



FORUM 50: AUTHORS, PEER REVIEWERS, EDITORS

Andrey Adelfinsky

Bauman Moscow State Technical University
5-1 2-ya Baumanskaya Str., Moscow, Russia
adelfi@mail.ru

Albert Baiburin

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
European University at St Petersburg
6/1A Gagarinskaya Str., St Petersburg, Russia
abaiburin@yandex.ru

Yuri Berezkin

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
European University at St Petersburg
6/1A Gagarinskaya Str., St Petersburg, Russia
berezkin1@gmail.com

Olga Boitsova

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
boitsova@gmail.com

Victoria Chervaneva

Russian State University for the Humanities
6 Miusskaya Sq., Moscow, Russia
viktoriya-chervaneva@yandex.ru

Dmitry Gromov

N. M. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences
32A Leninskiy Av., Moscow, Russia
gromovdv@mail.ru

Tatyana Ivanova

Institute of Russian Literature (The Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences
4 Makarova Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
tgivanova@inbox.ru

Olga Khristoforova

Russian State University for the Humanities
6 Miusskaya Sq., Moscow, Russia
Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration
82 Vernadskogo Av., Moscow, Russia
okhrist@yandex.ru

Svetlana Kleiner

Springer Nature Publishers
30 Van Godewijkstraat, Dordrecht, The Netherlands
Institute for Linguistic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences
9 Tuchkov Lane, St Petersburg, Russia
anthars@gmail.com

Natalia Kovalyova

University of Texas
110 Inner Campus Drive, Austin, TX, USA
nvk@utexas.edu

Anton Kukhto

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Av., Cambridge, MA, USA
anton.kukhto@gmail.com

Anna Lazareva

Russian State University for the Humanities
6 Miuskaya Sq., Moscow, Russia
anna-kadabra@mail.ru

Konstantin Pozdniakov

National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO)
65 rue des Grands Moulins, Paris, France
French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)
3 rue Michel Ange, Paris, France
konstantin.pozdniakov@cnsr.fr

Natalia Pushkareva

N. M. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology
32A Leninskiy Av., Moscow, Russia
pushkarev@mail.ru

Maryam Rezvan

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
maryam.rezvan@kunstkamera.ru

Olga Tkach

independent researcher
St Petersburg, Russia
t_olya@mail.ru

Andrey Toporkov

A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences
25 Tverskoy Blvd., Moscow, Russia
atoporkov@mail.ru

Arseny Verkeev

Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison
210 Ingraham Hall, 1155 Observatory Drive Madison, WI, USA
arsenyverkeev@gmail.com

Alexander Zheltov

St Petersburg State University
7/9 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences
3 Universitetskaya Emb., St Petersburg, Russia
ajujeltov@mail.ru

And also:

Anton Chekhonte, D. B., D. E., B. Spinoza, Janus Yksipuolin

Abstract: The 50th Russian issue of the journal marks a jubilee. We have decided to mark this exceptional event in the journal's history by organising a 'Forum' on an exceptional subject: the relations between two different camps in the academic world: authors and editors. Sometimes these relations are harmonious and friendly, at other times less so; at other times again, they can be plain tense, or even openly hostile. The situation is further complicated by the activities of peer reviewers (a relatively novel phenomenon in the Russian speaking world, more familiar in the USA and UK, and in parts of Western Europe). Participants were invited to share their experience of working with editors / editorial boards / authors and to describe the ideal editor (or conversely, the ideal author), and the ideal peer reviewer — as well as the antiheroes. They were at liberty to use pseudonyms or their real names.

Keywords: journals, peer review, academic publishing, editors, editorial boards, authors, reviewers.

To cite: 'Forum 50: Authors, Peer Reviewers, Editors', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2022, no. 18, pp. 24–107.

doi: 10.31250/1815-8927-2022-18-18-24-107

URL: <http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/eng018/forum.pdf>



Participants in Forum 50: Authors, Peer Reviewers, Editors

Andrey Adelfinsky (Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Moscow, Russia)

Albert Baiburin (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences / European University at St Petersburg, St Petersburg, Russia)

Yuri Berezkin (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences / European University at St Petersburg, St Petersburg, Russia)

Olga Boitsova (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia)

Victoria Chervaneva (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia)

Dmitry Gromov (N. M. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia)

Tatyana Ivanova (Institute of Russian Literature (The Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia)

Olga Khristoforova (Russian State University for the Humanities / Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow, Russia)

Svetlana Kleiner (Springer Nature Publishers, Dordrecht, The Netherlands / Institute for Linguistic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia)

Natalia Kovalyova (University of Texas, Austin, USA)

Anton Kukhto (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA)

Anna Lazareva (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia)

Konstantin Pozdniakov (National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) / French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris, France)

Natalia Pushkareva (N. M. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, Russia)

Maryam Rezvan (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia)

Olga Tkach (independent researcher, St Petersburg, Russia)

Andrey Toporkov (A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia)

Arseny Verkeev (Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, USA)

Alexander Zheltov (St Petersburg State University / Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia)

And also:

Anton Chekhonte

D. B.

D. E.

B. Spinoza

Janus Yksipuolin

Forum 50: Authors, Peer Reviewers, Editors

The 50th Russian issue of the journal marks a jubilee. We have decided to mark this exceptional event in the journal's history by organising a 'Forum' on an exceptional subject: the relations between two different camps in the academic world: authors and editors. Sometimes these relations are harmonious and friendly, at other times less so; at other times again, they can be plain tense, or even openly hostile. The situation is further complicated by the activities of peer reviewers (a relatively novel phenomenon in the Russian speaking world, more familiar in the USA and UK, and in parts of Western Europe). Participants were invited to share their experience of working with editors / editorial boards / authors and to describe the ideal editor (or conversely, the ideal author), and the ideal peer reviewer — as well as the antiheroes. They were at liberty to use pseudonyms or their real names.

Keywords: journals, peer review, academic publishing, editors, editorial boards, authors, reviewers.

EDITORS' QUESTIONS

Our journal has been appearing for eighteen years, since 2004. And for eighteen years the editorial board and editors of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* have been working on its issues, editing its publications and dealing with their authors. The fiftieth Russian edition (or the seventy-fifth if you also include volumes in English and issues of *AF Online*) marks a jubilee. We have decided to devote this jubilee 'Forum' to an unusual topic: the relationship between authors and editors. This relationship may be friendly, or not very, sometimes strained, and occasionally leads to open conflict. In recent times the interaction between them has been complicated by the appearance of a third party — the external reviewer. We think that all authors know the feelings (generally termed mixed) with which they read the editor's comments on their text (and also the reviewer's assessment). We think that all editors and reviewers are familiar with the no less mixed feelings evoked by their first sight of the author's text.

All of us, the editors of *Forum*, are members of both camps, that is, we have the experience of dealing with an editor as an author and the experience of dealing with an author as an editor. (We also regularly find ourselves in the third, intermediate role of external reviewers for other publications.) Therefore, unlike other 'Forums', this one contains some of our own

answers to the questions posed below. When we invited other authors and editors of academic journals to take part in the discussion, we allowed everyone who sent in their answers to choose whether to publish them under their own name or under a pseudonym. A little quest is thus offered to the reader: guessing who said what — one of the editors of *Forum* or someone from outside.

- 1 *Share your story of interaction with an editor (or editorial board) / author — funny, sad, appalling or simply instructive.*
- 2 *Describe your ideal: ‘the author’s dream editor’ / ‘the editor’s dream author’ / ‘the dream reviewer of both’. Have you experience of any that, at least to some extent, approached that ideal?*
- 3 *Describe your ‘nightmare’ — the nastiest, strangest, most absurd, ludicrous or irritating editor / reader / author, real or imaginary.*
- 4 *What, in general, do you think about the relationships and interactions between these three parties? Is ‘peaceful coexistence’ possible, and if so, on what conditions?*

ANDREY ADELFINSKY

This is a story, both funny and instructive, of a manuscript. Today is the 2100th day since it was first submitted. 923 days with the editors. Sixteen de facto rejections by twelve journals. Four changes of title. Two acceptances without comment followed by a later rejection. The irony is that ‘it’s not my bike, I just placed the ad.’¹ A certain author happened to assert in a Russian sports science journal that ‘runners do not push off the ground but fall forwards via a gravitational torque.’ In turn, I attempted to publish an objection to that erroneous theory from the position of classical mechanics, and to draw attention to an earlier polemic by the same author regarding the same error in publications abroad. However, Russian publications specialising in the subject said, more or less, that an academic journal is no place for discussions.² Publications not specialising in the subject said ‘It’s not our subject’ or ‘You are starting an academic war’, etc.

An amusing element of the story is that I managed to conduct my own involuntary ‘Alan Sokal experiment’: expose a paradigm shift in Russian sports science from positivism to postmodernism, and discover an earlier critique V. M. Zatsiorsky, Yu. V. Verkhoshansky, V. N. Seluyanov and others who had raised the same problem in the 1980s and 1990s. Now the manuscript is at its thirteenth journal,

Andrey Adelfinsky
Bauman Moscow State
Technical University
Moscow, Russia
adelfi@mail.ru

¹ Russian Internet meme, used when the author of the message is not the direct initiator or person concerned.

² This is an echo of a famous comment by Boris Gryzlov, then Speaker of the Russian State Duma, ‘Parliament is no place for discussions’ [Eds.].

submitted for the seventeenth time... Perhaps it will be crowned with success? If not — that's what Alt+Shift is for.¹

This story also has an instructive component. Recently people have often been writing about authors' disregard for ethics. 'Self-plagiarism', the submission of the same article to different journals, and so on, are widely condemned. But who's going to write about the lack of feedback for authors? About acceptances followed by silent rejections? About manuscripts that remain unread, sometimes for up to a year? Who will say what length of time is really acceptable, with regard to the author, either for a first reaction or for the full review? My modest experience allows me to suppose that that a month for a reviewer to reply, or a couple of days for Desk-Reject with a short justification — surely that is manageable?

YURI BEREZKIN

1

I have no cause to complain of editors. I have had misunderstandings with reviewers. Once I sent an article to *Arctic Anthropology* and one of the reviewers was indignant that I had not cited Propp or Lévi-Strauss. Oh Lord! Another time I was not accepted by the *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* because I did not cite field material of my own. This does not seem to be a sufficient reason for a rejection, and indeed it was not. Some reviewers fail to grasp what an article is about, or don't know something, but are afraid to admit it, and so they write nonsense. But about trivialities.

2

Indeed, I do have experience of such ideal people. The first example is working with Jessica Hemmings at the London journal, *Folklore*. She put me through the wringer, but it was worth it. I am immensely grateful for that sort of editing. Something similar happened at *Uralo-altayskie issledovaniya*. I don't know the people's names, but the article was greatly improved as a result. Answering sensible questions is always a pleasure.

3

There was a time when the people working at *Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia*

Yuri Berezkin

European University
at St Petersburg /
Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and
Ethnography
(Kunstkamera), Russian
Academy of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
berezkin1@gmail.com

¹ By January 1, 2023, the manuscript will have aged 2650 days since its initial submission. It has already been translated into English by the author and is still under review in another journal.

included someone who, rumour had it, did not even know how to type. She was more of a proofreader than an editor, and had a sharp eye for omissions and misprints. But I had to struggle with her for two weeks in order to be able to write ‘Trans-Eurasian’ and not ‘Transeurasian’.

Fertile soil for the appearance of a ‘nightmare’ is when the author and the editor / reviewer work according to different scholarly paradigms. In that case there is nothing to be done.

4

*Rex imperavit, redaktor pravit.*¹ Lev Mironovich Mints, who worked at *Vokrug sveta*, wrote that epigraph above his desk in 1975.

I do not see any general problem in the relationship between ‘the three of them’. In most cases it is a positive relationship, ranging from the definitely friendly to the generally tolerable. Some journals are arrogant. They do not address you by name, but only as ‘Dear author’, and rather than pointing out specific deviations from their norm, tell you to read the guidance to house style more attentively. This is unpleasant, but one can get over it.

If an article falls within the journal’s speciality, if its ‘Introduction’ is not exactly the same as its ‘Conclusion’, and if it is written in readable language, then it is almost certain to be accepted. If there are a lot of questions about it, then in most cases they are justified and will help to improve the text. When I act as a reviewer, I never want to give a negative assessment, but three times out of four that is what I do. People quite often rework their articles, and as a rule the new variant turns out substantially better.

One common reason for conflict is the impossibility of fitting into one authorial sheet² and at the same time digesting the basic concepts, since this requires another half-sheet. There is no solution to this dilemma. Every case is different.

Another common problem is the underpopulated academic milieu in contemporary Russia. Many authors have no one to talk to, and there is no one to review their work. On the whole, that does not matter, but it’s vital, after all, to have specific inaccuracies and mistakes pointed out.

¹ Lit. ‘the editor rules’. A pun in Russian, as *pravit* can mean either ‘rules’ or ‘corrects’ [Trans., Eds.].

² *Authorial sheet* (*avtorskiy list*) — a parameter used in Russian publishing, equal to 40,000 characters (including spaces), or c. 12 printed pages [Trans.].

OLGA BOITSOVA

For fifteen years or so I have been acting in three persons, author, editor and reviewer, and, like other participants in the discussion, I have accumulated a few amusing stories, or stories of conflict, about the interaction between the various parties in the process of publication. Many of these stories are connected, one way or another, with unreasonable demands. For example, Western journals and publishers require the author to present written permission, obtained in advance, for the publication of each illustration. This demand is reasonable and feasible, provided you are not analysing material from old journals that have since ceased publication, while the publishers that issued them have survived the collapse of the USSR and changed their name and ownership, if they have not ceased to exist altogether. In that case an article containing visual analysis risks being published entirely without pictures, because there is no one to get permission from. On one occasion an editor suggested that I should find an artist to draw pictures for me like those I was analysing! However, the actual content of these demands matters less. It is when they appear unfounded that is annoying to a person in any role, be it that of author, editor or reviewer.

As I see it, conflicts within the relationship between authors, editors and reviewers represent a struggle for power. Authors suspect that the reviewers of their texts are not competent to form judgments, and that editors are acting *ultra vires* when they reject a text. Editors are irritated by reviewers' inability to deliver their assessment on time, and by authors' unwillingness to prepare their manuscript for publication properly, seeing this as an attitude that treats editors as service personnel who have to do everything for authors. Reviewers are stressed by the unpaid work that is demanded of them, and by the fact that the editors may disagree with their assessment and take a decision that is flatly contrary to their opinion. Each of the parties is indignant at the impudent

Olga Boitsova

Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and
Ethnography
(Kunstkamera), Russian
Academy of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
boitsova@gmail.com

behaviour of the two others. As a result all three of them, I would say, are frequently arguing over 'who's the boss'.

The problem may be that formally these three parties do not form a hierarchy, but are on an equal footing. Without the author there would be no publication, but there also wouldn't be one if it weren't for the editor or the reviewer. In reality 'nobody is boss'. This is reflected in the very name of double blind reviewing: *peer review*. Sometimes the author thinks that the reviewer understands nothing, at times the reviewer supposes that it would do the author no harm to take a few lessons from him / her, the reviewer, but in fact they are equal, and neither is the master or pupil of the other. In their 'blind' duel, achievements, degrees and titles count for nothing and cannot add to their weight. Neither of them is obliged to accept the other's point of view. The outcome of their duel must be decided by the editor, but it is much harder to resolve combat between rivals of equal weight than between good and evil. All the three parties can do is come to an agreement, relying in the process not on their formal roles, which do not give them any advantage over the others, but on the evidence base and persuasiveness of their positions. This seems to me to be an excellent aspect of double-blind reviewing: so long as no non-academic factors (such as recognising each other) are involved, the result is pure academic debate which is won by the one whose arguments are strongest.

I had no leverage to influence the editors of the Western journal that required of me permission to publish my illustrations, but I remembered the existence of 'fair use' for the purposes of scholarly analysis, which they had forgotten about in their anxiety to defend copyright. This story ended happily for everybody: it was, after all, in the editors' interests too that their journal should look more interesting, and that the analysis of the images in the article should not be reduced to words alone. As authors, editors and reviewers we are engaged in a common task and all have an interest in the result, the academic text that will eventually be published. I think that the answer to the question of peaceful coexistence is to be found precisely in coming to agreement.

ANTON CHEKHONTE

1

Most of my replies refer to routine business in the life of journals and publishers, but I shall begin with an anomalous, even extraordinary, case. Getting on for 30 years ago, I was co-editor of a multihanded book and we got into serious difficulties with one of the authors. The original text that the person concerned sent in was not

very satisfactory, to put it mildly; we had to foot it to libraries in order to find quotations, and evidence generally, to support the case that the author had made (the topic of the contribution was important for us, and had had little scholarly attention at the time). Added to that, we experienced what one might term ideological difficulties with the author, who adopted an extreme anti-Soviet position, so extreme, in fact, terms such as ‘hegemony’ (in the Gramscian sense) were branded ‘Sovspeak’. The style of the piece was distinctly awkward, too, but the author vehemently resisted changes. Every box ticked, you could say. I can remember that there were even difficulties paying the small fee that was due on publication and that we had to send a cheque that was not in the author’s usual name (to the delight of the university’s accounts department, of course). We did, though, manage to edit the piece, despite the loud protests. The chapter turned out all right, and even gets cited every now and again. But then, about 10 years after the book came out, a fearful row broke out in the university where X worked, after X published materials indicating support for far-right political causes. X was formally suspended by the university and took early retirement not long before the scheduled disciplinary hearing. Obviously, this raised all sorts of questions for the collection generally. However, suggesting to the publishers that they remove the chapter would have been a manoeuvre out of Orwell, even if such a thing had been practically possible. Removing the author’s name would have been even worse. Added to that, the whole book was a collaborative venture and the chapter had been worked over to an extent where the original author’s contribution had been changed of all recognition. So the chapter lives on, under the original author’s name (or perhaps not, given that the bank account had a different one!).

2

I have been lucky enough to deal with some ideal editors. Perhaps less often with journals than books, given that journals work continuously with a whole range of writers and that the edit tends to take a standard format. But whether it is a publisher or a journal, the most important thing is that the editor and reviewer grasp what the author is trying to do. The principle, ‘if I were the author of this text, then...’ has thoroughly bad results. That does not, of course, mean that empty praise is desirable. Nobody loves ‘Reviewer no. 2’. Yet a constructively critical assessment is far more useful than one which is positive, but does not engage. One may not feel like that straight away (most people, me included, get annoyed by direct criticism). But later, when the euphoria of a response along the lines, ‘excellent article, no suggested changes’ dies down, you start feeling much more gratitude for assessments that provide well-argued guidance on how to improve the submitted text. (I have a real instance in mind: Reviewer no. 1 had obviously looked through the

text in a hurry and had not even noticed that same quotation appeared twice, leaving aside various more trivial flaws that were picked up by Reviewer no. 2 and important points about making the argument come through more clearly.)

3

Not long ago, I got two different responses from a journal. You could summarise them as, ‘Why am I not cited?’ and ‘The article is definitely publishable, but the argument should be changed to reflect the conclusions in the existing literature...’ (a list of work published in the 1990s followed). In fact, I was of course aware of the work mentioned and had directly been taking issue with it in the article. Fortunately, the journal’s editors grasped the problem, and I was able to deal with the situation by inserting a couple of paragraphs at the beginning and a few extra notes. These are two widespread types of reviewer, and both of them are less than helpful. Another common problem is advocates for the scholarly literature in a given language who are insistent that this literature must be cited even in situations where it essentially has nothing to say on the topic. I remember one reviewer insisting that I should cite an article in some hard-to-find journal, and then, when I finally tracked it down, it turned out to be a paraphrase in language A of texts that I had already cited in language B!¹ But these are trivial problems. If one works as an editor and reviewer oneself, then one’s sympathies tend to lie there, since writing one’s own text (no matter how much we may swear about it) is still a lot more pleasant than sweating over other people’s. And rarely is it so tricky dealing with an editor or reviewer as it is with an author. Where editors are concerned, I think the worst case that I have dealt with was someone who spent the whole time moaning about workload and took forever to deal with the text. When I eventually lost patience and suggested that it might be simpler for both of us if the editor could establish exactly what (s)he was prepared to do, I got an indignant reply: ‘So why do you suppose that I am required to correct your text?’ Where does one start??! All the same, I would say that I’ve more often dealt with difficult authors, in particular, those who treat the editor in the manner of an eighteenth-century landowner addressing a house serf. Interestingly, well-known scholars tend to be a delight: they receive suggestions in a businesslike way, usually accepting them without demur, or explaining courteously why they do not agree. The real nightmare is people who, on the basis of one published article, think they know everything and are above criticism of any kind. In those cases, even correcting a typo can provoke outrage.

¹ One gets responses of a more offbeat kind as well: for instance, one of the reviewers of an article I had written about an exchange in the UN that involved representatives of a dozen or so different countries — I think this must have been an enthusiastic younger scholar — recommended that I should consult, along with the UN records already considered, materials in the national archives of all the countries involved in the discussion!

