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Teenage in the Ironic Mode: A Study of the Drafts of “Red Dress—1946” by Alice Munro¹

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Several stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades* are connected by a protagonist presenting recurring traits: a girl who lives in Tuppertown, has a younger brother, a dominating mother, and a father, Ben Jordan, who is first a fox-farmer then a salesman. These stories include “Images,” “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “Boys and Girls,” and “Red Dress—1946.” Considered together, they trace a girl’s development from the age of about five to thirteen and evoke various experiences and discoveries: fear and anxiety (“Images”), grown-ups’ secret past lives (“Walker Brothers’ Cowboy”), the constraints of gender roles as the teenage years arrive (“Boys and Girls”), the rituals of boy-girl relations in a context of budding sexuality, and the need to move away from a dominating mother (“Red Dress—1946”). As is well known, relations between men and women, and between mothers and daughters, became two of Munro’s favourite topics. As she gets closer to these subjects in this collection, she deploys a subtle form of irony in this story (the other childhood stories focus instead on the child’s sensations, instincts, curiosity and imagination). Calling on the ironic mode is an early sign of the “battle for authenticity” Munro would wage “in the field of sex,” to quote Margaret Atwood (Atwood 2008 np). Here the battle is in the field of mother-daughter relations: it aims at

¹ A different version of this article, focusing on the theme of “growing up” rather than on genetic criticism, is included in Chapter 4 of Ailsa Cox and Christine Lorre-Johnston, *The Mind’s Eye: Alice Munro’s Dance of the Happy Shades* (Paris: Fahrenheit, 2015).

getting to the core of the protagonist's inner feelings and motivations, peeling off the outer layers of theatricality needed in social context. At the same time, the girl is still between childhood and teenage, so the viewpoint also reflects a growing girl's sensitive emotions, and Munro's gently ironic style reflects this liminal position.

In her theoretical work, Linda Hutcheon has observed that irony is often defined as "involving saying one thing and meaning another" (Hutcheon 1994: 37), but that it is more complex than that. Hutcheon points out how "irony happens as part of a communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations." (13) She sees it primarily as "the mode of the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen" (9), and insists that "there is an affective 'charge' to irony that cannot be ignored and that cannot be separated from its politics of use" (15). All these factors give irony what Hutcheon calls its "edge," that is to say its critical potential. This paper aims at examining the emergence and functioning of irony as discursive practice in "Red Dress—1946" by comparing the drafts of the story which are available in the Special Collections of the Taylor Family Digital Library at the University of Calgary,² and the version first published in *The Montrealer* in 1965, and then collected in *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968).

The different versions of the text are typewritten and archived in seven files (numbered 37.6.41, 37.6.42.1, 37.6.42.2, 37.6.43.1, 37.6.43.2, 37.6.44 and 37.6.45; the pages of each draft are also numbered: f1, f2, etc.).³ The texts are not dated so the numbers of the folders do not correspond to a clear chronological order, but there is a sequential

² Warmest thanks to Annie Murray and Allison Wagner at the Special Collections of the University of Calgary for their precious help during my visit there in April 2014. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support of LabEx TransferS (ENS / CNRS / Collège de France) for that research trip, and the help of Josette Rio at ARIAS in managing the archival material.

³ File 37.6.45 is a photocopy of the story published in *The Montrealer* in 1965, which is almost strictly identical to the 1968 published version. (The only changes concern some words that were capitalised in *The Montrealer* and that were then lower cased in the collected version – high school, principal, physical education – the italicisation of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and minor aspects of punctuation that do not alter the style or meaning.) Because the 1965 published version is not significantly different from the 1968 one, this study will ignore it and refer to the 1968 text in the comparison of the versions.

arrangement to their numbering, with a rough progression towards versions of the text that are fuller and closer to the published one. The texts certainly give us an insight into the writing as process (De Biasi 11), which we will aim at interpreting by comparing the various versions of the text, following the principles of genetic criticism. This study will focus on the most significant variations in the text, which illustrate two main points: the dress as source of irony, and narrative voice (together with characterisation, setting, and ending) as a factor of reflexivity.

