

The Fragile World of Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men

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ABSTRACT

In Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005), not only old people's life is fragile in that they have no place or country to live comfortably in, but also almost everybody's life is at stake. The purpose of this article is to explore the nature of the fragile world in addition to the forms and causes which McCarthy depicts in his novel from perspectives other than the ones addressed previously by the majority of McCarthy's critics and scholars. Those critics attempt to refer to outside or external forces to account for the fragility of the world which the novel vividly delineates. Among such approaches to the novel is the overemphasis on the destructive power of fate and chance over the inhabitants of that world. In this regard, other scholars try to shed light on the meaning of the story and its characters against an allegorical background. The current paper, however, approaches McCarthy's novel aiming at internalizing the causes behind the weakness and vulnerability of characters and the insecurity of the world where they live. The article tries to suggest other factors, such as inaction and lack of communication, whose roles are by no means less effective than the external ones in portraying the fragility of McCarthy's fictional world.

KEY WORDS: Communication, Determinism, Fragility, Inaction, Violence

1. INTRODUCTION:

Cormac McCarthy (born in 1933) is among some distinguished contemporary American novelists, like John Grisham and Dean Koontz, who have long predicted, through their writings, the states of instability and insecurity experienced by the Americans in their daily life. With some tragic undertones, McCarthy weaves stories with major characters as individuals trapped in environments that appear totally violent and unsafe.

McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* is addressed to a general audience. This aspect is supported by the author's avoidance of complicated style which is found particularly in his earlier works such as *Blood Meridian*

(1985) (Greenwood, 2009, p. 71). However, when the novel was written, McCarthy was still experimenting with style in the sense that he chose to reveal and develop his protagonist, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, through extended interior monologues (Greenwood, 2009, p. 72). Furthermore, the novel, since its publication in 2005, has won large critical attention owing to its treatment of such crucial cultural dilemmas in American society ranging from drug trafficking across the American-Mexican borderlands, violence, to the inclusion of the post-Vietnam war era and its resultant traumas (Hawkins, 2017, p. 17).

Based on a line borrowed from W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium", the title of McCarthy's novel serves a contrastive, ironic purpose. While the ancient city of Byzantium is "a way of redeeming mortality" through its world of art and beauty in Yeats's poem, McCarthy sets the action of his novel on the border of Texas and Mexico to display "the artlessness and ugliness of drug war" in that region (Greenwood, 2009, p. 72). On account of some cultural crisis of belief in the healing power of religion and morality, characters find it impossible to survive in a materialistic environment that raises the slogan of violence as a means for survival.

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Set in 1980, the action of the novel takes place definitely at a time when Mexican drug cartels were becoming powerful by smuggling different types of drug (Hillier, 2017, p. 164). The story commences when Llewelyn Moss, a Vietnam veteran in the middle of his thirties, discovers, on the Texas desert, a document case filled with more than two million dollars in a scene with dead bodies, and the cause apparently is “a drug deal gone bad” (Hage, 2010, p. 114).

Thus, he is to make up his mind whether to take the money - and thus seriously endanger his life and that of his nineteen-year-old wife - or just leave it where it is. As a result of his keeping the money, Anton Chigurh, a mysterious professional murderer chases Moss everywhere to kill him and get back the drug money. Interestingly, Chigurh uses a strange means to end the lives of his victims, that is, a cattle gun (Greenwood, 2009, p. 72). In the end, Moss, as well as his wife and other people, loses his life on account of Sheriff Bell's failure to put an end to the criminal activities maintained by Chigurh and the other drug dealers.

The realistic action of the narrative is often interrupted by Sheriff Bell's digressive, philosophical introspections. At such moments, Bell reflects on different matters, including his shock caused by the changing behavior of ordinary citizens and by the disappearance of the world as he knew it. Such testimonies, which are deliberately italicized, affirm the man's thoughts about the transformation of that world from good to bad (Greenwood, 2009, p. 73). With his opening monologues, the fifty-seven year-old sheriff acts like the narrative stage manager (Lincoln, 2009, p. 143). Those monologues, acting as a framing device (Bloom, 2009, p. 134), hold the book together and preserve its unity.

Alternatively, the novelist employs the third-person narrator to go deep into Moss's character and disclose his ongoing internal struggle, especially when he is about to decide whether to take or give up the drug money (Hillier, 2017, p. 170). In the novel, “Moss absolutely knew what was in the [document] case and he was scared in a way that he [didn't] even understand” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 17).

