UDK 821.111(73=163.6).09 Molek M.

MARY JUGG MOLEK AND HER FIRST WRITINGS

Irena Milanič

In this paper I present the life and work of Mary Jugg Molek (1909-1982) an American writer of Slovene roots . So far she was mainly known as the wife and translator of her much more famous husband Ivan Molek, a prolific writer and a very influential Slovene-American editor. Whilst Mary Molek's publications of the seventies have already been reviewed, most of her earlier writings, in particular those of the thirties and forties have been overlooked.

Mary Jugg was born of Slovene parents in Mineral, Kansas, on June 9, 1909. She was a brilliant student and one of the first immigrant girls of the area to finish college at the age of eighteen, assisted by scholarship loans and self-employment. She completed her studies (English Major, Education Minor) at Kansas State Teachers' College in Pittsburg. When she was attending college she helped at the local school magazine and wrote poetry encouraged especially by her English teacher, Margaret E. Haughawout. After graduation she worked as a high school teacher, but being soon out of work, due to the Depression cuts in education, in 1932, she moved to Chicago. There she found a job in the *S.N.P.J.* headquarters.[1] From 1932 to 1943 Mary Molek contributed to *Mladinski list* (*Juvenile*), publishing ninety poems, thirty-seven short stories and nine one or two-scene plays. In *Prosveta* (Enlightenment) and in the Slovene-American progressive papers *Proletarec* (The Proletarian) and *Majski glasnik (The May's Herald)* she wrote articles which are relevant because they reveal the writer's main interests –her deep faith in socialist reformism, her concern in women's issues and in second-generation identities. In some of her articles she was rather radical. She advocated how women and the *S.N.P.J.* youth should be given not only more space but also power inside the benefit society. Significantly she provocatively entitled her weekly *Proletarec* column "For Women Only" (1st January 1936 – 1st July 1936), and her milder *Prosveta* column "Women's Round Table" (15th July 1936 – 22nd July 1938). Professor Christian points out that the appearance of Mary Jugg's articles, particularly her column "Women's Round Table", in July 1936, represented a "more positive sign for *Prosveta*".[2] In 1934 she started to organize

1 *S.N.P.J.: Slovenska Narodna Podporna Jednota- Slovene National Benefit Society* (1904–) is one of the major Slovene insurance societies in the United States. Apart from insuring its members in case of sickness, injury and death, it also has a central cultural function of binding together its Slovene members. The society had its own publishing house, a newspaper (*Prosveta-Enlightenment)* and from 1922 a monthly magazine for its young members, *Mladinski list-Juvenile.*

the Red Falcons, the youngest generation of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation. In 1938 she helped at the establishment of autonomous juvenile clubs: she prepared an outline of very practical advice, which aided the rise of new circles and gave the local leaders new ideas for their activities. These suggestions were published in several issues of *Mladinski list.*

Not always, however, was her work adequately appreciated. She expressed her disappointment in her report delivered at her last YSF Convention, "[...] we are good talkers, sympathetic with the idea for very strong children's organizations, but when it comes to the genuine enthusiasm that should be given as the real support for such an undertaking, we fail."[3] Her analysis reflects a mutual misunderstanding, a consequence of the generation gap. The senior members did not attend the children's programs, which were probably disregarded as "children's matter". Mary Jugg advocated a greater collaboration of the Red Falcons in the official programs of the Branch. She was annoyed by the traditional programs full of "pretty tunes that run the full gamut of emotions"[4], a sentimentality which she found superfluous. At the same time, she was never fully accepted. This exemplifies how the older generation was unable to admit that the second generation was primarily an English-speaking generation. At the same YSF Convention, in fact, it was admitted that "Mary Jugg was doing a good job" with her articles in the *Proletarec,* trying to attract women to the socialist movement, *but* it would have been better if a Slovene column for women had been established too.[5]

The Moleks married on 1st May 1934, she was his second wife and twenty-seven years younger than he. They remembered their marriage in their respective works: Ivan Molek indirectly in his *Veliko mravljišče* (The Great Anthill), and she in her *Immigrant Woman*:[6]

> It was officiated in the Chicago City Hall, without witnesses, without wedding rings, and without anyone having been informed. After the brief exchange of vows, I took off for a two-week vacation to my family in Kansas, and Ivan returned to his office.[7]

In those years Ivan Molek was editor-in-chief of all *S.N.P.J.* publications. He was well-known among the Slovene-American readers, who liked his direct and acute editorials. He was a first generation immigrant who had come to the United States in 1900 when he was eighteen. The majority of his works are written in Slovene. He was one of the few Slovene American writers to have some of his works first published in Slovenia and then distributed in America. The most apparent difference between their works is that Mary Jugg wrote mostly in English,

---

2 Henry Christian, "The *Prosveta* English Section: Certainly Not Hard News And Never Intended to Be, *Dve domovini – Two Homelands*, 1992, 2-3, p. 37.

