TECHNIQUE AS MEANING: LANGUAGE, PERCEPTION AND TIME IN ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST AND SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION

by

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B.A., McGill University, 1969

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

The University of British Columbia

August, 1975
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ABSTRACT

Both *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* are essentially about conflict, and the thematic resolution of both novels involves the affirmation of the dignity of the individual. While Kesey's theme is not unusual, his method of articulating theme is worthy of study. Conflict is acted out structurally in each text. Point of view is the primary element to consider. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, there is a single first person narrator who is clearly psychotic and only intuitively reliable. In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, there are a series of first person narrators as well as a third person narrator and the contradictions in accounts of events and thoughts throw the whole nature of truth into doubt. The novels focus our attention on perception. Attention to perception carries us to an awareness of the structural and contextual implications of language and time. Language shapes, records and transmits perceptions; time is experienced as a subjective phenomenon and is therefore a function of perception.

Reading the novels in terms of perception, language and time leads to a recognition of the complexity of Kesey's work and to a series of conclusions about the intricacy of the thematic patterns which Kesey forms. The quality of conflict is such that there are never absolute winners or absolute losers; rather there are moments of ambiguous victories and defeats. Both novels endorse a vision of life as a cyclical process and any kind of finality (except for the finality of death) implicitly becomes questionable.

Perception, language and time are themselves arenas for conflict in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; but in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey transcends open confrontation in these areas and goes on to explore
the further ramifications of perception, language and time. The more subtle dynamics of *Sometimes a Great Notion* result from the evolution of a real union of method and meaning in Kesey's writing. In his first novel, Kesey is trapped by limitations of sequence, chronology and point of view, and he writes through the contradiction of conveying a cyclical vision in a linear form. His second novel is more sophisticated and more integrated. *Sometimes a Great Notion* is structurally, not just thematically, cyclical. Yet in both novels, either through contrived or natural momentum, a sense of cycles is projected. The theme of individual dignity is reinforced by the peculiar structural contortions of each novel. Lines give way to fragmentation or circles give way to centrifuge and then to entropy, but in each case, the result is the dispersion of characters. In both novels, protagonists either die or spin off, not even to an ambiguous end, but to the next phase of an ambiguous process. In focusing on perception, language and time in both novels, we are focusing ultimately on Kesey's concept of reality as perpetual flow.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I did not go to Chuck Kesey's dairy farm to interrogate brother Ken on the real purpose and meaning of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. I resolved to keep distance between this paper and Kesey, the Merry Prankster, the cult-hero of the 1960's, the fugitive from the law, the preacher of "Acid Graduation," the author of "The Fried Ice Cream Papers," the milker of cows. My concern is not with the Kesey mystique or the Kesey aura, but with the Kesey novels. My approach to his texts is essentially "new critical"; my premise is that the novels speak for themselves, and eloquently.

My point of departure is the recognition that Kesey's themes are not remarkably new. Their attachment to classical myth, to American myth, to comic book cosmology has prompted a series of critical articles and essays that testify to their lack of newness.¹ *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is, on one level, a line-drawing of a microcosmic community. It pits characters whom we are schooled to love against characters whom we are schooled to hate, and it evolves a plot out of the inevitable battles between them. The battles produce no absolute winners and no absolute losers. Yet the novel delineates moments of winning and moments of losing and affirms one value—the value of individual dignity.

¹ There are, to date, no complete books of Kesey criticism. Most of the existing critical essays are concerned with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and many of these tend to be reductive and even simplistic. The most insightful critical pieces I have read are those of Tony Tanner in *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), and Raymond R. Olderman in *Beyond the Waste Land* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).
Sometimes a Great Notion draws a more complex picture of a more intricately dynamic society. It pits three-dimensional characters against other three-dimensional characters and pits them against other forces and against themselves. Conflict is the substance of the novel. Again, there are no absolute winners and no absolute losers, and again, there is delineation of moments of winning and moments of losing and affirmation of the value of individual dignity.

Kesey's central theme and many of his insights are not new. But throughout his novels lingers the suggestion that Kesey knows that, if not nothing, then little is new under the sun. This knowledge permeates both novels and imparts to them another layer of meaning. Images of circles and cycles recur in the texts and confirm the notion that newness is an illusion. The implication is that newness isn't the point of the novels, and that lack of newness is.

As he narrates One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Chief Broom reminds us that, despite the appearance of a sometimes equal struggle between the individual and the Combine, the reality is the existence of a cycle which is kept in motion by the Combine and assures its victory. The novel may close with the escape of the characters we love, but it is clear that there will be other protagonists in battles yet to come, and we must wonder where our friends escape to when they flee. Big Nurse will "go on winning, just like the Combine . . . she don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours."[^2] So victories for "our side" can

never be complete: they belong to a never-ending cycle. Moreover, the Combine extends its power beyond the ward. The mental hospital is like the point from which concentric circles of malevolence emanate. The mark of the most brutalized victims of the Combine is the purple circles around their eyes, the soft scars of frontal lobotomy. The novel takes this fact and turns it into a question: whence the rim of purple on Doctor Spivey's nose? Whence the purple under the eyes of the workers on the fishing dock? The cycle dictates that while inmates may escape, the Combine will prevail; while Broom may be free and his friends too, McMurphy is dead and Miss Ratched's time will come around again.

Out near the Wakonda Auga River, in the setting of Sometimes a Great Notion, the Combine is less visible, the battles are less simplistic and the cycles are of a different order and even more pronounced. Cycles of nature and human life take over the content of the novel, while cycles of time take over the structure. The nature of cycles defies newness, and defies purity of beginnings and endings, victories and defeats. Cycles just keep spinning. In both novels, characters either spin their way to death (as Cheswick, Bibbit and McMurphy do in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; as Joe Ben and Henry do in Sometimes a Great Notion) or remain to spin off, not even to an ambiguous end, but to the next phase of an ambiguous, cyclical process.

If themes are not new, if lack of newness even structurally informs the novels, then what can be said (that is new) about Kesey's work? The answer is implicit in the question: we may examine the relationship
between what Kesey says and the way in which he says it. The relationship between meaning and form operates not only in a negative sense (that is, in lack of newness articulated in cyclical patterns), but also in a positive sense: the central theme of the novels—the theme of the primacy of individual dignity—is given through, and underlined by, technique.

Technique as meaning is manifested on three levels and in three arenas in the novels. These are:
- perception (including ways of perceiving, point of view, and interpretation of what is perceived),
- language (including internal, oral, written and non-verbal expression), and
- time (including individual relationships to history, sequence and pace).

These three manifestations of technique as meaning are not arbitrarily chosen. Rather, they emerge, interconnected, from a close reading of the texts. The interplay among them evokes a further dimension of theme in the novels, and brings forth the acknowledgement that reality is not a constant, but a moveable base. Perception is involved with the subjective experience of time, and language is the medium through which perceptions and interpretations of reality are shaped and recorded.

In the next two chapters, I will be exploring the implications of perception, language and time as they pertain to meaning in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and Sometimes a Great Notion. The three elements that will be under discussion are central to both novels, but they function differently, and are treated from different perspectives in each.
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest treats perception, language and time as arenas for conflict. The novel establishes that there are contrary ways of perceiving, of communicating and of relating to time. And the personal choices or predispositions which determine these ways of experiencing and sharing the universe serve to define people and subsequently separate or join them. As perception, language and time become (sometimes subliminal) centres of conflict in the novel, we learn where Kesey’s allegiances are: he describes variations and he judges what he describes.

Sometimes a Great Notion carries perception, language and time to another level of meaning in order to attend to another level of conflict. It presupposes indigenous discrepancies in all of these areas, begins from the point at which battles have either been resolved or transcended, and goes on to raise a different set of questions. Even if every character receives the world through the same senses, how are perceptions evaluated or brought to represent a common reality? Even if every character uses the same language system, or even if disparities exist but are obvious and acceptable, what is the truth or purpose of any form of communication? Even if every character agrees that time is a subjective phenomenon, how does each find his/her place in the temporal world?

The different meanings of perception, language and time in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest and Sometimes a Great Notion determine the order in which these elements are dealt with in the ensuing chapters of this paper. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest is characterized by conflict in three interrelated arenas. Conflict in language systems is effectively the most dramatic of the three, and an understanding of conflict in
languages provides a working base for an understanding of conflict in modes of perception and relationships to time. Time is necessarily the last element to be discussed because it is approached as a function of perception.

The same method of organization is untenable in writing about *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The novel is gargantuan and anti-linear and dictates its own priorities. An understanding of the complexity of all that is meant by "perception" is a precondition to an understanding of the novel as a whole. The chapter on *Sometimes a Great Notion* therefore begins with a comprehensive analysis of the myriad implications of perception, and moves from there to a more specific treatment of perception, language and time as they define themselves in the novel and as they compare to, and move beyond, their respective meanings in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

The discussion of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* precedes the discussion of *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The ordering of chapters is not based solely on chronology (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published in 1962 and *Sometimes a Great Notion* was published in 1964), but on the belief that an interpretation of the first novel establishes the frames of reference for an interpretation of the second novel. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* draws attention to perception, language and time; it points to them, indicates their thematic importance through technique. *Sometimes a Great Notion* complicates and actualizes the precepts which *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* indicates. The first novel points to variations in language systems; the second novel moves fluidly among a
multitude of languages. The first novel points to variations in modes of perception; the second novel is organized as a montage of conflicting perceptions. The first novel points to variations in methods of relating to time; the second novel shifts between time sequences with regular irregularity. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* prepares us for reading *Sometimes a Great Notion* by drawing attention to those elements which act together to form the whole meaning of the second novel. This process of preparation is especially interesting with respect to the manipulation of time in the novels.

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey reveals a certain contradiction in relationship to time. The novel thematically supports a non-linear model of experiencing time; yet Kesey seems trapped by the linear nature of print and indirectly undercuts his professed sense of time by creating a novel that is basically linear in form. He focuses on one consciousness and that consciousness adheres to plot line. He uses flashbacks, but these tend to be regressions on a single temporal plane. Kesey resolves the contradiction when he writes *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Using a multiplicity of perspectives, he controls his narrative so well that he fosters the impression that he is exerting no control at all. As we enter each narrator's mind, we are absorbed into that narrator's relationship to time, and so we are shuttled between a long series of nows and a longer series of thens in an unpredictable temporal flow. Kesey breaks further from the constraints of linear reporting by reminding us sporadically of the simultaneous nature of experience. Encounter, by definition, implicates more than one person, and each moment in time
is experienced by every character in the novel. No longer constricted by the apparent limitations of linear progression, Kesey develops a form that more accurately bespeaks theme.

Kesey's third major publication carries the process begun in *Sometimes a Great Notion* to its logical extreme. Linearity is renounced in principle, and print is thrown into relief. *Kesey's Garage Sale* is a conglomeration of articles, letters, interviews and advertisements, and even includes a full-length play. The book is replete with illustrations and graphics which are interspersed through the writing, laid over, under and around the printed words. The ostensible editor of *Kesey's Garage Sale* appears intermittently through the text, guiding and grounding the reader, pretending to pretend nothing (and everything). The result is a book like pure process, bound by its covers and not by any sense of being a cohesive product.

*Kesey's Garage Sale* was published in 1973. I mention it here because it represents the extension of the process through which the writing of novels finally became an anomaly for Kesey. In 1966, after the publication of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey announced that he did not intend to do any more writing: "I'd rather be a lightning rod than a seismograph," he said. Kesey's lightning rod status, bolstered by everything from his days as a Merry Prankster to his return-to-the-dairy-farm, has made him notorious. His attempts to combine his lightning rod identity with his seismographic talent have produced such interesting and such unspectacular pieces as

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Kesey's Garage Sale and contributions to Rolling Stone Magazine and The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue. But I end this beginning with a tribute to the art and craft of Kesey's pure seismography and proceed now to examine his novels.
CHAPTER II

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest explores the perceptions of a psychotic narrator to recreate, in new fictional perspective, the time-honoured struggle between the individual and the established power structure. Kesey's version of the struggle is particularly American and particularly contemporary. Randle Patrick McMurphy is a descendent of Natty Bumppo—rugged, resilient, resolved, and shadowed on one side by his own "good Indian." He fights a power structure that has all the technology of the 1960's in its arsenal.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is a novel about conflict. McMurphy is the central protagonist, described by Chief Broom as a man who would not "let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit" (153), "a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine" (255). Miss Ratched is the central antagonist, thus named partly because she is so personally adept at perpetrating atrocities on the ward, and partly because she is an agent of the Establishment, with "all the power of the Combine behind her" (109). The thematic direction which combat takes in the novel is toward the affirmation of individual dignity. A man without dignity is not a man, but a rabbit: this is proclaimed. A man who is separated from his dignity (as McMurphy
is surgically separated from his) is a good subject for righteous 
euthanasia. Within this thematic context, McMurphy emerges as both a 
winner and a loser in his battle with Big Nurse. His act of transforming 
the ward rabbits into men constitutes a major victory. His defeat 
by the machinery of the Combine is mitigated, rather than confirmed, 
by his death.

Because the battle on Miss Ratched's ward is framed in hyperboles, 
because the people who engage in conflict are so black or so white 
(grey people in the novel--Doctor Spivey, the nurse on the Disturbed 
Ward--are emphatically ineffectual), it is tempting to see the dramatic 
action in the novel as allegory, and the characters in conflict as 
stock figures. In fact, the novel is more sophisticated and intricate 
than it may at first appear to be. For even if we look at the existing 
levels of allegory in the text, we find that there are so many allegorical 
patterns operating simultaneously that simplicity gives way to complexity 
by virtue of sheer layering. The novel seems to manipulate mythologies, 
tossing about allusions that allow the reader to grab on to workable 
rubrics. Every reduction of the text has its own truth. Yet any 
reading of the novel that is bound by reference to a single mythology 
is too narrow; any reading that attaches importance to contextual 
connections, while ignoring technique, is inadequate.

Before discussing technique as meaning in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's 
Nest, we may take a look at some of the possible reductive interpretations 
of the text. Each of these has some validity, but each alone is 
insufficient. These interpretations should not be discarded, but 
aggregated and subsumed in a more structural approach to the novel.
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest has many of the components of a medieval morality play, only modified to conform to the quality of struggle popularized through the television Western and the comic book serial. McMurphy is Good; Big Nurse is Evil. The other characters are the (ironically) non-committed, who must be claimed by one side or the other by the end of the Romance. That is, the inmates on the ward constitute the Everyrabbit figure, oscillating between false complacency and terrifying insubordination.

As the personification of Good, McMurphy is compared to the Lone Ranger. Harding confesses that he wants to roll a silver bullet along his palm and watch the Great One ride off when his deed of salvation is done—watch him and say, "Who wawz that'er masked man?" (295). McMurphy is also compared to Captain Marvel, archetypal hero of comic book lore who moves, unscathed, through a "cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black" (31).

