

A full-length, sepia-toned portrait of a woman, Jelena J. Dimitrijević, standing and facing slightly to the right. She is wearing a long, dark, high-collared dress with a light-colored apron. Her hair is styled in an updo. The background is a mottled, studio-style backdrop.

Jelena J. Dimitrijević The American Woman



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Translated and Introduced by
Goran Petrović

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*Knjiženstvo, Theory and History of Women's Writing in Serbian
until 1915.*

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Editor's Note

This book is aimed at presenting Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862-1945), a Serbian author, humanitarian worker, feminist, wartime nurse, and world traveler, to non-Serbian readers, especially those interested in American culture and its perception outside the US from a hundred years ago.

It consists of an introductory scholarly text and two pieces by Jelena J. Dimitrijević, one fictional and the other non-fictional, which form a separate episode within her “American cycle”. The story entitled “The American Woman” tells us about an encounter between a gentleman from an unknown European country and an American lady. It is told in the first person by a male narrator, and was first published in 1912. The second piece is a chapter from the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* written in 1919-20, during Dimitrijević’s journey to the East Coast, yet published only in 1934. In this chapter the author visits the town of Brockton, MA, where, as we soon learn, the prototypes of the American woman and her mother from the story actually live, which transforms this work into an unusual epilogue of an episode which spans over one decade, different genres (fiction and reality), as well as two continents. Its literary and emotional beauty makes it exciting even after one century, and inspired us to have these pieces translated and present them to a new readership.



It is worth knowing that Jelena J. Dimitrijević was marginalized in Serbian culture for more than 40 years – from her death in 1945, at the very end of World War Two, up until the second half of the 1980s, her works were neither reprinted nor discussed, except in some very narrow scholarly circles. Thanks to feminist literary critics, the interest in her work has soared since, and her works are now both reprinted and accepted in the reading list for primary schools, and also translated into foreign languages. Recent translations of Jelena J. Dimitrijević's writings include *Letters from Salonika* (translated into Greek in 2008, and into English and Italian in 2018) and *Letters from India* (translated into Hindi and English in 2016).

The “American Cycle” by Jelena J. Dimitrijević consists of the stories “The American Woman” (reprinted in Serbian in 1918, 2016, 2018, and 2019) and “Something Happened in America” (originally written in French in 1920, published in Serbia in 1924, republished in 2019), the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* (originally published in 1934, reprinted in 2019), as well as a number of poems written during her stay in America in 1919-20 and her second visit to the US in 1927. Many of these poems were published in contemporary journals and magazines, while all the manuscripts are kept in the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade. Three of the poems, written in English originally, were published for the first time in 2019, both in original and translation.

We hope that this publication will make you interested in Jelena J. Dimitrijević's rich life and her writings. Data on both her life and work are accessible in English in the database *Knjiženstvo* (www.knjizenstvo.rs.)

Biljana Dojčinović



Jelena J. Dimitrijević and Katherine Flagg: Free-Thinking Women from Different Worlds¹

Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862–1945) was a renowned literary figure, benefactor, polyglot, fervent advocate of feminism, and the first woman globe-trotter in Serbia. Well-educated and well-traveled, Dimitrijević lived in some of the most turbulent periods in history – ones that saw a serious undermining of the conservative Christian worldview and the outbreak of two World Wars – and so used her linguistic prowess and her extensive traveler's experience to immortalize the society-changing atmosphere of the day. A prolific author of not only poetry and fiction but also travelogue literature, she relied on her considerable writing talent to develop a free-thinking and cosmopolitan stance in philosophy, which, at the turn of the twentieth century, was only beginning to take root in the Central Balkans as a region well known for its unyielding devotion to the values of Christian Orthodox patriarchy, in spite of the then-ongoing rise of libertarian tendencies in the West.²

¹ This article has been written within the project *Knjiženstvo, Theory and History of Women's Writing in Serbian until 1915*.

² It is worth remembering that strong Christian patriarchy in Serbia, at the turn of the twentieth century, is closely related to the long reign of Turkish Islam over South East Europe, spanning from 14th–15th to 19th–20th century (depending on the time when each of the particular areas of the Balkans was subjugated and liberated, for all the Balkan territories neither lost nor regained their independence at the same date). In other words, over the centuries, the conservative Islamic tradition had prevented the Serbs

It is precisely with a view to popularizing the libertarian, free-minded philosophy of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, as an author who, during her lifetime, not only debunked the stereotype of women as being incapable of skillful writing but also the one of early twentieth-century Serbia as being devoid of anti-patriarchal sentiments, that we present the following edition consisting of two of her prose texts – the story “The American Woman” (1912) and the chapter “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” from the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* (1934). The two texts are only a minor selected portion of her entire body of work dealing with the Western World (in addition to her opus dealing with Oriental cultures), and together comprise a full description of her relationship with Katherine (Kitty) Flagg, an intellectual woman from Massachusetts as one of the several female personalities who left a powerful impression on Jelena J. Dimitrijević during her journeys westward, to Britain and the United States.

Although the two texts, as being written by the same author, comprise a single narrative entity (with “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s”, as the later of the two texts, containing an explanation of “The American Woman” and therefore making some kind of an epilogue to the story), the characteristics they share seem to be fewer than the ones that set them apart. In other words, “The American Woman” and “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” differ in terms of their respective genres, narrators, characters, times and settings, and topics. First of all, when it comes to genre, “The American Woman” is written as a work of fiction or belles-lettres literature, whereas “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” is essentially a piece of biographical, travelogue writing. Secondly, while the narrator of “The American Woman” is an unnamed male person, the narrator of “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” is Jelena J. Dimitrijević, or the author herself. Thirdly, the main characters of “The American Woman” are an unidentified European man (i.e. the narrator) and his American woman, whereas the protagonists of “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” are Jelena J. Dimitrijević and Mrs. Flagg. Fourthly,

(and other Balkan peoples) from following the course of scientific progress that many Christian nations began to develop as early as the Renaissance. For this reason, the 19th-century’s reestablished Serbian state was, for all its patriotic, anti-Turkish elation, still quite unprogressive from the point of view of Western European states and had before it the unenviable task of having to compensate in as short a period as possible for all the time lost under Ottoman occupation.

“The American woman” describes temporally unspecified events in an unnamed European large capital, whereas “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” is set in 1920 Brockton, Massachusetts, USA (however, the year of “The American Woman” is specified as 1910 only in the travelogue chapter). Last but not least, while “The American woman” centers itself on love, the main subject of interest in “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” is American culture. For clarity’s sake, we provide below a table showing the main differences between the two texts:

| Title of the work | Genre | Author | Narrator | Characters | Time and Setting | Topic |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--|---|------------------|
| “The American Woman” | Short story (fiction) | Jelena J. Dimitrijević | Unnamed male narrator | Unnamed American woman; unnamed European male person | Temporally unspecified; unnamed city | Love |
| “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” | Travelogue (a chapter) | Jelena J. Dimitrijević | Jelena J. Dimitrijević | Mrs. Harry Flagg – Kitty Flagg; Jelena J. Dimitrijević | London (1910, in reminiscence); Brockton (1920, in the present) | American culture |

The above-mentioned differences point to the fact that “The American Woman” was written as a mysterious story, with neither topographical nor onomastic references, a narrative that was only superficially (i.e. when read on its own) meant to describe a man’s meeting and infatuation with a foreign woman, while, in reality (i.e. when explained by means of the travelogue chapter), it was designed to tell of the author’s anti-traditional love for Mrs. Flagg (hence the use of a first-person male narrator to conceal the socially unsanctioned sexual proclivities). In other words, when understood through the lens of “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s”, “The American woman” reveals that its narrator is, in fact, the author’s male alter ego, while its American woman as the object of the narrator’s erotic desire is none other but the Kitty Flagg of the 1934 travelogue chapter. Apropos of this, it is important

to mention Magdalena Koch's *gender transgression* as a concept that enables a woman writer to transcend the boundaries of sex and so treat her love for a woman from a male perspective, for it is clear that in writing "The American woman", Jelena J. Dimitrijević wanted precisely this – or, in other words, to attain emotional liberation through a well-masked defiance of the taboo of homoeroticism.³ As for the last remaining mysterious element of "The American woman", "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's" reveals that the European city where the male narrator's (Mrs. Dimitrijević's) and the American woman's (Mrs. Flagg's) first encounter happened is London. So, the two stories, as being separated by 22 years in terms of the respective times of their publication and as describing events mutually separated by ten years, together familiarize the reader, in gradual steps, with Jelena J. Dimitrijević's ten-year relationship with the American woman Katherine Flagg.

In brief, "The American Woman", as the older of the two texts we publish in this edition, is a story about love. As the male narrator openly states at the very beginning, the main reason of his departure from his mundane existence in his fatherland (somewhere on the fringes of Europe) is the lack of love, which he considers the objective of life and something that one has to be in pursuit of, whether willingly or unwillingly:

I had said goodbye to love, had parted with it forever with too heavy a heart, for to me it was not life, but rather the objective of life. My troubles had disappeared, but something worse came, boredom and emptiness. All of a sudden, I felt all alone in this vast and cold world. I had no one to make me sad, no one to cheer me up. Indifference. And in such a mood, with no love or hatred, I set off into the world (2).

Bored, empty, and lonely, as he says, the narrator heads for "a large European capital, the biggest city in the world, [...] where the morning fog looks like vapor and the evening sky like copper" (2), and in one of that city's hotels meets the American woman. Very soon, he strikes a cordial friendship with the middle-aged lady, but the relationship, at least from the viewpoint of the story's narrator, does not remain just friendly. In other words, the narrator becomes infatuated with his "American woman"

³ Магдалена Кох, *...КАДА САЗРЕМО КАО КУЛТУРА... Стваралаштво српских списатељица на почетку XX века (канон – жанр – род)*, превела с пољског Јелена Јовић, (Службени гласник, 2012), 251–254.

and, as a result, spares no words in describing both her physical and spiritual beauty. What he particularly likes about his new acquaintance is her childlike sincerity, her manly conduct, and the manner in which she speaks and walks. Apropos of the American woman's free conduct, which includes a transvaluation of the traditional role of women as mere objects of desire obliged to always keep themselves dependent on their men's will, the narrator goes so far as to equate her with "the first woman – before her expulsion from Paradise" (3), or with the perfect woman as she would have looked like before the sin of patriarchy (rather than Adam's Biblical one) corrupted mankind. Precisely therein lies the feminist dimension of this literary work of Dimitrijević's, for, throughout "The American Woman", her male narrator does not miss to couple his love story as the central thread of the narrative with his propagation of gender equality ideas, which, at the time, were only beginning to find their way into his society (which is identified as Serbian in "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's"), whereas in America they already had massive intellectual support. In other words, the American woman symbolizes the ideal woman as living on equal social terms with men.

As the story unfolds, the narrator grows ever more enamored with the American woman, his covert passion, which he is not bold enough to express openly, almost driving him insane. Following an excursion to a town (which also remains unnamed in the story, but is identified as Stratford-upon-Avon in "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's"), where the narrator, inspired by the picturesque landscapes everywhere around him, barely restrains himself from "kneeling before [the American woman], kiss[ing] her hands, and tell[ing] her the craziest sort of things" (5), the culmination of the story occurs one morning in the guest lounge of the hotel they are staying at. That morning the narrator, having plainly said to the American woman that the lounge looks empty without her, exchanges kisses on the cheek with the lady. Although the kisses do not seem to be understood by the American woman as erotic, the narrator becomes overjoyed, as he says, at having been kissed "by the woman who came from the New World to the Old World to reign over all women" (10). However, he soon realizes that in their commonly shared hotel, the American woman, apart from the company of her seventy-seven year old mother (who came to London with her daughter and with whom

the narrator also strikes a warm friendship), also frequently enjoys the company of a young athletic man. That man, of whom the narrator soon becomes jealous, is called simply “the man” and described as being very strong and “with eyes as pure as a child’s”:

Who that young man was, I did not enquire, for to me he was just a *man*. As though that was his name. And I always looked at his head of a man, with overgrown thick bushy hair, at his face of a man, though with a shaved moustache, at his arms made up of sheer muscles, and especially at his legs in his short yellowish black-checked socks covering his curved, almost female, calves. He must have been a great athlete; and surely with nerves of steel... His eyes as pure as a child’s, and as strong and hard as if he were made of bronze. This is what the first man must have looked like... If the greatest sculptor of our age were to make a man of bronze, the original caveman, he should take this young man as a model... And suddenly, I saw them caress on my bed sheets... “They are equal in body and soul, that old man and this new woman. No, they are both new... How healthy the fruit of their love will be! And if millions were born so healthy, our sick age would be cured” (12).