4

I shall state the obvious here: of course, harmonious interaction between author, reviewer and editor is eminently possible. The important thing is not to treat editorial suggestions as if they were the directives of the Soviet censorship (I need hardly add that the editors should not behave in a way to provoke such a comparison).

VICTORIA CHERVANEVA

I find the topic of this ‘Forum’ extremely interesting, since I myself am constantly having to act in all three of the named capacities, as author, reviewer and editor, and in each role to interact with the other parties. During this work, of course, I have accumulated many stories (all sorts, both funny and sad), and formed an idea of what each of these participants in the process of editing and publishing ought and ought not to be. I should like to answer the ‘Forum’ second and third questions in more detail, and give examples of actual cases to illustrate my judgments.

2

The author’s dream editor

My idea of the ideal editor is, firstly, a professional in the subject area that he or she has to work in. This competence allows him or her to see anything that is wrong with the author’s text and give useful comments to the author, and likewise — which is no less important — to avoid making stupid remarks and asking unnecessary questions of the author, consuming the latter’s time in explanations. It is altogether splendid if the editor is someone with a wide outlook and extensive general erudition, which helps in the same way (or at least, not too lazy to find out something new when necessary — one is sometimes dumbfounded by the list of questions that an editor sends in, which could have been answered by a single click of the mouse on Google without entering into correspondence with the author).

Secondly, a most important quality for an editor is an excellent knowledge of the language (as one Moscow publisher used to say, the only real editor is one who ‘sleeps with one’s arms round

Victoria Chervaneva

Russian State University
for the Humanities
Moscow, Russia
viktoriya-chervaneva@yandex.ru

Rosenthal'),¹ and this seems to be so obvious that it needs no argumentation.

And, thirdly, it seems to me that the medical commandment *primum non nocere* 'first do no harm' may be applied to the editor. The ideal editor is careful with the author's text, does not impose unnecessary corrections, preserves the author's style and the author's words. This manifests both the professionalism and the tact of editors who can keep within bounds and not exceed their competences. An editor is not a co-author, and not the supervisor of a wayward student whose text is more easily rewritten than corrected, and therefore editors must always remember that their role is not primary, but ancillary.

The editor's dream author

The best author, I feel, is one who takes a serious and responsible approach to referencing sources and quotations, and makes sure that they are exact and correct. The most laborious part of the process of editing is usually the reverification of the bibliographical apparatus. In my experience as an editor the nicest authors were those who were themselves editors for some other journal. So I would say that the editor's dream is another editor.

And I would, perhaps, note another quality in an author that makes him or her close to the ideal in the editor's eyes: readiness to collaborate, and a swift and adequate response to letters, questions and requests.

The dream reviewer of both

Excellent reviewers — with them I have most often dealt as an author (and there have also been those who were not excellent — who gave perfunctory, non-engaged reviews, and I am grateful to them, too). The ideal reviewer does not simply evaluate the article; he or she gives the author recommendations that not only allow the article to be improved, but also reveal new prospects for research, inspire and encourage. In fact, the practice of scholarly review is intended to make a learned journal a platform for discussion, academic seeking, trying out ideas and exchanging experience. I have derived great benefit for myself in communication, albeit 'blind', with reviewers, and I am convinced that a highly qualified expert does much good (it is a pity that they are in no way rewarded for it).

¹ D. Rosenthal (1900–1994), author of authoritative reference works on Russian spelling, punctuation and style, comparable to the *MHRA Style Guide* or *Chicago Manual of Style* [Eds.].

3 *The awful editor*

The editor as antihero is for me primarily the reverse of the ideal editor in the last of the qualities that I named. This is an editor possessed by a particular ‘editorial conceit’.

How does this ‘conceit’ manifest itself? First of all, in unnecessary corrections, even going so far as rewriting the author’s text. I am profoundly convinced that the editor’s field of action is delimited by the bounds of the linguistic norm: the editor has a right to make a correction only where those bounds are transgressed. But if the editor’s ‘creativity’ means substituting subordinate clauses for gerundival constructions and vice versa, this is not work, but imposition of tastes and a lack of professionalism.

Nevertheless, such an approach to editing is encountered, and is not so rare. My husband, for example, broke off relations with an extremely respected philosophical journal, where he had published regularly, precisely on account of such a calamitous editor, who had not edited his article but entirely rewritten it and, what is most reprehensible, refused to ‘put everything back where it was’. Incidentally, the leadership of this journal reacted to the conflict with indifference and took no steps to resolve it, as a result of which the editor continued to rewrite other people’s texts, and the author ceased to submit his articles to that journal.

A bad editor is one who, in one way or another, exceeds his or her competence. I once encountered a completely egregious situation, when the publishing editor who was preparing my manuscript for the press, at the very last stage of the process (after positive reviews), withdrew my article from publication on his own initiative, without even informing me of it. (I simply failed to find my article in the next issue of the journal and enquired about the reasons for it myself.) And the reason was that this editor (who, incidentally, did not even have a degree in Folklore Studies) had doubted the validity of my research and conclusions, discovered mistakes in my use of terminology, and, when he sent his edited version of the article to me to be agreed, asked questions about this, among others. My answers and explanations, it turns out, did not satisfy him, and he decided to take matters into his own hands with this author who did not inspire him with confidence.

All my efforts to find out what had happened and get at the truth were in vain. The positive review of the article that had previously been sent to me was now declared to be negative (so the remarks in it were interpreted), another review, that had not been shown to me before, appeared out of nowhere — it was short, on half a page, and lacking in content, but with a clearly explicit conclusion that the article did not correspond to the journal’s profile. In the end I decided not to

exacerbate the conflict, but simply to refrain from collaborating with that particular journal so long as such people were working there.

The stories just described appear instructive to me because they not only demonstrate what an editor ought not to be, but also cast light on the problem of the lack of any codified ('written') norms in the interrelations between editors and authors, since the unwritten rules are not always observed by everybody. From my experience of interacting with the editorial boards of journals in my capacity as an author, I have retained the sense that, in an antagonistic or problematic situation, editors have the advantage, and if they wish, can behave as if they were the owner of the journal — if they do not like you, they will not print you.

An editor's self-assertion at the authors' expense is, in my opinion, the principal sign of an occupational deformity. I think that the reason for such an approach to editorial work is to be found not only in a lack of professionalism and a failure to understand one's tasks. The 'editorial conceit' that I have spoken of grows in the soil of the power relationships that inevitably arise in the course of the work of publishing. An author who submits an article to a journal is in a certain sense a petitioner: he or she is dependent on their university leadership, on the administrators of the body that has awarded them a grant for which they will have to give an account, on the whole bacchanalia of metrics, with which we have been living for so long, and for this reason the relations between author and editor need regulating.

The awful author

There are difficult authors, and then there are awful authors.

For me as an editor, difficult authors are, for example, foreigners with a poor knowledge of Russian or authors who write about a field of which I have a poor understanding (such as oriental studies), so that when working with their articles I have to spend much more time sorting out the terminology, proper names, sources, etc.

The awful author is an author with 'low social responsibility'. For example one who disappears and does not answer letters while the manuscript is being prepared for publication. Or ones who consider that formatting their own manuscripts according to the requirements of the journal is no task for their good selves, and leaves the formatting of an appendix listing four dozen sources to the editors to manage.

The awful reviewer

As an author I have encountered them, but in my practice of working at a journal I have more than once observed reviewers who give the

sort of assessment that one would be afraid to show to the author, there is such a degree of malice in them. In my view writing a negative review requires much more attention to one's words and a more balanced choice of expressions. Reviews that are demeaning, humiliating, or written in a tone of mockery are completely unacceptable.

Someone to whom the editors have applied with a request for a review acquires the status of an expert, but not everyone is up to the task. In my observation, one may discern a correlation: malicious and at the same time superficial reviews are most often written by those who have a candidate's degree, but not a higher doctorate.

In this situation too, the author is at a disadvantage. It is worth considering why, in the situation of interaction for a journal, a reviewer, who in a professional sense may be no better than the author, dictates conditions which the author must willy-nilly fulfil. Still this problem can easily be solved if the author is given the opportunity to give reasons for not following the reviewer's recommendations (it is another matter that not all journals allow this practice).

4

I think that peaceful coexistence is possible and even readily attainable — provided there are clearly prescribed rules (even if they are valid only for a particular journal and not binding on everyone) and it is ensured that everyone, without exception, obeys them.

Thinking about the interrelations and interactions of the three parties reminds one of the words of Leopold the Cat: 'Guys, let's all get along.'¹ The scholarship in which we are engaged is a thing of beauty, and not a battlefield or Vanity Fair. This must not be forgotten.

D. B.

The author has no rights.

Mikhail Bulgakov

1

Since I am writing under a pseudonym, I shall do my best to camouflage myself, though I am sure that my colleagues will identify me with ease (I would like to think, by my style, though it is more likely to be through references to actual events). In my life, in all three roles, there have been many funny, sad, appalling or instructive stories about authors, editors and reviewers. I shall content myself with two of them.

¹ Leopold the Cat is a Soviet cartoon character of the 1970s and 1980s [Eds.].

The reviewer / author's story. Some time ago I was sent a small collection of articles for review, for the most part by authors whose grasp of professional standards was lacking. For various non-academic reasons I did not want to reject it, but rather to help these authors bring their articles up to a publishable level. There were seven texts, and in the second of them, which was quite short, I was astonished to discover three pages copied word for word from a book of mine, published twenty years previously. I forget what I wrote to the editors — something mild, to the effect that in such-and-such an article it would be good to rephrase such-and-such pages, so that they did not bear too close a resemblance to what had already been published — but when I was given a copy of the collection, the text of that article was printed word for word as it had been in the original variant. 'Is this fame?' I wondered. 'Or an outrage?' Whether this story belongs to the category of the appalling or the instructive, I still can't say...

The author / reviewer's story. I was compiling a textbook of a quite uncommon language, and I had to invent (or rather, extract from existing texts) examples of the use of various words, mostly verbs. This is a delicate matter. I shall never forget how my main informant laughed, when I asked him how the verb equivalent to Russian *chesatsya* can be used in that language: could one say that one's nose *cheshetsya*? It turned out that the equivalent verb could not mean, as in Russian, *to itch*, but only *to scratch oneself*, so that I had conjured up something like Gogol's *Nose*, sitting and scratching itself like a dog... For the transitive verb meaning *to hurry*, which in this language is derived from a different root from the intransitive verb, I gave the example 'The girl is hurrying him.' We got as far as proofreading, and I was sitting with the editor, turning over one page at a time (this was long before computers came on the scene). We got as far as that example, and I saw that it was underlined. 'What's the matter?' I asked. 'You can't say that,' said the editor, blushing slightly. 'Why not?' I asked, baffled. 'Well, you understand,' she said, turning a deeper shade of red. 'Honestly, I don't,' I said. And I really didn't. 'This is a textbook we're publishing, it could be seen by schoolchildren!' exclaimed the editor, turning crimson and looking at me with detestation. 'You might at least write "her".' At this point it dawned on me, and I began to laugh, because, firstly, this language does not have grammatical gender, so that there is no difference between 'him' and 'her', and secondly, following the editor's logic, shouldn't 'her' have been even worse? We replaced that example, I forget with what.

2

What can one say about ideals? They don't exist in nature, that's why they are ideals. One might say that the ideal author, for me as a reviewer, is one who accepts all my remarks and thanks me for them, and then also expresses gratitude in the first footnote. And the ideal

3

editor for me as an author, is the one who scrupulously corrects all my slips of the pen, typing errors and lapses of logic, puts right all the names, dates and references that I have muddled, and also tells me in every letter what a wonderful text I have written. And the ideal reviewer for me as an author is the one who begins and ends their review with panegyrics, saying that it is a new contribution to scholarship, that it must be published immediately, and in between observes that there seems to be a superfluous comma on p. 17.

Only it should be said that I have not encountered such ideal authors, or reviewers, or editors, and I probably never shall. Fortunately.

Correspondingly, my nightmare cases are those who do exactly the opposite: they ask me as author annoying questions, shove my nose into my own stupid mistakes, rudely refuse to accept the wise suggestions that I have made as a reviewer or editor...

4

Of course 'peaceful coexistence' is possible, but it would be as well to remember when this term came into being and what it means. 'Peaceful coexistence' is when there are, side by side on this Earth, two completely opposite political systems, armed to the teeth, that hate and fear each other. If for a time they manage to avoid killing each other, that is 'peaceful coexistence'. For the time being authors, editors and reviewers are managing to do this, but there is no guarantee that this will always be the case.

It seems to me that there is another aspect to this question which is not among the 'Forum' questions, but which does concern me. The situation becomes much more complicated when there is more than one author, editor or reviewer, i.e. when there are two authors, or when a second editor looks at the text after the first, or when an article submitted to a journal has two reviewers. Two authors to an article or book are like two cooks in the same kitchen: each one thinks that (s)he is in charge and views the other's actions with distaste. It is quite usual to have two reviewers, and all is well so long as their views coincide — but what if they don't? If there are different things in the text that they do not like? If one of them wants the theoretical section (written by one author, moreover) to be shortened, and the other one wants it extended? Horror...

But two editors are the worst of all. There is an old rule, known to everyone without exception, that operates here. It is hard to formulate this rule, but easy to provide an example of it. You have called out the plumbers, and they arrive, look at the dripping tap, and say 'What cowboy put those taps in?' Or you see the doctor, who looks at the prescription written by the previous doctor, and gently asks 'Why did they prescribe that for you?' Or you are having your house redecorated, and the workman exclaims 'My God, who hung that wallpaper?' And so on.

The same thing happens with editors: if a text is passed from one editor to another, all the first editor's corrections will look completely wrong to the second editor, who will also find a lot of things that the first one has seemingly missed. And then the text, as corrected by the second editor, goes back to the first... Horror.

Pity the poor authors! Which of them should they trust? Normally authors don't know Rosenthal's handbooks by heart and are forced to agree with both of them, since they both speak with such assurance, so convincingly, even though they say opposite things. While the author? The author, as Bulgakov so brilliantly put it, 'has no rights'.

D. E.

2

My 'dream editor' is in the first place an erudite specialist, who will not let pass any factual error or absurdity. The ideal editor is a sort of Socratic midwife (cf. Plato's *Theaetetus*): he or she assists in 'bringing into the world' the most successful formulation, bringing a thought to its logical conclusion, and, if necessary, turning the research perspective in the right direction. (The ideal reviewer, incidentally, has the same tasks, the only difference being that he does not have to work with the text.) As well as professionalism, the ideal editor has to preserve the balance between a correct, respectful style of communication and their principles. As an author I have had to deal with such editors more than once, and I am immeasurably grateful to them, even though I have to admit that working on the articles was far from easy. (Naturally, both authors' preconceptions and editors' methods may differ, and their ideas of the ideal will differ correspondingly. I imagine that the 'dream' for authors who cannot bear other people interfering with their texts will be no editor at all, or, at best, ones who confine themselves to technical aspects.)

The 'editor's dream author' is one whose article does not particularly require correction, who formulates thoughts clearly and presents them logically (incidentally, experience shows that such authors usually format their work properly too), and if any questions do arise, is perfectly

well-disposed and ready to discuss them. And there is one more, admittedly subjective element: if the editor also finds the article valuable in itself, or simply interesting, then he or she can be said to be truly in luck. The ideal author is not only one that is easy to work with, but from whom one can learn, whose article is a source of useful information. I may say that I have quite often been fortunate in this sense in my work as an editor.

‘The dream reviewer of both of them’ can exist, it seems to me, in one particular situation: when the article under review is neither stupid nor pointless. In the reverse situation, the ‘editor’s dream’, proposing to the latter’s satisfaction that the article should be rejected, will clearly not be ‘the author’s dream’, and vice versa. The ideal reviewer will make intelligible, specific remarks, the sort that will allow the improvement of the quality of the article, if the author is prepared to take notice of them. In addition, I would like to take note of certain reviewers’ precious ability to distance themselves from the preconceptions of their own school if the article is written by a representative of a different tendency, and evaluate the work for what it is, and not through the prism of their own ‘only correct’ position and the ‘inadmissible’ position of other people. In fact, there are quite a few attentive reviewers whose attitude to writing their assessments is marred neither by petty respect for rules nor subjectivity, but I would like to note some exceptional cases that delighted me at the time.

1. Reviewer X took the work so seriously that the review (which was positive, though it did contain some criticism) was more like a mini-article (with detailed argumentation and even footnotes, references to the literature, sections and subheadings).
2. Reviewer Y disagreed completely with the author’s conclusions, and frankly stated this, but, while noting a number of faults, nevertheless recognised the article’s academic merits and recommended it for publication.

3

The following portraits are not drawn from actual people, but represent a selection of different editors’, reviewers’ and authors’ behavioural strategies which are more or less commonly encountered (and it must be admitted that the writer of these lines is sometimes embarrassed to observe some manifestations of these strategies in himself). In any case it must be stated that the ‘vices’ described below (which irritate some people, while others are perfectly happy with them) are in no way to be compared with incompetence.

The first kind of ‘editor as antihero’ is the one with petty respect for the rules. His or her work tends to be limited to technical formatting and occasionally corrections on matters of ‘taste’. They prefer not to ask any questions about the substance of the article, leaving any

unclear or debatable expressions to the author's conscience. The second kind is the dictator, who aspires to the role of 'midwife' (see above), but is intolerant and uncompromising. An editor of this kind lets it be clearly understood that any opinion other than their own is wrong, and that they know for sure how the material ought to be interpreted and how the article ought to have been correctly written. Any article that doesn't conform to the preconceptions of the school to which they belong, or from which they emerged as young scholars, will certainly provoke ill-concealed irritation.

Several kinds of 'author as antihero' may also be identified. First of all, there's the 'couldn't care less' author. Their articles are carelessly written, there are mistakes in quotations, they take no notice of some of the editor's questions, and answer the rest in such a way that it is difficult at first to make sense of the comments. You get the feeling these people would be relieved if the editor answered all the questions and spared the author all this trouble. Then there's the 'hypersensitive' author. This type, by contrast, is pained by any interference with their text and being asked to clarify something (particularly if the editor is, as they would say in the army, 'of a lower rank') is likely to provoke astonishment. A subtype of the 'hypersensitive' author, 'the casuist', is also occasionally encountered. This kind of author is usually very well versed in the problems of editing and publishing, and provides commentaries (frequently extensive) not only on questions and corrections, but also on elements of the journal's house style: for example, (s)he knows better than the editors how inverted commas are to be used, and whether the letter *ë* is necessary in a Russian text.

As for 'reviewers as antiheroes', such people confine themselves to the most general observations about the work in hand. This may be tolerable if they have no observations to make and their review is entirely positive, but a negative review of this type is meaningless, and even harmful, as it is likely to provoke conflict between the author and the editors. Worst of all, though, when the author and the writer of the review engage in a polemic, conducted (since they are not in direct contact) via the editors, who will be forced to take one side or the other. A conflict between an author and a reviewer which is intensified by the fact that they have found out each other's identities is, arguably, one of the most unpleasant and painful situations that can arise, and in one way or another damaging to everyone.

4

This is probably banal, but 'peaceful coexistence' is possible if all the participants are aware of the rules of the game and what each is empowered to do. An editorial board may disagree with a reviewer and accept an article not recommended for publication. There are things that the editors have the right to insist on, and things that the author has the right to insist on. The other essential conditions

are maintaining respectful attitudes to each other and a readiness to seek compromise, to discuss and come to agreement, while clearly setting out ‘spheres of influence’.

DMITRY GROMOV

1

It is upsetting when corporate interests are preferred to the quality of a text, and sometimes this is fostered by perfectly respectable scholars. For example, once upon a time, when I was the editor of a journal at a certain university, I received a selection of articles on literature, including one by the literary scholar X, who, shall we say, went a little over the top in his treatment of Russian classical texts. Thus the article said that Prince Andrei Bolkonsky in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* was a pagan sorcerer who conducted rituals based on agricultural magic on his estate; the rest of the text was in much the same style. I suggested that we should refrain from publishing it, and as a result had to deal with a delegation of literary scholars whose objections were, ‘How dare you insult our colleague! We approved his article at a faculty meeting!’ Not a word was said about the quality of the article. When I asked for clarification, the delegation replied, ‘But Andrei Bolkonsky really was a sorcerer. We completely agree.’ Ever since, I have been following X’s output with interest, and his style has remained consistent — every article brings some epochal new revelation. Sometimes I sympathise with the editors whose paths cross his.

