

THE BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD: CANADA AS THE ABSENT SPOUSE

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"Dear Momma: . . .

I feel I am acting out America's relationship to the Canadas. Martin is the imperial ogre while I play the role of genteel mate who believes that if everyone is well-mannered, we can inhabit a peaceable kingdom. That is the national dream of the Canadas, isn't it? A civilized garden where lions lie down with doves. I did not see the difference until I married Martin. We possess no fantasies of conquest and domination. Indeed, to be from the Canadas is to feel as women feel—cut off from the base of power. Oh Momma, I am finding housewifery difficult. Why didn't you tell me it is more work than being a spieler? . . . YOUR ANNA" [c. 1874, Ohio]

Anna is the protagonist of Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (1983, 273-74.) She is the Canadian giantess who has her maidenhead ruptured (35) by a Canadian dwarf holding an icicle; who first mates with the Canadian giant Angus McAskill—"Aye, lass. I've been saving myself for the likes of you" (58); who marries the American giant, Martin Van Buren Bates—he confesses to her, only a mere five years after they get married, that he is "not capable of manly spending" (297); who falls in love with and gets pregnant by a short Australian, Apollo Ingalls—"Apollo," [she] murmur[s], "I am making you grow" (296).

Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, taking place between 1846 and 1888, is a novel that desires to be postmodern and Victorian as well as fictional and historical at the

same time. This generic ambivalence is prefigured in its title. The modernity of giantess Anna Swan, the biggest woman of the world, is the analogue of the text's generic and thematic desires. Modernity as a concept in this novel exceeds the aesthetic norms we traditionally associate with modernism and postmodernism in order to include sexual and national politics.

Within the nineteenth-century framework of *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, modernity embraces any element of otherness that threatens the doxa of established forms of society, sexuality, art, and national unity. It forces the categories of gender, genre and politics "into the sphere of extremes" (Deleuze and Guattari xvii), producing thus an economy of discourse whose only defining measure is what resists the logic of numbers and of boundaries. Anna's own gigantic size is the yardstick of that kind of economy. P.T. Barnum, at whose museum of freaks in New York she reaches the apogee of her fame, bills her at 8'11", but Anna admits that she is "definitely less. In New Annan, my mother told friends I was 7'9". . . I put my height at 7'11 1/2". It's an educated guess" (8). Later on in the novel, Apollo attempts to persuade her that she is shrinking. These and similar discrepancies, including those of the length of her birth canal—is it 17", 22" or a mere 12"?—and of her lovers' penises—"there is a correlation," Anna claims, "between the size of a hand and the size of what makes a man a man" (5)—do not only give us a glimpse into the scientific bent of the Victorian mind, but also illustrate how a world as Rabelaisian and "modern" as that of Anna's thrives on the very inconsistencies that threaten to undermine its unique status.

Modernity as it occurs in the Victorian world of Anna Swan is welcomed and applauded only insofar as it remains on the stages of Victorian theatres and circuses, entertaining an audience that feels titillated and at the same time self-satisfied at its own normalcy. This modernity as it is parodied by the author exposes the ineffectiveness of art when it tries to remedy social malaise; it also reveals the tentativeness of the audience's relationship to art and the precarious position of the "modern" artist in society. When this kind of modernity attempts to enter the street, the life of a small town, a sexual relationship, or even the private world of Queen Victoria's court, it is immediately acknowledged as something disturbing that has either to be kept at

a safe distance or to be completely appropriated. It is the audience's ambivalent response that grants the modernity of *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* its allegorical status. It might even be more appropriate to argue that modernity is configured allegorically in this novel because of the audience reception Anna is given. Allegory, in this respect, doesn't merely suggest the double semantic function of telling a story; it also suggests the semiotics of otherness, be it the otherness of discourse, gender, or nation. Allegory in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* breaks up the textual ground of the story so that the characters double-speak—often without knowing it.

