

## The Manufacturer of the Split Psyche in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*



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**ABSTRACT:** Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) is an authentic portrayal of what is like to be in a mental hospital, shedding light on the dehumanizing and punitive acts under the label of medical treatment that are done to the patients. The novel is narrated by Chief Bromden, a native American who pretends to be deaf to avoid interactions with anyone around him. This article argues that the 1960s psychiatric therapeutic measures and treatments contributed to the construction of a deteriorated, split psyche as exemplified in the novel. Moreover, it highlights the power of storytelling in challenging the mental institution metanarrative as well as the therapeutic aspects of the act of writing in gaining power and agency.

**KEYWORDS:** *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Mental Institute, Split Psyche, Agency, Therapy, Anti-psychiatry, Fiction, Madnes

### INTRODUCTOIN

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) is set in its entirety in a psychiatric hospital. The novel tells the story of a mental hospital patients and focuses on their struggles within a merciless system. It is narrated by Chief Bromden, a native American who feigns his deafness to avoid interactions with anyone. It masterfully deals with inhumane treatments, involuntarily hospitalization and the role of the mental hospital in manufacturing docile bodies. Kesey showcases how the mental hospital relies on common medical treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy, hydrotherapy, lobotomy and medical drugs as a means of controlling patients and shaping them into obedient objects. This article will explore how the mental institution's treatments and procedures contribute to the construction of deteriorated split psyche as presented in the novel. It will examine the effects of the mental institutions on the psyche of the patients. It will also demonstrate how common psychiatric measures exacerbate and contribute to the fragmentation of the self, leading to a loss of agency. To that aim, the paper will examine the effects of mental hospital procedures and measures on Bromden's and McMurphy's psyche and in relation to Foucault's concept of docile bodies.

### 1. Theory

The 1960s was a tumultuous period filled with many social and political upheavals around the world. In the United State in particular, it was marked with several political and cultural movements including the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the Counterculture movement. One of the most influential movements is the anti-psychiatry that challenged the traditional method of treating mental illness and advocated for a humane model of treating patients. The main argument of the anti-psychiatrists is that mental illness is a social construct which aims to mold nonconformists into obedient individuals, denying them their individuality and freedom. The term anti-psychiatry was coined by David Cooper in his book *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (1967). In his book, Cooper criticizes the practices of psychiatric institutions and calls for humane approaches in mental healthcare. Similarly, other pioneers such as R.D Laing, Thomas Szasz and Michel Foucault advocated that biomedical psychiatry with its extreme methods of treatment function to abolish individuals' autonomy. As Arya Aryan argues, the anti-psychiatry was a sustained diatribe against orthodox psychiatry's paradigms of treatment and medication" (2020, p. 93). As Farreras discusses, "[m]odern treatments of mental illness are most associated with the establishment of hospitals and asylums beginning in the 16th century. Such institutions' mission was to house and confine the mentally ill, the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, and the criminal" (2021, p. 247). The outcome of this practice turned out to be confining any individual considered to be troublesome. As Foucault discusses the establishing of Hôpital général of Paris in 1656 which was a representation of the changing attitude toward the so-called "mad". He describes that the hospital did not function as a medical institution but rather as Foucault explains that the early mental hospitals were "a sort of semijudicial structure, an administrative entity which, along with the already constituted powers, and outside of the courts, decides, judges, and executes" (Foucault, 1988, p. 40). *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* reflect and express these views before the emergence of the movement since the novel is a critique of the psychiatric institutions and its

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destructive role in the disintegration of the self and human agency. The conventional treatments of the institution of psychiatry include insulin therapy, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), hydrotherapy and lobotomy.

Ken Kesey was a central figure in the American countercultural movement of the 1960s. Kesey enrolled in a creative writing program at Stanford University and became a key figure of the literary movement of the West Coast. During his time at Stanford University, he volunteered for a government experiment that involved trying psychedelics drugs. Kesey worked as a night aide in a mental hospital. This experience enabled him to know the ugly realities of the mental institution. This had affected his perspective and his way of writing. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, published in 1962, was Kesey first novel. The novel led Kesey to his literary fame. It skillfully criticizes the practices of the mental institution in the 1960s. During the 1960s, Kesey was involved in the counterculture movement and supported the use of psychedelics as a means of challenging the status quo.

