

重述誰的故事？：

談威廉·福克納小說《押沙龍！押沙龍！》中敘事與歷史 的多重對話

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摘要

歷史與記憶一直以來都是人類延續與再現「過去」的主要途徑，然而兩者間的複雜關係引起了不同理論家的諸多討論，其中又以皮耶·諾拉(Pierre Nora)於其〈記憶的場景〉(*Les Lieux de memoire*)一書中對兩者的區分最為人所接受。他認為，記憶相對於歷史是一種生命；而歷史卻是充滿問題性、不完整的一種重構物。諾拉的理論打破了記憶如同「藏寶庫」的傳統僵化隱喻，重新賦予記憶多重性(multiplicities)與生成(becoming)的可能性，另外，在當中也揭示了歷史學家試圖藉著歷史化記憶(historicized memory)來實體化單一歷史的虛假性。換句話說，諾拉認為，記憶與歷史關係存在於相互編織的動態過程中 -- 記憶活化、豐富歷史，而歷史是記憶不斷生成與開展(unfolding)過程中的產物。但將兩者連接的主要媒介為何？或許我們可以在班雅民的論述中找到答案。班雅民認為真正傳遞歷史者並非一般的歷史學家(historian)而是「說故事者(storyteller)」。班雅民曾經說道：「對說故事者來說，他在金綠石(chrysoberyl)石化的、無生機的本質中預見與他（說故事者）所身處的歷史世界彼此間的相聯性。」也就是說，說故事者作為一位聯繫看似已經失去改變能力的「過去」歷史事件或記憶與自身所處的歷史時空氛圍(milieu)的媒介者，藉由他的敘事(narrative)，使聽者或讀者重新擁有了對「過去」全新詮釋的空間；再者，在其看似不斷重述故事(retelling)的過程中，過去、現在與未來不斷地貼合碰撞，提高了歷史(histories)彼此間對話的可能性。在此論述之下，「過去」的歷史事件或記憶則可視為無法全然翻譯的原文，在敘事的過程中將不斷地與當下外在環境彼此交織、傳譯、改寫、與開展。本文將連結班雅民的說故事者和其歷史論述，來重新閱讀美國小說家威廉·福克納的著名小說《押沙龍！押沙龍！》。文中作者藉由多名人物透過自己或他人的記憶間接或直接地以說故事的方式描繪小說中代表「過去」的如迷般的歷史人物 Thomas Sutpen，

在如此龐大複雜的敘事體系中，過去變得如迷一般而無法掌握。不同於以往對此小說的分析均著重在說故事者的論述內容，本文試圖論述書中主要人物都如同班雅民的說故事者，結合自身經驗與當下歷史氛圍持續地再現、重構、詮釋以及開展 Thomas Sutpen 的可能面貌，在此同時，也不知不覺地將自身經驗、記憶與當下氛圍帶入重構歷史對話的故事當中。

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<關鍵字>：班雅民、說故事者、歷史、敘事、辯證影像

**Retelling Whose Story?— Dialogues between History and Narrative in
William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom***

(Abstract)

History and memory are treated as access to preserving and representing the lost past in human civilization. The former is constructed discursively and the latter is formed psychologically. The interrelation between history and memory has brought forth lots of debates among critics. Pierre Nora, one of the most influential contemporary French philosophers, in his famous book *Les Lieux de memoire* states that memory is life while history is a kind of construction problematic and fragmentary. The statement not only challenges the conventional petrified metaphor of memory as a “treasure house” but also debunks the myth of a unitary History. Nora here re-endows memory with a power of becoming and denies the traditional concept that history is constituted by a sequence of historicized memories designated by historians. In other words, Nora believes that memory and history are in a dynamic reciprocally-determined relation—memory activates and enriches history and history is unfolding and rewriting itself in the flow of time continually. But who is the mediator facilitating the virtual memory to realize into the actual history? To put simply, what makes the psychical phenomena realized into the discursive ontology? Maybe the answer can be found in Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Storyteller.” In this essay, Benjamin states that the person who really transmits history is not a historian but a storyteller. A storyteller as a mediator is able to “communicate” the past historical events personal or collective with the present milieu he lives in. Through the storytelling, audience or readers have much more freedom to interpret and communicate with the ungraspable past. As long as the story is retold or the historical events are re-narrated, the present and past will keep encountering with each other, which causes the emergence of a new image the hi/story. Each of the images reflects a truth of the hi/story and gives people a new perspective to comprehend the history. Consequently, if we presuppose historical narrative and storytelling are homologous, then we can infer that both historians and storytellers continue reconstructing the

