

## John Dryden

### FROM THE PREFACE TO *OVID'S EPISTLES*

**I**T REMAINS THAT I SHOULD say somewhat of Poetical Translations in general, and give my opinion (with submission to better Judgments) which way of Version seems to me most proper.

All Translation I suppose may be reduced to these three heads.

First, that of Metaphrase, or turning an Authour word by word, and Line by Line, from one Language into another. Thus, or near this manner, was *Horace* his Art of Poetry translated by *Ben. Johnson*.<sup>1</sup> The second way is that of Paraphrase, or Translation with Latitude, where the Authour it kept in view by the Translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly follow'd as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not alter'd. Such is Mr. *Waller's* Translation of *Virgil's* Fourth *Aeneid*.<sup>2</sup> The Third way is that of Imitation, where the Translator (if now he has not lost that Name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sence, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion: and taking only some general hints from the Original, to run division on the ground-work, as he pleases. Such is Mr. *Cowley's* practice in turning two odes of *Pindar*, and one of *Horace* into *English*.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the first of these Methods, our Master *Horace* has given us this Caution,

Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus

Interpres—

Nor word for word too faithfully translate. As the *Earl of Roscommon* has excellently render'd it.<sup>4</sup> Too faithfully is indeed pedantically: 'tis a faith like that which proceeds

from Superstition, blind and zealous: Take it in the Expression of Sir John Denham, to Sir Rich. Fanshaw, on his Version of the *Pastor Fido*.<sup>5</sup>

That servile path, thou nobly do'st decline,  
Of tracing word by word and Line by Line;  
A new and nobler way thou do'st pursue,  
To make Translations, and Translators too:  
They but preserve the Ashes, thou the Flame,  
True to his Sence, but truer to his Fame.

'Tis almost impossible to <sup>(Succinct, concise etc.)</sup> Translate verbally, and well, at the same time; For the *Latin*, (a most severe and Compendious Language) often expresses that in one word, which either the Barbarity, or the narrowness of modern Tongues cannot supply in more. 'Tis frequent also that the Conceit is couch'd in some Expression, which will be lost in *English*.

atque idem venti vela fidemque ferent<sup>6</sup>

What Poet of our Nation is so happy as to express this thought Literally in *English*, and to strike Wit or almost Sense out of it?

In short the Verbal Copyer is incumber'd with so many difficulties at once, that he can never disentangle himself from all. He is to consider at the same time the thought of his Authour, and his words, and to find out the Counterpart to each in another Language: and besides this he is to confine himself to the compass of Numbers, and the Slavery of Rhime. 'Tis much like dancing on Ropes with fetter'd Leggs: A man may shun a fall by using Caution, but the gracefulness of Motion is not to be expected: and when we have said the best of it, 'tis but a foolish Task; for no sober man would put himself into a danger for the Applause of scaping without breaking his Neck. We see *Ben. Johnson* could not avoid obscurity in his literal Translation of *Horace*, attempted in the same compass of Lines: nay *Horace* himself could scarce have done it to a *Greek* Poet.

Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio.<sup>7</sup>

Either perspicuity or gracefulness will frequently be wanting. *Horace* has indeed avoided both these Rocks in his Translation of the three first Lines of *Homers Odyssees*, which he has Contracted into two.

Dic mihi Musa Virum captæ post tempora Trojæ  
Qui mores hominum multorum vidit & urbes.  
Muse, speak the man, who since the Siege of Troy,  
So many Towns, such Change of Manners saw. } *Earl of Rosc.*

But then the sufferings of *Ulysses*, which are a Considerable part of that Sentence are omitted.

“Ὅς μάλα πλὰ πλάγχθη<sup>8</sup>

