

## Keith Walker (1936–2004)

The death of Keith Walker in February has further diminished the distinguished body of bibliographers and literary editors who received their first training in New Zealand during the 1950s. Born in Wellington on 24 June 1936, Keith took his BA and MA at Victoria University, prior to postgraduate work at Harvard and later Cambridge, where he received his PhD for a thesis on Byron. When I first met him in 1963 he was ensconced in rooms on Trinity Great Court, together with a piano that was in constant use (he was a fine performer with a special love of the music of Fauré) and a stunning collection of editions of Byron and *Byroniana*. After teaching briefly in Canada he returned to England to join the English Department of University College, London. Here he developed a unique personal teaching style in which a Johnsonian mock-solemnity was a cover for both an irrepressibly mischievous wit and an instinctive kindness. The Byron collection was a sad casualty of his move to London, having to be sold to finance the purchase of a flat. It now graces a Japanese university. He was the subject of many good stories, none of them, unfortunately, suitable for a learned publication such as the *Bulletin*. He never returned to New Zealand. Keith produced scrupulously prepared and widely used Oxford Authors editions of Marvell (with Frank Kermode) and Dryden, and the fine Fountainwell edition of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. His outstanding scholarly achievement, however, was his 1984 edition of Rochester's verse for Blackwell. David M. Vieth's work in the 1960s had solved many of the severe attribution problems of the canon, but Vieth's own edition of 1968 did not include a list of textual variants. Keith was the first editor to perform this daunting but very necessary task. In other respects the edition declared the man: sparkling with sly humour, wearing its enormous erudition lightly, and inspired by a deep personal devotion to the author. It still offers a better general introduction to Rochester than any of its rivals. My own Oxford *Works* of 1999 was greatly indebted both to Keith's scholarship and much generously given advice. Some of his best work went into reviews, now scattered, but well worth pursuing. He died with projects still uncompleted, including a study of Mahler. While to his students he was the mercurial sage of Gower Street, his many friends will remember him most vividly in the house he shared in Kent with his partner Brian Oatley, its walls laden with books, its rooms alive with music and the aroma of fine cooking, and its windows opening onto a splendid garden (tended by Brian). His later years were clouded by an inoperable cancer that by the end had almost deprived him of speech, but that left the inner spirit intact. His death marks the passing not only of a distinguished scholar but also of an older, humanistic ideal of editorial scholarship in which the technical was indissolubly wedded to the personal.

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