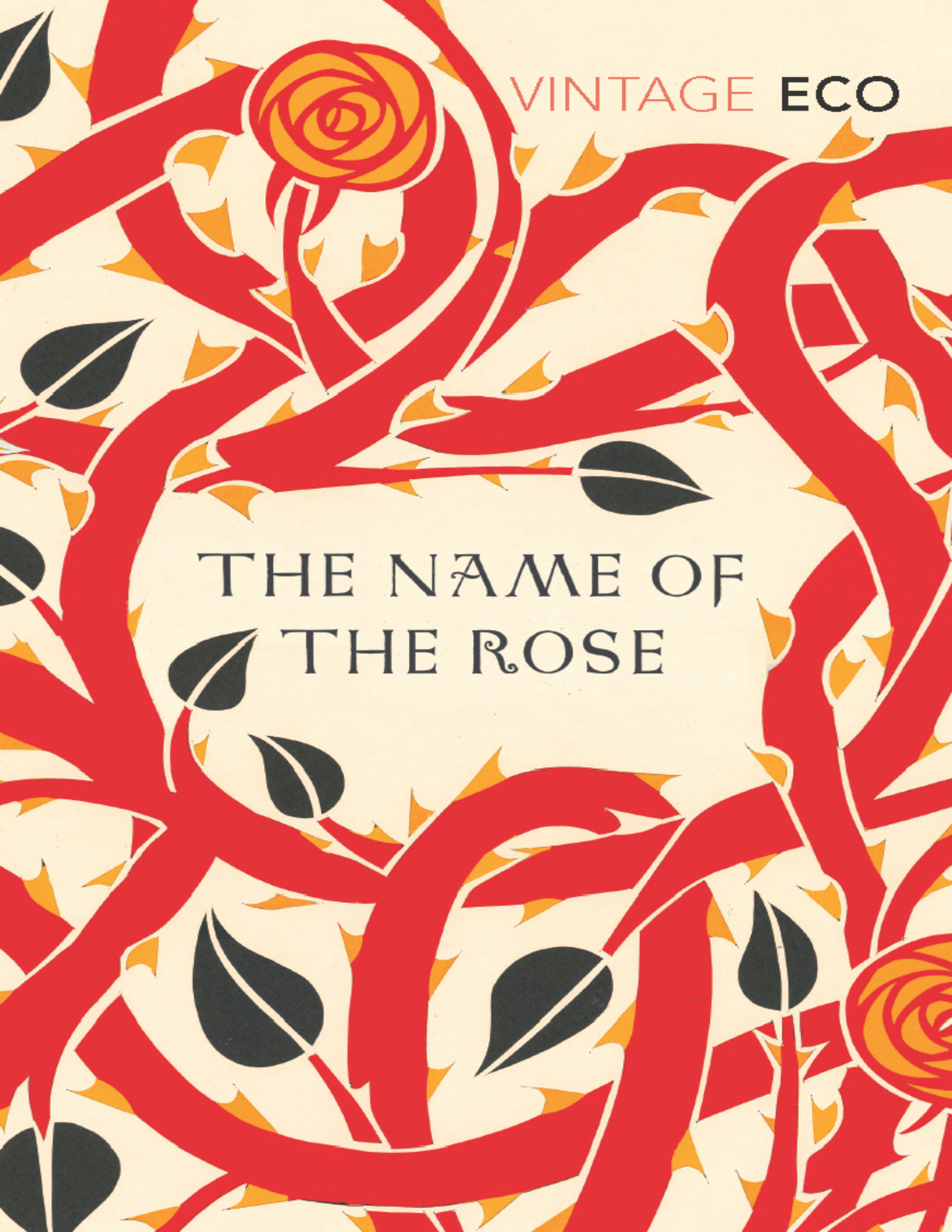

VINTAGE ECO
THE NAME OF THE ROSE

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Contents

About the Book

The year is 1327. Franciscans in a wealthy Italian abbey are suspected of heresy, and Brother William of Baskerville arrives to investigate. When his delicate mission is suddenly overshadowed by seven bizarre deaths, Brother William turns detective. He collects evidence, deciphers secret symbols and coded manuscripts, and digs into the eerie labyrinth of the abbey, where extraordinary things are happening under the cover of night. A spectacular popular and critical success *The Name of the Rose* is not only a narrative of a murder investigation but an astonishing chronicle of the Middle Ages.

