



Portrayal of Aggression and Brutality in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*

M.L. Eileen Brisha^a, Dr. M. Sagaya Sophia^b

^a Ph.D Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of English, Government Arts College for Women (Autonomous), Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Tamil Nadu

^b Research Supervisor, PG and Research Department of English, Government Arts College for Women (Autonomous), Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Cormac McCarthy is known for his unique writing style. His plain style with no punctuation is a benchmark for him. He deals with ordinary happenings of life and for him, literature is not an opening for dealing with complexities and unknown matters instead, it is a way concerning life and death. In this novel *No Country for Old Men* (2005), the author has challenged the readers about the difficulty of existence in a modern world. The title itself suggests that violence and valueless living spoil the system of leading a peaceful life. The lack of human quality can be seen through the events as the novel moves further. Among the three main characters of the novel, the innocent character is Ed Tom Bell, for whom the title of the novel aptly suits. The title itself suggests that this world is not meant for someone with a timid heart like Ed but it is for the people like Chigurh. The setting is the United States- Mexico border. This paper thus focuses on the violence and valueless life of the society which makes an individual a mere toy of fate.

Keywords: Violence, Worthless Living, Death, Evilness, Materialistic Outlook, Fate, Choices, Accountability, Danger.

1. Introduction

The story of *No Country for Old Men* (2005) is set in the lawless borderland between Mexico and Texas. The depiction of violence does not wait for any circumstance to present itself rather it starts from the very moment when the novel opens. Violence in this novel as in *Blood Meridian* has no particular motif but assimilates from within the story and the characters as well. The opening scene itself tells the readers about the murder of a police officer which is considered as an extrasensory attack by a horrendous villain Anton Chigurh. The novel opens with a monologue of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell who laments over the loss of humanity in the modern world. He is a World War II Veteran who talks about the evolving evil in the nation and his struggle to reconcile with the changes he is witnessing in society.

The story begins with the scene which shows a drug-dealing that had gone wrong. While hunting near the accident zone Moss stumbles upon the spot and finds that the trucks are filled with drugs and a satchel of money. The satchel has a hidden transponder in it and Moss is unaware of that.

Moss has imbibed all the luxurious advantages that wealth would bring in a man's life. He has seen people with money and its charm. So the already laid trait of the desire to become rich kindles the spirit of Moss, which makes him dare enough to steal the money despite the knowledge about the danger.

The novel highlights the story of Moss who happens to stumble on a drug dealing business and after a thorough observation decides to take the satchel of money with him. He finds men shot dead, a load of heroin, and more than \$2 million in cash. He is not a looter in that way but a common man with the desire for a decent living. He feels that the money will give him retirement from the fumes of hard work and that he would lead a happy life ever after. As he is inspecting the place of the accident he comes to know about the dangers of the business maybe for the first time, which does not stop him from stealing the money though. He encounters the dead bodies of the unknown men in which the author has placed his mastery in depicting the violence and bloodshed.

He takes the satchel with him unaware that he is inviting an upcoming fatal danger on him and his wife. He later is been chased by some men who are connected with the drug deal and Moss urges his wife and both leave the town for Odessa. He sends his wife to her grandmother's house and he is on the run to escape from the drug dealers. Wherever he goes he is tracked down by Chigurh a destructive villain who is sent behind Moss to bring the satchel of money back.

As *Blood Meridian* talks about mindless violence, *No Country for Old Men* talks about Senseless violence. This novel is a neo-western type as it has western imagery like the cow-boy type of image of Moss with his hat, the varieties of guns used by Moss, Chigurh, and the Sheriff. The novel begins with a question of a new kind of human race which has evolved perhaps with a selfish and deadly attitude with the observation of Bell "I thought I'd never seen a person like that and it got me to wonder in if maybe he was some new kind" (NCFOM 4).

This new kind of human does not act insane or irrational as observed by the readers instead they are clever, determined, smart, reasonable, principled, and calculating. Bell calls Chigurh "a true and living prophet of destruction" (NCFOM 5). Bell comments on the emergence of new civilization as the result of the broken-down ethics. The mentality of the people only prioritizes money and luxury rather than relationship, love, and values in the background of the Post-World War era.

It is the convergence of Economics and human nature. In which the characteristics of the human are determined by money and wealth. So, there is always a question of value and meaning of existence. When monetary importance creeps in there is no room for love, affection, sacrifice, and help. There is a competitive market logic that governs the mindset of the people. The monetary logic and forces determine all spheres of human life.