The historicity of Susan Swan's novel is first marked by the family name and the exceptional height that the author shares with her protagonist, the historical giantess. Both Swans are from Nova Scotia, but, "unfortunately," as the author says in her preface, "neither her descendants nor my relatives have enough information on our backgrounds to establish a connection. . . . But—so the story goes—both branches of the families trace their way back to a Scandinavian ancestor who settled in Scotland, and whose descendants later became a sept of the clan MacDonald."¹ Despite, however, this historical gap between the tall author and her gigantic character, the two Swans, through a postmodern twist of history, discourse, and onomastics, are brought together by their acts of writing.

This fortuitous encounter within the field of fiction is not unique in Canadian literature. George Bowering, for example, in his novel *Burning Water* inscribes himself masterfully in the story of George Vancouver. Bowering shows that in the markers of the difference between history and fiction resides a logic of identity, a logic that authorizes the postmodern writer to unveil a truth that demystifies its own absolute and terrorizing status in human history. Similarly, Daphne Marlatt's narrator in *Ana Historic*, Annie, wife of Richard and daughter of Ina, tells the story of Mrs. Ana Richards, a story that is as much based on historical documents and the history of colonialism and of gender relations as on the author's own imagination and experience. History and fiction lose their distinctiveness as genres. As Linda Hutcheon remarks,

On the one hand, history seems to be ontologically separate

from the self-consciously fictional text (or intertexts) of fiction. This is an extension of the commonplace distinction between two kinds of reference: what history refers to is the actual, real world; what fiction refers to is a fictive universe. . . . On the other hand, you can also find—lately—quite another view of history, but this time it is history AS intertext. History becomes a text, a discursive construct upon which literature draws as easily as it does upon other artistic contexts. (1987, 169-70)

It is that second use of “history AS intertext” that we find in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*. Susan Swan inscribes her historical other, Anna Haining Swan, within those historical gaps that denied Anna’s modernity its full expression. The author embellishes history in many ways, but perhaps the greatest embellishment of all, at least for my purposes here, is that of having the novel read as personal history, as Anna’s own autobiographical account. Allowing Anna to have a say *now*, in the presentness of fiction, expresses acutely the novel’s poetics of gender while deconstructing its historicity. The author also takes advantage of the fact that the two best known Canadian giants, Anna Swan and Angus McAskill, not only lived at the same time but also in geographical proximity. Although Anna and Angus never met in real life, they meet and fall in love in the novel. This romance, as we will see later, is one of the key elements in the novel’s political allegory.

Susan Swan’s fictionalization of history and her historization of fiction are introduced in the opening chapter of the novel, entitled “Spiegel,” which announces that the biggest modern woman of the world is about to tell her own story:

Now I am in full voice. . . blowing my own horn. . . spiegel the way I used to for P.T. Barnum, Queen Victoria, and all the normals who came to my performances after I grew up into an eight-foot giantess who toured North America and the Continent. This is my final appearance and I promise to tell all. What really happened to the BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD in a never-before-revealed autobiography which contains testimonials and documents by friends and associates (from their perspective) of a Victorian lady who refused to be inconsequential. (2)

Anna's intent "to tell all" echoes Susan Swan's own intent to retrieve Anna from the relative anonymity she fell into after her death in 1888, but at the same time it contradicts the author's postmodern method of writing, a method which by definition effectively denies the desire to master totality. What the author (re)constructs both repeats and distorts history, just as what Anna narrates both affirms her status as "THE BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD" and undermines the effectiveness of her modernity. The "never-before-revealed autobiography," which Anna promises will be her "final appearance," is her swan song as a *spieler* while comprising, paradoxically, the first "big" literary publication of the other Swan, the author herself. This conflation of beginnings and endings, of fiction and history, is in keeping with the novel's intertextual treatment of gender and national politics.

