

The Formation/Transformation of a Romantic Displacement: Kate Chopin's "Mamouche" and "The Godmother"*

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Abstract

Both set in the town of Natchitoches, "Mamouche" and "The Godmother" deserve a close comparison because both stories treat the motifs of romantic attachment, frustrated love, and romantic displacement. Doctor John-Luis in "Mamouche" and Tante Elodie in "The Godmother" had each suffered deep frustration in love while they were young. Even though neither narrator details the romantic affair per se, the frustrated love accounts for the reason why both characters remain single. More interestingly, despite (or because of) their earlier frustration in love, both John-Luis and Tante Elodie in the fictional present displace the past romantic attachment onto the offspring of their respective love/lover.

But "Mamouche" focuses on the initial formation of the old doctor's romantic displacement, whereas "The Godmother" deals mainly with the transformation of an affectionate relationship between Elodie and her godson Gabriel in the wake of the latter's hot-headed midnight murder and the former's clandestine endeavors to cover up the crime. Furthermore, the difference in narrative emphasis leads to drastically

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dissimilar endings. Toward the end of “Mamouche,” the title character finds a new home at the old bachelor farmer’s house, and there is a promise of a close tie between the youngster and his godfather. In comparison, “The Godmother,” which is darker in tone, concludes with the death of the guilt-ridden godson and the shrivelling of the title character. While the doctor’s public offer of a 25-dollar reward helps him attain a godson, Elodie’s secret retrieval of Gabriel’s knife causes her to lose the trust and love of her godson. Finally, if Mamouche constitutes the incarnation of John-Luis’s fitful memories of the past, Gabriel serves to fulfill vicariously Elodie’s need to express her maternal and sexual love.

Keywords: Kate Chopin, “Mamouche”, “The Godmother”, romantic displacement

Over the past century or so since their initial publication, "Mamouche" and "The Godmother" have been largely ignored by critics of Kate Chopin's work.¹ In his *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, the prominent Chopin scholar Per Seyersted makes virtually no mention of either story. Peggy Skaggs, in her 1985 study on Kate Chopin, sums up "Mamouche" in one sentence and devotes three short paragraphs to "The Godmother" (27, 48-49). Published in 1986, Barbara Ewell's *Kate Chopin* does not touch upon "Mamouche" and contains a one-paragraph plot summary of "The Godmother" (171-72). Likewise, Emily Toth's biography of Kate Chopin devotes one short paragraph to "The Godmother" and mentions "Mamouche" only in passing (298, 327). Bernard Koloski, in his 1996 study on Chopin's short fiction, simply quotes Peggy Skaggs's sentence about "Mamouche" (129); he ignores "The Godmother" altogether. Though Janet Beer covers more than thirty short stories by Kate Chopin in Chapters Two to Four of her recently-published *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Studies in Short Fiction*, she devotes merely one sentence to discussing a minor character (the black servant) in "Mamouche" (30), while ignoring "The Godmother" altogether.² Neither story is mentioned in Helen Taylor's *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin*, Anna Shannon Elfenbein's *Women on the Color Line: Evolving Stereotypes and the Writings of George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin*, or Christopher Benfey's *Degas in New Orleans: Encounters in the Creole World of Kate Chopin and George Washington Cable*.³ The latest bibliographical

¹ Written on February 24-25, 1893, "Mamouche" was first published in *Youth's Companion* 67 (April 19, 1894), 178-79, and about three years later was included in Chopin's second collection of stories, *A Night in Acadie*, which is, in the words of Bernard Koloski, Kate Chopin's "most balanced, most mature, most fully developed book of short stories" (31). Written between January and February 6, 1899, "The Godmother" was published in the St. Louis *Mirror* 11 (Dec. 12, 1901), 9-13 (Seyersted 1015, 1028; Seyersted and Toth 206, 210). Before its publication in the *Mirror*, "The Godmother" was to be included in a planned short-story collection entitled *A Vocation and a Voice*, under contract to Herbert S. Stone & Company, together with "A Vocation and a Voice," "Elizabeth Stock's One Story," "Two Portraits," "An Idle Fellow," "A Mental Suggestion," "An Egyptian Cigarette," "The White Eagle," "The Dream of an Hour," "Two Summers and Two Souls," "Sketches (The Night Came Slowly, and Juanita)," "The Unexpected," "Her Letters," "The Kiss," "Suzette," "The Falling in Love of Fedora," "The Recovery," "The Blind Man," "A Morning Walk," "Lilacs," and "Ti Démon." But in February 1900, Herbert S. Stone & Company decided not to publish *A Vocation and a Voice*. Emily Toth, Chopin's recent biographer, ascribed the decision to the firm's budget cutback, though Chopin might have related the crushing news to the overwhelmingly harsh reviews *The Awakening* had received since its publication on April 22, 1899, also by Herbert S. Stone & Company (Toth 357, 373-74).

