

## Greenblatt's Self-fashioning in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*

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### Abstract:

In *Blood Meridian*, the formation of a violent identity can be traced by applying Greenblatt's ideas concerning self-fashioning, in which a self-conscious character's reaction to dilemmas, doubts, and beliefs are taken into consideration. In addition, any significant view offered or questioned by the character can enhance our understanding of the formation of identity. The role assumed, created, performed, or opposed by the character can also reveal the process of self-fashioning. In the confrontation between authority and alien, the way an individual or a group deals with opposing ideas and negotiates with the alternatives can result in a new mobility which presupposes constraints. Identities are shaped by negotiating with the alternatives through dialectical processes. In this paper, different characters are studied to discover whether they share the same tastes as those of figures in power or they are far removed from their tastes.

**Keywords:** identity, constraint, self-fashioning, culture, authority, alien, confrontation

### Introduction

Greenblatt believes that "there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities" (Greenblatt, 2012: 1). He attempts to consider the impacts of the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures in the formation of identity. He finds the change "difficult to characterize in our usual ways because it is not only complex but resolutely dialectical" (Greenblatt, 2012: 1). This dialectical quality can be related to Greenblatt's view of culture as a totality bristling with challenges and conflicts. Thus, in the light of this view, which gives culture a dynamic nature, the concept of self can be formulated with regard to how individuals deal with opposing ideas. Any new mobility presupposes constraints, and any alternative ideas, views, or theories are accompanied by opposing concentrated efforts. It

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is in such dialectical processes that individuals fashion their identities by negotiating with the alternatives.

Greenblatt traces the meanings of the word “fashion” as a verb which had been used long “for the action or process of making, for particular features or appearance, for a distinct style or pattern,” (Greenblatt, 2012: 2) but he continues that the term “fashion” in the sixteenth century was widely used “as a way of designating the forming of a self” (Greenblatt, 2012: 2). Greenblatt suggests that such a forming may have contained various meanings including imposing a physical form on an individual. He says that the word “fashioning” during the Renaissance “may suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving” (Greenblatt, 2012: 2). There was a distinctly significant shift, he adds, in the meanings of fashioning from its frequent religious usage, i.e. fashioning and altering unto Christ, towards its secular meanings including cultural practices ranging from instilling good manners in children by parents and teachers to the “representation of one’s nature or intention in speech or actions” (Greenblatt, 2012: 3). The diverse meanings of “fashioning” form the basis of Greenblatt’s reasoning that self-fashioning functions without drawing any rigid lines of demarcation between literature and social life. Self-fashioning knows no boundaries in the invention of literary characters, the forming of one’s own identity, the experience of being shaped by external forces over which one has no control, and the project of trying to shape other selves. If such boundaries are defined or established, then there will be the loss of “a sense of the complex interactions of meaning in a given culture” (Greenblatt, 2012: 3). Greenblatt implies that literary symbolism should not be separated from the symbolic structures which operate elsewhere because art alone is not a human creation and humans themselves are not but cultural constructions. In other words, art and human beings as constructions are created within symbolic structures. Thus, a literary critic is required not to observe rigid divisions between literature and other aspects of social life if he/she is interested in maintaining that sense of the complex interactions of meaning. Greenblatt indicates that identity is formed by and forms the social structures via interactions between them and that just as identity is a cultural construction, so culture is produced by humans. What he is aiming at by these points can be encapsulated as literature and the social structures are culture-bound.

According to Greenblatt, there are three ways in which literature functions: “as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes” (Greenblatt, 2012: 4). Greenblatt clearly states that the interpretive practice he has in mind must deal with

all the three above-mentioned functions to practically ensure the maintenance of the larger cultural networks of meaning within which the author and his works participate, to avoid the complete absorption of literature in an ideological superstructure, and to preserve the connections between literature and social life through its relations to both individuals and institutions. As a result, the interpretations of literature must not limit itself to only the author's biography, or to solely the social rules and instructions shaping behavior, or to merely the reflection on the prevailing social codes, but they must encompass all of them since neither is literature autonomous nor human essence is timeless or cultureless. The goal of this critical practice, within which literature is viewed as a part of the system of signs forming any given culture, is a poetics of culture, a term Greenblatt applies to the "study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices" (Greenblatt, 1998: 5). Poetics of culture involves the intellectual, social, psychological and aesthetic aspects of self-fashioning.

