

# Chaotic Orders and Unbalanced Triangle-- Interpretation of The Sound and the Fury from Lacan's View

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**Abstract:** The paper applies Lacan's Three Order theory and Oedipus Triangle to the novel *The Sound and the Fury* to investigate the unconscious mechanisms of the three brothers to account for their behaviors. Banji, Quintin, and Jason respectively have breakdowns in three orders: the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic. Banji's isolation in the Imaginary imposes restrictions on his self-consciousness, reflected by his inability to language. He represents Oedipus who's obstructed from becoming a conscious subject during the process of grasping the meanings of beings. Quintin, on the other hand, is unable to balance his desire in the Real and his identity in the Symbolic, like the Mother in the Oedipus Triangle, so the conflict between his complex for Caddy and the burden of the family and social conventions result in his collapse and eventual suicide. Jason relinquishes his emotions and desire to adapt to the Symbolic. Just like the Father in the Oedipus Triangle, under the Big Other's control, his desire is coerced to be unified with the Symbolic. Therefore, he is forced to follow orders that he is oblivious of, and thus can't attain pleasure for himself. With careful reflection on the individual analysis of the brothers' pathologic psychosis, not only does *The Sound and the Fury* release more charm for sophisticated psychological depiction, but also a more general picture of human's mental mechanism can form, warning people of their potential mental conflicts to help avert the tragedies happened in *The Sound and the Fury*.

**Keywords:** *The Sound and the Fury*, Three Order theory, Oedipus Triangle

## 1. Introduction

Lacan's philosophy of psychoanalysis is one of the most complicated and compelling contemporary philosophical theories. It is applicable for many subjects beyond philosophy, for example, literary analysis. Although with growing popularity Lacan's ideas have been more often utilized to interpret literature, the range is still quite narrow that most modern novels haven't been applied. *The Sound and the Fury* by Faulkner is one of them. This book won Faulkner the Nobel Prize in 1949 and many praises from famous authors and critics; for example, "Faulkner is the only true tragic writer in our age" by Albert Camus. Due to its complexity and charm, it has been interpreted hundreds of times with different methods such as feminist, Marxist, deconstructionist, and also psychoanalysis since its publication. The characters' inner mechanisms have been demonstrated multi-dimensionally. However, there are still potential spaces for a new perspective, Lacan's psychoanalysis, to excavate more unnoticed connotations of the characters' inner complexities.

Mellard draws a comprehensive collection of mainstream interpretations arrayed chronologically, whereas there isn't enough textual evidence to elaborate how the theories, as well as Lacan's, work in *The Sound and the Fury*. [1]

The mass of its content made it difficult to focus on psychoanalysis and elaborate deeper.

Understanding Freudian psychoanalysis helps understand Lacan due to their kinship, thus it is important to mention Zeitlin, who relates Freud and *The Sound and the Fury* with specific evidence from real events, critics, and text to showcase the application of Freudian theory. [2] It involves a deep analysis of theories in the form of narrative. Unfortunately, the characters' performances are relatively ignored, leaving vacancies for further exploration into their subjective thoughts. Zhu, Wu, and Wang interpret the characters with textual evidence, focusing mainly on the inner activities of the three brothers and their conflict with the real world. [3][4] Their research provides precious insights from the Freudian perspective but the relations between Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis remain unclear. Gan expounds on the Oedipus Complex in her paper analyzing *The Sound and the Fury*, which is more closely connected to Lacan's Oedipus Triangle.

Barker and Kamps, on the other hand, directly amend the long-lasting lack of Lacanian interpretation. They thoroughly apply Lacan's psychoanalysis of the three brothers to indicate their complex relationship and desire, using Caddy as the central character to contrast. They

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divide their research into three parts respectively Banji, Quintin, and Jason.[6] They set a good precedent for integrating Lacan's theories into literary analysis, but they only employed the theories fragmented, leaving Lacan's philosophy impenetrable at the macro level.

