel never been used. Except for the chrome the panel and shower look just like the hydrotherapy outfits they used at the old hospital fifteen years ago: nozzles capable of reaching

parts of the body from every angle, a technician in a rubber apron standing on the other side of the room manipulating the controls on that panel, dictating which nozzles squirt where, how hard, how hot-spray opened soft and soothing, then squeezed sharp as a needle-you hung up there between the nozzles in canvas straps, soaked and limp and wrinkled while the technician enjoyed his toy.

"EeeeeaooOOOoommm. ... Air to ground, air to ground: missile sighted; coming into my sights now. ...

Martini bends down and aims over the panel through the ring of nozzles. He closes one eye and peeps through the ring with the other eye.

"On target! Ready ... Aim ... Fi-!"

His hands jerk back from the panel and he stands bolt upright, hair flying and both eyes bulging out at the shower booth so wild and scared all the card-players spin around in their chairs to see if they can see it too-but they don't see anything in there but the buckles hanging among the nozzles on stiff new canvas straps.

Martini turns and looks straight at McMurphy. No one else. "Didn't you see thum? Didn't you?"

"See who, Mart? I don't see anything."

"In all those straps? Didn't you?"

McMurphy turns and squints at the shower. "Nope. Not a thing."

"Hold it a minute. They need you to see thum," Martini says.

"Damn you, Martini, I told you I can't see them! Understand? Not a blessed thing!"

"Oh," Martini says. He nods his head and turns from the shower booth. "Well, I didn't see thum either. It's just kidding you."

McMurphy cuts the deck and shuffles it with a buzzing snap. "Well-I don't care for that sort of kiddin', Mart." He cuts to shuffle again, and the cards splash everywhere like the deck exploded between his two trembling hands.

I remember it was a Friday again, three weeks after we voted on TV, and everybody who could walk was herded over to Building One for what they

try to tell us is chest X-rays for TB, which I know is a check to see if everybody's machinery is functioning up to par.

We're benched in a long row down a hall leading to a door marked X-RAY. Next to X-ray is a door marked EENT where they check our throats during the winter. Across the hall from us is another bench, and it leads to that metal door. With the line of rivets. And nothing marked on it at all. Two guys are dozing on the bench between two black boys, while another victim inside is getting his treatment and I can hear him screaming. The door opens inward with a whoosh, and I can see the twinkling tubes in the room. They wheel the victim out still smoking, and I grip the bench where I sit to keep from being sucked through that door. A black boy and a white one drag one of the other guys on the bench to his feet, and he sways and staggers under the drugs in him. They usually give you red capsules before Shock. They push him through the door, and the technicians get him under each arm. For a second I see the guy realizes where they got him, and he stiffens both heels into the cement floor to keep from being pulled to the table-then the door pulls shut, phumph, with metal hitting a mattress, and I can't see him any more.

"Man, what they got going on in there?" McMurphy asks Harding.

"In there? Why, that's right, isn't it? You haven't had the pleasure. Pity. An experience no human should be without." Harding laces his fingers behind his neck and leans back to look at the door. "That's the Shock Shop I was telling you about some time back, my friend, the EST, Electro-Shock Therapy. Those fortunate souls in there are being given a free trip to the moon. No, on second thought, it isn't completely free. You pay for the service with brain cells instead of money, and everyone has simply billions of brain cells on deposit. You won't miss a few."

He frowns at the one lone man left on the bench. "Not a very large clientele today, it seems, nothing like the crowds of yesteryear. But then, *c'est la vie*, fads come and go. And I'm afraid we are witnessing the sunset of EST. Our dear head nurse is one of the few with the heart to stand up for a grand old Faulknerian tradition in the treatment of the rejects of sanity: Brain Burning."

The door opens. A Gurney comes whirring out, nobody pushing it, takes the corner on two wheels and disappears smoking up the hall. McMurphy watches them take the last guy in and close the door.

"What they do is"-McMurphy listens a moment-"take some bird in there and shoot electricity through his skull?"

"That's a concise way of putting it."

"What the hell for?"

"Why, the patient's good, of course. Everything done here is for the patient's good. You may sometimes get the impression, having lived only on our ward, that the hospital is a vast efficient mechanism that would function quite well if the patient were not imposed on it, but that's not true. EST isn't always used for punitive measures, as our nurse uses it, and it isn't pure sadism on the staff's part, either. A number of supposed Irrecoverables were brought back into contact with shock, just as a number were helped with lobotomy and leucotomy. Shock treatment has some advantages; it's cheap, quick, entirely painless. It simply induces a seizure."

"What a life," Sefelt moans. "Give some of us pills to stop a fit, give the rest shock to start one."

Harding leans forward to explain it to McMurphy. "Here's how it came about: two psychiatrists were visiting a slaughterhouse, for God knows what perverse reason, and were watching cattle being killed by a blow between the eyes with a sledgehammer. They noticed that not all of the cattle were killed, that some would fall to the floor in a state that greatly resembled an epileptic convulsion. 'Ah, zo,' the first doctor says. 'Ziz is exactly vot ve need for our patients-zee induced fit!' His colleague agreed, of course. It was known that men coming out of an epileptic convulsion were inclined to be calmer and more peaceful for a time, and that violent cases completely out of contact were able to carry on rational conversations after a convulsion. No one knew why; they still don't. But it was obvious that if a seizure could be induced in non-epileptics, great benefits might result. And here, before them, stood a man inducing seizures every so often with remarkable aplomb."

Scanlon says he thought the guy used a hammer instead of a bomb, but Harding says he will ignore that completely, and he goes ahead with the explanation. "A hammer is what the butcher used. And it was here that the colleague had some reservations. After all, a man wasn't a cow. Who knows when the hammer might slip and break a nose? Even knock out a mouthful of teeth? Then where would they be, with the high cost of dental

work? If they were going to knock a man in the head, they needed to use something surer and more accurate than a hammer; they finally settled on electricity."

"Jesus, didn't they think it might do some damage? Didn't the public raise Cain about it?"

"I don't think you fully understand the public, my friend; in this country, when something is out of order, then the quickest way to get it fixed is the best way."

McMurphy shakes his head. "Hoo-wee! Electricity through the head. Man, that's like electrocuting a guy for murder."

"The reasons for both activities are much more closely related than you might think; they are both cures."

"And you say it don't hurt?"

"I personally guarantee it. Completely painless. One flash and you're unconscious immediately. No gas, no needle, no sledgehammer. Absolutely painless. The thing is, no one ever wants another one. You ... change. You forget things. It's as if"-he presses his hands against his temples, shutting his eyes-"it's as if the jolt sets off a wild carnival wheel of images, emotions, memories. These wheels, you've seen them; the barker takes your bet and pushes a button. Chang! With light and sound and numbers round and round in a whirlwind, and maybe you win with what you end up with and maybe you lose and have to play again. Pay the man for another spin, son, pay the man."

"Take it easy, Harding."

The door opens and the Gurney comes back out with the guy under a sheet, and the technicians go out for coffee. McMurphy runs his hand through his hair. "I don't seem able to get all this stuff that's happening straight in my mind."

"What's that? This shock treatment?"

"Yeah. No, not just that. All this ..." He waves his hand in a circle. "All these things going on."

Harding's hand touches McMurphy's knee. "Put your troubled mind at ease, my friend. In all likelihood you needn't concern yourself with EST."

It's almost out of vogue and only used in the extreme cases nothing else seems to reach, like lobotomy."

"Now lobotomy, that's chopping away part of the brain?"

"You're right again. You're becoming very sophisticated in the jargon. Yes; chopping away the brain. Frontal-lobe castration. I guess if she can't cut below the belt she'll do it above the eyes."

"You mean Ratched."

"I do indeed."

"I didn't think the nurse had the say-so on this kind of thing."

"She does indeed."

McMurphy acts like he's glad to get off talking about shock and lobotomy and get back to talking about the Big Nurse. He asks Harding what he figures is wrong with her. Harding and Scanlon and some of the others have all kinds of ideas. They talk for a while about whether she's the root of all the trouble here or not, and Harding says she's the root of most of it. Most of the other guys think so too, but McMurphy isn't so sure any more. He says he thought so at one time but now he don't know. He says he don't think getting her out of the way would really make much difference; he says that there's something bigger making all this mess and goes on to try to say what he thinks it is. He finally gives up when he can't explain it.

McMurphy doesn't know it, but he's onto what I realized a long time back, that it's not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it's the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them.

The guys don't agree with McMurphy. They say they know what the trouble with things is, then get in an argument about that. They argue till McMurphy interrupts them.

"Hell's bells, listen at you," McMurphy says. "All I hear is gripe, gripe, gripe. About the nurse or the staff or the hospital. Scanlon wants to bomb the whole outfit. Sefelt blames the drugs. Fredrickson blames his family trouble. Well, you're all just passing the buck."

He says that the Big Nurse is just a bitter, icy-hearted old woman, and all this business trying to get him to lock horns with her is a lot of bull-

wouldn't do anybody any good, especially him. Getting shut of her wouldn't be getting shut of the real deep-down hang-up that's causing the gripes.

"You think not?" Harding says. "Then since you are suddenly so lucid on the problem of mental health, what is this trouble? What is this deep-down hang-up, as you so cleverly put it."

"I tell you, man, I don't know. I never seen the beat of it." He sits still for a minute, listening to the hum from the X-ray room; then he says, "But if it was no more'n you say, if it was, say, just this old nurse and her sex worries, then the solution to all your problems would be to just throw her down and solve her worries, wouldn't it?"

Scanlon claps his hands. "Hot damn! That's it. You're nominated, Mack, you're just the stud to handle the job."

"Not me. No sir. You got the wrong boy."

"Why not? I thought you's the super-stud with all that whambam."

"Scanlon, buddy, I plan to stay as clear of that old buzzard as I possibly can."

"So I've been noticing," Harding says, smiling. "What's happened between the two of you? You had her on the ropes for a period there; then you let up. A sudden compassion for our angel of mercy?"

"No; I found out a few things, that's why. Asked around some different places. I found out why you guys all kiss her ass so much and bow and scrape and let her walk all over you. I got wise to what you were using me for."

"Oh? That's interesting."

"You're blamed right it's interesting. It's interesting to me that you bums didn't tell me what a risk I was running, twisting her tail that way. Just because I don't like her ain't a sign I'm gonna bug her into adding another year or so to my sentence. You got to swallow your pride sometimes and keep an eye out for old Number One."

"Why, friends, you don't suppose there's anything to this rumor that our Mr. McMurphy has conformed to policy merely to aid his chances of an early release?"

"You know what I'm talking about, Harding. Why didn't you tell me she could keep me committed in here till she's good and ready to turn me loose?"

"Why, I had forgotten you were committed." Harding's face folds in the middle over his grin. "Yes. You're becoming sly. Just like the rest of us."

"You damn betcha I'm becoming sly. Why should it be me goes to bat at these meetings over these piddling little gripes about keeping the dorm door open and about cigarettes in the Nurses' Station? I couldn't figure it at first, why you guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior. Then I just happened to find out about the way the nurses have the big say as to who gets discharged and who doesn't. And I got wise awful damned fast. I said, 'Why, those slippery bastards have conned me, snowed me into holding their bag. If that don't beat all, conned ol' R. P. McMurphy.' " He tips his head back and grins at the line of us on the bench. "Well, I don't mean nothing personal, you understand, buddies, but screw that noise. I want out of here just as much as the rest of you. I got just as much to lose hassling that old buzzard as you do."

He grins and winks down his nose and digs Harding in the ribs with his thumb, like he's finished with the whole thing but no hard feelings, when Harding says something else.

"No. You've got more to lose than I do, my friend."

Harding's grinning again, looking with that skitterish sideways look of a jumpy mare, a dipping, rearing motion of the head. Everybody moves down a place. Martini comes away from the X-ray screen, buttoning his shirt and muttering, "I wouldn't of believed it if I hadn't saw it," and Billy Bibbit goes to the black glass to take Martini's place.

"You have more to lose than I do," Harding says again. "I'm voluntary. I'm not committed."

McMurphy doesn't say a word. He's got that same puzzled look on his face like there's something isn't right, something he can't put his finger on. He just sits there looking at Harding, and Harding's rearing smile fades and he goes to fidgeting around from McMurphy staring at him so funny. He swallows and says, "As a matter of fact, there are only a few men on the ward who are committed. Only Scanlon and-well, I guess some of the

Chronics. And you. Not many commitments in the whole hospital. No, not many at all."

Then he stops, his voice dribbling away under McMurphy's eyes. After a bit of silence McMurphy says softly, "Are you bullshitting me?" Harding shakes his head. He looks frightened. McMurphy stands up in the hall and says, "Are you guys bullshitting me!"

Nobody'll say anything. McMurphy walks up and down in front of that bench, running his hand around in that thick hair. He walks all the way to the back of the line, then all the way to the front, to the X-ray machine. It hisses and spits at him.

"You, Billy-you must be committed, for Christsakes!"

Billy's got his back to us, his chin up on the black screen, standing on tiptoe. No, he says into the machinery.

"Then why? Why? You're just a young guy! You oughta be out running around in a convertible, bird-dogging girls. All of this"-he sweeps his hand around him again-"why do you stand for it?"

Billy doesn't say anything, and McMurphy turns from him to another couple of guys.

"Tell me why. You gripe, you bitch for weeks on end about how you can't stand this place, can't stand the nurse or anything about her, and all the time you ain't committed. I can understand it with some of those old guys on the ward. They're nuts. But you, you're not exactly the everyday man on the street, but you're not nuts."

They don't argue with him. He moves on to Sefelt.

"Sefelt, what about you? There's nothing wrong with you but you have fits. Hell, I had an uncle who threw conviptions twice as bad as yours and saw visions from the Devil to boot, but he didn't lock himself in the nuthouse. You could get along outside if you had the guts-"

"Sure!" It's Billy, turned from the screen, his face boiling tears. "Sure!" he screams again. "If we had the g-guts! I could go outside to-today, if I had the guts. My m-m-mother is a good friend of M-Miss Ratched, and I could get an AMA signed this afternoon, if I had the guts!"

He jerks his shirt up from the bench and tries to pull it on, but he's shaking too hard. Finally he slings it from him and turns back to McMurphy.

"You think I wuh-wuh-wuh-want to stay in here? You think I wouldn't like a con-con-vertible and a guh-guh-girl friend? But did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you? No, because you're so b-big and so tough! Well, I'm not big and tough. Neither is Harding. Neither is F-Fredrickson. Neither is SuhSefelt. Oh-oh, you-you t-talk like we stayed in here because we liked it! Oh-it's n-no use ..."

He's crying and stuttering too hard to say anything else, and he wipes his eyes with the backs of his hands so he can see. One of the scabs pulls off his hand, and the more he wipes the more he smears blood over his face and in his eyes. Then he starts running blind, bouncing down the hall from side to side with his face a smear of blood, a black boy right after him.

McMurphy turns round to the rest of the guys and opens his mouth to ask something else, and then closes it when he sees how they're looking at him. He stands there a minute with the row of eyes aimed at him like a row of rivets; then he says, "Hell's bells," in a weak sort of way, and he puts his cap back on and pulls it down hard and goes back to his place on the bench. The two technicians come back from coffee and go back in that room across the hall; when the door whooshes open you can smell the acid in the air like when they recharge a battery. McMurphy sits there, looking at that door.

"I don't seem able to get it straight in my mind. ..."

23

Crossing the grounds back to the ward, McMurphy lagged back at the tail end of the bunch with his hands in the pockets of his greens and his cap tugged low on his head, brooding over a cold cigarette. Everybody was keeping pretty quiet. They'd got Billy calmed down, and he was walking at the front of the group with a black boy on one side and that white boy from the Shock Shop on the other side.

I dropped back till I was walking beside McMurphy and I wanted to tell him not to fret about it, that nothing could be done, because I could see that there was some thought he was worrying over in his mind like a dog worries at a hole he don't know what's down, one voice saying, Dog, that

hole is none of your affair-it's too big and too black and there's a spoor all over the place says bears or something just as bad. And some other voice coming like a sharp whisper out of way back in his breed, not a smart voice, nothing cagey about it, saying, Sic 'im, dog, sic 'im!

I wanted to tell him not to fret about it, and I was just about to come out and say it when he raised his head and shoved his hat back and speeded up to where the least black boy was walking and slapped him on the shoulder and asked him, "Sam, what say we stop by the canteen here a second so I can pick me up a carton or two of cigarettes."

I had to hurry to catch up, and the run made my heart ring a high, excited pitch in my head. Even in the canteen I still heard that sound my heart had knocked ringing in my head, though my heart had slowed back to normal. The sound reminded me of how I used to feel standing in the cold fall Friday night out on a football field, waiting for the ball to be kicked and the game to get going. The ringing would build and build till I didn't think I could stand still any longer; then the kick would come and it would be gone and the game would be on its way. I felt that same Friday-night ringing now, and felt the same wild, stomping-up-and-down impatience. And I was seeing sharp and high-pitched too, the way I did before a game and the way I did looking out of the dorm window a while back: everything was sharp and clear and solid like I forgot it could be. Lines of toothpaste and shoelaces, ranks of sunglasses and ballpoint pens guaranteed right on them to write a lifetime on butter under water, all guarded against shoplifters by a big-eyed force of Teddy bears sitting high on a shelf over the counter.

McMurphy came stomping up to the counter beside me and hooked his thumbs in his pockets and told the salesgirl to give him a couple of cartons of Marlboros. "Maybe make it three cartons," he said, grinning at her. "I plan to do a lot of smokin'."

The ringing didn't stop until the meeting that afternoon. I'd been half listening to them work on Sefelt to get him to face up to the reality of his problems so he could adjust ("It's the Dilantin!" he finally yells. "Now, Mr. Sefelt, if you're to be helped, you must be honest," she says. "But, it's got to be the Dilantin that does it; don't it make my gums soft?" She smiles. "Jim, you're forty-five years old ...") when I happened to catch a look at McMurphy sitting in his corner. He wasn't fiddling with a deck of

cards or dozing into a magazine like he had been during all the meetings the last two weeks. And he wasn't slouched down. He was sitting up stiff in his chair with a flushed, reckless look on his face as he looked back and forth from Sefelt to the Big Nurse. As I watched, the ringing went higher. His eyes were blue stripes under those white eyebrows, and they shot back and forth just the way he watched cards turning up around a poker table. I was certain that any minute he was going to do some crazy thing to get him up on Disturbed for sure. I'd seen the same look on other guys before they'd climbed all over a black boy. I gripped down on the arm of my chair and waited, scared it would happen, and, I began to realize, just a little scared it wouldn't.

He kept quiet and watched till they were finished with Sefelt; then he swung half around in his chair and watched while Fredrickson, trying some way to get back at them for the way they had grilled his friend, griped for a few loud minutes about the cigarettes being kept in the Nurses' Station. Fredrickson talked himself out and finally flushed and apologized like always and sat back down. McMurphy still hadn't made any kind of move. I eased up where I'd been gripping the arm of the chair, beginning to think I'd been wrong.

There was just a couple of minutes left in the meeting. The Big Nurse folded up her papers and put them in the basket and set the basket off her lap on the floor, then let her eyes swing to McMurphy for just a second like she wanted to check if he was awake and listening. She folded her hands in her lap and looked down at the fingers and drew a deep breath, shaking her head.

"Boys, I've given a great deal of thought to what I am about to say. I've talked it over with the doctor and with the rest of the staff, and, as much as we regretted it, we all came to the same conclusion-that there should be some manner of punishment meted out for the unspeakable behavior concerning the house duties three weeks ago." She raised her hand and looked around. "We waited this long to say anything, hoping that you men would take it upon yourselves to apologize for the rebellious way you acted. But not a one of you has shown the slightest sign of remorse."

Her hand went up again to stop any interruptions that might come-the movement of a tarot-card reader in a glass arcade case.

"Please understand: We do not impose certain rules and restrictions on you without a great deal of thought about their therapeutic value. A good many of you are in here because you could not adjust to the rules of society in the Outside World, because you refused to face up to them, because you tried to circumvent them and avoid them. At some time- perhaps in your childhood- you may have been allowed to get away with flouting the rules of society. When you broke a rule you knew it. You wanted to be dealt with, needed it, but the punishment did not come. That foolish lenience on the part of your parents may have been the germ that grew into your present illness. I tell you this hoping you will understand that it is entirely for your own good that we enforce discipline and order."

She let her head twist around the room. Regret for the job she has to do was worked into her face. It was quiet except for that high fevered, delirious ringing in my head.

"It's difficult to enforce discipline in these surroundings. You must be able to see that. What can we do to you? You can't be arrested. You can't be put on bread and water. You must see that the staff has a problem; what can we do?"

Ruckly had an idea what they could do, but she didn't pay any attention to it. The face moved with a ticking noise till the features achieved a different look. She finally answered her own question.

"We must take away a privilege. And after careful consideration of the circumstances of this rebellion, we've decided that there would be a certain justice in taking away the privilege of the tub room that you men have been using for your card games during the day. Does this seem unfair?"

Her head didn't move. She didn't look. But one by one everybody else looked at him sitting there in his corner. Even the old Chronics, wondering why everybody had turned to look in one direction, stretched out their scrawny necks like birds and turned to look at McMurphy- faces turned to him, full of a naked, scared hope.

That single thin note in my head was like tires speeding down a pavement.

He was sitting straight up in his chair, one big red finger scratching lazily at the stitchmarks run across his nose. He grinned at everybody looking at

him and took his cap by the brim and tipped it politely, then looked back at the nurse.

"So, if there is no discussion on this ruling, I think the hour is almost over ..."

She paused again, took a look at him herself. He shrugged his shoulders and with a loud sigh slapped both hands down on his knees and pushed himself standing out of the chair. He stretched and yawned and scratched the nose again and started strolling across the day-room floor to where she sat by the Nurses' Station, heisting his pants with his thumbs as he walked. I could see it was too late to keep him from doing whatever fool thing he had in mind, and I just watched, like everybody else. He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again. The iron in his boot heels cracked lightning out of the tile. He was the logger again, the swaggering gambler, the big redheaded brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare.

The Big Nurse's eyes swelled out white as he got close. She hadn't reckoned on him doing anything. This was supposed to be her final victory over him, supposed to establish her rule once and for all. But here he comes and he's big as a house!

She started popping her mouth and looking for her black boys, scared to death, but he stopped before he got to her. He stopped in front of her window and he said in his slowest, deepest drawl how he figured he could use one of the smokes he bought this mornin', then ran his hand through the glass.

The glass came apart like water splashing, and the nurse threw her hands to her ears. He got one of the cartons of cigarettes with his name on it and took out a pack, then put it back and turned to where the Big Nurse was sitting like a chalk statue and very tenderly went to brushing the slivers of glass off her hat and shoulders.

"I'm sure sorry, ma'am," he said. "Gawd but I am. That window glass was so spick and span I com-pletely forgot it was there."

It took just a couple of seconds. He turned and left her sitting there with her face shifting and jerking and walked back across the day room to his chair, lighting up a cigarette.

The ringing that was in my head had stopped.

part 3

24

After that, McMurphy had things his way for a good long while. The nurse was biding her time till another idea came to her that would put her on top again. She knew she'd lost one big round and was losing another, but she wasn't in any hurry. For one thing, she wasn't about to recommend release; the fight could go on as long as she wanted, till he made a mistake or till he just gave out, or until she could come up with some new tactic that would put her back on top in everybody's eyes.

A good lot happened before she came up with that new tactic. After McMurphy was drawn out of what you might call a short retirement and had announced he was back in the hassle by breaking out her personal window, he made things on the ward pretty interesting. He took part in every meeting, every discussion-drawling, winking, joking his best to wheedle a skinny laugh out of some Acute who'd been scared to grin since he was twelve. He got together enough guys for a basketball team and some way talked the doctor into letting him bring a ball back from the gym to get the team used to handling it. The nurse objected, said the next thing they'd be playing soccer in the day room and polo games up and down the hall, but the doctor held firm for once and said let them go. "A number of the players, Miss Ratched, have shown marked progress since that basketball team was organized; I think it has proven its therapeutic value."

She looked at him a while in amazement. So he was doing a little muscle-flexing too. She marked the tone of his voice for later, for when her time came again, and just nodded and went to sit in her Nurses' Station and fiddle with the controls on her equipment. The janitors had put a cardboard in the frame over her desk till they could get another window pane cut to fit, and she sat there behind it every day like it wasn't even there, just like she could still see right into the day room. Behind that square of cardboard she was like a picture turned to the wall.

She waited, without comment, while McMurphy continued to run around the halls in the mornings in his white-whale shorts, or pitched pennies in the dorms, or ran up and down the hall blowing a nickel-plated ref's whistle, teaching Acutes the fast break from ward door to the Seclusion

Room at the other end, the ball pounding in the corridor like cannon shots and McMurphy roaring like a sergeant, "Drive, you puny mothers, drive!"

When either one spoke to the other it was always in the most polite fashion. He would ask her nice as you please if he could use her fountain pen to write a request for an Unaccompanied Leave from the hospital, wrote it out in front of her on her desk, and handed her the request and the pen back at the same time with such a nice, "Thank you," and she would look at it and say just as polite that she would "take it up with the staff"-which took maybe three minutes-and come back to tell him she certainly was sorry but a pass was not considered therapeutic at this time. He would thank her again and walk out of the Nurses' Station and blow that whistle loud enough to break windows for miles, and holler, "Practice, you mothers, get that ball and let's get a little sweat rollin'."

He'd been on the ward a month, long enough to sign the bulletin board in the hall to request a hearing in group meeting about an Accompanied Pass. He went to the bulletin board with her pen and put down under TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY: "A twitch I know from Portland named Candy Starr."-and ruined the pen point on the period. The pass request was brought up in group meeting a few days later, the same day, in fact, that workmen put a new glass window in front of the Big Nurse's desk, and after his request had been turned down on the grounds that this Miss Starr didn't seem like the most wholesome person for a patient to go pass with, he shrugged and said that's how she bounces I guess, and got up and walked to the Nurses' Station, to the window that still had the sticker from the glass company down in the corner, and ran his fist through it again-explained to the nurse while blood poured from his fingers that he thought the cardboard had been left out and the frame was open. "When did they sneak that danged glass in there? Why that thing is a menace!"

The nurse taped his hand in the station while Scanlon and Harding dug the cardboard out of the garbage and taped it back in the frame, using adhesive from the same roll the nurse was bandaging McMurphy's wrist and fingers with. McMurphy sat on a stool, grimacing something awful while he got his cuts tended, winking at Scanlon and Harding over the nurse's head. The expression on her face was calm and blank as enamel, but the strain was beginning to show in other ways. By the way she jerked the adhesive tight as she could, showing her remote patience wasn't what it used to be.

We got to go to the gym and watch our basketball team-Harding, Billy Bibbit, Scanlon, Fredrickson, Martini, and McMurphy whenever his hand would stop bleeding long enough for him to get in the game-play a team of aides. Our two big black boys played for the aides. They were the best players on the court, running up and down the floor together like a pair of shadows in red trunks, scoring basket after basket with mechanical accuracy. Our team was too short and too slow, and Martini kept throwing passes to men that nobody but him could see, and the aides beat us by twenty points. But something happened that let most of us come away feeling there'd been a kind of victory, anyhow: in one scramble for the ball our big black boy named Washington got cracked with somebody's elbow, and his team had to hold him back as he stood straining to where McMurphy was sitting on the ball-not paying the least bit of heed to the thrashing black boy with red pouring out of his big nose and down his chest like paint splashed on a blackboard and hollering to the guys holding him, "He beggin' for it! The sonabitch jus' beggin' for it!"

McMurphy composed more notes for the nurse to find in the latrine with her mirror. He wrote long outlandish tales about himself in the log book and signed them Anon. Sometimes he slept till eight o'clock. She would reprimand him, without heat at all, and he would stand and listen till she was finished and then destroy her whole effect by asking something like did she wear a B cup, he wondered, or a C cup, or any ol' cup at all?

The other Acutes were beginning to follow his lead. Harding began flirting with all the student nurses, and Billy Bibbit completely quit writing what he used to call his "observations" in the log book, and when the window in front of her desk got replaced again, with a big X across it in whitewash to make sure McMurphy didn't have any excuse for not knowing it was there, Scanlon did it in by accidentally bouncing our basketball through it before the whitewashed X was even dry. The ball punctured, and Martini picked it off the floor like a dead bird and carried it to the nurse in the station, where she was staring at the new splash of broken glass all over her desk, and asked couldn't she please fix it with tape or something? Make it well again? Without a word she jerked it out of his hand and stuffed it in the garbage.

So, with basketball season obviously over, McMurphy decided fishing was the thing. He requested another pass after telling the doctor he had some friends at the Siuslaw Bay at Florence who would like to take eight

or nine of the patients out deep-sea fishing if it was okay with the staff, and he wrote on the request list out in the hall that this time he would be accompanied by "two sweet old aunts from a little place outside of Oregon City." In the meeting his pass was granted for the next weekend. When the nurse finished officially noting his pass in her roll book, she reached into her wicker bag beside her feet and drew out a clipping that she had taken from the paper that morning, and read out loud that although fishing off the coast of Oregon was having a peak year, the salmon were running quite late in the season and the sea was rough and dangerous. And she would suggest the men give that some thought.

"Good idea," McMurphy said. He closed his eyes and sucked a deep breath through his teeth. "Yes sir! The salt smell o' the poundin' sea, the crack o' the bow against the waves-braving the elements, where men are men and boats are boats. Miss Ratched, you've talked me into it. I'll call and rent that boat this very night. Shall I sign you on?"

Instead of answering she walked to the bulletin board and pinned up the clipping.

The next day he started signing up the guys that wanted to go and that had ten bucks to chip in on boat rent, and the nurse started steadily bringing in clippings from the newspapers that told about wrecked boats and sudden storms on the coast. McMurphy pooh-poohed her and her clippings, saying that his two aunts had spent most of their lives bouncing around the waves in one port or another with this sailor or that, and they both guaranteed the trip was safe as pie, safe as pudding, not a thing to worry about. But the nurse still knew her patients. The clippings scared them more than McMurphy'd figured. He'd figured there would be a rush to sign up, but he'd had to talk and wheedle to get the guys he did. The day before the trip he still needed a couple more before he could pay for the boat.

I didn't have the money, but I kept getting this notion that I wanted to sign the list. And the more he talked about fishing for Chinook salmon the more I wanted to go. I knew it was a fool thing to want; if I signed up it'd be the same as coming right out and telling everybody I wasn't deaf. If I'd been hearing all this talk about boats and fishing it'd show I'd been hearing everything else that'd been said in confidence around me for the past ten

years. And if the Big Nurse found out about that, that I'd heard all the scheming and treachery that had gone on when she didn't think anybody was listening, she'd hunt me down with an electric saw, fix me where she knew I was deaf and dumb. Bad as I wanted to go, it still made me smile a little to think about it: I had to keep on acting deaf if I wanted to hear at all.

I lay in bed the night before the fishing trip and thought it over, about my being deaf, about the years of not letting on I heard what was said, and 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.

It hadn't been just since I came in the hospital, either; people first took to acting like I couldn't hear or talk a long time before that. In the Army anybody with more stripes acted that way toward me. That was the way they figured you were supposed to act around someone looked like I did. And even as far back as grade school I can remember people saying that they didn't think I was listening, so they quit listening to the things I was saying. Lying there in bed, I tried to think back when I first noticed it. I think it was once when we were still living in the village on the Columbia. It was summer. ...

... and I'm about ten years old and I'm out in front of the shack sprinkling salt on salmon for the racks behind the house, when I see a car turn off the highway and come lumbering across the ruts through the sage, towing a load of red dust behind it as solid as a string of boxcars.

I watch the car pull up the hill and stop down a piece from our yard, and the dust keeps coming, crashing into the rear of it and busting in every direction and finally settling on the sage and soapweed round about and making it look like chunks of red, smoking wreckage. The car sits there while the dust settles, shimmering in the sun. I know it isn't tourists with cameras because they never drive this close to the village. If they want to buy fish they buy them back at the highway; they don't come to the village because they probably think we still scalp people and burn them around a post. They don't know some of our people are lawyers in Portland, probably wouldn't believe it if I told them. In fact, one of my uncles became a real lawyer and Papa says he did it purely to prove he could, when he'd rather poke salmon in the fall than anything. Papa says if you

don't watch it people will force you one way or the other, into doing what they think you should do, or into just being mule-stubborn and doing the opposite out of spite.

The doors of the car open all at once and three people get out, two out of the front and one out of the back. They come climbing up the slope toward our village and I see the first two are men in blue suits, and the behind one, the one that got out of the back, is an old white-haired woman in an outfit so stiff and heavy it must be armor plate. They're puffing and sweating by the time they break out of the sage into our bald yard.

The first man stops and looks the village over. He's short and round and wearing a white Stetson hat. He shakes his head at the rickety clutter of fishracks and secondhand cars and chicken coops and motorcycles and dogs.

"Have you ever in all your born days seen the like? Have you now? I swear to heaven, have you ever?"

He pulls off the hat and pats his red rubber ball of a head with a handkerchief, careful, like he's afraid of getting one or the other mused up-the handkerchief or the dab of damp stringy hair.

"Can you imagine people wanting to live this way? Tell me, John, can you?" He talks loud on account of not being used to the roar of the falls.

John's next to him, got a thick gray mustache lifted tight up under his nose to stop out the smell of the salmon I'm working on. He's sweated down his neck and cheeks, and he's sweated clean out through the back of his blue suit. He's making notes in a book, and he keeps turning in a circle, looking at our shack, our little garden, at Mama's red and green and yellow Saturday-night dresses drying out back on a stretch of bedcord-keeps turning till he makes a full circle and comes back to me, looks at me like he just sees me for the first time, and me not but two yards away from him. He bends toward me and squints and lifts his mustache up to his nose again like it's me stinking instead of the fish.

"Where do you suppose his parents are?" John asks. "Inside the house? Or out on the falls? We might as well talk this over with the man while we're out here."

"I, for one, am not going inside that hovel," the fat guy says.

"That hovel," John says through his mustache, "is where the Chief lives, Brickenridge, the man we are here to deal with, the noble leader of these people."

"Deal with? Not me, not my job. They pay me to appraise, not fraternize."

This gets a laugh out of John.

"Yes, that's true. But someone should inform them of the government's plans."

"If they don't already know, they'll know soon enough."

"It would be very simple to go in and talk with him."

"Inside in that squalor? Why, I'll just bet you anything that place is acrawl with black widows. They say these 'dobe shacks always house a regular civilization in the walls between the sods. And hot, lord-a-mercy, I hope to tell you. I'll wager it's a regular oven in there. Look, look how overdone little Hiawatha is here. Ho. Burnt to a fair turn, he is."

He laughs and dabs at his head and when the woman looks at him he stops laughing. He clears his throat and spits into the dust and then walks over and sits down in the swing Papa built for me in the juniper tree, and sits there swinging back and forth a little bit and fanning himself with his Stetson.

What he said makes me madder the more I think about it. He and John go ahead talking about our house and village and property and what they are worth, and I get the notion they're talking about these things around me because they don't know I speak English. They are probably from the East someplace, where people don't know anything about Indians but what they see in the movies. I think how ashamed they're going to be when they find out I know what they are saying.

I let them say another thing or two about the heat and the house; then I stand up and tell the fat man, in my very best schoolbook language, that our sod house is likely to be cooler than any one of the houses in town, lots cooler! "I know for a fact that it's cooler'n that school I go to and even cooler'n that movie house in The Dalles that advertises on that sign drawn with icicle letters that it's 'cool inside!'"

And I'm just about to go and tell them, how, if they'll come on in, I'll go get Papa from the scaffolds on the falls, when I see that they don't look like they'd heard me talk at all. They aren't even looking at me. The fat man is swinging back and forth, looking off down the ridge of lava to where the men are standing their places on the scaffolding in the falls, just plaidshirted shapes in the mist from this distance. Every so often you can see somebody shoot out an arm and take a step forward like a swordfighter, and then hold up his fifteen-foot forked spear for somebody on the scaffold above him to pull off the flopping salmon. The fat guy watches the men standing in their places in the fifty-foot veil of water, and bats his eyes and grunts every time one of them makes a lunge for a salmon.

The other two, John and the woman, are just standing. Not a one of the three acts like they heard a thing I said; in fact they're all looking off from me like they'd as soon I wasn't there at all.

And everything stops and hangs this way for a minute.

I get the funniest feeling that the sun is turned up brighter than before on the three of them. Everything else looks like it usually does—the chickens fussing around in the grass on top of the 'dobe houses, the grasshoppers batting from bush to bush, the flies being stirred into black clouds around the fish racks by the little kids with sage flails, just like every other summer day. Except the sun, on these three strangers, is all of a sudden way the hell brighter than usual and I can see the ... seams where they're put together. And, almost, see the apparatus inside them take the words I just said and try to fit the words in here and there, this place and that, and when they find the words don't have any place ready-made where they'll fit, the machinery disposes of the words like they weren't even spoken.

The three are stock still while this goes on. Even the swing's stopped, nailed out at a slant by the sun, with the fat man petrified in it like a rubber doll. Then Papa's guinea hen wakes up in the juniper branches and sees we got strangers on the premises and goes to barking at them like a dog, and the spell breaks.

The fat man hollers and jumps out of the swing and sidles away through the dust, holding his hat up in front of the sun so's he can see what's up there in the juniper tree making such a racket. When he sees it's nothing but a speckled chicken he spits on the ground and puts his hat on.

"I, myself, sincerely feel," he says, "that whatever offer we make on this ... metropolis will be quite sufficient."

"Could be. I still think we should make some effort to speak with the Chief-"

The old woman interrupts him by taking one ringing step forward. "No." This is the first thing she's said. "No," she says again in a way that reminds me of the Big Nurse. She lifts her eyebrows and looks the place over. Her eyes spring up like the numbers in a cash register; she's looking at Mamma's dresses hung so careful on the line, and she's nodding her head.

"No. We don't talk with the Chief today. Not yet. I think . that I agree with Brickenridge for once. Only for a different reason. You recall the record we have shows the wife is not Indian but white? White. A woman from town. Her name is Bromden. He took her name, not she his. Oh, yes, I think if we just leave now and go back into town, and, of course, spread the word with the townspeople about the government's plans so they understand the advantages of having a hydroelectric dam and a lake instead of a cluster of shacks beside a falls, then type up an offer-and mail it to the wife, you see, by mistake? I feel our job will be a great deal easier."

She looks off to the men on the ancient, rickety, zigzagging scaffolding that has been growing and branching out among the rocks of the falls for hundreds of years.

"Whereas if we meet now with the husband and make some abrupt offer, we may run up against an untold amount of Navaho stubbornness and love of-I suppose we must call it home."

I start to tell them he's not Navaho, but think what's the use if they don't listen? They don't care what tribe he is.

The woman smiles and nods at both the men, a smile and a nod to each, and her eyes ring them up, and she begins to move stiffly back to their car, talking in a light, young voice.

"As my sociology professor used to emphasize, 'There is generally one person in every situation you must never underestimate the power of.' "

And they get back in the car and drive away, with me standing there wondering if they ever even saw me.

I was kind of amazed that I'd remembered that. It was the first time in what seemed to me centuries that I'd been able to remember much about my childhood. It fascinated me to discover I could still do it. I lay in bed awake, remembering other happenings, and just about that time, while I was half in a kind of dream, I heard a sound under my bed like a mouse with a walnut. I leaned over the edge of the bed and saw the shine of metal biting off pieces of gum I knew by heart. The black boy named Geever had found where I'd been hiding my chewing gum; was scraping the pieces off into a sack with a long, lean pair of scissors open like jaws.

I jerked back up under the covers before he saw me looking. My heart was banging in my ears, scared he'd seen me. I wanted to tell him to get away, to mind his own business and leave my chewing gum alone, but I couldn't even let on I heard. I lay still to see if he'd caught me bending over to peek under the bed at him, but he didn't give any sign—all I heard was the *zzzth-zzzth* of his scissors and pieces falling into the sack, reminded me of hailstones the way they used to rattle on our tar-paper roof. He clacked his tongue and giggled to himself.

"Um-ummm. Lord Bawd amighty. Hee. I wonder how many times this muthuh chewed some o' this stuff? Just as hard."

McMurphy heard the black boy muttering to himself and woke and rolled up to one elbow to look at what he was up to at this hour down on his knees under my bed. He watched the black boy a minute, rubbing his eyes to be sure of what he was seeing, just like you see little kids rub their eyes; then he sat up completely.

"I will be a sonofabitch if he ain't in here at eleven-thirty at night, fartin' around in the dark with a pair of scissors and a paper sack." The black boy jumped and swung his flashlight up in McMurphy's eyes. "Now tell me, Sam: what the devil are you collectin' that needs the cover of night?"

"Go back to sleep, McMurphy. It don't concern nobody else."

McMurphy let his lips spread in a slow grin, but he didn't look away from the light. The black boy got uneasy after about half a minute of shining that light on McMurphy sitting there, on that glossy new-healed scar and those teeth and that tattooed panther on his shoulder, and took the

light away. He bent back to his work, grunting and puffing like it was a mighty effort prying off dried gum.

"One of the duties of a night aide," he explained between grunts, trying to sound friendly, "is to keep the bedside area cleaned up."

"In the dead of night?"

"McMurphy, we got a thing posted called a Job Description, say cleanliness is a twenty-fo'-hour job!"

"You might of done your twenty-four hours' worth before we got in bed, don't you think, instead of sittin' out there watching TV till ten-thirty. Does Old Lady Ratched know you boys watch TV most of your shift? What do you reckon she'd do if she found out about that?"

The black boy got up and sat on the edge of my bed. He tapped the flashlight against his teeth, grinning and giggling. The light lit his face up like a black jack o'lantern.

"Well, let me tell you about this gum," he said and leaned close to McMurphy like an old chum. "You see, for years I been wondering where Chief Bromden got his chewin' gum-never havin' any money for the canteen, never havin' anybody give him a stick that I saw, never askin' Public Relations-so I watched, and I waited. And look here." He got back on his knees and lifted the edge of my bedspread and shined the light under. "How 'bout that? I bet they's pieces of gum under here been used a thousand times!"

This tickled McMurphy. He went to giggling at what he saw. The black boy held up the sack and rattled it, and they laughed some more about it. The black boy told McMurphy good night and rolled the top of the sack like it was his lunch and went off somewhere to hide it for later.

"Chief?" McMurphy whispered. "I want you to tell me something." And he started to sing a little song, a hillbilly song, popular a long time ago: "'Oh, does the Spearmint lose its flavor on the bedpost overnight?'"

At first I started getting real mad. I thought he was making fun of me like other people had.

"'When you chew it in the morning,'" he sang in a whisper, "'will it be too hard to bite?'"

But the more I thought about it the funnier it seemed to me. I tried to stop it but I could feel I was about to laugh-not at McMurphy's singing, but at my own self.

" 'This question's got me goin', won't somebody set me right; does the Spearmint lose its flavor on the bedpost o-ver niiiite?' "

He held out that last note and twiddled it down me like a feather. I couldn't help but start to chuckle, and this made me scared I'd get to laughing and not be able to stop. But just then McMurphy jumped off his bed and went to rustling through his nightstand, and I hushed. I clenched my teeth, wondering what to do now. It'd been a long time since I'd let anyone hear me do any more than grunt or bellow. I heard him shut the bedstand, and it echoed like a boiler door. I heard him say, "Here," and something lit on my bed. Little. Just the size of a lizard or a snake ...

"Juicy Fruit is the best I can do for you at the moment, Chief. Package I won off Scanlon pitchin' pennies." And he got back in bed.

And before I realized what I was doing, I told him Thank you.

He didn't say anything right off. He was up on his elbow, watching me the way he'd watched the black boy, waiting for me to say something else. I picked up the package of gum from the bedspread and held it in my hand and told him Thank you.

It didn't sound like much because my throat was rusty and my tongue creaked. He told me I sounded a little out of practice and laughed at that. I tried to laugh with him, but it was a squawking sound, like a pullet trying to crow. It sounded more like crying than laughing.

He told me not to hurry, that he had till six-thirty in the morning to listen if I wanted to practice. He said a man been still long as me probably had a considerable lot to talk about, and he lay back on his pillow and waited. I thought for a minute for something to say to him, but the only thing that came to my mind was the kind of thing one man can't say to another because it sounds wrong in words. When he saw I couldn't say anything he crossed his hands behind his head and started talking himself.

"Ya know, Chief, I was just rememberin' a time down in the Willamette Valley-I was pickin' beans outside of Eugene and considering myself damn lucky to get the job. It was in the early thirties so there wasn't many kids able to get jobs. I got the job by proving to the bean boss I could pick

just as fast and clean as any of the adults. Anyway, I was the only kid in the rows. Nobody else around me but grown-ups. And after I tried a time or two to talk to them I saw they weren't for listening to me-scrawny little patchquilt redhead anyhow. So I hushed. I was so peeved at them not listening to me I kept hushed the livelong four weeks I picked that field, workin' right along side of them, listening to them prattle on about this uncle or that cousin. Or if somebody didn't show up for work, gossip about him. Four weeks and not a peep out of me. Till I think by God they forgot I could talk, the mossbacked old bastards. I bided my time. Then, on the last day, I opened up and went to telling them what a petty bunch of farts they were. I told each one just how his buddy had drug him over the coals when he was absent. Hooee, did they listen then! They finally got to arguing with each other and created such a shitstorm I lost my quarter-cent-a-pound bonus I had comin' for not missin' a day because I already had a bad reputation around town and the bean boss claimed the disturbance was likely my fault even if he couldn't prove it. I cussed him out too. My shootin' off my mouth that time probably cost me twenty dollars or so. Well worth it, too."

He chuckled a while to himself, remembering, then turned his head on his pillow and looked at me.

"What I was wonderin', Chief, are you biding your time towards the day you decide to lay into them?"

"No," I told him. "I couldn't."

"Couldn't tell them off? It's easier than you think."

"You're ... lot bigger, tougher'n I am," I mumbled.

"How's that? I didn't get you, Chief."

I worked some spit down in my throat. "You are bigger and tougher than I am. You can do it."

"Me? Are you kidding? Criminy, look at you: you stand a head taller'n any man on the ward. There ain't a man here you couldn't turn every way but loose, and that's a fact!"

"No. I'm way too little. I used to be big, but not no more. You're twice the size of me."

"Hoo boy, you are crazy, aren't you? The first thing I saw when I came in this place was you sitting over in that chair, big as a damn mountain. I tell you, I lived all over Klamath and Texas and Oklahoma and all over around Gallup, and I swear you're the biggest Indian I ever saw."

"I'm from the Columbia Gorge," I said, and he waited for me to go on. "My Papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, and we didn't live on a mountain. He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size."

"You must of had a real moose of an old lady. How big was she?"

"Oh-big, big."

"I mean how many feet and inches?"

"Feet and inches? A guy at the carnival looked her over and says five feet nine and weight a hundred and thirty pounds, but that was because he'd just saw her. She got bigger all the time."

"Yeah? How much bigger?"

"Bigger than Papa and me together."

"Just one day took to growin', huh? Well, that's a new one on me: I never heard of an Indian woman doing something like that."

"She wasn't Indian. She was a town woman from The Dalles."

"And her name was what? Bromden? Yeah, I see, wait a minute." He thinks for a while and says, "And when a town woman marries an Indian that's marryin' somebody beneath her, ain't it? Yeah, I think I see."

"No. It wasn't just her that made him little. Everybody worked on him because he was big, and wouldn't give in, and did like he pleased. Everybody worked on him just the way they're working on you."

"They who, Chief?" he asked in a soft voice, suddenly serious.

"The Combine. It worked on him for years. He was big enough to fight it for a while. It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe, and they worked on him. In the town they beat him up in the alleys and cut his hair short once. Oh, the Combine's big-big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up."

McMurphy didn't say anything for a long time after that. Then he raised up on his elbow and looked at me again, and asked why they beat him up in the alleys, and I told him that they wanted to make him see what he had in store for him only worse if he didn't sign the papers giving everything to the government.

"What did they want him to give to the government?"

"Everything. The tribe, the village, the falls ..."

"Now I remember; you're talking about the falls where the Indians used to spear salmon-long time ago. Yeah. But the way I remember it the tribe got paid some huge amount."

"That's what they said to him. He said, What can you pay for the way a man lives? He said, What can you pay for what a man is? They didn't understand. Not even the tribe. They stood out in front of our door all holding those checks and they wanted him to tell them what to do now. They kept asking him to invest for them, or tell them where to go, or to buy a farm. But he was too little anymore. And he was too drunk, too. The Combine had whipped him. It beats everybody. It'll beat you too. They can't have somebody as big as Papa running around unless he's one of them. You can see that."

"Yeah, I reckon I can."

"That's why you shouldn't of broke that window. They see you're big, now. Now they got to bust you."

"Like bustin' a mustang, huh?"

"No. No, listen. They don't bust you that way; they work on you ways you can't fight! They put things in! They install things. They start as quick as they see you're gonna be big and go to working and installing their filthy machinery when you're little, and keep on and on and on till you're fixed!"

"Take 'er easy, buddy; shhh."

"And if you fight they lock you someplace and make you stop-"

"Easy, easy, Chief. Just cool it for a while. They heard you." He lay down and kept still. My bed was hot, I noticed. I could hear the squeak of rubber soles as the black boy came in with a flashlight to see what the noise was. We lay still till he left.

"He finally just drank," I whispered. I didn't seem to be able to stop talking, not till I finished telling what I thought was all of it. "And the last I see him he's blind in the cedars from drinking and every time I see him put the bottle to his mouth he don't suck out of it, it sucks out of him until he's shrunk so wrinkled and yellow even the dogs don't know him, and we had to cart him out of the cedars, in a pickup, to a place in Portland, to die. I'm not saying they kill. They didn't kill him. They did something else."

I was feeling awfully sleepy. I didn't want to talk any more. I tried to think back on what I'd been saying, and it didn't seem like what I'd wanted to say.

"I been talking crazy, ain't I?"

"Yeah, Chief"-he rolled over in his bed-"you been talkin' crazy."

"It wasn't what I wanted to say. I can't say it all. It don't make sense."

"I didn't say it didn't make sense, Chief, I just said it was talkin' crazy."

He didn't say anything after that for so long I thought he'd gone to sleep. I wished I'd told him good night. I looked over at him, and he was turned away from me. His arm wasn't under the covers, and I could just make out the aces and eights tattooed there. It's big, I thought, big as my arms used to be when I played football. I wanted to reach over and touch the place where he was tattooed, to see if he was still alive. He's layin' awful quiet, I told myself, I ought to touch him to see if he's still alive. ...

That's a lie. I know he's still alive. That ain't the reason I want to touch him.

I want to touch him because he's a man.

That's a lie too. There's other men around. I could touch them.

I want to touch him because I'm one of these queers!

But that's a lie too. That's one fear hiding behind another. If I was one of these queers I'd want to do other things with him. I just want to touch him because he's who he is.

But as I was about to reach over to that arm he said, "Say, Chief," and rolled in bed with a lurch of covers, facing me, "Say, Chief, why don't you come on this fishin' trip with us tomorrow?"

I didn't answer.

"Come on, what do ya say? I look for it to be one hell of an occasion. You know these two aunts of mine comin' to pick us up? Why, those ain't aunts, man, no; both those girls are workin' shimmy dancers and hustlers I know from Portland. What do you say to that?"

I finally told him I was one of the Indigents.

"You're what?"

"I'm broke."

"Oh," he said. "Yeah, I hadn't thought of that."

He was quiet for a time again, rubbing that scar on his nose with his finger. The finger stopped. He raised up on his elbow and looked at me.

"Chief," he said slowly, looking me over, "when you were full-sized, when you used to be, let's say, six seven or eight and weighed two eighty or so-were you strong enough to, say, lift something the size of that control panel in the tub room?"

I thought about that panel. It probably didn't weigh a lot more'n oil drums I'd lifted in the Army. I told him I probably could of at one time.

"If you got that big again, could you still lift it?"

I told him I thought so.

"To hell with what you think; I want to know can you promise to lift it if I get you big as you used to be? You promise me that, and you not only get my special body-buildin' course for nothing but you get yourself a ten-buck fishin' trip, free!" He licked his lips and lay back. "Get me good odds too, I bet."

He lay there chuckling over some thought of his own. When I asked him how he was going to get me big again he shushed me with a finger to his lips.

"Man, we can't let a secret like this out. I didn't say I'd tell you how, did I? Hoo boy, blowin' a man back up to full size is a secret you can't share with everybody, be dangerous in the hands of an enemy. You won't even know it's happening most of the time yourself. But I give you my solemn word, you follow my training program, and here's what'll happen."

He swung his legs out of bed and sat on the edge with his hands on his knees. The dim light coming in over his shoulder from the Nurses' Station

caught the shine of his teeth and the one eye glinting down his nose at me. The rollicking auctioneer's voice spun softly through the dorm.

"There you'll be. It's the Big Chief Bromden, cuttin' down the boulevard-men, women, and kids rockin' back on their heels to peer at him: 'Well well well, what giant's this here, takin' ten feet at a step and duckin' for telephone wires?' Comes stompin' through town, stops just long enough for virgins, the rest of you twitches might's well not even line up 'less you got tits like muskmelons, nice strong white legs long enough to lock around his mighty back, and a little cup of poozle warm and juicy and sweet as butter an' honey ..."

In the dark there he went on, spinning his tale about how it would be, with all the men scared and all the beautiful young girls panting after me. Then he said he was going out right this very minute and sign my name up as one of his fishing crew. He stood up, got the towel from his bedstand and wrapped it around his hips and put on his cap, and stood over my bed.

"Oh man, I tell you, I tell you, you'll have women trippin' you and beatin' you to the floor."

And all of a sudden his hand shot out and with a swing of his arm untied my sheet, cleared my bed of covers, and left me lying there naked.

"Look there, Chief. Haw. What'd I tell ya? You growed a half a foot already."

Laughing, he walked down the row of beds to the hall.

25

Two whores on their way down from Portland to take us deep-sea fishing in a boat! It made it tough to stay in bed until the dorm lights came on at six-thirty.

I was the first one up out of the dorm to look at the list posted on the board next to the Nurses' Station, check to see if my name was really signed there. SIGN UP FOR DEEP SEA FISHING was printed in big letters at the top, then McMurphy had signed first and Billy Bibbit was number one, right after McMurphy. Number three was Harding and number four was Fredrickson, and all the way down to number ten where nobody'd signed yet. My name was there, the last put down, across from the number nine. I was actually going out of the hospital with two whores

on a fishing boat; I had to keep saying it over and over to myself to believe it.

The three black boys slipped up in front of me and read the list with gray fingers, found my name there and turned to grin at me.

"Why, who you s'pose signed Chief Bromden up for this foolishness? Inniuns ain't able to write."

"What makes you think Inniuns able to read?"

The starch was still fresh and stiff enough this early that their arms rustled in the white suits when they moved, like paper wings. I acted deaf to them laughing at me, like I didn't even know, but when they stuck a broom out for me to do their work up the hall, I turned around and walked back to the dorm, telling myself, The hell with that. A man goin' fishing with two whores from Portland don't have to take that crap.

It scared me some, walking off from them like that, because I never went against what the black boys ordered before. I looked back and saw them coming after me with the broom. They'd probably have come right on in the dorm and got me but for McMurphy; he was in there making such a fuss, roaring up and down between the beds, snapping a towel at the guys signed to go this morning, that the black boys decided maybe the dorm wasn't such safe territory to venture into for no more than somebody to sweep a little dab of hallway.

McMurphy had his motorcycle cap pulled way forward on his red hair to look like a boat captain, and the tattoos showing out from the sleeves of his T-shirt were done in Singapore. He was swaggering around the floor like it was the deck of a ship, whistling in his hand like a bosun's whistle.

"Hit the deck, mateys, hit the deck or I keelhaul the lot of ye from stock to stern!"

He rang the bedstand next to Harding's bed with his knuckles.

"Six bells and all's well. Steady as she goes. Hit the deck. Drop your cocks and grab your socks."

He noticed me standing just inside the doorway and came rushing over to thump my back like a drum.

"Look here at the Big Chief; here's an example of a good sailor and fisherman: up before day and out diggin' red worms for bait. The rest of

you scurvy bunch o' lubbers'd do well to follow his lead. Hit the deck. Today's the day! Outa the sack and into the sea!"

The Acutes grumbled and griped at him and his towel, and the Chronics woke up to look around with beads blue from lack of blood cut off by sheets tied too tight across the chest, looking around the dorm till they finally centered on me with weak and watered-down old looks, faces wistful and curious. They lay there watching me pull on warm clothes for the trip, making me feel uneasy and a little guilty. They could sense I had been singled out as the only Chronic making the trip. They watched me-old guys welded in wheelchairs for years, with catheters down their legs like vines rooting them for the rest of their lives right where they are, they watched me and knew instinctively that I was going. And they could still be a little jealous it wasn't them. They could know because enough of the man in them had been damped out that the old animal instincts had taken over (old Chronics wake up sudden some nights, before anybody else knows a guy's died in the dorm, and throw back their heads and howl), and they could be jealous because there was enough man left to still remember.

McMurphy went out to look at the list and came back and tried to talk one more Acute into signing, going down the line kicking at the beds still had guys in them with sheets pulled over their heads, telling them what a great thing it was to be out there in the teeth of the gale with a he-man sea crackin' around and a goddam yo-heave-ho and a bottle of rum. "C'mon, loafers, I need one more mate to round out the crew, I need one more goddam volunteer. ..."

But he couldn't talk anybody into it. The Big Nurse had the rest scared with her stories of how rough the sea'd been lately and how many boats'd sunk, and it didn't look like we'd get that last crew member till a half-hour later when George Sorensen came up to McMurphy in the breakfast line where we were waiting for the mess hall to be unlocked for breakfast.

Big toothless knotty old Swede the black boys called Rub-adub George, because of his thing about sanitation, came shuffling up the hall, listing well back so his feet went well out in front of his head (sways backward this way to keep his face as far away from the man he's talking to as he can), stopped in front of McMurphy, and mumbled something in his hand. George was very shy. You couldn't see his eyes because they were in so

deep under his brow, and he cupped his big palm around most of the rest of his face. His head swayed like a crow's nest on top of his mastlike spine. He mumbled in his hand till McMurphy finally reached up and pulled the hand away so's the words could get out.

"Now, George, what is it you're sayin'?"

"Red worms," he was saying. "I joost don't think they do you no good-not for the Chin-nook."

"Yeah?" McMurphy said. "Red worms? I might agree with you, George, if you let me know what about these red worms you're speaking of."

"I think joost a while ago I hear you say Mr. Bromden was out digging the red worms for bait."

"That's right, Pop, I remember."

"So I joost say you don't have you no good fortune with them worms. This here is the month with one big Chinook run-su-ure. Herring you need. Su-ure. You jig you some herring and use those fellows for bait, then you have some good fortune."

His voice went up at the end of every sentence-for-chune-like he was asking a question. His big chin, already scrubbed so much this morning he'd worn the hide off it, nodded up and down at McMurphy once or twice, then turned him around to lead him down the hall toward the end of the line. McMurphy called him back.

"Now, hold 'er a minute, George; you talk like you know something about this fishin' business."

George turned and shuffled back to McMurphy, listing back so far it looked like his feet had navigated right out from under him.

"You bet, su-ure. Twenty-five year I work the Chinook trollers, all the way from Half Moon Bay to Puget Sound. Twenty-five year I fish-before I get so dirty." He held out his hands for us to see the dirt on them. Everybody around leaned over and looked. I didn't see the dirt but I did see scars worn deep into the white palms from hauling a thousand miles of fishing line out of the sea. He let us look a minute, then rolled the hands shut and drew them away and hid them in his pajama shirt like we might dirty them looking, and stood grinning at McMurphy with gums like brine-bleached pork.

"I had a good troller boat, joost forty feet, but she drew twelve feet water and she was solid teak and solid oak." He rocked back and forth in a way to make you doubt that the floor was standing level. "She was one good troller boat, by golly!"

He started to turn, but McMurphy stopped him again.

"Hell, George, why didn't you say you were a fisherman? I been talking up this voyage like I was the Old Man of the Sea, but just between you an' me an' the wall there, the only boat I been on was the battleship Missouri and the only thing I know about fish is that I like eatin' 'em better than cleanin' 'em."

"Cleanin' is easy, somebody show you how."

"By God, you're gonna be our captain, George; we'll be your crew."

George tilted back, shaking his head. "Those boats awful dirty any more-everything awful dirty."

"The hell with that. We got a boat specially sterilized fore and aft, swabbed clean as a bound's tooth. You won't get dirty, George, 'cause you'll be the captain. Won't even have to bait a hook; just be our captain and give orders to us dumb landlubbers-how's that strike you?"

I could see George was tempted by the way he wrung his hands under his shirt, but he still said he couldn't risk getting dirty. McMurphy did his best to talk him into it, but George was still shaking his head when the Big Nurse's key hit the lock of the mess hall and she came jangling out the door with her wicker bag of surprises, clicked down the line with automatic smile-and-good-morning for each man she passed. McMurphy noticed the way George leaned back from her and scowled. When she'd passed, McMurphy tilted his head and gave George the one bright eye.

"George, that stuff the nurse has been saying about the bad sea, about how terrible dangerous this trip might be-what about that?"

"That ocean could be awful bad, sure, awful rough."

McMurphy looked down at the nurse disappearing into the station, then back at George. George started twisting his hands around in his shirt more than ever, looking around at the silent faces watching him.

"By golly!" he said suddenly. "You think I let her scare me about that ocean? You think that?"

"Ah, I guess not, George. I was thinking, though, that if you don't come along with us, and if there is some awful stormy calamity, we're every last one of us liable to be lost at sea, you know that? I said I didn't know nothin' about boating, and I'll tell you something else: these two women coming to get us, I told the doctor was my two aunts, two widows of fishermen. Well, the only cruisin' either one of them ever did was on solid cement. They won't be no more help in a fix than me. We need you, George." He took a pull on his cigarette and asked, "You got ten bucks, by the way?"

George shook his head.

"No, I wouldn't suppose so. Well, what the devil, I gave up the idea of comin' out ahead days ago. Here." He took a pencil out of the pocket of his green jacket and wiped it clean on his shirttail, held it out to George. "You captain us, and we'll let you come along for five."

George looked around at us again, working his big brow over the predicament. Finally his gums showed in a bleached smile and he reached for the pencil. "By golly!" he said and headed off with the pencil to sign the last place on the list. After breakfast, walking down the hall, McMurphy stopped and printed C-A-P-T behind George's name.

The whores were late. Everybody was beginning to think they weren't coming at all when McMurphy gave a yell from the window and we all went running to look. He said that was them, but we didn't see but one car, instead of the two we were counting on, and just one woman. McMurphy called to her through the screen when she stopped on the parking lot, and she came cutting straight across the grass toward our ward.

She was younger and prettier than any of us'd figured on. Everybody had found out that the girls were whores instead of aunts, and were expecting all sorts of things. Some of the religious guys weren't any too happy about it. But seeing her coming lightfooted across the grass with her eyes green all the way up to the ward, and her hair, roped in a long twist at the back of her head, jouncing up and down with every step like copper springs in the sun, all any of us could think of was that she was a girl, a female who wasn't dressed white from head to foot like she'd been dipped in frost, and how she made her money didn't make any difference.

She ran right up against the screen where McMurphy was and hooked her fingers through the mesh and pulled herself against it. She was panting from the run, and every breath looked like she might swell right through the mesh. She was crying a little.

"McMurphy, oh, you damned McMurphy ..."

"Never mind that. Where's Sandra?"

"She got tied up, man, can't make it. But you, damn it, are you okay?"

"She got tied up!"

"To tell the truth"-the girl wiped her nose and giggled"-ol' Sandy got married. You remember Artie Gilfillian from Beaverton? Always used to show up at the parties with some gassy thing, a gopher snake or a white mouse or some gassy thing like that in his pocket? A real maniac-"

"Oh, sweet Jesus!" McMurphy groaned. "How'm I supposed to get ten guys in one stinkin' Ford, Candy sweetheart? How'd Sandra and her gopher snake from Beaverton figure on me swinging that?"

The girl looked like she was in the process of thinking up an answer when the speaker in the ceiling clacked and the Big Nurse's voice told McMurphy if he wanted to talk with his lady friend it'd be better if she signed in properly at the main door instead of disturbing the whole hospital. The girl left the screen and started toward the main entrance, and McMurphy left the screen and flopped down in a chair in the corner, his head hanging. "Hell's bells," he said.

The least black boy let the girl onto the ward and forgot to lock the door behind her (caught hell for it later, I bet), and the girl came jouncing up the hall past the Nurses' Station, where all the nurses were trying to freeze her bounce with a united icy look, and into the day room just a few steps ahead of the doctor. He was going toward the Nurses' Station with some papers, looked at her, and back at the papers, and back at her again, and went to fumbling after his glasses with both hands.

She stopped when she got to the middle of the day-room floor and saw she was circled by forty staring men in green, and it was so quiet you could hear bellies growling, and, all along the Chronic row, hear catheters popping off.

She had to stand there a minute while she looked around to find McMurphy, so everybody got a long look at her. There was a blue smoke hung near the ceiling over her head; I think apparatus burned out all over the ward trying to adjust to her come busting in like she did—took electronic readings on her and calculated they weren't built to handle something like this on the ward, and just burned out, like machines committing suicide.

She had on a white T-shirt like McMurphy's only a lot smaller, white tennis shoes and Levi pants snipped off above her knees to give her feet circulation, and it didn't look like that was near enough material to go around, considering what it had to cover. She must've been seen with lots less by lots more men, but under the circumstances she began to, fidget around self-consciously like a schoolgirl on a stage. Nobody spoke while they looked. Martini did whisper that you could read the dates of the coins in her Levi pockets, they were so tight, but he was closer and could see better'n the rest of us.

Billy Bibbit was the first one to say something out loud, not really a word, just a low, almost painful whistle that described how she looked better than anybody else could have. She laughed and thanked him very much and he blushed so red that she blushed with him and laughed again. This broke things into movement. All the Acutes were coming across the floor trying to talk to her at once. The doctor was pulling on Harding's coat, asking who is this. McMurphy got up out of his chair and walked through the crowd to her, and when she saw him she threw her arms around him and said, "You damned McMurphy," and then got embarrassed and blushed again. When she blushed she didn't look more than sixteen or seventeen, I swear she didn't.

McMurphy introduced her around and she shook everybody's hand. When she got to Billy she thanked him again for his whistle. The Big Nurse came sliding out of the station, smiling, and asked McMurphy how he intended to get all ten of us in one car, and he asked could he maybe borrow a staff car and drive a load himself, and the nurse cited a rule forbidding this, just like everyone knew she would. She said unless there was another driver to sign a Responsibility Slip that half of the crew would have to stay behind. McMurphy told her this'd cost him fifty goddam bucks to make up the difference; he'd have to pay the guys back who didn't get to go.

"Then it may be," the nurse said, "that the trip will have to be canceled and all the money refunded."

"I've already rented the boat; the man's got seventy bucks of mine in his pocket right now!"

"Seventy dollars? So? I thought you told the patients you'd need to collect a hundred dollars plus ten of your own to finance the trip, Mr. McMurphy."

"I was putting gas in the cars over and back."

"That wouldn't amount to thirty dollars, though, would it?"

She smiled so nice at him, waiting. He threw his hands in the air and looked at the ceiling.

"Hoo boy, you don't miss a chance do you, Miss District Attorney. Sure; I was keepin' what was left over. I don't think any of the guys ever thought any different. I figured to make a little for the trouble I took get-"

"But your plans didn't work out," she said. She was still smiling at him, so full of sympathy. "Your little financial speculations can't all be successes, Randle, and, actually, as I think about it now, you've had more than your share of victories." She mused about this, thinking about something I knew we'd hear more about later. "Yes. Every Acute on the ward has written you an IOU for some 'deal' of yours at one time or another, so don't you think you can bear up under this one small defeat?"

Then she stopped. She saw McMurphy wasn't listening to her any more. He was watching the doctor. And the doctor was eying the blond girl's T-shirt like nothing else existed. McMurphy's loose smile spread out on his face as he watched the doctor's trance, and he pushed his cap to the back of his head and strolled to the doctor's side, startling him with a hand on the shoulder.

"By God, Doctor Spivey, you ever see a Chinook salmon hit a line? One of the fiercest sights on the seven seas. Say, Candy honeybun, whyn't you tell the doctor here about deep-sea fishing and all like that. ..."

Working together, it didn't take McMurphy and the girl but two minutes and the little doctor was down locking up his office and coming back up the hall, cramming papers in a brief case.

"Good deal of paper work I can get done on the boat," he explained to the nurse and went past her so fast she didn't have a chance to answer, and the rest of the crew followed, slower, grinning at her standing in the door of that Nurses' Station.

The Acutes who weren't going gathered at the day-room door, told us don't bring our catch back till it's cleaned, and Ellis pulled his hands down off the nails in the wall and squeezed Billy Bibbit's hand and told him to be a fisher of men.

And Billy, watching the brass brads on that woman's Levis wink at him as she walked out of the day room, told Ellis to hell with that fisher of men business. He joined us at the door, and the least black boy let us through and locked the door behind us, and we were out, outside.

The sun was prying up the clouds and lighting the brick front of the hospital rose bed. A thin breeze worked at sawing what leaves were left from the oak trees, stacking them neatly against the wire cyclone fence. There was little brown birds occasionally on the fence; when a puff of leaves would hit the fence the birds would fly off with the wind. It looked at first like the leaves were hitting the fence and turning into birds and flying away.

It was a fine woodsmoked autumn day, full of the sound of kids punting footballs and the putter of small airplanes, and everybody should've been happy just being outside in it. But we all stood in a silent bunch with our hands in our pockets while the doctor walked to get his car. A silent bunch, watching the townspeople who were driving past on their way to work slow down to gawk at all the loonies in green uniforms. McMurphy saw how uneasy we were and tried to work us into a better mood by joking and teasing the girl, but this made us feel worse somehow. Everybody was thinking how easy it would be to return to the ward, go back and say they decided the nurse had been right; with a wind like this the sea would've been just too rough.

The doctor arrived and we loaded up and headed off, me and George and Harding and Billy Bibbit in the car with McMurphy and the girl, Candy; and Fredrickson and Sefelt and Scanlon and Martini and Tadem and Gregory following in the doctor's car. Everyone was awfully quiet. We pulled into a gas station about a mile from the hospital; the doctor followed. He got out first, and the service-station man came bouncing out,

grinning and wiping his hands on a rag. Then he stopped grinning and went past the doctor to see just what was in these cars. He backed off, wiping his hands on the oily rag, frowning. The doctor caught the man's sleeve nervously and took out a ten-dollar bill and tucked it down in the man's hands like setting out a tomato plant.

"Ah, would you fill both tanks with regular?" the doctor asked. He was acting just as uneasy about being out of the hospital as the rest of us were. "Ah, would you?"

"Those uniforms," the service-station man said, "they're from the hospital back up the road, aren't they?" He was looking around him to see if there was a wrench or something handy. He finally moved over near a stack of empty pop bottles. "You guys are from that asylum."

The doctor fumbled for his glasses and looked at us too, like he'd just noticed the uniforms. "Yes. No, I mean. We, they are from the asylum, but they are a work crew, not inmates, of course not. A work crew."

The man squinted at the doctor and at us and went off to whisper to his partner, who was back among the machinery. They talked a minute, and the second guy hollered and asked the doctor who we were and the doctor repeated that we were a work crew, and both of the guys laughed. I could tell by the laugh that they'd decided to sell us the gas-probably it would be weak and dirty and watered down and cost twice the usual price-but it didn't make me feel any better. I could see everybody was feeling pretty bad. The doctor's lying made us feel worse than ever-not because of the lie, so much, but because of the truth.

The second guy came over to the doctor, grinning. "You said you wanted the Soo-preme, sir? You bet. And how about us checking those oil filters and windshield wipes?" He was bigger than his friend. He leaned down on the doctor like he was sharing a secret. "Would you believe it: eighty-eight per cent of the cars show by the figures on the road today that they need new oil filters and windshield wipes?"

His grin was coated with carbon from years of taking out spark plugs with his teeth. He kept leaning down on the doctor, making him squirm with that grin and waiting for him to admit he was over a barrel. "Also, how's your work crew fixed for sunglasses? We got some good Polaroids." The doctor knew he had him. But just the instant he opened his mouth, about to give in and say Yes, anything, there was a whirring noise and the

top of our car was folding back. McMurphy was fighting and cursing the accordion-pleated top, trying to force it back faster than the machinery could handle it. Everybody could see how mad he was by the way he thrashed and beat at that slowly rising top; when he got it cussed and hammered and wrestled down into place he climbed right out over the girl and over the side of the car and walked up between the doctor and the service-station guy and looked up into the black mouth with one eye.

"Okay now, Hank, we'll take regular, just like the doctor ordered. Two tanks of regular. That's all. The hell with that other slum. And we'll take it at three cents off because we're a goddamned government-sponsored expedition."

The guy didn't budge. "Yeah? I thought the professor here said you weren't patients?"

"Now Hank, don't you see that was just a kindly precaution to keep from startlin' you folks with the truth? The doc wouldn't lie like that about just any patients, but we ain't ordinary nuts; we're every bloody one of us hot off the criminal-insane ward, on our way to San Quentin where they got better facilities to handle us. You see that freckle-faced kid there? Now he might look like he's right off a Saturday Evening Post cover, but he's a insane knife artist that killed three men. The man beside him is known as the Bull Goose Loony, unpredictable as a wild hog. You see that big guy? He's an Indian and he beat six white men to death with a pick handle when they tried to cheat him trading muskrat hides. Stand up where they can get a look at you, Chief."

Harding goosed me with his thumb, and I stood up on the floor of the car. The guy shaded his eyes and looked up at me and didn't say anything.

"Oh, it's a bad group, I admit," McMurphy said, "but it's a planned, authorized, legal government-sponsored excursion, and we're entitled to a legal discount just the same as if we was the FBI."

The guy looked back at McMurphy, and McMurphy hooked his thumbs in his pockets and rocked back and looked up at him across the scar on his nose. The guy turned to check if his buddy was still stationed at the case of empty pop bottles, then grinned back down on McMurphy.

"Pretty tough customers, is that what you're saying, Red? So much we better toe the line and do what we're told, is that what you're saying? Well, tell me, Red, what is it you're in for? Trying to assassinate the President?"

"Nobody could prove that, Hank. They got me on a bum rap. I killed a man in the ring, ya see, and sorta got taken with the kick."

"One of these killers with boxing gloves, is that what you're telling me, Red?"

"Now I didn't say that, did I? I never could get used to those pillows you wore. No, this wasn't no televised main event from the Cow Palace; I'm more what you call a back-lot boxer."

The guy hooked his thumbs in his pockets to mock McMurphy. "You are more what I call a back-lot bull-thrower."

"Now I didn't say that bull-throwing wasn't also one of my abilities, did I? But I want you to look here." He put his hands up in the guy's face, real close, turning them over slowly, palm and knuckle. "You ever see a man get his poor old meathooks so pitiful chewed up from just throwin' the bull? Did you, Hank?"

He held those hands in the guy's face a long time, waiting to see if the guy had anything else to say. The guy looked at the hands, and at me, and back at the hands. When it was clear he didn't have anything else real pressing to say, McMurphy walked away from him to the other guy leaning against the pop cooler and plucked the doctor's ten-dollar bill out of his fist and started for the grocery store next to the station.

"You boys tally what the gas comes to and send the bill to the hospital," he called back. "I intend to use the cash to pick up some refreshments for the men. I believe we'll get that in place of windshield wipes and eighty-eight per cent oil filters."

By the time he got back everybody was feeling cocky as fighting roosters and calling orders to the service-station guys to check the air in the spare and wipe the windows and scratch that bird dropping off the hood if you please, just like we owned the show. When the big guy didn't get the windshield to suit Billy, Billy called him right back.

"You didn't get this sp-spot here where the bug h-h-hit "

"That wasn't a bug," the guy said sullenly, scratching at it with his fingernail, "that was a bird."

Martini called all the way from the other car that it couldn't of been a bird. "There'd be feathers and bones if it was a bird."

A man riding a bicycle stopped to ask what was the idea of all the green uniforms; some kind of club? Harding popped right up and answered him

"No, my friend. We are lunatics from the hospital up the highway, psycho-ceramics, the cracked pots of mankind. Would you like me to decipher a Rorschach for you? No? You must burry on? Ah, he's gone. Pity." He turned to McMurphy. "Never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power, power. Think of it: perhaps the more insane a man is, the more powerful he could become. Hitler an example. Fair makes the old brain reel, doesn't it? Food for thought there."

Billy punched a beer can for the girl, and she flustered him so with her bright smile and her "Thank you, Billy," that he took to opening cans for all of us.

While the pigeons fretted up and down the sidewalk with their hands folded behind their backs.

I sat there, feeling whole and good, sipping at a beer; I could hear the beer all the way down me-zzzth zzzth, like that. I had forgotten that there can be good sounds and tastes like the sound and taste of a beer going down. I took another big drink and started looking around me to see what else I had forgotten in twenty years.

"Man!" McMurphy said as he scooted the girl out from under the wheel and tight over against Billy. "Will you just look at the Big Chief slug down on that firewater!"-and slammed the car out into traffic with the doctor squealing behind to keep up.

He'd shown us what a little bravado and courage could accomplish, and we thought he'd taught us how to use it. All the way to the coast we had fun pretending to be brave. When people at a stop light would stare at us and our green uniforms we'd do just like he did, sit up straight and strong and toughlooking and put a big grin on our face and stare straight back at them till their motors died and their windows sunstreaked and they were left sitting when the light changed, upset bad by what a tough bunch of

monkeys was just now not three feet from them, and help nowhere in sight.

As McMurphy led the twelve of us toward the ocean.

I think McMurphy knew better than we did that our tough looks were all show, because he still wasn't able to get a real laugh out of anybody. Maybe he couldn't understand why we weren't able to laugh yet, but he knew you can't really be strong until you can see a funny side to things. In fact, he worked so hard at pointing out the funny side of things that I was wondering a little if maybe he was blind to the other side, if maybe he wasn't able to see what it was that parched laughter deep inside your stomach. Maybe the guys weren't able to see it either, just feel the pressures of the different beams and frequencies coming from all directions, working to push and bend you one way or another, feel the Combine at work-but I was able to see it.

The way you see the change in a person you've been away from for a long time, where somebody who sees him every day, day in, day out, wouldn't notice because the change is gradual. All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example-a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another hatch.

Or things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they're still linked together like sausages, a sign saying "NEST IN THE WEST HOMES-NO DWN. PAYMENT FOR VETS," a playground down the hill from the houses, behind a checker-wire fence and another sign that read "ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL FOR BOYS"-there were five thousand kids in green corduroy pants and white shirts under green pullover sweaters playing crack-the-whip across an acre of crushed gravel. The line popped and twisted and jerked like a snake, and every crack popped a little kid off the end, sent him rolling up against the fence like a tumbleweed. Every crack. And it was always the same little kid, over and over.

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. They ate and went to bed. The only one they noticed was the little kid at the end of the whip. He'd always be so scuffed and bruised that he'd show up out of place wherever he went. He wasn't able to open up and laugh either. It's a hard thing to laugh if you can feel the pressure of those beams coming from every new car that passes, or every new house you pass.

"We can even have a lobby in Washington," Harding was saying, "an organization NAAIP. Pressure groups. Big billboards along the highway showing a babbling schizophrenic running a wrecking machine, bold, red and green type: 'Hire the Insane.' We've got a rosy future, gentlemen."

We crossed a bridge over the Siuslaw. There was just enough mist in the air that I could lick out my tongue to the wind and taste the ocean before we could see it. Everyone knew we were getting close and didn't speak all the way to the docks.

