

Soft caresses of wrinkled skin

In the stories of "Late in Life, Love", the American Arlene Heyman recounts the sexual life of septuagenarians. Without taboo and with a fierce truth.

Love in the age of maturity. The theme is in vogue today (in the air of the time). Not only in sociology, because of the inverse pyramid of ages. But equally in literature. After *Joie* (*Joy*) by Clara Magnani, a novel which came out this spring through Sabine Wespieser (176 p., 17 Euros), now comes *Late in Life, Love* by Arlene Heyman. But whereas *Joie* is situated, as the title indicates, on the side of light – Mediterranean – and of fullness (plenitude) – basically Italian cinema – in the present collection of stories, the American, Arlene Heyman explores just those aspects the least charming of physical relations after a certain age. In the original version, *Late in Life, Love* is called *Scary Old Sex*, literally translated, "old sex which causes fear."

Which causes fear because of taboo. For the most part, Arlene Heyman's protagonists are septuagenarians. Without cosmetics, the author – herself born in the 1940s – evokes their bodies. Their flaccid nudities. "*The sparse jungle, strange, of black, gray and white hair on the chest.*" The "*stringy muscles along the arms and legs.*" "*The worn-out flesh, uneven, covered with excrescences, pimples, warts, skin tags, beauty marks that must be examined every year.*" "To tell the truth is an important aspect of the process of writing," notes Heyman. For this New York psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, "the author speaks of truths when others prefer to pretend that they do not exist."

But (as) her heroes might well be wrinkled "as in the paintings of Lucian Freud," they might also use subterfuges – often humorous – to compensate for the ravages of time, (but) as they disrobe and find themselves beneath the covers, their emotions are youthful. Intact. Like (Similar to) those which can enthrall (invade a being) at any (no matter what) period of life. A rich palette that goes from fiery ardor to the boredom of the routine in passing through submission to "*hygienic activity supposed to be good for you, like passing dental floss between the teeth one has just brushed.*" The thread that cleans, purifies, binds. In the last story, the protagonist, "*a small, lively woman with fine bones*" notes, not without humor, that this weekly rendezvous becomes for her "*like speaking by phone with her children and grandchildren.*" She and her second husband have "*a considerable number of them (she has three [...], he has four, she is on good terms with all, but certainly prefers her own): these telephone calls consolidate, connect her to other beings in the human world.*"

Neither voyeurism nor vulgarity.

There is a comic structure (form) in Heyman's work. Ironic, detached. Take the couple in the first story, Marianne and Stu: "*In their case, making love required as much preparation as going to war: establishing plans, arranging equipment in the perfect condition, deploying the troops and coordinating to the millimeter, warding off all rebellious, fearful activity so that the vanquished land recovers from fire and blood.*" Take the woman who notes: "*He entered naked and she remembered why she didn't like to make love in daylight.*" There is also, as one would expect in a psychoanalyst, a sense

of observation and a profound knowledge of emotions. Moreover, on such a delicate subject, it is most important to highlight that which isn't there in Heyman's work. Especially voyeurism and vulgarity. The prose is raw, fierce, sometimes shocking. But the light is always the same, that of truth. Unclothed. (Unvarnished.) Like the protagonists. "I hide myself in the dark forest and observe that which surrounds me with a pocket light: what is happening here?" explains the author.

Except for the story dedicated to the writer Bernard Malamud (1914 – 1986) – whom Heyman knew well – which is about a liaison between an art student and a well-known artist, the age difference – almost always in the same way with which we have become so familiar in Roth, Singer, Gary, or Woody Allen – that difference in age doesn't exist here. So much the better. Moreover, beyond this limit, the ticket of the characters is still valid.* It (The book) also opens doors too seldom tried (pushed) in literature. It would not displease Turgenev; the last love is worth as much as the first if it is valued (if one is interested).

Not sure how to render this slang. "They've still got a ticket to ride," perhaps.