

NEON ORIGAMI

LITERARY MAGAZINE



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BREAKING THE SPELL

Fiction

BY ALEX MCMILLIN

At first, the party was easy to manage - just the soccer team grads and Coach Herriman there to help me protect the value-size bottles of vodka and Jack Daniels.

Now the friends and boyfriends have started showing up, despite our explicit instructions, and coincidentally Herriman has to leave.

"The wife told me dinner's getting cold," he says, not quite looking me in the eyes. "I'm sure you got this."

I watch him go through the double-wide's dirty windows. He pushes past a couple of boys carrying grocery bags. You can hear the bottles clinking from in here. "Don't worry." Katie, looking up at me with those lovely green eyes. "I'll help keep everyone under control. I don't want my house to get trashed." She gives me a coy little smile and walks away like she knows I'm watching her. I gotta bad feeling about this.

The boys back through the door. "Beer's here!"

"Shhh!"

"Mr. T's still here."

"Oh, shit!"

The boys freeze and look at me. I shrug. "You're technically adults, you're not my students anymore, and I'm not a teacher at North anymore. Just don't fuck up Katie's house."

"Cool."

"You're quitting?" Katie again, pulling a case of beer out of one of the bags.

"They didn't renew my contract, but I was thinking about resigning anyway."

"Why?" She asks. She turns away and bends over, her tight ass nearly bursting through her jean shorts.

"I don't think I'm cut out to be a teacher."

"I thought you were a great teacher," she says, turning to me and offering a beer. Natty Light. I don't really want to drink this piss, but it'd be a mistake to turn it down.

"Sure."

"Really," she says, and opens her beer. "You actually made Shakespeare interesting."

"All I did was play the latest Hollywood adaptations. That doesn't make me a great teacher."

"Okay, fine. You weren't a great teacher then. You were a good coach, though. I wouldn't have gotten this scholarship without you. Thanks so much!"

“My pleasure.”

“Hey, Katie, come over here and cut the cake!” Her gangly pale friend, a pretty bad goalkeeper. Kept us from making it to state.

“Okay, jeez.” Katie looks back at me and smiles. A fuck-me smile, or is that just wishful thinking? “Come over and get some cake. I’ll cut you a big piece.”

“Sure, I’ll be over there in a second.” Katie squeezes my arm and bounces away.

I pound the Natty Light and toss it in the kitchen garbage. So Smirnoff or Jack Daniels? I like whiskey better, but I can drink more vodka without getting a hangover. But I shouldn’t drink enough tonight so that I have to worry about getting a hangover, anyway. I don’t want to do anything really stupid. Jack Daniels it is.

Chatter and squeals of laughter from the girls. They’re having a great time. Good for them.

I find a dirty glass in the cabinet and pour myself a double. First of three. Max.

Someone starts playing rap through the cheap speakers in the living room and the smell of weed wafts over.

I shuffle over to find Katie and one of the boys smoking a blunt on the couch. The guy - a dumb little hick with pubey facial hair that I noticed hanging around our games - tries to hide the blunt behind his back and almost sets the couch on fire. Katie just looks up at me with that same little smile on her face.

“I can smell it from all the way across the house.” The hick looks up at me through bloodshot eyes. “Just let me get a hit.”

“Okay, sir.”

“You’re cool with us smoking weed?”

Katie asks.

“As long as you let me have some. One thing I’m not cool with, though.”

“What’s that?” the hick asks.

“The music. Play some rock. Or anything besides rap or country.”

“Okay. Johnny, put some Slipknot on.”

“That’s more like it.”

The hick passes me the blunt and I take a huge hit.

“That’s some pretty shitty weed, bro.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“Damn, Mr. T,” Johnny says. “I can’t believe you’re actually a teacher.”

“Not anymore.”

“You got fired?”

“No, I quit. The job sucked. Low pay, waking up early, having to deal with you little shits.” Scattered laughter.

