

Analysis of Plot Structure in Desiree Baby's Short Story by Kate Chopin

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ABSTRACT

Desiree Baby is one of the American literature short stories written by Kate Chopin set in Louisiana during the late 19th century. The story explores themes of race, identity, and societal prejudice in the late 19th century. The story examines the destructive power of the complexities of racial identity in a social context through its engaging characters and storyline. This study aims to analyze the intrinsic elements especially the structure of the plot in a short story entitled "Desiree Baby" by Kate Chopin. The data was taken from the textual short story that contains the intrinsic elements. The data was collected by descriptive method with the form of research that is qualitative. Also, the data was obtained by reading, observing, collecting, and identifying the material that related to the theory. The data were analyzed using the theory contained in the book *Mastering English Literature* by Richard Gill (1995). The results showed that the short story "Desiree Baby" by Kate Chopin contains five crucial elements of the plot as stated by Gill (1995). The five elements of the plot consist of the situation, trajectory, proleptic events, and reversal & discovery.

Keywords: intrinsic element, plot, short story, Desiree Baby, Kate Chopin

ABSTRAK

*Desiree Baby adalah salah satu cerita pendek sastra Amerika yang ditulis oleh Kate Chopin berlatar Louisiana pada akhir abad ke-19. Ceritanya mengeksplorasi tema ras, identitas, dan prasangka masyarakat di akhir abad ke-19. Cerita ini mengkaji kekuatan destruktif dari kompleksitas identitas rasial dalam konteks sosial melalui karakter dan alur cerita yang menarik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis unsur intrinsik khususnya struktur alur dalam cerita pendek berjudul "Desiree Baby" karya Kate Chopin. Data diambil dari tekstual cerpen yang mengandung unsur intrinsik. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan metode deskriptif dengan bentuk penelitian kualitatif. Selain itu, data diperoleh dengan membaca, mengamati, mengumpulkan, dan mengidentifikasi materi yang berkaitan dengan teori. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori yang terdapat dalam buku *Mastering English Literature* karya Richard Gill (1995). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa cerita pendek "Desiree Baby" karya Kate Chopin mengandung lima unsur krusial alur seperti yang dikemukakan oleh Gill (1995). Lima elemen plot terdiri dari situasi, lintasan, peristiwa proleptik, dan pembalikan & penemuan.*

Kata Kunci: unsur intrinsik, alur, cerita pendek, Desiree Baby, Kate Chopin

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a medium for someone to express themselves in an imaginative work that has good quality and beauty. According to (Taum, 1997) literature is a form of creative or fictional work that is imaginative and uses beautiful language and its existence can be useful for other things. Literary works created based on the author's

imagination represent the truth of human life as well as the author's expressiveness in transmitting his ideas and views (Lina and Setiawan, 2017). The author's imagination can be inspired by nature, emotions, human life, and the environment. Literary works written by authors reflect the societal norms, values, and challenges of different times and regions. Each region has its own culture that offers unique insights into its society, politics, beliefs, and artistic evolution which influence the genres, styles, and movements of literature. One region known for its literary works influenced by historical and cultural diversity is American literature.

American literature is the written works produced in the United States by its original inhabitants as well as by its former colonies. American literature covers a wide range of genres, styles, themes, and historical periods, reflecting the diverse and multicultural nature of American society. Various types of literary works were created, ranging from novels, poetry, drama, and especially, short stories which summarized concise but in-depth explorations of themes, characters, and narratives that have successfully flourished in America.

Short stories are literary works in the form of fictional prose, which only focus on one character in one situation. Short stories are concise and aim to convey a message or story in a limited number of words. Its short, simple, and compact form, usually no more than 10,000 words, makes it one of the most popular forms of literature. (Ummah, Eripuddin and Rahayu, 2020) stated that a short story is a short work of fiction. A fictional literary work is the result of the author's creative process as a vehicle for expressing themselves (Samanik, 2018). American literature is rich in short stories that have evolved, reflecting changing societal norms, values, culture, history, and American identity. The modern short story emerged in the early 19th century as a distinct literary form, influenced by the works of Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Kate Chopin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville. Among these figures, Kate Chopin stands out for her deep examination of social norms and human complexity. especially evident in her short story "Desiree Baby."