² At the "Kate Chopin Centenary Colloquium," Professor Janet Beer admitted that she likes "The Godmother" very much.

³ While Helen Taylor's chapter on Kate Chopin discusses the issues of gender, race and region in *The Awakening* and stories like "At Chênrière Caminada," "A No-Account Creole" and "Athénaïse," Anna Shannon Elfenbein, in Chapter Four of her book, also focuses on Chopin's novel and "Désirée's

research done by Suzanne Disheroon Green and David J. Caudle shows that there has not been any critical essay on either “Mamouche” or “The Godmother,” though they come up with an entry that addresses, among other stories of Chopin’s, “The Godmother” (Green and Caudle 73).⁴

Actually, these two less-known stories merit an in-depth comparison because both deal with the motifs of romantic attachment, frustrated love, romantic displacement, and the condonation of wrongdoing. In “Mamouche,” which is classified as a story for children (Koloski 87; Skaggs 27), the unexpected appearance of a mischievous waif triggers the bitter-sweet memory of an old wealthy farmer’s romantic attachment in the past.⁵ Doctor John-Luis, the bachelor farmer, had once been romantically attached to Stéphanie Galopin, the boy’s grandmother, but the pretty Acadian girl had chosen for her husband Théodule Peloté, the boy’s good-looking grandfather, who could dance, play the fiddle and sing. After condoning all the mischief committed by the young boy Mamouche, the kind-hearted physician decides to ask the boy to live with him: “. . . I want you for my own child.”

About six years later, Kate Chopin turns again to the motifs of romantic attachment, frustrated love, romantic displacement, and the condonation of wrongdoing, in the obviously more complex tale of “The Godmother.” But unlike “Mamouche,” which ends on a note of hope for the new godfather, the later tale, somewhat chilling in tone,⁶ concludes with the death of the godson and the shrinking of the godmother. While “Mamouche” focuses mainly on the title character and the promise of an affectionate relationship between him and John-Luis, “The Godmother” deals, among other things, with the transformation of a deep and strong affection between a middle-aged spinster named Tante Elodie and her godson, Gabriel Lucaze. Elodie dotes on Gabriel, for he is the son of her former lover Justin Lucaze, whom she would have married but for her parents’ intervention. What triggers the change in the relationship is Gabriel’s accidental killing of a half-drunken man and Elodie’s

Baby,” “La Belle Zoraïde,” “At the ‘Cadian Ball” and “The Storm.” Christopher Benfey focuses on *The Awakening* in Chapter 14 and deals in Chapter 13 with stories like “The Story of an Hour,” “A Wizard from Gettysburg,” “After the Winter,” “The Locket,” and “La Belle Zoraïde.”

⁴ In her study on childbirth and motherhood in Kate Chopin’s fiction, Patricia Hopkins Lattin devotes barely a sentence to “The Godmother”: “Her fiancé having been killed in the war thirty years before, Ma’ame Pélagie (‘Ma’ame Pélagie’) acts out her mother-instincts toward her younger sister Pauline, while Tante Elodie, ‘The Godmother’ [*sic*], experiences a deep, consuming attachment for the son of her former fiancé, whom her family refused to allow her to marry thirty-five years before” (9). Besides “Ma’ame Pélagie” and “The Godmother,” Lattin’s study also treats, often in greater detail, “Athénaïse,” “Désirée’s Baby,” “La Belle Zoraïde,” “Mrs. Mobry’s Reason,” and *The Awakening*.

⁵ It is by no means accidental that Chopin originally titled this piece “A Romantic Attachment” (Chopin 1015; Toth and Seyersted 157).

⁶ Indeed, Emily Toth in her biography calls “The Godmother” a “chilling short story” (326).

subsequent endeavours to cover up the crime by secretly retrieving Gabriel's knife and simulating robbery. As a result of her clandestine actions, no one suspects the young man of the crime; however, he continues to be haunted by guilt. Elodie is afraid that her godson might betray himself. After discovering his godmother's complicity, Gabriel turns away from her, an act that breaks her heart.

I

In his youth, John-Luis was romantically attached to a pretty Acadian girl named Stéphanie Galopin. But the "very intelligent woman" or "clever woman," as the old doctor says of her, chose Théodule Peloté for her husband, a choice that John-Luis considers to have been a great mistake, because young Théodule "had never done a steady week's work in his life."⁷ Nevertheless, John-Luis is no equal to his friend Théodule in terms of outward appearance and romantic disposition. While he is, according to the third-person narrator, "small and thin," young Théodule is described by the old doctor as "handsome" and "good-looking." Moreover, young Théodule "could dance and play the fiddle and sing;" he used to sing "A ta—à ta—" when he and John-Luis went out serenading. By contrast, young John-Luis could neither dance nor play the fiddle; his voice, which is now "pretty low and husky" (274), "even in his youth, could not have been agreeable" (270). That "fiddling and dancing and tra la la" is, as the old doctor relates to Mamouche, who turns up one rainy night at his door, presumably what had turned young Stéphanie's head.

