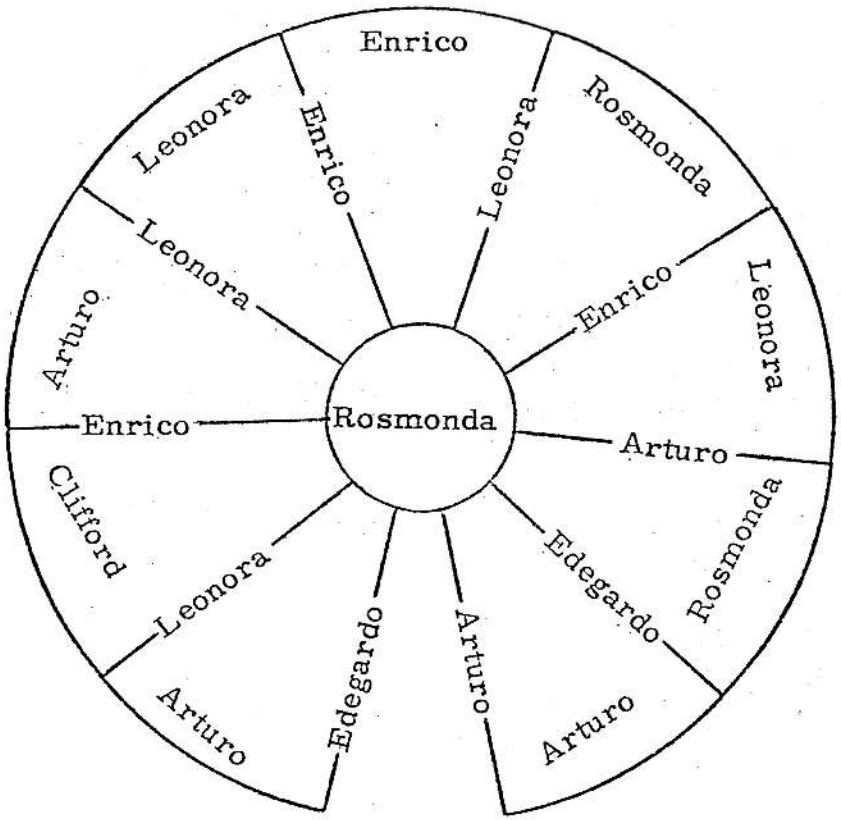


History, LEGEND, and Romani's ROSMONDA d'INGHILTERRA

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In his introductory synopsis Romani recommends his "ROSMONDA D'INGHILTERRA" because, if for no other reason, he had been "at pains to preserve the simplest themes in his work and the greatest verisimilitude". In making such a claim he is, naturally, very much the librettist with an eye for drama, and, for his story, he drew on more than one treatment of the legend of "Fair Rosamond", adding some ideas of his own. Romani's amalgam generally succeeds very well if one remembers that accretions to the original tale of Rosamond have been many, varied and often fanciful to an extreme degree. His historical framework is no more unbelievable than some and a good deal less than many notable libretti for operas on themes from English history.

Before looking more closely at Romani's "operatic version" of the legend, touched here and there by history, it might be opportune to recount the few facts out of which has grown the legend. We know a Walter de Clifford had a daughter, Rosamond, who was Henry II's mistress after (and possibly before) his marriage in 1152 to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who knew of her husband's infidelities though not necessarily of those committed with Rosamond. Soon after the King's open acknowledgement of Rosamond, she died, not from any violent attack by the

Queen, and was buried at Godstow.

The action of the opera takes place in and around Woodstock Castle, one of Henry's private residences and venue for a number of Grand Councils and meetings with his bishops. Act I opens as the villagers await the arrival of the King. Indeed Henry was at Woodstock in 1175 and believing Rosamond to have died not later than 1176 the timing of the action is credible.

