REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION

ISSN: 2146-0353 • © RIGEO • 11(3), SUMMER, 2021

www.rigeo.org

Research Article

Reed's Flight to Canada as a Manifestation of Afrofuturism

Hassanain Ali Hassaan[1]
College of Education / Department of English/ University of Al-Qadisiyah/Iraq

Hind Ahmed Al-Kurwy[2]
College of Arts / Department of English/ University of Al-Qadisiyah/Iraq
Hind_ahmed_kj@yahoo.com

[2] Corresponding author: E-mail: Hind_ahmed_kj@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper deals with Afrofuturism as a literary aesthetic whereby African artists, such as Ishmael Reed, can anticipate a counter-reality through which they are able to practice their liberty. Afrofuturism represents the other voice of the marginalized blacks against the white authority and it is a reaction to the heavy use of technology by the whites to promote themselves over other races. It is a means at the hands of the black artists to recognize the inequality and oppression imposed over the Africans. The Afrofuturists often criticize the hegemony of the global status quo whether it is social, political or even technical. Thus, this movement came to existence due to the dehumanization that the Africans have faced since the Middle Passage, the slave trade case; the black nation which has no past, present, and even future from the Western perspective. The main goal that Afrofuturism is about to achieve is to imagine a good future for the Africans far from the white restrictions, and it shows how the blacks can use modern technology, or in general, how the black culture intersects with the twentieth century technological issues. The study discusses Reed's Flight to Canada (1976), a novel that parodies the slave narrative and at the same time it draws a good future for its black slave characters, Raven Quickskill and Uncle Robin, as they plan to get their freedom away from the white supremacy. While Quickskill escapes to Canada to live in peace and getting his freedom, Robin stays under his slavemaster order plotting one day can manage himself freely.

Keywords

Ishmael Reed, Flight to Canada, Afrofuturism, and Hoodooism

To cite this article: Hassaan, H, A,; Kurwy, H,A,A (2021) Reed's Flight to Canada as a Manifestation of Afrofuturism. *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO), 11(3), 962-971. Doi:* 10.48047/rigeo.11.3.89

Submitted: 13-02-2021 • **Revised:** 16-03-2021 • **Accepted:** 25-03-2021

Introduction

Ishmael Reed often works on the counter, the opposite, tries to establish his own method. In *Flight to Canada*, he rebels against the reputable slave narrative that has been produced by the white kingdom, "he is always insisting of blacks and the issue of slavery" (Andrews et al., 2001). Released in 1976, a time of America's bicentennial celebration, the novel is a pastiche of the slave fiction which, in Reed's opinion, was not enough or decent to bear the depressions and melancholies of the oppressed culture. *Flight to Canada* is Reed's fifth novel, it belongs to an anachronistic neo-slave fiction, and its protagonist runs away from his owner by a jumbo jet. (Bakhtiar & Ghorbani, 2016). As for Afrofuturism, Reed in *Flight to Canada* recognizes the inequality and prejudices that the Africans confronted. He also makes his black characters as fugitive slaves searching for freedom and independence, namely, they are chasing their future. In addition, the author constructs a clear intersection between the Africans and modern technology. Womack, an essential critic, notes that Afrofuturism is just as a convergence of technology, imagination, liberation and the future (Dery, 1994).

As a necromancer, Reed suggests another point of view of slavery in this novel. Reed mentions: "My work is probably more in the tradition of African-American folk art-including the art of humour, fantasy and satire" (Gatewood, 1981). In order to examine the relic of the 'peculiar institution' of the 1970s American cultural scene, Reed draws the attention towards slavery in its literature and historiography. He parodies some stereotypes like Uncle Tom's Cabin adopting his method which mixes fantasy with history, political experience with parody. As well, he parodies the criteria of rebellion and resistance, to be exact, to challenge the ways solidified in the American imagination (Graham, 2004). Also mentioned, it is "his pastiche slave narrative with its crossovers in time and place" (Jackl, 2018). Levecq delivers:

> *"Reed uses slavery to challenge American national identity and look to a new, global vision, epitomized by Canada. Because Canada turns out to reproduce the white hegemonic practices that the characters hoped to be escaping, Reed also warns against the expansion of race-based nationalism on a universal scale" (Jarrett, 2010).*

Flight to Canada is a Civil War era novel with some references to the days of its publication in the 1970s. Raven Quickskill, the protagonist, writes a poem that sums up his escape to Canada freeing himself from his slavemaster, Arthur Swille. Quickskill with other slaves, Stray Leechfield, and 40s runaway from Swille's castle to get their freedom. The events then jumps to the end of narrative as Swille dies and Quickskill returns to the estate to live new life and to write the story of Uncle Robin, a slave who pretends docile and mindless in front of his owner, Swille. Although the 'Emancipation Proclamation' publicized by Abraham Lincoln, Swille goes on in his search to catch the escaped slaves. The narrative then shifts to Emancipation City, in the northern United States, where the three slaves are living. The Beulahland Review magazine promises to publish Quickskill's poem '*Flight to* Canada' making Swille be informed about the place of Quickskill, whom the two hired men come to arrest but he evades and gets away to warn his fugitive friends. Quickskill will receive an amount, nearly two hundred dollars, from the magazine that can help him to flee to his dream place, Canada.