Kate Chopin, who lived from 1850 to 1904 was an American author best known for her trailblazing feminist, realism novels and stories about the inner lives of sensitive, adventurous women. Her prominent works include *The Awakening*, *At Fault*, *The Storm*, and the reflection of women's independence contained in the short story "Desiree Baby".

Desiree's Baby by Kate Chopin is a short story about Desiree, a young woman who is adopted by the Valmonde family. She falls in love with wealthy plantation owner Armand Aubigny, but their child's appearance raises questions about their racial background. Armand accuses Desiree of mixed-race ancestry, leading to a deteriorating relationship. Despite discovering his mixed-race heritage, Armand rejects Desiree and their child, highlighting the destructive power of prejudice and societal norms.

In a short story, to help readers and analysts understand the various layers and components that contribute to the meaning, structure, and impact of the story, some elements are categorized into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic elements. Extrinsic elements are elements that come from outside the story (Lestari,

Rakhmawati, and Rohmadi, 2016). Extrinsic elements include the author's background, the historical and social context, the literary genre, the values, messages, and the reader's reaction. According to (Ardayati and Rahayu, 2017) intrinsic elements are those that build the literary work from the inside, such as theme, character, characterization, setting, plot, point of view, and so on.

Plot is one of the intrinsic elements that affect the quality of a literary work. According to Stanton (1965), a plot is a story that contains a sequence of events, but each event only has a causal relationship, an event causes or causes another event to occur. Events with chronological creation do not stand alone in a story but are related to each other because each event in a story has its certain purposes. Richard Gill (1995) stated that a plot can be divided into five elements, there are the situation, disjunction, trajectory, proleptic events, and reversal & discovery.

Related to this, this study aims to analyze and explore intrinsic elements, especially the plot structure in the short story *Desiree Baby* by Kate Chopin. This story has an unexpected plot related to gender roles, race, and societal expectations, especially in the context of 19th-century Louisiana. Contemporary issues of race, identity, and social justice make it interesting to explore the intricacies of the plot. This study is also expected to be useful for readers in understanding the intrinsic elements, especially regarding the plot structure in short stories.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, qualitative research designs were applied to analyze the data. The qualitative research method means to explore and understand the individuals or groups described to a social or human problem (Cresswell, 2009). This method is used because it is adapted to the object of the data that has been determined. The object of the data in this study is written data taken from the short story entitled *Desiree Baby* by an American writer Kate Chopin. Kate Chopin's short story "Desiree Baby" was released in 1893 and is set in Louisiana. The plot revolves around Desiree, a young woman of uncertain paternity who is abandoned and raised by the Valmondés family. She falls in love with Armand Aubigny. Despite their marriage, the child's mixed-race origin is proven to be Armand's, not Desiree's. This discovery reveals the hypocrisy and prejudice common at the period, establishing "Desiree's Baby" as a notable work in American literature due to its themes and narrative approaches.

The data in this study were collected by documentation method. The documentation method is the method of gathering data and information in the form of books, archives, documents, writing numbers, and images in order to support the study (Sugiyono, 2013). The technique used to collect the data is observation. According to (Cresswell, 2009) Observations involve taking field notes on persons' behavior and activities at the research site. In this study, the researcher read and observed the short story in collecting the data for the study. After collecting the data, this study employed Richard Gill's (1995) theory to assess the plot structure of the story, which included the situation, disjunction, trajectory, proleptic events, and reversal and discovery.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The author gives an explanation and analysis of the plot structure from beginning to end of the short story entitled *Desiree Baby*. The theory given by Richard Gill (1995) was employed by the author in this study to conduct the analysis. In the theory, Gill (1995) emphasizes that a full and good plot story consists of five crucial elements, there are the situation, disjunction, trajectory, proleptic events, and finally reversal and discovery.

