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DRAMATURG Carla Steen
GRAPHIC DESIGNER Akemi Waldusky
RESEARCH Stephanie Engel, Carla Steen

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Jo Holcomb: 612.225.6117 | Carla Steen: 612.225.6118

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The Guthrie Theater, founded in 1963, is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training. By presenting both classical literature and new work from diverse cultures, the Guthrie illuminates the common humanity connecting Minnesota to the peoples of the world.
James Goldman was born in Chicago on June 30, 1927, and was the older brother of novelist William Goldman (writer of *The Princess Bride* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*). James Goldman spent his undergrad at University of Chicago then studied music criticism as a postgraduate at Columbia University before being drafted into the army during World War II. Following his two-year stint in Korea and a dawning realization that he had “neither the talent nor the sensibility” for musical analysis, Goldman shifted his attention to fiction writing, collaborating with his brother to produce the Broadway play *Blood, Sweat and Stanley Poole* (1961) and *A Family Affair* (1962), a comedic musical written with the assistance of lyricist and composer John Kander.

Goldman also undertook his own independent projects in the 1960s, writing *They Might Be Giants* in 1961, a play that caught the attention of Stephen Sondheim and led to their future partnership on the TV musical “Evening Primrose” in 1966, and the stage musical *Follies* in 1971. Following his success with *The Lion in Winter*, first produced more than six months before “Evening Primrose,” Goldman continued to write stories that delved into the lives of historical and classical literary figures for not only the stage but the screen as well. Goldman’s repertoire soon included renditions of *Oliver Twist* (1982) and *Anna Karenina* (1985) for television audiences and *Robin and Marian* (1976) and *White Nights* (1985) for moviegoers. He and his second wife, Barbara, even created a production company at the end of the 1970s entitled Raoulfilm, a reference to the stuffed pet lion that was a common fixture by Goldman’s typewriter. “When you’re [young] you have an endless number of ideas,” Goldman later joked in a 1980 interview with *Publishers Weekly*. “I just seem to have the knack for switching from one medium to the other.”

Indeed this knack continued through the latter half of his career when Goldman took to writing novels, constructing stories like *Myself as Witness* in 1980, a tale about King John of England, a familiar face in *The Lion in Winter* narrative. “I read about the things they did, I studied them and then imagined what they felt and thought and said and wanted from their lives,” Goldman explained when describing his process of bringing historical characters to life through fiction. “What they were really like, of course, no one will ever know.” For him, the joy came from “putting clues together” and uncovering small, yet authentic details – performing the role of detective, not historian, for historically constructed narratives. In fact, according to Goldman, the inspiration for *The Lion in Winter* came from his simple discovery that Henry II had imprisoned his wife Eleanor for a number of years, only letting her out for holidays like Christmas or Easter. When discussing *The Lion in Winter* with Utah Shakespeare Festival’s Kelli Frost-Alred, Barbara Goldman, said that “The Lion in Winter could have been a tragedy as easily as a comedy. And it has to do with [my husband’s] point of view of the world. He viewed himself as a comedic writer. I think his sense of humor was everything about him.”

The comedic timing and wry wit within Goldman’s work did not go unnoticed. For the Hollywood film of *The Lion in Winter* in 1968, which starred Peter O’Toole and Katharine Hepburn, Goldman won the 1969 Academy Award for the movie’s adapted screenplay. Two years later, *Follies* debuted on Broadway, the same year that one of Goldman’s earliest works, *They Might Be Giants*, was produced for film. With Goldman’s book and Sondheim’s musical score, *Follies* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best musical, best actress in a musical and best director, and had a subsequent run of 522 performances. Then, in 1987, when *Follies* moved to London, the musical won both the Evening Standard and Olivier awards for best musical, after an extensive round of rewrites by Goldman.