2

Editors are a delight to the author if they really do improve the text, but without changing the author’s basic ideas. There are such editors in existence. Authors are a delight to the editor and reviewer if they write texts that don’t need editing. Fortunately, there are many such authors around. As an example of an outstanding editor and reviewer I could name Sergey Viktorovich Cheshko, the former chair of the Academic Publications Council (NISO)¹

Dmitry Gromov

N. M. Miklukho-Maklai
Institute of Ethnology
and Anthropology,
Russian Academy
of Sciences
Moscow, Russia
gromovdv@mail.ru

¹ *Nauchno-izdatelskiy sovet* [Eds.].

at IEA RAS. Alas, he is no longer among the living. The post of head of NISO is, to put it mildly, no easy one, it requires taking a decision about every book that comes out under the auspices of the institute, resulting in a mass of conflicts with authors, compilers and editors, and these conflicts are not with some abstract individuals from outside, but with colleagues, even friends. I found it very interesting to observe how Sergey Viktorovich ‘sorted out’ these questions: he was highly principled and stern (people were a bit afraid of him), but also able to compromise — true, once he had achieved his aims to the extent that it was possible.

3

One of my young colleagues was a bad editor: out of inexperience he attempted to improve articles by adding his own ideas. He soon grew out of it, and scholarship did not suffer thereby.

Once I made the acquaintance of two bad authors at once: a husband and wife, psychologists with higher degrees, who, discovering what I did, promised to submit to an academic almanac that I edited an article on the results of some large-scale research which, judging by what they said about it, would be very interesting. In the event they wrote not one article but two, each consisting of only a page and a half of text, and that chaotic. Not wanting me to ‘feel neglected’, they even promised to send me more articles. I still have no idea what that was all about.

I have not met any bad reviewers, but I have heard of cases where people ‘weed out’ the competition within their own narrow disciplines by making undeserved criticisms of the unfortunate authors submitted for their judgement.

4

Experience shows that most often, constructive relationships form within the intellectual triangle (although, of course, anything can happen). All three participants must understand that the editor’s and reviewer’s activities are designed as much as possible to assist authors, and not to annoy them. Even if the editor and reviewer are wrong, authors must take account of their remarks and try to make their texts better and clearer (if the editor can understand it, so will the reader). For the author, collective work on the text is often like a visit to the dentist — not very pleasant, but beneficial. The reviewer should not only criticise the author, but offer helpful advice (personally I often correspond with authors, especially since they usually easy to identify). As for the editors, they need more patience than the other two, as their work is routine, everyday stuff.

TATYANA IVANOVA

1

I remember an old story from the beginning of the 1990s. I submitted an article about my teacher, Irina Mikhaylovna Kolesnitskaya, to a Moscow journal. It said that one of the people in Kolesnitskaya's student circle before the war was L. M. Lotman. I meant, of course, Lidiya Mikhaylovna Lotman. The article was edited, as we would say today, remotely. But this was still the beginning of the 1990s, we did not yet have e-mail, and so the journal editor changed 'L. M. Lotman' to 'Yu. M. Lotman' without consulting me, evidently assuming that it was a misprint in my article. (I can imagine how amused the editor was by that misprint.) So, when the article was published, I received offprints with the name of Yu. M. Lotman. Meeting Lidiya Mikhaylovna Lotman at the Pushkin House, I gave her an offprint of the article about Irina Kolesnitskaya, and apologised for the editor's change to the name. Lidiya Mikhaylovna replied: 'Don't worry. Literary scholars all fall into three groups: one group knows both Yu. M. Lotman and L. M. Lotman, one group knows only Yu. M. Lotman, and the third has never heard of either of us.'

Incidentally, in the same article I wrote something about I. M. Kolesnitskaya's first experience of taking part in an *edition* — about her part in the prewar edition of the tales of the Siberian storyteller Sorokovnikov-Magay. This edition was put together by Irina Mikhaylovna's teacher, M. K. Azadovsky. In my article, again without my being consulted, there appeared a sentence about her experience of taking part in an *expedition*. In fact, Kolesnitskaya had never been to Siberia; it was Azadovsky, as a collector, who had worked with Sorokovnikov-Magay. I was intending to write to the editors of the journal so that they could publish corrections to the article somewhere, but in the end, I could not be bothered.

The moral of this story is clear. An editor who is working at a distance must check every correction with the author. But this is the ideal.

Tatyana Ivanova

Institute of Russian
Literature (The Pushkin
House), Russian Academy
of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
tgivanova@inbox.ru

Sometimes the editor is working to a strict deadline (for example, editing a volume that has to be published by the beginning of a conference), and authors send in articles that exceed the agreed length. Then editors have to shorten the articles on their own initiative, without discussing their every move. I must admit that I have been in this position as an editor, and I must have done things that one author or another would not have wanted.

2

In the ‘author — reviewer — editor’ nexus, if we leave aside the author, it seems to me that the reviewer is the most important figure. My ideal reviewer is a colleague who reads the author’s work carefully. They are thoughtful, meticulous, demanding. Let us not pretend: we have all been in the situation when a reviewer has, as a pure formality, written a short, laudatory review, giving the verdict that the article is worth publishing. I know of cases where an author has written the review and given it to the reviewer to sign. Indeed, to be honest, I have sometimes played the part of such a ‘reviewer’ myself.

My ideal reviewer, I repeat, is a meticulous and demanding (but at the same time courteous) colleague, whose academic interests are as close as possible to the subject studied by the author. This last is very, very important. This is the sort of reviewer from whom one can expect substantial and useful comments. It is not long since I, as managing editor, reviewed the compilation and editing of a large five-volume work, *Russkie folkloristy: biobibliograficheskiy slovar, XVIII–XIX vv.* (Russian Folklorists: A Biobibliographical Dictionary, Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries), in 5 vols., St Petersburg, 2016–2020. The manuscript of each volume, naturally, passed through the hands of two internal referees. Of course it was pleasant to read a text in which the manuscript of a particular volume was praised, and which spoke of the significance of the work that had been done. But as the compiler, I needed comments: if certain characters had been omitted, if there were errors of fact, if there were lapses of style, misprints, etc. When I got that sort of review, I did not feel stressed; I was glad. It meant that there was more work to be done. And, incidentally, by reacting to the comments, etc., I was able significantly to supplement the first volume submitted.

I am very surprised when an author for some reason perceives a review with suggestions for improvement as ‘negative’. Again, my own experience: not long ago I was the internal referee for a large and very interesting work, the publication of the material of a prominent early-twentieth-century ethnologist. The documentary material collected in the manuscript was excellent, as the review said. The manuscript was approved. But the scholarly apparatus around that material needed some further work, and this is what I concentrated on (the largest ‘space’ in the review was for comments and

suggestions). The second reviewer, on the contrary, concentrated on the documentary material itself, emphasising its merits. For some reason, when the authors of the work discussed the manuscript, my review was called ‘negative’, and the other one, which did not contain a single comment, ‘positive’. It is an author’s right to accept comments or not. But an intelligent author will never simply ignore them.

I write my internal reviews according to the following formula: one paragraph about the significance of the subject and a positive evaluation of the manuscript (if my evaluation is positive) + comments and suggestions (which can extend to two, three or four pages). Incidentally, I really do not like these newfangled schemes (one of which, it seems, is also used by *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*) with headings for evaluation of the article (relevance of the topic, originality of the material, style, etc.). As a reviewer I am always baffled by the need to give a mark (like a schoolteacher!) under one heading or another.

Now on the role of the editor within the ‘author — reviewer — editor’ triad. Strange as it may seem, in my view the editor, while of the highest possible significance at the substantive level (it depends on an editor whether the article will be printed or not) is all the same less significant than the role of the reviewer. As a result, the remarks editors make will be less substantial than reviewers’ are. But the editor, naturally, is also essential: both the academic editor and the copyeditor. As an author I always accept the editor’s stylistic comments without making a fuss; I am happy to agree to changing the title of the article, and so on.

4

To tell the truth, I was a little surprised by the fourth item in the questionnaire, ‘What, in general, do you think about the relationships and interactions between these three parties? Is “peaceful coexistence” possible, and if so, on what conditions?’ Don’t we already have peaceful coexistence? The situation of greatest conflict is when the editors refuse to publish the author’s article at the outset. In that case there cannot be any agreement between ‘author, reviewer and editor’. But once an article has been accepted by the editors, then the author needs simply to take due note of any comments, and the reviewer and editor to exercise ordinary courtesy. All very simple.

OLGA KHRISTOFOROVA

**‘Why on Earth Did You Choose This Topic?’
Publication as Childbirth and Duel**

1

I have been an author for twenty-five years, an editor for twenty, but less as an external reviewer — ten years for monographs, and about three for journal articles. These three positions differ greatly in their relationship with the text, but all of them, one way or another, claim the right to know what an ideal text is and how a particular work relates to the ideal. It is understandable that being in each of these positions generates different emotions with regard to the text, both positive and negative. Working with the books and articles they are given is wearisome or, less often, enjoyable, for both editor and reviewer, but the author, still, is more involved in the process and reacts more emotionally as a rule. I am the same: a great deal has happened over the years of editing, but what has stuck in my mind (which means, was more traumatic) are situations connected with my own texts.

I remember that in 2013 an editor was working very thoroughly on my manuscript on *ikota*, the Russian version of spirit possession. She was very good at noticing misprints and gaps in the literature, asked a lot of questions and requested clarifications. Professional work of the highest order. But once, as we were discussing the latest batch of corrections, she said ‘Why on earth did you choose this topic? Is anyone really going to be interested in it?’ This question seemed inappropriate to me, going beyond the boundaries of privacy and even decency, but it was a natural extension of her work as an editor: she suggested corrections on the basis of her own ideas about style, asked questions and requested clarifications on the basis of her own knowledge. Such a personal position, getting to grips with someone else’s text and to a certain extent making it one’s own, creates the possibility of asking such questions. But it ought not to, of course.

Olga Khristoforova

Russian State University
for the Humanities /
Russian Presidential
Academy of National
Economy and Public
Administration
Moscow, Russia
okhrist@yandex.ru

The second example is more positive. A foreign folklore journal asked me for an article, again about *ikota*: they were interested in the mythological ideas about the demon and the human condition that was ascribed to his activities. The article was reviewed by an anonymous reviewer, also from abroad, and he or she suggested that *ikota* should be described from the point of view of the social context, gender and certain other positions. In fact this would have meant writing a new article. The editor said that I should take no notice of these remarks, because, firstly, the article had a different viewpoint and did not presuppose those aspects noted by the reviewer, and, secondly, the editorial board liked the article. So the article was published with very small emendations, and I ‘got off lightly’.

A similar story recently had a different ending. It was suggested by the reviewer that a text for a foreign collection, which had been accepted by the editors, should be turned round methodologically and given a somewhat different framework. I cannot say that I was particularly upset by this, but the fact that I did not find time to do this by the deadline and so withdrew the article probably says something about the author’s hidden feelings.

4

Author, editor and reviewer — these three positions are located at different points on the ‘map of academic knowledge’, and the road between them passes through steep mountains and impenetrable forests. Sometimes there is no road at all. Or one might say that the author, editor and reviewer are different states, relations between which are complicated, ranging from peaceful coexistence to armed conflict. There are also coalitions between those states: two of them ‘are allied against the third’. What is surprising is that in all this they have the same aim: creating a good scholarly text, saying something worthwhile in the academic conversation. Seldom are they united in their views on a particular text: each of them has their own idea of how to ‘make it better’. One might suggest another metaphor for these interrelations — childbirth, where, clearly, the author is the woman in labour, the editor is the certified nurse midwife and the reviewer is an external observer, say, an obstetrician. In this metaphor the author is the main hero of the process, but also subject to the power of the other two participants, who ‘know best’. I am deliberately using terms from Western medicine, where the relationship of power is organised precisely on those lines. (I might add paediatrics: anyone who has taken their child to see, shall we say, the paediatrician at the local clinic will confirm that in the doctors’ opinion the mother is the main enemy of medicine on the road to her child’s health and happiness.) In any case, one can rarely call an editor a traditional midwife or doula.

2

I could name as ideal editors Elena Petrovna Shumilova, Elena Sergeevna Novik, Sergey Yuryevich Neklyudov, and people of their generation and school in general. Elena Petrovna Shumilova began editing scholarly literature relatively late, when she came to the RSUH Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities in 1992. But she immediately became a remarkable, intelligent, brilliant editor. Never captious over trivialities, she gave valuable advice, respected the author and his right to have thoughts and even commas, she did not insist on her own vision. She had all the Institute's publishing activities in her hands, and that was an outstanding project. Elena Sergeevna Novik combined academic and editorial work all her life. Up to 1974 she worked at Iskusstvo Publishers, where she edited monographs by P. G. Bogatyrev, A. Ya. Gurevich, B. A. Uspensky, E. M. Meletinsky, and others; the translation of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale* that came out in 1985 was edited by her, as were other books published by Nauka, and in the 1990s and 2000s, selected works by Meletinsky and Bogatyrev, the myths and stories of various peoples of Western Siberia, etc. She was my supervisor, and I can declare from experience that it would be hard to imagine a more intelligent, attentive and at the same time gentle editor. I could say the same about Sergey Yuryevich Neklyudov. One might suppose that the combination of the two positions, the author's and the editor's, makes one more attentive, more tactful, more benign (in both positions). But if this does happen, it does not happen all the time: the change of register can as it were change the person, and a kind editor becomes an intolerable author who fights for his / her every comma. Still, such a combination does appear logical (in both cases the position of the author is acknowledged as superior); other situations are more complex — when a compliant author is also compliant as an editor (where then is the point of reference?), or when a nasty author is nasty as an editor too (Really? If (s)he has the experience, why does (s)he not see himself / herself in the other position?).

So the ideal editor is one who respects authors and their right to thoughts and their expression, helps to improve the text, is not sarcastic, not irritable, not demonstrative of his or her power over authors. And agrees all the corrections with them! (In our days this fine feature of the old school of editing seems to be disappearing.)

I have noticed that all this time I have been writing on behalf of authors. I shall try to change register and look at the situation like an editor. The ideal author is one who sends the text in on time, answers letters straight away, accepts corrections easily, or if he or she does not accept them, justifies his or her position without getting heated.

The ideal reviewer observes deadlines (this matters to the editor), criticises the text on the basis of what it contains (and not what it

does not contain), does not demand everything be rewritten in accordance with his or her own view of the subject, gives specific advice to improve the text, and does not get heated (all this matters to the author).

It would be unfair to ignore the reviewer's opinion. For the reviewer, the ideal editor would be polite, give realistic deadlines and send intelligible forms for the review. The ideal author for the reviewer is the one in whose published work you can see that the advice has been taken into account and the mistakes that the reviewer has noticed have been corrected.

I shall say something banal, but for peaceful coexistence, for the good of the text being published, it is important for all three to have respect in their relations with each other, goodwill, punctuality, and an inclination towards collaboration, and not towards a duel for power over the text.

3

I have written above about 'antihero' editors and reviewers, now for the authors. First I shall give an example from the experience of Sergey Neklyudov (as reported by Olga Vladislavovna Belova, now editor-in-chief at *Zhivaya starina*). When Neklyudov was working as an editor in Soviet times, he had to deal with a whole variety of authors, including some who considered that their status alone was enough for them to be regarded as scholars. One such character enriched Sergey Yuryevich's experience with the sentence 'If you see a thought, develop it!' And from there this pearl passed into the treasury of several generations of academic editors.

During the years of my work as an editor (informally, I must stress: I mean editing collections of work by my colleagues, the almanac *In Umbra*, and the position of an invited editor for journals) I have encountered various authors. Some were altogether loyal and accepted the corrections I suggested, others were indignant and would not allow a single letter to be changed. I do not remember any particular situations that were painful for an editor. But there are amusing situations that dilute the sometimes wearisome experience of sitting with the text. For example, how is this for a misprint? 'Across the heap of troubles [*del* — it should be *tel* 'bodies'] gallops a black skeleton mounted on a monstrous, bony lion with a horn in the middle of its forehead.' Somehow that even sounds optimistic.

SVETLANA KLEINER

1

There are, of course, plenty of stories, but one of them is funny, sad, appalling and instructive all at once. This is the story of an author whose project not a single publisher wanted to take on, because of the author's forthright reputation and opinions — and these were entirely scholarly opinions, not social or political ones. The editor of a certain serial publication decided to give the author a provisional contract and take the final decision at the stage of peer review. Then we had the problem of looking for reviewers, because nobody wanted to accept the manuscript for comment. After a couple of dozen refusals we finally succeeded in finding two people. One was an admirer of the author's work, and the other was not. In the event the second review was negative, but the first review was not exactly positive either, and contained many comments on the contents, some of them serious and wide-ranging. We informed the series editor of this, and he sent the anonymised reviews to the author with the verdict 'alas, we must reject it.' About a month after this, I, my superiors and the editors of the series received long and spiteful letters in which the author claimed that we had deliberately chosen reviewers who were always going to write negative reviews, that we had intended to do the author down from the first, and that in revenge the author would do us down on all fora and discussion platforms, and that, overall, we were complete and utter swine. The author copied the letter to certain of colleagues and acquaintances. Attempts to talk produced no results, and he only stopped writing when we agreed to stop replying. Thus, a publisher that had been ready to publish a questionable monograph, if it had been of high enough quality, was left to pick up the pieces, and at least three professors who had nothing to do with the case had to spend a month reading about how we deliberately chose reviewers so as to reject a book that did not suit us.

Svetlana Kleiner

Springer Nature
Publishers
Dordrecht,
The Netherlands /
Institute for Linguistic
Studies, Russian Academy
of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
anthars@gmail.com

2

The editor's dream reviewer is someone who sends in the review on time and is clear about what the strong and weak points of the manuscript are. If the second of these is unproblematic, the first is a constant headache. It's a life of interminable reminders and delays to the point when 'I do realise that it's been five months, but I'm afraid I've now realised that I'm not going to be able to write that review for you after all' (that really happened, and that, of course, was a total nightmare). There are, however, some ideal reviewers — well, almost ideal reviewers, who remember about their review after the first reminder and send it in the next day.

The editor's dream author is someone who is not rude and who writes clearly and to the point. That, in my opinion, is all it takes. There are plenty of those.

Ideal people also answer letters. A huge proportion of letters fall into some kind of black hole, and it is not only reviewers, it is also authors who fail to answer. If the former is understandable, the latter is theoretically in danger of breach of contract. But we are used to it: we wait, we remind them, we consult — and wait again. Sometimes (this really happens!) for years.

3

X is a composite of real cases.

At the proposal stage my colleague sent X an electronic form, so that the project would be included in our system (explaining in a letter why this was necessary), and received the answer: 'You already have my complete draft, and I see no sense in this electronic form, so sort it out for yourselves. And indeed, if you write "it's" instead of "its" once more, I shall have nothing more to say to you.' There were two typing errors in this wrathful letter, one of which resulted in a serious error of grammar. X did not reply to any further letters from my colleague.

At the contract stage, X started haggling and demanding explanations for various points in the contract, and then disappeared altogether. The contract, on which a vast amount of time and effort had been spent, remained unsigned in the system for months.

At the stage of 'manuscript submission', X vanished and did not respond to our attempts to get in touch. Deadlines were approaching. X replied to our fifth reminder along the lines, 'I am not in a position to deal with the book at the moment, but fair enough, it will be ready in November.' Then X disappeared again until the New Year, and it goes without saying, expressed disinclination to get on with the book over the holidays.

Finally the manuscript arrived, and X was shocked that peer review was taking so long, because the book must be published this year, come what may. X wrote: 'I am fed up with these delays. Either the

review's here by Pushkin's birthday,¹ or there will be no book.' The X of this paragraph and the preceding ones is made up of different people. But sometimes all the characteristics come together in the same person, and then life becomes really interesting.

Finally the manuscript goes to the printers. X writes: 'I will get proofs, won't I? And I will be able to change something in the text and add a couple of paragraphs?' X begins to get worried that things will go wrong, and bombards the editor with letters: 'What if...?' and 'Ten minutes ago I asked you a question and I still haven't had a reply!' Sometimes something really does go wrong, and X writes three letters in a row with the words 'Your colleagues are useless! I can't work with them! Do something!', and then a day later writes 'Oh, whoops, it turns out that I sent your colleague the wrong files.'

The book's been published. X has got the copies. 'What have you done?! You've stuck the contents in after the preface, and there are fifty pages of it! What a total mess!' This question had, of course, been discussed at the correction stage, and there is correspondence in which X says that all's well, that's exactly how it should be. But that means nothing now, because X is having a hissy fit.

4

It seems to me that if all parties understand that other people can make mistakes, forget things and misunderstand things, all is well. Therefore, I consider the ability not to be rude an ideal quality. Overall, if not everything, then most things can be discussed and put right. But if one of the participants in the process, be it author, editor or reviewer, starts from the position that the others are in their debt, then naturally no good will come of it. Rule number one is goodwill and a belief that people do what they do not in order to cause us trouble, but because they are only human.

