

1. Fugitive Borders

This book contributes to the literary branch of Black Canadian studies. As such, it works at the interdisciplinary juncture of history, literature, and literary history. Although Black Canadian studies have been flourishing over the past decades, especially, work in history and historiography has dominated the field (see below). Much remains to be explored in Black Canadian literature; in particular, the literary output of the nineteenth century has garnered hardly any attention. Yet, despite the absence of Canada as a nation-state, or maybe precisely because of that, it is necessary and relevant to delve into lesser known texts today. Such attention can nuance our understanding of the British North American-U.S. border, its racial dimension, and the community-based textual production that shaped it. Therefore, this book gives full recognition to an original sample of multilayered life narratives that have received little or no regard from literary scholars in Canada. This has to do with the fact that they have been partly regarded as historical sources, and also because the label “slave narrative” has made them “an exotic species of Americana” (Clarke, “No Hearsay” 7), which prevented them from entering the canon of British North American literature before Confederation in 1867. The choice of texts continues to challenge the literary canon of both Canadian literature written by minority authors and that of North American slave narratives. Accordingly, the attention this book dedicates to these four narratives participates, on the one hand, in putting Canada West on the map of abolitionism, anti-slavery activism, and black community building before 1867, and discussions of North American slave narratives and black life writing by former slaves, on the other.

Fugitive Borders utilizes and transcends life writing scholarship in investigating the consequences of the authors’ multiple literary and biographical cross-border trajectories between Canada West and the United States (and sometimes other places) as reflected in their narratives. The potential of this cross-border literature unfolds precisely through these trajectories, turning the by now

theorized “fluid frontier” (see below) equally into a realm of literary experimentation and innovation that exceeds the confines of the slave narrative genre. In order to further illustrate the concept of the fluid frontier, this book provides the necessary case studies that so far have lacked in scholarship. It offers close readings of an initial archive that expand Paul Gilroy’s idea of the “Black Atlantic” (1993) and fulfill what Siemerling demands in his recent monograph (2015): Clarke has sharply criticized Gilroy’s work for perpetuating “the blunt irrelevance of Canada to most gestures of diasporic inclusiveness” (“Embarkation” 8). Siemerling, too, sees Canada involved in important “black diasporic contexts” and calls on Canadian studies’ “role [...] in related transnational fields, where it can offer occasions of critical self-reflection and opportunities for renewal” (4-5). To do so, this book relies on recent developments in Black Canadian studies that have turned to a transnational and explicitly cross-border understanding of Black Canadian history. This understanding has been adapted by noteworthy literary scholars as well and will be applied to the sample of nineteenth-century autobiographical writing under scrutiny here. The analyses will show that these texts are part of a transnational archive because they represent accounts of transnational, cross-border individuals who negotiate borders, personhood, and community.

Before devoting the necessary space to these narratives, this chapter will provide a short overview of the historical frame for the sample texts. It will briefly look at the development of Black Canadian studies as a relatively young academic field in flux by outlining which historiographical works have influenced its recent focus on transnationalism. Finally, it will show how the literary branch of Black Canadian studies has evolved on the basis of the ‘transnational turn’ by discussing the work of George Elliott Clarke (2005), Nancy Kang (2005), Alyssa MacLean (2010), and Winfried Siemerling (2015). These scholars have laid the foundations for Black Canadian cross-border literary studies of the nineteenth-century and thus represent the references with and against which the present book was written.

1.1 WRITING THE PROMISED LAND AND BLACK NORTH AMERICA IN THE 1850s

The narratives in this book by Thomas Smallwood, Austin Steward, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Richard Warren were published in the 1850s, when “Canada”

did not yet exist as a nation-state.¹ At the same time, the concept of “nation” is important in these texts and among Black immigrants in Canada West, particularly when they claim royal British subjecthood, as much as the rights and privileges attached to it, based on the idea of a protective British *nation*.² As their activism at mid-century shows, Blacks were discussing forms of (political) participation in Canada West, a possible Canadian nation-state, and even projects of a separate black nation elsewhere.³ Notwithstanding, refugees and immigrants joined highly

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- 1 The narratives that figure in this work were written by four different men, a fact that might easily invite criticism. Male voices and experiences have long dominated the discourse on slavery, in writing the slave narrative as well as other forms of life writing. This is not to say that women’s testimonies do not exist in the case of Canada (West). On the contrary, one of the most vocal and prolific writers of the mid-1850s in Canada West was Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893), but she was never enslaved and did not leave a personal narrative nor other forms of personal life writing such as a diary, autobiography, or memoir. One might argue, though, that the numerous editorials in her journal *The Provincial Freeman* (1854-1857) and her famous *Plea for Emigration* (1852) constitute a form of life writing, as they represent her personal intervention in the debates on how to shape the present and future of the black population in North America. This would certainly deserve a separate thesis, and both Afua Cooper (2000) and Jane Rhodes (1993; 1998) discuss Shadd’s different writings and opinions. Other shorter narratives by women exist, such as *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831), compiled, as Siemerling explains, with considerable help from British expatriate writer Susanna Moodie (71). Sophia Pooley’s account of her enslavement by First Nations in Canada in Benjamin Drew’s *The Refugee* (1856), or Lavina Wormeny’s “Narrative,” which appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* in 1861, are unique renderings of women’s experiences under slavery (Wormeny’s testimonial was reprinted in Frank Mackey’s *Black Then* 162-66). These examples, however, are so different in format, time frame, authorship, and context from the four single-authored life narratives selected for this book that they were left out of the present analysis, although they invite future work.
 - 2 The complexity of this term is shown in the fact that the authors mainly fail to give a clear understanding of what “nation” means. Smallwood, for example, repeatedly refers to Britain’s “best national freedom” that is available for Blacks, without, however, giving a clear explanation of the term as, for example, political or ideological (44).
 - 3 An important example is the North American Convention in Toronto (see below). Martin R. Delany’s *Condition* (1852) is probably the most prominent example of early black nationalism, discussing the necessity of moving back to Africa. Delany briefly lived in Chatham, Canada West, and would later invite Mary Ann Shadd Cary to recruit Black soldiers during the Civil War (see Shadd, Stanford).

diverse, long-standing black communities in Canada West; a fact that is often neglected. Indeed, Robin W. Winks observes that black people “have lived in Canada for nearly as long as in the United States,” certainly as long as 1628, when the first known black boy, Olivier Le Jeune, was brought to New France from Madagascar by the Kirke brothers (*History* ix).

