

# KICKSHAWS

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*Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor at drABC26@aol.com. Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.*

## Perfect Roman Window: One in a Billion Phenomenon!

Last Kickshaws, the topic of Roman windows opened up. Roman windows are stretches of text containing all 7 Roman numeral letters (IVXLCDM) one or more times in no special order. These are easy to find. However, a perfect Roman window isn't quite as simple: it consists of the Roman letters occurring in increasing or decreasing numerical order once each, uninterrupted by additional Roman letters. I couldn't find any. Mike Keith writes "As you said in the last WW, perfect windows are very rare. I only found one in the whole Project Gutenberg corpus of nearly 1,000,000,000 letters. It's from the first paragraph of the Preface in *The New McGuffey Fourth Reader* (window is marked by brackets):

Revisions have since been made from time to time as the advancement in educational theories and the changes in methods of teaching seemed to de[m]and. No other school text-books have retai[n]ed the popular favor so long or have exerted so general and so wholesome an influence as has this set of Readers." [35 letters]

"This has the Roman numerals in reverse order (MDCLXVI). I did not find any perfect windows with IVXLCDM order, nor any other MDCLXVI examples besides this one," says Mike. Not only is this the first discovery of such a wordplay phenomenon, but it occurred only once in almost one billion letters. How many examples of wordplay phenomena make their debut in such a grand style? Since it appears in the book's preface, the page that the window is on may itself be numbered with a lower-case Roman numeral; however, Project Gutenberg doesn't include page numbers to verify this. If someone sends me a photocopy of the page(s) with the text, I will send them a copy of my book *A Visit From St. Alphabet*.

## Other Roman Windows

Mike has also found other Roman windows that were described in the last issue. He notes that "11 letters is definitely not the shortest ideal window (using each Roman letter once in any order) possible, but I'll go out on a limb and suggest that 9 is (just so I can be proved wrong, too!). I found more than one example of ideal windows, two of them quite common:

..xclaimed v.. In Chapter 22 of *Tarzan of the Apes*: 'No!' she e[xclaimed v]ehemently, much too vehemently he thought

..climaxed v.. From an Internet review of a Phish concert: It had a nice deliberate jam which [climaxed v]ery well despite a minor flub by Fish and Trey at the end

..x decimal v.. In the book *Java Au Naturel* by William C. Jones: Figure 13.1 An array with si[x decimal v]alues"

For a numerically-ordered window (using each Roman letter one or more times in numerical order) the shortest found is 21 letters: "...but the inner motion he d[ivided in six places and m]ade

seven unequal circles...” from Plato’s *Timaeus*, translation by Benjamin Jowett. For a reverse numerically-ordered window there is this 18-letter one: “...he sees a co[m]plete and complex vi]sion of another world...” from G.K. Chesterton, *A Miscellany of Men*, chapter “The Mediaeval Villain.”

### Roman Crowds

Anil writes “The May 2003 Kickshaws introduced Roman Windows. I don’t do windows, but I recommend a variant, Roman Crowds. Instead of looking for windows out there, *make up* intelligible phrases or sentences that aim for the shortest (most crowded) concoctions. Ideal windows contain each Roman numeral exactly once; perfect windows have them in order as well. Univocalics are also possible because a vowel is included. For starters, I offer:

1. ideal: VEXED CLAIM, MALICED VEX [‘vex’ is a nonce noun in Webster’s Second]
2. perfect: I VEX LACE DAM [vex by typing up or blocking]
3. near-perfect reverse order: MEDICAL, X-UV, IR [12 types of radiation, flawed by two I’s]
4. univocalic CIVIL, I’D MIX [socializing just to be polite? or a decent bartender?]

