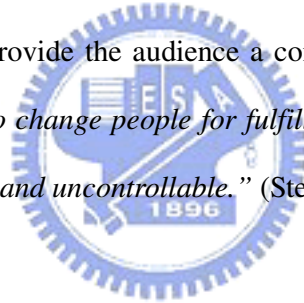


Chapter 5

American Trilogy

Dogville, *Manderlay* and the last work “*Washington*” are the latest works of von Trier. They are “American Trilogy”. It is a series of story describing a female idealist, Grace, the daughter of a gangster leader. She believes in the goodness of humanity and always tries to help people whenever she can. Nevertheless, the unpredictability of human nature disappoints everyone in the end. The film is named from the diverse places where Grace has stayed. Most of them are located in the isolated area of America.

The theme for the story can be reflected to the idea that von Trier uses in his previous works. Von Trier intends to provide the audience a conflict experience of “*How an idealist with the best intention, tries to change people for fulfilling her idea, but eventually leads the situation become catastrophic and uncontrollable.*” (Stevenson 54).



5.1 Plot and Setting

When it comes to the first film of American Trilogy, *Dogville*, von Trier described that he has “a second-hand inspiration” from a German dramatist, *Bertolt Brecht (note.1). He experienced Brecht’s dramas during his teenage and thought he didn’t want to return to his own work again. They are irresistibly everlasting in his memory.

Based on the interview between Bjorkman and Lars von Trier, von Trier said that he would prefer to view the style of *Dogville*, which is the first film of American Trilogy a new kind of “fusion film”. “Fusion” means a mixture of different styles. For von Trier, the innovation is made for exploring and challenging the way of conventional film-making. In von Trier’s idea, when it comes to art, people always question “What is art?” and try to limit and label “this is art” or “this isn’t art.” Such condition also appears in film and literature. Therefore, von Trier is trying to challenge this condition by creating a fusion of film, theatre and literature. That doesn’t mean a film has to be a performance only in a theatre. *Dogville* has its own genre of a new type of “fusion film”. The most important part is to avoid the limitation of itself by questioning what is cinematic or non-cinematic, for we are led to believe “everything is possible” nowadays.

The narrative techniques borrowed from the classic Angle-Saxon literature are translated into a unique film language in *Dogville*. For example, the omniscient narrator’s voice and the division of chapters, and the chapter titles foreshadow what is about to happen in the film (Fig.5.1) (Bjorkman 242).

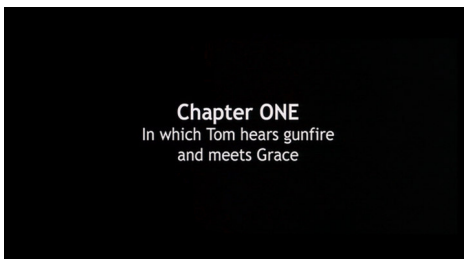


Fig.5.1 The division of chapters and foreshadowing in *Dogville*

There are more concrete reasons for using this narrative method. It gives the audience certain expectations of what is about to happen, but then something different beyond their imagination appears. The introductory words help to build the preview for conceiving cinematic experience. The contribution of introductory words has become part of the framework (Bjorkman 243).

Moreover, the elements taken from theatre and literature are not just mixed with the expressive forms of film. The whole component has to function as a cohesive fusion. “It should be a thoroughly blended and harmonious emulsion.” said by von Trier (Bjorkman, 241).



Note5.1 Brecht, Bertolt, 1898–1956, German dramatist and poet. “Brecht began to develop his so-called epic theater, in which narrative, montage, self-contained scenes, and rational argument were used to create a shock of realization in the spectator. In order to give the audience a more objective perspective on the action, Brecht promoted a style of acting and staging that created a distancing effect. Instead of identifying with their roles, actors were instructed merely to demonstrate the actions of the characters they portrayed. Sets and lighting were designed to prevent the illusion of the theater from gaining sway, and Brecht revealed elements of the staging process itself.” His work, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, reveals Brecht's continued hostility toward the capitalist social structure as well as his bittersweet compassion for humanity. The later works, *Mother Courage and her children* (1941) and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1943), both concerned with ethical conduct.” (Brecht, Bertolt, reference.com.)

5.1.1 The Setting of American Trilogy

1. Isolated and harsh environments in America

Dogville is located in the isolated area of Rockies in America. Similar with Dogville, Manderlay is also a farmstead which area which is located in an isolated zone of Alabama, America. It is separated by the gate and no one has ever run out of the gate for generations (Fig.5.2). Resemble to *Breaking the Waves*, life condition is poor and harsh in both Dogville and Manderlay. Thus the villagers have to work very hard to maintain their life. Therefore, the residents in both regions are adapted with narrow-minds and very conservative in many ways.



Fig.5.2 The isolated gate of Manderlay

2. The theater effect

Von Trier gets the idea of setting up the scene of *Dogville* from a trip. He wants the whole of Dogville to be like a place lay out on a map that the whole story could be told on an unfolded map.” He is pretty fascinated by the limitations of space. In addition, he mentioned a very outstanding TV play:

“It looked like the actors were allowed to improvise from the text.... The special about the performance was that it was supposed to look as though it had all taken place on a stage...,and other distancing effect like the actors occasionally assuming the role of narrator, or the scenery and properties being changed in full view.”

After deciding to set up the scene of *Dogville* in this way, he further decided that the scene of his movie should not look like the filming of a theatre stage. On the contrary, it should be stylized uniquely to the extent that it couldn’t take place in a theatre though it is similar to the

film in the theater in some ways (Fig.5.3). Besides, the sound wouldn't be stylized but was completely realistic. For instance, one may be able to hear the crunch of gravel underfoot, even if there isn't any visible gravel on the studio floor. And the way the actors have played their scenes is nothing like those actors acting in the theatre either.

In a word, the idea is that the actors would perform in a very realistic way, even though the scenery and the external set-up are far from realistic. They are real in the same way that a child's drawing is real. A child would make his picture by drawing a few simple lines, and that's how the scenery in the film looks (Bjorkman 245-246).

Besides, the dialogues between characters are intended for speaking slowly and clearly because the meaning of the lines plays an important role for the plot. The remarks in the film are mostly concerned about moral judgments or vital truth. As a result, the actors need to stress every single word precisely to emphasize the power and force of these languages. Then the audiences are able to catch the worlds and ponder upon the meanings with accurate and explicit perceptions. Furthermore, the narrator also clarifies and defines the situation so as to correspond to the plot, or pierce to the truth of humanity in characters with precise remarks.



