

Is humanism an existing component of the world? A Humanistic approach to *No Country for Old Men* by Cormac McCarthy

M.L. Eileen Brisha M.A., M.A (Ling)., M.Phil with SET & NET (Author)
Assistant Professor in English,
PG & Research Department of English,
Holy Cross College (Autonomous),
Trichy – 2.

Dr. M. Sagaya Sophia M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D with NET & SET (Co- Author)
Assistant Professor in English,
PG & Research Department of English,
Government Arts College for Women,
Pudukottai-1.

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 suggest that the people of the modern era neither bother about the value system nor helping each other, Instead, they act as a mere being who just has come to this world and soon may pass away. 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- Mexican border. This paper thus focuses to bring to light the unhealthy human relationship in the modern world with the question about the real existence of humanism in the world.

Key Words: humanism, existence, relationships, innocence, evil vs good

Introduction

McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* (2005) is a deeply challenging one for the readers to relate themselves with its characters. The landscape is very harsh and surrounded by deep wilderness indicating that any danger may approach at anytime at any point which happens to be a worrying factor for such honest officers like Ed Tom Bell. The novel talks about a dangerous drug dealing that had gone wrong and Llewellyn Moss a near hero who stumbles on the scene to meet his fatal end and losing his family meaninglessly to the hands of evil. McCarthy has portrayed Moss as a determined character with a touch of humanism. He faces the challenge of the modern world which is highly dangerous and suffers due to his imperfections in the process of maturity. Moss is able to manage the waves of the modern era whereas Ed is hardly struggling to swim.

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 desires of 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 may be 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. The most moving part of the scene is when he encounters a dying man seems to be the driver of the truck, who asks for water but Moss with utter confusion move out of the scene with the cash. "Agua, the man said. Por dios. I aint got no water. Agua" (NCFOM 5). This incident moved him a lot that even after reaching home he is unable to sleep. But everything has a twist towards the end of a decision. Had he been like Chigurh, he wouldn't have returned to that place, instead have gone somewhere and settled. But his compassion towards the dying man is so strong that he steps out to the desert again.

He is torn between his desire and luck of the newly found wealth and his humanity which forces him to help the dying man and so decides to go back to the desert surrounded by wilderness. But he fails to be watchful on his steps and smell the approaching danger. His heart is filled only with compassion and love for the man begging for water. He could not think anything more than that. In fact, he fails to sense the awaiting danger and the security of his family. He rushes to the spot and runs to the truck to give water but finds the man dead. He realizes only after that that he is being watched by someone or may be a group. Before he could reach his truck, it was driven away by a gang of men followed by a shootout. He is literally crawling on the grass and is shocked to see number of men lying dead on the ground.

Before he could gain his conscious self he is targeted by the gang and chased. He ran for his life with bullets following him tired, worn out but still determined. Once reaching home he is much alert that they would surround him at any time and so sends his wife to her mother's place. In this entire situation he is cool and collected towards his wife and did not show or explain what is behind him in spite of her questions. McCarthy has presented him equal or almost a step ahead of his villain Anton Chigurh in a way that McCarthy's villains are always talented than the innocent characters. But here Moss is highly resourceful that he makes Chigurh track behind him but closely.

For Chigurh it is chance that determines events and nothing more than that. There is no transcendent order or God watching over. By grasping this insight, Chigurh paradoxically elevates himself above it, and he no longer sees himself as being simply the play material of fate as are those around him. He finds his bliss in proving to others both the contingency of their lives and the freedom of his own. While they are buffeted blindly by forces they don't understand, he is in complete control. The author's introduction about Chigurh is rather fearful or surprising. His thoughts and attitude make the readers think that he is a Demigod. His calculations about human beings and their relationships are little churning because he lands up with ill logical reasoning and tries to prove it for which he demands the life of one who he encounters.

Chigurh is such a complex character because he is difficult to be understood as he feels both responsible and not for the death of his opponent and believes that chances will determine a person's fate of living. He also is particular that everything has a cause and effect and nothing is left unaccounted. "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" (NCFOM 30). He excludes himself from that chance because he feels that no one in the world has the strength of his will and determination which makes him an immortal being. He considers the people around him as mere animals and imagines that their lives are in his hands. He believes that laws of the mortal world will not harm him. Before killing Wells he says, "If the rule you followed brought you to this, of what use was the rule?" (NCFOM 105)

So when he meets someone he tosses the coin to be decided by the person whether to be killed or to be left alive. This he does by giving the person the chance of choosing the sides of the coin. For him the chance determines the fate but actually it is in his mind that the culmination of his desire to kill the person depends. "It's nineteen fifty-eight. It's 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 26). Though Moss is not that fully determined like him, he is slightly turned in the path of Chigurh. That is why he is able to make decisions and fix his way ahead of him. In fact, he is not killed by Chigurh a great determined villain whose guesses never wronged him, instead by a gang of men involved in the drug dealing. This is quite appealing for the readers.