To extend the scope of both crowds and windows, Anil suggests “adding in the medieval Roman numerals R (80) and P (400). Here’s my go at enlarged 9-letter IVXLRCPDM case:

5. ideal: PRIMEVAL CODEX [sounds deeply meaningful], EXCLAIM “PROVED!”
6. perfect: “I, VOX, LARK-CAPED AM” [voice claims to be a lark’s--or a wolf’s in lark clothing?]
7. reverse perfect: MAD PACER? LAX VIE! [“no hurries, mate”]
8. univocalic: PIX-CRIM LIVID [“exposures” infuriate criminal].”

### Self-Defining Double Dactyl

In the February Word Ways, Don Hauptman’s article on double dactyls inspired Fred Cookinham to put the rules for double dactyls into a double dactyl. And the beat goes on!

Tersical versical:	Line One: reduplicate.
Double Dactylicus:	Two: someone’s name. Pen- or
Quatrains: two. Syllables:	Ante-pen-ultimate:
Six-six-six-four.	One word; no more.

### Healthy Linguistic Advice

Jim Denigan writes “Here’s the final word on nutrition and health. It’s a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting medical studies: (1) The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans, (2) The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans, (3) The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans, (4) The Italians and the French drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans, (5) The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausages and fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.”

### Www.Oops.Com

Stuart Kidd has found two non-sex-peddling websites that just happened to pick the wrong names. He writes “There’s a website called Who Represents? for the publicity and agency

representatives of actors. Its address is [www.whorepresents.com](http://www.whorepresents.com). Experts Exchange is a programming advice and discussion website whose address was [www.expertsexchange.com](http://www.expertsexchange.com) until recently. It now has a hyphen."

### Mongoosed

One way to avoid the problem of pluralization in English is to speak and write only about complex topic in the singular. In other word, one for all and all for one. Mike Morton suggests the following thing: "Perhaps for your column involving more than one Kickshaw... The other day I saw a mongoose, and another right next to it. Since I don't know the correct plural, this was difficult to discuss. My friend Andy suggest the possibility of writing an entire novel without using a single plural. I suggested titling it *One of a Kind* or perhaps *The Silent Plurality*."

### Recycled Palindromes

All of us who indulge in the Sotadic art have, at times, produced mindless rubbish. But, ignore the wastepaper basket. Follow in the footsteps of Peter Newby and irritate your granddaughters with them. Calling his crossword-type puzzles a cryptogram, the palindrome is revealed by solving clues. Each different letter in the construction has its personal number and the same code is used for sets of anagrams extracted from that compilation. The clues are simple definitions:

75432 incorrect	615 by-product of coal
25473 developed	516 rodent
	156 skill
546 1 54713, 2317 451645	

### Potty Palindromes

Peter sends this palindromic business news: "Chesterfield, Derbyshire, has added a second commercial palindrome to its TOP POT market stall. Once again it is a porcelain retail outlet, this time a shop named POT STOP."

### Real Signs From Perth

Anil sends the following two unusual instances of signage down under: (1) "Nedlands Cemetery: A Community Project of the City of Nedlands", and (2) two adjoining shopfronts in Northbridge used to have hanging signs facing traffic that looked like the same sign to drivers-by: "Liberal Party Headquarters" and "Rubber Stamp Company."

### Without Rhyme...

"J.M. Crais of Sideup, Kent," Peter writes, "rose to the challenge of disputing the assertion that there was no rhyme for POEM. England's *Daily Mail* published his limerick below."

A villainous Nazi named Roehm  
 Was searching for rhymes matching 'poem.'  
 Then, chortling with glee,  
 Stated that he  
 Had found one at last. "That'll show 'em!"

### ...Or Reason

At least three Hollywood stars have punning names which bear no relationship to their personas. Peter wonders what lies behind the naming of Slim Pickens, Eddie Cantor and Faye Dunaway.

### Overlooked Anagrams

There are a number of real people who fit into a specific category, a category that everyone is familiar with. Most of the people who qualify have had their names anagrammed in Word Ways and other places. However, for a specific reason, seven of the people in this list have probably never been anagrammed before. Peter Newby has anagrammed six—can you figure out who they are? Can you come up with the name of the one person in this subcategory who is not listed below? Give yourself one point for each person whose name you can figure out, ten points for identifying what these people have in common, and one hundred points for the missing person.