Therefore, to amend more theories and integrate them into a systematic interpretation, this paper attempts to use the Three Order theory and the Oedipus triangle to illustrate the psychosis of the three brothers. The main idea is that the brothers' predictions derive from the malfunction of the order of the three realms: the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic. In the first part, the research will discuss how Banji's desire failed to finish his construction in the Imaginary, thus failing to enter the symbolic, for the reason he cannot properly communicate and understand his desire. The Oedipus triangle demonstrates that his denial of the impossibility of obtaining Phallus engenders his psychosis, signified by his incompetence in language. The second part concerns Quintin, who holds the maternal position since it represents the source of desire in the Real and is always in an unstable status. He cannot manage the conflict between the Symbolic and the Real, and thus collapses under great pressure from both sides. In the third part, Jason represents the paternal symbol, for he practically acts as a father in the family. He is totally in The Symbolic but unconsciously loses himself under the control of the Big Other. This discussion will excavate the most essential desire of the three brothers. Understanding the cause and effect of their psychosis in the three realms can provide us insights into how to deal with our desires, imaginations, and society. This psychoanalytic interpretation can be analogized to other literary works. More perspectives and understandings will hence appear to make works of literature more diverse and provoking.

## 2. Banji: Trapped in the Imaginary

Banji, the retarded "boy" presents an extremely uncommon narrative in *The Sound and the Fury*. However, his dementia is much more than that: it is a Lacanian psychosis invoked by the malfunction of his Three Orders. Banji's psychosis occurs when the unconscious forms into a conscious subject. He is trapped in the Imaginary and expelled out of the Symbolic, causing him unable to understand meanings in reality.

The Oedipus triangle of Lacan's theory indicates that one marches from the Imaginary into the Symbolic only if one realizes his inability of owning the imaginary Phallus. However, Banji cannot appropriately finish this step: he still insists on his imagination of the Phallus. This is the cause of his isolation from the Symbolic.

### 2.1 Expelled out of the Symbolic

Lacan notes that "The unconscious is structured like a language" [9] Language consists of infinite signifiers without definite meaning. "According to Saussure, "meaning does not reside in individual signs but in the relationship between signs in the language system itself." [9] The social order is established based on language by the same token, which is also uncertain and constantly changing.

Everybody is controlled and shaped by this order, the Big Other, which means that just like symbols would only substantiate their meanings in a specific context, one's consciousness, as a kind of self-referential reflection of one's unconscious, would only be activated when conforming to the social order. When Levi Strauss writes, "symbols are more real than what they symbolize" [9], he asserts that objects themselves only "be" but do not contain any connotation, while all that align in people's minds are conceptions, in other words, symbols. As a result, everything perceived is essentially created by this unstable social order, instead of itself or ourselves. This pattern is also consistent with that of language. That's why the Symbolic is described as the reality instead of merely a processing system. In short, to be a conscious subject is to get involved in the social symbolic order.

Therefore, Banji's biggest defect, the disability of language, signifies his inability of entering the symbolic order. He cannot arrange symbols correctly, and thus cannot deal with relationships and his perceptions, which are mutually connected. Consequently, he cannot distinguish whether a feeling comes from touching, seeing, hearing, tasting, or smelling. For example, he says that "He(I) could smell the cold. The gate was cold." [10] His sense of time is also chaotic and discontinuous. His thoughts flash back and forth too often and intensely. For instance, the memory of the day on which he delivered a letter to Caddy before Christmas uncontrollably interferes with his current actions: "'Keep your hands in your pockets.' Caddy said. 'Or they'll be froze. You don't want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.'" [10] The same objects would bring him back and forth in time for no logical reason—in this case, the barn he sees. His exile from the Symbolic is the culprit responsible for these symptoms.

