

# Good versus evil on the road by cormac mccarthy

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The theme good versus evil is a well-known theme throughout many books, not just novels. When thinking about good versus evil critics and readers have this mindset of there is one good guy and one bad guy and that there is no mediator, until you read the book *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. According to Jean Paul, "The conscience of children is formed by the influences that surround them; their notions of good and evil are the result of the moral atmosphere they breathe." Throughout the novel the boy has this unsettling mindset that he is both the good and bad guy, which he can be good but bad as well.

The boy is good and bad, he does get angry with his father but in the end he is the father's moral compass to keep him on the right track. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the theme of good vs. evil is developed through point of view, foreshadowing, structure, setting, and imagery. To think there is both good and evil in the world makes the world balance out. If there was nothing but good in the world everything would be better but if there was nothing but evil in the world, then there would be chaos.

There can be good and evil in the world but neither can balance the other out. When the father feels that there is no hope for them at the end of the road the boy always reminds him that they are the good guys because he, the father, told the boy that they were good. "While a popular notion in today's society is that people are generally good or that everyone has some good in them, Cormac uses cannibalistic beings to remove empathy and suggest that the heat of life brings the true nature of people to the surface." In the beginning of the novel the boy has no concept of good or evil until the chase with the cannibalistic men. Good versus evil is a stretch for the man

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and the boy because they are living in a post-apocalyptic world. The father and boy present good nature throughout their journey but there are a few moments when both of them have an unsettling characteristic towards each other.

The boy is hesitant about his nature because he does not know if he is good or evil but the father presents both good and evil nature. The boy always has this fear of being bad and that one day he will do something that he will regret. He consistently asks his father if they are the "good guys" and the father keeps answering "yes" but the boy is hesitant until the pair is chased by the cannibals. Once the pair found a safe place to hide the boy immediately asks the father "Were those the bad guys" the father immediately answers "yes" just so the boy feel reassured that they are the good guys and not bad. Throughout the novel evil outweighs the good in many ways.

The man and boy are hanging onto their good nature while everything else is falling apart. Many of the people left have become cannibals because of the post-apocalyptic environment, the boy and father are almost killed because of the chase with the cannibals, and the father is slowly dying because of the ash that is in the air. So the boy has this sense of everything will end badly in the end. The boy has a dream about a wind-up penguin that came from the corner of a room; but there was no one to wind up the penguin and when the penguin turned around he saw that the turner was not moving. Strange that the boy would have this dream because they are trying to get to the end of the road but they will have to face trials along the way. The father has this evil nature that comes over him.

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One night while they are camping out the boy is fast asleep and then the father starts thinking that he could eat the boy and there would be no problem with that because at this point the father is hungry. Any time the father finds food his first instinct is to give it to the boy so he will not go hungry. This is right before they find the house with the bunker full of food that will last them a long time. McCarthy has this freedom of a third person omniscient point of view because he is able to switch between the fathers character and the boys character. The names of the boy and the father are never given so if the boy were to talk then you would have read back through that section to figure it out.

McCarthy does give at least one name and that is the one of the old man named Ely; well at least we think that is his name but later he says it is not. He gives no punctuation throughout the entire story but you can tell when he shifts characters. He also does not give a chapter ending or a chapter beginning the only form of ending and/or beginning is when he stops and then there are three dots in the center of the page that signifies when something new is happening. The only dialogue given is when the man and boy talk and when the three of them, the man, boy, and Ely, have their conversation that night. He will also let you know when it is daylight and when it gets dark. The characters remain on the U.

S. highways and interstates for much of the novel but they encounter other places like the abandoned houses not only for reasons of safety but also for food too, but they never stay long. The longest they stayed at one of the abandoned houses is the house with the bunker full of food, they stay for a few days to regain their strength and then move on. There is never a specific  
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setting details the boy and man travel south and east toward the coast but they also pass a plantation-style house. The man imagines the slaves who probably work there carrying drinks and silver trays. While McCarthy never gives a specific place or names he gives a hint, " They trucked along the blacktop.

Tall clapboard houses. Machinerolled metal roofs. A log barn in a field with an advertisement in faded ten-foot letters across the roofslope. See Rock City." This is a place outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee; that is a natural rock formation on top of Lookout Mountain. Ely is an old man that knows a great deal and gives the man and his some insight into the present situation being the post-apocalyptic world.

Ely believes that no one wants to be in the state they are right now and now on wants to leave either. He also believes that there is no God and we are his prophets. " When we're all gone at last then there'll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He'll be out in the road with nothing to do and nobody to do it to." Ely can be a symbol of both good and evil nature because he was helpful but also negative because of the current situation. He believes that everyone will die from the current state their world is in but he also thinks that life will be good.

None of it makes any sense but all the man and the boy can do is hope for the best and that whatever is at the end of the road will lead them to a better life. Good and evil do not have to be figures; they can be inanimate objects throughout a story. While there are many throughout the novel a few stand out. The highway or road can be looked at as freedom, a way out of the

danger they are both in but it seems like the road goes on forever. When they reach the end there is a boat there but the man and boy are both highly disappointed they thought that there would be something on the ship worth finding and keeping, or maybe something that would help them through the journey or maybe a way out of the miserable state. The road is also looked at as dangerous because you do not know what lies at the other end.

It can be used as a mental state thinking that there is something at the end but really is not. The man has mindset that if they travel any further they may end up into trouble because they were also killed by the cannibals what if they are traveling this road right into their territory. The Coca-Cola can be looked at as a sign of good because what place does not have fizzy drinks to make the soul feel good. The man and the boy were both dehydrated and starving so the refreshing cold taste of the Coke gave them that sense of happiness that they would be fine. Snakes are looked at as sly and deceptive and something bad is about to happen. Snakes are not the friendliest of creatures that's why most are killed or put in captivity.

The man had a dream about snakes that he saw a person pour gasoline on them and watched them burn alive. Evil deeds are often as a result of a person's reaction to, for example, the evil around them and a person always has a chance of redemption, a change of heart, and goodness. Snakes will never be good. Since the beginning of time, snakes have represented slyness, deceit and even brought about the downfall of man when he was banished from The Garden of Eden. " The men poured gasoline on them and burned them alive, having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as

they conceived it to be." McCarthy is saying that he only destroyed the image of evil but he did not destroy evil itself.

The boy is looked at as a good image because he is seen as the father's compass throughout the novel. He also keeps reminding the father that they will continue to live as the good guys and they cannot label themselves as one or the other. The ash and soot falling from the sky makes the man sick and kills him. He has ingested so much that it has weakened his breathing and every morning he is coughing up blood. With the ash killing the man it is also said earlier in the book that the man would die soon.

The man keeps wondering what is after him. What will steal his eyes and what will seal his mouth. Every morning the father wakes up coughing blood and the boy does not know why nor will the father tell him. He just wants to live his life with his son before he is gone. Good and evil have their place in the world we are the ones to decide if they have a place in how we live our lives.

An old Cherokee told his grandson, " My son there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, and truth." The boy thought about it and asked, " Grandfather, Which wolf wins?" The old man quietly replied, " The one you feed.

" This quote has no author but relates itself to the book very well. The boy wanted to know if they were the good guys, his father kept telling him yes they are and at the end he finally believes they are, without question.

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