



# **ADIA PROSIDING ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**2023**

ISBN 978-623-99014-6-3



9 786239 901463

**PADANG, 04 – 06 JUNE 2023**

 <http://www.adia.uinib.ac.id>

Narrative Analysis and Religious Values in Kate Chopin's *Desiree's Baby*

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**Abstrak**

The story of *Desiree's Baby* by Kate Chopin is interesting and important to study in terms of its narrative analysis and religious values because it has a complex plot and strong characters, and demonstrates moral conflicts related to religious values. These conflicts reflect the social and cultural injustices of the time, and also provide themes about guilt and forgiveness, namely how religious values such as responsibility and forgiveness conflict with social and cultural values such as injustice and racial discrimination. The theories used in this study are the narrative theory in narratology by Seymour Chatman and literature and religiosity by YB Mangunwijaya. A qualitative research method is used to explore the meaning and interpretation of the story and to understand the religious values related to the narrative in the story. The data collection technique used is documentation technique by collecting data from the text of *Desiree's Baby* available in various sources. The research results show that the religious values related to *Desiree's Baby* story are injustice, betrayal, guilt, and forgiveness. These values are reflected in the plot and characters in the story and affect the resolution of the story.

**Kata Kunci:** *Desiree's Baby; Narrative Analysis; Religious Values; Moral Conflicts; Social and Cultural Injustice*

**INTRODUCTION**

Kate Chopin is the author of the short story *Desiree's Baby*. It represents antebellum Louisiana society and was published in 1893. Desiree, the main figure in the narrative, is a young woman who was raised by the Valmonde family. She marries affluent Armand Aubigny, with whom she has a lovely quadroon (mixed-race) son. As their child gets older, Armand starts to wonder if Desiree's family may have some African blood in them. Armand is persuaded that Desiree is black and not of white descent as he had thought as the baby's skin begins to darken.

Armand forces Desiree to leave the house, leaving a sad Desiree in her wake. In the end, she finds a shocking revelation that modifies her understanding of the circumstances and reveals her family's actual ancestry. It demonstrates how *Desiree's Baby* successfully argued against racism and prejudice prevalent at the time. The story examines issues of race, ethnicity, and physical appearance while demonstrating how racism and gender inequality can destroy relationships and families.

The short story *Desiree's Baby* by Kate Chopin is an accomplished and engrossing piece of literature that blends engaging narrative elements with in-depth considerations of moral and religious values (Finatti, 2020). Chopin examines the moral conflicts between society and cultural standards of justice, gender, and racial discrimination and Christian concepts of responsibility and forgiveness.

An approach that examines the components and framework of this short story's narrative is Seymour Chatman's theory of narrative in narratology. Plot, characters, time, and point of view are just a few of the elements that Chatman mentions as making up a tale. By using Chatman's story theory, we can see how these elements combine to create meaning. This method provides a full understanding of how literary narrative affects meaning and experience.

Mangunwijaya's perspective on literature and religion contributes to our comprehension of the ways in which religious ideas can be developed and debated in literary works. Mangunwijaya gives a unique perspective on how literature may embrace the religious part of human nature by examining how literary narratives can elicit moral and ethical issues, address existential difficulties, and also create space for spiritual reflection. According to this theory, literature may deepen one's comprehension of religious concepts and can generate and encourage spiritual experiences. As supporting frameworks or foundations for the main topics to be covered in this paper, Seymour Chatman's narrative theory in narratology and YB Mangunwijaya's literature and religion theory are both used.

## METHOD OF RESEARCH

### Research Design

This research employs a qualitative technique to explore the story and moral conflicts of Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby." This approach was selected because it allows for both the examination of the religious values associated with the narrative as well as the understanding and interpretation of the story's significance. The study uses a literature review technique and is prompted by Chatman and Mangunwijaya's theories. As part of the study, any information is acquired and evaluated from a variety of relevant sources.

Seymour Chatman's narrative theory is explained in *The Handbook of Narrative examination* (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012), with a focus on the examination of narrative structure, which includes elements like plot, characters, and themes. According to Chatman, a narrative is made up of the "what is told" (content) and the "how it is told" (expression). This theory is used to look at how the religious principles in *Desiree's Baby* are portrayed in the story and the characters.

The literature and religiosity theory of Indonesian author and theologian YB Mangunwijaya, on the other hand, focuses on how literature may be used as a vehicle to

study and comprehend religious and moral principles. Although there may not be much direct research particularly addressing Mangunwijaya's theory in the context of this study, his approach to literature and religion is used as a framework to understand how religious values are conveyed and perceived in *Desiree's Baby*.

