

# THE RACIAL LIMITATIONS OF FREEDOM IN SANTIAGO RUSIÑOL'S *LLIBERTAT!*

JEFFREY K. COLEMAN

## Abstract

---

Santiago Rusiñol's 1901 play *Llibertat!* is known as a harsh critique of Catalan liberalism. Little scholarly attention, however, has been devoted to the racialized nature in which Rusiñol frames his satire. This article will demonstrate that the play uses the rejection of the racialized Other (Jaumet Negre) not only to highlight the hypocrisy of liberal Catalan political rhetoric but also as a way to critique the notion of freedom as a societal ideal. As Josep Maria Mestres's 2013 *mise en scène* demonstrates, freedom does exist in Catalonia, but only for some, thus establishing a connection between the racial injustice experienced by Jaumet Negre and the racialized tension that has emerged in contemporary Catalonia as a result of immigration.

---

Santiago Rusiñol's 1901 play *Llibertat!* is a polemical look into the hypocrisy of liberal ideology as portrayed in a small coastal Catalan town. The satirical critique of political rhetoric is coupled with the presence of a racial Other (Jaumet Negre) in the town. Though written during the early twentieth century, the play still resonates today, as demonstrated by Catalan director Josep Maria Mestres's 2013 *mise en scène*, which emphasized the role that racism and xenophobia has played in Catalonia from the early twentieth century to the present. The apparent timelessness of Rusiñol's play creates a critique of a society that betrays the sociopolitical messages it proclaims. While much critical attention has been paid to the political connotations of the text, the racialized nature of these connotations has been explored less so. This article will demonstrate that the play uses the rejection of the Other not only to highlight the hypocrisy of liberal Catalan political rhetoric but also as a way to critique the notion of freedom as a societal ideal. By this I mean, that society has imposed racial limits that prevent the Other from obtaining freedom, be it cultural, political, or social. Furthermore, in Mestres's production, which established a connection between the racial injustice experienced by Jaumet Negre and the racialized tension that has emerged in contemporary Catalonia as a result of immigration, it can be argued that *llibertat* cannot be so simply achieved in contemporary society and thus his staging is a call for the autochthonous society to enact change.

*Llibertat!* recounts the story of a mulatto child who, in Act I, arrives from Cuba to a small town in Catalonia with his *amo* (master) Don Patriciu. Upon their arrival,

Don Patríciau is named *hijo adoptivo* of the town and there is a large ceremony. The child, known only as “Moreno” at this point in the play, nervously observes the townspeople as they do the same to him. Donya Carme and other women in town demand that Don Patríciau not take Moreno with him back to Cuba, but rather leave the child in the town so that he may be baptized and christened. At the end of Act I, however, Moreno is abandoned as none of the townspeople actually want to care for him, despite the overwhelming desire for him to be left in the town. Out of pity, Pere Anton, the local bartender, takes Moreno into his home to be raised alongside his daughter, Florentina.

In Act II, which occurs ten years later, Moreno is now named Jaumet Negre. He is a young intellectual who sees himself as equal to the other men in the town as a result of his liberal upbringing. That is, until Jaumet decides to ask Pere Anton for Florentina’s hand in marriage. The mere possibility of miscegenation causes Pere Anton to disavow Jaumet and to convince the townsmen to ostracize him, which actions allow Jaumet to realize that the ideals of liberalism do not and never will apply to him. Only his friend Martinet is willing to defend him and his humanity when the town turns against him. In Act III, the conflict shifts to class struggle as the local factory workers strike against the layoff of twenty local men spurred by industrialization, mechanization, and the incorporation of foreign workers (i.e. cheaper labor). The two opposing sides, however, are able to rally together against the presence of Jaumet in the town because, “Això no és un negre: és un grop que ens ha sortit a l’arbre de les idees,” thereby implying that he (and his blackness) is a parasitic or cancerous growth that threatens liberalism and progress (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 537).

The play is based on a short story entitled “Llibertat” that Rusiñol published in his 1898 collection of short stories, *Fulls de la vida*. The short story is much more tragic in that upon the death of the *amo* (Don Juan), Jaumet Negre is baptized and then simply forgotten. Homeless and alone, Jaumet finds solace in the sea. Due to loneliness, he begins drinking alcohol until one day he drunkenly falls into the ocean and drowns. When his body washes up on shore, he is immediately recognized, “essent com era l’únic negre que hi havia en tot el poble” (Rusiñol, “Llibertat” 37). The cause of his death, though, is linked to his blackness rather than to the lack of respect he received from the townspeople because as the story’s narrator depicts, “Aquell *negrito endreçat*, rialler, vergonyós i trist, s’havia tornat una figura terrible: un ídol indi arrossegat pels fangals; un *mascaron* vernissat de vaixell pirata, suant quitrà i molsa; una fantasma endolada; tot menys la imatge d’un home” (36; emphasis in the original). Jaumet’s blackness is novelty turned monstrosity, such that the town strips him of his humanity by physically and socially ostracizing him. Upon his death, the “taca de tinta en aquella capsula blanca” no longer disrupts the status quo of the Catalan society, allowing it to continue to

believe that it upholds liberal values (34). The death of Jaumet Negre in the short story serves as a stark critique of the Catalan society and its alleged liberal ideals, which Rusiñol portrays as hypocritical for its use of words such as *llibertat* and the inhumane abandonment of Jaumet from baptism to death.