About the Author

Umberto Eco is the author of five bestselling novels, *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, *The Island of the Day Before*, *Baudolino* and, most recently, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. His collections of essays include *Five Moral Pieces*, *Kant and the Platypus*, *Serendipities*, *Travels in Hyperreality*, and *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays*. He is also the author of *On Beauty* and *On Ugliness*. A Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna, Umberto Eco lives in Italy.

ALSO BY UMBERTO ECO

How to Travel with a Salmon
Misreadings
Foucault's Pendulum
Faith in Fakes
Reflections on The Name of the Rose
The Island of the Day Before
Kant and the Platypus
Baudolino
The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana
The Prague Cemetery

FOR CHILDREN, WITH EUGENIO CARMI

The Bomb and the General
The Three Astronauts

UMBERTO ECO

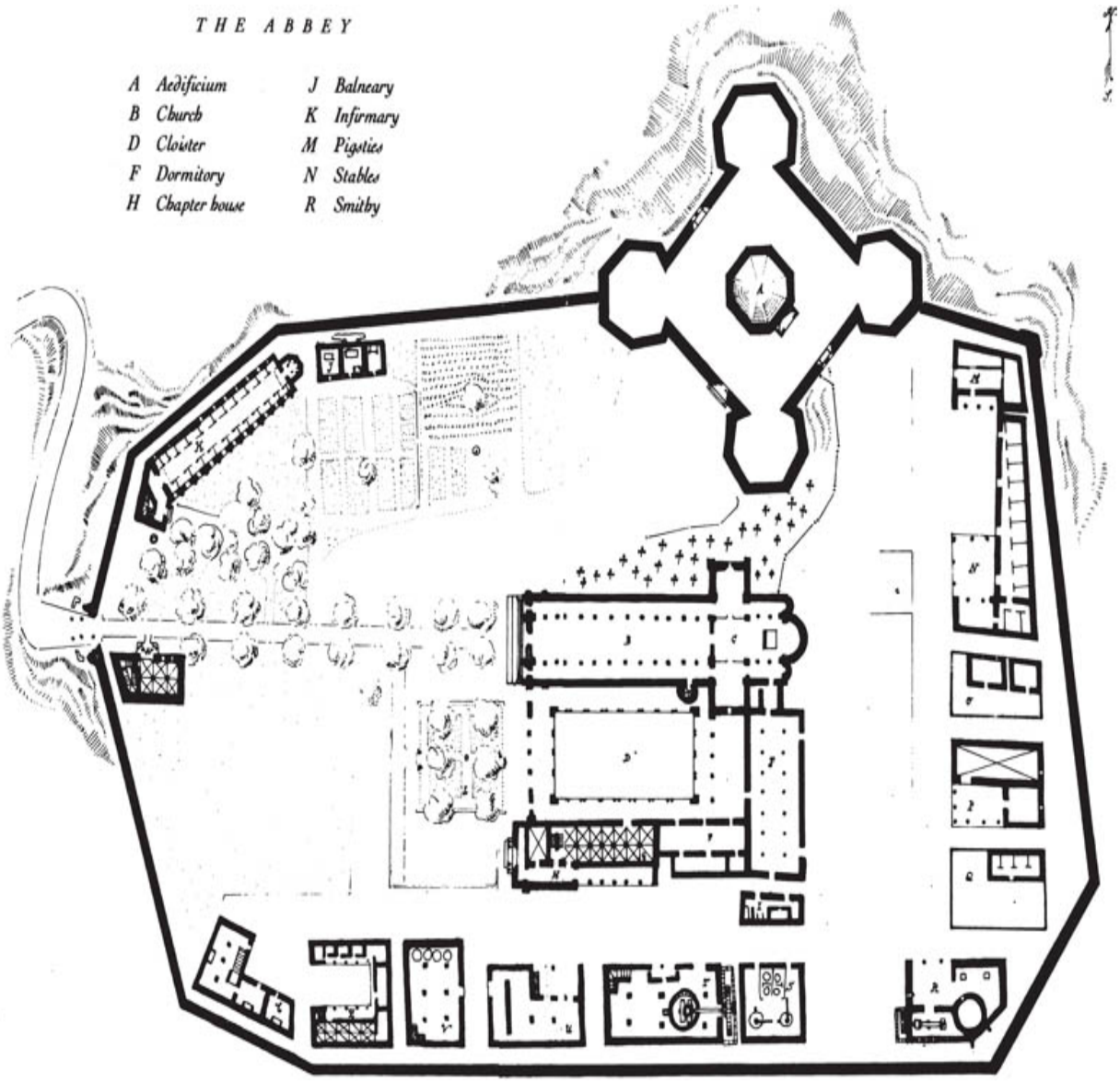
The Name of the Rose

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

NATURALLY, A MANUSCRIPT

THE ABBEY

A Aedificium
B Church
D Cloister
F Dormitory
H Chapter house
J Balneary
K Infirmary
M Pigsties
N Stables
R Smithy



