

DOUBLE CASTINGS

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Double Castings

1. Description: Précis and the Double Bind

From Sappho to Ai and beyond, a mystification¹ has enveloped the creative process of the woman poet writing in persona. John Keats defined “negative capability” as “a sort of emptying of the self, suspending judgment, so as to imagine others and even the natural from the inside” (Wallace and Boisseau 162). However, this male-centered approach, often coined empathy² today, involves “projecting,” or as Keats once wrote in a letter, dated 27 October 1818, “*he* [the poet] is continually in for and filling some other body” (162, my emphasis). Beyond the nearsightedness of seeing the end creative product (in natural order) as a totalizing *empathy* and not atomized *sympathy*, the creative process (in nurture) is grounded in contested space.

According to Suzanne Juhasz in Naked and Fiery Forms, “The woman who wants to be a poet, therefore, needs to exhibit certain accepts of herself that her society will label masculine. She is in a double bind situation, . . . The conflict between her two

¹ I invoke “mystification” in the sense R.D. Laing does in his article “Mystification, Confusion, and Conflict (1965)”. He defines “mystification” as meaning “both the *act* of mystifying and the *state* of being mystified” (200). Both in its active and passive sense, “mystification” activates and is activated by “the substitution of false for true constructions” of what is being experienced, whether in praxis or process (see footnote 7 for further discussion on the definition of *act* in and for itself). He later defines this “action of one person *on the other*” as “transpersonal” and akin to Sartre’s notion of “bad faith” (204).

² Although beyond the scope of this paper, I am alluding to the difference between how some modern poets and scholars define empathy as the authority or license to “walk in another’s shoes” from the more systematized German psychological origin of empathy and what William Hazlitt called “sympathetic potentialities” nearly a century earlier in Essay on the Principles of Human Action. In a discussion of Keats’s and Hazlitt’s interactions, David Bromwich makes a clear distinction between “sympathy” and “empathy”: “[E]mpathy— translating the German *Einfühlung*— and I need to say why it is closer to what Hazlitt all along called ‘sympathy.’ Empathy is the process by which a mind so projects itself into its object that a transfer of qualities seems to take place. Keats, on the other hand, was looking for a capability of so heightening the imagination’s response to anything that the identities of both the mind and its object would grow more vivid *as what they are*” (Bloom 187).

‘selves’ is an excruciating and irreconcilable civil war, when both sides are in fact the same person” (2). She goes on to write that female poets like Rich, Brooks, and Giovanni have such different voices “precisely because feminine form needs to be an articulation of the person speaking” (4). Only through this creative process “can the double bind be broken” (5), and the whole woman can begin to share her holistic experience with the other voices present in and outside herself.

In its simplest form, the double bind is a communication situation in which a person is forced, yet unable to choose between two equally correct/incorrect choices. The poet, actor, medium, sender, etc. recognizes not only that the choices before her are unacceptable, but that the rules for making those choices have failed. The *mystified* ambiguity created in the space between choices is typically depicted as a negative space producing anxiety, hopelessness, fear, doubt, guilt, and mental illness. However, most double bind theorists, from Bateson to Wilden, allude to the possibility of the double bind as a positive space, which is the ultimate embodiment of creativity. In his article “On the Anguish, and Creative Passions, of Not Escaping Double Binds: A Reformulation,” Lyman C. Wynne theorizes that “*not* escaping double binds for long periods of time” may be the only way for the “creative transformation” of experience to untangle (249). The creative moment occurs when the rules for choice-making become visible and the poet learns to create new combinations of rules (deutro-learning) or new rules for action (art). The ambiguity *de-mystified* becomes a fertile ground for revelatory perception.

Throughout this critical précis, I will argue that Lola Haskins’s persona poetry, highlighted in Castings, is an articulation of the creative double bind enacted. Through an exploration of her own inhabitation within the negative spaces and capabilities bound in

traditional double binds, her work offers therapeutic possibilities for the reader. In her book Not Feathers Yet: A Beginner's Guide to the Poetic Life, she explains much about her conception of the voices throughout Castings:

When Jane fell silent, Julia and Patsy followed in her wake. By this time I'd viscerally realized something else that had been only intellectually obvious to me before— that this “I,” this Lola whose book you're reading, is just an accident of time and space. This idea must have cracked something open in me,... (118)

Haskins also transcends the boundaries of self and the rules of self-disclosure to offer the reader new ways to envision the self, as “cracked open,” through the voice(s) of the other.

Bateson and his Palo Alto group, working off a Rockefeller Foundation grant for the advancement of schizophrenia research, collaboratively created, advanced, and defined the term “double bind”³ in their 1956 article “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia.” For the purposes of this paper, it may be useful to broaden this definition, by reducing it to general characteristics, as the original authors did with the addition of the headings by Sluzki, Beavin, Tarnopolsky, and Veron in 1967:

Setting: The individual is involved in an intense relationship; that is, a relationship in which he feels it is vitally important that he discriminate

³ The original definition states that the “necessary ingredients for a double bind situation” are essentially (1) a relationship between two or more people, and for one of these people (the victim), this relationship is broadly paradoxical; (2) the paradoxical situation is repeated and becomes “an habitual expectation”; (3) it is “a primarily negative injunction” maintained through threats or punishments like “the withdrawal of love or an expression of hate”; (4) “a secondary injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level, and like the first enforced by punishments or signals that threaten survival”; (5) the victim (recipient) of this “tertiary negative injunction” cannot escape from the field (frame) through metacommunication; (6) all these “ingredients” (requirements), once established, are no longer necessary to perpetuate this “double bind pattern” (Bateson et al., “Toward a Theory” 6-9).

accurately what sort of message is being communicated so that he may respond appropriately.

Message: The individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other.

Response: The individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed to correct his discrimination of what order of message to respond to, i.e. he cannot make a metacommunicative statement. (222)⁴

Ignoring the protracted male-centered language of this time-bound passage, the *setting*, *message*, and *response* will become useful markers later to mirror the dramatic and epistolary frames perfected by Haskin's throughout Castings. The reader will note that the whole process of double bind developed originally from Bateson's explication of the concept of *duetro-learning* (as Gestaltist) verses *proto-learning* (as Behaviorist), and it should further be stressed that each bound meaning needs to be ultimately "consistent within its own frame of reference" (Sluzki et al. 224).