With black history in Canada reaching back to the seventeenth century, it would thus be a blatant misrepresentation to ignore an indigenous blackness in the various provinces, as Clarke has described it, and to overemphasize the influx of U.S.-American refugees.⁴ On the other hand, to say that the great numbers of fugitive arrivers did not raise concern among black (and white) Canadians who had been in the province for decades or centuries is wrong, too. Winks explains that “[p]rejudice rose as the number of [black fugitive slaves] rose [in British North America]; earlier [black] arrivals anticipated this and hoped to forestall discrimination by slowing the threatening flood to a trickle. The result was a division in [black] ranks, exacerbated by sectarian controversies, that [confirmed the whites in some of their prejudices on the inability to organize effectively]” (*History* 143). The sample texts in this book exemplify the transnational, cross-border experience of many black individuals at mid-nineteenth century, such as the intra-continental mobility of Smallwood, Steward, and Warren, or the inter-continental, transatlantic migrations of Ward. Their trajectories also intersect with this context of varying national allegiances, establishing new or integrating into preexisting communities, and conflicts in such communities.

It is, however, not fruitful to use terms such as “nation” or “national identity” in discussions of black cross-border life writing of the 1850s, chiefly due their anachronism and terminological imprecision.⁵ It is obvious, nevertheless, that

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- 4 Clarke’s original scholarship on Black Canada includes his analysis of “Africadia,” a term he coined to describe the longstanding presence of people of African descent in the Maritimes, particularly in his home province of Nova Scotia (see particularly his *Fire on the Water* anthology in 2 volumes [1991; 1992]).
 - 5 The argument between George Elliott Clarke and Rinaldo Walcott, which erupted at the end of the 1990s, proved to be a pivotal moment for Black Canadian studies in which “nation” and “diaspora” figured as central topoi. In the debate on the black Canadian literary canon and cultural nationalism, Clarke’s and Walcott’s respective approaches to Black Canadian (literary) studies have been described to reflect a roots—routes paradigm (see Chariandy 541). Clarke’s argument has shaped the ‘roots’ approach which opposes what Karina Vernon describes as “Paul Gilroy’s diasporic black Atlantic model” (23). Instead, he focuses on “unearth[ing]” and presenting an indigenous black Canadian archive (Chariandy 541). Walcott’s ‘routes’ school of thought, on the contrary, emphasizes a Canadian “‘diaspora sensibility’,” chiding Clarke’s focus on the

Blacks established allegiances to the British monarchy as a *nation*, for example, mostly to denigrate the United States as a Republic corrupted by slavery. Consider, for instance, Ward's letter to white colonizationist Benjamin Coates from October 1852, in which he assesses the likelihood of Canada's annexation by the United States. He holds that Blacks would never voluntarily give up "the genial sweets of true British freedom" in favor of a "a nation who violate their solemn Declaration of Independence" (*BAP* 240).⁶ These "genial sweets", which are part and parcel of Canada (West)'s portrayal as the Promised Land for fugitive slaves, were ambiguous at best. As the sample texts show, Canada West rarely ever went undisputed as the earthly Paradise. In fact, Ward was well aware of this, and also gained fame for his severe criticism of prevalent racism and prejudice in the province as "second-handed imitations" of "Yankeeism" (*BAP* 226). Therefore, this book suggests that the four autobiographies here share an underlying strategy that, ultimately, redirects attention away from the seemingly dominant "nation" to elaborate an alternative narrative that, nevertheless, offers a kind of allegiance and a sense of belonging.

More accurately, all establish a form of genealogy, and in doing so, inscribe themselves in different black lineages, literary and intellectual traditions, whose upholding and remembering creates a narrative of pride and strength of black communities that resisted undoing by slavery or racial prejudice.⁷ The authors show how being part of a genealogy and thus, heritage and belonging to a

nation (Vernon 28). As David Chariandy explains, Walcott intends to underline "the transnational migrations and identifications of Black Canadians of *all* historical periods" (541; original emphasis). Echoing the reaction of many scholars after the debate, Vernon and Chariandy have pointed out that "'sid[ing]'" with one or the other view is unfruitful (Vernon 29). This book follows Chariandy's explanation that this binary is unable to encompass the "full variety and creativity" of the archive, criticism, and scholarship (541). There is, in fact, a common ground for both approaches, namely their attack of the fact that "Canada [...] has for centuries been *imagined* as a site beyond the evils of racism specifically directed to Blacks" (542, original emphasis).

6 I will use *BAP* to refer to the *Black Abolitionist Papers* (vol. II, Canada, 1830-1865).

7 The term might evoke Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) and its extensive influence on Michel Foucault, particularly in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). However, for Foucault, "genealogy" serves as a historical method that relieved the previous approach of "archeology of knowledge" (Gutting). More precisely, "the point of a genealogical analysis is to show that a given system of thought [...] was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends" (Gutting). This is not the approach of this book, in which "genealogy" stands for lineage, or tradition, to which the authors under discussion hark back.

community, in a way, is possible through writing, even when external circumstances such as enslavement, discrimination, and prejudice counter these attempts. Each author, although writing an autobiographical narrative, opens a textual space to insert the stories (in a broad sense of the term) of others, creating a textual fiber that emphasizes the importance of the black community across borders. Warren (1812-?) unconsciously places himself in the line of those who had romanticized Canada West as a safe haven for black fugitives, but more importantly even into a religious genealogy of Methodist writing and church history in Canada. Smallwood (1801-?), for example, uses a radical, intellectual, activist genealogy by relying on David Walker and his *Appeal* (1829) to claim a position as both an activist and leader in Canada West's black community. Ward (1817-c.1866) creates a genealogy of heroic individuals to underline the future of Blacks as "modern negro[es]" on British soil (Ward 106). Last, Austin Steward (1793-1869) creates a bottom-up genealogy not of failed settlement experiments but of meaningful individual lives—transmitted through stories—that constitute a community.

