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Candidate session number	0	0							
Candidate name									
School number	0	0							
School name									
Examination session (May or November)	MAY		Year	2009					

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: English A1
(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: How does Cormac McCarthy Portray Common Thematic Elements in No Country for Old Men and The Road?

Candidate's declaration

If this declaration is not signed by the candidate the extended essay will not be assessed.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: _____ Date: 6 March 2009

Supervisor's report

The supervisor must complete the report below and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator. The supervisor must sign this report; otherwise the extended essay will not be assessed and may be returned to the school.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) _____

Comments

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

is a gifted writer and a rabid fan of Cormac McCarthy, so I don't think he encountered too much difficulty in his study of these two texts. If anything, I think he enjoyed the challenge of forging a meaningful series of connections between two disparate seeming texts.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: 9 March 2009

How does Cormac McCarthy Portray Common Thematic Elements in *No Country for Old Men*
and *The Road*?

Candidate Number:

IB Extended Essay

Word Count: 3,821

I. Abstract:

Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* is a novel about a man on the run from a deadly assassin. His other novel, *The Road* is about a father and son striving to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. However, upon a closer inspection, one begins to notice similarities in style and even in the theme of these two novels. One begins to realize that they are in fact linked, and do contain similar themes, such as the ability to survive in difficult situations, the strength of father-son relationships, and an intricate balance of pessimism and hope. In an attempt to further explore these issues, the following research question arose:

How does Cormac McCarthy Portray Common Thematic Elements in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*?

In order to answer this question, in depth analysis of the novels was required. As these works have not been around long enough for critics to begin to dissect them, the need to rely on primary research was created. Through this primary research, McCarthy's two novels were placed under examination in order to ascertain what similar qualities they possess, and how they are displayed in each novel. Through my research I concluded that the two novels do indeed share several themes, and that McCarthy unifies the two novels through adherence to these themes and through stylistic similarities. My conclusion is that the two novels, though not similar in plot, are similar in how McCarthy explores several important themes within each. As such, through my research, I came to the conclusion that Cormac McCarthy creates two works which could intertwine into one, creating an exploration of the human spirit during the worst of situations.

Word Count: 281

a real
way we
connect



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I. Introduction:

Upon first glance, it is easy to think that Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* are polar opposites, and are unrelated in every way except in the author they share. However, if one were to invest a certain amount of time exploring the novels, a different conclusion might emerge. Granted, one's subject is a Mexican hit man on the loose trying to track down a missing briefcase containing a sizable sum of money, while the other is centered on a father and son trying to survive in a post apocalyptic world, respectively. Nevertheless, the two possess a common theme of survival in the face of the harshest of adversities. McCarthy, through similar settings, characters and situations, amongst other things, is able to create a grandiose portrait of common people battling the most difficult of circumstances. ✓ ✓

What McCarthy manages to do is to portray a sense of deep desperation coupled with insurmountable fear, while maintaining the integrity of his central characters. Both Sheriff Bell and Llewellyn Moss, carrying a suitcase full of drug money, feel the inescapable and dwarfing presence of Anton Chigurh, who is portrayed as nothing else but a figure of death, to whom human life is but a coin flip away from ceasing to exist. Yet both Moss and Bell maintain the belief that they can somehow run away Chigurh, then they can run away from the evil that haunts man. Similarly, in *The Road*, the father and son are forced to battle thieves, murderers, and cannibals, yet they maintain a sense of hope for an escape that may never even come.

The following approach will be given to the question: first, an exploration of the general themes permeating the two works will be presented, followed by a shift in focus on the way that Cormac McCarthy relates them to one another. As the novels are intricately worked together and one is limited by the length of the essay, more emphasis will be placed on the overarching themes and connections rather than on the exploration of every minute link. ✓ ✓

As Cormac McCarthy is a notoriously reclusive author, granting less than a handful of interviews during a career that spans forty years (Conlon), it is necessary to rely on primary research and what little information is available on the novels, which, though they are well regarded, are nevertheless recent additions to the canon of American literature, and thus have yet to be fully analyzed by critics.

