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## **An Overview And Detailed Review Of Cormac Mccarthy's Film, No Country For Old Men**

The 1980s had many Mexican drug cartels filled with illegally imported drugs such as cocaine, to sell in the United States. These cartels were very violent, causing many drug deals to go down near the border, many times ending with a big shootout, occasionally leaving no survivors. In *No Country For Old Men*, written by Cormac McCarthy, the setting is in Texas, along the Mexican border, where a man named Llewellyn Moss is out hunting in the wilderness where he spots a drug deal gone bad and discovers a satchel containing 2.4 million dollars.

Moss then did what many people would have done after finding a bag with that much money in it, he took it and ran. He did know that someone out there was looking for that bag of money, but he had no idea that they would send Anton Chigurh, a reaper-like man who shows no mercy and kills anyone who gets in his way. In order to retrieve the stolen money, Chigurh goes on a chase, killing those who are close to Moss as well as the police who try to clear things up. Anton Chigurh believes that he plays a passive role, and that he isn't actually responsible for the fate of his victims, he believes that his victims bring their own fate upon themselves, through the coin toss, showing that he is not the decider, the novel shows Chigurh to be an efficient killer, showing he has power by forcing his victims to participate in a coin flip to save their lives, although in the Coen brothers' film adaptation, Chigurh seems to be in less control, causing him to show more anger, making his character to seem as a psychopath who feels the need to be in control of the situation at all times.

One reason that Anton Chigurh uses the coin-flip is to make himself feel that he has more power and control than he actually does. Both the novel as well as the film show that Chigurh was hired by a higher power in order to retrieve the stolen money, after it was taken by Moss at the location of the shootout. His employers give him the transponder which helps him track down the satchel, leading him to Moss. Neither the film or novel say who he exactly works for, since he ends up killing the people who gave him the transponder, since they gave one to the mexicans as well. In the scene where Chigurh meets the man at the register, he insists that he call the flip of the coin multiple times, although he doesn't specifically tell the man that he is calling the flip of a coin for his life. The scene is filmed in the late afternoon, and the store is empty besides Chigurh and the store owner. Inside the little store, the lighting is slightly dark, to show the scary situation the store owner is in, as he conversates with Chigurh, knowing that he is odd, but does not know the possible violence that Anton is capable of. The store owner finally calls heads, which turns out to be the correct answer and is unknowingly rewarded with his life being spared. Later in the novel, Chigurh says-

"Not everyone is suited to this line of work. The prospect of outsized profits leads people to exaggerate their own capabilities. In their minds. They pretend to themselves that they are in control of events where perhaps they are not. And it is always one's stance upon certain ground that invites the attentions of one's enemies. Or discourages it."(chapter 9)

Chigurh believes that he alone, is fit for his occupation. It's his belief that no one else has the ability to stay in control of all situations he puts himself in, while others who attempt his career, end up making mistakes about their ability to complete the job, he is the perfect fit to be a hit

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man. In addition to his skills, Chigurh is probably the only one in the novel who doesn't actually care about the 2 million dollars. He simply views it as the object of his mission, and to return it to the people who hired him to do so. He claims that money can easily become a blindfold and cause people to underestimate situations, causing their failure. Chigurh knows that the key to his success in his business, is to always be in control and know the risks of every situation, this is why along the novel and film, when Chigurh starts being confronted or starts being defied against, he realizes it could turn into a bad situation in which he could completely lose control of the situation, and he would be a failure, just as the ones he talked about that exaggerated their own capabilities who couldn't be in complete control.