The narratives of these four authors belong to the vast archive of Black Canadian literature that comprises a plethora of textual forms for the nineteenth century alone, as the work by Clarke and Siemerling has proven, including petitions, letters, newspapers, speeches, minutes, reports, interviews, travel accounts, court documents, and registers. Although the literary output by black people in British North America had been significant before 1850, the focus of this book lies on the particular decade from 1850 to 1861. Mainly, this decision wants to draw attention to a "watershed" in North American history that had dramatic effects on British North American-U.S. relations, Canada West's role in the black freedom struggle, and consequently, the production of black life narratives (Cooper, "Doing Battle" 17). The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (FSL) in 1850 shaped the following ten years, the pace of which accelerated fiercely only to climax in the U.S. Civil War in 1861. Both dates have become significant markers, too, for British North America and its black population.

The FSL, passed as part of the Compromise of 1850, sparked outrage and a wave of fear amongst free Blacks and abolitionists alike. Their responses to the provisions of the law have become widely known for seeing the North turned into a 'hunting ground', since it obliged "all good citizens [...] to aid and assist in [its] prompt and efficient execution," including citizens of the North in a nominally free territory (sec.5).⁸ Given its regulations, the FSL did pose an imminent and,

8 Accordingly, Samuel Ringgold Ward, in the 1852 letter to American Colonization Society member Benjamin Coates, sharply refuses "the subjection of Canada to the Fugitive Slave Law, for the purpose of making one free province a park to hunt human

above all, arbitrary threat to the security of black bodies and black mobility. It changed the dynamics in North America in that Blacks could no longer consider the northern states to be secure, which forced a high number of them to flee to Canada.⁹ For many individuals, this escape represented their second uprooting, having formerly fled slavery in the South to settle in a supposedly free North. Subsequently, contemporary historiography made out an exodus to Canada in the first years of the 1850s that was accentuated through a number of highly publicized fugitive slave rescue cases. Although Michael Wayne's important article "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War" (1995) has done much to relativize the "[exaggerated] size of the black population in general" as well as the number of fugitives (466), the perceived mass migration tested the relations between Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. At the same time, it helped create the lore around British and Canadian steadfastness against U.S. extradition requests: Canada across the border was easily cast as a safe haven for fugitives and a stronghold against the 'slave Republic'. It is this myth that has dominated the Canadian national narrative way into the twentieth century.

Even though Wayne and others have also pointed to the parallel return movement of Blacks to the United States at the outbreak of the Civil War, it is clear that the FSL changed the life for black people in the North and had a considerable influence on the black community in British North America. The sample texts discussed in this book are thus taken from a period when the creation of the myth of Canada as the Promised Land was well under way. They show how black authors were caught up in this myth-making, both supporting and subverting it, as Clarke explains: authors "denounced American slavery, but, simultaneously, supported the creation of a Canadian nationalist, anti-Americanism that [...] also legitimized the repression of the reality and history of Euro-Canadian racialism" ("No Hearsay" 23).

deer in" (*BAP* 239-40). Stanley W. Campbell's study *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1865* (1970) remains a standard reference work on the provisions and executions of the law. Roman Zorn's article "Criminal Extradition Menaces the Canadian Haven for Fugitive Slaves, 1841-1861" (1957) is still authoritative on the consequences of the FSL, fugitive slave cases, and U.S. extradition requests of fugitives. More recently, historian Gordon S. Barker has given a critical re-reading of Anthony Burns's return to the South in 1854 (2010), one of the most famous fugitive slave cases. Barker has also argued, in 2013, that fugitive slave cases should be considered part of the legacy of the American Revolution.

9 Of course, the North's conflicted relationship to race and discriminatory laws is taken into account here.

Although by 1850, Blacks in Canada had constituted a long-standing presence in the country, the 1850s went on to show the extent of black involvement in abolitionism and anti-slavery work in Canada West. Marking the province as a crucial spot in the anti-slavery struggle, Henry Bibb called for a North American Convention, which assembled in Toronto in September 1851, notably *not* in Boston or Philadelphia, as a direct reaction to the passing of the FSL. Fifty-three delegates, as C. Peter Ripley explains, “condemned slavery, endorsed Canadian immigration [...], praised British government, and outlined a plan for black uplift based on temperance, agriculture, skilled trades, and accumulated wealth” (*BAP* 149). This programmatic meeting shaped the discussions for the years to come. They found discursive outlet in the numerous publications by Blacks in Canada West, mainly the two newspapers *The Voice of the Fugitive* (1851-1853), edited by Henry Bibb, and *The Provincial Freeman* (1854-1857), edited by Mary Ann Shadd Cary (and Ward, initially).

Aside from the political events outlined above, the 1850s are a signature decade also in literary respects, as black authors continued to intervene in autobiographical and fictional writing. The common scholarly periodization of the antebellum slave narrative sees its golden age between the 1830s and 1860s (see Starling 1). Indeed, Moses Roper (1838), Lewis and Milton Clarke (1846), Henry Bibb, and Josiah Henson (both 1849) all published their slave narratives before 1850, and all of them have specific relevance for Canada. They are also a part of Clarke’s list of Canadian slave narratives (see “No Hearsay” 16-17). The 1850s saw yet an increase in the popularity—and the necessity—of literature that catered to abolitionism’s goal to appeal to the moral opposition to slavery and the requests of their audience. Black authors like Smallwood, Steward, Ward and Warren demonstrated, however, that they did not depend entirely on the phenomenon of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 to further fuel the distribution of their narratives.

They show that our tendency to subsume nineteenth-century autobiographical life writing under the cloak of the “slave narrative”, the conventional label used to talk about the literary production at this time, is insufficient.¹⁰ Nicole Aljoe has recognized, already for the eighteenth century, the “fundamental diversity” (4) of “the” slave narrative and its circulation throughout the Black Atlantic, “both physically and symbolically” (2). In her introduction, Aljoe, too, asks for an extension of the genre label to include the many accounts that we subsume under

10 James Olney’s classic article “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature” (originally from 1984) has notoriously outlined the “Master Plan,” a series of plot elements, that slave narratives allegedly follow (153). This book repudiates Olney’s claim and follows recent scholarship on the genre that has moved away from such restrictive views.

the term today (see 7). If we accept her observation, we must recognize the instability of the term “slave narrative” even in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Instead, it is more productive to use a concept like “life narratives,” following Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s more general terminology inclusive of both slave narratives and autobiography as self-referential writing, without making judgments on historical veracity, authenticity, and authorship—terms of great relevance in the discussions of the slave narrative (3).¹² I do advocate here the assumption that it is necessary to look at the texts in terms of their relation to Canada (West), but that it is also increasingly difficult to maintain categories of “slave narrative”, “U.S.-American slave narrative” or “Canadian slave narrative”. The texts in question invite us to reevaluate the importance of a canon based purely on national discourses, at the same time as they ask us to reconsider conceptions of a genre that allegedly “introduce[s] a tension between an ‘I’-centered model of the exceptional individual and a narrative model centered in events that either objectify or subordinate the ‘I’ to communal discourses of identity” (Smith and Watson 104). The four narratives included in this book challenge what we understand as “slave narratives” by building on the genre’s popularity and impact, on the one hand, experimenting with expectations and expanding its conventional limits, on the other, to meet the need to express complex life stories in a challenging time period in a dynamic region.

