

**“AGAIN, BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME”:
TRANSLATING HIS-STORIES THROUGH A FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LENS**

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Translating His-stories, M^a Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026, 72pp., £18.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781009673167, £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781009673174, £23.00 (eBook), ISBN 9781009673181.

In 2012, Christopher Rundle posed a thought-provoking question: are we, as translation scholars, interested in exploring “what history can tell us about translation,” or, conversely, “what translation can tell us about history” (p. 239)? But what if the boundaries between these disciplines are less clearly demarcated—more porous, more intimately entangled—than this formulation suggests? If we take up this challenge and move beyond strict oppositional frameworks, further questions emerge: how does our understanding of history shift and become enriched when we consider its linguistic materialization—historiography—as already a form of translation? And, in turn, how might viewing historiography as translation recalibrate and expand our sense of what translation itself entails? It is precisely these questions that María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte (2018, 2026) has taken up in recent years through a sustained engagement with the work of historian Hayden White and the subsequent development of critical historiography and its connections to subaltern studies. By foregrounding the notion of historical imagination (White, 1973; Funkenstein, 2019)—that is, the historian’s ability to imagine and reenact the past in order to create a meaningful narrative in the present—critical historiography has enabled history to escape positivist Rankean frames of objectivity and neutrality, ultimately contributing to the emergence of critical rewritings, or retranslations, of previous historical accounts.

In her earlier monograph, *La traducción y las historias. Nuevas vías para la investigación* (2018), Vidal Claramonte laid the theoretical groundwork for this line of inquiry by conceptualizing the historian as an intralingual translator of reality. In *Translating His-stories* (2026), she revisits these premises through a feminist lens. Rather than focusing primarily on the epistemological status of history as translation, she now analyzes how women writers and translators rewrite—and thus retranslate—“again, but for the first time” (p. 2) narratives previously told by men. The title itself neatly encapsulates this intervention. While several Romance languages employ a single term for both ‘history’ and ‘story’ (a semantic overlap long emphasized by critical historiography), English maintains a distinction between the two; yet by hyphenating his-story, Vidal Claramonte not only translates that entanglement but also foregrounds how the masculine subject has been historically authorized to narrate the past. In doing so, she echoes feminist critiques associated with the

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notion of 'herstory', which gained prominence in second-wave feminist discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly through writers and activists such as Robin Morgan.

Translating His-stories is further divided into five short chapters or sections, followed by a brief conclusion. The first section lays the theoretical foundations on which the rest of the book builds, documenting the points of contact between translation and critical historiography. As Vidal Claramonte argues, both historians and translators are agents who selectively choose between different options (which facts, which words, respectively). Consequently, rather than there being only one possible account of the past, critical histories highlight the importance of retranslation, insofar as they can fill in the voids that previous narratives—as history-from-below and *longue durée* accounts demonstrate—have often created by neglecting the lives of subjects deprived of power. As such, Vidal Claramonte's defense of history as retranslation finds parallels with Marie-Alice Belle's (2014) contention that,

Nowhere is the rejection of a teleological approach to translation history as clear as in the recent debates on the issue of retranslation, as Antoine Berman's initial hypothesis of a gradual progression towards a fuller and more faithful rendering of literary texts through their consecutive translations (Berman, 1995, 2009) has been re-placed by theories stressing the multiplicity of human, historical, social and material factors involved in the retranslation of a given text. (p. 45)

Drawing on Salman Rushdie, Vidal Claramonte thus calls for the "chutnification" of history (Vidal Claramonte, 2026, p. 10), that is, the accumulation of multiple historical retranslations as a means of correcting what White termed the "doxa" of the "historiographical establishment," namely, "the perspective [that] endeavored to make the general public believe that historical discourse was unbiased, and that the story was a mirror image of the facts" (p. 5). In doing so, Vidal Claramonte seems to echo the words of subaltern thinker Ashish Nandy (1992), when he stated, "one must always choose the slave because he represents a higher-order cognition which perforce includes the master as human, whereas the master's cognition has to exclude the slave except as a thing" (pp. xv–xvi). In other words, against History as a materialization of power, the response is not to erase these dominant accounts but to layer them, as in a palimpsest, with alternative ones that explore the lives of, or are written by, those who have often been marginalized, thereby "deconstructing the homogeneous and supposedly universal foundations of patriarchal logocentrism" (Vidal Claramonte, 2026, p. 17).

In the second section, Vidal Claramonte reviews the works of several fiction writers who "have reflected on what history means and how it represents the past, in other words, how it is constructed, reconstructed and translated, generally from the viewpoint of the conqueror" (p. 12). The author cleverly organizes this discussion under the different aspects that these novelists of 'historiographic metafiction' (Hutcheon, 1989) problematize in their narratives, namely, teleology (the creation of a chronologically ordered, albeit artificial, historical account), voice (the question of who is granted legitimacy to narrate a (hi)story),

monoglossia (the lack of alternative voices beyond the narrator of historical facts), and textuality (the prominence of the textual evidence against other, often marginalized, media, such as orality).

