Program Statement

My time in History and Literature has been spent vacillating between belief and despair in the power of words in the face of human suffering. As a freshman, a combination of serendipity and active interest landed me in Anna Deeny’s HL90 seminar titled *Nunca Más.* Through Anna, I found the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita, whose work of poetry, *Canto a su amor desaparecido* (1985), opens with an unnamed narrator’s assertion, interrupting an otherwise blank page: “Now Zurita,” the voice accuses, “now that you got in here into our nightmares, through pure verse and guts: can you tell me where my son is?”

This haunting question reveals what has been a central motif in my academic work here. We can ask it this way: what is the use of words when bodies are at risk? Over the course of my time here, I examined this question in different sites of manifestation: not only the cliffs and desert of Chile where Zurita’s poetry locates thousands of mass disappearances during the Dirty War, but also the simultaneously beautiful and dangerous border region between the United States and Mexico, and the legacies of slavery and colonialism on Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean, to name just a few examples. This interest in the power of discourse to reckon with violence and material subjection continued to mature, developing over the course of my Junior Tutorial into the further question: how are particular historical and literary narratives constructed in order to support or contest a particular political discourse or project?

These questions led to an increasingly central focus on the modern Mexican State and its central nationalist myths. In my junior paper, I examined one of these myths: the narrative of the Mexican Revolution as a central and founding event in the modern nation’s consciousness. Specifically, I looked at a strike in 1907 at the Cananea coal mine near the U.S.-Mexico border. I treated historical accounts of the strike as my objects of analysis. My analysis revealed that although the miners of Cananea were themselves the agents of this legendary strike, which is so often cited as the catalyst to the Mexican Revolution, historical narratives tend to relegate them to passive subjects in their own struggle. Meanwhile the miners of Cananea and their counterparts throughout the Americas continue their fight against exploitation – reminding us that historiography itself, as a terrain shaped by power and discursive conflicts, can and must be mapped onto the material realm, if we are to take our work as scholars seriously.

My interest in State narratives and their discursive power, as well as my developing secondary field in African American studies, carried over into my senior thesis, where I examined the trope of the *mulata* as manifested in Mexican film and literature in the 1940s. *Afro-mexicanidad* as a historical and contemporary presence in the nation of Mexico has only recently begun to be acknowledged, in part due to the post-revolutionary nation’s conception of a unified *mestizo* identity. I embarked on this project in order to examine cultural products in which *afro-mexicanidad* surfaces, specifically in its powerful intersections with gender and sexuality. This was an effort to understand how and why the recognizable trope of the *mulata* woman was mobilized in cultural production in 1940s Mexico; part of a larger imperative to study the ways in which cultural and discursive production in Mexico has silenced minority and dissident voices and experiences.

To inaugurate Chile’s Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Raúl Zurita wrote the following: “And suddenly we understand – painfully, irredeemably – that every angle of this building, its almost hurtful beauty, is built upon an irreparable loss in the face of which all
discourse shatters… And yet we *should* speak… Expelled from the horizon of language, we should, nonetheless, lift ourselves up from the impotence of those same words.”¹ The shattering futility of language, and of text, noted here by Zurita, has haunted my academic work in History and Literature over the past four years. My task in the face of this reality has been an attempt to piece together the layered meanings behind the narratives through which we tell our stories; in the hopes that my words, though always insufficient, may raise questions that point in the direction of justice.

