5. Community

Twenty-Two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman (1857)

Approaching Austin Steward (1793-1865) begins with a paradox. While he has been set on par with "the key black nationalist leaders of the antebellum period" such as "[Frederick] Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, and James McCune Smith" (Hodges xxvii), he has also been called a more marginal, "lesser-known" figure (Pease and Pease, Introduction ix). Historiographical scholarship has dominated this critical reception of Steward. The introduction to the 1969 Addison-Wesley edition (merely reprinted with minor changes in 2004) by Jane Pease and William Pease might serve as an example here. They recognize the narrative's importance as a historical source but fail to identify its literary value. They struggle with the fact that Steward was an "exceptional black man" (xv) who did not, however, correspond to the image of a typical fugitive. Troubled by his autobiography, which lists "[ex-]slave" and "freeman" to describe the same existential condition (liberty), their language represents a conceptual restriction to envision Blacks claiming their identities as freemen—free men—men, when they can still be instrumentalized as ex-slaves—ex slaves—slaves. Graham Russell Hodges's 2002 introduction, while it realizes that freedom for Steward was not merely a disguise, offers little more in in terms of recovering the literary value of Steward's text. He does not resolve the central issue that Steward is part of a non-literary category, i.e. black political and intellectual leadership, yet chooses a literary expressive mode, the "jeremiad" (xxvii). This chapter attempts to offer a more coherent connection between Steward's narrative as a multifaceted literary text and his cross-border life and activism.

More than a chronological narrative of his own life, Austin Steward's narrative represents a mosaic of many different stories. John Ernest, eminent scholar of the slave narrative and African American literature, has described a change in *Twenty-*

Two Years a Slave "from the individual experience of oppression to organized resistance and collective self-definition," which eventually exhort other Blacks to stop considering whites as example figures worthy of emulation (Ernest, *Liberation* 209). This chapter shows that, while Ernest's assessment certainly reflects one important message of Steward, it does not do justice to the complex web of relations between individual and collective as represented in the narrative. I argue here that there is no teleological momentum underlying the narrative that could be summed up as "from slavery to freedom" or "from the United States to Canada", but that it is driven by the interplay between Steward as an individual and the collective as represented through a plethora of different stories that he inserts in his text. Opening up his own life story to that of so many others creates a genealogy of meaningful individuals that emerges from these stories, all within the scope of his own storytelling. Rather than disrupt or fragment the narrative flow, this genealogy helps Steward's textual community building, to make sense of Wilberforce in Canada West in which he was a leading figure, defend his own reputation, but also shows significant ways of forming alliances with other groups outside the black community in Canada West.

The chapter consists of three larger sections. It begins by looking at what I call the strategy of the looking glass. It underlines a particular purpose in Steward's narrative project that relies on the incorporation of the stories of others. The looking glass as a narrative strategy relies on the simple dichotomy of "good versus evil" to plot Steward and his family against his corrupt former slave master Captain Helm and his wife. Therefore, the looking glass does not equal a mirror that reflects sameness, but instead shows a perverted, evil "other." In this process, Steward is able to shape and control the memory of his family as a meaningful genealogy: their virtuous, moral, Christian lives are set against Helm, his wife, and brothers who are pictured as evil antagonists that lead corrupt, morally-debased lives as the products of the institution of slavery. Steward as a narrator successively writes their memory out of his story and out of the communities of, first, his former slaves and, later, of free black women and men. However, when Steward extends the motif of the looking glass to his opponent Israel Lewis (?-ca. 1841), one of the agents for the Wilberforce settlement in Canada West, the reflection functions less effectively and leaves an ambiguous image of Steward's relationship with them.

Subsequently, the chapter moves form the particular case of using the looking glass, which centers on Steward's opponents, to the inclusion of more eclectic individual stories and to an exploration of their narrative functions. Steward shows that he uses some of them pragmatically to underline his reformist agendas of promoting temperance, for example, or for his anti-slavery work. Others seem to

identify, in problematic ways at times, the possibilities of alliances with indigenous people for Blacks in a new country. Others still seem to follow goals for the black community that are more complex: in these stories, Steward gives testimony of, becomes a witness to, and works to uphold the memory of black life in slavery and freedom. In this way, these stories reflect diverse experiences on both sides of the border and show the importance of meaningful individuals for the creation and maintenance of a community.

The chapters' final section demonstrates how the motif of storytelling can be applied not simply to human individuals but to more abstract entities like Great Britain and Canada West. Steward's numerous border crossings between the United States and Canada West shape the very contradictory impressions of British North America and its suitability for Black fugitives in the pursuit of freedom. While Steward's experiences in the Wilberforce settlement leave him frustrated and prompt his return to his former home in Rochester, NY, his participation in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Conferences on both sides of the border a few years later lets him re-experience Canada West under a different vantage point. The visit as part of a religious convention focuses on prominent Canadian symbols of, particularly, Canadian nationalism and pride, without however referencing Steward's previous Canadian years. This curious gap leaves an unresolved picture of Canada West as the "Promised Land" for black settlers as well as of Steward's own changing alliances.

5.1 THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

A core motif of Austin Steward's narrative is the use of the dichotomy of "good versus evil". As if through a looking glass, Steward as the protagonist presents his former Virginia slave master Captain Helm not by way of similarity but opposition. *Twenty-Two Years a Slave* relies on their chiastic developments: while Steward rises from slavery to freedom, education, and Christian faith, Helm, his wife, and brothers successively descend from their wealthy life styles to moral and physical decay. This might seem like an all-too-well-known story, and indeed, Steward's narrative is a strong testimony to his anti-slavery activism, in which the opposition of former slaves and slaveholders was put to powerful rhetorical uses. However, this subchapter shows how the image of the looking glass, contrasting Steward and his family's uprighteousness to their former masters' decadence and unfitness for respectable society, helps Steward construct a first type of meaningful genealogy. The members of his family, as opposed to the Helms, represent generations of respected black men and women, valuable community

members, and decent Christian folk. Steward's narrative includes their portraits and assures their place in the collective memory, in the same way that it writes the Helms and their legacy out of existence. In turn, this strategy demonstrates Steward's powerful position of control as a narrator as well as the degrees of self-fashioning at play. The insertion of family stories in the shapes of homages, portraits, or elegies opens up Steward's own narrative as well as the genre boundaries of autobiographical writing to become more inclusive and fluid. What is more, it creates a form of written resistance by means of which Steward counters the (discursive) dominance of the institution of slavery, which denied the livability of black memory, family, and advancement.

Twenty-Two Years a Slave begins in Virginia around the turn of the nineteenth century. Steward's quasi-encyclopedic account of slave life on a plantation teems with well-known slave narrative topoi and characters at first glance, yet serves to position Steward, his family, and the other slaves as pillars of support within an oppressive system. Robert and Susan Steward, his parents, as well as his sister Mary form the nucleus of Steward's elaborations on plantation life that cover the crude housing provided for slaves, the availability of food, working conditions for men and women, daily schedules, as well as the terrors of punishment by the overseer and his dog. An emotional description of the arbitrary punishment on the plantation, heightened by the underlying (sexual) violence against the female body, exposes the otherwise unspeakability of the system of slavery, framed as a well-known appeal to (anti-slavery) readers: "Oh, you who have hearts to feel; […] think of the sufferings of the helpless, destitute, and down-trodden slave" (Steward 19). Despite the seeming utter hopelessness of their situation, Steward inserts the power of the slave community's communal support as healers, helpers, sympathizers, and keepers of each other.

Similar to classical drama, the plantation becomes the microcosmic stage on which protagonist and antagonist confront each other. Steward opens with a by now canonical "I was born," but defers the status of being a slave to several years after his birth: "At seven years of age, *I found myself a slave* on [a] plantation" (13; added emphasis). This life-changing realization of the narrator might signify the end of an ingenuous childhood, underlined by the fact that he is sent to work at the Great House. There, he is exposed to plantation owner Captain Helm and his wife. Both are portrayed as stereotypical representatives of their class. As such, Helm's usually rather "kind and pleasant" nature is subject to his "terrible" temper under intoxication (22). His predilection for gaming and alcohol as well as his failure at taking care of his businesses not only discredit him in the eyes of any nineteenth-century reformer but also have devastating consequences for Steward and his fellow-slaves, who are at risk to become the prizes to be lost or won in a

gambling bid (see 23). Mrs. Helm, on the other hand, while being "a very industrious woman," embodies the power-ridden plantation mistress who takes out her anger at the younger servants, especially (24). She takes pleasure in seeing others flogged; her power is both sadistic and arbitrary. The plantation's female slaves, on the contrary, are exposed to the (sexual) whims of their owners.

The Helms, both through their character and luxurious life style, become the narrator's tools to advance major topics of the reform movement in which Blacks were prominently engaged, both in Canada and the United States: abolition and slavery's deteriorating effects, temperance, frugality, and hard work.[1] Steward takes their negative examples as continuous lessons throughout the narrative in which he figures as a superior moral instance. Several chapters display Helm's immoral behavior, which becomes a stand-in for Southern society's misguided conduct at large. Helm indulges in horse racing, gambling, and later, dueling, whose pomp and vain pleasures Steward sharply criticizes (see 41). Finally, the Captain finds himself in dire financial straits after a horse race, causing him to consider emigration to another state. After a visit to the "far-off 'Genesee Country'," in today's western New York State, he returns enthusiastic, claiming that "the more slaves a man possesse[s] in that country the more he [will] be respected" (42-43). Consequently, Helm decides to sell all belongings at a great auction, retaining his slaves whom he will move to New York State with him.

Helm's whim, therefore, initiates the long list of geographical removals and border crossings Steward undergoes in his life. The first relocation away from the Virginia plantation problematizes not merely the slaves' status as (literally) movable goods but the impact of their forced migration in the face of an uncertain future. The final good-byes from their families and friends in Virginia illustrate the slaves' feelings that leaving for New York State is about "the greatest hardship they had ever met" and, so they think, a move "beyond the bounds of civilization" (47). At the same time, the forced move to New York State at Helm's desire spark a reflection in Steward that reveals his complex relationship with the plantation, Virginia, and notions of "home." Steward remarks that the plantation remains the "land of our birth, the home of our childhood" and "all that was so familiar to us" (48-49). However, he seems torn when he confesses that the memories of his "native State" are tinged with the memories of slavery (49). He seems frustrated

1 Cooper notes the significance of the temperance issue for the middle-classism of many free Blacks: "Blacks […] took up the temperance sword, in conjunction with the rest of white society, simply because they saw this as a vehicle toward respectability. […] In joining the temperance movement, free Blacks, many of whom were also middle class (or aspired to its rank), were simply doing what others of their class were doing" ("Doing Battle" 326).

at the loss of the more joyful thoughts at his early youth and manhood that any free person might have, but which have been denied him as a slave. The "despairing sigh" that he feels at the memory of Virginia points to the loss of a sense of home and belonging—a home he feels does not correspond to the norm—and introduces the *déracinement* of a diasporic man (50). On the other hand, Captain Helm indirectly figures not only as the one who causes the loss of "life's sweetest memories" by the new uprooting of his slaves but also as someone most incapable "of taking care of himself and family" (50-51). In this respect, he proves inferior to his slaves. The chapter's foreshadowing of his future downfall against his own prophesy of being successful in the new state seems to be a slight compensation at this moment of anxiety.

For the time being, however, Helm establishes himself and his family in his chosen home, attempting to consolidate his control. At the same time, Steward develops the first thoughts of freedom and self-emancipation. The great "general training" of the army in Phelps, NY, marks an incisive moment in his life and he is overwhelmed with thoughts of wanting to be free.[2] Feeling infused with the spirit of joining the army on the spot to take his chance in "fight[ing] the British," this "grand display" causes him to have serious troubles "to content [himself] to labor as [he] had done" (77-78). He is transformed in the sense that he clearly pronounces his increasing dissatisfaction with being a slave and, moreover, the utter impossibility of identifying himself with this category any longer: "I was sick and tired of being a slave, and felt ready to do almost any thing (sic) to get where I could act and feel like a free man" (78). His prospects, however, are crushed by Helm who refuses that he join the army and reasserts his control over Steward's movements ("[I]f you get killed your wages will stop; and then who, do you suppose, will indemnify me for the loss?" 79).