Fig.5.3 The theater experience in *Dogville*

3. The simple and artificial properties

The constant attempt of von Trier is never changed, which is to purify the process of filmmaking by simple acting and story itself (Stevenson 2002:101). Based on Stevenson, the props in the setting are very few and limited in *Dogville*, as well as in *Manderlay* (Fig.5.4).

Therefore, the use of sound effect and lighting is very important in order to bring the fictional setting and characters to life. In other words, it violates the regulation of Dogme. The setting is full of reminiscent and artificial implements. In addition, the costume and antique car running on the imaginary main street at that time are just like settings in a museum exhibition. Due to lack of reliable visual presentations, the film depends on symbols and audio clues very much (2003:102-104). As a result, it is full of symbols and metaphors, which make *Dogville* and *Manderlay* so unique and worth observing. Similar with Golden lock trilogy, the simple setting is used for giving the audience a pure perception to ponder on the meanings of lines and the metaphor behind the images.



Fig.5.4 The simplest prosperity in Manderlay

5.1.2 The Setting of Dogville

1. The view of Dogville

The design of setting for Dogville is very unique. It is a black sound stage that contains an entire mountain village. Dwellings are demarcated merely by the drawing of white line on the ground (Fig.5.5). There is no wall, only several doors and furniture are erected directly from the ground (Fig.5.6). Von Trier elaborately designs and emphasizes the movement of opening and closing the door to create a metaphor so as to reveal the evil things that take place behind the door (Fig.5.7). Besides, under the cover of the fictitious wall, the villagers in Dogville believe that they can be free from arbitration. In fact, their hidden side is totally exposed at a

glance. In this way, closing the door can also be a symbol of covering up the truth.



Fig.5.5 The town of *Dogville*



Fig.5.6 The village without visible wall

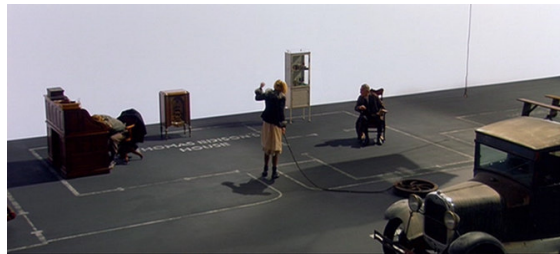


Fig.5.7 Grace is knocking on the fictitious door

In sum, the whole setting is like a life stage where various human beings and life scenes are collected and presented here. It brings out an idea that crime can never be concealed, for it has already existed since the very beginning. As people feel guiltier about what they do in *Dogville*, they become eviler to do more bad deeds. They lose their conscience and keep on

acting like demons until the final destruction arrives. Here the audience, as witness, plays the role of God and watches the corruption of humanity in *Dogville*.

2. The lighting

(1) The regular times for a day

In the early morning (Fig.5.8), there are brisk sounds of birds' singing. Like the previous idea of objects without physical existence, no real birds appear as well. The light is incandescently white; hence the "sky" in *Dogville* is very clear and bright.

In the daytime (Fig.5.9), the light in *Dogville* is also bright, but not as bright as in the morning. In addition, the sky is blue, and there is no other sound but the sound of people working in *Dogville*.

Dogville in the sunset (Fig.5.10) is very beautiful and enchanting. With the sunset that becomes a contrast with the coming darkness, the shadows of dwellings in *Dogville* are beautiful and poetic.

As for *Dogville* at night (Fig.5.11), the lighting is dark and murky. Under such atmosphere, terrible things take place secretly and are under cover.



Fig.5.8 *Dogville* in the early morning



Fig.5.9 *Dogville* in the daytime



Fig.5.10 *Dogville* in the sunset



Fig.5.11 *Dogville* at night

(2) The lighting in the old man's house

In *Dogville*, Grace always comes to the old man's house at sunset. The dim light of sunset symbolizes the condition of the blind old man (Fig.5.12). He is in the sunset of his life, and apparently achieves a quiet and peaceful state of mind (Fig.5.13). The sadness of his life is that all he gets is nothing but darkness and loneliness. Thus he even refuses to admit the fact of being blind. Moreover, he also represses himself and pretends to be gentle and optimistic to cover his uneasiness of being old and blind.



Fig.5.12 The sunset in the old man's house



Fig.5.13 The blind old man under the light of sunset

5.1.3 The Setting of *Manderlay*

1. The view of *Manderlay*

The setting of *Manderlay* is similar to *Dogville*, which is marked by black line drawing on pale ground (Fig.5.14). Compared with *Dogville*, the difference in *Manderlay* is that von Trier

manipulates the simple props and artificial settings much apparently and frankly to emphasize the sense of pure and subtle perception here. People at least may get involved with the story and feel sympathy for Grace in *Dogville*. However, in *Manderlay*, the audiences only stand on the sidelines and observe the story without getting involved. Grace lives with a group of black people who are slaves prior to her joining to their life. She is no more a victim but a leader in *Manderlay*. This has made the audiences become not so emotionally intense to view the story.

Aesthetically, the layout in *Manderlay* is not as elaborative as in *Dogville*. It is visually much simpler. After all, the story is only located on a colonial grange. The chalk drawing on the ground would not have much diversity as the mountain village in *Dogville*. Such repressive and gloomy sense also corresponds to the dull color and lights.

In other words, von Trier uses such simple and extraordinary style to satirize and challenge the visual presentation of modern films. Additionally, this extremely simplified style especially makes the viewer concentrate on the plot and dialogue of the film without being disturbed by complicated visual effects. This enables the viewer to deliberate the meaning behind the images more thoughtfully and reflect on the whole story more attentively. Such technique is effective to reveal and construct the profound implications in *Manderlay*. It is hard to acquire so much sensual enjoyment from the usual film patterns. Therefore, here von Trier successfully engages the viewer with his implications for the story by means of such marvelous visual narratives.



Fig.5.14 The setting of *Manderlay*

2. The lighting

The entrance of Manderlay always appears with night view (Fig.5.15 and 5.16). The light and shadow of tree reflect on the ground. Such images create mysterious feeling and ghostly sense for the impression of Manderlay. Manderlay is a remote and ancient farmstead. Most important of all, the segregation of the gate maintains for generations. Therefore, the slavery still preserves here and people remains to live in the old fashion.

In the beginning of the story, Grace comes to Manderlay at night and reveals the secret of Manderlay. The entrance of Manderlay also gives the audience a sense of curiosity for the film. At the end, it is also at night that Grace leaves Manderlay with irritation and disappointment.



