
Literary History, Indian History, World History

Author(s): Sheldon Pollock

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SHELDON POLLOCK*

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I

Literature, literary history, and their interactions with community identity formations are crucial features of the social order. Yet we know precious little about some of the key historical moments in their development for any social orders of the premodern world, when so many of the transformations occurred that shaped modernity. We understand little about the particular circumstances within which certain kinds of speech come to count as “literary” language; we have very few accounts of how notions of “the literary” change over time and place; few attempts have been made to compare and analyze the different narratives of the development of such literary languages; far fewer, to relate literary-language choice or change and narratives of literary history to their most salient conditions, the acquisition and maintenance of social and political power.

For a student of Sanskrit culture like myself, the promise of a history of literary cultures that asks questions like these lies in the possibility of understanding one particular stage in the long-term historical process of the rise and fall of transregional communities of readers and writers, and figuring out what such cultural communities might have to do with real or potential political communities. But as a student of culture more broadly I am also interested in how such cosmopolitan ecumenes relate, at one end of the spectrum, to local and regional formations, and, at the other end, to transcontinental or even world systems of literary culture.

The sort of literary history that addresses the crucial features I mention above does not exist, as far as I can tell, for any region of the world. Certainly none brings to bear serious comparative evidence, or can be said to address long-term change. South Asia is an arena in which a more complex study of these processes can be undertaken than anywhere else. If for an earlier paradigm of knowledge India was the “sociolinguistic giant” (Fasold 1984:20), in a future paradigm of literary studies it may constitute the literary-historical giant, with a multilingual textual history of greater depth and continuity than any other cultural area in the world. In fact, the study of literary history in South Asia may help us fill one of the key desiderata in a postcolonial South Asian studies: the reorientation of method, whereby our

* Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago.

informing questions no longer presuppose European primacy and ask, How did the West develop and why didn't the India develop that way, but rather will be generated from Indian materials themselves and ask, How did India develop, and what might this tell us about the West (and other places)? Given the long histories they enable us to follow—of polyglossia, technologies of the word, practices of reading, speaking, writing—these materials might help transform a lifeless knowledge-practice known as “history of literature” into a more vital, socially embedded “history of literary cultures.”¹ The great challenge is to figure out good questions to ask, questions adequate to this complex, deep, and I believe unique body of material, and the right theoretical framework within which to ask them. What I want to try here is try to identify a few of these problems—which we are far from solving but cannot solve until we identify—and suggest why they are important; hence a speculative essay, with far more questions than answers. The problems chosen are those of the outside of the text, of communicative contexts and practices, without which the inside of the text must remain unintelligible for any historicist understanding of literary discourse, which always has primacy in critical scholarship.

One of the most important but also one of the hardest questions thrown up in the first instance by our South Asian materials seems to me to concern the conditions of possibility for the very commencement of a literature. Do new literatures enter the world, and if so, what can we say about how and why? It is a question that seems rarely if ever to get asked in any of the many literary histories published over the last twenty years—not only those of Indian languages and literatures but of most others.² Perhaps this is due in part to the ambiguity of its terms: What do we mean by “literature,” and who gets to define it; what do we mean by “commencement,” and who gets to decide it? Yet the complexities of the question should not dissuade us from asking it; they should in fact form the substance of the inquiry. The alternative is to empty literary cultures of their history, to render them timeless or facts of nature. Whatever else it may turn out to be, literature is an intentional phenomenon, produced by human agents in changing but determinate conditions, with changing but determinate models of the literary, technologies, languages, and textual communities related to its production. These make up much of what a history of literary cultures should be charged with recovering.

I will have less here to say about “conditions of possibility,” paramount in importance though these are, because we can get to conditions only once we figure out what phenomena are conditioned, “the very commencement of a literature.” What I want to probe critically is the proposition, banal at first sight, that literatures begin—to explore, that is, how at certain times and places certain kinds of language come to be deployed in certain new ways, as never before in their histories, for making certain kinds of texts which for reasons I will try to specify we may call “literary.” Although I am speaking here of the commencement of everything from a given genre (from the “nāṭaka” to the “novel”) to traditions as such (“Telugu” literature or “Persian” literature), I concentrate here on the latter, which require the most careful handling. Like a poetic form or a genre, a literary tradition itself may not be always-already existent, but begin; that in a culturally-specific sense

“literatures” may not be coeval with their languages. This becomes more comprehensible if “beginning” and “literary” are clarified.

I am not unaware of the enigmas that beset the very idea of “beginnings,” and the complicated issues in historiography, and indeed, in epistemology, ontology, and ideology, that beginnings raise. A beginning is always provisional until something earlier can be found, and therefore it always bears the trace of an absence. There are discursive and categorical complications to beginnings: what in fact is “Old Gujarati” or “Maithili,” and how do we decide the former is not Apabhramśa, and the latter not Bengali or Hindi? What is “the novel”? There are ideational complications to beginnings: agents may think that they are making a new beginning when (to other eyes) they are not; or they may imagine that they are simply reproducing the old when (to other eyes) they are making the new. Moreover, beginnings are often only what traditions choose to make into beginnings; they may remember or erase one beginning in favor of another; indeed, it is through the very denial of the possibility of beginning—the delusions of autochthony and primordality—that traditions like nations often constitute themselves. In regard to South Asia historiography more particularly, I have noted a stubborn if usually tacit insistence that real new beginnings are somehow conceptually permissible only with regard to colonialism. Colonial critique derives its power largely from the assumption of the sharp discontinuity and new beginning (in consciousness, power, culture) that colonialism, it is thought, uniquely wrought. Similar beginnings seem *ex hypothesi* excluded for precoloniality, which therefore is left without a history.³

None of these enigmas, however, is fatal to the historiography of the “literary” in South Asia. They are, to repeat, the very problems we need to subject to historical analysis. This historicization gains special purchase from taking seriously the representations of beginnings within literary traditions themselves. How people have thought, that they have made history with literature—emic literary histories—is as important a component of the history of literary cultures as any positivist facts we pride ourselves on recovering. And from this perspective what agents thought counted as “Kannada” or “the novel” is itself a historical truth, which linguists or literary historians may be right to challenge but cannot ignore.

One way to think about beginnings in the history of literary cultures is to investigate the role of writing. For in certain crucial ways the category of the “literary” itself is linked, conceptually and historically, emically and etically—both outside and inside the indigenous systems of the literary—with the category of writing. Historically the most important way both of making history with “literature” and of making “literature” as distinct from something else, has been to write it down. It is “literization” as such, and not so much its different modalities (manuscript, print), that seems to mark the great discontinuum in culture, history, and above all, power. And it is power we shall fail to grasp if the role of writing in making the history of “literature” is overlooked.

Literatures commence, as I want to understand those terms, in ways that seem to conform to a strong cultural tendency. This forms the third topic I want to address, the role of superposed cultural formations: Literatures develop in response to other,

dominant literatures. My fourth and final concern here is the macrohistorical frame of a history of South Asian literary cultures. This reveals a crucial dialectic: transregional, indeed, transcontinental linkages and forms of cosmopolitanism periodically arising, and being crosscut by vernacularism and the growth of literary “incommunication” through regions and locales.

II

Around the middle of the ninth century, vernacular intellectuals in south-west Andhra Pradesh began to use Telugu in ways it had never been used before, for inscribing royal panegyrics and redacting other imaginative texts. Across the continent, three hundred years later, in the last decades of the thirteenth century, other intellectuals in Maharashtra (Mhāibhāṭa, Jñānadev) wrote the first texts of literature—imaginative biography, metaphysical poetry—in Marathi (Līlācaritra; Jñāneśvarī). More than a thousand years before these developments, Sanskrit itself comes to be used for purposes unprecedented in its history: the praśasti—what I call “public poetry”—in Sanskrit was inaugurated by a king of a immigrant dynasty from Central Asia, the Śakan Rudradāman I, who inscribed a monumental prose poem on a cliff-face in western Gujarat in 150 C.E.; around the same time, Buddhist poets under the patronage of Kuśāna rulers began their historic innovations with literary genres (mahākāvya and drama above all). Across the world, and several centuries before the new poets in Sanskrit, a freed Greek slave by the name of Livius Andronicus invented Latin literature with the composition of a play performed in Rome (240 B.C.E.) and an adaptation of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Twelve centuries later, around 1050, a poet in northern France, let’s call him (with Bedier) “Tuold” (or call him by some other name), inscribed the *Chanson de Roland* and created the *chanson de geste*; seventy-five years later in the south of France, Guillaume IX, Duke of Aquitaine (born 1071)—or his immediate predecessors or indeed successors, it makes no difference—wrote poetry in Occitan for the first time, while a century later still, Dante used a new language for a new literature and wrote a separate philological treatise to explain how and why (*De vulgari eloquentia*, “On Vernacular Literature”).

These historical moments are beginnings in the strong sense of breaking with the past and making something new. In some cases we are probably wrong, or will someday be shown to be wrong, about the precise historical moment or the identity of the agent, but in fact the positivity itself is a secondary issue (high though the stakes have sometimes been).⁴ In their historical structure they or their future usurpers represent the same kind of break we register, though with greater exactitude, when we observe that in 1866 the first novel in Gujarati, *Karaṅ Ghelo*, by Mehta, was published, and the first autobiography, *Mārī Hakikat*, by Narmad (as Sitanshu Yashaschandra remarks in this volume), or that “the Spanish theater” began on December 24, 1492, when at the court of the duke of Alba, Juan del Encina staged the first drama (Gumbrecht 1988:37). In addition, the worlds in which these breaks had been made often knew and recorded that they were made, and, as we will see, sometimes concealed or revised them.

Clearly people had been using forms of Telugu for long before what S. Nagaraju (in this volume) calls the “momentous experiment” of the Andhra intellectuals, as forms of Marathi had been used before the works of Mhāibhāṭa and Jñānadev, forms of Latin before Livius and forms of French before Turolde; there is no need to prove this from testimonia, inscriptions or other documents, though one could. (I use the phrase “forms of” since one could well argue that these languages are “unified” only when texts such as those in question are produced, see below).⁵ But it is with Turolde, Livius, Jñānadev, and our Andhra intellectuals that some crucial literary-historical break is marked or represented as being marked. What precisely constitutes this break?

