

That Alluring Land (Tá zem vábna) Which They Both Have Never Seen: Imaging and Imagining America in the Words of Timrava and Virginia Woolf

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Abstract:

Božena Slančíková "Timrava" (1867-1951) and her British contemporary Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) wrote scathingly about America without having visited the place. Timrava's 1907 short story "That Alluring Land" ("Tá zem vábna") and Woolf's 1938 essay "America, which I have never seen" expose the workings of the "technology of place". The term "technology", which means "coming to presence" and "concealing" in Martin Heidegger's sense, is appropriated as part of this paper's proposition that the America imaged and imagined by both writers is a result of negotiations between the "concrete place" of the senses, both writers' socio-cultural constructs, and the "abstract place" of the imagination.

The myth of America as the promised land of freedom and opportunity, a melting pot of gold, has been prevalent in the collective consciousness since the Age of Discovery, or around the fifteenth to seventeenth century, until the present day. The Turn of the Century (1890-1914), which culminated in Antonín Dvořák's "New

World Symphony", ushered in a sense of optimism and utopian exaltation in America's industrial and technological progress. Unlike the case of Dvořák who composed his masterpiece in 1893 during his actual visit to his "new world", America is featured in the works of those who have not even touched its soil. The Slovak writer

Božena Slančíková (1867-1951), known by her nom de plume "Timrava", and her British contemporary Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) wrote scathingly about America without having visited the place. I propose in this paper that Timrava's short story *That Alluring Land* (*Tá zem vábna*), which appeared in 1907, and Woolf's short essay *America, which I have never seen*, published in 1938, expose the workings of what I term "technology of place". The word "technology", which means both a finished product and an ongoing production process, a mode of both "coming to presence" and "concealing" in Martin Heidegger's sense, is used as part of this paper's proposition that America in the works of Timrava and Woolf is a result of constant negotiations between the "concrete place" of the senses—both writers' socio-cultural constructs; and the "abstract place" of the imagination—both writers' dreams and visions of the "alluring" unknown.

I wish to demonstrate in my paper how words shape and complement images and how images shape and complement words. I argue that the intertwined connection and rich interaction between "words" and "images", or between textual and visual culture, can be seen reflected in my analysis of "technology of place" in Woolf and Timrava's (re-) creation of words on and images of the America they have not seen or visited. In the case of Timrava, as I shall illustrate, her textual representation of America can be said to be shaped and stimulated by the reality of her time, namely, that of the early twentieth-century Slovak emigration to and migration in America,

as well as the effects of remigration on the lives of the people living in small villages in Slovakia. In the case of Virginia Woolf, as I shall illustrate, her textual representation of America, as well as the accompanying illustration by the American artist C. Peter Helck (1893-1988) of Woolf's article in *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan* (1938) which is based on her words and which is also transgressed by her words, can be said to be shaped and stimulated by the alternative reality Woolf had wished upon her world. For Woolf, America stands as a symbol of an alternative space where women writers come to forge an alternative voice or even a new language which can liberate them from the confines of dominant male writers' vocabulary and patriarchal mindset. America, for Woolf, is also an alternative place for a new world order, where Britain's socio-cultural, economic and political supremacy as well as hegemonic claims after the First World War are put into question.

Before analysing the chosen literary texts, I shall begin by briefly explaining Heidegger's concept of "technology" in my "technology of place" theoretical framework. Often read and regarded as an anti-technology and anti-modernism statement, Heidegger's essay entitled *The Question Concerning Technology* (*Die Frage nach der Technik*), first published in 1954, nevertheless can be said to suggest that technology's deconstructive tendency can lead to the questioning of preconceived notions and values. According to Heidegger, much as the use of modern technology

can dangerously reduce humans to "Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge", or "functionaries of enframing" driven only by the desire to get the most out of their resources without thinking, technology can also manifest itself as a "saving grace" in that, particularly when certain technological devices break down, humans can be moved to question their "illusions of power" over natural resources, or "standing-reserve", and also contemplate upon what it means to "be" in the world as Daseins. Quoting the lines of the German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin: "But where danger is, grows/ The saving power also" (1977, p. 28), Heidegger asserts:

If the essence of technology, Enframing, is the extreme danger, and if there is truth in Hölderlin's words, then the rule of Enframing cannot exhaust itself solely in blocking all lighting-up of every revealing, all appearing of truth. Rather precisely the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power (1977, p. 28).

