A Long Fatal Love Chase Essay, Research Paper

A Long Fatal Love Chase by Louisa May AlcottLouisa May Alcott’s background influenced her to write the tragedy A Long Fatal Love Chase. Oneimportant influence on the story was her father’s role as a leading transcendentalist (Doner 342). Transcendentalism states that society is a necessary evil (Clendenning 371). Simi-larly, RosamondVivian, the main character in the book, states her opinion of society when she says: “Law and custom Iknow nothing of, public opinion I despise, and shame and fear I defy ” (8). In addition to beliefs,another influence on the story was the many jobs that Alcott held. Besides being an author, she was alsoa nurse and seamstress at one time or another. By comparison, Rosamond becomes a seamstress to affordfood and board after she runs from Tempest with no money (94). Later, she joins a convent and becomes anurse when a conta-gious fever breaks out in the town (124). Perhaps the most important influence on thestory is that she was a supporter of the Temperance movement and women!’s suffrage. Among other things, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the National Woman’sSuffrage Associa-tion believed in equality between men and women (Scott 389). Likewise, Rosamond, thepro-tagonist, is a woman who is characterized as fearless, ethical, and competent compared to the maleantagonist Phillip Tempest. This background, together with a believable plot, convincingcharacterization, and important literary devices enables Louisa May Alcott in A Long Fatal Love Chase todevelop the theme that love is a fatal obsession. The structure of the novel is cleverly used by Alcott to keep the reader hooked. The openingsituation is used to describe the circumstances of Rosamond Vivian’s and Phillip Tem-pest’s lives. Thefirst scene portrays Rosamond as a beautiful and restless young woman who is living with her grandfatherin seclusion. By writing Rosamond’s thoughts, “I shall do something desperate if this life is notchanged soon. It gets worse and worse and I often feel as if I’d gladly sell my soul to Satan for a yearof freedom,” Alcott is able to show how vulnerable and what easy prey she would make to a man likeTempest (3). She also uses the opening scene to give the reader a clear picture of how Tempest thinksand feels. It is obvious that he only considers people as entertainment when Alcott writes: “Most menwould have been touched by the inno-cent confessions of the girl [Rosamond], but this man’s heart hadgrown hard with years of selfishness and he merely enjoyed her as he would h!ave done a lovely flower, an exciting book, a passionate song” (9). Following the opening situation, thegenerating circumstances are used to show how Rosamond’s and Tempest’s lives have been changed by beingmarried and the rea-son that Rosamond decides to run from Tempest. At first it seems that married lifehas changed both of them for the better. Alcott describes Rosamond’s new appearance by writing: a year of love and luxury had ripened her youthful beauty into perfect bloom. Grace-ful by nature, arthad little to do for her, and, with a woman’s aptitude, she had acquired the polish which society alonecan give She now showed fair promise of becoming all that a deep and tender heart, an ardent soul and agracious nature could make her, once life had tamed and taught her more (43). Also, for the first time Tempest shows real emotions towards someone besides himself and re-morse for hispast sins when he mutters: “I wish to heaven I had found this girl ten years ago and saved myself fromtreachery for which I never can atone” (45). Though it seems that eve-rything is perfect, the generatingcircumstances also show that Tempest’s old ways have not completely changed. When Rosamond hears a noisewhile she is sleeping, she wakes up and goes to the head of the stairs and hears voices. After listeningfor a while she finds out that the woman speaking to Tempest is his true wife and she is trying to gettheir son, Lito, back from him (88). Rosamond is shocked to find out that Tempest lied to her anddeceived her into be-coming his mistress. She quickly packs a few clothes and escapes through herbedroom window into the night (92). Succeeding the generating circumstances, the rising action bringssuspense and apprehension to the novel. This segment is a r!epetition of Rosamond retreating from Tempest, him finding her, and barely escaping him again by usingher intellect; it is also signifi-cant because it reveals that Rosamond has fallen in love with anotherman. An example of Tempest’s persistence occurs after Rosamond’s first flight when she takes up sewingto support herself, and ends up living in an apartment for nine months. When she returns to her room oneday, she finds Tempest sitting in her only chair waiting for her. She tries to escape but Baptiste,Tempest’s