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Fear of Freedom: Erich Fromm and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Maryam Soltan Beyad [1]
Associate professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Iran
Mahshid Mirmasoomi (Corresponding Author) [2]
PhD Candidate of English Language and Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

The pursuit of freedom has constantly been debilitated due to external shackles embodying themselves mainly with the presence of an authority that anesthetizes individuals into voluntary submission. Erich Fromm (1900-80) is the German psychologist who underscores the significance of individual freedom in his book *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and maintains that on the path towards freedom, individuals attempt at unshackling themselves from restrictive forces; however, as they release themselves from the restrictions of an authority and refuse to yield to its demands, individuals are left with feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. As a result, they try to compensate for the feeling of insecurity by either submitting themselves to another authority figure or becoming authority figures themselves. Within the paper, Fromm's concept of freedom is elaborated upon and applied to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). The paper discusses the two major concepts of "freedom from" and "freedom to" known as "negative freedom" and "positive freedom" and demonstrates the possibility of finding a getaway from a negative sense of freedom by investing mankind with the power of love and communication. Real freedom is not a release from external constraints but mainly a release from internal forces.

Keywords

Authority; Erich Fromm; Freedom from; Freedom to; Submission.

1. Introduction

Freedom has been regarded as an unattainable yet extremely precious goal throughout the history of mankind. As mankind released himself from the yoke of servitude, restrictive traditions, societal norms and religious conventions, he assumed that he could attain happiness and find the path towards freedom. He gained victory over all these restrictive forces and proved himself as an independent self-assertive being that could transcend all boundaries. Notions such as democracy, freedom of speech, and free religious thinking are the fruits

[1] msbeyad@ut.ac.ir
[2] mahshid.masoomi@alumni.ut.ac.ir

of mankind's struggles against subjugation. In his determined attempts to achieve freedom, he also made great technological advancements, transcended the boundaries of science, and provided himself with a prosperous secure life.

Whether freedom is merely the removal of all restrictions and whether modern man gained what he desired are open to debate. Many critics and philosophers addressed this critical concept and set out to acquire an in-depth understanding of the concept of freedom. It could be asserted that, men are free by nature, but left to their own devices, they will inevitably enslave each other. Unlike the natural man who marches towards felicity and freedom, the civilized man marches towards inequality and oppression (Shklar 154). Despite all the achievements of civilization which provided individuals with temporary satisfaction, modern man is psychologically and mentally dissatisfied. In fact, civilization as the greatest achievement of mankind is also the main cause of his unhappiness. Thus "what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we would be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions" (Freud 33). The following section of the paper aims at giving an insight into Erich Fromm's theory of freedom at the core of which lies the concepts of "freedom from" and "freedom to", or as Fromm put it, "negative freedom" and "positive freedom". The remaining sections are dedicated to the application of Fromm's theory to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962).

2. Erich Fromm's Concept of Freedom

Erich Seligmann Fromm was an eminent psychoanalyst and social psychologist whose ideas concerning individual freedom are of utmost significance both in the realm of psychology and politics. Fromm observed that the godlike image of the modern man as emerged with the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution invested him with the absolute power he has never gained previously. He affirmed that "[t]he Great Promise of Unlimited Progress- the promise of domination of nature, of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, of unlimited personal freedom has sustained the hopes of the generation since the beginning of the industrial age" (Fromm *To Have* 1). However, according to Fromm, such progress left mankind not only desperate and insecure but inherently unhappy and un-free.

Fromm compared the progress of modern man to the story of Adam and Eve who took the first step towards freedom through an act of disobedience. By defying authority, man lost his oneness with nature and brought disharmony while paving the way for progress under the new faculty of reason. Expelled from paradise and ashamed of his nakedness and misstep, man felt insecure and powerless. He was free, yet powerless; "the newly won freedom appears as a

curse; he is free from the sweet bondage of paradise, but he is not free to govern himself and realize his individuality" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 28). It could be asserted that "man's evolution is based on the fact that he has lost his original home" (his own source of security) to which he can never return again (Fromm *The Sane Society* 31).

Fromm maintained that the same process occurs in the growth of a child, which is called "individuation". A child delights in the feeling of oneness with his mother before his birth, and for a short period after his birth. According to Fromm, in this pre-individualistic stage, the child establishes "primary ties" with his mother. He feels secure but grows heavily dependent on the mother while denying any chance for the development of his individuality. Fromm added that "[t]he primary ties not only connect the child with its mother, but the member of a primitive community with his clan and nature, or the medieval man with the church and his social caste" (*Fear of Freedom* 20). These bonds not only impede a person's progress and development of faculties but also deprive him of his freedom and autonomy.