We meet Leonora (see note 1) and Arturo, a page, a Romani invention preferred to the generally encountered "trustye knight" assigned by legend to the safe keeping of Rosamond. The relationship between the Queen and Arturo is quickly revealed, as is Romani's choice of name for the page when we remember Eleanor's courts of love at Poitiers professed to derive from authentic practices of chivalry in the Court of King Arthur. When Leonora promises Arturo the hand of Rosmonda as reward for his revealing the girl's hiding place we have, in microcosm, the Poitevin code, a demonstration of arrant feudal heresy. One version of the legend does relate how Rosamond was brought to Court "to waite on Elianor the Queen" but this is inadequate to endow Leonora with any rights to determine who Rosmonda should marry. Arturo, the man, is the property of the Queen, the woman. His love for Rosmonda advocated by his demeanour has now been judged by Leonora, though, as events prove, for her own ends.

When making the promise, Leonora, in the first version of the cabaletta to this scene, mentions Rosmonda by name.

"Sposa tua sarà Rosmonda"
(Rosmonda will be your bride)

Subsequent events show that Romani, wittingly or unwittingly, here created somewhat of a puzzle the explanation of which is best delayed. Interestingly in a revised cabaletta for a later production Leonora is much less precise as to the girl's identity.

"Ti vedrò donzella andace
che lo sposa a me contendi piu celar"

(I will see you, you rash girl
that my husband denies he still hides)

This proves to be the only clue in the opera that the Queen had previously confronted Enrico with his deceit. Historically Eleanor, imprisoned in 1173 and only permitted some freedom of movement about 10 years later, could not have been at Woodstock at this time, but she was probably not unaware of the King's waywardness if mindful of his earlier transgressions. Eleanor, daughter of William X, Count of Poitou, Duke of Aquitaine was born in 1122. With her husband, Louis VII, whom she had married when she was 15, Eleanor journeyed in the Second Crusade, engaging the attentions of her uncle Raymond in Antioch. Her flirtatious behaviour prompted Louis to take her, forcefully, to Jerusalem. Subsequently Eleanor's failure to produce the essential son for the continuation of the Capet line, resulted in divorce, justified to the world and the Church, by the rule of consanguinity.

The villagers welcome their King. Henry, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet, and great-grandson of William the Conqueror, was born in 1133 and had become King in 1154, two and a half years after his marriage to Eleanor, though the degree of consanguinity between them was hardly less remote than between her and Louis (see note 2).

Clifford is the next to arrive, just returned, he says, from a mission to France for the King. That would not have been impossible, though, historically it was unlikely for Henry himself had returned to England, from France, in May 1175. Of Walter de Clifford little is known with certainty. Son of Richard FitzPonce he married Margaret, thought to be the daughter of Ralph de Tony who, in 1068, was lord of the Clifford fee. Walter probably came to the barony by his wife but some suggest Richard's wife, Maud, was the orginal holder. Walter's estates, inherited from Uncles Walter and Drogo, lay in Herefordshire and Berkshire; he had manorial rights in Shropshire and was lord of the castle of Llannymddyvri. Doubtless it was in this last guise that he sallied forth against Rhys ap Gruffydd, to whose complaints, Henry turned a deaf ear, confirming the favour Walter enjoyed. However it is Romani's invention

making him a sometime governor of Enrico.

Clifford has heard everywhere of Enrico's liaison but is ignorant of the girl's identity. Historically it was not until near the end of the century that those outside the King's immediate circle had some inkling as to who had been his mistress. Giraldus Cambrensis writing at the close of the 12th century in his De Principis Institutionae tells how "once he had imprisoned his wife Alienora, he who had formerly practised adultery in secret, now did so without concealment, misusing openly and shamelessly not indeed the rose of the world (rosa mundi) ... but rather the rose of the unclean (rosa immundi) - clearly a pun on Rosamond. Some 75 years later Rosamond's affair with Henry was common talk amongst the tenants on the Clifford manor of Corfham.

Enrico concludes the scene, giving Clifford an unappreciated clue, in a misjudged expression that

"tu la vedrai con giubilo
Sposa del tuo Signore ... "
(you will be happy to see her
as wife to your master)

Enrico feels, as Henry must have done, that Walter de Clifford was one of his men. Had not Henry closed an eye to Walter's expansionist ideas in Wales? Had not Enrico sent him on a mission on his behalf and was not Clifford one of his old tutors? Yet for all this Enrico will be disabused. There is no evidence that Henry wished to marry Rosamond though different tellings of the legend have shown him with such intentions and some went so far as to present the King and Rosamond as man and wife.

