

Remembering Karl Miller

PHILIP HORNE and others

When Karl Miller died at his home in London on September 24, 2014, it was a shock, even though he was 83 and had been seriously ill for years. Poor health had long been one of his richest topics of conversation – as Andrew O’Hagan recalls, he was always saying things like: ‘I’m quite ill. I’m stricken with gout. I’ll probably die soon. Then you can all have a party and say I was no good.’ The discernible gleam in his eye and hint of a dour smile hovering below his surface lugubriousness had seemed to suggest that he would somehow continue surviving, to enrich our sense of life with the far-spreading interest of his own, and with his jokes.

Karl had a genius for friendship as well as for enmity – and it was the former that flourished more particularly in the two decades and more since his resignation in 1992 both from the co-editorship of the London Review of Books, which he had co-founded in 1979, and from the Northcliffe Chair of English Literature at University College London. He had left a mark on British and American culture – political as well as literary – in innumerable ways, but also on individuals. When his biography is written – a daunting task for someone, to encompass his importance and influence in so many spheres, yet also to catch the note of his quick, dry, dark wit, his indignations and kindnesses – stock can be take more formally of his impact on the world. It seemed a more immediately pressing matter to gather some of the many people for whom Karl mattered and for us to express his significance to one another by constructing a composite portrait.

So in June 2015, with my UCL English Department colleague René Weis, I co-organised an event entitled ‘Remembering Karl Miller’ – pitched as far as possible to convey a sense of his mind and presence and activity even to those who hadn’t been exposed to him,

and to give especially a sense of his many-sidedness – aspiring to the condition of an issue of the London Review of Books, with contributions from many who knew him.

His widow Jane Miller told me that Karl sometimes suffered at memorial services by the way they went on and on – and would mutter to her, ‘I hope we get to go home for the holidays.’ We correspondingly tried to make the occasion the kind of thing that wouldn’t have made Karl himself too restless. And this rendering of it into print will I hope be kept vivid by the variety of voices, subjects and tones – and by the variousness of Karl himself, who had in one way or another selected all the speakers. It’s particularly pleasing that this composite evocation of him, which draws on the UCL event, has found a home here, as Karl, like Jane, was a contributor to this magazine, initially as an old friend of Raritan’s late editor Richard Poirier (reciprocally, Dick wrote for the LRB). In honor of this friendship, I’ve asked Raritan’s Managing Editor, Stephanie Volmer, to fill out our portrait of Karl by reflecting briefly on his relationship to Raritan, as an addendum to the UCL remarks.

Jane had told me of Karl’s observation that the barrage of praise for the deceased at memorial services and similar occasions tended to have the effect of making others feel depressed; so it would have been unMillerian of us simply to praise Karl – we were taught by him that the things and people we love shouldn’t be too much protected from searching criticism, which can enrich our sense of their nature and character. The speakers were encouraged to avoid the blandness of nil nisi bonum, and the much bonum that was said took a warmer and more human hue for that Karl-like frankness. While the odd prickly or rebarbative passage resurfaced, since Karl had a devastating turn of wit, what predominated was a sense of his generosity and appetite for life – and art. Karl cites somewhere a saying of Lawrence’s that he particularly seized on: ‘You live by what you thrill to.’ Karl himself was thrilling; and never ceased to thrill.

Even in brief summary, Karl's career is striking. A Scot from Midlothian for whom Edinburgh was a formative place, from his schooldays at the Royal High School, Karl did two years of National Service before going to Cambridge, in 1951, when F.R. Leavis flourished at Downing College, to read English. While there he and his friend Jonathan Miller were invited to join the Cambridge Apostles, who met for Sunday evening conversazioni in E.M Forster's rooms, and he co-edited the magazine Granta, where he published poets including Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes. He spent two years, one at Harvard, studying Scottish literature, then with a young family took jobs in the Treasury and the BBC as a TV producer before becoming literary editor of the Spectator in 1958, then literary editor at the New Statesman from 1961 to 1967. He resigned in a dispute with the editor, Paul Johnson, over a contribution by William Empson. (Karl was a great resigner, and one of his recourses in quarrels over the phrasing of exam questions in the department's 'scrutiny meetings' was to offer to resign if his form of words was voted down.) He immediately became editor of the Listener from 1967, then of the LRB from 1979 to 1992. If there is a defining feature of his editorial achievement, it's his devotion to and championing of good writing, and of new writers, both as contributors and as objects of review – not just Gunn and Hughes, but (to pick a few) V.S. Naipaul, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie and Seamus Heaney. But it can't be separated from his antagonism to cant.

While busy as an editor, in 1974 Karl also became Lord Northcliffe Professor of English at University College London – a remarkable move possible mainly because his fellow-Apostle Noel Annan was Provost. His idiosyncratic methods as editor and teacher were in fact strikingly similar, and rather Socratic. Neil Rennie, another Scot, a poet and UCL professor, literary historian of the South Seas, of Pocohontas, and of pirates, was Karl's tutorial student, and describes his approach: 'In preparation for the tutorial he would read my lucubrations, my essays, and place in the margins at various points – not very often,

but occasionally, here and there – a cross. Then in the tutorial he would lean back on his chaise longue and ask why I thought he had put a cross there. He couldn't remember why, but it was to make some point about my essay – so I should know.' As a way of getting the writer to think about the writing, this was unsurpassed, if intimidating.

Karl had as yet no books to his name, but would soon remedy that with Cockburn's Millennium in 1975 (a biography of Henry Cockburn, which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize), then Doubles: studies in literary history (1985), Authors (1989), and after his retirement Rebecca's Vest: a memoir (1993), Dark Horses: an experience of literary journalism (1998), Electric Shepherd: a likeness of James Hogg (2003) and Tretower to Clyro: essays (2011). Doubleness characterised not only his subjects but Karl himself – as a journalist and a scholar he would reportedly call himself a 'hackademic', and after a morning in UCL's Foster Court he would head for the LRB offices half a mile away in Bedford, then Tavistock, Squares, saying 'I'm just going down the road'.

Karl could be prickly: he was fiercely loyal to those he valued, just as he could take a stand against those he felt went too far in one way or another. One of the speakers at UCL was Alexandra Pringle, now Group Editor-in-Chief of Bloomsbury, who looked back over 35 years to the time when she began as a PhD student at UCL and Karl called her in: 'He was furious on my behalf because someone at a dinner party had said something belittling of me. "I am seen here as an intellectual tart," he said. "You will be too. And you're not to mind."' As his publisher for Rebecca's Vest, then his agent, she met him for regular lunches, at which 'he would complain about his health then accuse me of smirking about it. Once he said, "When I'm in my coffin, six foot under, I'll look up at you and laugh and you'll be crying because you didn't take me seriously.'" At their final venue, the Chelsea Arts Club, she recalled, 'it began to dawn on me that at last the long-predicted moment was coming into view, where he would laugh at me from down below the earth and I would be so sad he was

gone.' To hear his talk, to enjoy his affectionate teasing, was a privilege for the many people who lunched with him – even if sometimes only, following his example, on a Scotch egg. Conversation was a vocation and a habit, an unending exercise in virtuosity, a rich mixed platter peppered with jokes.

