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# ALTERNATIVES TO MEANINGLESSNESS IN KEN KESEY'S SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Dennis L. Beckmann

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Thesis Committee

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Date

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

At first glance, Ken Kesey appears to be a contemporary prophet of doom. His characters find little meaning in life, as each day brings only hopelessness and despair. For each of these characters, there are many causes of and responses to the problem of meaninglessness. The common denominator which links all of Kesey's characters, and perhaps all men, is that they cannot progress toward any kind of satisfactory existence until some meaning for life is found.

Kesey shows that meaning in life is not an easy task. One may find consolation in the fact that this search is not attempted by only a few people just during modern times. This odyssey has been taken since the beginning of mankind. The time has changed, the names are different, the characters have assumed different roles, but the experiences of Kesey's characters can be traced to antiquity. Indeed, as the wino boltcutter in Sometimes A Great Notion says, "Don't you see it's just the same plain old horseshit as always?"[1]

Jeff Nuttall in Bomb Culture analyzes the problems which appear in the sixties. His analysis is specifically oriented to this particular time period, but much of what he says relates to man's eternal battle to overcome or be overcome by meaninglessness. Nuttall's description illustrates a

kind of hopelessness, very similar to that found in Samuel Beckett's plays--characters waiting, waiting essentially for nothingness.

> We knew for certain that governments had nothing whatsoever to do with the morality they preached and enforced, that society had lost its appetite for life and looked forward to the death it had contrived. . .that we ourselves lacked even the will of colonial dissidents, that none of us was sufficiently alarmed about extinction to force the murderers to put down their weapons, that society commanded nothing but contempt, much less dedicated labor or respect for law, that love, honor, faith, selflessness were as false in ourselves as in our elders, that the only effective thing to do was what we daren't do--riot and destroy the death machine in a demonstration of serious protest--that the only thing we could do was sit in humiliation and wait for extinction.[2]

This is, indeed, the epitome of meaninglessness; where the only thing a man can do is "sit in humiliation and wait for extinction."

Ken Kesey, in his novel, Sometimes A Great Notion, portrays this meaninglessness. Conflict in the essence of Kesey's plot, and in particular three kinds of conflict exist: the conflict of man versus nature, the conflict of man versus man, and the conflict composed of an inner struggle and turmoil in the individual's own personality. Through these conflicts one is led to an understanding of man's inability to attain meaning from life. These conflicts are carefully delineated through Kesey's use of characters and symbols.

The kinds of conflicts man faces are varied, but the ones which cause most concern are internal problems such as

guilt, inadequacy, loneliness, and impermanence imposed externally. Each individual can live a satisfactory life if he responds appropriately to each conflict. It is man's failure to accept the problems for what they are, coupled with his excessive attempts to escape the problems, which creates a state of agitation labeled anxiety. Anxiety is a complicated phenomenon which requires extensive delineation.

Angst, the German term equivalent to American anxiety, is a predominent and ever present factor influencing not only our lives now, but most certainly playing a significant role in determining future action. One approach to a definition of normal anxiety appears in Rollo May's book, The Meaning of Anxiety. He believes anxiety is the "apprehension cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality."[3] The threat must be to a value of ultimate importance and must be strong enough to create serious questions of the self's capability to stay intact. This "dissolution of the self"[4] must be countered with action which will maintain the individual's basic security pattern, for it is security which the individual holds most sacred when facing external or internal threat.

Freud, in his treatise The Problem of Anxiety, also considers descriptions and definitions of anxiety. It is his belief that anxiety is an "increase in tension arising from non-gratification of its needs." He sees the creation of a type of "unpleasure" in the self which leads to a

heightened sense of exitation, culminating in a duplication of the trauma of birth which is the prototype of anxiety. The unpleasure seems to be a reaction to the perception of the absence of the object which is the source of gratification.[5]

It seems though that when one faces a situation of anxiety, one is "proportionately less able to see himself in relation to stimuli and hence less able to make adequate evaluation of the stimuli."[6] The uneasy feeling associated with anxiety is exaggerated because of the heightened incapability of analyzing the stimuli which is causing the anxiety. The essence of the response to anxiety is then a reaction to an unspecific, vague, objectless, type of threat. In facing the threat, one has a feeling of uncertainty and helplessness. This helpless feeling, according to Freud, is a product of "psychic helplessness" of the infant, which is the obvious counterpart of "biological helplessness."[7]

The development of anxiety may also be related to a person's contact with a "significant person," i.e., a person of importance to the individual. It is noted that "essential values are originally the security patterns existing between the infant and the significant persons."[8] May elaborates on this idea when he reiterates Karen Horney's belief that anxiety has its origin in the child's conflict between "his dependency on his parents and his hostility towards them."[9] The child cannot adequately express his hostility because of his dependence.

Essential persons need not be relatives only. May states

that the community is an important factor in the anxiety question. The common denominator of conflicts that underlie anxiety can be found in the dialectical relationship between individual and community.[10] If communication or development is blocked at either end, anxiety can develop. Why this kind of situation exists has long been an enigma. Most psychologists feel now that "what the individual regards as a situation of threat to vital values is largely due to learning."[11] In other words, values are largely cultural products, and when these essential values are threatened, anxiety results.

Normal anxiety is a complicated response which creates considerable problems for an individual. Some of Kesey's characters respond in such a manner that the mental state is no longer normal anxiety but verges on neurotic anxiety. A neurotic response only makes things worse for the individual. Moving towards a definition of neurotic anxiety, W. Stekel notes that "neurotic anxiety, like ordinary fear, is a self-protective measure directly connected with the instinct of self-preservation."[12] As such, neurotic anxiety attempts to serve the same function that normal anxiety serves. The method and extension of the response, however, differentiates the types. It appears that the method of coping is a reaction that is totally disproportionate to the objective threat. The threat has mushroomed in the eyes of the neurotic victim so that something which could usually be handled through quite elementary channels has now appeared to be equivalent to a major problem which seems destructive of the innermost security pattern. This disproportionate reaction then causes more

problems by engendering repression or other defensive mechanisms that only serve to complicate the difficult problem. Because of these neurotic defense mechanisms, stimuli cannot be confronted constructively. With a problem disproportionately large and stimuli that are vague and undifferentiated, the anxiety multiplies.[13] This, then, is the milieu in which we find the characters of Sometimes A Great Notion. Faced with a meaninglessness existence and incapable of accepting or correctly approaching their problems, men become anxious, often to the point of neurotic anxiety.

Solutions to the problem of meaninglessness have been promulgated by sundry psychologists, both in our time and in the past. Much of Kesey's thought, though, appears best interpreted in the light of the philosophy of one man, Carl Jung. To Jung, life offers no adequate interpretation, and to that extent it appears meaningless.[14] Man can not comprehend life, and as a result he moves vaguely through existence truly unable to know the right course of action. Jung feels that at least one-third of all cases under his study came about because of the failure to find meaning and purpose in life.[15] Going one step further, he believes that psycho-neurosis is the "suffering of a soul which has not discovered its meaning."[16] Man drifts--looking for meaning but seeing none in his everyday living. Aniela Jaffe echoes Jung's thinking when she says, "Man does not see the essential, or seeing it does not understand; because he does not create meaning but waits for it

and so ends in never-ending disappointment."[17] Jung again emphasizes the dissipatory nature of meaninglessness when he says, "Meaninglessness inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness."[18] This illness must be diagnosed and remedied before man can find any kind of happiness.

When facing a meaningless life, man reacts, according to Jung, as if he were experiencing anxiety. The consciousness exercises inhibition on incompatible material so that anything which challenges standard beliefs or actions is shoved to the side.[19] As a result, the individual faces nothing which can create conflict within his personality. For example, a person who believes he is superior rejects all material which might prove that he was somewhat inferior. Anxiety is calmed for the moment, but since the problem is skirted, internal conflict continues.

The responses to the conflict within oneself are also closely associated with the response to anxiety. One generally uses displacement to calm one's feelings by insisting that "the other person is always at fault."[20] This is a considerable problem because until one accepts the problem for what it is, no satisfaction is derived. Another typical response in Jung's philosophy is that of repressing the complex.[21] Man refuses to face the dangers. He must not only accept the problem for what it is but must come face to face with the problem.

The above responses could lead to neurotic anxiety,

which according to most psychologists is a worse dilemma than normal anxiety. To Jung, though, a neurosis can be beneficial. Neurosis, he feels, is a "cry for help" which could jolt one out of the rut in which he is presently mired.[22] This "trial by fire" creates possibilities for awareness that the individual did not have before.

Kesey's novel, although primarily emphasizing the meaningless of man's life, could not be complete without a "way out" for the individual. Kesey suggests possibilities for finding meaning in life. Kesey's alternatives follow closely, again, much of the thinking of Jung.

In order to have a meaningful life, Jung believes, man must first search for meaning; for as he says,

> We are no longer concerned with the obstacles that hinder a man in the practice of a calling, in marrying, or in anything that means the further expansion of life. Instead, we are confronted with the task of finding a meaning which will make possible the very continuance of life, in so far as it is to be more than mere resignation and mournful retrospection.[23]

This meaning of life reaches to the very core of the individual's existence. The search is not passive--one must make a conscious effort.

The procedure to aid in this search is labelled the "process of individuation"[24] by Jung. It is basically an attempt towards coming to "know oneself."[25] The impelling motive in this process is the desire for self-realization,[26] which is the attainment of a station in life where man realizes what he really is as opposed to what he would like to be.[27]

To "know oneself" then, man must take an objective attitude toward his personality. He must be willing to analyze himself in every respect, accepting whatever he may find. The individual must confront the shadow hidden within himself. This shadow is usually the dark side of the personality. It is often ". . .what is, inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward, but not wholly bad."[28]

If one is willing to face the dark side of his nature and if he objectively confronts this element, then he must still react correctly if he is to succeed in the individuation procedure. Above all, according to Jung, the individual must not repress or suppress anything which he might find. If the individual does use any of these defense mechanisms, he shuns his real nature and attempts to conceal the aberrant, weak, or dark side of his nature. Without total awareness of oneself, the entire process is doomed.

Eliminating repression and suppression from one's psychological activities is a first important step. Displacement, where "the other person is always at fault," is another consideration. As long as a scapegoat exists who can take away personal fault, the individual can not truly know himself. Man must literally live in the "House of self-collection." Such a man knows that whatever is wrong in the world exists within himself.[29]

Man's first reaction to this kind of thinking is to seek only certainties and protect himself by not experimenting

with new ideas. As Jung says, "We want to have certainties and no doubts--results and no experiments--without even seeing that certainties can arise only through doubt and results only through experiment."[30] We must be willing to go through a "trial by fire" in order to reach the ultimate of self-realization. This ability, then, eventually will give meaning and character to the individual.

The importance of the process of individuation extends beyond the individual and reaches to the society as a whole. Jung insists that in order for an individual to find his place in society, he must first come to self-realization. He comments that,

> Only he who can deliberately say "Yes" to the power of destiny he finds within him becomes a personality and only such a personality is able to find its true place in a collective, only it is truly able to form a community, i.e., to be an integral part of a group of human beings.[31]

The individuation process, then, leads to assimilation into the community. Through self-knowledge and through successful community relationships man "has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in removing an infinitesimal part at best of the unsolved, gigantic social problems of our day."[32]

Jung's concepts add a glimmer of hope to a meaningless world. It appears that man must come to see himself for what he is, to recognize the dark side of his nature, and then to accept that darker side as but one side of a personality that possesses a duality. That duality is extremely important

in Jung's thinking, "for in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded in its opposite."[33] Thus when man sees only meaninglessness in life, he has failed to comprehend the whole. Self-realization occurs when we see and accept the duality of every aspect of our life and personality.

Self-realization, through knowledge of the opposites in our being is our goal. This goal is not one, though, that can be attained in totality. Wholeness is relative, and we must work at it all our life. "The personality as a full realization of the wholeness of our being is an unattainable ideal."[34] Confrontation continues, questions abound, as the essence of self-realization is ever to be sought but never to be totally grasped.

These, then, are some of the psychological and philosophical implications which affect all man. Kesey through his novel, Sometimes A Great Notion, presents a microcosm, a world of men in a small town in the logging area of Oregon. This microcosm, although exhibiting a uniqueness all its own, is still subject to those same psychological and philosophical principles which affect all men. The denizens experience a meaningless life and fail to comprehend possibilities which might eradicate or at least lessen the intensity of the problems.

