

## Book Reviews

# Review of: *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families.*

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Vieira, Kate. *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families.* Oxford University Press, 2019.

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Months ago, my mom was taking a graphology course offered by one of her friends in Venezuela and asked me to write a few paragraphs on the topic of family so that she could use it for practice (that is, to try to “read me” through my handwriting). Despite initially resisting this request (what might my writing *actually* reveal about myself?), I complied, obedient older hija that I am. In the process, I realized that it had been a long time since I had last handwritten anything in Spanish. When I sent her the photo of my composition, I captioned it: “Qué raro escribir en español” (*How strange to write in Spanish*), to which she replied: “No lo pierdas, hija... Has [sic] ejercicios que te lo recuerden.” My mom’s plea to keep my Spanish alive reveals her understanding of how language and writing keep us connected to our loved ones and our cultural roots. Writing in this story is not only about love and relationships, but also about money: having immigrated to Portugal four years ago, my mom was also taking this course to support her friend’s side hustle as a graphology teacher back home in Venezuela. My handwriting contributed to my mom’s desire for closeness and to her friend’s efforts towards financial stability.

In the Introduction to *Writing for Love and Money*, Kate Vieira states that “migration, often undertaken in response to problems of the pocketbook, also poses problems for the heart” (1), and that to address them both, families scattered across the globe often turn to literacy learning. The book joins other scholarly works that underscore the central role of community-based spaces and practices in literacy learning (Gillard, Haas, Kynard, Lorimer Leonard, Martinez). Specifically, *Writing for Love and Money* recognizes migration itself as a context for learning, one that throws into sharp relief the practical, affective, and ideological implications of literacy. To demonstrate how migration prompts literacy learning across borders, Vieira conducted fieldwork with transnational families tethered to three geographical locations across three continents: Jaú, Brazil; Daugavpils, Latvia; and Madison, Wisconsin. Each chapter examines how migration mobilizes

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literacy learning from a different set of circumstances. What is a constant in all of them is the exchange of what Vieira calls *writing remittances*; “the communication hardware, software, writing practices, and literacy knowledge that migrant family members often circulate across borders” (4).

The first two chapters of the book lay out the theoretical and methodological foundations of the project: Chapter 1, “What’s New about Writing for Love and Money?” situates the book in the context of relevant interdisciplinary conversations about literacy in general and migration-driven literacy in particular. Chapter 2, “Writing for Love and Money on Three Continents,” thoroughly discusses the project’s methodological approach and how research design choices contributed to the overall goal of the book. Of note in this section are Vieira’s discussions about the affordances of comparative case studies (34), literacy history interviews (36), researcher’s positionality (38), and collaborative and desire-motivated approaches to data collection and analysis in community-based research projects (38). Graduate- and early-career scholars interested in ethnographic approaches to research in rhetoric and composition might find Vieira’s methodological discussion especially useful.

Chapter 3, “Learning to Log On: From Post to Internet in Brazil” is the first case study in the book. It builds upon fieldwork conducted in 2011 in Jaú, Brazil, “a medium-sized town in the interior of São Paulo, with a modest outmigration” (39), and its emphasis is on literacy practices and communication technologies. In the chapter, Vieira engages with her fieldwork materials through three different lenses: First, what she calls an “aerial view;” a class analysis of the circulation of writing remittances. Here, Vieira notices that lower-class family members often shuttled hardware to their loved ones “back home” to maintain connection and in the hopes of intervening in their family’s socioeconomic (im)mobility. Second, through a “narrative view” of literacy trajectories, Vieira studies how individuals’ sense of agency in relation to personal and communal goals can be tied to their literacy journeys over the course of a lifetime. Third and last, a “historical view” of Jaú residents’ literacy experiences pre- and post-internet illustrates the contingent value of literacy practices, and the ways in which people respond to those changes.

Chapter 4, “Learning Languages: From Soviet Union to European Union in Latvia,” draws on Vieira’s 2014 fieldwork in Daugavpils, a city with a long history of in- and out-migration, as well as unstable borders. Here, stories of literacy learning complicate the popular narrative that equates emigration with “brain drain” for “origin countries.” The stories in this case study reveal how people from a society that for generations has seen itself in flux have developed trans/multilingual orientations and practices to maintain relationships and better their chances to have financially stable presents and futures. An important theoretical contribution of this chapter is the concept of *anticipatory literacy learning*, which Vieira uses to explain how “potential migrants stockpiled languages and literacies to prepare for what seemed to be their inevitable eventual migration westward” (96). The chapter powerfully captures how sociopolitical struggles, state apparatuses, and intergenerational knowledge can converge in writing and language.

