

3. Radicalism

A Narrative of Thomas Smallwood (Coloured Man) (1851)

Thomas Smallwood was born into slavery in 1801 in Maryland. Free at around the age of 30, he became one of the founders of the Underground Railroad in Washington, D.C., together with abolitionist Charles T. Torrey (1813-1846). They organized and maintained activities in the city in what Stanley Harrold has called a “biracial” and “radical community of action,” before he settled in Canada West in 1843 with his wife and five children (65, 93).¹ From then on, he led a restless cross-border life marked by his activity in and for the black community in Canada West and the United States. As such, Smallwood became involved in the political work that was put into place by Blacks in Canada West including, for example, conventions, debates, petitions, and the publication of newspapers. In spite of this involvement, Smallwood has sunk into oblivion until recently, with (historical and literary) scholarship having focused instead on other towering leaders such as Henry and Mary Bibb, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, or Samuel Ringgold Ward, for example. It seems true that Smallwood was a relatively difficult character with a certain disregard for authority, which brought him into conflict with several such leading figures.² By the same token, this constitutes one of his foremost qualities, i.e. the will to speak his mind in different public settings such as in court, in church, and at meetings. It seems that Smallwood aspired to a position among these leaders, both through his constant engagement for and in the black

-
- 1 Harrold’s chapter on the Underground Railroad in Washington, D.C., is in fact largely based on information contained in Smallwood’s narrative. A report by Hilary Russell is informative on Smallwood’s family: He married his wife Elizabeth Anderson in 1836, and all their five children—Thomas, Catharine, Susan, William, and Celestine—were apparently born free (Russell, nn 56, 57, Part V.a, n.pag.).
 - 2 For example, Almonte mentions that Smallwood was one of the shareholders who sued the *Provincial Freeman* (see 11).

communities in the United States and Canada West and, most fiercely, through his *Narrative* of 1851, which engages in urgent debates of his time.

If Smallwood appears to have been no easy character, he also remains a somewhat elusive figure. Consequently, the issue of how to approach Smallwood begins with the question of where to trace him. According to Richard Almonte, editor of the 2000 edition of Smallwood's narrative who has done crucial work in unearthing him from the archive, only very few written sources remain to give a voice to Smallwood. More precisely, he claims that only five "published sources" are available: the *Narrative* itself (1851), the *Report* of the convention at Drummondville (1847), irregular mentions in the *Toronto City Directory* after 1846, a reference in Mary Ann Shadd Cary's biography, and the appearance in Davis and Gates, Jr.'s, *The Slave's Narrative* (9). To this brief list, we might add William Andrews's major study *To Tell a Free Story* (1986), although the comments in scholarly analyses are hardly illuminating Smallwood's life, given the very brief mention these books make of him at all. Instead, the rich source collection in the *Black Abolitionist Papers* hold other documents that reveal Smallwood's involvement in Canada West's black community (see below).

From these extant sources, it is possible to locate Smallwood and his writing more precisely in the context of Canada West during the 1850s. The *Narrative* was published for the author in Toronto in 1851, which speaks to an astute understanding of the significant time period. Publishing in Toronto constitutes a bold statement in itself, since most narratives were printed in U.S.-American cities, or even in Great Britain to appeal to a transatlantic anti-slavery readership. Instead, Smallwood, unlike Samuel Ringgold Ward, for instance, inserts himself in a North American context and addresses a principally black readership on the continent. In fact, the events before and shortly after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law (FSL) in 1850 were calling for immediate discursive action on the part of the Black community and its leaders, and Smallwood's *Narrative* directly participates in these discussions.

Consider, for example, how the *Narrative* stands in dialogue with Smallwood's hands-on involvement in Canada West's black community. It is crucial that it was published only a few months before the North American Convention, a cross-border effort in black organization, which took place in Toronto's famous St. Lawrence Hall from September 9-11, 1851. Smallwood's son (also called Thomas) was in attendance. The convention, organized by Henry Bibb as an immediate reaction to the FSL, marked a "watershed in [...] Black Canadian history," according to historian Afua Cooper ("Doing Battle" 17). Delegates called for immediate emancipation, supported agriculture, rejected African colonization, recommended other Blacks to immigrate to Canada, and

proclaimed loyalty to the British government (see *BAP* 149-69). As this chapter demonstrates, all of these were topics that Smallwood had addressed in his *Narrative* only months before.

Smallwood's continuous engagement in meetings and conventions in Canada West also shows in the Drummondville Convention of 1847. There, he sat on the committees on business and finance, and had led the opposition against Josiah Henson of the British American Institute at Dawn on charges of mismanagement and fraud.³ Finally, Smallwood's committed participation in shaping the lives of Black people is solidified by his involvement, together with his son and other leaders, in composing the "Address to the Colored Citizens of Canada" in April of 1863. Composed shortly after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, it constitutes a telling comment of the contradictory feelings the U.S. Civil War prompted in Blacks in Canada (*BAP* 513-14). The document is a clear endorsement of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the prospects it might hold for still enslaved Blacks in the United States, while at the same time, it expresses loyalty to the Queen and Great Britain's 'freedom' bestowed upon her "loyal subjects" (*BAP* 514). Smallwood was thus at the forefront of the convention movement and the self-organization of Black people in British North America.

This chapter argues that Smallwood's *Narrative* constitutes a political-ideological manifesto that underlines his claim to black leadership. More precisely, this claim is based on an intellectual allegiance to David Walker and his *Appeal in Four Articles* of 1829, whom he makes out as one of the "great men" of the age (Smallwood vii). By inserting Walker as a powerful role model in his *Narrative* and fashioning himself as the living example of Walker's claims, this chapter contends, Smallwood becomes part of the process of creating a black, cross-border, radical intellectual genealogy. This chapter will therefore look at how Smallwood stands as one example of how black authors in the nineteenth century, by experimenting with autobiographical formats and textual hybridity, actively inserted themselves in, and influentially shaped, contemporary political debates and black life writing.

3 On the committee of finance, he was joined by Richard Warren, whom I discuss in chapter 2 (see *Report* 6). The *Report of the Convention* shows that Smallwood, partly together with Noah Cannon, proposed two important resolutions to be debated against Henson and the agents of the British American Institute: "Resolved,—That if the monies, clothing, and other articles contributed in the United States and Great Britain had been equitably and judiciously divided, our condition would have been greatly better than it now is. [...] Resolved,—That this Convention is satisfied that frauds have been committed upon the people of colour in Canada, in regard to monies, clothing, and other articles sent from the United States and elsewhere" (8).

The chapter will start out by looking at how scholars have struggled to categorize Smallwood as an author who, though he plays with and exceeds the slave narrative, still presents a piece of life writing that follows a personal agenda. In this respect, Smallwood's preface is unique among the texts of the time and will receive a close analysis for introducing his core motifs and concerns. Smallwood demonstrates his impressive versatility in a biracial, abolitionist, intellectual canon that lays the foundation for his leadership aspirations. In the following, the focus on his disillusionment with the African Colonization Society (ACS), his work as an Underground Railroad organizer, and his troubled relationship with the black community are all aspects that contribute to rehabilitating his reputation and construct his persona as an aspiring leader. Subsequently, the removal to Canada initiates Smallwood's cross-border life and work, but it is far from ending his troubled relationship to the United States. In fact, the more he idealizes Canada and Great Britain as the best option for Black resettlement, the stronger his anti-Americanism becomes. In the end, however, both Canada and the United States remain only ambiguous elements in Smallwood's ideology. Finally, the chapter looks more closely at the conversation Smallwood establishes with David Walker. There are several obvious overlaps with Walker as a kind of intellectual ancestor to whose radicalism Smallwood subscribes. More precisely, he reproduces attempts to begin a black intellectual genealogy that includes Walker. He works toward (re-)establishing Walker's importance for the struggle against slavery roughly twenty years after the latter's mysterious and untimely death, while at the same time establishing himself as part of this struggle and the line of "great men."

3.1 PLACE-ING BLACK LIFE WRITING IN THE 1850S

Smallwood is a challenging author. His often erratic style, in addition to the formal experimentations with this autobiographical text, has confused scholars who, consequently, have struggled with the question of where to place him and his text. It has only been most recently that Smallwood's narrative has gained some critical recognition in the work of Winfried Siemerling (2015) and Sandrine Ferré-Rode (2013). Indeed, Almonte published the only scholarly edition of the text in 2000, a reprint of the 1851 original. His introduction offers a few interesting approaches to the *Narrative*. To him, Smallwood is an adventure hero, a "picaro," and a self-made man (15). As a narrator, Almonte sees Smallwood dealing with two main rhetorical concerns: his strife for authenticity and the will to insert himself in a literary tradition (see 14). However, he seems at a loss to assign a conceptual 'place' to Smallwood's text. He admits that Smallwood's narrative is "a Canadian

book,” taking into account both the narrative’s place of publication (Toronto) and what he calls Smallwood’s “contradictory” relation to his adopted home (16, 18).

This argument, though, clashes with Almonte’s observation that Smallwood’s narrative “is firmly rooted” in what he calls “an American literary genre, the slave narrative” (16).⁴ Following George Elliott Clarke’s argumentation, on the other hand, there is no doubt that Smallwood is not only a Canadian narrative but should also be considered part of Canadian Victorian literature (see Clarke, Review 272). Siemerling has gone a step further in claiming Smallwood as a part of what he establishes as the “Black Canadian Renaissance,” on par with the “textual and cultural production” by recognized leading figures in the community such as Ward, Loguen, Steward, and Shadd (98). Yet Siemerling, too, offers no further analysis or reading of the *Narrative*.

Finally, Ferré-Rode’s analysis is crucial as it links Smallwood, in accordance with Clarke, to “other agents of Black protest” such as William Wells Brown, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, and David Walker (“Black Voice” 31). She does not elaborate on this connection, however, and thus does not recover it as a crucial site for Smallwood to establish his own voice in relation to a genealogy of protest which he creates, affirms, and inserts himself into through the underlying presence of David Walker in his narrative. In fact, Walker is basically the only other voice Smallwood admits in his text, which then is not only a radical re-thinking of a classic form (the slave narrative), but also in itself a radical expression of dominant topics of debate in the middle of the nineteenth century. Siemerling, therefore, is right in placing Smallwood among his list of “the most important abolitionists of Canada West and the northeastern United States” (96). A closer look at the *Narrative* is crucial, however, to understand Smallwood’s idiosyncratic approach to an autobiographical form in a tradition of protest for his claim to leadership and to become part not only of a “literary tradition,” as Almonte claims, but a radical, cross-border intellectual genealogy.

Given Smallwood’s involvements in the political work of the black community and his references to current affairs, it is likely that he was aware of the popularity of the slave narrative by 1851. Indeed, the appearance of a few familiar elements in the *Narrative* indicates a sense of the genre, its inherent potential, and might represent strategic choices to attract prospective readers and align the *Narrative* with successful precursors. The title seems conspicuous enough already and contains all necessary pieces of information the avid reader of

4 Clarke has pointed out in his review of the 2000 edition that Almonte is incorrect in stating that Smallwood’s was the only narrative published in Canada (see 271). In his own article on Canadian slave narratives of 2005, Clarke lists numerous examples of Canadian-published texts (see ““No Hearsay”” 16-17).

(anti-)slavery literature would expect: “A Narrative of Thomas Smallwood, (Coloured Man:) Giving an Account of his Birth—the Period he was held in Slavery—His Release—and Removal to Canada, etc. Together with an Account of the Underground Railroad. Written by Himself” includes the references to genre, a brief survey of the major life stations from slavery to the “removal” to Canada West, a report of the Underground Railroad, peaking in the assertion of authorship (ii). Smallwood could have been fairly assured to find a receptive audience for this kind of work, as Almonte suggests (see 9-10). What is more, the structure of the book reveals a preface and an appendix; elements which, although not exclusive to slave narratives, fulfilled the particular purpose of authenticating the author within the genre. While Almonte has called the title choice “misleading,” I argue that Smallwood’s *Narrative* strays from the path of genre expectations held towards the slave narrative to adapt it to a different set of needs that authors did no longer find aptly represented by the traditional genre (9).

