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The Quest and Beyond

Journeys in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

BA Thesis: English Language and Culture



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Abstract

In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* a journey is taken by man and boy across the roads of a post-apocalyptic world. Their goal is to reach the southern coast due to the coming winter. This thesis views the various notions of the journey undertaken by the novel's heroes. It is viewed through the theoretical framework of the quest as put forth by Joseph Campbell and Christopher Booker. The quest's elements are set out and explored further extending beyond the theory. The physical and psychological journeys are discussed, and the differences between each character's personal journeys. This thesis considers the significance of the past and the future, and the concepts civilisation versus cannibalisation, which play important roles in the ordeals man and boy face on their travels. Elements such as the novel's monsters, "the bad guys," and the integral phrase "carrying the fire" are explored. What is discovered in this thesis is that all elements of the novel's journey point to the boy, his future, and the future of humanity. What becomes clear is in order for the world and humanity to have a future, the boy must help towards the regeneration of civilisation, which he cannot do without the assistance of his father. The novel's underlying quest is to find the "good guys," which cannot be done until the father has died due to his inability to see other people as good. Once the "good guys" are found the possibility of the renewal of civilisation arises through the reintroduction of the female who embodies fertility. The chance of overcoming the "bad guys," also becomes viable. The father's aid, his guidance of the boy and his discovery of the flare pistol in the leviathan, and his death at the end of the novel, are integral to the novel's plot and the completion of the underlying quest.

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Introduction

In literature the journey can be found in many forms, in that of a road trip such as in Nabokov's *Lolita*, or Kerouac's *On the Road*; a pilgrimage as in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; a quest such as in Tolkein's *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*; and the voyage and return as in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. The majority of Cormac McCarthy's work involves one or more journeys which are substantial to the narrative. A journey has two components; the physical and the psychological. Physically McCarthy's protagonists are most often on foot, frequently on horseback, and occasionally they drive. Psychologically, their travels are either with or without aim or purpose. Those who travel with objective are either searching for or running away from something or somebody and they may or may not have a destination in mind. In McCarthy's *Outer Dark* we find both types of traveller. The two protagonists set out on separate journeys; Rinty searches for her child who is taken to an unknown location by a tinker after Culla, her brother and the father, leaves it in the woods; Culla wanders the same land as his sister, though without any goal in mind. Both McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and his *Border Trilogy* concentrate on boys who leave home for various reasons, although ultimately to find a better life out west. In *Suttree* Cornelius constantly trapezes Knoxville's sidewalks without intention. McCarthy's narratives chiefly cover physical journeys, focusing on action and dialogue, above thoughts and feelings, which must be interpreted between the lines. He persistently refuses to look into a character's mind and gives no authorial opinion on what drives a character (Cant 10). *The Road* disengages from this omission of the inner self, bringing it into the narrative text through focalisation. One, therefore, gains a distinct perception of the psychological journeys taken in this novel.

The Road, McCarthy's latest novel, is driven by a journey undertaken on foot, by a father and son, through a post-apocalyptic American wasteland, ravished by a disaster whose nature never comes to light. They are on their way south presuming the climate there will enable them to survive another winter. The novel's journey and elements thereof have been explored by several critics. Cooper specifies that *The Road* has a grail narrative: her interpretation ascribes the boy a double roll as both "symbolic grail," and "Perceval figure"; and the father as "the dying Fisher King". The goal is to "[find] the right question and [proffer] the right answer" which will recover the world's "potential to heal" (222). Kunsu studies the linguistic journey concluding that *The Road* has its own "post-apocalyptic language" which the father teaches to his son. The rediscovery of the "basic forms" points towards a hopeful future (69). Furthermore, Weiss states that McCarthy demonstrates the map as a description of "western progress" and "historical containment," and it does not show truths, rather, it defines expertise dependant on background and opinion (73-74). This thesis studies the overall significance of the journey through a narratological analysis of the primary text. It applies the quest narrative, as set out by Campbell and Booker, as a theoretical framework in which to organise the journey's elements. It proffers that these elements all signify the underlying goal of the novel, which is to find other "good guys" and regenerate civilisation.

Chapter 1: *The Road's* Journey as Quest

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell claims that there is one story told repeatedly and in various ways throughout the world's cultures, the monomyth. His "adventure of the hero," part of this theory, relays a protagonist's journey which consists of three stages, each further divided into phases: departure, initiation, and return. Several phases may not be present in a work of literature, although according to Campbell, these are then often alluded to. Booker's more simplified theory, in *The Seven Basic Plots*, builds forth on Campbell's. He claims that there are seven stories, rather than one, told in various ways, one of which is the quest.