Greenblatt suggests that "the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text" (Greenblatt, 1998: 5) should be investigated. He stresses that the literary text is the focus of attention in the study of self-fashioning since a literary text records and expresses the struggles and harmonies of a given culture and since the resonances of literature give rise to interpretations. Treating history as a text implies that history, like other texts, is part of the fashioning of a culture; therefore, neither history nor culture of any given time can be fully reconstructed and reentered, and it is impossible for the literary critic to leave behind his/her situation.

Kiah Siobhán Karlsson disputes the general notions of American historical and cultural identity concerning the American West and labels such a history a monologue. Karlsson demonstrates how McCarthy questions the representation of history through the character of Judge Holden, who asserts his control over things and people, by reasoning that resorting to violence is exercising will and dominating lives outside Holden's own destiny, by means of which he integrates "the subjective and objective constituents of others into a sense of his own being and entitlement" (2011: 8).

William Carl Brannon analyzes McCarthy's employment of conflict and its resolution through violence, as two narrative conventions of the Western genre, and examines the raging conflict in *Blood Meridian* owing to the reward offered for scalping and murdering the land's indigenous inhabitants, which in turn induces the most critical period of westward expansion. Brannon continues that "The incessant violence in the novel serves as an indictment of imperialism, suggesting that the process of westward expansion necessitates the subjugation of others

and in turn creates conditions conducive to the existence of Glanton's gang and similar parties" (2003: 20–21).

Cody Todd explores the function of violence, rebellion, immorality, and Manifest Destiny in *Blood Meridian* and examines their implications on American settlement in the southwest. Todd regards Judge Holden with his unjustified will to power as a symbolic representation of evil, who asserts his right to change the natural order of the universe. He also considers the paradoxical lawlessness and law enforcement through the reabsorption of villains by the state to build the empire in the process of westward expansion, aiming at the white American settlement in the west. Todd considers *Blood Meridian* an acknowledgement of "the depravity and blood-lust of American expansion. While the violence of *Blood Meridian* implicates Manifest Destiny, the ideological justification of the latter falls short – at least in the minds of its characters" (2013: 1–2).

Carlos Martinez holds that *Blood Meridian* with its "unrelenting violence, gore, atrocity, and abomination ... critique(s) the self-righteous mythology of expansion and modernization that dominate American discussions of westward expansion" (2012: 259). To him, McCarthy's choice of historical figures and places in this novel is determined by his conscious evaluation of values in a historically significant moment in the American context that would resonate with anyone who is rather familiar with the cultural discussion of this seminal moment in the American history.

Kevin Stadt examines the relationships between postmodern epistemology and grotesque violence in contemporary American novels including McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. The basis of his discussion is that the questioning of the objective knowledge and the universal truth leads to both the rejection of the epistemological matrices and the reconstruction of novel ones, having the potential to destabilize and subvert identity, history, and morality. Stadt concentrates on the relationship between knowledge and truth, on one hand, and the violence of the novel, on the other. In his investigation, he considers *Blood Meridian* with its grotesque violence "the central determining knowledge of man, God, morality, and nature. McCarthy recoils from relativism and establishes brutality as the center of the novel's epistemology, making the murder of innocents an end in itself" (2009: 9).

Daniel Weiss examines violence in McCarthy's novels to discover how the individual and the social reality are related. The examination extends to the exploration of the traditional American delineation of landscape and McCarthy's depiction of landscape, considering Immanuel Kant's and Edmund Burke's vision of the sublime as a beautiful but frightening place. Weiss states that "McCarthy's novels position violence as central in the construction of individual subjectivity

and social reality, as it is inseparable from traditional ideas of American landscape and progress” (2009: 3). He believes that it is significant to study McCarthy as a single writer because his novels “construct violence in the relationship between social subjects and the background of social reality in a way that collapses difference and provides a new reading of the American tradition” (2009: 3).

