adapted into prose, is intimately bound up with the appearance of the first prose romances, which were Grail romances based in many ways on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, as we will see in the following chapter.

Both the traditional verse romances and the new prose romances of the thirteenth century thus owe a great deal, in different ways, to the work of Chrétien.

**The Many Paths of Adventure**

While Chrétien was still alive, his colleague and rival Gautier d'Arras reproached both him, without naming him, and other amateurs of the Breton marvelous with telling incredible stories that made those who heard them think they were dreaming rather than awake. This was the beginning of a reaction against Chrétien's influence, a reaction often, but incorrectly, termed "realist." The romancers who reacted against Chrétien's influence did not in any way contest his essential contribution. Like him, they implicitly admitted the fictive nature of romance and made no claim whatsoever to historical or referential truth. Their concept of verisimilitude was simply a little different from his and they preferred to avoid the mythical mists of the Arthurian world. The action of *Ille et Galeron* (*Ille and Galeron*), Gautier's first romance, moves from Brittany to Rome; his second romance, *Eracle*, is something between a romance of antiquity and a saint's life, since the model for his hero is the Byzantine emperor Heraklios and the romance's second part is based on the legend of the discovery of the Holy Cross. Jean Renart, who, like Gautier, delivers a polemical elegy of verisimilitude in his first romance, *L'Escoufle* (*The Kite*, around 1200), is otherwise entirely unlike him. A brilliant stylist, a malicious and subtle mind, able to disconcert without seeming to and to overturn the commonplaces he feigned to use, he could do a great deal with nothing and took pleasure in generic settings, depicting with grace and humor scenes that only appear to be quotidian. In his *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* (*Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume of Dole*, around 1212 or 1228, according to different scholars), he was the first to insert lyric pieces in a romance, a technique that subsequently enjoyed great success throughout the rest of the Middle Ages and one whose interest and function he explains with evident pride in



the prologue. He was quickly imitated, in this and other ways, by Gerbert de Montreuil in his *Roman de la Violette ou de Gérard de Nevers* (*Romance of the Violet or of Gerard of Nevers*), while at the end of the century, Jakemes's *Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel* (*Romance of the Chatelain of Coucy and the Lady of Fayel*) cites poems by the twelfth-century trouvère known as the Châtelain de Coucy, who is also the hero of the romance.

Jean Renart is likewise the author of a sort of courtly short story, the delightful *Lai de l'ombre* (*Lay of the Shadow*). This poem is not altogether unique. Certain other poems, like *La châtelaine de Vergi* (*The Chatelaine of Vergi*), *Le vair palefroi* (*The Dappled Palfrey*) of Huon le Roi, and, later, the *Dit du prunier* (*Poem of the Plum Tree*), use the pretext of a very simple intrigue to offer a reflection—or a shadow—of courtly life, of a refinement of manners and feelings they do not feel obliged to transport to the distant Breton universe and dress up in Arthurian accessories. These tales reveal that the elegance one finds in the works of Chrétien also inhabits the contemporary world.

But there is a host of other romances that, without giving any thought to verisimilitude or seeking the bareness of an elegant brevity, simply give themselves up to a passion for adventures in other frameworks and according to other conventions than those of the Arthurian world, like *Ipomedon* and *Protheselaus* by the Norman clerk Hue de Rothelande, who was roughly a contemporary of Chrétien and wrote with a ready pen and a somewhat cynical smuttiness. Or all the romances whose action takes place in the Mediterranean basin, either because they remain faithful to antiquity—for their setting if not for their sources—like *Athis et Prophilias* (*Athis and Prophilias*) and *Florimont*, or because they prolong the Alexandrian tradition of stories of separated lovers who travel the world over in search of one another, like *Floire et Blancheflor* (*Floire and Blancheflor*) or, to some degree, *Partonopeus de Blois* (*Partonopeus of Blois*), in which the fairy mistress plays an interesting role. In the thirteenth century, these diverse romances of adventure, nourished with various leftovers, with borrowings from folklore and myth, with diverse phantasms—like the incest in Philippe de Remi's *La Manekine* (*The Manikin*), in Jehan Maillart's *Roman du comte d'Anjou* (*Romance of the Count of Anjou*), in the *Roman de la*

*Belle Hélène de Constantinople* (*Romance of Beautiful Helen of Constantinople*), in the updated version of the old *Roman d'Apollonius de Tyr* (*Romance of Apollonius of Tyr*)—these romances are as numerous as the Arthurian verse romances. Adapted into prose, many of them—some of those cited above, but also *Blancandin*, Adenet le Roi's *Cléomadès*, and many others—enjoyed a certain success right through to the end of the Middle Ages . . . at which point we will return to them.

# PART THREE
# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LITERATURE

The fertile and original development of French literature that began in the twelfth century does not seem to have continued with the same vigor after the first third of the thirteenth century. The principal literary forms were in place by then and, from our perspective, they seem to have been simply maintained, and sometimes exhausted, rather than renewed. Although it is not entirely false, this impression should not prevent us from grasping the importance of the thirteenth century.

The thirteenth century was critical, assimilating and organizing the achievements and acquisitions of the preceding century in all domains of intellectual life. It was the age of encyclopedias—*specula*, or "mirrors," as they were then called—and of *summae*, or "compendiums." The *Summa theologica* of Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, is a synthesis of a body of theological reflection that had been developing with an extreme, but sometimes disorganized and, in the eyes of the Church, even dangerous, vigor since the end of the eleventh century. The triple "mirror"—the *Speculum naturale, doctrinale, historiale* (*The Natural, Doctrinal, and Historical Mirror*)—of Vincent of Beauvais, another Dominican, is a monument of erudition which sought to bring together all the knowledge of its time. Universities appeared during this period and, developing rapidly, undertook to organize and disseminate this knowledge. In the domain of literature there was also an effort toward organization and reflection, and French literature began timidly to admit of intellectual speculation.

Because of the conditions underlying its diffusion and practice, literature did not really merit its name, from the word *letters*, until the thirteenth century. It was then that the circulation of texts was truly developed and organized. Twelfth-century French literary manuscripts are rare and the works of that period are known to us principally through manuscripts copied