At a dinner party, Quickskill meets Quaw Quwa Tralaralara, an American native dancer, who is already married to Yankee Jack, a common pirate. They express their love to each other. While they are watching a play on television at the Ford Theatre, they see someone kills Abraham Lincoln lively on the screen. Quaw wishes to go with Quickskill to Canada. The narrative transitions to Swille's estate. There, Barracuda, a subservient slave, tells Mr. Swille that his wife rejects to eat or get out from her bed, since she is not satisfied with her husband's oppressive and anti-suffregette views. Barracuda beats her until she obeys Mr. Swille's decisions. The events now are on Lake Erie where Quickskill and Quaw on a boat heading north. Quaw discovers a poem written by Quickskill that shows her husband, Yankee Jack, attacking her tribe and killing her family many years ago. The ghost of her dead son, Mitchel, visits Ms. Swille to inform her that Arthur Swille, his father, is responsible for his murder, hence she pushes Arthur into a fireplace burning him to death. After reaching to Canada Quickskill and Quaw see Carpenter, an old friend. He informs them that racism in Canada is as common as in America, and Quickskill feels depressed to hear this. Then, they struggle and Quaw leaves Quickskill. Uncle Robin doctors the will of Swille to win his whole

fortune, and then, he writes to Quickskill to return to Virgina to adapt Robin's story into a book. Significantly, Reed opens *Flight to Canada* with a poem entitled '*Flight to Canada*' which represents the ambitions of its fictional writer, the story's protagonist Raven Quickskill, who pursues his salvation from the white supremacist slave-owner, Arthur Swille. In this poem, Quickskill announces his happiness to escape from Virginia estate to Canada, where he can find his identity and freedom. Reginald also states that: Canada, through the story, is introduced to signify different meanings. Firstly, it is presented as the actual historical country where slaves can live with liberty. Secondly, it symbolizes happiness (Lam, 1981).

Reed evidently gives his black hero a moment to choose and draw his future away from the restrictions of slavery imposed by the white dominators on the other nations, especially the black skin. Thus, there is an opportunity for the blacks to live in a world where they can feel belonging to. Slavery and freedom represent the main themes in this tale. The novel pictures a good future for the oppressed nation by offering new spaces and places to be inhabited other than the narrow plantations intended by the Western authority. Even the history is viewed from a black perspective, especially when Reed intrudes Abraham Lincoln into narration to inform a certain fact about the deal done between him and Swille that is to donate the Civil War against the Confederacy. Due to Lincoln's anti-slavery stance, Reed brings him to the story so as to sustain the African expression.

Reed mixes the historical facts with fiction targeting to state repression, dehumanization, prejudice, and inequity justified by that history. Indeed, Lincoln is casted to be a key figure in achieving the needed lost freedom as he decrees the 'Emancipation Proclamation'. On top, writing is a strong means that helps to build or destroy any society. Reed explains that the Civil War is an outcome of Stowe's '(Levecq, 2002), as Lincolin says: "So you're the little woman who started the big war" (Lindroth, 1996). Reflecting on this, Reed makes his black main characters depend on artistic expression to anticipate a good future, a counter reality within which they can practice their liberty and rights.

Hemantha Kumar utters: "Flight to Canada revises the fugitive Slave narratives" (Lock, 1993). By Reed's postmodern view on the slave narrative in *Flight to Canada*, his connections to Afrofuturism may extend to a large account (Reed, 1976). Reed parodies the slave narrative, "a parody of traditional slave narratives" (Reed & Henry, 2016), as he makes Quickskill accuses Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) of plagiarism. She borrows her story, '*Uncle Tom Cabin*', from Josiah Henson (1789-1883), a slave who escapes to Canada to achieve his self-determination. Likewise, Reed describes Canada as not mere a land where the blacks feel free, but it is a state of mind, or as he asserts: "Each man to his own Canada" (Reed & Nazareth, 2014). Quickskill mentions:

> *"The story she "borrowed" from Josiah Henson. Harriet only wanted enough money to buy a silk dress. The paper mills ground day and night. She'd read Josiah Henson's book. That Harriet was alert The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short, but it was his. It was all he had. His story. A man's story is his gris-gris, you know. Taking his story is like taking his gris-gris. The thing that is himself. It's like robbing a man of his Etheric Double" (Steinskog, 2018).*

Truthfully, any piracy goes bad upon the one who has committed. Reed speaks: "*Harriet paid. Oh yes, Harriet paid. When you take a man's story, a story that doesn't belong to you, that story will get you*" (Walsh, 1993). For this theft of the black art, Reed summons Guede, the deity that makes people deride Stowe's celebrity and success: "Guede knew. Guede is here. Guede is in New Orleans. Guede got people to write parodies and minstrel shows about Harriet. How she made all that money. Black money. That's what they called it. The money stained her hands" (Weixlmann, 1992). Ashraf Rushdy, a literary critic, argues that, "The whole book is framed around the question of how to protect writing so that it is not vulnerable to theft" (Williams, 1981).