In fact, print can hardly do justice to the passage with which the proceedings properly began – the screening of an unused section of an interview Karl had given to David Thompson (who kindly unearthed it) in 2012 for the BBC Arena Programme he directed on Jonathan Miller. It recalled the pleasure of seeing Karl talk, and Karl's pleasure in talking, as well as recalling what an auspicious start he had (though indeed he had met Hugh MacDiarmid and Norman McCaig while still a schoolboy in Edinburgh). Karl could digress magnificently, and this is not about Jonathan Miller but about the Cambridge he and Karl attended, and of what they found there. Karl was ill and tired, pale and less playful than in his best days; but what came across most powerfully were the energising movement of his thought, the inseparability of his sustained seriousness from his sense of humour, his moral disapproval of moralising, and his relish of the play of grand words against tangy phrases.

It was a very enjoyable time, partly because it was rather a halcyon period in terms of undergraduates' ability, in Cambridge – in Oxford too, but at that time a little more so in Cambridge, because there were two poets there, in the shape of Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, who became Poet Laureate, who were evidently very good poets – this was evident to us, when we first saw their typescripts flap from their briefcases. We would sit in our rooms reading their poems and discussing them. That was very exciting and educational – for me. I knew Gunn better than Hughes, but I knew them both, and I published them both, a great deal. There was an anthology of poetry from Cambridge which involved them [Poetry from Cambridge, 1952-54 (Fantasy Press, 1955), edited by Karl]. It was quite interesting to see how Thom and Ted bedded

down in the estimates of the dons and the undergraduates. There were dons who thought that Ted Hughes was no good, and I was taken aside once or twice by people from the professoriat who said that this will never do, and so on. I don't mean to claim prescience, but I did feel confident that the poems were good. So I wasn't much dashed by that. But I was surprised that they couldn't see that the brutalities he was executing in some of the early poems were poetry, were a form of poetry. They weren't just him being brutal. He had moved into the posture of an animal poet, of course, someone who liked animals and wrote wonderful poems about them. But there were people who didn't like him, just as when he took up with Sylvia Plath, who became his wife, I remember seeing somewhere a letter from another don, a female don, deploring her associating with Hughes, who seemed to be a peasant from Yorkshire, without many of the literary graces that Sylvia had. It was a bad misjudgement on her part, even worse than the other one.

Karl's not being 'much dashed' by the adverse views of professors, his already-mature faith in his own judgment, sounds a familiar note: some of his most caustic comments were reserved for those in authority who tried to close the door on new, individual voices, and he bristled and resisted when told things wouldn't do.

*

First, Blake Morrison – because as he explains he was Karl's student, Karl's contributor both as poet and reviewer, and subsequently himself a literary editor of distinction (of the Observer and The Independent on Sunday) – appreciates

Karl as Editor

Karl admired the kind of literary journalism pioneered at the *Edinburgh Review*, which he describes in his memoir *Dark Horses* as 'a unified field of knowledge which ran from politics to poetry'. Such happy unity wasn't to be found at the weekly magazines on

which Karl worked before arriving at UCL, which operated on the pantomime horse principle, with a front half (politics and opinion) and a back half (arts and books), and never the twain shall meet. When he founded the *London Review of Books* Karl did away with such divisiveness. Book reviews ran at essay length and often *were* essays. Poems mingled with opinion and often *were* opinion. Karl was in favour of doubles and doublings up. He opposed phoney oppositions.

He expected opposition when he arrived at UCL fearing that the academic world, no less than the world of weekly magazines, had become ‘a fortress of mutually exclusive disciplines’, its doors barred to ‘amateur intrusion’. Never mind that he came with the blessing of Noel Annan and Frank Kermode, and that the Lord Northcliffe Chair of Modern English Literature had been endowed by a press lord. Karl had been a *journalist*, an inhabitant of Grub Street, not Gower Street, and imagined he’d be surrounded by enemies who’d regard him as both an amateur and an intruder.

But the English department at UCL was no ivory tower; long before creative writers became commonplace at universities, UCL had them – A.S. Byatt was already on the staff, and Dan Jacobson soon followed. This flow between UCL and the wider literary world was made thrillingly apparent to us PhD students when word came that Mary-Kay Wilmers, then of the TLS, was looking for poetry reviewers. The late Michael Mason asked a postgraduate friend of mine, Richard, if he’d be interested. He would indeed, he said. Tell me what you think of Stevie Smith then, Michael said. Oh I think he’s great, said Richard. You’re no good, Michael said, are there any other postgraduates who might do?

It was a lucky break for me but really Karl was my lucky break. When he arrived at UCL, I’d already spent a year as a PhD student, under the supervision of Stephen Spender, without feeling very supervised (Stephen was about to retire and though he did once take me to lunch, we met only once a term and he failed to recognize me from one occasion to the

next). When Karl took over, he changed all that. My thesis was on the Movement poets and novelists of the 1950s – Larkin, Amis, Donald Davie – most of whom Karl knew, and was either a friend of or had fallen out with. Till then I'd had no experience of one-to-one supervision. And perhaps Karl's interpretation of it was unique to him. I'd arrive with a draft chapter at a dependably quiet time, a Friday afternoon, with none of his colleagues, as he'd drily remark, anywhere to be seen. He'd have my typescript, with marks and queries on every page, sometimes it seemed on every line. We'd start at 2 and might go on till six or seven. Even then we'd not have got through all his edits.

I wasn't used to such vigilance. At times I felt crushed by it – would I never come up to scratch? – but I knew that the likes of William Empson and Seamus Heaney had endured this kind of close scrutiny when writing for Karl. And despite his severity, there were jokes along the way and encouragement each time we parted – reasons to persevere and fail a little better with each fresh draft. Above all, he gave me a conviction that contemporary literature merited serious attention – and might even be worth trying to write.

Good prose should be as transparent as a window pane, Orwell said; for Karl it was more a case of seeing through a glass darkly – his own writing was rarely straightforward in either thought or syntax. Caricatures have him fussing about semi-colons and he did; it was important to get things right. But ideas mattered too. His editing was a form of teaching in disguise.

A distinction is often made between line editors and commissioning editors – the micro and the macro. But for Karl the two were no different: both involved being inventive, and being willing to go against the grain. He understood what he called 'the attraction of detraction'; hatchet jobs were fun and sometimes fully deserved. A sense of mischief was helpful too, and it was certainly mischievous of him to commission A. Alvarez's ex-wife to review his, Alvarez's book on divorce. But Karl preferred to *champion* writing, something

he'd done since his editing days at Cambridge. His 1968 anthology *Writing in England Today*, for instance, well worth looking out, includes, along with Larkin, Hughes, Gunn, Sillitoe, Naipaul and Muriel Spark, less expected texts like the lyrics of 'Eleanor Rigby' by the Beatles and 'Arnold Layne' by Pink Floyd.

Seamus Heaney's 'Digging' is there too, and when Karl lured Seamus to a postgraduate seminar at UCL I found the experience so enthralling that I went on to write a short book about him. By then I'd become a literary editor, and, along with the day job, I wrote poems and sometimes showed them to him. It's commonly imagined that editors either accept or reject poems, and that's it. But Karl didn't hesitate to make suggestions, some of them severe verging on brutal.

We went on discussing poetry till the last time I saw him – everyone from Empson and Dylan Thomas to Hugo Williams and Emily Berry. And though we'd sometimes switch the talk from Louis Simpson, say, to Luis Suárez [the controversial Uruguayan footballer], poems were the focus and he kept badgering me to write more. One of them, 'Bonus', prompted him to ring me up on the same day it was published in the *Guardian*. Here it is:

Time was when poetic talent came dearer than gold... (Ovid, Amores, 3, 8)

This poem is my annual bonus... I know, I know,
 most folk slog away for a modest return with no extras,
 and *their* work's in the public interest,
 teaching and healing and cleaning and stuff. Whereas...

