

The English Lesson

We'll begin with box, and the plural is boxes,
But the plural of ox should be oxen, not oxes.
Then one fowl is goose, but two are called geese,
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.
You may find a lone mouse or a whole lot of mice,
But the plural of house is houses, not hice.
If the plural of man is always called men,
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be pen?
The cow in the plural may be cows or kine,
But the plural of vow is vows, not vine.
And I speak of a foot, and you show me your feet,
But I give a boot... would a pair be beet?
If one is a tooth, and a whole set is teeth,
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be beeth?
If the singular is this, and the plural is these,
Why shouldn't the plural of kiss be kesæ?
Then one may be that, and three be those,
Yet the plural of hat would never be hose.
We speak of a brother, and also of brethren,
But though we say mother, we never say methren.
The masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
But imagine the feminine she, shis, and shim.
So our English, I think you will agree,
Is the trickiest language you ever did see.
I take it you already know of tough,
and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you on hiccough,
through, slough and though.

Well done! And now you wish, perhaps
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead; it's said like bed, not bead!
For goodness sake, don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat,
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt)
A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.
And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up – and goose and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward
And font and front and word and sword.
And do and go, then thwart and cart.
Come, come, I've hardly made a start.
A dreadful language: Why, man alive,
I'd learned to talk when I was five.
And yet to write it, the more I tried,
I hadn't learned it at fifty-five.
And yet to write it, the more I sigh,
I'll not learn how 'til the day I die.