

Editor's Column

Remembering Patsy Yaeger: Her Work and Its Influence

PATRICIA (PATSY) YAEGER WAS AN ACCOMPLISHED TEACHER AND scholar and, for five years, the editor of *PMLA*. As editor of the journal, she opened its pages to a diversity of voices, reached beyond the borders of North America to seek new readers and contributors, and used the Editor's Column to mark new directions in scholarship and research. On 9 January 2015 some of Patsy's former colleagues, associates, and students gathered in Vancouver, Canada, to pay homage to her work, to assess its influence, and to remember moments shared in the classroom, the conference hall, and the pages of *PMLA*. When I heard that Patsy had died, I recalled her presence and inimitable style through her mode of walking. Patsy loved to walk. As we strode through the streets of New York, from Midtown to Wall Street, she would remind me that each city had its own walking style, that the trick to surviving and thriving in crowded city streets was to anticipate the movement of others. So I came to associate Patsy with the "walking rhetoric" described by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

The walking of passers-by offers a series of turns (*tours*) and detours that can be compared to "turns of phrase" or "stylistic figures." There is a rhetoric of walking. The art of "turning" phrases finds an equivalent in an art of composing a path (*tourner un parcours*). Like ordinary language this art implies and combines styles and uses. Style specifies a linguistic structure that manifests on the symbolic level . . . an individual's fundamental way of being in the world; it connotes a singular. Use defines the social phenomenon through which a system of communication

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219

manifests itself in actual fact; it refers to a norm. Style and use both have to do with a “way of operating” (of speaking, walking, etc.), but style involves a peculiar processing of the symbolic, while use refers to elements of a code. They intersect to form a style of use, a way of being and a way of operating. (100)

As the following remarks from the memorial illustrate, to think about Patsy is to imagine the full range of the literary as connected to human life and survival. Patsy was a product of the moment of high theory, but beneath what she described as a “quirky” style was a concern with the world’s relation to being. Patsy’s favorite poems were the ones that invited a meditation on the inner life, inviting us to delve beneath the surface of words and things and to discover what Wallace Stevens,

in “Meditation Celestial & Terrestrial,” calls the “lustrous inundations”:

The wild warblers are warbling in the jungle
Of life and spring and of the lustrous
inundations,
Flood on flood, of our returning sun.

Day after day, throughout the winter,
We hardened ourselves to live by bluest reason
In a world of wind and frost,

And by will, unshaken and florid
In mornings of angular ice,
That passed beyond us through the narrow sky.

But what are radiant reason and radiant will
To warblings early in the hilarious trees
Of summer, the drunken mother?

Simon Gikandi

When we dress Holocaust texts in too much sanctity, we miss how badly they behave. We may also miss the odd ways a testimony’s figures of speech invite readers or listeners to misbehave: to turn away helplessly or to try too hard to recover a sacred sense of witnessing as we scramble back into the belly of the text.

—Patricia Yaeger, “Testimony without Intimacy”

“TESTIMONY WITHOUT INTIMACY” AND ITS companion essay, “Consuming Trauma,” have transformed what we have come to call trauma studies by acknowledging how impossible it is to respond appropriately and ethically in a testimonial encounter. While scholarship on trauma, especially concerning the memory of the Holocaust, has highlighted the aporias of unspeakability, Patsy focuses on the incongruities of traumatic speech. While Dori Laub’s ideas about the listener’s necessary investment and coownership of the trauma have set the standard for

ethical listening, Patsy theorizes out of her own experience with recalcitrant acts of witness. Charlotte Delbo describes a dying woman’s hand, reaching toward the narrator, as a “faded mauve star upon the snow” (25). As the narrator turns away from the woman, so does the reader turn away from the metaphor. Patsy allows herself to fail as a listener and thus gives the rest of us permission to fail as well. And that failure opens another threshold of response altogether. What makes these crucial insights possible is a quirky reading process that all of us who knew Patsy as a reader will recognize. Quirky reading is the ability—an ability Patsy had like none other—to find the one disturbing detail in a text that doesn’t fit. Most of us, eager to move on to find sense, read over that detail, especially if it makes us feel uncomfortable, but Patsy zeroes in on it, allowing herself to linger over it, to sit with her unsettlement and then to go

wherever it takes her. Even if it takes her to an unempathic or uncompassionate response.

Exercises in ethical listening, watching, and reading, Patsy's essays on trauma and testimony not only admit but actually perform the impossibility of the task they hold out to us as an aspiration. Testimony behaves badly, Patsy argues, because it first invites and then, through various literary or bodily strategies, outright rejects intimacy and community with its listeners. That rejection can come through an incongruous figure of speech, through yanking us out of a dream or fantasy into the light of reality, through the body language of witnesses whose gestures belie their speech. It often comes through an incommensurability of scale.

As Patsy describes how passages from Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* and stories from Yale's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies "behave badly," she herself uses a series of unsettling figures of personification and animation. She shows us how we "dress" texts in too much sanctity, how figures of speech "invite readers or listen-

ers to misbehave." She has us walking away from these personified texts or "scrambl[ing] back into the belly of the text" ("Testimony" 401). How better to undercut a sense of misplaced sanctity or sanctification than through the image of the scrambling reader and the text's belly? Sanctity invites intimacy, scrambling into a belly deflects it. Here is the distinctive Patsy touch—not just highlighting incongruity but producing it. A "violation of etiquette," she calls it later in the essay (422).

