

# The road essay



Prometheus, a Titan in ancient Greek mythology, stole the fire from Zeus, the ruler of all Gods, and gave it to humanity, even when Zeus strictly told him not to. As punishment, Prometheus is bound to a rock. Every day, an eagle swoops in to eat his liver, but Prometheus does not die. His liver regenerates only to be eaten again the following day. Because Prometheus “carried the fire” to humanity, his days are forever filled with torture. Similar to the situation that appears in the Cormac McCarthy’s novel, *The Road*, the main characters, a man and his son also “carry the fire” for the sake of mankind. Carrying the fire”, a motif that Cormac McCarthy portrays throughout his novel, *The Road*, can be used to explain the reasoning behind why the two main characters, a man and his son continue to persevere in the novel’s harsh world. Perhaps the saying “carrying the fire” was only a boorish way to encourage the child to keep on going and to endure the depressing world after the father dies. But perhaps it was more, perhaps being a “good guy” and “carrying the fire are closely related with God and good morals.

But why fire? Why is fire looked at as their only sense of hope when fire was what caused the world to perish and die in the first place? Why is fire the father and son’s reason to live when for many others, fire was their reason to die? Prometheus Carrying The Fire to Mankind The setting of *The Road* takes place in a post-apocalyptic world, where a comet has struck the Earth, setting it and all of its inhabitants ablaze. In doing so, the Earth has become a world of desolation, loneliness, and hatred.

Seeing “A charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (198) would portray merely one of the multiple morbid scenes that

describes McCarthy's work. In providing scenes such as the one shown, McCarthy introduces the infamous "bad guys" and the prevailing "good guys" of the story. In the road, McCarthy portrays a single principle that separates "good guys" from "bad guys". During a conversation between the father and the man, the boy questions what is right: [Boy:] We wouldn't eat anybody, would we? [Man:] No.

Even if we're starving? We're starving now. You said we weren't I said we weren't dying. I didn't say we weren't starving. But we wouldn't. No. We wouldn't. (128) Since the passage states that the man and son do not eat human beings "because [they're] the good guys" (129), it can also be said that people that do eat other human beings are the bad guys; however, this cannot be said for stealing from or helping others. There are several times in the book where the father does not find the need help others when they need it, and even steal from others.

During the scene where the father entered the house that was inhabited by prisoners, the father did not choose to help them. During the scene where the father caught the thief that stole the cart, the father took away all the thief's clothes and left him on the streets naked. The father has committed these acts, yet he is still classified as a "good guy". Why is this true?

Although the father has committed similar acts that "bad guys" commit, he does feel guilty about them, which separate him from the bad guys, who do not feel guilty about the acts they commit.

Feeling guilty about committing these acts also resemble the ones that "carry the fire", and carry the good morals that they were raised up with, and

ones that do not “ carry the fire”, and live to serve only them and no one else. God is also an influential subject in The Road. God was only mentioned at the end of the novel (excluding the man saying “ Oh God” in various scenes) when the boy and women met: The women when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God.

Although God appears only at the end of the novel, God can be seen intervening in the father and son’s life throughout the entire novel. Starving slowing, every time the man and the boy come across the brink of death, an outer force seems to come in and lead them back into the right direction, blessing them with a bountiful number of supplies as well. For example, near the middle of the book where they are near the edge of death by starvation, the man and the boy find “ crate upon crate of canned goods” (138) in a bunker that they dug out not so long ago.

What are the odds of finding an almost limitless supply of provisions in a world where close to none exist? Either both the man and the boy are extremely lucky, or there is some sort of divine intervention guiding them through their way, which is the more likely option. Another time god and religion is seen through the book is during the aftermath of the gruesome basement scene. After encountering things like “ a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt” (110), they take refuge in a barn in which the two they find safety.

While the boy is resting in the barn, the man searches the barn to find as many foodstuffs as possible. In doing so, he finds “ a grape flavored powder

to make drinks with" (119), " hard and brown and shriveled" (121) apples, and " water so sweet the man could smell it" (122). With these items, McCarthy portrays an abundance of biblical allusions. First, the author uses the apples in the book to portray the apple Adam and Eve ate in the book of Genesis.

The apple, which came from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, can justify why the author juxtaposes the Clear, Pristine water, similar to what the man found at the barn. basement scene with this scene with all the biblical allusions. The author puts a scene of pure goodness with a scene of pure evil to relate to the apple's meaning. The man and the boy witness evil at the basement scene, and are currently witnessing good during this scene. Second, the man finds clear, pristine water while searching the barn. Water, in almost all cases, resembles purity, immaculacy, and cleanliness.

Also, water also relates to baptism, which further justifies the fact that this scene is the " good scene" that contradicts the " bad scene" that came just before. Third, the man finds grape flavoring powder to sweeten water with. McCarthy uses grapes, which are used to make wine, to perhaps resemble the blood of Christ. Also, when the wine is poured into the pure water, it almost seems as if the man and the boy are turning water into wine, just like Jesus did in the bible. Colors are another prominent factor in the book. Colors can somewhat predict whether you're a " bad guy" or a " good guy" in The Road.

During a scene in the middle of the book, when the man and boy encounter some bad guys, McCarthy writes: He woke in the morning and turned over in

the blanket and looked back down the road through the trees the way they'd come in time to see the marchers appear four abreast. Dressed in clothing of every description, all wearing red scarves at their necks. Red, the color of blood, and the color of warning, tells us these men are not to be trifled with; furthermore, it is made clear that the people in red " were the bad guys" (92) on the following page.

During a scene near the end of the book, color is used to describe one of the " good guys" of the story. McCarthy writes: The man that hove into view and stood there looking at him was dressed in a gray and yellow ski parka. Cormac McCarthy uses the color yellow, which resembles goodness and light, to show us who the " good guys" portray in the book. Colors, " good guys" and " bad guys", and the presence of God throughout the book all relate to the original motif of " carrying the fire".

Good guys are seen as the ones " carrying the fire" while " bad guys" are conveyed as not, since they have different moral standards; one with moral realism, the other, moral relativism. One believes in the morals that mankind bestowed on us long ago when civilization was present, while the other believes in the morals that fit the situation at hand; in this case, the moral relativism believers think that eating humans is okay. Colors can be seen throughout the book as a notifier of who " carries the fire" and who does not.