In the short story, Jaumet Negre is ostracized for being black and therefore must die in order to achieve *llibertat*, as is demonstrated by the story's last sentence, "A l'últim era ben lliure" (38). In the play, however, he is only capable of achieving freedom through his self-imposed exile from the town at the end of Act III, or, to use the term that Neil Roberts so precisely coined, "marronage". Jaumet Negre's exile at the end of the play is an act of escape, a flight from the repression of the supposedly liberal progressive society in which he was raised. As Roberts defines it, "Marronage is a total refusal of the enslaved condition" (13). It is in this act of flight that Jaumet is able to enjoy freedom, because all of the townspeople, including his one friend, Martinet, are products and symbols of a society that serves to "mostrar al públic el desencaix entre el llenguatge i la realitat" (Casacuberta 102). The discrepancy between political rhetoric and lived experience necessitates marronage, as Jaumet Negre is the only character to whom *llibertat* does not apply.

The word *llibertat* takes on various connotations throughout the play, shifting according to whoever invokes the word. By definition (*Diccionari de la llengua catalana*), *llibertat* can refer to the "Estat o condició de qui és lliure, de qui no està subjecte a un poder estrany, a una autoritat arbitrària, de qui no està constret per una obligació, un deure, una disciplina, una condició onerosa, etc.," or the "Estat dels ciutadans els drets i els privilegis dels quals estan protegits per una comunitat civil organitzada, dels ciutadans que participen de la vida pública exercint un control sobre llur govern i dels ciutadans que són lliures en tot allò que la llei no prohibeix." These varying definitions of the word can be boiled down to two concepts of freedom developed by Isaiah Berlin: negative freedom and positive freedom. As Anthony Bogues summarizes, "For Berlin, negative freedom is about a *freedom from*, an absence of interference. Drawing from Kant, he argues that positive freedom is about a *freedom to* and includes issues of self-realization and mastery" (38; emphasis in the original). In Rusiñol's play, these complementary notions of freedom are necessary to understand how Jaumet is excluded from the freedom that the rest of Catalan society accesses.

## FREEDOM: INTERPRETATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The word *llibertat* is used for the first time in the play in Act I, Scene I, when Jepet asks Pere Anton why Don Patriciu should be considered *hijo adoptivo honorario*

of the town, “¿Ha donat llibertat al poble?” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 507).<sup>1</sup> Pere Anton’s response is that Don Patriciu has contributed to the industrial progress of the town, which in turn will enable the creation of egalitarian society in which all houses and streets are the same, instituting “nivellació obligatòria i llibertat per a tothom” (507).<sup>2</sup> *Llibertat* in this case is freedom from difference, engendering homogeneity, which is destroyed with the arrival of the mulatto child. The notion of freedom is first used in reference to Jaumet Negre in Act I, Scene I, when Pere Anton explains why the *negrito* that Don Patriciu is bringing to the town is not a slave:

No. Els negres eren esclaus i els *negritos* són independents i lliures. Si encara en guarden algun, com don Patriciu té el seu, és que són negres de niu, negres desparionats que encara els tenen amb ells perquè estaven avesats a tenir la seva cria i no saben desavesar-se’n. Però avui no hi ha esclavitud; tots som uns. Tu ets igual que jo i ells són iguals que nosaltres, gràcies als nostres principis, a l’*ideia* i l’igualtat de política i de supressió de colors per mires humanitàries. (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 508; emphasis in the original)

The distinction between *negres* and *negritos* is a matter of freedom and sentiment. The latter group’s inability to desert their former slave masters as a result of their enslaved upbringing is described here as a form of separation anxiety. However, the desire or need to separate is no longer necessary since slavery has ended and Western society has allegedly become color-blind. The abolition of slavery thus presents a case of negative freedom, in which the former slave now has freedom from subjugation.

When El Mestre enters the conversation in Scene III, he adds eugenic arguments to explain the novelty of the boy’s arrival in the town, to which Martinet, the play’s intellectual voice of reason, responds with sarcasm. Martinet explains that the arrival of laws and government to black people will ensure that they, “Tindran l’angúnia moderna: consums, quintes, exèrcits uniformats i fins comitès i sufragi. De tot tindran menos dret d’èsser feliços” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 509). The freedoms that will be given to black people ultimately do not allow for happiness, which serves as an enlightened barometer of freedom. Baldiri rebukes Martinet, stating “Noi, remena i escapça i que cada u pensi o no pensi, amb llibertat de pensada” (510). As Sosa-Velasco points out,

Rusiñol parodia la idea de llibertat entesa com a “llibre alvedriu” o com la “possibilitat de decidir per si mateix sobre la pròpia conducta i sobre el sentit o la configuració del propi ésser, la que comporta una capacitat d’elecció entre diverses alternatives.” Baldiri no es refereix a la llibertat de pensament, entesa com la llibertat de pensar de forma diferent, sinó a “no pensar,” allò que aquests personatges faran al llarg de tota l’obra, ja que articulen paraules sobre la llibertat que no entenen. (237)

The right to *not think* is what enables the word *llibertat* to become so diluted and problematic throughout the play, because many, like Baldiri, do not understand its implications for others.

At the end of Act I, the townspeople implore Don Patríciau to leave the mulatto child in the town. He finally concedes by stating:

DON PATRÍCIU. *Bueno, doncs. Que es quedi. Vull dar-vos una altra prueba que os quiero más que a mi plata. Os regalo el negro. Queda't en el pueblo, Moreno. Sigas hombre libre, i que la libertad te ampare, que yo me voy al otro mundo, país de las libertades.*

PERE ANTON. Que visca la llibertat!