Patsy behaved badly. Not just as a wonderful, quirky reader who created such memorable insights. But as the beautiful human being who enfolded us in her aliveness, only to leave us with the incomprehensibility of her absence. And yet, as she writes at the end of her essay, "our only choice is to plunge down the precipice and then scramble up again—into the next sentence, the next trial by fire" (422). And lucky for us: as we scramble, her quirky metaphors can be our guide.

Marianne Hirsch
Columbia University

IN HER 2011 *PMLA* EDITOR'S COLUMN "Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources," Patsy Yaeger asked, "Instead of divvying up literary works into hundred-year intervals (or elastic variants like the long eighteenth or twentieth century), or categories harnessing the history of ideas (Romanticism, Enlightenment), what happens if we sort texts according to the energy sources that made them possible?" (305). As the title of this Editor's Column suggests, Patsy sparked a conversation about the role of energy in literary studies; she asked six schol-

ars to join her in reflecting on the literary and cultural significance of the energy sources that were dominant in their respective periods, from Shakespeare's tallow and the wood and coal of Milton's infernal London to *Avatar*'s future energy source, unobtainium. Patsy pondered (among other things) the popularity of the road novel in an era of cheap gas and new highways.

As she did with so many other topics, Patsy used her Editor's Column on energy as a platform to change the terms of debate in the discipline at large. At the end of the column, Patsy included a call for papers for

a volume on energy and literary periodization that she was planning to edit with the cultural theorist Imre Szeman, whose provocation in a 2007 essay was one of the inspirations for the energy column: "What if we were to think about the history of capital not exclusively in geopolitical terms, but in terms of the forms of energy available to it at any given historical moment?" (806). Sometime late in 2011 (before her illness), Patsy invited me to join this project as a third coeditor. Energy—particularly oil—had been a recurrent topic at our lunches at the old Zanzibar restaurant in Ann Arbor, during which she'd pepper me with questions about my work and hers. More than any other interlocutor I've ever known, Patsy would deeply listen to what I said, rummaging in one of her marvelous bags for pen and paper to make notes.

After many Skype conversations and brainstorming sessions, the three of us dreamed up something truly exciting: a collection called *Fueling Culture: Energy, History, Politics* (Fordham UP, forthcoming), which brings together more than one hundred scholars, practitioners, and activists from around the world and across the humanities and social science disciplines to offer brief reflections on keywords related to energy. Writing on topics ranging from accumulation and addiction to whaling, wood, and work, the contributors to *Fueling Culture* explore the significance of energy in the world-historical processes of industrialization, decolonization, modernization, globalization, and digitization, on scales ranging from the planetary to the intimacies of the human body. Aiming beyond a mere catalog of existing knowledge, we asked our contributors to stretch our thinking by telling us what we don't quite know about energy as the source and limit of culture, in order to bring a collective intelligence to bear on some of the most pressing questions of our time. We hoped, in short, to set the agenda for an emergent field of energy studies.

Fueling Culture continues the inquiry that Patsy initiated in her Editor's Column by considering the myriad substances and forces with which humans have produced energy, by considering what happens to previous understandings of how history works when questions of energy become central to the analysis, and by considering the import of energy for periodization, whether of literature or history more broadly. As I ask in the introduction to *Fueling Culture*, "[W]hat would a mode of combustion narrative look like?"

We also expand on another of Patsy's insights in the Editor's Column, where she brilliantly invoked Pierre Macherey's *non-dit* and Fredric Jameson's political unconscious to consider whether "energy invisibilities may constitute different kinds of erasures" (309–10). *Fueling Culture* seeks new methodologies and protocols of reading that can perceive the pressure that energy exerts on culture, even when it is so "slippery" (as Amitav Ghosh argues of oil) that it eludes representation and critical attention. In the era of cheap and abundant fossil fuels, energy has indeed been the great not-said, at once everywhere and nowhere, indispensable yet largely unapprehended, not so much invisible as unseen. So, following the opening salvo of Patsy's column, in *Fueling Culture* we ask, What work do particular cultural forms and genres do in making energy visible, or in obscuring it from view?

Even after Patsy became ill, we three dared to assume that we'd write the introduction to *Fueling Culture* together after Imre and I had made our way through editing the mountain of entries. Instead, I wrote the introduction in June and July 2014, putting in a few hours in the morning and then, once or twice a week, driving across town to spend the afternoon at Patsy's. Our conversations during these visits touched increasingly less on this project and the ideas that animated our other research. Whenever I sat down to draft the introduction, however, I felt I was writing for her, sometimes even with her. The



final lines, though from my keyboard, are pure Patsy: “Choose your own path. Plug in. Let the sparks fly.”

Only in putting these remarks together to commemorate Patsy have I recognized what a consolation it has been to speak of her in the present tense, in the editorial *we*.

Each time I drove the scenic road along the Huron River that took me to Patsy, I thought of the trip she once made on that road in the opposite direction: the time, as she wrote in her dazzling Editor's Column on trash, that she forgot a bag of to-be-recycled paper atop her car and inadvertently scattered it to the sky, “kites kicking in the wind” (“Editor's Column: The Death of Nature” 321). Patsy—that peerless “Redeemer of trash!” in the words of my Michigan colleague Gillian

White—turned some Good Samaritan passersby into fellow redeemers as they scrambled to gather the papers again.

And so with us all. *Fueling Culture* is only one example of the thinking and writing that Patsy enabled, inspired, catalyzed, provided the spark for—like the sudden gust of wind in the Jeff Wall photo that she wrote so beautifully about in the same Editor's Column: “whoosh!” We can choose to see those countless white pages (and even the petrochemical plastic bag in Wall's photo) not as scattered, lost, or gone but instead as shared, disseminated, taking flight: in Patsy's words, “a paean of joy” (323).

