



## One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)

Directed by Milos Forman

### Cast

- Jack Nicholson as *R.P. McMurphy*
- Will Sampson as *Chief Bromden*
- Louise Fletcher as *Nurse Ratched*
- Brad Dourif as *Billy Bibbit*
- William Redfield as *Harding*
- Sydney Lassick as *Cheswick*
- Danny DeVito as *Martini*

### Drama, Fiction

**Rated R** for violence, sexual content, alcohol, drugs, and profanity.

**134 minutes**

## Caution: Not All Made it to the Big Screen



By: Lauren Carr

The transition of a piece of literature into a film is always a challenge and Milo Forman welcomed that challenge when it came to Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It's the same story with the same plot, but projected onto a screen for the world's entertainment. Although Forman's interpretation of the book into the film resulted in the disappearance of the important perspectives and character defining moments of what patients' lives in the Combine were like after Randle McMurphy flipped their world upside down with his manipulation tactics and his desire for personal gain, Forman established a film that sent audiences into the Ken Kesey's character's lives in the institution.

If there's one thing that Milo Forman and his film deserve it's: **praise**.

Praise for casting choices. Praise for the set design. Praise for music choices throughout the film.

The actor choices are key when it comes to making any movie and Forman's decision of Jack Nicholson portraying Randle P. McMurphy was what put the stamp of "have to watch" on this film. Jack Nicholson is the perfect fit for McMurphy due to his work in Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* where he plays a character who slowly loses his sanity. However it wasn't just Nicholson's past experience that made him the right man for the job, it was his impression of Randle McMurphy's signature laugh. Having Nicholson create the perfect impression of McMurphy's laugh was key because the sound of McMurphy laughing was his introduction to

the Combine and “the first laugh [the patients] heard in years” (Kesey, 12). That’s just what Nicholson did. His laugh draw all eyes to him in the scene where McMurphy enters the institution and greets all. Experience and impression that’s dead on creates the accurate decision to choose Jack Nicholson and make this film worthy of praise.

Having the perfect set design just shows how Milo Forman was the right man to direct this film. By using a real institution facility, it helped capture what a mental institution is really like. There’s also the fact that the set design went perfectly with Chief’s description of the Combine-- bonus!

Let’s not forget about the music. Forman’s choice of intense and creepy background music adds to each and every scene as the movie reaches its ending. The film starts out with a type of music that the audience would categorize as Native American themed which also ties into one of the character’s background--Chief. The use of music helped audiences get the feeling of the dangers and importance of their actions such as McMurphy’s stand against Nurse Ratched.

With every great transition from book to movie comes critics and as good of a job as Forman did **it wasn’t perfect.**

The loss of the narrator’s perspective. The loss of key plot points.

Changing the perspective of book can cause problems when it comes to comparing the piece of literature and the film. In this case Forman choice to use McMurphy’s point of view rather than Chief’s-- Kesey’s narrator throughout the entire book. That was a **bad idea**. Not only is the characterization of other key characters based on Chief’s observations lost, but the ability to connect and relate to who Chief is as a character is simply gone. There’s no room to sympathize with him. There’s no room to see how McMurphy is viewed in his eyes There’s no room to show the true evolution of Chief as a character. All lost due to the change of perspective. However Forman integrated a small moment within the film to display Kesey’s true work, that’s when McMurphy is brought back after numerous “treatments” (Kesey, 289) --consisting of shock therapy and finally a lobotomy-- within a few weeks. The audience sees the relationship between the two when Chief admits McMurphy made him big again and then takes McMurphy’s life therefore he wouldn’t have to live life as a vegetable in that place.

Perspective wasn’t the only thing loss through the creation of this film; important plot points missed the cut as the movie was finalized. Many scenes were changed due to the film being in McMurphy’s perspective. Having to miss out on moments such as the right way the patients went on the fishing trip and the scenes that showed how Nurse Ratched had so much control over the employees and patients. It all just lessened the exciting storyline.

All the bad and the good have been laid out on the table, but now it’s time to give the overall rating for Milo Forman’s job on the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. This film deserves 4.5 stars out of 5 and a high recommendation of the film. Allow me to leave you with these three words: **read then watch.**