Chapter 5, “Teaching Homeland Family: Love and Money in the United States” focuses on an immigrant family from Mexico and a refugee family from Ukraine, both living in Madison, Wisconsin. The case study investigates how differences in access to educational opportunities shape migrants’ circulation of writing remittances. The four migrants’ experiences that this chapter centers are noticeably different from each other, but they are connected in that each interviewee infuses writing remittances with the ideologies through which they have encountered literacy in their transnational journeys. Key to this discussion is Vieira’s framing of migration itself as a *fund of knowledge*, “the ‘historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills’ people use in their lives” (Moll et al. in Vieira, 131). This chapter further gels the argument about migration-driven literacy learning as both shaped by historical and sociopolitical factors, and tactically activated by migrants (or their loved ones) who understand and navigate their conditions for personal and collective benefit.

In the book’s Conclusion, “Migration-Driven Literacy in Uncertain Times,” Vieira outlines implications for researchers and educators at the intersection of migration and writing. In the context of research, Vieira calls for attention to three main ideas: 1) migration as a driver of literacy learning, 2) the entanglement of love and money in literacy learning, and 3) how space (state borders) and time (the changes that come with its passage) shape literacy practices and learning. As for educators, Vieira urges us to approach literacy teaching as the complex, entangled process that it is and to recognize and welcome community-based learning practices into our classrooms. She shares insights from her own attempts at doing this in a course titled “Fast Writing in Fast Times” that focused on the importance of learning to use literacy “just-in-time”: “to move, to act, and to adapt entrepreneurially across borders on a moment’s notice and often in inequitable circumstances” (166)—kairoic literacy, if you will.

Vieira’s focus on migration and literacy places her book (and her overall work) in a growing cluster of scholarship that sits at the intersection of mobilities, rhetorical practices, and learning (Chavez, Hsu, Lorimer Leonard, Nordquist, Wan). Horner et al. have recently called this emphasis a “mobilities paradigm” in composition (3). In this conversation, *Writing for Love and Money’s* intentional focus on members who remain in “places of origin” is important: Vieira’s decision to dedicate two out of the three case studies to this side of the migrant equation echoes the call by Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller to consider those who “stay put” and nonetheless are deeply impacted by migration (7). In Vieira’s study, “left behind” family members are not passive recipients of writing remittances; they are active members of “circuits of literate exchange” (151-152).

Other features of *Writing for Love and Money* connect this book to feminist research and writing: The book prioritizes storytelling and dialogue in/as knowledge production. Vieira also maintains a conversational tone throughout the book, which makes her analysis of complex phenomena accessible and alive. Additionally, thorough methodological descriptions in the Appendixes section, as well as the snippets of coding that are part of each case study, show a commitment to transparency and accountability. Feminist researchers might also rightly point out that the book’s emphasis on “traditional” families does not account for how writing remittances factor into the lives of migrants whose main support systems are not defined by blood and/or



marriage. I see Jo Hsu's *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics* (2022) as one example of more recent work that, even though not explicitly about literacy, extends questions about migration, self- and collective definition, and language and writing also present in this book.

Vieira did not claim to write the end-all-be-all of writing remittances and literacy learning, though. Her focus on families is a choice and if there is something she makes sure we are aware of from the beginning, is that the choices that she makes in this book often come from a particular position, one that includes her perspective as a mother. And as a mother, Vieira closes *Writing for Love and Money* with a Coda dedicated to matriarchs of transnational families: "Yes, these stories revealed, community ties often fray over space and time. But if we listen closely, we can hear the ever-present hum of the mothers, knitting them back together" (172). I thought of my own mother again, who insists on staying in touch with my American husband through a complicated texting scheme in which she messages him in English (so that she can practice, in the hopes of coming to visit us in Canada soon), and he replies in Spanish (so that he can know a part of our family that we need to hold onto before we lose it).

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