Jennifer Wenzel
Columbia University

Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (after Hokusai), 1993.

Transparency in light box, 229 × 377 cm.

Courtesy of the artist.

I'm all, like, what do you say after Derrida's the law of genre?

it seems like every time you set up a genre the representatives of the genre disprove the generic guideline . . . maybe genre's really a collectivity, a kind of averaging of many different entities . . . or a media or something.

what is the work genre does? what does it help achieve what does it hinder? to me those are the questions when i think genre.

also i remember once upon a time nancy vickers in a really interesting talk about homer said something like how weird it was that the great reps of the great genres always seemed to begin at the margins of their generic aspirations . . . like the iliad beginning with a sulk fest.

jus' bein goofy here!

—E-mail of 23 Dec. 2012, to members of the working group charged by the MLA's Executive Council with proposing revisions to the MLA's intellectual structure

REREADING THAT E-MAIL FROM PATSY TOOK me back to the early years of our friendship, which began in the mid-1970s at Yale, when she was working as the first teaching assistant I ever had in the first course I ever taught on the impossibly large topic of classical and Renaissance (European) epic. It was a survey course—of course—and it happened during a muggy New Haven summer when both Patsy and I needed money. According to the syllabus that I had cobbled together from previous syllabi crafted by professors more experienced than I was, the students were to read selections of the ancient epics by Homer and Vergil before moving briskly to selections from long poems by Ariosto and Tasso and thence to the English crown jewels by Spenser and Milton. Patsy said at the outset that she didn't know much about the subject matter of the course—she was writing a dissertation with Geoffrey Hartman and was already a post-modernist in her passions. But it soon became

clear that she knew plenty about the epic genre and had a remarkable talent for getting the students to think and even talk about the big poems we were asking them to taste in haste. She and I read and discussed how to teach the scene at the beginning of the *Iliad*, but neither of us thought to call it a “sulk fest,” as Patsy does in her message written more than thirty years later; there, she makes a characteristically generous gesture to a feminist colleague's interesting point. I don't actually remember much about the content of our classes that summer at Yale; I do remember that we had a great deal of paper grading to do, and that we spent many afternoons and evenings at my apartment with some breaks for talking as well as for drinking and eating unhealthy foods. I also remember that Patsy offered to give a lecture on book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, though lecturing was not part of her official job duties; you won't be surprised to hear that she chose to speak on sex in the Bower of Bliss, paying special attention to the bizarre forms of intemperate erotic expression displayed by Spenser's hero, the Knight of Temperance, as he violently destroys a landscape inhabited by a seductively beautiful pagan (or Roman Catholic) witch.

Patsy brought to our shared teaching and grading ventures a gaiety, an enthusiasm, and a sense of humor that made that summer's pedagogical experience one of the best I've ever had. Only a couple of months separated us in age, and we talked freely about the masks of professional mastery that we, like other women who were graduate students or junior faculty members in the 1970s, were experimenting with while reading Marx and Freud and radical feminist theorists such as Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell. Active in the effort to organize a union of pink-collar clerical workers at Yale, Patsy was already working out the ideas that took one

written form in the paper she presented at the annual South Atlantic Modern Language Association conference in 1984: "Re-marking Marx: Production, Reproduction, and the Feminist Critic." She was also passionately interested—then and later—in the topic of sex and the southern woman writer.

It was a delight to work with her that summer and to have a chance to do so again, though too briefly, during our time as members of the working group that Marianne Hirsch created to tackle the epic task of revising the MLA's intellectual structure for the first time since 1974. Members of the group had many e-mail exchanges right before the 2013 convention in Boston because we were attempting to fulfill the Herculean labor Marianne had set us of saying something cogent in ten minutes on enormous categorical concepts such as period, nation, and genre. Patsy took on genre after having already helped us all think outside our disciplinary comfort zones. Marianne had wisely asked Patsy and Carla Freccero to go to the wild side of thinking about possible revisions to our discipline's basic categories. Their creative proposals

seeded the more sober plan that was debated on *MLA Commons*, revised, discussed again, and eventually brought to the Executive Council for final revisions and (after further discussion) a decision to send the proposal forward to the Program Committee on its path toward being implemented in 2016. The revised MLA structure shows Patsy's influence in all sorts of subtle ways, but it doesn't yet, I'm sorry to say, include a forum on trash studies. Such a forum should have sprung like Athena from Patsy's head, which was already producing brilliant work in that new and terribly timely field.

I find it incomprehensible that Patsy's death prevents her from being here with us now. I'm grateful to Marianne Hirsch, Jennifer Wenzel, and Simon Gikandi for giving us spaces in which we can share memories of a person who gave so much radiant thought and emotional warmth to her family, friends, students, readers, and audiences—and who did so often, as in the e-mail text I began with, under the guise of just bein' goofy.

Margaret W. Ferguson

University of California, Davis

A QUICK INTAKE OF BREATH. THAT'S WHAT I would say was Patsy's characteristic gesture as an undergraduate teacher. When I think back to the several courses I took from her as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, that's what I remember. You would say something, make an observation about the text under discussion . . . or make a personal revelation (Patsy's classes were full of personal revelations). You would say something and she would draw in her breath, and turn her head, and *look* at you, so intensely. Sometimes she would smile, as if to say, "Let's just

pause and revel in the amazingness of that insight." (Patsy was all about revelry.) Or you would confide something upsetting and her eyes would widen in shock, her mouth make an "o" of sadness. (For Patsy was just as open about the shit life throws at us as she was about the sunshine.) But either way, there would be a pause, a holding up of what you said. As if we had stopped her in her tracks, turned her head . . . and her turn of the head turned our heads. It was intoxicating; feeling as if you were the center of her world at that moment, as if you were making her day.

