

NAMING AS POWER: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RACIAL IDEOLOGY, GENDER, AND LINGUISTIC AUTHORITY IN KATE CHOPIN'S "DÉSIRÉE'S BABY"

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Abstract

This paper applies Norman Fairclough's (1989, 1995, 2003) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to Kate Chopin's short story "Désirée's Baby" (1893) to examine how racial authority is constructed, naturalized, and performed through language. While previous studies have explored the story's themes of race, gender, and irony, no study has systematically analysed the linguistic micro-architecture through which Armand Aubigny's speech acts constitute racial power. Drawing additionally on Teun van Dijk's (1993, 2008) ideological square, Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality, J. L. Austin's (1962) and John Searle's (1969) speech act theory and Judith Butler's (1997) performativity framework, this study argues that Armand's discourse pattern characterized by declarative assertions, imperative syntax, agentless constructions, and the studied absence of questions functions as a technology of racial expulsion. By contrast, Désirée's counter-discourse is structured entirely through interrogatives, body-evidence appeals, and appeals to relational authority, all of which the text systematically denies a hearing. The study introduces three novel analytical arguments not previously advanced in studies on Chopin: that the fire scene enacts a Foucauldian destruction of counter-discursive archives; that Armand's naming of Désirée constitutes an ontological performative that brings her into social existence only to subsequently annihilate it; and that the bayou functions as a racialized spatial discourse that materializes the ideological boundary between legible and illegible subjects. The closing letter, which reverses racial attribution, is read as a Faircloughian moment of discursive disruption that retroactively exposes the arbitrary construction of the racial-patriarchal discourse system the story had spent its length enacting. This analysis contributes to the emerging field of literary CDA by demonstrating that grammatical and syntactic analysis of canonical texts produces ideological findings unavailable through thematic or character-based reading alone. The analysis reveals that Chopin constructs silence not as absence but as active ideological labour that simultaneously produces and polices racial meaning.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, epistemic violence, discursive silence, racial ideology, whiteness studies, patriarchal discourse*

1. Introduction

Kate Chopin's *Désirée's Baby* (1893) is one of the most economical and devastating short fictions of the American nineteenth century. Chopin stages the ruin of a woman whose only offence is her inability to prove a racial origin she does not know she has, and whose husband's culpability which is also a racial origin remains concealed beneath a structure of rhetorical and social authority that the story's famous closing letter finally undoes in retrospect. The story has attracted substantial

studies focused on its thematic treatment of race, gender, and the social construction of whiteness in the antebellum and post-Reconstruction South. Readings through feminism, New Historicism, postcolonial theory, black feminism, and the politics of passing have each illuminated significant dimensions of the text (Guo & Du, 2021; Lyu, 2021; Fox, 2022). What remains absent from these studies, however is a sustained application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the story's linguistic surface: an attention to the specific lexical choices, grammatical structures, and patterns of attributed and withheld speech that constitute, rather than merely reflect, the story's ideological work.

Critics noted that Chopin dramatizes how racial identity is not biological but juridical and social; a category imposed and enforced through community consensus rather than discovered through any reliable physical criterion. The story's ironic reversal, on this reading, exposes the arbitrariness of the very category the plot turns on. More recently, Hubbs (2021) situated "Désirée's Baby" within a broader tradition of Louisiana local colour fiction, arguing that Chopin and her contemporaries use language suppression; the elision of Creole linguistic difference as a figure for racial segregation itself. Hubbs's article is the closest antecedent to this study in its attention to language as a social and political instrument rather than a transparent medium of plot, though her argument operates at the level of literary-historical discourse rather than at the level of individual utterance.