This meaninglessness as found in Sometimes A Great Notion has many roots. Sometimes impermanence will tear at man's

search for meaning, rendering him little if anything to hold as security. Other times an inability to develop successful relationships will create meaninglessness. Then, too, feelings of inferiority, self-dissatisfaction, or guilt will lead to a meaningless despair. Another catalyst to a meaningless life may be the challenging of time-honored principles which govern a man's life. With one's recognition of one's meaningless life, anxiety develops, sometimes to an incredible complexity. Man, facing anxiety in a meaningless world, appears to be in a hopeless situation. Kesey would not have it that man has no alternatives. The alternatives are roughly similar to the process of self-realization as described by Jung.

Anxiety and meaninglessness are thus inextricably connected. In order to better understand these concepts, one must analyze causes--the three conflicts of man versus nature, man versus man, and man versus himself--as well as results. Kesey's use of characters and symbols are appropriate tools to use in such an analysis.

## CHAPTER ONE FOOTNOTES

[1]Ken Kesey, Sometimes A Great Notion (New York, 1963), p. 99.

[2]Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture (New York, 1968), p. 117.

[3]Rollo May, The Meaning of Anxiety (New York, 1950), p. 191.

[4]May, p. 193.

[5]Sigmund Freud, The Problem of Anxiety (New York, 1936), pp. 69-84.

[6]May, p. 192.

[7]Freud, p. 77.

[8]May, p. 209.

[9]May, p. 212.

[10]May, p. 214.

[11]May, p. 208.

[12]William Stekel, "Conditions of Neurotic Anxiety and Their Treatment," in Childhood's Fears, by George Morton, (New York, 1925), p. 127.

[13]May, p. 197.

[14]Aniela Jaffe, The Myth of Meaning (New York, 1971), p. 148.

[15]Jolande Jacobi, The Psychology of C. G. Jung (New Haven, 1943), p. 176.

[16]Jaffe, p. 146.

[17]Jaffe, p. 147.

[18]Jaffe, p. 146.

[19]Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York, 1971), p. 274.

[20]Jacobi, p. 149.

[21] Campbell, Introduction XXVII.

[22] Jacobi, p. 135; 137.

[23] Jacobi, p. 136.

[24] Jacobi, p. 141.

[25] Campbell, Introduction XXVII.

[26] Jacobi, p. 138.

[27] Jacobi, p. 175.

[28] Jacobi, p. 148.

[29] Jacobi, p. 150.

[30] Campbell, p. 5.

[31] Jacobi, p. 140.

[32] Jacobi, p. 150.

[33] Jaffe, p. 148.

[34] Jacobi, p. 139.

# CHAPTER TWO

## MAN VERSUS NATURE

Throughout history, nature has tested man to see if he was strong enough and intelligent enough to handle her very worst climatic conditions. Battles have been fought with man the conquered as often as he was the conquerer. Ken Kesey's novel Sometimes A Great Notion renews this fierce rivalry. The rainy season seems to pose the most problems for the people of this small Oregon town. Each character reacts somewhat differently while trying to cope with the rain.

In general, most of the people of Wakonda hate to see the rains come. The days are warm and dry when they go on strike and the townspeople are hoping that they can get back to the logging slopes before the rains hinder them to such an extent that a good day's work is impossible. Teddy, owner of the Snag Saloon, is aware that the loggers must get back to work. According to Teddy, ". . .the fear hidden all summer shoots up and blooms overnight."[1] During the dry months the people still have hope. With the rains, hope diminishes and fears proliferate. Nature appears to have the final say concerning the success or failure of the strike.

The Stamper family has always opposed nature. Some of the Stampers are able to overcome the challenge of the rain,

while others choose escape as their only response. The rain profoundly affects Henry's father, Jonas. Jonas is the last of a long line of Stampers who are plagued by a family curse. The Stampers have been wanderers, continually picking up their belongings and moving Westward. Jonas comes to Oregon after the wanderlust infects him in Kansas. He sets up a good business, and it appears that the chain of wanderings has been broken. As time passes, though, Jonas feels the urge to leave. The word urge may be too simple; indeed, he is driven from the land because of his conflict with nature. He cannot stand the incessant dampness. He feels

> Saturated and overflowing! The feeling haunted Jonas's days and tortured his sleep. O, Jesus, light of life, fill the darkness. He was being smothered. He was being drowned. He felt he might awake some foggy morn with moss across his eyes and one of those hellish toadstools sprouting in the midst from his own carcass. (24)

In his battle with nature, Jonas has lost. He feels as if he is going down for the third time. His only course of action is to flee from the situation, with hope that there will be some place where he can dry out and start over again.

Jonas is the last Stamper to choose escape as a course of action in response to the unrelenting pressure of nature. The Stampers take a solemn oath to stay and fight the rain and the river. The house is completed and it stands, naturally, in the midst of the battlegrounds next to the river. This river, combined with the rain, is the substance of the Stamper conflict with nature.

They shore up the river banks to prevent erosion. They keep vigil to insure that the river will not make any inroads into the stable land. Adding to the problem is the Stamper's awareness that they must complete much of their contract with Wakonda Pacific before the rains come. They use all of their resources to stockpile as many logs as possible. The rains come, catching the Stampers somewhat unprepared. Many members of the Stamper clan quit logging because of the continual peer pressure. As a result, the Stampers are working short-handed. It becomes apparent that much of the work is going to have to be done during the rainy season. Faced with a man-power shortage, Joe Ben searches for other family members. The call goes to Lee Stamper to come west to help in the battle with nature.

A fierce antagonism toward the rain and river exists because of economic considerations. The loggers face the possibility of not being able to get to the slopes for work. The Stampers realize it will be hard to fill their quota because of the incessant rain. The rain and river, however, also function on a symbolic level. They represent a kind of impermanence which pervades all aspects of their life. The rain and river combine to create an awareness of continual change, and where change presents itself there is threat. The river and rain threaten the Stampers' existence. The river, as a symbol, connotes impermanence because it continually sucks away at the land which is man's only source of

stability. The personified houses understand about the workings of the river.

> The houses know about riverside living. Even the modern weekend summertime places have learned. The old houses, the very old houses that were built of cedar shake and lodgepole by the first settlers at the turn of the eighteen-hundreds, were long ago jacked up and dragged back from the bank by borrowed teams of horses and logging oxen. Or, if they were too big to move, were abandoned to tip headlong into the water as the river sucked away the foundations. (3)

The houses are eventually consumed by the river, which seeks to engulf the entire land. Also, the land, important for stability, is literally being swamped by the river. The river is a predator. As noted later, "the river roams the fields like a glistening bird of prey" (147).

The river comes to be, for Hank, a contestant in an eternal match of wits and strength. Hank remembers back to his high school days.

> But years later it used to wonder me just how come I'd sometimes get all of a sudden so itchy to cut out from basketball practice, or from a date. It would really wonder me. . . .It was like me and that river had drawn ourselves a little contract, a little grudge match, and without me knowing exactly why. (109)

Hank sees the river as a threat to his existence. He knows the river would eat away at anything that was not firmly tied down. The contest was to see if Hank could defeat or at least stay equal with the river.

One particular story is a key to Hank's anxiety. As a young boy, Hank finds some bobcats, which he brazenly carries out of their lair. He brings the bobcats home and has his dad

help him with a large cage. During a heavy rainfall, the river begins to rise, but both Hank and his father agree that it is impossible for the river to rise so much as to cover the cat's cage. Next morning Hank checks the cage. The river has washed a great amount of dirt, causing the cage to tumble into the river. Hank almost could have predicted this unhappy ending, because he earlier feels an anxiety when he takes the cats from their nest. At the time, he attributes the fear to concern that the mother cat would return. Even though supposing that this fear is the cause, he recognizes that the anxiety he is experiencing does not necessarily have anything to do with the mother cat.

> But the fear continued to shake against his ribs, and it occurred to him that it had been shaking that way constantly from the moment he'd found the three kittens playing peacefully in their nest. Because it had known-it, the fear, the being-awful-scared-of-something-had known the boy better than he knew himself, had known all along from that first glance that he wasn't going to be satisfied until he had all three kittens. It didn't make any difference if they were baby dragons and mama dragon was breathing fire on him every step of the way. (104)

That "awful scared of something feeling," in essence, defines anxiety. What Hank unconsciously is afraid of is the lack of stability created by the river. The river is yet one more symbol of that terrible impermanence which challenges the existence of all in its domain.

Many symbols which Kesey uses are nature oriented. This is only logical since the conflicts are so intimately related to the workings of natural objects on man or man-made objects.

A fourth natural symbol is the geese. Flying south for the winter, the geese are a constant reminder that life there is impermanent, that time keeps moving, that nothing indeed is stable. Lee hears this idea in the call of the geese.

> We are kept on the move by continual reminders of the lateness of the hour, Peters: nature signals to us in her numerous ways that we'd best get our ass in gear while we can, because the summer is never going to last, my darlings, never. Just now a flock of geese passing over calls out to me "Go south! Follow the sun! If you wait too long it will be too late." And I get all manicky just hearing them. . . . (398)

Man is urged to keep on the move, that time is short. The geese emphasize the impermanence of time, nature, and man.

Impermanence in nature engenders change. Change produces threat and threat plays a large role in the creation of anxiety. The characters can react to the physical aspects of nature, but they fail to realize the essential cause of their conflict, life's impermanence. This conflict will continue to create more anxiety until the people face the problem and take some kind of affirmative stand toward acceptance of the situation. It is only when anxiety is constructively confronted that life can hold meaning.

# CHAPTER TWO FOOTNOTES

[1]Ken Kesey, _Sometimes A Great Notion_ (New York, 1963), p. 348.

# CHAPTER THREE

## MAN VERSUS MAN

Kesey's second kind of conflict is man against man. Here too, the individual fails to accept the real problem and fails to take any kind of affirmative stand to overcome his anxiety. The individuals in Kesey's novel all have different ideas about the cause of the problem. Just a few of the scapegoats they choose are: Hank Stamper--as earlier noted, not enough civic pride, automation, or the bomb. All their answers to the enigma only add more anxiety to an already anxious group of people. No solution is possible unless the individuals accept the essence of the problem.

In Sometimes A Great Notion almost every character faces a problem and usually the problems, although complicated, do not seem insurmountable. Each character though, overreacts to the problem. One can recognize two types of response. The first response is for one to escape, either mentally or physically. Through a type of mental fantasy, the characters alter their perceptions of the world to make life more acceptable. In the second type of response--hostility--the characters attack the problem by fierce aggression, often aggression for the sake of relieving frustration. But again the response does not get to the heart of the problem, and as such the problem becomes worse than what it was. Problem compounds upon problem.

Floyd Evenwrite, for example, is the head of the local union. It appears inevitable, then, that he will come into conflict with Hank Stamper. He uses this clash as a means of expressing his aggression toward Hank. A head to head battle is what Floyd wants. The conflict disguises Floyd's real problem. He has been antagonistic towards Hank ever since Hank made All-State and he did not. After a drinking bout, Floyd is awakened by a state highway patrolman.

> He mumbles a thanks and climbs out of the back seat and seeks a nearby gas station restroom. Where he vows to his red-nosed and red-eyed image in the mirror that he'll make Hank Stamper rue the day he used his family influence to get picked in that All-State team over him, by jumping Jesus![1]

Floyd knows that the union conflict is only a facade to hide his true conflict with Stamper. What he does not see is that his larger conflict arises from his feeling of inferiority. He adds fantasy to his world of hostility and creates a world where he actually is as good as or better than any other man. During one drinking episode he is,

> . . .aiming to drink, unkink, unwind and unlimber over a couple beers, and to once more prove to any one of these big-city bigasses in here who might doubt it, that Floyd Evenwrite, ex-bushler and chokeresetter from the little pissant town of Florence, was just as goddam good as anybody else whateverthefuck size of the city they come from! (58-9)

The Stamper conflict is a mere vehicle Evenwrite will use to prove that he is important, that he has some meaning. A loss to the Stampers in the union conflict would probably create anxiety and could endanger the integrity of Evenwrite's self.

A similar case in point is Teddy, proprietor of the Sang

Saloon. Teddy, too, has feelings of inferiority, but he overcomes these by his collections of "medals."