### 2. The Manufacturer of Madness and the Mental Institution:

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* takes place in a psychiatric hospital. The novel draws on deconstruction techniques which help reveal “contradictions . . . which highly question and overturn binary oppositions” (Aryan, 2022, p. 1) such as sane/insane. It is narrated by Chief Bromden whom everyone at the mental institution assumes to be deaf. Bromden introduces us to Randle McMurphy who feigns his mental illness to avoid a 6-month imprisonment. McMurphy introduces himself as a gambler and a womanizer. Furthermore, Nurse Ratched runs the ward with an iron fist and the patients have their own nickname: the Big Nurse. She enforces her rules upon the patients and anyone who dares to break them is ultimately met with utmost monstrosity and cruelty. She has the power to send them to get electroconvulsive therapy or even a lobotomy surgery. McMurphy undermines her power and tries to challenge her authority. For example, to Nurse Ratched's total dissatisfaction, he encourages the other patients to go on a fishing trip with him. Despite all the pressures from the Big Nurse, they manage to go on their fishing trip and experience what it is like to be away from her constant gaze and grip. After their return, Nurse Ratched tries to convince them that McMurphy is manipulating them to get money out of them. She asks the attendants to check all the patients that went to the fishing trip for bugs. George, one of the patients, refuses to be checked because of his fear of physical contact and the attendants force him to it. During that time, McMurphy and Bromden defend George but face the punishment of being sent to the disturbed ward to receive electroconvulsive therapy. On McMurphy's return, the patients discuss how they are going to help him escape. They throw a party in the ward at night and McMurphy brings two prostitutes to the party. During the party, McMurphy arranges for Billy Bibbit to have his first intercourse with one of the girls. The day after, when Nurse Ratched understands the situation, she threatens Billy that she will let his mother know what he did. Billy commits suicide in fear of his mother's reaction. McMurphy attacks Nurse Ratched. Later he is sent to receive his lobotomy. Upon McMurphy's return, Bromden cannot handle to see McMurphy as a prisoner in his own body. Hence, he smothers McMurphy with a pillow and manages to escape the institution to Canada.

The novel starts with Chief Bromden introducing us to the asylum and what it is like to be incarcerated in a mental institution. Bromden describes Nurse Ratched as:

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. (Kesey, 1990, pp. 5-6 emphasis added)

Bromden describes Nurse Ratched using terms which typically are used for manufacturing toys or machines, suggesting that the patients are dehumanized in the hospital. They are treated as machines, taking away their individuality and freedom. In other words, mental patients and mental illnesses are manufactured through the mechanics of psychiatric hospitals. Hence, by incarnating individuals in mental institutions, patients are treated not as individuals with their own unique characteristics but merely as objects. This kind of dehumanization is established through the use of pseudo-scientific psychiatric labels which could ultimately lead to a loss of agency and autonomy. As Szasz articulates that:

[P]sychiatric training is, above all else, a ritualized indoctrination into the theory and practice of psychiatric violence. The disastrous effects of this process on the patient are obvious enough; though less evident, its consequences for the physician are often equally tragic. It is one of the few “laws” of human relations that not only those who suffer from arbitrary authority, but also those who wield it, become alienated from others and thus dehumanized. The oppressed tends to become a passive, thinglike object, and the oppressor a megalomaniacal, godlike figure. (1997, p. 41)

Thus, the mental institution employs this kind of dehumanizing language and rhetoric to reduce patients to objects like figures which in turn allow the physicians to administer treatments which would contribute to the patient's disintegration of the self, autonomy and individuality. As the ward in the novel is run by Nurse Ratched, she is responsible for the dehumanization of the patients. This is why Bromden describes her with phrases associated with machines: “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” (Kesey, 1990, p. 4 emphasis added). Bromden's terminology indicates that the patients are the ones who are being dehumanized by this merciless system.

