

MEDIOCRE NAPOLEONIC PALINDROMES

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Able was I ere I saw Elba

As is known by any self-respecting Francophile, the above palindrome is but one in a long litany of egregious examples of English-language imperialism. It purports that the greatest military mind of all time, the Emperor Napoleon, took to raving in English palindromes while enisled at Elba. Mon dieu!

This is rubbish. Napoelon's knowledge of English was even less than his knowledge of Yiddish. In the event that he ejaculated a palindrome, Cartesian logic dictates that it would have been "Et la marine va, Papa, venir a Malte" [And the navy, Daddy, is coming to Malta]. Because he spoke rudimentary Italian, he conceivably could have said "Eran i modi di dominare" [These were the ways of dominating]. But an English palindrome? Never!

In any case, much in the way that we are besieged by ubiquitous Big Macs and Coca-Colas, we are also laden with Napoleon's supposed English palindromic utterance as one of the world's best-known palindromes. It is essentially a palindrome within a palindrome because the central core "was I ere I saw" also is palindromic in structure. Thus, any word or words added to the front of the palindrome, balanced by their reverse order at the end, will maintain palindromic symmetry. In honor of the Little General, I suggest that any palindrome that plagiarizes its structure be deemed a Napoleonic palindrome.

There are several word combinations that fulfil this palindromic criterion while still making perfect sense. For example, by replacing "Able" with "A slut" we uncover the palindrome "A slut was I ere I saw Tulsa." Palindromes such as "Drab was I ere I saw bard" and "Dog was I ere I saw God" also make sense, albeit they lack the indefinite article. We can also create acceptable Napoleonic palindromes with regal-lager, snug-guns, raw-war and avid-diva.

Far more interesting, however, are what I call mediocre Napoleonic palindromes. To qualify as a mediocre Napoleonic palindrome the sentence should only make sense if it requires an explanation. Here, then, are my Top 10 mediocre Napoleonic palindromes, replete with explanatory notes.

10 A GOY WAS I ERE I SAW YOGA After seeing a yoga class, a Gentile has an epiphany and becomes a Hasidic Jew

- 9 A RAT WAS I ERE I SAW TARA The beauty of the plantation Tara changes Rhett Butler's life
- 8 A NIT WAS I ERE I SAW TINA The beauty of Tina changes Ike Turner's life--that is, until he started beating her
- 7 RED NAG WAS I ERE I SAW GANDER A Communist shrew reforms after moving to Gander, Newfoundland
- 6 AMORAL WAS I ERE I SAW LA ROMA Seeing Rome transforms someone from amorality to immorality when he becomes a press photographer
- 5 BOOB WAS I ERE I SAW BOOB Seeing his first breast transforms a puerile fellow
- 4 LAID WAS I ERE I SAW DIAL Using the soap has a detrimental effect upon the above fellow's sex life
- 3 A BUC WAS I ERE I SAW CUBA A former member of the Pittsburgh Pirates (known colloquially as the Bucs) decides to defect to Cuba so he can play for the Havana Have-nots
- 2 OTTOMAN WAS I ERE I SAW 'NAM, OTTO A poor-spelling former auto mechanic tells his friend Otto that he stopped repairing cars after a stint in Viet Nam
- 1 AJAR, A HAM WAS I ERE I SAW MAHARAJA Seinfeld quits being a comedian after a trip to India