

Emma Berning  
AP Literature and Composition  
Mrs. Rutan  
2 May 2018

### AP Literature Essay Revision

Pieces of literature tend to be rich with multiple symbols embedded into the pages; in Ken Kesey's novel--*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*--there is a continuous theme with the alleged fog being a complex symbol holding multiple levels of meaning. The allegorical novel symbolizes the fog as the surface level representation of mental illness, while it is also symbolic in challenging the social normalities of conformity. The novel follows the perspective of the "deaf and dumb" Chief Bromden as he is forced to obey the tyranny of the head nurse, Nurse Ratched. Chief--being the patient that has been on the ward for the longest term--has blindly molded into the mute and ideal patient, conforming under the authoritative figures on the ward, as well as society's perception of who he is as an individual. The mental ward had become a victim to the dull numbness the mindless daily procedures had inflicted on it--that is until R.P. McMurphy stirred up the bland routine, and created an uprising to break the hold Nurse Ratched had gripped on the lives of each the patients.

Chief being a "chronic"--long term mental patient--and the narrator of the novel, he was the invisionist of the mysterious fog that consumed the ward. Chief often gave larger than life descriptions of things that could not have possibly been present in the novel, making the reoccurring fog seem to be a pigment of his imagination, and a symbolic way of representing his mental illness. Chief often saw the fog roll in and devour the ward, until Chief himself was devoured as well. The visions of the fog goes hand in hand with experiences people suffering from schizophrenia tend to have, making the fog symbolic in representing Chief's mental state, and possible diagnosis of schizophrenia. Chief's illusions of the fog also put into question the reliability of his narration, since it helps to conclude Chief as being mentally unstable.

Among other interpretations--an example including the fog symbolising the medicated state of Chief--the complexity of the fog is symbolic in crafting a social critique against conformity of individuals under authoritative figures and society itself. Nurse Ratched held a dictatorship over the mental ward, and McMurphy strongly challenged the hold her power had on the patients; when Nurse Ratched's authority was called into question, the fog would roll in, as the pressure to conform under her ruling intensified. McMurphy's character was essential in pushing the symbolic aspect of conformity the fog had, by being the rebellious leader and causing an uprising within the patients. As McMurphy "shattered the glass" the fog enveloped the ward stronger than it ever had before, because the desperate need for the patients to fall under Nurse Ratched's tyranny had never been so evident. The fog not only symbolized conformity but also the challenge of conformity as the fog emerged in instances where molding under rules or rebellion were present.

Conforming was evident in the instance of the mental ward, but was also apparent in social prejudices held against Native Americans; Chief--being unusually tall and biracial--had a Native American father and a white mother, causing him to be a social outcast of both the Native American society and the white society. Chief's alienation was caused by the prejudice of all society, resulting in powerful--and often female--figures to effortlessly oppress his true

identity and set a precedent of his lack of worth. This results in Chief conforming under society's idea of him, by becoming deaf and dumb, as well as under the ruling of Nurse Ratched, by allowing the pressure to conform to consume him through the symbolism of the fog. As the fog engulfed the floors of the mental ward, Chief would allow himself to get "lost in the fog" and ultimately losing his sense of self.

The fog was a critical symbol in illustrating the illusions of mental illness, and representing the conformity of individuals under the standards held by authoritative figures, and the conceptions held by society. The fog was emblematic in demonstrating the lack of self identity, and the domination conformity holds on an individual. Chief Bromden strayed away from himself and molded under the dictatorship of Nurse Ratched, until the rebellious McMurphy broke the trance she had set on the patients. The machinery like fog was a figment of Chief's imagination, symbolising mental illness, but also calling attention to controversial topics during the time period in which it was written. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a timeless novel as it is relevant in calling attention to social critiques still evident in today's society; the pressure to conform under powerful figures and the prejudice held against racial groups are issues that were and are still pertinent. The several layers of symbolic meaning embedded throughout the fog helps in crafting Ken Kesey's novel into the outstanding multi-meaning story it remains today, as everybody could learn to "shatter the glass".