

# The Causes of Spiritual Imbalance in *The Sound and the Fury*

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the causes of the spiritual imbalance of the female characters Caddy, Mrs Compson and Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* from three aspects, namely ideological restriction, alienated existence and spiritual wasteland.

**Keywords:** spiritual ecology; ideology; patriarchy; alienation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory holds that people lose their balanced spiritual ecology if the natural environment is polluted and the social environment is degraded with ethical vacuum and cultural corruption. The viewpoint is clearly manifested on the three female characters Caddy, Mrs Compson and Dilsey who have lost their balanced spiritual ecology in *The Sound and the Fury*. In this paper, the causes of spiritual imbalance will be analyzed from three aspects based on Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory.

Faulkner once said that the Yoknapatawpha lineage was a southern society that "could not finish writing it in a lifetime" (Jean Stein, 1956). Here, women do not have the opportunity to receive education or obtain wealth. Hence they only serve as accessories for men and lack independent personalities. There are multiple reasons for women's imbalanced spiritual ecology. Internally, women's pessimistic thoughts. After being oppressed for a long time, they lose the strength to revolt and give up the idea of self-development to fit in the society. Externally, the social norms imposed by men handed down from generation to generation. The whole society becomes an obstacle to women's growth, so women are destined to lose their balanced spiritual ecology. Causes of women's Spiritual Imbalance in *The Sound and the Fury* will be elaborated on in detail in the following part.

### I. Ideological Restriction

Firstly, Puritanical view on gender. In the times of Faulkner, Biblical thoughts permeated deeply in every aspect of life. Puritans believed that women

were inferior to men. They were required to live according to the mind of men. They were expected to be obedient, humble, and modest. The fact that Eve was created from Adam's rib in the Old Testament indicates women's subordinate position. This view can also be seen in the novel. "Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and, therefore, contrary to nature." (William Faulkner, 98) Moreover, Puritans believed that a woman was identified on her chastity, especially for the aristocratic class. They were responsible for controlling their sexuality and that of others. To a certain extent, this distorted concept of chastity is responsible for the downfall of Caddy's spiritual ecology.

Moreover, women have internalized Puritanical view on gender. Women regard these views as the guidance of their behavior, so does Mrs. Compson. She is a firm defender of Puritanical view on gender. Therefore, when the Compson family knows about Caddy's loss of virginity, the first thing she does is to humiliate her for she thinks that the family have lost dignity and honor because of her. The oppression of patriarchy and the Puritanical view on gender remain and still work in the family even though the Compson family falls.

As a rebel, Caddy challenges the traditional ideals bravely. However, her spiritual world turns imbalanced in face of her brother's death and the disdain from her family. She feels ashamed and self-reproach for her behavior, and thinks she deserves punishment for her sin. Puritanical view on gender has a huge impact on Caddy's spiritual ecology imbalance.

Secondly, racism. Racism persisted though slavery was abolished on in 1965 after the four-year Civil War. Back in Faulkner's time, racist ideas prevailed. Slavery was not only the protective umbrella of white but also the sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of blacks.

Dilsey is Faulkner's glorification of racism. (Shao Minghan, 1992) Most of his blacks are loyal and kind-hearted, while whites are generally cold-blooded and spiritually empty. Dilsey represents the future because Faulkner believes what the blacks need is to serve the whites faithfully rather than freedom and equality. It can be seen from Quentin's narration. "I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers. I learned that the best way to talk to all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone." (William Faulkner, 73) Moreover, Faulkner could not hide his deep-rooted view of white supremacy. In the novel, Dilsey faithfully serves the Compson family, even when Jason hurts her life. Sense of obedience and loyalty makes Dilsey unable to escape from her tragic fate.

## II. Alienated Existence

Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory holds that the development of science and technology has improved the material living standards of human beings, but it has not improved the spiritual standard of human beings. In the novel, the development of industrial capitalism and commercial economy has indirectly led to people's spiritual crisis; marginalizing people and making them lose morality and the ability to love.