The captain who was supposed to take us out had a bald gray metal head set in a black turtleneck like a gun turret on a U-boat; the cold cigar sticking from his mouth swept over us. He stood beside McMurphy on the wooden pier and looked out to sea as he talked. Behind him and up a bunch of steps, six or eight men in windbreakers were sitting on a bench along the front of the bait shop. The captain talked loudly, half to the loafers on his one side and half to McMurphy on the other side, firing his copper-jacket voice someplace in between.

"Don't care. Told you specifically in the letter. You don't have a signed waiver clearing me with proper authorities, I don't go out." The round head swiveled in the turret of his sweater, beading down that cigar at the lot of us. "Look there. Bunch like that at sea, could go to diving overboard like rats. Relatives could sue me for everything I own. I can't risk it."

McMurphy explained how the other girl was supposed to get all those papers up in Portland. One of the guys leaning against the bait shop called, "What other girl? Couldn't Blondie there handle the lot of you?" McMurphy didn't pay the guy any mind and went on arguing with the captain, but you could see how it bothered the girl. Those men against the

shop kept leering at her and leaning close together to whisper things. All our crew, even the doctor, saw this and got to feeling ashamed that we didn't do something. We weren't the cocky bunch that was back at the service station.

McMurphy stopped arguing when he saw he wasn't getting any place with the captain, and turned around a couple of times, running his hand through his hair.

"Which boat have we got rented?"

"That's it there. The Lark. Not a man sets foot on her till I have a signed waiver clearing me. Not a man."

"I don't intend to rent a boat so we can sit all day and watch it bob up and down at the dock," McMurphy said. "Don't you have a phone up there in your bait shack? Let's go get this cleared up."

They thumped up the steps onto the level with the bait shop and went inside, leaving us clustered up by ourselves, with that bunch of loafers up there watching us and making comments and sniggering and goosing one another in the ribs. The wind was blowing the boats at their moorings, nuzzling them up against the wet rubber tires along the dock so they made a sound like they were laughing at us. The water was giggling under the boards, and the sign hanging over the door to the bait shack that read "SEAMAN'S SERVICE-CAPT BLOCK, PROP"

was squeaking and scratching as the wind rocked it on rusty hooks. The mussels that clung to the pilings, four feet out of water marking the tide line, whistled and clicked in the sun.

The wind had turned cold and mean, and Billy Bibbit took off his green coat and gave it to the girl, and she put it on over her thin little T-shirt. One of the loafers kept calling down, "Hey you, Blondie, you like fruitcake kids like that?" The man's lips were kidney-colored and he was purple under his eyes where the wind'd mashed the veins to the surface. "Hey you, Blondie," he called over and over in a high, tired voice, "hey you, Blondie ... hey you, Blondie ... hey you, Blondie ..."

We bunched up closer together against the wind.

"Tell me, Blondie, what've they got you committed for?"

"Ahr, she ain't committed, Perce, she's part of the cure!"

"Is that right, Blondie? You hired as part of the cure? Hey you, Blondie."

She lifted her head and gave us a look that asked where was that hard-boiled bunch she'd seen and why weren't they saying something to defend her? Nobody would answer the look. All our hard-boiled strength had just walked up those steps with his arm around the shoulders of that bald-headed captain.

She pulled the collar of the jacket high around her neck and hugged her elbows and strolled as far away from us down the dock as she could go. Nobody went after her. Billy Bibbit shivered in the cold and bit his lip. The guys at the bait shack whispered something else and whooped out laughing again.

"Ask 'er, Perce-go on."

"Hey, Blondie, did you get 'am to sign a waiver clearing you with proper authorities? Relatives could sue, they tell me, if one of the boys fell in and drown while he was on board. Did you ever think of that? Maybe you'd better stay here with us, Blondie."

"Yeah, Blondie; my relatives wouldn't sue. I promise. Stay here with us fellows, Blondie."

I imagined I could feel my feet getting wet as the dock sank with shame into the bay. We weren't fit to be out here with people. I wished McMurphy would come back out and cuss these guys good and then drive us back where we belonged.

The man with the kidney lips folded his knife and stood up and brushed the whittle shavings out of his lap. He started walking toward the steps. "C'mon now, Blondie, what you want to mess with these bozos for?"

She turned and looked at him from the end of the dock, then back at us, and you could tell she was thinking his proposition over when the door of the bait shop opened and McMurphy came shoving out past the bunch of them, down the steps.

"Pile in, crew, it's all set! Gassed and ready and there's bait and beer on board."

He slapped Billy on the rear and did a little hornpipe and commenced slinging ropes from their snubs.

"Ol' Cap'n Block's still on the phone, but we'll be pulling off as quick as he comes out. George, let's see if you can get that motor warmed up. Scanlon, you and Harding untie that rope there. Candy! What you doing off down there? Let's get with it, honey, we're shoving off."

We swarmed into the boat, glad for anything that would take us away from those guys standing in a row at the bait shop. Billy took the girl by the hand and helped her on board. George hummed over the dashboard up on the bridge, pointing out buttons for McMurphy to twist or push.

"Yeah, these pukers, puke boats, we call them," he said to McMurphy, "they joost as easy like driving the ottomobile."

The doctor hesitated before climbing aboard and looked toward the shop where all the loafers stood milling toward the steps.

"Don't you think, Randle, we'd better wait ... until the captain-"

McMurphy caught him by the lapels and lifted him clear of the dock into the boat like he was a small boy. "Yeah, Doc," he said, "wait till the captain what?" He commenced to laugh like he was drunk, talking in an excited, nervous way. "Wait till the captain comes out and tells us that the phone number I gave him is a flophouse up in Portland? You bet. Here, George, damn your eyes; take hold of this thing and get us out of here! Sefelt! Get that rope loose and get on. George, come on."

The motor chugged and died, chugged again like it was clearing its throat, then roared full on.

"Hoowee! There she goes. Pour the coal to 'er, George, and all hands stand by to repel boarders!"

A white gorge of smoke and water roared from the back of the boat, and the door of the bait shop crashed open and the captain's head came booming out and down the steps like it was not only dragging his body behind it but the bodies of the eight other guys as well. They came thundering down the dock and stopped right at the boil of foam washing over their feet as George swung the big boat out and away from the docks and we had the sea to ourselves.

A sudden turn of the boat had thrown Candy to her knees, and Billy was helping her up and trying to apologize for the way he'd acted on the dock at the same time. McMurphy came down from the bridge and asked if the two of them would like to be alone so they could talk over old times, and

Candy looked at Billy and all he could do was shake his head and stutter. McMurphy said in that case that he and Candy'd better go below and check for leaks and the rest of us could make do for a while. He stood at the door down to the cabin and saluted and winked and appointed George captain and Harding second in command and said, "Carry on, mates," and followed the girl out of sight into the cabin.

The wind lay down and the sun got higher, chrome-plating the east side of the deep green swells. George aimed the boat straight out to sea, full throttle, putting the docks and that bait shop farther and farther behind us. When we passed the last point of the jetty and the last black rock, I could feel a great calmness creep over me, a calmness that increased the farther we left land behind us.

The guys had talked excitedly for a few minutes about our piracy of the boat, but now they were quiet. The cabin door opened once long enough for a hand to shove out a case of beer, and Billy opened us each one with an opener he found in the tackle box, and passed them around. We drank and watched the land sinking in our wake.

A mile or so out George cut the speed to what he called a trolling idle, put four guys to the four poles in the back of the boat, and the rest of us sprawled in the sun on top of the cabin or up on the bow and took off our shirts and watched the guys trying to rig their poles. Harding said the rule was a guy got to hold a pole till he got one strike, then he had to change off with a man who hadn't had a chance. George stood at the wheel, squinting out through the salt-caked windshield, and hollered instructions back how to fix up the reels and lines and how to tie a herring into the herring harness and how far back to fish and how deep:

"And take that number four pole and you put you twelve ounces on him on a rope with a breakaway rig-I show you how in joost a minute-and we go after that big fella down on the bottom with that pole, by golly!"

Martini ran to the edge and leaned over the side and stared down into the water in the direction of his line. "Oh. Oh, my God," he said, but whatever he saw was too deep down for the rest of us.

There were other sports boats trolling up and down the coast, but George didn't make any attempt to join them; he kept pushing steadily straight on out past them, toward the open sea. "You bet," he said. "We go out with the commercial boats, where the real fish is."

The swells slid by, deep emerald on one side, chrome on the other. The only noise was the engine sputtering and humming, off and on, as the swells dipped the exhaust in and out of the water, and the funny, lost cry of the raggedy little black birds swimming around asking one another directions. Everything else was quiet. Some of the guys slept, and the others watched the water. We'd been trolling close to an hour when the tip of Sefelt's pole arched and dived into the water.

"George! Jesus, George, give us a hand!"

George wouldn't have a thing to do with the pole; he grinned and told Sefelt to ease up on the star drag, keep the tip pointed up, up, and work hell outa that fella!

"But what if I have a seizure?" Sefelt hollered.

"Why, we'll simply put hook and line on you and use you for a lure," Harding said. "Now work that fella, as the captain ordered, and quit worrying about a seizure."

Thirty yards back of the boat the fish broke into the sun in a shower of silver scales, and Sefelt's eyes popped and he got go excited watching the fish he let the end of his pole go down, and the line snapped into the boat like a rubber band.

"Up, I told you! You let him get a straight pull, don't you see? Keep that tip up ... up! You had you one big silver there, by golly."

Sefelt's jaw was white and shaking when he finally gave up the pole to Fredrickson. "Okay-but if you get a fish with a hook in his mouth, that's my godblessed fish!"

I was as excited as the rest. I hadn't planned on fishing, but after seeing that steel power a salmon has at the end of a line I got off the cabin top and put on my shirt to wait my turn at a pole.

Scanlon got up a pool for the biggest fish and another for the first fish landed, four bits from everybody that wanted in it, and he'd no more'n got his money in his pocket than Billy drug in some awful thing that looked like a ten-pound toad with spines on it like a porcupine.

"That's no fish," Scanlon said. "You can't win on that."

"It isn't a b-b-bird."

"That there, he's a ling cod," George told us. "He's one good eating fish you get all his warts off."

"See there. He is too a fish. P-p-pay up."

Billy gave me his pole and took his money and went to sit up close to the cabin where McMurphy and the girl were, looking at the closed door forlornly. "I wu-wu-wu-wish we had enough poles to go around," he said, leaning back against the side of the cabin.

I sat down and held the pole and watched the line swoop out into the wake. I smelt the air and felt the four cans of beer I'd drunk shorting out dozens of control leads down inside me: all around, the chrome sides of the swells flickered and flashed in the sun.

George sang out for us to look up ahead, that here come just what we been looking for. I leaned around to look, but all I saw was a big drifting log and those black seagulls circling and diving around the log, like black leaves caught up in a dust devil. George speeded up some, heading into the place where the birds circled, and the speed of the boat dragged my line until I couldn't see how you'd be able to tell if you did get a bite.

"Those fellas, those cormorants, they go after a school of candle fishes," George told us as he drove. "Little white fishes the size of your finger. You dry them and they burn joost like a candle. They are food fish, chum fish. And you bet where there's a big school of them candle fish you find the silver salmon feeding."

He drove into the birds, missing the floating log, and suddenly all around me the smooth slopes of chrome were shattered by diving birds and churning minnows, and the sleek silver-blue torpedo backs of the salmon slicing through it all. I saw one of the backs check its direction and turn and set course for a spot thirty yards behind the end of my pole, where my herring would be. I braced, my heart ringing, and then felt a jolt up both arms as if somebody'd hit the pole with a ball bat, and my line went burning off the reel from under my thumb, red as blood. "Use the star drag!" George yelled at me, but what I knew about star drags you could put in your eye so I just mashed harder with my thumb until the line turned back to yellow, then slowed and stopped. I looked around, and there were all three of the other poles whipping around just like mine, and the rest of the guys scrambling down off the cabin at the excitement and doing everything in their power to get underfoot.

"Up! Up! Keep the tip up!" George was yelling.

"McMurphy! Get out here and look at this."

"Godbless you, Fred, you got my blessed fish!"

"McMurphy, we need some help!"

I heard McMurphy laughing and saw him out of the corner of my eye, just standing at the cabin door, not even making a move to do anything, and I was too busy cranking at my fish to ask him for help. Everyone was shouting at him to do something, but he wasn't moving. Even the doctor, who had the deep pole, was asking McMurphy for assistance. And McMurphy was just laughing. Harding finally saw McMurphy wasn't going to do anything, so he got the gaff and jerked my fish into the boat with a clean, graceful motion like he's been boating fish all his life. He's big as my leg, I thought, big as a fence post! I thought, He's bigger'n any fish we ever got at the falls. He's springing all over the bottom of the boat like a rainbow gone wild! Smearing blood and scattering scales like little silver dimes, and I'm scared he's gonna flop overboard. McMurphy won't make a move to help. Scanlon grabs the fish and wrestles it down to keep it from flopping over the side. The girl comes running up from below, yelling it's her turn, dang it, grabs my pole, and jerks the hook into me three times while I'm trying to tie on a herring for her.

"Chief, I'll be damned if I ever saw anything so slow! Ugh, your thumb's bleeding. Did that monster bite you? Somebody fix the Chief's thumb-hurry!"

"Here we go into them again," George yells, and I drop the line off the back of the boat and see the flash of the herring vanish in the dark blue-gray charge of a salmon and the line go sizzling down into the water. The girl wraps both arms around the pole and grits her teeth. "Oh no you don't, dang you! Oh no ...!"

She's on her feet, got the butt of the pole scissored in her crotch and both arms wrapped below the reel and the reel crank knocking against her as the line spins out: "Oh no you don't!" She's still got on Billy's green jacket, but that reel's whipped it. She's and everybody on board sees the T-shirt she had on is gone-everybody gawking, trying to play his own fish, dodge mine slamming around the boat bottom, with the crank of that reel fluttering her breast at such a speed the nipple's just red blur!

Billy jumps to help. All he can think to do is reach around from behind and help her squeeze the pole tighter in between her breasts until the reel's finally stopped by nothing more than the pressure of her flesh. By this time she's flexed so taut and her breasts look so firm I think she and Billy could both turn loose with their hands and arms and she'd still keep hold of that pole.

This scramble of action holds for a space, a second there on the sea-the men yammering and struggling and cussing and trying to tend their poles while watching the girl; the bleeding, crashing battle between Scanlon and my fish at everybody's feet; the lines all tangled and shooting every which way with the doctor's glasses-on-a-string tangled and dangling from one line ten feet off the back of the boat, fish striking at the flash of the lens, and the girl cussing for all she's worth and looking now at her bare breasts, one white and one smarting red-and George takes his eye off where he's going and runs the boat into that log and kills the engine.

While McMurphy laughs. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, spreading his laugh out across the water-laughing at the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier and the bicycle rider and the service-station guys and the five thousand houses and the Big Nurse and all of it. Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girl friend has a bruised breast and the doctor is losing his glasses, but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain.

I notice Harding is collapsed beside McMurphy and is laughing too. And Scanlon from the bottom of the boat. At their own selves as well as at the rest of us. And the girl, with her eyes still smarting as she looks from her white breast to her red one, she starts laughing. And Sefelt and the doctor, and all.

It started slow and pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger. I watched, part of them, laughing with them-and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water and skating the wind with those black birds, high above myself, and I could look down and see myself and the rest of the guys, see the boat rocking there in the middle of those diving birds, see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people, and

watch them, us, swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles, farther and farther, until it crashed up on beaches all over the coast, on beaches all over all coasts, in wave after wave after wave.

The doctor had hooked something off the bottom on the deep pole, and everybody else on board except George had caught and landed a fish by the time he lifted it up to where we could even see it—just a whitish shape appearing, then diving for the bottom in spite of everything the doctor tried to do to hold it. As soon as he'd get it up near the top again, lifting and reeling at it with tight, stubborn little grunts and refusing any help the guys might offer, it would see the light and down it would go.

George didn't bother starting the boat again, but came down to show us how to clean the fish over the side and rip the gills out so the meat would stay sweeter. McMurphy tied a chunk of meat to each end of a four-foot string, tossed it in the air, and sent two squawking birds wheeling off, "Till death do them part."

The whole back of the boat and most of the people in it were dappled with red and silver. Some of us took our shirts off and dipped them over the side and tried to clean them. We fiddled around this way, fishing a little, drinking the other case of beer, and feeding the birds till afternoon, while the boat rolled lazily around the swells and the doctor worked with his monster from the deep. A wind came up and broke the sea into green and silver chunks, like a field of glass and chrome, and the boat began to rock and pitch about more. George told the doctor he'd have to land his fish or cut it loose because there was a bad sky coming down on us. The doctor didn't answer. He just heaved harder on the pole, bent forward and reeled the slack, and heaved again.

Billy and the girl had climbed around to the bow and were talking and looking down in the water. Billy hollered that he saw something, and we all rushed to that side, and a shape broad and white was becoming solid some ten or fifteen feet down. It was strange watching it rise, first just a light coloring, then a white form like fog under water, becoming solid, alive. ...

"Jesus God," Scanlon cried, "that's the doc's fish!"

It was on the side opposite the doctor, but we could see by the direction of his line that it led to the shape under the water.

"We'll never get it in the boat," Sefelt said. "And the wind's getting stronger."

"He's a big flounder," George said. "Sometimes they weigh two, three hundred. You got to lift them in with the winch."

"We'll have to cut him loose, Doc," Sefelt said and put his arm across the doctor's shoulders. The doctor didn't say anything; he had sweated clear through his suit between his shoulders, and his eyes were bright red from going so long without glasses. He kept heaving until the fish appeared on his side of the boat. We watched it near the surface for a few minutes longer, then started getting the rope and gaff ready.

Even with the gaff in it, it took another hour to drag the fish into the back of the boat. We had to hook him with all three other poles, and McMurphy leaned down and got a hand in his gills, and with a heave he slid in, transparent white and flat, and flopped down to the bottom of the boat with the doctor.

"That was something." The doctor panted from the floor, not enough strength left to push the huge fish off him. "That was ... certainly something."

The boat pitched and cracked all the way back to shore, with McMurphy telling grim tales about shipwrecks and sharks. The waves got bigger as we got closer to shore, and from the crests clots of white foam blew swirling up in the wind to join the gulls. The swells at the mouth of the jetty were combing higher than the boat, and George had us all put on life jackets. I noticed all the other sports boats were in.

We were three jackets short, and there was a fuss as to who'd be the three that braved that bar without jackets. It finally turned out to be Billy Bibbit and Harding and George, who wouldn't wear one anyway on account of the dirt. Everybody was kind of surprised that Billy had volunteered, took his life jacket off right away when we found we were short, and helped the girl into it, but everybody was even more surprised that McMurphy hadn't insisted that he be one of the heroes; all during the fuss he'd stood with his back against the cabin, bracing against the pitch of the boat, and watched the guys without saying a word. Just grinning and watching.

We hit the bar and dropped into a canyon of water, the bow of the boat pointing up the hissing crest of the wave going before us, and the rear down in the trough in the shadow of the wave looming behind us, and everybody in the back hanging on the rail and looking from the mountain that chased behind to the streaming black rocks of the jetty forty feet to the left, to George at the wheel. He stood there like a mast. He kept turning his head from the front to the back, gunning the throttle, easing off, gunning again, holding us steady riding the uphill slant of that wave in front. He'd told us before we started the run that if we went over that crest in front, we'd surfboard out of control as soon as the prop and rudder broke water, and if we slowed down to where that wave behind caught up it would break over the stern and dump ten tons of water into the boat. Nobody joked or said anything funny about the way he kept turning his head back and forth like it was mounted up there on a swivel.

Inside the mooring the water calmed to a choppy surface again, and at our dock, by the bait shop, we could see the captain waiting with two cops at the water's edge. All the loafers were gathered behind them. George headed at them full throttle, booming down on them till the captain went to waving and yelling and the cops headed up the steps with the loafers. Just before the prow of the boat tore out the whole dock, George swung the wheel, threw the prop into reverse, and with a powerful roar snuggled the boat in against the rubber tires like he was easing it into bed. We were already out tying up by the time our wake caught up; it pitched all the boats around and slopped over the dock and whitecapped around the docks like we'd brought the sea home with us.

The captain and the cops and the loafers came tromping back down the steps to us. The doctor carried the fight to them by first off telling the cops they didn't have any jurisdiction over us, as we were a legal, government-sponsored expedition, and if there was anyone to take the matter up with it would have to be a federal agency. Also, there might be some investigation into the number of life jackets that the boat held if the captain really planned to make trouble. Wasn't there supposed to be a life jacket for every man on board, according to the law? When the captain didn't say anything the cops took some names and left, mumbling and confused, and as soon as they were off the pier McMurphy and the captain went to arguing and shoving each other around. McMurphy was drunk enough he was still trying to rock with the roll of the boat and he slipped

on the wet wood and fell in the ocean twice before he got his footing sufficient to hit the captain one up alongside of his bald head and settle the fuss. Everybody felt better that that was out of the way, and the captain and McMurphy both went to the bait shop to get more beer while the rest of us worked at hauling our fish out of the hold. The loafers stood on that upper dock, watching and smoking pipes they'd carved themselves. We were waiting for them to say something about the girl again, hoping for it, to tell the truth, but when one of them finally did say something it wasn't about the girl but about our fish being the biggest halibut he'd ever seen brought in on the Oregon coast. All the rest nodded that that was sure the truth. They came edging down to look it over. They asked George where he learned to dock a boat that way, and we found out George'd not just run fishing boats but he'd also been captain of a PT boat in the Pacific and got the Navy Cross. "Shoulda gone into public office," one of the loafers said. "Too dirty," George told him.

They could sense the change that most of us were only suspecting; these weren't the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse that they'd watched take their insults on the dock this morning. They didn't exactly apologize to the girl for the things they'd said, but when they asked to see the fish she'd caught they were just as polite as pie. And when McMurphy and the captain came back out of the bait shop we all shared a beer together before we drove away.

It was late when we got back to the hospital.

The girl was sleeping against Billy's chest, and when she raised up his arm'd gone dead holding her all that way in such an awkward position, and she rubbed it for him. He told her if he had any of his weekends free he'd ask her for a date, and she said she could come to visit in two weeks if he'd tell her what time, and Billy looked at McMurphy for an answer. McMurphy put his arms around both of their shoulders and said, "Let's make it two o'clock on the nose."

"Saturday afternoon?" she asked.

He winked at Billy and squeezed the girl's head in the crook of his arm. "No. Two o'clock Saturday night. Slip up and knock on that same window you was at this morning. I'll talk the night aide into letting you in."

She giggled and nodded. "You damned McMurphy," she said.

Some of the Acutes on the ward were still up, standing around the latrine to see if we'd been drowned or not. They watched us march into the hall, blood-speckled, sunburned, stinking of beer and fish, toting our salmon like we were conquering heroes. The doctor asked if they'd like to come out and look at his halibut in the back of his car, and we all started back out except McMurphy. He said he guessed he was pretty shot and thought he'd hit the hay. When he was gone one of the Acutes who hadn't made the trip asked how come McMurphy looked so beat and worn out where the rest of us looked redcheeked and still full of excitement. Harding passed it off as nothing more than the loss of his suntan.

"You'll recall McMurphy came in full steam, from a rigorous life outdoors on a work farm, ruddy of face and abloom with physical health. We've simply been witness to the fading of his magnificent psychopathic suntan. That's all. Today he did spend some exhausting hours-in the dimness of the boat cabin, incidentally-while we were out in the elements, soaking up the Vitamin D. Of course, that may have exhausted him to some extent, those rigors down below, but think of it, friends. As for myself, I believe I could have done with a little less Vitamin D and a little more of his kind of exhaustion. Especially with little Candy as a taskmaster. Am I wrong?"

I didn't say so, but I was wondering if maybe he wasn't wrong. I'd noticed McMurphy's exhaustion earlier, on the trip home, after he'd insisted on driving past the place where he'd lived once. We'd just shared the last beer and slung the empty can out the window at a stop sign and were just leaning back to get the feel of the day, swimming in that kind of tasty drowsiness that comes over you after a day of going hard at something you enjoy doing-half sunburned and half drunk and keeping awake only because you wanted to savor the taste as long as you could. I noticed vaguely that I was getting so's I could see some good in the life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kids' poetry to me.

We'd drove back inland instead of the coast, to go through this town McMurphy'd lived in the most he'd ever lived in one place. Down the face of the Cascade hill, thinking we were lost till ... we came to a town covered a space about twice the size of the hospital ground. A gritty wind

had blown out the sun on the street where he stopped. He parked in some reeds and pointed across the road.

"There. That's the one. Looks like it's propped up outta the weeds-my misspent youth's humble abode."

Out along the dim six-o'clock street, I saw leafless trees standing, striking the sidewalk there like wooden lightning, concrete split apart where they hit, all in a fenced-in ring. An iron line of pickets stuck out of the ground along the front of a tangleweed yard, and on back was a big frame house with a porch, leaning a rickety shoulder hard into the wind so's not to be sent tumbling away a couple of blocks like an empty cardboard grocery box. The wind was blowing a few drops of rain, and I saw the house had its eyes clenched shut and locks at the door banged on a chain.

And on the porch, hanging, was one of those things the Japs make out of glass and hang on strings-rings and clangs in the least little blow-with only four pieces of glass left to go. These four swung and whipped and rung little chips off on the wooden porch floor.

McMurphy put the car back in gear.

"Once, I been here-since way the hell gone back in the year we were all gettin' home from that Korea mess. For a visit. My old man and old lady were still alive. It was a good home."

He let out the clutch and started to drive, then stopped instead.

"My God," he said, "look over there, see a dress?" He pointed out back. "In the branch of that tree? A rag, yellow and black?"

I was able to see a thing like a flag, flapping high in the branches over a shed.

"The first girl ever drug me to bed wore that very same dress. I was about ten and she was probably less, and at the time a lay seemed like such a big deal I asked her if didn't she think, feel, we oughta announce it some way? Like, say, tell our folks, 'Mom, Judy and me got engaged today.' And I meant what I said, I was that big a fool. I thought if you made it, man, you were legally wed, right there on the spot, whether it was something you wanted or not, and that there wasn't any breaking the rule. But this little whore-at the most eight or nines-reached down and got her dress off the floor and said it was mine, said, 'You can hang this up someplace, I'll go home in my drawers, announce it that way-they'll get the idea.' Jesus, nine

years old," he said, reached over and pinched Candy's nose, "and knew a lot more than a good many pros."

She bit his hand, laughing, and he studied the mark.

"So, anyhow, after she went home in her pants I waited till dark when I had the chance to throw that damned dress out in the night-but you feel that wind? Caught the dress like a kite and whipped it around the house outa sight and the next morning, by God, it was hung up in that tree for the whole town, was how I figured then, to turn out and see."

He sucked his hand, so woebegone that Candy laughed and gave it a kiss.

"So my colors were flown, and from that day to this it seemed I might as well live up to my name-dedicated lover-and it's the God's truth: that little nine-year-old kid out of my youth's the one who's to blame."

The house drifted past. He yawned and winked. "Taught me to love, bless her sweet ass."

Then-as he was talking-a set of tail-lights going past lit up McMurphy's face, and the windshield reflected an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and frantic, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do ...

While his relaxed, good-natured voice doled out his life for us to live, a rollicking past full of kid fun and drinking buddies and loving women and barroom battles over meager honors-for all of us to dream ourselves into.

part 4

26

The Big Nurse had her next maneuver under way the day after the fishing trip. The idea had come to her when she was talking to McMurphy the day before about how much money he was making off the fishing trip and other little enterprises along that line. She had worked the idea over that night, looking at it from every direction this time until she was dead sure it could not fail, and all the next day she fed hints around to start a rumor and have it breeding good before she actually said anything about it.

She knew that people, being like they are, sooner or later are going to draw back a ways from somebody who seems to be giving a little more than ordinary, from Santa Clauses and missionaries and men donating

funds to worthy causes, and begin to wonder: What's in it for them? Grin out of the side of their mouths when the young lawyer, say, brings a sack of pecans to the kids in his district school-just before nominations for state senate, the sly devil-and say to one another, He's nobody's fool.

She knew it wouldn't take too much to get the guys to wondering just what it was, now that you mention it, that made McMurphy spend so much time and energy organizing fishing trips to the coast and arranging Bingo parties and coaching basketball teams. What pushed him to keep up a full head of steam when everybody else on the ward had always been content to drift along playing pinochle and reading last year's magazines? How come this one guy, this Irish rowdy from a work farm where he'd been serving time for gambling and battery, would loop a kerchief around his head, coo like a teenager, and spend two solid hours having every Acute on the ward hoorahing him while he played the girl trying to teach Billy Bibbit to dance? Or how come a seasoned con like this-an old pro, a carnival artist, a dedicated odds-watcher gambling man-would risk doubling his stay in the nuthouse by making more and more an enemy out of the woman who had the say-so as to who got discharged and who didn't?

The nurse got the wondering started by pasting up a statement of the patients' financial doings over the last few months; it must have taken her hours of work digging into records. It showed a steady drain out of the funds of all the Acutes, except one. His funds had risen since the day he came in.

The Acutes took to joking with McMurphy about bow it looked like he was taking them down the line, and he was never one to deny it. Not the least bit. In fact, he bragged that if he stayed on at this hospital a year or so he just might be discharged out of it into financial independence, retire to Florida for the rest of his life. They all laughed about that when he was around, but when he was off the ward at ET or OT or PT, or when he was in the Nurses' Station getting bawled out about something, matching her fixed plastic smile with his big ornery grin, they weren't exactly laughing.

They began asking one another why he'd been such a busy bee lately, hustling things for the patients like getting the rule lifted that the men had to be together in therapeutic groups of eight whenever they went somewhere ("Billy here has been talkin' about slicin' his wrists again," he

said in a meeting when he was arguing against the group-of-eight rule. "So is there seven of you guys who'd like to join him and make it therapeutic?"), and like the way he maneuvered the doctor, who was much closer to the patients since the fishing trip, into ordering subscriptions to Playboy and Nugget and Man and getting rid of all the old McCall's that bloated-face Public Relation had been bringing from home and leaving in a pile on the ward, articles he thought we might be particularly interested in checked with a green-ink pen. McMurphy even had a petition in the mail to somebody back in Washington, asking that they look into the lobotomies and electro-shock that were still going on in government hospitals. I just wonder, the guys were beginning to ask, what's in it for ol' Mack?

After the thought had been going around the ward a week or so, the Big Nurse tried to make her play in group meeting; the first time she tried, McMurphy was there at the meeting and he beat her before she got good and started (she started by telling the group that she was shocked and dismayed by the pathetic state the ward had allowed itself to fall into: Look around, for heaven sakes; actual pornography clipped from those smut books and pinned on the walls-she was planning, incidentally, to see to it that the Main Building made an investigation of the dirt that had been brought into this hospital. She sat back in her chair, getting ready to go on and point out who was to blame and why, sitting on that couple seconds of silence that followed her threat like sitting on a throne, when McMurphy broke her spell into whoops of laughter by telling her to be sure, now, an' remind the Main Building to bring their leetle hand mirrors when they came for the investigation)-so the next time she made her play she made sure he wasn't at the meeting.

He had a long-distance phone call from Portland and was down in the phone lobby with one of the black boys, waiting for the party to call again. When one o'clock came around and we went to moving things, getting the day room ready, the least black boy asked if she wanted him to go down and get McMurphy and Washington for the meeting, but she said no, it was all right, let him stay-besides, some of the men here might like a chance to discuss our Mr. Randle Patrick McMurphy in the absence of his dominating presence.

They started the meeting telling funny stories about him and what he'd done, and talked for a while about what a great guy he was, and she kept

still, waiting till they all talked this out of their systems. Then the other questions started coming up. What about McMurphy? What made him go on like he was, do the things he did? Some of the guys wondered if maybe that tale of him faking fights at the work farm to get sent here wasn't just more of his spoofing, and that maybe he was crazier than people thought. The Big Nurse smiled at this and raised her hand.

"Crazy like a fox," she said. "I believe that is what you're trying to say about Mr. McMurphy."

"What do you m-m-mean?" Billy asked. McMurphy was his special friend and hero, and he wasn't too sure he was pleased with the way she'd laced that compliment with things she didn't say out loud. "What do you m-m-mean, 'like a fox'?"

"It's a simple observation, Billy," the nurse answered pleasantly. "Let's see if some of the other men could tell you what it means. What about you, Mr. Scanlon?"

"She means, Billy, that Mack's nobody's fool."

"Nobody said he wuh-wuh-wuh-was!" Billy hit the arm of the chair with his fist to get out the last word. "But Miss Ratched was im-implying-"

"No, Billy, I wasn't implying anything. I was simply observing that Mr. McMurphy isn't one to run a risk without a reason. You would agree to that, wouldn't you? Wouldn't all of you agree to that?"

Nobody said anything.

"And yet," she went on, "he seems to do things without thinking of himself at all, as if he were a martyr or a saint. Would anyone venture that Mr. McMurphy was a saint?"

She knew she was safe to smile around the room, waiting for an answer.

"No, not a saint or a martyr. Here. Shall we examine a cross-section of this man's philanthropy?" She took a sheet of yellow paper out of her basket. "Look at some of these gifts, as devoted fans of his might call them. First, there was the gift of the tub room. Was that actually his to give? Did he lose anything by acquiring it as a gambling casino? On the other hand, how much do you suppose he made in the short time he was croupier of his little Monte Carlo here on the ward? How much did you lose, Bruce? Mr. Sefelt? Mr. Scanlon? I think you all have some idea what

your personal losses were, but do you know what his total winnings came to, according to deposits he has made at Funds? Almost three hundred dollars."

Scanlon gave a low whistle, but no one else said anything.

"I have various other bets he made listed here, if any of you care to look, including something to do with deliberately trying to upset the staff. And all of this gambling was, is, completely against ward policy and every one of you who dealt with him knew it."

She looked at the paper again, then put it back in the basket.

"And this recent fishing trip? What do you suppose Mr. McMurphy's profit was on this venture? As I see it, he was provided with a car of the doctor's, even with money from the doctor for gasoline, and, I am told, quite a few other benefits-without having paid a nickel. Quite like a fox, I must say."

She held up her hand to stop Billy from interrupting.

"Please, Billy, understand me: I'm not criticizing this sort of activity as such; I just thought it would be better if we didn't have any delusions about the man's motives. But, at any rate, perhaps it isn't fair to make these accusations without the presence of the man we are speaking of. Let's return to the problem we were discussing yesterday-what was it?" She went leafing through her basket. "What was it, do you remember, Doctor Spivey?"

The doctor's head jerked up. "No ... wait ... I think ..."

She pulled a paper from a folder. "Here it is. Mr. Scanlon; his feelings about explosives. Fine. We'll go into that now, and at some other time when Mr. McMurphy is present we'll return to him. I do think, however, that you might give what was said today some thought. Now, Mr. Scanlon ..."

Later that day there were eight or ten of us grouped together at the canteen door, waiting till the black boy was finished shoplifting hair oil, and some of the guys brought it up again. They said they didn't agree with what the Big Nurse had been saying, but, hell, the old girl had some good points. And yet, damn it, Mack's still a good guy ... really.

Harding finally brought the conversation into the open.

"My friends, thou protest too much to believe the protesting. You are all believing deep inside your stingy little hearts that our Miss Angel of Mercy Ratched is absolutely correct in every assumption she made today about McMurphy. You know she was, and so do I. But why deny it? Let's be honest and give this man his due instead of secretly criticizing his capitalistic talent. What's wrong with him making a little profit? We've all certainly got our money's worth every time he fleeced us, haven't we? He's a shrewd character with an eye out for a quick dollar. He doesn't make any pretense about his motives, does he? Why should we? He has a healthy and honest attitude about his chicanery, and I'm all for him, just as I'm for the dear old capitalistic system of free individual enterprise, comrades, for him and his downright bullheaded gall and the American flag, bless it, and the Lincoln Memorial and the whole bit. Remember the Maine, P. T. Barnum and the Fourth of July. I feel compelled to defend my friend's honor as a good old red, white, and blue hundred-per-cent American con man. Good guy, my foot. McMurphy would be embarrassed to absolute tears if he were aware of some of the simon-pure motives people had been claiming were behind some of his dealings. He would take it as a direct effrontery to his craft."

He dipped into his pocket for his cigarettes; when he couldn't find any he borrowed one from Fredrickson, lit it with a stagey sweep of his match, and went on.

"I'll admit I was confused by his actions at first. That window-breaking-Lord, I thought, here's a man that seems to actually want to stay in this hospital, stick with his buddies and all that sort of thing, until I realized that McMurphy was doing it because he didn't want to lose a good thing. He's making the most of his time in here. Don't ever be misled by his back-woody ways; he's a very sharp operator, level-headed as they come. You watch; everything he's done was done with reason."

Billy wasn't about to give in so easy. "Yeah. What about him teaching me to d-dance?" He was clenching his fists at his side; and on the backs of his hands I saw that the cigarette burns had all but healed, and in their place were tattoos he'd drawn by licking an indelible pencil. "What about that, Harding? Where is he making muh-muh-money out of teaching me to dance?"

"Don't get upset, William," Harding said. "But don't get impatient, either. Let's just sit easy and wait-and see how he works it."

It seemed like Billy and I were the only two left who believed in McMurphy. And that very night Billy swung over to Harding's way of looking at things when McMurphy came back from making another phone call and told Billy that the date with Candy was on for certain and added, writing an address down for him, that it might be a good idea to send her a little bread for the trip.

"Bread? Muh-money? How muh-muh-much?" He looked over to where Harding was grinning at him.

"Oh, you know, man-maybe ten bucks for her and ten-"

"Twenty bucks! It doesn't cost that muh-muh-much for bus fare down here."

McMurphy looked up from under his hatbrim, gave Billy a slow grin, then rubbed his throat with his hand, running out a dusty tongue. "Boy, oh boy, but I'm terrible dry. Figure to be even drier by a week come Saturday. You wouldn't begrudge her bringin' me a little swallow, would you, Billy Boy?"

And gave Billy such an innocent look Billy had to laugh and shake his head, no, and go off to a corner to excitedly talk over the next Saturday's plans with the man he probably considered a pimp.

I still had my own notions-how McMurphy was a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper wire and crystal, how he was too big to be bothered with something as measly as money-but even I came halfway to thinking like the others. What happened was this: He'd helped carry the tables into the tub room before one of the group meetings and was looking at me standing beside the control panel.

"By God, Chief," he said, "it appears to me you grooved ten inches since that fishing trip. And lordamighty, look at the size of that foot of yours; big as a flatcar!"

I looked down and saw how my foot was bigger than I'd ever remembered it, like McMurphy's just saying it had blowed it twice its size.

"And that arm! That's the arm of an ex-football-playing Indian if I ever saw one. You know what I think? I think you oughta give this here panel a leetle heft, just to test how you're comin'."

I shook my head and told him no, but he said we'd made a deal and I was obligated to give it a try to see how his growth system was working. I didn't see any way out of it so I went to the panel just to show him I couldn't do it. I bent down and took it by the levers.

"That's the baby, Chief. Now just straighten up. Get those legs under your butt, there ... yeah, yeah. Easy now ... just straighten up. Hooeee! Now ease 'er back to the deck."

I thought he'd be real disappointed, but when I stepped back he was all grins and pointing to where the panel was off its mooring by half a foot. "Better set her back where she came from, buddy, so nobody'll know. Mustn't let anybody know yet."

Then, after the meeting, loafing around the pinochle games, he worked the talk around to strength and gut-power and to the control panel in the tub room. I thought he was going to tell them how he'd helped me get my size back; that would prove he didn't do everything for money.

But he didn't mention me. He talked until Harding asked him if he was ready to have another try at lifting it and he said no, but just because he couldn't lift it was no sign it couldn't be done. Scanlon said maybe it could be done with a crane, but no man could lift that thing by himself, and McMurphy nodded and said maybe so, maybe so, but you never can tell about such things.

I watched the way he played them, got them to come around to him and say, No, by Jesus, not a man alive could lift it-finally even suggest the bet themselves. I watched how reluctant he looked to bet. He let the odds stack up, sucked them in deeper and deeper till he had five to one on a sure thing from every man of them, some of them betting up to twenty dollars. He never said a thing about seeing me lift it already.

All night I hoped he wouldn't go through with it. And during the meeting the next day, when the nurse said all the men who participated in the fishing trip would have to take special showers because they were suspected of vermin, I kept hoping she'd fix it somehow, make us take our

showers right away or something-anything to keep me from having to lift it.

But when the meeting was over he led me and the rest of the guys into the tub room before the black boys could lock it up, and had me take the panel by the levers and lift. I didn't want to, but I couldn't help it. I felt like I'd helped him cheat them out of their money. They were all friendly with him as they paid their bets, but I knew how they were feeling inside, how something had been kicked out from under them. As soon as I got the panel back in place, I ran out of the tub room without even looking at McMurphy and went into the latrine. I wanted to be by myself. I caught a look at myself in the mirror. He'd done what he said; my arms were big again, big as they were back in high school, back at the village, and my chest and shoulders were broad and hard. I was standing there looking when he came in. He held out a five-dollar bill.

"Here you go, Chief, chewin'-gum money."

I shook my head and started to walk out of the latrine. He caught me by the arm.

"Chief, I just offered you a token of my appreciation. If you figure you got a bigger cut comin'--"

"No! Keep your money, I won't have it."

He stepped back and put his thumbs in his pockets and tipped his head up at me. He looked me over for a while.

"Okay," he said. "Now what's the story? What's everybody in this place giving me the cold nose about?"

I didn't answer him.

"Didn't I do what I said I would? Make you man-sized again? What's wrong with me around here all of a sudden? You birds act like I'm a traitor to my country."

"You're always ... winning things!"

"Winning things! You damned moose, what are you accusW me of? All I do is hold up my end of the deal. Now what's so all-fired--"

"We thought it wasn't to be winning things ..."

I could feel my chin jerking up and down the way it does before I start crying, but I didn't start crying. I stood there in front of him with my chin jerking. He opened his mouth to say something, and then stopped. He took his thumbs out of his pockets and reached up and grabbed the bridge of his nose between his thumb and finger, like you see people do whose glasses are too tight between the lenses, and he closed his eyes.

"Winning, for Christsakes," he said with his eyes closed. "Hoo boy, winning."

So I figure what happened in the shower room that afternoon was more my fault than anybody else's. And that's why the only way I could make any kind of amends was by doing what I did, without thinking about being cagey or safe or what would happen to me-and not worrying about anything else for once but the thing that needed to be done and the doing of it.

Just after we left the latrine the three black boys came around, gathering the bunch of us for our special shower. The least black boy, scrambling along the baseboard with a black, crooked hand cold as a crowbar, prying guys loose leaning there, said it was what the Big Nurse called a cautionary cleansing. In view of the company we'd had on our trip we should get cleaned before we spread anything through the rest of the hospital.

We lined up nude against the tile, and here one black boy came, a black plastic tube in his hand, squirting a stinking salve thick and sticky as egg white. In the hair first, then turn around an' bend over an' spread your cheeks!

The guys complained and kidded and joked about it, trying not to look at one another or those floating slate masks working down the line behind the tubes, like nightmare faces in negative, sighting down soft, squeezey nightmare gunbarrels. They kidded the black boys by saying things like "He, Washington, what do you fellas do for fun the other sixteen hours?" "Hey, Williams, can you tell me what I had for breakfast?"

Everybody laughed. The black boys clenched their jaws and didn't answer; this wasn't the way things used to be before that damned redhead came around.

When Fredrickson spread his cheeks there was such a sound I thought the least black boy'd be blown clear off his feet.

"Hark!" Harding said, cupping his hand to his ear. "The lovely voice of an angel."

Everyone was roaring, laughing and kidding one another, until the black boy moved on and stopped in front of the next man, and the room was suddenly absolutely quiet. The next man was George. And in that one second, with the laughing and kidding and complaining stopped, with Fredrickson there next to George straightening up and turning around and a big black boy about to ask George to lean his head down for a squirt of that stinking salve-right at that time all of us had a good idea about everything that was going to happen, and why it had to happen, and why we'd all been wrong about McMurphy.

George never used soap when he showered. He wouldn't even let somebody hand him a towel to dry himself with. The black boys on the evening shift who supervised the usual Tuesday and Thursday evening showers had learned it was easier to leave it go like this, and they didn't force him to do any different. That was the way it'd been for a long time. All the black boys knew it. But now everybody knew-even George, leaning backward, shaking his head, covering himself with big oakleaf hands-that this black boy, with his nose busted and his insides soured and his two buddies standing behind him waiting to see what he would do, couldn't afford to pass up the chance.

"Ahhhh, bend you head down here, Geo'ge. ..."

The guys were already looking to where McMurphy stood a couple of men down the line.

"Ahhhh, c'mon, Geo'ge. ..."

Martini and Sefelt were standing in the shower, not moving. The drain at their feet kept choking short little gulps of air and soapy water. George looked at the drain a second, as if it were speaking to him. He watched it gurgle and choke. He looked back at the tube in the black hand before him, slow mucus running out of the little hole at the top of the tube down over the pig-iron knuckles. The black boy moved the tube forward a few inches, and George listed farther back, shaking his head.

"No-none that stoof."

"You gonna have to do it, Rub-a-dub," the black boy said, sounding almost sorry. "You gonna have to. We can't have the place crawlin' with bugs, now, can we? For all I know you got bugs on you a good inch deep!"

"No!" George said.

'Ahhh, Geo'ge, you jes' don't have no idea. These bugs, they very, very teeny-no bigger'n a pinpoint. An', man, what they do is get you by the short hair an' hang on, an' drill, down inside you, Geo'ge."

"No bugs!" George said.

"Ahhh, let me tell you, Geo'ge: I seen cases where these awful bugs achually-"

"Okay, Washington," McMurphy said.

The scar where the black boy's nose had been broken was a twist of neon. The black boy knew who'd spoken to him, but he didn't turn around; the only way we knew he'd even heard was by the way he stopped talking and reached up a long gray finger and drew it across the scar he'd got in that basketball game. He rubbed his nose a second, then shoved his hand out in front of George's face, scrabbling the fingers around. "A crab, Geo'ge, see? See here? Now you know what a crab look like, don't you? Sure now, you get crabs on that fishin' boat. We can't have crabs drillin' down into you, can we, Geo'ge?"

"No crabs!" George yelled. "No!" He stood straight and his brow lifted enough so we could see his eyes. The black boy stepped back a ways. The other two laughed at him. "Somethin' the matter, Washington, my man?" the big one asked. "Somethin' holding up this end of the pro-ceedure, my man?"

He stepped back in close. "Geo'ge, I'm tellin' you: bend down! You either bend down and take this stuff-or I lay my hand on you!" He held it up again; it was big and black as a swamp. "Put this black! filthy! stinkin'! hand all over you!"

"No hand!" George said and lifted a fist above his head as if he would crash the slate skull to bits, splatter cogs and nuts and bolts all over the floor. But the black boy just ran the tube up against George's belly-button and squeezed, and George doubled over with a suck of air. The black boy squirted a load in his wispy white hair, then rubbed it in with his hand,

smearing black from his hand all over George's head. George wrapped both arms around his belly and screamed.

"No! No!"

"Now turn around, Geo'ge-"

"I said that's enough, buddy." This time the way his voice sounded made the black boy turn and face him. I saw the black boy was smiling, looking at McMurphy's nakedness-no hat or boots or pockets to hook his thumbs into. The black boy grinned up and down him.

"McMurphy," he said, shaking his head. "Y'know, I was beginnin' to think we might never get down to it."

"You goddamned coon," McMurphy said, somehow sounding more tired than mad. The black boy didn't say anything. McMurphy raised his voice. "Goddamned motherfucking nigger!"

The black boy shook his head and giggled at his two buddies. "What you think Mr. McMurphy is drivin' at with that kind of talk, man? You think he wants me to take the initiative? Heeheehee. Don't he know we trained to take such awful-soundin' insults from these crazies?"

"Cocksucker! Washington, you're nothing but a-"

Washington had turned his back on him, turning to George again. George was still bent over, gasping from the blow of that salve in his belly. The black boy grabbed his arm and swung 'him facing the wall.

"Tha's right, Geo'ge, now spread those cheeks."

"No-o-o!"

"Washington," McMurphy said. He took a deep breath and stepped across to the black boy, shoving him away from George. "Washington, all right, all right ..."

Everybody could hear the helpless, cornered despair in McMurphy's voice.

"McMurphy, you forcing me to protect myself. Ain't he forcing me, men?" The other two nodded. He carefully laid down the tube on the bench beside George, came back up with his fist swinging all in the same motion and busting McMurphy across the cheek by surprise. McMurphy nearly fell. He staggered backward into the naked line of men, and the

guys caught him and pushed him back toward the smiling slate face. He got hit again, in the neck, before he gave up to the idea that it had started, at last, and there wasn't anything now but get what he could out of it. He caught the next swing blacksnaing at him, and held him by the wrist while he shook his head clear.

They swayed a second that way, panting along with the panting drain; then McMurphy shoved the black boy away and went into a crouch, rolling the big shoulders up to guard his chin, his fists on each side of his head, circling the man in front of him.

And that neat, silent line of nude men changed into a yelling circle, limbs and bodies knitting in a ring of flesh.

The black arms stabbed in at the lowered red head and bull neck, chipped blood off the brow and the cheek. The black boy danced away. Taller, arms longer than McMurphy's thick red arms, punches faster and sharper, he was able to chisel at the shoulders and the head without getting in close. McMurphy kept walking forward-trudging, flatfooted steps, face down and squinting up between those tattooed fists on each side of his head-till he got the black boy against the ring of nude men and drove a fist square in the center of the white, starched chest. That slate face cracked pink, ran a tongue the color of strawberry ice cream over the lips. He ducked away from McMurphy's tank charge and got in another couple of licks before that fist laid him another good one. The mouth flew open wider this time, a blotch of sick color.

McMurphy had red marks on the head and shoulders, but he didn't seem to be hurt. He kept coming, taking ten blows for one. It kept on this way, back and forth in the shower room, till the black boy was panting and staggering and working mainly at keeping out of the way of those clubbing red arms. The guys were yelling for McMurphy to lay him out. McMurphy didn't act in any hurry.

The black boy spun away from a blow on his shoulder and looked quick to where the other two were watching. "Williams ... Warren ... damn you!" The other big one pulled the crowd apart and grabbed McMurphy around the arms from behind. McMurphy shook him off like a bull shaking off a monkey, but he was right back.

So I picked him off and threw him in the shower. He was full of tubes; he didn't weigh more'n ten or fifteen pounds.

The least black boy swung his head from side to side, turned, and ran for the door. While I was watching him go, the other one came out of the shower and put a wrestling hold on me-arms up under mine from behind and hands locked behind my neck-and I had to run backward into the shower and mash him against the tile, and while I was lying there in the water trying to watch McMurphy bust some more of Washington's ribs, the one behind me with the wrestling hold went to biting my neck and I had to break the hold. He laid still then, the starch washing from the uniform down the choking drain.

And by the time the least black boy came running back in with straps and cuffs and blankets and four more aides from Disturbed, everybody was getting dressed and shaking my hand and McMurphy's hand and saying they had it coming and what a rip-snorter of a fight it had been, what a tremendous big victory. They kept talking like that, to cheer us up and make us feel better, about what a fight, what a victory-as the Big Nurse helped the aides from Disturbed adjust those soft leather cuffs to fit our arms.

27

Up on Disturbed there's an everlasting high-pitched machine-room clatter, a prison mill stamping out license plates. And time is measured out by the di-dock, di-dock of a Ping-pong table. Men pacing their personal runways get to a wall and dip a shoulder and turn and pace back to another wall, dip a shoulder and turn and back again, fast short steps, wearing crisscrossing ruts in the tile floor, with a look of caged thirst. There's a singed smell of men scared berserk and out of control, and in the corners and under the Ping-pong table there's things crouched gnashing their teeth that the doctors and nurses can't see and the aides can't kill with disinfectant. When the ward door opened I smelled that singed smell and heard that gnash of teeth.

A tall bony old guy, dangling from a wire screwed in between his shoulder blades, met McMurphy and me at the door when the aides brought us in. He looked us over with yellow, scaled eyes and shook his head. "I wash my hands of the whole deal," he told one of the colored aides, and the wire drug him off down the hall.

We followed him down to the day room, and McMurphy stopped at the door and spread his feet and tipped his head back to look things over: he

tried to put his thumbs in his pockets, but the cuffs were too tight. "It's a scene," he said out of the side of his mouth. I nodded my head. I'd seen it all before.

A couple of the guys pacing stopped to look at us, and the old bony man came dragging by again, washing his hands of the whole deal. Nobody paid us much mind at first. The aides went off to the Nurses' Station, leaving us standing in the dayroom door. Murphy's eye was puffed to give him a steady wink, and I could tell it hurt his lips to grin. He raised his cuffed hands and stood looking at the clatter of movement and took a deep breath.

"McMurphy's the name, pardners," he said in his drawling cowboy actor's voice, "an' the thing I want to know is who's the peckerwood runs the poker game in this establishment?"

The Ping-pong clock died down in a rapid ticking on the floor.

"I don't deal blackjack so good, hobbled like this, but I maintain I'm a fire-eater in a stud game."

He yawned, hitched a shoulder, bent down and cleared his throat, and spat something at a wastepaper can five feet away; it rattled in with a ting and he straightened up again, grinned, and licked his tongue at the bloody gap in his teeth.

"Had a run-in downstairs. Me an' the Chief here locked horns with two greasemonkeys."

All the stamp-mill racket had stopped by this time, and everybody was looking toward the two of us at the door. McMurphy drew eyes to him like a sideshow barker. Beside him, I found that I was obliged to be looked at too, and with people staring at me I felt I had to stand up straight and tall as I could. That made my back hurt where I'd fallen in the shower with the black boy on me, but I didn't let on. One hungry looker with a head of shaggy black hair came up and held his hand like he figured I had something for him. I tried to ignore him, but he kept running around in front of whichever way I turned, like a little kid, holding that empty hand cupped out to me.

McMurphy talked a while about the fight, and my back got to hurting more and more.. I'd hunkered in my chair in the corner for so long that it

was hard to stand straight very long. I was glad when a little lap nurse came to take us into the Nurses' Station and I got a chance to sit and rest.

She asked if we were calm enough for her to take off the cuffs, and McMurphy nodded. He had slumped over with his head hung and his elbows between his knees and looked completely exhausted-it hadn't occurred to me that it was just as hard for him to stand straight as it was for me.

The nurse-about as big as the small end of nothing whittled to a fine point, as McMurphy put it later-undid our cuffs and gave McMurphy a cigarette and gave me a stick of gum. She said she remembered that I chewed gum. I didn't remember her at all. McMurphy smoked while she dipped her little hand full of pink birthday candles into a jar of salve and worked over his cuts, flinching every time he flinched and telling him she was sorry. She picked up one of his hands in both of hers and turned it over and salved his knuckles. "Who was it?" she asked, looking at the knuckles. "Was it Washington or Warren?"

McMurphy looked up at her. "Washington," he said and grinned. "The Chief here took care of Warren."

She put his hand down and turned to me. I could see the little bird bones in her face. "Are you hurt anywhere?" I shook my head.

"What about Warren and Williams?"

McMurphy told her he thought they might be sporting some plaster the next time she saw them. She nodded and looked at her feet. "It's not all like her ward," she said. "A lot of it is, but not all. Army nurses, trying to run an Army hospital. They are a little sick themselves. I sometimes think all single nurses should be fired after they reach thirty-five."

"At least all single Army nurses," McMurphy added. He asked how long we could expect to have the pleasure of her hospitality.

"Not very long, I'm afraid."

"Not very long, you're afraid?" McMurphy asked her.

"Yes. I'd like to keep men here sometimes instead of sending them back, but she has seniority. No, you probably won't be very long-I mean-like you are now."

The beds on Disturbed are all out of tune, too taut or too loose. We were assigned beds next to each other. They didn't tie a sheet across me, though they left a little dim light on near the bed. Halfway through the night somebody screamed, "I'm starting to spin, Indian! Look me, look me!" I opened my eyes and saw a set of long yellow teeth glowing right in front of my face. It was the hungry-looking guy. "I'm starting to spin! Please look me!"

The aides got him from behind, two of them, dragged him laughing and yelling out of the dorm; "I'm starting to spin, Indian!"-then just laugh. He kept saying it and laughing all the way down the hall till the dorm was quiet again, and I could hear that one other guy saying, "Well ... I wash my hands of the whole deal."

"You had you a buddy for a second there, Chief," McMurphy whispered and rolled over to sleep. I couldn't sleep much the rest of the night and I kept seeing those yellow teeth and that guy's hungry face, asking to Look me! Look me! Or, finally, as I did get to sleep, just asking. That face, just a yellow, starved need, come looming out of the dark in front of me, wanting things ... asking things. I wondered how McMurphy slept, plagued by a hundred faces like that, or two hundred, or a thousand.

They've got an alarm on Disturbed to wake the patients. They don't just turn on the lights like downstairs. This alarm sounds like a gigantic pencil-sharpener grinding up something awful. McMurphy and I both sat bolt upright when we heard it and were about to lie back down when a loudspeaker called for the two of us to come to the Nurses' Station. I got out of bed, and my back had stiffened up overnight to where I could just barely bend; I could tell by the way McMurphy gimped around that he was as stiff as I was.

"What they got on the program for us now, Chief?" he asked. "The boot? The rack? I hope nothing too strenuous, because, man, am I stove up bad!"

I told him it wasn't strenuous, but I didn't tell him anything else, because I wasn't sure myself till I got to the Nurses' Station, and the nurse, a different one, said, "Mr. McMurphy and Mr. Bromden?" then handed us each a little paper cup.

I looked in mine, and there are three of those red capsules. This tsing whirs in any head I can't stop.

"Hold on," McMurphy says. "These are those knockout pills, aren't they?"

The nurse nods, twists her head to check behind her; there's two guys waiting with ice tongs, hunching forward with their elbows linked.

McMurphy hands back the cup, says, "No sir, ma'am, but I'll forgo the blindfold. Could use a cigarette, though."

I hand mine back too, and she says she must phone and she slips the glass door across between us, is at the phone before anybody can say anything else.

"I'm sorry if I got you into something, Chief," McMurphy says, and I barely can hear him over the noise of the phone wires whistling in the walls. I can feel the scared downhill rush of thoughts in my head.

We're sitting in the day room, those faces around us in a circle, when in the door comes the Big Nurse herself, the two big black boys on each side, a step behind her. I try to shrink down in my chair, away from her, but it's too late. Too many people looking at me; sticky eyes hold me where I sit.

"Good morning," she says, got her old smile back now. McMurphy says good morning, and I keep quiet even though she says good morning to me too, out loud. I'm watching the black boys; one has tape on his nose and his arm in a sling, gray hand dribbling out of the cloth like a drowned spider, and the other one is moving like he's got some kind of cast around his ribs. They are both grinning a little. Probably could of stayed home with their hurts, but wouldn't miss this for nothing. I grin back just to show them.

The Big Nurse talks to McMurphy, soft and patient, about the irresponsible thing he did, the childish thing, throwing a tantrum like a little boy-aren't you ashamed? He says he guesses not and tells her to get on with it.

She talks to him about how they, the patients downstairs on our ward, at a special group meeting yesterday afternoon, agreed with the staff that it might be beneficial that he receive some shock therapy-unless he realizes his mistakes. All he has to do is admit he was wrong, to indicate, demonstrate rational contact, and the treatment would be canceled this time.

That circle of faces waits and watches. The nurse says it's up to him.

"Yeah?" he says. "You got a paper I can sign?"

"Well, no, but if you feel it nec-"

"And why don't you add some other things while you're at it and get them out of the way-things like, oh, me being part of a plot to overthrow the government and like how I think life on your ward is the sweetest goddamned life this side of Hawaii-you know, that sort of crap."

"I don't believe that would-"

"Then, after I sign, you bring me a blanket and a package of Red Cross cigarettes. Hooee, those Chinese Commies could have learned a few things from you, lady."

"Randle, we are trying to help you."

But he's on his feet, scratching at his belly, walking on past her and the black boys rearing back, toward the card tables. "O-kay, well well well, where's this poker table, buddies ...?"

The nurse stares after him a moment, then walks into the Nurses' Station to use the phone.

Two colored aides and a white aide with curly blond hair walk us over to the Main Building. McMurphy talks with the white aide on the way over, just like he isn't worried about a thing.

There's frost thick on the grass, and the two colored aides in front trail puffs of breath like locomotives. The sun wedges apart some of the clouds and lights up the frost till the grounds are scattered with sparks. Sparrows fluffed out against the cold, scratching among the sparks for seeds. We cut across the crackling grass, past the digger squirrel holes where I saw the dog. Cold sparks. Frost down the holes, clear out of sight.

I feel that frost in my belly.

We get up to that door, and there's a sound behind like bees stirred up. Two men in front of us, reeling under the red capsules, one bawling like a baby, saying, "It's my cross, thank you Lord, it's all I got, thank you Lord. ..."

The other guy waiting is saying, "Guts ball, guts ball." He's the lifeguard from the pool. And he's crying a little too.

I won't cry or yell. Not with McMurphy here.

The technician asks us to take off our shoes, and McMurphy asks him if we get our pants slit and our heads shaved too. The technician says no such luck.

The metal door looks out with its rivet eyes.

The door opens, sucks the first man inside. The lifeguard won't budge. A beam like neon smoke comes out of the black panel in the room, fastens on his cleat-marked forehead and drags him in like a dog on a leash. The beam spins him around three times before the door closes, and his face is scrambled fear. "Hut one," he grunts. "Hut two! Hut three!"

I hear them in there pry up his forehead like a manhole cover, clash and snarl of jammed cogs.

Smoke blows the door open, and a Gurney comes out with the first man on it, and he rakes me with his eyes. That face. The Gurney goes back in and brings the lifeguard out. I can hear the yell-leaders spelling out his name.

The technician says, "Next group."

The floor's cold, frosted, crackling. Up above the light whines, tube long and white and icy. Can smell the graphite salve, like the smell in a garage. Can smell acid of fear. There's one window, up high, small, and outside I see those puffy sparrows strung up on a wire like brown beads. Their heads sunk in the feathers against the cold. Something goes to blowing wind over my hollow bones, higher and higher, air raid! air raid!

"Don't holler, Chief. ..."

Air raid!

"Take 'er easy. I'll go first. My skull's too thick for them to hurt me. And if they can't hurt me they can't hurt you."

Climbs on the table without any help and spreads his arms out to fit the shadow. A switch snaps the clasps on his wrists, ankles, clamping him into the shadow. A hand takes off his wristwatch, won it from Scanion, drops it near the panel, it springs open, cogs and wheels and the long dribbling spiral of spring jumping against the side of the panel and sticking fast.

He don't look a bit scared. He keeps grinning at me.

They put the graphite salve on his temples. "What is it?" he says. "Conductant," the technician says. "Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?"

They smear it on. He's singing to them, makes their hands shake.

" 'Get Wildroot Cream Oil, Cholly. ...' "

Put on those things like headphones, crown of silver thorns over the graphite at his temples. They try to hush his singing with a piece of rubber hose for him to bite on.

" 'Mage with thoothing lan-o-lin.' "

Twist some dials, and the machine trembles, two robot arms pick up soldering irons and hunch down on him. He gives me the wink and speaks to me, muffled, tells me something, says something to me around that rubber hose just as those irons get close enough to the silver on his temples-light arcs across, stiffens him, bridges him up off the table till nothing is down but his wrists and ankles and out around that crimped black rubber hose a sound like hooeee! and he's frosted over completely with sparks.

And out the window the sparrows drop smoking off the wire.

They roll him out on a Gurney, still jerking, face frosted white. Corrosion. Battery acid. The technician turns to me.

Watch that other moose. I know him. Hold him!

It's not a will-power thing any more.

Hold him! Damn. No more of these boys without Seconal.

The clamps bite my wrists and ankles.

The graphite salve has iron filings in it, temples scratching.

He said something when he winked. Told me something.

Man bends over, brings two irons toward the ring on my head.

The machine hunches on me.

AIR RAID.

Hit at a lope, running already down the slope. Can't get back, can't go ahead, look down the barrel an' you dead dead dead.

We come up outa the bullreeds run beside the railroad track. I lay an ear to the track, and it burns my cheek.

"Nothin' either way," I say, "a hundred miles ..."

"Hump," Papa says.

"Didn't we used to listen for buffalo by stickin' a knife in the ground, catch the handle in our teeth, hear a herd way off?"

"Hump," he says again, but he's tickled. Out across the other side of the track a fencerow of wheat chats from last winter. Mice under that stuff, the dog says.

"Do we go up the track or down the track, boy?"

"We go across, is what the ol' dog says."

"That dog don't heel."

"He'll do. There's birds over there is what the of dog says."

"Better hunting up the track bank is what your ol' man says."

"Best right across in the chats of wheat, the dog tells me."

Across-next thing I know there's people all over the track, blasting away at pheasants like anything. Seems our dog got too far out ahead and run all the birds outa the chats to the track.

Dog got three mice.

... man, Man, MAN, MAN ... broad and big with a wink like a star.

Ants again oh Jesus and I got 'em bad this time, prickle-footed bastards. Remember the time we found those ants tasted like dill pickles? Hee? You said it wasn't dill pickles and I said it was, and your mama kicked the living tar outa me when she heard: Teachin' a kid to eat bugs!

Ugh. Good Injun boy should know how to survive on anything he can eat that won't eat him first.

We ain't Indians. We're civilized and you remember it.

You told me Papa. When I die pin me up against the sky.

Mama's name was Bromden. Still is Bromden. Papa said he was born with only one name, born smack into it the way a calf drops out in a spread blanket when the cow insists on standing up. Tee Ah Millatoona, the Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, and I'm the biggest by God

Injun in the state of Oregon and probly California and Idaho. Born right into it.

You're the biggest by God fool if you think that a good Christian woman takes on a name like Tee Ah Millatoona. You were born into a name, so okay, I'm born into a name. Bromden. Mary Louise Bromden.

And when we move into town, Papa says, that name makes gettin' that Social Security card a lot easier.

Guy's after somebody with a riveter's hammer, get him too, if he keeps at it. I see those lightning flashes again, colors striking.

Ting. Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she's a good fisherman, catches hens, puts 'em inna pens ... wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock ... one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest ... O-U-T spells out ... goose swoops down and plucks you out.

My old grandma chanted this, a game we played by the hours, sitting by the fish racks scaring flies. A game called Tingle Tingle Tangle Toes. Counting each finger on my two outspread hands, one finger to a syllable as she chants.

Tingle, ting-le, tang-le toes (seven fingers) she's a good fisherman, catches hens (sixteen fingers, tapping a finger on each beat with her black crab hand, each of my fingernails looking up at her like a little face asking to be the you that the goose swoops down and plucks out).

I like the game and I like Grandma. I don't like Mrs. Tingle Tangle Toes, catching hens. I don't like her. I do like that goose flying over the cuckoo's nest. I like him, and I like Grandma, dust in her wrinkles.

Next time I saw her she was stone cold dead, right in the middle of The Dalles on the sidewalk, colored shirts standing around, some Indians, some cattlemen, some wheatmen. They cart her down to the city burying ground, roll red clay into her eyes.

I remember hot, still electric-storm afternoons when jackrabbits ran under Diesel truck wheels.

Joey Fish-in-a-Barrel has twenty thousand dollars and three Cadillacs since the contract. And he can't drive none of 'em.

I see a dice.

I see it from the inside, me at the bottom. I'm the weight, loading the dice to throw that number one up there above me. They got the dice loaded to throw a snake eyes, and I'm the load, six lumps around me like white pillows is the other side of the dice, the number six that will always be down when he throws. What's the other dice loaded for? I bet it's loaded to throw one too. Snake eyes. They're shooting with crookies against him, and I'm the load.

Look out, here comes a toss. Ay, lady, the smokehouse is empty and baby needs a new pair of opera pumps. Comin' at ya. Faw!

Crapped out.

Water. I'm lying in a puddle.

Snake eyes. Caught him again. I see that number one up above me: he can't whip frozen dice behind the feedstore in an alley-in Portland.

The alley is a tunnel it's cold because the sun is late afternoon. Let me ... go see Grandma. Please, Mama.

What was it he said when he winked?

One flew east one flew west.

Don't stand in my way.

Damn it, nurse, don't stand in my way Way WAY!

My roll. Faw. Damn. Twisted again. Snake eyes.

The schoolteacher tell me you got a good head, boy, be something. ...

Be what, Papa? A rug-weaver like Uncle R & J Wolf? A basket-weaver? Or another drunken Indian?

I say, attendant, you're an Indian, aren't you?

Yeah, that's right.

Well, I must say, you speak the language quite well.

Yeah.

Well ... three dollars of regular.

They wouldn't be so cocky if they knew what me and the moon have going. No damned regular Indian ... He who-what was it?-walks out of step, hears another drum.

Snake eyes again. Hoo boy, these dice are cold.

After Grandma's funeral me and Papa and Uncle Runningand-Jumping Wolf dug her up. Mama wouldn't go with us; she never heard of such a thing. Hanging a corpse in a tree! It's enough to make a person sick.

Uncle R & J Wolf and Papa spent twenty days in the drunk tank at The Dalles jail, playing rummy, for Violation of the Dead.

But she's our goddanged mother!

It doesn't make the slightest difference, boys. You shoulda left her buried. I don't know when you blamed Indians will learn. Now, where is she? you'd better tell.

Ah go fuck yourself, paleface, Uncle R & J said, rolling himself a cigarette. I'll never tell.

High high high in the hills, high in a pine tree bed, she's tracing the wind with that old hand, counting the clouds with that old chant: ... three geese in a flock ...

What did you say to me when you winked?

Band playing. Look-the sky, it's the Fourth of July.

Dice at rest.

They got to me with the machine again ... I wonder ...

What did he say?

... wonder how McMurphy made me big again.

He said Guts ball.

They're out there. Black boys in white suits peeing under the door on me, come in later and accuse me of soaking all six these pillows I'm lying on! Number six. I thought the room was a dice. The number one, the snake eye up there, the circle, the white light in the ceiling ... is what I've been seeing ... in this little square room ... means it's after dark. How many hours have I been out? It's fogging a little, but I won't slip off and hide in it. No ... never again ...

I stand, stood up slowly, feeling numb between the shoulders. The white pillows on the floor of the Seclusion Room were soaked from me peeing on them while I was out. I couldn't remember all of it yet, but I rubbed my

eyes with the heels of my hands and tried to clear my head. I worked at it. I'd never worked at coming out of it before.

I staggered toward the little round chicken-wired window in the door of the room and tapped it with my knuckles. I saw an aide coming up the hall with a tray for me and knew this time I had them beat.

28

There had been times when I'd wandered around in a daze for as long as two weeks after a shock treatment, living in that foggy, jumbled blur which is a whole lot like the ragged edge of sleep, that gray zone between light and dark, or between sleeping and waking or living and dying, where you know you're not unconscious any more but don't know yet what day it is or who you are or what's the use of coming back at all-for two weeks. If you don't have a reason to wake up you can loaf around in that gray zone for a long, fuzzy time, or if you want to bad enough I found you can come fighting right out of it. This time I came fighting out of it in less than a day, less time than ever.

And when the fog was finally swept from my head it seemed like I'd just come up after a long, deep dive, breaking the surface after being under water a hundred years. It was the last treatment they gave me.

They gave McMurphy three more treatments that week. As quick as he started coming out of one, getting the click back in his wink, Miss Ratched would arrive with the doctor and they would ask him if he felt like he was ready to come around and face up to his problem and come back to the ward for a cure. And he'd swell up, aware that every one of those faces on Disturbed had turned toward him and was waiting, and he'd tell the nurse he regretted that he had but one life to give for his country and she could kiss his rosy red ass before he'd give up the goddam ship. Yeh!

Then stand up and take a couple of bows to those guys grinning at him while the nurse led the doctor into the station to phone over to the Main Building and authorize another treatment.

Once, as she turned to walk away, he got hold of her through the back of her uniform, gave her a pinch that turned her face red as his hair. I think if the doctor hadn't been there, hiding a grin himself, she would've slapped McMurphy's face.

I tried to talk him into playing along with her so's to get out of the treatments, but he just laughed and told me Hell, all they was doin' was chargin' his battery for him, free for nothing. "When I get out of here the first woman that takes on ol' Red McMurphy the ten-thousand-watt psychopath, she's gonna light up like a pinball machine and pay off in silver dollars! No, I ain't scared of their little battery-charger."

He insisted it wasn't hurting him. He wouldn't even take his capsules. But every time that loudspeaker called for him to forgo breakfast and prepare to walk to Building One, the muscles in his jaw went taut and his whole face drained of color, looking thin and scared-the face I had seen reflected in the windshield on the trip back from the coast.

I left Disturbed at the end of the week and went back to the ward. I had a lot of things I wanted to say to him before I went, but he'd just come back from a treatment and was sitting following the ping-pong ball with his eyes like he was wired to it. The colored aide and the blond one took me downstairs and let me onto our ward and locked the door behind me. The ward seemed awful quiet after Disturbed. I walked to our day room and for some reason stopped at the door; everybody's face turned up to me with a different look than they'd ever given me before. Their faces lighted up as if they were looking into the glare of a sideshow platform. "Here, in front of your very eyes," Harding spiels, "is the Wildman who broke the arm ... of the black boy! Hey-ha, lookee, lookee." I grinned back at them, realizing how McMurphy must've felt these months with these faces screaming up at him.

All the guys came over and wanted me to tell them everything that had happened: how was he acting up there? What was he doing? Was it true, what was being rumored over at the gym, that they'd been hitting him every day with EST and he was shrugging it off like water, makin' book with the technicians on how long he could keep his eyes open after the poles touched.

I told them all I could, and nobody seemed to think a thing about me all of a sudden talking with people-a guy who'd been considered deaf and dumb as far back as they'd known him, talking, listening, just like anybody. I told them everything that they'd heard was true, and tossed in a few stories of my own. They laughed so hard about some of the things he'd said to the nurse that the two Vegetables under their wet sheets on the

Chronics' side grinned and snorted along with the laughter, just like they understood.

When the nurse herself brought the problem of Patient McMurphy up in group the next day, said that for some unusual reason he did not seem to be responding to EST at all and that more drastic means might be required to make contact with him, Harding said, "Now, that is possible, Miss Ratched, yes- but from what I hear about your dealings upstairs with McMurphy, he hasn't had any difficulty making contact with you."

She was thrown off balance and flustered so bad with everybody in the room laughing at her, that she didn't bring it up again.

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. A man out of sight can't be made to look weak, she decided, and started making plans to bring him back down to our ward. She figured the guys could see for themselves then that he could be as vulnerable as the next man. He couldn't continue in his hero role if he was sitting around the day room all the time in a shock stupor.

The guys anticipated this, and that as long as he was on the ward for them to see she would be giving him shock every time he came out of it. So Harding and Scanlon and Fredrickson and I talked over how we could convince him that the best thing for everybody concerned would be his escaping the ward. And by the Saturday when he was brought back to the ward-footworking into the day room like a boxer into a ring, clasping his hands over his head and announcing the champ was back-we had our plan all worked out. We'd wait until dark, set a mattress on fire, and when the firemen came we'd rush him out the door. It seemed such a fine plan we couldn't see how he could refuse.

But we didn't think about its being the day he'd made a date to have the girl, Candy, sneak onto the ward for Billy.

They brought him back to the ward about ten in the morning-"Fulla piss an' vinegar, buddies; they checked my plugs and cleaned my points, and I got a glow on like a Model T spark coil. Ever use one of those coils around Halloween time? Zam! Good clean fun." And he batted around the ward bigger than ever, spilled a bucket of mop water under the Nurses' Station door, laid a pat of butter square on the toe of the least black boy's white suede shoes without the black boy noticing, and smothered giggles

all through lunch while it melted to show a color Harding referred to as a "most suggestive yellow,"-bigger than ever, and each time he brushed close by a student nurse she gave a yip and rolled her eyes and pitter-patted off down the hall, rubbing her flank.

We told him of our plan for his escape, and he told us there was no hurry and reminded us of Billy's date. "We can't disappoint Billy Boy, can we, buddies? Not when he's about to cash in his cherry. And it should be a nice little party tonight if we can pull it off; let's say maybe it's my going-away party."

It was the Big Nurse's weekend to work-she didn't want to miss his return-and she decided we'd better have us a meeting to get something settled. At the meeting she tried once more to bring up her suggestion for a more drastic measure, insisting that the doctor consider such action "before it is too late to help the patient." But McMurphy was such a whirligig of winks and yawns and belches while she talked, she finally hushed, and when she did, he gave the doctor and all the patients fits by agreeing with everything she said.

"Y'know, she might be right, Doc; look at the good that few measly volts have done me. Maybe if we doubled the charge I could pick up channel eight, like Martini; I'm tired of layin' in bed hallucinatin' nothing but channel four with the news and weather."

The nurse cleared her throat, trying to regain control of her meeting. "I wasn't suggesting that we consider more shock, Mr. McMurphy-"

"Ma'am?"

"I was suggesting-that we consider an operation. Very simple, really. And we've had a history of past successes eliminating aggressive tendencies in certain hostile cases-"

"Hostile? Ma'am, I'm friendly as a pup. I haven't kicked the tar out of an aide in nearly two weeks. There's been no cause to do any cuttin', now, has there?"

She held out her smile, begging him to see how sympathetic she was. "Randle, there's no cutting involve-"

"Besides," he went on, "it wouldn't be any use to lop 'em off; I got another pair in my nightstand."

"Another-pair?"

"One about as big as a baseball, Doc."

"Mr. McMurphy!" Her smile broke like glass when she realized she was being made fun of.

"But the other one is big enough to be considered normal."

He went on like this clear up to the time we were ready for bed. By then there was a festive, county-fair feeling on the ward as the men whispered of the possibility of having a party if the girl came with drinks. All the guys were trying to catch Billy's eye and grinning and winking at him every time he looked. And when we lined up for medication McMurphy came by and asked the little nurse with the crucifix and the birthmark if he could have a couple of vitamins. She looked surprised and said she didn't see that there was any reason why not and gave him some pills the size of birds' eggs. He put them in his pocket.

"Aren't you going to swallow them?" she asked.

"Me? Lord no, I don't need vitamins. I was just gettin' them for Billy Boy here. He seems to me to have a peaked look of late-tired blood, most likely."

"Then-why don't you give them to Billy?"

"I will, honey, I will, but I thought I'd wait till about midnight when he'd have the most need for them"-and walked to the dorm with his arm crooked around Billy's flushing neck, giving Harding a wink and me a goose in the side with his big thumb as he passed us, and left that nurse pop-eyed behind him in the Nurses' Station, pouring water on her foot.

You have to know about Billy Bibbit: in spite of him having wrinkles in his face and specks of gray in his hair, he still looked like a kid-like a jug-eared and freckled-faced and buck-toothed kid whistling barefoot across one of those calendars, with a string of bullheads dragging behind him in the dust-and yet he was nothing like this. You were always surprised to find when he stood up next to one of the other men he was just as tall as anyone, and that he wasn't jug-eared or freckled or buck-toothed at all under a closer look, and was, in fact, thirty-some years old.

I heard him give his age only one time, overheard him, to tell the truth, when he was talking to his mother down in the lobby. She was receptionist

down there, a solid, well-packed lady with hair revolving from blond to blue to black and back to blond again every few months, a neighbor of the Big Nurse's, from what I'd heard, and a dear personal friend. Whenever we'd go on some activity Billy would always be obliged to stop and lean a scarlet cheek over that desk for her to dab a kiss on. It embarrassed the rest of us as much as it did Billy, and for that reason nobody ever teased him about it, not even McMurphy.

One afternoon, I don't recall how long back, we stopped on our way to activities and sat around the lobby on the big plastic sofas or outside in the two-o'clock sun while one of the black boys used the phone to call his bookmaker, and Billy's mother took the opportunity to leave her work and come out from behind her desk and take her boy by the hand and lead him outside to sit near where I was on the grass. She sat stiff there on the grass, tight at the bend with her short round legs out in front of her in stockings, reminding me of the color of bologna skins, and Billy lay beside her and put his head in her lap and let her tease at his ear with a dandelion fluff. Billy was talking about looking for a wife and going to college someday. His mother tickled him with the fluff and laughed at such foolishness.