But I'm a poet, and who are you to interfere
 if the powers above choose to reward me?
 Remember the value of the words I generate
 and all I contribute to the cultural economy.

Be warned: if you deprive us poets of our bonuses,
 we'll be forced to move and work abroad
 in a different language, and London will lose its place
 as the poetry hub of the western world.

Is that what you want? No? I thought not.

You're just jealous of the cats that get the cream.

Go on, admit it: we're worth our bonuses.

Every stanza. Every line-break. Every half-rhyme.

Light though it is, I'll always think of it as Karl's poem: because of its mix of politics and poetry; because the verse form, rhyming quatrains, is so Movement-like; but above all because I can still hear his voice down the phone giving it his approval – and no one's approval ever counted, or will ever count, for more.

*

Paul Keegan edited the Collected Poems of Ted Hughes (2003) and the magnificent Penguin Book of English Verse (2004), and was the editor at Faber of Karl's book on James Hogg.

Karl Editing Karl

The praise for Karl's gifts as editor can sometimes sound as if these preceded or outshone his gifts as writer, as reviewer. But in the case of the *London Review of Books* the two are not easy to separate. The identity of the paper in its early years was called into being by the way Karl wrote for it. And the savour of his writing-to-order was released by his also being the Orderer, the Editor. Which is not to say that the paper was not collaborative from the outset, nor that Karl's writing was not itself 'edited'.

He wrote well over 100,000 words for the paper during its first decade, from 1979 onwards. Many of the reviews are lengthy: 4000 words is not unusual, nor even 8000 words. Not to mention his Diary pieces, devised as a format for heterodox moves, with their display of ‘political suspicion’ as the paper’s official attitude, looking simultaneously this way and that. Nor to mention the combat zone of the Letters pages, in which Karl fought without rules and with a terrific, negligent, left-handed ease, calculated to further incense those he had already provoked – one of Karl’s casual asides, about the ‘speeding cars of a violent Police’ (the year is 1987) giving rise to an especially rich exchange of outrage and rebuff.

The composite editor/reviewer persona made for a kind of prose talk, an air of dramatic monologue – a genre whose best examples always contain two voices rather than one. It begat a polyphonic style which never left him. I don’t think the style was quite there in *Doubles* (1986) but it was certainly in full song by the time of *Electric Shepherd* in 2003.

Writing, Karl said, was not about escaping a self, but about finding ‘within yourself a someone else’ – something a good editor might release in a reviewer, with added piquancy if they were one and the same. He also wrote that ‘No author is ever alone.’ Karl was nothing if not a literature machine – hence the unpredictability of his reviews: almost any other text can find itself summoned as witness to the quarter session of the book under review. As he wrote, reviewing anthologies of ghost stories (‘Things’, 1987), ‘One text leads to another, in the ordinary way of literature.’ That review, not untypically, digresses from M. R. James into a digression on *Hamlet*, which segues into a possible verbal memory of *Hamlet* in Henry James’s *Turn of the Screw*, which gives rise to a long speculative aside on that story and whether or not we are to believe the Governess’s version of what she saw, which adverts briefly to a recent rape case, then on to F. R. Leavis and his disagreements with Marius Bewley, then forwards or backwards to *The Spoils of Poynton* . . .

His digressions are in fact interlocutors, and Karl's *London Review* pieces sometimes bristle with voices, arguing or wrangling with each other. Sometimes the reviews are not reviews, but oblique conversations about a book the reader is presumed *already* to have read. And he often adopts a kind of patrician take-it-or-leave-it, I-may-be-wrong-about-this, line of attack (thinly disguised as defence).

Karl's *LRB* prose releases pheromonal energies: a serpentine line (much as Karl's conversation had vanishing points, often vertiginously deferred), very dry but baroque, in the Caledonian vein, a mix of understatement and exaggeration. With a hinted undergrowth of heterogenous learning: a piece on Cervantes (1986) alludes to Erasmus on folly, to the further reaches of humoral pathology, to historian Lawrence Stone on affective individualism, to Foucault by way of Auerbach. Many pieces conduct an easy commerce with a sideshow of sometimes far-flung *mentalités*.

One aspect of his writing for the paper is its wary and sometimes weary humanity, its being in touch with ordinary truths; another aspect is a kind of throwaway and thrown away lyricism, which is nevertheless reined in: 'Ghost stories can look like a nostalgic game, a trivial make-believe that the spirits of the dead return to the land of the living – mopping, mowing, gibbering, giving their owl cries, causing the tapers to burn blue, sheeted – but never in any circumstances nude.' ('Nude'?)

I published *Electric Shepherd* at Faber, the typescript of which was substantially longer than the finished article – substantial as *that* was. In Karl's version Hogg is an exemplary subject, because orphaned. He construes it as a life in which one thing gave rise inexorably to another, as well as a life split and doubled by the roles of shepherd and writer ('Here was a man of feeling who used to bite the balls off sheep.'). The book feels to me like Karl's real autobiography: a finished thing and, at the same time, outtakes from a larger work. And whose working principle was that it takes a digression to release an essence.

Last, and first, there is the wit. One of the things to be cut or cut back in the ur-text of *Electric Shepherd* was its account of a farcical swimming competition by the protagonists of the *Noctes Ambrosianae* (those weird and cannibalistic mutual impersonations, about everything under the reviewing sun, published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in the 1820s). Karl's account of the swimming competition calmly unfurled its convulsive comedy for thirty or forty pages, in mock-heroic style, out-dunciading *The Dunciad*. Finally he allowed that the section largely had to go – not on the grounds of length, but that, in Blake's words (as redacted by Karl, who suggested that Blake had Robert Burns in mind): 'Fun is good, but too much fun is an abomination.'

Karl became this style – whose 'command of the insinuating mystery of wit was absolute', as he wrote of Sydney Smith – and I think it was the duality of his writing for and editing the *LRB* which called the style into being.

*

Mark Ford, poet and critic, wrote for the LRB before he came to UCL – since when he has served, like Karl, though for less than 18 years, as Head of Department. He recalls

Writing for Karl

I began writing for the *LRB* in 1987, with a piece on the facsimile edition of the manuscripts of Allen Ginsburg's *Howl*. I'd been warned by my friend John Lanchester, who'd just started working for the paper, that Karl was not necessarily a big Ginsberg fan, and that therefore I might want to inject a note of scepticism into my piece, particularly as this book set up a kind of implicit comparison between *Howl* and *The Waste Land* – which Karl did admire. Anyway, I handed in my typed-up review in person to the offices of the *LRB*, then in Tavistock Place, and recalling that moment now I think what I'd like to get across is the almost unbearable excitement – excitement that verged on terror – at being, even if only momentarily, in this room with four powerful editors: they were seated at four desks

that, I seem to remember, all faced each other. It felt like being, to adapt a phrase that Roland Barthes applied to falling in love, ‘in the crucible of meaning’. And indeed it has stayed in my memory as a Wordsworthian spot of time, although Karl never in fact looked up or acknowledged my presence, for the thirty seconds that I was in the room. I scuttled off as fast as I could, leaving the Fates busy at work, judging and snipping.