NATALIA KOVALYOVA

My first encounter with a *bizarre* reviewer occurred when I was trying to place a chapter from my dissertation reworked as a self-standing article. I sent it to a journal published by a regional professional organization. When the reviews came in, I was in for much surprise. It was a case of split reviews, with the editorial decision to reject. Reviewers' notes were attached: one — a regular half-page commentary about a poor fit with the journal, the other — a two-pager dated and signed by the reviewer

Natalia Kovalyova
University of Texas
Austin, USA
nvk@utexas.edu

¹ O.S. 26th May [Eds.].

who informed me that he believes in transparency so he discloses his own name and — brace yourself — he knows who I am because he had googled me to discover my dissertation, by then available online via an institutional repository. He then announced that I do not understand much about discourse and listed his disagreements with more specific passages but did not, on my reading, close the door to revisions.

I agreed with the first reviewer that the article was not quite a fit for that journal. I reviewed a few articles for it myself and was fully aware that my submission was borderline acceptable. But I did not know enough either about publishing conventions or about the ethics of a double-blind review process to raise a concern with the editor(s) about the integrity of the process my submission had gone through. To this day, it remains a mystery to me why they allowed those conventions to stay broken. No doubt, they read the reviewers' remarks to form the final decision to reject. But why not solicit a third review?

The editorial choice of a reviewer for my submission was hardly random, I suspected. I cited his work even though I was skeptical about the methodology, was clearly not impressed with the interpretation of the study results, found some of the foundational assumptions erroneous, and considered his theorizing about language in society somewhat weak. It came in handy in building a knowledge base for my own research, but that was the extent of my use of his work: as a part of a literature review. Three dozen other authors could have qualified as reviewers on that ground just as well except, as I learned later, editors do not have a limitless pool of reviewers whose combination of expertise, availability, and turn-around time could be drawn upon to arrange for a smooth publishing process. Moreover, my reviewer lived in the area and could have been reviewing for the journal before so local connections might have factored in into his selection. Cognizant that I would never know the story in its entirety, two months after the 'incident', I secured a book contract and published a revised version of the dissertation as a monograph, the unfortunate chapter included.

In comparison to horror stories from the 'publish or / and perish' segment of academic folklore, that incident pales away. Yet, it gave me a chance to revisit practices of academic knowledge-making and habits and idiosyncrasies that bolster it. Local networks matter. On specialized topics, one can often count experts on one hand. Since reviewers do their work for free and out of goodness of their hearts (although some find in it an opportunity to exercise power), a mantra of research being a conversation resonates widely. Your contemporaries whose work you cite will most certainly be reading

your contribution; thus, writing so as to engage them directly is not a far-flung metaphor. Three additional aspects of the review process are worth mentioning here in connection with the anecdote above: comments to the editor; gradations of scrutiny; and anonymity (aka blind reviews).

Notes to the author vs comments to the editor

That my unconventional reviewer's comments read like suggestions to revise and resubmit did not necessarily mean that he explicitly communicated the very same suggestions to the editors. Until I served as a journal reviewer, I was not aware of two sets of comments that reviewers are invited to share. One is intended for the author; the other — meant for editorial eyes only. Editors, I am sure, have a long list of stories about discrepancies between the two sets. I myself constantly fall into the interstices between them when a submission calls for drastic revisions or a complete redesign (read, a clear candidate for a desk rejection that somehow escaped that fate). As I craft my comments to the author of such a paper, I oscillate between a wish to provide constructive feedback and a recommendation to find a different home for the manuscript, and I secretly hope that the author would know to read between the lines and would withdraw in order to take some time and put their project in a better shape. But my dancing around often backfires, and I end up with revised manuscripts that have diligently responded to my minor suggestions (such as cleaning references, tabulating data, reordering sections, etc.) but have left intact the matters of recalibration, redesign, or substantiating the claims. Such manuscripts sometimes arrive even after I communicate to the editor that the submission under review is not salvageable. To be more straightforward here, I will say this: authors tend to interpret reviewer's comments as instructions for micro-improvements that would ensure future publication even if those comments read as a post-mortem identifying what, cumulatively, has sunk the paper. But then, I remind myself, there is a second (and sometimes a third) reviewer as well as the editorial discretion to publish. Their enthusiasm about the work and my tentative language in comments to the author may well be enough to save a submission whose merits I might occasionally underestimate.

Reviewers vs reviewers

Venues requesting reviews calibrate the quality control bar for submissions by providing reviewers with criteria for evaluation. Conferences typically welcome work in progress. As a result, conference reviewers are more likely to give the green light to a promising study in the early stages of its development, leaving it

to panel discussants to provide more detailed feedback to the author(s) and weigh in on the merits of a completed piece. Publishing outlets, on the other hand, primarily deal with well-articulated contributions and allocate little room for minor genres that do not undergo a peer review beyond editorial screening, such as book reviews, forum discussions, symposia notes, and the like. Consequently, the acceptance rate of conference submissions is much higher than that of journals. And since the latter evaluate submissions as candidates for a placement in one of the upcoming issues, their rejections can safely be read as ‘unlikely to be revised on a schedule that will work for us,’ which does not preclude submission to other journals.

This hierarchy of venues translates into the type of scaffolding available to prospective authors. This is especially important for young and aspiring scholars to recognize: a paper that was written for a class and received enthusiastic comments from a professor is likely to pass as a conference presentation but is set to be slammed by journal reviewers. Hence, multiple revisions when reworking a term paper for publication. A mandatory part of that process is growing thicker skin and developing a strategy for handling criticism. As a student, I met wonderful respondents at conferences; as a young assistant professor, I saw respondents whose harsh comments shredded entire panels.

My own experience and stories from my peers made it apparent that in academic communities, scholarship is conceptualized in radically different ways. Some disciplines subscribe to a (largely) Aristotelian worldview upon which membership in a category is granted only when all features deemed necessary are present. Aristotelians-at-heart do not allow partial entries and do not issue discounted tickets to special groups. On their view, one’s work either meets all criteria on a (largely secret) list or it does not count as scholarship at all. Fortunately, quite a few scholars practice an alternative approach to categorization. They group prospective members on a basis of their family resemblance and do not exclude those candidates who bear some — but not all — family features. For instance, while experimental studies most boldly represent a *research* family, reflective essays on the state of a discipline, its history or pedagogy belong to the same family and differ from, say, a family of *creative writing* or a family of *cookbooks*.

Reviewers and editors may subscribe to either camp. Those who see their mission in nurturing young scholars and bringing budding ideas to fruition are more sympathetic to the submissions that do not match the profile of ‘pure’ research; others imagine themselves to be watchdogs of academic rigor and reject the submissions that ‘tell us nothing new’ or do not cite all key works on the topic or

do not engage in the current debates in the field to the degree that a reviewer would find satisfactory. It is only post factum that an author gains some insight into the type of a reviewer assigned to their work since telling signs abound. Aristotelians are more prone to pointing to formatting issues, unconventional grammar, spelling errors, and tone in general. On their books, to qualify for acceptance, all features must be present in a paper simultaneously, approximating the best specimen in history. This brings me to my final point: anonymity.

Merits of a double-blind review process

Learning the ropes of academic scholarship in Russia, I often felt awkward about that part of a journal submission process that required me to solicit reviews of my work and provide them to the editorial office. So, on my early submissions, I sought the advice of my thesis advisor. His position of Department Head helped me a lot and I got positive reviews in a timely manner for publishing in the University's bulletin and for placing another article in a repository (*na deponent*).¹ Among the reviewer's comments, one phrase in particular stuck with me as it suggested that a couple of more examples would have been a pleasant 'adornment' to my work (*'ukrasili by rabotu'*). Grateful to the reviewers for their kind words, I was puzzled about the purpose that their evaluations served. I could not believe that journal editors would take them as reflective of anything beyond the scope of authors' connections or of their dexterity in finding agreeable reviewers. Twenty years later, I checked the submission requirements of another university-based journal in Russia. Things had not changed much. Together with their work and a publication fee, authors were instructed to submit two reviews. I cringed inside and walked away. Not dismissing the hard work necessary to keep an academic journal afloat, I was not willing to participate in a commercial enterprise that so obviously exploited the academics whose job security depends on continuous publications and that pushed onto them the burden of financial sustainability of the publishing model alongside the costs associated with peer review arrangements, the latter incompatibly high for young scholars who have not yet accumulated substantial social capital.

The anonymity of the review process was invented precisely to protect scholars from underrepresented groups against bias and to secure independence of reviewers. Remaining 'blind' to each

¹ Depositing articles, books, etc. was a common practice in Soviet times. A deposited article was not published, but kept at the publishers. It could be found in bibliographies, ordered to the reading room and cited [Eds.].

other's identities, both parties are meant to articulate their views and express their opinions without fearing that they might step on politically sensitive toes or fall prey to deeply seated stereotypes. But anonymity is not easy to maintain, especially for established scholars as the anecdote I started my remarks with testified. In narrow or new areas of research, it takes an educated guess to identify an author and / or a reviewer based on some peculiarities of style, a 'patent' approach to the topic, a specific methodology, or a recognizable line of argumentation. However, the clout of total anonymity harbours the effects similar to those we observe online where it creates breeding grounds for unchecked negativity, hate-speech, trolling, and the like. Harsh criticisms in peer reviews would most certainly be curbed if reviewers knew that their comments and their identities would go public. Unfortunately, neither complete openness nor total anonymity is free from undesirable interferences that threaten to sway the evaluation of academic work: the former fends bias, stereotypes, and personal connections; the latter — uncivility and unreasonable comments. Remarkably, both options would converge on a proposition that knowledge production is steeped in human relationships. Hence, my proposal here is to emphasize the advancement of knowledge and to regulate the relationships, relentlessly promoting the norms of civility and educating the academic community on ways to tame bias.

ANTON KUKHTO

*For S. S. Belousov, N. V. Gannus,
L. S. Kozlov, A. S. Kuleva,
Z. Yu. Petrova and V. A. Plungian*

1

I am not a sociable person. And, as I become more and more convinced with time, my outlook is a constricted one. For example, I used to believe, with no basis whatsoever, that the work of the editor of an academic linguistics journal was limited entirely to working with the text.

A perfect dream: you would come to the editorial office, pick up your pencil, sit down with a manuscript, correct the text, proofread the examples, check the citations, sort out the bibliography... and then you would put down your pencil, finish your cup of tea (which went cold long ago), try in vain to wash the stains off

Anton Kukhto

Massachusetts Institute
of Technology
Cambridge, MA, USA
anton.kukhto@gmail.com

the cup, give up that idea, put your rucksack over your shoulders, lock up the office, go down the main staircase and out onto the Volkhonka. And there the sun would be setting, Moscow would be ablaze, gold and copper shining from the windows, the Strelka would be full of noise, Gorky Park full to bursting, and once again they'd be dancing something resembling salsa on St Andrew's Bridge, and you could even play table tennis by the school until it got completely dark.

That, of course, is how it was. But then it became clear that a substantial part of the work consisted of dealing with authors and reviewers. I think that the authors found my unpreparedness for interaction with people noticeable. For example, I had quite a long argument with one of the authors of the first article I ever edited about what patina is — this happened at *Voprosy Jazykoznanija*, and patina had absolutely nothing to do with the contents of the article (which, it seems, was the point that I was trying to convince him of). The ardour of the novice could produce even more interesting results. Another author attached to his article not the font that he had used for transcription in his text, but a previous version of it. Instead of finding out why there was a multitude of identical misprints in the transcriptions, I restored all the characters as they appeared in the pdf, in the old font. It is easy to imagine the astonishment of the author when he saw the corrected text that I had sent, which — on his computer with the new version of the font — contained a multitude of identical misprints.

My problems in dealing with authors began with the first line of the e-mail, the salutation. I can hardly say anything new or interesting on this topic, but I cannot say nothing, either. Authors that I knew were easiest to address: 'Dear X', or 'Hello X', or even 'Hi X!', or else something altogether more esoteric — depending on your relationship with the author. But what to do with authors whom I did not know, I really could not understand. None of the above variants was suitable. I could not bring myself to write 'Respected X',¹ or 'Greatly Respected X'. Finally I decided to write 'Deeply Respected X', and proceeded along those lines. It must be said that authors from St Petersburg were more tolerant of this sort of salutation than those from Moscow; those from other cities usually did not object either. But at least one Moscow author decided that I was mocking him, and, because the letter contained news from the editorial board that was not of the best, took deep offence. I dread to think how many other authors found me difficult to communicate with. It may

¹ In Russian, as in other Central and Eastern European languages, this and the variants that appear here are the traditional salutation in a formal letter, but in recent years the etiquette surrounding them has become very uncertain. There is the additional complication that some recipients find 'Respected' on its own unacceptable [Eds.].

be that I shall recognise myself in one of the responses on these pages amongst the most dreadful, absurd and irritating editors.

Taking offence was not the end of it, and from time to time we could not avoid rows, which had likewise formed no part of my original notions of the duties of an editor. I shall not go into detail, but the case I remember most vividly is when the author of a book that we had reviewed, beside himself after reading the review, began to fill our postbox with unimaginable demands. Naturally we, the members of the editorial team, found ourselves between Scylla and Charybdis. Overall, mediating between authors, reviewers and the editorial board takes up a lot of time, and it is frequently the editors who are the butt of the irritation generated by the decision of the editorial board, the attacks of the reviewer or the intransigence of the author.

Still, rows and conflicts were infrequent occurrences; another source of dissatisfaction with editorial policy in particular, and life as a whole, was much more widespread. I prefer not to call the authors of these letters ‘big city nutters’, particularly considering that the phenomenon extends not just to Moscow, but to many towns and villages, but I cannot find a more apt term. Again, so as not to discredit anyone’s efforts, I shall not give real examples, but our post brought, with enviable regularity, lengthy works revealing the three original elements of the Russian lexicon (in the best case, obscene, in the worst, connected with Slavonic pagan divinities or heavenly bodies) from which all other words were derived, or else deriving some long extinct language from Modern Russian (or in the best case from Sanskrit), or else opening the eyes of the linguistic community, on the one hand, to the filthy lies, falsifications and machinations of linguists and archaeologists around the birch-bark letters (which had never existed), or, on the other, to the genuineness and unbounded wisdom of *The Book of Veles*.¹ It could be ridiculous: two particularly persistent authors threatened to sue the editors on the grounds that by refusing to publish their work on the pages of the journal, we were depriving them of the rights to freedom of thought and speech guaranteed in the constitution. If my memory does not deceive me, the suit was never brought.

Among all these problems and difficulties, including the bureaucratic ones (and there were plenty of them), the main joy of my years of working in the editorial office was the company of my colleagues. I think that as well as everything else, I learnt in that time to be more patient and indulgent towards editorial mistakes, delays and peculiarities. I do not mean that there are no editors who had better not be editors, but I am prepared to believe that these are uncommon.

¹ A book purporting to contain the tenets of pre-Christian Russian religion, in fact a forgery by A. I. Sulakadzev (1771–1829) or Yu. P. Mirolyubov (1829–1970) [Trans.].

For the rest, a text only gains from editorial work, and when you realise that editors are human too, and, moreover, motivated to deliver your text from the inevitable mistakes, misprints, and so on, and that their work is often unrewarding and far from profitable, you will close your eyes to the occasional transgression.

2

In my view, the chief characteristic both of the ideal author and of the ideal reviewer is punctuality. It is not so often encountered, and in human terms this is easy to understand: authors and reviewers are overwhelmed not only by their own immediate research and teaching duties, but also by the endless bureaucratic routine, all those subject programmes, grant reports and the rest of it. Not everyone can find the time in these conditions to correct their own text by the deadline, let alone send in an assessment of someone else's text, which is something that in the present system a reviewer does only out of noble motives, their only reward being the gratitude of the editors, and occasionally of the author. In such conditions you learn to value not only punctuality as such, but also the ability to say no. At first you are upset by potential reviewers' refusals: it means that the editorial board has to find a new reviewer, if it has not already decided on a 'spare', and then this new reviewer has to be written to and agreement obtained, and by this time the deadline will certainly have shifted — all in all, a right palaver. But there is nothing worse than the position you find yourself in when a reviewer has promised to send in the assessment by the deadline, and the deadline approaches, a day passes, a week, then a meeting of the editorial board, and there is still no assessment, and the reviewer is unresponsive to all your pleas. In such situations it takes all your strength to restrain yourself from saying more than is strictly necessary to this dilatory reviewer.

This probably does not have a direct application to the question of ideal authors and reviewers, but soon after I started work in the editorial office I noticed certain changes in time and space taking place around the editors. People with whom you are in contact outside your editorial duties, but who have promised you an assessment of an article, or a book review, or corrections to an article, but have not sent them in on time, start to disappear. They stop answering letters and messages, pretend to be on the telephone when you walk past them in the corridor, and do not always recognise you when you meet them outside. Although you have no real power over them, they still try to avoid you. Perhaps at such moments you are for them not so much a friend or a colleague as a manifestation of the system or even of their own fears and problems, a monster under the bed.

Ideal authors and reviewers, though, are not mythical creatures: they really do exist. They reply to letters, they send everything in on time,

and meanwhile do not ask you every day God sends when their precious article will be published. They can format a manuscript according to the prescribed rules, read it through before sending it off and do not become incandescent in reply to any change you may suggest. Once or twice, I have had the good fortune to edit texts where all I have had to do was add a couple of commas, catch a couple of typing errors, and that was all, however many times I read it through. But I remember such authors as exceptional, and I do not think that in the foreseeable future this exception will become the rule, doing away with the need for editors.

3

Instead of sketching an ‘antihero’, I shall list a few examples of behaviour from authors and reviewers that, to put it diplomatically, particularly upset me.

I have already written above about punctuality, but I shall add more. When authors do not send in their corrections, assent to editorial corrections, etc. on time, they are mostly hurting themselves. In the early stages of work, the editors usually have the possibility of transferring an article by a slow author to a later issue, but at the correction stage the editors have already done all they can, and if an author misses the last opportunity to correct something in a text, it is all the worse for the author. Lateness by reviewers, on the other hand, delays the whole process of publication: so long as there is no assessment, the editorial board cannot take a decision, the author cannot receive an answer, they begin to be dissatisfied with each other, and the editors once again find themselves in the middle of an incipient conflict. Of course it is a good thing if the reviewer does send in the assessment in the end, even if it is late, but there is danger here too. One has known cases where at the very last moment a reviewer has sent in a formal answer consisting of a few lines from which absolutely nothing can be understood. Whether this answer resolves anything or not, the discussion of the article will still have to be put off to a later date. It is understandable that reviewers are not always sufficiently able to judge whether they will have enough time to work on the article, but if there is any suspicion that they will not, then an immediate and decisive refusal to review is better for everyone.

As for authors, neither petulance nor intransigence, nor bad punctuation (it happens to everyone, after all), nor unverified glosses can compete with the main difficulty, which many of them find insurmountable: formatting the bibliography. Why so many people with a university education and higher degrees cannot manage this seemingly trivial task remains a mystery to me. I think that many of them simply do not pay any attention to the bibliography and think that the editor will put it all right. And the editor perforce will, so this tactic is much preferable to the completely bewildering cases

when it is evident that an author has tried to format the references according to the template and the result may even resemble what is required, but this resemblance is superficial and deceptive. In such cases, one has to spend much longer wearing out one's eyes looking for mysterious deviations from the model that when the references are jumbled at the end of the article in an arbitrary sequence in all their naked glory. I fear that I shall never penetrate this mystery.

4

All these minor matters notwithstanding, I do believe that peaceful coexistence between authors, reviewers and editors is possible. They say that we live at a time of a global softening of manners. Softening or not, but what if the author and the reviewer were both to be less wilful, more understanding? The technological process may also be favourable to peaceful coexistence. Take, for example, the growing availability of programmes that can deal with those unfortunate lists of works cited, or the automated submission of manuscripts, which may reduce misunderstandings in the course of this process, and spares the editors some routine communication with authors.

In my view, the main danger menacing this coexistence is the undermining of the very institution of academic editing. One keeps coming across large publishers that, in the interests of optimising their outgoings, outsource their editing and proofreading instead of maintaining a staff of experienced employees who specialise in a particular area and know its peculiarities. Occasionally by some miracle they even do without editors altogether. At the same time, in those editorial offices that still exist, the employees' salaries are sometimes so low that it's embarrassing to mention it. It goes without saying that I do not have the solution to all the problems of the academic publishing industry, but I sincerely hope that whatever it turns out to be, it will find a place for editors, whose day is not yet done.

ANNA LAZAREVA

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration between
Author and Editor (On Preparing
the Collection of Articles,
The Anthropology of Dreams)**

In 2020 I was the head of a project for the 'Creation of a Type and Motif Index of the Folk Tales about Dreams (East Slavonic Material of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries)' about which I have already written in response to the questions from the editors of *Forum* ['Po sledam foruma...' 2020: 189–214].

Anna Lazareva

Russian State University
for the Humanities
Moscow, Russia
anna-kadabra@mail.ru

I should like to share with the reader some thoughts that arose in the course of preparing *Antropologiya snovideniy* (The Anthropology of Dreams) [Lazareva 2021] following the conference of the same name that took place within the framework of the project in summer 2020. Dreams are a phenomenon of human psychology and biology, but at the same time, the subject of a dream and its interpretation are products of a given culture, a reflection of a picture of the world, of mythological and religious beliefs and traditional values. The experience of a dream may be the basis for a work of art and confront a person with philosophical problems. Therefore, the main idea of the conference and collection *The Anthropology of Dreams* was to create a space for interdisciplinary collaboration, and to conduct a multilateral analysis of stories about dreams as a part of culture by anthropologists, folklorists, literary scholars, psychoanalysts and other specialists.

