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Lehigh University

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Herchel, Sarah

Playful Women:

Masochistic

Tendencies in

Louisa May

Alcott's *A Long*

Fatal Love...

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Playful Women: Masochistic Tendencies in Louisa May Alcott's *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, "Taming a Tartar", and "Behind a Mask"

by

Sarah Herchel

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Date

Mary-Jo Haronian
Thesis Advisor

David Hawkes
Co-Advisor

Barry Kroll
Head of the Department

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Abstract

Psychoanalytic theories describes masochism as both healthy and dangerous. Masochistic play in women is important for their own self exploration and is critical in creating agency within sexually charged relationships such as father/daughter and master/slave. This paper explores the ways in which the women use masochism to attain their desires for freedom, agency, and power, oftentimes over men.

For Rosamond, of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, masochistic pleasure is hidden, and she only glimpses her true desires, ultimately failing to perform a healthy masochism; Sybil, of "Taming a Tartar", flaunts her masochistic nature, and she achieves many of her desires; Jean Muir, of "Behind a Mask", plays a different game in that she reverses the roles of the master and slave, in doing so furthers my argument that Louisa May Alcott understood the power of masochistic tendencies. Through perversions of masochism, I argue, women in many of Alcott's texts learn that they have an identity and desires separate from those prescribed to them by society and their childhood. They succeed, in different degrees, in taking the role of the objected and using it to write their own scripts that offer some power.

Parallel to the constraints of heterosexual power dynamic run the constraints of language, and Alcott's female characters grapple with the system in a way similar to masochistic play. Finally, I turn to the question of the reader's agency in attending to these texts noting that the readership is shaped by the same scripts by which the heroines are shaped.

A masochist may be viewed as an individual who is always playing a game. Slovoj Zizek explains the theatrics of masochism succinctly. He says “masochism is inherently theatrical: violence for the most part is feigned, and even when it is ‘real’, it functions as a component of a scene, as part of a theatrical performance; violence is furthermore never carried out, it always remains suspended, as the endless repeating of an interrupted gesture. It is therefore the servant who writes the screenplay” (Zizek). Inherent in even the titles *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, “Behind a Mask”, and “Taming a Tartar” is this idea of playing a game or putting on a performance. In the first there is the childish game of being chased, knowing full well that the object of the game is to be caught. In the second, hiding is the performance; creating fantasies is the game. Finally, taming a tartar suggests playfulness simply with the alliteration in the title and idea of taming; one tames a dog. This last title is interesting because not only does it suggest a game, but also it suggests danger within play. In these texts, the game often assigns the woman as the victim and the masochist, but as seemingly powerless the role is, she is, I argue, simultaneously the victor because it is her choice to be victimized. In other words, there is power in her masochism; the masochist gets to write the play. For Rosamond, of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, her masochism is hidden, and she only glimpses her true desires, for ultimately she does not succeed in performing a healthy masochism; Sybil, of “Taming a Tartar”, flaunts her masochistic nature, and she achieves many of her desires; Jean Muir, of “Behind a Mask”, plays a different game than the two other heroines in that she reverses the roles of the master and slave, and in doing so she exemplifies the idea that, although not limited nor essential to women, Louisa May Alcott focuses on such masochistic

tendencies. In several of Louisa May Alcott's texts, especially in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, a heroine satisfies her desire for freedom, subjectivity, and sexual agency through actively subjecting herself to painful situations.

Psychoanalysis sheds light on how this game playing is empowering. In the terms of psychoanalytic theory, in childhood, through the relationship between father and daughter, women recognize that they lack the male phallus. At the stage in life when females realize that they are "the same" as the mother, they also realize that they are "different" from their father. According to Freud, it is also during this time of recognition of themselves as different, or lacking from their father, that women develop what Freud terms as penis envy. Jessica Benjamin interprets "the desire for the penis as evidence that little girls are seeking the same thing as little boys, namely, identification with the father of separation, the representative of the outside world" (Benjamin 108). The women individuate themselves through attaching themselves to someone, their male father, who is obviously 'different' from them, and so they have an identity more troubled than do men. But the male counterpart is not merely different because he has a physical penis, rather, the male is separate from the female because of what that penis represents in society; mainly power, subjectivity, and agency. The penis is representative of the phallus in that it is the object of desire. The phallus, in psychoanalytic theory, is a symbol of the ability and capability of participating in discourse and the patriarchal language that overruns the society. Lacan suggests that our desires are actually morphed through using the language we are given, and perhaps even more so for women, because the language we are given is

one developed by men. In Alcott's texts, we see the heroine's struggle with language as they perform their submissive and masochistic roles with the men in their lives.

Lacan's idea of the phallus is essential in understanding this father/daughter dynamic. Benjamin goes on to explain that when little girls realize they cannot *be* like their father they then want to *have* and be *had* by their father. In childhood, women learn and construct a schema for what society demands of a woman to have a successful relationship with a man. Through women's lack of similarity to and the desire to be needed by their fathers in childhood, a framework is built of an acceptable relationship. Thus, according to psychoanalytic theory, the role of a dominant figure and a submissive figure is formed in establishing a desirable relationship for a woman. This tension is needed in order to be recognized and have an identity. All their lives women search for these patriarchal figures, which are usually dominating and controlling, so that they can be recognized and recognizing themselves as subjects. Women are in a constant struggle with "the tension between the desire to be free and the desire not to be" (Benjamin 10). What follows is a masochistic performance for self-exploration and recognition.