JONAH NOSH  
HIRE READER LYNCH

LAID OUT NOISE  
TRUST LIAR CHART

THIN FILM FOAMS  
RICY GRUFF SIN

### Nexus Wordplay

In the last Kickshaws, I described nexus words as a specific form of letter substitution involving letters that are next to each other in the alphabet and that occupy the same relative positions in the words, such as NEXT and NEXUS. Furthermore, every substitution should involve at least three letters, none repeated. This rules out single-step letter substitution pairs (HIS-HIT) as well as some single-step lettershift pairs (ADDS-BEET) but not others (ONO-POP). However, Jeremy Morse asked why single-step shifts were excluded. I mainly wanted to avoid the Venn diagram-like situations that some lettershift pairs are nexus words, some aren't, etc., but such a definition complicates more than clarifies. Following the KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) rule, here is a better definition of a nexus word: a word formed by changing one or more adjacent letters in it to one or more other letters. All the letters involved in the substitution occur together as a string of adjacent letters in the alphabet, each used once in that string. A nexus word may also be formed by similar substitutions of letters at more than one place in the word. That definition includes single-step substitutions. Jeremy writes "The largest single-step nexus I know contains 16 reasonably common words (shown below as a network with lines drawn to connect single-step pairs)."

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DARES—CARER—BARER—BASER          EATER
      \  |      |      |      |      |
CARET---CARES—BARES—BASES—BATES  DATER
      |      |      |      |      |
      CARDS—BARDS  CASES—CATES—CATER
  
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### Snowplow Lowbrow Knowhow

Snowplow words, also discussed last issue, are compound words made of shorter words that look like they should rhyme but don't. The only two I could find were SNOWPLOW and LOWBROW. Jeremy added several more. He says "Snowplow words are indeed rare. Reasonably common examples are BLOODWOOD, KNOWHOW, OVERCOVER and WHOSO. Hyphenated examples from the OED would add DOWN-THROWN, HOME-COME and WAND-HAND. Common phrases are COME HOME, GOOD FOOD, MOWN DOWN and the trifle SO TO DO." With Jeremy's listing of KNOWHOW, there are three snowplow words that rhyme (see above). In Iowa a prize-winning heifer is known as a SHOWCOW—or should be!

## Heyday Words

Jeremy points out that compound words that work in the opposite way can be considered: "The converse type, 'heyday words.' i.e. ear- but not eye-rhymes, are less rare, as BROADSWORD, FOURSCORE, HEYDAY, REDHEAD, SWEETMEAT, ETC."

## Pangrammatic Number Names

A pangrammatic number name has all 23 letters (no JKZ) used in spelling the names of numbers. Each letter appears one or more times in any order. How many pangrammatic numbers are there? The series of pangrammatic number names begins with **one octillion one septillion one quadrillion one billion one million two thousand five hundred sixty eight** with 91 letters; the order in which new letters appear is ONECTILSPQUADRBMWHFVXYG. Are there more pangrammatic than non-pangrammatic number names? My guess is the non-pangrammatic hoard is bigger. Two challenges using a circular alphabet (ends connected ...XYZABC...): (1) construct a number name with all 23 letters in alphabetic order, and (2) construct a number name that has all 23 in reverse alphabetic order. The following falls one letter short of a full deck: **one hundred fifty eight vigintillion one novemdecillion one septendecillion one quindecillion one hundred sixty four sextillion seven hundred twenty six quintillion twenty quadrillion one billion** runs the alphabet in order starting with D but omits C. I don't think that all 23 can be inserted in either alpha or reverse alpha order.

## ProvERBS

Ove Michaelsen writes "A first grade teacher collected well-known proverbs. She gave each child in her class the first half of a proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb." But were these *really* created by first graders? I think not.

