



40 There are a number of objects in the room, and on each one a strip of white tape has  
been affixed to the surface, bearing a single word written out in block letters. On the bedside  
table, for example, the word is TABLE. On the lamp, the word is LAMP. Even on the wall,  
which is not strictly speaking an object, there is a strip of tape that reads WALL. The old man  
looks up for a moment, sees the wall, sees the strip of tape attached to the wall, and  
45 pronounces the word *wall* in a soft voice. What cannot be known at this point is whether he is  
reading the word on the strip of tape or simply referring to the wall itself. It could be that he  
has forgotten how to read but still recognizes things for what they are and can call them by  
their names, or, conversely, that he has lost the ability to recognize things for what they are but  
still knows how to read.

50 He is dressed in blue-and-yellow striped cotton pajamas, and his feet are encased in a  
pair of black leather slippers. It is unclear to him exactly where he is. In the room, yes, but in  
what building is the room located? In a house? In a hospital? In a prison? He can't remember  
how long he has been here or the nature of the circumstances that precipitated his removal to  
this place. Perhaps he has always been here; perhaps this is where he has lived since the day he  
55 was born. What he knows is that his heart is filled with an implacable sense of guilt. At the  
same time, he can't escape the feeling that he is the victim of a terrible injustice.

There is one window in the room, but the shade is drawn, and as far as he can  
remember he has not yet looked out of it. Likewise with the door and its white porcelain knob.  
Is he locked in, or is he free to come and go as he wishes? He has yet to investigate this matter  
60 —for, as stated in the first paragraph above, his mind is elsewhere, adrift in the past as he  
wanders among the phantom beings that clutter his head, struggling to answer the question  
that haunts him.

The pictures do not lie, but neither do they tell the whole story. They are merely a record  
of time passing, the outward evidence. The old man's age, for example, is difficult to determine  
65 from the slightly out-of-focus black-and-white images. The only fact that can be set down with  
any certainty is that he is not young, but the word *old* is a flexible term and can be used to  
describe a person anywhere between sixty and a hundred. We will therefore drop the epithet  
*old man* and henceforth refer to the person in the room as Mr. Blank. For the time being, no  
first name will be necessary.

70 Mr. Blank stands up from the bed at last, pauses briefly to steady his balance, and then  
shuffles over to the desk at the other end of the room. He feels tired, as if he has just woken  
from a fitful, too short night of sleep, and as the soles of his slippers scrape along the bare  
wood floor, he is reminded of the sound of sandpaper. Far off in the distance, beyond the  
room, beyond the building in which the room is located, he hears the faint cry of a bird—  
75 perhaps a crow, perhaps a seagull, he can't tell which...

By now, Mr. Blank has read all he can stomach, and he is not the least bit amused. In an  
outburst of pent-up anger and frustration, he tosses the manuscript over his shoulder with a  
violent flick of the wrist, not even bothering to turn around to see where it lands. As it flutters  
through the air and then thuds to the floor behind him, he pounds his fist on the desk and  
80 says in a loud voice: When is this nonsense going to end?

It will never end. For Mr. Blank is one of us now, and struggle though he might to  
understand his predicament, he will always be lost. I believe I speak for all his charges when I  
say he is getting what he deserves—no more, no less. Not as a form of punishment, but as an  
act of supreme justice and compassion. Without him, we are nothing, but the paradox is that  
85 we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us, for once we are thrown  
into the world, we continue to exist forever, and our stories go on being told, even after we are  
dead.

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## Document B

**John Dryden**, *Preface to the Translation of Ovid's Epistles*, 1680, in W. P. Ker (ed.), *Essays of John Dryden*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900

To state it fairly; imitation of an author is the most advantageous way for a translator to show himself, but the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead. Sir John Denham (who advised more liberty than he took himself) gives his reason for his innovation, in his admirable Preface before the translation of the Second *Æneid*: *Poetry is of so subtile a spirit, that, in pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate; and, if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a caput mortuum*. I confess this argument holds good against a literal translation; but who defends it? Imitation and verbal version are, in my opinion, the two extremes which ought to be avoided; and therefore, when I have proposed the mean betwixt them, it will be seen how far his argument will reach.

No man is capable of translating poetry, who, besides a genius to that art, is not a master both of his author's language, and of his own; nor must we understand the language only of the poet, but his particular turn of thoughts and expression, which are the characters that distinguish, and as it were individuate him from all other writers. When we are come thus far, 'tis time to look into ourselves, to conform our genius to his, to give his thought either the same turn, if our tongue will bear it, or, if not, to vary but the dress, not to alter or destroy the substance. The like care must be taken of the more outward ornaments, the words. When they appear (which is but seldom) literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since every language is so full of its own proprieties, that what is beautiful in once, is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author's words: 'tis enough if he choose out some expression which does not vitiate the sense. I suppose he may stretch his chain to such a latitude; but by innovation of thoughts, methinks he breaks it. By this means the spirit of an author may be transfused, and yet not lost: and thus 'tis plain, that the reason alleged by Sir John Denham has no farther force than to expression; for thought, if it be translated truly, cannot be lost in another language; but the words that convey it to our apprehension (which are the image and ornament of that thought,) may be so ill chosen, as to make it appear in an unhandsome dress, and rob it of its native lustre. There is therefore, a liberty to be allowed for the expression; neither is it necessary that words and lines should be confined to the measure of their original. The sense of an author, generally speaking, is to be sacred and inviolable. If the fancy of Ovid be luxuriant, 'tis his character to be so; and if I retrench it, he is no longer Ovid. It will be replied, that he receives advantage by this lopping of his superfluous branches; but I rejoin, that a translator has no such right. When a painter copies from the life, I suppose he has no privilege to alter features and lineaments, under pretence that his picture will look better: perhaps the face which he has drawn would be more exact, if the eyes or nose were altered; but 'tis his business to make it resemble the original. In two cases only there may a seeming difficulty arise; that is, if the thought be notoriously trivial or dishonest; but the same answer will serve for both, that then they ought not to be translated:—

... *Et quæ  
Desperes tractata nitescere posse, relinquas.*

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- 45 Thus I have ventured to give my opinion on this subject against the authority of two great men, but I hope without offence to either of their memories; for I both loved them living, and reverence them now they are dead. But if, after what I have urged, it be thought by better judges that the praise of a translation consists in adding new beauties to the piece, thereby to recompense the loss which it sustains by change of
- 50 language, I shall be willing to be taught better, and to recant. In the meantime it seems to me that the true reason why we have so few versions which are tolerable, is not from the too close pursuing of the author's sense, but because there are so few who have all the talents which are requisite for translation, and that there is so little praise and so small encouragement for so considerable a part of learning.
- 55 To apply, in short, what has been said to this present work, the reader will here find most of the Translations with some little latitude or variation from the author's sense. That of *Æcone to Paris* is in Mr. Cowley's way of imitation only. I was desired to say that the author who is of the fair sex, understood not Latin. But if she does not, I am afraid she has given us occasion to be ashamed who do.
- 60 For my own part, I am ready to acknowledge that I have transgressed the rules which I have given; and taken more liberty than a just translation will allow. But so many gentlemen whose wit and learning are well known being joined in it, I doubt not but that their excellencies will make you ample satisfaction for my errors.



Document C  
 Thierry Guetta a.k.a. Mr Brainwash, cover art for Madonna's Greatest Hits collection  
*Celebration*, 2009