Heroes of the Road

A quest narrative focuses on a hero; *The Road's* hero may be the father, or the son, but this thesis assumes that both father and son are, simultaneously, heroes. The omniscient narrator often focalises through the man. His thoughts, feelings, dreams, past, and opinions are presented to the reader within the narrative text. Occasionally, the narrator focalises through the boy, as when he sees a waterfall for the first time: "The river went sucking over the rim and fell straight down into the pool below. The entire river. He clung to the man's arm" (40). He is awestruck, this feeling is made explicit in the words "sucking," "clung," "straight," and "entire." Had this been focalised through the man it would have been less charged. Furthermore, where "he" usually refers to the man, here it refers to the boy. By the end of the novel, when the boy's father is on his deathbed, the focalisation switches permanently from man to boy. While the narration mainly centres on the man's perspective, the story itself and the story the man creates for himself focus on the boy and his survival.

This compensates for the lack of focalisation through the boy and implies that man and boy are both equally hero worthy. The man is a hero from the novel's outset, whereas the boy is a hero in becoming.

The Priceless Goal & the Call and its Refusal

The hero must achieve a priceless goal which is found far away. This shapes the story which is not completed until the objective is obtained (Booker 69). On the most basic level this is the man and boy's attempt to reach the southern coast to preserve their lives, specifically the boy's. In order for the hero to become aware of the objective, an event must occur which propels the hero towards it. Both Campbell and Booker refer to this as the "call to adventure"; due to a fearful threat the hero can no longer remain where he is, whether this is home or someplace else (Booker 70). In *The Road*, the unnamed disaster that ravages the world, and the birth of the child shortly after, both result in an inherent need to survive. Man, and boy are forced to leave their location and travel south due to the cold of the coming winter. Before the hero leaves he must, often, confront one or more obstructions (Booker 71), Campbell's "refusal of the call". The man's wife, the boy's mother, refuses the call through the act of suicide. Before this, the man contemplates ending their and their sons lives together: "The hundred nights they'd sat up arguing the pros and cons of self destruction with the earnestness of philosophers chained to a madhouse wall" (60). Later the boy expresses the same thoughts. These recur for both parties throughout the novel, they are, however, always overcome.

Guidance & Companionship

The hero does not set out on his pursuit alone (Booker 71), he has an aid, or companion(s) who is of importance and comes in several forms. In *The Road*, each hero serves as the other's guide, thus, they learn from one another; the boy learns the skills

necessary to survive, whilst the man learns that compassion is essential. Furthermore, they exhibit opposite characteristics and each serve as a foil for the other (Booker 72); The man is cautious and unwilling towards others, whereas the boy is open and honourable; The man is adept at survival, whilst the boy must still learn; The man does not take risks where the boy would and vice versa; Furthermore, the boy is born into the broken uncivilised world, and the man is from the past world in which civilisation still existed. These differences cause their contrasting views on the environment they find themselves in.

Ordeals, Respite & Aid

The hero's journey starts when he crosses "the first threshold" which is generally a gate guarded by a monster (Campbell 64). After the mother's decease man and boy continue their journey as two. The narrator describes the moments that lead up to her suicide, although, the days before and its aftermath are not recounted explicitly. One must, however, assume that this was a period of mental unease for the man and his son. Their perseverance after this event is their passage through the first threshold. In this case the monster is not a physical embodiment that must be defeated but a mental struggle that must be overcome. Both critics agree that there is a "road of trials"; a sequence of dangerous ordeals in which, generally, the hero must face the possibility of death. Firstly, the hero must endure the untamed, alien, and hostile terrain which must be crossed (Booker 73), in other words the "belly of the whale" (Campbell 74). This is the rugged post-apocalyptic wasteland, crossing it involves the hazards of forest fires; falling trees; rainstorms; snow, impassable at times; ash and dust in the air; and a constant presence of death. Secondly, the heroes face encounters with monsters, which come in the form of the "bad guys"; the cannibalistic road marauders who may appear at any moment of the journey. Lastly, there are various forms of temptation; suicide; and the will to stay in a place of respite for an excessive period of time, which would