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

"Mother, I'm th-th-thirty-one years old!"

She laughed and twiddled his ear with the weed. "Sweetheart, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?"

She wrinkled her nose and opened her lips at him and made a kind of wet kissing sound in the air with her tongue, and I had to admit she didn't look like a mother of any kind. I didn't believe myself that he could be thirty-one years old till later when I edged up close enough to act a look at the birth date on his wristband.

At midnight, when Geever and the other black boy and the nurse went off duty, and the old colored fellow, Mr. Turkle, came on for his shift, McMurphy and Billy were already up, taking vitamins, I imagined. I got out of bed and put on a robe and walked out to the day room, where they were talking with Mr. Turkle. Harding and Scanlon and Sefelt and some of the other guys came out too. McMurphy was telling Mr. Turkle what to expect if the girl did come,-reminding him, actually, because it looked like they'd talked it all over beforehand a couple of weeks back. McMurphy

said that the thing to do was let the girl in the window, instead of risking having her come through the lobby, where the night supervisor might be. And to unlock the Seclusion Room then. Yeah, won't that make a fine honeymoon shack for the lovers? Mighty secluded. ("Ahh, McM-Murphy," Billy kept trying to say.) And to keep the lights out. So the supervisor couldn't see in. And close the dorm doors and not wake up every slobbering Chronic in the place. And to keep quiet; we don't want to disturb them.

"Ah, come on, M-M-Mack," Billy said.

Mr. Turkle kept nodding and bobbing his head, appearing to fall half asleep. When McMurphy said, "I guess that pretty well covers things," Mr. Turkle said, "No-not en-tiuhly," and sat there grinning in his white suit with his bald yellow head floating at the end of his neck like a balloon on a stick.

"Come on, Turkle. It'll be worth your while. She should be bringin' a couple of bottles."

"You gettin' closer," Mr. Turkle said. His head lolled and bobbed. He acted like he was barely able to keep awake. I'd heard he worked another job during the day, at a race track. McMurphy turned to Billy.

"Turkle is holdin' out for a bigger contract, Billy Boy. How much is it worth to you to lose your ol' cherry?"

Before Billy could stop stuttering and answer, Mr. Turkle shook his head. "It ain' that. Not money. She bringin' more than the bottle with her, though, ain't she, this sweet thing? You people be sharing more'n a bottle, won't you." He grinned around at the faces.

Billy nearly burst, trying to stutter something about not Candy, not his girl! McMurphy took him aside and told him not to worry about his girl's chastity-Turkle'd likely be so drunk and sleepy by the time Billy was finished that the old coon couldn't put a carrot in a washtub.

The girl was late again. We sat out in the day room in our robes, listening to McMurphy and Mr. Turkle tell Army stories while they passed one of Mr. Turkle's cigarettes back and forth, smoking it a funny way, holding the smoke in when they inhaled till their eyes bugged. Once Harding asked what manner of cigarette they were smoking that smelled so

provocative, and Mr. Turkle said in a high, breath-holding voice, "Jus' a plain old cigarette. Hee hoe, yes. You want a toke?"

Billy got more and more nervous, afraid the girl might not show up, afraid she might. He kept asking why didn't we all go to bed, instead off sitting out here in the cold dark like hounds waiting at the kitchen for table scraps, and we just grinned at him. None of us felt like going to bed; it wasn't cold at all, and it was pleasant to relax in the half-light and listen to McMurphy and Mr. Turkle tell tales. Nobody acted sleepy, or not even very worried that it was after two o'clock and the girl hadn't showed up yet. Turkle suggested maybe she was late because the ward was so dark she couldn't see to tell which one to come to, and McMurphy said that was the obvious truth, so the two of them ran up and down the halls, turning on every light in the place, were even about to turn on the big overhead wake-up lights in the dorm when Harding told them this would just get all the other men out of bed to share things with. They agreed and settled for all the lights in the doctor's office instead.

No sooner did they have the ward lit up like full daylight than there came a tapping at the window. McMurphy ran to the window and put his face to it, cupping his hands on, each side so he could see. He drew back and grinned at us.

"She walks like beauty, in the night," he said. He took Billy by the wrist and dragged him to the window. "Let her in, Turkle. Let this mad stud at her."

"Look, McM-M-M-Murphy, wait." Billy was balking like a mule.

"Don't you mamamamurphy me, Billy Boy. It's too late to back out now. You'll pull through. I'll tell you what: I got five dollars here says you burn that woman down; all right? Open the window, Turkle."

There were two girls in the dark, Candy and the other one that hadn't shown up for the fishing trip. "Hot dog," Turkle said, helping them through, "enough for ever'body."

We all went to help: they had to lift their tight skirts up to their thighs to step through the window. Candy said, "You damn McMurphy," and tried so wild to throw her arms around him that she came near to breaking the bottles she held by the neck in each hand. She was weaving around quite a bit, and her hair was falling out of the hairdo she had piled on top of her

head. I thought she looked better with it swung at the back like she'd worn it on the fishing trip. She gestured at the other girl with a bottle as she came through the window.

"Sandy came along. She just up and left that maniac from Beaverton that she married; isn't that wild?"

The girl came through the window and kissed McMurphy and said, "Hello, Mack. I'm sorry I didn't show up. But that's over. You can take just so many funsies like white mice in your pillowcase and worms in your cold cream and frogs in your bra." She shook her head once and wiped her hand in front of her like she was wiping away the memory of her animal-loving, husband. "Cheesus, what a maniac."

They were both in skirts and sweaters and nylons and barefoot, and both red-cheeked and giggling. "We had to keep asking for directions," Candy explained, "at every bar we came to."

Sandy was turning around in a big wide-eyed circle. "Whoee, Candy girl, what are we in now? Is this real? Are we in an asylum? Man!" She was bigger than Candy, and maybe five years older, and had tried to lock her bay-colored hair in a stylish bun at the back of her head, but it kept stringing down around her broad milk-fed cheekbones, and she looked like a cowgirl trying to pass herself off as a society lady. Her shoulders and breasts and hips were too wide and her grin too big and open for her to ever be called beautiful, but she was pretty and she was healthy and she had one long finger crooked in the ring of a gallon of red wine, and it swung at her side like a purse.

"How, Candy, how, how, how do these wild things happen to us?" She turned around once more and stopped, with her bare feet spread, giggling.

"These things don't happen," Harding said to the girl solemnly. "These things are fantasies you lie awake at night dreaming up and then are afraid to tell your analyst. You're not really here. That wine isn't real; none of this exists. Now, let's go on from there."

"Hello, Billy," Candy said.

"Look at that stuff," Turkle said.

Candy straight-armed one of the bottles awkwardly toward Billy. "I brought you a present."

"These things are Thorne Smithian daydreams!" Harding said.

"Boy!" the girl named Sandy said. "What have we got ourselves into?"

"Shhhh," Scanlon said and scowled around him. "You'll wake up those other bastards, talking so loud."

"What's the matter, stingy?" Sandy giggled, starting to turn in her circle again. "You scared there's not enough to go around?"

"Sandy, I mighta known you'd bring that damn cheap port."

"Boy!" She stopped her turning to look up at me. "Dig this one, Candy. A Goliath-fee, fi, fo, fum."

Mr. Turkle said, "Hot dog," and locked the screen back, and Sandy said, "Boy," again. We were all in an awkward little cluster in the middle of the day room, shifting around one another, saying things just because nobody knew what else to do yet-never been up against a situation like it-and I don't know when this excited, uneasy flurry of talk and giggling and shuffling around the day room would've stopped if that ward door hadn't rung with a key knocking it open down the hall-jarred everybody like a burglar alarm going off.

"Oh, Lord God," Mr. Turkle said, clapping his hand on the top of his bald head, "it's the soo-pervisor, come to fire my black ass."

We all ran into the latrine and turned out the light and stood in the dark, listening to one another breathe. We could hear that supervisor wander around the ward, calling for Mr. Turkle in a loud, half-afraid whisper. Her voice was soft and worried, rising at the end as she called, "Mr. Tur-kull? Mis-tur Turkle?"

"Where the hell is he?" McMurphy whispered. "Why don't he answer her?"

"Don't worry," Scanlon said. "She won't look in the can."

"But why don't he answer? Maybe he got too high."

"Man, what you talkin'? I don't get too high, not on a little middlin' joint like that one." It was Mr. Turkle's voice somewhere in the dark latrine with us.

"Jesus, Turkle, what are you doing in here?" McMurphy was trying to sound stern and keep from laughing at the same time. "Get out there and see what she wants. What'll she think if she doesn't find you?"

"The end is upon us," Harding said and sat down. "Allah be merciful."

Turkle opened the door and slipped out and met her in the hall. She'd come over to see what all the lights were on about. What made it necessary to turn on every fixture in the ward? Turkle said every fixture wasn't on; that the dorm lights were off and so were the ones in the latrine. She said that was no excuse for the other lights; what possible reason could there be for all this light? Turkle couldn't come up with an answer for this, and during the long pause I heard the battle being passed around near me in the dark. Out in the hall she asked him again, and Turkle told her, well, he was just cleanin' up, policing the areas. She wanted to know why, then, was the latrine, the place that his job description called for him to have clean, the only place that was dark? And the bottle went around again while we waited to see what he'd answer. It came by me, and I took a drink. I felt I needed it. I could hear Turkle swallowing all the way out in the hall, umming and aching for something to say.

"He's skulled," McMurphy hissed. "Somebody's gonna have to go out and help him."

I heard a toilet flush behind me, and the door opened and Harding was caught in the hall light as he went out, pulling up his pajamas. I heard the supervisor gasp at the sight of him and he told her to pardon him, but he hadn't seen her, being as it was so dark.

"It isn't dark."

"In the latrine, I meant. I always switch off the lights to achieve a better bowel movement. Those mirrors, you understand; when the light is on the mirrors seem to be sitting in judgment over me to arbitrate a punishment if everything doesn't come out right."

"But Aide Turkle said he was cleaning in there ..."

"And doing quite a good job, too, I might add-considering the restrictions imposed on him by the dark. Would you care to see?"

Harding pushed the door open a crack, and a slice of light cut across the latrine floor tile. I caught a glimpse of the supervisor backing off, saying she'd have to decline his offer but she had further rounds to make. I heard

the ward door unlock again up the hall, and she let herself off the ward. Harding called to her to return soon for another visit, and everybody rushed out and shook his hand and pounded his back for the way he'd pulled it off.

We stood there in the hall, and the wine went around again. Sefelt said he'd as leave have that vodka if there was something to mix it with. He asked Mr. Turkle if there wasn't something on the ward to put in it and Turkle said nothing but water. Fredrickson asked what about the cough sirup? "They give me a little now and then from a half-gallon jug in the drug room. It's not bad tasting. You have a key for that room, Turkle?"

Turkle said the supervisor was the only one on nights who had a key to the drug room, but McMurphy talked him into letting us have a try at picking the lock. Turkle grinned and nodded his head lazily. While he and McMurphy worked at the lock on the drug room with paper clips, the girls and the rest of us ran around in the Nurses' Station opening files and reading records.

"Look here," Scanlon said, waving one of those folders. "Talk about complete. They've even got my first-grade report card in here. Aaah, miserable grades, just miserable."

Bill and his girl were going over his folder. She stepped back to look him over. "All these things, Billy? Phrenic this and pathic that? You don't look like you have all these things."

The other girl had opened a supply drawer and was suspicious about what the nurses needed with all those hot-water bottles, a million of 'em, and Harding was sitting on the Big Nurse's desk, shaking his head at the whole affair.

McMurphy and Turkle got the door of the drug room open and brought out a bottle of thick cherry-colored liquid from the ice box. McMurphy tipped the bottle to the light and read the label out loud.

"Artificial flavor, coloring, citric acid. Seventy per cent inert materials-that must be water-and twenty per cent alcohol-that's fine-and ten per cent codeine Warning Narcotic May Be Habit Forming." He unscrewed the bottle and took a taste of it, closing his eyes. He worked his tongue around his teeth and took another swallow and read the label again. "Well," he said, and clicked his teeth together like they'd just been sharpened, "if we

cut it a leetle bit with the vodka, I think it'll be all right. How are we fixed for ice cubes, Turkey, old buddy?"

Mixed in paper medicine cups with the liquor and the port wine, the sirup had a taste like a kid's drink but a punch like the cactus apple wine we used to get in The Dalles, cold and soothing on the throat and hot and furious once it got down. We turned out the lights in the day room and sat around drinking it. We threw the first couple of cups down like we were taking our medication, drinking it in serious and silent doses and looking one another over to see if it was going to kill anybody. McMurphy and Turkle switched back and forth from the drink to Turkle's cigarettes and got to giggling again as they discussed how it would be to lay that little nurse with the birthmark who went off, at midnight.

"I'd be scared," Turkle said, "that she might go to whuppin' me with that big of cross on that chain. Wun't that be a fix to be in, now?"

"I'd be scared," McMurphy said, "that just about the time I was getting my jellies she'd reach around behind me with a thermometer and take my temperature!"

That busted everybody up. Harding stopped laughing long enough to join the joking.

"Or worse yet," he said. "Just lie there under you with a dreadful concentration on her face, and tell you-oh Jesus, listen-tell you what your pulse was!"

"Oh don't ... oh my Gawd ..."

"Or even worse, just lie there, and be able to calculate your pulse and temperature both-sans instruments!"

"Oh Gawd, oh please don't ..."

We laughed till we were rolling about the couches and chairs, choking and teary-eyed. The girls were so weak from laughing they had to try two or three times to get to their feet. "I gotta ... go tinkle," the big one said and went weaving and giggling toward the latrine and missed the door, staggered into the dorm while we all hushed one another with fingers to the lips, waiting, till she gave a squeal and we heard old Colonel Matterson roar, "The pillow is ... a horse!"-and come whisking out of the dorm right behind her in his wheelchair.

Sefelt wheeled the colonel back to the dorm and showed the girl where the latrine was personally, told her it was generally used by males only but he would stand at the door while she was in there and guard against intrusions on her privacy, defend it against all comers, by gosh. She thanked him solemnly and shook his hand and they saluted each other and while she was inside here came the colonel out of the dorm in his wheelchair again, and Sefelt had his hands full keeping him out of the latrine. When the girl came out of the door he was trying to ward off the charges of the wheelchair with his foot while we stood on the edge of the fracas cheering one guy or the other. The girl helped Sefelt put the colonel back to bed, and then the two of them went down the hall and waltzed to music nobody could hear.

Harding drank and watched and shook his head. "It isn't happening. It's all a collaboration of Kafka and Mark Twain and Martini."

McMurphy and Turkle got to worrying that there might still be too many lights, so they went up and down the hall turning out everything that glowed, even the little knee-high night lights, till the place was pitch black. Turkle got out flashlights, and we played tag up and down the hall with wheelchairs from storage, having a big time till we heard one of Sefelt's convulsion cries and went to find him sprawled twitching beside that big girl, Sandy. She was sitting on the floor brushing at her skirt, looking down at Sefelt. "I never experienced anything like it," she said with quiet awe.

Fredrickson knelt beside his friend and put a wallet between his teeth to keep him from chewing his tongue, and helped him get his pants buttoned. "You all right, Seef? Seef?"

Sefelt didn't open his eyes, but he raised a limp hand and picked the wallet out of his mouth. He grinned through his spit. "I'm all right," he said. "Medicate me and turn me loose again."

You really need some medication, Seef?"

"Medication."

"Medication," Fredrickson said over his shoulder, still kneeling. "Medication," Harding repeated and weaved off with his flashlight to the drug room. Sandy watched him go with glazed eyes. She was sitting beside Sefelt, stroking his head in wonderment.

"Maybe you better bring me something too," she called drunkenly after Harding. "I never experienced anything to come even close to it."

Down the hall we heard glass crash and Harding came back with a double handful of pills; he sprinkled them over Sefelt and the woman like he was crumbling clods into a grave. He raised his eyes toward the ceiling.

"Most merciful God, accept these two poor sinners into your arms. And keep the doors ajar for the coming of the rest of us, because you are witnessing the end, the absolute, irrevocable, fantastic end. I've finally realized what is happening. It is our last fling. We are doomed henceforth. Must screw our courage to the sticking point and face up to our impending fate. We shall be all of us shot at dawn. One hundred cc's apiece. Miss Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we,,, face the terrible maw of a muzzle-loading shotgun which she has loaded with Miltowns! Thorazines! Librium's! Stelazines! And with a wave of her sword, blooie! Tranquilize all of us completely out of existence."

He sagged against the wall and slid to the floor, pills hopping out of his hands in all directions like red and green and orange bugs. "Amen," he said and closed his eyes.

The girl on the floor smoothed down her skirt over her long hard-working legs and looked at Sefelt still grinning and twitching there under the lights beside her, and said, "Never in my life experienced anything to come even halfway near it."

Harding's speech, if it hadn't actually sobered people, had at least made them realize the seriousness of what we were doing. The night was getting on, and some thought had to be given to the arrival of the staff in the morning. Billy Bibbit and his girl mentioned that it was after four o'clock and, if it was all right, if people didn't mind, they'd like to have Mr. Turkle unlock the Seclusion Room. They went off under an arch of flashlight beams, and the rest of us went into the day room to see what we could decide about cleaning up. Turkle was all but passed out when he got back from Seclusion, and we had to push him into the day room in a wheel chair.

As I walked after them it came to me as a kind of sudden surprise that I was drunk, actually drunk, glowing and grinning and staggering drunk for

the first time since the Army, drunk along with half a dozen other guys and a couple of girls-right on the Big Nurse's ward! Drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold! I thought back on the night, on what we'd been doing, and it was near impossible to believe. 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? I felt so good thinking about this that I gave a yell and swooped down on McMurphy and the girl Sandy walking along in front of me, grabbed them both up, one in each arm, and ran all the way to the day room with them hollering and kicking like kids. I felt that good.

Colonel Matterson got up again, bright-eyed and full of lessons, and Scanlon wheeled him back to bed. Sefelt and Martini and Fredrickson said they'd better hit the sack too. McMurphy and I and Harding and the girl and Mr. Turkle stayed up to finish off the cough sirup and decide what we were going to do about the mess the ward was in. Me and Harding acted like we were the only ones really very worried- about it; McMurphy and the big girl just sat there and sipped that sirup and grinned at each other and played hand games in the shadows, and Mr. Turkle kept dropping off to sleep. Harding did his best to try to get them concerned.

"All of you fail to compren' the complexities of the situation," he said.

"Bull," McMurphy said.

Harding slapped the table. "McMurphy, Turkle, you fail to realize what has occurred here tonight. On a mental ward. Miss Ratched's ward! The reekerputions will be ... devastating!"

McMurphy bit the girl's ear lobe. Turkle nodded and opened one eye and said, "Tha's true. She'll be on tomorrow, too."

"I, however, have a plan," Harding said. He got to his feet. He said McMurphy was obviously too far gone to handle the situation himself and someone else would have to take over. As he talked he stood straighter and became more sober. He spoke in an earnest and urgent voice, and his hands shaped what he said. I was glad he was there to take over.

His plan was that we were to tie up Turkle and make it look like McMurphy'd snuck up behind him, tied him up with oh, say, strips of torn sheet, and relieved him of his keys, and after getting the keys had broken into the drug room, scattered drugs around, and raised hell with the files just to spite the nurse-she'd believe that part-then he'd unlocked the screen and made his escape.

McMurphy said it sounded like a television plot and it was so ridiculous it couldn't help but work, and he complimented Harding on his clear-headedness. Harding said the plan had its merits; it would keep the other guys out of trouble with the nurse, and keep Turkle his job, and get McMurphy off the ward. He said McMurphy could have the girls drive him to Canada or Tiajuana, or even Nevada if he wanted, and be completely safe; the police never press too hard to pick up AWOLs from the hospital because ninety per cent of them always show back up in a few days, broke and drunk and looking for that free bed and board. We talked about it for a while and finished the cough sirup. We finally talked it to silence. Harding sat back down.

McMurphy took his arm from around the girl and looked from me to Harding, thinking, that strange, tired expression on his face again. He asked what about us, why didn't we just up and get our clothes on and make it out with him?

"I'm not quite ready yet, Mack," Harding told him.

"Then what makes you think I am?"

Harding looked at him in silence for a time and smiled, then said, "No, you don't understand. I'll be ready in a few weeks. But I want to do it on my own, by myself, right out that front door, with all the traditional red tape and complications. I want my wife to be here in a car at a certain time to pick me up. I want them to know I was able to do it that way."

McMurphy nodded. "What about you, Chief?"

"I figure I'm all right. Just I don't know where I want to go yet. And somebody should stay here a few weeks after you're gone to see that things don't start sliding back."

"What about Billy and Sefelt and Fredrickson and the rest?"

"I can't speak for them," Harding said. "They've still got their problems, just like all of us. They're still sick men in lots of ways. But at least there's

that: they are sick men now. No more rabbits, Mack. Maybe they can be well men someday. I can't say."

McMurphy thought this over, looking at the backs of his hands. He looked back up to Harding.

"Harding, what is it? What happens?"

"You mean all this?"

McMurphy nodded.

Harding shook his head. "I don't think I can give you an answer. Oh, I could give you Freudian reasons with fancy talk, and that would be right as far as it went. But what you want are the reasons for the reasons, and I'm not able to give you those. Not for the others, anyway. For myself? Guilt. Shame. Fear. Self-belittlement. I discovered at an early age that I was-shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me-and the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different."

"I'm different," McMurphy said. "Why didn't something like that happen to me? I've had people bugging me about one thing or another as far back as I can remember but that's not what-but it didn't drive me crazy."

"No, you're right. That's not what drove you crazy. I wasn't giving my reason as the sole reason. Though I used to think at one time, a few years ago, my turtleneck years, that society's chastising was the sole force that drove one along the road to crazy, but you've caused me to re-appraise my theory. There's something else that drives people, strong people like you, my friend, down that road."

"Yeah? Not that I'm admitting I'm down that road, but what is this something else?"

"It is us." He swept his hand about him in a soft white circle and repeated, "Us."

McMurphy halfheartedly said, "Bull," and grinned and stood up, pulling the girl to her feet. He squinted up at the dim clock. "It's nearly five. I need me a little shut-eye before my big getaway. The day shift doesn't come on

for another two hours yet; let's leave Billy and Candy down there a while longer. I'll cut out about six. Sandy, honey, maybe an hour in the dorm would sober us up. What do you say? We got a long drive tomorrow, whether it's Canada or Mexico or wherever."

Turkle and Harding and I stood up too. Everybody was still weaving pretty much, still pretty drunk, but a mellow, sad feeling, had drifted over the drunk. Turkle said he'd boot McMurphy and the girl out of bed in an hour.

"Wake me up too," Harding said. "I'd like to stand there at the window with a silver bullet in my hand and ask 'Who wawz that'er masked man?' as you ride-"

"The hell with that. You guys both get in bed, and I don't want to ever see hide nor hair of you again. You get me?"

Harding grinned and nodded but he didn't say anything. McMurphy put his hand out, and Harding shook it. McMurphy tipped back like a cowboy reeling out of a saloon and winked.

"You can be bull goose loony again, buddy, what with Big Mack outa the way."

He turned to me and frowned. "I don't know what you can be, Chief. You still got some looking to do. Maybe you could get you a job being the bad guy on TV rasslin'. Anyway, take 'er easy."

I shook his hand, and we all started for the dorm. McMurphy told Turkle to tear up some sheets and pick out some of his favorite knots to be tied with. Turkle said he would. I got into my bed in the graying light of the dorm and heard McMurphy and the girl get into his bed. I was feeling numb and warm. I heard Mr. Turkle open the door to the linen room out in the hall, heave a long, loud, belching sigh as he pulled the door closed behind him. My eyes got used to the dark, and I could see McMurphy and the girl snuggled into each other's shoulders, getting comfortable, more like two tired little kids than a grown man and a grown woman in bed together to make love.

And that's the way the black boys found them when they came to turn on the dorm lights at six-thirty.

I've given what happened next a good lot of thought, and I've come around to thinking that it was bound to be and would have happened in one way or another, at this time or that, even if Mr. Turkle had got McMurphy and the two girls up and off the ward like was planned. The Big Nurse would have found out some way what had gone on, maybe just by the look on Billy's face, and she'd have done the same as she did whether McMurphy was still around or not. And Billy would have done what he did, and McMurphy would have heard about it and come back.

Would have had to come back, because he could no more have sat around outside the hospital, playing poker in Carson' City or Reno or someplace, and let the Big Nurse have the last move and get the last play, than he could have let her get by with it right under his nose. It was like he'd signed on for the whole game and there wasn't any way of him breaking his contract.

As soon as we started getting out of bed and circulating around the ward, the story of what had taken place was spreading in a brush fire of low talk. "They had a what?" asked the ones who hadn't been in on it. "A whore? In the dorm? Jesus." Not only a whore, the others told them, but a drunken blast to boot. McMurphy was planning to sneak her out before the day crew came on but he didn't wake up. "Now what kind of crock are you giving us?" "No crock. It's every word gospel. I was in on it."

Those who had been in on the night started telling about it with a kind of quiet pride and wonder, the way people tell about seeing a big hotel fire or a dam bursting-very solemn and respectful because the casualties aren't even counted yet-but the longer the telling went on, the less solemn the fellows got. Everytime the Big Nurse and her hustling black boys turned up something new, such as the empty bottle of cough syrup or the fleet of wheelchairs parked at the end of the hall like empty rides in an amusement park, it brought another part of the night back sudden and clear to be told to the guys who weren't in on it and to be savored by the guys who were. Everybody had been herded into the day room by the black boys, Chronics and Acutes alike, milling together in excited confusion. The two old Vegetables sat sunk in their bedding, snapping their eyes and their gums. Everybody was still in pajamas and slippers except McMurphy and the girl; she was dressed, except for her shoes and the nylon stockings, which now hung over her shoulder, and he was in his black shorts with the white whales. They were sitting together on a sofa, holding hands. The girl had

dozed off again, and McMurphy was leaning against her with a satisfied and sleepy grin.

Our solemn worry was giving way, in spite of us, to joy and humor. When the nurse found the pile of pills Harding had sprinkled on Sefelt and the girl, we started to pop and snort to keep from laughing, and by the time they found Mr. Turkle in the linen room and led him out blinking and groaning, tangled in a hundred yards of torn sheet like a mummy with a hangover, we were roaring. The Big Nurse took our good humor without so much as a trace of her little panted smile; every laugh was being forced right down her throat till it looked as if any minute she'd blow up like a bladder.

McMurphy draped one bare leg over the edge of the sofa and pulled his cap down to keep the light from hurting his reddened eyes, and he kept licking out a tongue that looked like it had been shellacked by that cough syrup. He looked sick and terrifically tired, and he kept pressing the heels of his hands against his temples and yawning, but as bad as he seemed to feel he still held his grin and once or twice went so far as to laugh out loud at some of the things the nurse kept turning up.

When the nurse went in to call the Main Building to report Mr. Turkle's resignation, Turkle and the girl Sandy took the opportunity to unlock that screen again and wave good-bye to all and go loping off across the grounds, stumbling and slipping on the wet, sun-sparkle grass.

"He didn't lock it back up," Harding said to McMurphy. "Go on. Go on after them!"

McMurphy groaned and opened one eye bloody as a hatching egg. "You kidding me? I couldn't even get my head through that window, let alone my whole body."

"My friend, I don't believe you fully comprehend-"

"Harding, goddam you and your big words; all I fully comprehend this morning is I'm still half drunk. And sick. Matter of fact, I think you're still drunk too. Chief, how about you; are you still drunk?"

I said that my nose and cheeks didn't have any feeling in them yet, if this could be taken to mean anything.

McMurphy nodded once and closed his eyes again; he laced his hands across his chest and slid down in his chair, his chin settling into his collar.

He smacked his lips and smiled as if he were napping. "Man," he said, "everybody is still drunk."

Harding was still concerned. He kept on about how the best thing for McMurphy to do was get dressed, quickly, while old Angel of Mercy was in there calling the doctor again to report the atrocities she had uncovered, but McMurphy maintained that there wasn't anything to get so excited about; he wasn't any worse off than before, was he? "I've took their best punch," he said. Harding threw up his hands and went off, predicting doom.

One of the black boys saw the screen was unlocked and locked it and went into the Nurses' Station for the big flat ledger, came back out running his finger down the roll and lipping the names he read out loud as he sighted the men that matched up with them. The roll is listed alphabetically backwards to throw people off, so he didn't get to the Bs till right at the last. He looked around the day room without taking his finger from that last name in the ledger.

"Bibbit. Where's Billy Bibbit?" His eyes were big. He was thinking Billy'd slipped out right under his nose and would he ever catch it. "Who saw Billy Bibbit go, you damn goons?"

This set people to remembering just where Billy was; there were whispers and laughing again.

The black boy went back into the station, and we saw him telling the nurse. She smashed the phone down in the cradle and came out the door with the black boy hot after her; a lock of her hair had broken loose from beneath her white cap and fell across her face like wet ashes. She was sweating between her eyebrows and under her nose. She demanded we tell her where the Eloper had gone. She was answered with a chorus of laughter, and her eyes went around the men.

"So? He's not gone, is he? Harding, he's still here-on the ward, isn't he? Tell me. Sefelt, tell me!"

She darted the eyes out with every word, stabbing at the men's faces, but the men were immune to her poison. Their eyes met hers; their grins mocked the old confident smile she had lost.

"Washington! Warren! Come with me for room check."

We rose and followed as the three of them went along, unlocking the lab, the tub room, the doctor's office. ... Scanlon covered his grin with his knotty hand and whispered, "Hey, ain't it gonna be some joke on of Billy." We all nodded. "And Billy's not the only one it's gonna be a joke on, now that I think about it; remember who's in there?"

The nurse reached the door of the Seclusion Room at the end of the hall. We pushed up close to see, crowding and craning to peep over the Big Nurse and the two black boys as she unlocked it and swung it open. It was dark in the windowless room. There was a squeak and a scuffle in the dark, and the nurse reached out, flicked the light down on Billy and the girl where they were blinking up from that mattress on the floor like two owls from a nest. The nurse ignored the howl of laughter behind her.

"William Bibbit!" She tried so hard to sound cold and stern. "William ... Bibbit!"

"Good morning, Miss Ratched," Billy said, not even making any move to get up and button his pajamas. He took the girl's hand in his and grinned. "This is Candy."

The nurse's tongue clucked in her bony throat. "Oh, Billy Billy Billy-I'm so ashamed for you."

Billy wasn't awake enough to respond much to her shaming, and the girl was fussing around looking under the mattress for her nylons, moving slow and warm-looking after sleep. Every so often she would stop her dreamy fumbling and look up and smile at the icy figure of the nurse standing there with her arms crossed, then feel to see if her sweater was buttoned, and go back to tugging for her nylon caught between the mattress and the tile floor. They both moved like fat cats full of warm milk, lazy in the sun: I guessed they were still fairly drunk too.

"Oh, Billy," the nurse said, like she was so disappointed she might break down and cry. "A woman like this. A cheap! Low! Painted-"

"Courtesan?" Harding suggested. "Jezebel?" The nurse turned and tried to nail him with her eyes, but he just went on. "Not Jezebel? No?" He scratched his head in thought. "How about Salome? She's notoriously evil. Perhaps 'dame' is the word you want. Well, I'm just trying to help."

She swung back to Billy. He was concentrating on getting to his feet. He rolled over and came to his knees, butt in the air like a cow getting up,

then pushed up on his hands, then came to one foot, then the other, and straightened. He looked pleased with his success, as if he wasn't even aware of us crowding at the door teasing him and hoorahing him.

The loud talk and laughter swirled around the nurse. She looked from Billy and the girl to the bunch of us behind her. The enamel-and-plastic face was caving in. She shut her eyes and strained to calm her trembling, concentrating. She knew this was it, her back to the wall. When her eyes opened again, they were very small and still.

"What worries me, Billy," she said-I could hear the change in her voice-"is how your poor mother is going to take this."

She got the response she was after. Billy flinched and put his hand to his cheek like he'd been burned with acid.

"Mrs. Bibbit's always been so proud of your discretion. I know she has. This is going to disturb her terribly. You know how she is when she gets disturbed, Billy; you know how ill the poor woman can become. She's very sensitive. Especially concerning her son. She always spoke so proudly of you. She al-"

"Nuh! Nuh!" His mouth was working. He shook his head, begging her. "You d-don't n-n-need!"

"Billy Billy Billy," she said. "Your mother and I are old friends."

"No!" he cried. His voice scraped the white, bare walls of the Seclusion Room. He lifted his chin so he was shouting at the moon of light in the ceiling. "N-n-no!"

We'd stopped laughing. We watched Billy folding into the floor, head going back, knees coming forward. He rubbed his hand up and down that green pant leg. He was shaking his head in panic like a kid that's been promised a whipping just as soon as a willow is cut. The nurse touched his shoulder to comfort him. The touch shook him like a blow.

"Billy, I don't want her to believe something like this of you-but what am I to think?"

"Duh-duh-don't t-tell, M-M-M-Miss Ratched. Duh-duh-duh-"

"Billy, I have to tell. I hate to believe you would behave like this, but, really, what else can I think? I find you alone, on a mattress, with this sort of woman."

"No! I d-d-didn't. I was-" His hand went to his cheek again and stuck there. "She did."

"Billy, this girl could not have pulled you in here forcibly." She shook her head. "Understand, I would like to believe something else-for your poor mother's sake."

The hand pulled down his cheek, raking long red marks. "She d-did." He looked around him. "And M-M-McMurphy! He did. And Harding! And the-the-the rest! They t-t-teased me, called me things!"

Now his face was fastened to hers. He didn't look to one side or the other, but only straight ahead at her face, like there was a spiraling light there instead of features, a hypnotizing swirl of cream white and blue and orange. He swallowed and waited for her to say something, but she wouldn't; her skill, her fantastic mechanical power flooded back into her, analyzing the situation and reporting to her that all she had to do was keep quiet.

"They m-m-made me! Please, M-Miss Ratched, they may-may-MAY-!"

She checked her beam, and Billy's face pitched downward, sobbing with relief. She put a hand on his neck and drew his cheek to her starched breast, stroking his shoulder while she turned a slow, contemptuous look across the bunch of us.

"It's all right, Billy. It's all right. No one else is going to harm you. It's all right. I'll explain to your mother."

She continued to glare at us as she spoke. It was strange to hear that voice, soft and soothing and warm as a pillow, coming out of a face hard as porcelain.

"All right, Billy. Come along with me. You can wait over here in the doctor's office. There's no reason for you to be submitted to sitting out in the day room with these ... friends of yours."

She led him into the office, stroking his bowed head and saying, "Poor boy, poor little boy," while we faded back down the hall silently and sat down in the day room without looking at one another or speaking. McMurphy was the last one to take a seat.

The Chronics across the way had stopped milling around and were settling into their slots. I looked at McMurphy out of the corner of my eye,

trying not to be obvious about it. He was in his chair in the corner, resting a second before he came out for the next round-in a long line of next rounds. The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place.

There was more phoning going on in the Nurses' Station and a number of authorities showing up for a tour of the evidence. When the doctor himself finally came in, every one of these people gave him a look like the whole thing had been planned by him, or at least condoned and authorized. He was white and shaky under their eyes. You could see he'd already heard about most of what had gone on here, on his ward, but the Big Nurse outlined it for him again, in slow, loud details so we could hear it too. Hear it in the proper way, this time, solemnly, with no whispering or giggling while she talked. The doctor nodded and fiddled with his glasses, battling eyes so watery I thought he must be splashing her. She finished by telling him about Billy and the tragic experience we had put the poor boy through.

"I left him in your office. Judging from his present state, I suggest you see him right away. He's been through a terrible ordeal. I shudder to think of the damage that must have been done to the poor boy."

She waited until the doctor shuddered too.

"I think you should go see if you can speak with him. He needs a lot of sympathy. He's in a pitiful state."

The doctor nodded again and walked off toward his office. We watched him go.

"Mack," Scanlon said. "Listen-you don't think any of us are being taken in by this crap, do you? It's bad, but we know where the blame lies-we ain't blaming you."

"No," I said, "none of us blame you." And wished I'd had my tongue pulled out as soon as I saw the way he looked at me.

He closed his eyes and relaxed. Waiting, it looked like. Harding got up and walked over to him and had just opened his mouth to say something when the doctor's voice screaming down the hall smashed a common horror and realization onto everybody's face.

"Nurse!" he yelled. "Good lord, nurse!"

She ran, and the three black boys ran, down the hall to where the doctor was still calling. But not a patient got up. We knew there wasn't anything for us to do now but just sit tight and wait for her to come to the day room to tell us what we all had known was one of the things that was bound to happen.

She walked straight to McMurphy.

"He cut his throat," she said. She waited, hoping he would say something. He wouldn't look up. "He opened the doctor's desk and found some instruments and cut his throat. The poor miserable, misunderstood boy killed himself. He's there now, in the doctor's chair, with his throat cut."

She waited again. But he still wouldn't look up.

"First Charles Cheswick and now William Bibbit! I hope you're finally satisfied. Playing with human lives-gambling with human lives-as if you thought yourself to be a God!"

She turned and walked into the Nurses' Station and closed the door behind her, leaving a shrill, killing-cold sound ringing in the tubes of light over our heads.

First I had a quick thought to try to stop him, talk him into taking what he'd already won and let her have the last round, but another, bigger thought wiped the first thought away completely. I suddenly realized with a crystal certainty that neither I nor any of the half-score of us could stop him. That Harding's arguing or my grabbing him from behind, or old Colonel Matterson's teaching or Scanlon's griping, or all of us together couldn't rise up and stop him.

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

We made him stand and hitch up his black shorts like they were horsehide chaps, and push back his cap with one finger like it was a ten-gallon Stetson, slow, mechanical gestures-and when he walked across the floor you could hear the iron in his bare heels ring sparks out of the tile.

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

He gave a cry. At the last, falling backward, his face appearing to us for a second upside down before he was smothered on the floor by a pile of white uniforms, he let himself cry out:

A sound of cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender d defiance, that if you ever trailed coon or cougar or lynx is ;like the last sound the treed and shot and falling animal makes as the dogs get him, when he finally doesn't care any more about anything but himself and his dying.

I hung around another couple of weeks to see what was to come. Everything was changing. Sefelt and Fredrickson signed out together Against Medical Advice, and two days later another three Acutes left, and six more transferred to another ward. There was a lot of investigation about the party on the ward and about Billy's death, and the doctor was informed that his resignation would be accepted, and he informed them that they would have to go the whole way and can him if they wanted him out.

The Big Nurse was over in Medical for a week, so for a while we had the little Jap nurse from Disturbed running the ward; that gave the guys a chance to change a lot of the ward policy. By the time the Big Nurse came

back, Harding had even got the tub room back open and was in there dealing blackjack himself, trying to make that airy, thin voice of his sound like McMurphy's auctioneer bellow. He was dealing when he heard her key hit the lock.

We all left the tub room and came out in the hall to meet her, to ask about McMurphy. She jumped back two steps when we approached, and I thought for a second she might run. Her face was bloated blue and out of shape on one side, closing one eye completely, and she had a heavy bandage around her throat. And a new white uniform. Some of the guys grinned at the front of it; in spite of its being smaller and tighter and more starched than her old uniforms, it could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman.

Smiling, Harding stepped up close and asked what had become of Mack.

She took a little pad and pencil from the pocket of her uniform and wrote, "He will be back," on it and passed it around. The paper trembled in her hand. "Are you sure?" Harding wanted to know after he read it. We'd heard all kinds of things, that he'd knocked down two aides on Disturbed and taken their keys and escaped, that he'd been sent back to the work farm-even that the nurse, in charge now till they got a new doctor, was giving him special therapy.

"Are you quite positive?" Harding repeated.

The nurse took out her pad again. She was stiff in the joints, and her more than ever white hand skittered on the pad like one of those arcade gypsies that scratch out fortunes for a penny. "Yes, Mr. Harding," she wrote. "I would not say so if I was not positive. He will be back."

Harding read the paper, then tore it up and threw the pieces at her. She flinched and raised her hand to protect the bruised side of her face from the paper. "Lady, I think you're full of so much bullshit," Harding told her. She stared at him, and her hand wavered over the pad a second, but then she turned and walked into the Nurses' Station, sticking the pad and pencil back down in the pocket of her uniform.

"Hum," Harding said. "Our conversation was a bit spotty, it seemed. But then, when you are told that you are full of bullshit, what kind of written comeback can you make?"

She tried to get her ward back into shape, but it was difficult with McMurphy's presence still tromping up and down the halls and laughing out loud in the meetings and singing in the latrines. She couldn't rule with her old power any more, not by writing things on pieces of paper. She was losing her patients one after the other. After Harding signed out and was picked up by his wife, and George transferred to a different ward, just three of us were left out of the group that had been on the fishing crew, myself and Martini and Scanlon.

I didn't want to leave just yet, because she seemed to be too sure; she seemed to be waiting for one more round, and I wanted to be there in case it came off. And one morning, after McMurphy'd been gone three weeks, she made her last play.

The ward door opened, and the black boys wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY, RANDLE P. POST-OPERATIVE. And below this was written in ink, LOBOTOMY.

They pushed it into the day room and left it standing against the wall, along next to the Vegetables. We stood at the foot of the Gurney, reading the chart, then looked up to the other end at the head dented into the pillow, a swirl of red hair over a face milk-white except for the heavy purple bruises around the eyes.

After a minute of silence Scanlon turned and spat on the floor. "Aaah, what's the old bitch tryin' to put over on us anyhow, for crap sakes. That ain't him."

"Nothing like him," Martini said.

"How stupid she think we are?"

"Oh, they done a pretty fair job, though," Martini said, moving up alongside the head and pointing as he talked. "See. They got the broken nose and that crazy scar-even the sideburns."

"Sure," Scanlon growled, "but hell!"

I pushed past the other patients to stand beside Martini. "Sure, they can do things like scars and broken noses," I said. "But they can't do that look. There's nothin' in the face. Just like one of those store dummies, ain't that right, Scanlon?"

Scanlon spat again. "Damn right. Whole thing's, you know, too blank. Anybody can see that."

"Look here," one of the patients said, peeling back the sheet, "tattoos."

"Sure," I said, "they can do tattoos. But the arms, huh? The arms? They couldn't do those. His arms were big!"

For the rest of the afternoon Scanlon and Martini and I ridiculed what Scanlon called that crummy sideshow fake lying there on the Gurney, but as the hours passed and the swelling began subsiding around the eyes I saw more and more guys strolling over to look at the figure. I watched them walk by acting like they were going to the magazine rack or the drinking fountain, so they could sneak another look at the face. I watched and tried to figure out what he would have done. I was only sure of one thing: he wouldn't have left something like that sit there in the day room with his name tacked on it for twenty or thirty years so the Big Nurse could use it as an example of what can happen if you buck the system. I was sure of that.

I waited that night until the sounds in the dorm told me everybody was asleep, and until the black boys had stopped making their rounds. Then I turned my head on the pillow so I could see the bed next to mine. I'd been listening to the breathing for hours, since they had wheeled the Gurney in and lifted the stretcher onto the bed, listening to the lungs stumbling and stopping, then starting again, hoping as I listened they would stop for good-but I hadn't turned to look yet.

There was a cold moon at the window, pouring light into the dorm like skim milk. I sat up in bed, and my shadow fell across the body, seeming to cleave it in half between the hips and the shoulders, leaving only a black space. The swelling had gone down enough in the eyes that they were open; they stared into the full light of the moon, open and undreaming, glazed from being open so long without blinking until they were like smudged fuses in a fuse box. I moved to pick up the pillow, and the eyes fastened on the movement and followed me as I stood up and crossed the few feet between the beds.

The big, hard body had a tough grip on life. It fought a long time against having it taken away, flailing and thrashing around so much I finally had to lie full length on top of it and scissor the kicking legs with mine while I mashed the pillow into the face. I lay there on top of the body for what

seemed days. Until the thrashing stopped. Until it was still a while and had shuddered once and was still again. Then I rolled off. I lifted the pillow, and in the moonlight I saw the expression hadn't changed from the blank, dead-end look the least bit, even under suffocation. I took my thumbs and pushed the lids down and held them till they stayed. Then I lay back on my bed.

I lay for a while, holding the covers over my face, and thought I was being pretty quiet, but Scanlon's voice hissing from his bed let me know I wasn't.

"Take it easy, Chief," he said. "Take it easy. It's okay."

"Shut up," I whispered. "Go back to sleep."

It was quiet a while; then I heard him hiss again and ask, "Is it finished?"

I told him yeah.

"Christ," he said then, "she'll know. You realize that, don't you? Sure, nobody'll be able to prove anything-anybody coulda kicked off in post-operative like he was, happens all the time-but her, she'll know."

I didn't say anything.

"Was I you, Chief, I'd breeze my tail outa here. Yessir. I tell you what. You leave outa here, and I'll say I saw him up and moving around after you lift and cover you that way. That's the best idea, don't you think?"

"Oh, yeah, just like that. Just ask 'em to unlock the door and let me out."

"No. He showed you how one time, if you think back. That very first week. You remember?"

I didn't answer him, and he didn't say anything else, and it was quiet in the dorm again. I lay there a few minutes longer and then got up and started putting on my clothes. When I finished dressing I reached into McMurphy's nightstand and got his cap and tried it on. It was too small, and I was suddenly ashamed of trying to wear it. I dropped it on Scanlon's bed as I walked out of the dorm. He said, "Take it easy, buddy," as I walked out.

The moon straining through the screen of the tub-room windows showed the hunched, heavy shape of the control panel, glinted off the chrome fixtures and glass gauges so cold I could almost hear the click of it striking. I took a deep breath and bent over and took the levers. I heaved

my legs under me and felt the grind of weight at my feet. I heaved again and heard the wires and connections tearing out of the floor. I lurched it up to my knees and was able, to get an arm around it and my other hand under it. The chrome was cold against my neck and the side of my head. I put my back toward the screen, then spun and let the momentum carry the panel through the Screen and window with a ripping crash. The glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth. Panting, I thought for a second about going back and getting Scanlon and some of the others, but then I heard the running squeak of the black boys' shoes in the hall and I put my hand on the sill and vaulted after the panel, into the moonlight.

I ran across the grounds in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go, toward the highway. I remember I was taking huge strides as I ran, seeming to step and float a long ways before my next foot struck the earth. I felt like I was flying. Free. Nobody bothers coming after an AWOL, I knew, and Scanlon could handle any questions about the dead man-no need to be running like this. But I didn't stop. I ran for miles before I stopped and walked up the embankment onto the highway.

I caught a ride with a guy, a Mexican guy, going north in a truck full of sheep, and gave him such a good story about me being a professional Indian wrestler the syndicate had tried to lock up in a nuthouse that he stopped real quick and gave me a leather jacket to cover my greens and loaned me ten bucks to eat on while I hitchhiked to Canada. I had him write his address down before he drove off and I told him I'd send him the money as soon as I got a little ahead.

I might go to Canada eventually, but I think I'll stop along the Columbia on the way. I'd like to check around Portland and Hood River and The Dalles to see if there's any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven't drunk themselves goofy. I'd like to see what they've been doing since the government tried to buy their right to be Indians. I've even heard that some of the tribe have took to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway. I'd give something to see that. Mostly, I'd just like to look over the country around the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again.

I been away a long time.

THE END.

Bloom's Modern Critical

INTERPRETATIONS

Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM

Ken Kesey's
**One Flew Over the
Cuckoo's Nest**

NEW EDITION



Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| African American Poets: | Samuel Taylor Coleridge | John Keats |
| Wheatley–Tolson | Joseph Conrad | Jamaica Kincaid |
| African American Poets: | Contemporary Poets | Stephen King |
| Hayden–Dove | Julio Cortázar | Rudyard Kipling |
| Edward Albee | Stephen Crane | Milan Kundera |
| Dante Alighieri | Daniel Defoe | Tony Kushner |
| Isabel Allende | Don DeLillo | Ursula K. Le Guin |
| American and Canadian Women Poets, | Charles Dickens | Doris Lessing |
| 1930–present | Emily Dickinson | C. S. Lewis |
| American Women Poets, 1650–1950 | E. L. Doctorow | Sinclair Lewis |
| Hans Christian Andersen | John Donne and the 17th-Century Poets | Norman Mailer |
| Maya Angelou | Fyodor Dostoevsky | Bernard Malamud |
| Asian-American Writers | W. E. B. DuBois | David Mamet |
| Margaret Atwood | George Eliot | Christopher Marlowe |
| Jane Austen | T. S. Eliot | Gabriel García Márquez |
| Paul Auster | Ralph Ellison | Cormac McCarthy |
| James Baldwin | Ralph Waldo Emerson | Carson McCullers |
| Honoré de Balzac | William Faulkner | Herman Melville |
| Samuel Beckett | F. Scott Fitzgerald | Arthur Miller |
| The Bible | Sigmund Freud | John Milton |
| William Blake | Robert Frost | Molière |
| Jorge Luis Borges | William Gaddis | Toni Morrison |
| Ray Bradbury | Johann Wolfgang von Goethe | Native-American Writers |
| The Brontës | George Gordon, Lord Byron | Joyce Carol Oates |
| Gwendolyn Brooks | Graham Greene | Flannery O'Connor |
| Elizabeth Barrett Browning | Thomas Hardy | George Orwell |
| Robert Browning | Nathaniel Hawthorne | Octavio Paz |
| Italo Calvino | Robert Hayden | Sylvia Plath |
| Albert Camus | Ernest Hemingway | Edgar Allan Poe |
| Truman Capote | Hermann Hesse | Katherine Anne Porter |
| Lewis Carroll | Hispanic-American Writers | Marcel Proust |
| Miguel de Cervantes | Homer | Thomas Pynchon |
| Geoffrey Chaucer | Langston Hughes | Philip Roth |
| Anton Chekhov | Zora Neale Hurston | Salman Rushdie |
| G. K. Chesterton | Aldous Huxley | J. D. Salinger |
| Kate Chopin | Henrik Ibsen | José Saramago |
| Agatha Christie | John Irving | Jean–Paul Sartre |
| | Henry James | William Shakespeare |
| | James Joyce | William Shakespeare's Romances |
| | Franz Kafka | George Bernard Shaw |

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Mary Wollstonecraft | Ivan Turgenev | Walt Whitman |
| Shelley | Mark Twain | Oscar Wilde |
| Alexander Solzhenitsyn | John Updike | Tennessee Williams |
| John Steinbeck | Kurt Vonnegut | Tom Wolfe |
| Jonathan Swift | Derek Walcott | Virginia Woolf |
| Amy Tan | Alice Walker | William Wordsworth |
| Alfred, Lord Tennyson | Robert Penn Warren | Jay Wright |
| Henry David Thoreau | H. G. Wells | Richard Wright |
| J. R. R. Tolkien | Eudora Welty | William Butler Yeats |
| Leo Tolstoy | Edith Wharton | Émile Zola |

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

Ken Kesey's
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
New Edition

Edited and with an introduction by
Harold Bloom
Sterling Professor of the Humanities
Yale University

Editorial Consultant, Robert P. Waxler

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—New Edition

Copyright © 2007 by Infobase Publishing

Introduction © 2007 by Harold Bloom

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher. For more information contact:

Bloom's Literary Criticism
An imprint of Infobase Publishing
132 West 31st Street
New York NY 10001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* / edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom.
p. cm. — (Bloom's modern critical interpretations)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7910-9616-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. 2. Psychiatric hospital patients in literature. 3. Mentally ill in literature.—Criticism and interpretation. I. Bloom, Harold. II. Title: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

PS3561.E667O5328 2008
813'.54—dc22

2007045157

Bloom's Literary Criticism books are available at special discounts when purchased in bulk quantities for businesses, associations, institutions, or sales promotions. Please call our Special Sales Department in New York at (212) 967-8800 or (800) 322-8755.

You can find Bloom's Literary Criticism on the World Wide Web at
<http://www.chelseahouse.com>.

Cover design by

Printed in the United States of America
Bang BCL 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

All links and web addresses were checked and verified to be correct at the time of publication. Because of the dynamic nature of the web, some addresses and links may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Editor's Note | vii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| <i>Harold Bloom</i> | |
| <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> and the High Cost of Living | 3 |
| <i>Terence Martin</i> | |
| Big Mama, Big Papa, and Little Sons in Ken Kesey's <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> | 15 |
| <i>Ruth Sullivan</i> | |
| The Cuckoo Clocks in Kesey's Nest | 29 |
| <i>James R. Huffman</i> | |
| Tangled in the Language of the Past: Ken Kesey and Cultural Revolution | 43 |
| <i>James F. Knapp</i> | |
| <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> : Rhetoric and Vision | 53 |
| <i>Michael M. Boardman</i> | |
| The Truth Even If It Didn't Happen: <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> | 67 |
| <i>Jack Hicks</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Separation, Initiation, and Return: Schizophrenic Episode in <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <i>William C. Baurecht</i> | 81 |
| Stories Sacred and Profane: Narrative in <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <i>Janet Larson</i> | 89 |
| Sanity and Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner <i>Fred Madden</i> | 107 |
| <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest:</i> A Tale of Two Decades <i>Thomas J. Slater</i> | 123 |
| The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <i>Thomas H. Fick</i> | 137 |
| The Mixed Heritage of the Chief: Revisiting the Problem of Manhood in <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <i>Robert P. Waxler</i> | 151 |
| The Western American Context of <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <i>Stephen L. Tanner</i> | 161 |
| Chronology | 187 |
| Contributors | 189 |
| Bibliography | 191 |
| Acknowledgements | 195 |
| Index | 197 |

Editor's Note

My Introduction, with benign amiability, does not allow Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* one place in my personal pantheon of Period Pieces. On rereading, it remains a comic strip. The baker's dozen of enthusiasts for it, reprinted in this volume, represent popular opinion. So be it.

Terence Martin has the temerity to invoke *Moby-Dick*, while Ruth Sullivan relies upon Freud's Oedipus Complex and James R. Huffman praises the Chief's stoic ability to live in the present moment.

The Cultural Revolution, responsible for the demise of Antioch College even as I write, is surpassed by Kesey's McMurphy as Christ, according to James F. Knapp, after which Michael M. Boardman discusses "tragic art" in *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Jack Hicks associates Kesey with Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg, while William C. Baurecht describes Kesey on Schizophrenia, Janet Larson studies narrative in *Cuckoo's Nest*, and Fred Madden examines Big Chief's functions in the book.

The film of *Cuckoo's Nest*, by Milos Forman, is seen by Thomas J. Slater as worthy of Kesey's novel. I myself would rather resee the movie than reread the book, unlike my usual pattern of response.

A final triad of kudos is bestowed upon *Cuckoo's Nest* by Thomas H. Fick, Robert P. Waxler, and Stephen L. Tanner. All three of these enthusiasts center upon notions of the frontier, psychic or geographical.

HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

KEN KESEY'S *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST* (1962)

I

The "Period Piece" is necessarily an involuntary genre, and I find it always causes rage—in some—when I nominate a particular work of enormous popularity to the Period Piece Pantheon. I do not judge *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* to be worthy of that pantheon, even though I see that my paperback copy is part of printing 88. My personal treasury of period pieces includes *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catcher In the Rye*, *A Separate Peace*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, several *Rabbits*, *Beloved*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Tobacco Road*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Jungle*, *The Old Man and the Sea*. Kesey's books palpably are not of that caliber: they sort better with *On the Road*, *The World According to Garp*, all the Harry Potter books—I forbear continuing, though Tolkien is the Emperor of inferior period pieces, perhaps never to be dethroned.

Rereading *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the comic strip genre begins to contaminate me, and I start to tell myself the tale from the stance of Big Nurse, the nightmare projection of the male fear of female authority. Nurse Ratched should be compared, in her function, to Vergil's Juno, not a comparison that writers far stronger than Kesey could sustain. I entertain myself with the wild notion of rewriting the *Aeneid* from Juno's perspective, but the prospect becomes phantasmagoric, and so I cease.

What is the utility of period pieces? In furniture, sometimes in costume, sometimes in songs—they can achieve, when rubbed down by time, something of an antique value. Alas, literature does not work that way, and the rubbing process leaves only rubbish, vast mounds of worn words,

like *The Fountainhead*. The Nineteen Sixties benefit from a general nostalgia, compounded by political correctness and the sad truth that the erstwhile Counter-culture has become Establishment-culture, visible upon every page of *The New York Times*. Dumbing-down is hardly a new phenomenon, and ideological cheerleading, before it took over the universities, had made its way through the churches, the corporations, the unions, and all our technologies. Readers of Ken Kesey or of the Harry Potter saga might risk the cure of carefully reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

TERENCE MARTIN

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
and the High Cost of Living

When Randle Patrick McMurphy swaggers into the cuckoo's nest, brash, boisterous, with heels ringing off the floor "like horseshoes,"¹ he commands the full attention of a world held crazily together in the name of adjustment by weakness, fear, and emasculating authority. As Chief Bromden says, "he sounds big" (p. 10). When, six weeks later, he hitches up his Moby Dick shorts for the final assault on the Big Nurse and walks across the floor so that "you could hear the iron in his bare heels ring sparks out of the tile" (p. 305), he dominates a world coming apart at the seams because of strength, courage, and emerging manhood. As Chief Bromden says (repeatedly)—he has made others big.

The early McMurphy has a primitive energy, the natural expression of his individualism. And in the manner of the solitary hero his freedom and expansiveness come from being unencumbered. He has 'no wife wanting new linoleum. No relatives pulling at him with watery old eyes. No one to *care* about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man" (p. 89). The later McMurphy, however, is thoroughly encumbered with the shrunken men on the ward, committed to a desperate struggle for *their* manhood—even though, as the Chief sees, "the thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place" (p. 303). That kind of

Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1973): pp. 43–55. A critical quarterly published by the Purdue University Department of English.

struggle, necessary, sacrificial, and fierce in its dedication, is what Ken Kesey dramatizes in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* with an intensity of focus at once sanative and cleansing.

I

"We are victims of a matriarchy here" (p. 61), explains Harding to McMurphy: Doctor Spivey cannot fire the Big Nurse. The authority to hire and fire belongs to the supervisor of the hospital, a woman and an old friend of Miss Ratched's from Army days (the supervisor is anonymous, a virtual extension of the Big Nurse). It is McMurphy's first lesson in the ways of the madhouse. Women in the novel, one comes to see quickly, are powerful forces of control. They represent a sinister contemporary version of a feminist tradition in American literature that goes back, at least, to Dame Van Winkle and that percolates through the popular fiction of the nineteenth-century in the form of domestic tyranny—as Helen Waite Papashvily has shown with her chapter "The Mutilation of the Male" in *All the Happy Endings* (1956). Given the highly charged vision of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, female authority becomes non-domestic, hard, insistently emasculating.

Not all of the women are cast in the mould of the Big Nurse. Harding's wife, for example, is a bitch of the first order, whose visit to the hospital shows us all that Harding must overcome in himself as a prerequisite to overcoming something in her. Her remarks are guaranteed to make Harding fall back on defenses whose very existence she scorns. His laugh is to her a "mousey little squeak." His lack of cigarettes means that he "never" has "enough." And the ambiguity of that remark becomes "I meant it any way you want to take it. I meant you don't have enough of nothing *period*" (p. 173). Mrs. Harding enters flirting with a black orderly. She leaves speaking of the boys with "the limp little wrists that flip so nice" (p. 174) who come by to inquire about her husband. The Chief completes the picture: "Harding asks her if it was only him that they were dropping around to see, and she says any man that drops around to see her flips more than his damned limp wrists" (p. 174). If her visit suggests how Harding came to be in the hospital, it spells out even more clearly why he is afraid to leave.

In a different way Billy Bibbit's mother denies him the chance to become a man. A receptionist in the hospital, she is a neighbor and "dear personal friend" of the Big Nurse's; her hair "revolv[es] from blond to blue to black and back to blond again every few months" (p. 281). Billy, on a comfortable day, talks about looking for a wife and going to college. His mother tickles his ear with dandelion fluff and tells him he has "scads of time" left for such things. When Billy reminds her that he is thirty-one years old, she replies, "*Sweetheart*, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?" Again, the Chief has a final word: "She wrinkled her nose and opened her lips at him

and made a kind of wet kissing sound in the air with her tongue and I had to admit that she didn't look like a mother of any kind" (p. 281).

Chief Bromden, too, knows of female dominance. His Indian father took his white wife's name when they married and suffered a diminishment of self ever after. The father's name signified his size and capacity as a man—Tee Ah Millatoona, the-Pine That Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain. But the 5'9" Mary Louise Bromden got bigger and bigger and came to be "twice his size." The father fought the Combine, which of itself would make him smaller, "till my mother made him too little to fight anymore and he gave up" (p. 208). The female reduced the male—the white reduced the Indian. The Chief has only to think of his parents to know the legacy of his people.

Only McMurphy stands outside such woman-power. His name, with its patronymic, identifies him as the son of Murphy, not of Mrs. Murphy. (At the outset, Miss Ratched attacks that identity by calling him McMurry; she would if she could deny him his father.) But even McMurphy has had to pass a test of manhood. He looks at his old home—after the fishing trip—and speaks of the precocious girl of nine who first took him to bed when he was ten. The youthful Murphy felt that they were married or that they should announce their engagement. Whereupon the young semi-pro gave him her dress and waltzed home in her pants. Under cover of night McMurphy threw the dress out the window where it caught, permanently, in a tree. She "taught me to love, bless her sweet ass" (p. 245), he remembers. From that point on he became the "dedicated lover"—rather than a man in petticoats. His latter day companions, Candy and Sandy, function both to emphasize his manhood and to measure the progress of the patients toward regaining (or finding) theirs. Drawn from the stock pattern of the fun-loving, "good" whore, Candy and Sandy evoke attitudes of freedom and openness rather than of restraint and confinement. Whereas the Big Nurse would make men little, they would make men big.

Matriarchy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* comes, we see, to be expressed in various forms of female tyranny. It can sink Harding into the quicksands of inadequacy or make a Lilliputian of the Chief's giant father. But its primary force and motive is to make men be little boys, to make them (want to) adjust to a role wherein lies safety. On the Disturbed Ward after the bruising fight with the orderlies (fought to protect George Sorenson—whose patronymic affords him scant protection), Chief Bromden notes the appearance of the Big Nurse: she "talks with McMurphy, soft and patient, about the irresponsible thing he did, the childish thing, throwing a tantrum like a little boy—aren't you *ashamed?*" (p. 268). If McMurphy—she calls him "Randle" at this point—will see his behavior in her terms, he will not be punished. When she finds Billy Bibbit with Candy, she shatters his new-found sense of manhood by wondering how Billy's mother will take the

news. Billy wilts immediately; stuttering once again, he disavows affection and friendship, and the Big Nurse leads him into the office, “stroking his bowed head and saying “Poor little boy, poor little boy” (p. 302). After which Billy commits suicide, unable to become a man and be jerked back to boyhood all in the space of a few hours.

At Miss Ratched’s disposal are the three black orderlies (hired for their hatred), the Shock Shop, and the final measure of lobotomy. With their thermometer, their giant jar of Vaseline, and their blood knowledge of rape and injustice, the orderlies make women out of men, just as the Shock Therapy machine turns men docile and lobotomy converts even the most unruly into Fully Adjusted Products. These are weapons of terror, dedicated to the proposition that the best man is a good boy. It is small wonder that the patients on the ward seek the relative safety of boyhood and allow themselves to be ruled by stern or selfish non-mothers who, like cuckoo-birds, have no instinct for building nests of their own. The Chief has his fog, but they have no other place to hide.

In such a world McMurphy, the epitome of raw, unvarnished maleness, represents all the Big Nurse needs to control. As the contours of the narrative take form, the bigger-than-life McMurphy and the bigger-than-life Miss Ratched come to be opposed in every way. He is the stud, she the “ball-cutter”; he is the brawler, she the manufacturer of docility; he is the gambler, she the representative of the house—where chance has no meaning.

II

The opposition between McMurphy and the Big Nurse goes to the very center of the novel, to the perception of Chief Bromden. Whenever the Big Nurse seems in indisputable control, the fog machine churns out its mist, scary, safe, and scary again. When McMurphy wins a skirmish, the fog disappears and the Chief sees clearly. Before the second vote on watching the World Series, the Big Nurse, in total command of the situation according to the Chief’s vision, fogs up the ward “thicker than I ever see it before” (p. 127). Billy Bibbit looks “like he’s a mile off” and things, including the Chief, begin to float in the eerie mist: “I never seen it this thick before, thick to where I can’t get down to the floor. . . . That’s why I’m so scared’ (p. 128). But when McMurphy gets his majority, when he lifts the Chief “out of the fog and into the open” for the twenty-first vote, the change is dramatic. Acting collectively, the men have voted to have a say about their lives; the Big Nurse has been unable to keep them from doing so. At that point, “there’s no more fog anyplace.”

As part of the Chief’s mode of perception, the fog machine is a metaphor for tyranny, fear, and hiding which becomes literalized in his narrative. During his army days when air fields would be “fogged” by means of a

compressor for purposes of secrecy and safety, fog machines had an objective reality in Chief Bromden's life. Even then, however, the experience was subjectively ambivalent: "You were safe from the enemy, but you were awfully alone" (p. 125). An association between machinery and a paralyzing of vision, however, dates from earlier in the Chief's life. As a high school football player, he visited a cotton mill in California. "The humming and clicking and rattling of people and machinery" put him in "a kind of dream"; it reminded him of the men in his tribe "who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotized by routine. . . ." As he talks to a Negro girl he notices that her face looks blurred, "like there was a mist between me and her. It was the cotton fluff sifting from the air." The scene in the mill "all stuck with me and every once in a while something on the ward calls it to mind" (p. 38).

Machinery, made by the Combine for the benefit of people who choose to live under the Combine, drove Chief Bromden's people away from nature into a world not their own. ("Joey Fish-in-a-Barrel has twenty thousand dollars and three Cadillacs since the contract. And he can't drive none of them" [p. 273].) Machinery, associated with authority, with the ward, with Miss Ratched, represents all that brings people into line. Kesey, we may note, invokes the full meanings of words to enrich Chief Bromden's vision. *Dam* can signify *mother*—and the Indians worked on "the gravel crusher for the dam" (p. 36), suggesting, at least to McMurphy-like minds, an activity as emasculating as "ball-cutting" and perhaps even more painful. (A man who "hath his stones broken." the Book of Leviticus stipulated long ago [21:20], is disqualified from entering the priesthood.) The sound of *Ratched* is virtually indistinguishable from that of *ratchet*, with its associations of machinery and distaff: And *combine*, as Raymond M. Olderman points out, carries with it the idea of "a mechanism, a machine that threshes and levels."² The experience in the cotton mill mediates between the Chief's early days with his people and his paranoid existence on the ward; his life, cut into pieces by machinery has a frightening coherence. But McMurphy stands visibly in opposition to the fabric of the Chief's perception. Consistently unaware of the fog, McMurphy "keeps trying to drag us . . . out in the open where we'd be easy to get at" (p. 123).

The strategy of literalizing metaphors, used by authors as different as Hawthorne and Ionesco, lends force and credence to the world the Chief sees and presents to us. The Big Nurse is an expert in "time control." On a bad day she slows down time so that the minutes freeze agonizingly on the clock; on a relatively good day she accelerates time so that the men whirl through a period they might otherwise enjoy. When Harding explains to McMurphy that they are rabbits and comically singles out two patients to play the role, "Billy the Kid and Cheswick change into hunched-over white rabbits, right

my eyes" (p. 63). And the Chief, as we know, has become literally deaf and dumb to the world because the world has treated him as if he could not speak and could not hear.

The words *big* and *little* likewise take on special meaning because of the Chief's literalizing vision. When McMurphy first shakes hands with Chief Bromden "the fingers were thick and strong closing over my own, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power. It blowed up near as big as his, I remember" (p. 24). And so at the beginning—at a time when the Chief is helpless and little in a chair—we have an anticipation the end: McMurphy's vital power will flow into Chief Bromden and make him big, at a cost terribly high and terribly necessary.

III

In his essay "The Concept of Character in Fiction," William Gass remarks that "a character, first of all, is the noise of his name, and all the sounds and rhythms that proceed from him." Even in the primary sense, McMurphy is quite a character. His name not only proclaims his paternity but suggests the brawling Irishman of fiction and fact. Moreover, the *sounds* of McMurphy pervade Kesey's novel and we are all the more prepared to hear them because we have narrator like Chief Bromden. As I noted earlier, the Chief hears McMurphy before he sees him, and he "sounds big." He comes into the ward laughing—"free and loud"; it is the first laugh the Chief has heard "in years." After the first Group Meeting, McMurphy himself comments that the patients are afraid to laugh. "I haven't heard a real laugh since I came through that door. . . . Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your *footing*" (p. 68). The next morning the sound of McMurphy singing booms out of the latrine, and "everybody's thunderstruck. They haven't heard such a thing in years, not on this ward" (p. 88).

The Big Nurse's ward has its own sounds, among them those of canned music played loudly over a speaker throughout the day. Annoyed because poker bets can hardly be heard. McMurphy objects, and if we can credit his remark we can see why: "Can't you even ease down on the volume?" he asks the Big Nurse; "It ain't like the whole state of Oregon needed to hear Lawrence Welk play 'Tea for Two three times every hour, all day long!'" (p. 102). The consequence of his objection is that he gets another room for their game; the issue of sounds has resulted in more space for McMurphy's activities.

McMurphy's laughter and signing, his tall biographical tales, and the authentic ring of his idiom at once dominate the ward and define him to the other patients. His example, of course, evokes the choked off manhood of the men on the ward and a sense of freedom they have forgotten, or not known.

When, later, McMurphy organized the fishing expedition, it is a shared adventure, exciting, fun, and noisy. During one hectic, scrambling moment on the boat, with Candy's breast bruised and bleeding and the Chief's thumb smarting red from the line, McMurphy looks on and laughs—"because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side . . . ; but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain" (p. 238). Harding is laughing this time, and Scanlon, too, "at their own selves as well as at the rest of us." And Candy laughs, "and Sefelt and the doctor and all." The laughter

started slow and pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger. I watched, part of them, laughing with them—and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water and skating the wind with those black birds, high above myself, and I could look down and see myself and the rest of the guys, see the boat rocking there in the middle of those diving birds, see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people, and watch them, us, swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles, farther and farther, until it crashed up on beaches all over the coast, on beaches all over all coasts, in wave after wave after wave. (p. 238).

Community laughter this, comic, aware, the signature of a deep experience, the expression of freedom—earned and shared. The fishing expedition, brilliantly handled by Kesey, accentuates the growing sense of community among the patients. It also contains the most joyous sounds in the novel. McMurphy, we know, has red hair, tattoo and hands that bear the marks of work and combat. But his capacity for laughter is fundamental to his identity as a character—along with his ability to make us laugh. "That's clean enough," he says to the orderly watching him clear the urinals, "maybe not clean enough for some people, but myself I plan to piss in 'em, not eat lunch out of 'em" (p. 151).

The McMurphy who shakes hands with all of the men and announces himself as "bull goose looney" has much to learn about his new situation beyond the fact of matriarchal authority. He is, at first, what he has always been, the con man, the gambler in search of new territory; and he has managed to get himself committed to avoid the regimen of the work farm. Characteristically, he seizes the opportunity to bet on his ability to outmaneuver the Big Nurse. Surprised and disappointed when the patients do not support his motion to watch the World Series on TV, McMurphy again bets on himself, this time with a new purpose: his failure to lift the steel and cement control panel, foredoomed, ac-

ording to the Chief, is an example of courage not lost upon the others. The next day they attempt the impossible and, as we have seen, reach their majority, twenty-one, in a second vote on the Series. (Interestingly, one of McMurphy's favorite games is blackjack, or twenty-one. Another, fittingly, is stud poker.) That they sit watching a blank screen, courtesy of Miss Ratched, gives the gesture an added, self-contained, significance; the cowboy-hero turned home-run hitter is now in their midst. They are now, as even the Big Nurse knows, a different group from the one they were before the advent of McMurphy.

McMurphy goes through two other stages in the course of the novel, both the result of increasing awareness. From the lifeguard at the swimming pool he learns the difference between being *sentenced* and being *committed*. He realized for the first time that he will be released only when the Big Nurse approves a release for him. The information has an immediate effect. As they are leaving the pool a hydrocephalic patient from another ward lies helplessly on his side in the footbath, his head bobbing around in the disinfectant. Harding twice asks McMurphy to help him and Cheswick lift the boy up. "Let him lay," says McMurphy, as he walks on, "maybe he don't like deep water" (p. 163). The next morning McMurphy polishes the latrine "till it sparkled" and waxes the hall floors when asked to.

As the others recognize, McMurphy is playing the game, playing safe—"getting cagey," the way "Papa finally did." At one time the Chief's father used to poke fun at the government men, speaking to them dead-pan like a stage Indian addressing tourists—to the great amusement of his Council. Like McMurphy, Chief Bromden's father learned to play it smart. The other patients on the ward understand about McMurphy; they are not angry or even disappointed. But there is a fearful cost of McMurphy's decision to think of Number One: Cheswick, who has achieved a certain momentum toward manhood, gets caught in the drain the next time they are at the swimming pool and drowns well before McMurphy, the lifeguard, and the orderlies can bring him to the surface.

McMurphy has one staggering fact left to learn. It astonishes him into meditative silence, then catapults him into his final role of savior. He hears from Harding that only a few of the patients on the ward, indeed, in the whole hospital, are committed. The great majority are there voluntarily, because, as Billy Bibbit says sobbingly, they don't have the guts to be Outside. The news is hardly credible to McMurphy. But his reaction to it is swift and thorough. At the ensuing Group Meeting he walks "big as a house" toward the Big Nurse, the "iron in his boot heels' cracking "lightning out of the tile," and rams his hand through the window in the front of her office as he reached for his cigarettes. When a new glass is installed, he does it again. And when a third glass is put in, with a whitewashed X on it to make it clearly visible, Scanlon accidentally bounces a basketball through it before the whitewash is even dry.

Direct violations of the Big Nurse's private office, symbolic sexual assaults, are only the beginning. McMurphy, aware now of what *committed* means, aware, too, that the frightened men on the ward are there voluntarily, and aware, further, that he cannot defeat the Big Nurse and all that is behind her—even as he could not lift the control panel—begins to act for the others rather than for himself. Before McMurphy arrived, the patients were set against each other in the name of therapy and adjustment. Each man was a spy for the Big Nurse, eager to write down information about someone else in the log book near the Nurses' Station. In Group Therapy sessions they would peck at the victim of the day, currying favor by making one of their own miserable. McMurphy once says (apropos of the way in which Harding and his wife make each other impossible), "All I know is this: nobody's very big in the first place, and it looks to me like everybody spends their whole life tearing everybody else down" (p. 174). It is a central insight for the unsophisticated McMurphy—and one of the truest and most generally applicable statements in the novel.

During McMurphy's final stage things on the ward *begin* to change radically. Kesey, in masterful control of the fully activated materials in his novel, takes his madhouse men one last inevitable step, to an achieved sense of community. It is something he has consistently held dear: Ken Babbs's "great statement," Kesey remarked in an interview in the *Rolling Stone* (March 7, 1970), was—"We don't want a commune, we want a community" (p. 29). Kesey's "great statement," made eight years before, was to turn a bunch of rabbits into a community of men, "close-knit," as Joseph J. Waldmeir observes, and "functioning."⁴ McMurphy organizes a ward basketball team, with Doctor Spivey (to Miss Ratched's amazement) approving, a team, with Doctor Spivey (to Miss Ratched's amazement) approving, a team fated to lose its game against the orderlies, but a team, nevertheless, composed of people playing together in a common effort. The fishing trip deepens and enlarges the sense of community; as Raymond M. Olderman points out, it likewise evokes the idea of fertility and functions as "the central incident in McMurphy's challenge to the waste land"⁵ of the hospital. And the party on the ward turns the great cast of characters into a group of Merry Pranksters, contributing, one and all, to a night of spectacular celebration.

The men on the fishing trip and at the party are a far cry from the little boys who spied on each other and tattled in the Big Nurse's log book. No longer do they *tear* each other down. Before Harding signs out and is picked up by his wife, *he* deals blackjack in the tub room and tells the silent Big Nurse on her return, "Lady, I think you're full of so much bullshit" (p. 307). The language of the novel virtually insists that we see McMurphy as a kind of Christ figure (at Shock Therapy time: "Do I get a crown of thorns?" [p. 270] and earlier: "McMurphy led the twelve of us toward the ocean" [p. 227]),

doling out his life so that others may live. The action of the novel dramatizes the manner in which he makes his sacrifices, amid doubts and rejoicings on the part of his followers. And the perception of Chief Bromden, now highly sensitized to the task, prepares us at times tenderly to appreciate McMurphy's legacy—manhood, friendship suffused with affection, and, finally, love. Miss Ratched's face at the time of McMurphy's last attack displays a "terror forever ruining any other look she might ever try to use again" (p. 305). She has her revenge, lobotomy, a "castration of the frontal lobes." But Chief Bromden denies the Big Nurse her trophy. "He creeps into the bed of his friend," in the words of Leslie A. Fiedler, "for what turns out to be an embrace—for only in a caricature of the act of love can he manage to kill him."⁶ It is, of course, as Mr. Fiedler signifies, a true act of love, performed with a manhood McMurphy has poured into the Chief.

In the terms of the narrative, there can be no more fog or time control. Thus, the Chief, bigger than ever before, makes his escape by picking up the control panel McMurphy could not even budge, the epitome of all the machinery in the hospital, of all machinery that has victimized him and diminished his people ("I head the wires and connections tearing out of the floor"), and throws it through the window. "The glass splashed out in the moon, like bright cold water baptizing [and thus perhaps awakening] the sleeping earth" (p. 310).

IV

Despite the fact that the term Big Nurse inevitably recalls the term Big Brother and thus invokes memories of *1984* and other controlled worlds, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is not in its thrust and emphasis an anti-Utopian novel. The specific make-up of the combine remains vague, as indeed it must, since the word *combine* is not simply a synonym for *organization*, since it is the Chief's protean metaphor for all that mechanizes, threshes, and levels—for all that packages human beings into "products." In this sense, the idea of a Combine contributes powerfully to the dramatic coherence of the novel. The ward, the Chief says, employing the logic of the metaphor, "is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches" (p. 38). The metaphor is not monolithic; there are other wards in the hospital. The Japanese nurse on the Disturbed Ward is pleasant—she gives gum to the Chief (a fresh stick), a cigarette to McMurphy, and she even criticizes the Big Nurse. And there is an Outside, increasingly regulated by the Combine, as is everything else, though not so rigorously as in the factory-ward.

On the trip to the ocean Chief Bromden notices "signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country": five thousand houses "punched out identical by a machine," five thousand identically

dressed kids playing on an acre of “crushed gravel,” five thousand men deposited like insects by a commuter train (p. 228). It is, recognizably, the world of our suburbs and sub-divisions, standardized, mechanized, virtually anesthetized. Coming back from the ocean, however, the Chief “noticed vaguely that I was getting so’s I could see some good in the life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kids’ poetry to me” (p. 243). Again the Chief faces a world of threshed out sameness; but he brings to it now—after the fishing trip—a sense of possibility which enlarges the dimensions of his spirit. The Combine, of course, continues to adjust things. But things may be increasingly adjusted (to pick up another idea from Mr. Olderman, who got it from McMurphy) because they are increasingly adjustable—which means, we realize with a sinking feeling of responsibility, that the Combine’s power to control may exist in ratio to our willingness to forfeit manhood.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest directs our attention to such a point: we have surrendered a sense of self, which, for Kesey, is involved with a sense of space—and thus possibility. “The American has a sense of something that the European doesn’t have,” he remarked in the *Rolling Stone* interview, “and it’s a sense of space. No matter how tight things get, there’s more space, there’s places you can go. . . . It’s the most that we have to offer the world, just to communicate that sense” (p. 30). To lose the *sense* of space is to be confined (whether it be on the Outside or on the Big Nurse’s ward) to contribute to the encroaching power of the Combine.

