

Imagery and themes
establish mccarthy's
views in the road



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Cormac McCarthy uses a variety of literary techniques in "The Road" to establish his views on a wide range of themes. First, the manner in which McCarthy describes the scenes throughout the novel distinctly conveys the bleak world he has created. Punctuation is notably scarce as simple grammatical rules are ignored (such as the use of commas, hyphens, etc) - this keeps to the minimalistic style of the novel, stripping the content down to the bare essentials. McCarthy seems to play around with this style, as he experiments with the use of contractions - for example, on page 2, he uses an apostrophe in "there'd" but dismisses any possibility of regularity of this in "hadnt". The use of this literary device creates a somewhat ambiguous response in the reader, as the author's intentions are unclear and misty, similar to the atmosphere of the setting. It is also noted that McCarthy avoids using quotation marks, thereby integrating dialogue with exposition, perhaps portraying the feelings of the characters in the novel; these details are considered unimportant and perhaps even trivial in the post-apocalyptic world. Likewise, occasionally indentations are not used to distinguish the beginning of speech, instead bleeding into the prose - this is shown on page 9, in the lines "His face in the small light streaked with black from the rain like some old thespian. Can I ask you something? he said". Additionally, the fragmentation of this text portrays the broken world that the author is trying to describe, thus strengthening the impact of the scene. In addition, we are immediately made aware of an indistinct sense of timing; for instance, we are told that the man "thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years." McCarthy hereby skilfully informs the audience that time is irrelevant in this world, as the novel begins in the midst of action, after ruin has taken place. Although the novel is structured

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chronologically, timing is purposely presented as vague, seemingly unimportant and somewhat trivial in the current world, where only a bleak, foggy atmosphere of the past life remains. McCarthy forms a strong sense of the scenes he is describing through imagery; this technique is introduced in the very second line, showing the significance of epitome ("Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before."). This ominous description instantly sets the scene as an incredibly grim one; this idea is reinforced further as the novel evolves ("Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust. Fossil tracks in the dried sludge.") The repetitive use of dull and demeaning adjectives to describe the remains of the city emphasises the effects of an urban tragedy on society, leaving but only broken remnants of the once 'whole' world. The vision McCarthy has created is almost a real-life representation of hell, possibly provoking fear and deterrence within the reader. The word "ash" is used repetitively through description to support these ideas, so as to persuade the reader to consider these thoughts and perhaps develop their own interpretations and understanding of death. Arguably the most common references featured in "The Road" are those with religious connotations - these are introduced from the start of the novel, which gives an insight into the depths of these ideas. For example, McCarthy personifies light in connection with "pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast". This clear biblical reference showcases the journey the man and boy are undertaking, like that of those on a pilgrimage. On the other hand, the journey could also symbolise the religious journey one takes to lead them to the afterlife, which could be seen as means of avoiding, or perhaps even cheating, death. Furthermore, death is personified

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on page 20, in the line " How else would death call you?" The author's use of language here conveys death to be crafty and sinister, perhaps suggesting that in order to beat death, ' he' must be befriended. Although not physically possible, this description provides juxtaposition between the concepts of living and death, in allowing the reader to consider other solutions to the inevitable happenings of death. The prospect of death is indeed brought to the forefront of the scene throughout the novel; it is even present in unconsciousness, as shown on page 17 (" He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death"). This detail highlights the role of death in the current world, perhaps in an attempt to reassure the characters - for example, if death is frequently spoken about, it may not seem so patronising or terrifying as the time draws closer. Another key reference to death is given on page 29, as we are given a heart-warming insight into the relationship between father and son - " the boy was all that stood between him and death". The relationship between the father and boy is portrayed as a loving, protective one; this is shown from the very beginning of the novel as the man awakes to " reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him". This instantly establishes the intense bond between father and son through protection, a subconscious reaction towards a loved one - McCarthy presents this relationship in such a way that the audience find themselves able to connect with the characters, as they will most likely be able to relate to this relentless feeling. Yet another recurring theme throughout the novel is the destination to which the father and son are travelling; the repetitive use of the word " south" (pages 2, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 24) establishes the destination to both the reader and characters. The man almost appears reassuring as he confirms that they are " still going

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south", perhaps in an attempt to persuade the boy that their journey is not wasted or worthless. He is also described as having "studied the country to the south", indicating that plans have been made in preparation, thus confirming that the direction is certain and necessary. On page 29, we are told that "everything depended on reaching the coast" - this detail is more specific than previously mentioned, as a precise destination is given. Moreover, this quote can be compared to the myth of Odyssey, as, like in "The Road", a journey of hope was undertaken. The journey throughout the novel symbolises life in whole (life is a journey, in which one may have to face seemingly impossible tasks). To conclude, McCarthy is able to convey his views of death, religion, and relationships through the use of many literary devices, including structure, language and imagery, thus strengthening his vision. This proves to be very effective, as the audience is invited to connect with the characters throughout the novel, provoking both thought and feeling.