The father/daughter relationships in Louisa May Alcott's *A Long Fatal Love Chase* are especially representative of the constant power struggle between men and women in nineteenth century literature. The woman's self denial begins at the moment they recognize the difference between themselves and the male; somehow the woman lacks what the man seemingly holds. Her identity is produced through submissive training in childhood and this training continues into adulthood. Women easily recognize the other, or the male, and have a "willingness to offer recognition

without expecting it in return...The female difficulty in differentiation can be described almost as the mirror image of the male's: not the denial of the other, but the denial of the self' (Benjamin 78). Because of this denial of self and focus on the father, women are constantly submitting to their father's desires in order to gain an understanding of what those desires actually are, and how they, as female, are separate from them. Important, however, is that through this submission women obtain glimpses of what it means to have feminine desire. While they become familiar with the male script of what a woman's sexual desire should be, they also realize what parts of their desire does not fit this representation. The othering of woman by the father actually creates a space for the woman to search for her true desires; her sexual desires, her desire to be recognized and have agency, and even her desire to be free within the structured society. Women's subjectivity is an issue that is under constant scrutiny because women are most often, in the nineteenth century as well as in today's society, considered as objects. It is therefore urgent to consider how women escape this objectification and in fact use this objectification to gain subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic theory suggests that in order to be a subject, people need a tension with and recognition from another individual. The Freudian model interprets the tension in the relationship as essentially an inequality in power distribution (Freud). In a sexually successful relationship, the partners need to stand perpendicular to each other rather than parallel, and then they can really "see" or recognize each other. A parallel relationship suggests that neither participant in the relationship can see the other, because the power is equally distributed. At the same

time, if the power is completely one-sided the relationship will not work either, as Benjamin says, “[I]f I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other controls me, then I cease to exist” (53). Both participants must have agency in order for the relationship to thrive and to maintain their own existence.

Females can gain recognition and the power of subjectivity through masochistic behaviors in their heterosexual relationships. In fact, it may be that these masochistic or pain evoking actions are necessary for a female to have power in female to male relationships; a relationship based on equality does not encompass recognition because, on a psychoanalytic level, you cannot really see yourself. To exist as an individuate, you must recognize a difference from yourself in an other. The tension involved in what Benjamin terms the master/slave dynamic produces subjectivity in, for this case, women. In actuality, these relationships are not about single-directed power, and often while the dominator sometimes believes he is in control, the person in the role of the submissive controls the situation. The woman, because of the learned roles taught in society, usually performs the masochistic role in the relationship, and she gains power and a self-understanding through *demanding* physical or emotional pain. Masochism is defined by Richard von Krafft-Ebing as:

a peculiar perversion of the psychical sexual life in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by master, humiliated and abused. This idea is colored by lustful feeling; the masochist lives in fantasies, in which he creates situations of this kind and often tries to realize them. (Noble 61)

Through these “perversions”, I argue that women in many of Alcott’s texts learn that they have an alternative identity and desires than the those prescribed to them by society and their childhood. They succeed, in different degrees, in taking the

role of the object and using it to write their own scripts that offer some power over the men in their lives, and some sense of female agency. The first text to turn to is *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, where the heroine achieves self-discovery through the pain she feels when she leaves her deceitful sadistic lover, Phillip Tempest. Although Rosamond experiences pain while she is in the company of Tempest, she feels even more hurt when she attempts to leave him. Rosamond only glimpses her true desires rather than achieving them. She hides her masochism and feels uncomfortable in her decision to perform the submissive role. Because of this uneasiness, Rosamond only temporarily succeeds as a subject with agency. Ultimately Rosamond cannot remain in control of her desires, and she therefore fails as a "healthy masochist".

Rosamond's lack of control directly connects with her physical desire for and attraction to fear. For Rosamond, being frightened by a man's ominous looks actually stimulates her curiosity and arouses her senses. She says after looking at a portrait of Mephistopheles, "Why, you are the very image of Meph—" (Alcott 5). This half uttered statement is Rosamond's recognition that Tempest has the potential to be evil, but also the statement represents her reluctance to actually voice that opinion and have it be real. In fact, Rosamond seems to desire to be at the hand of the devil, but she cannot admit to this desire. The devilish looks of Phillip Tempest are part of his appeal to Rosamond because such looks indicate power.