3 M. Jugg, "The Work of JSF among Children", Minutes of the XI Yugoslav Socialist Federation Convention held in Chicago, 03, 04,and 05 June 1936, *Proletarec,* 23, 09, 1936, p. 14.

4 M. Jugg, "Sidelights", *Proletarec*, 12, 09, 1934, p. 7.

5 In the minutes of the YSF Convention, cit., p. 7.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151. I. Molek, *Veliko mravljišče*, pp.125-127.

7 Mary Molek, "Through the Eyes of the Bibliographer," in *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Literary Works of Ivan(John) Molek,* Mary Molek Inc. Dover, Del. 1976, pp. 8-9.

while the majority of Ivan Molek's literary contributions, especially his books, are in Slovene. But there are other differences as well. While Ivan Molek's books are always about Slovene immigrants, Mary Jugg Molek rarely mentions Slovenes or her Slovene background directly. The Moleks were both devout socialists who believed in a gradual improvement (not overthrow!) of the capitalist society through the aid of socialist reforms. Mary Molek, however, also saw socialism as an anational cauldron where all the different ethnicities can melt. Therefore, in her writings she felt as more compelling to depict particular aspects of American society that are common to different ethnic groups rather than to limit herself to one only.

In 1936 the Moleks withdrew from the Socialist Party because they could not agree any more with the radical orientation the American Socialist Party took after the Detroit convention. Nevertheless, they remained loyal socialists throughout their lives even after 1944, when Ivan Molek lost his job as editor, because he refused to agree with the political orientation *S.N.P.J.* took in relation to the Old Country in the 1940s. He refused to write in favor of the communists who were becoming the dominant leaders in the Liberation Front in Yugoslavia. In making such a choice he remained consistent with his socialistic convictions, his deep faith in democracy and democratic means as the only possible ways of improving society.

This affair happened just when Mary was about to finish her Ph.D. She enrolled at the Chicago University in 1940, achieved the M.A. degree in education 1942, and was admitted to the Ph.D. candidacy. From 1944 on, the Moleks were forced to live very modestly only on the wife's salary as a school psychologist, counselor and adult teacher. About that she wrote:

> When it came my turn to take over the financial responsibilities for the period of the last 18 years of our 28-year married life, the transition was natural, easy, without even a comment about woman's role. "Women's lib" was not yet a popular term, although we had both been propagating the idea for thirty years previously.[8]

This was also a "barren period" when she did not publish, although she continued to write.[9] Only after her husband's death, in 1962, did Mary Molek resume publishing. In 1963 she brought most of his very large archives to Minneapolis-St. Paul. This collection constituted the beginning of what has become known today as the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Within a period of five years the material of some twenty other ethnic groups was added to the Archives, under the supervision of Professor Timothy L. Smith.[10] Mary Jugg Molek was appointed its first curator in 1963 and she compiled Ivan Molek's bibliography.

---

8 Mary Molek, "Through the Eyes of the Bibliographer," cit., p. 7.

9 This emerges from the correspondence of Mary Molek with Margaret E. Haughawout (July 1932 – December 1961). Unfortunately, only the Haugawout replies are available at Pittsburg State University, Special Collections.

10 John P. Nielsen, "Mary J. Molek Wins Author Award", *Ameriška domovina*, 8, 12, 1978, p. 3.

In 1969 she moved to Dover, Delaware, and all the works she wrote or translated now were published at her own expense. Besides the bibliography, she translated and published Ivan Molek's autobiography and his novel *Dva svetova – Two Worlds*. When her own original work, *Immigrant Woman,* was published in 1976, it soon became a considerable success within the Slovene community. The book had three reprints and earned for Mary Jugg Molek the 1978 League of Slovene-American Award for contributions to Slovene-American literature.[11] Influenced by the "ethnic revival", which began in the 1960's along with the Civil Rights Movement, Mary Molek searched in it for her own ethnic past. The book is a testimony of her mother's life as she, the daughter, had experienced it. Mary Jugg Molek was also an active member of the Society for Slovene Studies, which she joined in 1977. She participated at its conferences and in 1980 she attended the Society's annual meeting in Philadelphia, presenting the paper entitled "Louis Adamic: Political Activist." After her death in 1982 she left 15,000 dollars for the constitution of the Molek Endowment Fund of the Society for Slovene Studies. According to Professor Velikonja she probably left a similar sum to the Slovenian Heritage in Cleveland.[12]

Mary Jugg always signed her early works with her maiden name. She started to contribute to *Mladinski list-Juvenile*, the *S.N.P.J.* monthly magazine for the youth, in February, 1932, while her first article was published in *Prosveta* on April 5, 1933.[13]. She became one of the first contributors to write only for the English sections of – at that time – predominantly Slovene written immigrant papers.

