Kate Chopin – “Desiree’s Baby”

Chopin

* Started writing at age 40
* Wrote two novels and the equivalent of two volumes of short stories
* Focus on Louisiana and racial tension – she saw the culture and wrote to open others’ eyes to the problems

“Desiree’s Baby”

* Setting
  + Plantation culture before The Civil War c. 1850
* Characters
  + Madame Valmonde
  + Armand
  + Baby
  + Desiree
* Plot
  + Madame Valmonde and husband found baby on doorstep
  + Had no children of their own
  + Baby grew into a great child and then a young woman
  + Armand sees her and falls in love
    - He must have her and gets her
    - He didn’t care about her family name or background
    - He could give her one of the oldest names in Louisiana
  + L’Abri – plantation Armand owns
    - Peaked roof, unusual building, deeply shadowed by oaks around it
    - Represented as a place of darkness
  + Born in France, stayed because she couldn’t bear to leave the land
  + Armand was very stern
    - Plantation existed for his son to inherit
    - He doesn’t really care about it
  + Desiree had a baby and is recovering
    - “Yellow woman” – at this time if you had any African American blood you were considered African American
  + Madame Valmonde – This is not the baby, he has changed…
    - Desiree thinks she is surprised by how much the baby has grown
    - Armand has been kind to his slaves
    - Desiree is so happy it frightens her
  + Baby is 3 months
    - Husband has changed – beats his slaves
    - Desiree realizes her child is African American, doesn’t understand how this could have happened
    - Armand says Desiree is not white and sends her away
  + Desiree writes to her mother, mother can’t confirm her background because she was adopted
    - Asks her to come home
  + Desiree walks with child to bayou
    - She probably dies
  + Armand tears out everything that reminds him of her, finds a letter that reveals that his mother was black and a slave of his father’s
    - The “flaw” was in him, not Desiree
    - Irony – he has destroyed what was “better” than himself to preserve his falsehood
* Point of View
  + 3rd person limited
* Theme
  + Role fulfillment in class-conscious society