The novel supplies and supports parallels to this kind of myth. McMurphy is presented as a composite hero and Big Nurse as a composite villain. The ward is portrayed as a microcosm, and not even a covert microcosm. Doctor Spivey describes his work-nest as a "little world Inside that is a made-to-scale prototype of the big world Outside" (47). Yet we should not take hold of the clues which Kesey drops so casually, and say of the novel, Colonel Matterson style, "The novel is . . . the TV Western. The novel is . . . the comic book." Despite the fact that such classifications work, they represent an underestimation of the complexity of the text.
The novel functions on another level of meaning as well: it cogently sustains a Christ allegory. We are told that the EST table is shaped like a cross. McMurphy submits himself to sacrifice by wires and electrodes, intoning, "Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?" (270). Big Mack leads his twelve disciples to the water and gives them strength. He finally dies for their sins. McMurphy's gospel is carried forward by Saint Broom; the book in our hands is the bible. The miracle-healer liberates the voice of a preacher in order that his "truth" may be carried to the oppressed masses, the psycho-proles of the Combine. The Christ parable is so obvious that it suggest parody. We must recognize that the analogy exists; but it is irresponsible for us as readers to rifle through the pages of the novel, searching out clues, construing patterns, "jerking" from significant page to significant page, leaving out everything in between.

Kesey exploits many myths at once, bending, folding and mutilating them for his own purposes. McMurphy is Natty Bumppo; McMurphy is the Lone Ranger; McMurphy is Captain Marvel; McMurphy is Christ; McMurphy is the Grail Knight, come to restore the Fisher King ("fisher injun") and bring rain to the Waste Land. 4 McMurphy is, actually, the embodiment of elements of all these mythical heroes, and he is more than the sum of them and he is much less.

McMurphy is brought into association with men of glory and distinction because, fundamentally, his role in the novel is to live and die in the name of individual dignity. He must either be it or transfuse it into

4 For an interpretation of McMurphy as Grail Knight, see Olderman, pp. 35-50.
the rabbit-men who queue up behind him to catch and reflect some of his radiance. But the fact is that individual dignity is not affirmed in the novel through triumph of the hero, defeat of the Combine, or even the storming of a path to freedom. Individual dignity is rather affirmed implicitly through the evolution of characters as they instigate terminal revolution on the ward. Kesey's novel is more complex and ambiguous than it seems.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is episodic. Its plot is pasted together as a series of battles. The confrontations that comprise the action of the novel are battles and rounds in a war that will never be won or lost. The Combine cannot be annihilated and the war won because the Combine is an indefatigable mega-force, defying destruction. And somehow, the war can never be lost either—simply because it will never end.

The suggestion throughout the novel that the Combine extends its power far in every direction inspires the fear that escaping from the Combine is as hopeless as defeating it. The novel concludes with the escape of Broom and some of his comrades; but escape is qualified as being a moment, just as McMurphy's conquests over Big Nurse are qualified as being a collection of moments of victory. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest makes it clear only that moments are precious and battles must be fought, because living is a matter of dealing with dignity in transient realities, while time is infinite and so is the war.

The ambiguity of the conclusion (and the beginning and the middle) of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is only one facet of the unknowable in the novel. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is narrated by a
"cagey" Indian who is susceptible to paranoid delusions and hallucinatory visions. The novel allows us as readers to become intuitively attuned to Broom's perceptions, to make adjustments as we go to compensate for our narrator's obvious psychosis. This means that we may not believe in the empirical existence of the fog machine, but we do grasp the metaphorical ramifications of Broom's acceptance of it. We may not believe that Big Nurse communicates with her aides through ultra-high-frequency message systems, but we do trust that black misanthropes in white uniforms converge on the ward daily to do Miss Ratched's bidding. In fact, we do not always know what to believe; but as we penetrate the novel, we begin to rely on our own sensibilities to make legitimate judgments. And, in a sense, we are in the same position with respect to unravelling reality as the Chief is. We simply have more evidence to work with (because we are not crazy) and less evidence to work with (because we know only what our narrator tells us). Chief Broom says, at one point, scanning the pages of a textbook, that "drawings and equations and theories [are] hard, sure, safe things" (171). The implication, for the Chief and for the reader, is that nothing else is certain.

Broom puts a disclaimer at the beginning of his story, saying that what he is about to recount is "the truth even if it didn't happen" (8). His statement becomes more than a disclaimer as we experience the novel: it becomes part of a realization that there is no clear relationship between fact and truth. And as we read the novel, we are continuously thrown back to our intuitions and instincts, exercising our option to feel Broom's reporting as true or as false.
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is complex because its hero is a composition of myths, because it focuses on a phase in a cyclical process, because it documents battles that occur irrespective of the futility of the war, because it offers no winners, no losers, no factual base, no fictional sanctuary.

Of course, the novel is impossible to label. We would like to call it comedy, and see Billy Bibbit's deflowering party as a kind of Dionysian feast, and the death embrace of McMurphy and Broom as a kind of bizarre marriage in a perverse comic vision. Or we would like to call the novel tragedy, and see the death of the larger-than-life hero preceded by a general acquisition of knowledge. But we cannot say the novel is comic or tragic--because it has a conclusion, but not a real ending. The battles fought are part of a cycle. The novel itself is a magnification of a moment in a greater struggle; and it refuses to be comic and it refuses not to be comic; it refuses to "let the humor blot out the pain" or "the pain blot out the humor" (238).

I introduced this paper by saying that Kesey's themes were not particularly new. And it is perhaps because its themes are so old that One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is so amenable to reductive interpretations. The last several pages have hopefully exploded the notion that Kesey's novel can be treated in gross thematic terms and diminished to, or schematized in, allegory or myth. The real originality of the novel consists in its ambiguity and in the fact that its battles are elucidated on the level of technique. The newness of the battles in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is that they take place in the arenas of language, perception and time. To study conflict in terms of this
structural trinity is to reveal the sophistication and intricacy of Kesey's first novel.

Language, perception and time operate simultaneously, connect variously, and act together to shape *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Language (both verbal and non-verbal) is cause and effect of perception. Each character in the novel becomes identified with his/her own language system. And each system at once expresses and dictates how that character perceives reality. So there is no one reality described in the novel, but a series of conflicting realities, articulated through technique.

Time, like language, is a function of perception. The characters in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* perceive time subjectively. Big Nurse imposes clock time on the ward, and her watch is understood to be a piece of machinery, part of the weaponry of the Combine; it is a metaphor for efficiency and a target in the struggle. A discussion of conflicting perceptions of time in the novel will lead to an observation of Kesey's own manipulation of time and pace: an observation of Kesey as choreographer in print. Leslie Fiedler has noted that Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, has the qualities of a first work and may, in fact, have been written before, and only published after, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. An examination of Kesey's use of time in both novels will reveal that Fiedler's claim is wrong. As we study the novels in turn, we will see a progression in technique that is, by extension, a progression in meaning.

Language, perception and time are all arenas for conflict in *One Flew

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Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. Conflict in language systems is probably the most apparent of the three. Each language system in the novel is discrete, and each is carefully reproduced by Chief Broom. The novel implicitly renders his replication, and even his interpretation, of languages as true. When Broom focuses attention on visual cues, he almost admittedly distorts: he may under-see, over-see, mis-see, not see. But Broom hears with more-than-sane sensitivity. If ever he is not completely accurate, it is because he goes beyond simple accuracy toward accurate insight. It is ironic that the Chief pretends to be deaf: he becomes the blind seer of the world of sound.

Through Chief Broom, we learn that each character inhabits his/her own linguistic universe. And as the ward is divided into Chronics and Acutes, language systems are divided into "Chronic" and "Acute" patterns. The Chronics (those that still speak) do not use complex styles of discourse. Rather, they are identified by their refrains. The refrains are more or less like Dickensian signatures and, in memory, they become interchangeable with the characters they represent. But each refrain succinctly reflects a vision of reality. We hear Ruckley perpetually chanting, "Ffffuck da wife." We hear Bancini intermittently providing a chorus of "I'm awful tired." We hear the hieroglyphic mutterings of Colonel Matterson, who alters the content, but never the form, of what he says: "The flag is . . . Ah-mer-ica. America is . . . the plum. The cross is . . . Mex-i-co. Mexico is . . . the wal-nut." Rub-a-dub George appears as one of the more diversified of the Chronics, but his message seldom varies: "I'm dirty, he's dirty, it's dirty . . ."--a conjugation of filth.
One of the extraordinary aspects of Chief Broom's narration is that he can feel what each refrain means. His eyes may deceive him when he tries to see through them, but when he hears through his eyes, they are infallible: "Yes, I see: Mexico is like the walnut; it's brown and hard and you feel it with your eye and it feels like the walnut" (129). Discussing Bancini, the Chief explains, "He tells me once about how tired he is, and just his saying it makes me see his whole life on the railroad" (130). Through the medium of Chief Broom, the cacophony of voices in the novel becomes separated out into meaningful, albeit cryptic, messages: "It's like each face was a sign like one of those 'I'm blind' signs . . . only these signs say 'I'm tired' or 'I'm scared' or 'I'm dying of a bum liver' or 'I'm all bound up with machinery and people pushing me alla time.' I can read all the signs, it don't make any difference how little the print gets" (131).

Broom is no less astute when reproducing the languages of the Acutes. Billy Bibbit is identified with his stutter, and Cheswick with his protestations. Harding's flowery language is waved around like his delicate white hands. We know them by the way they speak, and their speech patterns are more important than what they say. We know that Billy's night with Candy in the Seclusion Room has made him strong, not because of what he says, but because he says it without stuttering. We know that Cheswick is ready to die before we know that he has drowned—we know it when he stops protesting: "I want something done! Something! Something! Some--." His language dies on page 164 and Cheswick dies on page 166. We know by the end of the novel that Harding is ready to leave the ward, not because the plot has turned in his
favour, but because when McMurphy asks him to explain what it is that happens, Harding shakes his head and says, "I don't think I can give you an answer. Oh, I could give you Freudian reasons with fancy talk . . . but what you want are the reasons for the reasons, and I'm not able to give you those" (294).

In the Tower of Babel that is the novel, the ward itself becomes a character with a language of its own. Ward language is comprised of institutional terminology and psychiatric jargon. It is a language that McMurphy is taught through the course of the novel. His fluency with the language becomes a measuring device that indicates his state of immersion in ward politics. Phrases like "Therapeutic Community," "ward policy," "Order Daily Cards" and "Up to Disturbed" are all part of the institutional language of the ward. Word chains like "Potential Assaultive," "Negative Oedipal" and "Latent Homosexual with Reaction Formation" belong to the lexicon of the psychiatrists who whisper diagnoses behind closed doors. "EST" and "frontal lobe castration" are the local profanities.

When he is first learning the language of the ward, McMurphy must be instructed carefully. After a few days in the hospital, he is moved to brush his teeth off schedule and finds out that the toothpaste is kept locked up. He is advised: "It's ward policy, Mr. McMurphy, tha's the reason. . . . What you s'pose it'd be like if evahbody was to brush their teeth whenever they took a notion to brush?" (90). But he learns quickly. Shortly after, when he generously offers to pilfer some food for an aide and finds out that "it ain't allowed for the help to eat with the patients," McMurphy ingenuously retorts, "Against ward policy?"--
"Tha's right" (99).

Early in his stay on the ward, McMurphy is exposed to mention of the "Shock Shop" ("jargon for the EST machine"), and he informs us, "Damn it . . . I'm not up on this talk" (66). A few weeks of intensive instruction leave McMurphy knowing that EST is "electricity through the head" (179), and able to recite, "Now lobotomy, that's chopping away part of the brain" (180). By the time McMurphy understands the words, he is well on his way to being destroyed by their referents.

Every language system in the novel describes a separate reality. But the most important language systems and the most important realities are those that belong to Big Nurse and to McMurphy. They are important because they are poised in direct opposition to each other, and it is in the war between their languages that the central conflict of the novel is acted out.

Big Nurse sustains her power on the ward by the controlled use of innuendo. The patients admit that they are made impotent, powerless to defend themselves, not by virtue of what she says, but by virtue of the way she speaks:

She doesn't accuse. She merely needs to insinuate, insinuate anything . . . . She'll call a man to the door of the Nurses' Station and stand there and ask him about a Kleenex found under his bed. No more, just ask. And he'll feel like he's lying to her, whatever answer he gives. If he says he was cleaning a pen with it, she'll say, 'I see, a pen,' or if he says he has a cold in his nose, she'll say, 'I see, a cold,' and she'll nod her neat little gray coiffure and smile her neat little smile and turn and go back into the Nurses' Station, leave him standing there wondering just what did he use that Kleenex for (61).

Harding explains that Miss Ratched has "a genius for insinuation" (61).
Her insinuations create a closed system, allow for no appropriate response. Built into any question is the preclusion of any reply. But "if you don't answer her questions . . . you admit it just by keeping quiet" (66). And any resistance to her implied accusations is met with further implications, further accusations: "Why do you seem so upset by that par-tick-ular question . . .?" (66).

Big Nurse is able to emasculate her victims by doing no more than manipulating words and inflections and by squeezing meaning out of what she does not say—out of the spaces between her words. She carefully orchestrates words and silences to achieve her effect. But she is capable as well of combining silences with silences, of waiting it out, like an animal biding time until the moment of the kill.

Twice we see her exercise the power of silence. Big Nurse calls a staff meeting to discuss the case of McMurphy. Everyone assembles; the door is locked. Big Nurse just sits there "smiling up at the ceiling and not saying anything," letting the rest of the staff "fidget around" as they struggle to say what they can only guess she wants them to say (145). She waits—until the moment she can make the greatest impact with "You—are very, very wrong . . ." (148). She proceeds to take control of the meeting.

On another occasion, she designs a silence-bound scenario to plant the suspicion of McMurphy's monetary motivations. Her first tactic is to feed "hints around to start a rumor and have it breeding good before she actually [says] anything about it" (249). Then she stages a patients' meeting, scheduled to insure McMurphy's absence. Her role in the meeting is to wait—to wait until the patients have finished talking about what
a "great guy" McMurphy is, until positive regard is "out of their systems." Then she pounces: she makes her case and prepares to wait again. She lets the suggestion take root and gives it time to grow. She stops discussion to allow for her waiting, saying, "it isn't fair to make these accusations without the presence of the man we are speaking of" (253).

If Miss Ratched's methods are so masterful, if a winning response is so unlikely, then one way to counter her linguistic stronghold is effectively to not listen, not respond to her, but bypass her. Broom is able to manoeuvre his way around her language because he has learned to wield his prerogative of silence. He will not hear and he will not speak. But McMurphy hears and McMurphy speaks, and his power lies in his ability to bypass her in his own way:

She would reprimand him, without heat at all, and he would stand and listen till she was finished and then destroy her whole effect by asking something like did she wear a B cup, he wondered, or a C cup, or any ol' cup at all? (196).

In moments of real frustration, McMurphy may slip unwittingly into the trap of Miss Ratched's language: "You seem so upset, Mr. McMurphy. Doesn't he seem upset Doctor?" "Don't give me that noise lady. When a guy's getting screwed, he's got a right to holler. And we've all been damn well screwed." "Perhaps, Doctor, in view of the patient's condition, we should bring this meeting to a close early today--" (135).