"Technology of place" is therefore a mode of constructing a myth or an understanding of place, "enframing" or "setting" the mind in ways that lead it to subscribe to or propagate the "imaged", or represented, as well as "imagined", or (re)invented, place. At the same time, however, "technology of place" can also be a mode of questioning and reading below that spatial construction.

In light of my concept of "technology of place" as a mode of constructing and deconstructing one's understanding of oneself and one's place, I shall begin this paper's textual analysis by offering an overview of Timrava and her works.

Božena Slančíková "Timrava" was born in 1867 to a family of a Lutheran pastor in a small village called Polichno, Banská Bystrica Region, Slovakia. She was the author of many works which depict village life, notably exploring the relationships between landowners and peasants, between the burgeoning middle class and the working class, and between men and women in the advent of modernization. The most famous among her short stories is *The Ťapák Clan (Ťapákovci)*, published in 1914. *The Ťapák Clan* is a story of a family trapped within a traditional and conservative way of life, stubbornly refusing to adapt to new changing conditions of society. The large Ťapák family lives together in one house:

Four brothers with their wives and children—the fifth brother, Mišo, the youngest, was still a bachelor. There was one daughter, Anča, thirty years old and an old maid because she was crippled... The whole Ťapák family lived together in one house. When they all got together, there was scarcely room on the benches (Timrava, 1992, p. 171).

The family's cramped and suffocating house serves as a metaphor of the family's narrow-mindedness which resists any form of change. Only Il'a, the wife of the eldest brother in the family, ventures to go against the patriarchal regime and the family custom of complacency by imagining an "abstract place" of healthier living and by suggesting that they expand the "concrete place" of their family house. Only Il'a dares to speak up and urge the family to embrace a more informed and "modernized" outlook and lifestyle.

Her "modern" opinion, of course, comes with a price. The family bestows upon her an insulting nickname "Queenie" and mocks her for her different views:

[N]one of them [the other members of the Ľapák family] liked Iľa; she felt she was too good for anyone else because she was in the community service. She was the village midwife! Since taking a course in Rimavská Sobota for two months, she had put on airs as if she no longer belonged to a peasant's family, but to a gentleman's. Now nothing and no one in the Ľapák house pleased her. She lectured them, bossed them, and tried to destroy all the old customs rooted for ages in their household. (ibid., p. 172)

Though Iľa, not without pain, successfully persuades her husband Paľo to physically remove themselves from the overcrowded "concrete place" of the Ľapák family house as well as mentally relocate themselves to a new "abstract place" of a more promising future, Timrava depicts how the rest of the obstinate Ľapák clan returns to their sense of complacency by making fun of the changes which Iľa and her husband have embraced at the end of the story:

The third brother made a small joke, leaning against the corner of the old house: "Well, well, what a yellow castle our Queenie's built—I'd be embarrassed to live in it."

"Oh, we can build one like that too," said the mistress Zuzka disparagingly, "when Mišo comes home from the army."

Everyone felt pleased with himself. (ibid., p. 212)

Timrava's endeavour to capture and portray the reality of the lives of

the people living in small villages in Slovakia is revolutionary. The tragic and, at the same time, satirical ending of *The Ľapák Clan* demonstrates her modernist transgressive tendency to put into question and revise the "old" traditional ways of thinking and writing whilst remaining within and utilizing the discursive tools of the very social system she criticizes in her works. Therefore, it can be said that her oeuvre goes beyond folk narratives, bordering between the trope of realism and the trope of modernism.

