

Public Historical Writing & Narrative non-fiction, an introduction to *PLOTTING FOR FREEDOM: An Enslaved Couple's Intimate Letters in the Age of Atlantic Slavery*

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Abstract :

This talk introduces a recent public history writing project, *Plotting for Freedom*, (Hurst, 2026). The project emerged from (and hopes to contribute to) conversations about historical memory with a symphony of artists, activists, and scholars whose work has sought to rectify the pervasive institutionalised erasure of the lives and legacies of enslaved people of African descent in Spain and the broader Atlantic world. The talk chronicles the possibilities and challenges of writing in the genres of narrative non-fiction and historical biography.

Plotting for Freedom (Hurst, 2026) tells the powerful story of how a family gathered and exchanged knowledge to fight for their freedom in the first century of the Atlantic trade in enslaved people. In the late sixteenth century, well before any whisperings of abolition, husband and wife Antón Segarra and Felipa de la Cruz plotted with each other from opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean to raise enough funds to purchase their family's freedom. Their quest for liberty spanned West Africa, Spain and Mexico—from afar, they penned letters to share their news, their hopes and their strategies. Drawing on fragmentary historical documents that Felipa and Antón created in their quests for freedom, the story intertwines these records with the dramatic arcs of their lives. This epic history spans oceans and mountains, cities and ports, palaces and ships, and paints a deeply moving picture of the human consequences of European imperialism—and of the courage and resilience of two individuals yearning to be free.