Two things I think are happening in the instances cited that are historically and perhaps necessarily related: The poets for the first time appropriate and domesticate models of language-use from superposed cultural formations—sometimes in a transgressive or even insurrectionary manner—thereby seeking to supplant those formations; and they confirm this self-assertion by seizing the privilege of literary inscription. These are among the great factors of discontinuity in the history of literary cultures, marking a crucial though not inevitable transformation. These two dimensions of the process of making literary history in premodernity are often confusingly related; in order to avoid acknowledging that new literatures do, in some sense, at some point in time, begin, we typically assume either that literacy represents a second-order problem (e.g., merely a new storage technology), or that we have simply lost all earlier textualized materials, say Marathi literature prior to 1300. It is not clear that either assumption, intuitive and sensible though they are, will do.

It is often suggested, with good reason, that literary inscription discursively as well as factually “creates” a language, in the sense that literary inscription leads to the standardization, regularization, and “unification” of the language.⁶ But language clearly exists outside of literate literature. And indeed, in the case of Marathi, one may estimate a nearly 500 year gap between the time it can be identified as a individuated language⁷ and the time it first makes literature by breaking through to textuality. We have virtually not a scrap of evidence that much before Jñānadev Marathi was used to write the kinds of texts composed after him; per contra, we see a striking and persistent defensiveness when the bhāṣā does come to be employed as Jñānadev employs it in the swiftly changing conditions of fourteenth-century Maharashtra (see below)—a phenomenon we find frequently associated with literary newness elsewhere.⁸

Similarly, it not easy to suppose that a corpus of five hundred years of Kannada “literary” texts (as the tradition will eventually define the category)—between the time of the first inscription in Old Kannada in the mid-fifth century to the Kavirājamārgam of ca. 875—has vanished. Far likelier, the imperial formation of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, which produced this great work with the aim of defining what it means to do a kavi’s work in the Kannada language—a *De vulgari eloquentia* for the Deccan, and the first work in world culture to theorize a vernacular poetics—consolidated a recently invented idea of what this work was, and thereby inaugu-

rated what can only be called an explosion of writing in the language.⁹ One might of course argue that it is only from the late ninth century that the vernacular culture cared to preserve what was written in the language. But this would be just another way to conceptualize literary beginnings.

These arguments could be made for other regional literatures. Indeed, we can say the same thing about Sanskrit literature—what Sanskrit poets call *kāvya*—for whose existence we have only dubious evidence from very much before the transformative events to which I allude above occurred around the start of the common era.

And we can say the same thing about European languages. In the case of Latin, for example, an unprecedented way of using the language, which will mark the next millennium of poetry, appears at least three centuries after Roman history begins (the first document in Latin, the juridical *carmen Arvale*, goes back to fifth or sixth century B.C.E.). In early and medieval continental Europe, literacy accompanied Christianity wherever it went, and yet literized literature in the regional languages does not appear in Europe with any density until the twelfth century; the few texts before that period are isolated experiments that never produced a vernacular literary habit. Again, early materials were surely lost, but Europeanists have come to realize that this is an altogether insufficient explanation for the “meagre corpus of vernacular literature in the continental West before c. 1100” (Richter 1994:232). With respect to old French, for instance, attested at the latest from the time of the famous Strasbourg Oaths (842), Michel Zink has put the matter succinctly: “It was not sufficient that [Romance, la langue romane] merely exist for it to become a language of culture”—that is, a language of “literature”—“and nothing assured that it would then become such a language; or more exactly, nothing assured that it would ever be committed to writing” (1992:15).¹⁰

In all these cases language practices for making literized imaginative texts stretching back continuously into the primordial mists of the tribe were not lost. On the contrary, these are new forms, inaugurated at specific moments. The history of literary cultures is not forever continuous, only broken by the break in our historical record and only really changing via the quasi-biological process of language change itself. There are real breaks, and two components of discontinuity are the technological—writing—and the socio-cultural—the role of superposed models that I discuss below. People no doubt make “literary” “history” by using language orally in unprecedented ways. But this oral culture is not only largely unknowable, it is crucially different from the literary history made by committing such new forms to writing. If it comes to be written it not only ceases to be oral in a formal sense but it is transformed into something different under the influence of the culture of textuality itself. The literary work, in a non-trivial sense, does not exist until it is inscribed. And it is not just the textual consequences of writing technology but also access to this technology that are defining conditions of possibility in the history of literary cultures.

What makes possible and desirable the literization of literature—more justly put, the creation of “literature”—is an important question in need of serious research.

But obviously only once we realize that literatures begin in this sense can we even know to examine their conditions of possibility, and this has not happened for South Asia, nor indeed for Europe.

The commencement of literature that is a theoretical and historiographical necessity of literary cultures is typically coded in ethno-representations of literary history. These are crucial to adduce, since we are as interested in what was thought to have happened as in what we think happened. For any number of traditions, literatures begin. In the eyes of Indian writers from at least the second century C.E. onward, Vālmīki—to cite the defining case—is the “first poet” and his Rāmāyaṇa the “first poem”; vālmīkir ādau ca sasarja padyam, “Vālmīki created the first verse-poem,” says the Buddhist poet Aśvaghōṣa (Buddhacarita 1.43). As readers will remember, the poem represents itself inventing something altogether new by a striking metapoetic tale; and indeed, the unanimous taxonomical conception of medieval Sanskrit culture regards all textuality prior to Vālmīki (the Vedas, etc.) as a fundamentally different species of language use (see below). For Latin writers of the first century B.C.E. onward, Livius was unequivocally “the very first poet of all,” to cite the second-century grammarian Gellius (primus omnium L. Livius poeta; cf. Conte 1994:40). What both cultures understood was that newness had somehow entered the world, although how and why this is so are questions far more difficult to answer. What actually are traditional Indians and Romans saying when they call the Rāmāyaṇa the “first poem,” or Livius the first poet?

In the case of Sanskrit, is it the nature, the form-and-content, of the kāvya text that is new? If we follow out the logic of tale of invention in the poem, what is held to be new, what makes this “literature,” is its recording a personal response to real—and not mythic—human experience; poetry arises, as a later poet says, in the pity (śokārtasya pravṛtto me śloko bhavatu nānyathā; “I was overcome with ‘pity,’ and this issued forth from me—it must be ‘poetry’ and nothing else”). But may newness also refer to the fact that this literature is being composed in Sanskrit, rather than some other form of Indo-Aryan? Does kāvya begin in the sense that, for the first time, the culture has found it useful enough to preserve? Or is it the fact that for the first time such material was committed to writing, a new communicative technology in the subcontinent, not far antedating the “first poem” itself? On this last interpretation, the image of orality in the prelude of the Bālakāṇḍa becomes not a realist depiction but a nostalgic “fiction” of written culture, and the manuscript history of the poem a record of just how difficult and discrepant such literization turned out to be.¹¹

To be sure, narratives of beginnings in premodernity are hardly more innocent than they are in nationalist literary history. We find instances where even as one beginning was being affirmed another was being suppressing. The verse on the great Telugu poet Nannaya, which has circulated widely in Andhra for centuries,

vācām āndhramayīnāṃ yaḥ pravaktā prathamō ‘bhavat/
 ācāryaṃ taṃ kavīndrāṇāṃ vande vāḡanusāsanam//
 [Praise to him, teacher of poets, who first enunciated
 the grammar of the language of Andhra.]

bears, as we shall see, the mark of such suppression.

III

Since much of “literary” history is constituted by the history of textuality, and since we can know this history only through textualization, writing itself, both as a literary-cultural and as a socio-cultural problem—and not just as a cognitive or technological problem—has to figure as an important factor in the development of “literature.” Unlike orality itself, textualization has rarely been the subject of sustained reflection or study in South Asian cultural history of the historical period. The new literary textualizations of regional languages in South Asia have enormous temporal depth, covering (the Tamil case aside) almost a millennium, from old Kannada in the seventh or eighth century to Avadhi, Oriya, Bengali, inter alia, in the fifteenth-sixteenth. For this and other reasons (linguistic and religious, to mention two) they present an even more challenging social- and cultural-historical problem than the parallel situation in medieval Europe. There, as M. T. Clanchy remarks in a new section of his standard work, almost everything remains speculative about the beginnings of writing down vernacular languages (1993:218), and Michael Richter, approaching the problem from the side of oral culture, argues that the whole question of the relationship between that culture and literate vernacular literature needs rethinking (Richter 1994:357). Let me try to highlight a couple of problems, introducing them by way of some reflections on the Sanskrit tradition, where so much of the paradigm of the literary for medieval South Asia was defined.

In Europe there existed a deep and formative connection between literacy, grammar, and literature (in the widest sense): a *litteratus* was “literate” because he was grammatically educated or, more precisely, knew how to read and interpret Latin; and *litteratura* was what he produced as a result of both literacy and grammaticality, the “discipline of the written” (Irvine 1994:2). In early South Asia, by contrast, grammaticality was to a degree divorced from literacy. Whether or not the composition of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* took place in a non-literate environment remains a topic of debate, but certainly the memorization of the grammar and a wide range of related texts such as dictionaries was long a basic feature of elementary Sanskrit education. But this should not be overplayed, as it usually is. The *Mahābhāṣya*, for example, without knowledge of which Sanskrit grammatical education is incomplete (as the kings of medieval Kashmir, who resuscitated the exegetical tradition of the text, well knew), is certainly a written text even while memorializing an oral pedagogy, and, I would think, it has always been studied as such. Furthermore, all that came to count as “literature” in the restricted sense (*kāvya* or *sāhitya*) in Sanskrit—and, by the process of “superposition” I discuss below, this extends to all other such “literatures” in the Indian ecumene—was necessarily committed to writing; put differently, “literature” in the world of Sanskrit culture was the expressive text that was inscribed.

