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Opinion

March 10, 2005
Where Is the Woo?

BY MARK MILLER

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I wish I lived 200 years ago so I could woo a woman the way single men did back then. Who even uses the word "woo" anymore, much less knows what it means? Who even gives much thought at all to what they say to the opposite sex?

The media and the MTV generation and life's increasingly rapid pace have pretty much finished off traditional courtship, replacing "wooing" with "hitting on" or "coming on to" or "making your move." It's so sad. Where's the poetry? Where's the passion? Where's the heart? For many of us men, unfortunately, it's all in our pants.

But, back then, a single man's brains were located substantially higher up. A single man put some thought into his pursuit of romance. It mattered to him and he showed it. The dude could woo. He was one lean, mean, wooing machine. Take this excerpt of a letter from French novelist Victor Hugo to his beloved Adele, on one Friday evening, March 15, 1822:

"My Adele, my adorable and adored Adele... I have been asking myself every moment if such happiness is not a dream. It seems to me that what I feel is not of earth. I cannot yet comprehend this cloudless heaven... Oh, Adele, do not mistake these words for blind enthusiasm -- enthusiasm for you has lasted all my life, and increased day by day. My whole soul is yours... Soon -- in a few months, perhaps, my angel will sleep in my arms, will awaken in my arms, will live there. All your thoughts at all moments, all your looks will be for me; all my thoughts, all my moments, all my looks, will be for you! My Adele! Adieu; pardon the delirium of one who embraces you, and who adores you, both for this life and another."

My God -- that's foreplay on paper! But sadly, such romantic language appears today less frequently than a Jean Claude Van Damme movie on the Lifetime Channel. Nowhere is this clearer than on the various online dating sites' personal profiles, those Web pages where a single woman or man posts a photo and description of who they are and the sort of romantic partner they seek. These profiles have become a repository of stock phrases, trite expressions, tired metaphors and colorless language. It's a case of the bland leading the bland.

This is a shame, because an online dating profile could (and should) be an opportunity to showcase one's romantic soul, to add poetry, beauty and wonder to the quest for a soul mate; to demonstrate one's ability to worship and adore a potential life partner through literary caresses. And, yet, what do I see on every third woman's profile I view? Dribble. The same dribble: "I'm as comfortable in a cocktail dress as I am in jeans."

Let me repeat that, since it represents one of the most overused and lame phrases appearing in these profiles and is thus worthy of our studied scorn: "I'm as comfortable in a cocktail dress as I am in jeans."

Will someone explain to me what the hell that means? Could it mean that I won't have to worry about her cocktail dress causing her to break out in hives and scratch herself bloody? That I can take her to Subway in her cocktail dress for the turkey Meal Deal? That I shouldn't be surprised if she meets me for a game of beach volleyball in her cocktail dress?

Tell me, is this a female trait guys desire? It must be, because so many women mention it. I mean, I have a number of single male friends and I honestly can't recall the last time any of them said to me, "Y'know, Amy is a wonderful woman, but I just don't think it'll work -- she's nowhere near as comfortable in her cocktail dress as she is in jeans."

But I digress. The point is the steady erosion of the language of love. And I think modern romance is suffering as a result. Now, I realize we men can't just, all of the sudden, up and start making love-talk like Hugo. As lovely as it is, women would perceive it as corny, old-fashioned and metrosexual.

Still, perhaps we can sneak a little of it in here and there. And that, combined with deleting all references to our comfort in formal wear, our love of taking long walks on the beach and our realization that you shouldn't go to bed angry and that you can't change anyone -- might just add up to one small step toward keeping it real, original and romantic. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go put on my tux and go bowling. Don't worry: I'll be just as comfortable.

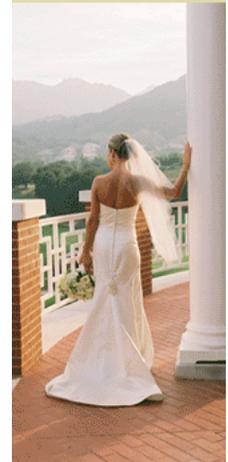
Mark Miller has written for TV, movies and celebrities, been a professional stand-up comedian, and a humor columnist for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate. He can be reached at

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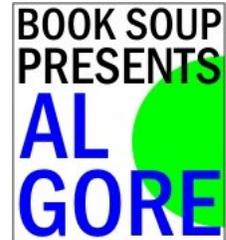
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