In fact, McMurphy has his own style of discourse and it is characteristically direct, liberally sprinkled with obscenities and thoroughly punctuated with laughter. And so, given the system of Big Nurse's reign, even when he loses, he wins, because he refuses not to be
himself. He refuses to cower under the threat of her language. (There is one period of exception. When McMurphy finds out that his stay in the hospital is indefinite and that it is dependent upon the discretion of Big Nurse, he becomes "cagey". When he is acting cagey, he is being other than what he is. So during this phase of the novel, his language is characterized by the subdued utterances of a "caged" and "cagey" man).

While McMurphy is "you damned McMurphy"—the objectified figure of red-blooded brawn—he can be nothing but direct. His directness is the linguistic antithesis of Big Nurse's calculated indirectness. One speculation can be made: that McMurphy's directness in language is a concomitant of his absolute humanness, and Miss Ratched's indirectness is a corollary of her absolute lack of humanness. This explains why much of the open confrontation in the novel is played out in the area of sexuality. Sexuality is the last bastion of humanness in the world of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. "There's not a man [on the ward] that isn't afraid he is losing or has already lost his whambam" (65). And McMurphy is both a man and a psychopath because he "fights too much and fucks too much" (13). Big Nurse is a "ball-cutter" (58).

McMurphy then engages in battle with Big Nurse by disrupting her accustomed denial of the flesh. When Big Nurse delegates McMurphy to clean toilet bowls and arrives with her mirror to inspect his work, their languages clash: "Why, this is an outrage . . . an outrage . . . ."

"No; that's a toilet bowl . . . a toilet bowl" (151). McMurphy then plants a mirror-image message under the rim of a toilet bowl to undermine her cleanliness fetish with a little verbal dirt.

One of McMurphy's more interesting ploys is his blatant refusal to
allow Big Nurse to ignore the existence of her mammoth breasts, the lie and the truth of her womanhood that she is forced to carry around with her. So he asks her to tell him "the actual inch-by-inch measurement of them great ol' breasts that she did her best to conceal but never could" (150). When *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* finally moves beyond ploy, beyond manipulation, beyond linguistic dance and into physical battle, McMurphy attacks Big Nurse, rips open her starched uniform, reveals her breasts and desperately, unsuccessfully attempts to strangle her. *Miss Ratched loses her voice.* The loss of her voice is the loss of her power. There could be no more perfect retribution.

Violence in the novel represents a kind of amplification of the war between languages. McMurphy's bodily force is called into play only when words and laughter no longer work for him. He hits Washington because the aide will not hear the pleading of Rub-a-dub George, will not stop dirtying him, mortifying him. McMurphy hits Washington because the aide will not heed the warning of "enough" or the "helpless, cornered despair in McMurphy's voice" (261). And McMurphy attacks Big Nurse because she has refused to hear Billy Bibbit—ever.

Violence is the endgame. Throughout the novel, we have been able to trace the movements of the characters between weakness and strength, rabbithood and manhood, by diagramming the changes in their languages. When McMurphy first arrives on the ward, the patients are, in effect, using Big Nurse's language. They have adopted it, assimilated it into their own speech. Billy stutters it, Cheswick shouts it, Harding embellishes it; but in the first group-therapy session of the novel, what we hear is a conglomerate of voices, all speaking the Nurse's words.
The subject is Harding:

What's he think is the matter with him that he
can't please the little lady; why's he insist
she has never had anything to do with another
man; how's he expect to get well if he doesn't
answer honestly?—questions and insinuations . . . (54).

By the time McMurphy has travelled through the novel, the patients
have dropped the Big Nurse style. While McMurphy is "Up in Disturbed,"
Harding is speaking in McMurphyisms. When Miss Ratched speaks to him of
her difficulty in making contact with McMurphy, Harding responds with
"from what I hear about your dealings upstairs with McMurphy, he hasn't
had any difficulty making contact with you" (278). The other patients
laugh. One of Harding's last statements in the novel is, "Lady, I think
you're full of so much bullshit" (307). Not bad.

So the patients ultimately absorb McMurphy's manner and trade in
Miss Ratched's manner in the process. Another kind of language changes
in the course of the novel as well: body language. A concordance to
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest would reveal that among the words
recurring most often in the text are variations of "to jerk." In the
body language of the ward, heads jerk, hands jerk, chins jerk, arms
jerk, whole bodies jerk: "Harding's head turns with a jerk" (55); "he
becomes a wild, jerky puppet doing a high-strung dance" (59); "she jerked
the adhesive tight as she could" (195). It goes on and on. The only
character in the novel who has the opportunity to jerk and doesn't is
Candy, the kind whore. She comes "lightfooted across the grass . . .
jouning up and down" (218), then "jouning up the hall past the Nurses'
Station" (219). Anyone else (with the exception perhaps of McMurphy)
would have jerked his/her way along the same path. Body language does speak. By the end of the novel, McMurphy has jerked to the rhythm of Electro Shock Therapy, and everyone else has stopped jerking.

We can observe action, then, by observing changes in language. But there is one character whose language remains consistent throughout the novel. Only his medium changes: he moves from silence to vocalization. McMurphy has not given him a language, but a voice.

Broom's vocalizations are of no special interest. The first words he speaks are "Thank you," and from that moment, everything he says is fairly unremarkable. Even the other characters do not pay much attention to him, "a guy who'd been considered deaf and dumb as far back as they'd known him, talking, listening just like anybody" (277). But the language of Broom's imagination, the language he uses to narrate the novel, is unique. His is the central consciousness of the novel and we never get beyond it.

The Chief's language is created out of his perceptions, and like his perceptions, it is symptomatic and marked by exaggeration. But the interesting aspect of his language is that it does not change. His metaphors stay with him, even when they describe absences instead of presences. The "fog" and the "fog machine," the apparatus of the Combine, are all part of his vocabulary, even when they become dysfunctional. What he learns from McMurphy is not another language or another way of perceiving the universe: he learns to accept his own language and his own perceptions--to stop being afraid of being who he is.

McMurphy seems to belong to Chief Broom from the beginning. McMurphy has his greatest reality as a force acting upon the Chief's consciousness.
Midway through the novel, we find Broom hiding in the latrine, communing with his image:

I'd take a look at my own self in the mirror and wonder how it was possible that anyone could manage such an enormous thing as being what he was. . . . It don't seem like I ever have been me. How can McMurphy be what he is? (153).

Slowly, as his relationship with McMurphy develops, Broom is tutored to be himself. Toward the end of the novel, he is shown again in the self-communing stance, confronting his own image. The work has been done:

I caught a look at myself in the mirror. [McMurphy had] done what he said; my arms were big again, big as they were back in high school, back at the village, and my chest and shoulders were broad and hard (257).

Broom does not take on McMurphy's language. Rather, he takes on McMurphy's strength, and that strength allows him to maintain his own language.

Chief Broom's style of language is informed by three dominating elements: machine imagery, nature imagery and sound imagery. Mechanical references constitute the most obvious element of his language. They are invoked whenever the Combine is being discussed. Examples are rampant through the novel: assault by technology is the leitmotif of the narration. Broom was "an electrician's assistant in a training camp" and "had some electronics in [his] year in college," and that is how he "learned about the way these things can be rigged" (27). It is not surprising that he understands the way the "Indwelling Curiosity Cutout" works, or that the fog machine is a simple military device: "you got an ordinary compressor sucks water out of one tank and a special oil out of another tank and
compresses them together" (124).

The hospital ward is not the only locus of technological takeover: it is only one fortress of the Combine and the whole Combine is mechanized. When Broom describes in retrospect the visit of the white appropriators of his tribal home, he explains the mechanical device operating within the brains of these instruments of the Combine. The device he perceives becomes part of the rationale for his deafness:

I can . . . see the apparatus inside them take the words I just said and try to fit the words in here and there, this place and that, and when they find the words don't have any place ready-made where they'll fit, the machinery disposes of the words like they weren't even spoken (201).

Broom is actually not only the inaudible, but the invisible man. Experience has confirmed that people of the Combine neither really hear nor really see him. The same white people who ignore the child Bromden's words ignore his physical presence too. They appear to look at him (he is "not but two yards away") and proceed to talk about him in the third person: "Where do you suppose his parents are?" (199). Years later, as a patient on the ward, Broom is no more successful at making himself seen. He is the transparent janitor in staff meetings, knowing his own transparency, knowing "they see right through me like I wasn't there--the only thing they'd miss if I didn't show up would be the sponge and the water bucket floating around" (143).

Broom's universe is a universe of metaphors become literal. His perceptions complement, sustain, express his fear. But Broom is more complex than his paranoia. He knows more than machines and machine-operated people. He is Indian and he is as close to nature as he is to
technology. (Actually, Broom is half Indian. The Bromden blood of his mother keeps him sensitive to the mechanics of the Combine. His father's blood, the blood of The-Pine-that-Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, keeps him sensitive to the earth. When Broom is given the gift of his selfness, he chooses his Indian identity. By the end of the novel, he is off in search of his tribe). As an Indian, Broom sees his world in terms of natural phenomena. Nature imagery, rather unobtrusively, finds its way into his language. He describes Harding's hands creeping "out from between his knees like white spiders from between two moss-covered tree limbs, up the limbs toward the joining at the trunk" (57). In the same sequence, he hears a sound come out of Harding's mouth "like a nail being crowbarred out of a plank of green pine" (60). Later in the novel, Broom portrays the Chronics as "old guys welded in wheelchairs for years, with catheters down their legs like vines rooting them for the rest of their lives right where they are" (214).

There are numerous examples of this kind of imagery scattered throughout the novel. But the most interesting of Broom's descriptions are those that combine mechanical and natural images and add the third unique element of his language: obsession with sound. Big Nurse's voice is described as having a "tight whine like an electric saw ripping through pine" (138). And one night on the ward, Broom hallucinates the following mixed-media event:

The furnace whoops a ball of fire and I hear the popping of a million tubes like walking through a field of seed pods. This sound mixes with the whirr and clang of the rest of the machines (84).
An examination of Broom's sound imagery has been held in store to form the last part of the discussion of language in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The study of sound takes us past language as an arena for conflict in the novel and on to perception as an arena for conflict. Language, of course, is a function of perception; but perception in its own right provides another plane on which the battles of the novel are enacted. When we observe the conflict of modes of perception in the novel, we find that our main protagonist is not McMurphy, but Broom.

Broom feigns being mute because people have historically not listened to him. But he feigns deafness, not because he has chosen not to listen to others, but because he has chosen to listen selectively and well. He does not have to listen to Miss Ratched or the aides—they have stopped talking to him and talk only past him or about him. But Broom listens for sounds that nobody else can hear. He hears "the lockworks rattle strange" when McMurphy comes on to the ward (9). He listens then for the sound of fear and hears only that the New Admission "sounds big" (10). When McMurphy shakes his hand, it *rings* "with blood and power" (24).

Broom's sensitivity to sound is boundless. When Public Relations claps his hands, the Chief "can hear they are wet" (35). At the end of each day, "the machinery in the walls whistles, sighs, drops into lower gear" (75). But not only does Broom hear sounds that nobody else *can* hear, he hears things that nobody at all *is meant to hear*. Because he is "cagey" and has convinced everyone that he is deaf, Broom finds that he can be an audience to all the secrets on the ward. He understands well the power of his deafness: "I had to keep on acting deaf if I wanted to hear at all" (197).
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest sets up a hierarchy of sound which is filtered to the reader through Chief Broom. We tend almost to use our ears to make our eyes comprehend what we are reading. The piped-in music which drones through the novel strikes a lower level of awareness than the sound of McMurphy’s laughter or McMurphy’s song. The ringing in Broom’s ears operates at a lower level of intensity than the sound of crashing glass when McMurphy drives his hand through the window of the Nurses’ Station. A dozen voices hum through the ward in a dozen languages. The sound of Miss Ratched’s key “hitting the lock” recurs as a kind of refrain, punctuating the soundtrack of the novel as a whole, combining structural sense with contextual sense: keys in the hospital are an objective correlative to authority. Throughout Kesey’s novel, sound is a preoccupation.

Broom himself experiences the world not only through his ears, but also through his other senses. He touches, he tastes, he smells and he sees. His disability is that he does not always see very efficiently:

because it’s painful to see somebody so clear that it’s like looking inside him, but then neither did you want to look away and lose him completely. You had a choice: you could either strain and look at things that appeared in front of you in the fog, painful as it might be, or you could relax and lose yourself (125).

Broom often chooses not to see. The fog becomes an expression of his denial of sight. When he strains to see, he sees too much. He looks at Colonel Matterson and "every hair and wrinkle of him is big, as though I was looking at him with one of those microscopes. I see him so clear I see his whole life" (128-9). The fog appears and disappears, and Broom
fluctuates between being blind and being so acutely sighted that it hurts.

The Chief is more comfortable with his other senses and he uses them all extensively. His perceptions are often synaesthetic; his world is pansensual. The light on the ward is as "bitter as bile" (142), and Big Nurse's nailpolish is "so hot or so cold if she touches you with it you can't tell which" (4). The hospital is "sticky with a thousand ... smells" (98), and stranded in the fog, words come to Broom "like through water, it's so thick" (127). One night, the Chief gets up from his bed and goes to the window of the "dorm":

I pressed my forehead up against the mesh. The wire was cold and sharp, and I rolled my head against it from side to side to feel it with my cheeks, and I smelled the breeze. . . . I can smell that sour-molasses smell of silage, clanging the air like a bell—smell somebody's been burning oak leaves, left them to smolder overnight because they're too green (154-5).

Broom drifts in the flow between his senses, trusting what he feels, questioning nothing. He becomes disoriented only when he is unable to hear—when the drumming gets so loud, he can't hear anything else (83).

Broom's multi-sensual reality is set over-against the rigidly visual reality of Big Nurse. Miss Ratched appears most often encased by the glass windows of the Nurses' Station. Even when she is not physically planted inside the Nurses' Station, she seems to carry windows around with her, seeing through glass, denying sound, denying touch, denying smell, denying taste.

Big Nurse speaks (sometimes through a sound system that lets her
own voice out of the Nurses' Station while letting no other voice in),
but she does not hear. While Broom can interpret the languages of the
Chronics, Big Nurse is deaf to their meaning. When Bancini begins to
make the speech of his lifetime, protesting that "it's all a lot of baloney," Big Nurse does not hear. Her response comes from behind her
invisible shield: "Yes, yes, Mr. Bancini . . . now if you'll just be
calm" (51).

Miss Ratched cannot be moved from her window. When her window is
moved from her, when it is broken and replaced by cardboard, she sits
in the Nurses' Station, acting "like she could still see right into the
day room" (194). Big Nurse cherishes her windows, making sure the glass
is polished daily (96). Her watching is a torture and a trick of the
Combine. Midway through the novel, charged with a transfusion of McMurphy's
strength, the patients turn the glass against her. She sits in the Nurses'
Station, soundproofed, and she is being watched:

For the first time she's on the other side of
the glass and getting a taste of how it feels to
be watched when you wish more than anything else
to be able to pull a green shade between your face
and all the eyes that you can't get away from (141).

