

The Nature Of Evil

The introduction of Chigurh in "No Country For Old Men" differs very much to that of Bateman in "American Psycho". They both represent evil but in their own unique way. When we first come across Chigurh we immediately know that he's not very innocent, we acknowledge that he is in a prison cell and at this first instance, we know he's done something bad but then he does much worse, without warning Chigurh "dropped his cuffed hands over the deputy's head... and hauled back on the chain." This nature of evil within this character is more superior to any other feeling within him, this idea is reinforced when he kills an innocent man he asked to be pulled over, and "he placed his hand on the man's head like a faith healer." This simile indicates Chigurh to be angel-like. This simile is used effectively because it juxtaposes the image of a 'healer' with the truth that unravels next. "The pneumatic hiss and click of the plunger sounded... a round hole in his forehead from which the blood bubbled," although it doesn't specifically write word-for-word what happened, the use of language is played with to create the vivid image of the innocent man being shot with the emphysema tank. By analysing the first few pages, we have already judged Chigurh's character and believe he's set to kill. By juxtaposing him with Bateman, we can distinguish how different Bateman is. When we're first introduced to him he is a wealthy, social, normal human being, living the "American dream". Evil does not lie within him, or so it seems. As he is narrating, he uses infinite description on pointless little things. He's very examining of the world around him and very detailed. "A Ralph Lauren silk tie and leather wing tips by Fratelli Rossetti." This phrase explores the idea of Bateman's personality being overall, arrogant. We're lead to believe, with his words that he's very intelligent, sane and just that little bit crazy over trends. By cross-examining, it shows Bateman isn't so indulged with his evil side as it only comes across later in the book whereas Chigurh is introduced straight away with two killings in the first chapter. Bateman seems to have a split personality which he occasionally switches to and from while Chigurh only has one side to him – the devil. He does not care what he looks like or what clothes he's wearing as long as he can kill – this is his living, this is what differs from Bateman – a self-centered egomaniac who 'kills' for his imagination's sake.

"The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement"."

James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* 1931.

The book portrays how the "American Dream" is deformed by the gluttony and greed of 1980's American society – the concept is shown through the yuppie lifestyles the book's characters lead on Wall Street and in the richest parts of Manhattan. Consumerism is a prevalent theme in American Psycho, Bateman is the ultimate stereotype of an excessive consumer: rich, shallow, and addicted to sex, drugs, and conspicuous consumption. He is the product of America's 1980's society. The elite group from the wealthy class of New York could get away with anything, even murdering. The "American Dream" can quickly be turned into a nightmare as its roots can be seen to cause evil as the dream is simply about having it all therefore linked to consuming everything to have the best possible life and judging from Bateman it clearly shows he has consumed all material things and after finding no satisfaction has moved on to human lives. His extreme violence parallels his extreme need for fulfillment. So can it be said that consumerism is a stepping stone for evil to overtake the human being. He eats, sleeps and breathes consumerism; this notion of consumerism is indicated in Bateman's use of long description, even when describing a simple album, "The whole album has a clear, crisp sound, and a new sheen of consummate professionalism that really gives

