

2 questions about the road



The Road In Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, the relationship shared between the boy and his father is incredibly powerful for the reader as it becomes clear that they have an elemental dependence on and concern for one another in a way that doesn't seem possible in today's world. The reason for this bond is due to the nature of the world that they live in. Following catastrophe, the world has been left dark and empty of most life. This world is described as "nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (McCarthy 3). The sun is permanently hidden behind the clouds, as are the moon and stars. Everything, everywhere has been burned, turning the world into black and grey underneath a 'sullen' light that casts only feeble shadows at its peak. There are no animals, no plants and very few people. What life does survive is scarce and desperate, willing to commit atrocities upon one another for the simple necessity of food or clean water. "The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought" (McCarthy 75). The bond between the father and son is thus predicated on surviving in this very harsh environment where all they have is each other and the knowledge still stored in the father's mind from the time before the disaster. The man is forced to adapt to an entirely foreign world despite all his conceptions of a better place while his son is enlightened by his father's confusion. The man's reluctance to accept the reality before him forces him to feel pity for the young son. This is obvious in the touching scene when he finds the can of Coke. "[H]e put his thumbnail under the aluminum clip on <https://assignbuster.com/2-questions-about-the-road/>

the top of the can and opened it. He leaned his nose to the slight fizz coming from the can and then handed it to the boy. ... You drink it ... It's because I won't ever get to drink another one, isn't it?" (McCarthy 20). As the man comes to realize, the world he remembers will never be anything more than a fantasy world to his son, a place of unrealizable possibilities for which the son must ultimately pity the father for having lost.

Although the man and the boy consider themselves the good guys, defenders of the old knowledge and the bonds of enlightenment, there are also several ways in which they are similar to the other humans they meet whom they consider the bad guys. The father considers himself a defender of knowledge that he attempts to pass down to his son, but continues to run into issues of which information will be useful as compared to which information no longer applies in this much-changed world. Constant references to his blond hair and angelic look continue to reinforce the idea that the son is perhaps even more enlightened than the father. While the man continues to hope for a better future for his son, he slowly begins to realize that the type of fire that once burned in him is useless in this new world. The discovery of an old coin forces the man to face reality. "The lettering was in Spanish. He started to call to the boy where he trudged ahead and then he looked about at the gray country and the gray sky and he dropped the coin and hurried on to catch up" (McCarthy 173). As he realizes his survival skills and knowledge are based upon a world that no longer exists, the man's fire can be seen to burn into ash and he dies, instructing his son to continue going south and to keep his fire burning. The father's submission to despair reduces him to the level of the bad guys as does the extreme survival mode he enters in which he is unable to treat anyone they

meet with kindness rather than learning how to distinguish between good and bad in the new world.

The fire of the son, though, is enlightenment brought about by already having his eyes adjusted to the new light of the world. He is aware that he has lost much in losing the world of his father, but he is also aware that he must find a means of surviving in this world. Intuitively, he perceives that this salvation will only come from finding a way of joining up with other 'good people' and beginning the process of rebuilding society. While his father's goals are simply to keep the two of them alive, the boy realizes that the final destruction of humanity is the loss of kindness. He finds it increasingly difficult to obey the instructions of his father as they continue south, finally breaking down in tears to force his father to do the right thing for a man who had thought to steal everything they owned. Later that evening, the man tells the boy, "I wasn't going to kill him" and the boy answers back "But we did kill him" (McCarthy 219). The boy is the leader of the future because his eyes are already adjusted to the light of a world completely alien and incomprehensible to those of his father's generation. Although he will require the help of the elder members of a group to interpret the forms of the previous generations, it will be his clear sight in identifying the unique value of the human being that will eventually push him to become the carrier of the light his father envisions.