1.2 TRANSNATIONALIZING BLACK CANADIAN STUDIES

In the past few decades, Black Canadian studies has entered a new phase that seeks to reposition Black Canada more forcefully in relation to other countries of the diaspora, and to reconfigure its geographical areas by reading them as transnational and cross-border spaces in which Blacks operated in the nineteenth century. In his 2015 monograph *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, Siemerling reiterates his call to situate Canada in a transnational dialogue, something which

11 This argument is also reflected in the latest *Oxford Handbook of the American Slave Narrative* (ed. John Ernest, 2014), which demonstrates the multi-faceted state of the art with regard to how scholars approach the genre, from the questions of authorial and editorial practices to the materiality of texts and their diasporic distribution.

12 I am aware of the discussions on the use of the slave narrative as viable historical source, such as it was led amongst historians. John W. Blassingame’s “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves” (originally 1975) gives an excellent review of the process of accepting slave testimony as sources and is itself a well-known case in point in this debate (esp. 78-79).

he has labored to do himself in the past with numerous publications on “new” hemispheric North American Studies.¹³ Black history in the nineteenth century is particularly apt to cross geographical and political boundaries of the nation, the nation-state, the country or even the continent, but Siemerling is not the first to recognize this potential for Black Canadian studies. In fact, there has been a trend, notably among scholars of history and historiography, to “transnationalize” the field.

In view of the rich Black Canadian archive, a transnational focus has been especially fruitful in scholarship on Canada West. Afua Cooper’s article “The Fluid Frontier” (2000) prepared the ground by highlighting the significance of the “Detroit River Region” for Black history, a geopolitical area connecting, rather than separating, Canada West and the United States. In doing so, Cooper also made readers reconsider the movements of black people, many of whom were fugitives at the time, not just from one country to the other, but most importantly, crisscrossing between them. This pattern of movement has given a new meaning to this borderland, which Cooper calls “fluid,” both for the significance of the waterway that marks this “frontier” as well as the identities that are being “negotiated in border zones,” as Cooper claims (131). In the article, she sketches the history of the region, with Detroit’s shifting status as French and American settlement to the different groups of Black people arriving in Canada from free Blacks to Black Loyalists. Through her focus on Henry Bibb, one of the best known individuals and Black Canadian leaders of the 1850s, Cooper is able to read his life and work on both sides of the border as part of a transnational, cross-border network of abolition, suggesting a conscious use of the border zone by black people who “manipulated it in their ‘search for a place ’ [...] where they could live fully as humans” (130).

Cooper’s article has proven crucial for Black Canadian studies in several respects. Other scholars like Harvey Amani Whitfield have resonated with it in important ways (see below), and their discussion of how identity is negotiated and cross-border ties are maintained in other geographical locales in Canada, for example, suggest a much larger transnational trend than what could be confined to one border zone. Additionally, Cooper’s reading begins to question a fundamental category of the political, namely the entity of the nation-state, which also constitutes one of McKittrick and Wood’s basic concerns (see below). This book attempts to reinforce these notions: autobiographical narratives of fugitive slaves from the mid-nineteenth century prove to be testimonies of cross-border

13 Siemerling has explored these branches in *The New North American Studies. Culture, Writing, and the Politics of Re/Cognition* (2005) and *Canada and Its Americas. Transnational Navigations*, with Sara Phillips Casteel (2010).

individuals and their respective lives. They can illustrate the complexity of the border both as a very real and fix entity that might decide between enslaved and free as well as the border's significance, its appropriation, and the use of that border zone by and for black people.

In 2006, Whitfield's *Blacks on the Border* (2006) offered a highly relevant and innovative approach, harking back to Cooper's idea of the fluid frontier. His analysis of the merging of the Refugee Blacks who came to Nova Scotia, especially after the War of 1812, into one community of Blacks in British North America is founded on a transnational angle. The region between British North America and the United States becomes a space for Whitfield in which the border assumes a twofold function. On the one hand, it represents a separating line between a slaveholding nation and the concomitant oppression of African Americans; on the other hand, however, it offers a possibility for a complex negotiation of the black self-concept as a combination of "emancipation, migration, and memory" (2). The process of an emergence of an African Canadian identity, for Whitfield, is played out in "contest[ation]" with the U.S.-American homeland, from which these Refugees were not easily severed (2). This book takes Whitfield's theses to initiate a dialogue with subsequent work done in literary studies in order to establish parallels to the situation of fugitive slaves in mid-nineteenth-century by looking at their literary testimony.

One year later, in 2007, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods's *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* again foregrounded Canada's part within "overlapping diaspora spaces" like the United States, Britain, Africa, and the Caribbean, and thus, within a geographic network (8). Race and geography become enmeshed in the contributions to their collection to show that "[i]nserting black geographies into our worldview and our understanding of spatial liberation and other emancipatory strategies can perhaps move us away from territoriality" (5). In questioning the dominance of the nation and the nation-state in an understanding of (black) citizenship, the authors attempt to "forg[e] cross-national and outer-national global rights for black subjects" (8). This notion is particularly important for the four narratives that figure in this book, as they, too, make us reconsider the relative importance of the nation(-state) in a personal quest for freedom.

