their female forebears as it was preserved in the great noble houses; other images will then appear, hazier, but nevertheless clarifying the image of women present in the minds of the knights of that period: I propose, lastly, in a third book, to look more closely at the judgement passed on these women by the men of the Church who directed their conscience and endeavoured to rescue them from their native perversity.

1

Eleanor

Beneath the central dome of the church at Fontevraud – in the twelfth century, one of the largest and most prestigious abbeys for women in France – one sees today four recumbent statues, the remains of old funerary monuments. Three of them are carved from soft limestone: that of Henry Plantagenet, count of Anjou and Maine through his father, duke of Normandy and king of England through his mother; that of his son and successor, Richard Coeur de Lion; and that of Isabella of Angoulême, second wife of John Lackland, Richard's brother, who became king in his turn in 1199. The fourth effigy, of painted wood, represents Eleanor, heiress to the duchy of Aquitaine, wife of Henry and mother of Richard and John; she died at Fontevraud, where she had finally taken the veil, on 31 March 1204.

The body of this woman lies full length on the slab, as it had lain exposed on the bed of state during the funeral ceremony. It is wholly concealed within the folds of the gown. A wimple fits tightly round the face. The features are of a perfect purity. The eyes are closed. The hands hold an open book. Before this body and this face, the imagination is given free rein. But the effigy, admirable though it is, tells us nothing of them as they were when Eleanor was alive. She had been dead for many years when it was carved. The sculptor may never have seen the queen with his own eyes.

In fact, it hardly matters; the funerary art of this period was not concerned with likenesses. In its perfect serenity, this figure makes no pretence of reproducing what had been visible on the catafalque: the body and the face of a woman of eighty who had struggled hard against life. The artist had been instructed to show what would become of this body and face in their perfect state, on the day of resurrection. No one will ever know, consequently, how powerful were the charms with which the heiress to the duchy of Aquitaine was endowed when, in 1137, she was handed over to her first husband, Louis VII, king of France.

She was then about thirteen years old; he was sixteen. 'He burned with an ardent passion for the maid'; or so at least it was said, half a century later, by William of Newburgh, one of those English monks who were then so skilfully retelling the story of past events. 'The desire of the young Capetian', he added, 'was trapped in a fine net'; 'this was hardly surprising, so strong were the physical charms with which Eleanor was blessed'. The chronicler Lambert of Wattrelos also rated them highly. But what are these eulogies actually worth? Convention required the writers of that age to celebrate the beauty of all princesses, even the least attractive. Furthermore, Eleanor was already, in 1190, the heroine of a scandalous story which was circulating round all the courts. It was inevitable that anyone speaking of her would attribute exceptional power to the charms she had once displayed.

This is a legend that dies hard. It still today delights some authors of historical novels, and there are even serious historians whose imagination it continues to inflame and lead into error. Since the Romantic Movement, Eleanor has been by turns presented as an innocent victim of the calculating cruelty of a first husband who was inadequate and limited and of a second who was brutal and unfaithful, or as a free woman, mistress of her own body, standing up to the clergy, defying the morality of sanctimonious hypocrites and standard-bearer of a brilliant, joyful and unjustly suppressed culture, that of Occitania, against gloomy savagery and northern oppression; but, free and easy, voluptuous and a deceiver, she is always presented as driving men wild. In even

the most austere works, she appears as 'queen of the troubadours' and their accommodating inspiration. Author after author takes at face value what the mocking Andrew the Chaplain said of her in his *Treatise on Love*, and the absurd sentences he concocted and ascribed to her, not least one whose savage irony would be appreciated by every contemporary reader: 'No one can legitimately give the married state as a reason for shirking love.' As for the games of courtly love, Eleanor might almost have invented them. At the very least, it was through her intermediary that these chivalrous manners spread throughout Europe from her native Aquitaine.