Tempest is older and wiser than the young Rosamond, and he speaks to her in a condescending and controlling way when they first meet, asking her to do such things as to "play hostess" for him and orders her where to sit as though she is his child. He even refers to her, condescendingly, as an "infant" when talking to both her

and his son, Lito (Alcott 48). This fatherly demeanor, as well as Tempest's inherent doomful looks, are both new and attractive to Rosamond. Rosamond's biological father is never mentioned in this text, and it is her grandfather, an unfeeling and stoic man, who does not readily accept her as his own, that is raising her. Rosamond, in a conversation with her grandfather, says at the opening of the text, "I wanted to be a child to you and you shut your heart against me" (Alcott 2). The desire to be a part of the dominant figure's life is apparent to the reader in this statement, though perhaps not to Rosamond. The attachment that is necessary for recognition of difference between father and daughter, in psychoanalytic theory, is never established between Rosamond and her Grandfather. The reader must wonder, then, whether or not Rosamond is seeking this attachment and tension necessary for identity in a relationship with Tempest. Rosamond longed to be recognized as a subject and she seems to find this recognition in Tempest.

In the beginning of their relationship, Tempest and Rosamond discuss the power dynamic that goes on between men and women in sexual (what they refer to as love) relationships. It is during these conversations that the reader sees possible conflict in Rosamond's remaining in a stable role of "slave" in the relationship. Phillip discusses how curious love is in that "it has the power to make fools of men and slaves of women." [Rosamond says] "It will never make a slave of me" (Alcott 61). From this statement a discussion ensues that ensures the reader's belief that Rosamond will indeed flee from Phillip because of her morals, or perhaps because she sees herself becoming the slave she does not want to be. But she remains a slave to Phillip for a long time, and the reader questions whether or not she subconsciously

desires to be a slave to Phillip. Freud would argue that indeed this desire is scripted by society and perhaps performed by Rosamond because of this script. But she discovers that her desire to be free is impossible with Tempest. After Rosamond realizes her limitations with Tempest, she wants to choose abstinence and a life without a master rather than life with a liar; this choice is not made, however, until Rosamond learns of the lies Phillip has told. Until this realization is made she remains happy in her dominated role.

Like Rosamond, Sybil also finds her sadist very appealing in an evil and dominating way. His looks are indicative of power, as are his actions. Sybil herself is portrayed as powerful. At first Sybil's power seems to stem from her not fearing Alexis the tyrant, but the reader comes to realize that much of her power is gained through a fantasy she seems to hold about taming a violent man. Sybil alludes to the idea that she desires only to be free, saying, "I was alone in the world, fond of experiences and adventures, self-reliant and self-possessed...this life[being the companion of the princess] was as charming as anything but entire freedom could be" (Alcott 586-87). But what Sybil deems as freedom is not what we, as readers, immediately conjure when the word is mentioned. Her freedom lies in subjecting herself to his violent temper and trying to tame it, and the way in which Sybil attempts to achieve this feat is quite dangerous. She does not fear the pain that Alexis may inflict on her, but instead she welcomes it. She says of one of Alexis' tantrums:

I had seen many demonstrations of wrath, but never any like that, for he seemed to be literally beside himself. Pale as death, with eyes full of savage fire, teeth set, and hair bristling like that of an animal, he stood fiercely glaring at me. My heart *fluttered* for a moment, then was steady, and feeling no fear, I lifted my eyes to his, freely showing the pity I felt for such an utter want of self-control. (Italics added Alcott 588)

Sybil's heart flutters when she sees that Alexis is in the position to hurt her physically. One would think that a heart would pound, but instead it *flutters* which indicates excitement and even a love interest. But Sybil actually does have reason to fear Alexis, since he did want to hit her prior to this scene, and he stands before her with a whip. She is attracted to this brutish man, who, when in this rage, indeed resembles Phillip Tempest's devilish looks, because he stands as a dominant figure who possesses something Sybil does not. The whip, certainly a phallic symbol, can be read as a representation of power and even as the phallus that all women seek to attain. Alexis' possession of this object, and recognition of Sybil in front of him, gives her a sense of subjectivity. Sybil realizes that if she subjects herself to a dangerous and potentially painful situation, she will attain control over Alexis, and perhaps even access to the phallus he appears to have. Psychoanalytically, seeing the asymmetry between what the subject lacks and the object possesses creates subjectivity in both. The man Sybil is supposed to fear lacks the self-control that she possesses, and therefore a sexual dynamic is created.

This sexuality is felt between Rosamond and Tempest as well, but not as emphatically until Rosamond realizes how the subjectivity she is gaining through Tempest's physical presence is short lived. She soon sees that a lasting agency would emerge by running away from the obsessive lover. At first Rosamond delights in her masochistic nature, and fleeing from Phillip Tempest is representative of this revelry in pain because later she finds she is only aching for his return. Although she is the one who fled from Phillip, it is Rosamond who feels abandoned by Phillip when he doesn't come to look for her:

In all those months nothing was heard or seen of Tempest, and Rosamond tried to feel rejoiced in the success of her last stratagem. But in her *perverse* heart of hers would linger a longing to know where he was, what he was doing and if he mourned her death with a grief as strong as his love had been... she could not conceal from herself that her affection for Tempest was not dead in spite of deceit and wrong. (Italics added Alcott 172)

Rosamond plays this masochistic game with herself throughout almost the entire novel. It is this kind of game that empowers Rosamond both within herself and over men. Even though she has these moments of longing for Phillip Tempest, she is still in control of herself and has agency; she is writing the script because it is she who is choosing to run. In the above passage Rosamond's role is twofold. She is, in a sense, able to play the role of the sadist by choosing her own pain, by forcing Tempest to chase her, mainly running from her lover, and the role of the masochist by experiencing the pain of this chosen loss.