The introduction of Chigurh is different and the readers are told that he decides his course of actions to determine whether a person should live or die by tossing a coin. Such a cold-blooded murderer is hired to chase Moss and bring back the satchel of money. He is a person who despite finding the satchel will not spare the life of his victim. His prime concern is not only to take the object he is searching for but also the victim who carries it and to make the victim run for his life. In the first scene, Chigurh kills a police officer inside the police station which upsets Sheriff Ed as the novel begins. This incident is highlighted by the author to emphasize the cruelty of Chigurh. He opens up a plethora of contradictory and convoluted implications about his true perspective on the meaning of death.

The second appearance of Chigurh is in the petrol station where he is seen conversing with the owner. The choices to make in life are inevitable which is quite inescapable. This inevitability extends to the entire world, as this coin has "been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. and I'm here. And I've got my hand over it. And it's either heads or tails. And you have to say. Call it" (NCFOM 56). For Chigurh,

Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldn't even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don't pay

attention. And then one day there's an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It's just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could that be an instrument of? You see the problem. to separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it?" (NCFOM 57)

Chigurh himself is thus seen as a pattern or an environment that influences others by his charms or principles and becomes a life-threat to all he meets. His origin and background are a complete mystery. He considers himself God-like as Judge Holden. This thought prevails in him which makes him take people's destiny into his hands and decide their future insisting on accountability.

He perceives himself as the arbiter of fate and operates outside of conventional understandings of justice and morality. He is against faith in God who only believes in fate, chance, and choice. He like Judge Holden talks about philosophy and logic before killing his victims and allows them to decide their fate by demanding them to call while he flings the coin. By leaving it up to chance, he bypasses the guilt for his actions.

For Chigurh, there are always choices in life and the consequences will be one according to one's selection of the choices. In Chigurh's worldview, everything is the determinate outcome of individual choices, choices for which every individual is utterly responsible. For Chigurh, every action and every moment is a calculation of risk and benefit, a calculation of what must be done to achieve the desired result or avoid unnecessary risk.

When Carla Jean arrives home after her mother's funeral, Chigurh waits for her in her bedroom. Since Moss has made Chigurh run behind him for the drug-dealing money so desperately the violence in Chigurh grows wilder and savage. So regardless of his death, Chigurh wants to take revenge on Moss by killing his wife as said before. When he encounters her he asks her to call by flipping the coin. Carla tries to make sense by arguing that she is innocent as she is in no way connected with the incident and unaware of the money. In response to her appeals, he places responsibility on the coin, stating, "This is the best I can do" (NCFOM 258). Carla Jean calls heads. The coin lands on tails.

Determining forces exert control over McCarthy's heroes, and the protagonists are ultimately forced to decide whether they believe in a wholly determined world or the power of their own free will. They are all led to a point in their lives where they are required to act on their beliefs. "Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn" (NCFOM 259).

McCarthy has made his readers be on the edge of the seat from the beginning to the end. A normal reader would think that Chigurh has met his fatal end in the accident. But to the readers' surprise, the author deliberately makes Chigurh survive the accident who moves out of the narrative as the same he entered the narration. This deliberation is to insist that violence and wrong deeds cannot be eradicated from the world as the world is in the hands of wrong-doers. It is the foremost duty of the people to lead a careful life without stepping on the snare of evil.

The Sheriff, on the other hand, is in a full swing behind the case and the clues left behind. He tracks Carla Jean, Moss's wife to get any lead about her husband because Sheriff Bell is very particular that the innocent should not be punished. Along the way, it is the voice of Sheriff Bell, the moral center of the book that puts this desperate chase in a larger context of what he sees as a breakdown in the social order of apocalyptic proportions.

Sheriff Bell is seen guilty-stricken throughout the novel because of a haunting memory from the past when the sheriff failed to safeguard his squad of people in World War II and upon the dead, as the only survivor he received a medal for his bravery. But for him, it was a failure since he felt he is not worthy

of the medal because he has failed to save his team. He is always stuck in the past that he fails to understand the intention of the so-called “civilized” man. The world has turned to be valueless and selfish in which he expects morality and culture.

The age when Sheriff Ed was born and what he now faces is different. He was brought up with values and knowledge of human importance rather than materialistic values. But the world he now faces gives importance only to things with monetary benefits. There is no compassion, kindness, and love among fellow men in the world. So he regrets being in this place. He tries to cope up with the change or even tries to change the change. But everything results in vain.

2. Conclusion

Through the character Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, the author nails the message which further emphasizes that there is no solution for the obliteration of evil but the people must be aware of what is going around them in the world and prepare themselves to safeguard their mind, body, and soul uncontaminated. Chigurh who is the representation of evil and violence disappears from the narration but still lingers around invisibly. This violence is everywhere and takes any form to come alive again. It is the responsibility of society to prevent violence and uphold humanity from further annihilation.

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