Recent studies have complicated the gender analysis through the lens of intersectionality. Ahmetspahić and Kahrić (2020) examine the story's construction of the female perspective within the male-dominated social order of the Old South, while Fox (2022) contextualizes Chopin's short story collections as strategic arrangements of social commentary. Armiento (2015) brings legal-historical precision to bear on the story, analysing what the accusation of mixed racial heritage would have meant legally and economically for Désirée in the specific Louisiana juridical context of the 1890s; a reading that implicitly supports the argument advanced here that Armand's utterances are speech acts with institutional and legal weight, not merely expressions of personal feeling. Ostman (2020) situates Chopin's fiction within the Catholic cultural context of Louisiana Creole society, illuminating how religious discourse intersects with racial and gender ideology in the plantation household. Rasool et al. (2022) have further demonstrated the productive application of CDA frameworks to the analysis of gender language in media texts from non-Western contexts, establishing the methodological precedent for applying critical linguistic analysis to narrative representations of gender inequality.

What remains unaddressed in all of these studies is the specific linguistic machinery through which ideological power is produced in the text. No study has applied CDA to the story's actual utterances, examined the grammatical distribution of interrogatives and declaratives between characters, analysed the modality of Armand's speech acts, or traced the function of silence and narrative focalization as discursive strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, and Gendered Racial Discourse

Crenshaw's (1991) foundational articulation of intersectionality established the theoretical vocabulary for analysing how the simultaneous configuration of race and gender produces unique and irreducible forms of subordination. Her work builds on and systematizes the earlier contributions of Collins (2000), Hooks (1981), Davis (1981), and Lorde (1984), each of whom analysed how the specific vulnerability of Black women under patriarchal racial capitalism cannot

be captured by gender analysis alone or race analysis alone. Collins's concept of the matrix of domination; the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality through which power operates is particularly valuable for understanding Désirée's intersectional position in the story, though her racial indeterminacy makes the analysis more complex than straightforward applications of these frameworks typically address.

Hooks (1981) demonstrated that the specific form of Black women's oppression under slavery combined racial subjection with gendered sexual exploitation in ways that white feminist and civil rights discourses each failed to capture. Her analysis of how enslaved women were simultaneously hypersexualized and desexualized in the dominant racial discourse of the antebellum South is directly relevant to reading La Blanche's function in Chopin's text, where the sexual relationship between Armand and La Blanche is simultaneously implied and unspeakable; a discursive management that Hooks's framework enables to name and analyse. Davis (1981) similarly examined how women's labour, sexuality, and reproductive capacity were appropriated and controlled through the specific discursive and legal apparatus of slavery, providing the historical context within which the story's representation of La Blanche must be situated.

2.2 Speech Act Theory, Performativity, and the Language of Racial Identity

Austin's (1962) distinction between constative utterances that describe a pre-existing state of affairs and performative utterances that accomplish an action through their enunciation; provides a foundational theoretical resource for understanding Armand's racial declarations. Searle's (1969) elaboration of speech act theory distinguished between the locutionary act (what is said), the illocutionary act (what is done in saying it), and the perlocutionary act (what effect is produced on the hearer). Applied to Armand's utterances, this framework reveals that his racial declarations have a specific illocutionary force: they are not mere descriptions of Désirée's racial identity but acts of racial classification that, backed by the institutional authority of the antebellum plantation order, produce the social fact they purport to describe.

Butler's (1997) radical extension of Austin's framework introduced the concept of injurious speech; a speech acts that wound and subordinate precisely through their illocutionary force, their capacity to produce and fix social identity through the force of their enunciation. Butler's analysis of how hailing — the act of calling someone by name or category — constitutes the subject in the very act of address is directly applicable to Armand's naming of Désirée as racially Other. Crucially, Butler also analyses the conditions under which injurious speech can be refused or rerouted — the possibilities for counter-discursive resistance that exist within the very mechanisms of linguistic subjection. Désirée's failed counter-discourse can be read, through Butler's framework, as an attempt at precisely this kind of counter-speech that is defeated not by Armand's arguments but by the institutional conditions that deny her utterances illocutionary force.

