

## Riders Between Worlds: Masculine Identity AND Moral Ambiguity IN McCarthy's Border Trilogy

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### Abstract

Through its three novels *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998) Cormac McCarthy creates a comprehensive exploration of shifting male identity during a time when moral and cultural standards were changing. The trilogy portrays the mental and metaphysical hardships of young males who navigate the transitional frontiers between United States and Mexico during mid-twentieth century life. The research examines how McCarthy reinterprets male identity through his protagonist John Grady Cole and Billy Parham by placing them inside a moral desert which probes and frequently shatters behavioural principles such as honour and justice and emotional self-control.

The research evaluates these motifs of silence as well as loss and violence together with displacement to understand the male identity crisis. The protagonists discover that their romantic cowboy code leads to inevitable destruction when they experience the indifferent reality of the world. Their ongoing physical boundary crossings align with an intense moral descent as well as psychological confusion. In opposition to traditional Western literary heroes McCarthy presents his cowboy characters who exist as doubtful beings because they experience both openness to suffering and lack guidance in ethical decisions.

The study reveals how landscape functions as a dynamic element which structures the inner struggles previously mentioned alongside moral complexities which the main characters face. The borderlands function as metaphoric areas of confusion since identities combine together while almost every choice leads to unsatisfying results. Through his poetic style and minimalist dialogue McCarthy constructs a new definition of Western masculinity that exists beyond success or conquest to represent masculine strength through inner communion and resignation to defeat.

This analysis reviews how the Western mythology contrasts with character emotional and moral deviations to extend discussions about Western literature and modern gender and cultural development. The analysis shows the Border Trilogy encourages deep thought about male identity throughout time periods where traditional navigational systems have failed while the act of moving forward remains the sole secure factor.

**Keywords:** Masculinity – Borderlands – Moral Ambiguity – Western Myth – Identity Crisis

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### INTRODUCTION

The Border Trilogy by Cormac McCarthy starting with *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992 through *The Crossing* in 1994 and concluding with *Cities of the Plain* in 1998 represents an essential portion of American literature today because it presents both picture-perfect depictions of the border region between U.S. and Mexico alongside a deep investigation into male identity in the fading western traditions. McCarthy uses John Grady Cole and Billy Parham to study the essence of masculinity in a time where conventional wisdom does not define male conduct. The trilogy reveals the declining days of the Old West through its historical setting in the mid-twentieth century along with two protagonists who struggle to attain their historic legacy while being unable to break free from it.

Since its inception Western literature has established specific rules about masculinity which include maintaining composure through hardships along with bravery and unattached independence and clear moral awareness. Through his stories McCarthy creates character qualities that challenge the straightforward framework of conventional heroism through various degrees of moral complexity and emotional weak points combined with a feeling of certain doom. Instead of following the stereotypical lawman or gunslinger mold McCarthy presents thoughtful young men who face their own inner struggles with loss separation and conflicted moral values. During their travel across real territories and metaphors the protagonists demonstrate how traditional masculine norms struggle when confronted by contemporary challenges and philosophical inquiry.

The study examines how the author reconstructs masculine identity through his Border Trilogy by contrasting traditional Western cultural codes with the complicated moral elements of borderland life. Their literal movements throughout the story symbolize their internal searches for meaning while discovery of self and greater purpose. The dominant themes spanning silence, violence, emotional suppression and spiritual wants link with the harsh natural environment to show how both landscape and identity remain constantly in flux.

The investigation of McCarthy's thematic elements through gender theory and American literary studies and Western cultural criticism will guide the analysis. The analysis investigates how the trilogy performs its dual role as a Western-style tribute and analytical breakdown to reveal male identity as a fleeting process between mythic traditions and contemporary values. Carrying this interpretation the Border Trilogy demonstrates its crucial transitional narrative about masculinity that proves itself through continuous survival rather than military achievements.