There is, in fact, some excuse for the erroneous judgements of modern scholars. Memories of Eleanor were distorted at a very early stage. Within fifty years of her death, the imaginary biography of that great poet Bernard of Ventadour had made her his mistress, and the preacher Stephen of Bourbon, fulminating against the guilty pleasures of touch, had quoted the perverse Eleanor as example: one day, supposedly, taking a fancy to the hands of the elderly scholar Gilbert of la Porrée, she had invited him to run his fingers over her thighs. And though the tendency of that amiable storyteller, the Minstrel of Reims, to make things up to please his audience is well known, he was only echoing the claims of an increasing number of people who said that the queen of France, during the crusade, had gone so far as to give her body to Saracens, when he ascribed to her a romance with the most illustrious of those miscreants, Saladin. She was on the point, he says, of going off with him, one foot already on the boat, when her husband, Louis VII, managed to catch up with her. So she was not only fickle, but gave her baptized body to the infidel, betraying not only her husband, but her God, the ultimate in debauchery.

Such fantasies were constructed in the thirteenth century on the basis of the malicious gossip which had circulated in her lifetime about the ageing queen. Some of it was collected in nine of the works of history composed between 1180 and the 1200s that have survived, and which provide almost all we know about her. Five had English authors, since it was

then in England that good history was written. All were the work of ecclesiastics, of monks or canons, and all present Eleanor in an unfavourable light. For this, there were four reasons. The first, which was fundamental, was that she was a woman; for these men, woman was an essentially evil creature, through whom sin had entered the world, with all the confusion that was apparent. Second, the duchess of Aquitaine's grandfather was the famous William IX, traditionally regarded as the first of the troubadours, a prince who had also, in his day, titillated the imagination of the chroniclers. They had denounced the scorn he displayed for ecclesiastical morality, the laxity of his morals and his obsessive womanizing, quoting the kind of harem where, as if in parody of a nunnery, he had kept a company of beautiful girls for his pleasure. Eleanor was condemned, last and above all, for two further reasons. Twice, disregarding the submission imposed on wives by the hierarchies instituted by divine will, she had gravely sinned: first, by requesting and obtaining a divorce; second, by shaking off the tutelage of her husband and turning his sons against him.

The divorce, and immediate remarriage, scandalized the Europe of 1152. Reaching this year in his chronicle, the Cistercian monk Aubrey of Trois Fontaines recorded only the one event. Laconically, and all the more forcefully as a result, he wrote: 'Henry of England took as wife the woman whom the king of France had just got rid of . . . Louis had let her go on account of the lasciviousness of this woman, who behaved not like a queen, but more like a harlot.' Such transfers of wives from the bed of one husband to another were by no means uncommon among the high aristocracy. That this one caused such a sensation is understandable. The unity of Europe was then identified with that of Latin Christendom; the pope, who was hoping to direct and mobilize it in a crusade, was therefore anxious to keep the peace by preserving the equilibrium between states. At a time when the West was experiencing rapid growth, these states were beginning to grow in strength. This was the case with the two great rival principalities of which the king of France and the king of England were rulers. But with political

structures that were still very crude, the fate of these political formations was largely dependent on successions and alliances, hence the marriage of the heir. Eleanor was heiress to a third state, smaller in scale, admittedly, but still considerable: Aquitaine, a province extending from Poitiers to Bordeaux, with designs on Toulouse. When she changed her husband, she took her rights to the duchy with her. Further, by the mid-twelfth century, the Church had completed the process of making marriage one of the seven sacraments so as to ensure it could control it. It laid down both that the conjugal tie should never be broken and, contradictorily, that it should at once be broken in case of incest, that is if it transpired that the couple were related within the seventh degree; which, among the aristocracy, they all were. This allowed the ecclesiastical authorities – in practice the pope, if the marriage involved kings – to intervene at will to bind or to loose, and so dominate the political scene.

Long after the event, the Minstrel of Reims described what determined the divorce as follows: Louis VII 'consulted all his barons as to what he should do about the queen and revealed to them how she had behaved. By our faith, said the barons, the best advice we can give you is that you let her go, because she's a devil, and if you keep her any longer, we believe she'll be the death of you. And, above all, you have no child by her'; he alleges devilry and sterility, two grave failings, and the initiative is taken by the husband.