Karl made writing matter. Everyone who wrote for him was aware of how impossible it was to get away with the kinds of bad phrasing or inept reasoning that you could when writing for other editors – few of whom were editors through and through in the way that Karl was. Many that I met seemed to have taken up a career in editing in order to finance the writing of novels or poetry or biographies, not of course that there’s anything wrong with that – but Karl was different, and everyone recognised that he was different. He was pure editor the way a tiger is pure tiger. (I don’t know why I chose a tiger as an example.) The *LRB* shaped and indeed still does shape my take on most things, literary and political. It’s the only paper that I’ve ever subscribed to, and I still read every issue pretty much cover to cover. And although it is now a long time since Karl edited it, I still feel when I open the pages of a new issue that I am in touch with his principles, his ideals, his exacting standards, his wit, his ability to take things seriously, to make things matter. In touch with his spirit even, or that part of the spirit which finds expression in the creation and the editing of a literary magazine.

*

Since leaving UCL in 2004, Danny Karlin, editor of the Brownings and author of Proust’s English (2005) and The Figure of the Singer (2013), moved through Boston University and the University of Sheffield before becoming Winterstoke Professor of English Literature at the University of Bristol. He relishes

Karl’s Antinomies

I'm going to talk about a book by Karl that has meant a great deal to me, *Doubles*, published in 1985. It's a book with a modest subtitle—'Studies in Literary History'—but it has a much wider reach and is more cohesive than it seems. A collection of essays and reviews, most between 20 and 30 pages, on writers ranging from James Hogg to Robert Lowell, John Keats to Edith Wharton, taking in the strange fellows and even stranger bedfellows of duality across British, European and American literature, it risks fragmenting along the fault-lines of its own theme. Yet the book succeeds in fixing the shifty figure of the doppelganger with its glittering eye. It is held together by Karl's wit, an eighteenth-century quality that fittingly blows hot and cold, is capable of maintaining the most caustic distance from its subject or plunging headlong into it with reckless disregard for academic conventions. 'The marriage-bed, Yeats was to discover, could be accounted "the symbol of the solved antinomy": but this did not dampen his ardour for antinomies.' Just the antiquarian touch of 'dampen his ardour' is what gives this sentence its cool shock. Yet in one of the book's most moving flights of fancy, Karl places Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium' alongside Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and Eliot's 'Burnt Norton': "There is a poem to be imagined in which all three of these poems, and the differences between them, take part. That poem, that cento, would give something of the higher history of romantic escapism. It would not indicate that the commitment to it had ceased to hold out hope that souls may be saved." The cautious double negative at the start of the last sentence—'It would not indicate that the commitment to it had ceased . . . '—modulates, feels its way into the 'hope that souls may be saved' in a manner that's wholly Karl's, and in which I unavoidably hear the cadence of his voice.

One of the things *Doubles* did for me, or to me, was to change permanently my sense of the meanings that belonged to certain words. Several of these are common words, not terms of art, and that's perhaps what made the effect so powerful. The word *strange* for

example, acquired a resonance for me from Karl's repeated use of it; so did two other words, *steal* and *soar*, which form the title of the chapter in which the strange conjunction of Keats, Yeats, and Eliot is imagined. This chapter is my favourite in the book, though the tentacles of stealing and soaring reach into almost every corner of it, in wonderful passages of writing about Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for example, or Conrad's *Lord Jim*. But the chapter called 'Steal and Soar' is the matrix of Karl's attention to these words, to their doubleness, their duplicity, their resourcefulness, and their pathos.

Karl's relish for words in themselves, both for what was ingrained in them and for what was capable of transformation, and also for their surprising, or queer affinities for other words, is at the heart of the discoveries he was able to make in the literary history of duality, a history in which identity theft was invented long before its appearance as a phenomenon of online impersonation. Here's a beautiful example of his way with words, in which the ponderous etymological dictionary is taken out onto the dance floor and is found to be unexpectedly light on its feet:

Romance is stealth, and theft, and it is flight. If time flies, so does the thief, and in the Latin tongue the matter is given the appearance of a tautology: *fur fugit*. In English, 'steal' and 'fly' reveal an approximation in meaning to which the ambiguous relationship between 'fly' and 'flee' has contributed. The Latin verb *fugio*, I flee, stands close to *fur*, a thief, and can be translated into English verse by the figurative 'steal'. In French the same word, *voler*, signifies both stealing and soaring. The Latin verb *volo* means both soaring and wishing: so that it may seem that fugitiveness became furtive in French. (pp. 57-8)

This is purposefully sharp in its playfulness; it's helped by the impulse given by that first short, aphoristic sentence, which sets the play in motion, and whose declarative certainty—'Romance *is* stealth, and theft, and *it is* flight'—is so quickly followed by 'appearance',

‘approximation’, ‘ambiguous’, ‘stands close to’, ‘it may seem’, since the critical scrutiny of duality itself shuttles between statement and suggestion. The three observations about Latin are not grouped together in a mass, but intercalated with remarks about English and French, so that the rhythm of the passage returns to its classical learning with a kind of graceful insistence. And the lovely alliterative joke at the end—‘it may seem that fugitiveness became furtive in French’—is brilliantly lit from within by the appearance—etymologically exact, of course—of the Latin word for ‘thief’, *fur*, in ‘furtive’. Such puns are the stock-in-trade of *Doubles*, but the double meaning of stealing and soaring is not just played for laughs; it has a penetrating and revelatory force, and best of all it is suggestive and fruitful.

Let me conclude with a brief instance, which takes flight from a short sentence. ‘Love and theft have looked alike at times; there are smiles which they share.’ The first part of this sentence is a near-perfect pentameter, by the way, with a percussive beat given by the elided syllable at the start; that’s appropriate because Karl is talking about Shakespeare at this point in the chapter, but of course the phrase ‘Love and theft’ takes me to Bob Dylan and the album of that name from 2001. Bob Dylan, who was born Robert Zimmerman, stole away from the little Minnesota town where he was born, stole away from his name and arguably stole the one he took, though whether the theft was from Dylan Thomas is ambiguous in a way Karl would have recognized as wholly befitting his theme. The album *Love and Theft*--a title which was itself stolen from Eric Lott’s 1993 book on blackface minstrelsy in American culture--has the reflexive quality that Karl also saw as crucial to the strain of duality; the title phrase is itself a borrowing, the songs are thieving magpies but, as Dylan reminds us in the beautiful series of thefts in the song ‘Moonlight’. ‘It takes a thief to catch a thief’. That song, like the entire album, is filled with the romance, the passionate yearning for escape, the recognition that it’s impossible: ‘Trapped in the heart of it, trying to get away’—that line

alone from ‘Mississippi’ establishes Dylan as a native of the country Karl mapped in *Doubles*, whose citizens are strangers to each other and themselves.

*

Another former colleague of Karl’s at UCL, a fellow-Scot, Rosemary Ashton, biographer of Coleridge, the Carlyles, George Eliot, and G.H. Lewes, went back to Karl’s roots, personal and intellectual.

Karl and Edinburgh

Many of those who have written remembering Karl have mentioned his Scottishness, and in particular his Edinburgh background, as central to their understanding and appreciation of his intellect, his wit, and his mesmerising, idiosyncratic way with words in writing and – even more so – in conversation. Most of them, and I am no different, do him the honour of following where he leads in this respect, for Karl’s writings and talk so often took aim at his origins and education. In his first volume of memoirs, *Rebecca’s Vest* (1993), he writes of being ‘determined’ when a schoolboy at the Royal High School in Edinburgh, ‘in a Scottish way, to get on’. The very title of the book alludes to the dark-haired heroine of *Ivanhoe*, written by his illustrious predecessor at the Royal High School of Edinburgh, Walter Scott.