ungraspable past via narratives. In this paper, I would like to reread William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* in terms of Benjamin's vision of the storyteller and his concept of history in order to explicate how the Sutpen history is rewritten and retold again and again through different modes of storytelling, how those storytellers make themselves as part of the Sutpen history unconsciously and finally how the unknowable past becomes visible in their storytelling.

<key word>: Walter Benjamin, storyteller, history, narrative, dialectical-image

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William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom***

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History and memory are treated as access to preserving and representing the lost past in human civilization. The former is constructed discursively and the latter is formed psychologically. The interrelation between history and memory has brought forth lots of debates among critics. Pierre Nora, one of the most influential contemporary French philosophers, in his famous book *Les Lieux de memoire* states that memory is life while history is a kind of construction problematic and fragmentary. The statement not only challenges the conventional petrified metaphor of memory as a "treasure house" but also debunks the myth of a unitary History. Nora here re-endows memory with a power of becoming and denies the traditional concept that history is constituted by a sequence of historicized memories designated by historians. In other words, Nora believes that memory and history are in a dynamic reciprocally-determined relation—memory activates and enriches history and history is unfolding and rewriting itself in the flow of time continually. But who is the mediator facilitating the virtual memory to realize into the actual history? To put simply, who makes the psychical phenomena realized into the discursive ontology? Maybe the answer can be found in Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller." In this essay, Benjamin states that the person who really transmits history is not a historian

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William Faulkner’s ninth novel, *Absalom, Absalom* (1936), is regarded as his most intricate and ambitious historical novel, which marks the creative and time-consuming effort of the author. Unlike the traditional historical narrative narrated in the third person monolithic voice, this work tries to reshape the American South history via several different narratives so as to reflect the fictionality of history. For Faulkner history is problematic and unable to be understood or summarized from certain points of view (Rollyson Jr. 70-1). History does not proceed with a sequence of events chronologically; instead, history is constructed in a retelling process passing on from generations. In this way, the emergence of diverse interpretations of the history in the retelling process is unavoidable, which makes the border between reality and imagination ambiguous. In *Absalom, Absalom*, most of the narrators, except Miss Rosa, attempt to reconstruct the Sutpen history via other individuals’ memories and modes of storytelling: Quentin learns the history from his father and Miss Rosa; Shreve retells and remakes the history in accordance with Quentin’s version. Every one of them intends to reconstruct the objective historical facts of the Sutpen history from fragmentary subjective representations. The transition from the subjective representations to the objective ones leaves a space to imaginations and interpretations, which distances the “objective” facts from being represented genuinely. Different from the traditional literary critics or readers trying to get a full

image of the Sutpen history, Faulkner expects his readers to read the complicated interrelation between history and narrative in a form of storytelling, for every storyteller inscribes himself into the history he narrates with his/her personal emotions, memories, and lived experiences. Every one of them is telling his/her own history as Faulkner once claimed,” every time any character gets into a book, no matter how minor, he’s actually telling his biography...” (qtd. in Ragan 16). As a result, in the following, I am going to find the relevance between history and storyteller in terms of Benjamin’s philosophy and then to show how the storytellers in this novel keep unfolding, interpreting, and reconstructing a possible contour of the Sutpen history while at the same time writing his/her story into the formation of the Sutpen history unconsciously. In other words, they are retelling their own stories instead of the Sutpen’s.

