

# *Letras Hispanas*

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**TITLE:** *Ripped Apart: Unsettling Narratives of Transnational Migration*

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In *Ripped Apart: Unsettling Narratives of Transnational Migration*, Vanessa De Veritch Woodside comprehensively examines Latina narratives of transnational migration that delve deeply into the intersecting nodes of violence experienced by undocumented migrants. She argues that Latina narratives turn to specific techniques to develop forms of empathic responses in readers that might unsettle the fear and hate-based discourses that surround immigration policies and practices in the US. By focusing on the power of storytelling, De Veritch proposes to look at the language of emotion and the practice of storytelling as methodological tools to broaden socio-economic analysis of the so called “immigration crisis.” Relying on a corpus of texts by Latina authors that focus on experiences of Mexican and Central American female and juvenile migrants, the book highlights the intersecting physical, psychological, sociocultural and legal/structural violence endured by undocumented migrants. Her argument develops in seven chapters that successfully articulate diverse historical and legal contexts as backdrop of her literary analysis of various genres by Latina authors.

The first chapter reconstructs the history of forcible family separation as result of immigration policies, laws and practices of policing that started as early as the nineteenth century. By drawing on trauma theory and narrative empathy, De Veritch argues that  
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looking at the literary representation of trauma and its aftermath permits a deeply and nuanced understanding of historical deployments of violence in the borderlands. Subsequent chapters show how each Latina author portrays layered forms of trauma and develop narrative empathy, defined as an engagement with “the trauma of other in a kind of virtual experience through which ones puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position” (78). Narrative empathy, she argues, allows to counteract a dominant political rhetoric centered on victimization, fear, and threat.

Chapter Two analyzes four young adult novels that document the violence endured by repatriated Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Mexican Revolution. In a subverted form of the Bildungsroman genre, novels by Irene Beltran Hernández, Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Guadalupe García McCall shed light on the not so visible types of violence lived by young women while coming of age within changing familial structures due to migration. Instead of focusing on physical dangers of border crossings, De Veritch argues, these novels present the complexity of feminine transnationalism and family separation challenging dominant representations of the male Chicano migrant experience. In so doing, these texts may shift reader’s cognitive schemas based on stereotypical expectations of gender roles and identity of migrant families.

Chapter Three focuses on Central American migrant experiences through Graciela Limón's novels and a short story by Helena María Viramontes. De Veritch argues that these literary texts link personal trauma to complex socioeconomic and sociocultural violence across borders inflicted on mothers and their children. By depicting the role of US foreign policy in Central America, the social consequences of the Salvadorian Civil War and the broader environmental and economic conditions that force migrants to leave, these texts unsettle dominant images of the Latinx migrant and the causes of migration.

Chapter Four analyzes novels by Reyna Grande, Ann Jaramillo and Alexandra Diaz that delve deeply into unaccompanied minors' experiences of migration. Like the other texts analyzed in previous chapters, these novels present the interconnected layers of violence that shape children's identity in the face of family separation. De Veritch posits that by appealing to emotions through coming-of-age stories, these authors unsettle preconceived dualities of childhood vs. adulthood, illegality vs. legality and vulnerability vs. criminality. Children in these stories blur the clear-cut distinctions of these categories by displaying forms of agency to overcome the different layers of trauma they endure.

Chapter Five does a genre-specific critique to broaden the discussion on motherhood, maternity and migration in Latina novels by Ana Castillo, Julia Alvarez, Melinda Palacio, and a theater play by Josefina Lopez. These texts represent border-crossing experiences and their emotional and physical consequences as well as family separation

caused by inhumane US immigration policies. These depictions counteract the demonized image of the undocumented border crosser by focusing on female characters and emotional experiences of distress, fear, loss, and uncertainty lived on these journeys that affect not only individuals but entire communities.

Chapter Six adds an important contribution to the book by including an analysis of non-fictional texts such as testimonios, ethnographies and memoirs written by Alicia Alarcón, Sonia Nazario, Diane Guerrero and Michelle Burford. Life-writing genres allow a deeply empathic engagement "by appealing to reader's sensibilities about the general dignity and humanity of all people" (226). De Veritch argues that by pointing to real-life people whose lives have been affected by transnational migration, these texts function as powerful tools for consciousness raising.

The last chapter wraps up the book's argument by highlighting the capacity of these texts to effect change beyond a practice of "documenting the undocumented" (278) by unsettling readers emotionally to recognize US immigration policy's negative effects on families and communities separated by borders. This book offers an innovative approach to the layers of trauma and violence inherent in experiences of undocumented migration to the US without turning to victimhood. By examining the transformative power of storytelling to unsettle readers through the multi-layered dimension of trauma, De Veritch highlights the role of affect in the politics of representation of transnational migration.