Clearly, the narrator views the unidentified man as the archetype of a perfect anti-patriarchal man and places him side by side with the American woman. In his imaginative mind, the two of them make a perfect male-female partnership, in which there will be no domination of men over women and with which a new utopian age will begin, with women as representing the equal intellectual partners of men rather than mere housewives and objects of male sexual desire. In this way, the narrator (that is, the author, for the narrator actually sets forth Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s views) not only expresses her firm belief in the righteousness of feminism but also prophesies the coming of a new age of gender equality, which he, obviously, does not view as some kind of an abstract theory, but rather as an entirely practicable idea. So, through the personality of “the first man” the narrator (i.e. the author) completes his criticism of the patriarchy in “The American woman,” for if the American woman stands for the perfect woman, her supposed lover symbolizes the perfect man of the future, whereas together they represent the pattern of a perfect marriage for the coming days.

Toward the end of the story, the narrator succeeds in overcoming both his jealousy and animalistic lust for the American woman, and so, as he says, enables his soul to vanquish his senses, but not before he receives another opportunity to show the beloved lady what he feels for her. In other words, on one occasion, the narrator tries to kiss the American woman’s hand and then notices that she has blushed. The blush is repeated again at their following encounter in the guest lounge, when the narrator’s appearance causes “the first man” or “the bronze man” (21), as he is called, to leave the company of the American lady and her mother. The narrator takes this as a sign that the American woman was not emotionally indifferent to him (i.e. the author) either, and, though he is far from being sure of this, ends his story in words that sound victory:

I set off into the world with indifference, and returned from it with love. It was no traveler’s flirtatious love adventure, but a serious love. My senses fought against my soul, and the soul was victorious. The American woman purified it, transformed it, and gave it the strength to prevail.

My last love, as beautiful and as great as the first one. My heart knows no age. To my soul age is merely a fancy (21).

So, the narrator’s excitement-seeking adventure ends in success. His last love, which starts as passionate but ends as a romantic, pure, spiritual experience, proves to him that his heart is still teeming with life, in spite of his mature years. As for “the bronze man”, of him the narrator finds out more a week after the American woman’s departure from the unnamed city for the European continent (after the departure of the American woman and her mother, and the departure of “the bronze man”, which occur at about the same time, the narrator stays in the hotel for another whole week before departing himself back for his native country). In other words, from a local newspaper he learns (or, more accurately, presumes because we are not completely assured that the man from the newspaper is “the bronze man”) that the man truly had amorous intentions with the American woman and that over the past three years he has been trying to win her heart, but with no success; and though, in utter despair because of his unrequited love, he tried to kill himself on a number of occasions, he has survived “to follow her everywhere like her shadow” (21).

To sum up, “The American Woman” is significant in two main respects: firstly, it is important as a story which places love at the center of one’s existence (the emotion itself not being restricted to the traditional male-female marital relations, but only so when the explanations from the travelogue chapter are taken into consideration), and secondly, its importance resides in its overt support of gender equality. As a third, secondary, plane of importance, we can single out its beautiful, lavish descriptions as bearing witness to Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s remarkable talents. Her literary aptitude is apparent in equal measure throughout the story – whether she is describing the narrator’s love of the American woman’s body, his love of her spiritual qualities, or, perhaps most conspicuously, the architecture and landscapes of the unnamed city. In the end, it is worth pointing out that, in keeping “The American Woman” clear of any topographical or onomastic details, Jelena J. Dimitrijević adds a fairy-tale-like flavor to her fictional work, for, as we understand, the story’s mysterious background where no names are mentioned slightly resembles traditional fairy tales in which onomastic and topographical details are not as important as the fantastic beings and events that appear and unfold before the eyes of the reader. In this sense, the fairy-tale dimension of “The American Woman”, as a work of realistic fiction, would, understandably, not reside in the presence of any supernatural elements, but rather in the fantastic quality and results of the emotions that the story’s key female character, as the representative of the New World (America), arouses in its key male protagonist, as the representative of the Old one (Europe).

“On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” describes Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s visit to Brockton, Massachusetts, at Mrs. Flagg’s home, in the spring of 1920, ten years after their first meeting. The visit, it is worth mentioning, happens during Mrs. Dimitrijević’s stay in Boston, as part of her one-year journey all over the Northeast of the United States. Right at the start of the text, the author mentions her previous meeting with Mrs. Flagg in London (London is now mentioned explicitly) and so gives the impression of smooth continuity with “The American Woman”. In addition to unveiling the mystery of the male narrator from “The American Woman” and the mystery of the European capital mentioned therein, the chapter also reveals that in that London hotel

ten years before Jelena J. Dimitrijević stayed with her husband, now deceased (the author’s husband, a Serbian lieutenant, had been killed in action during the First World War). It is worth noting, the introduction of this character, who was not at all mentioned in the story, opens the possibility of understanding the infatuated narrator from “The American Woman” as Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s husband, so that the reason behind the author’s writing of the story could be her desire to heal herself mentally from her husband’s emotional unfaithfulness.⁴ However, this “psychoanalytic” approach to the story, to our mind at least, seems to be less accurate than the “homoerotic” one as being spurred by the author’s desire to conceal her lesbianism (the terms for both approaches come from Magdalena Koch).⁵

The chapter’s narration begins with Dimitrijević’s unannounced call on the Flagg family, and then proceeds with the author’s second visit to Mrs. Flagg, who, having been surprised and delighted at the Serbian woman’s unexpected arrival, hastens to invite her old friend for a whole weekend of socializing. The text now makes no mention of erotic attraction, for the only physical description of Mrs. Flagg, as alluding to her now a bit more advanced age, is quite devoid of lust (“[h]er hair is not just ‘streaked with gray like silver’ – as in my story – but is gray”) (27). The two women are described as overjoyed at having an opportunity to refresh the memories of their days in London, and the main topic of this writing, as it seems, is American culture as revealed to the reader through the Flagg family.

Speaking of American culture and how it is presented in “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s”, it is first important to emphasize the personality of the American woman, for it is through her characteristics and through the values she advocates that most elements of American culture are reflected in this text. Second, it is also of significance to note that the characteristics and ideas that make up the philosophy of Mrs. Flagg as a highly intelligent woman can be associated with different epochs of

4 Магдалена Кох, „Текстуалне релације приповетке ‘Американка’ и поглавља ‘На уик-енду код Мисиз Флаг’ из америчког путописа: субверзивност и трансгресија“, 61–77, у: Биљана Дојчиновић (ур), *Американке Јелене Ј. Димитријевић: зборник радова*, (Београд: Филолошки факултет Универзитета у Београду и Народна библиотека Србије, 2019), 74.

5 Ibid., 74–76.

American history, so that what we are dealing with is the assumption that Jelena J. Dimitrijević's friend symbolizes a three-hundred-year ideological history of the United States, ever since from its inception in the early 1600s, as the time when the first permanent Anglo-Saxon settlements were founded in North America, until 1920, as the year of the second meeting between the two ladies, the American and Serbian one. Finally, it is worth mentioning that a close insight into Mrs. Flagg's personality, and per se into American culture, is provided through a series of socializing events that take place in the following order – on Saturday, as the first day of the weekend in question, Mrs. Flagg prepares lunch for four (her mother, her husband, her guest, and herself) and shows Mrs. Dimitrijević around the house, whereas on Sunday, the four of them first go to the local Episcopal church to attend the mass, and then head for Plymouth Rock to visit the site of the legendary 1620 disembarkation of the Pilgrim Fathers. All the events, needless to say, are marked by eloquent conversations among the three Americans (especially Mrs. Flagg and her mother) and Jelena J. Dimitrijević.

The first important characteristic of Mrs. Flagg's that the reader becomes familiar with in the chapter is her industriousness, and in a very practical, down-to-earth sense. In other words, as we learn from the text, the American woman is immensely hard-working and capable of keeping her house perfectly clean in spite of having no domestic service, that is, in spite of doing all the housework on her own. Speaking of Mrs. Flagg's having no domestic service, it is important to mention a historical aspect that the author refers to – that is, the fact that, in the early 1900s, Brockton was one of America's largest shoe-producing centers,⁶ so that, due to most of the town's uneducated citizens being employed in the local shoe factories, it was very difficult to find available domestic servants. This information is one of a number of similar pieces of evidence in the story testifying to the fact that, at the beginning of

the twentieth century, the United States was, in terms of economy, the fastest growing nation in the world. Other such pieces of evidence include the mention of various household appliances that Mrs. Flagg uses to perform her everyday chores (a washing machine, cleaning machines, a parquet-waxing machine) – and that would have certainly been seen as wonders of technology in less developed countries of the world (such as Jelena J. Dimitrijević's Serbia, or, more precisely, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, as her country was called at that time) – and also the mention of a family car owned by the Flaggs, which, in the early 1900s, was seen as a symbol of America's technological and capitalist progress. In addition to being successful in keeping her house clean, Mrs. Flagg is also good at cooking, which Jelena J. Dimitrijević can assure herself of at their shared Saturday lunch, when, among a number of splendid courses, she particularly relishes the American lady's home-made strawberry short cake.

Apropos of Mrs. Flagg's success as a housewife, it is important to stress the Puritanical background of these characteristics of hers. In other words, in devotedly fulfilling her domestic obligations, the American woman obviously resembles the first settlers in Massachusetts, the Pilgrim Fathers, who early in the seventeenth century displayed unparalleled physical industriousness, without which it would have been impossible to survive in the harsh environment of uncivilized America. As a caring daughter and a faithful wife – for Dimitrijević praises the American woman's devotion to her aged mother as well as her faithfulness to her husband Harry – Mrs. Flagg stands as a worthy heiress of the strong Puritan women of the seventeenth century, without whom there would also have been no successful settlement of North American wilderness. And that her Puritan industriousness and perfectionism are no random traits of hers, but rather strongly attached to the Puritan past of America, we get to learn from the Sunday events, for while in Saint Paul's Episcopal Church the mother and daughter are shown as zealously chanting Christian hymns, at Plymouth Rock they are shown as silently revering the shadows of their seventeenth-century forefathers. Therefore, it is no wonder the Serbian author, as being enthralled by the two women's commitment to Anglican spirituality, describes them as looking like "devout American Christian women" (34).

⁶ Interestingly enough, after a century and a half of incessant operation, Brockton's shoe industry became totally extinguished in the early years of the twenty-first century (Katelyn Rota, "The Brockton Shoe Industry", *The Great Migration*, n. d., <http://brocktonsgreatmigration.blogspot.com/p/historical-10.html> [accessed January 19, 2020]). "The shoe city's" golden age (as Brockton used to be called) began during the American Civil War (1861–1865), while at the peak of its productivity (which was precisely at about the time the events from "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's" take place) it had dozens of factories and thousands of employed workers (Ibid.).

However, though puritanically hard-working and respectful of the Puritan beginnings of America, Mrs. Flagg is by no means as dogmatic and conservative as her seventeenth-century forebears would have been. In other words, Dimitrijević's American woman is, as we learn from the chapter, highly intelligent, well-educated, and especially loving of English poetry. She owns a private library at home and is "the president of not only a number of social and humanitarian societies in Brockton but also of a women's literary association in Boston" (30). She also has a collection of antique art objects, purchased on her journeys overseas, and is, most importantly, an enthusiastic liberal and free-thinker. In specific terms, Mrs. Flagg does not only support feminism, of which Jelena J. Dimitrijević has already spoken enough in "The American woman", but is also a passionate supporter of republicanism as the idea that, at the close of the eighteenth century, was built into the very foundations of American independence.

Of Mrs. Flagg's republican beliefs the reader learns from the many described conversations between the American woman and her mother, in which the former opposes the latter's pro-British monarchism. That is to say, the daughter and her mother were born in different countries and, as a result, differ in terms of their national identities (the mother was born in England and, in spite of having migrated to America already at the age of fifteen and marrying an American man, declares herself as an Englishwoman, whereas her daughter, as having been born and lived her whole life in the New World, feels American), so that they frequently argue with one another on the grounds of the separate worlds and ideologies they represent.

For instance, Mrs. Miner, on the one hand, criticizes America's secession from the British Empire and defends the view that the English "are meant to master [and] the Americans to labor" (33). On the other hand, Mrs. Flagg accuses her mother of being a "proud Albion woman" (33) and passionately denounces Britain's imperialistic efforts toward the establishment of a lasting global empire. On one occasion, she even expresses humor in her criticism of her mother's monarchist views. That is, she describes a group of cats that she sees running hither and thither in her yard as European kings fleeing from the field of battle (an ironical allusion to the expulsion of monarchism from America at the

end of the 1775–1783 Revolution). It is interesting to quote the words by which Jelena J. Dimitrijević, with an unmistakable talent for shrewd judgment, summarizes the verbal, philosophical clashes between the American woman and her English mother, or, in other words, between the New and the Old World:

Yes, I was becoming, that is, I had become totally convinced, not in London – for no such conversations took place there – but in Brockton, at their home, that this was not a conflict between two women, a mother and a daughter; not between two nations, the English and American; not between two races, for they are both of the same race, but between two continents, or, to put it more aptly and accurately – between two worlds: the Old and the New one. As with the old and young people, so with the Old and New worlds – they cannot understand one another. The former is proud of its traditions, and the latter haughty because of its youth (32).