“I wish I had had some teachers like you,” the little hick says.

“Be thankful that you didn’t. I was a shitty teacher, man.”

“Yo, whatever.”

“You were not a shitty teacher,” Katie said.

“Thanks.”

A moment of awkwardness descends and I head back to the kitchen to watch the kids have a good time.

As long as they don’t start smoking meth or whatever, I’ll just let them do their thing. If they weren’t drinking beer and smoking weed here, they’d be doing it somewhere else.

Psychosocial kicks on. That’s more like it. I put my glass to my lips and a single drop falls on my tongue. Shit. Gotta pace myself. I can’t get piss-ass drunk around these kids. That’d just be pathetic.

This next drink has gotta last me at least 30 minutes. It’s 6:37 now, so it’s gotta last me until 7 o’clock.

I pour myself another double and stare at the glass. 7:15, then.

Katie comes into the kitchen with an armful of cans and drops them in the garbage. She catches me looking at her and I look away, far too late.

“You look a little lonely,” she says, crossing the kitchen and standing so close I can feel her body heat. A pump of blood hits my dick.

“I’m fine, thanks.”

These girls know exactly what they’re doing. They love to turn on older men who’d be ruined if anything happened. Though I haven’t seen Katie like this before. Maybe it’s the weed.

“Okay, just keep standing over here by yourself, then.”

“Will do.”

She spins and struts back to the party, throwing a little look over her shoulder as she goes. I know it's coming but I can't look away.

I should really get out of here. A teacher fucking his student... but she's not my student anymore, is she? And she turned 18 a few months ago.

It would still look really bad if anyone found out.

I look down into my drink. Already half-empty. I think this'll have to be the last one. I can't afford to have my self-control eroded any further.

"Yo, what the fuck!"

"Man, get the fuck offa me!"

Johnny and the hick are rolling around on the floor while the girls giggle and cheer.

The skinny hick pins Johnny down and starts hitting him. That's my cue.

I run across the house and yank the little hick off.

"That's enough! Calm down!"

The hick pushes me off and glares at me. I tense up and ball my fists, but he turns away and storms out. He gets into his truck and speeds away.

I look over Johnny. Bloody nose but could have been worse. He wipes off the blood and grabs another beer.

A pair of soft, warm hands wrap around my bicep.

"Thanks for breaking that up," Katie says. "Didn't have much of a choice."

I look back toward the kitchen and Katie pulls my arm.

"Come hang out. You don't have to stand over there by yourself."

She smiles at me and I mumble something in agreement. We sit on the couch with our legs touching. Good thing she's wearing jeans or I'd have a hard-on already.

At least this'll keep me from the whiskey. Katie grabs two beers from the case and hands one to me.

"Congrats on the scholarship."

"You really helped by doing all that extra practice with me. Thanks so much."

"You're welcome."

We crack the beers open and I take a sip. Blood and nickels.

"Been a long time since I've had a Natty Light."

"This is considered shitty beer, right? I'm not much of a drinker."

"Yeah, it's terrible."

Katie takes a sip and looks into the can thoughtfully. "Doesn't taste that bad to me."

"That's because you don't know the difference."

She nods and takes another sip.

"So what are you going to do now?" She asks, turning to me and running a hand through her wavy blonde hair.

"Good question. I was in marketing before I became a teacher, maybe I'll go back to doing that."

"Sounds boring."

"It was. And unfulfilling. That's why I became a teacher."

"If you didn't even like working in marketing, why would you go back to it?"

"Marketing and teaching are the only things I'm qualified to do."

"You could learn how to do something else."

"Nah, it's too late for that."

"Oh."

"So what are you going to major in at SFCC?"

"I think I'm gonna just get my General Studies A.A. so I can major in anything for my bachelor's."

"That's a perfectly logical choice. That's exactly what I did. Now look how well I'm doing."

"Oh, stop feeling sorry for yourself, Mr. T. We're supposed to be having fun."