Soon, however, Steward's narrative shows that he and Helm have embarked on irreversible courses that will lead one of them to self-determination and the other, to slow destruction. After roughly one year Steward finds his personal growth and changes during the past months quickly make it "beyond endurance" to re-adapt to his old life as Helm's slave (81). In a move of self-empowerment

2 Up to date, I have been unable to get source credit for this training or when this would have taken place. The only hint is the appearance of Governor Lewis, which Steward describes in the course of the episode, on the second day of the training (Steward 76-77). The only Governor Lewis of New York State was in office between 1804 and 1807, which would place the training a good way before the outbreak of the War of 1812. Another point of reference is that the village of Dresden, where Tower first takes his workers, was apparently started in 1811 as a planned community, meaning that Steward and his fellow workers would have witnessed the very beginning of this place.

and determination, Steward sets about "making a virtue of necessity" and educates himself, learning to read with the aid of a self-procured spelling book (82). This courageous and dangerous undertaking is finally discovered and he suffers a severe flogging by Helm's son-in-law (82-83). The punishment only spurns Steward's determination and defiance, and he resolves "to learn to read and write, at all hazards, if [his] life was only spared" (83). Steward takes this open act of resistance, one that aligns him with a plethora of slave narrative authors, to foreshadow the Captain's worsening financial situation, at the same time that he as his "slave" has taken a crucial step on the way to concrete (psychological) emancipation from his "master."[3]

Steward fleshes out the allusion to the Helms' downward spiral through Mrs. Helm's death in an almost metaphysical reflection on decay, death, *memento mori*, but also new beginnings. His extensive description of death and dying is one of his tools of mirroring, used to establish the moral integrity and thus, superiority, of himself and his family as the exact opposite of the slaveholding class. The Helms as representatives of the latter become negative foils, or reflections, of a decent Christian life, their moral debauchery being a sign of the influence of slavery that extends even to the moment of death. In this way, Mrs. Helm's final moments are part of a dramatic chapter setting. Like her luxurious life, her death becomes a spectacle. Her and her husband's condescending attitudes toward inevitable death quickly turn into desperate lamentations and anxiety. Steward coldly remarks that "[s]urrounded as she was with every elegance and luxury that wealth could procure, she lay shrieking out her prayers for a short respite, a short lengthening out of the life she had spent so unprofitably" (85). He seems to feel this to be a deserved end of someone with an initially "active intellect and great force of character," but whom slavery had "made a tyrannical demon" (87). The gap between her and her slaves is ever more apparent at the end of her life, when she finds herself alone and let down by earthly riches, whereas her slaves, though suffering from "rough, lowly cabin[s]" enjoy a "quiet conscience" (85). The extravagance of her life continues in the drama of her death scene, which is displayed in the narrative as a Gothic celebration of her final minutes in the midst of heavy rain and storm, culminating in her expiration "as the clock struck the hour of midnight" (86). Mrs. Helm's passing is so horrible that it makes a lasting impression on family, friends, and the slaves present. Amongst them, feelings are

3 The importance of (self-)education for enslaved women and men cannot be emphasized enough. It is a recurring feature in slave narratives, and marks both rebellion and self-determination. Literacy and emancipation are often inseparable in slave narratives. On the connections between literacy, emancipation, and manhood, see, for example, Cooper's case study on Bibb ("Doing Battle" 26).

mixed, as Steward describes: "some doubtless truly lamented the death of their mistress; others rejoiced that she was no more, and all were more or less frightened" (86). For Steward, Mrs. Helm is the prime example of a fallen woman in that she would have had the means to become a positive role model to other women of her class, had she been religious and "under a different influence" than slavery (86).[4]

Steward forcefully illustrates this different influence through the elegy dedicated to his daughter Patience Jane Steward, who dies unexpectedly in the mid-1840s and represents, in stark contrast to Mrs. Helm, a perfect example of the devout and humble young Christian woman.[5] Foreshadowing his daughter's unexpected illness, Steward's plans for her are put to a stark hold. He reveals their close father–daughter relationship and the hopes he had put in his child. Given that women appear rarely enough in the narrative other than as fugitives, for instance, Steward's expectations and respect for his daughter gain significance. He points out that all his efforts had gone into her education, accompanied by "all the trials and difficulties that every colored man meets, in his exertions to educate his family" (306). Knowing all too well the reality of discrimination in education and the often insufficient learning conditions for Black children, his daughter's role would have been to teach her younger siblings. Steward proudly reports that Patience held a teaching certificate in the sciences, "reward[ing]" her father's efforts (307). However, it is her faith that exceeds Steward's expectations by far. Here, his elegy turns into an idealization of his dying daughter as "the quiet sufferer," whose faith seems to sustain her and grow the weaker her body becomes (308). Her faith is relevant in her own dealings with her illness, but also because it helps her in trying to alleviate the situation for her family (307).[6] Patience suffers death "without a struggle or moan" (308). Her passing, noted by the exact date, marks an incisive moment in Steward's life and another personal loss to the "fell destroyer" (307).

It is crucial that hers is the first name we learn out of the family, and "Patience" reflects her demeanor and character as she approaches the final months of her life (308). Patience's death at only eighteen, although it leaves the family's house "desolate," is ultimately turned into something triumphant (308). Not only does she die in peace with herself, but in complete submission to God and his will (see 309). Her passing represents what Steward understands as tragic but dignified, and

4 One can see the parallel here to Mrs. Auld in Douglass' 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

5 I use the term in this chapter not in the sense of the poetic form of elegy, but in its quality as a "song of lament" (Cuddon 253).

6 Patience's younger sister died in 1837, aged eleven (see below).

not without hope for a Christian family who believes in the afterlife. Therefore, the poem "The Autumn Evening" by Unitarian minister William B. O. Peabody (1799-1847), which forms the chapter's epilogue and whose melancholy is mitigated by "the morning's happier light" waking the dead, leaves a hopeful note (310). Steward does not conceal his personal feeling of gratification as he sets up his daughter's passing as the greatest possible contrast to Mrs. Helm's death. Hers was accompanied by screams and mortifications, whereas Patience, who has lived an honest and upright, albeit short life, dies a "peaceful death" (309). His daughter's "triumph" is also one over the former mistress.

Patience's death serves to underline how Steward labors explicitly throughout the first third of his text to distance himself from Helm, his family, or any of their acquaintances, attributing to himself the realm of Christian faith and temperance, in particular. In fact, his concerns to lead a moral life become more and more acute in the changing Helm household. The Captain hastily remarries a widow of six weeks, Mrs. Thornton, who transforms the house in such dramatic fashion until two slaves run away. In this tense atmosphere, Steward recounts his own religious self-examination in a moment of crisis. Quite suddenly, he falls so seriously ill that he is afraid to die and makes his testament. This experience sparks what he describes as "examin[ing] [his] own condition before God" (90). As one would expect, he himself flawed and imperfect in character and deed even as a slave in the non-place of society (see 91). He prays to God to spare his life in return for a better life as a Christian. Curiously enough, the episode of his sickness seems incomplete and at odds with the rest of the chapter. His conversion moment seems like a staple narrative element he might have felt needed to be included; in any case, it serves to underline the opposition to an unreligious, unconcerned Captain Helm.

There are signs, nevertheless, that Helm's influence as a master is crumbling. Through the long and convoluted abolition process in New York State, Steward ultimately gains his freedom, and Helm will be defeated. With the help of Mr. Cruger, a lawyer in Bath, and the local manumission society, represented by Mr. Comstock and Mr. Moore, Steward is eventually able to clarify his status as a freeman, but only after much uncertainty.[7] Having reached freedom, Steward goes

7 Possibly Daniel Cruger (1780-1843), who was admitted to the bar in 1805 and began practicing in Bath. In the War of 1812, he served as a major, and thereafter was involved in several political offices such as the State assembly and the 15th Congress (see "Cruger"). Dennis Comstock and James Moore, both directors of the local Manumission Society (see Landon, *African-Canadian Heritage* 78-79). Steward exceptionally gives the year for these events, 1814, toward the end of the War of 1812. He encounters U.S. troops returning from Buffalo when he is allowed to visit with

on to describe his rise to self-improvement through education. While asserting his freedom made him feel like his own master, buying his first school books to continue his studies makes him feel like a king (see 114). The clear defeat of the former master Helm through freedom and personal uplift continues as the latter descents further into depravity and crime. Helm, now deserted by most of his slaves and his second wife, devises a scheme to alleviate his need of money. His plan illustrates his utter moral depravity and exposes him, in Steward's moral eye, as a true child of the slave South: "[H]e had been raised in a slave State, and Southern principles were as deeply instilled into his mind, as Southern manners were impressed on his life and conduct" (117). In order to make money, Helm resorts to "collect[ing]" all of his former slaves in order to sell them south (117). Simon Watkins, whose task is to assist Helm, sets about inviting black people of the surrounding villages to a party. Steward explains that "[his] parents were invited; and Simon took the pains to come to Farmington to give [him] a special invitation" (118). In hindsight, Steward sharply denounces the plan as morally outrageous and an act of "piracy" unfit for the Republic (117).

Only the use of another tool of reflection, namely, the use of forebodings and dreams, saves Steward's life. At first entirely unsuspecting, he prepares for the evening when, "by some mysterious providence, or something for which I can not (sic) account, a presentiment took possession of my mind that all was not right. […] I grew so uneasy, that I finally gave up the party and returned home […]" (118). While Steward is in safety, Helm and his helpers upset the party and make their arrests. When panic erupts and the betrayed slaves fight for their lives, Steward's own father is severely wounded and will later die from his injuries (119). Even though Steward is not participating in the event, being absent from the scene, he delivers a vivid account of its turmoil. Most slaves manage to escape, he explains, but some were not so fortunate. He therefore accounts for lost community members by explicitly naming and recording them: "Among those taken were Harry Lucas, his wife, Lucinda, and seven children; Mrs. Jane Cooper and four children, with some others" (120). In doing so, he gives an identity to and

friends in Geneva and Canandaigua (see Steward 108). Hodges explains that Austin Steward received his official freedom papers on April 21, 1821 (a fact that is left out in the narrative, interestingly): "Elisha B. Strong, the first judge of Monroe County, endorsed a certificate that declared Austin Steward a free man. It was an interesting statement" (xviii). According to Hodges, Strong argued that in his personal opinion, Steward had indeed been free since January 1, 1811, when Helm first hired him out to a man named Towers.

account of those whom he knew, before they might be irretrievably lost.[8] He knows that "[t]he sorrow and fearful apprehension of those wretched recaptured slaves can not (sic) be described nor imagined by any one (sic) except those who have experienced a like affliction" (120). His record is crucial, not only because so far, they had been subsumed under the title of being "Helm's slaves" but because Steward assures that they become part of the genealogy of meaningful individuals that all his fellow slaves and the black community will recall and identify with.

When forced to cope with his father's death at Palmyra in 1816, following several months of severe illness due to the attack by Helm, Steward delivers one of the strongest instances of establishing a meaningful genealogy of his family in opposition to Captain Helm. He becomes the writer of his father's elegy, shaping his life as a respectable Christian and role model. While Steward emphasizes, in the words of the Bible, the promise of Heaven for the oppressed, he equally establishes his father's earthly reputation (see 125). He gives a brief insight into the personal estimation in which he held his father as a son by casting the latter as a morally upright person, both in public and in private. "My father had a good reputation for honesty and uprightness of character among his employers and acquaintances, and was a kind, affectionate husband and a fond, indulgent parent. His, I believe was the life and death of a good man" (126). Given that the father has only appeared twice before in the narrative, Steward ensures that he is in charge of his father's memory, not as a slave, but as a respectable man. It is significant that Steward shares this moment with readers as a moment of reverence. The role of the father in slave narratives is often enough one of absence. Here, Steward connects himself firmly to his parent just as he will focus several times on his own children throughout the narrative. In his personal genealogy, incidentally, the mother as well as the wife are almost completely absent.

Most slaves are eventually able to escape before being shipped south by Helm, and the Captain continues to become more miserable. After several stages of moral and material deterioration, Helm reaches the bottom of the social ladder: reduced to utter poverty, Steward describes him living with "one of his slave women, and […] supported by public charity!" (145). Being both desperate and sly, Helm tries to profit from his former slave's rise to wealth and employs a lawyer to demand money from Steward for alleged debts he has with Helm. Steward, however, now

8 In Lawrence Hill's novel *The Book of Negroes (*2007) the protagonist Aminata, abducted from her home village in Africa and survivor of the Middle Passage, quickly learns of the existence of the "fishnet" as the secret web of information by which the slave community corresponds. "'What is the fishnet?' I asked. 'It is how we find each other, passing messages from one to another to still another'" (137).

not only has the legal back-up but also possesses a new self-confidence which he makes known to Helm and his lawyer: "I replied that I should […] continue to maintain my personal rights and enjoy the freedom which was already mine" (146). Helm, unrequited, initiates a trial against him, claiming "every particle of property [Steward] possessed" (146).[9] Before the trial can begin, however, Helm suddenly dies.

These "startl[ing]" news trigger Steward's reexamination of the life of a man who, for so long, had exercised brutal control over his life (147). It is tempting to read these reflections in the moralizing tone of anti-slavery discourse that interprets Helm's life as preconditioned to end the way it did: like his wife, he was reared on a plantation and "nurtured" in the values of a slave society (147). Moreover, his character was spoilt by alcohol, gambling, and a type of arrogance summed up by Steward's laconic comment that "[h]e who had once been thought to be one of the wealthiest as well as one of the greatest men in the county, died a pauper - neglected and despised, and scarcely awarded a decent burial" (147). There is, however, something else to Helm's death in Steward's words that transcends the apparent simple moral undertones. In fact, set against the death of Steward's father as a consequence of the struggle against re-enslavement, Helm's death functions as a type of (anti-)elegy and represents another instance of using the looking glass to establish contrast. Steward symbolically takes on the role of funeral speaker for his former master, but instead of establishing him as a respected, upright member of society, as he did with his father, Helm dies bereft of all earthly goods and the victim of his own moral deviance. Steward states, "now he is regarded as no better than his poorest slave, and lies as lowly as they" (147).

The seeming erasure of all hierarchies in death should not hide the crucial difference between Steward's father and the unrepentant slaveholder: for Helm, there can be neither honorable legacy nor memory. In a final reversal of roles, Steward puts himself in control of Helm and his inheritance. In fact, he even expands this control to Helm's brother Thomas. Steward claims to have visited Thomas's grave, but found "very little to mark [his] resting place" (148). On the fate of the Helm brothers, the narrator remarks: "They had passed away. Their wealth, power and bravery had come to nought; and no tribute was now paid to the memory of one of 'Old Virginia's best families'" (148). Steward thus fashions himself as a witness to the physical manifestation of the Helms' non-memory, by

9 In an aside, Steward mentions that the trial is to be held before William Beatty Rochester (1789-1838), son of the city's founder Nathaniel Rochester (146). This does not only mark Steward again as a pioneer citizen of Rochester but also as well versed in the city's elite (see "Rochester").

the same token attempting to erase Helm not only from his own remembrance, as a cathartic cleansing from the vestiges of slavery, but also from that of the following narrative.