Benjamin’s concept of History

The concept of history in Benjamin’s philosophical trajectory is dialectical. Different from historicism, Benjamin’s philosophy of history, namely, materialistic historiography, emphasizes contingent events and a “caesura” or an “arrest” in the progress of history, which contradicts the concept of linear time in history. Benjamin in “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” says, “Its [Universal history] method is *additive*; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a *constructive* principle” (my emphases added, XVIII 262). In other words, for Benjamin the real history is not composed of the accumulation of successive events in a scientific linear timeline; instead, history is “the subject of structure” whose site is “time filled by the presence of the *now*” (emphases added, XIV 261). The “now” corresponds to Benjamin’s idea of a “caesura” or an “arrest” which reveals a flash of a moment of historical truth at the encounter of the end and the beginning of two historical series. Each “now” is a particular moment of “recognizability,” “the point of explosion,” or “a dialectical image at a standstill,” by which the truth is bursting out in the authentic historical time. This critical moment of “now” is where the newness (creativity) comes out. As

Benjamin states,

Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion, and nothing else, is the death of the *intention*, which this coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth.) It is not what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural. (Benjamin, *AP*, 463; N3,1)

Accordance with Benjamin’s notion on history, the structure of history is not constituted by aligning fixed points of presents subsequently but constructed by every particular “now of recognizability.” It is only through the dialectical nows that a part of the past can be touched by the present instant (*AP*, 470; N 7a,1). Benjamin compares the “now” to a vivid image of a “force field” so as to emphasize the dynamic forces preserved in the historical time. In this “now,” the present moment “interpenetrates” the unrealized past. Every now of the historical circumstances in the present is always anew. The now of the present instant has certain *correspondence* with the unattainable pure past. The now is co-existence of both the present and the past. The illusion of segment of the present, the past, and the future is invalid. What replaces the temporality is a series of contingent images of “nows.” The authentic truth keeps unfolding in forms of different images on the historical plane of immanence (now). Just as a seed embracing the whole life of a tree is embedded in the darkness of the earth, waiting to sprout and transform itself into a tree in the flow of time, the seemingly sterile dead past (the virtual) constantly unfolds itself repetitiously in different now-images (the actual). In Benjamin’s own words, “... the historical evidence polarizes into fore- and after-history always anew, never in the

same way.” That is to say, every image of a now is a newness, a new revelation, rid of the oppression of the linear historiography. Then he goes on saying, “And it does so at a distance from its own existence, in the present instant itself—like a line which . . . experiences its partition from outside itself” (*AP*, 470; N 7a,1). This statement points out the irreducible distance between what-has-been and the present. The present cannot touch the past directly. We can only “telescope” the past through the present instant (*AP*, 471; N 7a,3). From the outside of the past, the past only partially be glimpsed. The continuity/unity of the history is unachievable to a historian in the present presentation because the past is touched by the present at different degrees in different epochs (*AP*, 470; N 7a,2). Therefore, if a historian attempts to understand or know an object of the history, s/he has to *assemble* flashes of critical points of now-images, that is to say, to “construct” the historical now-images incessantly rather than to “reconstruct” them in a certain period of historical time.

Benjamin’s Concept of History and Its Relevance to The Storyteller

If the responsibility of a historian is to assemble the flashes of now-images in order to create something new in the present instance between fore- and after-history and to find something neglected and oppressed in the traditional historiography, Benjamin also grants a similar obligation to a storyteller, who not merely synthesizes the past with the present but also keeps renewing his story again and again by integrating personal and impersonal experiences when retelling the story. Both a historian and a storyteller provide us an alternative to understand our history. In *The Storyteller*, Benjamin distinguishes the differences between the task of a historian and a storyteller. For Benjamin, after WWI and the rise of capitalism, individual experiences are replaced and oppressed by collective ones. Newspapers, information, and novels withheld by the middle class change into rigid states of affairs determined by its own materials and verifiability of the things. However, a storyteller, though now gradually vanishing, is the only one who can pass on and exchange experiences and plays a role as a “counselor,” weaving the fabric of his real life into his tales and sharing his experiences with his readers. He makes possible “the communicability of experience”

in the process of storytelling (“The Storyteller” 83-7). Benjamin states,

[t]he storytelling... is itself an artisan form of *communication*... It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. *Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.* (my emphases added, “The Storyteller” 91-2).

