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## ODES TO NEW YORK CITY – TWO PORTRAITS BY TWO SERBIAN WOMEN AUTHORS A CENTURY APART

**Abstract:** Some four score years ago, Ayn Rand wrote: “I would give the greatest sunset in the world for one sight of New York’s skyline.” (1993: 446) A few years later, it was Simone de Beauvoir who famously said: “... there’s something in the New York air that makes sleep useless; perhaps it’s because your heart beats more quickly here than elsewhere...” (1999: 18). Up to the present, New York City has not ceased to mesmerise Americans and foreigners alike. But what kind of cultural space does the city constitute, and what kind of place is it? Is there only one, or are there many New York Cities, each of them given a new coat of paint through the lens of the observer? In this paper, we propose to take a unique look at this fascinating locus, through the eyes of two Serbian women authors who wrote about it as foreign visitors almost exactly a century apart. Following Fritz Steele’s definition of the sense of place (1981), *Novi svet ili u Americi godinu dana* (*The New World or A Year in America*, 2019) by Jelena J. Dimitrijević and *Tamo je ovde* (*Over There Is Here*, 2019) by Maja Lalević Piščević will be examined through a thorough contrastive analysis, focusing on the relationship between the social and the physical setting and taking into account the differences in Serbian and American culture. Both written in documentary style and both published by the same publishing house in Belgrade in 2019, the former is a series of travel essays written in 1919/1920 and the latter a collection of columns written for the “Nedeljnik” weekly in 2016/2017. The detailed descriptions and impressions provided by two brilliant and insightful women authors will generate interesting conclusions about the shaping of the perception of various images and signals, sights and sounds, into quite personal, but intertwining views of New York City and its cultural space through the eyes of two Serbian nationals.

**Keywords:** sense of place, cultural space, New York City, Jelena J. Dimitrijevic, Maja Lalevic Piscevic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: CAPTURING THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS

This paper examines two unique pieces of writing produced almost exactly a century apart – *Novi svet ili u Americi godinu dana* (*The New World or A Year in America*, 2019) written in 1919/1920 by Jelena J. Dimitrijević and *Tamo je ovde* (*Over There Is Here*, 2019) written in 2016/2017 by Maja Lalević Piščević. Both these works were written in documentary style, the former as a series of travel essays (considered to be the first Serbian piece of travel writing depicting the United States, first published in 1934) and the latter a collection of columns written for the “Nedeljnik” weekly in 2016/2017 (at a time when New York City is widely considered to be the cultural capital of the world). Curiously enough, both these works were published by the same publishing house in Belgrade in 2019, which is another feature they have in common.

The two aforementioned pieces of writing might be categorized as crossovers between pieces of travel writing and diaries/memoirs or even novels. Both written by female authors, they unmistakably contain a personal touch which adds a certain air of originality to the vivid place depictions of New York City. The first one, in chronological order, *Novi svet ili u Americi godinu dana* (*The New World or A Year in America*) by Jelena J. Dimitrijević, was written at approximately the end of the era of Decadence in place writing and the beginning of modernism, while the second one, *Tamo je ovde* (*Over There Is Here*) by Maja Lalević Piščević was written at a time in the history of literature that is repeatedly being called post-postmodernism and the exact name of which will probably become known in the years or decades to come. There is also a stark difference between the periods in history in which these two works were written – Jelena J. Dimitrijević wrote at a time when the whole of Europe was recovering from the bloody carnage of the First World War, while Maja Lalević Piščević came to live in a New York City that had been forever changed by the tragic circumstances and aftermath of the vicious terrorist attacks of 9/11. Still, even though written almost exactly a century apart, both travel pieces contain an aura of a sense of place similar to what Fritz Steele defined in his 1981 publication titled *The Sense of Place*. Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s insightful piece, written in 1919/1920 and first published in 1934, was based on the experience of a New York City that was a budding metropolis – only a decade or so prior to the author’s arrival, what would later become the City’s landmarks were erected: the Flatiron Building (originally the Fuller Building) in 1902, the tower of the

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower (colloquially known as the Met Life Tower) in 1905 and the Woolworth Building in 1913 (the tallest building in the world from 1913 to 1930). Through many delightful anecdotes and personal commentary, the author describes a New York City that can never be known to the modern traveller. However, as we shall see later on, many of the tropes in her writing are what Maja Lalević Piščević will also reflect upon almost exactly a century later.

It is a commonly known fact that in this past half century or so New York City has become somewhat of a household name, and not just in the West. It has been immortalized in countless poems, novels, short stories, plays, not to mention movies and TV shows. If you ask a random person to tell you something about New York, it might probably be assumed that they will be able to tell you at least a few sentences, and also whether they are a fan of the city or not, even though many will probably not have visited it. In fact, New York City has become so popular and well-known that it is frequently featured on clothing and various merchandise as if it represented a unanimously elected capital of the world. And while many years ago it may have been quite difficult to capture the essence of a city that was rapidly growing and changing on a daily level: “New York is ... the ultimate challenge to the novelist, refusing to sit still long enough for any representation to appear contemporary.” (Murray 2016: 181), nowadays there are so many factual and fictional depictions of The City that it has become futile to even discuss the point of writing about it. The examples are endless – some four score years ago, Ayn Rand wrote: “I would give the greatest sunset in the world for one sight of New York’s skyline.” (1993: 446) and a few years later Simone de Beauvoir famously stated: “... there’s something in the New York air that makes sleep useless; perhaps it’s because your heart beats more quickly here than elsewhere...” (1999: 18), and the list goes on and on. And while writing about The City early on, the European heritage that America was built on used to be a burden and something to look up to but also bury into a deep unrecognizability, New York City has somehow managed to break free from the Old World, and up to the present has not ceased to mesmerise Americans and foreigners alike. This is probably not only due to the “fact” that “if you can make it there you’ll make it anywhere” as preach the lyrics that owing to Frank Sinatra skyrocketed to what would become eternal fame in 1979 (this song is still played on Times Square every New Year’s Eve in New York City), but also to wildly popular TV shows that promote The City, such as “Seinfeld”, “Friends”, “Sex and The City”, to name only a few. In this

digital era, it might also be argued that readers/followers across the globe await every new word written or said about this magical place with bated breath (the number of blogs, vlogs and publications related to it is mind-boggling).

## **2. ODES TO NEW YORK CITY: TWO PORTRAITS BY TWO SERBIAN WOMEN AUTHORS**

Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862–1945) is considered to be one of the first Serbian women authors of great importance. Born in Kruševac in 1862, Dimitrijević did not manage to get far ahead in school because at the time education was not considered desirable for young women. Despite this outdated and misconceived viewpoint, the author spent her entire life educating herself in various ways and on her own, exploring, researching, travelling, learning foreign languages (she spoke several – German, French, English, Russian, Greek, probably Italian and last but not least Turkish, which enabled her to write invaluable texts about harems). Even according to contemporary education standards, Dimitrijević ended up becoming an erudite, and she was especially good at acquiring knowledge through experience, which was still a novel concept in the decades she lived in, especially when it came to women; but Dimitrijević was ahead of her time in too many ways to count.

Jelena J. Dimitrijević wrote her first poem in 1878, and she would go on to publish her poems in prominent magazines and as separate publications. In February 1881, she got married to her only husband who would become her pillar of support and remain so until his untimely death in combat in 1915. Belgrade became the author's home at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1898, when she moved there with her husband. Despite Dimitrijević's travels across the globe, Belgrade would remain her permanent place of residence until her death in the spring of 1945. It is also her final resting place, as she was interred at Belgrade's "Novo groblje" cemetery. It is a curious fact that no one attended her funeral, due to an unfortunate mistake in the announcement of the timeslot (Пековић 2018: 230). As one source says, for reasons unknown the funeral was held two hours earlier than announced and Dimitrijević left for her final journey the same way she embarked on her other journeys – alone (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 20).