Thanks in no small part to Patsy I am now a teacher of undergraduates myself. And so I know that teachers often perform or exaggerate such excitement. To be honest, I'm rarely genuinely amazed by anything my students say about texts. You might think this knowledge would complicate or even invalidate my memories of Patsy as a teacher. But it doesn't. Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter to what extent the excitement was performed. The quality of attention was so real . . . the intensity of it was so powerful. It changed us, as students, making us grow more confident of ourselves as readers and writers and thinkers and speakers. I know this is a hokey metaphor, but if a heat lamp makes a plant flourish . . . the plant doesn't care if it didn't get pure, natural sunlight. The nourishing happened, either way.

And that nourishing continued long after I left Michigan. For Patsy treated mentoring not as something that ends the minute your student gets into graduate school or gets a job but as a lifetime relationship. So, for example, when she became editor of *PMLA*, she said to me, "Let's do a Theories and Methodologies forum on children's literature!"—which is my field, a field that many academics still do not take seriously. Most English departments still do not have a children's literature specialist . . . even though there is no better cure for declining enrollments than to add courses in children's and young-adult literature to your curriculum. And even though children's books are among the best-loved, best-remembered, and best-selling of all books.

But back to *PMLA*: before Patsy's editorship, this key journal in our field had paid virtually no attention to children's literature. And that has changed, thanks to Patsy. There's been so much more material in *PMLA* about figures such as Maurice Sendak and Lemony Snicket as a result of her open-mindedness and guts, her guts and gusto. Patsy was the opposite of a snob; she was so unpretentious . . . so omnivorous . . . nothing was beneath

her notice. I'm thinking here of her work on trash, late in her career, but also about her first book, *Honey-Mad Women*, with its wonderful imagery of women writers pursuing what they love the way bears hunt honey. Engaged in what Patsy calls "ecstatic espionage" (3).

I was rereading *Honey-Mad Women* on the plane coming here and it made me realize how much I have been intellectually influenced by Patsy, in ways that I had forgotten (or never fully recognized). Women writers, she contends, were not only silenced and oppressed by a sexist literary tradition, they also savored, stole from, and repurposed it. Her conception of women as canny, creative thieves clearly inspired my vision of children as artful dodgers deeply shaped—but not silenced—by adult influence and adult-authored texts. Only now do I see how many of "my" ideas were purloined from Patsy . . . how her voice enabled my own.

Rereading *Honey-Mad Women* also brought to the surface a memory (or a fragment of a memory) that I had forgotten.

Since it's an MLA memory, I will conclude by sharing it. It's a memory of Patsy and my mom—Susan Gubar—standing together in a hotel room, in that little space right in front of the door. I can't remember what city it was, which MLA convention, whether they were going in or out of the room. All I remember is looking at them and feeling how lucky I was to have two such amazing and kooky Mentorias. Because they were kooky, with their crazy hairdos and their unclassifiable outfits—not power suits, no—weird drapery: layers of scarves and cardigans that went off in unexpected directions. All I remember is them clutching at each other, with a lunatic glee in their eyes. Not like empowered insiders ruling the roost (as they were). More like spies engaged in "ecstatic espionage" (as they also were).

Marah Gubar

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MARIANNE HAS ASKED ME TO SHARE MY thoughts about Patsy as a colleague—and, hands down, the one characteristic that summed up Patsy's collegiality was her unstinting critical generosity. Like many of you, I experienced this firsthand in Patsy's responses to my own work, but I also witnessed it secondhand in the literally dozens of reports on *PMLA* submissions she wrote over the years. It occurred to me that the perfect way to demonstrate Patsy's critical generosity would be to read snippets from these reports. Sadly, they no longer exist—Richard couldn't find the files on Patsy's computer, and the MLA keeps them for only a limited time—so, ironically, these ephemera have become part of the “luminous trash” about which Patsy so eloquently wrote. But, as you can imagine, these lost gems were brilliantly crafted mini-essays, in which penetrating insights were interwoven with unstinting generosity, empathy, and praise. For any of you familiar with Patsy's ebullient verbal flights, you can imagine the vocabulary that lifted these critiques into the realm of the extraordinary: “breathtaking,” “capacious,” “vertiginous,” “stunning,” “dazzling”—these are words that rolled off Patsy's tongue with absolute sincerity, forming part of the honey-mad language that marked both her scholarly enterprise and her most intimate bonds.

Such generosity also marked my last telephone conversation with Patsy. She allowed herself only one personal comment, a statement of desire as ruthlessly truthful as it was unadorned: “I wish [imagine Patsy's signature sigh here] I didn't have cancer.” And then she turned the conversation to me—not because she wished to avoid what she was undergoing but because she, like Keats listening to his nightingale, was already fading away into the forest dim, viscerally and imaginatively experiencing recent events in my life, her voice soaring with visions of the future yet to come

for me. In the midst of these raptures, she quietly asked, in an aside, for Kiri to adjust her morphine pump, and then she flew on, overriding pain in genuine pleasure at “being there,” in the moment, with and for me. At the time, I desperately yearned to turn the conversation back to *her*—her life, her triumphs, her days, her hour. But, of course, in that moment Patsy was in fact talking about herself—because for Patsy there was little division between her life and those many, many selves she folded into her own. As Virginia Woolf has Clarissa think near the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway*, so too with Patsy: “She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that . . . she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (11). Clarissa's refusal of categories, her ability to move fluidly between “this” and “that,” is of a piece with what made Patsy, from the beginning to the end of her career, a passionate advocate of language and literature's dialogic potential to expand the self beyond the self, to connect others across chasms of difference, to find dirty materiality in transcendental flights of desire and, conversely, to find desire in the dirt.