Chigurh doesn't believe that he is a reaper-like figure or a higher power when confronting his victims. He believes that he is not playing the role of God, or any other higher power, but more as an effect of one's fate. He doesn't decide for anyone whether they live or die, especially by forcing his victims to call the coin flip, it distances himself and partially removes his responsibility for the death or life of the victim. He only kills those who are a potential threat to him or his mission, while the others are calmly told to call the coin flip to attempt to survive another day. Although he never states that they are calling the coin flip for their life, he hints at it, while repeatedly insisting that they comply and call the flip. In the conversation with the gas station owner he says,

"Yes you did put something up. You've been putting it up your whole life. You just didn't know it. You know what the date is on this coin?... It's nineteen fifty-eight. It's been travelling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. And I'm here. And it's either heads or tails. And you have to say. Call it.. You stand to win everything... Anything can be an instrument. Small things. Things you wouldn't even notice... 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 another instrument." (56-57)

Chigurh is insinuating that the coin is the reason for him to live or die, and that he himself is there just by fate, waiting for him to call the coin flip. Later in the novel, Chigurh confronts Carla Jean, the wife of Llewelyn Moss. He then says "Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this." (259) Here, Chigurh is once again trying to say that chance and choice is something that happens in everyday life, he is just simply appearing by fate, and that the coin toss is just another choice you make in life, although it may be one that ends your life, just as in the case when Carla Jean calls the coin flip incorrectly, therefore ending her life. Although Chigurh even stated that Carla Jean was innocent, and none of it was her fault, it was her choice to be the wife of Moss, which had trouble foreshadowed when Carla Jean's own mother thought of mMoss as trouble. As odd as it seems, Chigurh has his own set of morals and rules that he follows, and one of those rules is that he doesn't make exceptions for anyone, ultimately ending in Carla Jean's death.

Although in the novel, Carla Jean complied with Chigurh and called the coin flip to end her life, the film adaptation had a different take on the scene. After burying her mother Carla Jean comes home to find Chigurh sitting inside of her house. The scene is also dark and focuses on Carla Jean and Chigurh's face. During the conversation, Chigurh claims that he gave his word to Moss that he would kill his wife. Carla Jean responds by telling him that he doesn't have to do it. Chigurh, to show a slight kind of remorse, offers Carla Jean the call of the coin flip to save her life, claiming that it's up to her and the coin to decide her fate. Carla Jean refuses to call the flip and says "the coin don't have no say. It's just you" By saying this, Chigurh is definitely

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angered that she just tried to tell him that the coin flip had no say and it was all really just him. It goes against Chigurh's way of thinking, since he believes that, by giving the victim the chance for their life by the flip of a coin, he is therefore removing his responsibility and is only acting as the force that comes with the fate of the coin flip, not as the decider. Chigurh throughout the film had not been defied when he offers the coin flip, which may have angered him even more, making him feel as if he did not have complete control of the situation as he likes it to be, and that Carla Jean was ruining it for him. Once he steps out of the house, Chigurh examines the bottom soles of his shoes, but the director doesn't show any blood, only the fact that he lifts each foot up to check for something, and never shows the exact fate of Carla Jean. The scene ends without explicitly showing that Chigurh kills Carla Jean, but due to her defiance and his anger, one can almost assume that she was then murdered. The Coen brothers may have done this in order to portray that Chigurh is just like any human, he isn't perfect. It shows that although he is indeed very qualified for his job, there will still be situations that don't go as he plans, and that there is always the possibility of him losing control of it, although he seemed to take care of Carla Jean in a controlled way, he was definitely not used to the idea of defying him by refusing the coin flip.

In the scene where Chigurh discusses his actions with Wells, another hit man hired to retrieve the stolen money, Chigurh explains to him his reasoning to be taken into custody by the police. Chigurh says-

"I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do. Do you understand?"

Here, it seems that although Chigurh agreed getting arrested by the police was a foolish thing to do, which could have ended his journey right there, he did it just to see if his own will was enough to get him out of the situation he had put himself in. It was almost as if Chigurh wanted to test his abilities and see if he was able to take control over a situation that did not really favor him at all. Chigurh then asks Wells "If the rule you followed brought you to this, of what use was the rule?" Chigurh is asking why Wells has rules that put him in dangerous life threatening positions. Chigurh's own set of rules usually depend on the need to survive and complete his mission, as well as making himself seem to be fate in human form, not as a cold blooded killer that murders anyone who gets in his way. Chigurh's rules keep him in control of situations as well as separate him from being responsible in his own mind of his many victims.

