



Henricus Hondius, *New Geographic and Hydrographic Map of the Entire Earth*, 1630. This flamboyant Dutch map shows the skill with which early modern mapmakers could plot the world, thanks to detailed travelers' reports and the "Mercator projection" developed by the Hondius family's friend Gerhardus Mercator. This scientific map is framed in classical imagery, including symbols of the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. In the upper corners, Julius Caesar and the ancient astronomer and geographer Ptolemy look on, inspiring the viewer to new efforts of imperial mapmaking, while the lower corners show Mercator across from Hondius's own mapmaker father, Jodocus. (*Hemispheres Antiquae Maps and Prints*.)

The Longman Anthology of World Literature



VOLUME C

THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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❖ CROSSCURRENTS ❖

The Vernacular Revolution

For a thousand years or more, from late antiquity until around 1200 C.E., almost all the world's literature was composed in elite languages, employing literary modes far removed from the speech of common people. Literacy was confined to a small number of people—almost always men—in court and temple circles, and writers usually strove to preserve and elaborate older literary traditions rather than to adapt their work to the changes of everyday language. Sanskrit in India, classical Chinese in Japan and in China itself, and Latin in Europe were for a millennium the dominant literary languages in their regions, even as people spoke ever more widely divergent dialects and languages in daily life.

This situation began to change between around 1000 and 1300 in many parts of the world. These changes took different forms in different cultures and occurred on varying timetables, yet collectively it is appropriate to speak of a worldwide "vernacular revolution" during these years and the centuries that followed. The works in this section show the varied purposes that common or vernacular language came to serve in several different cultures. In some cases, the older, elite literary language was still used as well, sometimes for privileged genres: thus in Japan, Chinese was often still used for poetry, even after prose writers like Murasaki Shikibu pioneered the use of Japanese for writing their prose romances. In China itself, the literary language and techniques perfected by the Tang dynasty poets of the seventh through ninth centuries continued to dominate upper-class poetry for another thousand years, but by the 1500s prose writers were coming to favor a "vernacular" style much closer to everyday speech. This shift in style went along with a shift in emphasis as well, toward more realistic portrayals in prose fiction of life in society, often with more attention to lower classes—"vernacular" itself comes from a Latin word, *verna*, meaning a household slave, and by extension "home-grown" or "native."

In India, Sanskrit began to give way to writing in many of the different languages spoken around the Indian subcontinent, such as Tamil and Telugu. Writers in these vernacular languages often came from artisan or merchant classes, and at times openly rejected the caste hierarchy that had put the Brahmins, and the Sanskrit language, above them. Sometimes these vernacular writings were secular in emphasis, with religious writing still favoring Sanskrit, but over time an increasing amount of religious and devotional writing came to be composed in the vernacular as well.

In Europe, German and Icelandic writers on the margins of the Latin tradition began to write in their local Germanic languages, and Anglo-Saxon, Irish, and Welsh literatures flourished in the British Isles. By 1300, even in the strongholds of the Latin tradition, Dante in Italy and Provençal poets in France were using the vernacular to write great poetry. In a letter to his patron Can Grande della Scala, Dante defended writing his *Commedia* in Italian rather than Latin, saying that he wanted to reach as many of his countrymen—and women—as possible. The trade-off was that vernacular work would be less read abroad, and Dante and many others continued to use Latin when they wanted to reach an international audience directly. The great sixteenth-century scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote and lectured in Latin all his life, communicating in this way with scholars across Europe as he worked in Holland, England, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland.

