

*Ana-Karina Schneider: Only Connect*

*I remember the shock when I first read Howards End forty years ago. Knowing nothing of the plot, it was disturbing to find that the main character, as I thought, disappeared about a quarter of the way into the story. Forster nonetheless makes clear that the influence of Mrs Wilcox lives on to the book's end. The novel roots Ruth Wilcox in the house of the title, and she herself connects it with Margaret Schlegel, leaving a legacy of not so much a house as an energy and spirit drawn from the history of the land and the natural beauty of the converted farm.*

*This summer of 2024, it was with a more visceral shock I learned of the death of Ana-Karina Schneider, someone whose story I expected to continue for many, many more years. The motto of Forster's novel, 'Only Connect' is something I associate with Ana-Karina. I knew her principally through conferences, especially those she herself organised in Sibiu, but also in Liverpool, London, and Galway. Ana-Karina brought people together, and I saw at first hand her connecting, empowering effect on colleagues, students, and conference attendees. I will always remember the enactment of scenes from The Importance of Being Earnest to which she took early conference arrivals at Lucian Blaga University one year. Her students gave a lively, inspiring reading, clearly developing a greater love of literature through expressing the wonderful lines in their own voices. But as important was the obvious teacher's delight Ana-Karina took in seeing her students immerse themselves in their theatricals. Her interest in bringing the play to new life through those young students showed her to have the most important quality in a person that Forster divined in Howards End, the ability to connect the 'Inner life' and the 'Outer life.'*

*As well as being a kind and gracious host, Ana-Karina was a truly accomplished scholar, sharp, nuanced, incisive. Like Forster, she had a love of Jane Austen, and enjoyed the novels' ludic treatment of social*

*manners, their fascination with ambiguities of language, and their keen alertness to irony: qualities Ana-Karina had as a person as well as a critic. These aspects to Austen's fine brushwork clearly drew her to other writers less often placed in the same tradition, from William Faulkner to Julian Barnes. Her own love of literature found no better expression than in another of her roles as connector, serving as an indefatigable and inspiring editor-in-chief for over fifteen years for the journal of American, British and Canadian Studies.*

*The last time I saw Ana-Karina, I made her a present of a proof copy of the first novel by a contemporary I do believe to be in the Austen tradition. As much as Zadie Smith seems to reinvent Forster in *On Beauty*, I feel Sally Rooney reinvents Jane Austen for the twenty-first century in her remarkable debut *Conversations with Friends*. As a rare copy, it was a gift to say thank you for Ana-Karina's hospitality at another Sibiu conference, and I hope a tribute to conversations with her over twenty years at seminars, over email, and occasionally at leisure.*

*I cannot say I knew her as well as many others, but I admired her greatly and felt her influence on people. I witnessed the friendships she generated through her devotion to literature and her generosity of spirit. Like Ruth Wilcox, she has disappeared much too early from her and our story, but her legacy will remain as long as her students, colleagues and friends remember her. On behalf of many of those from across the years, I would like in conclusion to pay tribute with a line from Forster's other great novel *A Passage to India*, published one hundred years ago in 1924: 'She had gone, there was no one like her, and what is that uniqueness but love?'*

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