Aside from poems, Jelena J. Dimitrijević wrote short prose, travel essays and a novel which she won an award for from the Serbian Literary Guild (Srpska književna zadruga) in 1912. Despite her being an established author during her lifetime, Jelena J. Dimitrijević's work was mainly overlooked and forgotten in the decades following the Second World War, and the reasons for this are thought to have been political in nature (Дојчиновић and Милинковић 2018: v). Dimitrijević came from a privileged background and her primary source of interest were not working women, as was desirable at the time (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 20). Her work has been back in the spotlight since the second half of the 1980s, and interest in it has only grown in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and rightly so, as her work is of invaluable importance for the historical and cultural context of the period she lived in. Dimitrijević was a polyglot and a world traveller, and her series of essays on the United States and New York City which will be discussed in this paper are just one small portion of the fascinating scope of her travel writing which encompasses such faraway places as India and Japan and a journey around the world. As one author aptly put it: "... the published impressions from this journey are one of the most interesting presentations of America from the age of its growth and prosperity."<sup>1</sup> (Пековић 2018: 229). The travel books are considered to be the most important part of Jelena Dimitrijević's legacy, some as descriptions of faraway places and others as testaments to times and circumstances long passed (Пековић 2018: 239).

In the context of this research paper, it is of interest to note that when it comes to Jelena J. Dimitrijević's work: "In many cases it is difficult to establish the specific genre of certain works. The very titles of her travel books invoke epistolary literature, which has its own characteristics, but at the same time they are also travel books."<sup>2</sup> (Пековић 2018: 239). The author transforms what would be considered the typical text of a travel book into that of a novel by focusing on the descriptions of emotions and thoughts, writing in the first person, introducing dialogue (Пековић 2006: 60). In her travel pieces, Dimitrijević also "combines both aspects of reality, the subjective and the objective"<sup>3</sup> (Пековић 2018: 28) and her work creates an exciting

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<sup>1</sup> "... објављени утисци са овог путовања су један од најзанимљивијих приказа Америке из доба њеног процвата и просперитета."

<sup>2</sup> „У многим случајевима тешко је поједина дела са сигурношћу сврстати у неки одређени жанр. Већ сами наслови њених путописа упућују на епистоларну књижевност која има своје одлике, али у исто време то су и путописи.“

<sup>3</sup> „комбинује оба вида стварности, субјективан и објективан“

discourse due to her gift of storytelling which makes objective writing easily slip into the fictional (Пековић 2018: 15). The travel piece on America has also been described as being of a hybrid genre “vaccinating between a piece of travel writing, a reportage and a diary”<sup>4</sup> (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 18). It is also interesting to note that parts of the travel piece correspond almost exactly to some of Dimitrijević’s short stories and that in her work there is often a thin line between something resembling a novel and something resembling a travel book (Пековић 2006: 57). The thematic circle of the American topics Jelena J. Dimitrijević wrote about includes the short stories titled “American Woman” (“Amerikanka”) and “In America, ‘Something Happened’” (“U Americi, ‘nešto se dogodilo””), the travel book discussed within this paper and some poems which are kept in the National Library of Serbia (Дојчиновић 2019: i).

Maja Lalević Piščević was born in Belgrade in 1960. Up until this point, she has led a very interesting and versatile life profession-wise. She rose to national stardom with a small but very significant movie role while she was still a teen, having played the love interest of the famous Yugoslav actor Dragan Nikolić (1943–2016) in what would become a cult movie – “National Class Category Up to 785 ccm” (“Nacionalna klasa”) released in 1979. Later on, she also played a role in “Eight Kilos of Happiness” (“Osam kila sreće”) which was released in 1980. Lalević Piščević did not pursue a career in the film industry even though she did complete her studies at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. She was also successful in obtaining a degree in law, having parallelly completed her studies at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, so she chose to pursue a career in the judiciary system. Mainly due to political reasons, Lalević Piščević abandoned the judiciary at one point and finally opted for a very successful career in international NGOs. This last chosen path was what led her to New York City and the journey which begot *Over There Is Here*.

As Maja Lalević Piščević is neither a professional nor a prolific author to date, there is no pool of literary criticism dedicated to her work as is the case with Jelena J. Dimitrijević. Still, a great deal said about the value of her first and only publication, *Tamo je ovde* (*Over There Is Here*), is available via the video recording of the book launch which is available online<sup>5</sup>. The launch of the aforementioned publication was held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019 in Belgrade’s

<sup>4</sup> „varirajući između putopisne forme, reportaže i dnevnika”

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNxLGSXu\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNxLGSXu_Y) [accessed 14 October 2021]

“Klub književnika” club (founded in 1946 as the Serbian Writers’ Association eatery) and it was organized by the publisher, the “Laguna” publishing house from Belgrade. On this occasion, the launch was hosted by a group of prominent individuals, each highly successful in their respective fields of work: Mr. Srđan Šaper, a professional in the fields of art and advertising, the journalist and TV host Ms. Olja Bečković, the famous playwright Ms. Biljana Srbljanović, the then US ambassador to Serbia Mr. Kyle Randolph Scott, and the main editor of the “Nedeljnik” weekly Mr. Veljko Lalić. Mr. Šaper described the book as a geography of the inner self and a book about inner wanderings. He also said, which is a curious fact, since it is supposed to be a collection of travel essays about New York City, that the main characters of the book are the author’s family members in Belgrade and described it as a book on observation. Ms. Bečković described the book as being about the author’s art of living and not New York City. Ms. Srbljanović invoked Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) and his notion of “invented traditions”, saying that the author had her own set of expectations that she walked into when moving into a new world and that some metaphors are more true than reality. Mr. Scott reflected on the fact that the author saw a different USA as a foreigner, and that her perception is more beautiful and cheerful. Finally, Mr. Lalić said that the publication was also about Belgrade. Having said all this, it becomes quite clear that just like in the case of Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s work, the book written by Maja Lalević Piščević cannot be compressed to fit into a single genre, but rather transcends the travel writing form and borders on becoming a piece of fiction.

It was also mentioned at the beginning of this paper that both works discussed resemble memoirs (the people both works are dedicated to also reveal that they contain a personal note – Jelena J. Dimitrijević dedicated her travel book to two dear female friends, Joka Petrović Njegoš and Delfa Iv. Ivanić, while Maja Lalević Piščević dedicated her travel book to her father and all fathers of little girls and all big little girls of which she is one too). This was said in the sense that they resemble a series of letters or diary entries. In Jelena J. Dimitrijević’s case, certain parts of her travel book were in fact originally letters written to close friends, while in the case of Maja Lalević Piščević most sections were originally weekly columns the composition of which also implies having a certain target audience that the author is writing for. Both these works were also written from a female perspective, which affects the choice of topics discussed in them. Being the products of female authors, the works deal with various kinds of women’s issues, race, poverty,

foreign customs and weather (as perceived from the perspective of the gentler sex, which will be illustrated by examples). This is certainly not to say that the works are not objective in nature, on the contrary, but it may be guessed from the choice of topics that they were written by women authors. In fact, according to one scholar, what makes Jelena J. Dimitrijević's travel book unique in Serbian literature is the "feminological thematic circle"<sup>6</sup> (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 64). Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two pieces of travel writing is the historical period they were written in, which was also briefly mentioned in the introductory part of this paper. Jelena J. Dimitrijević visited the United States on two occasions, once in 1919 and the second time in 1927. Unfortunately, it would take a long time for her to publish her travel piece (which mainly encompasses impressions from the first trip), and it was in 1934 that the travel piece first came out. This was unfortunate due to the fact that the great economic crisis of 1929 left America as only a vestige of what it once was. It may be assumed that the success of such a publication would have been much bigger had it been published in the 1920s (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 18), and it may be claimed that this text has greater importance today in the contemporary Serbian feminist literature than in the year of its publication because it enables the reader to find out from first-hand experience what the American women's movement was like, especially in comparison with the diametrically different world of the East, which makes the work an integral component of historical processes rather than providing a single view (Reba Kulauzov 2010: 70). As opposed to these unfortunate circumstances, the columns written on a weekly basis by Maja Lalević Pišćević, which were also published regularly, provided a topical scoop on the weekly news in New York from quite a genuine perspective. These texts too will perhaps one day provide unique insight into a year and a half spent in New York City, as written by a Serbian national of the female gender in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the text that follows, we shall try to present in more detail what brings these two unique pieces of travel writing together despite them having been written in such different time periods.

