
Themes Of Racism And Prejudice In The Short Story Desiree's Baby

Who we are and how we identify ourselves is an important part in human society. People look towards the people and belongings around them to define themselves in life. For example, being an orphan can make a person feel empty and abandoned, unfulfilled as a person. As people get older, they get married and have children, giving them an additional form of identity. The marriage between Desiree Valmonde and Armand Aubigny is an example of how prejudice became the destruction of their relationship. By examining Desiree Valmonde's unknown origins and Armand Aubigny coming from an upper-class family, there is clarity in that Armand's pride supersedes his love for his wife when faced with problems of racism.

The short story 'Desiree's Baby', written by Kate Chopin, takes place before the Civil War era when slavery was the usual norm. The adopted daughter of Monsieur and Madame Valmonde, Desiree, was left by a pillar at the gateway of the Valmonde's plantation as a little toddler, the same pillar where she eighteen years later falls in love and marries Armand Aubigny, the rich, admirable neighbor next door, in L'Abri, Louisiana. Armand is dark and handsome and often seen as a strict and stern owner by the slaves until the birth of his and Desiree's baby, where he had proven to be easier going. As the months go by, Armand grows to be suspicious of his baby's colored features blaming Desiree for this happening. He acts angrily and hateful, is disgusted with his wife and burns all her finest clothing and gifts he provided her at their wedding. Armand eventually tells Desiree and the baby to leave and are to be never seen again. In the midst of him collecting more of Desiree's items to burn, Armand finds a letter in the back of a dresser drawer written by his deceased mother stating that he 'belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery' (insert citation here).

Chopin uses symbolism throughout the story to convey her message of racism and prejudice. The story begins with Monsieur Valmonde finding Desiree abandoned in the shadows of the stone pillar, depicting a mysterious feeling like Desiree and her unknown life. Chopin goes on to describe the moment Desiree gives birth and the purity she holds within herself where she 'lay full length, in her soft white muslins and laces' (insert citation here). When Madame Valmonde goes to visit Desiree in L'Abri, the plantation is described as what some would describe gothic, dark and dreary. 'The roof came down steep and black like a cowl... and their thick leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall' (insert citation here). Chopin uses alliteration in some points of the story to describe Armand's attitude stating 'the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to hold of him' when he turned on his family and took out his problems out on the slaves' (insert citation here). Another form of figurative language Chopin presents us with is when Desiree makes the connection when she looks at the slave boy's skin color and then back at her baby. 'The blood turned like ice in her veins' (insert citation here). She was in shock in fright for her son was of color. There was another connection going back to the stone pillar when Chopin says, 'She was like a stone image; silent, white, motionless' (insert citation here). Desiree and her baby leave the plantation down the 'broad, beaten road' never to be seen again (insert citation here). The last key point of symbolism is in the end of the story when Armand is having the bonfire of all Desiree's finest clothing and possessions while at the same time showing his position of wealth. This is significant because he is burning all her items to remove his memories of his wife and baby.

The tone throughout this short story is a tragic and depressing mainly because racism was such a major issue in this time period. Having a baby in the Civil War era can cause families to question the looks of their baby if not white. Being of color was frowned upon and it meant that a person was of a lower class. Throughout the whole story, Desiree was submissive to her husband as it was common to obey and do what a woman was told. For example, when Desiree asks her husband if she should leave his plantation and he obliged, she had no choice but to comply. Had it not been a world where being of color was seen as a negative concept, Armand's mother might have told him when he got to an age of understanding that he was a man of color and not lost the opportunity to have an everlasting life with his wife and child.

Racism and prejudice played a strong theme in this short story. Armand lets his pride overpower his love for his wife and child simply because of the color of skin. True love knows no colors. Armand took no time to figure out how two people could produce a biracial baby and instead of looking at both sides, he was so quick to only believe what he thought and that was to put the blame on his wife. Armand so confident of his lineage and his race but little did he know, he was the one of color and because of his mother, had been able to avoid racism towards him all his life.

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