Besides the most obvious outcome that he cannot blend in the society, a more essential problem is that he cannot express desire or even know what he desires. Lacan says "It is the structure of language that speaks the subject and not the other way around." [9] In other words, in the Symbolic, a subject should float between signifiers. When I say "I", the "I" speaking and the "I" spoken are not the same "I". The former (subject of enunciation) is in the Real, on the unconscious level, while the latter (subject of utterance) is in the Symbolic, as a de-essentialized, decentered one, who must enter the Symbolic, the linguistic order, to gain its essence. Banji's inability with language is destined for his failure to become a subject. In his narrative, none of his desires for Caddy is unfolded subjectively, he can discern his behavior but not the origin that triggers it, symbolizing that on his conscious level, he is unable to realize his desire since he cannot symbolize them first. This indicates that he is still in a fractured stage where his subject of enunciation and utterance are overly separated: what he desires is not consistent with what he thinks he desires.

### 2.2 The Infant in the Oedipus Triangle: The Imaginary's Confinement

Understanding the Oedipus Triangle will help clarify Banji's inability to language. The problem occurs not

because of his lack of intelligence but because he fails to disengage with the Imaginary. In the Mirror stage, in which infants develop their self-consciousness, the first step is to recognize the fragmented part of their own image. It is completed by "the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality". [9] As elucidated in the last part, our cognition is formed through the social order. Therefore, these image fragments are given meaning and put together to form a full figure of oneself. This process is the formation of the subject. One can only acquire the ability of language after the subject is formed. In other words, the reason why Banji can't talk is that he failed to form his conscious subject. These fragmented perceptions cannot be unitedly put together. Therefore, language, a symbol system, cannot match Banji's cognition.

In the Oedipus Triangle, at first, an infant has a bi-relationship with his mother, but when his father comes, this relationship becomes trinary: a part of care is transformed from him to his father. The infant needs to imagine that his father owns a Phallus, which attracts his mother. Therefore, he also wants to retrieve Phallus to go back to the first stage, to win all the care from his mother. However, "the intervention of the father distances the child from the mother and also places the phallus forever beyond its reach. If the symbolic father is seen to possess the phallus, then the child can only become a subject itself in the symbolic order by renouncing the imaginary phallus." [9] The process is analogizable to the way that one understands a non-existing, imaginary word "leaf" is meaningless by itself but enriched by the Symbolic order in which it represents a real leaf, only that the metonymy of Phallus is the very first one for the infant.

However, Banji cannot accept the absence of the imaginary Phallus, which is symbolized by his castration: "I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them ain't going to do no good. They're gone." [10] This can also illustrate Banji's transference of desire since his exceeded libido has nowhere to turn but to project on other things. For example, Caddy's flipper: "I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark." [10] Even worse, he transfers his emotion onto something impossible due to his lack: "watching the girls going home from school, trying to want something he couldn't even remember he didn't and couldn't want any longer." [10] His empathy cannot fit into the Symbolic to find its right place.

### 3. Quintin: Conflict of the Real

Quintin is uncommonly highly educated from a southern family, symbolically destining his separation from them. However, entering Harvard didn't make him a successful person, in contrast, committed suicide. This tragedy manifests his ardent inner conflict between the Symbolic and the Real.

Quintin takes the place of the Mother in the Lacanian Triangle. His desire was divided by the social order and

his inner libido. To gain the pleasure of pain for recognition of the social order, he has to betray his desire. Unfortunately, unable to stop the Real from invading his consciousness, he eventually disintegrated.

#### 3.1 Disassociated by Dis-unification

On the verge of the Real and the Symbolic, there is a paradox. Concerning the same action, "If we look at a thing straight on, i.e., matter-of-factly, disinterestedly, objectively, we see nothing but a formless spot; the object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it at an angle, i.e., with an 'interested' view, supported, permeated, and 'distorted' by desire." [7] In *the Sound and the Fury*, the biggest challenge Quintin is facing is the conflict between his desire in the Real and the confinement in the Symbolic. Inside, he desires Caddy. Though they seem to be close as brother and sister, Quintin imagines Caddy as his lover. Quintin has a strong desire to have a sexual relationship with Caddy but knows it is impossible and even feels guilty for his thoughts. "We are not simply guilty if we break the law and commit incest, but rather we are always already guilty of the desire to commit incest." [9] This accounts for why he let Ames go when he had the chance to kill him. He realizes that Ames is the excuse and outlet for his desire for Caddy. He can taste the Jouissance by the superego's forbidden law of incest while also being freed from the guilt of desiring it since Ames takes the responsibility. In other words, he symbolically incest with her sister by filling the absence of Ames, who is permanently gone. By letting Ames go, his desire in the Real is forever brought to an unknown void that will remain untouchable. Ames becomes a non-existent signifier and exits the Symbolic when he disappears, representing the spot in the Real, erasing Quintin's sin.