The dress as source of irony

The dress the mother makes for the girl is foregrounded in the title as a central element in the story. As often with a Munro story, a protagonist's garment acts as a metonym, telling the reader about the person's character as well as about her social and, in this case, filial relationships. The dress is the mother's creation in a way that reflects the fact that she would like to shape the fate of her daughter as a young woman, for she has romantic scenarios in mind for her. This is clear in draft 37.6.42.1, where we read about the mother's life prior to her marriage: "My mother remembered dresses. The story of her life – I mean of the romantic and interesting part of her life before she married – was told to me serially on Saturdays when she was in a good mood, and she always paused to describe a dress [...]." And it is explicit in draft 37.6.43.1.f5: "She could still remember every detail of [her dress], even the mother-of-pearl buttons. Those were the happiest days of her life, as she expected these to be of mine." The mother's nostalgia for her youth and the fine dresses she used to wear means that she has hopes and expectations for her daughter.

In the published text the mother's stories no longer interest the girl, for they "had begun to seem melodramatic, irrelevant, and tiresome" (Munro 1968: 149); an emotional gap is growing between the two of them, reflecting the gap between the mother's memories of youth and the girl's experience of it. The mother is presented as a fairly hard, quick-tempered person, who complains indirectly in the presence of Lonnie about her daughter's ingratitude. This signals a more antagonistic relationship, while also emphasising the girl's docility, although she is fuming inwardly. The mother is meaner, less complicit with the girl than

in the two drafts quoted above, paving the way for the girl's reticence when she comes back from the dance.

The mother is also figuratively trying to corset the girl, although the mother herself wears "no corset or stockings at home" (148), much to her daughter's embarrassment at her aging body in front of Lonnie. In some drafts the dress is very tight: "Half an inch more around the middle would be your ruination, it fits you like a glove." (37.6.41.2) – or even too tight – "I like it," I said. "Its just the armholes are too tight." (37.6.43.1.f4) – so the mother has to adjust it. In no version of the text are her ideals of feminine elegance and beauty adapted to the changing body of her daughter, so those ideals are bound to make the girl feel worse about a physical reality that she is obviously not yet used to and not comfortable with.

All this is seen retrospectively, something the title hints at. The phrasing "Red Dress-1946" is blunt in style, a bluntness that is emphasised if we compare this title to the slightly different one given to the story in three of the drafts: "A Red Dress, 1946."⁴ In both cases the title reads somehow like a label for an object in a museum, casting the remembered dress into historical perspective, in the immediate post-World War II period, inscribing it in a context that has since undergone many transformations. It also conjures up a visual image, a memory that the narrator has, which is associated with that time, and with many other memories that are described in the story. So the dress as object and its colour act as triggers for the narrator's remembrance – visual, sensual, emotional. This is a well-known creative writing device, sometimes used in workshops, as Wayson Choy recalls from his course with Carol Shields in the Creative Writing programme at the University of British Columbia in 1977, when she asked her students to start a story from a colour they picked at random.⁵ The title "Red Dress-1946" thus casts the narrator

⁴ The drafts in the first three files have no title; the next three read "A Red Dress, 1946." The seventh file has the final title given to the *Montrealer* version: "Red Dress-1946."

⁵ "For one assignment, she tore up pieces of paper, each marked with a colour, and set the rule: whichever colour you picked up, that colour had to become a major part of your next short story assignment." (Sellers 36) This led to Choy writing "The Jade Peony," which was published first as short story and then as novel (1995). American-born Carol Shields (1935-2003), one of the major Canadian women writers of the last third of the 20th century, is best known as the author of *The Stone Diaries* (1993), which won the US Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the Governor General's Award in Canada.

into a position of reminiscence and narration, that is to say the position of a storyteller. Had Munro used the indefinite article in the draft title, followed by a comma rather than a dash before the year, it would have made the dress more generic and anonymous, less sharp in the storyteller's memory. Alternately, Munro could have used the definite article – “*the red dress*” – which would have made the dress the explicit focus of the story, but it is not: it is only a starting point, the visible sign, to be deciphered, of the girl's feelings at the time, and of the social rituals that she had to go through. The choice of a dash rather than a comma in the published title makes it more abrupt, less narrative; the material for narrative is just put there in front of storyteller and reader, so the story can start.

