

I thought you were supposed to get more conservative as you get older, but I seem to be going in the opposite direction. I more and more dislike pedantry in the criticism of writing. Every time I see someone complaining about the misspelling of they're, there, their or even worse making fun of it, I get grouchy. What is the point, I think. People know what is meant. "The bane of my existence" is what someone wrote. Who leads a life so empty of unhappiness that the bane of their existence is a misplaced comma? I want it to be easier for people to write, not more difficult or scary. Certainly not humiliating. One of the only things I know for certain in my old age is that the most valuable of experiences is writing, indeed what makes us human even more so than speaking. All people should write.

Poets don't worry about grammar. Alyda Faber writes this lovely little couplet in her poem "Cactus Essay": "Trees tell light./If only we could marry trees." The second line is not a complete sentence. My mother-in-law wrote us beautiful letters from her trip to Europe--vivid, full of the excitement she felt, and in her unique voice. Many of her sentence constructions were comma splices. The pedant, the English teacher in me, noticed them and was ashamed of myself. Using the comma correctly is ridiculously difficult. Letters home from the war are priceless. If the soldier had been self-conscious of his grammar and had not written from his heart, how much of the human condition we would have missed. Nearly every speaker uses the object of a preposition incorrectly, saying "between you and I". I notice it and hate myself for noticing.

On the other hand, I do love it when the waitress says to us, "What can I get for youse." This tells me so much about her. One of the many quibbles I have about fiction is that these constructions are used inauthentically. I want the waitress to write about her life in her own voice, and I don't want editors to change it. I certainly don't want her to be making anything up.

Now people are getting around these pedantic restrictions in their smartphone texting—using short cuts in spelling, incomplete sentences, emoticons. I wonder if there will be a tipping point when this ubiquitous method of communication will affect writing in general.

You can see nineteen of the area's most accomplished photographers in just one block of Fredericton's Queen Street. In Gallery 78 the Silverfish Collective, a group of twelve photographers, is showing their work. An exhibit of the seven photographers forming the Emerge Artist Collective is on at the Playhouse. I haven't seen the Emerge exhibit yet, and I have to go back to the Silverfish exhibit after having ruminated about it and about the state of photography in general. That exhibit is of beautiful images, many like abstract art, many black and white, few dramatic, obviously taken with state of the art cameras and produced with the highest technical quality.

The smartphone that comes with a camera has also changed the experience of photography. The chances of someone being on the scene for a dramatic photo have increased—some deer in a backyard, an especially bright rainbow, a group of men rescuing a dog. Sunsets and sunrises are all over the internet. Human interest photos abound. My 94 year old aunt, living without a computer, complains that no one sends her photos anymore. Going through an album I made of steps of improvement at our lake cottage, I realized that I had no photos for the last six years because they had all been shared by email.

Amateur theatre is thriving, painting materials and lessons are easily come by, self-published novels and memoirs proliferate. What does this mean for the professional trying to earn a living?

Joseph Haj, Artistic Director of the Guthrie Theatre, writes, "Are we making the work that we most want and need to make? Or are we making some other kind of work while waiting for the economy to recover.... What are we waiting for? Better times? These ARE better times. This might be as good as it ever gets." The professional still does need to lead the way in the best practices, innovation, and execution.

Plans for the new literary festival, "Word Feast", are shaping up. It's being billed as the "St. John River Valley Literary Festival" and will take place up and down the valley, from Florenceville-Bristol to Hartland, Woodstock, King's Landing, Fredericton, ultimately to Gagetown, in 2017 from September 18 to 24. Brendan Helmuth of Chapel Street Editions in Woodstock has designed a handsome logo. Keith Helmuth is organizing an exhibit of book cover art. Ian LeTourneau, the cultural laureate of Fredericton, is the originator and chair of the festival.