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No Country Rhetorical Analysis

No Country For Old Men by Cormac McCarthy is one of the best books to get one to question human morality and what drives humans forward in the this drastically changing world. There has also been a movie adaptation of the book two years later that follows the book almost to every detail. The film adaption will be the main focus of this rhetorical analysis. The purpose of this story is to get the viewer to question morality, question whether human life even has a purpose if all will die one day, and if humans even deserve life. McCarthy does not give any answers to the viewers for a good reason. It is up to every single person to decide what is a good moral compass and what path to take by showing the lives of drastically opposite people as well as those that some would consider to be in between. Through this, one may be able to find one’s own true moral compass and direction and figure out this call to action of one’s morality and beliefs using examples from these characters experiences with ethos, logos, and pathos.

Before a quick summary of the story, one must know the definitions of **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos**. **Ethos** is the appeal to one’s own credibility or character to persuade someone or a group and **pathos** being the persuading by emotions to the audience. **Logos** is the use of logic or facts to persuade. All of which are used in this story and in different ways.

A quick summary of the story would be a man (Llewelyn Moss) finds cash from a drug deal gone wrong with a Mexican cartel one night. After being caught returning to the site where he found the money by the cartel, the man barely escapes with his life and is heavily injured. Moss being hunted by the cartel, as well as a contract killer (Anton Chigurh), who is tied in from a different party also involved with the money; meanwhile, local Sherriff (Ed Tom Bell) is trying to find Moss as well, but to bring him back alive.

The story begins with introduction to three main characters that have wildly different moral compasses and views on meaning of life. The first is Llewelyn Moss who has more of a free will aspect to his morality and that humans can control all aspects of life. The second is Anton Chigurh who is drastically different in his belief system. Anton, being a contract killer, believes in a moral code that is so drastic, that humans who don’t live up to it are sub-humans. Anton believes himself to be a persecutor of destiny, by killing those who aren’t worthy of life. One must be strong, kind, and never leach or lie to others to be worthy of being a human and if not, then they must be put to destiny. The third character is Ed Tom Bell, the sheriff where Llewelyn Moss resides. He has the moral compass closer to Chigurh without all the homicidal additions. Bell believes in good and evil and that evil will never prevail over good in hopes that he will one day see god. Both Bell and Chigurh both change by the end of the story, unlike Llewelyn who stays true to his beliefs until the end. Breaking down these characters further show the author’s use of logos to make the audience question morality.

Llewelyn’s story is bleak to say the least. Believing in free will and him controlling his own destiny, he goes up against great odds of a contract killer and the Mexican cartel hunting him after he runs upon a drug deal gone bad. With everyone dead on the scene he takes the two million in cash and flees to different locations to avoid them. Even though he has multiple deadly encounters with Chigurh, he persists on, leading to his untimely death by the Mexican cartel that plays a minor role in the film and comes quiet unexpected since Chigurh and Lleweyln were the one’s battling mostly. At one point, a man who is also hunting for the money Carson Wells, but doesn’t want to see Llewelyn get hurt because he knows if Llewelyn persists, he will die.. At this part, Carson tries to use **ethos** to reason with Llewelyn by relating to him, asking if he was in the Vietnam War also, to try to find some common ground and get him to listen to him. After **ethos** fails to work, Carson uses **pathos** to try to reason with Llewelyn by telling him his wife could be killed by Chigurh or the Cartel just for revenge if he somehow manages to elude them. Unfortunately for both, Llewelyn did not head his words and still believed he would take down Chigurh and any others that got in his way. Later, Llewelyn dies off-screen to the Mexican cartel like his wife. This is significant to the reality of living one’s life recklessly and how fast life can be taken away from those one cares about as well as one’s self. However, this does not give an answer as to which life is a better choice, as the viewer will come to see later on.

Anton Chigurh is a fan favorite because of his intriguing and different perspective on life for the viewer, as destructive, violent, and wrong they may be. As stated before, Anton being a contract killer has a very grim and straight to the point view of what makes a human being to give him/her a reason for what he/she is doing in life. Using his strong moral compass to determine what a human is, he also sometimes gives the victim a chance to flip a coin or “call it”(23:49). He does this to give the victim of fate one last chance since they lived their lives on it. We see this in the film when Chigurh is in a gas station getting random things when the owner strikes up a conversation. Doing this leads to Chigurh asking how he acquired the store and learning that he got it from his wife’s father. Chigurh, believing he did not earn it himself, but by luck, makes the owner risk his life on a coin toss. Making the victim choose what the coin will land on and seal their fate gives Chigurh a chance to reason with himself that destiny is what brought this victim here; he is just the bringer of the bad news. Using this own internal **logos** to reason with himself, he feels it clears him of any wrong doing because not only did these humans deserve to die, fate wanted them dead.