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<sup>6</sup> "feminološki tematski krug"



### 3. A SENSE OF PLACE IN THE CULTURAL MILIEU OF A NEW WORLD

It is a well-known fact that, with some exceptions, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards most works of literature have been produced in big cities. The emergence of this trend, of course, lies in urban and industrial expansion due to which more and more people have been moving to the cities for the past few centuries, which led to various changes in the ways of life, both good and bad. The role of the city in literature has been changing with the times, ranging from but not limited to presenting the differences between urban and rural settings, utopian and dystopian renderings, the metropolis, the center as different from the periphery, the contemporary modern and postmodern cosmopolis. The development of using the images of the city in literature has been in step with changes in political views and it cannot be denied that: "... literature has the advantage of being a way to understand cities and city lives which avoids claims to objective truth." (Miles 2019: x) and that "... literary elements were reconceptualized in the face of historical and cultural change, including the commercial, industrial, and postindustrial realms through which the city evolved." (Lehan 1998: xv). This leads one to the conclusion that the city and the urban environment are closely linked with the novelistic form and that the respective paths of development of both intertwine at different levels.

The two works discussed in this paper, *The New World or A Year in America* (*Novi svet ili u Americi godinu dana*) by Jelena J. Dimitrijević and *Over There Is Here* (*Tamo je ovde*) by Maja Lalević Piščević cannot be defined as novels, so they could not be analysed by using any of the theories that connect the novel to the urban environment. In addition to this, the pieces were written almost a century apart, which would not allow them to be discussed within the same framework in this line of study. As Lehan put it: "... the history of the city contains within it the history of Western civilization." (Lehan 1998: 285) and consequently each representation of a city in literature has to take into account the historical circumstances of when a piece of writing was produced. For this reason, a different approach needed to be adopted, and in the introductory part of this paper it was stated that the two works would be examined through a thorough contrastive analysis following Fritz Steele's definition of the sense of place which he defined in his eponymous book of 1981. What is particularly interesting about Fritz Steele's theory and definition is that it can be applied to many areas of human activity, in other words it is not a literary theory *per se* but a theory based on what one would

call common sense and common knowledge. The reason we have chosen this theory as the basis for this paper is twofold. Firstly, there is the very specific and unique nature of the two works in question – we have already commented upon the various genres both pieces could be filed under. In addition to this technical aspect, the two women authors themselves seem to have been quite aware of the particular roles they played in perceiving their surroundings (this is especially true of Jelena J. Dimitrijević) so this justifies making use of one such theory. If we could sum up the entire theory that Fritz Steele has come up with, in his own words it would be: “what we think is an unbiased picture of the world is really a product of time, place, and frame of mind” (1981: 38). Having said this, we shall go on further into the details.

According to Steele, “Place’ has two aspects: The *sense of place*, which is the particular experience of a person in a particular setting... and the *spirit of place*, which is the combination of characteristics that gives some locations a special ‘feel’ or personality...” (1981: 11). Both these aspects will be discussed in this paper, as they both pertain to both works selected. Further points to be taken into account are that: “... we often create our own sense of place by what we bring to a setting and how we use it. This also suggests that most places are only settings until there are users there to complete the picture.” (Steele 1981: 18). Steele illustrates this point by invoking images of New York City: “The point of this scenario should be clear: experience of place on the Fifth Avenue sidewalk can never really be described as simply a function of its physical attributes; we must also take into account the eyes, ears, intentions, and moods of the persons who are experiencing it.” (Steele 1981: 4). It will become clear, as we provide examples from the two pieces of travel writing selected for analysis, how this process that Steele defined actually works. The formula that Steele provides is as follows (1981: 12):

$$\text{SETTING ( Surroundings } + \text{ Context )} + \text{PERSON} = \text{SENSE OF PLACE}$$

(physical setting)      (social setting)      (psychological factors)

In the context of this research, it will become clear that both addends in this equation are of equal importance in experiencing a sense of place. For the two women authors, both the physical and social settings and the psychological factors involved become crucial in their presentations of their own perceptions of a sense of place. Through providing different examples it is our intention to show how this formula works in two different yet similar

pieces of travel writing. In describing the psychological factors involved, Steele writes:

When people come to a setting, they usually do not arrive empty-handed, open to whatever turns up there. They almost always bring a good deal of “baggage” with them that influences how they perceive, use, and feel about the setting. There are two main psychological factors that shape these reactions: the expectations and intentions about what can be seen and should be done in the setting; and mood that provides a general sense of atmosphere, that indicates whether the surroundings are friendly or hostile – or something in between. (1981: 33)

In the case of the two women authors, it becomes clear at the very beginning of the two books that they have this certain amount of “baggage” that they are carrying with them to the New World. Both are leaving behind their former lives, Jelena J. Dimitrijević is leaving a Europe ravaged by war and she is thinking of all the loved ones she lost in the mindless carnage, including her beloved husband. As she travelled to America in 1919, she took an ocean liner from Plymouth (UK), so her voyage took almost ten days and the thoughts she was faced with and the people she encountered are prominently featured in a significant portion of the book’s introductory pages. Maja Lalević Piščević, on the other hand, as she is travelling to the USA in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is taking a direct flight from “Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport” to New York City’s “John F. Kennedy International Airport”. At one point up in the air, she breaks down while thinking about her life and her family that she has left behind for the very first time in her adult life (Lalević Piščević 2019: 186). Another important aspect of arriving in a (new) place, according to Steele, is the following: “One of these structuring devices is our conception of who we are and what we are doing in a particular setting: our intentions for being there, our expectations as to what we and others should or are likely to do there, and our assumptions about the setting itself.” (1981: 33) Let us discuss each point individually – the intentions of the two women authors were only a little different – Jelena J. Dimitrijević travelled to the New World to explore a new place and to learn new things about it and the people there; on the other hand, Maja Lalević Piščević moved to New York City because of a job. She could have gone there to explore it, as a tourist, but this was not the case. However, had she gone as a tourist, she probably would not have stayed an entire year in the United States, as Dimitrijević did (in modern times, a tourist visa to the US would not allow this). There is, ultimately, one last thing to consider – technically speaking, Dimitrijević could not have gone to the USA as a female

working professional in the post-World-War-One period. In this sense, one may treat the intentions of the two authors as similar – they both spent a longer period of time in New York city unburdened by money issues. As for the second aspect Steele enumerates, their expectations, it seems that they both expected to like New York City, but they did not like it at first. As one would say, the city grew on them, and here are just a few examples to illustrate this (the extended period of beginning to love NYC is frequently mentioned in both books): when Jelena J. Dimitrijević first arrives in America, we find out that she is disappointed by the simple cobblestone of the city streets and the garbage and that she had expected more from New York: “But what disappointment! Is this New York?! What simple cobblestone streets! What garbage! My impression is worse than in Constantinople, after disembarking the ship. And after all, I did not expect much of Constantinople; but how I did of New York!”<sup>7</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 81), and at the very end of the book she tells the readers that she is leaving American shores richer: “As so many others have, I have also gotten rich in America. I acquired great wealth there. Not the kind that comes and goes – dollars, but a kind of immeasurable, infinite wealth that cannot be diminished by anyone or anything: experience and – memories.”<sup>8</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 446). Further on, she writes: “Although according to its spatial features New York may be the biggest city in the world, and according to its natural position the world’s first, it, without a doubt, is not also the most beautiful city in the world.”<sup>9</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 91), adding that: “Yes, New York is not beautiful, but it is quaint. It is original.”<sup>10</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 93). Maja Lalević Piščević shares similar thoughts: “So, I have finally admitted it and said it out loud. I love New York. And truth be told I did not love it only four months ago. What is more, I could have sworn that I would never come to love it and I proudly paraded this attitude before my friends who observed my rebelliousness with

<sup>7</sup> „Ali kakvo razočaranje! Je li ovo Njujork?! Kakva prosta kaldrma! Kakvo dubre! Utisak gori no u Carigradu, posle iskrcavanja. Uostalom, od Carigrada nisam mnogo ni očekivala; ali od Njujorka!”