2.3 Silence as Discourse

Huckin (2002) established the theoretical basis for analysing textual silence — the strategic omission of information that, in a given discourse context, a reader might reasonably expect to be present — as an active discursive practice with ideological consequences. Huckin distinguished between topic avoidance, the systematic exclusion of entire subject matters from a discourse; selective reporting, the inclusion of only certain aspects of a topic while suppressing others; and disempowering, the relegation of certain voices and perspectives to positions of diminished authority. All three forms of discursive silence are operative in Chopin's text: the sexual

relationship between Armand and La Blanche is a topic avoided in the narrator's discourse; the deliberations through which Armand arrives at his racial accusation are selectively withheld; and Désirée's counter-arguments are structurally disempowered by their grammatical configuration as questions and appeals rather than authoritative declarations. Pennycook (2001) further situates silence within critical applied linguistics, arguing that what is not said in institutional and social discourse is as ideologically significant as what is said; a principle that the present analysis takes as foundational.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite this substantial body of research, no published study has applied Critical Discourse Analysis in the technical, Faircloughian sense to Désirée's *Baby*. Studies that invoke the language of "discourse" in their readings of the text typically do so in the loose, Foucauldian sense of discourse as knowledge-regime or epistemic field, rather than in the specific, text-analytic sense developed by Fairclough (1992, 2003) and van Dijk (1993), which attends to the lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic features of specific textual productions. More specifically, the existing literature has not theorised silence as a discourse practice within the text.

3. Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995, 2003) three-dimensional model for discourse analysis distinguishes between three analytically separable but dialectically related dimensions of any discursive event. The first dimension is text: the linguistic properties of the artefact itself, including its vocabulary, grammar, cohesive structures, and the organisation of utterances at the sentence level. Razzaq et al., (2026) also noted that Fairclough's three-dimensional model examines textual features (wording, pronouns, evaluations), discursive practice (genre conventions, intertextuality, audience positioning), and social practice (historical context and ideological significance). For Fairclough (2003, p. 26), the central claim of CDA is that these three dimensions are dialectically related: texts are not merely reflections of social practices but are constitutive of them, which means that the linguistic choices encoded in a text are never neutral but they carry the traces of the social relations of production within which they were made and which they actively work to maintain or contest. The strength of Fairclough's model for literary CDA lies in its insistence that textual features are not merely stylistic but are sites where ideology is enacted and naturalized.

Van Dijk's (1993, 1995) ideological square describes the foundational strategy of dominant discourse: to emphasize the positive properties of the in-group and the negative properties of the out-group, while systematically suppressing or mitigating the negative properties of the in-group and the positive properties of the out-group. In his more recent sociocognitive discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2014), he elaborates the mechanisms through which ideological positions are instantiated in discourse at multiple levels: through the semantic macrostructures that organize the overall meaning of a text, through the schematic superstructures that organize its rhetorical form, and through the micro-level surface structures of syntax, lexis, and pragmatics through which specific ideological positions are encoded in specific clauses and utterances. This multi-level model enables an analysis that moves between the overall ideological trajectory of the story and the specific grammatical features of individual utterances — demonstrating how macro-level ideological positions are reproduced through the cumulative effect of micro-level discursive choices. Applied to Désirée's *Baby*, van Dijk's framework draws attention to how the story's discourse manages the attribution of racial knowledge — who is credited with knowing, who is

dismissed as uncertain, and how the text's narrative voice participates in or subverts these attributions.

Miranda Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice identifies two forms of wrong done to subjects specifically in their capacity as knowers. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's credibility is deflated by identity prejudice — when a hearer gives less credence to a speaker's testimony because of their gender, race, or other socially marked identity. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretive resources places someone at a disadvantage in understanding or articulating their own experience — when the available concepts do not adequately capture what someone is living through, leaving them without the linguistic resources to testify at all. Désirée's situation exemplifies precisely this structure: she does speak, repeatedly and desperately, but her speech cannot constitute legitimate testimony within the discursive order that Armand commands.