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The process of dehumanization starts from the moment a patient steps into the mental hospital. Chief Bromden describes the arrival of McMurphy and how the attendants are after him with a thermometer to take his temperature: "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, . . . 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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 10). The act of forcibly taking the patients temperature with a thermometer strips them of their autonomy, treating them as objects for medical procedures. The fact that one cannot hear anything that goes in the shower symbolizes the broader suppression of their identities, autonomy and agency within the mental institution which in turn serve to show that the mental institution reinforces the dehumanization and marginalization of the patients. As Daniel J. Vitkus argues, "[t]he ward is run by Nurse Ratched, who controls the process of turning men into machines. This process of transforming the patients into obedient automatons involves the loss of their sexuality, their masculinity, and their individuality" (1994, p. 65). For example, Bromden narrates what happens to Mr. Taber in the hospital when he does not accept to take the pills unless they tell him what those pills are, and Nurse Ratched says that he is just being hostile simply because he wants to know what those pills are: "[t]he 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" (Kesey, 1990, pp. 33-34). This part demonstrates physical force is used against Taber and he is dragged against his will to the mattress by the two attendants. This act exemplifies the psychiatric institution's coercion and force exerted upon those who do not conform. It also indicates the dehumanization of Taber to a state of helplessness. Therefore, ironically medical treatments which are supposed to be therapeutic are forced onto the patients very punitively, resulting in stripping away the individual's autonomy and integrity.

The ward in the novel functions as the Panoptic to ensure that the patients will adhere to the rules and orders. The glass window of Nurses' Station represents the central watchtower of the Panopticon. As Bromden puts it, "she's [Nurse Ratched] 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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 4). Nurse Ratched observes and monitors every little move in the hospital in a way that nothing goes on without her prior knowledge about it. Foucault contends that, "[a]ll that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (1995, p. 200). The idea of placing a supervisor in a central tower seems to suggest a system of surveillance and control. The supervisor in this case is Nurse Ratched since she is always watching over the patients from her glass station, and it represents a Panoptic structure where she is in position of having complete visibility and control over them. Nurse Ratched tells Sefelt and Fredrickson that she is aware of the alteration they have made to their medication. She states that "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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 97). At that moment, Nurse Ratched makes the patients aware of her presence at every single second. She constantly reminds them that her gaze never fails and any attempt by the patients to transgress the institution's rules is immediately known and is faced with consequences. Thus, this automatically generates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among the patients. For example, Nurse Ratched leads group meetings that she claims to be therapeutic. However, in fact they are a way of installing fear and paranoia among the patients. As Bromden puts it:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 14)

Through encouraging the patients to spy on each other, Nurse Ratched creates an environment filled with paranoia and fear where patients cannot trust one another and live in a constant fear of the other. This in turn make them internalize the power relation and ultimately, they become their own police and guard. Foucault argues that:

[T]he major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers." (1995, p. 201 emphasis added)

The Panopticon's main psychological effect is to make individuals feel that they are constantly visible and always subject to control. Similarly, the ward in the novel ensures that the patients always regulate their behaviour in fear of being observed and punished. Hence, the hospital Panopticon transforms the patients into a means of their own suppression and control through internalizing this power mechanism as they monitor their own behaviours and become their own guard. The mechanism of the Panopticon in the hospital functions to induce "a state of conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). This leads

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the patients to regulate their own behaviours in fear of Nurse Ratched's ever-present gaze. Thus, the patients become part of this power structure. This is evident Bromden's description of Nurse Ratched:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 27)

The way that Bromden describes Nurse Ratched showcases how she dreams of "a world of precision" and all the patients are placed "under her beam". This symbolizes the omnipresent power that she possesses, and it also reflects that Nurse Ratched dreams of a Panopticon-like environment which reduces patients to mere components of that power relation system.

Foucault contends that producing docile bodies can be achieved through adapting numerous mechanisms of discipline and control. One of those mechanisms is "[t]he art of distributions" (Foucault, 1995, p. 141). This mechanism focuses on spatial division of individuals by putting them into specific categories which in turn makes it easier to monitor and control. The main aim of adapting this mechanism is to "establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct, of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits" (Foucault, 1995, p. 143). Dividing patients based on their mental health problem helps simplify the process of monitoring and controlling them. In the novel, the mental hospital constructs a dubious category which divides the Acutes from the Chronicles. As Bromden states, "[t]he Chronicles 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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 16). The Chronicles are also divided in two categories, the Walkers and the Vegetables. The Walkers are those who can still move and engage in basic daily activities without needing extensive assistance. On the other hand, the Vegetables are those who will never recover, and their state is considered hopeless. By dividing the patients, the institution extends its control mechanism to each group specific needs and capabilities. For example, since the Walkers can move and are more aware of their surroundings, they can pose more danger to the authority of Nurse Ratched as they are able to resist and rebel against the rules. On the other hand, the Vegetables require less surveillance since they are reduced to mere objects through procedures such as lobotomy, electroconvulsive therapy and hydrotherapy. This strategy is beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, it becomes easy to monitor and control the patients since they are aware of every move they make. Secondly, the separation of the Chronicles from the Acutes generates fear and paranoia among the Acutes as they know that if they do not behave as per the institution's will, they can easily become a Chronic.