> A short, plump polyp of man in a land of rangy loggers, Teddy is appeased by his collection of signs. Napoleon needed no elevator shoes to make him as big as the next man: he had a chestful of medals. It was these symbols of success that proved his size. Yes, wearing his medals he could remain silent while the brutes whined about their troubles. . . . (47-8)

Teddy keeps to himself, does his jobs, and thinks his own thoughts. For it is in his own world that he can be self-satisfied. During one of his pensive moods, he is lost in his own thoughts when someone yells for a beer.

> "Be right with you." He hustled their order to the table with a great show of haste to make up for the delay. But they had already returned to their discussion of the local trouble, ignoring him. Sure. Already the big idiots had to ignore him. They were afraid to look too close. It is threatening to perceive superiority in someone. . . . (48)

Teddy feels inferior. In order to compensate for his weakness he collects the "medals." This gives him a feeling of accomplishment, of meaning. He goes one step further when he sees himself as superior. Self-delusionment is added to his other problems. Teddy may perhaps understand his problem, but he fails to comprehend a correct method of facing the anxiety he feels.

As Teddy has his signs to make him feel in control, Johnathon Draeger has his escape. Draeger is the regional representative of the union. He is the man who must direct the strike and make sure that it is successful. He, too, suffers from an incorrect assessment of reality. His vision

is very similar to both Evenwrite's and Teddy's self views. He perceives himself as eternally ready for any dilemma. He is ready because of his escape to neat aphorisms of life-directing magnitude. He continually has his note pad ready for action.

> The note-taking habit was a carry-over from his college days, when he had A'd all tests by being the most ready. He read the phrase over and smiled approvingly. He had been collecting such aphorisms for years now, and dreamed of some day compiling them into a book of essays. But even if the dream failed to come off, the little phrases came in quite handy in his work, little notes taken daily in the lesson of life. . . .Should a test ever present itself, he would be ready. . . . (56)

He writes these aphorisms as a means of stabilizing his world. The world is, thus, predictable. Should a new situation arise, he reaches into his bag of clever sayings and finds security. This action covers up a deep-seated fear of change. When his predictable world is challenged, the ensuing threat creates anxiety.

A case in point is the situation where Hank decides to make the run down the river. Floyd calls Draeger and tells him to return to Wakonda. On his return trip Draeger feels the threat.

> He sighs again, resigning himself, oh what the devil, anybody is liable to call it wrong once in a while. But the car does not slow, and far down in his precise and predictable heart, where the foreboding first sprouted and where resignation lies now like a brooding moss, another bloom is budding. (10-11)

The anxiety is spreading throughout Draeger's personality. His neat and secure world is crumbling, because one man,

Hank, fails to heed the guidelines prescribed by the aphorisms. Draeger never understands his whole problem and fails to make any kind of progress toward a solution to his anxiety.

Feelings of inferiority are difficult to overcome. Sometimes, though, inferiority is not as much a problem as desirability is. Indian Jenny fits the latter case. She wants to conquer one particular male, Henry Stamper. He refuses her advances. She wonders whom to blame, and, since acceptance of the blame as being related to herself is impossible, she must turn to a fantasy world to explain her deficiencies or escape from them.

> Indian Jenny is just getting around to telling herself that Henry Stamper musta had reason to avoid her other'n her being Indian; didn't he fool with them Yachats squaws up north? And them squaws at Coos Bay? No, it isn't her being Indian that's kept him from her. So it must be that somebody close to him objects to Henry partying with Indians. . . .somebody elset that's kept them apart all these years. . . . (82-83)

The fault cannot lie within herself. She cannot be deficient as a person. The problem must be created by someone else who does not want Henry to like her. Mere fantasy is not enough. Indian Jenny turns to snuff and whiskey to make her feel needed and important. Without her man, Indian Jenny is unneeded and her life is meaningless.

Kesey's most interesting characters for analysis are often those who are the most nondescript to other people. Willard Eggleston is such a person. Willard is a hen-pecked husband. In his own words, "Perhaps it was because his wife insisted so much on acting the part of the overbearing spouse that he

found it easiest to play the dominated husband and wait for her to call the shots" (402). Whatever the reason, his wife dominates his life. His reaction is to become basically dualistic, living the life of a dominated husband externally while playing yet another role with "Jelly," his assistant at his laundry. This double life is, in effect, offered by his wife who puts all the ideas into his head.

Rather than solving his marital problems, he chooses to have the extramarital affair suggested by his wife. The inevitable result of the affair is the birth of a little boy. Willard sees he cannot solve the problem without telling his wife. Again, refusing to go to the heart of the problem, he chooses escape. He wants one last chance to make his life meaningful. His true meaning in life comes down to some insurance policies. His desire is to insure his son's future by committing suicide. Willard yearns to tell someone, whether it be to unburden his conscience or to glorify his actions; Hank Stamper is seen as a logical choice. Willard believes Hank would never tell anyone else, especially since the people in town are angry with the Stampers. Hank correctly assesses Willard's choice of action as an escape and tells Willard: "What I'd call a man with spine is a man able to pay for a kid by living for him, no matter how hard it comes" (465). Willard is enraged that Hank would suggest such an idea. He feels further antagonism at the fact that Hank seems indifferent. This perception of indifference adds to Willard's anxiety.

Willard, outraged by Hank's attitude, decides to attack the problem.

> Fuming with indignation, he heads back toward town. No, by golly; no right! Hank Stamper is no better than anybody else! I have as much spine as he does! And I will prove it! (466)

Even though approaching a more viable alternative, he confronts the problem in the wrong way. He speeds down the mountain and "unintentionally keeps both his appointment and promise. . ." (466). Willard has never faced his problems. The one time he makes a determined effort to do so, he again mismanages the attempt. To the eyes of the public it appears that there has been one more meaningless death.

In order to solve conflicts, an individual needs to be flexible. He must be able to adapt to a new situation and realign his life. When a person has been trained for only one role, adaptability is almost impossible. Such a person is Biggy Newton. His relatives have trained and conditioned him to such an extent that

> . . .by the time he'd reached his full growth, he was so well conditioned that he was as sure as they were that he was the bully of the woods, the thick-headed heavy who'd bust up any block who got in his road. And after busting up enough of these blocks he'd become good enough at his role that his road began to be avoided. (538)

The role of a bully is never a very satisfying one because his actions create a lack of communication between people. The bully is set apart from society, and few people attempt any kind of permanent relationship with such a person. Hostility was Biggy's answer to every problem. His only meaning and

purpose in life was to display this hostility. A worse problem appears when the target of the bully's hostility is gone. The little meaning in such a person's life is lost.

> What does a guy do. . .when his purpose in life peters out? when he ain't fit for marryin' or bein' friends or for nothin' but bustin' up one certain somebody? And that certain somebody's just finked out? Big ground his teeth: Stamper, dammit anyhow, how could you be such a bad ass, so downright thoughtless as to cop before them managers got me a replacement trained? (539)

With the target of Biggy's hostility gone, he faces a meaningless existence. Biggy's only response to a problem is hostility. Two other characters, Henry and Hank Stamper, express themselves with a mixture of hostility and staunch determination. Determination is not necessarily a poor response to a particular plight. The conflict lies in the fact that the real problem, a guilty conscience, is not accepted for what it is.

As previously discussed, the Stamper family is cursed by the spector of the wanderer. No one in the family, up to the time of Henry, could stay in one area for an extended period of time. The grass always looks greener elsewhere and the family moves on. In this perspective, one sees the attitude of Henry and Hank Stamper. Because of the disgrace Jonas Stamper has laid on the whole family, many Wakonda natives feel that the Stampers are prime subjects for good-natured cajoling. Henry reacts to the ribbing with iron-clad determination and hostility toward anyone or anything which stands in his way. Hank cites the cause of his father's attitude.

> So I first heard from Boney Stokes about how old Henry's daddy, Jonas Stamper, disgraced Henry and the rest of us. Then heard from uncle Ben about how Boney had spent so many years trying to rub it in on Pa. But it was from Pa himself that I found out what it all come to, how the disgrace and the rubbing in had built an iron-clad commandment. (28)

Henry and Hank are determined to stay and make a living on their own, and to govern their lives around that commandment which is, "never give an inch" (31)! When the strike begins, they make a contract with Wakonda Pacific to insure the stability of their way of life. Later, when facing antagonism from townsfolk, their steadfastness becomes fierce hostility towards outsiders. Later yet, when all others are bowing down to mass pressures, hostility turns to a defiance of anyone who would challenge the Stamper's right to guarantee stability for their clan. Their focal point is on defiance and antagonism rather than on a solution of the basic problem. The direction behind their actions is an obsession, driving them onward. A Stamper could not be beaten by man, beast, or climate.

Lee Stamper is born in the North woods of Oregon. He comes into a world where existence is a day-to-day matter, where hard work is the word, where the gentle life is unknown and unsought. It seems as if Lee is never meant for the harsh life. Early childhood problems cause Lee and his mother to flee to the East for an easier life. He cannot escape his past life and is finally drawn, because of family problems, back to Oregon. In an attempt to lessen his anxiety, Lee turns to many types of escape.

Drugs are a method of escape often used by Lee. He smokes marijuana regularly and often turns to phenobarbitals and dexedrines for relief.

> He drew a glass of water and opened the medicine cabinet on a large array of pill bottles; chemicals awaiting like tickets for whatever ride the heart desired. (60)

A second method of coping with his anxiety is a psychosomatic response. Lee is unable to cope with the harsh life in Oregon. He feigns illness in order to secure an emotional reaction from his mother and to escape from whatever conflicts he faces.

Before Lee returns to Oregon, he hears of the death of his mother who has committed suicide. This further accentuates his feeling of hopelessness and meaninglessness. His course of action is suicide also. He rigs a bomb and sits back and waits for his annihilation. He fails in his attempt, but in facing the postman, a partial victim of his first bomb, he says:

> I think I'm attempting to kill myself; but I'm not quite sure I've found exactly the right method. Now, if you will excuse me a moment, I'll have another go. (58)

His intent is plain, but his attitude is almost frivolous. This kind of attitude is in itself a kind of neurotic response to the problem.

With the onset of interest in the exploration of the mind, many young people have acted out the illusion of insanity. Lee's bouts with insanity are linked to another of his escape mechanisms, drugs. On the bus ride to Oregon, after taking

some drugs, he feels he's beginning to lose control.

> My stomach rolled, voices tilled in my head - that interior monitor of mine bellowing for me to WATCH OUT! HANG ON! THIS IS IT! YOU'RE FINALLY COMPLETELY FLIPPING! I clutched the armrests of the bus seat desperately, terrified. (71)

Earlier Lee had been analyzed by a psychiatrist who accurately assessed Lee's reaction.

> . . .you have a talent for releasing frustration through clever fantasy. . .you may be neurotic as hell for the rest of your life. . .but I'm afraid never completely out. . .the best I can offer is plain schizophrenic with delusional tendencies. (71)

His reactions are not quite psychotic, but definitely a means of escape--escape from his anxiety, which is grounded in a meaningless life.

Further kinds of defense mechanisms employed by Lee to cope with his anxiety concern his abnormal methods of interaction. Older brother Hank tells stories of how he would taunt Lee and lead him into impossible situations which would cause a retreat.

> "Ah, Hank," the kid would holler, "Ah, Hank," and then go storming off to his mother, who would give us a hard look and take him away from such lying lowbrows as us. (115)

A singular response, leaning on mother as security, is not necessarily a problem. However, when this response becomes the only reaction one realizes that the anxiety is not being properly handled.

Another type of abnormal interaction pattern used as a defense mechanism is an inflexibility in a relationship. Consistency is absolutely essential, with no variation from the

typical behavior pattern accepted. Lee shows this inflexibility when he talks about his relationship with his roommates.

> . . .in our eight months of rooming together and years-long friendship, this homely, lantern-jawed Negro and I had established a clear set of limits within which we knew we could comfortably communicate, a sort of dramatic tradition wherein he always played the sagacious and slow-talking Uncle Remus to my intellectual dandy. Within this framework, behind our shammed masks, we had been able to approach the most extreme personal truths in our conversations without suffering the embarrassment of such intimacies. I preferred it that way, even under the new conditions, and I tried again. (65)

Just as Draeger cannot accept change in his conception of the world, so also cannot Lee. Again, all change is threat, and all threat causes anxiety. Inflexibility creates a certain kind of stability, which, even though not real, is better than no stability.