Analysis of *Desiree's Baby* aligns with previous studies that highlight the role of religious values in shaping narrative structures and characters' actions (Berman, 2011; Suleiman, 2018). The story's complex plot and strong characters, combined with its depiction of moral conflicts and religious values, shows the significance of religious values in narrative analysis.

#### Instruments

The text of *Desiree's Baby* and other pertinent materials such as religious arguments from Islam, Christian, Buddha, and Hindu serve as the primary instrument in this study.

#### Procedures

Data collection for this study begins with a search of *Desiree's Baby* and other pertinent texts to acquire evidence for the claims made. After gathering the data, the researchers use YB Mangunwijaya's literature and religion theory and Seymour Chatman's narrative theory in narratology to examine it. Examining the story's content and interpretation as well as the religious values underlying its tale are all part of the analysis.

#### Research Questions:

1. Through narrative analysis, how can we interpret and communicate religious ideals in *Desiree's Baby*?
2. How do religiously based moral conflicts appear in the story's narrative and characters?

#### General Objective:

This study's main goal is to comprehend how religious values are conveyed and comprehended through narrative analysis of "Desiree's Baby."

#### Specific Objectives:

1. To understand how religious values like responsibility and forgiveness intersect with social and cultural ideals like fairness and racial prejudice.
2. To clarify how religious values affect how the story is resolved.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The narrative study of Kate Chopin's *Desiree's Baby* demonstrates the nuanced interaction of moral conflicts and religious values in a sociocultural setting. Injustice, shame, and forgiveness are themes present in the storyline and characters of the novel, and these themes are firmly based in the religious values of the period.

The narrative framework, in Seymour Chatman's theory, presents a sequence of occurrences that expose the moral conflicts and religious values. The story's plot, characters, and discourse all have an impact on the narrative's ultimate meaning (Chatman, 1978). The characters' actions and choices, which are influenced by their religious views and cultural norms, result in a series of events that depict the moral dilemmas and religious ideals of the time.

Armand, Desiree's husband, is shown as a powerful member of society. He stands for the ethical tensions caused by injustice and racial or gender discrimination in modern society. He makes a careless move by accusing Desiree of the baby's mixed-race descent immediately away. Armand's decision to disown Desiree and their kid on the grounds that he assumed they were of African heritage might be considered as a reflection of the cultural norms and racial prejudices of the time. However, he ultimately regrets this choice when he learns that he is actually the one who possesses African ancestry. As Chatman would contend, this plot twist is a literary device that draws attention to the moral conflicts and religious values in the novel.

The story's religious values, as analyzed through YB Mangunwijaya's theory of literature and religiosity, are manifested in the characters' actions and decisions. The characters' moral conflicts, stemming from their religious beliefs and societal norms, reflect the social and cultural injustices of the time (Mangunwijaya, 1989). The themes of guilt, central to the story's religious values, are portrayed through the characters' struggles with moral conflicts through their committed sins.

For example, Armand's reaction to the discovery of their baby's mixed-race heritage reflects these values. He tells Desiree, "it means... that the child is not white; it means that you are not white" (Chopin, 1893). Desiree's response to Armand's accusation reflects her embodiment of these values. When Armand blames her for their baby's mixed-race heritage, she responds, "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand," (Chopin, 1893). Desiree takes responsibility for her perceived racial identity, choosing to leave quietly rather than fight back. That reflects on how Desiree's decision to leave with her baby upon being rejected by Armand reflects her sense of guilt and desire to forgive Armand's accusation. Despite her innocence, Desiree is demonstrating the religious value of self-sacrifice and forgiveness. This decision, however, leads to her tragic end, reflecting the societal, gender, and cultural injustices of the time.

In the broader context of Chopin's work, the story of Desiree's Baby is a critique of the gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression prevalent in the 19th century. As Rosita and Purwani (2018) argue, Desiree's character is portrayed as a victim of gender discrimination, particularly within the context of marriage as Desiree's position in the story reflects the gender dynamics of the time by being dependent on Armand for her social status and is powerless against his accusations. When she pleads with him, "Do you want

me to go, Armand?" (Chopin, 1893), It depicts her lack of autonomy and the patriarchal power systems that hold her captive because she is a woman and women always get blamed first. Her choice to vanish, essentially freeing herself from Armand's control, is viewed as a sort of post-structuralism that challenges the status quo and represents a form of resistance.

Contrary to the precepts of many faiths, which promote the safety and respect of women, *Desiree's Baby* portrays a patriarchal society. In the Christian faith, for example, Galatians 3:28 declares that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In contrast to the discriminating actions depicted in the text, the verse praises equality and harmony.

