

*United in Grief:
In Memoriam Ana-Karina Schneider (1975-2024)*

*I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing times and bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve, to dry before the sun;
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.
(“Afterglow,” Helen Lowrie Marshall)*

Of the gracious person

In its increased reflection on mortality, ageing is a process deeply intertwined with the act of memorializing, commiserating and commemorating. In the latter stages of life, as your generation is fading, you feel bound to dedicate yourself to composing memorial tributes, be they to a loved one, a mentor, a dear friend, a public figure or perhaps an esteemed peer. Heightened with age, one's sense of awareness of one's own mortality is conducive to the urge to immortalize as a sublimatory, ethereal exercise. Writing in remembrance of, indeed as a homage to a fellow individual whose life regrettably ended, is like a rehearsal of one's own passing and contemplation of the implications of one's existence. As an obituarist, you are in the position of editing, sifting through a collection of material, trying to gauge how one would have wished to be remembered; your touch somewhat represents the ‘final cut’¹ of a chronicle. It comes with an ethical moment as it empowers you with the precious role of having the final edit over one's recorded history. It is a narrative, the account of a life, a summary of one's personal legacy. For, in recording the image of the deceased, you feel as though you had finally

owned your own memorializing space, that you have earned your right to express, indeed that you deserve to be remembered and loved and live on. The significance of the act will vary from one individual to another and from culture to culture. In youth-centric societies, obsessing over longevity and immortality, defying the very concept of aging, the avoidance of exposure to the experience will be endemic. For those in the latter stages of their lives, the editorial drill will be therapeutic in that it helps process and distill grief. For aging individuals, participating in the drafting of or pre-writing their own obituary can offer a sense of control over how one's story will be told after death. Either way, writing or reading obituaries is a congenial experience, prompting deeper consideration of the evanescence of a life, the obituary serving as a poignant reminder of this ineluctable transition.

As a final account of a life lived, an obituary ought to reflect the values, relationships, and accomplishments that the deceased held dear. Doubtless, all those who spent any significant amount of time around Ana-Karina will probably agree that she cherished her privacy, enjoyed quality, like-minded companionship, and, above all, valued mentorship. The consummate pedagogue, heuristic in method through and through, Ana-Karina embodied the didactic role with unparalleled grace. Ever the talent spotter, she had the innate ability to identify potential, inspire, motivate and see it further. Although an introverted personality of a timid disposition, she sparkled in the classroom, betraying her true vocation with every single teaching endeavor. Almost diffident about her achievements, she felt at home at her desk, which is where she spent the last days of her life, in trainings of trainers, as she tried to take ABC journal further and embarked upon the supervision of her first generation of PhD candidates. Illness literally cut her down in her prime.

About ten or so years ago, having written and edited a considerable number of obituaries, I entrusted my dear colleague and lifelong friend, Ana-Karina, to write mine, in the event I departed this life. It was a quid pro quo, a transfer contingent upon another, the obituarist's inevitable sense of bereavement, in exchange for a sizeable copyediting load off my chest, for among so many other virtues bestowed upon Ana-Karina was that of being a natural born editor with the keenest eye for and laser-like focus on detail. She would laugh about it, describing the job as "an old Chinese man's." Patience was another, she did the antiquarian work with

such eager attention one would have thought only good things should come to her. Indeed, she had all the four cardinal virtues exalted by classical philosophy, was prudent, just, fortitudinous, and temperant. Coupled with her protestant ethics and moral uprightness, these invaluable attributes made Ana-Karina a person of great spiritual and intellectual depth and endowment, in short, an extraordinary human being, the kind you rarely happen to meet in a lifetime. For in so many respects, Ana-Karina was from another era, too gentle, too humble, too reverential, and too gracious. She was from a realm where there are only angels that “fear to tread.”²

Capturing the essence of one’s personality is like trying to describe joy, as ephemeral and ineffable as the human being you are trying to evoke. You cling to the meaningful pictures, fall back on the memories, the mementoes, the defining moments in the hope of bringing to life someone who the rational mind knows is gone, yet the soul perceives as impossible to lose. And “there’s the rub,” for there is only so much admiration and gratitude you can express in a eulogy. And then there are the clichés, ‘she was warmhearted and had a noble character,’ ‘she was someone who treated her friends like family.’ ‘She was full of wisdom, gentleness, modesty, rectitude and respectfulness,’ all of which Ana-Karina actually was. Essentially, she was an angelic being, someone who touched so many of our lives, particularly those of her students, found weeping at her coffin at the memorial service. Her passing brought many of us together, in mourning, tender recollection and passionate remembrance.

