CHAPTER 4

Vernacular Literature

At some time not long before 967 AD, a Buddhist monk named Kyunyŏ of the Kingdom of Koryo, which then comprised much of the Korean peninsula, composed a series of vernacular-language poems on Buddhist doctrinal themes. This was not in itself an unprecedented activity—the historical record contains evidence that vernacular poetry had been composed for several centuries by this time, nor was Kyunyŏ the first to write Buddhist vernacular poetry in what is now Korea. What is more remarkable is that one of his contemporaries, the scholar and diplomat Chŏe Haenggwi, chose to translate those poems into classical Chinese, still the dominant language for intellectual and literary discourse on the Korean peninsula, and the only linguistic choice available to an author in Koryo who wished his work to be read beyond the peninsula’s boundaries. Chŏe composed a preface to his translation of Kyunyŏ’s poems, itself necessarily written in classical Chinese, in which he advocates for their merit, and explains his decision to translate them:¹

But these shi poems (by other Korean poets) used Chinese (Tang) words, polished like jade into five words or seven characters. The (Korean) songs were drawn up in our rustic speech, fashioned into three phrases and six names.² In terms of their sound, they are as far apart as Orion and Antares, easily distinguished in the Western and Eastern skies. According to their principles of construction, they are

¹ A famously difficult phrase; see the discussion at ibid., 53n164.
as opposed as spear and shield. Although they seem to vaunt themselves as sharply distinct, yet it is clear that they will return to the same ocean of righteousness, and each will find its place. How could this not be a good thing?

And yet it is a pity that our country's men of talent and renowned officials can understand and recite Chinese (Tang) poetry, but of the venerable scholars who have mastered virtue in that land, none can understand our rustic chants. This is because Chinese characters (Tang wen) spread out like Indra's net, and the people of our country can read them easily. Our hyangchal writing is connected tightly like Sanskrit writing, and the people of that land (China) sound it out with difficulty. This is why the rough and smooth pearls of Liang and Song (i.e., Chinese literature) often catch an eastward-flowing stream, but the brocades and embroideries of Qin and Han (i.e., Korean literature) rarely follow a westward-turning star. This hindrance to communication makes one deeply sigh and ache. Did not the Exalted King of Culture of Lu (i.e., Confucius) wish to dwell in this land (Korea), though he did not ascend the sea-turtle's head (to do so)? Did not Sŏl Hanrim energetically transform education, with the only result a rat's tail prolixity?

Ch'oe's chief theme here is the one-way nature of literary circulation in his era; texts in classical Chinese (wenyan), part of a network of texts reflecting each other like Indra's net, cross political boundaries and circulate everywhere, while Korean-language texts, in this era awkwardly transcribed using Chinese characters, are caught up in a narrower network and do not travel (though at the same time they do resemble Sanskrit, which as the source of Buddhism acts as a kind of counter-cosmopolis to wenyan). The pearls of Chinese literature can be sold in Korea, but the brocades of Korean-language literature cannot be sold in China. Koryo can compete with metropolitan China in terms of its Confucian virtue and has long been able to do so (hence Confucius's alleged desire to dwell in Korea), but the word of that achievement, conveyed as it often is in the "rat's tail prolixity" of Sŏl Hanrim's awkward system of transcription in which Chinese characters were used to transcribe Korean words, go nowhere.

The monk Kyunyŏ offers something of a paradigm for the early use of a vernacular language (in Sheldon Pollock's sense) for literary purposes.

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3 A jeweled net said to hang over the palace of the (Hindu) god Indra, in which each jewel reflects all the other jewels.

4 Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500," in Public Spheres and Collective Identities, edited by Shmuel
Pollock understands the process of vernacularization as "the historical process of choosing to create a written literature, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture." As such, foundational vernacular authors, such as Kyunyŏ, are usually more than fluent readers and writers of the cosmopolitan language from which they draw their models. Kyunyŏ, in addition to having an extensive knowledge of the Chinese tradition, has access through it to a vast corpus of Indic Buddhist texts, including in particular the Bhadraçaripranidhāna, on which his vernacular poems are dependent for their content. He is thus very far from anything like a "folk" poet, composing indigenous verbal art in a cultural vacuum, which I argue in this chapter and the next represents rather more the later nationalist fantasy of the emergence of the vernacular rather than observed practice. Kyunyŏ uses the vernacular to discuss religious doctrine, suggesting affinities with theories by which religious proselytization provides the justification for the vernacular. At the same time, and as this very text notes, the hyangchal system of transcription, in which Chinese characters were used phonetically to represent Korean-language syllables, was far from a transparent medium for expressing the vernacular language. Indeed, so opaque was this medium that knowledge of hyangchal was all but lost for centuries and recovered to a significant extent in the 1920s because of Ch'oe Haenggwī's translations of Kyunyŏ's poems into Chinese, which offered a sort of bilingual "Rosetta stone" permitting the decoding of the Korean-language originals. Kyunyŏ's Korean-language poems would thus have been little easier to read than poems in classical Chinese; only with the development of the Hangul alphabet in the mid-fifteenth century would vernacular literacy begin to offer genuine advantages of ease of learning over wenyan. Moreover, as Ch'oe Haenggwī's preface laments, the use of the Korean language guarantees that only Koreans will read a given text.

The choice to write in a vernacular language (and it is always a choice, given the availability of the cosmopolitan language) is thus, especially at first, not simply a question of ease of use or the ability to communicate

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7 Buzu and Prince, Kyunyo-jon, 2. Note that the recovered ability to interpret the Korean-language text here is itself very much a product of a nationalist era.
more effectively with a population unfamiliar with the prevailing cosmopolitan language. Rather, as Pollock emphasizes, this choice is an aesthetic choice, with the potential for political overtones, where authors writing in the vernacular construct a narrower audience for their work and, through that construction of an audience, construct some sort of cultural community.

Cosmopolitan languages, as we have seen, are almost by definition few in number, while the number of panchoric languages is likewise not very large. Vernaculars, like national languages, are considerably more numerous, but where the construction of national languages and literatures developed first in one localized region (Western Europe) and spread outward from there, vernacularization began independently in a number of different regions, in several different historical waves, beginning with the emergence of ancient Near Eastern vernaculars about three thousand years ago, followed by the emergence of a series of vernaculars in Europe and the Mediterranean between the third century BC and the fourth century AD, and then by Pollock's "vernacular millennium" beginning around the eighth century AD. As a result of this series of multiple and independent emergences, it is particularly difficult to reduce the story of vernacularization to a single narrative. In what follows, instead, I examine multiple dimensions of vernacularization in sequence, looking for commonalities within and beyond regions. First, I distinguish between vernacularization and similar-seeming processes—the use of local languages for chancery or proselytizing purposes, and oral-traditional culture—in order better to understand the limits of vernacularization. Then, I examine two key tropes of vernacularization: the vernacular manifesto and emulation of the cosmopolitan literary tradition, briefly examining some key case studies of each. I then explore a series of vernacularizations, beginning in the ancient Near East and moving through early Medieval Europe, which I believe complicate the picture offered by Pollock, before closing with a consideration of the two great cosmopolitan regions that did not undergo vernacularization in the usual way: the Arabic world and China proper.

**Literization and Literarization: The Limits of the Vernacular**

Cosmopolitan literary ecologies, designed as they are to function across great distances and for speakers of many languages, are also able to endure for very long periods of time; thus, each of the cosmopolitan languages we discussed in the previous chapter endured in that role for a millennium and
several for much more, often in the total absence of native speakers (at certain periods Sumerian and Akkadian, Latin, Sanskrit) or in the virtual impossibility of their serving as everyday spoken languages (classical Chinese). At least one literary cosmopolis, that based on Arabic, remains alive today and shows little signs of changing in the near future. Of all the literary formations we have studied, in fact, the cosmopolitan seems to have the greatest potential for long-term stability.

And yet, in most cases, we also know that cosmopolitan literary ecologies do not remain stagnant but grow and change and adapt. Sometimes, as in the case of Akkadian supplementing Sumerian, or Persian supplementing Arabic, one cosmopolitan language gives way to, or accommodates, another. Sometimes, as in the case of classical Chinese within China itself, a cosmopolitan language remains dominant until its encounter with European modernity and the national literature ecology. More often, however, when cosmopolitan ecologies evolve they generate vernaculars. These literary languages emerge in symbiosis with existing cosmopolitan languages, serving distinct functions. Casual habit associates vernaculars with the spoken language of everyday people, with the establishment of local kingdoms rather than universal empires, and with new religious movements (particularly the three great proselytizing religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam). In truth, each of these can be a factor in the emergence of vernacular literatures, though it is not clear that any or all of these factors need to be in place.

Indeed, the available evidence resists any easy assertions about the conditions of emergence of literary vernaculars. They are, indeed, usually much closer to daily spoken language than are cosmopolitan languages, and they most often emerge first in regions where the cosmopolitan language is especially far removed from spoken language (as with Old Irish and Anglo-Saxon in the Latin cosmopolis, with Japanese in the classical Chinese cosmopolis, or with Javanese, Khmer, Kannada, and Tamil in the Sanskrit cosmopolis), emerging only later, if at all, in linguistic heartlands (France, Italy, Spain; China proper; the North Indian Gangetic plain, respectively) where the cosmopolitan language is much closer to spoken dialects. That said, early vernaculars often contain heavy admixtures of their cosmopolitan parent language (especially in the South and East Asian cases) and/or represent artificial standardizations at points along a complex dialect continuum (as with the Romance and Indic languages in particular) such that the differential ease with which the cosmopolitan and the vernacular may be learned is not as great for as many people as might be imagined.
The effects of religion and of the political order on the vernacular is likewise complex and requires us to pay attention to an important distinction Sheldon Pollock draws between the literarization of a language and its literarization. In this context, the literarization of a language is the development of a system by which that language may be set to writing, for any purpose; as such, it includes such phenomena as the development of an alphabet or other writing system, developed indigenously or adapted from abroad, the development of at least some minimal standards of orthography, and the dissemination of these systems across a body of people sufficient to justify the innovation. Literarization, on the other hand, refers to the development of the aesthetic resources of a given language so that it will be a suitable vehicle for verbal art of a written kind. The processes inherent to literarization will include such phenomena as the compiling of dictionaries (and particularly of bilingual dictionaries with the cosmopolitan language or with other prestige vernaculars), the editing of grammars, and the development of a rich and supple lexicon, able to express complex ideas with subtlety and frequently borrowing considerably for that purpose from cosmopolitan languages. Only languages that have undergone both literarization and literarization, I will argue, emerge as true vernaculars.

In the sense meant here, a traditional and oral folk culture, operant in some peripheral or marginal region of a cosmopolitan ecology or circulating amongst the lower social orders in the ecology’s heartlands, will not qualify as a vernacular literature. Such cultures of verbal art are, presumably, ubiquitous in the historical record. Gauls, no doubt, had songs and stories they told in their own languages, before and during the era of Roman rule; hill peoples of southwest China could (and did, and still do), perform and transmit their own transitions in the context of Chinese imperial rule, under which the Chinese language held a monopoly on the technology of writing. For that matter, the songs sung by the urban proletariats of Rome and Chang’an, performed in variants of the standard language, must have echoed around the residences of the great and officially sanctioned poets of each regime, leaving only the occasional trace for posterity through accidental survival or literati appropriation. The fact that such works, numerous though they must have been, were not written down, not only ensured their eventual

8 Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millennium,” 41–74; Casanova, Pascale, La republique mondiale des lettres, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999, 188–93, independently coins the term, as Pollock will observe in later work.
demise as the cultural configurations that gave them birth themselves shifted to new forms. Just as significantly for our purposes, since cosmopolitan literatures are by definition transmitted through writing, a verbal art communicated orally marks itself thereby as interested in a different kind of circulation altogether, one not directly in competition with the cosmopolitan.