And so Kesey gives us McMurphy, the advocate of our manhood, who brings a sense of space, freedom, and largeness onto the ward as something co-existent with his life. We hear him, we see him, and once we smell him—the outdoor odor of man working. We are even treated on occasion to the splendor of his white whale shorts. Given to him by a co-ed at Oregon State who told him he was a symbol, McMurphy’s shorts have, no doubt, a sexual significance. If Melville can spell “archbishopric” with a final “k,” Kesey can surely play on the name *Moby-Dick*. Beyond that, McMurphy’s shorts have already become ambiguous. Joseph J. Waldmeir, in his fine essay on Joseph Heller and Kesey, comes to see McMurphy as Captain Ahab because of his shorts.⁷ And that, I believe, is an error with unfortunate implications. McMurphy may represent the indomitableness of *Moby-Dick* himself: as *Moby-Dick* cannot be vanquished by the monomaniac Ahab, so the spirit of McMurphy cannot be quenched by the Combine. Much more meaningfully, however, the leaping white whales suggest *Moby-Dick*, a novel that dramatizes with a fierceness of its own the inter-dependence of man in the face of Ahab’s will to stand alone. Ahab curses the “inter-indebtedness” of man, that which binds one man to another; Ishmael sees it and accepts it, most notably,

perhaps, when a literal line ties him to Queequeg in "The Monkey-Rope" chapter. And *Moby-Dick* validates Ishmael's vision of reality in the world.

The men on the Big Nurse's ward become stronger once they recognize their inter-dependence. McMurphy becomes heroic once he throws his lines out to them. And we come to appreciate the force of Kesey's novel once we see that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is an intense statement about the high cost of living-which we must be *big* enough to afford. That, I should think, is the "truth" the Chief speaks about at the outset. It will "burn" him to tell about it; it will "roar out" of him "like floodwaters." And it will remain true, for him and for all of us, "even though it didn't happen" (p. 8).

NOTES

1. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Compass Books Edition, Viking Press, 1962), p. 10. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

2. *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 37.

3. *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 49.

4. "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 5 (1964), p. 198.

5. *Beyond the Waste Land*, p. 45.

6. *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968). p. 182.

7. "Two Novelists of the Absurd," p. 203.

RUTH SULLIVAN

*Big Mama, Big Papa, and Little Sons in
Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Sigmund Freud is something less than a culture hero in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. What else but destructive can one call a psychoanalytically-informed therapy that brands McMurphy's rebellion against the institution's ego murder as "schizophrenic reaction," his love of "poozle" and pretty girls as "Latent Homosexual with Reaction Formation" or, with emphasis, "Negative Oedipal"?¹ Kesey portrays the psychiatrists and residents as patsies of Big Nurse Ratched; portrays her as a powermaniac running a small machine within that big machine, Society (the "Combine"). Psychoanalytic therapy in this novel dehumanizes because it serves not people but technology.

Ironic then, is the fact that while the novel disparages psychoanalytic therapy, it compliments psychoanalytic theory in that Kesey structures human relationships in *Cuckoo's Nest* after his own understanding of Freud's delineation of the Oedipus complex.² That is, Kesey presents the typical oedipal triangle of mother, father, and sons in Nurse Ratched, Randall McMurphy, and Chief Bromden plus the other inmates of the asylum. And he dramatizes some typical oedipal conflicts: the sons witness encounters, often explicitly sexual, between the father and mother figures; and the crucial emotional issue for the sons is how to define their manliness in relation to the mother figure and with the help of and ability to identify with the father.

Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1973): pp. 34–44.

That Kesey intends Nurse Ratched to play Big Mama not only to Chief Bromden but also to the other characters is evident by the many references to her often perverted maternal qualities. To Public Relations she is “just like a mother” (37). He believes in “that tender little mother crap” (57) as McMurphy puts it, but the big Irishman and soon the other inmates see through “that smiling flour-faced old mother” (48) with her “big womanly breasts” (11). Chief Bromden observes Big Nurse draw Billy’s “cheek to her starched breast, stroking his shoulder. . . .” Meanwhile, “she continued to glare at us as she spoke. It was strange to hear that voice, soft and soothing and warm as a pillow, coming out of a face hard as porcelain” (265). “We are victims of a matriarchy here, my friend,” (59) Harding says to McMurphy. “Man has but one truly effective weapon against that juggernaut of modern matriarchy” (66), rape, and McMurphy is elected to do it.

Why rape? Because Kesey’s Big Mama is a “ball-cutter” (57) in McMurphy’s language and the men must protect themselves. Harding, too, understands about Big Nurse that one of her most effective methods of control is to render the men impotent: Dr. Spivey by subtle insinuations about his need for drugs and by depriving him of real authority; Billy Bibbit, by threatening to tell his mother about his night with the prostitute; and the young residents by making them fear her judgment on their professional performance. “There’s not a man here that isn’t afraid he is losing or has already lost his whambam,” says Harding. “We comical little creatures can’t even achieve masculinity in the rabbit world, that’s how weak and inadequate we are. We are—the *rabbits*, one might say, of the rabbit world!” (63) Harding even sees that to the Nurse, lobotomies are symbolic castrations: “Yes; chopping away the brain. Frontal lobe castration. I guess if she can’t cut below the belt she’ll do it above the eyes” (165).

Big Nurse should be keeping those in her care warm and fed and healthy; she should be loving but is instead denying, destructive, and terrifying. Big Daddy in Randall McMurphy’s *Big Daddyhood* is only a little less obvious than Nurse Ratched’s warped maternity. “Like the logger, . . . the swaggering gambler, . . . the cowboy out of the TV set . . .” (172), Randall McMurphy booms upon the scene, his heels striking fire out of the tiles, his huge seamed hand extended to lift the inmates out of fear and into freedom. He renews their almost-lost sense of manliness by denying Harding’s description of them as “rabbits sans whambam” (63), by having them deep-sea fish, gamble, and party-it-up with pretty little whores, by encouraging the men (himself as an example) to flirt with the nurses, by spinning virility fantasies, and by introducing Billy to women. He teaches them to laugh and to revolt against Ratched’s tyranny, and he often protects them while they are growing.

McMurphy plays father to all the inmates, but Chief Bromden makes explicit the Irishman’s fatherly role by often comparing him to the Chief’s

own father. "He talks a little the way Papa used to. . . . He's as broad as Papa was tall . . . and he's hard in a different kind of way from Papa . . ." (16). "He's finally getting cagey, is all. The way Papa finally did..." (150). Chief Bromden learns from and is protected by McMurphy even as the small Indian boy learned to hunt from a father who tried to save the Columbia Indian's heritage for his tribe and son. "McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid . . ." (216). Chief Bromden grows big; he lifts and destroys the control panel; he frees himself from Big Nurse, the Combine, and his insanity; and he performs an act of love and mercy by killing the husk of the once-mighty McMurphy and by assuming the manhood McMurphy bestowed upon him. The big Irishman seems to pump life and blood into the Indian:

I remember the fingers were thick and strong closing over mine, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power. It blew up near as big as his, I remember . . . (27).

In fact, McMurphy encourages the Chief to surpass his model. Christ-like, the father sacrifices himself so that his sons may live free men.

Kesey sketches in the oedipal triangle, then, in dramatizing an intense emotional relationship among father, mother, and son figures and by having the father teach the sons what it means to be a man. He teaches them about self-assertion, aggression, fun, and sex — the latter sometimes in relationship to Big Nurse. After all, the inmates expect McMurphy to make Ratched into a woman by performing some sexual act with her and McMurphy eventually does that. Meanwhile, he acts sexually toward her by making teasing remarks about her big breasts.

But Kesey gives the reader his own unique version of the oedipal struggle. What the sons witness in the interaction between Big Nurse and Randall McMurphy is pseudo-sex. The most urgent emotional issue between them is really power. McMurphy will strip Big Nurse, but he will do so in vengeful destruction of her power. When he teases her about her womanly body suppressed by the starched uniform, his motive is to humiliate her. When he takes up the inmates' challenge to best Big Nurse he says, "I've never seen a woman I thought was more than me. I don't care whether I can get it up for her or not . . ." (68–69). "So I'm saying five bucks to each of you that wants it I can't put a betsy bug up that nurse's butt within a week. . . ." "Just that. A bee in her butt, a burr in her bloomers. Get her goat" (69).

The imagery here is not genital but anal. He wants to be free of her control, wants to be in control himself; and wants the inmates to gain self-control

and control over Big Nurse. So, the central symbolic act in the novel is the unseating and destruction of the control panel. Big Nurse herself is a caricature of the anal personality, a typical obsessive-compulsive creature with those typical needs for order, cleanliness, and power, with the tendency to treat people like objects, the inability to relax and to relate to others with tolerance for their frailties. Chief Bromden associates her with machinery, whiteness, frost, starch, cleanliness, rules, time, manipulation, and the Combine. She does try to castrate her sons, but it is in the interest of power. She denies them warmth, autonomy, and manhood in order to keep her own world intact. Her biggest fear, and the sign of her defeat, is loss of control.

It seems, then, that in Kesey's version of the oedipal struggle, the sons learn that mature women are dangerous because they want to emasculate (i.e., to control so as to incapacitate) their men. Almost every woman who stands in an explicitly sexual relationship to men in the novel poses a threat to her man's virility. Billy Bibbit's mother as well as the wife of Ruckly ("Fffffuck da wife!" [21]) and of Harding are most blatant examples, the latter because she makes cutting comments about Harding's effeminate mannerisms and flitty friends during a visit to the asylum in which she wears blood-red nail polish on sharp fingernails, high heels that make her as tall as her husband, and a blouse so low that when she provocatively bends over, Chief Bromden can see down it from across the room. "I am a woman," she says in effect, "but I am more of a man than you are."

Even for McMurphy, set forth as an almost-legendary lover, women are often aggressive bitches without tenderness or generosity. When McMurphy recalls the occasion on which he lost his virginity he seems not delighted but sad. That nine-year-old "little whore" (217) callously presented her ten-year-old lover with her dress as a memento of an act that McMurphy had wished to sanctify. She was the "first girl ever drug me to bed," (217) he says, and "from that day to this it seemed I might as well live up to my name — dedicated lover . . ." (218). McMurphy does not embrace the role as eagerly as his boasts on other occasions seem to indicate, for in telling his tale, his expression is "woebegone" (218) and in the dark, when he thinks no one can see him, his face "is dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*" (218). The event seems disillusioning partly because, boy-like, he believed that sex and commitment were complements (he proposed to the girl) but discovered that for his girl they were not; and partly, perhaps, because she rather than he was the aggressor. McMurphy jokes about this, about the underaged and over sexed girl who got him arrested for statutory rape, for instance, but the pattern in the novel seems nevertheless constant: aggressive women hurt their men.

The women in Chief Bromden's past were also almost always ball-cutting bitches too, beginning with that female responsible for cheating the Columbian Indians of their land. She was "an old white-haired woman in an outfit so

stiff and heavy it must be armor plate" (179). She plotted to have the offer to buy made "by mistake" to Mrs. Bromden, for she knew instinctively that women, and not men, wore the trousers there. She was right. Mrs. Bromden made Chief Tee Ah Millatoona little: "Oh, the Combine's big—big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up" (187). By overmanagement, Mrs. Bromden ruined her husband and her son, too. So the sons in *Cuckoo's Nest* learn that the only women who are fun and harmless are not mature women but girls, sisterly girls who are easily controlled and undemanding. The feminine ideals in this novel are Candy and Sandy because they bring joy and warmth into the asylum. But they do not need to be taken seriously: they are whores, they can scarcely be distinguished from one another, and they are like children. Kesey makes them sentimental portraits, whores-with-hearts-of-gold whose younger-sister role is made explicit by Chief Bromden when he describes McMurphy and one of the "girls" at the end of the night: "I could see McMurphy and the girl snuggled into each other's shoulders, getting comfortable, more like two tired little kids than a grown man and a grown woman in bed together to make love" (258–259). In fact, Candy and Sandy are most closely associated with the little-kid's-fun of the party, where the liquor is as much sticky-sweet cough syrup as vodka and the principal delight lies in fooling the grown-ups, Big Nurse and her night supervisors, who think that the children are asleep when really they are playing through the night. Even Billy's sexual initiation by Candy is more infantile than adult. The scene in which Big Nurse intrudes upon Billy's love nest is rather like a parent's discovery of children engaged in forbidden games (Ratched threatens to tell Billy's mother), a discovery followed by the child's extreme guilt-ridden response, first in denying all responsibility and tattling on his friends, then in committing suicide as self-punishment.

Kesey's oedipal triangle, then, is not casebook pure. It bears the stamp of the preceding emotional phase, the anal, in which the crucial issues are control over one's own body and the environment, rebellion and submission, autonomy and shame. Such a pattern works itself out in the novel thus: the oedipal elements revolve around the wish of the sons to love and be loved by adult women and by the women originally closest to them, mother and Big Nurse. They turn to the father, McMurphy, as role model; he teaches them by anecdote and example how to be men. The anal elements color this pattern because the sons are frustrated in their desires toward a woman so threatening as Big Nurse. They want to be men but she wants them to be automatons; they want to love but she wants to control. Because Big Nurse manages every aspect of their lives—their bodies, activities, shelter—she deprives them of autonomy. Oedipal elements mixed with anal reappear when McMurphy both "feminizes" Big Nurse in his symbolic rape that exposes her breasts; and also dethrones her, breaks her control.

Further, the novel displays emotional conflicts even more primitive than these, for if the men fear woman because she can emasculate her man (a phallic issue) or because she can control him (an anal issue), they also fear her because she withholds emotional warmth and physical care (oral issues). A deep disappointment that the novel expresses concerning women is not only their failure to be equal and generous partners of men or even their unwillingness to submit to men in a battle of the sexes, but their failure to play a warmly maternal role or, when actually assuming that role, their failure to play it effectively,

Though Nurse Ratched is an obvious example of this, almost all other women in the novel are, too. The birthmarked nurse, for example, cannot take adequate care of the men because she fears and hates them, holds them responsible for her “dirtiness,” as she conceives of her birthmark.

In the morning she sees how she’s stained again and somehow she figures it’s not really from inside her—how could it be? A good Catholic girl like her?—and she figures it’s on account of working evenings among a whole wardful of people like me [Chief Bromden]. It’s all our fault, and she’s going to get us for it if it’s the last thing she does (143–144).

Even the Japanese nurse, who has more sensitivity than any other woman in that institution, who understands why everyone hates Ratched, and who wants to help McMurphy and Chief Bromden after their fight with Washington—even she is ineffectual. Chief Bromden describes her as “about as big as the small end of nothing whittled to a fine point . . .” She has “little bird bones in her face” and her hands are little, “full of pink birthday candles” (233). She is maternal but not powerful enough to ensure her men’s safety.

One motherly person is appreciatively portrayed in the novel, Chief Bromden’s grandmother, who, “dust in her wrinkles” (239), sat beside the small boy at the salmon falls and counted on his fingers: “Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she’s a good fisherman, catches hens, puts ‘em inna pens . . . wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock . . . one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo’s nest . . .” (239). “I like the game and I like Grandma,” (239) the Chief says, for she is a loving woman associated with all that is healthy in the Chief’s background—his Indian heritage, the natural order, and the warm bond his people felt for one another. But like the Japanese nurse who cannot for long protect her men, this old woman could not save her men from moral and mental disintegration. Her son, the Chief, becomes a drunken derelict and her grandson falls insane. “Next time I saw her she was stone cold dead . . .” (239). She in effect abandons them when they are most needy and the nursery rime she chants is in certain ways a sinister pre-

figuration of what will happen to the Chief and his son. The rime is about a *woman* who catches things and puts them in pens (like Big Nurse, who pens up "Chief Broom"); about a dispersing flock of geese (like, perhaps, the dispersal of the Columbia Indian tribe and of their salmon) one of whom flies over the cuckoo's nest, over the mental institution that for the chief is both an escape from the world (a nest) and a prison. So the loving grandmother is shown abandoning her sons and indirectly predicting their defeat. Women who should be able to help and protect, or at least take care of their men are often disappointing in *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Then there is Harding's wife, who more than castrates him and beats him in a power struggle. She also actually denies him the emotional support and tenderness he needs, a failure symbolized for her as for Nurse Ratched by her outsized breasts: "one hell of a set of chabobs . . . Big as Old Lady Ratched's" (159), McMurphy says. Now Mrs. Harding's breasts signal for Harding her especially active sexuality and sexual appeal but unconsciously such breasts likely stir remembrances of motherly giving, a quality in which Mrs. Harding is deficient.

So is Nurse Ratched, the most formidable woman in the novel and possessor of the most formidable bosom. All the men are impressed, but Chief Bromden seems to express for all of them the deep yearning that Big Nurse's actions should answer the promise of her anatomy, the promise of softness and abundant giving one can associate with a mother's breasts. Instead, she seems to the Chief to resent her body and to work hard to suppress it in her starched, clean white uniform. He is deeply troubled by this as by the porcelain-and-plastic quality of her face, the burning cold or burning heat of her lipstick and nailpolish, in fact by many aspects of her body. He fixes upon it almost obsessively and upon her emotional states, to which he is attuned as closely as an anxious child is attuned to his mother. His fixation upon her body is discriminating, though. He is captured by the quality of the whole body in its stiff uniform, then by her breasts, face, mouth, eyes, and hands; not the hips, say, or the belly or shoulders but all those portions of anatomy that a child fastens on in relating to his mother. And when he observes these body parts, it is with anxious eagerness to know her mood (it is almost always dangerous). "Her painted smile twists, stretches to an open snarl" (11). "Gradually the lips gather together again under the little white nose, run together, like the red-hot wire had got hot enough to melt, shimmer a second, then click solid as the molten metal sets, growing cold and strangely dull. Her lips part, and her tongue comes between them a chunk of slag. Her eyes open again, and they have that strange dull and cold and flat look the lips have . . ." (90). "She darted the eyes out with every word, stabbing at the men's faces . . ." (262). "Her more than ever white hand skittered on the pad like one of those arcade gypsies that scratch out fortunes for a penny" (268).

Chief Bromden's dramatized need for a warm mother is appropriate to his condition as schizophrenic, a man whose emotional regression is often so severe that he withdraws from reality completely (retreats into the fog), refuses to speak or acknowledge that he can hear, and cannot control body functions. The emotional pattern Kesey draws for Chief Bromden is severe withdrawal alternating with periods of intense, if often negative, fixation on a mother figure, then apparent growth to attachment to a father and finally to growth beyond an infantile need for a family.

How much of Kesey's delineation of the oedipus complex is deliberate, how much is inevitable revelation of his own complexes is impossible to know accurately. Clearly, he does label his Big Mama, Big Daddy, and little sons; but when he involves them in a power struggle and in a search for a generous, caretaking mother, likely his emotional constellations are no longer consciously created. But our subject is not biography; it is interpretation of one work of art. Hence we might ask how Kesey's oral, anal, and oedipal patterns, deliberate and not, influence a reader's emotional response and interpretation of themes.

For instance, one might wonder what psychological events make the novel so especially appealing to the young (and others). Big Mama is indeed defeated and Chief Bromden as well as several inmates do escape, but the victory is pyrrhic. Cheswick, Billy Bibbit, and most crucially, Randall McMurphy are all sacrificed to achieve that end. Furthermore, the novel promises, that there will be more Big Nurses in the future:

They talk for a while about whether she's the root of all the trouble here or not, and Harding says she's the root of most of it. Most of the other guys think so too, but McMurphy isn't so sure any more. He says he thought so at one time but now he don't know. He says he don't think getting her out of the way would really make much difference; he says there's something bigger making all this mess and goes on to try to say what he thinks it is (165).

Chief Bromden knows what it is:

McMurphy doesn't know it, but he's onto what I realized a long time back, that it's not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it's the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high ranking official for them (165).

In oedipal terms, the novel promises that the matriarchy cannot be defeated. To do battle with it means the castration of both the father and most of the sons: indeed, all of the sons, for the rehabilitation of Chief Bromden

is fairy tale, not reality. He has been on the ward nearly twenty years; he has had over two-hundred shock treatments; and he is, by the revelations of his own speech, a paranoid schizophrenic. A man so deeply scarred is unlikely to recover so completely in a few months no matter how brilliant his model and nurturer is.

This anxiety-filled fantasy of mechanical, destructive motherhood cannot account for the enthusiasm of Kesey's readers any more than can the genius of the style or plotting. The latter two are significant, of course, but for reasons beyond the aesthetic or intellectual pleasures they afford. The novel must somehow also create other, but satisfying fantasies and also such an effective defense against its nuclear fantasy that a reader, especially a young one, feels not only reassured but triumphant.

One of the appeals of the novel is the opportunity it affords its readers to feel unjustly persecuted and to revel in self-pity. "Poor little me. See how helpless and good I am: yet They hurt me." Because persecution of those undeserving sets the tone for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a reader can scarcely escape the novel's stimulation of these unconscious feelings in himself. Everyone has in his early life experienced the apparent omnipotence and omniscience of adults who, on occasion, must frustrate the demands of their infants and must therefore seem unjust, even cruel. But such experiences usually are painful. Why should their arousal in *Cuckoo's Nest* prove delightful? Because, first, the novel is convincing about the power of the Combine and its agent, Nurse Ratched. Americans particularly have reason to feel oppressed by Big Government, Big Business, and Big Industry and to be convinced that the individual alone can do little to influence them to his benefit or to prevent their harming him. Chief Bromden is paranoid, but not everything in his vision is false: "You think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my *God*; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! . . . But it's the truth even if it didn't happen" (13). The novel offers its readers a sympathetic forum, a justification for feeling oppressed, even congratulations for being so sensitive as to have those feelings. Kesey's novel says in effect that someone understands.

A second reason for the pleasure-in-persecution feelings evoked in the reader's unconscious by *Cuckoo's Nest* is this: "Poor little me" fantasies are pleasurable if one knows that one's audience is kindly and even effective against the alleged or actual abuse. The anti-establishment, anti-tyranny tone of the novel answers these needs; so does the person of McMurphy because he functions the way a powerful father figure might against a cruel mother. The plaint of injustice is largely carried by the helpless inmates; their target is Big Nurse and the Combine; their forum and protection is McMurphy. Finally, one might speculate that forum and protection is McMurphy. Finally, one might speculate that being unjustly persecuted is pleasant if it arouses

one's masochism and if it provides a sense of moral superiority. "You may be bigger than I am but I am superior to you in other, especially moral, ways." *Cuckoo's Nest* dramatically demonstrates the righteousness and goodness of the inmates over Big Nurse, her cohorts, and the Combine. And of course she is overthrown. Injustice may live, but in *Cuckoo's Nest* it does not thrive.

The novel also richly gratifies latent or conscious hostile impulses against authority. Obviously the novel delights in jibes and pain inflicted upon Nurse Ratched (an audience applauds whenever Big Nurse is bested in the play; it even hisses and boos when the actress who plays her takes her bow). But the book allows expression of hostile impulses toward loved authorities as well, for the inmates not only care about McMurphy, they also resent him. Big Nurse succeeds in turning most of them against him for a while when she hints that he exploits them. Billy Bibbit turns against him when caught in his sexual misdemeanor. They all use him to fight their battles, egg him on to engage Big Nurse when they, but not McMurphy, know that he can be punished in the "Brain Murdering" room. Most significantly, they kill him. They are responsible for his lobotomy "We couldn't stop him [from attacking Big Nurse] because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the Nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up . . ." (267).

Chief Bromden performs the actual killing. Manifestly, the deed is euthanasia; symbolically, it is an enacted crucifixion; thematically, it is evidence that the son has grown up and surpassed his father even while loving him; and latently, the killing expresses the ancient hostility of the son to even a loving father.

To permission for indulgence in self-pity and in attacks on loved and hated authority figures, the novel adds permission to gratify dependency wishes. A theme of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* concerns the nature of individual freedom political, social, and psychological. It asserts that in the psychological realm, certain kinds of dependence are healthy: the dependence of a child upon good parents; of a patient upon effective nurses and doctors; and of weak adults upon nurturing strong ones. But this dependent condition is healthy only if it fosters eventual independence. Big Nurse destroys because she must control; hence she blocks the autonomy of her patients, whereas McMurphy nurtures because while he protects, he also encourages the inmates to use their own resources in order to meet the world. This theme, readily apparent to a reader's intelligence, disguises the abundant latent gratification the novel offers one's often unacknowledged pleasure in dependency upon an omnipotent figure. Throughout the novel, with a few exceptional times, McMurphy acts on behalf of the patients, acts so magnificently that a reader laughs. "We ain't ordinary nuts; we're every bloody one of us hot off the criminal-insane ward, on our way to San Quentin where they got better facilities to handle us" (199–200). So McMurphy informs the gas station at-

tendants who would bully the inmates. Here the weak overpower the strong the way children overpower giants in fairy tales. The inmates overpower Big Nurse when McMurphy, a sort of kindly helper figure also common in fairy tales, shows them how; and they overpower her in part gayly, jokingly, in part grimly. The child-like fun of the novel, the use of ridicule as a weapon against oppression, and the demonstration on the part of McMurphy that he is a bigger, better person than Big Bad Nurse all contribute to a reader's readiness to accept the novel's tacit invitation: allow yourself to depend upon the good, omnipotent father; he will help you conquer the wretched stepmother.

Cuckoo's Nest is gratifying especially to the young, then, because while on the one hand it creates an anxiety-ridden fantasy about a destructive mother (and social order), it allays it by creating a powerful caring father. It also grants indulgence in certain unconscious needs and wishes to be dependent, to feel unjustly treated (masochistic and moral-righteousness pleasures), and to attack and defeat ambivalently-held authority figures (even McMurphy is killed).

To unearth unconscious fantasies as a way of understanding why *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is emotionally satisfying is not to dismiss the power or validity of themes one understands intellectually. Indeed, unconscious fantasies isolated from theme in a piece of fiction sound grotesque, perhaps meaningless. In *Cuckoo's Nest* as in all fiction, theme not only gives meaning to unconscious fantasy but also functions as a kind of defense.³ For instance, *Cuckoo's Nest* is usually read as an indictment of our technological society, which, by standardization and forced conformity, murders human brains even as the shock shop murders the inmates' minds. Psychotherapy is dangerous because this novel alleges that it has become mechanized, a tool for social control wielded by the Combine. But the novel also affirms that man's drive for independence is so strong that no matter how overwhelming the obstacles, he will break free. Too, perhaps nature will once more nurture man where technology now destroys him.

Kesey's anti-technology, pro-nature theme is fittingly supported by his deliberate use of an oedipal triangle marked by a man-woman power struggle, a triangle in which mother acts like a machine against rather than for her children and father tries valiantly to restore them to their own natures and to freedom. The unconscious needs the novel stimulates in its readers also reenforces the theme. For instance, though men yearn to be free, they also fear it and wish to be dependent. Chief Bromden sits in the cuckoo's nest because he has not the courage to face the world. No more do those voluntarily committed — Billy Bibbit and Harding, say, who admit their fear of leaving the institution.

Now *Cuckoo's Nest* has another theme that seems to counterpoint its blatant Darwinian survival-of-the fittest message. The strong do indeed aggress against the weak; and though a few escape the trap, most are caught and destroyed. But the Combine is only the ostensible enemy; the real one lurks

in men's own minds. Just as in a paranoid fantasy the external persecutors are projections of the sufferer's self-hatred, so is the Combine a projection of the destructive power-drive in men — especially in weak, ineffectual men. While *Cuckoo's Nest* does show how the strong oppress the weak, it also shows how the weak can destroy the strong. Chief Bromden understands this at the end of the novel, for he knows that McMurphy attacks Nurse Ratched because the inmates compel him to. Harding understood this earlier. In explaining why he must be institutionalized he at first blames society:

“It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me — and the great voice of millions chanting, ‘Shame. Shame. Shame.’ It's society's way of dealing with someone different” (257).

But McMurphy counters that he, too, is different, yet he was not seriously affected. Harding answers:

“I wasn't giving my reason as the sole reason. Though I used to think at one time, a few years ago . . . that society's chastising was the sole force that drove one along the road to crazy [sic] . . . you've caused me to re-appraise my theory. There's something else that drives people, strong people like you, my friend, down that road . . . It is us.” He swept his hand about him in a soft white circle and repeated, “Us” (257–258)

The theme of *Cuckoo's Nest* is not merely the assertion that society will get you. It also realistically affirms that if society gets you, it is because you have complied in both your own and others' destruction. The weak are tyrants, too, subtle and dangerous because they can wake in the strong a sympathetic identification and perhaps guilt: “Why should I have so much when they have so little? Then, maybe I am in some way responsible for their fate.” Like the inmates of the asylum, the weak can unintentionally exploit and cannibalize their benefactors, driving them to ruin.

This more subtle theme functions as defense in the novel because without it *Cuckoo's Nest* would offer a sentimental, over-simple diagnosis of an individual's ills rather than dramatizing without moralizing a complex relationship between man and his society. The novel is idealistic, but not at the expense of clear-sightedness. It abundantly gratifies the id but it also recognizes the needs of an ego that must bring the psyche into harmony with the real world, and the demands of a superego that will not condone flagrant abuses of morality: the guilty are punished, Witness the fate of Nurse Ratched — and of Randall McMurphy for mauling her.⁴

Unlike, say, Tolstoi's *Kreutzer Sonata*, whose condemnation of social conventions is transparently paranoid, hence clearly not to be taken as seriously as the protagonist's psychology, *Cuckoo's Nest* almost from the beginning tempers its anti-technology theme with realism. Everywhere in the novel the ego has control over a potentially too-rapacious superego and a demanding id. For instance, Chief Bromden is the narrator; he is a paranoid schizophrenic, hence the world he describes is his world, not everyone's. Then, as the Chief comes more and more often out of the fog, his perceptions grow more accurate. For a long time he sees McMurphy as "a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper wire and crystal" (224); later he understands the man's weaknesses: that is, his humanity. He at first believed that McMurphy might save them; he later sees that the men are using him and that they must eventually save themselves. Finally, while the novel does permit Chief Bromden to fly like a goose northward, home, it tempers the promise that Chief Bromden's freedom is hazard-free. For Kesey implicitly compares the Chief's escape scene with another in which the latter sees clearly for the first time where he is, in an asylum deep in the country. A lively, reveling dog investigates the countryside while "the moon glistened around him in the wet grass . . ." (143). Then the Chief listens attentively to Canada honkers flying above, "a black, weaving necklace, drawn into a V by that lead goose . . . a black cross opening and closing . . ." (143). Finally, he runs off

in the direction they [the geese] had gone, toward the highway . . . Then I could hear a ear speed up out of a turn. The headlights loomed over the rise and peered ahead down the highway. I watched the dog and the car making for the same spot of pavement (143).

The Chief has identified with the geese, flying free after a lead goose even as the Chief and the others do when led by that "Bull Goose Loony" McMurphy, later to crucify himself (" 'Do I get a crown of thorns?'" [237]) for them. He identifies with the dog, too, young and free and curious about his environment but also heading for potential death on the highway. Once more, natural things are threatened by machines. Will the Chief, too, be crushed?

I ran across the grounds in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go, toward the highway. . . . I caught a ride with a guy, a Mexican guy, going north in a truck full of sheep . . . (272).

Kesey does not mislead his readers. For those who choose to hear he says that while the social order is indeed a mighty, complex organism difficult to understand, more difficult to influence and change, nevertheless men are responsible for their own fates. One must be strong to survive, even stronger

to prevail, but if such a man is inspired with that most valued of American qualities, the drive for independence and freedom, he can make it.

Kesey's novel is a kind of phenomenon, though, for the skillful way in which he manages to be hard-headedly realistic (hence to appeal to the ego) as well as indulgent of so many and such powerful unconscious, even infantile drives (the novel richly gratifies the id) and respectful of certain ethical considerations: the evil are punished, but so are those who inflict punishment: crime does not pay (the superego is appeased). The fact that the theme can be doubly-perceived as that technology is responsible for man's destruction and that men are responsible for their own — this both stimulates and manages the anxiety-ridden nuclear fantasy because on the one hand a reader can fully respond to his own regressive fantasies and on the other, he is encouraged to put out of them and cope with external reality. Kesey's use of the oedipal constellation to pattern human relationships in *Cuckoo's Nest* functions in much the same way, for by content the novel damns psychoanalytically-informed psychotherapy in such a way as to cater to fantasies of persecution and helplessness; while by artistic design the book uses psychoanalytic theory so as to reassure the reader (as all skillful handling of artistic form and style do) that nevertheless everything is safe. "I, the artist, can handle this material, dangerous though it may be. See, I make it part of the solid structure of this novel. You need not be afraid while I am in control." Mama may be dangerous, but Big Daddy is here to protect his children.

NOTES

1. Ken Kesey. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York Signet, 1962): p. 135. Hence forth, all quotations from the novel will come from this edition. Page numbers will be noted in my text.

2. Ken Kesey worked in a mental institution while writing *Cuckoo's Nest* and he knew of Freudian psychology through Vic Lovell, to whom the novel is dedicated ("To Vik [sic] Lovell, who told me dragons did not exist, then led me to their lairs") and about whom Tom Wolfe says: he was "like a young Viennese analyst, or at least a California graduate school version of one. . . . He introduced Kesey to Freudian psychology. Kesey had never run into a system of thought like this before." (Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* [New York: Bantam, 1969], p. 36.)

3. For this theory and for most of the psychoanalytic literary methodology in my essay I am indebted to Norman N. Holland's works, especially to *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

4. For further elucidation of how fiction satisfies all parts of the psyche, see Simon O. Lesser, *Fiction and the Unconscious* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), *passim*.

JAMES R. HUFFMAN

The Cuckoo Clocks in Kesey's Nest

Now that several critics have flown over Kesey's nest, readers have a number of perspectives from which to view what Kesey is hitching. Some critics have deposited their own eggs in the nest, of course. As John Clark Pratt discovered in compiling an anthology of criticism on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the novel "often plays upon the preconceptions of its readers . . . Teased by shapes that elude him, one critic after another goes wading through the fog and finds that it is full of allusions. Not one of them comes back with a satisfactory discussion of the novel as a whole, but all have interesting points to make."¹ When I first read Kesey, I was deeply involved in a study of the sense of time in novels, so my own preconceptions focused on the nature of time in his work. *Sometimes a Great Notion*, with its "dissolving of chronological time so that past and future events swim into each other" and its attempt "to achieve the illusion of temporal and spatial simultaneity," reveals that Kesey too has an ongoing interest in time and the novel.² So perhaps my perspective on Kesey's first work is not far from its center. A number of Critics have noticed the use of time in *Cuckoo's Nest*, but no one discusses it fully.³ If I may strain my opening metaphor further, I think that particularly the metaphorical uses of time in Kesey's novel nestle in the center of its theme and structure. Certainly, at any rate, I have been sitting on this conception long enough. If my interpretation

Modern Language Studies, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1977): pp 62-73.

does not provide a satisfactory overall view, perhaps it does no worse than lay another egg in Kesey's nest.

Among the eggs in the nest, biographical criticism may have left the least legitimate. Like Kerouac, Kesey tempts the reader into easy identifications of characters with authorial viewpoint. But the chauvinistic Randle P. McMurphy is not Ken Kesey, any more than the obviously psychotic Chief Bromden can stand in for him. Neither McMurphy nor Bromden fully understands the situation in the ward, so extracting Kesey's views must be a matter of careful inference. The reverse procedure, importing Kesey's views to explain the novel, is valid only if those views are demonstrably present. Far too much has been made of Kesey's experimentation with LSD as a key to the novel. According to the theory that psychedelic stimulation created the work, *Cuckoo's Nest* supposedly preaches a "retreat to private 'irrational' satisfactions," "the unrestricted sensorial life," and a "radical dedication to the ecstasy of the present moment."⁴ However, while the present and the senses are important elements in leading Chief Bromden toward sanity, the novel does not contain the drug-oriented message Kesey later preached and followed. In *Cuckoo's Nest* drugs are shunned, not sought, and many patients avoid taking even necessary medication. Sefelt brings on epileptic seizures by failing to take his pills, McMurphy refuses Seconal before shock treatments, and the Chief avoids all drugs as tools of the Combine. Given this attitude toward drug-induced alterations of consciousness, it is difficult to conceive the LSD trip as "the underlying superstructure" growing organically through the work, or that all Kesey's novels are "literally metaphors for psychedelic experiences."⁵

Placing primary emphasis on other external concerns creates similar distortions. Leslie Fiedler traces images of blacks and Indians very interestingly through recent literature, but his preoccupations exactly reverse the emphasis of the novel. Fiedler sees here "the archetype of the love that binds the lonely white man to his Indian comrade—to his *mad* Indian comrade, perhaps even to the *madness* of his Indian comrade, as Kesey amends the old tale."⁶ But this view ignores the fact that Chief Bromden is only one of many men that McMurphy sacrifices himself for; that McMurphy is debatably mad even in attacking Big Nurse; and that the opposite relationship—Bromden's attachment to McMurphy—is more central to the work's movement and meaning.

Similarly, Charles Witke's comparison of Kesey's novels to pastoral conventions in Vergil is more suggestive than definitive. His conclusion that the pastoral ideal is no longer viable in Kesey is well supported by *Sometimes a Great Notion*. To say simply that "*Cuckoo's Nest* was a kind of purely fantastic pastoral retreat in an insane asylum," however, does not relate the pastoral ideal fully enough to the ethic of the novel.⁷ Olga Victory's comparison of the ward to Dante's *Inferno* is fertile, but again just reinforces intrinsic interpretations of the work.⁸

Standing outside the novel with a feminist viewpoint is not much more helpful. Marcia Flak charges Kesey with "blatant sexism" and racism, and condemns "the psychic disease out of which the book's vision was born."⁹ McMurphy is obviously a male chauvinist, but his chauvinism is not the "solution" to the ward's problems. Men like Harding and Billy Bibbit cannot cope with such an image, nor is it presented as ideal. McMurphy's sense of identity, not his male chauvinism, is the model. Furthermore, Miss Ratched and the black aides are not so much stereotypes as metaphorical figures. As Joseph Waldmeir points out, "It is neither accident nor racism that Kesey makes them Negroes or that one of them, a dwarf, is the result of his mother's rape by a white man."¹⁰ The aides represent what oppression can do to blacks in American society. Even McMurphy realizes that the Big Nurse is not what he is fighting. "Ball-cutters" can be "old and young, men and women."¹¹ And McMurphy is not sure that getting the Big Nurse "out of the way would really make much difference; he says that there's something bigger making all this mess" (181). McMurphy is never certain what is behind the problem, showing again that he is no straight spokesman for the author. But he perceives that the Big Nurse is more a metaphorical than a literal villain, more asexual than matriarchal. Kesey may have trouble pinpointing the enemy with the Big Nurse and the Chiefs metaphors of the "Combine," but the focusing problem is not the result of simple racism and sexism.¹²

Robert Boyers judges the novel from a psychological perspective. Charging that McMurphy's methods would not reclaim the ward's victims, Boyers does not present a strong criticism either, for the novel does not claim that the ward is cured. Curable Acutes just start on the way to recovery by asserting their own wills and worth for a change. Boyers also wrongly claims that Kesey uses a "*reductio ad absurdum* of familiar Freudian propositions," so that repressed sexuality "lies behind every psychosis" and causes the acquiescence of all men in the confining conventions of Western society."¹³ Certainly Kesey uses basic Freudian ideas. But to the extent that the novel contains a *reductio ad absurdum* of Freud, Kesey is revealing the absurdity of using psychoanalytic ideas to explain all human behavior. The oversophisticated intern with a pipe, Mr. Gideon, is clearly satirized in the staff meeting when he infallibly pronounces McMurphy a "*Negative Oedipal*" (148). Like the Biblical Gideon, he is trying to bluff the enemy with false weapons. The anecdote on the nine-year-old girl who starts McMurphy's career is perhaps comically Freudian (244–245). McMurphy himself, however, thinks the Freudian view is too simple: "But if it was no more'n you say, just this old nurse and her sex worries, then the solution to all your problems would be to just throw her down and solve her worries, wouldn't it?" (181). McMurphy's actual attack on the Big Nurse is a parody of this Freudian "Solution," a metaphor of the deeper struggle. Similarly, Chief Bromden correctly rejects a Freudian cause,

homosexuality, as the explanation of his attachment to McMurphy (210). Even the psychoanalytic Harding ultimately revises to accept Freudian principles as definitive: “Oh, I could give you Freudian reasons with fancy talk, and that would be right as far as it went. But what you want are the reasons for the reasons, and I’m not able to give you those” (294). Surely Boyers is wrong in assuming that sex is not used as metaphor in the novel, but as a literal solution. If sex cures, why does Billy Bibbit commit suicide after his first treatment? Why does Chief Bromden improve without any sexual treatments at all? And why doesn’t McMurphy hold a therapeutic “gang bang” on the boat, as the heckling manors suggest? As in the aides’ bugging of the patients (34), representing “the shaft” wielded by the Combine, sex is metaphorical in the novel.

Not only sex and race, but virtually every other major element in the novel should be taken metaphorically. One of the advantages of using a psychotic narrator who “talks crazy” yet makes good sense is that the themes of the book can be couched in metaphors. The “cuckoo’s nest,” or mental hospital, is itself a “metaphor for modern America.”¹⁴ As Irving Malin so correctly sees, Kesey is more poet than philosopher, and “the images *are* the real meaning of the novel.”¹⁵ Consequently the most accurate analyses of *Cuckoo’s Nest* rely on his thinly veiled names as keys to symbolic figures, on his allusions to the Bible and popular media, and on his images and metaphors.¹⁶ This essay adds to these intrinsic studies and places them further in perspective by analyzing the use of time in *Cuckoo’s Nest*, particularly as time becomes an index to the themes of the novel.

The connection of the word “cuckoo” with insanity, making the “cuckoo’s nest” an insane asylum, is well known. The word is also readily associated with clocks, and Kesey makes more of the association than is generally recognized. Each Acute neurotic is metaphorically a cuckoo clock which Miss Ratched must readjust to a proper schedule. Successfully rehabilitated patients are clocks that “run down after a pre-set number of years” (38). Even the doctor is like a clock, a very “uptight” one; he “stops winding his watch on account of it’s tight enough, another twist is going to spray it all over the place” at a tense staff meeting (145). The Big Nurse allegedly carries a watchmaker’s pliers in her purse, presumably to help her adjust the inmates (4). She always wears a wristwatch, using it to control the one o’clock therapy sessions, and puts it on McMurphy’s folder as a sign of her control over him (140–45). The whole ward runs on a strict hourly schedule. From the nurse’s station with its glass observation window on the ward, Miss Ratched dreams of a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back” (27). (Kesey may be playing here with the meaning of “watch” as a term denoting surveillance as well as timepieces.) In the ward time is always explicitly on her side (70–71, 109, 150).

Apparently readers have not noticed how far Kesey carries these images. Although Miss Ratched's "precise, automatic gesture" and "smooth, calculated, and precision-made face" is first compared to a baby doll's (5), she becomes more and more a living clock. Sometimes in group meetings she will sit twenty minutes in silence, "quiet as an electric alarm about to go off" (48). Confronting McMurphy, she has a "calm whir coming from her eyes, but down inside of her she's tense as steel," like the mainspring of a clock (26). Her schedule is "delicately balanced" (114). Late in the novel her face starts to "warp and flow" like Einsteinian time (141), and to move with a "ticking noise" (188). Like a ratchet, a common ticking device in many clocks, the Big Nurse allows movement in only one direction—hers. One of her favorite sayings is "everything in its own good time" (24). She always tears a sheet off the calendar each day (31). She taps her watch with a thermometer, indicating that both instruments may be diagnostic and therapeutic. Through the telltale logbook, she uses "past history" to power-grip the present and mold the future (48). When her conflict with McMurphy nears the climax, with her "enamel and plastic face" as "hard as porcelain" and with "her back to the wall" (301–302), Miss Ratched resembles the ward clock that McMurphy had pelted with butter. The Big Nurse is the asexual institutional clock face of the Combine.

Furthermore, the black aides, in becoming her "hands" on the ward, take on the images of clock hands. The hour hand is "a twisted sinewy dwarf the color of cold asphalt," whose "eyelids hang loose and thin from his brow like he's got a bat perched on the bridge of his nose" (28). Like this slow moving hand of time, the dwarf learns to apply steady pressure to the inmates. His two fellows, faster moving and taller, look remarkably like pointed clock hands too. As the minute and second hands, "both looking so much alike I think she had a replica made of the one who came first," the other two aides "are tall and sharp and bony and their faces are chipped into expressions that never change, like flint arrowheads. Their eyes come to points." All three are "black as telephones," and "they never make any noise when they move" (28–29). In ward basketball games, they score baskets "with mechanical accuracy," like clockwork (195). When they move, the clock moves (101). To the patients, each aide seems to float against the wall, his black face contrasting sharply with the institutional white. Before long the aides are even in electrical "contact on a high-voltage wave length of hate" with the Big Nurse, and "are out there performing her bidding before she even thinks it." They are indeed her hands: "So After the nurse gets her staff, efficiency locks the ward like a watchman's clock" (29).

A few patients challenge the routine of the clock and Miss Ratched's control. Pete Bancini, living on memories or working thirty years for the railroad, has not been adjusted to society because he was born with too little

intelligence to act unnaturally. His complaint. "I'm tired," sounds "real and true" in the artificial atmosphere. Pete has to work hard to read a watch that measures artificial time (130) When he hits Williams, significantly he breaks the aide's watch (53), and the other two clock hands freeze, "the big one and his tiny image, in exactly the same position" (51). Pete is a cuckoo clock that cannot be fixed; he is "like an old clock that won't tell time but won't stop neither, with the hands bent out of shape and the face bare of numbers and the alarm bell rusted silent, an old, worthless clock that just keeps ticking and cuckooing without meaning nothing" (53). As in McCullers' *Clock Without Hands*, published the year before *Cuckoo's Nest*, mechanical time cannot measure progress in human psychology.

Randle McMurphy is of course the major challenger of sterile life by the clock. His first statement to the ward after a routine greeting shows his connection with more natural measures of time, the seasons: "Mighty nice fall day" (11). The clock in the mess hall is a literal and metaphorical target for McMurphy to attack. He refuses just to watch the clock, and although he misses the face with his first pat of butter, he still beats the clock by betting on when the butter will melt to the floor (100). As he says in betting that he can beat the Big Nurse, "she may have the element of time, but I got a pretty long winning streak goin' myself" (71). McMurphy talks the patients into disrupting the schedule, as in stopping the work hour to watch the World Series on a blank television screen. He causes them to ask subversive questions, such as "What's so wrong with changing time?" (133). Twice he breaks the glass that represents her ability to "watch" the ward, influencing Scanlon to break it the third time (190–196). From Miss Ratched's viewpoint, McMurphy causes the group meeting to lose time. From McMurphy's viewpoint, he is helping the patients escape from a time-ridden, sterile world.

But McMurphy knows that time is working against him, as it works against all men moving toward death. His face begins to look "dreadfully tired and strange and *frantic*, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do" (245). He takes the patients back to his own childhood, replacing their devastating pasts with his own exploits. McMurphy "doled out his life" for the others to "dream" into (245).

He is right to worry. After fighting for Sefelt, he is sent up to Disturbed, where "time is measured out by the di-*dock*, di-*dock*, of a Ping-pong table" (263). McMurphy has full power to disrupt mechanical time at first; "the Ping-pong clock died down in a rapid ticking on the floor after he entered. But after a few shock treatments, McMurphy acts as though he has been connected electronically to the Big Nurse's time, and sits "following the ping-pong ball with his eyes like he was wired to it" (277). When he enters the Shock Shop, "a hand takes off his wristwatch . . . drops it near the panel, it springs open, cogs and wheels and the long dribbling, spiral of spring

jumping against the side of the panel and sticking fast" (270). Big Nurse is fixing his clock for good. She destroys him, but not before he shows the curable Acutes the way toward sanity, and reveals that she is more than just another porcelain face.

The use of time in the novel is not confined to images of the Combine, to Big Nurse's control of the ward, and to McMurphy's fight against depersonalizing influences. Time is even more central to the work. Through the narrator, Chief Bromden, time is intimately connected to sanity and insanity, and to the meaning and purpose of the work. The Chief's conceptions and experiences of time are a clear index to his state of mind throughout the novel. When his psychological clock is "cuckoo," so is he. As a result, considering the relation of time to the narrator in *Cuckoo's Nest* provides a reliable point of reference for putting interpretations of the novel in proper perspective.

This viewpoint strongly supports interpretations of the novel which center on Bromden's fight toward sanity.¹⁷ The importance of curing individuals is clear in Kesey's thought, perhaps the result of his working in a mental hospital. As he argues in an interview, "What this country needs is sanity. Individual sanity, and all the rest will come true. . . . You can't do it any other way. You work from the heart out, you don't work from the issue down."¹⁸ With McMurphy to show him the way, Chief Bromden is ultimately the main one who flies over the cuckoo's nest, not yet fully sane but well on his way.

Bromden tells the story in the historical present, and the very telling of it is part of his therapy, an essential attempt to grasp the significance of his past. Surely his narration, even when it reveals his still faulty conception, "represents a breakthrough rather than a breakdown."¹⁹ Carrying Fiedler's argument on the Indian as a symbol of madness to an extreme, Terry Sherwood suggests that perhaps *all* events in the book are hallucinations.²⁰ But Chief Bromden's "talking crazy" makes clear sense, as McMurphy realizes (210). And the very fact that he is narrating the book reveals that he is well out of the protective fog and attempting to communicate with others. He realizes how hard it is to keep a clear mind in thinking about the ward. Statements such as "It's the truth even if it didn't happen" (8), however, are not meant to discredit the reliability of the narrator so much as to indicate that his truths are psychological ones. As in Malamud's *The Tenants*, the reader can always perceive what is happening in the outside world and what takes place only in the main character's mind. The Chief gradually learns to differentiate fantasy from external reality too. But he does not deny the internal reality of fantasy. As Bromden argues of his visions of the Combine, "If they don't exist, how can a man see them?" (87). They do exist—as psychological truths even if they did not happen.

The novel uses the Chief's gradual adjustment to time as an index of his improving sanity. At first his perception is obviously faulty. In his para-

noia, he thinks the Big Nurse controls the pace of clock-time. As a result, time becomes totally existential or psychological for the Chief in John Henry Releigh's sense of these terms;²¹ he controls its pace subconsciously, sometimes suspending time entirely or slowing it to a crawl, sometimes accelerating events almost to slapstick speed (73–75). But this psychological control or lack of control of the pace of time fails, for the Chief feels frustrated, insecure, and disoriented without some stable routine and measurement of time. He risks irreversible psychosis when he hides in the fog, hoping not to perceive the present nor to recall the past by blotting out all particular consciousness, but he always returns to the relative security of Miss Ratched's schedule.

Early in the work he uses the past like the fog, as a place to hide from the threatening present: "But like always when I try to place my thoughts in the past and hide there, the fear close at hand seeps in through the memory" (6). Pretending to be hunting with his father does not always work partly because much of the past Chief Bromden has to escape into is not happy. In fact, he generally tries to avoid remembering the past, since it is even more painful than the present he has built for himself.

As a result, the Chief's memory is very faulty early in the novel. He remembers getting hysterical about being shaved one particular morning, and then being locked in Seclusion. But he cannot remember whether he got breakfast or not. He "can call to mind some mornings" when the aides stole his breakfast, but this morning he just does not remember (8). His memory is understandably selective, to protect him from the unpleasant. He drifts in the fog as a way to escape past and present. In it "time doesn't mean anything. It's lost in the fog, like everything else" (75). Interestingly enough, Bromden thinks the fog must affect memory, since none of the others seem to notice it. He does not yet apply these supposed memory losses to himself. However, even in these faulty memories, he can reason. He figures out that he probably did not have breakfast on the morning in question, and cannot remember because he was drugged. When he awakens, he reckons that it must be after eight o'clock because the ward door has been opened. Clearly some signs of improvement between his earlier state and his perspective as narrator are already showing.

Shock treatments and other remedies on the ward are no help at all, though. He has had over two hundred of these, resulting in "disorientation for days" and the inability to recall things (67). As Pratt's selections on psychotherapy show, shock treatments and lobotomies cause patients to be confused about the time of day and not to think about the past or future. Kesey may well have known that "the feeling of somehow going on in time—the feeling of being essentially the same individual as one was yesterday and will be tomorrow, but recognizing that one has changed since childhood and may go on changing"—that this feeling would be lacking in such patients as the

Chief.²² In any case Kesey's description of the Chiefs disorientation in time is strikingly similar to clinical descriptions, and the cure he presents is precisely the regaining of that sense of self which is so dependent on a perception of continuity and change through time.

Bromden's true therapy begins when McMurphy arrives. The Irishman is a positive influence on his memory from the beginning. When McMurphy first enters, Bromden can "remember all this part real clear," including even his handshake. For a time McMurphy is all that keeps the Chief from drifting forever in the fog (39). Soon the Chief's memory steadily improves. He places events in clear sequences: "I remember it was a Friday again, three weeks after we voted on TV" (177). He learns to *try* to remember: "You forget—if you don't sit down and make the effort to think back" (122). He also learns the important psychological truth in the old German proverb, "Happy is he who forgets what cannot be changed." Instead of losing himself or becoming terrified in flashbacks, he learns how to recognize and deal with them: "That's not even happening now. You see? There's nothing you can do about a happening out of the past like that" (132). He is finally able to put his boyhood together: "It was the first time in what seemed to me centuries that I'd been able to remember much about my childhood" (203). Since he recognizes the difference between actual time passage and seeming in this passage, he is clearly gaining control over psychological time.

Being able to perceive the past is part of a simultaneous ability to live in the present. One night for the first time in years he is "even able to see out the windows" and experience the present fully. He walks to the screen and feels the cold wire mesh against his cheeks, with his eyes closed, only the mesh and "that cold linoleum was real right then, only that moment" (154–155.). After a time, without drugs, "all was sharp and clear and solid" as he "forgot it could be" (186).

Chief Bromden's differentiation of past and present parallels his recognition of acts of his own will instead of his paranoid presumption that others always control him. He admits that he lifted his hand himself to vote with McMurphy (136), and is able to cut through his lies to himself about why he would like to touch McMurphy (210).

His developing sense of time is not merely an adjustment to the tick-tock time of Miss Ratched, however. Like the early McMurphy, he now lives on natural time. As he smells burning leaves, he realizes fall is coming, "just like that was the strangest thing ever happened. Fall. Right outside here it was spring a while back, then it was summer, and now it's fall—that's sure a curious idea" (155). Time is marked by the sun, moon, and seasons, not by clock's (cf. 281). That moon, almost stereotypical Indian measure of time, puts past and present together for Chief Bromden as it dwarfs the stars; it makes him recall how he had noticed the same thing when he was hunting with his

father years before (155). As if to emphasize the health of Bromden's sense of past and present now, Kesey lets him listen to Canadian geese fly across that moon until all he can hear is his "memory of the sound" (156).

On the fishing trip he is able to relate past and present, continuity and change even more extensively. He is alert to all that has developed in twenty years. As a result of his confinement, he has a better sense of change than those who have lived through it (226–227). The trip also renews the joy he had felt as a child (243).

Once back on the ward, the Chief does not lose this improved sense of time and sense of renewal even when he is threatened with memory-killing shock treatments. He may not remember the nurse on Disturbed who had treated him while he was most deeply psychotic (265), but even on the way to the Shock Shop he remembers later details such as the digger squirrel holes which he had seen a dog explore in the moonlight (269). True, he cannot control his involuntary fear of shock (271). But his flashbacks under the influence of electricity are comparatively coherent memories of his childhood. His sense of time remains sound, as he can "remember hot, still electric-storm afternoons" and perceive "it's cold because the sun is late afternoon." Kesey makes these images of natural time explicit in the shock dream, and Chief Bromden emphasizes what he and "the *moon*" have going for them (273–274). Bromden is able to question how McMurphy made him big again, and realizes that the shock made him think the recovery room "was a dice" (275). He chooses never again to slip off into the fog to hide. Although he cannot regain his whole memory at once, he works at it for the first time, and knows he has won now. Formerly he spent weeks recovering. This time he is aware of "fighting out of it in less than a day, less time than ever" (276).

By now McMurphy and Bromden have reversed positions, as Fiedler notices but also interprets in reverse. The Chief tries to convince McMurphy to play along for protection just as he had, but McMurphy refuses. Randle is losing his clear consciousness and, perhaps significantly, must squint up at "the dim clock" to read it. This time the clock beats him, for he does not wake up in time to escape. After the lobotomy his eyes just "stared into the full light of the moon," that "cold moon at the window" which looks in on the ending of his natural life (308).

Bromden knows that McMurphy's message must live on through him. A big fisherman like Peter, he tries on McMurphy's hat, then is ashamed of trying to wear it (310). For McMurphy's message is individualism, not discipleship. Now the Chief sides with the moon against the mechanical control panel which runs on artificial time. Moonlight "glinted off the chrome and glass gauges," so cold that Bromden "could almost hear the click of it striking" (320). In smashing out with the control panel, the Chief combines the image of a comic-strip hero with Christian imagery and natural metaphors of time,

as the "glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth" (310).

Marcus Klein feels that the plot breaks down at this point, "where Chief Bromden, become ambulatory, will just manage to escape back to the mythic free life of his Indian forbears, which is an item of faith."²³ But Bromden is not going back to his tribe for good, nor will he be happily-ever-aftering. He wants to look at the Columbia "just to bring, some of it clear in my mind again" (311). Then he may go to Canada. But as Colonel Matterson, another mad oracle in the novel, has explained in his homemade language, "Canada" is "the cal-en-dar" (129). Chief Bromden is entering a long period of righting himself with the world so he can play some role in righting that world; he has not found any panacea. Like E. E. Cummings, the Chief has had to learn how to make his body put on space and his mind take off mechanical time. He has learned that in a mad world, fleeing through space is a way to gain time to adjust, and that fleeing from all sense of time leads only to madness.²⁴ In that time-weighted final sentence of the novel, he realizes the simple truth that the past always converges with the future at the present: "I been away a long time." He will remain in the present, the only place a sane man can stand and fight.

NOTES

1. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, ed. John Clark Pratt (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. xii. Hereafter Pratt.

2. Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 379.

3. Cf. Tony Tanner, p. 382; Pratt, pp. viii and xii on "multivalent synchronicity," and p. 341 quoting Kesey himself; James O. Hoge, "Psychedelic Stimulation and the Creative Imagination: The Case of Ken Kesey," *Southern Humanities Review*, 6 (1971), pp. 382-383; Joseph J. Waldmeir, "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 5 (1964), pp. 192-204 passim; Nicolaus Mills, "Ken Kesey and the Politics of Laughter," *Centennial Review*, 16 (1972), pp. 83, 90; and Janet Sutherland, "A Defense of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," *English Journal*, 61 (January 1972), p. 29.

4. Hoge, pp. 381-382.

5. W. D. Sherman, "The Novels of Ken Kesey," *Journal of American Studies*, 5 (1971), pp. 185, 188.

6. Leslie Al Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), p. 185. See also his article "The New Mutants," *Partisan Review*, 32 (Fall 1965), p. 524.

7. Charles Witke, "Pastoral Convention in Vergil and Kesey," *Pacific Coast Philology*, 1 (1966), p. 24.

8. Olga W. Vickery, "The Inferno of the Moderns," in Melvin J. Friedman and John B. Vickery, ed., *The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honor of Frederick J. Hoffman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 159-163.

9. Marcia L. Falk, letter to the editor of the *New York Times* (1971), as reprinted in Pratt, pp. 450–453. Compare Terence Martin, “*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and the High Cost of Living,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19 (Spring 1973), pp. 44–46.

10. Waldmeir, p. 199.

11. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 58. All numbers in parentheses refer to this readily available Compass Books edition, which has the same pagination as the first edition.

12. Terry Sherwood presents an interesting criticism of Kesey’s wavering symbols in “*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and the Comic Strip,” *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 13 (1971), p. 106. Pratt, p. 349, also records Kesey’s similarly metaphorical statement that media wires all lead to the Bank of America, reprinted from “An Impolite Interview with Ken Kesey,” *The Realist*, 90 (May–June 1971).

13. Robert Boyers, “Attitudes Toward Sex in American ‘High Culture,’” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 376 (March 1968), pp. 36–52, as reprinted in Pratt, especially pp. 436–437.

14. Richard Blessing, “The Moving Target: Ken Kesey’s Evolving Hero,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4 (Winter 1971), p. 615.

15. Irving Malin, “Ken Kesey” *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *Critique*, V (1962), 81–84, as reprinted in Pratt, especially pp. 432–433. Stephen L. Tanner, in “Salvation Through Laughter: Ken Kesey & the Cuckoo’s Nest,” *Southwest Review*, 58 (Spring 1973), pp. 125–137, traces several of these “meaningfully consistent patterns of imagery” very well, centering on images of Nature and the Machine, but he neglects time images. Cf. Martin, p. 48, on the “strategy of literalizing metaphors.”

16. See Blessing, Malin, Mills, Sherwood, and Waldmeir; John A. Barsness, “Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress,” *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 23 (March 1969), pp. 27–33, reprinted in Pratt; Richard B. Hauck, “The Comic Christ and the Modern Reader,” *College English*, 31 (February 1970), pp. 498–506; and Bruce E. Wallis, “Christ in the Cuckoo’s Nest: Or, the Gospel According to Ken Kesey,” *Cithara*, 12 (May 1972), pp. 52–58. (Wallis’s interpretation is hurt by a doctrinal bias, but has a sound foundation.) Perhaps fortunately, name hunters who have identified Randle P. McMurphy as a mover (RPM), Miss Ratched as a part of the machine (ratchet-but also “wretched” or worse), and the stuttering Billy Bibbit as another Billy Budd, have not tackled the aides (Williams, Warren, and Washington-dominated by political allusions and “w”), Mr. Gideon (and the institutional Gideon’s Bible), Doctor Spivey, nor Tee Ah Millatoona (Take A Miltown?). And the hunters of allusions to Christianity have not yet mentioned the rosary bead sparrows on the electrical wires (270), the parallel to Christ’s last words in the question “Is it finished?” (309), nor the Pontius Pilate in Disturbed who keeps saying, “I wash my hands of the whole deal” (264–266).

17. Cf. Stephen Tanner, pp. 128–136; Mills, p. 82; Harold Clurman, reviewing the theatrical version in *The Nation*, 212 (April 5, 1971), pp. 442–443, as reprinted in Pratt, 443; Ronald G. Billingsley, “The Artistry of Ken Kesey,” Diss, Oregon 1971, as abstracted in *DAI* 32: pp. 3293a–94a; Carol S. P. Havemann, “The Fool as Mentor in Modern American Parables of Entrapment: Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*,” Diss, Rice 1971, as abstracted in *DAI* 32: pp. 2091A–92A; Richard B. Hauck, “The Comic Christ and the Modern Reader,” *College English*, 31 (February 1970), p. 501; and William Schopf, “Blindfolded and Backwards: Promethean and

Bemushroomed Heroism in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Catch-22*," *BRM-MLA*, 26 (Fall 1972), pp. 89-97. Several studies have espoused briefly this basic view of the novel or implied it, but none has worked it out fully with the support of the use of time.

18. Quoted in Pratt, p. 360.

19. Mills, p. 83. Cf. Vickery, p. 163, and Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, as quoted in Pratt, p. 331.

20. Sherwood, p. 109, n. 8.

21. John Henry Raleigh, "The English Novel and the Three Kinds of Time," *Time, Place and Idea: Essays on the Novel*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968, pp. 43-55.

22. Mary Frances Robinson and Walter Freeman, *Psychology and the Self* (New York: Grune and Stratton, Inc., 1954), as quoted in Pratt, p. 496. Cf. Sherman. p. 185, defining the Chief's madness.

23. Marcus Klein, ed., *The American Novel Since World War II* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1969), "Introduction," pp. 20-21.

24. Cf. Martin, p. 54, on the "sense of space" in Kesey.

JAMES F. KNAPP

*Tangled in the Language of the Past:
Ken Kesey and Cultural Revolution*

Literary Critics have always found ways to contradict each other. But sometimes their disagreements can help us to get beyond the niceties of literary interpretation to see deeper contradictions, not only in the particular work under scrutiny, but in the very culture which includes both the writer and his critics. Consider two statements concerning Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: according to Terrence Martin, "The men on the Big Nurse's ward become stronger once they recognize their interdependence. McMurphy becomes heroic once he throws his lines out to them." but W. D. Sherman says that "The kind of affirmation which arises from Kesey's novels is an anarchic 'yes' to life, which, despite its joyousness, leaves a man prey to unbearable isolation." Both observations ring true, and yet surely Kesey cannot be affirming a vital individualism, whose price is personal isolation, at the same time that he offers a vision of the necessity of inter-dependence and mutual brotherhood.

This apparent contradiction exists at the level of "meaning": which is the true interpretation of Kesey's novel? But Eliot M. Zashin, a political scientist, discussing Kesey's rise and fall as an active leader of the sixties' counter-culture, has identified a similar contradiction at the level of practical action: "Being part of the group-mind implied going with the flow of the collective psyche, while the theorist wanted to shape the elements of his vision. If Ke-

The Midwest Quarterly, Volume 19, Number 4 (Summer 1978): pp. 398-412.

sey directed the Pranksters, their activity could not really be an expression of the group-mind.” Thus the ambiguous titles for Kesey (e.g., “non-navigator”) which Tom Wolfe describes in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Self-assertive leader imposing his vision on the group? Or member of an inter-dependent collective of equals? He apparently sought the magic to be both.

So we could attempt to decide whether Kesey’s writings preach independence or inter-dependence, just as, presumably, he struggled to reconcile those two poles in his own mind. His books, however, as well as that part of his life which was made a public fiction, became part of a popular movement whose importance, for a time at least, was far more than artistic. The counter-culture of the sixties promised (threatened) to change the nature of America, and then, as suddenly as it had come, it collapsed into the quietism of a more conservative decade. Like other movements of history, this one had innumerable causes—political, economic, psychological, even scientific—but my own concern in this essay is with just one part of that process. The structure of a society—its range of acceptable roles and behaviors, its values, its ideals—is reflected in that symbolic network of stories, pictures, and metaphors which we might call its body of popular myth. We generally assume that such an agency functions to “socialize” the young, and that its effect is more often than not a conservative one, preserving traditional attitudes as it passes them on to a new generation. By the nineteen-sixties, of course, such a sociological notion was commonplace, and it could easily be inverted and used consciously by those who were eager to change the nature of their society. If traditional images socialize traditionally, then *new* images might be found which would have the power to shape minds in *new* directions. Social change could be brought about through the simple, non-violent agency of “creative mythology”: initiate a cultural revolution, and the rest will follow,

The reality appears to be more complicated. Ken Kesey certainly began with many of the assumptions of the “cultural revolutionaries.” He became a public figure by writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, a novel which depends heavily on the sort of critique of society which was being made throughout the serious media during the nineteen-fifties. America has become a lonely crowd of organization men, offering its affluence only to those who are willing to pay the price of strict conformity. Increasingly hierarchical, technological, and efficient, society has become that dehumanizing machine which Chief Bromden calls the Combine, producing “things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they’re still linked together like sausages.” Complete with identical commuter husbands and identical children in the back yards, those houses represent society’s primary demand: adjustment.

By choosing a mental hospital for his setting, Kesey was able to picture society’s pressure to adjust at its most coldly, and explicitly, coercive. Identify-

ing social evil with institutional constraints which hinder individuality, he proceeded to set a microcosmic revolution in motion by introducing a powerfully individual character. Randle McMurphy succeeds in destroying the order of the ward, and in liberating some of its patients, not through any kind of direct attack on the system, but simply by refusing to speak the language which sustains it. His most telling weapons are jokes, games, obscenity, make-believe, verbal disrespect. The patients have seen physical violence before, and been left unchanged by it. But when McMurphy violates that language which had marked out, invisibly, the social space of the ward, they begin to be freed of its power, begin to see that other patterns of relationship, other values might be possible. McMurphy's singing in the shower is disturbing and exciting precisely because it challenges that web of indirect, symbolic control through which the *voluntarily* committed patients have been made to choose their own oppression. Like a bawdy William Blake, McMurphy is a cultural revolutionary whose function it is to smash the "mind-forg'd manacles" of his time.

When Kesey moved away from fiction to create the real-life games of his Merry Pranksters, he adopted the same strategies he had created on paper. Tom Wolfe's account opens with his being driven through the streets of San Francisco by several Pranksters in a pick-up truck, and a crucial distinction is made at the outset. Driving through a city which is largely the alien territory of those straight citizens whose surest emblem is their "black shiny FBI shoes," the Pranksters are set apart by bizarre costumes certain to startle and disturb the expectations of anyone trapped in the grey conformity of "well-adjusted" America: "Here comes a beautiful one, attache case and all, the day-is-done resentful look and the . . . shoes—how they shine!—and what the hell are these beatnik ninnies—and Lois plugs him in the old marshallow and he goes streaming and bouncing down the hill" (*Kool-Aid*, 2). As Kesey and his group gradually refine their intentions in preparing for a trip across America, they begin to see the possibility for initiating radical changes through the simple expedient of offering people the sight of a multi-media bus full of Day-Glo crazies. Like drugs, or kicking a jammed soda machine, this approach is based on the assumption that violent, temporary alteration of a too-rigid system can be liberating. Since the system at question is the uniform, unimaginative, overly conditioned mentality of corporate America, the mental games of the Pranksters seemed an obvious way to begin the process of change.

In his second novel, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, Kesey had defined a similar set of oppositions. Setting a hero whose unpredictable independence passes all bounds of reason against a loggers' union whose members are plodding fools at best, Kesey affirms his opposition to institutional conformity—among workers no less than owners. His hero, Hank Stamper, sets out to undermine the strikers' position by supplying their mill with logs almost singlehandedly, because he will not bow to group pressure—justified or not.

In a gesture which becomes the central image for his defiance, he runs his father's severed arm up a flagpole, all its fingers but the middle one tied down. That act, which, paradoxically, destroys the dignity and authority of the union leader in the eyes of his men, is essentially an audacious, macabre *prank*. The point I would stress, however, is that in each of these cases, we are asked to identify with characters who set themselves in opposition to a world of stultifying, institutional conformity—whether Combine and hospital, or company suburb, or manipulative union. It was institutions such as these which came to be grouped together, during the sixties, under the label Establishment. From this point of view, Kesey is a decidedly “anti-Establishment” figure whose works, in life as well as in art, encouraged social change.

Why did so little change occur? Marvin Harris, the anthropologist, has argued that the counter-culture itself was in fact a powerful force acting *against* change, that it “has all the classic symptoms of a lifestyle dreamwork whose social function is to dissolve and fragment the energies of dissent. This should have been clear from the great importance given to ‘doing your own thing.’ You can’t make a revolution if everybody does his own thing. To make a revolution, everybody must do the same thing” (*Riddles*, 257). The Pranksters were certainly among those whom Harris describes as seriously believing that they could “kiss away the corporate state as if it were an ‘evil enchantment.’” Addressing a Vietnam War protest, Kesey simply played his harmonica and advised the crowd to “just look at, look at the war, and turn your backs and say . . . Fuck it . . .” (*Kool-Aid*, 199). That is to say, the Pranksters confronted the Vietnam War as they did the plastic suburbs—as cultural revolutionaries. To say that such a revolution of the mind only supports the status quo by mystifying those who might bring about genuine change is certainly to validate the feelings of those anti-war organizers who felt the unity and resolve of their crowd melt away under the spell of Kesey’s harmonica. But it does not deal with the fact that for many millions of people the hippies seemed as tangible and terrible a sign of radical change as ever appeared in the fiery cloud of a mystic’s vision.

At this point, we might frame an argument something like this: though the counter-culture offered a fearsome appearance of change, it was in fact powerless, because a society cannot be changed simply by the symbolic magic of altering its myths. That is to say, cultural revolution is bunk. Before dismissing the endeavor of the Pranksters as doomed from the start, however, it might be well to look more carefully at just how their elaborate showmanship did attempt to invoke, and change, traditional American myths. Structural linguists make a distinction between *langue* and *parole*—between the underlying rules which constitute the grammar of a language, and the endless variety of particular utterances which may be patterned by those rules. If there is rapid change, even fashion, at the level of individual sentences, change is very rare and very gradual at the deeper levels of grammar. In attempting to

understand cultural change, we must make a similar distinction. "Lifestyle" may tell us much about the nature of a society, but novelty in these endlessly interchangeable "words" of a culture—its fashions, its pop heroes, its slang—does not necessarily represent change at the deeper levels of cultural patterning. A luminescent soap bubble appears to be very different from a bubble of hot mud, but at the level of structure, they are the same. If there is such a thing as myth, it surely exists in fundamental, potential patterns of social relationship, and not in the particular manifestations of those patterns. Adam ruling Eve defines a pattern which can then be brought to flesh by any male chauvinist at all.

As Kesey's Pranksters presented themselves to the world, they seemed to offer mixed signals. In their Day-Glo strangeness they sought to create an impact of unheard-of novelty. And yet Kesey himself was adept at drawing on the most traditional of images: "Somehow the Perry Lane set got the idea that his family were Okies, coming out of the Dust Bowl during the Depression, and then up to Oregon, wild, sodden Oregon, where they had fought the land and shot bears and the rivers were swift and the salmon leaped silver in the spring big two-hearted rivers" (*Kool-Aid*, 32). In his buckskin shirt and cowboy boots, Kesey played a role whose implications he fully understood. When he created a hero to break up the order of Big Nurse's ward, he made him in the mold of a thousand dime novels: "he's got iron on his heels and he rings it on the floor like horseshoes. He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart, and stands there with the guys looking at him" (*Cuckoo's Nest*, 16). Nor is Hank Stamper, muscles rippling like steel cables, any exception to Kesey's image of the proper Western hero.

As Kesey conceived it, these frontier heroes must engage in acts which reveal their gritty, solitary fortitude. McMurphy strides to his deadly showdown with the corrupt enforcer of bad laws. Or Kesey, explaining his decision to go beyond acid, pictures himself as a Daniel Boone of psychic exploration: "Don't say stop plunging into the forest,' Kesey says. 'Don't say stop being a pioneer and come back here and help these people through the door. If Leary wants to do that, that's good, it's a good thing and somebody should do it. But somebody has to be the pioneer and leave the marks for others to follow'" (*Kool-Aid*, 27). Uninterested in the administrative drudgery of organizing a wagon train, Kesey views his role strictly as that of pathfinder. And since America had long since reached the shores of the Pacific, his trailblazing would have to turn to a psychic wilderness. Nevertheless, the legend on the front of his bus is "Further" and his destination is "Edge City."

By adopting traditional metaphors such as these, Kesey invests his new experiments with the authority of a national history full of exploring. He can be traditional and revolutionary at the same time. In embracing the image of the pioneer, however, he invokes a body of tradition which has helped to

sustain a deep continuity within the American experience. Although there has never been a single dominant version of the “myth of America,” one thread of the tradition does lead directly to Kesey and his Pranksters. Robert Bird’s 1837 novel, *Nick of the Woods*, was an extremely popular tale of the frontier, and it offers a particularly clear use of that ultimate text for American myth—the Fall of Adam and Eve from Eden. Bird begins his book by quoting a few lines from *Paradise Lost*, choosing the point at which the fallen pair leave Paradise and enter the world for the first time. Rather than emphasizing their sin or the sadness of their loss, Bird uses his allusion to point out the enormous possibility that lay before them. It was just such a possibility which confronted the pioneers who settle Kentucky—“the first region of great ultra-montane Wilderness penetrated by the Saggenah, or Englishman,—the first torn from its aboriginal possessors, and converted from a desert hunting-ground into the home of civilized men” (*Nick*, 27). So perceived, the myth of the Fall could sanction, as it did for Bird, the movement of European civilization into the new continent. Perceiving nature as fallen, and yet available for salvation through human toil, he saw the proper course as clear: gain mastery over that alien world and so transform it that it might assume the altered shape of a New Jerusalem.

If Kesey plunged into the forest as a pioneer of the avant-garde, he did so in pursuit of a very old vision: “Sandy could see that Kesey wasn’t primarily an outdoorsman. He wasn’t that crazy about unspoiled Nature. It was more like he had a vision of the forest as a fantastic stage setting . . . in which every day would be a happening, an art form” (*Kool-Aid*, 51). The Pranksters painted the redwoods with Day-Glo, and wired them up with multiple speakers for jazz and rock music, and filled them with junk art. For Kesey, nature was an alien presence that must be transformed by the arts of civilization before it could serve a human purpose. His aim was not to build the mines and mills and cities of the earlier dreamers, but his starting point, like theirs, was the assumption that nature must be mastered by human technology. One consequence of such an attitude has been the enormous physical transformation of the continent, but the full implications of the myth must be understood. When a part of the world was marked as alien territory, that label sanctioned the mastery of everything beyond the frontier—including the people.

One of the interests of the Merry Pranksters was the attempt to achieve an intimate sense of psychic unity among themselves—to be “in synch.” And yet their empathy was strongly narrow. Like much of the counter-culture in general, the Pranksters combined an intense desire for openness and emotional sharing with a habit of perception which entirely excluded most people from their sympathy. The formula was explicit and categorical: “‘There are going to be times,’ says Kesey, ‘when we can’t wait for somebody. Now, you’re either on the bus or off the bus. If you’re on the bus, and you get left behind,

then you'll find it again. If you're off the bus in the first place—then it won't make a damn' (*Kool-Aid*, 74). Like a pioneer contemplating the benighted savages who lurk in the forest before him, Kesey was willing to accept any converts to the true faith, but those who chose to remain beyond the pale were not worth further consideration. Tom Wolfe's book is full of incidents in which Prankster behavior depends on the perception of a clear line between "us" and "them." Stark Naked goes insane in Houston, and the bus moves on, leaving her to be picked up, eventually, by the cops. A girl freaks out at an Acid Test, and her hysteria is piped into the sound system to become part of the atmosphere. At a Beatles concert, Kesey watches with fascination as the crowd becomes a jellyfish before its rock heroes, and at another Acid Test he experiences that kind of mastery himself as he controls the crowd by manipulating the electronic media which determine its mood. Stoned at La Honda he indulges the ultimate fantasy of separation as he imagines himself to be God, the whole world subordinate to his power.

The Pranksters move through a world of non-people, projecting their own movie onto faces which remain unrecognized, and presumed to be blank. Kesey's fiction was no different. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, for instance, the service station attendant only exists to be badgered into submission, the charter boat captain to be outwitted, the psychiatrist to be used, Big Nurse to be defeated by any means possible. Nor are we allowed to feel any real sympathy for the self-pitying, blustering, diuretic, athlete's-foot-ridden union men of *Sometimes A Great Notion*. Against such backgrounds, the Kesey hero (himself or his fictions) stands out all the more clearly as dynamic entrepreneur. He imposes his will on the unenlightened like any Calvinist preacher armed with Bible and gun, and the effect seems to be to affirm a powerful individualism. There is a strong case, then, that for all the "anti-Establishment" cast of its surface appearance, Kesey's work actually conveys the most traditional of messages: it is the right and the destiny of strong individuals to shape the world to their wills. Even within the circle of friends and family there can be only one "bull-goose looney," one top stud logger, one chief of the psychedelic avant-garde.

But this essay began with the paradox that Kesey has been seen to affirm both independence and inter-dependence, and I am not quite ready to resolve that contradiction on the side of unqualified individualism. Nor would I conclude that Kesey was simply a deceptively reactionary part of a social movement mis-named as "counter-culture." There is a clear concern in each of these books for the problems of forging some kind of community in the face of a cold, alienating world. The Merry Pranksters shared their adventure as fully as we might imagine, while Randle McMurphy establishes a new kind of human solidarity among his fellow patients. Kesey does indeed adopt the role of intrepid, self-reliant pioneer, and I have argued that that role is richly

precedented in the American past. If salvation after the fall depends on our right use of a natural world which is equally available to good or evil, then it would seem that we must set off into the heathen darkness, and build our holy city with ax and gun—or strobe light. But that is only part of the myth. Salvation cannot in fact be complete until Christ, as Second Adam, makes his sacrifice and offers a new pattern for human life.