Fig.5.15 Grace comes to Manderlay at night



Fig.5.16 *Manderlay* at the end

5.2 Suppression of Humanity

5.2.1 Suppression in Society

The New Psychoanalysis of Fromm highlights the social and cultural impacts on human beings. Human behaviors can go beyond the animalistic instincts but constrained by the social system. Therefore, the unconscious behavior of human being comes from a demand for security and satisfaction in society they live by (Fromm 14-15).

Therefore, in Dogville, von Trier intends to compress the social behaviors of a community into each scene. Thus the audience is able to observe people's ways of life, as well as their unrevealed part of it in this community. In order to gain a sense of security, the community oppresses Grace mercilessly. Their act of cracking down on Grace comes from what Grace has revealed about them and the escape of Grace, which intimidate their sense of security by fulfilling their desires. This drives all the people in Dogville, even the children, to act like psychos to persecute Grace (Fig.5.17).



Fig.5.17 Grace is bullied by the children in Dogville

Fromm further assumes that every society is constituted by a set of concepts and system. Every community has its unreasonable side, which surely will oppress many members in this community. If one doesn't learn how to repress one's feeling, one plunges himself or herself into danger. The reason why we are unconscious to the control and examination of the society is due to the fact that we are afraid of being isolated and excluded by the society. In order to maintain a connection with others, one has to follow the rules, beliefs and regulations held by

community so as not to be isolated (Fromm 77-81)

Back to *Dogville*, people in Dogville work together to crack down on Grace, and Tom is afraid to stand by Grace's side as well. Since the consciousness of the community goes against Grace, Grace's behaviors, speaking, and her unknown background all relegates her further into the tabooed position. Besides, all the others, including Tom, all accept the fact that their consciousness have been constrained and oppressed by the society. They fail to acknowledge their feelings inside in order to maintain the completeness of social order. However, Grace isn't affected by the mechanism of this social order. She puts people's feelings of being repressed in public, which makes everyone feels like he or she has been judged as well. This is the hugest humiliation and taboo for the villagers in Dogville (Fig.5.18).

Tom knows what Grace has done will provoke tremendous revulsion and oppression from the society. Therefore, he won't follow Grace and speak out what he knows. As an outsider of this community, Grace isn't so sensitive to this taboo topic. As a result, she is manipulated by Tom to speak out the taboo against the community under Tom's advice. In order to maintain the order and system of the Dogville, they decide to expel Grace from this community forever.

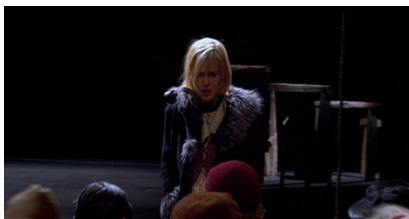


Fig.5.18 Grace reveals the truth of repression in Dogville

Finally, what the community has done to Grace becomes synonymous with what Tom has inflicted on Grace. They do all the evils to Grace in the name of righteousness, justice and Godness. However, they are actually finding means to fulfill their private desires. To Tom, it is a desire to control and manipulate others. To Grace, it is a desire to revenge. Her desire for revenge can be overseen when she asks the assassin to kill the children and tortures the

mother in the way that the mother has caused her to suffer. In the end, the mother is forced to watch her children being massacred. It is the most brutal act in Grace's revenge toward Dogville (Fig.5.19).



Fig.5.19 The mother who witnesses the massacre of her children

5.2.2 Fear and Desire

1. The desire upon Grace

In Freud's perspective, the social civilization has been achieved through the suppression of our instinctive desire. In the primitive cultures, there are many taboos and suppressions against human sex instinct. These, taboos have been inscribed into human order, law and system. The overflow of sex instinct will destroy social civilization, but the excessive suppression of instinctive urge can also cause aberrant personality or society (Yuan-Ming Wang, 11-12).

As for the example of primitive taboos, Freud mentions about Darwin's theory. Darwin suggests that the primitive tribe is gregarious and is formed by different male-centered groups. Men might kill and even eat their fathers for taking possession of females in their group. Due to the iniquity of murdering parents, the ancient law has forbidden the deed of murder and incest (Yuan-Ming Wang, 11-12).

For the residents in Dogville, Tom views himself with high esteem and represses himself. In addition, the folkways in Dogville are simple and traditional. People intentionally remain the repressive manners for keeping their life in order, until the showing up of Grace. She is not only beautiful and attractive, but also is sweet and innocent. Naturally, she becomes

people's attention in Dogville (Fig.5.20). Men have hidden desires upon her (Fig.5.21), and women perhaps are envious of her perfection, especial Leth, who is thought as the most beautiful woman in the villager before Grace's arrival. Maybe because of the suppression of desire and envy of the villagers in Dogville, Grace is abused by them afterward. After being imprisoned by the villagers, Grace even becomes the sexual victim of men in Dogville (Fig.5.22).



Fig.5.20 The beautiful and charming Grace



Fig.5.21 The male desire reveals upon Grace



Fig.5.22 Grace become the sexual victim of Dogville

2. The meaning of the outside law

People in Dogville originally live happily with Grace, until one day the policemen come and post a wanted note for arresting Grace (Fig 5.23). Being accused by the official law as a criminal, the villagers start to have conflicting attitude toward Grace. The villagers' good impression of Grace gradually disappeared due to the coming of the wanted note. The

villagers are anxious for being warned of the danger to hide the criminal, Grace.

Even though, the villagers still repress their feeling just because of Tom's incitement by saying: "*Are you afraid of a piece of picture on the wall?*" As a result, people keep repressing the true feelings toward Grace and apparently continue to accept Grace. It finally causes the aberrant behaviors and unreasonable ill-treatment inflicted upon Grace by the community.

The system from the outside law provokes people's fear.



Fig.5.23 The wanted note of Grace

In this community, people self govern themselves and live well within the community. They don't have much to pursue but to lead a normal life. It is a bit like the American community before the American Independence period. People in the community don't really have a specific law documents. Therefore, all the decisions made by the community are formed by the community gatherings. Therefore, all kinds of possible decisions could be reached and there is no model for this community to follow. However, the selfish heart of human beings is bottomless. Therefore, people in Dogville unreasonably demand Grace. If the act is agreed by most people, what they have done to Grace is always reasonable. In the moral and ethics orders of Dogville, the villagers' selfishness seems to overrule everything.