Using the Helms as a negative foil, or reflection, occupies much of the first third of *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, from Steward's birth into slavery to his liberation and decision to move to Canada West. The portraits of the Helms focus on their descent into moral depravity, poverty, illness, and death, whereas Steward (and his family) emerges as a moral example and rises to freedom. Once he transitions into Canada West to become involved in the all-Black Wilberforce settlement in Biddulph,[10] the looking glass motif reappears in the shape of a new antagonist: Wilberforce agent Israel Lewis.[11] The controversy surrounding the settlement centered on the personal feud between Steward and Lewis, in particular. In Steward's narrative, the agent undergoes a similar negative development as Captain Helm, which marks him as Steward's opponent and that of the communal effort that Wilberforce represents. While the motif of the traitor figure appears in relation to Lewis, too, it is less strong overall than in the narrative by Thomas Smallwood, for example. Instead, Steward's descriptions allow for direct parallels to the white former slave master, but with a far more ambiguous result. While Lewis will eventually be reduced to depravity and death in poverty as well, Steward cannot easily write him off—or, *out* of the narrative, as it were. After all, he must acknowledge Lewis's involvement in Wilberforce as a leader and partly successful agent for the settlement abroad. Therefore, Steward must focus on distancing his character from his, while there is no longer a chiastic development between himself and Lewis as it had been the case with Captain Helm.

Steward introduces Lewis early on as an opponent. In his testimonial, Steward, the newly appointed president of the colony, recounts the board of managers' most important and far-reaching decision, namely the appointment of two agents for "soliciting" funds for the support of the settlement (185). Ripley has called Wilberforce both "an experiment in social reform and an antislavery symbol." Thus, its support was basically a must for self-proclaimed anti-slavery philanthropist as "a measure of their abolitionist commitment" (*BAP* 47). The board's choice of Lewis does not proves a felicitous one, however. While Steward does not dispute that Lewis in fact collects money, he laments that he "would neither pay it over to the board, nor give any account of his proceedings" (187). Not only do the board members suspect him of defrauding the collected sums, Steward also accuses him of indulging in luxuries on his tours. "[E]xtravagan[ce

10 Biddulph; today, the county is named Lucan Biddulph.

11 The other agent was Nathaniel Paul, see footnote 17.

…] expensive hotels, [and] giving parties" do not only run counter to the colony's ideological framework but also to the practical and material circumstances of the settlers who fight for survival (187). Lewis's behavior is cast as creating great damage and "dishonor" for the colony and its reputation, particularly (187). Therefore, Steward's testimonial is concerned with rectifications, re-contextualizations, and providing the "correct" information. He emphasizes, for example, that Wilberforce did not consider "begging" an option, an association with which would have seriously threatened the project.[12] As Ripley explains, the fact that the colony had to rely on philanthropy at all represented a "dilemma, [as] the Wilberforce managers attempted to solicit financial assistance without diminishing the credibility of their experiment" (47).

Finally, the board decides to go public and make the "facts in the case" known (Steward 188). This resolution lays open the schism between the board and its agents. Desperate to save the well-meaning help of their supporters, Steward appears to bear the brunt of the "excitement…on the part of Lewis and his friends, who were joined by the friends of N. Paul, to destroy, if they could, the board of managers" (188). His standing in the United States, where he had succeeded as a Rochester businessman, makes him the target of the adversaries' efforts. His "high reputation for truth and honesty," in his opinion, saves him from severe social consequences (189). Publicizing the scandal, however, leads the Canada Company to cease all further land dealings with the Black settlers in Wilberforce. Steward explains that he is unable to buy land from the Company's agent "because he so despised Lewis" (189).

Hodges has rightly pointed out that the conflict in Wilberforce is indicative of Steward's narrative control, using his narrative, and particularly the appendix (341-360), as "the fullest record of the futile settlement [to put…] most of the blame for its demise [on Lewis]" (xxiv). Lewis's own voice is silenced in the narrative, whereas he appears in the *Black Abolitionist Papers* with a vociferous letter from 1833 disavowing Steward and the board of managers. Calling himself "President and Agent of Wilberforce Colonization Company," which he had organized with his followers in July 1832 in view to replace Steward and the board, illustrates the open struggle for power in the settlement (*BAP* 58). Steward and his supporters tried to "minimize[…] the support" of the rival body, Ripley explains, but Lewis nevertheless received "notable white support" before 1839 (61n5). The letter discloses the stark contrast of opinion between Lewis and Steward on how the colony should be run, and also underlines Lewis's self-

12 For more on the contention around "begging" in the Black community in Canada, see Cooper on the controversies between Mary Ann Shadd and Henry Bibb ("Doing Battle" 231; 251), as well as Michael Hembree's "The Question of 'Begging'."

confidence and understanding as the founder of Wilberforce "which [he] had the honor to plant" (58). Moreover, the document directly challenges Steward's one-sided narrative authority at the same time that it reveals the fragility of Wilberforce as a collective settlement experiment as, indeed, "one of the first times that blacks acted together and independently" (Hodges xxiv). Steward, on the other hand, turns Lewis into a dishonest traitor figure who neglects the communal well-being, but as much as the image of the traitor, it was the public controversy that threatened the settlement. The ensuing factionalism "raised serious doubts about the feasibility of organized black settlements and threatened the relationship between white philanthropy and the black Canadian community" (*BAP* 63). Faced with the Canada Company's cut on land deals, Steward laments that "it cannot be right [for them] to judge the character of a whole class or community by that of one person" (189).

Steward includes a variety of other documents to show Lewis's ill behavior against Wilberforce, but also to illustrate that he as the president and the board of managers received (white) public support. The circular of the "committee of colored citizens of the city of New York," the resolutions by that body at a public meeting, and those resolutions passed by the board at Wilberforce are all signed by well-known abolitionists such as Theodore S. Wright, Samuel E. Cornish, or Charles B. Ray (see 232-34).[13] The board of managers shows unity in its assessment of Lewis and Paul, and the American supporters clearly and openly warn the public against Lewis (see 234). Wilberforce also has the important support of Arthur Tappan who openly announces, according to Steward, "that Israel Lewis was not a man to be fully relied upon in his statements regarding the Wilberforce colony" (235).[14] In turn, Lewis is cast as a vociferous and belligerent man, none to shy away from the renown of a Tappan, whom he takes to court for "defamation of character" (235). Finally, Steward recounts that Lewis tries to bribe him as well, promising to reward him if he keeps silent about the attempt to sue Tappan and if he "abandon[s] the interests of the colonists" (236). When Steward refuses, distancing himself from "that kind" of disloyal behavior, Lewis turns against him personally and tries to get rid of him (236).

13 Theodore S. Wright (1797-1847), Samuel E. Cornish (ca. 1796-1858), and Charles B. Ray (1807-1886), all three of them African American ministers and abolitionists. Wright was the protégé of Cornish, who co-established the *Freedom's Journal* in 1827. Ray eventually owned and edited the *Colored American* (see *BAP* 79n1; 189n7).

14 Arthur Tappan (1786-1865), American businessman and abolitionist, the first president of the American Anti-Slavery Society and founder of the *Emancipator* in 1833 (see *BAP* 71n6).

While Lewis's moral depravity has thus been established, two further incidents clearly align him with the character of Captain Helm. First, Lewis sues Steward for theft, remembering a land deal he had struck with Steward, in which the latter had ended up taking up twenty-five dollars for Lewis to be refunded (see Steward 191-92; 236).[15] Second, he, too, plans an attack on Steward's life. The trial itself and the preparations serve to carve out the psychological distress it is causing Steward, who had been laboring to establish himself as an upright moral man. He is desperate to be "arraigned, for the *first* time in [his] life, as a *criminal*, by one of the very people [he] had spent my substance to benefit" (237; original emphasis). Implicitly, he calls Lewis a traitor here, but Lewis uses the same argument. In his letter, he describes that he was the one who brought Steward to Wilberforce in the first place, as "he was recommended to [him] as a man of color supporting a fair character" (*BAP* 58). Lewis's counter-narrative portrays himself as the good Samaritan who took Steward into his own home before he could get settled himself. Rhetorically, discrediting Steward subsequently as a thief weighs therefore even more heavily. Steward, on the other hand, feels personally threatened by Lewis. More than by the personal discredit, he is struck by the fact that Lewis attributes everything to a "private quarrel" (Steward 237). This damage to Steward's reputation of both his private and public self, if the settlers believed it and/or if the court sanctioned it, would entail his societal destruction.

While Steward describes the strains of the trial as "a dark time" that weighs heavily on him, he emphasizes his resolution and commitment to the project of Wilberforce (237). He refuses to follow his friends' advice to "flee from the country, which I had labored so hard and so conscientiously to benefit"—even more so, he stresses, as his labor had been accompanied by "nothing but detraction and slander" (237). He still firmly believes that the court will establish his innocence. Lewis, on the contrary, is seen to spread the "slander" before the trial (237). Steward goes further in describing Lewis's efforts to spread rumors about his person as sinking to the lowest echelon of the moral ladder: Lewis tries to instrumentalize his own "faithful, but illiterate wife" in his scheme to discredit him (238). Steward, however, is equally engaged in defamations himself: elaborating on Lewis's scandalous treatment of his wife whom "he looked now with disdain upon," he details how Lewis lies to her in order to win her over as his

15 Steward follows up on a previous mention in the narrative with more detail on the actual trial that had been adjourned in 1832. Lewis, in his 1833 letter, announces the trial for "felony" against Steward to follow in August of the same year: "I lost a twenty dollar note of hand out of my house, which I found some time afterwards in the hands of a man, who said he got it of Austin Steward. I presented Steward to the grand jury" (*BAP* 58).

accomplice (238-39). Although she finally gives in, she soon regrets and, remembering to behave loyally, "mortified [… flees] to Wilberforce" to confess to Steward (240).

While a most unfavorable light shines on Lewis's character, Steward has succeeded in asserting his voice and control over the event. The day of the trial confirms Steward.[16] At first, he elaborates on the humiliation of being seated in the "prisoner's box" and next to a murderer (241). His only comforts here are the written notes of support from some of Rochester's former fellow businessmen; "first men" testifying to his "good character" (241). While the prosecutor only relies on Lewis's testimony, Steward emphasizes that his own attorney brings into account the well-meaning testimonies of three "respectable white men" (241). This leads the jury to release Steward on a verdict of "not guilty" (241). He thus regains his reputation despite Lewis's defamatory efforts, which recalls his victory over Helm who, too, who had given in to immorality and failed legally against him.

The climax of the personal feud between Steward and Lewis, however, is the attack on Steward's life upon his return from London. If Lewis had already reached the lowest moral level, as Steward had pointed out previously, he has now forsaken even the most basic legal scruples, too, like Captain Helm. Steward implies that Lewis steals his letter to his wife telling her when he would return to Wilberforce. Additionally, a woman who is married to one of Lewis's "associate[s]" warns Mrs. Steward of her husband's return (254). She urges her to

16 The description of the court proceedings represents an interesting comment on Steward's relationship to Great Britain. He describes the trial to follow "English court style," for example (241). This applies to Chief Justice John Beverley Robinson's dress as well as to the loud "God save the King!," which opens the trial (241). Sir John Beverley Robinson (1791-1863), who shares almost the same life dates with Steward, became chief justice in 1829. In the rebellions of 1837/38, he sentenced two of the leaders to death. He is known to have contributed to upholding the separate school system for black children in his ruling in *Hill v. School Trustees of Camden and Zone* (see Ripley 8). Steward's descriptions, however, are based on the topos of equality before the law, which Black settlers in Canada praised highly. To be able to use the court system to obtain justice constituted one of the pillars of citizenship and thus greatly helped to idealize Canada in the eyes of Black immigrants. Jehu Jones describes his feelings upon his arrival in Toronto in 1839 in a letter to Charles B. Ray: "That I assure you, sir[,] my soul was absorbed in rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving to the Author of all good gifts, that he has given me courage, through so many difficulties […] to find a place where I am protected by the law - besides that I can enjoy my peculiar Religious opinions, without giving offence to my neighbors" (*BAP* 76).

make him stay in London for the night and only return the next morning, thereby announcing the impending danger. Again, as did Lewis's wife when she confessed to Steward before the trial, the wives of his adversaries represent moral conscience. Since "the violent threatenings of Lewis" against Steward and his family have by this time become so frequent, however, Mrs. Steward does not heed the bad omen (254). Yet, on the way to Wilberforce, Steward crosses "McConnell's Dismal Swamp, […] one of the most dreary places in all that section of country," in which a Gothic episode unfolds in the course of which he is suddenly shot at twice from the thicket (254; 255). Miraculously, Steward's horse carries him "to [his] own door" (255).

It is no surprise to the reader, due to Steward's hints throughout the episode, that Lewis and his friends are the instigators of the life-threatening attack. Steward learns from other colonists that they had not only been out all night but had also been seen near the swamp (255). The serious offense by Lewis does not, however, make Steward seek legal redress, but rather sparks his concern for Lewis's soul, as he is glad "that he had been prevented from imbruing his hands in the blood of a fellow being" (256). Steward finds the opportunity to cast himself as a generous Christian who, even now, muses on his perpetrator's fate. He concludes with a short morale in the form of a poem pointing out that Lewis's conscience will do its share (256). This cannot detract, though, from the disappointment and annoyance that Steward, his family, and their fellow-settlers begin to feel about their Canadian experiment.