More particularly, McKittrick's re-reading of the Underground Railroad is particularly instructive in the context of the narratives assembled here. She first recognizes that the Underground Railroad (UGRR) is an "embedded *North American* historical narrative," rather than a national one, resituating it in different national historio-geographies (101; added emphasis). In fact, she explains that the UGRR is a "contested" geography and one that different parties of different races

have been trying to “map and therefore know,” implying a symbolic control and taking possession that accompany the term “knowledge” (99). She posits this attempt to map and know against the inherently secretive nature of the UGRR that operated successfully precisely because it resisted the forces that wanted to make it known and visible for the longest time in order to not endanger fugitives and activists. For McKittrick, this secretiveness becomes “a radical spatial act, an explicit reconfiguration of white supremacy and a socio-spatial resistance” (100). The narratives discussed here illustrate the struggle with the insider organization of the UGRR, its secret geographies, and the journey into a, mostly unknown, country precisely when we usually associate liberty with “seeable territoriality” (101).

Two additional case studies by German scholar Heike Paul illustrate fruitful overlaps with the concerns of this book. Her essay “Out of Chatham: Abolitionism on the Canadian Frontier” (2011) presents a case study of this town in today’s Ontario as a diasporic abolitionist locus with transnational ties (165). Chatham is also to be read as part of Cooper’s “fluid frontier” situated close to Lake Ontario. What is more, Paul is also clearly following a transnational theoretical approach inspired, above all, by border studies, and is therefore of importance for the present work. Her chapter in the collection on *Pirates, Drifters, Fugitives: Figures of Mobility in the US and Beyond* (Paul, Ganser, and Gerund 2012) continues the work of the previous article in acknowledging the importance of recognizing an abolitionism “out of Canada” as a condition to focus on black agency (264). Paul goes on to investigate the figure of the fugitive slave as a “foundational figure” in the black Canadian imaginary (263). Here, she picks up on McKittrick’s approach of ‘diaspora geographies’ and points out the fugitive’s particular mobility that “entails the formation of ‘alternative geographies’” (263). Paul focuses on Josiah Henson, the by now commodified ‘star’ of Black Canadian history, problematizes the relationship between the individual Henson as a fugitive from U.S. slavery, and the collective, Henson being taken as the representative fugitive who, moreover, contributed to his own myth-making (260-63). The four autobiographies by Smallwood, Steward, Ward and Warren also speak to this conflicted relationship and are published as these foundational myths play out “at a time when Canada did not yet exist as a confederation, let alone as a modern nation” (263).

The first collection dedicated to a solid theorization of the transnational conception of this borderland between the United States and Canada West, is presented in Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Tucker’s most recent edition *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (2016). The collection is a synthesis of work triggered by reflections

such as Cooper's and Nora Faire's, and presents the state of the art in the reconceptualization of this area as a "boundary and passageway" for Black people throughout several centuries (3). They show that "this transnational region" has a long history of contested borders (5), indeed, and that the border, therefore, has always been fugitive, in some sense (see, especially, Smith Tucker's contribution). The authors also expressly recognize the "transnational abolitionist thought and activism" as a core trait of the region (5), something that this book strongly supports as well. However, when the editors state that they are attempting to fill a "lacuna in the historical record" of this region (5), they do so mainly from the perspectives of historians, historical curators, or archaeologists, taking their inspiration from Underground Railroad and border studies (see 8). This book, therefore, wants to close another "lacuna" that such projects leave yet open, namely, reinforcing what literary studies bring to the analysis in recognizing literature, particularly autobiographical writing, as a major vector of expression, necessary for the exchange and negotiation of ideas that shape this "fluid frontier".

1.3 TOWARDS CROSS-BORDER BLACK LITERARY STUDIES

This book departs in part from the observation that the 'transnational turn' in Black Canadian studies as outlined above has been taken up by only a few literary scholars of, roughly, the last decade. In particular, the work by Clarke, Nancy Kang, Alyssa MacLean, and Siemerling has contributed to shaping the field of Black Canadian literary studies by both claiming a place for Black writing in Canada and situating it in transnational, cross-border frameworks. Although all of them look at nineteenth-century literature, the four autobiographies here go unnoticed or receive little attention in their discussions, even though these narratives adapt or challenge their theoretical lenses in important ways.

George Elliott Clarke's seminal publication of "'This is No Hearsay': Reading the Canadian Slave Narratives" (2005) represents groundbreaking work. His piece has been crucial as an overture to conceptualizing a Canadian slave narrative tradition and for addressing several critical vistas that are important to consider in the discussion. With his article, he does not only proclaim the sheer existence of a "Canadian" slave narrative, he also positions it as a genre of "Victorian-era Canadian literature (1837-1901)" and "anchored in a Victorian temperament" (7; 29). This recognition, he implies, will counter the view of this body of texts as a "species of Americana" that is misplaced in a Canadian canon as "always exilic, always exotic" (7; 14). Clarke criticizes both the U.S. scholarly monopoly on the

slave narrative (see 9) as well as a Canadian scholarly outsourcing of its analysis on the grounds of being “American and alien” (11). It is important to note that while Clarke has been criticized himself for clinging to his cultural nationalism, into which such a positioning of the slave narrative would fit (see above), he does offer venues to transnationalize the genre. The slave narrative cannot be enclosed within “one *national* literary tradition,” he notes, but touches on several, such as Anglo-African and British writing (11; added emphasis). He finally also calls to find a “continental continuity between these [different] ‘national’ expressions [which include the African American tradition]” (31). This latter conclusion, especially, has been explored subsequently by scholars such as Kang, MacLean, and Siemerling under the terminology of cross-border writing.

Clarke also offers several analytical perspectives in presenting the genre. Some of the common features of these narratives Clarke points out reiterate assessments by scholars of the African American slave narrative; other characteristics, however, mark them as distinctly “Canadian”. For example, he calls the texts a “literature of propaganda that attacks [...] pro-slavery arguments” and recognizes a “formulaic rhetoric [that] scores these texts” (“No Hearsay” 18; 20). Both observations have been familiar arguments in scholarly discussions of African American slave narratives.¹⁴ Clarke, however, also points out that these texts help create an “*imagined* superiority” of an allegedly free Canada towards the United States, turning Canada into “the *true* land of opportunity” for black fugitives (25, 26; original emphases). In this land, Clarke reminds us, Blacks were active in various ways, as reflected in the “casual historiography” of their “mainstream settler, pioneer, and travel narratives” which, in fact, turns them into “builders of Canada West” (27). While he thus underlines the position of these slave narratives as Victorian *and* foundational writing of early British North America, he also acknowledges its heterogeneous nature. Yet, Clarke sticks to the label of the “slave narrative”, which, as this book argues, is ultimately too restrictive when we consider the panorama of terms that Clarke himself has invoked to describe nineteenth-century writing (see above).

