

2. Religion

Narrative of the Life and Sufferings of Rev. Richard Warren, (A Fugitive Slave.) (1856)

There is little information available on Richard Warren. His *Narrative* having gone undetected by scholarship, one must plough through city directories, marriage and death records, and religious convention minutes to trace him.¹ He was born a slave in North Carolina, according to his own record, on December 1, 1812 (Warren 7). Shortly after his escape to freedom in 1845, he married Lucinda “Lucy” Robertson from Windsor, Canada West, in Detroit, on September 10, 1847. From the marriage record, it emerges that the pair was most likely married by John Mifflin Brown (1817-1893), influential African Methodist Episcopal (AME) bishop and serving minister in Detroit from 1844-1847 (see Glazier 642). In 1851, the small Warren family figures in the census taken at Chatham, Canada West, with Richard, aged 40, now serving as “Minister” and living with his wife Lucy and two-year-old son James William, who was born in Canada West (“Census”). The couple very possibly had more children, and might have moved back to Detroit by the early 1860s, in line with Warren’s appointments as a traveling Methodist preacher.²

As is true for Thomas Smallwood (see ch. 3) and other black leaders and community members, the picture of Warren becomes clearer by consulting the records of local (religious) conventions. At the beginning of August 1847, roughly a month before his wedding, Warren was present at the Drummondville

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- 1 I am indebted to Guylaine Pétrin for sharing with me bits of information on Warren that she herself stumbled upon in her many hours of meticulous research spent looking at the infamous ‘miscellaneous’ boxes in archives or unlabeled digitized documents on websites.
 - 2 Pétrin expressed these likely assumptions in a private e-mail.

Convention. About two and a half weeks later, he joined the Eighth Annual Conference of the AME Church for Canada in Hamilton. In the minutes of the Hamilton conference, Warren is listed among those “Preachers...admitted on trial” and is presented “for Deacon’s orders” (*Minutes* 2; 4). In Drummondville, he met Josiah Henson and Thomas Smallwood, with whom he sat on the Business and Finance Committees (*Report* 6).³ The Dawn Settlement under Josiah Henson was being critically discussed at Drummondville, and years later, in late August 1855, Warren and Henson would likely have met again at the Dawn Convention, when the “friends of the British American Institute” gathered amidst the heightening crisis around control of Henson’s settlement (“Minutes” 82).⁴ On that occasion, Warren was elected to the Executive Committee of fifteen responsible to file a court trial against “the original Trustees of the British American Institute, and their Assigns, for non-performance of their duty” (“Minutes” 82).

Such involvement mirrors the importance of Warren’s *Narrative of the Life and Sufferings*, despite its brevity and somewhat elusive nature, in presenting a bottom-up image of life for Blacks in Canada West before Confederation. The *Narrative* merits our critical attention, this chapter maintains, in several respects: For one, having been printed in Hamilton in 1856 makes it one of those narratives that were actually, according to George Elliott Clarke, “written or spoken and transcribed—and sometimes published—in Canada” instead of the United States or Great Britain (“No Hearsay” 14). Warren emerges as devout, diligent, and dutiful, serving the Methodist church readily for many years as an itinerant preacher who was employed in various communities in Canada West. His

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- 3 Henson was a fugitive slave, originally from Maryland, and became one of the most famous black inhabitants in Canada West. A Methodist preacher like Richard Warren, Henson published an autobiography in 1849 with several subsequent editions. Once Harriet Beecher Stowe acknowledged to have met him, Henson became quickly enmeshed in the hype created by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and was called the inspiration for the book and the living Uncle Tom (see Winks, *History* 184-95 for a critical discussion of this myth). Henson escaped to Upper Canada with his family in 1830 and co-founded the Dawn settlement for black fugitives along with its central institution, the British American Institute, a manual labor school. As Jane and William Pease explain, Henson was the “patriarch” of the settlement, and although this position was acknowledged for many years, he was also at the center of “[m]uch of the tension [...] generated by conflicts between Henson, as spiritual and symbolic leader, and the official administrators” (Pease and Pease, “Henson”). Dawn disbanded after 1868, and Henson lost his function as a leader.
 - 4 Ripley clarifies that this summer meeting in 1855 marks the beginning of a “protracted court battle for the control of Dawn” (*BAP* 106n2).

narrative provides insight into his common life and work; in particular, his short travelogue and account of AME conferences shed light on the organization of the church and how it provided for its parishioners. At the same time, we see him cross paths with numerous church representatives, leaders, and black community members. Instead of being one of the more prominent leaders, such as Henry Bibb (1815-1854), Josiah Henson (1789-1883), or even Samuel Ringgold Ward (1817-c.1866), Warren represents the individual who found his place in Canada West, at least temporarily, and who “composed from their spiritual journeys crucial documents of black life, hope, and [community life]” (Brooks and Mabry 88). *The Narrative* illustrates, in short, the “shaping” role of the Black church in community life on *both* sides of the British North American-U.S. border, its “the networks of evangelical Methodism” (84) that would, eventually, also influence black writing (see 77).

What is more, the *Narrative* engages most obviously the stereotypical image of Canada (West) as an earthly paradise and a Promised Land for fugitives from slavery. Differing markedly in form and content from the other texts in this book, this “brief sketch” of Warren’s life follows more obviously the genres of the spiritual autobiography and the slave narrative, among others (Warren 7). Its brevity and the seemingly idealizing portrayal of Canada should not detract, however, from the force and the “very interesting” character of the work and its potential to yield a “useful [longer] narrative” that Warren’s advocates promise in their letters of recommendation prefacing the text (3). Warren’s *Narrative* is an apt entry into this book, because summarizing it merely as a classic example of what Clarke has termed the antebellum Canadian “Canaan” narratives disregards its inherent complexities, such as the underlying trouble in the Canadian paradise and a genre variability that combines various established textual traditions, both oral and written, to accommodate more than the “spiritual realism” of arriving on Canadian shores (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 49). In this way, Warren’s sketch is a fitting start to contemplate how black authors at mid-nineteenth century experimented with genres to create examples of multilayered, multifaceted autobiographical writing.

More precisely, this chapter contends that the *Narrative of the Life and Sufferings* inscribes itself into a religious genealogy that extends to both black authors and their use of a plethora of “religious” genres in texts that touch both sides of the border. While it does not represent an African-Canadian “church narrative” proper as per Clarke’s definition (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 46), it connects this idiosyncratic genre to adaptations of the spiritual autobiography, or a religious slave narrative, as another “example[...] of African-Canadian *folk* creativity” (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 222n5; original emphasis). Most

importantly, Warren's text shows that this church writing was not confined to Nova Scotia, but can be traced in Canada West as well. This chapter will look at three specific aspects in more detail. First, it will show how, despite its brevity, Warren creates an eclectic textual mix combining the slave narrative, spiritual autobiography, and other religious genres. Second, while it might appear that Warren contributes mainly to the idealization of Canada as the Promised Land for black fugitives, I will show how Canada is instrumentalized as part of a religious cross-border geography that encompasses Warren's travels as an itinerant preacher and his true self-actualization as a free black man of the church. His arrival on free soil figures as a conflation of his visions of the paradisiac afterlife with Canada, which does not only signify physical but spiritual freedom. This idealization, however, also glosses over the more disruptive sides of the so-called Promised Land. Finally, I will contextualize Warren and his narrative more precisely within the trajectories of a Methodist church writing genealogy at mid-nineteenth century, which represents a form of textual community building.