America, for Timrava, is an imagined land. However, it is nevertheless constructed upon the "concrete place" of the grim reality of political oppression of her time: the Magyarization Policy and the formation of an independent Czechoslovakia. Poverty, forced denationalization and socio-economic inequality prompted a vast amount of labour migration. Signs of social unrest can still be seen in post-independence Czechoslovakia from the year 1918 onwards:

The country itself was threatened by an invasion of Slovakia by Hungary and by the short-lived proclamation of an independent Slovak Soviet Republic. The Sudeten German minority refused allegiance to the new Republic and sought a solution of its grievances in an alignment with Austria. Finances were in chaos, due to the enormously inflated old Austrian crown. The war had all but derailed the economy; coal production had dropped drastically, and transportation was in disarray. Lack of food aggravated social unrest, and the working class, suffering most, was

radicalized by Communist agitation. Peasants were hungry for land. Strikes spread like wildfire, and attempts to seize land erupted around the country. (Korbel, 1997, p. 43)

That Alluring Land (Tá zem vábna) was published in 1907, the year when the Hungarian Apponyi Laws were drafted and passed, granting the government official rights to turn all Slovak elementary schools into Hungarian and decree that the Slovak language was only to be taught one hour per week as a foreign language. The impact of the Hungarian aggressive acculturation regime on Slovak education, for example, was tremendous:

[A]ll teachers, whether in state or church schools, were to educate their pupils to love the Magyar Nation and the Hungarian State. The state was authorized to change even Slovak church schools to Magyar schools if they included a minority of Magyar pupils. Teachers who neglected to teach the Magyar language could be summarily dismissed, and for the same cause the state had the right to close down a school entirely. The school became the most potent weapons of denationalization. (Lettrich, 1955, pp. 36-37)

Timrava's story is about a 26-year-old young man named Jano Fazul'a who belongs to a peasant family. Jano is worried about his father, who is dying. He has also been feeling frustrated about his wife, whom he does not love but was arranged by his mother to marry. The family has just bought new land next to the family's farm, for which Jano needs to pay and clear his debt. Jano wishes to go to America to earn enough money to

pay for his newly acquired land: "So that alluring land crept into Jano's thoughts again, the New World across the ocean, which gave a man everything good, and which could ease from his shoulders the pressing debt" (Timrava, 1992, p. 109). He also wishes to go to America in order to escape from his domineering mother as well as his "mundane" and frustrated life in his small village:

The closer he got to the house, the more despairing he felt and the more he yearned to go to that land for which Prívoda [Jano's friend] had again fanned his love. The golden threads stretching from America and pulling him to herself grew stouter. That land over there could not only ease the debt off his shoulders, but also take away this burden he was always carrying in his heart. He didn't know if otherwise he could ever throw it off. (Timrava, 1992, p. 122)

Upon hearing about his son's fervent desire to leave home, Jano's mother complains:

"How could you go off to America? How could I let you? Your father's ill—he won't last till spring, so what will become of us, and of the farm? Why did we buy the new field if you're going to leave? America is across the ocean, you can get sick there, you can die there, my son! Two years! By that time I'll lay my old bones down, too, if you leave!" (ibid., p. 106)

While Jano is still deciding whether to leave or not to leave his home, he is persuaded by his friends who are also planning to go and work in America to pay off their debts. He and his friends, who usually drink at the local pub and talk about "that alluring land"

called America, are ironically and scathingly referred to by the locals as "the Americans". The village's other young men, who do not have the means or luxury to leave their homes, also join "the Americans" in the collective dreaming and imagining of the land they have never seen:

Then, while they drank, they talked about that wondrous land across the ocean which provided mankind with such blessings. It had four harvests a year with no taxes, and money fell everywhere like dust. That land glittered magically before their eyes. It was covered by luxuriant ears of grain strewn with the dollars that rained down abundantly upon the working man and jingled together like music. (ibid., p. 117)