Oral works can circulate for long periods of time and over fairly broad geographic regions, as the cases of Homeric epic and of the South Slavic tradition attest. That circulation is not, however, unlimited; changes in dialect, for example, bind oral traditions both geographically and chronologically, even if, as in the case of Homeric Greek, very real efforts at standardization across dialects have taken place in a panchoric context. Moreover, the audiences for oral and written verbal art, especially in pre-modern times, are radically different. Oral art has the potential for a very deep penetration of a geographically and chronologically limited region. Written verbal art may not penetrate so deeply into a community, thanks both to low levels of literacy and to the high costs of the reproduction of written text prior to commercial printing, but it can circulate much more broadly through a transregional elite and, within that elite, across long periods of time, as we have seen in the cosmopolitan chapter. To perform a poem or song orally, then, is not to place it in competition with a written cosmopolitan tradition, and the various local oral cultures of pre-modern cosmopolitan ecologies are better understood, perhaps, as forms of epichoric, or panchoric, circulation. While such literatures could and did find themselves transposed into writing on occasion, it was that transposition, and not the original composition of a work, that marked the entry into the vernacular order. Moreover, from a purely pragmatic perspective, if such oral verbal art was not committed to writing, then we are unlikely to know anything of it today (as with my notional Gaulish folk poetry), and as such, it will not function as part of any literary ecology for us. Without literization, then, there can be no vernacular.

And yet, while literization may be a necessary condition for vernacularization, it is far from sufficient in the absence of literarization. Languages are frequently first written down to fulfill functions other than the literary and, notably, for political and religious reasons; the former because polities wish to monitor more effectively the populace they administer (and to maintain the laws they use for that administration with more consistency), the latter because a religion will penetrate more deeply into a population the more that population has access to verbal art espousing the religion in
appropriate terms, such that writing at once broadens access to religious knowledge, and regulates its production and circulation more effectively. As such, scriptures and homilies and handbooks of spiritual or ethical practice are frequently among the first literary, or quasi-literary, texts to be committed to writing in a newly literized language.

Many languages are first committed to writing as what Thomas Kamusella calls "chancery languages," languages used by imperial or at least transregional polities for the recording of official documents (tax records, testimony in criminal proceedings, deeds of property) in regions under their rule, where the cosmopolitan or transregional language preferred by the state is inadequately known by local officials or by the local elites they managed. Kamusella argues that many of the languages of Central and Eastern Europe first entered into writing in this way—German, Bohemian/Czech, Polish, Magyar, Ruthenian, and others. While use as a chancery language does imply some level of standardization and refinement to the level necessary to discuss complex legal and financial matters, it does not automatically entail the use of that language for literary purposes; indeed, that use can easily lag behind chancery uses by several centuries, as Kamusella's Central and Eastern European cases generally do.

Nor does the use of a language in writing as a vehicle for proselytization automatically confer vernacular status upon it; such literizations of language, usually for the translations of scripture, do, as with chancery languages, standardize previously complex dialectal continua and enrich local languages with sophisticated technical vocabularies, key elements of literarization. At the same time, they are frequently driven by outside agendas, even by outside individuals, and need not spark the development of an indigenous literary tradition beyond the work of scripture. Scriptural translations, whether Luther's translation of the Bible into German or translations of the Theravada Buddhist canon from Pali into Burmese, can, and frequently do, provide a foundation on which a vernacular literature is built, but examples also abound, particularly in Christian missionary work from Fujian to Nigeria to the Amazon, where the development of a written form of a spoken language for the purposes of scriptural translation does not lead to the production of any significant body of other material in that written language. Literization for scriptural purposes is not automatically

equivalent to literarization, though it can provide a basis on which that literarization takes place.

The point is that a real vernacular literature represents a decision to transmit in writing a literary tradition in a new language, constructed for that purpose and intended in some way to compete with, complement, or otherwise coexist with a cosmopolitan literary language. Vernaculars, in the definition I am using, exist in symbiosis with one or more cosmopolitan literary languages and potentially with other vernaculars as well. As we shall see in more detail later in this chapter, they frequently announce this symbiosis in some explicit form, whether through a vernacular manifesto or through emulation of major works of the cosmopolitan canon (or both). Vernacular ecologies always, then, exhibit some level of diglossia, or rather digraphia, with the choice to write in the vernacular (or in a vernacular, since the choice of vernaculars in such a system is itself often complex) always also a choice not to write in the cosmopolitan idiom. That choice can be motivated by questions of audience or of genre and can take place in the contexts of radically different configurations of political and cultural power with respect to the available languages. The choice to write in a particular vernacular can even be motivated, among other things, by the native language of the author or his or her desire to write in alignment with a particular political regime or to espouse a particular set of religious views, but it rarely, if ever, reduces simply to those factors.

This fact is why a vernacular language is also never created with the explicit and simple aim of providing the basis for a national movement. Many of the languages of Eastern Europe, for example, fall into this category, in which the modern written form of the language is largely, or even entirely, the product of the nineteenth century and the ripple effect of nationalisms beginning in France and then in Germany. Languages such as Estonian; Latvian and Lithuanian; and Belarussian and Ukrainian; exist as we know them as products of just such nationalist movements, despite the use of versions of these languages as chancery languages and/or as vehicles for Christian (and frequently specifically Protestant) proselytizing for as many as four or five hundred years prior to the nationalist moment. The first text composed in Lithuanian that we know of, for example, was a catechism published in a low-country dialect in Königsberg in 1547, and from the 1620s onward, fragments of Lithuanian language survive in court transcripts. For centuries prior to that, Lithuanian had been the home language of the Jagiellonian Dynasty, which ruled Poland and Lithuania from the late fourteenth through the late sixteenth centuries, although for administrative
purposes the Jagiellonians used Latin, Polish, and Ruthenian, while German was also prevalent in urban areas. Folk literature of various kinds must have existed in dialects that could be recognized as related to modern Lithuanian, but it was only in the 1880s that the literary form of the language was stand-
ardized, at a point on the dialect continuum deliberately chosen to be relatively distant from Latvian, with an orthography derived from Czech (rather than an earlier, Polish-inspired orthography, rejected in the nation-
alist era because of tension with Poland). 10 Only at this point did it become possible to publish work in any significant quantity in Lithuanian, although here again the very nature of Lithuanian as a nationalist project ran up against equally nationalist but more powerful antagonists in German and Russian/Soviet imperial rule. As such, Lithuanian as a literary language was always engaged in a kind of ecological competition with larger regional national languages, such as German and Russian (and, of course, with still more powerful national literary languages, such as English and French), but not significantly in competition with Latin, since by the time Lithuanian emerged as a genuinely viable literary option, Latin had ceased to be a major structuring feature of the literary ecology of Europe.

Not all spoken languages are equally available for use as literary vernac-
ulars; some are spoken by too few people, and differ too much from their neighbors, to make easy reading for enough people to justify their use. In linguistic terminology, these languages differ from their neighbors through Abstand; that is, differences of mutual unintelligibility marking clear linguistic borders, as between Spanish and Basque, or French and German. 11 Usable literary vernaculars will need to be close enough to the spoken language of a large enough number of people to generate viable audiences for such work; as such, they are well suited to regions of dialect continuum, such as the Germanic and Romance languages of Europe or the Indic and Dravidian languages of South Asia. These dialect continua bring their own problems, of course; when the spoken language of each village varies slightly, the differences across larger regions does become unmanageable; moreover, the question of where and how along that continuum a written literary standard should emerge becomes a complex matter of cultural politics. This question forms, in fact, a central concern of one of the key manifestoes of vernacularization in the European

10 Ibid., 180–91.
11 Heinz Kloss, “Abstand Languages' and 'Ausbau Languages,’” Anthropolog-
ical Linguistics 9 (7), 1967.
tradition, Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia*, and I will return to it in my discussion of that text. However this question is resolved, resolved it must be, and a literary language emerging from a dialect continuum will need to choose a point or region on that continuum and then develop it through processes linguists describe as Ausbau, or building-up. Vocabulary must be managed by selecting from the range of available possibilities; syntactical structures must be regularized (often through assimilation to the syntax of the cosmopolitan language); frequently, though not always, grammars and dictionaries are compiled.¹²

**Language Names**

Even the naming of a vernacular language is an act of significance and an act that betrays the difference between vernaculars and national languages. Because modern national languages are understood as in some way the embodiment of a nation-state and of a people, the names of national languages tend quite straightforwardly to derive from the names of the nation they embody, or at least the nation where they originate. Thus, the French speak French in France; Finns speak Finnish in Finland; Americans, the English of their English forebears in England.

Pre-modern European vernaculars were, however, much more complexly territorialized, if at all. While their early use was frequently correlated with courtly or monastic centers, the relationship between the two was frequently complex, as was the relationship between either language or polity on the one hand and any notion of a “people” on the other. Thomas Kamusella notes several examples of the ways in which regional identity was often constructed in pre-modern Europe. Orthodox believers located within the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and those in the Kingdom of Poland (polities combined through dynastic union for much of the middle ages), initially identified the languages they spoke as “Ruthenian,” but came over time to identify the Lithuanian–Polish border as a boundary between “White Russia” and “Little Russia,” or between Belarusians and Ukrainians. While this border continued to have political significance under the jurisdiction of states centered elsewhere, it only became the basis for a boundary between a Belarusian and a Ukrainian

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¹² Casanova, *La republique mondiale des lettres* 1999, 108 claims, I think wrongly, that the failure of English to develop rigorous linguistic norms prior to the eighteenth century hindered the autonomy of literature in England.
state (and only briefly then) in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and more enduringly in 1991. Likewise, the people now known as the nation-state of Slovenia began as Slavic migrants to the Alpine region and fell, for complex historical reasons, under the territory of the Duchy of Bavaria and thus of the Carolingian empire. Ecclesiastical boundaries between dioceses tended thereafter to reinforce a sense of difference between Slovenes and their fellow Catholic South Slavs, the Croats, but the term “Slovenian” did not emerge until the late eighteenth century; it is etymologically almost identical to the words “Slav” and “Slovak,” such that the words for Slovene, Slovak, and Slav in today’s Slovenian and Slovak are almost indistinguishable. Prior to this somewhat arbitrary naming, inhabitants of the general region tended to identify themselves through sub-regional toponyms, such as Carinthia, Carniola, or Styria, regardless of whether they spoke a Germanic or a Slavic dialect.  

In a somewhat analogous manner, the historian of late imperial China Pamela Crossley has shown, for example, that the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) carefully constructed a new sense of identity for both its own Manchu ethnicity and for the Mongols. For example, “Mongol” identity under Genghis Khan had been largely a question of personal loyalty, with many Mongolian-speaking groups excluded from such identity as not sworn to loyalty and other, Turkic, groups identified as “Mongolian” because they were loyal. After the fall of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in China in 1368, the groups identified as “Mongol” became still more diverse, including a wide range of linguistic communities, from Jurchen to Kirghiz, as well as multiple religious and political affiliations, even among the leaders of the groups called “Mongol” by the Ming court. Finally, as the “Manchu” (itself a problematic identity) Qing Dynasty took power, they sought legitimacy in part through an affiliation with the cult of Genghis Khan and thus co-opted Mongol elites into their political structure. Over time, the Qing court in Beijing sponsored the production of literature in Mongolian and mandated literacy in Mongolian for the groups they had labeled as “Mongol” (whether or not that was the native language of the individuals in those groups),

13 Kamusella, The Politics of Language and Nationalism, 288–300.
helping in the process to construct a new, linguistically based Mongolian identity that would later serve both as a basis for the nationalism of the modern state of Mongolia and for the acceptance by other Mongols of citizenship within an officially multiethnic People's Republic of China.