The metaphor of “the handprint of the potter cling to the clay vessel” can be read as a very visual dynamic scene. The potter, similar to the storyteller, leaves his handprints on the not-yet-formed clay vessel, namely, the story, when fashioning it. On the one side, the form of the story keeps in variation when being retold again and again by the storyteller. On the other side, the potter’s handprints should be regarded as part of the vessel itself, which contains the life or experience of the potter. In the same way, the story itself embraces the life of the storyteller. Under the circumstances, the story is unable to be fully represented by one authentic version, for the story is integrated with the experiences and interpretations of the storyteller. For Benjamin, it is the real task of the storyteller—bringing the real life (newness) to the old and already-formed story. The storyteller is like a ladder-climber with the *freedom* “moving up and down the rungs of their experience as a ladder” which is down to the depth of the earth of individual experiences and up to the clouds of collective experiences, and restrained by neither of the poles (“The Storyteller” 102).

A storyteller refuses to follow the already-formed story; rather, he tries to “reconstruct” his story by integrating his personal and other’s experiences in the present milieu, as enlivens the rigid structure of the story and activates the “communicability” between his outside and inside world. Although the story seems to be a “chrysoberyl,” the storyteller is granted to see a “natural prophecy of petrified, lifeless nature concerning the historical world in which he himself lives.” He is an “artisan” able to see through the “innermost chamber of the realm of created things” (“The Storyteller” 107). The storyteller brings forth multiplicities of a historical world

via the provisional integrate of inner and outer milieu, and personal experiences in the story. In the same way, the historian discovers the authentic historical truth in the fragments of the present dialectical now-images as the personal experience of the storyteller collides with the object of the story itself. Both of them continue introducing newness to and reconstructing the history or the story. Although the process of retelling a story or the recurrent object of the history seems like an act of the identical repetition, there are newness and differences of the truth which are oppressed by the collective history or the form of a story popping out in this repetitive procedure. They come out in a flash, a glimpse of light. Gerhard Richter points out that, the condition of the emergence of the truth of something inhabits in its transformation into something else. It echoes Benjamin's saying in "One Way Street," "Truth wants to be startled abruptly... Who could count the alarm signals with which the ... true writers is equipped? And to "write" is nothing other than to set them into motion" (qtd. in Richter 222). The truth of the object is in the constant movement with its interpreter or narrator and it itself is approaching to "what is not yet" (Richter 222). Every emergence of the truth is not the same but a new. As a result, the hi/story, for a storyteller or the history of a historian, will never be exhausted and completed; instead, they will be consumed by the gentle flame of the story or the fragments of the history.

Storytellers and the Sutpen History in *Absalom, Absalom!*

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner draws on multiple fragmentary narratives to portray the history of the Sutpen family (the allegory of the South history) so as to challenge the rigid form of traditional novel and historicism. Despite the dissimilar versions of the story told by different narrators, readers can still perceive "truths" of the South history temporarily by piecing together the multiple complicated narratives, for multiple readings entail new modes of portrait of the Sutpen's history instead of the duplication of a lifeless historical event. Such an innovative writing technique echoes Benjamin's concept about novel and history. Hence, it would be more appropriate if we read this extraordinary work as a storytelling other than a novel, and

