

The Multiple “I” Within the Narrative of William Faulkner’s Absalom! Absalom!

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to understand the connectivity between a writer’s psyche and the act of narrative creation within a novel. A literary work or novel that is chosen to be the material object in this research is a work from William Faulkner entitled *Absalom, Absalom!* This novel has a complicated narrative style in which the storyline is not linear; moreover, some too many narrators appear to replace the main character. The theory of schizoanalysis will be applied to get the result that the novel has a schizophrenia tendency in its narrative style. The word schizophrenia as it is explained by Deleuze and Guattari is a form of a breakthrough. By examining the narrative style it is concluded that the novel had schizophrenic tendencies and Faulkner has offered his readers new ways to free themselves from the binary opposition caused by the grand narrative in history.

Keywords: *Shizoanalysis, Deleuze, Guattari, Faulkner, Subjectivity*

William Faulkner is an important writer in the development of American literature, especially in the South. Faulkner is still the only Southern writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for his contribution to American literature by breaking the tradition of writing through something unique and of great artistic value. The prize was awarded in 1949, not for any of his novels, but for the narrative style found in all his novels from *The Sound and The Fury* onwards. As Peek (1999:121) says, it is no wonder that Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for his narrative style, because none of his novels after *The Sound and The Fury* can be read straightforwardly. This is because William Faulkner presents a narrative with many overlapping narrators, very dynamic, never forming a unity from one narrator to another, and also the story ends without unifying all the points of view raised.

William Faulkner's writing career did not begin with a smooth ride. His writing talent was evident even as a child. In the beginning, Faulkner wrote poetry a lot. The first poem Faulkner wrote was a poem for his mother, which he read at his school on Mother's Day. According to Matthew (1982:16), the poem was incomprehensible to the audience at the time, even to his

mother. Faulkner, however, was very pleased that his poem was incomprehensible. According to him, the poem was about a child's love for his mother, and love is inherently complex and not easily 'understood'. Therefore, if his poem about love could not be understood, he felt that he had succeeded in getting closer to the essence of love itself.

As Faulkner became more serious about writing, his partner told him he should go to New Orleans to meet Sherwood Anderson. Anderson was a famous writer who, like Faulkner, was from the South. At the time, Anderson had just finished writing *Dark Laughter* (1925), which was to become his best novel. Faulkner came to Anderson to get his opinion on the draft of his first novel, called *Soldier's Pay*, so that his work could be published. Anderson taught Faulkner a great deal and suggested changes to many parts of the novel, including a change in Faulkner's narrative style, which Anderson commented: "None of these publications wanted to publish this" (White, 1969:466). Faulkner followed all the advice of Anderson, whom he often referred to as his teacher. As a result, *Soldier's Pay* was published in 1926, and *Mosquitoes* the following year. Both sold very well. Faulkner, who was desperate for money at the time, was relieved that his novels were selling well, even though he had to change his character. With the publication of these two novels, Faulkner is often said to have a similar narrative style to Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

Faulkner next worked on a novel called *The Sound and The Fury*, which he wrote himself. He abandoned Anderson's teachings so that his novel could be easily published. Faulkner returned to his distinctive writing style, which can be described as complex and not easy to understand. Faulkner also began to write about the Civil War in America, which was treated as a background event to be seen from different points of view, presenting many narrators who all have their own stories and do not form a whole narrative. When the manuscript was finished, Faulkner sent it to the publisher who had published his first novel, although he was unsure. His guess was right, the

manuscript was rejected and he had to look for other publishers. As Porter (2007:37) says, Faulkner was very happy to be able to write again as himself, without having to think about money. Nevertheless, Faulkner was still unable to overcome his difficulties in finding a publisher until one finally agreed to publish his work in 1929.

In a preface written by the publisher, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith said that in *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner experimented with his writing style and spoke honestly about the complexities of society during the American Civil War (in Porter, 2007:33). The novel did not sell as well as his first novel, but it did not hurt sales. It led Faulkner to continue writing stories with his consistent writing style and also about the American Civil War. He published three more novels, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).

After a brief look at William Faulkner's writing career, one can see how his efforts to finally write in a different style were hindered by what the market wanted at the time. Sherwood Anderson, quoted in Evans (2008:14), said that Faulkner was taught to write the way Southerners wrote, by elegantly resisting much of the history that cornered and inferiorised the South. He did this, and his novels sold well, but after making a profit and being able to support himself, Faulkner began to write for himself. The uniqueness of the narrative in his works makes it very difficult for Faulkner to be considered a Southern writer. It is an interesting relationship to explore the formation of a unique narrative style like Faulkner's with the author's psyche as a subject.

