Freedom and Dynamic Relationship between Male and Female Characters in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Big Nurse Ratched

What is going to happen when distinct personalities of different genders have a collision in the novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest? What is going to happen when women’s acerbity and men’s stubbornness have a collision? Moreover, does it mean that same genders would make the same choices on the same question? One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest is a famous novel with political reflections written by Ken Kesey who is an American author. The novel tells a story about that McMurphy who is not insane in the mental hospital leads other patients to rebel Big Nurse’s control. This novel reflects American society’s problems such as race discrimination and the government’s strict control at that time interestingly. The most interesting thing of this novel is that it has a “confused” ending in order to lead readers to think deeply. In this essay, I will focus on the different attitudes and actions of McMurphy and Chief Bromden when they face the control of the Big Nurse Ratched and injustices as well their different endings due to their actions.

To begin with, what kind of person is the Big Nurse Ratched? Obviously, the Big Nurse Ratched represents the upper class in the mental hospital. She is able to control patients’ activities and freedom. Almost every patients think her words as absolute rules. As it says on the page 76, “ The Big Nurse is able to set the wall clock at whatever speed she wants by just turning one of those dials in the steel door; she takes a notion to hurry things up, she turns the speed up, and those hands whip around that disk like spokes in a wheel.” She makes every decision for all patients in the hospital. She forces the patients in the hospital to eat medicine no matter whether they have to. She forces everyone to participate in the useless group discussions. She likes to know other people’s deep scars and make others to laugh at them. Maybe Ratched is a very capable person from normal people’s eyes. For example, Billy’s mother trusts in Ratched very much. In fact, she uses moral excuses to warn every patients to believe that what she says is always right. She knows everyone’s weaknesses, but McMurphy disrupted the pace of life there. She begins to feel threatened and starts to use moral excuses to suppress everyone again and again. Moreover, she never changes the formal schedule and use compulsive ways to make every patients follow. And she is not a kind person. She does not try to please the patients. As it says on page 76, “The scene in the picture-screen windows goes through rapid changes of light to show morning, noon, and night …… awful scramble of shaves and breakfasts and appointments and lunches and medications ……. till the Big Nurse sees everybody is right up to the breaking point, and she slacks off on the throttle, eases off the pace on that clock-dial, like some kid been fooling……. got bored with all that silly scampering and insect squeak of talk and turned it back to normal.” The Big Nurse pays less attention to the patients’ mental health and moods. She controls them, and she does not treat them as equal people. She hates that other people make jokes with her. Ratched is a serious person and represents the authority among the patients. Also, everyone’s compliance leads her to be arrogant and strict. Although Ratched is cruel and cold, she is still just the accomplice of the hospital and the government. The mental hospital wants to suppress the patients. The government controls the thoughts of people and people who rebels are sent to the mental hospital. They may be not insane. Maybe compared with those so-called “normal” people, people in the mental hospital are like real

people. However, these people are persecuted step by step into lunatics, and just like McMurphy who is finally given a lobotomy. They use electric shock, surgery, and drugs to control patients and make them obey the rules. These are what Americans felt fearful at that time.

