

A PREMODERN PALINDROMIC HISTORY

HOWARD RICHLER

Cote St. Luc, Quebec, Canada

It's a heavy burden I carry as a member of the most oppressive group on the planet. Yes, you guessed it. I am a White Heterosexual Adult Male or WHAM. Postmodernist deconstructionist analysis has proved that WHAMs are inherently biased.

I thought that writing for **Word Ways** would be sanctuary from the slings and arrows of the cultural cognoscenti about my biases but I was wrong. Dave Morice, the Iowan iconoclast, accused me of (for lack of a better term) modernism in the February 1991 Kickshaws. Referring to my "Palindromic History of Civilization" in the November 1990 **Word Ways**, Mr. Morice stated "His selections were weighted in favor of the 20th century". He then proceeded to emit some pre-20th century palindromes so that symmetry could be restored to recorded time.

There you have it. Morice's j'accuse hit straight to the marrow. I had to admit my piece had a modernist slant. To atone for my bias, I've been dredging the palindromic archives for the last two years searching for premodern palindromes. Here are my dregs.

SEX, REX XERXES? (480 B.C.) An Athenian courtesan propositions the conquering Persian king

SORE DEIFIER REIFIED EROS (399 B.C.) At his trial, Socrates is accused of corrupting youth

WE, PLATO, TAR A TOTAL PEW (365 B.C.) Attributed to an ebullient Aristotle after one of the lads at the Academy spilled tar on a bench

SULLA, CALL US (88 B.C.) Confronted by Sulla that he and Sulpicius are challenging Sulla's rule, Marius gives Sulla a flip-pant reply

DRAW, O CAESAR, ERASE A COWARD (44 B.C.) Caesar ignores advice to do unto Brutus before Brutus does unto him

REVOLTING IS ERROR; RESIGN IT, LOVER (73 B.C.) Spartacus's girl friend implores him not to lead a revolt against Rome

YAWN A MORE ROMAN WAY (39 A.D.) Caligula explains Roman etiquette to a first-term Senator

GALL A ROMAN IN A MORAL LAG (39 A.D.) Further advice is forthcoming from Caligula

TONSURED NERO, RENDER US NOT (68 A.D.) Some prisoners awaiting execution for mocking Nero's skinhead plead for mercy

GNOSTIC, A TACIT SONG (150 A.D.) According to the Gnostic Christians, knowledge, not faith, is the path to salvation

I NAB RUMOR FROM URBAN I (229 A.D.) A bishop eavesdrops on

- the first city Pope
 LID OFF A DAFFODIL, ALLAH; SHALL ALI DOFF A DAFFODIL? (650)
 Supplication, courtesy of Caliph Ali ibn-abu Talib
 GNAT WAS I ERE I SAW T'ANG (668) A bootlicking Korean tries
 to curry favor with his Chinese masters
 EVIL WAS SALADIN, A MAN I'D (ALAS!) SAW LIVE (1191) Crusader
 Richard the Lionhearted gives begrudging praise to his heathen
 foe Saladin
 SLOG NO MINI MONGOLS (1238) Russian Prince Alexander Nevski
 underestimates the Mongols who are about to overrun his country
 LIVE FOR A WAR OF ROSES OR FOR A WAR OF EVIL (1455) Henry
 Tudor rallies his red rose Lancastrians against their white
 rose York foes
 RESUME SO PACIFIC A POSE, MUSER (1516) After a lunch break,
 Leonardo da Vinci exhorts La Gioconda to resume her previous
 expression
 ANNE, I STAY A DAY AT SIENNA (1534) Henry VIII discusses his
 travel plans with Anne Boleyn
 SUMS ARE DEIFIED, ERASMUS (1563) John Calvin decries society's
 materialism to Desiderius Erasmus
 EGAD! A BASE TONE DENOTES A BAD AGE (1555) French astrologer
 Michel Nostradamus uses tonality as a prognostication device
 SEX? EVEN A DANE VEXES (1600) His mother's recent remarriage
 intensifies Hamlet's revulsion of sex
 REGAN, A MEGASTAR, A STAGE MANAGER (1605) Near the end of
 his life, King Lear realizes that his daughter Regan's love
 for him is only an act
 DELIVERY, REVERE, VERY REVILED (1776) A customer complains
 after his pizza arrives a week late from Pony Paul's Pizza
 Parlor
 NOMISTS REIGN AT TANGIER, ST. SIMON (1793) Robespierre tells
 French philosopher St. Simon of recent political developments
 NO SLENDER EVIL; SNUG WAS I ERE I SAW GUNS-LIVERED NELSON (1805)
 Commander Villeneuve of the joint French-Spanish fleet laments
 his loss to Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar
 EMBARGO? GO GRAB ME! (1807) Senatory Timothy Pickering tells
 President Jefferson what he thinks about Jefferson's planned
 embargo
 PEEL'S ASLEEP (1834) A British M.P. remarks that P.M. Sir Robert
 Peel is somnolent in Parliament
 YES, SY, DOOM ALAMO ODYSSEY (1836) Mexican General Santa Anna
 gives Lieutenant Sy Gonzales the order to storm the Alamo
 STENO MEN INTERPRET NINE MONETS (1866) Pierre Renoir can't
 resist a snide comment when he hears some office workers dis-
 cussing Impressionism
 O, GERONIMO, NO MINOR EGO (1886) Attributed to General Cook
 who captured Apache leader Geronimo
 I, MAN, AM REGAL; A GERMAN AM I (1898) When asked his identity
 at a masked ball, Emperor William II gives this haughty re-
 sponse