Steward's final portrait of Lewis at the news of his death irrefutably casts him not simply as a negative reflection of Steward's moral Christian life but as a parallel to Captain Helm.[17] Lewis's death represents a chance for Steward to

17 Nathaniel Paul, Wilberforce's other agent, and his brother Benjamin, are similarly aligned with Captain Helm. Benjamin Paul is described as one of Lewis's most devout followers (see 257-58). Steward also casts him as a proud, but unhealthy man, recalling the unison of *mens* (mind) and *corpus* (body) which had marked Helm's fate, too. Paul's mind and body begin to decline after Lewis's demise in the colony: "[He] had kept up pretty well, until Lewis was effectually put down, and his own character involved in many of his notorious proceedings […] his health failed, and he sank rapidly under accumulating disasters, to the grave" (258). Additionally, his spirit suffers as he is overcome with "melancholy and remorse for his past course of living" (258). As Steward comes to visit Paul on his deathbed, the latter's sufferings are strongly reminiscent of Mrs. Helm's memorable death scene. Paul's last days, for example, are spent "writhing in agony," a punishment, Steward seems to suggest, for a life of "extravagance and a style far beyond their means" (259). As with the case of the Helms, the "mysterious ways of Providence" again seem to confirm Steward's turn to moral

review the larger framework of Wilberforce's leading figures, but his contemplations are at the same time reflections on his own position and life. He thereby instrumentalizes Lewis as a personal moral lesson, in the shape of another anti-elegy, a review of Lewis's life and times. Simultaneously, Steward shows himself somewhat at pains to come to terms with Lewis's complex character, as he oscillates between defamation of and fascination for the figure who proved his most obvious and tenacious adversary in Canada West.

Like the Captain's, Steward describes Lewis's end as a tragic but logical consequence of his "living in extravagance" (283). At the end of his life, Lewis is not only "despised and dishonored" but also dies a pauper in a Montreal hospital without even a "decent burial" (283). The semi-benevolent exclamation "Poor man!" cannot mitigate Steward's observation that finally, all of Lewis's material and immaterial luxuries "have perished with his memory" (284). Similar to Helm's example, Steward makes sure that in his narrative, he remains in control of people's legacy. Despite the alleged erasure of memory, Steward elaborates eloquently on Lewis's character and life, painting a detailed picture of the man ranging from his outer appearance to his moral character, from his upbringing, education and connubial life to his career as a leader. It appears that both Helm's and Lewis's fate have been determined by the influence of slavery. Steward is quick to point out Lewis's potential, since his "natural abilities [are] above mediocrity," and his character as strong, determined, and energetic (284-85). However, he claims, Lewis also had a natural penchant to use these qualities 'the wrong way,' giving in to his "malicious, selfish, and consequently […] deceptive disposition" (285). According to Steward, his life as a slave aggravated this circumstance; being surrounded by "vice" prevented Lewis's intellect from developing in an acceptable way (285).

Steward seems fixated on slavery's corrosive influence on Lewis, but visibly cannot do away with Lewis's allegedly flawed character so easily. For example, Steward pays respect to Lewis's strong aura and personality, which fascinated many people around him, above all his own wife. She is not the only one to suffer from Lewis's "dangerous…and overbearing" nature (285). Steward illustrates Lewis's Janus-faced attitude by contrasting his "prepossessing" outward appearance as a "gentleman" and his abilities as a "good speaker" with his "ungoverned passions" (285-87). After all, Steward has to concede that "Lewis became the founder of the Wilberforce colony" (286). The office was offered him

integrity and Christian spirituality, summed up in his formula of "an honest man" under God's guidance and protection (259-60). Paul, like the Helms, becomes an example to be cautioned against, and only to be taken as another exhortation to beware of the "temptation" of wealth and "lusts" (260).

by his fellow citizens in Cincinnati, an observation that implicitly speaks to Lewis's standing and the trust people must have placed in him, but which also establishes parallels to Steward himself and how he came by his office as president. Steward even detects "the fame of a [Benjamin] Lundy" and "the memory […] of a [Thomas] Clarkson" in Lewis, had he not devoted his life to "characteristics directly opposed to the deportment of the humble Christian" (287). This statement is crucial to Steward's self-fashioning as the moral Christian man and to the lesson he draws from Lewis's anti-exemplarity. He emphasizes the necessity of constant self-examination and reliance on the "ROCK (sic)" of Christian faith as opposed to the "self-aggrandizement" which Lewis had come to represent (288). Set against Steward's disappointment with his Canadian years and the Wilberforce project (see below), the struggle with Lewis has left a significant mark on Steward. Only the sense of community and a genealogy of meaningful individuals will help Steward make sense of this experience and find something positive in the colony.

5.2 MOSAIC STORIES

This section leaves behind the strategy of the looking glass, which represents Steward's particular method of creating a meaningful genealogy to set against his former dominant slave owner, to look at a more eclectic cluster of brief stories and accounts. These mosaic pieces centered on friends, fellow-slaves, and often marginal characters, I argue, transcend Steward's own life writing and turn his narrative into a mosaic of different stories, voices, and narrative tones. At the same time, they cover the cross-border area between the United States and Canada West, and highlight, too, the fluid genre boundaries in the narrative. In attempting to trace the stories' narrative purposes for Steward, this section shows how they, too, create a genealogy of meaningful individuals. They serve Steward a pragmatic goal of advancing a reformist agenda, and are a testimony of black life under slavery and in freedom. As such, these stories witness the continuous violence and discrimination against black bodies, but also a tradition of black protest and rebellion against oppression. They record fugitive slave stories to save and uphold the memory of those who might otherwise be lost to succeeding generations, while centering escaped slaves at the heart of free black communities such as Wilberforce. Finally, by including these stories Steward also suggests the possibility of building alliances between the black community and additional "othered" groups in white settler states such as the First Nations. The portrayals of people in these stories are not always unproblematic, but they evidence

Steward's relationality to a multitude of other individuals in the narrative's past and the present who shape each other's lives, creating a genealogy necessary for the creation and maintenance of a (textual) community that transcends national borders.

Reformist Agendas

Temperance figures as the strongest reformist goal in Steward's narrative. There are numerous references to be found, and Steward embeds his own conversion to temperance in an ongoing discussion "which commenced about this time," i.e. after the black convention in Philadelphia in 1830 (168). Up to this point, he admits to have been selling liquor freely in his store in Rochester, "as most other grocers were at that time" (168). Although it yields financial profits, alcohol causes him trouble with drunk clients (see 168-69). Having seen "the matter in its true light"—namely, that it "would make beasts of men"—he stops his business with alcohol altogether (168-69). His decision is clearly motivated by his faith, a "duty to God and [his] fellow-men" (169-70).[18]

The most elaborate story concerns the alleged smuggler Cannouse, who appears at Steward's tavern in Wilberforce. The young man serves two important purposes in Steward's narrative: for one, he shows himself repentant of the deed he is accused of and, therefore, seems fit to receive Christian moral teachings. Initially, however, Cannouse arrives at the tavern to authenticate Steward's good reputation and renown as an upright man: When Cannouse has to leave St. Catharines precipitously, a young man tells him to "get to the colony if you can; if you succeed, go to A. Steward; he is an upright man and will never betray you for money" (199). Against the atmosphere of fraud and betrayal marking Steward's first chapters on Wilberforce, this affirmation will not go unheard among Steward's abolitionist readership. Cannouse tells Steward he is accused wrongfully of smuggling, but recognizes that his situation is due to "[his] own folly," having visited a young woman, which angered another aspiring admirer (198). Repentant and duly suffering, Cannouse seems to Steward "a talented young man … who would have felt deeply the disgrace of imprisonment" (201). Most importantly, he has "learned a lesson," and Steward is proud to have assisted not only in his protection but also his final, successful escape from his persecutors (201).

Most important, however, is Cannouse's second function as a type of fugitive. In all likelihood (and although this is never made the topic of conversation),

18 Hodges has remarked on the influence of the "religious impulses" of the 1820s on Steward, by which he refers to the Second Great Awakening (ca. 1790-1840) (xx).

Cannouse is white, and thus, his story represents an obvious counterpoint to the 'classic' fugitive slave stories in Steward's narrative. However, his tale certainly qualifies as a "thrilling narrative," showing at least some parallels to fugitive slave stories (203). When he hears that he is pursued by officers who want to arrest him in St. Catharines, after having been given away by his rival, Cannouse escapes into the woods (see 198). Then, during the week at Steward's house, the children hide Cannouse in "a thicket" every time the persecutors get too near (200). Like many fugitives, he has to rely on well-disposed helpers like the brother of the young lady or the protagonist and his family for assistance and protection. At all times, he is in danger of being discovered, and relives several of the "hair-breadth escapes" that Steward otherwise seems to reserve for the fugitive slave (203). Steward details how only sheer luck saves him eventually from the officers who are close on his heels but informs readers that "[h]e had succeeded in reaching Detroit, from whence he passed safely to his home" (201). Cannouse's story of repentance and his reverse-fugitive tale from Canada West back to the United States show how Steward incorporates non-Blacks into the powerful trope of the fugitive slave, a variation on a theme that expresses both Steward's narrative control and the willingness to experiment with topoi and genres.

Rebellion and Violence

One of the longest and most central stories in Steward's narrative occurs almost at its very beginning, when the young Austin is sent to work in Captain Helm's great house. The episode centers on the "grand dance" at Colonel Alexander's estate neighboring the Helms'. It reflects the social hierarchies on the plantation, the rules of oppression, but also the hazardous possibilities of insurgence. Alexander represents the "indulgent master" and has been suspiciously eyed by his neighbors; Steward lets readers in on the principles of slave society by explaining that "it is not true, that slave owners are respected for kindness to their slaves" (28). When Alexander allows for a dance to be organized by his slaves for other slaves from neighboring plantations, the preparations take place under the eyes of the patrol. Through Steward's comments, the dance eventually unfolds as a perfect imitation of a Southern (high) society event, including invitations, fine dresses, an abundance of food, drink and music. Given the embeddedness of the dance in the confines of slavery and the constant threat of the patrol only waiting to make their appearance and violently put the slaves in "their place", as a common phrase went, the staging of the dance seems an grotesque suspension of the every-day terror of the plantation.

Steward appears as a highly critical observer of inter- and intra-racial hierarchies and codifications as they are played out at the dance. “Slaves like on such occasions to pattern as much as possible after their master's family,” he explains, and thus, “the aristocratic slaves began to assemble, dressed in the cast-off finery of their master and mistress, swelling out and putting on airs in imitation of those they were forced to obey from day to day” (29). In fact, Steward reveals a clear class bias here. Not only does he insist on the differences between “aristocratic” and “unpolished” slaves but he also describes the dance pejoratively as infused “with all the wild abandon of the African character” (30; 33). House servants appear on the top of the hierarchy on the plantation, enjoying respect as the ones with the greatest insight into the planter class and being looked upon as models of “politeness and gentility” (32). However, Steward also discloses their ambiguous standing as objects of envy and even hatred, and as the subjects of plots against their fellow slaves (see 32).

The grand dance quickly turns from an imitation of a white social practice into the “imitation” of a crucial black tradition, i.e. the slave revolt, and thus, into a form of (temporary) black empowerment.[19] The sudden appearance of the patrol at the dance causes instant panic among the assembled guests, many of whom have arrived without a written pass to excuse their absences from their plantations. Yet, a feeling of defiance and resistance begins to emerge when a slave named Robert seizes control of the situation and instantly becomes the leader of a small rebellion. Steward’s tone now markedly changes from a more critical to an openly pathetic and emotional description of the situation, although he does not cast himself as an active participant in the events. Robert becomes the stereotypical “leader, a gigantic African, with a massive, compact frame” and, most importantly, possessing a “spirit the cowardly overseer had labored in vain to quell” (34). He becomes the prototype of the Black insurgent when he declares “that he would resist unto death,” echoing Patrick Henry’s revolutionary call to “[g]ive me liberty or give me death” (34).

Locked in a cabin, Robert and his followers await the arrival of their opponents. The members of the patrol are a haughty, condescending group of men who underestimate the resistance that awaits them. A dialogue between the patrol leader and his men illustrates their function as flat proslavery character foils. Finding the rebels unwilling to yield, a fight erupts as the patrol bursts into the cabin, resulting in the death of six slaves, and two more wounded. Steward dwells on the impact of the revolt by reporting all its graphic detail. Although he claims that it would “be impossible to convey to the minds of northern people, the alarm

19 Other well-known rebellions in Virginia involved, for example, Gabriel Prosser (1800) and Nat Turner (1831).

and perfect consternation that the above circumstance occasioned," he uses the occurrence to explain the intensification of white fear following the revolt as reports rapidly spread to the neighboring plantations (37). As an intertextual reference to other Virginia slave rebellions, the brief episode of rising up against white oppression also illustrates the well-known anti-slavery argument that slavery's effects weigh on the slaveholding class as well by creating an atmosphere of suspicion and threat from which no one can feel safe (see 37).[20] The aftermath of the drama belongs to the black slave community, however, who prepare their dead for the funeral.