John of Salisbury, however, eminent representative of the humanist renaissance of the twelfth century, clear-sighted and well informed, is a better witness. He wrote much earlier, in 1160, only eight years after the event. He had been with Pope Eugenius III in 1149 when the latter had received Louis VII and his wife at Frascati, Rome then being in the hands of Arnold of Brescia, another intellectual of the first rank, but an anti-establishment figure. The couple were returning from the East. The king of France, leading the second crusade, had taken Eleanor with him. After the failure of the expedition and the difficulties that ensued for the Latin states in the Holy Land, the churchmen who pondered the reasons for these reverses claimed that they resulted from

this very fact. 'Prisoner of a violent passion for his wife', said William of Newburgh (and it was to explain this that he stressed the queen's physical attractions), the jealous Louis VII 'decided he ought not to leave her behind but that the queen should accompany him to the wars'. This set a bad example. 'Many nobles imitated him, and since the ladies could not manage without chambermaids', the army of Christ, which ought to have been a picture of virile chastity, was encumbered with women, hence riddled with depravity. This had made God angry.

In fact, everything went wrong on this journey. At Antioch, in March 1148, Eleanor had met Raymond, her father's brother and master of the town. Uncle and niece got on well, even too well in the eyes of her husband, who became uneasy and hastened the departure for Jerusalem. Eleanor refused to follow him. He resorted to force. William, archbishop of Tyre, though he wrote his history thirty years later, when the legend was at its height, had known the queen personally, and was also ideally placed to hear all the gossip circulating about this affair. If we are to believe his account, relations between Raymond and Eleanor had been extremely close. In order to detain the king and use his army to his own ends, the prince of Antioch had planned to deprive him of his wife 'by force or by intrigue'. She, according to William, was willing. In fact, she was 'a loose woman, who behaved imprudently, as had already been observed and as her later behaviour would confirm; contrary to royal dignity, she mocked the laws of marriage and did not respect the marriage bed'. Less bluntly expressed, this is already the accusation made by Aubrey of Trois Fontaines: Eleanor was lacking in the discretion that was proper in wives, especially the wives of kings, and which countered their natural tendency to lust.

John of Salisbury, on the other hand, highlighted only one fault, though a grave one: rebellion. Defying her husband – her master – Eleanor, at Antioch, had demanded a separation. This was obviously intolerable; it was accepted that a man might repudiate his wife, just as he got rid of an unsatisfactory servant, but the opposite was regarded as scandalous. In favour of divorce, the queen invoked the best

of pretexts, consanguinity. She declared that she and her husband were related within the fourth degree, which was true, and that, steeped in sin, they could clearly no longer live together. This was a strange revelation, since this relationship, though clear as day, had never been mentioned in the eleven years they had been married. Louis, a pious man, was worried, and, 'though he loved the queen immoderately', prepared to let her go. One of his counsellors, a man Eleanor disliked and who had no love for her, persuaded him not to agree, arguing as follows: 'How shameful for the kingdom of France were it to be known that the king had let himself be deprived of his wife or that she had left him!' From Paris, Abbot Suger, Louis VII's mentor, gave the same advice: swallow your resentment, hold out and wait for the end of the journey.

The couple were still at loggerheads on their return from the Jerusalem pilgrimage, when they were received by the pope. He did his utmost to reconcile them, which was in his interests. On the one hand, he very publicly demonstrated his power to control the institution of marriage; on the other, he feared the political troubles that were likely to follow a divorce. The spouses appeared before him, and here we may follow John of Salisbury, who was present. The pope listened to their recriminations, and made peace between them. The king was delighted, still ruled by a passion that John called 'puerile', by the desire that it was one's duty to master if one was a man, a real man, and especially a king. Pope Eugenius III even went to the length of remarrying the couple, scrupulously respecting the conventions, renewing all the requisite rites, first the mutual commitment, spoken aloud and put into writing, then the solemn progress to the sumptuously appointed marriage bed, the pope here performing the role of father and ensuring that everything happened as it should. Lastly, he solemnly prohibited any future dissolution of the union or any further talk of consanguinity.