In my answers to the editors' questions, I shall concentrate on the specifics of preparing an interdisciplinary edition and the consequent difficulties of interaction between authors and editors.

1

Most of the participants in 'The Anthropology of Dreams' Conference were anthropologists, folklorists and specialists in literature, and also linguists who study folkloric texts and specialists in cultural and religious studies.¹ These are by and large overlapping disciplines. At the same time among the conference participants (and, afterwards, authors of the articles) there were some philosophers and psychologists.² Often when I received articles from specialists in disciplines that are not my own profession, I found myself in difficulties, because I could only assess these texts as a reader. For example, I might like a text: it is informative, 'meaty', but it is hard for me to judge whether it says anything new or to give any critical remarks to the author.

I wish to focus attention on this problem, because it is quite typical when interdisciplinary volumes are being prepared. I have come across similar situations as the author of works published in interdisciplinary editions. Thus I have written articles on research into narratives about dreams within anthropology and folklore studies for special editions of *Zhurnal prakticheskogo psikhologa* (2018, no. 1) and *Vestnik prakticheskoy psikhologii* (2020, no. 1), written upon the results of 'A Gallery of Dreams' Conference. As far as I know, there

¹ An overview of the 'Anthropology of Dreams' Conference was published in the journal *Zhivaya starina* [Lazareva 2020]. The same issue contains a selection of articles prepared by participants of the project for the 'Creation of a Type and Motif Index of the Folk Tales about Dreams (East Slavonic Material of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries)'. The articles may be downloaded from: <<https://www.rsu.ru/news/detail.php?ID=685891>>.

² The contents of *The Anthropology of Dreams* volume may be seen on the RSUH website: <<https://www.rsu.ru/news/detail.php?ID=711523>>, which also gives information about other publications and conferences prepared in 2020 within the framework of this project: <<https://www.rsu.ru/science/proektnye-nauchnye-kollektivnyyrggu/sozdanie-syuzhetno-motivnogo-ukazatelya-folklornykh-rasskazov-o-snovideniyakh-navostochnoslavlyansko/>>.

were no anthropologists or folklorists on the editorial boards that prepared these editions. My articles were, accordingly, simply accepted, no one gave them a critical examination, as they would have if, for example, I had submitted the text to *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, *Traditsionnaya kultura* or *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. This, of course, did not change my aim of preparing the text to the highest possible level, as I would for a journal in my own speciality.

I think that such factors (when there is no specialist on the editorial board of an interdisciplinary edition in preparation who could give a professional assessment of the articles by some of the authors) do not by any means favour the view that interdisciplinary conferences and editions are pointless. On the contrary, they are very informative and inspiring, and interdisciplinary collaboration is productive. I would be interested to write an article for a journal read primarily by psychologists. And the articles by psychologists made *The Anthropology of Dreams* richer and more diverse.

Nevertheless, this experience brings me to the thought that creating an interdisciplinary collection or journal requires forethought and work on the largest scale. I shall try to imagine and describe how the preparation of the ideal interdisciplinary edition could be organised.

2

The ideal editorial board for an interdisciplinary collection is an interdisciplinary collective (for example, an anthropologist, a linguist and a psychologist), so that every author's article might be assessed by a professional. At the same time, an interdisciplinary edition should have much in common with an educational one: the articles in it must be written easily, comprehensible not only to specialists. The use of specialised terminology should be restricted, or if necessary explained in footnotes. For example, in my article I set out in great detail what a type and motif index is and why folklorists compile type- and motif-indices. I should not have made such long digressions to explain concepts, terms and ideas, if I were writing only for folklorists. Therefore, I think it important for the researcher's work to be read and edited by different scholars, pointing out those places in the text that are hard to understand without specialist knowledge. I think that a professional from a different area could give the author valuable feedback, showing how the text would be seen by a wide range of readers. It is therefore desirable for an article in an interdisciplinary collection to have at least two editors or reviewers. For example, an article on dreams written as part of folklore studies could be read by a folklorist and a psychologist.

The main aims of the editorial board should thus be, on the one hand, to maintain the high quality of the articles in the interdisciplinary edition (which would correspond to the level of articles in a specialised journal), and on the other, to make sure that the articles were written in a language that was accessible and comprehensible

(this might sometimes require the author to give explanations in the article at first-year undergraduate level), so that the collection as a whole was interesting to different specialists.

The ideal author is an enlightener and an 'eternal student' in the same person. It is someone who wants knowledge to be open and accessible to a wide audience, including various specialists, while being always ready to learn something new. An author of this kind is open to collaboration with professionals from other fields.

3

The nightmare author regards scholarship as arcane knowledge inaccessible to the uninitiated. Very often such an author's articles could very well be rewritten in simpler words. However, were the excessive terminology, intricate wording, and the bulk of unnecessary allusions removed, the work would appear poor and banal because the author did not suggest any valuable idea or approach. In other words, the nightmare author uses jargon to hoodwink the audience from outside the profession, and also to distinguish 'people like us', who use the same language, from 'outsiders'. Here one calls to mind T. J. Scheff's article in which he compares academic schools, or 'academic gangs', as he calls them, with street gangs [Scheff 1995]. An author of this kind knows who 'must' be cited, and whose contribution to scholarship may be ignored. The nightmare author moves easily up the career ladder, incessantly generating imitations of research that often contain plagiarism from the works of students, junior colleagues, or authors whose work he or she was given to assess or review. Such a person's view of everyone who does not belong to their institution or school is condescending or hostile.

Of course, lots of such nightmare 'scholars' and 'authors' emerge and prosper only because of social problems that influence the university community as well (not because of problems in scholarship itself). However, I think interdisciplinarity could be, to some extent, an antidote to 'closed' scholarship, the separation of disciplines and academic schools, and the fragmentation of research.

4

Nowadays one hears the word 'interdisciplinarity' more and more frequently. It seems that calling a conference or a project 'interdisciplinary' has become quite the fashion. It is evident, however, that simply inviting different specialists to participate is not always enough to create an interdisciplinary edition, project or conference. Interdisciplinarity is not a mechanical combination of research by different specialists, but its synthesis, leading to new results. And obviously the principles for such a synthesis are yet to be worked out. As essential conditions for interdisciplinary collaboration (between author and editor, author and reviewer, or between joint authors) I would name mutual respect, a sincere ambition for new knowledge (and not the mere similitude of scholarship), and a transition from the academic hierarchy to horizontal connections between scholars.

For me, interdisciplinarity is the search for answers to the most vital questions that concern everybody, and not just representatives of narrow specialities. The real search for truth will never be confined within the limits of a single academic discipline. Perhaps the interdisciplinary synthesis will take place on the basis of anthropology, since anthropology is closely involved with many other of the sciences that study man: psychology (psychological anthropology, ethnopsychology), medicine (medical anthropology), religious studies (the anthropology of religion), sociology (ethnosociology), etc. When the collection *The Anthropology of Dreams* was being prepared, an attempt was made to invent multilateral research into dreams as a cultural phenomenon on the basis of an anthropological approach. It is for the readers to judge how far this experiment succeeded.

References

- Lazareva A. A., 'Konferentsiya "Antropologiya snovideniy"' ['The Anthropology of Dreams' Conference], *Zhivaya starina*, 2020, no. 4 (108), pp. 65–67. (In Russian).
- Lazareva A. A. (comp.), *Antropologiya snovideniy: sbornik nauchnykh statey po materialam konferentsii* [Anthropology of Dreams: A Collection of Essays Based on Conference Proceedings]. Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2021, 299 pp. (In Russian).
- 'Po sledam foruma: Kollektivnye proekty v sotsialnykh naukakh' [Sequel of the Forum: Collaborative Projects in the Social Sciences], *Antropologicheskij forum*, 2020, no. 45, pp. 189–214. doi: 10.31250/1815-8870-2020-16-45-189-214. (In Russian).
- Scheff T. J., 'Academic Gangs', *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 1995, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 157–162.

KONSTANTIN POZDNIKOV

1

I was lucky with the editors at Nauka Publishers. The people who worked at Vostochnaya literatura were very professional. They made a great job of dividing long sentences into short ones, and treated their authors to tea and rusks. Once over tea my editor told me that she had just had a spat with an author after she suggested to him that he should remove a paragraph from his book. As the author said to her, 'I had two ideas in that book, and you've just cut one of them out.'

But with an editor at Detskaya literatura (Detgiz Publishers), something happened to me that you

Konstantin Pozdniakov

National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) / French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)
Paris, France
konstantin.pozdniakov@cnsr.fr

could apply all the negative adjectives suggested in the questionnaire at one go to. At that stage, I was the compiler of the volume of African stories in the ten-volume *Stories of the Peoples of the World*. The print run for this was huge even for Soviet times — 204,000 copies (4,000 of them probably intended for free distribution). The editor of this volume was a well-educated lady, and quite a personality too, and when we first met, provoked no alarm of any kind. I let down my guard, and simply did not read her suggested corrections. When I got the galley proofs, I suddenly noticed that in one story the editor had changed the characters: she had replaced a man's second wife with his sister. After I hurried to Moscow to sort things out, the editor explained to me that in the USSR, daddies officially had only one wife, and children didn't need to know anything about second wives. All kinds of things happened in this story, only now they were happening between brother and sister, and not between a lawfully wedded man and wife. The result was a text that would not have passed the censor for adults, let alone for children. I suggested that the editor should think about one of the ambiguous passages of her new story. She tore her hair and declared that our stories would drive her to a nunnery. The story did not appear in the published book at all.

Things were even worse with another story. I discovered in the proofs an unfamiliar page of text that had not been in the original. Investigation revealed the following. The story has a rather sad ending: a snake swallows an inquisitive woman who has tried to get a glimpse of him come what may, though this was something that one should never do. The editor had decided that this was an insufficient motive for killing the woman, whose only fault had been simple feminine curiosity. She added a page where the missing motive was drawn in broad brush-strokes: the woman in the tale was very rude. The editor derided the snake for a whole page with choice epithets — all I can remember are the banal 'slithery creature', 'sneaking reptile' and 'nasty green worm'. Obviously, the young reader would begin to understand that things could not turn out well for this rude lady. In the end it became clear that she could not be allowed to live. I've no idea how, but I managed to get rid of this page — the volume had to be reset anyway. All the same, I overlooked one of the editor's insertions, or perhaps she slipped it in at the last moment. In the published version of the story the snake justifies its actions: 'She was shouting, making a noise, being rude, so I swallowed her.' I do hope that this 'motif' has not found its way into Yuri Berezkin's splendid classification of myths and folklore.

NATALIA PUSHKAREVA

Thank you for the opportunity to answer these questions, remembering the reviewers and editors with whom fate brought me together. I had no occasion to think about it before your questionnaire, but twenty or thirty years ago these relationships lasted much longer than they do today, and had a greater significance for making both authors and editors true professionals in their craft.

1

My finest memory of working with an editor is the story of my relations with Mysl Publishers. They occupied a greenish corner building on Leninskiy Avenue opposite the First City Hospital in Moscow, and in the 1980s they mostly published geographical and sociopolitical works, and it took a great deal of courage to present oneself there with a book on a subject which in those days was not even considered scholarly. (Women's history had only just begun to exist in the worldwide humanities, and gender studies was not even heard of.) In the 1980s publishing a book with Mysl was prestigious: this publishing house was not afraid to publish research by certain historians with oppositional views (N. Ya. Eidelman, Yu. F. Karyakin, E. G. Plimak), and such books were quickly snapped up by readers and avidly discussed.

A large part in the formation of the publishing policy of Mysl was played by the tastes and editorial 'instinct' of the people heading the different editorial sections. One of these, the historical one, was headed at that time by Vadim Stepanovich Antonov. He gave me one of the strongest impressions of my youth: after acquainting himself with my candidate's dissertation (which only took a few days), he summoned me by telephone 'for a talk', which he began abruptly: 'I've read it, we'll print it!' To this day I can remember how he smiled at that moment... I remember all the praise he gave me afterwards, which in my further career was the invisible support that gave me faith in myself. At that time, I was twenty-six years old.

Natalia Pushkareva

N. M. Miklukho-Maklai
Institute of Ethnology
and Anthropology
Moscow, Russia
pushkarev@mail.ru

I can remember even now how my head was spinning with delight, because I walked out of the doors of the publishers straight into the middle of Leninskiy Avenue without noticing the traffic.

I must say at once that the road to the publication of that book (*Zhenshchiny drevney Rusi* (The Women of Ancient Rus), Moscow, 1989) was a long one. For three years (the present generation of authors can hardly imagine it!), from 1986 to 1988, I rewrote the text of the dissertation, added entire chapters, discussed them at the section of the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences and changed them again. But you need to motivate a young author so that she should *want* to spend so long over her text! I was distressed to the point of tears by my colleagues' criticisms, but in the historical section of Mysl, I was comforted by the editors S. S. Ignatova and L. P. Zhelobanova (I still remember their names, even though thirty years have passed and I never published anything with that publisher again).

Vadim Stepanovich Antonov, the editor who accepted the manuscript, foresaw a happy fate for *The Women of Ancient Rus*, which was published with a print run of 100,000 (in fact, there were a million orders for the book, so that it immediately went out of print). It was with huge emotion that, in 1989, I signed a copy for him: 'To my invisible co-author...' — for it was Vadim Stepanovich who had suggested structuring the book in a way that made it noticeable in the sea of bibliography.

I am convinced that the ability to inspire a young author is a most important skill for an editor, or for anyone who works at a publisher, and may sometimes determine a scholar's fate. Colleagues might criticise a text, but an editor must praise it, and never write or express any negative remarks whatever. That is the reviewer's job. I have learnt that lesson, and when I am an editor I always try to praise graduate and doctoral students in advance, finding discoveries and successes even in feeble works.

2

Yes, I have encountered such ideal editors, and more than once, but... in the past. They knew how to say what I had in mind more briefly and more vividly than I could myself. They were never in a hurry and offered their variants in pencil in the margins or between the lines.

And now where have they gone?

But then, in the eighties and nineties, they were masters of their trade, who did not begrudge the time (imagining to themselves the reader's interests, requirements, level of knowledge and psychological peculiarities) to suggest to authors successful, original expressions that expanded the author's vocabulary. There were outstanding editors then at the journal *Voprosy istorii*, and very good ones (who

taught me many of the 'secrets' of editorial work) who worked for publications in the popular science field (*Znanie — sila, Nauka i zhizn*).

As for the concept of 'the editor's dream author', that is one who eschews on boring arguments or long correspondences (this is now the scourge of editors of collections of articles and collective monographs) and avoids sending in pages of justification for their position or arguments for their 'vision'. The ideal author must learn to state their arguments briefly. A readiness to give way and listen to another person is, it appears, an important skill both for an editor and for an author. I am convinced: if the editor has not understood what has been written, it is the fault of the author, who will not be understood by other readers either. Whatever has been criticised must certainly be rewritten, that is not open to debate; all doubtful paragraphs must be written again using other words; to insist on what you have written is to harm yourself.

3 Never in my life have I encountered reviewers or editors whom I could call 'antiheroes', perhaps because I assume that the editor, reviewer or critic are always right. The author is not, but they always are. They are ordinary readers, and if you have not convinced them, that means your arguments are not worth a brass farthing, and 'your modelling's rough, you don't love them enough, what's wrong is your stuff, and it's nobody's fault' (as the poet Novella Matveyeva said). One must try to understand and justify one's 'nightmare antagonist', explain to oneself what has got into him or her, and then, perhaps, the 'enemy' will become simply a person, and the veil of opposition to the opinion they have expressed will melt away.

The worst type of reviewer and, even more so, editor, is a malicious person who tries to be witty and wound the author with his or her sarcastic comments, rebukes in capital letters and multiple punctuation marks (?!). In forty years of academic work I have come across some of these, but I have tried to treat even them with understanding.

Having suffered repeatedly (especially in my youth) because of articles that were not accepted, and later because of projects that failed to find support (the proposals for which take up masses of time), I have come to the conclusion that the worst sort of reviewer is the one who does not know how to express dissatisfaction, and does not provide reasons for disliking something. A hail of criticism can provide material for a future excellent, really readable polemical text, taking existing formulations from the most lethal assessment and answering its sarcasms and reproaches. But nothing can be done with a bare rejection, especially if the argument is expressed in the phrase 'this is not the format of our publication' or 'superficial'.

An inability to work quickly is also a negative quality in a reviewer, as is a failure to understand that an author who has submitted a manuscript is impatient for a definitive decision.

4

Coexistence is possible if the reviewer is above all a kindly critic of the text, and the editor a friend and helper. Those who apply to work as editors for journals and publishers must understand that they are going to learn how to be a friend, how to understand a whole sentence from half a word, and how to rewrite something without feeling superior ('I know how to express a thought, but the author lacks both fluency and education'). If the reviewer has 'passed' the text for the journal or publisher, given it the green light, then the editor becomes a support and promoter, irrespective of age, sex, lifestyle and spiritual values.

Although it begins as a formal agreement, the relationship between the author and the editor must without fail become warm and businesslike; sometimes they simply become friendly. It was no accident that in the old days when we brought a manuscript to the publishers we asked for an editor whose capacity for friendship, assistance and a common outlook was already tried and tested. And if the reviewer reads the text after it has been prepared by the editor (and this does happen in publishing houses), then the editor is even more in the same camp as the author, and assists the latter in satisfying every comment.

MARYAM REZVAN

1

A story of harmonious relations between an author and a reviewer

A reviewer, among other comments (insignificant ones — it was a good article) reproached the anonymous author for not citing a number of his own works, to which he gave high commendations. The author, having read the review (from which this reproach had been deliberately removed), asked the editor to add a footnote to the article expressing his gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for a number of valuable recommendations, which was duly done.

2

It seems to me that all the kinds of relationship indicated in the question may be productive and useful to both sides provided one preserves both mutual and self-respect. This is, naturally, not merely a question of formalities, but means first

Maryam Rezvan

Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and
Ethnography, Russian
Academy of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
maryam.rezvan@kunstkamera.ru

of all that authors must be attentive towards their own texts, thereby showing respect not only to their own labours, but also to their potential readers; editors, as the last milestone before the text is published, being aware of their ultimate responsibility for the reputation of their publication, must have a careful attitude towards the author's text, avoiding a box-ticking approach; the 'dream reviewer', while preserving the greatest objectivity, must not forget what it is like to get reviewed oneself.

3

Here I shall permit myself to quote verses by Vera Pavlova, which are quite applicable to academic publishing, its chief characters, and their fears.

The editor weeps as (s)he edits,
 The corrector weeps as (s)he corrects,
 The writer weeps as (s)he rereads
 The seventh proof for the fourth time.
 And then, through someone's care
 From its place of treatment and confinement
 The book is set free,
 And contains three gross errors.

4

I shall risk expressing a heretical, radical idea: the institution of double-blind review is harmful to the development of scholarship. Firstly, it seems to me that this practice, which has expanded noticeably in recent years, has not led to any essential improvement in scholarly output. Serious journals were always careful of their reputations and would not let doubtful texts be published — their regular editorial boards coped with this task perfectly well. Unserious, 'rubbish' publications are still with us even today. Moreover, under the dictatorship of metrics the proportion of them has increased.

Secondly, the technical possibilities that appeared at the end of the last century have substantially simplified and accelerated the passage of texts from author to reader, but today we see how the introduction of an intermediate link, in the form of the reviewer, is complicating and prolonging it.

Thirdly, in view of his or her status, a reviewer must inevitably emphasise the shortcomings of the text in hand, and this often leads to hypercriticality.

And fourthly, in some subject areas the circle of specialists studying a particular problem is so narrow that authorial anonymity is a utopia, and this unfortunately sometimes provides an opportunity for settling personal scores. Moreover, the reviewer can often identify the author of an article while remaining an unknown quantity. This seems to me an infraction of the principles of academic solidarity. Besides, the editors' choice of reviewers is still an absolutely closed

process, unregulated by any rules, which leaves a space for ‘editorial arbitrariness’ and returns us to point 1.

We all know that there comes a point in working on a text when it is necessary to put a full stop to it: one can improve it endlessly, but the ideal text is unattainable. Alas, I know of cases when reviewers’ remarks have led to an author refusing to publish, although the variant of the article sent for review contained valuable material and could perfectly well have been made public. All the precedents of that sort that I know of concerned young scholars or students. This calls to mind an episode from Sergei Dovlatov’s *Craft*:

I know our clever, talented critics. They spend eleven months of year on the problems of the sequence of consonants in Rabindranath Tagore. Then they’re given a contemporary author to review. Not entirely officially. Then our critics roll their sleeves up. They mobilise all their talent, all their intelligence, all their objectivity. All their unsatisfied exigence. And they swoop down from this height like hungry hawks upon their prey. The order has been given, and they can! They are permitted to show off all their intelligence, all their talent, the full measure of their secure objectivity.

