

The Spiritual Imbalance in *The Sound and the Fury*

Xinghuan Li¹, Zhenhua Lyu^{1*}¹Department of Foreign Studies, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, ChinaDOI: [10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i12.001](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i12.001)

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*Corresponding author: Zhenhua Lyu

Department of Foreign Studies, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China

Abstract

The paper analyzes the manifestation of spiritual imbalance in *The Sound and the Fury* from the perspectives of Caddy, Mrs. Compson and Dilsey through the lens of Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory.

Keywords: *The Sound and the Fury*, spiritual imbalance, Lu Shuyuan.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sound and the Fury are the representative work of William Faulkner, the Noble Prize laureate and one of the most prominent writers in the history of American literature. The novel tells a story about the destruction and downfall of the aristocratic Compson family of Yoknapatawpha County in northern Mississippi from four different points of view. The novel, a tragedy of "loss and innocence", presents the inevitable decline of traditional morality and order during the process when the traditional society transforms into modern society. *The Sound and the Fury* has attracted wide attention since its first introduction in China in 1984.

I. Key Concepts of Lu Shuyuan's Spiritual Ecology Theory

In 1989, Lu Shuyuan formally proposed the theory of "spiritual ecology" which instantly received high recognition from the academia. Lu's theory is deeply influenced by Western eco-criticism and Chinese Taoism. According to Lu, ecology can be divided into three categories: natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology. "Natural ecology is concerned with the study of nature as a relatively independent entity; social ecology involves productive activities, ideology as well as material life of human society. Spiritual ecology is related to the inner emotions and self-awareness of human spirit." (Qinying Gao, 2022) Lu defines spiritual ecology as "the interaction between the spiritual subjects (mainly human beings) and the living environment (including the natural environment, the social environment, and the cultural environment)" (Lu, 2000).

Later, Lu further developed the theory and stated that the ecological crisis is not only a problem of the ecological circle but also the spiritual circle of human beings (Lu Shuyuan, 2002). The spiritual imbalance in present days is largely attributed to the rapid development of the economy and the subsequent growth of people's material desire. Besides, problems from external environment, such as Western hegemony, colonial expansion, social oppression and women's lack of right to speak contribute to the spiritual imbalance as well. If human being's spirit is not elevated, the social problems will eventually lead to natural crisis. According to Lu's theory, the imbalance of spiritual ecology is generally embodied in the emphasis on material pursuit and contempt for spirit and the emphasis on form and contempt for emotion, which will inevitably cause cultural decline, spiritual degradation, and emotional indifference. Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory enriches the theory of eco-criticism and fills the gap in this field in China.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner has created many vivid and impressive female characters, such as the selfish and cold Mrs. Compson, the invisible Caddy, the rebellious Quentin jr., and the warm and sincere Dilsey, and the kind-hearted Florine. Regardless of their backgrounds and personalities, their spiritual ecology is all out of balance. This paper tends to elaborate on the spiritual imbalance of Caddy, Mrs. Compson and Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* through the lens of Lu Shuyuan's spiritual ecology theory.

II. Caddy: Victim of Outmode Conventions

Spiritual imbalance is attributed to the corruption of thoughts based on Lu Shuyuan's theory.

Unlike Mrs. Compson, young Caddy is lively, optimistic, and kind, but unfortunately she was born in a society ruled by outmode customs. She wants to revolt against the rules and moral values, so her imbalanced spiritual ecology is doomed.

Young Caddy has the happiest, the freest, and the healthiest spiritual ecology during her childhood. In Benjy's memory, Caddy is full of vitality. Like the elf of nature, she is unrestrained: "Caddy was walking. Then she was running, her book-Satchel winging and jouncing behind her." (William Faulkner, 4). Little Caddy does not care about the mannerisms required by the aristocratic lady and lives like any other ordinary child. At the same time, she tries her best to care about her brothers, paying more love than their mother. In Benjy's concept, Caddy has the fragrance of trees, which is a natural smell: "Caddy smelled like trees and like when she says we were asleep." (William Faulkner, 4) This smell makes Benjy feel at ease, meanwhile, the image of the "tree" is also the author's implicit expression that Caddy is "the child of nature". "'Did you come to meet Caddy?' She said, rubbing my hands. 'What is it. What is it? What are you trying to tell Caddy?' " (William Faulkner, 4) All of these can show that young Caddy is in balanced spiritual ecology.

When Caddy grows up, Benjy becomes more and more dependent on her so she has to act as a mother, but her family members all take it as granted. The asymmetry between giving and returning makes Candy more and more eager to be loved and cared. Gradually, her spiritual world becomes imbalanced. In adolescence, Caddy desires to have a romantic relationship with boys, so she dresses herself up. But Caddy's change makes Benjy angry. Jason thinks that "[h]e does not like that prissy dress". (William Faulkner, 33) In the end, she has to give up her pursuit of beauty to please her brother Benjy. As Caddy's natural growth is suppressed, her spiritual ecology gradually deteriorates.