Lee arrives in Oregon, in his attempt to help the family, and is sitting at the family table "talking" with his father. As his father talks, the pressure mounts. In Lee's attempt to cope with the anxiety, he encounters another method of escape, a tie-up of speech patterns.

> I just don't know. All I know is I thought I was relaxing a little around him, then tied up, the same as I tied up trying to talk with Viv the night before explaining our deal with Wakonda Pacific. Same as I tie up with anybody except Joe Ben. (179)

Lee faces too many problems in his relationship with the family to feel relaxed. He must first reach to the center of his problem, escapism, and approach the anxiety in some successful manner. If he doesn't, lack of communication and anxiety will continue.

Anyone who is the victim of anxiety experiences an inner threat to his basic security pattern. As a result, the victim must seek out new forms of security to fill the void. Lee finds, both as a young child and later as an adult, that the classroom can be an escape from anxiety and a type of security to lessen anxiety.

> All through prep school I avoided the playground, all through college I had stayed safely in the classroom, secure behind a bastion of books, and played no base at all on the field outside. Not first or second, not third. Certainly not home. Secure but homeless. Homeless even in the town of my home-town team, with no base to play. No arms in all the wet world to enfold me, no arms by the cozy fire to hold me. (490)

Temporary relief is felt, but the security is short-lived. As always, Lee's retreat only skirts the real problem. As such, anxiety increases.

An escape often employed by a person experiencing anxiety is to retreat to such an extent that he attempts nothing which could result in failure. Lee responds to his brother, as earlier stated, by either clinging to some security source, or in times when the security source is absent, by remaining aloof. Lee, when faced with a situation where his brother Hank would fight, does not or cannot fight back. This causes more antagonism which in turn causes more anxiety. Hank comments,

> "That we didn't fight. That he won't, and I know it and he knows it. Maybe that right there is the thing keeps us just like oil and water." (271)

Hank needs a release of his tension, which he feels would result if they fought. Lee still avoids conflict to preserve

his equilibrium. Neither has chosen the correct method of overcoming his dilemma with the result being heightened anxiety and displacement of reality.

The import of these actions is further accentuated when one is made aware of the fact that such defense mechanisms actually act as a catalyst to further anxiety. Most psychologists agree that "repression sets up inner contradictions within the personality." Because of this contradiction a person is less able to face real danger. The repression increases the individual's feeling of helplessness in that it involves a curtailing of his own autonomy, an inner retrenchment and shelving of his own power.[2] As such, along with being an inadequate response to anxiety, repression creates a kind of snow-balling effect which leads to more anxiety.

Kesey's use of symbols further delineates his important concepts. Whether he uses a symbol which concentrates our attention on the conflict itself, a symbol which emphasizes the reaction to the conflict, or a symbol which is related to a result of the conflict, this literary device points toward a fuller understanding of both character and theme.

The everyday life at the Stamper household is governed by a sign which reads, "Never Give an Inch." The sign's meaning evolves from a curse the Stampers were subject to, but the sign comes to mean considerably more in future years.

Jonas Stamper leaves Oregon because he can no longer stand the climate and because the family's wandering tendency urges him to move on. The family, faced with such humiliation,

rejects him and refuses any kind of communication. In response to their dissociation, he sends a plaque to them which states, "Blessed are the Meek, for They Shall Inherit the Earth." In response Henry takes yellow machine paint, covers the plaque, and then in big bold red letters writes, "Never give an Inch." This is the credo that governs the Stampers' lives for years to come--symbolic of defiance and hostility toward anyone who would challenge them. This hostility fails to reach to the essential conflict, which is their guilty conscience over the family curse, and instead finds expression in defiance of all people.

This same kind of defiance is emphasized in the symbol hung from the pole by the Stamper house. Henry loses his arm in a logging accident and for unknown reasons keeps the arm and stores it in the family freezer. Later, Hank retrieves Henry's arm from the freezer, pulls back the fingers to expose the middle finger and hangs the arm from the pole. Draeger sees the arm and feels that the arm is

> somehow lifted especially, Draeger could not help feeling, to him. "To me! Disparaging me personally. . .being so mistaken. For. . ." Lifted as a deliberate refutation of all he believed to be true, knew to be true about Man; as a blasphemous affrontery to a faith forged over an anvil of thirty years, a precise and predictable faith hammered out of a quarter-century of experience dealing with labor and management--a religion almost, a neatly noted-down, red-ribboned package of truths about men, and Man. (9)

Draeger is again facing the possibility that his neat aphoristic world is not stable. This conflict causes considerable anxiety, and it is never clear whether Draeger can adequately handle that anxiety.

There are many symbols which represent two kinds of conflicts. Lee Stamper is a complex character. The symbols that are closely associated with him have their roots in both the conflict with his brother or others in the community and the conflict which stirs within himself. One such symbol is the playground. The playground and his interaction with the children are always a conflict for Lee. He ignores the conflict and flees to the security of the classroom. This relieves anxiety at the time, but his problem continues.

A post card is a simple object but one which has tremendous significance for Lee. Joe Ben asks Lee to come to Oregon to help with the logging operation. This is a shock to Lee. Accenting the shock is a note scribbled at the bottom which reads, "You should be a big enough guy now, Bub" (43). This comment brings back memories of his conflict with Hank. Anxiety rushes upon him as he realizes the still unsolved problem that he faces.

Lee arrives in Oregon and, while eating with Joe Ben, another image flits across his mind which causes an anxious response. Lee stares at his plate, and the egg-yolk and bacon conjure the image of a halloween mask. The halloween mask symbolizes a conflict with his brother and the resultant internal conflict. Lee is forced to go "trick-or-treating" by Hank. Getting out of the truck at the first house, Lee protests the task but Hank encourages him and says he'll protect Lee. The presence of other boys buoys Lee and he proceeds to the front door. But the confidence is short-lived.

> (Finally the boy managed to get through the gate and across the yard, only to stop once more at the door. Fear paralyzed his fingers again, but this time he knew that the thing he feared lay not in back of that door, but behind him! back across that yard! waiting in the pick-up! Without thinking another second, he jumped from the porch and ran. "Bub, hold it. Where?" Around the corner of the house. "Bub! Bub! Wait; it's okay!" Into the tall weeds, where he hid until Hank was past. "Lee! Lee-land, where you at?" Then jumped up and ran again, and ran and ran and ran). . . . (303)

Lee feels the fear is not of going "trick-or-treating" but fear of his brother. This does not make sense to Lee because, as Lee knows, Hank would never hurt him. As Lee continues thinking, it becomes obvious that Lee's real fear is that his brother might see him afraid. The Stamper stand on this subject creates trauma for Lee.

> (So the only thing I was really scared of back at Swede Row was of Hank seeing me get scared. Now ain't that simply the most ridiculous thing? Sure. . .The boy laughed to find his fear so ridiculous, but kept walking away from the town just the same; he knew that what he had done had banished him forever from his home; he knew what old Henry and all of them thought of scaredy cats, even if the thing the scaredy cats were scared of was of being scaredy cats.) (307)

The quotation reminds one of Roosevelt's homily: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." The conflict is rooted in his relationship with Hank, but the anxiety is an internalized problem.

One last symbol which emphasizes conflict between men is the hole in the wall, where Lee can look into what was formerly his mother's room and is presently Viv's room, and which in turn can be spied upon from the other room. There is a curious repetition of action that is only slightly altered.

When Lee is a child, he peaks through the hole to watch the copulation of his mother and step-brother, Hank. This, naturally, creates considerable anxiety in Lee because the only type of security he was sure of dissipates in the arms of Hank. Lee believes he has lost a highly valued object. This loss multiplies Lee's anxious feelings.

Later the roles are reversed as Hank becomes the onlooker to adultery. Viv and Lee make love while Hank watches, through the very same hole where Lee earlier had watched his mother and Hank. This scene adds to Hank's anxiety which is already cumbersome. Henry has just lost his arm and Joe Ben has drowned. Hank reacts by becoming sick and vomiting, a response similar to that of Lee during his mother's adultery. These paralleled instances cause Hank to resign himself to defeat.

Man faces what he considers threats. These threats may be real or unreal. In facing these conflicts, man usually misjudges the conflicts; usually he fails to understand the real conflicts; usually he fails to take any type of correct actions to eliminate the essential conflict; and, as a result, usually he creates more anxiety than what he had before. One can ascertain that man is not successful in conflict with nature or with man. In conflict with himself, internal conflict, man fairs just as poorly.

# CHAPTER THREE FOOTNOTES

[1]Ken Kesey, Sometimes A Great Notion (New York, 1963), p. 83.

[2]Rollo May, The Meaning of Anxiety (New York, 1950), p. 200.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## INTERNAL CONFLICT

At one time reason was the answer to all problems. In the seventeenth century philosophers dealt with the "rationalistic solution to the problem of man." It was believed that each man was a rational individual who could solve his problems and achieve autonomy in his life. This autonomous reasoning would enable man to control emotion and become the master of physical nature.[1]

Spinoza felt that fear "arises from a weakness of the mind and therefore does not appertain to the use of reason."[2] Pascal differed from these beliefs in that he felt reason was not a dependable guide.[3] With the dawn of the nineteenth century, traditional rationalistic thinking was rejected and it was insisted that "reality can be approached and experienced only by the whole organism."[4]

Kierkegaard, Freud, and others developed more complex theories about man's ability to overcome his problems. Much literature today concerns the inner self and the interplay of action and mind in the solution of conflicts. Kesey follows modern tradition and emphasizes a high degree of internal conflict. Much of what is said will be repetitious of the kinds of conflict previously noted, primarily because of the intimate relationship between external and internal conflict.

Most of Kesey's characters have a feeling of anxiety, and it is never quite explained what causes this feeling. The men in town have this foreboding. Teddy notices the feeling but cannot decide what the problem is. Individual characters experience the concern but are not able to do anything about the situation.

Myra, Lee's mother, and Viv, Hank's wife, are two of Kesey's characters who experience anxiety as a kind of deep, hollow feeling, and each is unsure exactly what to do to solve the feeling. Myra is a dilemma, in that she leaves a successful college career, "For some gangly old logger in some muddy town clear up north of nowhere."[5] No one can understand why she leaves the East. Viv begins to ask herself this very same question.

> ("I've always been lonely. It's always been in me, like a hollow. . ."). . .("I thought Henry would be able to fill that hollow. Then I thought the child would. . .") (34) [sic]

First Myra comes west to fill that hollow. Then she has a child to solve the problem. A child does not alleviate the anxiety, so she seeks an incestuous relationship with her stepson. This, too, does not fill the hollow, but actually intensifies the problem. As a result, Myra thinks she must leave to take Leland back East. Sadly, this is equally unsuccessful. Problems worsen and Myra finally commits suicide by jumping forty stories to her death.

Viv is similar to Myra in many ways. She, too, has a kind of loneliness which leads her to Hank. She has dreams which

she hopes can be fulfilled by Hank. A short courting period precedes a short absence. Hank returns to take her home to Oregon. While living in Oregon, Viv ponders reasons for her continued stay. As Myra had, Viv becomes pregnant with hopes that this will satisfy her loneliness. The baby dies. The loneliness persists.

Viv's isolation is but one of the problems she faces in her relationship with Hank. She has dreams previous to her marriage. These dreams fail to materialize, she finally believes, because of Hank. A short love affair with Lee only worsens the problems. Both characters face a deep-seated anxiety that they attempt to alleviate by a succession of substitutes. They fail to realize that a substitution never solves the real problem, and in effect, can make the anxiety worse than what it was.

The preceding characters were missing something which they needed desperately. In contrast, Joe Ben has something which he feels he must rid himself of, if he is to avoid anxiety. Joe Ben's father had been extremely handsome. As such, he was continually sought by the local women. It appeared that Ben, Joe's father, had been caused considerable problems by being so handsome. Joe Ben is determined not to have the same problem.

> As Joe got more handsome he got more scared, until the summer before our senior year he was about to give in to it and admit he didn't have any say-so about what he was going to be--he'd even got him a slick-looking Mercury like his dad used to have, all primered and chopped with zebra seats--when just in the nick of time he got into some kind of

> hassle off there in the state park with the homeliest girl in school, and she shredded his pretty face with a brush-cutting knife. He never said much about what brought on the hassle, but it sure changed him. With a new face he figured he was able to open up and become himself. (117)

Joe Ben's anxiety is then lessened by having his face shredded. Instead of coping with the problem, Joe is able to ignore the original problem. Had not Joe's problem been solved for him, he would have reacted in other ways to lessen the anxiety. These reactions would also probably have emphasized escape from the problem.