In fact, some details, including “daily particulars, local dialects, small thoughts, short actions on the face of grand slaughter through drug trade, institutional greed, futile stupidity and satanic killing” (Lincoln, 2009, p. 142), crop up the text. McCarthy is always keen providing what looks minor or unimportant at a first glance; however, these are by no means less important than the details related to the main points of the story. Together, these, in effect, are meant to portray the contemporary crime world of the United States of America.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF MCCARTHY'S NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

The majority of the research done on McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* moves predominantly around what is claimed to be the novelist's deterministic design or fatalistic framework within which he allows his characters to move and the action of the story to take place. Determinism is essentially a doctrine or a philosophy that pertains to everything and event in man's life, showing them to be predestined and inevitable and giving rise to man's absolute lack of freewill as a result. Among the critics who are of this category is Kenneth Lincoln (2009). In McCarthy's predestined world, even though the characters are “pitted between fate and free will, chance and choice, [and] love and indifference”, all is determined by a sort of a “dicing fatality” (p. 145). On this basis, “characters give in to destiny, or fate, or dumb luck, or a cursed existence whose only grace is that it will end someday. . . .” (Lincoln, 2009, p. 149). Thus, McCarthy's novel may be viewed as a classical tragedy featuring the struggle of Llewelyn Moss against “lethal odds and forces much bigger than himself,” a man who is “fated to fail. . . . how he fails is . . . the drama of everyman against destiny and ill winds and corruption” (Ibid., p. 141).

The terrifying insecurity and randomness governing the universe are symbolized by the coin toss, a method with which Chigurh demands from his victims to decide their destiny. As the coin seems to confirm “what destiny has already prescribed,” he becomes “an agent of destiny, . . . one carrying out the will of the universe” (Hage, 2010, pp. 53-54). Why Chigurh must kill can be “an American brand of predeterminist nihilism rooted in Puritan advent. If all's fated, nothing's consequential and anything goes” (Lincoln, 2009, p. 151). Critics find in Chigurh's last words to Carla Jean just before he shoots her an evidence of his firm belief in the fixed role of destiny in one's life: “A person's path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly. And the shape of your path was visible from the beginning” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 259). In such a context, Chigurh is thus a clear symbol of the working of a cruel fate and the inevitability to end or even avoid it: “When I came into your life your life was over. It had a beginning, a middle, and an end. This is the end” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 260). In this regard, Hillier (2017) argues that Chigurh arbitrarily selects certain people - such as Carla Jean - to call a coin toss, whereas he denies his other victims, like Carson Wells, this choice. Yet, Chigurh himself actually falls victim to chance by running into “such hazards” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 260) as driving a car into the city without a seatbelt (pp. 196, 201). Chigurh appears an extraordinary man, a superman, not of the old fairy tales and romances, but

rather of a fallen world where all moral and human values have long been twisted and distorted. Therefore, McCarthy's doomed protagonists, no matter how hard they work to eradicate all that is posing threats to their existence, circumstances have it that all such attempts remain futile and ineffective.

As for Murnighan (2009), McCarthy, in the novel, is a prophet who is predicting an upcoming apocalypse, and the one who is responsible for it is man himself through his endless darkness and limitless horror which he inflicts on other fellow men (p. 349). McCarthy's apocalyptic vision is reflected in the fragile world that is portrayed throughout the story. This world is simply so chaotic and insecure that it paves the way for its radical transformation. Through Sheriff Bell, the protagonist, McCarthy is voicing "the fearful feelings and positions of many Americans" (Bloom, 2009, p. 135). One reason that is suggested by Bloom (2009) for the upcoming apocalypse is drugs, which provides a sign of the disintegration of civilization. As a result, the eradication of the heroin and other narcotics, whose function in the novel is more symbolic than realistic, remains "an unfulfillable dream" (p. 146).

From a different perspective, Greenwood reads McCarthy's novel as a morality play that has "a twist" (2009, p. 73). This is clearly seen in the absence of the poetic justice rule that operates much in common with morality and fairy tales. For one reason or another, the good is not rewarded and the bad get easily away with their crimes and evil doings. In other words, the idea of fragility arises from the fact that this "country is a land where the good die young and the bad seem to prosper forever" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 144). At the same time, the novel is "an old morality tale in a new context of precision weapons that replace bows and arrows and atlatis" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 114). Hillier agrees with the novel's allegorical interpretation, emphasizing that it is "a dark fable of greed and moral cowardice" (Hillier, 2017, p. 166). Some critics have found in the character of Bell the "good guy" whose conduct is impressively heroic and is in support of moral and spiritual development (Hillier, 2017, p. 202). Allegorically too, people who die horribly by means of Chigurh's cattle gun "mean no more than stock to death's handyman" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 146). As the characters appear to be powerless while confronting a cruel fate, they tend to be flat having neither psychological depth (Greenwood, 2009, p. 142) nor a free will of their own. McCarthy's characters remain running after an illusion, and when they realize that, it is too late to find any way out.

