

# Cuckoo and people: good cuckoo people: institute, the good

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the main character, Randle Patrick McMurphy demonstrates both sanity and insanity according to different definitions and from different points of view. Firstly, the novel illustrates McMurphy's disobedience and failure to obey rules or the law which can be regarded as insane at that time. In the beginning, McMurphy is sent to jail due to five arrests for assault and statutory rape. However, from his conversation with the doctors and the fact that he commits crime repeatedly, we can see that he doesn't think he has done anything wrong and doesn't feel guilty for what he has committed. On the work farm, he doesn't obey the rules and 'sit there like a goddamn vegetable'. Being described as 'belligerent, talked when unauthorized, been resent in attitude towards work', he was sent to the hospital for evaluation by doctors to determine whether he is mentally ill.

In the hospital, McMurphy shows no acquiescence to the authoritarian control over the psychiatry ward by Nurse Ratched. He is rebellious and tries to challenge the nurse's autonomy. Unlike the other inmates who accept every decision made by the nurse, McMurphy voices out and asks for a change of schedule when he wants to watch the World Series. After being rejected and tricked, he cannot accept the unfairness. He starts to narrate an imaginary baseball game on the turned-off-television to show that he will never surrender.

The novel also presents McMurphy's impulsivity, irritability, and aggression. He gets annoyed easily and often provokes to anger, especially when facing injustice or unfairness. He gets very annoyed and eventually angry when

Nurse Ratched refuses to give Martini his cigarette to calm him down. He cannot hold his temper but broke the glass of the nurse station to grab a pack of cigarettes for him. Another example is when he saw Billy in blood, he nearly chokes Nurse Ratched to death out of anger.

Another characteristic of McMurphy represented in the novel that makes him sound crazy is taking great risks, which seems unwise as most of the time, it may not be beneficial to himself but for the others good. He takes great risk of heavy punishment after being caught back to the hospital to drive the other inmates to the seaside and go on a boat trip with them. The idea of telling psychiatry patients to pretend to be doctors of the National Psychiatry Hospital and taking 'crazy people' along with you to have fun sounds pretty crazy too. He takes great risk of being discovered and never able to escape from the hospital to hold a farewell party to say goodbye to the other inmates and wait for Billy and Candy to have sex.

Although McMurphy is so wild and risky which makes him seem crazy, the novel also represents the characteristic of McMurphy as being sane. For one, he is smart to be able to trick the nurses and guards for so many times which shows that he has a clear and rational mind. He doesn't confront the tough with the toughness every time. Knowing that refusing to take the oral medicine will mean injections, McMurphy pretends to take the medication obediently but never swallow the drug. He also knows how to get the patients and doctors to his side, as well as to bribe the safety guard with woman and alcohol so that he'll let the two women in.

Secondly, although McMurphy always breaks the rules but what he does are often for the good of the other patients. There are many chances for him to escape from the hospital alone and set himself free in Canada. However, each time, he let go of these chances for the sake of the other inmates. The first time is when the Chief raised him up and helped him get over the fences. Instead of escaping alone, he took the inmates for a boat trip so that they can have fun and be free for half a day. The second chance is the night when he manages to get Candy and Rose into the hospital. To play safe, he could have left quietly. However, he holds a farewell party instead to say goodbye to the other inmates and let them have fun before he leaves. Right after the party, the four of them are ready to go. However, as he wants to help Billy overcome his fear of woman and sex, he chooses to stay and let Billy have sex with Candy. The last chance before everything is too late is when the nurses and guards are shocked by the death of Billy and are busy dealing with the messy situation, he could have escaped through the opened windows. However, he is too angry about Billy's death and didn't grab the chance. His self-sacrifice shows that he is empathetic and will think for the others.

In contrast, Nurse Ratched manipulates the inmates by their fears, desires, and shame, especially during community meetings. She claims that all these are for the inmates' good. But forcing them to share their deepest fears and shame to everyone, giving them electric shocks when they break the rules and having control over everything in their life are doing more harm than good to them. Although McMurphy's appearance in the hospital disrupts

normal functioning but brings the inmates a lot of happiness and gives them the courage to ask for what they want and have their own opinion towards their life. He even helps Billy to overcome his fear of woman and sex and stammer by letting him have sex with Candy. Therefore, his insanity as in the protest against autonomy can actually be sanity when it happens in an insane and unjust society or group.

The doctors don't think that McMurphy is truly insane but suspect that he is pretending to be mentally ill to escape from the work farm to the relatively luxury hospital. However, they do not dare to speak from their hearts but only agree with Nurse Ratched as everybody has something to lose if they admit they don't think he's crazy.

Unfortunately, in the end, after choking Nurse Ratched, McMurphy is lobotomized. With the connections in his brain's prefrontal lobe severed, McMurphy becomes truly insane. He loses his mind and his spirits. He cannot give any response to the Chief. The surgery turned him from a rambunctious but sane into a mute and vacant-minded man.