TOTS. Visca! (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 516; emphasis in the original)

This excerpt transmits several messages about freedom, particularly that of the mulatto child. First, the boy is said to be worth more than Don Patríciau's money. One possible reason for this is that Don Patríciau states that he has more than six dozen other *negritos*, which would imply that the boy is replaceable. Another possibility is that the child is the son of Don Patríciau, hence the boy's mulatto complexion, which in turn explains his resistance to the town's plea through his solemn declaration, "No vos creieu que siga esclavo!" (516). On the one hand, the boy is dispensable because he is no longer a slave, but on the other hand, if the child is his son, then he is of incalculable value that cannot be disclosed and, therefore, giving him up is the only way to avoid further discussion of his origin. Both interpretations lead to the same end, in that Don Patríciau tells the child that freedom will protect him. However, Don Patríciau says that he is leaving for the land of freedoms (Cuba), implying that freedom is not present in the coastal town. Cuba, at this historical moment, is now independent from Spain, signifying a level of political autonomy not found in Catalonia. Rusiñol therefore makes clear that freedom in Catalonia is a farce and foreshadows that it will not protect the boy.

In Act II, Scene I, which takes place ten years later, we discover that Pere Anton ends up adopting Jaumet Negre because no one else wanted him. Don Patríciau died very soon after the action of Act I, and at the burial, Jaumet refused to move from the tombstone. Pere Anton explains to Jepet why he chose to have compassion for Jaumet and adopt him:

PERE ANTON. I, fill meu, el van tenir d'arrencar com qui arrenca les arrels d'un xiprer vell que s'ha arrelat a terra.

JEPET. Sí que ho tenia arrelat, això de l'esclavitud!

PERE ANTON. Per això, com t'he dit, em féu tanta compassió, que fins me'l vaig emportar a casa per ensenyar-li de prop les lleis de la democràcia i treure'l de les dames grises.

[...]

PERE ANTON. Encara el tindria a casa si no fos la meva dèria: llibertat, llibertat sempre, per a bèsties i persones. (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 518–519)

Similar to the earlier excerpt differentiating *negres* and *negritos*, there is reference to the internalization of slavery as a characteristic of blackness. The metaphor of the cypress tree illustrates the deep-rooted effects of slavery, which can only be uprooted by the laws of democracy. The democratic laws to which Pere Anton refers are the ideals of the French Revolution and liberalism: freedom, equality, and brotherhood. They compel Pere Anton to teach Jaumet to read and write in order to understand democracy. Jaumet grows up to exceed expectations because “treballa com... com lo que és, i és intel·ligent i honrat, té inculcada l’*ideia* i sap més que tots nosaltres” (518; emphasis in the original). Pere Anton catches himself about to use the common phrase, “treballar com un negre,” which alludes to the arduous work of slaves in the Americas. The shift to highlight Jaumet’s intelligence does not preclude his blackness and therefore his monstrosity, no matter how liberal and accepting Pere Anton appears to be, because in distinguishing between freedom for animals and for people, it is left unclear whether he considers Jaumet to be a man or a beast.

Though Pere Anton wants freedom for men and beasts, the distinction is rooted in racism. As Lewis Gordon explains, “Blacks here suffer the phobogenic reality posed by the spirit of racial seriousness. In effect, they more than symbolize or signify various social pathologies—they become them. In our anti-Black world, Blacks are pathology” (87). If blackness is pathology, then no matter how integrated into the Catalan society Jaumet Negre may be, he functions as the town’s phobogenic object that must be excised for the health of the town. It is also worth noting that despite being the play’s main protagonist, Jaumet Negre appears in the text simply as “El Negre,” even after being baptized with a name that carries significance in Catalan culture. For example, the stage directions for Act II describe, “El negre s’ha fet un jove fort, fornit i esvelt” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 517). Unlike the description of other characters, his description is entirely physical, thus building upon the stereotypical image of the black man physically superior, which in turn creates subconscious fear of the day that he may revolt against whiteness. In Act II, Scene III, Martinet and Jaumet discuss why the fact that the latter is no longer a child makes him a phobogenic subject:

MARTINET. Això és el mal.

EL NEGRE. Que m’hagi fet home?

MARTINET. Que t’hagis fet home. Mentres eres... un *niñero*, una joguina mansa que n’estalviaves d’altres a les criatures dels rics; un divertiment barat que sabia moure els ulls i que no s’espatllava mai, allavores... eres *negrito*; allavores distreies i entretenies; portaves recados i et feien ballar una dansa que en deien del teu país;

i, com t'estimaven per dèbil, et donaven menjar sobrer i roba esquifida i ridícula; però, ah, fill meu!, a mida que et facis home, que et facis *negre* a seques, ja els rics et voldran... de lluny, perquè, vist de massa prop, els espantaries les criatures i els espantaries an ells. Ara, si ets tu que et fas ric, pel do de la intel·ligència, no et voldran els menestrals. I, si ets fas independent, no et voldran ni els rics ni els pobres.

EL NEGRE. Doncs què haig de fer?

MARTINET. Fer-te un món per a tu mateix. Que jo et serveixi d'exemple. (520; emphasis in the original)

As a child, Jaumet Negre could be regarded as a novel object, a commodity of cultural difference for the town's children. As a man, however, his blackness disenfranchises him from integrating because he poses a phobogenic reality to Catalan society due to his intelligence and his physical capability.

