



A NEWSLETTER FROM JENNY BHATT  
WRITER. LITERARY TRANSLATOR. BOOK CRITIC.  
WRITING INSTRUCTOR. DESI BOOKS FOUNDER.

## WE ARE ALL TRANSLATORS

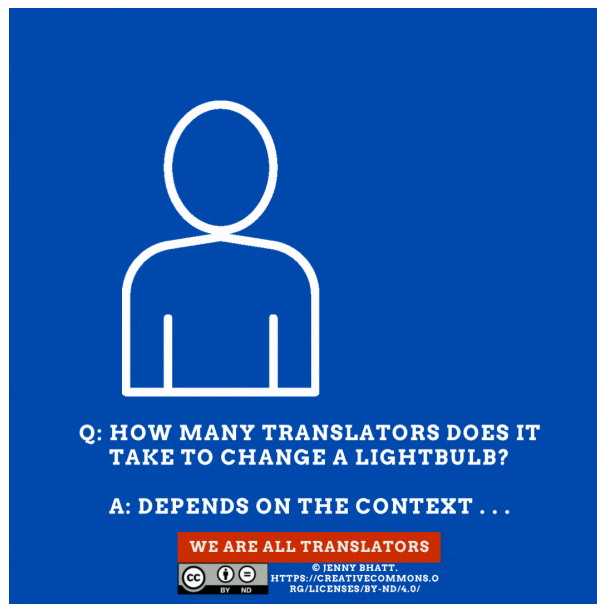
FOCUSING ON THE ART & CRAFT OF LITERARY  
TRANSLATION & THE TRANSLATING LIFE.

NOTE: Some email service providers clip these newsletters so please click on the "message clipped" link, if you see it, to read further. Thank you.

Dear Reader,

Here's a good question I get asked often about my translation work: what do you do when you're at odds with the original writer's aesthetic choices or their moral/ethical stances? (Most recently, it was in response to last week's newsletter. Hi, Akankshya.)

So far, I've mostly translated classic Gujarati writers. That means male writers who wrote from positions of some socioeconomic privilege. Naturally, they were men of their time who wrote about their times and in the styles and manners of those times. So, as with everything in literary translation, I like to say ...



On a more serious note. With aesthetic choices, it's pretty straightforward for me. I don't go to the classics expecting them to read like works from today. Of course they will be different in terms of narrative style, voice, etc. I approach such a text as a historical and sociocultural artifact. The content or the story is, to me, like historical fiction (which I enjoy, write, and [teach](#).) Form is about literary tradition and lineage and not something I appreciate in the same way as I might appreciate it in contemporary works.

With moral/ethical issues, I have two personal litmus tests. And I'm sure these hold true for many literary translators. The first question is whether the writer is showing those questionable ethics or moralities in genuine or gratuitous ways. Meaning, are they necessary to the story and the plot? If yes, then I want to

understand whether the writer is simply presenting the situations to us or shedding some new light on them.

If the text passes these two tests (and, generally, if we've chosen our original text well, it will), then I have to decide how much hand-holding I want to do with a contemporary reader. Generally, if we're dealing with a good writer's work, we shouldn't have to do much at all. And, as George Saunders often says, we have to trust that the reader is smart enough, perhaps even more intelligent than us. That said, I've sometimes added into the text what Jason Grunebaum (a Hindi/Urdu to English translator in the US) has called a "stealth gloss", which is about adding just enough information or context within the text itself that isn't intrusive or didactic. If there's no way to do that well, then I'll put something into a formal glossary.

Here are some interesting links:

**[READ: Indie presses publishing works in translation in the US \(by Minerva Laveaga Luna; Book Riot\)](#)**

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**[READ: Richard Howard, acclaimed poet-translator, dies at 92 \(by Hillel Italie; ABC News\)](#)**

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**[WATCH: A keynote lecture by George Szirtes: The Poet as Translator of Poetry and Fiction or, How to Mind One's Own and Other People's Business. \(University of Bristol\)](#)**

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**[SUBMIT: 2022 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize](#)**

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**[TWITTER: "okay so a neat thing about QUENCH is that it's an extant causative form of a word that no longer exists in English!" \(@foundbysara\)](#)**

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Over to you. Tell me about a literary translation you've read or worked on where you didn't agree with the original writer's aesthetics or ethics. What did you do? Please let me know via the social media links or in reply to this newsletter.

Until next week.

Warmly,

[Jenny Bhatt](#)

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[jenny@jennybhattwriter.com](mailto:jenny@jennybhattwriter.com)

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