"Yeah, okay. You're right. Call me Xander, by the way."

"Xander. Wow, that's such a cool name."

"If you say so. I'm kind of tired of it, but it's too late to tell people to call me something else. Anyway, here's something else you didn't think you would hear from a teacher: Don't waste too much time and money on education. Are you interested in healthcare?"

"Maybe." She sips her beer. Her eyes are starting to get a bit glassy.

"If you are, you can just get an associate's in nursing and start at 100 K at pretty much any hospital in the area. You'll never have a problem finding a job that pays well."

"That sounds pretty good, but I'm hoping to play at a university after I play for SFCC."

"Oh. Yeah, that makes sense."

"Are you surprised?" She turns to me and sways slightly. What a lightweight. "You don't think I can do it?"

"Sure, you can do it if you keep working hard."

"Maybe we could keep doing extra training sessions. Sounds like you'll have plenty of time on your hands."

"Yeah, maybe. Though I'll need to get a full-time job pretty soon. I wasn't able to save a lot of money from my public school salary."

"Right, well. I guess we'll see--"

CRASH and the crunch of broken glass at my feet.

"Oh, fuck," Johnny moans. Looks like he tripped and fell through the glass coffee table. I bend over and take a close look at him. I don't see any blood, but there are several deep slashes in his hoodie. Lucky motherfucker.

"My mom's going to fucking kill me," Katie whines.

I stand and help Johnny up. "You alright?"

"Yeah, I think so," he mumbles.

"Now I've gotta clean all this up."

"I'll help," I say, turning to Katie.

There are glass shards strewn over half the living room, along with icing-smeared plates, beer cans and the remains of at least two blunts.

"I'm going to go," Johnny mumbles to nobody. He stumbles out of the house and wobbles down the driveway on his bike. Katie leaves and returns in a moment with a broom and dustpan. Now that it's time to clean up, everyone starts to say their goodbyes to Katie and leave. She gives a few awkward hugs with the arm not clasping the broom, trying not to look annoyed. Suddenly, it's just me and her. "I'll help you clean up."

"Thanks. Could you pick up the beer cans?"

"Sure."

Katie starts sweeping up the weed stems and cake crumbs. The sun comes through the dirty windows and draws a glowing line around her. For an instant I see us living together in a place like this. There is something about her I've always been drawn to, a peaceful presence I've only seen once or twice before.

She feels me looking at her and turns toward me. I put my head down and start collecting an armful of beer cans.

I know she felt that. Women never miss things like that. She probably knew that I liked her before I admitted it to myself.

We cross to the trash can at the same time and nearly run into each other. I gesture awkwardly and Katie dumps the dustbin while I stand behind her with my face burning.

I gotta get out of here.

I drop the first load of beer cans into the trash bin and stop to take a deep breath. Grooming a minor. While I was her teacher, no less.

"Are you okay?"

Oh, the kind smile in her voice.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

If I didn't actually like her, it'd be so much easier to walk away. Walking away from a fuck is one thing. Walking away from a woman you actually like is another thing entirely.

I turn and survey the living room area. Still at least a dozen beer cans left. Katie is crouched over the floor, searching for tiny shards.

But she's not a woman, is she? She's a girl. And the fact that I'm so drawn to her says something about who I am as a 30-year old man.

I start collecting the last load of beer cans.

She's not a girl. She's a woman, both legally and in reality. I've known 40-year old women that don't have that sort of poise. She's the kind of young woman who could have a relationship with an older man and come out the other side stronger.

My arms are full and I start for the trash can.

Listen to yourself, X. If you have to rationalize it, you already know that you shouldn't do it.

"I think that's clean enough," Katie says. "At least, I can't find any more glass."

I drop the beer cans in the garbage bin and wash my hands. Katie dumps the dust bin in the garbage and crosses the house to put the broom away.

After she passes out of sight, I find myself eyeing my drink. It's still half-full. I shake my head and pour it down the drain before I can change my mind.