They say all things grow in time except for grief. For whatever it is worth, for whatever solace this truism can bring us, Karina united us in grief. And as a lasting tribute, she would have probably wanted us to channel our grief into a celebration of life and regard death as the final stage of growth, spiritually, emotionally and in every other respect. Ultimately, she would have probably urged us to embrace “carpe diem quam minimum credula postero.”

Of the scrupulous, outstanding scholar

Ana-Karina’s acumen and sedulous critical-creative input were fully demonstrated in a doctoral thesis acclaimed by many a distinguished specialist as ‘mind-blowing,’ one of the sharpest, most astounding studies

in the Faulkner literature ever published in these parts of the world. It was a stellar performance, the versatility of which did justice to both her breadth and depth as an American studies scholar. A tour de force providing multiple readings of Faulkner's writing from the vantage point of every significant major critical tradition, ranging from new criticism to deconstruction and new historicism, the thesis was an intellectual feat that genuinely added to the Eastern-European, Faulknerian exegesis, particularly as she also explored the reception of Faulkner in the Romanian academia, engaging with local perspectives and the broader 'criticism of survival' that highlighted cultural resilience under trying historical contexts. The resulting monograph, Critical Perspectives in the Late Twentieth Century: William Faulkner, A Case Study (2006) examines Faulkner's works through a historicist lens, focusing on themes of identity and ideological critiques in Faulkner's canonical novels. Her interpretations often employed postmodern and deconstructive approaches, shedding fresh, invaluable light on Faulkner's alembicated narrative strategies and abysmal thematic exploration of Southern identity, trauma, miscegenation, and the racial hubris.

As well as high theory, Ana-Karina had a rare gift for close readings. She relished delving into the intricacies of a text's structure, challenging dominant readings, and unveiling the broader historical and cross-cultural contexts embedded in a literary work. Whichever the textual-critical-cultural pursuit, under Ana-Karina's pen, it was vouchsafed to be original, thorough, nuanced and principled. Probing a happy marriage of interdisciplinary and close readings – her signature mark – Studies in the Rhetoric of Fiction (2015) offers an insightful exploration of the intimate relationship between rhetorical strategies and ideological subtexts. In an apt, meticulous manner, the author sheds meaningful light on the mechanism by which rhetorical structures shape the experience of interpreting narrative fiction. Grounded in classical and contemporary theories of rhetoric, the work examines how authors manipulate language structures and narrative techniques to persuade, engage, and guide the reading process. As with the Faulkner reference work, the book has a certain ludic dimension to it, Ana-Karina pursuing with great panache fundamentals and subtleties of narrative theory, in the process addressing the mesmerizing and intrinsically ethical dimension of storytelling. She thus skillfully and

stylishly exposes the driving force in the communicative intent underlying all fiction, and the collusive part played by the reader in de/constructing meaning. Building on close readings of a comprehensive range of texts, the author fully demonstrates her exceptional ability to connect, explain and exemplify the most abstract of concepts. The work invites a timely reconsideration of the dynamics at play between narrative technique and reader reception and is as such a tremendous contribution to the field of literary criticism. Its clarity, stylistic beauty and profoundness make it accessible not only to academics but also to anyone interested in the art of storytelling.

A passionate and intuitive Jane Austen critic, Ana-Karina made notable contributions to Jane Austen studies, particularly through her nuanced interpretations of Austen's implicit influence on the pedagogy of literary theory. Ana-Karina's work on Austen impresses for its grounding in the social and cultural contexts of Austen's writing and the examination of Austen's works through the integrative lenses of feminist theory, narrative theory, and reader response criticism. One of Ana-Karina's primary contributions is her analysis of how Austen's novels subvert the social and gender norms of the Regency era, in the subtle use of irony and free indirect discourse to question and critique the limited roles available to women in her time. This approach illuminates from within Austen's strategic, sophisticated employment of narrative voice and her unparalleled mastery of conveying unspoken criticism of the patriarchal structures and social expectations imposed on her characters. From this vantage point, Ana-Karina revisits Austen's often subversive engagement with topics such as marriage, economic dependency, and personal agency, pointing to the degree to which these themes still resonate with contemporary feminist concerns.