As Anthony Wilden and Tim Wilson explain in their article "The Double Bind: Logic, Magic, and Economics," a "true" double bind is not just "a binary opposition," contradiction, or oppositional situation that leaves the participant pondering the choice between "the lesser of two evils," "damned if we do and damned if we don't," or the "horns of the dilemma," but instead a "true" double bind "requires a choice between two states which are *equally valued* and so *equally insufficient* that a self-perpetuating

⁴ In phenomenology the method of analysis is *description*, *reduction*, *interpretation* (see Richard L. Lanigan's Phenomenology of Communication, pages 3-17, esp. Fig 2 page 9), and in this passage we encounter a similar processing, except the *interpretation* becomes a primary *abduction* (defined via Charles Sanders Pierce, Gregory Bateson, and Merleau-Ponty as *adduction* in the Phenomenology of Perception).

oscillation is engendered by any act of choice between them” (276). Just as Sartre stated “we are condemned to freedom” and Merleau-Ponty replied that “we are condemned to meaning,” the participant in the double bind is *condemned* to choose between two poles that are “logically or pragmatically incompatible with each other, but each *alone* must also be incompatible with some other aspect of the context” (277).

In “Double Bind, 1969,” Bateson recontextualized double binds as “tangles in the rules for making the transforms . . . such as humor, art, poetry, etc.” (238) that reflect reality, but moreover this redefinition throws light on the tangles and the process by which one learns about these tangles (deutro-learning). Tom McFeat provides a succinct description of Bateson’s concept of “deutr-o-learning” in his 1979 monograph “The Communication of Culture: Models of Learning for Troops and Children”:

‘deutro-learning’ identifies a more complex end product (or by-product) of the series of like proto-learning situations. . . . generalizations of context. . . emerge as the direct, though unconscious, reading by learners of these situations; it is an act of creative synthesis. (2)

Lola Haskins puts it succinctly, “Writing in persona is never the full voice and never a totality, but like disco ball, reflecting back different parts of the self and others.”⁵ She goes on to declare that one is “always writing in persona.”⁶ Bateson coined the word

⁵ The lecture and workshop on writing persona poetry given at the Rainier Writer’s Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University is reflective of the Lola’s Haskin’s larger approach to practical pedagogy, which finds its identity rooted between response learning and cognitive learning, or the trail-and errors of the self to, thus, create a larger organic learning environment that Michel Foucault would have called *savior* or “understanding; know how” (Lanigan, The Human Science 167).

⁶ If one were to explore a philosophical notion congruous to these positioning statements, I think Jacques Lacan’s idea of the “mirror stage” in relationship to childhood seems apropos to the wonderful image of the ‘disco ball.’ In Wilden’s translation of Lacan’s The Language of the Self, he explains, “Through his perception of the image of another human being, the child discovers a form (*Gestalt*), a corporeal unity, which is lacking to him at this particular stage of his development. . . . Lacan interprets the child’s

“transcontextual” to deal with the creator’s consciousness of the double bind in context of its own self and the world. He points to the “experiential component” in context theory that for better or worse causes a “double take” to occur like “a falling leaf, the greeting of a friend, or a ‘primrose by the river’s brim’ [as] not ‘just that and nothing more’” (238). Of course, this puts a “primacy on perception” that most writers agree with— an attention to detail necessary on the part of the audience too, a space in the context where *not* escaping the double bind makes the *act*⁷ of the reader (as a participant), responding to the writer, the writing, and the world, into an *act* (*in-itself* and *for-itself*) of creativity. In an interview with editor Harry Humes for Yarrow magazine, Haskins expands this notion of the ever-present “double take” of the writer and her expectations for the reader in her own way:

And I have the feeling that what I took out is still there, there’s a power in condensation, a pent-up energy, that tends to pen-up energy, involve a reader more than that which spells everything out, as one letter at a time would. Because it makes him invest something. It makes him do his own discovering. (5)

fascination with the other’s image as on anticipation of his maturing to a future point of corporeal unity by identifying himself with the image” (160).

⁷ Just as Lola Haskins’s word *cast* is recast through every definition in the opening eleven poems of Castings, so should the word ‘act’ be treated throughout this essay. Not merely an ‘activity’ or ‘process’ or evoked ‘power,’ it refers also to ‘in-tension-al’ relations bound between ego, consciousness, and self. In The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, Emmanuel Levinas notes, “Acts originate, so to speak, from the ego which lives in these acts that one distinguishes the receptivity from the spontaneity of consciousness and from intentionality. The activity of the self when it is attentive, in acts of creative judgment and synthesis, of assertion and negation, the spontaneity of the self in all forms, must be faithfully described before being interpreted. In some of these ‘positional’ acts the self lives . . . as a center of radiation, . . . a sort of ‘fiat’ of the self” (50).

2. Reduction: The Symbolic “I” (Un)bound

...where his black eyes went in...
 the olives made me think of him
 and I was eating his eyes all through dinner....
 and my fingers are his eyes
 and his eyes are my fingers
 and we twist and turn til morning, so hot.

The eye of Lola Haskins’s poetry is an “I” in double bind. In the poem “From the Top of the Hill” published in fall 1977 edition of the Beloit Poetry Journal, Haskins offers her first published example of a persona poem that experiments with the epistolary or letter writing style. A form that itself is a perfect set-up for the double bind situation. Obviously, if the *setting* is a group of letters, the chance of the *message* reaching the receiver’s present (often too late for a *response*) is a matter of deferred time. In turn, this creates a sense of foregrounded ambiguity in how the audience receives the collected letters. For example, “From the Top of the Hill” ends:

So here’s to you from
 the rooftop and when you
 go through my drawers
 and find this
 here’s to you,
 lying awake at night,
 listening, wondering
 what’s true
 and what’s not. (39)

The “you” in the poem is the mother that Lola (or not Lola) leaves this collection of letters, poems, etc. that confess to moments of exposing, premarital carnality, creativity, and improper deeds. The audience is in ambiguity, trans-contextually speaking, about whether the poems were ever received by the mother, which specific details (if any) are true, and what the audience should do with both a (de)construction of reality and a diachronic unity.

Although “From the Top of the Hill” does not exemplify the apex of “pent-up energy” present in the best of Lola Haskins’s persona poems, it highlights many of the broader thematics and symbolic drives that ignite and shine through Castings and remain in trace elements, circulating in her later lyrical poetry. Haskins describes her early personae poems in another context as “first-person fictions” (Not Feather Yet 126), and in the Yarrow interview, she describes Castings, Forty-Four, and Extranjera as building towards a “specific climax” much “like oddly worded novels” (15). Clearly, she marks the “power in condensation” here, and when one marvels about all that is presence in absence in these three poetic “novels,” the amount of lived experience and research that went into each becomes gloriously illuminated.