This is not to claim, of course, that the poet of medieval literary culture cognitively created the work in just the same way that contemporary literate poets do. Yet he certainly wrote his composition down, and certainly literacy affected the

poetry literate poets composed, albeit in ways we may not fully understand. Nor is it to claim that the product of the literate poet was experienced exclusively through private reading. For all Sanskrit critics, literature exists either as something “seen” (*dr̥śya*, drama) or “heard” (*śravya*, recitative), and when Bhoja, for example, speaks about poetry that is “heard,” he probably means just that, and not read. Discussing *rasa* in the introduction to his account of literary art—that breathtaking *summa poetica*, the *Śrīgāraprakāśa* (ca. 1025)—he says,

When displayed [*pradarśyamāna*] by skilled actors in correctly performed dramatic presentations [*abhinaya*] it can be grasped by spectators; when properly declaimed [*ākhyāyamāna*] by great poets in their compositions it can become accessible to the minds of the learned. However, [there is a difference in these two modes of *rasa* experience:] things are not so sweetly relished when they are actually perceived as they are when cognized through the language of masters of language. Cf.:

Profound meanings never penetrate the heart so intensely
as when they flash forth from the words of great poets
when we carefully listen.

Therefore we prize poets far more than actors, and poetry more than dramatic representations (pp. 5-6, my translation, here and *passim*).

In the widely influential Jaina poem from a century before Bhoja, the *Ādipurāṇa* of Jinasena (ca. 875), the author describes the virtues of poets, poets, listeners, and reciters (Ch. 1, esp. 126ff.). The modes of the recitation of poetry centrally occupied the attention of literary critics like *Rājaśekhara* (*Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* 7). And we know from the twelfth-century *Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* that a poem was in a sense only published when it was recited before an audience, for a literary work without auditors to hear it is like a ship on the open sea without a helmsman: it will sink without a trace (25.10). But as *Maṅkha* also tells us, in a striking verse, it was recited from a written text:

He spread out his book. Scattered over the [leaves] the letters were like black pearls on the necklace of the Goddess of Speech, and his eyes were irresistibly drawn to them. Calmly he read aloud (*paṭhan*) in a recitation (*vyāhāreṇa*) that sounded like the anklets of the Goddess of Knowledge as she danced inside his mind (25.143)

Indeed, as every Sanskritist knows, a common word for “read,” *vācayati*, literally means “to make [the text] speak.”

But poetry was also read, and from a very early date. Among the oldest manuscripts in the subcontinent are second-century palm-leaf fragments of Buddhist drama and poetry, discovered in Chinese Turkestan. These literary works, transported into Central Asia, were evidently transmitted in written form, and not, or at least not only, orally.¹² And I suspect that they were privately read: some of the fragments carry interlinear glosses of a Tocharian reader (Hartmann 1988). Manuscript leaves, ink, and the like were the basic equipment of poetry

(*kāvyaavidyāyāḥ parikarāḥ*), at least according to the *ācāryas* Rājasekhara cites (KM 10; GOS ed. p. 50.18). Consider also an account like the following, told of a court poet of Bhoja's, Dhanapāla:

Dhanapāla was completing his soon-to-be famous prose-poem, the *Tilakamañjarī*, when one day he brought to court the manuscript of the first part [*prathamādarśaprati-*]. King Bhoja had him read and explain it [*vyākhyāyamānām tilakamañjarīkathām vācayams . . . nṛpaḥ*]. The king asked to be made the hero of the story, promising to give the poet anything if he agreed. Dhanapāla exploded in a rage and burned the sole copy (*mūlaprati*). But his daughter rewrote the first half of the poem, since she remembered it from having written the first manuscript (*tilakamañjarīprathamādarśalekhanāt*); the second half the poet had to write anew (*Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, ed. Jinavijaya p. 41)

Lastly, some basic features of Sanskrit literary art can only be properly understood when read, and not when heard.¹³

While the Sanskrit materials demonstrate that the worlds of the auditive and the written were complexly interactive, there is a range of important questions they do not answer for the literization of the regional languages, though they may help frame them. What, first of all, is the inducement, the draw, of the literization of the vernaculars? This may be, as Clanchy called it in his work on late medieval England, “the hardest question to answer precisely” (1993:218). Second, what does literization in India do to create literature, what does it do to the text qua text, in terms of its inner organization, the structure of its argument, or the degree of its novelty;¹⁴ how, if it all does the performative “vocality,” in Paul Zumthor’s terms, of written texts continue to manifest itself? Third, how do different regional traditions think and write about writing; how do they think about what is allowed to be written or appropriate to being written, or about what writing does to transform a composition; is what is committed to writing a form of culture different from what is not written? (Sanskrit literary discourse, for instance, nowhere acknowledges the existence of non-written Sanskrit poetry.) In other words, how do traditions distinguish between what is and is not written, or better, what exists exclusively when it is performed, and what continues to exist afterward?

As a social phenomenon, furthermore, we may need to recognize that in India, as everywhere else, writing has been a social resource kept deliberately scarce, subject to control or hoarding, a privilege that may be granted or denied. For inscription is not only a form of authorization but at the same time confers the blessing of dissemination, and the promise, however illusory, of permanence; and authorization, like dissemination, presupposes authority. It is also a form of recognition—recognition, for one thing, that *bhāṣā* knowledge is worthy of the kind of preservation (of initial inscription and recopying) accorded to cosmopolitan knowledge. The literary politics of recognition is well brought out in a story told of Tukarām. The Śūdra poet is forced by a Brahman, one Rāmeśvar Bhaṭ, enraged at the poet’s pretensions to knowledge, to throw his poems into the river *Indrāyaṇī*—

just as Eknāth before him was forced by the Brahmans of Banaras to throw his Marathi Bhāgavatam in the Gaṅgā (cf. Deshpande 1979:76, 78).¹⁵ When Tukarām defends his use of Marathi—note this is 300 years after Jīnādev—he is evidently defending the right to write Marathi, not just to sing it. But beyond such stories as these, our ignorance of the sociology and ideology of literacy in premodern India is vast,¹⁶ and without such knowledge a critical history of literary cultures will elude us. For such a history will be in part answers to the questions, What are the social factors that have determined what may and may not get committed to writing and recopied? Whom has literacy permitted to make literature—that is, allowed to speak literarily—and whom has literacy prohibited—that is, literarily censored?

Some suggestive responses to these questions are offered in a paradigmatic essay of Narayana Rao's (1986), one of the few scholars to have addressed these central questions. What emerges from his study of contemporary epics and the long-term history of their literization (the creation of what he calls "secondary" epics) is the ideological power of writing itself. "Writing and the materials of writing," he says, "have an almost magical, authoritative significance in oral societies."¹⁷ The stories of literization of Telugu epics show that inscription is the procedure for authenticating the knowledge of an oral composition; this is reinforced by the pseudonymous attribution of authorship to higher-caste brahman poets (to Śrīnātha, for example), and by the renaming of the text with a cosmopolitan turn (Palnāṭi Kathā becomes Palnāṭi Vīra Bhāgavatamu). Literization also produces complex textual transformations of narrative and style that anticipate and long antedate those of modern editors and printers.

One does not want to make too clean a break between the oral and the written in India. If oral compositions can be literized, literized compositions can return to oral circulation, and the interplay between oral and literate composition and transcription can be dizzyingly complex (Blackburn and Ramanujan 1986:4-5). Yet there are real differences. Not only do oral compositions exhibit formal features that vastly diminish in literature (formulae, repetition, and the like), and use substantially different genres. But, as I have suggested, there also typically emerges, and increasingly so, a serious social asymmetry between textual and non-textual culture. Reconstructing the histories of these asymmetries and the attempts to redress them will be one important step toward a history of literary cultures that captures their social meaning.

IV

Obviously one of the bedeviling conceptual problems in literary history, which I have so far bracketed, is the categorical problem of "the literary" itself. Not everything that is textualized is "literary," though everything that is literary, in the sense that I've just argued out, is necessarily textualized. Without knowing what this category means, we cannot possibly know if it begins, but knowing is no easy matter. Although I do not fully accept the analysis of the colonial construction of the category in nineteenth-century India offered recently by Vinay Dharwadker (1993)—who strains to find in the Orientalists' attempts to define what "literature" may have

meant in India both colonial malevolence as well as the seeds of later nationalist narratives—I agree that, given the role of literature however conceived in telling the story of communities and thus in making communities, it is a phenomenon saturated with ideological content. It is also saturated with local content: just as one man’s history is another man’s myth, and one man’s science is another man’s magic, so what constitutes the literary, and if there is a literary, must always in the first instance be a local decision—or decisions, for change in, and indeed contention over, the literary occurs locally, too.

For this reason I would always prefer to write the “literary” fully encased in quotations, marking it as an epistemological space to be filled with other content as South Asian cultural history presents it. No stipulative definition of the literary from whatever source will be much use to us, for in fact what literary history largely describes is the history of the constant redefinition or reconstruction of what people have taken the literary to be. Better to be pragmatic about the matter, and to look at the several thousand of years of Indian textuality and ask ourselves what people in the subcontinent have done with their different texts, and how their texts and practices changed over times and places, and indeed, how their own understanding of the literary changed. That said, it is crucial to recognize that non-conventionalist, in fact essentialist thinking about literature has deeply affected the way people both wrote and listened to or read it in non-modern South Asia. A historical anthropology of literary cultures has, in the first instance, to investigate such essentialism from within, both its powerful historical pressures and the resistances to them; only this allows us to grasp possible forms of the “literary” that dominant cultures themselves never recognized, or refused to recognize, as such. The history of South Asian literary cultures will be in part the history of confrontation with and contestation of this internal colonization of the field of the literary.