Stowe's novel is an anti-slavery one, but still, it is narrated from an abolitionist point of view as Tom, the slave protagonist, dies under slavery and he can't find his refuge in any place, he lives and deceases without his will, he has done his life as a slave, he has no real identity or autonomy. Whereas, Reed's '*Flight to Canada*' presents another form of slavery. Quickskill and Robin are black slaves under Swlille's order. While Quickskill runs away heading to Canada to get his salvation from Swille's colonialization, Robin stays at the plantation acting in his dim and fool manner aiming one day he will govern the castle. Robin cites that:

"I prayed to one of our gods, and he came to me in a dream. He was wearing a top hat, raggedy britches and an old black opera waistcoat. He had on alligator shoes. He was wearing that top hat, too, and was puffing on a cigar. Look like Lincoln's hat. That stovepipe. He said it was okay to do it. The 'others' had approved" (Womack, 2013)

In the purpose of revolting against the monocultural white authority, Reed continues in his hoodoo aesthetic to subvert the established views. By giving Uncle Robin the role of who manipulates and doctors the will of his slaveowner, Reed rectifies and remedies Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. The above quotation reveals the fact that Robin depends on the god that has visited and allowed him to forge the will. Indeed, that god is not a god from Christianity, but it is a deity that will lead Robin to his end. Robin says: "When we came here, our gods came with us. They'll never go away. No slavemaster can make them go away" (Ibid.). Robin intends the deities that came with them to America after the Middle Passage. So the story of Uncle Robin is going to be protected from any piracy, it is said that: "Quickskill would write Uncle Robin's story in such a way that, using a process the old curers used, to lay hands on the story would be lethal to the thief. That way his Uncle Robin would have the protection that Uncle Tom (Josiah Henson) didn't" (Andrews et al., 2001). Therefore, Hoodoo is a good means that will rescue his present in addition to his future inheritance (Bakhtiar & Ghorbani, 2016).

As for 'time', it is treated specifically in Reed's discourse. Through much of his works, he bases time on the African concept, namely, it is not diachronic or linear, instead it is circular and synchronic. In other words, voodoo synchronicity is a common means whereby Reed unites past, present and future by showing time as a circle. In conclusion, almost all Reed's works show signs of dystaxy, which means the temporal distortion of linear narration. A good example of this synchronic use of time is Reed's *Flight to Canada*. There is an apparent overlap between the time of the novel's setting, which is the antebellum period, and the year of its writing (Dery, 1994) (Gatewood, 1981). In Mumbo Jumbo, Reed says: time is not a river, it is a pendulum. Eric discusses: the word 'literacy' is defined in the novel as: "the most powerful thing in the pre-technological pre-post-rational age" (Graham, 2004), and the double prefix means that there is a co-occurrence of different meanings or logics. Accordingly, time is introduced in a way defying the established appreciation of history, that is to say, this way approaches Afrofuturism that calls for the counter-histories (Jackl, 2018). Reginald Martin remarks that: in *Flight to Canada*, Reed most efficiently employs time according to the Hoodoo tradition (Jarrett, 2010).

The novel is avant-gardist and unconventional, so that it disdains some of the key elements of the slave-narrative genre. The most noticeable unusual aspect is its use of anachronisms. For instance, Quickskill mentions in his poem: "I flew in non-stop Jumbo jet" (Lam, 1981). Also, there are many times to hear the words: phone, radio, television, and even satellite. Mr. Swille asks his slave: "Uncle Robin, give me the telephone. I want to call Lee." (Ibid., 36). As well as, in chapter five, Uncle Robin talks in the phone: "INSIDE THE KITCHEN OF the main house of Swille's plantation, Uncle Robin sits on a high stool reading some figures over the phone which have been scriebbled on a sheet." (Levecq, 2002). Radio is occasionally intruded into narration: "AM/FM stereo radio" or "*IT* WAS SIPPING FROM a glass of wine and listening to the radio." Concerning television: "There's a television set." (Ibid., 106) or "The television light was the only one in the room." (Ibid., 111). So, these innovations had been not existed yet in the setting of the novel, they were found in the time of its publication. Reed here offers an Afrofuturistic gist as he makes his black characters invest or intersect with these technological developments and this has been clarified when Mark Dery defines Afrofuturism as:

"Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century techno-culture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called Afrofuturism" (Lindroth, 1996).