The abandonment of Phillip Tempest can be viewed as both positive and negative. On the one hand, Rosamond has agency and subjectivity through the recognition she attains by him. If she could maintain her self-awareness and subjectivity without the pain, then a reader could argue that Rosamond performed her masochisms successfully, in that she made self-discoveries. However, because Rosamond's strategy leaves her physically exposed to Tempest's violence, she is inflicting a pleasurable pain upon herself that may be ultimately fatal; and the end of the novel does indeed prove to be fatal. Marianne Noble discusses how various masochistic acts are not necessarily unhealthy, and, in fact, how they can be a means of self-exploration. An individual, however, must be careful with her fantasies. Noble says:

Whereas masochism is not a priori bad for women (or men), women's attraction to dominating men *is* always at least dangerous. An aesthetic of masochistic ecstasy is different from an attraction to abuse. But even when self-deprecating, male-identifying attractions to submission, and not self-conscious, aesthetic varieties of masochism, are present, I still think it is important to allow for the play of female masochistic desire. Genuine self-exploration must precede any transformation. (Noble 193)

Noble devises that these masochistic behaviors are healthy as long as they are experiences where the individual is learning more about themselves, but masochism that allows for abuse must be rejected. For Rosamond, what starts as an exploratory game becomes a dangerous obsession.

Sybil, of "Taming a Tartar", seems to be able to practice a healthy mode of masochism. The text exemplifies an instance where fear is confused with excitement, and the heroine flirts with feelings of danger: both the danger of the Prince's violence and of her own emotions. At a climactic point in the story, Alexis comes back to kidnap his love, the heroine, Sybil. This kidnapping, of course, couldn't be a better fantasy realized for Sybil! Sybil compares love and war numerous times, for example, she says, "[Y]es. I like courage in love as in war, and respect a man who conquers all obstacles" (Alcott 604). After several times of making this comparison, Alexis grasps what kind of violent game truly generates excitement for Sybil. The statements about love and war are the inherent meaning of what it means to be scripted as a woman, for Sybil essentially aligns herself with one of the conquests in a battle; she believes herself, on some level, to be a mere object.

Alexis takes Sybil, by surprise, from behind in a choking manner. During the attack Sybil explains she was at first "frantic with anger and fear" and then:

Being half-suffocated, I suddenly feigned faintness, and lay motionless, as if spent. A careful hand withdrew the thick folds, and as I opened my eyes they met those of the prince fixed on me, full of mingled solicitude and triumph.

“You! Yes; I might have known no one else would dare perpetuate such an outrage!” I cried, breathlessly, and in a tone of intense scorn, though my heart leaped with joy to see him. (Alcott 608)

Sybil is a resistant character unwilling to be tricked by a man; however she cannot help but swoon in the presence of the prince’s violence. It is not completely clear whether Sybil is breathless because she was being choked or because she is in the presence of the prince. She even says later, when Alexis is crooning words of love to her, “I dared not listen to it, and preferring to see him angry rather than tender, I said provokingly: ‘No man ever forced a woman to love him against her will. You will certainly fail, for no one in her senses would give her heart to *you*’” (Alcott 610)!

Sybil’s game slaps the reader in the face with these lines, and as readers, we love it!

Sybil has agency in biting words, and she is in control of her game, but only can be in such a state if Alexis shows cruelty towards her. The reader clearly understands her game when she finally condemns Alexis and then, as he is leaving, says, “‘Return soon to me,’ I cried, ‘the test is over and the victory won’ (Alcott 613). Sybil feels *joy* in seeing someone who many times over attempted to hurt her. Sybil struggles with both the desire to be in control and the desire to be dominated. She has a physical reaction which is, in fact, very similar to a reaction that Rosamond has while she looking for Tempest at a party.

Rosamond starts to grow out of the Freudian trap of master and slave when she finds herself a companion for the elite family of Comte De Luneville and there is no turning back. Before she truly recognizes this maturation within herself, the reader sees her confuse fear and excitement in a dangerously masochistic way.

Rosamond becomes highly sensitized when she is closest to meeting with Tempest. For example, Rosamond cannot control her anxiety about seeing Tempest when she is at a party with her fiancé, the Comte De Luneville. Her normally calm demeanor is transformed into that of a frantic and disturbed individual. Comte is completely taken aback by her mannerisms, because never before has he seen her in such a, perhaps sexual, state. Rosamond's "altered demeanor surprised, then pleased, then disturbed De Luneville, for he could not understand it" (Alcott 216). What is unusual about this change in personality is the overall feeling of excitement that seems to overwhelm Rosamond, when logically she should be experiencing feelings of fear. In this situation "her usually pale cheeks burned with an unnatural color, her glittering eyes roved restlessly to and fro, she talked at random, turned almost rudely to look after passers-by, started and breathed quickly sometimes, and often seemed about to break away and follow some uncontrollable impulse" (Alcott 216). Interestingly enough, in this passage fear and excitement cannot be separated. Furthermore, when she does finally see Tempest he smiles a satirical smile at her "that drove her wild" (Alcott 216). Wild with fear or wild with joy? Indeed, a sexual intensity is felt in Rosamond's reaction to Tempest's vicinity. Again Rose looks at him and sees a fierceness and the fiery eyes that remind her of Mephistopheles, she is somehow uncontrollably attracted to this devilish figure. She is actually pleasurablely torturing herself with these conflicting emotions. Her reveling in Tempest's gaze even seems to be a form of masturbation; this pleasure and subjectivity is one that is not easily found in every man around her.