ON AUGUST 16, 1968, I was handed a book written by a certain Abbé Vallet, *Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d'après l'édition de Dom J. Mabillon* (Aux Presses de l'Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842). Supplemented by historical information that was actually quite scant, the book claimed to reproduce faithfully a fourteenth-century manuscript that, in its turn, had been found in the monastery of Melk by the great eighteenth-century man of learning, to whom we owe so much information about the history of the Benedictine order. The scholarly discovery (I mean mine, the third in chronological order) entertained me while I was in Prague, waiting for a dear friend. Six days later Soviet troops invaded that unhappy city. I managed, not without adventure, to reach the Austrian border at Linz, and from there I journeyed to Vienna, where I met my beloved, and together we sailed up the Danube.

In a state of intellectual excitement, I read with fascination the terrible story of Adso of Melk, and I allowed myself to be so absorbed by it that, almost in a single burst of energy, I completed a translation, using some of those large notebooks from the Papeterie Joseph Gibert in which it is so pleasant to write if you use a felt-tip pen. And as I was writing, we reached the vicinity of Melk, where, perched over a bend in the river, the handsome Stift stands to this day, after several restorations during the course of the centuries. As the reader must have guessed, in the monastery library I found no trace of Adso's manuscript.

Before we reached Salzburg, one tragic night in a little hotel on the shores of the Mondsee, my traveling-companionship was abruptly interrupted, and the person with whom I was traveling disappeared—taking Abbé Vallet's book, not out of spite, but because of the abrupt and untidy way in which our relationship ended. And so I was left with a number of manuscript notebooks in my hand, and a great emptiness in my heart.

A few months later, in Paris, I decided to get to the bottom of my research. Among the few pieces of information I had derived from the French book, I still had the reference to its source, exceptionally detailed and precise:

> *Vetera analecta*, sive *collectio veterum aliquot opera* & opusculorum omnis generis, carminum, epistolarum, diplomaton, epitaphiorum, &, *cum itinere germanico*, adaptationibus & aliquot disquisitionibus R.P.D. Joannis Mabillon, Presbiteri ac Monachi Ord. Sancti Benedicti e Congregatione S. Mauri—*Nova Editio* cui accessere *Mabilonii* vita & aliquot opuscula, scilicet Dissertatio de *Pane Eucharistico, Azymo et Fermentatio* ad Eminentiss. Cardinalem *Bona*. Subiungitur opusculum *Eldefonsi* Hispaniensis Episcopi de eodem argumentum *Et Eusebii* Romani ad *Theophilum* Gallum epistola, *De cultu sanctorum ignotorum*, Parisiis, apud Levesque, ad Pontem S. Michaelis, MDCCXXI, cum privilegio Regis.

I quickly found the *Vetera analecta* at the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, but to my great surprise the edition I came upon differed from the description in two details: first, the publisher, who was given here as "Montalant, ad Ripam P.P. Augustinianorum (prope Pontem S. Michaelis)," and also the date, which was two years later. I needn't add that these analecta did not comprehend any manuscript of Adso or Adson of Melk; on the contrary, as anyone

interested can check, they are a collection of brief or medium-length texts, whereas the story transcribed by Vallet ran to several hundred pages. At the same time, I consulted illustrious medievalists such as the dear and unforgettable Étienne Gilson, but it was evident that the only *Vetera analecta* were those I had seen at Sainte Geneviève. A quick trip to the Abbaye de la Source, in the vicinity of Passy, and a conversation with my friend Dom Arne Lahnestedt further convinced me that no Abbé Vallet had published books on the abbey's presses (for that matter, nonexistent). French scholars are notoriously careless about furnishing reliable bibliographical information, but this case went beyond all reasonable pessimism. I began to think I had encountered a forgery. By now the Vallet volume itself could not be recovered (or at least I didn't dare go and ask it back from the person who had taken it from me). I had only my notes left, and I was beginning to have doubts about them.

