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Writers Rule!

Whatevr u say, Mike, but this hedlin didnt get editd and thts why it readz like this

Essay by Michael Kinsley
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Writers are sensitive souls--generally intelligent and hardworking but easily bruised. Treat them right, though, and you will be rewarded. Writers shape words into luminous sentences and the sentences into exquisitely crafted paragraphs. They weave the paragraphs together into a near perfect article, essay or review. Then their writing--their baby--is ripped untimely from their computers (well, maybe only a couple of weeks overdue) and turned over to editors. These are idiots, most of them, and brutes, with tin ears, the aesthetic sensitivity of insects, deeply held erroneous beliefs about your topic and a maddening conviction that any article, no matter how eloquent or profound or already cut to the bone, can be improved by losing an additional 100 words.

If you're lucky, your editor will have lost all interest in your article by the time you produce it, and on the way to a fancy expense-account lunch, he will pass it along unmolested to the copy editors (apprentice fiends, with intense views about semicolons). If you are not lucky, your editor will take a few minutes to ruin the piece with moronic changes and cloddish cuts before disappearing out the door.

I didn't always feel this way. (And even now, nothing here should be construed to apply to the editors of TIME, who edit with the care of surgeons, the sensitivity of angels and the wisdom of the better class of Supreme Court Justices.) I have spent most of my professional life as an editor. When editors get together, they complain about writers with the same passion that writers bring to complaining about editors.

Writers, they say, are whiny, self-indulgent creatures who spend too much time alone. They are egotistical, paranoid and almost always seriously dehydrated. Above all, they are spectacular ingrates. Editors save their asses, and writers do nothing but bitch about it. "If anyone saw the original manuscript from ..." (and you can insert the name of your favorite Pulitzer Prize-winning writer here) "... that guy wouldn't get hired to clean the toilets at the Stockholm Public Library. Say, the Pulitzer is the one they give away in Scandinavia, isn't it? I better remember to change that in a piece we're running. The stupid writer says it's the Nobel. What would they do without us?"

Editors are selfless, editors believe. They labor in anonymity and take their satisfaction vicariously. The writer gets all the glory. He gets the big bucks. He gets invited to the parties, the openings, the symposia, while the editors toil at their desks turning the writer's random jottings and pretentious stylistic quirks into something resembling English prose. But that's O.K. Editors don't mind. They say, "Have a lovely time at that writers' conference, and we'll have the rewrite done when you get back." ("And your laundry too, you unappreciative bastard," they mumble under their breath.)

When I was an editor, I reasoned like an editor. But these days I am a full-time writer, and I have put away the editorial mind-set. Now I say, before you criticize writers, you should write a piece in their shoes.

Did you say paranoid? Is it paranoid to wonder why an editor hasn't returned your calls for two weeks, even though she has been sitting on your piece for four? Did you say egomaniacal? What self-respecting egomaniac would put up with the enraging powerlessness of the freelance writer, totally dependent on the whims of half-literate editors for a pathetic drip-drip-drip of income. Oh, for a regular paycheck and health care, so you wouldn't have to suck up to some jerk of an editor for the next mortgage payment. ("Yes, I see. You want it to be iambic pentameter with internal rhymes. I've never read an analysis of the political situation in Pakistan done that way before. What a good idea!")

So this is an apology to any writers I may have treated callously over my years as an editor. If I didn't answer your e-mail, I'm sorry. If the check was late or the amount less than agreed on, please forgive me. If I shut my office door, turned off the lights and hid under the desk when I heard you coming, I deeply regret such childish behavior.

On the Internet, they don't have editors. Or they don't have many. Writers rule, and a thought can go straight from your head onto the Net. That used to sound hellish. Now it sounds like heaven.