In this sort of context, in which shifting political and religious borders overlay complex dialect continua and in which cultural formations could be as much the product of imperial strategy as of indigenous self-identification, it is hardly surprising that it was not always easy to define language names unambiguously. As a result, a great many vernacular languages either have multiple names or no name at all or very generic names. We shall see below how Ramon Vidal refers to the language his text describes as “Limousin,” although his own home is far from Limoges and although many other writers of the time refer instead to the language of the troubadours as the language of Provence. Dante, likewise, speaks of the “language of st” and of a vulgar Latin but never of Italian per se. The first known use of the term linguaggio italiano is in an undated letter of Leonardo da Vinci, to Leo X, probably written between 1513 and 1516, though Dante himself does speak of the “volgare italic” (Convivio, l.vi–8),\(^\text{15}\) using a related glotonym that is clearly not, however, the origin of the modern name. This relatively late naming of Italian as such contrasts with the significantly earlier dates at which other Romance language names are attested; for example, frances is found as early as 1100, castellana and espannol in 1254 and 1284 respectively, and even portugues by 1437.\(^\text{16}\) Although these other languages first received names earlier, in part because each was more clearly associated with a single polity than was Italian, it is nonetheless striking that the language names long post-date the first written texts known in each language: for French, the Oaths of Strasbourg (842); for Spanish, the Glosas Emilianenses (c. 1000); for Portuguese, texts from the late ninth century AD. In contrast to the “national languages,” which emerge as literary standards in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and were developed specifically for the use of an actual or emergent nation-state, the Romance languages first emerged for pragmatic reasons and for significant early periods operated without fixed names. Poets themselves frequently described

\(^{15}\) Muljacic Zarko, “Perché i glotonimi ‘linguaggio italiano’, ‘lingua italiana’ (e sim.) appaiono per indicare ‘oggetti’ reali e non soltanto auspicati molto più tardi di altri termini analoghi che si riferiscono a varie lingue gallo ibero-romane?” Cuadernos de filología italiana (4), 1997: 254.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 257.
vernacular language as "Latin," *lati*, a term used, indeed for the singing of birds, as well as for Latin itself;\(^7\) when the need arose to discuss Latin, however, both Dante and Ramon Vidal prefer the term *gramatica*. From a comparative perspective, similar kinds of terminological ambiguities can be found in South Asia: the Dravidian language now known as Malayalam, spoken in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, was not normally given that name until the colonial era; the term Malayalam emerged first in the sixteenth century for the region of south India west of the Western Ghat mountains and for a script that is neither the one now used for Malayalam nor its ancestor. Down to the colonial period, the term Tami, or just *bhāṣā* ("language"), was more commonly used for the continuum of Dravidian dialects used for literary purposes in the territory of modern Kerala.\(^8\)

This vagueness of linguistic terminology was inevitable, I would argue, in an ecological context in which it was impossible to draw one-to-one relationships between languages, peoples, and polities. That Italy was politically fragmented in Dante's time and that it was also a battleground for the competing interests is a fairly familiar story; that the territory of modern France took some time to coalesce into its current form may bear repeating. The province of Limousin was at the time an English possession (though one contested heavily in the Hundred Years' War), and it would not be officially annexed to the French kingdom until 1607; likewise, the County of Provence, with fluctuating borders, joined the Kingdom of France only in 1481, and only as an inheritance. The regions of southern France, of Italy, and of those parts of Spain no longer under Muslim rule, thus comprised a complex political terrain, and one in which the future emergence of France, Spain, and Italy as we know them would have been unimaginable. The territory of Kerala, likewise, was subsumed under a wide variety of local and transregional polities throughout much of its history. Small wonder, then, that the languages used by poets from these regions had inconsistent names even in theoretical treatises, let alone in the work of poets.


**VERNACULAR MANIFESTO AND COSMOPOLITAN EMULATION**

Once a vernacular has been literized and literarized—that is, made available for written literary production—it remains actually to produce literature, and particularly works of literature that will make the case for the vernacular as a literary language. This case can be made either directly, through the publication of literary manifestoes of one kind or another, or indirectly, through the composition of works of literature designed to emulate works in the cosmopolitan tradition. In the case of European and South and Southeast Asian languages, this often involves the composition of vernacular translations of cosmopolitan epic; in the case of Japanese, the gesture of emulation is rather one of the anthologization of poetry, with the Man’yōshū (759) compiling earlier poetry in a form designed to rival the Chinese Shi Jing and other poetic anthologies. I now consider these two phenomena, the vernacular manifesto and the emulation of the cosmopolitan tradition.

For most modern and Western readers, Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, likely composed between 1302 and 1305 but left incomplete by its author and unknown for two centuries following his death, likely constitutes the most familiar example of what I am characterizing as the "vernacular manifesto." Dante is not, in fact, the first European, even in modern times, to compose such a manifesto, a distinction that belongs to the Catalan Ramón Vidal, whose *Razós de trobar* (c. 1210), advocates for and seeks to define the terms of the language we call either Provencal or Occitan, which he himself characterizes as "Lemosin," or of the region of Limoges, in southwest France. I return to Vidal's manifesto below, and for the moment note only that it appears likely that Dante was familiar with the work and/or with its verse translation into Italian by the troubadour Terramagnino of Pisa in the late twelfth century.\(^\text{19}\) While not the first modern European vernacular manifesto, then, Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, though incomplete, is nonetheless much more sophisticated and detailed in its argumentation and deserves a more detailed scrutiny. In what follows, I discuss a few passages that I consider to be critical to the work as a whole:

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XIX So now we can say that this vernacular, which has been shown to be illustrious, cardinal, aulic, and curial, is the vernacular that is called Italian [*vulgare latium*]. For, just as one vernacular can be identified as belonging to Cremona, so can another that belongs to Lombardy; and just as one can be identified that

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belongs to Lombardy, so can another that belongs to the whole left-hand side of Italy [totius sinistre Ytalie]; and just as all these can be identified in this way, so can that which belongs to Italy as a whole [totius Ytalie]. And just as the first is called Cremonese, the second Lombard, and the third half-Italian [semilatium], so this last, which belongs to all Italy [totius Ytalie], is called the Italian vernacular [latium vulgare]. This is the language used by the illustrious authors who have written vernacular poetry in Italy [qui lingua vulgari poetati sunt in Ytalia], whether they came from Sicily, Apulia, Tuscany Romagna, Lombardy, or either of the Marches. And since my intention, as I promised at the beginning of this work, is to teach a theory of the effective use of the vernacular [de vulgari eloquentia], I have begun with this form of it, as being the most excellent; and I shall go on, in the following books, to discuss the following questions: whom I think worthy of using this language, for what purpose, in what manner, where, when, and what audience they should address. Having clarified all this, I shall attempt to throw some light on the question of the less important vernaculars, descending step by step until I reach the language that belongs to a single family.20

One of the first points to observe is that Dante nowhere identifies the vernacular language he defends as “Italian.” He does use Ytalia to describe a geographic region corresponding fairly closely to both the Roman understanding of Italy and to the modern nation-state and refers at times to the Ytalii as the inhabitants of that territory. It is therefore all the more striking

20 XIX 1. Hoc autem vulgare quod illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale ostensum est, dicimus esse illud quod vulgare latium appellatur. Nam sicut quoddam vulgare est invenire quod proprium est Cremone, sic quoddam est invenire quod proprium est Lombardie; et sicut est invenire aliquod quod sit proprium Lombardie, [sic] est invenire aliquod quod sit totius sinistre Ytalie proprium; et sicut omnia hec est invenire, sic et illud quod totius Ytalie est. Et sicut illud cremonense ac illud lombardum et tertium semilatium dicitur, sic istud, quod totius Ytalie est, latium vulgare vocatur. Hoc enim usi sunt doctores illustres qui lingua vulgari poetati sunt in Ytalia, ut Siculi, Apuli, Tusci, Romandioli, Lombardi et utriusque Marchie viri.

2. Et quia intentio nostra, ut polliciti sumus in principio huius operis, est doctrinam de vulgari eloquentia tradere, ab ipso tanquam ab excellentissimo incipientes, quos putamus ipso dignos uti, et propter quid, et quomodo, nec non ubi, et quando, et ad quos ipsam dirigendum sit, in immediatis libris tractabimus.

3. Quibus illuminatis, inferiorma vulgaria illuminare curabimus, gradatim descendentes ad illud quod unius solius familie proprium est.

that the term he uses for the generalized vernacular common to that population is consistently *Latium vulgare*, or “vulgar/popular Latin.” The choice of this term is, I would argue, significant. Dante divides the linguistic geography of the world into a Greek part, a northern European part, corresponding roughly to the Germanic and Slavic languages (where, according to Dante, the word for “yes” is *io*), and a third part, corresponding in essence to the Romance languages, which is itself divided into three, based on the different words for “yes” used there:

All the rest of Europe that was not dominated by these two vernaculars was held by a third, although nowadays this itself seems to be divided in three: for some now say *oc*, some oil, and some *si*, when they answer in the affirmative; and these are the Hispanic, the French, and the Italians [*Latini*]. Yet the sign that the vernaculars of these three peoples derive from one and the same language is plainly apparent: for they can be seen to use the same words to signify many things, such as “God,” “heaven,” “love,” “sea,” “earth,” “is,” “lives,” “dies,” “loves,” and almost all others.  

Dante’s linguistic geography conforms in part to our own, with two interesting exceptions. The less immediately relevant exception is that the language of “oc” for him is not simply what we would call the language of “Languedoc” (i.e., Provencal/Occitan), but in fact the language of Spain, understood, presumably, as including what is now southern France (but which was not, of course, under the territorial administration of the French monarchy in Dante’s time). More immediately striking is that Dante here identifies the people of “*si*” not as “Ytali” (a term, remember, that he does use elsewhere), but as “*Latini,*” or Latins. That Dante is positioning Italy as the direct heir of Rome is made explicit shortly thereafter, as he seeks to identify which of the three parts of what he sees as a common language is best suited to literature:

and second, because they seem to be in the closest contact with the grammatica which is shared by all—and this, to those who consider the matter rationally, will appear a very weighty argument.


22 secundo quia magis videntur inniti grammaticque que comunis est, quod
I return below to the earlier part of Dante's distinctions between the three varieties of this language, which relates to questions of genre. Here, I wish to observe that Dante makes explicit the claim that "Italian" (which he calls "vulgar Latin") is closer to "Latin" (which he calls "gramatica") than are either of the other Romance dialects. Nor is it accidental that Dante uses the term gramatica to describe Latin. In part, this is because he is already using the terms "Latin," "Latins," and "Latium" to refer to the language, people, and territory of Italy, and so he needs to avoid ambiguity by using another term for Latin itself. Beyond this, however, the term gramatica itself has significant connotations and does not simply substitute for "Latin." As Dante introduces the term at 1.1.3, gramatica is a secondary language, possessed by the Romans but also by the Greeks and by some, but not all, other peoples.