The scene moves to the tower where we find Rosmonda lamenting her confinement over the past three months and longing for the return of Edegardo. Romani here introduces a less than common feature of the legend. In Robert Greene's "Mourning Garment" the "Shepherd's Tale" relates how a Rosamond was wooed by a king in disguise. This, in 1592, may well have been the source for William Warner, in one of the first literary treatments of the legend of Rosamond, adding the idea of disguise to 16th

century chronicle accounts. It is no capricious variation by Romani; it adds dramatic content, the important relationship of Edegardo, Rosmonda and Arturo, the relationship, less immediately obvious, of Edegardo, Leonora and Rosmonda and, quite remarkably, a role for the baritone more substantial than Clifford enjoys in almost all other treatments of the legend.

It might be as well to summarise the relations between the characters, now they have all been introduced, for Romani sets a number of problems, some, perhaps, unintentionally. In the second scene it will be recalled that Leonora mentioned Rosmonda by name and ensuing events now make an explanation crucial. Simply it is that until the revelation later that Rosmonda is the King's mistress, she is, as far as Arturo knows, not Rosmonda Clifford. The plot is strewn with "eternal triangles". Romani, in his introductory synopsis, stated the prime one, viz Enrico, Leonora and Rosmonda; clearly Edegardo, Rosmonda and Arturo is important and Leonora has revealed to us that of Enrico, Rosmonda and Arturo. Furthermore subsequent developments will only fall into place if we remember Arturo is forced to recognise, due to the Queen's interest in his loved one's hideaway, that Leonora vies with "his" Rosmonda for the favours of Edegardo. This play by Romani acknowledges the oft told scandal of Eleanor's infidelities and draws a little sympathy away from the Queen lest we feel too strongly she is justified in her murderous intentions towards the girl who has seduced her husband. The idea of Leonora being unfaithful is no outrageous conclusion, in literary terms, for in "Queen Eleanor's Confession" she "admitted" to a clandestine love and this element is not unimportant to the opera. Clifford as yet, is unaware that his daughter is the King's mistress so another triangle exists. At this point there is a sixth too; that of Edegardo, Arturo and Rosmonda, as she herself imagines.

It seems from Rosmonda's revelations that she had known Arturo from his young days. The implication of this (Arturo still does not know Rosmonda is a Clifford) forces us to conclusions based to a degree on assumptions.

Firstly a recapitulation of the "facts" derived from what has gone before; Edegardo is Arturo's master and the

corollary is that Arturo has not penetrated Enrico's disguise. Arturo believing Leonora and Rosmonda rivals for Edegardo's love understood the Queen's promise as the means to leave the way clear for her to win Edegardo's favour. Whether or not Arturo knew the King had Rosmonda Clifford as mistress, he does not associate her with his Rosmonda. Secondly just two assumptions that allow an untroubled consideration of the libretto. Arturo fears the King owing to his supposition of the Queen's infidelity and he has known Rosmonda only after her arrival at Woodstock, or, remembering Rosmonda's

"Anch'io l'appresi dell età sull'aurora"
(Still I taught him from his very young days)

more likely he has not seen her since they were children and failed to recognise her when he encounters her at Woodstock.

Whatever Arturo's feelings Rosmonda makes it clear that, for her, their relationship is innocent and platonic and so an unrequited love led him, figuratively, to the court of love for a judgement and practically to the disclosure of Rosmonda's hiding place. Romani persuades us this was secret but he does not get involved with these popular elements, though almost certainly fictional, of silken threads and a maze.

Arturo, described in the list of characters as page replaces the "trustye knighte", featured in most versions of the legend, charged with the care of Rosamond and frequently involved romantically with her. Arturo reveals that his master is newly returned from Ireland and the imminent arrival of Edegardo gladdens Rosmonda though Arturo is naturally dejected. Henry's last visit to Ireland prior to this time had been in 1172, some two years before his liaison with Rosamond became known generally. Arturo here, almost as an aside, drops a clue that he might know of the King's extra-marital adventures but he hurries on to explain that Edegardo has permitted access to an old knight, in favour with the King and a source of help in any eventuality. Of course it is Clifford and the effect on Rosmonda is traumatic; she reveals that he is her father and Arturo's surprise would come as a shock to us if we

over-looked the minutae of what has gone before. Romani, either due to indecent haste and "cobbling" of his earlier version for Coccia or according to some deep plan, has to this point strewn his libretto with many problems and wandered far from the "simplest themes". The directness of Donizetti's composition carries the project through but a decision on Romani's intent or unawareness, when setting the difficulties we have seen, might reveal greater depths to the music.

