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