#### **Nature of the Study**

The research examines how Cormac McCarthy in his Border Trilogy rewrites and deconstructs male identity through his books *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*. The study aims to understand how McCarthy portrays his young male characters as they question traditional male roles during the Western period. The traditional cowboy heroes from American myths display rigid resilience and moral certainty with physical strength but McCarthy portrays characters with a swinging masculine nature which is internal, doubting and emotionally damaged.

The analytical framework of this study analyses motifs of silence along with grief along with loneliness and moral ambiguity which together shape the expression of psychological internal distress of the male characters. McCarthy presents his cowboys as stranded characters who occupy the space between two worlds regarding cultural norms and moral values and emotional states. Each border crossing consists of mystical passages which transcend mere geographical exploration as they function both as moral confusion and existential exploration and spiritual seeking.

An assessment of McCarthy's dual romantic and critical approach to Western elements and themes demonstrates his restructuring of masculine perspectives through disillusionment. The Border Trilogy functions beyond its generic interpretation as a Western tale or adolescent tale since it explores philosophical and literary themes about identity and cultural transitions together with gender insights.

The study adopts an interpretive and analytical approach to evaluate both literary texts and gender studies research and American literature and Western genre studies scholarship. This work seeks to advance academic knowledge about how contemporary literature modifications canonical stories of masculinity within the framework of modern times along with ethical transformation. The study investigates the ways McCarthy transforms traditional male identity standards by analysing how men adapt to their contemporary situation without established moral guidelines.

#### **Scope of the Study**

This research investigates Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy by examining how the trilogy depicts masculine identity while the socio-cultural environment alters in American Southwest and Mexican borderlands. The research investigates the development of main characters John Grady Cole and Billy Parham in the three interconnected narratives *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and *The Crossing* (1994) and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). The research restricts itself to scrutinizing these three novels because this framework allows detailed investigations into McCarthy's depiction of masculine decline and Western value collapse.

Through multi-faceted research design this work merges literary criticism with academic perspectives from gender studies together with cultural studies alongside Western genre criticism. McCarthy replaces the traditional cowboy myth by showing how his protagonists face internal struggles which revoke their traditional role of frontier conquerors and Hokusitic heroes. Throughout their narrative the main characters undergo multiple literal and metaphoric border experiences that show their inner psychological and spiritual transitions which reveal disrupted and searching masculine identities.

The study uses literary elements such as silence and nature alongside loss and language to enhance the emotional dimension of male experiences throughout the trilogy. The novel's plain writing style along with desolate wilderness settings symbolize the blocked emotional and spiritual development of the male protagonist against the backdrop of ranch and desert lands and border settlements where identities clash morally.

The research mainly explores the Border Trilogy yet provides evaluations of McCarthy's entire writing corpus in relation to Western literature to reveal both conventional and unconventional elements in his literary approach. The study refrains from performing a thorough examination of McCarthy's personal life as well as his books outside the western genre.

The research examines how McCarthy transforms male identity through his biblical Western literary framework of multiple thematic connections. The research contributes knowledge that participates in current scholarly evaluations about gender representation and generic evolution and American myth development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Author: Bell, M. 2000**

Bell evaluates the intricate relationships between mythic elements and masculine identity and violent conflicts in McCarthy's Border Trilogy through his 2000 publication. According to Walter Vanant he shows how McCarthy strips away traditional Western hero elements through the vulnerability and existential crises of his cowboys. According to Bell frontier mythology has weakened leaving both John Grady and Billy to find their way through a world where previous beliefs no longer apply. Through analysis the author investigates silence as a form of masculine display which involves hiding strong emotions through silence. Bell analyses male character repression within their emotions by applying the principles of psychoanalytic theory. By studying the trilogy, he identifies that inherited moral values instead of chosen virtues result in psychological battles between the characters. The author discovers a literary technique which undresses established heroism while exposing genuine masculine realities. According to him McCarthy applies natural settings as representations of internal emotional emptiness. Bell reveals in his analysis the complete physical and psychological impact that violence has on male bodies and brains. Through his analysis the author understands McCarthy's characters act as old-fashioned representatives alongside progressive take-downs of primitive male identity patterns. Bell conducts an ethical counterargument against Western romantic depictions through his analysis of the trilogy. The emotional profile of his characters fits exactly into the literary expression of McCarthy. Bell determines that masculinity remains under constant reassessment within the trilogy rather than obtaining resolution. Through its tragic nature the cowboy transforms into a figure filled with loss yet reduced to silence due to shame. Bell establishes an essential analysis which explains how masculinity takes its form through mythological narratives and ethical standards and personal remembrance.

