

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Women have long been seen as inferior to men for lack of significant roles in public orientation. As a result, they have been treated as domestic laborers. For example, in the old days, as mothers, they were assigned the job of nurturing children; as wives, they cooked food, cleaned house, and took good care of their husbands and children; as members of the family, they worked hard side by side with their male counterparts. Daughters followed up with their mother in working but followed their father's will in living. Once they got married, either with or without their own consent, women were under their husband's subjugation.

Women in most tribes were treated as interchangeable objects and domestic property. For example, in Chinese legend "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms," beautiful Tiow Sian was treated merely as an instrument to get rid of a prominent courtier by causing an adopted son to kill his stepfather (Na Nakhorn 20). In the old Thai society, women could be legally sold into slavery by their father or by their husband (Kanchanawan and Weerawong 32). Some women, either as daughters, or as sisters, were forced to marry strangers for their fathers' and brothers' political, economic and social purposes (Mckee 271). Ambitious

fathers sought to strengthen their own political power and influence by forcing their daughters to become concubines of old military strongmen, princes, and even kings. For example, Marie Antoinette went from Austria to France to marry Louis XVI in spite of the fact that the couple had not met each other before (Nopapiwatkul 12-3).

Besides, some women had to share a husband with other women; kings and powerful men in the old days were in a fashion of having concubines. Princess Dararasamee, a daughter of the northern state ruler, came to King Rama V's court for the sake of the King's and her father's political motives. Some years after that she could object to her father's intention to have political contact with a foreign country which was, at that time, the enemy of Siam. So Prince Dararasamee helped Siam keep the northern region from being colonized by a western country because of the close filial and political relationship of Chiang Mai and Bangkok (Chotamara 22-3, 198-211). Nowadays the two states are territorially joined under the same national flag known as Thailand.

In Muslim countries, men are allowed to marry four women simultaneously by the religious rules (Jitmoud 322-3). Some women are expected to live their own lives in accord with social rules and convention. Some of these rules and practices were cruel and barbaric. For example, women were bound by Sutteism to throw themselves into the

funeral pyre of their dead husband to show their love and honesty (Bader 240-50). Chinese women, because of their gender, suffered the most. According to Pamela Tan, women were to live under the men's will all their lives; girls obeyed their father; married women adhered to their husbands' words; and old widows listened to what their son told them. During the Tang Dynasty, women were expected to behave and act in accordance with the Women's Ethics. For example, they were told not to turn their heads while walking, not to open their mouths while speaking, not to laugh loudly, not to reveal their feelings of happiness and anger. If a woman of fifty years of age could not give her husband a child, she would be demoted and abandoned, and her position of wife was given to a concubine, another woman of low status in the family. The Song Dynasty instituted another tradition--foot-binding. This torturous practice not only deformed the feet but also prevented women from venturing too far from their home (Ferroa 57). Further, the Confucius teaching timely strengthened this practice so as to differentiate the people's genders (Sikkhakosol 152-3).

A Song man could mistreat his wife such as by beating her. If he did not want to live with his woman, there were seven reasons to divorce her. Many women were born and raised into womb betrothal. Child bride was another tradition where women had to marry without their own

consent. A girl of a poor family could be sold by her family to another family for financial reason. Working like a slave, the child bride was often abused until her husband-to-be grew old enough to marry her. There was a tradition of suicide of wives in the Qing Dynasty; both wives and concubines were to kill themselves when their husbands died. When their husbands went to war, they were expected to do the same thing (Tan 22-7).

Confuciusism also spread to Japan. As a patriarchal society, women in Japan were placed in the lowest rank. Women did not have legal rights and status; they had to live under male protection. Young girls from poor families often helped their families by working as servants, concubines and geishas. Though some could avoid being in low positions, newly wedded girls suffered mental and physical suppression in their husbands' home. A new daughter-in-law was in the period of probation to make her in-laws accept her (Kanematsu 58-61).

Raised to be wives and mothers, women were taught all kinds of housework: cooking, sewing, nursing, childbearing and nurturing. In Medieval England, women attempted to behave in accord with an ideal image of a housewife. Those wives who did not adhere to this practice would be severely beaten. Like an ancient Chinese law, a man could batter his disobedient wife and beating a wife was legal and accepted. This barbarous treatment existed legally in the

United States until the nineteenth century (Baer 276).

Besides their physical and social power over women, men of the Middle Ages had more opportunity to learn about the outside world. Young men went to educational institutions while young women, of wealth, were kept or sent to great houses to learn how to behave (Chancellor 104, 115). But if they could not or did not marry, people would think there was something wrong with them. In India, unmarried daughters were unlucky objects of the family. It was a disgrace for a girl to remain single when she was old enough to have her own family (Ministry of Education 153).

Women have also been discriminated against in religious practices. In Shintoism, women were barred from joining some religious practices and entering certain places. Emphasizing ritual purity, Shintoism regards death, disease and the spilling of blood as degrading to religious rites (Kanematsu 58). In Buddhism, although women were allowed to be ordained, they were to observe more disciplinary rules than their male counterparts. With many obstacles, Bhikkhuni ordination, did not survive and will never resurrect into practice again. As a result, the Four Company of Buddhism (Buddha Borisat) is no longer complete because of loss of Bhikkhuni ordination. So the status of female practitioners in Buddhism is no longer formally and practically accepted. Ranjuan Indharakamhaeng, an Ubasika who devotes herself to

Buddhism, contends that nunship has not been guaranteed formally. Some temples are unwilling to admit female practitioners, and many reject nunnery completely for fear that women are disturbing elements (Indharakamhaeng 18).