Munro's treatment of the dress, and through it of the girl's feelings, is ironic in a way that makes the viewpoint simultaneously compassionate and humorous. She could have opted for a more dramatic approach, as shown in an early draft in which the third-person narrative starts with a description of the dress:

When she opened the wardrobe in her room, no matter what she came to get, it was always that dress she saw, hanging alone in the ghostly folds of the plastic bag her mother had bought for it, and she flapped it back with her hand but couldn't stop seeing it, until one day she made herself take it right out and move it back behind everything else she owned, including her winter coat; this was an improvement but the bottom of the plastic bag was still visible. She just blinked and pretended she hadn't seen it. Sometimes she thought her mind was furnished with nothing but trap-doors, insecurely fastened, and she had to keep running around jumping on them so things wouldn't pop up on her. Things she had pushed down there to get them out of the way. (37.6.41.f2)

This passage is Gothic in tone: the dress is like a skeleton in the closet, “a secret source of [...] pain [...]” (*OED*). The plastic bag, instead of sealing it away, only enhances its ghostly nature. The shift from actual vision, in the sense of eyesight, whereby the protagonist sees the dress every time she opens the wardrobe, to mental vision, whereby the dress obsessively haunts the girl's mind, signals her inability to discard the old dress, and with it the unpleasant memories and feelings it evokes. The image of the trap-doors suggests the permanent danger of living with her past weighing over her and preventing her from moving on. The final sentence, about “things she had pushed down” under trap-doors, unambiguously evokes the failed repression of old emotions from consciousness, into the

subconscious. Altogether, this passage makes for a more dramatic and painful evocation of emotions linked to adolescence, with the narrator less distant from them. Such an opening would certainly preclude the ending of the story as we can read it in the published version, which focuses on the girl's successful distantiation from her mother.

By contrast with the Gothic tone of the first paragraph in the draft previously quoted, the dress in the published version is described in humorous terms:

My mother, never satisfied, was sewing a white lace collar on the dress; she had decided it was too grown-up looking. [...] The dress was princess style, very tight in the midriff. I saw how my breasts, in their new stiff brassiere, jutted out surprisingly, with mature authority, under the childish frills of the collar. (Munro 1968: 151, 152)

The clashing styles of the childish collar and the tight midriff signal the mother's contradictory double impulse, to acknowledge and underline the femininity of her daughter's figure, and also to protect her like a child. It echoes the girl's feeling, who dreads the school dance and "longed to be back safe behind the boundaries of childhood" (151), while being aware of the failure of the dress. This awareness is a sign of her maturity, and contrasts with the time when she wore clothes made by her mother "with docility, in the days when I was unaware of the world's opinion" (148). The description of the outfits the mother made before this dress is comic, first of all through an effect of accumulation, and then, because of the mother's pretention to styles that are outmoded. She made: "a flowered organdie dress with a high Victorian neckline edged in scratchy lace, with a poke bonnet to match; a Scottish plaid outfit with a velvet jacket and tam; an embroidered peasant blouse worn with full red skirt and black laced bodice" (147-8). The child is like a doll the mother dresses, and her outfits look like costumes rather than children's clothes, especially with the matching hats that are from another time (the poke bonnet, which became fashionable in the early 19th century) and another place (the Tam O'Shanter or Scottish bonnet, named after the eponymous hero of Robert Burns's 1790 poem). The first dress sounds particularly uncomfortable, with the stiff cotton of the organdie and the "scratchy lace." The third outfit, which one pictures as traditional central European in style, seems out of place.

Altogether these clothes signal the mother's nostalgia for a Victorian culture in which children were meant to be "seen and not heard," and for her presumably Scottish origins. They contrast with the physical reality of the girl's body, which makes her uncomfortable, especially at school. The irony of these descriptions thus derives from the implied discrepancy between the mother's idea of style and the reality of her adolescent daughter's life, but also from the discrepancy between the mother's tastes and those of the times, as reflected in Lonnie's bought dress, which the narrator admires and envies her. It is a case of "a double significance which arises from the contrast in values associated with two different points of view" (Leech and Short 278), repeated twice. Irony is based not on antiphrasis (saying one thing and meaning its opposite), but on the interpretation by the reader of the meaning implied by the narrator; it is therefore relational, to use Linda Hutcheon's terminology (Hutcheon 58), and based on the presence of a strong first-person narrative voice.

