

## **Grammar Precisionism Is a Big Fat Pyramid Scheme**

There, I said it. No, actually, another critic in a literary magazine stated that Grammar was a Ponzi Scheme and I, not only agreed, but was glad someone else, who already had a publishing career and contract, finally said that which I've always believed. Every time I write something, I have imagined a secret underground bunker in some location in the universe that houses volumes of Grammar Penal Codes; Therein is a list of all the things I'd be in error to commit - crap, have I just violated a grammar tenet of monumental stature? I feel so bohemian - a rebel with a very valid cause.

Who is this grammar enforcement and who appointed them said title? Even the Ponzi scheme is a Ponzi scheme. The original idea had already been carried out by a woman named Sara Howe, in Boston in the 1880's. But, someone, with some concealed regulation book of rules and appointments of history, attributed the concept, renaming it, after an Italian man, named Charles Ponzi, much later, in the 1920's. The same appointees, who robbed Sara Howe of her rightful authorship of the schematic fortitude to defraud solely female clientele by charging them an eight-percent monthly interest rate, and then stealing the money that the women had invested, could, possibly, be the very ones overseeing grammar guidelines. A scheme in a scheme, I resound. And, yes, the sentence before this short one, as well as others herein, is lengthy; all hail long sentences. Martin Luther King: **"A Letter from Birmingham Jail."** 310 words; Marcel Proust: **"Remembrance of Things Past."** 958 words; and, Gabriel Garcia Marquez: **"The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship."** 2,156 words. Go off you scribes of creative fiction, build great and extended

sentences. Don't forget to toss in some necessarily appropriate words ending in "ly".

I meant, "ladies and gentlemen of the jury, who really knows what an infinitive is?" And having acknowledged this, what human can actually, decipher when he or she has split one. An infinitive is the uninflected form of a verb along with *to* - *to jump; to run; to correct*. "*She urged me to casually walk up and complain,*" should be written, instead, as: "*She urged me to walk up and casually complain.*" Listen you, alleged, grammar purists, Henry James and Rudyard Kipling split infinitives and they weren't detained.

A dangling participle, you say? And, which offenders keep dangling them? Participles are a type of verbs; they act as adjectives. See, this is so confusing. "The filtered water tastes great." Filter is an adjective that modifies water and is derived from the verb: "filter." "Sitting on the park bench, the moon disappeared behind the building." "Sitting on the park bench" has nothing to modify and is just existing there, by itself, thus, dangling.

Which and what governing body decided that the following sentence is incorrect: "**Him wants to eat dinner**". I can hear your imperiously hifalutin tone there, Ms. Prudence Persnickety, when you emphatically replied: "*It's ungrammatical, the pronoun is in the object form instead of the subject form he.*" But the rule that says to use a subject pronoun here was not decided by some governing body. It wasn't an idea someone came up with and then demanded English speakers comply. Instead, this grammar rule is derived from how people actually use the language. Grammar, therefore, is at its heart, a set of standards based on

common practice. If suddenly everyone in the English-speaking world started saying *him wants* instead of *he wants*, sometime in the next century *him* would be correct, sanctioned by every grammar authority alive.

"Oh dear", admonished Madame Persnickety, with a supercilious sneer: "That's not *JUST* non-standard English, it *IS* complete and utter, savage colloquialism." Stick a pencil behind your ear, position yourself in a James Dean stance, by folding your arms across your chest, and diplomatically demand: "Tell me the rule I have broken your ladyship?" I've refused to capitalize the "L" in protest, that may or may not be entirely due to my intent of a grammar revolt.

Firstly, if Prudence Persnickety began using a phrase and it caught on, everyone else would be using it. Take for example, "currying favor." It's "currying Favel", from a French poem about a horse. "For all intents and purposes," not, "all intensive purposes"; "A damp squib", not "squid".

If all the people made the same mistake, it could come to take root in our collective consciousness, sometimes replacing the original phrases entirely.

If someone was wildly mistaken, would you say they had another thing coming? Well, it's actually another "think" coming. But, this correct phrase, to most of you, just sounds all kinds of wrong.

These are the sorts of changes that keeps lexicographers updating their dictionaries so that they reflect how language is really being used by people, rather than instruct on how

language should be used.

The grammar enforcement, the *screiben das Gefangnis*, yes, it's my opinion they could, most likely, be German. What other language can scare the daylights out of you when vocalized by humans in black uniforms wearing monocles? Your punishment, though, will be British - literature that is - the most insipid English prose. Your reading list will consist of three sleep inducing novels - read one-hundred times each - staying awake is imperative: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "**The Marble Faun**"; Spenser's "**Faerie Queene**"; and, John Milton's "**Paradise Lost**". Quizzes on all things Milton will be given for the sole purpose of driving you to ways to plot your escape. Consequently, the guards will apprehend you and throw you into solitary confinement with a bound copy of George Elliot's "**Silas Marner**," along with, copies of: **The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Authors and Publishers**; **The King's English**; and, **The Oxford Style Manual** - the guards are, indeed, sadistic.

Good luck on your appeal to the non-existent, invisible guardians of the grammar penitentiary system.

Their source, conveniently, is never revealed. They know what's wrong but they will never tell you how they know - as if they have the only copy, in existence, of the "**Grammar Penal Code**" and you don't, so you will forever be at their mercy.

Be careful what you write in your petition and how you write it because every word you pen or speak, will put you in danger of an extended sentence or, re-incarceration for breaking a rule you never knew even existed.

However, there is hope, if enough people commit the same

grammar infraction, yours might end up in the dictionary - paradoxically confusing, isn't it? The grammar law universe can reverse itself.

If, by chance, you do manage to get released from grammar detention, as you exit the gargantuan, iron doors, peer upwards and pay attention to the inscription to your left: "*Caesar non supra grammaticos.*" After gathering your meager belongings, you should, timidly, ask the release guardian what that quote means? She, most likely, will pull her monocle further down on her nose, contorting her mouth into a smug sneer and reply, in contemptuous condescension, "*The Emperor is not above the grammarians.*"

You hang your head and affect an obsequious mannerism - oh hell, you become a complete sycophant, realizing that grammarians surely have taken themselves way too seriously. They not only produced imperative, language usage demands, on mere, lowly writers like you and me, but on one of the most notable Emperors of Rome - they be bad. You WILL go forth and continue to anguish about whether you had dangled a participle or split an infinitive because *the Grammar Ponzi Police* still wields the authority to batter ram your mind and force entry into your writing with all intents and purposes of making your writing so much better that you will earn enough money and fame to break *their* rules without risking arrest.