The second mechanism of discipline and control in creating docile bodies is "[t]he control of activity" (Foucault, 1995, p. 149). This mechanism is related to controlling and regulating every detail in individuals' lives. Through the application of control of activity, the institution can control the patients' moves and dictate the exact time of their actions; thus, it can shape their behaviours and ensure their compliance according to the timetable that is provided to them. Foucault argues that "the time-table is an old inheritance. The strict model was no doubt suggested by the monastic communities. It soon spread. Its three great methods - establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition - were soon to be found in schools, workshops and hospitals" (1995, p. 149). Similarly, Nurse Ratched constantly monitors the patients from her glass window. Moreover, Foucault stress the importance of eliminating any distractions that might disturb the timetable for the inmates. As he puts it, "an attempt is also made to assure the quality of the time used: constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract" (1995, p. 150). That is why Nurse Ratched frowns at McMurphy's idea of playing cards with the other patients in the tub room as it will ultimately distract them from following the timetable that has been set up for them. McMurphy and Harding are talking about ways of challenging Nurse Ratched's authority. All the patients at that moment turn to check her: "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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 69). The fact that Nurse Ratched "is planning how to work it [The information] into the schedule" (1990, p. 69) indicates that through documenting and integrating information into strict schedule, she exerts her power over the patients. It also shows that eliminating distractions means ensuring that all the patients' actions align with her strict timetable. Later on, McMurphy disagrees with one of the attendants as to when he can brush his teeth. McMurphy believes that he has the freedom to decide the timing for such personal activity while the attendant insists that he does not have the liberty to do this. The attendant says that "[i]t's ward policy, Mr. McMurphy, tha's the reason" (Kesey, 1990, p. 90). When the attendant notices that McMurphy ignores his statement, he adds that, "[w]hat you s'pose it'd be like if evahbody was to brush their teeth whenever they took a notion to brush?" (1990, p. 90). Hence, setting a timetable function to produces docile bodies that are easily monitored and controlled.

All these medical measures and treatments have repercussions that affect the psyche of the patients and their sense of self with an ultimate consequence of the loss of agency. The effects of the intense surveillance and the mental institution treatments are apparent in Bromden's hallucinations. Bromden refers to "The Combine," a hidden group in control of everything. This shows his paranoid delusion about the existence of a hidden force that controls and plans everything. As he puts it, "[t]he ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods. . . . 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

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twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component” (Kesey, 1990, p. 38). Bromden’s belief in the existence of a hidden power reveals his loss of agency as he is delusional and feels like a passive object in the hands of a powerful, authoritative and dangerous hidden force. As Aryan argues, “our sense of self-consciousness works with regards to both that subjectivity and agency which also make up authorship” (2021, p. 112). Indeed, Bromden is projecting his own anxieties and delusions onto non-existing external agents, the Combine. Therefore, he has lost control and agency and authorship over his life.

Furthermore, the word Combine signifies a factory-like setting that manufactures components to be distributed in the outside world. As Vitkus states, “[t]he Combine is described as a vast system of machines and robots, engaged in a process of converting human flesh, imagination, and individuality to a machine-world of freedomless conformity” (1994, p. 73). The effect of the mental institution’s psychiatric treatments on Bromden’s psyche is illustrated in the way he perceives the Combine as a vast mechanized system. Bromden believes that the Combine is not just controlling the patients in the hospital, but its power is also affecting the outside world. Stephen and Graham describe this type of delusion of thought as the breakdown of self-consciousness: No doubt, hallucinators have the impression that certain things exist in their external environments that cannot really be found there. . . . A more charitable reading is that the subject mistakes one sort of mental event or activity for another. Specifically, he mistakes an “imaginative” or merely introspective experience for a perceptual one. (2000, pp. 37-38)