Still, a critic like Lincoln (2009) sheds light on the novel as a western finding in it "an old romance with violent American 'heroes' from . . . [the] founding revolutionaries to frontier gunslingers, mobsters to marines" (149). To this effect, Moss, as a leading figure

in this trend, claims that the majority of people "run from their own mother to get to hug death by the neck" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 234). McCarthy's novel may as well be evaluated in its thematic-structural content. For Bloom, the book is about a collapse beginning with the structure in which one genre slides down into another, and not ending with the fatal collapse of the protagonists towards the conclusion of the narrative (2009, pp. 133-134). The collapse that Bloom must be particularly referring to is that of the individual, which is one step that leads to any subsequent collapses.

In short, the past critical studies of McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* fail, in the main to definitely, address the actual reasons that account for the readers' persisting sense of the fragility of world which the story delineates. There is a need to add further dimension to the meanings of McCarthy's novel to best reflect the reality of events and characters.

3. EXPLORING THE FRAGILE WORLD OF NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

In McCarthy's novel, it is clear that the novelist gives a grim portrait of a region in which everything is fragile and no one appears practically to be safe. It would not be accurate, however, to declare that this fragility is solely caused by the working of a cruel fate or chance that turns one's life into a series of nightmares. The following sections of this article are dedicated to suggesting and discussing other causes for such a condition, which are not less influential on deciding the inhabitants' fate in this world.

3.1 Lack of Communication

This theme of lack or cut of communication is typical of modern literature as it exemplifies how man, based on different factors including the vast advancement of science and technology, has turned into a lonely creature who suffers fundamentally from a severe inability to communicate with his fellow human beings. Only the action of the main characters is approached in this section for the sake of illustrating the abovementioned point.

As far as the communication theme in *No Country for Old Men* is concerned, Greenwood (2009) indicates that the "main characters rarely interact with each other, and there is no confrontation or showdown between any of [them]" (p. 74). In the lack of security and in the absence of real verbal communication or real constructive discourse, the language of violence and bloodshed rises to the surface. Therefore, murdering becomes an obligation, or an unavoidable task, not just in self-defense but also in displaying and sending a message to rivals and opponents in the very language which they understand. The language of the drug traffickers and

dealers is definitely that of violence, and this is demonstrated in the bloody opening scene where Moss finds himself among dead bodies on the plain. The necessity for shedding blood haunts Moss while staying at the hotel: "By the time he [Moss] got up he knew that he was probably going to have to kill somebody. He just [didn't] know who it was" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 87). Moss is sadly aware that keeping the money has just forced him to a situation where many things will neither be the same as they used to be in the past nor will they be necessarily available as sacrifices that have to be presently made: "There's lots of things you aint [going] to see again" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 29), including peace of mind.

By contrast, Moss looks at finding the money as something crucial that must hardly be ignored or abandoned: "You have to take this seriously, he said [to himself]. You [can't] treat it like luck" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 23). The image in which Moss's "whole life was sitting there in front of him. . . . All of it cooked down into forty pounds of paper in a satchel" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 18) illustrates the tremendous value of money for Moss. Incidentally, there is an analogous image that occurs earlier showing Moss on volcanic-like rocks: "Moss sat with the heels of his boots dug into the volcanic gravel of the ridge and glassed the desert below him with a pair of twelve power [German] binoculars" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 8). It is interesting to note here that Moss, like Kino, the hero of John Steinbeck's novel *The Pearl* (1945), seems not a true or a firm believer in fate and luck, for he, with the money, reaches the conclusion that "at some point he was going to have to quit running on luck" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 108). Both Moss and Kino are never satisfied with what they have got; Moss is only a welder who has every propensity for renouncing his life spent in a trailer with his wife, and Kino, the poor fisherman whose dreams of fortune blur his vision to the truth of the outside reality. It is for this reason that both men remain thus subject to constant attacks from criminals and robbers, which is the price they have to pay. Like Kino's wife, Carla is ready to abandon the ease and comfort which wealth can provide her and her husband with in favor of a simpler and more secure life: "Llewelyn, I [don't] even want the money. I just want us to be back like we [were] . . . I want things like they [were]" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 182). Entering the hellish world of drug trafficking must imply the disadvantageous undertones that leave Moss's world fragile and vulnerable; "he would probably never be safe again in his life" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 109).

