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Salem Press Announces *Critical Insights:* *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey

Ken Kesey's important status in recent American literature rests primarily on two novels: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964). *Cuckoo's Nest* was immediately popular, widely read, and immensely influential. It was soon adapted into a play that is still widely performed. And, of course, the novel also became the basis for one of the most critically and commercially successful films of all time. In the first three decades after the novel was initially published, it was the subject of much scholarship and appreciative commentary.

Ken Kesey's drug use, his advocacy of drug use, and his arrest for drug use brought him a different kind of public attention than the kind won by his novels. This novel perhaps best reflects the ever present links between Kesey's life and works. Serving as an aide at a mental institution, Kesey's personal history and his own struggles helped provide the motivation and experiences for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The novel appealed to the growing countercultural movement of the 1960s, and initial reaction was largely positive despite some claims of misogyny, racism, and overwrought humor about serious issues. *Cuckoo's Nest* remained the novel for which Ken Kesey was best known and most widely appreciated.

Edited by Robert C. Evans, a Young Professor of English at Auburn University at Montgomery, *Critical Insights: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* presents an unusually comprehensive review of the best that has been written about *Cuckoo's Nest*, while also adding new insights of its own. The newest addition to Salem Press' acclaimed *Critical Insights* series, this volume provides sixteen insightful essays about not only Kesey's life but his influence on American literature.

The essays included in this brand-new compilation approach Kesey's writing in a number of ways. First, the book opens with a brief overview of Ken Kesey's life, it then shifts to a series of four **Contextual Essays** designed to play *Cuckoo's Nest* within some important, larger framework. For instance, Darren Harris-Fain situates the novel in the contexts of various literary and cultural traditions as well as the contexts of its immediate times. Harris-Fain especially focuses on such issues as the book's relation to earlier examples of narrators and narration in American fiction; its connections with earlier works stressing individualism; and its links with numerous cultural developments in the decade or so following World War II. In each case, Harris-Fain shows how the book both reflects and affected its specific moment in literary and cultural history. In the next contextual chapter, Robert C. Evans offers the first of several essays in this volume designed to indicate, in great detail, precisely how *Cuckoo's Nest* has been

discussed by previous critics. In the final contextual essay, Christopher Baker compares and contrasts Kesey's novel with *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck, a book Kesey greatly admired.

The next major section of the present volume, **Critical Readings**, offers a series of diverse critical perspectives on Kesey's novel. This section opens with a chapter by Robert C. Evans that offers a chronological overview of commentary on the various "minority" characters presented in *Cuckoo's Nest*. This survey is then followed by an essay by Brian Yothers, the distinguished Melville scholar, who sets Kesey's novel within the contexts of various nineteenth-century American literary traditions. The following Chapter, Ronald G. Billingsley discusses the novel's relationship to nineteenth-century American humor, especially frontier humor, and then an essay by Joakim Nilsson relates Kesey's book to twentieth-century theories about gender in general and masculinity in particular. Also adopting recent theoretical perspectives, Catherine Calloway uses ideas about "gatekeeping" to explore the various ways gatekeepers and gatekeeping are presented in the novel, focusing especially on Nurse Ratched. Ronald G. Billingsley then returns to offer a vigorous defense of the novel against charges that it is insensitive to minority characters, followed by a spirited reminiscence of Kesey by Ed McClanahan vividly describing Kesey's reactions to a high school performance of the stage version of *Cuckoo's Nest*. Finally, the book closes with three more overviews of critical comments on the novel and/or its adaptations.

Each essay in *Critical Insights: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of Works Cited and detailed endnotes. Also included in this volume are **Appendixes** to provide readers with additional information and opportunities for further research, including a **Chronology of Ken Kesey's Life**, a list of **Works by Ken Kesey**, an annotated **Bibliography**, biographies of the **Editors** and **Contributors**, and an alphabetical **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current literary criticism of the world's most studied literature. Edited and written by some of academia's most distinguished literary scholars, *Critical Insights: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

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In addition, *Critical Insights: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* comes with complimentary online access via <http://online.salempress.com>. A single purchase of the printed version is all it takes to gain access to this important title on the web.

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