This collective image of America as a land of milk and honey, a land of abundance, is described through the words they know, through farming imagery of crops and harvests. This extract therefore demonstrates how the "technology" of place-making is based on or "enframed", to appropriate Heidegger's term, within the context of the dreamer or the imaginer in the same way that it "enframes" or propels the dreamer or the imaginer to propagate the myth of place in his/her mindset. Here, Jano and his friends are all peasants trying to conjure up the image of America as utopia and cornucopia. This image of America as a Slovak farmer's El Dorado is also reinforced by the image of America as a land of justice and freedom:

"Over there it's not like it is here, where nothing happens to a thief. Here

you catch him, like I caught Vyšovan when he stole my sausages, and nothing happened to him because I didn't have a witness. In America, brother, if you take even one broken needle, you'll be hanged at once!" Here he looked at Paľo Prívoda. "That's what I heard." (ibid., pp. 118-19)

It is interesting to note how the word "here" is starkly contrasted with "there". Compared with the laws in Jano's village, where people can get away with petty theft, the laws in America are thought or imagined to be stricter—a guarantee of a better life. However, the hopeful voices of aspiring young men who dream their collective dreams of America are nevertheless cracked and broken by some comments which have the potential to expose and challenge the fabricated myth of America in these villagers' minds:

"But really, men, the laws about women are strict there." Jano Krajec was a young man whose appearance and speech were so proper that he had just been elected as sacristan for the new year. "Men can't even stand and joke with a woman, or play a little, or even wink at her—to jail at once! He looked toward the smiling, handsome face of Prívoda, observing it sadly, since people said Prívoda was a passionate admirer of women.

"Oh, no!" The young men groaned at the speech of Jano Krajec.

"Excuse me, but none of this is true." Prívoda still spoke coolly.

"Just nonsense! Don't worry, Janko Fazula."

"No getting drunk there, either. Imagine! My father-in-law said they

take drunks to jail at once," said Paľo Ambriš from the upper village.

"Now what kind of freedom is that?" Jano Guška, despite his abruptness and contrariness, always wanted another glass (*ibid.*, p. 119).

As Jano Guška has questioned, "what kind of freedom is that?" (*ibid.*, p. 119) when there are so many restrictions. Freedom, of course, comes with a price. Tímrava plants such witty dissonance in her text so as to induce her readers to be sceptical of her characters' myth of America.

To Jano Fazula's delight, his mother comes to believe all the rumours about "that alluring" land which she has never seen and finally agrees to let him go and work in America. After Jano and his friends leave their hometown, a letter from Jano reaches Slovakia. It reads:

"Here it's not like people at home said it would be. Just don't believe it's so good. It's very difficult here, very hard. True, we get three dollars a day, but we work by the open furnace where the iron ore is melted. Just the two of us—old Ďuro Ťankel' didn't last there even two days and had to quit. Now he's working by the train hauling coal in a wheelbarrow for the engine. He said he's going home as soon as he gets enough money for the ticket. Srnec went down into the mine because he didn't last by the furnace either. We work in leather gloves so the flames won't burn our hands, and we have glasses over our eyes." (*ibid.*, p.129)

The image of America as a land "covered by luxuriant ears of grain strewn with the dollars that rained down abundantly upon the working man

and jingled together like music" (1992, p. 117) is shattered by the "concrete" reality of industrial America, or the reality of coals, hot furnaces and hard labour. The ending of the short story is tragic in that Tímrava demonstrates, with wry humour, how people tend to hold on to the myths and images they only want to see and believe in. The myth of America as "that" alluring land superior in every way to "this" alluring land of one's own "concrete place" of home or homeland, of one's reality of the here and now, will still be propagated as truth when people believe in it without questioning:

When this information [in Jano's letter] reached Jano Hložo, he went to visit the Bubučka family next door to the Fazula house. He enjoyed making up stories and upsetting people with them whenever he could.

There he said, "Did you hear the latest? In Libová someone just came back from America. He said Jano Fazula fell into the boiler where they melt the asphalt. Ah, that's the truth! Old Ondro Mihal'ko was in the city yesterday, and he heard about it from the Libová men who were sawing wood at Koň's place."

"Oh-h-h!" Bubučka was so shocked she almost fainted.