Jay Barclay Owens discusses cultural myths of the western frontier in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* and examines the prevalence of excessive, mindless violence in this novel in the climate of cultural shifts transpiring during the Vietnam epoch, when the violence, atrocities, and horrors of war came to light through their depiction in the media, revealing the brutal face of modern combat.

Benjamin N. Lisle argues that McCarthy in *Blood Meridian* reconstructs the significant Western myth of regeneration through violence by means of rendering the inherent tension in humanity between the violence and the inspiration coming from the Western myth. Lisle demonstrates “how the novel attempts to deny the formative American myth of regeneration through violence” (2006: 3). He holds that the objective and graphic illustration of prolific violence is aimed at disaffirming any assessment of violence to rationalize it.

Meredith Snodgrass examines McCarthy’s characters’ wanderings through the vast countryside which causes wavering from their pasts to the uncertainty of their futures. He believes that violence in McCarthy is presented in a way to be regarded with awe and wonder. Snodgrass views *Blood Meridian* having a fertile ground for an object-oriented reading and holds that McCarthy’s “characters’ senseless violence and disregard for human life make it much easier for other objects to take center stage, even if only momentarily” (2013: 69).

Guadalupe V. Linares explores McCarthy’s portrayal of the historical violence that led to the wake of the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War. He refers to McCarthy’s revision of the Western by deviating from depicting the ideally popular image of the Western hero winning out in the face of death. Linares adds that McCarthy reconstructs a world “that recasts old myths and highlights the violence and racism for which previous narratives have tried to offer explanations or have overlooked altogether. McCarthy emphasizes stories that have been subsumed by the glorified mythos surrounding the settlement of the West” (2013: 20). McCarthy challenges the idealized representations of Westward expansion by his direct addressing of historical memory through incorporating fact into fiction.

Stacey L. Peebles examines the unusual depiction of violence in *Blood Meridian*, in which compelling violence and the impossibility of the assimilation of its hard facts exist as a narrative premise. Peebles

believes that “Explanations or conclusions created by assimilating the hard facts of violence within an ethical, political, or even aesthetic system would do a certain violence to violence itself” (2004: IV). She adds that McCarthy’s substituting plot by violence, which attracts the reader by the linguistic power of violence and its depiction, is an attempt to dispute the notions of narrative as well as historical understanding.

## **Discussion**

### **Self-fashioning and individual’s authority**

The confrontation between an authority and an alien leads to self-fashioning. What is produced in this confrontation has certain characteristics of the authority and the alien. The identity thus shaped contains among other things the signs of its own subversion or loss.

To see how self-fashioning works in practice requires the reader to focus on a character that is a self-conscious figure in the literary work, to pay attention to what dilemmas, doubts, and beliefs the character expresses, and as an observer what view, whether that of an insider or that of a skeptical bystander, he/she offers or questions. In addition, attention should be directed to the role the character assumes or creates for him/herself and to whether at any point in the story the character shows any inclination not to perform that role. Furthermore, it is significant to notice whether the character shares the same tastes as those of people in power or he/she is far removed from their tastes.

As a self-conscious character in the novel, the kid, though having committed appalling atrocities, sometimes feels compelled to acts of mercy. When Captain White’s army of filibusters are attacked by thousands of Comanche Indians, the kid wants to help a wounded soldier “with an arrow hanging out of his neck” (McCarthy, 1992: 55) in spite of being in imminent danger of losing his life. The kid, at times, demonstrates a proclivity toward the role of a caring character with noble intentions and kind deeds.

Throughout the novel, moments can be traced when the kid feels irrevocably committed to help others while he is urged to leave them and save himself. The fatally wounded Sproule, for instance, insists that the kid should save himself, but the kid deviates from a course of egocentric behavior; hence, he does not share the utter selfishness of the cold and heartless villains of the novel.