Firstly, twisted family relationship. As a mother of three children, Mrs. Compson, being indifferent and selfish, has never given warmth and love to her family. She even sacrifices the happiness of her children to maintain the so-called noble dignity. Mrs. Compson's imbalanced spiritual ecology is the direct cause of Caddy's degeneration. In this regard, Jason has deep insights:

"I say, ..., with that damn family and her not making any effort to control her nor any of them, ...she happened to see one of them kissing Caddy and all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil...crying and saying her little daughter was dead and Caddy about fifteen" (William Faulkner, 190).

The same is true with Mr. Compson. The concept of male patriarchy drives him to maintain his authority at all times, so he does not often show affection to his children.

In the absence of a responsible mother and a loving father, Caddy has to fulfill her mother's responsibilities, caring for her idiot brother in her childhood. She finally succumbs to the burden, gives up her pursuit of self and gets lost in spiritual ecology. What's worse, the family blames her for the family's decline and misfortune:

"The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town" (William Faulkner, 248).

The blow from the family and the pressure of public rumor forces Caddy to lose her original intention, turning from a noble woman to a fallen woman. At this time, Caddy's spiritual ecology has been completely out of balance.

Secondly, invisible women. According to Lu Shuyuan, the existence of people needs to be acknowledged to own healthy spiritual ecology, but obviously women in the novel are not acknowledged.

In a society where only men have the right to speak, women are subordinates and silenced without independent personalities and thoughts. In this sense, women are invisible in the patriarchal society. Caddy can be everything except herself. "Southern women are seen as the embodiment of all virtues such as humility, chastity, piety, and self-sacrifice, as well as representatives of family honor and social prestige; on the other hand, women are the source of all evil." (Tao Jie, 1992) Caddy is clearly aware of her situation since her childhood. 'I know I'm just a trouble and a burden to you,' she says. 'I ought to know it,' I say. 'You've been telling me that for thirty years. Even Ben ought to know it now' " (William Faulkner, 152). The invisibility of women reflects society's indifference to their contribution and family's indifference to Caddy's sacrifice. Caddy challenges patriarchy, but she fails. So her spiritual ecology is imbalanced, living her life abiding by the rules and culture of the patriarchal society.

## III. Spiritual Wasteland

People's beliefs and ethics deteriorate in the process of modernization in southern America in the 19th century. Based on Lu Shuyuan's Spiritual ecology theory, the degeneration of spiritual life, spiritual wasteland, has become a common problem faced by the entire southern America.

With the collapse of slavery, the manor economy collapsed and was replaced by the gradual development of capitalist industry and commercial economy. The whites in the south felt the dual crisis of economy and spirit, unable to fit in the society.

As a child, Caddy has natural attributes. In Benjy's eyes, Caddy has the fragrance of a big tree, which means that Caddy is Benjy's spiritual support and harbor, and it is Caddy's healthy spiritual ecology that gives Benjy sense of security. However, after learning that Caddy lost her virginity, Benjy can no longer smell the tree from Caddy. Instead, Quentin thinks that Caddy has the scent of honeysuckle. Quentin says: "Honeysuckle is the saddest of all fragrances." (William Faulkner 143) Honeysuckles used to symbolize wholehearted love and selfless dedication, but now it reflects the crisis of Caddy's spirit.

In adulthood, Caddy's rebellion directly leads to the deterioration of her spiritual ecology. Breaking the deep-rooted and long-accepted traditional morality makes her feel incredibly guilty and anxious. As a result, on the one hand, Caddy can face reality and accept the decline of her family and new ideas. On the other hand, her challenge of the patriarchal gender roles fails and brings about spiritual emptiness which makes her suffer to the extreme.

Moreover, in Lu Shuyuan's theory, the development of capitalist industry exacerbates the alienation of people. Caddy's indifference and numbness is the typical symptom. She wants to escape from the family and get rid of the ridicule of her mother and brother, but she is afraid of social rumors and is dependent on the family. She gradually becomes numb though she is forced to leave the house under pressure from all parties.

We can see Faulkner's spiritual ecological view of women from his understanding of spiritual ecology. Firstly, the social environment affects the fate of spiritual subjects; Secondly, the study of the spiritual subject, the predominantly female spiritual crisis is a fundamental cause of women's tragedy. Therefore, only

when women are free, attach more importance to their spiritual world, and solve the contradictions in the growth process can they find their true selves and be more faithful to themselves. Finally women can improve their spiritual ecology and even change their destiny.

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