2.1 WARREN'S RELIGIOUS SLAVE NARRATIVE

Warren's *Narrative* is a highly religious text, literally and figuratively set under the auspices of the American, and particularly the African, Methodist Episcopal Church: It was printed at the *Christian Advocate's* office, the publication organ of the Methodist Church on King Street in Hamilton, Canada West.⁵ From the start, it also appears as a *religious* slave narrative. Warren's title, for instance, is not merely a variation of popular slave narratives; rather, "Narrative of the Life and Sufferings of Rev. Richard Warren, (A Fugitive Slave), Written By Himself" does in fact foreshadow the emphasis on Warren's actual spiritual crises and martyr-like "sufferings" in slavery and freedom. Where Austin Steward would later have the support of fellow businessmen and politicians for his recommendatory letters, Warren's clearly reflect his work in Hamilton as "Pastor" of the "Colored Methodist Episcopal Church [...] between John and Catharine Streets" (*Hamilton Directory* 9). David Inglis of the Free Church, James Elliott and Ephraim B. Harper of the Wesleyan Methodist Churches, and William McClure of the New Connexion (sic) Methodist Church make up Warren's listed "Recommendations"

5 The *Christian Advocate* advertised in Hamilton's *Directory* of 1856, where it gives the office's address on King Street (52). Warren's narrative indicates that the "Book and Job Office" (1) was on John Street, adjacent to King's.

(9; 117). They are joined by the two editors and book agents of the *Christian Advocate*, Gideon Shepard and Samuel Morrison (8).

The prefatory letters also give different indications of the Narrative's genre. Harper, Shepard, and Morrison focus on the usefulness of the narrative for enlightening "the cruelty and odiousness of Southern slavery" and for illuminating Warren's struggles "in connection with [the institution]," which aligns it with an anti-slavery project (Warren 3). Elliott and Inglis, on the contrary, seem to recognize a different layer of the text. For Inglis, the text represents the "graphic picture of [Warren's] trials and religious experience" and Elliott asserts that "the providence and grace of God have sustained him" in the period of "perplexity and trial" (3). Suggesting the "rhetorical message of the Christian faith [which] promises freedom, liberation, and deliverance from bondage," these words by Warren's advocates also situate his text more firmly as a form of spiritual autobiography (Pierce 93).

Navigating between genres, the *Narrative* also contains those structural elements that would have made it instantly identifiable as a slave narrative both by publishers and a prospective reading public: the "Recommendations" are followed by the "Preface", and the body of the narrative is appended with a "Letter to my master". A more detailed look at the "Preface" seems to confirm the author's aspiration to emulate other examples of the slave narrative. After all, the *Narrative* was published in the "boom years" of the genre, from the 1830s-1860s (Starling 1). After having obtained external authentication through his (white) colleagues in office, Warren claims to write only because of "the earnest solicitation of a number of friends" and promises a simple tale written "in a plain, unvarnished style." Warren suggests he does not write fiction but fact, and wishes his audience to understand his honest intentions free from "pretension to literary ability" ("Preface"). Although he outwardly fulfills the humbleness expected of the author, Warren in fact goes on to rewrite several elements of the classic slave narrative in the following, and adapts the spiritual autobiography to create a sense of empowerment and regain narrative control over his life.

The beginning is a case in point, as it continues the tension between genre conventions and a more individualistic conception of his story. Far from using the typical "I was born" to "attest to the real existence of a narrator" in the midst of an often absent genealogy, Warren not only furnishes his exact birthday but precisely his familial lineage (Olney 155). The pillars of his earliest childhood life are present in the first couple of lines: his parents, both slaves of one "Mr. John Warren" from Gates County, North Carolina, and "two children besides [himself]" (Warren 7). Interestingly, what Warren seems to forgo is his inherited position as a slave of John Warren. Similar to other authors in this book, he does identify his

parents as “slaves” and “property”—but these are terms that describe him only by implication. That young Richard is a slave as well is irrefutable, as the consequences of this status are played out when John Warren moves to a different state, Tennessee, taking his ‘possessions’, including Richard and his family, with him (7). Warren as a narrator still does not call himself slave, however, although the horrors of his condition strike readers in the first paragraph: the family of five is “sent to the slave mart... and hired out to the highest bidder” after John Warren’s death shortly after settling in Tennessee (7). In this first paragraph, crucial for any narrative, Warren is almost entirely concerned with the collective “we” instead of the individual “I”, prioritizing the black family over the white master and even his own fate: despite the underlying presence of the owner, his own family, and the “great majority of slave families” with whom they come to share a terrible lot, are the center of the narrative’s opening (7). This instance illustrates Davis and Gates, Jr.’s, statement that the “descriptive ‘eye’ was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual ‘I’ of the black author, as well as the collective ‘I’ of the race” (Davis and Gates, Jr. xxvi). It also serves as a powerful redefinition and rewriting of a familiar structural beginning.

The ensuing auction scene that sees each family member sold to a different master could easily be read as a rendition to satisfy the commodification of Warren’s narrative and to generate sales amongst a sensationalist readership.⁶ Yet, the author uses this instance of loss and pain to create a powerful moment of conversation between individual and collective stories. As each family member is forced to go with a new ‘master,’ Warren attempts to put into words the emotional havoc of the scene, although it seems “not possible” (7). The fate of one family, his own, provides an example to illustrate the trope of the loving ‘slave mother’ and her children. Using a scene of family separation as one of the most essential and emotionally challenging elements of a slave narrative might be ascribed to testing ground with a potentially white readership. The exposition of the cruel system of slavery would resonate strongly with readers, a fact of which Warren surely would have been aware. He compares a slave mother’s deep affection for her children directly to any white mother’s as of the “same” nature (7). Naturally, the suffering caused by their separation is forced on the reader, first by implicit identification, and second by the allusion to “feelings that can be better imagined than described” (7). Warren has understood the narratological force of such a scene, and addresses the alluring paradox of speaking the unspeakable. At the same time, this scene has allowed him to introduce the motif of suffering, which will guide his narrative in the following.

6 Warren and his five advocates explain that the publication is meant to lay the basis for a longer text possibly to be published “should this edition meet with a ready sale” (3).

