

Drop the club, write a poem, you'll get the girl

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April is Poetry Month, whatever that may mean to you, perhaps not much. Perhaps what with your nomination to be Assistant Secretary for Human Rights running into rough waters because of that silly song you sang at the company Christmas party in 1997 which has been used to make you look like an insensitive jerk, your interest in poetry is practically nil, and if so - hey, you're not alone.

The reading aloud of poetry has been shown, time and time again, to be effective at breaking up gatherings of people. Rather than tear gas or pepper spray, many police departments now use Wordsworth. Or T.S. Eliot, that small dark cloud of a poet.

I don't care for poetry much either except for my own, of course. (Have you seen mine? Did I forget to send you a copy of "God's Hand Shadows On My Bedroom Wall"?) And that's the real message of Poetry Month, not that you should go back and reread the one about the cherry tree wearing white for Eastertide or the plums in the icebox so sweet and so cold - no, no, no - it's the month when you should write a poem and see how powerful this can be in winning the favor of women.

Back when our hairy-legged ancestors were living in mud huts and sleeping on piles of animal hides, and smelling of rancid grease and woodsmoke, men were not attractive to women at all. Fighting with rocks and clubs made unsightly marks on men and left putrefying sores. They squatted around the smoking fires, put ashes on their wounds, exchanged myths and felt a terrible ache for love and affection.

They longed to see women exhibit an avid interest in them for their own merits and not have to go marauding against enemy tribes and stand toe to toe with their warriors and hack at them and bash their brains out and eviscerate and decapitate them and drag their women away screaming and sobbing. A lousy way of dating, especially as you, the winner, have plenty of hack marks on you and are not so interested in sex now, due to loss of blood.

They longed to make themselves appealing to women and at first, they thought they could do this with tomatoes - then known as the "love fruit" - and the lady would fling herself into your arms and your pleasure would be greater than if she were screaming and sobbing.

This worked for a time, but eventually tomatoes became so common that their aphrodisiac powers were diluted. This led to civilization as we know it: music, sport, learning, poetry - it all began as an attempt by men to impress women who would come home with you and eat a tomato and come to your bed. But the best strategy of all was to compose a long ode to her beauty: O wondrous O shining Thou, I lift my pen up now to pay Thee Thy due praise, the wonderment of these my happiest days, and so forth and so forth, her lips, her brow, her raven or flaxen hair, her neck, her breasts, her pale thighs and so on.

Then the Christians came along and tried to put aside carnal pleasure as a hindrance to the spiritual life, and Christian men hung out in gangs of disciples, devoting themselves to Bible study and prayer. (One thing they prayed for in secret was for women to love them, despite their thorny theology.) They taught their children to endure this earthly sojourn in the faith of reward in the life to come.

But poetry whispers, "Life is a gift and very brief. Seize the day. Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." And this is the gist of the poem you are about to write to the wondrous and shining woman. You adore her and you long to clasp her in your arms and smell her hair and kiss the back of her neck. Forget about the cherry tree and the plums in the icebox. Write your own. Don't send it by e-mail. Write it on a sheet of clean paper and hand it to her and as she reads it, put your hand on her shoulder so that you're right there when she turns to embrace you.

This works almost all the time. You'll see. Cummings wrote, "springtime is my time is your time is our time for springtime is love time and viva sweet love," and Cummings got the girl.

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