This fear is realized in Act II, Scene VIII, when Jaumet Negre asks Pere Anton for Florentina's hand in marriage:

PERE ANTON. Però què sento! ¿Què t'has tornat boig? Que ets cego? Que no et veus? ¿Que potser no tens mirall? Vaia: estàs de broma!

[...]

EL NEGRE. Beneit me dieu perquè estimo! ¿I quins motius teniu per a negar-me-la? No sóc honrat? ¿No sóc digne, no sóc un home com els altres?

PERE ANTON. ¿I què has d'èsser, tros de suro? ¿I que potser no ho veus, que ets... negre?

EL NEGRE. Negre! ¿I no deïeu ara mateix que no hi havia diferència?

PERE ANTON. Allò era la política, i lo que em demanes és sèrio. I vaia, i que no en parlem més; i no et tracto d'altra manera perquè fa temps que et conec. (526–527)

Pere Anton's disavowal is ironic in that he raised Jaumet Negre not to see himself as different from anyone else in the town. Jaumet's ability to process and truly understand the liberal ideals he was taught therefore restrict his freedom due to the limited comprehension of freedom that the other men in town have. Jaumet is thus unable to obtain positive freedom (freedom *to*) because the self-realization of his manhood, unlinked to his blackness, threatened the racial stability of the town.

Rusiñol sets up Act II such that the limitations of freedom are actually symbolized by the room in which the act takes place. The stage directions state that "Sobre la presidència, una capelleta blava amb l'estàtua de la "Llibertat il·luminant el món"; dos ciris apagats per a il·luminar l'estàtua, i al voltant, ple de gàbies amb ocells presos i cegos" (517). The statue of freedom is incapable of illuminating the world, as the candles are unlit. In a similar fashion, the townspeople are incapable of achieving freedom because they are jailed in their myopic ideology and thus blind to the light of freedom, just like birds. The placement of these items above the president's podium signifies the hypocrisy of freedom that the Junta comes to

represent through its actions in Act II. At the end of the act, when the Junta votes to expel Jaumet Negre from the casino for allegedly insulting the presidency and wishing to subvert the principles of freedom, it is the word *llibertat* that allows the Junta to do so:

MARTINET. *Bueno*. Ja és fora. I en nom de qui l'haveu tret!

PERE ANTON. De les majories.

MARTINET. I aquella fraternitat?

BALDIRI (*aixecant-se*). És en temps de pau.

MARTINET. I l'igualtat davant la llei?

JEPET (*aixecant-se*). Nosaltres no ho som, la llei.

MARTINET. I el dret de la llibertat?

PERE ANTON. Tenim la llibertat de treure-us.

MARTINET. I nosaltres la de dir-vos que, si viu en algun lloc aquesta pobra llibertat, no serà mai vora vostra, que fins la llibertat prendríeu presonera entre les reixes dels vostres cervells estúpids. Anem i deixem-los acoblats, que necessiten aguantar-se els uns amb el cos dels altres si no volen estimbar-se. No són dignes d'anar sols. La soledat és per als homes. (528)

The words of liberalism used in this scene are a facade, just as is the symbolic weight of the statue of liberty described earlier in this paragraph. The ideals of liberalism shine upon no one without the acceptance of all people, hence why the birds are blind and jailed just as the men have freedom trapped in their narrow minds. Rusiñol craftily uses dialogue and the scenography to critique the hypocrisy of society in proclaiming the sublime ideals of liberalism without a complete application.

The symbolic representation of *llibertat* extends into Act III with the presence of the tree of freedom. Act III takes place in a plaza in the industrial wasteland outside the town, in which, “Al mig de la plaça, un tancadet com un panteó protestant, amb un reixadet de llances, i entre els ferros de la reixa, morint-se de set i de pols, l'arbre de la Llibertat. Més enllà, més arbres, d'aquells arbres tenyits per sutge de fàbrica i suc de carbó de pedra” (529). The tree of freedom, unlike the statue of freedom, is not symbolic of political hypocrisy, but rather the societal shift from religious to industrial values, which kills any possibility for freedom to flourish. As Sosa-Velasco notes, “De manera semblant a l'estàtua de la llibertat, l'arbre de la llibertat enreixat torna a mostrar la contradicció entre les idees de llibertat que es proclamen i la seva efectiva representació simbòlica” (235). In Scene II Pere Anton sets the tree of freedom on fire, stating that it was essentially already dead due to the contamination from the factory that Don Patriciu had built to stimulate the economy of the town. Industrialization at the beginning of the twentieth century was necessary for the modernization of Spain, but automation (just as we are seeing today) then replaced the manual labor of the Spanish workforce.

In Act III, Scene III, it is announced that the factory had laid off twenty local men, leading to a strike in which Baldiri is the leader. The members of the strike demand that all foreigners who work in the town be sacked. Donya Carme blames the factory and its workers for the decline of moral values in the town: “Si això és ple de forasters que estan matant les creències i les virtuts casolanes! Fins negrots tenim aquí!” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 532). Although the text does not explicitly state the origin of these foreign workers, the most probable answer is that they arrived from other regions of Spain. As Vicente Moreno Cullerell avers, regarding industrial migration at the end of the nineteenth century:

Sense que l'èxode rural interior cap a les ciutats s'aturés, ara començarien a arribar immigrants no catalans — bàsicament valencians, aragonesos i els primers murcians — , a les principals poblacions urbanes i industrials del país com a conseqüència de l'anomenada “febre de l'or” (1876–1886), de la generació de llocs de treball derivats de l'Exposició Universal de Barcelona de 1888 i de l'auge econòmic provocat pel sistema proteccionista de la Restauració.