The kid also shows human feelings of mercy by trying to save McGill, who is lanced. This is an example of a confrontation between the kid, as the alien, making an ill-fated attempt to help McGill, and Glanton, as an authority, who expressly forbids the kid from any attempt to save him, and Glanton himself calculatingly shoots McGill coldly as a wounded gang member is not only of no use but of a burden. In fact, since any member of the gang critically wounded can be a crippling

burden to the gang, that member is perceived by the authority as false or negative and his association with the gang must be dispensed with. The kid obeys Glanton's command this time and plays the role of a rather truly submissive and passive member in the process of forming a violent group identity, but when David Brown, carrying an arrow in his thigh, begs for help, no one but the kid is ready to attend him and removes the arrow's point and shaft. The kid, like other members of the gang, can refuse Brown's request for help, but he provides Brown with help, i.e. producing a new sense of self different from others, indicating that the kid has not lost all human qualities and adopts a sympathetic rather than indifferent or dismissive attitude towards Brown's plight, which is far from the qualities required of a violent gang. The kid as an individual assertively deals with the opposing view.

The kid also performs a similar willful act of mercy when he is supposed by lottery to kill Shelby, the Mexican badly wounded in the firefight between Sonoran army and the Glanton's gang, as Shelby, along with three others, cannot continue to ride with remaining scalp hunters. The kid's noble endeavor to minimize his role in murder, as an alternative approach to authority, despite incurring serious risks of being fatally punished by Glanton for this act of mercy, as opposing concentrated efforts, provides another piece of evidence confirming the existence, although dim, of human qualities. The kid shows an inclination not to perform the role determined by the authority. In this dialectical process, the kid questions the view of the insider and fashions his identity by negotiating with the alternatives, and it is in these series of outright confrontation that the kid's identity is being constructed as having both the brutality of the dominant attitude, i.e. that of the authority, and the tender mercy of the alien, which is completely removed from the tastes of the authority. Such an identity also has the signs of its own loss too as he passes up the chance of getting rid of the Judge in the desert near the wells of Alamo Mucho despite Tobin's urging him to shoot the Judge.

He extends his mercy to Tobin too when escaping from the Judge. Interestingly, his act of mercy is responded by nature's mercy, i.e. the wind obliterates their footprints to ensure their survival. They also receive mercy from Diegueno Indians; "They would have died if the Indians had not found them" (McCarthy, 1992: 312).

In such moments, the kid, despite his acts of gross indecency, is distinguished from the brutal company that he keeps, especially the Judge, who expresses his discontent with the kid's preserving in his heart some mercy for their quarry and the wounded gang members. The kid is blamed by the Judge for betraying the enterprise of the scalp hunters by being too merciful and not giving his entire agency to

warfare. The kid is accused of creating a role for himself and not performing the role demanded by an authority. The Judge associates the dance with warfare and believes that the dance is a ritual, so it includes bloodshed; otherwise, it would be a mock ritual. He says that the dancers are informed of their roles. He continues that the dance contains its own arrangement and history which the dancers are not required to contain. The Judge adds that when “war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question” (McCarthy, 1992: 344), those who are aware of the sanctity of blood will turn into false dancers, like the kid, and will be excluded from the dance, and finally there will always be one true dancer, the Judge himself. “Only that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance” (McCarthy, 1992: 345). The kid has questioned the sanctity of blood and has not participated in the Judge’s dance of war; he has played the role of a false dancer. He is a great danger to the Judge’s religion of war, for which the kid is regarded as a heretic and traitor, and accordingly deserving execution. The kid’s tendency towards acts of mercy stands in stark contrast with the Judge’s full dedication to violence and war, which results from the aesthetic pleasure he derives from them because of the close connection he establishes between the dance and warfare. This intense but malicious pleasure, which the kid cannot fully grasp and experience, transcends any other pleasure for the Judge.

Near the end of the novel, the kid buys from a soldier the necklace of ears that Brown wore to the scaffold, and he wears it when setting “out for Fremont on the Sacramento River with a train of wagons and pack animals. If the conductor had any curiosity about the necklace he kept it to himself” (McCarthy, 1992: 324). Considering the fact that during this time he leads not a violent but rather humane life, the necklace can be reminiscent of his dark past and may be taken as his unconscious desire to always remember his great potential for violence. Regarding this fact that the kid’s self-fashioning is achieved in relation to violence perceived as alien and strange, savagery is embodied in the necklace of ears to be condemned. The kid creates a new sense of self, which disapproves of savagery, by cancelling the old violent sense of self.