Faulkner as a storyteller instead of a novelist, we are able to glimpse a truth of the South via diverse modes of storytelling of the Sutpen history in this work. Benjamin once proposed that the distinction between a novelist and a storyteller lies in the fact that the former is alienated from the story he constructs; the latter integrates his or other's living experiences into the story, giving the story a real life. The story told by a storyteller never comes to an end and is not determined by the material it has already had. The story is in motion, indeterminate and unfolds with the retelling procedure ("The Storyteller" 87-8). In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the object of the story, Sutpen, is a mythic figure who is retold and remembered again and again by several characters in different periods of time and in various perspectives. Likewise, Sutpen corresponds to Benjamin's "strange figure of time," which is determined by both "temporality (it is written, thought, or remembered in time)" and its "suspension (it is, we are told, radically from the natural material of life)" (Richter 228). A real image of Sutpen only emerges temporally in dialectic-images in a standstill, the collision of the past and the present historical narratives, outside of the traditional historical narrative. He can never be represented fully by any one of the narrators. Consequently, what readers have to inquire is not how to represent the historical facts of Sutpen; on the contrary, readers have to find out how and why the figure of Sutpen is portrayed and constructed in diverse ways, and what authentic historical facts here and now are revealed in the tension among differential narratives. In other words, how is the intertexture of the outside and inside milieu of the historical object, Sutpen, formed in this multi-perspectival story? And how the narrators (storytellers) make themselves as part of the Sutpen history in their storytelling?

The Sutpen history is constituted by four storytellers, including Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, and Shreve. The story begins, in Chapter I, with Rosa Coldfield's retelling her memory about Sutpen when she invites Quentin to her dark, dreary old house in a hot September afternoon in 1909. Faulkner uses the image of "dust motes" dispersed and stratified in the house to feature Miss Rosa's memory in her youth. The "biding, dreamy, and vicious dust" surrounding her foreshadows her

tragic life (AA²⁶⁴ 5). She is always living in her past. The reason of her choosing Quentin as her audience to retell the Sutpen story is because of Quentin's remote but related relation to her family²⁶⁵ but the most important reason is that she "wants it [the story] told," Quentin believes. Once she told Quentin, "maybe some day you will remember this and writes about it... submit it to the magazines" (AA 7,10). She wants him to be a "judge" to her tragedy (AA 137). Compared with the other storytellers in the novel, Miss Rosa's story seems to give the Sutpen history the most complete and concrete contour. But because the story is told through the mouth of an old woman with vehement hatred and prejudiced verbal descriptions, her version of the Sutpen history is insufficient and incommensurable to the complex world she intends to explain. However, Carl E. Rollyson Jr. states "each character," in Faulkner's works, "does see a part of the truth, but each one's attempt to tell the story is also another attempt to explain his own biography" (75). Individual/subjective experiences are irreducible to make the truth of the history appear. Every individual interpretation of the history reflects a certain truth of the whole history. Benjamin analogizes history to the closed system of a monad. A monad reflects a single perspective of the world in its clear region without communicating with other monads while at the same time each monad is contained within the world. It is only in a caesura of history that the dialectical image emerges and the truth of the history flits by. In the thesis XVI of "Theses on the Philosophy of History," he states,

...where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past... (262-63)

²⁶⁴ *Absalom, Absalom* will be abbreviated as AA in the following pages.

²⁶⁵ Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* is a character unable to get rid of the past and finally commits suicide. The relation of two Quentins in the two novels is unclear but we can infer that Faulkner parallels Miss Rosa to Quentin in order to indicate their incapability of getting out of the past, which represents the tragedy of the whole South.

The monad is both a “prerequisite for image formation” and it is also the place where dialectical images occur. It is a “true synthesis” in which the past and the present collide, collective and individual experience encounter (Cesar 125-57). History is composed of and recognized via “constellation” or assemblage of dialectical images in the present, Benjamin argues, other than the dead historical facts sited in some spot of time. The temporal assemblage of images forms a *new* history out of homogenous empty time. The history is constructing itself constantly, forming and de-forming itself in the present time in different epochs fortuitously. It is only via this process the “real life” of the history appears. As for a storyteller, he makes a possible encounter of his own or others’ experiences and the object of the story in his storytelling, which causes a shock, a cessation in the structure of the story and makes the unknown past visible in the presently-formed story. The story is not determined by its preexisting material; rather, the story lives and transforms with the storyteller’s own experiences and the experiences reported by others. The story is affected by the milieu inside or outside itself. The metaphors of the chrysoberyl and the seed indicate that a storyteller has a potential to envision and bring out the truth of history embedded in the virtual, and not-yet-be-told story. From the story, he sees a whole world and the not-yet-formed history, that is, multiple possibilities unactualized in the present instant (Benjamin “The Storyteller” 87, 107).