Apart from defying Mrs. Miner's monarchism, Mrs. Flagg also opposes her mother with regard to her affirmative perception of the then-incumbent President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. That is to say, Mrs. Flagg refuses to agree with her mother's view of President Wilson as the political leader who, in 1917, saved the world by dispatching US troops to the Western Front. The American woman, for her part, believes that the engagement of US military in World War One was greatly belated because it happened "only after [American] waters had been sailed into and [the President's] egotism touched" (32) (alluding, thus, to Wilson's declaration of war on Germany only after German submarines began to sink the American merchant vessels carrying provisions to the European Allies). So, the American woman, as a shrewd observer, believes that the myriad World War One casualties could have been saved if only the American President as the supreme commander of the world's mightiest army had been bold enough to extinguish the fires of Prussian militarism no sooner than they had been lit. In addition to that, she also criticizes President Wilson for marrying his partner in card games, in contrast with Mrs. Miner, who views the President's choice of a wife as his private affair, even though, as Mrs. Flagg openly complains, the old Englishwoman herself taught her daughter that "frivolous women should be excluded from a serious society" (33).

All in all, Mrs. Flagg is shown as an independent thinker vehemently opposed to dogmatism, her free-thinking philosophy being wholeheartedly supported if not by her mother, then most definitely by her husband, a reputable Brockton lawyer who, as we are told, is as arduous a feminist as his clever wife. In this respect, it would be possible to connect the American woman's liberal views with America's eighteenth-century ideology which, as a result of the then-ongoing inflow of enlightenment ideas from Europe, was on its way to breaking, once and for all, with the patriarchal narrow-mindedness of Puritan Christianity.⁷

When it comes to the characteristics that connect Mrs. Flagg with America's ideology of the nineteenth and twentieth century – which, understandably, was the ideology of capitalism – it is primarily of importance to stress the American woman's strong reliance on different technological devices in her everyday life, of which we have already spoken earlier, when mentioning the technological and economic prowess of the young American nation. In addition, it is also significant to mention her love of being show-offish, that is, her habit of boasting about her success as a housewife, and her tidiness in particular. Although, in the chapter, Mrs. Flagg is not shown as boasting in the media but before her Serbian friend from London, it would be easy to establish a similarity between this habit of the American woman's and the capitalist frenzy of advertising one's qualities and achievements for the purpose of creating an ever-advancing career, or in other words, for the purpose of outplaying one's market competition. So, in terms of her great reliance on modern technology and her habit of publicizing her working qualities, Mrs. Flagg is presented as embracing modern-day values, in addition to those which were typical of America's earlier history.

Based on all of the above-said about Mrs. Flagg, it is clear that she embodies different values characteristic of different epochs in America's history. From the Puritan seventeenth century, she adopts devout Christian spirituality, and the spirit of industriousness, that is, entrepreneurship; from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment Age,

⁷ The eighteenth century saw the rise of the so-called Great Awakening movement, which was spearheaded by the non-English clergy of rural America, and whose aim was to put an end to the privileges of America's Puritan priesthood and lay the foundations of a tolerant Christian creed that would care more about morality than about theological dogmatism (Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, New York: HarperCollins Publisher, Inc., 1997, 109–110).

she inherits open-mindedness and the love of free thinking, which by no means hinders her spirituality but rather makes her Christian beliefs tolerant and focused more on ethics than on dogmas; while from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century capitalism she takes reliance on state-of-the-art technology and the spirit of marketing competition. In brief, Jelena J. Dimitrijević's American woman symbolizes American culture as it has evolved over the course of three centuries, from its colonial beginnings in the early seventeenth century, to its position as the world's leading political and economic power in the early 1900s. As it has been observed, from the perspective of her personal characteristics and philosophical values, Mrs. Flagg does not entirely break with the dogmatic, patriarchal past of her nation but rather takes from it what is best (industriousness and spirituality) and leaves behind the worst (single-mindedness), while replacing the latter with the anti-dogmatic ideological heritage of the more recent periods. Hence the mindset of the American woman reflects the collective mindset of America as an evolving nation that, through its practical, problem-solving philosophy, has, in just three hundred years of history, secured for itself the status of the most progressive country on the globe.

So, it is in the versatile personality of Mrs. Flagg that the greatest value of "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's" rests. Among other notable elements of the text, there are two elements to be mentioned. First, what we are referring to is the author's aptitude for vivid descriptions of natural landscapes, which is again, just like in "The American Woman" easily observed (though, in earnest, Dimitrijević's descriptive technique in the travelogue chapter does not match the one she exhibited in her 1912 story). Second, what we bear in mind is the historical aspect of the chapter, which we become familiar with while reading about the excursion to Plymouth Rock; for it is on that sacred site of America's that the real story behind the founders of the Massachusetts Colony is related with much detail and listened to with no less reverence (while Dimitrijević reads about the Pilgrim Fathers from a book, the two American women – or one English and one American woman – listen to the reading in piety). The end of the chapter, as showing the final parting of Jelena J. Dimitrijević with her beloved American friend(s), also ends a warm ten-year long friendship, which began in London, 1910, was then maintained

via an exchange of letters until the outbreak of the First World War (the author says that, during the First Balkan War – which Serbia waged against Turkey for the liberation of its medieval territorial cradle – she wrote letters to Mrs. Flagg in order to familiarize the American public with the Serbian people), and was eventually finished in Brockton, 1920, when the two women met for the last time.

Despite their differences in style and despite a ten-year time-span between the events they respectively describe, the story “The American Woman” and the chapter “On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg’s” from Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s American travelogue are parts of one biographical episode from the author’s life and, as such, represent the best portion of prose literature produced by the “Serbian Sappho”.⁸ There are several reasons for which the two writings are important. First of all, their significance resides in the progressive philosophical ideas which their author discusses and advocates, such as gender equality and republicanism, and which, from the viewpoint of the early 1900s, were yet to gain a stable footing in Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s Serbia as a country still clinging to the traditional principles of monarchism and the patriarchy. Given that Serbia has come a long way toward adopting the said two concepts of social philosophy since the time of Dimitrijević’s two meetings with Mrs. Flagg, it would be appropriate to argue that this gifted author not only recorded in writing the society-changing conditions of her day but also appeared as a prophet of the coming social phenomena. Secondly, in the two texts we present, Dimitrijević also makes her reader well acquainted with American and Serbian culture, and also gives insight into contemporary relations between the two – while America is presented as immensely progressive and a model that most other countries aspire to emulate, Serbia, as still forming its state borders in the early 1900s and as still being relatively unheard of outside of Europe, is shown as a country that strives to make itself known in the United States. Since, at that time, it was the task of a nation’s elite intellectuals to popularize their country abroad, we might recognize Mrs. Dimitrijević as one of a number of significant Serbian thinkers of the early twentieth century who successfully contributed to the rising

⁸ The nickname Jelena J. Dimitrijević was given after the publication of her book of poetry in 1894, due to a frequent use of homoerotic motifs in it, which made her strikingly similar to the famous woman poet from ancient Greece.

reputation of Serbia in America – the list of such thinkers including not only the humanitarian activist Helen Losanitch Frothingham (1885–1972) but also the scientific geniuses Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) and Mihajlo Pupin (1854–1935). Thirdly, these two writings (“The American Woman” in particular) stand out as evidence of Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s considerable literary skills, and as examples of her best emotional (i.e. confessional) writing-style.

Taking all of the above-mentioned aspects into account, we hope that this translation will be of interest to non-Serbian readers just as Dimitrijević’s original texts have recently begun to re-captivate the attention of the reading audience in Serbia after several decades of unjustified marginalization. It is also our hope that this edition will encourage an international exchange of ideas on the topic of Western philosophical influence on Serbia, for it is precisely the possibility of rising Western libertarian ideas in the Balkans that the two published texts address. Therefore, with our minds set for the commencement of an open-minded discussion about the work of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, we let this book see the light of day.

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Jelena J. Dimitrijević

Jelena J. Dimitrijević in the 1920s

Jelena J. Dimitrijević

THE AMERICAN WOMAN





I

I had said goodbye to love, had parted with it forever with too heavy a heart, for to me it was not life, but rather the objective of life. My troubles had disappeared, but something worse came, boredom and emptiness. All of a sudden, I felt all alone in this vast and cold world. I had no one to make me sad, no one to cheer me up. Indifference. And in such a mood, with no love or hatred, I set off into the world.

In a large European capital, the biggest city in the world, where millions hasten to a distressful and fierce struggle for existence, and where the morning fog looks like vapor and the evening sky like copper, I met an American woman. We met in our shared hotel, small and charming, which looks a lot like a comfortable, decent home, and where you feel as though hosted by your best friends, in a hotel the likes of which are many in this most pleasant neighborhood of the city.

She was a lady and was not there alone but with her mother, a surprisingly vivacious old woman with hair as white as snow, who from the very first days talked to me as to an old acquaintance, asking questions about my country as if it were one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Right from the start, even before I thought I would be able to meet anybody, I was interested in the American woman, for she was more interesting than all the female guests. Young, with her hair streaked with gray like silver or foam from the Ocean that she had crossed for the first

time in her life. Tall and proud, in appearance she looked like a queen from the New World, which she had left and come to the Old World to reign over all women, or like a “dollar princess”. She dressed simply – every day in a different white blouse – and yet elegantly. Perfumed just a little – with lavender perfume – she knew just how much perfume she needed... She was not so beautiful, and yet how very beautiful! Her beauty lay in what you could convey with neither a paintbrush on canvas nor a photograph camera on paper: in her movements, where you could see dancing waves and hear their music, and in her voice, where all the colors of flowers and things overflowed. But what enchanted me, enchanted me the most, was her speech, surprisingly unusual, not American, but specially hers. I compared that speech of hers now with the sound of an unknown musical instrument and now with the song of a bird I could not name. At one point she said: “Why has he a white hat?” and I exclaimed: “Voogah!” It seemed to me a voogah (oriole) was singing. But since the name of that bird in my language is very unaesthetic, as a matter of fact ugly, I never mentioned it again. And once, while listening to her, I thought: “A lark singing”, and then dismissed it altogether as banal. When seated – a common woman, almost even not beautiful; when she walked and spoke – beauty! Completely transfigured, so I would hug and kiss her every movement, every word like her hands or face...

Apart from this, she also enchanted with her posture and conduct. In posture a queen, in conduct a child. As free as a man, and as sincere and natural as a child. She, the new woman, reminded me of the old, first woman – before her expulsion from Paradise... Perhaps she was specially such, like her movements and her speech... Toward evening, in the guest lounge, she would freely lie down on a sofa, in front of everybody, to rest in a horizontal position from her stroll around that vast city and from the impressions that kept surging into her soul, to dream of hitherto unseen things, which she had seen that day; and as she lay with her eyes closed, the people, both young and old in equal measure, with their eyes staring at her, sat in silence... And when everyone was already out, I still sat not moving, not breathing, not taking my eyes off her, not taking my lips off her lips... In her, a woman perhaps for many years now, everything was virgin: her eyes, mouth..., and I wanted to kiss that. While she lay so still, what I looked like! I changed colors; her every movement made me start

like someone who had just begun stealing or committing any other crime. Her feet in her shallow shoes, showing underneath her light dress, drove me insane... Only now did I see how corrupted I had become socializing with women who in front of men never forgot they were women, so that they adjusted their manner of walking, speaking, looking, and smiling, and blushed with his every look.

II

Though as free as a man, she was the most serious and sensitive, therefore the most feminine of all the women in the hotel. She was intelligent and educated. She was from the most cultured state in North America called Massachusetts, or as she regularly referred to it in abbreviated form – Mass. Some afternoons, when she stayed to rest, she would speak of great English and American poets and was very comfortable with the fact that I too was familiar with these poets, particularly because I read them in their, in *her* language. For this reason, I was her spiritual kinsman, so she asked to speak with me. And when we were silent, or when she spoke of other things, I was just a male... While enduring discomfort, I cursed my upbringing. In my country no one even imagines that things could be different!... From our conversation, she heard from me that in my country women never walked alone at night. She was indescribably curious. “Why?” And when I, seeing that I should not have said that, answered by shrugging my shoulders, she attacked me with her questions: “Perhaps they are afraid of the dark? Perhaps there are too many thieves where you come from, so you unleash dogs at night and let them roam the streets? Perhaps, when it gets dark, there are beasts coming down from the forest to your towns?” At that moment I felt as ashamed as I had never felt before at the thought that our women never walked the streets alone at night because of men. But had I told her that, she would have attacked our women as to why they had brought us up that way; she would have scolded, perhaps, our mothers; or, perhaps, she would not have understood. So I said nothing.