A unique feature of the *Narrative* is the absence of any introductory letters. Neither do we find letters of recommendations in the “Appendix,” usually another conspicuous place for such material (see Ferré-Rode, “Black Voice” 27). The fact that Smallwood begins immediately with his own preface represents a bold statement of confidence while at the same time it sets the tone for the narrative to follow. At one instance in the preface, Smallwood explicitly uses conventional language typical of slave narratives, claiming that he is the author of this “simple narrative of unvarnished facts” (viii-ix). However, Smallwood uses the conventional humble authorial self-description to assert his voice and his own authority: “This little work, with the exception of the quotations and a portion of the matter in the preface, is wholly original, [...] interspersed with such comments as I conceived to be necessary” (viii-ix). In defiance of any contemporary genre exigencies, Smallwood declares himself the “sole custodian of the truth,” as Ferré-Rode has called it (“Black Voice” 28). She also rightly explains that Smallwood manages to ascertain his voice ubiquitously in the text (see 29), while shutting out *other* authenticating voices, making him equally the sole authority of the text to follow.

Smallwood’s opening of the narrative’s main part has been noted as highly untypical and “unfit” to match the genre conventions (Ferré-Rode, “Black Voice” 26). Almonte notes, for example, that “only one or two pages can rightly be said to deal with biographical matters,” reducing Smallwood’s life as a slave to “one paragraph” (Almonte 9-10). Although the first paragraph begins with the classic “I was born,” there is no “a slave” or “on the plantation of.” Rather, Smallwood gives the precise date of birth, “the 22nd day of Feb., 1801,” immediately followed by the prospects of freedom: “I was recorded to be set free at the age of thirty, in

the clerk's office of [the] county" (13). What Almonte has called "defamiliarizing the experience of slavery [...] by not naming it" leaves no doubt about what Smallwood perceives to be his rightful status (10).

The "master", one Rev. J. B. Ferguson, who had come by Thomas and his sister through his wife and her children, is rhetorically repurposed by Smallwood as the mere executor of his manumission process. Smallwood does mention that Ferguson "was no friend of slavery," either, and that he and his sister "served" until the ages of 30 and 25, respectively, "so as to work out what he had paid for [them]" (13). Other than the details of this legal act of being freed, Smallwood wastes no time on a more extensive biographical account. He finds it rather "needless [...] to go into a detail of the vicissitudes [of] that period" and instead, sums up a few major events (13): he hired himself out at about twenty-five, got married at about twenty-nine, and had children thereafter. The teleological focus of this extremely brief glimpse into his early life and adulthood remains "the expiration of my servitude" (13). Linguistically, too, this first paragraph is crucial for the deferral that Almonte sees at work (see Almonte 10). Although he uses the familiar vocabulary of slavery, such as "to serve," "to be bequeathed to" or "to hire oneself out to," Smallwood never calls himself "slave." The years of bondage are referred to simply as "that period" (13), and through this strategy of deferral, Smallwood emerges out of this first paragraph not only debt-free, but free *tout court*.

Smallwood's subsequent address of his literacy, however, seems abrupt in the narrative and like a concession to include crucial tropes of the slave narrative rather than the coherent suite of his story. He describes that despite the lack of institutionalized schooling available to himself, his owner Ferguson and his wife taught him the basics of the alphabet and how to spell "in two syllables" (14). Smallwood uses this fact for a searing commentary both on the prejudiced whites of his Maryland County and the system of slavery that has produced an "abyss of intellectual darkness" for black people (14). Smallwood describes how his abilities to spell and write turned him into a "walking curiosity in the village" and how he had to perform for white audiences "to spell baker and cider, to their great surprise, (which were the first two words in the two syllables of Webster's Spelling Book)" (14). Smallwood has more respect for John McLeod and his family, with whom he lives as one of several black "hired help[s]," and whose children also continue Smallwood's education (14). Incidentally, McLeod is "a Scotch gentleman," a remark that subtly foreshadows what Smallwood later claims as British freedom (see below) in the midst of a slaveholding community (14).

As Smallwood leaves the years of his enslavement to be concerned with the two decades in freedom prior to the publication of the *Narrative* in 1851, it is

worth noticing how scholars have responded to this altogether unique beginning of a black autobiography. Taking Smallwood's beginning as the most prominent example, Almonte claims in fact that the appropriation of the slave narrative genre is Smallwood's main rhetorical objective that he pursues, not least, "for his own ends" (13). Rightly so, Almonte does not see Smallwood concerned with the much-expected "biographical matters," which Smallwood 'neglects' in favor of a more extensive account of his work on the Underground Railroad (9). While other critics will link this to a moment of self-assertion at the hand of Smallwood (see Ferré-Rode), Almonte seemingly cannot shake a certain feeling of unease at how bluntly Smallwood defies chronology. "Luckily," he writes, "the *Narrative* does contain some of the dates most vital in formulating a basic [outline] of Smallwood's life" (10).

In his concise review of Almonte's edition, Clarke reiterates his stance that African Canadian slave narratives "adapt" the strategies of their U.S.-American counterparts (Review 271). In this way, Smallwood stands as an example for this kind of adaptation, even experimentation, in that he uses certain elements of the slave narrative to embed them in a larger project. Therefore, he transcends the actual genre of the slave narrative, which has become limiting and restrictive to highly mobile, free black activists and leaders. Ferré-Rode agrees with Almonte that Smallwood's text confronts readers and presents an atypical beginning, but follows Clarke in claiming the necessity to define the slave narrative as a more pervasive genre in which Smallwood introduces different "nuances" ("Black Voice" 32). I would call these nuances different needs and desires that black authors expressed by using an established, very successful genre in which they introduced different *Sujets* and formal elements. Almonte's struggles to "place [the] book" reside precisely in his difficulties to reconcile the *Narrative* as "a Canadian book" to the 'American' slave narrative genre (16, 18). Accepting Smallwood in the canon of Clarke's "Canadian slave narratives" (see "'No Hearsay'"), and following the more recent approaches of Nancy Kang (2005), Alyssa MacLean (2010), and Winfried Siemerling (2015) (see introduction), Smallwood can be read as part of black cross-border literature of the nineteenth century that explores the possibilities of life writing.

3.2 OVERTURE: ESTABLISHING THE EXTRAORDINARY

The preface presents a carefully composed overture that is unique among black life writing of the 1850s. Comprising about one fourth of the total *Narrative*, there can be no doubt this opening section is of particular importance. Indeed, the

preface reads as a synthesis of the narrative's key topics. Whereas the main body of the narrative is more episodic and follows a basic storyline, even if somewhat incoherent, the three discernable parts of the preface deliver a more pragmatic outline of Smallwood's concerns. It begins by creating a sense of urgency that centers on the depravity of the system of slavery and the United States as the place where it still thrives, and establishes the opposition to freedom in the British Empire. This is logically followed by Smallwood's relationship to Canada West as one place where this British freedom is played out. Finally, he offers two example cases of men worthy of support and admiration: white abolitionist George Thompson, and black abolitionist David Walker. They are made out as "great men" and later in the *Narrative*, lay the foundations for Smallwood's concern to establish a genealogy of great black men. Smallwood emphasizes the image of Walker and his position as a leader and martyr, in order to be able to focus on fashioning himself as the living example of Walker's claims in the main part of the *Narrative*.

The preface opens with a memorable first sentence—"We live in stirring times!" (iii)—that immediately creates the sense of immediacy that permeates much of the *Narrative*. This singular era, Smallwood suggests, manifests itself in the lives and work of a number of great men. Overall, the preface references a mosaic of no less than twenty-nine writers, politicians, and some of their most representative works from all ages. They are carefully elected to span both ancient Greek mythologies and the Bible, the old and the new worlds, literature and politics. Smallwood's eclectic references do not only accentuate his own literacy and versatility in contemporary transatlantic anti-slavery discourses, they also reflect his use of a biracial abolitionist canon of leaders. Above all, they challenge readers to keep pace with this intellectual tour de force. His references to extraordinary figures of past and present history serve to illustrate, especially, the pressing question of this "age of epochs" and superlatives, i.e. the question of slavery (iii).

Smallwood's rhetoric mirrors the turmoil and rising tensions after the passing of the FSL in 1850. Job-like, he introduces a well-known argument in anti-slavery discourse: God will and must soon awake from his "slumber" and free the enslaved from "the iron hoof of Southern despotism" (iii). John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) provides one of the logical anchors for Smallwood in what appears to be an underlying epistemological and spiritual crisis: how can God allow for the torments of slavery? Not only does Smallwood fashion himself as "the voice of Stentor" who calls God to keep his promise to look out for those in need of protection (iii) but he quotes a verse from Milton that seems to ascertain the upcoming godly intervention: "'Jehovah thundering out of Zion,/Thron'd between

the cherubim,' may yet rain fiery hail upon this wicked land" (iv). Smallwood draws on other, more notorious figures like Napoleon to substantiate the necessity of God's punishment of the 'slave Republic' by quoting the French Emperor's claim that "the slave trader is a pirate and a felon" and that "all men are born equal" (iv).⁵

Indeed, Smallwood elaborates the motif of sleep to stigmatize slave traders and slaveholders. He recovers "natures (sic) sweet restorer" from romantic poems such as Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) (iv), but shows how a peaceful sleep is at odds with the presence of slaveholders. Smallwood excludes them from the placid and restoring quality of sleep due to their 'original sin' of keeping human property and their lack of "conscience" (iv). A restless sleep, then, contrasts with the sleep of the dead who have deserved rest through their deeds in life: Smallwood's quote of English poet William Cowper (1731-1800) seems to prove the latter's "conscience," as the reference from his poem *The Task* (1785) clearly expresses an anti-slavery position: "No! dear as freedom is, and in my heart's/ Just estimation, prized above all price,/ I'd much rather be myself the slave/ And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him" (v). Cowper is often quoted in anti-slavery literature and is in line with Smallwood's superlative-laden language as one of the "most splended (sic) spirits" of the age (v).

From the impression of impending punishment for slavery in the United States, the second part of the preface goes on to use the preponderance of British poets, politicians, and anti-slavery activists to support the idea of "the flood of British freedom" (from William Wordsworth's "London, 1802," 1807) that stands in contrast to the corrupted New World. Smallwood here suggests a crucial reversal of images: he subverts the trope of the United States who reject the Old World for corruption and unfreedom by turning these negative attributes into characteristics of the New World. In this way, Smallwood introduces what will become the main argument for his allegiance to and support of Great Britain, i.e. the Empire's status as a convert from slavery. Like Samuel Ringgold Ward, he describes the "old climes of Europe" as formerly ruled by slavery, but as having overcome the evil,

5 While Almonte was unable to locate the source of this quote by Napoleon, it appears to stem from a 1798 "Proclamation, issued by Bonaparte, in the Arabic language, on his landing in Egypt," during the French Egyptian campaign (1798-1801). The quote follows a defense of the French Nation against the "contempt" and discredit at the hands of the ruling Beys, which Napoleon declares to defeat. In this context, the Proclamation, signed by Napoleon, reads: "People of Egypt! You will be told that I am come to destroy your religion: do not believe it [...]. Tell them that all men are equal before God. Wisdom, talents, and virtue, are the only things which make a difference between them" (*Copies* 180).

in the words of John Philpot Curran, due to “British law, which makes liberty commensurate with, and inseparable from, British soil” (v).⁶ The idealization of Great Britain as free from slavery is heightened further by the contrast to Thomas Campbell’s “Epigram” (1838), a powerful illustration of the Janus-faced United States whose flag, to the poet, is emblematic of the country’s tension between “[t]he White Man’s liberty [and the] Negroes’ scars” (vi).