When he learns that Mamouche, the ragged white boy sitting beside the fire eating a platter of cold food, is the grandson of Théodule Peloté and Stéphanie Galopin, the pleasantly surprised doctor immediately has his negro servant Marshall "bring him [the boy] a mug of milk and another piece of pie" (269).⁸ In addition to offering him a good supper, which Mamouche eats "with keen appetite," Doctor John-Luis also provides the orphan boy with shelter. Indeed, having spent an

⁷ Kate Chopin, *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969), p. 270. Subsequent textual references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically.

⁸ As a faithful servant, Marshall has obviously internalized the racial and social mores of the Southern plantation culture when he asks the child: "Is you wi'te o' is you black? . . . Dat wat I wants ter know 'fo' I kiar' victuals to yo in de settin'-room" (268). Though slavery no longer exists in the narrative present of the story, the class structure is determined by the power-relations of the antebellum South. In such a society, "social and even psychological subjection to the role of either servant or master has come to be central to personal and cultural identity" (Beer 30). In Chapter 2 of her book, Janet Beer convincingly demonstrates that Chopin's Louisiana is a post-colonial rather than an American post-bellum society.

agreeable evening with Mamouche, the amused and reflective doctor has Marshall prepare a bed for the boy beside the sitting room fire.

Furthermore, the amiable old doctor decides to adopt the orphan as his own child, despite all the mischief Mamouche confesses to having committed earlier, including lifting the doctor's gates from their hinges. A few days after Mamouche slips away from the doctor's house very early in the morning, Doctor John-Luis is astonished to find the boy brought to his presence by a red-faced man who, in response to the offer of a twenty-five dollar reward, identifies Mamouche as the person guilty of the malicious offense described on the placards the doctor has sent abroad:

It was Mamouche, covered with mud, the picture of misery. Doctor John-Luis stood with his back to the fire. He was startled, and visibly and painfully moved at the sight of the boy.

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed. "Then it was you, Mamouche, who did this mischievous thing to me? Lifting my gates from their hinges; letting the chickens in among my flowers to ruin them; and the hogs and cattle to trample and uproot my vegetables!"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the red-faced man, "that game's played out, now;" and Doctor John-Luis looked as if he wanted to strike him.

Mamouche seemed unable to reply. His lower lip was quivering.

"Yas, it's me!" he burst out. "It's me w'at take yo' gates off the hinge. It's me w'at turn loose Mr. Morgin's hoss, w'en Mr. Morgin was passing veillée wid his sweetheart. It's me w'at take down Ma'ame Angèle's fence, an' lef her calf loose to tramp in Mr. Billy's cotton. It's me w'at play like a ghos' by the graveyard las' Toussaint to scare the darkies passin' in the road. It's me w'at—." (273)⁹

Instead of letting the boy finish his torrential confession, the bachelor farmer demands to know the reason for his secret departure several days before:

"And pray tell me," he asked, as severely as he could, "why you left

⁹ Mamouche's confession that "It's me w'at take down Ma'ame Angèle's fence, an' lef her calf loose to tramp in Mr. Billy's cotton" comprises the opening plot line of Kate Chopin's other story called "The Lilies," written and first published about one year earlier than "Mamouche." According to Per Seyersted, "The Lilies" was written on January 27-28, 1892 and first published in *Wide Awake* 36 (April 1893): 415-18. As Patricia Hopkins Lattin has rightly summarized, "Viewed broadly, Chopin's repeating characters serve to flesh out the skeleton of her central fictional world, creating a full and rich social reality" (1979-80: 21).

my house like a criminal, in the morning, secretly?"

The tears had begun to course down Mamouche's brown cheeks.

"I was 'shame' of myse'f, that's w'y. If you wouldn' gave me no suppa, an' no bed, an' no fire, I don' say. I wouldn' been 'shame' then."

(273)

The words uttered by the teary boy indicate that Doctor John-Luis' acts of kindness toward him have triggered in him feelings of remorse for the mischief he had done earlier and that Mamouche is, as the doctor (and the reader) must have deduced, certainly not wicked or ill-disposed by nature.