One day she invited me for an excursion. I was beside myself with joy. “Now is the chance to change our relationship”, I thought and rejoiced. But on the trip she was just the same as in the hotel: natural,

free – with male fellow travelers she spoke as with her female friends, and to me she behaved as to a female companion; and when once I got carried away and almost lost the train, she took my hand and pulled me into the train, and then laughed at me. If only she knew why I had gotten carried away! And that the touch of her hand drove me insane: made me want to kneel before her, kiss her hands, her dress, and tell her the craziest sort of things, beg her not to leave me so that we should live together as husband and wife... But she brought me to my senses with her free behavior. As free as a man, she had all the traits of her female gender: to motherly take care even of those who were far older than her. That day, she took care of me as if I were her son: that I should carefully get off the train, and that I should not forget anything. While she, seated and facing me, looked at the wonderful landscapes of a country that resembled a garden cultivated for centuries and tilled to perfection, at the green meadows and forests and red villages, at the white sky, I looked at her and burned with desire to put my head on her knees, the curves of which I could visualize underneath her light dress and almost lost consciousness. There was something criminal in me... I fought against my senses while she was elated with nature and exclaimed: “I dearly love nature!” using the adverb *dearly* in American fashion. If only she were wise enough to remain silent, so that I would not hear her speak! If only she were wise enough to remain seated, so that I would not see her walk! When she was such, my soul never got excited. Once, having hastened toward a window, she touched me with her knee and without apologizing, like a child, called me to watch picturesque images. Because of that touch, I became completely lost... I composed myself before doing anything foolish, quickly went and stood by her side, mindful that I should not touch her. In front of us, a valley spread like an endless green sea and the groves far away were reminiscent of ships. In the distance we could see another, blue sea. It was the bottom of the sky which gave a complete illusion of the sea. Above it there were two long, thick clouds, both of them seemingly full of gold in the middle and full of soot in the outer part. And when they became totally thickened, they would unleash golden and sooty rain; the golden one would pour over the middle of the blue sea and look like some kind of yellow water flowers.

A tall black pole was outlined against that blueness and looked like a mast on a sinking ship. The American woman was excited by this image and turned my attention to its wholeness and its parts, showing great understanding of art, for she spoke of it with a deep emotion. "Of all the beauties in the world, I like nature the most!" she exclaimed to the highest pitch of excitement. "Of all the beauties in the world, I like women the most!" I exclaimed utterly excited, and looked her piercingly in the eye. This daring look did not make her drop her eyes, nor did she take this as an allusion to herself as the women I socialized with would have taken it, blushing and laughing, or turning pale or becoming serious. She took it as a confession of mine... Above all those beauties shone a small northern, and yet hot, sun. That day I realized that just like smell and music, landscapes too can affect one's senses. They affect your senses like white warm summer moonlight, or like a beautiful spring day... Under every tree, in the shade, I imagined myself by her side, and everything was dear and sweet to me, every one of my nerves vibrated, and there was nothing spiritual in me. At these moments, I, a man corrupted by life, did not look like a man...

III

This lasted for almost three weeks and then something happened, which transfigured me...

I met with her every morning and every late afternoon. In the morning, after meeting in the guest lounge and having a conversation, or just after she spoke and I kept silent, or stammered quivering like a culprit, we went our separate ways. But all around this colossus, where the morning fog looks like vapor, like vapor rising from a huge pool, in which this colossus bathes washing off from its gigantic crimson body the soot fallen from thousands of factory chimneys, around this monster that the poets call the city of gluttony and hunger, I was not without her for a single moment; she followed me everywhere as though she were my shadow; I imagined her proud and free and was infinitely joyful. Some days I did not dare swim into the waves of people, for I would be incapable of swimming, so the waves would carry me away. At these moments I usually ran to a park which, as it seemed to me, was

endless, and passing through dense greenery I sat or sprawled on a lawn among the homeless; the old oaks rustled above my head and, through their branches, I looked at the sky, either as heavy as lead or as light as white silk, and dreamt about the American woman; later on, I went to the middle of the endless park and sat on a secluded green bench by a green lake with white swans, and there, with my spiritual eyes, I watched my dear woman, caressed her, had her all... Then I leaped and ran from the park, went into the noisy streets of the colossus, the city of gluttony and hunger, fog and smoke, which spread across the entire city and, in fine weather, rose upward, became rarer and mixed with the clouds; and in bad weather, fell on the ground as fog. I wanted to be lost; I, a tiny piece of nothingness, wanted to be etched in this dark wholeness and disappear in it.

One morning, full of fog and the songs of street singers, who earned their daily bread by singing, thus keeping death of starvation away, I went, just like the previous mornings, to the hotel garden, where I could feel the smell of smoke, damp soil, grass, and ivy scattered all over the high fence; and the tall acacia trees rustled sadly as they usually rustle on humid foggy late-summer mornings. Before me, ran out little Nelly, all in white and with a black cat. Every morning, before breakfast, she played with this cat and talked to me. "Miss Nelly, may I give you a kiss?" I asked, pretending to be serious. "Yes, you may, but just one" she answered as if jestingly, and threatened me with her little finger. I kissed her. She laughed mischievously and kissed me back, and right away innocuously said: "I travel... on Saturday". I felt pain... Later on I went to the guest lounge, where I was overwhelmed by sadness because of little Nelly's departure. She was also American. They both had dark eyes. Only this one had golden hair, while the other one's was streaked with silver. I had gotten so used to her: she was slowly, imperceptibly getting into my life.

I sat at the table by the window to the garden to write. Everyone had already left the room, and had it not been for the cracking of coal in the fireplace and the creaking of my pen, it would have been completely silent. You could not even hear, as it was commonly the case in the evening, the roar of street life, which in the distance, in the compartments of that garden, was turning into noise, reminiscent of the humming of bees in

a hive... My hand was flying over a postcard when the door opened and I heard light footsteps and the barely audible rustle of a dress... "That is her!" I felt..., and I must have been as pale as a ghost... I knew it was her even before I smelled lavender...

I turned and answered her American good morning. Her Good Morning! To me it was a whole song, not a song as something spiritual but material, and I wanted to put my mouth on it... I sensed where she was going to sit, but would not turn anymore; instead, I wrote to a friend of mine bringing her into my every letter, or in reality writing about her. If I were now to go from one of my relatives to another, or from one of my friends to another, in search of my postcards from that city, I know that in every one of them I would find her and that I would keep every one of them as a holy relic. All these postcards, I know, are warm, because you can feel my heart in them. "I am still here. My company is still not gone". These simple words had a deep meaning, they were full of content. "My company", that meant her to me. "Is still not gone" expressed my happiness to my friends. "Apart from my narrow fatherland where I was born and which I love as I loved my mother, I also have a wide fatherland; until now, it was the world, and now the world is – this city". That is what I wrote; and whether I would love this city that much if she had not been in it is a problem that has remained unsolved to me.

Every now and then I turned and she raised her head, looked at me, and smiled on me. Over the past days, there were moments, especially on our excursion, when I got angry because I was enchanted, at the very beginning, with her childlike conduct, and I was seized with rage because she did not blush when I blushed, because she did not look at me with yearning eyes when I looked at her that way. That was the case this morning too. I wanted her totally different...

Quite a lot of time elapsed and I did not turn, for I had sworn to myself not to turn; we were both writing and I could hear the creaking of her pen. I felt that she felt me and was watching me, and not being able to bear this any longer, I turned: my eyes met her gaze and I thought that an older sister was looking at her younger brother. At that moment, there was some warmth in her eyes, the warmth of an older sister. As if she were saying to me: "Boy, you are writing about a woman... this is too early for you". And I spontaneously jumped and, as her younger brother, albeit

older than her, approached her as freely as never before. She stopped her hand with a pen and raising her head looked me in the eye with a smile as if asking me: "Boy! What do you want from me?" I quickly said, for the first time without a stammer: "To me this room is empty without you", and kissed her as I had kissed little Nelly half an hour before, not asking for her permission as I had asked for it from little Nelly... I touched her face with my lips but in that light kiss, the whole of my soul was on my lips. Surprised, she exclaimed cheerfully: "Ah!" and kissed me back just as little Nelly had done half an hour before... I would not move from her, feeling that she too felt that I had kissed her with my soul, and that she knew how happy I was. "I travel... on Saturday", she said innocuously with a smile just as little Nelly had said, and I felt unutterable pain... No, this feeling had no name. She moved her head pointing to my seat, as if she were saying to me as to her little brother: "You got what you wanted, now leave me alone – I need to write", so I obediently left her and, having sat on my seat, began to write. I wrote, wrote, and wrote feeling her incessantly. And what did I write? I scribbled on a clean piece of paper and she was in my every single scribble, even in every stroke of my pen. She had slowly, imperceptibly gotten into my life.

I got up and went without saying goodbye... She looked at me and smiled on me. I smiled back. In that smile was my soul. At the door I stopped and turned – purified, transfigured, reborn, totally different. No, that was me, just in a different nuance, as light as though it were sunlit. For the sky too in that city, though usually gray in the morning, red in the evening, and as white as snow at noon, is nonetheless one and the same sky... I looked at her and she, in her white blouse, sitting upright, wrote... Not turning she wrote, wrote, and wrote as if she wanted to write out all the pains of her heart and solve with her pen all the problems of her soul. In the mirror above the fireplace I saw her profile shaded by the palm leaves and her black hair streaked with silver and foam, upon which flickered a golden sunray, fallen at that moment through the window to the garden, where little Nelly, all in white, still played with the big black cat.

IV

I walked the streets like a madman. That day I could not go far, unaware through the aware millions like spirit through matter, having no eyes for that dense, impenetrable, colorful crowd surging with an awful noise through the streets set with dark buildings like rough sea waters through the straits with black cypress trees rising nearby... It was all outside, that crowd of people, that pulsing, the heartbeat of a colossus; and that day I had neither eyes nor ears for the outer world. I was carried by something strong, enormous from within me... I felt her kiss on my face incessantly and touched that spot with my fingers, then kissed my fingers, or to put it more appropriately, kissed them as a priest kisses the church icons. It changed me every moment, so now I was a winged extraterrestrial being flying toward the sky, and now an earthly being, a human, a great – the greatest general who had conquered the world. In self-respect I went to extremes. That I should be kissed by the woman who came from the New World to the Old World to reign over all women! That I should be presented with the prize that she, as the queen, gives only to the chosen one among the chosen! Happiness, pride, whatever it was, utterly overwhelmed me, and I, not seeing anything with my bodily eyes, withdrawn into myself, went elbowing my way through the dense impenetrable colorful crowd which carried me, guarded me, brought me to the open space, where I surrendered to a strange intense emotion, which came to me as a thing familiar from the ancient past, from my first youth. I could not see anything, not even the things that, until that day, I had looked at more than at the greatest sights, and which made this city, in spite of all its grimness, look jolly to me; I could not see the women, those beautiful women as well grown as firs... Later on, I came to my senses and would not dare swim into the horrifying stormy sea. The huge mob milled around like sea waves, was agitated like a rough sea. These were sea waves, yellow, blue, red, colorful, colorless, that crowd, the mob, those carts, those cars, trams, omnibuses, and that banging, thudding, roaring, murmuring, gurgling, as when the sea gets rough. Those waves of water were destroyed by Poseidon; these waves of people were halted with a hand by a policeman. And I, for the time being aware, waited for the hand of a young beautiful giant to be raised, the hand of a “man in blue”, so I could cross in haste... That strong emotion

led me, carried me into silence, where I would be able to feel her kiss on my cheek in peace and watch her undisturbed, watch her in her white blouse, her profile shaded by the palm leaves and with a sunray in her hair... That moment had deeply engraved her in my mind.

I wandered right until noon, without rest, feeling no fatigue, now utterly cheerful, now utterly sad. In both cases I was all soul. Now I was a second, third person going with me to watch two emotions fight, fight inside of me – joy and sorrow. Joy came because of the kiss and sorrow because of my dear woman's departure. And when joy triumphed, I cheered, clapped my hands, but when sorrow prevailed, I was indescribably sad. And suddenly, having come to my senses, I started to run away from the crowd in the street, I quickly got into my dear well-known endless park; but the crowd was there too... I hurried away from the main avenues, where it was as seething as in the street, countless carts, countless horsemen, pedestrians, many men with no moustache like women, all women walking like men, each and every one of them with their love or hatred or indifference, or joy and sorrow, like me...; I headed for solitude, to the green lake with white swans... But when I saw that secluded bench as green as the grass which, that day, was embellished, almost all covered with yellow dead leaves fallen from a huge old oak, I started as from a holy place that I had desecrated, and hurried backwards, into the mob, to be lost in it...