<...> Urban has written a fair review. He has written it as if my book had already been published, and is lying on the counter, and around it lie even more remarkable compositions, to which I must be equal. That is, Urban has written his review as a passionate fighter for eternal truths.

<...> Urban became very animated. ‘You know, an interesting manuscript generates high expectations. And an untalented one quite the reverse...’ ‘Clear enough,’ I think. ‘An untalented manuscript generates low expectations. And in view of those expectations it must be approved and published. An interesting one generates high expectations, and from the height of those expectations it must be annihilated...’

B. SPINOZA

1

I have been in the roles of author, editor, and manuscript peer reviewer more times than I can count. My experiences are positive most of the time. When I am the author, the editors and external reviewers give me good advice about how to improve my opus. They save me from publishing items that would prove embarrassing, that omit important primary sources and secondary literature or draw questionable conclusions. They affirm the underlying quality

of my scholarship, boosting my confidence as a scholar. When I am a peer reviewer, I see the newest scholarship in my field just as it is reaching fruition. These emerging works educate me about unfamiliar sources and concepts that I can apply to my own research. Even the articles that are fatally flawed teach me valuable lessons, if only how NOT to present scholarly work! The same is true when I am the editor. Editors encounter a huge number of submissions, many of which lie outside their immediate area of expertise. The knowledge I gain allows me to remain current in the field as a whole, enhancing my research and my teaching. I have become a much better writer by seeing so many examples in so many different styles. In addition, in all three roles I have the satisfaction of serving the scholarly enterprise as a whole — the production of new knowledge.

Even at its best, though, the author / reviewer / editor relationship has its frustrations. Many relate to time management. As an editor, I have the responsibility of ascertaining that the journal appears on schedule. I have succeeded only because I am blessed with competent, efficient staff who hold everyone, including me, to deadlines. Many editors are not so lucky. They have no staff at all because the publications generate insufficient revenue to pay salaries, and so they struggle to fulfil editing duties amidst other professional obligations. As a result, journal issues sometimes appear years after the nominal date on the cover page. As an author, I frequently had publication of articles delayed by months and even by years. Long periods would go by and I would hear nothing from the editors. In a few cases, the articles appeared in print without the editors ever consulting me about editorial emendations or sending me page proofs, so huge mistakes made their way into print. Authors also experience time crunches, so that they cannot meet deadlines. I have missed a few deadlines myself. Usually, authors have compelling reasons for the delays, such as illness, family tragedies, burdensome administrative or teaching duties, or catastrophic computer failure. Peer reviewers often put off their work on submitted articles for understandable reasons. They receive no payment and garner no public recognition for their efforts, so it is not surprising when they make writing their reports a low priority. However, when authors wait months for a decision on their article, they nag or even harangue the editors, who cannot do more than plead with the peer reviewers.

Another less common frustration relates to plagiarism. Only rarely do authors actually steal another scholar's published work and pass it off as their own. In those cases, sharp-eyed reviewers spot it, and editors ban them from publishing. A more frequent problem is self-plagiarism, when authors recycle material that they published previously. In Russia, this practice has been unobjectionable, but it is frowned upon in the West. As a rule, Western journals require newly submitted articles to contain at least 75% material that has

not previously been published, even if the prior publication was in a different language. (However, it is completely acceptable even in the West for authors to incorporate into a book material that previously appeared as an article.) Once again, the reviewers invariably notice the repetition. Often they are alarmed, imagining that some unscrupulous newcomer is trying to steal Famous Scholar Z's work. But it is just Famous Scholar Z, trying to squeeze out an additional publication on the basis of some old research. When I as an editor have pointed this out to Scholar Z, I have received a variety of responses. One Scholar Z pronounced themselves to be 'abashed'; they hadn't realised that half the new article had already appeared in their published book. Another Scholar Z tried to argue that there really wasn't any significant crossover between the new article and the old one. I checked back with the reviewer, who pointed out that nearly all the footnotes were identical and occurred in the exact same order. I rejected the article and told this Scholar Z to submit a completely new piece next time.

2

Ideally, authors, editors, and peer reviewers see themselves as partners in the production of high-quality scholarship. The authors undertake the most significant work, that is, finding the sources and compiling the data, drawing conclusions from them, and presenting the whole in a cogent, accessible manner. The best authors wait to seek publication until their research is complete and their ideas are fully formed, and they welcome input from peer reviewers and editors about how to improve their work. They take guidance graciously and respond promptly and cordially. They thank the editors, peer reviewers, and journal staff (if any) for their efforts in an informational footnote in the article itself and / or in a private note. In my capacity as an editor, I have encountered quite a few ideal authors. Once in a while, they show their gratitude in a more tangible way — a cup of coffee at a conference, a copy of their book, or a small edible treat mailed to the office. I myself have not always been an ideal author.

Ideal peer reviewers see their role as helping authors to speak effectively in their own voices. They start by discerning, as well as possible, what the author is trying to accomplish with their opus and restating it in their reports. Many times, the peer reviewer actually states the author's thesis more cogently than the author did, thus helping the author to think more clearly about their project. Then the ideal peer reviewer points out the strengths and weaknesses of the article frankly and in detail. Usually the emphasis is on the weaknesses, but that is appropriate. The most helpful peer reviewer not only points out flaws, but also proposes ways to correct them: additional evidence to incorporate, secondary literature to consult, restructuring the argument, and rewording awkward phrasings. Finally, a fine peer reviewer keeps in mind the author's feelings, and presents criticism in a helpful, encouraging tone.

The ideal editor has the same traits as the ideal peer reviewer in dealing with authors. When peer reviewers produce reports that are less than ideal or that contradict each other, the editor guides the author in how to navigate them. Sometimes the editor has sufficient knowledge of the topic to add guidance of their own; other times, the editor can only offer suggestions that might or might not prove fruitful. Experienced editors know that authors will not be fully pleased with any decision other than an unconditional acceptance of their work for publication, and compose decision letters to mitigate the disappointment. An acceptance conditional upon revisions needs to spell out exactly what changes are needed, while congratulating the author on having succeeded to this point. A 'revise and resubmit' letter should detail the improvements that are essential and it should accurately convey the editor's sense of whether the article ultimately can be published in anything close to its current form. A rejection letter must affirm the author's dignity; nobody intends to submit a bad piece of work! As an editor, I developed some gentle phrases to soften the blow: the work is 'too preliminary' or 'better suited for a different sort of journal'.

3

I have had multiple experiences with antiheroes of all three types, but for reasons of space, I will provide only one real-life example of each. Names are changed to protect the guilty.

Antihero Author: Let's call them 'Ishmael'. As editor, I sent Ishmael an encouraging revise-and-resubmit letter along with the two peer review reports. The peer reviewers called on the author to broaden their source-base, connect with a specified body of secondary literature, and remedy an inconsistency in the argument. Soon afterwards, Ishmael sent me a nine-page, single-spaced retort: The article was perfect as it was, Ishmael insisted. I was practising 'Soviet-style censorship'. The peer reviewers were idiots, and the only reason they criticised the article was because they harboured personal animus against Ishmael. Ishmael *demand*ed that, breaking confidentiality, the names of the reviewers be revealed to them! (Of course, this is impossible; the journal practices stringent double-blind review.) Finally, Ishmael threatened me: if I did not agree immediately to publish the article 'as-is', Ishmael was going to 'take the matter to the Editorial Board — if not higher!'. Well, the Editorial Board of Journal X answered to me and not I to them, so that was not much of a threat. I doubted that the Head of State of my nation would be inclined to get involved.

Antihero Reviewer: Let's call them 'Jael'. Jael had been a competent reviewer in the past. Jael's reports were not vituperative or too brief to be valuable, as some are. (On a few occasions, I received peer review reports that consisted of a one-sentence postcard.) So when I received a new article in Jael's field, I asked them to review it. Jael

agreed, and after a couple of months Jael emailed to say that the report was complete. However, Jael refused to submit the report without compensation, demanding either payment at the rate of \$100 per hour, or a seat on the journal's editorial board. I told Jael to keep the report and that the journal would not collaborate with Jael in the future. Several months later, Jael sent me an apology. I accepted it.

Antihero Editor: Let's call them 'Abimelech'. Abimelech gained a reputation for privileging articles submitted by friends and patrons while sloughing aside other submissions. If articles by members of Abimelech's privileged circle garnered less-than-favourable peer review reports, Abimelech simply ignored them and accepted those articles anyway. When articles by outsiders to the charmed circle received positive assessments, Abimelech threw them out, and personally wrote up new, negative reports. Abimelech then used those negative reports 'from the anonymous peer reviewers' as justification for the decision as editor to reject those articles. After some time the journal's governing body found out about this practice and removed Abimelech from the position of editor.

4

Authors, editors and reviewers must find a way to coexist peacefully, because they need each other. Of course, in this age of the Internet, authors can easily disseminate their work without submitting it for peer review or placing it in formal scholarly venues. But self-published work of this sort rarely earns the author professional recognition, because nothing distinguishes it from the huge quantity of uninformed or even falsified material that floods the Web. To build their professional reputations, authors need their work to appear in refereed outlets. Peer reviewers and editors supply essential quality control, so that audience can rest assured that the works they read are reliable. Although they are gate-keepers, they can fulfil that role in a way that benefits the authors also. Editors foster new directions in scholarly endeavour, but in order to do so, they need authors to create new research and peer reviewers to vet it. For all its weaknesses, the current triad of authors, editors and reviewers is sound and valuable.

OLGA TKACH

Olga Tkach

independent researcher
St Petersburg, Russia
t_olya@mail.ru

The questions asked by the editors have made me revising the list of my publications as a story of intellectual search inextricably linked with the series of my relationships with various participants who have facilitated or hindered the arrival of the texts. I have played all three of the parts that we were invited to consider,

though I have more often been an author or co-author than one of the others. This is the position from which I have basically written my remarks.

1

As an author I was revolted by a recent example of interaction with a certain Russian social science journal, which is considered a leading one. I had prepared my manuscript for a special issue, and was waiting for it to be reviewed. However, instead I received an email with the following content: ‘Your article has been edited and approved for publication. You are urgently requested to telephone the editorial office. Certain clarifications are necessary.’ I did not know the status of the person who had been working on my text, as the letter was signed only with her name. I shall not even mention the absence of the procedure of blind review here. My statement that I would like to work on my own text on the basis of any critical comments received the reply ‘What for? I’ve already edited it.’ Then began a correspondence with demands to have my authorial right to work on my own text restored, with reference to academic standards, on my side, and on the other side officialese and the involvement of the authoritarian editor-in-chief, who tried to put me in my place by issuing commands. I had the rather unpleasant feeling that my text had been taken hostage. I still regret that I gave in and left it there. I simply met halfway the colleague who was preparing the special issue: I would have ruined it by withdrawing my article. Curiously enough, this article was later noted by the journal as ‘a high-quality article’, but, it goes without saying, not by my standards. For me it was still disfigured and no longer mine. Needless to say, this journal no longer exists for me.

Another story with which I was involved as the co-editor of a special issue in an international thematic journal is also not very pleasant. There were quite a lot of texts in this special issue, but my co-editor and I decided to sacrifice one of them and rejected it, since it was the most primitive and featureless in comparison with the others, and its argument was quite banal. The author had practically failed to respond to our comments. As a result we decided that the volume would lose nothing by omitting that text, and we informed the editorial board accordingly. But this is where things went wrong. Out of all of us, the author was the researcher with the highest status and with a recognisable name; the rest of us were all more or less at the same stage of our careers. In a word, the journal took a completely uncompromising position and categorically insisted that we should retain that text, maintaining that we were mistaken about its quality. Of course, the editorial board did not want to lose a famous author, who had come to them together with our special issue and might not have chosen their journal in other circumstances. And not without reason: that article has indeed been the one most frequently downloaded in our special

issue: the name has its effect. But that did not change anything in our opinion as co-editors.

2

My experience as an author shows that it is usually most congenial to work with the editors of collective monographs or collections of articles. Unlike journals, where the whole process is practically anonymised and standardised, there is room for a personalised approach to the authors, more flexible work plans and a much more relaxed atmosphere. As a rule, a collection of articles is the project of one or more researchers who have assembled their authors through an open call for papers (less often) or through their own networks (more often). Frequently these volumes come about through many years of collaboration and they are prepared by existing collectives. Unlike the atomistic work on a journal article (even a special issue), preparing a collection feels like teamwork including constant direct contact with the editor. Unlike journal editors and even reviewers, who are by no means always specialists on the subjects the author works on, the editor of a collection is such a specialist by default. The assessments by the editor of the volume, as a rule, are more attentive and thoughtful, unlike the blind review at a journal which is sometimes more like an execution. With the editor of a collection one can discuss both one's chapter and their reaction to it. One can agree on one's own work schedule while the editor is working on other chapters.

Some years ago, I had a very nearly ideal experience of writing a chapter for a collection. The editor, from the United States, had been seeking authors through her connections and had come across me by chance: we were not previously acquainted. Having looked at my abstract, she rang me up to discuss in detail the relevance of my chapter to the overall idea of the volume. Then she sent out a letter to all the authors, introducing us to each other, and a detailed schedule of work, and also provided us with the rules for formatting references. Thus, I learnt the names of the participants in our international team and their topics. She went on to create a Google drive on which she placed the general literature on our topic, such as could be useful to us, and also individual folders for each of us. We were supposed to place our drafts there at various stages of our work, read each other's drafts and discuss them at webinars. However, this appealing idea was not fated to become a reality — we were all too busy. Still, the editor successfully fulfilled her role by herself, read our texts, even more than once, edited them, discussed them, gave advice and sent us the necessary literature. I think that she took a quite serious interest in every chapter. In parallel with all this she regularly sent out updates informing us of how the work was going, how we were progressing, and what was coming next. She was always in contact. For me this was incredibly valuable: the transparency and reciprocity of relations with the editor, the sense

of togetherness with the other authors. When the book was published, the editor made sure that we had all received the pdf of our chapter and also our copies of the book, and only then did she say goodbye. This is not a story of how an editor should mollycoddle her authors. It is about how very productive regular contact with authors and signalling the progress of the planned work can be overall. Positioning every author's text as a contribution to a collective work also inspires and leaves good memories. I am glad that afterwards the editor and I were able to meet and have face-to-face contact. It is only a pity that collections are not read and cited as actively as journal articles.

3

I am usually annoyed and irritated by those editors who think that working on the whole text — the collection or special issue — is entirely their own achievement and do not regard it as a project of many people who have become involved in it and adapted their career expectations and plans (and not only their professional plans) to it. Usually, such editors' contact with authors is in small doses and grudging, and they may disappear altogether for months on end without answering emails. Such cases are very frustrating for authors, and in my view should cause one to doubt the editors' professionalism. I have had an experience when one of the co-editors deleted my article from the project for a special edition and then cut off communication, without thinking it necessary to give an explanation. On another occasion conflict arose between the three co-editors of a volume. As it later transpired, conceptual disagreements on the quality of the final product had come to light. In this connection they kept us, the authors, in ignorance for over a year, and our texts under wraps. It is interesting that in cases like this the informational vacuum, the alienation of the text from its author and the obsolescence of the data on which it was based are not regarded as problems at all. They use authors as means to obtain their own ends or ignore them altogether. It is interesting that both of these cases happened to me with the same text. I was all the more glad of its publication at the third attempt.

4

In my view, the patterns of interaction between authors, editors and reviewers and the distribution of forces between them have undergone certain changes over the last ten or fifteen years. There are several reasons for this. Above all, the triumph of metrics, which has made scholars' careers dependent on their publication activity and the relevant indexes. On the one hand, the need to publish *n* articles a year in high-ranking journals makes authors more dependent on the opinions of editors and reviewers and, as a result, unoriginal, compliant and ready to make unnecessary compromises. On the other hand, the expansion in the market of academic publication gives authors a wider choice, and the opportunity to be flexible, withdraw their texts and expand them and publish them

elsewhere. Finally, if we ignore the notorious problems of the contemporary neoliberal academy, the interaction between author, reviewer and editor always takes place in the context of a particular academic culture, of the career stage at which each of them is, and depends, in the end, on their personal qualities.

Regarding peaceful coexistence, it is probably possible if all parties are mainly focused on the result, if there are transparent rules on which everyone is oriented and which everyone follows, and if the writing and everything connected with it is regarded by all parties as a working process, and not as means of solving some personal problems, exercising power or increasing one's own significance. It is also important to maintain a balance between formal rules and informal relationships. Force majeure can happen to anyone, but that is what feedback is for, so that everyone should be aware of any changes and that the overall process should not suffer as a result. Last but not least, it would be as well to remember to respect the author's hard labour, the no less onerous work of the editor, and the often unappreciated efforts of the reviewer. The value for all three of them should be (and is) a good (enough) text. I am convinced that only this can reconcile them all.

ANDREY TOPORKOV

1

In 1989 I proposed to a Moscow publisher compiling a popular book which would contain girls' fortune-telling practices, and love charms, and omens and superstitions, and much else — everything that might be interesting to a girl from the age, roughly, of fourteen to twenty-three. The publisher liked my idea, and asked me to compile such a book. About a month later I brought my text to the publisher, who almost immediately sent it off for review. As I was afterwards told, they gave the book to a certain very knowledgeable person, whose opinion they valued very highly. The problem was, that they then forgot who this wonderful man was, and therefore the book was in all probability not reviewed by anybody. In any case, in a month's time the book was printed, and the first 100,000 copies put on sale, the complete print run being 500,000.

Then the book started to be reprinted by unscrupulous publishers, and versions appeared in which I had co-authors, and the overall print

Andrey Toporkov

A. M. Gorky Institute
of World Literature,
Russian Academy
of Sciences
Moscow, Russia
atoporkov@mail.ru

run exceeded a million. Such curious histories were possible in 1989–1991, when it was possible to publish absolutely anything, but the market was not yet flooded with all kinds of esoterica. The main thing was that there were publishers who took decisions quickly, and authors who could think up an idea for a book ‘on the fly’ and realise it at short notice.

2

‘Author’, ‘editor’ and ‘reviewer’ are definite social roles, not just professions. The same person may be an author in one situation, an editor in another and a reviewer in a third. If it is a matter of the publication of archival or field materials, the author of the introductory articles and commentaries may in addition engage in archival research, go on expeditions and prepare the texts for publication in accordance with particular rules. The author of an article written for a collective work may at the same time be the responsible editor of that work.

The ideal editor combines three roles: firstly, as specialist in the subject area to which the work being edited belongs; secondly, as someone with a good knowledge of the written language; and thirdly, as a fact-checker and corrector of style. The ideal editor identifies various kinds of fault in the text and helps the author to rid the text of the blunders that can occasionally be found even in the works of the most highly educated scholars.

The ideal author gives the editor a text that is ready-to-go, carefully proofread and corrected, so that the editor can concentrate entirely on the content of the text. In this case the editor’s work is reduced to helping authors discover inexact formulations in their text, gaps in the bibliography, etc. The ideal editor and the ideal author work together to bring the text to an ideal state.

If it is a question of preparing a collective academic edition, the editor’s work begins with defining the concept of the edition, assembling the authorial collective and agreeing the topics of particular articles or publications. These preliminary discussions are very important, particularly if the editor is involving relatively young and inexperienced authors or if the editor is at the same time the supervisor of some of the potential authors.

I have prepared quite a lot of books on folklore, the history of literature and the history of science for publication, as responsible editor, compiler and author of commentaries. On several occasions I asked other scholars to act as responsible editors for these books. This collaboration was exceptionally useful for me. I usually included the responsible editor’s most substantial additions in my commentaries, indicating the author of these fragments. That is, not only did the responsible editor help to correct and supplement my text, but also acted in part as my co-author.

The preparation of a work of scholarship within an academic project also has its own specific features. The ideal situation is when before becoming an article a text is delivered as a paper at a seminar or conference and becomes the object of a discussion. The future editor has the chance to discuss the text with its author and other specialists at a preliminary stage, even before the text is fixed in written form.

I have also more than once been the responsible editor for books written by some other author or group of authors. Internally I always made the effort to conform to the image of the ideal editor that I described above. It is, of course, for others to judge how far I succeeded, not for me. In my youth I had some experience of work as a proofreader, and I am accustomed to correcting typing errors and mistakes in spelling and punctuation when I read other people's texts. I understand that a responsible editor has no need to do this, but I still do, out of habit rather than on principle.

The practice of reviewing has a formal character and is regularly used when undergraduate and graduate dissertations are being defended, in assessing articles for so-called indexed journals, when work that has already been written is discussed at the academic council of some academic organisation, when evaluating projects submitted to various grand-awarding bodies. The experts for such bodies sign special agreements obliging them to follow particular rules. Each expert assessment prepared, for example, for the Russian Science Foundation, begins with a declaration that the expert has no personal interest in the results of the assessment.

