

Arises in the stories
"desiree's baby" and
"crackling day" essay
sample



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Arises in the Stories “ Desiree’s Baby” and “ Crackling Day” Essay Sample

Racism has been an issue throughout time, and in some societies it is still present. The belief that an individual of a different race or colour is not equal to an individual, who is “ white”, has caused many fights, arguments and deaths. In the nineteenth century, the slave trade was at its height, as we see in “ Desiree’s Baby”. The conflict between different races is also shown in “ Crackling Day”. Although both stories were written at different periods and set in different continents, both challenge the idea of racism. Desiree’s Baby” is set in the deep south of Louisiana. It shows prejudice against the “ blacks” by Armand Aubignys , a cruel plantation owner, “ Young Aubigny’s rule was a strict one, too, and under it his Negroes had forgotten how to be gay”.

Armand is a very important man, as he owns a plantation, this also means that he has power over “ his Negroes”. Armand is full of self-importance, “ what did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana? and very proud of his family and his origins. Within this society it is important to know a person’s background, as there was an order within the society. For example Armand would be one of the men at the top of this order, whilst “ his Negroes” would be at the bottom. As Armand believes in this order, it is therefore a surprise to the reader when he falls in love with Desiree especially as “ Monsieur Valmonde grew practical and wanted all things well considered: that this, the girl’s obscure origin.

Desiree's father loves her, and therefore reminds Armand that they do not know of her past. He does this, as he is afraid of future troubles that may be caused by this for his daughter as they live in a society where titles are of a high importance, and if she were to be of mixed race, Armand may reject her. This is an ominous sign within the book, foreshadowing the pain that Desiree suffers. The manner, in which Armand's love for Desiree is perceived, is an indication of the pain that he will cause for her.

The passion that awoke in him that day, when he saw her at the gate, swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles", his love is associated with destruction, showing that Desiree will be hurt by his love. These similes are harsh and strong, to represent and personify his intense and over dramatic love. Although Armand claims that he loves Desiree, he soon rejects her when signs appear that she may be mixed race. " One of La Blanche's little quadroon boys-half naked too" is when Desiree realises that he baby is mixed race.

The similarities between the " quadroon boy" and her child are also realised by Armand, " It means,' he answered lightly, ' that the child is not white; it means that you are not white" he answers very coldly, his tone of voice is very controlled and inhuman, which is an attempt to distance himself from Desiree. However Armand's actions towards Desiree are full of irony " Look at my hand: whiter than yours, Armand,' she laughed hysterically" as he is the one who is of mixed race, but he is blind to see that he is darker.

This is how Desiree did not realise so soon that her own baby was " dark", as she loves the child no matter what it looks like. " Desiree was miserable

enough to die" emphasises Armand's great power as he even has control over his wife's emotions, this also foreshadows Desiree's short-lived future. The birth of the child had at first "softened Armand Aubigny's imperious and exacting nature greatly", but now he saw his child as a different race "the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves.

The alliteration within this sentence quickens the pace to represent Armand's eccentric temperament, and how his emotions for Desiree were never real for if they were he would have loved her and the baby no matter if they were mixed race. The use of the figure "Satan" personifies Armand's feelings of evil and hatred towards the two most important and most loved people within his life. Desiree has been discarded by Armand, and so turns to her mother "Armand has told me that I am not white. For God's sake tell them it is not true.

You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy and live." Her desperation for her mother's love and help shows that she does not receive any affection or comfort from Armand. "I cannot be so unhappy and live" is prophetic of Desiree's final actions, "She disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again." Although it is not made clear that Desiree commits suicide it is strongly suggested to provoke empathy from the reader towards her.

Her suffering, which was caused by Armand, is also symbolised "she walked across a deserted field, where the stubble bruised her tender feet, so

delicately shod, and tore her thin gown to shreds. " The pathetic fallacy is used " the sun was just sinking" to signify Desiree's heart and hopes sinking within her life. Armand inflicts pain upon Desiree, and is referred to as " the very spirit of Satan" whereas Desiree is portrayed as an angelic figure.

