



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,

If you've been a subscriber for a while, I thank you for making this journey with me to #25. If you're a relatively new subscriber, I thank you for taking the leap and hope you'll find the [archives](#) as well as upcoming editions interesting and useful.

When I started on January 7th, I had no idea how things would go. I wanted to create a regular, weekly practice of thinking through translation matters with a like-minded community. This newsletter has certainly done that for me. I appreciate all of you who take the time to respond about something that resonates for you. Oftentimes, that leads to another exploration topic, which is just how it should be, right?

One such question I received recently was about how, outside of doing the actual work of translation, one might work on the craft. Obvious as it may sound, I always respond with: we need to learn how to read like translators first. And it's actually not as easy or simple as it sounds.

### Reading like a translator



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Now, there are some terrific [books](#) and [essays](#) on how to read translated works, how to review them, and more. I'll add a separate list to the [newsletter archives](#) page for several of these shortly. In the meantime, here's a bit about my reading-as-a-translator practice. Take what works for you and discard the rest. But remember this is a lifelong skill and needs ongoing practice.

# 1.

Pick a classic text that has been translated at least twice. Read the original and at

least two translations, making notes of the differences and similarities. If it feels like too much work, maybe start with a favorite excerpt. But read closely for different word, idiom, phrase choices. Consider why the translators varied (or didn't vary) their choices. Consider what you might have done instead. Which translation makes for a smoother, immersive reading? Which one gives you pause for thought? Are there any other contextual meanings that the translations are missing or emphasizing? Why do you think that might be the case? You're doing a line-by-line comparison, yes, but you're also looking for form and structure, musicality and rhythm, syntax and semantics. This kind of close reading is actually fun even if you're not a translator. Trust me.

## 2.

Next, see if you can find some critical reviews of the above two translations you've closely read. Read through these carefully to understand what the reviewers are focusing on (or not.) What inherent biases can you spot in the reviewer's approach to the translated and the original text? What are things the reviewers have emphasized and that didn't occur to you in your close reading?

## 3.

And, finally, write a pair of reviews of your own. Do this with the original language text and with one of the translations. These don't have to be formal reviews. They could be just journal entries. But they need to be essay-length. Describe all the aspects that stood out during your close readings and those that, based on the reviews you read, did not catch your attention quite as much. Have a conversation with yourself as to why you've noticed certain things and not others.

# AND REPEAT . . .

This is a quick and easy cheat sheet. Perhaps you're doing some of this already if you're a writer who enjoys reading world literature in translation. Whatever the case, even if you're not a translator, a close reading approach will enhance your appreciation and understanding of any text. It goes beyond an active mode of engagement to an interactive one. Have fun. And do reply to let me know if you're planning to do this kind of close, interactive reading project with a translated work.

Oh, before we close, would you mind taking this very brief survey about the newsletter so I can make it even more useful for you? Thanks.

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Feel free to hit reply to let me know your thoughts on all or any of the above. Or you can share on social media and tag me (links below.)

Best,

[Jenny Bhatt](#)

My upcoming translation, [The Shehnai Virtuoso](#), was given a lovely thumbs-up by [Kirkus](#) and [Publishers Weekly](#). If you're interested in interviewing me for a US publication, please let me know? A fun, casual, two-way conversation about some of the topics we're exploring through these newsletters? Just hit reply.

NOTE: All the books mentioned or featured in this newsletter are listed at the Bookshop below. I earn a tiny affiliate fee if you buy a book from the list. It goes towards funding this otherwise free newsletter. Thank you.

[JENNY'S BOOKSHOP \(US\)](#)

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## Some interesting links

[READ: The Diva Mode of Translation by Fiona Bell \(Asymptote\)](#)

[READ: On the Etymologies and Linguistic Evolutions of "Family" by Maria Manoukian \(Lit Hub\)](#)

[READ: Translator Frank Wynne Responds to Richard Charkin's Column \(Publishing Perspectives\)](#)

[ATTEND: July 5th: Living in Translation; Bristol Translates 2022 Keynote Lecture with Professor Susan Bassnett](#)

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**LISTEN: How Political Language Is Engineered with Drew Westen & Frank Luntz (Humane Tech podcast)**

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