The idealization of Great Britain and now, Canada, reveals the “almost bombastic praise for Canadian/British ‘liberty’” common in slave narratives, as Clarke has noted, which at the same time suppresses the past of slavery and “earlier accounts of white settler racism” (“No Hearsay” 18). It is crucial that the initial conceptualizations of Canada were marked by rumors that were often spread by slave owners to discourage runaways. Smallwood connects these “*strange and romantic stories*” to Shelley’s “Revolt of Islam” (1818) (vi; added emphasis). The quote by Shelley speaks to a romanticized vision of Canada’s nature—“Of that green land, cradled in the roar/ Of western waves and wildernesses” (vi)—but it should also be seen in the context of the poem’s concern with (peaceful) revolution that sees the two protagonists rise up against the sultan in Constantinople. According to Mark Sandy, Shelley’s poem as a “visionary romance embod[ies] an idealised re-imagining of how the French Revolution, in 1789, should have been conducted and contrast[s], strikingly, with the actuality of the bloody removal of monarchy” (Sandy). There is a parallel to the preface’s strategy of idealizing Britain and Canada without facing slavery as a reality but only as a thing of the past which no longer informs the present. Given Smallwood’s casting of Britain as having thrown off the shackles of slavery and his resolution that “a land of slaves shall ne’er be mine” (from Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*, 1821), his decision to go to Canada gains importance perhaps more as an act of ‘revolutionary’, self-determined defiance than as the religious “pilgrimage” Smallwood ostensibly claims (vi).

The preface, then, is also a metaphorical commentary on Smallwood’s geographical journeys. “Professor Longfellow[‘s]” “Indian Hunter” (1825), for example, describes the escape of slaves from the South, while remaining silent on Smallwood’s own (vi). In doing so, he adapts and thereby appropriates the second-

6 John Philpot Curran (1750-1817) was an Irish lawyer and politician. The quote is taken from his defense of Archibald Hamilton Rowan before the court of King’s Bench in January of 1794. According to James Kelly, the Hamilton Rowan case helped solidify Curran’s renown and his abilities as a defense attorney. The speech, which was considered “a masterpiece of forensic pleading as well as contextual extenuation for which he was rightly applauded” (Kelly), is contained in Thomas Browne’s collection *The British Cicero* (1810) (vol. 3, 215).

to-last stanza of the poem in which, instead of a beech, it is “[...] the cotton tree [that] shadow’d the misty lake,” and instead of the hunter, “the slave was seen in the south no more” (vi). Describing his arrival in Toronto, Smallwood finds truth in Scottish national poet Robert Burns’s (1759-1796) patriotic “Scots Wha Hae” (1793). Here, Smallwood operates the connection between liberty and a form of nationalism. “Wha sae base as be a slave/ Let him turn and flee” is not only part of Burns’s song, which for a long time served as the Scottish national anthem (vii), but might also serve to underline an allegiance to Britain for offering “the best national freedom” and asylum for fugitive slaves (44) (a notion to which I shall return).

The previous idealization of Great Britain and Canada West contrasts starkly with Smallwood’s personal experiences in Toronto, where he witnesses “prejudice equal to any thing I ever experienced in the south (sic)” and the animosity “against myself personally, held by people of my own colour” (vii). This impression, however, is necessary to transition to the third part of the preface, and to introduce some of the most pervasive themes of his narrative. For example, he is straightforward about using his narrative as a space to counter the attacks by his fellow Blacks in order to “clear up [his] character” (vii).⁷ At the same time, Smallwood offers the first example of his many criticisms of the black community, portraying them as unquestioningly believing the discrediting rumors in circulation about him. As we shall see, herein lies a fundamental overlap with David Walker, who himself did not shy away from criticizing his fellow Blacks in his *Appeal*. The preface refuses to speak to the comfort zone of his readers, but rather, as Ferré-Rode had pointed out, challenges the notions of a homogeneous and harmonious black community. As a way of engaging with this “perverted” community, as Ferré-Rode calls it (“Black Voice” 31), Smallwood has understood the power of the word and of the slave narrative to “repel the thrusts of Slander,” whose evil potential he takes from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (Smallwood vii). Smallwood wants to clear his public reputation through his own version of the truth and his innocent consciousness, which sets him off from the corrupted slaveholders. At the same time, the preface uses the connection between discredit and notoriety to position Smallwood in the ranks of black and white abolitionist leaders, since “[...] it has been the lot of great men to be slandered” (vii).

The experience of slandered character as a mark of great men allows Smallwood also to identify himself as a supporter of British abolitionists, specifically. Next to two of the movement’s most prominent figures under attack, Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) and William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the preface

7 Writing “to clear up [his] character, and do justice to humanity” resembles Austin Steward’s later attempts to give his version of the Wilberforce colony (vii).

focuses on the case of George Thompson (1804-1878). This brief intervention illustrates the topicality, on the one hand, and the textual hybridity of Smallwood's *Narrative*, on the other. The preface in fact includes an "Address" to the abolitionist which lauds Thompson's work for the enslaved. It is likely that Smallwood refers to Thompson's visit to Toronto in May 1851 (the preface is signed for July 1851) where he gave "a lecture on the Evils of Slavery" for which he was severely criticized ("Speech" 1). The address comes in the form of a six-stanza poem of occasional verse, likely Smallwood's own writing, and breaks the preface's prose style. In line with the theme of great men, a quote by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* sets the tone for this elegiac praise of the "second Wilberforce": "His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that NATURE might stand up and say to all the world—THIS WAS A MAN" (viii; original emphasis).

Such an endorsement of Thompson as such is not surprising. It marks, however, a departure from the classic scheme of the slave narrative, in which authentication must be white on black, and instead serves as an instance in which Smallwood powerfully endorses a fellow abolitionist based on several aspects that might have resonated with Smallwood himself. A closer look at Thompson's Toronto speech reveals, for one, that it represents an appeal of sorts as well: Thompson offers a strong anti-slavery statement and a call to action to a *Canadian* audience. The piece is remarkable not so much for its well-known abolitionist argumentative apparatus but for the sense of urgency and responsibility he evokes for Canadians to become involved in the discussions of the question of slavery. He explains that given the number of fugitives arriving after the FSL, Canadians have no choice but to interfere (see "Speech" 14). He also calls for an alliance with Britain as two countries "separated geographically and politically from the country where slavery reigns [, and therefore representing] the persons best able to form an unbiased and sound judgment on the question at issue" ("Speech" 13). In this sense, the speech is in line with the strong abolitionist message of Smallwood's *Narrative*, as well as its sense of supporting Britain and taking up the fight against slavery in Canada West.

Smallwood's actual focus in evoking a line of great, multiracial, slandered abolitionists, however, is David Walker. The famous anti-slavery activist becomes the center of the *Narrative*'s crusade for authentication and authority as he defends him against the plagiarism scandal caused by Paola Brown.⁸ Brown's recent

8 Paola Brown (c.1807-?) came to Upper Canada in 1828, and is mostly remembered for assuming a leadership role in the black community in the flourishing town of Hamilton. He worked as a handyman and a town crier, and therefore was well-known to people. He gave his speech on the evils of slavery in February 1851, but after the census of

“Address intended to be delivered in the City Hall, Hamilton, February 7, 1851, on the Subject of Slavery” was nothing more, as Smallwood explains, than “a copy, almost verbatim, of a book known as ‘Walker’s Appeal,’ written by a coloured man of that name [David Walker]” (ix). Brown’s speech is indeed not merely a case of intellectual theft but a larger, “diabolical attempt [...] to rob the *memory* of an estimable man” (ix; added emphasis). Smallwood does not only personally appraise Walker, but engages in restoring the text to its rightful author. At the same time, Smallwood attempts to recover awareness and respect for Walker. While the concern to maintain the memory of black individuals is one he shares, for example, with the chronicler Austin Steward, Smallwood is both technical and bold in his method: he reproduces, within his own preface, both the preface and the biographical sketch of David Walker as they were written by abolitionist minister Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882) “and published with the second edition of the book referred to in 1848” (ix). Reprinting Garnet’s interpretation of Walker’s life and his impact on the history of Black people dismantles Brown’s plagiarism while, at the same time, it echoes Garnet in (re)creating the myth of David Walker and institutes Smallwood’s radical intellectual genealogy into which the *Narrative* inscribes him.

3.3 UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WORK AND CONFLICTED COMMUNITIES

A major focus of Smallwood’s narrative lies on the period of his life as a freeman before he left the United States for Canada West. This time is consumed by the work with fugitive slaves as a co-founder of the Underground Railroad, but also by becoming the center of attention within inner-black unrest in the community of Washington, D.C. The description of his work, free from all romanticism that may surround the stories of the Underground Railroad, therefore serves Smallwood to address the attacks he faces and accuse what he terms “traitors” among his fellow Blacks. Credibility is crucial both in the hazardous work he is engaged in and as a black writer, and so he attempts to render his version of “the truth” in order to save his reputation (see Ferré-Rode 28). Consequently, it is not surprising that the creation of the local Underground Railroad should be prefaced by a moment of conversion to anti-slavery work.

1852, is untraceable in the records “and it has been alleged that he died a pauper” (Weaver).

It is unclear whether Smallwood joined the support for the American Colonization Society while he still lived with the McLeods.⁹ Although he describes the temptations emanating from the Society's purported "object of [...] the entire abolition of slavery in the United States," Smallwood quickly joins the severe criticism brought forth against the ACS by quasi-demonizing it into a fraudulent organization pretending to act in favor of the black population only to hide its true objective to rid the United States of free Blacks (15). In fact, he describes his disillusionment upon realizing that the colonization project in Liberia was meant to eliminate the potential danger of a free black population that would possibly "contaminate[...] the slave population with a spirit of freedom" (15). The *modus operandi* of the ACS, Smallwood claims, deliberately used aspiring and potential black leaders among the free population in order to use them for its purpose to "delude[...] Blacks into emigrating to Africa" (15). Smallwood admits that he was among those "to whom inducements were held out," implying they had identified him as a leader, but that he chose "a good conscience" over money and an involvement as a "merchant in the Liberia trade" (15).

In this way, the description of his long interest and subsequent break with the ACS is meant to clear his name and portray himself as unaffiliated with this society, as the organization was highly controversial in the "northern free black [community] and the growing abolitionist movement" (*BAP* 118n10). Blacks in Canada also opposed the ACS, as a letter by Henry Bibb from April 1851 shows. He states that securing land for fugitives in Canada "would be one of the greatest [...] blessings [...] for the people" as it would, among other things, distract them from "put[ting] a check the American Coloniceation Society (sic) or scheme" (*BAP* 115). Distancing himself clearly from the ACS allows Smallwood to insert himself and his political standpoint into the current debate on emigration, in which the ACS formed a ready target. Through this instance of self-fashioning, he now appears as a morally upright character who resists the ACS's temptation.¹⁰ What is more, Smallwood situates his own work at the opposite end of the spectrum: working for and with fugitive slaves clashes not only with the efforts of the ACS

9 The American Colonization Society's (founded 1817) "primary goal [was to] remove [...] free blacks from the United States, particularly to [...] Liberia" (*BAP* 118n10). It became the focus of criticism both by the black community in the north and the abolitionists during the 1830s and 1840s. The Society only formally dissolved in 1964.

10 Austin Steward echoes this example when he resists the tempting offers held out to him by his enemy Benjamin Paul (see Steward 221-22).

but also with some of his former friends who had become “willing tools for [and profiteers of] the Colonisation Society” (16).¹¹

Smallwood’s opposition to the ACS quickly shifts from moral and personal to political reasons by linking the organization to the passing of the FSL. Ever since then, he claims, the efforts of the ACS have dramatically increased, while the law as such could only have come into being through “the influence of Northern Colonisationists [...] who suck their riches from the South off from the sweat and blood of the African race” (17). Smallwood, albeit somewhat polemically, shows his ability to engage with current debates by outlining a strong political stance which mirrors a well-known contemporary abolitionist argument.