The expert evaluation of an application or report on a project is also in fact a kind of review, although it is done according to a particular scheme. The ideal expert is not just a specialist, but has a grasp of the whole panorama of schools and institutions in a particular field and in related specialities. He or she aims for maximum objectivity, keeps emotions under control and has a sceptical attitude towards recognised academic authorities. Since their reviews are partly visible to the proposers of the project, experts weigh their every word and write nothing of which they are not completely sure.

Since I have worked as an expert for several grand-awarding bodies for many years, and regularly review articles for journals, I have developed the habit of evaluating every academic text that I read from the expert's point of view. Obviously I don't correct it, but almost unconsciously I analyse its structure, its merits and shortcomings. Besides this, I almost automatically begin to make a critical evaluation of my own texts. This complicates the process of composition considerably, since it makes me return repeatedly to the same texts and rewrite them over and over again.

If it is a question of an article submitted to an academic publication, the ideal reviewer not only evaluates the article, but also helps the author to see its merits and shortcomings, suggests literature on the subject that has been overlooked, and catches any errors of fact in the text.

When a scholar is writing a review of a book that has already been published, there is a much freer choice of genre and style. I know from personal experience that when writing journal reviews the author, as it were, chooses a tone that will determine the overall attitude to the work under review. In this case the ideal reviewer aims for objectivity, observing a balance between evaluating the book's merits and criticism of it. Unfortunately some authors look at reviews as an opportunity for baring their teeth, and instead of a balanced evaluation offer something like a list of mistakes and misprints, which, if you want, you can find in almost any book. But what upsets an author most of all is not a negative review, but a complete absence of reviews, which suggests that your book is of no use or interest to anybody.

3 Once I received three reviews of my report on a grant-supported project. Two of the reviews were fully positive and even complimentary, while the third was a complete demolition of it, even giving the impression that its author for some reason felt a bitter hatred for me personally, and the whole review was just a means of communicating that hatred to me. I do not know who wrote that review (nor do I wish to know), but I may suppose that the person concerned was the 'antihero' about whom you were asking.

4 Of course 'peaceful coexistence' between author, editor and reviewer is perfectly possible and highly desirable. The guarantee of such interaction is the observance of the existing written and unwritten rules, positive attitudes, readiness to hear and understand another person, and to perceive a different opinion as something valuable and a stimulus to development.

I think that any modern scholar will, over the course of their life, have played the part of author, of editor, of reviewer, and many other parts. In each part a person assimilates particular habits of behaviour and mutual relationships with people playing other parts. If today you are playing the part of the author and working with the reviewer's text, and tomorrow playing the part of the reviewer and working with the author's text, but, as it were, from the other side, this enriches your personality and develops tolerance towards other people's approaches and points of view.

People who generate scholarly texts are not only authors, but also their own editors and reviewers, since they evaluate their own texts as critics and readers. It is in this regular exchange of roles that the

dialectic of the creative process evidently lies. Everyone has probably experienced a strange feeling when they read a text they themselves wrote and published many years ago. That is what makes it so important not only to read one's own text on the screen, but periodically to print it and read it on paper, so as to have the chance of seeing it with someone else's eyes.

ARSENY VERKEEV

The editors of *Forum* suggest that we should discuss the relationship between two 'camps', the authors and editors of academic journals. Conflicts do arise between them, but both groups nominally belong to the same big camp: academia. As members of the scholarly community, both share the same interest in the increase of academic knowledge. In response to the proposal of the editors of *Forum*, I shall try to answer the question of what conditions make the 'peaceful coexistence' of authors, editors and reviewers possible.

Let us start with the reverse. The opposite of peaceful and organic relations is conflict. One of the factors causing the difficult progress of conflicts is the context or environment in which they arise. Imagine, for example, that you have overcome an appreciable number of flights of stairs and a complex system of corridors so as to reach an office in order to sign papers which formally establish your employment, but in terms of content have nothing to do with it. The papers must be signed in any case, that is understandable. What bewilders you is the difficulty in finding the office: why not situate it near the entrance to the building or at least display clear signs on the way to it? Your irritation and the degree of hostility in your relations with the denizens of the office will be the greater, the further and the more intricately concealed the office is, *ceteris paribus* (and that is before we remember the possibility of circulating documents electronically). Consequently, it must be recognised that the most important attribute of peaceful coexistence between a person and the said office would be

Arseny Verkeev

Center for Russia, East Europe,
and Central Asia, University
of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, USA
arsenyverkeev@gmail.com

a convenient and comprehensible environment, reducing the costs of interactions and limiting possibilities for conflicts.

One often hears people say that the academic community is suffering from the excessive formalisation of research activity. Universities are burdened with regulations, and scholars write bureaucratic reports instead of producing new knowledge and communicating it to their students. Filling in forms takes up time and energy and can reduce motivation for substantive work. It is hard to have any effect on this situation: in some cases it is a matter of governmental regulations and in others of the managerialisation and bureaucratisation of universities from within. It is beyond us to change all that 'here and now'. But how can individual scholars act at their workplaces? First of all, correct those situations when they themselves are creating unnecessary difficulties for academic activity.

This is what happens in the course of scholarly communication, the key institution for which is the journal. Journals are controlled by editorial boards consisting of scholars, and are involved in professional self-regulation of the academic community. The authors and editors of journals, like the circumstances of their interaction, are not all the same. But let us consider the commonest situation: when an author contacts the editors with the aim of submitting a manuscript. It is not hard to trace the analogy with looking for the right office: the more actions unconnected with the content of a manuscript that the author has to accomplish in order to submit it to the journal, the more irritated they will be and the more antagonistic the interaction between them and the editorial board will be.

The context (the environment) consists of the submission requirements determined by the editorial board for authors. This means that the more the rules are inconvenient and require additional actions, the more antagonistic the interaction of any and every author who submits something to the journal with the editorial board will be. If we regard coexistence as the sum of all the interactions between authors and the editorial board, the effect of annoying rules is disastrous for the coexistence of authors and editors overall. With annoying rules the two camps nominally belonging to academic community will become more and more polarised.

What do scholars face in particular with regard to academic publishing? Leaving aside the effort they expend on actually doing the research, and the physical effort and time that go into preparing their texts, as well as the opportunity costs (the benefits that they have forgone by not engaging in activities other than writing academic articles), at least two kinds of costs remain.

On the one hand, the costs of overcoming the barriers of professional communication established by the academic community. This includes, for example, the effort to use professional jargon and terminology, structuring the text in conformity with the disciplinary norms, and following specific conventions in writing. For professional scholars these are minor costs, but they are significant for authors 'from outside', for 'aliens'. This is precisely the function of barriers, to separate professional from everyday discourse.

On the other hand, there are costs in the visual presentation of academic texts. These costs also complicate communication, but to an equivalent degree both for scholars and for outsiders. It is these supplementary costs that are imposed on authors by editorial boards of journals.

The key point of this text is that Russian social science and humanities journals create unnecessary barriers to scholarly communication by imposing manuscript submission requirements that (1) differ from journal to journal, (2) do not always correspond to those styles that are internationally accepted and (3) are not compatible with software for citation managers, and (4) are demanded to comply with at the point of a manuscript's submission, and not at the point of its acceptance for publication.

If this text were a policy paper, the following points would be recommended for the sphere under discussion: (1) manuscripts should be accepted with any style of bibliographical references, at the author's discretion (but, for the convenience of editors and reviewers, this style should be consistent throughout the manuscript); (2) references made in accordance with the journal style should be required once an article has been accepted for publication; (3) the style for references should be one that is already in existence and commonly used, and compatible with citation managers such as Zotero (e.g. Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA) or Chicago), and not be a unique style invented for the journal, which the editors might find nice, but which would be inconvenient for authors.

Authors often have to reconcile themselves to the rejection of the manuscripts that they have submitted to journals. There are many reasons why this happens, not always connected with the quality of the text — for example, its subject-matter may be unsuitable, or one particular reviewer is more severe in their judgments than another. Sometimes authors have to withdraw a manuscript themselves — say, the journal is taking too long to consider it. If a manuscript is resubmitted to a different journal, this usually requires a considerable expenditure of time on reformatting the

citations and references. Russian academic periodicals could perfectly well adopt more convenient and standardised requirements for the formatting of manuscripts, at least within particular disciplines. This text is an attempt to bring this situation closer.

JANUS YKSIPUOLIN

4

What does it mean to be a good or bad author, or a good or bad editor? We were never taught anything in particular about this, we picked up knowledge and abilities for ourselves as best we could. We were taught to write term papers, master's dissertations, and PhD dissertations, and some of us were taught to write book reviews and reviews of our classmates' work. Our supervisors read our articles and corrected them before they were submitted to a collection or journal. Some of us, beginning work in journals' editorial offices, were instructed by our more experienced colleagues. But we acquired our basic practical knowledge and experience in the process of the work and in interaction — authors with editors, editors with authors, both with reviewers. This is where mutual instruction took place: we learnt from each other — good things and bad.

Of course there are no exact rules for how one scholar (the author) and another scholar (the editor) should interact in order to turn the first one's manuscript into a published article or book. For each of us, the encounter with an author or editor (even more so with a reviewer) is a lottery — you draw what you draw. Usually, as editors, we are more experienced and more insistent: we have to deal with more authors (than the number of editors we have to deal with as authors), and it is easier for us to argue our position by referring to the journal's internal rules. As authors we are more anxious and insecure: whoever edits the text, in whatever journal or publishing house it comes out, it is still the author's creation, and bears the author's name, not the editor's. But even those who have had to try different roles, acting now as author,

now as editor, and now as reviewer, find it difficult to understand each other. Sometimes for the very reason that we are familiar with all those positions. Take me for instance...

2

Without false modesty I shall say that I am a skilled editor and, I think, by no means a bad one. I have learnt a great deal from my many years' experience and the great variety (in both level and content) of the material that I have dealt with. I have an established manner of working both with texts and authors: it is quite flexible, so as not to level everyone down, and quite strict, so that the articles in our publication should have a uniform appearance, instead of everybody doing their own thing. I am nice and patient to deal with, I do not worry the author's text unnecessarily, following the maxim of my first instructor in editorial work: if it needn't be corrected, don't correct it! I usually have a sufficient general education and sense of the language to avoid stupidities and awkwardnesses in the text. In a word, if you need an ideal, here I am. Obviously, none of us is faultless, but overall...

And what is an author with a wide experience as an editor? Without doubt, that is every editor's dream. I write intelligibly, logically and smoothly, and I have written like that ever since I was a student: I began by reading good books (and I read them attentively!), and then learnt from my work as an editor. The formatting of my articles is irreproachable, including the references and bibliography. I answer letters from the editorial office promptly and accurately, knowing the editorial process from the inside. I understand, for example, what can easily be corrected when the text has already been set, and what will need it to be reset. As for the scholarly worth of my articles, I am sufficiently professional in my own field. I have a couple of times come across editors who gave useful advice about the content of my text, but that was all. Therefore, I think that to a certain extent I approach the ideal here too. At least, that is how I must seem to my editors.

3

Aiming for perfection in both spheres, I have difficulty in understanding or tolerating those who fall far short of it. How is it possible for researchers (who graduated long ago) not to know how to construct a text consistently, set out their thoughts comprehensibly and format a bibliography? Helplessness or carelessness in this respect is extremely irritating. It goes without saying that as an editor I find it easier to make the corrections myself than to educate an ignoramus or instruct a sluggard. This saves energy on both sides, especially since careless authors (and they are the majority) dislike taking on the burden of meticulous supplementary work, and are eager to accept the editor's corrections. It is much more exhausting when authors are obsessed with their own text. This happens less often, but is more troublesome. Authors who are exacting and sure

of their own infallibility can wear the most patient editor out as they endlessly argue that their ideas have been formulated in the only correct manner, and stubbornly reinsert into the text inappropriate formulations, words and punctuation. The endless battle (a very courteous one, naturally) with an author like that seems a meaningless waste of time and energy. It is more productive to correct a few of the most unacceptable places, and leave the rest to the stubborn author: if he or she rejects the thoughtful corrections of a skilful editor, it is the worse for them; after all, the article is not going to come out under my name.

Unskilful editors, particularly those who are scholars, really depress one. One would have thought that there was nothing easier: gather experience, be meticulous and work with authors the way you would want people to work with you. But, alas, not many of them follow these sensible rules. The cause of this is evidently the aim of minimising effort, which always leads to inattention. Of course it is hard to find blunders in my own texts, but I have more than once encountered inept corrections in the texts of my learned colleagues. How painful it is to see! It remains for me to do it all again myself, so as to help out a fellow author who has fallen into bad hands.

I too have suffered from nitpicking and captious editors. I would remind you: I write beautifully, I have excellent taste and feeling for the language, and all my articles are formatted in the best possible manner. What should an editor do with such articles? Rejoice and not interfere. But no, there are those who in their zeal start latching on to words and expressions, in places they transpose words (which I had, of course, deliberately arranged in that very order), and even alter the punctuation. And completely impossible are editors (or reviewers) who think that they are the author's supervisor and instructs them like their own graduate student. This is obviously complete nonsense, at least where I am concerned. I am always nice and patient when dealing with editors. However, with the most obstinate of them it is necessary to show firmness, restore what you had written and even remind them about author's rights. It is my article and, strange as it may seem, I am the one who will have to blush at the result of ignorant editorial corrections.

1

There are many stories, but I will share one of them, which happened three times (or three of them, which were practically identical). Once, about fifteen years ago, I was invited to submit an article to a collection of conference papers. I agreed, sent it in on time, and waited for a letter with the editor's corrections. For a long time no one wrote to me, and then I received my copy of the book, in which my article had been published without a single correction. Naturally, I was astonished, but since the book was from abroad, I supposed that 'that's how they do it.' A few years later the same thing happened

with a Russian collection. I was again astonished. On the third occasion they did send me proofs, but again, not a single correction had been made in my text — I made the necessary emendations myself. How is this to be understood? Of course, all three of my articles were, as usual, faultlessly written and formatted according to the prescribed rules. But all three volumes had had editors, both academic and technical, and should they not have been doing something? Had they read the articles submitted? Who ever heard of texts being published exactly as they were when they were submitted. Even now, when I remember these cases, I am indignant both as an author and as an editor...¹

ALEXANDER ZHELTOV

First of all it should be noted that the topic for discussion, unlike the previous ‘Current Tendencies of the Academic Landscape’, supposes a greater attention to properly academic questions than to the interaction between scholarship and the ‘external’ administrative discourse. This makes it less acute from a publicist’s point of view, but allows serious internal problems to be discussed. My experience of interaction with *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* is limited to a not particularly active participation as an author. However, involvement in the work of the editorial boards of two other journals (*Vestnik SPbGU. Vostokovedenie. Afrikanistika* and *Kunstkamera*), working as one of the two co-editors of the new journal *Language in Africa*, editing / co-editing sixteen different academic publications, working on the programme committees of conferences and experience as a reviewer or author in various academic publications, do stimulate me to take part in the discussion.

Alexander Zheltov

St Petersburg State University /
Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and
Ethnography (Kunstkamera),
Russian Academy of Sciences
St Petersburg, Russia
ajujeltov@mail.ru

In the context of the proposed topic the following structure for my remarks seems logical: 1. objective factors, 2. personal experience, 3. problems. The first and third sections will be quite short, and I shall deal with the basic substantive questions, under

¹ The text, of course, is faultless, but so as not to be suspected of being an idle person who does not read texts, I have still corrected a few things [Style ed.]. So have I [Copy ed.].

the subheadings of author, reviewer and editor, in the second section.

1. Objective factors

Metrics, which have an ever greater influence on us, make us adhere to certain norms when publishing a journal — the editorial board, reviewers and authors should be international in character, an online version should be available, there should be double-blind review — and these are, in principle, perfectly rational (unlike many other bureaucratic demands). In the abstract, it is hard to object to the reasonableness of such a requirement for the assessment of quality. But a knowledge of real academic life tells us that young researchers have to acquire their experience somewhere, and there must be a possibility somewhere for publishing preliminary results, the reaction to which will help to correct the course of further research. For this reason, a complex system of academic publications at various levels is essential. At the same time the division of scholarship into ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ (‘For the first time in the scholarship of this country...’) or ‘young’ and ‘mature’ must not be definitive.

2. Personal experience

2.1. The author

When I was a student or graduate student, and senior colleagues told me that they liked everything in my text, I understood that they found either my text or me myself completely uninteresting. But I was lucky, and this was a rare event. When (as a fourth-year undergraduate) I first tried sharing my ‘discoveries’ with a senior colleague, as soon as I had uttered a few sentences I was treated to an hour-long lecture on how it should be done and argued, and where I was categorically wrong. After this I and my arguments were listened to at some length, and I was unexpectedly invited to a proper grown-up conference, which is how I began my academic career. After a training like that, my tolerance for criticism as an author is extremely high. One of my most recent articles received a review that was longer than the article itself, with a recommendation to ‘resubmit’. Understandably, my first reaction was to abandon the article and not publish it. But when you read the comments and remarks, you begin to respect a colleague who has spent so much time on your text, and to understand that much of what (s)he says is justified and could improve your article (often not everything, but that is where the editor’s work begins). The key element in this situation is the tone of the review, respectful or otherwise. And this makes me, as a reviewer, correct my own reviews.

2.2. *The reviewer*

The reviewer's basic problem is that the topic of the text that (s)he has been sent for review is not always really within his or her area of expertise. But it is not always possible to refuse, particularly if you are an editor yourself. It is understandable that often the subject-matter of the article submitted is wider than the 'academic interests' declared in the cv's of potential reviewers. As a reviewer, I try to be guided by the following principles:

2.2.1. If I know of a specialist who is more suited to the text for review, I suggest sending it to that person.

2.2.2. If an article contains evident improper borrowings, or data which I can see are unscholarly, if it ignores an academic tradition that is important for the subject, or if there is a complete lack of new data or ideas, I write a negative review.

2.2.3. If I realise that the article is at a high level and exceeds my knowledge of the subject, then I write a short positive review.

2.2.4. The hardest case is the intermediate one, when the article has a rational or heuristic core, but many faults: to explain one's comments, one often has to spend as much time as one could have spent writing an article of one's own.

2.2.5. In every case one should bear stylistic propriety in mind.

2.3. *The editor*

A journal editor is very close to the position of a reviewer, but is always burdened with the need to ensure that the journal is published regularly. An editor should not, of course, admit publications belonging to category 2.2.2, even if the reviewers have let them through. But in the case of category 2.2.4, the editor's role becomes more important: he or she often functions as supplementary reviewer or as a moderator between the author and the reviewer.

3. *Problems*

1. There are many fairly narrow areas of knowledge, where an author or reviewer is easy to recognise or identify. This raises the question of whether we need a pseudo-anonymity that can create a certain sense of hypocrisy that is inadmissible in scholarship.

2. The more competent a reviewer is in the subject of the article, the more critical the review will be, and the fact that the choice of reviewer is the editor's job creates an opening for subjectivity.

3. The way in which an editor chooses more or less critical or sympathetic reviewers can represent a significant intervention into the process of reviewing and publishing articles.

On the whole it should be acknowledged that the system for publishing articles currently offered by many academic journals may not be ideal, but it is quite reasonable. Its application and putting into practice, of course, depends to a great extent on the personal conscientiousness and competence of editors, reviewers and authors, but without that no system would work.

ALBERT BAIBURIN

**‘Peaceful Coexistence’ Is Possible, if...
(Afterword to the Discussion)**

We decided to devote the ‘Forum’ in our anniversary number to the relationships between authors, reviewers and editors. It might be said that we decided to devote it to ourselves, since all the members of the journal’s editorial board play these parts to one extent or another.

It seems to us that the topic put forward for discussion is now acquiring a particular meaning, given those changes in academic life that have resulted from the introduction of metric indicators. Among these is, first and foremost, the scholar’s position of dependency on the number of his or her publications in journals with high ratings. How have the relations between author and editor changed in this situation (if they have)? What is the position of reviewers in the process of preparing the text, and how essential is the institution of review? Finally, how have authors’ views and attitudes to preparing the text changed? There are plenty of questions, but we have confined ourselves to the most general ones, oriented towards the existing relations between the participants in the process of producing academic knowledge.

The participants in the discussion were primarily those of our colleagues who have experience of working in a least two of the roles — author and reviewer — and many as editors too. Their ideas are that much more interesting, insofar as the relationships that have come about were examined ‘from inside’, from several points of view.

Albert Baiburin

Peter the Great Museum
of Anthropology and Ethnography
(Kunstkamera), Russian Academy
of Sciences / European University
at St Petersburg
St Petersburg, Russia
abaiburin@yandex.ru

1

The nature of the questions proposed for discussion, and their tone, presumed that they could be answered with varying degrees of seriousness. However, only D. B. and Janus Yksipuolin made full use of that opportunity. The stories offered in response to the suggestion to share one’s experience of interaction with

an editor / author (first question) demonstrate the range of possibilities and the unpredictability of each participant's actions. At the same time they are most instructive and even beneficial, at least in the sense that they incline us towards the probability of encountering the most unexpected variants of interaction. What price, for example, the editor's question to the author of a monograph: 'Why on earth did you choose this topic? Is anyone really going to be interested in it?' (Olga Khristoforova). In such cases, naturally, there arise questions of professionalism, of the observance of written and unwritten rules, and much else. These stories can probably be regarded as preambles to more specific subjects, directed towards the explication of ideas about the basic types of authors, editors and reviewers.