Donya Carme's scandalized response to their presence is, in part, a result of linguistic dissonance, as many of these workers likely did not speak Catalan. Her second comment regarding the presence of more black people in the town is a sign of the gravity of the pathology, the destruction of the town morally and physically. By that I mean that despite the cultural differences of the other foreign workers, it is the presence of the black workers, probably brought from Cuba by *indianos*, that marks the limits of the town's acceptance.

At this point in the play, Jaumet Negre is an outcast and now homeless. When two factory workers make their way to the strike, one asks if Jaumet is coming, to which the other responds, “Deixa'l estar, que no és dels nostres” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 532). It could be argued that *nostres* refers to a factory worker on strike or to a white man, or both. Regardless, the proclamation they make, “Llibertat, llibertat per a tots!,” excludes Jaumet Negre. A series of women then pass by, making racist remarks until Florentina arrives to make them leave. The emotional conversation between Florentina and Jaumet in Scene IX reveals that she cares for him, but is unable to love him because she fears that if they were to have children, they would suffer the same discrimination that he faces now. Her inability to serve as Jaumet's social and romantic ally solidifies the impossibility of freedom from discrimination.

Upon hearing the workers' cries for freedom, brotherhood, universal love, and the destruction of barriers, Jaumet thinks that they will support him as they predicate the ideologies to which he clings so dearly. However, as Baldiri is the leader of the strike, he positions Jaumet as a scapegoat for the town's problems: “Però si algú té de sortir, no té d'ésser cap company de la mateixa política. Aquí

n'hi ha alguns (*amb molta reticència*) que són més que forasters. Que són estranys a nosaltres!” (537). Jaumet is more than a foreigner, because despite being raised as an autochthonous townspeople, he is a racialized Other as well. As such, there is no possibility of his remaining in the town. The final lines of the play establish a case for marronage as the only way to achieve freedom:

MARTINET. Malalts de la prèdica! Després de tant predicar, ¿no us remou la consciència que tingui d'abandonar-vos?

PERE ANTON. Ell és lliure! Que visca la llibertat!

TOTS. Visca!

MARTINET. Visca sempre! Però tingueu ben present que si no sabeu conquerir-la no sou dignes de tenir-la!

(*El Negre i en Martinet fugen pel fons.*)

BALDIRI. Nois! Vos dic que *viva* la llibertat!

TOTS. Que *viva* la llibertat! (537–538)

Martinet's reference to the townspeople as “malalts” subverts the pathology narrative used against Jaumet. It is rather they who are sick as a result of their inability to see the hypocrisy of the selective liberalism. By the end of the play, the word *llibertat* now rings hollow as it is clear how little it means. As Roberts propounds, “The issue of the color line and the contradiction of freedom for some and not for all raise queries about the model of freedom itself and markers of achievement” (37). If race dismantles freedom as a societal ideal then we must question if freedom is truly possible for the racial Other. Rusiñol suggests in *Llibertat!* that freedom is impossible for the Other so long as the autochthonous society is unable to see the Other as worthy of the same sociopolitical ideals as the rest of society.

Jaumet Negre declares his departure in his final two lines of the play. In the first, upon being asked where he will go, Jaumet explains marronage as an escape from hypocrisy: “No ho sé, a on vaig. A buscar a on devia néixer; a buscar una pàtria nova. Vaig allí on me vulguin bé o em matin d'una vegada a cops de llança an el cor, no a punxades a l'ànima amagades amb carícies” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 537). There is a desire to return to Cuba or perhaps a journey toward a new homeland, for example, in Africa, where he can be accepted for who he is. Édouard Glissant names these two paths *retour* and *détour*. Neil Roberts summarizes Glissant's first path by noting that “*Retour* is the yearning to return to a single origin and fixed state of being. Glissant argues that individuals and groups who have been transplanted by force from one location to another develop an obsession with finding strategies to recreate lost primordial customs and ways of life and to return to an original ancestral locale” (Roberts 157). *Retour* is impossible because even if Jaumet Negre returns to Cuba, his ten years away in Catalonia would render him

a stranger, culturally and linguistically. On the other hand, “*Détour* is the desire to acquire freedom in a place or medium other than your transplanted homeland” (Roberts 157). *Détour*, however, is possible in that Jaumet Negre, with an aware political consciousness, may be able to find or even create a society in which the ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood are actually upheld. Paradoxically, both fleeing and staying, according to Jaumet’s quote above, imply violence. In the new homeland there is the possibility of physical violence (to the heart) whereas staying in the town is a perpetuation of psychological and spiritual violence (to the soul) disguised in kindness, which ultimately is more damaging as it infringes more upon one’s notion of freedom. Marronage, then, is the only way in which Jaumet Negre can continue to assert himself as a man, equal to all others.