On reading the first few chapters of the novel, one gets a sense that there must be something wrong with either Moss, Carla Jean, or both of them in their relationship. It is noticed that Moss, practically, has no positive, constructive communication with Carla; he

refrains from telling her what exactly happened to him at the Caldera, the Texas desert, or even why he decides to return to the scene of the gunfight in there at midnight. The fragility of their relationship can also be explained in the light of Moss's narcissistic, vain pursuit that is reflected in his refusal to listen but to himself. Below is an example illustrating how Moss is responding vaguely to Carla's incessant inquiries:

Where are you goin, baby?

Somethin I forgot to do. I'll be back.

What are you goin to do?

.....

I'm fixin to go do somethin dumbern hell but I'm goin anyway. If I don't come back tell Mother I love her.

Your mother's dead Llewelyn.

Well, I'll tell her myself then. . . .

You're scarin the hell out of me, Llewelyn. Are you in some kind of trouble?

No. Go to sleep.

Go to sleep?

I'll be back in a bit.

Damn you, Llewelyn. (McCarthy, 2005, p. 24)

From the above extract, it is clear that Moss prefers not to be frank or direct with his wife, and is using, for this purpose, roundabout ways in answering each of her questions, the matter further scares rather than comforts her. Furthermore, with his language loaded with frightening utterances, like "dumbern hell" and "If I don't come back," he appears to be a man empty of intimate, deep love feelings, mainly lacking the ability to express his emotions with sweet words that enhance the love a husband may show to his dear wife. It is to be mentioned here that Moss is, after all, a war veteran and most likely is suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that has a deep impact on the way he treats others.

Even if Carla could maintain some communication with Moss, it would be of that sort that would never enable her to fully understand him. This, in effect, helps in her developing some gap between the two - besides their age difference - and culminates in her suspicion (albeit slight) that he has run away from her with the stolen money. Therefore, it is noticed that mutual understanding between the two is almost missing as the relationship between them suffers from coldness and shallowness. She has "a bad [feeling]" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 65) about the stolen drug money to which Moss replies that she has to stop her unnecessary worries about everything. He is unable to fully comprehend that the both of them are truly "in a world of trouble" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 94), as one of the Sheriff's assistants declares. Moss, naturally, rejects Carla's premonitions partly because he prefers to hide behind "a façade of masculine self-confidence" (Hillier, 2017, p. 181), which allows him to impulsively believe that "he can make him

[Chigurh] go away” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 148) on his own rather than get help from others. Moss’s naivety leaves him at a dead-end, that is, a state of self-deception the outcome of which is an unequal, direct confrontation with a mysteriously sophisticated enemy.

In addition, Moss’s view of fate and luck is largely at odds with Carla’s perspective. She believes that her husband is already “in some kind of trouble” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 24) though she trusts that he is “awful smart” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 129) and “can take care of himself” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 127). Moss himself, with his “dead certainty that someone was going to come looking for the money, maybe several someones” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 19), is aware that his decision to keep the drug money “has turned his life into a living nightmare,” and it, in effect, has brought about “an irrevocable sundering of the married couple” (Hillier, 2017, pp. 171, 173). In fact, this ill-acquired money money proves responsible for Moss’s new existence that “is now impoverished, stunted, and beset with fears and apprehensions” (Hillier, 2017, p. 174); nevertheless, his endless belief in taking chances is stronger than all these, which ends not only in his destruction but also of his beloved ones as well. Incidentally, this situation is again comparable to that in Steinbeck’s novel where Kino, the protagonist, finds the biggest pearl of the world, yet his and his wife’s life remain insecure, restless, and miserable ever since. Thus, even in his struggle to survive, Moss proves the most isolated among the characters. In this context, his narcissism blocks every way in front of him to reconsider even warning, even the one given by Carson Wells that he (Moss) is not fit to oppose such “a psychopathic figure” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 141), a “goddamned homicidal lunatic” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 192) as Chigurh, simply because he (Moss) is not “cut for this” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 154). Moss’s self-deception continues until he becomes almost certain that he is able to outwit both Chigurh and all the drug dealers behind him.