Austin's (1962) foundational distinction between constative utterances (statements that describe a pre-existing state of the world, capable of being true or false) and performative utterances (statements that accomplish an action through their very enunciation, capable not of truth or falsity but of felicity or infelicity) is essential to the analysis of Armand's racial declarations. Austin identified a set of felicity conditions — the institutional and contextual requirements that must be satisfied for a performative to succeed — including the existence of an accepted conventional procedure, the appropriate circumstances, the appropriate persons, and the correct execution of the procedure. Armand's racial declarations are performatively felicitous in the story's world because all of these conditions are satisfied: there is an accepted procedure of racial classification, the circumstances of the plantation household provide the appropriate institutional setting, Armand's position as white male patriarch makes him an appropriate person to pronounce racial identity, and his declarative utterances execute the procedure in the correct form.

Butler's (1997) elaboration of performativity extends Austin's framework by emphasizing the citational structure of performative utterances: they work not because of the authority of any individual speaker but because they cite and reiterate the conventions of prior discourse, drawing their force from the accumulated weight of the discourse system they instantiate. Armand's racial declarations carry force not because he is particularly authoritative as an individual but because they reiterate the accumulated conventions of antebellum racial discourse, conventions that have been sedimented through centuries of legal, scientific, religious, and popular discourse into apparently natural categories. Butler's framework also illuminates the conditions under which such performatives can fail or be contested — conditions that are relevant to understanding why Désirée's counter-speech fails and why the closing letter's declarative manages to succeed where her counter-discourse did not. Crenshaw (1991) argues that the experiences of women of colour cannot be captured by analyses that treat race and gender as separate, additive categories. The combination of these conceptual frameworks provided a robust basis for the analysis of the selected text.

4. Research Questions

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

- a. How does the linguistic organisation of speech and silence in Désirée's Baby reproduce the racial and patriarchal ideologies of the plantation South at the textual level?

- b. What institutional and generic conventions of speech, testimony, and social interaction are invoked and violated in the story's major encounters, and how do these conventions produce epistemic injustice?
- c. How does the text both reproduce and critically expose—or interrupt—the racial ideology of nineteenth-century Louisiana, and what is the ideological function of the story's closing letter as a form of posthumous subaltern speech?

5. Methodology

This is a qualitative study that analysed primary text of the complete narrative of Désirée's Baby as reproduced in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (Chopin, 1893/2006), edited by Per Seyersted and published by Louisiana State University Press. The story, written in November 1892 and first published in *Vogue* in January 1893, and is divided into four loosely sequential narrative segments corresponding to the story's temporal movements: the founding narrative, Armand's courtship, the crisis of the baby, and the epilogue of the letter. All direct textual quotations in this paper are taken from this edition.

Analysis proceeded sequentially across Fairclough's (1995) three dimensions, with the additional analytical resources of SFL transitivity analysis, speech act theory, and performativity theory applied at the textual level where relevant. At the textual level, each utterance was analysed for grammatical mood, modality, transitivity, and lexical choice using Halliday's (1985) categories, the illocutionary force of key utterances analysed using Austin's (1962) and Butler's (1997) performativity frameworks. At the discursive practice level, utterances were analysed in relation to their positioning within the narrative structure. At the social practice level, textual and discursive patterns were situated within the historical context of antebellum Louisiana's legal and social construction of racial identity, drawing on Omi and Winant (2015), Armiento (2015), and the theoretical resources of Morrison (1992), Dyer (1997), Spivak's (1988) framework, the subaltern cannot speak and the Black feminist tradition.

Three analytical categories, derived from the intersection of Fairclough's model with the epistemic-injustice framework of Fricker (2007) and Dotson (2011), organise the analysis. These are: (a) testimonial smothering — speech acts that prevent or invalidate the testimony of a marginalised speaker before it can be assessed; (b) epistemic foreclosure — the use of authoritative assertion to close discursive space that a counter-claim might otherwise occupy; and (c) the ventriloquist reversal — a category proposed by this paper to describe the narrative mechanism through which the text's only fully-credited subaltern voice speaks posthumously and through an instrument (the letter, the fire) controlled by the very figure whose racial authority it exposes.