In Castings alone, the broader thematics of the double binds embedded in the narrator, personae, and *dalles de verre* in the form of the writing itself reaches deep into the “I” of recast feminism. In Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership, Kathleen Hall Jamieson states that “[T]he means of reclaiming language include recasting words used to disqualify into terms denoting qualification, and so transforming handcuffs into credentials” (192). Haskins realizes the significance of reclaiming both language and speech (*langue* and *parole*) and emphasizes the importance of not being comfortable just writing in the women’s voices. In this early stage of her life as writer, the dramatic persona becomes her vehicle for expression out of the confines of race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual norms. In her first book of poetry Planting the Children, the two persona poems, “Persistence: The Will of Jeremy Bentham” and “A Note on the Acquisition by American Medical Schools of Skeletons from India,” take the audience through a museum of many voices—intertwined voices of

colleagues, a janitor, a wife, her husband's skull, the skull's mistress, another husband, a dean, a student, etc. In essence, her work exemplifies the need for choice, both artistic and throughout her life— her own individual risks and latitudes⁸.

To define the boundaries of Castings as a feminist text, it would be useful to be aware of the five overarching double binds that women face in contemporary culture. All five of these binds qualified by Jamieson are prevalent at the peripheries, in the margins, in “the pent-up energy,” and written in the dreamer's “lemon juice”⁹ throughout Castings and many of Haskins's other gender-redefining monologues and lyrical presentations.

- Women can exercise their wombs or their brains, but not both.
- Women who speak out are immodest and will be shamed, while women who are silent will be ignored or dismissed.
- Women are subordinate whether they claim to be different from men or the same.
- Women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine.
- As men age, they gain wisdom and power; as women age, they wrinkle and become superfluous. (16)

The field of these double binds creates an ever-tightening sense of “urgency” with each rereading of Castings. These women command voice from the narrator's fingertips, just

⁸ Always redefining the edges of herself, I think of Haskins's *anima* as artist in much the spirit of Kenneth Patchen when asked about his need to be a writer foremost, and he replied, “Poetry is writing. Maybe what I am talking about is not poetry (the stuff that critics are yammering about). In whose name is the criterion? Dante's, I think. Homer's, I think. Dostoevski's, I think. They were writers, and they wrote. I am a writer, and I shall write. The term ‘poet’ is a convenience of the middle-class. I declare myself a writer. I want room to move around” (1).

⁹ This reference is from Not Feathers Yet, where Lola Haskins wrote about finishing her research for writing Castings, and how these real women's voices appeared and disappeared: “One night I dreamed the real stories had been told in lemon juice, and I saw them, emerging warm and brown under my hot iron. But when I woke up, they vanished” (117).

beneath her skin, under fingernails, and in “chapel” of the reader’s tongue, paced by the flow of the author’s words, reread under each breath. For these poems demand to be voiced (both by author and participant), and Haskins deftly constructs a choir in the rafters that builds in the blood of these women without possessing them or tearing them down to do so. Like Calliope, the early Greek goddess of Art and Mnemosyne (memory), who first represented, through condensation, her nine muse sisters and an amused Apollo, Lola seems to enter into a reciprocal relationship with each persona spoken through her body. She *enacts* the Muse, and they become amused (*act* the Muse) for her too. They complete each other’s needs, fulfilling a pantheon together. As Mary K. DeShazer points out in Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse, the woman poet’s dilemma is often that “this tradition of the objectified muse has made it hard for her to transcend Otherness and thus attain the subjectivity crucial to a strong poetic stance” (2). Haskins avoids getting trapped in this double bind of identity though by *enacting* what Julia Kristeva suggests, as explained by Kelly Oliver in her analysis Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind:

Kristeva suggests that women must articulate their *jouissance* within the Symbolic without relinquishing any of their difference. This project requires both symbolic law and negativity. It requires that women take up their identity as an identity-in-process in order not to be linked to that identity in an oppressive way. Women must take up identity always tentatively and never completely in order to avoid the annihilation of difference. (187)

Anyone familiar with Lola Haskin's embracing and sweeping poetry, with an "I" to Castings, will be aware of her images skirting (pun intended) through the archetypal double binds of womanhood, but if "we" pluralize this problematic for a moment, Haskins primal symbolic patterns appear from the weave of her words. For the purposes of unity and brevity with the subject, symbols will be defined through the following quotation from Lacan's The Language of the Self: "[T]here are thousands of symbols in the sense that the term is understood in analysis, all of them refer to the body itself, to kinship relations, to birth, to life, and to death" (58). If one lines up the first two times the nominative plural "we" is invoked by the narrator in Castings, a pattern of symbols, a symbolic order, begins to appear through each word emphasized:

If we *love* each other well,
it will be her *heart's* red beating you feel
against your *chest*, her heart
from her body which was taken away
but now returns. (4)

It is not she by whom we enter,
but by what is on her table: a calling
card set back askew by her trembling *hand*.
A pair of gloves. A china *bird*.
...with her mother's *eyes*... (11)

In A Dictionary of Symbols, J.E. Cirlot defines the symbol of 'Love' as "always express[ing] a duality in which the two antagonistic elements are, nevertheless, reconciled... in the mystic 'center', the 'unvarying mean'" (194). In the double bind *setting*, an 'unvarying mean' becomes the synchronic oscillation, and the heart-symbolism "signifies love as the centre [think sun] of illumination and happiness," and this links with the love-symbolism "either through correspondences [think letters] or through substitution, as in the case of the goblet, the coffer [think chest] and the cavern" (142). The *message* forges a concealing and revealing correspondence in the living chest or coffer, "acquiring the symbolic character of the heart, the brain or the maternal womb" (52), between the plural love and the singular heart. However, the words in the second passage remind the reader that a *response* cannot be formed to this primary corpus of

symbols, only in what is left behind on “her table”: a “calling card” (marker) emphasizing “her trembling hand,” “gloves” to conceal her hands, “a china bird,” etc. This cluster of symbolic objects trails back to “her mother’s eyes,” echoing the condensation of those first double binds Haskins experimented with in “From the Top of the Hill.”

Combining her double-cast, yet intuitive, use of symbolism with Ezra Pound’s mantra “make it new,” Lola Haskins came to conduct research and write about the women (Julia O’ Halloran, Jane Marshall, and Patsy) in Castings not “with a thief’s eyes” but as each woman emerged under her fingers (Not Feathers Yet 117-118). This emergence of expression *enacts* through her poetry of a gestural meaning that leads from symbolic interpretation back to the ‘institution’ of meaning itself. As Merleau-Ponty wrote in Signes, “being-in the world,” “body proper,” and “the soul and body” as expressed “in gesture” place one at the origins of language “in the use of our body and our senses in so far as they involve us in the world, we have the means of understanding our cultural gesticulation, in so far as it involves us in history” (87). Emerging with the same conclusion through her embodied gesticulation and vision, Haskins astutely observed that when she began to see history or her-story as lived (like the movement from ‘I’ cogito to ‘we’ collective) and consisting “of *one* pair of eyes at a time,” she moved from perceiving herself through the continuum with *not* just ‘semantic’ knowledge but ‘episodic’ knowledge too, and then she realized that *both* a “horizontal” *and* “vertical”¹⁰ knowledge of history were needed on her “journey towards masks” (Not