Nevertheless, the FSL is only one of several aggravating factors that directly affect his “extremely hazardous,” yet highly efficient work with escaped slaves (17). Smallwood outlines how quickly he gained a reputation of helping escapees, calling himself successful in all but seven cases (17). However, he sees this work seriously impaired by slaveholders’ schemes to sow “continual lack of confidence [, ...] jealousy and envy” among the black population in order to prevent communal action and solidarity (17). Offering this insight into his first-hand experience, Smallwood insists that these schemes were to blame for failed assisted escapes, turning susceptible black people into the greatest obstacles for the emerging Underground Railroad under Smallwood’s care (17).

A few years prior to the advent of the FSL, 1842 proved a seminal year for Smallwood’s fugitive slave work as it marked the “appearance” of Charles T. Torrey in Washington, D.C. (18). Smallwood had been following the uproar around Torrey in Annapolis, where the latter had attended a slaveholders’ convention, and was eager to meet him (18). The well-known abolitionist quickly becomes a major figure in Smallwood’s professional life (see Harrold 66; 77). Not unlike that for Walker, he develops a deep veneration and personal admiration for “that most excellent and whole-souled Abolitionist” (18). Their first encounter seems to have begun *in medias res*.¹² Torrey must have placed great trust in the

11 Smallwood does not shy away from calling out two of these converts by name (“James Brown, and a Mr. McGill,” 16).

12 It is crucial to note Smallwood’s acknowledgment that the joint work with Torrey was only made possible by “the agency” of two women, the abolitionist’s boarding lady and Smallwood’s own wife, “who took washing out of the house in which [Torrey] then boarded; through her, I sought and obtained an interview with him” (Smallwood 18). What is more, Smallwood openly acknowledges the two women’s paramount help in establishing fugitive support: “And be it spoken to the praise of the lady with whom he boarded, that she and my wife were the only assistance we had for some time in the execution of our plans” (18). Given that in many slave narratives, male authors are

man he just met, as Smallwood describes that already “[a]t our first interview [Torrey] informed me of a scheme he had in view, and requested my assistance, to which I readily assented” (18). From the *Narrative*, Torrey emerges as a restless, energetic, and even driven abolitionist, displaying traits that agree well with Smallwood’s own spirit and ambition.

The introduction of Torrey marks, too, the beginning of a shift in the narrative: Smallwood’s plot line becomes more erratic as the actual work on fugitive slave escapes also invites a number of digressions that can pose a challenge for readers. The first case in which he and Torrey become involved is a case in point. Smallwood, aware of the chance to collaborate with an already well-known abolitionist, and seeing the opportunity to solidify his standing in Washington, accepts the task of informing the mother of an enslaved family of the “scheme” to rescue them (18). The husband and father is away in the North, initially to collect money to meet the prize the owner had set for the family, but then resolves that the man “had already got more of their labour than he was justly entitled to [...]. Besides, he was not in favour of paying slaveholders for any of their slaves that could be otherwise rescued from their grasp” (18). Smallwood here openly takes sides for the family; he calls on “proslavery apologists” and an implicit readership to reconsider their understanding of justice (18). Slaveholders, he describes, often enough feel offended that they should lose their slaves without recompense, but “remember that justice has two sides, or in other words, a black side as well as a white side” (19). Smallwood argues that the family, as well as enslaved women and men in general, have the right to escape as the logical consequence of having been forced to work without pay (19). Smallwood fashions slaveholders into both “aggressors” and “robbers [...] of men” whom he then exposes to act against “their own language” as outlined in the Declaration of Independence (19). In doing so, he reveals himself to be a follower of David Walker who illuminates the latter arguments in his *Appeal* (see below).

Smallwood’s numerous episodes around his and Torrey’s Underground Railroad activities, whether failed or successful, are not simply a concession to the curiosity of his prospective readership. They turn the *Narrative* into a moral compass as well as a fascinating, detailed record of the manner of operating a branch of the Underground Railroad, which has become engrained in the anti-

usually nearly silent on wives and other women, Smallwood’s remark is significant. Yet, his narrative, too, remains set within a context that disregards women and their activities.

slavery imaginary.¹³ This information is valuable because it gives an insight into the execution of assisted escapes, while Smallwood needs to find the balance between providing enough information to make the experience palpable for his readers and not to put former escapees in danger. Many slave narrative or Underground Railroad authors, like Wilbur Siebert (1898) or Richard Warren, have therefore chosen to be silent and not give away places, names, or dates, or have kept these records in secret correspondence. However, in Smallwood, there is a sense of purpose, as it were, to these select pieces—“I proceed to place the reader in possession of the mode of travel, on the so-called underground railroad” (20)—and of authority coming from a credible expert.

It becomes evident that for each operation, Smallwood and Torrey have to rely on various people to care for, transport, and receive the fugitive(s) (see 20). Most importantly, Smallwood strips the “legend of the underground railroad” (Gara) of all its romanticism, as planned escapes emerge as most hazardous, pragmatic business transactions between the fugitives and Smallwood/Torrey, on the one hand, and between the two and their “teamsters,” on the other (20). The latter determine each time anew the price at which they will risk their lives “in so dangerous an enterprise” (21). Not one of the operations seems the same, and depends upon various factors such as the number of fugitives, the teamster involved, or the season. A daring operation from the summer of 1842 illustrates the hazards and dangers for everyone involved in Underground Railroad work. This time, the two partners attempt to take a large group of fifteen people out of Washington. “[H]ow that could be accomplished was a question of considerable importance, it was next to impossibility to get a teamster to convey them at any price,” explains Smallwood (21). Only with the help of a “confidential friend” do Smallwood and Torrey succeed in obtaining a wagon and horses for the undertaking (21). A time delay forces them to disperse the group throughout the city where they have to spend the night. The setback comes at a great cost the following morning, when chaos ensues at the set hour of departure upon learning that several of the group have “absconded” or “taken French leave” (22). The resulting general confusion is reflected in the narrative, as Smallwood digresses and becomes lost in following the strands of individual fugitives (see esp. bottom 22-23). From the successful escape of a mother and child to Toronto to the story of a desolate husband, Smallwood only returns to the initial group of fifteen fugitives after connecting the husband to family members within the group and thus returning to the present of the narrative (23).

13 Larry Gara’s authoritative *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (1961), while maintaining its importance for fugitives, has argued for a demystification of the network as thoroughly organized.

At the same time, Smallwood is increasingly narrowing the narratological focus on his own person. He becomes increasingly concerned with specific attacks on his character as a consequence of his fugitive work, and very consciously fashions himself into a virtuous and upright founder of a local Underground Railroad chapter which operates increasingly independently of the abolitionists (see 24-25). In the midst of the uproar that “feat[s]” like the above create among the slaveholders, Smallwood describes himself as continuously bold, active, well-organized, experienced and courageous, but also very clever, “defy[ing] detection, and sen[ding people] off in gangs; never less than a dozen” (24). Being called a traitor in his work is highly detrimental and dangerous, and thus, he spends quite some time refuting this epithet. While his enemies would like to impute to him to “have made [his] jack” with the large number of fugitives he was assisting at this period in time, he strongly objects the baseness, in his opinion, of giving in to the lures of money, instead insisting on his role to help and take care of ‘his’ fugitives (24). Smallwood sees himself as the one who takes action (and agency), who gets involved risking his own safety while providing for the fugitives as a good Samaritan when his accusers stand by passively. Consequently, Smallwood quickly becomes a well-known target of suspicion in the area making his absence from the city nearly impossible (see 25). Indeed, with Torrey being gone with the remainder of the fifteen fugitives in the North, “the burden and responsibility of consequences” rest on Smallwood’s shoulders for the time being (25). He even calls himself “the sole proprietor of the so-called Underground Railroad in that section” (25), standing in for its four founding members: “Torry (sic), myself, my wife, and the Lady with whom he boarded” (25).¹⁴

In contrast to Smallwood’s own virtuous behavior, the fugitive slave episodes are more and more directly concerned with traitor figures and perpetrators from within the black community. By insisting so much on this topos, Smallwood is able to subtly but actively construct himself as the living example and mouthpiece of David Walker, whose major concerns in the *Appeal* are in fact the issues of treason and disunity within the community (see below). One of the two representative traitor figures in Smallwood’s narrative is a man named George Lee. Smallwood does not hold back his disdain for Lee, both professionally and personally: Lee took money from fugitives, allegedly on Smallwood’s behalf, and “appropriate[ed] it to is (sic) own use” (25). What is more, Lee turns out to be a former fugitive whose wife and child had been previously rescued by Smallwood (see 26). Smallwood turns Lee into the protagonist of his pinnacle “piece of

14 Again, Smallwood recognizes, but does not elaborate on, the role of women and cites them on the same level as himself and Torrey as the founders of Washington’s Underground Railroad activities.

rascality” that Smallwood claims “wounded [his] feelings more severely than any thing (sic) that had ever happened to [him]” (26-27).

The story centered on Lee is emblematic of the intricacies, even *intrigue*-acies, of several of Smallwood’s episodes that underline how conflicted the black community in Washington appears through his eyes, but also how important the community was in the organization of fugitive escapes. Traitor figures posed direct threats to this work and were able to throw it off balance. In the episode, Lee crosses a morally acceptable line when he turns against his own half-brother and two of his friends. Lee’s relative had given money to Smallwood to see to the escape of two of his friends, money which ends up in Lee’s profligate hands on the false promise to “get them off,” while making his half-brother believe the money is safely with Smallwood (26). Finally, Lee betrays the two fugitives to their ‘masters’ only to blame the deed on Smallwood (27). Lee’s portrait as a man who is profit-driven and willingly betrays even friends and family would have made him a *persona non grata* in the eyes of an anti-slavery audience, as taking advantage of the situation of the neediest put him at the lowest echelon of the moral ladder. Calling out the traitor by name is therefore not simply an example of personal revenge on the part of Smallwood, but an act that will single out George Lee to the black community as well.

At the same time, Smallwood is able to confirm his image as the lone fighter who is beset by enemies and who attempts to maintain his reputation.¹⁵ Extrapolating from Lee’s example, Smallwood’s frustration is unabated when he states that “there was not a coloured man to be found, about there, who thought enough about the condition of his race” and how to ameliorate it (28). He insinuates that not only were his opponents trying to profit from the underground railroad mechanisms that Smallwood had helped establish, but that they were actively trying to depose him by casting him as an “agent for the abolitionists” (28). By now in the *Narrative*, it has become an important objective to distance Smallwood from cooperating with abolitionists in general, a critical aside on the predominance of institutionalized (white) abolitionism in fugitive assistance. Smallwood compares the difference between himself and the latter group to “oil

15 It is crucial for Smallwood to distance himself as best he can from ‘veritable traitors’ like Lee. He therefore renders his ingenious scheme to bring all the parties involved in the “piece” together at his house and directly confront each other with their respective versions of the story (Smallwood 27-28). Although this scene is relatively short, Smallwood pulls the literal strings in a highly staged moral drama in the course of which the evildoer Lee gets what he deserves. His deeds being finally and “complete[ly]” exposed, his depravity still seems to increase as he admits to having defrauded even more refugee money than previously known (27-28).

[and] water,” although, paradoxically, he joined forces with Torrey, a well-known radical abolitionist (28). At the same time, Smallwood uses this strategy again for his self-empowerment, as he asserts his position as an activist for fugitive slaves and “establisher of that underground railroad” who was not in need of any outside assistance (28).