II. An Escape from Time

If *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* were reduced to a single phrase, that phrase would be "men on the run." In the end, both novels are about people trying to escape an immense calamity, whether it is avoiding a murder at the hands of a hit man, as is the case in *No Country*, or trying to escape to a location away from the dangers of cannibals and murderers, as is the case in *The Road*. Llewellyn spends the majority of *No Country* on the run from Chigurh, distancing himself from his wife, and from his home, all in the hope of avoiding what at times seems inevitable. On the other hand, the father and son in *The Road* have multiple potential enemies and are not running to escape but are running because there is simply nowhere to go. ✓

As such, Cormac McCarthy infuses both novels with a sense of forward movement and progression, juxtaposed with visions and remembrances of the past. As Llewellyn remarks in *No Country for Old Men*, "You think when you wake up in the mornin yesterday dont count. But yesterday is all that does count. What else is there? Your life is made out of the days it's made out of. Nothin else." (227). Throughout the work, the idea that every past decision carries weight into the present and future is constantly reiterated, and neither Llewellyn nor anyone around him can escape what is coming. Cormac McCarthy furthers the exploration of the past through the chapters told in first person by Sheriff Bell, which interrupt the plot of Moss's flight from Chigurh. In these monologues, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell provides a link to an earlier time, often ✓

— give on page 6 ✓

lamenting the way the world has turned out to be, and of how new ideas and concepts trample time-honored traditions: “[t]he old time concern that sheriffs had for their people is being watered down some” (64). ✓

The structure of *The Road* is similar to that in *No Country* where the progression of the father and son is often interrupted by flashbacks and remembrances of times past. Characters in *The Road* deal with the changes that have occurred in a similar way to Sheriff Bell. A crucial exchange occurs after the two men encounter and help an old man. The Father asks him if he had prepared for the tragedy that has occurred, to which the old man replies, “People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there” (168). ✓
Needs further explanation

In a sense, the both Llewellyn and the father and son in *The Road* are simply attempting to secure a future, the former by keeping the satchel with the \$2.4 million in cash, and the others by arriving at a place free from the dangers of those that can harm them and steal their supplies, and thus their livelihood. What McCarthy accomplishes by contrasting the search for a better future with the dwellings of the past is the suspension of the two novels in a vacuum. In essence, neither novel can simply be a look to the future because the past is an inescapable part of our present. Early in *The Road*, McCarthy writes, “Ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all” (28). Both works, therefore, become explorations of what one can do with the short time one is allotted. As the concepts of life and death are central to both novels, the incorporation of the past with the present serves to remind the reader of the fact that, even during all the hardships that the characters face to escape death and to guarantee themselves a future, they are still working within a finite environment, and even after they face the harshest ✓
N.C. ✓

of circumstances, their death is unavoidable, and only those who are on their way out, such as Sheriff Bell, will even remember their names, if that.

III. Pessimism and Hope:

At times, both *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* possess a similar quality of hopelessness and despair, yet McCarthy carefully balances the desolation with a sense of optimism, or at the very least, a sense of growing hope. In *No Country for Old Men* Llewellyn is running from Anton Chigurh, ^a man that will stop at nothing and murder everything and everybody, a man that will go as far as to kill Moss's wife, a woman who by no stretch of the imagination deserves such a sentence, simply because he said he would. Even Llewellyn himself, the protagonist of the novel, is killed in passing; as such, the reader never gets to experience it, and thus the author rejects suspense for a sense of despair. After an entire novel is spent tracking Moss's plight from Chigurh, McCarthy dispatches him with a single unremarkable sentence: ^{flight} "(Llewellyn) went up the walkway and climbed the stairs and went in" (236). In essence, Moss and the female hitchhiker are just mundane victims, whose death is nothing more but a reflection of the impossibility of the quest for salvation or even a sense of escape. The real tragedy however is not that Moss is dead, but rather that innocent and uninvolved people are killed just as easily as the drug dealers. Moss and the hitchhiker are victims of Mexican drug runners looking for their loot, while Moss's wife, Carla Jean, a Wal-Mart worker who is extremely concerned for husband, is killed by Chigurh due to the fact that he had "given his word" to Moss that he would not leave anyone alive would Moss not surrender. Even Carla Jean's mother dies after "the cancers" consume her body. However, as the novel winds down and after all the spilled blood and wasted lives, McCarthy again focuses on Sheriff Bell. As he is walking down the steps of a courthouse, Bell is struck by a realization: "He'd felt like this before but not in a long time