As these "primary ties" become tenuous, the child has the opportunity to develop his faculties and unlock his potentialities. In fact, "[t]he more the child grows and to the extent to which primary ties are cut off, the more it develops a quest for freedom and independence" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 23). However, as the process of "individuation" proceeds and the child's new-found freedom flowers, his feeling of loneliness and anxiety increases. He feels shattered while observing himself as an entity separated from his mother and is terrified of progressing any further. The magnitude of such feeling of insecurity is so considerable that it can haunt mankind for the rest of his life:

> The growth of individuality and freedom is accompanied by a feeling of isolation and anxiety that can disturb mankind for the rest of his life. Losing the close contact he once had with social, religious, and political institutions which gave him security and assurance, man feels petrified and desperate in his new independent position. (Beyad and Mirmasoomi 433)

Fromm discussed the two concepts of "freedom from" and "freedom to" in the progress of humans. Freedom from is attained as human being unchains himself of all the fetters (i.e. his primary bonds) that confine him and impede his advancement. Defying religious and societal conventions while making scientific and technological advances assisted man in dominating nature. Though these emancipatory forces appear positive, Fromm regarded them as mere "substitutes for a truly individual sense of identity" (*The Sane Society* 63). Fromm deemed such freedom negative as it imbued man's life with anxiety and aloneness:

> Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total.... Man has created a world of man-made things as it never existed before. He has constructed a complicated social machine to administer the technical machine he built. The more powerful and gigantic the forces are which he unleashes, the more powerless he feels himself as a human being. He is owned by his creations, and has lost ownership of himself. (Fromm, *The Sane Society* 115)

At this point, the master feels powerless before his own creation and "the newly gained freedom becomes a burden", a "yoke" from which mankind tries to escape. He cannot go on "bearing the burden of "freedom from"; he must try to "escape from freedom altogether unless he can progress from negative to positive freedom" (Fromm, *Fear of Freedom* 116). As Fromm mentioned, "[w]e have to gain a new kind of freedom, one which enables us to realize our own individual self; to have faith in this self and in life" (*Fear of Freedom* 91). The insecure, un-free, and unhappy modern man "finds himself 'free' in the negative sense, that is, alone with his self and confronting an alienated, hostile world" (Fromm, *Fear of Freedom* 130); as Fromm contended, "[f]ree man is by necessity insecure" (*The Sane Society* 174).

An individual is confronted with two paths in order to liberate himself from feelings of insecurity and loneliness. The first solution to overcome negative freedom is to socialize with people while appreciating the sense of love and life and consequently find the path towards the recognition of potentialities and establishment of identity. The other solution is to "fall back, to give up his freedom, and to try to overcome aloneness by eliminating the gap between his individual self and the world" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 120). Like a child who desires to go back to the haven of a mother's womb, mankind also attempts to return to the state before he achieved "freedom from". According to Fromm, "such a retreat is not possible since primary bonds once severed cannot be mended; once paradise is lost, man cannot return to it" (*Fear of Freedom* 29). Escaping from negative freedom could not assuage the feeling of insecurity and could result in a lifelong confinement since "this course of escape like every escape from threatening panic is also characterized by the more or less complete surrender of individuality and the integrity of the self" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 121).

A person who surrenders his individuality to safeguard his sense of security encounters two paths of escape, namely, "mechanisms of escape". Like a child who has lost the primary bonds, the free yet insecure person escapes negative freedom by resorting to the two mechanism termed "sadism" and "masochism". Sadomasochistic relationships are marked with what Fromm called "symbiosis", "where the individual attempts to establish a union with the world or with

another self so as to make himself dependent and forget the burden of his own self" (Fromm *The Sane Society* 36).

An individual who demonstrates proclivity towards masochism escapes from negative freedom by adhering to a source of power which invests him with security and safety he lacked previously. This person "abandons his individuality by submitting himself to an authority. The aim is to dissolve in (another's power) and to fine pleasure and satisfaction within his surrender" (Fromm, qtd. in Funk 119). Rather than basing their lives on their own decisions, they become dependent on extraneous forces and regard themselves as nonentities; "[t]his sense of insignificance helps the individual forget his feelings of loneliness and separation as an independent entity, and saves him from the shackles of negative freedom by relegating him to nothingness" (Beyad and Mirmasoomi 434).