In an hour, the story had spread around the whole village that Jano Fazula had fallen into the boiler and was cooked to pieces. Only a few bones remained of him. Vrabelčička [Jano's mother], when they had revived her from her faint, grabbed a scarf for her head. She ran out just the way she was, greasy from cooking. Weeping aloud, she ran all the way to Libová to ask that

American if it was really true about Janko. (ibid., p. 129)

The haunting, vivid image of Jano's mother weeping and rushing out of her house in panic serves as a reminder of the destructive outcome of one's unscrupulous subscription to the myth of an imagined place.

Timrava, who grew up and lived in an isolated village, has long been regarded as a folk writer whose genius and theme of writing transcend her village ways of life, resisting the patriotic trend of writing prevalent in her time. Four years before Timrava's birth, the Matica Slovenská, Slovakia's prominent cultural and scientific institution whose objectives were "to foster Slovak education, to encourage literature and the arts, and to improve the material welfare of the nation" (Lettrich, 1955, p. 34), was established in the city of Martin on 4 August 1863:

And when the Matica Slovenská constitution of 21 August 1862 had been approved, the first general assembly took place almost a year later, on 4 August, in Martin. The assembly, attended by around 5,000 people, was the largest in the history of events in Slovakia in that time. It was an exceedingly solemn incident that might have impressed even the biggest sceptics. On this occasion, there was no shortage of false expression of sympathy towards the Slovaks artfully and calculatingly dispatched from the Emperor. (Mráz, 1963, p. 39)¹

Timrava's father, Lutheran priest Pavel Slančík (1833-1906), was one of the institution's co-founders:

In addition to the primary school in his

hometown, he [Pavel Slančík] studied in Ožďany, Kežmarok and Banská Štiavnica, from where he graduated. He went on to study theology in Bratislava. Then, in 1857, he went to Halle. He married, at the age of 28, 16-year-old Eva Mária Honétzy (1847-1923), who was daughter of the pastor of Kyjatice in Gemer. The marriage produced 11 children. Among whom that survived to adulthood were Pavel, Irena, Božena and Bohuslav (who were identical twins), Izabela and Mária... In 1863, Pavel Slančík co-founded the Matica Slovenská in Martin. (Obecný úrad Polichno, 2011)²

However, unlike the works of Slovak nationalist writers, most notably the poet laureate Pavol Hviezdoslav (1849-1921) and Martin Kukučín (1860-1928), Timrava's works deal with simple plots. Her emphasis is on the character's interior conflict, or "landscape of the mind", rather than on a didactic and propagandist agenda, which was the trend of her time. In 1907, in the same year that *That Alluring Land* appeared in print, Kukučín published a play entitled *Komasácia: Obraz zo slovenskej dediny v štyroch dejstvách* (*Land Consolidation: Image from a Slovak Village in Four Acts*), which was Slovakia's earliest realist play. Kukučín's prioritization and promotion of the political message of land protection and consolidation through flat and almost "lifeless" characters serves as a stark contrast to Timrava's prioritization of in-depth exploration of her fictional characters. The issues of labour migration and of land acquisition in Timrava's short story are explored on a more personal level and through the

point of views of the neglected "other", or the men and women who are left by the exodus heroes to carry on with their lives and who are also the culprits in propagating the myth of imagined place, unconsciously sustaining the inequality embedded within the social class and economic system: "When even the rich are going off to America, what can poor people like us expect?" (Timrava, 1992, p. 123).

I thus agree with Norma Rudinsky, who aptly points out that Timrava's short story "presents immigration as emigration" (1992, p. xiii). I also wish to propose that Timrava not only portrays the conditions of early twentieth-century Slovak emigration to and migration in America, but also offers insights into the effects of remigration. The men from Jano's neighbouring town of Libová who had gone to work in America and returned to Slovakia with their earnings not only transform the physical landscape of the town but also contribute to the shaping of the myth of America in the minds of the people they have left behind: "Well, it's America that made Libová rich!" Exclaimed Srnec. "Without her they couldn't have built those palaces!" (Timrava, 1992, p. 113). It is their "remigrated" stories of America that propel the aspiring "Americans" in Jano's town to pursue their dreams: "Listen, brother, Srnec spoke up proudly, then puffed on both cigars at once. 'Ďuro Hríb from Libová told me that even men who just sweep streets in America get four dollars a day. You know what one dollar will pay for! Oh, what we're going to get!' (ibid., p. 116).