Kesey and his heroes are obviously cast in the mold of the frontiersman, but there is an equally strong suggestion of self-sacrifice in the adventures they seek. These are not the invincible white-hats of old movies, emerging spotless from one brawl after another. In Wolfe's book, Kesey gives up the easy leadership of a pop cult he helped to create, becoming instead the ragged, persecuted, misunderstood fugitive. Justifying himself to a puzzled would-be follower, he emphasizes his suffering in the cause of others: "If you don't realize that I've been helping you with every fiber in my body . . . if you don't realize that everything I've done, everything I've gone through. . . ." "And he pictures himself as willing martyr to a hard age: "We're in a period now like St. Paul and the early Christians," Kesey says. 'St. Paul said, if they shit on you in one city, move on to another city, and if they shit on you in that city, move on to another city—'" (*Kool-Aid*, 26). In *Cuckoo's Nest* he creates a character who quite simply learns to be Christ. As McMurphy begins to feel a bond of sympathy for his fellow patients he comes to their aid at increasing cost to himself. Publicly failing to lift a heavy control panel he seems to say: I am mortal like you, but I am not afraid to commit myself. Smashing Big Nurse's window, he cuts himself badly, but restores the spirit of the ward. And when he forgoes his self-interested good behavior to defend another man, and so faces the punishment of shock treatment, he consciously identifies himself with Christ: "They put the graphite salve on his temples. 'What is it?' he says. 'Conductant,' the technician says. 'Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?'" (p. 237). Ultimately, McMurphy sacrifices his mind and then his life so that his brothers may be reborn out of the living death in which he had found them.

In attempting to understand particular works in terms of mythic patterns such as these, however, it is essential to realize that no myth has a simple, unvarying meaning which is automatically conveyed to the reader as soon as the familiar allusions are made. When Robert Bird chose to invoke the story of the fall, he offered a version which was entirely compatible with the need of his own time to justify the final stage in the conquest of the American continent. If myth is an active force in shaping values and attitudes, it is also conditioned by the particular historical demands of each new age. Anyone who has glanced through a history of religious painting knows, for example, that the image of Christ has undergone great change. Early

pictures of the Good Shepherd are nearly indistinguishable from classical representations of Orpheus, but that portrayal gives way to the Christ enthroned of Byzantine art, to be followed still later by a Renaissance emphasis on the physical suffering of a very mortal body. When Kesey associates his character with Christ he does not choose the pink-cheeked Jesus of modern calendar art. McMurphy goes to his crucifixion with winks and wisecracks, a tough guy trying to buck up his fellow victims. If there is a precedent for such a Christ it must surely be that Anglo-Saxon warrior who strides to the cross in “The Dream of the Rood”:

Then the young warrior. God our Saviour,
Valiantly stripped before the battle; with courage and resolve
Beheld by many He climbed upon the Cross to redeem Mankind.
(Old English Poems, 129)

When Christianity came to the Germanic peoples of northern Europe, it quickly took a shape acceptable and understandable to their society of warlike lord and thane.

And so with Kesey, Christ becomes a pattern for heroic, assertive action. He is a frontiersman whose bold sacrifice opens the way for everyone else able to follow his example. But like his Anglo-Saxon predecessor, such a Christ can only be the leader of a small band of brothers. His stance toward the evils which would kill him demands that he be set over against a hostile world. No respecter of theology, this version of the myth has little sympathy for the unstoned and no forgiveness at all for Big Nurse. Setting himself against the cold impersonality of modern society, Kesey would create a new community based on self-sacrifice and mutual dependency. And yet his community would include only the elect, and, set in opposition to a world of outsiders he regards as unenlightened or downright evil, it would offer no vision of the larger, inclusive society. There was a kind of siege mentality about much of the counter-culture, and perhaps that had something to do with Kesey's attraction to this beleaguered warrior-Christ. But whatever the cause, he seems to embrace aggressive individualism one moment and self-sacrificing brotherhood the next, and the contradiction cannot be resolved because it is rooted in the only words he knew. Society's myths are always open to the movement of history, responding to change, or causing it, or mediating it in such a way that new patterns may be spoken in the reassuring categories of an older language. But to consciously master so complex a process, to understand all the social messages being transmitted by any body of tradition, and to try to bend them to your own ambition—is to fly awfully close to the sun. Ken Kesey was a cultural revolutionary, all right, but the beast he sought to control had a mind subtler, and more willful, than he ever guessed.

WORKS CITED

- Bird, Robert. *Nick of the Woods*. New Haven: College and University Press, 1967.
- Crossley-Holland, Keven, and Bruce Mitchell, eds. *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967.
- Harris, Marvin. *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Signet, 1962.
- . *Sometimes A Great Notion*. New York: Bantam, 1969.
- Martin, Terrence. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the High Cost of Living," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19 (Spring, 1973).
- Sherman, W. D. "The Novel of Ken Kesey," *Journal of American Studies*, 5 (1971).
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. New York: Bantam, 1969.
- Zashin, Elliot M. "Political Theorist and Deniurge: The Rise and Fall of Ken Kesey," *Centennial Review*, 17 (Spring, 1973).

MICHAEL M. BOARDMAN

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest:
Rhetoric and Vision

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* illustrates well the difficulties of writing a successful tragic action in the modern world. In large part, the problem stems from what David Daiches long ago termed "the breakdown of the implicit agreement between author and readers about what was significant in human experience," a collapse lamented by Virginia Woolf, among others. "Only believe," she wistfully wrote, "and all the rest will come of itself." But what if many readers find belief difficult or impossible? Any novelist who sets out to free himself from "the cramp and confinement of personality," who attempts to represent as moving and important a sequence of imagined life, depends heavily, today more than ever, on creating through "rhetoric," the way he tells his story, a community of values that may not exist in the real world. If an author's *donnée* is the spectacle of a character passing from happiness to misery—always a difficult subject to represent successfully—and that author wishes to avoid the "disagreeable spectacle" David Hume saw as attendant on "the mere suffering of plaintive virtue, under the triumphant tyranny and oppression of vice," problems peculiar to tragedy arise to complicate matters. Tragedy, that "higher form of art" than even the epic, can fail to move or convince if the plea to "believe" falls on ears assaulted daily with conflicting claims for credence.¹

The Journal of Narrative Technique, Volume 9, Number 3 (Fall 1979): pp. 171–183.

Among those conflicting claims are the critical formulae that have been used to explain Kesey's first novel. Why should one see *One Flew Over* as a tragic action, rather than as comic allegory or melodramatic fable? After all, Bromden, whom many regard as the central character, not only does not die, but experiences a kind of liberation. The book also seems to contain far too much humor to be beaten with the stick of tragedy. One justification for seeing the book as tragic is that tragedy, as a formal model, explains better than other conceptions the reasons for the book's specific and general features, its teleology. If, like Sheldon Sacks and Robert Wess, who have both suggested that *One Flew Over* fits that pattern of the tragic action, we consider, even as a mere possibility, that tragedy may be a form, rather than a special vision or philosophy, capable of appearing in a variety of guises, then the "designedness" of the book, the way seemingly comic elements serve purposes other than the comic becomes clear.² The tragic model also enables us to explain the source of several complaints about the technique and rhetoric, or "philosophy," if one prefers, and why they may be misguided, given the hypothesis of tragic form. Finally, moving past the purely formal, we can begin to recognize the difficulties, by no means solved with complete success, that Kesey encountered when he sought to give form and significance to a basic tragic conception. This more general question involves nothing less than the possibility for tragedy in the modern age.

I

We gain some insight into the magnitude of Kesey's task by sketching out what kind of story this was to be. Take a character who, though basically good, is far from "elevated" in the classic sense, show him subjected to a situation of coercion in which he acts, sacrificially, to help others at the risk of his own destruction, and try to represent the pattern as moving and significant. How can Kesey feel that his notions of the value of human sacrifice will be shared by his readers? If the human condition for many readers—and perhaps more critics—entails necessarily seeing the individual as puny and ineffectual in the face of the void, "doom" becomes not an arresting aberration but a shared condition of existence, as quotidian and unremarkable as eating and drinking. The tragic action entails on the modern author an additional, related burden. To avoid the maudlin or, worse, the simply horrible, the hero must in a real sense choose his doom, with that "noble courageous despair" that raises human misery above the merely dolorous.³ If many readers doubt the meaningfulness of individual choice, a sense of its importance, at least in the self-contained world of the work, must be conveyed by fictional rhetoric. When we have witnessed the last twilight of all the idols and seen the future dim to a *nada y pues nada*, lending significance to a single act of rebellion becomes a crucial problem of the novelist's art.

A number of modern authors seem so aware of the difficulty that they have eschewed attempting to portray tragic declines and turned instead to delineating static states of futile existence. If there is anything tragic about the characters of Beckett or Vonnegut, or of that contemporary chronicler of the execrable, Jerzy Kozinski, it is that they are condemned to be human. At the same time, other modern authors, such as Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, and, I am suggesting, Kesey, have sought ways to build into their tragic actions sufficiently strong systems of positive belief so that the "fall" approaches, at least, tragic proportions. Often such beliefs are, as it were, the instruments of the telling and not necessarily identical with the author's view of the world; they can be, in Wayne Booth's terms, the "rhetoric" of the "implied author" rather than the reasoned philosophy of the novelist, a distinction virtually identical to Henry James' calling some things of the "essence" and some of the "treatment." *One Flew Over* clearly depends on a number of artistic decisions designed to produce at least a temporary community of value so that McMurphy's destruction can be experienced as both plausible and significant. Other, much more general, ethical elements are part of the basic conception, Kesey's "tragic vision," and he must assume full responsibility for their validity. In the criticism of the book, rhetoric and conception have not always been carefully distinguished, perhaps because some modern criticism tends to assume that any element of thought not obviously repudiated in a novel must be part of its author's intended meaning.

The most serious charge against Kesey has been sexism: a "concealed sexist bias" that makes the book "a bit dangerous." Peter G. Beidler summarizes and extends the charges: the book has "obvious flaws as a novel—its *merely* heroic hero, its once-latent (now blatant) anti-feminism, its too carefully contrived plot, setting and characters."⁴ Even when critics attempt to defend the novel's basic conception an uncomfortable awareness of the current difficulty in generalizing about questions of value intrudes: "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was written from the point of view that man's problems are caused by woman who refuses to allow him to play the domineering role which nature intended him to play."⁵ In 1962, when Kesey's book appeared, such a "defense" might have ruffled few feathers. But, as Leslie Horst put it, in an essay provocatively titled "Bitches, Twitches, and Eunuchs: Sex-Role Failure and Caricature," a "liberation" that "exhilarated" one "more than a decade ago" now seems "derogation of women . . . attractively packaged."⁶ Values, that is, have changed and the newly discovered difficulty many readers have with the novel points to a need to understand which ideas really represent Kesey's articles of faith and which are rather elements in his rhetoric of significant fabulation. My contention is that most of what readers have found objectionable is "local" rhetoric designed to allow the reader to experience McMurphy's tragedy as moving and significant. The basic conception left after the rhetoric

of “telling” has been distinguished is universal: the significance of sacrifice characteristic of one variant of the tragic experience.

II

When McMurphy enters the hateful world of the Big Nurse, he reminds the narrator, Chief Bromden, “of a car salesman or a stock auctioneer,” hardly a candidate for martyrdom.⁷ No one can “tell if he’s really this friendly or if he’s got some gambler’s reason for trying to get acquainted with guys so far gone a lot of them don’t even know their names” (p. 21). Against this long-developed instinct for survival wars a common human concern his independence has not extirpated: will he act to help the men or to help himself? At first, he bets he can “bug” the “Big Nurse,” a sexually repressed and supremely efficient force for conformity who has learned to “smell not” the fear of her patients and “put it to use” (p. 17). In numerous important scenes, we learn the extent of her power to prevent noisome independence: she can, in addition to all the little arts of prodding the guilty recesses of her “patients” consciences, order electric shock, even lobotomize the recalcitrant or merely disruptive patient. The connection between Mac’s behaving himself, playing it “cagey,” and staying in one piece becomes clear to us and to him when, after promising to “bug” the nurse “till she comes apart at those neat little seams” (p. 72), he learns that he can be institutionalized as long as the nurse sees fit. He immediately becomes cagey, satisfying, temporarily at least, the Chief’s earlier question about his motivation: Mac is for Mac. He has had “no one to *care* about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man” (p. 89), and the first duty of a con artist is survival. The terms of the action are set. If he acts to defy the nurse, he risks destruction, past reminders of which, the “Vegetables,” are conveniently and conspicuously placed around the ward. If he plays it cagey, as all his past experience has taught him to do, not only will he be safe but eventually free.

Kesey’s problem with this pattern should be apparent. How could he show McMurphy acting, in a manner entirely out of character, to insure his own destruction? In addition, even if Kesey could find a plausible way to motivate McMurphy’s sacrifice, how, given the power of the combine and Nurse Ratched, could the horror of senseless waste be avoided?

Whether Kesey knew it or not, many novelists have sought solutions to similar problems. One of Hardy’s greatest difficulties, one he did not always solve satisfactorily, was to give us a sense of the *importance* of the fall of characters who, “objectively,” are mere toys of the “President of the Immortals.” Conrad, facing a similar problem with Kurtz and, especially, Jim, invented a sympathetic narrator who was personally involved with the tragic figure, invested him with authority, and allowed the intrinsic advantages of a first-person narrator—we tend to trust the “I” unless given reasons not to—to

establish the importance of what he has witnessed. Marlow and Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway are just two in a long line of I-narrators designed primarily as rhetorical devices to assist the realization of tragic potential out of seemingly untragic materials. They are not *mere* devices, of course, since the skilled novelist makes pleasurable virtues of artistic necessities.

But Kesey's problem was more than just persuasion. Not only was McMurphy to give his life away; he was to do so in conflict against a microcosmic representation of a brutal and unforgiving society that valued his independence not at all. The potential for horror was great. Kesey's solution was to create not only a first-person narrator, but one whose entire well being depended on the sacrifice toward which McMurphy gradually moved. The Chief's "fog" is the sign that McMurphy is playing it cagey; for the reader, it is the signal to regret Mac's caution and desire his continued resistance to the Big Nurse, even though we may care greatly for him and fear his peril. When everything seems "hopeless and dead," when the Chief feels "McMurphy can't help. . . . Nobody can help," that is when "the fog rolls in" (p. 110). Kesey carefully handles the relationship between Mac's attitude toward the hospital and the nurse, and the Chief's mental health. Very quickly, one implies the other with almost syllogistic force.

As Mac inches toward destruction—it is never really in doubt, once we have seen the past and present power of the Big Nurse—a corresponding auction in the Chief's psychosis takes place. The other inmates are part of the immanent and powerful pattern, showing clear signs of independence, sexual and otherwise. It is as if the entire cast of characters supporting Mac and the Big Nurse has been invented to convert an implausible and horrifying tale into one that is inevitable and transcending. There should be no confusion over just who this story is "about." For all of the Chief's importance and vividness as a narrator, he is still part of the "telling" and not the "essence." Aside from being one of the strangest "reliable" narrators in fiction, the Chief provides the compelling need that, coupled with that of the other men, drives Mac on. On the other hand, replace Mac with another *kind* of character, and the entire *donnée* of the novel changes drastically.

The Chief's desires, and those of the other men, would not be enough to establish the instability that leads, in a series of gradually more direct acts of rebellion, to Mac's lobotomy and death. Even with "every one of those faces" on the Disturbed Ward "turned toward him" and "waiting" for him to act, something in Mac's personality must make the confrontation inevitable. Here is where Kesey had perhaps his trickiest problem. If the battle were simply between the Nurse's absolute desire for control and Mac's *con man* independence, we have melodrama. What Kesey does instead is to represent, largely from the outside, through the perceptions of the Chief, a change in Mac. The tragic fate he endures—distinct from the lobotomy and death that

are its effects—is to lose his personality in the other men. The McMurphy who leads his twelve disciples down to the sea to fish for salmon has relinquished his role as dynamic and independent rabblrouser. On the trip back, with seas high, he takes a life-jacket, even though they were three short. The old Mac would have played the tough leader, disdaining the whipping waves. But now, “McMurphy hadn’t insisted that he be one of the heroes; all during the fuss he’d stood with his back against the cabin . . . and watched the guys without saying a word” (p. 240), a reticence equally unusual for Mac. Harding, near the end, sees the change clearly. It hasn’t been the nurse “bugging” Mac “about one thing or another.” “That’s not what drove you crazy,” Harding says. It was “us,” the men who turned the independence of Mac into the only kind of weakness that could have destroyed him: the ability to care about others (pp. 294–295).

Kesey risked creating a mere comic book hero in Mac, a caricature of real heroism. We do not see the psychological process that turns Mac from egocentric sinner to sacrificial saint; it is portrayed through signs: Mac’s uneasiness, noted by the Chief, his “dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*” (p. 245) look as he realizes, we surmise, what he must do. For four reasons I can think of, three probably essential and one at least highly desirable, the change *must* be represented indirectly. For the sake of plausibility, such a drastic change is better shown from the outside. Then too, if we were to see Mac’s internal state of confusion, what he *feels* could become more important than what he does—and his actions form the tragedy, not his state of mind. Thirdly, dwelling on the ruminations of a man who quite clearly is going to act in a manner that will insure his own destruction risks creating that sense of horror at the “triumphant tyranny of vice over virtue” David Hume contended was counter to the tragic. We could become *too* close to Mac, and our concern for his safety overpower our desire to see him resist. Finally, the dramatic tension—the suspense—is heightened by our uncertainty in conflict with our desire.

That there existed a potential in Mac’s “flaw” for melodrama is apparent. Some readers find the comparisons of Mac to Christ not only heavy-handed but inappropriate. But this too is a rhetorical problem: to elevate Mac’s actions to tragic proportions, not only must a great deal be at stake (the other men) but his struggle must seem larger than it objectively is. Kesey may intend a “statement” about the “Combine,” the American society with its passion for homogenization; but that “lesson” is present only indirectly as a function of Kesey’s need to raise the confrontation above the level of local melodrama. At points such as this, it does seem that the “rhetoric” of tragedy has shaded perceptibly over into conception. Perhaps, once the problem of shared values becomes so crucial, rhetoric designed to create necessary belief actually becomes a part of the author’s vision, even if, analytically, the two are always separable.

Many other elements of the novel function as rhetoric to establish the importance of McMurphy's fall, including the sense that it is not merely idiosyncratic, but somehow "true," universal in its implications and importance. Here is where Kesey has run into the most trouble with critics and general readers. Some of the objections seem merely matters of misreading, but others strike to the heart of what Kesey was trying to do. The Big Nurse, for example, has been seen as evidence of Kesey's "demeaning" attitude toward women, a charge that could be brought against Shakespeare because he created Lady Macbeth. For the dramatic requirements of the story, Nurse Ratched had to be very nearly an incarnation of evil, unthinking or otherwise. For Mac's struggle to seem important, the forces opposing him must not only seem nearly omnipotent, but must not be too "understandable," and never sympathetic. Here is one place, among many, where Milos Forman, and laudatory critics of the movie version, seem to me to have gone completely astray. The last thing Kesey needed was a "humanized portrait of Big Nurse," one that would make "viewers wish to know more about the character."⁸ We have totally confused the exigencies of representation with life when we argue that given "the opportunity to run that ward in her own right, instead of having to manipulate the rabbit doctor, perhaps Miss Ratched might have run it more humanely."⁹ To criticize Kesey for not showing how the Big Nurse got to be a "bitch" is to forget that she is not a real person but a character subordinated to the realization of a tragic plot. A little understanding, where villains are concerned, often courts artistic disaster; with the Big Nurse, as with Iago, the moral terms of the struggle need to be clear in order to prevent confusion.

There is little doubt, however, that Kesey's decision to incarnate the forces of oppression in Nurse Ratched led, under conditions that have become widespread since he wrote the novel, to the current view of the book is "sexist." Kesey needs a sharp confrontation; but why did he not, I have often been asked, make the director of the hospital a man, and the head nurse his instrument of control, herself in effect another victim? For the sake of immediacy and even plausibility, the threat to the men needs to be visible and present. But that is a weak consideration, since Kesey could have found a way around the problem. We may, finally, be forced to concede that Kesey saw something in the male-female conflict that was "to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it." Before so doing, however, it would be well to examine to what extent, in the text, we are given the impression that Nurse Ratched is the *cause* of all the men's problems. Surprisingly, we find that Kesey was careful to signal that she too is just a local manifestation of the pernicious desire to manipulate the lives of those too weak to resist. McMurphy's indictment of her occurs early in the novel; critics often quote it, but seldom quote enough.

No, that nurse ain't some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is is a ball-cutter. I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young, men and women. Seen 'em all over the country and in the homes—people who try to make you weak so that they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to. . . . If you're up against a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger then watch for his knee, he's gonna go for your vitals. And that's what that old buzzard is doing. . . . [p. 58]

The words are important: “men and women . . . people . . . guy.” Mac here speaks of what the Chief calls “the Combine”: “It worked” on his father “for years.”

He was big enough to fight it for awhile. It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe, and they worked on him. . . . Oh, the Combine's big—big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up. [p. 208]

His mother, a white woman, reflected the much wider forces that would destroy anyone; but she too was a pawn, and not by virtue of her sex. The Big Nurse, with all the other emasculating women in the book, is to be seen as the Chief sees her: a cog in a big grinding machine. It may be, as Addison C. Bross contends, that Kesey's is a “weary ideology.”¹⁰ But it clearly is not so much antifeminist as antiskinnerian.

The sexual problems of the men become, in this view, symptoms of weakness rather than causes. As Harding says, “There's not a man here that isn't afraid he is losing . . . his whambam. We. . . . can't even achieve masculinity in the rabbit world, that's how weak and inadequate we are” (p. 65). The causal relationship is clear: “weak” *therefore* impotent. All of the patients, except McMurphy, suffer from “flaws born in, or flaws beat in” (p. 14), like Pete Bancini, who has “been a Chronic all his life” because the doctor at his birth “pinched his skull” (p. 49). Nurse Ratched is just the efficiency expert in this “factory for the Combine” (p. 38); her cruel effectiveness, and the way she represents an entire society, make her, for Kesey's dramatic purposes, a perfect adversary for Mac. She is no more like a ‘real’ nurse than Iago is like a real soldier. That sort of critical naiveté should have disappeared with Thomas Rymer. Even so, there is nothing terribly implausible about her. She plays a part. Harding's ability to look her in the eye and tell her she is “full of so much bull shit” signals the independence that will enable him to leave the hospital. This is the goal on which the tragic impulse of the book depends. To

have made the Big Nurse anything “less” than she is—more “human,” more understandable—would have been to attenuate the force of the final victory, as deadly as it must be for Mac.

McMurphy's fate is indeed to become the kind of “savior” he scorns being treated as earlier in the novel (p. 182). All of the rhetoric of the book is designed to make plausible his final attack on the nurse, an act he cannot avoid, that will destroy him, and yet one that is out of character for the “cagey” Mac. Like most tragic figures, Mac's physical destruction is not identical to his doom. His tragic fate is to become fatally dependent on the men, to act in a way that makes clear that he is under the control of their needs and desires. What removes the “conversion” of Mac from the merely melodramatic is that he loses himself largely without recognizing—at least, so that *we* can see it—what is happening. Harding, usually a perceptive witness, errs for once when he argues, after the fishing trip, that “everything he's done was done with reason” (p. 254). We have seen no process of ratiocination indicating a calculated intention. In fact, at crucial points in the book, when Mac must take another rebellious step closer to lobotomy, what we see is a man who would avoid the confrontation if he could. In the shower room scene, Mac finally makes himself fight only when it is clear that Washington will not leave the men alone, will insist on soaping down the frantic and helpless George. McMurphy reacts, with “helpless, cornered despair” in his voice (p. 261). By keeping the thoughts of McMurphy hidden, by indicating his state of mind through signs the Chief interprets, Kesey manages simultaneously to achieve two difficult ends: we do not question the plausibility of Mac's actions, and we desire more and more that he continue them. Our fears for him are not allowed enough strength to conquer our stronger desires that he act to help the men. It is as if Kesey had discovered that a powerful tragic action could be constructed around the spectacle of a man who is destroyed because he is forced to become better than he was. All the authorial rhetoric at Kesey's command, including the hiding of certain things, had to be employed to prevent such a character from seeming merely pitiful or his destruction evidence of the multifarious horror of existence.

If we grant this description of the formal exigencies of the book, many complaints cease to have objective basis. Some have already been discussed: portrayal of the Nurse Ratched, the necessity for a somewhat oblique point of view, the alleged sexism. As a further test case, we might ask two simple questions to test the power of the hypothesis: why are the attendants black and why is there a sympathetic female nurse on the Disturbed ward?

The formal requirements I have sketched dictate that the lives of the of Chief and the other men must be made as miserable as possible, under the guise of “therapy,” so that our desire for McMurphy to act will be strong. They must be watched, pushed around, even sexually abused, since depriv-

ing a person of sexual integrity is especially demeaning. Many of these activities the nurse could not plausibly engage in. The attendants, furthermore, must have sufficient motivation to commit such acts against men who are not only pitiful but largely helpless. Without spending the time to construct case histories for all the attendants, to make their hate *individually* plausible, Kesey hit upon the device of making them black and sketching in a kind of collective past for them. The first one watched as “his mother was raped in Georgia while his papa stood by tied to the hot iron stove with plow traces, blood streaming into his shoes . . . and he never grew an inch after” (p. 28). The choice of black attendants is a kind of shorthand; but Kesey was careful to include signals that *he* does not think of blacks as inherently cruel. Nurse Ratched had already rejected “thousands” because they did not “hate enough” (p. 27). The attendants are themselves victims, an important point to convey if one wants this confrontation to be not only unique and vivid but universal.

Like the nurse, their individual motives must not claim our interest. They must become independent of her influence, but act, rather, as her surrogates, vessels into which she has poured her own hate, which is never explained either.

Although she plays no real part in the action, the gentle nurse on the Disturbed ward serves a few of the same rhetorical purposes; she is primarily a device of disclosure. She tells Mac and the Chief that things are not everywhere as bad—though “a lot of it is”—as they are on Nurse Ratched’s floor, but she also reminds them (and us) that the Big Nurse “has seniority” and can therefore do what she will. We learn of the possibilities for hope, are assured that the conflict in front of us is an important and general one, and then brought back immediately to the specific horrors of this situation. Although we may not think of this as we read, we are reassured that Kesey himself knows not all women are “bitches” and “ball cutters.”

What remains when we have isolated the elements of Kesey’s rhetoric? It is tempting to accept Kesey’s own appraisal of his subject, to concur with his often quoted statement that “It’s the Indian’s story—not McMurphy’s or Jack Nicholson’s.” But Kesey goes on, immediately, to suggest what I think is the real conception underlying the novel: “The emphasis should . . . be . . . on the battle going on in the Indian’s mind between this man and the Combine that is loose in America.”¹¹ The Chief, that is, controls our responses to the conflict by himself responding in ways that compel us to wish for McMurphy to act. Several critics have seen the similarities between Bromden, Nick Carraway, and even Melville’s Ishmael; but they have not seen that the function of such narrators, no matter how extensive a role they play in the story (or sometimes by virtue of that role), is largely rhetorical: to control judgment and emotional response. The typical conclusion drawn from the example of these novels is that they are “about’ many things” and that the question,

“whose *is* the story.” cannot be answered.¹² I have tried to demonstrate that when we ask, of Bromden’s role as narrator, “for the sake of what,” the answer is clearly to tell McMurphy’s story as powerfully as possible. At any point in the novel, our fear or happiness for the Chief results almost entirely from how he views McMurphy.

The tragic conception, then, rests on McMurphy. Kesey is correct, in addition, to suggest that the conflict is between Mac and the Combine. The Big Nurse is a representative. But what gives the book its tragic power, what assimilates it to the great tragedies of all ages, is that the conflict is never merely *between* figures but leads to an internal struggle, mirrored at every point by the Chief’s responses. Despite the vast dissimilarities between Kesey’s novel and many of Shakespeare’s tragedies, there are yet these two important similarities. The struggle with Nurse Ratched and the Combine becomes, inside McMurphy, a fight between two opposed principles of his being. Like Hamlet, McMurphy must become something other than what he was for the disaster—and the victory that accompanies high tragedy—to take place; and like many of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, McMurphy finds himself in a situation in which the ethically “correct” choice—although it will doom him—is one for which none of his previous experience has prepared him. When faced with the chance to escape at the end of the novel, he calmly turns the opportunity down: “I’ve took their best punch.” Harding realizes that Mac does not “fully comprehend” what can happen to him (p. 298). But the Chief has already told us that “it was bound to be and would have happened in one way or another . . . there wasn’t any way of him breaking his contract” (p. 296). The “bull goose loony” has become loony indeed; he can no longer care only for his own survival.

That such an “old fashioned” conception, based on convictions of human worth and the value of sacrifice, has provoked some jeers is not surprising. John Barsness summarized the problem:

. . . it has become increasingly difficult to maintain that rugged frontiersman as hero, particularly since at midcentury the society approaches an overwhelming urbanization, and contemporary literature seems totally preoccupied with non-heroes whose landscapes are concrete and steel and whose primary characteristics are fixed upon failure. In such surroundings, faced with such assumptions, the hero is an anachronism, out of scale and out of kilter with contemporary *standards of truth*.¹³

That elements in any author’s repertoire of rhetoric might seem outdated in time is not unusual. As Wayne Booth noted, “At one time the invention of the turtle, heading southwest across the highway in *The Grapes of Wrath* . . .

paralleling in his direction, his helplessness, his determination, and his pace the loads' hopeless, dogged lives, may seem brilliant. . . . But after twenty years, that turtle seems decidedly outmoded and obtrusive."¹⁴ The task would seem to be to choose no element of rhetoric that will succumb to time. But realistic fiction demands some reflection of the way lives are lived at any time, and what seems enduring truth in one decade, or one century—say, the universality of the “battle of the sexes”—can evoke indignant protest in the next. In an age, like ours, of value confusion and increased social sensitivity, it may be that authors can please widely only by pleasing blandly, or will have to resort to that last refuge of value timidity, ambiguity.

Tragedy, in whatever medium, is neither bland nor timid. The spectacle of a human being experiencing his or her doom can be one of the most moving and powerful in art. But it cannot occur without the prior existence, or creation, of values shared between author and reader. The “institution” Croce pronounces to be at the bottom of the artistic transaction involves, in the tragic action, belief in the significance of human choice and human sacrifice.¹³ Much that we have valued in the past, and still do, despite our critical theories of indeterminacy and plurisignificance, would be lost if we actually stopped lending credence, even if only for the nonce, to the systems of belief, often very different from our own, that inform, must inform, tragic works. This is not to say that we should credit any philosophy merely in order to gain a powerful artistic experience. But we must carefully distinguish between what is basic to the tragedian's conception and what beliefs he uses, as instruments, to make the experience possible. To hold artists responsible for every value that appears in their works may seem the height of enlightened social responsibility; but a failure to discriminate among intentions can destroy unnecessarily the noble treasure that is tragic art.

NOTES

1. David Daiches, “What Was the Modern Novel?” *Critical Inquiry* I (1975): p. 813; Daiches first made the point in 1939, in his seminal study, *The Novel and the Modern World*; Virginia Woolf, “How It Strikes a Contemporary,” *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953): pp. 243–244; David Hume, “Of Tragedy,” *Four Dissertations* (New York: Garland, 1970): p. 199; Aristotle, *Poetics*, 26.

2. Sheldon Sacks, “Clarissa and the Tragic Traditions,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 2, *Irrationalism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland & London: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972): pp. 209–210; Robert V. Wess, “Modes of Fictional Structure in Henry Fielding and Jane Austen” (University of Chicago dissertation, 1970), Appendix i.

3. Hume, p. 199.

4. Elizabeth E. McMahan, “The Big Nurse as Ratchet: Sexism in Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest*,” *CEA Critic*, 37 (1975): p. 26; Leslie Horst, “Bitches, Twitches, and Eunuchs: Sex-Role

Failure and Caricature," *Lex et Scientia*, 13 (1977): p. 17; Peter G. Beidler, "From Rabbits to Men: Self Reliance in the Cuckoo's Nest," *Lex et Scientia*, 13 (1977): p. 56.

5. Robert Forrey, "Ken Kesey's Psychopathic Savior: A Rejoinder," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 21 (1975): p. 224. Not only is Forrey's judgment, suspect, he cannot get the chronology of the novel straight.

6. Horst, pp. 14, 17.

7. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 12. Subsequent references are in the text.

8. Marsha McCreddie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Some Reasons for One Happy Adaptation," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 5 (1977); p. 130.

9. McMahan, p. 27.

10. Addison C. Bross, "Art and Ideology: Kesey's Approach to Fiction," *Lex et Scientia*, 13 (1977): p. 61.

11. Ken Kesey, in Beverly Grunwald, "Kesey: A Sane View from 'Cuckoo's Nest,'" *Women's Wear Daily*, 18 December 1975, p. 1.

12. John W. Hunt, "Flying the Cuckoo's Nest: Kesey's Narrator as Norm," *Lex et Scientia*, 13 (1977): p. 27.

13. John Barsness, "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress," *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 23 (1969): pp. 27-33; reprinted in John C. Pratt, ed. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 420 (my emphasis).

14. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 197.

15. Benedetto Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics*, translated by Patrick Romanell (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), esp. pp. 3-27.

JACK HICKS

*The Truth Even If It Didn't Happen:
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

I been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my *God*; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen.—Ken Kesey

Along with Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey represents the familiar unsettling artistic type.¹ For all three of these men, the once comforting borders separating the artist's work from his life are thoroughly dissolved. Mailer's prominence as a public figure, as the personal existential eye of the American hurricane, has dominated our attentions and his as well, and his work has surely suffered for it. But Ginsberg and Kesey are younger breeds and knottier figures: each has sought to transcend the category of poet or novelist by making his life a larger poem or fiction. Both Ginsberg and Kesey have become powerful cultural figures over the last decade, exemplars and proponents of a countercultural life-style, modes of being attractive to millions of young Americans. In the case of Kesey, especially, biographical concerns have overshadowed the writing, a fact demonstrated by the mere existence of Tom Wolfe's pop biography, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

Wolfe's fascination with Kesey is natural. The man has lived at the heart of America, and his path has traced a chain of separations and returns. Born

Jack Hicks, *In the Singer's Temple: Prose Fiction of Barthelme, Gaines, Brautigan, Piercy, Kesey, and Kosinski* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 161-176.

in 1935 in Colorado, Kesey migrated westward with his parents, several generations beyond the desperate vitality of the Okies. As Wolfe recalls, the elder Kesey's were less unwilling adventurers than "entrepreneurs, who looked to the West Coast as a land of business opportunity."²

Kesey attended the University of Oregon and graduated in 1958. During his years in Eugene, he was a minor campus celebrity, an athlete, and an accomplished actor. In that time span, Kesey also came under the influence of the first of a series of prominent writer-teachers, James B. Hall. By 1958, when he entered Stanford University as a writing student, Kesey had completed a decent body of writing: short stories, one-act plays, poetry, and an unpublished novel about college athletics, *End of Autumn*. The years following (1959–1960) were a natural watershed for Kesey. He was fully engaged at Stanford, where he studied writing with Wallace Stegner, Frank O'Connor, and Malcolm Cowley; he lived and worked on Perry Lane, a quasi-bohemian Palo Alto artist's colony that provided a yeasty medium for his energies.³

Another unpublished novel, *Zoo* (1960), about San Francisco's North Beach, grew from Stanford's writing seminars, but an unlikely extracurricular experience as a medical volunteer was of far greater import to Kesey's life and writing. By this time Kesey had married and fathered a child and, like the classic graduate student, found his debts exceeding his income. Heeding a friend's tip that a government medical experiment paid human guinea pigs at the rate of seventy-five dollars a day, Kesey presented himself at Menlo Park Veterans Hospital, volunteering for experiments with "psychomimetic" drugs. Between spring of 1960 and spring of 1961, fully two years prior to psychologists Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert and their infamous experiments at Harvard, Kesey ingested a wide variety of psychedelic (mind-altering) drugs: LSD-25, psilocybin, mescaline, peyote, morning glory seeds, IT-290 (a meta-amphetamine)—the list swells to a small pharmacopoeia. Kesey extended the experiments beyond the hospital. Although the singular effects of his drug experiences would have been quite powerful enough, Kesey took a job as night attendant on a psychiatric ward at Menlo Park Hospital to supplement his income. As he recounts vividly in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and later in *Kesey's Garage Sale*, he was fascinated and disgusted by life on the ward; and he often raised his perceptions to a higher power with on-the-job doses of peyote.⁴ Out of this experience grew his first and most successful novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and an entire life-style, neither of which the American public will soon forget.

In the years following, Ken Kesey's literary achievements have not matched the power of his first published novel. His second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), is longer and more ambitious but for great stretches nearly impenetrable.⁵ Stage versions of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* have

continued for ten years: one starring Kirk Douglas in New York (1963) ran briefly and with little success; a revised version was well received in New York and San Francisco, where it ran very successfully until 1977. Between 1964 and 1973, Kesey published only letters and occasional fragments, which were riddled frequently by a kind of careless obscurantism, as if he were content to address only himself and a coterie of friends who already knew the language. Cynics have suggested that he may well have lost great sections of his mind to heavy drug use, like many young Americans of the time. More accurately, we can say that Kesey became bored with the possibilities of fiction after *Sometimes a Great Notion*; perhaps he came to believe that the novel was an inadequate form for recording his complex human experience. In the early 1970s, he worked mainly in the visual arts (films and drawings) and made recordings, and also co-edited (with Paul Krassner) *The Last Supplement* to the highly popular *Whole Earth Catalogue*.⁶

Deeply into the drug culture by 1964, Kesey invested much of his royalties in a remarkable coast-to-coast bus trip, documented in lurid detail by Wolfe. In the attendant deluge of legal harassments that followed, he was arrested several times for possession of marijuana and related offenses. Finally, in mid-1966, Kesey melodramatically faked a suicide and fled to Mexico, to avoid prosecution by the FBI. In October of that year, he “surrendered” to the authorities and soon thereafter served two concurrent three-month jail sentences in San Mateo, California. Many of Kesey’s experiences are recounted in *Kesey’s Garage Sale*, an uneven ragbag of memoirs, letters, interviews, and articles woven together by his own illustrations. As the title page very modestly suggests, aesthetic considerations are at least matched by a need for money, the book stemming from “The Ancient Search for AND Subsequent Discovery, Application, Loss and Reappearance of \$\$\$.”⁷

Following the acid hijinks that very nearly destroyed him as an artist, Kesey retired to a family dairy farm near Pleasant Hill Oregon—a move “up to the country” undertaken by a whole generation of young agrarian zealots and in many ways the precursor of the current evolution of interest in ecology and self-supporting communities. Unlike many others, Kesey was successful in building a family and a vocation, often from a blend of intense desire and a willing ignorance.

In 1975 he began writing seriously again and published “Abdul and Ebenezer” in *Esquire*, an essay on his early life among the cows, the first substantial writing in many years. Since that time, Kesey has been hard at work with a small circle of friends, and his renovated literary interest has led to the publishing of a “family” little magazine, *Spit in the Ocean (SITO)*. *SITO* has been a vehicle for his most recent fiction, *Seven Prayers by Grandma Whittier*, a markedly biographical sequence of seven dense interior monologues by a loving grandmother among the crazies. It marks a daring shift in Kesey’s art

and, as John Clark Pratt notes, “Keseyphiles . . . who appreciate him only for *Cuckoo’s Nest* will be at least startled if not openly distressed.”⁸

Ken Kesey’s overriding passion in the last eighteen years, both personally and artistically, has been the qualities and possibilities of human consciousness and particularly the modes of literary rendering of every sort of mental state. This passion has been a constant element, from the fragments of the unpublished *Zoo* to those in the current *Seven Prayers by Grandma Whittier*. Frankly, one can learn as much in the turnings and tracings of his life as in his fiction, for we can read in the scattered lees of his past a cultural history of underground America in the 1960s. But my main interest here is in the particular artistic uses of those experiences in his single major fiction to date, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. More exactly, I wish to consider the novel as one of the few successful literary treatments of the alteration or expansion of human consciousness.

That the novel was warmly greeted seems indisputable. Critic Malcolm Cowley, teaching at Stanford during Kesey’s stay, saw the promise in a rough, semifinished manuscript. He advised Kesey in a letter that the book contained “some of the most brilliant scenes I have ever read” and “passion like I’ve not seen in you young writers before.” Thirteen years later, Cowley seemed to have renewed his estimate by including *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* in his Viking Critical Library series. Cowley’s early appraisals strike me as correct: the novel is vividly and powerfully realized and, though Kesey remembers long scenes as coming “more easily to my hand than anything before or since,” it was doggedly written and revised.⁹

His account of the novel’s origin is an apocryphal variant among modern underground novelists. Much of Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* issued from the author’s alcoholic deliriums; William Burroughs attributes the surreal qualities of *Naked Lunch* to his use of marijuana; his friend Jack Kerouac wrote much of his fiction—*On the Road* and *Dr. Sax*, for example—with the aid of benzedrine. Kesey’s version differs only in detail, the drug of his choice being peyote, “because it was after choking down eight of the little cactus plants that I wrote the first three pages.”¹⁰ Actually, before his experiences with peyote, Kesey had been fumbling through the book, mainly because of problems with point of view. With the aid of Wallace Stegner at Stanford, he worked toward a resolution. A letter to Kesey’s friend Ken Babbs recalls: “I am beginning to agree with Stegner, that it is truly [sic] the most important problem in writing. The book I have been doing on the lane is a third person work, but something was lacking. I was not free to impose my perception and bizarre eye on the god-author who is supposed to be viewing the scene. . . . I am swinging around to an idea that I objected strongly to at first; that the novelist to be at last true and free must be a diarist.”¹¹

So, at Stegner's suggestion, he shifted to a first-person narrative and, under the unsubtle pressures of peyote, the first three pages emerged as follows:

I think it way time to let somebody in on it, if they can stand it I can. I think I can. You must read about it in those advances those sheets you get every morning which have what they desire you to know. You got that same part that makes them a dime a sheet. Nothing else. I think it way time one of us tried to tell you and let you see what truely happened.

The basic story is this: one of us is dead, and it don't make much difference which one because you won't even remember and you just read it this morning at the bottom of the last page of that sheet you get. One dead. He dead. A man dead. Died in hospital. Died of Pneumonia. Exhasstion. Recent, once long ago, sometime way back, A Colonel in Europe. Oh yes.

That you get in you sheet and go right on with you business, running a tunge around a coffee cup edge. That much you can digest and puke not back up. But I think it way time somebody, me, told you. I have decided I can stand it if you can.

Let's go back to when he came in.

Let's go back to before he came in, the morning, so you can look around. It's all part of the filthy machinery and combine, anyway.

They out there. Black boys in white suits, up before I am to commit sex acts in the hall and get if moped up before I can get up to catch them. They are mopping when I come out of the dorm and they all look up at me, eyes out of a vacuum tube. They stick a mop at me and motion which way they figure me to go today, and I go. Behind me I can hear them humming hate and other death; they always hum it out loud around me, not because they hate me special, but because I don't talk and can't tell about it.

The big ward door is a funnel's bottom. We keep it locked so all the backlog won't come pouring in on us and sufficate us like ants in the bottom of an hour glass. When the big nurse comes through she close it quick behind her because they're out their pinching at her ass. She locks it with a sigh and swings a load of clanking bottles off her shoulder; she always keep them their in a fresh laundried pillow case and is inclined and grab one out at the tiniest provocation and administer to you right where you stand. For that reason I try to be on the good side of her and let the mop push me back to the wall as she goes by. "Home at last," I hear her say as she drags past and losses her pillowcase into a corner where it crashes, mixing everything. "What a night, what a night." She

wipes her face and eyes like she dipping her hands in cold water. "What a relief to get back home," is what she say near me, because I don't talk.

Then she sight the colored boys. Wheoo, that's something different! She goes into a croach and advances on them where they huddled at the end of the corridor. My god, she gonna tear them black limb from limb! She swole till her back splitting out the white uniform, she let her arms get long enough to wrap around them five six times, like hairy tentacles. I hide behind the mop and think My god, this time they're gonna tear each other clean apart and leave us alone. But just she starts mashing them and they start ripping at her belly with mop handles all the patients come pouring out of the dorms to check on the hullabaloo and the colored boys fall in line behind the nurse, and smiling, they herd the patients down to shave. I hide in the mop closet and listen to the shriek and grind of shaver as it tears the hide off one then another; I hide there, but after a while one colored boy just opens out his nostrils like the big black ends of two funnels and snuffs me right into his belly. There he hold me wrapped in black guts while two other black bastards in white in white go at my face with one of the murder combines. I scream when they touch my temples. I can control the screaming until they get to the temples and start screwing the electrodes in, then I always scream and the last thing I hear that morning is the big nurse whooping a laughing and scuttling up the hall while she crash patients out of her way with the pillowcase of broken glass and pills. They hold me down while she jams pillowcase and all into my mouth and shoves it down with a mophandle.¹²

Self-disordered states of consciousness may be initially helpful for a writer, but some sort of refining and revision is always necessary. In this case, revisions brought the style and structure of the novel into focus. Comparing the early and final manuscripts, we can note several changes. Primarily, the difference is one of telling and showing. Note that Kesey places emphasis in the original on Chief Bromden's *narration* of events, on the oral qualities of his tale. Kesey is more concerned here with capturing the semiliterate qualities of Bromden's speech, with creating an idiolect replete with intentionally awkward and agrammatical constructions, phonetic spellings, and dropped verbs. His speech is clanging and oddly awkward to the ear, but it is also more metaphorical than the final version ("The big ward door is a funnel's bottom" [334]; this is yet another narrative detail placing the narrator squarely between events and the reader. The early manuscript is generally unfocused: it lacks the detail allowing us to see characters, observe action, overhear dialogue.

By contrast, the final manuscript is more sharply focused and more thoroughly dramatized. Emphasis is properly placed on establishing vividly differentiated characters in a concrete situation. Although the black attendants are phantasms in the pervasive fog of Bromden's tale in the early version, revision focuses them on the stage of the narrator's consciousness. They are described more trenchantly, their actions made specific, they are given idiomatic dialogue: "Here's the Chief, the *soo-pah* Chief, fellas. Ol' Chief Broom. . . . Haw, you look at 'im shag it? Big enough to eat apples off my head an' he mine me like a baby" (3). Because the drama of Bromden's consciousness is Kesey's main interest, he reshapes his narrator into a less obviously mediating character. Much dialect is dropped and metaphor diminished in favor of a more fully dramatized narrative. The final focus early in the novel is on Chief Bromden's acutely heightened but passive *state of consciousness*; his narrative is a distorted, detailed film on which a menacing world leaves its grain and shadow. "They're out there" is buried in the second page of Kesey's first draft. This phrase opens the completed novel, establishing the major emphasis on Bromden as pure receiver: mute for twenty years, he can only receive the world and have it impinge upon his consciousness, and his only weapons are scrambling devices. Hallucinations, nightmares, and fantasies heighten characters and scenes that press on his mind, and his last retreat is into the fog that descends regularly to seal him deeper in his own insanity.

The state of Chief Bromden's consciousness is clinically termed paranoid schizophrenia. He is insane. He can perceive the world only in fragments that happen to him, fragments that assume menacing cartoon shapes from which unconsciousness is the only refuge. Terry G. Sherwood accurately reads *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as a kind of comic strip, the aesthetic of which is "that of the caricaturist, the cartoonist, the folk artist, the allegorist. Characterization and delineation of incident are inked in bold, simple, exaggerated patterns."¹³ But this is a recurring mode of perception limited to Bromden's early consciousness. Things are unreal for him, "like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be really funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys" (31). Thus the world of the asylum, rendered through Bromden's schizoid mind, is a black and white world, one in which people are dehumanized, represent or embody qualities, or exist as static states. The Chief's hallucinations and nightmares further define the specific threat of each character. Our first glimpse of Big Nurse, for example, occurs when she enters the ward to find the black attendants loafing:

I can see she's clean out of control She's going to tear the black bastards limb from limb, she's so furious. She's swelling up, swells till her back's splitting out the white uniform and she's let her arms

section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times. . . . So she really lets herself go and her painted smile twists, stretches to an open snarl, and she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor carrying too big a load. I hold my breath and figure, My God this time they're gonna do it! This time they gonna let the hate build up too high and overloaded and they're gonna tear one another to pieces before they realize what they're doing!

But just as she starts crooking those sectioned arms around the black boys and they go ripping at her underside with the mop handles, all the patients start coming out of the dorms to check on what's the hullabaloo, and she has to change back before she's caught, in the shape of her hideous real self. [4-5]

Bromden's nightmares caricature truth even more. On the evening of the "vegetable" Blastic's death, he has a terrible premonitory vision. As he enters sleep, he has a vision of the entire ward being lowered into a deep, hellish chamber: "a whole wall slides up, reveals a huge room of endless machines stretching clear out of sight, swarming with sweating, shirtless men running up and down catwalks, faces blank and dreamy in firelight thrown from a hundred blast furnaces. . . . Huge brass tubes disappear upward in the dark. Wires run to transformers out of sight. Grease and cinders catch on everything, straining the couplings and motors and dynamos red and coal black" (83-84). Out of this inferno, a gigantic worker swings a hook toward Blastic, the man's face:

so handsome and brutal and waxy like a mask, wanting nothing. I've seen a million faces like it.

He goes to the bed and with one hand grabs the old Vegetable Blastic by the heel and lifts him straight up like Blastic don't weigh more'n a few pounds; with the other hand the worker drives the hook through the tendon back of the heel, and the old guy's hanging there upside down, his moldy face blown up big, scared, the eyes scummed with mute fear. He keeps flapping both arms and the free leg till his pajama top falls around his head. . . . The worker takes the scapel and slices up the front of Old Blastic with a clean swing and the old man stops thrashing around. I expect to be sick, but there's no blood or innards falling out like I was looking to see—just a shower of rust and ashes, and now and again a piece of wire or glass. [85]

Chief Bromden's aberrations are a form of peculiarly heightened truth. He *does* foresee Blastic's death accurately. His paranoid vision of Big Nurse,

recurringly depicted as a mechanical, domineering figure entombed in ice or glass, is likewise accurate in its symbolism. She oversees this world from a raised glass booth, a doubly threatening figure who is obviously in control and thoroughly shut off from the human consequences of her power: "What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back" (27).

When the knowledge of what goes on around him is too intense for his consciousness to transfigure by distortion, the fog descends. The device is effective under Kesey's hand and works in several ways. Because Bromden is both paranoid and passive, he imagines that Big Nurse regularly turns on the fog machine to hide her machinations. And it is here that she is caught up in the web of institutions impinging upon and blinding Bromden's consciousness. The army, Department of Interior, his Anglo mother, Big Nurse—all are aspects of "The Combine," "a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as she has the Inside" (26). The fog is a paranoid metaphor, a concrete figure of fear and secrecy, of the threat that "they" are systematically deceiving you. But the fog is also a grotesque comfort representing unconsciousness for Bromden. As he recalls his army days, "You had a choice: you could either strain and took at things that appeared in front of you in the fog, painful as it might be, or you could relax and lose yourself" (125).

Briefly then, this is the state of the Chief's consciousness before Randall McMurphy arrives on the ward. Bromden, who was born a half-blooded Columbian Indian of immense stature, has been worn down by life. Evidently, he has been deaf and dumb for the last twenty years, consigned to sweep the floors of this microcosmic ward and unable to perceive people humanly or to leave his imprint on the world. But inmate McMurphy's appearance alters much of this.

Bromden's first impression of Randall McMurphy is that of a vital, protean figure. He strikes the diminished narrator as being like his lost, disgraced father, a full-blooded Columbian Indian chief. But, more than a surrogate father, McMurphy is a cartooned, holy con man: "The way he talks, his wink, his loud talk, his swagger all remind me of a car salesman or a stock auctioneer—or one of those pitchmen you see on a sideshow stage, out there in front of his flapping banners, standing there in a striped shirt with yellow buttons, drawing the faces off the sawdust like a magnet" (12–13). Like the best American con men, McMurphy finally sells himself. He does not offer a product but evokes and embodies a way of life to ponder and desire.

His effect on the patients is electric. They are collectively dominated by Big Nurse and her staff, but he very quickly sets off human responses in them; his impulse runs precisely counter to Big Nurse's. He runs toward vitality, spontaneity, friendship, and warmth—the accumulated detritus that makes a human life and a person. By the midpoint of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,

he has propelled his fellow patients into a major act of resistance. Randall Patrick McMurphy (*Revolutions Per Minute*) is exuberant; through his efforts near the end of a group therapy session, the fog parts for Bromden, and he recognizes that his fellows are also fogged in: "Maybe Billy's hid himself in the fog too. Maybe all the guys finally and forever crowded back into the fog" (128). Billy Bibbit and Colonel Matterson, Old Pete and his own wrecked alcoholic father, their "faces blow past in the fog like confetti" (131).

Bromden has a sudden, insightful hallucination of "that big red hand of McMurphy's . . . reaching out into the fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by their hands, dragging them blinking into the open. First one, then another, then the next. Right on down the line of Acutes, dragging them out of the fog till there they stand, all twenty of them, raising not just for watching TV, but against the Big Nurse, against her trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she's talked and acted and beat them down for years" (134). In those hands and faces, Bromden sees a fused image of all that has systematically driven him into the fog. For the first time in twenty years, he can act. With Bromden casting the deciding vote, the ward rebels and turns on the television to watch the World Series (one of the stranger acts of rebellion for our time). They see, appropriately, a cartoon: "A picture swirls into the screen of a parrot out on the field singing razor blade songs" (137). Enraged, Big Nurse turns the set off, "and we're sitting there line-up in front of that blanked-out TV set, watching the gray screen just like we could see the baseball game clear as day, and she's ranting and screaming behind us" (138). As the first part of the novel ends, the group is self-conscious for the first time, watching a small blank screen out of which each man has been dragged into the world, white and shining, by Randall McMurphy.

As their first handshake telegraphs to Bromden, McMurphy's function is to feed his consciousness, to aid in psychic recovery: "My hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power" (24). Paramount among his influences on Bromden is the recovery of memory. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey suggests repeatedly that memory, knowing one's individual and collective pasts, is a key to any sense of present or future. For patients like Ruckly, "memory whispers somewhere in that jumbled machinery" (16). Significantly, the recovery of memory for Bromden is a process of reimagining the sources of his own pain and paralysis. McMurphy triggers him and, as the novel progresses, Bromden experiences vital parts of his past in flashbacks. Flashbacks are a familiar technique for the first-person novelist. They permit him to offer the reader a past for his characters, a sequence of motivation. But in addition, each time Bromden experiences these dreams of key moments in his past, he retrieves a part of himself from the fog and becomes more conscious. His flashbacks are poignant and often

painful. They involve reenacting the oppression and destruction of his father by his mother, the wasting of his tribe by various U.S. government agencies, and his own paralysis and emasculation.

Very gradually, as Bromden reclaims his past, his sense of himself and of things beyond himself evolves. He perceives differently. For one thing, he is conscious of himself in relation to a larger world: "I realized I still had my eyes shut. . . . I was scared to look outside. Now I had to open them. I looked out the window and saw for the first time how the hospital was out in the country" (153). For another, he sees a more humanized existence around him. People are no longer cartoons: "For the first time in years I was seeing people with none of that black outline they used to have" (154). In fact, Bromden has almost ceased to see the world as a stream of aberrated and unrelated phenomena. He can form associations, in this context, the purely associative cognition demonstrated by Matterson suddenly becomes sensible: "Mexico is . . . the walnut". . . . I want to yell out to him Yes, I see: Mexico *is* like the walnut; it's brown and hard and you feel it with your eye and it *feels* like the walnut! You're making sense, old man, a sense of your own. You're not crazy the way they think. Yes, I see" (129). He can relate events in the present with his own past. At the ward windows, for instance, Bromden sees that "the stars up close to the moon were pale; they got brighter and braver the farther they got out of the circle of light ruled by the giant moon. It called to mind how I noticed the exact same thing when I was off on a hunt with Papa" (155).

So Randall McMurphy serves as an energy source and an inspiration to Bromden and his fellows. They become less lethargic and more interested in their own sexuality and physical existence. But mainly, they become able and willing to struggle for life. Through McMurphy's prodding and coaxing, they venture into the world outside, the occasion being a deep-sea fishing expedition. By this time, McMurphy has become aware of the paradox of his existence in the asylum. The inmates are voluntary admissions but lack the psychic abilities to sign themselves out; he is *committed* but can be released only on Big Nurse's judgment. What follows is a sequence establishing McMurphy as a kind of holy con man who "sells himself" by giving up his life for the patients on the ward. For if Kesey's protagonist is the true American hero, the confidence man, he is also an avatar, a Christ —the healer, literally a fisher of men. A pattern of Christ-like suffering is carefully wrought in the background of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Early in his tenure on the ward, while examining the electroshock table, McMurphy is told: "You are strapped to a table, shaped, ironically, like a cross, with a crown of electric thorns" (67). Later, as he is about to receive his first shock treatment on that very table, he regards the graphite conductant: "Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns? . . . They put those things like headphones, crown of silver thorns over the graphite at his temples" (270).

The fishing scene is an extended figure of Christ and his disciples, an instance of McMurphy as fisher of men. Here we see that McMurphy is Kesey's laughing Christ—profane, spontaneous, and above all loving, leading men not to immortality but back into this physical world. After a series of trials, the men are safely at sea on an old fishing craft. They repeatedly request McMurphy's aid in handling the boat and landing fish, but he laughingly refuses them. Imperiled by hostile men, seas, weather, and fish, they survive and flourish as a community. By the end of the trip, Bromden notices that the men have been energized by the trip, but the robust McMurphy looks "beat and worn out" (243). His men are psychically cannibalizing him. Slightly later, the Chief notes "the windshield reflected an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do" (245). And finally, part 4 of the novel concludes as directly as possible: "his relaxed, good-natured voice doled out his life for us to live, a rollicking past full of kid fun and drinking buddies and loving women and barroom battles over meager honors—for all of us to dream ourselves into" (245).

Near the end of the novel, after McMurphy has been quieted by repeated electroshocks and is about to be lobotomized, his purpose has become even clearer to Chief Bromden. By this time the Chief is fully conscious, able to articulate the peculiar insistence that his friend feels to defy Big Nurse and go the full route of consciousness reduction by lobotomy:

We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting, his big hands driving down on the leather chair arms, pushing him up, rising and standing like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters. It was us that had been making him go on for weeks, keeping him standing long after his feet and legs had given out, weeks of making him wink and grin and laugh and go on with his act long after his humor had been parched dry between two electrodes. [305]

At this point, Bromden and the entire ward have changed radically. Following McMurphy's attack on Big Nurse and his subsequent lobotomy, many of the Acutes have signed themselves out or otherwise taken control of their lives. Big Nurse's domain is toppled, and Randall McMurphy's mind must be dimmed, extracted as fealty. Bromden performs a final action, the mercy-killing of the burned-out husk that remains of McMurphy. He quickly assimilates his master through a series of ritual actions. Like Mc-

Murphy, he becomes protean, a water force that breaks through walls of glass or ice. In a repetition of McMurphy's earlier actions, Bromden seizes the control panel and hurls it through the window—one of the many ritual cleansings and baptisms in the novel: "The glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth" (310). Bromden escapes northward, now a con man and storyteller himself, but we recognize at the novel's conclusion that the only certitude is Bromden's new consciousness. What lies ahead is at best tentative, but it is certain that Bromden has come through whole and sound:

I might go to Canada eventually, but I think I'll stop along the Columbia on the way. I'd like to check around Portland and Hood River and The Dalles to see if there's any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven't drunk themselves goofy. I'd like to see what they've been doing since the government tried to buy their right to be Indians. I've even heard that some of the tribe have took to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway. I'd give something to see that. Mostly, I'd just like to look over the country around the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again.

I been away a long time. [311]

NOTES

1. The epigraph on page 161 is taken from Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Viking, 1962), p. 8.

2. Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968), p. 88.

3. John C. Pratt's introduction and chronology in Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; Text and Criticism*, edited by Pratt (New York: Viking, 1973), provide much of the available biographical information on Kesey. See also the special Ken Kesey issue of *Northwest Review*, published in book form as *Kesey*, edited by Michael Strelow (Eugene: Northwest Review Books, 1977).

4. Ken Kesey, *Kesey's Garage Sale* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 7.

5. Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (New York: Viking, 1964).

6. Kesey and Paul Krassner, eds., *The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue* (San Francisco: Portola Institute, 1971).

7. Kesey, *Kesey's Garage Sale*, p. iii.

8. Two "prayers" appear in *Kesey*, edited by Michael Strelow, pp. 99–166; Pratt's comments are also in "On Editing Kesey: Confessions of a Straight Man," in *Kesey*, p. 10. "Abdul and Ebenezer" appeared in *Esquire* (March 1976), pp. 55–59.

9. Kesey, "Letter to Ken Babbs," in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, edited by Pratt, p. 337. See also Malcolm Cowley's article, "Ken Kesey at Stanford," in *Kesey*, edited by Michael Strelow, pp. 1–4.

10. Kesey, *Kesey's Garage Sale*, p. 7.

11. Kesey, "Letter to Ken Babbs," quoted in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, edited by Pratt, p. 338.

12. Kesey, "An Early Draft of the Opening Scene of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, edited by Pratt, pp. 333–335.

13. Terry G. Sherwood, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip," *Critique*, 13 (Winter 1971): p. 97.

WILLIAM C. BAURECHT

Separation, Initiation, and Return: Schizophrenic Episode in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) portrays sexual mythology as a primary motif in the individual's struggle for consciousness and to become free from institutional oppression in contemporary America. The use of a "schizophrenic episode" as a central stylistic and thematic device illustrates Kesey's idealized perception of modern heroism. Kesey portrays our national ideology of virile heroism in a story of democracy's triumph in true brotherhood. Two men, Chief Bromden and Randle Patrick McMurphy, come to love each other profoundly. Herein is the novel's radical departure from tradition. In our culture the portrayal of real love between men, not typical comradeship or male bonding, is difficult, if not nearly impossible, to achieve artistically and believably, because male affection is suspect.

The novel dramatizes a resurrection ritual through the narrator's *schizophrenic episode*. Kesey's central consciousness, Broom, is first of all a victim of racism. He is rescued by McMurphy, a messiah who shows him and the men in the ward the "way home." Chief Bromden repeatedly creates his own womb when he withdraws into his fog, wherein he is finally purified by the love of his messiah. Haunted by an image of his "giant" father, Broom must learn to accept his father as chief and refuse to replicate his father's dissipation from that "giant" into the racist culture's expected image of an alcoholic Indian. Broom's centering episode is in his discovery of true and unrestrained love for another

The Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought, Volume 23, Number 3 (Spring 1982): pp. 279–293.

male. At the novel's end Broom pursues an American pastoral ideal by fleeing north to Canada rather than remaining on the battleground that is mundane society. Broom rejects victimhood in a heroic male mode. He smothers the corpse-like martyr, McMurphy, in a lover-like embrace, smashes his way out of the asylum, and dashes north to open country. Some day Broom may return to the mundane world of America, without a woman, and become responsible for his brothers' welfare. If he returns he will be forced by history to engage in unromantic political activism rather than in revolutionary, messianic, warrior-like activism. Sitting behind a desk with a pen is, after all, not the romantic image of heroism manning the barricades or leading the charge of comrades, illustrated so vividly by McMurphy's heroism. If Broom ever becomes a political activist, which he implies he may become, ending the novel with such a commitment would not structurally resolve, with literary tightness, the McMurphy-Broom love, nor would such an ending, although required by political realism, correspond to the mythology of male independent action. But the novel does end with a strong emphasis upon the central motif of male love. Finally, evil is located in clearly-defined external sources of oppression, rituals, and ideologies in American culture that are collectively called the Combine, the grim reaper of prevailing linear consciousness, in Kesey's transcendental world view.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is a distinctly American novel because it is clear that no other culture could have produced it, given the novel's distinct mythology and ethos derived from the Western. Ken Kesey's work graphically portrays American masculinity snared in its myth of individual possibility, i.e. rugged individualism. Myth is a multifaceted cultural and psychic phenomenon. In this essay I use "myth" both to mean a notion or half-truth which so captivates one's emotions that it becomes a religious verity and (in Richard Slotkin's words) an "intelligible mask of that enigma called the 'national character.'" The American democratic dream renders one equal in *potentia* to all others. Accordingly, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a tragic portrayal of a working-class hero's moral ascension and the implications for contemporary American males of that messianic encounter with society's limitations upon personal freedom. Ken Kesey endows his hero, Randle Patrick McMurphy, with mythic stature, using exclusively American literary allusions and associations drawn from the Western novel and film, and from American folklore. As Dixon Wecter, in *The Hero in America* (1941), argues, the authentic American hero must be a man of the people and not one who sets himself up as above the people. A fact of the American character is that Americans trust only humanly flawed heroes, and simultaneously they look to those who inspire them to seek their potential and to those who give them hope.

Randle Patrick McMurphy is such a democratic hero, but he is not a *macho* archetype embodying the American male's capacity for violence and misogyny as most critics who have written about the novel contend. Rather,

McMurphy is something quite different, revealing both the dominant American male literary myth of "the territory ahead" and a repressed homoeroticism that exceeds in emotional intensity Leslie Fiedler's provocative, but accurate, thesis that male bonding in American literature (especially between a white protagonist and an ethnic minority companion) reveals a cultural denial of mature loving male relationships in which American men can engage. McMurphy does represent certain sexist and violent tendencies, which upon close scrutiny, however, are transcended by his symbolic heroism and his humanity. If this were not true, then it would be easy to categorize McMurphy as a reprehensible American male fantasy, a stereotype from out of that unique American creation, the Western.

On the other hand, McMurphy is an outlaw. It is understandable that American male mythology so admires and is so compelled by the ethos of the outlaw as hero because the United States is a nation founded by European outlaws and renegades, malcontents, and uncommonly stubborn and idealistic deviants who demanded something more than European institutions provided them (especially in the nineteenth century), who pursued their idealism, and who insisted that their wills were primary determinants of behavior. America, consequently, became the "City upon a hill," the *garden* in mythology, the retreat of plenty in a festering and hopelessly fallen world. The outlaw lives on the open road and thrives outside society's prevailing bourgeois institutions. Chief Bromden is also an outlaw; and when he escapes the ward, his "territory ahead" becomes Canada, because in the American male myth there must always be a place *outside to escape* to as man seeks freedom, self-integrity, and self-respect. The West is no longer a journey *outward*, a direction toward a frontier of sparsely inhabited space, it is a journey *inward* for Kesey, but also a journey above the forty-ninth parallel, where the garden may exist in myth because the people whom one will meet there are not absorbed in all of the same oppressive cultural assumptions and because there is much sparsely populated land with abundant timber, lakes, mountains, and wildlife.

Love, not power, glory, *machismo*, or the masculine imperial will, is the key to the meaning of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as an expression of a national male mythology. Climaxing in McMurphy's attack on Big Nurse, he totally forgets himself in his act of love for the men in the ward. His momentary insanity, in the vain attempt to exact revenge for Billy Bibbit's death, underscores the prevalence of injustice in society's dictation of behavioral norms and in man's helplessness to stand alone against those norms. No greater love hath any man than to give his life for his comrade or comrades. This is the key to Broom's "schizophrenic episode" and to the remission of his culturally prescribed insanity. Because Ken Kesey does not directly reveal McMurphy's thoughts and motives, one must examine the implications of what he does, and everything he does is in relation to Chief Bromden.

In the oral tradition of the tall tale, Chief Bromden tells us the story of McMurphy as he observes it. Its authenticity is established by his peripheral presence on the scene. He speaks to no one through most of the story except to McMurphy and, at the end, to the men. The tale filters through the Chief's schizophrenic consciousness. Unlike the tall tale which begins *ex post facto*, we have the feeling that Broom is telling us most of the story as it takes place; therefore we are more intimately drawn in. The tale is a resurrection myth whose central incident is a rescue, a typical motif of the tall tale. As a disciple, Broom, in a sense, recites the gospel of McMurphy according to Chief Bromden, or St. Bromden, if we are to assume that through his resurrection Bromden's salvation leads him to become a teacher of the gospel. Because of the story's length and its verbal and psychological complexity, it is, of course, not an orthodox tall tale, though largely dependent upon its tradition.

In lighting upon Bromden as a narrator, Kesey brilliantly created a tightly structured novel in which form and content are inseparable. The Chief as narrative consciousness accounts for the novel's understatement and for the universal suggestiveness regarding masculinity in American culture. Kesey believes that the Chief is a creation of Indian consciousness, a spiritual source with which Kesey had communed while writing the novel. Because Kesey had never known an Indian, he had no living model to imitate as he wrote the book. Kesey states that at first he credited Broom's creation to the mind altering, transcendental influences of peyote which he had used while writing. Later Kesey changed his mind, explaining that the Chief's spirit exists, and that he merely relayed the spirit's consciousness. Kesey thinks of himself as a *transmitter* rather than as a creator; this is in accordance with his transcendental consciousness.

After years of getting off behind being prognosticator of what seemed to me a stroke of genius, if not a masterstroke, I was notified that a certain spirit was getting a little peeved at the telegraph operator for being so presumptuous as to take credit for messages coming in, as though the receiver were sending the signal.

What Kesey means here is that Chief Bromden was not a personal creation but a spirit of the Indian within American culture speaking through Kesey. The message he finally received from the spirit was: "I . . . am the entity that spoke through your words. It was my task to acquaint your people with this particular transgression upon the human soul. You availed yourself of the transmission. If you need something of which to be proud, be proud of this availability." I do not cite this to be accused of the intentional fallacy. The point is this, the metaphor (while, for Kesey, the spirit is probably *real*) excellently depicts the psychic consciousness of the artist. Kesey received the

resonance of the male dilemma diffused throughout American culture from the consciousness (he calls it a spirit) which created Broom. The fact that Broom is an Indian adds dimension to the male dilemma, but, as in high art. Broom is more *everyman* than specifically Indian. The implications and motifs become universal. Ironically, in this tall tale an Indian is a hero, not just a supporting actor, a side-kick-Tonto, or an antagonist. Bromden's point of view gives thematic dimension as well as credence to the story.

What adds further dimension to the mythic interpretation of the novel are the parallels between a *Schizophrenic episode and a mythic hero journey*. Because of these parallels we can rely upon Broom's authenticity and the clarity of his truth, even though he is classified a schizophrenic by society. Joseph Campbell describes the parallels between the two phenomena in which the imagery is identical. He breaks the schizophrenic episode into five stages of imagery. The first stage is a "break away or departure from the local social order and context." The second stage is "a long, deep retreat inward and backward, as it were, in time, and inward, deep into the psyche." Third, a series of "darkly terrifying" encounters within the depths of one's private inner world follow. Fourth, for those who will spontaneously reemerge from their schizophrenic episode, "encounters of a centering kind, fulfilling, harmonizing, giving new courage," reintegrate the personality. Fifth, and finally, a rebirth journey into a new life integrated into reality ends the episode. These are the stages through which Broom has passed in the novel, and McMurphy is his centering force and his guide. The universal formula of a mythological hero journey is described by Campbell as separation, initiation, and return. Again, Broom takes this Journey through McMurphy's tutelage, a role a psychotherapist frequently plays, or, in a primitive culture, a role played by a shaman.

As a prelude to Broom's rebirth as a man, he again begins to love another and himself. The simple act of receiving a package of chewing gum from McMurphy causes Broom to desist in his strategy of bizarre behavior that society labels schizophrenia. A simple act reveals McMurphy's loving and sensitive nature. He conquers Broom's fifteen years of silence. Broom's mask is lowered as he says "thank you." Brotherhood is what Broom most desperately needs to feel. McMurphy's act is a combination of *philia* (friendship, brotherly love) and *agape* ("love which is devoted to the welfare of the other"). Although one could argue that the underlying mythology in the novel is the traditional flight from women expressed in American literature and popular culture, the book graphically portrays as well the emotional withdrawal of men from themselves that they are encouraged to adopt. In his second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), Kesey focused upon the depth of homoeroticism within a family, which may be possible and is necessary if men are to adopt polymorphous emotional lives, but Kesey began his exploration of this phenomenon in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Broom immediately realizes the kindness, openness, and unselfishness of McMurphy's interest in him. Broom is so moved that he wants to say that he loves McMurphy, but society's restrictions upon the expression of homoeroticism is so relentless, intransigent, and punitive that Broom is unable to tell his friend the significance of receiving the package of gum. Broom tried to think of something to say to McMurphy, but the only thought which occurred "was the kind of thing one man can't say to another because it sounds wrong in words." Broom then explosively confesses his history, explaining the destruction and death of his "giant" father through alcoholism after society stole his way of life and denied the validity of what he was. This self-revelation fatigues Broom, who momentarily feels embarrassed and defensive. He tries to pass off what he has said as crazy. McMurphy ironically agrees that it *is* crazy, but says that it *does* make sense. Racism and economics make Broom's father's experience seem crazy.

Broom's bizarre behavior is a survival strategy that, like all behavior labeled *schizophrenia*, is invented in order to endure an intolerable situation. Psychiatrist R. D. Laing explains that the schizophrenic "cannot make a move, or make no move, without being beset by contradictory and paradoxical pressures and demands, pushes and pulls, both internally from himself, and externally from those around him. He is, as it were, in a position of checkmate." Temporarily, Broom publicly steps out of his adopted, protective role of schizophrenia. He realizes the truth of McMurphy's assurance that he is not actually crazy, that to the contrary, he is a victim.

Broom's blighted spirit then blooms with *philia* and *agape*, no longer is he defined only as a simple tool he constantly pushes to sweep clean the ward. He is elated and wishes to touch his new friend, but again taboo inhibits him from responding as his spirit urges. Broom wonders if he is homosexual but knows that it is a lie. He thinks, "That's one fear hiding behind another." (p. 210) The fear of latent homosexuality lurks behind the fear of wanting to embrace his friend as an expression of love, in order to show his appreciation and vulnerability, and to allow affection to pass between them physically. The root of this fear is the primary terror of males to express vulnerability, softness, and the need to be comforted. Men may lose face among other men if they display such human frailty. The male child is cast out, condemned under Medusa's gaze to maintain physical inviolability vis-a-vis other males. This taboo denies Broom the fullness of thanking his friend. "I just want to touch him because he's who he is," (p. 210) Therefore, one level of McMurphy as myth represents male love, *philia* and *agape*. He is the ideal friend, as well as a messiah, teacher, and democratic saint.

McMurphy is a fabulous character of mythic, heroic stature. Thus far critics have failed to comment upon the fact that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is an elaboration of a *fable*. The novel's title derives from a counting-out rhyme,

partially quoted as the book's epigraph, in which a girl (significantly, because boys are not supposed to be helpless and need rescuing) is trapped in a cuckoo's nest and is plucked out by a goose. McMurphy, of course, is the "bull goose loony" who plucks the men (victims) out. As a title the rhyme works because the obvious colloquial definition of cuckoo is "crazy," and the nest is the asylum. But the rhyme's apt use is far more sophisticated and subtle. One must reconcile the nursery rhyme with the novel's meanings because not only is part of the rhyme used by Kesey in the title and epigraph, but on page 272 it is also quoted completely by Chief Bromden who lies in an isolation room after his last EST treatment, the only shock treatment he emerges from of his own volition. Because Broom, in this scene, recalls the rhyme and then never again reenters the fog of schizophrenia, the rhyme is a key to the myth in Broom's resurrection ritual. Broom tells us that he has always liked, even as a child, the goose who flies over the nest. The rhyme is a pleasant childhood memory of his grandmother and his native culture, and it is recalled when his mind is released from reality to freely associate. Myth intertwines with Broom's realistic memories, and the rhyme is most significant because it connects Broom with what he is, an Indian, with his dead grandmother whom he loves, with her culture, and with McMurphy. In the rhyme a mysterious girl, paradoxically a "fisherman" (Broom's heritage because his ancestors were fishermen), is in need of a savior. A victim or merely an innocent, she is saved by the goose who swoops down and plucks her out. Just so, Broom and the acutes on the ward are saved by their messiah, McMurphy, the American confidence man out of P. T. Barnum.

The rhyme, then, is a miniature fable. A fable is a story that satirically criticizes human folly, most frequently acted out by animals (but not exclusively) pointing out a moral. Not only does the child's rhyme suggest that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is fabulous, but also Kesey's careful use of animal imagery throughout supports this analysis. McMurphy is the "bull goose loony" as messiah. The men are rabbits and "dirty chickens" pecking each other to death. (p. 55) Finally, the rhyme is also significant because in a schizophrenic episode the mad journey often takes the schizophrenic deeply within himself into a cosmic realm where the person experiences ego loss within animal form, a phenomenon that parallels Joseph Campbell's description of the mythic hero journey.

In the beginning, Broom has taken refuge in "caginess," the ethos or rabbithood, and his psychic defense, which defines him as a schizophrenic, is the fog. Broom reasons that in modern society a man must be cagey in order to defend himself against violation and defeat, that fighting is pointless, perhaps suicidal. The cause of Broom's fog was an incident in World War II involving a helpless comrade. The war is the trauma, following upon racism that Broom suffered in the land of his ancestors, which pushes him over the edge. At Anzio, Broom as a warrior was compelled to listen to the death

screams of another warrior who was tied to a tree in the blazing sun, but Broom was absolutely helpless because to attempt rescue was suicidal. The enemy lay waiting in ambush in a farmhouse near by. This traumatic horror creates the fog, Broom's spirit is crushed by guilt and impotence when he is trapped in the ultimate "double-bind," choosing death or choosing life at the expense of a fellow warrior's death. Broom's psychosis continually fogs him in; the fog is his troubled mind's creation, a symbolic equivalent of a shroud which protects him in self-isolation. The fog preserves his sense of freedom and integrity while it simultaneously buffers him from feelings of guilt for abrogating his responsibility to commune with other men and to be his brother's keeper.

In Broom's schizophrenic descent deep within his fragmented mind, his "darkly terrifying" encounters occurs within the bowels of a furnace room that he imagines within the asylum. Broom experiences men as robots whose entrails reveal "a shower of rust and ashes, now and again a piece of wire or glass." (p. 85) For Broom men have become so controlled by modern culture that they are mere electronic products. However, he never believes that he too is such a robot. Broom keeps his experience to himself because he knows that if he confided in anyone, even his fellow inmates, he would be told "a big machine room in the bowels of a dam where people get cut up by robot workers" doesn't exist. (p. 87)

The Chief's repeated withdrawals into the fog become both less terrifying and less comforting because McMurphy is working his magic as Broom's messiah. Love, *philia* and *agape*, draws Broom voluntarily out of his fog; this is his centering experience, which finally reintegrates his shattered ego and gives him new courage. As with schizophrenics who thus "heal," as it were, Bromden reemerges from the fog by choice. His last shock treatment was administered after he chose to join McMurphy in defense of George, the cleanliness fanatic. This act was Bromden's first willful decision to return permanently to the community of men. At this point, he is no longer concerned with threats to his ego and with self-exposure.