heighten the pair's chances of being discovered by "bad guys." Booker explains that ordeals are followed by breaks in which the hero and their companions may regain fortitude. In such periods, they will often receive assistance and guidance from other friendly characters to help further their journey (73). In *The Road* periods of rest are frequent, although short, due to the father's worries, and restlessness to move on. There are few periods of long lasting respite in which the helpers (Booker 77) are primarily others who have died due to the novel's catastrophe, such as the family whose air-raid shelter is found, who, the boy thanks, despite their deaths. Both critics mention predominant figures who the hero meets during their journey; Campbell's goddess (91) and Booker's "beautiful young woman" (77) are found in the reintroduction of the female at the end of the novel; Campbell's "woman as temptress" (101) is the man's wife; and the father figure (Campbell 105) or wise old man (Booker 77) is, from the boy's perspective, the man and from the man's, Ely, the almost blind wanderer who speaks knowledgably to him, or God, whose existence the man doubts but whom he does often ask for advice.

The Final Ordeal & the Underlying Quest

During the enterprise the hero culminates knowledge and power, Campbell's "Apotheosis" (127), to the state in which they are able to confront the "archetypal power of darkness" which, potentially, brings them complete liberation (Booker 86). The man's learning is that compassion is essential to survive in the damaged world, and that he must let go of the past to make way for the future. The boy's is the development of his moral sense, and the fire he carries, which are connected and critical at the end of the novel. Ultimately the hero comes close to the goal they have worked towards (Booker 78). With this in sight they must face one last ordeal to claim and secure their prize (79), Campbell's "ultimate boon" (148). This is the father's death, which enables the boy to meet the "good guys" and the

father to release his past and leave the future in the hands of his son. In the quest's resolution its real purpose comes to light, a new, true, goal emerges. In essence, this is the establishment of a kingdom, through the eventual "coming together" of man and woman. The threats are lifted, and life is renewed; The quest ends, partly or wholly, on "an image of completion" (Booker 82-86). The hero is now a "master of two worlds," he is able to share his knowledge and powers with others, and he gains "the freedom to live" (Campbell 196-206). *The Road's* true goal was not to reach the southern coast, it was to find and meet the other "good guys," with whom the boy will share his moral knowledge, and the fire he carries. Due to the reintroduction of the female at the end of the novel the possibility of a new, fertile, kingdom arises. The novel's "power of darkness," cannibalism, can be overcome together, and the boy will have the "freedom to live."

The application of quest theory to *The Road* sets out a useful structure of both the novel and the journey undertaken therein from which meaning is acquired. Aspects of the novel's journey are pinpointed to facilitate further analysis in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Journey Beyond *The Road's* Quest

The journey in *The Road* is, physically, a means to an end which is almost identical for both man and boy. Psychologically, it is a process which for the man entails a release of the past in order to properly lend his assistance in the endeavour, and for the boy involves a moral learning which aids him in the quest. The man often loses himself in the past, a world he knew well which has vanished along with its people. The catastrophe changes civilised society as he knows it; and results in a divide between two types of people; the “good guys” and the “bad guys.” Man and boy label themselves as good, and the cannibalistic road marauders as bad. The child born into the post-apocalyptic world symbolises the possibility of a better future, in which “the good guys” overcome “the bad guys,” and in which civilisation, opposing cannibalism, may be achievable once more. To achieve this the boy must complete the underlying goal of the quest which is to discover and meet the other “good guys.”

Journey to the South

The Road's title symbolises the journey in both a literal and figurative sense. Literally it is, mainly, “roads” that man and boy travel by. Figuratively, according to the OED, the word “road” means “the way or course to some end.” This “way” is the quest’s physical and psychological ordeals. The “end,” the quest’s initial goal, is the southern coast of the United States and, ultimately, the sea. The man’s choice of destination is made in the hope that it will be warmer there and, thus, easier to survive. “They were moving south. There’d be no surviving another winter here” (2). There are also several symbolic interpretations of the father and son’s destination.

The sea is where all life began. It brought settlers, first from Asia and later from Europe, to the American continent. It represents new life, possibility, and hope. In the novel this is best illustrated when man and boy have reached their destination and discuss what could be on the other side: “[Boy] There must be something. [Man] Maybe there’s a father and his little boy and they’re sitting on the beach. [Boy] That would be okay. ... And they could be carrying the fire too? [Man] They could be. Yes. [Boy] But we don’t know” (231). Although man and boy do not know what is on the other side of the ocean, they feel there is a chance that other “good guys” are sat there as they are. They do realise that reaching the sea is not enough to complete the quest which is depicted in the boy’s disappointment at their arrival (230). The real objective becomes clear to the boy when his dying father tells him: “Keep going south. Do everything the way we did it. ... You need to find the good guys” (297-8). It is not, after all, the sea that must be found, it is the “good guys.” It is, however, near the sea where the boy finally meets them.