Arturo's newly gained knowledge of his loved one's identity adds a seventh relationship to those already summarised. Although there are five characters Romani, in adding the illusory Edegardo and a Rosmonda, at first believed to be other than Rosmonda Clifford, multiplies the number of relationships, actual, imaginary and inferred.

Clifford confronts his Rosmonda in the seventh scene. Learning that it is his daughter of whom so much has been said; he rejects her, aggravating her distress by reminding her of his age, their family name, her dead mother. Having married by 1138 it is reasonable to assume that Walter was in his late fifties or early sixties at this time, a reasonably advanced age in the 12th century. It is thought he died in 1190.

Confused, seeking pity, Rosmonda would prefer to die than see her father so upset; Clifford will take her away to a convent. Earlier Rosmonda had reminded us of her

"dolce ritiro, ove tranquilla e innocente io vivea"
(quiet retreat, where I would live peacefully and innocently).

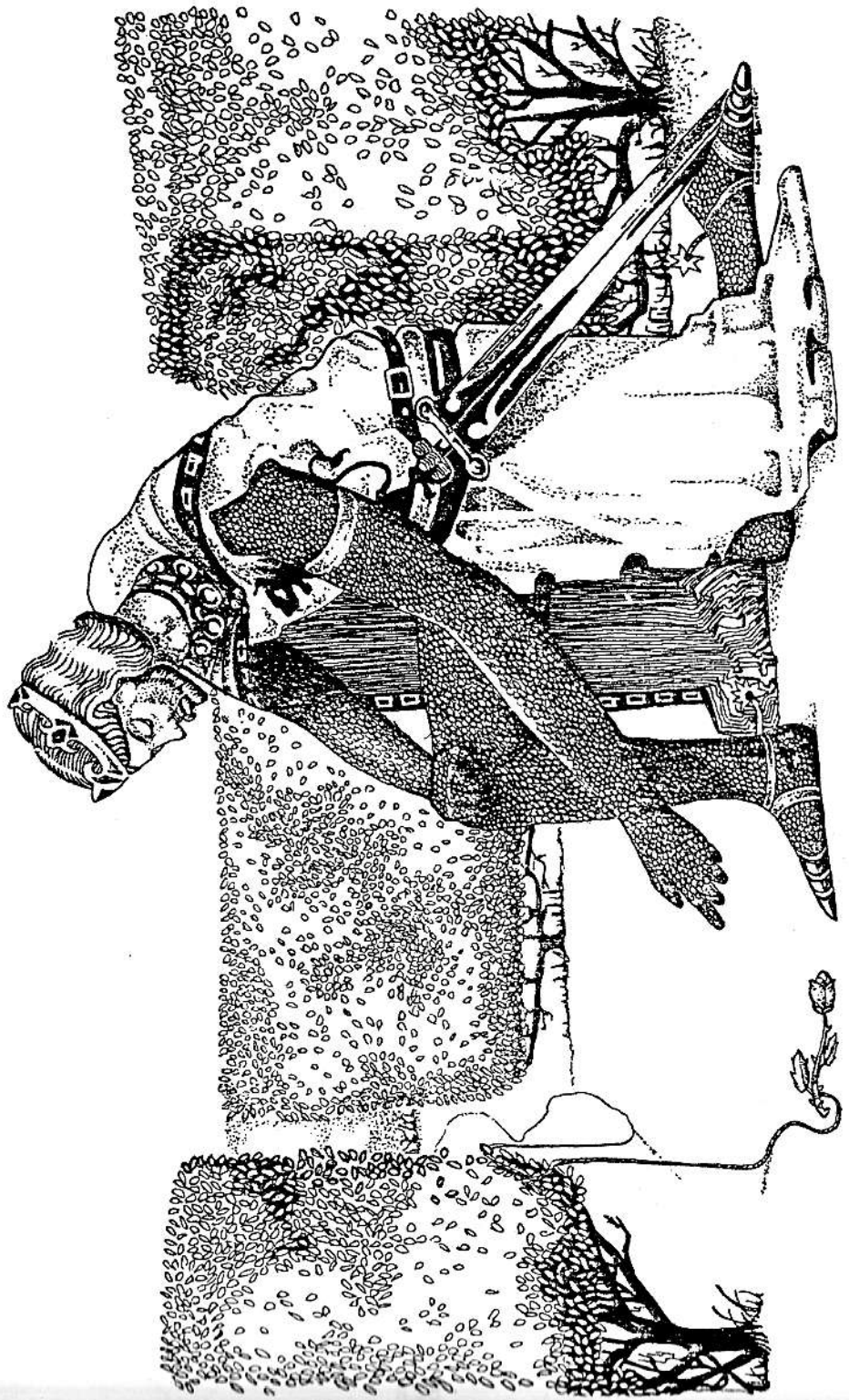
Some versions of the legend recall that Rosamond had been at Godstow nunnery as a girl and subsequently it was there that her remains first lay. Her brother-in-law, Osbert Fitzhugh (husband of Rosamond's sister Amicia) later bestowed a salt pit for the salvation of the souls of Rosamond and her mother and Walter, and Henry too, each endowed the nunnery in her memory.