As well, Robin's use of phone calls that pushes other slaves blame Mr. Swille to allow him for doing that: "Uncle Robin, are you abusing your phone privileges? I don't know why the Master lets you use it. He doesn't let any of us use it." (Ibid., 47). Another example is the use of 'helicopter' at the time of Civil War:

"Sorry to disturb you, Master Swille, but Abe Lincoln, the President of the so-called Union, is outside in the parlor waiting to see you. He's fiddling around and telling corny jokes, shucking the shud and husking the hud. I told him that you were scheduled to helicopter up to Richmond to shake your butt at the Magnolia Baths tonight, but he persists. Says, 'The very survival of the Union is at stake'" (Ibid., 27).

Reed often uses the strategy of anachronism in order to challenge the linearity of events and to pay attention to the writing process of history and the concept of time, or of progress in general. This tactic also allows him to mix the past with the present in a way that informs that the old problems and constant paradoxes need to be reconsidered and reassessed (Lock, 1993). What is important then is that Reed does not follow the conventional form of slave narrative which pursues the slave from his plight towards freedom. Instead, Reed divides the case between two characters, the escaped Raven Quickskill and Uncle Robin who remains in Swille's castle. In effect, he does this opposition to reflect on the situation of emancipation and how it should be acquired (Reed, 1976).

The other feature of Afrofuturism that is marked in Reed's novel is the way he elaborates his characterization. As has been discussed, one of the Afrofuturists' goals is to point to the marginality and subjugation that the Africans are used to suffer. The cruel practices that the whites manipulate with. Sadjadi articulates, *Flight to* Canada is a reaction against singularity, monoculturalism, univocalism, and the dominance of the whites over other groups dehumanizing their existence at all. Like *Mumbo Jumbo*, it is opposed to Atonism (Reed & Henry, 2016). Reed in *Flight to Canada* introduces Arthur Swille character who represents the white supremacy. Swille, the antagonist of Quickskill, is a rich and powerful man who lives in Virginia. The Swille family is obsessed with 'Camelot', the fictional place where King Arthur wanted to inhabit, it is the mythical city which Swille identifies with his own Virginia castle dreaming of the medieval aristocracy to be applied within this city. In consequence, he is the colonizer who is always proud of his nation that has been ruled by King Arthur, as his name also indicates:

According to the family records we do have, we know that the first Swille, a zealous slave trader, breeder and planter, was "indescribably deformed." He did his business from the tower of a Castle he built on his grounds, said to be the very replica of King Arthur's in the Holy City of Camelot, the Wasp's Jerusalem, the great Fairy City of the old Feudal Order, of the ancient regime; of knights, ladies, of slaves; of jousting; of toasting; Camelot, a land of endless games (Reed & Nazareth, 2014).

Swille, like his ancestors, sustains the idea of slaving and suppressing others under an aristocratic vision in order to build a perfect society. Reed, symbolically, refers to the Western hegemony and how the whites always support the enslavement justifying their control upon others. After the runaway of Raven Quickskill, Stray Leechfield, and a character whose name is 40s, Swille continues sending his men to capture the fugitives in any way even after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. He has a real desire in dominating the people of the coloured skin. As well, Swille rejects to accept money paid by the escapees when Robin, his obedient slave, suggests that:

"But suppose they paid you off. Would you try to recover even then?" "Look, Robin, if they'd came to me and if they'd asked to buy themselves, perhaps we could have arranged terms. But they didn't; they furtively pilfered themselves. Absconded. They have committed a crime, and no amount of money they send me will rectify the matter. I'd buy all the niggers in the South before I'd accept a single dime for or from them … Quickskill, I'll never be able to figure out. Why, he ate in the house and was my trusted bookkeeper. I allowed him to turn the piano pages when we had performers in the parlor, even let him wear a white wig—and he'd give all of this up. Well," he said, pounding on the top of his desk, "they won't get away with it. One thing my father told me: never yield a piece of property. Not to a man, not to the State. Before he died, that's what he told me and my brothers." (Steinskog, 2018)

As so, he considers them as a part of his possessions, he sells and buys them whenever he wants. He is the only one who manages their lives, "Justice Taney said that a slave has no rights that a white man is bound to respect" (Ibid., 70). Swille represents the antithetical ideas in the novel since he is obsessed with aristocracy and wants to accomplish his supremacy over other people. He is pro-slavery, who is born into a rich and high class family, so that he sees himself superior to the

slaves who flatter thim to get his gratification. He is too egocentric and selfish to the extent that he takes milk from the slave mothers, "two gallons of slave mothers' milk" (Ibid., 23). He constantly tries to hide his ethical bankruptcy behind the faked chivalry. Reed declares in an interview:

PN: In Flight to Canada, three slaves escape and one of them tries to earn enough money to buy his freedom. When it comes to a critical point, it is revealed that he cannot actually buy his freedom.
IR: The slavemaster didn't want him to buy it, he didn't want any money, he wanted HIM! (Walsh, 1993).