Also, it is the changes which these returned "Americans" made to the community that persuade Jano's mother to agree to let him go: "Vrábelčička [Jano's mother] sat down beside him at the table and began to speak. 'Well, Janko, it's true—people really do have it good who have been in America. Even Mišo Krupár in Libová brought back a lot of money, and he was there only a year and a half.'" (ibid., p. 123). Timrava, living in her microcosmic "concrete place" of Polichno, must have witnessed the phenomenon of massive labour migration and remigration. According to the statistics of migration between the United States and Europe in the years 1908 to 1923 in Wyman's *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe*, a staggering number of 225,033 Slovaks migrated to the United States. 127,593 Slovaks (a total of 57% of all migrants) remigrated from the United States, returning to their home country or moving to other places in Europe (1993, p. 11).

As outlined at the beginning of this paper, Timrava was not the only writer who wrote about the "allure" of America without having actually visited the place. Timrava's junior contemporary from England, Virginia Woolf, also engaged in a mental journey to America without physically leaving the British Isles. To point out the similarities and differences between the two writers, I shall offer an overview of Woolf's life and works in connection with Timrava's life and works.

Woolf was born to a literary family in the year 1882, in London, England. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-

1904), was the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and one of the eminent Victorian men of letters. Around the time when Timrava was writing *The Ťapák Clan*, Woolf was writing *Melymbrosia*, a story about a young English woman travelling abroad and undergoing an emotional and sexual awakening. *Melymbrosia* is dense with blatant social commentaries on colonialism, the suffrage movement and homosexuality. Though modified and toned down by self-censorship, the *Melymbrosia* unpublished drafts would later form her first published novel *The Voyage Out* (1915). With the exception of her last unfinished novel *Between the Acts*, which centres on a village pageant, Woolf, unlike Timrava, did not produce folk stories or write extensively about village life. However, Woolf shares Timrava's keen interest in charting out the characters' interior landscapes. Both of their works deal with interior monologues and negotiations between the "concrete place" of reality and the "abstract place" of dreams and imagination. Another striking similarity between the two writers lies in the fact that both were contented to be referred to and regarded by the public as "autodidacts" who did not receive formal education. However, their claims are not entirely true. While Timrava was "[s]chooled mainly at home" and "read sporadically in European literature (Czech, German, Magyar, Russian)" (Rudinsky, 1992, p. x), she nevertheless attended a boarding school for young ladies at the age of fifteen "to improve her German and Magyar" (ibid.). Likewise, according to her enrolment

records and syllabi at King's College Ladies' Department between the years 1897-1901, when she was between the ages of 15 and 19, Virginia Stephen was officially registered for courses in English and Continental History, Greek, Latin and German. Unlike Timrava who died at the ripe old age of 84, having lived until the year 1951 and witnessed the atrocities of both World Wars, Woolf committed suicide in 1941. She died at the age of 59, right before the outbreak of the Second World War.

To complete this comparative study, we now turn to Woolf's essay which, like Timrava's *That Alluring Land*, is a product of a writer's attempt to "image" and "imagine" America. "America, which I have never seen, interests me most in this cosmopolitan world of today" was first published in April 1938 in *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan Magazine*. It was written in response to a question put to a succession of writers, with J.B. Priestley (1894-1984), for example, billed as next in line: "What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?" (2002, p. 56). Woolf is described in the headline across the article page in Hearst's as "Author of 'The Years'", which was her best-selling novel in America. Her reply, "America, which I have never seen, interests me most", is accompanied by C. Peter Helck's montage illustration, which is composed of a bird's-eye view of Manhattan and its skyscrapers, of the Statue of Liberty and a gigantic native American, of cars and traffic, and of cocktail bars and factories (1938, p. 21). The article begins thus:

'What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?' That is an enormous question; the world is a very large object, buzzing and humming on every inch of its surface with interesting things. But if we compress and epitomize, this essence and abstract of the world and its interesting things reduces itself undoubtedly to the United States of America. America is the most interesting thing in the world today. (Woolf, 2002, p. 56)

If the world is constructed from both objects and ideas, the concrete and the abstract, Woolf proposes that they come together in the form of America. How has she come to this conclusion? Woolf explains that it is "imagination", a personified winged figure who is never to be trusted when it comes to facts, that induces her to think of America in the ways she has described:

And imagination, unfortunately, is not an altogether accurate reporter; but she has her merits: she travels fast; she travels far. And she is obliging. When the question was put to her the other day, "What is America like?", she gave her wings a shake and said, in her lighthearted way: 'Sit still on a rock on the coast of Cornwall; and I will fly to America and tell you what America is like.' So saying, she was off. (ibid., pp. 56-57)

I propose that this extract demonstrates "technology of place" in the making. While the body of the speaker rests on a rock in Cornwall, her imaginative mind travels to "that alluring land" which is America, on which the speaker has never laid eyes and on which the speaker's feet have

never stepped before. As a negotiation between the "concrete place" of the senses belonging to the speaker who sits on a rock in Cornwall and the "abstract place" of the imagination which transcends the physical reality, America is Woolf's New World, land of the new. The most striking aspect of this refreshing "newness" lies in Woolf's notion of America as a place of new language. After being dispatched to do the job of surveying and "imaging" America, imagination returns with a detailed report: "Everything is a thousand times quicker yet more orderly than in England. My mind feels speeded up. The blood courses through my veins. The old English words kick up their heels and frisk. A new language is coming to birth -" (ibid., p. 57). This article is not the first piece of writing where Woolf describes America as a utopia of a new language and new mindset. In an article entitled "American Fiction", published in the *American Saturday Review of Literature* on 1 August 1925, she points out that to be an American or an American writer, in particular, is to denounce the English way of writing, which has been dominant for centuries. A new language which better suits both the landscape of the place and the temperament of its people needs to be invented:

He [the American writer] must tame and compel to his service the 'little American words;' he must forget all that he learnt in the school of Fielding and Thackeray; he must learn to write as he talks to men in Chicago barrooms, to men in the factories in Indiana. That is the first step; but the next step is far

more difficult. For having decided what he is not, he must proceed to discover what he is. (1986, p. 271)

In the same way that American writers need to seek alternative means of articulating their different landscape and culture, women writers need to form an alternative voice or even a new language which can better convey their histories and memories and which can liberate them from the confines of dominant male writers' vocabulary. Woolf's comments on the similarity between Americans and women, who both need to invent their own language and history, are further elaborated thus: "Women writers have to meet many of the same problems that beset Americans. They too are conscious of their own peculiarities as a sex; apt to suspect insolence, quick to avenge grievances, eager to shape an art of their own" (ibid.). Her 1925 description of America corresponds perfectly with the content of her 1938 article and with Helck's visual representation of America which accompanies her text. Taking Woolf's ongoing concerns into consideration, we shall return to the 1938 article, where newly invented language ushers in a new social order:

There are no dark family portraits hanging in shadowy recesses. Nor, although it is dinnertime, does a parlourmaid in cap and apron bring in a silver-covered dish. A spring is touched; a refrigerator opens; there is a whole meal ready to be eaten: clams on ice; ducks on ice; iced drinks in tall glasses; ice creams all colours of the rainbow. (Woolf, 2002, pp. 57-58)

New technological devices, replacing and transforming domestic labour, contribute to the abolishment of the class system. Woolf, with Timrava's wry humour, satirises the myth of America as a land of milk and honey, a classless society with opportunities for all, through the exaggerated vision of the spurious imagination: "Everyone has a car: the millionaire has one; the hired man has one; the hobo has one. And their cars go much more quickly than our cars, because the roads are as smooth as billiard balls and very straight" (ibid., p. 58). I argue that Woolf's subtle mention of "the hobo" hints at the prevailing inequality and social hierarchy behind the rosy picture of democratic and capitalist America.