Like Patsy, Clarissa Dalloway was a honey-mad woman, embracing the expansive possibilities of being and of language. Such expansiveness permeates Clarissa's early-morning thoughts of mortality, thoughts that help me put Patsy's passing into perspective. Plunging into her day, Clarissa muses:

Did it matter then . . . that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her . . . or did it not become consoling to believe that . . . somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there . . . part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she

had seen the trees lift the mist, [and] it spread
ever so far, her life, herself. (12)

Patsy shared with Clarissa that special gift of creating moments that kindle and illuminate, of catching the moment in the instant of its passing, of providing a diamond center teasing us with glimmers of radiant meaning. This gift is one with Clarissa's embrace of the ebb and flow that allows "the unseen part of ourselves, which spreads wide," to exist in others long after our physical selves

have dissolved (231). And indeed you, Patsy, survive, now, in us: your family, your friends, your colleagues, your readers . . . those who knew you best, those whom you never met. And we, gathered here, are now the trees, these arms are our branches, we are the ones among whom your presence is now laid out like a mist as we lift you aloft, as you spread ever so far, your life, yourself.

Joseph Allen Boone

University of Southern California

To go honey mad is the equivalent of going language mad.

—Patricia Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women* (28)

I'M GOING BACK. BACK TO 1988. AND THE MOMENT Patsy's *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing* hit the feminist bookstores. There it was, showcased in Nancy Miller and Carolyn Heilbrun's prestigious series *Gender and Culture* at Columbia University Press.

Those were heady days for feminist literary studies. Through the early and mid-1980s influential feminist work on women's writing was percolating, then coming to a boil, giving off steam, finding welcoming publishers. And when the work appeared, commonplaces were shaken up, discourse rejiggered, contentious debates joined. We were thinking through one another, if often in energetic critique.

Patsy had forecast her project a couple of years earlier in *Browning Institute Studies* with a piece entitled "Honey-Mad Women: Charlotte Brontë's Bilingual Heroines." Here she released her titular figure from capture in the pages of Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* to signify anew. For Patsy, this "exotically defiant figure . . . who

eats honey in bizarre amounts, who feeds on it wildly and to excess" was wildly generative, a figure of the woman who "by consuming a substance like herself . . . usurps her society's right to consume her" (11). There the figure was, out of the book. A time traveler and code switcher, reanimated as thought puzzle to illuminate the play of French and English words and the intervals between in Brontë's *Villette*.

The honey-mad woman arrived in book form in 1988. What a year. Here's a glimpse at what came out that year: Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life*, Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History*, Jane Gallop's *Thinking through the Body*, bell hooks's *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. And the essays: Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*), and Françoise Lionnet's "Métissage, Emancipation, and Female Textuality in Two Francophone Writers." A dizzying, cacophonous rock group.

And Patsy was there, in the thick of it. She was so agile in sticking a figure, a trope, a phrase, an analytic. So exuberant in her postulation of emancipatory strategies in women's writing. Her

title arrested. Her prose caught fire. And then came the supple delivery of the deep reading.

She said of the women writers she lived with that they were “sporting with the tradition” (82)—and she herself was sporting with the theoretical tradition. She stuck it to the authoritative poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists in a late chapter, but to her own purpose. Listen here, she writes, “In filling this chapter with writhing male voice—and openly reveling in the fact that I have ‘had to do with goblin merchant men’—I would like to argue, as Laura [of “Goblin Market”] implicitly does, that this gathering of male texts can also represent a feminist harvest, . . . a useful homeopathy for phallogocentric inquiry” (247–48). She also stuck it to those of us who were feminist critics, gently, feminist critic to feminist critic. “Why are we so uneasy with the concept of play, so reluctant, as feminist critics, to equate the practices of the woman writer with delight, with ludic freedom, with pleasure?” (18).

She was there in the fight and the frenzy. At once pugilist and dancer. Immersed in a life-changing exchange joining woman critic and woman writer and feminist reader.

Her work was of the times, of the late 1980s. Talking of “woman.” Recuperating the valence of madness. Projecting an emancipatory politics. Lolling with desire. Her work was part of the debates, about the status of the referent *woman*. About whose woman. About the politics of difference. About the lacunae of postmodern theory. About the postcolonial challenge.

I want to dynamite the rails.

—Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire* (34)

THAT’S A SENTENCE THAT LAUNCHED A FLEET of dissertations.

Patsy was 1980s then. And in a few more years Patsy would become 1990s, coediting *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, critical to the turn to intersectional analyses of gender, sexuality, race, and national identities. Later she would become 2000s and, even later, 2010s.

I didn’t know Patsy back in 1988. I came back to the University of Michigan in 1996, and there she suddenly was, the person with the name, a burst of vibrant energy, in the flesh. She was the first of my colleagues in English and women’s studies to invite us to dinner, to launch a sisterly relationship, of feminist critic and feminist critic. Additionally, we were neighbors, Patsy and I. Awhile back, for about a year, Patsy got me out for yoga lessons. She usually picked me up and the two of us transformed the twenty-minute drive into intimate talk. For me, the ride time was a lifeline. I was adjusting to a distressing diagnosis of a partner’s dementia. Patsy understood I needed to care for myself. In that car, we sorted through strategies for making change or leaving things alone or letting them just be good enough. And then we’d open our mats and spend an hour and a half contorting our bodies, resting our minds, finding a center of quiet release. I can still see those long legs rising upward from her mat. I can still see the magisterial height of her fully perpendicular body as she came to rest in a standing pose. A honey-mad woman in repose.