Sometimes, anxiety develops in an individual because he has no way of coping with a problem. Biggy Newton is a case in point. His one purpose in life is to be a bully. He is prepared for nothing else.

> Now, barely voting age, he faced the bleakish future of the bully with no blocks left who'd get in his road and nothing to bust up. He hulked over his dark beer in the Snag, brooding about the years ahead, and wondering why all them managers who'd started slapping his back and buying him drafts when he was fifteen hadn't prepared him for this inevitable blockless day. (538)

Biggy has no means of solving the problem that he faces. He is inflexible and unprepared to handle his anxiety. He has no choice. This hopelessness is the essence of anxiety. No security object will save him, no repression can give temporary relief. Until another "block" appears, Biggy's only reaction is despair.

Character after character appears on Kesey's pages suffering from mental anguish. Floyd constantly worries about the "big asses" in town, and he is driven to show them that he is

just as good and big as they are. This anxiety is reinforced when he feels he must compensate for his father, an alcoholic union leader, because his father was unable to cope with his own problems. The blame is placed on management, but the need to win for his father is still inherent in his every action.

Draeger faces a "world that won't stand still." His life is based on numerous time-honored principles. He organizes his life in response to a neat list of aphorisms, which he keeps close-by at all times. When anything happens to challenge his concepts, rapid disintegration of his confidence and outer poise occurs. He, in effect, loses his means of security.

A person is, to a certain extent, what others make him to be. Willard Engleston is a perfect example of such a philosophy. Willard's conflict is created by others, the solution to his conflict created by others, and his eventual demise prompted by others.

Willard, a nondescript person, is completely controlled by his wife. She commands his every action. Although dissatisfying to Willard, this situation does create somewhat of a secure world. His wife's accusations prompt him to have sexual relations with his laundry assistant, which result in a child. As always, his wife solves his problem for him. The girl is urged to leave, and then Willard is also urged to take a business trip to Portland where Jelly, his former assistant, lives. His attitude is that

> Things were still working out hunky-dory for his protection. His world had been kept under his hat

> so long that pretty soon no one would even need to worry about somebody's finding out; there wouldn't be anything under there to find out. If he didn't take steps it would all never have been, like the sound a tree doesn't make when it falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it. (404)

But things are not satisfactory. Internal conflict grows because of the separation from his child. Because of economic and social needs, Jelly is going to marry a sailor. Willard begs her to wait, telling her that he has a plan. The plan is to commit suicide so that his baby would have enough money to live. Hank Stamper mentions that this course of action is an unacceptable solution. Hank's comment and his supposed indifference cause more anxiety. Willard senses that he must take affirmative action to preserve his self-integrity. This action proves fruitless as his car goes off a cliff on the way back to town. His death shows that man has no control over his life and that this lack of control is a primary catalyst of anxiety. Kesey seems to point out that man faced with anxiety often has no choice of actions, and even if he does can never effectively relieve his tension.

Even among the supposed "immoral" element of society a kind of inner turmoil exists. Indian Jenny and Simone are two cases which exemplify this fact. Both are prostitutes, but both have differing kinds of internal conflict. Indian Jenny always had a fairly good business, until she became a little old and a little haggard. She was still able to make a living, but the one man she had always desired refused to be with her. Hank Stamper comments that "anybody'd hump an Indian would

hump a she-bear" (59). Jenny cannot believe race is the problem, so she invents another cause. Her failure to capture Hank causes considerable unhappiness. His rejection diminishes her self-respect. She attempts to relieve her turmoil by magic and fantasy. Her actions fail to solve the problem, and actually cause her to become more anxious.

"That little French fluff," Simone, experiences a greater trauma because she displays considerable self-deception. Simone's husband leaves her with five children and mortgages on everything. Support must come from somewhere so the men of Wakonda present her with various types of gifts. These gifts are always "for love" just as her sexual intercourse with them is "for love." Simone cannot accept the fact that she is a prostitute. The townspeople help by saying that "maybe she's no saint, but she's certainly no Indian Jenny" (138). This then helps Simone keep "her amateur standing" (138).

Anxiety plagues Simone when Howie Evans brings up the question of money for her services. This attacks Simone's concept of herself. She reacts violently.

> She had snapped into rigid, scandalized outrage, slapped his face decorously, and stomped from the bar. She was certainly no Indian Jenny! So angry had she been with the implication, that the two quarts of beer--a mere drop ordinarily--had commenced to boil and bubble savagely inside her, and by the time she reached the car she had been forced to give them up. (139)

She is no Indian Jenny who accepts money for her services. With a diminution of self-respect, Simone has to find a scapegoat. Her first target is her husband. But "he is both too weak and

too inaccessible to blame satisfactorily" (139). Simone must find a target. Her next thought leads the reader to believe that the target is Hank Stamper. The cause must be:

> Someone else, someone closer, and stronger, and big enough to bear the burden of blame she is baking in her hot little oven of a heart. . . (139) [sic]

With anxiety pressing in on her, she finds an escape in placing blame for her action on another source. This time it is not the Russians, or the satellite, or lack of civic pride--it is Stamper.

Many an individual, when approaching retirement or after retirement has been forced upon them, feels useless. He is not ready to accept retirement so he fights vehemently to maintain some kind of respect. Henry Stamper fits this characterization perfectly. He has put in a life of hard work, but he is getting quite old for the job of a logger. His being injured has not helped him in his battle to give a full day's work. With the loss of his physical ability, his mental control of the operation is lagging as well. During one particular incident, he is pushed to the background, and he responds by saying:

> (But by God the old hound don't need good ears for some things goddammit. He don't need good ears to know where to draw the boogin' line! And all this goddam telling me it's the best old man you keep outta sight and outta trouble that don't set so good. I get tired! I get tired of!) (93)

This inner turmoil is typical for Henry as he seeks to make himself feel more comfortable. He will not accept his weakness but speaks loudly and acts rashly in his attempt to portray strength. Acting in such a manner only creates more inner turmoil.

Hank Stamper faces a continual torrent of problems from external sources. In general, he seems quite able to handle most of these problems. One particular relationship, though, causes excessive mental anguish for Hank. When his brother arrives in Wakonda, Hank feels that he is going to have to teach this man from back East how to live the rugged life of a logger. Lee does not seem to catch on as fast as he should to this new life and Hank becomes pensive.

> (So I ask myself! how can I show him? how can I give him some notion? how can I snap him outta that fog without getting in some hassle with him?) (190)

This problem continually infects Hank's mind. How does one approach a brother who holds a grudge? Both Hank and Lee feel an urgent need to reach each other but fall victim to the "go-away-closer disease." They avoid coming too close to each other. These actions cause grief for both brothers.

Lee creates a worse situation when he commits adultery with Hank's wife. This action occurs at the same time that Henry is severely injured and Joe Ben drowns. These combined problems are too much for Hank. He gives up, feigns illness, and resigns himself to losing his battle with the union. All these problems affect Hank internally. He begins to seriously question all his previous concepts of living. At this point Hank's life seems meaningless and hopeless. Hank does not really attempt to remedy his situation until much later.

Often an internal conflict is camouflaged by an external conflict. Lee Stamper exhibits such a paradox. He sees every mental or physical problem as directly related to his brother's

relationship with Myra. This Oedipal kind of situation, so Lee thinks, has created the fierce antagonism between brothers and has necessitated and justified his vendetta. Lee's incapability in accepting blame has created the problem rather than any external force. If Lee were to realize this, many of his dilemmas would disappear as would much of his anxiety. Until Lee accepts the blame though, anxiety will increase. Repressing the real cause of his problems aggravates an already tender psyche.

In Kesey's intricate weaving of plot, characterization is terribly significant. As always, though, the author seeks to further develop the conflicts of the novel by well chosen symbols which are juxtaposed to the character's actions during various conflicts. In relationship to internal conflict the author is consistent in his use of symbols. These symbols indicate the nature of the conflicts and the cause of the conflicts.

Teddy, proprietor of the Snag Saloon, has created a type of security by buying other businesses and then placing the sign of the non-existent bars in his window. These signs calm his anxiety for a period of time. His internal conflict, that of inferiority, still emerges and plays a significant role in his interaction. At times, he convinces himself that he is even superior to the patrons of his saloon. He refuses to see his actions though for what they really represent--a profound feeling of inferiority. Until he sees that shadow, his inferiority, he will not live a very satisfying life. Those signs

then represent the internal conflict which has seized Teddy.

As previously noted, the Stampers suffered from a curse. This curse is the inability to stay in one place for very long. The climax to this problem occurs when Hank's grandfather, Jonas, "escapes" from Oregon and goes to the Midwest. This abandonment creates a profound sense of guilt which plagues the Stampers for years to come. They seek outward signs that they have overcome the curse. Two symbols stand out as representative of that anxiety--the house the Stampers built, and the sign: "Never Give an Inch." Both symbols communicate to the world and to the Stampers that the curse has ended, that the Stampers are a permanent family, willing to overcome any obstacle, be it man or nature. These outward symbols, however, fail to erase the guilt deep inside the Stampers.

Many psychologists agree that all change is threatening, and threat causes anxiety. There are many symbols in the novel which represent a treacherous impermanence, a "world that won't stand still." As a result the reader realizes that impermanence is a major cause of internal conflict expressed as anxiety.

The sound of the geese suggests that man is impermanent. As Lee, Hank, and most of the townspeople listen to the geese overhead, they come to understand the geese's call. The noise the geese make is an ever-present reminder that time waits for no one, that something must be done now to solve the problems that exist. Everything is impermanent; new ideas and new solutions must be forever forthcoming.

Hank loves to create fantasies to see how Lee would react to them. One such fantasy, the hide-behind, represents imper-

manence of ideas, solutions, relationships, basically everything concerning man's existence. Hank tells the story of the hide-behind to Lee.

> "Lee, bub," I would tell him, toting him on in the house on my hip, "the Hide-behind is one of the worst cree-churs a logging man can be plagued with. One of the very worst. He's little, not big at all, actually, but fast, oh Christ, fast as quicksilver. 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. You can hear one of em' sometimes when it's real still in the swamp, and when the wind ain't blowing. Or sometimes you can catch just the least glimpse of him outta the corner of your eye. You ever notice, when you're alone out in the woods, seein' just a speck of something outta the corner of your eye? Then when you turn, whooshee, nothing?" (114)

Man's existence is much like the hide-behind. Just when you think you have a grasp of the situation, whoosh!, and the touch with reality or permanence is gone just like the disappearance of the hide-behind.

Man would like to think that his character is permanent. The moon, another one of Kesey's symbols used to point out impermanence, conveys the idea that man's nature is very much like that of Dr. Jekyl. It appears that the moon is quoting Gothic poetry to Lee;

> Even a man who is pure of heart
> And says his prayers at night
> May turn to a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
> And the autumn moon is bright. (227)

Each man seems then to possess the potential of evil. This kind of thought is not easily accepted by Lee nor something easily accepted by humanity in general. Man would seek to find only goodness in his nature.

Man's concept of the world and his place in it is governed by, say scientists, a few basic facts. Man's satisfactory existence is dependent on the stability of these few tenets.

The notion of time in Oregon is one of those supposedly stable concepts which become impermanent just like everything else in this land. Lee asks a native what time it is. The response is a sermonette explaining the complications of telling what time it is.

> "I'm a millworker an' I work switch shifts, sometimes weekends off, sometimes a day here, a night someplace else, so you'd think that'd be enough of a mess, wouldn't you? But then they got this time thing and I sometimes work one day standard, the next day daylight. Sometimes even come to work on daylight and go home on standard. Oh boy, time? I tell you, you name it. We got fast time, slow time, daylight time, night time, Pacific time, good time, bad time. . .Yeah, if we Oregonians was hawking time we'd be able to offer some variety! Awfullest mix-up they ever had." (89)

No one can specifically tell a person what time it is. This mix-up adds more confusion and lack of stability to an already little understood and impermanent society.

