

# Plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape: Space, Place, and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy.

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## "Plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape": Space, Place, and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy

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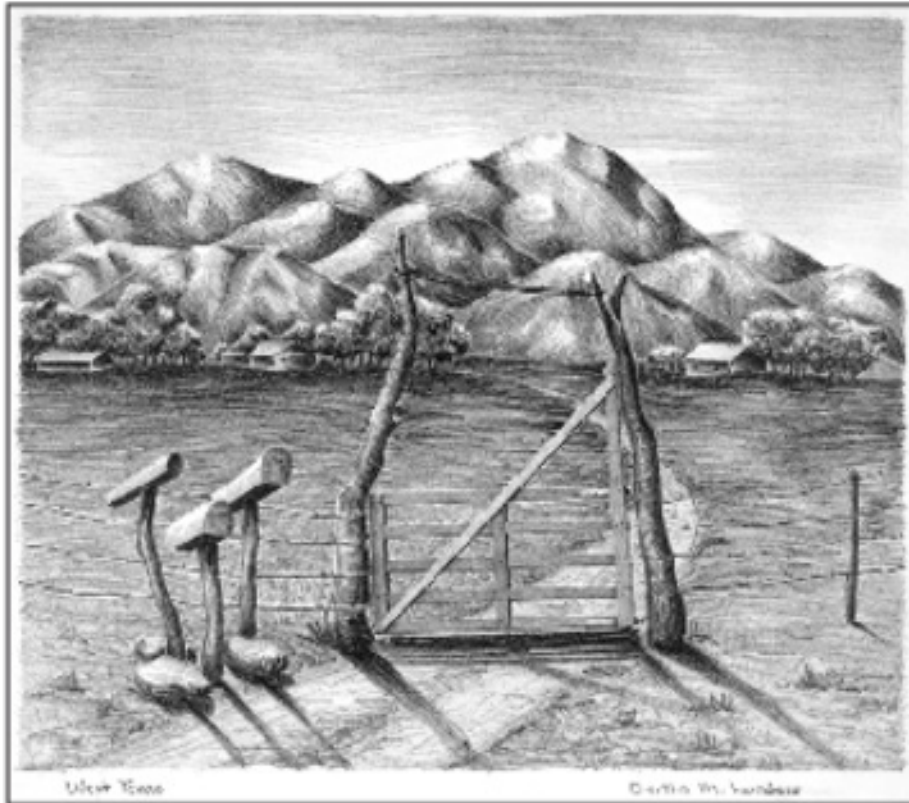
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### Abstract

Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy conjures up the stark and beautiful landscapes of the southwestern United States and Mexico, living terrain which the protagonists must constantly navigate as they attempt to achieve stability. The invisible process through which place is created is dependent on the ways that individuals and societies attempt to transform empty space into a fixed, stable location with ideological dimensions in order to obtain a sense of identity. Often this transformation is effected through ecological

transformation, razing, and reconstructing the landscape in various ways to accommodate industry, technology, and human activity. Taking a phenomenological approach and building on theorists Edward S. Casey and Yi-Fu Tuan, the author argues that the movement between space and place in McCarthy—both a literal and figurative process—produces a sense of loss in the protagonists and in the cultural landscape of the novel. McCarthy highlights the paradox inherent in this process of the construction of place, namely, that although the characters crave the constancy of place, they are constantly compelled into motion in order to find the ideal place they seek and thus are never able to root themselves definitively or stabilize their individual identities. In a parallel sense, McCarthy emphasizes the region itself as a space that is in flux, in the process of being transformed by technological, industrial, and economic changes that preclude the protagonists from achieving the identities they internalized in their youth, which are associated with the western myths of roving cowboys and unsettled wilderness. Such myths in McCarthy's trilogy are, however, shrouded in violence and prove to be illusory, much like the idea of the stable home places that the protagonists seek and fail to find.



Bertha M. Landers. WEST TEXAS. Nd. Lithograph. 13" x 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". Courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art. Volk Brothers Prize, Tenth Annual Dallas Allied Art Exhibition, 1939.



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