

Textual Analysis Examination
Admissions by Application, 2022
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.

He no longer thinks of waking Rosalind. Why wake her into this nightmare? In fact, the spectacle has the familiarity of a recurrent dream. Like most passengers, outwardly subdued by the monotony of air travel, he often lets his thoughts range across the possibilities while sitting, strapped down and docile, in front of a packaged meal. Outside, beyond a wall of thin steel and cheerful creaking plastic, it's minus sixty degrees and forty thousand feet to the ground. Flung across the Atlantic at five hundred feet a second, you submit to the folly because everyone else does. Your fellow passengers are reassured because you and the others around you appear calm. Looked at a certain way—deaths per passenger mile—the statistics are consoling. And how else attend a conference in southern California? Air travel is a stock market, a trick of mirrored perceptions, a fragile alliance of pooled belief; so long as nerves hold steady and no bombs or wreckers are on board, everybody prospers. When there's failure, there will be no half measures. Seen another way deaths per journey—the figures aren't so good. The market could plunge.

Plastic fork in hand, he often wonders how it might go—the screaming in the cabin partly muffled by that deadening acoustic, the fumbling in bags for phones and last words, the airline staff in their terror clinging to remembered fragments of procedure, the levelling smell of shit. But the scene construed from the outside, from afar like this, is also familiar. It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed.

Henry knows it's a trick of vision that makes him think he can see an outline now, a deeper black shape against the dark. The howl of the burning engine continues to rise in pitch. It wouldn't surprise him to see lights coming on across the city, or the square fill with residents in dressing gowns. Behind him Rosalind, well practised at excluding the city's night troubles from her sleep, turns on her side. The noise is probably no more intrusive than a passing siren on the Euston Road. The fiery white core and its coloured tail have grown larger—no passengers sitting

in that central section of the plane could survive. That is the other familiar element—the horror of what he can't see. Catastrophe observed from a safe distance. Watching death on a large scale, but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free. The fight to the death in the cockpit, a posse of brave passengers assembling before a last-hope charge against the fanatics. To escape the heat of that fire which part of the plane might you run to? The pilot's end might seem less lonely somehow. Is it pathetic folly to reach into the overhead locker for your bag, or necessary optimism? Will the thickly made-up lady who politely served you croissant and jam now be trying to stop you?