¹⁰ Haskins’s conception of “horizontal” and “vertical” seems very likely an intuitive understanding of Roman Jakobson’s model of human communication. Jakobson’s contribution of the paradigmatic (vertical) axis and syntagmatic (horizontal) axis of language illustrates the process of the development of thought into meaningful structures— semantic knowledge to episodic knowledge bound by collective knowledge

Feathers Yet 116-117). At the end of the chapter ‘Masks,’ Haskins succinctly explains this necessary contingency and displacement from the “flat person” to the “whole person”:

When you’ve been walking around in other people’s lives, you’ll start to see through their eyes, . . . [and] when you go back to your own voice, as you’re *bound* to, . . . you’ll find you won’t be the same “I.” Your new “I” will catch the light differently when you walk around it, and as you open the door and walk in, conversation will stop, and strangers, beautiful, dangerous, or both, will look up and smile. (121, my emphasis)

3. Interpretation: Acts of Revealing and Concealing

Ladies, we are going on a picnic.
We are several. We are not of an age.
We do not like each other. But come.
There is something we must finish.
We must cast off forever . . .

These lines from the last poem in Castings, “The Cast Assembled,” reveal a gathering together of women’s lives beyond the curtain call of the finished performance. Lola Haskins’s multiple definitions for ‘cast’ set the stage for layer upon layer of double entendres, but I find it more fascinating to set my mind, past body, to the poet’s timeless dimension beyond, where these women live together bound, and even at perpetual odds, that living space of the *double bind*. But first, as the word “assembled” implies, one must understand how the poet got to this final cast. It would be quite easy to keep up the notion that this book is simply a accumulation of dramatic poems, with casting (double casting

(research). The “vertical” axis provides possible choices, while the “horizontal” axis supplies possible combinatory rules. In The Human Science of Communicology, Richard L. Lanigan broadly defines both the “vertical” as discourse, selection, substitution, similarity, and metaphor *in absentia* and the “horizontal” as grammar, language, combination, contexture, contiguity, and metonymy *in presentia* (230).

even¹¹) and stage directions intimated, but unlike Pamela White Hadas's Beside Herself, where each of the poems reads as a complete monologue in itself, Haskins's poems are fragmentary orchestrations, parts to and from a whole, and take bigger risks in their rawness and complexity when epoxyed together.

A better metaphor (as primer) for understanding Haskins's finished art/i/fact¹², Castings, would be to first view each numbered part (Julia O' Hallaron, Jane Marshall, and Patsy) in this production as a double cast panel of slab glass. According to How to Work in Stained Glass by Anita and Seymour Isenberg, "slab glasses or *dalles de verre*, often just called *dalles*, are thick chunks of glass approximately 1" thick by about 6" to 8" wide and 12" long" (23)¹³. Each panel, or part, contains multiple *dalles* that are paneled together with epoxy or cement after they have been shaped. There are many methods to cutting slab glass: breaking on the anvil, by wedge, scoring with cutter and chipping hammer, faceting, band saw, and shaping with hammer alone. Obviously, this is the artist's act of creation when working with a collective unconscious of historical documents. Each piece can be shaped, but the *actual* inner soul only appears *authentic* in light through individual pieces. No matter how one decides to cut, shape, and arrange—

¹¹ If one were to explore this territory though, I think there could be a ripe comparison and contrast between Castings and Adrienne Kennedy's Funnyhouse of the Negro. The notion that comes to mind would be one of the various personas materializing as the self, maintaining their own vested experiences in a collective stream of identity. Moreover, this doubling in the experience of the artist has a connection to Keats's "negative capability" as well. In his 22 December 1818 letter to his brothers, Keats's reading of Shakespeare allows his mind to "dovetail" and then finally yield his intellectualizations of an individual identity to the larger substantiation of multiple identities (191-194).

¹² art/i/fact: I think this division is representative of the double bind in Haskins's Castings (addressed in detail later in the paper). It operates in context of the author in relation to her work [microcosm] and the woman in relation to herself [macrocosm]: a splitting between 'mind' and 'body' and 'reason' and 'emotion'—a division between a small 'i,' as subject, and a universal 'me,' an object (Jean-Paul Sartre), a conflict between a 'true self' (hiding in facts) and a 'false self' (striving to make art's ends meet), neither of which is the author or a person (R.D. Laing).

¹³ Although the size isn't necessarily important to the context here, I find fascinating to imagine each slab as starting at about the dimensions of a poet's collected life work, chiseled away to create single volumes. For that matter, any individual artist's life lived in compression could amount to this sized tome.

the anima of the original *dalles de verre* selections remain. Hence, this is my homage to her spinning “disco ball.” Certainly, Lacan’s “mirror stage” of childhood holds the image longer, but on personal reflection, Haskins’s Castings appears to me more as a triangle of double cast slab panels, each side (Haskins, O’Hallaron, Marshall, and Patsy) connected by surfaces, points, and light. The characters live between the Imaginary and the Symbolic realms¹⁴ that interact between the author (as speaking medium) and reader (as listening participant) in each individual slab piece, protruding from its panel to complement and/or contrast the whole and complete the art/i/fact.

In Lola Haskins’s Castings, the first eleven poems deal with “definitions”. As the subheading “Castings: Some Definitions” implies, each poem is paired with a definition, and these definitions are incomplete¹⁵. In the spirit of Haskins, I would define “definitions” as the clarity of the process by the artist, or the shaping of the slab glass poems and the planning of the finished art/i/fact. In this “some definitions” section, Haskins is letting the reader in on the production process, but like any good artist, she is teasing out the *revealing* process by *concealing* too. One of the core symbols, or images, of femininity here is the skirt. Whether rim or periphery or environ, the skirt’s primary definition would be a flowing garment that conceals and reveals the obvious differences between most women and men, not only the orifice or phallus, but more the ability or

¹⁴ In a Lacanian sense, the speaking subject/ listening other create a bridge between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. This is transference. The intimacy of the subject matter sets the listening participant up as analyst to speaking medium’s character(s) or subject. Thus, the reader (as listening participant) determines the fate of the author (as speaking medium) existing between two ways of being. The dramatic tension is built in the decision by the reader, whether to consign the character back to the mirror stage of the Imaginary self or release in image (slabbed in its clustered symbols) to the Symbolic other, by way of desire. Lacan would have called this sort of metonymy the “desiring spark” and Haskins a reflection from the “disco ball.”