The poems, short stories and plays written in the thirties are thematically very close to each other. In the thirties Mary Jugg's main concern is a realistic depiction of the Depression in its different aspects. From the very beginning, her writings are distinguished by the fact that they are entirely rooted in American society and in its social realities. She describes the Depression through its everyday urban scenes: workers' strikes, unemployed men sitting on benches in the Central Park, young people, although gifted and smart, unable to find a place in society. Her short stories present the rapid decline of a mining town, the stories of youth entrapped in the economic system, stealing because of hunger, youth unemployment, disrupted families, where older children have to take care of the younger. When the general economic situation started to improve she shifted her interest to contemporary international events and in particular she followed the turmoil in Europe. While in the thirties her writings are imbued with socialism, in the forties her fervent socialist faith wanes, becoming mainly a pacifist conviction. At the same times on the one hand, her interest in depicting nature, present already in her first writings, increases, and on the other, more and more fairy tales and children's rhymes started to appear.

In the thirties the *Juvenile*'s aims were, on the one hand, to infuse the young readers with the socialist doctrine and, on the other, to make them aware of their Slovene roots. Jugg, on the other hand, felt that it was more important to teach the young readers the socialist principles, rather than to nourish their ethnic pride.

---

11 John P. Nielsen, "Mary J. Molek Wins Author Award", *Ameriška domovina*, 08, 12, 1978, pp. 1 and 3.

12 Joseph Velikonja, "Mary Molek", personal e-mail, 22, 12, 1997.

13 Mary Jugg, "The Dialog", *ML*, 2, 1932, p. 49, "Facts For Considerations", *Prosveta*, 05, 04, 1933 p. 6.

Therefore, although Mary Jugg's writings were published in a Slovene-American youth magazine, they had only a Slovene background. For example, some of the characters that appear in her short stories have Slovene names and partly a occasionally interjections of Slovene words or phrases.[14]

With her first contributions she felt she had the task to make her young readers aware of the true causes of the contemporary hopeless economic situation, but she had to help them to develop a new and independent vision of what they saw. On the one hand, the socialist doctrine is the means that reveals the discrepancies in the American egalitarian ideology. The capitalist system is seen as mainly responsible for the division of people into rich and poor, the oppressors and the oppressed. The only accepted alternative to social injustices is that of a future socialist world, based on social democracy. On the other hand, her idea of socialism mingled with the American ideology, recharging anew the American ideals of democracy, freedom and equal opportunities for all. She considered the socialist doctrine in actual, pragmatic terms: as science put at the service of all men, as the right for everybody to improve his/her situation by education, and as an idea of mutual help through brotherhood. This implies also the responsibilities that every individual has to assume, so that the society can work properly. Rights as well as duties are emphasized. The socialist values of work and brotherhood assume a new American dimension. She gave particular importance to the individualistic potentialities of every single man and woman, which they should use for the benefit of the larger community. Unselfish work becomes the only means to gain immortality. The pioneers of the future are

> [...]
> Men who their talents all will give –
> Men who will live that all may live –
> Pioneers –
>
> Such unknown roads now beckon you –
> Such Romance now is calling you –
> Pioneer![15]

The poem is an example of how the poet reconsiders certain values from the American experience, and recharges them with a new significance. The poem starts with a youngster sighing that those exciting years when one could be a pioneer are gone forever. Past figures from American history are mentioned. Columbus, the colonists, the "forty-niners" – all are pioneers of the past and all of them died in glory. But the youngster's interlocutor scolds him, reminding him that these people fought for selfish gain ("Think you of naught but wealth and fame/ And power...?"). She indicates a new frontier to him – science and scientific discoveries that will aid people. The new romance is in scientific altruism. The scientific adventure is open to everybody, and the poem ends with a direct appeal

---

14 "Brothers", *ML*, 03, 1934, p. 81; "Nationality", *ML*, 05, 1933, p. 145; "Friends", *ML*, 01, 1934, pp. 22-23.

15 M. Jugg, "Pioneers", *ML*, 06, 1936, pp. 177-178.

to the reader/youngster ("Pioneer!"). Brotherhood signifies not only a shelter, but also a commitment stressing personal responsibilities. The new pioneer will work for all humanity, where altruistic loyalty will be the rule, rather than the exception.

Another way through which Jugg reveals the discrepancies in American ideology is by presenting the dichotomy between school and the outside world. It has to be remembered that when she started to write for the *Juvenile* she was not much older than her readers and she more easily drew material for her contributions from the readers' closest experiences, school realities in particular. As a matter of fact, school is one of her favorite settings both in her poems and especially in her short stories such as "Conversational Scraps" (1932), "Labor Lost" (1934), Tomorrow Did not Come", (1935). School is seen as a happy place, because detached from American reality. There, all the expectations are still real, because they exist only in the students' minds and they have not yet been crushed by the reality of experience. School is a physical place, but it is also an enchanted palace that encloses the American Dream. Once out of it, the world is not able to provide the students with what school has promised them. A return is impossible.

