

Translation of [literary works](#) ([novels](#), [short stories](#), [plays](#), [poems](#), etc.) is considered a literary pursuit in its own right. Notable in [Canadian literature](#) specifically as translators are figures such as [Sheila Fischman](#), [Robert Dickson](#), and [Linda Gaboriau](#); and the Canadian [Governor General's Awards](#) annually present prizes for the best English-to-French and French-to-English literary translations.

Other writers, among many who have made a name for themselves as literary translators, include [Vasily Zhukovsky](#), [Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński](#), [Vladimir Nabokov](#), [Jorge Luis Borges](#), [Robert Stiller](#), [Lydia Davis](#), [Haruki Murakami](#), [Achy Obejas](#), and [Jhumpa Lahiri](#).

In the 2010s a substantial gender imbalance was noted in literary translation into English,<sup>[102]</sup> with far more male writers being translated than women writers. In 2014 [Meytal Radzinski](#) launched the [Women in Translation](#) campaign to address this.<sup>[103][104][105]</sup>

History[[edit](#)]

The first important translation in the West was that of the [Septuagint](#), a collection of [Jewish Scriptures](#) translated into early [Koine Greek](#) in [Alexandria](#) between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE. The dispersed [Jews](#) had forgotten their ancestral language and needed Greek versions (translations) of their Scriptures.<sup>[106]</sup>

Throughout the [Middle Ages](#), Latin was the [lingua franca](#) of the western learned world. The 9th-century [Alfred the Great](#), king of [Wessex](#) in [England](#), was far ahead of his time in commissioning [vernacular Anglo-Saxon](#) translations of [Bede's Ecclesiastical History](#) and [Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy](#). Meanwhile, the [Christian Church](#) frowned on even partial adaptations of [St. Jerome's Vulgate](#) of c. 384 CE,<sup>[107]</sup> the standard Latin Bible.

In [Asia](#), the spread of [Buddhism](#) led to large-scale ongoing translation efforts spanning well over a thousand years. The [Tangut Empire](#) was especially efficient in such efforts; exploiting the then newly invented [block printing](#), and with the full support of the government (contemporary sources describe the Emperor and his mother personally contributing to the translation effort, alongside sages of various nationalities), the Tanguts took mere decades to translate volumes that had taken the [Chinese](#) centuries to render.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

The [Arabs](#) undertook [large-scale efforts at translation](#). Having conquered the [Greek](#) world, they made Arabic versions of its philosophical and scientific works. During the [Middle Ages](#), translations of some of these Arabic versions [were made into Latin](#), chiefly at [Córdoba](#) in [Spain](#).<sup>[108]</sup> King [Alfonso X the Wise](#) of [Castile](#) in the 13th century promoted this effort by founding a [Schola Traductorum](#) (School of Translation) in [Toledo](#). There Arabic texts,

Hebrew texts, and Latin texts were translated into the other tongues by Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scholars, who also argued the merits of their respective religions. Latin translations of Greek and original Arab works of scholarship and science helped advance European [Scholasticism](#), and thus European science and culture.

The broad historic trends in Western translation practice may be illustrated on the example of translation into the English language.

### [Geoffrey Chaucer](#)

The first fine translations into English were made in the 14th century by [Geoffrey Chaucer](#), who adapted from the [Italian](#) of [Giovanni Boccaccio](#) in his own [Knight's Tale](#) and [Troilus and Criseyde](#); began a translation of the French-language [Roman de la Rose](#); and completed a translation of [Boethius](#) from the Latin. Chaucer founded an English [poetic](#) tradition on [adaptations](#) and translations from those earlier-established [literary languages](#).<sup>[108]</sup>

The first great English translation was the [Wycliffe Bible](#) (c. 1382), which showed the weaknesses of an underdeveloped English [prose](#). Only at the end of the 15th century did the great age of English prose translation begin with [Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur](#)—an adaptation of [Arthurian romances](#) so free that it can, in fact, hardly be called a true translation. The first great [Tudor](#) translations are, accordingly, the [Tyndale New Testament](#) (1525), which influenced the [Authorized Version](#) (1611), and [Lord Berners'](#) version of [Jean Froissart's](#) [Chronicles](#) (1523–25).<sup>[108]</sup>

### [Marsilio Ficino](#)

Meanwhile, in [Renaissance Italy](#), a new period in the history of translation had opened in [Florence](#) with the arrival, at the court of [Cosimo de' Medici](#), of the [Byzantine](#) scholar [Georgius Gemistus Pletho](#) shortly before the fall of [Constantinople](#) to the Turks (1453). A Latin translation of [Plato's](#) works was undertaken by [Marsilio Ficino](#). This and [Erasmus'](#) Latin edition of the [New Testament](#) led to a new attitude to translation. For the first time, readers demanded rigor of rendering, as philosophical and religious beliefs depended on the exact words of [Plato](#), [Aristotle](#) and [Jesus](#).<sup>[108]</sup>

Non-scholarly literature, however, continued to rely on adaptation. [France's](#) [Pléiade](#), [England's](#) [Tudor](#) poets, and the [Elizabethan](#) translators adapted themes by [Horace](#), [Ovid](#), [Petrarch](#) and modern Latin writers, forming a new poetic style on those models. The English poets and translators sought to supply a new public, created by the rise of

a [middle class](#) and the development of [printing](#), with works such as the original authors would have written, had they been writing in England in that day.<sup>[108]</sup>

The Elizabethan period of translation saw considerable progress beyond mere paraphrase toward an ideal of [stylistic](#) equivalence, but even to the end of this period, which actually reached to the middle of the 17th century, there was no concern for [verbal accuracy](#).<sup>[109]</sup>