Better to be safe than PUNCH A 5TH GRADER  
 Strike while the BUG IS CLOSE  
 It's always darkest before DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME  
 Never underestimate the power of TERMITES  
 You can lead a horse to water but HOW?  
 Don't bite the hand that LOOKS DIRTY  
 No news is IMPOSSIBLE  
 You can't teach an old dog new MATH  
 If you lie down with dogs, you'll STINK IN THE MORNING  
 Love all, trust ME  
 The pen is mightier than the PIGS  
 An idle mind is THE BEST WAY TO RELAX  
 Where there's smoke, there's POLITICIANS  
 Happy the bride who GETS ALL THE PRESENTS  
 Two's company, three's THE MUSKETEERS  
 Don't put off till tomorrow what YOU PUT ON TO GO TO BED  
 There are none so blind as STEVIE WONDER  
 Children should be seen and not SPANKED OR GROUNDED  
 If at first you don't succeed, GET NEW BATTERIES  
 You get out of something only what you SEE IN THE PICTURE ON THE BOX  
 When the blind leadeth the blind GET OUT OF THE WAY  
 Better late than PREGNANT

## Dictionary of Misinformation

Recently I picked up an old edition of the Dictionary of Misinformation. The entry titles are somewhat quirky, more like subject headings, but that's part of the fun. For example, three that occur in a row are ETHELRED (OR AETHELRED) THE UNREADY, EUNUCHS AND ERECTIONS, and EVEREST AS THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN. I've always liked unusual dictionaries, especially if they're interesting to read.

Another dictionary-like "index," completely unrelated to the book above, has the following entries: ANNA, BUCHANAN, CRVENI KRST, C.X.C., DEFICIT, EESTI, GROUCH, KPHTH, OIL RIVERS, OZ., QARKU, RAYON, WIPA, XEJEPА, ZALOTKOP. The book was published in English and intended for an English-speaking audience. The index has 2000-3000 entries. It was widely used by people of all ages for several years (in fact, I used it when I was a kid). Each entry is followed by a specific bit of helpful information. What kind of book do these 15 entries appear in?

### Ucalegon: Hoax or Hot Topic?

**Ucalegon** *n.* [L. *Ucalegon*, fr. Gr. *Oukalegōn*.] In Trojan legend, one of the ancient counselors who sat with Priam. Aeneas speaks of the flames reaching Ucalegon's house, next to that of Anchises, before he fled from the city. Hence, a next-door neighbor, or a neighbor whose house is on fire. [Webster's Second Unabridged]

Recently, while talking about wordplay to a class of eighth-graders, I said that UCALEGON has one of the most unusual definitions in the English language. After I told them the definition, one student said "Oh, I get it. It comes from YOU CALL AGAIN, like a neighbor." I replied "That's very interesting! I wonder if UCALEGON is a made-up word coming from the sound of 'you call again'." Later, I looked it up and realized that it's not named after the sound but after a character of that name from the Aeneid. And yet, although the name is real, the dictionary definition of the word could be a hoax. If the definition had ended with "he fled from the city," there would be no question of authenticity, but the entry continues with the two-part addition "Hence, a next-door neighbor, or a neighbor whose house is on fire." In each part, UCALEGON means a neighbor, but in the first part the neighbor lives next door, and in the second part the neighbor's house is on fire. Big difference! Has anyone ever used the word in either sense? Has anyone ever said "She married the ucalegon next door." Has a cop ever pulled anyone over and growled "Okay, ucalegon, where's the fire?" Is it a crime to shout "ucalegon" in a crowded theater? Do any two people who live in the same neighborhood even know the word at all? Finally, why isn't there a definition of an anchises as "a next-door neighbor of someone whose house is on fire" or an aeneas as "a person who speaks of the flames reaching his neighbor's house," or a priam as "a person with whom ucalegons sit"? Next time you see a house on fire, notice all the aeneases speaking of the flames to the anchiseses, who watch tearfully as a few priams try to calm down the hysterical ucalegon sitting with a blanket around him. It's a heart-warming sight.

