



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,

This week, I revisited this video by the musician, Jacob Collier, where he takes a well-known British song and plays it in eighteen different complex emotions. As he transitions from emotion to emotion with increasing complexity, he also gives a fascinating real-time musical analysis about his composition process.



We could take much of what he says here and apply it to any kind of creative writing and, particularly, to literary translation. The interpretations and word and phrase/sentence structure choices we make are driven by our own experiences, emotions, and knowledge. And—excuse my unintended alliteration here—being more deliberate and thoughtful with all of those decisions allows us to add more depth and dimensions to our text.

In the video, Collier talks about the difficulties of working with the more abstract, more subjective emotions and how he has to use more intervals between notes and more dissonant chords to create "a careful balance between absence and silence, and space and hollowness." And he describes the tension between his left and right hand because of his own natural preferences versus a particular emotional effect he has been asked to create.

In the end, he mentions how music is, for him, a process of learning how to alchemize the forces in his life so he can create with them and transform them into something with form and structure such that it can be understood even by people who don't have the same emotional experiences. As a creative, the process of getting "inside" the emotions he doesn't understand himself is one of the most powerful things for him.

This is how it is with my creative writing and, even more so, with literary translation. I don't claim to always understand what the original writer might have intended. But, immersing myself into and inhabiting the emotions and worlds they've created catalyzes a kind of alchemy within me too. Once I feel that transformational effect for myself during the translation process, I know the reader will feel it too when they read the end result.

Over to you: when was the last time you felt such a transformational, alchemizing effect when reading or translating a text? You can reply to this newsletter or share on social media with the links below.

Until next week.

Warmly,

[Jenny Bhatt](#)

PS In last week's newsletter, I'd mentioned how audiobooks are a way for me to improve my language listening skills. And I'd mentioned that I'm picky about the narration style. Then, this [Vulture essay by Mimi Kramer](#) landed in my inbox talking about what makes an audiobook good, bad, great. Kramer writes about how some audiobook narrators do a kind of editorializing with their tone and style to guide listeners on how to think and feel about what they're hearing. And they don't always get it right. To me, this also sounds a lot like one of the major challenges with literary translation.

Some interesting links

[READ: Translating Poetry Ezra Pound's Seafarer and River Merchant's Wife by Frank Moone \(Medium\)](#)

[LISTEN: What it means for a language to be official \(Lingthusiasm podcast\)](#)

[BOOK RECOMMENDATION: Why Do We Say That? 101 Idioms, Phrases, Sayings & Facts! A Brief History On Where They Come From! by Scott Matthews](#)

[DOWNLOAD \(free\): World Language Map by Ben Ambridge](#)

Connect with me at the links below.



If you find this newsletter useful, please share it on.



New reader? [Click to subscribe](#)

All newsletter content is the copyright © of Jenny Bhatt. It is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#). Please ensure proper linkage and attribution (e.g. Bhatt, Jenny. "We Are All Translators," March 25, 2022) and do not transform, adapt, or remix. Thank you. If you have questions, please contact [here](#).

[Personal website](#) for my latest books, publications, news, events, workshops, and more. [Desi Books](#) for the latest news and views about South Asian literature from the world over.

jenny@jennybhattwriter.com

You received this email because you signed up.

[If this is no longer useful to you, click here to unsubscribe.](#)