Watching is a weapon of the Combine. So Doctor Spivey, lackey of
the Combine and erstwhile puppet of Big Nurse, has his own miniature
windows: his glasses. He polishes them (108); he grabs them (144); he
puts them on and "peers around" (104). And once, just once, he leaves
them off. On the fishing trip, out in the ocean, past the reaches of the
Combine, Doctor Spivey's eyes get "bright red from going so long without
glasses" (239). During the fishing expedition, he is released from his
ties with the Combine and is thereby released from oppressively watching.
Back on the ward, the doctor is back fiddling with his glasses (303).

The conflict in modes of perception pits Broom against Big Nurse. And the novel structurally poses the question of McMurphy's place in the conflict. It poses the question and answers it. McMurphy sees, but he sees as Broom sees—past appearance and through to a kind of reality. This is how McMurphy manages to make the analogy between group-therapy and a "peckin' party"—quickly (55). And McMurphy hears. He hears each patient individually, speaks to each in his own language, strengthens each on his own ground. With Harding, he is forceful; with Billy, he is sexual; with Cheswick, he is dauntless; with Broom: "I didn't say it didn't make sense, Chief, I just said it was talkin' crazy" (210). He even understands Broom's metaphors made real as the Chief talks about being "little" when he used to be "big."

McMurphy is, of course, sensual. He eats his breakfast, savouring the tastes and smells of cold orange juice, cornflakes with bananas, eggs, bacon, coffee . . . (99). He seduces the patients to the ocean with the promise of "the salt smell o' the poundin' sea, the crack o' the bow against the waves" (196-7). Most important, McMurphy is not afraid of touching: he scratches his belly; he stretches and yawns; he whacks his leg and digs "his thumb into the ribs of whoever [is] sitting next to him, trying to get him to laugh" (152).

While opposing modes of perception manifest their extremes in Chief Broom and Big Nurse respectively, McMurphy certainly finds his place in the Chief's camp. Broom's world through most of the novel is an interior world, and the novel reveals his perceptual inclinations by following the mosaic pattern of his imagination. Broom has attempted to resist the
Combine by being "cagey," by undermining it from inside his mind, by hearing selectively and seeing sporadically. His whole world is a secret. But the Chief is ineffectual beyond the implementation of his private formula for survival. In terms of action, in terms of confrontation in a public realm, he is virtually catatonic. He may use the sense of touch to establish contact with his environment (154), but he cannot reach out to touch McMurphy without going through a long internal monologue:

"I ought to touch him to see if he's still alive. . . . I want to touch him because he's a man. . . . I want to touch him because I'm one of these queers! . . . I just want to touch him because he's who he is" (210). He does not touch him.

McMurphy does not suffer from Broom's paralyzing interiority. When he appears on the ward, he appears as an exteriorization of Broom: his perceptions are of the same order, but he is not prey to the same contradictions; he is not afraid to be who he is. This explains why, when the time comes for a coup in the battle between modes of perception, it is McMurphy and not Broom who acts. Violence is again the form that frustration takes. McMurphy is later to attack both Washington and Big Nurse for their crimes of not hearing. In the context of the perceptual battle, he smashes the window of the Nurses' Station as a gesture against Miss Ratched's crime of watching. McMurphy shatters the window twice, but it is significant that the window is shattered a third time, not by McMurphy, but by Scanlon, another of the inmates. McMurphy's power is gradually being transferred to the other patients. When McMurphy first arrives on the ward, he learns that he is safe if he does not "end up cussing [Big Nurse] out or busting a window or something
like that" (70). By the end of the novel, he has committed both transgressions: one is linguistic; the other, perceptual.

Time is the third arena for battle in the novel. Time, like language and perception, is not an absolute here: it is part of the separate experience of each person on the ward. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, there is a link between modes of perception and relationships to time. Big Nurse is capable of using only one sense: her sense of sight. And she perceives the world by moving her eyes from object to object, from person to person, in succession. She experiences time in a comparable linear fashion, moving from moment to moment along a clock-dominated line. So Miss Ratched is again poised in direct opposition to Chief Broom. Broom absorbs the world through many senses simultaneously, and he experiences time as a phenomenon that is relative and not bound by the clock. Just as there are linear and non-linear ways of perceiving the world, so there are linear and non-linear ways of relating to time.

Chief Broom perceives time cyclically: past, present and future run circuitously through his imagination. As the novel traces the convolutions of his consciousness, it flips between recollection and attention to a "now" that keeps changing. Clock time has no corresponding reality to the Chief: it is an inconvenient device of the Combine, manipulated for the purpose of regulating behaviour:

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. The scene in the picture-screen windows goes through rapid changes of light to show morning, noon and night—throb off and on furiously with day and dark, and everybody is driven like mad to keep
up with that passing of fake time . . . But generally, it's the other way, the slow way. She'll turn that dial to a dead stop and freeze the sun there on the screen . . . The clock hands hang at two minutes to three and she's liable to let them hang there till we rust (73-4).

According to Broom's perception of the passage of time, the clock is not only deceptive, but insidiously false: "The clock at the end of the mess hall shows it's a quarter after seven, lies about how we only been sitting here fifteen minutes when you can tell it's been at least an hour" (100). The only real time is experiential time and that is subjective and relative.

Broom's denial of the clock and his insistence on affirming the truth of his personal time are part of what designates him as "insane." His contention that Big Nurse controls time is more than a metaphor. Clock time is one of the constants against which the Combine measures reality. Deviations from clock time are predictably frowned upon. The Nurse, in fact, does dictate the reality of the ward by her strict adherence to the clock. The Combine has constructed a linear, mechanical system of measuring time, but the Big Nurse carries the directive of the Combine to its illogical extreme. Every activity on the ward is circumscribed in units of hours, minutes and seconds. (Days are unimportant: they are all alike). "Efficiency locks the ward like a watchman's clock" (29). "Lights flash on in the dorm at six-thirty." At six-forty-five, the shavers buzz; at seven o'clock, "the mess hall opens"; at seven-forty-five, "the black boys move down the line of Chronics," taping catheters as they go (29-31).

Big Nurse insists that "the schedule has been set up for a delicately
balanced reason that would be thrown into turmoil by the switch of routines" (114). But she is obsessed. Not only can the order of activities (and inactivities) not be changed, but each operation on the ward must be compressed or expanded to fill a predetermined number of minutes. Twelve minutes into a group-therapy session, she remarks, "we have . . . forty-eight minutes left" (106). Her watch is part of the machinery she carries around in her wicker basket, and it is no less a part of her than her breasts or the windows of the Nurses' Station. As the novel develops, we witness the near apotheosis of the watch. When Pete Bancini falls in a fit of abortive communication, Miss Ratched inspects the damage and assesses it: "His watch is broken and he's cut his arm"—in that order (53).

It is clear that there is a conflict between Broom-time and Ratched-time. It is just as clear that Big Nurse can draw upon all the resources of the Combine to enforce her version of time. So Broom is rendered powerless. He can only protest silently and alone, or immerse himself in the fog where time is "lost . . . like everything else" (75). McMurphy again functions in the capacity of an exteriorization of Broom. His perception of time is not the same as the Chief's, but it is equally independent of Miss Ratched's manipulations. McMurphy's confrontation with Big Nurse over the watching of the World Series on ward television (132-6) is not just a fight for baseball, or even a fight for democracy: it is a fight to change the order of hospital routine. There is no precedent for afternoon television. Television has been slotted into the time computer as an early evening distraction. But McMurphy and Broom act together to foil the Nurse. McMurphy coaxes Broom's vote and the Chief raises his arm. There is collective action, shared responsibility,
and the result is that the rigidly scheduled day must be re-scheduled. The McMurphy/Broom victory stands, even when Big Nurse turns off the television set. The men on the ward organize to ignore their daily clock-bound duties and gather together around a blank screen. This is the first time in the novel that the routine is broken.

A pattern begins to emerge. Big Nurse's language has been made ineffectual by McMurphy; the medium of her watching has been splintered by McMurphy; her control over time has been punctured by McMurphy. As pattern emerges, so does meaning. We know that Miss Ratched's language of insinuation is hurtful. We know too that her denial of sensuality in favour of voyeurism is wrong. We now learn that her affection for the clock is almost immoral.

The message that appears through an observation of temporal conflict in the novel is that clock time is an unnatural imposition on the natural order of things. Clock time is artificial while subjective time is real. The question that the novel poses is whether time defines reality or reality defines time. And what the novel suggests is that it is more "true" for reality to define time. If time is contingent upon perception of reality, then time is cyclical or mosaic and certainly not linear. Linear time is just another lie conceived by the Combine.

Broom takes a significant leap in the novel when he stops perceiving the world as a scene on "picture-screen windows" and is able to look through to the countryside. The first observation that he makes is that "it's fall coming" (155). This is the first mention of seasons in the novel, and the passage is important. The flow of seasons testifies to the cyclical nature of time. The perception of time as a cyclical
phenomenon predates clocks by millenia: it is aboriginal; it is real. Dawn and dusk move cyclically as the seasons, and the natural world is unaffected by the ticking of the clock. As Broom's father explains, in one of the retrospective accounts in the novel, "Geese up there, white man... Geese this year. And last year. And the year before and the year before... and the year before and the year before and the year before" (92). Nature has its own time. The clock on the ward is absurd. Up on Disturbed, "time is measured out by the di-dock, di-dock of a Ping-pong table" (263). One timestick is as true or as false as the next.

_one flew over the cuckoo's nest_ seems to urge us to a recognition of the proper reality of a non-linear relationship to time. Yet within the urging is a contradiction. While the novel may thematically endorse natural, cyclical time, it is structurally submissive to the most obvious limitations of its own form. _One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_ does not, in any significant way, break from the chronological plot-bound conventions of prose fiction. It is a linear product, organized around a vision of a cyclical process.

While Kesey's novel does not always appear to be linear, it always is. _One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_ is set inside a single consciousness, and moves forward and back within that consciousness, but never outside of it. The novel begins only paragraphs before McMurphy's arrival on the ward and ends only paragraphs after his removal from it. The book is no more and no less than Chief Bromden's account of the life, the dying and the death of Randle Patrick McMurphy. And although it abounds with digressions--historical, fantastical, reportorial--it never alters its
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is subject to its own internal clock. It speeds up and slows down, manipulating time like Big Nurse does, and on a parallel linear scale. When it is describing the arduous struggle or the cold war in the hospital, the novel moves slowly, with leisure to recount Broom's thoughts and memories. But there are certain scenes which describe open combat or open play, which is a defiance of the Combine. In these scenes, the pace of the novel changes. The fishing trip, for example, is marked by a different sense of time:

"Up! Up! Keep the tip up!" George was yelling.  
"McMurphy! Get out here and look at this."  
"Godbless you, Fred, you got my blessed fish!"  
"McMurphy, we need some help!" (236).

While Kesey uses his own clock, he still uses a clock, always lurching forward. Even if it loses a minute or two or a year or two along the way, it always catches up to itself.

There is a period in the novel in which Kesey allows time to be directed by Miss Ratched's watch. For a duration of fifty pages, we, like the characters, are never allowed to forget the time of day. On page twenty-nine, the lights "flash on" in the ward as artificial day breaks; on page seventy-eight, the lights are turned off and a day in the life of the ward is complete. As we read this portion of the novel, the clock is the base to which we are repeatedly returned. Drama from any time or any place may interrupt our awareness of the hour, but flashbacks are only flashbacks, and these fifty pages tell us something about the novel as a whole: it moves in a line. The line may be crooked and it may be uneven, but it is always one-dimensional.
When Kesey later writes *Sometimes a Great Notion*, he manages a progression toward a closer representation of a simultaneous, cyclical reality in print. He suspends use of a single narrator and moves beyond sequential development of plot. *Sometimes a Great Notion* begins and ends at the same moment; it forms a circle and aspires to the portrayal of a three-dimensional reality. Cycles and circles are built into the fabric of Kesey's second novel. *Sometimes a Great Notion* becomes what *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is about. In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, circles and cycles, both thematically and structurally, give way to a kind of centrifugal force and then to entropy, as each constituent of the Stamper community spins off in his/her own direction. The structural physics and metaphysics of *Sometimes a Great Notion* tell us something about the dynamics of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The entropy in Kesey's second novel is part of the bringing together of technique and meaning; it can be anticipated through the novel as circles of time widen and cycles take on momentum. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* generates its own kind of entropy, arrives at the same conclusion, although it takes a different route. All of its characters are systematically dispersed.

In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey writes that Hank Stamper once "traveled in a straight line and completed a circle." The description of Hank Stamper's path may be extrapolated to become a description of the form of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It is as though thematic cycles and circles in the novel are contorted and compacted to form a straight

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line of plot and point of view. And then the line fragments. Cheswick, Bibbit and McMurphy die; Big Nurse recedes; Broom, Harding and others escape. The cycle of life, death and regeneration asserts itself despite the structure of the novel. It is not until he writes *Sometimes a Great Notion* that Kesey is able to bring thematic circles into unity with form.

The last page of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* attests to the cyclical nature of reality and the war which the novel describes. It tells us that Broom is going off to "look over the country around the gorge." He meets a Mexican traveller along the way and tells him a "good story about . . . being a professional Indian wrestler." The Chief is still cagey, and now he has learned to use not only his voice, but his eyes. The ending of the novel is inconclusive. Broom escapes, but we know nothing of what becomes of him. The ward is left virtually without patients, but we know that it remains as a trap for other men in other times. Big Nurse has lost her voice, but we know that she will speak and insinuate again. One stronghold of the Combine has been broken, but we know there are other strongholds quite intact. Each protagonist has triumphed somehow by taking a path of dignity, but we have been warned that the Combine itself is invincible: individual victory is therefore tenuous, and perhaps even illusory.

Do we rejoice or despair? McMurphy is dead. Does the Chief leave the Combine, or does he only escape to its outer reaches? Where is the Oregon or Canada to which Broom flees? It can only be a place where different battles are acted out by different people. The battles and the people are the ones that will make up *Sometimes a Great Notion*. 
CHAPTER III

SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION

Sometimes a Great Notion opens with a cinematic view of the Wakonda Auga River and focuses, sentences later, on an amputated human arm. The arm is hanging from a pole, protruding from the top-story window of a house. Below, a log boom is being navigated through the current. It is raining. The rain and the river blend together to form a waterlogged soundtrack to the scene. The wetness slips into audio background with the introduction of a collective voice shouting, "Stammper! Hey, goddam you anyhow, Hank Stammppmper!" (2). Several pages later, but simultaneously as the shout echoes, a man identified as the Union President approaches a woman identified as Hank Stamper's wife in a small local bar. He wants to know "what happened ... and why" (11). Here begins the story of the Stampers. On the penultimate page of the novel, the bar scene is re-enacted, superimposed on a reproduction of the boom-sailing-down-the-river scene. The novel reaches its end in the same way and on the same day as it began. By this time we know, at least, whose arm was left turning above the Wakonda Auga.

Kesey's novel plunges us into confusion. It begins with its ending and moves backwards to its beginning. It is simple, even accurate, to say that the novel is constructed as a circle, that it has an organizational frame. But this does not account for the inherent complexity of the book: the confusion never really lets up. By the end of the novel, Draeger
has gone through the Stamper family album and we have gone through nearly six hundred pages of print. We are closer to knowing "what happened . . . and why," but we understand that we will never know the whole truth. Draeger has been privy to photographs and we have been privy to the thoughts and actions of many characters. But photographs are moments frozen for future interpretation and thoughts are subjective responses to the actions that constitute a subjective reality.