In previous Word Ways issues, zzxjoanw, Torpenhow Hill and pneumonoultramicroscopicsilico-volcanoconiosis have been shown to be spurious. Perhaps UCALEGON should join this elite group of wonderful fakes. To find out more, I searched for it on the Web using Google—over one thousand websites turned up! Not bad for a word no one ever uses. No website that I checked listed its meaning as "a neighbor whose house is on fire." The truth is a burning issue.

### Father Stu Very Rarely Speaks

Louis Phillips sent a sentence in which a string of five consecutive letters occurs consecutively in the alphabet, too: "FatheR STU Very rarely speaks." Louis suggests the challenge of finding the longest possible successive alphabetic (or reverse alphabetic) string in a sentence. In the May 1994 Word Ways John Meyer came up with "sprinGFED Creek," a very natural-sounding phrase with 5 letters in reverse alphabetic order. At that time I coined another "wilderness phrase" with 5 letters in alpha order and 3 in reverse alpha order: "eLM, NO PONd." In response to Louis's challenge, I came up with the two below. Using regular words, five consecutive letters seem to be the limit in either direction, using either of two forward strings (LMNOP, RSTUV) or the one backward one (GFEDC). Using abbreviations and other tricks it is possible to climb beyond the five-letter level, but probably not as dramatically as the Dutch-language example in *Opperlandse Taal- & Letterkunde*, translated and explained in "Who Says A Must Say B" in the August 1985 Word Ways, which has a sequence running from A through Q!

Am I caLM? NOPe. My buRST UVula makes me jumpy  
ABC DEFends its TV ratings

### Cereologists Vs. Croppies

The term CEREOLOGIST isn't in the dictionary yet, and it may become obsolete before it ever has a chance to be listed as an actively used word. The "opposite" of a cereologist is a CROPPIE. Cereologists don't like croppies. Their dislike sometimes reaches a fever pitch, and they have sent hate mail and have damaged the property of croppies. Croppies claim to do a lot of work without getting paid. Cereologists don't believe croppies do any work at all. Some of them claim that croppies are part of a government disinformation conspiracy. Both groups have one thing in common, their unusual beliefs about their shared interest. What in the world—what in the universe—are croppies and cereologists?

A CEREOLOGIST is a person claiming that the mysterious giant "crop circles" cut into farmers' fields around the world are actually symbols of communication made by aliens visiting earth. These symbols have been appearing year after year since the mid-1970s. The recent movie *Signs*, starring Mel Gibson, involved the puzzling appearances of crop circles around the globe, and placed the blame for them on...but you really should see the movie. A CROPPIE is a person claiming to have created "crop circles" as artworks. However, croppies have their own extraterrestrial side: some claim to have seen or experienced UFOs while doing their crop circle art. For more information on the Twilight Zone inhabited by both groups, check out the websites [www.circlemakers.org](http://www.circlemakers.org) (croppies) and [www.cropcirclesearch.com](http://www.cropcirclesearch.com) (cereologists).

### Letteral Limericks

William Brandt writes "I was intrigued by the letter word limerick in the May issue. Now that the 'ice has been broken' I suspect you will be receiving more limericks created with letter words." He sends the following two:

NRE S N 10-SE  
I C E S E-10 A B  
EE UUN D BB  
N N-6 S DD  
2 QR A B-9 LRG

XAVR S CN AC-C  
N FN A 2-R F D CT.  
2-2-D N 1-1-D  
D 2-R S 4 L D.  
E S UUN L EE NRG.

## Classic Letteral Exchange

Anthony Sebastian writes “The letteral limerick in the May Kickshaws reminded me of a ‘letteral exchange’ between a customer and a waitress manning the lunch counter. The conversation begins and ends with the customer. No need to eggs plain this one. I do not remember where I learned it, but I’ve known it since I was in grammar school in the 1950s.”