For Bromden the Combine undoubtedly exists, and it is not just a metaphor to describe the injustices of the mental hospital. His paranoia and fear of an intimidating hidden force are heightened as a result of the treatments he gets at the hospital. This is also evident in the way he prefers to stay invisible and avoids interactions with the other patients and the staff. The treatments have contributed to his split psyche to the point that he cannot differentiate between his internal mental state and the external reality. Thus, Bromden’s experiences are subjective and authentic only to him. As he puts it in the beginning of the novel, “[i]t’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, 1990, p. 8 emphasis added). This shows that much of what he experiences holds a subjective reality for himself and is therefore a projection of his own split psyche. Yet, as Aryan contends, “paranoia can be viewed as a creative energy which is directed and channelled through storytelling that helps the writer maintain a degree of control and agency which would otherwise be existentially threatening” (2023, p. 341). Hence, Bromden’s paranoia is a main driving force of his creativity and storytelling.

The psychiatric hospital’s treatments have led to the patients’ split psyche. It is quite clear that McMurphy is not mentally ill at all and only feigns his insanity to avoid prison. However, toward the end of the novel, he has completely changed. He no longer can feel anything. Bromden describes McMurphy’s entering the ward after lobotomy as:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 307)

Bromden’s description of McMurphy is a metaphor for his psychological state. It is not just McMurphy’s body that is affected but also his psyche. It is clear that the hospital’s main function is not to cure or treat mental illnesses but to discipline and punish, turning sane people into psychologically damaged passive patients if necessary. Therefore, the mental institution becomes a place where mental illness is manufactured and produced.

### 3. The Importance of Counternarratives in Deconstructing Metanarratives

Inspired by Kesey’s own experience of working at a mental hospital, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* reflects some of the concerns of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s. This part argues that through McMurphy, the novel demonstrates the importance of storytelling which challenges the institution of psychiatry and its harsh medical treatments and helps some patients regain their autonomy and agency. It also contends that McMurphy’s stories defy those of the mental institution and Nurse Ratched’s abusive authority and have a therapeutic impact on Bromden’s mental health.

From the moment that McMurphy enters the mental hospital, it becomes clear that he is different from everyone else in the there. Bromden comments on how different McMurphy is: “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” (Kesey, 1990, p. 10). This difference is due to the way he narrates stories about him and others around him. From the beginning, he challenges the hospital’s grand-narratives and offers an alternative narrative that delegitimizes that of the mental hospital. This is exemplified in McMurphy’s attempts to convince Nurse Ratched to let them watch the world series on the television. Nurse Ratched refuses his request, saying that it will disrupt the patients’ schedule. Later on, McMurphy asks for a permission for voting on that matter; however, none of the patients are brave enough to raise their hands against her authority. McMurphy manages to convince them and on the second voting almost everyone raises their hands including Bromden. However, she rejects the result arguing that the *Chronics* should be included in the voting process, which is impossible since most of them are unable to move. Then, McMurphy sits in front of the television although it is off and after a while all the *Acutes* come to join him ignoring Nurse Ratched’s orders to get back to their tasks: “[t]hen 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” (Kesey, 1990, p. 138). This shows the positive and transformative impact of McMurphy’s move on the patients specifically in creating a counter discourse that challenges Nurse

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Ratched's narrative. At the time of the baseball game all the patients gathered in front of the television and listen to McMurphy's imaginary report of the match. As Bromden states:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 301)

The act of lining chairs in front of a powered off TV symbolizes the patients' attempt to regain their autonomy and agency. Through McMurphy's stories, the patients now gain the ability to envision a reality beyond what the hospital offers. Similar to anti-psychiatrists' argument, McMurphy's storytelling implies that mental illness is a narrative constructed in a discourse. It also showcases the importance of counternarrative as a means of resistance to the metanarrative of the mental hospital. Moreover, the act of voting represents the struggle to create a counter discourse and narrative which has been undermined by Nurse Ratched's authority. Lundholt et al. emphasize the importance of counternarratives:

Counternarratives reveal individual or collective experiences that master narratives suppress, silence, or exclude. They fill a need for stories that match one's own experiences of self, particularly those that are at odds with socially constrained master narratives. They are a resource for sensemaking in the absence of other available narratives. (2018, p. 3)

Hence, the collective voting of the patients represents their resistance and functions as a counternarrative against the mental institution's metanarrative which deem them to be incapable of making choices on their own. It also questions the legitimacy of Nurse Ratched's narrative.