<sup>8</sup> „Kao toliki drugi, i ja sam se u Americi obogatila. Stekla sam tamo silno blago. Ne ono što ga danas jeste, sutra nije – dolare, nego jedno neocenljivo, neiscrpno blago kome ne može niko ništa: iskustvo i – uspomene.”

<sup>9</sup> „Mada je Njujork po prostoru možda najveći grad na svetu, a po prirodnom položaju prvi grad na svetu, on, bez sumnje, nije i najljepši grad na svetu.”

<sup>10</sup> „Da, Njujork nije lep, ali je čudnovat. Originalan je.”

a tolerant mix of puzzlement and incomprehension.”<sup>11</sup> (2019: 58) and “... New York keeps on testing you, and every time you think you cannot take any more it bestows upon you a little bit of mercy which makes you wish you stayed in the city forever.”<sup>12</sup> (2019: 96). As time goes by, she unmistakably feels that she is getting to know the city better and becoming quite close with it: “I felt that New York and I were now on a first name basis.”<sup>13</sup> (2019: 181), “I finally stopped wondering what I was doing here and why I was here, because I felt at home.”<sup>14</sup> (2019: 181–182).

The final aspect Steele mentions, the assumptions about the setting, or The City in this case, the situation here is a little ambiguous but in our opinion similar in both cases: it may be argued that Jelena J. Dimitrijević could not have assumed a lot about the New World, as sources of such information were scarce in comparison with modern standards. Maja Lalević Piščević was definitely in a better position when it came to such assumptions. We may assume that she had seen hundreds of pictures of New York City in her lifetime, probably countless movies, and she probably read a lot of books about it too, since she informs her readers that she loves to read. She has also already been to The United States at the time of her moving there. Having said all this, we would conclude by saying that both authors had certain assumptions, but they both found out new and interesting things about the “New World”. Also, taking the amount of time both authors spent in The City (Dimitrijević almost and entire year, she visited a few other cities during her one-year stay as well, and Lalević Piščević almost a year and a half, she travelled home a couple of times), we might conclude that they would fall into a category between the residents and the visitors that Steele differentiates between as they perceive a place through different eyes – tourists have no personal history there and usually no responsibilities (1981: 36). In the case of both authors, their stays were too extensive for them not to have personal histories on site. Moreover, while Lalević Piščević naturally stayed in a rented apartment since she moved to New York for work,

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<sup>11</sup> „Dakle, konačno sam to priznala i izgovorila. Volim Njujork. A istina je da ga do pre samo četiri meseca nisam volela. Štaviše, mogla sam se zakleti da ga nikada neću zavoleti i s tim stavom sam ponosno paradirala pred svojim prijateljima koji su moj bunt posmatrali s tolerantom mešavinom čuđenja i nerazumevanja.”

<sup>12</sup> „... Njujork te neprekidno iskušava i svaki put kad pomisliš da više ne možeš, on ti pokloni malo milosti od koje poželiš da zauvek u njemu ostaneš.”

<sup>13</sup> „... osetila sam da sam s Njujorkom prešla na Ti.”

<sup>14</sup> „Konačno se nisam pitala šta radim ovde i zašto sam tu, jer sam se osećala kao kod kuće.”

Dimitrijević also takes pride in the fact that she chooses private boarding whenever she can. Why? In her words: “since the life of a country and a city is not studied in hotels”<sup>15</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 344).

It is important not to overlook the fact that Steele did not take into account the cultural factor in experiencing a sense of place, as his book is oriented towards the USA and its citizens which he regards as one homogenous national group. In the contemporary context it is believed that, just as culture is difficult to define, cultural space can mean many different things to many different people. In this case we would adhere to the definition given by St. Clair and Williams (2008) which states that cultural space is stratified. Following Michel Foucault’s model of interruptions presented in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, these two authors conclude that: “Layers of space accrue over time resulting in a laminated or stratified space.” (St. Clair and Williams 2008: 1). In Foucault’s own words: “Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogeneous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions.” (Foucault 2002a: 4). In this sense these authors are correct in concluding that: “In the archeology of knowledge, Foucault proposes that the relationship of time to space is uniquely connected.” and “... Foucault presents cultural space as the sedimentation of layers over time.” (St. Clair and Williams 2008: 1). Time, in this case, cannot be perceived as being simply linear. Prior to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault wrote that:

History constitutes, therefore, for the human sciences, a favourable environment which is both privileged and dangerous. To each of the sciences of man it offers a background, which establishes it and provides it with a fixed ground and, as it were, a homeland; it determines the cultural area – the chronological and geographical boundaries – in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity; but it also surrounds the sciences of man with a frontier that limits them and destroys, from the outset, their claim to validity within the element of universality. (2002b: 405)

In other words, nothing that we as people perceive can be thought to be one hundred per cent objective or one hundred per cent original. Everything we do or think is influenced by certain patterns or certain rules that we have

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<sup>15</sup> „pošto se život jedne zemlje i jednoga grada ne proučava po hotelima”

either acquired/learned in the past or which had been presented to us as “objective” or “true”. Thus, when we inhabit space, and cultural space falls under this category, “... time is embedded in space: the present is embedded in the cultural past and the future is embedded in the cultural present.” (St. Clair and Williams 2008: 1) and “... cultural consciousness plays an important role in the co-present, the place where the present is embedded in the past.” (St. Clair and Williams 2008: 7). The perception of cultural space is thus heavily burdened by our past experiences which have a huge impact on our present experiences. The aforementioned approach by Michel Foucault is thought to have deepened the research methodology of history and cultural history, because: “Even when they avoid all reference to history, the human sciences (and history may be included among them) never do anything but relate one cultural episode to another (that to which they apply themselves as their object, and that in which their existence, their mode of being, their methods, and their concepts have their roots); and though they apply themselves to their own synchronology, they relate the cultural episode from which they emerged to itself.” (2002b: 405). In this sense the quoted authors identify Foucault’s “concept of re-presentation” which allows them to define a “sedimentation theory of culture” (St. Clair and Williams 2008: 7). This kind of approach falls perfectly in line with Fritz Steele’s theory of space, as he too realized the heavy roll history plays in human perception. In the case of the two Serbian women authors discussed in this paper, it is obvious that one has to take into account the cultural aspect as well. The two authors move from their own cultural space, which is Belgrade and Serbia, to a foreign cultural space, which is New York City and the USA. In these two pieces of travel writing, due to the authors’ feeling of a sense of place, one gets the impression that the two cultural spaces overlap, at least in their own perceptions. In both works, one frequently comes across examples where tropes of another culture are invoked in what seems to be the hope of understanding and accepting a foreign one. Furthermore, both authors have left behind a past that shapes their present experiences. In this sense, the reader can follow how their respective (cultural) pasts shape their new (cultural) presents.