Faulkner's Works in Focus

The study of narrative about something within the author or his or her psyche is not new. Many such studies have been carried out using psychological theories, such as psychoanalysis, adapted for use in literature. In psychoanalytical studies, the most important and first thing is to look at the identity of the author, whether he or she is an exile or a person who enjoys the trauma of a certain event, and so on. The study is usually used to find desire, by examining the narrative as a kind of signifying chain, in which metaphors and metonymies used by the author can be

found about his identity that has been stated at the beginning. These two things are then used as clues to find the author's desire manifested in literary works.

The relationship between the narrative and the author's psyche would be very interesting to study, especially in a unique narrative like Faulkner's, because he is not easily identifiable in his narratives as writing with a northern or southern mind. Although biographically it would be easy to see that he was born in Mississippi and never lived or moved to a northern state (Parini, 2005:127). Interestingly, Faulkner has more than one chain of meaning in his narratives, and traces of his Southern identity are omitted from the narratives of his novels (Evans, 2008:93). In psychoanalysis, Faulkner's failure to recognise himself as a Southerner and his inability to know his identity with certainty could lead to the conclusion that he experienced ego-loss, which usually occurs in the development of subjects who do not know who they are and their position in the social environment. For this reason, this research will use another psychiatric theory, schizoanalysis, to find other options for Faulkner's possible ego loss.

Most readers are confused about the meaning of schizophrenia. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is not a mental disorder. They write that they 'have not seen a schizophrenic in this writing' (1983:456). They also see schizophrenia as a subject that has infinite semiosis, so that it is never connected to a single, complete object. Deleuze and Guattari, following Melanie Klein's concept of the partial object, explain that the subject's connection is not really with an object as a whole, but only with a partial object. For Klein, the subject's relationship to the object will never be intact, which means that if it is intact, then that is what needs to be suspected. The relationship between subject and object mustn't lead to a relationship with the whole object, because what is prioritised from the relationship with the whole object is the full meaning of the object. The full

meaning itself will never be achieved, so it will only lead the subject to produce nothing for itself (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 210).

The “I” in B

To select the novel by Faulkner to be used as the material object of this study, the researcher read many critics' responses written in several biographical books of William Faulkner to get *Absalom, Absalom!* to be used in this study. The critics say that of his four novels about the Civil War in America, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a masterpiece in terms of writing style. Faulkner's writing style seems much more developed. The dynamic between one narrator and another is not obvious, and this is what Faulkner wanted in terms of the ambition to maintain his style when faced with a difficult publishing situation (Peek, 1999:335). The narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* is more overlapping than in Faulkner's other works. There is a succession of narrators who are not unified. The appearance of one narrator and the appearance of a new narrator can make the story go backwards and seem to repeat the same thing with a different point of view, sometimes it goes forward but with a very different variety of points of view, and the transition between one narrator and another narrator is very unexpected. This makes it one of those complicated novels that are difficult for readers to understand.

In his novel *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner tells the story of Thomas Sutpen, a foreigner who comes to Yoknapatawpha with twenty black slaves and an architect. Sutpen wanted to build a plantation on 100 acres of land he had purchased from a tribe of Indians, which would later be called Sutpen's Hundred. With his cotton plantation, Thomas Sutpen became the richest man in town and the most important figure in the economic development of the town in which he lived. Not only did Sutpen become the most important person in the community's economy, but he also became the most mysterious figure in the community. That's because no one knew Sutpen's background. His estate, called Sutpen's Hundred, was 12 miles from the centre of town, and he

was a man who rarely talked about himself. His involvement in that great dark event in the history of the United States, the Civil War, made him an even greater influence on the people of his neighbourhood, especially with his title of Colonel. Sutpen, who was a figure of great influence in this society, then his identity was told by people who had a relationship with him and how Sutpen influenced their lives. Sutpen's story was first told by his sister-in-law to the grandson of Sutpen's close friend Quentin, who was going to Harvard. It is also told by Quentin's grandfather and father, then by Quentin to his friend at Harvard, a North American named Shreve, and finally by Shreve, who tells what he heard from Quentin. All the narrators have their views of Sutpen, which are presented in a balanced relationship, in the sense that they do not blame each other and there is no communication between the narrators that leads to conclusions.