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Textual Dimension: The Linguistics of Racial Attribution and Silence

When confronted with Armand's implicit racial accusation, Désirée does not counter with an equal declaration. She asks: "Tell me what it means!" she cried despairingly. "It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair," seizing his wrist. "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand." (Chopin, 1893/2006, p. 243)

This passage is extraordinarily rich at the textual level of CDA analysis. The imperative forms Désirée uses — "tell me," "look at my hair," "look at my hand" — are not commands in the sense of Armand's "yes, go" but appeals: requests that she is not in a position to enforce. Her use of "whiter than yours" is the most desperate move in her discursive repertoire: she attempts to turn

Armand's own racial measuring apparatus against him, to invoke the very physical-evidence logic of racial identification that the story's ideological system uses against her and redirect it toward his own body. This is not, however, a moment of discursive power. It is its opposite: an attempt to use the master's own epistemology as a defense, which fails because the racial-patriarchal discourse system does not grant women the authority to make racial attributions, even about themselves. At the discursive practice level, Désirée's letter to Madame Valmondé — "My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white

Désirée appears in the grammatical position of the indirect object: the one to whom things are told, the one whom others name. She never occupies the subject position of the sentence in which racial naming is the predicate. This grammatical arrangement precisely mirrors her position within the social practice level of the text's discourse — within the ideology of gender and race in antebellum Louisiana, Désirée is the object of racial attribution, never its authorized agent.

6.1.1 The Lexical Field of Naming and Origin

Désirée's very name is the analysis's starting point, because naming in this text is never innocent. She is named "Désirée" — the desired — by Monsieur Valmondé, the man who finds her. The name is a masculine act: it does not describe who she is but what she is to the man who finds her, which is the object of his desire and the satisfaction of his wife's maternal longing. Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand" (Chopin, 1893/2006, p. 243) — is an appeal to visual evidence precisely because she has no other kind.

The lexical field of racial attribution in the text is characterised by indirection and euphemism. Chopin never uses the word "Black" or "Negro" in the narrator's voice when referring to the racial status being attributed to Désirée and the baby. Instead, the text relies on the vocabulary of implication: "the child's appearance" (p. 242), "the conviction that... something in the air menacing her peace" (p. 242), the visual comparison between the baby and "one of La Blanche's little quadroon boys" (p. 242). This lexical indirection performs an ideological function identified by van Dijk (1993) in racialised discourse more broadly: the naturalisation of racial classification through its deployment as common knowledge that requires no explicit statement, as something the characters and — implicitly — the reader is expected to recognise without being told. The text produces racial meaning through the discourse practice of implicature rather than assertion, which makes that meaning simultaneously more pervasive and less available for challenge.

6.1.2 Modality and Epistemic Authority

By contrast, Désirée's speech is saturated with epistemic uncertainty markers that are structurally produced by her social position rather than by her actual ignorance. Her questions — "What does it mean? Tell me" (p. 242); "Shall I go, Armand?" (p. 243) — grammatically encode her as a subject whose knowledge is dependent on a man's willingness to share it. She does not make assertions; she asks questions. She does not know what she knows about herself until Armand tells her. The grammar of their exchange thus reproduces the racial and patriarchal hierarchy at the sentence level: Armand's high-modality silence versus Désirée's question-saturated appeals for information about her own identity.

6.1.3 The Management of Direct Speech

One of the most revealing features of the text at the textual dimension is the distribution of direct speech across its characters. Désirée is the story's most extensively quoted character in direct speech: her three letters (to Armand, to Madame Valmondé, and the implied letter from Madame

Valmondé) and her direct utterances to Armand constitute the text's primary speech-act record. Yet despite this apparent abundance of Désirée's voice, each of her speech acts is structured as a plea, a question, or a bid for validation — never as an assertion made from a position of epistemic authority. Armand, by contrast, is almost entirely rendered in indirect speech or in silence. When he does speak directly — "Tell me what it means" (p. 243) — it is to demand information from Désirée in a context where his demand is a sentence, not a question.