Fritz Steele identified several main types of place experiences which in his opinion were “both frequent and interesting in trying to understand the sense of place” (Steele 1981: 12). This list contains the following items, in the order given: immediate feelings and thoughts, views of the world, occupational experiences, intimate knowledge of one spot, memories and

fantasies, recognition or newness, personal identification with someone's "spot", sense of accomplishment or blockage caused by the setting and sense of enjoyment, fun, or displeasure (Steele 1981: 12). All these items may be found in both works discussed in this paper, to a greater or lesser extent. The first notable examples of the two authors experiencing a sense of place are their immediate feelings of apprehension upon arrival. It has previously been mentioned that both authors arrived to their destination with a sense of unease, which may have preconditioned this. The fact that they did not at first like New York City may have been caused by this as well. So, despite both Dimitrijević and Lalević Piščević coming to America with good reason, and both of them having all the necessary papers, they are both nevertheless slightly apprehensive and have unusual first contact with the United States via the immigration officer who allows them entry. In the case of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, one of her immigration officers was a woman and Dimitrijević thought that she wanted to bar her entry into the USA because her last name made her think Dimitrijević was Jewish (Dimitrijević 2019: 77; 162). This did not happen, so it could have been just a product of the author's inner turmoil. In a similar situation, Maja Lalević Piščević finds herself trying to organize her papers with trembling hands (Lalević Piščević 2019: 18). Contrary to her inner mood, the immigration officer is utterly kind and friendly, he even tries to relax her and make her feel better by giving her some small stones and markers for her to write the Serbian words for "smile" and "love" on (Lalević Piščević 2019: 18-20). Both these apprehension-filled arrivals are fast forgotten and both authors' less than favourable first impressions of New York City will change as their mood improves.

The cultural space, which Fritz Steele does not mention as such in his book, plays a significant role in the two Serbian authors' perceptions of the USA. As we have already mentioned, on the psychological plane the Serbian cultural space merges with the American cultural space on the occasions when both authors compare unfamiliar surroundings with well-known places and people. This would fall under what Steele calls views of the world, memories, recognition or newness, which are some of the main types of place experiences previously mentioned on Steele's list (Steele 1981: 12). This merging of two very different cultural spaces makes the authors feel at ease, and it also appears to be a kind of natural response to unfamiliar surroundings. Firstly, it needs to be mentioned that both authors remember the wars in their immediate pasts: the memories of the First World War are still fresh and extremely painful for Jelena J. Dimitrijević, while Maja



Lalević Pišćević frequently remembers her former homeland of Yugoslavia with nostalgia and openly criticizes the wars that broke the country apart which to her mind were both tragic and senseless. Since they are arriving in a new world, the new setting does not directly evoke such memories, so in this sense one can see how much of a part the personal factor plays in the perception of a place. To further prove this point, it is interesting to note that both authors also invoke personal memories and associations while experiencing a sense of place. For Jelena J. Dimitrijević, these memories and associations often have little to do with either America or the author's own culture – as her main field of study prior to her journey to the West were Turkish women and the Islamic culture, there are countless examples in the text where Dimitrijević compares New York City to Constantinople (to give just a couple of examples, her first impressions of Constantinople were much more pleasing (Dimitrijević 2019: 71; 81) and the cosmopolitanism of New York City reminds her of Constantinople (Dimitrijević 2019: 114)), she frequently mentions Turkish women and Turkey as a country (again just a couple of examples: while Dimitrijević perceives American and Turkish women as different, the behaviour of an American woman while serving dinner reminds her of Turkish women (2019: 189) and the atmosphere at Hotel Rutledge at times reminds her of that in a Turkish harem (2019: 216)), and finally on a few occasions she remembers Greece, of which she has fond memories as she travelled there in the company of her late husband (Dimitrijević 2019: 66-67)). It appears that in her case scenes from Serbian life play a smaller part in her perception of the new surroundings (such associations are mainly mentioned in connection with other cities on the East Coast, once Dimitrijević has temporarily left New York City), perhaps because her mind is so full of thoughts about the topics she had studied in detail. In the case of Maja Lalević Pišćević, she frequently invokes various places of which she has fond memories, and many of them are in the former Yugoslavia. These places, again, have no direct links to the USA or the American people, but they are something that occupies the author's thoughts. Thus, for instance, when she tries to investigate the map of David Bowie's New York City (as she calls it), Lalević Pišćević experiences recollections that take the reader from the streets of Belgrade to Croatia's islands in Dalmatia to the peninsula of Istria: "... that first kiss with Bane in the park beneath the National Assembly building, waking up at dawn on a tiny sailboat somewhere among the Kornati islands, riding a motorcycle on the hard seat of Bane's BMW and my arms around his leather jacket on

the rain-laden road from Rovinj to Pula.”<sup>16</sup> (2019: 53). All it takes for this to happen is a visit to a record store (the author is aware of music having such an effect on her: “Like invisible tattoos on my soul, certain songs have the power to toss me back in time at a speed faster than any thought, never failing to place me exactly into the eye of an event that I was not aware I remembered.”<sup>17</sup> (2019: 147). Unlike Jelena J. Dimitrijević, Maja Lalević Piščević frequently mentions her home city of Belgrade; a couple of notable examples would be when, following a visit to her Iranian greengrocer in New York City, she informs the reader that she: “[I] paid and with bags in [my] hands started to walk home, down the street of Krunska, through Beogradska street, towards the street of Svetozara Markovića. Like a real New Yorker.”<sup>18</sup> (2019: 192) or when she compares a pile of odds and ends in her New York City living room with Belgrade’s Mount Avala (2019: 236). Lalević Piščević also often mentions the Adriatic coast, where she used to spend her summer holidays; at one point in the book, she compares a comforter a homeless woman is using to cover herself with the Adriatic Sea when its waters are rough (2019: 87), another homeless woman reminds her with her serenity of a person who could be sitting on a beach in Bol on the island of Brač or one in Ibiza (2019: 164) and on more than one occasion on a cold New York Day she transports herself in her mind to a beach (perhaps that same one) on the island of Brač (2019: 183; 231). On another cold day, she remembers some delicious, fundamentally Serbian food her mother would bring her from the local bakery (2019: 200). Being on top of her tall skyscraper in New York City reminds Lalević Piščević of spending time on Mount Kopaonik (2019: 233), while the Hudson River reminds her of the Sava River in Belgrade (2019: 2019).

Despite these minor differences in personal memories and associations, both authors notice great differences in the mentality of Americans and their own (Serbian) people. Dimitrijević does often mention Turkish women, but she also comments on the mentality of Serbian women saying how loud they

<sup>16</sup> “... prvi poljubac s Banetom u parku ispod Skupštine, buđenje u zoru na maloj jedrilici negde na Kornatima, vožnja motorom na tvrdom sedištu Banetovog BMW-a i moje ruke oko njegove kožne jakne na kišnom putu od Rovinja do Pule.”

<sup>17</sup> „Kao nevidljive tetovaže na mojoj duši, određene pesme imaju moć da me brzinom bržom od svake misli zavrtljaju kroz vreme i nepogrešivo spuste tačno u oko događaja koga nisam ni znala da se sećam.”

<sup>18</sup> „Platila sam i s kesama pošla kući Krunskom, preko Beogradske, ka Svetozara Markovića. Kao prava Njujorčanka.”

tend to be. In an attempt to provide witty commentary she says that she is amazed at how quiet American women are; in her opinion, had she been staying at a women-only hotel with Serbian women, she would have jumped out the window multiple times due to all the noise (Dimitrijević 2019: 349). It is interesting that Lalević Piščević makes this same observation – while having dinner with an old friend, they both notice how quiet an American family is, a family that is having dinner at a table close by, in complete silence, while staring at their phones. She draws a comparison with her family dinners, where everyone talked with everyone at the same time while passing around all the food (Lalević Piščević 2019: 57). It is interesting to mention how both authors notice how much more Serbian people eat when compared to American people (Dimitrijević 2019: 291). Both authors also notice how cold in their opinion American people are – they both mention episodes in which they were shocked at their lack of compassion. Dimitrijević recounts an episode where an American man was telling her how it was not unfortunate for a widowed single mother of six to be making only eighteen dollars a week because at least a few of her children are capable of working as well (2019: 163), while Lalević Piščević tells the readers about a destitute elderly lady who was missing one cent to buy a bottle of nail polish (2019: 24–26). The author procures this missing cent but gets scolded by the salesperson because in her opinion what she did was wrong and the elderly lady would not learn her lesson.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that had these two pieces of travel writing been novels as such, perhaps they would have contained purposefully written sections which would show how alienated the authors felt in their new surroundings. However, feelings of otherness or any kind of inadequacy are absent from the texts. The only thing that is mentioned in this context is that despite having spent a while in their new surroundings, and having made the United States their temporary home, both authors are constantly aware that they are foreigners and they stress the fact that people cannot pronounce their names correctly. For example, Dimitrijević reflects upon the facts that her female American friends call her Mrs. Dem, which she does not find strange because to her mind her name is long and “exotic”, a word she herself writes between inverted commas (2019: 291) and that her first name is spelled incorrectly on the passenger list for her way back to Europe (2019: 445). Lalević Piščević informs the reader that the people she works with, who are to a certain degree in awe of her, cannot repeat her last name and pronounce her first name incorrectly (2019: 81), and that she

always has difficulty spelling her name (which she is probably frequently asked to do), as she has never mastered the American way of spelling names (2019: 114).