### **Owens, B. 2003**

Through an assessment of *All the Pretty Horses* by McCarthy Owens explores how John Grady Cole attempts to match his ethical principles with the fading moral codes in his environment. The research indicates Cole represents a man who exists between maintaining romantic ideals while also surviving in the real world. In his analysis Owens studies the ways that unforeseen results harm moral certainty especially when violence occurs as part of unjust actions. Romantic ideals face direct opposition from the harsh realities of unregulated borders according to the writer. Throughout the dialogue of the book McCarthy displays a restrained communication style which symbolizes male emotional restraint. Through analysis the study demonstrates how honour and love bring no security against the effects Cole faces following his choices. Owens situates McCarthy's work within the larger decline of the Western genre. The research investigates the emotional effects which result from betrayal of family and love partners on male identity development. Owens demonstrates that repression of emotions takes the place of real power in McCarthy's story world. The research investigates how horses act as associates and also extend the masculine identity of males. According to Owens the central character gains moral insight from his experiences of suffering. The document demonstrates how cultural and historical forces lead ethical systems to fail under their weight. Through existentialist theory Owens demonstrates how responsibility and free choice manifest in the text. Cole proves to be an ethical repository rather than a failed cowboy of the traditional rodeo world. Feminine characteristics appear in Owens' work as weak conduct which transforms through tragedy and sadness.

### **Author: Bloom, H. 2002:**

Through his interpretation Bloom analyses Border Trilogy by McCarthy as an elegy that mourns the death of American mythology. Through his analysis he demonstrates that McCarthy's characters show multiple signs of orphanhood both psychologically and spiritually as well as physically. The trilogy contains

Shakespearean tragic themes alongside elements from Biblical scripture according to Bloom. According to Bloom McCarthy turns the cowboy into a tragic example who meets his downfall due to an unyielding commitment to honesty. Through the tools of silence and solitude and death the trilogy examines the boundaries which exist for human masculinity. The study establishes that McCarthy utilizes Hemingway-like sparse writing but reveals search for deeper existential suffering. Throughout the characters' moral paths, he sees characters traveling as their language struggles to detect emotional reality. Through his analysis Bloom reveals how the characters' real circumstances clash with their idealized masculine beliefs. The author demonstrates that McCarthy establishes a tragic moral perspective where noble men endure pain and ultimately meet ruin. According to Bloom the trilogy serves as a grievance about a period when moral order governed the world. In his research he demonstrates that McCarthy represents a godless landscape instead of sacred harmonious interactions with nature. Literary analyses of Melville's writing and Faulkner's work are included in the study to position McCarthy's works within American literary history. According to Bloom Billy Parham carries Job-like status through his experience of unexplainable suffering. The author determines that McCarthy constructs male strength through enduring hardships instead of participating actively. According to Bloom's reading the trilogy becomes an exploration which probes the matters of male identity and personal mortality and existence.