On October 28, 1998, James Goldman passed away while preparing for another revival of *The Lion in Winter* on Broadway, over 30 years after he first saw the play staged. Since his death, *Lion* has undergone numerous revivals both in the United States and abroad, along with a restored edition of the 1968 film and a TV movie starring Patrick Stewart and Glenn Close.
Meeting Goldman, one can understand how his view of human nature grows out of his own personality. A large, genial bear of a man whose shy grin flashes often, Goldman has a sunny outlook. ... Goldman's interest in England’s past first manifested itself about 20 years ago, when he began a play about Robin Hood, “not as the Errol Flynn character but as a person.” (The project was abandoned, later to surface as Goldman’s screenplay for “Robin and Marian.”) In the course of his research, he came across a reference to the fact that Henry II had Eleanor imprisoned for nine years, freeing her only for Christmas and Easter. From this spark came “The Lion in Winter.” Goldman also discovered that contemporary sources said very little about King John. In the Middle Ages, Goldman explains, recording history was not considered an important profession. It was fortuitous that several great historians lived during the reign of Henry II and his successor, Richard the Lionhearted, but around the turn of the 13th century “all the good chroniclers began to die.” John’s terrible reputation was foisted on us by historians writing a full generation after his death, Goldman notes. ... Emphasizing that he is not a historian, he nonetheless confesses to his delight in locating authentic details; the menu for one of King John’s banquets that he came across in an old cookbook, for example. ... When “The Lion in Winter” was produced in 1966, it closed after only 83 performances, but Goldman was commissioned to write the film adaptation. After his screenplay for “The Lion in Winter” won an Academy Award, “all sorts of good things happened,” Goldman recalls. He mentions his screenplay for “Nicholas and Alexandra” and “Robin and Marian,” Goldman also wrote “Waldorf,” a novel that sold few copies. ... Goldman is proud of his prolific output, but he is modest about his varied talents. “I just seem to have the knack for switching from one medium to the other,” he says. For the present, he is contemplating another novel, hoping that “Myself as Witness” will establish him as a well-known name in the field. He is tired, he says, with a twinkle in his eye, of being known as “the guy who wrote ‘The Lion in Winter.’”


In Follies we deliberately decided not to create characters with wars and all. Everybody would be, not a type, but an essence of whatever they were about, which is why James Goldman’s book got so heavily criticized. People didn’t understand what he was trying to do. I kept hearing people say, “Those people are so bloodless.” Yes. That’s the idea of the piece. Now that may be a wrong notion, but it was a very conscious choice, to create poetic essences, and by poetic I mean the reduction of a human character in a situation to its most succinct form. They never spoke a normal English sentence. Everything was written. Jim was drawing essences. That’s his style of writing.


Nowadays James Goldman, who died in 1998, is mainly remembered for having written the book for Stephen Sondheim’s “Follies.” In his lifetime, though, “The Lion in Winter” was his best-known piece of work – but not for the original Broadway production, which ran for just 92 performance sin 1966. It was the success of the 1968 film version, which won Goldman a best-screenplay Oscar, that made “The Lion in Winter” a regional-theater staple.


Laila Robins (Eleanor of Aquitaine) and Kevyn Morrow (Henry)
The Play

For Christmas in 1183, Henry is at his palace in Chinon, France, where he has gathered his estranged wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, his three squabbling sons – Richard, Geoffrey and John – and his not-so-secret lover, Alais. He intends to settle the question of inheritance and succession to the English crown, and has invited the new king of France, Philip (Alais’ brother), to hammer out a new treaty.

The young French ruler refuses to give in to Henry’s hardball tactics, however, and Alais is fearful that Henry will cast her aside if it means he can sign a favorable treaty and secure his legacy. The impatient demands of Henry’s sons also threaten to jeopardize the entire process. Richard is the eldest son and already a strong warrior who inherited Henry’s bravery and military skill, and has the support of his mother Eleanor. Geoffrey is intelligent and devious but fears he will be relegated to one day serve as chancellor to the future king. John is a pimply teenager who wants everything handed to him and, lucky for him, happens to be Henry’s favorite son.

The greatest threat to Henry’s plan lies in the imposing Eleanor, who he has kept imprisoned for the last 10 years after she and her sons rebelled against Henry’s rule. She has been freed by Henry for the duration of the treaty negotiations, because as the ruler of the Aquitaine, she still holds in her control valuable pieces of Henry’s empire. Despite her years behind bars, she is cunning and powerful enough to match Henry move for move and work to put her own favorite, Richard, in line for succession.