The Bible which he carries, although he can read no word of it, implies his break from ferocity and bloodshed and his inclination towards virtue and mercy. Self-fashioning for the kid entails submission to the sacred book as the authority which is situated outside the self. The Bible, as part of a social structure, imposes constraints on the kid as an individual and shapes his identity by playing the role based on Christian teachings, which reject violence.



Considering this idea that an individual's authority is another one's alien, violence, the gang's authority, turns into the kid's alien. This transformation is metaphorically confirmed when he kills Elrod, who has a taste for violence. The kid's violent act of murdering his own belligerent and vicious image projected onto Elrod can represent denying his past violent self. This act can be rendered as the kid's reproducing his new sense of self.

Moreover, the kid's retreat into silence towards the end of the novel evokes Tobin's assumption that "Almighty speaks most profoundly in such beings as lives in silence themselves" (McCarthy, 1992: 130). This is another piece of evidence substantiating his desire for mercy and virtue. Silence can be viewed as a strategy devised and utilized by the kid to reach an acceptable compromise in the process of self-fashioning in which the authority and the alien mutually impact each other.

The kid, whose identity has been shaped in the process of self-fashioning, contains savagery and violence of the authority and mercy of the alien, with the latter being a sign of his own loss. Thus, the kid, who has committed many outrageous acts of violence, becomes the man who finally experiences horrific and possibly sexual violence because he is not fully subscribed to violence and as a result controlled more by his violence than anything else.

### **Self-fashioning and Social Structure**

#### **A. Racism**

Self-fashioning occurs in the confrontation between the authority represented by Judge Holden, white supremacy, law enforcement in Tucson, and other Glanton's men's racial bias on one hand, and the alien represented by the black John Jackson on the other. The Judge introduces the black Jackson to Aguilar as an underling and adduces the inferiority of the black race by "references to the children of Ham, the lost tribes of Israelites, certain passages from the Greek poets, anthropological speculations as to the propagation of the races in their dispersion and isolation through the agency of geological cataclysm and an assessment of racial traits with respect to climatic and geographical influences" (McCarthy, 1992: 88–9). The Judge resorts to such social structures as family, religion, and education to produce a stereotypical representation of the black John Jackson' race. Both Jackson's bluntly asking the Judge what he has told Aguilar and the Judge's evading the question indicate that he senses an inaccurate and stereotypical representation of himself. The black John Jackson is, in fact, dealing with an opposing view, racism, i.e. the blacks' savagery and moral inferiority, which is itself a kind of violence. His sense of self is being formulated through his refusing to shake hands with Aguilar, his being

provoked, his sweating, his reaction against the unfair treatment of him, and finally his killing the white John Jackson. He assumes the role of, if not a superior, at least an equal rather than an inferior individual. The black Jackson had the alternative of accepting the segregation by race, but he does not find it suitable; thus, his act of decapitating the white Jackson is a new mobility to assert his existence, identity, and right. His assertion, beheading the white Jackson with a single stroke, is bold, strong, and confident enough not to presuppose constraints or to confront any opposing concentrated efforts, as manifested in the others' saying nothing and tacitly accepting the black John Jackson's action. The black Jackson self-fashions his identity by negotiating with the alternatives through his rejection of the white supremacy.

He also fully, forcefully, and boldly asserts his identity by brutally killing Owens, the proprietor, who, referring to the black John Jackson, says that he knows "for a fact that man yonder's a nigger" (McCarthy, 1992: 246). His shooting Owens causes a double handful of his brains go out the back of his skull and plop in the floor behind him. "Most terrible nigger I ever seen" (McCarthy, 1992: 246) is what Davy Brown cannot help uttering. This suggests that no constraints are placed and no opposing concentrated efforts are invested.