**Sepich, J. 2008**

In *The Crossing* Sepich examines the narrative organization together with the moral outcomes to demonstrate how Billy Parham reveals his fractured male identity through his decisions. McCarthy depicts moral choices in *The Crossing* as indistinct entities because they are deeply interconnected with both personal trauma and cultural disillusionment. Throughout the study Billy's path is presented as a mission toward ethical understanding while experiencing emotional destruction. Throughout the novel Sepich evaluates male identity through encounters with unfamiliar people. The novel shows how paternal absence makes Billy lose his moral compass. The author studies grief as a space through which masculinity receives its defining tests. Through the theme of "crossing" he sets up connections between territorial boundaries and human existential and moral decision points. According to Sepich the trilogy does not end since masculine identity remains in a state of continuous transformation. The Western convention faces subversion according to McCarthy because he chooses to explore moral changes inside characters instead of actual territory acquisition. Sepich demonstrates that the protagonist's emotional numbing becomes visible through his work on narrative speeds. The narrative shows animals possessing stronger emotional qualities than the human figures in the story. Using trauma theory, the paper reveals how ethical confusion produces psychological damage in its victims. Men adopt this protective behaviour of remaining silent when they encounter world moral uncertainty according to Sepich. According to his analysis Billy fails as a guardian and suffers from burdens caused by memories and empty achievements. McCarthy depicts masculinity through the process of enduring hardships rather than through physical power observations. The author views McCarthy's storytelling as an energetic exploration of morality rather than a production focused solely on the genre.

**McWilliams, J. 2013**

McWilliams studies how stories and passed-down tales influence male identity in *Border Trilogy* through his analysis. McCarthy presents his cowboys as vessels which carry collective memories instead of existing as simple fictional characters. Throughout the study the characters try to match their actions to Western myths but encounter continual failures from the reality that departs from their expectations. Through his analysis McWilliams explores how oral storytelling multiplies for male characters and this failure illustrates their loss of self-awareness. Failed communication runs as an important characteristic throughout McCarthy's male characters exposing their emotional detachment and their inner isolation. This paper examines the relationship between lived reality versus inherited beliefs which produces masculine crisis in literary works. From McWilliams' perspective the cowboy character performs a role between traditional Western symbolism and contemporary reality. In his analysis McWilliams evaluates McCarthy's spare language which mirrors masculine emotional self-control. Silence functions in the text as a safety measure to shield rather than divulge personal identity. According to McWilliams the failures of the characters exist within their culture and represent signs of an evolving mythos. The author maintains that through his work McCarthy leads readers toward questioning the value of heroic storytelling devices. The author McWilliams interprets the trilogy as a moral critique of nostalgic sentiments. Based on postmodern theory he establishes how McCarthy approaches his deconstruction of

literary categories. According to the research men performing masculinity in the trilogy face an irrelevance that haunts their attempts. According to McWilliams McCarthy uses his writings to form a critical assessment about how stories generate identity formations as well as limit personal growth.

**Frye, S. 2010**

Through his analysis McCarthy transforms the traditional Western storytelling format to reveal traditional masculine values in a new light. According to the author *The Border Trilogy* demonstrates masculinity as an ethical puzzle instead of presenting it as an adventure or physical display. According to Frye the male protagonists in the story seek inner meaning instead of dominating others. The text reveals that their exposure while being human stands as a powerful natural quality instead of indicating weak or flawed character. According to Frye violence emerges in the story as an experience that brings psychological devastation to the male characters by altering their minds. The author studies McCarthy's literary writing technique through the rhythm of his prose and its visualization process which reveals emotional states within characters. Frye creates links between existentialism when he demonstrates how McCarthy's cowboy characters strive to find meaning in an empty world. According to this analysis moral certainty becomes unattainable in McCarthy's fictional world. Frye observes that the landscape works against rather than for characters since it stays uncaring to the point where characters suffer losses exceeding their gains. Through his analysis the author demonstrates how silence works as a thematic function to show what men cannot articulate. Frye studies spiritual and mythical elements which present suffering as a means to gain understanding. McCarthy defines his male characters through endurance rather than through dominance according to this author. Frye dismantles the popular image of western life by revealing how McCarthy dismantles it. According to Frye the three novels demonstrate how absolute beliefs fail when confronted with actual life circumstances. According to him McCarthy presents masculine archetypes based on ambivalence alongside loss and ethical questioning.