However, for this balance to last, he must conceal this truth with his self-deceit. He lies to their father to disguise that Caddy has lost her virgin with Ames but instead, says that he is the one responsible for that. In the Symbolic, he does so to keep his father from feeling ashamed that someone takes her daughter's virgin and escapes to avoid taking any responsibility. However, the lie itself is the truth in the Real from the "distorted" view of desire. "As soon as the subject "knows too much," gets too close to the unconscious truth, his ego dissolves." [7] His jealousy toward Herbert, who owns love, which he craves, of Caddy, reminds him of his distorted desire so that he can no longer pretend to be unaware of it. The revelation brings to light the pressure between the shame the social convention exerts and his real desire for which he collapses. His story with the little girl is symbolic. The girl keeps following Quintin after he provides her with some pieces of bread though he tries to get rid of her until his father jumps out to accuse him of kidnapping his daughter. In this case, the girl symbolizes Quintin's desire for Caddy: he doesn't want to admit her constant existence, but she is always with him. In his narrative, at the level of Symbolic and his self-deceit, he is the innocent victim in the incident, just like he considers his lie to be kind and sacrificing.

### 3.2 The Mother in the Oedipus Triangle: Divided Desire

Quintin takes the place of the Mother in the Oedipus Triangle. In most cases, only Oedipus and the Father (law) are frequently discussed, while the Mother is just a link to interpret their relationships, but since Quintin's psychosis is rooted in the conflict between the three orders, only the Mother can establish enough complexity. First, Quintin's ego-ideal, namely the imaginary one he wants to become, presses him to conform to the social convention, in which incest is strictly prohibited. However, his superego, which is the libido created by his desire in the Real, endlessly urges him to externalize his strongest unconscious desire for incest. This superego opposite to ego-ideal constantly challenges the suppression of his desire in the Symbolic, the reality, and the social order. Illustrated in the Oedipus Triangle, the ego-ideal is the Father, and the superego is Oedipus. The mother's desire is bisected in the Triangle: one toward her son, created before the Father enters the relationship, and the other points to the Father which breaks the binary bond between Oedipus and the Mother. On the one hand, he reserves the primitive desire toward Caddy. On the other hand, the Father, the social order, imposes moral restrictions on him after he enters the Symbolic. Oedipus desperately wants to heist the Father of his Phallus, while the Phallus is merely a product of Oedipus' imagination. Nonetheless, the Father inevitably demands Quintin's attention which would consolidate Oedipus' imagination and thus boost the conflict. This fight of desire between the two makes the Mother, Quintin, almost impossible to manage the balance. According to Žižek, "superego pressure demonstrates that we effectively are guilty of betraying our desire." [8] Quintin is haunted by the guilty that he has to commit suicide to run away from such pressure. Moreover, the Imaginary is also a pressure exerted on Quintin. His ideal ego, which is "the way I'd like others to see me" [8] renders him under even more pressure. He cares a lot about his image in others' eyes even before he dies: "Then I remembered I hadn't brushed my teeth, so I had to open the bag again. I found my toothbrush and got some of Shreve's paste and went out and brushed my teeth. I squeezed the brush as dry as I could and put it back in the bag and shut it, and went to the door again." [10]

### 4. Jason: controlled by The Symbolic

Jason is the most practical person in the family, maybe much too practical. His desire in the Real has been replaced by the obligation assigned by the Symbolic, which is to infinitely seek social status elevation and more wealth. Being only a task, his pursuit does not bring him any pleasure or satisfaction.

