

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN LITERATURE  
**EXAMPLE**

Choose **two topics** from the following list and write well-organized and thorough essays in response. Your essays should demonstrate your wide acquaintance with specific works and movements in literature as well as your knowledge of the history of and recent developments in literary theory. The following are guidelines:

- *Unless a question specifies otherwise*, you should engage with at least three major examples drawn from your reading list. These three should come from three distinct “contexts”—either different historical periods or, where appropriate, from different cultures or sub-cultures. You may refer to further examples more briefly where appropriate.
- Be sure that you make some kind of argument rather than offering a survey of examples.
- Choose examples that cross the boundaries of genre. Show, for example, that you can write about drama and poetry as well as fiction.
- Include specific information about writers and texts that you discuss.
- In writing your essays make sure to define your major terms.
- Provide specific examples from the texts.
- Where appropriate, indicate what traditions of criticism and theory inform your interpretations of the literature.
- Do not use the same examples in both essays.
- Finally, note that each question may have its own particular instructions.

**FOUR HOURS**

1. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler asserts that, for many critics, “in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body.” One might expand this to say that gender studies as a whole needs to acknowledge the materiality of the body—with its pain and pleasures. Discuss the relationship between gender and the body in three texts.
2. One of the hallmarks of pastoral literature, going back to Virgil’s *Eclogues*, is the inclusion of the world of politics in a “green” space. Indeed, the simple, idealized pastoral landscape in literary texts may only be *known* when defined against a space of corrupt urbanity. Charles Martindale suggests that the relationship between the pastoral and the political “hints at the modern environmental movement, whose prescription for the good life” is “designed to counter ever-encroaching urbanism and the rape of nature.” Write an essay in which you explore issues of natural landscape vis-a-vis urbanism, and/or politics and/or corruption. Take your examples from three distinct historical periods.
3. “Every enhancement of the type ‘man,’” said Nietzsche, “has so far been the work of an aristocratic society..., a society that believes in the long ladder of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or another.” Explicate the literary relevance of this remark.
4. Following Benedict Anderson’s formulation that nations are *imagined communities*, theorists of nationalism have articulated the ways in which nationhood is culturally constructed. One primary way in which we see the formation of nationalism is through language and literature. Engaging with three texts from three distinct periods, address how nationalism is a concern of the authors. In what ways do the texts contribute to a nationalist ethos? How do they complicate notions of nationhood?
5. A pervasive element in many works of literature is their self-reflexivity. That is, texts often—either overtly or subtly—point to their own status as texts. Write an essay in which you discuss the self-reflexive nature of texts, commenting on the formal means by which this self-reflexivity is expressed (narrative framework, self-consciousness as working in a genre, point of view, etc.). What are the implications of such self-revelation, both for the texts themselves and for literary studies at large?