



A NEWSLETTER FROM JENNY BHATT  
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## WE ARE ALL TRANSLATORS

FOCUSING ON THE ART & CRAFT OF LITERARY  
TRANSLATION & THE TRANSLATING LIFE.  
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/WEAREALLTRANSLATORS](https://bit.ly/wearealltranslators)

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Dear Reader,

I loved this week's big discovery story about a forgotten [Sanskrit translation of Don Quixote](#) by two Kashmiri pandits in the early-twentieth century. This manuscript is quite a treasure find.

Actually, the Indian subcontinent had a lot of translations happening from English into South Asian languages back then. Maybe not so much into Sanskrit, though, because it is and was an older language by then.

My maternal grandfather, who was a big reader, read several European classics in Gujarati translation. My mother would tell us that he had even translated Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* from English (which was, itself, a translation from the French) into Gujarati. Sadly, we believe he destroyed all his writing and translation work because it wasn't considered as respectable a career as accountancy in his conservative lower middle-class Gujarati community. So the entire family moved to Mombasa, Kenya, to work on sugar plantations instead. Still, he passed on his love for European works in translation to my mother. Below, you see her some of her treasured stash of Jules Verne (the translators wrote the poor man's first name as "Julay") and, yes, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. She also loved Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*, which she remembered way better than I ever could because she'd correct my memories of the sequence of events in the story whenever we discussed it (and, by that, I mean whenever she wanted to discuss why I wasn't writing swashbuckling adventure novels like it.) And I know I've got some of her Stefan Zweigs, again in Gujarati translation from the English translations, somewhere too. By the way, do note that the translators' names are on all the covers. And these copies are from decades ago!

## My mother's stash of Jules Verne (and The Count of Monte Cristo)



Coming back to the *Don Quixote* story, though. I particularly appreciated what the grandson of one of the co-translators had to say about it. Surinder Nath Pandita said:

*“During the late 19th and the 20th century, there was a vibrant interface of scholarship between western scholars and Kashmiri Sanskrit scholars, when much of Kashmir’s classical literature was treated by the western hand. However, translating Don Quixote was a singular exception in that league because here the west wanted to embellish western literature by the treatment of Kashmiri hands.”*

And this speaks to another important point, which is that it is often believed that translating a book into English helps the source culture and language by giving them wider recognition and readership. But, really, sometimes, it is English that is enriched by the translation more so than the source language/culture. Which is exactly what Som-Mai Nguyen writes in this hard-hitting essay, '[Blunt-Force Ethnic Credibility](#)', about a particular treasure of Vietnamese literature in English translation. She writes:

*"Vietnamese is not endangered, and its literature is not honored by translation toward English – it is English-using society that benefits from gaining access to literature produced in other languages . . ."*

I've read Nguyen's essay more times now than the Guardian piece above. And I'm likely to revisit it a few more times because she makes so many important points about the publishing ecosystem for literary translations and books from other cultures. Please, if there's one essay you read this weekend, let [this](#) be it.

With all that, let me leave you with something on a lighter note. Click through below for the English translation.



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