The episode in which Moss meets the hitchhiker girl, who is his “fellow traveler” (McCarthy, p. 219), and has a conversation with her is to be contrasted with those early scenes where he seems to discuss with Carla Jean the topic of the found money and the necessity to keep it. It is with the hitchhiker girl that Moss has ever had the longest of all his communications all though the novel. Probably, the author intends to allow Moss some more moments for self-expression before his death at the hands of drug dealers. Furthermore, these two people appear as passersby spending the majority of their life in movement from one place to another, running away from something that has long been annoying them. Although strangers, they seem intimate and harmonious, as if to suggest that they can achieve more intimacy than with friends or with relatives.

Moss and the girl converse about a variety of topics, including, for instance, their tastes for food (how food for her “is a luxury” while it is for him “a necessity” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 225) as well as the significance of people’s not knowing where one is. In contrast with his apparent coldness with Carla, Moss feels intimate enough to expose to her frankly the secret of his being a runaway, an outlaw, simply because he “took [something] that belongs to [them] and they want it back” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 232). Here, he is admitting he has committed the crime of taking and keeping something that is never his. Nevertheless, he demonstrates that he is not sorry for being an outlaw; he is sorry for he “didn’t start sooner” (McCarthy, 2005, p. 228). Even this, however, can hardly serve as a good example of a sound conversation between two people governed by friendly relationships. This vivid conversation turns at times to take the form of *stichomythia*, a device that is made up of quick and short questions and answers and was commonly used by Greek dramatists, to support the heightened tension and to intensify the sense of an approaching doom involving the two conversers. Moss is shown as if admitting his crimes to a police officer in an investigation. Alternatively, it sounds like a confession of his sins to a priest just before his own execution:

Is the law huntin you?

Everybody’s huntin me.

What did you do?

I been pickin up young girls hitchhikin and buryin em out in the desert.

That aint funny.

You’re right. It aint. I was just pullin your leg.

You said you’d quit.

I will.

Do you ever tell the truth?

Yeah. I tell the truth.

You’re married, aint you?

Yeah.

What’s your wife’s name?

Carla Jean.

Is she in El Paso?

Yeah.

Does she know what you do for a livin?

Yeah. She knows. I’m a welder. . . .

(McCarthy, 2005, pp. 231-232)

Yet, if anything, this dialogue serves only to assert the deterministic environment which he lives in where everything seems to be decided or settled beforehand. He therefore eludes taking the responsibility of his action by trying to attribute it to the unexpectedness with which things often happen to one: “Three weeks ago I was a law abidin citizen. Workin a nine to five job. Eight to four, anyways. Things happen to you they happen. They [don’t] ask first. They don’t require your

permission" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 220). Moss is allowed some moments of rest and relief just "before the shroud drops, the darkness" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 259), as Chigurh puts it while talking to Carla Jean just before murdering her. In fact, the conversation between Moss and the girl is again comparable to an instance from classic novels in which two convicts find some momentary relief before their execution. One of the heroes of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), precisely Sydney Carton, has a brief consolatory conversation with the seamstress whom he has never met before and with whom he shares nothing but the catastrophic fate of an imminent execution by the guillotine at the hands of the French revolutionaries.

In declaring to Carla Jean that "I never knew nor did ever hear of anybody that money [didn't] change" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 128), Sheriff Bell exemplifies to her his firm belief in the powerful influence of money on people and their relationships with each other. Yet, beyond this and his unfulfilled promise to keep them safe, he hardly succeeds to build a bridge that can connect his ideas with hers. For this reason, it is noticed from her short answers to his questions that she has not yet reached the level at which she can open her heart fully to the sheriff and show him where he can move accordingly. In the short dialogue below, Bell's words to her are provocative but adequately intimate to keep on the conversation:

But you aint heard from him in a while.

I didnt expect to hear from him.

Were you all havin problems?

We dont have problems. When we have problems, we fix em.

Well, you're lucky people.

Yes, we are.

She watched him. How come you to ask me that, she said.

About havin problems?

About havin problems.

I just wondered if you were. (McCarthy, 2005, pp. 127-128)

Hillier (2017) states that while Bell employs a discourse of nostalgia and pessimism, Chigurh's is based on a complex deterministic philosophy of fatalism (p. 166). Chigurh almost knows no language except that of violence; no one is, precisely, able to interact with him and come up with a positive outcome. This may likewise explain the impossibility of making any viable contact with him. For this reason, Carson Wells once warns Moss against the risk of coming close to Chigurh:

You [can't] make a deal with him 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"; he is a man whose

principles "transcend money or drugs or anything like that. (McCarthy, p. 153).