Anna's swan song appropriately opens and ends in an elegiac tone; she concludes her "autobiography" by stating "I have accepted my destiny. I was born to be measured and I do not fit in anywhere. Perhaps heaven will have more room" (332). By transferring her desires for self-fulfillment into afterlife, Anna reveals to her readers the tone and content of her autobiography: her gigantism thwarts her desires, but it also functions as an analogue of the patriarchal values that determine her personal and artistic lives. She is not fully aware of that, but there is no doubt that in the novel the "question of woman's desire actually runs parallel to the question of power" (Benjamin 1986, 78). Anna's determination to tell her story as "a Victorian lady who refused to be inconsequential" is an affirmation of her individuality, and her way of telling the story is certainly marked by her gender.

Nevertheless, her attempt to take hold of her life by telling her own story is textually frustrated. "The testimonials and documents by friends and associates" that Anna uses in order to give her autobiography greater authenticity create a hiatus for the reader, for it is never explained how or if she has access to them. Letters to her by her parents and Angus, and newspaper clips about her performances are naturally in her possession; but the excerpts from the journals of Apollo and Martin that intersperse her writing, while revealing the chauvinism and manipulative behaviour of both, are undoubtedly the author's own intrusion and

are meant to undermine Anna's authorial control of her narrative. This discrepancy, which greatly affects the plot and Anna's character, redefines history, not as the *real* facts available about Anna and which are employed in the novel as intertexts, but as the making of the fiction we read.

These anti-autobiographical elements, together with the spiels delivered circa 1977 at the Sunrise Trail Museum at Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, where mementos of Anna are a great attraction, at once emphasize the epistolary form of the beginnings of the novel as genre and the postmodernism of its present development. But the postmodernism of Susan Swan's novel challenges the equally postmodern notion that the author is dead, "and subjective agency along with him," thus acknowledging that for women the death of the author "prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them" (Miller 1986, 106). What the novel's anti-autobiographical elements also emphasize is that Anna is only the writer of her autobiography, not its author. The author remains her namesake other, Susan Swan, whose authority is not simply an extratextual given but an authority exposing Anna's own problematic relationship with the male and institutional authorities in her life. To the history of the novel's making and of Anna's life there is added the history of ideas informing the novel, i.e. Victorian patriarchy, Freudianism, and, as we will see, the politics of Canadian and U.S. relations.

Interestingly enough, Anna does not even have the last word in her autobiography; the novel's epilogue consists of statements by her mother and Anna's American neighbors; most importantly, Anna herself submits her narrative to her American husband Martin "to amend and publish . . . as I do not have much time left" (332). Martin doesn't bother to amend Anna's memoirs after her death, for if he had he would certainly have improved on her unflattering portrait of him. But this giving away of her words suggests her inability, perhaps a reluctance or a not knowing how, to be the sole subject of her discourse.

It is highly ironic, but consistent with the novel's allegorical layers, that Anna, who becomes in her life the subject of curiosity and admiration of large and illustrious audiences, fails to become the subject of her own discourse. Anna obviously lives within a "world of discourse and asymmetry, whose arbitrary rules work to displace the subject" (de Lauretis 1984, 2). This is most evident

in the spiels, written for her by her literary agents, that she delivers during her lifetime. The few spiels that she blurts out herself strike too a foreign chord, as they are about matters she has simply memorized: "There, it was out: the forthright lecture voice I used to divert jesters" (68), Anna observes as she stands in the lobby of the Hotel Astor, New York, during her first encounter with Barnum:

"Allow me to clear up a few misconceptions about the Canadas, which are thought to be a technically backward dominion, important only as a massive exporter of wheat and timber.

"Contrary to the opinion of the rest of the world, which sees us as a backwater of medical research, the development of cough suppressors is a major scientific field in my country as well as a philosophical principle" (69)

Obviously, and to her credit, the sixteen-year-old Anna wants to assert her Canadianness, which she fears is threatened by Barnum's enterprising will. But if she succeeds at all as a Canadian here, her young female voice is totally consumed by the male rhetoric she employs.