¹⁵ By “incomplete,” I am referring back to that Keatsian sense of the larger substantiation of multiple identities from an individual identity (see footnote 11). Unlike when Haskins first published “Castings: A Sequence” in Nimrod in 1982, the recast “Castings: Some Definitions” embeds the part to whole relationship, instead of the “sequence” of whole to part, in the word “some” as incomplete in the smaller senses of unity in each multiple identity, with the future promise of a possible completion.

inability¹⁶ to directly embody reproduction. In the first poem “In each of my fingers,” the author (as speaking medium) writes, “The way girls bare their legs / shames my thee-saying heart” (3). The ‘thee’ sets the first boundary of intimacy between the author and her world, and it lets the reader in on her manner of “shame” as a secret revealed to develop her hauntingly informal closeness of tone. In “If you stroke my back,” this “shame” is transformed into something more, perhaps a past fear of abuse even, when the author writes, “She has come far, who used to put on / her morning petticoats atremble” (4). The figure of Ann is prostrating herself to the “lying voices at chapel” (4), and then this important woman fades into the distance as Ellen forcefully takes to center stage where her “grey words” speak against the author “at every stained window” (5). The cut lives of slab¹⁷ glass are beginning to “grow” together and “in the morning shine” (5) through the author’s art/i/fact.

At this point in the first section, the definition for cast, “~loose: to untie or unfasten” (5), begins to relate to the core image of the dress that threads into a crescendo later throughout Castings. In the next poem, “Because I was Clystie,” the author ends by writing, “I cover you again” (6). This act is one woman comforting another woman’s pain to the point of immersion, or possible suffocation as implied by the desire to ‘red shellac’

¹⁶ I use “inability” here in the way Julia Kristeva helped me to think about it throughout the section “Women, Psychoanalysis, Politics” in The Kristeva Reader edited by Toril Moi. It becomes an “inability” that shows the nature of sexism is still inherent in many cultures. Even though a man can technically have the in-ability to reproduce, the common cultural conception still stigmatizes the woman over the man here. So, in contextual terms, the continuation of the menstrual cycle under patterned pressure of the desiring father-figure transforms the woman from future mother-figure to stigmata. This keeps up the myth of potency for the male and vilifies the menstruating woman as unholy in her mockery of Christ’s ecstasy of blood as her continued *jouissance* outside childbearing (137-321). Another good resource on this phenomenon is Wise Wound, co-authored by two poets, Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove.

¹⁷ It may be useful here to think of slab as SLABS. A loose spin-off on George Starbuck’s idea of SLABS, or Standard Length and Breath Sonnets, only loose the sonnet and syntax deal, and think of the women (like Ann and Ellen) as connected through breath. So, slab becomes SLABS, Standard Length and Breath Slabs, connecting their deep experiences together through both the “horizontal” and “vertical” knowledge of her-story.

over Ellen in the previous poem. This physical act of concealment by the author is teasing the reader to wonder about the secrets that she is not allowing the *other*¹⁸ women to reveal. This silencing by the author seems to hearken back to the last poem's line, "We do not like each other" (63). A tension between the women is being skillfully constructed here. Lola Haskins keeps this build of tension mounting in the next poem, "I remember chewing a stick," when she writes (in an unnamed 'male' persona) "How I drove her out" after the daughter comes home to say she had a baby that was "another girl, and already dead" (7). The complexity builds even more in the next poem, "Speaking With Lucy," where the ambiguous "you" shifts between representing Lucy or the author (a double casting) until it becomes localized as the author in the line, "Because you had not been born" (8). Lucy confesses that she could not "grow up to say what mattered" (matter-ed to mater to mother) because the 'you' could speak (as mother-figure) for/ through her, but this authority of speech act also gives the 'you' (as author-ity) power to prohibitive ends, and even if it is only for artistic license and vision, this particular reader and participant is intrigued enough by this concealment to question the dramatic motivation behind it.

This is one classic contextualization of the double bind, one in which, as Anthony Wilden writes in Man and Woman, War and Peace, an injunction is imposed to prevent "the victim from stepping outside the frame of the situation, an injunction preventing any attempt at comment, metacommunicative action, withdrawal, or escape. The victim thus cannot *not* respond to the double bind, but at the same time no appropriate response—within the context imposed—is possible" (112-113). Certainly the author

¹⁸ The small "o" in *other* here, just like the 'listening other' is not Other, gains relevance in the fact that the small "o" grants autonomy to the author as a 'speaking subject' in correlation to the small "i" in art-i-fact by remaining a-part from the whole, not a part of the subject "I" bound in an endless cycle of dominating and being dominated.

reinforces this “transcontextualization” of the *double bind*¹⁹ on a more playful level when she writes “Dracula’s Deserted Lady,” but what interests me more is the (b) definition below the poem “Scene” that reads: “an impression taken from an object by covering its surface . . . when hardened retains form and detail of the original and can serve as a mold for reproduction” (Haskins 11). The reader will note, again, that there were some important differences in the original publication of the first five poems in the “Some Definitions” from the version in Castings. In Nimrod, under the title “Castings: A Sequence,” the single definition corresponding to “Scene” in Castings was the only one *in presentia*. So this ‘covering’ of the (sur)face complicates itself by bringing reproduction, and loss of reproduction (loss of the proto-child), to the meta and mental (sur)face again. This processed extension of casting, or double casting, becomes a double bound product. This theory plays out in my favorite poem from this section, “A Study in Time,” and its contextual doppelganger, “When she enters.” For the sake of brevity, I will (double) cast loose the last two stanzas of “A Study in Time” reflected against samplings from Haskins’s last poem, “When she enters,” both without need of my further commentary or interpretation.

The woman starts towards the door.
Her child bursts in,
an acorn in his fat fist.
Mama, mama, look what I found!
The tree falls on the house.

The woman opens the door.
On the table she sets one plate.
White, shining.

When she enters, my shivery hands...
She is the love
Whose small wrists fly to my fingers,...
Whose mumbled words flower my sleep.
She was the one...

I circle, but there is no food.
In every canyon an angry rancher stands,
His gun pointed to the sky.”²⁰

¹⁹ It would be helpful to also contextualize a double bind as “Two or more persons in an intense relationship that has a high degree of physical and/or psychological survival value for one, several, or all of them, with at least one of them designated as the *victim*” (Wilden 110-111).

²⁰ I suggested I wouldn’t comment, but I do feel I need to emphasize my love of collage here. I hope one would take it as a sign of deep respect that I would desire to cast one poem against another in an attempt to (de)construct the complexity of ideas that the author has so painstakingly arranged here.