Shortly after Richard is taken away by his new ‘owner’, one James Patton, readers encounter another identifiable trope, the violent master. Patton fits any description of a “cruel, hard-hearted” sadist who indulges in the brutal beatings of the child Richard “until the blood would stream down [his] body” (7-8). Avoiding an even more detailed description of physical punishment, however, Warren spends only the necessary minimum of sentences on the pitiless owner, instead diverting the focus from this character by introducing two other essential aspects in the narrative. For one, Patton is set against the increasing importance of religion in young Richard’s life by turning the enslavement under the former into a time of trial and suffering. In line with the spiritual autobiography’s focus on crises, religion and faith become a sustaining and uplifting force for young Richard (see Pierce 93), and a leitmotif in his narrative. What is more, religion becomes associated explicitly with the maternal. As Warren explains, his mother, whom he is allowed to see only “two or three times during the year,” was not only a “pious woman” herself but also “instruct[ed]” her son in religious matters (8). The memories of these religious lessons, Warren recalls, are “sweet to [his] mind to this day,” representing not merely the rare moments of comfort and relief for the young boy, but casting religion’s impact on him as sustaining through his mother’s “counsels” (8). Through his narrative, Warren is able to reclaim these memories and repossess them. The brief passage creates an instance of intimate togetherness in this mother-child relationship which, narratologically, surpasses the separation and violence enforced by Patton.⁷

Additionally, the brief pause in the narration created by the retrospect on his mother highlights the contrast to Richard’s life as a young man growing up in slavery as a ‘moveable good’ and his later freedom. On each New Year’s Day, “[he] was put upon the block and hired out,” either to the person of the previous year or a new master (8).⁸ Warren describes this procedure went on “for twenty years,” way into his early adulthood, bringing him into contact with a wide variety of white owners and a spectrum of possible treatments, mostly feeling, however, treated “worse [...] than [their] dumb animals” (8). The circumstance of being constantly “driven about” against his will creates the sense of unsettledness and lack of stability (8). His mother’s comforting lessons, as the rest of his family, have now vanished from the narrative. At the same time, this forced nomadic way of life represents a red thread in Warren’s life and marks a stark contrast to his

7 The figure of the mother is also of particular importance in the narrative by Samuel R. Ward (see ch. 4).

8 Warren’s text here serves as a form of historical source and testimonial. New Year’s Day appears in a bulk of other narrative’s as the most dreaded day for slaves and the occasion when they were auctioned off and sold to new ‘masters’.

later profession as itinerant Methodist preacher. As a young man, he finds himself subjected to the brutal effects of slavery that required him to be moved about, while as a freeman, he is able to choose his profession and life style. He will later be able to recast mobility as an essential marker of his life and rid himself of the slave status altogether.

While the first part of Warren's narrative, centered on his early biography, family, and religion, functions to both work with and against the slave narrative and the spiritual autobiography, the subsequent focus on acquiring literacy, linked to religious instruction and his own sense of agency, do much the same. In this way, Warren uses his time of being hired out actively to pursue his education, as did Frederick Douglass. Against the legal and socio-political background that provided for severe punishments of literate slaves, Warren describes that he acquired reading and writing while he was "with a Mr. Jonathan Pope" for three years between 1826 and 1829 (8). He speaks favorably of Pope's daughter who "took great interest in [his] welfare," taking care of Warren physically by attending to the wounds left by beatings, but also intellectually by catering to his desire for religious instruction (8). Significantly, it is again a woman who manages to soothe Warren with religion *au sense large*.

Warren casts Pope's daughter as her father's "great favorite," which explains her willingness to undergo the considerable risk of being detected in helping him (9). To console him when he is "unable to leave [his] miserable cabin," she brings the Bible to him and reads from "that blessed book" (9). Unlike with his mother, however, the Bible does not simply convey the word of God and inspire him to lead a Christian life, but also sparks Warren's wish to be further educated. In fact, he relies on Pope's daughter for "instruction," but emphasizes that she commences to teach him "at [his] request," which subtly introduces his own agency in this critical step in his life (9). Moreover, the daughter's role is restricted to what seems to have been only an initial phase in his learning. She disappears quite abruptly from the text, and Warren, as if empowered by the first steps towards literacy, uses his will to learn instilled in him by the Bible lessons to "fle[e] to the woods after receiving a flogging" to pursue his studies by himself (9). Literacy as a key topos in slave narratives has now become a means of defiance for Warren: "I would take my spelling book along with me, and then I would set my mind to work to master some word, feeling that I had accomplished great things if I could in one day learn to spell one or two words" (9).

If education encompasses both literacy and religious literacy for Warren—meaning the study and understanding of the Bible—it is essential as a precondition for his religious conversion moment. In fact, Warren's sense of empowerment and accomplishment from studying by himself in religious contemplation are soon

tested. His marriage “to a slave named Eliza” in 1832 can only provide brief sustenance. Warren is fond of Eliza as she is “a true and devoted Christian,” but has to bear her being sold south two years later (9). Additionally, he is forced to witness the auctioning off of both his brother and sister to different states. The combination of these events leads Warren into a serious emotional and spiritual crisis as he threatens to break under the weight of suffering he is made to endure. He describes the loneliness and emotions that “possess [his] soul,” marking him as the severely tried individual critical to the spiritual autobiography (10). Slowly, Warren finds comfort in the words of a hymn: “I could say, ‘The Lord giveth,’ (sic) but in this instance I could not say ‘The Lord taketh away.’ [...] ‘Yet how can I doubt my Saviour’s protection, [...] O let me with patience receive his correction’” (10). Religion finally comes to provide solace again in this time of utmost anxiety. This realization prompts Warren to join the Methodist Church, which marks an incisive moment and the instance of his religious conversion: “[I] found the Saviour precious to my soul [and] experienced the forgiveness of my sins” (10). What is more, Warren now understands the earthly power of the master over the slave’s body, whereas the soul is responsible to God and otherwise free (see 10). This critical moment, too, is one of empowerment induced by religion. Religion, too, has by now become the structuring device of his story as well as the *Narrative*.

Soon after he becomes a member of the Methodist Church, Warren hears the “call[...] to the Gospel,” completing his initiation into his vocational and professional life (11). For the *Narrative*, this underlines a more confident turn to the spiritual autobiography and even other religious genres. The firm identification of his own will and choice allows Warren to assume intellectual control over his status as a slave. While other slave narrative authors have taken the acquiring of literacy as the first step towards both physical and mental self-emancipation, Warren connects literacy also to a religious conversion moment that becomes the actual focus of his liberation.⁹ More precisely, he describes that the status as a slave keeps him from executing his true calling and vocation as a minister (see 11). Slavery, therefore, not only becomes an imposition on his preaching, entailing “much opposition and trouble” but, in fact, an interference with God’s pre-ordained plan for him (11). Accordingly, Warren depicts the dangerous and tiresome preaching to fellow bondswomen and –men on various farms, a duty that he pursues for an astonishing eighteen years. The ‘peculiar institution’ continuously infringes on his work through severe punishments and threats (see

9 This argument has been most famously made in the case of Frederick Douglass and his 1845 *Narrative*, but is true for a diverse range of narratives from Olaudah Equiano to Harriet Jacobs to the narratives in this book.