Katie returns with a lighter and a pack of cigarettes.

"You wanna have a smoke with me?"

"You smoke cigarettes?"

"Not usually. Sometimes I borrow a few from my mom."

"Borrow?" I say as I shuffle toward her.

"You gonna give 'em back?"

"You know what I mean."

That smile again. No mistaking it this time. I can fuck her if I want to.

"Yeah, let's have a smoke. I want to hear about your plans for college."

"Okay. Acting like a teacher again?"

"Just curious."

I follow her out of the house, my eyes never leaving her tight ass.

The back yard is half dirt and half weeds inside a decrepit chain link fence. A power line sizzles overhead.

Katie sees me looking over the place and sighs. "I can't wait to leave here."

"It's not so bad."

"My mom and I are always fighting. I think she might be an alcoholic. She gets really defensive whenever I bring up her drinking."

"You can't help people who aren't ready to be helped. But it's hard to accept that when it's a family member."

"Yeah. That's true."

"You're going to be living in the dorms?"

"Yeah, my scholarship includes a free dorm room. I'm even getting free meals in the school cafeteria."

"That's great."

Katie lights a cigarette and hands me the pack. 301 menthols. The sort of shit a Waffle House waitress would smoke. And what an asshole I am for thinking that. I hang a cigarette from my lips and take the lighter from Katie's hand.

"You can't smoke too many of these before it starts affecting you on the pitch."

"Yeah, I know, thanks."

I light up. Wow, that first drag tastes like someone lit a jar of Vicks VaporRub on fire.

The sunlight turns golden as the day's end approaches. Katie sees me looking at her. She smiles a little and looks down at her feet for a moment before facing me and meeting my eyes.

"Actually, I think I might move out of state," I blur just as Katie starts to say something.

"Wait, what?"

"Well, I'm just thinking about it. I haven't actually made a decision yet."

"Why?"

"I could use a change of scenery. I feel kinda stuck here."

"I mean, okay, but you don't necessarily need to move out of the state. I'm getting a change of scenery and I'm only moving like ten miles."

"Maybe I'll just move somewhere else in Florida."

"Okay, whatever."

Katie looks away at nothing. The spell is broken. On both of us.

I drop my cigarette and stamp it out.

"I'm going to go. Let me know if you want to do a training session."

"Okay. Bye."

She gives me an awkward little half-hug and puts out her cigarette.

"Bye," I say and start walking around the house to my car.

I get in and leave before I can change my mind.

IN AN EMPTY MULTIPLEX



Poetry

BY CONOR BRADLEY

Memory and dream
flicker and die on one screen.
So keep this line close—
you can put pen to a memory
and give it breath.

JUST ABOVE MY HEAD'S EXPLORATION OF RACE & SEXUALITY



Literary Criticism

BY ARTHUR FREEMAN

James Baldwin's novel *Just Above My Head* was not as well received as some of his earlier novels. It seemed that the powerful yet palatable writing of Baldwin's previous works had evolved into pure political discourse. While it may be true that *Just Above My Head* is an overtly political book (especially with regards to the last 300 pages or so), this sort of bare emotion gives literary critics much material, and indeed much has been written about this novel. However, much of the existing work focuses on either Baldwin's treatment of race or Baldwin's treatment of sexuality. For example, Robert Reid-Pharr's "Alas Poor Jimmy" offers a provocative analysis of the dynamics of race, but does not cover sexuality with much depth. There has, however, been work that analyzes the identity struggles gay black men have regarding the intersection of race and sexuality in the black gospel world. Anthony Heilbut's "The Fan Who Knew Too Much" is a perfect example, and it will help us shine a light on why Baldwin chose gospel music to illustrate this complicated dynamic. There isn't much work regarding the intersection of these two components in *Just Above My Head*.

We have to start from scratch, and what better place to start than the placement and lyrics of the gospel songs Baldwin chooses to include.