From the materials by which I have long been fascinated (Sanskrit, Prakrit, Old Kannada, Braj), it is clear that people in the subcontinent began at certain times and places to make and do things with texts that had little in common with preceding texts and practices. In the case of Sanskrit, for instance, this meant making and using texts that had nothing to do with the texts and practices relating to the principal discursive domain in which Sanskrit had hitherto been largely restricted, the “liturgical” (to be understood broadly in the sense of the *vaidika*, in contradistinction to *laukika*). To these new texts they gave various names, but ultimately *kāvya* with its manifold subspecies (and later *sāhitya*) came to be applied. What defines this category of texts was long a matter of debate, but it was debate of detail only, held on the common ground of an assessment that was old and wide-spread. Bhoja, for example, invokes this older conception when he says, “People traditionally define (*āmananti*) literature (*kāvya*) as the ‘unity’ (*sāhityam*) of word and meaning, cf. ‘Word and meaning unified (*sahitau*) constitute poetry’ [*Bhāmaha*]” (*ŚP* p. 6). That is, other forms of language foreground either sound, such as the transcendent discourse of the Vedas, or sense, such as those accounts of the past called the *purāṇas*, or those descriptive/prescriptive statements of human knowledge called the *śāstras*. “Literature” is that discourse in which what is said and how

it is said are equally defining features. Bhoja's masterpiece is in fact an analysis of the twelve aspects of the unity he believes characterizes literature (these include everything from the text's denotative meaning, *abhidhā*, to the necessary presence in it of *rasa*, *rasāvīyoga*, Chapters 7-11).

It is worthwhile going into this matter in a little more detail, not only to clarify what Bhoja meant, but to show how different—being self-aware and diligently categorical—the Indian situation is from what is found elsewhere, in Europe for example; for in India, at an early date, a relatively autonomous “aesthetic sphere” with its own theoretical self-understanding (*sāhityaśāstra*) is constructed that Europe does not witness until perhaps the eighteenth century (stimulating Weber to name it and theorize its novelty). This is how Bhoja organized his knowledge of the medieval discursive system:

A “sentence” is a group of words with unitary meaning. There are three types of sentences: in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhraṃśa.¹⁸ A Sanskrit sentence [is itself of three types:] “relating to revelation” (*śrauta*), “relating to the seers” (*ārṣa*), “worldly” (*laukika*). Sanskrit sentences relating to revelation have two subdivisions, *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa*. Those relating to the seers are of two types, “memory” (*smṛti*) and “accounts of the past” (*purāna*). Worldly sentences have two subdivisions, “literature” (*kāvya*) and “scientific discourse” (*śāstra*) (SP pp. 165-66).

The essence of transcendent texts is their actual wording . . . the essence of texts relating to the seers is their meaning. . . and the essence of human texts [i.e., literature] is both the wording and the meaning (ibid. p. 376-77).

Bhoja's taxonomy, which reproduces a very wide-spread cultural conviction, confirms in a way the ethnohistorical account of the origins of poetry I referred to earlier. However much a contemporary reader may be prepared to consider such texts as *vedic sūktas* to be “literature,” Bhoja clearly excludes them from the category, as did every Indian who wrote on the matter before modernity—indeed, as *Aśvaghōṣa* did, who, as we saw, recognized that *Vālmīki's* *padya* was totally unlike anything that had come before. Another thing to bear in mind is that however much we may wish to explode the notion of “literature”—Eagleton argues that “anything can be literature” (1983)—Sanskrit definitions of the literary sought, even more literally than Bhoja himself reveals, to essentialize the phenomenon. Every critic strove to capture this essence once and for all. Indeed, from the eighth century on they usually spoke in terms of the “soul” of poetry, and one after the other decided it was to be found in “linguistic texture” (*rīti*) (*Vāmana*, late eighth century), “suggestion” (*dhvani*) (*Ānandavardhana*, ninth century), “striking expression” (*vakrokti*) (*Kuntaka*, tenth century), “propriety” (*aucitya*) (*Kṣemendra*, eleventh century), “signifiers that produce beautiful significations” (*ramaṇīyārthapratipādaḥ śabdah*) (*Jagannātha*, seventeenth century). And such discourses had effects. Purporting to define the literary in its very soul—as well as, of course, by its powerful examples—the Sanskrit tradition exercised dominant and dominating influence on what could count as literature in regional literary cultures.

But again, the Sanskrit materials offered by Bhoja's systematization prompt as many questions for regional traditions as they answer. It is crucial to know, as we do not yet know, how different regional languages in South Asia responded to this domination, distinguished and taxonomized realms of speech, contested cosmopolitan definitions—all of which could help us gauge the awareness and sense of agency in those discontinuous moments of “literary” history I have adduced. How far, for example, do notions of *kāvya* in non-modern India penetrate to regional cultures in the understanding of the literary? (It is an equally important, albeit separate, task to determine how far local alternatives to *kāvya* come to affect the development of cosmopolitan genres.) How do regional traditions understand the emergence of new forms of composition? The first extant Kannada *campūs*, those of Pampa (941 ff.), and the first Braj *kathās*, those of Viṣṇudās (ca. 1450), self-confessedly subscribe to *kāvya* norms. Indeed, the entire conception of literature as we find it in the late ninth-century Kannada *Kavirājamārga* is appropriated from the Sanskrit texts of *Bhāmaha* and *Daṇḍin* (though its project is to determine how the local should relate to the global cultural norms). But what about a *Vīraśaiva vacana*, or a *Sūr pada*—into what taxonomies have their authors and audiences placed them, and how have these taxonomies changed over time? Do we find anywhere in regional language writing before modernity second-order judgments about whether a composition is or is not admissible into whatever realm—that of canonicity or commentary or whatever—might have been taken to constitute the literary field? In short, we need not only to recover categories and conceptions that are South Asian, but, as Foucault put it, “to subject them at once to interrogation; to break them up and then to see whether they can be legitimately re-formed; or whether other groupings should be made,” especially groupings in terms of the sociality and politics of culture. Clearly the different ways in which the epistemological space of the literary was filled in regional cultures needs vastly more work, a kind of new literary pragmatics. But what I suspect operated frequently is something closely related to the second hypothesis on the “conditions of possibility for the very commencement of a literary tradition” that I want to enunciate.

This hypothesis concerns what I have already referred to as the problem of “superposition.” Viewed macro-historically, new literatures develop in reaction to superposed or dominating forms of pre-existent literatures. The vernacular intellectuals of medieval Andhra or Karnataka did not invent Telugu or Kannada literature except in response to the superposed example of Sanskrit, Mehta did not invent the Gujarati novel except in response to the superposed example of English (of Bulwer Lytton), Livius writes under the sign of the superposed Greek of Homer and the tragedians, and Dante under that of Vergilian Latin.¹⁹ What precisely is dominant in “dominating forms” of culture, what constitutes the prestige of “prestige” languages, are questions that need a new and different social theory to answer. My point in framing this hypothesis is in part to invite us to develop such a theory, but also to make a historical point. The instances I mention prompt us to take seriously the principle that Gramsci most powerfully formulates: there is no “parthenogenesis” in cultural history. Language does not merely “produce other language,” does

not change by reacting solely upon itself; on the contrary, “innovations occur through the interference of different cultures”—cultures that themselves, of course, are subject to the same processes.

Literary reaction to superposed cultural forms is not only a literary problem. Again it was Gramsci who understood better than anyone—except Bakhtin, but more materially and historically than Bakhtin²⁰—that something profoundly important to the world of social and political life is at stake in literary language choice and more generally in the processes that constitute the history of literary cultures. For Gramsci language, above all as manifested in literature, was the very paradigm of hegemonic power (the term he used to characterize the process by which a dominant community exerts prestige over contiguous subordinate communities to secure active consent, instead of establishing relations of domination wherein consent is secured passively and by coercion). As he put it, “Every time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore,” especially “the need to reorganize the cultural hegemony.” What does that mean, exactly? Let us consider our examples again, and try to capture the concrete circumstances in which literary history was made.

On the basis of a detailed inscriptional analysis S. Nagaraju shows (in this volume) how the rivalry starting in the seventh century between the Cālukyas of Bādāmi and the Pallavas of Kāñcīpuram stimulated a transformation in the economy and polity of the intervening zones, Rayalaseema and contiguous districts of S-W Andhra, which brought in turn a reorganization of cultural power and the rise of non-Sanskritic “vernacular” intellectuals, Śaiva as well as Jaina. Nagaraju doesn’t here pursue the plot that soon thickens, in terms of the contest over literary and social primacy: this whole early literary history is quickly erased from Andhra memory, and in its place has been constructed the counter-memory of Nannaya, adapter of the Mahābhārata and defender of brahmanical privilege (and pseudonymous author of a grammar now known to have been composed centuries later). The invention of this counter-memory, for its part, has its own history in the cultural politics of the mid-eleventh-century Deccan. There, three important powers, the Kalyāṇi Cālukyas, the Cōḷas, and the eastern Cālukyas, all vied for control of the rich deltaic Vengi area. The creation of a great literature, deeply informed by the superposed model of Sanskrit poetry—a mārga Telugu rather than a deśi Telugu,²¹ comparable to the mārga Kannada of the Kalyāṇi Cālukyas (Ranna’s *Gadāyuddha*) and the epic masterpiece of Kampan among the Cōḷas—was part of the creation of a polity with regional sensibilities newly energized from intense and ultimately explosive competition from similarly regionalized powers to the south and west.

Such interconnection between literary language choice and realignment of cultural hegemony is even easier to demonstrate in the more recent period of early Indian nationalism, as in the case of Mehta’s Gujarati novel. Far more difficult is it to talk about the distant past. But let me take a moment to share some speculations about the origins of non-liturgical, that is, literary Sanskrit.

Like others before me I have long been curious about the precise role played in the development of Sanskrit kāvyā by the new competitors for power—Yavanas, Kuśānas, Śakas, and others—who entered western and north-central India at the beginning of the common era. In the middle of the second century C.E., an event indicative of what I believe was some radical transformation in the historical sociology of Sanskrit takes place with the Rudradāman inscription to which I have already referred. The text of this inscription has been known for more than a century and a half, since James Prinsep first published it. But what may not be adequately appreciated is the fact that in all the hundred and fifty years since Prinsep—a period that has witnessed an intensive hunt for inscriptions throughout South Asia, issuing in forty-two volumes of *Epigraphia Indica*, eight volumes of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, and countless other reports of inscriptional finds from archaeological investigations around the subcontinent—virtually nothing has been discovered to diminish the cultural-historical significance of Rudradāman’s work.