11), but Warren already emerges as deeply committed to his community and, in the face of adversity, to his version of a “[religious] anti-slavery life” that Samuel R. Ward would later proclaim (Ball).¹⁰

Substantiating his spiritual emancipation from slavery, on the one hand, and an openness to include other religious genres, on the other, is, for example, the letter in Warren’s Appendix. The “Letter to my master in Tennessee” from August 1855 (23) is an example of a well-established element of the slave narrative, outwardly providing structural closure to the text, but it is also a demonstration of Warren’s ability to adapt the familiar to his own purposes. In the beginning, his letter reproduces the polite tone and polished style of address, yet also the stinging sarcasm reserved to attack the former master. Through the letter, Warren eventually performs a role reversal and regains control over his written life. The letter displays the intellectual capacities, the degree of literacy, and, most importantly, the moral triumph over the so-called master by using common-sense logical exposition of arguments. Typically, Warren begins with an act of defiance—“I am still in the land of the living”—and asserts that he has not once regretted his decision to leave Tennessee and the sphere of influence of the master (24).

This conscious seizing of control of defying the owners’ monopoly over the slave’s mind, body, and mobility is heightened by the portrait of life under slavery which prompted Warren’s escape. Revisiting the daily routines on the plantation expose the master as cruel and inhuman, as someone who “prevented me, by force, from praying [...] you stripped my clothes from my back and made me receive one hundred lashes for holding a religious meeting” (24). Warren’s tone markedly shifts to a more graphic description of the punishments he endured while trying to exercise his religious freedom, a dramatic heightening of tension which is released in his conclusion that “it [is] not strange that ideas of liberty and freedom would cross my brain” (24). In a powerful rhetoric twist, Warren has his former master

10 A vividly graphic depiction of a secret hush-harbor meeting that is interrupted by the patrol illustrates the reality of these threats. One of the few instances that could be ascribed to an openly abolitionist discourse, the rhetoric of this passage serves to illustrate the outrageous conflict—the sinfulness—between the practice of religion and the practice of slavery. Portraying the slave community of worshippers as beset by the patrol also allows Warren to position himself as a martyr-like figure, insisting that “the fear of privation, suffering, and cruelty [...] did not deter [him] from performing [his] duty” (12). That he still associates these years partly with “many [...] happy seasons” in which he felt confirmed in his work by “the divine presence [of God] towards [him],” might relate to his understanding of religious work not only as soothing but also subversive (11).

understand that he no longer relies on the latter's "responsibility to God you assumed on my behalf" (24). Instead, Warren asserts his physical, intellectual, and now literal emancipation from the master, assuming his own agency in disengaging from the master: "I have relieved you from [this responsibility to God] [...] and you may rest assured I shall not give you an opportunity of again subjecting me to your horrid cruelties" (24-25).

Continuing the full role reversal is Warren's assertion that he the former master lacks core qualities of a respected member of society, pledging allegiance only to God. Aside from casting him as in- or anti-humane for his behavior as a slave owner, the former master now also becomes anti-religious. Warren sees no signs of repentance or self-inspection in him, or the necessary will to improve morally and lead a decent life according to Christian doctrine. Using a strategy similar to Austin Steward (see ch. 5), Warren instrumentalizes the old master as a negative foil to highlight his own priorities in life, and underlines that he is now in the superior position to engage with him. The most ironic passage of the letter plays with this notion of acquired superiority in the common "invitation" to the former master to Canadian soil, and in this case, to Hamilton. "I assure you, should you do so, I would receive you courteously, and try to render your visit agreeable and comfortable"—a projected version of an encounter among equals and a poignant reminder of, finally, the former masters' societal inaptitude (25-26).

Finally, the closing hymn "When Shall We All Meet Again" (27) reveals the motif underlying the narrative's overall form and shows Warren's ability of adaptation. In fact, the end of Warren's letter, read against the succession of the hymn, rather than cementing a simple emulation of the slave narrative, suggests that readers have actually participated in a church service. The letter indicates the end of a sermon by asking "that [the master] can enjoy [God's] presence *for ever and ever*," leaving out only an "Amen" (26; added emphasis). The hymn is reminiscent of the closing hymn of a service, played before or as the congregation leaves the church, rather than a biting farewell to the former master. This quasi-performative character also recasts Warren's *Narrative* in the confessional mode of "public and private acts of self-examination and self-expression" (Imbarrato 408) that shares qualities of the sermon in its more exhortative parts. The religious framing also identifies the *Narrative* as the work of a Methodist itinerant preacher who combines well-established and sought-after genres such as the slave narrative and the spiritual autobiography with genres closer to home and his daily work, such as the sermon and the hymn. Religion as the structuring device of his narrative's experimentations is also the lens through which he casts his escape and arrival in Canada West.

2.2 CANADA WEST'S RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY

Having established his “[conversion] from seeker to convert” (Imbarrato 407), as well as his suffering “during [...] years of privation [and] toil [under slavery],” Warren describes that thoughts of liberating himself had often occupied his mind (12). He explains that while he was certain he could only be free through escape, it took him years to devise a precise plan and wait for the right moment. Eventually, Warren casts the occasion of his escape in less than haphazard circumstances. His escape becomes a providential event, incorporating the transition from slavery to freedom, from the South to Detroit and then Canada West into the religious trajectory of the *Narrative*. In this way, he interprets an unexpected and short reunion with his wife and child, after a separation of no less than eight years, as a divine answer to his prayers and a sign of God’s mercy towards “all his creatures” (13). Only through the meeting with his wife, essentially a God-given occasion, does he come by “some important information which would enable [him] to escape to a free land” (13).

The scene of the short reunion leads up to the climax of Warren’s narrative, his physical escape from slavery, and gains quasi-mystical qualities due to its secretive, vague, and elliptical character. Warren does not tell readers what kind of information he receives from his wife, possibly to protect her. What is more, the execution of his plan is delayed by three more years. Only then can he make use of the knowledge she provided him with and slip away via the “depot of the underground railway” (13). Warren’s metaphorical use of the “*light* which [his] wife held in her hand” (13; original emphasis) as the key to his escape connects the “basic formula of the conversion narrative” (Brooks and Mabry 88) with the popular epistemology of the Underground Railroad.¹¹ On the one hand, the light can be read as a symbol of illumination and gaining knowledge; on the other hand, it might represent the North Star showing the fugitive the way to freedom, in line with Katherine McKittrick’s statement on imagining the Underground Railroad that “liberty is [...] coupled with seeable territoriality” (“Freedom” 101). Warren’s continuous use of the term “free land” and “land of freedom” follows this pattern (Warren 13). Instead of a more politically-connoted “country,” the term “land” allows Warren to both remain imprecise in order to not give away the “merciful conductor” who helped him along the way and to map his version of the Promised Land in religious terms: “I was speedily brought to the land of freedom,” he

11 Brooks and Mabry point out that the early conversion narrative and the spiritual autobiography as inspirations for the slave narrative in the nineteenth century were steeped in a Black Protestantism (see especially 88).

describes, “to the land where the oppressed and down-trodden sons of Africa can find a resting place” (13). This echoes the verse in Job that Warren had quoted only a few paragraphs before about a place “[where] the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest” (Job 3.17).