The reappearance of the tearful Mamouche rekindles the bachelor farmer's hope for an ideal companion, a well-disposed boy whom, as the rich John-Luis has told Marshall, "I might train to work, to study, to lead a decent, honest life—a boy of good heart who would care for me in my old age" (272). Doctor John-Luis' desire to search for such an ideal companion is apparently aroused by a longing to repeat the agreeable evening he has passed with Mamouche, for he begins to feel lonely shortly after the white orphan's surprise departure.¹⁰

"Marsh," he said, "you know, after all, it's rather dreary to be living alone as I do, without any companion—of my own color, you understand."

"I knows dat, sah. It sho' am lonesome," replied the sympathetic Marshall. (272)

As his subsequent search for that ideal companion had proven futile, Doctor John-Luis became resigned to spending the rest of his life alone. Now, the second coming of Mamouche makes it clear to the doctor that the orphan grandson of Théodule Peloté and Stéphanie Galopin will be the ideal companion he has been looking for. Though having a tendency to do mischievous pranks, a character trait which the doctor believes to have been inherited from Théodule Peloté, the youngster has shown heartfelt repentance for his wrongdoings.

Moreover, old John-Luis sides with Mamouche when the red-faced man, upon

¹⁰A similar motif appears in another Chopin story called "Regret." Mamzelle Aurélie, a satisfied spinster of 50 years, becomes charged with the responsibility of caring for Odile's children for two weeks. After some struggling, she acquires a motherly efficiency. When Odile returns, Aurélie is saddened by the silence. She weeps with regret for a life she refused years ago (Bonner 131). After the children leave, she cries with "sobs that seemed to tear her very soul" (Chopin 378). The title "Regret" makes clear that she is finally regretting that she never married and had her own children.

hearing that the boy had once left the doctor's house secretly, "like a criminal," pronounces the boy to be also guilty of theft while producing from his coat pocket a bolt as evidence:

"I en't no thief!" blurted Mamouche, indignantly. "It's one piece o' iron w'at I pick up in the road."

"Sir," said Doctor John-Luis with dignity, "I can understand how the grandson of Théodule Peloté might be guilty of such mischievous pranks as this boy has confessed to. But I know that the grandson of Stéphanie Galopin could not be a thief." (274)

After sending the red-faced man off with the reward, the good-natured doctor proceeds to wipe away the boy's tears and asks the boy to be his godson, if the latter so chooses:

"Mamouche," he said, "I want you to stay here; to live here with me always. To learn how to work; to learn how to study; to grow up to be an honorable man. An honorable man, Mamouche, for I want you for my own child."

His voice was pretty low and husky when he said that.

"I shall not take the key from the door tonight," he continued. "If you do not choose to stay and be all this that I say, you may open the door and walk out. I shall use no force to keep you." (274)

To the amiable doctor, Mamouche constitutes the incarnation of his fitful memories of the past. The old doctor seems eager to detect in the boy perceptible traces of his old-time lover. For instance, when Doctor John-Luis learns of what Mamouche is doing the following morning, he is filled with obvious delight:

"What is he doing, Marsh?" asked Doctor John-Luis the following morning, when he took the coffee that Marshall had brought to him in bed.

"Who dat, sah?"

"Why, the boy Mamouche, of course. What is he doing?"

Marshall laughed.

"He kneelin' down dah on de flo'. He keep on sayin', 'Hail, Mary, full o' grace, de Lord is wid dee. Hail, Mary, full o' grace'—t'ree, fo' times, sah. I tell 'im, 'W'at you sayin' yo' prayer dat away, boy?' He 'low dat w'at his gran'ma larn 'im, ter keep outen mischief. W'en de

devil say, 'Take dat gate offen de hinge; do dis; do dat,' he gwine say t'ree
Hail Mary, an' de devil gwine tu'n tail an' run."

"Yes, yes," laughed Doctor John-Luis. "That's Stéphanie all over."

(274)

Finally, the doctor believes that Mamouche is intelligent, for he has "a pair of big, soft, dark eyes" (269) similar to his grandmother's. Indeed, he is not timid like one of Baptiste Choupic's boys, or painfully forward like Theodore; nor is he ugly like Hippolite or heavy and stupid like Cami. With this belief in mind, the doctor is quite certain that he will be able to do something to help the boy.