Later in the narrative, when Helm has relocated to Sodus Bay in New York State, where he and his slaves experience the hardships of pioneer life, a slave called Williams openly resists Helm's overseer. Having attracted the wrath of the man, the latter intends to flog Williams who resists punishment. The episode is crucial in that it describes Williams's open physical defiance of the overseer and thereby, establishes an effective intertextual reference to other slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass and his fight with Edward Covey.[21] In fact, Williams enacts a moment of ultimate revenge by wrestling the cowhide from the overseer's hands and "[giving him] such a flogging as slaves seldom get" (58). Similar to the scene in Douglass, the other slaves who rescue Williams from the overseer's dog refuse to aid the overseer, who then commences begging for assistance. The ultimate humiliation of the most hated person in charge is opposed to Williams's logical defiance of the overseer's authority when he claims that "as he was no longer in Virginia, he would not submit to such chastisement" (57-58). For the first time, the forced geographical relocation to New York State opens new possibilities for the slaves. Williams, having decided the overseer had received enough lashes (and thereby, again, asserting his control of the situation through a reversal of roles), takes a boat and escapes by water. The overseer is unable to catch Williams, though now armed with a rifle, and is left "crestfallen and unrevenged" (59). The slaves have successfully achieved the defeat of the overseer, who eventually returns to Virginia where, as Steward sarcastically observes, "he could beat slaves without himself receiving a cowhiding" (59). Curiously, despite Williams's successful stance against the system of slavery and his escape, which is the result of a community effort, Steward makes no further comment on the consequences or implications of this incident for the remaining slaves.

20 The scenario recalls the aftermath of other examples like Nat Turner's rebellion, which would have been familiar to both southern and northern readers.

21 The scene famously takes place in ch. X in Douglass' *Narrative* (1845).

The stories take a violent turn in the drama of Daniel Furr, a Black man, and his wife, a white woman. Here, racial prejudice reaches a life-threatening high. Their decision to marry immediately triggers ferocious opposition in Rochester. When they can find "no one to perform the marriage ceremony in the village," they finally resort to Steward "to accompany them" (134). Interracial marriage, however, proves a contentious matter even for him. Though Steward concludes "that [he] could take no active part in the affair, nor bear any responsible station," he does join them once he learns that "all the mischief was already done" (134). In the middle of the night, they reach the magistrate's house, who only marries the two after great hesitancy and after all attempts to dissuade the young woman (not Furr, significantly) have failed (see 135). The sensational news of the marriage quickly spread in Rochester, causing "threats of alarming character" against the newlyweds (135). Indeed, shortly after their marriage, Furr spends an evening drinking with a class of "pretended friends" and falls seriously ill quickly after (136).[22] Again, Steward is called on for assistance. He describes the doctor's reaction as more than suspicious, condemning the suffering Furr to a sudden death. Steward bitterly remarks, "so it proved, though not so speedily as the medical man had predicted; nor did he ever visit him again, notwithstanding he lingered for several days in the most intense agony" (136).

The tragedy of Furr's death is heightened even when his young widow dies during childbirth, along with her baby. Steward's sentimental tone relates their end to the evils of slavery (see 137). After the description of Furr's sad burial, therefore, Steward clearly positions himself on the matter. "It has ever been my conviction that Furr was poisoned, most likely by some of his false friends who must have mingled some deadly drug with his drinks or food; nor do I believe that the medicine administered by the physician was designed to save his life" (137). Even years after the actual event, featuring the Furrs' story in his narrative is still an important statement. Although Steward himself seems to have no favorable position on interracial marriage, a contentious issue in abolitionism as well, the story of the Furrs transcends an anti-slavery impetus and stands as an important record of the injustice inflicted on the young couple as a part of Rochester's early history of discrimination and racism.

Fugitives

Out of the many different stories included in *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, a substantial number concerns fugitive slaves. As Steward awaits clarification on his status as a free man, for instance, it is the energetic fugitive woman Milly who

22 Steward himself will later be poisoned by tea, but survives (see ch. XXVIII).

inspires Steward to forget his scruples attached to fugitivity and flee from Helm (see ch. XI). She quickly disappears without a word from the narrative, but her presence triggers a crucial step in the plot. This seems to leave her as a narratological tool and yet, her name and brief influence on Steward are noted. Other fugitive slave stories move away from Steward's own life, but stand as records of individual fates, slavery's tentacles in free and enslaved territory, and how these individual fates relate to collective ones, such as those of the Wilberforce settlers.

The case of Ellen, for example, describes how the force of the first Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 came to bear in Ontario/Genesee county. Ellen arrives in Rochester at the time of the Carthage Bridge disaster in 1822, but is arrested and finally returned to bondage (139).[23] As Steward explains, "nothing short of an open violation of the law of the land, could prevent her return" (140). Ellen's case is significant in the genealogy of the numerous fugitive cases whose number would increase in the decade after 1850, when the narrative was written. Ellen's being escorted from the village by a military cortege after her trial strongly echoes with the much later procession of Anthony Burns (1834-1862), who was carried through the streets of Boston to the harbor in broad daylight and for thousands of spectators to witness.[24] Despite his polemic anti-slavery language, Steward succeeds in conveying Ellen's humiliation as a human being and as a woman inherent in the return as a public show. He also points out the bitter ridicule in having a defenseless fugitive woman led out of the village with military pomp: "She indeed must have required this military parade - this show of power! And that too, by men who throw up their caps with a shout for freedom and equal rights!" (140).

The bitter defeat of Ellen contrasts ever more strongly with the case of "Doctor Davis," which Steward recounts simultaneously. Davis's case, arrested as a fugitive from Kentucky, not only exemplifies a typical fugitive rescue case but also functions as a powerful narratological strategy at this point in the narrative.[25]

23 For a detailed contemporary account on the Carthage Bridge, see O'Reilly's *Sketches of Rochester* (1838).

24 Although Burns was famously shipped back into slavery only in 1854, three years before the narrative was published, it had such an impact in the North that it might easily have influenced the author.

25 Pease and Pease have pointed out that Steward did not represent the typical fugitive. "Doc Davis" does, according to their definition, as his case does feature the "exciting drama" of disguise and pursuit (Introduction ix-x). Davis's case reminds us, for example, of Ellen and William Craft, who are prime examples for the use of disguise and passing, or Shadrach Minkins, an escaped slave, who was forced from the Boston

His arrest creates much "excitement," particularly among the Black community (140-41). The court room is packed on the day of the trial, as such cases usually drew large crowds, but some of his friends manage to disguise Davis and usher him out of the room and send him on to Canada (141). The Kentucky slave catchers, however, quickly notice his disappearance and offer a fifty-dollar reward for his return. The distribution of the handbill featuring the reward sum leads to Davis's betrayal and recapture. The dramatic climax of the episode is Davis's emotional lament after his arrest. Like William "Jerry" Henry, in whose rescue Samuel Ringgold Ward would become involved in 1851, Davis, too, issues Patrick Henry's dramatic "Give me liberty or death! Or death!" before he attempts suicide (143). The onlookers of the scene immediately denounce the institution of slavery. The Kentucky slave catchers, accordingly, have to give Davis up for dead and are driven out of town (143). Davis's friends, subsequently, are able to take care of him and see to his recovery, after which he is finally assisted in crossing over into Canada.

Davis's case is thus relevant for various reasons. First and foremost, it represents the opposite of Ellen's recapture, who was returned to slavery. Davis's is the case of a fugitive man, not a woman, and although he, too, experiences the public display of his case as well as his body, there are no sexual or voyeuristic innuendoes as with Ellen. Davis has a voice in order to function as the model refugee (choosing death over slavery) and his escape story is cast entirely in the current anti-slavery rhetoric of the day, combining sentimental and revolutionary language, denouncing slavery as an institution along with its dehumanizing features, which seems to appropriate the Davis case for "the cause." Part of the appropriation of his story concerns the role of Canada, which here figures prominently in its mythical function as a safe haven for all refugees: "[T]he poor slave […] must fly from this boasted land of liberty, to seek protection in the dominion of England's Queen!" (142). Davis's case as a success story is a strategic counterpoint to Ellen's tragic return to slavery, and its position at the end of a chapter leaves readers with the "right" (i.e., anti-slavery) impression of the peculiar institution.

The fate of Rosa and Joe, fugitive slaves from Virginia like Steward, move the significance of such stories across the border into Canada West. Theirs represents a complete, self-contained story at the heart of what characterizes the colony of Wilberforce. Steward points out that as a Black settlement, Wilberforce offers "many a thrilling narrative," emphasizing the plethora of fugitives assembled in

courtroom by activists and escaped into Canada. The case occurred in February 1851. See William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860); Collison, *Shadrack Minkins* (1997).

the colony (203). Appealing to his abolitionist readership and their hunger for sensationalism, he chooses Rosa and Joe as representatives of these "hair-breadth-escapes from the slave-land" (203). At the same time, he fashions himself as the mediator of their story, or their amanuensis, vowing to tell the story "as 'twas told to [him]" (203).[26] Rosa and Joe are set in the context of Wilberforce as an obvious defiance of white racist assumptions about free Blacks. The industry of the Wilberforce settlers is meant to "show […] to the world that they were in no way inferior to the white population" and moreover, to "prove […] that the colored man can not only take care of himself, but is capable of improvement," despite the fact that many settlers have arrived only recently and thus have enjoyed freedom for only a brief amount of time (202).

The story of Rosa and Joe reads like a sentimental novella. They represent the stereotypical slave couple: Joe is the more daring, determined husband willing to risk his life for freedom as soon as he hears that both are to be sold south. Rosa, on the contrary, is stylized into the fearsome, weak, dependent wife scared to lose her "old plantation where [they] were born," but who submits to her husband (204).[27] As they set out on their escape journey, they follow two core topoi of fugitive slave accounts: the North Star for guidance, and the woods for protection and hiding (see 204).[28] The woods, which soon turn into a dangerous "wilderness", as Rosa had feared, bring the two fugitives close to starvation. Disoriented and exhausted, they become indeed "bewildered" and completely

26 The choice of words here is important: nowhere else in the narrative does Steward employ an expression similar to "'twas" (203). It is in line with the dramatic tone of Rosa and Joe's story, and possibly meant to underline his identity as amanuensis and story-teller. If one looked for editorial intervention in Steward's narrative, this chapter would probably qualify as the most serious contestant. Its sentimental language and phrasings seem to correspond too readily to a typical fugitive slave drama cut out for an abolitionist audience.

27 The narrator, trying to distance himself again from 'ordinary' Black people, here marks Rosa and Joe's superstition as a characteristic trait of "most slaves" (206). Given the fact, however, that he himself is frequently plagued by forebodings and dreams, and believes in their significance, he inadvertently becomes one of them.

28 The story even features a quote from poet John Pierpont's (1785-1866) "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe to the North Star" (1839): "Star of the North! though night winds drift the fleecy drapery of the sky,/ Between thy lamp and thee, I lift, yea, lift with hope my sleepless eye" (205).

absorbed by the density of the surroundings for several days (205).[29] After several turns, Joe and Rosa escape discovery by their former master and haste to Cincinnati, only to join other Blacks for the Wilberforce project. Steward fashions their story as one of success, well fit for a country that seems to be made to support survivors like Joe and Rosa and their happy endings: in Wilberforce, he explains, "they are in no danger of the auction block, or of a Southern market; and are as much devoted to each other as ever" (209). This happy-end, I argue, is not only an important reminder of black success and the potential of Canada West as an apt place for such promising settlers; the story should also stand as a forceful reminder for Steward himself who will struggle to make sense of his years in Wilberforce. Rosa and Joe stand in for all the other fugitives in the colony who make up the fabric of the settlement.

"Indians"

The appearance of "othered" characters in the form of First Nations representatives is not unproblematic in Steward's narrative. While their presence is used to typify a "Canadian" setting, Steward's appropriation of their stories, his stereotypical descriptions and use of language, and not least his use of "mock Indians" remain difficult to incorporate in his narrative project. Their presence might suggest, as I argue, a possible alliance for non-white settlers in white Canada, as Steward opens to them use of the label "fugitive" as a marker of inclusion. His treatment of these characters as his narrative subjects, however, also suggests an implicit hierarchy in which he determines their degrees of "aptness" to fit into such an important category.

The first appearance of "Indian" characters both uses and undermines the topic of the "Other." On a typical Canadian winter evening, Steward and his family receive an unexpected visit from three men whom he "suppose[s] to be three Indians," according to their clothes, which identify them as "red men of the forest" (211-12).[30] However, because of their "voice" and their suspicious behavior, Steward quickly recognizes them not only as non-Indian but also as non-Canadian (211-12). The Stewards quickly make out their guests as "belong[ing] to that race

29 The "wilderness" becomes the "woods" again as soon as they find assistance from the man to whom Joe turns for help. He tells Joe to stay in the forest with Rosa for the night before coming out in the open, a life-saving advice as it turns out (207).

30 Steward mentions "piercing cold," "the snow four feet deep," and "snow-shoes" as a kind of cultural artifact. A brief mention of his house being "situated on the king's highway" helps to enhance the "Canadian" ambience of the passage (211).

who had so long looked haughtily down upon the colored people" (212). As Steward observes not without some amusement, they gave themselves away in being surprised to find "the least exhibition of comfort, or show of refinement" in the house of a Black family (212). In turn, "the smell [of] coffee" reveals the couple as being "from the States," which leaves the newcomers rather puzzled (212). After the wife finally recognizes one of the men as from Canandaigua's high society, the three "mock Indians" cast off their "savage costume," as they are assured to be "among friends now" (212-13). Eventually, the guests also disclose the purpose of their costumes in this cross-border cultural mix-up: they had been trading "in the wilderness"—presumably with First Nations—for "valuable furs," evoking the ur-Canadian topos of the *coureur de bois* (213).[31]

Steward goes on to dedicate a whole chapter to "Incidents and Peculiarities of the Indians" (ch. XXVI). While it does shed at least some light on the relations between First Nations and Black pioneer settlers, the chapter also problematizes Steward's role as quasi-ethnographer.[32] It oscillates between obviously stereotypical representations of "the Indian" and the playful undermining of the cultural appropriations at work. Steward identifies with the anonymous representatives of "the Indians" first by virtue of their regular visits to Wilberforce, "which gave us an opportunity to learn their character, habits and disposition," but also by virtue of his recognition of the First Nations as "that abused people" (223).