The use of alliteration " her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes" produces an image of innocence and purity. Even after the birth " the young mother was recovering slowly, and lay full length, in her soft white muslins and laces, upon a couch" the use of the colour white along with the muslins and lace indicates vulnerability and creates a soft image. These are a contrast to Armand's portrayal, " Armand's dark handsome face" does not only produce an evil image with the use of the word " dark", but also suggests that he is not pure " white".

As the reader discovers, Armand learns of his great mistake of mistreating and rejecting his wife. An old letter from his mother to his father reveals his past, " I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery. " Armand's mother was coloured, meaning that Armand was the one of mixed race; in spite of this his father still loved him and his mother showing that he was a better man.

Armand's mother did not travel to Louisiana to live as she did not want her son " cursed with the brand of slavery", as she hates the way her race is treated, it is therefore highly ironic that through the love of his mother and her wish for him to live successfully and without pain, that he subjects Desiree to this cruelty. The author ends the story with this, so as to give the

reader as sense of Armand's grievous mistake and Desiree's unnecessary suffering. "Crackling Day" also shows the conflicts that racism can cause. It is set in South Africa, and also focuses on the discrimination on an innocent person, in this case a child.

The first problem that is shown in the story is about the food "the square of the pig's rind that passed for our daily meat" suggests that the meat is inadequate and not fulfilling, this is only one of the problems that is faced by the "black" families of the area. Poverty of these families is as a result of the discrimination that they suffer from the "white man", and is shown in all aspects of their lives, "Aunt Liza was at her washtub in the yard" the fact that the washtub is outside reflects that they are a poor family. Although poor, Lee, the young boy, is polite and respectful "Yes, Aunt Liza".

As the family are poor, they do not have money to buy warm clothes for the winter, and so suffer from the cold "she lifted the apron and put her hand through the slits of the many thin cotton dresses she wore" Aunt Liza's attempt at keeping warm is to wear all her dresses at once. The cold is also personified to make it more intimidating "there was a sharp bite to the morning air I sucked", it also foreshadows the physical attack that Lee endures later within the story "it stung my nose so that tears came to my eyes; it went down my throat like an icy draught; my nose ran. Lee describes the cold as though it is physically damaging him to enhance how cold he feels.

The alliteration of "my feet felt like frozen lumps" quickens the pace and the harsh sound emphasises the pain he is suffering. This does not only apply to

the two boys, as " in all the mornings and evenings of the winter months, young and old, big and small, were helpless victims of the bitter cold. "

Alliteration and the pathetic fallacy are used as in " Desiree's Baby" to represent the victim, " looking wet and weary" slows the pace, drawing attention to the fact that the journey is long and hard.

As in " Desiree's Baby", the sun is used in a negative sense; " the sun lost some of its damp look and seemed real, if cold" this is ironic as the sun stereotypically personifies hope and happiness. The author spends a long time focusing on how the natural conditions affect the boys, using intense descriptions even though this is not the main battle for them. The first instance that the reader sees of the " whites" control is when " a young white woman call the dog to heel", although set in a time when women were inferior to men the " young white women has power over the dog and the two " black" boys.

The dog is even referred to as " Damn Boer dog" which is a white dog, and this dog has power over the boys too " in our terror". The man who serves them has to manipulate their time as he pleases " the young white man who served us did it in a leisurely fashion, with long pauses for a smoke", the man has no need to hurry as he is in charge, and the fact that he smokes signifies he has money and he is not poor like the " blacks". The metaphor " occasionally he turned his back" shows his disrespect towards them, this is in contrast to Lee.

The man's stare suddenly became cold and hard" reminds the reader of the weather, suggesting that the man is also an enemy like the weather. On

returning home Lee and Andries are confronted by "white boys", "Andries saw them first and moved over to my side of the road." The action taken by Andries is a step to move away from the white boys and stick together with Lee; the idea that he saw "them" creates suspense and indicates that they may be in danger, as people are frightened by what they do not know.