The only evidence Warren reveals about the escape as such is his safe arrival in the city of Detroit. This scene is pivotal in several respects. First, it opens up yet again the narrative’s outlook and genre from religious slave narrative with a telos, focusing on conversion and liberation, to an account of a life dedicated to religious work that includes several more literary-religious genres, namely the church record, the sermon, and the travelogue. Second, it transcends other slave narratives in crossing the border not merely into free territory, but into a different country. In doing so, Warren’s text inserts itself in the canon of Clarke’s “Canadian slave narratives” (see “No Hearsay”), which contain an ‘arrival scene’ reflecting the emotionality and the ‘shock’ of freedom.¹² Nevertheless, Warren reworks such a staple scene for his purpose: his arrival is not that of the weary slave reaching free soil, but that of the pilgrim who has been led by God’s grace. He attributes his safe landing in Detroit to God who has guided him “through dark and angry waters” (Warren 13). Therefore, the moment of arrival also signifies a spiritual climax. He casts his liberation as that of an unworthy “sinner” who has been led on the path to “salvation” (13; 14). Warren is overwhelmed at God’s grace to have bestowed freedom on him; the retrospect of his lives past and present at the same time produces feelings of “excite[ment] and [...]joy” (13). Warren here fuses physical and spiritual liberation: if other authors from Olaudah Equiano to Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass emphasize the importance of literacy as fundamental in intellectual and mental emancipation, Warren’s conversion fulfills the same purpose. Religious instruction, together with the image of God’s providence provided sustenance in slavery and eventually, helped to overcome his status mentally and, finally, physically. In the subsequent paragraphs, Warren will also map this conflation onto a religious geography of Canada as the Promised Land, as “that soil consecrated to freedom” (24).

In order to understand this operation, it is important to consider that the immediate arrival in Detroit as a confirmation and recompense of faith is followed immediately by a picture of the afterlife. Warren here envisions the entrance through God’s “iron gate” and the reunion with lost friends, family members, and those he had helped convert to religion while working as a preacher amongst other slaves (14). Using the dichotomy between darkness and light, Warren’s vision of

12 See, for example, Josiah Henson’s description of his landing in Canada in his *Life of Josiah Henson* from 1849, that I reference in chapter 1 (n16).

(t)his form of heaven is cast explicitly as anything *non-slavery*. The absence of control over one's own body and life, paired with the brutal and brutalizing regime of slavery, are rejected by such formulations as "there is no [...]" or "where [...] is no more" and replaced by notions of unity, togetherness, and joy (14; 15). Warren's vision finally takes the form of a sermon praising the prospects of a hereafter and reminding readers to lead a righteous life. Specifically, Warren's plea "may the remainder of our life be so spent that [...]" (15) enhances Pierce's observation that the "spiritual autobiography represents a behavioral guide and an instrument of moral leadership" (93). The language of this dream-like vision, while forming the basis for Warren's subsequent interpretation of Canada West as heaven on earth, can also be read as an instance of rewriting, as it refutes the past infringements of slavery and helps regain control over his life and his story.

The elative tone and message of the vision, delivered as a sermon, lead over to an instance of anti-slavery discourse in Warren's narrative. His use of the dichotomy between light and darkness helps to emphasize his ideal of an afterlife, but as a comment opposing free soil and slave soil, it also serves to refute prevalent proslavery arguments. At the same time, the opposition between the two will help readers identify the association of Canada to the afterlife and as the Promised Land later on. In this way, Warren's portrayal of an afterlife as "that land [where] we can sing and shout the praises" is the obvious refutation of the 'slavery-as-positive-good'-argument which postulates that slaves were actually "better off and more contented in the South" (15). From the position of freedom, Warren bluntly discards such statements as "not [bearing] the semblance of truth" (15). He spells out very clearly the gaping contradiction of any pro-slavery argumentation, which is, he implies, ignorant of reality, and expounds that "slaves cannot be contented and happy, because they are SLAVES. They have not the control of their own will, desires, or ways [...]" (15; original emphasis). This lack of control amounts to no less than an existential crisis for the bondsman or -woman and marks, according to Warren's explanation, "[a] most essential point" in the contrast between slavery and freedom (16).

Consequently, Warren also presents himself as an astute mediator between an audience that needs to be instructed about the characteristics of slavery from the point of view of an ex-slave. As an author, he is aware of the necessity to overcome the epistemological *décalage* between his experience and that of a (white) readership, as is obvious in his acknowledgment that "[t]he man who says that the condition of the slave with his master is preferable to that of being his own master does not understand the first principles of liberty" (16). What is more, Warren assumes authority both as a (secular) witness of the institution and a sufferer in slavery and freedom, which will render him worthy of God's grace. He admits that

liberty does not come without a cost, as the escape is often marked by periods of “hunger, [...] without a shelter [...], and with but scanty clothing during the severity of a northern winter” (16). However, he emphasizes, even the abstract idea of freedom in the sense of self-determination “more than compensated [him] for the sufferings and privations [he] endured” (16).

After this ellipsis, Warren returns to his arrival scene in the city of Detroit (see 13). It is now that Canada West figures within reach for the first time; it partakes immediately in the joy of reaching Detroit and of the religious significance of the moment. Warren proudly recalls “beh[olding] the soil of Canada” just across the shore, relegating Detroit to the mere starting point of a more symbolic journey that makes him part of the “fluid frontier” between Canada West and the United States (16). Moreover, the sight of Canada West triggers Warren’s realization that there, “the slaveholder and his blood-hounds cannot come—a partial fulfillment, as readers now recall, of his vision of heaven and the afterlife (16). Significantly, this observation also makes Warren “burst out in songs of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God,” alluding to the arrival in Canada West as a godly sign (16).

As a consequence, Warren does not spend more time in illustrating the practical arrangements of finding assistance in Detroit or reaching Canada West, but focuses on beginning his religious work on free soil as part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Canada West becomes the occasion for Warren to “labor in the vineyard of the Lord, and [reap] a rich harvest of souls” (25). Indeed, the country becomes that vineyard itself, which Warren opposes neatly to the cotton fields of slavery, in which work and harvest were meant to enrich another man. J.H. Thomas licenses him to preach in Detroit, and a few weeks after, he tells his readers he has moved on “for my mission to Canada” (17). This missionary work is directed specifically at Black Methodists. Although his transition into living the life as a preacher—and consequently, his border crossing into a different country—is wrapped in only a few sentences, it marks a significant point in the narrative. From now on, he focuses entirely on his professional life in Canada West. In turn, he casts the province as the place where he is finally able to exercise what he perceives to be his true vocation, whereas under slavery, as he had pointed out, his status as a slave had kept him from fulfilling God’s calling (see above). Similarly to Mary and Henry Bibb, Warren sees Canada West as his personal mission field, which takes precedence over the mere fact of it representing free territory.¹³

13 In a letter to Gerrit Smith, Mary Bibb uses the same metaphor to describe the necessity to perform work in the province of Canada West: “There are hundreds of Slaves coming here daily. My husband & self consider this the field for us at present” (*BAP* 108).

