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Bromden's Enlightening Perceptions

Through Part One of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, the narrator Chief Bromden brings us his perspective of life within a psychiatric hospital. My understanding of how memory and the present interact has been challenged through Bromden's recalls of being in the ward. Before this reading, I never fully considered how I can often allow my perceptions of people to become altered due to their past. Specifically, how Bromden's perceptions of certain characters are altered as time goes on.

The fat-faced Public Relations man is the one who conducts tours throughout the ward. On page 34, Bromden states "...serious women in blazer jackets, nodding to him as he points out how much things have improved over the years. He points out the TV, the big leather chairs, the sanitary drinking fountains..." Being someone who is not a patient of the ward, the man's words would seem to be trustworthy, as there seems to have been a great difference between the ward before versus the ward in the present. Bromden specifically points out the differences on page 111, "You forget—if you don't sit down and make effort to think back—forget how it was at the old hospital...They didn't have nothing but walls and chairs, confinement jackets it took you hours of hard work to get out of." While this man paints an image for the people to picture in their minds, Bromden understands how ironic this is. It causes him to question and become almost afraid of Nurse Ratchet and others in control of the ward regarding their real intentions with the patients. This is to the point that the only thing that causes him to feel safe is the cloud of fog that he hallucinates.

Therefore, this directed but also challenged me to reflect on the fact that I often assume that people around me are just like that of the Public Relations man. They claim to have themselves and everything in order, but instead, they are misleading others to paint an image of themselves to cause people to believe in something that is not true. Even though my colleagues Aleida and Eliza emphasized that Bromden is not the most reliable narrator during our first fishbowl discussion, his descriptions of his surroundings and what he is feeling continue to have the power to cause us as readers to think deeper about the ways we perceive others. Being born from two teenage parents, I have witnessed them mature as I have grown up. However, even as my parents have grown, I still hold onto the behaviors and actions of their pasts. Sometimes I am guilty of disregarding the work that they put in to change and all I see is attempts to seem like a better parent than the other as they are no longer a couple. This is similar to how Bromden believed those in charge of the ward were painting over what the ward is really like just to appeal to the eye.

Not only that, but Bromden believes the ward is used to create people who conform to authority, and he states this on page 25, calling it the “Combine.” Sometimes we tend to believe that people who surround our lives are simply working to control us and keep us confined. They might be to us what Bromden describes Nurse Ratchet as on pages 25-26, “Practice has studied and strengthened her until now she wields a sure power that extends in all directions on hairlike wires too small for anybody’s eye but mine.” Nurse Ratchet is the head nurse of the ward in which he resides, and he believes she is attempting to control him and the other patients in a variety of ways. This reminded me of what my father described religious leaders to be like in his head, with about two in ten Americans saying that their parents’ or guardians’ religious backgrounds were different from each other, this may be a similar story for many (PRRI). My dad grew up around religion, specifically Catholicism, but never in such a way that his family was committed. He says that he never committed himself because what he saw repeatedly was that every part of religion seemed “fake” and they were all in it for the money, to make them feel better about themselves, or to control the people into being better for the world. So, in that way, we will not

have as many tragedies as we do now in the world. My dad's perception of people under religion was altered based on the actions of a set group of people until I grew up and showed him a different side of what Christians can be. He is now a bit more open to the idea and no longer allows the bad that he saw from some to affect his perception of all.

With that, Bromden's narration caused me to think deeper and challenge myself to examine my mindset in a way that could help me improve it. It is important in our real world to try and understand people before creating assumptions and holding ourselves back from something that may be good for us in the long run.

Works Cited

PRRI. "Family Religious Dynamics and Interfaith Relationships." PRRI, 5 May 2024, <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/family-religious-dynamics-and-interfaith-relationships/#:~:text=Around%20two%20in%20ten%20Americans,were%20different%20from%20each%20other.> Accessed 24 November 2024.