Moving from the process of the artist (Lola Haskins) back to the core image of the dress in the Julia O'Holloran section, the *concealing* and *revealing* technique creates a union that transforms the image of the dress (as a core dress and addressed) to not only symbol but icon²¹: bearing embodied gesticulation, speech, and location. The poem "Thoughts While Teaching Grammar" begins this progressive stratagem, opening with Julia holding up her "skirts" as a slight revealing to avoid "the green-slicked water" (17). The sexual tension in the poem increases when a turkey cuts off Julia's path, "shaking his fanned tail for a mate" (17). Finally, she *addresses* the turkey by "fanning [her] skirt" back and then running at him "waving wild skirts" (17). This retaliation, or forward behavior, teaches Julia "a lesson" about the interaction of address, and through her experience, which she sees as symbiotic, one learns that Julia sees her teaching as a code that, even if the children have it "word-perfect," cannot be translated as anything but confusion between cultures. Her dress has become a symbol of confusion between signs. This notion entails that the core image of the dress is also iconic, a one on one representation of sacred/profane womanhood. This interpretation gains momentum in "The Phonograph Arrives, 1904" where "two children cling to her ribboned skirt" (20). Moreover, Julia listens to patriotic "canned man" music with her husband Frank that creates a type of male-centered "pride" in the ownership of technology ("Frank's Pride"), but this comes at a price of their "particular music," which Julia equates to wearing her "long skirts" and "high-necked blouses" even in oppressive heat (21). So Julia's *concealing* of her biological differences, that make her doubly oppressed (cultivated

²¹ I define icon as Charles Sanders Peirce does: "[I]con is a sign which signifies by its own quality, in contrast to the index, which depends on its object, and the symbol, which depends on conventions between interpreters" (Nöth 121). However, I do not discount Umberto Eco's refuting definition that "iconism is based on *cultural convention*" (127) too. I believe both relate here.

through culturalized convention of content), equates too with the association of herself as mother to Billy, her youngest son who calls their “The Stars and Stripes Forever” dislikeable “canned man” music. All this becomes a strangling reminder to Julia that the only way she can *reveal* her womanhood is through her connections to husband and children. Jamieson’s first archetypal double bind enters here: “Women can exercise their wombs or their brains, but not both” (16). Julia is trapped in the double bind of sacred/profane womanhood inside this larger archetypal double bind of brain/womb. Essentially, her relative connections are choking her slowly like those “high-necked blouses buttoned to [her] throat” (21).

The reader (as listening participant) cannot help but feeling sympathy, even “imaginative sympathy”²², for Julia. I would argue that all these connections solidify her dress as a symbol that through their progressively more negative (de)constructions of *revealing* and *concealing* become less ambiguous, at the meaning level, and even more iconic. This notion of the dress as womanhood imbued with negative affect at the iconic level is strengthened by the next poem, “There will be no more crossings today,” where Frank brushes Julia’s skirt as foreplay to his boot toe sliding “like an animal up [her] leg” (22). As the poem ends, she ‘slides’ away this time with “plates,” creating an ambiguity at the semantic level between “plates” as dishes (implying the role of the woman as housewife) and “plates” as hunger (implying the man’s role as aggressor). This ambiguity hints at Jamieson’s archetypal double bind: “women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine” (16). Thus, another overarching double bind of womanhood deepens the dramatic tension and the

²² Like “sympathetic potentialities,” this term comes from Walter Jackson Bate’s analysis of William Hazlitt’s thematic of “sympathy” in *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. Refer to Bloom’s *John Keats* pages 23-25 (also see my footnote 2).

“imaginative sympathy” the reader feels starts to build into imagined sympathy too. The reader is placed, all at once, at both the Imagery image of the past through the dates progressing and at Symbolic point of interlocution in the present. This heuristic acceleration and projection causes a *bond* to be formed from what was and is *bound* between the character (as subject), the author, and the reader (as participant).²³

The next poem, “The Visitor: An Interlude” shifts back to the dress as both a symbol and a code. First the dress becomes the image of the sun—“bright dress,” “yellow dress,” and this symbol lures the child-native, Hope, to contemplate Julia’s reality: “*How would my waist dance in yellow color?*” (24). In many American Indian mythologies the sun is female, so the symbol of the dress as Sun works well to emphasize this patterned trajectory of wholeness in east to west reversal, but Julia’s underlined religion is Christian (Sun to Son to Jesus to Male), this is her code. Following the Jungian archetype of the Sun as the “source of life and ultimate wholeness of man” (Man and His Symbols 32). So Hope refuses the white woman’s code, but is charmed by the symbol, even though she refuses to wear it instead of her “Indian skirts” (Haskins 24). So, when Hope evaporates (she was never corporeal to begin with, but ghostly internal)²⁴, one hears her

²³ This relates back to the art/i/fact. This meta-level double bind is the reality that everything could be a written artifice of the double bound woman in relation to other women, the competition between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in context of a woman in relation to herself being mediated through the art/i/fact, Castings here, as a commodity. Of course, at the meta-level, the reader could always be thinking this, but the power of Haskins woven narrative, I believe, overrides these negatives to create a powerful bond of sympathy with all the women instead.

²⁴ But the reader does not learn that Hope is Julia and Julia is Hope until the last poem of Part One. So, every image of womanhood through the dress remains on the symbolic and coded level until the split in personality is discovered, and both women as one are caught in a selfsame double bind (ying/yang) that eventually forces the image of the dress, in the reader’s mind, back to the iconic level.

voice calling to Julia: “*White lady wears dark dress/like bird at night*” (25). Thus, she sees Julia as Christian (coded), but desiring to be the big “O” Other (symbolic).²⁵

In the next poem, “English to the Miccosukee: At First,”²⁶ when the author writes: “holding my skirt around my ankles” (26), the reader is taken back to the opening image of Julia holding her “skirts above the green-slicked water” (17). And in the final poem, “Sometimes I think Hope is here, humming,” all the *concealment* turns to *revealing* when the author strips away the layers (of skirts) to bare Julia with the words, “Sometimes I think that my womb opened, / wide as an eye, / and a child fell out without my knowing” (32). Julia, in her double bind, has conceived herself as Hope. Julia’s Sun is revealed here. What follows is a powerful lyric, naked from raw birth. Julia promises a new day as her “yellow dress” is laid across “the arms / of the porch swing” (23) for the reader (as participant) to find this time. Every poem as a part, unbound the “I”, reflects back the original double bind of womb/brain, all the way to mirror-stage of childhood through the last word “empty” echoing the closing lines:

And there are times I do not lie.
There are times I know that Hope never lived here,
And in the mirror two faded eyes say to mine:
Look, woman.

Your skull is empty. (32)

²⁵ Here again, when Julia and Hope are revealed as double cast in the concluding poem (and this ‘whole’ awareness of a gestalt structure causes the audience to codify both in relation to one another, the author, themselves, and the world), the code becomes a ‘digital discontinuity’ of Christianity and the symbol becomes an ‘analog continuity’ of Other, nurturing the double bind at the iconic level. In fact, the flux between symbol [through code] to icon creates a causal ∞ (i.e. relationship between picture and word).