A further interpretation of the ocean is as Northrup Frye puts forth; it is an element of destruction (155), and an archetypal symbol of death. The latter is explained in the form of the water cycle, in which rain stands for youth; springs or fountains stand for maturity; rivers stand for age; and the sea stands for death (160). The sea plays an integral role in the father’s death as it is his final destination before he passes on and his demise occurs in a wooded area close by. Furthermore, leviathan symbolism is found in the tipped oil liner the pair spot in the ocean. The leviathan stands as symbol for death and if a hero enters it, he must die (Frye 192). The man swims to and enters the ship, thus his death is inevitable. Although the ocean and the leviathan symbolise death, cyclically new life stems here from. Thus, the father’s death must take place to enable the regeneration of life.

Frye further notes that, often, an object crucial to the plot is fished out of the sea (191). The man takes several things from the ship, one of which is indispensable to the

action; the flare gun which is a hidden key towards the quest's completion. For fun man and son shoot off the flare together, after which the boy questions his father about the signal: "[Boy] They couldn't see it very far, could they, Papa? [Man] Who? [Boy] Anybody. [Man] No. Not Far. [Boy] If you wanted to show where you were. [Man] You mean like the good guys?" (263). A few days after this moment the man dies and three days later the boy meets the "good guys." It transpires, through the questions about the boy's father, that they have been keeping an eye on the pair for several days and that it has taken them three days to decide whether to take the boy with them or not (301-3). This implies that they have seen the boy's father alive and that the flare signal is what brought their attention to the pair.

Journey's into the Past

Before the man's imminent death, he goes through his own individual journey, in which he learns what role he must play in the saviour of mankind. The ravished world through which man and boy travel holds many allusions to its past which consistently remind the man of the world he is from. The very roads they travel upon are reminders of the past simultaneously pointing towards the pair's future. The "tattered oilcompany roadmap" (43) they use to find their way is a commodity of the past. Oil companies and the function the map once had no longer exist, as Cant also observes (275). Daniel Weiss notes that the map is a "dead cultural artefact"; it does not depict an accurate scope, rather, it shows a recollection of "original violence" (73). The pair are surrounded by phenomena that once had a purpose, but no longer do: The "ruins of a resort town" (29), holidays an unthinkable concept in the broken world; Billboards, a symbol of capitalism: "through the paint could be seen a pale palimpsest of advertisements for goods which no longer existed" (135), the concepts of money and consumerism have become void. The pair also come across several places which lend as personal reminders of the man's past; his childhood home (25); and a place where the man

had once “watched trout swaying in the current” (30). The boy is depicted as afraid of this past the man holds onto. When in his father’s childhood home, the boy is at constant unease. Several times he asks if they can leave (25-27). The boy is unfamiliar with the past, it is strange and, thus, frightening. The man becomes aware hereof:

Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect. He could not construct for the child’s pleasure the world he’d lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. (163)

He realises he must leave the past behind to be able to focus on the future, his son. He does so, quite literally, when he leaves, amongst other things, the photo of his wife behind in the road:

He’d carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers. Then one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver’s license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on. (52)

Although the past still confronts him he no longer physically carries it with him. This lifts its burden and enables him to better focus on the future for which his son stands as a symbol. The concentration on his son and the future that he must help create is characterised in his role as protector and guide.

Journey as Protector and Guide

Throughout most of the novel, the narrator directs its attention to the expedition through the man’s eyes. The majority of what the reader learns about the boy, is received through the

man. This leads the reader to know things that the boy does not, such as the man's awareness of his approaching death. Clues to which are given from the opening of the novel: "He descended into a gryke in the stone and there he crouched coughing and he coughed for a long time" (10). These coughing sessions recur throughout the novel and become longer over time. Furthermore, the man chokes up blood, an ill omen which makes it evident that he is dying. He attempts to conceal his wellbeing from the boy and consistently walks a distance away from camp before he expectorates. It is necessary for him to hide his ill health as he must guide his son in his quest.

