

The aim of this thesis is to explore the theme of struggles in Ken Kesey's most acclaimed novels *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The two books were written only two years apart, and despite the major difference in form and style, I was struck by the amount of conflict around which they both revolve. The conflicts are very visible and explicit, they form the basis of the plots, they condition what kind of characters appear, and introduce the idea of various types of opposition. Being novels from the sixties written by an important countercultural figure, this is not all too surprising. The point I wish to illustrate, is that the characters' internal struggles hold at least as much importance as those that are exhibited on the outside. These internal strivings have a very essential nature, because they are struggles for identity, and also for survival, which leads me to believe the novels situate conflict at the very core of human existence.

It is first necessary to clarify what exactly is understood by "struggles". Webster's Third New International Dictionary offers these definitions: the verb to struggle means "to make violent, strenuous, labored or convulsive exertions or efforts against difficult or forceful opposition or impending or constraining circumstances." The noun is similarly explained as "an act of earnest striving: a violent effort or exertion (as to obtain an object, overcome a difficulty or avert an evil)." The collocation "struggle for survival" is mentioned as are the synonyms "contest" and "contention".