

*In Memoriam Ana-Karina Schneider:
A Consummate Teacher, a True Researcher,
a Genuine Friend*

I still find it hard to speak in the past about one of my most precious colleagues and friends who never ceased to be a fighter in her life. A life that was too soon defeated by a merciless disease! But I must do it in the name of academic professionalism, an unstinting sense of duty, faultless dignity, generosity, overflowing kindness and genuine friendship, all of them exemplary qualities naturally possessed by Karina.

I met Karina in 2001, when, as an MA student, I participated in the “Infinite Londons” conference organized by The British Council in conjunction with the Department of Anglo-American and German Studies of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, to which she was affiliated. She was introduced to me by my mentor, Prof. Mihaela Irimia, “our dear Mickey,” who departed from this world in 2022. Karina was radiating with joy the moment I met her, always eager to help, to provide technical and academic information and, ultimately, to make sure everyone was well. Her lady-like presence, much like her genuine smile, have left its mark on me ever since. Later on, when we became friends, Karina confessed to me: “You know, Mickey told me that we must never give up. We must close ties, be friends for ever and help each other whenever needed.” These wise words uttered to a young academic strengthened her own creed in life, as did mine.

Karina’s lady-like presence always went hand in hand with her outstanding intellectual virtues. This felicitous association was revealed to me in 2005, when I first submitted an article to the American, British and Canadian Studies Journal, one of the top-ranked in Romania. She served as its editor-in-chief for 25 years. In fact, she was the mastermind of this high-quality journal to which she gladly devoted much of her time,

energy and arduous work. Her cogent and comprehensive feedback provided in a modest and friendly manner enabled me to consider her not only an accomplished scholar – young as she was! – but also an excellent connoisseur of academic writing in English. But, above all, that was the moment which cemented our long-lasting friendship. Karina was exigent, yet in a mild way, she knew how to ask questions and elicit answers from her students, her peers and her ordinary interlocutors alike. Indeed, I realised she had nothing to do with ignorance, narrow-mindedness, superficiality and impoliteness whenever she was confronted with tense situations related to academic matters or the rejection of certain articles submitted to the ABC Journal. She had an extraordinary power to behave as if nothing bad had happened, to dodge gossip, to get over difficulties – her illness included – with a smile on her face. Sometimes I even admonished her for being too modest and lacking self-confidence, to which she answered: “Let them be! I prefer to do the best that I can.” This was Karina’s intellectual mindset and purpose in life.

Over the years, I understood that Karina was a “brand,” a flagship “institution” whose name was on everyone’s lips when it came to teaching, research and conference organization skills. I felt so excited and honoured when she asked me to peer-review a few papers submitted to ABC in 2016 and 2018, and, tense as I was, I managed to live up to both her and the journal’s academic expectations. Yet again, this task tested my own self-confidence, and Karina knew so well how to develop it. I owe a lot of that to her! The 2019 conference entitled “Craving Planet Earth: Food in Culture – Past, Present and Future” was the corollary of her ordinary concerns. Brilliant and hard-working students, PhD candidates, and great colleagues were all mobilized to make the conference a real success. Karina was also a remarkable speaker, a bon viveur, a catalyst for formal or informal discussions or conversations, be they academic or related to everyday life. She was the heart and soul of any academic event in Sibiu, not in the sense of wishing to be in the limelight, but as a purveyor of stimulating ideas and views. She put her expertise in English and American literature, as well as in literary and critical theory – strengthened by her numerous grants, scholarships and research trips in Europe and the USA – to the service of her students who adored her. In

2001, she founded “The Chocolate House” reading club, a priceless opportunity for students to voice their opinions on thought-provoking books and, most notably, to write and publish essays. She was an avid reader with a penchant for original topics, such as the work of Anne Enright, an Irish female writer that had been on her research radar for a few years. She managed to turn her project into an excellent book in 2020, as a result of her research trip to London in 2019, where we met and read together at the British Library, and where we had a great time along with her colleague – and now our mutual and wonderful friend – Corina Selejan, and her adorable sons, Cristian and Alexandru. I will always recall and cherish our stay in London in 2019, when I met Cristina Şandru, one of Karina’s close friends and managing editor for The Literary Encyclopaedia, and when we walked a lot in the picturesque Camden Town or in and around Hampton Court Palace. I will always remember her birthday party in January 2022, when I met Iris Rusu, her lovely disciple and PhD student. I will never forget how honoured I was when she accepted to give a keynote speech at the Annual Conference of the English Department of the University of Bucharest in 2021, and the wonderful time we spent together at the same conference this very year. In late June, she gave me the go-ahead for an article that will soon be published in ABC. After revising the article thanks to her usual constructive criticism, as well as the peer-reviewers’ fruitful suggestions, it was ready for publication. Meanwhile, Karina told me she had been suffering from sinusitis. Grim news broken by Iris, her close friend as well, shocked me. There was no sinusitis, but a severe, incurable and fast-growing disease. I begged her to fight till the end and that is what she did in silence, accepting her fate with a noble dignity that added to her physical grace and intellectual elegance. We last spoke in early August. September 18th was the day of her funeral, a day when Karina left the world of Romanian Anglicists and Americanists in tears, grieved and poorer. She had to come to Bucharest in late September as an external PhD examiner. Regrettably, time was not on her side. However, her strong sense of duty and self-discipline pushed her towards writing the PhD report long before her undeserved death. Such was Karina’s unwavering devotion to academic requirements and all that!

Today, when I am writing this memorial tribute, I cannot help wondering how many academics would do what she did. Karina's life was her profession, and her profession was her life, enlightening the mind of thousands of students who loved her unconditionally for her breadth of knowledge, rigour, generosity and unforgettable smile, as did the entire academic community she served with unflagging enthusiasm and unabated honesty. She was an angel among people, a model of intellectual fairness, laudable professionalism, delicacy, duty and true friendship. She was the one who introduced me to all her reliable, upright and intellectually refined colleagues, such as Ovidiu Matiu, the current head of the Anglo-American and German Studies Department, Alexandra Mitrea, Adriana Neagu, Anca Ignat, Anca Iancu, and Teodora Creangă. Karina was magnetic and charismatic, although she always disliked such labels in the name of her natural modesty. I can only say in good faith that I owe her most of my recent academic achievements and frame of mind. In a world rife with ideological disputes at social, political and, sadly, academic level, Karina was a beacon of hope, trust, tolerance and never-ending faith in human goodness, respect, exigence, perseverance and knowledge. This is how she should be remembered by her students and colleagues alike! And this is how she will forever be remembered by her delicate mother, her charming sister, Maria, and Valentin, her sister's partner. At the end of the day, Mickey's words confirmed what Karina genuinely was: a model to follow or, if not to follow, to inspire! May your spirit always shine upon us!

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