✓ ✓

and when he said that, then he knew what it was. It was defeat. It was being beaten. More bitter to him than death. You need to get over that, he said. Then he started the truck” (306). In a sense, Bell, who provides the novel’s human center, and whose narration serves as a counterpoint to McCarthy’s bleak prose when it comes to Moss and Chigurh, counterbalances the hopelessness of the rest of the novel. Even after Bell broke his promise to Carla Jean and was unable to save Llewellyn, even after witnessing the horrors of his profession, Bell simply realizes that time spent weeping over personal defeat and death and tragedy is time wasted. The final chapter of *No Country for Old Men* is focused on Bell as well, as the Sheriff recounts a dream he had of his father, where his father was “carryin fire in a horn” and was “fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there,” (309). In a sense, he affirms that, despite everything, man is not completely without hope. Even as the work ends with the words “And then I woke up,” (309), one does not come to the feeling that there is hope only in dreams rather than in the real world, but instead that the hope that Bell sees in his dreams can carry over into the real world rather than be simply a product of one’s imaginings. After all, there are countless victims in *No Country for Old Men*, in the end Bell is still alive, and he can carry on a legacy that his father has carried on to him and so on and so forth. In essence, it is as if the 300 pages prior to the end of the work are simply a prelude to Bell’s realization. It seems that, McCarthy, through his prose, highlights the fact that though one may face extraordinarily difficult circumstances, one is given the opportunity to survive, and thus the opportunity to one day maybe even thrive.

Though the subject explored in *The Road* is vastly different from that of the other work assessed, Cormac McCarthy uses a similar technique of layering despair and pessimism with the faintest glimmer of hope. After encountering unimaginable evil and the most gruesome of

situations, the father and son in *The Road* reach a similar bittersweet, yet inevitable end. Though far more shocking and violent than *No Country for Old Men*, at various points encountering human cannibalism and baby-eating, *The Road* is in a way also much less pessimistic. While Llewellyn is forced to tackle Chigurh on his own, the father and son have each other and their mutual love and care propels them further and further into their journey. Ultimately, after a lengthy quest for the sea, where they father and boy unsuccessfully seek solace, the father passes away, and just when things seem at their bleakest, McCarthy introduces a couple who take in the child, promising to take care of him. ^{this is} Though far from a happy ending, the boy is not left alone in the woods, helpless, with only his dead father to keep him company. Rather, even as the father is dying, he comforts the boy, telling him that he'll "be okay. [He's] going to be lucky" (279). ✓

At times *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* are indeed pessimistic explorations of equally pessimistic situations. McCarthy writes with a sense of realism rather than one of false hope, and thus when situations do indeed become hopeful, one feels as if they are truthful rather than artificial. McCarthy is able to evoke sympathy and a sense of compassion for his characters by first subjecting them to the darkest of conditions. It is as if McCarthy is writing that, if these characters could find the strength to continue under the most brutal of circumstances, what is to stop anybody else? In crafting the works in such a way, where despair is carefully countered by hope, the product is two novels, which, though they vastly different in terms of plot, become testaments to attainment ^{of} the difficult ideal of regaining hope in a situation that is completely bereft of it. ✓ ✓

IV. The Struggle of Man Through Generations:

Amongst other things, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* both deal with the way different generations interact and coexist. The theme is particularly important in *The Road*, where the father and son must work side by side simply to keep each other alive. However, in *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Bell is constantly expounding on the past and how the “old timers” were running things. By using several generations of families in his novels, Cormac McCarthy explores the strength of familial relationships and their importance to the survival and existence of the characters. ✓