Even when she speaks off stage, Anna invariably uses a voluble rhetoric inappropriate to the occasion; this is what she "hear[s her]self say," for example, while resting in a little Nova Scotian inn after having exposed by accident her ankle to the public: "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FRIENDS AND PASSERS-BY: Forgive me. My body is showing" (24). Anna cannot control these rhetorical outbursts, but although they become a source of her ridicule, they are the only way in which she can make her own voice heard. She can never exceed the carnivalesque world of freaks. Her inability to possess language parallels her failure to come to grips with her private self. Even when she is not on stage or in the salons of princes and other moguls but in the privacy of her bedroom writing in her journal, Anna lacks any sense of a cohesive self. She remains lost among the various contexts of her life.

Yes, I was a GENUINE SHOW-BIZ CELEBRITY who found no forum modern enough to suit my talents and who has written this authentic account to entertain you the way I could not during my career as a professional giantess. A good per-

former has many spiels and I have three up my long sleeve to delight and astound (2; emphasis added)

Her autobiography is obviously geared toward a public audience and her aim is to entertain others, not to apostrophize herself. Anna fails to distinguish between public and private discourse. This may be problematic vis à vis the genre of autobiography, but it does not come as a surprise given Anna's artistic aspirations and the allegorical nature of the novel. The motives behind her autobiographical act are compounded by the epistemological crisis evident in her shifts from yes to no, from authenticity to performance, from autobiography to entertainment. Autobiography as performance delimits the signification of Anna's narrative and marks the loss of her identity by default.

Anna's parents register her in a college to become a teacher but, as she says, "I do not see the point of teachers' college when my interests lie in theatre" (54). She badly wants to play high drama written by Broadway writers but, because of her size, her only venue is Barnum's museum of freaks where she plays farce and melodrama to non-appreciating audiences and harsh reviewers. She posits her autobiography, then, as her first, and last, serious attempt at art. But the drama she reveals there flatly documents rather than re-creates her life experiences. Anna doesn't know how to write an autobiography, because she hasn't had a private life. She is denied access even to the genre, as recent feminist critics have argued, most conducive for the experience of her gender. Her freakishness lies not so much in her gigantic proportions as in her "modern" desire to assert her femaleness in a world dominated by Victorian men and mores. Modernity, as Alice Jardine says, is "about the loss of narrative" (1986, 100).

Anna's gigantic body with its disproportionately small head hides a dwarfed female self. Her biology, paradoxically, becomes an allegory of the traditional strictures imposed on the female body. Since the beginning of her relatively short life—she died two days before she would turn forty-two—her large size has accustomed her to public scrutiny. Her notion of selfhood is identified with public spectacle. Despite many of her misgivings about the "show-biz" life, Anna can't imagine herself being some-

one other than a performer. Her philosophy that "life is a performance and all moments are dramatic" (332) contradicts her confession that "Alas! It's hard for a woman like me to escape into a private world" (95). Although she is fully aware it is her physical size that grants her fame and wealth and which also determines her destiny, it takes her many years of public life and disappointments to realize that it is her female gender and the gender politics of her times that frustrate her dreams. "As for me," Anna says early in her career, "I saw my growth as a symbol of my power and energy and expected others to envy me for it" (11). Daring to see her Victorian womanhood as a symbol is already a transgression that she will never be forgiven by her society. It is Anna's very modernity—namely that she doesn't shy from displaying her 8'1" frame, but instead makes a career out of it; that she expects to be treated as normal; that she expects to have her voracious sexual appetite fulfilled—that keeps her locked within the web of the public, and predominantly male, gaze.