#### 4. THE NEW COLOSSUS AND THE GOLDEN DOOR: THE SPIRIT OF NEW YORK CITY

As it has previously been mentioned, in his book on the sense of place, Fritz Steele also defines something that he calls the spirit of place. He writes: "... there are certain physical and social settings that are so potent that they evoke similar responses, regardless of the diversity of internal states of the responders." (Steele 1981: 13). According to Steele, this is "magic, with which certain locations seem to be endowed". (Ibid.) Examples of the spirit of place include special physical features, the spirit of the people, a spirit of mystery, city diseases of the spirit, the spirit of personal place (Steele 1981: 13). Steele also mentions a "strong location" as something that differentiates such places (Steele 1981: 53). New York City most certainly does have a strong location, first of all on the open seas – it is the first thing one sees when arriving to America by ship, as was the case with Jelena J. Dimitrijević, and it is also one of the first cities in the USA a plane will reach when flying from the East, as was the case with Maja Lalević Piščević. Steele also mentions "bigness" as a contributing factor (Steele 1981: 59), and both authors mention how mesmerised they were with New York City's skyscrapers: "... the height of these structures truly is an utter impertinence."<sup>19</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 106), then, speaking about the Woolworth building: "From the top of that building one would actually see the Old World as well if only the Earth weren't round."<sup>20</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 110); Lalević Piščević lives on the thirty-fifth floor, and she calls her building a high tower neither in Heaven nor on Earth (2019: 41; 220) referencing a Serbian folk tale translated as "The Wonderful Kiosk" ("Čardak ni na nebu ni na zemlji"). We also learn that at one point Dimitrijević can view the Metropolitan Tower from her window (Dimitrijević 2019: 215), while Lalević Piščević often mentions the Chrysler Building, and the Empire State Building a little less frequently (see, e.g. Lalević Piščević 2019: 41). In his discussion of this topic, Steele also writes: "Some large

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<sup>19</sup> "... visina ovih građevina, to je zaista jedna neverovatna drskost."

<sup>20</sup> „Sa tog vrha zaista bi se video i Stari svet kad samo zemlja ne bi bila okrugla.”

buildings, such as New York's Empire State Building (...), take on an identity that is strongly based on their scale in relation to the people using them; in fact, the intention of the builders was often to communicate the infinite smallness of humans through such settings." (1981: 59). With New York City, this was not the case, as we know from the history of the United States that New York City and its skyscrapers served to show the grandness of a new nation and the New World (of which both authors are in awe, regardless of the different period in history). According to Steele, another strong factor in experiencing a sense of place are "rich images" of the place that are present when "... the setting is rich in features that conjure up images in users' minds." (1981: 60). This could perhaps only apply to Maja Lalević Piščević, since Jelena J. Dimitrijević could certainly not have been bombarded on a daily basis by images of New York City which have become an integral piece of a common, worldwide popular culture. This would also, in the case of Lalević Piščević, imply that Maja experienced "instant recognition" (Steele 1981: 149) and in this sense it would be irrelevant whether she had seen New York City for the very first time – this was the first time it would become a temporary home.

With regards to Fritz Steele's examples of experiencing a spirit of place, in the case of the two travel books discussed in this paper, one might talk about special physical features, as New York City is nothing like the home city of the authors in question (The City of Belgrade a century apart). We have already mentioned the "bigness" or better yet grandness of the city and its infrastructure, and that both authors notice the tall buildings which have become The City's symbols (at one point Lalević Piščević calls the Chrysler Building "the steele metaphor of New York"<sup>21</sup> (2019: 41)). A perhaps less expected aspect that both authors mention are the weather conditions which are drastically different from those in their home country of Serbia. Inclement weather is not something a typical tourist would think about, as tourists are usually able to choose the time of year when they go to visit a certain place. However, since they spend a while there, both authors experience the less than favourable weather conditions that New York City has to offer. Jelena J. Dimitrijević, the world traveller that she was, compared the weather in The City to that in some European locations: "... the winter weather in New York is not the same as the one in Paris or London. The winter weather in New York is freezing cold. And those icy

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<sup>21</sup> „čelična metafora Njujorka”

New York winds, do they blow!”<sup>22</sup> (2019: 212). In fact, she found the New York weather so fascinating that she dedicated two entire chapters to it: chapter 16 titled “The Winds of New York” (“Njujorški vetrovi” 2019: 228–231) and chapter 17 titled “The Snowfalls of New York” (“Njujorški snegovi” 2019: 232–242). Lalević Piščević has a similar experience, but she describes both the cold and the heat: while waiting for a cab her cheeks are “stung by an icy wind”<sup>23</sup> (2019: 20) and the heat in the city is “a new kind of heat”<sup>24</sup> (2019: 94), different from the one in Belgrade. She also dedicates some of her writing to New York’s weather, for example in the chapter titled “Feeling the Weather in New York” (“Osećaj vremena u Njujorku” 2019: 93-96) where she describes the city’s unbearable heat or the one titled “A Winter Fairytale” (“Zimska bajka” 2019: 153–156) in which she describes the city’s winter or the one titled “The Day the North Wind Blew” (“Dan kada je duvao severac” 2019: 183-185) about the city’s wind. It is interesting to note that both authors describe the female experience of being carried by the strong New York wind; Dimitrijević describes other women she sees: “Lo, they walk and they stop, and then they walk again, but backwards! Some are huddled next to a building’s wall neither taking a step forwards nor backwards. Lo, that one is carried by the wind, that other one is knocked down by it!”<sup>25</sup> (2019: 229) while Lalević Piščević describes her own experience “... the icy wind changes direction at every corner. You never know where it is going to hit you from. I am keeping my balance on the sidewalk trying to walk a straight line.”<sup>26</sup> (2019: 183). Dimitrijević’s claim that “You need to spend a winter in New York in order to know what wind is.”<sup>27</sup> (2019: 228) seems to ring true to this day.

The spirit of the people also plays a significant role in the two authors’ experiences of New York City. In this sense, both authors notice the very specific mixture of cultures in New York City, or what we would today call its melting pot. Jelena J. Dimitrijević passes on certain facts that she heard at a

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<sup>22</sup> “... njujorško zimnje vreme nije što parisko i londonsko. Njujorško zimnje vreme je ledeno hladno. Pa kad duhnu njujorški ledeni vetrovi!”

<sup>23</sup> „peče ledeni vetar”

<sup>24</sup> „neka nova vrsta vrućine”

<sup>25</sup> „Gle, pođu pa stanu, i opet pođu, ali natraške! Neke se pribile uza zid neke zgrade pa ni koraka ni napred ni nazad. Gle, ovu ponese vetar, onu obori!”

<sup>26</sup> „... ledeni vetar na svakom ćošku menja pravac. Nikad ne znaš odakle će te udariti. Balansiram na trotoaru pokušavajući da zadržim pravac.”