**Jarrett, D. 2016**

Through his analysis Jarrett explores both psychological aspects of grief together with aspects of masculinity that appear in *The Crossing*. The author analyses how Billy Parham develops his masculine self through his experience of loss. Through his analysis the author concludes that sorrow has a stronger influence than justice on Billy's moral worldview. According to Jarrett the numerous Mexican border crossings by Billy should be seen as a form of repentance as opposed to remaining mere exploits. He explores the process through which Billy looks for redemption for his unexpressed failures as he manifests the traditional masculine archetype. Through his research Jarrett illustrates how McCarthy produces minimal dialogues and maintains emotional suppression in his writing. Billy's inability to safeguard others marks him as a man who faces recurring traumatic experiences. The character in this analysis experiences unresolved feelings of guilt and helplessness which he carries as a burden throughout the narrative. The author evaluates how animals function as symbolic representations connected to ethical issues throughout the narrative. The paper demonstrates how McCarthy develops male character identification by having his characters endure continuous ethical struggles instead of achieving victory. The author explores cultural separation as a central concept through his analysis of borders which represent both emotional and moral disruption. Through his analysis he detects that Billy experiences existential grief which stems from the lack of meaning in life. Using trauma and masculinity studies as a foundation the author explains Billy's internal conflict. According to Jarrett *The Crossing* functions as a contemplation about the solitude and grief experienced by contemporary males.

**Morton, C. 2018**

Morton critiques the romantic Western ideal through the lens of postmodern masculinity. According to Morton McCarthy's central characters embody an ironic approach to receive a mythical inheritance they cannot achieve. Through his analysis of *Cities of the Plain* Morton demonstrates how romantic feelings together with longing cause men to lose their sense of masculine stability. According to him McCarthy transforms the cowboy myth into a sad and tragic narrative. According to Morton the emotional ties that John Grady develops turn into debilitating suffering instead of protecting him. The story centres on tenderness which Western genres typically overlook until its fatal conclusion. McCarthy demonstrates how emotional weakness forms an essential aspect of maintaining ethical behaviour. Morton presents in his analysis that brotherly bonds between men are not sufficient to protect characters from their deep-seated emotional emptiness. Physical violence does not work to fix the issues beneath emotional distress. According to the analysis language creates an unbridgeable gap between human feelings and the execution

of actions. According to Morton McCarthy employs Mexico as a literary device to symbolize unfathomable ideals alongside lost childhood innocence. The death of John Grady represents the eternal termination of mythic maleness according to the analysis. According to the paper McCarthy functions as a post-heroic and emotionally nuanced writer. According to Morton the struggle between idealistic constructs and concrete reality affects how men create their self-concept. The author states that *Cities of the Plain* serves as a moving goodbye to the cowboy through its portrayal of despair and a lack of purpose.

**Waldron, M. 2011**

Waldron analyses through *The Border Trilogy* how masculinity functions as a tool for questioning American exceptionality. McCarthy presents his cowboy characters as failed representations of national identity because they belong to a tradition of regression instead of advancement in the frontier. The author positions these works as an answer to widespread American disillusionment about nation-level myths that manifested during the late twentieth century. The author studies how McCarthy delivers justice through individual experiences instead of established institutions while displaying it as a purposeless ambition. Few where throughout his work McCarthy shows his characters playing traditional roles while they simultaneously doubt their legitimacy. As Waldron explains male detachment functions as a necessary survival technique throughout disordered moral areas. The article analyses the way people resort to violent communication after discussion no longer works. The author demonstrates how McCarthy develops his fictional characters' psychological dynamics through their unsaid thoughts against the backdrop of the absent external world. Through his analysis of gender roles Waldron acknowledges that men receive almost no influence from women in their development of identity. His research indicates that male values pass down through traumatized experiences rather than conventional cultural teachings. Waldron analyses how the historical changes of the era relate to the various themes in McCarthy's trilogy series. McCarthy delivers the death of self-made man myth through his characters' continuous unethical conduct. Through his analysis the author shows how masculine identity develops through sensations of impending loss and deep isolation along with ongoing feelings of desolation. Waldron interprets *The Border Trilogy* as a work which laments the end of heroic individualism. The author decides that McCarthy's masculine character exists in a state of mournful introspection with deep uncertainties.