Dante thus understands human language as divided into two locutiones, namely gramatica and the vulgare. Both are, he claims, in some sense the same the world over, though diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa ("the vernacular [is] divided into different pronunciations and [uses] different names"), a somewhat remarkable claim that is more intelligible in the immediate context of Dante's world, where most of the linguistic variety he would have encountered would have differed chiefly in these respects from his own speech. Because, for Dante, all peoples have a vulgare but not all have gramatica, the former is more honorable, nobilior; a term whose use as a descriptor borders so close on the oxymoronic as to insist on the polemical nature of Dante's claim here. At the same time, gramatica has advantages of its own, as a fixed and unchanging standard:

This is where the inventors of the art of grammar began, for this gramatica is nothing other than a certain unchanging speech, the same across different times and places.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the details of Dante's theory of language (or, perhaps better, the theory of language that can be inferred from his somewhat scattered observations) remain obscure and contested, I would argue that gramatica here functions as a sort of template-language for local vernaculars, a kind of

\textsuperscript{13} Hinc moti sunt inventores grammaticae facultatis: que quidem grammatica nichil aliud est quam quedam inalterabiles locutionis ydemptitas diversibus temporibus atque locis. 1.IX.11.
unchanging deep structure, of which vernacular speech and writing is a temporally and spatially bound external manifestation. Thus, in exalting the vulgare as nobilior, Dante also maintains a privileged position for grammatica as the paradigm for each version of the vulgare, and as a stable means of communication across time and place:

[Gramatica’s inventers] designed it thus, lest, through changes of speech due to the judgment of individuals, we should either be unable, or only imperfectly able, to gain access to the authorities and deeds of the ancients, or from those who have, as a result of difference in location, become different from us.24

If grammatica is constant over time and place, then, the vulgus is not—it is a locally bound form of speech, which, as Dante notes, can vary from street to street within a city, as well as between cities or regions, and which, not being codified as grammatica, is also subject to change over time. This almost infinite linguistic variety is not suitable for literary purposes. What is needed here is a vernacular common to all cities, which seems to belong to none (omnis Latie civitatis est et nullius esse videtur); a vernacular language that operates in much the same way as grammatica does (and which Dante thinks it will resemble in formal terms as well). Dante thus famously calls for a vulgare illustre that is cardinale, aulicum et curiale (1.XVI.6). Each of these four adjectives requires some unpacking, even for Dante himself, as their uses here are far from intuitive. Dante glosses illustre as illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens, that is, as giving off light or reflecting the light given off by other things; Dante further explains that language that is illustre is sublime in power and in learning, sublimatum est magistratu et potestate. This vulgare must also be cardinale, an adjective conventionally glossed as “pertaining to a hinge; principal, chief.” Dante uses the vehicle of this adjectival metaphor quite seriously, making the argument that the vulgare illustre should be the hinge on which the other vernaculars depend, a language that avoids the excessive movements of more peripheral forms of speech but whose shifts are indexical for the shifts of all the others. The adjectives aulicum and curiale suggest that this vernacular should pertain to both the royal court and to the law-courts. Dante here engages in

24 Adinvenerunt ergo illam ne, propter variationem sermonis arbitrio singularium fluitantis, vel nullo modo vel saltim imperfecte antiquorum actingeremus authoritates et gesta, sive illorum quos a nobis locorum diversitas facit esse diversos. 1.IX.1.
productive slippage between two senses in which these adjectives could be meant: either metaphorically, that the vulgare illustre acts as a (royal/legal) court at which other linguistic forms are judged; or literally, as the language actually used in the courts both royal and legal. Italy in Dante's time famously lacks the former, and also, therefore, a systematic version of the latter; Dante's double usage of the adjectives aulicum and illustre explicitly suggests that the vulgare illustre can be both a substitute for and a precursor of these institutions for which Dante longs so profoundly, in the De vulgari eloquentia and elsewhere.

In the remainder of the text as we have it, Dante begins his quest for the precise location of his vulgare illustre, though he seems not to have completed the text according to its original plan, and as a result we are left with no clear sense of where to find this elusive "panther," as Dante terms the vulgare illustre at I.XVI.1. He does, of course, offer several hints: just as he suggests that the closeness of the "language of si" to gramatica is a mark in the former's favor, so, too, his cautious, backhanded praise for both the dialect of Bologna (I.XV.5) and for at least certain individual writers from Florence and environs (I.XIII.3) (even as he rejects their dialects as suitable in themselves for service as the vulgare illustre) suggests that key models for this elusive linguistic standard are to be found in this general region, more than in any other. Nonetheless, as suggested earlier, the key to Dante's notion of the vulgare illustre is that it be a form recognizably related to the spoken dialects of each Italian city yet proper to none on its own. That the actual form of that vernacular as it historically emerges, beginning a few years after the De vulgari eloquentia with Dante's own Commedia divina, is in fact heavily indebted to the specific language of Florence, indicates of course a certain disingenuousness on the part of Dante, who on some level is seeking to enshrine his own native dialect through a form of "bad universalism." At the same time, Dante's notion of the vulgare illustre as some kind of abstraction or generalization of the dialect continuum fits rather well with the empirical reality not only of literary vernaculars in the

25 A term I borrow from, e.g., feminist and postcolonialist discourses, where in which it acts as a shorthand for the ideological use of universalism by hegemonic groups as a means of projecting their own identities and experiences onto those in a marginalized position. See, e.g. Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" Critical Inquiry 30 (2), 2004: 403–8, 405. Dante here performs, I argue, a similar move, by claiming to select the dialect to be the basis of the vulgare illustre on the basis of abstract and disinterested principles, when the result tends instead to constitute his own experience as universal, and universalizable.
Romance-speaking world but also more broadly across Europe and South Asia (the region whose vernacularization bears the strongest resemblance to that of Europe, though of course predating any conceivable European influence by a millennium).

As we shall see in detail in the rest of this chapter, the Romance, Germanic, and Slavic languages of Europe, along with the Indic and Dravidian languages of South Asia, are best understood as extensive dialect continua, over which are overlain written literary languages, many of which began as vernaculars and most of which have long since made the transition to "national" status. Yet there are very real distinctions between vernacular and national languages, even when the former are the direct ancestors of (or even indistinguishable from) the latter. As Sheldon Pollock observes, and as many of his South Asianist colleagues affirm in detail in a volume edited by him,26 while literary vernaculars frequently emerged in the contexts of specific courts and were thus from the beginning implicated in networks of political relationships, those relationships rarely, if ever, resembled the homology of people-language-nation-state that is the desired object of nationalist production.

The production and circulation of literary texts in Telugu, one of the literarized vernaculars of the Dravidian family in south India, form a case in point. Today, Telugu is probably best known as the official language of the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, located on the Deccan plain and the adjacent Bay of Bengal coast in south-central India. Since independence, the political geography of India has been repeatedly reconfigured in an attempt to perfect the mapping of literary languages onto state boundaries in a process I examine in more detail in my chapter on global literary ecologies. But the literary geography of Telugu in pre-modern times in no way maps onto the area of modern Andhra Pradesh, nor does it even map onto some other different but still discrete region. In the sixteenth century, for example, the city of Hampi in Karnataka was the leading center of Telugu literary activity, even though it was under the rule of King Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, who styled himself a Kannada king. Under the Nayakas, who were Telugu-speaking but whose rule stretched far to the south of modern Andhra Pradesh, the center of Telugu literary activity was in the south in places such as Madurai, where Telugu literature remained active after the Nayaka fell. Areas within the territory of Andhra were often

multilingual, such that the sultans of Golconda used Persian for administrative purposes but eagerly cultivated poetry in Telugu. In the northwestern Andhra town of Srisailam in the thirteenth century, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, and Marathi (the latter an Indic language, not a Dravidian one, and thus not sharing a family resemblance to the other three) were all major literary languages, and Tirupati, in the southeast, was a center for both Tamil and Telugu in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Conversely, many of the Telugu-speaking rulers in Andhra promoted Sanskrit, rather than Telugu, poetry, while many of the greatest Telugu poets gained official recognition in Tamil or Kannada-speaking areas.27

Pollock explicitly contrasts cases like Telugu (and examples could be multiplied across all of South Asia), to the European case, where he sees Dante's discussion of "Italian" in the De vulgari eloquentia as much more explicitly proto-national than anything found in contemporary South Asia.28 There is some truth to this case, and Pollock also makes clear that his own claims here are a rhetorical strategy designed as a corrective to the too-easy contemporary reappropriation of older Orientalist paradigms, in which European models of vernacularization would necessarily be more progressive than those found elsewhere.

A closer examination of both the text of the De vulgari eloquentia and of medieval European literary practice, however, suggests not only that the situation in Europe resembled that in South Asia much more closely than Pollock imagines, but also hints thereby at possibilities for escaping outmodeed Orientalist paradigms without simply falling into the reverse error of insisting on the failures of European models compared with non-European ones. Dante's own text, as I have already suggested, claims that each of the three vernaculars—those of oc, oil, and si—has its own advantages from a literary perspective: the language of oc has the advantage, Dante says, of having the longest history of poetic production; that of oil, is ideally suited to the romance and to other prose forms, while the language of si, more recently developed for poetic purposes, is sweeter even than the language of oc for those purposes and additionally, as we saw earlier, is the closest in form to gramatica (I.X). While this series of distinctions preserves, at least implicitly, an advantage for Dante's own

language of si, that advantage is clearly relative rather than absolute, and
the choice of vernacular in which to write is framed rather more in terms
of genre and of the history of literary custom than in either the inherent
superiority of one vernacular over another or even in the native speech
of the author. Both the general tenor of this discussion, as well as most of
its specific details, owe much to Raimon Vidal's own defense of the
vernacular from a century before Dante, which I discuss below. Of
course, we should not assume that Vidal's claims here are in any way
original or provocative; they likely reflect, rather, something of the
received wisdom of the period. Moreover, we have considerable evidence
that the actual literary practice of the Romance world in medieval times
was quite as Dante and Ramon Vidal describe it, with genre and function
shaping the linguistic choices of an author far more than mother tongue,
that of the audience, or that of the sovereign, beginning with Dante's own
acknowledgement of the superiority of each of the vernaculars for differ-
ent literary purposes. As such, they bear more than a passing resemblance
to the phenomena observed by Pollock and other South Asianists, as
described earlier.

All of this is quite confusing, of course, especially if understood (as it
usually is) through a framework that takes the modern national languages
of Europe as a given and understands the literary production of medieval
and early modern Europe as teleologically directed towards those national
languages, when it cannot be directly subsumed under them. How can we
understand, in that context, a manuscript of the Chanson de Roland,
composed in Treviso in a "French" overlain with elements from northern
Italian languages\textsuperscript{29} or a work of troubadour poetry written as an exchange
between a male poet and his female lover in which the man speaks in
Occitan and the woman in Genoese dialect?\textsuperscript{30} Such works either belong to
multiple national histories or, more often, to none at all and frequently
find themselves consigned to oblivion when vernaculars give way to
national literatures.

If, however, we understand vernacular languages as nodes of literarization
and literarization along a dialect continuum changing constantly with time,
it begins to seem easier to understand how slightly different nodes can

\textsuperscript{29} Stephen Patrick McCormick, "Remapping the Story: Franco-Italian Epic
and Lombardia as a Narrative Community (1250–1441)," Ph.D. dissertation,

\textsuperscript{30} Gaunt, "Sexual Difference and the Metaphor of Language."
assume greater or lesser significance in different times, places, genres, or registers. Since all are somewhat stylized and somewhat removed from the daily speech of any individual (and all owe much of their more sophisticated vocabulary to cosmopolitan languages, whether Latin and Greek in Europe or Sanskrit and Persian in South Asia), all are potentially open to speakers living at any point along the continuum. As they evolve over time, it can be argued that the standardized forms of French, Spanish, and Italian share a greater family resemblance, both in terms of diction and of syntax, than each does with many of the spoken dialects subsumed under them. As a result, and especially since in a vernacular era literacy implies literacy in the cosmopolitan language as well (or at least a strong awareness of that language and its legacy), it is almost as easy for a poet to assume one vernacular as another, to occupy one node rather than another, as the case requires.

Dante's major predecessor as an expositor of vernacular poetics, Ramon Vidal, provides confirmation of this pattern. Himself a native of Besalú, in what is now the northeast corner of Catalonia in Spain, Vidal would have been a native speaker of a dialect that would today be considered a part of the Catalan language, and yet the language of Vidal's poetry, the language he seeks to define and affirm in his Razos de trobar (c. 1200), is what is now known as Provençal or Occitan—Dante's language of oc. Vidal's treatise circulated widely in Catalonia, in Italy, and eventually in what is now southern France, the homeland of Occitan; a grammatical account of the language was of particular interest at early stages, in other words, to poets who used the language but whose native language was relatively distant from it. Vidal's discussion of the relationship between French and Occitan (for which he prefers the name "Lemosin") is an obvious source for Dante's later discussion:

Every man who wants to produce or understand troubadour verse must first know that no other speech (parladura) in our language is more natural or more correct than that of Provence or Limousin or Saintonge or Auvergne or Quercy. This is why, I tell you, that when I speak of Lemosin, that I mean all of these lands, and all their neighbors, and all the lands which are between them. And all men born and raised in these lands have a natural and right speech . . .