Less than three years later, it was being talked about once more, and again to justify a divorce. This was at Beaugency, near Orleans, before a large gathering of prelates. Witnesses appeared and swore, which was not in doubt, that Louis and

Eleanor were of the same blood. The marriage was therefore incestuous. Consequently, it was not a marriage. The tie did not even have to be broken, since it did not exist. No one bothered about the papal prohibition. The king had resigned himself, on the advice of his vassals, as recorded by the Minstrel of Reims, who, on this point, we may probably trust. Had Eleanor, in the meantime, gone too far? Had she behaved in a wanton manner during the visit to Paris, the previous year, of the Plantagenets, father and son? The chief reason, I believe, was that she was barren. But she was not, in fact, completely barren, and inasmuch as there was sterility, it was not on her side, as the exuberant fertility of which she gave proof in the arms of a new husband made plain. In fifteen years of marriage, however, she had produced only two daughters and then in an almost miraculous fashion. The first had been born, after a miscarriage and seven years of trying in vain, following a conversation in the basilica of St Denis. Eleanor had complained to Bernard of Clairvaux of the harshness of God, who was preventing her from giving birth. The saint had promised that she would at last become fertile if she persuaded King Louis to make peace with the count of Champagne, so ending a war which, incidentally, she herself may have instigated. The second daughter had arrived, only eighteen months before the council of Beaugency, as a result of the reconciliation at Frascati, the new wedding night and copious papal blessings. There was a pressing need, however, for the king of France to have a male heir, and Eleanor seemed hardly likely to provide him with one. She was rejected, in spite of her attractions, and in spite of Aquitaine, the rich province she had brought with her on her marriage, and which, leaving the court immediately after the annulment, she took away.

In 1152, Eleanor was once again what she had been at the age of thirteen, a magnificent catch, a great prize for whoever could win her. There was no shortage of candidates. Two were very nearly successful during the short journey which took her from Orleans to Poitiers. She managed to flee from Blois, at night, before the lord of the town, Count Thibauld, could make her his wife by force; then, warned by her

guardian angels, she avoided the road where the brother of Henry Plantagenet lay in wait. It was into the arms of Henry himself that she fell. Gervase of Canterbury suggests that Eleanor had planned this; he claims that she had informed the duke of Normandy by secret messenger that she was available. Henry, 'tempted by the quality of this woman's blood but even more by her lands', moved fast. On 18 May, he married her at Poitiers, in spite of the obstacles. I refer here neither to the difference in age (Henry was nineteen, Eleanor twenty-nine – she had long reached what was then regarded as middle age), nor to consanguinity, which was as obvious and as close as in her previous marriage, but to the suspicion of sterility which hung over the ex-queen of France and, above all, to the prohibition regarding her issued to Henry by his father, Geoffrey Plantagenet, seneschal of the kingdom. Do not touch her, he had said, for two reasons: 'She is the wife of your lord, and your father has already known her.' It was then regarded as indecent, and more culpable than the offence of incest as conceived by the Church, to sleep with the spouse of one's lord, whilst to share a sexual partner with one's father was incest 'of the second type', 'primordial', and consequently strictly forbidden in all societies. Two out of our nine historians, both writing a little later, admittedly, and in gossipy style, Walter Map and Gerald of Wales, report that Geoffrey had, in the words of one of them, 'taken his share of what was in Louis' bed'. This double testimony lends credence to the story and confirms that Eleanor was anything but shy.

This episode had clearly given much pleasure at courtly gatherings, and all those who envied or feared the king of France, or who simply enjoyed a good laugh, had made fun of him. Here is the basis of the legend, and the writers who, in monasteries and cathedral libraries, were busy recollecting the events of their day, enjoyed collecting such stories, when, ten years after the council of Beaugency, Eleanor rebelled once again, and rose up against her second husband.