The man's preparation for death consists mainly of readying his son to carry on the venture without him. As is clear from the beginning of the novel the boy is the man's only reason to live: "[T]he boy was all that stood between him and death" (29). His relevance is obvious from the opening sentence of the novel: "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him" (1). He is the first thing the man thinks of as he wakes, and he must touch him to make sure he is both there and alive. The protection and guidance of his son is his responsibility: "He knew only that the child was his warrant." (3). His son's survival after his own death is therefore crucial. As Cant puts it: "[T]he father in *The Road* is marked for death; he knows it and so do we ... the question the novel must answer is not what will happen to the father, but to the son?" (270). The man's death is inevitable, and his son is to go on once the man has died, albeit he must first be made ready to do so.

Survival is inherent to the completion of the journey and this need is apparent throughout the novel: "Mostly he worried about their shoes. That and food. Always food" (16). In order to stay alive, the man and the boy must accumulate enough provisions. Many scenes depict their exploration of disused buildings, during which the boy keeps a watchful eye on his father. Through his watching he learns the skills he needs to survive. Cant agrees

and states that the boy picks up both moral and practical information while he monitors his father's undertakings (275). An example of the man's adeptness is the shopping trolley he uses to carry their belongings, although their most essential ones are kept in knapsacks in case they must leave the cart behind to escape a sudden threat (4). The father is, thus, the perfect teacher from whom his son accumulates the skills he will need once left alone.

The man teaches the boy that, at times, although he may be afraid, he must take risks in the hope for a positive outcome. He must, furthermore, be prepared to react efficiently to any negative results. There are two contrasting instances in *The Road* in which the pair are confronted with the compromising situation of a locked cellar. In the first example, the pair set foot in a once stately house where they find the cellar padlocked shut. The man breaks the lock and the two descend. Once below ground they discover a group of starving people who have been locked up to later be killed and cannibalised. The two manage to escape just before they are discovered by the cannibals who occupy the house (111-22). When they find a second hatch in a garden the boy is instantly wary due to the previous encounter, his father explains that they must take this opportunity. In this case, after prising the hatch open and climbing down, the man discovers a haven full of food and supplies. Man, and boy stay several days and leave with adequate supplies which will maintain them for quite some time (141-65). From both situations the boy learns that there is always a possibility that some need could be satisfied. Therefore, they must take their chances, whilst being sufficiently prepared for a negative outcome. If the latter occurs, they must find the means to escape. If it is not possible to flee, the son is taught how to use a firearm. Particularly how to use one to kill himself if the need be. "If they find you you are going to have to do it. Do you understand? Shh. No crying. Do you hear me? You know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point it up. Do it quick and hard. Do you understand?" (119). The man does not want his son to

endure anything the “bad guys” would do to him and tutors him that death would be better in a situation in which he is caught.

Aside from physical skills, the man, further, teaches his son about right and wrong, through the use of the labels “good guys,” and “bad guys.” The “good guys”: do not kill other people, unless this becomes a necessity to the boy’s survival (39); they do not eat people (136); they do not give up (145); they are generous towards others (148); they do not take other people’s stuff (259); and they are “carrying the fire.” The latter has several interpretations; Firstly, the discovery of fire gradually brought humans from a nomadic lifestyle to civilisation. The fire that man and boy carry symbolises that not only are they civil people, they carry the tools for civilisation, and thus, carry civilisation itself. Cant explains it as the father passing civilisation on to his son (270); Secondly, fire physically embodies warmth and light. Warmth is expressed in the boy’s openness and generosity towards others. Furthermore, light, as the opposite of dark, coincides with the novel’s other duality’s; the “good guys” versus the “bad guys,” “right” versus “wrong,” and “civilisation,” versus “cannibalisation.” Daniel Luttrull agrees and explains that, apart from giving the boy confidence, carrying the fire stands for generosity towards others, and it prescribes the boy as a good person and part of a group (21-5). Frye also relates fire to virtuosity and states that, apocalyptically, it symbolises the heavens, particularly heavenly bodies and creatures (145). As “good guys,” father and son must avoid the “bad guys”, who are, generally, the people who have turned to cannibalism. In literature cannibalism is often portrayed as an act which occurs in hell. Archetypically it is associated with the radically demonic, the ultimate manifestation of evil (Frye 148). *The Road*’s “bad guys” have become in so far degenerative that they eat their own children. Cannibalism is the destruction of one’s own species, this is the opposite of procreation and would eventually result in the extinction of humanity, thus the opposite of the boy’s fundamental goal to regenerate civilisation.