During her stay with the De Luneville family Rosamond realizes that the pleasure she finds in the father/master of Tempest is not the sort of relationship that she truly desires. She realizes that she is drawn to the relationship with Tempest not only because she finds him devilishly attractive, but also because Rosamond is playing into the role of the masochist that society has scripted for her. Upon staying with the De Lunevilles, Rosamond becomes aware that not all loving relationships must have a master/slave dynamic, but at the same time, unfortunately, she grasps that she needs that tension in order to fulfill her sexual desires. It is as though the freedoms of being an equal entrap Rosamond rather than liberate her. Her employment gives Rosamond the opportunity to experience a different sort of relationship than the one she experienced with Tempest. She finds that her employer, or master, has fallen in love with her. Comte De Luneville offered Rose everything in marriage; wealth, protection, and "he had offered the one gift that made both *equal* [Rosamond and Comte], his love, and sued for hers as *humbly* as if she were a princess of the land. Such things win women, and though she did not love him Rosamond could not find the courage to refuse him" italics added (Alcott 206). This equality and humble nature precludes any sexual thoughts by Rosamond. Rosamond's desire is to be seen, and psychoanalytically speaking, she will never be seen as a subject if the difference between she and Comte is not addressed. Rosamond herself is explained as not having the 'courage' to express the problem of the parallel relationship, and it is here that the reader sees Rosamond truly playing into the role she is given by society. Her fear of offending the man with her words of refusal is an example of her submissiveness and lack of the phallus. Comte will never

be more than a protector to her, and he will always treat her as a friend and as an equal. She even tells Tempest that loves Comte De Luneville "as a father" (Alcott 217).

Of particular interest is that this father/daughter relationship does not have the same sexual tension and desire that Tempest and Rosamond have, or even Alexis and Sybil have in their relationship. Hegel and Freud say that the tension between the two sexes is "the state of nature", and it seems that the Comte and Rosamond relationship refutes this idea (Benjamin 54). This refusal is fascinating because it seems there is a further connection between tension and sadistic nature or even devilish looks. Comte is described as "a tall, soldierly man...with a handsome patrician face which age would only soften and refine" (Alcott 203). Comte's looks exude pleasantness and softness, and they are looks that do not even resemble those harsh and rigid ones of Tempest or Alexis. It seems that in order to be sexually appealing to a woman, the character must have impending doom actually written on his face. Rosamond accepts the proposal of De Luneville, but in her acceptance speech she makes it apparent that the love she can give him is not sexual. She says, "I confess I do not love you as I should; my heart is full of affection, reverence and thankfulness; these I can give gladly, but no more" (Alcott 208). Never in the text are there scenes where the reader doubts this platonic relationship.

A confusion of fear and excitement is a constant and necessary theme in a woman's desire if a relationship is to be sexual. In trying to become closer and identify with male desire, a woman is confronted with difference. These conflicting emotions suggest a trap that Rosamond and Sybil have caught themselves in. A

woman desires to capture both freedom and subjectivity in a heterosexual relationship, but in these texts she cannot do so without, at times, being dominated. The women actually have to contradict their desires at times in order to achieve them! Sybil has a realization, in her potentially dangerous position in which she puts herself, that she possesses a quality that Alexis does not have, which gives her a significant amount of power. She can show him how to develop the quality of self-control through denying herself to him. In denying herself to Alexis, Sybil is both hurting herself and proving herself powerful over her own feelings and over Alexis. She does want him sexually, for "an odd fancy" is often taking over her emotions, but she must first prove her strength and freedom as a woman before she submits to him. She has to play the taming game through masochism. Danger and desire seem to go hand in hand, and this is the same game the reader sees in Rosamond and Tempest.

While Tempest creates a physical reaction in Rosamond, the other patriarchal figures in *A Long Fatal Love Chase* do not produce such a thrill. The heroine encounters many father figures that want to protect her, as already seen in Comte De Luneville, but none other than Tempest who overtly expresses the wish to dominate her. The relationship between Rosamond and Father Ignatius is significant because through him the reader sees a possible sexual relationship develop between Rosamond and an inherently "good" man; he is a servant of God. There is indeed a glimmer of sexuality in the relationship between Rose and Ignatius, but it is only present when he is taking the dominant or heroic role in the relationship. For example, when Father Ignatius is ushering Rose off the island to her escape, he plays

the role like a knight. He is no longer a priest, but instead he is a manly man; he dives into the lake and steals Rose a boat for a getaway:

It was a great feat to stir a woman to that admiration of that manly strength and skill which men most love to win; Ignatius saw it shining in the girl's eyes as she welcomed him and his barren life seemed suddenly to blossom like the rose.