Whenever I was overwhelmed by sorrow, pain, an intense pain because of her departure, I asked myself in complete awareness: “What is this foreign woman to me? Did I think she would never leave?” Oh! What was she to me?! And that I was just a charming fellow traveler, that is, a dear acquaintance from the hotel, just as to her little compatriot; I eventually saw this that day, that is, I recalled it. They both treated me in a friendly manner, as my male friends, and although they wore skirts, they had both kissed me as a friend or as a brother. And instead of being glad, I became sad and wished with all my heart it had all been just a dream, I wished she had not kissed me in reality...

Finally, having returned, awfully tired of walking and emotions, I did not go where I had left her, but to my room. Through the open windows I saw the noon sky, totally white, where, clearly outlined from the houses, were small red chimneys “that looked like freshly extracted

bloody teeth”, in the words of Heine, and from the old magnificent churches and palaces, black cupolas that looked like the shadows of giants; and the small northern sun poured its cold golden dust on my bed sheets. I tumbled down on this golden layer, but not with her in my thoughts as before our kisses. Inside of me awoke a different, higher man... But when I smelled the bed sheets and saw that they smelled of a physical man, a passion appeared inside of me, a desire, a thought, an original thought that overwhelmed the whole of me: that someone kissed her. Someone other than myself. And that the man had brought into his love all his passion, all his purity...

I recalled a young man. Since a few days before, I had seen that man many times in the guest lounge where she sat or lay, as seated facing her, and not a thought ever crossed my mind. Who that young man was, I did not enquire, for to me he was just a *man*. As though that was his name. And I always looked at his head of a man, with overgrown thick bushy hair, at his face of a man, though with a shaved moustache, at his arms made up of sheer muscles, and especially at his legs in his short yellowish black-checked socks covering his curved, almost female, calves. He must have been a great athlete; and surely with nerves of steel... His eyes as pure as a child's, and as strong and hard as if he were made of bronze. This is what the first man must have looked like... If the greatest sculptor of our age were to make a man of bronze, the original caveman, he should take this young man as a model... And suddenly, I saw them caress on my bed sheets... “They are equal in body and soul, that old man and this new woman. No, they are both new... How healthy the fruit of their love will be! And if millions were born so healthy, our sick age would be cured”. I thought this later on...; back then I could not think properly.

When I desired to kiss her, I always saw that I was with her, that I sat by her side, that I watched and felt her; and once I kissed her, I avoided her and found another man (I guess, because he was better, more worthy) to kiss her... I would now die of a physical contact with her...

V

I had not seen her for two days, I did not want to see her – I was ashamed. What a role I played after our kisses... While I kissed her in my thoughts, I went out before her and blushed, not with shame, but with lust. Now, shame. If only she knew! And I avoided her, intending not to see her until her departure, or upon her departure, so that I could imagine her as being here, gone downtown for a walk, just as I did when someone dear to me died: I would not go to see that person dead, I would not follow their coffin to pay my last respects, just to make them seem alive, gone wherever on a trip.

But already the first day I encountered her mother and, having greeted her with utmost kindness, asked her confusedly: “You travel... on Saturday”. – “Who told you that?” she asked. “Your daughter”, I uttered with a painful feeling. – “My daughter!” she said amazedly. And then, almost in a whisper, she added: “Yes, we ought to travel on Saturday but... she does not want to. I never imagined she would like it here so much. She likes this black city!” she finished in amazement. I was overwhelmed with joy for an instant: why did she like it here? “Because of me”, I daringly thought and began to nervously laugh with joy. But that lasted only a moment, as I said, and then again pain.

The second day, exactly at five, when they had tea, I was in the hotel. I could not endure any longer, I had to see her. In my room I washed soot off myself, put on the clothes she told me she liked, and went downstairs. In the dining room they were still having tea and eating butter and jam, and I headed for the door... But all of a sudden, I heard her voice and the voice of a man... I stopped... “We travel on Saturday”, she said. – “Back to America?” he asked. “Oh, no... To the continent...” I was unfamiliar with the male voice. His accent – American. Undoubtedly an elderly red-haired American, for he talked to everybody, asked questions of everyone... So I instinctively peeked into the dining room and saw her with her mother at the table by the window, while below, at another table, I saw him, that young man, athlete, with a bronze body and nerves of steel, my original man: she was talking to him... I started as though I were bitten by an adder; even though she had seen me, I did not greet her, did not enter, got back and hurried up the staircase as if I were driven by demons, burst into my room, and, having found

the spot on my bed sheets where I had imagined her with him, I got to it in a single leap, took off the bed sheet, and began to tear it. When I had imagined them caressing one another, I was calm. Once I saw them having a conversation, I became enraged. I never thought I would feel bad in the least at seeing her with the man I had chosen for her...

So I got to the window and opened it abruptly. Fresh, late afternoon air streamed into my room. I looked at the sky: as if it were all soot, and as if a sickle-shaped jet of blood were spilled on it... It was a crescent moon. I started at the sight of such a bloody moon and, turning, rang the bell... After knocking, a slender blonde girl in blue and with a small white cap appeared at the door. "Give me another sheet, please... I will pay for this one", I said, pointing to the white shreds. She looked at me frightfully, stammering: "Thank you!... Thank you!..." and hurried outside, thinking, I suppose, that I was mad, for I must have looked like a madman.

I ran down the stairs. Girls in blue and with white caps silently went through the long corridor, and without making any noise, carried teacups, dishes out of the dining room... "It is over... Now she will come", I thought and started at the thought of meeting her, and then ran to the street...

Not thinking anything, I headed for the city center shrouded in thin, transparent evening mist, through which becoming visible was a horrifying fire. That was no fire, but the city's lighting: myriads of lamps and light bulbs in shop windows and advertisements, and along pavements on tall iron posts; and all of a sudden, the whole city went blinking, shone as if it were caught by a fire with flames licking toward the sky; the sky, which was sooty just a little time before, turned red, turned copper-like: as always, so now – it got its night color from the earth; that black bleak city had turned into a white magic fairy town. In almost empty side streets spread the smell of gasoline, the cars appeared stealthily, without a noise, like some kind of stealthy beasts, and while flying over the smooth cobble stones, they produced a sound which first resembled the song of a siren, and then the whistling of a wind coming from the bellows of Aeolus. The lame left their rented places for work, not for begging; the pavement night singers in worn clothes and with sunken cheeks, which had hunger sculpted upon them, gathered and arranged

their sad "Prelude" for their *Song of Tears*. I had now so few eyes and ears for all this, for I was entirely overwhelmed by one thought: to see her just tonight. I had to meet her just tonight. But how? I could not find anything to approach her for. Oh, Lord, did I ask before for permission to approach!... To ask her if she would travel on Saturday. For this reason... it did not make any sense. And a thought flashed through my mind: "To ask her to tell me what gift I should give to my sister".

I hurried to the hotel, and in order to make them open the door as soon as possible, I did not ring but knocked with a knocker on the door: I knocked hard, once. The Swiss man opened the door and I entered the very moment she was leaving the dining room... We met; I began to stammer more than ever: "Please... come... to the studio"... – My mother", she said, that is, she sang out quickly. "No... you. A gift... for my sister... I do not know what suits her, so you could tell me what..." – "Let me tell my mother", she interrupted me and went to the guest lounge; and I prepared all that I was going to tell her. I thought I should tell her I loved her, and beg her to run, as soon as possible, from this place, so that I would not desecrate her with my profane closeness. For she was the holiest thing in the world to me now... She instantly returned and came with me into the studio. She was very serious. Not saying anything, she quickly inspected the presents I had already taken out of my pocket and placed on the table, and in one hour, with a bracelet that women quite frequently and very gladly wore in this city, she said that was fine for my sister, because it was something local: a present befitting the place I had been to. And I was simply mute, and while taking the things, I cared not to touch her hand, not with fear of getting lost and telling her crazy things, but with fear of being overwhelmed by a yet more powerful emotion. "So, I would give this to your sister", she said and, pointing with her finger to the watch, went; and I grabbed her fingers to kiss her hand and uttered with a stammer: "Excuse me!" She made an indescribably harsh face and blushed a lot, pulled out her fingers, as cold as ice, and not saying a word, quickly went out. I felt buzzing in my ears, took hold of a chair lest I fall... Later on, I went to my room staggeringly.

I stayed a long while in my room, and when I completely mustered my strength, I went to the guest lounge to see her. She was surely there, I thought, so I would ask her what had happened to her a few moments before.

In that room, she sat with her mother and “the man”. He sat where I had sat the morning I kissed her. She sat at the same table as that morning. Back then, I had sat with my back to her, now she sat with her back to him. Oh, when I saw them together like this, all three of them! I felt buzzing in my ears now as in the studio, and I sat on a chair facing her and her mother. They raised their heads, she blushed, and neither of them answered my good evening. How much I wanted her to blush. And now, after she blushed, I was so unhappy. And yet, I was no longer the man I had been until two days before. I was now a higher man, a spiritual man, and mind how sad I was! But had I been able to remember that I, like everybody else, was better in sadness than in joy, I would have surely comforted myself.

The “man” rose and got out without a word or goodbye. After all, until that point, I had not heard him speak at all. He had been silent all the time. And I had not seen him look at anybody or interested in anything. And her mother left. The two of us remained all alone, as two days before, and yet – what a difference! We both wrote, not talking to one another, not looking at one another though facing one another. It seemed to me that she knew I had imagined her with the man so I could not look at her; I did not dare ask her why she had behaved like that in the studio, why she had pulled her hand out of my hand. And she?... why was she not looking at me, why was she angry?

But she was not angry, she was serious. An icy stiff seriousness was on her face. Completely different! Neither she nor I were the same. I was now a spirit, she was a riddle. In every man there are two, three men... My better, higher self rose from the dead when I approached this unusual woman, woman-girl, child.

And yet, that was her, only in a different nuance, in a different color. The sea, now blue, now green, now opal-like, later like emerald, and in the end overflows in all the colors of the world, and every color in all nuances, but still it is always – the sea.

We sat for a long time facing one another and writing. I was only writing her name, which I was unfamiliar with... “Mrs. Smoke, Mrs. Fog”: something opaque, something that disappears leaving something enigmatic in us...

Eventually I rose; she would not raise her head to receive my goodnight.

“So, she loved the sensual man in me, she does not love the spiritual one”, I whispered entering my room. But even if she had tried in a million ways to make me what I was like, she would not have done it. Again, she had a face and eyes and a mouth, but not for me to kiss them. I would now die of a physical contact with her. She was now higher than me, higher than any earthly being. That light scent from her dress now affected my soul. I felt the presence of God in that small charming hotel more than in the old cathedral. “She is the woman that all women must become one day. When they are all as sincere as children and as free as men, then men will not see them as their females but as their companions. How happy everyone will become when false shame disappears! Women will purify us, allow us to be reborn. Our women teachers will be different, better, and we will also become different, better”. I thought like this much later; back then I could not think properly. I was sad, indescribably sad.

VI

I had sworn not to go downstairs right until noon, but I came down before nine o'clock. I came down a whole hour before they usually went out of their room. I found them in the guest lounge so early and I knew what this meant. They would travel that day... So, after all, Saturday was the day of their departure. It seemed to me that was one of those sad and solemn days when we completely change, having nothing earthly and feeling closer to God than to human beings.

When I came in, I greeted them somehow solemnly and sadly as if they were saintly or dead. The mother would not raise her head, she was writing, the daughter looked at me and answered me with her eyes.

I slumped into an arm chair. Oh, yes, they are going to travel today: before going out downtown, they always wore white tricots; now they are wearing going out dresses... Her mother, my conversational friend, was quiet, not looking at me! She was offended, believing that I had thrown suspicion on her daughter by peeking through the door while she was having a conversation with the man. And she..., she was angry either because she thought she was under suspicion or because she

had been avoided for two days. Or... Who knows how I behaved? The day I was jealous, I banged the door of the guest lounge... My behavior to her, the new woman, was the same as to the old women, with whom I had spent my life, who had educated me in accordance with their education. No, I did not know how to behave to this one. So I recalled how insolently I had looked her in the eye that day on the excursion when I exclaimed that of all the beauties in the world I liked women the most. To this new woman, or to put it more aptly, *the woman of the future*, the future man, whom she will educate and prepare to accompany her, will know how to behave. This American woman is the woman of the future.

Later on I thought, looking at her: "She forgot herself... A crazy moment came even to her, though as clever as she was... The coal was cracking in the fireplace, the sun was rising, she became more cheerful, and forgot herself... My lips are now burning her face. Her lips are now burning because of my face...; she too is ashamed, and is pretending to be sad, angry... And her mother, vivacious and witty, feels, sees that there was something between me and her daughter, so she is angry with me"...

Their open faces were now books closed with seven seals. Their change is a problem that will stay unsolved forever.

If only I could describe that feeling of mine or write the history of my soul in these several short moments!