The measure of Anna's modernity becomes most apparent in her relationships with men and in her strong sense of national identity. Whereas in the world of Barnum's freaks and Apollo's circus Anna is seen as a commodity, in the world of normal people she is transformed into an allegorical being who exceeds both sexual and national boundaries. In both worlds, she remains a displaced woman. When her dwarf neighbor finds her urinating in her father's field, he exclaims: "Do you know what a boundless universe lies inside you, Anna?" (32). Anna doesn't quite know at this point—she is only an innocent fourteen-year-old girl—but she is soon to find out that it is this "boundless universe," the "highway uncurling in her great physique" (33) and not her soaring soul that will inspire men to colonize her.

As a Canadian woman, Anna becomes an allegory imaging the vast Canadian landscape, her personal difficulties depicting the problems of pioneers as represented in the novel by her parents. The allegorization of Canada as woman evokes female passivity, a passivity which is played out in the sexual politics of Anna's life. As a woman with an immense body, Anna allegorizes female otherness and the ways in which it threatens man's confidence in his phallogocentric power. Whether Anna is treated in

the novel as a sexual or political allegory, she embodies the discomfort and uncertainty alterity induces.

When we begin to examine Anna's sexual relationships with three men representing Canada, the United States, and Australia, it becomes evident that male response to sexual otherness in the novel allegorizes, and parodies, national difference. We can measure the success or failure of these relationships only in relation to each other. The idea of nation is defined in correlation to other nations, alterity thus becoming the only measuring device of national identity.

"It is a tradition in the Canadas: when in public, self-eface!" (24), says Anna, who has a deeply rooted sense of Canadian identity. Paradoxically, however, Anna as performer emulates this Canadian trait only in theory. This is one of the main reasons why her relationship with the Canadian giant Angus fails. Angus has tried but rejected the American values of the Rabelaisian world of freak museums and circuses in the United States for the quiet pastoral beauty of his Nova Scotian landscape. During their first love encounter, Anna is astonished to discover that, although the "fit was snug," his organ was a mere foot in size. "At fifteen," Anna says, "I didn't know that I was as much in charge of my sexual ecstasy as the man . . . Had I known, I would have shown Angus how to rub me." What is, however, even more astonishing for Anna is what Angus expects from her upon the completion of their intercourse: "Now you'll have to marry me, Annie, and settle down to farm life." Who would deny that Angus is an honorable Canadian, but this is not the honor Anna desires. "I wanted to be a show-biz personality—not a rural drudge" (58). Although these words don't mark the end of their relationship, which is to last for another two years, they do sever Anna's relationship with Canada. Angus's philosophy, which he expounds upon in his many letters to Anna when she lives in New York, is, paradoxically, full of echoes of the Emersonian faith in self-reliance—of course insofar as it is practised in the backwoods of Canada. Canada, for Anna, will forever remain a desired but absent spouse.

Although Anna remains a proud and vocal Canadian for the rest of her life, her rejection of Canada allegorizes the extent to which her female expansiveness remains unreadable by her own country. By virtue of her size, Anna posits a country all by her-

self, a dark, and unreachable, continent (Cixous 1981, 247), a space that continues to expand in defiance of the boundaries that enframe it. This is perhaps the main reason why Susan Swan invents the fictional relationship between Anna and Angus. Anna does not denounce patriarchal values by rejecting her normalized father who always addresses her fondly—"I couldn't understand why it was wrong to show you on one side of a border [Canada] and not the other [U.S.] . . . YOU ARE MY ONLY GIANT DAUGHTER. I EXPECT GREAT THINGS OF YOU" (81). That would be too Freudian and reductive for the author's political intentions. Anna, once again, goes beyond the personal by refusing Angus's offer, by attempting to escape, however fleetingly, from the constraints of male systematic phallogocentrism. Angus's gigantic shape allegorizes the power system Anna has only begun to suspect. Her rejection of Angus is not synonymous with a denial of her Canadianness; instead, it signifies her desire to deterritorialize her female self.