The Situation

Starting from an introduction, the situation might be referred to as the starting point of a story. Whereas the characters in the story have goals that they desire to reach, to do so, they must overcome obstacles that correspond to the order in which they are revealed to the reader. The plot can begin at any time and under any conditions. The situation or starting point is the first plot aspect of the short story, and it is strongly related to the plot point that the characters convey to the reader in general.

In the short story *Desiree Baby*, the situation is described by the introduction of the character *Désirée*, a young woman of unknown origins, adopted by the Valmondé family. She later marries Armand Aubigny, a wealthy estate owner. They are initially described as a loving couple who eventually have a child. The following is an explanation of the points of introduction of the situation as a starting point in *Desiree baby's* story.

Desiree was adopted by the Valmonde family

Desiree is a girl of unknown origin. She was adopted by the Valmonde family, a wealthy and well-known family. At this point, the introduction of the main character, Desiree, is explained, where Desiree's background is important to know because it will be related to the storyline later. The description of this point can be seen from the story fragment in the following quotation below.

"...Why, it seemed but yesterday that Désirée was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmondé had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar." (Chopin, 1893)

Armand Aubigny fell in love with Desiree

At this point, Desiree begins to grow up and accidentally meets a young man named Armand Aubigny, and they begin to fall in love with each other. This part is also included in the introduction of the situation because it is one of the important aspects related to the next storyline. The illustration of the point above can be seen in the following quotation below.

"It was no wonder, when she stood one day against the stone pillar in whose shadow she had lain asleep, eighteen years before, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had fallen in love with her." (Chopin, 1893)

They got married and then had a baby

In the story, Desiree and Armand Aubigny finally decide to get married. Not long after their marriage, they were blessed with a baby, but it was this baby that would be the beginning of their domestic problems. Thus, this point is one of the beginning of the introduction of the plot in *Desiree Baby*. The proof of this point can be seen from the story fragment in the following quotation.

"...He ordered the corbeille from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married. Madame Valmondé had not seen Désirée and the baby for four weeks. ..." (Chopin, 1893)

Based on the all narratives above, it is known that Désirée, an orphan, was taken in by the wealthy Valmondé family. Her beauty and grace attracted the attention of Armand Aubigny, an estate owner. They get married and have a child, leading to a situation where everything seems harmonious and ideal.

Disjunction

A disjunction occurs when an author begins a story by creating a situation and then begins to pose an issue in it that connects to a forthcoming event that the reader is primarily interested in. Disjunction usually refers to the main events, such as thrillers, mysteries, literature, and so on, that are about to commence. As a result, the reader becomes increasingly eager to learn the rest of the story. In the story, disjunction occurs when Armand realizes that their son's skin color is different from Armand and Desiree's, where the baby's skin color is darker than expected. This unexpected revelation disrupts the harmonious life they have.

Armand notices that the baby's skin color is darker than expected

At this point, it can be seen that this point in the storyline is the beginning of the conflict. The following quotation is a fragment of the story.

"It means," he answered lightly, "that the child is not white; it means that you are not white." (Chopin, 1893)

Based on the narrative above, it can be seen that Armand realizes that their child's skin color is not as bright as expected for someone born to two white parents. This sudden revelation upsets the balance, casting a shadow of doubt and suspicion over the family's happiness. This becomes a critical turning point in the story.

Trajectory

Trajectory refers to when a story begins to develop in a specific period and direction, and the core issues of the characters are revealed. This movement piques the reader's curiosity in continuing to read and learn about the rest of the story. In the short story *Desiree Baby*, the trajectory of the story shifts as Armand becomes

increasingly distant and cold towards Désirée and their child, this also influences Désirée's trajectory to become tragic as she begins to doubt her own identity and lineage, which ultimately leads to her desperate act. The following are the points that become the trajectory plot points in the Desiree Baby story.

Armand became cold and careless towards Desiree and the baby

After finding out that his baby was not white, Armand Aubigny then changed his attitude towards Desiree, he became colder and more indifferent towards Desiree and her baby. This can be seen in the following quotation below.