II

Like Doctor John-Luis, Tante Elodie, the title character of "The Godmother," was also entangled in an unfulfilled romantic affair during her youth.¹¹ About thirty-five years previously, young Elodie had briefly loved a young man living next-door named Justin Lucaze. Her parents' opposition, however, had prevented her from marrying him. Like John-Luis, frustration in love explains why Elodie remains single. Interestingly, if Mamouche's mischievousness bespeaks the reason why Doctor John-Luis considers Stéphanie's choice a great mistake, there is a hint in "The Godmother" that Gabriel might have inherited his hot-headedness from his father. Apart from the hot-headed killing of Everson from Conshotta, Gabriel committed another wrongdoing earlier, also in a blind rage. As he confesses: "If I hadn't got mad and lost my head, I might have fooled him. . . . But I didn't know any more what I was doing than the day I threw the inkstand at old Dainean's head when he switched me and made fun of me before the whole school" (602). Though Justin never appears in person, this inherited trait may explain why Elodie feels grateful to her deceased parents whenever she is reminded of her past romance which occupies only a short narrative space, like John-Luis's: "While she tacitly condoned the romance, perhaps for the sake of the sympathy it bred, she never thought of Justin Lucaze but with a feeling of gratitude towards the memory of her parents who had prevented her marrying him thirty-five years before" (599).

¹¹ According to Emily Toth, Chopin might have herself in mind when she creates the character of Tante Elodie, for they had much in common. Both "attracted youth in some incomprehensible way" (Chopin 597), but needed to be alone, to think; both loved cards, especially *solitaire*; and both believed that all morals and ethics are relative (Toth 327). In his critical biography, Per Seyersted also points out that "like one of her characters, Kate Chopin 'attracted youth in some incomprehensible way,' and she was constantly surrounded by the friends of her children" (60)

If Doctor John-Luis shows a strong liking for the grandson of Stéphanie Galopin, Tante Elodie likewise bestows a deep and powerful affection on young Gabriel Lucaze, Justin's only son. In fact, Elodie fills the role of mother to young Gabriel, now that his biological mother has passed away and his father lives on a plantation several miles from the town of Natchitoches, Louisiana,¹² where Gabriel currently stays at a relative's house reading law at Morrison's office. For example, she cleans and mends Gabriel's coats. As the omniscient narrator repeatedly states, Elodie "loved the boy above everything on earth" (599), and "It often seemed to Tante Elodie that all the affection of her heart was centered upon her young protégé, Gabriel; that what she felt for others was simply an emanation—rays, as it were, from this central sun of love that shone for him alone" (606).¹³ In terms of outward appearance, the middle-aged spinster regards her godson as the most attractive young man on earth ("There was none so attractive to her as he") despite the fact that the narrator, in describing this rather good-looking youth, finds his eyes and mouth not quite satisfactory, for the former are sometimes bloodshot and the latter "drooped a little at the corners" (598). In terms of devotion, there is "none so thoughtful of her pleasures and pains. In his devotion there was no trace of a duty-sense; it was the spontaneous expression of affection and seeming dependence" (599). At the outset of the story, Elodie appears as a substitute mother or "a refuge" for Gabriel; indeed, she is "someone dearer than a mother" (612).

In acting out the role of mother to Gabriel, Elodie hopes, if only vainly, to substitute for sexually expressing her love for Justin or for having a son herself. Hence she displaces her erstwhile passion for Justin onto her godson.¹⁴ Elodie's love for Gabriel is manifest in her concern about his personal comfort and reputation. For example, one evening in February when he is getting ready to leave her place after playing two games of cribbage with her, Elodie asks while watching him in the mirror,

¹²According to Heather Kirk Thomas, "The Godmother" and another short story called "A Little Country Girl," both written in January and February 1899, before the publication of *The Awakening*, were "clearly inspired by Chopin's December 1898 visit to Natchitoches Parish" (1992: 47). In Kate Chopin's Natchitoches, the quality of daily life is, in the words of Larzer Ziff, "genial and kind. People openly like one another, enjoy life and savor its sensual riches. Their likes and their dislikes are held passionately, so that action bears a close and apparent relation to feeling" (298).

¹³Patricia Hopkins Lattin cites "The Godmother" and "Ma'ame Pélagie" as stories of substitute mothers, in which "Chopin reflects the prevailing nineteenth-century American view that a childless woman will, from her state of incompleteness, naturally seek out a child for whom she can serve as mother on a part-time basis." But Lattin argues that works in which childbirth actually occurs (like "Désirée's Baby," "La Belle Zoraïde," and *The Awakening*) "present a pessimistic, negative view of childhood and motherhood, a view that contrasts sharply with what we know of Chopin's acceptance of the role for herself" (1978: 9, 8).

¹⁴According to Thomas Bonner, Jr., Chopin uses Elodie to "explore the power, limit, and damaging effects of love" (48).

"Will you be warm enough, *my boy*? It has turned very cold since six o'clock" (598, emphases added). Late that same night when Gabriel returns unexpectedly to her house, Elodie is "grieved to the soul" to find that

His eyes were bloodshot, as they were when he drank or experienced any unusual emotion or excitement. But he was pale and his mouth drooped excessively, and twitched with the effort he made to control it. The top button was wrenched from his coat and his muffler was disarranged. . . .

