

國立中央大學 115 學年度碩士班考試入學試題

系所： 英美語文學系 碩士班 不分組(一般生)

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科目： 文化與文學分析

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Essay Question: Please carefully read the following passage and explain, in your own words, what the main idea is, paying particular attention to autobiography as a literary mediation of liberalism in relation to the paradoxical effects concerning slavery and emancipation. (100%)

“The canonization of Equiano’s text as the first autobiography in English by an enslaved African produces a structural paradox in which its elevation as a paradigm for liberal freedom has often involved the burial of the more complex currents of the transatlantic world on which that freedom rests. The intense social value accorded the autobiographical genre illustrates how liberal emancipation required a literary narrative of the self-authoring autonomous individual to be distilled out of the heteronomous collective subjectivity of colonial slavery. This is as much a literary critical question of how the autobiography is interpreted—whether we read it as a fluid story of a unitary author’s successful development of reason, sentiment, industry, and freedom, or whether we read for the ellipses, interruptions, contradictory shifts in voice or tempo that surround particular episodes—as it is a historiographical matter of which archives, events, temporalities and geographies will be privileged in the situating of Equiano’s story. Moreover, it asks us to consider how liberalism requires mediation through an aesthetic form that encourages readers to understand the emancipation of the individual as if it were a collective emancipation. As the autobiographical subject writes his life, and comes to possess the meaning of slavery as his own “past,” the genre does the work of subjugating the history of the collective enslaved within a regulative temporality in which slavery is only legible as a distant origin out of which the free modern subject can emerge. As such, autobiography, a genre of liberal political narrative that affirms individual right, may precisely contribute to the “forgetting” of the collective subject of colonial slavery, a heteronomous subaltern collectivity necessary to colonial slavery and its abolition. When abolitionists like Wilberforce promoted Equiano’s tale of individual liberty as the representative slave narrative, the exemplary qualities selected to illustrate the humanity of the slave may have subsumed the persistence of slavery, for those still in bondage at the time of the autobiography, as well as for those who would be ‘emancipated’ in the aftermath. The exemplary tale of individual freedom had the power to defer the larger scale transformation of slavery as a collective condition in the empire.”