The episode anchored in the traitor figure of Benjamin Lannum further substantiates Smallwood’s position as a victim of vicious personal attacks at the heart of disunity within the black community.¹⁶ This longish “remarkable piece of treachery” is particularly challenging for the reader due to its complex web of persons, places, days and sums of money involved (28). Despite the somewhat incoherent storytelling, the passage shows elements of the crime novel, in which Smallwood retraces the actions of the victims (the fugitives who are eventually betrayed), the perpetrator (Lannum), and the detective (Smallwood himself). At the end of the narrative, however, stands a curious stalemate: after Lannum has given away the fugitives to a slave trader, Smallwood is in danger of being identified (31). The fugitives, as Smallwood explains, “could not describe [him] to the slave catchers, for [he] was only with them in the dark, although they could call [his] name; [but] there were other Smallwoods in Washington” (31-32). At the same time, Smallwood knows that Lannum keeps purposefully silent on his part, partly “through policy,” but equally because “he tried very hard to have [Smallwood] believe he was not guilty of the crime” (32). Smallwood himself, alluding to his delicate standing in the community, dares not speak out against Lannum publicly, either, for fear that he and other opponents would reveal his identity (see 32).

The Lannum incident therefore heightens Smallwood’s “precarious” standing in the black community (32). He is left feeling “between two fires—[that of his] own colour [and the slaveholders’]” (32). Smallwood employs direct and sometimes even harsh language regarding his fellow Blacks which, too, reminds of David Walker. The case of Lannum is one more proof for him that “that want of sympathy with each other that exists among us” is to blame (31)—a well-known abolitionist argument, but most prominently used by Walker, who blamed slaveholders for discouraging black people to form bonds of solidarity and mutual assistance amongst themselves (see Walker 31-32). Smallwood finds himself in a curiously paradoxical situation: on the one hand, he is deeply invested in the community by assisting fugitives; on the other hand, he feels antagonized and threatened by many of its members. At the same time, his controversial reputation within the black community stems from precisely this belligerent and outspoken

16 Russell identifies Lannum as Benjamin Lanham, “One of the founders of St. Paul AME Church” (Part V.a, n.pag.).

nature and cannot solely be attributed to the fact that people spread rumors about him. A telling example is his open dispute with Reverend Abraham Cole during “a leader’s meeting” (32). As a consequence, Smallwood was severely discredited by Cole’s friends (32).¹⁷ Harrold explains that “Cole responded by expelling Smallwood from the [African Wesleyan Church]. Therefore Smallwood, like Torrey in regard to Garrison, was motivated to demonstrate his own superior bravery in comparison to Cole and other local black leaders” (Harrold 74-75). Smallwood’s strong opinions and active claim to black leadership create considerable backlash for him, but also reveal the competition on this leadership level.

Ultimately, Smallwood insinuates that this atmosphere, which he describes as a “cloud of treachery,” makes him leave Washington for Canada West (32). A few dense sentences construct a sense of acuteness and inevitability of emigrating north, after seeing that “through the treachery of some of my colour I could be of no further service to my poor slave brethren” (32). Unlike the other texts in this book, Smallwood links his decision to move to Canada West directly to the rift with Washington, D.C.’s, local black community—because in view of the attacks against his person, “Washington was no longer a place of safety for me” (32). This estrangement between himself and his peers is contrasted to the “resting place” Smallwood hopes to find north of the border (32). Not least, the transition to his new destination implicitly engages the contemporary emigration debates within the black community: Like David Walker and Frederick Douglass, Smallwood indirectly refuses destinations outside the North American continent as he is sure that “the place [to settle] could only be found in America” (32). His choice of “the British dominions,” interestingly, does not simply follow idealizing, optimistic conceptions about Canada West “where the laws are equal, and know no difference between man and man on account of colour” (32). Instead, Smallwood casts his choice as individualistic and authoritative: in similar fashion to Samuel Ringgold Ward’s later praise, he makes out the British dominions to correspond “to [his] satisfaction” (32).

3.4 THE BEST NATIONAL FREEDOM?

Smallwood’s bold announcement to leave the United States for Canada West ushers in a new direction in the *Narrative*. His orientation northward entails the establishment of strong allegiances to Canada West and Great Britain, which

17 Harrold ascribes this “quarrel” to an inspiration from Walker’s *Appeal* (74).

become idealized spaces and emigration destinations for Blacks. This should not mislead readers into thinking that Smallwood achieves to sever ties neatly with his life in the United States. On the contrary, he relies heavily on the often-used discursive dichotomy between Canada West and the United States as free from or corrupted by slavery, allowing him to flesh out his fierce anti-Americanism coupled with an equally strong anti-abolitionism. While his decision to leave conflict-ridden Washington, D.C., might indicate some form of quieting down, the opposite is true. The move north of the border merely marks the beginning of Smallwood's restless cross-border life as he continues his work for fugitive slaves. Constant comings and goings to and from the United States into Canada West also translate into a partly convoluted narrative. At the same time, the more Smallwood tries to plot these countries against each other ideologically, the more they appear two-faced and ambiguous. Ferré-Rode calls Canada a "hybrid space" in Smallwood's text and marks this hybridity as a possible "genuinely Canadian" feature of the narrative ("Black Voice" 34). This book attempts to reconfigure what she terms "hybridity" as "ambiguity" towards Canada West in the four texts under scrutiny, and this subchapter will show how Smallwood's *Narrative* eventually has no resolution to offer on the position British North America should hold for Black prospective settlers.

With not just the traditional one but several arrival scenes on Canadian soil, the *Narrative* underlines its unique status among black writing at mid-nineteenth century. Departing from Washington at the end of June, 1843, Smallwood's first arrival in Toronto on the "fourth day of July" is highly symbolic (Smallwood 33). Using the Underground Railroad now himself instead of assisting as a conductor, he travels quickly and hardly "stop[s] to hold any parley with Abolitionists or any one (sic) else" (33). Once he reaches Toronto, he instantly builds on the symbolic significance of the day by expounding "how different [his] feelings [were] that day to what they would have been had [he] been in the States" (33). Dwelling on the differences between experiencing this day in the United States and in Canada West, he captures the sense of alienation for black people who are confronted with U.S.-American "hypocritical demonstrations" of liberty (33), later epitomized by Frederick Douglass's iconic speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852). Canada quickly becomes an ideal place, where Smallwood "first put [his] feet in a land of true freedom, and equal laws" (33). Smallwood here reinterprets the significance of the American national holiday and appropriates it at the same time. The day for him comes to signify a day of independence and self-liberation, but firmly tied to another country. In choosing Canada West consciously as his destination, he uses British North America for the purpose of casting himself as a

liberated man, while at the same time, relying on the binary opposition between the ‘corrupted’ States and a ‘free’ Canada.

Within the structure of the *Narrative*, too, his arrival forms a small climax, inserted between the series of Underground Railroad episodes and the several border crossings between Washington, D.C., and Toronto that follow. As if to highlight the scene particularly—no less a staple trope of the Canadian slave narrative—the passage gains singularity from being so abruptly cut off by Smallwood’s return to Washington, D.C., to attend to business and “prepare to take leave of that mock metropolis of freedom, and sink of iniquity” (33). While this sudden move inaugurates his traveling back and forth across the border, it is clear that Smallwood is not able to easily leave behind his life in the States. In this way, his glorious arrival and emancipation in Canada West are set against a return to “have another contest with slaveholders, and treacherous coloured persons” (33). Rumors about Smallwood in Washington, D.C., have substantiated in his absence, and he traces them to two specific individuals in the city who suspect him of using his trip to take fugitives with him. These allegations in fact cause Smallwood’s house to be surrounded and searched by the watch.

Two ensuing episodes illustrate Smallwood’s complex narrative persona as well as his contaminated relationship to the community in D.C. The first shows Smallwood as literally beset by his enemies (see 33-34). Nevertheless, it gains humorous quality from Smallwood’s free acknowledgment to the reader of having around thirteen people in his house at the time of the search “preparing to leave for Canada the next morning, and take a final leave of such beautiful scenes of republican freedom” (34). While thus confirming the rumors about him, he claims that it is not he who is supposed to take the fugitives away, but some of his “confidential friends” (34). While the captain of the watch addresses him sternly, the reader is made to understand that one woman was indeed kept in hiding in the house, and was secretly taken outside into the garden “by some females, who [...] concealed her in some corn” (34). Smallwood renders this whole nerve-wrecking scene in a hurry, joining sentences together without punctuation to create a sense of urgency, acuteness, and yet comic relief. Most importantly, though, he asserts his superiority as a “picaro” who knows how to forego the traps set by his enemies, because he maintains control of the situation at all times, duping the representatives of the law.

Only shortly after his house was surrounded, he comes close to being arrested on the way of bringing his family to the steamboat to Baltimore on October 3, 1843. His old acquaintance George Lee has sent “an Irishman of the name of Kennedy” on his pursuit, ready to have Smallwood arrested by two accompanying constables on money charges (34). The constables let him go, however, explaining

that “they had no warrant to do it” (35). Smallwood recognizes the imminent danger for him in remaining in the city. Consequently, instead of returning to the auction of his belongings, as he had intended to do, he sees himself forced to hide in town and “[a]bout four o’clock the next morning [to] set out on foot, on a by-road, for Baltimore” (35). Yet again, he leaves Washington due to a looming threat, and in being forced to escape in secret, comes closer to appropriating the image of the fugitive.

As he reunites with his family in Baltimore, he admits that his wife is instrumental in the successful continuation of the family’s journey to Canada West. As Smallwood explains, although she “had undergone much uneasiness on [his] account, notwithstanding she had sufficient presence of mind to make arrangements to remove the only obstacle that lay in the way” of their getting out of the city (35). While waiting for her husband to arrive, she has already looked for a “responsible person to enter bond” for the family in the person of Mr. Pitman (35-36).¹⁸ Smallwood explains that black people were forced to provide a bondsman “in consequence of several instances of stage and steamboat proprietors being sued and mulct in for the value of slaves that were proved to have absconded on their conveyances” (35). Through the help of Mr. Pitman, the family is able to obtain a passage on a steamboat.

Smallwood’s second journey to Canada West, therefore, is in the company of his family and marked by friendlier tides. Smallwood, using his extensive personal network, had provided for his wife and children in the case of being separated and, consequently, they are met with (financial) assistance upon their arrival in Albany. Identifying himself and his family now as “fugitives, falling in [the local abolitionists’] way,” Smallwood singles out his helpers as “bright stars of benevolence” (36). Albany, however, fails to keep him. Smallwood categorically refuses to remain in the United States to establish a business there, like Austin Steward had done in Rochester, but “pushe[s] on to Canada” (36). By this time, the narrative “we,” which had included his family from Baltimore to Albany, reverts back to “I,” focusing the narratological control, authority, and determination yet again on Smallwood. This second arrival in Toronto, in October 1843, is just as significant for him as the previous brief stop-over on July 4. He describes his self-confidence and determination in a dense statement:

“I pushed on for Canada, and arrived at Toronto, October 14, 1843, and settled in it, and I have never regretted one moment for having carried out my first intention, which was,

18 *Matchett’s Baltimore Director for 1842* lists only one entry for “Pittman” (spelled with double “t”): Mr. Edward Pittman, from “Pittman & Philipps, dry goods merchants” (310).

inasmuch as I had to leave the metropolis of the United States, to seek freedom, from whose legislative halls freedom is proclaimed to all the world, except to the African race, I would seek it in no part of that inconsistent nation, because I was aware that there was no freedom for a coloured person within its limits.” (36)

Smallwood’s pledge of allegiance to Canada West is significant as much for its idealization as for his anti-Americanism, cast in noteworthy terms of “metropolis” and “inconsistent nation” (see below). Notably, his view of the United States contrasts with the idea of agriculturalism, which many leaders supported as an ideal occupation for black settlers in Canada. Consider, for example, the resolution of the business committee of the North American Convention at Toronto, in which Smallwood and his son participated: “3. Resolved, that we warmly recommend to colored settlers in Canada, to use all diligence in obtaining possession of uncultivated lands, for the laudable purpose of making themselves and their offspring independent tillers of a free soil” (*BAP* 152, original emphasis). Smallwood’s terms equally evoke the negative connotations of urban life for black people as marked by discrimination, poor housing conditions, and overpopulation.¹⁹ The epithet “inconsistent”, in particular, opposes a perceived unstable and conflicted national identity of the United States to that of an idealized, reliable, British Empire, which Canada represents by extension, but which Smallwood himself will eventually fail to uphold.