"Gabriel, w'at is the matter?" she asked imploringly. "Oh, *my poor child*, w'at is the matter?" . . . (600, emphases added).

Elodie's concern about the reputation of her godson is best illustrated in the alibi she invents for him after Gabriel details his accidental killing of a half-drunken white man named Everson in the old Nigger-Luke Cabin. When he tells her of his intention to give himself up, the protective godmother vehemently insists upon his innocence:

"You 'ave not killed the man Everson," she said deliberately. "You know nothing about 'im. You do not know that he left Symund's or that he followed you. You left at ten o'clock. You came straight in town, not feeling well. You saw a light in my window, came here; rapped on the door; I let you in and gave you something for cramps in the stomach. . . ."

(603)

Before sending him away, Elodie takes care to remove the physical evidence of his involvement, including sewing the missing button on his coat and washing off the blood she has noticed on his right hand: "With a wet towel she washed his face and hands as though he were a little child" (603).

If Doctor John-Luis, convinced that "the grandson of Stéphanie Galopin could not be a thief" (274), condones the mischief the shameful boy confesses to having committed, Tante Elodie, determined to shield Gabriel "from ignominy—maybe worse" (604), sets about accomplishing what the narrator has called "her labor of love" (605), that is, covering up his crime. So after Gabriel leaves, she sneaks to the Nigger-Luke Cabin to look for the hornhandled knife he left at the scene. After retrieving the knife, the exultant woman catches sight of "the golden gleam of the murdered man's watch chain" (605), and there flashes upon her the idea of simulating

robbery. First she unhooks the watch and chain. Then, finding that there is money in his pockets, she empties them, turning the pockets inside out. After her swift return, she burns the paper money, which she has tied in her handkerchief, and puts the watch into a large, strong stocking. Having washed and dried the knife with care, she places it in the pocket of one of Gabriel's coats, which she hangs in her closet after she has cleaned it. Thanks to the "labor of love" she has undertaken on the sly, nobody suspects young Gabriel of the crime.

III

While "Mamouche" and "The Godmother" both deal with the protagonist's displacing his/her past unfulfilled romantic attachment onto the offspring of his/her former love/lover, their points of emphasis are different. If "Mamouche" focuses on the incipient stage of Doctor John-Luis's romantic displacement, "The Godmother" is in the main concerned with the transformation of a fond and affectionate relationship between Tante Elodie and her godson Gabriel Lucaze in the wake of the crucial incident. The transformation is effected by a number of interrelated factors. First of all, Elodie's vehement insistence upon Gabriel's innocence actually runs counter to the original intention of the godson, who says, "The best thing is to go give myself up, I reckon, and tell the whole story like I've told you. That's about the best thing I can do *if I want any peace of mind*" (602, emphases added). Hence, while Mamouche is overcome with shame for his mischievous acts, Gabriel is haunted by a guilty conscience. To alleviate his own sense of guilt, he deliberately avoids going to his godmother's house: "He had no desire to see Tante Elodie. She wanted him to forget and her presence made him remember" (610). Moreover, despite her successful coverup, Elodie is also seized with unspeakable fear that Gabriel may betray himself. During the following three days when mental anguish and subsequent fever confine her to bed, her thoughts are invariably with Gabriel, who has not been near her, however: "She wondered what he had done after he left her; what he was doing at that moment? She wanted to see him again alone, to insist anew upon the necessity of his self-assertion of innocence" (606).¹⁵

But the most important factors that have led to the metamorphosis of their close

¹⁵The changing relationship between the godmother and her godson is framed within two intriguing subplots. For one thing, the transformation has come to affect not only Gabriel's law studies but also his love for a fair, blonde teacher at the Normal school, who ends up marrying Fifine Delonce's brother, a "silent, studious looking youth" (597). For another, there is the suggested romance between the unnamed Doctor and Widow Nicholas, Elodie's friend and neighbor, and their resultant wedding near the end.

relationship are Elodie's retrieval of the hornhandled knife and Gabriel's later discovery of it. Ironically, while Elodie's retrieval of the knife is the one thing that has saved Gabriel (legally), his realization of her complicity prompts him to turn away from his godmother once and for all. What brings about Gabriel's realization is his unexpected discovery of the knife in the pocket of his coat, which he switches in Elodie's room with the one he had been wearing. Worried that someone is going to accuse him, the miserable young man asks his godmother, when he comes to her place at her request on the third day following his midnight murder:

“. . . Tante Elodie, are there any spots on this coat? Can you see anything here in the light?"