Carson Wells, the other hit man who was hired to retrieve the money actually went to Moss and told him about what kind of ruthless killer Anton Chigurh was. It created the illusion that Chigurh was not just a normal human being, but almost an agent of death, showing no mercy to those that he sees as victims or potential threats. Wells explains to Moss that -

"You can't make a deal with him. Let me say it again. Even if you gave him the money he'd still kill you. There's no one alive on this planet that's ever had even a cross word with him. They're all dead. These are not good odds. He's a peculiar man. You could even say that he has principles. Principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that."(chapter 5)

Wells is trying to tell Moss that no matter what he does, Chigurh will be after him every step along the way and that the final result would be his death. After working in the same profession as Chigurh, Wells understands what happens to all those who stand in Chigurh's way, and that

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making deals with someone so crazy was impossible. As James Wood of *The New Yorker* says -“Chigurh is similarly monomaniacal, an agent of death.”

Because Carson Wells is also in the same profession as Chigurh, it creates a sense of fear into Moss that one man in the same profession could also have such a fear of Chigurh. It almost makes it seem like Anton Chigurh was on another level from the rest, almost comparable to the difference between the average NBA player when compared to the greatest of all time, Michael Jordan. With Anton Chigurh's image as reaper-like as it sounds, it helps create his control using fear from what people have heard about him. Fear is one of the key elements Chigurh uses in order to be the efficient hit man he is as well as having complete control of situations, just as he wants.

Right after murdering Carla Jean, Chigurh gets into an unexpected car accident and is badly injured. While Chigurh's light was green, the vehicle on the other side of him continued on, leading to Chigurh's car being smashed in the middle of the intersection. This shows that although Anton Chigurh is seen as a “reaper” or even “an agent of death” he is still actually human and that even he himself can't avoid chance and fate of the universe. Although he was seriously injured, Chigurh managed to crawl out with the satchel and paid two children in order to use their shirt as a sling for his broken arm. Chigurh says- “what will you take for the shirt?”

After the two children told him that their was an ambulance on the way, Chigurh quickly reacted by purchasing a shirt from one of them in order to make a sling for his severely broken arm. He knew that, if he was taken to the hospital by the ambulance, he would be caught and unable to free himself from the police this time, and that his only hope would be to leave as fast as he could. Although Chigurh understands that he is also subject to chance and fate, as he experienced with the car crash, he knows how to turn a bad situation into a controlled situation with his abilities.

Anton Chigurh was for the most part, a mysterious antagonist in both the novel and film *No Country For Old Men*. Although he seemed almost robotic, like a machine assassin built to accomplish his mission and nothing else in the novel, the Coen brothers' take on Chigurh made him seem to have more human characteristics, showing their viewers that Chigurh is still human, but has all the skills necessary to almost be the perfect hit man. Some may even argue that Anton Chigurh was actually the main character in the novel, and that while everyone else was so focused on the money, Chigurh was only focused on completing the task he set out to do.

Throughout both the film and novel adaptation, Chigurh in every scene always had a sense of confidence, like everything was going as planned or things he expected. Although a couple things did not occur as he wanted, such as Carla Jean not calling the coin flip in the film, to the unexpected car crash, Chigurh still maintained control over the situation in order to be successful in retrieving the stolen satchel. The coin flip is basically Chigurh's way of showing people that he is only there to kill them based on fate and chance, that he is not responsible for the outcome, but must carry out what needs to be done. While some may say Anton Chigurh is a blood-thirsty psychopath, I believe Chigurh is the near perfect employee due to his situation control and ability to stay on top of things.