For the moment, however, Clifford's news seems worse than death; her Edegardo is actually the King, Enrico, and

her horror stems from her realisation of the part she had, unwittingly, been playing in the relationship of Enrico, Leonora and herself, the eighth, and penultimate "triangle".

Enrico's surprise on entering is not at finding Clifford in his mistress' hiding place, but because Clifford, unlike he imagined, has not seen honour in his daughter being the King's mistress. Clifford's first anger, his ensuing compassion, his current opposition to Enrico and his final remorse is all to Romani's credit. Enrico tries promises of marriage, Rosmonda will be his Queen. There is no evidence whatsoever that Henry ever had such intentions towards Rosamond, despite ready made grounds to set aside his marriage to Eleanor (consanguinity) and even when the Queen was imprisoned Henry did not seek annulment, for Aquitaine was too valuable to lose.

Leonora startles all at her arrival. She sees her rival for the first time and finds her to be Rosmonda Clifford so that here in the ninth and last scene of Act I, Romani reveals to us and the Queen the ninth and last relationship, that of Leonora, Enrico and Rosmonda. (All these relationships, as conceived by the participants, are diagrammetically represented for ease of reference and clarity.) Enrico has strong premonitions of Leonora's intentions, Rosmonda wrestles with her unenviable position, Arturo and Clifford each hope for a happy outcome whilst the Court fears the ominous signs. Leonora endeavours to maintain a facade of judicious determination but Enrico's protectiveness towards Rosmonda breaks her down and then it is evident she can no longer "judge", being involved personally in the litigants' case. The argument develops and Leonora, surely like Eleanor, who had by this time grown hardened to almost everything, faces the final insult, a disputing of her sovereignty in one of the royal palaces. The King threatens more surprises (are we to assume his marriage to Rosmonda or Leonora's imprisonment?). The Court want nothing more than an end to the whole affair for the sake of the two peoples devoted to their majesties and we are reminded of "Merlin's" prophecy referring to Eleanor as "an eagle because she spread her two wings over two kingdoms".



Act II opens with the King in conference with his advisors who are concerned that his plans to marry Rosmonda will result in attack from a re-armed Aquitaine no doubt supported by the "covetous foreigner", Louis, Eleanor's first husband. Enrico has no illusions regarding Leonora, he appreciates the dreadful dowry of haughtiness, has felt the burden of the Guienne sceptre and resolves to send her to France, though history showed Eleanor to be more of a threat to him there than in England. This strong-willed woman, dedicated to Minerva, Venus and the Virgin rather than Mars, the Pope and the King, would dispense patronage and justice and her unwelcome, indeed unacceptable, discipline was a feature of 12th century courts of love which, differing from Ovid, recognised the woman as mistress, the man her vassal. This particularly aggrieves the King, used as he was to worldly delights, and when Leonora joins him he berates her for her ways, acceptable though they may have een in France and at Antioch

"Sulla Senna, e sul'Oronte
Son pur chiari i vanti tuoi"

(By the Seine and Orontes
your honours are still bright)

they count for nothing in England.