'Ah, that was a brave miracle bravely wrought! It reminds me of the days of romance. You should have been a knight and not a monk', she says...
(Alcott 199)

It is at this moment that the reader feels the sexual tension between Rosamond and Father Ignatius, but it is never to be really felt again because Ignatius promises himself to treat Rosamond as an equal. He renounces his dominant role, and he retains his vow of celibacy to the church. Father Ignatius essentially removes the sexual dynamic, and by doing so, murders Rosamond's subjectivity.

After Rosamond sees that she can develop this non-dangerous and therefore "healthy" and non-masochistic relationship with Ignatius, she matures as a woman, and sees the potential to resist the pleasure in the pain that Tempest was causing her. In fact, she realizes she does not desire Tempest at all when she sees the goodness and love in Father Ignatius. An interesting aspect in this romantic discovery is that Alcott has the "perfect" man, the one who loves Rosamond and cares for her unconditionally, be a servant of God. Because of this position in the church, an easy justification for he and Rosamond not becoming sexually involved is accessible. However, in a psychoanalytic reading, Rosamond and Father Ignatius do not become sexually involved because they lack difference and tension. For Freud, the father is desired because of the power struggle and difference. Because Father Ignatius is

unwilling to assume the dominant role in the relationship, he and Rose can never be together.

Father Ignatius does possess paternal characteristics such as supportiveness and protection; although he refers to Rosamond as such names as “foolish child”, he does so in a caring way. When Father Ignatius smiles at Rose, “he warms her heart” rather than Tempest’s smile which drives her wild (Alcott 200). Contradictorily to caring, Phillip Tempest talks to Rose as a slave and simply loves the novelty of the game of the chase, he says to Rose:

I like the chase, it is exciting, novel, and absorbing. I have tried and tired of other amusements, this satisfies me and I am in no haste to end it. Upon my soul, Rose, it gives me a new interest to life and makes my wooing varied and delightful...you lose yourself again, and in a week or two Baptiste and I will take the field for another harmless hunt. (Alcott 194)

It is the game that interests him, not so much as the relationship; on the contrary, Father Ignatius proclaims his intentions to Rosamond to be faithful to her as a person and friend. Father Ignatius says to Tempest of Rose, “I shall love her all my life, shall be to her a faithful friend, and if I can not remain loyal to both God and her I shall renounce her and never see her face again. You call this folly; to me it is a hard duty, and the more I love her the worthier of her will I endeavor to be become by my own integrity of soul” (Alcott 325). Father Ignatius has perpetually “good” intentions towards Rosamond and treats her as a friend and an equal, even if he does love her. As is the case between Rosamond and Comte De Luneville, this equal treatment seems to be the demise of their relationship. The impossibility of this “good” relationship, one that has both Rosamond and Father Ignatius act as independents, can be looked at through what Benjamin says about the context for recognition.

Benjamin formulates that the hypothetical self “does not *want* to recognize the other, does not perceive him as a person just like himself” (Benjamin on Freud 53).

She goes on to explain:

Were both partners to give up control [as in Rosamond and Father Ignatius' case], the dissolution of self would be total. The violated partner would have no controlling partner to identify with; she could not “safely” abandon herself. When both partners dissolve the boundary, both experience a fundamental sense of breakdown, a kind of primary, existential anxiety; instead of connection to a defined other, there is a terrifying void. Thus the desire to inflict or receive pain, even as it seeks to break through boundaries, is also an effort to find them. (Benjamin 64)

Essentially, there is a tension needed in order to be recognized and truly involved in a relationship. The loss of tension and ceasing of the game in a relationship like that of Father Ignatius and Rosamond results in virtual nonexistence and loss of subjectivity for both partners. Actually, Father Ignatius still feels recognition from God, but Rosamond is no longer recognized by a man and so she ceases to exist; the ending of her relationship with Tempest is actually the end of her life. Her death in the end of the novel is inevitable, unless she rekindles her empowering masochistic tendencies. Although death may seem a way for Rosamond to escape Tempest's objectifying attitude, it ultimately is not, for Tempest's last words uttered while cradling Rosamond's dead body are, “Mine first—mine last—mine even in the grave!” (Alcott 346). These words indicate that there is no chance of subjectivity or freedom for Rosamond unless she had continued to maintain power through her masochism. She is trapped as Tempest's slave with no chance of agency in her death.

But in her life, Rosamond learned from her masochism, which is what Noble suggests as the healthiest way of participating in masochistic fantasies. Because of the knowledge of herself gained through masochistic play, Rosamond was not willing

to return to the danger zone of Phillip Tempest. Although the relationship with Ignatius could never have sexual encounters, Rose would prefer equality in friendship than subjectivity in sex. The reader sees Rose develop as a woman who begins to perform outside of the role which was written for her by the men society and in childhood. She sees and attempts to act upon her true feminine desires, but is punished for such dangerous actions. Killing Rosamond is a way for Alcott to placate her patriarchal readership, (ironically, a readership shaped by the same masochistic tendencies that I have been discussing), while writing a role where women can see and act upon their desires. *A Long Fatal Love Chase* is one of Alcott's texts where she takes extreme measures to show that the equality between genders in heterosexual relationships simply cannot exist.

