Dating
by Dave Williamson

Reviewed by John Herbert Cunningham

Dave Williamson’s protagonist, Jenkins, is horny. His wife of many years, Barbara, passed away a couple of years before. And now, Jenkins is looking for love in all the wrong places. Will Jenkins find love or, at least, a cure for his horniness? That’s what this novel is all about.

Williamson was the founder of the Creative Communications Program at Red River College in Winnipeg and Dean of Business and Applied Arts there until his retirement. He has written four previous comic novels as well as drama for stage and television and non-fiction.

This novel is an enjoyable romp through later middle age – it’s about time this stage of life was explored – and the pursuit of romantic happiness Although somewhat akin to the television sitcom Two and a Half Men, Williamson’s narrative adds a touch of class while avoiding the clichés with which that show is littered.

In one scene our hero, Jenkins, is reminiscing about his wild oats days when he took the girl Joanie to the prom. What sparks this memory is that Joanie, after many years, has reappeared in his life. He has set up a date with her, remembering how much fun (double entendre here) he had at his grad but also how he had his heart broken when she immediately disappeared on him, her family having sent her away. While all this was going on, he was getting to third base with Mary, who was an employee of his father’s, as well as dating the ice maiden Marcia. All of this causes him to muse that “I’m sure I wasn’t the first guy receiving letters from one girl who fantasized about his touching her, was officially dating another girl who wouldn’t let him touch her, and was secretly dating a third girl who would – all at the same time” (124).

We next encounter Jenkins preparing for his date with the older Joanie after not having dated for ages. His fears of being newly single surface and flood his mind with questions:

I get up and put a frozen spinach pizza in the oven and pour a second drink. This one tastes better than the first and my thoughts grow more risqué. If we kiss – and I can’t imagine our not kissing – will she expect to be groped? Will she grope me? Do people our age neck? Will I kiss her in the car, in the restaurant parking lot, or will she expect to go somewhere and then kiss? Where will she expect to go? A hotel? My house? If we go to my house, will she be freaked out by photos of Barb? (132)

These musings lead to thoughts of condoms and vaginal cream and Viagra – the latter two being new additions to the dating paranoia. The phrase plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose comes to mind.

As Williamson describes in immaculate detail, finding love in late middle age is a dangerous pursuit. All the individuals, including Jenkins, are damaged goods carrying the baggage of a lifetime. Given this, one could expect Dating to be a depressing novel – but it’s not. Somehow, hope persists. This is the gift that Williamson’s novel offers. No matter how bad things get, there is always hope of something better. And it does happen to Jenkins, as he – and the reader – will discover. ♥
John Herbert Cunningham is a Winnipeg writer. He reviews poetry in Canada for *The Malahat Review, Arc, The Antigonish Review, The Fiddlehead* and *The Danforth Review*, in the US for *Quarterly Conversations, Rain Taxi, Rattle, Big Bridge* and *G latea Revisits*, and in Australia for *Jacket*.

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