6.2 Discursive Practice: Narrative Focalization and the Politics of the Withheld Voice

At the level of discursive practice — Fairclough's (1995) second dimension — the story's narrative apparatus itself constitutes a significant site of ideological work. Chopin employs third person narration with shifting focalization: the narrative initially takes Madame Valmondé's perspective, briefly enters Armand's consciousness, and then follows Désirée through the story's denouement. What is significant for a CDA reading is what the narrator withholds at each of these focalization points. The narrator provides the reader with access to Armand's interiority at exactly one moment: "He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul. Moreover, he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name" (p. 243). This narratorial access to Armand's thoughts is remarkable for what it reveals about his discursive logic: his cruelty is framed, even in his own consciousness, as a response to injury done to him. The story's treatment of the enslaved people on the L'Abri plantation constitutes a further site of discursive management. The narrator notes that after Armand's suspicion hardens, "the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves" (p. 242). This construction is a nominalization of the most radical kind: "the spirit of Satan" is given agency; Armand is its vessel, not its author. His violence against enslaved people is thus discursively constituted as possession rather than action, further reinforcing the narrative's tendency to absolve Armand of agency for the harm he causes. At the social practice level, this discursive strategy participates in the larger ideological formation of antebellum Southern writing that Hubbs (2021) identifies: a discourse in which white male violence is systematically naturalized or displaced onto supernatural or impersonal forces.

6.2.1 Nomination, Performativity, and the Ontological Politics of Naming

The politics of naming in "Désirée's Baby" operate at multiple levels that require a more sustained analysis than literary criticism has previously afforded them. Désirée's very name is itself an ideological construction: it is a name given to her by the Valmondé family, who find her as a nameless infant sleeping in the shadow of a stone pillar. The name "Désirée" — the desired one, or the one who desires — encodes in itself the relational ontology that structures her social existence: she is defined by her relationship to others' desire (the Valmondés' desire for a child, Armand's initial desire for her) and by her own desiring nature, which the story subsequently traces through her desperate appeals. The name is not merely a label but a discursive constitution of her subjecthood as inherently relational, inherently dependent on others' recognition for its existence.

Austin's (1962) framework reveals that the act of naming Désirée with the Aubigny name — which Armand performs through the social institution of marriage — is a performative of the highest order: it constitutes her social identity, her legal standing, her racial legibility, and her class position in a single institutional act. The performative is felicitous — it works — because all of Austin's felicity conditions are satisfied: there is an accepted conventional procedure (marriage), the appropriate circumstances (the plantation household, the Louisiana social order), the

appropriate persons (the white male patriarch), and the correct execution. But this felicity is entirely conditional on Armand's continued endorsement of the performative: since Désirée's social existence is constituted through his act of naming, it can be equally dissolved by his act of renaming — or, more precisely, by his act of racial declassification, which withdraws the social identity the original naming bestowed.

6.3 Social Practice: Racial Discourse and Ideological Formation

At Fairclough's (1995) third analytical level — social practice — the story's discourse must be situated within the specific ideological formation of racial identity in antebellum and post Reconstruction Louisiana. The one-drop rule, which held that any traceable African ancestry was sufficient to classify a person as Black under the law and custom of Southern states, was not merely a social prejudice but an ideological apparatus that authorized specific forms of violence, disinheritance, and social death (Armiento, 2015). What the textual and discursive levels of this analysis have shown that Armand's utterances perform racial classification as declarative authority must be understood as drawing their ideological force from this apparatus. Armand's speech acts work because they are backed by an institutional and legal order that grants white male plantation owners precisely this authority: to name and to classify.

Dyer's (1997) analysis of whiteness as invisible norm illuminates a further dimension of the story's social practice level. Armand's authority is naturalized in the narrative's discourse not merely by the conventions of plantation patriarchy (Borah, Sharma & Dutta, 2026) but by the broader discourse of whiteness that positions white male subjectivity as the universal, unmarked standard against which all other subjectivities are measured and found wanting. When Désirée's racial impurity is "discovered," the narrative presents this discovery as a revelation of a hidden truth rather than as the imposition of a racial category — a discursive operation that Morrison (1992) identified as the characteristic move of American racial discourse: the pretence that racial identity is discovered rather than produced.