Narrative voice, characterisation, setting, ending, and reflexivity

Like the other stories dealing with a similar narrator, "Red Dress—1946" is a first-person narrative. However, two of the drafts reveal that Munro started by telling the story in the third person. In draft 37.6.41.1 the mother, called Adelaide, walks into the house, bringing a box that contains a dress she has bought off someone. This opening foregrounds the mother as a theatrical woman who bosses around her daughter Lois and another character called Frank, presumably her son, so the daughter is out of the limelight for a whole page—this is probably not the effect Munro wanted to achieve. It is worth noting that the names chosen here are the same as those of two characters in "Thanks for the Ride": Lois and Adelaide are the two friends who go out with the narrator and his cousin, and they are sexually promiscuous in a way the girl in "Red Dress—1946" is unlikely to become. What the two stories have in common though is a mother flaunting her daughter's youthful figure, but the mother in "Red Dress—1946" is virtuously proud of her sewing skills and thrift, while the one in "Thanks for the Ride" is hoping to obtain some benefit from her daughter's encounters, so the two are morally contrasted. The fact that both mother and daughter are unnamed in the published version of "Red Dress—1946" lays the emphasis on their respective roles as relatives rather than on their individuality.

In a second draft also in the third person (37.6.41.2), the opening paragraph is a description of a dress that has been put away in a wardrobe (see the passage quoted above, starting with "When she opened..."), and it is followed by the scene of the mother, Adelaide, entering the house with the box containing that same dress, calling for the attention of her daughter Robina and of two other characters called Frankie and Theo (probably Robina's siblings). This opening, with a shift back in time between the first two paragraphs, sets up a retrospective perspective on the dress, establishing links between the girl's present obsessions and memories linked to the dress (which are not developed in this unfinished draft). This retrospective outlook is maintained in the published version of the story, where it is reinforced by the use of the first person, as it gives the story resonance, but now in a reflective rather than a dramatic or sentimental way (as in draft 37.6.41.2). The use of the first person here implies access to a greater variety of confusing inner feelings in the girl, and, combined with the retrospective perspective, leads to "a complex weighing up of one attitude against another, especially of sympathetic identification [with the girl narrator] against ironic distance" and complicity with the adult narrator (Leech and Short 283).

For instance, while the (adult) narrator's listing of the outfits her mother made her over the years has a distancing ironic effect, as we saw earlier, her mentioning the discomfort she feels at school (as a girl), fearing she may have stained her skirt when she has to go to the blackboard, or having sweaty hands when she has to use the blackboard compass, lead to a form of sympathetic identification on the part of this reader. Irony can also be directed at herself: this is the case in the passage where she relates her various failed attempts at getting sick or incapacitated to attend the dance, and which ends in an ironic oxymoron: "Every morning, including the day of the dance, I rose defeated, and in perfect health" (Munro 1968: 151). This type of irony is a form of self-protection through self-deprecation (Hutcheon 1994: 47); as the narrator remembers her young self, she gives the remembrance comic relief, while also implying that as adult narrator she is now at ease with her own body, and is able to laugh at her own failings.

Lonnie plays an important role in the definition of the narrative voice, which turns into the plural "we" when the two girls retire to the

narrator's bedroom to discuss boys and sexuality. The anaphoric accumulation of the plural pronoun in this passage creates an atmosphere of complicity and gives the narration univocality, but that is undermined by the end of the paragraph, when the narrator reveals something she has kept secret from Lonnie about the high school Christmas Dance: "I did not want to go [...]" (Munro 1968: 149). The intimate friendship between the two girls emphasises the narrator's feeling of alienation. This is different from draft 37.6.42.2, in which the friend is called Irene Dark; the draft starts with the girl narrator setting off to walk to Irene's place before the dance. When the girl gets to their place Irene reads her "Do's and Don'ts for Dance-time Fun." This characterisation takes the focus away from the girl and shifts it to Irene and her house. Draft 37.6.43.1 is overall closer to the final version but in it the girl also goes to pick up her friend, now called Lonnie, on the way to the dance, instead of Lonnie coming to pick her up. Lonnie's family is described as being two-faced, which puts the girl in a more vulnerable position and brings complications to a different aspect of the plot.