Shortly after the arrival in Canada West, Smallwood demonstrates that moving across the border has not diminished his ambitions to be politically involved, to aspire to leadership, and to be active for fugitives from slavery in both his old and new “home” (39). Almost immediately after his second arrival, he re-crosses the border into the United States in order to collect money for a new fugitive slave rescue mission, but his comments on his frustrating experiences of fund-raising quickly turn into a significant ‘cross-border’ commentary on black leadership, the involvement of abolitionists, and one of the dominant issues for black people in exile, which Michael Hembree has called “the question of ‘begging’” (314). Finding abolitionists in New York State slow to respond to his call for financial aid, Smallwood voices his anger about prioritizing their support for “a defunct institution, got up by a few designing persons in the name of coloured refugees in Canada, but in reality, I believe, to line their own pockets” (Smallwood 37). Smallwood might refer here to Henry Bibb’s newly-founded Refugee Home Society (RHS) which labored to create a settlement for fugitives in Canada

19 Austin Steward comments on New York City in much the same way (see Steward 301; see ch. 5).

West.²⁰ His project quickly became a hotly-debated center of discussion on financial assistance, as its critics—notably Mary Ann Shadd Cary—condemned the RHS for its corruption and “keep[ing] up the begging system” (*BAP* 249).²¹ Smallwood takes a clear anti-begging stance in this debate by aligning himself implicitly with Shadd Cary’s argument that the wrongful collection of money for fugitives undermined their reputation and went against the fundamental principle of self-reliance and independence: “The coloured people, as a body, in Canada, will never appreciate the benevolence, if benevolence it may be called, of those who gave large sums of money and quantities of clothing in their name, and that against their will [...]” (Smallwood 37). Speaking out against the RHS and one of the most important black leaders in Canada West (Henry Bibb), show that his straightforwardness and conflict with authority continue in his adopted country.

Smallwood’s return to the United States provides several narrative strands and episodes, but outlines, most notably, the dramatic final separation from his friend Torrey, as a consequence of which he again becomes a fugitive trying to find his way back to safety. In Washington, D.C., Smallwood and Torrey prepare to realize their plan of taking “about fourteen” fugitives away at the same time (38). In the city, everything seems to have been well prepared by their friend John Bush, when their venture suddenly turns into a “catastrophe” as soon as the police who “had been made aware of our coming” surround the premises (38-39). Smallwood’s style conveys the drama of the scene and its tense atmosphere. Feeling outnumbered by the police force and realizing “they are closing in on us,” Smallwood tries to justify that he and Torrey “had to make speed in our own escape and leave the poor creatures to the mercy of the bloodhounds” (39). Trying to save themselves in the face of imminent danger, Torrey and Smallwood are separated. Smallwood remembers the traumatic experience: “After getting about a quarter of a mile from the place I heard the clanking of the chains, and shrieks of the poor souls, but we could afford them no help, they were in the claws of the lions” (39). After several similar episodes in the *Narrative* so far, Smallwood now fully assumes the role of a fugitive on the run, approximating him ever so closely to an essential trope of the slave narrative and, especially, the Canadian slave narrative. Having left his free papers in Toronto puts him in great danger, and he

20 The “Constitution and Bylaws” from 1852 can be found in the *Black Abolitionist Papers* (208-11). The foundation of the RHS is dated “in the spring of 1851” and thus only shortly predates Smallwood’s *Narrative* (208). Bibb outlines the project in the larger frame of refugee settlement in Canada West in his June 18, 1851, editorial in his paper *Voice of the Fugitive* (see *BAP* 143-48).

21 Cooper has sharply criticized Shadd Cary’s accusations of the RHS as “opportunistic and probably reflect[ive of] her jealousy of Bibb’s popularity” (“Doing Battle” 23).

knows that if he was arrested now, “[he] should be lodged in gaol for a fugitive, and [his] case would be hazardous” (39).

Crossing Baltimore on his way north, Smallwood picks up the first issue of the *Sun* that comments on the tragic events from the previous weekend. He encloses the extract from the paper in his narrative in order to intervene in what he perceives to be a misrepresentation of events:

“Information having been received by the police of this city, that a negro fellow by the name of Thomas Smallwood, who had removed to Toronto, Canada, a few months ago, and a white man, arrived in this city on Thursday night, about eleven o'clock, with a team, for the purpose of taking away a number of slaves; a strict look out was kept, and on Friday night the waggon (sic) with the horses and a number of slaves were taken, but Smallwood is not yet captured.” (40)²²

While the brief report demonstrates that Smallwood has again outsmarted the police authorities in Washington, he does not fail to call out the racism of the press and becomes a defender of his version of the story. He criticizes the *Sun* for calling him out by name, whereas Torrey, on the other hand, “was not molested during his stay in Washington; being a white man they dared not publish him” (40). Besides, Smallwood explains that had the paper accused Torrey wrongfully or without substantial proof, “it would only have subjected them to legal action” (40). Bitterly, he concludes that since he was black, “it made no difference [to them]” (40).

Continuing on his return journey to Canada West, Smallwood openly embraces his role as a fugitive. His friend “G.,” who accompanies him and another man, leads him “as he did fugitives from slavery, because [Smallwood] had been published as a fugitive from justice” (40). Traveling on the Underground Railroad, Smallwood is faced, too, with the dangers surrounding the network. They pass the house of a woman who had usually been a stopover for G. to hand over fugitives to the next, “friend P.” (41). However, Smallwood and his company find that “she had turned traitress and had betrayed some into the hands of their owners” (41). Smallwood is certain she has given them away, because the house of P., where they have rested, is surrounded again by constables from a near-by village. This time, it is not a woman but Smallwood who has to sneak out of the house and hide. Only after much disorientation and bewilderment after his latest escape does Smallwood reach Pennsylvania. There, he is taken into the home of a black family,

22 This extracts appears in *The Daily Atlas* (Boston) from November 30, 1843, which the *Sun* might have copied. In the *Atlas*, the incident is reported under the key words “Running Slaves.”

the Clarks, who provide for his well-being and advise him on how to continue to Philadelphia (see 42). His stop in that city is equally short, since he receives a note from Torrey telling him to leave immediately “for other parts of the North; [and] that the slaveholders were in hot pursuit of [him]” (43). This is the last contact in the narrative between the two men. Smallwood takes time to recount Torrey’s arrest and death in jail in Baltimore, paying respect to his friend and partner. He does not want to leave, however, without two fugitive families Torrey and himself had sent along before. The last bit of traveling before reaching Toronto is especially strenuous for Smallwood: all are in want of money, so he finally sells his watch in Buffalo to finance their ship passage north (43).

The third and final safe arrival in Canada ends Smallwood’s long, convoluted digression devoted to re-crossing the border into the United States (ranging from pages 36 to 43). As if to leave behind the strains and dangers linked to his return to the States, Smallwood uses the imaginary border to shift his narrative abruptly to an assessment of Canada as a destination for black people. This prepares the narrative’s climax, which outlines Smallwood’s position on the black community, Canada and Great Britain, and his anti-Americanism. As previous passages have shown, the latter is linked to his strong disapproval of the institutionalized abolition movement. Abolitionists “on the other side [in the States],” he claims, have substantially contributed to spreading “the most absurd stories” about Canada among fugitives, so that Smallwood, speaking from his experience, laments the “ignorance” in which black people have been kept with regard to the potential “advantages” that Canada could hold in store for them (43). He directly accuses abolitionists of deceiving fugitives by “promis[ing] them perfect freedom and safety in the Northern (sic) States” (43-44). On the other hand, Smallwood’s anger is equally directed at those black people who return from Canada to the United States and contribute to the bad image of the country amongst potential immigrants (44). Smallwood’s class bias shows when he calls these returners “worthless,” “idle,” and “lazy” for blaming their failure to establish themselves successfully on the country rather than on themselves (44). To him, they are at odds with the otherwise positive impression that black settlers have left in Canada as “an industrious and sober class of people”—that group of people Smallwood actively encourages to emigrate (44).²³

23 Cooper has pointed out that “[a] class divide was definitely at work in the Black communities of Ontario at mid-century, and at its centre was hostility against newly escaped fugitives from some influential freeborn persons, or those long free” (“Doing Battle” 273). She emphasizes the importance of class as a factor in the analysis of Black Canadian life, as with the case of the delegates at the North American Convention in Toronto: “[The] position of the Convention revealed its class bias [and ignorance of

These emigrants can hope for what Smallwood terms “the best national freedom in the world [i.e., British freedom]” (44). With this vocabulary, he returns to a central idea of his preface (see v), while it remains unclear what he exactly understands by the concept of ‘national freedom’. Certainly, Smallwood subscribes to an idealized vision of Great Britain, and Canada West by association, as free ‘nations’—overriding their past practice of slavery, as Clarke has observed (see “No Hearsay” 18). The abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, effective in 1834, was lauded and drew a disproportionate amount of attention from many black leaders. Prominent figures like Samuel Ringgold Ward could make use of the association of Great Britain to freedom to promote emigration to Canada. Indeed, claiming that “the glorious empire of Britain” offers the pinnacle of national freedoms furnishes Smallwood with the rhetorical means to denounce the United States’ “passage of that iniquitous fugitive law” to contrast the two ‘nations’ (44-45).

Smallwood’s critique of abolitionism ties in here on a political level: he argues that abolitionists helped bring about the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 by trying to discourage emigration. In his view, had all fugitives “accumulat[ed]” in Canada instead of the Northern States, slaveholders would not have wanted a law to begin with, “knowing that it could have no effect on any part of [...] Britain” (45).²⁴ In turn, he declares the abolitionist stories portraying “Canada [as] one of the most frightful spots on the globe” not only prevented black emigration to a safe haven but kept prospective settlers from British freedom and citizenship, because “had [they] been encouraged, or even let alone, they would have gone to Canada at first, and be now secure in their persons and property as British subjects” (44).²⁵ Smallwood admits that Canada West as a destination involves more for him than simple settlement; in fact, he joins other leaders who advocate allegiance to Great

Canadian racism]. The delegates positioned themselves as the ‘talented tenth’ who knew what was best for the race. They blamed the masses of Blacks as architects of their own misery” (178-79).

24 Smallwood here believes in the integrity of the British Empire, which was, however, tested time and again in numerous fugitive slave extradition cases between 1842 and 1861. Roman J. Zorn has written the classic article on “Criminal Extradition” in 1957. It spans the time between the Nelson Hackett and John Anderson cases. Canadian courts (sometimes with the help from London) often decided in favor of fugitives, which helped propel the myth of a safe haven (see Ripley 4).

25 Smallwood does not fail to point out that he, unlike many abolitionists who had neglected their responsibility toward fugitives, was conscious of the power slavery would develop and “warned [his] brethren in the States” (46).

Britain and encourage Blacks to become British subjects.²⁶ Finally, Smallwood traces this kind of anti-emigrationism on the part of abolitionists to, essentially, a type of “national prejudice” that he sees “ingrafted (sic) in their national compact,” by which he likely, and in line with many other black leaders, refers to the Declaration of Independence (45).²⁷ Smallwood’s own assessment of the long-term development of race relations in the United States is therefore radically dire. Peaceful coexistence on the level of equality is only a “vain hope” of some of the more naïve U.S.-American abolitionists (45).