However, his extreme brutality has invested him with the qualities of a true dancer who can partake in the Judge's dance of war. That is why the Judge feels concerned about his brief desertion. The black Jackson is described to be dressed the same as the Judge "in a mantle of free flowing cloth" (McCarthy, 1992: 284) and standing beside him, suggesting a close affinity between them. The black Jackson remains loyal to the Judge's religion of warfare and becomes an ardent and avid disciple of the Judge's by accompanying him in the course of ruthless violence until he is killed in the Yumas' raid. In this confrontation, the black John Jackson has certain characteristics of the authority, like savagery as well as indifference to violence, and some attributes of the alien, such as autonomy, wanton savagery, and intense hatred of racist attitudes, remarks, and stereotypes. The black John Jackson shares the same tastes as the Judge, as the authority, and is far removed from his racist attitude of white supremacy. He does not play any role indicating any succumbing to inferiority, and he maintains the distance between himself and the racist world. This is the room for the irreconcilable aspect of the black John Jackson's self created by the negotiation between him as an individual and the world dominated by the white supremacy.

### **B. Christianity**

Such confrontation can also be seen between the Judge's religion of warfare, as an immoral authority, and Christianity, as a moral alien, leading to self-fashioning. The wickedness and violence of the world of the novel, represented by the Judge and manifested in the hideous

debauchery of the scalp hunters, who are described as “besotted bedlamites lurching and cursing and ringing the churchbells with pistolballs in a godless charivari” (McCarthy, 1992: 198), predominates over the observance of Christianity, manifested in the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Souls by the villagers in the town of Jesus Maria. The product in this confrontation can be individuals who have some characteristics of the authority and the alien. For example, the priest, bearing an icon of crucified Christ, who is drubbed and prodded obscenely, does not touch the gold coins the scalp hunters fling at him at first, but shortly after he orders the small boys who have collected them to bring him the coins, which are nothing but blood money. In this process of self-fashioning, Christianity, as a social structure, is involved. The priest’s submission to church as an institution imposes curbs on his conduct, but the priest cancels his sense of self as defined by his social and religious status; instead, he creates a new role for himself, i.e. the role of an individual for whom material considerations can outweigh spiritual ones. Thus, his identity is shaped by partially cancelling the role of a spiritual person and assuming the role of a material individual. In this confrontation, the priest shares the avarice, corruption, and worldliness of the immoral authority, serving to widen the gap between the grinding pragmatism and religious idealism by undermining his own moral authority, which is, in turn, responsible for the decay of Christianity. The immorality of the Judge can be explained with regard to his belief that morality “is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test” (McCarthy, 1992: 261). He asserts that morality cannot serve as a touchstone for judging human conduct. The priest’s partial withdrawal from public life is responsible for his not fully abiding by morality, possibly sharing the same idea concerning the invention of morality as the Judge’s.

Another product of this confrontation is the transformation of the Mexican townspeople from peaceful folks observing Christian rituals into violent people committing violent acts such as burning down the saloon and shooting the surviving members of Glanton’s gang who could not escape the town after Glanton dishonors the Mexican flag by tying it to the tail of a mule. The Mexican townspeople now embrace violence, as a trait of the immoral authority, as well as their religious beliefs, as manifested in their baptizing the surviving scalp hunters. Their violent response implies the ineffectuality of the passively peaceful Christianity, and the act of baptizing reflects their abiding faith in Christian teachings. In fact, the Mexican townspeople through the negotiation between the peacefulness of Christianity and the violent

behavior developing in their village make room for violence as an irreconcilable aspect of their religious self.

### **C. Defection**

Greenblatt believes that power enables one to impose his/her fiction on others, compelling them “either to participate in it or to watch it silently” (Greenblatt, 2012: 13). Defection from the Judge’s company means not taking part in the Judge’s fiction, “war is the truest form of divination ... war is ... a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god” (McCarthy, 1992: 261). It ends in violent death. Grannyrat, having defected from the Judge’s company, does not partake in the Judge’s fiction. He is perhaps killed by the two Delawares, who bring with them his horse. The burning of Grannyrat’s saddle and blanket implies this fact that not only the defector’s existence but any trace of him must be obliterated. Therefore, he is obliterated to silently watch the Judge’s fiction. Later on, the other two defectors from the gang are found strung up and skinned by the pursuing Indians.