"Sul Tamigi aver non puoi
degno luogo accanto a me"

(by the Thames you are unworthy
of a place alongside me.)

Leonora enlists the aid of Venus but to no avail; she reminds the King of her help in making easy his ascent to the English throne (historically an excessive claim) still Enrico is adamant. He has no regrets for his behaviour and Leonora's continued protestations of love bring no similar response. The sea will separate them, though Henry might well have taken fright at Enrico's "bargain",

"serba i tuoi stati, e lasciami
pago regnar su i miei"

(keep your lands and leave me
contented to rule over mine)

Leonora's outburst reveals the conflict between pagan naturalism and Christian restraint that characterise the Queen's behaviour and that of Rosmonda. The King will hear no more, they must part.

The scene moves back to Rosmonda's tower where Arturo reflects on his position, hoping the Queen in knowing of his love for Rosmonda, will remember her promise and not pursue revenge and he rues his weakness that has ensnared him in Leonora's power.

Romani again reminds us of the secret nature of Rosmonda's tower as Arturo responds to

"picchiare all'uscio segreto"

(knocking at the secret door)

where, to his surprise, he finds Clifford. A suggestion that the famous labyrinth could have been architectural was taken up before the mid 19th century by Thomas Richardson whose version of the legend told of a Norman architect who made Rosamond's abode impervious to her enemies and then sought herlove, only to be spurned.

Clifford, freed from prison by the Queen, comes in her stead ("by the secret way") to persuade Rosmonda of Leonora's plan for Arturo to take Rosmonda to Aquitaine and there marry her. Rosmonda at first will not hear of it (Arturo must now believe a court of love will never deliver a favourable decision) but Clifford's self pitying arguments wear down his daughter's resolve until she succumbs. Accretions to the legend frequently tell of Rosamond marrying to escape Henry.

Rosmonda's joy at seeing her father is quashed. She had believed him to be reconciled to the King and her filial love, had brought the name, Enrico, to her lips, one of only three instances when she utters the King's name. In a moment of trepidation the name escapes her in the solitude of the gardens later and we shall see, in the finale, the significance of the other occasion.

Clifford's threat to return to prison, that finally persuades Rosmonda what she must do, can almost be seen as a microcosm of all literary treatments of Walter de Clifford. So variable are the ways tradition deals with Rosamond's father that one perceives most writers experienced difficulty in assigning him a role that would be consistent. His complicity with Leonora is just sufficient reason for imprisonment by the King - certainly more acceptable than the inexplicable imprisonment by the Queen that some versions relate. Leonora will honour her promise to Arturo, though motives of love are now forgotten as she takes the law into her own hands.

Left alone Rosmonda appreciates the sacrifice she has made. Her preference, almost a prophecy of Rosamond's fate, is for

"mi asconda agli uomini
de'penitenti il velo"

(the penitent's veil to hide me
from all men)

and when she is joined by the King she is not receptive to Enrico's blandishments. Never has she thought of him as Edegardo, nor will she be his wife. Enrico relates he already has the support of the bishops, arguing no doubt the same manner employed by Louis to rid himself of Eleanor. He will grant Rosmonda's plea for reinstatement of her father in the King's favour if she will be his Queen. But Rosmonda's love was for Edegardo, her faithful love (though we might wish to enlighten her of Leonora's transgressions) and she cannot, will not, grant the King's desire.

Rosmonda is startled by the clock striking and involuntarily reveals her impending departure. We too are startled, for tower clocks, particularly with striking mechanism, were later developments of primitive devices to measure the passage of time or remind people of the passing of time that would have been the contemporary means of keeping some account of the hours. Rather than the "castle clock" Rosamond would have heard a bell being struck manually, or, as Clifford said a little earlier

"suon di squilla
che annunzi il dì morente"

(the sound of the trumpet
that heralds the sunset)

Enrico offers his kingdom for Rosmonda's hand but she, like Rosamond throughout the tradition, is not fickle with her love despite attempts (some successful) to marry her off to protect her from her fate. Romani continues and emphasises the essential conflict (see diagram) of Rosmonda's preparedness to marry an unloved Arturo and her unwillingness to marry the beloved Edegardo, the divulsion of her life, into which Leonora will drive her dagger. If only the eligibility of Arturo had been synthesised with Edegardo's desirability her life would have been the perfect rose (rosa) and she would have truly lived and been of this world (mondo).