²⁶ It seems to me that this poem is the lynchpin that fully develops this part’s perfection. In its original version in the Beloit Poetry Journal, this poem was missing and “He is having a fever dream” replaced it. Although that poem furthered the idea of the ‘skirt’ as negative icon, I submit that Lola Haskins’ choice to replace it with “English to the Miccosukee: At First” was right. The subtle, yet realistic, critique of a capitalistic, missionary-style of Christian and Governmental pedagogy makes, in my mind, the Julia O’ Halloran section the most engaging and far-reaching of all the parts in Castings (if divided from the whole).

In the next section Jane Marshall [b. 1835 d. 1910 near Palatka], many more complexities arise; so this reader will focus on the core image of the dress and its relationship to the interplay of light through each slab glass poem. However, let me the address the complexities of identity first. In the original format of the poem in the Beloit Poetry Journal dates were included. The first date, “May 13, 1980,” let the reader know that the first poem was in the author’s voice writing to Jane, but in Castings the linkage of dates is erased, causing one to believe it might be Octavia (or another) writing to Jane instead of the author.²⁷ All this leads into the question of ambiguity between levels of reality. Who was Jane Marshall? All the reader knows is that she “is in no way Octavia” (65), and the answer according to a personal correspondence with Lola Haskins about this matter is “that she’s entirely fiction” (October 4). In this letter, she goes on to write “I took only the barest outline of Octavia’s life²⁸, then changed it, so that who Octavia was isn’t really in the end anything to do with Jane” (October 4).

With much thanks to the author for her episodic knowledge of Jane Marshall, I would venture the interpretation that the light in this section is an aura, a rayed fulfillment of the desire for warmth, love, and security. But that light can only be coded (filtered)

²⁷ Desire Lines clears this problematic up years later by changing it to “Dedication: Lola to Jane,” but since I am examining Castings primarily, I will assume that this problematic has a purpose (i.e. to make this section a more pronounced middle ground between ‘true self’ and ‘false self,’ or a movement from small ‘i’ to universal ‘me’ to create a symbiotic symmetry of collective womanhood).

²⁸ “[T]he barest outline of Octavia’s life” got me thinking about the possible deeper illuminating connection between Octavia (as the light only to Jane) and the poem “Octave” in Forty-four Ambitions for the Piano. Certainly, there seems a deeper reflection of an unconscious connection through the symbolic here as one considers these bountiful ending lines to “Octave”:

It is the sun
and her sister moon, slow-dancing.

It is what returns
when you are most alone,
calling across some dark orange dawn
to the farthest rim of rock. (7)

through the Christian, male-oriented sun (Winston, or the longing for Winston here). So in “Dedication” these lines,

You are leaving me.
Your gold warmth is fading in my arms
and Jane, I want you to stay. But the sun’s
too low, and we live in different times, (34)

transfigure Jane as the aura of light, but the dying rays like Winston, filtered through the thick slab glass of generations, cannot last. In the second poem, “I may not yet write,” the unspoken, but written, violence of Winston’s sun is present in Jane’s illumination as her eye “shone, bright / as a woman in the morning river sun” (35). In “Surely there must be others,” Jane imagines ‘other wives’ like Margaret with “her skirts pouring blue / to the floor” (36). Again, this light is through the male filter. Later in the same poem, Jane keeps her silence about Winston, “folding it like a bird” in her secret heart-locket, but when that silence becomes a feminized ‘other,’ “It flies through gold” (36), it flies through the time-bound night of the locket, and it makes the roof moan with loss and longing “in the dawn light” (36). In “Today you have been five months gone,” Jane again invokes the code of Winston as sun when she writes, “And so I slide this blue morning on your / marriage finger” (37). In “My fingers are mending,” Jane takes her “new nightgown” past “the valley for hurt dresses” that she imagines Winston sending her from the box where “It takes the light whitely / and shines like needles” (38). Then, in “Becky’s in the sweet corn running,” the reader has a direct return to the ‘yellow dress’ of “The Visitor: An Interlude.” The author writes as Jane relating her dream: “I glimpse her yellow / dress between the rows, parted neatly/ as a Negro’s head” (39).

In these fevered reoccurrences of illumination, all these women, projected through the author, connect together at the level of their double binds. This continued

reinforcement of self/same/other imagery strengthens the resolve of the bind on Jane. As Bateson is quoted as pointing out in Double Bind: “If we engage in experiments to study the wave forms of light, we shall continually reinforce our belief in wave theory” (321). So, in context, the “tangles” bolster the traps of the double binds, but in the context of contexts, where the reader (as participant) derives pleasure from the repetition, the creative impulse may cause a “desiring spark, as Lacan might say, in the reader (as participant). In the poem “Robbie coughs blood roses in his crib,” the day, again, “shines blue in the window” (41), and in “Winston, you were wrong to dance,” the other woman flings “up her skirt” (43). Moving into “I have asked the wet sun in,” the sun as Winston doesn’t allow Jane to forget his betrayal. In “I have grown plump and settles these months,” that betrayal manifests in Jane’s children, “each egg / is a yellow scream” (45). Despite this she feels the desire to comfort her eggs by rocking them in her skirt. In the last poem of this section, “My dear, today we sold the last pig,” the reader presumes Winston dead, darkness settles, and his mocking ‘silence’ turns ‘quiet’ to the place where “the light never comes” (46).

The final voiced section, Patsy, amalgamates all the art/i/factual themes I have detailed so far, as well as a few others I have only alluded to: light (sun), shadow (cold), the dress (as address), the core image of the dress, and birds (as code, the sent and received messages through boundless time). These themes double cast in the slab glass pieces will be filtered through the framework of *power* and *desire* built by Lola Haskins. In “Patsy is Born” the author doubles two previous images—cold and bird. The reader will note that cold was used to foreshadow Winston’s death through the setting of sun

and his aura of light in “Dedication” and “There are days you do not write.”²⁹ As the ‘Notes’ section explicates, a cold bird is “a bird which was said to predict the weather by its actions” (65). This prediction, or forecasting, relates directly to Patsy’s future in relation to Chloe, and desire enacts itself through the exertion of their collective power in the lines: “and every night we die, / every morning rise again to life” (49). So like “the cold bird laughing” they are escaping the bounds of their slavery (desire) by playacting their collective rebirth (power).

The reader can intuit the power coming in a masculine (sunlight rising), but not male³⁰ impulse. In “Patsy Sees a Ghost” the desired impulse works in the light and the core image of the dress in the lines: “I can see trumpet vine and blackberries / through her white dress” (51). This impulse becomes a power when it is repeated and forecast through light and a dress as the ghostly resurrection by and of Chloe, and Patsy too, in the lines: “and saw the trumpet vine and / berries, hot and ready / through my white dress” (51). The image of the sun, denied of its native and feminine origin yet again, as a Christian slave-owner works throughout the rape of Patsy in “Patsy Speaks of the Master” as “The sun rises to the driver’s horn” and “The helpless sun rises, and burns” (52). The operative word here is ‘helpless,’ perhaps a foreshadowing of the subjugation

²⁹ I can’t resist another doubling collage here of “Dedication” and “There are days now you do not write.”