<sup>27</sup> „Ko nije proveo zimu u Njujorku, taj ne zna šta je vetar.”

public lecture: “New York is overflowing with foreigners. New York belongs to foreigners more than it does to us. In New York there are more Germans than in Potsdam, more Italians than in Padua, more Jews than in Warsaw. Of the upwards of seven milion inhabitants – more than four million, or – seventy-six percent were not born here. In the largest city in America there is barely twenty-four percent of American-born residents.”<sup>28</sup> (2019: 176). Lalević Piščević provides the reader with her own impression: “And when I look up, I am surrounded by New York at its best. Side by side there stand an Indian and a Native American, a cowboy and a writer, a hippie and a lady cook, a poet addict and an adult actress, an astronaut and a night watchman, a heart surgeon, a street drummer and an acrobat, a Russian emigrant and an English spy.”<sup>29</sup> (2019: 30).

Going further through Fritz Steele’s list, although we would not call it a spirit of mystery, which was the term he used, both authors do notice a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* about New York City. When Jelena J. Dimitrijević first arrives in New York City, she uses the words “strange” and “unusual” to describe it: “Everything is strange. It is unusual.”<sup>30</sup> (2019: 71). Further in the text, she reiterates this stand, saying that her first impressions are “not unpleasant, though they are unusual”<sup>31</sup> (2019: 88), using the word “unusual” again. We have already mentioned the quote where she calls the city “quaint” and “original.”<sup>32</sup> (2019: 93), so this choice of words was obviously not random.

Finally, both authors do experience a personal connection with New York City. At times, The City personifies a lover: “Let’s get one thing clear, our relationship resembled a melodramatic love affair from the get-go. I have lost count of the times we broke up as terrible things were said and

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<sup>28</sup> „Njujork je prepun stranaca. Njujork je više stranački nego naš. U Njujorku je Nemaca više nego u Potsdamu, Italijana više nego u Padovi, Jevreja više nego u Varšavi. Od preko sedam miliona stanovnika – više od četiri miliona, ili – sedamdeset šest odsto je inorodaca. U najvećem američkom gradu jedva je dvadeset četiri odsto rođenih Amerikanaca.”

<sup>29</sup> „A kad dignem pogled, oko sebe vidim Njujork u najboljem izdanju. Jedni pored drugih tiskaju se Indijac i Indijanac, kauboj i pisac, hipik i kuvarica, pesnik zavisnik i porno glumica, astronaut i noćni čuvar, kardiohirurg, ulični bubnjar i akrobata, ruski emigrant i engleski špijun.”

<sup>30</sup> „Sve je čudno. Neobično je.”

<sup>31</sup> „nisu neprijatni, mada su neobični”

<sup>32</sup> „Da, Njujork nije lep, ali je čudnovat. Originalan je.”

angry glares were shared, only to come running back into each others arms only a few days later.”<sup>33</sup> (Lalević Piščević 2019: 193) and:

Of course there were bad days as well, when it [New York] would refuse to look at me, let alone listen to what I had to say. It would turn its head in an arrogant manner, as if it bluntly wanted to let me know that it did not need me and that it had countles others like me who wandered its streets intoxicated by the smell of trash and expensive fragrances. Nevertheless, I never stopped believing, and I do to this day (even in moments of anger towards it), that there was this part of itself that it had been keeping for me alone and that it had been waiting for me to come.”<sup>34</sup> (Lalević Piščević 2019: 193)

Naturally, as it was written at a different time, Jelena J. Dimitrijević's piece does not contain such examples. However forward-looking she may have been, a serious woman of her standing, and a war widow at that as well, would not have written about a city as being or becoming her lover. Nevertheless, what both authors do have in common is a sense that The City is personally saying goodbye to them. For Jelena J. Dimitrijević, it is personified by the Statue of Liberty. She informs the reader that she told no one when she was leaving, so no one had come to see her off; but: “Still, somebody did see me off. Liberty. She was trailing the *Olympic* in her salt-water sandals. The Statue of Liberty disappeared on the horizon together with its islet at the same time New York did with its skyscrapers.”<sup>35</sup> (2019: 445). For Maja Lalević Piščević, The City is personified by her beloved Chrysler Building which is the last thing she casts her eyes upon before leaving for the last time. She writes: “I push my suitcases into the hallway, and from the door I turn to have one last look at the Chrysler Building.”<sup>36</sup> (2019: 223) and “From the walls I lowered my gaze towards the window through which I could see the magnificent East River with the fancy Chrysler Building somewhere half

<sup>33</sup> „Da se razumemo, od početka je naš odnos podsećao na neku melodramatičnu ljubavnu aferu. Ne mogu više da se setim koliko smo puta raskidali uz teške reči i besne poglede, da bi se posle nekoliko dana ponovo bacali jedno drugom u zagrljaj.”

<sup>34</sup> „Bilo je naravno i loših dana, kad je odbijao da me pogleda, a kamoli čuje. Arogantno je okretao glavu, kao da je baš hteo da mi stavi do znanja da mu nisam potrebna i da on ima bezbroj takvih kao što sam ja koje skitaju njegovim ulicama omamljene mirisom dubreta i skupih parfema. Ipak, sve vreme sam verovala, a verujem i danas (čak i onda kad sam na njega ljuta), da postoji jedan njegov deo koji je čuvao samo za mene i čekao me da dodem.”

<sup>35</sup> „Pa ipak me neko isprati. Sloboda. Za *Olimpikom* – Sloboda je išla u svojim sandalama za vodu. Statua slobode iščeze sa svojim ostrvcem u isto vreme kad je iščezao i Njujork sa svojim oblakoderima.”

<sup>36</sup> „Guram kofere u hodnik, s vrata se okrećem da još jednom pogledam Krajzler.”



way. With my eyes I grabbed its silver cap and held on to it for a while as if it were a life vest. It's a good thing that it's still where it's supposed to be, I thought with gratitude. A person has to grab onto something to bridge the gap between two lives."<sup>37</sup> (2019: 239). And this is not where this kind of personal relationship ends; this personal connection that both authors' feel with The City will be dwelt upon a bit further in the last section of this paper.

The presented examples from the two travel books that describe New York City have shown without a doubt that this place has a certain inexplicable charm that few cities in the world can boast. It indisputably has its own spirit and probably holds first place when it comes to the multitudes of its admirers. Perhaps some of this charm can be traced back to the original role this city played in the New World, unforgettably depicted in Emma Lazarus' (1849–1887) poem titled "The New Colossus" (originally published in 1883 to raise money for the construction of the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty<sup>38</sup>). In this poem, Lazarus describes "A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name / Mother of Exiles." and this woman lifts her lamp "beside the golden door". Although neither of the authors were exiled, and they did not need a golden door as such, New York City provided them with a refuge and a golden door for creating treasured memories which they both bequeathed to generations to come.

## 5. CONCLUSION: LEAVING ONE'S MARK ON THE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

According to Fritz Steele, writers have a special connection with a place if they choose to write about it. In his words, these works "... often come alive in a way that unrooted pieces do not." (Steele 1981: 106). The writing process also provides a benefit, an indirect one, as "The writer is bound to learn about settings and individual place experiences in the process of trying to produce a creative work." (*Ibid.*). As both female authors discussed in this paper were trying to communicate the process of experiencing New York

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<sup>37</sup> „Sa zidova pogled mi je skliznuo ka prozoru kroz koji je pucao prizor Ist rivera s otmenim Krajzlerom negde na pola puta. Pogledom sam zgrabila njegovu srebrnu kapu i držala se za nju neko vreme kao za pojas. Sreća da je bar on još uvek na svom mestu, pomislila sam sa zahvalnošću. Mora čovek za nešto da se pridrži u raskoraku između dva života.”

