

The father of desiree's baby



I liked this story, because it is alive with secrets, irony, and a twist on the O. Henry story Gift of the Magi. In Magi, a husband sells his gold watch at Christmas for money to purchase decorative combs for his wife's beautiful long hair, while she sells her hair to provide money with which to purchase a chain for his watch. In Desiree's Baby, Desiree is an orphan of unknown heritage who marries a white man and gives birth to a black infant. This brings out the bigotry in her husband Armand that results in the likely death of both mother and child.

Soon after, Armand learns that his own mother was part African and thus he, himself, caused his baby's color. He caused the probable death of his wife and child as well, sacrificing his own nuclear family in order to save the good name of his wealthy family or origin. This is a story of racism and gender discrimination that betray love through ignorance. I completely agree with this theme as a warning to us from 1893. Racism and prejudice against women are based only on the fear of a perceived threat one group sees in another race's supposed designs upon their power, money, and entitlements.

In most cases, the threat resides only in the imaginations of small minds. Related to this, I like the character of Armand's father more than any other character in this story, because he knowingly married a woman who was of mixed race and vowed to face any consequences of his decision. He was kind to the slaves that he owned, unlike his son Armand, who was a stereotypical cruel white slave master who insisted on perfect order according to his rigid rules.

The point of view in Chopin's story is that of a third party narrator ("omniscient") that observes, enters all the characters' minds, gathers facts and impressions, and presents the gathered information for the reader to judge. Chopin does this in a setting in the ante-bellum south, specifically Louisiana, a settlement filled with a mixture of races and mixed-race people. These include the French, Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, Haitians, Cajuns, Creoles, and others.

While it is a melting pot of races and creeds, it reveals itself also as a hotbed of bigotry and snobbery. I connected with the bigotry in this story in Desiree's victimization, because I am in large part Native American, but look white. I did not know my heritage until I was an adult. Others belittle Native Americans to me as uneducated, lazy drunks. They talk to me as one whom they think is white and whom they know has education, professional history, and accomplishments; but I let them spew ignorance and reply, "Oh, you mean like me?"

This takes them aback and we can then discuss the matter more intelligently. If I were to critique this short story, I would examine the characters and what they represent symbolically: Desiree as the embodiment of wrongful discrimination, Armand as an archetype of white bigotry, and the Valmondes as a representation of unconditional love. In addition, I would write more in depth about the themes of racism and gender discrimination and their origin. Finally, I would write about the ending twist of the story and its impact on Armand's future.

Of the literary elements used in this story, three are foreshadowing, conflict, and crisis. Foreshadowing occurs as Desiree wakes one morning to feel a depression in the air: "When the baby was about three months old, Desiree awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace"(paragraph 18). Conflict between persons and between an individual and society appear in Armand's cold rejection of Desiree. He shuns her because he thinks she is black and therefore has contaminated his family's white bloodlines.

This would ruin the family business and he would become a pauper because of what society thinks of mixed marriages. Desiree is hurt and confused by this. She escalates this conflict into crisis when she argues with Armand. She argues: "Look at my hair, it is brown and my eyes are gray, Armand you know they are gray. And my skin is fair," "Look at my hand whiter than yours, Armand" (paragraph 26). This escalates the conflict between husband and wife into crisis because Armand does not believe her. Later, Desiree finally disappears into the bayou and Armand burns all the things she left behind.