The Tone In Mind (One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest) Essay, Research Paper

The Tone in Mind

The imagination is the reader?s most important tool on the path to enjoying a good book. One can only hinder their enjoyment of the story by disregarding the vivid images created by the mind. Nothing can compare to a landscape so exquisite that it would make a cinematographer jealous, or a prison so cold that you can see the inmates? hot breath. However, some authors offer help for those who are creatively impaired. In One Flew Over the Cuckoo?s Nest, the author, Ken Kesey builds such an effective tone, that the shifts in the attitudes of the characters can be detected.

In the first half of the novel, Kesey uses a wonderful device to show oppression that makes the reader feel as if they themselves are going insane. Bromden describes it best. ?She?s got the fog machine switched on?and the more I think about how nothing can be helped, the faster the fog rolls in,? (Kesey 101). This fog is not literally there, but instead appears when Kesey wants to create an atmosphere that is disparaging. This dark tone is also emphasized through Bromden?s nightmares. In one of the dreams, the hospital turns into a hot industrial factory where the noise of cold, hard, unyielding machinery is almost deafening, (78-82). During the dream, one of the old Chronics, Blastic, is Hung on a hook and sent away into the machines. The strange thing is that he actually does die. Bromden?s dream is actually a metaphor for the quick disposal of those who do not survive the nurse?s treatment. It is as if she does not want any evidence that her patients are not recovering. So, the effect the reader is left with is one representative of how unceremoniously a death is dealt with in the hospital.

Death and despair also come in the form of shock treatments. A patient was usually given a quick, yet mind-blowing zap for unruly behavior. When Bromden observes the outburst of another chronic, he actually thinks that the guy finally just snapped, and is throwing a fit so they?ll give him a fatal shock treatment. While this guy is going out of his mind and attacking the guards, Bromden thinks, ?What makes people so impatient is what I can?t figure; all the guy had to do was wait,? (115). Bromden sees that the ward and the nurse herself will kill him in time. So, he looks upon this behavior with disapproval.. Through Bromden?s hazy attitude, Kesey makes the reader feel the dark cloud of frustration and despair that hangs over the ward.

Fortunately, this doesn?t last too long, for a whole new tone is taken on when McMurphy pledges that he will stop at nothing to crush the nurse?s tyranny. First, it is a tone that often accompanies a heated battle, and it is displayed at it?s height when McMurphy and Miss Ratched face off at the meetings. Almost like a prizefight, the nurse and McMurphy square off while the other patients look on starry-eyed. Of course, the entire audience is rooting for McMurphy. This strained sparring comes to a head when McMurphy holds vote to change the daily schedule in order to watch the World Series. The meeting starts out in the deepest ?fog? to date, but it begins to dissipate for good. Bromden describes McMurphy?s triumph;

?And then off down the slope I see them, other hands coming up out of

the fog. It?s like?that big red hand of McMurphy?s is reaching into the

fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by their hands, dragging

them blinking into the open,? (124).

When Bromden himself raises his hand, and breaks the barrier that his false deafness has put on, the tone is completely changed. He may still play deaf for awhile, but the fact that he thinks about playing deaf and acknowledges that he must keep up the fa?ade, shows that he and the tone have changed.

After this, Kesey puts an almost nostalgic tone on the story. The Acutes, Bromden, and the doctor go on an antic filled fishing trip that makes the group seem as if they did this every weekend, and that insanity had never crossed their minds. On the car ride back, Bromden says of McMurphy, ?His relaxed, good-natured voice dolled out his life for us to live, a rollicking past?for all of us to dream ourselves into,? (218). The men see that they can change and finally go back out into the world that they had been so afraid of. When McMurphy dies at the end, Kesey does not allow his characters to mourn or forget all that they have learned. Instead the story keeps a positive attitude because Kesey is trying to communicate to the reader that life will go on.

So, why does Kesey turn a wonderful exploration into the dank side of the human psyche into a light romp that tries to mask the deeper issues at hand? He does this because it is the inherent behavior of humans to mask their apprehensions, especially of impending doom. Everyone, including the reader knows that McMurphy cannot succeed. Kesey hints at it many times. However, it is natural to pretend that it will all turn out for the best. This is what Kesey truly explores through his tone, among other things, in this novel.

Bibliography

Kesey, Ken. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.