No sooner had I sat a short while, indescribably troubled, looking at her serious face which kept changing its color, than little Nelly, in a red topcoat, with her long golden hair fluttering on it, ran into the room. No, this morning it was not golden, but as if it were made of wheat stalks just beginning to ripen. Her little hair changed its color like the sky, like the sea, and like the soul. She almost climbed on my knees and, having kissed my face with a long warm kiss, quickly said: "Goodbye, my friend... Today it is Saturday". These words made me start. Oh, what if again she repeats Nelly's words, just as she did some time before! And I wished I were as strong as "the man", that my nerves were like steel, iron. I kissed the girl so passionately that her little cheek turned red, and looked at the American woman: she blushed as never until that point and seemed unutterably sad to me. "She likes this black city!" the words flashed through my mind as through a lightning cloud. The girl hopped away, and I did not see her off, for I did not have the strength to get up.

The American woman! And with this seriousness and sadness she was as sincere as a child. For if she were able to pretend, she could not have been like that. This is what one day all women and men must be like. Oh, how wonderful the world will be then! How pleasant life will be!... "Sincerity is the virtue, the good health of the soul". This aphorism did not occur to me back then, but does so only now. Half an hour later, she was in a long, dark brown coat and a panama hat that hid more than half of her face, whereas her long bluish veil looked like the fog that this black city was still shrouded in. She rang the bell and the Swiss man entered the room. She ordered a "taxi", and I heard for the last time the song of a bird, her speech, which now excited my soul... And when she went, I saw for the last time the dancing waves, her movements, which now made my soul quiver... I was prepared to ask her why she had changed, but when I saw her, it seemed crazy to me, as if I were to ask the sun why it appeared around noon yesterday and today it looks as though it would not appear at all. Every one of us is a small world and every one of us is a big riddle.

I heard the whistle of our Swiss man. How many mornings I had heard this whistle and stayed indifferent. And this morning!... He, young and big, bare-headed, blowing it at the crossroads like an automaton, calling a taxi for the American woman while thinking about something completely different; and this high-pitch whistling wrenched my heart. "Oh, if she leaves without saying goodbye!" That was not a thought but a feeling. But they did say goodbye to me. "I feel sad", I said. – "Why should you?" she said... And that goodbye of hers was a whole song. Her good morning, her good evening, and her goodbye, these are the three finest songs of all the songs I have ever heard. The last one is the most sincere, because it provoked my tears...

They sat in their taxi and it took them like a cyclone, leaving desolation behind it...

And I went to my room, opened the window, and, looking over the red roofs toward the station whither she had gone, let out a cry of despair and loudly exclaimed: "I love you!" as though she could hear me; and then I fell down on the bed sheets and wept...

I did not get out of my room for a whole day: I grieved for her and wrote her a letter. I wrote only two pages; but there was a huge

heart in these two small pages; you could feel great love in these minute letters. I did not write her to talk about love but to tell her about my pain because she changed, and to ask her why she changed... Heart, love! – Where shall I send her a letter with such treasure?... She has gone to the European continent: where shall I find her?... I sent it to her to one of the American federal states, Massachusetts, to her home, not being afraid that it would be read by her husband: those married couples from the New World respect each other's freedom. But even if he opens it, he will find a sublime feeling in his wife's letter... And is his wife guilty of being loved by someone?

And the following day, after submitting my letter to the post office, I felt better. But I did not stay long on the first floor, for I could not stand the desolation... Toward evening, that day, I remembered him, "the man": he was there, as beautiful as an immortal God. How could have I equated him with a man, with an unfinished man, to be more exact? This one was finished by culture, made complete. And I found him likeable: in him I would see her... Then I ran down the stairs, ran around the first floor, from one room to another: to the guest lounge, to the dining room, to the room for writing, to the room for smoking, to the room for conversation, to the room for silence, to the studio, to the garden, I went everywhere, but could find him in no place. "He must have gone out downtown". When everybody gathered, as usual, in the guest lounge, I looked for him – he was gone. I waited for him, he may have gone somewhere further, so he will come back later – I did not get to see him. "They have gone together!" a thought flashed through my mind, so I wanted to find and kill them both.

In the "Black City" I stayed for another whole week, feeling all alone, even though there were millions milling around me. There was someone only in the guest lounge, because in there something was left of her. It was that something of her, that part of her soul that eventually kept me there for another whole week.

Just before I left, a genuine spinster, small, skinny, like a rose withered on its bush, who would not miss a single church concert and on Sundays attended the service in the main cathedral, and who spoke a lot with the American woman and her mother while never speaking a word with me, but simply gave me newspapers to read about "the wonders

around the world", marking them with a pencil – that spinster, just before my departure, gave me a twenty-page long newspaper, touching with her finger a spot on the penultimate page. I understood that was what I was supposed to read and so read: "*Sentimental Hercules*. – In our city there was until recently a new Hercules, a giant. That giant is American. He fell in love three years ago with a fellow countrywoman. She will not requite his love. He follows her everywhere like her shadow. Being desperate because of his unreturned affections, he once cut his wrists, once jumped into water off a high bridge, and once tried to suffocate himself with vapor... And survived to follow her everywhere like her shadow".

"That is him! My bronze man, with nerves of steel", I thought and jumped. And a hundred heads appeared in my mind approving: "Yes! Yes! Yes!" and the head of that genuine spinster – who in that moment was hastily enveloping herself in a long black cloak, so as not to be late for a church concert – shook as if it were denying for a thousand times: "No! No! No!"...

I set off into the world with indifference, and returned from it with love. It was no traveler's flirtatious love adventure, but a serious love. My senses fought against my soul, and the soul was victorious. The American woman purified it, transformed it, and gave it the strength to prevail.

My last love, as beautiful and as great as the first one. My heart knows no age. To my soul age is merely a fancy.

And today, after a year, at the end of this story, that is song – for I both sing and write these sentences – I repeat the following question for a thousandth time: why had she changed?... Sometimes I have the cheek to believe: she had fallen in love with me, and I raise my head so proudly as if I had conquered the world. Many times I have the courage to think: she loved the one who...; but this thought always remains unfinished... Perhaps that hard feeling was not only sadness because of her departure, but also shame because I thought I was humiliated?... Would I be that sad if we had parted in a different manner? Questions, questions, and nothing but questions. To each question I receive countless answers and yet remain without an answer... How will I understand what other people feel if I do not understand what I feel?...

Every one of us is a small world, and every one of us is a big riddle.

*

And one day Oblivion will fall on all the things I saw in that vast city, on the churches and palaces and on countless magnificent structures, which Time has clothed in black soot and decorated with green moss. Oblivion will fall on everything except for the woman I met there. She will remain in my memory forever. My mind will preserve her from everything external, even from the thing that changes everyone and everything, from Time. Her black hair will be eternally just streaked with gray, and her posture will stay proud and upright even when her back becomes burdened with old age. I will always hear the song of a bird in her speech and see the dancing waves in her movements.

...Now I finish my song and close my eyes... Today I re-experience all the things I experienced a year ago; I renew our meetings and conversations; I hear her good morning and her good evening; I hear her light footsteps and the rustle of her dress; I feel the lavender perfume; and looking deep inside of me, I see her in a white blouse, her profile shadowed by the palm leaves and with a sunray in her hair...



Jelena J. Dimitrijević

***ON THE WEEKEND AT
MRS. FLAGG'S***



Ten years ago, in an English hotel, in London, in that hotel I looked for last year but could not find, because it does not exist anymore – for it had been turned into a nursing facility during the war¹ – I met an American woman from Massachusetts, a state where the capital city is Boston. And, having come to America, I thought of her very often, especially of how I was in Boston, so that Bostonian women reminded me of that dear woman: reminded me of her by their manner of walking, their posture, and their speech, or, in fact, by their pronunciation and accent of the English language.

In London, in that hotel, she had not been alone, but with her mother, a charming old lady who gladly entertained herself having conversations with my fellow-traveler,² her speaking English and him Serbian.

With them we had gone on excursions, one of which – the one to Stratford-upon-Avon – can never be forgotten.

And, the week before last week, I decided to look for her. Miss Julia³ was hurrying me so that she would arrive in time for service in Mrs. Flagg's church. In Wellesley I caught a train to Boston, and from Boston

¹ The fact that the hotel *Montague* in London was transformed into a convalescent facility during World War One is mentioned in the first chapter of the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* from which "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's" is taken.

² The author's husband.

³ Miss Julia Brown is a spinster in her sixties from Wellesley. It is at her home, in this town near Boston, that the author stays during her 1920 visit (the one that is described in this text) to Massachusetts.

I continued to Brockton, a town where she, Mrs. Flagg, my acquaintance from the London hotel, lives.

Brockton is small, in the vicinity of Boston, and it is famous for its shoe factories.

While the train rushed through the green fields that smelled of spring, I was now joyous because I was going to see her, now curious to find out if she would recognize me, and most often sad because she was going to remind me of my deceased fellow-traveler, with whom she too had gladly entertained herself – in the same way as her mother.

I knew the name of her street, and I did not forget the number of her house either, because we had written letters to each other up to the World War. In the Balkan War, I had written her long, detailed letters about our past, and she published those letters to get her countrymen acquainted with a heroic people which was known to them either little or not at all.

And when the train was already near Brockton, I was overwhelmed by a new feeling. "My God", I asked myself, "are they alive, particularly the mother, for back then she was seventy-seven?"

"Brockton!" and the train stopped.

– Where is Highland Street! – I asked a porter telling him the number of the house.

Oh! Highland Street! Oh! Number 151! Oh! Is there any one in Brockton who does not know number 151! For that is the house of a famous Brockton lawyer, Mr. Flagg.

And after "Oh! Oh! Oh!" the porter told me that Highland Street is the main street in Brockton, and showed it to me.

I am walking along Highland Street. The houses are like in Wellesley, wooden and variously colored, in the style of villas. The gardens or yards – just like in Wellesley, luxuriantly green, dotted with flowers, without a fence either on the front or on the sides; and where one's plot ends and another one's begins can be told from the rose bushes and other short trees, planted not densely, so it would make them look like a hedge, but here and there. By so looking I, in reality, am deceiving myself so I could forget where I am going and who I am coming to. I am

getting ever more excited – what if they do not recognize me, neither the mother nor the daughter, or... Are they alive, particularly the mother? And again I look at the houses, variously colored, as I said, blue, yellow, green, especially red. Truly there is nothing more vivid than these variegated houses in the greenery, with verandas, with bay windows, with steps leading straight from the street. On that veranda sits in his armchair an elderly gentleman, on this porch from the front of the house rests in her rocking chair an elderly lady. The service is certainly over. They came back from church, and now they are sitting and reading the newspaper, perhaps the Bible as well. This is what the elderly are doing; the young, the women – they must be in the kitchen.

Unconsciously I counted, or uttered: “113”. Oh, how come the first number I paid attention to turns out to be 113! And I go farther, look closely, again unconsciously... 159! How could have I passed by the number 151 without seeing it!? And what happened? As with other houses, so with this house: the number is on the entrance door, and the door is open.

The house in front of which I stopped – after I came back – is of a sour cherry color, enveloped in green vines, violet wisterias, and wild roses with red flowers, and through the greenery and flowers shows a white head, so white that it does not seem to be covered with hair, but with snow. A complete picture from an American film.

I got on top of the stairs and approached. Yes, that is her mother, I recognized her: she is just the same as ten years ago! It seems to me that time had made changes in her face, in her – only until ten years ago, and then stopped.

Yes, I recognized the old lady, but she did not recognize me. She put the Bible down on her lap and looked at me.

I greet her, and try as she might, she cannot recognize me; I introduce myself to her, and she does not remember my name. But when I gave her my visiting card and when she saw my name written on it, she recognized it and rose, hugged me and kissed me very tenderly – all excited. And at that moment she was going to ask me about my fellow-traveler from back then, but then started and in sheer horror said:

– Oh! Who are you wearing black for? Oh! How good he was! And how many conversations we had then! – I smiled because I recalled how they had talked to each other...

Happy memories for sad days.

And almost instantly a gentleman appeared on the veranda. The old lady said: “Mr. Flagg”, and gave him my visiting card; for I doubt she would be able to tell him my name. Who knows how they pronounced my name – this mother and her daughter!

The entrance door was wide open, so he pushed the screen and went into the house. As in other places in America, so here: on doors and windows there are screens installed, so that everything is open and yet the flies are prevented from getting into the house. Of course, in the summer.

And after just a short while, through the screen appeared – she...

“Definitely, that must be her”, I thought because I did not recognize her.

Her hair is not just “streaked with gray like silver” – as in my story – but is gray.

Over the past ten years, time has made changes in her without stopping its merciless, ruthless work for a single moment.

And what did I look like to her?

And only in such situations do we realize the power of time. But, alas, it does not only make changes in our faces, but in our feelings as well; and we are sad not so much because of the former as because of the latter.

