

IGNIS, SING I: A NEROIC ODE

DAVID L. STEPHENS
Jacksonville, Florida

The poem below is a palindromic summary of Nero's musings during the burning of Rome:

Revolts erupt. Oho!
Revel ever,
Sure vile devil, revolt!
Oho, Sir! A secret pure,
O rêver of evil!
Sin, O Renata Neronis!
(Sin, O Reno -- na)
No evil, no evil sing I.
Amor ignis sing I, Roma.
Live on, ignis Romae!
Sum summus muse!
Vile, gay, my Rome,
My mere vers,
I, mad as Xerxes,
I be ye bi-sex rex.
Sad amis, revere my memory.
My age lives or
A deified era has passed.
Ah, Nineveh! So bad an Eden!
O god Ira!
Sir, a sea Caesaris -- arid --

O gone -- de nada!
(Bosh! Even in Hades
Saps -- ah! are deified.)
A rose, vile, gay,
My Rome, my mère!
Versi, mad as Xerxes,
I be ye bis, ex-rex.
Sad amis, revere my memory.
My age, live!
Sum summus muse!
Amor sing I, no evil.
Amor ignis sing I, Roma.
Ignis, live on!
Live on (ano Neronis!)
Sin, O Renata Neronis!
Live forever, O erupter:
Cesar is!
O hot lover, live!
Deliver us.
Revel ever,
O hot purest lover!

Id numen, si nomen et nemesis, e mente nemonis ne mundi

If, as has been said, French is simply Latin badly spelled and badly pronounced, it is not surprising that Nero occasionally lapsed into French or Spanish. This palindrome, found chiseled in stone, apparently ancient, seems to have some parts (given in parentheses) that were added by a detractor. The same hand probably attempted to remove the final letter of "muse", which would have resulted in sum summus mus (I am the greatest.mouse). "I be ye bi-sex rex" is clear enough, but when the phrase is repeated the letters are grouped differently, "I be ye bis, ex-rex", which seems to mean "I am twice as great as you, former King". "Renata" means reborn, as the phoenix from the flames. "My mere vers, I" (My mere verse) by regrouping becomes "My mère, versi" (My mother, turns - as in dancing).

The following word-palindrome poem, entitled "Sing, Ignis", was inspired by a German folk song, which has been recorded in different translations by Burl Ives and Richard Dyer-Bennet.

Returning exquisite desire,
 Burning, then ashes and smoke.
 Glowing ember or flaming oak --
 Unknowing, unknown secret fire!
 Fire, secret, unknown, unknowing,
 Oak flaming or ember glowing.
 Smoke and ashes, then burning
 Desire, exquisite, returning.

In "Wed, Roses or Dew", Sir Francis Drake is told of the approach of the Spanish Armada:

Rise, Sir! Mars ever!
 Ahem! 'E's abed.
 Madam!
 Hoo-hah! Armada!
 Punish a live devil!
 Rise ye, Sir!
 O no Sir, O Noser, oh, on!
 No hero, son --
 I'm Adam; Deb's Eve.
 We'd no be wed -- no bed!
 We'd no bed.

Dew ewe, Sir, dewed?
 O dew!
 Do not sin in a rose garden,
 Ned rages, or A. Nin
 Is to nod. We do?
 Dewed rise we, wed,
 Deb, on dew,
 De bon dew,
 Ebon dew -- Eve's bed.
 Mad, am I? No -- sore, Hon.
 No -- 'horseson!

Orison: O rise ye, Sir!
 Live, devil!
 Ah, sin! Up, Adam!
 Rah! -- Ah! Ooh!
 Madam!
 Debase me -- her!
 Eve's ram -- rise, Sir!

The next poem, entitled "Sexes (Nemo nomen)", seems to be a warning from a militant feminist. Perhaps we cannot fully understand it, but we ignore it at our peril:

Wo! Vici! Nomen mnemonic, I vow!
 O men, mon nom Nemo!
Nemo won no women.
Ecce, ole man, ere
Monsieur Tossopot's tops.
 So true is no moron,
 Oh no evil ogre;
 To women ye no hero, man.
 Roman amor et tu, sore foe,
 Man alive!
 No sin, unisexes in unison.
 Wo! Vici, demon.
Nemo, we rose sore women.

No medic, I vow:
 No sin, unisexes: I nun, I son.
 Evil a name of Eros.
 Utter, O man, amor na more,
 Honey, Nemo wot!
 Ergo, live on honor,
 O Monsieur Tosspot's
 Tops, sot.
 Rue is no mere name.
 Lo, ecce: Nemo won.
 No -- wo, men!
 Omen: mon nom Nemo.
 Wo! Vici! Nomen mnemonic, I vow.

Yet another word-palindrome, entitled "Hannibal, Missouri":

Glimmering, gone -- springtime stream
 Lapping -- road winding down
 The shimmering hill. Hometown
 Napping -- sweet, solemn dream!
 Dream, solemn, sweet -- napping
 Hometown. Hill shimmering --
 The down-winding road -- lapping
 Stream -- springtime -- gone, glimmering!

The following is brought to the attention of those who think that Shakespeare knew little Latin:

O wo! Doom! Damn!
 I'm, ah, so bored.
 Now I wonder, eh?
 To be, be not --
Sum, esse, non esse --
Must one be bothered?
 Now I wonder.
 O bosh!
 Am in mad mood.
 O wo!

Finally, I offer for the delectation of Word Ways readers the following light-hearted canine romp, entitled "Doberman Running (Be Sirius)":

Rats! Go, dog.
 God, O go!
 (Rat say no:
 Beware --
 Rare cargo.)
 Race car, go!

Dog, race car.
 O grace, rare,
 Raw, ebony as tar!
 O go, dog!
 Go, Dog Star!