_Sometimes a Great Notion_ is about the subjective nature of reality and the struggle for survival within a world that is full of resistance and short of absolutes. And the novel moves its readers through perspectives as quickly as it moves its characters through conflicts. It shifts from one narrator to another, from one character's speech to another's thoughts, from time present to time past, from omniscience to solipsism. Technique makes the novel as difficult to read as the world it portrays is difficult to experience. It is because of this that _Sometimes a Great Notion_ is ultimately more complex than Kesey's first novel.

_One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_ asks us to consider its story as "the truth even if it didn't happen." _Sometimes a Great Notion_ puts forth a more demanding request because it gives us a kind of warning:

being accurate is not necessarily being honest.
. . . Nor is chronological reporting by any means always the most truthful (each camera has its own veracity) especially when, in all good faith, one cannot truthfully claim to remember what happened accurately . . . . Or accurately claim to remember what happened truthfully . . . . Besides, there are some things that can't be the truth even if they _did_ happen (70).

_One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_ invokes very acceptable literary
parameters. It asks us only to believe. Kesey gives us one narrator
and one point of view and provides us with intuitive grounds for
evaluating the perceptions that are proffered. *Sometimes a Great
Notion* is more complex because it suggests that we cannot easily believe—
anything. Kesey now gives us a series of narrators and a series of
points of view. Moreover, the perceptions we are witness to persistently
contradict each other.

In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey creates a form that is at once
more contrived and less contrived than the form that defines *One Flew
Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It is more contrived because it mindfully
manipulates its resources to replicate something like life. It is less
contrived because it is less schematized, less amenable to any kind of
reductive reading.

In his second novel, Kesey has removed the centrality of a single
narrating consciousness and in the process he has pushed beyond linearity.
Plot supplies the only chronological ordering of the novel. But plot
is never one-dimensional or completely linear. The primary plot revolves
around the progress of negotiations between the labour union and the
Stamper family, while the Stampers work toward meeting a contract
deadline with a logging company. The secondary plot is a revenge plot
against Hank Stamper, with his brother as agent and his wife as instrument
of his intended fall. For the greater part of the novel, this plot has its
only expression in the imagination of Lee Stamper. The ways in which the
two plots coalesce and assimilate subplots give substance and definition
to the novel. Basic plot line functions almost as an interruption of
the momentum that is set up through memory, digression, internal monologue
and narration of episodes that have no direct relationship to the central
action of the novel. Most of Kesey's secondary characters (Indian Jenny, Simone, Willard Eggleston, Teddy, Rod and Ray) have only incidental connections to plot, yet each is expanded and explored in turn. The novel becomes a mosaic of character and conflict.

Kesey's method renders his novel very confusing. But the structural confusion functions to underline theme. We have no single reliable character to whose perceptions we can refer when images refuse to be consistent and the truth announced in one sentence is contradicted by the truth announced in the next. This is because the lack of shared agreement as to what is good or evil, right or wrong, real or imagined, true or false is a central concern of Sometimes a Great Notion.

Like One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Kesey's second novel is about battles—winning them, losing them, compromising in them and being compromised by them. More than anything, it is about the perception of battles, and then the naming of them. The perception and naming of battles, protagonists and antagonists form the process that carries readers and characters through the text. Nothing is quite clear. Or rather, nothing remains clear for very long. The entire novel is a study of perception; it is about perception and written through a labyrinth of changing perspectives.

The central characters of Sometimes a Great Notion refer to an imaginary monster called "the Hidebehind." The Hidebehind is "little, not big at all . . . but fast . . . . And he stays behind a man's back all the time so no matter how quick you turn, he's run the other way, out of your seeing" (108). All the Stampers know about the Hidebehind. Lee's silent messenger, who keeps him advised to "WATCH OUT," cautions
him from the beginning to especially "LOOK OUT FROM BEHIND" (63).

"Because one can never, no matter how fast he is on the spin, face an attack from behind" (64). And it is basically the enemy from the rear, the chameleon enemy, that the Stampers must continually choose to escape or keep spinning to confront. The Hidebehind becomes a metaphor for all the enemies in the novel.

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the enemy is straight ahead and visible at every turn. The novel pits one man (perhaps two) against one enemy and calls the enemy the Combine. The Combine encompasses everything that is citified and mechanized, everything that is opposed to nature and variety. Natural, direct language is in conflict with understatement and insinuation; multi-sensualism is in conflict with unswerving visuality; personal, cyclical, natural time is in conflict with impersonal, linear, unnatural time. Although we have seen that the conflict between the individual and the Establishment is acted out in subtle ways, acted out through technique, still we have been able to name the enemy and watch the battles. The battles are simple because our protagonists never really stop being protagonists, and our antagonist is so perfectly personified and epitomized in Big Nurse--so easy to hate. Even if our narrator is psychotic, he is the only narrator we have.

There is no such simplicity in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. This is because of the interrelationships of technique, character and theme. The author offers no single narrator, psychotic or otherwise; and because of the multi-narrator technique, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between positive characters and negative ones. Theme is couched in a complex network of characters fighting battles; and while individual dignity is ultimately affirmed, there is no Combine to fight,
the natural world is a given, and the enemies are yet to be named. From its earliest pages, the novel tells us to "Stop," "Look" and "Listen" (1-14). The instructions are repeated all the way through the text. We are being guided through the novel, warned to keep our eyes and ears alert, and like children about to cross a street, we are being told to WATCH OUT. We must read carefully, because it is for us, as it is for the characters in the novel, to be cognizant of perceptions, to name the heroes and the villains and name the battles.

Although there is some contention about this within the novel itself, Hank Stamper does emerge as the single most heroic figure of the saga. It is he who is most closely identified with the central value of dignity. It is he who learns the meaning of strength and weakness, learns it from his brother:

Weakness is true and real. I used to accuse the kid of faking his weakness. But faking proves the weakness is real. Or you wouldn't be so weak as to fake it. No, you can't ever fake being weak. You can only fake being strong . . . . And if you can only fake being strong, not being weak, then the kid has done to me what I set off to do to him! He's shaped me up. He's made me to quit faking (503-4).

In return for the knowledge which Lee gives (which he gives in ignorance because he never really owned it), Hank imparts integrity to his brother, forces him to fight—"not run for [his] miserable life" (584).

Hank develops a certain stature in the novel, and his role as hero sets up a fairly irresistible temptation to compare him to McMurphy, and even compare the union he fights to the Combine. The analogy seems sound to the extent that Hank, like McMurphy, stands apart from every other character in the pose of a partly real and partly manufactured hero.
(The people of the town create Hank no less than the inmates of the hospital create McMurphy). The qualities of Hank's heroism are translated into a language compatible with the image of the untamed West. Joe Ben describes him as the lone man who can "hold a double-edged ax straight out at arm's length for eight minutes and thirty-six seconds" (312).

The union approximates the Combine to the extent that it cannot tolerate isolationist tactics in its opposition. Like the Combine, the union needs everyone to fit together if everything is to run smoothly. Like the Combine, it is an amorphous yet organized force that must prosecute defectors.

While the Combine/union analogy applies, the union is by no means the only enemy or even the real enemy in the novel. Hank Stamper must fight more than the union if he is to survive with dignity and "feel all right about [him]self" (589).

Yet to what extent is Hank a reincarnation of McMurphy? At times, he seems to resonate with the voice of the man we meet at the beginning of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Hank explains his politics in the following excerpt from a diatribe to Draeger:

If we was to get into it with Russia I'd fight for us right down to the wire. And if Oregon was to get into it with California I'd fight for Oregon. But if somebody . . . gets into it with me, then I'm for me! When the chips are down, I'm my own patriot (346).

Hank, like McMurphy, is not afraid to be who he is and to defy his own image too. Chief Broom expresses his astonishment at discovering that McMurphy can "paint pictures or write letters to people, or be upset and worried" (Cuckoo's Nest, 153). No less astonishing then is Hank's
sensitivity to "rhododendron flowers in the dozen ways they bloom every 
year" (391). And Hank is capable of being both upset and worried. Joe 
Ben notices his "spots of rust . . . in a dozen places" (426).

Hank's interior development allows us to see his "spots of rust" 
as well, and it is the very expansion of his interiority that separates 
him from McMurphy. We are never admitted to the secret world of McMurphy's 
thoughts. He may be as complex a person as Hank, but we are dealing 
with fiction, and as a character, McMurphy is not exposed sufficiently 
to reveal his complexity. This makes McMurphy more mysterious than Hank, 
and effectively precludes any extensive comparison between the two men. 
While we perceive McMurphy as a hero on the basis of Broom's reporting, 
we must ascertain the nature of Hank's heroism on the basis of evidence 
we acquire from conflicting sources.

In this context, it is important that we know Hank's attitude 
toward his seemingly endless fighting: "I don't care about the actual 
hitting and getting hit so much as I care that I always have to be 
goddammit working up to fighting with some-guy-or-other" (314). And 
it is important that we know of Hank's dream "that he is at the top of 
his class and nobody is trying to pull him down, nobody is trying to 
push him off, nobody but himself even knows that he is up there" (328). 
It is important that we know that Hank is ultimately terrified by the 
reflection of his own image in a nighttime window (449).

Hank appears as strong and independent, yet sensitive and even 
vulnerable. He is a man who is forever cornered into fighting for his 
place "at the top of the class," because there are people who keep 
pushing him—people who admit "we wanted the champ down simply because
it was insupportable to us that he had the audacity to be up there—perched arrogantly on the throne, when we were not" (187). The confession is Lee's, but the "we" he uses groups him with every man in town who prays for the fall of Hank Stamper. And poor Hank has to "pull himself together and tell them 'Up yours' . . . like Hank has always had to do when all's said and when all's done, on account of that's his place, no matter how he don't like it" (309).

Although Hank's role as protagonist seems unshaken in terms of all we have seen, there are those that will call him the enemy. And while their voices are often weak, they cannot be ignored. Lee sees Hank as the person who violated his mother and stole his sunshine (188). Lee's perception has its truth, but it is Lee's private truth. And Hank reinforces Lee's perception. He taunts him with "You think you're big enough now?" (66), and even despite himself, feeds Lee's image of older brother as maniacal goliath. Hank explains:

I'm intending to kind of kid him but, try as I may, I can hear myself sounding just exactly like old Henry doing some first-rate ass-chewing, and I know I couldn't pick a worse way to talk to Lee. But I'm damned if I can stop it (170).

We can determine ultimately that Lee's perceptions of Hank are distorted. As the novel develops, Lee becomes an increasingly negative figure. His "WATCH OUT" is always for himself. While the other Stampers are fighting a collective fight, while they are even dying in the process, Lee is self-consuming, self-indulgent, self-preserving. The novel structurally flashes back and forth between Hank's struggles in the "real world" of the forest and the town, and Lee's (always simultaneous) struggles in no reality but his own—"a fairybook world . . . like a kind of nightmare" (318).
Moreover, Lee is about as paranoid as Chief Broom and much less accurate. The moment the avenger feels complacency coming on, he puts forth the following analysis: "The whole diabolical houseful was being warm and sweet and treacherous, from my serpent brother down to the littlest snake-in-the-weeds infant" (201).

Until the conclusion of Sometimes a Great Notion, when growth and knowledge become the stuff of the novel, Lee remains the selfish victim of his own monoideism. He compares himself to Hamlet in a way that is half serious and half parodic (62-7). He is the hesitating youth, bent on destroying the man who despoiled his mother, only "beset by the slings and arrows of outrageous introspection" (262).

But we cannot dismiss Lee's understanding of Hank or his understanding of reality. In this novel, we are warned to "Look" and "Listen" and not dismiss anything. Lee laboriously attempts to give credence to his perceptions. He writes to Peters (his Eastern cohort), struggling "with a stubby pencil to illuminate his own particular reality to someone else" (407). (Peters appears only once in the novel. For the remainder of the book, he is invisible. His only function is to receive Lee's perceptions of reality. We know that Peters responds to Lee's letters, but we never learn what he writes. He is effectively a creation of Lee to validate somewhere Lee's own version of what is true).

While Lee may be alone with Peters in his private world of familial revenge, he is not alone in his simultaneous admiration and hatred of Hank Stamper. The truth of Hank's heroism may be apparent to us because we penetrate his image and enter his mind. But in Sometimes a Great Notion, there are always conflicting perceptions of the way things really are. "One man's poison is another man's high" (329). And one man's truth
is another man's lie. To the people of the union and the people of the
town, Hank Stamper is not a protagonist but an antagonist. He is seen,
like the rain, as a satanic force, with no other purpose than to torment
innocent folk:

Nothing can be done about the rain except blaming
. . . . And you can maybe put the blame on the
Arm of the Lord those years when that arm puts a
stranglehold of frost on the woods so tight it
freezes all the way to your pay envelope . . . .
But when the arm is the arm of Hank Stamper
strangling off your income, and you damn well know
that the blow is being dealt by the fist on that
arm, then you find yourself having a pretty hard
time blaming your woes on anything other than that
arm (382-3).

So everyone in the town blames Hank Stamper for something. On the night
of his impending suicide, Willard Eggleston telephones Hank because he
"deserves to be told just what extremes his hardnosed obstinence can
drive a man to" (407).

To some extent, the townspeople are justified in blaming Hank
Stamper—for everything. The novel depicts a Depression in Western
Oregon that grows out of a strike which is broken and therefore prolonged
by the Stampers alone. The Stampers are scabs. It was no easy task
for a novelist to turn a scab into a hero at the beginning of the 1960's,
when the labour movement was growing in North America and the counter-
culture was endorsing the New Left. But Kesey did it. And he did it
all through perspective and point of view. Because individual dignity
can supercede labour politics when the world is a novel and the novel
is structured carefully.

The people who oppose the Stampers are not granted even a fraction
of Hank's dignity. Evenwrite goes to the Stamper home to negotiate
the terms of a labour settlement and leaves cursing himself for not asking Hank for a cigarette (347). Les Gibbons accepts transportation daily from the Stampers and then wishes for Hank's destruction at the hands of Biggie Newton (186). The members of the extended Stamper family assume all the characteristics of vultures when they smell the rumour that Hank may be selling the business (396). And on the day of Joe Ben's funeral, the collective personality of the town is revealed: the undertaker overdoes his embalming work to compensate financially for the unprofitable death of Willard Eggleston (508), while Brother Walker wonders what he should wear to the services (513). Boney Stokes misses the funeral and goes to visit the elder Stamper in the hospital: he cannot rest until he sees resistance die in Henry (534).

Teddy, the owner of the local bar, is the one character who does not expend excessive energy in hating the Stampers; but only because he does not have to. First, he is aware of the monetary gain that comes to a bar-owner in times of general misery. Second, he has created an image of his own to fear and respect, and needs the Stampers to do nothing but prevail in the name of good business. Teddy is in awe of Jonathan Draeger, and his tale of awe becomes a parable about the primacy of images and perception in the novel. Evenwrite sees Draeger as a "fastidious know-it-all who'd obviously never had on a pair of corks in his life" (361). To Hank, Draeger is just "this other dude" (398).