These pessimistic assertions culminate in one final reckoning with the United States. Smallwood makes himself the judge of the “most hypocritical, guileful, and arrogant *nation*” that tries to stubbornly maintain, export, and convert others to the system of slavery (46, added emphasis). He points to his own experiences in claiming that “foreigners, who become slaveholders in the States (sic) are more cruel than the natives” (47). Here, Smallwood cites the examples of an Irishman and Scotchman who become cruel slaveholders in the South. The examples are strikingly savory, as both men originally come from the praised British Empire, a fact he fails to elaborate upon, but reveal themselves to be highly susceptible to slavery (see 47). Smallwood purposefully and effectively refuses the United States’ attitude “to meddle with the affairs of others” while at the same time not accepting outside commentary on the institution of slavery (48). He makes clear that “[he] will give [his] opinion of the United States, caring not who may demur thereto, nor what may be said thereof” (48).

This bold self-assertion includes calling out a terrible community of knowledge between slaveholders and bondsmen, from which neither is able to escape. The truth about the brutal realities of slavery, he explains, can only be

26 The *BAP* alone offer numerous instances of evoking black loyalty to Great Britain. Ripley states, for example, that the Amherstburg Convention delegates, in 1853, “approved more than twenty-five resolutions, most of them concerning life in Canada—praising her Majesty’s government, urging blacks to be loyal subjects and good citizens” (270).

27 The interpretation of the Declaration as officially instituting racism by assuring “that the African race should never ascend to an equality with the whites” was held by many black leaders (Smallwood 45). Other than Walker’s *Appeal*, the “Address to the Colored Inhabitants of North America” by Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James F. Tinsley reflects the same thinking (*BAP* 170-76). Referring to the Declaration of Independence as “their national text book,” the authors decry the rift between the claims that “look[. . .] well on paper” and the “hypocrisy” they describe to black Americans (170). The document clearly foreshadows Douglass’s speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852).

known by “those who commit them, and the slaves themselves” (50). The consequences of this reality lead to a struggle for credibility that slaves and ex-slaves face in this community of knowledge (50). Remembering this struggle fuels Smallwood’s tone which becomes visibly more agitated and polemical. He outlines that Blacks, despite their enslavement, have contributed to winning independence for the United States, and have defended it even against the British (see 51). Smallwood establishes the black population as instrumental in building United States society and the economy, heightening the sense of outrage and shame at their present situation (52). Given the sustained status of Blacks in the South as non-persons, Smallwood is at a loss to explain why there are no rebellions and uprisings against white rule. His final verdict that “it is a disgrace for [Black people] to stay when they can get away” is another indicator of his conflicted relationship to the black community, while it is a telling commentary on the significance of escape as a form of open rebellion (52).

Smallwood’s visible alienation with both the United States and its inhabitants (white and black) results in the reiteration of an idealized version of Canada West as a powerful counterexample. The province, he explains, cannot be infiltrated by the lures of slavery emanating from the United States, because it is “an integral part of the glorious British empire” and, moreover, a country under God’s care (Smallwood 45). As such, Canada West becomes not just the “*true* land of opportunity,” as Clarke has observed (“No Hearsay” 26; original emphasis). Additionally, it transforms into the true ‘nation under God’, “just and powerful [...] pursu[ing] the just and righteous course” (Smallwood 45). Again, Smallwood expands the stereotypical image of Canada as a safe haven for fugitives by evoking its “best national freedom” that will be every immigrant’s recompense (52). In terms of the emigration debate within the black community, Smallwood has a clear position that focuses on “a land on the continent of America where [Blacks] can get to”—implying that he does not so much support other emigration destinations as North America, the rightful home for people of African descent (52). Smallwood casts Canada as a kind of Garden of Eden where Blacks can finally “prosper and multiply,” live industriously, and thereby gather their strengths and power to “become a terror to their enemies *on the other side*” (52, added emphasis). Smallwood speaks directly to the threats of annexation by the United States, “that much desired project, by some” (52), which was hotly debated in the Canadian provinces.²⁸ Like other black leaders, Smallwood envisions

28 Possible annexation of Canada by the United States represented a real threat to many Canadians and was debated in the press. However, not everybody was against it, as Canadian pro-annexation groups existed as well. Ripley mentions that “a serious annexation movement emerged in the Canadas in the late 1840s [...]. The movement

Blacks fighting for Britain against the United States in the case of war (see 52). At the same time, his statement evokes the border between Canada and the United States as a powerful demarcation of black loyalties.

The short piece in the Appendix, “The conduct of the Coloured People, in Canada, impolitic”, too, is an effort to preserve this idealized image of Canada through an *ex-negativo* definition of *un-American* habits and attitudes. Specifically, Smallwood addresses the question of separate religious black institutions. Smallwood and Samuel Ringgold Ward agree in this respect, both being of the opinion that this type of segregation must be avoided because it hinders the “moral and religious elevation” of Blacks in Canada West (59). In Smallwood’s view, separate institutions contradict the image of equal laws and treatment in the country, and would only befit the United States where the churches discriminate against Blacks “as [the] State [does]” (59). Smallwood laments the “prejudice” that this unequal treatment within the denominations has engrained in his fellow Blacks and which has spurned their wish to worship in separate institutions (59). He therefore admonishes prospective emigrants “not to bring that spirit to this country; we want none of it here” (60). Smallwood’s comment does not simply reflect his critical stance toward the black community, but also shifts the blame of being prejudiced against whites to them. This seems unfair in the light of the struggle around (de)segregated worship which continued on Canadian soil. As Donald Simpson points out, the response of white churches to the question of slavery was of “a great variety” and he cites the *Provincial Freeman’s* criticism of the Canadian Wesleyan Church’s silence on slavery (23-24). The fight around desegregated worship is not only one of white versus black separate churches but also an intra-denominational one between Canadian and United States branches.

The most important facet of Canada and Great Britain’s difference from the United States, an aspect Smallwood keeps returning to, is that they “are not slaveholders” and treat everybody equally which, in his logic, forbids upholding the system of separate worship (60). In an outspoken and strategic call for integration with the host society, Smallwood—late in the *Narrative*—outlines his vision for Black Canadian life:

appealed primarily to embittered Conservatives and young French-Canadian nationalists and was particularly strong in Montreal [...]” (*BAP* 241n2). In the city, the Annexation Association issued a manifesto advocating separation from Britain, which found wide support before, however, the movement ended in the wake of changing political conditions such as the passage of the FSL in 1850 (see 241n2).

“It is our business to identify our interest with that of our white fellow citizens, and to form the most intimate relations with them of which our circumstances in life will admit. They have, under God, all the wealth, influence, and power. How dare we then, poor refugees, to say, as I understand some have said, that, ‘they want nothing to do with the white people:’ –the very people to whom they fly for freedom. We have neither learning, wealth, nor influence, at the present. It is to them, under God, that we owe our present freedom. With what grace, then, can we complain of prejudice against us, while we ourselves are the promoters thereof.” (60)

What sounds like Smallwoodian realpolitik here in fact dramatically complicates race relations in Canada, especially when he supposes that fugitives seek shelter in Canada as a white man’s country, and not because there are established black communities which organize assistance to the new arrivars. What is more, his idealized allegiance to Canada for the sake of denigrating the United States clearly conflicts with his own observations from the preface, where he had admitted prejudice in Canada was “equal to any thing [he] ever experienced in the south (sic)” (vii). With repeated paradoxes troubling a homogeneous view of British North America, Smallwood’s view of Canada West’s role is complex and does not offer a clear resolution within the *Narrative*.

His final paragraphs reflect an ultimately torn, conflicted, and ambiguous narrative persona. In his discussion of the black population’s current condition, he solidifies his own class bias, his merciless stance towards his fellow Blacks, and therefore comes full circle with his allegiance to aspects of David Walker’s criticism. From those black ‘renegades’ who had fought behind U.S. lines, he broadens his criticism to “the coloured men of the present generation” (55). He accuses his peers for lacking “energy [and] courage” to work towards change, instead “follow[ing] the white man, and that very far behind” (55). The call to action that Smallwood might take from David Walker seems to go unheard as his outlook on the future for the black population in the United States is bleak. In the only direct reference to David Walker in Smallwood’s text, he chooses to cite Walker’s radical opinion on Blacks in the United States who “are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began, and I pray God, that none like us ever may live again until time shall be no more” (qtd. in Smallwood 56).

The hierarchical difference Smallwood establishes between Blacks in the United States and Canada adds another layer to his vision of black people. The latter group he sees as the current pinnacle of “resolution” and “ambition” (55-56). Smallwood takes his visits to the Queen’s Bush in the Canadian hinterland in 1843 and 1846 as a base to laud the pioneer spirit of these black settlers bearing the Canadian wilds, content with a simple, hard life (55). Like Samuel Ringgold

Ward, Smallwood exalts the Black yeoman idyll and contrasts it with the image of those Blacks who seek refuge in the city, in servant professions—“Their highest ambition is to be a good waiter, or barber, and then they are made” (56). The difference here between the class bias of some black leaders—who mostly did not live in the country permanently—and their (abstract) ideas for the general black population is obvious. Cooper has called the expectations “that both Black leaders and white abolitionists had for the refugees [...] very unfair” (“Doing Battle” 235-36). Smallwood is intent on severing all ties to his former homeland and his former community, but it is questionable whether his positions served him well in his adopted country.

3.5 RADICAL GENEALOGY: SMALLWOOD AND WALKER

Although Smallwood makes only two direct references to Walker at all—his inclusion of Walker’s biographical sketch and introduction by Henry Highland Garnet in the preface and a brief quote towards the end of the *Narrative*—readers of the *Appeal* will recognize numerous overlaps between the two activists. This section therefore serves to show that David Walker’s *Appeal* is a powerful subtext of Smallwood’s *Narrative*, and the only outside voice he admits. In fact, I argue that Walker figures as an inspirational leader and ideological role model, whose legacy the *Narrative* attempts to uphold and continue. It resumes Walker’s radical discourse, as Clarke has suggested (see Review 271), as well as supports Walker’s claims with examples from Smallwood’s personal experience. In doing so, the *Narrative* establishes a cross-border allegiance in which Smallwood fashions himself as the living example of Walker’s account.

Walker’s *Appeal* has become an iconic document of resistance to white supremacy and is known for shaping the discourse on black nationalism (see Thabiti Asukile’s review of Sterling Stuckey’s arguments, 16). It has been treated with scholarly superlatives as “probably one of the most controversial tracts written during the ante-bellum era in America” (Asukile 17). Even judging from the outrage the *Appeal* created after its publication, Walker fits well into the line of great men that Smallwood evokes in his preface, as well as to the sense of urgency that he creates. In fact, one could say that Smallwood takes the sense of living in extraordinary times from Walker, who stresses the feeling that the question of slavery is fast approaching its (violent) resolution, entailing judgment day for pro-slavery forces (see Walker 61). If Smallwood takes Walker as an example, he also adopts the latter’s strategy of self-authentication to speak about

this extraordinary age: Walker bases his opinion—and the right to voice it—solely on his experience and as “the result of my observations” (11). Smallwood, too, repeatedly evokes his authority as a first-hand witness (see viii-ix). Walker, however, seems more focused overall in transmitting his authority to the page and his implied readership. His *Appeal* is carefully composed and straight-forward, as much as it is elaborate and emotional. While Smallwood certainly shares the emotionality, he is often more erratic and more polemical. He is driven, but also hastens through his numerous episodes without necessarily creating a coherent narrative, which can be challenging for readers. Nevertheless, if Walker openly calls his text an “Appeal,” I argue that Smallwood’s narrative is as much a call to action, a text that attempts to rouse his readers.