Another of these supposed immutable, stable laws is that if all else fails we can depend on our concept of truth to lead us through problem situations. We lean on truth as the one kind of security that can never be altered, abused, or dissipated. Lee elaborates on the concept of truth as he contemplates his past experiences. He comments that:

> I could now (possibly) go back and restretch those shrunken hours, flake the images separate, arrange them in accurate chronological order, (possibly; with will-power, patience, and the proper chemicals) but being accurate is not necessarily being honest. (73)

Here, Lee accentuates the fact that strict accurate reporting

is not necessarily honest reporting because it does not take into account myriad considerations and contingencies. He sees the image of his mother talking to himself and comments:

> 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. . . .(74)

Lee considers another element of truth, that chronological reporting is not always the stronghold of truth. After he sees the vision of his mother committing suicide, he makes his first statement on the subject: "Besides, there are some things that can't be the truth even if they did happen" (74). This final climactic statement makes an uneasy hypothesis. Here even truth is mutable, truth lacks stability, truth is Janus-faced. If we cannot rely on truth we face this whole world of impermanence without any kind of praetorian guard, lost in a sea of confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety.

The preceding symbols suggest that anxiety is created because of a lack of permanence in the Oregon society. When faced with such change people react in almost unexplainable ways, usually tending towards escape as a means of alleviating anxiety. In one of the intercalary parts of the novel, Kesey tells a story of a squirrel. This particular creature lived in an old davenport. The squirrel lived in harmony until the davenport was covered with a plaid blanket.

> Instead of trying to incorporate a plaid exterior into the scheme of his world he moved to the rainspout at the back of the house and was drowned in the first fall shower, probably still blaming that blanket. . . . (148)

Again the reader notes that change is threat. The change confuses the squirrel, and because of his inability to cope with the change, he chooses escape. The result is tragedy.

Few people are able to confront anxiety in an appropriate manner. Another example of escape, as a means of ridding oneself of internal anxiety, is the "lemming instinct." A dictionary definition describes lemmings as: "some species that undertake spectacular mass migration at peaks of population growth, ultimately crowding into the sea to destruction."[6] Henry first describes the lemming instinct in discussing his early days when he works on a crab trawler. While working, they would come across fox and deer clear out to sea. He felt they were, at one time, trying to rid themselves of fleas, jumped into the river, and were carried out by the current. He changes his attitude when he comes across one particular buck.

> "Well, he looked so done in we didn't bother to tie him down. He was just layin' there sort of stunned an' so shot he didn't look like he could bat an eye. He laid there, didn't make a move till we got close to the beach on our way in; then, man alive, he was up and for a second there it was just hoofs and horns in all directions, then over the side. I thought at first the booger had just been sullin' till he got near enough to swim to shore. But that wasn't it. He turned right around, right into a incom' tide, and headed right straight back out, lookin' scared as ever. It kinda got me, you know? I'd always heard tell that deer and such went into the surf to kill the ticks and lice with salt water, then got swept out, but after seein' that buck I decided different, I decided there was more to it than bugs." (254)

Lee picks up on this concept and insists on the animal's obvious desire to drown himself in order to escape his peculiar type of demon. Lee says; "Don't you think a poor dumb buck has the ability to recognize the same cruel world as the drunk" (255).

With this comment it becomes apparent that these animals' actions represent a type of lemming instinct which in turn represents man's attempts to escape from whatever dilemma he faces.

As Jung has noted, consciousness exercises inhibition on the acceptance of incompatible material. This he goes on to say is used for the momentary process of adaption.[7] Lee's consciousness is portrayed by a conscience-like figure he calls "Old Reliable." Old Reliable acts up every time Lee comes into conflict with ideas or situations which constitute a threat to the basic equilibrium Lee has attempted to forge over the years. The warning comes in the form of "Watch Out!" This reaction creates a vague feeling of anxiety and Lee really doesn't understand the cause nor does he know how to react. Often Lee heeds Old Reliable's warning and escapes from the conflicting situation. His refusal to face the situation creates a worse problem.

Internal conflict is not a new phenomenon. Men have told of the conflicts and the reaction to the conflicts in many art forms. Kesey utilizes songs to symbolize his ideas. Many of the songs speak of mobility and movement.

> This Springfield water tastes like turpentine,
> I'm goin' down. . .that long dusty road. (19)

The urge to move on is present as expressed in the title of Hank Snow's song, "I'm Movin' On." Again, nothing is permanent, man moves on.

Certain songs brought to mind by Kesey's novel portray

a much more serious response to anxiety. Huddie Ledbetter's song "Good Night, Irene" suggests suicide as the kind of escape. In the chorus are the words:

> Sometimes I live in the country
> Sometimes I live in town
> Sometimes I have a great notion
> To jump in the river and drown.

Ledbetter's last verse emphasizes the same concept of suicide as escape.

> I love Irene, God knows I do,
> I love her till the sea runs dry.
> If Irene turns her back on me
> I'm gonna take morphine and die.

When faced with internal conflict, the individual chooses escape. Nothing is solved; the world is not bettered in any way.

Towards the end of the novel, a few symbols appear which exemplify the results of internal conflict. After Lee has had sexual intercourse with Viv, he leaves the house and stays at the hotel. While there he gets a picture of what he has become when he notices his reflection in a cigarette machine. Lee studies the

> unkempt, unshaven, wastepaper basket of a face that peered back at me with red-rimmed and terror-filled eyes, as a look of bleak destruction. (585-6)

Lee's conquest of Viv apparently has done little to soothe his state of anxiety. The "look of bleak destruction" only accentuates his internal conflict.

Hank, earlier, also comes in contact with an image of himself which reeks with terror. Hank, during a rainy night, goes to a window to check the foundation. What he sees represents his state of mind.

> Out past the glass there seemed to be nothing but rain being whipped around in long filmy sheets, like the banners of the wind. I was just standing there, stroking the beam of that light back and forth, still about half sacked-out, when all of a sudden I see out yonder a face! A human face! floating out there on the rain, wide-eyed, wild-haired, with a mouth twisted in horror like a thing been trapped outside in the storm for centuries. . . .I don't know how long I stared at it--maybe five seconds or five minutes--before I gave a yell and jumped back from the window. And saw the face mimic my actions. Oh! Oh for chrissakes . . . .It's just a reflection, nothing but a reflection. . . . (470)

"Just a reflection" is Hank's reaction. The reader can see, though, the true nature of Hank. Hank has "a mouth twisted in horror." He is experiencing the same feelings that almost every character in Sometimes A Great Notion experiences--that "unspeakable, supreme terror" (572).

A final symbol, representative of man's reaction to anxiety, concerns the dark shadow of shame. While upstairs in the attic looking for an insurance policy, Lee notices this shadow on Viv. The shame which he notices is not shame for herself or Lee, but is shame for Hank. Lee comments that he had

> not recognized it earlier because it was not shame for herself or her guilt, or for me in mine, but shame for the man so weakened by his illness that he was unable to let his wife disappear momentarily from his observation into the attic, so stricken with fever that nothing would do but take me across the river himself to keep her from being alone with me that little time more. . . (605)

This intense shame cannot remain stationary but must reach out and attach itself to as many people as possible. As Lee leaves the attic he too is "encumbered by a shadow as unnatural as

it was unwieldly" (605). This realization of shame is a definite reaction to the internal conflict. Many would see this shame as debilitating. In effect, this shame may be the first step of these characters toward a realistic handling of their anxiety.

Internal conflict is a culmination of many kinds of problems. Man's conflict against nature and against other men often becomes a catalyst for internal conflict. Man seems unable to handle the problems he faces, but it becomes readily apparent that his only choices are that he must either accept his deficiencies or escape from them. Kesey skillfully develops internal conflict through a blend of character and symbol, pointing out that man faces meaninglessness and hopelessness largely because of a treacherous impermanence in society. As Kesey notes:

> You can make a mark across the night with the tip of an embered stick, and you can actually see it fixed in its finity. You can be absolutely certain of its treacherous impermanence. And that is all. (100)

This impermanence causes man to react in many ways. Perhaps the most significant way is to escape. Through internal conflict man becomes a frantic being, unable to successfully overcome his anxiety.

Were Kesey to leave us at this point, there would seem to be little hope for mankind. Kesey, though, provides the reader with some type of solution. The solution does not totally solve man's problems but does pose a method which may engender an alternative to meaninglessness and despair.

# CHAPTER FOUR FOOTNOTES

[1]Rollo May, The Meaning of Anxiety (New York, 1950), p. 19.

[2]May, p. 23.

[3]May, p. 26.

[4]May, p. 30.

[5]Ken Kesey, Sometimes A Great Notion (New York, 1963), p. 34.

[6]New World Dictionary, David B. Guralnik, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p. 808.

[7]Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York, 1971), p. 274.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## SOLUTION

Man's unresolved conflicts, whether they be against nature, against other men, or within himself, can make existence hopeless and meaningless. Modern life is all too often a continuation of the drama of despair that has been played since man's beginning. Henry David Thoreau observes man's failures to make life meaningful when Thoreau says, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."[1] The desperation or anxiety is "quiet" because there are often few outward signs of the struggle. In effect the entire human race may live in a state of anxiety and die in that state of anxiety, leaving this world "not with a bang but a whimper."[2]

Kesey's characters in Sometimes A Great Notion exist in a state of anxiety. When they attempt to overcome their problems, they fall into a category Joyce Wegs designates as "grotesque. They become grotesque because of "their inability to change, to rid themselves of their terrible preoccupations."[3] Toward the end of the novel, Hank has supposedly given up in his fight to break the union, which is what the townspeople have been wanting him to do all along. Even though success is imminent, the community still is not happy. Teddy, the bartender, notices this feeling and continually asks, "What are they afraid of now?"[4] Evenwrite quizzes himself by asking, "And why ain't I satisfied how things worked out" (551). Teddy notices the

anomalous actions of his patrons and the queer expression on their faces which he cannot quite define. He finally realizes that this expression which he observes, is nothing less than "absolute, unspeakable, supreme terror" (572). Again, the question lingers--why is there this terror when the demon has been defeated? Individuals behave in bizarre fashion as exemplified by Rod, a performer in Wakonda. With no apparent motivation, he mutilates his guitar and then rushes across the room to plunge his hands into boiling water. If Wakonda's primary problem has been eliminated, what is the source of anxiety that still plagues the community? Teddy asks the same question when he ponders:

> What drove these men in, like cattle to the barn in a thunderstorm, on this crystal-clear day? Could it be that his cherished equations and formulas of man, based on years of correctly relating alcohol intake to fear output, were finally being proved imperfect? For what awful fear could possibly lurk beneath all this noisy joy and victory? How could a storm strong enough to drive such a large herd into his long, barnlike bar be thundering behind all this blue sky and sunshine? (536)

His cherished equations are not incorrect; for fear and anxiety still plague the townspeople's lives. The question still remains--what prevents these individuals from ridding themselves of their terrible preoccupations?

The answer may be determined by reference to the psychological assertions of Carl Jung, who writes that man must provide his own answers to meaning in life. Man must be willing to look into his nature, accept the darker side of his life, and see himself for what he is rather than what he

would like to be. It is only in the acceptance of the opposites in one's nature that the individual can see meaning in life.[5] If the individual blames others for misfortune, runs away from problems rather than facing them, and depends on others to provide solutions to conflicts, he cannot develop as a mature being.

The townspeople encounter many conflicts but they run away from the real problems, for avoidance, as E. E. Levitt points out, is "one of the simplest, most common forms of defending against anxiety."[6] When Hank was strike breaking, all their misfortunes could be blamed on Hank. With Hank's yielding, the community has no one to blame for its unresolved problems but itself. This anxiety--the horror at finding no one to blame but themselves--creates the "absolute, unspeakable, supreme terror" (572). Dependence, blame, escape must be eliminated through recourse to the Jungian alternatives which are the only solutions to the meaninglessness, anxiety, and despair which the community faces.

Kesey's outlook for this community is not a pleasant one. The individuals are unaware or incapable of the right course of action to make life meaningful. As noted, however, Kesey provides an alternative to this anxiety and despair. The roots of the alternatives may be termed Jungian; acceptance of one's darker side appears to be the first necessary step toward self realization. A few characters in Sometimes A Great Notion take the first step and appear ready to accept the darker side of their natures. Viv, Lee, and Hank are the

only characters who come to any kind of realization, with even these three lacking any kind of complete success in finding life meaningful.