Some of her first writings anticipate certain aspects that will be later elaborated in *Immigrant Woman*. For instance, in her book she describes how the worlds of the immigrants and their children are divided. The children are not aware of their parents' economic problems. They are deceived by the promising American ideology, conveyed not only through education, but also through movies and other spheres of life. Other themes which appear later in her book are anticipated in her short stories. The most significant is the setting. *Immigrant Woman* is set in a small mining town in Kansas. Many of her short stories, too, are set in small American towns. A similar setting implies also a similarity of themes: particularly hard economic conditions, where all the family members have to contribute financially to the family well-being, the monotonous passing of life, where nothing exciting ever happens, young children assuming responsibilities sometimes bigger than themselves, such as taking care of and providing for the younger brothers and sisters, helping in the hard domestic chores, and walking miles upon miles to school.

If in the thirties Mary Jugg is interested in portraying the Depression in its different, tragic paradoxes, in the forties her concern is projected into the complicated world situation. In the forties Mary Jugg's attitude towards socialism changes. The play "A League of Nations" exemplifies this. The characters' names show that they are children of different national groups, but they share the same neighborhood. They suddenly learn that the site where they used to meet and play will no longer be "theirs", and another block will be built there. But the boys decide to build a memorial composed of their favorite toys. At that point of the play they are very proud of being capable of cooperation required to create an original monument. Their teamwork is on a micro-level, what the big nations should do on an international level. They mention the persecution of Jews in Germany, which they see as one of the gravest consequences of this inability to collaborate with one another. But there is a sudden change in the mood of the play. The boys unexpectedly start to quarrel over a triviality and everybody takes back his own "piece" of the monument.[16] If the socialistic antidote is right, people are still not mature enough to understand its full value and significance.

In 1938 *Mladinski List–Juvenile* underwent a general reorganization. This influenced Mary Jugg's writings too. In this year she started a series of short stories entitled "Nifty and His Friends". It is about a dog and his animal friends. Nifty is an "intelligent" dog, whose common sense is sometimes better than humans'. From 1938 onwards, animals are increasingly given voice in her poems and short stories. She allows objects such as a clock, a radio or an old armchair to speak and this enables her to show facts from a different perspective. If at the beginning of her career any fantasy dreaming was discouraged, now, in contrast, it is being fostered. More children's rhymes, simple jingles and fairy tale stories start to appear from that year on. Humor replaces her sarcasm. Moreover, none of her 1938 poems and short stories deals with any specific social problem.

Both in the thirties and in the forties in addition to her "committed" writings she also produced poems depicting nature and her own response to natural elements. She tries to explain the human condition and actions by employing images of the sea and the different characteristics of the winds. Mary Jugg has different attitudes towards nature. Generally speaking, the image of spring appears frequently in her poems. She depicts May as a young, beautiful maiden, she sees both the time of May and youth as too fleeting: the girl's "[...] basket of Hopes" does not last long enough "to combat Despair".[17] From a careless lassie, spring becomes the symbol of social rebirth ("There Will Come Spring", 1933), and of a personal (female) emancipation ("Lines on Spring", 1934). The Springtime rebirth of nature is then perceived as empowering in "Opinion", 1940. All its small manifestations (the touching of the trees, the vision of busy bees and the scent of the just-cut grass), rather than being just a transitory "spring fever", represent life and all the happy moments that make our life worth living. By contrast, in "April Showers", 1939, she sees the catastrophe of the forthcoming war. Men's "killing showers" – the falling bombs – go against Nature and its natural course. These April showers are "foul mockery to 'bringing May flowers'".[18] If the time of rebirth has become the time of death, if all values are trampled on, then what future is destined to men? A similar interrogative is expressed in her poem "Nineteen-Forty", 1940, where she again refers to the contemporary world situation. The war's destruction is associated with cold and with the December freeze. Traditional values are "frozen" by war, and Spring, which stands for peace, is too weak "to thaw the aged ice" and counteract the destruction of war.

[...]

Then wilder, yet still wilder storms
Unlashed across the lands,
Sweeping vaster, ever vaster, –
Crushing, twisting, beating, blighting
Men and homes, and all that Home has meant,

16 "A League of Nations", *ML*, 05, 1939, pp. 5-7.
17 "Month of May", *ML*, 05, 1932, p. 148.
18 "April Showers", *ML*, 04, 1939, p. 3.

And all that Man and Woman meant,
And all that Spring has meant. –

If Man beats Spring into a pulp,
What can the year bring forth? [19]

In some of her earliest poems there prevails the idea that man could master nature through the aid of science. In the poem "Credo", 1933, she expresses the positive idea that the powerful natural elements such as the wind and the sea acquire meaning only if they are subdued by man to his service. In other poems she sees Nature as a perfect, organized world, and in comparison human reality appears fallacious and illogical. The purpose of the parallel between the animal and human world is sometimes social. In "Management", 1933, she describes the self-sufficiency of the animal world where work and stored provisions guarantee a survival in the winter. The same can not be said about conditions of the workers and their families, deprived of everything and condemned to beg from door to door for food. Sometimes examples from the animal world help her to elucidate the human condition ("The Ant and I", 1939), and to reassure us that the connection still exists between the animal and human worlds. She frequently considers nature as something alive and anthropomorphous ("Seen from Above", 1935; "Nocturne", 1936).