In terms of a methodology, Clarke provides two important insights this book will engage. First, he backs his theoretical claims with a concrete list of narratives that were written during Queen Victoria’s reign (see 16-17). It includes eighteen narratives published between 1838 and 1901, with an astonishing number—“almost half” (17)—published in Canada; a forceful reminder of the importance of these texts for Canadian literary history. To Clarke’s list, which contains three

14 I am referring to authoritative studies of the slave narrative by Andrews, Olney, and Starling, for example. Recent scholarship is moving beyond such assessments, however (see above).

narratives discussed in this work (those by Smallwood, Steward, and Ward), this book adds Richard Warren's brief autobiographical sketch, also published in Canada (1856). While the present intervention can only offer a glimpse into mid-nineteenth-century life writing, it nevertheless seeks to provide an interpretive avenue discernible in all of them. This attempt entails a re-problematization of Clarke's second methodological proposition that suggests dividing Canadian 'slave narratives' into several periods. Relegated to a footnote, his outline is tentative, yet demands further scrutiny. Clarke first divides the textual production from its beginnings to 1833, when narratives "treat[ed] slavery in colonial Canada;" next, from 1783-1815, in which period he subsumes "'exodus' narratives" around Black Loyalists and the refugees of the War of 1812; and last, from the 1830s to 1861, the golden age of the "'Canaan' narratives" by and about fugitive slaves and the Underground Railroad, "mainly [in] southern Ontario" (18n19).

Clarke's propositions evidence the problems of periodization of literary canons. The second time frame appears to be a subcategory of colonial narratives, which leaves a vast time span open for consideration, suggesting at least some kind of homogeneity in context and content. The third period, which concerns this book first and foremost, coincides with the "boom years" of the (African American) slave narrative in general, as postulated by Marion Wilson Starling in her foundational *The Slave Narrative* in 1981 (1). Using the label "Canaan narratives" for the entire antebellum period, primarily a time span important in U.S.-American history, is then neither apt to cover thirty years of black Canadian literary production nor capture the complexity of genres and topics this production represents and addresses. With a focus on the period of the 1850s, post-Fugitive Slave Law, which directly influenced black Canadian history as well, this book shows that the narratives published in the lead-up to the U.S. Civil War are not simple "Canaan narratives", although glorifications of Canada as a free, liberated British stronghold figure, too, in these texts. They do not, however, conjure up a mere Canadian haven or Promised Land as much as offer differentiated, mostly ambiguous, visions of this place north of the U.S. border, while incorporating a vast array of other—equally important—topics, from civil rights, emigration/nationalism, to, most crucially, the creation of community within and without the dominance of the "foundational figure" of the fugitive (see Paul). The term "Canaan narrative" also suggests a monodirectional, teleological view that underestimates the cross-border literary status of these narratives, and their authors' crisscrossing between Canada and the United States.

In the same year as Clarke's introduction to Canadian slave narratives, then doctoral candidate Nancy Kang published an article that should be recognized as

equally foundational to the theorizing of Black Canadian literature of the nineteenth century, but which has remained somewhat under the radar in scholarship. In fact, “‘As If I Had Entered a Paradise’: Fugitive Slave Narratives and Cross-Border Literary History” foregrounds a ‘transnational turn’ in the interpretation of what she, too, calls ‘slave narratives’. In doing so, she substantially broadens Clarke’s proposals. Her initial focus is the significance of the action of passing and the slave pass as “a site of rebellion for slaves” through textual appropriation (433). Benjamin Drew’s collected interviews in *The Refugee* (1856) represent the occasion for Kang to introduce and elaborate on a transnational interpretive framework for these individuals’ “transnational ‘passing[s]’” and geopolitical border crossings (435). Recognizing the mobility of escaped slaves and their “multi-directional migration[s]” as a reality of a veritable “cross-border experience,” Kang opens the literary assessment of ‘slave narratives’ with implications on the genre itself (443). On the one hand, Kang calls these texts “*North American* slave narrative[s],” which both comprises the various movements of these people on the continent and implies their complex, “ambivalent” national allegiances (443; 448). On the other hand, she additionally terms this body of texts “cross-border” to reinforce this idea (433). Kang’s terminological and conceptual re-examination of black fugitive writing climaxes in her “trope of the borderless text,” which she understands as an “African Canadian adjunct” to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s, “talking book” and which she defines as a “model of supranational literary collaboration” (435). For the considerations in this book, it is important to note that Kang insists she does not employ this term “to *negate* borders” but instead, “to *dilate* them beyond their supposed station as geographically or phenomenologically fixed points” (445-46, original emphasis).

Kang’s piece, therefore, is significant for providing a toolbox for the study of black life writing at mid-nineteenth century. Drew’s collection of short interviews from various locales in Canada West offers a glimpse into the complex worlds of fugitives and certainly calls for an investigation that transcends national boundaries. More importantly, though, Kang’s apparatus can and must be partly applied to longer forms of autobiographical life writing that was largely untouched by white abolitionist editorial practices, as in the case of Drew. The sample texts here were written, too, by cross-border individuals that embodied “multi-directional migrations” and who inserted themselves into a North American writing practice and a transnational web of textual production and dissemination. However, while I consider Kang’s thoughts crucial for Black Canadian literary studies, reflecting the transnational turn that scholars in history and cultural studies were establishing, her concept of the borderless text seems yet somewhat

inadequate. Although she admits that it seems “contradictory” to speak of ‘borderlessness’ in a cross-border framework, she claims that we must understand the border in its shifting significance “as recognizable marker of difference” and its ability “to define separate communities” (444). She claims that the collection by Drew exemplified no unitary definition or delineation of the act of crossing (see 444). What this book shows, moreover, is that the border never quite disappears for escaped slaves, and that instead of “dilating” it, it might be more apt to speak of an at least temporary permeability.¹⁵ The autobiographies here emphasize the ambiguous—somewhat elusive, or *fugitive*—meaning of the border for the authors, and yet show how much the borderland was shaped by black individuals and their writing.