The linearity that is completely lost in *Absalom, Absalom!* confuses the reader, who is even more confused by his habits. Faced with a narrative style that is full of piles and never achieves the wholeness of a story like Faulkner's, the reader still tries to find the wholeness in it, which makes the reader even more confused. Readers should rather think of William Faulkner's work as a piece of porcelain that has been thrown on the floor and they (readers), as the owner of the porcelain, are trying to put it back together piece by piece (Singal, 1997:76). Readers are accustomed to questioning the author's position or ideology in literary works as if it were a given. What many fail to realise is that ideology can only be found in a work if the author positions his or her work as a representation of his or her mindset as an 'I' subject resulting from his or her existence as a social subject reflected in a linear and non-overlapping plot (Deleuze, 1990:118).

Contrary to what readers might expect, Faulkner never uses the intrinsic elements of the work in *Absalom, Absalom!* to show representation as an 'I' subject. By presenting many narrators with different identities in his work and placing them on an equal footing, Faulkner removes the traces of his ideology from his work. Ideology must be distinguished from 'ideological', which is

an adjective. Faulkner removes traces of his ideology in the sense that ideology is a noun as understood by Husserl, something that is created when there is a connection between the subject, his social environment, and things that are considered identical to him. Faulkner as a subject only has a connection with the social environment in the South, then what is identical to that connection and usually appears in other subjects who live in the same environment does not appear in him. Faulkner in his narrative, as noted above, shows a double connection between himself and the North and the South, even though they are opposites in the social environment. This certainly makes the traces of ideology in Faulkner's narratives vague, so it is said that the works of William Faulkner are works that represent no one, only an event told from many points of view that can be enjoyed by the reader (Matthews, 1982: 21).

The author's subject is positioned as a person with the ability to think and react to everything he sees and hears in the social environment where he is, and then write it down. This makes literary works a manifestation of the results of the author's thoughts, in which there is an intensity that has been formed based on the social environment in which he is. For this reason, the author is positioned very close to the Cartesian subject, where 'I think and I exist'. Thus, an 'I' is needed to write a literary work, while the 'I' itself needs the integrity of the identity obtained from culture, social environment, political views, etc. In other words, the author is a representation of the social environment. Therefore, the audience of literary works is trapped in two representations, namely the work is a representation of the author, whereas the author is a representation of the environment or social relations.

This begs the question: where is the other 'me'? Isn't there a lot of 'me' in the social environment? Why does the author, with his ability to see and hear, become blind and deaf to the other 'I'? As long as literary works are trapped in the circle of representation, they will become very subjective, where there is only 'I', and the others become the negation of 'I'. The negation of

the 'I' becomes unimportant or exists only to emphasise the presence of the 'I'. Writing it again in terms of Husserl's phenomenology, we obtain the equation of representation: $x = xI = \text{noty}$ ($I = II = \text{noty}$). The existence of I exists because of the negation of I, namely II, while II becomes nothing (noty) or only as a support for the existence of the 'I' or the 'I'.

The “I” Negation

The complexity of Faulkner's works is related to Faulkner's desire to see an event from different perspectives and to create a new model for seeing the history of an event (Basset, 1975: 114). In other words, Faulkner's work is said to be detached from the typical representation of phenomenology, which is identical to the equation of representation, in which there is only an open equation: $\dots + y + z + x + a + \dots$ (infinite and never reaching totality, so that the symbol '=' does not appear in it). It is not said to be infinite in the sense that the novel has no end, but the intrinsic elements in the novel are not captured as in the concept of the equation of representation. The 'I' in the novel is not in the main character or the main narrator, but its power is in all the characters presented in the novel. Again, looking at Husserl's concept of phenomenology, the subject can only be in one position in the bracketing, the rest being the power of binary opposition that makes the subject exist. In the open equation, the subject is not in one position in the bracketing but in both, and it is not impossible to enjoy the other bracketing (Deleuze, 1992:56)

Representation in the concept of phenomenology is also described by Deleuze and Guattari as something that affects psychoanalysis and vice versa (1983: 21). In this case, the ego is formed from Oedipus and the social environment, the performance of Oedipus allows the subject to recognise his position or identity, while at the same time gaining control to remain in his position. On the other hand, the subject, with his identity, will find the intensity of the social environment that suits him, and there the subject will play a role in the continuity of social production, which always appears in binary oppositions. The power of the social environment in the formation of

the subject means that the author, as a subject, is also formed by his connection with the social environment. The social environment, with all its intensity of the two concepts, prevents the subject from enjoying only one of them (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983:21). Judging by the power of his scattered narratives, Faulkner has transcended both concepts. In the sense that his position is no longer on one side and the intensity of the social environment he feels is no longer on one side.