Two imbalanced episodes suffice Steward to lay claim to knowing "the Indians" quite thoroughly. The first incident he relates has one man appear at the tavern in the middle of the night. "Had he been in his own wigwam, he could not have looked about him with more satisfaction and independence," Steward explains, delving into the stereotype of an alleged strong-willed Indian character (223). He follows this image in the description of the man's 'habits' (sleeping on the floor, noiseless movements) and his speech ("Me lost in the woods," 223).[33] The brief visit of the man, who is looking for a place to stay for one night, might

31 Unlicensed fur traders in New France, engaging in the trade with the First Nations, which was crucial for the colonial economy, "often in defiance of the law. […] The fur trade frontier had become a law unto itself" (Conrad 60).

32 Trudel treats encounters between First Nations and Blacks in New France, as well as their involvement in slavery both as slave owners and enslaved people. A lot of work remains to be done in the field, however.

33 One of the gravest instances of regurgitating stereotypes comes with Steward's assertion that "he would have scorned to injure any one beneath the roof that gave him shelter, unless he had been intoxicated" (224).

be meant primarily to entice the reader's interest in giving one exotic glimpse at life in Canada.

The second incident, however, is a more intricate play between appropriation and reappropriation. Similar to the young alleged smuggler Cannouse, the Indian's uprighteousness intrigues Steward, as we learn from "his history" (225). Although Steward willingly advertises this story of the "old warrior," the latter remains conspicuously anonymous, and is more reminiscent of a stand-in than a fully developed character (226). We do not learn his name nor his tribal origins, and as Steward entirely controls his story including his appearance, speech, and thoughts, it becomes clear that the "Indian" serves as a medium of another fugitive story and as Steward's vehicle to reflect on the future of Black people.[34]

Indeed, the warrior stands out for having lived what Steward perceives to be an honorable life. From his youth a "great warrior," he knew and fought at the side of Shawnee chief Tecumseh (1768-1813), and participated in the Federation that allied with the British to fight against the United States in the War of 1812 (225).[35] Having assisted in the Battle of the Thames, when Tecumseh fell "on the fifth of October, 1813," emphasizes the warrior's deep veneration of the chief.[36] Tecumseh is idealized as a great, generous, just chief and warrior, protecting even the feeble "pale face" in battle (225). After the war, the warrior buys land to settle in peace, but an envious (white) neighbor tricks him out of his possession, which establishes an obvious parallel to Steward's flawed land deal with Israel Lewis. His alliance with Britain turns against him now, as he not only loses his land but is also jailed and sent South along with a group of prisoners to be tried as a traitor (see 226). After a stop on the way to Detroit, one of the guards enjoys a sentimental reunion with his aged mother who gives her last surviving son an "American mother's blessing" (227). Steward emphasizes that the Indian warrior observed

34 While at the moment of his appearance at Steward's tavern, he addresses the daughter in impeccable English ("Will my little lady please to give me a drink of water?" 224), his speech is assimilated in the following to the somewhat broken speech pattern used in stereotypical representations ("'Me *must* get a rifle,'" 229; original emphasis).

35 A subtle undertone might be read into this observation; first because the War of 1812 also saw many Blacks take up arms for Britain, and because loyalty to Britain in the event of war was often emphasized in the discourse among Black leaders at the time (see *BAP* 87-94).

36 The Battle of the Thames took place near today's Chatham, ON. Chatham is an important location in Black Canadian history, as it had a substantial Black (refugee) community in the nineteenth century. It was, however, also known for its problems with racism and discrimination against Black residents, as Benjamin Drew noted on his tour through Canada West (see Drew 235-39).

very attentively what was happening in order to contradict the set opinion of some who would call him "heartless" (227). Thus, Steward does rely on racial stereotypes of the warrior while he defends him at the same time.

This strategy becomes clearer when the party stops in Detroit, where the warrior decides to escape. He seems superior and aloof throughout the episode to be able to simply "[make] up his mind to leave, which with the red man is paramount to an accomplishment of his design" (227-28). Managing to free himself from the attic of a hotel where the prisoners are kept, he plans also to take with him the fur coat of none less than General Isaack Brock, another Canadian war hero of 1812, which is to be exposed in the town (see 228). At this moment, however, the warrior is made to remember "that old pale-faced mother," as he is made to say, and pity for her does not only make him leave the coat where it is but return to "his attic prison" (228). For the moment, he gives in to his captivity, becoming the idealized embodiment of the "noble savage."

After the arrival in Virginia, however, there is no trial and the warrior is treated no better than a slave, as Steward observes. In the spring, he attempts to escape again. He manages to trick a pioneer woman out of her rifle and finally reaches his old farm. Here, he consciously makes use of the stereotypes that whites have adopted of him: "giving himself the most frightful appearance possible," he enters his house and starts to play with its new inhabitants, ordering them about and threatening them with his mock-"frightful attitude," succeeding in driving them off his property (230). The warrior literally re-appropriates his land and his life. In his story, Steward brings to bear the explicit parallel between the Indian and himself, as the former's dispossession "reminded me of the injustice practiced on myself, and the colored race generally" (230). In fact, the warrior's cross-border story of escape bears many similarities to Steward's own. What is more, the Indian warrior remains an anonymous stand-in so that his parable can be applied to aspects of the larger framework of the Black freedom struggle. Steward relates to instances of white suspicion that Black (and First Nations) property owners face (see 230-31), and muses on the relevance of the "vanishing Indian" trope to the black population: "I have often wondered, when looking at the remnant of that once powerful race, whether the black man would become extinct and his race die out, as have the red men of the forest" (231). However, he insists on the decisive difference between the two: according to his conviction, "the colored man has yet a prominent part to act in this highly-favored Republic" (231).

5.3 CROSS-BORDER STORIES OF CANADA WEST

Steward's storytelling creates two different portraits of Canada West as a potential place of settlement for black emigrants. One is centered on Steward as a successful, respected Rochester businessman who moves to Canada West to be involved in the all-Black settlement experiment in Wilberforce. After several years of serving as its president, at the heart of the struggle with Israel Lewis, Steward returns to Rochester, NY, frustrated and disappointed. The second portrait sees him visiting Canada West again a few years later, this time as part of the African Methodist Episcopal Conference. This visit to fellow church members in Canada West also constitutes a tour of famous Canadian symbols and sites, which leaves a more positive and proud impression of the province with regard to black expectations. Without referencing Steward's own previous Canadian years, the curious gap between the two portraits leaves an unresolved picture of Canada as the "Promised Land" for black settlers.

Steward's decision to move to Canada West to begin, essentially, an adventure in an unknown land, gains gravity when considering his life as a businessman in Rochester, NY, which he leaves behind. It is here that he begins his professional and personal career as a freeman, first as a peddler, later as the owner of a meat market. Steward underlines his decision to settle in town after his first visit in the winter of 1816 as his "chosen place of [his] destination" (129). In fact, he elaborates extensively on Rochester's history and race relations in the young town; with Rochester being established only in 1811, Steward is truly one of its pioneer citizens and gives important insights into the life of its early years.[37] Prospering, increasing his business and landed property, he marries an "intelligent and amiable Miss B—," a daughter of "a particular friend" in May, 1825 (149). As an inhabitant of Rochester, Steward witnesses the official abolition of slavery in New York State in 1827. He describes the black community's emancipation celebrations on July 5, 1827, as he delivers the Emancipation Day speech, a great honor underlining his respected position in Rochester (see ch. XVII).

37 For example, he recalls that, though Rochester was rapidly thriving and developing into the economic center of the region in rivalry to Carthage, "the surrounding country was mostly a wilderness. Mr. E. Stone, who then owned the land on the east side of the river, thought his farm a very poor one; he, however, commenced clearing it in the midst of wild beasts and rattlesnakes, both of which were abundant, and in a few years was richly rewarded for his labor, in the sale of village lots, which commanded high prices" (131-32).

The project of Wilberforce originates in the reactions to a severe race riot in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1829. In a series of conventions, the decision is made to "establish a colony in Canada" (176). In view of the recent race riot, this decision turns Canada into a potential shelter "from this boasted free Republic" (178). The resolutions of the a solidarity meeting in Rochester shortly after explicitly pick up the diction of the Declaration of Independence to justify the move across the border, a fact which plays on the common contemporary trope of Canada as the "*true*" and better America (Clarke, "'No Hearsay'" 26).[38]

The first impressions from and about Canada West that Steward includes are conflictive, however. Israel Lewis, who had been sent to Canada West by the group of Cincinnati Blacks to make arrangements for settlement, returns from his land negotiations with the Canada Company with reports of a group of settlers in Canada West living under harsh conditions and in a "state of actual starvation" in the "dense woods" (Steward 179). He calls for help on his fellow Blacks, particularly on Steward. The latter finally agrees to join the project, explaining his motivation to "try to do some good; to be of some little service in the great cause of humanity" (179). His statement reveals his Christian incentive as someone who had "just made a public profession of [his] faith," but it also points to the insecure and experimental character of the settlement in Canada West (179). In fact, he will soon see for himself what Lewis meant by his report.

To follow up on his promise, he leaves Rochester for Toronto in order to convince himself personally of the status quo. His trip constitutes the first of many across the border into Canada West and back. His first journey from Rochester to the settlement via Toronto (York, at the time) and Ancaster gives insight into a "new country," referring here literally to the pioneer setting (179). He witnesses "hard traveling" on "bad roads," few inhabitants, and the "destitute circumstances" of the first Cincinnati settlers upon their arrival (179-80).[39] Steward explains that the piece of land for the settlement was initially nothing but "one unbroken wilderness"—a characteristic feature of their new Canadian home—and that the first harvest was still "ripen[ing]," causing the settlers' temporary hardships (180). However, "a few rude log cabins" had already been

38 The passage from the narrative reads as follows: "That when a class of men so far forget the duty they owe to God, their fellow men, and their country, as to trample under their feet the very laws they have made, and are in duty bound to obey and execute, we believe it to be the duty of our brethren and fellow citizens, to protect their lives against such lawless mobs; and if in the conflict, any of the mobocrats perish, every good citizen should say Amen" (177).

39 Hodges explains that only between 300 and 500 people went to take up settlement in Canada, but that no more than 200 were at Wilberforce ever (see xx-xxi).

set up and the pioneers were busy (180). Right after Steward's arrival, they set about their settlement's administrative and formal organization. Just one "day after [he] arrived at the settlement," they look for an adequate name (180). Steward is the one to make the decisive suggestion: he opts for Wilberforce, "in honor of the great [English] philanthropist"—firmly rooting the settlement in the context of English abolitionism and therefore, Great Britain's protection (180).[40]

The project of Wilberforce is designed as an all-Black enterprise, although it has to rely on the financial support of philanthropists (see *BAP* 47). It is the first in a series of settlement efforts, which heightens its significance from its inception.[41] Returning from this short first visit, Steward therefore hastens to relativize Lewis's initial reports which had confirmed the stereotype of the "cold and dreary [Canadian] wilds" (Steward 178). He admits that the life of the settlers is still characterized by "hardships and privations of a new settlement," but it seems an incentive to him, a challenge with the possibility of improvement (181). Therefore, he decides to move to Canada West with his family—a brief sentence only announcing a life changing move for the successful Rochesterite (see 181).

In fact, Steward delivers the first promotional report of Wilberforce to frame the project within the rhetoric of a Canadian haven. From its concrete geographical location to its agricultural potential, Wilberforce is symbolically heightened to an "asylum for the oppressed" which "guid[es them] by its beacon light of liberty" (182). This also continues the "American" rhetoric of the convention. In Wilberforce, Steward explains, people will not only find a new "home" but opportunities of education and self-development by "obtain[ing] a competency for themselves" (182). Steward's and Benjamin Paul's letter to John G. Stewart, for example, written only three months after Steward's arrival in the settlement, reads as an "early progress report" (*BAP* 47). It reflects the work of the settlers on housing and farming, as well as their religion and education. A truly enthusiastic and optimistic account of Wilberforce, however, is the report by Steward's friend, the abolitionist Benjamin Lundy.[42] He published his report on his visit to Wilberforce along with a travelogue in his own paper, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, in March 1832. Lundy's description of the colony follows an

40 William Wilberforce (1759-1833), British politician, known for his labors in favor of the abolition of slavery.

41 Wilberforce was followed by Dawn in 1842, the Elgin settlement and the Buxton Mission in 1849, and finally, the R(efugee) H(ome) S(ociety) program in 1851. See Simpson, Winks.

42 Benjamin Lundy (1789- 1839), American abolitionist and anti-slavery activist, issued his own anti-slavery paper, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* from 1821-1839, when he died.

obvious abolitionist agenda and wants to be an enticement for Black Americans to immigrate to Canada (see Landon, "Diary" 110). It is brimming with praise for both the location of Wilberforce and its potential, as well as for the settlers themselves. It is instructive in its detail on the settlers' work and is firm in its conclusion that "Wilberforce will be, by far, the most important […] nucleus for an extensive emigration from the [United States]" (Landon, "Diary" 116). Lundy succeeds in believably stressing that "the colony had good prospects" (Hodges xxii).

