PREFACE

FOR A LANDHOLDER, FAMILY MAN, and professional administrator, Philippe de Remi (ca. 1205/1210–65) had an unusual hobby: he wrote poems, songs, and long verse narratives. Not merely lettered, but literate in the genres in vogue, he paid to well-known authors (especially Chrétien de Troyes) the compliment of both reading them and borrowing from them. Yet he had an independent streak, which his amateur status permitted him to indulge: to improbable acts and mysterious otherworldly settings he preferred the quotidian and the psychologically "true." Courtly conventions are now respected, now revised, and sometimes flatly refuted as Philippe opens his horizon to all strata of society, from kings and princesses to sailors and fishermen. His broad sympathies are linked to a firm sense of common humanity and that, in turn, to a moral system endorsed by most characters in the stories and by the author himself in his prologues and epilogues.

Philippe's initial foray into literary composition was *Le Roman de la Manekine*, in 8,590 verses. It interweaves several widely known themes: the sovereign in need of a male heir, the father bent on wedding his own daughter, the girl's self-mutilation to escape a forced marriage, the beautiful fugitive found and wedded by a king, the jealous and murderous mother-in-law, the substitution of letters announcing the birth of a child and then giving the father's reply, the resultant separation of the spouses, the husband's search for his lost wife, the reunion of the couple through divine intervention and the identification of a ring, the repentance of the father and his rediscovery of his daughter, the restoration of the severed hand as a sign of healing and reconciliation. Joy is the name of the princess; she loses it to be nicknamed "the Maimed One" and in the end, no longer maimed, becomes Joy again. This adventure romance with hagiographical overtones centers on a young heroine of strong will, firm principles, and great charity and integrity.

Jehan et Blonde, true to its title, is the story in 6,262 lines of two young people who fall in love; they eventually marry in spite of everything. "Everything" includes, as initial obstacle, a considerable difference in rank,

and origin as well, for he is the eldest son of an impoverished French knight while she is the heiress of the Earl of Oxford. John, restive at home and seeking employment in England, becomes Blonde's squire and French tutor, and later her lovesick admirer, so sick that he all but literalizes the courtly topos of dying for love before Blonde relents, tardily appreciates his innate qualities, casts aside her notions about rank and wealth, and returns his affection. Thereafter they are inhibited by fear of Blonde's parents and of a possible pregnancy. John must return home on family business, but reappears on the day set, and the lovers elope. By now Blonde has been promised to the ridiculous Earl of Gloucester, who hotly pursues the fleeing pair. His retainers detect them in Dover; an unequal battle ensues, during which John, aided by his faithful valet and a friendly sea captain and his crew, fight off the Earl's men and narrowly escape. Arriving at John's home, the lovers marry immediately. The King of France approves of the match and of John's heroics, makes him a count, and reconciles him and his bride with the latter's father. All converge on Dammartin for the splendid knighting ceremony of John and his three brothers. The new count and countess do much good in their region and are greatly beloved.

In a very different social register, "The Tale of Foolish Generosity" echoes the moral of *Jehan et Blonde*: work diligently, be prudent, help those in real need. A goodman makes his living by going to the sea and fetching salt to sell. He marries; his idle bride ingratiates herself with her crafty neighbors by giving away the merchandise; she also blames her husband for bringing back small loads. The salter, realizing what is going on, invites her to accompany him on his next trip: it will be a pleasant change of scene for her, and for him a little help with his burden. The trip out is agreeable, but the return is another story, and by the time they get home at midnight the young woman's ideas about her man's occupation have changed drastically. She at last appreciates the realities of his hard labor. Declining his invitation to go again for salt, she undertakes to present a different attitude to her neighbors: no money, no salt. The money is forthcoming, and the salter and his wife soon buy two horses and a cart and expand their clientele, all the while enjoying their neighbors' respect. In the epilogue the author cautions against idleness and imprudence and promotes a fitting use of one's worldly goods.

These three verse narratives all bear the imprint of a single consciousness. Philippe was much interested in people, throughout the social spectrum, interested in their motivation and their inner life even more than in their actions. In both his romances he attributes interior monologues to his characters. Granted, this was a resource of much medieval narrative and the

conflicts between, for example, Love and Reason in *Manekine* and Love and attendant powers allied against their opposites—a whole *psychomachia*—in *Jehan et Blonde* have a long prehistory. Still, Philippe can go well beyond convention. The uncertainties, the vacillations between hope and despair, trust and doubt, that plague both John and Blonde during their yearlong separation, have a ring of truth, especially when the appointed day and very hour are at hand and all is to be won or lost forever. Philippe's sympathies are clearly with young lovers and those who aid them; but even the incestuous father in the first romance repents, begs his injured daughter's pardon, and is reconciled with her; the matchmaking father in the second romance is quite ignorant that his daughter's heart belongs to her squire, but at last guessing the truth, refuses to join the spurned noble fiancé in pursuing her. Even the fiancé is, if dangerous, in the end ineffectual and rendered harmless. The salter's wife is not wicked, only young and heedless—and teachable. In fact, in all this narrative corpus there is only one thoroughly evil person, Joy's mother-in-law, who dies in her prison.

The aim of the English prose translation here offered is to make this attractive body of work accessible to readers interested in medieval romance and tale but not familiar with Old French.