Here for the first time Sanskrit is used for public cultural-political purposes; a new style of public literary expression is inaugurated that will come to be practiced from then on for a thousand years in polities from Afghanistan to Java. And in this process of appropriation the newly settled immigrants from northwestern India, the Kṣātrapa Śakas, seem to participate centrally. Louis Renou years ago may have been right to argue that the new sovereigns “consecrated” the vogue of using Sanskrit for literary purposes rather than invented it (whatever “consecrate” here could mean). More recently Gérard Fussman, a leading authority in Śaka studies, may be correct in seeing mere coincidence in the factor of the political changes, and “concomitance does not constitute causality.” Yet the synchrony of the two events is striking, and others may be right to locate in them an “innovating force.” At any event, given the liturgical prehistory to the domains of usage of Sanskrit, there is a dimension of fundamental innovation to this development. What I find to be historically significant is not so much that newcomers from Iran and central Asia should begin to participate in the prestige culture of Sanskrit, since other communities had done so earlier and would do so later, but rather that they and others begin to turn Sanskrit into an instrument of polity, and to do this by making literature in Sanskrit.

While Central Asian and Iranian immigrants are expanding the discursive domain of Sanskrit, it may seem paradoxical—though it is in fact key evidence for my argument—that Brahmanism remains resolutely Prakritic outside the liturgical realm. This is decidedly the impression one forms after scrutinizing the inscriptional record of the Deccan and peninsular India for the first three hundred years of its existence (and we have no other *laukika* textual remains to contradict this). Not only Buddhist but all brahmanical records are in Prakrit, even the most vedic of records. The Sanskrit transformation of this world of public texts in the south begins only in the fourth century.²²

The main point is that little evidence supports the view, though it is now the standard one, that in the several centuries prior to the Guptas there occurred a “resurgence of Brahmanism” that “led to a re-assertion of Sanskrit as the language of literature, administration and religion” (Norman 1988:17-18; emphasis added).

The sort of Sanskrit in question had not died, it had not, in a real sense, been born yet—Sanskrit for the laukika purposes of inscriptions, coinage, and indeed, kāvya, uses far beyond the realm of purposes to which the language had hitherto been restricted, the liturgical realm of ritual practice and religious pedagogy. I still hesitate to go so far as D. C. Sircar and Sylvain Lévi before him and date the very inception of Sanskrit kāvya from this period, let alone, with Lévi, to place it at the court of the Śakas themselves; fragments of some sort of literature antedate this period (though not by much), and the Rāmāyaṇa had probably begun to be textualized before this time (though not much before). Yet I don't think anyone has seriously countered their argument, or even fully digested its implications for a history of Sanskrit literary and social practices. Given the absence both in texts and memory of texts, for a thousand years before this, of what comes to be called "literature" (kāvya), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that something breathtakingly new is happening around the beginning of the common era. Possibly this too was in reaction to a superposed cultural formation (see below), certainly it took place under political conditions of new, if not unprecedented, fluidity, even if we do not know enough to specify exactly how these political mediations operated.

Similar kinds of processes are at work in European literary history as well, but here too, scholarship has been slow to frame the pertinent questions. For Rome, a primary case, only recently have the sociality and the politics of its literary culture begun to be theorized. Bakhtin, for example, clearly grasped the importance of the literary-cultural break in the mid-third century: "The purely national [i.e., "indigenous"] Latin genres, conceived under monoglottic conditions [i.e., in the absence of a superposed cultural formation], fell into decay and did not achieve the level of literary expression," in other words, they were never literized. But he conceives of the transformation merely as a language question, the problem of bilingualism—"From start to finish, the creative literary consciousness of the Romans functioned against the background of the Greek language and Greek forms" (1981:61)—and is unable to help us find what underlay it. What is important about the beginning of Latin literature is not just that it occurs, or occurs "with a sideways glance" at Greece, but under what circumstances it occurs: When Livius Andronicus "abruptly" invents Latin literature, it is an event intimately related to "the stimulus of the Hannibalic War and the national feeling it provoked." This is a connection that the Romans themselves made.²³

The rise of literary culture in medieval Europe, for its part, has long remained decontextualized and undertheorized. The editor of the new Oxford History of Medieval Europe recognizes that a major factor in "the new diversity" that marked the late Middle Ages was "the exploitation of a variety of languages in important writings," yet this is a movement he cannot explain; it is "in some ways mysterious." And in the best new book on the making of Europe, agency disappears altogether from literary history, and the vernaculars just "emerge" (Bartlett 1993:198). Richter may be correct in believing that oral culture was long preferred in the face of literacy because of its tradition, respectability, and adequacy; but we get no arguments for why literization became important on the Continent when it did, after 1100. Other

scholars, however, are filling in the blanks. Martin Irvine has recently shown how King Alfred and his successors (exactly contemporaneously with Nṛpatuṅga and his Kavirājamārga, by the way) established a new vernacular and bilingual grammatica, “in which an English and Anglo-Latin literary culture were tied to national identity and ideology” (1994:14; 415ff.; see further on this below). Equally if not more important is the fact that Alfred and his court are creating a vernacular imitation of Carolingian imperial culture and power, as I would suggest to have often been the case in what I call the “vernacular polities” of medieval India, which replaced imperial polities after the middle of the first millennium. When Dante seeks to theorize an “illustrious vernacular” (thereby indirectly inventing a new idiom and a new, perhaps “Italian,” literature), he is, as one scholar puts it, “also measuring the distance between the concepts of an empire and of a secular nation defined by its own body of ‘literary’ documentation, the stable substratum of the varied Italian tongues” (Shapiro 1990:27).²⁴ In other words, Dante is striving for a language to articulate a new bourgeois polity in place of an old Latin Roman empire, one waiting to be born in the wake of the debilitation of the northern city-states.

But let me stop with these examples, for the point I want to make is probably clear. One of the great challenges of a history of literary cultures in South Asia, as elsewhere, is to exhume the conditions that make possible and desirable the creation of new literatures and to understand more subtly what other choices, social, political, religious, are being made when a given language is chosen for literature; what new communities have come into being—or must be brought into being—that need to be addressed; what there is that needs to be said, now, in Kannada rather than Sanskrit, in English rather than Kannada, in Latin rather than Greek, in Italian rather than Latin. In short, given that language is “ideologically saturated,” as Bakhtin has it, what is the division of ideological labor between regional and “imperial” or “cosmopolitan” literary languages—this most stratified, and least theorized, form of heteroglossia?

VI

The final hypotheses I want to present, closely related to issues I have already discussed (beginnings, textualization, superposed cultural formations, and the cultural politics of literary language) concern, on the one hand, what I have called the problem of cosmopolitanism, and on the other, the macro-historical trends in which this cosmopolitanism seems to be embedded. On both points I will be sketchy, in part because I have only recently begun to work through these issues.

The history of literary developments in South Asia can to a large degree be plotted along two axes, one unidirectional and the other recursive. The recursive axis of literary history plots the presence and fate of subcontinent-wide cultural ecumenes—chiefly Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic, and English. These are all obviously very different kinds of ecumenes, with very different histories, but they are comparable in constituting super-regional communities of readers and potentially super-regional communities of citizen-subjects or at least super-regional classes. This component is crosscut by the largely unidirectional development of what might

be called the growth of literary “incommunication” (Kaviraj, 1992:26), the growth, that is, of ever more delimited reading publics and, putatively, delimited aggregations of citizen-subjects.²⁵ For the first thousand years of its existence, literary culture in South Asia—which was Sanskrit and Prakrit literary culture—was always represented to be (and, given the pattern of dissemination of manuscripts, was in fact) pan-continental. This is also the representation, and perhaps the reality, even in the case of Apabhraṃśa, texts in Apabhraṃśa (or “Apabhraṃśa”) being produced in North India, Bengal, Karnataka, and Gujarat for a thousand years (and that the language was a largely unified and bounded category at least by the end of that period is immediately obvious from work like Hemacandra’s grammar in the eleventh century). On the other hand, fifteenth-century Marathi, and sixteenth-century Bengali are largely mutually unintelligible and mutually exclusive. At about the same period, Malayalam speciates into a language that ultimately becomes unintelligible to the language to which it had for centuries been more or less identical, Tamil; it develops, that is, from a mutually intelligible dialect into a mutually unintelligible language; whereas—puzzling asynchrony—such speciation and literarization take place in Karnataka and Andhra perhaps six or seven centuries earlier. Literary incommunication is accompanied everywhere, from a far earlier date, by graphic incommunication, the development of regionally distinctive scripts (even for cosmopolitan Sanskrit).

The long-term trajectory toward molecularization of the literary world is a fascinating if obscure problem of cultural history. And one of the questions I am most interested in answering in literary history is the question how—that is, what are the historical processes whereby and why—a cultural cosmopolis or ecumene like those constituted by Sanskrit or Latin (radically different though these two are in terms of political and religious unity) come to be replaced by fragmented, increasingly ethnicized, and ultimately non-intercommunicating cultural islands. Admittedly there were multilingual vernacular courts, like eighteenth-century Tanjavur, or indeed ninth-century Mānyakheta, which witnessed textual production in Kannada as well as in Apabhraṃśa (Puṣpadanta’s *Harivaṃśa*) and Sanskrit (the Jaina Jinasena, and Nṛpaṭaṅga himself);²⁶ medieval intellectuals were typically multilingual and sometimes creative in a number of languages and people were often literate in multiple scripts. But this is usually much overstated, and the dominant tendency toward mutual differentiation and incomprehension, and away from indigenously generated literary cosmopolitanism, is absolutely clear.²⁷ And how does “literature,” which is a fundamental condition for the creation of those transregional ecumenes, participate in their destruction?