Throughout *Just Above My Head*, characters struggle with their identities, both sexual and racial. Baldwin's choice to use the lyrics of old traditional gospel songs suggests the ability of the medium to express thoughts and emotions that the characters would not be able to express through words alone. Gospel in *Just Above My Head* serves as to both explore and communicate what the protagonists either leave unsaid, or haven't said yet. Not only does gospel allow for a more spiritual and emotional discourse, it allows the communication of messages deemed taboo by the church in a way understandable to other members of the "taboo" group (gay black men in this instance) and incomprehensible to members of the persecuting group.

Black gospel music is an important part of African-American culture. It started with slaves singing old spirituals and evolved into the industry seen in *Just Above My Head*. It has changed as the situation of black people in America has changed, and is an essential act of community for nearly all people of color in the United States.

In this way, Baldwin's use of gospel functions as a microcosm of African-American life. The songs express emotions of hardship, love, and endurance. The metaphors present in the song's lyrics relate to both Scripture and earthly realities for African-Americans. Gospel music is also a perfect method to surreptitiously explore sexuality. It has historically been an area of culture where gay men congregate. In black gospel, gay men are both discriminated against and welcomed by the church. As Heilbut says in "The Fan Who Knew Too Much": "In church circles, gay and bisexual men are regularly identified as "sissies" or "punks," - terms sometimes used, and often not more kindly, by the men themselves."

However, the passion of gay men is acknowledged by many of the black church-goers. "Almost as common and much friendlier is the appellation "the children," a term rich with its allusion to the lifetime quest of a mother's favorite son." This dichotomy creates a situation in which gay men are encouraged to express great emotion through gospel music but are forbidden from any obvious displays of sexuality within the church. Thus, they use their passion for gospel to express emotions forbidden by the very culture that created the method of expression.

This harkens back to the days of slavery when slaves used the framework of their owner's Christianity to express their pain and feelings of rebellions by singing spirituals in the fields as they worked.

Just Above My Head features many examples of gospel music that are used to show the reader the depth of underlying emotion. The first, and perhaps most powerful of these, is the song early in the novel that serves as an expression of Crunch's love for Arthur, and more importantly Arthur's love for Crunch. The boys are singing in a church in Birmingham, Alabama, a place where not only is racism prevalent, but homosexuality is persecuted viciously. Thus, Crunch and Arthur are unwelcome in the white church not only for their homosexual desires, but for their race.

The song serves most clearly as an expression of forbidden romantic passion, but also serves as a claiming of the full identity of a black gay man, not just as a gay man. The fact that Arthur and Crunch use a gospel song to air their love for each other suggests their deep respect for black culture, as they likely know the history and the passions that have been expressed by their ancestors using the same medium.

The lyrics of the song are sung as a conversation between Arthur and Crunch:

"Crunch's guitar began, as Arthur's voice began.

Take me to the water

Crunch moaned,

yess! take me to the water" (199).

Baldwin's use of the word "moaned" further suggests that the characters are using the song to engage in a dialogue about their taboo affection for one another, a dialogue that appears to the uninitiated to be an expression of passion for their religion. This is not the first time Baldwin uses gospel lyrics in the novel, but it is the first time gospel is used to form a homosexual connection. If Arthur and Crunch had openly professed their love for one another in Birmingham, they likely would have been lynched, and even if they had escaped, likely shunned in the North. However, by using a medium "approved" by the ruling group, they were able to declare their feelings for one another with no risk to their personal safety. Gospel is perfect for this sort of hidden expression of passion. As

Harrison writes in *Then Sings My Soul: The Culture of Southern Gospel Music*: "The specific drift of gay men toward southern gospel attests to its particular power to activate feelings and intuitions essential to psychospiritual transformation, without placing preconditions on access to these experiences."

While Harrison speaks specifically of southern gospel, this quote is certainly applicable to black gospel as well. The baptism in the song is used as a metaphor for the psychospiritual transformation Arthur undergoes after his first gay sexual experience with Crunch.