Given the storyteller is able to bring out a not-yet actualized history in his storytelling, Miss Rosa can be, at first, regarded as both a historian and a storyteller who revives and makes the unknown past of the Sutpen history appear. Miss Rosa is the only narrator who witnesses the Sutpen history. When retelling the Sutpen history, she integrates her personal emotions, experiences, and Jefferson’s communal opinions into the story. Depending on her narrative, we can gain a basic contour of Sutpen. In Miss Rosa’s opinion, Sutpen is an embodiment of a “demon,” an “evildoer,” an “ogre” or a “man-horse-demon.” What causes her to look down upon Sutpen is because of her aborted engagement to him and her tragic childhood (She is an unexpected child raising by her father and her unmarried aunt). Her tragic past makes

her look like a “crucified child” or “a figure of little girl... of the dead time” (AA 6,17). She is stuck in her past memories and never grows up. Like Quentin in *The Sound and The Fury*, she refuses to face the present reality and the procession of time. She tells Quentin the engagement abruptly turned down by Sutpen has made her a life-dead since then.

... I had had all my life to watch him in, since apparently and for what reason Heaven has not seen fit to divulge, *my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago*,... would not call what I have had since living. (AA 14).

Besides blaming Sutpen for canceling the engagement, she keeps justifying her desire to marry him. She states,

...though I defy anyone to blame me, an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources, who should desire not only to justify the situation but to vindicate the honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been impugned, by accepting the honorable proffer of marriage from the man whose food she has forced to subsist on. (AA 15).

By virtue of her complaints and self-justification, Miss Rosa endows Sutpen with a personality. She retells the Sutpen’s story with her personal experience and emotion in her narrative. The past and the present collide in her present narration. The encounter of the present and the past forms a temporal dialectical image of Sutpen though not complete. According to her narrative, Sutpen and the Sutpen history are no longer a historical figure or event located in the unattainable past. Miss Rosa’s storytelling brings them back into the present; they revive in the mind of the listeners/readers. According to Carl Becker, “the actual past is gone; and the world of history is an intangible world, recreated imaginatively, and *present in our mind*.” To reconstruct the past needs much more to follow “empathy” and “the ability to recreate” the historical figure than to abide by “objective logic” (qtd. in Rollyson Jr. 76-7). Miss Rosa’s storytelling presents part of the unknown images of the Sutpen history. Besides, we glimpse Miss Rosa’s unknowable past and her sufferings in the present moment as

well. When retelling the Sutpen history, she retells her own history at the same time.

Unlike Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson, who recount the Sutpen history in accordance with historical facts and personal emotions or experiences, the second group of narrators, Quentin and Shreve, going beyond the facts at-hand, tries to make clear the “truth” concerning the dark mystery of the Sutpen history through their personal imagination and fantasy. Consequently, a majority of critics consider the Quentin-Shreve version the most fiction-like, which is far from the recorded historical facts. In spite of the fictional parts of the version such as the imaginary father-son relationship between Charles Bon and Stupen, the unreal characters (the lawyer and Bon’s mother) and the misinterpretation of Jim Bon’s personality, the Quentin-Shreve version not only gives “voices” to those voiceless in Miss Rosa’s and Mr. Compson’s narrations but also lays bare the racial conflicts haunting the South. Shreve is often criticized as an unreliable narrator. However, his imagination “re-enchants” the old and obscure Sutpen history by way of “questioning” the truth of the history and exposing fictionality of history to readers (Puxan). That the imaginary parts of the history in Quentin-Shreve version transcend the historical facts of the Sutpen history echoes the indeterminable of the history retold and reformed repeatedly by its storyteller. Hence the aim of the two storytellers is not to represent the facts occurring in the past but to envisage the possible historical truth buried in the rigid form of the story. This intersection of reality and fiction reveals a “zone of the indiscernible” in the Quentin-Shreve version of the Sutpen history. In this zone, the past objective narrative and the present subjective imagination are involved in a dialectical struggle, which causes a newness (dialectical image) to appear in a fissure/stop of the Sutpen history. It is where a truth of the history comes out.