Furthermore, McMurphy's counternarratives significantly transforms the patients, empowering them to reclaim their agency and resist the imposed metanarrative of the mental hospital. As Andrews contends, counternarratives are "the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (2004, p. 1). This is clear during the so-called therapeutic meetings that Nurse Ratched holds for the patients. During those meetings, Nurse Ratched always picks one of the patients and roasts him in front of everyone by choosing an embarrassing subject to discuss about that person. As Bromden says, this time it is Billy's turn, "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. . . I recognize Billy's voice, stuttering worse than ever because he's nervous" (Kesey, 1990, p. 127). Bromden further states "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" (1990, p. 131). Nurse Ratched's main intention behind using such narrative, where she constantly criticizes and humiliates the patients, is to worsen and exploit Billy's vulnerability and undermine his agency. Nurse Ratched makes sure that the patients always feel helpless and inadequate to achieve anything outside the mental ward. However, McMurphy creates a counternarrative which helps Billy see himself as someone capable of taking control of his own life. As Michael Bamberg contends, "narratives provide the possibility of a format that has become the privileged way of fashioning self and identity, at least in 'modern times,' which is open to a certain fluidity, to improvisation, and to the design of alternatives" (2004, p. 354). Therefore, McMurphy's counternarratives and storytelling enlighten Billy to the possibility of fashioning a new self that is capable of resisting the metanarrative of the mental hospital. Moreover, at the breakfast, McMurphy starts to tell a fabricated story about Billy:

"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?' (Kesey, 1990, pp. 98-99)

The stories that McMurphy creates empowers Billy to construct a new self. McMurphy's story here portrays Billy as "Billy 'Club' Bibbit" which alters Billy's and others' way of perceiving him. This demonstrates the importance of reshaping one's own self through creating narratives and counternarratives. McMurphy's storytelling enormously helps Billy feel confident about himself. This enables Billy to move beyond the limitations that are imposed on him by Nurse Ratched's narrative.

For example, Billy normally feels ashamed of himself as he stutters and is not brave enough to have a relationship with any girl. However, his shame disappears after McMurphy's storytelling. This happens on the night that McMurphy arranges for Billy to have an intercourse with Candy whom he has previously met during the fishing trip. Billy's sexual experience with Candy enables him to see himself differently, more capable away from the vulnerable self that Nurse Ratched has portrayed for him. After this experience, Billy is expressing himself for the first time without stuttering: "'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'" (Kesey, 1990: 301). Nonetheless, Billy's shame soon returns after Nurse Ratched intimidates him. This is clear in his stuttering: "'Duh-duh-don't t-tell, M-M-M-Miss Ratched. Duh-duh-duh—'" (Kesey, 1990, p. 301). This moment highlights the clash between McMurphy's narrative and Nurse Ratched's metanarrative. Nurse Ratched's threat to tell Billy's mother is her attempt to reinforce the metanarrative of control and power over the patients. Hence, the counternarrative has a crucial role in deconstructing the metanarrative of Nurse Ratched and showcasing alternatives to individuals like Billy. Billy shows that madness is not an inherent

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biological disease but it is manufactured. As Thomas Szasz argues, "the identification of new psychiatric diseases began not by identifying such diseases by means of the established methods of pathology, but by creating a new criterion of what constitutes disease" (1974, p. 12). Martyn and Thompson argue about the importance of personal narrative against master narratives stating that "it becomes increasingly evident that the metanarrative of mental illness is defined by stigma and shame, against which the individual must work hard to ensure the more authentic personal narrative is voiced" (2021, p. 58). Therefore, McMurphy's counternarrative becomes an important step toward deconstructing the metanarrative of the mental institution which is designed to control its patients. Through voicing a counternarrative, McMurphy does not only challenge Nurse Ratched authority but creates a new safe space that allows the patients to create their own individualistic narratives.