Teddy sees Draeger differently:

\[\text{You're just a piece of a bigger piece getting bigger rolling across the land into an ocean of mercury} \]
\[\text{. . . . And you know all this, Mr. Draeger. It is the thing that makes you special. And you have the courage to use it. I can only stand awed by the true All-Powerful; you can use it. You are beautiful (375).}\]
The apotheosis of Draeger is fundamentally a product of Teddy's private perspective. Images contradict each other, but they dominate the novel. The theme is underlined by the conflicting perceptions of Teddy himself. We see Teddy and Teddy sees himself as a lay psychologist of fear (348). The clientele of The Snag never gets beyond Teddy's appearance, and welcomes "the comic interlude Teddy [brings] to their serious, grim, down-to-business discussions" (370). What can the reader believe about Teddy, Draeger, Hank or anyone?

Our examination of the secondary characters of Sometimes a Great Notion has seemed to support Hank's role as central protagonist of the novel. The suggestion has even emerged that, aside from Lee, the union members and other townspeople constitute the enemy that Hank must contest. But the novel is too complex to allow for such pat naming of enemies and battles: it shifts perspectives too often. While a negative evaluation of the town-characters has its own truth, there are other perceptions and more information which must be taken into account. We know that Evenwrite is without real integrity; but we know too that his integrity evaporated in the home of his two drunken parents (356-8). We know that Biggie Newton is the murderous agent of the union; but we know too that his monstrous body grew faster than his young mind, leaving him "barely voting age," with the "bleakish future of the bully with no blocks left who'd get in his road and nothing to bust up" (514). We know that the Stamper relatives are pawns of the union; but we know too that each one was pressured individually by every non-Stamper in the town (374). We know that Brother Walker was in a quandary over his funeral attire; but we know too that Viv Stamper, loving as she is, spent hours preening herself for the event (519). We know that Boney Stokes is resentful behind his mask of solicitousness to Henry; but we know too that his
resentment is a response to the Stampers' rejection of the admirable notion of "community" (533). If nothing is certain, then perhaps Draeger is even all that Teddy dreams him to be.

We can never say without qualification that any character is good or evil, any action completely right or completely wrong, any perception absolutely true or absolutely false. Finally, we must sympathize with Floyd Evenwrite when he says:

> It's getting so you can't hardly be sure . . . any more . . . who's the Big-Asses and who's the Little-Asses . . . who's on whose side . . . or who's winning . . . any more . . . or even who you want to win for sure . . . (362).

Part of the complexity of *Sometimes a Great Notion* comes from the non-existence of a Combine and the non-existence of its corollary, a repressive matriarchy. The Combine metaphor is convenient, even valid, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* because that novel is set within the walls of a state mental hospital, and the walls form a microcosm and compress it sufficiently to make hyperboles credible. But even if it is true that the Combine exists and spreads its tentacles in every direction, by the time we get out into the open country that forms the setting for *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the Combine is no longer recognizable. At the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Broom escapes to the free spaces of Oregon or Canada. The Wakonda Auga country is the place to which the Chief escapes. Here the battles are no less draining; they are simply harder to pin down.

Each member of the union in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, each potential enemy, is individualized to the extent that he cannot be associated with the Combine, or even with the rest of the union. Each character is as
much victim as victimizer. (To some degree, this is true in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* as well. The black aides, for example, can "hate enough" because they were the oppressed long before they became the oppressors [*Cuckoo’s Nest*, 28]. But the theme of victimizers as victims is not much explored in the novel).

*Sometimes a Great Notion* might have taken an easier path. The novel might have set up a dichotomy between Eastern and Western people, the former representing mechanization and citified values. Lee's relationship to Boston and his mother's relationship to New York City would have made the dichotomy plausible. But Kesey does not make much of East/West distinctions, or even urban/rural distinctions. Each possible antagonist in the novel is saved from association with the image of the Combine in his/her own peculiar way. Henry's second wife is set apart from any stereotype by making love to her husband's son and by committing suicide. Draeger is repeatedly called back from his remote intellectualism by the damp reminder of his athlete's foot. Lee is saved from city one-dimensionality by marijuana and his conviction that he is insane.

And whereas the image of the Combine in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* presupposes a fear-inspiring matriarchy, women in *Sometimes a Great Notion* (who are, incidentally, mostly imported from the East) have a remarkable propensity for dying. Henry Stamper's mother died when she came to Oregon; his first wife died unceremoniously while doing the chores; his second wife returned east to die. Only Viv survives; but she survives in order to leave—to go east as Lee's bus ticket directs her to do.

So no Combine, no city myth, no Eastern myth, no matriarchy serves
to facilitate the naming of enemies in the novel. Viv concedes that "there are bigger forces . . . . I don't know what they are but they got ours whipped sometimes" (597). She may be making a new dedication to the power of some inter-galactic Combine, but we never know for sure.

_Sometimes a Great Notion_ sets up a cycle. Because enemies are difficult to name, we must rely on images and perceptions. And because images and perceptions are often in conflict, and therefore unreliable, enemies become even more difficult to name. The novel articulates the theme of the primacy of images and perceptions through structure, by shifting perspectives and contrasting perceptions. But the novel underlines the same theme through pure content. The questions of what is right and what is true are posed indirectly through technique, and they are posed directly by the characters themselves.

The story of Willard Eggleston—his business, his wife, his mistress, his death—seems initially to be a digression in the novel, another in Kesey's series of expanded portraits of minor characters. In fact, Willard Eggleston's life and death constitute a paradigm of the meaning of the whole novel. His decision to commit suicide is all wrapped up in thoughts of images and perceptions and the mystery of everything that lies behind appearances. Willard decides to kill himself in order that Jelly, his only-ever lover and mother of his child, can have his insurance money and not be compelled to marry another man in order to support her son. But Willard's dilemma is that his suicide is out of synch with his image. He must take his life, not only to provide money for Jelly, but to defy the reflection that he sees when he looks into the window of his laundromat:
... a ridiculous little character with a receding chin and eyes swimming nearsightedly behind glasses out of style years ago, a cartoonist's wash-drawing of the capital-H henpecked husband, a satirist's two-dimensional straw man designed to convey at first glance a two-dimensional personality that everyone knows everything about before it even opens its straw man's mouth. Willard wasn't shocked by the image; he had been aware of it for years. When he was younger he had scoffed to himself at all those people who treated him as though he really were this image he projected—"What do I care for what they see? They think they know the book by its cover, but the book knows what it is." Now he knew better; if the book never opens up and comes out, it can be warped to fit the image others see (386).

And Willard never does escape his image. He finally dies, but not by an act of will: he "goes into a slide on the very turn he had picked weeks before, and unintentionally keeps both appointment and his promise" (445).

Not only then are images in conflict in Sometimes a Great Notion, they are either deceiving or tyrannical (or both) even when they are consistent. Joe Ben marries the woman who slashes his face because "he looked so much like [his father] that he was scared to death he would grow up to be the same person" (111). With a scar on his face, Joe Ben is free to be himself, and free also to be subjected to other people's interpretations of his appearance, his speech and his whole being. Hank sees him as a kind of saint who "didn't care if he made a fool out of himself, just so long as he made you happy with the fool" (442). Then again, Lee sees Joe Ben as "poor fool Joe" with a "Tinker Toy mind and scrambled world" (282).

Awareness of images—of others and oneself—permeates the novel. The mirror is a recurring metonym for the theme. When Viv leaves the
home of her youth to marry Hank Stamper, she stares into her own eyes in "a wood-framed oval mirror" and kisses the face in the glass goodbye (152). Years later, she "faces her image in a medicine-cabinet mirror" and frowns. "What she sees—or doesn't see—in the face makes her uncomfortable" (557). The mirror is an appropriate object for Viv's discomfort. During the weeks and decades that the novel spans, she is always being moulded to fit someone else's image of who she is. Her uncle will not let her cut her hair; Hank will not let her cut her hair; Lee is not concerned about Viv's hair, but confesses that he is in love with her "need for what I have to offer" (408). The contest for Viv becomes, in Lee's mind, at least, a contest of which brother needs her more. And we hear Viv silently protest, "I can't be everybody's somebody" (250). It is no wonder then that Viv, who is deprived of her integral, separate self for years, confronts her reflection a final time and asks and answers a question about images:

What does it mean, all this concern about our images? . . . It means this is the only way we ever see ourselves; looking out, at others, reflected through cobwebs from an attic window (578).

Because images are often in conflict, and because reality is often a matter of opinion, some of the characters in Sometimes a Great Notion seek the solace afforded by anything absolute. Unfortunately, absolutes most often turn out to be illusions. It is important to note here that the grasping after fact is built into the novel structurally as well as contextually. The reader, no less than the characters in the novel, is beckoned by the mirage of a fixed reality.
Representations of fixed reality in the novel appear most overtly in three forms: photographs, signs and (of course) Jonathan Draeger's aphorisms. The Stamper family album begins and ends *Sometimes a Great Notion*; signs are posted throughout the novel as a kind of comfort in black and white or neon; Draeger attempts to compact human nature into sentences or paragraphs and believes that he is recording truisms.

We are guided through the history of the Stamper family through the auspices of Viv and the album of photographs she shares with Draeger. The photographs are reproductions of moments of people in fragments of space and time—of, say, Jonas Armand Stamper, "Dusty Kansas train depot in 1898" (14). Yet what can Viv or anyone do with photographs but read into them, through them and beyond them? When photographs are interpreted, their truth becomes variable and their stillness part of a flow. Viv does not put much stock in photographs, "turning the pages in silence" (598), creating a movie. And the movie is no more true than each separate image that creates it. The truth rather lies somewhere in a series of simultaneous images with contradictory commentary. The book teaches us this lesson structurally, and then unequivocally spells it out:

*Reality is greater than the sum of its parts.*

*... Truth doesn't run on time like a commuter train, though time may run on truth. And the Scenes Gone By and the Scenes to Come flow blending together in the sea-green deep while Now spreads in circles on the surface* (14).

Viv understands and explains to Draeger that he cannot really know "what happened" "because it's still happening" (598).
Lee does not have Viv's wisdom. He believes in the truth, however false or non-applicable, of photographs. Toward the end of the novel, when Lee realizes that he cannot take Viv east with him, he decides to abscond with a photograph of her instead. A reasonable substitution. He takes hold of a snapshot, supposedly of "Viv seated beside a small bespectacled boy." He is determined to have it—that snapshot that "showed her caught in an attitude that perhaps for that one instant fulfilled completely all that her slight smile perpetually suggested" (575). Lee is in love with a photograph of Viv and all he reads into it. But later we learn that the photograph is dated September, 1945: the woman is Myra Stamper; the child, Lee.

The importance of this particular photograph consists in the way it cuts through to the image theme of Sometimes a Great Notion. Myra's part in the novel itself is small. Henry fetches her from the East on page thirty-two and returns her on page thirty-seven. But she is a ghost that haunts the entire book. To Hank, she is the mysterious lady who took his virginity; to Lee, she is the inviolate mother; to Henry, she is simply the wife who didn't work out. But Viv, who has never even known this woman, is forced under her shadow and becomes the unwitting centre of a vendetta that was initiated by Myra's adultery. (Lee, at one point, resolves to tell Viv the whole story: "I was determined to reveal the truth to someone, though it meant lying myself blue in the face" [230]. He never does tell Viv the story of Hank and Myra). Yet Viv, in the end, finally rejects Myra, her photograph, their interchangeability, and her own interchangeability with both person and photograph. But Lee is never to know that the
photograph lied or that he himself imposed its lying, because Lee Stamper wants to believe in stills. Even his attempts to describe the act of his lovemaking with Viv segment the scene into a sequence of photographs: "I might . . . list impressions, images still brilliant, flash-bulbed forever by the white arching of those first touches" (499). He is deceived.

Signs are like photographs in the novel in that they represent a striving toward the fixing of elusive truth. Things mounted on plaques, billboards or in electric lights are things to hold on to. The novel is full of such signs. There are advertising signs for Pepsi-Cola ("BE SOCIABLE") and for beer ("Mabel, Black Label"); and these serve as touchstones, if not for the characters, then for the reader. These signs are taken out of "real life" and we know them. There are commercial signs for business enterprises ("The Gull," "The Black Kat," "The Crab Pot" and "The Wakonda House"). Teddy's bar, The Snag, has no sign of its own because Teddy has been hoarding neons of defunct bars instead, and the neons give him warmth. There are signs that are warnings ("CAUTION . . . SLOW . . . STOP . . . RESUME SPEED"), and the traffic signs effectively direct the movements of the characters and ultimately, the movement of the novel itself. There are signs that are rules to live by, both written ("NEVER GIVE A INCH") and unwritten ("First Come, First Served," "If You Wants to Win, You Does Your Best," "Watch the doughnut, not the hole"). But these signs are to be obeyed or disobeyed: their concrete reality does not make easier the subjective decision of whether or not to believe in them. Signs are everywhere in the novel. Like photographs, they aspire toward the truth; like photographs, they may be looked at, looked through, or looked away from.
Jonathan Bailey Draeger writes his own signs, extensive ones, compiled in a notebook for a sense of security and a projection of immortality. He reduces and capsulizes with the pretense of inventing truisms. The reader must decide how true are his aphorisms and what relationship, if any, they have to the meaning of Sometimes a Great Notion:

Men are forever eager to press drink upon those they consider their superiors, hoping thereby to eliminate that distinction between them (53).

Man is certain of nothing but his ability to fail (81).

The lowest of villains will push a man to greater heights than the tallest of heroes (317).

Draeger perpetually struggles (as the author himself struggles) to find the relationship between the human condition and language. Kesey is more successful. It is impossible to establish the veracity of Draeger's aphorisms because, in his own non-capsulized writing, Kesey gives us no method for judging them. The importance of Draeger's quotable quotes does not lie in their truth or lack of truth, but in the fact that they exist, testifying to a quest. Joe Ben's father probably comes closest to phrasing the indisputable when he says, "A cigar is just a cigar, but a good woman is a fuck" (193).

Sometimes a Great Notion supports no fixed reality, but a flow of simultaneous approximations of reality. So returning to the problem that the novel presents of identifying protagonists and antagonists and naming battles, we arrive at the following approximation: Hank Stamper is a protagonist because he, more than any other character, consistently
acts with dignity. Lee and the townspeople are enemies to the extent that they oppose the man we affirm as protagonist. And two battles are named: Hank versus Lee, and Hank versus practically everyone else. None of this is sufficiently fixed or sufficiently true to be satisfying as an analysis, but lack of shared agreement is the subject of the novel and contrived ambiguity defies any analysis that does not pay due respect to its complexity.

One battle remains to be named. It is the battle against nature and it is fought most openly on the Stamper front. The forest and the river appear as forces of opposition in Sometimes a Great Notion. Of the forest, Henry says, "I cut it down an' it's comin' back up. It'll always be comin' back up. It'll outlast anything skin an' bone. You need to get in there with some machinery an' tear hell out of it" (227). Of the river, Hank says, "It was like me and that river had drawn ourselves a little contract, a little grudge match, and without me knowing exactly why" (104).