FUNEM? S, VFM. FUNEX? S, VFX. OK. MNX

## Letteral Farewell

Several years ago, I was leaving a restaurant. I saw a friend of mine and her daughter. She said to her daughter “There’s Dr. Alphabet.” We talked for a couple of minutes, and then, while I was leaving, I said, “Be seeing you,” but halfway through the phrase, I realized it was a rebus—BCNU—and pronounced the “ing you” as “N-U.” I hadn’t planned it, but I’ve used it on and off ever since. Anthony Sebastian concluded his letter with a sign-off that beats the stuffing out of BCNU. He ended with “CUL8R, LEK8R.”

## Traffic Light Logology

Here’s a horse of a different color—or, rather, a traffic light of a different color—that Mike Keith came up with. Mike writes “We often see directions to places containing steps like ‘go to the third traffic light, and...’. Using Google I searched for the phrases ‘first traffic light,’ ‘second traffic light,’ and so on up through the numbers. The largest numbered traffic light used in any directions anywhere on the Web is fifteen. There are no directions on the Web using “sixteenth” or higher-numbered traffic lights. (There’s one hit for ‘eighteenth traffic light,’ but it’s in an excerpt from a work of fiction, not a set of directions.) All numbers 1 through 15 are represented, though.

While discussing the traffic-light thing on the Internet, someone else pointed out that one should also search for the form ‘15th traffic light’ as well as ‘fifteenth traffic light,’ for instance. By doing this we can find numbers beyond the 1-15 I reported above. In fact, all of them from 16th to 21st appear. People are more serious about counting traffic lights than I would have guessed.”

## Street Number Wordplay

Mike’s stoplight question made me wonder about naming streets with number. The lowest numerical avenue anywhere is 1st Avenue, or 1st Street, or 1st Something (unless there is a Zero Avenue or a negative number or fractional avenue). But what is the numerically highest? Usually one would assume that the numbers represent a count of streets that occur in succession and that are parallel. 2nd Avenue is the closest parallel avenue to 1st Avenue. In Iowa we have 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue, etc., but one day I drove out about thirty miles from town to go to a flea market, and I noticed a street numbered 250th Avenue or something like that, surrounded by farmland and guarded jealously by local cows and horses grazing nearby. I think the namer of that street was extremely optimistic in assuming that there would be 242 streets between it and 7th Avenue, which I think is the highest numbered street in Iowa City.

Mike wrote back, saying “There are perhaps three subproblems:

(1) What is the longest sequence of consecutively numbered streets? Some good candidates are: In Los Angeles there is a series of east-west streets numbered 1st Street to 267th Street; proceeding south on Western Avenue, 1st Street is the first street south of Wilshire Boulevard



while 267th is the last one before Palos Verdes Drive. The borough of Queens in New York has a sequence of streets from 1st Street on the East River to 271st Street on the far west end by the Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

(2) What's the highest numbered street that's part of an essentially sequential set? Essentially sequential means that there is a clear sequence, but there may be some, or even more than a few, numbered streets missing. The north-south streets west of Phoenix, Arizona are numbered, it seems, based on distance from the city center. Though many numbers are skipped, I find that they go up to 427th Street, which is out in the desert about 50 miles from the center of Phoenix. The Seattle area also contains some high numbers, as streets in surrounding King County seem to be numbered using a similar scheme. I've found a 486th Ave. S.E. but I'm not sure that's they highest one as they are laid out very irregularly.

(3) What's the highest-numbered street, period? The map of Adams County, Illinois given at the website [http://www.co.adams.il.us/county\\_board/districtmaps/district6.pdf](http://www.co.adams.il.us/county_board/districtmaps/district6.pdf) shows a "N 3000th St" (as well as many large numbers, but 3000 appears to be the largest)."