In her unpublished dissertation of 2010, Alyssa MacLean considers the influx of fugitive slaves into Canada as one of two large population movements in North America next to the deportation of French Acadians to the American South. Her work is clearly anchored in transnational American studies. While she adopts and critically relies on Nancy Kang for some of her basic conceptualizations, for example the use of pass/passing/passage, she also expands the critical inventory to analyze the texts by black fugitives (see MacLean 194). Where Kang had focused on the borderless text, MacLean introduces the “Lake Erie Passage” as a black Canadian trope in this writing (iii). Her primary point of reference is the United States and therefore, she interprets the two population movements across the border according to how they influence discussions in the United States during the American Renaissance (see iii). Consequently, her work also illuminates views of Canada in the nineteenth-century United States. Canada becomes a means to challenge understandings of “American[ness]” and, ultimately, “the definition and consolidation of the idea of a US nation” (14; 17). In this way, MacLean claims that “African-American slaves who crossed Lake Erie exposed the formation of ideas of race in *both* countries” (270; original emphasis). She also adopts Cooper’s model of the fluid frontier, which she casts as a zone of “interaction and knowledge production” that, moreover, opened the possibility of a “potential citizen[ship]” for black fugitives (43-45; she takes this term from Mark Simpson). This book, too, attempts to illuminate the consequences of Black writing for the Canadian context: the four sample texts show the significance of cross-border migration for Canada (West) before Confederation. The narratives show that in

15 See also Smardz Frost and Smith Tucker’s rationale for employing the term “transnationalism” in their work: “The Detroit River borderland merits a transnational designation because it was a highly permeable boundary long before the more formalized organization of the clandestine system of escape known as the Underground Railroad came into being” (10; added emphasis).

the mid-nineteenth century, Blacks demonstrated great activism and skill in claiming forms of citizenship and subjecthood that were far from being only “potential” or “imagined,” in Benedict Anderson’s terms (1983), but instead proved a concrete, accessible goal, that could be attained if not without hindrance. Blacks assumed agency in trying to realize their project of becoming participants in Canadian society and were vocal in the discussions on what this participation could look like. In this way, they challenged the hegemonic narrative of Canada as a white settler nation.

Two aspects of MacLean’s topos of the “Lake Erie Passage” are crucial in our context. On the one hand, she relies on the ‘real’ geographic border zone, separating the United States from Canada West through the Great Lakes. On the other hand, the literary representations of this zone and the crossing of the lake into Canada become, for MacLean, a literary Canadian trope, which she traces to a variety of genres from the 1840s to the 1860s, including “slave songs, abolitionist poems, pamphlets, novels, newspaper articles and slave narratives” (163). This time period purposefully coincides both with the golden age of the slave narrative, on which she bases her analyses, and with Clarke’s “Canaan narratives”. MacLean takes the narratives of William Wells Brown, Lewis G. Clarke, and Josiah Henson, mainly, to exemplify the potential of Lake Erie as a “narrative of political emancipation, a process of personal transformation, and a site of literary convergence” (163). MacLean explains that Lake Erie as a site was described as both fluid and fix: while some authors “downplayed [its] relevance,” others did represent “the border in very fixed ways,” emphasizing the power of “transformation” that its crossing operated on their shift from bond- to freeman (195-96).

Despite the valid recognition of Lake Erie’s significance, MacLean’s interpretation and application to literary examples seem restrictive and too selective overall. The idea of “transformation” is particularly misleading in this respect. It is true to point out that some depictions of the arrival on Canadian soil after having crossed Lake Erie give the impression of unimaginable joy and express the feeling of being overwhelmed at the prospect of a new life.¹⁶ We

16 Josiah Henson gives indeed a paradigmatic account of his emotional arrival on Canadian soil in his *Life of Josiah Henson* (1849): “When I got on the Canada side, on the morning of the 28th of October, 1830, my first impulse was to throw myself on the ground, and giving way to the riotous exultation of my feelings, to execute sundry antics which excited the astonishment of those who were looking on. A gentleman of the neighborhood, Colonel Warren, who happened to be present, thought I was in a fit, and as he inquired what was the matter with the poor fellow, I jumped up and told him I was free” (58-59).

should, however, refrain from easily deducing a “sudden[...]” change in identity, status of citizenship, or national allegiance altogether (170). MacLean herself identifies Lake Erie and the border zone as one of constant negotiation (see 194), and the reality for Blacks trying to establish themselves in Canada proved much more complex to assume the immediate cut of ties with the United States, as Whitfield has shown. The mere fact of a “multidirectional migration” should caution us against such ready-made assumptions (Kang 450). What is more, Lake Erie was neither the only waterway that slaves crossed, if we consider Lake Ontario as well, nor the only *route*, keeping in mind that many slaves crossed into Canada on land on ways that remain unknown to us today (see McKittrick).

The intrinsic nature of waterways invites us to consider the potential dangers a crossing of Lake Erie implied, without necessarily having recourse to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s fictionalized drama around Eliza in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Lakes and rivers might “enabl[e] the reunification of destroyed families,” but they might also harm or separate them (MacLean 235). Similarly, Lake Erie is not a space that carries universally acknowledged positive connotations. While this trope works for the narratives MacLean analyzes in her work, there are significant exceptions to the rule. Austin Steward’s narrative (1857), for example, opens up a different perspective on Lake Erie. His frustration at his attempts to establish a black settlement in Canada West is cruelly heightened when, on the return to Rochester, NY, via Lake Erie, one of his daughters catches “a *violent* cold” (Steward 293; added emphasis) from which she does not recover. The death of his daughter as a result of re-crossing Lake Erie into the United States marks a significant personal setback and influences his assessment of his years in Canada West. Therefore, the introduction of the Lake Erie Passage as a trope particular to black Canadian writing cannot be applied universally.