From a structural point of view, the move to Canada West initiates Warren's travel journal that he had announced to be incorporated in his narrative (see 17). After a few weeks of work in Detroit, he travels to Chatham, Canada West, for ten days. Barely arrived, Warren begins *in medias res* by alluding to the turmoil the local community is undergoing, "caused by a difference about the question of Slavery" (17). Interestingly, Warren ascribes this unrest to a self-proclaimed "Missionary from the True Wesleyans in the States" challenging the Methodists on their alleged stance as pro-slavery (17). Warren's fierce defense of his church against "misrepresentation and deceit" reveals the danger this U.S. 'emissary' represents by luring "large numbers away from the Church" and the congregation (17). Warren's descriptions also reveal that this obvious struggle was neither "confined to Chatham" nor to the Methodist church, and how the political debates between pro- and anti-slavery factions played out in the religious sector (17). Warren only hints at the fact that the zealots were successfully bringing discord to several other communities, but quickly moves on, as if uncomfortable with the state of the art in Chatham (see 18).

In fact, Warren witnessed part of a substantial controversy. Winks clarifies that "[t]he churches of Canada were not in agreement on how to deal with the fugitives or with the problem of slavery" (*History* 219). Donald G. Simpson asserts that churches were established quickly after black fugitives had arrived in Canada West, but that "most worship was done on a segregated basis" (22). He goes on to explain that the Methodist New Connexion in Canada West was the "equivalent of the True Wesleyans in the United States and...decidedly anti-slavery [but that...] the Wesleyan Methodists [...] did not take a stand on the issue" (24). As Simpson shows, the *Provincial Freeman* (1854-1857), for example, one of the black newspapers in Canada West, discussed this issue vehemently in the first half of the 1850s and called out, for example, the Canadian Wesleyan Methodists for not taking a stand against slavery (see 24-25).

While the question of slavery was contentious between the branches of one denomination in Canada West and the United States, a storm was brewing within the AME itself that Warren leaves unmentioned. Indeed, Warren published his narrative in 1856, the same year that saw the end of the AME Church and its remodeling as the "BME", the British Methodist Episcopal Church (see Simpson 49-50; Payne 361-92). Simpson interprets this decision primarily as a way to leave the "embarrass[ing]" position for the AME church in Canada West to be structurally part of "an American Division" (48). A separation, he suggests, would enable members also to express their allegiances to Britain (48-49). Bishop Daniel A. Payne, remembering the motion of 1854 and its putting into practice in 1856 in his *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, explains that there had

been “an absolute need” for a separation, but that the suggestion, brought forth by Benjamin Stewart first sounded “like a clap of thunder in a clear sky” (322). Payne underlines the momentous change that a separation announced, and reports the substantial and controversial debate it caused at the General Conference of 1856 in Chatham (see Payne, ch. XXIX). Warren’s narrative, with a “Preface” signed in May, would have seen the light only a few months before this incisive step, and it seems that the accompanying turmoil figures as a subtext. While the unrest allows Warren to justify the necessity of his work in Canada West, it also relativizes the idealized image of a peaceful “mission”.

Therefore, it seems, Warren is hurrying to provide more positive and encouraging examples of religious congregations in Canada West. Via London, Ontario, he arrives in Hamilton at the end of November. As he travels through the different towns and villages, he connects with the church representatives *sur place* and begins to establish his professional and personal network. For example, Noah C.W. Cannon and J. Taylor in London still seem to face “differences... among our people,” but the state of the community in Hamilton is “more healthy” (18).¹⁴ Hamilton marks an incisive stop for Warren as he spends the first holiday season and New Year’s as a free man in Canada West. He takes his time to praise the province as a haven that fosters self-esteem and humanity, where he feels “esteemed as a man among men” (18). He indulges in the common comparison to the slavery-ridden United States in a brief verse centering on the images of the (British) lion welcoming the fugitive and the claw- and therefore powerless (American) eagle (see 18).

Warren suspends the narration to elaborate on this praise of Canada West in an idealized accolade that brings the connection to his initial scene of the afterlife full circle (see above) by turning Canada into a ‘heaven on earth’: he describes unmolested religious worship and the wholeness of families, foregrounding essential traits such as togetherness, union, and harmony. Warren uses familiar images of domesticity to underline a blissful communion under “our own vine and fig-tree” and around the “family altar” (18).¹⁵ In turn, evoking the notions of freedom, self-determination, and security serves to construct the passage as an

14 Cannon and—very likely—Jeremiah Taylor were both itinerant preachers in the AME Church in Canada, like Warren. Both appear frequently in Payne’s *History*, which allows tracing their appointments and involvements in the church. For example, Payne mentions that Cannon was not only a preacher but also an aspiring author, having penned several books (Payne 102; 160).

15 Likely a paraphrase of Micah 4.4: “Each of them will sit under his vine And under his fig tree, With no one to make them afraid, For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.”

explicit *ex negativo* foil of the southern United States. In Canada West, he seems to find precisely what the South had denied him and his fellow-bondsmen—the place is marked by the absence of harassment, fear, slave-traders, the lash, and chastisement (18-19). Instead, Canada West becomes the place where it is allowed to “[make] a great noise” freely and undisturbedly, representing the “prayer and praise” of the adult community as well as the “voices of the little ones” (18, 19). With all connotations attached to the regaining and finding one’s voice, Canada West is cast as the realm where one also regains one’s identity as a self-determined Christian. This enforcement of the earthly Canaan and the Promised Land seems yet awkwardly situated as a digression from Warren’s travelogue, as if to overemphasize these positive qualities in the face of a brewing storm of disunion.