Jason represents the name of the father in the Oedipus Triangle. He intends to dominate others to establish himself as the law, while he is but a representative of the Symbolic. In other words, the Big Other not only controls him but also at the same time deceives him into believing that he is the dominator.

### 4.1 The Deceit of the Big Other

Human society is reigned by the Big Other, the social order, society's unwritten constitution, and the second nature of every speaking being: "it is here, directing and controlling my act; it is the sea I swim in, yet it remains ultimately impenetrable—I can never put it in front of me and grasp it." [8] It constructs people's recognition background and creates a common understanding. The Big Other is the subject, the active form of the Symbolic. Jason's relentless chase after wealth symbolizes the invasion from the Symbolic to the Real. In other words, his desire ceases to be his but is gradually taken over by the Big Other. He longs for what society wants him to, innocent of the absence of his self-governing. For example, when the customer asks Jason how can he know that the cheaper hame string isn't as good as the expensive one, he replies: "'Because they don't ask thirty-five cents for it,' (I say) that's how I know it's not as good." [10] For Jason, money is no longer the reflection of something's worth, but on the contrary, the origin of it. His understanding of the world is extracted from the simplest social expectations, which, just like the structure of language, is in itself meaningless. In addition, his headache, signifying the Real, helps demonstrate the conflict with clarity. When he is in pursuit of little Quintin, his headache troubles him: "He could return and get the forgotten camphor, or he could go on." [10] The Symbolic, his wish of being a dominator, a father, conquered the Real, his headache, in the end, making him shrink himself in front of the materialistic value the Big Other recognizes. It is important to notice that here he does not concern about the practical use of the money but only its symbolic meaning of power; his anger comes more from being outwitted by a girl: "If he could just believe it was the man who had robbed him." [10]

The invasion into the Imaginary is also reflected in his ego-ideal, which is the ideal of whom he wants to become. He wants everyone else in this family obedient to him to loom him as a master. However, this wish to control is not based on age, reputation, wisdom, leadership, or other tangible property but on the ability to earn money. His ego-ideal no longer derives from the Real, his inner self, but is filled with the materialistic value bestowed by the Symbolic.

Jason loses himself to the social order, obeying the will of which money and status he thinks are supposed to give him satisfaction. Unfortunately, these fake aims are never to bring any pleasure, unlike normal people's desire for the Real. Take little Quintin as a contrast. In the last part, Quintin and her lover in the circus run away while Jason tries to take Quintin and more importantly, the money with her, back. Lacan differentiated goal from aim in the explanation of desire: "The goal is the final destination, while the aim is what we intend to do, i.e., the way itself. Lacan's point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, and continue its path to and from the goal." [7] In this chasing game, Quintin and her boyfriend taste pleasure through running away. Their object is what they sincerely desire—freedom and happiness. However, Jason is angry. He wants to achieve his full

satisfaction, the outcome, the goal, where his desire cannot be satisfied. To arrest Quintin and retrieve the money is not the desire of Jason, but the Big Other. The money, the dignity of his symbolic name of the father is an unreachable goal the Big Other imposes on him during the pursuit of which no pleasure can be attained. His desire is replaced by the Big Other as Jason himself has no awareness of why. He blindly follows the order, being fully disintegrated as a subject.

#### **4.2 The Father in the Oedipus Triangle: Paternal Narcissist**

Jason is placed in the father's place in the Oedipus Triangle. It is his existence that interrupted the bilateral relationship between little Quintin and her mother Caddy. He acquired attention from Caddy for she has to reach little Quintin through him. He is in a sense in charge of the Triangle by his force.

As explained above, the Father in the Oedipus Triangle owns an imaginary Phallus. Concerning Jason, the Phallus is the ability to make money. He burns the tickets for the show in front of Luster just to indicate that no one can earn a nickel in this family except for himself. He burns the tickets not because he wants the money compared to their worth but because he wants to stress his ownership of Phallus. He considers the ability to make money the essence of his identity, both as the head of the family and a father to whom little Quintin must obey.