Furthermore, the disadvantage of the gathering is that the weak will never win in the battle, and the stronger always wins. Ben represents the side of the weak, supporting Grace. Therefore, he is always despised by the community. Perhaps Ben, the cart driver, has the access to getting outside connection, thus he could have a sense of righteous ethics to speak out for the good. As an outsider, Grace has the ability to judge bad from good. Therefore, she

is sure that the community is wrong. However, the community regard themselves as righteous. Therefore, when Grace speaks out the true color of people in Dogville, they are afraid of accepting the ugly truth. Thus it has eventually causes the psychological distortion of people in Dogville.

3. The narcissism of Tom

In Freud's viewpoint, in the narcissism, one view himself as his model to enhance his sense of ego and protect himself from the feeling of inferiority. Further more, Alfred Adler, Freud's student, proposes that human have the will power to strive for winning a sense of superiority. Also the desire to pursue a sense of superiority is derived from the inferiority complex. Further more, one must learn how to love others to transfer the libido to others. If one fails to love others, the sense of frustration will return to thrust him into the state of narcissism (Freud132).

Tom's psychological state corresponds to the previous narcissism symptoms. In order to fulfill his expectations of being a great writer as he wishes, he grows a ferocious sense of narcissism. He not only sets himself up as a model but regards himself as the example of morality and ethics for the whole community. He even holds a meeting called "moral re-amend" and preaches people in Dogville to follow with him. Tom's egoistic sense of superiority comes from his desire to pursue respect and affirmation from the others so as to hide his weakness, powerlessness and his useless existence of fooling around (Fig.5.24).



Fig.5.24 Tom fools around and thinks about nothing

As for Tom's ability to love, Tom seems to enjoy himself to control Grace. When Tom

grows his affection towards Grace, the voice-over of the film which narrates the story also explains the origin of Tom's affection towards Grace. It says that Grace gives Tom a sense of superiority and excitement, for he is able to enjoy the thrill of controlling and conquering the opposite gender since he saves Grace from the hellish condition (Fig.5.25). Such kind of love is a distorted sense of love and self ego. Since Grace gives him something that he could be proud of, Grace enables him to assume that he has the ability to save all the others. Only in front of Grace can he feel capable, empowered and praised. The others can't give Tom this kind of feelings. In this sense, he does everything he could to keep Grace by his side. He persuades Grace to be a helping servant for all the community for his self interest.



Fig.5.25 The first encounter of Tom and Grace

In scene eight, Tom finds that he can no longer control and persuade Grace to accord to his will, and Grace also finds Tom is no different from the community who threatens her for her flesh and body. Therefore, Tom can no longer defend for Grace. He further assumes that this kind of doubting of his personal integrity will damage his prospect of being a writer that he can't bear to see. Therefore, he turns his love away from Grace. Finally, he even betrays Grace to save himself and win the trust of people in Dogville (Fig.5.26). From this aspect, we see that he considers himself firstly and pursues his self-interest all along.



Fig.5.26 Grace is betrayed by Tom

Finally, when Tom is forced to face the external threats, selfish Tom admits to Grace that he has abused her under his fear or maybe for self-defense. But Tom continues to say:

“Although using people is not very charming, I think you have to agree that this specific illustration was surpassed all expectations. It says so much about being human. It’s being painful but I think you also have to agree that it has been edifying.”

Even before his death, he continues to strive for finding ways to escape the reality and still falls unrealistic about persuading others into his empty idea. He always mentions of pursuing of a vain dream about being a great writer. He has been using this fantasy to help himself deal with his powerlessness of facing reality. He remains to act in this way and never shows a trace of regret. He has been dreaming and assuming that he is a great writer. But in fact, he can never be a writer.

4. The resolution

After Grace tries to escape from Dogville, the villagers start to become psychologically distorted. They lock the neck of Grace with a chain and treat her just like a dog (Fig.5.27). The reason for doing so is “in case she escapes and says something bad about them.” The worst of all is that they don’t admit their wickedness at all, but consider their evil way of treating Grace as a reasonable deed of protecting themselves. This can be proved by the following words of people in Dogville. While Grace is just chained, the villagers say: *“Don’t take it as a punishment; the chain is long enough for you to go to bed.”*(Fig.5.28). From the sentence, the shamelessness of people in Dogville is implied. Furthermore, it also reveals that the irrational and abnormal psychological conditions of the villagers that are originated from the suppression of desire.



Fig.5.27 Grace is chained by people in Dogville



Fig.5.28 Grace pulls the heavy chain to her bed



5.3 Visual Narrative

The realism film researcher, Andr'e Bazin, in his *Cahiers du Cin'ema* emphasizes that the inner quality of film exists in the composition of one single shot. It is the representation of the camera's capture of the real world. Bazin thinks that the importance of one single shot lies in the non-interrupted long take, which enables the audience to glance the frame, to read and to interpret the inherent meanings of the text. Besides, the movement and composition of various elements in the frame develops the meanings of the images. From this perspective, the movement and arrangement of the characters, the position of the camera, the light, the backdrop, the manipulation of the focus point are all very important and contribute directly to the forming of meanings in the film.

Bazin assumes a concept of the "mise en scene" [dispatch of scene], in which the truth and aesthetic are two sides of one coin. The mise en scene refers to the arrangement of various elements in the frame or the camera shot. The "mise en scene" enables us to discuss the various elements of the shots in one single frame or continuous frames. In this way, we can see how these elements in the shots are positioned, moved and lighted. Moreover, the mise-en-scene highlights the importance of the audience's interpretations of the film. This is the new direction of the film theory (Graeme 51-52).

Since the whole setting is gathered up in a room, the dispatch of scenes is very important position in American Trilogy. Without the visible wall, the camera is able to shot with an overall perspective, so as to give the audience a panoramic view of all the act of characters in the film. By doing so, all the incidents are revealed at one glance. Everything is so clear that even the most hidden and ugly things could not escape from the eyes of all the audiences.

Among the shots, the action of opening and closing doors is very obvious. For the door is visible that is strongly in contrast with the fictitious wall. For the audiences, everything behind the door is still in public. The daily routine of everyone is also contained within,

repeated and discovered by the audiences. Moreover, the knocking sound of small action and trivial stuff are constantly appeared with the shot. However, the small sounds of talking and whispering are concealed. In other words, the sounds of people speaking in each other's ears are intentionally eliminated by von Trier. The silence of secret speaking has increased the unpredictable and hidden implications of humanity. In this small village, the behavior of everyone seems to be disclosed without any concealing. Nevertheless, under the appearance, the deep and complicated heart inside is still dissimulated. Thus it implies that the thought of human is never predicable.