When Viv is a young girl, she dreams about marriage and her ideal mate. Her plans include a man who would let her cut her hair, who would permit her to have canarics, who would father a child that would be taught to sing and dance, "And most of all. . .he was to be someone who wanted the real. . . me, who wanted-- truly --what I am. . . .Not a someone who just wanted what they needed me to be. . ." (626). Viv is not true to herself. She permits herself to be used by Hank and Lee. As a result, she experiences a deep, hollow feeling which could only be eliminated by living the way she had always planned. She rids herself of a facade and accepts what her true feelings are, her darker but more real self. When looking at an earlier picture of herself, she talks to herself;

> "I love them, I do. I truly can love. I have that. . ." But this minute, for this woman, this dead image, she feels a hatred that sings in her ears like steam. This woman has been like a dark fire, a cold fire, that melted them all beyond recognition. Burned then until they barely knew themselves or each other.
>
> "But I won't let her use me any longer. I love them but I cannot give myself for them. Not my whole self. I have no right to do that." (626)

Viv realizes that she has given up her true feelings in order to be used and manipulated by Hank and Lee. She accepts this fact and recognizes her other side, which is not so altruistic, but is more concerned with her own individual dreams and ideals. Viv knows her other self can be shunned no longer. By leaving, which she intends to do, she is not running away from the problem

but in essence is running to her true self--a self that must encounter the fulfillment of her childhood dreams.

The story revolves around Lee and Hank so it would seem appropriate that these two come to some sort of realization about life. They do, indeed, become aware of the possibility of life and do take steps toward the process of individuation.

Lee has always seen the problem of his life as emanating from his brother's relationship with his own mother. Lee blames all his problems on his brother and feels the only hope for himself lies in the fact that he must somehow destroy or weaken Hank. If Hank can be hurt as badly as Lee himself has been hurt, or if big brother can be pulled down from his almighty pedestal, Lee then feels that life would have some meaning. As with any solution that depends on an external reaction, Lee's plan is bound to prove fruitless.

The plan to "dethrone" Hank succeeds when Lee commits adultery with Viv. Hank sees the two make love and it is this scene, plus the trauma of the logging accident, that causes Hank to break down completely. The victory is supposedly complete, but the spoils seem not so enjoyable. Lee experiences what his conscience labels "post dual depression."

> I was struck with that feeling of inconsolable loss that the satiated big-game hunter must experience when he returns to camp, through the suddenly monotonous jungle, having slain whatever demon he feared the very most. My steely eyes, once alert and aglitter with the excitement of the hunt, had waxed muddy and dull behind fogged lenses that I made no attempt to clean. My sentinel ears no longer pricked outward to catch warning snap of the tell-tale twig, turning instead to the dull murmur of introspection. My sense of touch was disconnected by the cold. My

> taste buds atrophied. My keen nose, that had but a few days previous run silently ahead gleaning the shadows for the scent of danger, now only ran, not at all silently. . . (583)

Lee chooses a route which is supposed to lead to satisfaction and meaning. Life is less meaningful than before because the real problem has not been faced and Lee's former self not accepted. Lee makes a step toward self-realization when he comes to understand that his plan to overcome Hank is not the way to solve his problem. Lee thinks that by taking out his revenge on Hank that the magical word "Shazam" would create a Captain Marvel out of an insignificant Billy Batson. When Lee realizes the fallacy in this assumption he begins to grow as a character. Lee comments:

> I knew that I had in no way achieved that stature I had subconsciously dreamed that my revenge would bring about. I had very successfully completed my ritual of vengeance; I had accurately mouthed all the right mystical words. . .but instead of turning myself into a Captain Marvel, as the ritual and words were supposed to do according to all the little-guy-beats-big-guy tradition. . .I had merely created another Billy Batson. (527-28)

Rather than solving his problem, Lee realizes that he has only worsened his condition. This is the first step toward finding meaning, and Lee has many more steps to take.

A second step Lee takes is emphasized in an intercalary section where Lee begins to become aware of his problem. It is noted that man ". . .has to make it with himself before branching out" (574). This, in essence, means that no external relationship can be created until the internal relationship--man with himself--is satisfactorily developed. "Making it

with himself" begins when Lee fights with Hank near the end of the novel; Lee knows Hank has the power to kill him, but Lee keeps fighting. What he accomplishes in this confrontation is noted by Hank.

> (This time he had fought with nobody to pull him out from under what he knew was maybe death when he crawled in under it. . .nobody to pull him out but himself.) (616)

Lee no longer leans on anyone else as a crutch. He fights for himself, by himself without escape to his mother, or without needing or seeking aid from any other source. Lee says, "I was fighting for my life. . . .Not running for my life as I've always done before. But fighting for it. Not merely to keep it, or to have it, but for it" (622). Instead of running away he faces his problem, a second step toward individuation.

As always though, the process of individuation is never complete. Something happens which demands that man continue in his process of self-realization. Hank and ultimately Lee decide to take the run down the river. Lee realizes that he must continually fight for himself if he is to ever be happy. He sees that "when the partner is equal there exists no end, no winning, no losing, and no stopping. . ." (622). Lee cannot beat Hank physically. Even if he could, though, physical prowess does not necessarily bring about victory. There is no victory; one only accepts the challenge of doing things that must be done. Lee's action of going on the run down the river would only symbolically represent that he is not going to give up his self for any one, that his "inner sanctuary" will not be violated. In a climactic moment Lee realizes that

> There is always a sanctuary more, a door that can never be forced, whatever the force, a last inviolable that can never be taken, whatever the attack; your vote can be taken, your name, your innards, even your life, but that last stronghold can only be surrendered. And to surrender it for any reason other than love is to surrender love. Hank had always known this without knowing it, and by making him doubt it briefly I made it possible for both of us to discover it. I knew it now. And I knew that to win my love, my life, I would have to win back for myself the right to this last stronghold. (622-23)

This last stronghold is Lee's inner self which he now refuses to give up. It is rejected by Lee when he blames his problems on another. It is ignored when he does not stand up for himself. This inner self, in which Lee recognizes his darker side of weakness as well as his strength, is the core no one can surrender. If it is surrendered a man's very existence is threatened. Until the inner core is accepted and respected, man is anxious and life is meaningless. Lee realizes that to protect this last stronghold he must win back the strength he had lost earlier in a "watered down" relationship with his mother, reestablish pride in place of pity, and he must not let Hank go down the river alone (623). Lee's realization makes him aware of his past actions and brings about a synthesis of both sides of his nature, the weak and the strong, the secure and the insecure. With acceptance of the problem and the undertaking of a direct course of action, Lee appears to be firmly on the path to individuation, self-realization, and meaning in life.

Hank, as well as Lee, has to come to an awareness of his true nature before his development can take place. The Stamper code, "Never Give An Inch," guides Hank throughout his life.

He always feels that he, in his own words, must be one of the "Ten Toughest Hombres this side of the Rockies" (110). For Hank to win over whatever conflict he faces means

> Going after it with everything you got, fighting, and kicking, stomping and gouging, and cussing it when everything else went sour. And being just as strong in the hassle as you got it in you to be. (111)

Strength and determination governed his life, with nothing less than his best effort his only rule. This attitude works quite well for a great part of his life. Still, when facing the crippling of his father, the death of his cousin, the adultery of his wife, and the incessant hatred of the townspeople, Hank finally breaks down. With this collapse he becomes aware of the opposites within his personality, accepts these opposites, and forges a synthesis which guides him to his next course of action.

After Joe Ben's death, Hank, knowing his wife and Lee are there, heads for home. Not finding a boat he swims across the river, thinking all the time that, "You'll make it across not because you're strong enough but because you're weak enough. . . (522). He sees the opposite in his nature but does not yet fully accept it. As he swims he first denies any true strength but then accepts a new kind of strength.

> (No, not the strength I always believed in; I kept hearing in my head--not strength like I always thought, I could build and thought I could have, and thought I could show the kid how to live. . .) (523).

Hank's concept of strength is changing, and he continues to refine his new idea by noting that there are many ways of being

strong and winning.

> . . .like winning by giving in, by being soft, by not gritting your goddam teeth and getting your best hold. . .winning by not, for damned sure, being one of the Ten Toughest Hombres [sic] west of the Rockies. And show we as well that there's times when the only way you can win is by being weak, by losing, by doing your worst instead of your best. (111)

The growth and development of Hank is accentuated by this awareness. He realizes that in order to salvage life, to save that inner core of his personality he might have to give up or lose everything. The battle with the union is lost. Joe Ben is dead and Hank is crippled. His wife has proven to be an adultress. Weakness and sickness overcome Hank. Lee sees this as the reenactment of his own childhood drama.

> He's carrying on with moaning and coughing and all the other theatrics traditionally used by children seeking repossession of sympathy. Yes, I knew: an exact duplication of the scene I used to enact, with identical motives and intentions. (526)

At this point Hank may be striving for sympathy, but his actions portend a sinking to total grief, loss, and weakness. It is necessary that Hank must face total loss before he can form his synthesis and grow as a personality. This total state of grief can serve the same role as neurosis. Jacobi says,

> A neurosis can thus act as a cry for help, sent from a higher inner authority in order to call our attention to the fact that we urgently need a broadening of our personality and that we can reach it if we confront the neurosis correctly.7

Indeed Hank does approach the problem correctly. He realizes what he is and moves forward, knowing what he must do.

Hank has learned a great deal in a short amount of time. When Hank decides to make the run down the river, it appears

that he has gone back to his old ways of being the "Toughest Hombre" and emphasizing strength and determination above everything. He is again facing the community and life with a fierce determination, but the action is the fierce determination of a man who knows when to be strong and when to be weak, when to lose and when to win. When he sends Lee into town, he says:

> I was feeling all right, maybe not in God's pocket because it ain't so easy a thing losing a wife, but more all right about myself than I had in a good spell. (617)

He is aware of the complexities of his life. Hank may have to be weak. He may have to lose his wife; he may have to give in to his brother. Despite all these problems, Hank can still feel good about himself because he better understands himself and others.

Hank appears to have solved many of his own problems. But as Ronald Billingsley says, Kesey's characters "are intimately inter-related."[8] As such, Hank's actions may have significant implications for the community of Wakonda. The natives of the town are dependent on Hank. They cannot face or accept their true selves; they cannot overcome the problems by themselves, so they turn to Hank both as a scapegoat and as strength. He serves the first function because his actions provide an excuse for the economic, social, and individual problems which they face. As long as Hank is around, there is no need to blame themselves. It also appears that Hank is a source of strength for the townspeople. When the Stampers have supposedly lost the battle against the union, one would think that the people should be happy. As Teddy notes, the opposite is true as they

react with terror. This happens because in a land and a society incessantly threatened by impermanence, a source of stability, even if it opposes one's way of life, is important. Hank provides that kind of stability not found in Wakonda. This stable symbol gives the townspeople something to live for, to fight. The town comes alive when it finds that Hank has not given up. Evenwrite calls a meeting to decide a course of action, Jenny forgets her self-pity, and Biggy Newton finds a reason to live as he starts doing push-ups on the living room rug. Hank becomes the catalyst for activity, activity which gives some kind of meaning to life.

The search for meaning in life, sought by all men in all times, could be so much simplified if the individual would look to himself first as the source of his problems, frustrations, and failures. It is appropriate that Kesey has chosen only three characters from a myriad of faces in _Sometimes A Great Notion_ who attain some kind of realization about what the real meaning in life is. The appropriateness lies in the fact that this microcosm can indeed represent the larger macrocosm of life where so few seem to understand the meaning of life, and only a few investigate their own souls. _Man_ must, as noted by the Greeks, "Know thyself."[9] Here the journey to a meaningful life must begin.

In _Sometimes A Great Notion_ Kesey depicts life in its many complex forms. His characters represent the opposites in our culture: the secure and the insecure, the strong and the weak, the leader and the follower, the developing and the static

character, as well as sundry other pairs. Kesey's picture is not complete, though, unless his characters have realistic motivation which culminates in logical action. This final area is the true test of an artist.

The goal of many characters in Kesey's novel, whether it be conscious or unconscious, centers around finding meaning in life. The task is not a simple one because man encounters conflicts with nature, with other men, and within himself. Because of these conflicts, only a few of Kesey's characters find a meaning in life. Hank, Lee, and Viv succeed better than any of the other characters in the search for meaning. If Kesey is to be successful in his presentation of these characters, they must be realistically and consistently drawn. There is a common ingredient which enables them to be successful in their quest. Conversely, there is a reason why the other townspeople are unsuccessful in their search for meaning.

