Death is such a salient conduit to express significant themes throughout literature, because as Joseph Campbell points out, "The cave [we] fear to enter holds the treasure [we] seek." Clearly, before, during and after scenes of death, characters and individuals are confronted with some of their greatest fears. More importantly, these rigors which are aroused by impending ruination harbor the potential to point us towards opportunities for our souls to flourish. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, death is omnipresent, consistently snapping at the heels of a wayward father and his son in a post-apocalyptic and dystopian world. Nevertheless, it is near the closing of the novel that McCarthy presents his readers with a scene of darkness and destruction so as to elucidate to the reader that the "breath of God (love/hope)…pass[es] from man to man…[and will continue to do so] through all time" (286). But none of this can happen without death.

Both the man and the boy are on the cusp of death all throughout the novel, but this is just a metaphor for how delicate a thing is love and hope, especially in such a gray and ashen world. Ironically, it is not the scene where the father actually suffers his physical death that McCarthy wishes for us to focus. Rather, it is when the man steals the cart that the truest and most powerful confrontation with death occurs.

At this point, the father comes precariously close to losing everything, cutting himself off from his son, "the fire," humanity or any further membership in the community of "good guys." As the father forces the thief to stand naked in the road, McCarthy is really presenting us with a scene in which the father is forced to examine is own sense of humanity. In other words, in confronting the naked hijacker, the father is in essence looking directly at himself: cold, vulnerable, starving, not only for food, but also for compassion.

Keep in mind, that all throughout the novel, the father's and son's entire sustenance depended solely upon pilfering the goods of others. So again, the father is peering directly at himself (another thief on the road). Obviously, the father does not like what he sees which is precisely why he turns and leaves the crook. Yes, the father is ashamed of what he has done, but it's equally significant that he is disgusted by what he has seen within.

Consequently, the boy sagely points out, that the man "was just hungry…he's going to die…he's so scared" (259). Realizing that the boy also "worr[ies] about everything" (surviving and preserving his own humanity), the father acquiesces to the boy's request to return to the man. Nevertheless, the man is gone, which is extremely poignant, for it suggests a passing, a death if you will. The father has confronted this nefarious shadow of himself, and thanks to the boy, this side of the father perishes. True, the father and the boy leave the man's shoes and clothes piled in the road, but they also "put a rock on top of them," signifying a tombstone, deliberately and ceremoniously bringing a close to this emaciated, carnal and shadow-side within the father (261). Later that night, the father emphatically states, "I wasn't going to kill him."

Yet, the boy profoundly points out, "But we did kill him" (261). Fortunately, for the father, they did indeed destroy this portion of the father's ego, allowing the father to focus his final days upon the "breath of God" (compassion/hope).

Sadly the father endures tremendous physical pain throughout the novel, dying both from his poisoned lungs and the arrow wound. Yet, with the boy, "There was light all about him" (277). The boy is allowed to shine for the primal side of the father has passed away, no longer casting a shadow upon the boy. The father dies with great contrition and passes the "fire," reminding the boy that, "You're going to be lucky. I know you are" (279).

In essence the father leaves the boy with the "breath of God" (fire/hope/love). It is no coincidence that after three days of the father's passing, the *son* rises to embrace his new family. None of this, however, is possible without death. In short, McCarthy points out that without death, specifically the death of fear and vengeance, there can be no passing of the "fire," or "the breath of God," just as the woman at the end of the story reminds us all.