To understand Faulkner's work, which escapes closed representation, it is time, as Foucault said, not to ask 'why' but to replace it with 'how'. It is therefore necessary to understand the process of the complexity of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* without imposing the position of the author's subject, because Faulkner has gone beyond the concept of the 'I' in phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Leitch (2014:3) says that literary works with narratives that do not show the author's position in the social environment are considered nonsense. If the author's detachment from representation is shown by a complex narrative, then it is often said that the narrative is complex for no reason. For this reason, it is important to examine how the complexity of the narrative in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is formed through an exploration of his psyche.

This study, as mentioned earlier, will examine the relationship between narrative and the psyche of the author as a subject. One of the things that must be possessed by the subject in the making of his or her psyche, both unconscious and conscious, is desire (Atlas, 2015: 11). Desire is not only simply defined as the desire of the subject - desire has a logic that is divided into two, as Deleuze and Guattari (1983:25) state. The logic of desire makes desire inherently divided into two categories, namely acquisition and production. According to them, this logical division of the subject's desire has occurred since the Platonic period. The logic of the acquisition of desire is a position in which desire loses the object it wants through the acquisition of a social system that

prohibits it so that the subject continues to feel deprived. Meanwhile, desire with a productive logic has the opposite meaning in the sense that the subject will not feel a lack of objects to achieve, the subject will be free to connect with any object and become anything. Then, Leitch (2014: 54) says that the author as subject sometimes frees himself from the shackles of a social environment that requires him to choose who to write as or to recognise himself before finally writing a literary work. So if William Faulkner's narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* is detached from representation, then he has a desire that has a logic of production because he does not feel the limitations of identity as a Southerner. To have a desire with a logic of production, one needs a way to achieve it, because what the subject is faced with is social production, and of course, it will not be easy (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 25).

With the emergence of desire with the logic of production in William Faulkner's narrative as understood above, this research will not use psychoanalysis, even though the aim is to reveal the psychology of the author through the narrative in a work. This is because psychoanalysis will never have the logic of productive desire. After all, Oedipus always makes him feel deprived by not being able to achieve the object he wants. In addition, Oedipus makes the subject always remain in his position and enjoy the identity given to him (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983:26). Thus, to look further into William Faulkner's story, a theory is needed that also deals with desire, which gives it the logic of production. Deleuze and Guattari put forward a theory based on the freedom of the subject to associate with all kinds of objects without feeling deprived, because identity for both emerges at the end of the process of subjectivity. This theory, known as schizoanalysis, is then considered most appropriate to examine the narrative in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* which rejects the representation of the 'I'. The purpose of applying schizoanalysis

theory is to explain how the author's psychology as a subject plays a role in shaping the narrative in Absalom, Absalom!

Productive Desire

The theme of schizophrenia in Deleuze and Guattari's theory is closely related to the desire machine. Most important in this desire machine are the three syntheses of the unconscious: territorialisation, reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation. Schizophrenic subjects themselves have the lowest point in terms of the influence of social production. This is because, before reaching schizophrenia, the subject has to deterritorialise by activating the desired machine in the body without organs, which prevents the three syntheses of the subject's unconscious from ever reterritorialising. In order not to be attracted to the territory, it requires a very hard effort on the part of the desire machine to reject the recording that the social machine aims at the subject's desire machine. As Deleuze and Guattari say, the further the subject moves away from social production, the stronger the wind that brings it back to social production (1983:127).

The thing that puts the most pressure on the subject to territorialise is the assumption that he is a mentally ill person. For this reason, the schizophrenic subject must be someone who is not afraid of the title 'mad'.

These men of desire - or do they not yet exist - are like Zarathustra. They know incredible suffering, vertigo and illness. They have their ghosts. They have to reinvent every gesture. But such a man produces himself as a free man, irresponsible, lonely and joyful, finally able to say and do something simple in his name, without asking for permission; a desire that lacks nothing, a flow that overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no longer designates any ego. He has simply stopped being afraid of going mad. He experiences and lives himself as the sublime illness that will no longer affect him (1983:131).

Just like Zarathustra, who had many misfortunes, but always responded to them with simple things that allowed him to avoid misfortune, at least for himself. Then, when it is said that he is

insane, the title of insanity will no longer be meaningful, because desire in him does not experience a lack or repression that is prepared for the continuation of social production.