Such connections, personal and fortunate, delighted him. In so many of his writings the memoirist in Karl joins seamlessly with the astute literary and cultural historian. Scotland, and Edinburgh, for Karl were a beloved subject of study as well as a part of himself, though the relationship was a complicated and in some ways unexpected one. In his own words, ‘He who is kept out tries both to stay out and to get in’; the aphorism refers *both* to his particular family circumstances – his parents ‘married at leisure but repented in haste’, as he put it, leaving him to be brought up mainly by his maternal grandmother – *and* to his far from unique experience of turning up, in his Scottish way, in academic Cambridge and subsequently in literary London. Many a clever Scot made much the same journey in the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the period to which Karl was most attracted as a scholar and historian.

Chief among these was the Edinburgh lawyer and reforming Whig, Francis Jeffrey; naturally, he too was an alumnus of the Royal High School in Edinburgh. As Neil Berry pointed out in his history of British intellectual journalism, *Articles of Faith* (2008), Karl in his editorial incarnations at the *Spectator*, *New Statesman*, *Listener*, and *London Review of Books*, was the direct – and deliberate – heir of Jeffrey, the great editor of the great quarterly *Edinburgh Review*. In Karl's second volume of memoirs, *Dark Horses* (1998), the explanation of the teasing title comes when he writes (p. 268) of Jeffrey as the 'dictator who drove the dark horses of the *Edinburgh Review*'; that is, the editor who rode roughshod over his contributors' material, those contributors being 'dark horses' in the sense of being unknown to their reading public, since all articles in the *Edinburgh* were anonymous and all, in the end, were written – you might say – by Jeffrey.

Thomas Carlyle was one young man who got his start under Jeffrey and had to put his very independent neck into the proffered yoke. He too found his way to London before long, and even more than Jeffrey took the capital by storm. Karl was a true appreciator of Carlyle's wayward and not always pleasant genius. I remember, when I was writing about Carlyle, sharing a passage in Carlyle's *Reminiscences*, over which Karl chuckled, and which might stand as a ghostly forefather of his own shrewd, sly prose. Carlyle describes hearing Jeffrey defend a girl in court on a charge of multiple murder. 'Not a human creature doubted but Nell was the criminal, and would get her doom', says Carlyle. However:

Assize-time came, Jeffrey there; and Jeffrey, by such a play of Advocacy as was never seen before, bewildered the poor jury into temporary deliquium, or loss of wits (so that the poor foreman, *Scottice* 'chancellor', on whose casting-vote it turned, said at last, with the sweat bursting from his brow, 'Mercy, then, mercy!'), and brought Nell clean off, – home

that night, riding gently out of Dumfries in men's clothes to escape the rage of the mob. The jury-chancellor, they say, on awakening next morning, smote his now dry brow, with a gesture of despair, and exclaimed, 'Was I mad?'

Karl's first book, *Cockburn's Millennium* (1975), was a sympathetic account of Jeffrey's friend and fellow contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, Henry Cockburn, another alumnus of the Royal High School. Already in the Preface Karl unashamedly aligns himself with his chosen subject, one whom he describes as a 'prisoner of the Edinburgh virtues' but one who was 'able to escape'. Cockburn, like Karl after him, was 'an Anglophile Scottish patriot'; Karl enjoys quoting Cockburn's 'inspired exaggerations' (which would be not a bad description of Karl's own style), and he even admits in characteristic phrase that in the course of his study of Cockburn and his age, 'I will commit one or two acts of autobiography myself'.

If I may be allowed to do the same in winding up, I can reveal that I think I owe my appointment to a lectureship in the UCL English Department in 1974 in large part to my own scholarly interest in Scottish literary journalism of the early nineteenth century. I won't ever forget pitching up in Foster Court for my interview and finding that the chair of the committee, Karl (who had himself only just been appointed to the Northcliffe chair), fell with urgent pleasure upon my abstruse doctoral topic – the reception of German literature in British magazines from the 1790s to the 1820s – and proceeded to conduct an expert dialogue with me about the German interests of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, an upstart Tory rival to the established Whig *Edinburgh Review*. In my interview, he engaged me in conversation about an obscure writer on German topics in *Blackwood's*, one Robert Pearse Gillies, whose undeniably dreary three-volume *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran* he had – inexplicably to me – read with gusto. I did not know that he was writing his book about Cockburn and Edinburgh journalism in the 1820s at the time, which explained this

extraordinary piece of knowledge. But I remember exclaiming in the interview that I thought he and I must be the only two people in the universe to have read this forgotten work of 1851. It is an example of Karl's love of nineteenth-century literary Edinburgh, but also of his breadth of interest – and his sheer unexpectedness.

*

Steve Fender, author of Sea Changes: British Emigration and American Literature (1992) and The Great American Speech: Words and Monuments (2015), recalled Karl's arrival at UCL.

Karl's Department

What happens when the best literary critic of his generation takes over as head of one of the best English departments in the country? Do expectations clash? even cultures? In the case of Karl Miller and UCL, yes, but ultimately to the advantage of both. This talk will be too short – and in any case, it would be presumptuous – to estimate what the department did for Karl. It's about what he did for us. Not that it was all that obvious at first. For one thing, he had a lot of trouble getting his head around the idea of academic leave. He couldn't see why you would pay someone to come to work, then pay them to go away again.

I was lucky. Under the old regime I had just had two terms unpaid leave in California, plus one paid in Italy, to research and write my first proper book, *Plotting the Golden West*, so I returned refreshed to the department just as Karl was taking up his post. But my younger colleagues had started to encounter Karl's scepticism on the sabbatical issue, and were finding the negotiations hard going. I remember one evening a number of us – Phil Horne, Danny Karlin, David Trotter – went up to the now-defunct Camden Parkway cinema to see *The Silence of the Lambs*. There in the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane was the brilliant psychiatrist and serial murderer Hannibal, (the Cannibal) Lector, in his windowless concrete cell, protected from the public by armoured glass. Poor Clarice Starling, the young FBI cadet, has been briefed to pick his brains (before he could eat hers) about the modus

operandi of another psychopathic killer, called Buffalo Bill because instead of eating his victims, he skins them. As she approached Lector, trembling before his glassed in enclosure, Phil Horne leaned across to the rest of us and said, "It's a bit like going to Karl to ask for leave."

Departmental meetings went according to custom, the members of the department advising and consenting, the professor deciding. But examiners' meetings, where it was one person, one vote, disconcerted Karl somewhat. As the sole editor of whatever journal of books page, he was used to saying go and she goeth, come and they come. But everyone who had set and/or marked an exam paper had an equal right to determine how well a candidate fulfilled the criteria; it was simply a matter of knowledge. But I know that Karl felt that the system sometimes short-changed the finals candidates.

This makes it sound as though Karl's first months in the department were tense. They weren't, though they were sometimes edgy. He was gruff but kind, immensely clever and witty – above all, serious. If he laid into you with one of his snarling sarcasms, you couldn't stop yourself from laughing. But the vulnerable he never assaulted, and the tough he never aimed to wound.

When I was about to leave UCL to take up the American Studies chair at Sussex, I asked him what was the most important single thing I needed to know about being a head of department. He told me to expect a lot of imperious queries from the centre asking for reports on this or that. All of them should be put straight into the bin, he said, after which most would be forgotten and never recur. Only the really persistent ones should be dealt with, as briefly as possible. It worked. "Well," Karl said as I left, "I shall miss your moon face looming round the door frame on matters of principle."