Moreover, Lincoln is against slavery at all, he discusses with one of his aides to give back the money that he has taken from Swille because of the terrible treatment that the slaves confront in Swille's castle, as Lincoln notices. He says that this slavery is "a subplot in this war" (Weixlmann, 1992), Lincoln means the civil war, as so he decides to sign his proclamation to release all slaves to "make it so that you can't be for the South without being for slavery" (Ibid., 55).
Swille is consumed in getting back the runaway slaves all the time. He hires agents to capture Raven Quikskill who now lives in the Great lakes where the Beulahland Review magazine promises to publish his poem '*Flight to Canada*'. Fortunately, Quickskill slips from a back room window and rescues himself from the men. The self-centered and asocial Swille appreciates his ways of torture and his fettering devices. He is also in harsh conflict with his wife, Ms Swille, who rejects his views on slavery. In fact, his wife will not eat or leave her bed until Mr. Swille changes his convictions concerning women rights and slavery, Ms. Swille says: "Why, I'm on strike, Barracuda. I refuse to budge from this bed till my husband treats me better than he treats the coloreds around here" (Ibid., 123). Reed here refers to the coming rift within the white community resulting from the different views of dominance. Barracuda, Mr. Swille's submissive slave, is another representation of the white hegemony who is introduced into the story. She forces Ms. Swille to accept her husband's ways. Another criminal act arises in the fantasy scene which comes in chapter twenty when Ms. Swille is visited by her son's ghost, Mitchell, whom she thought that he traveled to Congo in an anthropological study. He appears:

MOOOOTTTTHHHHHEEEEERRRR. MOOOOOTTTTTHHHHHEEEERRR. "What can that be?" Ms. Swille said at the dresser, turning her head around. Mooooottttthhhhhheeeeeerrrrr. Then she saw a foot—no, not really a foot but some strange reticulated claw—entering the room from the wall opposite her. And then a clammylooking hand … well, not exactly a hand. It was a human figure, but not exactly; the skin belonged to that of a crocodile, but the head—oh no—the head, it was Mitchell's head. Mitchell, the anthropologist; it was his head. "Mitchell, you're supposed to be in the Congo. What on earth are you doing in that outfit?" (Williams, 1981).

Then, the ghost tells her that his father, Mr. Swille, has sent him in a business mission to check his commercial ventures there where he was killed: "They threw me to this crocodile called Aldo. He ate everything but my head" (Ibid., 136). At last she enters her husband's room and pushes him into a fireplace to be burned until death. Afrofuturistically, Reed in these details depends on fantasy to reveal the fact that Arthur Swille is in charge of the murder of his son. At the same time, Ms. Swille revenges from her husband by pushing him into fire, this means that there is a future gap among the whites themselves which may tighten the black fist over the case. As so, Ms. Swille is the moral and kind voice in Virginia estate; she rebels against the tyranny and brutality of Arthur Swille in his castle, she faces the same hardships that the Virginian slaves do. On other hand, Barracuda represents Swille's sadistic manner as she abuses others, imposing her domination over them.
The other character to be discussed is Uncle Robin. This character is based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's protagonist, Tom, in her novel '*Uncle Tom* Cabin'. Robin is an elderly slave who acts dutiful and passive, but he is continuously plotting for getting respect and lost privileges that may seem far from him and his nation. While the other three slaves escape leaving Swille's estate, he stays obeying his slavemaster's order whenever he is needed to do certain job putting his plan to win at the end. The following conversation is to show the relation between Swille and Robin:

"Robin, what have you heard about this place up North, I think they call it Canada?" Swille says, eying Robin slyly.
"Canada. I do admit I have heard about the place from time to time, Mr. Swille, but I loves it here so much that … that I would never think of leaving here. These rolling hills. Mammy singing spirituals in the morning before them good old biscuits. Watching 'Sleepy Time Down South' on the Late Show. That's my idea of Canada. Most assuredly, Mr. Swille, this my Canada. You'd better believe it." "Uncle Robin, I'm glad to hear you say that. Why, I don't know what I'd do without you. I can always count on you not to reveal our little secret. Traveling around the South for me, carrying messages down to the house slaves, polishing my boots and drawing my bath water. All of these luxuries. Robin, you make a man feel like … well, like a God" (Womack, 2013).