Deleuze and Guattari give meaning to 'madness' for schizophrenic subjects:

Madness need not only be a breakdown. It can also be a breakthrough...the person going through ego loss or transcendental experiences may or may not become confused in various ways. Then he may legitimately be considered mad. But to be mad is not necessarily to be ill, although in our culture the two categories have become confused...from the alienated starting point of our pseudo-sanity, everything is ambiguous. Our sanity is not 'true' sanity. Their madness is not 'true' madness (1983:132).

The meaning of madness itself does not indicate mental depravity, it is simply something that goes against social production. All sorts of things are not allowed to come into existence because if they are allowed to come into existence then social production and the forces within it might experience a shift in power or at least a disruption. This is why madness is also said to be a breakthrough in social production.

Schizophrenic subjects may show their deterritorialisation directly in their daily lives, but there are other ways. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:106), art, philosophy, film and literature are the best places for schizophrenic subjects to show their process of deterritorialisation. For literary works themselves, Deleuze and Guattari say that works that are considered schizophrenic are works that do not experience oedipalisation. This is because

Oedipalisation is one of the most important factors in the reduction of literature to an object of consumption, conforming to the established order and incapable of harming anyone. It is not a question here of the personal oedipalisation of the author and his readers, but of the oedipal form to which one tries to enslave the work itself, to make of it that little expressive activity which conceals ideology according to the dominant codes (1983:133).

Literary works, whether the author is trapped into writing a work as a reflection of his or her ideology, or the reader interprets it and makes the author have a certain ideology, a work that undergoes a process of oedipalisation. This is because having an ideology puts the work in two positions (for and against something) that are useful in the continuity of social production. Apart

from this, an oedipalised literary work can also be said to be one in which the author, in his narrative, enjoys a signifying chain that makes him have an intended signifier, which makes him direct the form of his expression towards that signifier (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:112). The author's loyalty to a signifying chain makes him a subject whose desire is repressed.

For this reason, literary works that are said to be schizophrenic must also be agrammatical (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:114). In this sense, the author has no allegiance to a chain of meaning, and his work does not have an ideology, but a flow that is itself in the middle of the Oedipal double-bind. On the other hand, the reader also plays an important role in making a literary work schizophrenic or oedipal. Deleuze and Guattari's disagreement with phenomenology leads them to think that literature is created as a package in which ideology is transformed, which is ridiculous:

How poorly the problem of literature is formulated, starting from the ideology it bears or from its co-option by a social order... for literature should have a style that is as syntactic, agrammatical, like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal; a production and not an expression (1983:136).

Conclusion

The complexity and chaos that appears in the narrative of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* show the author's active unconscious in the production of desire. By activating the desire machine to make the production of desire go hand in hand with the body without organs, William Faulkner certainly prevents himself from connecting with only one object as a whole. This keeps him away from the double bind trap that has been prepared in two forms, namely desire and social repression.

Through the novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner wants to show his desire to connect with all the objects involved in the civil war that took place in the United States. This is evident in his use of connections with objects in the form of a stream of memories about the events of the Civil War, obtained through the people closest to him. The use of these connections can be seen in the

presence of many narrators in the novel with different characterisations of the story. One narrator can have several different characterisations. For example, Rosa hates Sutpen as a landowner whose life has become chaotic. A moment later, however, she becomes a character who is willing to marry Sutpen.

Two of the highlights of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative style are the characterisation of the narrators and the points of view they present in their respective stories. These change constantly, not from one narrator to another, but within one narrator. This shows that William Faulkner's body without organs functions well by using its connection to the partial object that is the history of the Civil War in America. Faulkner combines the North and the South in a mixture that makes the narrative in his novel a unique one; one that never achieves unity. This proves that Faulkner is a schizophrenic subject, who did not write a novel about the Civil War by being a Southerner trying to correct history, or by being a Southerner who was Northern and said things like Abraham Lincoln, who condemned the landlords and forced an immediate end to slavery in the name of humanity. Faulkner chose to be both with equal intensity.

The diversity of viewpoints that the author provides by presenting multiple narrators undermines the absolute nature of grand historical narratives in seeing, or even creating, a view of anything. In this sense, Faulkner's narrative style is not nonsense. Its complexity can be explained by its origin about the three syntheses of the unconscious of the author as subject. Faulkner's narrative style is unique and different because of its schizophrenic tendencies, which makes it seem like a breakthrough. In this case, the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* is a breakthrough in not being trapped in the grand narrative of history when looking at events that happened in the past. It shows a schizophrenic tendency, with Faulkner being all the 'names' in the history of the Civil War.

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