

## CLASSIC LATIN PALINDROMES

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*The following excerpt has been copied from Ove Michaelsen's unpublished book of palindromes.*

In his book *Literary Frivolities; Fancies, Follies, and Frolics* (London, 1880), William T. Dobson relates the following mediæval story (taken from Hone's *Everyday-Book*) showing that his Satanic Majesty was a master of palindromic wordplay:

Saint Martin, having given up the profession of a soldier, and being elected Bishop of Tours, when prelates neither kept horses, carriages, nor servants, had occasion to go to Rome to consult His Holiness upon some important ecclesiastical matter. As he was walking gently along the road he met the Devil, who politely accosted him and ventured to observe how fatiguing and indecorous it was to perform so long a journey on foot, like the commonest of cockle-shell chaperoned pilgrims. The saint knew him to become immediately a beast of burden or "jumentum" which the Devil did in a twinkling by assuming the shape of a mule. The saint jumped upon the fiend's back, who at first trotted cheerfully along, but soon slacked his pace. The bishop, of course, had neither whip nor spurs, but was soon possessed of a much more powerful stimulus, for, says the legend, he made the sign of the Cross, and the smarting Devil instantly galloped away. Soon, however, and naturally enough, the father of sin returned to sloth and obstinacy, and Martin hurried him again with repeated signs of the Cross, till, twitched and stung to the quick by those crossings so hateful to him, the vexed and tired reprobate uttered the following distich in a rage:

**Signa te, signa; temere me tangis et angis,  
Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor.**

Dobson's translation: "Cross, cross yourself; you plague and vex me without need; for, owing to my exertions, Rome, the object of your wishes, will soon be near".

The second line appears in the following palindrome attributed to Sotades the Obscene of Maronea (ca. 275 BC), and said to have been quoted by Roman rhetorician Quintillian (Marcus Fabius Quintillianus) (ca 39 to ca 95 AD):

**Roma, tibi subito motibus ibit amor,  
Si bene te tua laus taxat, sua laute tenebis,  
Sole medere pede, ede, perede melos.**

Ron Sipherd translates in the Fall 1996 issue of *The Palindromist*: "Rome, love will come to you suddenly, with violence. If you praise well values you, you will hold its concerns splendidly. Just heal your foot, eat, devour a tune." Mark Saltveit, editor and publisher of *The Palindromist*, is doubtful that either claim is true. Sotades wrote in Greek, not Latin. Saltveit states that only two references to Sotadean verses have been found in Quintillian's writings, "inspired, but not written by Sotades," and explains that the three lines appear together in a footnote to an 1833 edition of Martial's *Epigrams* (Book II, No. 86), which cites the first two lines as part of a legend of Saint Martin, and the second as a different Latin palindrome.