There are magic moments, involving great physical fatigue and intense motor excitement, that produce visions of people known in the past ("en me retraçant ces détails, j'en suis à me demander s'ils sont réels, ou bien si je les ai rêvés"). As I learned later from the delightful little book of the Abbé de Bucquoy, there are also visions of books as yet unwritten.

If something new had not occurred, I would still be wondering where the story of Adso of Melk originated; but then, in 1970, in Buenos Aires, as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess*. It was an Italian translation of the original, which, now impossible to find, was in Georgian (Tbilisi, 1934); and here, to my great surprise, I read copious quotations from Adso's manuscript, though the source was neither Vallet

nor Mabillon; it was Father Athanasius Kircher (but which work?). A scholar—whom I prefer not to name—later assured me that (and he quoted indexes from memory) the great Jesuit never mentioned Adso of Melk. But Temesvar's pages were before my eyes, and the episodes he cited were the same as those of the Vallet manuscript (the description of the labyrinth in particular left no room for doubt).

I concluded that Adso's memoirs appropriately share the nature of the events he narrates: shrouded in many, shadowy mysteries, beginning with the identity of the author and ending with the abbey's location, about which Adso is stubbornly, scrupulously silent. Conjecture allows us to designate a vague area between Pomposa and Conques, with reasonable likelihood that the community was somewhere along the central ridge of the Apennines, between Piedmont, Liguria, and France. As for the period in which the events described take place, we are at the end of November 1327; the date of the author's writing, on the other hand, is uncertain. Inasmuch as he describes himself as a novice in 1327 and says he is close to death as he writes his memoirs, we can calculate roughly that the manuscript was written in the last or next-to-last decade of the fourteenth century.

On sober reflection, I find few reasons for publishing my Italian version of an obscure, neo-Gothic French version of a seventeenth-century Latin edition of a work written in Latin by a German monk toward the end of the fourteenth century.

First of all, what style should I employ? The temptation to follow Italian models of the period had to be rejected as totally unjustified: not only does Adso write in Latin, but it is also clear from the whole development of the text that his culture (or the culture of the abbey, which clearly influences him) dates back even further; it is manifestly a summation, over several centuries, of learning and stylistic quirks that can be linked with the late-medieval Latin

tradition. Adso thinks and writes like a monk who has remained impervious to the revolution of the vernacular, still bound to the pages housed in the library he tells about, educated on patristic-scholastic texts; and his story (apart from the fourteenth-century references and events, which Adso reports with countless perplexities and always by hearsay) could have been written, as far as the language and the learned quotations go, in the twelfth or thirteenth century.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that, in translating Adso's Latin into his own neo-Gothic French, Vallet took some liberties, and not only stylistic liberties. For example, the characters speak sometimes of the properties of herbs, clearly referring to the book of secrets attributed to Albertus Magnus, which underwent countless revisions over the centuries. It is certain that Adso knew the work, but the fact remains that passages he quotes from it echo too literally both formulas of Paracelsus and obvious interpolations from an edition of Albertus unquestionably dating from the Tudor period.[1] However, I discovered later that during the time when Vallet was transcribing (?) the manuscript of Adso, there was circulating in Paris an eighteenth-century edition of the *Grand* and the *Petit Albert*,[2] now irreparably corrupt. In any case, how could I be sure that the text known to Adso or the monks whose discussions he recorded did not also contain, among glosses, scholia, and various appendices, annotations that would go on to enrich subsequent scholarship?

Finally, was I to retain in Latin the passages that Abbé Vallet himself did not feel it opportune to translate, perhaps to preserve the ambience of the period? There were no particular reasons to do so, except a perhaps misplaced sense of fidelity to my source…. I have eliminated excesses, but I have retained a certain amount. And I fear that I have imitated those bad novelists who, introducing a French

character, make him exclaim “Parbleu!” and “La femme, ah! la femme!”

In short, I am full of doubts. I really don’t know why I have decided to pluck up my courage and present, as if it were authentic, the manuscript of Adso of Melk. Let us say it is an act of love. Or, if you like, a way of ridding myself of numerous, persistent obsessions.