In his last line, Jaumet Negre addresses the town with his desire for a racial utopia, “Me’n vaig poble; me’n vaig amb recança al cor! T’estimava com un fill, i tu m’has fet de madrastra. No et maleixo, que no en sé, de maleir. T’estimo encara, i t’espero on tots poguem abraçar-nos en braços del sentiment, que són els sols que conec” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 537). Jaumet’s optimism in spite of all that has happened since his arrival to Catalonia rests in the fact that he imagines himself as a son and citizen of the town, as an equal. However, he has never truly been equal, which is made textually evident by the fact that Pere Anton never acknowledges Jaumet as a son, but rather as a boy that he raised because Jaumet “semblava gosset sense amo” (518). Jaumet’s inability to conceptualize himself as an Other, just like his desire to marry Florentina, stems from an ideological upbringing in which the concept of the Other did not exist. As a result, he invites the townspeople to join him on the journey toward a more harmonious society — but only Martinet flees with him.

## A RETELLING OF THE STORY

The play has only been staged five times: the Italian translation debuted on August 21, 1901 at the Teatre Novetats; the Catalan original version on October 11, 1901 at the Teatre Romea; Jacinto Benavente’s Castilian translation at the Teatro de la Comedia in Madrid on March 17, 1902, Juan Antonio Hormigón’s Castilian production at the Teatro María Guerrero in Madrid on September 25, 1998; and finally Josep Maria Mestres’s production in Catalan, staged from May 5 to June 9, 2013 at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya. As Hormigón states, the distance between productions signifies that “Quizás por todo ello, por radicarse la historia en un pueblo catalán pero erigirse al mismo tiempo como un microcosmos de toda España, por conducirla con humorismo ácido hacia una conclusión amarga y melancólica sin concesiones edulcorantes, la obra no ha sido revisitada ni escénica

ni editorialmente desde comienzos de siglo [XX]” (Hormigón 10). In establishing a microcosm of Catalan (and Spanish) society, the play is able to critique the incongruence that exists in the standing definition of national identity, which is as important now as it was in 1901. It is also that strong critique, however, that has encumbered the frequency of its staging. This is partly because so little has changed in regards to racism in the Western world. As Jesús Rubio Jiménez notes, “Un siglo después del estreno de *Llibertat*, por desgracia no se ha avanzado mucho en la lucha contra el racismo y la xenofobia, la libertad continúa siendo un espejismo para razas enteras. El negro sigue siendo visto como ser inferior y como “perro” tal como se reitera en la comedia” (Rubio Jiménez 38). Rusiñol’s work is therefore necessary to understand and critique the ways in which progressive members of society can contribute to racism and xenophobia through hypocrisy and inconsistency.

Regarding the genesis of his staging of the play, in a personal interview with director Josep Maria Mestres, he states that he lived through “la inmigración andaluza de los años 60, entonces claro, había realmente como una separación muy fuerte entre el otro, los de allí, y los del pueblo. Era una cosa realmente muy fea [...]. Es decir mirábamos como muy normal que estábamos los de allí y los de fuera, y era una cosa que realmente me parecía muy injusta”<sup>3</sup> (Mestres). His lived experience explains his decision to separate the play’s three acts over three time periods, 1901, the 1960s, and 2013, which reflects how waves of immigration have affected Catalonia. The first refers to the return of *indianos* from Cuba after the Hispano-American War in 1898; the second, the internal migrations from southern Spain to Catalonia during the 1950s and 1960s; the third, the present-day wave of migrants from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. The ostracizing of immigrants is nothing new, what has changed is simply which group is ostracized and the justification for that group’s marginalization.

Using the stage as a microcosm of the contemporary sociopolitical climate, Mestres utilizes nineteenth-century ideals to address the contemporary issue of race and immigration. Margarida Casacuberta elaborates:

*Llibertat*, igualtat, fraternitat, progrés, sufragi universal i drets humans, són els grans mots que enclouen les bases de l’Europa del segle XIX, de l’Europa moderna, positivista i romàntica, producte de les revolucions liberals i encaminada a l’adopció de règims democràtics. Pura ficció, segons Rusiñol, perquè aquests mots, ben lluny de posseir un valor absolut, prenen un valor o altra segons el context en què eren invocats. A *Llibertat!*, aquests termes [...] no són res més que “cabòries mal païdes”, conceptes buits, pura retòrica. (102)

In staging Act III in contemporary times, these terms are as empty now as they were in 1901, political buzzwords of progressive ideology that in practice are

nowhere to be seen. In addition to the chronological framework, Mestres also makes the audience complicit in the demise of Jaumet Negre through two scenic choices. First, the audience flanks both sides of the stage because “Això fa que les situacions interpel·lin l’espectador i el facin formar part d’aquest poble gris que descriu en Rusiñol” (Bruna). In addition, every audience member is given a Catalan flag to wave during momentous scenes, such as the ceremony commemorating Don Patrícia as *hijo adoptivo* of the town in Act I, and after Donya Carme’s proclamation that Jaumet Negre “Serà nostre; serà de tots, i entre tots el pujarem I en farem una persona” at the end of Act I (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 514). The carnivalesque nature of the audience’s participation implicates it in Jaumet Negre’s flight at the end of the play. Furthermore, waving Catalan flags is an overt reference to nationalism as exclusionary. Etienne Balibar writes that such nationalism creates “a racism of *extermination* or elimination (an ‘exclusive’ racism) [...] aiming to purify the social body of the stain or danger the inferior races may represent” (Balibar and Wallerstein 39; emphasis in the original). The display of national pride thus functions as a way to critique the political doublespeak of today, in which the nation espouses liberal ideals while simultaneously excluding the immigrant Other from what constitutes the nation.