In "Nocturne" every element from nature becomes associated with the miners' life. The poet moves freely between three spatial dimensions: the sky, the human realities on Earth and the mines underground. The speaking voice selects different natural elements and transplants them into the human world. In this way the star becomes the light in the miner's shack, "[...] a wee kerosene lamp, on a table near a window" that illuminates the sewing done by the miner's wife, or the room of a sick child, or is just the light waiting for the son coming home from a night shift. The washing hung on a line day after day are clouds ("Tomorrow you'll be there again./Mrs. Clancy takes in washing".) The trees are the nightwatchmen and the garden suddenly becomes the city factory. With the introduction of trees, the natural elements are not used simply descriptively, but start to be directly addressed:

[...]
Can you smell and see and hear all?
Choking gases can kill many men;
Rotten props will let rocks fall.
Can you sound a warning, trees?[20]

In the last stanza the crows appear. In contrast to the other elements the speaker can neither see nor locate them, but she hears their calls. She does not establish a clear parallel, but the crows represent the miners or, generally, the

19 Mary Jugg, "A Column", *Prosveta,* 31,12, 1940, p. 7.
20 "Nocturne", *ML,* 07, 1936, p. 210.

workers. They are "lost", "scattered", "groping", "stumbling" and their calls are "distress signals". The poem ends up with the poet's invocation to join their voices and to manifest their problems united.

Jugg's most frequent stanza pattern is the quatrain where the second and the fourth line rhyme; but the traditional ballad stanza undergoes a series of changes, rhythmical adaptations and variations. According to Jerneja Petrič, Mary Jugg Molek is probably the first to introduce free verse into Slovene-American literature.[21] When the poet uses free verse, she strives to maintain a unity. Apart from alliteration and assonance, the repetition of the same consonant or vowel sounds, her poems often have a mirroring structure, so that the stanzas have the same number of lines, the same length and the same layout. The same mirroring effect is constructed if the stanza ends or begins with the same line or a slightly changed line. Enjambment is used repeatedly, contributing to the general impression of spontaneity and smoothness. Furthermore, the text achieves unity by the use of words from the same semantic area. In the poem "To Let", 1932, the poet works around the act of counting. First she presents an unemployed man sitting on a bench and counting cobbles in the side-walk to kill time. From time to time he is distracted in his calculations by swift steps passing by. And he "follows their retreating tread/To count the steps to such and such a place". She then proceeds to explain that there was a time when he was one of them – one of the employees – and he was looking for an apartment – ("He thought that from the legion of apartments/ Upon his every side, all marked 'To Let',/ He surely might accede to one of them"). But "his hopes dissolved to merely counting matters". Then the vision is reversed and he is only a number on the unemployed list ("He is a number in the endless counters–/ Vast armies of reserved energy 'To Let'") as if he had become one of the stones in the walk. Then follows a verbal revolt:

> He will shatter numbers, stop the counting,
> Crush the cobblestones upon the walk
> So that the frenzied steps will shove into the dust
> To lose their clack upon his mind.

But nothing really happens. The man is seized by a rude policeman's hand and urged to keep on moving "[a]nd 'To Let,' vaunts the bench in Central Park."[22] In the poem "The Sun Breaks Through", 1934, she both constructs on the central opposition light/shadow and uses a series of words with the same root or from the same semantic area. In the poem are mentioned the *sun*, the *rays*, the *light*, *Sunny* State of California, "the streaks of *sunlight* bare the face/ Of him who *lies*". In a new stanza she then continues:

> Not often has he *lain* thus;
> Time was when he was active on the *lines*.

---

21 Jerneja Petrič, *Naši na tujih tleh* , Cankarjeva založba , Ljubljana 1982, p. 475.

22 "To Let", *ML*, 10, 1932, p. 306. (the italics are mine)

He is then beaten with the *shiny* stick, on the *shin* and on the legs. However, the poem's end is quite propagandistic and its purpose is to settle things and to proffer a message of rebellion and change:

> The shafts of light now bare the face,
> And they rise and extend upward and onward
> To columns that some day will expand and burst
> And shatter the streaks of the shadows forever...[23]

As a matter of fact, this contrasting of light and shadow is one of her frequently used dichotomies. She employs this antithesis on different levels: for simply realistic descriptions, as a black and white depiction of the scene, for its metaphorical component and for its symbolic weight. In the above poem the light assumes the function of the camera eye, narrator describing what we can see. Then, as the poem proceeds, the shadows of the bars are presented both in their "physical" way and in their symbolic meaning as the visual representation of injustice.