It is in the following three sections that Vidal Claramonte explicitly zeroes in on retranslations penned by women. Each revolves around a distinct literary genre—myths, fairy tales and children’s literature, and fiction originally authored by male writers. Echoing Chimamanda Adichie’s call to avoid the danger of a single story, the third section examines how, particularly since the rise of feminist scholarship in the 1970s, women writers have retranslated myths and traditional narratives to produce original works that restore agency to female characters long silenced by the patriarchal gaze. In this context, Vidal Claramonte pays particular attention to the work of writers like Madeline Miller, Christa Wolf, and Anne Carson, who are inspired to tell classic myths and epics again, but for the very first time. She argues that these retellings can indeed be regarded as feminist translations once we move beyond “narrow Eurocentric definitions of translation” (p. 23) which, not unlike positivist historiography, restrict our understanding of this practice as a univocal and unified linguistic transfer that limits the translator’s agency to reinterpret the text. The retranslation of a myth, Vidal Claramonte points out quoting Karpinski (2012, pp. 7-8; as cited in Vidal Claramonte, 2026, p. 23), is

transformative rather than imitative in that it makes the target language grow at the same time as it ensures survival of the original by making a foreign text perform new meanings in the target culture.

Section Four considers a genre that has traditionally perpetuated, perhaps more than any other, the male gaze, relegating women characters to a submissive position: Western fairy tales and children’s literature. The section focuses not only on retranslations of well-known stories (such as *Little Red Riding Hood*), but also on original works that challenge the patriarchal structure underpinning these stories altogether. Particularly noteworthy—especially given Vidal Claramonte’s (2022, 2025) expertise in the visual arts and their relation to multimodal translation—are her analyses of the visual paratexts accompanying some of these tales and the ways in which authors like Niki Daly or Nancy Sheppard deploy them to introduce non-Western perspectives. Equally welcome is her engagement with feminist translation scholars (Knowles and Malmkjaer, 1996; Castro and Spoturno, 2021) as a way to critically examine how children’s herstories can also function as vehicles of ideology (Vidal Claramonte, 2026, p. 24). These herstories oftentimes reinforce white liberal Western versions of feminism, or what Vidal Claramonte terms the “Disneyfication” (p. 33) of fairy-tale retellings. In doing so, she carefully demonstrates that such retranslations are not always emancipatory and thus successfully manages to avoid the risk of essentializing gender identities.

Whereas Sections Three and Four provide a wide-ranging overview of diverse texts, Section Five adopts a more focused approach, centering on four women writers and translators. This shift enables a nuanced and deeper engagement with the specific strategies

through which they rewrite and retranslate dominant male narratives: Jen Bervin's intersemiotic translations of Shakespeare in *Nets* (2004/2019); Patience Agbabi's *Telling Tales* (2014), a retranslation of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* told from the perspective of Alison and recast in a contemporary setting in Nigerian English; Caroline Bergvall's homophonic and experimental rewritings of *The Canterbury Tales* in *Alisoun* (2019), which similarly revisits the figure of Alison through a queer and feminist revisionist lens; and Erin Mouré's 'perverse translations' (Simon, 2006), or translations, of Fernando Pessoa's work, relocated in a contemporary Canadian context. Given the concise format of the Cambridge Elements series, it is in this section that Vidal Claramonte most compellingly demonstrates how translation operates not only as a means of rereading the past, but also as a conceptual framework that expands our understanding of rewriting itself. By devoting sustained analytical attention to these works, she shows how translation contributes meaningfully to both the reconfiguration of history and the theoretical expansion of what we understand by translation.

Translating His-stories convincingly demonstrates that contemporary translation theory—thanks to its outward turn (Bassnett, 2012; Bassnett and Johnston, 2019; Blumczynski, 2023), recent feminist and queer approaches to translation theory (Castro and Ergün, 2017; Baer, 2021), and multimodal studies (Boria et al., 2020; Vidal Claramonte, 2022, 2025)—is fully equipped to contribute to an understanding of history that challenges its presumed objectivity and aligns it with the insights of critical historiography. If there is a possible limitation, it lies in the tension between the book's theoretical alignment with critical historiography—which does not deny factuality (Vidal Claramonte 2026, p. 3)—and the fact that many of the retellings examined here draw on fictions rather than (fictional) documentary materials. This tension, however, may be read as an invitation to further reflect on the porous boundaries between fiction and factuality. Although briefly mentioned (Rundle and Rafael, 2016), a deeper engagement with critical historiographers who explicitly address interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation in their work (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2000) might have also nuanced the dialogue the book so productively initiates. Yet, as Vidal Claramonte herself suggests in her '(un)concluding remarks', this Element is less a closure than an invitation. In fewer than sixty pages, she opens promising paths for future research, encouraging us to further explore how feminist, queer, postcolonial, racial, political, and class retranslations might converge within an increasingly intersectional framework for thinking history as translation. In this sense, the rise of feminist translation history monographs (e.g., Brown, 2022; Misiou, 2023; Castellano-Ortolá, 2024; Gehmacher, 2024) also offers us the chance of exploring how such projects intersect with critical historiographical methodologies, further evidencing the porous, entangled, and intimate relation between these two fields.

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