Joining his master, Broom emerges to fight in defense of his brothers. George is only his first public attempt to fight back. At the novel's end Broom seeks out his Indian brothers (no women are mentioned) in his village before fleeing to Canada. The male bond here is exclusive because in male mythology it is the warrior's bond in combat. Broom returns to society and his people as a warrior, a role still as important and respected in many Indian cultures in America as it is in the masculine mystique. Another minority male, "a Mexican guy," aids Broom without hesitation in his escape, lending him ten dollars and a jacket. Broom's new-found faith in his manhood and brotherhood is expressed in his intention to repay the man's hard-earned money. Through the coupling of love and communal responsi-

bility, Broom is reborn a man and a warrior, after a prolonged schizophrenic episode. In pointed contrast, Cheswick, a suicide, is a victim of despair. Cheswick is disillusioned when he believes that McMurphy is only a self-interested confidence man. When a man is convinced that all are dreadfully alone and complete only for self-aggrandizement, the resulting despair, in Kesey's world view, may be fatal. McMurphy is a messiah because his ritual death lifts the acutes from their despair, and they return to the "sane" world of American society.

As the novel ends, the Combine still controls society through coercive, paternal cultural patterns. Broom's father was weakened and then destroyed by the intransigence of the Combine's racism. Consequently, Broom's father failed not only his people as their chief but also, and as importantly, his son in his collapse as protector and spiritual guide. Before his death McMurphy had replaced Bromden's lost father. In Bromden's lengthy schizophrenic episode he acts out his quest to know, honor, and love his father as himself and to experience brotherhood. By exorcizing the ghost of his withered father, Broom emerges healed; he becomes capable of assuming both the paternal role of an activist "chief" and the fraternal role of a caring comrade.

Romantic male myth (reflected in the novel's ideology and mythology) places man's "natural" home outside the settlement of civilization. Although McMurphy is Kesey's hero, Bromden is a survivor with the potential for heroism as he emerges from the asylum with a healthy, rebellious understanding of himself as a man and his society. Chief Bromden and McMurphy portray what is generally missing in the writing of American men, a genuine, profound male love that transcends friendship, male bonding, and comradeship in arms. This is Kesey's radical departure from American tradition. But, finally, one must admit that these men live without women, suggesting that the underlying mythic fear of women remains.

Separation, initiation, and return: Kesey's narrator self-defensively drifts off into his schizophrenic fog in order to preserve his fragile "sanity"; he centers in the "darkly terrifying" space of the human mind, and he ultimately emerges a potential hero, profoundly changed but willing and able to lead other men, possibly his people.

WORKS CITED

- Baurecht, William C. "Messianic Masculinity: Myth of Freedom on the West." *Southwest Images and Trends: Factors in Community Development*. Susan Owings and Helen Bannan, Eds. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University Press, 1979.
- . "Romantic Male Deviance and the Messianic Impulse in American Masculinity: Case Studies of *Moby Dick*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Sometimes a Great Notion*." Ph.D Diss., University of New Mexico Press, 1978.
- Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*. New York: Bantam Books, 1973.

- Fielder, Leslie A. "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey." *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
- . *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Rev. ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1966.
- . *The Return of the Vanishing American*. New York: Stein and Day, 1968.
- Kesey, Ken. *Kesey's Garage Sale*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.
- . *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Viking Press, 1962.
- Laing, R. D. *The Politics of Experience*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.
- May, Rollo. *Love and Will*. New York: Dell, 1974.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.

JANET LARSON

*Stories Sacred and Profane: Narrative in
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

In his “wry codicil” to the “Definition of Man” which opens *Language as Symbolic Action*, Kenneth Burke observes that this symbol-using, symbol-misusing animal is “rotten with perfection.” Goaded by Aristotle’s principle of entelechy to make plans for our own completion—plans that could extend with “perfect logic” to our complete extinction (16–20)—we are storytelling animals and creatures who live in stories. Theologians have drawn upon such an understanding of human nature and culture to develop powerfully appealing accounts of life and faith as story. But what kind of stories shall we have? Ethicists David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas write that

a true story could only be one powerful enough to check the endemic tendency toward self-deception—a tendency which inadequate stories cannot help but foster. Correlatively, if the true God were to provide us with a saving story, it would have to be one that we found continually discomfiting.¹ (111)

If the world is made not out of atoms but out of stories, what assures us that the narrative structures of our beliefs about God and ourselves bear truth and not fruit that is “rotten with perfection”? Northrop Frye has reminded us that while “truth and falsehood are not literary categories,” for the critic

Religion & Literature, Volume 16, Number 2 (Summer 1984): pp. 25–42.

they “represent the directions or tendencies in which verbal structures go, or are thought to go” (17). If it is possible to identify a story form that tends toward truth, that works toward its liberation for the hearers, it would be both dialectical and dialogical. In this essay, I will be tracing the implications of such a story form in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Two distinct narrative expressions of *telos* together define the form of Ken Kesey’s novel: myths, in a vitiated contemporary American mode, and parables, as understood chiefly but not exclusively from Jesus’ dominant form of teaching in the gospels. Kesey exposes an idolatrous American archmyth and its parallel god-myth, but he also presses further to test the redemptive power of parable lived and told by his characters and through his book. While *Cuckoo’s Nest* is not a Christian novel—for its wisdom is explicitly secular—its dynamic narrative structure models the possibility for genuine transcendence in this world and liberates its readers through a dialectic of myth and parable. In so doing, Kesey’s novel imitates in its non-supernatural way the “*logos tēs pisteōs*” (words of faith) New Testament writers claim to tell and overturns the “*bebēlous kai graōdeis mythous*” (profane and old wives’ fables) which St. Paul urges his fellow Christians to reject (I Tim. 4:7). It is only as McMurphy’s own profane myths and those of the men in the institution are subverted through the power of parable that Kesey’s transformed messiah can save and be saved from stories that are rotten with perfection.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade has set forth the ancient function of myth to bring into the present, through the narration of the gods’ creative acts, “the irruption of the sacred into the world... that *establishes* the world as a reality.” This ontological function of myth is yoked to its cultural function: that “which narrates this sacred ontophany,” which “alone reveals the *real*,” becomes the paradigm for all important activities in a religious culture, vouching for what is done (97-98). Warner Berthoff emphasizes the “principle of generosity” in these basic functions of myth. Its chief purpose is

not explanation (in the sense of interpretation) but *recovery, preservation, organization, continuance*. . . . The essential character of myth is plenitude and accommodation, above all the accommodation of the collective mind of men to their own incessant experience.

That accommodation is also personal: myths give individuals faces to put on. Thomas Mann, arguing for the need to assume an ancient mythic mantle, has called myth “the legitimization of life; only through and in it does life find self-awareness, sanction, consecration” (314-322).

In this personal appropriation of myth, one might discern the effort to achieve self-transcendence, Yet to the extent that one loses oneself in the legitimizing story—as Burrell and Hauerwas remind us that Albert Speer

enclosed himself in the image of “Hitler’s architect”—one can perfect the grand illusion, what Ernest Becker has called the “vital lie,” with which we protect ourselves from the consequences of our own and others’ acts (ch. 4). If myths are “organs of reality,” in Ernst Cassirer’s phrase, how can the reality thus created be judged for its truth? Sacred myth is not self-conscious; it cannot stand outside itself, for to the primitive mind enclosed in its myths, there is no other “real” place to stand. When personal myths are reinforced by all-embracing culture myths, it becomes considerably difficult for the unaided individual to achieve the critical standingplace of “self”-awareness.” And for the society whose basis of integration is questionable, as Kenneth Burke cautions, cultural myths that give expression to this integration can become a social menace (*Literary Form* 314–322).

John Dominic Crossan has formulated structural definitions of myth and parable that, with qualifications, will prove particularly helpful in identifying the narrative structure of *Cuckoo’s Nest*, in naming the kinds of stories told within this fiction, and in tracing their theological and ethical implications.² Drawing upon the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, Crossan describes what goes on in the deep structure of myth:

an opposition between two terms that cannot be reconciled (binary oppositions) will be represented by two fictional surrogates, and these replacements will allow a reconciliation or mediation which the original pair could not receive.

Through this logic, the mediation may yield an actual “gain” in the story, like the recovery of the Golden Fleece, but the fictive gain is not crucial: “the whole process of mediation and reconciliation implies in itself a gigantic gain,” for one establishes “in, by, and through myth the conviction that mediation is *Possible*” (*Interval* 51–53). In the realm of myth, dissonances are harmonized; the abstract pattern of rounded closure ensures belief in satisfying solutions in general. Crossan sees the danger in this; Berthoff, in his less skeptical conception of myth, calls it “organized plenitude” (282–83). But in the world of modern history, plagued by failed fictions, many myths do not preserve the plenitude their organization would seem to promise; these Northrop Frye in *The Secular Scripture* would consign to his category of “kidnapped romance,” stories assimilated into ideology of the ascendant class and peddle for the mass consumption of docile citizens for whom these tales cannot really perform the profound functions of myth although they may seem to (26, 57). In a fractured and skeptical world, popular myths struggle to keep alive the belief in mediation and in rounded closure at the risk of mass delusion. It is these bogus myths that are exposed in *Cuckoo’s Nest*.

In his typology of story, Crossan opposes parable to myth:

parable is always a somewhat unnerving experience. You can usually recognize a parable because your immediate reaction will be self-contradictory: “I don’t know what you mean by that story but I’m certain I don’t like it”. (*Interval* 56)

Instead of reconciling contradictions, the logic of parable creates them within a given situation. At the heart of the parabolic event, “the *structure of expectation* on the part of the hearer and . . . *the structure of expression* on the part of the speaker” are diametrically opposed; in this battle of basic structures, the parable effects “the reverse of what the hearer expects” through a typical sequence of operations: Crossan calls them advent, reversal, action (*Interval* 66). The familiar situation in which, for example, Jesus’ parables typically begin is shattered by what Crossan calls God’s “advent,” his act of sovereign freedom that upsets the hearer’s cherished story, his righteous expectations, his ethical code. Advent brings a polar reversal of these expectations, and reversal initiates new action, “open[ing] up new worlds and unforeseen possibilities” for Prodigal Sons and their brothers, Publicans and Pharisees (*Parables* 34). To be truly human, Crossan says, “and to remain open to transcendental experience, demands a willingness to be ‘parabled’ . . .” (*Interval* 56)—not only in stories, but also in the surprising reversals of our temporal lives.

The relationship between myth and parable in Crossan’s typology should now be evident: myth “establishes world. . . . Parable subverts world” (*Interval* 59). In the act of subversion, parable is not anti-myth but “shows us the seams and edges of myth”:

To live in parable means to dwell in the tension of myth and parable. . . . [Parable] is a story deliberately calculated to show us the limitations of myth to shatter world so that its relativity becomes apparent. (*Interval* 56, 59–60)

If the storyteller begins to mediate the newly created contrast, “the story starts slipping . . . back into myth” (*Interval* 55). Correlatively, if the person who has been parabled begins reorganizing his life to achieve and sustain a static coherence, he too has slipped back into living by myth rather than remaining open to the experience of being “parabled.”

This hardening of the outlines can make story idolatrous. As Paul Tillich argues in *Dynamics of Faith*, myths cannot be removed, for they are the language of faith; but they can be broken, so as to acknowledge their finite character. To break free of idolatrous faith, the modern believer must recognize the myth as a story which is not in itself sacred—and therefore no longer the story of traditional religious societies—but which points beyond itself as a provisional symbol of one’s ultimate concern (48–54). In this way Tillich

makes room for myth in the skeptical modern world. Parable, I would go on to argue, is a peculiarly appropriate narrative form in which to express a faith that is not wholly demythologized in Bultmann's sense, but that lives in tension with myth, that accepts its human stories as provisional and "broken." *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a novel that is critical of its own formulations, shows us that, particularly in a modern world ridden by bogus myths that make false promises to order our existence and bring delusive comfort, an appreciation of the parable's truth-bringing power becomes crucially important in our personal and collective lives. Further, for all its secular wisdom, Kesey's novel points to the power of the Christian story in particular by placing at the center a naturalized version of Jesus as the Parable of God.

In "The Nature of Art Under Capitalism," Kenneth Burke writes that art which makes for acceptance of its culture

enables us to "resign" ourselves by resolving in aesthetic fusion trends or yearnings not resolvable in the practical sphere. . . . [But such art] tends to become a social menace in so far as it assists us in tolerating the intolerable. . . . at a time when the very basis or moral integration is in question. . . .

In such times art "must have . . . an element of suasion or inducement of the educational variety," that is, "a large *corrective* or *propaganda element* . . ." (*Literary Form* 320–321). The adjectives in Burke's statement suggest quite different narrative modes of inducement, "propaganda" being perhaps the least useful and certainly least attractive of forms. For if story is to save from delusion and corruption, its way of addressing the reader's experience must acknowledge its psychological and moral complexity—something propaganda cannot afford to do. The gain of parable as a corrective teaching device is that it is so constructed to induce us to change our expectations, experiencing them as lost in order to learn something entirely new.

Especially in its play and film versions, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has been taken by many as a propagandistic story for the flower-child revolution. But Kesey's book is much more than counter propaganda directed against America's dreams of order. The novel narratively exposes an American pseudo-myth of gain; it also challenges a conception of deity that is quite compatible with the American dream; the myth of an omnipotent sky-god who flies over the world, touching down just long enough to pluck out the "cuckoos." These challenges come through a transformational, shifting logic that generates the liberating power of Kesey's work, a dialectic of myth and parable. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* exposes the relativity of story in a parabolic way, for the dialectical structure of the narrative constitutes an attack on the structure of expectation set up by the novel's own title. Through a process of story-reversals,

or losses and gains, by which both readers and characters in the novel learn, Kesey persuades us to believe in the possibility of winning—through sacrifice, even death—an authentic transcendence within the natural order.

Before Chief Bromden even sees the newcomer, he hears the Word—a “loud, brassy voice” that “sounds like he’s way above them, talking down, like he’s sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He sounds big . . . (*Nest* 10). For the Indian, McMurphy is a “giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine,” from all the social forces that crush men (255). At the opening of the novel, this red-headed hero appears to be the mythic figure which the title promises. Bursting into the deadly institutional quiet with an apparent hicrophanic surplus of being, Mac performs a larger-than-life role for the lifeless inmates, who crave a sense-making story that demands of them no personal change. While Kesey’s culture-hero suffers initially from no explicit “Christ complex” like Nathanael West’s Miss Lonelyhearts, McMurphy revels in his personal pop mythology, which stretches from the American past of the legendary logger, “the swaggering gambler, the big red-headed brawling Irishman,” to the present of Superman, Captain Marvel, the Lone Ranger on “the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare” (189). Relishing himself as an emblem of “transcendent human possibility,” in Terry G. Sherwood’s phrase, Randle Patrick McMurphy at first takes on the lineaments of a “mythic Christ.” Sherwood argues that the simplistic moral oppositions this heroic design requires prevent Kesey’s novel from being a serious work; the book projects, like the comic strip, a world only as it ought to be (96-100). If *Cuckoo’s Nest* remained thus enclosed in this pop-mythic pattern, it would indeed risk indulging a self-deceptively simple morality, for the sake of popular entertainment or counter-propaganda. But the “cartoon world . . . where the figures are flat and outlined in black,” as Bromden calls it (31), is not Kesey’s vision: it is his paranoid narrator’s delusion. This structure must be broken if the whole saving story is to be lived and told.

As the Indian’s “primitive” religious imagination suggests, the attraction of the McMurphy hero as a “giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine” is rooted in the appeal of ancient myth to a sick man terrified of formlessness. As his narrative opens Bromden sets the stage for nothing less than the primordial struggle between dragon and sky-god (Tiamat and Marduk, Cetus and Perseus) that in myths of the beginnings establishes the world (*Symbolic Action* 383).³ Miss Ratched, who can blow herself up to more than human size in the Indian’s imagination is the center of an evil technological priestcraft, sitting “in the center of [a] web of watchful robot” (26), she inhabits a mechanical dragon’s lair, where this female version “of the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” is as ontologically elusive as the dragon of the Apocalypse, to which Kesey refers in the novel’s dedication. The head nurse of the ward is an opponent truly worthy of the larger-than-life McMurphy.

But the power of these opposing mythic terms must be diminished if the narrator is to get well. The archetypal enemy, the Combine, must be defeated *as an idea* (myth) because, representing all the ways “these things can be rigged” (27), it licenses Bromden’s paranoid conviction that he is a victim who can at least play “deaf and dumb” safely in this enclosed fantasy. Bromden’s image of his Champion as immortal hero must also diminish, change into mortal shape. The Indian puzzles over the logic of two possible answers to the question of identity: if Mac is One who “came out of the sky” he is surely the superhuman rescuer from the mythic Combine; but if Mac is “merely” human, surely he cannot save. Mac’s continued presence in the institution as a real man who “is what he is” gradually subverts the Indian’s imaginary world that dictates these false choices—these binary oppositions that prevent him from accepting the far more ambiguous, unfixed terms of historical experience. McMurphy comes to Bromden as parable by reversing these expectations: he is a “mere man” who redeems the time, rescuing other men not by touching down briefly in their world as a superhuman force, but by deeply enmeshing himself in their suffering experience. It is only as McMurphy becomes less mythic to the inmates and to himself that he *can* rescue them from the comfortable nest of their delusions and empower them to be what they are in the world as, it is.

Understanding the structure of these transformations is essential for seeing what kind of “Christ figure” McMurphy is and is not. Students of this novel have noticed many of Kesey’s deliberate parallels drawn from the life of Christ. It is peculiarly appropriate, however, that these historical parallels “begin to emerge only in the last quarter of the book,” as Theodore Ziolkowsky has observed (266, n. 19).⁴ For by then Mac has moved away from his initial position as an ahistorical “mythic Christ” to become another kind of authentic messiah in human time. Just as Christ crucified, the Parable of God in the gospels, subverted the expectations of his world through the power of his weakness and the wisdom of his foolishness (I Cor. 1:20–25), so the parabolic McMurphy scandalizes the prevailing idolatries by succeeding ever more recklessly through failure, breaking Bromden’s self-enclosing myth and becoming a parable for the men; he risks being martyred in the cause of his friends’ liberation and is resurrected through the new life he brings to his followers—not, however, as a mythic Jesus or “Christ dream,” but as a just and compassionate fellow human being. But he is no Son of God incarnate in fiction; the Christlike pattern is complicated by the reality of his own resurgent sinning. If McMurphy becomes saving as he becomes parable for others, the others are also a needed parable for him. And McMurphy, unlike Nathanael West’s false messiah, is willing to be parabled.

This is the central double reversal in the novel; but *Cuckoo’s Nest* overturns expectations more than once, and in more than one way. The mutual transformations of the men and of Mac are effected not by a single dramatic

shift but, on a much more closely discriminated scale, through the repeated alternations of two distinctive forms of story logic. Again and again in the narrative parable (with its dynamic open structure of advent/reversal/action) breaks the perfect designs of resurgent popular myth (with its rounded closure), exposing the provisionality of story. This repeated dialectic eventually forms a pattern in the novel that makes moral and existential sense out of the discontinuities, regressions, dreamlike sequences, disjointed flashbacks, clearer memories, and stretches of forward-moving action that constitute the narrative complexity of Kesey's work. Each time parabolic breakage occurs, expectations are overturned, values are redefined, plans are changed, emotional security is upset, and fresh action is forwarded for a while until the delusive certainties of the men's and McMurphy's myths reassert their old seductions. These alternations in the action are accompanied by the actual storytelling of myths and parables, with their different rhetorical situations and effects. And yet, even though the narrative movement of *Cuckoo's Nest* depends upon the breakdown of stories that foster mere acquiescence, Kesey remains tolerant of the human need for legends and mythic play-acting as his characters live through the pain of coming to awareness. This tolerance I do not sense in Crossan's treatment of myth. More usefully, Kenneth Burke writes that along with efforts to change the structure of society

must go the demand for an imaginative equipment that helps us to make it tolerable while it lasts. Much of the "pure" or "acquiescent" art of today serves this invaluable psychological end. For this reason the great popular comedians or handsome movie stars are rightly the idols of the people (*Literary Form* 322)

For such reasons does the heroic McMurphy legend linger through the last pages of the novel. But it is embedded in Kesey's dynamic fictional world of provisional stories that undergo continual reformulation; and in the concluding paragraphs, myth does not have the final word,

Even at the novel's opening when Mac is most celebratively identified with popular mythology, his parabolic potential for the men is evident. With his unexpected laughter and songs, he threatens "the whole smoothness of the outfit" (39), as though he were pure subversion aiming at "simply the actual *disruption* of the ward for the sake of disruption" (25). After the first group therapy session, Mac unsettles the inmates' theories of Big Nurse as either the "tender angel of mercy. Mother Ratched" or as "the juggernaut of modern matriarchy" (58, 68) and sets out to expose the seams of her myth: he is going to "Bug her till she comes apart at those neat little seams, and shows, just one time, she ain't so unbeatable as you think" (72). By the end of Part 1 he has done it, but the reversal and new action come not quite in the way anyone expects.

Mac's small successes in early skirmishes with Big Nurse are entertaining, but he cannot diminish her power by his own pop-myth performances: he must first change the men's image of themselves. (As Crossan says; "It takes two to parable" [*Interval* 87]). Mac then tries to teach these losers that they can "win" at the gaming table; to their myth of total failure, he opposes the antimyth of capitalistic success. But an antimyth does not disturb the hearer's structure of expectation; and this one is only another version of the institution's myth of the powerful against the weak. Besides, the men play only for paper money and a poker-table peripety. When the odds are seriously against them in a real power-game (as in the first vote on the World Series), the men back down. What they must learn is a different kind of heroic winning that challenges the myths of power and gain by transforming the meaning of failure.

An unexpected parabolic event points this way when McMurphy, typically inviting bets and bragging of his legendary strength, tries to lift the control panel in the tub room. No emblem of transcendent possibility now or a TV hero, Mac shows himself a man with a body shaken by strain who has the courage to try even though "he *knows* he can't lift it," even though *everybody* knows he can't" (121). Mac thus begins to take on the lineaments of a new kind of "gambling fool." As the inmates' images of him change, the way is opened for their expectations of themselves to change, and for action on their discovery that risking oneself is also a way of succeeding as a human being.

This acted parable has almost immediate results on the men Mac has been "trying to pull . . . out of the fog" (132). Their second, successful vote on the baseball game, a gesture of independence from ward policy, initiates a rapid series of reversals, losses, and gains. By the time the outraged Ratched comes apart, making her lose control has become much less important than the men's gain of a new structure of expectations. Better than actually watching the old World Series on television, the men "see" a new "world"—their new communal assertion and collective laughter. And now Mac sits next to an empty TV screen, entertaining them not with pop-culture antics in place of TV's mass media fantasies but with parabolic stories: true accounts of efforts to win that had turned out losses which Mac laughs at now, and stories about losers who, even "blindfolded and backwards," had defeated the expected winners (152). As Part I closes, the Indian has ventured outside the enclosure of his fantasy to see the whole absurd scene objectively and to laugh at it. If his hero has outwitted an enemy, the victory has come not on the terms of myth but on the unsettling terms of parable. Bromden's willingness to be thus parabled signals his capacity for healing—and for telling the whole story.

Part II begins by working out the ironies of a nice counterpoint: Nurse Ratched seeks now to expose the seams of McMurphy's myth ("a Napoleon, a Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun") with an antimyth that this "mere man" will sooner or later prudently enclose himself in self-interest (146); meanwhile,

Mac's actual generous presence on the ward *as* a mere man has an increasingly salutary effect on his "buddies." Even with the tragic results of Mac's temporary defection in Part II, when he retreats self-protectively and a disillusioned Cheswick lunges into the deep water to his death, we see Mac's lasting influence as parable for the men: they still gaze at him with a look "like they wished things didn't have to be this way" (165). And just when they have nearly given up on their champion, he breaks their structure of expectations again by recklessly running his hand through the Nurse's spotless window. By this foolish gamble, Mac risks not financial loss or limited physical pain as before, but permanent commitment in an institution for the insane.

The works that follow this perilous victory are his increasingly daring therapies for the men, culminating in the fishing trip. Their biggest risk, the journey repays them with both successes and failures as they learn to laugh at the chaos they make in their struggles with the deep. By Part III McMurphy has grown to be considerably more real than an emblem of sheer transcendence. That complexity is now reflected in the unfolding of Bromden's fuller humanity as a courageous *and* compassionate human being. Already Mac has made the Indian "bigger" in personal power than his fatalistic fantasies had allowed, but such power carries with it the danger of psychopathy; Bromden's consciousness as a social being must be empowered too. Appropriately, this expansion is not manifested in clear vision alone, which might still imply the passive attitude of a wise but uninvolved onlooker; awareness, as Burrell and Hauerwas observe, is more like speaking than like seeing. In Part III what Bromden discovers is that he must talk to save himself and others. He must venture out of the fog to name his experience in the existentially open territory of dialogue. Parable, which depends upon a dynamic relation between teller and listener in a way myth does not, helps to prepare Bromden for this engagement with others in the fluid space of social relationships.

Bromden's first social challenge is the reconstruction of his personal story for another. McMurphy helps the Chief to find his voice by telling a boyhood story of his own about the "worth" of speaking out despite its material "cost" (206–207). Bromden acts on this surprising parable by talking about his own past and discovers that for the loss of what is not true in his myth of the White Man's exploitation and the Red Man's total weakness, he gains both sympathy and judgment from his listener. McMurphy is there to question, to ask for clarifications, to object, to empathize through dialogue as well as through story that is dialogical. Dialogue and dialectic clarify and refine thought; and during a silence when Bromden is arguing internally, he follows the sequence he has learned through speaking with another person, three times making a statement, questioning it, correcting it, and affirming a restatement, working toward a truer account of his history (210). Yet their midnight talk ends in fantasies as McMurphy spins a yarn about a wild Heaven in which Bromden is

the superlatively sexual hero. The Indian needs such stories, mingled with the laughter that acknowledges their provisionality, as old expectations of himself are reversed and he works toward clearer consciousness.

With the spoken word, Bromden's narrative in real time properly can be said to begin. His action in open time—with an uncertain future—flows from this point in the novel. His first words had been an involuntary "Thank you" for a stick of gum; speaking also brings Bromden out into the world of others where there are both gifts and demands. Much earlier in the book, the befogged and paralyzed cigar-store Indian had seen faces floating by asking him for help: "I can't do nothing for you either, Billy," he had imagined himself saving. "You know that. None of us can. You got to understand that as soon as a man goes to help somebody, he leaves himself wide open. . . . Put your face away, Billy" (131). Nevertheless, the faces had kept "filling past"—for, as Martini (hallucinating bodies in the showers) says, "They need you to see thum" (176). Bromden has been trying to put the faces away by making them into mere signs that read "I'm tired" or "I'm dying of a bum liver" (131). The impact of McMurphy's parabolic presence is to liberate the faces from these signs so that they take on fully human dimensions for the Indian, who also gains a face of his own that is no longer trapped screaming behind mirrors. As his narrative in open time begins, Bromden sheds mythological thinking to become a human being present for others.

In Part IV as the men return toting salmon like "conquering heroes," Mac threatens to turn back again into myth, into a friend too good to be true, like Jesus or Santa Claus (243–249). Big Nurse determines to destroy the men's new heroism by launching her final attack on the McMurphy legend, whose terms have significantly shifted from "Attila the Hun" to "martyr" and "saint" (252). Harding offers a weak defense with the demoralizing theory that there are neither gifts nor givers but only "the dear old capitalistic system of free individual enterprise, comrades," and its "good old red, white, and blue hundred-percent American con man" (254). This "whole bit" is not adequate to explain their friend; and the cynical Harding desperately needs more. But as the men ask, "What's in it for or Mack?" (250); McMurphy re-enacts the opportunistic role of "Nobody's fool" with which he has been charged, and the capitalistic counter-myth seems to be winning again.

The men's mythic expectations are once more shattered when Mac steps forward to defend a vulnerable inmate from the cruel pranks of the aides. The importance of this moment as parable for the men is underscored by Bromden's response. By joining Mac in a fray which neither can finally win, Bromden shows that he has gained the compassion to identify with others' losses, as well as the courage to throw himself into an open situation "without thinking about being cagey or safe or what would happen to me," thinking only about "the thing that needed to be done and the doing of it" (258).

Reversal has led to action, and when the action is punished by Electroshock Treatment, the impact of the parable is not lost. In the foggy aftermath, it is by reordering fragments of his past largely in parabolic patterns that Bromden painfully reconstructs his identity toward the clear moment of his full awakening. The hunting incident with his father which he recalls, the memory of his white mother's challenge to the old Indian ways, and the stories of his grandmother's life/death/resurrection follow in his mind as a lifelike sequence of losses and gains, the ambiguous contradictions he must face in his continued living (271–275). When he emerges as an openly speaking and hearing member of the human community after this, the Chief is capable of his own liberation.

As the men's transformation in the background and Bromden's in the foreground show, the combat at the heart of *Cuckoo's Nest* is not simply, as it first appears, the opposition of Champion and Enemy (the sky-god myth), or People against the Institution and Machine (the Combine myth), or the Weak against the Strong (Harding's rabbit myth), although these conflicts are anchored in real power relations in the book. The central conflict is between the men's endemic tendencies toward self-deception and their capacities for generating truer, more adequate stories about themselves and their world. And just as parable is "story grown self-conscious and self-critical" (*Interval* 57), so Bromden's dialectically constructed narrative increasingly becomes aware of itself. While he does not simply demythologize McMurphy's story—for remnants of legend linger in the descriptions of Mac's last performances—the transformed narrator's very awareness that the pop myths are broken testifies to the saving power of Mac's parable for his friends.

In *Cuckoo's Nest*, master and disciples become transformed in the encounter with each other. The men are also an "advent" for McMurphy that turns his familiar world upside down and challenges him to new and unforeseen acts, Mac too needs to be parabled; the protective "cartoon world" of his shallow individualist persona must be transformed if he is to enter the multidimensional human community. The sign of his grace is that McMurphy is open to the reconstitution of his image and to the lesson of limit, indeed to the lesson of his own mortality.

Introducing himself through his master-image—"McMurphy, buddies, R. P. McMurphy, and I'm a gambling fool"—he does not at all hide the fact that he has come not to *be* a sacrifice but to "trim you little babies like little lambs" (11–12). A "smart gambler," Mac plans to "look the game over awhile before [drawing him] self a hand" (47). But the game he sees is not what he expects. Although he has begun in the spirit of enterprise he later laughs at "how funny the whole thing is" (113); and by the end of Mac's first parabolic encounter with the men, he feels "he's been trapped some way" (69). The surprising crazy story of the patient's utter defeat forces him to listen to their expressions of suffering, and he watches Harding with "puzzled wonder . . .

like it's the first human face he ever laid eyes on" (60). After the first revelatory group therapy session, he begins examining his values and later dreams night after night not of signs but of individual faces.

Mac keeps drifting back into old games of self-interest even as he moves toward his redemption from that capitalistic world. His first savior role is the perfect "con" (getting what he wants while making others think they are getting what they want): he will become the Champion of this pitiful circle without taking risks, by gambling on a sure thing. [Ironically, this is his disciples' own game of self-protection (78). In Part II the tables are turned on him: by coming to him like he is "some kind or savior," he says, without warning him of the "risk [he] was running," the men have "conned of R. P. McMurphy." Stepping right out of this deep water, he tells his buddies: "Yon got in swallow your pride sometimes and keep an eye out for old Number One" (182). Yet he cannot achieve insensibility to the men's continuing need. Nor can he find a harmonizing explanation for their shocking news that they are voluntary inmates: this scandal to his winning principle he cannot "seem to get straight in [his] mind" (185). If Mac is to be saved and saving, he must, as the resident doctors say, "give up his bit," reverse his master-image, and become a "gambling fool" who wins by losing. When he runs his hand through the glass at the end of Part II, he breaks his own self-encapsulation in an individualist myth; the man dedicated to "gambling on all levels" has escalated the perils and redefined the meaning of his vocation.

That he has not entirely disengaged himself from the gambler's dream of gain is evident yet in Part IV when McMurphy exploits Bromden's new physical strength by persuading the men to bet on it. When Bromden scruples to refuse his share of the winnings, the baffled McMurphy asks, "Now what's the story?" His comrade steps in a parable: "We thought it wasn't to be *winning* things . . ." (257). In the next critical scene, Mac acts on Bromden's "story" by defending the helpless George from the cruel aides, just as Bromden acts on the parable Mac has been for him. The ring of expectant faces goads McMurphy to make an irrevocable choice against the remnants of his master-image, for he knows he cannot finally win. As his "helpless, cornered despair" (261) forecasts, he seems to know that this event will lead him to give his last gift, his life.

Thinking forward to the end of the story, Bromden muses that "it was like he'd signed on for the whole game and there wasn't any way of him breaking his contract" (296). In this new "world series," McMurphy had also *been* signed on and the stakes are very high. The suicides of Cheswick and Billy Bibbit are sobering proof that Mac has risked, as Nurse says, "Playing with human lives—gambling with human lives"; but it is not, as she further charges, because Mac thinks himself "to be a *God!*" (304). For her psychopath theory is only another version of *her* dream of manipulation. It also implies an

inadequate conception of deity as transcendent power, rather than as the paradoxical God of the Bible who requires sacrifice and is himself the satisfying sacrificial love—that courageous compassion which Mac has in his imperfect way imparted to the others because he has risked participating in their reality. Now, his last desperate gamble with his own life is an act of justice as well as an act of love that consummates his incarnation from mythic into mortal shape, an obedience unto death for the friends “making him do it” (304).

Billy’s suicide is a harrowing parabolic event that launches Mac’s final reversal. It also shows us that the revolution of consciousness which we have attended through the book is not in itself enough. Hearing Nurse’s self-legitimizing explanation moments after Billy’s death, Mac instantaneously grasps the reality of human limit: people are not inviolable, and institutional stories have real power over people’s lives. Billy’s self-deception had been an enemy, but Nurse Ratched is an enemy too, not just a paranoid projection. McMurphy’s lunge to strangle her makes a frontal attack on an institutional lie, tackling the larger structure of untruth which has victimized Billy and in which the Nurse plays the leading role. Accepting his parable, McMurphy is drawn swiftly to his death. The men, accepting theirs, venture out not at all assured of their futures, but strong enough to try living their lives outside the mythic entrapments of the institution.

Bromden’s triumphant leap from the asylum with all the symbolic force of a resurrection from the tomb may seem to turn the parable of McMurphy back into myth. But Kesey does not perfect the form of his story by harmonizing all the contradictions his work has raised. His conclusion is poised on a paradox of death/life that opens up the story for the survivors; and some of the remaining details and ambiguities suggest a conclusion appropriate to the dynamic provisionality of all the novel’s storytelling and to its own narrative structure.

Bromden’s escape coalesces two opposed images that have been kept separate through most of the book: images of lifting associated with mythical transcendence (only a hero of legendary strength could have lifted the control panel that Bromden lifts) and images of shattering associated with parabolic breakage (only one who now sees himself as human can shatter this prison and enter the contingent human world). The event occasioned by lifting and shattering is both transcendental and descendent: he flies, he falls. “The glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth,” he writes (310). Joyously celebrating beauty, he is also reminded, with deliberate invocation of the sacrament, that one enters a new life by being baptized into a death.

As the narrative nearly slips back into myth, Bromden nonetheless goes on to show us that he has entered no legendary life outside the contingencies of human time; rather, in his ending he is finally aware of himself as a tem-

poral being. The entrapping mythic present of his opening paranoid formula, “They’re out there,” has been replaced by the sense of the past now measured and assessed: “I been away a long time” (311). Leading up to these last words, he thinks through his plans in the closing paragraphs and imagines that the world he will encounter is neither entirely in the grip of a Combine conspiracy nor better than it really is. Aiming to “look over the country” in order to “bring some of it clear” in his mind, Bromden heads toward whatever is “out there”—the tragedy of Indians who have “drunk themselves goofy” and the comic absurdity of Indians spearing salmon again in the dam’s spillway—in the provisional, surprising world (311).

Bromden heads toward the highway “in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go” to hitch a ride toward home (310). The memory recalls Bromden’s first time at the symbolic window in an important prefiguring scene that had mingled threat with promise. In the tranquil autumn night, a flock of Canada honkers were crossing the moon, led by one that looked like “a black cross opening and closing.” When the geese pass out of sight, a dog continues loping in their direction “steady and solemn like he had an appointment.” A car’s headlights loom; Bromden sees the “dog and the car making for the same spot of pavement.” What had happened next he never knew, for he had been taken away from the window (156–157).

Recalling this earlier passage is an appropriate way for Kesey to open the end of his novel. Bromden will have to live in the tensions that have moved his narrative forward, with its combat between closed and open forms of living and of telling and with its many conflicts between disillusion and believing, sin and regeneration, dying and living. Kesey’s work has a complex structure with many crossings and re-crossings, most fundamentally a dialectic between the tragic and the comic in a tale of loss and gain. Across its moon flies not a sky-God, transcendent and distantly beautiful, but a black cross, opening and closing, moving into the dark.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to professor Walter R. Bouman for his paper. “Piety in a Secularized Society.” Read at Valparaiso University in 1977, which called my attention to “Self Deception and Autobiography . . .” and to John Dominic Crossan.

2. The adequacy of Crossan’s definition of parable to describe the actual *Parabolē* of Jesus has been debated. See, for example, *Semeia* 1 (1974) and John Cobb. What ever its technical limitations of applicability to the gospel stories, however, Crossan’s understanding of parabolic story and action does accord with the design in the gospels of Jesus as the Parable of God and, in kesey’s novel, of McMurphy’s story.

Parabolē encompasses many kinds of figurative language: although metaphor is part of the event of Jesus’ parables through which consciousness is transformed, I do not treat metaphoric structure in this essay.

3. Burke cites ten elements from the earliest known type of “combat myth” which are present in the opening episodes of *Cuckoo's Nest*.
4. See also David M. Graybeal and George M. Boyd.

WORKS CITED

- Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press, 1974.
- Berthoff, Warner. “Fiction, History, Myth: Notes Toward the Discrimination of Narrative Forms.” *Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Mortan W. Bloomfield. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Boyd, George M., “Parables of Costly Grace Flannery O’Connor and Ken Kesey.” *Theology Today* 29 (1972): pp. 161–171.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- . *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Burrell, David, and Stanley Hauerwas. “Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2 (1974).
- Cobb, John. *Orientation by Disorientations, Presented in Honor of William A. Beardslee*. Ed. Richard A. Spencer. Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980.
- Crossan John Dominic. *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*. Niles, Illinois: Argus, 1975.
- . *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

FRED MADDEN

*Sanity and Responsibility:
Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner*

In more than twenty years since its publication, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has elicited continuing critical debate about McMurphy as the novel's hero. Readings fall roughly into two camps: one, because downplaying aspects of McMurphy's racism, sexism, and paternalism, proves of him as a vital, positive figure and the novel's hero; the other, condemning McMurphy, attacks Kesey for glorifying a despicable individual. Those readers who affirm McMurphy's heroism argue that he valiantly confronts the forces of dehumanism and mechanism in our society—forces represented by what Big Chief calls the “combine.” But even recent readings that praise McMurphy have the task of either palliating or ignoring what have been seen as McMurphy's racist and sexist biases.¹ Readers condemning McMurphy have pointed both to his language (he calls blacks “coons” four or five times and Washington “a nigger”) and to his actions (he seems to take sadistic pleasure in bloodying Washington's nose in a basketball game and in hitting the orderly in the shower room). Other readers have accused McMurphy, and Kesey himself, of sexist attitudes: the “bad” women (Big Nurse, Billy's mother, and Harding's wife) are bitches, and the “good” women are prostitutes with hearts of gold. Readings that emphasize racist and sexist attitudes blame Kesey for creating stereotypical characters who are used to convey a white macho-paternalism that degrades women and blacks.²

Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 32, Number 2 (Summer 1986): pp. 203–217.

Emphasis on either McMurphy's positive character traits or his negative ones is largely responsible for the novel's continuing controversy. Readers, lining up on one side or the other, have produced an interpretative stalemate. However, a shift of critical perspective from McMurphy to Big Chief provides a way around this deadlock. For such a reading, Big Chief must be seen as the novel's central character whose narrative records his own movement toward self-reliance and sanity.³ But, second, this seemingly positive narrative reveals the ward members' and Big Chief's manipulation and destruction of McMurphy.

Most readings render the plot of the novel in approximately the following form. McMurphy arrives on a static ward where all the ward members have been cowed into conformity. He immediately wants to challenge the power of Big Nurse—first as a means of winning a bet but later in behalf of the ward members. Just before Cheswick's suicide, however, McMurphy finds out that Big Nurse has control over the length of his stay in the asylum. So he decides to conform. But after a time he begins to understand that his rebellion is terribly important to the ward members, and so he resumes his challenge to Big Nurse's control. He succeeds until he fights Washington for attempting to abuse George, another ward member. As a result of this confrontation and of his refusal to conform to the rules of the ward, he receives a number of shock treatments. Finally after Billy Bibbit's suicide, McMurphy cannot control his hatred of Big Nurse, whom he attempts to strangle. This act of rebellion gives Big Nurse the power to order McMurphy's lobotomy. When McMurphy is brought back to the ward, Big Chief smothers him because the Chief feels that the lobotomized form is not really McMurphy and that Big Nurse will use it as an example to make her ward members conform. After he kills McMurphy, Big Chief escapes from the hospital to spread McMurphy's word of rebellion against conformity. Such a summation of the novel's plot relies heavily on McMurphy as the central character and hero, making Big Chief McMurphy's sidekick—a sort of Tonto figure.

There is, however, evidence against this reading of the novel. In an interview after the release of the film version of *Cuckoo's Nest* (during the production of which he “walked off the set” in disagreement with Milos Forman), Kesey stressed that “it's the Indian's story—not McMurphy's or Jack Nicholson's” (Grunwald 4). Kesey's insistence was not simply the result of his disagreement with Forman. While working on *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey wrote that he wanted to create a narrator “who leaves the ground and breathes in print” (Tanner 23). In a letter to Ken Babbs, Kesey suggested the examples of Holden Caulfield, Benjy Compson, Gully Jimson, and Humbert as the type of character he wanted to create with Big Chief (Tanner 23). These characters filter events and control the way in which these events reach the reader—as, in fact, Big Chief's consciousness does. *Cuckoo's Nest*, then, needs to be seen

in a tradition of novels that present limited and sometimes unreliable points of view.

Not only does Kesey argue against McMurphy's being taken for the central character, but it also seems doubtful that Kesey advocated the type of rebellion McMurphy advocates. An interview after the film was released indicates Kesey's own emphasis:

Kesey: No, listen what this country needs is sanity. Individual sanity, and all the rest will come true.

Argus: "Bullshit!"

Kesey: You can't do it any other way. You work from the heart out, you don't work from the issue down.

Argus: You don't think it's a heartfelt thing, making revolution. You don't think it means anything? . . .

Kesey: I had to spend six months in jail, taking all the stuff you're talking about first hand, over and over, until you realize that what they want you to do is what you're doing. . . . As long as that action is taking place, as long as you take up the gauntlet, you'll have somebody to slap you. (Kesey, *Kesey's Garage Sale* 205)

The "individual sanity" expressed here is a position closer to Big Chief's at the end of the novel than to McMurphy's during it.

Of course it still may be argued that without McMurphy's sacrifice, Big Chief never would have achieved the sanity he does. As valid as such an idea may first appear, it is qualified *throughout the novel* by Kesey's treatment of McMurphy. In an interview in 1963, Kesey's words seem echoes of Emersonian self-reliance: "Look. I don't intend to let anybody make me live in *less* of a world than I'm capable of living in. Babbs once said it perfectly: *A man should have the right to be as big as he feels it's in him to be*. People are reluctant to permit this" (Lish 18). At first McMurphy seems to be "big" from the Chief's point of view, but by the end of the novel, his cap is "too small" for the Chief to wear. McMurphy does not become increasingly self-reliant as the novel progresses; rather, he becomes increasingly dependent on the ward members for direction. McMurphy may seem to achieve a kind of heroism *as defined by the members of the ward*, but the reader is meant to judge McMurphy's "sanity" (in response to the ward's wishes) as a loss of "individual sanity." The ward members first "con" and then "sacrifice" McMurphy in their attempt to overcome Big Nurse:

We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up . . . rising and standing like one

of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters. (304)

McMurphy's description as a zombie emphasizes his conformity to the wishes of the ward members. How admirable can McMurphy be when the reader remembers Big Chief saying, at the beginning of the novel, that the black aides, like McMurphy in the above passage, operate "on beams" (their beams from Big Nurse) and that the wheelchair Chronics are "obedient under [Big Nurse's] beam" (29)? By the end of the novel, McMurphy is as obedient to the desires of the ward as the Chronics and blacks were to Big Nurse's desires at the novel's beginning. For Kesey, any sort of conformity means a loss of individual sanity.

In commenting on *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey has repeatedly stressed "conditioning" as important (Grunwald 2). McMurphy is conditioned by the ward members into accepting his role as hero and with it the eventual necessity of strangling Big Nurse:

We made him stand and hitch up his black shorts like they were horsehide caps, and push back his cap with one finger like it were a ten-gallon Stetson, slow, mechanical gestures—and when he walked across the floor you could hear the iron in his bare heels ring sparks out of the tile. (305)

Not only do the ward members condition McMurphy to accept his role they also make him take on the image of the cowboy hero. This transformation, however, is not entirely successful because McMurphy's gestures are "mechanical"—a word that does not link him to the prohuman, anticombine forces he is often seen as representing. If anything, the word "mechanical" might be seen as linking McMurphy with his opponent and supposed opposite—Big Nurse, whom Big Chief described early in the novel as a "watchful robot" (an image similar to "zombie") that looks after its network of wires "with mechanical insect skill" (26).

In contrast to Big Nurse's and McMurphy's acquiescence to group pressure suggested in the dehumanizing imagery above is Big Chief's "humanizing" ability to make his own choices by the end of the novel. These choices reflect a growing self-reliance that comes out of a matrix of attitudes in opposition to those producing conformity.* Some of these attitudes come from his family. His Papa says, "if you don't watch it people will force you one way or the other into doing what they think you should do, or into just being mule-stubborn and doing the opposite out of spite" (198). The Chief's father implies that a person is controlled either in conformity to the wishes of others or *in rebellion* against them. He goes on to illustrate this apparent paradox by

pointing to one of the Chief's uncles, who became a lawyer "purely to prove he could, when he'd rather poke salmon in the fall than anything" (198).

By the end of the novel all the characters, except Big Chief, either conform to society or become "mule stubborn" and rebel against it. Judging from the comments of the Chief's father, none of these characters has made an individual choice. Early in the novel, Big Chief is "stubborn," pretending to be deaf and dumb because he feels that people will not listen to him anyway. McMurphy, as well, can be seen as stubborn when he arrives on the ward:

"Ya know, ma'am," he says, "ya know—what is the ex-act thing somebody always tells me about the rules. . . ."

He grins. They both smile back and forth at each other, sizing each other up.

". . . just when they figure I'm about to do the dead opposite."
(24)

In this passage, McMurphy limits his individual choice because he *reacts* to Big Nurse rather than acting as an individual. But what is also telling is the equation of McMurphy and Big Nurse, smiling back and forth, "sizing each other up."

Kesey presents a number of comparisons between these "supposedly" strident opponents. Both must exert self-control to play by the rules of their "battle." Although Big Nurse calls McMurphy "a manipulator," she herself is "a manipulator" par excellence who continually acts to expert her power and control over others. Nevertheless, her power is revealed as an illusion as the novel progresses. In reality, Big Nurse acts as an agent who enforces a conformity to the rules of "outside society," whereas McMurphy becomes an agent of conformity to the wishes of the ward members' "inside society." Both are used by their respective societies, which deny their individuality and pit them against one another as combatants. Their similarity is stressed in the aftermath of their final "showdown": Big Nurse's face is described as "bloated blue" after she has nearly been strangled, and McMurphy's eyes have purple bruises around them after his lobotomy (306, 307). The similar bruises result from their socially imposed roles rather than from the exercise of individual choice.

Of course, Big Nurse may have lost any chance for individuality long before she ever heard of McMurphy. But McMurphy is given a chance to see the importance of retaining his identity, a chance he fails to take advantage of. After McMurphy learns that Big Nurse controls his length of stay in the asylum, he decides to conform to her demands, becoming what the ward members call "cagey." Although McMurphy's retreat from rebellion may be viewed as a loss of personal courage or as a structural device to heighten the action, this retreat also allows him to have glimpses of his "bind": if he conforms to Big Nurse's

demands, he loses his status as ward “hero”; if he rebels against her, he may be committed forever. Kesey, however, wants the reader to see that either choice will limit McMurphy’s overall freedom because external pressures, rather than McMurphy’s own internal preferences, are forcing him to choose.

McMurphy’s “bind” is illustrated after McMurphy meets Harding’s wife:

“What do you think?” Harding says.

McMurphy starts. “She’s got one hell of a set of chabobs,” is all he can think of. “Big as Old Lady Ratched’s.”

“I didn’t mean physically, my friend, I mean what do you—”

“Hell’s bells, Harding! What do you want out of me? A marriage counsellor? All I know is this: nobody’s very big in the first place, and it looks to me like everybody spends their whole life tearing everybody else down. . . .” (174)

Like Harding, the ward members want “something out of” McMurphy and use their group pressure to tear him down, an action that seems paradoxical because they also idealize him. But in this novel, being idealized is dangerous. As his conversation with Harding continues, McMurphy begins to realize the danger of and pressure behind the ward’s admiration of him. So he “glares” at “the other patients” and yells “All of you! Quit bugging me, goddammit!” (174).

The conflict between individual choice and social pressure is crucial to the novel. For Kesey, any kind of social pressure can “condition” the individual and destroy his freedom of choice, as McMurphy begins to see in the ward member’s behavior:

“Hell’s bells, listen to you,” McMurphy says. “All I hear is gripe, gripe, gripe. About the nurse or the staff or the hospital. Scanlon wants to bomb the whole outfit. Sefelt blames the drugs. Fredrickson blames his family trouble. Well, you’re all just passing the buck.” (181)

McMurphy even goes on, a few lines later, to suggest that getting rid of Big Nurse would not get rid of “the deep down hang-up that’s causing the gripe” (*Cuckoo’s Nest* 181).

The reason behind this “deep down hang-up” is something that McMurphy is not able to realize because he cannot see the full extent of the seductive power of social control. McMurphy is able to understand that the ward members as individuals lack self-reliance and also that, as a group, they are conning him:

“I couldn’t figure it at first, why you guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior. Then I just happened to find out about the way the nurses have the big say as to who gets discharged and who doesn’t. And I get wise awful damned fast. I said, ‘Why those slippery bastards have *conned* me, snowed me into holding their bag. If that don’t beat all, conned ol’ R. P. McMurphy.” (182)

But McMurphy assumes that the ward members “con” him so that they can take Big Nurse’s pressure off themselves. When he finds that most of the Acutes are voluntary and can leave whenever they want, he gets a “puzzled look on his face like there’s something that isn’t right, something that he can’t put his finger on” (182). What McMurphy cannot understand is the ward’s responsibility, as a group, for reinforcing its patients’ feelings of powerlessness, feelings that do not arise simply from Big Nurse’s authoritarianism.

When Billy Bibbit blames his own voluntary commitment on the fact that he is “not big and tough” and does not have “the guts,” McMurphy “turns round to the rest of the guys and opens his mouth to ask something else, and then closes it when he sees how they are looking at him.” The ward members stand in front of McMurphy, their “row of eyes aimed at him like a row of rivets” (185). This image, in part, conveys the social pressure and guilt “aimed” at conditioning McMurphy’s behavior. But the image carries more sinister associations as well. A few pages earlier, the “metal door” of the shock shop looked “out with its rivet eyes” (269). Through this association Kesey suggests that McMurphy is receiving the ward members’ version of “shock therapy.” The patients want McMurphy to conform to their expectations in the way that electroshock in the novel is used as a means to make deviants conform to “outside” society.

After the ward’s “treatment,” McMurphy embraces the role of savior that the group has presented to him, a role that leads ultimately to his lobotomy. In fact, McMurphy’s individuality undergoes a “lobotomy” as the result of group pressure long before Big Nurse orders the actual one. Kesey underscores the callousness of McMurphy’s manipulation when the whole ward passively watches his being subdued by the orderlies after he has attempted to strangle Big Nurse. The ward knows he is headed for an actual lobotomy, but not one of them helps because such an action would force them to admit that they are responsible for McMurphy’s position. In an attempt to deflect this responsibility, Big Chief often calls the struggle between Big Nurse and McMurphy a “game.” For the ward members this contest, among other things, provides excitement in their otherwise dull lives.

Only three of the twenty Acutes who condition McMurphy to accept his role as ward hero remain to find out what happens to him. It might be argued that it would be too depressing for them to see McMurphy after his

lobotomy, but their deflection of responsibility from the person they have victimized, conned, and manipulated points out the negative feelings Kesey has about the final effects of “social conditioning.” What Kesey is advancing, cynically and unromantically, is the necessity for a person to look after his own individuality. It seems likely that Kesey sees McMurphy as a more positive figure when he first arrives on the ward than when he sacrifices himself for the ward members at the end.

McMurphy’s problems are both his lack of awareness of the dangers of social control and his unwitting acceptance of some forms of it. Early in the novel he is “a moving target that’s hard to hit” (89). But later he becomes “a fool” because he is conned by others into ignoring his own individuality. As Big Chief says, “You got to understand that as soon as a man goes to help somebody, he leaves himself wide open” (131). Such a message is undoubtedly unpleasant to people who would like to believe in sacrifice for the sake of others; Kesey’s novel, however, contains no such “elevated message.”

What, after all, has McMurphy’s “rebellion” accomplished? Billy Bibbit and Cheswick have killed themselves, and all the Acutes except Scanlon, Martini, and Big Chief discharge themselves from the ward before the lobotomized McMurphy returns. For those who have left, “the game” is over. They have, in a sense, “won” in pitting their warrior against Big Nurse. But there is no solid evidence that any of the discharged patients has taken responsibility for his role in McMurphy’s destruction. Nor is there evidence that any of the ward members has become sane. Some have simply transferred themselves to other wards. Harding’s return to his wife gives no indication that any of his problems have cleared up. Although they have discharged themselves, Sefelt and Fredrickson are still faced with the “double bind” of epileptic fits or rotting gums. Though the composition of the ward has changed, nothing significant has happened to any of the ward members—except Big Chief.

Big Chief is Kesey’s most complex creation in *Cuckoo’s Nest* because he is both a character in his own right and one whose perspective controls the reader’s. Although the Chief cannot be termed a character who intentionally attempts to deceive, he is a character whose insanity *and* humanity cause him to distort facts in ways that disclose Kesey’s preoccupation with people’s dehumanization of themselves and others.

Big Chief’s distorted perspective reveals truths about the extent of dehumanization on the ward because much of his bizarre behavior is an attempt to avoid this dehumanization. His “deaf and dumb act” offers him a way out of degrading situations, but the problem with this tactic becomes evident to Big Chief when he finds the alienation of the “fog” more frightening than the hostile environment of Big Nurse’s ward. In avoiding the outside world and retreating into the “fog,” the Chief comes up against the terrifying sense of being alone without identity.

As Big Chief moves toward sanity, he begins to break out of the bind of having to choose either the hostile world or his own alienation. McMurphy, as a catalyst, may be partially responsible for prodding the Chief toward recovery, but Kesey wants the reader to see that Big Chief's sanity results from his own actions, especially after his last electroshock treatment when the Chief knows he "had them beat" (276).

There is, however, for the Chief no quick avenue to sanity, which seems to come mainly from his increasing sense of responsibility for his own actions. His first significant act is his vote in favor of the World Series. Initially the Chief attempts to believe that McMurphy is making him raise his hand by means of "wires." But immediately after making this assertion the Chief takes responsibility and says that he "lifted it" himself (136). This first acceptance of responsibility leads to others: his decision to go on the fishing trip, his support of McMurphy in fighting the orderlies, and his quick recovery from his last shock treatment.

What often happens, however, is an attempt by readers to give McMurphy exclusive credit for the Chief's growing sanity. Yet Big Chief is the only one of the ward members who gains his sanity. If McMurphy acts as a catalyst, to sanity, all of the other Acutes presumably should have benefited as well. Only the Chief, however, is meant to be seen as sane at the end.

Read carefully, the novel reveals the pattern of Big Chief's slowly growing sanity independent of McMurphy's aid. Twenty pages after he has voted in favor of the World Series, the Chief gets out of bed alone to look at the autumn night. Here he begins to recapture some of his former feelings about nature as he watches a dog wander about in the moonlight. That the dog is run over by a car reinforces the images of the power of the machine over the organic world, but the event doesn't distress Big Chief. In fact, the extensively birthmarked nurse who puts the Chief to bed might seem less sane than he does. This whole incident is independent of McMurphy's presence and points to Big Chief's growing individualism.

Immediately after the above incident, McMurphy begins to "get cagey" because he learns that Big Nurse has control over his length of commitment. In relationship to the pattern of the novel Kesey is suggesting that Big Chief is increasingly able to strengthen his self-reliance while McMurphy loses his: specifically, when McMurphy capitulates to the pressure of the ward members and becomes their leader once again at the end of this section (189-190).

In the next section, when McMurphy becomes the ward's leader once again, the Chief begins to remember his childhood in detail, independent of McMurphy's, or anyone else's, influence. Because these rather lengthy memories (197-203) precede McMurphy's offer of gum (205), it seems likely that they can be seen to have some influence on Big Chief's decision to speak. Take for instance a passage that occurs seven pages before the Chief speaks:

"I lay in bed all night . . . and thought it over, about my being deaf, about the years of not letting on I heard what was said and I wondered if I could ever act any other way again" (197-198). The memory that follows this quotation bears directly on the reasons why Big Chief began his "deaf and dumb" act; it is his memory of when he was treated as "invisible" by the federal agents who wanted the Chief's tribal land. After the memory, he is already predisposed to begin talking when he finds Geever taking the gum from under his bed. Such an argument does not deny McMurphy as a catalyst agent, but rather it emphasizes Big Chief's active part in preparing himself for sanity.

Big Chief's active role is most clear when he has his last electroshock treatment, after which he is able to speak to others and no longer feigns deafness—a change meant to indicate his growing sanity and ability to cope. Surprisingly little attention has been given Big Chief's fragmented thoughts immediately before his recovery from his last electroshock treatment. If, however, these thoughts are seen in the context of Big Chief's attempt to find a viable individualistic option for his life, the section makes sense. As the Chief searches his memory, images of dice coming up "snake-eyes" indicate his rejection of possible options:

My roll, *Faw*, Damn. Twisted again. Snake eyes.

The schoolteacher tell me you got a good head, boy, be something. . . .

Be what, Papa? A rug-weaver like Uncle R & J, Wolf? A blanket-weaver? or another drunken Indian?

I say, attendant, you're an Indian, aren't you?

Yeah, that's right.

Well, I must say, you speak the language quite well.

Yeah.

Well . . . three dollars of regular.

They wouldn't be so cocky if they knew what me and the *moon* have going. No damned regular indian . . .

He who—what is it?—walks out of step, hears another drum.

Snake eyes again. Hoo boy, these dice are *cold*. (274)

In this passage Big Chief rejects the standard options, from rug-weaver to alcoholic, available to an Indian in white or Indian society. At the end of the passage he also rejects his possible role as rebel (intimated by the paraphrasing of Thoreau's words). Ultimately Big Chief does not want to be cast in the role either of conformist or of rebel because both end with "snake eyes."

If Big Chief rejects both conformity and rebellion, what option is left for him? Here the dice imagery is important because at the end of the section the Chief sees that he has been loading the dice against himself (275). Only after

this realization can he “work himself out of the shock treatment. When he takes responsibility for his own actions, he knows he has “them beat” (275).

After his recovery from this, his last shock treatment, the Chief is able to see McMurphy from a less idealized perspective. He becomes aware that McMurphy forces himself to continue to take shock treatments because “every one of those faces on Disturbed had turned toward him and was waiting” (276). Although McMurphy attempts to pose as a heroic figure who can take anything that Big Nurse “dishes out,” Big Chief sees through the role: “But every time that loud speaker called for him to forgo breakfast and prepare to walk to Building One, the muscles in his jaw went taut and his whole face drained of color, *looking thin and scared*—the fact I had seen reflected in the windshield on the trip back from the coast” (276–277, italics mine). Group pressure forces McMurphy to play the role of hero, but the result is the draining of his individuality.

When Big Chief returns from his last electroshock treatment, he begins to understand the power exerted on him by the ward members. They begin to look at him as a hero: “everybody’s face turned up to me with a different look than they’d ever given me before” (277). And, as a result, Big Chief begins to realize “how McMurphy must’ve felt all these months with these faces screaming up at him” (277). The ward members are ready to see the former “deaf and dumb Injun” as a glorious “Wildman,” but Kesey’s point is that neither of these roles reflects the Chief’s real self. “Injun” and “Wildman” are roles that the group defines or has defined.

Perhaps Big Chief is the only character who actually maintains an awareness of his personal involvement in the process of playing roles at the end of the novel. To a large extent this awareness is the result of watching McMurphy become trapped by his roles. It is not by chance, then, that Big Chief kills McMurphy. It is not a mercy killing as some readers have argued, or an act of love, or a murder of the Chief’s former self.⁵ The murder is best understood in light of both group pressure and individual realization. It is the Chief’s last action as part of the group, and through it Big Chief is able to understand fully the extent to which McMurphy and he have been manipulated by the ward members. This awareness of the power of groups allows him to free himself from the members and to define himself as an individual.

As one of the ward’s members. Big Chief acts in the manner of a priest/executioner of a primitive society. The title of the novel is derived from a nursery rhyme, and as Bruce Carnes notices, counting rhymes were often used by “primitive tribes” to “select the human sacrifice offered to appease a wrathful god” (15). The idea of a sacrifice is apropos: not in order to “appease a wrathful god” but rather as the result of the ward members’ need to manipulate and destroy a victim both as a demonstration of their own power and as a way to scapegoat the guilt resulting from the destruction of the individual.

The notion that Kesey intended McMurphy as a sacrificial victim finds support in the novel. When McMurphy returns from the lobotomy, Big Chief denies that the lobotomized form has a name—a denial comparable to a ritual common to sacrifices: the victim's namelessness before sacrifice. Big Chief, however, attempts to argue that McMurphy's form will be used by Big Nurse as an example to others of what happens to those who buck the system. In reality, the ward members themselves are more responsible for McMurphy's destruction than Big Nurse is.

Big Chief, however, is more than simply an executioner performing the will of the ward members who have sacrificed McMurphy's individualism to their own manipulative needs. Earlier in the novel, Big Chief had seen McMurphy as "a giant come out of the sky to save us from the 'Combine'" (255). Later he sacrifices "this giant" not to the "Combine" but to fulfill the collective will of the ward members, which is inseparably his own. It is immediately after he kills McMurphy that Big Chief realizes the extent of his own manipulation and his responsibility in McMurphy's death.

It is interesting that Big Chief deflects this realization from direct expression:

I lay for a while, holding the covers over my face, and thought I was being pretty quiet, but Scanlon's voice hissing from his bed let me know I wasn't

"Take it easy, Chief," he said. "Take it easy. It's okay." (309)

Big Chief's crying here might be explained as the result of his grief over having to destroy the lobotomized form of his onetime friend and leader, McMurphy. But more is suggested if Big Chief's reaction is connected with his description of the actual murder:

The big, hard body had a tough grip on life. It fought a long time against having it taken away, flailing and thrashing around so much I finally had to lie full length on top of it and scissor the kicking legs with mine while I mashed the pillow into the face. I lay there on top of the body what seemed days. Until the thrashing stopped. Until it was still a while and had shuddered once and was still again. (309)

What is noticeable about this description is its dehumanization of McMurphy, who is referred to as "it" or "the body." Here Big Chief, fulfilling his role as the ward member's priest/executioner, has completely dehumanized another human being. Viewed in the context of Big Chief's murder of McMurphy, it might seem ironic that so much attention has been paid to McMurphy's

sexist and racist postures in the novel. They may be indefensible, but in the novel their expression as an indication of an individual's prejudice and stereotyping might be judged as less menacing and destructive than the type of dehumanization that is socially enforced.

In killing McMurphy, Big Chief has, as the ward's "representative," direct experience of the power of a social group over an individual. He has been both a participant in exerting the group's power and a witness in recording the effect of that power on the individual. He cries after McMurphy's death because he realizes that both he and McMurphy not only have been used by the ward members but also have accepted the roles that the members have provided for them—executioner and victim. In rejecting McMurphy's cap as too small, Big Chief also rejects his attachment to any social role because it can lead only to the roles of victimizer or victim. In his rejection of the social role that led to McMurphy's lobotomy and murder, Big Chief proves that he is "bigger" than any of the other characters. He is able to understand the terrible power of groups and, more than that, the power of the individual to reject social control. It is this second realization that leads to his escape from the institution and his freedom.

Such an escape, as uplifting as it might appear in relationship to the assertion of an individual's freedom, is not without qualification in the novel. A question might be raised about what exactly Big Chief escapes to. There is some suggestion that he might become like the other Indians who "are spearing salmon in the spillway" below the "big hydro-electric dam," an image of the survival of individualism under the immensity of the technocratic superstructure of American society. However, his main preference is "to look over the country around the gorge again" because, as he says, "I been away a long time" (311).

On the surface, this rather tentative ending, bordering on nostalgia, does not seem a potent enough answer to the socially destructive forces that Big Chief escapes. But the Chief's last line, "I been away a long time," also echoes Huck Finn's last line, "I been there before" (Clemens 299).⁶ And likewise, Big Chief's escape to The Dalles may be reminiscent of the impossibility of Huck's complete escape from social forces by being "ahead of the rest." But the connection between Huck Finn and Big Chief is not simply one of tentative escapes. Both are storytellers who recount their pasts and, in so doing, reveal their inability to escape. In each novel the reader is given little about the possibilities of each of these characters' lives after their respective escapes to freedom. The only definite action is the narration of the story itself. However, there is a paradox in the telling of each story because in doing so the narrator still is tied to the social forces he has supposedly escaped. On one level, the narration recounts an individual's escape. Simultaneously, on another level, the narration repeals an individual's inability fully to escape because

the individual independence that is formed in repudiation of society is also inextricably linked to it.

In *Cuckoo's Nest* the Chief's growth in his sense of responsibility for his own actions leads ultimately to his escape from the asylum. But that same responsibility carries with it the burden of guilt for his role in murdering McMurphy. The individual responsibility that allows Big Chief to escape also binds him to his past actions in the asylum. When Big Chief played deaf and dumb at the beginning of *Cuckoo's Nest*, he may have swung from his alienation in the "fog" to his fear of the hostile world of the ward, but he did not feel any guilt. Guilt, however, drives Big Chief's narration, which must finally be seen as confessional: "It's gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guy—and about McMurphy. I been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters . . ." (8). The "truth even if it really didn't happen" is the Chief's final inability to escape the ward because his shadowy sense of freedom at the end is irrevocably tied to his escape from the asylum. The act of murder that allows the Chief to realize his own and McMurphy's manipulation at the hands of the ward members is the same act that, because of his newly acquired sense of responsibility, produces the guilt that drives the narration. By the end of the novel Big Chief has traded his initial freedom from guilt (due to his personal denial of responsibility for his own actions) for a freedom from social control (due to his acceptance of responsibility and its attendant guilt). It is perhaps fitting then that Big Chief's narration should begin as if he were once again back on the ward.

WORKS CITED

- Barsness, John A. "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress." *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 23 (1969): pp. 27–33.
- Baurecht, William C. "Separation, Initiation, and Return: Schizophrenic Episode in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Midwest Quarterly* 23 (1982): pp. 279–293.
- Beidler, Peter G. "From Rabbits to Men: Self-Reliance in the Cuckoo's nest.:" *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 56–59.
- Benert, Annette. "The Forces of Fear: Kesey's Anatomy of Insanity." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 22–26.
- Boardman, Michael M. "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: Rhetoric and Vision." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 9 (1979): pp. 171–183.
- Bross, Addison C. "Art and Ideology: Kesey's Approach to Fiction." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 60–64.
- Carnes, Bruce, *Ken Kesey*. Boise State University Western Writers Series 12. Boise: Boise State University Press, 1974.
- Clemens, Samuel L. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 1885. New York: Norton, 1977.
- De Bellis, Jack. "Alone No More: Dualism in American Literary Thought." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): p. 73.
- . "Facing Things Honestly: McMurphy's Conversion." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 11–13.

- Falk, Marcia Y. Letter. *New York Times* 5 Dec. 1971. Rpt. in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest": *Text and Criticism*. Ed. John C. Pratt. New York: Viking, 1973: pp. 450-453.
- Forrey, Robert. "Ken Kesey's Psychopathic Savior: A Rejoinder." *Modern Fiction Studies* 21 (1975): pp. 222-230.
- Gallagher, Edward J. "From Folded Hands to Clenched Fists: Kesey and Science Fiction." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 49-50.
- Grunwald, Beverly. "Kesey: A Sane View from *Cuckoo's Nest*." *Women's Wear Daily* Dec. 1975: pp. 1-3.
- Hardy, William J. "Chief Bromden: Kesey's Existentialist Hero." *North Dakota Quarterly* 18 (1980): pp. 72-83.
- Herrenkohl, Ellen. "Regaining Freedom: Sanity in Insane Places." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 42-44.
- Hort, Leslie. "Bitches, Twitches, and Eunuchs: Sex Role Failure and Caricature." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 14-17.
- Hunt, John W. "Flying the Cuckoo's Nest: Kesey's Narrator as Norm." *Lex et Scientia* 13 (1977): pp. 26-32.
- Kesey, Ken. *Kesey's Garage Sale*. New York: Viking, 1973.
- . *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Viking, 1962.
- Leeds, Barry H. *Ken Kesey*. New York: Ungar, 1981.
- Lish, Gordon. "'What the Hell You Looking in Here For, Daisy Mae?' An Interview with Ken Kesey." *Genesis West* 2 (1963): pp. 17-29.
- Martin, Terence. "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the High Cost of Living." *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (1973): pp. 43-55.
- Murphy, Kevin. "Illiterate's Progress: The Descent into Literacy in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Texas studies in Literature and Language* 26 (1984): pp. 363-387.
- Sasoon, R. L. Rev. of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. *Northwest Review* 6 (1963): pp. 116-120.
- Sherwood, Terry G. "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the Comic Strip." *Critique*, 13 (1971): pp. 96-109.
- Sunderland, Janet R. "A Defense of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *English Journal* 61 (1972): pp. 28-31.
- Tanner, Stephen L. *Ken Kesey*. Twayne's United States Authors Series 444. Boston: Twayne, 1983.
- Waldmeir, Joseph J. "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 5 (1964): pp. 192-204.

THOMAS J. SLATER

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest:
A Tale of Two Decades

When adapting Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* for the screen, Milos Forman faced one very significant problem: the novel's narrator is a paranoid-schizophrenic who sees things that nobody else can. Seen through the eyes of the six-foot-eight American Indian named Chief Bromden, *Cuckoo's Nest's* main setting of mental ward at the Oregon State Hospital becomes a surrealistic world controlled by hidden wires and fog machines that help the head nurse and her staff to work their will on the patients. Although the Chief's vision is comic and absurd, it also reveals the reality of the world and the events that take place. As he accurately notes, "It's the truth, even if it didn't happen" (Kesey 1962, p. 13).

Forman also faced the problem of making Kesey's liberal early-sixties' theme of fighting conformity relevant to the mid-seventies. Forman had to make the story contemporary without losing its essence. He was successful mainly because he gave the novel's unusual narrative perspective to his camera and transformed Kesey's mythic characters and surrealist setting into human beings in a unique but recognizable world.

To many readers, the novel's apparent hero is Randle Patrick McMurphy, a big, boastful Irishman who lies his way into the Oregon State Hospital to escape the drudgery of a prison work farm. Once there, he leads the patients in a fight against the hospital staff's attempt to impose mind control. The

Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation, Eds., Wendell Aycock and Michael Schoenecke (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1988), pp. 45-58.

narrator, Chief Bromden, sees McMurphy as a hero because he merely laughs at the whole situation on the mental ward instead of living in fear.¹ Through his swaggering, boastful nature and his defiance of conventions despite the consequences, McMurphy eventually helps instill the other men on the ward with the confidence to face life again. He creates a virtual metamorphosis in his fellow patients, which leads the Chief to present him in mythic terms.²

For example, the Chief's depiction of McMurphy as a Christ figure is blatantly obvious. McMurphy comes into the ward, gathers his followers about him, instructs them in how to live, and then sacrifices himself for them even though he has done nothing wrong. He dies merely because he is a threat to the status quo. The Chief leaves no doubt about his analogy when he includes a description of the electroshock therapy table as looking like a cross (Kesey 1962, p. 64) and of himself as wanting to touch McMurphy merely because "he's who he is" (Kesey 1962, p. 188). A fishing trip that McMurphy organizes is also directly out of the Christ story. McMurphy leads his twelve followers out to sea and goes down into the hold, but when chaos breaks out on board, he is forced to come back up and calm everything down (Kesey 1962, pp. 191–218). The Chief completes the analogy by saying that the last time any of them saw him conscious "he let himself cry out" (Kesey 1962, p. 267).

Despite this convincing portrait, McMurphy is not really the man that the Chief presents him to be. Throughout the novel, Kesey subtly undercuts the Chief's biased presentation of McMurphy as a mythic figure. At mid-point in the story, McMurphy learns that Nurse Ratched (the ward's controller and novel's villain) has the power to keep him in the hospital as long as she wants. He first responds by fully cooperating with her so that he can gain his release (Kesey 1962, pp. 148–149). But then he changes his mind and spends the rest of the novel doing exactly what he wants, consciously antagonizing Big Nurse (Ratched's nickname). The Chief never explains why McMurphy becomes rebellious again, but he does reveal several factors operating on his hero's mind at that point in the novel. McMurphy feels responsible for the suicide of fellow patient Charlie Cheswick (Kesey 1962, p. 151), and he also discovers that the other men are in the hospital only because they do not have the courage to be on the outside (Kesey 1962, p. 168). McMurphy therefore realizes that conformity and fear are interrelated, feeding on each other and producing the kind of hollow men that Nurse Ratched desires.

Thus, when McMurphy once more defies Nurse Ratched, he is acting under strong feelings of guilt and doubt. Just when Nurse Ratched believes that she is in full control of the ward, McMurphy deliberately smashes her office window, an act that the Chief relates in mythic terms as a calculated act of self-sacrifice (Kesey 1962, pp. 171–172). Most likely, McMurphy is attempting to redeem himself and preserve his self-identity. The Chief notes

that Nurse Ratched felt she had gained a “final victory” (Kesey 1962, p. 172). McMurphy is mainly fearful of losing his own soul, and he is not basically concerned with saving others.

Nurse Ratched is also a larger than life character in the novel. The Chief pictures her as a machine who sits at the center of a system (which he calls “The Combine”) that operates both outside and inside the ward to keep people contentedly going about their business without complaint. The Chief sees her battle with McMurphy as a struggle between two large conceptions of what America is, and his hero’s one chance of victory is to get Nurse Ratched to recognize her own humanity.

At the end of the novel, Kesey undercuts the mythic stature of both McMurphy and Ratched when fellow-patient Dale Harding denies that McMurphy is a Christ-figure while at the same time denying Big Nurse a chance to regain her power. She feels that if she can make an example of McMurphy, the ward will return to its former routine. Taking over the words of Christ, she tells Harding that McMurphy is going to return: “I would not say so if I was not positive. He will be back” (Kesey 1962, p. 268). Harding responds, “Lady, I think you’re so full of bullshit” (Kesey 1962, pp. 268–269). By finally dispelling the notion of McMurphy as Christ, Kesey makes it clear that the novel’s true hero is the Chief himself. Throughout the novel, the Chief undergoes a complete spiritual transformation and is ready at the end to continue struggling against society’s oppressiveness, but not by adopting McMurphy’s recklessness. He represents a middle path between these two extremes and exemplifies Kesey’s message of individual responsibility. The Chief’s story represents the end of one phase of his battle and the beginning of another.³

Milos Forman remains true to the spirit of Kesey’s novel by keeping his basic message but renovating the story to make it relevant to the mid-seventies. In the film, Forman’s camera appropriately takes over the narrative perspective of both the Chief and Ken Kesey. Like the Chief in the novel, the camera presents McMurphy as a mythic figure while, at the same time, undercutting that notion. In the end, the viewer must realize his own responsibility for going beyond the philosophies of both McMurphy and Nurse Ratched. Once again, the Chief provides the final example to be followed.

In contrast to the book, the movie establishes the Chief as the only character that McMurphy sets free because he is the only one who has gained the courage to act on his own. Forman gives the story a contemporary meaning by showing it as a struggle for power among McMurphy, Ratched, and Harding. On its surface, Forman’s film appears to have a conservative message because the hero is battling an oppressive social system dominated by a woman and a homosexual (Dale Harding), but his film is neither sexist nor anti-gay. His depiction of all three characters as failing to achieve or maintain power because of their very lust for it presents his true theme. Forman shows that people who

strive for power are susceptible to their own human weaknesses, a fact that everyone needs to realize. In the end, each individual must work towards his or her own freedom or remain entrapped by the whims of those in power.

Forman begins by translating the Chief's characterization of McMurphy as a mythic hero onto the screen. The opening shot shows the red light of daybreak glowing out over a dark mountain. The music starts with the sound of an American Indian drumbeat, which is joined by a gentle folk guitar and a mournful harmonica that also has a mocking tone to it, like something has passed but does not really merit deep sympathy. Emerging from the deep shadows of the mountain are the headlights of the police car bringing McMurphy from the prison camp to the hospital.

In this one shot, Forman creates McMurphy as a mythic figure. McMurphy represents the freedom and elemental forces associated with the American wilderness. The mountain becomes an important symbol of manhood. When the Chief is ready to leave the hospital at the end of the film, he tells the comatose McMurphy that he is "big as a damn mountain." The native and folk music associates McMurphy with the basic instincts of Americans who are closely related to the land and do not have much power, people such as American Indians, farmers, and mountain people. The harmonica sounds like a lament, but McMurphy is not a character who would mourn anything and so the slightly mocking tone is appropriate. When the Chief makes his escape at the end, the harmonica tune becomes a brief, joyously orchestrated crescendo before lapsing again into a gentle murmur. The music thus emphasizes Forman's theme that the human spirit can, at times, overcome despair and burst forth in triumph.

For the second shot of the film, Forman pans from a window inside the hospital ward across the bed of one of the patients and on through the room. The shot is from the viewpoint of a patient who could have been watching the car coming and then turned to look back across the room. Scattered patches of red light coming from the window break the darkness of the ward, like sunlight seen from under water. Forman maintains the association of the red light with freedom and the idea of the men being kept like fish in an aquarium throughout the entire film. The ward's red exit signs constantly beckon the men towards a different world, one whose uncertainty makes them reluctant to leave their safe confines, despite the abuse they suffer.⁴

Forman's starting the shot from the barrier formed between the two worlds by the wall and the opposite movement of the camera from the opening shot further support his quick division of the world in the film between the outside and the inside. This division does not exist in the novel, where the Combine operates everywhere. In the film, McMurphy enables the men to experience freedom and dignity by taking them away from the hospital by involving them in sports such as basketball and fishing. McMurphy starts

simply, within the ward. When he arrives, four of the men, Charlie Cheswick (Sidney Lassick), Billy Bibbit (Brad Dourif), Harding (William Redfield), and Martini (Danny DeVito) are playing cards.⁵ McMurphy gathers his first follower by flashing his own deck of pornographic playing cards at Martini and luring him away. This action demonstrates that McMurphy is presenting the men an alternative reality more appealing to them than anything they have experienced before. Forman, however, has already begun to undercut McMurphy. When the police first take the handcuffs off him, McMurphy begins jumping around and screeching like a monkey. The action is funny, but it also shows that an uncontrolled nature is not completely desirable. Society has good reasons for taming the forces with which McMurphy is associated. But, in the mental hospital, it has gone too far. The film, therefore, like the novel, must demonstrate that a middle path between the extremes of McMurphy and Ratched does exist.