Even though both novels are ultimately about survival, the struggle of generations investigated in depth by Cormac McCarthy throughout. That is, how fathers and children deal with similar, if not the same, situations. In *No Country for Old Men*, Bell, whose first person narration constantly addresses these themes, often refers to his father and his grandfather: “I always liked to hear about the old timers. Never missed a chance to do so” (64). His ancestors, who had also been cops, represent to Bell an easier time, though McCarthy makes it clear that it ^{how} was never any easier. In *No Country for Old Men* things are almost cyclical. Or rather, McCarthy is able to display the relations between the situations faced by Bell’s father and himself, in such a way as to show that, though there is a difference, fundamentally, they are facing the same enemy and the same things in slightly different times. However, in his narration, Bell sometimes laments that he cannot understand the older people: “they look at me it’s always a question” (304). Yet, at a certain point, Bell realizes that he himself has become old and out of touch, to an extent: “I feel like them old people” (296). As such, though things change and certain people ✓ believe that the world is progressing while others believe the exact opposite; essentially, Cormac McCarthy makes the point the nature of life is cyclical, and with it are the problems of man. ✓

Therefore, though the times are changing, the people and the situations they face are not necessarily changing as well. *need evid. of this*

The Road, much more than *No Country for Old Men*, explores a father's relationship with his son. The two protagonists are thrust into a drab and austere situation, yet the father still tries to maintain the boy's childhood, innocence, and invariably, his life. As the novel progresses, one realizes that the gun they carry has only two shots, meant for them in the event that they are captured. The father spends much of the time in *The Road* contemplating whether or not he could actually kill his own son for his own good. Yet, as he lays dying he admits "I cant. I cant hold my son dead in my arms. I thought I could but I cant" (279). In essence, even as he is on the brink of death, the father maintains the necessity to care for his child. In essence, *The Road* is distinctly about a father and son surviving, rather than simply two people surviving in difficult circumstances. It is a novel exploring the care that each provides for the other and the necessity of the father/son relationship. ✓

Similarly, both novels explore the passing of one generation's livelihood to that of the next one: though the father dies, the son promises to speak to him every day, just ^{as} like Bell seems to seek comfort in his deceased father's presence. McCarthy writes, "Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again," (281) and though it may seem difficult to accept, the novel manages to make the reader believe it; though all the bleakness, one cannot help but cling to whatever one can, even if it is the possibility, rather than the existence, of hope.

By allowing the son to live in *The Road*, McCarthy allows for the possibility of life in the future. The author satisfies the desire of the father to at the very least see his son live. In a sense, by doing so, McCarthy crafts the father's death to not simply be a meaningless one. He dies while attempting to protect his son, to his very end. Therefore, the son is able to keep upholding ✓ ✓

the memory of his deceased father, simply by continuing to survive. As in the final chapter of *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Bell, rather than reminiscing on the tragedy that has occurred, discusses a dream wherein his father is preparing to fix him shelter: "And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew whenever I got there he would be there" (309). Sheriff Bell reaffirms what was reaffirmed in *The Road*, that it is a father's task to prepare the way for his son, and that hope is present because one can trust in a father to do so for them.

V. Geography and Language

In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the road itself becomes the third protagonist. At one point, McCarthy writes of the road "The black shape of it running from dark to dark...something imponderable shifting out there in the dark...the salitter drying from the earth" (261). As such the road itself is both a symbol of the continuing struggle and a means to escape it. By crafting it in such a way, McCarthy again balances a sense of hope with the drab reality of the outside world.

In *No Country for Old Men*, though not overly emphasized, rough Texas terrain is as central a character as Chigurh or Moss, not only allowing the action to take place, but taking a part in it also. The barren and desolate landscape of both novels portrays the depths of hell that these characters go to. The vast emptiness of Texas and the endless road, polluted with graffiti and remnants of an event that rocked the foundations of humanity to its core. In *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, McCarthy's characters are constantly on the move, yet they never seem to get too far away. Wherever Llewellyn goes, be it Odessa, Texas or Mexico, somebody will find him, and no matter how far the father and son travel, death and threats are constantly

walking by their sides. In *The Road*, when the father and son do reach the sea, they are not fulfilled: there is no escape because the threat of destruction and evil is ever-present.