faithful servant, is blocking the door and Tempest threatens that if she screams, he will sayshe is mad and carry her away by force (96). After a long discussion and a real proposal from Tempest,Rosamond tells him that she will think about it and give him an answer in the morning. He then tells herthat he has made sure she cannot escape and will be waiting for her tomorrow. After he leaves, sheclimbs out the window, goes across the roof, and knocks on !a neighbor’s window (101). Mademoiselle Honorine, Rosamond’s neighbor, hides her in a basket filled velvet fabric and together they leave right under Tempest’s nose(106). Later in the novel, Rosamond joins a convent and meets Ignatius, a young and attractive priest. He falls in love with her right away, and when Tempest bribes Father Dominic into letting him into thecon-vent, Ignatius tries to save her. They flee and he becomes the only friend that she can trust (140). This event is precarious because it may be the last chance that Rosamond has for happi-ness, and with theconstant threat of Tempest’s pursuit and Ignatius’ distance (he loves her but cannot get to close becausehe is still a priest), it is unknown if she will ever find peace. Subse-quent to their escape, theprolonged climax occurs when Tempest and Ignatius twice confront each other. Tempest stops Ignatius inthe middle of a street and challenges him to a duel with pistols. Ignatius turns him down claiming thathe is a man of God and will shoot no one. When Tempes!t insults Rosamond, Ignatius quickly catches him by the throat. They then fight violently but the shortstruggle is abruptly over when Tempest’s head strikes a stone lays stunned (225). The secondconfrontation occurs when Tempest seeks revenge on Ignatius. Ro-samond and Ignatius decide to go back tothe island when she receives word a letter from her grandfather explaining that her aunt has passed away. Tempest is determined not to let Ignatius leave with her, and he bribes the attendants of their boat toleave with Rosamond while Ignatius is gone. Ignatius returns to find Rosamond out at sea and the Circe,Tempest’s yacht, in close pursuit. He gets into another boat to follow but it is not fast enough. WhenTempest sees that the Osprey, the boat Rosamond is in, is safe at shore, he tells one of his men to rundown the boat Ignatius is in with their yacht. After the boat is destroyed, Tempest returns to shore

ex-pecting to find Rosamond. Instead he sees Rosamond’s gr!andfather weeping over Rosamond’s dead body and Ignatius standing close by. When he asks what killed her, the grandfather ex-claims: You wrecked her and left her to die in the cruel sea! The priest followed and compelled your tools togive her up, and would have brought her to me without harm but for your black deed. Wring your hands andgroan till your hard heart breaks, you are too late for any word of hers (241). Tempest then drives a hidden dagger deep into his breast, drops to his knees, gathers the dead woman hisarms and says: “Mind first-mine last-mine even in the grave!” (242). At that point the novel abruptlyends with no resolution except Ignatius’ previous words: “Nothing can part us long; our love was true andpure, and though forbidden here it will unite us forever in the beautiful hereafter” (242). Thoughpredictable at the beginning, Alcott makes A Long Fatal Love Chase memorable with its high energy andunexpected conclusion. A Long Fatal Love Chase is based on three main characters: Rosamond Vivian, Phillip Tempest, andFather Ignatius. To begin, Rosamond Vivian could be the leading character in any fairy tale with herbeauty and temperament, strong moral convictions, and endurance. Her uncommon looks and vibrantpersonality are repeatedly brought up in the novel. Alcott depicts her as ” full of power and passion,yet still half unconscious of her gifts; beautiful with the beauty that wins the heart as well assatisfies the eye, yet unmarred by vanity or affectation” (43). Her moral principles are shown when sheturns down Tempest’s second offer of marriage even though she still loves him. When he asks her why shewill not become his wife after he gets a divorce, she replies: “Before I was innocently guilty, now Ishould be doubly guilty if I went back to the ‘gay and free life I love.’ Atone for the wrong you havedone me by ceasing to tempt and trouble me. I will not yield, though you hunt! me to death” (101). Lastly, Rosamond has to be enduring to survive so long on her own with her crazedhusband constantly showing up and ruining her efforts at a fresh start. For example, the last time hecatches her alive, he places her in a mental institution. Tempest leaves her a note saying that she willnot be able to leave until she relents and lets him take her home with him. She decides to stay, andeven though her health takes a turn for the worse, she stays for several weeks until Baptiste tricks herinto a false escape where Tempest is waiting (179). Another main character in the novel is PhillipTempest. He is very handsome (despite the scar on his forehead that he received in a duel) and charming. In the matter of a month he is not only able to convince Rosamond to marry him, but to leave everythingelse behind and sail around the world with him, a man she hardly knows (42). Tem-pest is also willing tokill if it further his own ends. When he takes Rosamo!nd to England, he sees Willoughby, who finds out that Rosamond does not know that Lito is Tempest’s son. Since Rosamond thinks that Lito is only a boy that Tempest foundand is taking care of, Tem-pest sees Willoughby as a threat. After finding out that Willoughby has heartdisease and may die from sudden shock or intense excitement, Tempest takes him on a tour of the town. Heruns him ragged with his unrelenting energy, until Willoughby loses consciousness and later dies in hisroom (61). Ultimately, Tempest feels no guilt toward any misdeed that he commits, no matter how much hewants to. He admits it to Rosamond when he says: “I mean that it is natu-ral for me to be wicked thanvirtuous; when I do a bad act, and I’ve done many, I never feel ei-ther shame, remorse or fear” (62). While Rosamond’s and Tempest’s true character show from the beginning, Ignatius’ real identity is notseen until the novel is almost through. Rosamond first describes him as “..a cold, silent man with apale, ascetic face and eyes that seemed so bent on tur!ning from the vanities of the world that they were seldom lifted from the ground (124). Later, whenIgnatius helps her escape, he is regarded as a kind man who is willing to leave eve-rything for a womanhe loves, but cannot have because he is a priest (141). Finally, Ignatius re-veals to Rosamond that hehas lead a whole other life before he became a minister. His real name is Bayard Conde, a hero who ledthe gallant students in the last revolution. He explains why he came to the ministry by saying: “I triedlove, glory and pleasure; none satisfied me, and, weary of the world, I left it” (199). Therefore,Alcott uses the characters as a means of bringing righteousness, depravity, and mystery to the novel inorder to show more than one perspective. In A Long Fatal Love Chase, Alcott uses several varying literary techniques. An impor-tanttechnique used in the novel is the foreshadowing of Rosamond’s death. For example, when Tempest andRosamond are sitting in her grandfather’s house during a storm, lighting strikes Rosamond’s favorite treeand she remarks: “It is a bad omen, for the superstitious say when the tree dies I shall follow soon”(14). The next instance occurs a few days later when Rosamond asks Tempest what he saw in the magicians’magic mirror. He replies: “A lovely dead woman, an old man mourning over her and myself standing nearwith an expression of remorse and despair such as I am quite incapable of feeling” (20). Anotherimportant literary device is point of view. Alcott writes the novel in third person omniscient to showboth the character’s actions and feelings. By using this method, it is possible to see Tempest’s twosides when he tells Rosamond, “promises are easily made” then mutters to him!self, “and broken” (47). This technique also gives Ignatius’ character more depth. Through third personomnis-cient, the reader sees his thoughts, which tell how much he obviously loves Rosamond. His ac-tions,however, show how much restraint he evidently has in order to remain a priest when he knows that Rosamondshares the same feelings for him (225). Possibly the most effective de-vice used in this novel issuspense. With its constant presence, the book is more active and vig-orous. For instance, after afierce argument with Tempest, Lito is never seen at the house again. Tempest is unwilling to speak ofit, so Rosamond goes in search of him and finds a grave with Lito’s fez on top. Alcott leaves thesubject alone after that, leading the reader to believe he is dead. It is not until later in the novelthat she reveals Lito has faked death to live with his mother (112). Therefore, Alcott is able to makethe novel’s different aspects seem round and complete by using !such different techniques. This background, together with a believable plot, convincing characterization, and im-portantliterary devices, enables Louisa May Alcott in A Long Fatal Love Chase to the develop the theme that loveis a fatal obsession. The point of this theme is to turn the novel into a trag-edy, which makes it morememorable. Alcott succeeds by giving the exact opposite of what is expected, the death of Rosamond. Itis a good method, because without it, it would have been just another love story. The novel isworthwhile because it deals with more than romance; it relates to death and events beyond our control.