Moreover, he is by no means apt to change any of his principles for he has "only one way to live. It [doesn't] allow for special cases" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 259).

It is only with a tracking device called transponder whose signals Chigurh picks up that he best communicates. In his discourse with the people whom he desires to end their lives, Chigurh's language, according to Hillier (2017), reflects his automatism (p. 187). In most cases, Chigurh utilizes a discourse that is loaded with puzzles or vague messages that lead to the victims' further confusion and despair. Below is an example of how Chigurh tries to manipulate the proprietor of a filling station at Sheffield by means of hypnotizing request of a coin toss. It is worth noting here that the man's physical disability (hard of hearing) is deliberately made preceding and paving the way for Chigurh's manipulative plan to control the man mentally and psychologically:

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.

I dont know what it is I stand to win.

.....

You stand to win everything, Chigurh said. Everything.

You aint makin any sense, mister.

Call it. (McCarthy, 2005, p. 56)

In his brief exchanges with his victims, Chigurh has no "sense of humor" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 153). Likewise, he is not "somebody you really want to know. The people he meets tend to have very short futures. Nonexistent, in fact" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 150). The only thing that he usually does at such occasions where he has short dialogues with them is involving them in their deaths by providing them with the choice of the coin toss by which they are to call the coin apparently to decide their fates. However, this is all designed to let them be participants in his killing games (Hillier, 2017, p. 94). The victims' submission to his game rules gets along with the deterministic outlook of the serial killer, but at the same time, it ushers total weakness that persists in them.

Carla Jean comes to understand that it is "Chigurh, and not fate or chance, who shaped events, and that it was his desire to torment others that motivated those same events" (Hillier, 2017, p. 196): "The coin didn't have no say. It was just you" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 258), as Carla extrapolates. Truly, since Chigurh, as he claims, has already given his word to Carla's husband, Moss, to kill his wife, he cannot alter it because "what's done cannot be undone" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 156). The only explanation offered of the necessity to kill her at this

moment is related to her bad luck: "None of this was your fault" and what is happening to her is a result of "bad luck" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 257). Carla's actual presentment returns her and the reader to the validity of her early premonitions which she has articulated and were dismissed completely: "I knowed exactly what was in store for me" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 257) and "I knowed this wasn't done with" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 254). She comments on the unexpected nature of her life, saying: "Everthing I ever thought has turned out different . . . There aint the least part of my life I could [ve] guessed. Not this, not none of it" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 259). It is disharmony characterizing her relationship with Moss that is also responsible for her bad luck and tragic fate. She is also behind the fate that befalls both Moss and her mother.

By exposing the nature of Chigurh's malignant death games, Carla is clearly denying Chigurh's argument that one can survive through one's choice: "Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this" and is almost a confirmation to his closing words that emphasize his deterministic belief in fate: "The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased. I had no belief in your ability to move a coin to your bidding. How could you?" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 259). As a result, if Chigurh is inclined to ever communicate with anybody, it is categorically to express his philosophy about the coin toss as an instrument, the matter which is reflected in his speech to a filing station proprietor:

Anything can be an instrument, . . . Small things. Things you wouldnt even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People dont 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? . . . 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. (McCarthy, 2005, p. 57)

Chigurh's usual philosophizing of his decisions comes usually as a preparatory step to his next violent action. It is an attempt at communicating a persuading message of the validity of whatever he is up to.

In brief, the not properly communicating people in the novel find it hard to not avoid or overcome the many mishaps, misfortunes, or pitfalls encountering them, and this is rooted in the failure of their setting up a sort of a spiritual bridge over which they would have the capacity to communicate their ideas and feelings clearly.

3.2 Inaction Vs. Violence

The point discussed in this section is closely related to the previous one. inactivity is another important and

common theme in literature. It is often used to denote a state in which a person takes a lot of time either to take action or even to decide to do so. In McCarthy's novel, this is typically applicable to Sheriff Bell, the very man who is responsible for protecting people and defending them against any criminal and illegal activities. Unable to resolve the mystery of a series of murders, Bell "retires from the force rather than pursue the pure evil of Anton Chigurh" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 146). The novel pits "Bell's traditional law-abiding values against the nihilistic savage ideology" of the psychopathic Chigurh (Greenwood, 2009, pp. 71-72).