*

Straight after this excursion I finished my stay in Wellesley and returned to Boston. In my boarding house in Arlington Street, there was a letter waiting for me from Mrs. Flagg. Among other things, she writes to me that she was just making strawberry short cakes when Mr. Flagg came into the kitchen and said to her: “Kitty! You have a visit from that Serbian lady you met in the hotel *Montague*, in London”.

“I thought that Mr. Flagg was joking. But when I came and checked it through the screen, I recognized you... No, I couldn't recognize you, possibly because of your black clothes...” And then she invited me for the following weekend; though she had already invited me when I was at her home. “Come over on Saturday”, she writes, “but early in the morning so we can have more time to talk about our beautifully spent days in the hotel *Montague* and about our pilgrimage to Stratford-upon-Avon”.

And as for Sunday: we'll leave Sunday for church and also for an excursion...”

*

Saturday. The same trip and different feelings... For to me she is now Mrs. Flagg rather than Mrs. Smoke or Mrs. Fog.

On Saturday, we spent the whole afternoon sitting at home – we browsed through the book of memories and spoke of America; and in the morning she was busy preparing lunch. There it is, surprisingly, this wealthy lady has no domestic service. “In Brockton it is more difficult to find domestic service than anywhere else – because of the factories.” And then she told me that a few weeks before she had obtained domestic service but was left without it after six days. One day, she says, the girl said to her: “When I bargained, I was told that, in this house, lunch is served exactly at noon; and, you see, now it's almost one and the gentleman is still away.” – Well, the gentleman is a lawyer’, I said, ‘so he must have been held up by a client’. And to this she replied: ‘No, madam, I did not bargain like this, so – as soon as I have lunch and wash the dishes, you pay what you owe’. This outrageous insolence made me lose my temper, so I jumped: ‘No, you're not going to have lunch and wash the dishes, but you will leave this instant.’ So I paid her and she went; and I was again left with no domestic service”.

We had lunch exactly at noon. At a large round table with an Etruscan vase in the middle (which Mrs. Flagg had bought somewhere on her journey across the ocean), with red roses, doilies, both big and small, with exquisite ornaments, on the right side of Mrs. Flagg's mother sat – I. Mrs. Flagg, though at the same time a cook and a chambermaid and a parlor maid – is a stylish lady; and all the things she prepared were indeed tasty and splendid. Of all the things served, what I liked the most is dessert – this day too, it was strawberry short cake. It seems

to me that this delicious sweet is her specialty. It was short cake with strawberries from their garden. We had no alcoholic drinks, of course, because America is “dry”. But they too told me what my New York host had told me, that there was no alcohol on their table even when America was “wet”. They apologized not being aware that they had a teetotaler at their table.

After we finished our lunch, Mrs. Flagg's mother, Mr. Flagg, and I came into the drawing room, so he could smoke a cigarette, and I and Mrs. Miner (the mother of my American woman) have a conversation; while Mrs. Flagg went into the kitchen – to wash the dishes. Never has this affected me so much as this day.

– Let's go, Mr. Flagg, and help with the dishes in the kitchen – I said, and he became sad and said:

– Oh, I'd love to; but my wife won't have me help her, and unfortunately, she just can't get permanent domestic service.

We went. She was in her white embroidered dress that she had worn at lunch, only now she had a white apron over it – she was doing her work. When I told her why we came: I, to wash the dishes with her, and Mr. Flagg, to scrub the silverware, she sang out:

– Oh, no! I don't like to have men in the kitchen. – So, she saw me, too, off from the kitchen.

And while she was working in the kitchen, Mr. Flagg was showing me in the drawing room the remarkable antique art objects that his wife had bought on her journey overseas. Then he turned my attention to her library – solely in English, for she does not speak any foreign languages. The atmosphere became even more pleasant when she finished her work and came for a conversation in the drawing room. I have spent weekends in so many American families and no one ever rests after lunch except for Miss Frothingham⁴ and the American woman's mother, for the former is in fragile health, and the latter is old.

4 The author's stay at Miss Elisabeth Frothingham's in Tarrytown (the state of New York) is described in the eleventh chapter of the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America*. Miss Frothingham, it is worth mentioning, was sister to John Frothingham (1879–1935), a well-known benefactor of the Serbian people, especially orphaned children, during the First World War. As we learn from the said travelogue, Miss Frothingham assisted her brother in providing war relief for Serbian orphans, not only by knitting socks for those children during the war but also by adopting them after the war ended.

Mr. Flagg went out downtown, and the two of us went around the house – alone. First, she showed me on the first floor some special cleaning machines, some special parquet-waxing machines, and a strange washing machine. It was huge, standing in a special compartment.

– I guess you’ve noticed, since you have been in America for a long time, that we usually do our washing on Monday every week, perhaps because, for the most part, we do all the washing by ourselves. There, I put all my laundry into the machine and afterwards I don’t have to attend to it at all.

– And what about drying it?

– The only thing I have to do is dry it.

– On the roof?

– Yes, on the terrace, in the summer, where I have everything I need for this.

Everything is very mundane, but also very interesting. For this work is done by a woman who owns an exceptional collection of art objects, for which reason neither her education nor her refined taste are doubted; a woman who owns a library with selected books; a woman who is the president of not only a number of social and humanitarian societies in Brockton but also of a women’s literary association in Boston.

Later on she took me upstairs, where their bedrooms are.

– I gave the most beautiful, that is, the sunniest room to my mother. I furnished it more beautifully than any other room; for she, though at a very old age, loves beauty just as she loved it in her youth. I nurse her like a child, so she doesn’t only live long but is also healthy: in spirit she is entirely youthful. You’ll have an opportunity to assure yourself of this maybe even today.

– And yet, such cleanliness, and you do all the work on your own...

– On Fridays a woman comes and cleans everything; though it’s all too easy for her to clean a neat house.

From every single sentence uttered by Mrs. Flagg about the house, about orderliness – one could see a tidy, but also slightly show-offish, American woman.

*

The mother having rested, her daughter helped her up and all the three of us went out onto a veranda facing their and the adjacent garden. At half past four, tea was served: it was served by Mrs. Flagg.

– Mama would sooner do without lunch at noon than without tea in the afternoon. For you remember that my mother is an Englishwoman. When she was fifteen, she left England with her parents, and there you have it, she has remained an Englishwoman even though seventy-two years have elapsed since then; and she will be an Englishwoman even at the moment of dying.

I took this statement or thought of the daughter’s as a totally common thing, and believed that in it there was nothing offensive to the mother; but the mother said in a somewhat strange manner:

– Yes, an Englishwoman I was, I am, and will be, and I’m proud of that.

– But, mama, I’m not ashamed of being an American woman – the daughter answered and raised her head high.

And there began a not so pleasant conversation between the mother and her daughter. The mother was revolted by the fact that the Americans took down and burnt the English flag in Washington, revolted as if that event had happened yesterday, as if it were completely fresh. The daughter argued that the English aspire to turn the entire globe into an empire of theirs. The mother spoke calmly, the daughter passionately. I kept quiet and listened and was becoming ever more convinced that this was not a conflict between a mother who strongly loves her daughter and a daughter who nurses her mother like a child; gives her the most beautiful room; makes tea to her taste and serves it for her at the precise second in the time of day when she is used to having it; thanks her for the education of “a Puritan mother” or “an English mother from the Victorian Age”; praises the Lord for deciding that this mother should have her for a daughter; and takes pride in this mother being her mother. Yes, I was becoming, that is, I had become totally convinced, not in London – for no such conversations took place there – but in Brockton, at their home, that this was not a conflict between two women, a mother and a daughter; not between two nations, the English

and American; not between two races, for they are both of the same race, but between two continents, or, to put it more aptly and accurately – between two worlds: the Old and the New one. As with the old and young people, so with the Old and New worlds – they cannot understand one another. The former is proud of its traditions, and the latter haughty because of its youth.

Certainly, they are both great, this mother and this daughter, these two women from two continents, from two worlds – this old Englishwoman and this young American woman.

The daughter enters the room where her mother was sitting with me, extends her hand toward the window facing the yard, laughs, and says:

– Mama! These American cats all fled as if they were European kings.

This witty comparison made me laugh; and casting a look through the window I really saw some cats running hither and thither, and the mother remained serious and cold. In this too, she must have certainly found something of an insult to Europe.

Then they began about politics. Neither in politics do they agree because the mother praises the president. “Why should she praise him if she knows that the president is a Democrat and her daughter a Republican?” I wondered.

– If the president is an altruist, then why didn’t he stop bloodshed as soon as the war began, but did so only after his waters had been sailed into and his egotism touched?

– But still: he saved the world.

– Mama! You’d better say the world’s remnants; for the men who lost their arms, legs, and eyes are human remnants, and such people are millions.

And perhaps the debate would have continued had we not heard the footsteps of a man. The daughter jumped, hurried toward the entrance, spread her arms and, rejoicing at the coming of not only her husband and friend but also her political soul-mate, exclaimed: – There comes my friend! – and then they hugged and kissed each other.

(And malicious foreigners say that in America marriage “has seen its last day”. These American marriage partners will soon celebrate their silver wedding anniversary.)

The three of them began about “the first lady”.

– The gentleman took his bridge mate for his wife – said the daughter, the son-in-law approved, and the mother said:

– That’s his private life.

– Ah, mama! If you think so, then why did you bring me up differently and tell me that frivolous women should be excluded from a serious society? – The mother did not answer this question.

This son-in-law respects his mother-in-law, but this husband sides with his wife. This could be because they are of a similar age, or because they are husband and wife, or simply because they are of the same nationality. “What was the father of your daughter?” – “What her husband is: an American”. – “A proud Albion woman”, the daughter once said when the mother was not in the room, and the son-in-law confirmed it. – “She’s old”, I said. “She was such in her youth, too”, the daughter said again. “Did you see the way she seats herself at the table? A lady. The English, in her view, are meant to master; the Americans to labor”.

The wife is a feminist, and the husband, too, is a feminist. “That women in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have been given the right to vote doesn’t only make me happy because of women’s voting, but also because before both laws, the human and divine, men and women will be equal”, says this husband. I recalled my husband. Though he was not an American lawyer, but a Serbian soldier, he still protested whenever he had to write: “I approve of my wife’s actions”. This American, just like that Serbian, could not grasp why it is that, before our law, women are “minors” until they are a hundred years old.

And from what else can you tell that the people in New England are mostly of English origin? From their love of animals. In Boston you often come across women with a dog on a leash. And in this house there is a white poodle that the household members, as one can tell, are very fond of. They tied a red ribbon around its neck and trained it, so it can do a lot of things. The head of the family tells it: “Three cheers for the United States!”, and it barked three times.

I was given a sleeping room at Mrs. Brockton lawyer's, in Brockton, which was not only beautiful but also coquettish, like the one at Mrs. *Western Union Telegraph Company* Deputy President's, in New York. This hostess came to visit me after I lay in my bed. She appeared all of a sudden, in a silky white peignoir with wide sleeves, like a ghost in the shape of that American woman from the hotel *Montague*. Having sat by the side of my bed, she told me not to be afraid because close by was the room where her mother slept, and also the room where she was going to sleep.

– With your husband?

– Yes...

*

Sunday dawned. We breakfasted, dressed, and went to Saint Paul's Church, the English Church, as the mother said, or the Episcopal, as the daughter corrected her.

It is difficult to find anywhere a more likeable or warmer church than this Brockton church. It, too, is small, red, in the greenery; on the north and south it is covered with thick vine stalks as with "the green hair of a sorceress from children's tales". The mother and daughter sat next to each other on their seats in the pew, and I sat next to the daughter on who knows whose seat, given up to me for this service, certainly in accordance with the wish of the lady beside whom I seated myself. Both mother and daughter sang as warmly as they sing everything – everywhere – devout American Christian women.

After the service – straight home. The old Englishwoman sat on the veranda where I had found her the previous week, when I paid them an unexpected visit; I sat close to her so we could talk to one another until lunch; the husband, a bit farther, took a newspaper to read it; and the woman went to prepare lunch.

And as soon as we finished our lunch, we sat in the car, I with her mother above, she with her husband below, and we took off, not with the flight of a bird but with the flight of American cars.

Past us went fields, meadows, and farms; and, through the forest, every now and then glistened white – the ocean. The farms and meadows

and fields, everything was more beautiful than around New York, or it only seemed to me to be so. This excursion was similar to the one to Stratford-upon-Avon: we were going on a pilgrimage to the historical town of Plymouth. And all of a sudden, we slowed down and Plymouth houses began to pass by: blue, yellow, wooden, short, ordinary, and historical, until we finally got out of town, when suddenly before us, in all its magnificence and wonderful beauty, opened wide – the ocean.