Greenblatt also holds that real power exists when people are prevailed upon to conduct themselves according to conventions, doctrines, rules, and principles in which they do not even believe. In fact, power lies in the capacity of a system to what extent it can make people of a given culture involved in the power structure by assuming a role and playing a part in it.

Toadvine, for instance, becomes so enraged at the Judge’s insensitive brutality to the Apache infant that he aims a pistol at the Judge’s head, but takes one of the two options the Judge offers him, i.e. putting the gun away rather than shooting him. Toadvine performs the role that the Judge expects from him and participates in the power structure which the Judge imposes. Toadvine’s remaining vestiges of humanity is no match for the Judge’s extreme cruelty in the power structure of the fictional world of *Blood Meridian*, indicating that Toadvine is overcome to perform according to the rules and principles of this hectic gang. He is also stripped of his courage to firmly uphold his conviction that the Tiguas are peaceful people despite voicing his objection to their bloody murder. This may lead to a paradox which is simultaneous engagement, whether social, political, intellectual, etc, and alienation, resulting from adopting a role and consequently being far removed from one’s true self. Toadvine’s role expectations make him experience a feeling of alienation from his true self and become more engaged in violence. This is validated by Toadvine’s capricious personality which demonstrates two contradictory tendencies: a ruthlessly seasoned murderer fiercely disapproving of murdering the innocent. Thus, self-fashioning should account for the distance one maintains between oneself and the world, between one’s observation and role-playing, and between one’s inner life and public life. In the



process of self-fashioning, withdrawal from public life and playing different roles upon necessity can be traced to perceive how identity is shaped. In this way, literature not only reveals the social and cultural codes regulating, restricting, and reinforcing behavior but also offers critical remarks as well as insightful comments on those codes. Despite these, Toadvine shows an act of mercy by staying truly loyal to the kid, who is cripplingly wounded by the Yumas. In other words, as a result of the process of self-fashioning, Toadvine has kept one of the characteristics of the alien, i.e. mercy.

### **Conclusion**

The identity in *Blood Meridian* is gained and maintained through the complex processes of fashioning, cancelling, producing, and reproducing different senses of self. The kid undergoes the process of self-fashioning by partially submitting to violence as well as expressing doubts about the ruthless streaks of cruelty and questioning the Judge's religion of war. His submissive and assertive approach to the opposing views, performing the required role or creating a new one, negotiating with the alternatives in the bloody, violent, and even verbal confrontations, being on the side of authority or being considered an alien, and the strategies he devises and utilizes are all involved in the formation of his identity which embraces the characteristics of both the authority and the alien. The kid cancels, produces, and reproduces different senses of self to become the man endorsing mercy and virtue as well as abhorring his past violent experiences at the end of the novel.

The black John Jackson, experiencing the confrontation between the authority and the alien, fashions his identity by reproducing his sense of self and opposing the racist stereotypes. His self-fashioning involves negotiating with the alternatives the outcome of which is a violent identity that not only rejects the white supremacy but challenges it. He performs the roles of authority and alien. When he is the object of racist attitude, he appears as a really violent alien asserting his superiority strongly and savagely.

Self-fashioning also happens in the confrontation between social structures, i.e. Christianity and the Judge's religion of war; the resulting identity contains both material and spiritual aspects of the authority and the alien. In this confrontation, there are also fashioning, cancelling, and reproducing different senses of self. Again, the negotiation makes room for the irreconcilable aspects of self.

*Blood Meridian* provides a clear understanding of the mutual impact between individuals and culture when tracing the self-fashioning process in which different strategies are devised and utilized to arrive at an acceptable or inevitable compromise.

Blood Meridian as a literary work manifests McCarthy's concrete behavior which refuses violence because of his negative depiction of terrible atrocities occurring in his novel. It also expresses the codes, moral, immoral, religious, material, spiritual, and criminal, by which violent behavior is shaped. In addition, the novel is a reflection upon these codes which serve as alternatives facing characters in the process of self-fashioning when negotiating with them. Blood Meridian reveals the struggles and harmonies of its violent culture.

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