By contrast with these scenarios, the published version establishes an intimate friendship between the narrator and her friend Lonnie, one in which the narrator nonetheless has secrets that she keeps from Lonnie, and in which Lonnie is deceitful in that she knows how to flatter adults. The girls' complicity is also reinforced by the fact that they read together the dance-attendance advice given to girls in a magazine, rather than Lonnie reading instructions to the narrator about do's and don'ts. In the draft, this passage is more didactic, a comic piece in six points, a parody of girl's magazines inserted in the text, juxtaposed to rather than worked into the narrative (37.6.43.1.f8-f9). By contrast, in the published text, the girl remembers similar advice *in situ*, as she is confronted with the fact that no boy has invited her to dance yet. The process of remembering the article is brief and limited to about two lines in italics in the text: "*Be gay! Let the boys see your eyes sparkle, let them hear laughter in your voice! Simple, obvious, but how many girls forget!*" (Munro 1968: 154) The advice is condensed and graphically stands out (with the italics), so it is identifiable as echoing the voice of girls' magazines. The ironical critique is more powerful and comical than in the longer version of girls' magazine parody, as the discrepancy between the magazine's advice and the girl's experience undermines its relevance on the spot, in action. The girl-narrator is left to

her own judgment, which leads to situational comedy, complete with the girl absurdly smiling at no one.

By having a relationship in which differences between the two girls are not foregrounded but minimised, Munro chooses to have a tighter unity of character as well as place (the girls meet in the narrator's room, in the house where all other personal events happen, the other, public location being the dance hall). But this is only to emphasise the girl's distress: she cannot confess her fear to her friend, because she is acting a part; even the house is a place for theatricality and role-playing.

Unity of setting and location also reinforces the identity of the kitchen as a gendered space. It is the room where the mother does the sewing, where the girl has a bath before the dance in some of the drafts, where her friend and mother interact in an overall atmosphere of female complicity; it is where the female body is being prepared for the ritual of the dance. While waiting, the girl lies on the kitchen couch, above which she can see the marks of old games she played with her brother, and she thinks: "I looked at them and longed to be back safe behind the boundaries of childhood" (151). The kitchen thus acts as a diachronic place, where the various stages of the girl's life, and even, through reminiscence, her mother's, can be envisioned all at once, syncretically. It is also where the mother waits for her at the end, drinking tea, and the girl, seeing her from outside, envisions their future relationship.

The importance of the feminine ritual of preparing for the dance is emphasised by the absence in the published version of the father, or even of the brother, who is only mentioned and relegated to the world of remembered childhood and the times when the narrator played Xs and Os with him. In one of the drafts, the father is more present:

My father was a fox farmer. That is, he raised silver foxes and sold their pelts to the Montreal Fur Auction or the Hudson's Bay Company, and they sent us every year a magnificent calendar, showing some scene out of the imagined past of this country. [...] I had what may have been my first premonitions of nostalgia. The kitchen seemed to me blessedly familiar, warm and sheltering. My father was in the cellar. Christmas was also pelting time, and he worked in the evenings, as he had worked most of the day, skinning foxes and stretching their skins inside out on long boards, to dry. The smell of blood and animal fat, as well the scent of the fox itself, rose in our house, reassuringly seasonal as the smell of figs and oranges and drying pine needles. My father had taken the radio down to the cellar and

was listening to the hockey game. I almost wept with my longing to stay home with them. (37.6.42.1.f2-f3)

In this draft the girl's perspective, as reflected in her description of the family environment, is more childlike than in the published version. Her worldview is based on sensations, on familiar seasonal smells that convey the reassurance of repetition, regularity and homeliness. The whole passage is nostalgic and sentimental in a way the published version is not: there, the girl is already at odds with her mother, although she does not verbalise it. And the fox-farmer father in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Boys and Girls" is not even mentioned in the final text of "Red Dress—1946," so the focus is on the mother-daughter relationship and on the feminine world. The paragraph quoted above was used though, after some reworking, as the first two paragraphs of "Boys and Girls": they refer to the fox-farmer father, the fur trade companies and their calendars, the cellar where the pelting goes on, the seasonal smells. But there is no mention at all of nostalgia: the girl is eleven at the time of the story, and very much part of her father's world still, although on the point of being excluded from it. By the end of "Boys and Girls", this has taken effect: Laird has become "a real help" (Munro 1968: 117), while she is "only a girl" (127). By the time of "Red Dress—1946," two years later, the girl, willy-nilly, has become part of the mother's sphere, whom she perceives as "my enemy" (117) in "Boys and Girls." By the time the girl is thirteen, there is acceptance and docility on her part, but also repressed frustration.