She was fifty years old. No longer fertile and her charms no doubt less dazzling, she was of no further use to her husband. She was entering that stage in life when, in the

twelfth century, women who had survived continuous childbirth were likely to be rid of their husbands, and when, able to dispose of the dower they had received at the time of their marriage, and generally respected by their children, especially the eldest son, they wielded real power for the first time in their life, and took pleasure in it. Eleanor did not enjoy such freedom. Henry was still alive. Never still, forever galloping from one end to the other of the vast territory he had accumulated by the chance of succession, from Ireland to Quercy or from Cherbourg to the Scottish border, king of England, duke of Normandy, count of Anjou and duke of Aquitaine in Eleanor's name, he had never much cared for her. He had sometimes trailed her with him from one side of the channel to the other when it suited him to display her at his side. He had impregnated her, here and there, hurriedly. He now neglected her completely, amusing himself with other women. But he was still there.

To take advantage of what opportunities remained open to her, Eleanor was dependent on her sons, and on one in particular, Richard. The eldest, William, had died in childhood. In 1170, harassed by the next two, who were growing up and impatiently demanding a share in power, Henry had been obliged to give in. He had associated the fifteen-year-old Henry with him on the throne. To Richard, who was thirteen, he gave his mother's inheritance, Aquitaine. Eleanor, inevitably, stood behind the adolescent boy, in the hope that, by acting in his name, she would at last become mistress of her ancestral patrimony. In the spring of 1173, she ventured further. She supported the revolt of these two insatiable boys and their younger brother. Rebellions of this type, pitting sons against a father who was slow to die, were common enough at this period, but it was rare for the mother of the troublemakers to take their side and betray her husband. Eleanor's attitude was regarded as scandalous. She seemed for the second time to be breaking the basic rules of matrimony. This was made plain to her by the archbishop of Rouen:

> The wife is guilty when she parts from her husband, when she does not faithfully respect the marriage contract . . . we all deplore the fact that you separate from your husband in this way. This is the body becoming estranged from the body, the limb no longer serving the head, and, what goes beyond the bounds, you allow the offspring of the lord king and your own to rise up against their father . . . return to your husband, if not, in accordance with canon law, we will make you return to him.

Such a tirade could have been uttered by every lord in Europe. All were convinced, in the words of the prelate, that 'the man is the lord of the woman, that woman was taken from the man, that she is bound to the man and subject to the power of the man'.

Henry put down the uprising. In November, Eleanor was in his hands, captured when, dressed in men's clothes – another serious breach of the rules – she had been attempting to take refuge with her former husband, the king of France. Henry shut her up in the castle at Chinon. Some said that he contemplated repudiating her, on the pretext, once again, of consanguinity. This would be taking a big risk, as he knew from experience. He preferred to keep her prisoner in one fortress or another until just before his death in 1189. Throughout this period, people often spoke about her, but certainly not to honour her, as do the dreamers of today, to extol her virtues or make her the first heroine of the feminist struggle or even of Occitanian independence, but rather to denounce her wickedness. She was talked about everywhere, and the Capetian episode remembered, because her behaviour had been a vivid demonstration of the terrifying powers with which nature had endowed women, who were lustful and treacherous. It had showed how the devil used them to spread discord and sin, which made it self-evidently essential to keep daughters under the strict control of their fathers and wives under that of their husbands, and to shut widows away in nunneries such as Fontevraud. At the end of the twelfth century, every man who knew how the duchess of Aquitaine had behaved saw in her the exemplar of what both tempted and disturbed him in femininity.

Eleanor's fate, in fact, differed little from that of the

women of high birth whom chance, by depriving them of a brother, had made heiresses to a lordship. Hopes of the power which they transmitted excited greed. Would-be husbands quarrelled over them, competing to gain a foothold in their house and exploit their patrimony until the sons they would give them came of age. They were, consequently, relentlessly married and remarried as long as they were capable of giving birth. Eleanor's story is exceptional only in the two events, the divorce and the rebellion, events whose chief interest is to have provoked, because she was a queen and involved in high politics, the flurry of written commentaries from which historians can learn something about the condition of women at that time, which normally eludes their investigations. We know very little about Eleanor; there is no portrait and there are, as I have said, nine and only nine testimonies of any length, which are, in the last analysis, pretty thin; yet we know a lot more about her than about most women of her time.