Baldwin's use of gospel to declare homosexual desire is in line with the aforementioned use of gospel by gay men, whether black or white, to communicate deep emotions forbidden by those who follow Christianity. The fact that gospel can allow the "activation" of these emotions despite the seeming disagreement between the religious principles professed by those that follow the Bible and the homosexual lifestyle is perfect for Just Above My Head. None of the characters seem to follow an orthodox Christian lifestyle, but they use Christian means to publicly air forbidden feelings.

As Harrison says, "This quality is a key part of what enables the music to contain conflicting sets of privately individualized meanings and possibilities simultaneously, while also publicly functioning as a catalyst for culturally conservative consensus."

Reid-Pharr's Alas Poor Jimmy discusses Just Above My Head in a racial sense, and references two of the songs included in the novel. Reid-Pharr does cover homosexuality in relation to the first song mentioned, which is found on pages 308-310 of Just Above My Head:

*Shine on Me
Shine on Me
Let the light
from the Lighthouse
shine on me
Let it
shine
on me!
Oh,
let it shine
on me.
I want,
the light from the lighthouse,
to shine on me.
I heard the voice of Jesus say,
come unto me
and rest.
Lie down,
thy weary one,
lie down
thy head upon my breast.*

Reid-Pharr argues that gospel music provides African-Americans with a connection to their past by putting Biblical principles into tangible language. He also says that this sort of language reinforces the belief that God is still living, that is, he is still relevant to the lives of modern black people.

Reid-Pharr goes on to provide a close reading of the song in which he claims the lyrics are a representation of a personal relationship with one's God (he compares God to a "lover") and that this style of gospel music was popular even with white people, specifically because it made real the Biblical principles that had previously been abstract to them.

While Reid-Pharr's sociocultural analysis may be correct, he fails to consider what the lyrics mean in the context of the novel. The lyrics are sung by Arthur to Hall before Hall leaves for a long period of time. Thus, on a surface level they signify a close family bond between Arthur and Hall. They have certainly been through a lot together, and they still have a good relationship. It is important to note that even in a non-sexual context, Arthur uses gospel music for his own purposes. That is, he sings lyrics that provide a message other than the Biblical principle espoused in the song.

In fact, Arthur's use of a gospel song in this manner is further evidence that Baldwin's use of gospel suggests the impossibility of separating race from sexuality. Arthur has learned through his homosexual experiences to use gospel as a vehicle for emotions completely unrelated to the message of the song. This mentality has become so deeply entrenched that it is now part of his identity as a black man. That is, when Arthur is asked to play a gospel song to see his brother off, he chooses a song that allows him to express his own emotions through the music, rather than choosing a song specifically about the departure of a loved one.

The second song Reid-Pharr analyzes is much later in the novel, near the end.

Sonny Carr sings it when Arthur and Guy are in the Parisian cafe:

Water-boy,
now, tell me
where you hiding?
If you don't a-come,
I'm going to tell your mammy
you jack of diamonds
you jack of diamonds
I know you of old, boy
yes, I know you of old
See, see rider
See what you done
Take this hammer,
carry it to the captain.
Tell him I'm gone, boys,
tell him I'm gone

Reid-Pharr claims this is an important moment of self-realization for Arthur. He says that it is at this moment that Arthur realizes what he has to do for his race. According to Reid-Pharr, Arthur now truly understands what being a singer means. Arthur is now equipped to accept the tradition of his people and forget everything that draws him away from this tradition.

Reid-Pharr makes a valid point that this is an important moment of self-realization for Arthur. However, he argues that this self-realization is purely race related. The realization is not merely regarding race, it is Arthur's realization of the inseparability of his sexuality and his race.

Sonny Carr is well aware of both Arthur's identity and his sexual orientation before he sings the song. Perhaps he was alerted by the barmaid, or perhaps he simply saw Arthur and Guy together and came to the conclusion on his own. Either way, it is clear he is singing the song to Arthur. It is also clear that Arthur is aware of this.