Smallwood begins by inserting Walker prominently in the preface. Using Garnet’s 1848 edition of the *Appeal*, he includes Garnet’s introduction and biographical sketch of Walker verbatim in his own narrative opening. In addition to being a powerful endorsement of Walker via Garnet, inserting Garnet’s pieces also constitutes an intriguing instance of life writing within life writing. Garnet’s biographical sketch is actually a condensed slave narrative and creates a powerful martyr figure that leaves readers with a vivid and energized picture of Walker, albeit only a “few materials can be gathered” regarding his life (qtd. in Smallwood x). Smallwood consequently continues Garnet’s work in trying to preserve “the very high esteem which is entertained for the memory of DAVID WALKER (sic)” (ix). This includes a ‘correct’ and respectful treatment of the material at hand. Garnet establishes Walker as a crucial voice in the genealogy of anti-slavery activism, which, in turn, makes him one of Smallwood’s great men: “The [*Appeal*] is valuable, because it was among the first, and was actually the boldest and most direct appeal in behalf of freedom, which was made in the early part of the Anti-Slavery Reformation” (ix). As the editor and Walker’s advocate, Garnet claims a place for Walker in history and historiography as a hero of anti-slavery’s earliest hour. This attempt to establish and continue a line of black anti-slavery fighters informs the narrative project in Smallwood’s text.

The choice to include the extensive description of Walker’s life in this way seems strategic, too. Garnet’s biographical sketch reinforces the image of the great man, but more importantly, prepares readers to recognize several parallels between Smallwood and Walker as the *Narrative* progresses: Garnet portrays Walker as “emphatically a self-made man” (qtd. in Smallwood x). Smallwood, too, builds on this ur-American topos, most forcefully perhaps through his leading position in Washington’s Underground Railroad as a free Black man. Walker shares this engagement with fugitive slaves, which Garnet connects to Walker’s private life, since he opened “his house [as] shelter” for refugees. Smallwood, in

turn, describes his pioneer Underground Railroad work as part of his private motivation, but very much in connection to his public persona (x). Most importantly, Garnet casts Walker as a hero assailed from many sides, and points out that he had no few “enemies” in the black community (xi). This aspect resonates strongly with Smallwood, who does not tarry to point to the many struggles he has experienced with some of his fellow Blacks. Through his *Narrative*, Smallwood not only fashions himself into an acolyte and fellow-activist of Walker but into the living example of Walker’s tenets. Consequently, Smallwood becomes a powerful tool in Walker’s spirit: Weighing in on facing his enemies, Garnet quotes Walker as having said “that he had nothing to fear from such a pack of coward blood-hounds; but if he did go [to Canada], he would hurl back such thunder across the great lakes, that would cause them to tremble in their strong holds” (xi). Smallwood uses his *Narrative* to “hurl back” his truth to his perceived enemies by inscribing himself in one line with one of the most prominent black personalities of the first third of the nineteenth century.

In following some of Walker’s core arguments, Smallwood is at times even harsher in his judgments and language than Walker. Most obviously, Smallwood’s obsession with treachery and disunion amongst the black community, which pervades the *Narrative*, echoes Walker’s lament that “the colored people are now, in the United States of America, [disunited], [which is] the reason our natural enemies are enabled to keep their feet on our throats” (Walker 30). Walker is constantly concerned with exposing the state of white-induced “ignorance” (29), and appeals to overcome internal division in order to bring about the betterment and “higher attainments” for black people (41). His language is as incendiary as it is empowering, and driven by optimism with regard to the fact that although their situation seems helpless and dire now, Black people have the potential to move up with the help of God: “we can help ourselves; [...] if we lay aside abject servility, and be determined to act like men” (73-74). Smallwood, on the other hand, does much to reveal what he, too, perceives as self-inflicted harm of the black community, but overall seems to lack the optimism for fundamental change as his class bias often gets in the way. We have seen how he accuses “the coloured men of the present generation” of lacking “energy [and] courage” to overcome imitations of the white man (Smallwood 55). Real change for the community, in Smallwood’s view, seems possible only in Canada, where the pioneers in the Queen’s Bush stand as emblems of black achievements and abilities (see 55-56).

While Smallwood and Walker differ as to how and to what extent an improvement of the situation for black people can be brought about, both are firm in their rejection of colonization in the shape of the American Colonization Society, which they see striving to remove Blacks from North America. Walker

had already recognized colonization to be a crucial political topic by 1829. He speaks out very forcefully against the colonization “scheme” which he perceives as a foul deal to forcibly relocate Black people out of the way (56; 59). Smallwood casts himself as the living example of the “inducements” that supporters of colonization in Africa held out to Black people (Smallwood 15). Significantly, his conversion from working for the ACS to its avid opponent occurs in “about 1830” and thus, shortly after Walker’s *Appeal* was first published (15). While Smallwood makes no direct connection to the possible influence of this tract, it is important to note that in his detailed description of the “wicked” operations of the organization, he seems to closely paraphrase Walker (15). For example, Smallwood’s accusation that the ACS wanted nothing more than “the draining off the free coloured population from among the slave population by inducing them to emigrate to Africa” echoes Walker (15). In the *Appeal*, the latter had countered white colonizationists to “tell us now no more about colonization, for America is as much our country, as it is yours” (80). Smallwood extends this bold statement into “the place [to settle for black people] could only be found in America” (Smallwood 32). While it seems here that the signifier “America” means the United States for Walker, but “North America” (focusing on Canada) for Smallwood, this notion is complicated further as both establish their allegiances to Great Britain (see below).

The alleged black disunity and an open anti-colonization stance are tied to a fierce anti-Americanism in both authors. Aside from bitterly and sarcastically commenting on white treatment of Blacks in the United States, for example, Walker is instrumental in exposing the Declaration of Independence as hypocritical. He points out the importance of the document in the struggle of the young republic against Britain, in which process the “declaration [still] was a glorious document” (91). However, after he quotes the famous beginning of the Declaration, Walker extends an emotional call to white fellow citizens to recognize its inherent discrepancies: “See your declaration, Americans!! (sic) Do you understand your own language? [...] Compare your own language above [...] with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers on ourselves on our fathers and on us (sic)” (85-86). Walker’s effective display of racism and oppression in the United States disenchanting the ur-American document which, in turn, becomes an example of hypocritical white supremacy.

Smallwood meets Walker’s radical assessment with at times more polemical accusations, culminating in his unforgiving statement that “[t]he United States is the most hypocritical, guileful, and arrogant nation on the face of the earth” (46). There is a difference to Walker’s approach in the *Appeal*, which is directed also to a white citizenry in need of operating substantial changes and taking

consciousness of itself and of its promises to all Americans (“understand your own language” 85). This is not to say that Walker does not take on a radical stance towards whites. In fact, one of his key arguments is for Black people to unite and become aware of their potential *despite* white racism and prejudice and their being “natural enemies” to Blacks (71). Yet, it seems crucial that such potential and change is lived out by facing the “enemy” on the same soil. On the contrary, Smallwood’s outlook on race relations in the United States seems more finalized. He declares that “the people of the United States will never voluntarily grant the African race among them freedom” (48). For him, the United States appears too corrupt to be saved, and he gives his allegiance to Great Britain and Canada instead.

Indeed, Smallwood seems to have been inspired by Walker in his use of terminology and the way he establishes these allegiances. The position of Great Britain and Canada therefore is conspicuous both in the *Appeal* and the *Narrative*. For example, Walker casts “the English” as “the best friends the colored people have upon earth” (53). Consequently, he somewhat belittles England’s implication in the slave trade “notwithstanding [the fact that] they [i.e. Great Britain] have treated us a little cruel” (53). Walker is also the one who uses the term “nation” repeatedly in this context, as in the statement “as a nation, the English are our friends” (53). He calls for the support of England and openly demands an alliance when he proclaims that “[t]here is no intelligent *black man* who knows any thing (sic), but esteems a real English man” (53; original emphasis). Therefore, should it become necessary, England and “the hospitable shores of Canada” are the only acceptable emigration destinations next to Haiti (61).

Similarly, Smallwood offers his allegiances to Great Britain and Canada by lauding their “national freedom” (44). In his view, Blacks can find the ‘true’ freedom the United States withholds in British North America. Although he remains unclear on the exact meaning of the expression, one might see “nation” as another signifier that continues the opposition between the free, seemingly stable monarchy, and the slavery-ridden, unstable republic. In any case, Smallwood is not able to clearly shape his position towards Great Britain. Aside from neglecting Britain’s former practice of slavery, like Walker, his brief mention of his experiences of racism and discrimination in Canada West modifies the image of the so-called ‘haven’ for fugitives. The nature of Great Britain and Canada West’s stance toward black people remain ambiguous, and the *Narrative* offers no resolution on how to incorporate them in a vision of free black life.

Finally, the *Appeal* and the *Narrative* enter into direct conversation as they both establish a black intellectual activist genealogy. In this sense, Smallwood’s adherence to Walker gains importance in that he inserts himself not simply in a

line of any great men but in the line of great *black* leaders. Walker begins to draw attention to a tradition of black leadership in his *Appeal* by concentrating on the Reverend Richard Allen (1760-1831), founder of the AME Church in Philadelphia, as an exemplary member of the black community and a fighter for the betterment of its condition. He writes Allen's homage as someone who prevailed despite much opposition from both white and black and who "has done more in a spiritual sense for his ignorant and wretched brethren than any other man of colour has, since the world began" (70). Walker's predictions for Allen's status in the annals of the history of black people is remarkable: one part of the liberation of Blacks from their current disparaging situation, Walker implies, will be the rise of black intellectuals and "historians" who will be responsible for writing black history including "the crimes of this nation to the then gazing world" (69). This process will include the rehabilitation of the reputation of Richard Allen who will then "stand on the pages of history among the greatest divines who have lived" (69). Walker's *Appeal* here is all the more performative, as it contributes to assuring Allen's place "in succeeding generations" (69).

There is, then, both a rhetorical and a formal continuity between the texts by Walker/Garnet and Smallwood in how they cast and inaugurate a genealogy of black leaders. There is, on the one hand, the textual hybridity that emerges from including life narratives within other life narratives as a form of homage and paying respect to an outstanding personality, and on the other hand, the rhetorical strategies that contribute to a self-determined authentication of leaders across borders and generations. Consider, for example, how Smallwood authenticates Walker as one of the great men of the black community and purposefully places him in the group of leaders. In this way, Smallwood restores authorship and respect to Walker in the preface of his narrative—defending him against Paola Brown's "diabolic" plagiarism (ix)—and points him out as "an estimable man" (ix). Both Richard Allen and David Walker are presented as martyr-like figures in the respective texts, struggling against opposition and braving personal and physical attacks. This imagery, finally, is also what Smallwood identifies with. He casts himself as assailed (personally and professionally) by white and black enemies and as prevailing over obstacles. The concern he demonstrates in recovering the *Appeal* and its importance to Walker, and supporting the latter's reputation, is the same he shows for his own reputation and standing. I have already discussed the use of Garnet's description of Walker in the preface, but it imports to point out again that it is Garnet who insists on the place that Walker will hold in the future histories of Blacks in America. He proclaims that "whatever name shall be placed first on the list of heroes, that of the author of the *Appeal* (sic) will not be second" (qtd. in Smallwood ix). Therefore, a genealogy emerges

in which Walker stands on the shoulders of Allen, and Garnet and Smallwood establish the standing of Walker.

This genealogy, however, does not exist in isolation. In 1851, when the *Narrative* was published, Black North America could look upon an impressive network of black leading men and women who had taken up Walker's torch and were working with fugitives, for the abolition of slavery, and for a self-determined future for Blacks on the continent. Although Smallwood's focus concentrates on Walker, the radical genealogy lived on in the leadership in Canada West, in editor-activists like Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Henry Bibb, and on the East Coast of the United States, where an elite network of individuals spanning Alexander Crummell, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and many others, was active. Many of them were border-crossing individuals like Smallwood himself—epitomized in Harriet Tubman's radical work with fugitives—and they were working for a black community regardless and in spite of borders. Although Smallwood never openly claims power as a successor of Walker, his *Narrative* clarifies that he is willing to engage in the debates on the future of the black community and thus, qualifies as a leader.