Like all girls, Eleanor, at thirteen, had reached the age to be married, and her father chose the man she had never seen to whom she was given. The latter came to the paternal home to collect her. After the wedding, he took her straight back to his own home and, as was then the custom in pious families, the marriage was consummated, during the course of the journey, only after a devout delay of three days. Like all wives, Eleanor lived in a state of constant anxiety at her continued childlessness. Like many others, she was dispensed with because she was too long in producing a male child. Since she came from a distant province, and since her speech and some of her manners were surprising, she was regarded as an intruder by her husband's family, constantly spied on and slandered. At Antioch, it is certain that her Uncle Raymond exploited her, if not sexually, at least politically. He was the only man in the family; he therefore exercised over her the power of a father. It may well be that he persuaded her to demand the separation from Louis on grounds of consanguinity with the intention of then marrying her himself, in pursuit of his own interests. In the great noble houses, where hordes of people milled about and privacy

was a rarity, there were always wives who succumbed to the approaches of their husband's seneschal. To all of them, in any case, the house poets, to please the husbands, dedicated their works, flattering the ladies with sycophantic praise, without, in actual fact, being their lovers. Women went from one pregnancy to another. This was what happened to Eleanor as soon as she was married to Henry Plantagenet. She had given Louis VII only two daughters; she provided Henry with three more daughters and five sons. Between her twenty-ninth and thirty-fourth years, impregnated every twelve months, she brought five children into the world. The rate then slackened. In 1165, she gave birth to the last of her children known to historians because they went to full term and, with one exception, survived beyond puberty. This was the tenth, in two decades. She was forty-one. Her reproductive capacity, like that of all the married women of her world, had been exploited to the full. Like them, after the menopause she assumed the role of matron, exploiting her power over her sons, tyrannizing her daughters-in-law, leaving her officials to administer her dower, planning the marriage of her granddaughters, who included Blanche of Castile, herself, in the next century, another impossible mother-in-law. Like all widows of her rank, she eventually withdrew to devote herself to a third husband, this one celestial, in the abbey on which her family had showered favours; she had done so herself during her lifetime, in order to purge her faults, for example after her divorce. The abbey was Fontevraud. William the Troubadour, her grandfather, had repeatedly mocked it, but he too, late in life, had bestowed gifts on it. Henry was already there, under the sod. She had escorted Richard's remains to it. There Eleanor lies, waiting for the Last Judgement.

What many people really thought of her in England can be seen from the way in which the chroniclers interpreted the tragic death of Henry II, in July 1189. How could God have let such a powerful sovereign die betrayed by all his legitimate sons, let him be carried naked to his tomb, stripped of everything by his servants, and allowed him to be buried in

the abbey of Fontevraud which he had not chosen for his tomb? Admittedly, he too had enriched it with donations, but because he longed with all his heart for Eleanor to take the veil there and finally cease to be a thorn in his side. In the book he wrote 'on the instruction of princes', Gerald of Wales said that God might have been punishing the murderer of Thomas Becket and the descendant of the fairy Melusine, daughter of Satan. He was certainly punishing Henry for the sins of his wife, chief among them bigamy. No one doubted that Eleanor was a bigamist, and doubly incestuous. Cousin of Henry Plantagenet in the same degree as the Capetian king, both of her two marriages were culpable. Henry had been a willing partner. God was exacting his revenge. But he was punishing him primarily for incest 'of the second type', the terrible sin he had committed under the baneful charms of Eleanor, instrument of the devil.