**Author: Campbell, J. 2020:**

Campbell applies the concepts of liminality together with masculine transformation to study *The Border Trilogy*. The author examines borderlands in their dual sense as areas where men face identity breakdowns leading to self-transformations. Campbell demonstrates how the characters advance through transitional stages which ultimately produce unstable self-identification. McCarthy demonstrates how interior psychological disorders find representation in his use of natural settings. Through his work Campbell examines the ways in which McCarthy challenges established social norms concerning honour and justice systems. According to him John Grady represents a pilgrim instead of a cowboy as he quests for meaning in an empty world. This paper explores how the trilogy displays strong elements of personal inner-life and how feelings subvert conventional male expectations. Through his purposeful narration style McCarthy erodes the various foundations of authority and certainty. McCarthy bases his trilogy on mythological structures though he distorts these fundamental structures through his writing. Campbell sees the practice of silence coming from a spiritual failure in the characters and not as an expression of stoic self-control. The characters in McCarthy's stories do not achieve completeness despite entering other territories which demonstrates the inability of masculine perfection to work. The analysis designates the trilogy as an anti-bildungsroman because growth within it results solely in sorrow. Campbell examines moral deadlocks as the main events which occur during the conclusion of each story. According to Campbell McCarthy constructs his trilogy to present masculinity as a developmental process that moves away from knowledge acquisition rather than toward it. According to Campbell McCarthy defines the Western hero archetype by incorporating mystifying aspects and emotional distress in his work.

**Findings**

Through his *Border Trilogy* analysis Cormac McCarthy methodically dismantles traditional western understanding about heroic manhood that characterizes American male figures. The trilogy shows its characters John Grady Cole and Billy Parham moving through ambiguous terrain by providing complex characters who lack double certainty about their strength or morality. The study reveals that in McCarthy's work masculinity exists through enduring periods as well as the process of ethical contemplation and displaying emotional weakness. The main characters fight to defend their ancestral honour codes along

with their concepts of justice even though these principles fail to function properly in their morally damaged environments. The male characters experience an identity breakdown at physical and psychological borders showing masculinity exists in transitional states while rejecting the archetype of fixed heroic masculinity.

Silence creates two dimensional effects in these novels because it shows both how traditional male behaviour restricts emotional expression as well as how it enables such revelations stylistically. Through limited verbal expression the characters display trapped psyche states that shows them unable to free themselves from their recognized yet unexpressed identities. The narrative presents family instability and missing strong female roles because these elements push the main characters into social isolation for which they drift rootlessly through an amoral space without borders. *Cities of the Plain* demonstrates through its narrative how love fails and death is bound to happen and violence achieves nothing while showing a somber view of male personality.

The author explores borderlands through numerous thematic threads which transform spaces into thresholds for identity redefinition. Through the trilogy McCarthy shows the U.S.-Mexico border functions beyond its geographical purpose because it represents a spiritual boundary that impacts individuals emotionally. McCarthy transforms the landscape into a visual representation showing characters' feeling of being detached from themselves. The trilogy explores whether masculine traditional values including courage along with stoicism and sacrifice can exist anymore when moral truth transforms into uncertainty. McCarthy presents manhood in an ambiguous way throughout his work because he avoids giving definitive answers about its meaning which prompts readers to rethink the emotional and ethical impact of masculinity during a time when myths have weakened.