From chapter VI to VIII, Shreve becomes a most dominant storyteller to weave the Sutpen history by imposing his own prejudice on the South. At the beginning of chapter VI, Shreve shows his curiosity about the South. He asks Quentin, “Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all” (AA 143). In order to make clear what the South is, he takes efforts

to piece together what he knows and hears about the South from Quentin's narrative so as to reconstruct his own image of the South. In his storytelling, he invents the unknown conversations between the characters, the octoroon female characters, such as Bon's octoroon mother and wife, and the revenging scene of Bon against Sutpen, which adumbrates the serious racial conflicts taking place in the South. These invented scenes interrupt our primal understanding of the Sutpen history. These scenes are "zones of the indiscernible," that is, points of dialectical struggles (the struggle between present and past, subjective imagination and objective description, and collective and individual understanding of the facts, etc.), where dialectical images come forth, the constellation being formed. The constellation of the images reflects the North's distorted impression on the South and meanwhile manifests the racial problems occurring in the South.

As for Quentin, he is just a prototype, a living history of the South to Shreve, who depends on Quentin to learn and construct his "imaginary" South. The Shreve-Quentin dialogues are an epitome of the negotiation of cultures between the South and the North. On Shreve's viewpoint, the South can never get rid of the invasion of the black people regardless of its history and bloodline. He boldly shares his vision with Quentin after finishing fabricating his version of the Sutpen history. He says,

... I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to *conquer the western hemisphere*. Of course it won't quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do... and so on a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from *the loins of Africa kings*. Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. *Why do you hate the South?* (my emphases added, AA 311).

The last sentence "Why do you hate the South?" marks Shreve's violent and distorted interpretation imposed on the whole South. This sudden inquiry shocks Quentin, for he is never aware of his desire to obviate from the ghost-like past of the South in the present though Quentin negates the inquiry—"I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't

hate it!" (AA 311). Shreve's abrupt inquiry creates a point of dialectics, a shock, a cessation, which interrupts Quentin's consciousness and enforces the unconscious, that is, an "individual" truth to come out of the mask of the collective consciousness.

"The zone of the indiscernible" within the story makes a truth of the history to emerge in a form of a dialectical image while the dialectical struggle within the zone constitutes and affirms the subjectivity of the narrator (storyteller) as well. Shreve replaces Quentin to become the dominant storyteller who fabricates "his" version of the Sutpen history. Throughout the final three chapters, Shreve shows his feverish interest in the South and his attempt to understand the South through Quentin's narrative about the Sutpen history. His incessantly interruption of Quentin's narrative but also persuading Quentin to keep telling the Sutpen history at the same time reveals both his strong will to manipulate the development of the story and his eagerness to contour the South in the story-making process. Shreve's illusion about the South causes him to impose his subjective interpretation and illusion unconsciously on the South as he "reinvents" the story with Quentin. He considers the South better than the "theater" and tries to "interpret" what he has heard and seen to "imagine" the real South. While they are re-making the story, Quentin happens to realize that the characters and storytellers are interconnected. Although the story itself varies when being told by disparate narrators, there is still a "correspondence" among different versions of the story. He wonders,

Yes. *Maybe we are both Father.* Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in *a different tone the infinite unchanging sky*, it doesn't matter: that pebble's water echo whose fall it not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old

ineradicable rhythm... Yes, *we are both father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.* (My emphases added AA 215)

