

Plurals

by Harry Dunn

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I knew a man from Texas - that's Texas, USA,
Who addressed me as yo'-all
When I was the only person with him on the day
So I asked him how he'd say it if there were others round the cask
And old Tex replied that *all yo'-all* was the plural of yo'-all,
And surprised I had to ask.

So I got to thinking on these plurals
And why they're tricky to get right;
Knowing that the English which we speak
Is often diff'rent to the English that we write.

There's no single rule to guide us,
But hundreds, if not more,
To vex and over-ride us,
When we have to pluralise,
Where words like radius and platypus
Become radii and platypuses -
Or is it platterpies?

A single molar's called a tooth,
And two are known as teeth,
And a single fact is called a truth,
So why aren't several truths called treeth?

A little rodent's called a mouse,
And two are known as mice;
The family dwelling's called a house,
So why aren't two houses called two hice?

A louse who lives the single life, is only just a louse,
But if he finds a mate, the happy pair are lice;
And if many grains of rice are simply rice
Why is a single grain of rice not called a rouse?

A single goose is called a goose,
And a single moose is just a moose,
But when you add one extra mouse and goose
You have a pair of geese, but whoever's heard of meese?

Now, take the woolly sheep,
Which is sheep, both singular and plural;
Not so the sailing ship, where you have to add an 's' if you have two -
It's enough to send you neural.

At the lower end of every leg, you should have a foot,
And if you add another, you have a pair of feet,
The shops which sell the shoes say they offer foot - wear,
But I have a *pair* of feet, so I'd prefer a shop which offers feet - ware.

A single roof becomes two rooves,
But several proofs are not called prooves;
A horse's hoof becomes a set of hooves,
And a single loaf becomes two loaves,
So why aren't a pair of oafs called oaves?

There's no sense in all of this, the singular and plural,
In spoken English, where the rules are rather loose,
For the educated city-smarts and the fustic, rustic rural,
Or is it just me - an uneducated goose.
- or should that be geoses, geese or geeses?

It's all too much for a tired and ageing brain,
So I'm heading for the bowls club, there to clear my head
And perhaps to have a bowl,
Followed by a cleansing ale, enough to ease the pain,
And the way it's said suggests just one of each,
When we know that no-one has a single bowl or a solitary beer;
But whoever heard a bowler say that he might extend his reach
And indulge in *plural* bowls and beers?