“And sometimes I see a dead man...
 alone. You are staring at a blank...
 I see in a stained uniform, sitting...
 white on snow, like the wing of
 a buried bird. Outside my window,
 the fence you built lets in the cold

your voice trails off, like a dusk bird
 vanishing into deeper woods. You are leaving me.
 Your gold warmth is fading in my arms
 and Jane, I want you to stay. But the sun’s
 too low, and we live in different times.
 No matter what we do, the cold comes in.”

³⁰ It is not male because the real power comes from the desiring impulse (feminine). The masculine and feminine are only traits (subject to interpretation), not types (objects not subjected to interpretation). Although, both power and desire do work congruently, regardless of gender typing, a good way to think about their relationship would be to see both concepts as “the *desire* to be like, and live like (*power*)” (Michel Foucault quoted through Lanigan’s The Human Science).

of the master through feminine power (spells) coming in the later poems. Moreover, in “Patsy Jumps Over the Broom,” the line—“through the room’s bright with women’s dresses” (54)—can be seen in the same mould. The desire finally manifests into feminine power again in the poem “He is beginning to complain” with the lines: “of pains like sharp lights across the window / that go and come. When the stuck doll / rots in its grave under the dogwood, / he will die (57). This magic is strengthened by the reversal of ‘come and go’ to “go and come” to mirror the ejaculation of the male, raping him back with the “sharp light” of the personified mandrake eating through the desired body of the objectified male. This same power comes bellowing back again in “Breaking Master’s Leg” in the lines after Patsy’s voice breaks his leg open: “in its white sharp voice, / humming through the fingers of master’s useless hands” (59). So to be ‘white’ is lower than low, but to process that power back on the abuser is the desired condition that forecasts the last lines of “Patsy is Over”:

moaning to them, time on time, how it will be
the day they rise in white to see
their multitudes, shining in the grass. (60)

Normally my analysis of Patsy [b. 1816 d. 1856, Oaklea Plantation] would end here, but I feel it would be doing this section a disservice if I didn’t include my favorite idea for an alternative analysis. I would like to reread the Patsy section, this time, as having nine lives like a cat. This reader-response “double take” found its impetus in the cat o’ nine tails reference in “Chloe, you left tonight.” I believe this “transcontextual” revamp furthers the notion of the power and desire present, only one must think of it as “the *desire* to die like, and live again like (*power*)” (Michel Foucault’s theory outlined in Lanigan with my additions). Moreover, one can see this theory of augmentation best in

Lola Haskins' *nine* selected poems of Patsy in Desire Lines, thinking of the left-out ones from Castings as doubles or casts of the selected ones.

The nine lives concealed becomes revealed. In the first poem "Patsy is Born" or "Mama said it was thundering," the lines, "and every night we die, / and every morning rise to life again" (39), show this ritual as the first rite of passage or passing from one life to another in Patsy's inner cat progression. In "Patsy Sees a Ghost," the spectacle of the 'haunt' becomes the death of her second incarnation realized in Chloe's references back to Patsy:

*She says Oh Patsy, take care,
or you will surely fall
.....
and you'll be gone,
gone as the moment you looked up...
.....
gone as all the years since I died
and waited here for you. (51)*

I spliced this powerful spoken invocation to emphasize the repeating of the three "gone[s]" centered around "the gone as the moment," that second life taken in that beheld gaze. In "Patsy Speaks of the Master," the rite of passage, or third life gone, is simply Patsy's initiation into experience through the master raping her. In "Patsy Jumps over the Broom," the crossing of the brooms border, initiated by the whip, is the fourth life gone, rite of passage again, that Patsy did not want to give. In "Supper" there is the symbolic taking of another of Patsy's lives in the simile of the lines:

but he caught my wrist
as if it were a rabbit in
one of his traps, shook it,
broke its neck" (45).

Notice the shift here from desire, with the killing of the rabbit (oftentimes the prey of a cat), to power in the consonant “t” sounds, that casting of death into life in the next poem, “He is beginning to complain.” In these lines: “When the stuck doll / rots in its grave under the dogwood, / he will die” (47), one sees Patsy returning to the progression of death (desire)/resurrection (power) playacted in the first poem, to deplete her sixth life creating her death-charm against one of her oppressors. The change of the comma from “I tell him soon, child, soon” to “I tell him soon child, soon” (57 and 45 respectively) emphasizes the revenge quality (less hesitation from the first quote), that Patsy feels for her this oppressor. In other words, she’ll be whispering this knowledge, or power, into his ear as he dies. Moving into “Cleaning Cotton at Night” from its original title, “Cleaning Cotton, At Night,” the poem starts with a reversal in the lines: “Yesterday a black cat ran across my feet / and turned to white before he reached the wall (46). Patsy uses the cat’s power (killing the cat), her seventh life too, in forecasting the fate of her mother through her anger and love in the lines:

And I know things.
That the morning glories will not close tonight.
That somewhere in Louisiana you will die
with a nail in your foot, and your jaw locked shut (46).

This death of a parent as rite of passage leads into the eighth poem “Breaking Master’s Leg” where her power materializes again in her voice (spell) to cripple her master through song, and one is left to hope, perhaps killing him. In the final poem “Patsy Is Over,” one sees Patsy live out her ninth and final life as a “quarter hand” quietly purring her words of defiance and prophecies of the day for their freedom into the ears of *her* sleeping children. So the circle of her nine lives completes itself, and the reader leaps back to the hungry and desired image of “White, shining” (12).

And thus one reaches the “Coda” and wonders about the reason for the progression of voices in Lola Haskins’s Castings. I defined “Some Definitions” as the conceptualized framework and shaping of the slab glass poems defined through the artistic *acts* in process, both *concealing* and *revealing*. So, in this truncated light, I define the progress from ‘Julia O’Halloran’ to ‘Jane Marshall’ to ‘Patsy’ as the progress from ‘actual real’ to ‘intuited real’ to ‘historical real.’ Julia was based on a real Julia, Jane was based on an internal extension of the phenomenological Jane, and Patsy was based on an accumulation of historical knowledge about runaway slaves like and/or as Patsy. In one sense, they are all ‘real’, but as a progression they form a critical argument for collective womanhood. The premise of which might be that all women share a form of base knowledge, or internal knowledge, about every other woman’s womanhood. The range of this knowledge is not spoken here, but left open ended (a silent oracle), to be engaged by the individual reader’s own collective pool of knowledge. In this way sisterhood becomes telepathy of accumulation, with its fluxes of individual patterns, waves, particles, generations, and divides. Or as Lola Haskins explains it in these last lines:

This is how it must end.
 With the wide bells of our skirts
 spreading like mouths
 which do not cry for help,
 but say nothing as they fill.

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