Andries short sentences "Shut up", and Lee being oblivious to the fact that they are now in danger creates tension. Racist names are yelled by the young white boys "Hey Klipkop", "Bloody kaffir" however Lee and Andries know not to react to them for fear of putting themselves in jeopardy. "They began pelting us with stones" shows the total lack of respect the white boys have for the black boys as they have grown up into a society where they have been taught that white people have power over black people.

The two boys do not react to this violence, until an emotional response is provoked by one of the boys from Lee "Your fathers are dirty black bastards of baboons!" as Lee's father is dead, he reacts without thinking at this insult. "A violent, unreasoning anger suddenly possessed me" identifies the intense emotions felt by Lee towards this comment, and he realises that it is violent, which could result in a fight. Not satisfied, the white boys start comparing them with animals "an ugly black baboon" treating them not as humans and believing that they are worth less than them.

Blows rained on me-on my head, my neck, the side of my face, my mouth-but my enemy was under me and I pounded him fiercely" may be the only time in his life that Lee has the power over someone else, despite surely being beaten, he seizes this moment of total control. Although having just

been attacked, Lee's first thought returns to the food, " I remembered the crackling. I looked anxiously about. It was safe" this is a clear indications that food is the most important thing in their lives as it is a necessity for living, and as they do not have much of it, they need to treasure what they have, even if it means risking their health.

The society in which this family live in is the same as in that which Desiree lives in. This is shown in Aunt Liza's and Uncle Sam's reactions, as they are the same, the writer shows this by using the same words " remote" and " withdrawn" to described them. This signifies that they too know the order, and that trouble now lies ahead, for they do not go above the whites. The tension that the family experiences is portrayed as having a life of its own " the thing we waited for came while we were having our supper" meaning that they have no control over what is happening and are helpless victims to a cruel society where racism rules.

Before Uncle Sam reached the door, it burst open. A tall, broad, white man strode in" introduces the idea that they have no privacy in their homes and no security from the white men. The white man's appearance is also threatening as he is " tall and broad" which suggests strength. Uncle Sam is also controlled by the white man, and does as he instructs, " Uncle Sam went into the other room and returned with a thick leather thong. He wound it once round his hand and advanced on me" Sam has now been turned into Lee's enemy for fear of a beating from the white man.

Uncle Sam then tells Lee what the white man wishes to hear " you must never lift your hand to a white person" he does this only through fear and

with bitterness for he does not wish to harm his nephew. " I screamed and begged for mercy" shows the immense pain Lee is suffering from Uncle Sam's fear of the white man, but it is not only Lee that is hurt " Aunt Liza went limp" as she is objecting to this beating, however she can not stand up for Lee as she is both female and black therefore at a worse disposition than Uncle Sam.

Not only has this moment affected Lee and Liza, it has also affected Uncle Sam, " Uncle Sam flung the thong viciously against the door, slumped down on the bench, folded his arms on the table, and buried his head on his arms" he deeply regrets what he has just done, but if he had stood up to the white man, it may have taken all their lives. Aunt Liza is furious at this " This is a man's world. You do the explaining" and feels powerless because of her race and gender, and therefore takes her anger out on Sam by blaming him " you should be happy.

The whites are satisfied. We can go on now. " She suggests that he humiliates himself by doing anything that the whites say, but he has no choice but to do this if he wishes to live. Aunt Liza does forgive her husband, and her last comforting words are to him " It's all right", showing that she understands that within the society that they live, they have to make sacrifices to the whites if they wish to live.

Both " Desiree's Baby" and " Crackling Day" show that within any society at any given point in time conflict between white people and black people will occur. It does not matter if the person is rich like Armand, or middle class like " the white man", there will always be someone who will inflict pain and

suffering into others lives. The message that is put across in " Desiree's Baby" is that you should not judge others before you judge yourself, as this can lead to deadly mistakes as Armand discovers.

Within " Crackling Day" it is shown that nothing and no one can change some people's attitudes, and that if you want to survive you have to give a little.

Both stories show the importance and specialness of family love, as the families are the ones that supported each other through the pain, however the path taken by the individual will always differ, as Lee forgave his uncle whereas Desiree rejected her mother's plea for her to come home.