Characters

**Henry II**
king of England, age 50

**Eleanor of Aquitaine**
his wife, age 61

**Richard Lionheart**
their oldest son, age 26

**Geoffrey**
their middle son, age 25

**John**
their youngest son, age 16

**Philip II**
king of France, age 17

**Alais Capet**
his sister, age 23

Setting

Henry II’s palace at Chinon, France. Christmas, 1183

Synopsis

Clockwise from above: Philip II, Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine, John and Richard Lionheart
The historical material on Henry’s reign is considerable insofar as battles, plots, wars, treaties and alliances are concerned. This play, while simplifying the political maneuvering — and combining a meeting of the French and English Kings in 1183 with a Royal Court held at Windsor the following year into a Christmas Court that never was — is based on the available data.

The facts we have, while clear enough as to the outcome of relationships — such things as who kills whom and when — say little if anything about the quality and content of those relationships. The people in this play, their characters and passions, while consistent with the facts we have, are fictions.

There were no laws of primogeniture in Henry’s time. It was a rare thing when the King was followed by his eldest son. When kings died, it was open season on the English throne, a fact responsible for much that Henry did.

The play, finally, contains anachronisms in speech, thought, habit, custom and so on. Those the author is aware of — the way, for instance, Christmas is celebrated — are deliberate and not intended to outrage the historical aspects of the script.
A Brief Production History and Analysis of *The Lion in Winter*

by Stephanie Engel
Literary Intern

James Goldman’s *The Lion in Winter* premiered on May 3, 1966, at the Ambassador Theatre on Broadway and featured Rosemary Harris as Eleanor and Robert Preston as Henry, along with a 23-year-old Christopher Walken as French King Philip II. The play ran for only 92 performances before closing that same year. Reviewers like *The New York Times* theater critic Stanley Kauffman found the play lacking a fundamental question, which led to a predictable pattern of “statement of intent; which turns out to be a deception; which turns out to be a deliberately transparent deception,” that left audiences asking “What is Henry’s successor to us?”

However, such criticism did not prevent *The Lion in Winter* from reemerging two years later. In 1968, after a rise in demand for epic English historical films, Anthony Harvey directed Peter O’Toole and Katharine Hepburn in the Hollywood rendition of the tale. Again, the two leads were not the only significant stars. Nigel Terry, who would later play King Arthur in *Excalibur* (1981), performed the role of John, Timothy Dalton, a future James Bond, was Philip and a young Anthony Hopkins played Richard.

*The Lion in Winter* has faced its share of criticism, on stage and on screen. For some, the story’s intentional employment of modernized and at times anachronistic language is too stagy in its presentation. This has been defended by Goldman’s proponents, who insist that modernizing the dialogue helps audiences connect to the universal story of familial dysfunction. Such positive commentary also commonly describes the play as a more humorous version of Edward Albee’s 1962 play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, by the way in which *The Lion in Winter* comically displays the dissection of a marriage in the most vicious and yet interestingly contemporary way, especially when considering the story’s historical setting. In his 1981 review for *The New York Times*, Joseph Catinella suggested that although the play was flawed, Goldman’s word choices provided a “contemporary flair” that could endow the characters with “genuine, not waxworks, emotions,” another way in which some critics have continued to defend against the play’s naysayers on both fronts over the past half-century.

The 1968 movie also garnered mixed reviews. Many critics disliked how the adaptation appeared to marginalize the historical importance of the Plantagenet lineage in exchange for over-the-top dramatics. *Time* described Goldman’s adapted screenplay as “a TV-sized version of the sovereigns next door, their epic struggles shrunk to sitcom squabbles.”

Yet both the play and movie received a significant number of nominations and awards. On stage, Rosemary Harris won her first and only Tony Award after playing Eleanor, and the film won three Oscars, for best actress (a surprising tie between Hepburn and newcomer Barbra Streisand), best adapted screenplay and best original score, showing that Goldman’s story was still a great vehicle for powerful actresses. In fact, both Harris and Hepburn received countless commendations for their ferocious yet witty characterizations, even in the reviews of unconvinced critics.

