

On Editors and Editing

An editor is a person who knows more about writing than writers do but who has escaped the terrible desire to write.

—EB White

Most editors are failed writers—but so are most writers.

—TS Eliot

Editing is the same as quarreling with writers—same thing exactly.

—Harold Ross

Many editors see themselves as gifted sculptors, attempting to turn a block of marble into a lovely statue, and writers as crude chisels. In actual fact, the writers are the statues, and the editors are pigeons.

—Doug Robarchek

Editors are a low form of life—inferior to the viruses and only slightly above academic deans.

—Anonymous, quoted by Robert A Day

Editor: A person employed on a newspaper, whose business it is to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to see that the chaff is printed.

—Elbert Hubbard

It was an interesting experience being metropolitan editor of the *[New York] Times*, in precisely the same way as being simmered in a saucepan for a few years is terribly interesting.

—AM Rosenthal

The *[Harvard Law] Review's* labyrinthine editing process . . . does to the written word what the Cuisinart does to broccoli.

—David Margolick

The job of an editor in a publishing house is the dullest, hardest, most exciting, exasperating and rewarding of perhaps any job in the world.

—Maxwell Perkins

I was born to be an editor. I always edit everything. I edit my room at least once a week. Hotels are made for me. I can change a hotel room so thoroughly that even its proprietor doesn't recognize it. . . . I edit people's clothes, dressing them infallibly in the right lines. . . . I change everyone's coiffure—except those that please me—and these I gaze at with such satisfaction that I become suspect. I edit people's tones of voice, their laughter, their words. I change their gestures, their photographs. I change the books I read, the music I hear . . . It's this incessant, unavoidable observation, this need to distinguish and impose, that has made me an editor. I can't make things. I can only revise what has been made.

—Margaret Anderson

Editing should be, especially in the case of old writers, a counseling rather than a collaborating task. The tendency of the writer-editor to collaborate is natural, but he should say to himself, "How can I help this writer to say it better in his own style?" and avoid "How can I show him how I would write it, if it were my piece?"

—James Thurber