Robin pretends to be foolish and compliant to serve his owner. However, he is very intelligent and careful when dealing with the oppression and slavery in Swille's plantation. Uncle Robin with his wife Judy live in the quarters that Swille assigns to his slaves. Indeed, Reed labels these quarters as 'Frederick Douglass Houses', to make a reference for freedom after the hard enslavement. Reed intentionally includes Frederick Douglass in his story, Willard B. Gatewood mentions that: the slave (Andrews et al., 2001) escaped from his slavemaster to be an anti-slavery writer and reformer (Bakhtiar & Ghorbani, 2016). Thus, there is a hopeful vision for a good future without slavery or persecution. In chapter eight, Reed speaks of the uncles and aunts that live in the Frederick Douglass, especially Uncle Robin and his wife Judy. In this scene the reader knows the real nature of Robin's personality for how he plans and thinks to gain his freedom from Swille's inflated ego. Robin's quarters are designated to be comfortable, and supplied with a "giant waterbed" (Dery, 1994), and also a television. Yet, they feel disappointed with their awful enslavement. However, Robin bears his admiration to Lincoln after hearing the 'Emancipation Proclamation', he says "I knew that Lincoln was a player. Man, he was outmaneuvering Swille like a snake. Me and him winked at each other from time to time" (Ibid., 63). Subsequently, Robin is actually clever and wit-minded who acts meek and simple in order to get Swille's graces. Reed gives Robin a central role in this novel as he:

Well, anyway, Swille had something called dyslexia. Words came to him scrambled and jumbled. I became his reading and writing. Like a computer, only this computer left itself Swille's whole estate. Property joining forces with property. I left me his whole estate. I'm it, too. Me and it got more it (Ibid., 183).

Therefore, he is the black character that intersects with technology for he does the function of computer. Robin enjoys a good contact with Arthur Swille who allows him even to use phones to fulfill some tasks. Moe, a white slave, wanders why Swille lionizes Robin and gives him such a trust:

"Uncle Robin, are you abusing your phone privileges? I don't know why the Master lets you use it. He doesn't let any of us use it."
"Oh, Mr. Moe, I was just ringing in the supplies for the week. I didn't mean no harm."
"I don't know why he trusts you, Uncle Robin. He thinks you're docile, but sometimes it seems to me that you're the cleverest of them all, though I can't prove it."
Uncle Robin stares blankly at him. "Well, I guess you are pretty simple. I don't know what gives me the notion that you're more complex than you seem" (Ibid., 47).

In chapter twenty eight, after Swille's death, his will is read in front of the castle people by Swille's lawyer. The surprise is when that statement shows that all what Swille had is now going to his slave, Uncle Robin, "And to Uncle Robin, I leave this Castle, these hills and everything behind the gates of the Swille Virginia estate" (Gatewood, 1981). Robin is very happy but not surprised, and he says that he can run the estate successfully. Then, as has been explained in chapter twenty nine, Robin informs his wife that he has doctored the will to win all the things that Swille possessed. Robin justifies his action: "Well, if they are not bound to respect our rights, then I'll be damned if we should respect theirs." (Ibid., 183). Actually, in this speech, Robin behaves as if he revenges to himself and to his community, as slaves in private and as Africans in general. After that, Robin has received a call from Harriet Beecher Stowe who offers to write a book on him, but he rejects:

"...well, Uncle Robin, I'd like to do a book on you ... and what it felt like being the house man of one of the most rich and fabulous men in the world. Known everywhere as the American Baron."
"I got somebody already, Ms. Stowe."
"You have somebody? Who could you know?"
"Raven Quickskill. He's going to do it."
"But I've already told Mr. Jewett that you'd do it for me. I need to buy a new silk dress. I have to go to England … I …" (Ibid., 186).

It is clear from these details that Reed wants to give his black slave character a chance to choose, to think, and to express himself freely and away from the authoritative whiteness. Reed grants Robin the position where the white man, Swille, could manage and judge. Robin at the end gets the future that he hopes and plans to catch. So, this is an Afrofuturistic view because the writer puts his characters in a place where they are able to imagine and obtain the life that is wished.
Raven Quickskill is another central character who has to be discussed from an Afrofuturistic point of view. He is the protagonist, the one who is in search for freedom, thus, he is in search for future. Lindroth pronounces: Like PaPa LaBas in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Raven Quickskill is a hoodoo trickster. In reality, his last name indicates this trickery. That's why the slaveowner, Arthur Swille, says: "We gave him literacy" (Graham, 2004). Consequently, the trickery with words and the hoodoo skills, that he has, make him flight to Canada, since the payment for his writing which enables him to travel. In fact, his poem confirms him as a trickster as Swille's overseer affirms: "The poem say that he has come back here to the plantation a lots and that he has drunk up all your wine and that he tricked your wife into giving him the combination to your safe." (Ibid., 59). Hence, the magical elements of his appearance and disappearance in this way as a smoke, assert him as a trickster one. What's more, he uses his shrewdness and hoodoo influence to subvert the oppressive white hegemony (Jackl, 2018). This novel demonstrates that, the characters who have experienced slavery and can trick their slavemaster are the ones who have learnt much about "ancient Afro-American oral literature", namely, to use their writing skills, that is, to use hoodoo (Jarrett, 2010).
Reed, in fact, intentionally casts Quickskill as an escaped slave to say that the Africans at all times have a chance to live another counter-life that they are searching for. Painstakingly in the novel, he pursues his dreams and ambitions. From the very beginning, in his poem, '*Flight to Canada*', he feels happy if he gets his freedom and salvation from his slavemaster's restrictions:

Dear Massa Swille:
What it was?
I have done my Liza Leap
& am safe in the arms
of Canada, so
Ain't no use your Slave
Catchers waitin on me
At Trailways
I won't be there (Lam, 1981).