The link between Hank, Lee, and Viv is a psychological phenomenon. The roots for interpretation are Jungian. As previously stated, Jung believes that man must accept the dark side of his nature before he can ever advance as a human being. Kesey carefully weaves a plot which parallels Jungian concepts. Initially they all ignore, in Lee's words, their inner "sanctuary" (622). Hank feels he can only display strength. Lee deceives himself when he places blame for his problems on his brother. Viv tries to overcome her loneliness through relationships with two different men. She realizes later that the relationships are only substitutions for her real desires.

It takes near death and almost total despair for these individuals to become aware of their hypocritical lives. When Hank understands weakness, when Lee comprehends the real source of his problems, and when Viv accepts her true feelings, they begin to see meaning and hope in life. They accept their dark side, and this acceptance, coupled with positive action, prompts development and creates meaning. Hank continues a similar course of action but combines both strength and weakness in his relationships with other individuals. Lee knows he must recognize that only he is to blame for his problems. Viv accepts her weaker but more real self. They find meaning in life because they are aware of the opposite sides of their natures and accept their potentials. Kesey, therefore, engenders realism and consistency in his characterizations.

Knowing themselves provides hope for Kesey's characters. Ignorance of self hinders the characters' search for meaning. Character after character fails to comprehend his real nature. Attempts toward self-realization become painful, and each individual resorts to defense mechanisms, half-truths, or complete deception. As such, the motivation for one's actions is clearly related to a desire to prevent discomfort. But, as long as the individual persists in his self-deceptive behavior, the only possibility is a dissatisfying, meaningless, hypocritical life. This failure to accept oneself for what one really is precipitates this condition.

Kesey proves to be successful with self-deceived characters as well. Because of the failure in the process of individua-

tion, some find life meaningless. Each person turns to others for both blame and for strength. The question looms: why is change such a problem? The answer is simple; it is too painful and too difficult. The motivation is frightfully evident. Considering the multitude of meaningless lives in American culture, one finds the picture Kesey draws almost too realistic.

The complex ideas Kesey projects are very similar to the Jungian alternatives. If the characters embrace their full psychic potentialities, they can find meaning in life. Most of Kesey's characters fail miserably in finding meaning in life because they choose unwisely. The use of defense mechanisms accentuates the fact that their reactions are typical of twentieth century life. The motivation is clear--they choose to escape from the pain of looking too closely at themselves.

Some individuals in Sometimes A Great Notion do find meaning in life because they elect the process of individuation. Their actions are consistent in that they become more aware of themselves and respond in a manner which emphasizes this awareness. Once seeing a small part of their dark side, they seek to eliminate hypocrisy in their lives. In regard to both types of characters, those who find meaning in life and those who find none, Kesey consistently motivates his characters toward logical action. His success is evident because his characterizations are consistent and convincingly depicted.

## CHAPTER FIVE FOOTNOTES

[1]Henry David Thoreau, "Economy," Walden Pond (Princeton, 1971).

[2]T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in Collected Poems 1909-1962 (New York, 1963).

[3]Joyce M. Wegs, "The Grotesque in Some American Novels of the Nineteen Sixties: Ken Kesey, Joyce Carol Oates, Sylvia Plath," Dissertation Abstracts International (Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

[4]Ken Kesey, Sometimes A Great Notion (New York, 1963), p. 541.

[5]Jolande Jacobi, The Psychology of C. G. Jung (New Haven, 1943), p. 175.

[6]Eugene E. Levitt, The Psychology of Anxiety (Indianapolis, 1967), p. 36.

[7]Jacobi, p. 134.

[8]Ronald Billingsley, "The Artistry of Ken Kesey," Dissertation Abstracts International (Oregon, 1971).

[9]Inscribed on Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

# CHAPTER SIX

# APPENDIX

Ken Kesey sees life in a very pessimistic manner. Man moves through day after dreary day facing a meaningless existence. So few, as we have seen, are able to come to any kind of awareness which would create meaning. For those who can come to some sort of realization about life, the process is not simple or enjoyable. This complexity and distastefulness discourage active involvement by the mass of men.

The route to meaning is exemplified by Kesey in his novel Sometimes A Great Notion by a process close to that espoused by Carl Jung, and it could be labelled the process of individuation. Even though his novel may be interpreted in this light, one cannot necessarily call Kesey a Jungian thinker or psychologist. He may or may not have deliberately applied the philosophy of Jung.

Nor is it possible to limit the interpretation of Kesey's work to only the philosophy of Jung. Many other scholars, philosophers, and psychologists have formulated ideas which can aid in the understanding of Kesey. Before leave is taken, it would seem important to take a quick look at a few of these men and their ideas.

Much of Jung's psychology had to do with the fact that man must go through a kind of "trial by fire" in order to develop as a human being. Through this trial, man comes to

understand himself better and profits by the experience. William Barrett relates this kind of idea to some existential thinking. He says that

> the whole man is not without such unpleasant things as death, anxiety, guilt, fear and trembling and despair. . . .Without the shudder of fear or the trembling of dread man would never stand face to face with himself in life.[1]

In Sometimes A Great Notion, we see character after character plagued by anxiety, fear, and guilt. Eventually, though, the individual in the novel uses these destructive forces to reveal much about himself. Kierkegaard echoes these same sentiments in The Concept of Dread. Kierkegaard insists that man can demand nothing from life and that terror dwells with man. But he emphasizes that when man learns that this very dread

> may the next instant become a fact, he will then interpret reality differently, he will extol reality, and even when it rests upon him heavily he will remember that after all it is far, far lighter than the possibility was.[2]

Man faces terror but realizes this terror is not nearly so bad as what it could be, i.e., its possibility. This is similar to Jung's thinking in that he believes that by seeing one side--meaninglessness--we immediately recognize the opposite, which then has to be meaning. Through the recognition of the worst, one can come to know the best.

When the individual faces dread and anxiety, he can either confront them or ignore or escape from them. The incorrect response is a way of life for most of Kesey's characters. From Jung's point of view, this causes a problem, for he insists that man must not suppress or repress, but must come to see

one's other side. This is difficult for most people because they find self-knowledge too painful. W. H. Auden, in The Age of Anxiety, tells a tale of four people who contemplate the possibility of self-knowledge but are never quite successful. The one who comes the closest to self-awareness, Malin, reflects on man's nature.

> Yet the noble despair of the poets
> Is nothing of the sort; it is silly
> To refuse the tasks of time
> And, overlooking our lives,
> Cry--"Miserable wicked me,
> How interesting I am."
> We would rather be ruined than changed,
> We would rather die in our dread
> Than climb the cross of the moment
> And let our illusions die.[3]

These sentiments relate closely to Kesey's characters, who refuse to face the truth, to change the illusions of themselves, to see themselves and life for what they really are. As a result, the characters do indeed "die in dread."

Man encounters problems, handles them poorly, and fails to advance in any way. Something is needed to jolt these individuals out of the rut they are in. Jung feels a neurosis can perform such a function. Some form of hysteria is important because he feels ". . .the unconscious sensibility of a hysterical patient is at certain moments fifty times more acute than that of a normal person."[4] Thus, it is the person on the verge of destruction and desolation who sees life and conflicts for what they really are. Some psychologists feel shame can serve the same function as hysteria or neurosis. Helen Merrill Lynd, in her work Shame and the Search for Identity,

interprets the importance of shame.

> Experiences of shame are a painful uncovering of hitherto unrecognized aspects of one's personality as well as unrecognized aspects of one's society and of the world. If it is possible to face them, instead of seeking protection from what they reveal, they may throw light on who one is and hence point the way toward who and what one may become.[5]

Experience of shame then can lead to self-awareness and aid in the process of individuation. This is relavant to the discussion of Viv, Lee, and Hank in Kesey's novel because they experience a deep-seated shame which enables them to discover more about themselves. Lee is preparing to leave the Stamper household. His last act is to locate an insurance policy which has him as the beneficiary. While in the attic he notices this pronounced sense of shame on Viv.

> I had not recognized it earlier because it was not shame for herself or her guilt, or for me in mine, but shame for the man so weakened by his illness that he was unable to let his wife disappear momentarily from his observation into the attic, so stricken with fever that nothing would do but take me across the river himself to keep her from being alone with me that little time more. . .[6]

As he left the attic, he too felt encumbered by the shadow of shame, "unnatural and unwieldly." Shortly after this experience Viv, Lee, and Hank come to a realization about their lives. The shame they felt was faced; it did "throw light on who one is, and hence point the way toward who and what one may become." Shame is a feeling of personal blame which is the first step towards a solution.

As pointed out in chapter five, few individuals find the

right course of action. The majority, like the townspeople, continue to blame others for their problems and seek someone to guide them. Monroe K. Spears in his analysis of Auden's Age of Anxiety, seeks a kind of false Messiah. Spears notes that in "The Dirge":

> Discouraged by the apparent meaninglessness of nature and the hopeless situation of man, the characters think of some "semi-divine stranger with superhuman powers, some Gilgamesh or Napoleon, some Solon or Sherlock Holmes" who promises to rescue man and nature, but who always dies or disappears.[7]

This person, Spears says, is the fake Messiah from whom "mankind will always look for relief from anxiety and guilt."[8] In Sometimes A Great Notion the townspeople depend on Hank to provide meaning for their life because without Hank they lack a certain future.

This dependency of the townspeople leads directly to a theory purported by psychologist Alfred Adler. Adler believes that man is a social animal.

> The social atmosphere surrounding man is so pervasive, that all human actions have social significance; although they may sometimes appear to have little to do with social problems. Social demands, social conventions and social values affect all aspects of human life.[9]

As such, anything that man does affects the community that surrounds him. This kind of philosophy works quite well with the Kesey-Jungian interpretation. Jung believes that only the individual who accepts and utilizes the process of individuation "is able to find his place in a collective, only he is

truly able to form a community, i.e., to be an integral part of a group of human beings." When this same individual has come to understand himself, he has made, according to Jung, a gigantic step towards the solution of most of the great social problems of our society.[10]

The similarities in Kesey's work are numerous. The dependency phenomenon of the natives of Wakonda has already been mentioned. The dependent person has yet successfully to realize what his self is all about. Until the individual overcomes the dependency, no insight will be forthcoming. The dependency theory is ever present as Lee first attaches himself to his mother, then drugs, then Viv. Viv and Myra become dependent on their husbands. Hank depends upon Viv. It is when each person learns to be independent that he sees the possibilities of growth both individually and collectively.

Kesey shows the interrelated nature of individual reaction and community reaction in two other ways. In an intercalary portion of one chapter, he mentions that one must "make it with himself" (574) before he can have any kind of community relationship. In relation to self-awareness, Kesey has Lee say that "this is the only way we see ourselves; looking out, at others. . ." (606). In other words, if a man is to come to understand himself, he can do so only by noting the reactions of others. In such a situation man can only become self-aware when he utilizes the community.

These theories, concepts, philosophies are but a few of

the many possible correlations with Kesey's novel as interpreted in the light of Jungian thinking. The thoughts expressed represent many different time periods. This is relevant because the problem Kesey exposes, as is so often said, is timeless, taking residence in man's life on the day of his first breath and extending to the last gasp. The experience of meaninglessness and man's attempt to conquer the dilemma are important considerations which find complete expression in Kesey's _Sometimes A Great Notion_.

# CHAPTER SIX FOOTNOTES

[1]William Barrett, Irrational Man, as cited in Essays in Individual Psychology, ed. by Kurt A. Adler and Danica Deutsch (New York, 1959), p. 160.

[2]Soren Keirkegaard, The Concept of Dread (Princeton, 1946), p. 140.

[3]W. H. Auden, The Age of Anxiety (New York, 1946), p. 134.

[4]Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York, 1971), Introduction XII.

[5]Helen Merrell Lynd, On Shame and the Search for Identity (New York, 1958), p. 183.

[6]Ken Kesey, Sometimes A Great Notion (New York, 1963), p. 605.

[7]Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden (New York, 1963), p. 236.

[8]Spears, p. 236.

[9]Essays in Individual Psychology, ed. by Kurt A. Adler and Danica Deutsch (New York, 1959), p. 77.

[10]Jolande Jacobi, The Psychology of C. G. Jung (New Haven, 1943), p. 140.

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