In spite of these promotional accounts, a negative air hovers about Wilberforce's beginnings. After his first visit, Steward is well aware of the opposition to the settlement, which is only a slight hint at the difficult race relations in Canada West facing the influx of Black refugees from the United States.[43] At this point in the project, though, Steward is still infused with his dedication to the colony and his Christian motivation to assist in the establishment of the settlement. In underlining his "purest motives" and "honest purpose," he separates himself not only from the opposition to Wilberforce, but also from a second dangerous group, namely those whose motivations are led by financial gain (182). From the start, therefore, Wilberforce oscillates between being the space for both ideals and 'dishonest' motivations.

Despite his professed dedication to the project, Steward's preparations to leave for Canada West are accompanied by mixed feelings. Entreated by his friends to stay in Rochester, he is at the same time plagued by "forebodings of evil" that add to his worries about the impending journey (183). He experiences "frightful dreams," which contribute to the gothic character of his arrival in Wilberforce as seemingly bad "omens" for his undertaking (183-84). The fact that he feels no consolation from God during this time, although he had cast Wilberforce as an explicitly Christian project, intensifies the atmosphere of anxiety (183). It turns out that the actual journey to Wilberforce is far from agreeable. Leaving Rochester in May of 1831, "[n]otwithstanding these omens," Steward and his family experience unfavorable winds that extend their journey via Buffalo and Port Stanley (Ontario) considerably (184). Stopping at Port Stanley on Lake Erie to pursue the journey toward London, Steward is struck by the "very wild and picturesque […] appearance" of the small town (184). His choice of words is characteristic not only of a romantic idea of the wild but also of a common association with Canada's wilderness. Indeed, their spirits seem to brighten as they pursue the itinerary to their "wild and new home" (185). It is worthy to note the

43 Ripley describes that "Canadian racial attitudes often resembled those of northern whites, and some Canadians opposed the formation of black settlements. The situation worsened in the 1850s" (*BAP* 72n13).

double significance of "new" here: it is not so much the question of Canada West and Wilberforce being "new" places and the new homes for Steward and his family to discover but rather that the "newness" of the country refers to untouched nature evoking the pioneer setting Steward finds himself in.

Although the family's arrival in Wilberforce is followed by Steward's appointment as president, life there is quickly overshadowed by the inner conflicts in the colony. At first, Steward's high position seems to promise hope. Indeed, he identifies relatively quickly as "one of [the settlers]" (185). This identification and mutual acceptance of Steward as a member and leader of the settler group speak for his standing and reputation that seem to have transferred without question from Rochester to Canada West. It also puts into focus his emerging cross-border identity as a highly public and publicized figure, being a leading member of his communities in New York and now, Wilberforce. By consequence, "reputation" and "character" become key terms for his involvement in Wilberforce. As the Conventional Board in Philadelphia remind him in a letter, he must "have an eye to character, knowing full well that by that alone you must *stand* or *fall*" (345; original emphasis).[44] The dominance in the narrative of the conflict in the colony contrasts with the description of daily settler life in Wilberforce. In fact, two motifs are prominent in his elaborations on life in Wilberforce, the recurrence of wild animals and the woods, and the mention of foreboding dreams. Taken together, they create somewhat of a Gothic atmosphere around Canada West, which reflects both what is taken to be a "Canadian" feature (wild nature) and the dangers of inner-communal conflict.

As Steward briefly moves away from Israel Lewis's misconduct, life in Wilberforce emerges with a strong reference to pioneer literature in Canada. The chapter entitled "Roughing it in the Wilds of Canada" recalls, most prominently, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852).[45] The chapter is concerned with one main theme, land, both with its actual purchase as the prerequisite of Wilberforce's survival and its characteristics as part of the "new home" in the "new land." Moreover, Steward reports two encounters with wild animals as a

44 The Philadelphia Convention elects Steward as their "*General Corresponding Agent* for the Wilberforce Settlement" (Steward 344; original emphasis).

45 Clarke has pointed to Moodie's activities as "antislavery editor" and her involvement in "the transcription and editing" of the narratives by Mary Prince and Ashton Warner ("'No Hearsay'" 12-13). Clarke suggests that *Roughing It* might be read "intertextually with Prince," but warns that "such a 'stealth' reading must underline, again, the invisibility of the slave narrative in Canadian literature" (13). Still, I would like to suggest that an allusion to Moodie seems more probable considering that her well-known book appeared five years before Steward's narrative.

distinctive feature of this kind of life at Wilberforce. In the first instance, he is alone and hunting for deer with his dog, when he suddenly faces two wolves whom he manages to kill, eventually. In the second instances, he describes a bear with his cubs taking possession of the settler children's playhouse. They leave before being shot, but the children "soon desert" their playground which their "unbidden guests" had appropriated (194). For Steward, these episodes underline the dominant facet of their new home in Canada, whose "forest[s] abounded with deer, wolves, bears, and other wild animals" (194). Even after roughly a year in Wilberforce, the settlers still live a difficult pioneer life and, Steward explains, "such incidents are common in a new country, surrounded as we were by a dense wilderness" (195). The bears leave the settlers "somewhat alarmed for their safety," but they rationalize their presence as a feature of their pioneer reality (194). Steward, finding himself out of munition after he shot the first wolf, improvises another ball out of a beech limb, thus managing a dangerous confrontational situation (193). He shows adaptability and a certain amount of control of their natural surroundings, not least when he sells the wolves' skins "for nine dollars and a half, - making pretty good wages for a few hours labor" (194). In this light, the hunting episodes represent moments of success that contrast with the overall bleak situation of the colony.

Other appearances of wild animals are less encouraging, however, and play into the underlying tone of anxiety connected to Wilberforce. The "bad omen" that plagued Steward before leaving Rochester was in fact a bad dream involving wild animals. He recalls his dream about snakes on the road from Rochester to Genesee River, and being spread all over Lake Ontario's shore. The snake as a treacherous animal in Christian symbolism might foreshadow the "treachery" of Israel Lewis regarding Wilberforce's finances. In the same dream, "A large bird like an eagle"—the eagle being usually associated with the United States—is flying south from Lake Ontario, in what appears to be a movement away from Canada West (184). Clarke has remarked that some slave narratives "exhibit […], then, the stuff of historical romance, as well as the murky, labyrinthine, Gothic terror demanding the stoic, yet active, heroic response" ("'No Hearsay'" 30). In Steward's dreams, they in fact assume prophetic qualities that challenge him to act in certain ways.

Finally, with the feud in the colony deteriorating, Steward decides to return to the United States. The fact that he is elected township clerk, a newly created office in Canada West, cannot change his decision, although his election constitutes a remuneration for his endurance, the trials he underwent with his opponent, and proof of the "entire confidence, and respect shown [him] by [his] townsmen, after all the cruel persecutions" (261). As Steward explains, a new law in the province provides for the constitution of a board, in each township,

consistent of three commissioners and one township clerk and "possessing all the power of a court, in relation to township business" (260). While this important office serves to highlight his standing in the colony, it serves Steward to ponder the significance of this law for Black life in Canada. In fact, as he explains, the law holds great potential and possibilities for the black settlers to become involved in township politics by their own vote and by actually becoming elected to these positions: "[I]n the township of Bidulph (sic), the colored people were a large majority of the inhabitants, which *gave us the power to elect* commissioners *from our own settlement*, and therefore, three black men where duly chosen […]" (261; added emphasis).

Conscious of the power the Black settlers exert by their numbers and their willingness to make use of the vote, Steward also casts this empowerment in the context of a great Canadian achievement: by becoming township clerk, he sees "the same power given him as though he had been born in Her Brittanic (sic) Majesty's dominion, with a face as white as the driven snow" (261). This crucial passage on the idea of equal rights in Canada also expresses the loyalty toward Great Britain. What is more, Steward emphasizes the possibility to exercise one of the most crucial rights of a citizen, with the vote being usually singled out as one of the greatest concrete offers of immigration to Canada. This short passage casts Wilberforce, for the first time, in an explicitly political context.

In the end, however, as Steward reviews his Canadian years, his conclusion is one of both personal and political disappointment. Indeed, his final assessment of his 'two lives' on both sides of the border is as complex as it is ambivalent, and predicated on an abolitionist discourse all too often based on the binary opposition "United States versus Canada." Musing on his personal development from slavery to "entire independence" and his image as a self-made man, Steward realizes that he had acquired all this "competency" before setting foot in Canada West (269). It was in Rochester, he claims, as an independent, well-situated businessman with a solid education, that "comfort and happiness of myself and family, required no further exertion on my part to better our worldly condition" (269). In fact, now that he feels close to his return to Rochester, he idealizes his life in the city as well as in the United States in general.

Doing so, he also comes to reverse the trope within abolitionism that casts Canada as a haven for fugitive slaves from persecution and the land of abundance. If Clarke had asserted that many slave narratives made Canada "the *true* land of opportunity," the discourse of superiority is here again brought back to bear on the United States as "one of the best countries on the earth" (Clarke, "'No Hearsay'" 26; Steward 269). For Steward, this quality is defined by "friends, - good and intelligent society, and some of the noblest specimens of Christian philanthropy"

along with "persons of refinement and cultivation" to surround his family with (269). Just as he had logically deducted the emigration to Canada as a necessity a few years prior, he now rationally explains that, given the circumstances in Rochester, "it cannot be thought very strange that they [his family] should desire to return" (269). Canada West, in turn, becomes the land of personal sacrifice and trial. Steward underlines that his family had not only given up everything to accompany him to a new land but had received "little less than care, labor and sorrow" in return (269). In fact, Samuel E. Cornish, a friend of Steward's, congratulates him on his and his family's return, claiming that "your Colony is by no means suited to her [Mrs. Steward's] talents and refined mind. She never could be happy there" (356).

Aside from personal disappointment, Steward had held higher hopes for the community of Wilberforce, too. First, he had hoped for a geographically more extended settlement by the "purchase [of] the whole township of Bidulph (sic)," a plan which was destroyed by poor choices of agents (270). Second, given the number of colonists, he underlines his great disappointment at the foiled prospect of sending "a member to Parliament, one of our own race" (270). Again, he blames both the Canada Company and, by consequence, Israel Lewis, for their "unjust judgment of a whole people, by one dishonest man" (270). The settlers were dependent on this external support for the practical realization of their experiment. In Steward's point of view, the Canada Company has given in all too easily to racist assumptions about free Black people being unfit for business by taking one man as an example. He laments that more "respectable and intelligent colored men" could have emigrated to Wilberforce had land sales not been disrupted (270). Steward's complaints throw light on the expectations and pressure surrounding the idea of Wilberforce. Initially conceived of as the only way out of oppression in the United States, it was well envisioned in theory and started out under favorable auspices (see Lundy). Nevertheless, it possessed an aura of having to work at all costs, creating pressure that materialized not least in the personal feud between the protagonist and Lewis. This observation also heightens the threat individuals like Lewis posed to the collective, ideologically and concretely.

The fact that *Twenty-Two Years a Slave* is almost the only account we have of Wilberforce has led to its being considered primarily a failure (see Pease and Pease, Introduction). On the contrary, I want to argue that Steward's final chapters on Canada West paint a more complex picture of Wilberforce and Canada West. Despite the preponderant sense of failure, he does admit, for example, that "the weight of that cruel prejudice" did thrive in the province (269). On a personal level, however, it was "usually" also met with "all that kindness and confidence, which should exist between man and man" (270). He positively recalls the

comings and goings at his tavern, where he succeeded in winning the trust of his guests and built a reputation for himself. Moreover, once the decision to leave the colony is publicly known, Steward can hardly conceal his pride that people "both in and out of the settlement, [importune him] to remain awhile longer, at least" (271).

The Stewards' farewell scene from Wilberforce has become iconic. It constitutes a direct parallel worthy of note to the family's arrival several years prior. Arriving from Rochester as a wealthy businessman with "five two-horse wagon loads of goods and furniture," the couple now has two more children, yet "now, [their] possessions were only a few articles, in a *one-horse wagon*" (271; original emphasis). Their material losses, however strongly they might bear on the family, contrast with the communal spirit developed over the past years. Enumerating several communal practices, from religious communion to social gatherings to acts of "neighborly kindness" serves to underline the establishment of a close-knit community, where "a mutual regard and friendship had bound us closer to each other" (272). In fact, Steward states that their "Christian brotherhood" held firmly through both "weary days" and "sweet[er]" moments, transcending "the adverse scenes incident to frail human life" (272). Taking into account Steward's motivation in going to Canada based on religious grounds, Wilberforce's community building must to be read as a success, and not as failure. In addition, taking into account the numerous stories that make up the fabric of this community, such as Rosa and Joe's, Cannouse's, the Indian warrior's, etc., it becomes clear that this genealogy of meaningful individuals stands in stark contrast to the sense of failure attached to Wilberforce and forces Steward to revise his assessment of his Canadian years.

Since the years in Wilberforce have been incisive in Steward's life, his own return to Rochester in January 1837 and the whole first year back are heavy with the relicts of his Canadian, or rather cross-border, experience. His return journey from Canada West, for example, is also marked by evil forebodings: Steward observes that his oldest daughter catches a cold during the trip to Rochester, which will eventually lead to her death (see 273). Also, his family now returns to a different town from what they had left and in which they start out again in difficult circumstances. With "not one dollar [left] for the support of [his] family," the Steward feels to have to commit everything to God's care and providence (273). Initially, he feels that his "honest purpose" and labors in the colony have not come to fruition, and assesses his "mission [… as] an entire failure" (290-91). It is only in hindsight that he sees that not everything was "in vain, but that some good did result from [his work]" (291). Thus, despite looking forward to returning to Rochester and reunite with family and friends, he feels wrapped in "gloom like

thick darkness" (291). This despondency is not least attributable to his anxiety about his reception in Rochester. Casting himself indirectly as the biblical prodigal son "reentering the city penniless" on January 23, 1837, he finds himself well received (292).[46] Several Rochester businessmen grant him credit so that he is able to open a store on Main Street soon after his arrival (see 292-93). Taking the trust put in him by these persons as a motivation to excel in "industry and diligence," he soon manages a simple, but "comfortable living for [his] family" (293).