Most recently, Winfried Siemerling has made a substantial intervention in Black Canadian literary studies with the publication of *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* (2015), which created considerable attention for the field. Conceived more as a handbook for teachers and students, it covers two vast literary and cultural “time-spaces” (3): black writing in Canada and the Caribbean. As a direct commentary of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993), Siemerling sets out on a remarkable feat to extend Gilroy’s “map” (30). As a champion of hemispheric and transnational studies, Siemerling continues to emphasize this approach for black Canadian writing (see 4-5), reminding his readers that literary production, even before the nineteenth century, “relate[d] Canada to black Atlantic, North American, and hemispheric contexts” (67). Therefore, he, too, employs terms such as “transnational texts” (88, when referring to slave narratives between 1834 and 1850), “transnational” century (128-29, when referring to black

Canada in the nineteenth century), and “border-crosser” (95, when referring to individuals such as Harriet Tubman or Henry and Mary Bibb).

In line with this perspective on Black Canadian literature, Siemerling situates the heart of his work, a chapter on the ‘long’ Black Canadian nineteenth century, between a focus on events in Canada (West) and their wider significance for the black diaspora and transnational cooperation. His ambitious work is remarkable in presenting a wide panorama of Black Canadian and Caribbean literatures, but can therefore not offer close readings and detailed analyses of individual works. It is here that the present book intervenes. Yet, Siemerling presents at least two major assets to a re-evaluation of the nineteenth century. First, he reassesses the figure and impact of writer Susanna Moodie (1803-1885), the white author originally from England, who has made her way into the Canadian canon through her pioneer writing in the colony of the 1830s. Her famous *Roughing it in the Bush* appeared in 1852, the same year as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. He outlines her later work in abolitionism as the editor of slave narratives and investigates how slavery, blackness, and racism figure in her own writing (71-87). This constitutes an interesting parallel to Siemerling’s focus on a second female figure, Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893). Given the relative scarcity of scholarly work in view of her outstanding position in the black community of the 1850s, Siemerling is right in pointing out Shadd Cary as a “transformative figure in her own time” and a female leader who “express[ed] values that are later emphasized by Marcus Garvey or Malcolm X” (99, 101).

What is more, Siemerling underlines the crucial importance of the antebellum era for black and fugitive slave literature, particularly in Canada West, which for him comprises “the heart of black Canadian writing” (67). He succeeds in clustering people, settlement ventures, events, and texts so as to create a complex mosaic. This effort, no less, to establish order in the nineteenth century also comprises an attempt at dividing the literary production into periods. This attempt, however, lacks rigor. He clearly identifies and discusses the period of slave narratives from 1834 to 1850, whose authors, he claims, must be considered as “authors of Canadian migrant and settler narratives and autobiographies, and [...] as [...] nation-builders” (87). This latter assertion, as much as the example narratives, mirrors assessments by Clarke. However, Siemerling goes on to propose another possible term to structure and conceptualize the decade before the U.S. Civil War and the lead-up to Canadian Confederation. Introducing the phrase “Black Canadian Renaissance” (97) for what seems to be the period after the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, he explains that the influx of a substantial amount of an elite of “highly motivated freedom-seekers” propelled a significant “textual and cultural production” (98). These freedom-seekers, a term first used by Daniel G.

Hill in 1981, include Smallwood, Steward, and Ward, and, among others, Delany, Drew, Loguen, or Shadd.

Siemerling wants his term to be situated at a critical distance from its namesake, F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), which had been reserved for "a specific group of male white writers of the United States" (98). For Siemerling, an adaptation to Canada signifies "a nineteenth-century effervescence of black writing and testimony that was transnational but written and rooted in Canada" (98). He also speaks of a "Second Black Canadian Renaissance" by which he refers to a renewed interest in the literature as of the 1960s (6-8). While I agree with the need to signal this extraordinary literary production on Canadian soil, particularly during the 1850s, Siemerling's terminology is slightly misleading. First, it is not entirely clear whether the term refers only to the 1850s or comprises a larger time period, given that he had set a first important genre epoch from 1834 to 1850. Also, we must ask ourselves whether Black Canadian literary and historical studies should continue to predicate its terms and conditions upon terminology coined for developments in the United States, or whether, from a transnational approach that so many scholars are now favoring, it might be allowed to stray from the path. "Renaissance"—even when designating the 1850s—suggests that there had been some kind of prior break or interruption, which would be inaccurate. As Clarke suggests, the Black Canadian archive is vast and reaches back to the very first black people who arrived on Canadian soil as slaves, but "these records [...] exist in newspaper articles and trial documents [and other media, but not necessarily in books]" (Clarke, "No Hearsay" 17). The period following the 1830s, and especially the 1850s, marks a considerable flourishing of this archive, but neither its rediscovery nor its incipience.

In sum, the theoretical and methodological approaches of these scholars inform the present book in one way or another. *Fugitive Borders* views the British North American-U.S. border separating Canada West from the Northern United States as a contact zone of negotiations, a "fluid frontier" in the sense that other scholars have suggested and convincingly argued. Yet, the border still holds significance as separating slavery and freedom, even if former slaves become border-crossing individuals, sometimes spending a "substantial" period of their lives in Canada (Siemerling 119). Black autobiographical writing of the 1850s border zone demonstrates that black people were living, working, cooperating *with* and *despite* the border, which makes "cross-border text" the more appropriate term than "transnational" or either national labels. The more than ambiguous national allegiances of former slaves to either Canada or Britain, and seemingly against the United States, as they emerge in the narratives discussed here, prove that a sudden

“cross-border liberation of formerly American, now ostensibly Canadian, ex-slaves” is illusory (Kang 435). As MacLean contends, “the debate about whether to consider Black cross-border writing as Canadian or American seems profoundly limiting” (260). Crossing the border did not automatically turn fugitives into Canadian citizens or British subjects.

As autobiographical writing in this book demonstrates, the border remained a contentious, fugitive presence for the negotiation of black identity, allegiance, and life in freedom. Nevertheless, it seems that the crucial point of reference for black individuals at the time were the free black communities which persisted on both sides of the border. While these communities were neither homogeneous nor unambiguous, they functioned as sources of identification and orientation, as entities to mediate how Blacks wanted to live in freedom and what options on a spectrum from integration to separation and emigration were available to them. In a white hostile environment, one they had faced in the United States and that they encountered all too often in Canada West, Blacks looked to the community as a central anchor beyond the nation-state. As this book hopes to show, individuals who engaged in cross-border life writing reflected this in their continued emphasis on community and their establishment of various kinds of genealogies. Notwithstanding, this observation does not preclude these individuals to be part of a “continental [literary] continuity” (Clarke, “No Hearsay” 31).