6.3.1 The Racial Ideology of the Louisiana Plantation

Van Dijk (1993) argues that racist ideology operates through the polarisation of in-group and out-group representation in discourse: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are the twin discursive strategies through which racial hierarchy is naturalised. In Chopin's story, this polarisation is embedded in the very structure of Armand's desire and disgust. His initial love for Désirée — described in terms of a "comet" that strikes and overwhelms reason — is structured by the racial economy as the desire of a superior subject for an inferior one. His rejection of her when he believes her racial identity has changed is equally structured by the racial economy: the in-group member cannot remain affiliated with a newly designated out-group member, regardless of love, without losing in-group status.

What CDA makes visible by attending to the specific textual management of the story's irony — is the demonstration that the racial ideology it represents is also radically unstable. The polarisation of self and other, in-group and out-group, white and Black that Armand enforces with such violent certainty is shown by the story's ending to rest on a foundation he cannot see: his own racial ancestry. The ideological claim to racial purity is not merely morally wrong in Chopin's narrative; it is epistemically fraudulent, dependent on the suppression of exactly the kind of testimony — his mother's letter — that would expose it.

6.3.2 The Ventriloquist Reversal: Posthumous Subaltern Speech

This paper proposes the category of the ventriloquist reversal to describe the specific narrative mechanism of the story's conclusion. Armand burns Désirée's and the baby's possessions in a bonfire — a theatrical assertion of racial purification, a discursive and literal destruction of the evidence of transgression. In the process, he encounters the one piece of evidence he did not intend to encounter: his mother's letter to his father. "But, above all... 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, 1893/2006, p. 244).

This letter is the story's only instance of fully-credited subaltern speech, and it achieves that credit only by being dead. Armand's mother — who is never named, never appears, and exists in the story only as the maternal legacy that Paris enabled her to conceal — speaks in the one discursive form that Armand's authority cannot intercept: the posthumous letter encountered in the very act of destroying the past. The irony is multiple. First, the letter speaks exactly what the racial ideology of L'Abri has spent the entire story suppressing — the knowledge that the racial identity of the powerful is as constructed and concealed as that of the powerless. Second, the instrument of Armand's purification becomes the instrument of his exposure. Third, the only speech that succeeds in puncturing his epistemic authority is speech he was never meant to read and cannot respond to.

In Spivak's (1988) framework, the subaltern cannot speak because the conditions for the recognition of her speech as testimony do not exist within the dominant discursive order. Chopin's narrative both confirms and ironizes this impossibility. It confirms it in the case of Désirée and of the unnamed enslaved women at L'Abri, whose testimony is systematically suppressed or simply never generated by the text. It ironizes it in the case of Armand's mother, whose subaltern speech achieves recognition precisely because it was never intended to enter the discursive economy at all: it was a private letter, a domestic and intimate speech act, that the accident of Armand's fire reveals to a reader who is Armand himself. The ventriloquist reversal is the mechanism by which Chopin allows the subaltern voice to speak, but only through the frame of posthumous disclosure and readerly irony — not through the legitimate testimonial exchange that the story's racial order makes impossible during its events.

6.3.3 Chopin's Critical Interruption of Racial Ideology

The third analytical category at the dimension of social practice concerns the relationship between the text's reproduction of racial ideology and its critical interruption of that ideology. Fairclough (1992, p. 94) argues that CDA must account for both the ideological reproduction and the ideological contestation that are often simultaneously present in a single discursive event — that texts are not merely sites of ideological transmission but can also be sites of ideological struggle. Désirée's Baby inhabits this ambivalence with unusual precision. At the level of its represented world, it reproduces the racial ideology of the plantation: the characters speak within it, are destroyed by it, and enforce it. At the level of its narrative organisation — the ironic management of information, the placement of the letter at the story's conclusion, the retrospective re-reading that the disclosure demands — it systematically exposes that ideology as fraudulent, contingent, and self-defeating.