Sidonie Smith

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

It would be hard to overestimate the dynamic, explosive impact that Patsy Yaeger’s work on southern women’s writing had on the field of southern literary studies. Few people have understood better the power of metaphor to sedimentize the ways we read literature,

and few people have set out as consciously and conscientiously to use metaphor to upset and render viscous the very ground beneath a discipline. Along the tracks Patsy wanted to detonate at the turn of the century ran two parallel lines. One was the Dixie Limited (34)—an “Agrarian-inspired,” Faulkner-driven locomotive of trope making that for generations kept the southern literary establishment enthralled (250). The other was a national critical discourse happy to understand Dixie and its literature as different from, and not entirely relevant to, itself. Together, twinned critical narratives that were comforting, convenient, and, to Patsy, so tiresome. Where, she wondered aloud in *Dirt and Desire*, her glorious book-length manifesto for southern women’s writing, oh where to place the nitroglycerin?

But why such passion for dynamite, and why *these* tracks? Article after article, a whole book, more articles and books in the works. . . . I suspect there may be people even in this room who know Patsy’s work primarily through *PMLA* or trauma studies or *Nationalisms and Sexualities* and who might ask, What’s up with all the southern women writers stuff? Why return to that tired old ground again and again?

Because, in her own words, when Patsy “open[ed] a story by a southern woman writer,” she found “figures and ideas that astonish”: “dirt-eating, finger-sucking fiction[s]” (*Dirt* ix), filled not by diminutive southern belles but by gargantuan women, thrown-away children, “flesh that has been ruptured or riven by violence, . . . fractured, excessive bodies” (xiii) in pieces floating in the air or being sucked back into the earth. Juxtaposing white and black southern women’s writing—itself a radical gesture when and how she made it—Patsy found a common, but differently inflected, struggle to articulate the non-epic, unseen everyday of race, or what she framed as “the unthought known” (12). But this was (and is) not just a southern project. Patsy understood and declared over and over the national, transnational bases for the im-

ages and histories encoded in southern women’s fiction, and she argued tirelessly for this fiction’s value for “examination of the ways the South has helped encode American ways of racial knowing: of both overconceptualizing and refusing to conceptualize an obscene racial blindness” (xii). When you actually read what’s on the pages of southern women’s writing, she argued, the “traditional categories” used to contain and overshadow it become literally incredible. Given all this dynamism, this prime territory for thought, she asked, “Why have the troubling crypts and verbal honey of southern women’s fictions been so segmented and split off from the rest of American writing” (xiv)? Why indeed. Generous, a careful and fair reader, but never afraid to name names, Patsy challenged regional and regionalizing literary establishments to change their paradigms, or to be *en garde*.

I think it’s fair to say that Patsy Yaeger’s verbal blasts hit right on the mark for southern studies, though we may need a little more powder under the national line. Patsy’s work, her example, has inspired generations of scholars, from her colleagues and their students to those students’ students, to seek answers through southern women’s literature: to questions about the role of region in the nation, “the place of women writers in North America’s racial history,” and “our sense of the relations” between southern writings—black, white, Native, Asian, Hispanic (keep going)—and configurations of trauma and pleasure that are sexual, ecological, economic, bodily, psychological, linguistic, imperialist, global, violent, everyday (xvi). Best of all, she got her wish: the new models and paradigms of southern literary criticism that she sketched out for us have had, as she hoped, the power of Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein. Southern studies, it turns out, has come to look just like them.

I’d like to close with a few more of Patsy’s words. The adjectives: *luminous, astonishing, honey-mad, gargantuan, monstrous, excessive, fierce, mouth-stopping, lustrous, remarkable,*

laughable. The verbs: *wrest*, *explode*, *expose*, *ravage*, *shock*, *hover*, *hide in plain sight*. Patsy's language is thick, sensual, throbbing with life. *Look at this*, it fairly begs you. *Open your eyes*. *Don't get stuck*. Writing about Patsy, having an excuse to revisit her work, especially on southern women writers, has been inspiring—even emancipating—for me, and, as much as I hate the occasion, I am deeply grateful to the organizers of this panel for inviting me to do it. Patsy's absence among us

is a great loss on every level. I console myself with the laws of physics, which as I understand them dictate that all the astonishing energy (and intelligence and good humor) that was in Patsy cannot just disappear: it must be conserved, preserved, up-served into different forms. It's up to all of us to find it and carry it forward. Thank you, Patsy.

Katherine Henninger

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge

UNDER THE PRESSURE OF PATSY'S INFLUENCE, this little piece, which began as a tribute to her work and its impact, changed key. Having no anxiety about Patsy's influence (quite the opposite: bring it on, I say), I let her spirit run my course.

A few days ago, I reread some of Patsy's essays to get the sound and texture of her thinking into my head and into these words. As always Patsy came through. She named the predicament of our task today—the task of those who loved her and who want her back. *Predicament* is Patsy's term for the work of grieving, the topic of her fine and troubling essay "Consuming Trauma." She defines that predicament by posing two questions: first, "What do we owe to the dead?" and, second, "what are our responsibilities when we write about the dead?" (27, 29). These are not the same question, though you don't see that until Patsy spells it out and gives them different answers, one the exact antithesis of the other. Patsy, being Patsy, chooses both. She chooses not-choosing. Again, borrowing from one of Patsy's many intellectual idioms, she chooses the pleasure principle *and* the reality principle.