While the person with masochistic strivings desires submission, the sadist craves supremacy and domination. Such a person wishes to dominate people not only physically but also mentally and emotionally. While reveling in the suffering of others, the sadist "seeks to destroy the will of another, makes him a defenseless and will-less instrument of his own will, dominates him absolutely, and in extreme cases forces him to suffer " (Fromm, qtd. in Funk 119). Sadistic tendencies "are usually less conscious and more rationalized than the socially more harmless masochistic trends. Often they are entirely covered up by reaction formations of over-goodness or over-concern for others" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 124). For instance, parents who dominate their children justify such acts by claims of love or concerns which could be called, "loving sadism".

As it is observed, Sadomasochistic relationships cannot lead to positive freedom or "freedom to"; such freedom is won when a person connects himself with other people and the universe while enjoying the feeling of love, care, and comradeship; as Fromm observed, "[l]ove is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence" (*Art of Loving* 104). By relating himself to his surroundings through love, man can overcome his feeling of loneliness and insecurity, prevent future neurotic breakdowns, and ultimately construct his distinct identity.

Depriving oneself of establishing physical and emotional relationships with one's fellows could result in various disorders. However, "moral aloneness" is more deleterious than "physical aloneness". Socializing with people emotionally while sharing their values and symbols, could establish mankind's sense of identity and freedom. This "lack of relatedness to values, symbols, and patterns" which we may call moral aloneness is as unbearable as the physical aloneness; "or rather that physical aloneness becomes unbearable only if it implies also

moral aloneness" as well (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 15). According to Fromm, love is the only path towards positive freedom; "the affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love, i.e., in care, respect, responsibility and knowledge" (Fromm, *Art of Loving* 47). The art of living requires daily practice and the use of one's inner life force. This art is to be discovered, both within oneself and in interaction with reality.

3. Discussion: An Analysis of Erich Fromm's Concept of Freedom in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, a 1962 novel written by Ken Kesey, portrays characters who are struggling to extricate themselves from the prison of a psychiatric hospital.The inmates desperately attempt to achieve a sense of identity to regain the liberty that has long eluded them. The hospital is controlled by the authority figure, Nurse Ratched (also called the Big Nurse) who cannot tolerate any missteps or disobedience and has cowed the patients into submission and conformity. However, as McMurphy appears, the tables are turned; with an indomitable spirit, he rises in rebellion and defies the authority of the Nurse; furthermore, he assists the inmates in regaining their long-forgotten sense of freedom.

Much to MacMurphy's consternation, most of the patients in the hospital are committed not sentenced and have been undergoing treatment in the ward voluntarily. They seem to enjoy their time in the ward playing cards, listening to music, and attending therapeutic sessions to improve their health. Feeling safe and secure in the nest of the hospital like cuckoo birds, the inmates are oblivious to the fact that by committing themselves to the authority of the ward, they have lost their real sense of identity. In fact, "[t]he great majority of them are there voluntarily, since they do not have the guts to be outside" (Martin 10).

Having lost contact with their primary bonds which gave them security, the inmates no longer feel the safety they enjoyed previously. Powerless and insecure, they seek refuge in the secondary bonds of the hospital, totally unaware that these new illusory ties will not enhance their mental health. Due to this feeling of insecurity, the inmates attempt to establish symbiotic relationships with a source of authority so as to compensate for their lack of security. However, the more they indulge themselves in the safety of the hospital, the more they realize that this short-lived feeling of safety is gained at the cost of losing their true selves.

In the ward, the Acutes are regarded as patients who still have a chance of improvement. Billy Bibbit is one of the Acutes who has totally lost his sense of identity under the emasculating figure of his mother. He is a nervous boy who can barely speak without stuttering and has a vulnerable personality shattered

under the constant pressure from both his mother and the Big Nurse. According to Fromm, "[t]he child remains functionally one with its mother for a considerable period after birth and to the degree to which the individual, figuratively speaking, has not yet completely severed the umbilical cord which fastens him to the outside world, he lacks freedom" (*Fear of Freedom* 20). These bonds restrict individual freedom but grant him the feeling of security he desires.