We (or I at least) have so little systematic knowledge of the differentia of transregional ecumenes and regionalized communities that I hazard even to suggest some socio-literary characteristics. For one thing, the point of composing and redacting “literature” in local language has, I think, as much if not more to do with symbolic as with communicative purposes. Regional language writing often appears to develop less in order to spread hegemonic or emancipatory discourse among vernacular illiterates than to demonstrate the capacity of vernacular elites

and their language for playing the game of elite cultural politics. The long-held assumption that vernacular poets like those in medieval Karnataka were (in Altekar's words) being "loyal to the precept of the founder of their faith that the vernacular should be used for preaching to the masses" is impossible to accept in view of the fact that most of the early writing in Kannada is perfectly unintelligible to those ignorant of high-culture poetry in Sanskrit. In fact, for much of the history of vernacular literary cultures—though for how much is, precisely, what we don't know—it seems as if vernacular literacy was as a rule mediated by Sanskrit literary, as was the case in medieval Europe (Palmer 1993:7). In the same way, vernacular grammaticalization and rhetoricization were, as I've noted, fundamentally informed by Sanskrit grammar and rhetoric (again, to take the Kannada example, Śabdamañidarpana of Keśirāja [thirteenth century] for the former, and Kavirājamārga [ninth century] for the latter). Vernacular intellectuals did not always articulate vernacular ideology, as my colleague David Ludden rightly has said. Nor was it a new audience that was being addressed, but rather the same literate audience in a more localized idiom. This may help shed some light on the structurally comparable state of affairs in Europe. It is in fact likelier that vernacularization was the cultural expression of Latinized elites rather than the expression of the national-popular on the part of organic intellectuals from below, as Gramsci would have us believe. Thus in southern France around 1100, the lyric poetry of the Troubadours, the first literary textualization in "la langue romane," was thoroughly an affair of the elite, as, some generations later in the north, the chansons de geste were an affair of the warrior aristocracy (Zink 1992:101, 91).

If this is true, we have to rethink what has become the standard narrative on the relationship between the emergence of non-cosmopolitan literary languages in South Asia and religious movements. The received and largely uncontested notion, of course, is that the rise of regional literatures in South Asia is to be monocausally related to the rise and spread of bhakti. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha have it, "Most of the regional literatures locate their beginnings in the poetry of the bhakti saints" (1992:57), or Sudipta Kaviraj, "The origin of vernacular languages [i.e., literized texts?] appears to be intimately linked to an internal conceptual rebellion within classical Brahminical Hinduism" (1992:38).

By my lights, the strong formulation of the issue such as we have here is plain wrong. Not the least of the historical problems are that the "vernaculars" as literary languages in the north often long antedate the rise of north Indian bhakti. In the case of Old Gujarati, for example, among the earliest literized texts are the erotic poem Vasantavilāsa, and Abdurrahman's Saṃdeśārāsaka, a very un-bhakti messenger poem composed by a Muslim from Multan. Some of the earliest texts in Braj, the kathās of Viṣṇudās at the court of the Gwalior Tomars, show no signs of bhakti sentiment. In the south, not only was much bhakti literature, from a relatively early date, written in Sanskrit (the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, to mention only the greatest case, as well as short lyrics like the Mukundamālā of Kulaśekhara), but the earliest literary texts there have nothing whatever to do with bhakti (ninth-tenth-century Kannada, eleventh-century Telugu, fifteenth-century Malayalam). This is not to

minimize the importance of the bhakti revolution that did later occur, but to urge a more precise estimation of its literary-historical implications. What we need are new literary-historical studies that examine both the relationship of bhakti texts to the preceding literary tradition and the process of their textualization; what had happened to allow or to require the oral-popular to take on the status of “literature” and to gain the elite privilege of inscription to which I earlier referred?

An even more important question concerns the relationship of vernacular literature and vernacular polity. It simply will not do to transpose, by gross anachronism, the discourse of nineteenth-century nationalism to third-century Rome, ninth-century England, thirteenth-century Italy, as the scholars I cite above have done. But what kinds of political and culture theory can help us put something else in its place? There is no question but that vernacular literature is crucial to the life of the court in Mānyakheta, Kāñcīpuram, Gwalior and elsewhere in middle-period India. The appropriation of Sanskrit or quasi-Sanskrit literary models, what I would call “vernacular cosmopolitanism,” may construe with the project of a vernacular imperium, as I suggested earlier. But that is at most a provisional suggestion; we need altogether new work and new thinking about writing before the nation in South Asia.

If I am uncertain about the different characteristics of subcontinental and regionalized literary communities I am even more ignorant about the larger historical developments that affect them. But I am beginning to develop some ideas which I would like to share even in their embryonic state. I cited earlier Gramsci’s insight that there is no “parthenogenesis” in language or culture, but rather that “innovations occur through the interference of different cultures.” I am beginning to wonder whether we can organize such “interference” into historical sets, or even historical cultural world-systems.²⁸ British colonialism organizes one such cultural world-system in the nineteenth century (as American globalization does today). The literary consequences for the Caribbean, parts of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia of the introduction of English are different in each case but closely related, in terms both of “English” language literary production and of the process of de-colonization and re-nativization of literary traditions.²⁹

Less clearly understood, since they are hardly a subject of research, are the cultural consequences of the eastward expansion of the cultural world-system represented by Islam—the so-called “Islamic Commonwealth”³⁰—around the beginning of the second millennium. So far as I understand the matter, the development of modern regional languages in north India cannot possibly be understood without reference to this historical process. It is certainly no coincidence that these come to textual/literary life in close synchrony with the expansion of the Sultanate; Jñānadev, for instance, lives in the very generation that Devagiri, an important center of the Maharashtra world, comes within the ambit of Delhi (ca. 1300), and in other publications I have called attention to the Rāmāyaṇa adaptations, often formative influences in the different regional traditions, that seem to ring the borders of the Sultanate. But less often remembered is the prominent, perhaps decisive role that the new immigrants play in this development. Whether the verses attributed to

Mas'ud Sa'd Salman, ca. 1100 of the Yamini Kingdom of Lahore are indeed the first recorded instance of use of "a northern vernacular for poetic purposes" (leaving aside for now definitional difficulties of both "vernacular" and "poetic"); or whether those ascribed to Śaikh Hamidu'd-dīn, a Cisti sufi of Rajasthan, are "if authentic, almost the first explicit textual record of Hindi poetry," literature in several new Indo-Aryan languages is probably not thinkable without the formative contribution of Muslim writers.³¹ As poorly understood a consequence of the expansion of the Sultanate is the fate of the Sanskrit ecumene. Its center of cultural power shifts decisively from the north, Kanauj and the Doab more generally, to the Vijayanagar South (note, for what it's worth, that here for the first time "Hindu" [hindava] becomes the self-description of Indians),³² with literary-historical consequences for both north and south that we have yet to unravel.

And finally, other cultural world-systems in place five hundred or a thousand years before this need to be analyzed afresh, and in a spirit of inquiry wholly different from what has prevailed to date: colonialist disdain for local genius or nativist resentment at the "foreign." What I have suggested were historically consequential events in the development of Sanskrit literature seem to have taken place in close synchrony with the dissemination of Hellenistic and (later) Hellenized Roman cultural forms into the subcontinent, by Greek and Śakan immigrants, and Roman traders (ca. 300 B.C.E. - 200 C.E.).³³ We now know, for instance, that in 150 C.E., squarely in the middle of the reign of Rudradāman I, a man with the title "Yavaneśvara" ("Lord of the Greeks") prepared a Sanskrit prose translation of a Greek work (probably from Alexandria) on the casting of horoscopes, which with another (lost) Greek text formed the basis of the Indian developments in the art of horoscopy until the introduction of Islamic ideas a millennium later.³⁴ We know that a portion of Mānasāra on architecture was adapted from Vitruvius ("a parallel almost down to every detail," in the words of Goetz 1959:178).³⁵ It has recently been argued that the cult of the goddess Pattinī and that of Isis are closely linked by cultural transmission (Fynes 1993). Now, by these examples I by no means intend to resuscitate for the literary domain crude notions of nineteenth-century imperialism—that Vālmīki can only have been translated from Homer, for example, or that Sanskrit drama can only have been derived from Greek³⁶—any more than that "real sculpture" begins only with Gandhāra. Rather, I simply want to remind us that South Asia was permeable to cultural flows from the west in another, earlier, cultural world-system. In the same way, India itself five hundred years later would be the source of flows for the transculturation of large parts of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, and would provide the literary-theoretical foundations for something so definitive of Chinese culture—an obligatory part of state examinations—as Recent Style poetry (Mair and Mei 1991). Without understanding the meaning and character of such massive cultural flows from India, which were both transformative and transformed in the process, we cannot make much sense of the Sanskrit cultural formation put in place in Angkor in the ninth-thirteenth centuries, of the old Javanese *parwan* and *kakawin* (= *kāvya*) literature that developed on the basis of extensive cultural appropriations and domestications from the Sanskrit, and what

the Chinese prosodists were trying to do that was new in the High T'ang.

In the case of British colonialism I have already indicated the globalized nature of the phenomenon. But the relationship of macrohistorical events and literary-historical change can be plotted in other periods as well. It was the thesis of a celebrated book by Henri Pirenne fifty years ago (and not thoroughly demolished since then) that there could not have been a Charlemagne without a Muhammad. In literary-historical terms this may no longer mean what Pirenne thought it did—students of early Romance are divided about the history of both the “real” and the conceptual individuation of those languages (Wright 1991). But there still seems a case to be made that the dissolution of the Latin ecumene in southern Europe and the literization of early Romance and Germanic at the end of the first millennium (along with the shift of the center of Latin culture from the South to the Germanic north and in fact the creation of the very idea of “Europe”—the term *europenses* is used now for the first time), are not unconnected with the expansion of the Islamic Commonwealth on the western frontier.³⁷ As for the earliest of the cultural world-systems I have mentioned here, it is precisely the western penetration of Hellenism that makes possible the invention of Latin literature; as Bakhtin put it, “From its very first steps, the Latin literary word viewed itself in the light of the Greek word, through the eyes of the Greek word” (1981:61). Thinking this way about the macrohistorical development of South Asian literatures gives weight to Gramsci’s insight that “history is always ‘world history,’ and particular histories exist only within the frame of world history.”