The concept of fire is essential to both novels in that it is both necessary in the sense of creating heat, but also for the physical and spiritual illumination amidst the harsh landscapes. During the same final chapter of *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Bell is intrigued by the cold, snowy weather and the fact that his father rode past "carryin fire in a horn" (309), thus giving him the feeling that everything will be all right. Similarly, in *The Road*, the father comforts the son by saying that they "carry the fire" (279), thus making them the good guys. Fire serves such a vital role due to the fact that it is a necessity for the characters to utilize it in the cruel terrains, making their dependence on it invaluable.

Furthermore, one of the main ways Cormac McCarthy illustrates the struggle of everyday man is in his manipulation of the language, particularly by simplifying conjunctions and grammar rules. "In the wake of apocalypse, reconstituting human life is a grim, uncertain business. McCarthy's fragmented style throughout suggests that human speech and human narrative must also--like other primitive skills--be reconstituted" (Shy). McCarthy's prose is devoid of linguistic flourishes, due to the fact that the author is portraying simple people in the depths of a grave situation. In both novels, the author writes from the point of view of those who are not too preoccupied with verbosity, but rather those who are too busy struggling with inner and outer turmoil. In doing so, the prose reflects the characters that McCarthy describes, and is therefore an essential part of the novel, rather than simply being a tool through which to tell the story. In Ed Tom Bell's narrative, for example, McCarthy's prose illustrates his stature as a down to earth lawman, a man too preoccupied with what is occurring to be truly concerned about

not really

much clearer than that.

As so much more could be said about the writing style, it would've been better perhaps to omit this last section - include more examples - earlier sections

✓

✓

punctuation. As such, McCarthy utilizes every tool and technique to create complete characterizations and a comprehensive account of the events.

VI. Conclusion:

While examining the research question: **How does Cormac McCarthy Portray Common Thematic Elements in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*?**, it has become clear that Cormac McCarthy links these works primarily through the repetition of certain themes within both novels, and furthermore by a general adherence to a similar style. Though they are vastly different in terms of plot and even structure, as *The Road* employs a straightforward narrative while *No Country for Old Men* contains chapters in first-person by Sheriff Bell, both works are essentially explorations of the resilience of the human spirit in situations where one would not think survival is possible. Furthermore, McCarthy relates the two works by the examination of the strength and existence of paternal relationships. Though the research was mostly primary due to the fact that the novels are quite recent (*No Country for Old Men* was published in 2005, and *The Road* a year later), it does provide an answer to the research question.

In both works, Cormac McCarthy uses situations of astonishing difficulty and gravity to illuminate the glimmer of hope that the characters eventually achieve. Though there are victims, what is inherent in both novels is the underlying belief in the human ability to survive, as unlikely as it may be in a novel about a Mexican hit man and another about a post-apocalyptic world. Nevertheless, what remains after all is said and done is the drive to look forward while being mindful of the past, as it plays an unavoidable role.

A very interesting and perceptive comparison of the themes — no mention of the allegorical elements but some very intelligent observations. Well written too.
Better to have left out language. (but not expected either)

A good example of what can be done with an intelligent comparison and analysis of texts ~~not~~ that have not yet generated much secondary literature.

Works Cited:

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- Shy, Todd. "The Road." The Christian Century 6 Mar. 2007: 38+. Questia. 28 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.questiaschool.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5019852323>>.



Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number	0	0							
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Achievement level

Assessment criteria		Achievement level		
		First examiner	maximum	Second examiner
A	research question	2	2	2
B	introduction	2	2	2
C	investigation	3	4	3
D	knowledge and understanding	3	4	3
E	reasoned argument	4	4	4
F	analysis and evaluation	4	4	4
G	use of subject language	4	4	3
H	conclusion	2	2	2
I	formal presentation	3	4	3
J	abstract	2	2	2
K	holistic judgment	4	4	4
Total out of 36		33		33

name of first examiner: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

name of second examiner: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____