2

2.1. *The author's dream editor*

Some of the authors associated the publication of a scholarly text with the birth of a child: '[T]he author is the woman in labour, the editor is the certified nurse midwife and the reviewer is an external observer, say, an obstetrician. In this metaphor the author is the main hero of the process, but also subject to the power of the other two participants, who "know how best to do it"' (Olga Khristoforova). The metaphor of childbirth assigns an honourable status to the midwife. As D. E. writes, 'The ideal editor is a sort of Socratic midwife (cf. Plato's *Theaetetus*): he or she assists in "bringing into the world" the most successful formulation, bringing a thought to its logical conclusion, and, if necessary, turning the research perspective in the right direction.' It is curious that in other replies the editor is mostly assigned an ancillary role. From Victoria Chervaneva's point of view, 'The ideal editor is careful with the author's text, does not impose unnecessary corrections, preserves the author's style and the author's words. This manifests both the professionalism and the tact of editors who can keep themselves within bounds and not exceed their competences. An editor is not a co-author, and not the supervisor of a wayward student whose text is more easily rewritten than corrected, and therefore editors must always remember that their role is not primary, but ancillary.'

It turns out that the editor's main task is the external 'processing' of the text, on condition of retaining the authors' concepts and the special features of their style (if any such are discernible). However, other notions of the author's dream editor are also expressed. In Andrey Toporkov's opinion, 'The ideal editor combines three roles: firstly, as specialist in the subject area to which the work being edited belongs; secondly, as someone with a good knowledge of the written language; and thirdly, as a fact-checker and corrector of style. The ideal editor identifies various kinds of fault in the text and helps the author to rid the text of the blunders that can occasionally be

found even in the works of the most highly educated scholars.’ It is evidently a question of different kinds of editor. The editor of a journal is one thing, and the responsible editor of a collection of articles quite another. Andrey Toporkov’s ideas evidently apply to the latter. And editor working for a journal can hardly be a specialist in all the fields to which the articles (s)he edits belong.

A benign attitude by the editor towards the author is particularly important in those cases when the author is a young researcher. For Natalia Pushkareva, ‘the ability to inspire a young author is a most important skill for an editor, or for anyone who works at a publisher, and may sometimes determine a scholar’s fate. Colleagues might criticise a text, but an editor must praise it, and never write or express any negative remarks whatever. That is the reviewer’s job. I have learnt that lesson, and when I am an editor I always try to praise graduate and doctoral students in advance, finding discoveries and successes even in feeble works.’ And again: ‘I have encountered such ideal editors, and more than once, but... in the past. They knew how to say what I had in mind more briefly and more vividly than I could myself. They were never in a hurry and offered their variants in pencil in the margins or between the lines. And now where have they gone?’ Laments for the disappearance of ‘real’ editors are quite common, but, strangely enough, they are easily combined with stories of the arbitrary actions of the editors of the golden age, which can be found in the answers to the first questions.

An editor must deal not only with authors, but also with reviewers. It is the editor, or editorial board, that chooses the reviewer, schedules the work and keeps in touch with the latter.

Olga Khristoforova considers that for a reviewer ‘the ideal editor would be polite, give realistic deadlines and send intelligible forms for the review.’ The editor’s position is unenviable: ‘mediating between authors, reviewers and the editorial board takes up a lot of time, and it is frequently the editors who are the butt of the irritation generated by the decision of the editorial board, the attacks of the reviewer or the intransigence of the author’ (Anton Kukhto). One way or another, the editor, in the opinion of the authors of the responses, is the key figure not only in preparing the text for publication, but in the selection of the material that is sent in to the editorial office. Ideal editors are aware of the limits of their power and despite the surprises that the author and reviewer might have in store, do their best to make a high-quality publication out of the texts that have been selected for publication.

2.2. The editor’s dream author

From the editor’s position, the ideal author is distinguished above all by the fact that the article that he or she has submitted requires

hardly any correction. What is more, such an author must take an understanding attitude towards correction and justify their position if they disagree with the proposed changes. In any case the author must be ready for discussion and not express his / her dissatisfaction with the editor's actions (Olga Khristoforova, Svetlana Kleiner and others). The ability to formulate and express things logically counts as a key desideratum in an author. In Natalia Pushkareva's view, 'if the editor has not understood what has been written, it is the fault of the author, who will not be understood by other readers either.'

A substantial part of the editor's work consists of formatting the author's text. It is no accident that this takes up much space in the responses. As Victoria Chervaneva writes, 'The best author, I feel, is one who takes a serious and responsible approach to referencing sources and quotations, and makes sure that they are exact and correct. The most laborious part of the process of editing is usually the reverification of the bibliographical apparatus. In my experience as an editor the nicest authors were those who were themselves editors for some other journal. So I would say that the editor's dream is another editor.'

Here a book editor's opinion is rather different from the opinions of journal editors. Andrey Toporkov writes: 'The ideal author gives the editor a text that is ready-to-go, carefully proofread and corrected, so that the editor can concentrate entirely on the content of the text. In this case the editor's work is reduced to helping authors discover particular inexact formulations in their text, gaps in the bibliography, etc. The ideal editor and the ideal author work together to bring the text to an ideal state.'

From the reviewer's point of view, the ideal author is 'one in whose published work you can see that the advice has been taken into account and the mistakes that the reviewer has noticed have been corrected' (Olga Khristoforova).

Punctuality is another trait of such an author, particularly in correspondence with the editor. Moreover, this quality is applicable likewise to the other participants in the text's preparation, and perhaps to the reviewer above all (Anton Kukhto and others).

It is worth noting that the author is assigned a 'subordinate' role in the triangle. The conditions are dictated by the editor / editorial board and the reviewer (it is appropriate here to remember Bulgakov's words, 'The author has no rights', which form the epigraph to D. B.'s response). Still, an author who has supplied a quality text and is ready to discuss it is not likely to feel oppressed.

2.3. The dream reviewer of both of them

The practice of compulsory review has only become widespread in Russia during recent years, although, of course, it did exist before.

Really, every reader (including the author himself / herself) is to some degree a reviewer. However, the fate of the article depends on the character of the reviews that the editorial board of the journal receives, and that is why the figure of the reviewer is so important both for the author and for the editorial board. If the reviewer makes useful remarks about the content of the article, the author gets a chance to improve it. For the editor or editorial board, the reviewer's recommendations are the basis for accepting the article and further work on it, or for rejecting it. It is impossible to disagree with Victoria Chervaneva's opinion: 'The ideal reviewer does not simply evaluate the article; he or she gives the author recommendations that not only allow the article to be improved, but also reveal new prospects for research, inspire and encourage. In fact, the practice of scholarly review is intended to make a learned journal a platform for discussion, academic seeking, trying out ideas and exchanging experience.'

Not all authors are grateful to reviewers for their remarks. Of course, a great deal depends on the character and tone of these remarks. I am close to the position of Tatyana Ivanova, who writes: 'My ideal reviewer <...> is a meticulous and demanding (but at the same time courteous) colleague, whose academic interests are as close as possible to the subject studied by the author.' Olga Khristoforova thinks that the ideal reviewer 'observes deadlines (this matters to the editor), criticises the text on the basis of what it contains (and not what it does not contain), does not demand everything be rewritten in accordance with his or her own view of the subject, gives specific advice to improve the text, and does not get heated (all this matters to the author).'

We expect of a reviewer not only substantive recommendations, but also other seemingly less important characteristics such as punctuality, which is manifested primarily in keeping to deadlines. It is no accident that many of the people who have sent in responses write about this. In Svetlana Kleiner's opinion 'The editor's dream reviewer is someone who sends in the review on time and is clear about what the strong and weak points of the manuscript are. If the second of these is unproblematic, the first is a constant headache. It's a life of interminable reminders and delays to the point when "I do realise that it's been five months, but I'm afraid I've now realised that I'm not going to be able to write that review for you after all" (that really happened, and that, of course, was a total nightmare).'

In evaluating the reviewer it should be borne in mind that reviewing is, essentially, 'philanthropic' in nature. Although they are constantly weighed down with all kinds of duties, reviewers take on the writing of assessments, in Anton Kukhto's words, 'only out of noble motives,

their only reward being the gratitude of the editors, and occasionally of the author. In such conditions you learn to value not only punctuality as such, but also the ability to say no.’

3

3.1. *The antihero editor*

The proposition of describing one’s antihero editor / reviewer / author was not taken up as widely as the previous proposition of describing one’s ideal heroes. The antihero editor is a particularly uncommon figure in the responses. More than that, Natalia Pushkareva writes: ‘Never in my life have I encountered reviewers or editors whom I could call “antiheroes”, perhaps because I assume that the editor, reviewer or critic are always right. The author is not, but they always are. They are ordinary readers, and if you have not convinced them, that means your arguments are not worth a brass farthing, and “your modelling’s rough, you don’t love them enough, what’s wrong is your stuff, and it’s nobody’s fault.”’ It is hard to agree that editors and reviewers are ordinary readers. Ordinary readers are not as intimately involved with the text as reviewers, nor do they have the possibility of correcting it, like editors. Giving them the right to be always right in their relationship with the author makes one reconsider the established hierarchy and remember the saying amongst editors that ‘the author is always right’, which, however, is often used ironically.

There are, nevertheless, antihero editors. For example, D. E. identifies two kinds of them: ‘The first kind of ‘editor as antihero’ is the one with petty respect for the rules. His or her work tends to be limited to technical formatting and occasionally corrections on matters of “taste”. They prefer not to ask any questions about the substance of the article, leaving any unclear or debatable expressions to the author’s conscience. The second kind is the dictator, who aspires to the role of “midwife” (see above), but is intolerant and uncompromising. An editor of this kind lets it be clearly understood that any opinion other than their own is wrong, and that they know for sure how the material ought to be interpreted and how the article ought to have been correctly written. Any article that doesn’t conform to the preconceptions of the school to which they belong, or from which they emerged as young scholars, will certainly provoke ill-concealed irritation.’

A similar kind of antihero is described by Victoria Chervaneva: ‘This is an editor possessed by a particular “editorial conceit”. How does this “conceit” manifest itself? First of all, in unnecessary corrections, even going so far as rewriting the author’s text. I am profoundly convinced that the editor’s field of action is delimited by the bounds of the linguistic norm: the editor has a right to make a correction only where those bounds are transgressed. But if the editor’s

“creativity” means substituting subordinate clauses for gerundival constructions and vice versa, this is not work, but imposition of tastes and a lack of professionalism.’ Other examples of editors’ ‘creativity’ may be found in the answers we got to the first question, for example the case described by Konstantin Pozdniakov, when an editor arbitrarily changed one of the characters in an African story on the basis of her own ideas of what a family in a children’s story ought to be.

It follows from such stories that antihero editors typically exceed the limits of their proper authority in their work with the text and with the author of that text. Our demands on the work of the editor / editorial board do not end there. Editors usually complain of the unreliability of reviewers and authors, but authors too do not always receive information from the editor on time (in such cases the very expression ‘on time’ seems inappropriate). Andrey Adelfinsky asks: ‘[W]ho is going to write about the lack of feedback for authors? About acceptances followed by silent rejections? About manuscripts that remain unread, sometimes for up to a year?’ One possible answer to the last question is to be found in the response from B. Spinoza: ‘Peer reviewers often put off their work on submitted articles for understandable reasons. They receive no payment and garner no public recognition for their efforts, so it is not surprising when they make writing their reports a low priority. However, when authors wait months for a decision on their article, they nag or even harangue the editors, who cannot do more than plead with the peer reviewers.’

3.2. *The antihero author*

In D. E.’s opinion, ‘Several kinds of “author as antihero” may also be identified. First of all, there’s the “couldn’t care less” author. Their articles are carelessly written, there are mistakes in quotations, they take no notice of some of the editor’s questions, and answer the rest in such a way that it is difficult at first to make sense of the comments. You get the feeling these people would be relieved if the editor answered all the questions and spared the author all this trouble. Then there’s the “hypersensitive” author. This type, by contrast, is pained by any interference with their text and being asked to clarify something (particularly if the editor is, as they would say in the army, “of a lower rank”) is likely to provoke astonishment. A subtype of the “hypersensitive” author, “the casuist”, is also occasionally encountered. This kind of author is usually very well versed in the problems of editing and publishing, and provides commentaries (frequently extensive) not only on questions and corrections, but also on elements of the journal’s house style.’

It is usually considered that an author is dependent not only on the reviewer, but on the editor. However, other relationships are possible

in this triangle. As Anton Chekhonte writes, there are authors ‘who treat the editor in the manner of an eighteenth-century landowner addressing a house serf. Interestingly, well-known scholars tend to be a delight: they receive suggestions in a businesslike way, usually accepting them without demur, or explaining courteously why they do not agree. The real nightmare is people who, on the basis of one published article, think they know everything and are above criticism of any kind. In those cases, even correcting a typo can provoke outrage.’

It must be said that cantankerous authors are encountered quite often. This is how this type is described by B. Spinoza: ‘Let’s call them “Ishmael.” As editor, I sent Ishmael an encouraging revise-and-resubmit letter along with the two peer review reports. The peer reviewers called on the author to broaden their source-base, connect with a specified body of secondary literature, and remedy an inconsistency in the argument. Soon afterwards, Ishmael sent me a nine-page, single-spaced retort: The article was perfect as it was, Ishmael insisted. I was practicing “Soviet-style censorship.” The peer reviewers were idiots, and the only reason they criticized the article was because they harboured personal animus against Ishmael. Ishmael *demande*d that, breaking confidentiality, the names of the reviewers be revealed to them! (Of course, this is impossible; the journal practices stringent double-blind review.) Finally, Ishmael threatened me: if I did not agree immediately to publish the article “as-is,” Ishmael was going to “take the matter to the Editorial Board — if not higher!”. Well, the Editorial Board of Journal X answered to me and not I to them, so that was not much of a threat.’ (Compare the cases described by Svetlana Kleiner and Anton Kukhto.)

Of course, an editor may experience negative emotions on account of the content of the text and the author’s ideas of what scholarship is. In Anna Lazareva’s opinion, ‘The *nightmare author* regards scholarship as arcane knowledge inaccessible to the uninitiated. Very often such an author’s articles could very well be rewritten in simpler words. However, were the excessive terminology, intricate wording, and the bulk of unnecessary allusions removed, the work would appear poor and banal because the author did not suggest any valuable idea or approach.’

3.3. *The antihero reviewer*

A good / sensible review is in both authors’ and editors’ interests, but such reviewers are not always to be found. As a rule, the choice of reviewer does not depend on the author, but the editor often has something to do with it. Still, both of them have their antihero reviewers. D. E. is clearly expressing his position from an editor’s point of view when he writes, ‘As for “reviewers as antiheroes”, such

people confine themselves to the most general observations about the work in hand. This may be tolerable if they have no observations to make and their review is entirely positive, but a negative review of this type is meaningless, and even harmful, as it is likely to provoke conflict between the author and the editors. Worst of all, though, when the author and the writer of the review engage in a polemic, conducted (since they are not in direct contact) via the editors, who will be forced to take one side or the other. A conflict between an author and a reviewer which is intensified by the fact that they have found out each other's identities is, arguably, one of the most unpleasant and painful situations that can arise, and in one way or another damaging to everyone.'

Natalia Pushkareva evaluates the antihero reviewer from a different position: 'The worst type of reviewer and, even more so, editor, is a malicious person who tries to be witty and wound the author with his or her sarcastic comments, rebukes in capital letters and multiple punctuation marks (?!).' And once again the responses raise the question of punctuality, a lack of which is unacceptable in a reviewer. If tardiness in an author is damaging primarily to that author, '[l]ateness by reviewers, on the other hand, delays the whole process of publication: so long as there is no assessment, the editorial board cannot take a decision, the author cannot receive an answer, they begin to be dissatisfied with each other, and the editors once again find themselves in the middle of an incipient conflict' (Anton Kukhto). The position of the reviewer in the process of preparing the text raises a large number of questions. For example, Victoria Chervaneva writes: 'It is worth considering why, in the situation of interaction for a journal, a reviewer, who in a professional sense may be no better than the author, dictates conditions which the author must willy-nilly fulfil.'

Doubts about the usefulness in any sense of reviewing material submitted to journals are raised by Maryam Rezvan: 'I shall risk expressing a heretical, radical idea: the institution of double-blind review is harmful to the development of scholarship. Firstly, it seems to me that this practice, which has expanded noticeably in recent years, has not led to any essential improvement in scholarly output. Serious journals were always careful of their reputations and would not let doubtful texts be published — their regular editorial boards coped with this task perfectly well. <...> Secondly, the technical possibilities that appeared at the end of the last century have substantially simplified and accelerated the passage of texts from author to reader, but today we see how the introduction of an intermediate link, in the form of the reviewer, is complicating and prolonging it. Thirdly, in view of his or her status, a reviewer must inevitably emphasise the shortcomings of the text in hand, and this

often leads to hypercriticality. And fourthly, in some subject areas the circle of specialists studying a particular problem is so narrow that authorial anonymity is a utopia, and this unfortunately sometimes provides an opportunity for settling personal scores. Moreover, the reviewer can often identify the author of an article while remaining an unknown quantity.⁷

It goes without saying that one need not agree with certain of these arguments, but they are worth thinking about, because such considerations are being expressed by more and more colleagues who have to do with the publishing of journals. For example, Alexander Zheltov also writes about the pseudo-anonymity of reviewers (particularly in narrow subject areas), an editor's subjectivity in the choice of reviewer, and about the overall management by the editor of the process of review and publication of articles. One way or another, our authors' responses 'do not fit' the framework of answers to the questions that were asked. But, though no section on 'Problems' was envisaged, but the last question was formulated in such a way that it entirely allowed their discussion.

4

What general problems concern the authors of the responses and what do they think should be done to reduce the probability of conflict between all the interested parties to a minimum? In Arseny Verkeev's opinion, '[I]t must be recognised that the most important attribute of peaceful coexistence <...> would be a convenient and comprehensible environment, reducing the costs of interactions and limiting possibilities for conflicts.' Meanwhile, 'Russian social science and humanities journals create unnecessary barriers to scholarly communication by imposing manuscript submission requirements that (1) differ from journal to journal, (2) do not always correspond to those styles that are internationally accepted and (3) are not compatible with software for citation managers, and (4) are demanded to comply with at the point of a manuscript's submission, and not at the point of its acceptance for publication' (Arseny Verkeev). It must be acknowledged that the problems listed do exist and are far from favouring the creation of a convenient milieu for interaction. They may be solved only on the basis of a general discussion and the acceptance of common requirements for formatting manuscripts and the submission process. It is evidently time to think about creating an Association of Russian Social Science and Humanities Journals, which would be concerned with answering questions of this sort.

There are, naturally, other threats. Anton Kukhto mentions one of them: 'In my view, the main danger menacing this coexistence is the undermining of the very institution of academic editing. One keeps coming across large publishers that, in the interests of optimising their outgoings, outsource their editing and proofreading

instead of maintaining a staff of experienced employees who specialise in a particular area and know its peculiarities. Occasionally by some miracle they even do without editors altogether.' Indeed, this practice is becoming more and more widespread, particularly, as it is rightly noted, among large publishers. The situation with journals is different, thank heaven, but by its very nature the gradual winding-up of the institution of editing cannot fail to worry anyone concerned in publishing activity.

As for 'peaceful coexistence' as such, none of the participants in the 'Forum' denied its possibility. They also recognised it as a necessary condition for work of good quality in preparing a scholarly publication. It is not surprising that the very question of the possibility of 'peaceful coexistence' moved Tatyana Ivanova to ask in return: 'Don't we already have peaceful coexistence? The situation of greatest conflict is when the editors refuse to publish the author's article at the outset. In that case there cannot be any agreement between "author, reviewer and editor". But once an article has been accepted by the editors, then the author needs simply to take due note of any comments, and the reviewer and editor to exercise ordinary courtesy. All very simple.' Things are probably not quite so simple, but it is telling that the majority of responses list such essential characteristics for participants in the interaction as mutual respect, goodwill, readiness to hear and understand each other, and, of course, a general inclination towards collaboration. It is a rare event when participants in a discussion are practically unanimous: these are precisely the qualities that make it possible to overcome the difficulties that may arise between the three parties in the course of work on an academic text.

The fundamental conclusion of this short review of the responses appears to be this: constructive relationships between authors, editors and reviewers require the creation of a convenient milieu for interaction (the development of common rules and standards), professionalism on the part of the participants and the human qualities listed above.

*The answers originally written in Russian were translated
by Ralph Cleminson*