French speech is best and most suited for composing [the genres of] romances and pastourelles; but that of Limousin is best for [the genres of] vers, canzones and for sirventes, and through all the lands of our language the singers of the Limousin tounge have a greater authority than those of any other speech, which is why I will speak of it first.
That is why I tell you that all men who wish to learn to produce or understand troubadour verse must first study well the speech of Limousin. And after that, they must know something of the nature of gramma
tica, if he truly wants to produce or understand troubadour verse, since the entire speech of Limousin is spoken naturally through case and gender and tense and person and through nouns, as you can hear well if you listen.\textsuperscript{31}

As is well known to specialists, Dante thus borrows much of his rhetoric in the \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} fairly directly from Ramon Vidal—the division of “our language” into a variety of spoken idioms, of which some are especially well suited to certain literary genres, while one form of the language (for Vidal, Lemosin; for Dante; a vulgare illustre derived from the language of \textit{si}) is especially privileged by its closeness to gramma
tica, which for both authors (as for many others of their period), is virtually a synonym for Latin. Vidal’s case is in some ways stronger than Dante’s, in that he can make the claim, as Dante cannot, that his preferred dialect retains something of the case-endings of Latin, distinguishing at least nominative and oblique cases where Italian dialects do not.

Dante’s emulation of Ramon Vidal substantially complicates a key argument made by Pascale Casanova in her \textit{République mondiale des lettres}, namely that Joachim du Bellay, and not Dante, is the first to found a national literature, in that the French literature constructed by du Bellay’s \textit{Defense et illustration de la langue française} (1549) “se fonde dans la relation complexe

\textsuperscript{31} Totz hom que vol trobar ni entendre deu primerament saber que neguna parladura no es tant naturals ni tant drecha del nostre lingage con aqella de Proen
tsza o de Lemosi o de saintonge o d’Alvergna o de Caerci. Per que ieu vos dic que qant ieu parlarai de Lemosis, que totas estas terras entendas, et totas lor vezinas, et totas cellas qe son entre elles. Et tot l’ome que en aqelllas sont nat ni norit an la parladura natural et drecha . . .

La parladura Francesa val mais et plus avinenz a far romanz et pasturellas ; mas cella de Lemosin val mais per far \textit{vers et cansons et serventes} ; et per totas las terras de nostre lengage so de maior autoritat li cantar de la lenga Lemosina que de negun’ autra parladura, per qu’ieu vos en parlarai primeramen . . .

Per q’ieu vos dic que totz hom que vuella trobar ni entendre deu aver fort privada la parladura de Lemosin. Et apres deu saber alques de la natura de la gramma
tica, si fort primamenz vol trobar ni entendre car tota la parladura de Lemosin se parla naturalmenz et per cas et per generes et per temps et per personas et per motz, aisi com poretz auzir si ben o escoutas. Translation adapted from Juliet Lucy Anne O’Brien, “Trobar Cor(s) | Erotics and poetics in Flamenc,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2006, 103.
à une autre nation, et, à travers elle, à une autre langue, dominante et en apparence indépassable, le latin" ("is founded in a complex relationship with another nation, and through it, with another language, dominant and apparently unbeatable, Latin"). As we can see from the well-established relationship between Vidal's treatise and Dante's, Dante, in seeking to found a literature in a volgare illustre, is in fact doing so not in relationship to another nation but to other languages (Occitan and French), whose significance in the Italy of Dante's time cannot be overstated. Even Brunetto Latini (1220–94), the famous teacher of Dante, encountered in the Inferno, wrote his major work, the encyclopedic Li Livres dou Trésor, in French.

We will explore the complexities of the situation in which du Bellay is working further in the next chapter, where my emphasis will be on the changing relationship between vernacular and Latin as French literature moves towards a specifically "national" focus. For the moment, I wish to underline the weakly territorialized and nationalized nature of the use of the vernacular in the age of Dante. While De vulgari eloquentia seeks to establish a transregional vernacular identifiable with a particular territory, the text also betrays the reality of its own time, in which a variety of vernaculars coexisted, each potentially available to a variety of authors who might or might not have had a territorial or mother-tongue relationship to any one of them and who might instead choose to write in Latin or any of the vernaculars for reasons of genre or audience. Vidal is the first European we know of (after King Alfred, whom I discuss later) to issue a vernacular manifesto, and he does so for a language that is not his own by birth or "nation." In imitating Vidal, Dante may have been seeking to territorialize the vernacular, and the received history of Italian literature, from Dante to Petrarch and Boccacio, may suggest that he was successful. At roughly the time that Dante was writing De vulgari eloquentia, however, other residents of Dante's Italia were retelling the story of Roland in an art-language containing elements of both Old French and Italian, the Venetian Marco Polo was dictating his adventures to Rustichello da Pisa, who circulated them in an amalgam of French and Pisan, while others were writing in rather purer French, in Occitain, and in other regional Italian vernaculars. The territorialization of language would have to wait.

As I have already suggested, Raimon Vidal was not the first European to compose any sort of vernacular manifesto. Alfred, King of Wessex (849–99 AD; r. 871–99), known to generations as Alfred the Great, was

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32 Casanova, La republique mondiale des lettres 1999, 71.
not only the first Anglo-Saxon king to successfully resist the Danish incursions into Great Britain and to claim some sort of leadership over the other Anglo-Saxon states, he was also the leader of a significant intellectual and cultural program, which had as its explicit aim the restoration and propagation of Latin and Christian learning under his aegis. In so doing, Alfred was likely inspired to some extent by his continental predecessor Charlemagne (742–814), whose own “Carolingian Renaissance” was crucially indebted to the work of the British scholar and ecclesiastic, Alcuin. The crucial difference between the educational and cultural programs of Charlemagne and of Alfred, of course, is that while Charlemagne’s was built around a revitalization of both knowledge and production of texts in classical Latin (indeed, the Carolingian Renaissance is often pointed to as evidence that the spoken standard had deviated far enough from the classical language to make such reforms necessary), Alfred’s was built around the first major project of translation into a vernacular language in the territory of modern Europe. Among the works he translated was Gregory I’s Cura Pastoralis, (c. 590). The preface to this translation, also said to be composed by Alfred himself, is written in Anglo-Saxon, and describes Alfred’s linguistic choice:

When I remembered all this, then I wondered greatly why those good wise men who formerly existed throughout England, and had fully studied all those books, did not wish to translate any part of them into their own language. But I immediately answered myself, and said: “They did not imagine that men would ever become so careless and learning so decayed; they refrained from it by intention and hoped that there would be the greater knowledge in this land the more languages we knew.” Then I remembered how the law was first found in the Hebrew language, and afterwards, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it all into their own language; and all the other books as well. And afterwards in the same way the Romans, when they had learned them, they translated them all into their own language through learned interpreters. And all other Christian nations also translated some part of them into their own language.

The historical significance of Alfred's preface is clear and noted by Pollock, among others. For the first time in the history of Western Europe (that we are aware of, anyway; see the discussion below of other possible early vernaculars under and after Roman rule), a writer not only translated major works of the classical or Christian past into a local language but offered an explicit justification for why he was doing so. Alfred's justification is simple—there are, he says, too few people in his kingdom who know Latin, and for Gregory's work to have the impact he needs it to have (the work is a guide to the proper role of bishops within the church), it must be accessible in Anglo-Saxon as well as in Latin. Such a claim, similar as it is to the justifications for most translations made today, may seem insignificant to a modern reader. In the context of its time, however, and given in particular the role that Anglo-Saxon and Irish monasticism had played in the prior century or two in preserving ancient and Christian learning, Alfred's claim that Anglo-Saxon translations were necessary even for the elites of his kingdom marks either a stunning admission of cultural failure or a radically new way of thinking about culture and power, couched in euphemistic terms.

That the latter might in fact be the truer motivation behind Alfred's translation project is suggested by the continuation of the passage cited above, where the king recounts his train of thought, and suggests that, just as the Greeks needed to translate the law of the Hebrew Bible into their language, and the Romans, that of both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, so, too, must he, Alfred, preside over a third round of translation, into what we call Anglo-Saxon (Alfred himself does not give a name to the language in which he is writing, describing it only as *hiora ægen gediođe*, "[their] own language," as he wonders why his predecessors had not employed it for translations). That Alfred cites, in effect, the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate as precedents, necessarily places his own project in rather more illustrious company than his modest and deploring tone would otherwise suggest. There is also at least some evidence to suggest that the decline in Latin learning was less precipitous than suggested by Alfred's preface; certainly, there were ecclesiastics at court who had good knowledge of Latin (as well, presumably, as Alfred himself), who could, in principle, have led a revival of the learning that had undoubtedly been hurt by the Danish invasions. The claim that other Christian nations translate these works as well is a more problematic claim; it is unclear which nations

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Alfred could possibly have in mind here, though it is also quite possible that
the king is simply appealing to spurious precedent to lend authority to what
is otherwise a rather audacious enterprise.

The idea that one should "write the way one speaks," adopted by
linguistic reformers as diverse as Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) for Serbian
and Hu Shi (1891–1962) for Chinese, has been so deeply ingrained in
modern ways of thinking that the radicalism of such an idea is easy to
understate. In addition to his translation projects, Alfred also promul-
gated a legal code (which, like the preface to Gregory's Pastoral Care,
explicitly linked the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition to the Hebrew Bible).
Further, he is believed to have commissioned the writing of a history in
the vernacular, which now, with later additions, goes under the name of
the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; copies of this chronicle were then distrib-
uted to monastic centers across the kingdom, providing at once a royally
sanctioned historical narrative and a significant school text and prose
model in the emergent vernacular prose tradition. The literary produc-
tion of Alfred's era, then, can be (and usually is) seen as a coherent
program, situating Alfred's kingdom as a new center for learning but for
a learning in the vernacular. Alfred and his court did not initiate the writ-
ing of Anglo-Saxon, but through their efforts they achieved something of
a monopoly on its early expression, producing not only a series of texts
centered around the authority of the king but also a model for prose and
poetic style regulated by the king himself. Language and literature, for the
first time in Europe, was representable as the monopoly of a particular
polity, where the polity in question was also understood as defined at least
partly by the language. To be sure, other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms remained,
and thus other potential centers of cultural authority, but the efforts of
Alfred guaranteed that the language he had done so much to render
usable for sophisticated literary purposes would remain permanently
identified with him and with his kingdom.

Similar efforts to establish the vernacular as a legitimate vehicle for liter-
ature, likewise integrated into political claims, were found in the wenyan
cosmopolis of East Asia. This chapter opened with a consideration of a
vernacular manifesto of sorts for Korean, but in Japan such statements were
both earlier and more emphatic. Traditional literature in Japanese can be
said to begin with a series of poetic anthologies, in particular with the

36 Thomas A. Bredehoft, Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon
Man'yoshu 萬葉集 (or “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves,” compiled after AD 759) and the Kokinshu 古今集 (or “Collection of Poems Old and New,” originally circulated c. AD 905). This gesture of anthologizing is itself a clear imitation of the Chinese literary tradition, in which poetry symbolically begins with two anthologies, the Canon of Songs 詩經 and the Songs of Chu 楚辭. Both of the Japanese anthologies collect poetry written in Japanese (the former, transcribed in a complicated system using Chinese characters and resembling thus the hyangchal system in Korea mentioned earlier; the latter, using the kana syllabic script still used in Japan today), as opposed to the also sizeable body of kanshi 漢詩, or poetry in wenyan, which had itself first been anthologized in the Kaifusō 懷風藻, in 751. Cosmopolitan and vernacular traditions thus coexisted from the very beginnings of Japanese literature as we know it through written sources. The Kokinshu is noteworthy in particular for having both a preface in Japanese, which articulates an indigenous Japanese poetics, and a preface in wenyan, which seeks to legitimate that poetics in terms of traditional Chinese poetic concepts:

Now Japanese poetry (waka) takes root in the heart’s soil, and flowers in the forest of words. Since men dwell in the world, it is impossible for them to be inactive. Their thoughts are constantly shifting; joy and sorrow changing into each other. Emotions are born of intent; song takes form in words. That’s why the voice of a person at leisure is happy; the cries of a resentful person are sad. This can be used to convey emotions; it can be used to express indignation. To move heaven and earth, to compel ghosts and spirits, to transform human relations, to harmonize man and wife – nothing is as suitable as Japanese poetry (waka) . . .