I transcribe my text with no concern for timeliness. In the years when I discovered the Abbé Vallet volume, there was a widespread conviction that one should write only out of a commitment to the present, in order to change the world. Now, after ten years or more, the man of letters (restored to his loftiest dignity) can happily write out of pure love of writing. And so I now feel free to tell, for sheer narrative pleasure, the story of Adso of Melk, and I am comforted and consoled in finding it immeasurably remote in time (now that the waking of reason has dispelled all the monsters that its sleep had generated), gloriously lacking in any relevance for our day, atemporally alien to our hopes and our certainties.

For it is a tale of books, not of everyday worries, and reading it can lead us to recite, with à Kempis, the great imitator: “In omnibus requiem quaesivi, et nusquam inveni nisi in angulo cum libro.”

January 5, 1980

[1] *Liber aggregationis seu liber secretorum Alberti Magni*, Londinium, juxta pontem qui vulgariter dicitur Flete brigge, MCCCCLXXXV.

[2] *Les Admirables Secrets d’Albert le Grand*, A Lyon, Chez les Héritiers Beringos, Fratres, à l’Enseigne d’Agrippa, MDCCLXXV; *Secrets merveilleux de la magie naturelle et cabalistique du petit Albert*, A Lyon, Chez les Héritiers Beringos, Fratres, à l’Enseigne d’Agrippa, MDCCXXIX.

PROLOGUE

IN THE BEGINNING was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This was beginning with God and the duty of every faithful monk would be to repeat every day with chanting humility the one never-changing event whose incontrovertible truth can be asserted. But we see now through a glass darkly, and the truth, before it is revealed to all, face to face, we see in fragments (alas, how illegible) in the error of the world, so we must spell out its faithful signals even when they seem obscure to us and as if amalgamated with a will wholly bent on evil.

Having reached the end of my poor sinner's life, my hair now white, I grow old as the world does, waiting to be lost in the bottomless pit of silent and deserted divinity, sharing in the light of angelic intelligences; confined now with my heavy, ailing body in this cell in the dear monastery of Melk, I prepare to leave on this parchment my testimony as to the wondrous and terrible events that I happened to observe in my youth, now repeating verbatim all I saw and heard, without venturing to seek a design, as if to leave to those who will come after (if the Antichrist has not come first) signs of signs, so that the prayer of deciphering may be exercised on them.

May the Lord grant me the grace to be the transparent witness of the happenings that took place in the abbey whose name it is only right and pious now to omit, toward the end of the year of our Lord 1327, when the Emperor Louis came down into Italy to restore the dignity of the Holy Roman Empire, in keeping with the designs of the Almighty and to the confusion of the wicked usurper,

simoniac, and heresiarch who in Avignon brought shame on the holy name of the apostle (I refer to the sinful soul of Jacques of Cahors, whom the impious revered as John XXII).

Perhaps, to make more comprehensible the events in which I found myself involved, I should recall what was happening in those last years of the century, as I understood it then, living through it, and as I remember it now, complemented by other stories I heard afterward—if my memory still proves capable of connecting the threads of happenings so many and confused.

In the early years of that century Pope Clement V had moved the apostolic seat to Avignon, leaving Rome prey to the ambitions of the local overlords: and gradually the holy city of Christianity had been transformed into a circus, or into a brothel, riven by the struggles among its leaders; though called a republic, it was not one, and it was assailed by armed bands, subjected to violence and looting. Ecclesiastics, eluding secular jurisdiction, commanded groups of malefactors and robbed, sword in hand, transgressing and organizing evil commerce. How was it possible to prevent the Caput Mundi from becoming again, and rightly, the goal of the man who wanted to assume the crown of the Holy Roman Empire and restore the dignity of that temporal dominion that had belonged to the Caesars?

Thus in 1314 five German princes in Frankfurt elected Louis the Bavarian supreme ruler of the empire. But that same day, on the opposite shore of the Main, the Count Palatine of the Rhine and the Archbishop of Cologne elected Frederick of Austria to the same high rank. Two emperors for a single throne and a single pope for two: a situation that, truly, fomented great disorder….

Two years later, in Avignon, the new Pope was elected, Jacques of Cahors, an old man of seventy-two who took, as I have said, the name of John XXII, and heaven grant that no pontiff take again a name now so distasteful to the

righteous. A Frenchman, devoted to the King of France (the men of that corrupt land are always inclined to foster the interests of their own people, and are unable to look upon the whole world as their spiritual home), he had supported Philip the Fair against the Knights Templars, whom the King accused (I believe unjustly) of the most shameful crimes so that he could seize their possessions with the complicity of that renegade ecclesiastic.