¹ Translated by Anna Deeny.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HISTLIT90aq</td>
<td>Nunca Más</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Anna Deeny</td>
<td>Art, literature, and history of the Chiliean and Argentinian Dirty Wars</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIST1926</td>
<td>How Historians Imagine Latin America</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Tamar Herzog</td>
<td>Examined historiographical debates central to the study of Latin America.</td>
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<td>GOV1295</td>
<td>Comparative Politics of Latin America</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>Steve Levitsky</td>
<td>20th century comparative politics, with a key focus on Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, and Argentina.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOC27</td>
<td>Intro to Social Movements</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>Jocelyn Viterna</td>
<td>Key theories relating to social mobilization and revolutionary activity. Focus on Zapatista rebellion in 1994 Chiapas, Mexico.</td>
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<td>HL97</td>
<td>Landscaping Latin America</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>Rebeca Hey-Colon and Ezer Vierba</td>
<td>Sophomore tutorial focused on the relationship between Latin America and landscape.</td>
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<td>HIST2510</td>
<td>History and Memory in Latin America</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>Kirsten Weld</td>
<td>Graduate seminar focused on the production of a journal article-length paper on some subject relating to history and memory in Latin America. Examined the National Literary Prize in Mexico in 1968, a year of political and social tumult.</td>
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<td>SPANISH90N</td>
<td>Border Flux and Border Subject</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>Sergio Delgado</td>
<td>Contemporary art and literature from the U.S.-Mexico border region.</td>
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<td>HL98</td>
<td>Junior Tutorial</td>
<td>Fall 2015- Spring 2016</td>
<td>René Carrasco</td>
<td>Critically examined selections of the central historical, literary, and theoretical texts from Latin American colonial period to the present day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAAS124y</td>
<td>Afro-Latin</td>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>Alejandro de la Fuente and</td>
<td>Art, literature, and history of the Afro-Latin American</td>
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<tr>
<td>America: History and Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Doris Sommer</td>
<td>experience, beginning in the colonial period until the present day.</td>
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<td>SPANISH71B: Intro to Modern Latin American</td>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>Sergio Delgado</td>
<td>Read central literary texts from throughout the region beginning in the late 19th century until present day.</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
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<td>HL99: Senior Tutorial</td>
<td>Fall 2016- Spring 2017</td>
<td>René Carrasco</td>
<td>Wrote senior thesis and prepared for oral examinations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL17: Marx and Marxism</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
<td>Tommie Shelby</td>
<td>Read central texts (early-late) by Karl Marx as well as key analytical philosophers in the Marxist tradition.</td>
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</table>
Topics for the Oral Exam

Contested Memory and the Conquest of the Americas

Primary

- *Popul Vuh*, excerpts.
- Christopher Columbus, excerpts from his journal.
- Hernán Cortés, "Segunda Carta de Relación" (1520).

Secondary


National Trauma and Reconciliation

Primary


Secondary


Neoliberalism and Gendered Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border

Primary

- Robert M. Young, *Alambrista!* (1977)

Secondary

National Myths and their Disintegration: the Mexican Revolution

Primary
- Mexican Constitution of 1917.

Secondary
- *The Mexican Revolution*, Adolfo Gilly (Introduction, Ch.1, Ch.3) (1983).

Nationhood and Racial Formation

Primary
- Simón Bolívar, “Letter from Jamaica” (1815).
- Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés or El Angel Hill* (1882).
- Jose Martí, “My Race” (1892).

Secondary
Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

(Pre- and Colonial period)

- *Popul Vuh* (selections).
- Christopher Columbus’ Diary and Letters (Selections).
- Hernán Cortés, “Segunda Carta de Relación” (1520).
- Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552).
- Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru* (Selections) (1617).

(19th and early 20th century)

- Simón Bolívar, “Letter from Jamaica” (1815).
- The Monroe Doctrine (1823).
- Louis and Elizabeth Agassiz, *A Journey in Brazil* (1868)
- Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdes or El Angel Hill* (1882).
- Jose Martí, “Our America” (1891).
- Jose Martí, “My Race” (1892).
- Platt Amendment (1901).
- Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, “Father Versus Mother” (1906).

(20th and early 21st century)

- Mario de Andrade, *Macunaima* (1928) and “Alejandrinho” (1928)
- Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry” (1924)
- Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto Antropófago (Cannibalist Manifesto)” (1928)
- Alejo Carpentier, *Kingdom of this World* (1949).
- Rosario Castellanos, *Balún Canán* (1957)
• Nunca Más: A Report by Argentina’s National Commission on Disappeared People (1986).
• Dir. Catherine Murphy, *Maestra* (2012).

Secondary Sources

• Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940).
• Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (1846).
• Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* (Introduction, Ch.1, Ch.3) (1983).
• Mariano Siskind, “The Genres of World Literature: The Case of Magical Realism” (2012).
• Ashley Carse, “Nature as Infrastructure: Making and Managing the Panama Canal Watershed” (2012).