

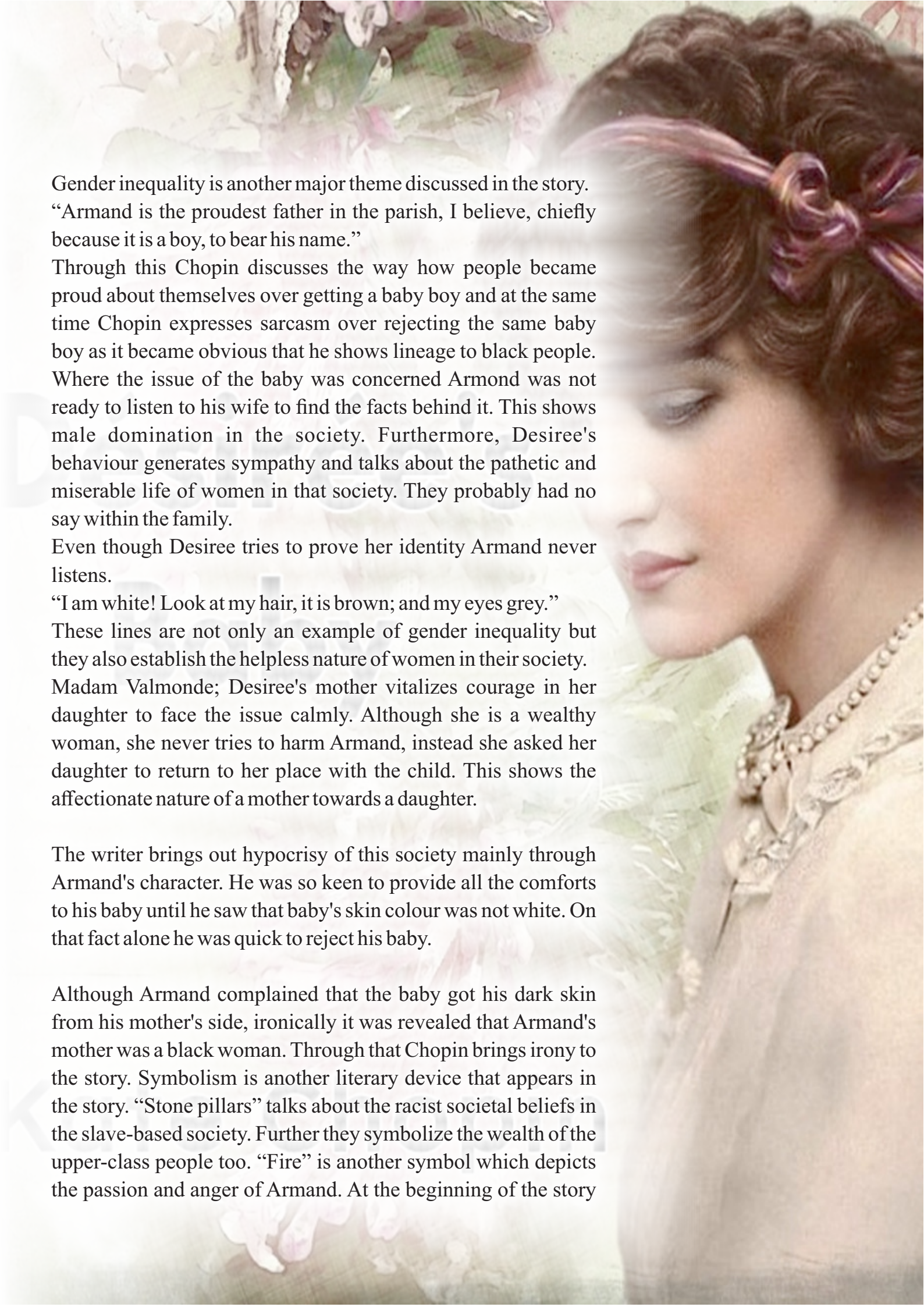
DESIREE'S BABY AN ANALYSIS

“Desiree's Baby” is a short story by the American writer Kate Chopin. This story is woven around the French upper class society in the 19th century. Desiree is the adopted daughter of Madam Valmonde. Desiree's parents are unknown to the world. As Desiree's adopted parents were rich, she got the chance to build up a courtship with Armand who also came from the same social stratum as Desiree. With the blessings of the two families, they got married. They had a perfectly comfortable life until their baby was born. When the baby turned three months the conflict began. As Desiree's baby was dark-skinned, Armand started complaining that Desiree was born out of mixed parentage. Knowing the situation faced by Desiree, Madam Valmonde asked her to come back with the child. After Desiree left Armand's place, he found a letter from his mother which revealed that it was he who was born out of an interracial marriage.

Through the story the writer basically talks about a few themes. Racism, gender inequality and hypocrisy are some of them. Racism or colour bar was a great issue in the past. Through the story of Desiree's baby Chopin managed to criticize the rudeness of Armand for rejecting his beloved wife and his own son based on race.

“That the child is not white; it means that you are not white.”

Armand's baseless belief over white people is a significant example to show how wealthy people value their race over family relationships. At the beginning of the story Chopin expresses how happy Armand was about the baby as he was a boy and it is an ironical point that the same person again questions on the race of the baby.



Gender inequality is another major theme discussed in the story. “Armand is the proudest father in the parish, I believe, chiefly because it is a boy, to bear his name.”

Through this Chopin discusses the way how people became proud about themselves over getting a baby boy and at the same time Chopin expresses sarcasm over rejecting the same baby boy as it became obvious that he shows lineage to black people. Where the issue of the baby was concerned Armond was not ready to listen to his wife to find the facts behind it. This shows male domination in the society. Furthermore, Desiree's behaviour generates sympathy and talks about the pathetic and miserable life of women in that society. They probably had no say within the family.


Even though Desiree tries to prove her identity Armand never listens.

“I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes grey.”

These lines are not only an example of gender inequality but they also establish the helpless nature of women in their society. Madam Valmonde; Desiree's mother vitalizes courage in her daughter to face the issue calmly. Although she is a wealthy woman, she never tries to harm Armand, instead she asked her daughter to return to her place with the child. This shows the affectionate nature of a mother towards a daughter.

The writer brings out hypocrisy of this society mainly through Armand's character. He was so keen to provide all the comforts to his baby until he saw that baby's skin colour was not white. On that fact alone he was quick to reject his baby.

Although Armand complained that the baby got his dark skin from his mother's side, ironically it was revealed that Armand's mother was a black woman. Through that Chopin brings irony to the story. Symbolism is another literary device that appears in the story. “Stone pillars” talks about the racist societal beliefs in the slave-based society. Further they symbolize the wealth of the upper-class people too. “Fire” is another symbol which depicts the passion and anger of Armand. At the beginning of the story



Armand describes Desiree “like a prairie fire” and at the end he burns his baby's cradle to forget him using the bonfire which depicts hypocrisy and symbolizes his wealth and material possessions.

Desiree's baby is a short story which depicts the darkness of racism. Although the baby could soften Armand, his skin colour reduced Armand to an insensitive father.

“He hasn't punished one of them – not one of them – since baby is born.”

Further, Chopin managed to picture an insightful portrait of one of the main characters, Armand; an insolent, wealthy and harsh person changed into an isolated, miserable character at the end. Desiree a gentle and innocent woman changed into a courageous and strong at the end. Chopin criticizes the wealthy upper-class society and its hypocrisy through the story successfully.