VII

What I hope I have been able to indicate here is that the research agenda for a new history of literary cultures is a full one, an intellectual engagement of great fascination, and nowhere more challengingly done and richly rewarding than in South Asia. What I don’t know I have been able to indicate as fully as I would like is the political significance of this agenda. We shall understand less of the mystifications of nationalist rhetoric the less we understand about literary history; we shall understand less of the sources of politicized culture—“ethnicity”—the less we understand of literary history; we shall have a far more impoverished sense of the historical development and self-understanding of communities and polities to the degree that our sense of their literary development as a historical, political, social form is impoverished. But there is another important aspect of the historicization of literary culture, one I have alluded to throughout this paper.

The political tasks of the kind of “historical cultural studies” envisioned here will be to demonstrate that “civilization” is no stable thing, but instead a process, and a process that ultimately has no boundaries. Literature, the site where nations and regions and peoples always seem to want to locate their real, continuous, primordial selves, will always be revealed to be embedded in a boundless process of give and take, of overcoming, even while appropriating from, contiguous literatures, and being overcome in turn. My approach thus aims toward something quite different from the diffusionist model once popular in anthropology; the old essay of Alfred

Kroeber, from example, from which some have recently sought a pedigree for the conception of “ecumene,” tells the story of always-already powerful and complete civilizations conferring their gifts upon “retarded or primitive cultures” (Kroeber 1952). I have in mind instead a model that wants to learn from the problematic as set forth in contemporary globalization research (e.g., Hannerz 1987; 1989) but historicizes it even further, and tries to figure out what precisely is the difference (beyond speed, breadth, intensity) between modern and premodern globalizations, between the kinds of processes captured in *Video Night in Kathmandu* or *Hamlet Comes to Mizoram* and what happens when Sanskrit and Śakan or Kuśāna cultures meet, or Kannada poets vernacularize Sanskrit. Building such a model means paying attention to the specific constraints of non-modern, non-capitalist history—where cultural globalization never comprised the element of economic domination that now defines it—and aiming to recover the radical dynamism and particularities of premodern transregional flows of culture.

From this perspective the popular anthropological image of discrete cultures—each of which is stably fixed as a mosaic stone in a disconnected dot-pattern of humanity—becomes gross misrepresentation. For example, Kannada literary culture, which I study as a paradigmatic instance, shows itself to be no “thing” but rather a series of processes comprising individuation from proto-Dravidian up to the fifth or sixth century, Sanskritization through the thirteenth, de-Sanskritization for some centuries thereafter, Anglicization, Europeanization, globalization in swift succession thereafter, with supplementary and typically highly self-conscious sub-processes (textualization competing with orality, the “popular” with the court, Jain with Brahmanical with Śaiva and Viraśaiva with, latterly, socialist, Dalit, feminist), each of which is fed by a cultural current whose source is always elsewhere and ultimately nowhere.

From such a perspective something like “Westernization” would be seen as a permanent and global phenomenon. In a real sense different areas have functioned as “Wests” for different “Easts” at different periods of history. These were Wests not only geographically but in terms of a self-declared superiority in point of political and economic power, rationality, and degree of “civilization.” England could be said to be France’s West in the sixteenth century (when, it has been argued recently, the notion of French national identity arises as a direct consequence of the invention of the idea of the nation in sixteenth-century England); France was Germany’s West in the nineteenth (Germans reactively defining a *Kultur* in direct contrast to France’s *civilisation*), Germany was Russia’s West in the early twentieth (when German bureaucrats were called to refashion the Czarist state, and then—other Germans—provided the strategy to destroy it). In similar ways Iran functioned as India’s West at various periods (Achaeminid, Sasanian), but especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (when poets in north India were viewed by their Safavid peers as purveyors of a hand-me-down literature). India was sometimes perceived as China’s West (think of the classic Chinese text *Journey to the West*, which describes the quest for Indian Buddhist culture on the part of a Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang), as well as the West of much of mainland and maritime

Southeast Asia (Thailand, Cambodia, Java). Throughout much of their history China was Japan's West. And of course, Egypt was Greece's, Greece was Troy's, and ultimately Rome, in an important sense, was Greece's. And finally, the U.S. became the West's West—until Japan became its own.³⁸

From the perspective of seeing literary cultures and whole “civilizations” as processes and not things, in which people are in constant motion and constantly receiving and passing on cultural goods, another (and my final) principle follows: No form of literary culture is “indigenous.” “Indigenous” is always the conceptual consequence—in the end, a dangerous consequence—of a deficiency of historicization. Indigenism inhibits us from seeing that all literary cultures participate in what turn out to be networks, ultimately globalized networks, of borrowing, appropriating, reacting, imitating, emulating, rivaling, defeating, albeit, by way of corollary, that literary traditions often construct themselves by sublating this history and affirming, stubbornly, a specious autochthony. From the processual perspective, “culture” or “civilization” (as in “Indian Civilization 101”) becomes nothing but an arbitrary moment—a still frame in a film—illegitimately generalized; each of these moments is in fact only an instance of exchange, a point of trans-shipment, a site for reprocessing cultural goods that are always-already other.

From such a processual perspective, cultures are never other than hybridized, and creolization becomes the normal cultural condition. There is nothing “pure,” nothing “ours” to retrieve in some past, as reactionary politics believes; there is nothing “authentic,” nothing beyond the process itself to recover from the depredations and degradations of colonialism, Westernization, “late capitalism”, as the more complicated position of a quasi-progressive indigenism construes the matter.³⁹ De-civilizing the past—a form of postcolonialism that refuses both the nationalization and the indigenization of the past—is one thing a seriously historical history of literary cultures, an unsentimental and undefensive literary history can demonstrate. It is thus that the study of language and literature becomes part of “general history,” as Gramsci put it, and “not pointless and merely erudite.” And it is for this reason, also—to return at last to the question I raised in the Introduction to this volume, Whose culture is it anyway?—that, since it is at once nobody's culture and everybody's culture, radical literary history is a project in which all of us, globally, have an important stake.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Although I often use the term "literary history" of my project, I also call it "the history of literary cultures" to distinguish it strictly from actually existing literary history. Typical of the latter is Perkins 1991, which is insular, historically thin, and despite its title not terribly theoretical—the three features, space, time, and method, that a history of Indian literary cultures most prompts us to scrutinize. A different problem is presented by the programmatic essay of Patterson 1990 (esp. 260). While suggesting that "literary history" now should mean the mapping of literary discourse against other social discourses, it poses few of the questions about social formations and history that I find to be central to the topic.
2. For example, for South Asian literatures, Das 1992 or any one of the dozen volumes in Gonda 1973ff.; or, for European literatures, Kenney and Clausen (1982) or Conte (1994) on Latin, Hollier 1989 or Zink 1992 on French.
3. This is to say nothing of the antihistoricism typical in literary studies of precolonial India. The explicit method of Zvelebil, for instance, is to view Tamil literature as a "simultaneous order,"

- not a historical order (1974:2). Similar is Lienhard, who speaks of the “timeless nature of [Sanskrit] kāvyā” (1984:48, 52).
4. The politics of beginnings is well illustrated in the history of the controversy over the *chanson de geste* in the nineteenth century. This really forms a chapter in the history of French nationalism (cf. Bloch in Hollier 1991). Dominant scholarly opinion now holds that the texts of the *chansons*, far from being the consequence of a gradual literization of folk culture, represent primary literate products on the part of twelfth-thirteenth century literati, who with “nostalgic” retrospection were staging an oral communicative situation (Gumbrecht 1983:168). See also note 10 below.
 5. “Unified” or “unitary” in Bakhtin’s sense that they are “not something given” but rather something “posited” in opposition to real “heteroglossia” (1981:270). What constitutes a language is a both a theoretical and an ideological problem known to premodernity as well as modernity. The *Lilātilakam* attempts to create a Malayalam in the fourteenth century that was deeply colonized by Sanskrit, and moreover was still known as Tamil (J. Richardson Freeman, in a paper delivered at the 1995 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies). The attempt to affiliate a *bhāṣā* with the oldest linguistic stratum, however impossible in cultural-theoretical or linguistic terms, is a hallmark of nationalist literary history. Bengali literary history, for example, begins for many such histories with the *Apabhraṃśa Caryapadas*.
 6. This is often referred to in sociolinguistics as *Ausbau*. The beginnings of vernacular inscription in South India are often accompanied by intensive grammaticalization; Kannada is a good example, with several major texts before the year 1000.
 7. As described in the eighth-century Prakrit tale, the *Kuvalayamālā* (ed. Upadhye):153. What is clearly Marathi is found, sparsely, in “non-literary” inscriptions from the middle of the tenth century at the latest.
 8. *Jñānadev* claims he will plant the garden of the *Gītā* in the city of Marathi (*ye maharāṭhiyeciyā nagarīm / brahmavidyācā sukā kari*), will place Sanskrit and his local language on the same throne (*taisī deśī āni saṃskṛta vānī / ekā . . . sukhāsanīm sōbhātī āyanī*), that though his words are in Marathi they can compete with nectar (*mājhā maharāṭā ci bolu kavatikem / pari amṛtātem hīm pajemsīm jīmke / (Jñāneśvari 12.16; 10.45; 6.14; Deshpande 1979:71)*). Cf. also 10.43: *mūlagranthīmchyā saṃskṛtā vari maharāṭī nīṭa pāhātam / abhiprāya mānāliyā cittā kavāna bhūmī hem na covaje //* “If my Marathi version of the original Sanskrit (*Gītā*) is read carefully, with a clear understanding of its meaning, no one could say which is the original.” We find similar defensiveness elsewhere, cf. *Somanātha’s Basavapurāna*: “Let it not be said that these words are nothing but Telugu. Rather, look at them as equal to the Vedas . . . great poetry in simple language” (trans. Narayana Rao, p. 6; see also his paper in this volume).
 9. *KRM* 1.29 may take us back a few generations, but no memory of this literature is preserved by succeeding poets.
 10. There are languages that remain without literate literature even in the presence of writing, e.g., in India, Tulu (western Karnataka), whose literati used Kannada until Christian missionaries committed the language to writing in the nineteenth century. Old Persian, to take a case outside of India, seems to have produced not much more textuality than a few inscriptions; and middle Persian, for 500 years after the fall of the Achaeminids, seems to have produced no texts at all (what little there is from the region, e.g., coins, is in Greek).
 11. See Irvine 1994:431-35 (the story of Caedmon, long taken as the “case-history of an Anglo-Saxon oral singer,” is “an exemplum of grammatical culture”); see also n. 4 above. A brief account of the manuscript tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is given in Pollock 1984. The manuscript history of the *Mahābhārata*, by contrast, which for the most part (“*Virāṭaparvan*” and “*Kaṇvaaparvan*” aside) is largely derived from a written archetype, has to be explained by locating it in a very different moment in the history of South Asian textuality.
 12. Indeed, I don’t know any evidence that the great Sanskrit genres of *kāvya* ever circulated as “oral” texts. Many *muktaka* verses have had a life of their own in the world of orality, no doubt (as *Kosambi’s* edition of *Bharṭṛhari’s Śatakātrayam* suffices to prove), but the transmission

histories evinced by manuscripts of mahākāvya, campūs, ākhyāyikas, even nāṭakas, is fully literate.