As vernacular writing spread, translation began to play a prominent role in the circulation of literary texts, and Erasmus himself strongly promoted the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages. The Church had long favored the exclusive use of Latin for theological writing and for the Bible, so that all Christians could understand it in common and also so that Church authorities could control the text's form and the doctrines they derived from it. With the rise of Protestantism, however, reformers like Luther and Erasmus began to emphasize the

individual's direct encounter with Scripture, and they sought to make the Bible accessible to all Christians, whatever their social class and whatever their language. As Erasmus declared—in Latin—in a preface to an edition of the Greek New Testament:

Perhaps the state secrets of kings have to be concealed, but Christ wanted his mysteries to be disseminated as widely as possible. I should prefer that all women, even of the lowest rank, should read the evangelists and the epistles of Paul, and I wish these writings were translated into all the languages of the human race, so that they could be read and studied, not just by the Irish and the Scots; but by the Turks as well, and the Saracens. . . . I would hope that the farmer might chant a holy text at his plow, the spinner sing it as she sits at her wheel, the traveler ease the tedium of his journey with tales from Scripture.

In this passage, Erasmus allows that Latin, long the language of European diplomacy, may still have value for keeping "state secrets" out of general circulation; but the spread of the vernacular tended as well to lessen the control over information formerly held closely by royal courts. The rise of the different vernaculars also stimulated the consolidation of nation-states around a dominant language or dialect, and gave the means for a growing number of people in those states to express themselves and to seek direct participation in public life. Even as it opened up a greatly expanded and varied literary landscape, the vernacular revolution ultimately paved the way for the middle-class and then working-class revolutions that have shaped our modern world.



Vernacular Writing in South Asia

For nearly a thousand years beginning in the last centuries B.C.E., the entire literary landscape of South Asia was occupied by Sanskrit (and to a far less extent, by the two languages related to Sanskrit—Prakrit and Apabhramsha—that had been used especially for literature meant to suggest the world of rural life in contrast to the court). We have no evidence that the regional languages of South Asia, with the important exception of Tamil, were ever used for the creation of written expressive texts during this period. But this situation changed dramatically near the end of the first millennium C.E., when writers in southern India first began to experiment with courtly registers of local dialects. Over the course of the next 500 years, local-language writing began to appear everywhere in South Asia. Scholars don't fully understand the conditions that made this vernacular revolution possible, and the fact that a remarkably similar transformation occurred in western Europe around the same period complicates explanation even more. But a revolution did occur, and it powerfully challenged the dominance of Sanskrit, and indeed other dimensions of Sanskrit culture and society as well.

In most regions of South Asia, the earliest vernacular writers were court poets who imitated Sanskrit literature in idiom, metrics, and themes. The religious dimension of their work, where present at all, was typically muted. However, this inaugural vernacular movement was followed by a second wave prominently marked by religious sentiment, especially by the idea of direct access to the divine sometimes termed *bhakti* (devotion). Unlike the vernacular transformation in Europe, which was hastened by translations of the Bible into regional languages (page 115), no attempt was ever made in South Asia before the modern period to translate Sanskrit scriptures. Instead, altogether new bodies of religious writing were created, some that would eventually attain canonical scriptural status. The devotional poets, often low-caste artists or ascetics, rejected the high style of Sanskrit and the social values of caste hierarchy imputed (sometimes unjustly) to Sanskrit culture as a whole. In south India, the *Virashaivas*—Militant Devotees of the god Shiva—invented what they called the *vacana* (plain talking), an

unversified, unadorned, and for the most part, it seems, unwritten form. In fact, this seems to have been meant as a kind of anti-literature, as radically anomalous in its aesthetic as was the Virashaivas' social critique, especially their rejection of the caste system and their denunciation of the wealthy and the grand temples that were the concrete manifestation of their power (and which low-caste people were prohibited from entering). Both men and women composed in the *vacana* form; among the latter, Mahadeviyakka produced *vacanas* that represent some of the earliest and most powerful expressions of erotic devotionism in South Asia, and bear close comparison to the poems of Mahadevi's European contemporaries, Hildegard von Bingen and Mechthild von Magdeburg (see Volume B). Somewhat later in northern India, the weaver-poet Kabir (1400-1450) composed verses in Old Hindi whose idiom and style were as innovative as the criticism he expressed through them of Hindu and Muslim exclusivity. Like those of many of the vernacular devotional poets, the compositions of Kabir remain alive to this day on the lips of people across northern India.