From the time when Prince Ōtsu began to write (Chinese) shi poetry and fu rhyme-prose, poets and capable men admired this fashion and carried on this practice. They imported Chinese writing, and transformed our Japanese customs. The people’s customs changed at once, and Japanese poetry (waka) began to decline.

37 夫和歌者、託其根於心地、發其華於詞林者也。人之在世、不能無為、思慮易遷、哀樂相變。感生於志、詠形於言。是以逸者其聲樂、怨者其吟悲。可以追懷、可以發憤。動天地、感鬼神、化人倫、和夫婦、莫宜於和歌。 . . .

38 自大津皇子之初作詩賦，詞人才子慕風繼塵，移彼漢家之字，化我日域之俗。民業一改，和歌漸衰。 Translation adapted from Laurel Rasplica Rodd, Mary Catherine Henkenius, and TsurayukiKi, Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern, Cheng & Tsui, 1996, 379–85.
The debt that the first paragraph cited here owes to a particular Chinese precedent, the Mao preface to the Canon of Songs, is striking, particularly the language concerning the emergence of song as an external manifestation of internal intent, and the transformative capacities of song, many of which are taken directly from the Mao preface.\textsuperscript{39} At the same time (and alongside the Japanese-language preface), the subtle differences between the Chinese preface to the Kokinshu and the Mao preface seem designed to underline the autonomy of the Japanese tradition in some sense. Obviously, the language of the poetry is marked as Japanese, both establishing an autonomous tradition and serving as a reminder that that tradition needs to be marked as something other than the default category of cultural production, which would be in Chinese. Also significantly, the Kokinshu preface in a sense “depoliticizes” the Mao preface; where the latter explicitly links internal emotional states, poetic form, and the quality of governance, the former makes poetry an index of inner emotion alone and not of governance. Finally, the introduction of vegetal imagery—“the heart’s soil,” “flowering in the forest of words”—seems also to ground Japanese-language poetry as poetry of place in some sense, where the Mao preface refers not to place but to government and human communities. Through all of these devices, then, the Kokinshu preface in Chinese simultaneously marks Japanese-language poetry as a distinct cultural formation and subordinates that formation to the cosmopolitan tradition.

The vernacular literatures of South Asia offer examples of both vernacular manifestoes and of translations and emulations of cosmopolitan literature. I discuss these phenomena briefly here, and especially the latter, drawing on the work of Pollock and others, before returning to this question of translation from the cosmopolitan in the Latin context a little later in this chapter. The first surviving text in Kannada, the South Indian Dravidian language that Pollock identifies as the first to create a vernacular literature, is the Kavirâjamârga, (or “Way of the King of Poets”) attributed to Śrîvijaya and composed at the court of the Rāstrakūṭa Dynasty, centered in the northern part of what is now the state of Karnataka in southern India, during the reign of Nṛpatuṅga Amoghavarṣa, around 875 AD.\textsuperscript{40} This text, a treatise on poetics

\textsuperscript{39} For a further discussion of the Mao Preface, see the first chapter of Beecroft, Authorship and Cultural Identity, 2010.

written in a heavily Sanskritized style, and borrowing from Sanskrit poetic theory, explicitly seeks to justify the use of the vernacular for refined literary purposes, much as (in different ways) Alfred the Great had very recently done in England and as Raimon Vidal and Dante would later do in continental Europe. Other texts of grammar and poetics, such as Nannaya’s Telugu grammar of the eleventh century,¹⁴¹ the fourteenth-century Lilātilakam, written for a literary language antecedent to modern Malayalam,¹⁴² and the ninth-century Sinhalese Siyabaslakara,¹⁴³ play a manifesto role as well. Translations from the cosmopolitan tradition are obviously extremely important to South Asian vernacular traditions, frequently playing a significant role in the early history of those vernacular literatures and/or marking a significant transition from a phase in which limited literary materials were composed in a vernacular to one in which the vernacular was used extensively in a wide range of genres. Examples here would include the eleventh-century Telugu Mahābhārata by the same Nannaya who composed the foundational grammar for that language;¹⁴⁴ the thirteenth–fourteenth century Rāmacaritam, ancestral to Malayalam;¹⁴⁵ the fourteenth-century Assamese and fifteenth-century Bengali and Oriya Rāmāyaṇas;¹⁴⁶ Vi udās’s 1442 Rāmāyaṇa in Brajbhasha, a North Indian literary language related to modern Hindi;¹⁴⁷ and, most famously of all, Tulsidas’s Rāmcaritmānas, composed in Avadhi (another literary standard related to modern Hindi) in 1574, today central to the canon of Hindi literature.¹⁴⁸ Versions of the Ramayana exist even in Tibetan¹⁴⁹ and in Persian, in translations supervised by the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542–1605),¹⁵⁰ a language whose own cosmopolitan status rivaled that of Sanskrit in early modern South Asia.

⁴² Freeman, “Genre and Society,” 2003, 442.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 937.
The vernacular literatures of southeast Asia, which likewise emerged in interaction with the Sanskrit cosmopolis, are not very well known in Europe or North America, though their histories stretch over and beyond the past millennium (making their emergence roughly contemporary with European vernaculars), and many of them are spoken today by tens of millions of people. In most cases, Buddhist scriptures in Pali and the Sanskrit epics, particularly the Rāmāyana, form a crucial component of the vernacular tradition, though in many cases the translations of the Rāmāyana known today are relatively recent innovations. Thus the earliest inscriptions in Burmese, for example, date from the early twelfth century AD, and already betray a knowledge of the Rāmāyana narrative. The earliest Burmese poetry transmitted in the manuscript tradition dates from the mid-fifteenth century and is on a mix of Buddhist and indigenous political and cultural themes. Only in the late eighteenth century, and then under Thai influence, did the Burmese Rāmāyana translation known today take shape. The Thai Rāmāyana itself, the Ramakian, was redacted by King Rama I in 1797, drawing on earlier materials, while the Thai alphabet is said to date to the late thirteenth century, and the poetic tradition is continuous and abundant from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. Inscriptions in Khmer are even older, with the earliest dating to the seventh century AD; again, knowledge of Sanskrit epic is a component of both the inscriptive and manuscript-based literary texts known to us, the latter beginning in the fifteenth century. The two great epics of the Khmer language, both initially composed in the seventeenth century, are the Ramakerti, a Rāmāyana translation, and the Lpoek Angar Vatti, an epic commemorating the construction of the famous temple complex of Angkor Wat. Javanese represents something of an exception to this pattern found in mainland Southeast Asian languages—early inscriptive history, followed a few centuries later by a manuscript-based literary culture, with Rāmāyana translations consolidating

51 For a general introduction, with bibliography, see Patricia M. Herbert, and Anthony Crothers Milner, eds., South-East Asia: Languages and Literatures: A Select Guide, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989, from which the following discussion is taken.
52 Anna Allott, Patricia Herbert, and John Okell, “Burma,” in South-East Asia: Languages and Literatures, 1989, 1–22.
only in the very years in which the European presence was beginning to assert itself in the region. Inscriptions in Old Javanese begin in the early ninth century, after five centuries of inscriptions in highly sophisticated Sanskrit; by the mid-ninth century, a highly sophisticated translation of the Rāmāyana, drawing on a complex range of Sanskrit source texts, had emerged. The Sanskrit-influenced literature in Old Javanese continued to develop over the ensuing six hundred years until the arrival of Islam on Java around 1500 led to a shift in literary production. Even after the arrival of Islam, however, production of Sanskrit-inspired literature continued on Java, with, for example, the production of a sequel to the Rāmāyana in the Sundanese language, whose text implies the existence also of a Rāmāyana in that language, in the sixteenth century.

**When Do Vernaculars Begin?**

One of the questions that remain to be addressed, as we enumerate vernaculars and observe their characteristics, is that of identifying the historical origins of vernacular languages. Although Pollock identifies this development very strongly with Kannada and Anglo-Saxon in the eighth century AD, cosmopolitan languages themselves long predate this era, and so we should look to still earlier times for the first vernacular emergence. Strong candidates would have to be Ugaritic and Hittite. Ugaritic, a Semitic language spoken in the Syrian coastal city of Ugarit, was first committed to writing in the fourteenth century BC. The archaeological work done on the site of Ugarit since 1928 has uncovered considerable libraries of texts in Akkadian and Sumerian (the cosmopolitan languages of the era, as we have seen), as well as in Hittite, but also in the local Ugaritic, including not only a number of administrative, financial, and legal texts (indicating status as a “chancery language”) but also imaginative literature. This imaginative literature, in a striking contrast with many later vernacular literatures, seems derived from local sources, rather than from the rich cosmopolitan tradition, and includes a series of poems on mythological themes, involving


the worlds of both gods and men. Hittite, spoken by the rulers of a large state centered in Asia Minor, presents a more complex case; originally literized in the sixteenth century BC, largely as a chancery language, Hittite was later used more extensively for literary purposes, down to the thirteenth century BC; especially after the crisis of the late twelfth century BC, when new polities emerged, the closely related Luwian language replaced Hittite. Much of the literature in Hittite follows later patterns of vernacular literarization, with a preponderance of translated texts from Akkadian (including a translation of the Gilgamesh epic), although some measure of indigenous material seems also to have played a role in Hittite literature.

These early cases aside (and the Hebrew tradition, likely a few centuries younger, could be added to their number), I turn to what is for me a more familiar case, that of the earliest stages of Latin. The earliest known inscriptions in Latin date from the middle of the sixth century BC (although there is more problematic evidence suggesting that the language was literized to some extent in the previous century). These early inscriptions are mostly legal, votive, or funerary in nature, and while they attest to a culture already highly developed in many respects, they do not constitute a literary tradition as such, and thus do not become a full vernacular until the third century BC.

Notionally, and in later Roman retellings, Latin literature began with Livius Andronicus in the third century BC. Cicero tells us he first presented a play in 240 BC, the year after the end of the first Punic war. (Cicero, Brutus 72–3); the emergence of a vernacular literary tradition in Rome was thus understood as coincident with the emergence of Rome as a major political power in the larger Mediterranean world. Livius Andronicus's name suggests the possibility that his original Greek name was Andronicus and that Livius was the gentilic name of his patron/master; Cicero further reports that he was captured from Tarentum, although modern historians have cast doubt on this. The historian Suetonius (c. 69–c. 122 AD) describes

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him as *semigraecus*, an ambivalent term in that it could indicate either half-Greek ethnic origin (viewed pejoratively) or quasi-Greek literary proclivities (viewed positively) (*De grammaticis I*). One way or another, the suggestion is that Livius Andronicus had his origins in the south of the Italian peninsula and was not a native speaker of Latin. The Romans, then, represented the origins of their own literary tradition as not only indebted to Greek source texts but also to individuals whose own identities were in some sense intermediate between the two cultures. In addition to his now-lost tragedies and comedies, all of which seem to have been based on Greek originals or derived from Greek mythological themes, Livius Andronicus is best known for his *Odusia*, the translation of the *Odyssey* into Latin, which marks for later Latin writers the beginnings of Latin literature. While Livius's dramatic works are in meters adapted from Greek poetry; his epic is composed in the Saturnian meter, found also in others of the Italic languages of Iron Age Italy and likely reflecting prosodic features characteristic of those languages.61

Despite its considerable importance to the history of Latin literature, very little of Livius Andronicus’s *Odusia* survives; there are a total of about thirty-five fragments, not all of which are certain to be from the *Odusia*, and none of which are longer than a single line. It is therefore difficult to assess the work’s qualities in any very meaningful way, although an examination of the most famous of these fragments, the first line of the poem, is revealing:

Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum  
Tell me, Muse, of the clever man

The line thus translates quite carefully the opening line of the Homeric epic: ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον (“Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways”). How to understand Livius’s diction here is, however, a somewhat complex question, the answer to which may ultimately depend on how one wishes to read Livius, and early Latin literature more generally. The choice of “Camena” the name of a local Italian water goddess, identified with a spring on the outskirts of Rome, to translate the Greek Muse, was not followed by later Roman authors and, since the time of Ennius (in the

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generation after Livius Andronicus), has conventionally been understood as an index of Livius's clumsy grafting of Greek literary culture onto rustic and unrelated Italic material, though recently scholars such as Stephen Hinds have suggested that the choice might instead reflect a literary program of Livius's own, one arguably at least as sophisticated as the later Roman choice to gloss the Greek mousa more straightforwardly as Musa.  