Women's stereotyped images have been defined clearly in both positive and negative tones. In positive stereotypes, good women were portrayed to be not only as honest, tame, sweet and caring wives, but also as loving and devoted mothers, and as hard working, and caring housewives who were both religious and conservative. Women who rejected traditional women's guidelines would be punished severely by the members of their family or by the legal system. In Thai literature Khun Chang Khun Pan, Wanthong was beheaded because of her indecisiveness; she could not choose between devoted and kind but bald Khun Chang and handsome and loving but sensuous Khun Pan. For hundreds of years, Wanthong has been referred to as a two-hearted woman (Chuadhury 61-3).

In a more scientific age, where men discover many things and invent useful equipment and in which there are more branches of human inquiries including psychology, women's images have been portrayed more scientifically, but not much different from those in the pre-scientific era. What the present science really does is to strengthen the myth and stereotype beliefs (Keothep 86). For example, in the Brovermans' research on stereotypical sex role traits

with 74 college men and 80 college women, they found that men were more self confident, independent, active, dominant, logical, worldly ambitious while women were dependent, passive, influenced, submissive, illogical and home oriented. The findings were not surprising since all the subjects, both men and women, were from the same male dominated society. Broverman's study implied that women do not qualify for any superior positions of traditionally male work and, moreover, strengthened those traditional beliefs (63. qtd. in Rathus and Nevid 107).

When women first entered the public sphere, they were given only subordinate positions only primarily because of their femininity. Other factors such as their lack of skills and knowledge, which one could gain from systematic education, are of secondary importance. Women could not enroll in all majors offered in college. For example, in 1833, 200 years after the establishment of the first college, of course, for men only, Oberlin College began to admit female students. However, the college seemed to prepare these students to be educated wives and mothers; female students had to do women's work like washing clothes, cleaning rooms, serving meals. Furthermore, they were not allowed to deliver speeches in public. This caused an uproar when Lucy Stone, later an outspoken feminist leader, "refused to write an essay for graduation because it would be read by a male student" (Fletcher 194:

Flexner 29-30, 342. qtd. in Schaefer 265). The first college for women was established 32 years later in 1865. Vassar was the first female college established by the founders who believed in human parities of intellect, rights and development (Rothman 26-7). Yet other male institutions continued to preserve their front doors and upper benches for men. This discrimination in the academic realm still exists the token equality of sexes.

Further, sexual prejudice limits women from gaining an access to learning and knowledge. In 1883, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts did not allow "Lady Modeling Class" to have nude human models but had cows instead. And no women were allowed into the academy until 1922. As Joanna Russ pointed out in her book How to Suppress Women's Writing women have been barred from higher education and this debarment, modified in many forms, still survives (Russ 10). The discrimination caused some trouble among girls in those fields which had long been dominated by men such as law, science, and arts. According to Roxanna Joy Albury, one of the problems was that women in traditionally male-dominated occupations were in need of the role models such as girls with artistic gifts and women artists (4192-A).

Besides the lack of role models, women were sometimes discouraged and dissuaded to go back to household affairs. For example, when Charlotte Bronte sent a poem to Robert

Southey in 1837; he accepted her competence but commented "Literature cannot be the business of a women's life and ought not to be. The more she is engaged to her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it even as recreation" (Russ 11). Ellen Glasglow went to New York City with the manuscript of her first novel. She met a male agent who not only refused to accept her work but also tried to ravish her (Glasgow 62, 63, 65. qtd. in Russ 11-2).

Despite setbacks, women like the Bronte sisters, Virginia Woolf, Marie Curie, to cite only a few, have made great strides in their careers. Nowadays, women share the responsibilities of the world with men.

However, many women still suffer an inferior living. Of all women of various races and cultures, black women in the United States of America are the most interesting people; they descend from a distant root of African blood and culture but survive their black consciousness in the white setting. Though they are the citizens of the United States, their average living situation is still underprivileged. Their difficulties have been mentioned by both themselves and other people of other races. But the depiction of black women's difficulties by black women themselves is more interesting and outstanding since what they write is what they know best.

One of black women writers who are notable for their

powerful portrayals is Toni Morrison. This black woman writer from Lorain, Ohio was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. Morrison is the first black American woman who was awarded this prize. She concerns her depiction with black experience in a suppressive society. Most of her main characters are female. These women play important roles in the novels. Beloved was about the experience of black women haunted by the memory of slavery and its affects. Sethe was the main character who fought with the memory of her bitter past. Her other female protagonists in each of her novels also run and cover the whole story.

So the present research will focus on the lives of black women as portrayed by a black woman writer--Toni Morrison.

The Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to examine the images of black female protagonists in Toni Morrison's novels.

The Significance of the Study

The present study will help us understand the black women's experience in sexist and racist society as portrayed by a black woman writer. Furthermore, it will help us learn how black women undergo and survive in their oppressive living situation.

The Limitation of the Study

* The present study will be limited to Toni Morrison's

three novels as follows:

1. The Bluest Eye (1970), Holt.
2. Sula (1973), Knopf.
3. Beloved (1987), Knopf.

Methodology

The following steps will be taken in the study:

1. Study and exploration of Toni Morrison's biography, critical writings about Toni Morrison's works, and Feminist theory.
2. Analyses of images of black women in Toni Morrison's three novels: The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Beloved.
3. Conclusion.

Chapters

1. Chapter One: Introduction
2. Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature
3. Chapter Three: Summaries of Morrison's Three Novels.
4. Chapter Four: An Analysis of Images of Black women in Toni Morrison's Three Novels
5. Conclusion