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus> [accessed 31 October 2021]

City to their readers, it is obvious how this might have had an impact on their sense of place. Furthermore, both authors are in certain ways exposed to what Steele calls a “micro-world experience”, which according to him “means coming to know a limited setting in great depth” and “... includes both knowing a setting in many intimate ways and coming to know oneself better in relation to that setting.” (Steele 1981: 114). Both authors stayed in the same neighbourhood long enough for this process to have taken place (it is also very interesting to note that both authors seem to have lived in the same neighbourhood). While reading their respective travel pieces, after a while it becomes obvious that both authors left a little bit of themselves on New York’s streets and in the New York air and that The City became their partner and their friend. The authors’ own words corroborate this:

With places it’s the same as with people. Some you like immediately, you are even delighted by some, while some you simply find repellent. It’s the same with places. When I spotted New York from the ship, I was surprised, taken aback, but I was not amazed by it; and then, little by little, I even came to love it, perhaps it took me a while to get accustomed to it, its unusual physiognomy; (...) Does this depend on us as persons, that is on the personal mood we were in when we met with a person for the first time or arrived in a new place?<sup>39</sup> (Dimitrijević 2019: 428)

It is interesting to notice how in this excerpt the author’s words echo those of Fritz Steele, who noticed, among other things, that: “... settings and people mix in different ways, with different (and sometimes unpredictable) results.” (Steele 1981: 12). Maja Lalević Piščević has similar observations almost a century later: “This is how New York imprints itself in me, and when those points come together, they become a map. (...) Because places are people, and people are places.”<sup>40</sup> (2019: 112) and also:

However, since I arrived here I’ve discovered that Bluetooth does not apply to people only. For example, I have recently come to the opinion that I am on Bluetooth with New York as well. We have said all kinds of things to one another in this past year, and things have not always been great between us. New York knows certain things about me that I have not told anyone, but I know a few of its secret passages as well.

<sup>39</sup> I s mestima je kao s ljudima. Neki vam se odmah sviđi, neki vas čak očara, dok vas neki prosto odbije. Tako i mesta. Kad ugledah Njujork s broda, ja se iznenadih, začudih, ali se njim ne ushitih; pa, malo-pomalo, ja ga čak zavoleh, može biti dok se na njega, na njegovu čudnu fizionomiju navikoh; (...) Da li ovo zavisi od nas samih, to jest od našeg ličnog raspoloženja koje je nama vladalo u momentu kad smo se s nekom osobom prvi put sreli ili u neko novo mesto došli?

<sup>40</sup> „... Tako Njujork utiskuje svoj otisak u meni, a one tačke kad se spoje postaju mapa. (...) Jer mesta su ljudi, a ljudi su mesta.”

Perhaps we do make a good couple, we're both a little old, but on the tough side, we are not giving up although we have been through many storms.<sup>41</sup> (2019: 215)

It is obvious that both authors have come to regard New York City as almost a human entity – Dimitrijević talks of its “physionomy” while Lalević Piščević regards herself and the city as a “couple”. This last allusion, and a female’s genuine love for the city is a common trope in contemporary popular culture, but it is quite interesting to see it in what is supposed to be a type of travel piece or a series of travel- or culture-related columns. This would be another example of both authors’ prose coming on a par with novelistic writing.

One critic noticed that in the travel writing of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, there is an intertwining of “topoi of the self and the other”<sup>42</sup> and that when the author is physically present in a place but in their mind replaces it with an imaginary topos of the familiar and when one’s own is predominant “... an impression is created that both the other and the different serves the writer as a sort of mirror.”<sup>43</sup> (Пековић 2006: 59). According to this same critic, this is another aspect which, when it comes to the opus of Jelena J. Dimitrijević, brings together to a significant extent novelistic and travel writing (*Ibid.*). Although no articles have yet been published about *Over There Is Here*, the same could be said for Maja Lalević Piščević. Many instances in her prose remind one of a novel, a good one that draws the reader in with its mesmerising depictions of a magical place far, far away. And even in those texts where the place is not so magical, the sad stories make one thankful for being where we are at the present moment.

Finally, let us answer the primary question that we posed at the beginning of this great journey through the enthralling worlds of Jelena J. Dimitrijević and Maja Lalević Piščević: Is there only one, or are there many New York Cities, each of them given a new coat of paint through the lens of the observer? Our answer would be both *yes* and *no* – we have seen that New York City, as a city and as a place, definitely does possess what Fritz Steele would call a spirit of place. In this sense, it would only be fair to say

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<sup>41</sup> Međutim, otkad sam došla ovde otkrila sam da blutut ne važi samo za ljude. Recimo, od pre nekog vremena mislim da sam i s Njujorkom na blututu. Svašta smo jedno drugom rekli za ovih godinu dana i nije nam odnos uvek bio med i mleko. Njujork zna o meni neke stvari koje nikom nisam rekla, ali znam i ja pokoji njegov tajni prolaz. Možda i nismo loš par, oboje malo vremešni, ali žilavi, ne damo se iako su nas već svakakvi vetrovi produvali.

<sup>42</sup> „топоси својег и туђег”

<sup>43</sup> „... ствара утисак да списатељки и друго и различито служи као нека врста огледала.”

that there is one New York City – a special place with a one-of-a-kind spirit. On the other hand, as the numerous excerpts from the two travel books have shown, this city has many different faces and many different manifestations which depend on the authors' (or observers') moods, pasts, emotions, frames of mind, world views, etc. The two authors managed to convey these different images to the reader in a very skillful manner. After having read the two works, one is left with a feeling that one has experienced their own sense of place, including a journey back in time and a voyage across the ocean. The two travel pieces provide those who have not seen New York City with two unique views of this amazing locus, while giving those who have had the privilege of visiting it a chance to experience it once again, embarking on a journey with their mind's eye. Above all, the two travel pieces are songs of love, odes to what appears to be one of the most beloved cities on Earth.

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#### ОДЕ ЊУЈОРК СИТИЈУ – ДВЕ АУТОРКЕ ИЗ СРБИЈЕ И ДВА ПОТРЕТА КОЈЕ ДЕЛИ ЈЕДАН ВЕК

**Резиме:** Пре неких осамдесетак година, Ајн Ранд је написала: „Дао бих најлепши залазак сунца на свету за један поглед на панораму Њујорка.” (Rend 2016: 378). Неколико година касније, Симон де Бовоар је написала познате речи: „... има нечега у њујоршком ваздуху што спавање чини бескорисним; можда је разлог томе што ти срце јаче куца ту него другде...”<sup>44</sup> (1999: 18). До дана данашњег, Њујорк Сити ништа мање не опчињава како Американце тако и стране држављане. Али какву врсту културног простора ствара тај град, и какво је то место? Да ли постоји само један, или има много градова који се зову Њујорк, и сваки изгледа другачије јер је производ новог пара очију? У овом раду бавићемо се јединственим погледом на ово изванредно место, онако како су га виделе две ауторке из Србије које су писале о њему као посетитељке из иностранства са временским размаком од готово једног века. Користећи дефиницију осећаја места коју је установио Фриц Стил (1981), испитиваћемо дела *Нови свет или у Америци јодину дана* (2019) Јелене Ј. Димитријевић и *Тамо је овде* Маје Лалевић Пишчевић (2019) кроз темељну контрастивну анализу, фокусирајући се на однос између друштвеног и физичког окружења и узимајући у обзир разлике између српске и америчке културе. Оба дела написана су документарним стилем и оба је објавила иста издавачка кућа из Београда 2019. године. *Нови свет или у Америци јодину дана* чини серијал путописних есеја написаних током 1919/1920. године, док *Тамо је овде* представља збирку колумни написаних за српски „Недељник” током 2016/2017. Две генијалне и продуховљене ауторке ће нас кроз своје детаљне описе и утиске довести до занимљивих закључака у вези са тиме како се доживљај одређених

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<sup>44</sup> Превод ауторке рада.

слика и сигнала, призора и звукова, обликује у врло личне, али сродне погледе на Њујорк Сити и његов културни простор дате кроз призму две Српкиње.

**Кључне речи:** осећај места, културни простор, Њујорк Сити, Јелена Ј. Димитријевић, Маја Лалевић Пишчевић