Into the gardens at Woodstock where the eighth scene is set with significant images; there are weeping willows and dark and secret places; followers of the Queen are searching the garden, commenting on the plane trees and willows, the secret fountain, of no particular significance, but a common feature of many descriptions of Woodstock. One version of the legend relates how Rosamond was lulled to sleep by the "murmurs of a soft cascade" and dreamt of her fate. Yet another refers to Woodstock as "this house ... where the Westwinds ever blow". Rosmonda too, when she arrives, is conscious of the wind and the noises, frightened by the darkness and the cold of the stones, marble for a monument on her impending grave. How closely Romani follows an earlier treatment when the moment caused Rosamond "to weep so sore, that woods and hardest rocks her harder fate deplore"!

Leonora finds Rosmonda and charges her with revealing to the King the plan, prepared by the Queen, Clifford and Arturo, for Rosmonda to be taken out of the country and be married. Poor Rosmonda is confused; she has not realised she said too much to Enrico and is concerned only for the safety of her father and Arturo. Leonora stops her leaving, revenge is at hand and Leonora fears Rosmonda might yet surrender herself to

the King for the sake of the others. The Queen will not be shamed or exiled and is deaf to Rosmonda's pleadings as in a delirium Leonora leaves no-one in doubt of her intentions. It is to be the dagger, there is no alternative, there can be none as delirium is typified by alacrity. Romani, as ever with an eye for drama, employs this uncommon variation. Tradition for centuries offered Rosamond poison with the sword or dagger used only as a persuasive threat to take the poison or as an alternative, hardly ever chosen by the unfortunate girl. Leonora's attack is almost unique in the telling of the legend.

Rosmonda protests her willingness to sacrifice herself to the rights of the Queen and

"se la vita ancor tu voi ...
pochi giorni ... e tua sarà."

(if you still demand my life
a few days ... and it will be yours.)

The dagger is raised, a moment's hesitation as Leonora offers

"un sol mezzo disarmarmi"

(one last way to have me put this away)

but there is no time for explanation, nor did Romani wish to expand on such a tenuous acknowledgement of the traditional alternatives. TheKing's arrival is imminent, Clifford has been recaptured and he and Arturo, helpless in the arms of their captors, follow Enrico who is just too late to prevent Leonora stabbing his beloved Rosmonda. The Queen is triumphant, Clifford distraught, Arturo (who never succeeds with his suit) shares with Enrico the chill hand of death on the heart.

With her last breath Rosmonda leaves us wondering at

"Ah, mio padre ... Enrico ... io moro"!

In the original finale her words were

"O padre! ... io moro".

At the moment of her own death she accepts that Edegardo, too, is dead; her thoughts are not for herself but directed to her father and Enrico; Enrico, how strange the name is on her lips, what a poignant reproach!

"mio padre ... Enrico ... io moro"

Rosmonda's creation ... betrayal ... her death

a subtle trichotomous summation of a flawed but superior telling of the legend of "Fair Rosamond".

NOTES

1 The names Henry, Eleanor, Walter and Rosamond are used to indicate the historical figures and references to the operatic characters will use Romani's designations Enrico, Leonora, Clifford and Rosmonda respectively. The librettist explained he shorted Rosamonda to Rosmonda "for the convenience of versification". Rosamond was also called Rosamund and Rosmunda in different versions of the legend.

2 Louis and Eleanor were related in the fourth and fifth degrees for her great-grandmother was grand daughter of Robert the Pious whose son, Henry I was grandfather to Louis. Henry was four degrees removed, and Eleanor five degrees removed, from Robert II, Duke of Normandy. Not only that but William the Conqueror's wife had been a granddaughter of Robert the Pious!