In 1322 Louis the Bavarian defeated his rival Frederick. Fearing a single emperor even more than he had feared two, John excommunicated the victor, who in return denounced the Pope as a heretic. I must also recall how, that very year, the chapter of the Franciscans was convened in Perugia, and the minister general, Michael of Cesena, accepting the entreaties of the Spirituals (of whom I will have occasion to speak), proclaimed as a matter of faith and doctrine the poverty of Christ, who, if he owned something with his apostles, possessed it only as usus facti. A worthy resolution, meant to safeguard the virtue and purity of the order, it highly displeased the Pope, who perhaps discerned in it a principle that would jeopardize the very claims that he, as head of the church, had made, denying the empire the right to elect bishops, and asserting on the contrary that the papal throne had the right to invest the emperor. Moved by these or other reasons, John condemned the Franciscan propositions in 1323 with the decretal *Cum inter nonnullos*.

It was at this point, I imagine, that Louis saw the Franciscans, now the Pope’s enemies, as his potential allies. By affirming the poverty of Christ, they were somehow strengthening the ideas of the imperial theologians, namely Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun. And finally, not many months before the events I am narrating, Louis came to an agreement with the defeated Frederick, descended into Italy, and was crowned in Milan.

This was the situation when I—a young Benedictine novice in the monastery of Melk—was removed from the peace of the cloister by my father, fighting in Louis's train, not least among his barons. He thought it wise to take me with him so that I might know the wonders of Italy and be present when the Emperor was crowned in Rome. But the siege of Pisa then absorbed him in military concerns. Left to myself, I roamed among the cities of Tuscany, partly out of idleness and partly out of a desire to learn. But this undisciplined freedom, my parents thought, was not suitable for an adolescent devoted to a contemplative life. And on the advice of Marsilius, who had taken a liking to me, they decided to place me under the direction of a learned Franciscan, Brother William of Baskerville, about to undertake a mission that would lead him to famous cities and ancient abbeys. Thus I became William's scribe and disciple at the same time, nor did I ever regret it, because with him I was witness to events worthy of being handed down, as I am now doing, to those who will come after us.

I did not then know what Brother William was seeking, and to tell the truth, I still do not know today, and I presume he himself did not know, moved as he was solely by the desire for truth, and by the suspicion—which I could see he always harbored—that the truth was not what was appearing to him at any given moment. And perhaps during those years he had been distracted from his beloved studies by secular duties. The mission with which William had been charged remained unknown to me while we were on our journey, or, rather, he never spoke to me about it. It was only by overhearing bits of his conversations with the abbots of the monasteries where we stopped along the way that I formed some idea of the nature of this assignment. But I did not understand it fully until we reached our destination, as I will tell presently. Our destination was to

the north, but our journey did not follow a straight line, and we rested at various abbeys. Thus it happened that we turned westward when our final goal was to the east, almost following the line of mountains that from Pisa leads in the direction of the pilgrim's way to Santiago, pausing in a place which the terrible events that took place there dissuade me from identifying more closely now, but whose lords were liege to the empire, and where the abbots of our order, all in agreement, opposed the heretical, corrupt Pope. Our journey lasted two weeks, amid various vicissitudes, and during that time I had the opportunity to know (never enough, I remain convinced) my new master.

In the pages to follow I shall not indulge in descriptions of persons—except when a facial expression, or a gesture, appears as a sign of a mute but eloquent language—because, as Boethius says, nothing is more fleeting than external form, which withers and alters like the flowers of the field at the appearance of autumn; and what would be the point of saying today that the abbot Abo had a stern eye and pale cheeks, when by now he and those around him are dust and their bodies have the mortal grayness of dust (only their souls, God grant, shining with a light that will never be extinguished)? But I would like to describe William at least once, because his singular features struck me, and it is characteristic of the young to become bound to an older and wiser man not only by the spell of his words and the sharpness of his mind, but also by the superficial form of his body, which proves very dear, like the figure of a father, whose gestures we study and whose frowns, whose smile we observe—without a shadow of lust to pollute this form (perhaps the only that is truly pure) of corporal love.