Tukaram, who lived in western India in the early seventeenth century and wrote in the Marathi language, gave voice to the 'literary' aspirations of many of these poets when he exclaimed, in one of his many confessional poems:

I have no
Personal skill.
It is
The Cosmic One
Making me speak.

Yet the artistry and aesthetic long associated with Sanskrit did maintain themselves in many vernacular literary cultures. Especially instructive is the case of Telugu, the language of today's Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India. Court poets continued for centuries to write marvelously sophisticated literature in Telugu in the high style even as poets associated with one or another of the great temples in the region sought a simpler, more common idiom. But the division between the court and temple traditions is not always hard and fast; moreover, creative innovation continued in both spheres, in content as well as form. The songs (called *padam*) of the mid-seventeenth-century poet Kshetrappa illustrate these trends particularly well. Like many devotional poets before him, Kshetrappa adopts a female voice, of various kinds: that of the confused love-sick ingénue ("Those women, they deceived me"), for example, or the jilted mistress ("Your body is my body"), but most often the courtesan ("Pour gold as high as I stand"). He uses these different voices to evoke powerful, complex emotions of spiritual longing for the divine (called here Muvva Gopala, the name of Kshetrappa's village god), and all the feelings accompanying that longing: from despair at God's apparent indifference, to a readiness to negotiate with Him (as if he were a prostitute's customer), to the self-negating ecstasy of union. Although the language and form of these songs are simple and entirely local, the categories of eroticism and much of the imagery borrow creatively from the high tradition (as seen, for example, in "Love in a Courtly Language," Volume A). The wit and wisdom and passion, however, are Kshetrappa's alone, as is the transformation of the very subject matter itself. Sometimes it seems impossible to decide whether the vision of sex, with God as customer, is an expression of the ecstasy of religious union in the manner of the older mystical traditions mentioned above, or whether—in the new early-modern economy of southern India that was fluid, commercial, and dynamic and where old traditions were crumbling—the customer himself is viewed as God; and sex is nothing more, or less, than sex.

PRONUNCIATIONS:

bhakti: BHUK-tee

Virashaiva: VEER-uh-SHAH-vuh

Go find a root or something

10 I have set myself up for blame.
 What's the use of blaming you?
 I've even lost my taste for food.
 What can I do now?
 Go to the midwives and get me a drug
 15 before the women begin to talk.

Go find a root or something

As if he fell from the ceiling,
 my husband is suddenly home.
 He made love to me last night.
 20 Now I fear no scandal.
 All my wishes, Muvva Gopāla,
 have reached their end,
 so, in your image,
 I'll bear you a son.

25 *Go find a root or something*

[END OF VERNACULAR WRITING IN SOUTH ASIA]



Wu Cheng'en

c. 1500–1582

Journey to the West (Xi you ji) is one of four vernacular language novels produced during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that came to be identified by traditional critics as masterworks of Chinese fiction. Like the others, it is rooted in historical fact, in this case the expedition of a Tang dynasty monk named Xuanzang (596–664) to India to bring Buddhist scriptures back to China. It shares with other fictional works an indebtedness to the conventions of oral storytelling, evident in its reliance on sequences of events whose resolution is always suspended, with formulaic predictability, until the following chapter. Equally common to contemporary vernacular works is its use of both prose and verse to carry the narrative forward, a tradition established centuries before in didactic texts for popular consumption that elaborated imaginatively on stories about the lives of Buddhist saints. In *Journey to the West*, the passages of poetry are of higher quality and more central to the narrative than in other novels, but the most distinctive feature of the work is its development of the tradition's most captivating character, a wily, brash, and comic swashbuckler who happens to be a monkey.