This is directly applicable to Billy's situation. Having lost his primary bonds that provided him with security, he is in pursuit of a haven to regain his security and remove his sense of powerlessness. As a result, he turns to his first source of security, i.e. his mother. However, the primary bonds once cut, cannot be restored and the person cannot return to the period during which he was safe next to his mother. Consequently, Billy assumes a submissive character, develops masochistic tendencies, and reduces himself to a nonentity under the rule of his overbearing mother. Individuals with masochistic strivings, such as Billy, "tend not to assert themselves, not to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces" (Fromm *Fear of Freedom* 122). Billy's mother not only fails to play the role of a savior for him but also "denies him the chance to become a man" (Martin 4). She constantly treats him as a child and never allows him to develop an authentic identity. As Fromm maintained, "[t]he realization of the submissive (masochistic) or the domineering (sadistic) passion never leads to satisfaction ... the ultimate result of these passions is defeat.... while these passions aim at the establishment of a sense of union, they destroy the sense of integrity" (*The Sane Society* 36). Instead of developing his own identity, the sadomasochist becomes dependent on those to whom he submits, or whom he dominates. At the end of the day, what Billy gains is the apparent love of an overbearing mother who never lets him grow mentally. For Billy, there exists no feeling of safety, since the safety which is ensured at the expense of losing his self is mere anxiety and powerlessness.

While Billy develops masochistic strivings, his mother demonstrates sadistic strivings to compensate for her feeling of loneliness. Billy's mother acts like a person with sadistic tendencies, who attempts to belittle others and subjugate them in every possible way. She becomes an authority figure for his son and dominates him entirely. As a close friend of the Big Nurse, she is also informed of the slightest mistake Billy commits. As she extends her control over Billy, his existence becomes conducive to her feeling of security as well. She needs her son to feel safe as Billy needs her love to remain secure. As the masochist Billy needs his mother's love, his sadist mother needs his son so as to feel powerful. As Fromm held:

> The sadistic person is as dependent on the submissive person as the latter is on the former; neither can live without the other. The difference is only that the sadistic person commands, exploits, hurts, humiliates, and that the masochistic person is commanded, exploited, hurt, humiliated. The difference is not so great as that which they both have in common: fusion without integrity. (*Art of Loving* 16)

When Billy talks about getting married and reminds his mother of him being thirty, she reproaches him by saying: "Sweetheart, do I look like the mother of a middle-aged man?" (Kesey 295). Being closely attached to his son to feel safe, young, and powerful, she is unaware of how detrimental her treatment is to Billy's health. After the fiasco of the party in the ward, the Big Nurse threatens Billy that she will inform his mother of his scandalous affair with a whore (Candy). Upon hearing the Nurse's threatening words, He feels panicked to be abandoned by his mother and thus commits suicide by cutting his throat. As Fromm contended, "[t]he phantasy of suicide is the last hope if all other means have not succeeded in bringing relief from the burden of aloneness" (*Escape from Freedom* 153). The feeling of powerlessness sometimes becomes so unbearable that the individual finds no other way than the destruction of the self to remove the source of anxiety.

The most complicated character of the novel is perhaps Chief Bromden. Being half-American Native American and thus belonging to ethnic minorities, Chief has undergone extreme marginalization leading to the shattering of his identity. Part of Bromden's weak self-concept is rooted in the fact that he has grown up "in a sub-culture that is in its final stages of socio cultural disintegration" (Ware 95). As a child, "he was treated as "invisible" by the federal agents who wanted Chief's tribal land" (Madden 116). As Chief describes:

> I lay in bed the night before the fishing trip and thought it over, about my being deaf, about the years of not letting on I heard what was said, and I wondered if I could ever act any other way again. But I remembered one thing: it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all. (Kesey 209-10)

He confesses that people always "look at me like I'm some kind of bug" or when they "see right through me like I wasn't there" (Kesey 126-51). He was disowned by the white society who regarded him as a nonentity; he has become "literally deaf and dumb to the world because the world has treated him as if he could not speak and could not hear" (Martin 8). In fact, "Bromden's bizarre behavior is a survival strategy that, like all behavior labeled schizophrenia, is invented in order to endure an intolerable situation" (Baurecht 86). In order to survive in a world cruel to him, he has to live as if he does not exist.

