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Movie Review

The book is always better than the movie. That is the stereotypical saying. But what if both could stand separately? What if both were each worthy in their own right?

It has been said that Ken Kesey once caught *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* on cable one night, watched for a bit, and then when he realized what it was, shut it off. You see Kesey had a money dispute with the producers and wanted the film to be narrated by Bromden's character (like in the book). He also wanted Gene Hackman, *not* Jack Nicholson to play the iconic character of McMurphy. However, within the first minute of McMurphy's arrival to the hospital (where he kisses his [male] guard) we know he is the right choice. Stark-raving mad.

Although Kesey was not very pleased with the film, audiences loved it. The film is on just about every "Top Ten Movies of All Time" list. Right off the bat I want to say that the set design for this movie is phenomenal. Instead of being filmed at a Hollywood soundstage in Culver City, California, it was actually filmed on location at the Oregon State [Mental] Hospital. The set was dingy and exactly as how I pictured it when I read the book. The lighting used in most of the movie was grey, and accurately depicts the mood and tone of a mental hospital.

Characterization is another aspect director Milos Forman hits out of the park. The casting choices of McMurphy (Jack Nicholson), "Chief" Bromden (Will Sampson), and Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher) accurately represent the characters from the novel. Louise Fletcher, who plays Nurse Ratched, has a role that is greatly underappreciated. This may be because her Nurse Ratched is so thoroughly despicable, and because she contains all the qualities we all have been taught to be afraid of in a certain kind of female authority figure. The zoom in shots that focus on her (especially during the group discussion scenes), help add to detestable personality. Sometimes her hair is done in a certain fashion to make her look like she has horns coming up through her head.

I have one critique for Forman: the little involvement of Chief Bromden in the film. If you've ever watched a Marvel film, Stan Lee makes a cameo somewhere in every film. Similar to Lee's cameo appearances, Bromden feels like he is only placed into the screenplay for true fan enjoyment. Honestly, if you never read the book you would not understand the importance Bromden's role in the story. In the book he is the narrator and main character, but his role is reduced in the film dramatically. It's almost like he is placed into the film in order to pay homage to the novel. There is only one scene that explains Chief's background to the audience (compared to the book with tons of information about Chief's early life). And this scene is very easily ignored by the average moviegoer. I only wish Chief had a larger role in the film.

Although I may complain that the movie strikes out while portraying certain parts of the book, it is certainly a worthy adaptation of the novel. The book and the movie should not be compared against one another. They both uniquely portray the subject of a free spirit located in a closed system. And that free spirit is Randle McMurphy.