Chigurh loved doing what he did best, and that is killing others that he sees unfit for his world. We see this when he has Carson Wells, the profiler following Llewelyn and trying to retrieve the money, at gunpoint in his hotel room. Carson tries to reason with Chigurh by using logos with what he loves most in the world, money. He uses this as his **strategic essentialism**, a sole leading ingredient into one’s identity,in getting people to hire him and hear him out when he wants to speak. He tries to pursuade Chigurh with **logos** by saying he will leave and pretend like none of this ever happened and give him the money, leaving and lying to his employers. Chigurh undoubtedly declines this offer because he is different then most humans and not driven by money, but what he believes is destiny being controlled. Before killing Carson, he asks him the famous line “If the rule you followed brought you to this, to what use was the rule?” (1:23:14 ).

Towards the end of the film, after killing Moss’s wife as he promised him in an earlier scene if he did not return the money and surrender his life, Chigurh is hit by something he never saw coming: blind fate. Struck by a car and hurt as cops are on the way, he begs for a kid to give him his shirt for money, so he can wrap up his broken arm. Fate forcing him to break his own strict moral rules, Chigurh walks away very badly injured and is never seen again. This is significant in the uncertainties that can always happen and that no one can control every single aspect. To control everything would make us inhuman.

The last and true main of this analysis, Ed Tom Bell is an old hardworking sheriff that seems to be losing his sense of morality as he continues throughout the story. He is always one step behind Moss and Chigurh, witnessing the aftermath of their encounters. He had always been a Christian man believing as time go on, he would see Christ and that life would sort itself out, but has found the opposite. Witnessing what he believes is the new breed of evil that has become of the world, he questions his own **ethos, pathos, and logos** whether anything he actually learned was true or if he even believes in any of it at all. What is his cozy lifestyle and what has it lead him to?

At the very beginning of the film it is of Ed speaking about how things were easier and simpler when he was growing up. He uses **public memory,** a form of memory displayed by a group,to display how things have changed so much into a violent **culture** over time. “Some of the old-timers never even wore a gun. Some folks find that hard to believe.” (1:04). Throughout the movie he views horrors that are unimaginable, like the officer and man Chigurh kills in the beginning. Towards the end of the film after Moss is dead, he goes to his brother, Ellis, where he tries to reminisce of the old days but finds out that things were always violent and hard, even when they were young. “Did daddy ever tell you how Uncle Mac came to his reward? Gunned down on his front porch over in Hudspeth County. Seven or eight of em’ come up there, all wantin’ this, wantin’ that” (1:45:54). Playing it safe and by the rules has made Bell bitter about his resolution as a man. This makes Bell question further on what was his point in life, and if his life was meant anything after all since no sense of purpose has struck him, such as God entering his life.

At the very end of the film, Bell speaks with his wife about his reflections on what he has to do now besides wait out the clock of life. He feels useless in a sense and is scared of what comes next for him, unlike the people who lived wild but felt as though they had a sense of purpose. He speaks to his wife about small things like going for a ride or cleaning the house while she’s at work but is rejected on both. She asks if he had been sleeping well when he begins to tell her about his dream that involved his father. “It was cold and there was snow on the ground, and he rode past me and kept on going. Never said nothing going by, just rode on past. And he had his blanket around him and his head down… and in the dream I knew he was going on ahead. He was fixn’ to make a fire or something in all that dark and all that cold. And I knew whenever I got there he’d be there. Then I woke up” (1:56:24). This shows the mystery of what comes next after death and Bell’s want to believe that there is something else that humans are meant for. Are we to sit and play it safe or are we supposed to strive to venture into the darkness and stare death in the face.

Through out the entirety of the film, the viewer is seeing different sides of life and consequences for choosing what to be and how to act. It is meant to question one’s own morality and see others views of life. One can only come to this conclusion internally due to the answer is specifically for each viewer to decide one’s own true morality. Is it better to live a life of recklessness or harsh rules? Is it better to take care with one’s life in the hope that there is something greater beyond or should one live in the now? What true morality is there or is there even a superior morality or do all have their own flaws and good things about them? What is our character, emotions, and logic all do. The only true answer is in that of the viewer, but be careful, every choice has consequences and this is a harsh world and some things are out of human’s control.

Works Cited

Coen, Ethan, director. *No country for old men*. Paramount, 2007.