When, despite the many political reservations of her parents, Anna crosses over the Canadian/American boundaries in order to realize her dream of performing, she jeopardizes the distinctiveness of her Canadian identity, while also putting at risk her female gender. While in New York, Anna functions as the prototype of the Canadian exile; her personal dislocation enacts Canada's historically ambivalent relations to her neighbor. From this point on in the action of the novel, Anna's otherness of body and gender is accentuated by her national otherness. Ironically, in order to become her own signifier, Anna has to tentatively erase what she signifies.

The contact Anna signs with Barnum's company allegorizes the extent to which Canada sells out to the United States. What Anna learns in the education Barnum is contractually obliged to offer her is not only the theories of Darwin, Emerson and Thoreau, but also that "a good education will make us [women] better companions for our husbands and more competent mothers" (88) and "that to be American is the true destiny of each of us" (85). She discusses these, and other aspects of her American education, in her letters to forlorn Angus.

Anna does not give in completely to the American Dream, but does end up marrying the Kentucky giant Martin Van Buren Bates. It is not a coincidence that her introduction to him occurs

when Angus is present: "I considered both giants from head to toe. Together they made a contrasting pair who satisfied my fantasies about men: Bates was rude and beautiful and Angus was beautiful and kind" (119). Anna's balancing act between rudeness and kindness epitomizes the political difference between the two countries represented in this triangle of giants and desire. Angus at 7'9" is taller than Martin, but Martin is heavier; Anna, though the tallest and smartest of the three, is immediately cast to play the role of the desired object. Once again, gender and power politics dwarf her identity.

It is no surprise that Martin, who believes in the future of a "superior species" to be procreated by giants (118)—"the great *Americanus*" (119)—will not fall in love with Anna herself but with what she represents—providing she couples with him: "the future of man" (172). Martin's dream of a generation of giant Americans represents American imperialism. Although their romance takes place aboard the ship taking them to Europe, Anna is not freed from male territorialism, from the consuming power of the male gaze. This time, while lying naked for a medical examination, she becomes the object of Martin's gaze. "In the name of science" (170), the doctor allows Martin to peep through a hole. In love with the big and dark gap that he sees, which he calls a "magnificent foyer" (171), Martin is ready to marry Anna at any cost.

The prone Anna has, obviously, no idea of the arrangement between the doctor and Martin. The reader finds out about this scene through the interpolation of Martin's journals into Anna's quasi-autobiographical account. This narrative intervention, yet another sign of Susan Swan's authorial interventions, identifies the politics of colonialist representation. The fact that these journal entries are presented as extracts from "'Species Development, or A Tract Towards Continual anatomical Wonders' by Captain Martin Van Buren Bates" (170), presumably a published document, deconstructs the genre of autobiography altogether. Anna gets displaced within her own text: "denied the right to subjectivity, internalizing and refracting the colonizer's address to its other as darkness and negation, alienated from a ravaged natal culture, the colonized is condemned to exist in an inauthentic condition" (Parry 1987, 29). Even though this episode, ironically functioning as a seduction scene, occurs on board a ship, in the

waters separating the Great Empire from its Canadian colony, Anna plays a passive role. She seduces Martin into marrying her not by her intelligence or by her elegant and "modern" wardrobe, but by undergoing a spatial transformation (a displacement) under Martin's gaze, unawares. Anna's womb described by Martin as a magnificent foyer evokes images of public life, the very opposite of the violated privacy of the scene. Inadvertently, Anna serves as both host and parasite, the very condition of a colonized state.

