

English IV CPI

Summer Assignment 2021

Ms. McDonald

Novel: *No Country for Old Men* by Cormac McCarthy

Assignment:

Prior to reading the novel, review the background and character information; it will help you with how the novel is set up.

Read the novel. The movie is similar, but it is different in many ways. If you just watch the movie, you will lose a lot of information and will not fair well on your assessments. As you read, look for way to tie the novel in with *The Road*, which you read junior year.

You will have a reading check quiz on the 2nd day back to school.

Additionally, we will discuss the novel upon returning to school, and you will have a test after discussion.

I ask that you wait to read the novel until close to the start of school so it is fresh in your mind.

Background for *No Country for Old Men* by Cormac McCarthy

Cormac McCarthy

- Charles Joseph McCarthy, Jr., was born on July 20, 1933
- Born in Providence, Rhode Island, but when he was 4, his family moved to Knoxville, TN
- McCarthy legally changed his name from Charles to Cormac, which is the Gaelic equivalent of "son of Charles" because he wanted to adopt an old family nickname bestowed on his father, Charles, by his Irish aunts
- Cormac attended the University of Tennessee briefly before joining the Air Force, but he returned to UT to major in engineering and business administration; he never graduated
- While there, he published two short pieces of fiction and won the 1959–60 Ingram Merrill Award.
- In 1961, he married Lee Holleman, a poet and fellow student. They moved to Chicago, where he worked as an auto mechanic and began to write
- McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), won the William Faulkner Foundation Award for best first novel
- The year *The Orchard Keeper* was published, McCarthy divorced and sailed to Ireland with money he received from a traveling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. There he met Anne DeLisle, a British pop singer–dancer who was working on the ship. They married in 1966, traveled extensively, and settled in an artist colony on the island of Ibiza, where he continued to write
- McCarthy went on to divorce and remarry another time and write several other novels: *No Country for Old Men* (2005) and *The Road* (2006) are his most recent
- Many critics find fault with McCarthy, arguing that his novels contain gratuitous violence and that his view is nihilistic; however, many agree that McCarthy's works are significant and challenge readers to confront the brutality of human existence

No Country for Old Men

- Setting: 1980 West Texas/Mexican border

Important characters:

Sheriff Ed Tom Bell

- Main protagonist-the story revolves around him
- He is an iconic WWII veteran who oversees the investigation and the trail of murders even as he struggles to face the magnitude of the crimes he is trying to solve-they are completely out of his wheelhouse.

- The parts of the chapters that are italicized are his memories that introduce each chapter and serve as part of the novel's narration-these are very important.
- Question: Is he a good sheriff? I am not asking if he is a good person.

Llewelyn Moss

- Secondary protagonist
- A welder who proclaims he is "retired."
- Vietnam War veteran
- He is in his 30s.
- Married to a 19-year-old named Carla Jean; they met at Walmart, where she was a cashier.
- Question: What do you think is his tragic flaw?

Anton Chigurh

- The main antagonist
- A psychopathic hitman
- Prone to extreme violence and philosophical musings
- He is in his 30s
- Question: Who and *what* is Chigurh?

Style of the novel

- There are periods of 1st person (Ed Tom Bell's stream of consciousness) and 3rd person omniscient (all knowing) narration
- Vernacular
 - Fosters verisimilitude (reality)
 - Explores the lives of rural Texas people
 - Conveys Bell's authenticity and Moss's vulnerability
- "Muscular Prose"
 - Distinctly lean and spare approach to writing
 - Minimal use of punctuation marks (like *The Road*)
 - Coarse and undecorated language