

### **The Good Guys: The Father's Mentality in *The Road***

Throughout The Road we hear the father and the son talking about good guys. Sometimes this is in reference to themselves, and other times it is in reference to other people in the world that they come in some sort of contact with. At times in this book, readers doubt whether the father is always a good guy, even when he and the son say, "Are we still the good guys?" he said. Yes. We're still the good guys. And we always will be. Yes. We always will be" (77). In my discussion group, someone said they think the father becomes monstrous because he is more cruel as the book progresses, but I disagree. The father is a "good guy" in the beginning, and in the end he is still a "good guy" as the quotation suggests.

The father is a good guy because he perseveres when there's no hope of survival. More than once, the father tells us that he knows there's nothing to live for. In one such instance, "He said that everything depended on reaching the coast, yet . . . he knew that all of this was empty and no substance" (29). The father is giving his son, and giving himself, a reason to live, to keep going. He knows that it's a pointless goal, especially because the world for them doesn't resemble anything of the world before, so it may not even be warmer or better south. However, he know they need something to go towards and keep them moving. It may be something silly, but it still gives the father motivation. In another example, the father says, "On this road there are no godspoken men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world . . . I have you" (32). This has an interesting twist because many people think life is pointless without their religion, and here the father is showing us that none of them are left, at least as far as he knows. The beautiful thing is that this does not make him give up. He has another reason to live, and it's more important to him than religion. Having a family, taking care of his son is his only

motivation to live, even knowing he will die sooner or later, too.

The father also shows us his perseverance as he speaks to the son. He states, “All the trees in the world are going to fall sooner or later. But not on us” (35). Saying all the trees will fall tells us that he knows the world will not recover, that everything is dying or will die, but how he ends this sentence is very powerful. Everything will die, but not them. The father wants to instill in his son a value of life that he already understands. He is trying to make himself keep believing it himself. Another of their conversations tells us, “Are we going to die now? No. What are we going to do? We’re going to drink some water. Then we’re going to keep going down the road” (88). So maybe the world is going to end, and yes it’s completely obvious to the father. But this doesn’t stop him from taking one thing at a time. Every little thing is one more step that they have taken, proving that they have survived and have the will to go forever if they can.

The father is a good guy because he protects the son at any cost. He makes sacrifices where others would ration the use of their resources. He finds, “In the pantry were three jars of homecanned tomatoes . . . Someone before him had not trusted them and in the end neither did he” (22). They live in a world where food is the main priority. They are always looking for it, and there is never enough. So even finding this much would have been beneficial. And if he didn’t have to worry about keeping his son alive, I think he would have taken the tomatoes, but he would rather starve until they found something else than risk his son dying of poisoning or something. The father also sacrifices his well-being and the well-being of others they meet for his son. The boy says, “I have to watch you all the time” (34) when the father tries to give him a whole cocoa packet, and later the father says, “We cant share what we have or we’ll die too” (52). Again, his main concern is his son’s life. It doesn’t matter so much to him if he goes

with nothing and weakens nor if the few people worse off than they are end up dying. This is because the main priority is for his son to survive. His son is the most important thing.

The father continues showing us how he sacrifices others, as well as a bit of his morals, for his son's welfare. When a man grabs the boy and holds a knife to him, the father shoots him (66), and after this ordeal the father says, "My job is to take care of you . . . I will kill anyone who touches you" (77). Others might argue that murder isn't okay at anytime, but in self-defense or the defense of someone's family, I think it is totally justified, so long as it's provoked and there are no other options. The father has an obligation to take care of his son, one that he takes gladly, and it's very much something a good guy would continue to do in such a horrible world. Lastly, the father tells his son, "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" (113). He's making sure that his son will commit suicide. At face value, of course this is a horrible thing, but think about their circumstances. Killing his son would save the boy from being captured and eaten by cannibals. He doesn't want the most precious thing in his life to be so desecrated. It's a kind of oxymoron that, in order to save his son, he is asking his son to die.

The father is a good guy because he never has any cannibalistic tendencies. The majority of this evidence is in what is never said, but here are a few that are mentioned. In their confrontation with the male cannibal, the man tells them to come get food, and the father replies, "You don't have anything to eat" (65). Since the man is a cannibal, we can assume that the food he's referring to is human flesh. The father's reply shows perfectly that he has never considered cannibalism and that he never will. The idea is simply disgusting in his eyes and he refuses to change that view. This is one of the biggest characteristics that separate the "good guys" from the

“bad guys.” At another time, the son asks, “We’re not going to kill it [a dog], are we Papa?” to which he answers, “No. We’re not going to kill it” (82). When the son asks this, he’s really asking if they are going to use the dog for food. Refusing to kill and eat what is a domestic animal to the father shows that he is humane. It’s next to killing a best friend, and it could also lead to killing and eating fellow human beings. The father doesn’t want to come close to this, so he avoids anything even slightly resembling it. More straight forward is the statement, “Mostly he worried about their shoes. That and food. Always food” (17). Being cannibalistic would, I’m sure, increase their options for food and how much, but these few short fragments easily show us that they chose the hard way. They chose to look for the quickly disappearing food that won’t ever be produced again.

The father is a good guy because he is human. The biggest argument against this would be the time when the two had their things stolen, but in the end, the father took everything the thief had, even his clothes. This does show anger and cruelty, but remember that humans are not perfect. Good guys are the people who believe in good, they don’t necessarily always do good things. Though might I add that he does leave the clothes on the road for the man when he’s no longer so angry. There are many instances where the father demonstrates his belief in and desire to do good. At one point he is watching the boy sleep and he ask himself, “Can you do it? When the time comes? Can you?” (29). This refers to killing his son. He knows that the time will come, that it will happen eventually. However, he shows indecision, which is definitely something a person with morals and a sense of humaneness would exhibit. These characteristics are further intensified because of the subject matter. Most people couldn’t honestly consider killing someone they love, and it’s a hard decision when they are simply choosing how it will happen

because they know it will happen. The father also shows morality and humaneness when he tells stories, “But he stopped making things up because those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad” (54). If he feels horrible just making up things about the past, I don’t see how he would have no compassion dealing with other human beings, no matter who they are and what he may do to them. He is honest and fair, but he also shows us his human emotion.

He continues to show us how human he is in thought and decision. At one time the father wonders, “What if it [the gun] doesn’t fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing?” (114). He previously instructs the son that he’ll have to commit suicide, but the father’s tortured by the thought that he will have to kill his own son. The father values human life, and taking it is not something he does easily. Lastly, we see the father’s morality in this conversation with the boy: “I can’t hold my son dead in my arms. I thought I could but I can’t. You said you wouldn’t ever leave me. I know. I’m sorry” (279). He cannot destroy something he values so much, especially as that something is a good, young boy. Additionally, he has broken a promise. The father has flaws like any other person, but in the end he chooses to do good and follow good though it’s a battle every time.

So does the father have some “bad guy” qualities? I would say yes. This is because he is a person just like any other, and he never claims to be perfect. But in all honesty, he strives to be a “good guy.” He performs his fatherly duties to the best of his abilities, including protecting and even considering the death of his son. He carries more hope than another person would in their situation, and he never surrenders to animalistic activity of eating his own kind. The father is a “good guy” when we first meet him, and he is a “good guy” when he leaves us.

Works Cited

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*.