In her poems the shadows are not always charged with only negative connotations, and the word is used also as a synonym for "the invisible", "the not considered", but present. The shadows are sometimes the workers marching round on a picket ("Shadows", 1934), or it is the blackness of the crows standing for the miners in the poem "Nocturne", 1936. In "Vigil", 1933, and "Christmas Eve", 1934, the darkness is the moment of expectations and hopes. As soon as the day appears, the "fires [will be] grown cold, and glad dreams gone."[24] Often, however, the shadows are just present in the realistic descriptions of the immigrants' shacks and dwellings.

The poem "Night Sketch", 1932, written in free verse, presents a peculiar outlook and again the light and shadow are two predominant elements around which the poem is constructed. As it is not determined what they stand for, the poem is open to a variety of interpretations. As it is already indicated by the title, the poet uses an impressionistic technique:

> Owl sounds – piercing, intermittent,
> unflinching rent the atmosphere,
> And I awakened.
>
> Barking – subdued, mournful,
> aided in the penetration,
> And I arose.
>
> Through a distant window a single light
> Uprooted darkness.

---

23 "The Sun Breaks Through", *ML*, 09, 1934, p. 271.

24 "Christmas Eve", *ML*, 12, 1934, p. 367.

Josh, the cobbler's son, had yesterday been brought in
a long, white carriage.
Whizzing of motors, worn-out laughter, unknowing,
continual, on distant moonlit roads.

Behind the window
The light is flickering.

The light is probably that of a candle and it is the central "sight" of the poem, and the scene is created through the sounds of the night. The general atmosphere is ominous – continuous owl sounds, mournful barking can be heard – all elements that contribute to the suggestion that the light was put for the vigil for the dead cobbler's son ("Josh, the cobbler's son had yesterday been brought in a long, white carriage").

The poem is remarkable for its formal structure and layout. It is divided into six short stanzas, of one sentence each. The first two are of three lines each, similar in structure, and an "I" appears. Then in the third stanza there is a description of what the poetic persona can see from her window, after she has been awakened by the dogs and the owl. The "I" is detached, just an outside observer and hearer, not involved in what is being described. All the following stanzas are of two lines and all are impersonal sentences. Two of them, the third and the fifth stanza, are without an active verb form. So if the central event of the poem is the wake for the dead, and the sight of the light implies all the tragedy and mourning connected with it, that vision is contrasted to the "whizzing of motors, worn-out laughter, unknowing, continual, on distant moonlit roads". This is a hint of a different world, maybe of a better-off society, careless of the tragedy of the working class; or the passing cars can just stand for an impersonal society, where the death of a person is no longer a moment of gathering, when the whole village comes together as in the Old Country.[25]

"To Wheels", 1935, is another social poem in free verse, where the poet employs all the possibilities the text offers to convey her message. It is a very interesting experiment since the poet expands the image of the wheels in both content and structure. The wheels stand for the workers and in this poem Mary Jugg is re-evaluating "the wheels" that make this society work:

Oh, wheels!
In you I see
The strapped energy of a thousand men
The stifled groans of a mighty horde,
The cruel lash of a heavy whip.

For you are small wheels, giant wheels,
Intricate wheels, impatient, unmerciful wheels.
You turn and roar and clash and grind.

---

25 "Night Sketch", *ML*, 06, 1932, p. 177.

The poet depicts their might and energy, concentrating on the sounds both of the machine and of the humans operating it. The wheels personify the hard physical labor. The machine compels the workers to work at a certain tempo and it represents the system where all its components are interrelated, regulated and controlled. It is a master, ("You are a gang boss without a soul;"), but it also depends on men's command ("You are a babe waiting to be led,/ Moving not a single arm without command."). She hopes for a general improvement. All men should become masters (owners) of the machines and they should work together in harmony in the same way as the wheels she has just described:

> For slaves have turned about and become masters,
> Striking and heaving all for one and one for all
> In unison, even as you,
> Oh, wheels!

The wish for a change in society that will put things upside down is expressed very effectively in this poem. The turning effect, already suggested by the repetition of the word "wheel", and by the expressed wish for an overturning of the workers' conditions, is mirrored in the formal structure of the poem. A clear contraposition is made on the layout level, by putting two structurally equal sentences, both relatively short, at the center of the poem, creating in this way a mirroring effect. Yet in content the two sentences stand poles apart. They both refer to the wheels:

> You are a master and a tyrant.
>
> You are a slave at the foot of man. [26]

The poem is composed of contrapositions: boss/babe, master/slave and blessing/curse. But all of them are instrumental to this central part, which is a momentary poetical pause and it represents the axis of the poem. The two short, lapidary and simple sentences represent a break in the general rhythm of the poem, since all the other stanzas are long sentences, covering three, four or five lines.