Bromden also suffered from a traumatic experience which resulted in his ultimate emotional breakdown and hospitalization since then. "At Anzio, Broom

as a warrior who was compelled to listen to the death screams of another warrior who was tied to a tree in the blazing sun, but Broom was absolutely helpless because to attempt rescue was suicidal" (Baurecht 88). Due to his moral failure to help the soldier, he was racked with a sense of guilt haunting him throughout his life. He escaped from the predicament to the fog that was created by the enemy. He describes the fogging procedure as such: "I know how they work it, the fog machine. ... Whenever intelligence figured there might be a bombing attack, or if the generals had something secret they wanted to pull—out of sight, hid so good that even the spies on the base couldn't see what went on— they fogged the field" (Kesey 130). Bromden seeks sanctuary in the thick fog to feel secure from all the anxieties and tension of the war. The fog as a façade or mask which gives him protection has a history in the Chief's childhood as well. As a child, while he was talking with a girl in the cotton field, the fog appeared all of a sudden:

> We talked a piece about football and I noticed how her face looked blurred, like there was a mist between me and her. It was the cotton fluff sifting from the air. We were locked together this way for maybe a couple of seconds; then the sound of the mill jumped a hitch, and something commenced to draw her back away from me. ... Her fingernails peeled down my hands and as soon as she broke contact with me her face switched out of focus again, became soft and runny like melting chocolate behind that blowing fog of cotton. (Kesey 39)

In the hospital too, he assumes that the fog appears whenever the Nurse enters or the Nurse creates the fog whenever she desires. "Whenever the Big Nurse seems in indisputable control, the fog machine churns out its mist, scary, safe, and scary again" (Martin 6). Therefore, once more, he seeks refuge in the thickness of the fog as he says, "I'm glad when it gets thick enough you're lost in it and can let go, and be safe again" (Kesey 113). Chief is cognizant of the fact that despite its giving a feeling of safety from the traumatic events of his life, the fog makes him feel desperately alone since it isolates him from other patients. He recalls that in the fog "you felt like you were out on that airfield all by yourself. You were safe from the enemy, but you were awfully alone" (Kesey 130). He finds "the alienation of the fog more frightening than the hostile environment of Big Nurse's ward. In avoiding the outside world and retreating into the fog, the Chief comes up against the terrifying sense of being alone without identity" (Madden 114). Distancing himself from the community of people gradually leads to the destruction of Chief's character.

What Fromm maintained about the formation of secondary bonds as a result of the loss of primary bonds could be applied to the Chief's predicament which has little resemblance to other patients. Unlike Billy who still attempts to save his broken primary bonds with his mother, Chief has no such sense towards his

parents. His father was the chief of a tribe who was under the complete surveillance of his white wife who persuaded him to surrender the Indians' land to the white for the construction of a dam. In fact, "Broom's father was weakened and gradually destroyed by the intransigence of the society's racism. Consequently, he failed not only his people as their chief but also, and as importantly, his son in his collapse as protector and spiritual guide" (Baurech 89). Chief's father took his white wife's name instead of keeping his own and got weaker and weaker under pressure and ultimately succumbed. These events had a devastating impact on Chief's character as he witnessed what became of his Native American father under white supremacy. Chief tells McMurphy that "[i]t wasn't just her that made him little. Everybody worked on him because he was big, and wouldn't give in, and did like he pleased. Everybody worked on him just the way they're working on you" (Kesey 220). His father continued to shrink as his mother got bigger; he got emasculated and ultimately surrendered his individuality.

As a child, when Bromden observed his father's degradation, he gradually grew up with a shattered personality which got battered in every possible way. On one hand, he was raised by a mother who denied him his real origin and by a father who was too weak to help him find his real identity; on the other hand, as a Native American, he was discriminated against by the white leading to the double disintegration of his self. "Rather than a participant in two cultures, Bromden as a half breed, becomes an outsider to both. He can no longer admire his Indian father and becomes estranged from his mother" (Ware 97) who insists, "[w]e ain't Indians. We're civilized and you remember it" (Kesey 284). Therefore, Chief Bromden, "that Vanishing American as Kesey calls him, must rediscover not only his legacy as a Native American, but the very roots of his shattered manhood" (Waxler 226). He seeks sanctuary from all these anxieties in the fog, the only place he feels safe.

Unlike others who demonstrate sadistic or masochistic tendencies to release themselves from their powerlessness, Chief turns inward. He "repeatedly creates his own womb when he withdraws into his fog" (Baurecht 81). He prefers to be deaf and dumb and withdraw from the outside world to create a haven in the fog. His symbiotic relationship is not with his mother as Billy's, or with the Big Nurse's authoritative character as other patients'; it is rather with a world unknown to others, with a refuge he is only aware of; a haven where he can disappear in order to rid himself of the burden of his self. "The fog preserves his sense of integrity"(Baurecht 88) while creating a sense of guilt in Bromden for breaking with the real world.