13. The kind of paronomasia typically named sabhaṅgaśleṣa in Sanskrit (e.g., a-sv-āpa-phala; a-svāpa-phala) cannot, by the rules the system itself promulgates, be transmitted in speech (I am thinking of the different accentual rules the system imagines theoretically to obtain, though they are in fact obsolete). Some forms of prāsa in medieval Telugu texts are sometimes meaningful only visually (as Narayana Rao informs me).
14. Two of several indices mentioned in Godzich 1994:79, who discusses a similar problem of the textual consequences of different technologies of the word. He uses the term “auditive” culture to capture the situation I describe above, of a literary culture comprising a large portion of aural consumption.
15. The trope is found also in the Telugu traditions relating to Śrīnātha’s inscription of folk epics, though with a somewhat different symbolic function (Narayana Rao 1986:154).
16. Saberwal 1991 is one recent, and unsuccessful, attempt to diminish this ignorance.
17. This is confirmed elsewhere in the same volume by accounts of the “official temple manuscript” that is present during Tamil bow song performances studied by Blackburn (176) and of performances of the Maṅikkuraṅ studied by Hart (256).
18. In an essay being prepared for publication elsewhere (“Writing Before the Nation”) I treat the significance of Bhoja’s catalogue of literary languages at length.
19. Another important case is new Persian. The Tārikh-i Sistān records that it was in Sistān, a little after mid-ninth century, “that the first lines of New Persian poetry were composed” (Lazard 1993:24). The Tārikh makes clear that this innovation was in response to the superposed model of Arabic panegyric (see further on this below). Regarding Telugu, I find myself in some disagreement with Prof. Nagaraju (in this volume). It is clear that the early literary inscriptions in Telugu are composed by writers fully literate in Sanskrit and fully conversant with the conventions of Sanskrit praśasti style, and it is from within this superposed cultural formation that they make Telugu literature. This is so even in those inscriptional texts Nagaraju describes as “deśī,” e.g., the Yuddhamalla inscription of the tenth century. This begins as follows:

nrpāṅkuṣātyantavatsala satya triṇētravistara śrīyuddhamallund
anavadyavikhyātakirttiprastutarājāśrayuṅḍu.
20. Bakhtin has a profound sense of the sociolinguistics of the matter; he was perhaps the first to see clearly that “The actively literary linguistic consciousness at all times and everywhere (that is, in all epochs, of literature historically available to us) comes upon ‘languages’ and not language. Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language” (1981:295; original italics). But he does not, as far as I can tell, possess quite so strong a historicized awareness of the cultural politics at issue in this choice.
21. See the paper of V. Narayana Rao in this volume.
22. Much of the previous two paragraphs is explored in detail in my essay on the Sanskrit cosmopolis (Pollock forthcoming); a more popular version (under the title “Public Poetry in Sanskrit”) in Indian Horizons Quarterly, March, 1996.
23. “Abruptly” according to Kenney and Clausen (1982:53; see also Gruen 1990:82 and Goldberg 1994:46, who consider the “conscious” invention of “literature” at this date to be an established fact); the second quotation is from the new Cambridge Ancient History (1989:429). The second-century grammarian Gellius writes that when peace was made with the Carthaginians (“Phoenicians”), the poet L. Livius taught Rome to make literature (fabulas docere Romae coepit) (17.21.42; cited Gruen 1990:82, n. 10).
24. The “standard” Dante creates is not the volgare illustre he envisioned but a more disciplined form of his own Florentine. “Nevertheless, many of Dante’s successors, including Petrarch and Boccaccio, believed that his language incarnated the volgare illustre and followed his lead in their own works, thus greatly furthered the Ausbau and prestige of Florentine” (Joseph 1987:64). In a roundabout way, then, Dante actually created a standard, though not precisely the one he intended.
25. To be sure, “cosmopolitan” is itself a relative category; Kannada was and remains a cosmo-

- politan code for many speakers of Tulu or Konkani. But there is a difference. Kannada was never represented as transregional; quite the contrary, from its earliest texts it is explicitly said to inhabit a particular place in the world.
26. I am thinking of the short poem *Prāsnottaramālikā*. A manuscript preserved in the Oriental Research Institute, Mysore makes it perfectly clear that this work is to be attributed to the king.
 27. In Kannada, for example, there are virtually no poets who wrote in both Kannada and Sanskrit or another language before the modern period (the notion of *ubhayakavi* refers, in my view, to the occasional use of Sanskrit in Kannada texts, not independent works); moreover, there is almost no evidence of intercommunication between Kannada and other contiguous literatures outside of certain transregional religious orders (*Śrīvaiṣṇavism*, for example). One counterexample to regionalized incommunication is the *koiné* (*sādhukkaṛī* or *kichri bhāṣā*) that develops in north India among the Sants. How real a *koiné* this is, though—is it the monks that are *peripatetic*, as in the case of the Pali *koiné*, or simply the manuscripts?—remains to be determined.
 28. My thinking on world-system analysis in relationship to the circulation of those “prestige goods” called literature is still very tentative. This is partly a result of the scholarship on world-systems, which has been resolutely indifferent to cultural processes.
 29. Its own new essentializations (e.g., of the “postcolonial”) notwithstanding, the work of Ashcroft et al. 1987 makes this point effectively.
 30. For the term and the explanation see most recently Fowden 1993:138-68.
 31. Both views are offered by Stuart McGregor, 1984:8; 23 (cf. also p. 26 where he observes that *Dāūd’s Candāyana* is “the first clearly known, major work of Hindi literature.”) Now, it may be that the Muslims, especially the Sufis, preserved their literary production better than putatively earlier regional-language poets, who only much later appear to have committed texts like *Laur Canda*, *Pṛthvirājarāso*, and the like to writing. But that retarded textualization would be an important fact in itself, and is part of the point I am trying to make. McGregor makes the important suggestion that Muslim innovations with regional languages were a consequence of their need to voice “an Indian dimension of their lives” (1984:9).
 32. *Epigraphia Carnatica* 8:40 (*Hariyappavodeya* [*Harihara*] is *hīṃdurāyasuratālu*, “sultan of the kings of the Hindus,” in an inscription of 1354).
 33. With the accession of Augustus, Roman trade with India was enormously enhanced both in peninsular India and in the north (where Parthians interrupted normal Silk Road transit). Latin sources record repeated missions from Indian kings to the Roman emperor.
 34. Pingree 1978:3-5. He defines the title as someone “exercising some sort of authority over Greeks settled in the domains of the Western Kshatrapas in those areas of India later known as Gujarat, Mālwa, and Rajasthan” (p. 3). The leading Śaka family, the *Kārdmakas*, adopt a *gotra* name by the late third century; the *Yavanas* seem totally Indianized by the same period and disappear as a separate people (pp. 20-1).
 35. However, from the perspective I adopt it makes little sense to say, with Goetz, that whereas “the whole” “would never have been possible with a Roman prototype,” it became “purely Indian” (164). What does “Indian” mean?
 36. We now know, however, that there were Greek theaters in Afghanistan—*Ai Khanoum*—and bilingual intellectuals in *Khandahar* who could translate *Aśokan* edicts into literary Greek (*Journal Asiatique* 252 (1964):137-57). Peter Green has argued that “Of genuine literary interpenetration between Greek and other cultures there is virtually no trace. For one thing, literary translations—as opposed to those of medical, mathematical, astronomical, or similar practical treatises—seem to have been nonexistent, a sure sign of esthetic indifference” (1990:316). But word-for-word literary translation is a late development in human culture almost everywhere.
 37. Pirenne 1958 (1939):274-78. This is to say nothing of formative literary-cultural exchange between Arabic and European poets (cf. Menocal 1987). In terms of “otherizing” impulses these events continue to stimulate important processes in Romance literary history. Consider for example the “seemingly sudden profusion of French texts” that are produced immediately

after the First Crusade (Duggan in Hollier 1989:20). As for the term "Europeans" it appears to be first used by the anonymous chronicler of Cordoba in reference to Charles Martel's defeat of the Arabs at Tours and Poitiers (732), then "Europe" frequently in reference to Charlemagne (von See 1985:42).

38. One could perform a similar geo-cultural-historical operation for "Easternization," with Greece as Rome's East in the third-first centuries ("Hellenization"), "Germany" as "France's" East in the sixth-ninth centuries (Germanicization), France as England's East in the eleventh-fourteenth (Normanization), India as Central Asia's from the second-tenth (Buddhicization), and so on.
39. Such as one finds even in the otherwise critical thought of someone like Aijaz Ahmed, who expresses belief in "civilizational moorings," a "common civilizational ethos," a "very real civilizational unity" of "Indian literature" in the singular (Ahmad 1992:256, 264). For a self-confessed indigenism, based on hardly more knowledge of precoloniality than Ahmad's, see Devy 1993.