Woolf's depiction of America illustrates my concept of "technology of place". To understand America, the "other" place, Woolf's "imagination" has to paradoxically "fly back" or refer back to England, her own homeland, as a starting point: "This valley is like a cup into which time has dropped and stands clear and still. There is the England of Charles the First, still visible, still living in America" (ibid., p. 59). The clash between Imagination's "abstract place" of the America of freedom and equality, and the "concrete place" of the England of an old hierarchical world order, shows that one's understanding of oneself and of one's place is part of a dynamic and on-going process or "technology" of cognitive mapping, which, according to Heidegger, must constantly be put into question. At the very end of the article, it is clear that Woolf is consciously aware that the America she has been

describing is nothing but an image conjured up by her own imagination, and composed from the elements of the "concrete place" that she knows:

So saying, Imagination folded her wings and settled on the Cornish rock again. While she had been to America and back, one old woman had filled her basket half full of dead sticks for her winter's firing. But of course, we must remember, Imagination, with all her merits, is not always strictly accurate. (ibid., p. 60)

Like Timrava's *That Alluring Land*, Woolf's *America, which I have never seen* demonstrates that place is constructed and reconstructed out of layers upon layers of narratives, of myths and dreams, and of the tangible reality of the writers' very own lives and socio-temporal context. As the Heideggerian notion of "technology" in my "technology of place" concept illustrates, the making of place has the potential to "enframe" or set human beings to believe that a certain understanding about a place is the only fixed truth while, at the same time, "technology of place" contains the "saving power", or the potential to propel human beings to put their received and preconceived notions into question. The myth of America, propagated by the remigrated "Americans" and taken as an unquestionable truth by Jano and his fellow villagers in Timrava's short story, is used by Timrava as a satirical device or "technology" to expose one's lack of critical judgment and one's tendency to believe in everything one blindly wants to. Likewise, the image of America portrayed by Woolf through her subtly satirical adulation of the

place and its people can be said to contain the seed of subversive thinking which transcends Helck's faithful illustration of the popular myth that is America. Woolf's article reveals that place is a sign which, like the figure of the winged imagination, is "not always strictly accurate" (2002, p. 60). Like Il'a in *The Ľapák Clan*, both Timrava and Woolf venture out of the mundane and invite readers to question the "allure" that is the myth of America prevalent in their time and society. Without having set their eyes on "that alluring land", they lure readers through their creative imagings and imaginings of America to construct and deconstruct an "abstract place", which is by no means less concrete and alluring.

Endnotes

¹ A keď po cisárskom schválení Stanov Matice slovenskej zo dňa 21. augusta roku 1862, temer o celý rok neskôršie, 4. augusta zišlo sa v Martine jej prvé valné zhromaždenie, to bol najväčší, sviatok v doterajších dejinách Slovákov, na ktorom sa zúčastnilo okolo 5000 ľudí za okolností náramne slávnostných, ktoré mohli imponovať aj najväčším skeptikom a pri ktorých nechýbali ani prejavy rafinovane vypočítanej panovníkovej priazne oproti Slovákom (translated into English by V.S.).

² Okrem ľudovej školy v rodisku, [Pavel Slančík] učil sa v Ožďanoch, Kežmarku a v Banskej Štiavnici, kde i maturoval. Teológiu skončil v Bratislave. Potom odišiel v roku 1857 do Halle. Oženil sa ako 28 ročný so 16 ročnou Evou Máriou Honétzy (1847–1923, dcérou farára z Kyjatíc v Gemeri). V manželstve mali 11 detí, z ktorých dospelého veku sa dožili Pavel, Irena, Božena a Bohuslav (dvojčatá), Izabela a Mária... Pavel Slančík v roku 1863 bol spoluzakladateľom Matice slovenskej v Martine (translated into English by V.S.).

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