

Textual Analysis Examination
Admissions by Application, 2021
MA program in English and American Literature

Graduate Institute of Foreign Languages and Literatures
National Taiwan University

- For this exam, you have two tasks. (1) Analyze the following excerpt in terms of plot, characterization, and point of view. That is, comment on what has happened, what kind of people are involved, and how the event is represented. (2) Discuss the whole excerpt with one (or more) critical framework of your choice.
- *Always refer to details of the text to substantiate your analysis.

On the stairs, there was a clear, plain silence.

It was a short staircase, fourteen steps in all, covered in lino from which the original pattern had been polished away to the point where it had the look of a faint memory. Eleven steps took you to the turn of the stairs where the cathedral and the sky always hung in the window frame. Three more steps took you on to the landing, about six feet long.

“Don’t move,” my mother said from the landing. “Don’t cross that window.”

I was on the tenth step, she was on the landing. I could have touched her.

“There’s something there between us. A shadow. Don’t move.”

I had no intention. I was enthralled. But I could see no shadow.

“There’s somebody there. Somebody unhappy. Go back down the stairs, son.”

I retreated one step. “How’ll you get down?”

“I’ll stay a while and it will go away.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ll feel it gone.”

“What if it doesn’t go?”

“It always does. I’ll not be long.”

I stood there, looking up at her. I loved her then. She was small and anxious, but without real fear.

“I’m sure I could walk up there to you, in two skips.”

“No, no. God knows. It’s bad enough me feeling it; I don’t want you to as well.”

“I don’t mind feeling it. It’s a bit like the smell of damp clothes, isn’t it?”

She laughed. “No, nothing like that. Don’t talk yourself into believing it. Just go downstairs.”

I went down, excited, and sat at the range with its red heart fire and black lead dust. We were haunted! We had a ghost, even in the middle of the afternoon. I heard her moving upstairs. The house was all cobweb tremors. No matter where I walked, it yielded before me and settled behind me. She came down after a bit, looking white.

“Did you see anything?”

“No, nothing, nothing at all. It’s just your old mother with her nerves. All imagination. There’s nothing there.”

I was up at the window before she could say anything more, but there was nothing there. I stared into the moiling darkness. I heard the clock in the bedroom clicking and the wind breathing through the chimney, and saw the neutral glimmer on the banister vanish into my hand as I slid my fingers down. Four steps before the kitchen door, I felt someone behind me and turned to see a darkness leaving the window.

My mother was crying quietly at the fireside. I went in and sat on the floor beside her and stared into the redness locked behind the bars of the range.