"There are no spots anywhere. Stop thinking of it, I implore you." But he pulled off the coat and flung it across a chair. He went to the closet to get his other coat which he knew hung there. Tante Elodie, still feeble and suffering, in the depths of her chair, was not quick enough, could think of no way to prevent it" (609)

By the time he puzzles out the mystery of the knife being in his coat pocket (and that of Everson having been robbed), Gabriel feels as if he never wants to see Elodie again and falls to weeping copiously:

For the first time, Gabriel wept. He threw himself down upon the ground in the deepening twilight and wept as he never had before in his life. A terrible sense of loss overpowered him; as if someone dearer than a mother had been taken out of the reach of his heart; as if a refuge had gone from him. The last spark of human affection was dead within him. He knew it as he was losing it. He wept at the loss which left him alone with his thoughts. (612)

To the horrified young man, nothing can justify her "monstrous" action because he "could not believe that any man was worth loving to such length, or worth saving at such a price" (612). In other words, he "finds accepting himself as a hot-headed killer easier than accepting his godmother as a cold-blooded accomplice" (Skaggs 48-49).

Dissimilarity in the two stories' narrative emphasis naturally results in disparate endings. While the (re)appearance of the mischievous Mamouche "eventually brings to that bachelor physician the fulfillment he had not even known he lacked" (Skaggs

27), the midnight murder committed by Gabriel while in a blind rage brings disastrous consequences. Toward the coda of “Mamouche,” Doctor John-Luis adopts the repentant grandchild of his former love, and there is a promise of an enriching emotional life for both the godfather and the godson. By contrast, Elodie’s attempt to protect the honor of the son of her former lover turns out to be futile, for “The Godmother” ends with the emotional despondency and physical deterioration of the guilt-ridden godson and the heartbroken godmother.

Tormented by guilt, Gabriel not only stays away from Elodie but finds himself indifferent to his girlfriend and his apprenticeship at Morrison’s law office. He used to be in love with a fair-haired girl up the hill at the Normal School, but now “where had that love gone? He thought of her with indifference” (610). During his final meeting with her up on the hill, he finds himself saying that he is going away to look for work in the city:

“And what about your law studies?”

“I have no talent for the law; it’s about time I acknowledged it. I want to get into something that will make me hustle. I wouldn’t mind—I’d like to get something to do on a railroad that would go tearing through the country night and day. . . .” (611)

As the narrator reveals in the final section, through the mouth of a great gossip named Fifine Delonce, Gabriel first works on the railroad as a fireman after a fruitless search for work in the city. Meanwhile, he seeks escape from his feelings of guilt through wild drinking sprees. Then, tired of the railroad, he returns to his father’s place “herding cattle, breaking in colts, drinking like a fish” (613). Finally, at Madame Nicholas’ wedding, a messenger of Death comes with the notice that Gabriel has been killed the night before by a fall from his horse.

While Gabriel cannot help but suffer the prick of a guilty conscience following his godmother’s deliberate assertion of his innocence, Tante Elodie begins to be filled with unspeakable dread that Gabriel may betray himself. When she is confined to bed with a fever in the wake of her “labor of love” and Gabriel has not been near her, Elodie feels “wounded, alarmed, miserable at his silence and absence” (608). But ironically, after she has actually seen him on the third day following the murder, she is further possessed with a new fear, for Gabriel, while pulling off the coat he is wearing (in order to rid himself of his scruples), has inadvertently put on the other coat hanging in her closet, the one that contains the big hornhandled knife:

She had at first put the knife in his pocket with the intention of returning it to him. But now she dreaded to have him find it, and thus discover the part she had played in the sickening dream. (609)

Uneasy and unhappy, Elodie has not been to confession for two months. Though it is warm for the last of April, she is "always chilly." As the narrator says of her in the last section, "she appeared to be shrivelling away to nothing. She had not again been sick in bed since that little spell in February; but she was plainly wasting and was very feeble" (612).

But what really breaks Tante Elodie's heart is not Gabriel's crime or her own accomplice to it, but his turning away from her. To Elodie, Gabriel should feel grateful to her since it is her "great love" for him that has prompted her to undertake the risky task of retrieving the knife, an act which has saved him from the prosecution of law.¹⁶ As the narrator says in Section VII, Gabriel "had broken her heart and he was killing her. It was not his crime that had broken her heart; it was his indifference to her love and his turning away from her" (613). Consequently, she does not seem to care much about Fifine's fresh news of Gabriel, to which she "always listened with a sad, resigned smile," for it "did not seem to make any difference whether she had Gabriel or not" (613). Upon hearing the sad news of Gabriel's death, the grief-stricken godmother is depicted as sinking "deeper down into the rocker, more shrivelled than ever" (614). Growing reticent and withdrawn, Elodie entertains one sole consolation: "He might have betrayed himself had he lived" (614). In the end, her state of mind and body is likened to the remains of what was once a magnificent plantation down beside her former lover's: "all dismantled, with bats beating about the eaves and negroes living under the falling roof" (614).¹⁷