What we owe, she says, is an act of a repersonation; to the gone girl, we restore a

local habitation and a name. We give her density and spatiality; we "*identify*" her. These are all Patsy's injunctions—indeed, Patsy's italics; as she uses the term, *identify* means also *identify with*. We do this—Patsy herself did it, gorgeously—by telling stories, crafting images, and, above all, by coining figures, figures of speech and speaking figures, to ventriloquize those who have grown silent. This is a labor gladly given and gladly received. It is heart's ease and homage at the same time.

And yet (and here's the characteristic Patsy backspin), when we write about the dead, Patsy enjoins an altogether different obligation. This one is hard and solitary. It does not console. It does not consume. In the face of a change so absolute, Patsy calls for a posture of silence, resisting the yearning to memorialize. She places us awestruck, dumbstruck before an in-itself—as she puts it, an "indissoluble physicality"—that brooks no representation. She asks us specifically *not* to turn bones to coral, bodies to words, loss into presence.

As I read her words and think about why we're here, I see another side to this lesson in wise passiveness. I hear Patsy saying that the inscrutability of death is as nothing compared to that of life, although only the death

brings that home to us. We thought we had captured her, known her, identified her—and why shouldn't we think this, for Patsy gave of herself extravagantly, no holds barred. And yet, now, when she eludes us in this final way, we see that she always eluded us. Maybe this is true of every life, every person. But with Patsy, more and different was an article of faith and a way of life. She was the most fiercely self-defining person I've ever met and, at the same time, the greatest of shape-shifters. The easy thing is to bring your bounding line into being by pushing against real or imagined others. I am the one who is not my mother, sister, daughter, husband. Patsy didn't do this; her way was to push hard and relentlessly against her own earlier selves, against the inertias, the authority, the security of "being yourself." The minute you thought you knew her—or, rather, the minute she thought she knew herself—she'd be off and running: not running away from earlier fixities, but searching out authenticities of feeling and action not yet tried. So when Patsy says, *Halt!* to our impulse to read and remember, she's not just acknowledging

the sublimity of loss. She's demanding respect for her own discipline of self-differing.

Patsy and I talked about our children. A lot. And the biggest topic, from their babyhood to now, was pain: their pain. What to do, what to say, how to be with your children and for them when they're suffering. Here's what she taught me: not to rush in with consolation, compensation, and advice. Not to put words in their mouths. Not to make their pain into yours. Not to love them to death. She taught me to respect the elusiveness, the absolute difference, of other people. She taught me how to sit with a sad or worried child—by my presence alone acknowledging the enormity of his or her feeling and, the harder thing, acknowledging it as the child's, not mine.

So, as much as I want to add my portion to the lovely heap of remembering, I'll end by translating the word *Patsy* into a language she loved, the language of Romanticism: *schöne Seele*—beautiful soul.

Marjorie Levinson

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

"HOW LIQUID ARE WE?" ASKS PATSY YAEGER IN one of her many tour-de-force Editor's Columns for *PMLA*, "Sea Trash, Dark Pools, and the Tragedy of the Commons" (523). Her question develops as poem and pun, riffing on "the real materiality" of oceans that belies "[l]iquid modernity" and, poignantly, on the materiality of the human body itself—"our blood a tide of oceanic ions" (524). Returning again and again to the matter of human and animal bodies, maritime labor, ships, and energy infrastructures sunk in the deep ocean, Patsy's "Sea Trash" for me epitomizes the stylistic and theoretical innovation that created new emphases

in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities in her years as editor of *PMLA*. Infrastructure, energy, rubbish, the material seas—under Patsy, *PMLA* began to speak a critical language I had started to learn from cultural geographers and conceptual artists in Los Angeles, from the Center for Land Use Interpretation, from the postmodern exurb itself. Patsy's ecologically inflected columns are lyrical, passionately political, and ambitiously interdisciplinary.

They are also heavy meditations on the limits of literary and cultural studies, bold forays into popular science, and sometimes-painful critiques of ecocritical—and literary-

historical—pieties. In “Sea Trash,” Patsy calls up many voices, speaking, as she was wont to do, in community. She speaks of and with Donna Haraway (for whom “[w]orldly embodiment is always a verb” [qtd. in Yaeger, “Sea Trash” 526]), Bruno Latour (who strategically “add[s] asterisks to words that have become impediments to thought” [529]), and Jane Bennett (who insists on agency as the “confederation of many bodies” [541]) and with marine scientists, mariners, and poets—Bishop, Pound, Dickinson, Merrill—whose words echolocate “externalized costs” amid more conventional oceanic ecstasies (534–35). The voices of this intellectual community preside over a fragile commons—the social, historical, overwritten, and yet living space of our modern world, our second nature.