Plymouth – a small town but a big name. It is not famous for its houses, small and ordinary, but for its rock: Plymouth Rock, which the English Puritans – "the Pilgrim fathers" – set foot on when they disembarked from the *Mayflower* ship.

As in Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare was born, so in Plymouth, where the Pilgrim Fathers rest in eternal slumber: in the American woman awoke the blood of her ancestors. For the American woman, too, like the Englishwoman, approached Plymouth Rock with reverence; the American woman, too, like the Englishwoman, approached the monument of the Pilgrim Fathers as a worshipper; the American woman, too, like the Englishwoman, came with piety to the graveyard where the Pilgrim Fathers rest. The mother stood in the graveyard with her head bowed; the daughter turned toward me and said, uttered quietly and in a way that one speaks in hallowed places: "In America, we don't have a place more sacred than this one". On tombstones are the names of those who lie there and the epitaphs; on the monument, there is an obituary with ninety-four names: men, women, and children – those who sailing on the *Mayflower* ship came to America three hundred years ago.

The history of those people is moving. Let me tell it in brief.

A group of Englishmen, mostly poverty-stricken, tried to flee their country, England, with women and children, but upon embarkation – the authorities came, called them derogatory names, took them back and imprisoned them. Had any foreigners seen this, they would have thought these honest men were thieves and villains, so the authorities were persecuting them for that. And why were they persecuted? Because they prayed to God "in their own way" and read the Bible. A strange reason to put someone in prison. But King James I, son of Mary Stuart, demanded from the English people that they all go to the church that he had established. These poor men, called Puritans, found that the

path determined for them by the King did not lead to God. And to avoid going to the King's church, they made for themselves small churches and went to them in secrecy. Sometimes they met for prayer in their own houses, sometimes in sheds and also in the fields. The King ordered that their churches be closed down and their priests incarcerated. When the Puritans had had enough of the King's violence and wantonness, they tried to leave their country. The historian compares King James I to the Pharaoh: "Neither will he let them go, nor will he leave them alone". Next time, the Puritans made a secret plan to escape, so they sailed off for the Netherlands with their women and children. There they worked, earned their living honestly, and prayed to God in their own way. But, alas! The Netherlands did not always have friendly relations with England; so, if war came, should they take arms against their country? They decided to go to America: there, they will be able to pray "as it pleases the Lord, read the Bible, and again live under their old beloved English flag". They borrowed money from England, rented two small ships: the *Mayflower* and *Speedwell*. A symbolical name, 'mayflower'—spring, the beginning of a new life. Priest John Robinson delivered them a solemn speech, their friends saw them off, and they began their voyage to America, to the region north of Virginia, which John Smith had named New England. But only to Southampton, and then the *Speedwell* let them down. However, since these travelers were full-blooded English, in addition to their faith in God, they also had faith in their dogged English persistence. On September 6th, 1620 — the *Mayflower* hoisted its sails again and with a hundred-strong crew — men, women, and children — set sail for America, not from Southampton, but from Plymouth. Nowadays fast ships get across the ocean in six days: and the *Mayflower* could not cross it even in sixty, because the small sailing ship struggled with storms and was carried by the winds. Bitter cold, December 11th — the Pilgrim Fathers disembark, step upon the rock on the main shore; and longing for the abandoned town whence they departed, Plymouth, they name this place which they arrived in — Plymouth.

Just as a mother, having lost her children,
Or as a sister, having lost her brother,
Will give the dear names of their beloved
To their son or grandson.

"And as long as this world lasts, this rock, known as Plymouth Rock, shall be revered as holy, for it is from it that the martyrs of Plymouth set foot on the soil where their children were predestined to become a powerful nation".

A hundred thousand souls, they say, come annually, particularly on Thanksgiving Day, to pay homage to this rock.

We sat on a bench on the coast of the ocean; and with the rhythm of the waves pounding against Plymouth Rock in the background, I took a series of postcards with the pictures of sights in Plymouth, bought for me by Mr. Flagg, to read from it the romantic and poetic history of those brave people.

"The ill Puritans and their wives and children disembarked... With difficulties they pruned the trees and made cabins to at least somewhat shelter themselves from the harsh winter of the north and its icy winds, and so await the spring sun with their faith in God. But this old man or that young woman or child were taken out of their cabins and buried in the frozen ground... Governor John Carver laid his child into its last resting-place, and soon afterwards he, too, lay by the side of his child. In the spring, his wife also lay in the same tomb... And for a while only seven souls remained on their feet, and they nursed the diseased. (Six of them had already died on the journey.)"

And when spring dawned, the birds began to sing, and trees turned green, they thought that their troubles had come to an end. But, suddenly, an Indian appeared in their settlement. "Welcome, Yankee!" the red native cheerfully exclaimed to the white newcomers. And there he made friends with them. And later on came the chief of a tribe, named Massasoit, and solemnly promised to the governor of the colony that he would never do them any harm. He kept his promise, but did not help them, since he was a poor man himself. The earth barren. Plenty of fish, but nothing to hunt with. In the fall, a small ship came with thirty-five pilgrim-travelers, but with neither a fishing net nor food... They would have starved to death if they had not received food, particularly fish, from the ships that, from time to time, passed close by. And yet, not even in such severe living conditions were these people abandoned by courage; they did not regret coming here, having abandoned their comfortable little houses in the Netherlands, but with much faith in the mercy of God,

whilst patiently enduring hunger, the cold, and disease, they were happy to be free and “live under the dear old English flag”.

And when the chief of a wild Indian tribe sent them a bundle of arrows wrapped up in the skin of a rattle snake – which, according to Indian customs, meant the declaration of war – they were not frightened, but put some powder and lead into the rattle snake skin, and then sent it back to the chief. The Indians were horrified by this “return gift” because they took it for some kind of spell, so they left the Plymouth settlers alone. Four years after their arrival, the Plymouth Pilgrims came back to life, for they had had livestock sent to them from England, and also corn, which they had sown. Many friends from the Netherlands had joined them; they had built many houses and also erected a fortress to protect themselves against the Indians. The Plymouth settlement cheered up; for, instead of starving, they were now able to give corn to the Indians in exchange for furs.

Gradually, along the coast, small trading outposts were erected and settled by the English. “But of all the English who first built for themselves cabins of tree trunks, cleared the forests and hunting grounds, bred livestock, and sowed corn – none were as honest, as persistent and tough, as our Plymouth Pilgrim Fathers”.

While I was reading, they were silent. Is it that they did not want to disturb my reading or was it an expression of their deep respect, given through silence, for the shadows of these martyrs?

The ocean looked as though it were engulfed in flames when we cast another look, not sad, but pensive: at the rock, at the monument, at the graveyard where the dead rest, and at the eternally living ocean.

This excursion to Plymouth was again of four, like the one to Stratford-upon-Avon, only now, instead of my husband, we had with us her husband.

The following day, on Monday, they saw me off to Boston at the station, not after breakfast, but after lunch, as it is common after staying at someone's over the weekend.

And the pain which I now felt upon saying goodbye to the American woman and her mother was no less severe than the pain I felt ten years ago when the car took them like a cyclone and left desolation behind it.



A Note On Jelena J. Dimitrijević

Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862–1945) was a Serbian woman writer, benefactor, and our first female globe-trotter. She was born in Kruševac, into a merchant family. At the age of ten, she moved to her half-brother Nikola's house in Aleksinac, where she would discover the world of books in her half-brother's rich library. She began to learn foreign languages on a self-study basis together with her maternal cousin Dobrosav. That is how she would learn German, French, English, Russian, Greek, Italian, and finally Turkish. In 1881, she married Jovan Dimitrijević, an artillery lieutenant-colonel, and moved to Niš, where, except for several short breaks, she would stay for the following 17 years. It is there that she continued to work on her literary education and published her first collection of poems entitled *Pesme I* (Poems I). From 1898 until the end of her life, her permanent place of residence was in Belgrade, but her nomadic spirit would, in this period, take her to the farthest corners of the globe.

A series of prose works would follow, such as her stories *Đul-Marikina prikažnja* (Đul-Marika's Story), *Fati-sultan / Safi-hanum / Mejrem-hanum*, *Amerikanka* (The American Woman), and then her works of epistolary literature (*Pisma iz Niša o haremina* [Letters from Niš about Harems], *Pisma iz Soluna* [Letters from Salonika]) and travelogues (*Novi svet ili u Americi godinu dana* [The New World or A Year in America], *Sedam mora i tri okeana* [Seven Seas and Three Oceans]), while it is of particular importance to mention her novel *Nove* (The New Women), which was published by Srpska književna zadruga (the Serbian Literary Cooperative) in 1912. After her husband's death in the First World War, Jelena Dimitrijević went on a journey around nearly the whole world: first, she went from Europe (Spain, France, and England) to

America (1919–20), and seven years later she visited the Middle and Far East (Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, India, China, and Japan) only to eventually find herself in America again. This is testified to not only by the aforementioned travelogues but also by those poetry collections of hers that were unpublished during her lifetime.

She also worked as a nurse in the Balkan Wars, and was one of the first members of Kolo Srpskih Sestara (the Circle of Serbian Sisters). She died in Belgrade, aged 84. Her manuscript legacy is kept at the National Library of Serbia.



A Note On The Translator

Goran Petrović was born in 1989, in the town of Kraljevo (Serbia). He obtained his BA and MA degrees at the Department of English language and literature, Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. After defending his master thesis entitled “Pastoralni svet u Šekspirovim komedijama i tragikomedijama: *Kako vam drago, Mletački trgovac, Zimska bajka, Bura*” (“The Pastoral World of Shakespeare’s Comedies and Romances: *As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, The Winter’s Tale, The Tempest*”), he enrolled in PhD studies at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. As a PhD candidate, he is currently working on his dissertation entitled “Evolucionizam kao teorijska osnova rane naučno-fantastične imaginacije H. Dž. Velsa” (“Evolutionism as the Theoretical Basis of H. G. Wells’s Early Science-fiction Imagination”). He is the author of eight papers in linguistics and literary studies, and has also published a Serbian translation of poetry by H. W. Longfellow. In 2015, his short story entitled “Veliki sultan na Hristovom grobu” (“A Great Sultan at the Tomb of Christ”) received a certificate of commendation for participation in the literary competition “Dositejevo zlatno pero” (“Dositej Obradović’s Golden Pen”). Since November 2018, he has been employed as a junior researcher on the project *Knjiženstvo – Theory and History of Women’s Writing in Serbian until 1915*. The area of his interest is Anglophone (British and American) literature, with emphasis on the utopian/science-fiction genre.

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а) Димитријевић, Јелена (1862-1945)

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When I first learned about the early 20th-century friendship between Serbian author and feminist Jelena J. Dimitrijević and "an American woman," a Republican feminist from Brockton, Massachusetts, Katherine (or Katharine) Miner Flagg, recorded so vividly by Jelena J. Dimitrijević, it was Brockton that grabbed my attention. In the two decades after Mrs. Flagg's death in 1945, I grew up not far from her Highland Street home, which looks today much as it looked in 1920, as does St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where Mrs. Flagg, her mother, and Jelena J. Dimitrijević attend the Sunday service in "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's," though today it serves Brockton's Haitian community. The only physical evidence of Kitty's independence and feminism that survives is her name on the tombstone she shares with her husband, "Katharine Miner." But she lives more completely in the writing of Jelena J. Dimitrijević. *Knjiženstvo* and the translator deserve great thanks for making these texts available in English for the first time.

Gerald Richman, Professor Emeritus
Suffolk University, Boston

It is with great enthusiasm that I see "American" texts by Jelena J. Dimitrijević, one of the most important Serbian women authors of the 20th century, enter broad circulation after more than eight decades of oblivion. They were restored to the active memory of her compatriot readership a mere dozen or so years ago. The English translation of "The American Woman" (1912) and "On the Weekend at Mrs. Flagg's" (1934) redresses a gap in Serbian-American literary relations. It affords an opportunity to develop and augment the American perception of Serbian culture, at the same time offering the American reading public a glimpse at an outsider's "exotic" and also incisive view on the US as it was one hundred years ago. The edition considerably enriches Serbian-American imagological, literary and feminist discourses. Hopefully, it will also provide a boost for the publication of Jelena J. Dimitrijević's entire travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* (1934) in English.

Magdalena Koch, Associate Professor
"Adam Mickiewicz" University, Poznan

This publication promises a most interesting entrance into the world of Jelena J. Dimitrijević and the international encounters which inspired both her fiction and her travelogues. Dimitrijević's elegant and smooth prose conveys humane, deeply moving, or, on the other hand, almost ecstatically exciting experiences. The piece of fiction "The American Woman" (1912) and an extract from the travelogue *The New World or A Year in America* (1934), both featuring encounters with the same person, offer a privilege of glancing into the literary laboratory of this Serbian modernist woman writer. Both texts are skillfully translated from the Serbian language by Goran Petrović, who also authored a knowledgeable introduction.

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