The forest and the river ultimately do prevail. As a child, Hank loses his treasured bobcats to a rising tide and thereafter is obsessed with checking the foundation of his house daily, compulsively, performing a ritual to save his home from the river by letting the river know that its power is never forgotten. Then the story is told of Judy Stamper who "got hammered flat by a spruce limb" (284). Finally, the forest and the river form a merger to strike at the centre of the Stamper tribe. One log separates Henry's arm from his body, rebounds off of Hank, and settles on top of Joe Ben at the bank of the river. Joe Ben dies by a joint effort of nature, trapped by a log in order to be drowned.
But like the other antagonists in Sometimes a Great Notion, nature is not only victimizer but victim. The Stampers are in the business of chopping down trees:

The forest fought against the attack on its age-old domain with all the age-old weapons nature could muster: blackberries strung barbed barricades; the wind shook widow-makers crashing down from high rotted snags; boulders reared silently from the ground to block slides that had looked smooth and clear moments before; streams turned solid trails into creeping ruts of icy brown lava . . . . But the trees continued to fall (474-5).

In fact, the forest and the river together sustain the Stamper empire, and directly or indirectly, sustain every character in the novel. They bring death, but they also give life. Whether or not they are enemies depends on who looks at them, and when and how. Again, perspective is flexible and relativity takes over.

In discussing Sometimes a Great Notion to this point, we have directed our attention primarily to matters of perception. Examinations of form, character and theme have all led to explorations of conflicting perceptions of reality and truth. Clearly, perceptions in conflict constitute both the technique and meaning of Sometimes a Great Notion. But a study of technique as meaning in the realm of perception was central to our reading of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest as well. And it is important that we now begin to look directly at the distinctions between Kesey's approaches to perception in his two novels. There are major differences. Moreover, just as perception has a central but new meaning in Sometimes a Great Notion, so do language and time.
The disparity in approaches to perception, language and time in the two novels emanates from the fact that *Sometimes a Great Notion* offers no single enemy to correspond, in magnitude or clarity, to the Combine enemy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Kesey's second novel begins, in effect, at the point at which his first novel leaves off. *Sometimes a Great Notion* takes for granted the ways of perceiving, communicating and relating to time that are fought for and died for in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Modes of perception, systems of language, methods of relating to time are all arenas for conflict in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. *Sometimes a Great Notion* assumes the supremacy of multi-sensual perception, and then sets images perceived through every sense into conflict. *Sometimes a Great Notion* assumes the existence of gross differences in language systems, and proceeds to watch, not the resulting battle, but the finer aspects of the resulting interface. *Sometimes a Great Notion* assumes the rejection of artificial time schemes, and recognizes from the start that there is "fast time, slow time, daylight time, night time, Pacific time, good time, bad time," but not "such a thing as the time" (85). What we see then in Kesey's second novel are the implications of perception, language and time taken to another level of meaning.

Every character in *Sometimes a Great Notion* is protected somehow from association with the Combine, and no Big Nurse figure, intent on watching, and refusing to listen, smell, touch or taste, is to be found in the novel. Perhaps because *Sometimes a Great Notion* is set in the open country, all of its central narrating characters are attuned with all of their senses to their environment. Many of their perceptions
are worthy of even Chief Broom's consciousness. Hank enjoys milking the cows because the feel of "a cow's tit [is] a nice change from an ax-handle" (79). He listens for sounds like the sound of logs in the river, "scraping and rubbing against each other . . . making an actual sound above the motor and the rain . . . like a big throng of people muttering to each other" (422). And not only does Hank hear, but he hears synaesthetically. He describes a multitude of birds "in the last bit of daylight":

... not purple, not green, not quite the acetylene blue of a cutting torch, a color almost a sound it’s so bright; ringing of bits of tinted glass against each other in the wind (389).

Lee too perceives the world with all his senses, and refers in a single silent monologue to his "steely eyes," his "sentinel ears," his "sense of touch . . . disconnected by the cold," his "taste buds," his "keen nose" (556). Viv, in her own world, can hear at once "the slough, the whistle and bell buoy, the last of the hillside flowers dying in the breeze--the drip of bleeding heart, the rattle of firecracker weed, the hiss of adder's tongue" (241).

Even more remarkable than the perceptions of Hank or Lee or Viv are the perceptions of the third person narrator who makes frequent appearances in the novel, filling the gaps that the troop of first person narrators leave in their trails, and providing the listings of simultaneous events that no first person narrator could know. It is this persona that describes the "light, restrained touch of the glass against the table, as light as a hammer cocking" (374), and the neon signs "so bright and so clashing . . . that on a dark night their effect is almost audible" (45).
Synaesthetic perceptions and a kind of ultra-sense are the keynotes of the novel. There are never conflicts between modes of perception; rather there are conflicts in what is perceived and how perceptions are assimilated and interpreted. This order of discrepancy is the single most important method and meaning of *Sometimes a Great Notion.* We have examined the many ramifications of images and perceptions in the first part of this chapter, but we may now observe perceptions and misperceptions in action in a couple of specific sequences in the novel. On pages 180-181, Lee and Hank are together at lunchtime during Lee's first day of logging. Hank tries to explain his attitude toward the work he does and shows Lee one of his occupational wounds. "You see what I'm driving at, bub?" says Hank, and Lee replies, "Yes, I see," or "Yes, I believe I see what you're driving at" (depending on whose version of reality we believe). But then, as Hank comments to himself that Lee "ain't completely lost to us, after all. College or no, we can still find ways of making contact," Lee thinks, "He'll always be running ahead for me to catch up. He keeps changing the rules for the run or the run itself . . . He will never give me the chance!" What is happening? On pages 318-319, at the scene of Hank's imminent fight with Biggie Newton, both brothers wonder why Lee has been brought along to witness the massacre. Each unable to find a reason that is the "whole truth," Hank guesses that "the kid needed to see first hand . . . the real world with real hassles," while Lee imagines that he is about to see a demonstration of the treatment he can expect for his involvement in such a "hassle" as "making a play for one of the woods folks' wildwoods wife." What is happening? Events are continuously taking place and being perceived, reperceived and
misperceived. The question in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is how do we perceive, while the question raised in Sometimes a Great Notion is what do we perceive. And just as the question is articulated through technique in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, so it is articulated through technique—differently—in Sometimes a Great Notion.

Language, like perception, has a separate meaning in each of Kesey's novels. In both novels, language is a function of perception, and in both novels language is an aspect of technique that has implications for theme. In One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, each mode of expression is personalized, and opposition between language systems is a manifestation of the central conflict in the novel. In Sometimes a Great Notion, modes of expression are again personalized, but the opposition between them is almost too obvious to be interesting. Fascination with language goes beyond questions of individuality and conflict: Kesey explores the subtlety of range within private language systems and moves toward the suggestion that language itself is an inadequate method of communication—an approximation of thought and feeling struggling to replicate what can only be an approximation of the way things really are.

Lee speaks in a starched academic language that is predictable in light of his starched academic history. But even within this frame, his language is more intricate and more variable than it seems to be. Lee, in fact, speaks with many tongues. There is the language he uses in conversation with himself (and this is not always consistent), the language he uses in writing to Peters, and the language he uses in speaking with other people (also not always consistent).
When Lee converses with himself, his language is often quite stilted and he draws a few too many analogies from literature. He compares the "specter" of his brother to his "Dickensian counterpart" (60), and contemplating suicide, he extends his Hamlet fantasy and concludes that "the Mad Dane of Denmark" would have allowed himself a last cigarette (62). But Lee is not always so pretentious. He has a fairly well-developed vocabulary of terror as well. In one of the countless scenes in which Lee imagines his life to be threatened, we hear the manic rumblings of his paranoia take over: "Call it a draw while there's still a chance. WATCH OUT. No, concede. WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT! YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! . . . I concede" (298).

When Lee writes to Peters, he summons all his intellectual prowess to the fore and writes in a language so stylized that it is almost a parody of itself. Describing life in the wilds to his correspondent, Lee puts together the following collection of words and allusions:

I have had to stand there pant and fainting trying to endure berryvines, nettles, sunstroke, blisters, mosquitoes . . . in the brief respite allotted me while I waited for that cable to drop its log a hundred yards away and come hissing and snapping back for a new assault (something of Dante, don't you think?) I mean not only have I suffered all these physical horrors, but I have, if anything . . . increased my mental menaces a millionfold! (Pardon my bad alliterative . . . ) (262).

When Lee speaks to other characters in the novel, he modifies his language to serve his particular purpose. He uses polysyllables as weapons, confounding Joe Ben, for example, with his reference to "a sort of pediatric Procrustean bed" (160). Sometimes he settles into his own brand of directness, arguing with Hank about music: "This is
Jazz as black as it comes, black balls dragging on the ground" (265); or playing at making Viv his confidante: "I was a liability when I first came. I don't feel so any more" (238).

Most of Lee's language is acutely self-conscious. But through the variations within his language system, we can note changes in his state of mind. At one point, his language becomes genuinely fluid; it dissolves into oneness with his environment. He goes out to get cream for the family dinner and we hear him thinking, "I stood with a bowl of fetched cream fragrant as alfalfa in my hands, watching the dark poultice of dusk draw bullbats from their hideaways" (217). Here Lee's language is so consistent with the language of his setting that we know, almost before he does, that he is losing his hatred, becoming involved with the Stamper mystique: It is his language that exposes him.

Hank's language is neither as variable nor as complex as Lee's. He is most often direct, only hiding what he feels he must hide. ("What went on inside, that was nobody's business but whoever's it went on inside of" [195]). When Hank speaks, there are no hidden agenda, no circumlocution or camouflage of meaning. Hank speaks the language of "plain folk," but forces us to re-examine our own preconceptions of what that language is. In Lee's jaded imagination, he attributes to Hank a language that belongs to a caricature of a country bumpkin:

Paw, I knowed how ya felt. I cain't help but feel the same way myself--worst, mebbe, comes down to it; I'd as leave never heard his name again the rest o' my nachrul life--but I didn't see no way gettin' around it, considerin' the situation we is in (75).
In fact, Hank is no caricature. He is capable of near eloquence in internal monologue, and his oral language, while not always grammatically flawless, is certainly nothing like the drawling dialect of the stereotyped farmboy in the image that Lee fabricates.

Viv straddles a linguistic fence. She is neither as crude as Hank nor as loquacious as Lee. Her language is without real distinguishing features. But her linguistic place in the novel is an indication of her role in the Stamper domain. In language, as in all other things, Viv is "without a world truly her own" (153).

The secondary characters in the novel are known by their languages as well, and their languages are generally variable. Draeger prevaricates until he dictates; Evenwrite sulks until he curses. Joe Ben's language is alternately profoundly religious and completely earthbound. Henry speaks like a geriatric casualty until he finds the lost vocabulary of a competent foreman. Even Indian Jenny oscillates between protest and prayer.

It is clear that language is a function of perception to the extent that it is considered to give expression to the particular views of particular people at particular times. But while language may follow from perception, it is also subject to perception. Once words are spoken, they are open to interpretation by any listener. Moreover, as an undercurrent to the importance of language in the novel, there is the suggestion that words do not always communicate the thoughts and feelings that are supposedly their impetus. Words may even purposefully betray inner truth.

So Kesey points to two illusions: the assumption that words are
necessarily interpreted to mean what the speaker intends them to mean (as in the incident in which Hank and Lee share misperceptions as they share lunch); and the assumption that language is truly representational of thoughts and feelings.

There are two scenes in the novel which illustrate most clearly the discrepancy between private conception and public expression. In the following passage from the text, we are given Lee's analysis of a dialogue he had with Hank on the subject of Myra Stamper's death:

"I really wished there'd been something I could do done." Meaning: Was there?
"I don't know, Hank." Meaning: You did enough.
"I always worried about her." Meaning: Was I partially to blame?
"Yeah." Meaning: We were all to blame (203-4).

There are layers of lying. In another scene from the novel, Lee has apparently been revealing his innermost thoughts to Viv, while he has actually been executing the double mission of attracting sympathy and furthering his revenge scheme. Viv is feeling pressured by the demands Lee is making on her attention, and we are given her public and private responses: "'Lee, please explain--' Don't explain! Leave me alone . . . 'What was it you started to confess?'' (250).

Given the undercutting of the credibility of language in the novel, it is no wonder that the best relationships in Sometimes a Great Notion are founded on a minimum of speaking. Hank explains that he and Joe Ben "didn't really have to talk a whole lot" (170). And suspicion of language is confirmed in Kesey's description of Joe Ben's last day of work. The action is permeated with silence and the vignette is one of the most evocative in the novel. The players are Hank, Joe Ben and Henry:
Few words actually passed between them; they communicated with the unspoken language of labor toward a shared end, becoming more and more an efficient, skilled team as they worked their way across the steep slopes, becoming almost one man, one worker who knew his body and his skill and knew how to use them without waste or overlap (475).

Communication without spoken language is given a certain sanctity in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Language is a fascination in the novel: it is described, examined, manipulated and thrown into confrontation. But it is finally undercut. While language systems are implicitly rated in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and one language system is deemed more worthy than another, no language is really sufficient in *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

In his first novel, Kesey explores conflicts in modes of perception, styles of language and relationships to time. He describes and he judges: one way of perceiving is better than another; one method of communicating is better than another; one system of relating to time is better than another. In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey moves beyond description and evaluation in his treatment of perception and language. And he actualizes the principle of "moving beyond" in his treatment of time as well.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* punctures the surface conflict between clock and anti-clock and between linear and non-linear time to explore the manifold meanings of time itself. The clock as clock—time for time's sake—is dispensed with summarily in the novel. As Lee moves closer to the Oregon setting of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, his watch stops working, his "self-winder" unwinds (84). And Lee's sense of
discomfort and his hankering after "the time" provide the occasion for the explanation that there is "fast time, slow time, daylight time, night time . . ." In this context of subjective, variable time, the hands on the clock are obviously irrelevant.

It is from the knowledge of the irrelevancy of pure mechanical time that the clock can be reintroduced into the novel. While the clock is an object of the absurd when it is revered in and of itself, it is an object of convenience when it stands in relation to the cycles of nature, when it serves as an indicator of what is taking place in the natural world. So the Stampers arise usually at four-thirty a.m. But four-thirty is the chosen hour for waking because it signifies time prior to sunrise. When the sun emerges earlier, so do the Stampers. The four-thirty waking hour, in Sometimes a Great Notion may be compared to the six-thirty waking hour in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

The patients on Miss Ratched's ward are jolted from bed at six-thirty because it is six-thirty. The waking hour is determined arbitrarily by Big Nurse, irrespective of sunrise and therefore irrespective of season.

Sometimes a Great Notion not only establishes the relationship between the clock and the natural phenomena which it indicates, it also concedes that four-thirty a.m. is necessarily interpreted differently by different characters. The hour of four-thirty may have a certain clock-defined constancy, but it is disturbingly early for Lee and not early at all for the other Stampers. In fact, Lee's accustomed sleeping habits raise the possibility that four-thirty may not denote the beginning of a new day at all, but rather the end of an old night.
While the clock is something of power in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, it is only another object to be perceived and reperceived, interpreted and re-interpreted, in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. It is not the clock but the individual that determines pace in the novel. His first day of logging seems long and interminable to Lee, but to the other Stampers the day is of routine length and passes even too quickly, considering the amount of work that must be completed before sunset.