In a concatenation of new materialisms and older materialisms, shot through with poetry that destabilizes critical mastery and forces its readers toward unfinished reference and the raw matter of worlds, Patsy invented a new way of reading called, provisionally, “eco-criticism\$.” Her succinct definition—“a prosthetic term that insists on the imbroglio of markets and nature”—belies the complexity of her method and its implications (529). Writing of a fish’s sequin-like scale as a “syllable” (the poet’s matter), as “silver” (capital’s capture), and as the complex embodiment of the fish, Patsy insists that literary language register at least three times over without transforming itself into any single epistemological field:

ecology, economy, or poetics. “Sea Trash” exemplifies, for me, a critical aesthetic akin to the “detritus aesthetic” Patsy wittily identifies with postmodern art in another *PMLA* Editor’s Column, “The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of Trash; or, Rubbish Ecology” (327). “Residue is a way of haunting the commodity,” she tells us (335)—and the arts are a way (though she doesn’t say it so crudely) of being residue, performing entropy as an invitation to new material and agential possibilities. One of my most striking memories of Patsy is about myself, not surprisingly. She said to me, in the course of a conversation about my work, “You’ve got a utopian sensibility!” The memory carries an exuberance that I attribute less to myself than to Patsy. Her work epitomizes a vibrant, living humanities, shifting language through diverse material histories, where aesthetic workhorses like beauty live not under erasure but as open and ragged forms—papers gusting into the air, never again to be placed in order, voices in tense conversation at the common table, never to merge in consensus. In short—and in homage to Elizabeth Bishop—Patsy’s scholarly voice conjured “what we imagine knowledge to be: / dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free, / drawn from the cold hard mouth / of the world, . . . / . . . / . . . flowing, and flown” (Bishop).

Stephanie LeMenager
University of Oregon

I DON’T WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT PATSY. WHAT I want is to hear Patsy speak. And so I am going to read from a talk that Patsy gave at the 2013 MLA convention entitled “The Embodied Classroom.” Literature, she remarks, is “a very physical thing.” This comes as no surprise, since Patsy

was nothing if not embodied. Gliding magisterially down the corridor, extending crane-like arms to stretch or make a point, jumping fully clothed into a Chinese waterfall, dancing with abandon and enticing others to join her: why would her response to literature be any different?

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The “first reason for teaching literature,” she reports, is that “I am battered, bowled over, absorbed into, wiped out, not by a three-person’d God but by text after text. . . . If this sounds New Critical,” she observes defiantly, “I don’t care; it describes exactly my response to [a writer like] Faulkner: cradled by, buffeted, at odds with, in deep rapport with the crashing rhythms of his whiskey prose.” This “desire for fusion with the [literary] object,” she continues, “also creates the hope of being transformed. How,” she asks, “could I write about Faulkner before registering the ways in which he called out and threatened to drown me?” And then, as Patsy often did, she turns the tables: “how does a poem, how does a novella, handle you, dear reader? Does it let you in? Push you and prod you? Does the poem hide from or entangle you?”

“Let’s go to a Mark Doty poem,” she suggests, “to find out.” The poem she chose for this lesson is “Difference”:

The jellyfish
float in the bay shallows
like schools of clouds,

a dozen identical—is it right
to call them creatures,
these elaborate sacks

of nothing? All they seem
is shape, and shifting,
and though a whole troop

of undulant cousins
go about their business
within a single wave’s span,

every one does something unlike:
this one a balloon
open on both ends

but swollen to its full expanse,
this one a breathing heart,
this a pulsing flower.

This one a rolled condom,
or a plastic purse swallowing itself,
that one a Tiffany shade,

this a troubled parasol.
This submarine opera’s
all subterfuge and disguise,

its plot a fabulous tangle
of hiding and recognition:
nothing but trope,

nothing but something
forming itself into figures
then refiguring,

sheer ectoplasm
recognizable only as the stuff
of metaphor. What can words do

but link what we know
to what we don’t,
and so form a shape?

Which shrinks or swells,
configures or collapses, blooms
even as it is described

into some unlikely
marine chiffon:
a gown for Isadora?

Nothing but style.
What binds
one shape to another

also sets them apart
—but what’s lovelier
than the shapeshifting

transparence of *like* and *as*:
clear, undulant words?
We look at alien grace,

unfettered
by any determined form,
and we say: balloon, flower,

heart, condom, opera,
lampshade, parasol, ballet.
Hear how the mouth,

so full
of longing for the world,
changes its shape?

Patsy describes how she would invite “a room of smart undergraduates” to “undulate like condom-wearing jellyfish”—and, believe me, she assigned such exercises regularly. I re-

member vividly the day that she gleefully reported, "Valerie, these students play with me! We get out of our chairs and dance!" Patsy reveled in the experience of others feeling themselves, as she did, to be in kinesthetic empathy with Doty's poem. But this was not an end in itself. When—"SNAP!"—the students encounter "the surprise of the poem," they register that "it's about figures, not bodies." The poem, she notes, "keeps sliding from the sea to the page; the jellies are 'nothing but something / forming itself into figures': the 'stuff of metaphor.'"

"It is all just figuration," she concedes. "But wait," she says. "For if you are willing to utter these last lines aloud, you will feel something peculiar happening to your pronouncing mouth. To speak the poem, the mouth must move or undulate like its swelling and contracting pelagic cousins. Try it. Let's all speak together and you'll feel something odd start to happen":

We look at alien grace,
unfettered
by any determined form,
and we say: balloon, flower,
heart, condom, opera,
lampshade, parasol, ballet.
Hear how the mouth,
so full
of longing for the world,
changes its shape?

As we wrap our mouths around Doty's words, we can hear the reverberations of Patsy's voice. Such embodied transmission was the heartbeat of Patsy's lessons to the end. With senses mingled and a mind undone, her approach to literature, as to life, was to invite what is outside to come in, to encircle, to be encircled, to be bowled over and blown away—and to invite the rest of us to join her. Her desire to undulate like a jellyfish, to pulse like a flower, to be buffeted by prose, to devour a poem and be drowned by it: she was the once-living embodiment of "alien grace,"

"so full of longing for the world"—in life, as in death, "unfettered by any determined form."

Valerie Traub

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

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