

Estes, Andrew Keller. *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2013.

Written as part of Rodopi's series, *Spatial Practices: An Interdisciplinary Series in Cultural History, Geography, and Literature*, Andrew Keller Estes' work serves as a thoughtful introduction and exploration into Cormac McCarthy's narratives that often pit anthropocentric actors against a biocentric optic. Estes spends much of the book setting up these definitions as he encourages readers to read McCarthy's works as dialectic rather than didactic. And as all Cormac McCarthy scholars can testify, McCarthy's works tend to be gloriously frustrating and rewarding, because they do so often refute attempts to explicate the ambiguous. In order to structure his readings of McCarthy's later fiction—ranging from the publication of *Blood Meridian* to *The Road* with glimpses at McCarthy's earlier Southern Gothic fiction—Estes largely considers McCarthy's recurrent fascination with biocentric maps that relay spaces and limit places in a more intimate and enduring manner than any man-made map could hope for.

There is much to be said for Estes' survey into McCarthy's more recent canon. Estes reviews relevant environmental criticism such as that of Lawrence Buell, and he reads McCarthy alongside Crevecoeur and Hawthorne. Similarly, Estes spends some time situating his new critical work amongst those of more well known McCarthy scholars such as Sara Spurgeon, Rich Wallach, and even Harold Bloom. In doing so, Estes produces a text that considers the historical, theoretical, and scholarly context of McCarthy's works. Estes discusses many prominent ideas and concepts that play an integral and recurrent role in McCarthy criticism such as the role of 'optical democracy' in McCarthy's narrative style and the dialectic and competing notions of ecology and representation.

That being said, the first half of the book serves more as an introduction to reading McCarthy than an in-depth examination of either McCarthy critics or the field of ecocriticism and the study of place and space. Although Estes claims to be exploring the writing of American spaces, very little time is spent considering theories and theorists pertaining to the study of place and space such as the works of Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Casey. There are also more specifically focused works like Ashley Bourne's influential article "'Plenty of Signs and Wonders to Make a Landscape': Space, Place, and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy" that appear to be in direct conversation with Estes' own topic yet do not make an appearance within the text. Similarly, Estes makes note of the importance of the Turner Thesis in reading McCarthy, a good observation to make when considering sociocultural contexts of environmental criticism and American ideology, but the Turner Thesis makes only a few brief appearances as something of note although Estes puts forth this observation as a new and noteworthy one.

The absence of much focused critical exploration by Estes into the role space and place, anthropocentric or biocentric, within McCarthy's works can be seen in the latter half of his work. While Estes evaluates *Blood Meridian*, *All The Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *The Road* individually, many of the examples he chooses to exemplify his points are referenced earlier in the text and repeated to substantiate his claims. Estes succeeds at choosing significant and essential points in the text to draw his analysis from, such as the passage where Judge Holden proclaims himself suzerain over nature and the passage in *The Road* where it becomes clear that the man and the boy carry with them an old oil map, imprinted with utilitarian and anthropocentric symbols that no longer correlate with the surrounding ecology. As such, Estes often draws from the same examples rather than extending his analysis to other parts of the novels. Estes' analytical scope, while narrow, does support his claims regarding McCarthy's fiction.

Indeed, Estes' analytical scope does much to clarify the audience most appropriate for this work. *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces* would serve as a good text for an instructor who was teaching an introductory, survey course on Cormac McCarthy. For a graduate course, John Cant's *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* remains largely on par with Estes' work. While Cant's work looks at more of McCarthy's novels from a variety of perspectives and Estes' work remains largely planted in environmental ground, both would be serviceable options for an introductory course to McCarthy. Cormac McCarthy scholars, however, who are familiar with McCarthy's novels as well as the wealth of criticism his novels have accumulated would most likely be already acquainted with many of the ideas put forth in this book.

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