In this extract from the poem, Quickskill tells Swille that he has done his 'Liza Leap', namely, this is a reference to '*Uncle Tom Cabin*' when Liza moves from the South to the North of the Ohio River. In other words, she jumps off slavery to freedom. Anyway, his aspiration to escape to Canada is his omnipresent desire for freedom. After Quickskill leaves Virginia, he arrives Emancipation City, which is in the northern United States. He is visited by two men hired by Swille to recapture him, they are talking with him:
"Your lease on yourself has come to an end. You are overdue. According to our information, Mr. Swille owns you," the short one said, reaching into his briefcase. "Here's the bill of sale. You see, Mr. Swille sees you as a bargain. Bookkeeper, lecturer, an investment that paid off. He's anxious to get you back, and since there are a lot of invoices and new shipments piling up, he says a man of your ability is indispensable." (Ibid., 69).
In fact, Quickskill feels his inferiority, that's why he has left Swille's estate. He says: "I am property. I am a thing. I am in the same species as any other kind of property. We form a class, a family of things. This long black deacon's bench decorated with painted white roses I'm sitting on is worth more than me—five hundred dollars. Superior to me" (Ibid., 71). In these chapters, nine and ten, the matter is to show Quickskill's goals and personal sensibilities in relation to other people in Emancipation City, those who faced the same experiences that Quickskill did. He and Mel Leer,

a Jewish Russian immigrant, argue the idea of oppression and how their communities, Jewish and Black, have confronted the miseries of that oppression, "Nobody has suffered as much as my people," (Levecq, 2002).
Quickskill meets the other two escaped slaves, Leechfield and 40s. The three men take different views on their salvation from Swille's plantation. Leechfield, for example, thinks that he is free now as he sent money to Swille for the purpose of purchasing himself. He makes his living by selling pornographic pictures and sexual acts of himself justifying this profession as that he has the control of his body and he enjoys with his own freedom. In consequence, Leechfield feels completely safe. On the other hand, 40s lives a paranoid situation as if he still resides in Virginia. 40s says to Raven Quickskill, "Virginia everywhere. Virginia outside. You might be Virginia" (Ibid., 83), therefore he is always in forthcoming danger. Meanwhile, Quickskill is in a place between the two. To accept his poem for publication is a serious moment that reveals the intersection between his thirst for artistic expression and his thirst for freedom. Meaning, the two hundred dollars that he will receive from the magazine, he will pay them for the way of Canada. It is mentioned that:
But it was his writing that got him to Canada. "Flight to Canada" was responsible for getting him to Canada. And so for him, freedom was his writing. His writing was his HooDoo. Others had their way of HooDoo, but his was his writing. It fascinated him, it possessed him; his typewriter was his drum he danced to (Ibid., 97).
Lock explains that, *Flight to Canada* offers a purest format of Neo-Hoodoo tradition. It is a text about a Text, but this time the Text is present, in contrast with that of *Mumbo Jumbo*, and it is a living organism. It represents the force that urges the things to happen as the flight to Canada comes into being because Quickskill writes his *Flight to Canada* poem. Keith Byerman comments, it "both makes it possible for him to get there and compels him to go, since its publication puts slave-catchers on his trail" (Lindroth, 1996). In addition, his writing by itself represents a form of freedom for he can explore and assert his identity. He practices his personal freedom within the medium of writing. One time he says: "Words built the world and words can destroy the world" (Lock, 1993).
After reaching Canada, Quickskill and his beloved, Quaw Quaw Tralaralara, see an old friend called Carpenter who informs them that racism in Canada is not very different from that of America, Carpenter tells: "they got a group up here called the Western Guard, make the Klan look like statesmen. Vigilantes harass fugitive slaves" (Ibid., 171). Quickskill is disappointed and depressed to hear that. Quickskill speaks to Carpenter: "To tell you the truth, I don't really care at this point, Carpenter. After what you've said about Canada. All my life I had hopes about it, that whatever went wrong I would always have Canada to go to" (Ibid., 172). Uncle Robin says that "I'm glad he's doing my book. I'll be glad to see him again. I wonder did he find what he was looking for in Canada? Probably all that freedom gets to you. Too much freedom makes you lazy. Nothing to fight. Well, I guess Canada, like freedom, is a state of mind" (Ibid., 190). Consequently, Canada is a truth , it is like the Book of Thoth, the Text in *Mumbo Jumbo*, it is something abstract, it is always there and may be reached and got by hard efforts. It is open at all times waiting for the next generations. Weixlmann adds that, for Reed, truth is a state of mind, it is not restricted to one view, it is also considered by plurality. Furthermore, *Flight to Canada* can be classified as, part drama, part poetry, part autobiography, part prose fiction, and part historiography (Reed, 1976).
When Swille dies, Robin writes to Quickskill to return to Virginia to live freely and to adapt Robin's story into a book. Indeed, this is an Afrofuturistic content in the novel since it puts the Africans in a position where they can express themselves in the way they want, and give them freedom to choose and even to write. Quickskill here is the artist who is going to write Robin's story from a black perspective instead of Stowe, the abolitionist, "Quickskill would write Uncle Robin's story" (Reed & Henry, 2016). Reed envisions a better future for the Africans, he replaces the white hegemony by the black power. He makes his skin colour characters behave liberally creating their own identity. At the end of the novel, the roles of Quickskill and Robin are inverted, instead of being powerless and subjugated, now they are authorized and empowered to publicize notions of equality.
Quickskill and Robin revolt against slavery and resist it vigorously at least in an act of writing. Lock declares: "in Flight to Canada the ability to write is the ability to control one's identity" (Reed & Nazareth, 2014). Rushdy also comments: "both Uncle Robin and Raven, the two 'writers' in the novel, write primarily as a way of resisting slavery" (Steinskog, 2018). So that Mvuyekure concludes: literacy is " a pathway to freedom" (Ibid.).