McMurphy is also a Christ-figure in the film, but Forman suggests the idea much more subtly than the Chief does in the novel. He shows McMurphy on the ward for the first time exercising with the other men before the daily therapy session. Forman shoots him from behind as McMurphy stands briefly with his arms stretched out in the crucifix position. The camera angle is significant because it emphasizes that McMurphy is not conscious of others seeing him as a Christ-figure. In the film, he never shows any intention of playing the hero. He makes all of his challenges to Nurse Ratched when he has no knowledge of her power to keep him institutionalized indefinitely. He acts openly only because he does not understand the risk he is taking.

For example, during the scene in which McMurphy tries teaching the Chief (Will Sampson) how to play basketball, Forman demonstrates the enormity of his spirit in comparison with the other men. McMurphy climbs onto the shoulders of another patient, Bancini. When Bancini begins to run around, McMurphy starts screaming. "Hit me, Chief! I'm open." His voice fills the soundtrack, giving the impression that he is now the dominant force at the hospital, but Forman's camera is on Nurse Ratched watching from an omnipotent position inside the hospital. She maintains the power and McMurphy's optimism is false. Once again. Forman uses the perspective of another patient, this time one who is standing on the sidelines, whose simple vision both supports and undercuts McMurphy's lofty stature.

In the fishing trip sequence, Forman undercuts McMurphy through a combination of the camera's point of view and an alteration in the narrative structure. In this scene, Forman strongly emphasizes the idea that the men are taking on new identities. McMurphy manages to confiscate a rental boat by telling the harbor manager that the men are doctors from the mental hospital. Forman captures the men in individual shots as McMurphy introduces them, and they all look suddenly sophisticated.⁶ McMurphy gets the men

started fishing and then goes below deck with his girlfriend. Martini immediately leads the men up front to try to peek in the windows. Chaos erupts when Cheswick turns around, sees no one on deck, and leaves the steering wheel. The boat starts going crazy, McMurphy comes up on deck, and Taber (Christopher Lloyd) hooks a fish. All of the men struggle together to bring it in while Harding and Cheswick fight over the steering wheel. Forman pulls up to a high shot to show the boat going in a circle, thus communicating one of the problems with McMurphy's influence. Though the men are feeling free, McMurphy is actually leading them in circles. They are merely bouncing from Nurse Ratched's control into his.

In this shot, Forman copies the Chief's narrative perspective in the book exactly. The difference is that the Chief interprets what he sees in purely optimistic terms, whereas Forman's shot captures the full complexity of the situation. Although he is a part of the group, the Chief also imagines himself high above the men and sees their laughter crashing in waves on shores all over the world (Kesey 1962, p. 212). In the film, the Chief is not even on the boat, a fact relevant not only to Forman's change of narrator, but also to his alteration of the story to emphasize his own distinct themes. In the novel, the fishing trip and the basketball game between the patients and the aides both take place after McMurphy has already learned about Nurse Ratched's power over him. Forman places both events before McMurphy's discovery of this fact. Thus, McMurphy is not taking a conscious risk in the film; he is acting out of a pure desire to prove himself to the men and have some pleasure, feeding his own ego and libido at the same time. Kesey makes the trip a major step in McMurphy's aid to the Chief's transformation, but Forman replaces the theme of spiritual growth with an examination of individuals in a struggle for power. The three characters who seek it, McMurphy, Ratched, and Harding, all fail, leaving each of the men ultimately responsible for facing the world on his own.

By showing that he never consciously plays a hero's role, Forman undercuts McMurphy's mythic image thoroughly. In the novel, when McMurphy smashes the glass in Nurse Ratched's office window, the Chief describes him as carefully contemplating his action beforehand. In the film, McMurphy acts out of anger while surrounded by chaos. Taber has been carried away screaming after being burned by a cigarette that became lodged in his pant cuff, and Cheswick is hollering to get his confiscated cigarettes back. McMurphy first tries to silence him, but then goes in frustration to smash the window.

Similarly, at the end of the novel, McMurphy simply chooses not to leave the ward, and the Chief once again allows for the possibility that McMurphy's act is a heroic gesture. Forman shows McMurphy as unable to leave; when the aides arrive in the morning, he is still passed out on the floor from the previous night's party. Forman's shot of him lying there summarizes his conception

of the character. The empty liquor bottle next to him, its former contents a source of both liberation and entrapment, is a reflection of McMurphy himself. Without self-control, the spirits of both have been wasted.

When McMurphy finally attacks Nurse Ratched, he is again acting impulsively. Shortly before, he is about to escape when Billy Bibbit's body is discovered. McMurphy's girlfriends call from outside the open window, but he cannot keep himself from returning to the scene. Nurse Ratched attempts to reassert the old order, and McMurphy, realizing that he is losing his power, attacks. Even if his action is interpreted as a sacrifice, his own lack of conscious behavior has created the entire situation in the first place. Ultimately, McMurphy has no one but himself to blame for his suffering.

Jack Nicholson deserves much credit for creating McMurphy as a powerfully ambiguous character, both appealing and repulsive.⁷ When he acts like a baboon upon entering the hospital, Nicholson indicates that McMurphy is a character who lives on his own level of existence. This factor is the source of both his power and his downfall; he fascinates everyone, but no one can figure him out. All the patients think he is crazy for acting as boldly as he does, but follow him as if he were sane. All the doctors, and Nurse Ratched, believe he is sane, but treat him as if he were crazy. Meanwhile, the audience must question who is really mentally ill, the patients or the staff. Nicholson illustrates the power in McMurphy's own brand of insanity in one key scene.

McMurphy's attempt to lift a shower control panel seems idiotic at first. He begins by taking some deep breaths, working himself into a frenzy, and uttering some gibberish as if he were speaking in tongues. As he strains to lift the panel, every vein in his arms and neck seems to pop up. He is clearly entering his own distinct reality. When he fails and challenges the other patients for not even trying, he gains the admiration of his fellow patients. By contrast, Forman questions McMurphy's sanity most at a time that appears to be his peak. At the end of the party he creates on the ward, the night before he is supposed to leave, McMurphy sits down to wait while Billy Bibbit goes to make love to the prostitute, Candy (Maria Small). The ward is in chaos, and the men are all drunk. It is McMurphy's moment of triumph. He gazes around with a self-satisfied smirk on his face. The camera holds him in a long close-up, forcing the viewer to stop to consider the image deeply. McMurphy's destructiveness does not make him an admirable figure to follow.

If McMurphy's ideal world is one of complete disarray, Nurse Ratched's is one of total order. Forman reveals this aspect of her personality in his first shot of her entering the ward. She wears a black cape and hat that forms a perfect color balance between herself and the three black aides, who all wear starched white uniforms. Later, Forman uses red light, which indicated a new day dawning for the men in the opening shot of the film, to represent the entrance to what Nurse Ratched considers to be freedom. Significantly, the hallway of the

ward is lined with jail cells filled with men probably considered to be hopeless cases. The dominant empty whiteness represents the blank future toward which the hospital methods are leading the men. In one shot, a bright rectangular white light shines at the end of the hall, an image of the future. In contrast with *McMurphy*, Nurse Ratched promises a future devoid of life and, color; however, Forman never makes Nurse Ratched into a mythic figure. Instead, she is a very human character whose evil is greater than she realizes. She is as unconscious of her destructiveness as *McMurphy* is of his positive aspects.

The combination of Forman's camera and Louise Fletcher's performance truly defines Nurse Ratched as a person whose initially good intentions have been transformed into oppressiveness.⁸ Because she is not a character of mythic proportions, Nurse Ratched is never called Big Nurse in the film. She is even referred to by her first name, Mildred.

Forman presents Nurse Ratched as a character who genuinely believes that she has the patients' best interests at heart, and Louise Fletcher offers no hint that the situation might be otherwise. The most obvious example of her nonmaliciousness occurs at the staff meeting when the doctors are trying to decide what they will do with *McMurphy*. When Nurse Ratched calmly states that they should not pass on their problem by sending him back to the prison farm, the camera is unable to capture a note of malice. Her statement that she thinks they can help him is made away from the camera and is dramatically ambiguous.

In this scene, Forman's camera once again correlates exactly with the Chief's perspective in the novel, and the film is again more complex because Nurse Ratched is seen as a human being. The Chief's view of her is clearly dehumanizing. He imagines her taking a sip of coffee and setting the cup smoldering from the heat of her lips (136). The novel then requires the reader to discern between the Chief's point of view and reality. Nevertheless, Bromden clearly presents Nurse Ratched as a mechanistic villain. In the film, Nurse Ratched does not blatantly overrule the other doctors' diagnosis as she does in the book. Instead, they ask for her opinion as a skilled professional. The viewer must ponder what is wrong about her judgment, which seems perfectly logical. The distinction between Nurse Ratched as the villain and *McMurphy* as the hero becomes significantly blurred.

Paradoxically, even through Forman's Nurse Ratched is more human, she is also more evil. In the novel, the Chief describes her as only the Combine's representative (Kesey 1962, p. 165). In the film, there is no Combine. Nurse Ratched is the sole barrier between the men and the outside world, a fact that Forman strongly emphasizes when she returns to the ward in the morning after the party. She and the aides stand opposite the patients, forming a human wall between the men and the red exit sign beckoning them towards the outside.

Forman's presentation of Nurse Patched as the evil oppressor left him vulnerable to being accused of sexism, as Ken Kesey had been earlier.⁹ Kesey escapes the charge by virtue of the fact that not endowing Nurse Ratched with masculine qualities would completely ruin his novel's comic structure.¹⁰ But, superficially, Forman seems to go even further in his antifemale imagery. Except for Nurse Ratched's young impressionable aide, the other women in the film are either sexual treats and builders of male egos or castraters. The prostitute whom McMurphy takes along on the fishing trip and later brings onto the ward for the party represents the woman as treat. McMurphy first introduces her to the others by saying, "Boys, this here is Candy." Candy's function is obviously to help turn boys into men, and she succeeds with Billy Bibbit. When McMurphy is about to leave the hospital at the end of the party, he stays only because Billy wants a quick "date" with Candy. Through Billy, the other men also gain maturity. They eagerly wheel him up to the room where Candy awaits. McMurphy affirms the act's communal nature when he tells Billy, "I've got twenty-five dollars that says you burn this woman *down*." Eliminated from the film are references to the Chief's mother as the cause of his father's drinking and to Billy's mother as the cause of his shyness. Forman thus avoids any attacks on motherhood. He also removes from the story the young, intelligent, and humanitarian head nurse of another ward who completely opposes Nurse Ratched's methods.

Discarding the Chief as narrator necessitates these changes. The camera can only present what it sees, and no dialogue informs the audience about the patients' backgrounds. Using the camera as narrator also accounts partially for Forman's creation of Dale Harding as a more negative character than he is in the book. In both works, Harding is a weak-spirited homosexual, but Kesey explains that his personal problems originated from social factors when he was very young. He is intelligent, and McMurphy has no trouble accepting him.

Forman makes him a negative figure because he challenges McMurphy for power, counseling conformity to Nurse Ratched's wishes. Every time McMurphy attempts something new, refusing to take his medicine, trying to get the World Series on television, stealing the hospital bus, or organizing the patient's basketball team, Harding either opposes him or goes along very reluctantly. Harding is in a leadership position, running the patients' games and speaking like an intellectual at the first group therapy session, but he is intimidated by Nurse Ratched, and all his talk is meaningless. He is weak because he is more committed to holding empty power than to resolving his personal problems and becoming a real leader. Harding frustrates the other patients, particularly Taber, because he wants to keep their respect without taking any chances.

After McMurphy's attempt to lift the control panel, Harding realizes that he has lost his leadership position. In the next scene, he reluctantly joins the vote to watch the World Series on television. But Harding never gives

up his desire for power. When McMurphy receives his lobotomy, Harding immediately attempts to take his place and destroy the masculine image that the men are trying to hold on to. But the men will not let him, even though he alone acknowledges that McMurphy has finally been defeated for good. Harding is not McMurphy either as a card dealer or as a leader. In the end, he is still trapped inside his personal weaknesses by his desire for power. In the final shot of him, Harding is standing behind an iron gate, a picture representing his state of mind, as the Chief runs off into the night.

McMurphy continually challenges Harding's masculinity and insults him throughout the film. On the fishing boat, when he is introducing all the other men to the dock manager as doctors, he introduces Harding as mister. McMurphy is also constantly asserting his own sexual prowess, such as when he returns from electroshock therapy and tells the men, "Next woman who takes me on is going to light up like a pinball machine and pay off in silver dollars." McMurphy is thus a sexual hero as well as a spiritual one, and Forman is thereby able to satisfy his audience's contrasting desires for rebellion and reassurance. Through his revolt against bureaucratic control and association with freedom, McMurphy is a sixties' hero; but through his reassertion of a traditional social hierarchy, he is definitely one for the seventies.

Yet, the film does by no means condemn homosexuals. During the party sequence, when McMurphy seems to be firmly in charge, Forman does show homosexuality as acceptable. McMurphy calls Harding by his first name, Dale. Forman presents Fredrickson (Vincent Schiavelli) and Sefelt (William Duell), who are together throughout the film, as clearly homosexual. They dance together during the night, and aides push their beds apart the next morning. Scanlon also demonstrates deviant sexuality at the party by putting on a dress and nurse's cap. McMurphy never objects to Fredrickson, Sefelt, or Scanlon because they never challenge him. Scanlon has only one line in the whole film. Harding's offensiveness, therefore, is dearly because of his desire for power, and in this respect he is no different from either Nurse Ratched or McMurphy.

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Milos Forman manages to capture many important popular attitudes of the immediate post-Watergate era. His presentation of three characters who each fail in their struggle for power because of personal weaknesses matches the public's dominant beliefs about the fall of Richard Nixon. People did not tend to blame the political system for Watergate, but they did generally distrust social institutions. *Cuckoo's Nest* reflects this attitude, and Forman's emphasis on individual responsibility fit the "Me" decade's concern with personal development perfectly.¹¹

Forman's presentation of the outside world supports his theme of each person being responsible for working towards his or her own freedom. Forman's camera again parallels the Chief's narration in the novel by revealing

more about the world than most of the other characters seem to realize. Unlike those in the novel, however, Forman's references are very brief and require more interpretation from the viewer.

When the men go out on their fishing trip, they see mostly deserted streets. The few people who are around are as lifeless as the chronics on the ward. One couple has pulled a pair of folding chairs up to a television set playing in a department store window. They turn their backs on life in order to enjoy the culture presented to them. Forman thus presents television as another dictator of the social order.

When the men arrive at a trailer park to get McMurphy's girlfriend, an old man stares blankly at the camera. Upon their return from their fishing trip, a number of people line the dock, staring at the men just as blankly. These are people, young and old, who have been worn down, who go places to observe life rather than experience it themselves. When they are no longer able to do that, they just sit and stare. The vision that Forman thus presents of America in October of 1963 is not one filled with the optimism of the Kennedy Administration's Camelot, but of stifled individuals for whom being on the outside is no guarantee of freedom. Forman captures the social conformity that Kesey was attacking in his writing, and he does not pretend that McMurphy's victory would make much difference in it.

As indicated in the film's opening, McMurphy represents the unbridled freedom of the American wilderness. His opponent, Nurse Ratched, represents a highly structured and institutionalized social system, one that is concerned with men only as physical beings who need to perform as required without complaining. When the Chief throws the water control panel through a window at the end, he produces the unity of body and spirit for which McMurphy was striving. Hearing the crash, Taber wakes up and gives a triumphant yell; but he and the other men still remain inside the ward. Each of them, like each viewer, must take the first steps towards freedom on his own and be prepared to keep fighting to preserve it. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* expresses many of Milos Forman's long-held beliefs about power and feelings of compassion for the people who lack it.¹² By capturing the spirit of Ken Kesey's novel while also giving its meaning a contemporary significance, Forman gained a popular audience and established himself as a prominent film adaptor of contemporary American works.

NOTES

1. Ronald Wallace explains the comic structure of Kesey's novel, arguing, "What McMurphy learns in the course of the novel is how to control and direct his laughter, how to use it as an effective counter to repression and sterility. What he really learns, and nearly masters, is the typical pose of the comic spirit" (97).

2. Donald Palumbo traces the metamorphosis McMurphy produces in the other patients.

3. Wallace concludes,

The final result of the Chief's new knowledge is the novel itself. Bromden learns to perceive his life as a comic fiction and to transform that fiction into art. Laughing at himself and his society, he writes a novel that makes the reader laugh, thus perpetuating his own comic vision. Form and content merge as Bromden writes a book in praise of laughter that itself induces laughter. (112)

4. Stanley Kauffmann gives Forman particular credit for his control in these opening shots and also heaps praise on Nicholson.

5. Casting the patients was crucial to Forman: "Since [they] have few lines to say, [the] audience must remember each simply by their look" (Burke, "The Director's Approach," 15).

6. Michael Wood finds Forman's theme of individual responsibility clearly expressed in the scene of the men boarding the boat (4).

7. Pauline Kael provides significant insights into Jack Nicholson's careful handling of the McMurphy role, showing how Nicholson created ambiguity while avoiding the temptation to flaunt his shrewdness.

8. Alejan Harmetz explains the importance of Louise Fletcher's contributions.

9. Robert Forrey delivers charges of racism and sexism.

10. Ronald Wallace gives a significant defense of Kesey.

11. Social and political analysts verify Forman's assessment of the struggle for power and social institutions as matching public attitudes at mid-decade. For analysis of public opinions about Nixon and social institutions, see Muzzio (161) and Carroll (235).

12. Josef Skvorecky quotes Forman as saying,

I think all that which is noble, and which has remained in art and literature since ancient times . . . and which also is significant for strong contemporary works of art, has always concerned itself with injuries and injustices perpetrated against the individual. There, at the bottom of all those great works, are the injustices, which no social order will eliminate. Namely, that one is clever and the other is stupid, one is able and the other is incompetent, one is beautiful while the other is ugly, another might be honest, and yet another dishonest, and all of them are in some way ambitious. And it indeed does not matter that we are arriving at eternal themes. (84)

WORKS CITED

- Buckley, Tom. 1981. "The Forman Formula." *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 1 March: pp. 28, 31, 42-43, 50-53.
- Burke, Tom. 1976. "The Director's Approach—Two Wives." *New York Times*, 28 March 2: p. 15.
- Carroll, Peter N. 1982. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s*. New York: Holt Rinehart, and Winston.
- Forrey, Robert. 1975. "Ken Kesey's Psychopathic Savior: A Rejoinder." *Modern Fiction Studies* 21.2: pp. 222-230.

- Harmetz, Alejan. 1975. "The Nurse Who Rules The 'Cuckoo's Nest.'" *New York Times*, 30 Nov 2: p. 13.
- Kael, Pauline. 1975. "The Bull Goose Loony." *New Yorker*, 1 Dec.: pp. 131-136.
- Kauffmann, Stanley. 1975. "Jack High." *The New Republic* 13 Dec.: pp. 22-23.
- Kesey, Ken. 1962. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: New American Library.
- Muzzio, Douglas. 1982. *Watergate Games: Strategies, Choices, Outcomes*. New York: New University Press.
- Palumbo, Donald. 1983. "Kesey's and Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* "The Metamorphosis of Metamorphosis as Novel Becomes Film." *CEA Critic* 415.2: pp. 25-32.
- Skvorecky, Josef. 1971. *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A personal History of the Czech Cinema*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, Ltd.
- Wallace, Ronald. 1979. *The Last Laugh: Form and Affirmation in the Contemporary American Comic Novel*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Wood, Michael. 1976. "No But I Read the Book." *New York Review of Books*, 5 Feb.: pp. 3-4.

THOMAS H. FICK

*The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

In "The White Negro" Norman Mailer describes the "hipster" as a philosophical psychopath living on the fringes of society: "One is Hip or one is Square... one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or a Square cell, . . ." (339). Mailer's essay is a characteristically American attempt to define possibility as the product of stark opposites. Hip and Square quite explicitly translate into contemporary and psychological terms the opposing forces that have been the basis for much of our greatest literature: civilization and wilderness, Aunt Sally and the Territory.

The internalization of geography is an attempt to compensate for the disappearance or degeneration of a literal frontier. The West may still offer freedom, but in addition it frequently represents an exhaustive emptiness, or else (telescoping freedom and repression) inspires madness—both a consequence and a rejection of restrictive society. Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) is the classic portrayal of emptiness and despair erupting into violence on what was once the frontier, the California toward which Jack Burden drives, in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946), feeling that he is "drowning in West," in a motionless "ooze of History" (288). Five years later, J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield (*The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951) dreams of fleeing to a rustic cabin to live a sequestered life with his girl. Yet when he goes West it is not to freedom but to recover his shattered nerves in the rela-

Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature, Volume 43, Number 1/2. (1989): pp. 19–34.

tive restriction of a Hollywood sanatorium. But if, as these novels suggest, the West provides no ready-made opportunities for escape, there is another intangible and portable frontier which can be maintained by constantly calling attention to the defining extremes of freedom and restriction.¹ The modern frontiersman invests his energy in disruption rather than flight: he must be a fighter, not for the sake of violence or of winning permanent victories but for the clearer distinctions and hence greater freedom that conflict engenders.² Yet this investment in a conflict from which there is no easy flight often demands an emphasis on personal inviolability—on the public to the exclusion of the private man—which can be a condition of defeat.

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) concerns just such a man, one whose successes and failures can help us to understand the special demands of the psychic frontier. *Cuckoo's Nest* takes place in an Oregon insane asylum—a version of Holden's sanatorium. In *The Closed Frontier* Harold Simonson remarks that "one way of escaping nineteenth-century conventions was to go west, another way was to go 'beyond'" (140).³ Randle Patrick McMurphy, the protagonist of *Cuckoo's Nest*, does both. A footloose westerner, he ostentatiously transgresses the limits of society, much like Kesey himself, whose destination—Furthur [sic]—was emblazoned on the Pranksters' bus. McMurphy teaches the inmates of the insane asylum to create their own truths and identities, but to do so he must share himself and inevitably compromise his own.

Committed to the asylum as a psychopath, McMurphy is a down-home hipster who vitalizes the sterile ward with the energy of his language. "Some thief in the night boosted my clothes" (93), he explains to Nurse Ratched when he appears the first morning wrapped in a towel (with his white whale undershorts beneath). The Nurse's confusion inspires McMurphy to more elaborate jive, a burst of verbal energy that cuts through the inert institutional vocabulary: "'Pinched. Jobbed. Swiped. Stole,' he says happily. 'You know, man, like somebody boosted my threads.' Saying this tickles him so he goes into a little barefooted dance before her" (94). And McMurphy makes his presence felt with fancy footwork as well as fancy talk, on his first day dancing away from the aides with all the grace and savvy of a street fighter and politician: "One of the black boys circles him with the thermometer, but he's too quick for them; he slips in among the Acutes and starts moving around shaking hands before the black boy can take good aim" (12). His beautifully choreographed entry—the physical counterpart of his verbal maneuvers—confirms the source of his strength: reaction, not just motion. His physical vitality expresses a love of struggle, of the conflict from which his identity as hipster takes form. Later, when he has become the acknowledged bull goose loony, Chief Bromden (chin jerking with emotion) accuses him of "always *winning* things" (257), to which McMurphy wearily responds, "Winning, for Christ-

sakes. . . . Hoo boy, winning” (258). Of course he *does* win, and shamelessly, but the pot is the excuse for the process, the joyous feints and games.⁴

The centrality of process rather than goal can be seen in the relative weakness of the fishing expedition and final party, scenes that offer a telling contrast with the dominant narrative rhythm of parry and thrust. Both belie the energy of conflict because they seem to promise not temporary respites but permanent victory. Under McMurphy’s tutelage, the fishing trip begins with the Acutes’ invigorating and self-promoting confrontation with two predatory service station attendants, and McMurphy successfully outmaneuvers the captain of the boat, who refuses to take the group out without proper authorization. But the fishing scenes drag, for all their consistent good humor, prize flounders, bruised nipples, and brotherhood. The fish are no Moby Dicks (as big Nurse seems to be) and offer only dumb resistance. The ward party at the end of the novel is unsatisfactory for similar reasons: no idyll of strife, the celebration consists of dull stories, flabby fun, and saccharine brotherhood.⁵ Though ill at ease outside the intense but narrow range of ecstatic battle, in these episodes Kesey nevertheless makes a gesture toward static joy, perhaps from a lingering respect for the unhip notion of success. The celebrations are not without merit; there *are* moments of rest in even the most driven of lives. Such consummations, however, are important as the beginning of a new cycle, not the completion of an old. We see McMurphy perfectly at rest only when marshaling his energy for the final, stylized assault on Big Nurse: “He closed his eyes and relaxed. Waiting, it looked like” (303). Waiting, of course, to *begin* for the last time. And his loss is ultimately the inmates’ victory, and his death offers the chance for a new beginning, as the successful and very different *Liebestod* between Bromden and McMurphy makes clear.

McMurphy most clearly reveals his dedication to process through his stories, which stand equally opposed to institutional stasis and to private revelations. In his stories and scarcely-believable brags—his self-conscious construction of a public self—McMurphy exemplifies the therapeutic aggression that affirms personal integrity by claiming absolute possession of personal materials. Soon after McMurphy arrives, one of the inmates calls him a “backwoods braggart” (56). Although the remark is intended to be cutting, it contains much truth: like his frontiersmen ancestors, “McMurphy” is as much a fiction as a fact. Unlike the mute, stuttering, or squeaky-voiced inmates, McMurphy knows that how big you are depends in part on how big you sound: Chief Bromden, six-foot-eight and silent for the last twenty years, is a pigmy. In conformity with this conviction, 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. As Billy Bibbit grins and blushes, McMurphy invents him a personal history worthy of a salacious Mike Fink:

Billy 'Club' Bibbit, he was known as in them days. Those girls were about to take off when one looked at him and says

"Are you the renowned Billy Club Bibbit? Of the famous fourteen inches?" . . . "And I remember, when we got them up to the hotel, there was this woman's voice from over near Billy's bed, says, "Mister Bibbit, I'm disappointed in you; I heard that you had four—four—for goodness *sakes!*" (98–99)

Later, on the way to the fishing excursion, McMurphy helps the inmates capitalize on what they had always thought a weakness. When two service station attendants try to take advantage of them, the inmates (with McMurphy's help) affirm their manhood by posing as criminally insane. "You see that freckle-faced kid there?" McMurphy says.

Now he might look like he's right off a Saturday *Evening Post* cover, but he's an insane knife artist that killed three men. The man beside him is known as the Bull Goose Loony, unpredictable as a wild hog. You see that big guy? He's an Indian and he beat six white men to death with a pick handle when they tried to cheat him trading muskrat hides. (224)

The Acutes learn, as Harding puts it, that "mental illness [can] have the aspect of power, *power*" (226), or, more generally, that one should have confidence in the self one chooses to invent. McMurphy's lies reveal hypocrisy even as they assert independence. He is the antithesis of those passive victims—suburbanite or institutional drudge—who are no more than blank screens for the receipt of others' projected desires and expectations. This crucial difference is made clear when McMurphy refuses to let Nurse Ratched thwart his plan to watch the World Series: "It didn't make any difference that the power was shut off in the Nurses' Station and we couldn't see a thing on that blank gray screen, because McMurphy'd entertain us for hours, sit and talk and tell all kinds of stories . . ." (152).

"Bull sessions" led by the bull goose loony provide an antidote to the "Therapeutic Community" (an intensified version of the outside world) which is ostensibly intended to help the inmates adjust to normal society but is actually devoted to destroying personal integrity by defining the individual as common property. The philosophy of this community, as Bromden understands it, is "Talk . . . discuss, confess . . . Help yourself and your friends probe into the secrets of the subconscious. There should be no need for secrets among friends" (47). The result of such talk, however, is the "pecking party" that thoroughly unmans Harding, already the least confident of the group.

McMurphy's entertaining gab is diametrically opposed to the generic "honesty" of institutional therapy, which can blur personal boundaries and leave one vulnerable to assimilation by repressive organizations like Bromden's "Combine." If McMurphy sometimes seems two-dimensional—a cartoon cowboy—it is neither because Bromden sees him as a superhuman savior, nor because of a weakness in Kesey's powers of characterization, but because McMurphy stands resolutely opposed to any violation of the inner man. In particular, he humorously but firmly rejects Big Nurse's cold, relentless probing, her insistence that the private self is community property, and that as such, it should be reduced to "phrenic this or pathic that" (288), the simultaneously impersonal and cheaply revelatory language of psychiatry. McMurphy's lack of conventional psychological complexity, his insistent exteriority, is in fact a defense rather than a denial of the private individual.

Candy's presence in the novel raises an issue that grows from the peculiar demands of McMurphy's character. Robert Boyers accuses Kesey of "porno-politics": the substitution of a sexual paradise for a difficult-to-achieve political vision (45). For all the talk, however, adult sexuality, like politics, is conspicuously absent from the novel. If, as Terence Martin has noted, the primary motive of female tyranny is to make men into little boys ("High Cost" 45), it is even more centrally the men's motive to remain boys on their own terms. Like so many American classics, *Cuckoo's Nest* is a boy's book, and paradise is surprisingly asexual, if not strictly bachelor as in many other American novels. McMurphy's women are appropriately boys' companions; although Candy and Sandy are physically robust and sexual women, in every other way they are good bad *girls*, hardly more substantial than promiscuous versions of Cooper's chaste and often infantile blond heroines.⁸ The paradoxical climax of the final party is not Billy Bibbit's deflowering or Sefelt's astonishing epileptic orgasm, but the transformation of Sandy and McMurphy from adult lovers into "two tired little kids" (296). Despite all his whoring, McMurphy has in this case much in common with the chaste Natty Bumppo, for his virility too (as Leslie Fiedler says of Natty) is ultimately "not genital but heroic" (*Love and Death* 211). It is true that Nurse Ratched, Billy Bibbit's mother, and Vera Harding embody the dual threats of regimented society and family and are the focus of a conventionally ghoulish misogyny. Yet women can also serve the cause of freedom, at least when they do not demand the commitments of adult relationships or marriage. The two types of women embody the polarities of Hip and Square, spiritual frontier and confinement, upon which the world of *Cuckoo's Nest* is predicated. *Cuckoo's Nest* effectively draws upon the energy of opposition by presenting sex not as orgiastic but as offering the opportunity for both aggressive confrontation and strategic retreat.

McMurphy's sexuality complements a personal consistency that obliterates the distinction between past and present. Returning from the fishing

trip, for example, he stops by his childhood house and tells the men of his own sexual initiation. Seduced at ten by a prepubescent whore, in retrospect McMurphy marvels at how little difference there is between girls and women, between his boyhood and adulthood: “Jesus, nine years old’ he said, reached over and pinched Candy’s nose, ‘and knew a lot more than a good many pros” (245). At ten he was already a little McMurphy and his woman a whore in a child’s body, just as Candy (no more proficient for all her professional experience) is a child playing prostitute. We should be prepared, as McMurphy is, to accept the rag flying above the house as a remnant of the same dress (a token of his conquest) that he threw out the window years before. Past and present merge for the seamless man.

Although McMurphy’s apparently inexhaustible vitality accounts for a great deal of the novel’s appeal, *Cuckoo’s Nest* is concerned with depletion as well as renewal, the second term in the hipster’s equation and one horizon of the spiritual frontier. It soon becomes clear that McMurphy’s commitment to telling stories for others, as well as for himself, is a dangerous undertaking. As the inmates drive home from the fishing trip, Chief Bromden remarks that McMurphy’s “relaxed, good-natured voice doled out his life for us to live, a rollicking past full of kid fun and drinking buddies and loving women and barroom battles over meager honors—for all of us to dream ourselves into” (245). One does not, however, dole out one’s life—and especially one’s fictional public life—with impunity. Unlike the others, Bromden notices that the relaxed voice comes from a man who is “dreadfully tired and strained” (245).

McMurphy, who comes in bigger than life and restores the inmates’ power, ends as a clockwork version of his former self, his defeat the fitting—even affirmative—conclusion to a life lived consistently on the very edge of experience. Only superficially predicated upon an orgiastic vision. *Cuckoo’s Nest* stresses a perpetual search rather than the definitive climax—a vision, finally, of strife rather than of fulfillment or mechanical immortality. And while McMurphy’s extraordinary physical presence is undeniable, his legacy is to be found as much in Harding’s effort to make his thin voice “sound like McMurphy’s auctioneer bellow” (306) as in the chief’s successful attempt to throw a control panel through the asylum’s barred window and escape. The language of the “backwoods braggart” is an intentional violation of taste and credibility; and because opposition rather than truth is its goal, such language can end, like the braggart himself, only in total collapse. Just before McMurphy gets up wearily from his corner for the final round with Big Nurse, Chief Bromden reflects with profound insight into the logic of hip that “the thing he was fighting, you couldn’t whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn’t come out any more and somebody else had to take your place” (303).

McMurphy's defeat is the result of an engagement that for all its emphasis on parry and thrust is predicated upon a monolithic heroism, upon a stable identity or *point d'appui* from which physical and verbal sorties can be made, and part of Kesey's strategy is to play this integrity off against another more conflicted version of heroism frequently associated with the frontier. McMurphy is among the "negative heroes" whose function, Terence Martin writes, "is to measure the world in which we live by the worlds in which they are unable to live" ("Negative Character" 232). Yet not all negative heroes are so depleted, even when, like Nathan Slaughter (in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*, 1837) or Natty Bumppo in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, they devote themselves as required by convention to their genteel charges. Of course neither Natty nor Nathan had to survive on the psychological frontier of modern American life; their wilderness offered possibilities for escape that McMurphy, in a madhouse backed up to the very western edge of the continent, does not have. But there is a more fundamental difference between these two types of hero: unlike McMurphy, Nathan and Natty find power in division, their doubleness conserving and purifying a strength otherwise dissipated in commitment to others. Nathan is both a violent Indian killer (the mysterious "Jibbenainosay") and a pious Quaker so solemn that he is a source of amusement to the rough frontiersmen. His blood-curdling psychopathic hipness depends upon the opportunities for evasion provided by his social persona. And Natty has the Great Serpent to assume part of the burden of violence. But McMurphy has only himself.

The double hero exemplified by Natty and Nathan—men who may have both their public spectacles *and* their private lives—defines a tradition of American heroism to which McMurphy offers an alternative, with its own rewards and dangers. The contemporary version of the divided man is the comic book superhero (e.g., Superman, Batman, The Incredible Hulk) whose doubleness is a way of re-creating the moral equivalent of the wilderness by concentrating social constraints in one identity while leaving the other free to act out dreams of force in a world purified of human commitments.⁷ The conflicting pulls toward community and self that ultimately drain McMurphy's energy are distributed between the two selves of the double hero; like Nathan Slaughter, the modern superhero can alternate between the spectacularly public (Superman) and entirely private (Clark Kent), and so preserve his powers without compromising his self. One may describe the typical comic book superhero as both square and hip at the same time: transformation rather than sustained force is the key to the superhero, who radically cons the world each time he changes from pipsqueak to savior.

In *Cuckoo's Nest* Kesey makes use of the divided hero in order to define by contrast the special qualities of his integral and undivided man. The influ-

ence of the comic book on Kesey's art has been discussed many times,⁸ but it is important to note that McMurphy is only half of a "superhero." Unlike Superman or Captain Marvel (Kesey's favorite), McMurphy is an undivided man, and his engagement cannot be interrupted with a SHAZAM!⁹ The centrality of this energetic wholeness is confirmed rather than undermined by the relative weakness of Bromden's efforts to convey a sense of his hero's private self. At times, Bromden remarks, McMurphy would do things

that didn't fit with his face or hands, things like painting a picture at OT with real paints on a blank paper with no lines or numbers anywhere on it to tell him where to paint, or like writing letters to somebody in a beautiful flowing hand. How could a man who looked like him paint pictures or write letters to people, or be upset and worried like I saw him once when he got a letter back? (153)

One answers that he must not, a response demanded by the categorical nature of Bromden's praise: "He's what he is, that's it. Maybe that makes him strong enough, being what he is" (153). The sudden revelation of McMurphy's painting, anonymous correspondence, and flowing penmanship rounds off an angular—even abrasive—personality, substituting arts and crafts for craftiness. It is a rare evocation of McMurphy's carefully concealed private identity, significant in its very implausibility. And while McMurphy does become more frantic as his commitment to the inmates increases, it is only because he cannot draw upon this other side. Without the saving options of flight to the frontier or refuge in an anonymous private identity, his single self can only snap.

McMurphy's death is a direct consequence of his successful efforts to establish a community of men, a success demanding forms of personal commitment in conflict with his essentially public nature. When McMurphy wins his first major bet with the inmates by cracking Big Nurse's icy facade, he is given an important but unrecognized lesson. As he sits before the blank television screen, Nurse Ratched screams, "You're committed, you realize.... Under jurisdiction and *control*..." (138). One by one, the inmates drop their work and join him to listen to his stories. The nurse means that he cannot voluntarily leave the asylum, as most of the other inmates can. And indeed, the prospect of this "commitment" is what first causes McMurphy temporarily to knuckle under to the nurse's authority. But the other form of commitment—to *others*—that this scene strongly evokes is more dangerous, and is finally McMurphy's triumphant undoing. As John Wilson Foster points out, McMurphy and Big Nurse are from the same world and play by the same rules (116). Incarceration can be circumvented. But McMurphy's growing commitment to replenish the imagination and the self-confidence of those who join him in front of the TV set cannot.

McMurphy's revolution succeeds. But by turning rabbits into men he thereby negates the very terms of his freedom. McMurphy is destroyed not by the Combine but by the united needs of the inmates—a "combine" of a very different sort. After Billy Bibbit's suicide, Bromden watches McMurphy girding himself for the final round: "We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it . . . [I]t was our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting. . . . rising and standing like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters" (304). Before McMurphy's arrival, Chief Bromden had watched Big Nurse "sit in the center of her network with mechanical insect skill" (26); now the inmates have spun their own kind of web, beaming commands which, though charged with love, work contrary to a consistently dramatized sense of radical individuality, of power in *difference*.

The last pages of the novel are spent dismantling the web of concerted action strand by strand. The inmates rapidly disband: only half a sentence is given to the departure of Sefelt, Fredrickson, and three others. Anything but occasions, these departures stand in telling contrast to the massive presence of the two celebrations, as well as to the jarring sentimentality of Sandy's and Turkel's earlier escape across the "wet, sun-sparkled grass" (298). Picked up by his bitchy wife, Harding is concerned above all with the *style* of his departure, just as McMurphy had earlier put himself wholly into the style of his entrance. As Harding explains, "I want to do it on my own, by myself, right out that front door, with all the traditional red tape and complications. I want my wife to be here in a car at a certain time to pick me up. I want them to know I was *able* to do it that way" (293). Harding does not deny the possibility of more substantive confrontations, but for the moment he means only to construct a public self to shield his private integrity. He engages the rituals of society without yielding to them, like the chief's uncle who becomes a lawyer, Bromden remarks, "purely to prove he could" (198). This might be McMurphy's motto. To prove, without thought of past or future, of reputation or permanent gain—*purely* to prove—is to find a force beyond the power of society to cast human energy in the form of mechanism or to reduce the private man to public formulae. Bromden learns from McMurphy that freedom can be achieved only through renewed gestures of mastery, and that energy must not be enshrined as a *fait accompli*. McMurphy is a savior without being a saint.

Despite his obvious physical courage, McMurphy's gestures of mastery are primarily verbal; fittingly, the major legacy of McMurphy's death is the chief's transformation from mute to storyteller. After the lobotomy, McMurphy lies with his eyes "open and undreaming" (309), emptied not just by the operation but by the transmission of imaginative energy, a gradual process whose effects the chief noticed on the way back from the fishing expedition. The chief is the primary recipient of this transmission; he is so full of his

story that it seems about to roar out of him “like floodwaters,” and he can say, with a true artist’s sensibility, that “it’s the truth even if it didn’t happen” (8). Like *McMurphy* himself, the chief has learned to distinguish between the facts that lie and the lies that save. It is important to keep in mind that Chief Bromden’s story, like one of *McMurphy*’s extravagant boasts, is a tall tale; he re-creates both *McMurphy* and his own madness from a position of recovered sanity and creative energy. The chief seldom portrays his past psychosis in convincing clinical terms; he consistently veers toward the extravagant. When Bromden describes his hallucinations and fears, the dominant impression is not of madness but of art, as we can see even in brief comments like this one, about a chronic: “At the old place he stood so long in one spot the piss ate the floor and beams away under him and he kept falling through to the ward below, giving them all kinds of census headaches down there when roll check came around” (15). Despite the horror behind such passages, the tone is comic, even celebratory: the dumb Indian can really talk.

The necessary complement of the chief’s newly acquired imaginative freedom is the possibility of perpetually renewed flight, of feints and strategic retreats in the interest not of winning for good, but of winning the freedom to enter the fight once again. Bromden’s exuberant escape (after smothering his shorted-out savior) is a fitting counterpart to *McMurphy*’s evasive entrance: “I remember I was taking huge strides as I ran, seeming to step and float a long ways before my next foot struck the earth. I felt like I was flying. Free” (310). In flight, Bromden joins those American heroes who typically achieve their stature on the run, like Nathan Slaughter, who is laughed at in the settlements but inspires fear when stalking through the woods at twilight, “as tall and gigantic . . . as the airy demon of Brocken” (125).¹⁰ Bromden finds freedom in movement, and thereby insures future confrontations and other chances to tell stories. As a professional wrestler, the identity *McMurphy* tentatively suggested to him earlier, Bromden hitchhikes north. *McMurphy* has not only made Bromden big again, he has shown him how to tell a story. Bromden survives.

Yet in some ways the novel turns away from the opportunity to clinch the value of those acts of imaginative aggression—tall tale and brag—that confirm personal integrity. Before *McMurphy* drew him from the fog, Bromden would sometimes imagine himself into the painting of a tranquil mountain landscape (a gift of the man known as “Public Relations”) from which he could look back at a safely contained ward: “It’s a real nice place to stretch your legs and take it easy” (122). The last paragraphs of the novel provide a similar frame, PR for a primitive isolation at odds with the predominant values of sophisticated struggle on the hipster’s new frontier:

I might go to Canada eventually, but I think I’ll stop along the Columbia on the way. I’d like to check around Portland and Hood

River and The Dalles to see if there's any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven't drunk themselves goofy. I'd like to see what they've been doing since the government tried to buy their right to be Indians. I've even heard that some of the tribe have took to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway. I'd give something to see that. Mostly, I'd just like to look over the country around the gorge again, just to bring some of it clear in my mind again. I been away a long time. (311)

This vision of extraordinary innocence seeks to rehabilitate the individual by diminishing the value of conflict. The language does emphasize possibility ("I might . . . I think . . . I'd like . . . I'd like"), and the boys indeed seem victorious. The battles with Big Nurse, however, did not make the opposition less threatening but more a force to be engaged even at the expense of one's life. Indeed, McMurphy warned the Acutes against those who, like Big Nurse, want to win by making others weaker rather than making themselves stronger. Yet the last paragraphs do precisely this; the Combine is reduced to a humming shell, and while the Indians' laid-back rebellion has a certain miniature charm, it evokes none of the aggressive excess that defines McMurphy's hipper brags and stories, and, certainly, none of the comic horror that characterizes Bromden's inspired and self-liberating tales of the Combine. Indeed, Bromden's final words—I been away a long time—not only resurrect family (albeit bachelor and native) but imply that victory waits complete in a sentimental past, a product of nostalgia rather than invention. By de-emphasizing the language (if not the fact) of conflict Kesey replaces the hipster with the noble savage, and evokes a dusty vision of the western hero to which McMurphy has thus far offered a modern alternative.

Gary Lindberg remarks that Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey are both attracted to "centers of energy, buoyancy, and faith" (270). This is for the most part true. In a moment of uncharacteristic introspection, Raoul Duke (in Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*) recalls the euphoria of riding up to La Honda, the home of Ken Kesey and the Pranksters:

There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning . . . And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply *prevail*. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. (68)

As we have seen, however, this Emersonian optimism is balanced by a pessimism as deeply rooted and formative. The language of the modern frontiersman, as Mailer notes, is “the language of energy, how it is found, how it is lost” (349). In *The Dharma Bums*, for example, Jack Kerouac’s hobo narrator, prevented by the police from camping on the pure white sand of a dry river bottom, thinks, “The only alternative to sleeping out, hopping freights, and doing what I wanted, I saw in a vision would be to just sit with a hundred other patients in front of a nice television set in a madhouse, where we could be ‘supervised’ (96). Pessimism—even paranoia—calls attention to the possibility of confinement, to one of the opposing terms which define a psychic frontier. Further, in the modern American novel failure can be as much a sign of grace as success: it substantiates the threat of repression and legitimizes the quest for purity. In *Cuckoo’s Nest* McMurphy pays the steep but unavoidable price of monolithic heroism on the modern frontier: he chooses to share himself and in the end must pay with his life. *Cuckoo’s Nest* is a powerful novel which effectively translates into contemporary terms the enduring American concern with a freedom found only in—or between—irreconcilable oppositions.

NOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau (expert in “home-cosmography”) was one of the first exponents of internalized geography. A true rebel if no literal frontiersman, he understood the importance of boundaries and restrictions in defining freedom of language and action. In *Walden* he wrote

Extra vagantet! it depends on how you are yarded. The migrating buffalo, which seeks new pastures in another latitude, is not extravagant like the cow which kicks over the pail, leaps the cow-yard fence, and runs after her calf, in milking time. I desire to speak somewhere without bounds. . . . (324)

2. Richard Slotkin describes the development of the American hero from the Indian captivity narratives and particularly from the Boone literature, which differs from earlier descriptions of America as Eden because “the final vision of paradise is seen growing out of a savage combat” (277). This hero is “the lover of the spirit of the wilderness, and his acts of love and sacred affirmation are acts of violence against that spirit and her avatars” (22).

3. “Leslie Fiedler, noting that Columbus, dreaming of a western passage to India, was considered mad, remarks that “it is only a step from thinking of the West as madness to regarding madness as the true West” (*Return* 185). My position, however, is closer to Tony Tanner’s in *City of Words*. Tanner writes that Norman Mailer tries to maintain a “tottering freedom by not capitulating to the patterns and powers on either side of him [i.e., political and demonized ordering of reality], walking his own line in a bid to defy conditioning” (371). The same is true of Kesey, who tries to make a home in Edge City, “poised *between* social identity and dissolution, a sort of third area between structure and flow” (390). Tanner’s analysis suggests that it is important to distinguish, as Fiedler does not, between liberating and restrictive

“madness.” The psychotic, writes Mailer, “lives in so misty a world that what is happening at each moment of his life is not very real to him” (344), whereas the psychopath knows only the intense reality of each successive moment. We should remember that the “psychopathic” Irishman saves the psychotic Indian narrator, who is much further gone in the “West” than he.

4. Only the Combine inevitably wins. Harding quickly informs McMurphy that Big Nurse “always wins, my friend, always. She’s impregnable herself . . . (70). Later Bromden says, “To beat her you don’t have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. And as soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose *once*, she’s won for good. And eventually we all got to lose” (109). The truth of this is no reason for capitulation; McMurphy teaches the inmates the importance of *trying*, not winning.

5. Joseph J. Waldmeir accounts for the deficiencies of this episode by arguing that Kesey “is trying to show that the form of protest which the party represents will no longer work” (201)

6. The only other sympathetic woman, the Japanese nurse on the Disturbed Ward, is also clearly a child, physically if not emotionally. Bromden describes her as “about as big as the small end of nothing whittled to a fine point” with a “little hand full of pink birthday candles” (265).

7. For a more complete discussion of the relationship between the frontier hero and the comic book superhero see Fick.

8. See, for example, Fiedler (*Return* 184), and Sherwood.

9. In *Sometimes a Great Notion* Kesey calls attention to the superhero and his divided existence. While going through his comic book collection. Lee Stamper reflects upon the source of Captain Marvel’s power:

[He was] still my favorite over all the rest of the selection of superdoers. Because Captain Marvel was not continuously Captain Marvel. No. When he wasn’t flying about batting the heads of archfiends together he was a kid about ten or twelve named Billy Batson, a scrawny and ineffectual punk who could be transformed, to the accompaniment of lightning and thunder, into a cleft-chinned behemoth capable of practically *anything*. . . . And all this kid had to do to bring off this transformation was say his word: Shazam . . . maybe it wasn’t really Captain Marvel that was my hero; maybe it was Billy Batson and his magic word. (142)

On Kesey’s own identification with superheroes, see Wolfe (especially 40–41, 52).

10. See also Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), which ends with Eugene Henderson’s remark that “I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running—leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence” (341). Henderson, like Chief Bromden, is a big man (and a brawler) whose spirit has been restored to a size commensurate with his physical bulk.

WORKS CITED

- Bellow, Saul. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Viking, 1959.
 Bird, Robert Montgomery. *Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay; a Tale of Kentucky*. Ed. Curtis Dahl. New Haven: College and University Press, 1967.

- Boyers, Robert. "Attitudes toward Sex in American 'High Culture.'" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 376 (March 1968): pp. 36–52.
- Fick, Thomas H. "A Killer and a Saint: The Double Hero in America." *Studies in Popular Culture*, 8 (1985): pp. 71–78.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Rev. ed. New York: Stein and Day, 1966.
- . *The Return of the Vanishing American*. New York: Stein and Day, 1968.
- Foster, John Wilson. "Hustling to Some Purpose: Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Western American Literature*, 9 (1974): pp. 115–129.
- Kerouac, Jack. *The Dharma Bums*. New York: New American Library, 1959.
- Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. 1962. Ed. John Dark Pratt. New York: Viking, 1973.
- . *Sometimes a Great Notion*. New York: Viking, 1963.
- Lindberg, Gary. *The Confidence Man in American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Mailer, Norman. "The White Negro." *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.
- Martin, Terence. "The Negative Character in American Fiction." *Toward a New American Literary History: Essays in Honor of Arlin. Turner*. Ed. Louis J. Budd, Edwin H. Cady, and Carol L. Anderson. Durham: Duke University Press, 1973.
- . "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the High Cost of Living." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19 (1973): pp. 43–55.
- Sherwood, Terry. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip." *Critique*, 13 (1971): pp. 96–109.
- Simonson, Harold P. *The Closed Frontier: Studies in American Literary Tragedy*. New York: Holt, 1970.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Tanner, Tony. *City of Words; American Fiction 1950–1970*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.
- Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Ravage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. New York: Popular Library, 1971.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *The Illustrated Walden*. Ed. J. Lyndon Shanley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Waldmeir, Joseph J. "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 5 (1964): pp. 192–204.
- Warren, Robert Penn. *All the King's Men*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968.

ROBERT P. WAXLER

*The Mixed Heritage of the Chief:
Revisiting the Problem of Manhood in
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* challenges us with the issue of mixed heritage through Chief Bromden's half-breed status. In this we confront the most significant and unsettling conflict of the text. Although few critics have focused on the issue it is complex enough to have been a part of American fiction throughout the twentieth century. Like Faulkner, Kesey sets his character on a symbolic search for the Father: that is, the spark of manhood within himself that flares at the traditional gender definition. The search is complicated, however, by the father's minority status which gives the mother social supremacy. Moreover, Kesey further hinders the search by making the dominant system throughout the story a demanding and outwardly oppressive patriarchy. The combined elements of gender and mixed heritage form the point, I believe, that makes the novel problematic, not only for the reader, but for Kesey himself.

In an important sense, the family is always the matrix for social and individual identity. We are our family. And in such a context, we need to ask how Chief Bromden can possibly gain back his manhood, in a sense rediscover "the name of the father," when he is rooted in a family which has denied that name, privileging instead the name of his white mother (Bromden). Chief Bromden's problem, in this sense, is the difficulty he faces in attempting to recover the roots of his Native American identity, the identity

Journal of Popular Culture, Volume 29 (Winter 1995): pp. 225–235.

of his father, that male Indian identity buried deep along the Columbia River in the Dalles.

What the critics seem to have avoided when discussing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is that Bromden's "mixed heritage" is at the root of the Chief's problem of identity, accounting, to a large extent, for his schizophrenic narrative. More specifically, the Chief's family history puts him in the precarious position of a son who believes that his roots can only be discovered through his father, a man with an ethnic minority status. The Chief is a son, in other words, attempting to achieve manhood in a world dominated by women in general (one version of the classic story of the American boy), but specifically by a white mother. As Terence Martin has put it: "The female reduced the male—the white reduced the Indian. The Chief has only to think of his parents to know the legacy of his people" (45). The Chief, that Vanishing American as Kesey calls him, must rediscover not only his legacy as a Native American, but the very roots of his manhood by thinking back through his father, that is through the place of the father, the original territory of the Native American man now overrun by whites. That act of white imperialism in terms of the novel is represented in the first instance by his mother. In this context, we can assume that the Chief's problems would be very different if his mother had been an American Indian.

In a sense, Kesey has given us an Oedipal story with a twist rarely explored by white American novelists, especially before the early 1960s when *Cuckoo's Nest* was written. In the simplest Freudian version of the Oedipal story, if the son is to achieve manhood, he must symbolically kill the father and marry the mother. But what if the father, a member of an ethnic minority, has been marginalized by the mother, a member of the dominant culture? How then does the son recover the authority and power of the father? And how does the son rejuvenate desire for the mother, especially when that mother, in the mind of the son, has become an abstraction, a repressive symbol of the majority culture? These are questions that critics rarely discuss when talking about *Cuckoo's Nest*, yet they are questions central to a full understanding of the novel. They raise issues that help to illuminate the relationship between the racial and sexual identity of the Chief and his narrative perceptions. They help the reader to understand the Chief as an embattled self and as a Vanishing American male.

When the Chief first introduces Big Nurse to the reader, for example, she is carrying her woven wicker bag made by Indians but used by her to carry the tools that she manipulates to maintain her dehumanized control over the ward. Like the Chief's mother, Big Nurse uses the Indian, but is not of the Indian. Yet the reader also realizes immediately that "those big, womanly breasts" (Kesey 5) hidden beneath her starched exterior make Big Nurse something other than a bureaucratic automaton. Those breasts eventually, and inevitably, will need to be exposed. For the Chief, Big Nurse is an abstraction, a projection of the

symbolic power that stripped his father of his name, but beneath her starched uniform she must also be a reminder of the carnal body of his origins.

For the Chief though, it is clearly not the memory of his mother that gives him any comfort, but the early childhood memories of bonding with his father. When Big Nurse sends the black boys to shave the Chief at the beginning of the novel, for example, the Chief thinks of his father, their hunting trips in the early morning fog in the Dalles. For the Chief it is the father who is associated with the womb-like protection of the fog—a temporary, but ultimately unsatisfying, retreat from the threat of Big Nurse's attempts at symbolic castration. In this opening scene, Big Nurse is clearly in control, forcing the Chief away from any possibility of manhood as "she jams wicker bag and all into Chief Bromden's mouth and shoves it down with a mop handle" (Kesey 7).

When Randle Patrick McMurphy appears in the ward, however, the Chief is reminded of the strength of his father: "He talks a little the way Papa used to, voice loud and full of hell . . ." (Kesey 11). And, as those familiar with the novel know, McMurphy takes on the role of the father for Bromden in order to get Bromden to emerge from the womb-like protection of that fog, to move the Chief to name and remake the father in himself.

Throughout the novel, McMurphy creates strategies (from games to gambling to fishing trips) to get the Chief to understand his full potency, for it is only then that he can name his father. As the Chief finally tells McMurphy, "My Papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, and we didn't live on a mountain. He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size" (Kesey 186). Not surprisingly, shortly after this naming, Big Nurse orders a lobotomy for McMurphy, who is then brought back to the ward, "wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY, RANDLE P. POSTOPERATIVE" (269). Like the Chief's father before him, McMurphy has been symbolically castrated here by a white woman and the white establishment. He has become an impotent member of Big Nurse's symbolic order. Only the abstraction of his name remains, controlled by Big Nurse herself.

In this context, the Chief knows that Big Nurse has silenced McMurphy just as the Combine had silenced his father. Big Nurse can now use McMurphy's name for her own purposes, bringing that name under her authority, making that name part of her matriarchal system. In effect, the same thing had happened to the Chief's father when he married the white woman named Bromden. That name became the family name, the father giving up his authority as the mother continued to grow in size. From the Chief's perspective, these events must have led to his belief that the world was dominated not only by whites, but by a matriarchal structure, one that blocked him from easily rediscovering the manhood embodied within his father. At the same

time, the Chief also knows that McMurphy “wouldn’t have left something like that sit there in the day room with his name tacked on it for twenty or thirty years so the Big Nurse could use it as an example of what can happen if you buck the system. I was sure of that” (270).

Throughout the novel, the Chief legitimately believes that it is not the name of the father, but Big Nurse, the name of the mother, that defines and represents the ruling symbolic order. His father is “the Other,” existing at best at the margins of Big Nurse’s discourse, a discourse that the Chief imagines eventually, through his schizophrenic projections, as the abstract order of the Combine itself.

The reader is faced then with a dilemma at the center of Kesey’s novel. Not only must the son separate from the mother, but she is being represented within the family romance as the one that needs to be killed, for she is the one who dictates law. The implication, in a larger sense, is that males with fathers of ethnic minority status married to mothers from the dominant culture must travel a difficult and radically indirect route to achieve manhood. In a somewhat confusing pattern, Kesey suggests that sons of “mixed heritage,” especially with mothers from the dominant culture, may not be able to achieve manhood in American culture.

It is as if Kesey is suggesting, like Jaques Lacan, that adulthood is achieved by the son when the child moves into the system of language and culture, a symbolic order, that has been defined and represented by the father. For Kesey, however, the dominant discourse experienced by the Chief is the symbolic order controlled by Big Nurse. Into this enters McMurphy and there he is comfortable. It seems he is able, not only to function along the lines of control as established by Big Nurse and her system of language, but also to out-smart her by using her own rules. Outside the showers McMurphy willingly engages in spirited verbal fencing with Big Nurse over the propriety of wearing nothing but a towel in the hall. In an act of complete compliance to Big Nurse’s wishes, thereby the controlling language, McMurphy drops the towel, effectively following the rules and challenging them at the same time. McMurphy, through his ability to recognize and function within Big Nurse’s discourse, takes the place of the Chief’s father and does what he could not do; McMurphy demonstrates how to use the language of the matriarchy to control a dominant female. The Chief, unfortunately, cannot place himself in the context of the father’s discourse. As a result, at best, the Chief is “the Other” in a system controlled by the white woman, his mother, Big Nurse herself. The Chief suffers from a lack of voice and language for these reasons.

In this context, we can first believe that there is a possible way out for the Chief. The American Indian voice, like the voice of women in America, can be defined as a voice of the body, a voice distinct from the abstract law. It is, in a sense, a voice of plenitude and joy, a celebration of the fullness of the

body. As Helene Cixous puts it in the context of women: "Let masculine sexuality gravitate around the penis, engendering this centralized body (political economy) under the party dictatorship. Woman does not perform on herself this regionalization that profits the couple head-sex, that only inscribes itself within frontiers. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide.... She goes on and goes on infinitely" (87-88).

Such a voice does not pound to a climax, nor drive to a determined point, but it does offer the richness of intimate experience. In terms of the 1960s, we might understand it best as a voice of polymorphous eroticism. In terms of *Cuckoo's Nest*, it is a voice that the Chief might discover at the margins of Big Nurse's own rigid discourse, a voice of the body and of his own past, the voice of the counter-culture itself. But to discover such a voice, the Chief must also abandon binary thinking about gender. He must substitute phallic power for the polymorphic erotic.

In such a context, we can understand the basic dilemma that the Chief faces and the contradiction in Kesey's own vision. For Kesey has within the logic of the novel legitimately established the father within the family romance as "the Other" equivalent to an ethnic minority overpowered by the dominant culture within the social structure. And he has posed the interesting question of how a son in such a situation can achieve manhood. However, at the same time, Kesey refuses to deny the binary mode of Western thinking about gender, and in fact he sets up an ideological fiction (Big Nurse) that allows him to blame women and to avoid any analysis of patriarchy. "Somehow, in the confused vision of the author and playwright, the refusal of women, an oppressed class, to utterly submit to male-oriented social structures is identified with the attack of white males, the oppressor class, on people of color" (Falk 221-222). It is as if Kesey recognizes that "the Other" must create a discourse and a life of process, a playfulness of the body, a polymorphous eroticism. Yet, at the same time, he accepts the binary thinking of Western consciousness. Kesey seems to embrace a style of polymorphous eroticism, but he will not give up the American myth of nineteenth century individualism, a myth which includes the privileging of the male and the celebration of phallocentrism.

Through much of the novel, McMurphy seems to adopt a strategy that encourages the playfulness of the polymorphous erotic body. Like the counter-culture hero that he is, McMurphy wants the Chief to feel the joy of life by expressing the natural playfulness of his own self. As he puts it early in the novel: "Yes sir, that's what I came to this establishment for, to bring you birds fun an' entertainment around the gamin' table" (Kesey 12). And the biggest bird of all, the Chief, will eventually not only go on a lark (the name of the boat on which McMurphy takes "his crew" fishing), but learn to fly without fear over that abstract symbolic order called the Cuckoo's Nest.

But at the same time, Kesey seems to insist on a conventional sense of manhood, manhood rooted not in the discourse of the polymorphous erotic body, but in the abstract language of the symbolic order, a form of phallogentric power. In such a system, meaning always operates within a hierarchial language system. Oppositions are established, and manhood is won when the male presence governs the female absence. In the end, Kesey, too, seems governed by this kind of thinking.

Kesey might like it both ways, but the result is that the Chief's narrative vision, rooted in his mixed heritage and half-breed status, necessarily remains confused and incomplete. Confronted with Big Nurse and her social order, the Chief is powerless. Like the other characters of the novel he has to "either conform to society or become 'mule stubborn' and rebel against it" (Madden 207). He is immobilized.

As a substitute father for the Chief, McMurphy helps him re-write the story of his father by opposing the rigidity of Big Nurse's rules with his own sense of bodily energy. McMurphy, as Kesey would say, goes with the flow, and that flow is the natural rhythm of uncalculated sexual energy, the rhythm of the body and of the land, a rhythm which in itself could help to eliminate the hierarchy constructed within the symbolic order. When Big Nurse attempts to rob McMurphy of his name at the beginning of the novel, for example, she does it within a context that insists upon the fixed structure of her rules. "Please understand, I appreciate the way you've taken it upon yourself to orient with the other patients on the ward, but everything in its own good time, Mr. McMurry. I'm sorry to interrupt you and Mr. Bromden, but you do understand: everyone . . . must follow the rules" (Kesey 28). McMurphy responds with a wink and a grin, resisting her formulation and simultaneously beginning to empower the Chief.

McMurphy also uses the power of touch to help effect this transformation. As the Chief describes it: "I remember (his) fingers were thick and strong closing over mine, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power. It blowed up near as big as his, I remember" (Kesey 24). And McMurphy's laugh, too, becomes part of an expansive expression of bodily plenitude: ". . . free and loud and it comes out of his wide grinning mouth and spreads in rings bigger and bigger till it's lapping against the walls all over the ward" (Kesey 16).

Kesey seems to offer through McMurphy's gestures the joy of the language of the body and of plenitude that McMurphy himself is capable of creating. It is the joyful language that we might imagine the Native American Indian had when he was still close to the natural world, living near the flow of the Columbia River along the Dalles. Such a language is clearly a threat to the rigidity of the symbolic order controlled by Big Nurse. It is the language

of “the Other,” an articulation of pleasure like the high school carnival that McMurphy discusses with Dr. Spivey, a celebration of polymorphous eroticism that undercuts the monolithic structure of the dominant culture. Most importantly, such a language does not suggest a phallogocentric strategy, but, as Cixous puts it, a joy of the body that could go on and go on infinitely.

Yet McMurphy also reminds the Chief that a man, like a pine on the tallest mountain (Tee Ah Millatoona), must grow big and stand erect in order to defeat the control of the white patriarchy. And it is this kind of image of phallic power rather than the image of polymorphous eroticism that finally dominates the novel. The Chief’s narrative story is filled with the language of play, the poetry of the land, even the playful rhymes of his grandmother (Porter 16–17). “McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I’d remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid’s poetry to me,” the Chief can claim at one point in his story (Kesey 216). But in the end the story drives toward a climax and so becomes a plot structured in typical phallogocentric terms, undercutting the counter-cultural voice.

At this level, *Cuckoo’s Nest* moves close to the traditional Oedipal narrative concerned with the son’s desire to replace the father and gain the phallogocentric power as part of his inheritance. Even in this context, however, Kesey makes the narrative problematic. In order to return to his Native American roots, the Chief cannot marry the mother; he must eliminate her. To marry the mother in terms of the Chief’s narrative structure would be to lose the name of the father again. In fact, as Kesey has defined the terms of the narrative, there is, ironically, no way for the Chief to achieve manhood without attempting to destroy the mother. For Kesey, marriage is an impossibility. Manhood for the Chief can only be achieved by a frontal attack on Big Nurse.

The climax of McMurphy’s battle against Big Nurse then, as it is filtered through the consciousness of the Chief, becomes unfortunately, but by necessity, an act of violence. McMurphy’s “red fingers” penetrate “the white flesh of her throat” in an act equivalent to rape; yet there is a hint of how it might have been otherwise as Big Nurse’s breasts are for a moment revealed; “the two nipples started from her chest and swelled out and out, bigger than anybody had ever imagined, warm and pink in the light . . .” (Kesey 267). The image here is of the world of the mother, the feminine body as the Chief would like it to be. But McMurphy’s violent attack undercuts such an image, aggravating instead the divisions in the battle of the sexes. Such violence does allow, however, the Chief to attempt to bring to closure his own Oedipal struggle.

When McMurphy is returned to the ward after his lobotomy ordered by Big Nurse, the Chief finally decides to kill him, a killing that not only clearly represents a transfer of sexual energy from McMurphy to the Chief, but also one that signals that the Chief has now assumed the place of McMurphy, his substitute father.

As the Chief describes the killing: "The big, hard body had a tough grip on life. It fought a long time against having it taken away, flailing and thrashing around so much I finally had to lie full length on top of it and scissor the kicking legs with mine while I mashed the pillow into the face. I lay there on top of the body for what seemed days, until the thrashing stopped. Until it was still a while and had shuddered once and was still again. Then I rolled off" (Kesey 270). In a poignant blending of homoerotic love and death, the substitute father is sacrificed for the son so that the son can become the father and so preserve the name of the father. But we must still ask: what precisely has the Chief with his mixed heritage gained in this struggle for manhood? And what does he still lack?

In one sense, the Chief has become McMurphy, although he realizes that in some ways he is bigger than McMurphy. McMurphy's cap is too small for him, for example, and the Chief can lift Big Nurse's control panel which McMurphy could not budge. Like McMurphy, the Chief has become a con artist able to survive on the road as he heads for the Columbia Gorge to see "if there's any of the guys (he) used to know back in the village" (Kesey 272). But if the Chief has saved the name of McMurphy, he has not recovered the place of Tee Ah Millatoona, nor has he come to terms with his white mother. This is particularly disturbing because, as Jack Hicks has said, "Kesey suggests repeatedly that memory, knowing one's individual and collective pasts, is a key to any sense of present or future" (Hicks 173).

Admittedly the Chief has found a voice that allows him to articulate his experience; yet as he says: "It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen" (Kesey 13). That "truth" is the burning fear and manic roaring of consciousness that makes up the Chief's own narrative, a narrative that has attempted to unveil through McMurphy the hidden identity of the father. But although we can hear the voice, we cannot locate it any more than the Chief can locate his own father. In fact, the underside of the novel seems to suggest that the Chief, like his father, is part of that culture of Vanishing Americans. The Chief, in other words, may have discovered a voice, but he remains invisible, a man without a name other than that of Bromden. The reader is exposed to the "truth" of the consciousness of the Chief, but the problem is that the reader has nothing to measure that consciousness against. In this sense, the Chief is imprisoned by the "truth" that he has created. He has achieved his individuality, but it is an individuality in isolation.

And here again we can see the contradiction in Kesey's own vision. The Chief's isolation suggests that he has achieved the nineteenth century version of the American myth of individualism, a myth that Kesey seems to embrace, but one that helped to destroy the Native American. It is a myth about power and about the inability to trust people unless one has control. Kesey's social vision, as we might call it, is bankrupt in such a context. For despite Kesey's

good intentions—and that of the counter-culture in general—we see exposed here that the foundation of that vision is not primarily a celebration of social identity or polymorphous erotic pleasure, but rather a further attempt to legitimate male individual identity and phallogocentric control.

Where is the Chief when he is telling the story? Unless he has returned to the Cuckoo's Nest, the Chief seems to be living an invisible life outside of that symbolic order that Kesey has defined through Big Nurse as America and that the Chief thinks of as a matriarchy, an extension of his castrating mother. The hope remains, of course, that the Chief will encounter a different style of life at the Columbian Gorge, perhaps becoming the "father" of an alternative culture, but the underside of the tale hints strongly that the Chief really has no place to go, nor is he sure where he is headed. The Chief remains in fact an indeterminate self much like that bluetick hound to which he compares his narrative. "No tracks on the ground but the ones he's making, and he sniffs in every direction with his cold red-rubber nose and picks up no scent but his own fear, fear burning down into him like steam. It's gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this . . ." (Kesey 13).

The combined issues of mixed heritage and gender definitions leave the reader, and I would suggest, Kesey, stumbling for some sort of satisfying resolution. Yet, there are no clear answers offered within the novel. In the tradition of American fiction Kesey chooses to struggle with these issues but at best only illuminates their complexities. William Faulkner, too, examined these issues in his novel, *Light in August*. Faulkner's main character, Joe Christmas, is like the Chief in that he cannot escape the notion that all women are trying to control and exploit him. He, too, lives in a confused world where the anticipated safety of being male, thereby dominant in a patriarchy, is denied him because of his mixed heritage and his consequential understanding of social order as a matriarchy.

In seeking resolution both authors ignore the primary cause of the conflict: mixed heritage. They neglect to have their characters personally challenge the system of oppression which labels a minority male as beneath a white female, another victim of the oppressive system. Instead, they skirt the issue, each allowing his main character to regain his manhood simply by claiming it with a six-word phrase. Joe Christmas, tired of being a passenger on the roller-coaster of life declares his intention to take control with, "I am going to do something" (Forrey 229–230). While the Chief announces his reentry into manhood with the powerful words, "I been away a long time" (Kesey 311).

Frank Waters' novel *The Man Who Killed The Deer* takes a slightly different track. Like Kesey, Waters develops a main character who feels his manhood is challenged by a matriarchy. Unlike Kesey, Waters chooses to allow Martiniano to recognize and reconcile the source of his conflict: the fact that he has learned the white man's definition of manhood and, later, tries to ap-

ply it in matriarchal Indian society. Martiniano relinquishes the fallacy that a man is more powerful than a woman and learns to accept and embrace the strength of the female.

Waters' character grows more than Kesey's. Martiniano does not get sucked into the old patriarchy as does the Chief instead of wandering, he finds a new peace. By integrating his impressions of gender definitions Martiniano is able to achieve relative reconciliation between his heritage and his perception of manhood. Waters' understanding that a minority male's feelings of oppression, seemingly at the hands of a matriarchy, could well be the result of a larger male-oriented system, has spared the author some of the harsh criticism dealt to Kesey.

Critics such as Robert Forrey have attacked Kesey claiming that he is sexist. Forrey, for example, places Kesey in the machismo tradition of Hemingway and Steinbeck: ". . . what we have in Kesey's novel is yet another group of American males trying desperately to unite into a quasi-religious cult or brotherhood which will enable them to sublimate their homosexuality in violent athletic contests, gambling, or other forms of psychopathological horseplay" (229–230). But Forrey's important insight is only half the story.

Kesey has given us the vision of a half-breed, a man of color rooted in a mixed heritage, and he has asked the question—how does such a person, with a dominant white mother, achieve manhood within a heterosexual arrangement? Kesey has begun to explore that question in *Cuckoo's Nest*, but he has failed to understand that such issues of gender and race need to include the insidious structures of patriarchy in their analysis. At the same time, though, the questions that he raises remain important ones, and so reflect the relevance and the uniqueness of Kesey's vision for us today.

WORKS CITED

- Cixous, Helen and Catherine Clement. *The Newly Born Woman*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986.
- Falk, Marcia. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 64: pp. 221–222.
- Faulkner, William. *Light in August*. Canada: Random House, 1959.
- Forrey, Robert. *Modern Fiction Studies*, Summer 1975: pp. 229–230.
- Hicks, Jack. *In the Singer's Temple*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981.
- Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Viking, 1962.
- Madden, Fred. "Sanity and Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 32.2 (1986): p. 207.
- Martin, Terence, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Spring 1973: p. 45
- Porter, M. Gilbert. *The Art of Grit*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1982.

STEPHEN L. TANNER

*The Western American Context of
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Occasionally a literary work captives a large audience by vividly embodying the fears and desires that now just beneath the level of articulation. Such a work evokes a pleasure of recognition; readers are confirmed in a knowledge of their society that they scarcely knew they possessed. Through such an accomplishment the artist brings into focus social and cultural tendencies that before had been only partially discerned by the general public. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is such a work. Written between the summer of 1960 and the spring of 1961, the novel preceded the counterculture movement of the succeeding decade, with its disruption of universities, opposition to the war in Vietnam, back-to-nature revolt against established authority and revered technology, and often indecorous rejection of what it viewed as the affluent complacency of the fifties. Yet the book prophetically contained the essence of this social-cultural turmoil. More importantly, it dramatically articulated the nation's queasy suspicion that its valued tradition of self-reliant individualism was being eroded by institutionalized conformity and dehumanizing technology.

The novel is further distinguished by having succeeded also as a play and a film. The play, adapted by Dale Wasserman, was produced in 1963 and revived in 1971. The 1975 film, produced by Michael Douglas and Saul Zaentz and directed by Miles Forman, won six Academy Awards. More-

Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1973): pp. 291-320.

over, the novel has frequently been used as a text in a wide variety of disciplines: literature, psychology, sociology, medicine, law, and others. After thirty years, it continues in one printing after another to entertain readers and prompt commentary.

That any novel should have so extensive a literary-cultural impact is unusual. The fact that it was the author's first published novel makes the case even more remarkable. Did Kesey suspect as he created the story while a creative writing student at Stanford that it would touch such a responsive chord in so many readers? His own answer is no. In a 1983 interview, he said he completed the manuscript, turned it over to Malcolm Cowley, his teacher and also an editor at Viking, and returned to his home in Oregon to proceed directly to writing another novel. "When the reviews came out and as time went by, I realized that I had written a great book. But that didn't occur to me when I was writing it. I had no idea it would be taken like it was." Later in the same interview, when asked what interested him about himself, he said. "It's 'Why me?' What is it about me, my family, my father, this part of the country that caused it to be me who wrote *Cuckoo's Nest*? It is not something I set out to do. It's as though all the angels got together and said, 'Okay, here's the message that America desperately needs. Now, let's pick him to do it.'"¹ Perhaps Kesey would not have accomplished what he did if he had consciously set out to do it. The pressure of such objectives would have been debilitating. He once wrote to his friend Ken Babbs, "The first book one writes is a noisemaker, a play with no pressure, and it may sometimes have that free-swinging song of the cells."²

What follows is an attempt to identify some of the elements which generated that "free-swinging song of the cells." I will also try to answer Kesey's own question "Why me?," to explain in some measure what it was about him, his family, his father, and his part of the country that caused him to write *Cuckoo's Nest*.

The Kesey Collection at the University of Oregon contains a 411-page final typescript of the novel and an earlier, typed version of 406 pages with holograph revisions, most of them minor editing changes. In addition there are 37 pages of miscellaneous fragments. The most important of these are three pages of the first draft of the novel's opening scene, which are included in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism* edited by John C. Pratt. This edition also includes a two-page sample of the few extant pages of the first draft showing how extensive Kesey's revisions were. More than seven pages of the miscellaneous fragments are stream-of-consciousness pencil scribbles on unlined paper, where Kesey registered the effects of some pills a nurse had brought him during a government-sponsored drug test in which he was a volunteer participant. He recorded his perceptions over a three-hour period, the handwriting becoming larger and more sprawling, the impressions more surrealistic. Such experiments with hallucinogens must have influenced

his creation of Bromden's hallucinations. Most of the random manuscript pages, however, are of little use because they are inconsecutive and without recognizable relation to the finished novel.

In an undated letter to his friend Ken Babbs,³ Kesey says that while he and his family were on a trip to Oregon, a friend who had a grudge against him broke into the small building behind his house in Palo Alto and burned his manuscripts. Some of the *Cuckoo's Nest* material may have been destroyed at that time. In any case, to understand the creation of the novel, we must rely on letters, interviews, related manuscripts and biographical information.

I

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest is a product of the American West, specifically of two locations along the Pacific coast: the environs of Eugene, Oregon, and of San Francisco, California. The first was the location of his childhood and formal education; the second was the location where his informal education was catalyzed by other creative minds and by the social-cultural-artistic ferment of that area in the late fifties, particularly the Beat phenomenon.

It is significant that in asking "Why me?" Kesey should mention in particular his family, his father, and his part of the country. These are primary elements in shaping his early development and in turn the products of his imagination. His family along both paternal and maternal lines were farmers and ranchers, the kind of people he described in his second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, as "a stringy-muscled brood of restless and stubborn west-walkers." In the case of Kesey's family the westward migration was from Tennessee and Arkansas to Texas and New Mexico, then to Colorado, where Ken was born, and finally to Oregon. This family line was imbued with traits and values characteristic of the rural West: family ties were strong, physical strength and self-reliance were prized, outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing were an integral part of life, Protestant Christianity informed the rules of behavior, and the pleasures of vernacular talk and storytelling colored daily intercourse.

At family gatherings at his grandfather's farm, Kesey competed with his brother and his cousins in racing, wrestling, boxing, and anything that needed proving. And he absorbed the idiom of vernacular anecdote with its homely but vivid figures of speech. These experiences had lasting effects. The physical competition continued for Kesey in the form of football and wrestling in high school college, and beyond. At the time he was writing *Cuckoo's Nest*, he was trying to qualify for the Olympic wrestling team at San Francisco's Olympic Club. Use of the region's vernacular persists in Kesey's talk and writing, in his tendency to communicate in anecdote and trope. The country Protestantism, particularly that of his grandmother Smith, left an indelible impression. In

1972 he said, "I'm a hard shell Baptist, born and raised, and though I thought I had left it I found it in myself at every turn, this basic, orthodox Christianity."⁴

This family background registers clearly in *Cuckoo's Nest*—in the strength, self-reliance, and competitiveness of the hero; in the style of the prose and the language used; in the emphasis on harmony with nature; and in the Christian imagery. Kesey's father was a sort of hero for him, a strong, independent sort of cowboy figure that he likened to John Wayne. Fred Kesey loved the outdoors and brought his sons onto the rivers and into the woods with him from an early age. Ken's hunting and fishing experiences were an important part of his youth, richly nourishing the wellsprings of his imagination. He and his father were strong-willed and their relationship was not without conflict, but Ken retained great admiration for his father, who died in 1969. He said that his father believed a time comes when a son should whip his father. It is an important and delicate matter. "A boy has to *know* he can best his father, and his father has to present him the opportunity." It has to be done in the right way and at the right time. "My father's a wise man and he gave me the chance. Perhaps this is a father's most significant duty."⁵

Father-son relationships—more precisely, the absence of satisfactory father-son relationships—are a crucial matter in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Bromden tells McMurphy, "My Papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain. . . . He was real big when I was a kid."⁶ But the Combine (Bromden's term for technologized society) diminished his size, and the loss of strength and self-respect that resulted for his son is a principal reason for Bromden's withdrawal from reality in a mental ward. McMurphy, acting as a surrogate father, incites Bromden to exert his strength, and Bromden eventually bests this symbolic father by lifting the control panel, which McMurphy had failed to budge, and bashing it through the window. Kesey once described his father as "a kind of big, rebellious cowboy who never did fit in."⁷ The description, of course, aptly fits McMurphy as well. Obviously, Kesey had reason to single out his father as he questioned himself about the sources of the novel.

