

The challenge of survival in the road and i am legend



When exploring the challenges and toils of survival, we can easily make a series of comparisons between the design of Francis Lawrence's and Cormac McCarthy's post apocalyptic worlds in *I Am Legend* and *The Road*, respectively. Both plots involve the main character as one of very few people left in this world, and each protagonist would do anything to protect his companions. While both Lawrence's film and McCarthy's novel build internal conflicts within the main character, Robert, the protagonist in *I Am Legend*, also has to deal with the Zombies, whereas *The Man* faces his conflict of world around him. This difference is highlighted in the building of each of the characters, with Lawrence's survivalist being strong and well prepared from any threat. McCarthy chooses to introduce *The Man* in a weak, dying state, with minimal supplies to share between himself and his son. This contrast however is also representative of the difference in setting between the two stories, with Robert Neville fortifying himself within an abundantly stocked New York City, and *The Man* and his son wandering down long stretches of barren highway. The final main contrast exists in each storyteller's interpretation of the meaning behind a gun, with Lawrence using a gun for killing; meanwhile, to McCarthy, the gun is symbolic of hope.

Lawrence first characterises Robert Neville with mise-en-scene by using an overhead shot of his car driving through the city, directly following a series of establishing shots showing the abandoned cityscape. As the audience see him speeding through the abandoned cityscape, the sound of the powerful engine fades in. Finally the audience see a medium shot of him in the car, allowing the audience to see him as a survival hardened man complete with jeans, combat boots, leather jacket and assault rifle by his side. Lawrence's

treatment makes the viewers believe that Robert is a man who is well equipped. This depiction results in the audience's initial impression being that he is a strong, admirable and supposedly unbreakable character. Lawrence's use of mise-en-scene, particularly costuming and props, conveys this message to the audience. The audience see the well worn leather jacket, and the strong, bright, high-key and natural lighting. Such visuals are paired with the bright red muscle car, heavily contrasting with the bleakness of the city. Shots are routinely shot from a low angle when Robert is in frame, giving the sense of power and control radiating from him. The shots are also generally still and stable, either statically placed on Robert or tracking his car as he slides it through the streets. Once again highlighting the supposed control and purposefulness that Lawrence suggests is needed to last with the challenges of survival. Alternatively, McCarthy develops a protagonist that is described as weak, sick, and ultimately set to die; creating the dark, depressed theme that resonates throughout the novel. First indications come from the imagery presented as a bloody cough from The Man, who has been carrying a huge load as well as pushing the trolley up a mountain side for the sake of his own son getting to see the beachside. As a result, the reader feels highly sympathetic for The Man, who is obviously not equipped to take on the challenges of survival as effectively as Robert is.

I Am Legend features establishing shots of New York City which is normally a busy, highly populated city covered in concrete. However, Lawrence's city shows green growth intertwined between all the dense skyscraper buildings. This shot then follows with shots of cars rusting away and with plants growing through them, littered through the middle of the street. This visual

in turn causes the audience to instantly recognise the fact that the city has been abandoned for some time and that the occupants have left in a chaotic manner. The final shot in the initial establishing shot collection is an overhead of a single red car driving through the city, weaving between the trashed cars. This is a powerful shot used by Lawrence, not only in building audience interest but also in the development of this central survival theme. It clearly highlights just how alone the driver of the vehicle is, in a city that is normally overflowing with people. Opposing this landscape is McCarthy's barren, empty and unpopulated land that peels off from either side of the highway. Throughout the novel there are only a few times to stock up the minimal supplies they have on them via the service centres and small towns that are placed off to the sides of the highway, "... stood in the road and glassed the plain down there where the shape of a city stood in the grayness...", They have no car, no military backpacks or gear and they have no quick way to move about or escape - serving to make survival more challenging. This contrast is reflective of the the conflict that each character faces with Robert facing other whereas The Man faces the environment around him.

Moreover, both McCarthy and Lawrence use the recurring symbol of the gun. Lawrence shows guns as being something to be on the offensive with, means of war and mass killing, as highlighted in both the actions of the protagonist as well as the weapons themselves. Robert has cupboards full of automatic, high powered weapons and powerful explosives which he uses to fuel war, with the hunting and slaughter of zombies that he comes across. Conversely, McCarthy makes note that The Man has only a pistol with two bullets in it,

representative of desperate hope; one is for him and one is for his son. The gun is therefore seen as being something for defensiveness, as it represents hope for them because when the bullets are gone, it is all over for The Man and his child.

Despite differences in medium, both McCarthy and Lawrence effectively demonstrate and explore the challenges and toils of survival in a post-apocalyptic world by using very similar techniques. For example, the symbolism of a simple gun, the carefully designed characterisation, and role of the setting are crucial to both narratives. While still creating contrasts between the way the survivalists go about surviving, *The Road* and *I Am Legend* show how men in desperate situations are not above caring and protecting those around them.