

FILM

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962)

Ken Kesey

(1935-2001)

adaptation by Lawrence Haubert & Bo Goldman (1975)

ANALYSIS

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest is the most enduring novel of the 1960s counterculture and one of the rare novels that has become more pertinent with passing years. This is because its targets of attack have become far more oppressive: Government and Feminism. A national poll in 2014 showed 82 percent of Americans fear our own federal government more than any external threat. A national poll in 2015 showed that 49% believe the government is "an immediate threat" to the rights and freedoms of the ordinary citizen. Feminists on campuses have by now imposed nationwide a fascist regime of Political Correctness that suppresses free speech, denies males due process, and persecutes anyone with nonconformist beliefs. This adaptation is faithful to the novel, entertaining and powerful.

The film opens with a prolonged shot of Wilderness and ends with an iconic Indian busting out of the mental hospital and running away from civilization back to the Wilderness, in the literary tradition of Huck Finn and Ike McCaslin. The mental asylum is a metaphor of society with its almighty government controlling everyone. When the *head* nurse arrives in the morning she is identified with a big red light over the doorway and she is authorized by the government to stop Nature in men with medications, shocks, and lobotomies. Her name, Ratched, evokes the functioning of a machine. Her adversary, the hero Randall P. McMurphy, embodies Nature. As soon as he is unshackled by authorities he whoops and dances around like an Indian. Unshaven with dark wild hair like an Indian, he wears the knit cap of a sailor and when he leads his fellow patients on an outing he steals a charter boat and takes them fishing out on the ocean. Sailors are typed as free spirits. He wears a black leather jacket outside that also associates him with motorcycle rebels. He wears blues and greens that identify him with Nature in contrast to the other patients who wear dingy white. After he has conformed somewhat, he shaves, slicks down his hair and wears a white hospital shirt over a blue or green shirt, maintaining his identity.

Society turns Nature upsidedown. The orderlies in the hospital are all black men in white clothes who do as ordered by the white head nurse. They are sadistic in compensation for their experiences of white racism and Big Nurse uses their violence to intimidate her white male patients, reflecting the political coalition of blacks and Feminists in society at large. The genteel white male psychiatrists who run the hospital would never be able to subdue McMurphy or dictate to their black orderlies out on the streets or in the Wilderness. Today, due to "Affirmative Action," many institutions—especially in education and government—are now run by equivalents of Big Nurse Ratched. In this film she is shown a number of times looking down on the men from a high window like the commandant of a concentration camp. The Indian Chief is a visual joke, especially when Big Nurse leads the patients in doing aerobic exercises. He is so tall he can dunk a basketball without jumping and so strong he can tear up the plumbing, yet he is docile and pretends to be deaf and dumb. McMurphy rides on his shoulders when showing him how to dunk a basketball, elevated above the other patients just as he is elevated above them as a natural man. Later he stands on the Chief's shoulders to climb over the high security fence around the hospital and go free.

All the patients except McMurphy are repressed white males. They are all defeated and fearful and kept that way by the medications of Big Nurse. In her "therapy" sessions she shames the men, subdues them verbally, and suppresses them with her rules of "the Ward." She denies all of McMurphy's requests—that the radio be turned down so the men can talk, that they be allowed to watch the World Series, that she give back Cheswick's cigarettes. As McMurphy tells the head psychiatrist, "She ain't honest. She likes a rigged game." Most of the men are so dysfunctional they have committed themselves voluntarily. The most

pathetic is cringing Billy Bibbitt, who stutters so much he can barely speak. Billy has been destroyed by his overbearing mother. After McMurphy brings in prostitutes one night and sends one in to help Billy lose his virginity, Big Nurse catches him in bed with her and says she is going to tell his mother—a dirty thing to do. Her white nurse's hat falls off and gets dirty. She claims that she has to tell his mother because they are "old friends," which implies that they are parallels as sadistic females. Billy begs her not to tell on him but she will not relent. Big Nurse knows that he has attempted suicide before because of his mother. He is so terrified of his mother that this time he slits his throat. The assistant nurse screams at finding his body and bumps into Big Nurse, smearing her with his blood. Boys have killed themselves at an increasing rate in comparison to girls as they passed through the Feminist educational system: Ages 10-14 the ratio in 2001 was 3-1; ages 15-19 it was 5-1; ages 20-24 it was 7-1 (*familyfirstaid.org*, 2013) Feminists have actually held panel debates on whether the male gender should be eliminated entirely.

McMurphy is so outraged he tries to strangle Big Nurse, leading to his lobotomy. Later in the century, Political Correctness became a Feminist form of psychological lobotomy. Kesey suggests that McMurphy is a Christ-evoking figure in that he "saves" some of the patients and gets "crucified" by the established order. McMurphy does invoke the name of Jesus Christ half a dozen times—his only expletive. But he is profane like unredeemed Nature, he indulges his lusts, he is violent and the only one he is able to save in the end is the Chief. Religious faith is not a part of Kesey's vision, nor is political faith.

Michael Hollister (2015)