

After reading *Masculinist Impulses* I feel as though because the black male missed his opportunity to fully actualize his masculinity in the past that such an actualization in the present is impossible. It seems that the only role left to black men is as support for the black woman through which he can too find his humanity. While I do not necessarily disagree with the notion of being supportive of the black female, something about the support smells of an emasculating nature. The cynic in me is suspicious of the desired political unity between black masculinity and black feminism as advocated by Toni Morrison.

After rereading *Masculinist Impulses*, I would like to retract my previous position and try to clarify my sentiments. I attributed a stance to Morrison that was a position of Grant's juxtaposed against my understanding of Grant's interpretation of Morrison's representation of black masculinity in Morrison's depiction of Paul D in *Beloved*.

Let's start here: Grant states that Toomer and Hurston's experience of "returning to ideations of black communitarianism" represents a "rediscovery of constituents of black masculinity that offer possibilities for reconfigurations of black manhood that black feminisms may find beneficial" (19). Grant goes on to say that black women writers are "interested" "in showing their [black men's] errant natures" (17). Grants continues, suggesting that Morrison, in *Beloved*, wants to "resurrect black manhood by complicating his nature beyond his ordinary depictions, even those mistakenly chosen for himself" (17-18). Finally, Grants posits that "Paul D's complications as a strong male figure...interrogates some of the inner reaches of [black feminism] to aid in creating the discourse of a black masculinity responsive to feminism's political and social impetus" (18).

From these comments, I believed the following was being suggested:

- 1) depictions of black males that are not responsive to black feminism are chosen by black men mistakenly.
- 2) there is a need to find a concept of black masculinity that black feminism may find beneficial.
- 3) Morrison's depiction of Paul D interrogates the errant nature of black men
- 4) Black women should be black man's greatest ally.

So, while I felt secure in believing that Grant and Morrison were delivering beneficial information regarding the representation of black masculinity in literature, there developed a secondary sentiment – which made me feel *a certain kind of way* – affecting how I received the information personally and as one who studies and plans to teach literature and as one who depicts representations of black masculinity. Let's go:

1) depictions of black males that are not responsive to black feminism are chosen by black men *mistakenly*.

As a black man personally and as a black male writer, this stung. First of all, because it was correct. Black men have chosen depictions of themselves that are found to be less than desirable, by other black men and portions of the rest of humanity. The tone of the comment suggested to me that black women know that some depictions of black men chosen by black men themselves are wrong, injurious or just found to be errant by black women. And this...it must be a mistake.

As though just because black women find the depictions bad, black men must have made a mistake. To me, it reinforced the idea that black women should be the arbiters of the depiction of black men that black men choose for themselves, otherwise a mistake will be made. That made me feel *a certain kind of way*.

2) there is a need to find a concept of black masculinity that black feminism may find beneficial. If black men and black women are to be partners in a community of harmony, then it would be great if black masculinity would be of benefit, as opposed to a detriment, to black feminism. Understood. I felt something was missing. I thought it should be emphasized that for the health of black men, *black men* should develop a concept of black masculinity that benefits *black men*. I thought that men should be their own best thing, *first*.(!)

3) Morrison's depiction of Paul D interrogates the errant nature of black men & 4) Black women should be black man's greatest ally

In response to this comment, I focused on Paul D's sexual transgressions in the coffle in Georgia as an example of Paul D's errant nature (as this episode was also pointed out by Grant). To me, the forced felatio Paul D endured was akin to forced sexual acts endured by women under slavery and beyond. Morrison seems to be depicting just how far from Euroamerican standards of masculinity Paul D has strayed. She seems to be suggesting that if insertion of the penis, as opposed to reception of the penis, is a defining criterion of strength associated with the ability to resist and associated with masculinity, then Paul D is no man; his version of masculinity is complicated and cannot meet the criteria of Euroamerican, middle class masculinity. Paul D's masculinity must have some other constitutive criteria.

And Morrison is right. And, if men are open to hearing what Morrison says through her depiction of Paul D, then they will benefit from her perspective. But if black men are continuing on the forbidden hunt for Euroamerican masculinity, then Morrison's words are a great threat. As was discussed with Grant, sexual violation of male slaves has rarely been acknowledged, and represented with not great frequency in AA literature. Even more, in an age when men of color are said to compose the vast majority of those incarcerated in prison, forced sexual transgressions of black men escape discussion in the public domain and occur rarely in the private domain. Morrison exposes a horrible scab for black men seeking the Euroamerican concept of masculinity, rips the scab right off, with the Paul D episode. To the black man who has mistakenly chosen Euroamerican middle class concepts of masculinity, Morrison destroys any façade of manhood developed on the Euroamerican model. If nothing else, Morrison signals that such a conception of masculinity for black men is always in peril. Black men may want to choose something other than Euroamerican masculinity. To men who choose Euroamerican masculinity, Morrison is a great threat.

Ultimately, I originally came away from *Masculinist Impulses* feeling like the only way for black men to achieve some sense of black masculinity and humanity was as a support apparatus for black women. Considering I found this to be a position advocated by black women writers like Morrison and Hurston and by men like Toomer – whom Grant labeled as effete countless times – I became suspicious and cynical. It felt as though feminist sentiments were conspiring to turn black men into people whose only spaces to be “men” exist in the millions of “man-caves” sequestered in some dark corner of the home in houses all over America. I felt, and admittedly it

is in comparison with the Euroamerican model, that black men were being pointed toward becoming nothing but effete men.