### **Suggestions**

The research conclusions from *The Border Trilogy* produce multiple recommendations for academic readers and cultural thinkers studying masculinity and identity. The academic community requires additional investigation into how non-traditional male characters present themselves within Western frontier literature. Through his writing McCarthy unveils essential research paths about how masculine stories can feature fundamental elements of emotional crises and emotional struggles alongside moral ambiguity. Researchers need to study how alternative character representations of western heroes combat established clichés within the genre while shaping new moral perspectives.

Research approaches from different fields enhance our comprehension of the masculinity direction found in McCarthy's works. Literary analysis of John Grady Cole and Billy Parham gains new perspectives through the combination of knowledge from gender studies psychology and ethical theories. The main characters experience both external events from their worlds and internal battles between their sense of meaning departure from self and their unconscious emotions and inner identities. Psychological identity models and moral development principles help explain why McCarthy's characters represent collective masculine struggles between men and women in contemporary society.

Thirdly teachers and critics should employ *The Border Trilogy* to display literary analysis of how literature constructs and sustains gender norms and destabilizes them. Academic discussions on masculinity would benefit from including McCarthy's trilogy since it presents complex characters who defy straightforward images of traditional gender norms. The analysis of silence together with themes about isolation along with ethical ambiguity issues would lead students toward heightened academic involvement in contemporary gender politics.

Future academic research should investigate comparative structures that merge McCarthy with modern writers who explore comparable themes including Larry McMurtry, Annie Proulx, and Denis Johnson in order to create a complete chart of evolving masculine identities in American literature. These comparative studies would disclose both universal thematic patterns as well as distinctive storytelling approaches for developing new versions of masculinity in unstable moral environments.

Academic research must examine how geographical areas together with spatial elements affect gender identity development. The author employs the border motif as a dynamic feature which extends beyond scenery to participate actively in character development. Writers can study how characters' moral logic develops through their experience of actual and metaphorical borders as they construct their individual identities. McCarthy's trilogy acts as academic research potential because it enables studies about the development of masculinity throughout its storyline.

## CONCLUSION

The Border Trilogy by Cormac McCarthy includes *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain* to deliver substantial reflections on male character development and moral ambiguities which break down traditional Western myths from literature and popular culture. McCarthy develops his protagonists John Grady Cole and Billy Parham to portray frontline manhood inside a bleak framework because it becomes irrelevant in the modernistic reality of contemporary society. These characters live trapped in emotional and moral confusion as they face their adverse environment and shattered relationships while following self-imposed ethical standards which makes them social outsiders.

Through its use of minimal conversation alongside long moments of quiet and poetic storytelling style the narrative technique matches how men in the story experience alienation within themselves. Through the inability of conventional masculine standards such as strength and stoicism and violence to find salvation McCarthy criticizes traditional male gender roles. The story's central elements transform into enduring strength along with emotional depth as well as moral uncertainty which defines its tragic portrayals of masculinity. The ethical landscapes navigated by characters show no absolute separation of good areas from bad territories because each character must ponder choices while facing results that only lead to defeat rather than success.

McCarthy employs the U.S.-Mexico border both as an actual location and as a symbolic element to enhance his profound exploration. The border functions as a metaphysical frontier because it allows identity transformation and the protagonists seek more than just power but meaningful experience. McCarthy places his male characters in a literary context where they endure a transitional state beyond definable realities to confront previously hidden spiritual remnants of the past.

Through *The Border Trilogy* McCarthy transforms masculine stereotypes into a process of internal struggle that produces harmful effects throughout the narrative. McCarthy leads readers through an examination of Western mythological assumptions to make them understand the emotional components and moral costs of preserving outdated heroic standards. The author presents a masculinity representation which embraces uncertain paths and accepts failure as part of human nature and strongly rejects easy solutions. The literary and gender discourse analysis of male identity in McCarthy's trilogy remains profoundly relevant and guides foundational understanding of the topic.

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