the songs a big boost.” All of the things that Bateman seeks give him no satisfaction therefore demonstrating the greed of evil, always wanting more. Chigurh acknowledges the impact that consumerism can have and the dangers of people always wanting more, people like Bateman, it is shown when Chigurh says, “the devil is just the angel who asked for more.” In contrast to Bateman, consumerism is not very relevant and important to Chigurh as he doesn’t acknowledge importance in material things and this is shown throughout the book, while Bateman uses all different types of fancy tools to hurt his victims and torture them, Chigurh uses whatever he can get his hands on, a simple emphysema tank will do the job for Chigurh. Additionally, while Bateman focuses a lot on society and being able to fit into the elite group of society, Chigurh’s state of mind is fatalistic; his life is controlled by fate. He believes very much in life taking its own course and that everything happens for a reason. Chigurh never takes responsibility for his actions, and always puts blame on ‘fate’ – “I had no say in the matter. Every moment in your life is a turning and everyone a choosing.” He says this when explaining to a woman why he killed her husband. That phrase reinforces the idea that Chigurh, even though he’s committing all sorts of killings, he feels no emotion what so ever, no remorse, no guilt, no sadness, nothing. A cold hearted, emotionless man which I believe does not kill just for the sake of it, but truly believes it is his mission in life to inflict so much harm on people and that fate brings him to those situations in which he has to kill, “But look at it my way. I got here the same way the coin did.” Additionally, the reaction of Chigurh to his murders differs very much to that of Bateman as he admits to ‘supposedly’ killing many people and does fall into a sort of psycho state of mind leading him to confessing the murders to his lawyer who doesn’t believe the confession and takes it as a joke. This just reflects the idea that people from the elite grouping society can do as they wish and have the power to get away with it. However, the ending of No Country For Old Men contradicts that statement as Chigurh, although no where near being an upper class gentlemen, still escapes from any sort of punishment.

The appearance of Bateman clearly shows the stereotyped person he is, he’s always so concerned with the tiniest details, a true materialistic who defines people by there wealth. A way he chooses to determine someone’s wealth is by looking at the business cards, Bateman’s description of Paul Allen’s business card - “subtle off-white coloring. The tasteful thickness of it. Oh my God, it even has a watermark!” This phrase portrays how meticulous Bateman is in describing even the tiniest piece of paper, which a normal person wouldn’t look twice at. Bateman can be classed as a metrosexual as he has a surprisingly amount of care for how he looks, “plastic ice pack Brushing my teeth inspect my hands and use a nail-brush ... deep-pore cleanser Facial masque Tooth polisher ... gel cleanser.” These are some of the activities that consist of Bateman’s morning routine something which certainly differs from Chigurh. Anton Chigurh is evil itself...evil needs a human form to flourish so therefore taking the body of Chigurh. Not much description of Chigurh is given, but a metaphor is used to describe his eyes, “blue as lapis.” By using the colour blue to describe Chigurh’s eyes, the colour blue symbolises coldness which mirrors the emotions of Chigurh, a cold-hearted figure. The fact that not much is written to describe the features of Chigurh gives the readers a sense that he is not physically human enough in order to have a description. The degree into which he is evil is superior to any mind of that the human should have, therefore making him seem almost like a monster and not an actual human figure.

“Duality is the concept that humans have two basic natures; the physical and the spiritual.”

Duality is a theme which can be explored throughout both books, but takes a specific role within the book No Country For Old Men. Chigurh often uses the traditional “coin tossing” game to determine

the future of the person being challenged. "Flipped it spinning in the air and caught it and slapped it down on his wrist. Call it. You should try to save yourself. Call it." This phrase expresses the ideology of Chigurh. He gives the woman a chance to survive, all depending on which side, a simple coin lands on. In this case, he won which meant that it was fate telling him that he had to kill the woman. The woman questioned him on his beliefs of the coin toss, "You make it like it was the coin. But you're the one." Her state of mind reflects that of a normal person which really gives the reader that sense of confrontation with something that you don't believe. In American Psycho, duality is not a major theme but can be related in the fact that Bateman has a dual personality, the conscience side which we can see when he's in his day-to-day activities like being with his friends and when at work but he's also letting another part of him overtake his conscience side thus creating the duality within himself. When his imagination begins to be in control, his monstrous acts of violence which he describes really shock the reader and make the reader feel disgusted.

Overall, the two books portray the same theme – the nature of evil. One thing that the reader can be certain of when reading both books is that the incidents happening throughout the book are products of evil minded people. But what is it that causes these characters to be so evil? Is consumerism the cause for evil? Is it fate which over takes the actions of a person? These are the questions in which a reader tries to respond after reading the books. Is evil a powerful force which is not able to be controlled or merely man's decision to act in such a manner?