



BROWSE



Eugene Manlove Rhodes: Ken Kesey Passed by Here

Mark Busby

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ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

MARK BUSBY Texas A&M University Eugene Manlove Rhodes: Ken Kesey Passed by Here Since it first appeared in the Saturday Evening Post in 1926, Gene Rhodes' Paso Por Aqui has been an extremely popular story, called by some one of the finest western stories ever written. One of the most popular western stories written since World War II, in both book and movie form, is Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. On close examination, the similarity between the two works goes far beyond the two stories' popularity. Critics have often noted that Ken Kesey borrowed characteristics from western heroes to help create Randle Patrick McMurphy in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. In his essay, "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress," John A. Barsness describes McMurphy's connection with the Western American hero of the nineteenth century: a peculiarly native and primordial image arising primarily out of nineteenth century notions of the democratic frontiersman, made virtuous and pure by the beneficial influences of nature,

absolutely free physically and morally from the debilitating corruptions of European civilization. He flourishes best among the innocent ideals of the Jeffersonian landscape, that well-groomed pastoral panorama, populated with peaceful, hardworking, independent yeomen, roused to instant action by any threat to their independence. 84 Western American Literature In such surroundings, the American hero was adorned for over a hundred years. He has had less success in the twentieth century, except in his best-known native form as the cowboy. . . -1 Indeed one early twentieth century cowboy who seems to have provided some of McMurphy's specific traits is Ross McEwen in *Pasó Por Aquí*. The two characters resemble one another in name, appearance, and personality traits, and the two works have similar points of view, supporting characters, imagery, and structure. Ross McEwen in *Pasó Por Aquí* is a red-haired rambler, former cowboy turned outlaw. He lightheartedly robs the bank at Belen, New Mexico, and begins the flight from the lawmen which provides the action of the first part of the story. Kesey's main character is Randle McMurphy whose Scotch-Irish "Mc" last name is similar to McEwen's; the R. M. initials are the same. McMurphy is also uncolorado, a red-head,² and from his first entrance into the asylum it is clear that McMurphy sees himself as, and the Chief recognizes him to be, the western hero translated into the twentieth century through folk songs, comic books, western movies, and television.³ From the beginning the Chief finds him "no ordinary Admission" (p. 15). Rather, he is larger than life, coming into the ward from above: He sounds like he's way above them, talking down like he's sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He sounds big. I hear him coming down the hall, and he sounds big in the way he walks, and he sure don't slide; he's got iron on his heels and he rings it on the floor like horseshoes. He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart, and stands there with the guys looking at him.⁴ Both McEwen and McMurphy believe in the value of humor; their usual facial expression is a grin. After McEwen robs the store-bank, he 1John A. Bareness, "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress," in Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism*, John C. Pratt ed. (New York: Viking Critical Library, The Viking Press, 1973), pp. 419-20. 2Eugene Manlove Rhodes, *Paso Por Aqui* (Norman: Western Frontier Library, University of Oklahoma Press, 1925, 1973), p. 18. Page numbers in parentheses in the text refer to this edition. 3See Terry G. Sherwood, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip," in Pratt, pp. 382-96. 4Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Signet Books, 1962), p. 16. Page numbers in parentheses in the text refer to this edition. Mark Busby⁸⁵ rides off laughing (p. 20). Later when he exchanges some of..

MARK BUSBY

Texas A&M University

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Since it first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1926, Gene Rhodes' *Pasó Por Aquí* has been an extremely popular story, called by some one of the finest western stories ever written. One of the most popular western stories written since World War II, in both book and movie form, is Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. On close examination, the similarity between the two works goes far beyond the two stories' popularity.

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



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