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“Desiree’s Baby”: Armand’s Unknowingly Ironic Fate

Kate Chopin’s story, “Desiree’s Baby” is set in Louisiana during the time of slavery and is a tale about the conflicts that racial intolerance and arrogance can cause. The plot centers around the prejudice that is rife during this period in time and how it affects people at every level of their life, regardless of how close they should be. I claim that Desiree’s husband, Armand Aubigny, unintentionally spelled his own fate out of collective ignorance as he; I don’t think he could’ve know his parentage was of mixed blood until the end, Desiree would not have married him otherwise, Armand would have avoided any chance of this revelation had he known, and his mother's letter was placed at the end of the story by the author as a grand reveal of information to all.

Kate Chopin’s writing style from her other works remains consistent here and her choice of sudden revelations is naturally of great importance in, “Desiree’s Baby” as well. Kate Chopin’s controversial collection, “The Awakening” contains stories that begin her writing style with poetic depictions. When Kate Chopin described her stories as, “…sensitive, graceful, poetic depictions of women’s lives” she perfectly explains her methodology to storytelling and how it will affect the outcome of her characters (CHOPIN, par. 5). In “Desiree’s Baby” Kate Chopin’s approach is evident in the grand reveal that occurs at the end of her stories. Knowing this, the thesis that Armand knew all along that he was of a mixed-race background becomes inarguable in my mind.

Armand didn’t know for certain the origins of his parentage based on the information provided to him and the reader. Armand’s parentage was a fact that was only revealed months later in the story and would be pertinent to such an exacting man’s actions. The story states, “…Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (BABY pg86 par5). I interpret this information as being unknown knowledge to Armand from the beginning of the story and that he is only shown to be made aware of it at the story’s conclusion. The story also states that, “…an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it matter-of-factly.” (BABY pg86 par4). While this is a small unassuming detail, it does ask the question, why would he bother reading through information that he was already aware of, if he wasn’t truly aware of his status at the story’s beginning? Armand is made abundantly clear to be a man in a time of ignorance that affects all and his wife Desiree is no exception.

Desiree would not have married Armand if she was in any doubt of his parentage. Armand would eventually have to tell his wife if he were to avoid the failure of his marriage if he had known previously. Desiree reveals the truth of her personal beliefs when she exclaims, “You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die” (BABY pg85 par1). In my interpretation she is clearly distraught over even the mere thought of not being white herself. Armand’s intentions reveal, “…he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife’s soul”. He shows the same treatment towards his wife as he shows towards his slaves as he is now showing to his wife, in his mind they are the same. Her nature being close to Armand’s own would’ve prevented her from entering a relationship and would cause them to avoid a child completely.

Armand would have avoided any chance of this revelation had he known, such as having a child that would be physical evidence of his deceit. The baby is quickly shown to not be of the same race as Armand, is presumed to result in the questioning of his origins. Desiree describes “…Armand Aubigny’s imperious and exacting nature…” (BABY pg83 par4). This depiction of Armand makes me think of him as someone who appreciates the fine details and oversees everything to keep it under his control. This “Exacting” quality calls into question of, how could he not foresee the issue of having a child that would expose his purported secret to world? It appears to me that he is described this way to be a symbol of the arrogance of such powerful men of the era that Kate Chopin would bring to attention. This attention to how the writer views their own character leads me to implicate how they structure the story as well.

The letter’s contents are placed at the end of the story. This is typical of Kate Chopin’s writing as the *big reveal* similar to her other stories from “The Awakening” and onward. Armand’s mother’s letter was described as, “There was one remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them” (BABY pg86 para4). The way that is placed and referred to is as something that was overlooked or forgotten, rather than something that was hidden away. It is referred to as a “Remnant” which means to me to be of something long left behind, not of modern concern. It is exactly because of the place of this passage and its descriptors that builds up the shock to the reader that the last paragraph of the story gives. This last subtopic is the most crucial for the main thesis as the others are considerably easier to try and refute.

Another critic might argue that the way in which Armand acts supports the idea that he is attempting to conceal his past. Armand’s choice, “…all its dainty furbishings, was laid upon the pyre” where he is incinerating anything related to his mixed-race child, which lends credence to the thought that this is actuality an attempted evidence burning (BABY pg86 para3). He is doing this as a great spectacle, a pyre that attracts the attention of everyone and commits this act through the use of his slaves in a very non-private affair. I see this more as a swansong to his old life and the relations these articles represent. If his aims were to remain evidence, then yes, a burning would be a very effective method, but one so open is not the approach that a man of his nature would employ. Something far more discreet and with less witnesses would be the likely way that Armand would handle such a mission, and one that he would handle and oversee personally to let as no rumor escape. My thesis thus remains strong as it is based upon the consistent nature of the characters as well as the writer.

Armand definitely acts as someone who was completely ignorant of the true nature of his parentage. My analysis can be questioned with whether, or not, I believe that the narration can be relied upon to be truthful, in which I concede that it does require an amount of faith in the writer to be a worthwhile interpretation. Considering that my thesis is based upon the actions that the characters take, one can understand that they would take said actions if they were in the same position and mindset as these characters.

CHOPIN. <https://www.katechopin.org/biography/>, 2005–2024, *The Kate Chopin International Society,* Editors of KateChopin.org

BABY. Kate Chopin, *Desiree’s Baby*. The Kate Chopin International Society, 2005-2021, 1892. Retrieved from <https://www.katechopin.org/pdfs/desirees-baby.pdf>.