

The Grammarian's Love

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an untranslatable story,
which is both short and humorous

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The grammarian fell in love with one of his students. Her hair was the color of sand, and her eyebrows too; her eyes, a lighter shade. She was all one color, just with lighter or darker tones here or there. When she worked on her translations, she wrote the definition of every word in fine-lined pencil above each line of the foreign text. Her work was never creased or smeared with ink.

The grammarian thinks he fell in love with her because of her favor for archaic language, like her use of the subjunctive -- now nearly discarded in our language.

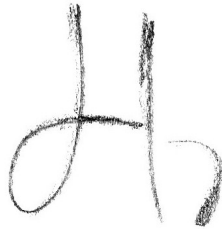
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“Our orthography is in dire need of reform!” lectures the grammarian “We might as well be drawing ideograms!”

His love remained silent and attentive.

Their eyes met for a moment as he paused to look his class over.

He writes on the board:



He turns to face the class, saying nothing, nervous under his love's careful eyes. Fiddling with the chalk gives him a few moments to decide on his next move. He makes up his mind to spontaneously address a look of furious intelligence to his pupils. So he does, then points to the board.

“This represents either a voiced or unvoiced sound, the former is heard in 'that' or 'the', the latter in 'thought' or 'thunk.’”

He draws more letters on the board:



“Our ancestors, barbarians though they were, had a phonetic philosophy.”

He taps expertly on ðe board, below each of the newly written letters.

(“Philosophy!? did I just say “philosophy?” It *must've* been orthography. No, philosophy, I'm sure. Hmmp. There should some kind of punctuation mark to indicate a sigh.”)

He clears his throat, ðen continues:

“Ðis is the voiced.”

Tap.

“And ðis ðe unvoiced.”

A tap a few inches to ðe right.

His class was unmoved. ðe moment lacked poetry; ðere wasn't an especially disaffected lout picking his nose.

His pupils handed over ðeir mediocre -- probably -- translations, and left ðe classroom. His love arranged ðe books in her bag as deliberately and slowly as she did her cloðing.

Ðæt nite, his love dremt, but he could not know of what. She woke, breakfasted, and reflected on yesterday's lesson. She decided to work on her translations, but še found ðæt še couldn't. To occupy her mind, še decided to leaf þru one of ðe grammarian's books: “A Brief and Incomplete History of our Language.” Two charts were presented sid by sid, for comparative purposes: one for our modern language, and ð' oðer for its ancient for'runner. Every sound of each language was written in a special phonetic script, and in ðæt language's own letters as well. Še studied ð' çart for a while.

Sometimes, ð' grammarian imagined her reading. During class, he noticed how še turned ð' textbook's pages slowly, holding ðem carefully; for her ðey were ð' feðers of great, rare birds ðæt še turned over in her small hands, or so he imagined.

He didn't suppose ðæt še had a favorite part of his book, but -- še did. Še turned to it after studying ð' çart, after her lips parted as še silently red þru boþ alfabet, ançent and modern. Ah! here was wher ð' grammarian expownds his þeory conserning our language's Grát Vowel Šift. His sentences wer wel-constructed, but his þóts muddld: it séms hé belévd it to be somhow or oðer tid to ð' reséding of ð' ošens, whiç left lonly deserts béhind.