5.3.1 Conspicuous Hiding

On the stage without real walls, the viewers would feel very anxious when seeing someone hiding herself near by the policemen who are in search of her (Fig.5.29). Or when someone is asleep in the bed tiredly and unconsciously, the entire villagers gather in the church and criticizing the person. These are extraordinarily subtle and ironic arrangements. The ironic metaphor for “conspicuous hiding” is – no matter how hard one tries to conceal, the truth still exists, no one can escape from the others' judgments here.

The followings are a few shocking scenes that are correlative to the concept of “conspicuous hiding” in American Trilogy.

1. Dogville

While someone is thinking about Grace or thinking about injuring her, Grace often stays in another fictitious room with a helpless countenance. The followings are some examples from *Dogville*.

When the cops come to find Grace, Grace hides behind (Fig.5.30). Such an arrangement usually needs at least two shots to portray, but here von Trier has melt two separated images

within one shot. Therefore, the audience is able to recognize the hiding of Grace and become aware of the tension of the image.



Fig.5.29 The police searching for Grace



Fig.5.30 Grace hiding in the fictitious pit behind

Another example is after being criticized harshly by people in Dogville, Grace goes back to her house and lies down on her bed with an exhausted body. Behind her are the villagers of Dogville in the church to decide her destiny. Such an image shows the true reality and also condenses the dramatic tension of the story. It also reinforces our compassion for Grace because she is helpless and numb with all the hardship. She is always a kind and harmless girl, but the villagers still plot against her and oppresses her cruelly, even her lover in Dogville, Tom, has no exception (Fig.5.31).



Fig.5.31 People criticize Grace behind her back in her sleeping

2. Manderlay

The place without real wall, such a technique of expression is also very effective in *Manderlay*. For example, in the chapter of “the old lady’s law”, Grace finally opens “the old lady’s book” and discovers the secret of the “mysterious numbers” on the floor of Manderlay from the book. These numbers classify the personalities of the slaves in Manderlay. While Grace is reading the book, the slaves that are mentioned in the book are just behind the house (Fig.5.33). Without using real walls to separate Grace from them, plenty of significant messages are able to come out and reach them. The important elements of this scene are Grace’s reading of the book in the second floor of the old lady’s big house, the numbers behind the house and the slaves standing alongside those numbers. These black people are labeled and put into catalogue by their master. It reveals the discrimination of the slave owner against the slaves. In my suggestion, it also suggests the suppression of humanity of the superior to the inferior.

In addition, Grace is lying on the old lady’s bed which is red and looks very sumptuous and comfortable. The luxurious bed is the symbol of the master’s noble position in Manderlay. Grace is lying on the bed comfortably and reading the contemptuous content of the book about how to control those slaves. Those slaves are not aware of the fact that they have been classified, and they are excluded outside the house and standing on those numbers. This is a very ironic scene that describes the dehumanization of blacks and the master’s ignorance of humanity.

The two scenes which happen in two different places are originally meant to be separately cut and presented in usual films. However, here von Trier makes best use of the technique, which is termed as the invisible wall. In this way, these two scenes can coexist harmoniously. And they can be presented in one shot simultaneously. This implies the fact about how we think about the others implicitly. On the other way, it also indicates the gap between people and people. Although people can be physically close, they may be psychologically distant. In

other words, the inner terrain of human heart can never be discerned easily. But through this technique von Trier enables us to get a glimpse of the inner terrain of human psyche.



Fig.5.32 Grace reading the old lady's book

Another scene happens in the chapter “The hardest time in Manderlay”. When famine strikes Manderlay, all the residents in Manderlay can only survive by eating dust and leave the meat for the sick child. However, the oldest granny in Manderlay, Wellma, can't bear to chew the dust and she can't help but eat the meat from the child's plate (Fig.5.33). Later, while the child died because of the serious illness, her father attributes the cause of her daughter's death to Wellma, accusing her of eating the child's meat. The father hopes Wellma can be put to death. When all the people are deciding whether to put Wellma to death, Wellma suffers tremendous psychological pain and tribulation in the front of the image. By contrast, people who discuss the dead penalty behind her are carefree and mindless (Fig.5.34). Like the previous techniques of filming Dogville, the scene intends to make a contrast between the helplessness of Wellma and the mindlessness of the people behind.

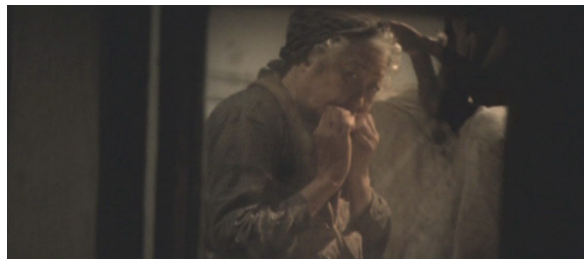


Fig.5.33 The starving Wellma eating Claire's food



Fig.5.34 Wellma lying on her bed and waiting for the adjudication

5.3.2 Ironic Shocking Scenes

1. Dogville

(1) The rape scene

The most shocking scene of the story in *Dogville* is when Grace is brutally raped in the house (Fig.5.35). There are policemen outside searching for her. Hence she could not even scream out for help or she will be found by the policemen. Then the camera is pulled out capture to the surroundings. This is also an expression of conspicuous hiding. Just outside the door, the women still carry on their whispering and gossiping, and others keep on their daily routines. Also the man who loves Grace just passes the door and asks the whereabouts of Grace. However, he is so blind to become aware of the fact that something bad has happened at that moment. Everything continues in Dogville, and the cruelest crime is also done to Grace. These images bring the audience a great shock. The whole arrangement of scenes implies that the cruelty and inequality in Dogville are always ignored by the villagers.



Fig.5.35 Grace is raped and ignored by the villagers

Furthermore, everything is in silence while Grace is raped. The image gradually changes to the long shot. Other elements join in the scene, but the focus is still on Grace. Besides, von Trier adds three little girls whispering in front of the rape scene (Fig.5.36). If these three little girls represent the innocence, then they can be a metaphor for contrasting the brutal behaviors of grownups and the lost of innocence. They are whispering as if wanting to question the whole incident. Besides, the image successfully points out the imposed sin and the suffering inflicted on the female in that society.