Bildung & Role Exchange

The boy's road towards success is one of growth, from the youth he is towards manhood.

When the novel starts, the boy comes across as the child he is, and that is how he behaves:

“You can read me a story, the boy said. Cant you, Papa?” (6), “Can we leave the lamp on till I'm asleep?” (8), “The boy had found some crayons and painted his facemask with fangs and he trudged on uncomplaining” (13). He depends on his father, he is often afraid, and he is at times playful, behaviour one expects from a child. As the novel moves along the boy develops, alike to “Bildung” as it occurs in a Bildungsroman. This has subtle beginnings and gradually becomes more conspicuous.

The boy's initiative evolves as the novel moves along, it starts with his suggestions on how to proceed in situations the pair find themselves in: “There could be something here, the boy said. There could be some corn or something” (16). Later in the novel it matures to his acting of his own accord: “When he looked behind him the boy was trudging through the snow half way to his knees gathering limbs and piling them in his arms” (101). Eventually he goes out to explore without his father's knowledge: “When he woke in the morning the boy was not there and he sat up with the pistol in his hand and then stood and looked for him but he was not in sight. ... He saw the boy coming at a run across the fields. Papa, he called. There's a train in the woods” (189). He advances from an anxious boy to a confident young man who takes responsibility.

Another characteristic which flourishes within the boy is his ethical thinking. Moral situations concern him and lead to an adjustment in his behaviour towards his father. This, also, begins subtly and is first apparent in the way the boy reacts to his father's prioritisation of him when sharing provisions:

In a pocket of his knapsack he'd found a last half packet of cocoa and he fixed it for the boy and he poured his own cup with hot water and sat blowing at the rim.

You promised not to do that, the boy said.

What?

You know what, Papa.

He poured the hot water back into the pan and took the boy's cup and poured some of the cocoa into his own and then handed it back.

I have to watch you all the time, the boy said. (34)

The boy cares about his father's wellbeing as much as his own and does not see his father's behaviour as fair. This awareness of what is right and wrong extends outside of the family towards others the two come across on the road. Each hero has a different approach towards those who do not pose any threat. The man is ever wary and does not trust anybody, whereas his son is open towards others and shows empathy. These opposing views on hospitality lead to conflicts between the duo. When they come across a man struck by lightning the boy wants to help, but his father does not want to get involved and they do not. The father reasons that the man will die even if they do assist him. The boy shows his disagreement through silence, no longer speaking to him for a time, behaviour which he repeats several times throughout the novel. When the man and boy meet the almost blind Ely a shift takes place and the boy convinces his father to help Ely; they give him food and company for the evening (171-185). Towards the end of the novel the boy's initiative and decision-making advances insofar that his father complies to the boy's will. In their last encounter with another person before the man's death their belongings are stolen. The pair follow the thief's tracks and when they find him the man has him strip naked and takes everything from him (270-276). Subsequently, the boy sits down in the road and cries in anger, the following discussion ensues:

You have to stop crying, [the man] said.

I cant.

... He's gone, he said. Come on.

He's not gone, the boy said. He looked up. His face streaked with soot. He's not.

What do you want to do?

Just help him, Papa. Just help him.

... He was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die.

He's going to die anyway.

He's so scared, Papa.

The man squatted and looked at him. I'm scared, he said. Do you understand? I'm scared.

The boy didn't answer. He just sat there with his head bowed, sobbing.

You're not the one who has to worry about everything.

The boy said something but he couldn't understand him. What? he said.

He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said. I am the one." (276-277)

At this point in the novel the boy has developed into a man, as he states above: "he is the one who has to worry about everything," he sees himself as the person who must make the decisions, where in the past he has let his father have the final say (Kunsa 66). Eventually the man follows up on his son's decision to return the thief's clothes. The thief, however, has gone, thus, the man leaves his clothes in the road. As Carole Juge observes the boy understands the necessity of not sinking to the level of the "bad guys," by surviving honourably. In his eyes, his father has done this as he causes the thief's death (26).

Throughout the above encounters and through the boy's general growth during the journey, a role exchange between man and boy gradually occurs and reaches its completion at the father's deathbed. The father's inevitable death is upon him and the boy takes care of him much as he took care of the boy throughout the rest of the novel. The boy still watches his

father, no longer to learn from him, rather, in the form of “watching over,” he tends to his father. On his deathbed, the man concludes that his son is a better person than he is, as he dies he tells him that he is the “best guy”. At this stage in the novel the focalisation switches from father to son, which enhances the role reversal further.