Similarly, recent scholars have explored the use of versutum as a translation for the Greek polutropos, or “having many ways or turns.” Not only does versutus, derived from the verb verto, vertere, “to turn,” trope on the tropos of the Greek original, but, as Hinds reminds us, vertere is the standard Latin verb for the act of translation. Livius's Odysseus, then, may not merely be a “man of many turns” but also a “translated man,” carried over from Greek literature into Latin and reminding us in the process of Odysseus's own role as an allegory for the westward colonization by the Greeks in the Dark Ages and beyond.

It is the rare word insece, translating the Greek ennepe as a verb for the act of narration, that attracts the most divergent and interesting readings. Ancient readers of Livius seem to have seen insece quite uncomplicatedly as an ungainly and archaic usage; Horace, for example, (at Ep. 2.1.69) protests that he enjoys the archaism of Livius Andronicus, in a manner that suggests that few share Horace's taste here. As such, Livius's use of insece is read against the backdrop of an idea, common since Ennius, that Livius represents a halting and inept beginning to a Latin poetic tradition that gains full refinement (usually) only in the author's own generation. Recent readers, perhaps predictably, have seen in Livius's insece traces of something more interesting. Gerald Browne has suggested that Livius's insece might derive from a native Latin epic tradition. The word derives from the same Indo-European root as the Homeric ἐννεπε, opening, for Browne, the possibility that Livius used a verb of programmatic significance within an indigenous tradition as a (perhaps inadvertent) exact equivalent to the term from the cosmopolitan language.  

George Sheets has suggested, alternatively, that Livius borrows insece from the related Umbrian language,  

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63 Ibid., 61–2.  
thus imitating the Homeric use of the Aeolic dialect form ἐννεῖπε, not necessarily to be expected in this context.  

On this reading, Livius Andronicus, far from being rustic and inelegant in his choice of words, is in fact a sophisticated and playful poet, matching on a highly sophisticated level the specific dynamics of Homeric diction and displaying his own multilingual erudition in the process. In so doing, he would also be acting in accord with the poetics of the Hellenistic Greek poets of his own era, notorious themselves for similar etymological and philological play in their work. It has been objected that, according to Suetonius, Hellenistic-style learning only arrived in Rome with Crates of Mallos, approximately seventy years after the composition of the *Odusia*, although this may be simply another case of the later Roman construction of Livius as a “primitive.”

Despite, then, the fact that only the tiniest fragments of Livius Andronicus's *Odusia* survive, we are confronted with several possible readings of this text. Ancient readers constructed Livius (reasonably or otherwise) as a rustic and primitive author, interpreting his diction as driven largely by an unpolished style and an imperfect understanding of his source text, in no small part because those readers were eager to see later generations (often, indeed, themselves, in a pattern repeated from Ennius to Virgil) as the key innovators in forging Latin as a rich and sophisticated literary language. One modern reading hints at an (admittedly unattested) prior indigenous epic tradition in Latin, a move that might make Latin epic cognate and synchronous with Homer, destabilizing to some degree the hierarchical relationship between the two. Another modern reading situates Livius in the context of the Greek poetry of his own era, making him at once an innovator (in creating literature in Latin) and a product of his era (in using philological thinking as an engine of his creative process) and refusing to see these two roles as incompatible.

It is of course unknowable which (if any) of these readings would have made sense to Livius himself, or to anyone in his original audience, not only because of the usual problems of the intentional fallacy but also because of the scarcity of evidence. The reading of Livius as a Hellenistic poet, founding a new literary tradition in his target language while following the latest literary trends in his source language, does, however, offer


interesting lessons for this project, whether or not this reading would survive an engagement with the whole text of the _Odusia_. From the retrospective view of the vernacular tradition, founding authors frequently seem primitive and inept, stumbling blindly toward the more refined use of their language that will characterize their successors. Indeed, from the perspective of those successors, whose own literary tastes have changed, the style and diction of founding authors may, almost inevitably, seem dated. Viewed synchronically, however, as part of an established cosmopolitan literary ecology, founding authors in the vernacular may in fact possess an exceptionally sophisticated understanding, both of that cosmopolitan literature and of the challenges of constructing something to rival it in a newly literized vernacular. As such, these vernacular founders are likely to be situated within the cosmopolitan ecology, if frequently on its periphery.

There are comparative analogues for this phenomenon. Sheldon Pollock discusses, as I mentioned earlier, the first work in the Old Kannada literary tradition (which he identifies as the first South Asian vernacular), the _Kavirajamārgam_ (or “Way of the King of Poets”), attributed to Śrīvijaya and composed at the court of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Dynasty, centered in the northern part of what is now the state of Karnataka in southern India, during the reign of Āpataūga Amoghavarṣa, around 875 AD. This text, a treatise on poetics, is, like much early vernacular literature in South Asia, heavily derived from Sanskrit models and indeed employs a highly Sanskritic diction. It is therefore situated much more securely than Livius’s _Odusia_ in two literary ecologies, the well-established cosmopolitan and the emergent vernacular. In the following chapter, we will see that similar phenomena can operate in emergent national literatures as well: Philippe Aubert de Gaspé fils’ 1837 novel _L’influence d’un livre_, the first novel written in French in Canada, has most frequently been studied for its use of folkloric material, which aligns nicely with the expectations later readers have for a primitive origin for their literature; the frequent citation by Aubert de Gaspé fils of recently published French poetry of Romantic and Radical persuasions went largely unexamined until quite recently.

If Anglo-Saxon cannot lay claim to status as the first European vernacular, neither can it be described as the first vernacular of the Greco-Roman and Christian cosmopolis, since Armenian, Coptic, and Syriac are all earlier. Syriac (as opposed to earlier dialects of Aramaic, long a lingua franca in the region) began use in inscriptions in the first century AD; legal use began in the third century, as did the earliest literary texts. In the third and fourth centuries, a lively tradition including not only biblical
translations but also hymns, homilies, and philosophical texts betraying a clear Greek influence, began to take root. A significant part of the literature takes the form of translation, but other works, like the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, describing the apostle's journey to India, are likely Syriac originals, as may well be the Apology of the philosopher Meliton. Smaller bodies of literary work may well have been produced by Manichaeans, and even by pagans, though much less of this survives.68 At about the same time, a quite distinct literature in Coptic, derived from ancient Egyptian but now written in a Greek-inspired alphabetic script, emerged, with magical texts in the first century AD and Christian, Gnostic, and Manichaean literature emerging from the third century AD onward; in most cases Coptic literary texts were translations from Greek or other languages, though after the schism between the Egyptian and Greek churches cemented by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the quantity of original work produced in Coptic increased considerably.69 Something similar can be seen with Armenian literature. The Armenians, on the fringes of both the Roman and the Sassanid worlds, saw the establishment of Christianity as a state religion as an important tool in the establishment of their autonomy. The Armenian alphabet was developed in 405 AD, and over the next century vast projects of translation were undertaken, including the Bible and a large quantity of religious and philosophical work; other writers began to produce indigenous texts, especially historical and religious works, all quite distinct from prior pagan and oral traditions.70 This literary tradition grew over time and remains a vital literary tradition to this day, though in a modernized linguistic form, which first developed, in part, through the work of the Armenian diaspora in Venice, Constantinople, and elsewhere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.71

While Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian all developed extensive literary traditions, other regional languages were also committed to writing under

Roman rule, with less lasting consequences. Numerous inscriptions exist in Punic, the language of Carthage, and there is also some evidence for a translation of the Bible, though whatever opportunities writing may have afforded Punic, by the fourth and fifth centuries the language seems to have been in decline.\textsuperscript{72} Epigraphical evidence also exists for the use of indigenous Libyan (i.e., an early Berber dialect) alongside Punic.\textsuperscript{73} Occasional inscriptions are found in the Celtic language of Roman Gaul—mostly dedications and transcriptions of magical incantations, from the second through fifth centuries—though since the religion and culture of the Gauls placed a high priority on orality, no consistent habit of conveying the language in writing ever emerged.

That these tentative essays written in Punic, Libyco-Berber, or Gaulish did not lead to the establishment of a vernacular literature is not simply a result of the cosmopolitan power of Latin, acting as an agent of Roman imperial power. First of all, it was under Roman rule that the writing of these languages both began and accelerated. Second, the position of Latin vis-à-vis Greek remained somewhat complex, though less so in the Western world of Punic, Libyco-Berber, and Gaulish than in the Eastern world of Coptic and Syriac (where, indeed, Greek rather than Latin was the main cosmopolitan language against which the vernacular operated). Third, it seems clear that all of these possible vernaculars were in the end thwarted not by the charismatic power of cosmopolitan Latin but by the invasions of Vandals and Franks and, later, Arabs. Arabic, as much as Latin, was the cosmopolitan language that blocked the development of Punic or Libyco-Berber literature and that slowed the use of Coptic and Syriac; if Gaulish failed to become the basis of a vernacular literature, the language of the Franks surely did—in a context in which the cosmopolitan power of Latin was all the stronger for no longer being associated with a single, increasingly fragile polity but rather with a great and universal religion.

If Celts on the continent failed to develop a consistent tradition of writing, the situation was of course different on the British Isles. Old Irish, we know, was written at an earlier date, with inscriptions, from Great Britain as much as from Ireland, very possibly dating from the fourth century A.D.—in which case, the use of Old Irish as an inscriptive language may well

\textsuperscript{72} R. MacMullen, "Provincial Languages in the Roman Empire," \textit{American Journal of Philology} 87 (1), 1966.

\textsuperscript{73} Fergus Millar, "Local Cultures in the Roman Empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa," \textit{The Journal of Roman Studies} 58, 1968: 126–34.
predate the departure of the Romans;74 whether or not this is true, the writing of Irish clearly began as a vernacular formation in reaction to Latin. The earliest surviving manuscripts in Old Irish, glosses found in Latin manuscripts preserved on the European continent and dating perhaps to the early eighth century, likewise predate Alfred’s reign, but their function clearly suggests a subordinate and pedagogical role for the use of the Irish language and not on the whole the use of the written Irish language as a literary vehicle, evidence for which exists elsewhere.75 The earliest surviving manuscripts containing literary texts date from the early twelfth century, although on linguistic grounds it seems likely that some of the texts thus preserved must have been written down by the seventh century.76 There is thus considerable, if somewhat complex, evidence to suggest that Irish functioned as a full vernacular language, used for purposes ranging from the translation of Latin texts to the transcription of oral poetry, to the writing of history, and that it did so as early as the 600s, after several centuries in which the language was written on at least limited occasions. Old Irish thus clearly predates Old English as a vernacular language, under the definitions used by Pollock and by myself.

Between the thriving vernacular literatures in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Old Irish (each of which seems to have begun to be written under Roman rule) and the abortive attempts to write in Gaulish, Punic, and Libyco-Berber, we can see that, pace Pollock, the Roman empire, and its attachment to Latin, did not prevent the emergence of vernacular literatures at a very early state. To be sure, these efforts made the most progress in regions on the peripheries of the empire or experiencing greater contact with Greek than with Latin or in regions where written literary traditions long predated not only Greco-Roman control but indeed literacy in Greece and Rome itself. The situation was very different, obviously, in Gaul and in Africa (i.e., modern Tunisia), where Greek would have been less powerful and where there was no ancient literary tradition. The situation was also different for the Italic vernaculars, such as Oscan and Umbrian, and for Etruscan, which had formed at the same time as Latin and in which writing


was extensively used in the first millennium BC and which continued to be spoken into imperial times. We know that theater in Oscan (and maybe even in Etruscan) was performed at Rome in the age of Augustus,\textsuperscript{77} despite two centuries or more of Roman rule over most of Italy, but within a century or two more, these languages were extinct. The picture of vernacular literatures under the Romans is thus complex, supporting neither Pollock's claim that Latin extinguished all other languages in its path nor yet quite the opposite claim that Rome caused vernaculars to flourish. Some vernaculars, though, clearly did flourish under Roman rule, a phenomenon that makes more sense if we think of Latin itself as still a vernacular language during the reign of Augustus, and even, to some extent, afterwards.