Fig.5.36 The little girl whispering in front of the rape scene

(2) The use of transparent covering

Another inviting scene is on the way when Grace is running away from Dogville. She is lying in the truck surrounded by apples (Fig.5.37). According to the story of Eden, apple is a symbol of charm, good taste, attraction, and danger which implies Grace's characteristic. In addition, similar to the previous scene, she lies in the truck sleeping soundly. Here von Trier digitalizes the image so that we can see through the canvas and perceive the image of her

innocence directly. The same visual effect also appears in *Manderlay*, while the body of the little girl, Claire, lies in the coffin. The audiences can still see through the coffin and feel the impact on the death of the little girl (Fig.5.38).



Fig.5.37 Grace lies on the truck in *Dogville*



Fig.5.38 Little Clair lies in the coffin in *Manderlay*

The function of such “conspicuous hiding” is to make a contrast between Grace and the villager. Behind the practical function, there is a metaphor: Even in the most brutal condition, Grace still insists on her faith of believing in the bright side of humanity and feels sympathy for others’ sins.

Besides, Grace is so eager to get away from Dogville that she would do everything to approach her hope. The person who is the driver and also the only hope of Grace is the truck driver, Ben. However, Ben is also a man from Dogville who longs for the body of Grace. When he finally gets the chance to take Grace away with him, he implies Grace to have sex with him. Under the force of Ben and the wish for leaving Dogville, Grace finally let the man take advantage of her. Here the audiences can still see through the canvas. It is also a shocking

and pitying image that describes the overtaking of male power upon female (Fig.5.39). In addition, it also implies the theme of conspicuous hiding- no crime can be concealed from the truth. Another implication is that no one can avoid from being judge in Dogville.



Fig.5.39 Grace becomes the sexual victim of Ben

(3) The shocking ending

At first, the community people in Dgville are kind and generous to Grace. And she feels that she has come to the paradise she has been aspiring for. However, everything turns out to be different. People are changing. The deed of tolerating evil deeds will result in endless sufferings and torments. Therefore, she decides to let all these evils go vanished. As Grace walks out of the car, she sees that the sunlight sheds on Dogville. However, she doesn't see any prospect of kindness, righteousness and mercy. Instead, she sees the light sheds on the evil aspect of Dogville (Fig.5.40). Therefore, she decides not to bear any injustice, but to revenge against people in Dogville. By doing this, she intends to finish and eliminate all the wickedness in Dogville that should not exist in the world.



Fig.5.40 The light sheds on the evil aspect of Dogville

Besides, when the massacre begins, the light in Dogville suddenly changes to dark and red.

Under the smokes of fire and gun shots, people in Dogville become victims of violence and revenge (Fig.5.41). Furthermore, after the ending of the massacre, the village lapses into silence, and nothing is left behind Dogville. The moon behind the image appears to be unusually huge and red (Fig.5.42). It can be interpreted as all the silence results from the fierce revenge as if the furious illustration of the moon.



Fig.5.41 The massacre scene of *Dogville*



Fig.5.42 Dogville after the massacre

2. Manderlay

(1) The issue of slavery

In *Manderlay*, Grace blames the white masters in Manderlay for committing slavery. Therefore, she punishes the whites on purpose. The way of punishment is very ironic. She asks the whites to smear their face with black colors and serve for the blacks (Fig.5.43). In my opinion, it actually implies a satire on the inferiority of the blacks instead of showing respect for them. In fact, it is a ridiculous show that specially emphasizes the skin color and the servant role of slaves.



Fig.5.43 The white people disguise and imitate black slave

Furthermore, she regards the black people as sufferers, and the white people including her as the sinners that cause the suffering of the blacks. She even says: “*Manderlay is the moral obligation (for her).*” Therefore, she never considers from the viewpoint of the blacks and blames the entire fault upon the whites. In fact, the blacks are hard to adjust to the new life as freemen. Therefore, most of the blacks don’t appreciate Grace’s help. They do not appreciate Grace for setting them free and question her suggestions for them constantly (Fig.5.44).



Fig.5.44 The blacks doubt about the suggestion of Grace

Besides, the blacks use the rights of freedom in voting to achieve unfair decisions. For example, the blacks vote to kill the old lady who steals the food of a seriously ill girl out of starvation. It gives us an important thinking that people still need to be constrained under some rules, or they may be overly free and do something unfair in the name of freedom.

(2) The ironic ending

At first, Grace appears in Manderlay for saving Timothy from being whipped (Fig.5.45). She is angry about the brutal act towards blacks and has great compassion for the blacks. Thus she decides to stay in Manderly and help the slaves to gain their free life. But unfortunately,

things are always not as easy as she think. She is deceived by the blacks mentally and physically. The man who she loves in Manderlay, Timothy, is the biggest liar who uses her love and body by cheating on her. As a result, she is so angry that she finally purposes to whip Timothy (Fig.5.46). The whipping act of Grace is exactly the same as the slave owner's brutal acts on the slaves that used to be condemned by herself. This is a very ironic and impressive arrangement, which makes us reflect on the position of the slaves in this society.



Fig.5.45 Grace saves Timothy from whip at beginning of *Manderlay*



Fig.5.46 Grace whips Timothy at the end

5.3.3 Fictitious Objects

There is a very extraordinary feature of the properties in American Trilogy. That is, many objects are appeared with no concrete but conceptual existence. That is to say, they are performed by the actors, and we do not see any visible appearances but sound.

On the one hand, von Trier intends to make these trifle stuff appear without any real physical attachment to symbolize its position of being neglected by people. The fictitious wall, fictitious water and tree are life substantial in Dogville and Manderlay. They are all great

examples. In reality, all these things look so simple and trifle. In our daily life, we are so accustomed to these things that they are easy to be ignored by us. However, for the residents in Manderlay, these things means so much to them for them to sustain the autarkic life in both Dogville and Manderlay.

On the other hand, the unique significance of these things in Manderlay also catches our attention to consider their substantial meanings in reality. For us, or the audience, the fictitious wall and door in Dogville are useless that can't protect the residents. However, for people in Dogville, the wall and door provide them security and privacy. The followings are some specific examples.

1. Examples from Dogville

(1) The fictitious gooseberry field

Grace steps on the old granny's field while running on the field which bears no substantial grains (Fig.5.47). But she is forbidden to pass through the deserted field by the granny under the excuse of protecting the field. The gooseberry field in the film is only presented with white chalk drawings on the ground. Therefore it gives the viewer a sense of forbidden Grace to pass the field. And it also represents the arbitrariness of people in Manderlay to Grace.