Further research will show that language functions in a similar way to masochism in that both constructions are limiting to women. Lacan suggests that a prison of patriarchal language is proliferated by a male dominated society, and the women try and maneuver within their patriarchal boundaries to find some semblance of a voice. We see the three heroines struggle within the confines of their 'given' language, to different degrees, in all the texts.

Rosamond often finds herself lacking words when accompanied by Tempest. In a scene aforementioned, she does not completely utter that Tempest looks like Mephistopheles, and instead says, "Why, you are the very image of Meph—" (Alcott 5). In the very same interaction with Tempest, actually the first time the two meet, he abbreviates Rosamond's speech via interrupting her, therefore taking over Rosamond's power over language and over herself. Upon Tempest's arrival

Rosamond says, “ ‘I was so absorbed in watching the sea I did not hear you come out. I love tempests and—.’ He interrupted her with a short laugh,” and essentially raped Rosamond of her attempt to express herself through language (Alcott 4). Not only does the disturbance represent a robbing of power, but also Rosamond’s submissive acceptance of the interruption dictates how she will behave through the remainder of the novel. Rosamond’s difficulty with language mimics her plight with masochistic tendencies.

Paradoxically, Sybil sustains power throughout her effort with language barriers, and we see this when she appropriates masculine terminology and metaphors. Exemplified in the scene where Sybil compares love and war, we notice her utilize words and concepts that are denoted for men. She says, “[Y]es. I like courage in love as in war, and respect a man who conquers all obstacles” (Alcott 604). This line succinctly demonstrates a successful use of patriarchal boundaries. Sybil speaks of herself using masculine ideas; she plays into the script of a woman behaviorally and linguistically. Not only does Alexis understand her innuendos, but also he acts upon them and therefore allocates power to Sybil. Readers see a similar power struggle in “Behind a Mask”; however in this text, the roles of master and slave are inverted.

Jean Muir from “Behind A Mask” is a heroine who gains freedom and subjectivity by scripting her life and forcing the men around her to become the masochists. Jean performs a role reversal in “Behind a Mask”, and proves that the woman can be the dominator, from a male standpoint, in a relationship. She maintains the tension that is needed for a relationship to succeed, but she does so in a

different way than Rosamond and Sybil. Although Jean plays games and roles throughout this text, which do indeed empower her and give her subjectivity, she does not play these roles in a masochistic manner. She is able to gain power because she meets a father figure who is willing to give *her* the dominant role in the relationship. Jean does, in one opinion, sacrifice some of her power by consenting to marry Sir John. It could be argued that by marrying a man she is submitting to the power of money and male dominance. Jean Muir and Sir John's relationship, however, has a sort of role reversal. Although Sir John is the older father figure in the relationship, he also plays the submissive role.

Throughout "Behind a Mask" Jean Muir plays several roles to trick the Coventry family. She even disguises herself so she looks like a demure young woman, when in actuality her looks resemble those of Tempest and Alexis. When she wiped "the pink from her face, took out several teeth, and slipping off her dress [she] appeared indeed, a haggard, worn woman of thirty at least" (Alcott 106). She is empowered by playing the role of the naïve victim, and in the end she still holds power over the family in an almost sadistic way. In the father/daughter relationship between her and Sir John, it is he who consciously decides to play the masochist. He admits to his decision to ignore any trickery that Jean has performed, and he marries her giving her both the title of Lady Coventry and power over him. He says, "I know what I have done. I have no fear that I shall repent it. If I am blind, let me remain so till time opens my eyes" (Alcott 201). He says this with a fatherly "protective arm" around Jean, and goes on to talk about how she will "make sunshine" for him now. I see this speech as dually masochistic and fatherly. This duality is unusual, but very

possible. Sir John has power in his masochism because he is conscious of the game he wants to play in order to keep Jean as his lover.

Sir John decided to allow Jean Muir to be in the dominant role, and therefore the psychoanalytic tension that is needed in a sexual relationship was created. Unlike Father Ignatius, Sir John was willing to sacrifice equality for subjectivity. He looked at Jean Muir with a skewed view rather than straight on, as Father Ignatius insisted on looking at Rosamond. It is this skewed view that allows for the two characters to survive as subjects at the end of the story. Sir John says of Jean, "I will look at nothing, hear nothing, believe nothing that can any way lessen my respect and affection for this young lady" (Alcott 200). This refusal to acknowledge a different view than the one he already created of Jean is not represented in Father Ignatius's viewing of Rosamond. Father Ignatius looks at Rosamond straight on, and he can only see her as an equal, mainly a subject of God, and therefore he misses and actually nullifies any productive relationship with Rosamond. Zizek postulates, "the Object can be perceived only when viewed from aside, in a partial, distorted form, as its own shadow—if we cast a straight glance at it, we see nothing, a mere void, we see nothing, a mere void" (Zizek). This sentiment is much like Benjamin's feeling about the void established in equality. The "Object" in the relationship is subjectivity for both partners, and because Sir John agrees to do away with equality in the relationship, the object can be seen; both individuals can exist subjectively. Gender aside, a master/slave relationship was needed in order for the relationship to work; in "Behind a Mask" the feminine character won the dominant role.