The head nurse of the psychiatric hospital is the domineering and vigilant Nurse Ratched, with a "smooth", "calculated" and "precision-made" face (Kesey 5), who exercises her force upon the patients to help them recover their sanity. She depicts what all patients regard as the features of a powerful authority. "Most critics have noted her name, Ratched as recalling ratchet to connect her as obviously as possible to a machinic nature" (Géfin 97) without emotion or sense of guilt. As a powerful emasculating woman, she imposes her sadistic strivings upon the patients and subjugates them in every possible way. Kesey portrays "the psychiatrists and residents as patsies of Big Nurse; he portrays her as a powermaniac running a small machine within that big machine, Society (the 'Combine')" (Sullivan 15). As a representative of the Establishment, Kesey gives the readers a vivid description of how she is:

> The Big Nurse tends to get real put out if something keeps her outfit from running like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine. The slightest thing messy or out of kilter or in the way ties her into a little white knot of tight-smiled fury. She walks around with that same doll smile crimped between her chin and her nose and that same calm whir coming from her eyes, but down inside of her she's tense as steel. (28)

Kesey adds (through the words of the Chief) that "she blows up bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor pulling too big a load" (5).

Based on her sadistic tendencies, the Nurse develops a symbiotic relationship with patients in the ward, who feel too powerless to have wills of their own. The insecure patients act like puppets under the hand of their puppeteer who has dominated them overwhelmingly. She needs her patients to feel secure and powerful as the patients need her vigilant protection and supposed love. Under a veneer of protection, the Nurse satisfies her own sadistic inclinations to which the patients respond with obedience and affection. Along with commanding the inmates and exerting her will, she manipulates the inmates to achieve what she desires. She maneuvers Billy to be her informant to divulge the secrets of the ward and inmates to her. It is the Nurse who ultimately triggers his suicidal attempt through the creation of the sense of guilt. As a result of her manipulation, Billy becomes guilt-ridden, is unable to go on, and ultimately gives ups on his life. In Nurse Ratched's treatment of Billy, there happens what is called, "internal unhappiness"; that is, "a threatened external unhappiness - loss of love and punishment on the part of the external authority which has been exchanged for a permanent internal unhappiness, for the tension of the sense of guilt" (Freud qtd. in Hughes 55). While threatening Billy to inform his mother of his affair, the Nurse places Billy in a dilemma of choosing between her own protection and the love of his mother (which has brought security and apparent happiness for Billy)

and his internal happiness and freedom (which are to be achieved by rising against the Nurse and his mother's authorities).

According to Fromm, both sadistic and masochistic strivings are rooted in an individual's helplessness and anxiety, and for the Big Nurse too, there must exist such a sense of powerlessness. As a woman, she seems emotionless, indifferent, and too relentless to let a patient commit a mistake with impunity. This relentlessness makes the reader ponder what might exist behind her mask of cruelty. Perhaps, like Chief or Billy who have undergone acute identity crisis as a result of exposure to several cruelties and misjudgments, she has suffered similar agonies as well. "Feminist critics have tended to downplay the menacing aspects of Miss Ratched; in Elizabeth McMahon's estimation, the Big Nurse happens to be the Big Victim when viewed with an awareness of the social and economic exploitation of women" (qtd. in Ge'fin 96). Upon Billy's suicide, McMurphy attacks and strangles her to death only to reveal her "warm and pink" (Kesey 319) body that contradicts her role as a robot. In fact, "far more grievously than her womanhood, in her symbolic public rape, it is her humanity that is violated and destroyed- the humanity that attempted to preserve itself by refusing the role her breasts, in accordance with society's dominant male expectations, would automatically have condemned her to play" (Ge'fin 100). By attacking her, McMurphy not only violates her womanhood but also her feminine identity.

She was once an army nurse who, like the Chief, must have experienced the trauma of war. However, in her current situation, she disguises her womanhood under the façade of an authoritative figure to feel powerful and young again. Harding, one of the inmates, tells McMurphy that "her face is quite handsome and well preserved. And in spite of all her attempts to conceal them, you can still make out the evidence of some rather extraordinary breasts; she must have been a rather beautiful young woman" (Kesey 71). These predicaments rendered her a powerless and lonely woman and led to her victimization; she is both the victim of a patriarchal society and war. Significantly, as the head nurse of the institution, besides dominating others, she must have her own authorities or rather Big Doctors who impose their sadistic tendencies upon her as well.