Fig.5.47 Grace trespasses on the fictitious gooseberry field

(2) Mosey the dog

In the film, Mosey only appears with barking sounds and white chalk drawing of its name and figure on the green ground (Fig.5.48). The appearances of Grace or other strangers come

with the continuous barking of Mosey. The direct alarm from the dog not only symbolizes the coming of outsiders, but also the dangerous and fearful occurrences. It also enhances the tension and anxiety for the happenings.

Furthermore, when everyone in Dogville has been killed, there is nothing left in Dogville, but the panic barking of Mosey remains. The last shot in the ending is the true figure of Mosey. Mosey finally appears with a true and visible figure as a brown dog while everything is eliminated in Dogville (Fig.5.49). Everything once happened in Dogville is just like a dream or even nightmare for Grace and the audience. Only the dog survives and the sound of barking persists emptily in Dogville. Though the story ends, the unforgettable lesson and terrible feeling of Dogville will still persist as if the ceaseless lingering of the dog barking.



Fig.5.48 The original appearance of the dog in Dogville



Fig.5.49 Mosey becomes visible in the last shot of *Dogville*

2. Examples from Manderlay

(1) The fictitious water and trees

In Manderlay, the irrigation of water makes the residents feel exultant. However, we can see the streaming of water, but can only hear the sound of water streaming (Fig.5.50). Moreover, the trees are essential because they can be regarded as the protection against the

devastating dust storm. But for those who have no idea of the importance of trees, the trees are only useless garden, and the only function of the trees for them is to cut them down as substitutes for building materials.

Afterward, the trees finally become visible after being cut down and used as mending materials (Fig.5.52). This arrangement implicates a metaphor. That is, when the objects are meaningless to people; in other words, when the objects are ignored by people, the objects are nothing but fictitious (Fig.5.51). Therefore, von Trier gives no physical substances for those objects. The concrete figures of objects only appear for people to use practically and appreciate their significances.



Fig.5.50 Everyone rejoices at the coming of water in Manderlay

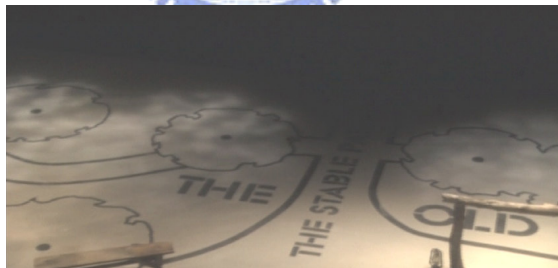


Fig.5.51 The old lady's garden



Fig.5.52 The tree become visible as mending materials

(2) Object with concrete figures

In the film, the fictitious stuffs are demonstrated by actors in order to give them distinctive meanings. Except for that, many things are also presented as real figures in the film. The figures give the objects sense of reality to emphasis their symbolic meanings. For examples, the gun, the whip and the old lady's book that records the characteristics of each slave in Manderlay (Fig.5.53). They are symbols of violence or the disclosure of the dark side of humanity. All these have created a suppressive feeling of Manderlay.

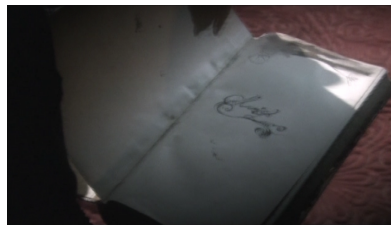


Fig.5.53 The old lady's book

Another example of the visible objects in Manderlay is the tremendous dusts that appear after the dust storm (Fig.5.55). This arrangement intends to stress upon the suffering of people that they have gone through. After the coming of dust storm, the intense color and the huge amount of the dust, also the desolate view after the storm imply the coming of famine and hard life in Manderlay.

The dust storm attacks Manderlay after Grace arrives. It causes unexpected damage and serious famine in Manderlay afterward. Thus the inevitable nature power of the storm symbolizes the hard life condition in Manderlay. Besides, the dust comes from the outside world. Therefore, it also symbolizes the outsider's power of Grace that intrudes on Manderlay and return with unexpected outcomes (Fig.5.54).

Besides, the normal kinds of sands seldom appear to be red brown. However, here von Tier makes use of red brown sands to make a contrast between the light colored filming of the whole scene. Since the color "red" brings a sense of cruelty and destruction to the viewer, it foreshadows the power of cruelty in nature.



Fig.5.54 The dust storm in Manderlay



Fig.5.55 Manderlay after the dust storm

Moreover, the water becomes visible while Grace is watching the shower of Timothy (Fig.5.56). She is overcome by her sexual desire toward Timothy when she comes across Timothy taking a shower. According to the narrator's interpretation that implies Grace is longing for the male body. The image focuses on the showering water, which is the symbol of Grace's desire that sways like the water streams.



Fig.5.56 The visible shower water in Manderlay

5.4 Symbol and Metaphor

5.4.1 The Symbol and Metaphor in Dogville

1. The church and church bell

In Dogville, people always meet in the church to decide the destiny of Grace. The church becomes a place for the villagers to gather together so as to exercise an impact upon Grace (Fig.5.57). Many crucial or brutal decisions are made here. In addition, the ringing of the church bell has been used to announce the decision of villagers toward Grace. As a result, it plays a role of pronouncing judgments upon Grace (Fig.5.58).

Besides, the ringing of church bell is also an alarm that symbolizes the occurrence of emergency. Whenever the bell rings, the villagers will feel uneasy and anxious for what is going to happen. In this way, the church bell also symbolizes the tension and anxiety inside the villagers.



Fig.5.57 The villagers criticize Grace in the meeting



Fig.5.58 The church bell

2. The bed of Grace

The bed of Grace is higher than any other bed in Dogville (Fig.5.59). The high of her bed may symbolize that her moral standard is higher than those of the villagers. Besides, the bed is the symbol of one's most personal privacy. But here the bed of Grace is erected so highly that even when she is sleeping, she still cannot get rid of the glancing of others. In addition, her house is very close to the church, where everyone in Dogville criticizes her behind her back even when she is asleep. I suggest that the metaphor behind this arrangement is that Grace can never escape from being spied and judged by everyone in Dogville.



Fig.5.59 Grace's new house and new bed in Dogville

3. The arrogance of Grace

No matter how Grace suffers or gets hurt from the abuse of people in Dogville, she still believes the bright side of humanity and tolerates everything silently. This is what Grace's father, who is the gangster leader, blames Grace for her "arrogance". The "arrogance" of Grace doesn't suggest that she is really an arrogant person. It means that she is too "arrogant" for the attitude of believing in human beings and insists on her kindness. She is too "arrogant" to realize the misuse of tolerance and the dark side of human beings. Due to her blind forgiveness to all the unfairness that happens to her, she has helped the growing of evil in Dogville.