**COSMOPOLITANS WITHOUT VERNACULARS? CHINESE AND ARABIC**

As we have seen, while vernacular literatures first emerged in the ancient Near East, Latin represents another early literature on the vernacular model. More complex vernacular ecologies emerged later, in the late first millennium AD, in both Europe and South Asia and in the East Asian periphery, giving rise in each case to major literary languages still in wide use today, built initially around, and in symbiosis with, the cosmopolitan literary languages Latin, Sanskrit, and classical Chinese. Yet this process of vernacularization did not proceed everywhere or uniformly. Neither Arabic nor classical Chinese participated in a full-fledged vernacularization at this time, for distinct reasons and with distinct results.

In the case of China, it would be a mistake to say that vernacularization did not happen at all. From the earliest stages of the transmission of Buddhism to China, beginning in the second century AD, we find vernacular expressions used in scriptural translation, albeit in a largely wenyan syntactic environment; a “second vernacular revolution” in the eighth century leads to a more thorough vernacularization of Buddhist scripture in Chinese.\textsuperscript{78} Vernacular writing grew in volume from this point forward, especially in the early second millennium AD, with the emergence of


popular literary forms, such as drama and prose fiction, both frequently employing the vernacular in whole or in part. In the following chapter, we will see how early twentieth-century reformers, such as Hu Shi, retrospectively reconstructed Chinese literary history as a movement toward the vernacular, gaining momentum through the Yuan Dynasty (1179–1368), though with a retrograde return to the classical idiom thereafter, a construction that had the effect of marginalizing the very considerable body of classical-language literature that dominated elite cultural production in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties until at least the late nineteenth century. In the process, they also for the first time identified the distinction between the vernacular (which they now characterized as a distinct language, *baihua*) and the classical language (known as *wenyan*) and invested that distinction with ideological significance.\(^7^9\)

The reality is, in fact, that it would be impossible to imagine Chinese literature in the late imperial period as *either* purely vernacular or purely classical. Both idioms exist in a state of diglossia, with certain genres favoring one over the other. Moreover, this diglossia is found within individual texts, at very deep levels, as Zhang Zhongxing has shown.\(^8^0\) Genres, such as drama and prose fiction, which are predominantly in *baihua*, frequently include poetry and aphorisms in *wenyan*, while dialogue in *baihua* can find its way into documents otherwise written in *wenyan*. Even more problematically, while there are some lexical and syntactical forms that unambiguously belong to one or the other of the two registers, there are others that are ambiguous between the two. In the case of many texts, it would be difficult to classify them as either *baihua* or *wenyan* on the basis of objective criteria, and in fact that classification is frequently based as much on the genre in which the work appears or on the general predilections of its author, as on anything else.\(^8^1\)

In a sense, then, classical Chinese, or *wenyan*, did not vernacularize prior to the twentieth century because it was able to vernacularize internally, to develop linguistic resources and registers that imitated spoken language and were more accessible to readers with lower levels of education but that did not represent a clean break with the past. Several other factors

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\(^7^9\) Zhang, Zhongxing, *Wen yan he bai hua*, Di 1 ban. Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang ren min chu ban she, 1988, 202.

\(^8^0\) Ibid., 192 characterizes the relationship between the two registers as 一種語言走向兩歧的路，“*a sort of linguistic two-way street.*”

\(^8^1\) Ibid., 196–7.
likely contributed here. One is the nature of the Chinese writing system, ideally suited, as Victor Mair has observed, to use as a transregional and transhistorical medium for elite expression but poorly adapted for use in the transcriptions of regional vernaculars. To this day, the repertoire of Chinese characters does not encompass even the full phonetic range of the so-called Chinese dialects, let alone allow for the full representation of the lexica of those regional languages, significantly more distinct in diction and syntax than the Indic or Romance languages. To write regional vernaculars, then, would have required a completely new writing system, education in which would have cut off access to the cosmopolitan past (in a way that, say, education in French and Italian did not preclude the learning of Latin, written in the same script). Moreover, the fact that the region speaking Sinitic languages was generally (not always) more-or-less under the rule of one empire, and thus potentially a single market for books from the (very early) emergence of printing in China, would have had the tendency to promote the study of the cosmopolitan language, and to act as a disincentive for the development of multiple vernaculars. A single vernacular language covering the whole of the Sinosphere was, perhaps, a possibility—except that the huge differences among the regional vernaculars would have made the task of learning any one vernacular not necessarily any easier than the learning of the classical language for many individuals and regions. To the extent that vernacular language is used in pre-twentieth century Chinese texts, it does tend to be a transregional vernacular, easier for many readers than the unadulterated classical language but necessarily not the everyday speech of the majority. In general, then, ecological factors in the Sinosphere tended to hinder the development of vernacular literatures.

The same seems to have been the case in the Arabophone world, although for somewhat different reasons. Sheldon Pollock has drawn attention to the near-simultaneous emergence, in and around the eighth century AD, of vernacular literatures in both Europe and South Asia (Japan should be added to this list). Although I am by nature reluctant to grant much weight to such coincidences, unless backed by compelling evidence, it is striking that the two regions of the world that were the slowest to develop vernaculars (China and the Arab world) are also the two regions that enjoyed the greatest peace and prosperity and were each comprised within a single world-empire (the Abbasid Caliphate and the Tang, respectively), during this era. By contrast, both Europe and South Asia in the latter part of the

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first millennium AD were largely divided into much smaller polities, after previous centuries of unified rule under the Roman and Gupta empires respectively and in spite of periodic attempts in both regions to reestablish some form of universal rule.

In the case of China, the Tang represented in many respects a return to a formation seen earlier under the Han, in terms of the linguistic usage of the ruling classes, the texture of the religious terrain, and the system of government. The Arab world (newly emergent as such, thanks to the conquests of Mohammed and his successors) was instead experiencing something rather new in the Caliphate, which may have drawn on preexisting Persian and Roman structures in some cases but which presented to the world both an entirely new religion, Islam, and a new cosmopolitan literary language, Arabic. If the late first millennium was an era of radical change in literary and linguistic ecologies in much of the world, in the Middle East and North Africa that change took the form not of vernacularization, but of a new cosmopolitan language. The very newness of this formation (which, as we have seen, damaged in its wake several emergent vernaculars, from Syriac to Libyco-Berber) would have militated against the emergence of new vernaculars. The evidence for the emergence of regional vernaculars in the Arabic world is scattered and incomplete, but it seems clear that the Arabic spread through conquest was itself a panchoric hybrid, mixing dialectal forms from the linguistic heartland, forms that would then evolve differently in different regions. For the extent that pre-Islamic Arabic was indeed a panchoric language, as I suggested in Chapter 2, the value of maintaining a literary standard across a suddenly dispersed population will have seemed high, and the rewards of literarizing, let alone literarizing, regional vernaculars will have seemed low. Moreover, as we shall see in the following chapter, the Islamic world over time became a region with three overlain cosmopolitan languages—first Arabic, then Persian, and finally Ottoman Turkish (used, to be sure, more for administrative purposes by non-native speakers, but an important part of the literary ecology nonetheless); for much of the early modern period, Persian was in fact the prestige language for literary composition in much of the Arabophone world. All of these factors, together of course with attitudes towards Arabic as the language of the Qur’ân, seem to have combined to reduce the potential advantages to the

adoption of literary vernaculars, although there was certainly a great deal of literature, including poetry, produced in various registers of dialect throughout the so-called "post-classical" era.\textsuperscript{84}

**Conclusion**

The evidence we have seen, then, permits some generalizations on the contexts in which cosmopolitan literary ecologies successfully generate vernacular literatures. Least promising is an environment like that in the Chinese and Arab worlds of the pre-modern era, in which large-scale polities remain in place for long periods of time over territories in which are spoken a range of dialects that are interrelated but extend well beyond the boundaries of mutual intelligibility. In such circumstances, the resources required to develop a vernacular language capable of covering the political territory that would demand it simply outweigh the disadvantages of the cosmopolitan idiom, namely its own remoteness, for reasons of geography, chronology, and register, from the spoken language of anyone. Most promising are regions on the peripheries of a cosmopolis, outside the political reach of any centralizing imperial state but within the sway of cosmopolitan literary culture. Such regions are especially likely to develop vernacular literatures when their own spoken languages (as is true in contexts from Japanese to Irish, from Tamil to Javanese) are unrelated to the cosmopolitan language, making the resources and energy required to learn that language greater, in the long run, than those required to literize and literarize a vernacular. They are also likely to develop a vernacular during eras when regional polities emerge on a scale proportionate to that of the mutually intelligible range of a dialect continuum. Religious developments, from the spread of Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism to the rise of bhakti devotionalism in India, can add a further incentive to vernacularization, though attempts by missionaries to impose a literary vernacular from without are generally less successful than those that come from within and are bolstered by political and cultural agendas. Regions that have never had their own indigenous written literary tradition frequently pass through a cosmopolitan phase as a necessary part of the literarization of their language; in those regions where long literary traditions predated cosmopolitan influence, such as Syria and Egypt, the emergence of a new

vernacular (Coptic, Syriac), more frequently turned out to be an intermediate stage on the way to the adoption of a new cosmopolitan language.

Vernaculars and cosmopolitans can coexist for long periods of time; indeed, in some respects they can be said to need each other. The vernacular gains literary resources from the cosmopolitan language, while the cosmopolitan language is in some ways better able to create a viable niche for itself if vernaculars exist for more purely local cultural functions. Thus, Latin remained a major European literary language till the seventeenth century (and indispensable for even longer to intellectual life); Sanskrit, through the eighteenth century;85 classical Chinese, through much of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century; Arabic, to this day. Readers and writers in each of those contexts could value the translocal possibilities offered by the cosmopolitan literary language, even as they may also have appreciated the charms of the vernacular.

Over time, however, several forces tended to gather strength. The literary resources gathered under vernacular languages grew stronger and stronger, as longer traditions existed in those languages, and the literary traditions they embodied came to seem more useful than those from the cosmopolitan tradition, increasingly localized for readers in the past, in old genres and old styles. Just as Roman poets of the first century AD increasingly saw Virgil and his contemporaries, and not Greek literature, as the works they wished to emulate or to surpass, so too did writers in modern European languages, using forms like the sonnet and the emergent prose fiction tradition, increasingly find their models in other modern and vernacular writers, whether in their own languages or not. Similar phenomena emerged in the East Asian periphery and, especially, in South Asia. The costs of learning the cosmopolitan language grew as it became ever more distant from the spoken language; conversely, the emergence of broader-based systems of education, as well as of the production and circulation of texts, increased the potential audience for written verbal art to new sectors of society, particularly to women and to the middle classes, groups less interested in the cosmopolitan language for its own sake.

These forces, and others, pushed all regions toward the notion of a literary ecology dominated by the vernacular, in which the cosmopolitan no longer played anything but an antiquarian role. The gradual diminution in

the role of cosmopolitan literary languages would, no doubt, have led to a new literary-ecological formation, one in which vernacular literatures coexisted with each other in the absence of their cosmopolitan rivals. By the time this phenomenon reached full strength in most parts of the world, however, it found itself integrated with a different, and much more powerful, set of changes—those associated with the emergence of European modernity, and with its often forcible spread to other regions. As a result, when the era of the coexistence of cosmopolitan and vernacular came to an end, it was a specifically European ecology that was to take its place, even in regions such as South Asia, where vernaculars were already highly advanced at the moment of the establishment of European dominance. That new, European-derived ecology is that of the national literature, and it forms the subject of the next chapter.