But surely it wasn't all a case of Karl having to un-learn his skills? Surely the editorial practice had something to offer the academic? You bet it did. Above all his editorial nose for

bullshit was proof against the then rising tide of “theory.” Not that he disdained what one or two of his more philistine colleagues called the “higher Froggy nonsense,” but that he liked to pick and choose. Above all – and this went beyond resisting or embracing theory – he realised that one could talk so convincingly as to smooth over fault lines in one’s logic that would appear on paper. Accordingly, he introduced a practice hitherto absent from the department’s hiring: requiring all candidates for a job to submit a piece of their writing.

Why we had never done this before escapes me, but it’s to our shame that we hadn’t. With the interview performance either backed up – or not – by the clarity of the prose, the wheat and chaff were soon disabused of one another. The result was simply a better class of appointment.

*

My co-organiser René Weis, author of Criminal Justice: The True Story of Edith Thompson (1988) and The Real Traviata: The Song of Marie Duplessis (2015), editor and biographer of Shakespeare, was a second-year undergraduate student in the Department when Karl became his tutor.

Karl’s Way

I became Karl’s tutee halfway through my undergraduate degree at UCL. By then I was familiar with his bracing, at times intimidating, style of teaching. Even so, nothing quite prepared one for ‘Commentary and Analysis’ seminars with Karl. He brought to these occasions a ruthless perfectionism. In poems under ‘scrutiny’ (Karl had after all been taught by Leavis at Downing) every word was made to earn its place, and the same rigour was brought to bear on pauses, punctuation, rhythm and cadence. Prose was accorded much the same treatment. One of the passages thus dissected was the opening of Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* and his use in it of the word ‘paladin’, a single word that took up the better part of the first half hour. Milton’s poignant sonnet about his dead wife (‘Methought I

saw my late espoused saint') was next. Karl was teamed up on this occasion with the mercurial Restoration scholar Keith Walker, who had read Dr Johnson's praise of the poem. Karl hadn't and when Keith wheeled out Johnson, Karl declared his colours: the poem was morally profoundly flawed, if not downright 'horrible': at least it should be to the modern reader! For the next 40 minutes Karl Miller and Keith Walker were at each other's throats while we sat ringside, petrified. The moral of the story was that nothing was given, that even Milton's poetry perhaps needed to earn its place in the canon all over again because great literature is alive and constantly in flux, and so are responses to it.

Would Karl have published Milton's sonnet 23? Undoubtedly, although he would almost certainly have suggested changes. Karl brought to his teaching the same uncompromising passion for literature that in journalism had made him the most admired literary editor of his generation. As a graduate student I saw him in action again when the then 37-year-old Seamus Heaney came to address Karl's Northcliffe seminar. At the time Heaney's poem 'Casualty', to be included in *Field Work*, was in draft and Heaney allowed us to discuss it, with a view of course to making it a better poem; or so Karl announced with a chuckle, before telling his friend, the future Nobel laureate, precisely what was right (and wrong) with his poem.

Karl, like his Northcliffe predecessor Kermode, was fiercely wedded to the one-to-one tutorial system. It was under pressure throughout his seventeen-year tenure of the Northcliffe chair and so was the Kermode-Quirk 1965 syllabus, a splendid organic beast with, at the core, Shakespeare (examined by a 6-hour paper), Chaucer (ditto), and Commentary (ditto). In the 1980s modularisation became the new mantra of Higher Education and soon UCL English found itself isolated in the Faculty. The pressure was intense but Karl's steely determination, his ability to argue his case relentlessly, in flawless

sentences, with a succession of deans, ensured the survival of not just the syllabus but also of a particular way of engaging with English Literature that was unique then, and is still so now.

When Karl published his memoir *Dark Horses* in 1998 he noted wryly that, 8 years on after his retirement, the non-modular syllabus and one-to-one tutorial still endured in the UCL English Department. '[It] has been protected from destructive change by performing satisfactorily in the eyes of the Government's inspector-general, and its practice under the current head, John Sutherland, deserves and has received their continued forbearance.' Only Karl could put it like that. The fact that 26 years after his retirement the UCL English Department still teaches one-to-one and remains autonomous and non-modular is a direct tribute to his leadership and his love of literature that underpinned it.

*

David Trotter, Arsenal supporter, King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge, author of Cooking with Mud (2000) and Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars (2013), was at UCL till 2001.

Karl and football

In a narrow sense, Karl wasn't interested in football. He played the game enthusiastically, with some considerable finesse, and no less self-deprecation. I remember him turning up loyally for staff-student matches in Regent's Park, well into his tenure as Northcliffe Professor, with his boots in a Tesco bag. He had things to say about football, and he wrote lovingly about its importance for him during a particular period of his life. But he lacked the true football fan's sad obsessiveness. Unlike me. So our conversations were rather one-sided.

What I didn't see then, and think I understand now, is that what Karl really liked about football was the opportunity it provided for drama. The football pitch is a stage. In each era, there are players whose performance on that stage is as much dramatic as it is athletic.

Those were the players who caught his attention. In my mind, there is a connection between his vivid curiosity about such players and his attitude to institutional life.

Absurdity and bad faith are not incidental to institutional life. They are its essence. They are the fuel it runs on. You can go with the programme, you can cheerlead for it, you can rage against it – or you can resign (Karl did a bit of that, too). But Karl's main strategy, at least while he was at UCL, was to develop a dramatic persona, or a series of personas.

On one occasion, he was summoned to see the Provost of UCL (Karl never went to see anyone higher up the food chain, he was always 'summoned', even, or especially, if he was the one who'd requested the interview in the first place). He found waiting for him in the Provost's office a senior colleague with whom he did not always see eye to eye. The Provost promptly whipped out a polystyrene replica of a book this colleague had just published to great acclaim. This he appeared to regard with the reverence due to a tablet of stone brought down from the mountain. After this exposure to the blinding light of advanced scholarship, Karl said, 'I had to go and lie down in a darkened room for quite a while'.

Karl chaired many staff meetings, and anyone who has done that, or the equivalent, will be familiar with the silence that falls at the end of an impassioned debate about the moral shortcomings of some offender against regulations, or the latest indignity inflicted by management. At that point, it becomes incumbent upon you to undertake to *do something about it*: so that everyone else in the room can forget whatever it was they had got so worked up about, and go home appeased. Silence would fall. Karl would look down at the table in front of him. Then he would say 'All right, I'll buckle on my battered armour ...'

So, Karl as vaporous Victorian lady, Karl as a Knight of the Round Table setting off to slay dragons: these were two of the many personas he was able to slip fluidly into and out of, to very funny effect, as the situation demanded. Self-dramatization was for him a survival strategy: as a way to negotiate his own necessary immersion in institutional absurdity and bad

faith. On many occasions, I have found myself in a similar position. On some of them, I've made grateful use of the same expressions I'd heard Karl use. Each time I do, I think of him.

Which brings me back circuitously, in Karlian fashion, to football. In the summers of 1989 and 1990, Karl wrote a couple of memorable diary pieces for the *London Review of Books*, both of which celebrate the drama in football, while remaining aware of its close proximity to violence. This was, after all, the era of stadium disasters. Both pieces feature Paul Gascoigne, a star of the 1990 World Cup in Italy, and a player who performed in both an athletic and a dramatic sense. I want to conclude with Karl's electric description in July 1990 of Paul Gascoigne in his pomp: a true football sentence.

