

M.G.M. -- A PALINDROMIC LEGEND

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PEPSI IS PEP. This famous palindromic slogan was, so it is alleged, coined by the Hollywood legend Joan Crawford when she and her husband ran the soft-drink conglomerate. Others attribute it to the movie historian Bert N. Weepy, though I would not be surprised if it transpired that yet a third name came under the investigative scrutiny of logological research. But, could the movie queen be the true coiner? To find the answer, we must examine the attitudes to word play in her cinematic thespian days.

Sam (include me out) Goldwyn is justly famed for his contribution to the language. His motto could well have been MIX A MAXIM, a palindrome which aptly describes his magnificent confusions. It is said that he even called the john 'Thomas' much to the dismay of his one-time casting director, Thomas John, in whom he nearly induced a nervous breakdown whilst sorting out one particular cast list. The film was intended to launch the daughter of Raymond Massey as the love interest of the British actor James Mason. Goldwyn not only confused the two stars such that he considered that the son of Anna May Wong (whom he called May) was to play both leading roles, but he also wondered why the whole film was to be shot in the bathroom. Once Thomas John had captured the drift of Goldwyn's thinking, he was able to set the record straight with three very succinct palindromic replies:

"Sam? Oh ... 'tis I, Thomas."

"Yes, Sam, Anna Massey."

"No, Sam, Mason."

Palindromes were so popular at this time that they even occurred in the film scripts. Wags called them 'turners' after one particular scene which involved Lana Turner and Tina Turner:

Lana: Can I, sir, dip Idris in a canal?

Tina: Nit!

It is not certain whether it was Sam Goldwyn or his partner, Louis B. Mayer, who first named a certain unmentionable part of the human anatomy the **yam**. Legend has it that when Goldwyn first heard of the Indian language Malayalam, he considered it to be some form of ovine sexual deviation and, out of exaggerated politeness, shortened it to **mayam** from whence came the euphemism **yam**. Joan Crawford was one of the many stars who latched upon this fruity descriptive term, and was to employ it in her classic retort to the czar of Hollywood when Louis B. Mayer sacked her as being 'box office poison'. Unfortunately for Mayer, Louella Parsons was

present at the time. The studio chief had no desire to see Miss Crawford's true words in print. By a lucky chance, Parsons did not catch the exact wording although she came close to it and, even more fortuitously, she was completely unaware of the latest in Hollywood slang. This Mayer was able to turn to his advantage as can be seen from this extract from Parsons' column:

"Guess which erstwhile Hollywood movie queen created a palindrome as a tribute to her former employer? As she swept away to cinematic pastures new, this lady said, **MAYER UP PURE YAM.**"

If Joan Crawford really did say that, then to have been the coiner of PEPSI IS PEP would have been child's play for such a wordsmith. Be silent, Weepy -- the truth is out at last.