His message to Arthur, or at least the message Arthur got, was one of futility. The feeling does not sink in immediately, as Arthur is happy to meet one of his father's old friends. Arthur does not show any animosity towards Sonny because he knows Sonny did not mean him any harm.

Just Above My Head provides a unique window into the use of gospel music to both express homosexual desires and simultaneously serve as an expression of homosexual identity. Baldwin was a gay man and a former preacher, so he understood that cultural products (such as gospel) must be used by gay men to communicate in ways incomprehensible to the persecutors. Perhaps the critics are right in claiming *Just Above My Head* is too overtly political. What cannot be denied is that this overt expression of belief resulted in a great insight into those who use their culture to express feelings that that same culture has deemed unacceptable.



THE EMERGENCE OF FEMALE SELF-AWARENESS IN FICTION

Literary Criticism

BY ALICIA LEE

As one might expect from the name of the character and the title of the novel, Betsy Thoughtless does not possess much self-awareness or engage in serious self-reflection for the majority of the novel. Betsy causes many problems for herself because of this, mostly notably driving Mr. Truworth away with her inconsiderate words and actions. The passage from page 557-558 represents a significant shift in Betsy's character as she begins to reflect on her past actions: "She blushed to remember, that she had given herself leave to be pleased at the thoughts of appearing amiable in the eyes of that great man." In many ways, this passage contributed to the very idea of character development in novels.

Betsy has moved on from her vanity and her constant desire for praise to a somber reflection on how she should behave. The fact that Betsy does so after encountering the unnamed Lord is also important to note, as Betsy was especially 'thoughtless' when it relates to male suitors. Betsy's realization that the fact she's a married woman means a man other than Mr. Munden declaring his love for her is shameful is another part of her emerging self-awareness.

Later on page 55, Betsy says: "...no man can now pretend to love me but with the basest and most shameful views." Once again, Betsy diverges from her earlier behavior.

Betsy often fell for flattery earlier in the novel, but now she realizes she has a duty to reject any such flattery as Mrs. Munden. Betsy is aware of her role as wife and this contributes to her overall self-awareness.

Betsy realizes her most obvious fault in this passage, saying on page 558, "Nature has made me no fool, yet not one action of my life has given any proof of common reason." This is the most apparent example of self-awareness emerging in the character of Betsy Thoughtless. When we contrast this passage to a novel like *Pamela*, it is clear that Betsy Thoughtless experienced far greater character development than Pamela.

While Pamela became less naive throughout the course of her story, Betsy Thoughtless becomes a completely different person by the end of her novel. Betsy goes from an inconsiderate, vain woman to a thoughtful, humble woman who considers the consequences of her actions before she actually goes through with them.

This character development is also significant because it further separates the novel from the legacy of amatory fiction.

While *The History of Betsy Thoughtless* clearly features romance as both a central theme and uses it as a plot device, the character development present in this passage makes this novel distinct from amatory fiction. Amatory fiction focused on romance, but the characters were not developed very much. Betsy even experiences character development when considering the topic of romance and says, “I rejected Mr. Truworth, only because I thought I did not love him enough, yet gave myself to Mr. Munden, whom at the time I did not love at all.” Betsy doesn’t blame Mr. Truworth for the breakdown of their relationship, but instead recognizes her own role in it. This passage establishes that character development is a critical and necessary part of any novel in addition to its significance in having Betsy experience such character development.

In this passage, Betsy recognizes her prior faults, such as vanity and the constant desire for praise instead of perpetuating them even further. Betsy also realizes her weakness to flattery and is determined to reject any man who offers it to her, especially since she is now married to Mr. Munden. This passage also helps create the idea of character development as a critical part of any novel and allows the novel to diverge from amatory fiction as its own unique form of literature. The character development in this passage is truly important for both the character of Betsy Thoughtless and the history of the novel itself.



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