He was a highly-charged spectacle on the field of play: fierce and comic, formidable and vulnerable, urchin-like and waif-like, a strong head and torso with comparatively frail-looking breakable legs, strange-eyed, pink-faced, fair-haired, tense and upright, a priapic monolith in the Mediterranean sun – a marvellous equivocal sight.

*

Peter Swaab, author of Bringing Up Baby (BFI Classics, 2010) and an editor of Shakespeare, Sara Coleridge and Edward Lear, looks back on

Karl Miller and Thom Gunn

The last time I had lunch with Karl, **about a year before he died**, he looked terribly white and frail when I arrived at the house in Chelsea, but within a minute he had used the words 'locomotion' and 'sartorial', so I knew things would be okay. 'Locomotion' referred to his mode of travel now that he was using a wheelchair and 'sartorial' to the enormous coat he would be sporting outside against the cold. The circumlocutory turn showed his mind and humour were alive and kicking. Karl's care for words and pleasure in them always seemed to me that of a poet, and we talked a good deal about poetry that day. He said one of the times he'd been happiest was as a teenager writing poems. One of his current pleasures was

listening to his son Sam reading favourite poems to him and then discussing them with him. He also mentioned a dream he'd just had. This featured a song he had written in the dream for his friend Frederick Seidel, which Seidel was to perform at a music hall. Some of the lines stayed with him when he woke, including these two:

When the records are scratched and the cancer's worse
Get in the cupboard, my lad

Karl was pleased by the oddity of this and gave credit to his medications for the fillip to his poetical creativity. Maybe they had done their bit, but we could also hear a touch of the stoicism and dark humour of the Scottish ballads he knew growing up.

Back in 1999 I invited Karl to speak at a conference I organised on 'Thom Gunn at Seventy.' Gunn's autobiographical essay 'Cambridge in the Fifties', in *The Occasions of Poetry*, gives some glimpses of the two as young men:

About this time, at the beginning of my second year, I met a brilliant young freshman from Downing, a Scot named Karl Miller. Argumentative, inquisitive, imaginative, he seemed to have no preconceived ideas of what he might find at Cambridge and he wasn't going to accept anybody else's. His very abrasiveness was part of his charm. And he charmed me off my feet, as he did everybody whom he didn't irritate, and I stuck by his side, all admiration, for the next year.

When I wrote a new poem I would give it to him for criticism, and he would pin it to the wall above his desk for several days before he told me what he thought of it. He matured my mind amazingly, and I learned from his habit of questioning, questioning everything.

The admiration was mutual – they wrote profiles of each other in *Varsity* – and not without flair and nerve as they made names for themselves in the literary world. Gunn goes on to remember becoming 'president of the English club, with Karl doing the hard work, as

secretary'. Graham Chainey's 1995 *Literary History of Cambridge* mentions some of the literary magazines in 1950s Cambridge, and notes that '*Chequer*, founded in 1953 by a group that included Harry Guest and Ronald Hayman of Trinity Hall with Karl Miller and Thom Gunn, was the most catholic'. The catholicity of taste was partly a sign that both men had a wider sense of the world than what they'd so far found in Cambridge.

Gunn's sexuality was one aspect of this wider world. Karl was gay-friendly before that word came into being. Indeed he had a rather gallant fascination with gay men and with our personal histories – as well as on the larger stage of the *LRB* strongly defending same-sex political rights at a time when that cause most needed fighting in this country. He was unabashed and disarming about calling his friends of both genders 'dear', not campy at all though I'm not entirely sure how it wasn't – how indeed it was, as the gay Thom Gunn says about the gay Christopher Marlowe's poem *Hero and Leander*, 'so wonderfully heterosexual'.

Gunn's essay also records a more Chaucerian moment:

I do remember one remarkable party, or rather Karl told me about it because I passed out from drinking about a half-gallon of sherry. It took place at Newnham, and a don had to be specially brought from her bed, in her nightdress and dressing-gown, to open a side gate, normally locked, so that I could be carried more easily to a waiting taxi. She stood there in pained silence, waiting to give permission for the closing of the gate, and it seems that as I was being hauled past her my unconscious body gave a terrific fart, as if adding the sin of ingratitude to that of gluttony. I do not remember this personally, but I have Karl's word for it.

Karl would have enjoyed being in the position to report this later to the insensate poet (who wouldn't, really?). He liked people to go a bit far, not to be too rule-bound, to be improperly themselves.

Thom Gunn must have been a romantic presence in 1950s Cambridge, though perhaps not on this occasion, and Karl liked people to have a romantic presence in the world. The last time we lunched he was taken with the idea that the waitress was, as he put it, besotted with Swaab and neglectful of Miller. I thought her warmth was well within the usual decorums of waiting table. I also thought it was directed equally at both of us, or rather more at Karl, who had been an appreciative regular there but kept away by bad health for several weeks, and was quite a big eater even when ill. But he wasn't having this. He was equally attached to the idea of her excessive attention to me and her insufficient attention to himself, more in game than regret, but with some of each. He liked his friends to fit into a picture he had of them, often tinged with comedy. More or less fitting in with Karl's idea of you was one of the challenges and pleasures of spending time with him. His picture tended to be an improvement on the original, so this was one of the ways he was always so much fun to be with (and part of how as an editor got more out of you than you knew you had to give). After seeing him I unfailingly felt not just that I'd had a good time, but energised and happier, the world a brighter, funnier, more interesting place.

*

Stephanie Volmer, Managing Editor of Raritan, writes about

Karl in Raritan

This story begins with a literary friendship. Karl Miller and Richard Poirier met at Cambridge Downing College in the early 1950s, when Dick was on a Fulbright Fellowship and Karl was still an undergraduate. In 1955, aiming to study Scottish literature, Karl went to Harvard University, where Dick was a graduate student, and the pair forged a personal and professional bond that would last their lifetimes and encompass the entire Miller family. I recall Dick telling me that he showed Jane and

Karl around Cambridge, Massachusetts, during their honeymoon and that he always kept an eye on the Miller children during their occasional sojourns in New York City. The mutual affection ran deep.

I had the good fortune to meet Karl and Jane on a few occasions in London, when I experienced first hand Karl's warmth and humor—the way he would interrupt a story he was telling with a chuckle and say, “I don't come out very well in this story, do I?”--not to mention his probing questions and intense curiosity, traits all of the contributors here have mentioned. I am struck by the way so many of their comments recall Dick and highlight similarities between the two men, both great critics and great editors. Their styles differed, yet they shared a gruffness tempered by affection and humor; they did not suffer fools. They both emerged from what might be considered inauspicious beginnings and succeeded through an intelligence and spirit that encouraged all to give way before it. They both recognized the value of the combination of good conversation and good food. They knew their own minds, trusted their own judgment, had a gift for friendship and enmity, and were open to the voices of the young and not-yet-discovered as well as to a wide variety of cultural forms--as Dick said, “the classic can be inferred from the vernacular, the vernacular from the classic, and each renews the life of the other.” It is no coincidence that the *London Review of Books* and *Raritan* are kindred spirits--a testament to the imprint of their founders.