4. The little china figures

The seven little figures look very cute and friendly. In Grace's opinion, they are the

symbols of the kindness of the villagers in community (Fig.5.60). While Tom introduces the seven china figures from the shop window, he mentions that the awful figures resemble in people in the community. Grace disagrees with Tom. In Grace's viewpoint, the seven figures are not awful at all. The reason is that in her mind, Dogville is a place where people have hope and dream, even under the hardest conditions. Therefore, the seven dolls represent the hope and dream of humanity in Grace's mind. These hope and dream are what that Grace has been longing for in her heart After she finally settles down in Dogville, she tries to buy the dolls with her working salaries. Therefore, Grace does her best to collect all of the dolls.

Besides, collecting the figures is also an act that symbolizes the intention of Grace to win the heart of the villagers. At the beginning, they do not accept Grace. Then with her hard effort to help everyone, she gradually becomes the most popular person there. The more little figures she has, the more favor she gains from the villagers. The collection of the little figures is a metaphor of the relationship between Grace and the villagers.



Fig.5.60 The porcelain dolls

However, the situation changes for worse due to the capricious humanity of people in Dogville. Grace is raped by a married man in the village. When his wife and other women discover Grace has intercourse with the man, they come to Grace and take revenge on her. At this time, the little china figures are all smashed by the man's wife. The wife even cruelly forces Grace to watch the china figures being smashed by her. To the up most, she even demands Grace to stop crying or she will continue destroying the figures unless Grace putting up with her tears (Fig.5.61). In consequence, the shattered little figures symbolize the disappearance of good will of people in Dogville.



Fig.5.61 The little figure is shattered in front of Grace

5. The symbol of car

In *Dogville*, car symbolizes outsider, which is also the only connection of the village to the outside world. The truck of Ben is the only way for people to get out of there. The policemen ride their car to Dogville and bring the news from outside world. The gangsters ride their car to Dogville at night and kill people there in the end of the story (Fig.5.62). The car symbolizes things from the outside world that brings anxiety and suffering to the village. Whenever the car comes to Dogville, people feel anxious and frightened for what is going to happen. In addition, it also symbolizes the power of outside world upon this isolated community, which includes the outside law that is brought by the policemen and the evil threats of gangsters.

In *Manderlay*, the car of gangsters symbolizes the power of outsiders invading the territory of community (Fig.5.63). Also the gambler who reveals the true face of Timothy also arrives in Manderlay by car. Therefore, the outsiders' cars in Manderlay also symbolize the foreshadowing of the dramatic change of the situation in Manderlay.



Fig.5.62 The car from outside world to Dogville



Fig.5.63 The car of the gangsters driving into Manderlay

5.4.2 The Symbol and Metaphor in Manderlay

1. The violent symbols of guns

The previous owner of slaves in Manderlay is “the old lady”. When Grace and her gangsters first time appear in Manderlay, the old lady uses a few guns to defend her property (Fig.5.64). At first, the old lady uses a shotgun and a couple of toy guns which are the symbol of violence first appear in Manderlay. However, compare with the gangster’s force that is brought by Grace, the old lady’s gun is much less intimidating. Even under such circumstance, the slaves in Manderlay are still willing to be repressed by their previous owners. Therefore, the old lady’s gun symbolizes the weapon against the enemies which is her defense for herself and also her means of oppression.

On the contrary, Grace uses real firearms to overwhelm everyone in Manderlay (Fig.5.65). She forces everyone to fulfill her command in the name of following her ideal contribution and goodwill for the slaves. For the old lady, the gun is only into use when defending against the enemy’s threats. Especially, the old lady doesn’t use the gun to force the slaves to submit to her. By contrast, Grace spontaneously holds the gun to terrorize people that she has never met before in Manderlay. This has pointed out the unjustifiable behavior of Grace. Therefore, the way of how the owner of the guns uses them and the owner’s purpose of using the gun can have different results. The symbolic meanings of these two kinds of guns are totally different. One is as a self-defense tool of the weaker- the old lady to defend against the stronger- the

gangsters; and the other is the terrifying force of the stronger- Grace, leader of the gangsters upon the weak- residents in Manderlay.



Fig.5.64 The old lady use the gun to defend herself



Fig.5.65 The gangsters with their gun

1. The metaphor of the fake money

The old lady, the previous slave owner in Manderlay, has set some rules for the slaves to follow. This includes that the slaves must use rough cottons to replace real money, instead of using the currency (Fig.5.66). For Grace or the viewers, that is a very unfair and unjustifiable rule. Nevertheless, the starting point and the substantial purpose behind the regulation is to avoid the slaves from indulging in gambling and losing all their hard savings. The shocking truth behind the fake money is that such rule is made by one of the slaves. It also brings out some metaphors that imply the fact we shall never judge things by appearance. This pushes the audiences to further realize the unpredictable human mind and the darkness inside.



Fig.5.66 The slaves using fake money in gambling

3. The metaphor of voting

The original intention of Grace to teach the slaves voting is to use voting as a means to make them express their own opinions (Fig.5.67). However, the slaves eventually learn to use voting to wreak injustice on people. For instances, to execute a granny who steals the food from a dying girl is an example. Finally, the slave even vote for Grace's staying, despite the longing of Grace for leaving. The consequence of voting in Manderlay can be interpreted as a metaphor for a possible means of gaining freedom, as well as preventing others from gaining freedom. Once people have freedom; it becomes easy for them to do acts of selfishness in the name of freedom.



Fig.5.67 The voting in Manderlay

4. The handkerchief of Timothy

All the time Grace is deceived by her favorite man who used to be a slave called "Timothy". Everyone including Grace is cheated by Timothy and believes that he is a noble prince in blood from Africa. Therefore, women in Manderlay are fond of Timothy, and Grace has no exception. Grace is strongly indulged in the sexual allure of Timothy. While she finally gets the chance to have sex with Timothy, he covers the face of Grace with a white

handkerchief (Fig.5.68). It is a mysterious handkerchief that Timothy always takes along with him (Fig.5.69). The mystery of the handkerchief is revealed at the moment of Timothy and Grace having sex, which is used as a part of the sexual ritual.

Such behavior and image symbolizes the absolute domination of man, Timothy, upon woman, Grace. Besides, it is also a metaphor indicating that Grace is covered from the truth and still believes in Timothy who in fact is the biggest liar in Manderlay.



Fig.5.68 Timothy and his mysterious handkerchief



Fig.5.69 The cover of handkerchief in the sexual act