As Warren moves on to St. Catharines, an important “distribution center for many of the fugitives who [arrived in the 1830s and 1840s],” his impression of community work in town are still imbued with the tone of the previous passage (Simpson 195). He praises the visible “unity, and prosperity” as a proof of successful “labors of both pastor and people” (Warren 19). All the while, St. Catharines had a reputation for bad race relations and a significant amount of prejudice against black people. For instance, when Samuel R. Ward visited the town, he was relieved that “the prejudice against our people, (sic) was not so strong, so prevalent nor so unprovoked as we had thought, from what we had heard” (*BAP* 257). It is difficult to image that Warren should not have been aware of this.¹⁶ Instead, Warren reports similar successes for the communities in Niagara, St. David’s, Drummondville, Chippewa, all of which he passes on his way to Buffalo. In mentioning these diverse places, Warren also functions as a chronicler of the expanding black churches in Canada West, and thus comes much closer to the “church historian” who combines “community genealogy[,...] folk theology and transcribed oral history” (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 46): “At all these places I found our people had organized themselves into Churches, and were striving to do good to [...] their brethren who had escaped from bondage” (Warren 19). Warren’s visible mobility from settlement to settlement, together with his positive observations, creates a dynamic within the narrative that emanates from vivid local black communities in motion as they organize their community life through the institution of the church.¹⁷ As Simpson puts it, “the church occupied

16 The proceedings of an “Indignation Meeting” of Blacks in town (1854) attests to discrimination that black people had to undergo (see *BAP* doc. 47). The meeting was called in reaction to exclusion of black citizens from public coaches and two hotels.

17 Warren’s travelogue interlocks with a number of accounts from the 1830s onward, by both black and white abolitionists touring Canada West and investigating the status of black communities in the province. Such accounts exist by Benjamin Lundy (1832),

a key position in helping blacks adjust to the demands of the Canadian society,” one of the crucial tasks being, for example, the assistance to incoming fugitive slaves (21).

As Warren describes his journey to Buffalo, his narrative contributes to illuminating “nineteenth-century Canada [as a] transnational[...] border zone [...] that generated numerous border-crossing stories” (Siemerling 129). Warren almost casually mentions what is *de facto* a border crossing back into the United States, where he describes the revival under Rev. Wires that is taking place as he arrives (see 19). Warren joins Wires in conducting the meeting and the conversion of believers, which helps to show that the church network still spanned across borders and that Warren as itinerant preacher navigated within a space primarily determined by his work for the church. From Buffalo, he returns to St. Catharines in Canada West for the Quarterly Meeting of Alexander Helmsley at the beginning of March, only to cross back into Buffalo to substitute for the local preacher (see 19). Warren narrates all of these trajectories within the brief span of one paragraph of his cross-border travelogue, and it seems that the frontier here is indeed fluid in the sense that it does not seem to represent any obstacle for Warren and his work. His tone is affirmative and positive (“The meeting [in St. Catharines] was a good one”; “I received an invitation to go back to Buffalo,” 19), although he does not mention any further details about his mode of travel, the speed or even the circumstances in which moves.

The impression of an entirely “fluid” frontier, however, is more complex. In fact, Warren had made a point of establishing a very concrete ideological as well as political border between the United States and Canada West only just before he related the first move back to Buffalo. Although as an author, he is more concerned with reproducing his travelogue, it seems contradictory that he should travel back and forth so easily and unreservedly between two opposite political—and in view of the turmoil within the church, not least spiritual—entities. As Warren re-crosses into Amherstburg, Canada West, he attends the celebrations for August 1, “the Anniversary of the Emancipation of Slaves in the West Indies” (20). Warren is a witness of the “great deal of enthusiasm” on the part of the black community, for whom this day had become the symbolic anti-Fourth-of-July and the day of celebrating freedom (20). At the same time, this is also an opportunity for Warren to reject proslavery arguments and proves to his readers that black people are well

Samuel R. Ward (1853) Benjamin Drew (1856), William Wells Brown (1861), or Samuel Gridley Howe (1863). Although the reports are seldom critical in the sense that they tend to idealize Canada West and the freedom it offers, they do record, as Siemerling claims, “black economic and emotional geographies” (121). The genre figures in more detail in chapter 4.

able to “appreciate the blessings of freedom” (20). He connects his assertion to a sharp side remark on the United States which denied them “the birthright of every son and daughter of Adam” (20). Warren takes up the polemic binary opposition between the United States and Great Britain, calling the latter the only one who has guaranteed freedom to Blacks “on the *American* continent” (20; added emphasis). The border thus signals yet a palpable difference between the slave Republic and Canada West as a stand-in for the Empire.

When the Ohio conference appoints him to Ypsilanti, Michigan, Warren for the first time gently refuses the decision. He underlines that “[his] desire was to go to Canada” (21). Following Noah Cannon’s suggestion, Warren becomes an official “Travelling Preacher in the A.M.E. Church *in Canada*,” starting out in the Amherstburg Circuit (21; added emphasis). Consequently, the latter part of his travelogue lists the various Methodist conferences in the province, together with Warren’s various appointments, detailing his salary, and the number of conversions he was able to perform. The focus is now on distilling his work efforts, such as his successful increase of community membership in the Chatham Circuit, where he is appointed by the Toronto Conference in 1850, and where he notes “an increase during the year of 120 members” by 1851 (22). Warren also gradually progresses in the church hierarchy. At the annual conference at Hamilton in August 1847, he is made a deacon by Bishop Quinn (21). At London in 1851, Warren is “recognized” as an Elder (22). The first half of the 1850s, following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, sees Warren appointed to all major towns and settlements in Canada West boasting a considerable share of black inhabitants, among which are Chatham, St. Catharines (1852), Peel (probably 1853), and Toronto (1854), together with the Circuits of Amherstburg, Windsor, and Dawn.¹⁸ Having reached the actual time of his writing, Warren indicates to be stationed in Hamilton, but also mentions his “ill health” (23). Indeed, although he has established himself as a diligent and dedicated preacher, he does reveal to be laboring under difficult conditions: he performs his duty to all his communities on foot, and “travelled [one] year [...] over 1200 miles,” visiting each of the communities “once in every month” and preaching “every Sabbath” (21).

In sum, the travelogue reflects best Warren’s participation in the bottom-up organization of black communities in Canada West in the 1840s and the first half of the 1850s. Warren’s concluding paragraph, a recapitulation of his time in Canada West and an evaluation of his life as a “Christian Minister,” highlights these years as “the happiest in [his] life” (23). He casts Canada West as the place

18 For a detailed account of these accounts, see Winks. For a particular focus on education in Canada West and its various black communities, see Simpson.

of his professional accomplishments characterized by the “kindest of treatment, not only from people of my own color, but from *nearly all*” (23; added emphasis). He closes also by evoking the religious frame of his Canadian enterprise, whose success was crowned by God’s help (23). In this way, Warren also comments on his “anti-slavery life” (Erica Ball), a life dedicated to his community and his work that, by preaching the gospel to his fellow-slaves and continuing the mission in freedom, deserves to be seen as a form of anti-slavery activism.

At the same time that he is thus reflecting on his vocation as a Christian travelling minister, he also relies on the image of the downtrodden, illiterate fugitive: “I have had much to contend with, being unlettered and unlearned” (23). While this ignores his claim “written by himself” and the episode of acquiring literacy as a young man, his statement also brings to a close the use of classic slave narrative elements. The ‘downtrodden fugitive’ in Canada as a staple character seems to resonate with the narrative’s other attempts to conform to the genre (see above). However, it might signal, too, that Warren expresses belonging to the black community of fugitives and believers who have somehow succeeded in Canada West where “[t]he Lord has done much for my people” (23). In this way, his final words return to the image of the Promised Land and the afterlife that Warren had connected to the province: he inscribes his wish to lead a ‘proper’ life as a Christian on earth to assure a “home in Heaven” into his chosen ground, Canada West (23).

