

Societies duplicity through the eyes of ken kesey



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In a perfect world each man, woman, and child are slightly unique but more or less exactly the same as one another. However, we do not live in a perfect world, we live in a world with many imperfections. Imperfections are looked down upon and significant measures are taken to “fix” them. In the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, written by Ken Kesey, people with these “imperfections” are sent to a medical ward and are absent from society because they are different. For the ward to suppress the differences within the patients, deceit and misdirection is used as an influential element. However, Kesey is not subtle in the way he presents the ward’s motives and hides the influential effects in the fog and machinery motifs. The fog motif serves to force patients into adapting to society, whereas the machinery motif aims to transform and “fix” the patients so they fit in and do not stand out.

Fog is the phenomenon that gives one a mental sanctuary where one may reel away from the world. In the novel, fog was used as a retreat from the cruelty of the ward by the patients. For example, on more than one occasion Chief Bromden slips away from reality because of his fear of acting out against the ward’s policies or because of the pain from the ward’s “treatments”. The novel itself starts as Chief indulges in the fog to numb the pain caused by the three aides and Nurse Ratched. Not only Chief but also all the other patients use the fog as a safe haven because they “can slip back in it and feel safe” (Kesey 123). Additionally, the fog keeps the patients in a mind-less state in the benefit of the ward. The fog keeps the patients satisfied reducing the chance of a rebellion against the ward, or symbolically society. Furthermore, when McMurphy arrives on the ward he drags all the

patients out of the fog and shows the patients that reality is much safer than the twisted conscience maintained by the fog. As the surrounding fog dissipates Bromden and the other patients begin to realize that the hospital treats patients inhumanely and they become more self-conscious and aware.

By means of the mechanical motif Kesey exposes how society manipulates ones actions “ into doing what [society] think[s] [he or she] should do” (Kesey 210). In the novel *Nurse Ratched* and the aides personify the machinery to achieve normality throughout the ward. However, normality was reached by harsh and extreme measures. For instance, two patients, Chief Bromden and Randle McMurphy, are sent to receive several electric shock therapy sessions that may lead to fatal ramifications because those patients stood up for a fellow member of the ward who refused to be scrubbed in a manner ratified by the ward. Another situation where electric shock therapy is used, as a means of suppression, is when a patient named Maxwell Taber demands information about the medication he is prescribed. The electric shock sessions had such an impact on him that once he was finished he was rendered completely docile, and was shortly dismissed from the ward acclaimed by Nurse Ratched herself. Adding to the list of disciplinary measures of Nurse Ratched is lobotomy. McMurphy’s lobotomy procedure was a success as he came back from the procedure as a vegetable, a term used for men that are brain dead. The Nurse went to such lengths just to castigate McMurphy for throwing a party in the ward and to make him functional in society. This sums up how the machinery motif plays a role in suppressing individuality and “ fixing up mistakes made in the

neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, [and in society at large]" (Kesey 40).

The novels core conflicts are the two major motifs of fog and machinery. The motifs revolve around Nurse Ratched's embodiment of social oppression and control. The fog is put into effect so the patients on the ward cannot think for themselves and must simply follow the wards policies similarly to societies demands. While the fog takes the patients to a compliant state the machinery enforces the strict parameters of society so the patients may one day attempt to live amidst society. Altogether, Kesey conveys the deceitful ways society acts to conform individuals into thinking and acting like one another.