Both set in the town of Natchitoches, "Mamouche" and "The Godmother" deserve a close comparison because both stories treat the motifs of romantic attachment, frustrated love, and romantic displacement. Doctor John-Luis in

¹⁶It is important to note that Chopin's original title for the story is "The Unwritten Law" (Chopin 1028; Toth and Seyersted 1998: 145-46). Though Gabriel is not prosecuted, the prick of a guilty conscience drives him into wild drinking sprees, which eventually cost him his life. Though Tante Elodie is likewise exempted from prosecution for her involvement, she is virtually consumed by dread and dejection—dread that Gabriel might betray himself and dejection that her young protégé should, upon discovery of her involvement that has saved him, turn away from her once and for all.

¹⁷Together with Mamzelle Aurélie of "Regret" and Madame Carambeau of "A Matter of Prejudice," this aging spinster belongs to Chopin's few "unhappy woman characters," who "usually have specific woes or grievances leading to their discontent" (Toth and Seyersted 274). In her perceptive study of a black woman named Sylvie in Chopin's "Athénaïse," Heather Kirk Thomas incidentally cites "The Godmother" as an example whereby Chopin experimented with the theme of female confinement (1996: 208).

“Mamouche” and Tante Elodie in “The Godmother” had each suffered deep frustration in love while they were young. Even though neither narrator details the romantic affair per se, the frustrated love accounts for the reason why both characters remain single. More interestingly, despite (or because of) their earlier frustration in love, both John-Luis and Tante Elodie in the fictional present displace the past romantic attachment onto the offspring of their respective love/lover. But “Mamouche” focuses on the initial formation of the old doctor’s romantic displacement, whereas “The Godmother” deals mainly with the transformation of an affectionate relationship between Elodie and her godson Gabriel in the wake of the latter’s hot-headed midnight murder and the former’s clandestine endeavors to cover up the crime. Furthermore, the difference in narrative emphasis leads to drastically dissimilar endings. Toward the end of “Mamouche,” the title character finds a new home at the old bachelor farmer’s house, and there is a promise of a close tie between the youngster and his godfather. In comparison, “The Godmother,” which is darker in tone, concludes with the death of the guilt-ridden godson and the shrivelling of the title character. While the doctor’s public offer of a 25-dollar reward helps him attain a godson, Elodie’s secret retrieval of Gabriel’s knife causes her to lose the trust and love of her godson. Finally, if Mamouche constitutes the incarnation of John-Luis’s fitful memories of the past, Gabriel serves to fulfill vicariously Elodie’s need to express her maternal and sexual love.

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浪漫情懷的轉移與轉變： 凱特·蕭邦的〈緬穆虛〉和〈教母〉

何文敬*

摘 要

過去一個世紀以來，凱特·蕭邦的〈緬穆虛〉和〈教母〉一直未受重視；事實上，這兩個短篇故事值得深入比較，因為兩者皆以路易西安那州的納可塔鎮為背景，同樣處理浪漫戀情、失戀、浪漫情懷的轉移和寬恕惡作劇或做壞事等母題。〈緬穆虛〉中的單身老農約翰陸易士和〈教母〉中的老處女譚娣·愛蘿迪年輕時均遭受失戀之苦。雖然敘述者均未刻劃戀愛情節，但是兩者之所以終身未娶／嫁，顯然與其失戀有關。更有趣的是，儘管（或者說：由於）以前的失戀，約翰陸易士和愛蘿迪都將浪漫情懷轉移到舊時情人的後代身上。

不過，〈緬穆虛〉的故事側重在老農舊情轉移的開端，〈教母〉則聚焦於愛蘿迪與其舊情人的兒子之間情感的轉變，其關鍵乃是蓋布爾在半夜裡失手殺死了一個人，愛蘿迪知道後漏夜取回凶刀以掩飾其教子之罪。其次，敘述重點的差異導致截然不同的結局。〈緬穆虛〉接近尾聲時，流浪的緬穆虛終於得以在老醫生的家安頓下來，這名聰慧的男孩和他的教父之間可望建立親密的父子情誼。相對的，〈教母〉的故事結局則顯得淒涼悲慘，深感內疚的教子在酗酒之際終於落馬而亡，遭教子離棄的教母在心碎之餘則日益消瘦、落寞。如果說老醫生所提供的二十五元獎金幫他尋獲一名教子，那麼愛蘿迪在三更半夜找回凶刀則使她喪失了教子的愛和信任。最後，如果說緬穆虛是約翰陸易士往日情懷的化身，那麼蓋布爾則取代其父親，成為愛蘿迪表達母愛和性愛的對象。

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關鍵詞：凱特·蕭邦、〈緬穆虛〉、〈教母〉、浪漫情懷的轉移