Conclusion

Ishmael Reed as an Afrofuturist is interested in anticipating a promising future for the blacks instead of the dilemma that they live in within a white society. His works indicate a good position where the Africans can change and challenge the prevalence. Also, he presents a kind of black characters who invest technology for their ends. He writes speculative fiction whereby he denies and rejects the established points of view. Reed depends on hoodoo elements to say that there is always another or alternative way for doing things other than the Western way. In *Flight to Canada*, Reed parodies the slave narrative, the like of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Indeed, Raven Quickskill escapes to Canada as he thinks it is the place of his dreams and to rid of the hegemony of Swille, but then, he returns to the same castle after demolishing the white's dominance in the hands of another black tricky character, Uncle Robin. Consequently, the two win the future they deserve as they are going to govern the estate.

Bibliography

Andrews, W. L., Foster, F. S., & Harris, T. (Eds.). (2001). The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakhtiar, S., & Ghorbani, S. (2016). From Counter History to Narration of Identity: A Postmodernist Reading of Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada. 13(4), 23–30.

Dery, M. (1994). Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose, 179-222.

Gatewood, W. B. (1981). Frederick Douglass and the Building of a "Wall of Anti-Slavery Fire," 1845-1846. An Essay Review. The Florida Historical Quarterly, 59(3), 340-344.

Graham, M., (Ed.). (2004). The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jackl, J. A. (2018). Alternative Perspectives of African American Culture and Representation in the Works of Ishmael Reed. California: San Francisco.

Jarrett, G. A. (Ed.). (2010). A Companion to African American Literature. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Lam, J. (1981). Black Magic: Conjure, Syncretism, and Satire in Ishmael Reed. Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling, 53(9), 1689–1699.

Levecq, C. (2002). Nation, Race, and Postmodern Gestures in Ishmael reed's Flight to Canada. Novel, 35(2), 281–298.

Lindroth, J. (1996). Images of Subversion: Ishmael Reed and the Hoodoo Trickster. African American Review, 30(2), 185.

Lock, H. (1993). A Man's Story Is His Gris-gris: Ishmael Reed's Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic and the African-American Tradition. South Central Review, 10(1), 67.

Reed, I. (1976). Flight to Canada. Chicago Review, 28(2), 200.

Reed, I. & Henry, J. (2016). A Melus Interview : Ishmael Reed. 11(1), 81–93.

Reed, I., Nazareth, P. (2014). An Interview with Ishmael Reed. 13(2), 117–131.

Steinskog, E. (2018). Afrofuturism and Black Sound Studies: Culture, Technology, and Things to Come. Cham: Springer.

Walsh, R. (1993). A Man's Story is His Gris-Gris: Cultural Slavery, Literary Emancipation and Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada. Journal of American Studies, 27(1), 57–71.

Weixlmann, J. (1992). African American Deconstruction of the Novel in the Work of Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major. Melus, 17(4), 57–79.

Williams, D. A. (Ed.). (1981). African American Humor, Irony, and Satire: Ishmael Reed, Satirically Speaking. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Womack, Y. L. (2013). Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books.