Anna and Martin marry but not before she loses her voice a day prior to their wedding. The loss of voice doesn't merely signify her loss of independence. The fact that she is reduced to uttering only gurgling sounds and chuckles when she resides in Great Britain allegorizes the colonial status of her already dwarfed Canadian identity. It is during this period that Anna has audience with Queen Victoria. A midget at 4'8" and suffering at the time from melancholia, another common female disease in the Victorian period, the queen amuses herself by strolling "in leisurely fashion through" (196) the gigantic arch of Anna's legs as menservants lift with tongs her silk skirts. This scene, truly Victorian in its ethos, forces the voiceless Anna to realize that she "had ceased to exist for [the queen] as a person" (195). It becomes clear at this point that Anna's body, which scares and fascinates males, is far from being a metaphor for imperialism; instead, it parodies the very notion of territorialism. Anna's gigantic size deconstructs the codes defining gender and national relationships. As Hutcheon says, "national differences and politics cannot be separated from sexual differences and politics" (1986, 225). By the same token, it is interesting that it is during this period of voicelessness that Anna takes up writing. Her writing, together with her physical immensity that can be ridiculed but not conquered, compensates Anna for her loss of female and national identity.

Having survived her audience with Queen Victoria, Anna resigns from her wife's role with Martin—who proves to be impotent—but not before she has her first orgasm with a man, a short Australian. Her relationship with her business manager Apollo further amplifies the political allegory of Anna's love life. Their first encounter takes place at Windsor Castle while they are guests of the Prince of Wales. Apollo, who returns to Australia

after their stillborn child is considered a valuable medical specimen—"female and flawed," as Anna puts it (242), "at 18 pounds and 27 inches" (240)—remains the most mischievous, coy and elusive character in the novel. Although he reappears in Ohio where Anna has settled with Martin and resumes for a while his passionate affair with her, Apollo doesn't share Anna's experience of colonialism. He is a free spirit, a true entrepreneur who knows how to combine pleasure and business. Allegorically, Apollo eradicates the differences between freakish otherness and normal behavior; a character who translates his displaced condition in America and in Great Britain into a pool of energy, he seems to be unmarked by the imperial and colonial forces. Paradoxically, however, his willed displacement that defies his own colonialism allows him to colonize Anna. As a politically unmarked subject, Apollo signifies the universal condition that Anna aspires to but never attains. As a male, though, whose organ reconciles Anna to the male species, he is marked by his gender, as Anna is equally marked by her immense body which, by the end of the novel, has become the continent (and the commodity) that all imperial powers desire. Markedness in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* is identified with unmarkedness; leadership is rewritten as otherness.

Anna Swan's sexual relationships exemplify the "gigantism and dwarfism of desire" (Deleuze and Guattari, ix). Her body as a continent in itself exceeds territorial boundaries and defies the Lacanian concept of woman as "not all" (Rose 1982, 49). The Freudian/Lacanian premise that anatomical difference figures sexual difference becomes in this novel an analogue of the Victorian ethos. Anna's gigantic size, far from being a metaphor of imperialism, parodies the very notion of territorialism. Her swan song, her last spiel, illustrates that it is her modernity that undoes the sexual and political codes of her life. The linguistic materiality of her autobiographical act, despite its textual gaps, remains the only space that can contain her desires. Complaining about, but not fully understanding, the conflict between her private and public roles, Anna acknowledges that "I cannot stop myself from spieling even when I want to be down to earth. I should never have tried to be an Ohio housewife: I belong on stage" (278). Even at this late point in the novel she does not fully recognize that the true name of her stage is that of gender and power

politics. Anna's own difference as a female subject of discourse lies in the fact that she allegorizes the "surplus value" in her culture. This no male subject can dwarf.

NOTES

¹ Regarding some of the historical background of the novel, see Phyllis R. Blakeley, *Nova Scotia's Two Remarkable Giants*, with a foreword by George Swan, Anna Swan's great nephew.

² There is enough evidence in the novel for speculation that Apollo's journals, which Martin admits to Anna that he read when the three of them were in Great Britain, have fallen into Anna's hands after his death. If this is the case, and Anna herself includes them in her manuscript, then the reader has to consider why Anna refrains from commenting on their compromising and often scandalous nature. There is no plot evidence, however, to show how Martin's journals found their way into Anna's narrative. One could of course speculate that Martin himself added them to her account, thus responding to her invitation to amend it.

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