Mestres’s staging of the play leads one to question the role of freedom and marronage for the racialized Other in present-day Catalan society. In other words, is freedom for the Other possible today? — and, if so, under whose terms? In today’s globalized, multicultural and multiracial world, marronage cannot be the answer to achieve freedom because Maroon communities can no longer exist in isolation as a result of technology. The effects of anti-blackness and the fabrication of the black body as a phobogenic object can emerge via social media and mass media. Rather than flee from the sociopolitical domain dominated by whiteness, Mestres demonstrates through his interpretation of the play that it is the responsibility of the autochthonous (white) society to fight against the arbitrary and racist application of revolutionary liberal ideals, such that freedom can exist for all.

If freedom is dependent on the greater society, then, as Jared Sexton proclaims, “blackness is not the pathogen [...], the world is” (31). The only character capable of seeing the play’s true pathogen is Martinet; however, he too is complicit in Jaumet’s exile as he advocates for flight. Martinet will flee with Jaumet, but this is less about securing Jaumet’s individual freedom and more about redeeming himself and his compatriots of their white guilt, as he declares, “Fuig, home primitiu, fugim d’aquest terra corcada i cerquem la terra ideal on tots poguem redimir-nos” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 537). The quotation refutes what other scholars, like Margarida Casacuberta, have laid out in regards to Martinet functioning as the intellectual voice of reason that defends Jaumet for three reasons. First, in referring

to Jaumet as a primitive man, Martinet falls into the same racial fallacies as his compatriots, like El Mestre, whose Eurocentric arguments claim that black people are designed for lives of slavery and pain. Martinet demonstrates his problematic stance from Act I as he, too, is unwilling to adopt Jaumet. Second, the decaying state of the town is in part due to Martinet's inability to convince others to understand his views. As the sole intellectual in a town of simple people, his voice is always patronizing and condescending, which alienates him as a possible source of reason. Therefore, in changing his command from the second person singular *fug* to the first person plural *fugim*, Martin is preemptively fleeing before the town can, next, turn against him. Third, in wanting redemption for all, Martinet in fact advocates for the freedom of the townspeople through the absolution of their sins, rather than through the correction of, or punishment for, their actions. Martinet's flight is therefore self-serving and thus problematizes his role as an ally for Jaumet.

Santiago Rusiñol's sharp critique of hypocritical liberal rhetoric in *Llibertat!* is relevant today as Catalonia pushes for independence and works to delineate its national identity. Given that Catalonia is the autonomous community with the highest rate of immigration, the question of race is and continues to be pivotal for understanding the future of the Catalan nation. Thus, Josep Maria Mestres's staging of the play, which juxtaposes racism with nationalism and immigration, is able to capture the political and rhetorical crossroads at which Catalonia finds itself as it defines its sovereignty. In talking with the director (see n. 3), he notes that the definition of Catalan identity is changing, "Eso aquí está cambiando y más en los últimos tiempos, con todo el crecimiento del soberanismo y todo eso ahora, sí que hay una corriente, también una consciencia, de que esto [prejuicio] no puede seguir así en círculos más progresistas." Ironically, Mestres's adaptation of the play was heavily criticized for its connection to present-day Catalonia in that its message was too heavy-handed. For example, acclaimed theatre critic Marcos Ordóñez wrote, "Resulta innecesario actualizar esa parte del drama para que el espectador se percate de que el conflicto central sigue presente, y la propuesta choca abiertamente con el texto: no encaja ver a obreros de hoy debatiendo las lacras del maquinismo o a Florentina rechazando a Jaumet porque le aterra tener hijos de color." While we no longer debate the importance of machinery, there is serious discussion in developed nations regarding the effect of automation on the job market. In many cases, the loss of manual labor jobs to automation is scapegoated onto immigrant communities, who are accused of stealing jobs. As for Ordóñez's second claim: Interracial relationships in Spain are still not wholly accepted, as is demonstrated by the results of the 2012 survey "Actitudes hacia la inmigración," by the Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia, in which Spaniards were asked if they would approve of their son /daughter marrying an immigrant. The data demonstrates that 64.4 per cent would accept such a marriage, and while

this is a majority, there still exists a large portion of society that does not approve (“Actitudes...” (VI) 8). This prejudice, according to the data in later surveys, is changing over time, but the cultural norm dictates that interracial relationships and, therefore, mixed race children are not seen as acceptable within the frame of Spanish national identity. Such a reaction is perhaps indicative of the liberal hypocrisy found in the progressive circles to which Mestres refers in that being leftist is not mutually exclusive from prejudice and racism.

## CONCLUSION

As Catalonia continues on the path towards independence, it will be crucial for its society to work through the relationship between the political rhetoric and the multiracial reality of its population in order to achieve a definition of Catalan identity that ensures that the pursuit of freedom will lead to a stronger nation for all. A recent example of that rhetorical relationship can be found in a tweet that Catalan journalist, Toni Soler, sent in response to the anti-independence rallies held in Barcelona on October 8, 2017, in which he states, “No oblidgeu evitar parlar català i respondre “sí, bwana.” Tranquils que a la nit se’n van.” This tweet appropriates a racialized colonial discourse in that the word *bwana* is Swahili, meaning “master,” a term used by native Africans to refer to white colonial authorities. The result of this appropriation is an analogous dynamic between black African colonial subjects and their white European rulers on one hand, and Catalan citizens and Spanish rulers on the other. If such an equivalence is to be drawn, then as Rusiñol’s play clearly demonstrates there is no possibility for coexistence, as freedom is limited for the Other, in this case the Catalan citizen, within the national framework of Spain. However, given the Catalan rejection of the Other in *Llibertat!* it is hypocritical at best and racist at worst for Catalans to assume racialized discourses to express their conflict with the Spanish state, given the former’s role in the subjugation of the racial Other from colonial times (slavery) to the present (immigration).