And the story of the Plantagenets’ dysfunctional Christmas has received countless revivals in the United States and the United Kingdom, especially in the last 20 years. In 1999, Michael Mayer directed a production at Roundabout starring Stockard Channing and Laurence Fishburne, a revival that ran for a total of 93 performances, one more than its original staging. Furthermore, *The Lion in Winter* has appeared at significant venues like the American Shakespeare Center in Virginia and performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London under the direction of Trevor Nunn. The play was also adapted for the small screen in 2003, with Patrick Stewart and Glenn Close starring in a television movie made for Showtime.

*The Lion in Winter* receives its first production at the Guthrie under the direction of Kevin Moriarty, artistic director of Dallas Theater Center.
Most everyone who talks to me about *The Lion in Winter* is totally convinced the play has always been a great success. Even people who actually saw it during its run on Broadway are apt to mention what a hit it was or that they caught it in its second year. In point of fact, Lion opened on March 3, 1966 to highly contradictory notices, including a thundering dismissal in *The New York Times*. Eighty-three performances later, it closed and sank from sight for what I was convinced would be forever.

Then came the film.

I still can’t quite believe what happened. There are many plays that fail and then become successful movies; *Casablanca*, for example. But the play itself remains a failure; there were no new productions of *Everybody Came to Rick’s*, the play on which the film was based. And there are other plays that attain a brief new lease on life from being filmed, only to disappear again. *Lion*, as a stage piece was more than reprieved by the movie. It was transformed into a theater work that has been performed all over the world. ...

I know that I have never met these characters. I made them up. I read about the things they did, I studied them and then imagined what they felt and thought and said and wanted from their lives. What they were rally like, of course, no one will ever know.


“The Lion in Winter” is a witty play that deals with everything from the formation of a dynasty when civilization was teetering between barbarism and the rule of law to the meaning of familial relationships. ...

And while “The Lion in Winter” is, without question, a comedy, what makes it interesting is the underlying seriousness of a disputatious family caught in a historical vise.

Without the drama, “The Lion in Winter” is soap opera.

**Leah D. Frank, “‘Lion in Winter’: Mid-Life Crisis,” The New York Times, October 9, 1988**

**Philip Brandes, “Handsome ‘Lion in Winter’ a Bit Too Tame,” Los Angeles Times, November 16, 1994**

Marital strife, generational warfare, adultery, sibling rivalry, betrayal and even homophobia. Some things never go out of style.

By investing 12th-Century England’s Henry II and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, with contemporary voices and psychological insights, James Goldman’s 1966 drama “The Lion in Winter” illuminates archetypal patterns in families, politics and the turbulent unions of men and women.
The script – James Goldman’s master opus, for which he won an Oscar – glitters with its own audacious, decidedly anti-Shakespearean brilliance. …

Stalking one another like jungle creatures, the vexed royal family, in this telling, is made up of super-sexualized emotional predators. Forget clean arcs of development – the spine-stiffening that Hamlet and Prince Hal undergo – and yield to repartee and the kind of volatile, occasionally cynical characterization that intrigued Goldman’s fellow playwrights, Eugene O’Neill and Edward Albee. …

[T]his “Lion in Winter” is a young playwright’s arrogant rebuke to Shakespeare, a megaphone for the 60’s theme of family malice, an occasion for new actors to supersede the dead, and in all a glorious fight – intelligent aggression, a delight.


The anachronisms in “The Lion in Winter” are deliberate, for it was Goldman’s conceit to portray the life-and-death struggle among Henry, Eleanor and their three resentful sons as a drawing-room comedy about absolute power and its discontents. Not only do his seven characters engage in witty verbal fencing throughout the first act, but they go so far as to drop the mask of illusion and let the audience know that they know they’re actors in a play. “Of course he has a knife,” Eleanor says at one point. “We all have knives. It is 1183 and we’re barbarians.” Yet these touches of proto-postmodernism don’t come off as coy, … the punch lines are never allowed to obscure the underlying bitterness of the characters, but instead are used to bring their raw emotions into sharper focus.