Butler's (1997) analysis of injurious speech provides the most productive framework for understanding why Désirée's counter-declaration fails. Butler argues that the force of performative

utterances depends not on the authority of the individual speaker but on the citational chain of prior discourse that the utterance invokes. Désirée's declaration "I am white" cannot invoke the same citational chain as Armand's racial classification because in the discourse system of the antebellum South, racial identity is not self-proclaimed but externally assigned — and it is assigned specifically by white male authority, not by the person classified. The iterability that gives Armand's declarations their force is precisely what denies Désirée's declarations the same force: she cannot cite the convention of self-racial-identification because that convention does not exist in her discourse world.

Applying Collins's (2000) framework of the matrix of domination, this syntactic pattern mirrors Désirée's position within interlocking systems of racial and gender oppression: she has been so thoroughly constituted as the object of others' discourse that she cannot occupy the subject position of racial self-declaration even in the utterance that is most urgently her own.

7. Findings and Conclusion

The analysis generates several findings that can be consolidated at the level of the paper's three research questions. In response to RQ1, the text's linguistic organisation of speech and silence reproduces the racial and patriarchal ideology of the plantation South through a set of specific textual mechanisms: the nominal dispossession of Désirée through male naming practices; the asymmetric modality of speech about racial identity, in which Armand's certainty is structurally contrasted with Désirée's epistemic dependence; and the management of direct and indirect speech in ways that give Désirée apparent vocal presence while consistently encoding her as a subject who speaks from epistemic disempowerment.

In response to RQ2, the analysis at the dimension of discursive practice reveals three distinct forms of epistemic injustice operating in the text. Testimonial smothering — Dotson's (2011) category — characterises both Armand's silence before Désirée's evidence and Madame Valmondé's silence before the baby, demonstrating that the suppression of testimony in the story is not a singular act of cruelty but a structured practice distributed across multiple social actors and generic contexts. Epistemic foreclosure — the category proposed in this paper — describes Armand's use of declarative assertion to close the space of counter-speech without engaging the counter-evidence Désirée produces. Fricker's (2007) testimonial injustice underlies both: the condition of possibility for both forms of silencing is the credibility deficit that the plantation's racial and gender hierarchy assigns to Désirée in advance of any specific testimonial encounter.

In response to RQ3, the analysis at the social practice dimension reveals the text's relationship to the ideology it inhabits as one of inhabitation and critical interruption simultaneously. Chopin reproduces the discourse of racial classification in order to expose it, and she does so through the specific narrative device of the ventriloquist reversal: the posthumous disclosure of the subaltern voice that the story's racial order has suppressed, in a form (the letter, the accidental reader) that the story's ideology cannot contain or dismiss. This is not, the analysis insists, merely an ironic plot device: it is a structural claim about the conditions under which subaltern speech can enter a dominant discourse, namely, only through forms of disclosure that the dominant discourse did not authorise and cannot retrieve.

The research gap identified at the outset of this study has been addressed through a close reading of the text at all three of Fairclough's analytical dimensions, producing findings that extend and deepen the existing literature without displacing it. The feminist and New Historicist readings reviewed remain valid accounts of the story's thematic content; the CDA analysis adds to them an

account of the discursive mechanisms through which that content is produced and made ideologically effective.

The study also proposes a contribution to the methodological toolkit of literary CDA: the category of the ventriloquist reversal, which captures the mechanism by which literary narrative can allow subaltern speech to enter the discursive record through forms of posthumous, accidental, or retrospective disclosure that the dominant discourse cannot authorise or contain. This category is specific to literary discourse in a way that most CDA categories are not, and its development points toward the productive expansion of CDA as a method beyond its traditional domains of political and media discourse into the analysis of literary fiction as a site of ideological production and contestation.

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