2.3 GENEALOGIES

Looking at Warren’s *Narrative of the Life and Sufferings* as a whole, this final section seeks to place it in a genealogy of black (Methodist) church writing, and to open the dialogue with what Clarke has called the “church narrative” as an original “contribution the African-Canadian literary canon” (“Church Narrative 46). Consider, for one, how Warren places himself within the network of black Methodist preachers in Canada West and the Northern United States who helped shape the church’s community work. If Warren’s travelogue at first glance seems repetitive and appears as a sequence of matter-of-fact descriptive paragraphs, readers gain insight into the appointment and service structure of the black Methodist church: for example, when Warren returns to Detroit, where he is appointed to by the Ohio Conference as a substitute for Rev. Thomas, he reports both who succeeded Thomas at Detroit (Rev. Edward Davis) and that Rev. Brown was to be the “School Teacher at the same place” (20). Warren also chronicles the various annual conferences, which constituted core organizational meetings of the

church, providing his point of view and showing where he fit in within this organizational structure. Giving names, places, functions, salaries, is one way for Warren to establish and inscribe himself in a church tradition, when other narrators such as Austin Steward focused more on genealogies of meaningful individuals or, as in Smallwood's case, political activist genealogies. It is also Warren's way of contributing to community building via texts, which all of the authors in this book pursue in different ways.

In doing so, Warren reproduces elements of a church record, a church narrative as "[the] histor[y] of [one] specific church[...]" (Clarke, "Church Narrative" 46), that he embeds in the larger structure of his *Narrative*. This record evokes a black (Methodist) church history and historiography. The travelogue, in fact, reflects Clarke's "casual historiography" and is a forerunner of what would later span into full-fledged histories, such as Bishop Daniel Payne's *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (1891) and Peter McKerrow's *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia* (1895) (Clarke, "No Hearsay" 37). This historiography, however, is of value "as literature" (Clarke, "Church Narrative" 46; original emphasis), and Warren's narrative is proof of a literary imaginary that is able to incorporate it. Writing an autobiographical narrative in the 1850s, Warren has a plethora of genres available to accommodate his multifaceted experience. Most importantly, the *Narrative* captures precisely the "grassroots", bottom-up story of Clarke's church narratives (47), not a top-down, elitist interpretation. This makes Warren unique among the texts in this book. Although he dwells extensively on the myth of the Promised Land, which the following chapters work with and against, his narrative produces precisely one of the "folk creations" that Clarke insists need to be included in a black Canadian literary canon and that deserve our critical attention (Clarke, "Church Narrative" 57).

If this chapter argues that Warren's *Narrative* is, however, not solely and properly a church narrative in Clarke's terms, it means that we can meaningfully extend this genre, temporally and geographically, through the lens of this particular text. In terms of space, we can clearly connect Clarke's work on the church narratives of maritime Nova Scotia, or Africadia, to Warren's *Narrative*, which covers Canada West, or communities in today's Ontario. Temporally, Warren continues the early black (Methodist, Baptist) religious writings from the eighteenth century that took the forms of the spiritual autobiography and the slave narrative. Clarke, in the "Primer of African-Canadian Literature" (2002), Siemerling (2015), and others draw attention to the accounts that emerged in Nova Scotia at the end of the eighteenth century. If we look at the narratives by Methodist minister John Marrant (1785), Baptist Loyalist David George (1793), and Loyalist preacher Boston King (1798) as "related to important aspects of black

Nova Scotian culture of the period [and revelatory of] the lives and thoughts of these ministers [...] in their daily work in Nova Scotia” (Siemerling 53), we must recognize the overlap with Warren, who nevertheless lived and wrote in decades later and in a different province.

Marrant’s *Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings, An Account of the Life of Mr. David George*, and *Memoirs of the Life of Boston King*, are noteworthy accounts that have been acknowledged for their play with genre, for they are captivity narratives, spiritual autobiographies, early transatlantic texts of conversion, migration, and testimonies of “energetic ministries” (Brooks and Mabry 85). Here, Warren figures as an important echo, adapting various genres to his particular needs. While the accounts of the eighteenth century relate mission and community building efforts in Africa, Warren is involved in such efforts in Canada West. Signs of continuing a tradition firmly established in early Nova Scotia also appear when we look at Warren in relation to the figure of Baptist minister Richard Preston (1791 or 1792—1861), founding father of the African Baptist Association of Nova Scotia and the African Abolition Society, who has emerged as their “First Saint” through the various church narratives that exist for communities in Nova Scotia (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 53).

Though none such “hagiography” has been bestowed on Warren (53), a couple of aspects seem to connect the two figures. For example, Clarke observes that all narratives stress “the godly working of fate” in Preston’s life (53). For Warren’s narrative persona, too, God’s providence is a driving force that is instrumental in his liberation, but also in his work. In particular, it is important to observe the focus of the church historians on the episode of Preston’s chance reunion with his mother, on free soil in Nova Scotia (hence his choice of name, Preston), not least as a divine intervention. The “miraculous maternal reunion” (54) is reminiscent of Warren’s insistence on the importance of his mother as a religious mentor who instilled in him an interest in religion and its sustaining power. She represents the “pious woman” who begins to transfer this interest to her son during their rare meetings (Warren 8). Later, the decisive piece of information for his escape would come to him from his wife, another sign of God’s mercy towards the believer. Most powerfully, though, Preston and Warren, contemporaries no less, come together as itinerant preachers, involved in community organization “as sleeves rolled-up, ‘hands-on’” figures who had risen from slavery to free men of the church (Clarke, “Church Narrative” 55).

Reflecting on Clarke’s assessment of the Nova Scotian church narrative and its leading figures, we might think of a kind of genealogy from early Black Atlantic writers such as John Marrant—the “immediate Afro-Christian literary antecedent” of Preston’s story (53)—, Boston King, and David George, to literary

imaginations that bring forth figures like Richard Preston in Nova Scotia, and individuals like Richard Warren who labored for the black churches and communities in different provinces of the fluid frontier. To this, we should add the imaginations of Walker and Smallwood who have identified founder and activist Richard Allen as a major part of a black (Methodist) church heritage. Such genealogies pay tribute to the literary, imaginative, spiritual, as well as community-based work of such figures. Even if Warren's *Narrative* is not a well-rounded text and remains inconclusive on the subcurrent troubles it only partly addresses, it elucidates "[t]he beauty of the African-Canadian and Africadian church narratives [...], i.e.] the desires of ex-slaves to enjoy four L's (sic): Liberty, Literacy, Land, and 'Ligion" (56).