Bell's inaction is evidenced by his slow driving in West Texas which results not only in his remaining safe from a bloody drug shoot-out (Bloom, 2009, p. 148), but also in his utter failure to keep his word to Carla Jean to protect her husband, Moss, from "some pretty bad people" (McCarthy, p. 127) who are after killing him. It is Bell's character weakness and irresolution that primarily lead to Moss's death (Hillier, 2017, pp. 214-215). Commenting on Moss's brutal murder, Bell only declares that: "there aint nothing you could of done about it" (McCarthy, p. 240). As will be shown below, the man is always good at creating pretexts to evade his responsibilities as a guard of people's security and order in the city.

Bell's supernatural view of Chigurh as "invincible" (McCarthy, p. 141), or as a ghost, whose movements are inexplicably mysterious and unstoppable, has a function. Psychologically, it is on Chigurh's elusive nature; on the one hand, that Bell's failure is safely projected. On the other hand, it has rather turned into a guise behind which he hides, allowing himself the opportunity to escape blame for not being active sufficiently to catch the murderer red-handed or shoot him though he (Bell) proves - in more than one instance in the novel - capable of doing so (Hillier, 2017, pp. 217, 219).

Bell's profound moral failure in responding to the call for duty practically leaves him a disrespectable figure, and here comes his further alienation: "I think . . . probably the only reason I'm even still alive is that they [the criminals] have no respect for me. And that's very painful" (McCarthy, p. 217). This man, in the words of Hawkins (2017), "is not up to the task of governing his county any longer" and his "legacy [as a sheriff] seems to have no future" (p. 18). Thus, he has no honorable legacy to bequeath neither to the deputy nor even to a son whom he has never begotten. In contrast with the traditional benevolent father figure, Bell practically has nothing to give or offer to others. No matter how hard he tries, his efforts remain short of coping with the harsh reality of the present, let alone helping in bringing about a sort of its radical transformation.

One reason behind Bell's inaction may be found in his showing much concern about the dead than protecting the living. Therefore, his attempts at atoning for his desertion of the dying and wounded soldiers in France during World War 11 can explain why he is haunted by the dead most of his life (Hillier, 2017, p. 226). He is characteristically "so haunted by the past that he can only see the present as a dark and confusing mourning over the dead" (Bloom, 2009, p. 134). According to Hawkins (2017), McCarthy, through Sheriff Bell and his like, was able "to dramatize the terrible split many Vietnam veterans still feel in relationship to the fathers and uncles who served a generation before them" (p. 18). Bell and Moss suffer from a constant discord between their former selves as veterans and their present ones, the matter which augments their confusion, the matter which not only isolates them from themselves but also further deepens the generation gap that leaves them in a state of emotional paralysis.

Bell's persistent state of inaction, which can be due to a severe war trauma, has left an indelible imprint on his personality. His resultant self-punishment throws him even further into the abyss of inactivity and powerlessness. The recursions that Bell frequently makes to the past to recapture some of its vividness and intimacy intensify his suffering and denies him any chance for revival. Why Bell's world is, then, fragile is basically because he is irretrievably shut up from the world of reality. To eradicate his pessimism requires his sound evaluation of his self-image, yet this presently proves hard to achieve.

Bell appears desperate about the people from the fallen world of his country where God has been substituted for drugs. For him, overemphasis should always be on drugs to account for the children's increasing disrespect for the parents, in particular, and for the elders, in general. For this and for other reasons, he concludes that this is a country that "had not had a time of peace much of any length at all that I knew of" (McCarthy, 307). In his view of Bell, Bloom tries to locate the man's problem in his detachment from the world of reality which he, all of a sudden, finds himself unable to confront:

The book ends with Bell so defeated that he can only retreat into an image of a past that never existed, into a mythology that seems more of a defense than a viable dream. Instead of a vision of how a man might live outside the space of his dreams, Bell's dream only throws into sharper relief the losses in his life. In this sense, Bell's monologues serve as evidence that his conscious control of life has become overwhelmed by unconscious fears. . . (Bloom, 2009, p. 150)