The variations on the ending of the story are revealing of Munro's uses of irony in the narrative voice. In draft 37.6.46 an unnamed, unknown Grade Ten boy, after dancing with the narrator twice, walks her home. He talks to her about hockey, she shares a piece of Kleenex she has for them to wipe their noses with – a more modern, anticlimactic, and less romantic item than the "handkerchief soaked in Violets" she puts in her pocket before the dance in another version (37.6.43.f7). Then they say goodbye:

We faced each other across a couple of feet of snow. At such times did people kiss. Nothing seemed more improbable.

"Good night."

"Yeah, good-night."

I went around the house to the back door, thinking, I have been to a dance and a boy walked me home. It was true. My life was possible."

(37.6.44.f12)

Even though the thought of a predictable kiss crosses her mind, she is not disappointed that it does not happen, and considers the evening a success even so. So what did Munro add to the scene in the published version by turning the anonymous boy into a boy from the girl's class, Raymond Bolting, whom she has never talked to, and by having him kiss her rather than not? She added irony, with Raymond being "the boy next door" rather than an older, stranger, therefore more glamorous boy. And the kiss is a quick one: Raymond "kissed me, briefly, with the air of one who knew his job when he saw it, on the corner of my mouth" (Munro 1968: 160). He is performing his role, following an established ritual of courting. The kiss is a chaste one, and the girl need not think about "what to do when a boy tried to go too far" (149), as she and Lonnie have been reading about in magazines. But she feels rescued and brought back into "the ordinary world" of boys and girls her age. Affectionate irony is found here in the gap between the imagined kiss and the actual one, which to the girl at the time nonetheless performs its role of making her feel normal.

We saw that the unpublished drafts had the narration in the third person with a dominant mother, or foregrounded the dress as a key element in a Gothic atmosphere. In the published version the story opens and closes with a vision of the mother, so structurally she really frames the narrative, suggesting that the girl cannot escape her presence or influence, or the type of female condition that the kitchen suggests. However, a lot happens between these two scenes, and this is reflected in the focalisation. In the opening, the mother is seen making the girl's dress in the kitchen, as the girl comes home from school. The mother is by the window for the light, and to look out at passers-by. In the final paragraph, the girl walks past the kitchen window and sees her mother. The fact that the mother is seen from outside, framed by the kitchen window, rather than from inside, establishes a distance between her and her daughter's perspective, whereby the mother appears as in some sort of tableau, and the girl is in observer position; the mother is seen, and no longer sees; she has lost that kind of control.

The insistence on the mother's sitting and waiting lays the emphasis on her immobility, as well as her confinement to the kitchen, which culminates in the hypallage found in the phrase "the waiting kitchen" (160), with the transfer to the kitchen of the epithet linked to the (waiting)

mother. The mother thus becomes the kitchen that she belongs to, in a metonymic process that definitely binds her to the home, in a suspended state of expectation rather than action, by contrast with her more commanding self, the self which earlier made the dress in which her daughter will confront the larger world.. Focalisation is perceptual, relating what the girl sees, but from “And I would not do it, I never would,” it is also explicitly psychological (Toolan 72-74), as the girl evaluates the situation and makes a resolution for the future that will define her relationship with her mother, this girl who hitherto has been mainly passive while the mother was pinning her and making the dress. Through her future silence she will deliberately withhold information, rather than simply being forced to be silent and to keep her feelings in check, as when she tries the dress on: “She [my mother] enraged me [...]. My head was muffled in velvet” (Munro 1968: 148). It could even be argued that focalisation here is ideological (Toolan 74), in the sense that by deciding not to tell her mother about her encounters with boys in future, the girl raises the possibility of defeating her mother’s expectations regarding her daughter’s future happiness; perhaps in her future she will be happy in ways that her mother cannot imagine. She may thus be able to escape the traditional notion of female happiness, which in the mother’s mind, as in many people’s, hinges on conventional marriage (Ahmed 7).

“Red Dress—1946” is a successful experiment for Munro in a style that is simultaneously subtly ironic, comic and tender. By choosing the first-person narration, she puts the narrator in charge of her own story, giving her the means to deal retrospectively with her younger self and with her mother. This is achieved through the creation of a dual ironic tone, whereby the narrator looks back at her awkward teenage self in a gently self-mocking way, and reassesses her relationship with her mother, retrospectively, identifying what it is that happened at that time. The story thus ends with the narrator’s becoming aware of her decision that night not to tell her mother about her encounters with boys, and thereby to retain her privacy. In doing so she protects both of them: she spares her mother possible disappointment, and spares herself her mother’s necessarily inadequate comments.

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