"...He coldly but gently loosened her fingers from about his arm and thrust the hand away from him..."(Chopin, 1893)

Desiree became desperate and questioned her identity

Armand's attitude towards Desiree made her depressed and stressed. It made her question her identity. This can be seen in the quotation below.

"My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me 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."(Chopin, 1893)

In the narrative above shows the trajectory of Armand and Desiree, where there is a significant change in Armand's attitude after knowing the color of their child's skin, he becomes colder and indifferent to Desiree and her baby. The change also happened to Desiree, where she became desperate, questioned her origins, and insisted that she was white because Armand rejected her and her baby.

Proleptic Events

Proleptic events are those in which the reader must wait for the truly significant things to transpire from the story's events because they expose the causes of the characters' problems. Events from the substance are used as story markers to allude to upcoming events. Suggest upcoming changes. As a proleptic event, Désirée and Armand's early happiness and love set the reader up for the tragedy that would follow. The following are the points of proleptic events contained in the short story Desiree Baby.

Armand burned Desiree's belongings and letters and one letter from his mother

The burning of the letters and the correspondence from Armand's mother allude to Armand's racial heritage, which will eventually come to light. Below is a fragment of the story that contains the following point.

"...In the centre of the smoothly swept back yard was a great bonfire. Armand Aubigny sat in the wide hallway that commanded a view of the spectacle; and it was he who dealt out to a half dozen negroes the material which kept this fire ablaze."

(Chopin, 1893)

The narrative above explains that Armand burns items and letters from Desiree and letters from his mother that reveal the real clues about the cause of the previous problem.

Reversal & Discovery

The author's explanation of the finale heavily relies on reversal and discovery. Depending on the genre and type of story, this stage also deals with proleptic events that result in significant character transformations. The revelation of Armand's black origin through a letter from his mother to his father marks a significant turning point in the story. He rejects Désirée and their child, placing the blame on her rather than taking ownership of his racial background. The devastating impact of society's preconceptions and expectations is revealed by this discovery, which also destroys the family.

Armand found an old letter written by his mother

Armand found an old letter written by his mother that contained the truth about his lineage. Below is the following quotation.

"...There was the remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them. But it was not Désirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it. She was thanking God for the blessing of her husband's love:—" (Chopin, 1893)

Armand discovered his black ancestors through a letter from his mother to his father

It was revealed that it was Armand Aubigny who had black ancestry, not Desiree. Here is part of the story.

"...“But, above all,” she wrote, “night and day, 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.” (Chopin, 1893)

The narrative shows that the letter written by Armand's mother finally solves the mystery of their baby's skin color. The eventual revelation that it is Armand who has black genetics, provides a resolution to the ending. However, Armand, ashamed of this fact and did not want this to be revealed, burned the letter.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, literature is an imaginative work, one of which is the short story. One of the most famous short stories during the American literature period is Kate Chopin's *Desiree Baby*. *Desiree Baby* contains an interesting storyline because it discusses race, identity, and societal expectations. In this study, the theory by Richard

Gill (1995) is used to analyze the storyline, starting from the situation is the starting point of the story, disjunction is the beginning of the conflict, trajectory is the development of the issue, proleptic events begin to see the cause of the problem, and reversal and discovery is the knowledge of the cause of the problem and resolution. Based on the results, the author hopes that this research can be useful for readers to find out the plot structure in Desiree Baby's short story and to add insight to general readers about the existence of a plot structure in a story.

Furthermore, in this study, the researcher examined the plot structure in further detail, concluding that Kate Chopin's short story Desiree Baby has a complete and cohesive plot structure that complies with the five plot characteristics proposed by Gill (1995) in his theory. To conduct further in-depth and extensive studies on this short story, the author recommends analyzing deeper into the other intrinsic elements found in Desiree Baby. Desiree Baby is an interesting story full of plot twists, drama, and intrigue, and future research can delve deeper into additional intrinsic elements such as theme, setting, character, characterization, point of view, and others contained in this story.

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