In the past men were handsome and great (now they are children and dwarfs), but this is merely one of the many facts that demonstrate the disaster of an aging world. The young no longer want to study anything, learning is in decline, the whole world walks on its head, blind men lead

others equally blind and cause them to plunge into the abyss, birds leave the nest before they can fly, the jackass plays the lyre, oxen dance. Mary no longer loves the contemplative life and Martha no longer loves the active life, Leah is sterile, Rachel has a carnal eye, Cato visits brothels, Lucretius becomes a woman. Everything is on the wrong path. In those days, thank God, I acquired from my master the desire to learn and a sense of the straight way, which remains even when the path is tortuous.

Brother William's physical appearance was at that time such as to attract the attention of the most inattentive observer. His height surpassed that of a normal man and he was so thin that he seemed still taller. His eyes were sharp and penetrating; his thin and slightly beaky nose gave his countenance the expression of a man on the lookout, save in certain moments of sluggishness of which I shall speak. His chin also denoted a firm will, though the long face covered with freckles—such as I often saw among those born between Hibernia and Northumbria—could occasionally express hesitation and puzzlement. In time I realized that what seemed a lack of confidence was only curiosity, but at the beginning I knew little of this virtue, which I thought, rather, a passion of the covetous spirit. I believed instead that the rational spirit should not indulge such passion, but feed only on the Truth, which (I thought) one knows from the outset.

Boy that I was, I was first, and most deeply, struck by some clumps of yellowish hair that protruded from his ears, and by his thick blond eyebrows. He had perhaps seen fifty springs and was therefore already very old, but his tireless body moved with an agility I myself often lacked. His energy seemed inexhaustible when a burst of activity overwhelmed him. But from time to time, as if his vital spirit had something of the crayfish, he moved backward in

moments of inertia, and I watched him lie for hours on my pallet in my cell, uttering barely a few monosyllables, without contracting a single muscle of his face. On those occasions a vacant, absent expression appeared in his eyes, and I would have suspected he was in the power of some vegetal substance capable of producing visions if the obvious temperance of his life had not led me to reject this thought. I will not deny, however, that in the course of the journey, he sometimes stopped at the edge of a meadow, at the entrance to a forest, to gather some herb (always the same one, I believe): and he would then chew it with an absorbed look. He kept some of it with him, and ate it in the moments of greatest tension (and we had a number of them at the abbey!). Once, when I asked him what it was, he said laughing that a good Christian can sometimes learn also from the infidels, and when I asked him to let me taste it, he replied that herbs that are good for an old Franciscan are not good for a young Benedictine.

During our time together we did not have occasion to lead a very regular life: even at the abbey we remained up at night and collapsed wearily during the day, nor did we take part regularly in the holy offices. On our journey, however, he seldom stayed awake after compline, and his habits were frugal. Sometimes, also at the abbey, he would spend the whole day walking in the vegetable garden, examining the plants as if they were chrysoprases or emeralds; and I saw him roaming about the treasure crypt, looking at a coffer studded with emeralds and chrysoprases as if it were a clump of thorn apple. At other times he would pass an entire day in the great hall of the library, leafing through manuscripts as if seeking nothing but his own enjoyment (while, around us, the corpses of monks, horribly murdered, were multiplying). One day I found him strolling in the flower garden without any apparent aim, as if he did not have to account to God for his works. In my order they had taught me quite a different way of

expending my time, and I said so to him. And he answered that the beauty of the cosmos derives not only from unity in variety, but also from variety in unity. This seemed to me an answer dictated by crude common sense, but I learned subsequently that the men of his land often define things in ways in which it seems that the enlightening power of reason has scant function.

During our period at the abbey his hands were always covered with the dust of books, the gold of still-fresh illumination, or with yellowish substances he touched in Severinus's infirmary. He seemed unable to think save with his hands, an attribute I considered then worthier of a mechanic: but even when his hands touched the most fragile things, such as certain freshly illuminated codices, or pages worn by time and friable as unleavened bread, he possessed, it seemed to me, an extraordinarily delicate touch, the same that he used in handling his machines. I will tell, in fact, how this strange man carried with him, in his bag, instruments that I had never seen before then, which he called his wondrous machines. Machines, he said, are an effect of art, which is nature's ape, and they reproduce not its forms but the operation itself. He explained to me thus the wonders of the clock, the astrolabe, and the magnet. But at the beginning I feared it was witchcraft, and I pretended to sleep on certain clear nights when he (with a strange triangle in his hand) stood watching the stars. The Franciscans I had known in Italy and in my own land were simple men, often illiterate, and I expressed to him my amazement at his learning. But he said to me, smiling, that the Franciscans of his island were cast in another mold: "Roger Bacon, whom I venerate as my master, teaches that the divine plan will one day encompass the science of machines, which is natural and healthy magic. And one day it will be possible, by exploiting the power of nature, to create instruments of navigation by which ships will proceed unico homine regente, and far

more rapid than those propelled by sails or oars; and there will be self-propelled wagons ‘and flying apparatuses of such form that a man seated in them, by turning a device, can flap artificial wings, ad modum avis volantis.’ And tiny instruments will lift huge weights and vehicles will allow travel on the bottom of the sea.”