In the second half of the 17th century, the poet John Dryden sought to make [Virgil](#) speak "in words such as he would probably have written if he were living and an Englishman". As great as Dryden's poem is, however, one is reading Dryden, and not experiencing the Roman poet's concision. Similarly, [Homer](#) arguably suffers from [Alexander Pope](#)'s endeavor to reduce the Greek poet's "wild paradise" to order. Both works live on as worthy English epics, more than as a point of access to the Latin or Greek.<sup>[109]</sup>

### [Edward FitzGerald](#)

Throughout the 18th century, the watchword of translators was ease of reading. Whatever they did not understand in a text, or thought might bore readers, they omitted. They cheerfully assumed that their own style of expression was the best, and that texts should be made to conform to it in translation. For scholarship they cared no more than had their predecessors, and they did not shrink from making translations from translations in third languages, or from languages that they hardly knew, or—as in the case of [James Macpherson](#)'s "translations" of [Ossian](#)—from texts that were actually of the "translator's" own composition.<sup>[109]</sup>

### [Benjamin Jowett](#)

The 19th century brought new standards of accuracy and style. In regard to accuracy, observes J.M. Cohen, the policy became "the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text", except for any [bawdy](#) passages and the addition of copious explanatory [footnotes](#).<sup>[k]</sup> In regard to style, the [Victorians](#)' aim, achieved through far-reaching metaphrase (literality) or pseudo-metaphrase, was to constantly remind readers that they were reading a foreign classic. An exception was the outstanding translation in this period, [Edward FitzGerald](#)'s [Rubaiyat](#) of [Omar Khayyam](#) (1859), which achieved its Oriental flavor largely by using Persian names and discreet Biblical echoes and actually drew little of its material from the Persian original.<sup>[109]</sup>

In advance of the 20th century, a new pattern was set in 1871 by [Benjamin Jowett](#), who translated Plato into simple, straightforward language. Jowett's

example was not followed, however, until well into the new century, when accuracy rather than style became the principal criterion.<sup>[109]</sup>

### Modern translation<sup>[edit]</sup>

As a language evolves, texts in an earlier version of the language—original texts, or old translations—may become difficult for modern readers to understand. Such a text may therefore be translated into more modern language, producing a "modern translation" (e.g., a "modern English translation" or "modernized translation").

Such modern rendering is applied either to literature from classical languages such as Latin or Greek, notably to the Bible (see "[Modern English Bible translations](#)"), or to literature from an earlier stage of the same language, as with the works of [William Shakespeare](#) (which are largely understandable by a modern audience, though with some difficulty) or with [Geoffrey Chaucer's Middle-English Canterbury Tales](#) (which is understandable to most modern readers only through heavy dependence on footnotes). In 2015 the [Oregon Shakespeare Festival](#) commissioned professional translation of the entire Shakespeare canon, including disputed works such as [Edward III](#),<sup>[110]</sup> into contemporary vernacular English; in 2019, off-off-Broadway, the canon was premiered in a month-long series of staged readings.<sup>[111]</sup>

Modern translation is applicable to any language with a long literary history. For example, in Japanese the 11th-century [Tale of Genji](#) is generally read in modern translation (see "[Genji: modern readership](#)").

Modern translation often involves literary scholarship and textual revision, as there is frequently not one single canonical text. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of the Bible and Shakespeare, where modern scholarship can result in substantive textual changes.

[Anna North](#) writes: "Translating the long-dead language [Homer](#) used — a variant of [ancient Greek](#) called Homeric Greek — into contemporary English is no easy task, and translators bring their own skills, opinions, and stylistic sensibilities to the text. The result is that every translation is different, almost a new poem in itself." An example is [Emily Wilson's](#) 2017 translation of Homer's [Odyssey](#), where by conscious choice Wilson "lays bare the morals of its time and place, and invites us to consider how different they are from our own, and how similar."<sup>[112]</sup>

Modern translation meets with opposition from some traditionalists. In English, some readers prefer the [Authorized King James Version](#) of the Bible to modern translations, and Shakespeare in the original of ca. 1600 to modern translations.

An opposite process involves translating modern literature into classical languages, for the purpose of [extensive reading](#) (for examples, see "[List of Latin translations of modern literature](#)").

Science fiction[[edit](#)]

[Science fiction](#) being a [genre](#) with a recognizable set of conventions and literary genealogies, in which language often includes [neologisms](#), neosemes,<sup>[[clarification needed](#)]</sup> and [invented languages](#), techno-scientific and [pseudoscientific](#) vocabulary,<sup>[138]</sup> and fictional representation of the translation process,<sup>[139][140]</sup> the translation of science-fiction texts involves specific

concerns.<sup>[141]</sup> The science-fiction translator tends to acquire specific competences and assume a distinctive publishing and cultural agency.<sup>[142][143]</sup> As in the case of other mass-fiction genres, this professional specialization and role often is not recognized by publishers and scholars.<sup>[144]</sup>

Translation of science fiction accounts for the transnational nature of science fiction's repertoire of shared conventions and [tropes](#). After [World War II](#), many European countries were swept by a wave of translations from the English.<sup>[145][146]</sup> Due to the prominence of English as a source language, the use of [pseudonyms](#) and [pseudotranslations](#) became common in countries such as Italy<sup>[141]</sup> and Hungary,<sup>[147]</sup> and English has often been used as a [vehicular language](#) to translate from languages such as Chinese and Japanese.<sup>[148]</sup>

More recently, the international market in science-fiction translations has seen an increasing presence of source languages other than English.<sup>[148]</sup>