In addition, what is the attitude of McMurphy when he faces the rudeness and injustice from the Big Nurse Ratched? Does he obey anything that Ratched orders? The answer is definitely no. McMurphy is the one who is really rebellious. Moreover, his open personalities lead his action to be free. He likes to take adventures and control his own life instead of listening to other people's order. However, when he hears that most people are voluntary to be in the hospital, he is angry. ''You have more to lose than I do,' Harding says again. 'I'm voluntary. I'm not committed.' McMurphy doesn't say a word……. 'As a matter of fact, there are only a few men on the ward who are committed. Only Scanlon and—well, I guess some of the Chronics. And you. Not many commitments in the whole hospital. No, not many at all.' …… After a bit of silence McMurphy says softly, 'Are you bullshitting me?'" McMurphy's surprise shows his personalities. He cannot understand why so many people gives up the freedom what he is expecting all time. He thinks people should control their life and enjoy the fun from the outside world instead of living in a mental hospital and being under the control of an annoying woman. However, the Big Nurse Ratched is used to controlling other people's actions and activities in the mental hospital. When she treats McMurphy who is rebellious and impolite, she must be tough. However, this causes the great conflict between McMurphy and her. As it says, "Then, just as she's rolling along at her biggest and meanest, McMurphy steps out of the latrine door right in front of her, holding that towel around his hips—stops her dead! She shrinks to about head-high to where that towel covers him, and he's grinning down on her. Her own grin is giving way, sagging at the edges." This is an interesting description of the rebellion of McMurphy to Ratched. It is easy to see that he dislikes the Big Nurse who controls his life without a sense of humor. "She sounds like a teacher bawling out a student, so McMurphy hangs his head like a student and says in a voice sounds like he's about to cry, 'I can't do that, ma'am. I'm afraid some thief in the night boosted my clothes whilst I slept. I sleep awful sound on the mattresses you have here.'" Obviously, the Big Nurse is quite serious and has no sense of humour. She treats the patients without geniality. She tries to make her patients to follow her lead including McMurphy. However, McMurphy always deliberately speaks and acts contrary to her order. She hates McMurphy to break the policies, especially when he objects to her in front of other mental patients who listen to her words. She thinks that McMurphy is challenging her authorities. Thus, Ratched treats him like enemy. As it says on the page 144, "The nurse stands this as long as she can; then she comes to the door of the Nurses' Station and calls across to him he'd better help themen with the housework. He ignores her." Because Big Nurse rejected the request of watching the game, that makes McMurphy angry and rebellious. And then he takes the action. "If somebody'd of come in and took a look, men watching a blank TV, a fifty-year-old woman hollering and squealing at the back of their heads about discipline and order and recriminations, they'd of thought the whole bunch was crazy as loons." As we can see, McMurphy leads a group of other patients to rebel like him in order to provoke the Big Nurse Ratched successfully. This rebellion makes Ratched feels that she loses the authority among the patients. It is quite ironic that the patients who always listen to her and never rebel before starts to disobey her order. She feels the kind of betrayal. This also causes that she is hostile to McMurphy. Freedom needs to fight. I feel touched by a group of people are facing the blank TV and watching their shadow reflected on the TV screen when their request is rejected. They passionately explain the picture of the game and pretend that they are watching the game. They laugh and shout for rebellion. When I was reading the novel, I have a question that is why McMurphy does not

escape the mental hospital since he has chances to leave. And now I have the answer. Although McMurphy wants the freedom, real freedom cannot be gained by running away and escaping. The real freedom must be gained by emancipation. When McMurphy takes his girlfriend and a group of patients to go fishing. All patients are happy and curious like children, and they are excited for being outside. And there is a detail. When someone stops them and asks what they are doing there, McMurphy lies that they are doctors. All patients show the expressions and actions like normal human beings. So that's why? From my own understanding, all of they may not be real patients, and they are just normal people who are afraid of their past lifestyles. They do not want to face the previous scars and pains. Their actions are kind of evasion behaviors. Billy comes in the hospital because he refused to confess to his favorite girl, so he cannot accept this cruel fact and chooses to escape. They all come in like that because they can avoid seeing those people and avoid uncovering their scars in this way. As a leader who pursues freedom in this environment, McMurphy has strong faith to help other people. Compared with his own freedom, what he cares more about is that Billy can face others and himself bravely, and get out of this lunatic environment. Moreover, he hopes the patients in the hospital have the courage to step out of the hospital and the power to pursue freedom. For McMurphy, this is what is far more meaningful than running away and escaping alone.