However, his identity fails to endow him with the power to act as a father. The end of the story signifies the absence of the name of the father—he didn't achieve to arrest little Quintin, where the phallus stands. "Of his niece he did not think at all, nor of the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it." [10] Jason has already symbolized everything into money and social status. His ego-ideal has been replaced by the desire of the Big Other. "It is merely its contents that change: the ego-ideal becomes "externalized" as the expectations of the social group to which the individual belongs. The source of moral satisfaction is no longer the feeling that we resisted the pressure of our milieu and remained true to ourselves (i.e., to our paternal ego-ideal), but rather the feeling of loyalty to the group." [7] The "group" here refers the society as a whole, who has made demands on him. The maternal superego seduces his desire but on the other hand, suppresses it with social laws; for example, he didn't manage to order the officer to go after little Quintin. Although this seems to contradict the notion above since he did try to transcend the social law sometimes, the point is that "even when his (my) desires are transgressive, even when they violate social norms, this very transgression relies on what it transgresses." [8] When Jason commands the sheriff to assist him with the pursuit of little Quintin, he is rejected. The social conventions, on the one hand, urge him to desire symbolic success but on the other hand, blocks him with social laws. This embodies that he is confined by the Symbolic. The theme of the fallen paternal authority has already its sign in the old Compson. He is a weak man that does not

rule his family who exhibits no reaction when he realizes Caddy has an affair with another man. He experiences himself as a rebel for not being affected by the incident but deep down he is trying to escape from participating in the battlefield of society. It is since then the paternal authority in this family fell.

## **5. Conclusion**

To lay the foundation necessary for the comprehension of this analysis, the paper first clarified Lacan's concepts in general before each part of the argument. Then in the course of the discussion, three major characters, Banji, Quintin, and Jason, in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, are respectively elaborated with Lacan's theories, applying his Three Order theory and Oedipus Triangle. Assuming that the sophistication of Lacan's psychoanalysis could account for abnormal characteristics and behaviors, the paper manages to correspond to the theories and the text.

The Three Order theory can be corresponded to the issues of the three brothers to discover the essential logic underlying their psychotic predications. Banji is concealed within the unconscious, living in fragmented meaningless symbols. Quintin's ambivalent love toward Caddy and the social pressure exerted on him tear him apart from the Real to the Symbolic. The Symbolic becomes an omnipotent monitor by which Jason is stifled. To further excavate the triggers, the paper utilized the Oedipus Triangle, elucidating the latent defects that result in their tragedies. Banji plays the role of Oedipus in the triangle, who is supposed to diminish the imagined non-existing Phallus to render himself becoming a subject but failed. Quintin's unbalanced libido directing to Caddy and the society makes him resemble the Mother, who is attracted both by Oedipus and the Father. His desires' disparity leaves him overwhelmed. Jason acts for the Father in the triangle, the representative of the Symbolic. However, his relationship with the Mother and Oedipus seems too shallow that gradually the Symbolic draws away all his attention. Their wrongdoing and malfunctioning while dealing with the three realms finally induced their mental debacles.

The study aims to assist to promote the understanding of the characters of *The Sound and the Fury* by harnessing Lacan's theories, which were rarely used until recently in modern novels. It is more multifaceted than most psychological research of *The Sound and the Fury* since it binds not only to Lacan but more to Faulkner's whole story. Compared to the most relevant research of Barker and Kamps, this paper is unique in that it makes systematic use of the Three Order theories integrated with the Oedipus Triangle to unveil the meanings and causes of their performances. With prudent reflection on the three brothers' plights, people can excavate into their own mental status and learn to balance their desire.

However, some more sophisticated concepts and theories worth exploring cannot be incorporated into this paper. In future literary analysis, these theories would hopefully be accurately applied in studies focused on a smaller scale, thus helping readers to understand the characters from the

view of psychoanalysis in detail. Also, employing Lacanian understanding in more works of literature may establish deeper and more diverse relations between literary critique and Lacan's psychoanalysis.

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