The scene turns upside down as Randle Patrick McMurphy enters the ward. Being transferred from a prison to the ward, McMurphy assumes he has extricated himself from compulsory prison work farm and can spend his time relaxing and gambling in the hospital. As a rebellious figure who has previously defied authorities, he confronts the restrictive rule of the Nurse in the ward. Upon his entrance, his alive, rebellious, and reckless character stands in sharp contrast to the meek and subservient characters of the inmates. When McMurphy

"swaggers into the cuckoo's nest, brash, boisterous, with heels ringing off the floor "like horseshoes," he commands the full attention of a world held crazily together in the name of adjustment by weakness, fear, and emasculating authority" (Martin 3); as Chief Bromden says, he is really 'Big'.

He seems to be connected to an unknown source of power as he firmly stands on his own feet. Unlike the obedient patients who seek refuge in the authority of the Nurse, McMurphy acts of his own volition and feels secure. He has no sadistic or masochistic ties with an outside force, and to the patients' amazement, he articulates his sense of self so outspokenly. He verbalizes his feeling and emotion in public with no fear of being chastised by the Nurse. He laughs out loud, sings, and narrates his life stories. Upon his entrance, he observes that the inmates "are even scared to open up and laugh"; He says, "You know, that's the first thing that got me about this place, that there wasn't anybody laughing. I haven't heard a real laugh since I came through that door (Kesey 70); According ti him, if you lose your laugh, you lose your 'footing'.

As it is observed, "[h]is example evokes the choked off manhood of the men on the ward and a sense of freedom they have forgotten, or not known" (Martin 8). Unlike the patients who have failed to find an outlet for the expression of their feelings, McMurphy has found a way out of his predicaments by appreciating life, love, friendship, comradeship, and a sense of community. He is not flawless; like other patients, McMurphy has undergone numerous ordeals in his life; charged with gambling, battery, and statutory rape and is as lonely and insecure as other patients. However, he has learned to liberate himself from predicaments by socializing with people and sharing his feelings with them. He helps the patients appreciate the community they can get involved in; In an interview in the *Rolling Stone* (March 7, 1970), Kesey remarked: "We don't want a commune, we want a community" (qtd. in Martin 11). McMurphy organizes a basketball team in the ward, takes the inmates on a fishing trip, throws a party, and imbues them with a sense of freedom they have never experienced previously.

Throughout the novel McMurphy undergoes transformation along with patients. On the path to help the patients find their true selves, McMurphy enhances his own self-concept. He is fully aware that "the protective 'cartoon world' of his incomplete individualist persona must be transformed if he is to enter the multidimensional human community" (Larson 102). In the beginning of the novel he has not yet developed his full sense of self, but his self-assertiveness and sense of comradeship help him thoroughly construct his identity. "By turns irresponsible and well-meaning, selfishly predatory and kind-hearted, he undergoes something of a moral education and transformation

as the novel progresses" (Jennings 17). Despite having flaws like the other patients, McMurphy never stops caring for the patients.

Rather than being committed to the hospital and its authorities, he is committed to patients. His very existence leads to improvement of the inmates' health. "McMurphy's therapy for the inmates consists as much of talk as of action; he teaches them to replace an imposed identity with an imagined identity of their own creation" (Fick 139). He helps them become real men and not to remain the rabbits they were. He assists Billy in reconstructing the image of his self in order to recover his identity as a man not as a helpless unmarried boy under the control of his mother. McMurphy lets Billy prove his lost manhood, even for a short time, when he enjoys the company of Candy. With the presence of McMurphy in the ward, Billy forgets his stuttering and feels rejuvenated.

As a friend, McMurphy listens to Chief as he unburdens his heart for McMurphy. "He conquers Bromden's fifteen years of silence. Bromden's mask is lowered as he says "thank you", when McMurphy gives him gum. Brotherhood is what Broom most desperately needs to feel" (Baurecht 85) and McMurphy grants him that unselfishly. Due to his attempts, Bromden realizes he must start to communicate with others in order to extricate himself from his predicament. He discovers that "he must venture out of the fog to name his experience in the existentially open territory of dialogue" (Larson 100). Chief describes McMurphy's attempts as such: "He keeps trying to drag us out of the fog, out in the open where we'd be easy to get at" (Kesey 128). The place where Chief and inmates are "easy to get at", is the community which is revived with McMurphy's presence. Bromden's ultimate escape from the ward could be the best emblem of McMurphy's victory. In the end, Chief begins his own course of freedom by escaping to Canada and defying the Nurse's authority and oppressiveness. McMurphy takes the inmates out of the hidden place or using Fromm's terms, their "hidden sanctuary, where they reduced themselves to nothingness" (*Fear of Freedom* 63) so as not to feel desperate.