How some, and probably many, people viewed the duchess of Aquitaine in the courts of northern France can be seen from the long and racy romance that enjoyed such a huge success in the last decades of the twelfth century, the *Roman de Renart*. Who, listening to its account of the misfortunes of Isengrin, was not reminded of the marital problems that had beset Louis VII at Antioch, which people still laughed about thirty years later, deriding the husband who was 'so jealous that he thought he was always being cuckolded', whose mistake had been to wash his dirty linen in public, to have shamelessly 'execrated his wife', when 'that sort of thing was best kept quiet'? Who, throughout this scintillating, mocking story, could not think of Eleanor herself as they heard about the three ladies whose 'grapes' had been joyfully 'trodden' by that 'great fornicator', Reynard? First, Hermeline who, as soon as she thought she was rid of her husband, went off, 'hugging and kissing' the young man she had lined up as her new husband and new lord, whom she had chosen because she already knew that he 'did it very well'? And who, hearing about the queen, the wife of the lion, the proud Lady Fière, whom Reynard enjoyed one night when, furious with her husband, she was sleeping apart, did not remember the good fortune of Geoffrey Plantagenet when he visited the

French court? Was not Eleanor, too, scorning the advice of the wise ('Let God guard you from dishonour'), inclined to give her ring to young men in the hope that they would soon come 'for the love' promised by this pledge, 'to talk to her privately and discreetly'? And did not the poet, exploiting the persistence of the scandal, make sure that his listeners recognized Queen Eleanor in the features of Hersent the adulteress, Hersent the temptress, the wily one, reproaching the gallants from the bed on which she had just given birth for being too fearful of her husband's anger, for not visiting her as often as she wanted in her room, and, obligingly, readily indulging in all the pleasures of the game? For Hersent, this game was almost her reason for living, and she left Isengrin, her husband, when he revealed that he was no longer a man: 'since he can't do it, what use is he to me?'; Hersent was a 'whore', who, 'having one husband took another' – in other words she was a bigamist.

The thoughts of anyone who heard Eleanor mentioned at this period turned to sex, which was the principal theme of *Renart* in the most scintillating of its social critique. Eleanor-Hermeline, Eleanor-Fière, Eleanor-Hersent, this woman was the incarnation of lust and 'lechery'. She thought of nothing else, and, basically, men connived, since for them woman was a plaything, all the more attractive if she was consumed by desire. But what was important was that she respected the rules of the game behind which sex was concealed; that things happened discreetly, without fuss and without violence. And without complaints: the man who was criticized was Louis VII, who, incapable of himself slaking the passions of his partner, had the bad taste to be jealous. Reynard, on the other hand, was forgiven because he loved, and for his expertise in love – courtly love, of course. When a lady responded to their advances, and accepted their 'love', men were justified in pursuing her and in taking her. Eleanor was an excellent excuse. Her supposed behaviour justified every excess and one might make free with her in spite of her marriage. This is probably why Andrew the Chaplain put her in his *Treatise on Love*, another burlesque, seated in the middle of a court of love, in the role of imaginary and risible

legislator for the rules of courtesy. It is unfortunate that such jokes, like the bombastic eulogies of the troubadours, have been, and are still today, taken seriously. Should one celebrate Eleanor's virtues? Or should one mock or wax indignant at her faults? For my part, I am inclined, rather, to pity her.

2

Mary Magdalen

In the middle of the twelfth century, a little book was written for the use of pilgrims to St James of Compostella. It was not unlike the tourist brochures distributed by travel agencies today; for the four routes that traversed the kingdom of France and merged to cross the Pyrenees, it noted which sanctuaries were worth a visit, even a detour, because they sheltered other saints as powerful, or almost, as the apostle James; of this, the miracles which occurred near their tomb were proof. Among these healers and protectors were two women, St Faith and St Mary Magdalen; the former lay at Conques, the latter at Vézelay.

Vézelay was then a key point in the network of devout pilgrimages. One of the four 'routes of St James' started from it, and St Bernard chose to preach the second crusade in this busy spot at about the same time that the *Pilgrim's Guide* was produced. The *Guide* briefly praised the town's attractions. These included, it said, 'an imposing and very beautiful basilica'; this was the church, then nearly complete, which we still marvel at today. It was the scene of splendid festivities on 22 July, because it contained 'the very holy body of the blessed Mary Magdalen', of 'that glorious Mary who . . . washed with her tears the feet of the Lord . . . for which her many sins were forgiven her because she so loved him who loved all men, Jesus, her redeemer'. Among other good deeds,