The last element mentioned specifically in his "Why me?" question is his part of the country, western Oregon. It is the natural landscape of that region, with its evergreen forests, clear rivers, and seacoast, that forms the norm of health and sanity in the book's central conflict. Bromden is a representative natural man who has been alienated from that environment and whose sanity depends on his reestablishing broken connections. His recovery is marked in stages by a renewed capacity to sense the world of nature. It reaches a climax or epiphany on a fishing boat off the Oregon coast with a cosmic blending of nature and laughter. In readily perceived ways, the novel's regional setting has much to do with its distinctive achievement, and it is likely that recent ecological approaches to literary criticism will further delineate relationships

between the book's themes and methods and Kesey's environmentally shaped values and frames of reference. Gilbert Porter perceptively observes that many of the experiences that stimulated Kesey's creativity occurred in California—in creative writing seminars at Stanford, in the interactions of the Perry Lane student community near Stanford, and in his experiences as an aide in the psychiatric wards of the Menlo Park hospital—"but in the transmutation of experience into art, Kesey relocated his world in Oregon, where familiar landmarks provided some stabilizing boundaries for a microcosm psychically out of kilter. Kesey's California experiences suggested a mental ward, but his roots in the Oregon outdoors suggested reality."⁸ The history and culture of the Northwest, which constitute a distinctive outlook on American life, permeate the novel just as the region's landscape does.

Another aspect of Kesey's youth in Oregon that helps explain the creation of *Cuckoo's Nest* is his reading and the interests that prompted it and were generated by it. From an early age, he was fascinated by fantasy, by any hint of exciting and mysterious things just beyond the reach of ordinary experience. He read a good deal as a boy, but until high school that reading was mostly comic books, Westerns, and science fiction—comic books such as *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Captain Marvel*; authors like Zane Grey, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Jules Verne. This reading was the beginning of a quest, a manifestation of that perennial appetite for transcendent consciousness, a yearning instinctive in most everyone but especially acute in Kesey. He once mentioned this search in an interview. As a boy he had sent for some decals of *Batman* comic-book characters. The package arrived containing a bonus, a small book of magic. This sparked an interest in magic that led him on to ventriloquism and then hypnotism. "And from hypnotism into dope. But it's always been the same trip, the same kind of search."⁹ It was this desire that enticed him, after he had written two novels, to seek beyond writing—through experiments with electronic media and further experiments with drugs—new forms of consciousness and artistic expression.

He treats the same kind of yearning in an unpublished essay in which he tells of walking as a boy with his dog across the endless rolling prairies near La Junta, Colorado, his birthplace. When he heard a far-off rumbling coming out of the clouds, he thought it was a herd of wild horses one grandpa or the other had told him about—"with teeth like rows of barbed wire and eyes like polished steel balls an' breath that'd peel paint." When he told his mother about it, she said, "It's just thunder, honeybun. You was only imagining you saw horses." As a man looking back he asks, "But why, Mama, is it *just* thunder?" And he wonders as he drives across Colorado "What would still roam these prairies if the old creatures had been allowed to breed and prosper, if they hadn't been decimated by that crippler of the imagination: *only*." He suggests that fact and fiction blend well and both are essential in presenting "the True Happening of

the moment.” Merely to report as a camera does is just touching the surface, like panning the stream instead of digging for the vein. “The vein lies under the topsoil of external reality: it is not hidden. We’ve known of it for ages, this vein, but it has been put down so long by *just*, disparaged so long by *only*, that we have neglected its development.” He suggests that mining the vein has many advantages. In writing, for example, “it can mean that as much emphasis can be placed on hyperbole, metaphor, simile, or *fantasy* as on actual events.” He concludes, “In the vast seas between red and white blood corpuscles Captain Nemo still secretly pilots his Nautilus, this white-haired scourge of Oppression and Warfare. Why not give him his head? Or through the dense growth, of neurons, Lou Wetzel stalks the Zane Grey Indians, silent as moss until he strikes with a chilling war whoop. Why not let him stalk?”¹⁰ Such attitudes are undoubtedly behind the claim by the narrator of *Cuckoo’s Nest* that what he tells is “the truth even if it didn’t happen” (*CN*, 8).

Comic books, Westerns, and science fiction—these popular genres captured Kesey’s fancy and stimulated his imagination in ways he would later take seriously. “A single *Batman* comicbook is more honest than a whole volume of *Time* magazines,” he once told an interviewer.¹¹ He recognized in these popular forms vital American myths that could be employed in serious literature the same way Joyce had made use of classic myths. *Cuckoo’s Nest* is informed by the mythology of American popular culture.

II

At the University of Oregon, Kesey was a sort of campus wonder-boy. He involved himself in athletics, theater, and fraternity life. He majored in communications and took courses in creative writing. It was a period of the kind of growth and discovery one would expect when a singularly bright, curious, but relatively uncultured mind is exposed to a university environment, when an emerging charismatic personality is exposed to a wider variety of people and social opportunities, but no matter how stimulating his experiences as an undergraduate may have been, they were not as life-transforming as his experiences as a graduate student at Stanford.

A Woodrow Wilson fellowship enabled him to enter Stanford’s creative writing program in 1958. It was a highly regarded program with distinguished writer-teachers such as Wallace Stegner, Richard Scowcroft, Malcolm Cowley, and Frank O’Connor. Perhaps even more important in shaping Kesey’s writing skills was the group of students with whom he associated and shared manuscripts and commentary. Among that group were Larry McMurphy, Wendell Berry, Robert Stone, Tillie Olsen, Ed McClanahan, and others whose writing later achieved varying degrees of acclaim. Kesey has likened them to the Green Bay Packers under Vince Lombardi. In addition to the wealth of talent, the seminars were distinguished by a generous spirit

of useful critique. Young writers can be hard on each other, quick to give and take offense. However, Kesey's experience with his classmates was positive and resulted in a number of lasting friendships.

An important one of these friendships, and one that clearly illustrates the kind of stimulation they provided, is the one with Ken Babbs. They met in a seminar during Kesey's first semester at Stanford, and during the next few years, while Babbs was in military service, they engaged in a correspondence deliberately intended to provide opportunity for writing practice and mutual evaluation. In a letter to Babbs written while Kesey was working in a mental institution and writing *Cuckoo's Nest*, he suggests that they continue their letters as a way of helping each other,

because I fog in and forget sometimes that I'm a damn good writer with potential of becoming a great one. Publishing house setbacks slow me down, could stop me and dry me up like a fallen fig. I doubt work that I should know is good. It is more important sometimes to point out the good than it is to distinguish the bad; you're certain of the old standby Bad, no one needs point that out all the time. But you're forever uncertain of the Good.¹²

In the next sentence, he says he is going to send Babbs sections of the *Cuckoo's Nest* manuscript. The quoted passage is interesting in several ways. The fog image brings to mind his narrator's struggle with fog, an intriguing parallel. The publishing house setbacks refer to his attempts to publish "Zoo," his novel about the Beat culture of San Francisco's North Beach, which had won the Saxton Prize at Stanford but was never published. Clearly, at this point in the creation of *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey felt a need to firm up his confidence. He wanted a reader's responses and suggestions, but only if they were encouraging. He must have known intuitively the book's strengths and didn't want criticism that whittled them away; he needed reinforcing praise.

He had to send the manuscript to Vietnam, where Babbs was stationed. Babbs annotated it and wrote a long letter of suggestions, including these:

I don't like the word, the Combine. You're trying to give a name to something that has no name. It's an emotion, a complacency, and a dulling of the senses that we're fighting, and to try and shut all these things into a box and give it a title is taking an easy gambit that isn't there to be had. . . . Throw away the thought that the opponent is real, that it exists. Everyone that reads with any intelligence knows what you're writing about, you don't have to give it a label.

He praised the hero and agreed that individual strength is more important than group action. "All I can say is do him bigger and better and finer, and you'll make everything and everyone else in the book as big and as fine." But again he counseled Kesey not to make the opposing force tangible or specific: "Forget about having the chief name something the Combine, keep it nameless. Don't sum up this total fight into the Big Nurse."¹³

This is reasonable advice and touches upon the principal risk Kesey took in simplifying the forces of good and evil and embodying them in a specific hero and villain. Some critics have shared Babbs's point of view, but the general public has responded positively to the comic-book and Western-showdown simplicity of the book's principal conflicts. In this respect, the novel is a tour de force, an unabashed and skillful use of the appeals characteristic of popular literature and culture.

Kesey was confident enough in his aims that he could resist the advice of a best friend but unsure enough about how he had realized them to be fortified by that friend's praise. Babbs assured him in the same letter that the book had the ingredients of success. "The writing is good, at times rough, but like all your stuff it swings with the wild rhythms of hot life, raw life, good life, and I move out with it, and that's the power of the book for me." He suggested that Kesey might not meet great success for ten or twelve years, but it was coming. The novel appeared in print exactly one year later, and Kesey took satisfaction some months before then in playfully teasing Babbs about his success: "When I got the telegram, direct from Malcolm Cowley, no less, I thought about calling you and rubbing the salt of my fortune into your already smarting literary wounds, but thought better of it when I realized how much more acute the sting would be upon receiving the published book. Unannounced, like an angel of derision swooping down to harass you."¹⁴ But of course he couldn't wait until the book was out before sharing his excitement with Babbs. Perhaps implied in the letter is both Kesey's trust in his own genius and an expression of gratitude for his friend's interest and encouragement.

What Kesey learned from teachers that helped him in creating the novel is difficult to determine with any precision. When asked in 1963 if he had learned anything in his creative writing classes at Stanford, he said he had learned a lot from Malcolm Cowley. What was it he learned? "Well, before Cowley, I studied with James Hall at Oregon. He taught me how *good* writing can be. Cowley taught me how good a writer *I* could be."¹⁵ Cowley had been a visiting teacher during the time Kesey was at work on the novel, 1960-1961, and therefore was the teacher who offered suggestions specifically about *Cuckoo's Nest*. Unfortunately, those annotations and suggestions were not preserved.

Before the seminar with Cowley, Kesey had been taught by Wallace Stegner. His debt to Stegner is problematical. When Gordon Lish asked him

what he had learned from Stegner, Kesey replied, "Just never to teach in college," explaining this answer by suggesting that Stegner's writing had been adversely affected by the academic life. "A man becomes *accustomed* to having two hundred people gather every day at one o'clock giving him all of their attention—because he's clever, good-looking, famous, and has a beautiful voice."¹⁶ The sour tone here could have had several sources; maybe it was jealousy or a sense of competition. Stegner was one of the leading writers associated with the West, and Kesey, as westerner, would inevitably be measured against him. But more likely it was a clash of values. Kesey would become a guru of the counterculture or youth-cult movement, a psychedelic impresario in the transition from Beats to Hippies. Stegner was to write critically of that movement. The Bohemianism Kesey was absorbing on Perry Lane and in North Beach probably alienated him from the academic establishment Stegner seemed to represent. Cowley, in contrast, was not an academic—he taught creative writing but was not a full-time professor—and was more sympathetic to the Beat writers Kesey was discovering. Kesey read Kerouac's *On the Road* three times before arriving at Stanford, "hoping to sign on in some way, to join that joyous voyage, like thousands of other volunteers inspired by the same book, and its vision, and, of course, its incomparable hero."¹⁷ Cowley had read the manuscript of *On the Road* while at Viking. He plugged it to his publisher and mentioned it favorably in *The Literary Situation* in 1954, three years before it was published.¹⁸

One item in the Kesey Collection suggests a certain friction between Kesey and Stegner. It is a chastisement from Stegner that might be related to the clash of perspectives just mentioned. Kesey submitted a paper titled "On Why I Am Not Writing My Last Term Paper." It was one of those things students write when they want to justify failing to complete an assignment by claiming it was not challenging or meaningful enough. Kesey argued that he should be writing a novel instead of doing academic exercises. Stegner would have none of that. His annotation chides Kesey, saying the paper is merely self-expression, which is really self-indulgence. "Now go write that novel, but don't for God's sake let it turn into self-expression."

But regardless of how this reprimand was taken or how Kesey disliked what he viewed as an academic quality in Stegner's writing, there is evidence that he learned from him. According to Kesey's wife, Faye Kesey, both Stegner and Richard Scowcroft played influential roles in Kesey's first year at Stanford. And in letters to Babbs, Kesey acknowledges that Stegner had been right in his emphasis on point of view.¹⁹ Under the stimulus of Stegner, Kesey became preoccupied with point of view, and his first two novels are distinctive in their experimental narrative technique.

Stegner, as far as I know, has not written about his association with Kesey. Malcolm Cowley has. In an essay titled "Kesey at Stanford," he tells

of meeting Kesey in his seminar in the fall of 1960. Kesey was not officially enrolled, but as a matter of courtesy, former students were invited to attend. According to Cowley, the class was distinguished and class members developed good relations in discussing each other's work. Cowley's description of the "stolid and self-assured" Kesey resembles Kesey's description of McMurphy: "He had the build of a plunging halfback, with big shoulders and a neck like the stump of a Douglas fir." Kesey read from the manuscript in class and showed the whole thing to Cowley for his critique. Cowley insists that he contributed nothing: "the book is Kesey's from first to last. Probably I pointed out passages that didn't 'work,' that failed to produce a desired effect on the reader. Certainly I asked questions, and some of these may have helped to clarify Kesey's notions of how to go about solving his narrative problems, but the solutions were always his own." John C. Pratt tells us that Cowley discovered rhyme in certain passages, and Kesey made it more explicit in revision. The first drafts seemed to Cowley to have been written rapidly, as evidenced by misspellings and typing errors. Later Kesey would edit with some care. "He had his visions, but he didn't have the fatal notion of some Beat writers, that the first hasty account of a vision was a sacred text not to be tampered with. He revised, he made deletions and additions; he was working with readers in mind."²⁰ Although Cowley didn't share McMurphy's theory of psychotherapy, he was impressed with the manuscript and was undoubtedly instrumental in its acceptance by Viking. The Cowley connection is one of the elements of chance and good fortune in the concatenation of circumstances resulting in the novel's success.

III

Kesey's life was radically transformed when he moved into Perry Lane and began making excursions to North Beach, just forty miles away. Perry Lane, which no longer exists, was a neighborhood of small cottages housing a rather Bohemian community of students. The story is familiar, told most colorfully by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Kesey grew a beard; began playing the guitar and singing folk songs; read about jazz and drugs; wrote a novel about what was happening in North Beach; volunteered for government-sponsored drug experiments at the Menlo Park Veterans Administration hospital; began, along with friends, conducting drug experiments of his own; took a job as an aide in the psychiatric ward of the hospital; and so on. Repeating as little as possible of the published information about this time in Kesey's life, I wish to provide some new information and to reexamine what is already known as it relates directly to the genesis of *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Kesey has publicly acknowledged his debt to Jack Kerouac a number of times, and he became close friends with Neal Cassady, the model for a main character in *On the Road*. Although the Cassady friendship pro-

foundly influenced Kesey's later activities, it had nothing to do with *Cuckoo's Nest*, which was completed before the two met. It was the spirit of Kerouac's book rather than the literary method that attracted Kesey. He considered Kerouac a reporter rather than a novelist, and he wasn't trying to be a reporter. Kerouac developed a technique of writing "without consciousness" and in "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" attacked the idea that revision is important and necessary. He compared the writer to a jazz saxophonist releasing an unrevised flow. Kesey used a similar method in dictating his drug experiences and in freewriting as he planned his novels. But his novels were planned. His working notes for *Sometimes a Great Notion* and "One Lane," an unpublished novel, reveal his self-consciousness about themes and about methods for conveying them. His courses in film and television scriptwriting at the University of Oregon had required him to design his objectives, and he retained the habit. Moreover, his mind has a philosophical quality and is naturally inclined to discover concepts and themes in even commonplace events.

More frequently mentioned in the letters and tapes in the Kesey Collection than *On the Road* is William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. In lending his copy to Babbs, he called it his "most prized possession." He greatly admired Burroughs's ability to capture the carnal and psychic throb of human experience. Burroughs says near the end of *Naked Lunch*, "There is only one thing a writer can write about; *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity.' . . . Insofar as I succeed in Direct recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function. . . . I am not an entertainer." As with Kerouac's "spontaneous prose," Kesey adopted the method only in a modified form. Tony Tanner has suggested that Bromden's paranoid fantasies are "a very Burroughs-like vision."²¹ And Burroughs's funny, carnival-pitchman style may have contributed something to the creation of McMurphy, who is frequently likened to a carnival pitchman.

There is much in *Cuckoo's Nest* that derived from the Beats, who advocated a return to nature and a revolt against the machine, attitudes that are paramount in the novel. Bromden's Combine is really a tag for the corporate, technical-industrial, suburban values that alienated the Beat generation. Perhaps prompted by or perhaps simply concurrent with critiques by the serious media in the fifties and books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1952), William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958), the Beats viewed America as inhabited by a lonely crowd of gray-flannel-clad organization men, offering its affluence only to those who were willing to pay the price of strict conformity. Kesey accepted these premises but offered an alternative to the Beats' rebellion, which lacked definite shape and direction and was little more than withdrawal from

the mainstream. Kesey's is an activist response that adumbrates the counter-culture strategies of the following decade.

The Beat movement was urban; Kesey's roots were rural. This accounts for why he embraced some Beat attitudes and ignored others. His family and regional tradition of self-assertive action prevented his accepting Beat passivity and withdrawal. He told Gordon Lish, "I get weary of people who use pessimism to avoid being responsible for all the problems in our culture. A man who says, we're on the road to disaster, is seldom trying to wrench the wheel away from the driver." He prefers the troublemaker who tries to make things better. In a letter to Babbs written while he was on duty at the hospital, Kesey tells of being called upstairs to listen to a tape about the brainwashing of Korean War prisoners: "It was most enlightening, especially in terms of the book I'm writing. It had a lot to do with the 'Code of Conduct.' Remember it? We used to ridicule it upstairs in the ROTC office at Stanford? Well, I'm becoming very square or something—but I'm beginning to believe the code has a lot to it, a lot about strength. Strength is the key. We need strong men."²² McMurphy, of course, meets the need for strong men.

Allen Ginsberg claimed that "the first serious experimentation with altered states of consciousness came with the Beats using pot and peyote."²³ He had written *Howl* under the influence of drugs—peyote, amphetamines, Dexedrine. Kesey, who says he wrote parts of *Cuckoo's Nest* under the influence of peyote, was introduced to drugs by the Beat culture. In volunteering for experiments with mind-altering drugs, he was following the lead of the Beats' curiosity about how such substances might affect artistic creation.

In a way, Kesey's attraction to the Beats was an attraction to the American tradition of romantic idealism—New England transcendentalism filtered through Whitman to writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg. Whitman had added a coarse, fleshy, vulgar element—the glorification of the body and sex. The Beats carried this impulse even further. Kesey was attracted to the idealism and readily embraced the earthiness, which was compatible with his western-small-town, locker-room background. *Cuckoo's Nest* is informed by American transcendentalism's preoccupation with nature and self-reliance, but it is couched in earthy, ribald language and action. While Beat writing and behavior affected the curious and impressionable Kesey forcefully, his strong personality shaped by western individualism caused him to gradually filter that influence and retain only what suited his own distinctive purposes. The stages in this process are apparent in his unpublished writing.

The novel "Zoo" is specifically about North Beach. It echoes Kerouac in its descriptions of wine drinking, drug addicts, jazz musicians, stupid and brutal police, interracial marriages, poverty-level Bohemian living, cars scarred by frantic miles on the highway, and talk of nihilism and Zen. It displays the same adolescent fascination with unconventional behavior as

On the Road, but it artistically shapes autobiographical experience in the interests of theme in a way that book fails to do. The main character in "Zoo" is torn between his attraction to a new way of life in North Beach and his rural Oregon roots. In Kesey's first two novels, "End of Autumn" and "Zoo"—both unpublished—the Oregon roots prevail. In his life following the writing of those novels, however, the new lifestyle in California prevailed until, after serving six months in prison on a marijuana charge, he returned to a farm in Oregon.

So "Zoo" constitutes one stage in his absorption of the Beat influence. An unpublished short story in the Kesey Collection titled "The Kicking Party" reflects another. The setting is a psychiatric ward. "The Five patients wonder why Abel Cramer is an inmate. The paranoids say, "Plotting, the bastard is, plotting to undermine the whole system with his evil laugh and sinful stories!" The head nurse watches him "through her protective glass shield from her sterilized isolation booth." He is talking to "a group of enraptured patients," telling "one of his heightened, hilarious stories of jazz days or junk days or juice days." Here is the basic situation of *Cuckoo's Nest*, but with interesting differences. Cramer is described as "this fabled handsome stud-with-goatee." He is a beatnik with a history of drug and jazz obsession. Moreover, he is mentally disturbed and haunted with the fear of madness. At this point on the road to *Cuckoo's Nest*, the charismatic laughter (McMurphy) and the patient on the brink of insanity (Bromden) are combined in the same person (Cramer), and that person has been created from a world Kesey had merely visited and read about. The turning point came when he precipitated from this solution two characters, a hero of event and a hero of consciousness, both of whom had their source in the life and culture of his own region. Music remained important, but it too was transformed: from jazz, which Kesey had just discovered, to the country-flavored tunes Kesey had grown up with. In short, Kesey was greatly stimulated by his encounter with the Beats but had to get most of that influence out of his system before he achieved the originality *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. What did Kerouac think of *Cuckoo's Nest*? In the Kesey Collection is a letter from Kerouac to Tom Ginsberg at Viking written October 19, 1961. Kerouac, who had read an advance copy of the novel, praises it highly but, perhaps because of his own autobiographical approach to writing, is convinced that the author must be the Columbia Gorge Indian himself, who used "Kesey," perhaps his wife's name, to avoid being identified with the "deafmute" hero. He says the author is certainly right about the Combine and praises the way he captures the American lingo. Kerouac even senses the flavor of "real western Indian talk" in the narration. His understanding of narrative personae was no more reliable, it seems, than his knowledge of Native American speech.

IV

Six months after his first volunteer drug experiment, Kesey was working as a psychiatric aide. Both his introduction to mind-altering drugs and his work as an aide were primary experiences in the inception of *Cuckoo's Nest*. As he once put it, "In the antiseptic wilderness of the Menlo Park VA Hospital. I cleared a space and rigged a runway and waited for my muse to take the controls."²⁴ He expected the hospital work to supply subject matter and hoped the drugs would inspire new awareness and perspective. The first expectation was fully realized. The matter of drug induced inspiration is more complicated.

In his own essay on the origins of the novel, "Who Flew over What?" in *Kesey's Garage Sale*, Kesey says that McMurphy was fictional but "inspired by the tragic longing of the real men I worked with on the ward." He described some of these men in a letter to Babbs. Their resemblance to the patients in the novel is obvious. He cultivated an empathy with these men and tried, through drugs, to glimpse their perspective: "I studied inmates as they daily wove intricate and very accurate schizophrenic commentaries of the disaster of their environment, and had found that merely by ingesting a tiny potion I could toss word salad with the nuttiest of them, had discovered that if I plied my consciousness with enough of the proper chemical it was impossible to preconceive, and when preconception is fenced out, truth is liable to occur."²⁵ He even persuaded a friend in electronics to rig an apparatus and give him a dose of electric-shock therapy so he could write authoritatively about it.

His sympathetic interest in the plight of patients is revealed in a one-sheet summary in the Kesey Collection headed "Be a good story." He notes that a patient had shown up the night before, having left Brentwood Hospital. "Make it a newer hospital, with better facilities and food," Kesey notes to himself. The man had hopped a freight to Oakland in cold weather and gone three days without food. Arriving at the wrong hospital he had walked to a new one. His feet were blistered and he was hungry and exhausted. Why had he done it? "Because they didn't treat him like a human down there. A man will go through a great deal of physical torment and punishment and cold and hunger—to be afforded at least human dignity."

Also in the collection is a taped conversation in which Kesey and another man who had worked in the same hospital compare their experiences. They agree about the white nurses. They found them hard, tough, trying to prove something. The black nurses were kinder. Kesey tells of working in the geriatrics section and getting in a scuffle with a black aide over the treatment of a patient known as Old Moses. For someone acquainted with the novel, the conversation resonates familiarly.

How realistic is Kesey's portrayal of a psychiatric ward? He worked just as an aide for a relatively short time, and he was not writing as a reporter.

His narrator, after all, fades in and out of hallucination, and Kesey was aiming for truths independent of literal accuracy. The question may not even be a fair or useful one to ask. But of course it has been asked, and the answers are varied. John Pratt quotes a British psychiatrist practicing in Canada who provides a list of what he considers the novel's distortions and misrepresentations of psychiatric-hospital care.²⁶ On the other hand, there are letters in the Kesey Collection from two psychiatrists who find the novel's portrayal of mental care accurate and who wish to quote from it and confer with Kesey on reforms in psychiatric practice. One expresses surprise that Kesey had developed such a remarkable insight in so short a time. "I was in this racket a lot longer than that," he says, "before I realized what was really significant and actually taking place."

A question more relevant to the genesis of the novel and to understanding the process of literary creation is this: what does the novel owe to drug inspiration? Kesey has said on a number of occasions that the inspiration for his Indian narrator came to him while he was under the influence of peyote. One interviewer provides this quote from a December 1971 conversation: "I was flying on peyote, really strung out there, when this Indian came to me. I knew nothing about Indians, had no Indians on my mind, had nothing that an Indian could ever grab onto, yet this Indian came to me. It was the peyote, then, couldn't be anything else. The Indian came straight out from the drug itself."²⁷ This claim, in one version or another, is the most widely known item of information about the writing of the novel. Kesey also makes the claim in "Who Flew over What?" and insists that it was not simply a matter of peyote being naturally associated with Indians. Bromden was, he insists, an inspiration from outside his experience. This claim merits careful examination for at least two reasons. First, it is linked to the longstanding question of whether artistic creativity can be enhanced by chemical stimulants. And second, it is Kesey's prime example of the creative benefits of mind-altering drugs.

I suggest that this claim should not be taken at face value. To begin with, Kesey is, or once was, temperamentally inclined to a certain credulity in matters of paranormal experience, as is evidenced in the search or quest already mentioned. His imagination has been captured by everything from the *I Ching* to mysteries of a lost pyramid—anything that offers awareness beyond the commonplace. He was very serious about his experiments with drugs and strongly desired to make discoveries. He has likened his volunteering for such experiments to Neil Armstrong's volunteering to go to the moon or Lewis and Clark's willingness to explore the West.²⁸ He used a good deal of the money earned by *Cuckoo's Nest* to finance attempts to find new forms of expression beyond writing through the use of drugs and electronic equipment. "Who Flew over What?" was written during his Merry Prankster era. He needed an example of drug inspiration to justify the Prankster activities

and to confirm to himself that he was on the right track. In other words, the assertion that Bromden was the exclusive product of peyote maybe an exaggeration generated by an intense desire that it be true.

In "Who Flew over What?" Kesey says that he wrote the first three pages of *Cuckoo's Nest* after swallowing eight little cactus plants. "These pages," he asserts, "remained almost completely unchanged through the numerous rewrites the book went through, and from this first spring I drew all the passion and perception the narrator spoke with during the ten months' writing that followed." Pratt includes these pages in the background section of his critical edition of the novel, noting that by the final version "Kesey made significant revisions, especially after he had decided upon the novel's point of view."²⁹ It is true that the germ of the narration is apparent in these first pages, but it is also clear that Kesey has again overstated his case.

There is ample reason why Kesey might have selected an Indian for his narrator. He had, in fact, known Indians—or at least observed them—and reflected upon their victimization. On one of the tapes he talks about having played on a football team with an Indian, and about an Indian employed by his father's dairy company. He describes an Indian with lipstick all over his face, his cowboy shirt splattered with blood. He told Gordon Lish of an Indian in a logging camp who went berserk and attacked with a knife a diesel truck tracing down a highway built on what had been his grandfather's land.³⁰ He wrote a story at the University of Oregon titled "The Avocados," which tells of two University of Oregon students in Los Angeles. In the company of two Mexican girls, they encounter two Klamath Indians, both World War II veterans. One of them, in a wheelchair, is used once in a while in movies when a classic Indian chief face is needed. The other wrestles occasionally. They make prickly pear wine. Once they were going to save and go back to Oregon. "Now," one of them says, "I hear they screwed all the Klamath Indians." The students drop the girls and drive off to see the city with the Indians. The girls are like avocados: soft on me outside but hard inside. The Indians are like a prickly pear cactus: repellent on the outside but sweet inside.

The most obvious intimation of Bromden in Kesey's early writing is the main character of "Sunset at Celilo," a script he wrote for a radio and television writing course. Jim Smith, a Celilo Indian, returns after five years in the army. "He is from a small tribe of poor hut happy people who have lived on the Columbia for years and fished for salmon at the Celilo Falls for a living." The government has given permission for a dam at the Dalles. The tribe has been paid \$28 million, which has been spent recklessly on television sets, expensive furnishings, and Cadillacs. Jim tries to arouse the tribe and threatens to dynamite the dam, but eventually realizes his efforts are hopeless. In a note to Dean Stark, his teacher, Kesey points out that the story is based on fact and the dam will soon be completed.

These examples show that Kesey had considerable experience with Indians from which to draw upon in his creation of his narrator, that Kesey was exaggerating his faith in drug inspiration when he described the sudden, inexplicable appearance of Bromden. On other occasions he has explained more convincingly that drugs do not provide new ideas or information but simply anesthetize inhibitions and preconceptions and thus allow the imagination a certain temporary freedom and fluidity. When asked once whether drugs had anything to do with the lyrical and fantastic descriptions in *Cuckoo's Nest*, he answered, "Yes, but *drugs* didn't create those descriptions any more than Joyce's *eyeglasses* created *Ulysses*. They merely help one to see the paper more clearly."³¹

V

Kesey's stimulating new experiences during his first two years in California clearly had much to do with the genesis of *Cuckoo's Nest*. But the substance of the novel—its principal tone, language, imagery, and comic vision—derives from frontier attitudes and traditions that he inherited from his family and picked up in his region. In demonstrating the indispensability of humor for combating the negative aspects of an increasingly urban and technological society, the novel reasserts the vitality of certain distinctive patterns in American humor, particularly those of nineteenth-century frontier humor. It not only demonstrates these varieties of American humor but also celebrates them. The novel brings patterns of frontier humor to bear on the urban, technological society of mid-twentieth-century America. The humor of *Cuckoo's Nest* is both an example of and a tribute to a distinctive and persistent rural, vernacular tradition in American humor. Part of the reason for the book's popularity is our enduring affection for the unsophisticated, unpretentious, but self-reliant folk humor that evolved along America's shifting western boundaries.

Some confusion about Kesey as a humorist resulted from his role as a counterculture hero and drug guru during California's psychedelic revolution in the early sixties. He was labeled a "black humorist," a term that enjoyed considerable currency in the sixties but has faded from the critical lexicon because it was difficult to define, indiscriminately applied, and eventually mistaken for a racial term. In the late sixties, trying to make sense of black humor as a concept, Hamlin Hill identified its tone as "belligerent, pugnacious, nihilistic." As humor moves into the black zone, he observed, it heads for the irrational and valueless, not seeking the sympathetic alliance of the audience but deliberately insulting and alienating it. He quoted Lennie Bruce as defining the creed: "Everything is rotten—mother is rotten, God is rotten, the flag is rotten."³²

The year after *Cuckoo's Nest* appeared, Hill had characterized modern American humor as Janus-faced. One face, he wrote, looks upon the native

strain rooted in the preceding century, which affirms the values of “common sense, self-reliance, and a kind of predictability in the world.” The protagonist of this variety of humor “faces an *external* reality with gusto and exuberance,” said Hill. “Even when he launches forth into his version of fantasy, the tall tale, he is based solidly upon the exaggeration of actual reality, not upon nightmare, hysteria, or delusion.” Hill labeled the other strain the “dementia praecox school.” The antihero of this humor is neurotically concerned with an inner space of nightmare and delusion where unreliability and irrationality abound. Clearly Hill had in mind the trend in modern urban humor to dramatize a sense of inadequacy, impotence, and defeat before the complexities and destructive potential of our century. Its protagonists are repressed, squeamish, and hypersensitive. Their individuality and self-confidence have been compromised by life in a depersonalized mass society. Thus, in Hill’s view, modern American humor “releases itself in both the hearty guffaw and the neurotic giggle, it reacts to both the bang and the whimper.”³³

Hill’s essays are helpful in clarifying Kesey’s relation to the varieties of American humor. Although the principal subject matter of *Cuckoo’s Nest* is dementia praecox and its narrator begins his story in a nightmarish state of neurotic fantasy and delusion, the novel is clearly founded upon the values of self-reliance and commonsense harmony with nature. Its victory is that of sanity over insanity, strength over neurotic victimization, and nature over misguided technology. McMurphy’s initial exchanges with Harding are confrontations between “the hearty guffaw and the neurotic giggle.” McMurphy is the bang, Harding the whimper. Ultimately, of course, McMurphy’s earthy, noncerebral humor vanquishes Harding’s cynical, intellectual, and timid attempts at wit.

Similarly although Kesey used techniques associated with so-called black comedy, particularly during the period following *Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, when he turned from writing to escapades with the Merry Pranksters, he never espoused the attitudes underlying that kind of humor. He gained notoriety within the California counterculture, but his roots were in rural Oregon and a family heritage of western-American values and vernacular stories. He has never strayed far from those roots. His fellow drug guru, Timothy Leary, who had no particular affinity for such roots, noted this a few years ago when he said of Kesey, “I have always seen him as very Protestant and quite moralistic, and quite American in a puritanical way. And basically untrustworthy, since he is always going to end up with a Bible in his hand, sooner or later.” Mark Twain once said, “Humor must not professedly teach, and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. By forever, I mean thirty years.”³⁴ *Cuckoo’s Nest* has met that thirty-year criterion, and its humor is largely Twain’s variety in source, method, and purpose.

Recognizing the pitfalls in delineating sources and influences in humor, I want to demonstrate the links between *Cuckoo's Nest* and what, for convenience, I call frontier humor. By this term I mean the indigenous, largely vernacular tradition of humor whose development during the nineteenth century has been described by scholars such as Constance Rourke, Bernard DeVoto, Walter Blair, Hamlin Hill, M. Thomas Inge, James Cox, and Kenneth Lynn. The critical literature generated by the novel has identified some of its similarities with frontier humor, in what follows, I provide a brief but more extensive and specific survey of parallels than has been supplied before and conclude with comments on the function and significance of those parallels.

To begin with, McMurphy is a westerner, a product and an anachronistic afterimage of the frontier. He has lived all around Oregon and in Texas and Oklahoma (*CN*, 186). In the frontier spirit of freedom and movement he has wandered restlessly, "logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling lightfooted and fast, keeping on the move" (*CN*, 84). His hand is like "a road map of his travels up and down the West" (*CN*, 27). As already mentioned, Kesey's family were restless west-walkers, not pioneers or visionaries but just a simple clan looking for new opportunities.

Drawing upon popular culture, Kesey links McMurphy with the most familiar hero of the frontier—the cowboy. He smokes Marlboro cigarettes and is described as "the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare" (*CN*, 172). He has a "drawling cowboy actor's voice" (*CN*, 232). Before his first meeting with Harding, he says, "this hospital ain't big enough for the two of us. . . . Tell this Harding that he either meets me man to man or he's a yaller skunk and better be outta town by sunset" (*CN*, 24). He has a "cowboy bluster" and a "TV-cowboy stoicism" (*CN*, 62, 73). He sings cowboy songs in the latrine and has Wild Bill Hickok's "dead-man's hand" tattooed on his shoulder (*CN*, 83, 77). Just before he assaults Big Nurse he hitches up his shorts "like they were horsehide chaps, and pushe[s] his cap with one finger like it was a ten-gallon Stetson" (*CN*, 267). Harding refers to him with an allusion to the Lone Ranger: "I'd like to stand there at the window with a silver bullet in my hand and ask 'who *wawz* that 'er masked man?'" (*CN*, 258). We all effortlessly absorb such cowboy clichés from our culture, but Kesey in addition had read Zane Grey (and named a son Zane) and other writers of Westerns. The widow of Ernest Haycox hired him while he was at the University of Oregon to write plot summaries of her husband's novels. Haycox, a major figure in the genre, appeared in *Collier's* alone an average of thirteen times a year between 1931 and 1949 and did much to shape the nation's conception of the Western hero.

In similar ways, McMurphy is identified with other frontier types such as the logger and gambler. As part of a scriptwriting course, Kesey prepared an outline for a television series to be called "Legends," a treatment of American

folk heroes. He was fascinated by such figures as Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, Mike Fink, and Pecos Bill. McMurphy is a product of that tradition, with its bragging, exaggeration, and humorous treatment of violence. When McMurphy fights the captain of the rental boat and then the two cheerfully sit down to drink beer together, we are witnessing a familiar pattern in frontier humor. When McMurphy and Harding square off to brag about which is the crazier (frequency of voting for Eisenhower being the principal measure), we are witnessing a fresh twist to the ring-tailed roarer confrontations of old-Southwest humor.

Kesey claims that he didn't see the film version of the novel because he was disgusted with the casting of Jack Nicholson as McMurphy. He referred to him as a "wimp." In Kesey's eyes he was too urban, too lacking in the western vernacular strengths that inspired his conception of McMurphy. Nicholson, I suppose, might have been appropriate for Abel Cramer, the main character in "The Tricking Party," but by the time Kesey wrote *Cuckoo's Nest* he had reverted to the wellspring of his western background. His own pencil drawing of McMurphy suggests rugged physical strength.³⁵

Americans have always loved the rustic or apparently simple character who appears naive but is actually bright and clever. One version of this type is the television detective Columbo. The type appeared early in American humor in the form of country hicks outsmarting city slickers. It is part of an anti-intellectual current in American humor. Drawing from a rural, oral tradition represented in his family particularly by his maternal grandmother, Kesey composed "Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear," which first appeared in his *Demon Box* and then as a separate children's book.³⁶ This backwoods animal fable in the vein of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* is a story of the clever little guy who defeats the wielder of unjust power. Arthur Maddox, a musician with roots in rural Missouri, composed music to accompany the narration, and Kesey has performed it with symphony orchestras across the country. It is a tribute to his grandmother and the oral tradition she perpetuated, and it suggests one of the sources for McMurphy.

McMurphy is, to a large degree, a hero from that oral tradition, and the bully he combats is not simply Big Nurse, but also the technological Combine she represents. Harding explicitly identifies this aspect of McMurphy when he acknowledges his intelligence: "an illiterate clod, perhaps, certainly a backwoods braggart with no more sensitivity than a goose, but basically intelligent nevertheless" (*CN*, 56). Elsewhere, he cautions the patients to avoid being misled by McMurphy's "back-woods-y ways; he's a very sharp operator, level-headed as they come" (*CN*, 224). Kesey himself was a diamond-in-the-rough when he arrived at Stanford from rural Oregon, but his new friends soon discovered a brilliant mind behind the down-home, college-jock exterior.

Cuckoo's Nest contains other parallels with frontier humor. For example, the novel employs homely but vivid similes, such as "shakin' like a dog shittin' peach pits" (CN, 122). McMurphy wrenches language in a way reminiscent of characters in *Huck Finn* and the Southwestern humor that inspired Twain. For instance, when Harding mentions "Freud, Jung, and Maxwell Jones," McMurphy replies, "I'm not talking about Fred Yoong and Maxwell Jones" (CN, 56). McMurphy often communicates in anecdotes. Their frontier-humor flavor is illustrated in the one about a rough practical joke that backfires. A man at a rodeo is tricked into riding a bull blindfolded and backwards and nevertheless wins (CN, 139). This bears a family resemblance to Twain's anecdote of the genuine Mexican plug in *Roughing It*. Similarly in the tradition of Twain, McMurphy nearly outdoes Huck Finn with his creative lying to the service-station attendants in order to protect his friends. He even receives a discount similar to the way Huck received money with his lie to the slave hunters that saves Jim (CN, 200–201). The novel's humor is at times scatological and often earthy and exaggerated, as in the description of Candy reeling in a salmon, "with the crank of the reel fluttering her breast at such a speed the nipple's just a red blur!" (CN, 211). Like a good deal of frontier humor, the novel involves masculine resistance to feminine order and control. "We are victims of a matriarchy here," complains Harding (CN, 59). Even the novel's narrative method, one of its most important aspects, can be linked with frontier humor. It is an original and rather bizarre adaptation of the frame technique often used in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the use of a hallucinating narrator allows for the elements of tall tale and exaggeration so characteristic of the native variety of American humor.

Another important cultural ingredient in the conception of McMurphy is the kind of character genially pictured in rascals, subversives, and con men so endemic to American humor. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill observe that "a procession of comic men and women whose life work combined imaginative lying with cynical cheating has been one of the most persistent groups that our humor has portrayed."³⁷ As new frontiers opened, imaginative scoundrels, in language that raised homely colloquialisms to high art, perpetrated new scams. Everyone is familiar with Twain's king and duke. Several entire books are devoted to the American con man, tracing the type from the Yankee peddler to *The Music Man*. Kesey had a special affinity for this brassy, fast-talking sort of personality. Beginning with his theater activities in college and continuing, through the Merry Prankster years up to the present, he has availed himself of every opportunity to play this role.

McMurphy's glib pitchman quality is conveyed by auctioneer and particularly carnival images. On first impression he reminds the narrator of "a car salesman or a stock auctioneer—or one of those pitchmen you see on a sideshow stage, out in front of his flapping banners" (CN, 17). He is likened

to an “auctioneer spinning jokes to loosen up a crowd before the bidding starts” (*CN*, 22). Three other times we are reminded of his “stock auctioneer” manner, his “rollicking auctioneer voice,” and his “auctioneer bellow” (*CN*, 72, 199, 268). Bromden refers to him as “a seasoned con” and “a carnival artist” (*CN*, 220). Harding calls him “a good old red, white, and blue hundred-per-cent American con man” (*CN*, 223). McMurphy himself explains that “the secret of being a top-notch con man is being able to know what the mark *wants*, and how to make him think he’s getting it. I learned that when I worked a season on a skillo wheel in a carnival” (*CN*, 74). He talks Dr. Spivey into suggesting in a group meeting that the ward have a carnival (*CN*, 97). He draws eyes to him “like a sideshow barker” (*CN*, 233), and as his example begins to have an effect on his fellow patients, they are infected with the same quality: when Bromden returns from a stint in the “Disturbed” ward for resisting the aides, the faces of the other patients light up “as if they were looking into the glare of a sideshow platform,” and Harding does an imitation of a sideshow barker (*CN*, 243).

But as one reflects on the carnival motif, it becomes increasingly interesting and complex. In this world of con or be conned, McMurphy is not always in control. Big Nurse is also a sort of technological-age con artist, and when her schemes are in ascendancy, she is described as “a tarot-card reader in a glass arcade case” (*CN*, 171) or “one of those arcade gypsies that scratch out fortunes for a penny” (*CN*, 268). And the patients, including McMurphy, are described as “arcade puppets” or “shooting-gallery target[s]” (*CN*, 33, 49). The carnival motif ranges from the vitally human barker toward the mechanized—toward humanoid machines that manipulate people and forecast the future. Harding, describing shock treatment to McMurphy, compares it to a carnival: “it’s as if the jolt sets off a wild carnival wheel of images, emotions, memories. These wheels, you’ve seen them; the barker takes your bet and pushes a button. *Chang!*” (*CN*, 164). McMurphy, of course, has not only seen those wheels, he has operated them, and therefore Harding’s words stun and bewilder him. When he realizes he has been committed and is liable to shock treatment, he is transformed from con man to mark: “Why, those slippery bastards have *conned* me, snowed me into holding their bag. If that don’t beat all, conned ol’ R. P. McMurphy” (*CN*, 166). Later, when he is wheeled back from a lobotomy, Scanlon refers to him as “that crummy sideshow fake lying there on the Gurney” (*CN*, 270). So during the course of the story, McMurphy (and to some extent the other principal patients) function as con men, marks, and sideshow freaks. The novel’s poignancy, of course, results from McMurphy’s ultimate breaking of the con-or-be-conned cycle by sacrificing himself for others.

Cartoons are another variety of humor that plays a role in the novel. Like the cowboy motif, they are part of popular culture. One of Kesey’s character-

istic achievements is his use of popular culture (Westerns, horror films, comic books, popular music, etc.) for artistic purposes. And like the cowboy motif, cartoons are related to certain patterns of frontier humor. Bugs Bunny is the quintessential American con man, and Tom and Jerry, Popeye, and others are lively, unsophisticated versions of the little guy versus the bully. America's native forms of humor, with their demotic appeal, naturally provided many themes, characters, and situations for comic strips and animated cartoons.

Cuckoo's Nest makes strategic allusions to the cartoon genre. Harding speaks of their "Walt Disney world" (CN, 61). When McMurphy reads, it is "a book of cartoons" (CN, 151). As in cartoons, characters swell up large when they are angry or feeling strong and shrink when they are embarrassed or frightened. A hallucinating narrator permits such description; that is part of the brilliance of Kesey's narrative strategy. For example, Pete's hand, as Popeye's might, swells into an iron ball when he resists the orderlies, and when he socks one of them against the wall, the wall cracks in the man's shape (CN, 52). This is a cartoon cliché, and much of the novel's violence is of this cartoon variety.

But as with the carnival motif, the cartoon imagery has its dark side. The patients are "like cartoon men" in a negative sense. "Their voices are forced and too quick on the comeback to be real talk—more like cartoon comedy speech." Theirs is "a cartoon world where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys" (CN, 37, 36, 34).

What conclusions can be drawn from Kesey's use of these varieties of humor and particularly the parallels with frontier humor? First of all, he was drawing upon an imagination nurtured in distinctive ways by his family and region. He had to step back from the powerful influences of his California experiences in order to allow that imagination to follow its most natural and vigorous inclinations. Second, he used the patterns of frontier humor not simply for comic effect but also because he wished to assert the values embedded within them against a constricting and depersonalizing urban mass society. There is a nostalgic and celebratory quality in their use, combined with a conviction that such values are not merely relics of a vanished frontier. His second novel, less comic and more ambitious, glorifies these values even more forcefully, a fact that disturbed his radical counterculture friends, whose attitude toward frontier values was ambivalent. Though Kesey went on to immerse himself in the attitudes and behavior of urban radical culture, Norman Mailer was correct in observing in the late eighties that "Kesey has stayed close to his roots and was probably absolutely right to do it."³⁸ Third, Kesey skillfully used native varieties of American humor in order to accomplish serious purposes. The con man-carnival motif is a principal example. Beneath the humor is a subtle and moving examination of institutionalized

victimization and the hardy human strength and unpretentious self-sacrifice that can alleviate it. The cartoon motif is likewise implicated in Kesey's sympathetic treatment of what the novel calls the culls of the Combine. On the whole, the novel demonstrates the enduring vitality and remarkable adaptability of frontier humor.

Kesey was interested in the question "Why me?" The process of literary creation is too complex to allow a complete answer, but the case of *Cuckoo's Nest* is instructive even in its partial demonstration of how an author transmutes life into art. It contributes to our understanding of the effects of chemical stimulants on the creative imagination; and it informs us about the determining influences of family, place, popular reading and viewing, and national literary-cultural traditions.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Peter O. Whitmer, "Ken Kesey's Search for the American Frontier," *Saturday Review*, May-June 1983: pp. 26, 27.
2. Quoted in John C. Pratt, ed., *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1973): p. vii.
3. Kesey Collection, University of Oregon, Eugene.
4. Quoted in Linda Gaboriau, "Ken Kesey: Summing up the '60s; Sizing up the '70s," *Crawdaddy*, no. 19 (December 1972): p. 38.
5. Quoted in Gordon Lish, "What the Hell You Looking in Here for, Daisy Mae?" *Genesis West*, 2:5 (1963): p. 27.
6. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: New American Library, 1962): p. 186. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CN*.
7. Ken Kesey, "Excerpts Recorded from an Informal Address by Mr. Kesey to the Parents at Crystal Springs School in Hillsborough, California, Presented under the Auspices of the Chrysalis West Foundation," *Genesis West*, 3:1-2 (1965): p. 40.
8. Gilbert Porter, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Rising to Heroism* (Boston: Twayne, 1989): p. 32.
9. Quoted in Gaboriau, "Ken Kesey: Summing up the 60s," p. 37.
10. Ken Kesey, "A Big Motherfucker," 16-18, Kesey Collection.
11. Lish, "What the Hell You Looking," p. 20.
12. Kesey to Ken Babbs, undated, Kesey Collection.
13. Babbs to Kesey, February 12, 1961, Kesey Collection.
14. Kesey to Babbs, undated, Kesey Collection.
15. Lish, "What the Hell You Looking," p. 25.
16. *Ibid.*, 24-25.
17. Ken Kesey, "The Day after Superman Died," *Esquire*, October 1979: p. 54.
18. Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York: Scribner's, 1971): p. 66.
19. Faye Kesey, interview by author, Pleasant Hill, Oregon, June 14, 1980; Pratt, *Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism*, p. 338.
20. Malcolm Cowley, "Kesey at Stanford," in Michael Strelow, ed., *Kesey* (Eugene, Ore.: Northwest Review Books, 1977): pp. 2, 3; Pratt, *Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism*, p. x.

21. William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove, 1959): p. 221; Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950–1970* (London: Jonathan Capps, 1971): p. 376.
22. Lish, “What the Hell You Looking,” p. 29; Kesey to Babbs, undated, Kesey Collection.
23. Cook, *Beat Generation*, p. 103.
24. Quoted in Pratt, *Cuckoo’s Nest: Tent and Criticism*, p. x.
25. Ken Kesey, “Who Flew over What?” *Kesey’s Garage Sale* (New York: Viking, 1973): p. 7; quoted in Pratt, *Cuckoo’s Nest: Tent and Criticism*, pp. 340–345, xi.
26. John C. Pratt, “On Editing Kesey: Confessions of a Straight Man,” in StreLOW, ed., *Kesey*, pp. 10–11.
27. Quoted in E. D. Webber, “Keepin’ on the Bounce: A Study of Ken Kesey as a Distinctively American Novelist,” p. 144, unpublished thesis, no date or place, Kesey Collection.
28. See Jeff Barnard, “Psychedelic Pioneer Values Family Most of All,” *Provo (Utah) Herald*, February 19, 1990, B3, and Whitmer, “Ken Kesey’s Search,” p. 26.
29. Pratt, *Cuckoo’s Nest: Text and Criticism*, p. 333.
30. Lish, “What the Hell You Looking,” p. 19.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
32. Hamlin Hill, “Black Humor: Its Causes and Cures,” *Colorado Quarterly* 17 (1968): p. 59.
33. Hamlin Hill, “Modern American Humor: The Janus Laugh,” *College English*, 25 (1963): pp. 171, 176.
34. Timothy Leary, quoted in Peter O. Whitmer, with Bruce VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited* (New York: Macmillan, 1987): p. 11; Mark Twain, quoted in E. B. and Katherine S. White, *A Subtreasury of American Humor* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1941), p. xxii.
35. Kesey, *Kesey’s Garage Sale*, p. 10.
36. Ken Kesey, *Demon Box* (New York: Viking, 1986).
37. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, *America’s Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury* (New York: Oxford, 1978): p. 43.
38. Quoted in Whitmer and VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited*, p. 63.

Ken Kesey Chronology

- 1935 Ken Elton Kesey born in La Junta, Colorado, 17 September.
- 1946 Family moves to Springfield, Oregon.
- 1956 Marries Faye Haxby.
- 1957 Graduates from University of Oregon.
- 1958 Finishes “End of Autumn” (unpublished novel).
- 1959 Enters creative writing program at Stanford on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship.
- 1961 Volunteers government drug experiments and works as a psychiatric aide at Menlo Park VA Hospital. Finishes “Zoo” (unpublished novel).
- 1962 *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is published.
- 1963 Stage version of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* produced.
- 1964 *Sometimes a Great Notion* is published. Embarks on a cross-country bus trip with the Merry Prankster filming “The Movie.”
- 1965 Arrested in April for possession of marijuana.
- 1966 Arrested in January for possession of marijuana. Flees to Mexico Returns in late fall and is arrested.
- 1967 Convicted and spends June to November in the San Mateo County Jail and later at the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Honor Camp.
- 1968 Moves to Pleasant Hill, Oregon. Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is published.

- 1969 Lives in London from March to June, doing work for *Apple* (The Beatles music label).
- 1971 Coedits (with Paul Krassner) *The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog*.
- 1973 *Kesey's Garage Sale* is published.
- 1974 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 1, including "The Thrice-Thrown Tranny-Man or Orgy at Palo Alto High School" and the first part of *Seven Prayers by Grandma Whittier* is published.
- 1976 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 2, including second part of *Seven Prayers* is published. "Abdul and Ebenezer" is published by *Esquire*.
- 1977 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 3, including third part of *Seven Prayers* is published.
- 1978 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 4, including fourth part of *Seven Prayers* is published.
- 1979 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 5, including "Search for the Secret Pyramid" and fifth part of *Seven Prayers* is published.
- 1980 *The Day After Superman Died* is published.
- 1981 *Spit in the Ocean*, no. 6, including sixth part of *Seven Prayers* is published. Takes a trip to China to cover the Beijing Marathon.
- 1986 *Demon Box* is published.
- 1989 *Caverns*, by O.U. Levon (Kesey and the Thirteen members of his graduate writing seminar at the University of Oregon) is published.
- 1990 *The Further Inquiry*, a screenplay examining Neal Cassady and the 1964 voyage of the bus *Further*, with 150 color photographs by Ron "Hassler" Bevirt, is published.
- 1991 *The Sea Lion* (children's book) is published.
- 1992 *Sailor Song* is published.
- 1994 *Last Go Round* (with Ken Babbs) is published.
- 2007 Ken Kesey dies in Eugene, Oregon of complications after surgery for liver cancer.

Contributors

HAROLD BLOOM is Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University. He is the author of 30 books, including *Shelley's Mythmaking* (1959), *The Visionary Company* (1961), *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), *Yeats* (1970), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), *Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), *The American Religion* (1992), *The Western Canon* (1994), and *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (1996). *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) sets forth Professor Bloom's provocative theory of the literary relationships between the great writers and their predecessors. His most recent books include *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), a 1998 National Book Award finalist, *How to Read and Why* (2000), *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (2002), *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (2004), and *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (2005). In 1999, Professor Bloom received the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Criticism. He has also received the International Prize of Catalonia, the Alfonso Reyes Prize of Mexico, and the Hans Christian Andersen Bicentennial Prize of Denmark.

TERENCE MARTIN is professor emeritus of English, Indiana University. His books include *The Instructured Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction*.

RUTH SULLIVAN was a professor of English Department at Northeastern University. The Dr. Ruth E. Sullivan Memorial Award was established in 1976 to honor her memory and her academic excellence.

JAMES R. HUFFMAN is professor emeritus of English at State University of New York at Fredonia.

JAMES F. KNAPP is professor of English and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs -School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. He is author of *Literary Modernism and the Transformation of Work* (1988) and *Ezra Pound* (1979).

MICHAEL M. BOARDMAN is author of *Narrative Innovation and Incoherence: Ideology in Defoe, Goldsmith, Austen, Eliot, and Hemingway* (1992)

JACK HICKS is author of *In the Singer's Temple: Prose Fictions of Barthelme, Gaines, Brautigan, Piercy, Kesey, and Kosinski* (1981).

WILLIAM C. BAURECHT professor of English, emeritus at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

JANET LARSON is associate professor of English at Rutgers University, Newark.

FRED MADDEN is professor of English, emeritus, at Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York.

THOMAS J. SLATER is professor of English and film studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices* (2002) and editor of *Handbook of Soviet and East European Films and Filmmakers* (1992).

THOMAS H. FICK is professor of English at Southeastern Louisiana University

ROBERT P. WAXLER is professor of English at University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. He is co-editor of *Finding Voices: Changing Lives through Literature* (2005).

STEPHEN L. TANNER is professor of English at Brigham Young University. He is author of *Ken Kesey* (1983)

Bibliography

- Allen, Henry. "A '60's Superhero, After the Acid Test," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1974, pp. L1-L3, cols. 4, 1-6.
- Alvarado, Sonya Yvette. "Em'ly in the Cuckoo's Nest." *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 38:4 (Summer 1997): pp. 351-362.
- Barsness, John A. "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress," *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Language Association* 23 (1969): pp. 27-33.
- Blaisdell, Gus. "SHAZAM and the Neon Renaissance," *Author & Journalist* 48 (June 1963): pp. 7-8.
- Blessing, Richard. "The Moving Target: Ken Kesey's Evolving Hero," in *Journal of Popular Culture* 4 (1971): pp. 615-627.
- Boardman, Michael M. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Rhetoric and Vision." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 9 (1979): pp. 171-183.
- Boyers, Robert. "Attitudes Toward Sex in American 'High Culture,'" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 376 (1968): pp. 36-52.
- Carnes, Bruce. *Ken Kesey*, Boise State University Western Writers Series, no. 12. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1974.
- Falk, Marcia L. "A Hatred and Fear of Women?," *New York Times*, December 5, 1971, p. 5.
- Field, Rose. "War Inside the Walls," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 25, 1962, p. 4.
- Fielder, Leslie A. "Making It with a Little Shazam," *Book Week*, August 2, 1964, pp. 1, 10-11.
- Foster, John Wilson. "Hustling to Some Purpose: Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," *Western American Literature* 9 (Summer 1974): pp. 115-129.

- Gaboriau, Linda. "Ken Kesey: Summing up the '60's; Sizing up the '70's," *Crawdaddy*, no. 19 (December 1972): pp. 31–39.
- Gefin, Laszlo K. "The Breasts of Big Nurse: Satire versus Narrative in Kesey's 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.'" *Modern Language Studies*, 22:1 (Winter 1992): pp. 96–101.
- Hague, Theodora-Ann. "Gendered Irony in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Cithara: Essays in the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, 33:1 (November 1993): pp. 27–34.
- Havermann, Carol Sue Pearson. "The Fool as Mentor in Modern American Parables of Entrapment: Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." Dissertation, Rice University, 1971.
- Hoge, James O. "Psychedelic Stimulation and the Creative Imagination: The Case of Ken Kesey," *Souther Humanities Review* 6 (Fall 1972): pp. 381–391.
- Knapp, James O. "Tangled in the Language of the Past: Ken Kesey and Cultural Revolution," *Midwest Quarterly* 19 (1978): pp. 398–412.
- Levin, Martin. "A Reader's Report," *New York Times Book Review*, February 4, 1962, p. 32.
- . "Life in a Loony Bin," *Time* 79 (Feb. 16, 1962): p. 90.
- Lish, Gordon. "What the Hell You Looking in Here for, Daisy Mae? An Interview with Ken Kesey," *Genesis West* 2, no. 5 (1963): pp. 17–29.
- Martin, Terrence. "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the High Cost of Living," *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (Spring 1973): pp. 43–55.
- Maxwell, Richard. "The Abdication of Masculinity in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," in *Twenty-seven to One: A Potpourri of Humanistic Material*. Ogdensburg, N.Y.: Ryan Press, 1970.
- Mills, Nicholaus. "Ken Kesey and the Politics of Laughter," *Centennial Review* 16 (Winter 1972): pp. 82–90.
- Napierski-Prancl, Michelle. "Role Traps in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962)." pp. 227–229. Fisher, Jerilyn (ed. Preface, and introduction); Silber, Ellen S. (ed. Preface and introduction) and Sadker, David (foreword). *Women in Literature: Reading Through the Lens of Gender*. (Westport, CT; Greenwood, 2003): pp. xxxix, 358.
- Nastu, Paul. "Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Explicator*, 56:1 (Fall 1997): pp. 48–50.
- Olderman, Raymond M. *Beyond the Wasteland: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972): pp. 35–51.
- Peden, William. "Gray Regions of the Mind," *Saturday Review* 45 (April 14, 1962): pp. 49–50.
- Pratt, John Clark, ed. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism*, New York: Viking Press, 1973.

- Sassoon, R. L. Review of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Northwest Review* 6 (Spring 1963): pp. 116–120.
- Schopf, William. "Blindfold and Backwards: Promethean and Bemushroomed Heroism in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Catch-22*," *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, vol. 26, pp. 89–97.
- Searles, George J. *A Casebook on Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992.
- Semino, Elena; Swindlehurst, Kate. "Metaphor and Mind Style in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Style*, 30:1 (Spring 1996): pp. 143–166.
- Sherman, W.D. "The Novels of Ken Kesey," *Journal of American Studies* 5 (August 1971): pp. 185–196.
- Sherwood, Terry G. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip," *Critique* 13, no. 1 (1972): pp. 96–109.
- Smith, William James. "A Trio of Fine First Novels," *Commonweal* 75 (March 16, 1962): pp. 648–649.
- Tanner, Stephen L. "Salvation Through Laughter: Ken Kesey and the Cuckoo's Nest," *Southwest Review* 57 (Spring 1973): pp. 125–137.
- . "Kesey's Cuckoo's Nest and the Varieties of American Humor." *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor*, 13:1–2 (1993): pp. 3–10.
- Tanner, Tony. "Edge City (Ken Kesey)," in *City of Words: American Fiction 1950–1970*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Vitkus, Daniel J. "Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 14 (1994): pp. 64–90.
- Waldmeir, Joseph J. "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 5 (Autumn 1964): pp. 192–204.
- Wallis, Bruce E. "Christ in the Cuckoo's Nest: or, the Gospel According to Ken Kesey," *Cithara* 12 (November 1972): pp. 52–58.
- Witke, Charles. "Pastoral Convention in Virgil and Kesey," *Pacific Coast Philology* 1 (1966): pp. 20–24.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968). New York: Bantam Books, 1969.
- Zaskin, Elliot M. "Political Theorist and Demiurge: The Rise and Fall of Ken Kesey," *Centennial Review* 17 (Spring 1973): pp. 199–213.

Acknowledgments

Terence Martin, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the High Cost of Living," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1973): pp. 43–55. A critical quarterly published by the Purdue University Department of English. © Purdue Research Foundation. Reprinted with permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ruth Sullivan, "Big Mama, Big Papa, and Little Sons in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," *Literature and Psychology*, Volume 25, Number 1 (1975): pp. 34–44.

James R. Huffman, "The Cuckoo Clocks in Kesey's Nest," *Modern Language Studies*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1977): pp 62–73. © 1977 *Modern Language Studies*. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

James F. Knapp, "Tangled in the Language of the Past: Ken Kesey and Cultural Revolution," *The Midwest Quarterly*, Volume 19, Number 4 (Summer 1978): pp. 398–413. © 1978 *The Midwest Quarterly*. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Michael M. Boardman, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Rhetoric and Vision," *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Volume 9, Number 3 (Fall 1979): pp. 171–183. © 1979 *The Journal of Narrative Technique*. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Jack Hicks, "The Truth Even If It Didn't Happen: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," from *In the Singer's Temple: Prose Fiction of Barthelme, Gaines, Brautigan*,

Piercy, Kelsey, and Kosinski, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981): pp. 161–176. Copyright © 1981 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher.

William C. Baurecht, “Separation, Initiation, and Return: Schizophrenic Episode in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *The Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought*, Volume 23, Number 3 (Spring 1982): pp. 279–293. © 1982 William C. Baurecht. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Janet Larson, “Stories Sacred and Profane: Narrative in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *Religion & Literature*, Volume 16, Number 2 (Summer 1984): pp. 25–42. © 1984 by *Religion & Literature*, University of Notre Dame. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Fred Madden, “Sanity and Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator and Executioner,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 32, Number 2 (Summer 1986): pp.203–217. © Purdue Research Foundation. Reprinted with permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thomas J. Slater, “*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*: A Tale of Two Decades,” *Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation*, Eds., Wendell Aycock and Michael Schoenecke (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1988): pp. 45–58. © 1988 Texas Technical University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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*, Volume 43, Number 1/2. (1989): pp. 19–34. © 1989 *Rocky Mountain Review*. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Robert P. Waxler, “The Mixed Heritage of the Chief: Revisiting the Problem of Manhood in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Volume 29 (Winter 1995): pp. 225–235. © 1995 *Journal of Popular Culture*. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers.

Stephen L. Tanner, “The Western American Context of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 1973): pp. 291–320. Reprinted from *Biographies of Books: The Compositional Histories of Notable American Writings* by James Barbour and Tom Quirk by permission of the University of Missouri Press. Copyright © 1996 by the Curators of the University of Missouri.

Index

- 1984, 12
- “Abdul and Ebenezer,” 69
- Academy Awards, 161
- Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The*, 181
- Affluent Society, The*, 171
- Ahab (character), 13
- All the Happy Endings, 4
- All the Kings Men*, 137
- Alpert, Richard, 68
- “Ancient Search for AND
Subsequent Discovery,
Application, Loss and
Reappearance of \$\$\$, The,” 69
- Anzio, 87
- Aristotle, 91
- Armstrong, Neil, 175
- “Avocados, The,” 176
- Babbs, Ken, 11, 70, 108, 162–163,
167, 169, 171–172, 174
- Bancini (character), 127
- Bancini, Pete, 33, 60
- Barnum, P. T., 87
- Barsness, John, 63
- Batman*, 165–166
- Baurecht, William C., 81
- Beatles, 49
- Beats, 170–173
- Becker, Ernest, 93
- Beckett, Samuel, 55
- Beidler, Peter G., 55
- Berry, Wendell, 166
- Berthoff, Warner, 92
- Bibbit, Billy (character), 4–6, 10, 16,
18, 22, 24–25, 31–32, 76, 83, 99,
101, 103–104, 108, 113–114, 127,
129, 131, 140–141, 145
- Bibbit, Mrs., 107, 141
- Bible, 32
- Big Brother (term), 12
- Big Chief (See Bromden)
- Big Nurse (See Ratched)
- Bird, Robert Montgomery, 48, 50,
143
- “Bitches, Twitches, and Eunuchs:
Sex-Role Failure and Caricature,”
55
- Blair, Walter, 179, 181
- Blake, William, 45
- Blastic (character), 74
- Boardman, Michael M., 53
- Boone, Daniel, 47
- Booth, Wayne, 55, 63
- Boyers, Robert, 31, 141
- Brentwood Hospital, 174
- Bromden, Chief (character), 3–8, 10,
12, 15–16, 18–27, 30–32, 35–39,
44, 54, 56, 58, 60, 63, 72–79,
81, 83–84, 87, 96–97, 99–105,
107–108, 110–111, 114–119, 123,

- 126–127, 130–131, 133, 138–140,
 142, 144–146, 151, 153, 156, 158,
 163–164, 171, 173, 175–177, 182
 Bromden, Mary Louise (character),
 5, 19
 Bross, Addison C., 60
 Bruce, Lennie, 177
 Bugs Bunny, 183
 Bumpo, Natty (character), 141,
 143
 Bunyan, Paul, 180
 Burden, Jack (character), 137
 Burke, Kenneth, 91, 93, 95, 98
 Burrell, 100
 Burrell, David, 91
 Burroughs, Edgar Rice, 165
 Burroughs, William S., 70, 171

 California, 165, 173, 177–178
 La Honda, 49, 147
 Los Angeles, 176
 Menlo Park, 165
 North Beach, 167, 169–170, 173
 Oakland, 174
 Palo Alto, 68, 163
 San Francisco, 45, 68, 163, 167
 San Mateo, 69
 Campbell, Joseph, 85, 87
 Canada, 39, 79, 82–83, 175
 Candy, 9, 19, 129, 131, 141–142, 181
 Candy (character), 5
Captain Marvel, 165
 Carnes, Bruce, 117
 Carraway, Nick, 57, 62
 cartoons, 183
 Cassidy, Neal, 170
 Cassirer, Ernst, 93
Catcher in the Rye, The, 137
 Caulfield, Holden (character), 108,
 137
 Celilo Falls, 176
 Cheswick, 10, 22, 100, 103, 108,
 114, 127–128
 Cheswick, Charlie (character), 7, 124

 Christianity, 163
 Christmas, Joe (character), 159
 Cixous, Helene, 155
Clock Without Hands, 34
Colliers, 179
 Colorado, 68, 163, 165
 La Junta, 165
 Columbia Gorge Indian, 173
 Columbia River, 39, 152, 156, 176
 Columbo (tv character), 180
 Comic books, 166
 Compton, Benjy (character), 108
 “Concept of Character in Fiction,
 The,” 8
 Conrad, Joseph, 56
 Cooper, James Fenimore, 143
 cowboys, 179
 Cowley, Malcolm, 68, 70, 162, 166,
 168–169
 Cox, James, 179
 Cramer, Abel (character), 173, 180
 Croce, Benedetto, 64
 Crockett, Davy, 180
 Crossan, John Dominic, 93, 98–99
 Cummings, E. E., 39

 Daiches, David, 53
 Dante, 30
Day of the Locust, The, 137
Demon Box, 180
 DeVito, Danny, 127
 DeVoto, Bernard, 179
Dharma Bums, The, 148
 Douglas, Kirk, 69
 Douglas, Michael, 161
 Dourif, Brad, 127
Dr. Sax, 70
 Duell, William, 132
 Duke, Raoul (character), 147
Dynamics of Faith, 94

 Eisenhower, Dwight D., 180
Electric Kool–Aid Acid Test, The, 44,
 67, 170

- electroshock treatment, 87, 102, 115, 117
 Eliade, Mircea, 92
 "End of Autumn," 173
End of Autumn, 68
 entelechy, 91
Esquire, 69
 "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose, The," 171

 Faulkner, William, 55, 151, 159
 FBI, 69
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, 147
 female authority, 4
 Fick, Thomas H., 137
 Fiedler, Leslie A., 12, 30, 35, 38, 83, 141
 Fink, Mike (character), 139, 180
 Finn, Huckleberry (character), 119, 181
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 55, 57
 Flak, Marcia, 31
 Fletcher, Louise, 130
 Forman, Miles, 59, 108, 123, 125–130, 132–133, 161
 Forrey, Robert, 160
 Foster, John Wilson, 144
 Fredrickson (character), 114, 132, 144–145
 Freud, Sigmund, 15, 31
 Frye, Northrop, 91, 93

 Galbraith, John Kenneth, 171
 Gass, William, 8
 Geever (character), 116
 George (character), 108
 Gideon, Mr. (character), 31
 Ginsberg, Allen, 67, 172
 Ginsberg, Tom, 173
Grapes of Wrath, The, 63
 Green Bay Packers, 166
 Grey, Zane, 165, 179

 Hall, James B., 68, 168

Hamlet, 63
 Harding, Dale (character), 4, 7, 9–10, 16, 25, 31, 58, 60–61, 63, 101–102, 112, 125, 127–128, 131–132, 140, 142, 145, 178–183
 Harding, Mrs. Vera (character), 4, 21, 107, 141
 Hardy, 56
 Harris, Joel Chandler, 180
 Harris, Marvin, 46
 Harvard University, 68
 Hauerwas, 100
 Hauerwas, Stanley, 91
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 7
 Haycox, Ernest, 179
 Heller, Joseph, 13
 Hemingway, Ernest, 55, 160
Hero in America, The, 82
 Hickok, Wild Bill, 179
 Hicks, Jack, 67, 158
 Hill, Hamlin, 177, 179, 181
 hipster, 137
 homosexuality, 32, 86, 125, 131, 160
 Horst, Leslie, 55
Howl, 172
 Huffman, James R., 29
 Humbert, Humbert (character), 108
 Hume, David, 53
 humor, 177–178, 183
 frontier, 179, 181

I Ching, 175
 individualism, 82
Inferno, The, 30
 Inge, M. Thomas, 179
In The Closed Frontier, 138
 Ionesco, Eugene, 7
 Ishmael (character), 13, 62
 IT-290, 68

 James, Henry, 55
 Jesus Christ, 51, 78, 97
 Jimson, Gulley (character), 108

- Joyce, James, 166, 177
- Kennedy administration, 133
- Kerouac, Jack, 30, 70, 147–148, 169–173
- Kesey, Faye, 169
- “Kesey at Stanford,” 169
- Kesey's Garage Sale*, 68–69, 174
- “Kicking Party, The,” 173
- Klein, Marcus, 39
- Knapp, James F., 43
- Korean War, 172
- Kozinski, Jerzy, 55
- Krassner, Paul, 69
- Kreutzer Sonata, 27
- Kurtz (character), 56
- Lacan, Jaques, 154
- Laing, R. D., 86
- Language as Symbolic Action*, 91
- Larson, Janet, 91
- Lasaick, Sidney, 127
- Last Supplement, The*, 69
- Leary, Timothy, 68, 178
- Leatherstocking Tales*, 143
- “Legends,” 179
- Levi-Strauss, Claude, 93
- Lewis and Clark expedition, 175
- Lish, Gordon, 168, 172, 176
- Literary Situation, The*, 169
- “Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear,” 180
- Lloyd, Christopher, 128
- Lombardi, Vince, 166
- Lonely Crowd, The*, 171
- Lonelyhearts, Miss (character), 96
- LSD, 30, 68
- Lynn, Kenneth, 179
- Macbeth, Lady (character), 59
- Madden, Fred, 107
- Maddox, Arthur, 180
- Mailer, Norman, 67, 137
- Malamud, Bernard, 35
- male chauvinism, 31
- Malin, Irving, 32
- Mann, Thomas, 92
- Man Who Killed The Deer, The*, 159
- marijuana, 69, 70
- Marlow, Philip (character), 57
- Martin, Terence, 3, 43, 141, 143, 152
- Martiniano, “Martini” (character), 101, 127, 159
- masculinity, 82
- Matterson, Colonel (character), 39, 76–77
- McClanahan, Ed, 166
- McCullers, Carson, 34
- McMurphy, Randle P. (character), 5–11, 13, 15–20, 22–24, 26–27, 30–32, 34–35, 37–38, 43, 45, 47, 49–50, 55–59, 61, 63, 75–78, 81–83, 85–87, 92, 96–97, 99–101, 103, 107–113, 115, 117–120, 123–133, 138–141, 143–148, 153–158, 164, 170–174, 178–183
- McMurtry, Larry, 166
- Melville, Herman, 62
- Menlo Park Veterans Administration Hospital, 68, 170, 174
- Merry Pranksters, 44–46, 48–49, 138, 147, 175, 178, 181
- mescaline, 68
- Mexico, 69
- Missouri, 180
- Moby-Dick*, 13
- Music Man, The*, 181
- Naked Lunch*, 70, 171
- Native Americans, 152, 156–157, 173
- Celilo, 176
- Klamath, 176
- “Nature of An Under Capitalism, The,” 95
- New Mexico, 163

- New Testament, 92
 Nicholson, Jack, 108, 129, 180
Nick of the Woods@, 48, 143
 Nixon, Richard, 132
- O'Connor, Frank, 68, 166
 Oedipus complex, 15
 Olderman, Raymond M., 7, 11
 Old Moses, 174
 Old Pete (character), 76
 Olsen, Tillie, 166
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
 (movie), 10, 108, 123
 "One Lane," 171
On the Road, 70, 169, 171
 "On Why I Am Not Writing My
 Last Term Paper," 169
 Oregon, 138, 162–165, 173, 176,
 178–180
 Dalles, the, 152–153, 156, 176
 Eugene, 68, 163
 Oregon State, 13
 Oregon State Hospital, 123
Organization Man, The, 171
- Papashvily, Helen Waite, 4
Paradise Lost, 48
 paternalism, 107
 Pecos Bill, 180
 peyote, 68, 70, 172, 175
 Popeye (character), 183
 Porter, Gilbert, 165
 Pratt, John Clark, 29, 70, 162, 170,
 175
 Protestantism, 163
 psilocybin, 68
 psychoanalytic therapy, 15
 Queequeg (character), 14
- racism, 107
 Ratched, Mildred (character, Big
 Nurse), 3–6, 8–12, 14–17, 19–21,
 23, 25–26, 30–37, 43, 47, 49–50,
 56–57, 59–61, 63, 73–77, 83, 96,
 98–101, 104, 107–112, 124–125,
 127–133, 138–142, 144–145, 147,
 152–157, 168, 180, 182
 Redfield, William, 127
 Releigh, John Henry, 36
 Riesman, David, 171
Rolling Stone, 11, 13
 romantic idealism, 172
Roughing It, 181
 Rourke, Constance, 179
 Ruckly (character), 18, 76
 Rymer, Thomas, 60
- Sacks, Sheldon, 54
Sacred and the Profane, The, 92
 Salinger, J. D., 137
 Sampson, Will, 127
 Sandy (character), 5, 19, 141, 145
 San Francisco Olympic Club, 163
 San Quentin, 24
 Saxton Prize, 167
 Scanlon (character), 9–10, 112, 132
 Schiavelli, Vincent, 132
 schizophrenia, 86
 schizophrenic episode, 81, 83, 85
 Scowcroft, Richard, 166
Secular Scripture, The, 93
 Sefelt (character), 9, 30, 34, 112, 114,
 132, 141, 145
Seven Prayers by Grandma Whittier,
 69
 sexism, 107
 Shakespeare, William, 59
 Sherman, W. D., 43
 Sherwood, Terry G., 35, 73, 96
 Simonson, Harold, 138
 Slater, Thomas J., 123
 Slaughter, Nathan (character), 143,
 146
 Slotkin, Richard, 82
 Small, Maria, 129
 Smith, Jim (character), 176
Sometimes a Great Notion, 29–30, 45,
 49, 68, 85, 163, 171, 178

- Speer, Albert, 92
Spit in the Ocean (SITO), 69
 Spivey, Doctor (character), 4, 11, 16, 157
 Stamper, Hank (character), 45, 47
 Stanford University, 68, 70, 162, 165–168, 180
 ROTC, 172
 Stark, Dean, 176
 Stegner, Wallace, 68, 70, 166, 168–169
 Steinbeck, John, 160
 Stone, Robert, 166
 Sullivan, Ruth, 15
 “Sunset at Celilo,” 176
Superman, 165
- Taber (character), 128, 131
 Tanner, Stephen L., 161
 Tanner, Tony, 171
 Tee Ah Millatoona (character), 5, 19, 153, 157–158, 164
 telos, 92
Tenants, The, 35
 Tennessee, 163
 Texas, 163, 179
 Thompson, Hunter, 147
 Tillich, Paul, 94
Time, 166
 Tolstoi, Leo, 27
 Tom and Jerry, 183
 transcendentalism, 172
 “Tricking Party, The,” 180
 Turkel (character), 145
 Twain, Mark, 178, 181
- Ulysses*, 177
Uncle Remus, 180
Under the Volcano, 70
 University of Oregon, 68, 162, 166, 168, 171, 176, 179
- Van Winkle, Dame (character), 4
 Vergil, 30
 Verne, Jules, 165
 Victory, Olga (character), 30
 Vietnam, 167
 Vietnam War, 46
 Viking Press, 169–170, 173
 Viking Critical Library, 70
 Vonnegut, Kurt, 55
- Waldmeir, Joseph J., 11, 13, 31
 Warren, Robert Penn, 137
 Washington (character), 107–108
 Wasserman, Dale, 161
 Watergate, 132
 Waters, Frank, 159
 Waxler, Robert P., 151
 Wayne, John, 164
 Wecter, Dixon, 82
 Weiss, Robert, 54
 West, Nathanael, 96–97, 137
 West, the, 137, 169
 Wetzel, Lou, 166
 “White Negro, The,” 137
 Whitman, Walt, 172
 “Who Flew over What?,” 174–176
Whole Earth Catalogue, 69
 Whyte, William H., 171
 Witke, Charles, 30
 Wolfe, Merry, 49
 Wolfe, Tom, 44, 50, 67, 69, 170
 Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, 166
 Woolf, Virginia, 53
 World War II, 87
- Zaentz, Saul, 161
 Zashin, Eliot M., 43
 Ziolkowsky, Theodore, 97
 “Zoo,” 68, 70, 167, 172