"The Call of The New Year", 1937, presents an interesting metaphorical approach. The poem is composed of five stanzas, where iambic tetrameters alternate with trimeters; in the first three only the second and the fourth lines rhyme, while in the last two stanzas the lines rhyme alternately. The poem starts with a vision of a field covered with snow with fresh footsteps across it. In the following stanza this vision is broadened by comparison. The field is presented as a neat image in a pool on a street suddenly shattered by a stone. The sound of the creaking snow expresses a state of mind. The poem is enriched by associations and by new details:

> Dull is the sound of the cheerless heart
> Stumping across the snow –

---

26 M. Jugg, "To Wheels", *ML*, 03, 1935, p. 79.

A violin robbed of its every tone –
Missing, the strings and the bow.

The third stanza starts with an explicatory sentence, where for the first time the "New Year" is introduced, but the language is still metaphorical. The scene is mainly apprehended through sight and hearing.

Stretch of a soft, clean snow is the New Year
Furrowed to deep, slushy mud;
Blaring, metallic, falsetto notes
That fall with a deafening thud.

The end is not optimistic, especially not in the socialist sense that sees the victory of the working class through united action. In fact, Jugg becomes aware that her plans for an improvement of society crash with the general amorphous attitude of the masses:

Humanity bleeding; humanity starving;
Humanity bound with a chain –
Humanity trampled – afraid of awakening –
This is the New Year's refrain.

She cries out for somebody, a "traveler across the virgin plains", capable of changing the tune ("discover the strings and pick up the bow") so that events will really take a new course with the New Year. But there is no appeal to the positive potentialities of all people, the idea of community is not stressed. In fact, not only are people seen as a mob incapable of organizing themselves, but also as "afraid of awakening". She is calling for someone who will be able to give these people strength, through "songs and strains", but not for an uprising, an active en masse attempt to change the desperate human situation. These songs will only "muffle the drone of humanity's woe."[27] In other words, their function will be only to reduce and not eliminate the severity of the human condition.

The reason why no progress has been achieved in society does not only lie in "the system", but also in the individual and his own responsibilities. Jugg realizes that there are impediments of other kinds that bar our good intentions. She notices how all the resolutions, usually uttered at the beginning of the New Year, are soon forgotten and never carried out. She speaks from her own experience. She investigates the causes of such a behavior and concludes that it is because of man's fear and doubt. She frequently uses images of doors that are closed, chests that are locked, insurmountable walls and clothes that cannot be discarded. All these images also suggest a sense of entrapment and immobility. In her program poem, "Decision", 1933, she looks at the future promising a commitment, but realizes the risky and the frightening part of it. Her approach is metaphorical. In this poem she compares the future to a closed book with stiff covers, and then to a chest:

---

27 "The Call of The New Year", *ML*, 01, 1937, p. 17.

I hold before me a closed book;
Not a page has been scanned nor a cover lifted;
The words, inspiration, and message
Are held within bounds of stiff, coarse buckram
That encloses.

A chest of potent ideas
Lies locked somewhere within power of my reach.
Their strength has never been tested;
They are held by strong padlocks
Of doubt.
[...][28]

At the end she decides that her New Year will be "a read book/ and an opened chest." But this ending is too plain and contrasts with the general uncertain atmosphere of the poem.

In "Deferment", 1934, she represents her longings as a vision of a white house on the top of a hill, which promises a kind of paradise of oblivion ("Enter, and all will be forgotten"). But the "I" hesitates, afraid of the steep and long road uphill, whilst knowing that she had better go. When she finally decides and climbs the hill, she realizes that she has just missed the given opportunity forever.

At last, after a great while, I summoned courage
And climbed the hill and reached the top,
Only to find
That a high wind had slammed the door before my eyes
And locked it fast-inside.[29]

In her "Lines on Spring", 1934, she expresses a yearning for renovation which is swiftly followed by a sense of impotence and immobility. Spring is a time of a year when a rebirth in everybody's life is expected, and the poet sees it as a powerful and dynamic moment when a sudden innovation is possible. But this outside force is not enough. The inside, conservative, elements of society, its customs and traditions, continue to dominate it. The four walls of the house , where the protagonist works as a cleaner, suggest her entrapment and the walls automatically become "the walls of ignorance". The "I" of the poem could be seen as a specifically female voice, and her discourse as an invocation for a woman's independence. She knows that other people share her entrapped position to which she feels constrained. The poem is composed of one extended sentence, where the main clause is the second stanza, and the subordinate is the first stanza. The poem is written in free verse:

---

28 "Decision", *ML*, 01, 1933, p. 17.
29 "Deferment", *ML*, 08, 1934, p. 240.

If I could only
Burst the shell
And
Crumble the barriers
That shut us in...

But I can only
Do private housecleaning,
Remembering
That the walls of ignorance
Are strongly cemented
By traditions of the many.[30]

To dare and fear are a constant dichotomy in her poems and it is associated with the concept of cutting with the tradition of the fathers and taking new roads "across the virgin plains"[31] "and strike out into new, better directions".[32] But in the "Sea of Memory", 1932 she admits: "At times we were a helmsman bold, / But oft submerged in flood of fears".