This shows that Moss though young comparatively in age and experience happens to prove his fortitude. In this aspect the villain has gone secondary for the first time in McCarthy's novels. Though the readers of McCarthy knew the style of depicting his characters, they enjoy the scenes and happy for Moss for his narrow escape from the villain at least on a for couple of occasions. The readers though pity for Moss are relieved that he died in the hands of the gang and not by Chigurh. This happiness does not last so long for the readers as Chigurh is not satisfied with the death of Moss instead, follows Moss' wife and kill her as he has promised Moss earlier. Killing Moss and taking the money is his assignment but even after Moss' death he wanted to keep up his words. He wanted to be perfect in all that he does. In this aspect he

shadows Judge Holden from the novel *The Blood Meridian* in whom murder was a perfect skill. That is why he kills innocent Carla without cause. He is totally inhumane towards her that despite her begging for life he shoots her down and calls it a chance. Even in the opening of the novel he kills a man in the car and drive off for which the author remarks that Chigurh does not want the blood inside of the car. The brutality is so vigorous in him but he appears to be a common man with no traits of cruelty or animosity unlike his counterparts - the trio in *Outer Dark* or Judge Holden in *The Blood of the Meridian*.

Nowhere in the novel Chigurh is seen with humanity. The mastery of McCarthy lies in depicting his villains with such hunger for lives, revenge, blood and death. These villains are uncouth, savage, and monstrous and kill anyone who comes their way. Chigurh is all alone and thinks that this gives him the control over others. This loneliness for no reason had made him shed the qualities of a human being. He believes that it is chance and certainty that makes him to encounter his victims.

Ed Tom Bell on the contrary, is a man with compassion, kindness and reasoning in spite being a Sheriff. His working environment challenges his temper and tolerance due to the crime scenes he come across and the criminals he meet. But in such a scenario he remains tolerant and compassionate and keen in finding the roots of any problem. That is how he finds out that Moss and his young wife needs protection desperately from the drug dealers. He runs out of his way to help them and make them secure and meets Carla Jean, Moss' wife and explains the situation and warns her against any stranger who comes on her. At any time he runs from El Paso to Odessa just to make sure if Carla is safe.

He wanted to somehow meet Moss and know what and who is behind him and put him into safety. As Chigurh is hunting for Moss, Ed on the other hand tries to reach Moss. The more he wanted to meet him, the more they drift apart and Moss is unaware that there is a good heart pursuing him very closely in spite of all the evils behind. Had he known that, he could have got a man to trust upon and to pour his heart out and breathe a while to have control over the situation he is undergoing.

Though Ed is as smart as Moss or Chigurh, he failed in his mission of protecting the young generation. This is because of his lack of knowledge in technology and his inability to understand the seducing nature of the modern world. In one of his dreams he sees his father carrying fire and succeeds him to light the dead cold night leaving Ed all alone in the threatening darkness. Ed is very upset that his father

did not speak a word to him in the dream. This darkness refers to the present world Ed is living in with suffocation and tensions.

His father leaves him a message that in this unhealthy world of posh and pretence he is waiting for his son with a lighted future and hope. He, like his father should carry the light of humanity now and forever no matter how the circumstances are to build a hopeful future for the young generation to follow. This carrying of fire is also an important element in the novel *The Road* (2006) where the father goes on insisting his little son to carry the fire (the fire of humanity) within him no matter how the people are in an apocalyptic world. Ed's world is not apocalyptic though.

But its traits tell not only to him but also to the readers that if the world continues to be like that with no concern for each other it surely will end up with destruction of lives. As the bible says, the wages of sin is death so does this novel say the wages of unhealthy human relationships, lust, pretence, revenge, passion, greediness are death and destruction.

Thus the paper has brought to light the endangered extinction of humanity in the modern world. If humanity is consciously build leaving away selfishness, greediness, revenge and violence, and place God in the place of money this world turns to be a Utopia or else it slowly turns out to be Dystopia as mentioned by T.S. Eliot in his *Wasteland* that when God and faith drains away it in turn drains the human life leading to drought thus making the world spaceless for people like Ed and Carla by creating "no country for no one".

Works Cited

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