### **Creatures As Collectives**

Susan Thorpe writes "A sounder of swine, a muster of peacocks and a leap of leopards are just three examples of creatures being described by collective nouns. Suppose, however, we use the creatures themselves as collective nouns for a range of things or people." The results range from seriously funny to funnily serious:

a dromedary of hunchbacks  
 a zebra of bar-codes  
 a chow-chow of tautonyms  
 a nightingale of choristers  
 a wasp of inoculators  
 a whale of geysers  
 a giraffe of busybodies  
 a porcupine of pincushions

a dalmatian of dominoes  
 a jackass of hysterics  
 a chameleon of kaleidoscopes  
 a meerkat of sentries  
 a flea of high-jumpers  
 a limpet of adhesives  
 a lemur of gymnasts  
 an amoeba of shape-shifters (Star Trek)

### **The French Disconnection**

During the second Gulf War, France butted heads with the United States. This led to a whirlwind of jokes popping up everywhere from TV and radio to magazines and newspapers to websites and beyond. The jokes perpetuated the idea that France would rather quit than fight. In fact, one email making the rounds gave a detailed list of military actions that France has been involved in since its early history and concluded that France gave up most of the time, "tied" twice, and won its only victory when it beat Napoleon, thus conquering itself. Some recent critics expressed anger through their humorous comments. One woman on the radio said :I'll boycott everything that's French. I won't eat French fries, French bread, or French pastries. I may even give up French kissing."

The image of France as enthusiastic loser isn't new. The *Onion*, the newspaper of political satire, published its first collection of parody news in 1999 in a book called *Our Dumb Century*. One of its articles from a fake front page for the end of World War Two bore the headline "French Unveil 'Arc de Capitulation'." I'm French, I've been to France, I learned to speak French, and I had a tres belle French girlfriend. I resent these relentlessly funny attacks on my heritage, but as a reporter of Word Ways, I'm only bringing the latest news on international wordplay, no matter

how funny it is. Vive la France! One of the funniest responses to the American backlash against the French backlash against America during the attack on Baghdad was this statement issued by the makers of French's Mustard whose sales began to suffer:

We, at the French's Company, wish to put an end to statements that our product is manufactured in France. There is no relationship, nor has there ever been a relationship between our mustard and the country of France. Indeed, our mustard is manufactured in Rochester, NY. The only thing we have in common is that we are both yellow.

### **The Uncommonest of the Commonest**

The editor writes "Mohammed is perhaps the commonest first name (male) in the world, and Chang the commonest last name, but it seems unlikely that a person would have this name in its entirety. However, Mike Keith checked the Internet and found such a person! He is the contact person for the Navigation Section of the Operations Branch of the US Army Construction Operations Division. His name shows that connecting the two commonest names in the world results in one of the uncommonest names in the world."

### **Proverbs For Another Time**

Louis Phillips sent the following collection of proverbs for another time (perhaps another time is the present):

Just because the chickens come home to roost, it doesn't mean you have to suck eggs  
 A rolling horse gathers no moss but is still extremely useful to a Hollywood stuntman  
 Sitting next to the king will not prevent you from spilling the coffee  
 Man is the excuse-making animal  
 I am in debt, therefore I exist  
 When you sup with the devil, you soon discover it is not necessary to tip the waiter  
 Although the cock crows, there is still no good reason to get out of bed  
 A word to the wise should be spelled correctly  
 Even if you make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, someone will steal your credit card  
 Just because you can locate your destination upon a map, it does not mean that you are not lost  
 Solitude is too good not to share  
 The best things come in small packages—that is why they are invariably lost in the mail

### **Haiku Mary**

The editor has written a haiku version of Mary's Lamb that would make even Basho and Issa feel sheepish:

Lamb's with Mary always.  
 They enter school, against rule.  
 Students laugh and romp.

### **Zeroization Continued**

In the last Word Ways, the article "Castaway Numbers" listed several numbers that have been overlooked for millennia. Two of those numbers are positive zero and negative zero, but I overlooked a third number that is the most useful of all. Jim Puder writes "Regarding your 'ultrazero' number system, if you're going to have positive and negative zeroes, shouldn't you also have imaginary zeroes? I'd employ the  $i0$  mainly, I think, in writing checks to creditors." I have nothing to add to that!