Jean Muir appropriates the masculine linguistically as well as masochistically; the other women in the story are disbelieving of such a feat. Like Rosamond and Sybil, Jean struggles with a constricting language system, but she does not allow this to prevent her achievements. Upon the discovery of Muir's letters Lucia exclaims, "She never wrote that! It is impossible. A woman could not do it" (Alcott 195). Women anticipate others of the same sex to speak in amorphous terms, and Jean simply does not speak or write this way. Parallel to her inversion of masochistic roles, Muir inverts ownership of language. On several occasions she performs the feminine 'woman' while working with a patriarchal language. When Sir John hears her reading he expresses skepticism:

'Novels!' thought Sir John, and smiled at them for a pair of romantic girls. But pausing to listen a moment before he spoke. He found it was no novel, but history, read with a fluency which made every fact interesting, every sketch of character memorable, by the dramatic effect given to it. Sir John was fond of history, and failing eyesight often failed his amusement. (Alcott 118)

Jean's voice inflections allow her to stay within the limitations of being a woman, but also her choice of a "male" text and the tone of her voice enables her to be in a powerful position. Sir John is interested in hearing more of a masculine text in a feminine light.

Feminine desire is, in some ways, to be in control of one's own subjectivity, agency, and freedoms. Rosamond "pined for freedom" from societal constraints, as did Sybil and Jean, and all three women accessed this desire, to different degrees, through similar actions (Alcott 175). Ironically, they attain some measure of freedom through playing the socially prescribed role of woman. The women performed roles outside social confines to access the phallus through masochism. For women, to

achieve their desires is to be recognized as subjects within a relationships. In reading these three texts through a psychoanalytic lens, we notice that a sexual tension is a necessity in order to attain subjectivity for a woman. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that, particularly for females, power and subjectivity can be found in masochism. In many of Alcott's texts this access to power and subjectivity proves true. Both Rosamond and Sybil choose their path of masochism, as does Sir John, and this choice represents their agency. As seen in the relationship between Phillip Tempest and Rosamond, playing games with a lover can prove to be quite powerful. Rosamond felt pain and loss while fleeing from her Tempest; however it was through this pain that she gained control over Tempest. He could not bear to go on without having her as his. He desired to possess her, and it was her resistance that drove him to chase her more. Although Rose was running away for most of their relationship, it seems that she very much enjoyed this sense of power, as is seen in the physical reactions she had when Tempest was close to discovering her. A need for recognition, and a need for protection were emitted from Rosamond's character throughout the novel; these sentiments are often developed as father/daughter bonds. Similar reactions were seen in Sybil and Alexis' relationship. Sybil actively strove for access of the phallus, which was something that she felt Alexis possessed. Sybil and Rosamond both placed themselves in dangerous situations to attain that which they desired.

As "Behind a Mask" shows, it does not necessarily have to be the female in the masochistic position in the partnership; but there does indeed have to be a distribution of power and with that power a designation of roles. From a

psychoanalytical standpoint, tension is needed in order for a relationship to be sexual. At the stage when an individual comes to understand to which gender she or he 'belongs', she or he also realize that she or he is somehow 'other' than one of her or his parents. For women, being objectified because of this difference is a commonplace. Women realize they lack the phallus, and they spend their lives trying to understand and rectify this lack in order to be recognized as subjects. Perhaps the only way to become a subject as a female is to be involved in a relationship that is based on the knowledge of these inequalities and differences, and for Rosamond's character this knowledge was simply unacceptable. Death was Rosamond's last attempt to achieve subjectivity, and Alcott does not even allow death as a means to Rosamond's ends. Alcott seems to be giving the message that women must be active players in the game in order to win the game, despite the pains that game may inflict.

A message about the danger of such literary situations might also be heeded by readers of fiction. If we are shaped by the same scripts that Rosamond, Sybil, and Sir John are shaped, then our pleasure in their masochism becomes more easily understood. Tania Modleski, in her book *Loving with a Vengeance*, formulates that as readers of nineteenth-century literature, "the texts often speak profoundly to us, even those of us who like to think we have shed our 'false consciousness' and are actively engaged in challenging patriarchal authority" (113). She articulates an opinion of Richard Dyer, author of "Entertainment and Utopia", and clarifies that "mass art [mainly the romance novel] appears to be escapist because it 'offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't supply'" (Modleski 112). Louisa May Alcott's texts are

providing exactly this fulfillment for the readers. We, as readers, can identify with the characters in the texts because we are shaped by the same masochistic scripts that the heroines utilize. We are tormented by Rosamond's deadly desires, we cheer Sybil's courage, and we revel in watching Sir John squirm; the characters create emotions within us because these emotions are reflected in us. Power in masochism is not limited to literary fictional characters; its power touches even the reader.

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About the Author

Sarah Jean Herchel was born in West Springfield, Massachusetts, November 5, 1977. She is the daughter of Henry and Jean Herchel. Sarah graduated from Lehigh University in 2000 with a B.A. in English and Psychology. She attended Lehigh University for her M.A. in English Literature and graduated in 2002. Sarah currently teaches reading skills in Boston, Massachusetts.

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