

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Most writers get their inspiration for writing from various sources, such as family, personal experience, history and their imagination. (“Social Criticism in Literature”). The purpose of the works can be varied; sharing experience or only entertainment, for instance. Besides those purpose, the writers also convey their messages in their works, for example as social criticism. The writer can use different literary tools to convey their messages, such as the major characters. Major character is “an important figure at the center of the story’s action or theme” (“Elements of Fiction”). Some examples of the famous books that use major character to represent social critique are: George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* and J.D Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*.

One writer who also criticised the society through major characters of his work is Ken Kesey. He is an American writer who was popular among the hippies (High 207). According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, hippie means “a usually young person who rejects established social customs (such as by dressing in an unusual way or living in a commune) and who opposes violence and war; *especially*: a young person of this kind in the 1960s and 1970s” (“Hippie”).

Between 1950s and 1960s, he wrote two novels: the first one is *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the second one is *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Both novels are written based on his own experience when he mingled with a particular society. It implies that his works contain his personal view towards some issues which happened in the U.S society.

In the 1950s, when *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* was written, the circulating major issue was the Cold War. The Cold War generated fear of communism, or also known as the "Red Scare." Accordingly, this period became the era of conformity because the U.S society tend to obey the government to avoid accusation of being communist.

Through *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey criticised that issue. The novel tells a story of mentally ill patients and a tyrannical nurse which allegorically criticised the repressive governance. The novel was controversial at the time it was published, which also becomes the reason I chose it. In addition, the major characters are portrayed uniquely with their contrasting characteristic.

The portrayal of the major characters is the most dominant element of the novel that helps conveying the social criticism. The first character is Chief Bromden, a representative of passive people in a society. Secondly, Nurse Ratched, who represents a repressive government, and Randle P. McMurphy who represents a nonconformist. Hence, each character shows an interrelation to represent a certain idea.

The characters allegorise the issue of individual freedom versus the repressive system in the U.S in the 1950s. "Allegory is a complete narrative which involves characters, and events that stand for an abstract idea or an event" ("Definition of Allegory"). Some examples of the allegorical novels are: C.S Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, William Golding's *Lord of Flies* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*. Kesey's book, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's*

*Nest*, is a political allegory, which is “a story that, on the surface, tells one tale, but has a hidden political meaning underneath. It is an extended metaphor that often uses a simple substitution of one element or symbol for another” (“What Is Political Allegory?”). Kesey uses “the mad-house as a microcosm of American society in which the internal policies reflect the order of the external world” (Holland 7). It shows that most elements in the novel might have similarities with the actual situation in the society.

Although *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is considered a great novel, the society in the past could not accept it as well as today because it criticises the government and the society. As the impact of the Red Scare (fear of communism spread), the government was considered repressive. Moreover, with a strong peer pressure, the society rejects those who are considered nonconformist in the society. (“The Individual and The System in *Kesey’s One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*”). Nonconformist is “a person who refuses to conform, as to established customs, attitudes, or ideas” (“Nonconformist”). These facts clearly show a strong interconnection between the events of the novel and the social and political situation in the U.S in the 1950s which I attempt to explore.

The approach I chose is formalism, which “focuses on the formal features found in literature that readers must notice and name when describing and interpreting texts” (“Formalism: Method and Glossary”). I also include some historical background to support my analysis. The book has already provided the foundation on the issue of individual versus the authority. By analysing the novel, I would like to show how the major characters are portrayed to convey Kesey’s social critique.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The problems that I am going to discuss are:

1. How are the major characters portrayed in the novel?
2. Why are the characters portrayed in such a way?

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Based on the above problems, the purposes of this study are:

1. To show how the major characters are portrayed
2. To show why the characters are portrayed in such a way

## **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The method of research that I use is library research. I begin the research by reading Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. After that I analyse the primary text by using some information and materials from the Internet that can support my analysis and help me writing a good thesis. Lastly, I draw some conclusions from what has been discussed.

## **ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis consists of three chapters, preceded by the Acknowledgements, the Table of Contents and the Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. In Chapter Two, I analyse the allegory of social critique through the major characters in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The third chapter is the Conclusion. This thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, consisting of the Synopsis of the Novel and the Biography of the Author.