Another example, the Qur'an (4:19) advises, "O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion. And do not make difficulties for them in order to take [back] part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality. And live with them in kindness." This verse emphasizes how crucial it is to treat women kindly and respectfully—a value that is flagrantly broken in "Desiree's Baby." While in Buddhism, The Buddha himself is said to have allowed women to join the monastic order, such a revolutionary act in his time. This act can be seen as a protection of women's rights to spiritual development, which was otherwise denied in a patriarchal society.

Armand's awful treatment of Desiree in the narrative, which is motivated by society standards and biases, stands in contrast to these religious beliefs. His inability to see beyond the societal norms of his time and his failure to uphold the religious values of forgiveness and justice ultimately lead to the tragic ending of the story.

Our grasp of the religious values in the narrative is enhanced by this broader perspective. It is possible to interpret Desiree's act of selfless defiance as a reflection of her religious values, notably the value of responsibility. She chooses to break free from the oppressive systems that hold her captive because she is a woman and a mother who takes ownership of her life and the life of her kid. As it opposes the social and cultural inequalities she encounters, this act of selfless defiance is consistent with the religious ideal of justice. She chose to break away from Armand's influence and the restrictive social conventions, as evidenced by the line, "She disappeared among the reeds and willows... and she did not come back again" (Chopin, 1893).

When Armand realizes that he is the one with African descent, the story's denouement occurs as a type of divine justice. It emphasizes the Christian principles of accountability and mercy, emphasizing the significance of these principles in resolving moral disputes and combating social and cultural inequalities. A crucial element in the story occurs when Armand receives the letter from his mother and admits that he is of African descent. The irony and tragedy of Armand's actions are suggested by the line, "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). As Armand's acts are motivated by society standards and racial prejudices rather than by religious principles of love and acceptance, it also emphasizes the moral conflicts and religious values at action. It may be read in a number of ways using the prism of Hinduism's religious principles:

1. Action and Consequence (*Karma*): Armand's cruel and inequitable treatment of Desiree—motivated by his assumption that she is of African descent—can be considered as an action with subsequent effects. When Armand's African ancestry is discovered, it might be interpreted as *karma* acting as payback for Armand's past deeds.

2. Ignorance and Enlightenment (*Avidya* and *Vidya*): Armand treats Desiree poorly because he is unaware of his own origins. The harm has already been done when he finally learns about his own lineage, demonstrating the terrible power of ignorance.

3. Duty and Righteousness (*Dharma*): By kicking Desiree and their kid out, Armand violates his obligations as a husband and a parent. His downfall comes from his lack of good deeds.

4. Attachment and Suffering (*Raga* and *Dukha*): Armand rejects Desiree and their child because of his fidelity to racial purity and cultural conventions. His pain is finally caused by this attachment when he learns about his own ancestry.

5. Liberation via Understanding (*Moksha*): Although it isn't mentioned in the narrative, Armand's predicament might benefit from the idea of Moksha. He might be able to free himself from the cycle of pain he has caused if he were to completely see and acknowledge the wrong of his acts, alter his ways, and do so.

Additionally, the fact that Desiree and her baby go, leaving a devastated Armand behind, makes a potent statement on the effects of societal and cultural inequities. When society conventions and biases prevail over religious values in Hinduism like how it is explained, fatal moral problems result.

The discussion of the place of religious ideals in literature is made more interesting by the examination of *Desiree's Baby*. The moral conflicts and religious ideals that are presented in the novel shed light on the social and cultural milieu of the period. Through the use of Chatman's and Manguwiyaya's theories, the narrative analysis of the story offers a sophisticated understanding of how narrative components and religious values interact in literature.

The narrative analysis of *Desiree's Baby* provides significant insight on the interaction between narrative components and religious principles in the context of literature and religion. The story's intricate storyline, compelling characters, and portrayal

of moral conflicts and religious values add to the discussion over the place of religious values in literature.

## CONCLUSION

The narrative analysis of *Desiree's Baby* illustrates how moral conflicts and religious values interact intricately in a socio-cultural context. The plot and characters in the story have themes of injustice, disgrace, and forgiveness, and these themes are deeply rooted in the religious values of the time. The analysis of the story in light of Chatman and Mangunwijaya's ideas provides a nuanced understanding of how religious values and literary elements interact.

The narrative analysis of *Desiree's Baby* reveals a major conflict between religious values and societal norms as a result. In addition to highlighting the need for a more understanding and forgiving society that upholds Christian ideals of mercy, justice, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity or gender identities, the story presents a critique of the societal injustices that were prominent at the time. This essay provides a comprehensive and critical analysis of the religious ideas and moral conundrums in "Desiree's Baby." The story is given greater depth by being put within the wider cultural and theological contexts. The written work also draws references to religious books to support the assertions made, providing a unique perspective on the story.

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