Along with her social poems Mary Jugg composed reflective and subjective poems. The above examples show that they cannot be extricated so easily from her social poems. As soon as her poems become autobiographical they gather complexity, becoming introspective. There is a desire to expose herself, but at the same time she hides in a metaphorical language. Many times in her poetry the inexplicable feelings, sentiments and abstract concepts become natural elements. In one of her earliest poems, "The Sea of Memory", 1932, she uses different sights of the sea to represent our past:

Across the sea of memory
The waves now surge, now flow;
Always on shores of mind they splash,
Deluge the sands, and then they go.

Sometimes the breakers cruelly
Rich-laden cargoes dash on rocks;
Again the tides to Hope give rise
And vessels reach their ports and docks.[33]

It is quite common to find the *Juvenile* contributors reflecting upon their past experiences, especially upon their being students, but usually their poems stop at the descriptive level. In her poems sometimes Mary Jugg is the observer, in some others she is the direct protagonist. For instance, her two poems about graduation

30 "Lines on Spring", *ML*, 05, 1934, p.115.
31 "The Call of The New Year", *Ibid.*.
32 "Educational Education", *Prosveta,* 19, 09, 1934, p. 7.
33 "Sea of Memory", *ML,* 04, 1932, p. 122.

"Graduation", 1932, and "Graduate–1933", 1933, treat the same theme from two different perspectives. In the former poem she presents the school scene from the point of view of a teacher, following her students through their school days to their graduation. The poet tries to define the word graduation, and she searches for a significance that goes beyond the "shuffling and the going" and "a sheet of paper marked with plus and minus signs". Her line is cumulative. This is how the poem starts:

> You say,
>
> I see long procession every morning filing into small classrooms;
> Chairs moving, shuffling, scratching of pencils,
> A few words said, then again–
> Going
> To return the following day,
> And so continuing through weeks and months.
>
> After some years they call it graduation.
> What does it mean? [34]

The visual outlook of the poem and the structure are peculiar. The stanza presenting the formal part of the graduation – the examination and the tests handed in – is given in brackets, in order to concentrate the readers' attention on the final section of the poem, where the poet reveals, in direct speech, the expectations, not so much of the students but of their parents, who worked hard to provide their children with an education. The poet employs this strategy to suggest she is just reporting what she has heard on that day among the public. The direct speech provides her poem with reliability.

While in this poem she looks positively at the generation just graduating, in the autobiographical "Graduate–1933", 1933, she is much more pessimistic. The point of view changes, since now she remembers her own graduation. She recalls how she was told that it was a crucial moment in her life ("They told me I stood at the crossroads/ Of momentous importance – four years ago"). After that she has taken her own road in search of success. A general sense of insecurity starts to permeate the poem as soon as it shifts to her present situation. The language becomes obscure and metaphorical. She describes her condition as coming to a standstill at a wall that bars her view of success and threatens her, but she also realizes that other ex-students are in her position. She is at a crossroads again and she does not know whether to join the others, or continue on her own road. The poem ends with a question: "where must I go?"[35]

Maybe the best comment on this poem would be Mary Jugg's own words expressed five years later in an article:

---

34 "Graduation", *ML*, 07, 1932, p. 209.

35 "Graduate – 1933", *ML*, 05, 1933, p. 145.

> How many of the graduates of the '27 and '28 have unwillingly but firmly resigned themselves to working on jobs that offer slight compensation above mere existence – jobs that were most remote from their expectations?[36]

Both in her poems and short stories Mary Jugg refers to fairy tales and riddles freely, since she feels that her readers are at home with them. Sometimes she reworks them charging them with new content, as the following reference to climbing the bean stalk to enter a new world. Again there is a sense of revolt and at the same time of helplessness, expressing hesitancy and fear of daring:

> I will tear from my latticed window
> The creeper vines, one by one,
> And fling from the diamonded trellis
> The bars that enlace the sun.
>
> I will grasp stout beans of the morning
> To draw me aloft in their sphere,
> And cling to the rays of the ascending sun
> Lest I fall to the earth in fear.[37]

Finally, it has to be considered that Mary Jugg writes especially for the *Juvenile*. Therefore, it is obvious that she is influenced in her selection of themes both by her readers' expectations and by the directives the magazine has. She is further influenced by the different times of the year the paper is issued, since many of her poems celebrate the first of May, various important *S.N.P.J.* events, the starting of a new season or the end of the year. For instance, many of her poems appear on the first pages of the January issues, usually celebrating the coming of the New Year and the departure of the Old. These poems, though similar in themes, are very different in terms of complexity.

Università degli studi di Trieste

36 "Women's Round Table", *Prosveta*, 25, 05, 1938, p. 8.
37 "Ambition", *ML*, 07, 1933, p. 210.