Additionally, McMurphy's narrative significantly helps Bromden to work out his fragmented psyche which is significantly the result of the hospital's treatments and regulations. Bromden starts to navigate his way outside his hallucinations including the fog. For Bromden, the fog symbolizes a safe place where he can hide and protect himself from the painful realities that surrounds him both from within and from outside the hospital. From the very beginning of the novel, Bromden talks about the positive effect of McMurphy presence in the ward:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 75)

For Bromden, the fog is the safe place where he can take shelter whenever he feels suffocated in the ward. However, since the arrival of McMurphy in the hospital, Bromden starts to feel differently that he no longer needs to hide himself in the fog. Later on, Bromden describes how McMurphy has managed to drag all the patients outside the fog during the voting to watch the world series:

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. (Kesey, 1990, p. 134 emphasis added)

McMurphy's hand with the bandage on it symbolizes his influence on the patients, as it represents both his physical sacrifice and his leadership in rallying the patients against Nurse Ratched's authority. Also, McMurphy's success in rallying the patients against Nurse Ratched's authority signify the power of his counternarrative in deconstructing the institution's metanarrative. Moreover, the fog represents the fear and oppression that they have endured during their time in the mental hospital under Nurse Ratched's authority. Due to the power of his counternarrative, McMurphy manages to drag them out of the numbing fog. This also symbolizes their rebirth and awakening from the state of numbness. Hence, it is evident that McMurphy's counternarrative successfully surpasses and overthrows the metanarrative of the mental institution.

Moreover, McMurphy's storytelling is a vehicle to transmit his power of storytelling to Bromden. McMurphy's narrative mostly affects Bromden as he moves from a state of invisibility to become the central figure in the novel. The first time that Bromden uttered a word is when he is with McMurphy: "[a]nd before I realized what I was doing, I told him Thank you" (Kesey, 1990, p. 205). This happens following Bromden losing his gum that he has stashed under his bed and McMurphy gifts him a new one. McMurphy then encourages Bromden to speak. As Bromden states, "[h]e told me not to hurry, that he had till six-thirty in the morning to listen if I wanted to practice" (Kesey, 1990, p. 206). McMurphy then helps Bromden by telling him a story of when he was a kid working in a bean field. During that time, McMurphy attempts to engage in a conversation with the adults around him, but they always ignore him which led him to remain silent for four weeks. As he states "[f]our weeks and not a peep out of me. Till I think by God they forgot I could talk" (Kesey, 1990, p. 206). McMurphy breaks his silence and confront them about how petty they all are. Through McMurphy's storytelling, Bromden gradually finds his own narrative and voice, changing from a marginalized and oppressed individual into the central storyteller. As Thomas H. Fick argues, "McMurphy has not only made Bromden big again, he has shown him how to tell a story" (1989, p. 29). As Bromden states, "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" (Kesey, 1990: 243). Hence, McMurphy has successfully transferred his power of storytelling to Bromden which ultimately enables him to articulate his own story and that of the other patients.

Toward the end of the novel, Bromden manages to free himself completely from the mental institution authority. As he states, "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" (Kesey, 1990, p. 257). Therefore, McMurphy's narratives and storytelling actually have succeeded in helping Bromden feel big again. Bromden finally decides to end McMurphy's agony after his lobotomy. This is the moment when Bromden becomes the master storyteller as he escapes from the institution and is now able to fully articulate his own narrative. Bromden describes the moment where he finally

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manages to escape from the claws of the mental hospital as: “[n]obody 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” (Kesey, 1990, pp. 310-311). Therefore, Bromden’s successful escape from the institution signifies that he is now the master storyteller of his life-story. Hence, Bromden not only continues McMurphy’s legacy of storytelling, but he has now become the embodiment of the power of storytelling as a way of resisting metanarrative of the merciless mental institution.

### CONCLUSION

Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* demonstrate that mental illnesses are actually manufactured and produced within psychiatric facilities whose function is supposed to be treating and healing. The novel also explored the effects of psychiatric institutions measures, treatments and procedures on the psyche of the characters. Moreover, the novel highlighted the dehumanization and marginalization of individuals who are labelled as mentally ill. Kesey’s narrative emphasize the punitive treatments that are exerted by the mental institution and showcase the disastrous effects of being incarnated in a psychiatric hospital. Lastly, through McMurphy’s journey, the novels illustrate the importance of storytelling in empowering, gaining agency and deconstructing the imposed societal values onto individuals.

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