When I asked him where these machines were, he told me that they had already been made in ancient times, and some even in our own time: “Except the flying instrument, which I have never seen or known anyone who has seen, but I know of a learned man who has conceived it. And bridges can be built across rivers without columns or other support, and other unheard-of machines are possible. But you must not worry if they do not yet exist, because that does not mean they will not exist later. And I say to you that God wishes them to be, and certainly they already are in His mind, even if my friend from Occam denies that ideas exist in such a way; and I do not say this because we can determine the divine nature but precisely because we cannot set any limit to it.” Nor was this the only contradictory proposition I heard him utter; but even now, when I am old and wiser than I was then, I have not completely understood how he could have such faith in his friend from Occam and at the same time swear by the words of Bacon, as he was accustomed to doing. It is also true that in those dark times a wise man had to believe things that were in contradiction among themselves.

There, of Brother William I have perhaps said things without sense, as if to collect from the very beginning the disjointed impressions of him that I had then. Who he was, and what he was doing, my good reader, you will perhaps deduce better from the actions he performed in the days we spent in the abbey. Nor do I promise you an accomplished design, but, rather, a tale of events (those, yes) wondrous and awful.

And so, after I had come to know my master day by day, and spent the many hours of our journey in long conversations which, when appropriate, I will relate little by little, we reached the foot of the hill on which the abbey stood. And it is time for my story to approach it, as we did then, and may my hand remain steady as I prepare to tell what happened.

FIRST DAY

PRIME

In which the foot of the abbey is reached, and William demonstrates his great acumen.

IT WAS A beautiful morning at the end of November. During the night it had snowed, but only a little, and the earth was covered with a cool blanket no more than three fingers high. In the darkness, immediately after lauds, we heard Mass in a village in the valley. Then we set off toward the mountain, as the sun first appeared.

While we toiled up the steep path that wound around the mountain, I saw the abbey. I was amazed, not by the walls that girded it on every side, similar to others to be seen in all the Christian world, but by the bulk of what I later learned was the Aedificium. This was an octagonal construction that from a distance seemed a tetragon (a perfect form, which expresses the sturdiness and impregnability of the City of God), whose southern sides stood on the plateau of the abbey, while the northern ones seemed to grow from the steep side of the mountain, a sheer drop, to which they were bound. I might say that from below, at certain points, the cliff seemed to extend, reaching up toward the heavens, with the rock's same colors and material, which at a certain point became keep and tower (work of giants who had great familiarity with

earth and sky). Three rows of windows proclaimed the triune rhythm of its elevation, so that what was physically squared on the earth was spiritually triangular in the sky. As we came closer, we realized that the quadrangular form included, at each of its corners, a heptagonal tower, five sides of which were visible on the outside—four of the eight sides, then, of the greater octagon producing four minor heptagons, which from the outside appeared as pentagons. And thus anyone can see the admirable concord of so many holy numbers, each revealing a subtle spiritual significance. Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; seven, the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In its bulk and in its form, the Aedificium resembled Castel Ursino or Castel del Monte, which I was to see later in the south of the Italian peninsula, but its inaccessible position made it more awesome than those, and capable of inspiring fear in the traveler who approached it gradually. And it was fortunate that, since it was a very clear winter morning, I did not first see the building as it appears on stormy days.

I will not say, in any case, that it prompted feelings of jollity. I felt fear, and a subtle uneasiness. God knows these were not phantoms of my immature spirit, and I was rightly interpreting indubitable omens inscribed in the stone the day that the giants began their work, and before the deluded determination of the monks dared consecrate the building to the preservation of the divine word.

As our little mules strove up the last curve of the mountain, where the main path divided into three, producing two side paths, my master stopped for a while, to look around: at the sides of the road, at the road itself, and above the road, where, for a brief stretch, a series of evergreen pines formed a natural roof, white with snow.