Dick invited Karl and Jane to write for *Raritan* in the run-up to the Summer 1981 debut, and Jane was the first to have work published in the magazine, in the Summer 1982 issue. Karl waited until Spring 1995 (which is, coincidentally, when I joined the magazine) to begin contributing to *Raritan*, and over the next fifteen years published a dozen essays on a range of subjects: W. H. Auden, Brigid Brophy, “bad reviews,” Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes, Gore Vidal, Alistair MacLeod, Harry Potter, the fiction of Anne Tyler. *Raritan* capitalized on Karl's position as an Anglo-Scot, inviting him to consider the House of Windsor after Diana's death and Scotland during the age of devolution. Yet this position occasionally stimulated writerly anxieties. Karl seemed, anyway, to feel self-conscious of his distance and difference from the American form of literary journalism, and his letters to *Raritan* show a concern that the magazine's readers would not respond to his writing. He

worried that his essays would be, as he put it, “too United Kingdom for your pages” or “too much a foreigner's view to be bearable.”

This concern occasionally developed into a readiness to withdraw a piece (a fact I immediately recalled on reading Philip Horne's description of Karl as a “great resigner”). One morning in October 2008, I arrived at work to find a letter from Karl admitting to having second thoughts about “that Scotland piece” and that “it's not the kind of thing your readers would be interested in.” He concluded: “So let's forget it.” I was concerned that perhaps we had offended in some way and wrote hastily to encourage a change of heart. Later, looking back through his correspondence with Dick, I discovered a theme: the willingness to withdraw a piece rather than “rewrite on stylistic grounds” or because it might need “too much mediating” for an American audience. Every time, it seems, he relented, and “that Scotland piece” appeared in the Spring 2009 issue, a book review, yes, but also a striking statement against devolution and nationalism and a brief testimonial to Hugh Trevor-Roper, for whom, as with his relationship with his native Scotland, Karl claimed to share a “fondness [with] a touch of the adversarial.” This mixture of the personal and the political--one aspect of Karl's distinctive style--was well suited to *Raritan's* pages, where Dick's notion of a “performing self,” of writing as an act of performance, held full sway. There was nothing “too United Kingdom” about it.

Karl's editorial disagreements with me were gentle, but insistent--mostly, we wrangled over usage differences between British and American English and over whether and when to let “Karl style” trump “house style.” “You will no doubt remember my fondness for hyphens, as in ‘the ancestrally-endowed Edmund Wilson,’” he wrote to me in March 2000, while we were reviewing proofs of his essay on Gore Vidal and the New York School. “Bear with that, if possible.” Most of the time, I did bear with it. And yet Karl always made me feel as though my editorial efforts and interventions were appreciated and even, “heroic,” as he once put it. For me, this generous spirit, so gracious during editorial deliberations, characterized what we might call the late style of Karl as writer and editor.

When Jackson Lears took over the editorship in 2002, the door between *Raritan* and the Millers stayed open, to the magazine's great benefit. When Karl was writing his first review for Jackson, on Joyce Lee Malcolm's *Guns and Violence: The English Experience*, they got to talking about the problems of the polemic as a form. Karl wanted to describe the book under review as "a work of polemical social history," which prompted Jackson to recall a conversation on the subject with Dick, who was not a fan of the form. Jackson still enjoys repeating Karl's reply: "But if the thing is done *well*." The understated phrase captured a key aspect of Karl's temperament and reflected a lifetime of experience tossing well-aimed barbs at deserving targets. He did many things *well*, including write polemics.

Let me return, finally, to the literary friendship with which I began, a friendship maintained for over fifty years. In 1990, Dick solicited a review of Karl's book *Authors* from Claude Rawson, a mutual friend. When the piece came in, Dick sent a copy of the admiring review to Karl, who wrote this in a letter: "Perhaps for painful reasons I am not used to such words on this subject. I should, I suppose, be conscious that it is a friend who is publishing them and another who is writing them. But I can't help liking them." Karl's skeptical spirit coexisted with a capacity for gratitude—and for appreciation. He embodied William James's observation that "Real culture lives by sympathies and admirations, not by dislikes and disdain—under all misleading wrappings it pounces unerringly upon the human core." Karl's eye for core quality was unerring; he proceeded by likes as well as dislikes in creating what James called "real culture." I very much hope that he would have liked the many voices brought together here to take his likeness.

*

With Stephanie Volmer's account we come to the end of the personal testimonies about Karl's significance. It seems as good a way as any to end this evocation of such a complex man as Karl, to turn to a late essay this very urban author wrote, on 'Country Writers', in Tretower to Clyro, a collection which moves in the direction of the rural and of 'natural life'. Karl characteristically expresses reservations and appreciation together about

the seventeenth-century Welsh poet Henry Vaughan – and makes some connections across the years to other people – poets, critics, writers – whom he loved.

It's possible to resist his elective theology, his story of the saved soul and the damned soul: but those who like poetry must find it hard to deny the intimacy and immediacy of his raptures, with their sense of a universal fellowship. For him, night was a time for human fusses to be done with and for the divine to send messengers. His celebrated poem 'The Night' has the stanza:

God's silent, searching flight:

When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and all

His locks are wet with the clear drops of night;

His still, soft call;

His knocking time; the soul's dumb watch,

When Spirits their fair kindred catch.

In 2010 I went with Seamus Heaney and Andrew O'Hagan to visit Vaughan's grave, where this passage of verse was spoken.

*These two friends of Karl couldn't be present at UCL in 2015, for different reasons – one had predeceased Karl, in 2013, the other was unavoidably abroad. Karl mentions them both in the paperback edition of *Tretower to Clyro*, expressing typically multiple-edged gratitude to the preface by 'young Andrew O'Hagan, which did me the favour of ridding me of the few scraps of dignitas and gravitas I'd been saving for my declining years. His piece recalls rural trips taken by him in the company of Seamus and myself, as does, in the present edition, a poem by Seamus.' Karl's reference to O'Hagan's supposed irreverence in his (in fact loving and delicate) preface works the comic-grouch, self-pitying persona he deployed so delightfully, portraying himself as robbed of his seriousness and due respect by the amusement and candour of the young. But O'Hagan's prose radiates affection, and a sense of*

the unpretentious dignity of the great poet and the great critic together, in reflective mood, at Vaughan's grave in Powys, on a hillside above the River Usk, in the graveyard of Llansantffraed Church.

'Well, here's Vaughan,' said Karl. 'A believer. It's hard to think of you, Seamus, without belief. I find it hard not to believe you believe.'

'I stopped practising a long time ago,' said Seamus, 'but some of it holds. If you have it as a child, it gives you a structure of consciousness – the idea there is something more.'

'I probably wouldn't go that far,' said Karl. 'But I have to say: I always believed I would see my granny again. She was good to me.'

'For me, it was my father,' said Seamus. 'I'd hope to see him again, all right.'

That long flow of talk and thought has ceased. As Jane Miller says in 'After Karl', an essay in her In My Own Time (2016), 'That strange, contradictory, complicated person will never exist again.' We'll see neither of these great men any more in this life. But we can read them – and for now can read Heaney's poem to Karl, 'Didn't they ramble', sent to be read at the launch of Karl's last book, and printed in the paperback edition, which, in its emphasis on love and gratitude, and its bringing together of the dead and the living, seems to make a good ending for this celebration of a wise and paradoxical man. Its last stanza:

Forty years ago and more

'A poet to be grateful for'

He called me in a first review,

Gratitude I would renew

A hundredfold for his own work

Which knows its mind and finds its mark,

Unobvious, passionate, precise.

Wherefore, Karl, we all rejoice.