

QUEEN ELEANOR AND FAIR ROSAMUND:
THE AFFECTIVE LANDSCAPE OF TWO FIN-DE-SIÈCLE
TALES OF MARRIAGE

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In the twelfth century, when Henry II was unfaithful to his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine by having a long-term relationship with Rosamund Clifford, known as Fair Rosamund, he created a love triangle with several notable features that would endure as their story continued to be told over time. He sequestered his lover Rosamund in an embowered palace that no one but he and his trusted servants were supposed to be able to find. Queen Eleanor eventually discovers Rosamund, confronts her, and full of jealousy and rage, forces her to take her own life – by poison or dagger, depending on the source. Meanwhile, Rosamund, who might otherwise be viewed as an immoral woman, comes out ... smelling like a rose. In adaptation after adaptation, Rosamund is represented as sweet, beautiful, and naïve, not seduced or taken advantage of by Henry, but somehow not blamed for her actions, either. As nineteenth-century versions of the tale proliferated, both Eleanor and Rosamund provided thought-provoking exceptions to Victorian notions about the sanctity of marriage and the necessity of moral women moderating their desires.

The Victorian fascination with medievalisms¹ resulted in many literary renditions of Rosamund, King Henry, and Queen Eleanor: ballads, operas, Mary Russell Mitford's 1824 closet drama *Fair Rosamund*, Pierce Egan's 1844 romantic novel *Fair Rosamund*, Swinburne's verse play *Rosamond* (1860), and Tennyson's verse play *Becket* (1884), starring Ellen Terry. The tale also inspired many paintings by nineteenth-century artists such as Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Arthur Hughes, Frank Cadogan Cooper, Emma Sandys, and others. Even Lewis Carroll produced a photograph of "Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamund," in 1863, featuring Anne Rogers and Mary Jackson in fancy dress (see fig 1).

The two Victorian adaptations I discuss here are Michael Field's 1884 closet drama in verse, *Fair Rosamund*, and Margaret Oliphant's 1886 novella, *Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamund*, published in *The Cornhill Magazine* and then posthumously reprinted in a collection edited by J.M. Barrie called *The Widow's Tale and Other Stories* (1898). Mrs. Oliphant's novella presents the well-known love triangle as a contemporary middle-class instance of bigamy,