As Etienne Balibar states in his chapter on Racism and Nationalism, “for the nation to be itself, it has to be racially or culturally pure. It therefore has to isolate within its bosom, before eliminating or expelling them, the ‘false’, ‘exogenous’, ‘cross-bred’, ‘cosmopolitan’ elements” (Balibar and Wallerstein 60). Santiago Rusiñol demonstrates in *Llibertat!* that the proximity of Jaumet Negre to Catalan society is deliberate, for it allows for his eventual expulsion at the end of the play, creating a stronger nationalistic bond. By eliminating the phobogenic object (Jaumet Negre), the town thus leans towards blind nationalism instead of the liberalism that it claims to uphold. The consequence of liberal hypocrisy

is not limited to racism, because as Martinet points out, “Si una mica de color variant la pell d’un home ja us espanta, què no faran les idees que no siguin com les vostres!” (Rusiñol, *Obres completes* 528). The lack of tolerance could unravel to create a nationalistic society in which only certain manners of thought are acceptable. Given the privilege of historical hindsight, the play’s didactic message may not have resonated as strongly in 1901 as clearly it did in 2013, as audience members may have endured the Franco dictatorship and the subsequent transition to democracy. Freedom, as Jaumet Negre unfortunately realizes, is never free. Josep Maria Mestres’s staging of the play, though deemed by some critics as exaggeratedly obvious, elucidates the importance for contemporary citizens to combat injustices, because if not, Catalonia lends itself to repeat the same horrid hypocrisy demonstrated in the play. The consequences of obstructing freedom for immigrants today are even greater, as immigrants now constitute almost 14 per cent of the Catalan population. The racialized Other is no longer able to utilize marronage as a survival strategy, because there is nowhere to hide in the age of social media. However, if, as a society, we can eradicate the discrepancies between rhetoric and reality, perhaps then, freedom for all will finally be possible.

## NOTES

1. The reference to Don Patriciu’s honorary title in Castilian is a subtle indication that he is an indiano (a Spaniard who left for the Americas in search of financial gains and returned wealthy), rather than a “pure” Catalan. This is later emphasized by the fact that Don Patriciu speaks Catalan dispersed with many Castilian words.
2. The spelling follows that of the original Catalan text as found in the 1975 edition of Rusiñol’s *Obres completes*.
3. The author’s personal interview with Josep Maria Mestres, July 27, 2015.

## WORKS CITED

- Actitudes hacia la inmigración (VI)*. Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia, 2012.
- Balibar, Etienne, and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Verso, 1991.
- Bogues, Anthony. “And What About the Human?: Freedom, Human Emancipation, and the Radical Imagination.” *boundary 2*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2012, 29–46.
- Bruna, Teresa. “Mestres dirigeix ‘Llibertat’ de Rusiñol amb un gran repartiment al TNC.” *Teatralnet: Revista Digital D’artes Escèniques*, 2013.
- Casacuberta, Margarida. *Santiago Rusiñol i el teatre per dins*. Institut del Teatre, Diputació de Barcelona, 1999.

- Diccionari de la llengua catalana*. “Llibertat.” 2<sup>a</sup> ed. Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 2007.
- Gordon, Lewis R. *Existentialia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*. Routledge, 2000.
- Hormigón, Juan Antonio. “¡Llibertat!” *Llibertat! / ¡Llibertat!* Edited by Santiago Rusiñol, Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2000, 5–13.
- Mestres, Josep Maria. Personal Interview, July 27, 2015.
- Moreno Cullell, Vicente. “La immigració a Catalunya en el segle XX: de l’èxode rural a les primers migracions peninsulars (1877–1939).” *Sàpiens*. blogs.sapiens.cat/socialsenxarxa/2011/05/26/la-immigracio-a-catalunya-en-el-segle-xx-de-l’exode-rural-a-les-primeres-migracions-peninsulars-1877-1939/#. Accessed May 5, 2019.
- Ordóñez, Marcos. “Proclama antirracista.” *El País*, “Cultura,” June 4, 2013.
- Roberts, Neil. *Freedom as Marronage*. U of Chicago P, 2015.
- Rubio Jiménez, Jesús. “Llibertat!” de Santiago Rusiñol, o de como negros e intelectuales son hermanos.” *Llibertat! / ¡Llibertat!* Edited by Santiago Rusiñol. Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2000, 15–42.
- Rusiñol, Santiago. *Llibertat*. Ediciones l’Albí, 2010.
- . *Obres completes*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Editorial Selecta, 1973.
- Sexton, Jared. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism.” *InTensions*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2011.
- Soler, Toni. “No oblideu evitar parlar català i respondre ‘sí, bwana’. Tranquils que a la nit se’n van.” *Twitter*, @soler\_toni, 11:27, October 8, 2017. twitter.com/soler\_toni/status/916958133506977793. Accessed May 5, 2019.
- Sosa-Velasco, Alfredo J. “Reconsideració d’un dramaturg català: el teatre ideològic d’Henrik Ibsen a Llibertat! de Santiago Rusiñol.” *Hispanic Research Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2008, 231–246.