

Nele Sawallisch *Fugitive Borders: Black Canadian Cross-Border Literature at Mid Nineteenth Century* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2019, \$55.00/€44.99). Pp. 218. ISBN: 978 3 8376 4502 6.

To look at the subtitle for this volume, you might decide it is a minority book about a marginal community that you will need for your research library for completeness sake. This would be a mistake as this volume is vital to an understanding of the nuances of the study of Abolitionism and racial politics in the Black Atlantic at a crucial time and place for the formation of African Atlantic modernity. In many ways, although it is principally in the genre of literature rather than history, centuries different in time period covered and mainly focused a continent away, it is an excellent complement to Jessica A. Krug's seminal *Fugitive Modernities: Kisana and the Politics of Freedom* (Duke UP, 2018). Both use a Black Atlantic focus and the lens of fugitivity to problematize narrow national narratives. Sawallisch's study interrogates four texts of Canada West that move away from the classic genre of the slave narrative, contributing "to a form of textual community-building across national borders" (back cover). Sawallisch looks at the autobiographies of Thomas Smallwood (1851), Samuel Ringgold Ward (1855), Richard Warren (1856) and Austin Steward (1857) and contends that the four texts she examines have slipped through a gap because of their creation as border texts so that they are treated as "historical sources with which literary scholars have not concerned themselves"(11), whereas she sees them as key texts which offer "alternatives to a hegemonic national narrative of the white settler nation" (10). Importantly and in an expansion of Benedict Anderson's trope of "imagined" nations, Sawallisch describes the agency displayed in these texts of fugitivity and the centrality of the (seemingly paradoxical) "project of becoming participants in Canadian society"(30). She stresses the ambiguous nature of the border in all these texts and the way the mapping of the borderlands "was shaped by black individuals and their writing" (29). The book

is divided into chapters on Religion (Warren), Radicalism (Smallwood), Heroism (Ward) and Community (Steward) with each study interrogating the texts against the grain of traditional nation-state critiques showing how the community was foregrounded for them rather than allegiance to competing nation-states. This is an impressive study showing how these authors “experimented with genres to create examples of multi-layered, multifaceted autobiographical writing” (37). In studying the fluid frontier Sawallisch points the way to “questioning national literary canons as well as narrow academic curricular” (203) and perhaps this is the study’s prime purpose to move us all to a wider compass especially when studying what appear at first glance to be marginal and esoteric texts with a limited range. Sawallisch comprehensively undercuts such a narrow vision with her excellent and needful study.

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