Unlike the Nurse, McMurphy's vitality originates from his sense of love, selflessness, and spirit of comradeship which according to Fromm are the prime incentives for liberation and happiness (*Art of Loving* 98). The Nurse's superficial affection for patients stems from her sadistic tendencies while McMurphy's love is real not a pseudo-love. Fromm argued that while the sadist or masochist has irrational faith in the person whom he dominates or submits to, a lively person has rational faith; he maintained that, the faith we have in "ourselves and the potentialities of others requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment" (*Art of Loving* 97-98). It is McMurphy's effrontery and his faith in Chief, Billy, and other inmates

which help them transform the weak and tarnished images they created of themselves in order to resuscitate their true selves. "Nobly, altruistically, McMurphy sets out singlehandedly to rescue his ward mates from oppressive, regimented civilization- the world inside the hospital. Outside is freedom; outside, therefore, they must go, figuratively or literally" (Barsness 28-29); and there you find your true selves.

For Fromm, "freedom to" is not merely liberation from external shackles; freedom is to be achieved by "generating a source of love" (*To Have* 44) within to protect ourselves from negative forces without. It is mainly freedom within, that is, spiritual freedom. In the end, the real prisoner who is confined is the Nurse not the inmates. By helping the inmates reconstruct their images of themselves and their surroundings, and by letting them see their individuality and manhood, McMurphy frees the inmates spiritually so that "the ward itself becomes the outside" (Barsness 29) and the patients become the sanest and freest.

4. Conclusion

Under Fromm's theory of freedom, the paper demonstrated how a true sense of self could be achieved by escaping from "negative freedom" towards "positive freedom". As Fromm contended the sense of love and comradeship is the decisive factor in rescuing individuals from their negative sense of freedom and guiding them towards positive freedom; a get away from "freedom from" to "freedom to". Symbiotic relationships (Masochism and sadism) are inert relations which do not result the individual's growth of self and freedom. The only path to freedom is love; "in contrast to symbiotic union, mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality" (Fromm *Art of Loving* 16). Human beings cannot be freed from the sense of powerlessness by submitting themselves to an authority or dominating others; they can escape this negative sense, only by socializing with others through love. As Fromm held, love has a "productive character" and reveals itself mainly through the act of "giving" rather than "receiving". In giving the individual shows aliveness and zeal for life. In love, "a person gives of his life, he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness" (*Art of Loving* 19) and of everything which is animate in him.

Despite being a flawed character, McMurphy shares his liveliness with other inmates, laughs with them, empathizes with them, and helps them see the sense of love and comradeship to which they were previously oblivious. Owing to his assistance, "[t]he inmates have spun their own kind of web, beaming commands which, though charged with love, work contrary to a consistently dramatized sense of radical individuality, of power in difference" (Fick 145). Fromm

maintained that "in giving an individual cannot help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life reflects back to him" (*Art of Loving* 19-20). McMurphy gives of his life and sacrifices himself; by rebelling against the Big Nurse to avenge Billy's death, he ultimately causes his own death. After his final act of giving and his last attack on the Nurse, McMurphy reveals her weakness in front of the patients only to undergo lobotomy which paralyzes him and turns him into a mere "body" on the bed. His "death is a direct consequence of his successful efforts to establish a community of men" (Fick 144) which Fromm considered as the main route to freedom.

In return, McMurphy receives the love of patients; they put in his footsteps and follow the same path to freedom. In the end, Sefelt, Fredrickson, and three other Acutes leave the hospital, six inmates are transferred to another ward, and the doctor of the ward resigns. Only Chief, Martini, and Scanlon are left. Observing McMurphy in a vegetative state, Chief strangles him to death and escapes; since for Chief, living without having free will is nothing but death. However, with McMurphy's death, a new life blossoms for the inmates. His indomitable spirit is now inherited by his fellow inmates. "His legacy is to be found as much in Harding's effort to make his thin voice 'sound like McMurphy's auctioneer bellow' as in the Chief's successful attempt to throw a control panel through the asylum's barred window and escape" (Fick 142).

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