The pebble-ripple metaphor emphasizes the interrelated and ineradicable relation among different modes of storytelling. The sinking pebble is similar to an inaccessible historical event, the original material of the story. People can only rely on the effects it brings forth, the ripples on water, to surmise the original figure of the pebble. And the moving-on of the ripples from one pool to another is an overlapping and differentiating process. That is to say, the ripples in the second pool are caused by those in the first one. With the flow of the time, the ripples are incessantly spreading out to the next pool via a narrow umbilical water-cord. However, the ripples in different pools are not the same. They have infinite nuanced differences. Quentin takes this metaphor to explicate the complexity of reconstructing the Sutpen history. The contour of the Sutpen history is changed and complicated in different modes of storytelling. The subsequent storytelling embraces the effects from the preceding one but contains its own uniqueness. If the Sutpen history is “the unchanging infinite sky,” then the different versions of the story are “different tones” expressing the story respectively and differently, just like the part-and-whole relation between a monad and the world. Besides, every storyteller is like a mediator, that is, “water-cords,” transmitting the story to the listeners both objectively and subjectively. The retelling/interpreting process unfolds much more possible factuality of the Sutpen history. In the end of the quotation, the assemblage of the Quentin-Shreve-Father-Sutpen image represents the intimate interrelation among storytellers, listeners, and the object of the story. The distinction between public/private, collective/individual, passive/subjective, past/present, and truth/fiction is blurred. The story constructs the subject, and the subject constructs the story, too. If as David Herman asserts, “storytellers use deictic points and other gestures to map abstract, geometrically describable spaces onto lived, humanly experienced places,”

then “the subjective component of space turns it into an infinite series of authorships... where speaking subjects both define it and are defined by it,” Hortense J. Spillers argues (qtd. in Spillers). Thus storytellers and the story are both intertwined in the process of storytelling.

Although Shreve’s invention of the story is treated as fiction, his story still reflects a certain aspect of the truth of the South. Shreve’s version is shaped in a dialectical struggle between the ideology of the South and the North, subjective and objective interpretation of historical facts, present and past understanding of the history, etc. Readers are able to grasp “a” truth of the history never shown when they gather the dialectical images emerging contingently in the process of narration. A truth is outside of the history we have known. It is hidden or oppressed in the linear history which can only be actualized as a dialectical conflict occurs. As a result, we cannot deny that Shreve’s story is plausible at some degree. His story gives flesh-and-blood to those silent, flat characters. His invention outlines the real racial conflicts in the South though he is a sarcastic and obnoxious narrator or observer. Through his storytelling, readers have another perspective to see the South. The history of the South is not composed of lifeless historical pasts and unable to be represented by the traditional historiography in only one-way perspective. On the contrary, the South history is always constituted by different narrators (storytellers) and narrators are constituted themselves in their storytelling. Hi/story is not an object; it is a real life born with the interweaving of personal/collective experiences and transcends the limits of the past, present, and future. It is only through storytellers that the South history will live out eternally.

Conclusion

Absalom, Absalom! problematizes the traditional discourse on history by displaying an intricate relation between history and narrative. It propels us to perceive that history is not composed of an accumulation of the past impersonal historical facts but history is actualized in an assemblage of different narratives in the flow of time. A narrative is a plane of immanence where the present personal and the past impersonal

elements are affecting and being affected with one another all the time, which reveals the instability of history because of the coexistence of subjective and objective, the past and the present elements embedded in each of the historical narratives. Benjamin has perceived such as a tension within a narrative and points out the tension as an encounter which results in a caesura in history. This encounter or caesura, that is, a dialectical-image, is where a real history flints by. A real history is constituted by an ensemble of dialectical-images in the present while there are only two kinds of people able to grasp or make this specific moment: cultural materialists and storytellers. The four storytellers (narrators) in *Absalom, Absalom!* are the ones whose past and present experiences and the fact of the history are intertwined when retelling the Sutpen story (narrative). It is because the encounter in a zone of the indiscernible occurs, that is, the confliction between personal and impersonal elements, that a real aspect of the Sutpen history or the storytellers' history is revealed. The images, brought forth from the encounters, emerging in these narratives on the one side make the contour of the Sutpen history clearer; on the other side, the histories of the storytellers are exposed to the readers/audience in their narratives as well. Thereby their act of retelling the Sutpen history is, in fact, an act of telling their own personal histories at the same time. The border between the subjective and the objective history is no longer clear.

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