Moreover, Chief Bromden who is the narrator of the novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is an interesting and complicated character to analysis. He always keeps silent when suffering Big Nurse Ratched's orders, and he pretend that he cannot hear as well speak. He is kind of invisible in the hospital. He observes everything happens and every patients' behaviors in the hospital. As it says on the page 1, " 'Haw, you look at 'im shag it? Big enough to eat apples off my head an' he mine me like a baby.' They laugh and then I hear them mumbling behind me, heads close together…… They don't bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I'm nearby because they think I'm deaf and dumb. Everybody thinks so. I'm cagey enough to fool them that much." Chief Bromden makes a trick to everyone in the hospital. He seems to be an excellent narrator of the novel because he is like an observer among all people in the hospital. Also, the hospital is like a small society which reflects a great number of American social problems at that time. Chief sees everything like a spectator, and it is just like how the author Ken Kesey sees the American society. Moreover, Chief Bromden supports McMurphy Silently. For example, when McMurphy has a competition with the Big Nurse Ratched, Chief votes for McMurphy at the last second. Although because of time and Ratched's acrimony, his support is not that important, he still gives his efforts. As it says on the page 142, " 'You, Chief, what about you?' He's standing over me in the mist. Why won't he leave me be? 'Chief, you are our last bet." McMurphy wishes to get efforts from Chief. Although Chief used to be an obedient person, he rebels the Big Nurse because of McMurphy. As it says on the page 142, " It's too late to stop it now. McMurphy did something to it that first day, put some kind of hex on it with his hand so it won't act like I order it. There's no sense in it, any fool can see; I wouldn't do it on my own…… lifting it slow just to get me out of the fog and into the open where i'm fair game. He's doing it, wires… No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself." Maybe Chief is unhappy to the Big Nurse, so he hopes that McMurphy can win the competition to defeat Ratched's control. Although he does not want to rebel the Big Nurse's lead obviously in his heart, he does in behavior for McMurphy. Ultimately, Chief makes the decision to rebel and to run away. He is sad for what McMurphy experiences, and he is angry for how the power of hospital treats them. It reflects that how disappointed the author Ken Kesey is to American society at that time. As it says on the page 324, " I took a deep breath and bent over and took the levers……. The glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth. Panting, I

thought for a second about going back and getting Scanlon and some of the others, but then I heard the running squeak of the black boys' shoes in the hole and I put my hand on the sill and vaulted after the panel into the moonlight." Chief runs away from the hospital. He gains the freedom. Before he leaves, he uses the pillow to kill McMurphy. This may be a little bit tricky because McMurphy is his best friend, but it is also easy to understand. In that crazy environment, McMurphy is the representative of fighting for freedom, but he fails. Does the emancipation for freedom fail? The answer is no. Chief brings McMurphy's soul to pursue freedom. He kills McMurphy because he knows that McMurphy does not want to live like that. Death for freedom is better than being controlled. At last, Chief uses the way that McMurphy tells him to leave and pursue freedom. This is also like a few Americans rebels the social system at that time. Chief gains the last victory, but McMurphy has a tragic ending. The reason why they has different results is because of their actions and attitudes, but also McMurphy's death encourages Chief to fight for freedom. Chief is clever and always follows the Big Nurse, so Ratched never pays attention to him. She always purposely makes difficulties for McMurphy just because he rebels directly. The attitude that McMurphy and Chief to Ratched and the way to react is completely distinct.

All in all, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest is a successful novel to make every readers think deeply. Every character is alive and vivid, and the novel has a great reflection on American society at that time. Attitudes of McMurphy and Chief to Ratched are quite interesting, and these leads to their different endings. The whole novel is trying to encourage people to fight for true freedom of humans' rights. Sometimes, we try our best to fight for our requests, but maybe we fail for some reasons. At this time, we cannot yield but accept the results because we have tried. Do not be like patients in the hospital who are afraid of raising their hands to vote for watching the game. Please be like a group of people who pretending that they are watching the game. Their positive attitude and rebellious souls are precious.