What's more, influenced by the trend of sexual liberation, at the age of 17, she lost her virginity. After that, her family sees her as bad luck and blames her family's downfall on her loss of virginity. Even her lover Dalton, who has taken Caddy's innocence, is full of contempt for Caddy. "*Jason: 'Did you have a sister?' Dalton: 'No, but they are all bitches.'*" (William Faulkner, 77). *People's blame makes her sink into endless self-blame and remorse, as a result she internalizes the belief that her behavior violates the traditional concept of women's morality, challenges her father's authority, and even brings shame to her family. The heavy spiritual shackles make her feel confused, her family's indifference deepens her guilt, and her lover's betrayal makes her give up her pursuit of good things. Finally, she feels so guilty that she believes she should be punished. After being kicked out of her*

home, she is utterly fallen. So far, Caddy's spiritual ecology is completely out of balance.

III. Mrs. Compson: The Woman in a Case

The emphasis on material and the contempt for spirit and emotion will lead to spiritual imbalance according to the spiritual ecology theory. Mrs. Compson is a typical example.

Firstly, Mrs. Compson keeps hurting Candy with the old-fashioned standard. As a representative of the Southern Lady, she abides by the standards of the nobility, especially the thoughts of Puritanism and patriarchy, in every word and deed. Like other fallen nobles, she firmly believes that chastity equals a woman's life and a family's fame. So when Caddy loses her precious chastity, what she gives to Caddy is not comfort but scorn and scold, thinking that her daughter's mistake is a harsh punishment by God. What's more, she is an incompetent wife and mother who have lost balance in spiritual ecology. As is written in the novel, "'I know it,' Mother said. 'It is a judgment on me. I sometimes wonder.'" (William Faulkner, 3). "'It is a judgment on me.'" Mother said, 'but I will be gone too, soon.'" (William Faulkner, 8). She believes that marrying Mr. Compson is an act of self-deprecation just because Mr. Compson does not has enough money to maintain her extravagant life. She even thinks taking care of children and doing household chores will make her lose aristocratic sense of superiority. As a mother she does not have any positive guidance for her children but only gives resentment and indifference to family members. Lastly, she sees calculative and hypocrisy as traits of her family, which is also a sign of Mrs. Compson's imbalanced spiritual ecology. She is always crying, saying now and then that she is about to die. She falsely claims that she is sick and frail, which intends to get everyone's attention. "'Mother puts her handkerchief under her veil. 'Stop it, Mother.' Jason said.'" (William Faulkner, 8) Her pessimism affects everyone's spiritual ecology in the family. From the beginning to the end, she only regards Jason, who is as cold-blooded and selfish as her, as her true son: "He is the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me for that he takes after my people the others are all Compson." (William Faulkner, 80).

The image of Mrs. Compson is mostly negative, irresponsible and cold. Maybe she has realized that her past glory is forever gone; however, her spiritual world lacks the powerful strength to adapt to the current society. The only thing she can do is to continue to deceive herself in the illusive world and adhere to the thoughts of the outdated requirements for ladies. It's the Mrs. Compson's spiritual crisis that leads to the family's tragedy.

IV. Dilsey: The Elegy of Racist Society

Long-term oppression from an unjust social system, which is a kind of cultural and moral downfall

according to Lu Shuyuan, numbs people's souls and makes them lost. In the novel, the unfair racist system leads to Dilsey's spiritual ecological crisis.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Dilsey, the black maid, is an ideal black image created by Faulkner. Despite her low social status, she takes care of the children of the Compsons wholeheartedly and gives the family love unconditionally. In return the children love and trust Dilsey. Dilsey believes that she has fulfilled her obligations perfectly.

Dilsey is submissive to her masters and grateful for the life that whites have given her. She tries her best to care for the declining Compson family day after day, especially for the idiot Benjy. By contrast, she is strict with her own child. "You going to do just what he want you to do, nigger boy," Dilsey said. 'You hear me.'"(William Faulkner, 46). Obviously, she identifies with her slave status from the bottom of her heart. She obeys the masters' orders, works hard, and never fights against the unfair system. Maybe she does not realize that this is a kind of oppression. So from this aspect, we can see that Dilsey's spiritual ecology is out of balance. Furthermore, in Benjy's narrative part, there is a description of Benjy's birthday scene. "I bought it,' Dilsey said. 'It never came out of Jason's panty. I fixed him some birthday.' 'Do you want to poison him with that cheap store cake?' Mother said." Dilsey buys a cake for Benjy's birthday at her own expense but is misunderstood by Mrs. Compson that she wants to poison Benjy with the cake. Dilsey could not defend herself facing Mrs. Compson's groundless accusation. From this scene, we can also see the spiritual imbalance of Dilsey.

By and large, the spiritual imbalance of Dilsey is manifested in the following ways: lacking awareness of self- subjectivity, fully accepting her master's groundless accusations, humiliations and deep-rooted

sense of slavery. Ironically, her merits, such as her loyalty, integrity and warmth lead her to the abyss.

The spiritual imbalance of the three female characters is evident. The degeneration of Caddy, the emphasis on material and contempt for spirit and selfishness and coldness of Mrs. Compson and the numbness and submissiveness of Dilsey are all manifestations of their spiritual imbalance.

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