The Journey Towards a Future

Throughout the novel the man refers to the boy as a deity like figure: “God’s own fire Drake” (31); “Golden chalice, good to house a god” (78); “What if I said that he’s a God?” (183). In these quotes the father sees his son as; belonging to God; having the ability to hold a God within him; and equivalent to a God. God stands for everything that is good, thus the boy is God’s goodness; he holds this goodness within him; and this goodness is equal to a God’s. The father’s belief in God as a religious figure wavers throughout the novel, his belief in his son does not. Furthermore, traditionally a God is a creator of the world and mankind. Thus, if the boy is equal to a God, he has the ability to create a new world, as well as procreate. This complies with the underlying goal of a quest narrative; the realisation of a kingdom, or, in *The Road*, the regeneration of civilisation. The boy is, therefore, a symbol of the future of human kind. His quest as “the best guy” (298), is to find other good guys and with them create a new world which upholds to his moral standing. With their assistance he has the capacity to overcome the “bad guys,” who stand for anti-civilisation; and create a “New Eden,” as Ashley Kunsu asserts (59), with the boy as moral compass.

The underlying quest cannot be brought to fulfilment if the man lives on. His distrust makes it impossible to join the other “good guys.” Although he has taught his son about the existence of other good people, the man is unable to view anybody else as a “good guy,” and he sees anybody they meet as a threat. When his son asks, “What if some good guys came?”,

he replies that he does not think they will meet them on the road (160). When the boy asks to leave a note in the sand for the “good guys,” the man claims that he fears the “bad guys” will see it which results in his son not taking the risk (262). This implies that finding the “good guys” is the boy’s quest, alone. He completes it three days after his father’s death: “Someone was coming. He started to turn and go back into the woods but he didn’t. He just stood in the road and waited, the pistol in his hand” (301). His father would not have taken the risk of a confrontation and they would have hidden. The boy, however, does take it, as he has been taught to; he stays in the road and anticipates the encounter’s results. It leads to a conversation with the man who approaches; the boy asks him if he is one of the “good guys,” to which the man answers affirmatively (302). The boy poses further questions which confirm, for him, that this man is good; he does not eat people and he is “carrying the fire.” The boy takes a final risk and decides to join this man and his companions; a woman, a boy, and a girl. The woman “would talk to him sometimes about God” (306) which indicates that he stays with the family for an extent of time.

The woman symbolises both fertility and mother earth. Before her appearance the world which the two traverse is, since the mother’s suicide, deficient of potency, a female principle (Cant 16). However, the return of the woman at the end of the novel represents the return of fertility, which is the last piece of the puzzle and makes civilisation viable again. Additionally, the young girl also holds tidings for the future as the possibility arises that the boy himself may someday procreate. The boy is thus set up with the ability to create a new and better world.

The boy’s connection to God; his moral agenda; the man’s belief in him; his youth; his survival; and his ability to find the “good guys”; all suggest that the boy is an indispensable asset to the future and whatever happens after the novel’s close. The continuation of the boy’s journey with the “good guys” leaves the reader with the suggestion

that the remainder of the quest, the regeneration of civilisation, can be fulfilled also. As the novel ends a new phase of the boy's journey, and quest, begins. "[The boy] can go forward, beyond the novel's end, to write the new story of the new world" (Kunsa 67).

Conclusion

Extensive research has been done on Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, although little has been done on the subject discussed in this thesis, that of the journey. In the past, the journey has had only an underlying function in theories focused on other aspects of the novel. This would suggest that more research could be done on this subject. Considering that McCarthy's other novels also, generally, convey journeys, there is room for comparative research. Furthermore, research could be done on the dualities and cycles that occur throughout the novel and their relationship to the journey. During the research for this thesis it has become apparent that there are many cycles and dualities present in *The Road* that this thesis has not covered. Research could be done as to what effect the seasonal cycle, the periods of the day, and dualities therein such as light and dark, and day and night have on the novel's quest. Another subject which could be further examined is the notion of Bildung within *The Road*. It is not a typical Bildungsroman, because it is not told through the narrative perspective of the character who goes through development, it does, however, contain other elements of Bildung and hold many similarities with the concept.

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