However, Steward' idyll is soon thwarted by the death of his oldest daughter. Having announced her attracting "a violent cold on Lake Erie" as his family returned to the States, he now blames the deprivation of the "comforts of life" in Canada West for her weak health (293). In a special instance of personal and intimate family life descriptions, Steward traces the despair as the couple realize their eleven-year-old "darling child" cannot be cured (294). He shares the existential moment of her death a mere three months after his return to Rochester: "One pleasant morning after passing a restless night, I observed her to gaze earnestly upward, and a moment after I called her name but received no answer" (294). He records April 15, 1837 as the first time that death "had…made [an] inroad in [his] family circle," and foreshadows the death of two more of his children in the following years (295). This scene is the most forceful reminder of the sense of evil surrounding Canada West in the narrative so far. It is also a clear contradiction to the passage across Lake Erie as a positively-connoted episode and topos in slave narratives, as Alyssa MacLean had it (2010). In line with Steward's depiction of Canada West as tied to evil forebodings, Lake Erie becomes the harbinger of death and desperation.

Although the first year back in New York States proves difficult for Steward, who is less lucky in business, runs into debt, and eventually moves to Canandaigua, he still actively participates in community life. As such, he embarks on the AME Conference in New York City, presided over by Bishop Morris Brown (see 299).[47] This tour of AME meetings through several American and Canadian cities is another forceful reminder of Steward's complex relation to both the United States as "home" and Canada West as "adoptive home." Indeed, his

46 The parable of the prodigal son appears in Luke 15:11-32. Steward does not resemble the son's wastefulness as described in the Bible but shares his sense of almost remorseful return to the city that had brought him wealth.

47 Morris Brown (1770-1849), co-founder, with Richard Allen, of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Philadelphia in 1816, founder of the AME Church of Charleston in 1818. In July 1840, Brown organized the AME's Upper Canada Conference in Toronto (see Simpson 46-47; Yee).

obvious disappointment with the province is quickly forgotten as he engages in the AME tour's cross-border trajectory both as observer and commentator of the Black populations in both countries. The New York City conference, which relies on a substantial body of around sixty or seventy participating ministers, lasts for around ten days in the city before moving on "to the West" (300). Steward does not give details on who exactly, aside from Bishop Brown, makes up the group of travelers, only that, after a short stop at Rochester, they cross the border into Canada West "where a conference was to be holden" at Hamilton, Ontario (300). Reminiscent of Richard Warren's narrative, Steward implicitly sheds light on the cross-border cooperations within the AME Church and its communities. Moreover, Steward resumes his role as observer-chronicler and offers a new view on Canada West, which had before been limited to the Wilberforce colony and the township of Biddulph. Now, following the geography of the tour to on both sides of the border produces a very different image of Canada West.

Arriving in Hamilton, Steward observes the Black soldiers stationed in the city by "the English government," making it a thing of everyday life there "to meet every few rods, a colored man in uniform, with a sword at his side" (300). He readily establishes the contrast between the "English government," a monarchy, and "this *free republic*" where Blacks are yet excluded from the military (300; original emphasis). But not only is Hamilton as such different from the New York City environment, the conferences, too, take place under different auspices. As a guest in Canada West, Bishop Brown opens the convention "under the authority of Her Brittanic (sic) Majesty," imbued with a "solemnity" that spreads to the audience (300). Steward draws a highly favorable image of the Hamilton convention, which profits from a large mixed audience and is embedded in several community activities (301). The conference leaders are invited to inspect the city and the conditions of its many fugitive slaves, who are engaged in work and church-building (301). They pay the usual "social calls" to local community leaders and members and "conver[t]" many to the faith (302). Steward obviously prefers the Hamilton setting to New York City, both for a "more interesting" conference and a different situation of the Black population (300). "The colored people were much more numerous in Hamilton, and in far better circumstances than in New York," he observes (301). On the contrary, he elaborates on New York City as a classic example of Black urban poverty marked by housing discrimination and "squalid" living conditions which have only begun to change at the time of his writing the narrative (301). Slowly reinserting Canadian greatness into his text, Steward describes Hamilton as an anti-New York City in the sense that it seems devoid of "that wretchedness and […] drunken rowdyism [of] Eastern cities" (301).

The Hamilton meeting soon turns into an extended sightseeing tour in the area for the American visitors. Interestingly enough, Steward joins these expeditions seemingly as a guest himself: there is no direct mention that he has returned to a province where he lived himself until not too long ago. The places and monuments the party visits almost all represent core Canadiana, making the tour also an exposition of Canadian history and culture while evoking standard topoi of the Canadian wild. This is the case, for example, at the Burlington Heights, north of Hamilton, whose "wild and terrific grandeur" Steward emphasizes (302). Next, the company is given a private tour through the residence of Sir Allan Napier McNab.[48] McNab, a "notorious" and well-known figure at the time not only in the "history of the Canadian revolution" had Dundurn Castle erected, which was completed only in 1835, merely a few years before the visit (302).[49] Steward gives his own impression of McNab's imposing estate and his appreciation of the surroundings "laid out in the English style of princely magnificence" (302). One might observe here that in contrast to Steward's anti-luxury stance, McNab's impressive mansion is cast only in positive terms of "Englishness" and not connected to an overly excessive lifestyle.

After another night spent in Hamilton, a particularly iconic scene follows with the visit of "the Falls" the next morning (303). This visit is embedded in a romantic description of the Hamilton scenery from which the party takes its leave: "the lake was still, no sound was heard but the rushing waves, as our boat moved on through its placid waters, toward our destination" (303). Here, the overwhelming sight of Niagara Falls disrupts the quietude of the morning. Steward is taken aback by the sublime character of nature and the "stupendous work of Almighty God" (303). His appropriation of one of the most iconic Canadian sites and its "awful grandeur" connects, nevertheless, to the infringement of U.S.-American reality: Niagara Falls is the embodiment of the cross-border, manifesting the proximity of the two states through the juncture of the Canadian and American Falls. For Steward, this proximity is linked not only to tourism that brings together people "from all parts of the world" but also to being an attraction for the "idle, swaggering slaveholder" (303). For him, slaveholders make use of their occasional trips to the Falls to "boast […] of [their] wealth," while their slaves are

48 Sir Allan Napier McNab (1798-1862), Canadian statesman, politician, businessman, lawyer. Widely known and controversial public figure in Upper Canada and Canada West (see Baskerville).

49 Steward refers to the Rebellions of 1837/38 in Upper and Lower Canada against the Crown, led by William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861) and Louis Joseph Papineau (1786-1871), respectively.

toiling at home (303). The impression of the Falls therefore carries the stain of the hypocrisy he feels has entered the site.

On their way back to Buffalo in the United States, the party stops at two more significant spots. First, they pass Grand Island, Mordechai Manuel Noah's vision of the erection of the city of Ararat.[50] The parallel to fugitivity and persecution are evident as Steward explains the purpose of Noah's project to erect a "City of Refuge" for "the poor Jew" (305). He deems the project to have failed, since by the time of his visit, "it remained in its native wildness" (305). The great monument erected there cannot compete, however, with that of "Gen. Brock" at Queenston Heights.[51] Although Steward does not further elaborate on Brock, the famous war hero, he has inserted another crucial figure and, implicitly, another crucial event in Canadian History, the War of 1812. Moreover, this war re-evokes the cross-border theme in that it represents the quintessential conflict between the United States and Great Britain on Canadian soil and along the border. The monument of Brock is another sentimental reminder of an allegiance to Great Britain/British North America, which seemed altogether unlikely after Steward's disappointment at Wilberforce.

After the conference's return to New York State, however, it is clear that Steward begins "to feel quite settled" in Canandaigua, and that a veritable identification with Canada West is absent (306). The city is a place where Steward engages in several activities other than his business and colony leadership, such as his work as a teacher in a Black school, together with one of his daughters (299). What is more, he becomes an agent for the *Anti-Slavery Standard* and thus, openly involved in the anti-slavery movement (306).[52] The local "Celebration of the First of August" to honor the abolition of slavery in the British Empire constitutes a determined, yet cautionary example of believing in the collective struggle for freedom and honors Steward both as a part of the collective as well as his own accomplishments.

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50 Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785-1851), well-known Jewish thinker, playwright, journalist, politician. Plan to establish colony on Gran Island (close to Buffalo) for Jews under the name of "Ararat," but the project failed (see *Jewish Virtual Library*).

51 Sir Isaac Brock (1769-1812), army officer and colonial administrator, famous war hero of the War of 1812. He died in the Battle at Queenston Heights, which he fought against U.S. Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer. Brock fought the battle with the assistance of a large number of First Nation warriors (see Stacey).

52 Following Hodges's remarks, Steward should have been known to Black abolitionists ever since he participated in the first Black national convention in 1830 (see Hodges xx).

His concluding chapter reinforces his complex position as a black, cross-border figure who has experienced life in the United States and Canada West. Turning away from explicit anti-slavery debates, Steward casts himself as the "observer of [his] race" and the condition of Blacks on both sides of the border (319). He concludes that there is some visible progress for Blacks in the North, but that "prejudice against that color is not destroyed" (319). Like Samuel Ringgold Ward, Steward points out the three areas that he feels evidence the most severe and constant discrimination against Blacks: hotels (or, public service), schools (or, education), and the church (320). Steward, however, makes clear that he has also gone beyond the role of "observer" in becoming actively involved in assisting fugitive slaves, whom he has received often in his house to "see and feel the distresses of that class of persons" (319).

The relation to the many fugitives and their escape to Canada, however, represent a complex matter for him. He feels "gratifi[cation]" at each escape and has followed closely the "movements of the fugitives" (321). His choice of words leads to suspect, though, that he does not identify himself as an escapee, although he had described himself often in the same terms as the "poor, frightened, flying fugitive" (319). Moreover, his references to the refugees in Canada West do not seem to stem from his perspective as a former resident. "The knowledge that [he] ha[s] of the colored men in Canada, their strength and condition" are never linked to his personal experiences (321). Just as he merged with the AME representatives as a tourist in Canada West, he lets through no personal affiliation with the Black population in that province.

Despite this ambiguous personal stance, Steward does use his "knowledge" of the Black population to return to the well-known image of Canada as a safe haven for fugitives. He cites the "monarchical government" in Canada as the institution that grants Black people true liberty which had been denied them in the "nominally free States" (321). This is the reason, too, why in the event of war, which even after 1814 seems always impending, the United States would stand very bad chances. In fact, much like Smallwood and Ward, Steward is convinced that "England could this day, very readily collect a regiment of stalwart colored men, who, having felt the oppression of our laws, would fight with a will not inferior to that which actuated our revolutionary forefathers" (321-22). "England's Queen" not only offers the true promises of the United States but also "acknowledge[s] [Black] manhood," which forms the basis of loyalty to both Britain and Canada (323-24). The United States, on the contrary, have stayed behind in fulfilling their ideals, and thus, offer no basis for identification, as Blacks are "drive[n …] from the soil which has been cultivated by [their] own labor" (323).

Joining other authors in their hierarchical division of black refugees, and no less problematically, Steward seems to observe a significant change that operates on the Black arrivers in Canada West, which constitutes the reason for their strength and support of Canada in wartime. More specifically, he establishes a crude contrast between the Blacks in Canada and "a class of poor, thriftless, illiterate creatures, like the Southern slaves" (321). Revealing a definite and problematic class-bias himself, Steward turns Blacks in Canada into "hardy, robust class of men; very many of them, men of superior intellect" (321). He claims that they can no longer be called "slaves," having spent many years in freedom or having never been bondsmen at all (321). Implicitly, Steward raises the question whether "fugitive" is an adequate term, which only seems valid to briefly describe the arrivers in Canada.[53] He seems to suggest a radical transformation that a free life effects on the former fugitives, both connected to the acknowledgment of manhood and a concrete realization of (U.S.-American) ideals as manifest in the triad of "his own broad acres, his family and fireside" (324).

Similar to some degree to Smallwood and Ward, Steward neglects the hardships of life under slavery in the South and the difficulties of effecting a successful escape. He also disregards his own experiences with racism and discrimination in Canada West. One could speculate on Steward's ambiguous assertions throughout the narrative—speculations related to editorial infringements, market value considerations, or the play with popular genres such as the sentimental novel. In sum, whether Steward takes his experiences in Wilberforce as failure or success, he establishes Blacks as "Americans; allied to this country by birth and by misfortune; and [claims that] here they will remain" (327). At the same time, he displays an unrelenting optimism for the future of his fellow Blacks "in North America" as "equal with the proud Anglo-Saxon in all things"—not specifying whether he means the United States *and* Canada, or only the United States (328). His narrative has shown that he was able, despite the setbacks within his own black community, to find meaningful individuals who embodied this hope for the future, by making it possible to keep those stories from being forgotten, and remembering that they, too, were assets to a community that, after all, represented an effort to defy anti-black racism and prejudice.

53 Steward himself still identifies as American. Not only does he refer to "our revolutionary forefathers" but also laments, having exposed continuing prejudice in the United States that drives his fellow Blacks into another land: "[h]umiliating as it is for an American citizen to name these things, they are nevertheless true […]" (322-23).