In addition to her pedantic, but generous readings, Ana-Karina contributed to the discussion of Austen's narrative techniques, particularly to her astute handling of allusion and indirect characterization. Ana-Karina aptly evinces Austen's refinement in narrative style that not only serves the plot but also functions as a vehicle for radical social critique. Austen's use of free indirect discourse, and the manner in which the characters' thoughts and feelings are subtly woven into the narrative, Ana-Karina argues, work as effective means to convey complex psychological depth. Through these insights, Ana-Karina

demonstrates how Austen's narrative techniques invite readers to engage in a performative interpretation of character motives and societal pressures, in so doing enhancing their active role in constructing meaning within Austen's novels.

Ana-Karina's contributions also extend to the pedagogical applications of Austen's writings. As a scholar based outside of the traditional Anglo-American academic sphere, Ana-Karina offers a unique perspective on how Austen's works resonate with readers and students globally. She thus explored the enabling, empowering nature of teaching Austen in non-English contexts, where cultural differences may lead to varying interpretations and receptions of Austen's themes. By addressing the transnational and transcultural dimensions of Austen studies, Ana-Karina provided a singular contribution to Austen's global appeal and the cross-cultural relevance of her work.

On the whole, Ana-Karina's contributions to Jane Austen studies lie in the happy marriage of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches, bridging narrative theory, feminist critique, and pedagogy. Her work enriches the understanding of Austen's novels as both products of their time and as works that continue to engage readers across diverse cultural and temporal contexts. Ana-Karina's insights thus broadened the scope of Austen studies, emphasizing the depth and adaptability of Austen's literary legacy, making a convincing statement that "rhetorically less is artistically more." For Ana-Karina, less was definitely more, which is evidenced in a work limited in volume that prioritizes quality, rigor, thoughtfulness and selectivity in content.

*Ana-Karina's innovative exploits of Anne Enright's work, as well as her broader contributions to English and American literature studies, will live on; they are part of her legacy. Her work on Anne Enright, as illustrated in *Understanding Anne Enright* (2020), provides a critical analysis of Enright's thematisation of gender, identity, and embodiment within the framework of Irish literature. Ana-Karina brings to light the evolution of Enright's narrative style and her distinctive focus on the corporeality of female experiences, particularly in *The Gathering* (2007), which earned her the Man Booker Prize. Ana-Karina's analysis also engages with various contemporary theoretical frameworks, such as post-structuralism and post-feminism, which adds depth to Enright's portrayal of female voices and imbricated family dynamics in a postmodern context.*

Ultimately, Ana-Karina's investigative touch provides a nuanced understanding of her authors, linking Faulkner's Southern gothic and Enright's Irish narratives within broader discussions of identity, memory, and place.

*Beyond these focused studies, Ana-Karina contributed extensively to Anglo-American literary criticism and translation in the form of numerous pioneering articles and critical pieces, serving as editor-in-chief of the journal *American, British and Canadian Studies* for 15 years, and promoting cross-cultural literary dialogue through various publications and conferences. Doubtless, her impact will continue to resonate within Romanian and international literary communities.*

Whereas Ana-Karina's loss is not yet fully emotionally processed by those close to her, the sense of connection we are now experiencing in her legacy is vividly felt and shared.

To end with an Irish blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

Farewell and God's speed, dearest of friends!

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Notes:

1. *The Final Cut*, directed by Omar Naim, starring Robin Williams and James Caviezel, Lionsgate Entertainment, 2004.
2. *William Shakespeare*, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I.
3. *Horace*, *Odes* (I.11).
4. *Forster, E. M.*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. 1st Vintage ed. Vintage Books, 1958.
5. *Thomas Keymer*, "Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility." *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 21-38.