Dates, like hours of the day, have both a personal and natural/cyclical meaning in the novel. Thanksgiving Day is important because it signifies the deadline for the Stampers’ contract with Wakonda Pacific. The first day of winter is notable because, according to the cycles of nature, it heralds the beginning of a season of rainfall. Other days in the novel accrue meaning according to the ways in which they are experienced by each character in turn. The experiential system is non-linear; time is represented through experience and experience is represented through time.

In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey seems to break through the formal limitations that constricted him in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. In his first novel, Kesey is simultaneously in rebellion against, and trapped by, linear progression. In his second novel, he deals with his own contradictions. He stops pointing to perception; rather, using a series of narrative perspectives, he turns the novel itself into a meditation on perception. He stops pointing to various ways of understanding time; rather, penetrating the perceptions of each of his characters, he turns the novel itself into a collage of time sequences.
Kesey controls time greedily in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and he bequeaths control cautiously to each of his narrators. We have seen that each narrator is given the power to present his/her perception of reality. Similarly, each narrator is given the power to present his/her understanding of time. It is because of Kesey's technique of power-sharing that Hallowe'en, for example, loses its relationship to October 30th and November 1st and accumulates a multitude of new relationships instead.

Hallowe'en is experienced by Joe Ben as the day of Hank's fight with Biggie Newton. As such, October 31st is linked to a day, years before, when it was Hank's fate to protect his dignity in another fight—a fight with Tommy Osterhaust, a newcomer to Hank's and Joe Ben's high school (315). This same Hallowe'en is experienced by Hank as the day he must save Lee from his own cowardice and from a troop of local juveniles who would see Lee drown. And so Hank's imagination takes him and the reader to a day in the distant past when he saved a frightened Lee from death in a dung ditch (303). Lee experiences this same Hallowe'en as the day of his intended rendezvous with Viv, and his thoughts carry us back to another Hallowe'en—an October 31st of Lee's youth—recalling his fear and hatred of masks and, no doubt, of witches and goblins (280). These various associations with this Hallowe'en day have contextual and structural significance. October 31st has no single meaning. Its place on the calendar is less important than its role as a trigger to the memories of people who have experienced other fights, other rescues, other fears. As Hallowe'en day follows its course in the novel, we are projected through time and space as
years are tossed around without attention to chronology. Memories are moments that evoke lifetimes.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* rejects linear time in favour of natural, personal, experiential time. Decades may slip by in paragraphs as generations of Stampers are described in a few pages, and moments may consume chapters as moments are multiplied by the number of characters in the novel that live through them. The third person narrator acquaints us with the details of simultaneous experience. We know that while the postman in Boston delivers a card addressed to Lee Stamper (a card composed five pages later by Hank and Joe Ben), Viv is cleaning up after breakfast, Evenwrite is driving the Oregon highway in search of a bar, Draeger is contemplating human nature, and Indian Jenny is sipping "bourbon and snuff" (54). The number of characters included in the listings of simultaneous events increases as the novel progresses. By page 205, the activities of Willard Eggleston and Simone are added to the list and the meaning of the moment is increased by two existences. In the voice of an italicized consciousness, Kesey accounts for his method:

*Time overlaps itself. A breath breathed from a passing breeze is not the whole wind, neither is it just the last of what has passed and the first of what will come, but is more . . . more like a single point plucked on a single strand of a vast spider web of winds, setting the whole scene atingle. That way; it overlaps (191).*

It makes sense that past and present should keep intersecting as they do in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. On his way to Oregon, Lee becomes the child he was, travelling in the opposite direction twelve years earlier,
and "meets himself coming back across twelve years after" (39).

Upstairs in his room, Henry Stamper converses with his youth as "the young Henry . . . [grapples] with the shirtfront of the old Henry" (230).

Sitting in The Snag at the end of the novel, Viv becomes Vivvy, speaking to her childhood self.

Time in Sometimes a Great Notion travels quickly, then slowly; backs up and renews its forward thrust; meets itself in new places. The novel moves like traffic, only devising its own instructions: "CAUTION . . . SLOW . . . STOP . . . RESUME SPEED" (82). Kesey exercises his sense of time structurally by shifting from one character's time warp to another's, by taking giant leaps through time, by infusing simultaneity into his text. His treatment of time shapes the content of the novel and gives it an added dimension of meaning. An implicit parallel is drawn between the nature of reality and the nature of time: both are in perpetual flux. Kesey's characters can live without the reality if each has some conception of a working reality. And they can, perhaps, live without the time if each has some conception of working temporal relationships. Disorientation comes when time is completely lost. In Sometimes a Great Notion, finding the answer to "what time is it?" is less often a matter of deciphering the hour than a matter of ascertaining the year or the decade or one's place in the merciless flux: "The raw materials of reality without that glue of time are materials adrift and reality is as meaningless as the balsa parts of a model airplane scattered to the wind" (157).

The image of the river recurs in the novel as an objective correlative to the movement of time. It constitutes an analogy to the form of the
novel and a metaphor for the flow and the flux, the meaning of the novel. The structure of Sometimes a Great Notion is anything but flat and linear. If we were to conceptually diagram the movement of the novel, we might imagine a river, rising and ebbing and changing its course with the tide. Or we might imagine a whirlpool. Because, on another level of structure, and irrespective of internal time sequence, the novel is patterned as a series of shimmering circles.

The abstract constructs of circles and cycles are involved in many aspects of technique and meaning in Sometimes a Great Notion. The novel itself is organized on a cyclical model, beginning with its ending, ending with its beginning. The concept of the "Hidebehind" and the consequent spinning to confrontation suggest circular movement. Lee's mission in returning to Oregon (twelve years after the twelve years he lived there) to "seek out [his] lost roots" (61), and encounter the sun-stealing shadow of his half-brother, is an attempt to complete a circle. Lee is driven by his own sense that "the past . . . never seems to stay in place as it should" (247). But the novel validates his point: even structurally, the past is never more behind than it is ahead. There is a passage that opens one of the chapters in Sometimes a Great Notion that lends some understanding to the circular, cyclical process:

An echo is an inflexible and pitiless taskmaster; you sing the echo's way because it is damned sure not going to sing yours. And even after you leave . . . you cannot help feeling . . . that any jig you whistle, hymn you hum, or song you sing is somehow immutably tuned to an echo yet unheard, or relentlessly echoing a tune long forgotten (272).
An echo is its own version of a cycle. Once the momentum is started, there is a loss of power—or at least an illusion of loss of power. Lee is locked into the echo of his past. But he is no more and no less a servant to his echo than Hank and Viv are to theirs. Our thoughts return to images and perceptions as we flash on Hank, immovable, and Viv, healer of the sick, tender of the sorry.

One of the crucial cycles that exists in the novel is the cycle of life, death and birth, the cycle of generations. It is the force of generations that has fed the Stamper stamina. Because, like the forest, the Stampers replenished their numbers as quickly as their numbers fell. And so it went—until Viv became the Stamper wife, carrying in her body the sum of the Jonas Stamper, Henry Stamper, Hank Stamper potential.

Viv (who opens and closes the novel, whose very name is a palindrome and a circle) stops the cycle, stops the movement of generations. Throughout Sometimes a Great Notion, Viv is essentially passive. She is plunged into the centre of a fraternal struggle that predates even her own Stamper name; she is fated to be loved by people "who just wanted what they needed [her] to be" (597). But Viv pulls out at the end of the novel and divorces herself from her fate. Her one act before her act of leaving is an anti-act: she has decisively not perpetuated the Stamper line.

Viv's childlessness is not simply assumed in the novel. The fact is not that Viv never became pregnant, but that she became pregnant and the foetus died inside her. Our attention is drawn to her childlessness, to the "hollow of something gone" that she carries around in her
womb (251). Viv's departure at the end of the novel confirms the breach in the Stamper cycle.

The circles and cycles, broken and unbroken, that comprise Sometimes a Great Notion generate a force like a centrifuge. By the end of the novel, each major character has gone to death or to some modicum of existential aloneness. The spinning off that marks the conclusion of Sometimes a Great Notion is reminiscent of the last pages of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest which see each protagonist taking his own path. In Sometimes a Great Notion, the entropy is more explicit. Joe Ben is dead; Henry is dying; Viv is "just going" (598). Hank undertakes to steer the barge down the river, prepared to accept the consequences of the attempt. Lee joins him, not in the name of brotherly love, but to retrieve "the pride [he] had exchanged for pity" (594). Viv decides, "I cannot give myself for them. Not my whole self. I have no right to do that" (597). Everything is lost and everything is won. Each character loses each other character, and each character wins him- or herself. The selfness which each character finds is in the isolation of death or life. But dead or alive, each has dignity. The novel closes mysteriously with an unexpected close-up of Indian Jenny parading some new-found dignity of her own.

Not community (the dashed myth of the union), not family (the compulsion of the Stamper blood), but the individual endures in the end. As there is no reality but that which is perceived, no language but that which is heard, no time but that which is felt, there is no promise but that of human dignity. And so the novel ends as it began, assuring us of nothing but the flow. The image of the river contains
the image of the whirlpool. The novel creates circles and spins them until they give way to centrifuge and centrifuge gives way to entropy, and the flow goes on.

*And the Scenes Gone By and the Scenes to Come flow blending together in the sea-green deep while Now spreads in circles on the surface.*
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Each in its own way, Kesey's novels describe a flow. Recognition of the flow is a function of the understanding that reality is a subjective phenomenon, perceived and experienced differently by every person and perhaps every organism in the universe. In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey represents a flow that is liquid and smooth. The flow that characterizes *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is more viscous and less integral to the novel. Kesey's first work has knowledge of the flow, but articulates that knowledge crudely. That is, the novel is constructed on the premise that if reality is not constant, then discrepancies in perception and experience of reality will give way to open confrontation. *Sometimes a Great Notion* becomes one with the flow which is its subject, and gives expression to the subtle poetics of conflict.

I reconceptualize, recapitulate my sense of the meaning of Kesey's work. I reiterate that the author's use of time in his novels reveals his progression in giving printed life to the existence of the flow. I repeat that the theme of the novels involves the importance of human dignity and the importance of living according to the felt truth of one's private interpretation of reality. I restate that although Kesey's themes are not really new, the thrust of his novels is not really thematic. The impressive quality of his work proceeds from the ways in which meaning
is given through technique and rendered through Kesey's treatment of perception, language and time.

Recapitulation, reiteration, repetition add up, at this point, to redundancy. This is because there are echoes in this paper as there are echoes in Kesey's novels. My thoughts on the books have been stated and restated. If my conclusion were to take the course of a summation, it would be written as a sequence of reverberations: "... no absolute winners and no absolute losers," "... circles and cycles," "... centrifuge and entropy."

What seems more important now than echoes is a further observation of Kesey as novelist. Kesey did say that he would rather be a lightning rod than a seismograph. The development in his writing—the bringing together of meaning and form in his second novel—may be seen as the beginning of an attempt to combine authorial identity with a certain active authenticity. In Sometimes a Great Notion, literature itself becomes a topic. Kesey's approach to literature as subject in his own text is a kind of revelation and an explanation of why he did so little writing after he completed his second novel.

The world of literature, like the world of esoteric language, belongs to Lee Stamper (Leland Stanford Stamper). Lee is the persona through which literature is discussed in the text. As part of Lee's seduction of his brother's wife, he offers her a book of poetry. His tactic is clearly to reach a place in her that is still virginal, a place in her that has not already been pioneered by Hank. Lee speaks at some length about reading and writing in general before making his proposition to Viv—the proposition that she read a book of poetry.
Lee explains his own ambivalence about literature:

When I first discovered . . . other scenes in other times, I thought the discovery so bright and blazing I wanted to read everything ever written about these worlds, in these worlds. Let it teach me, then me teach it to everybody. But the more I read . . . after a while . . . I began to find they were all writing about the same thing, this same dull old here-today-gone-tomorrow scene . . . Shakespeare, Milton, Matthew Arnold, even Baudelaire . . . the same scene for the same reasons and to the same end . . . this same dull old scene . . . This one, the rain, those geese up there with their hard-luck stories . . . this, this same world. They all tried to do something with it . . . They were all driven by the need for something else. But when the drive was over, and the dreaming and the deluding worn out, they all ended up with the same dull old scene (415).

Lee is talking about the relationship between "the scene" (that is, the actual world) and the writing about it, sifted through the imagination. And although he does not know it, he is talking about himself writing letters to Peters, about Draeger writing memoranda to himself, about Kesey writing about books within his book. Lee is talking about the luxury and the folly of recording that scene and dressing it up instead of living it straight out. Moreover, he adds that writers in other times had "an advantage with their scene . . . something we've lost." The "something lost" that Lee is referring to is "a limitless supply of tomorrows to work with." He explains that the "little red button" might be pushed at any time, and he effectively zeroes in on the fear or the paranoia that marked the 1950's and the early 1960's in America--the fear of THE BOMB. The threat is that cycles, which are designated as the only realities that can be known or written about, will be halted, dead-ended in a moment by the push of a button. It is terrifying,
especially in the context of the circular reality that Sometimes a Great Notion asserts, that it is only "pretty likely" that Viv will be up making pancakes and coffee the next morning as she has done every morning for days and years (415). The implication seems to be that the existence of the bomb turns literature into a kind of pastime, something so removed from any reality that it is a denial.

Lee uses poetry as a weapon to conquer Viv. It even works. But Kesey, the creator of the weaponry, becomes the mocker of it. In retrospect, the author has mocked Lee's bookishness throughout the novel. Lee is redeemed only when he puts away his intellectualism and becomes part of a fist-fighting, log-driving struggle. At the moment that Lee courts Viv with poetry, it is clear that there is no justice if the heap of words that belongs to Lee can stand up against the stark world of forest, rain, life and death that belongs to Hank.

Kesey's presence is suggestively invoked when literature is being discussed in the novel. Reading and writing—the activities of fiction—are never elevated within this fictional world. Within the thematic framework of the novel, literature is a self-indulgence. It is almost as if literature were a form of exorcism for the literary and Sometimes a Great Notion is the process of exorcising the seismograph in Kesey.

Ken Kesey's second novel is about the subjective nature of reality. It is also about the living out of many conceivable notions of what reality is. It is about the edge where Hank Stamper lives and about the safe places far from the edge where Lee Stamper has lived. The concept of the edge is important. The Stamper home is a "two-story monument of wood and obstinacy" at the edge of the river (5). Hank
is at peace at the edge of the woods "where the cutting stops and the forest starts" (169). Living on the edge is living unafraid, and being mindful and powerful enough to, at least, feign strength. *Sometimes a Great Notion* ends with each of the Stampers moving toward his/her own perception of his/her own edge, with everyone out there with Hank and everyone out there alone. This is the entropic vision and the vision of living on the edge and living with dignity. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* ends the same way: McMurphy knowingly sacrifices himself to lobotomy; Broom passionately murders McMurphy and goes. Each protagonist in each novel finds the periphery of his/her own being. Kesey completes two novels and joins his characters at the edge, at a place where he sees neither time nor space for writing books. It is enough.
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