In the world delineated by the novel, no one's life is secure simply because things are measured not by anything but by the law of the jungle with which

survival is always for the fittest. Moss, the antelope hunter, is always on the run as he is hunted down by the psychopathic killer, Chigurh, as well as by the Mexican drug dealers and Sherriff Bell (Lincoln, 2009, pp. 143-144). This is a country or a land in which man, according to Chigurh's reasoning, can do nothing except "decide in what order to abandon his life" (McCarthy, p. 177). Violence has in fact turned to be the rule in a country that has abandoned God in favor of money and drugs. In one of his monologues, Bell explains, in what looks rather like a state of delirium, how things are getting worse with the spread of all that can corrupt man's life and innocence:

Well, here come the answers back. Rape, arson, murder. Drugs. Suicide. So, I think about that. Because a lot of the time ever when I say anything about how the world is goin to hell in a handbasket people will just sort of smile and tell me I'm gettin old. That it's one of the symptoms. But my feelin about that is that anybody that cant tell the difference between rapin and murderin people and chewin gum has got a whole lot bigger of a problem than what I've got. (McCarthy, p. 196)

Bell's description of the condition of his country gets along with Lincoln's account of "a land of broken warriors come home to hell" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 148), with their dreams and hopes "torn apart by the rabid dogs of greed, dominance, and lust" (ibid., p. 149).

Since Chigurh has propensities for violence and bloodshed, motivation seems absent from his criminal action, which he attributes to fate that "has placed his victims in his path" (Greenwood, 2009, p. 73). The reader is never actually told how Chigurh's path looks like. Hence, all attempts to hold any clear verbal communication between him and the reader are doomed to fail. Instead, readers are left with the assumption that this man is either stimulated to act as a "bounty hunter," in the words of Hillier (2017, p. 166) - which is quite likely - or that he suffers from a sort of a superiority complex or, what Hillier describes "a god complex that desires dominance" (Ibid.) that places him so high above others and drives him to look down on and dehumanize them. At any rate, he seems to enjoy scenes of violence and bloodshed in spite of the possibility that he himself meanwhile may run the risk of losing his life or get seriously injured. Being "utterly ruthless, remorseless, and seemingly indestructible," Chigurh's sense of pride and vanity is responsible for his "placing himself above the common and beyond the law" (Hillier, 2017, pp. 191-192). In his crimes, he treats people and things as "instrumental to his sense of superiority" (Hillier, 2017, p. 193). Therefore, he exactly functions as a foil to Bell, that is to say, where Chigurh succeeds, (Bell) fails.

4. CONCLUSION

As this current study in McCarthy's *No Country for old Men* is intended to spotlight some problems associated with the scope of man's ability to control his life against a disturbing sense of doom and fate operating inexorably in man's life, it basically tries to respond to such questions as to what extent in McCarthy's fragile fallen world the characters are – fully or partially-responsible for deciding or designing their fates and to what extent they are protected against the terrible inner/outer dangers shown through the novel.

In McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, it is noticeable that the characters' attitudes are shaped less by an intuitive positive reaction to calamities or whatever is befalling them than by an impulsive reclining or retreating to private worlds of their own made up of destroyed hopes and unfulfilled dreams. The titular "no" of McCarthy's novel might indicate that "old men" are not admitted in any country or they have no country to live comfortably in, simply because they have grown, in the Darwinian sense, beyond the stage at which they are capable of coping with the energetic, active, and even violent life maintained by the younger generations. More importantly, they, on account of some generation gap, seem unable to positively communicate with younger people with the purpose of understanding their motivations, habits, moods, problems, and so on. Relatively old men like Sheriff Bell and Llewellyn Moss have central positions in the novelist's fragile fictional world.

According to Bell, who is morally a failure, old men are doomed to be far away from any destination as, he thinks, they prove incompetent to fulfill their duties, preferring instead to spend their time pondering on the world of the past and its aura which they feel incomparable with the present. In like manner, people mostly prove to be so inactive while facing violence and the danger of death. Carson Wells and Carla Jean, for example, do nothing practical to save themselves and passively succumb to their fates while confronting the malignant Chigurh and his cattle gun. Chigurh becomes then not an instrumental agent of fate or destiny but rather a scourge with which these characters are chastised or punished for their utmost failures in being well active and communicative.

In addition, what makes the world of McCarthy's novel so fragile that its inhabitants' safety is threatened at any moment is their unjustifiable persistent sense of defeat. This spirit of defeatism when confronting evil characterizing characters' actions and behaviors becomes instrumental in doubling the amount of doubt the moment those people are about to make important decisions related to the course of their life. Lack of self-confidence helps likewise in preserving the sense of fragility and contributes to the dilemmas experienced by most of the characters in the story.

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