Born into a family of high officials and schooled in the Confucian classics by his father, the historical Xuanzang renounced a political career and joined a Buddhist monastery at the age of thirteen. Inspired by lively doctrinal debates swirling about during the Tang dynasty, he determined that understanding and resolution would be impossible without resort to key scriptures currently unavailable in China. When the emperor refused to authorize an official journey to fetch them, Xuanzang embarked on his mission to India in secret with a merchant caravan, late in 627. He returned to the capital of Chang'an in early 645, laden with over 650 items and, equally important, an imperial pardon. Supported by the throne, he then spent the rest of his

life studying and translating the texts and also wrote an account of his harrowing travels to secure them.

By the early thirteenth century Xuanzang's pilgrimage had become rich material for legends, story cycles, and dramas about a band of increasingly colorful characters whose perils and exploits across fantastic landscapes captured the popular imagination. These culminated in the 100-chapter novel, *Journey to the West*, of which the earliest preserved edition dates to 1592. Its supposed author was a late Ming dynasty writer and official, Wu Cheng'en, who, after passing the first level of the civil service examination, held minor government posts and traveled widely between the capital and the provinces. An accomplished poet, he circulated freely in elite literary society. He was known both for his wit and his keen interest in the supernatural and is said to have composed the novel toward the end of his life. Although the attribution of authorship to Wu is relatively recent and based on rather scant evidence, none of its many challengers has offered a more compelling alternative.

A twelve-chapter prologue introduces Xuanzang's most fascinating and resourceful companion, Sun Wukong ("The Monkey Enlightened to Emptiness"), also called Pilgrim. The monk's journey then consumes all but three chapters of *Journey to the West* and takes him through a preordained series of eighty-one ordeals presented by assorted fiends, monsters, and deities in disguise. The monk is usually referred to as Tripitaka—"Three Baskets," a name for the body of Buddhist scriptures, thereby identifying the seeker and his goal. Scholars have pointed to the formulaic nature of each adventure, in which the monk and his companions typically find their initially carefree travels disturbed, first by some natural discomfort (such as cold or hunger) and then by some variety of demon, who usually succeeds in capturing Xuanzang. Sun Wukong, who is generally not among the captives, almost always proves instrumental in rescuing the monk from each trap, thanks to a formula or weapon or, sometimes, divine intervention; this dispels the thrall of the demon, who then reveals its true form. All the while the monkey's mischievous inclinations require constant discipline from his master as well. The remarkably hapless Xuanzang also relies on assistance from three other companions with supernatural features: Zhu Bajie ("The Pig of Eight Prohibitions"), a Daoist deity banished from the pantheon for drunkenness and transformed into a pig/human figure of grossly but amusingly sensual appetites; Sha Wujing ("Sand Awakened to Purity"), an erstwhile cannibalistic monster converted to a morose but dutiful Buddhist; and a faithful white horse who was once a dragon prince.

Previous fictional and dramatic accounts of Xuanzang's trek had already introduced the intriguing figure of a "monkey novice-monk" as guide and protector. He bears striking similarities to other tricksters, among them the character of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*, as can be seen in the Resonance following the selections given here. Legends about Hanuman are known to have reached China by way of the trade route known as the Silk Road. While no definitive connection has been established, some scholars have suggested that a common stock of motifs was probably available to the author of *Journey to the West*. New to the novel, compared with earlier versions of the pilgrimage, is the elaborate history of the monkey's origins and magical powers provided in the prologue, and his talents and exploits subsequently engendered an independent legacy of spin-offs in opera, puppet theater, film, and comic books. Another innovation is the novel's underlying framework of multiple allegories. Much discussed by traditional commentators, these were discounted by influential modern Chinese scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century in favor of a focus on its more popular and comic appeal, but they have recently been reevaluated as an essential aspect of the text's meaning.

Direct references to Buddhism are surprisingly rare in the novel, despite the centrality to the story of a search for its sacred texts. The pilgrims' interactions can best be understood, however, within the religion's framework of karmic redemption. "Karma" is the Hindu and Buddhist term for one's destiny as determined by the pattern of actions as one progresses through a series of lives, deaths, and rebirth, ideally toward enlightenment and eventual liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Xuanzang would be helpless without the assistance of