The prickly family Christmas is an event with which many in the audience will identify, though most families only plot each other’s grisly demises as a whimsical fantasy. Not so the Plantagenets, who are ready and waiting with actual armies to take each other out if the division of the turkey (or the kingdom) goes the wrong way. … Historically speaking, it’s a justifiable version of their relationship, and a very beguiling one.

Alex von Tunzelman, “The Lion in Winter: it’s ‘Dynasty’ in the middle ages,” The Guardian, April 2, 2009

The contemporary stage is not often home to this kind of literate, witty, twisty excursion through the private side of history, and more’s the pity, although it should be noted that “The Lion in Winter” struggled to find an audience in 1966, when it premiered on Broadway.

After receiving what Goldman dryly described in a later edition of the play as a “thunderous dismissal in The New York Times, the show ran for fewer than three months. But the 1968 film version, starring Peter O’Toole and Katharine Hepburn, with an Oscar-winning adaptation by Goldman, greatly enhanced the popularity of the stage version of “The Lion in Winter.”

Don Aucoin, “It’s a jungle in there,” Boston Globe, July 1, 2013

Editor’s note: The Lion in Winter opened on Broadway in March 1966. It received mixed reviews, among which was the voice of The New York Times, coming down on the negative side. The show closed after just 92 performances, in no small part because of the Times’ influence. An excerpt from that review follows:

James Goldman has written the work with intelligence, some astringent wit and much theatrical skill; but all through the evening, the wrong question keeps growing in us: What is Henry’s successor to us?

In other words, Mr. Goldman’s play – for all its considerable cleverness of construction, pith and mercurial storming of moods – never really shakes or concerns us. His characters are recognizable but not affecting; his drama is discernible but not gripping; and a theme – to justify the existence of the play here and now – is hard to find.


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Quotes from the Play

It isn't such a dreadful thing to be a Queen of England. Not all eyes will weep for you.
- Henry, act one, scene one

Tell me they all three want the crown, I'll tell you it's a feeble prince that doesn't. They may snap at me or plot and that makes them the kind of sons I want. I've snapped and plotted all my life: there is no other way to be a king, alive and fifty all at once.
- Henry, act one, scene one

Some of them are smarter folk than I or crueler or more ruthless or dishonest. But not all rolled in one. The priests write all the history these days and they'll do me justice. Henry, they'll say, was a master bastard.
- Henry, act one, scene one

Well — what shall we hang? The holly or each other?
- Henry, act one, scene two

Henry: Once I'm dead, who's to be king? I could draw papers till my scribes drop or the ink runs out and once I died, unless I've left behind me three contented sons, my lands will split three ways in civil war. You see my problem?
Philip: Clearly; but it's yours, not mine.
- act one, scene two

It isn't power that I feel deprived of; it's the mention that I miss. There's no affection for me here.
- Geoffrey, act one, scene two

Henry, I have a confession. ... I don't much like our children.
- Eleanor, act one, scene two

Kings, queens, knights everywhere you look and I'm the only pawn. I haven't got a thing to lose: that makes me dangerous.
- Alais, act one, scene three

I know. You know I know. I know you know I know, we know that Henry knows and Henry knows we know it. We're a knowledgeable family.
- Geoffrey, act one, scene three

Henry was eighteen when we met and I was Queen of France. He came down from the North to Paris with a mind like Aristotle's and a form like mortal sin. We shattered the Commandments on the spot.
- Eleanor, act one, scene three

He's all I've got. How often does he have to hear it? Every supper? Should we start the soup with who we love and who we don't?
- Henry, act one, scene four

I even made poor Louis take me on Crusade. How's that for blasphemy? I dressed my maids as Amazons and rode bare-breasted halfway to Damascus. Louis had a seizure and I damn near died of windburn but the troops were dazzled.
- Eleanor, act one, scene four

I fooled you, didn't I? God, but I do love being king.
- Henry, act one, scene four

Of course he has a knife. He always has a knife. We all have knives. It is eleven eighty-three and we're barbarians.
- Eleanor, act one, scene five

That's a rare fair feature, even teeth. She smiled to excess but she chewed with real distinction.
- Eleanor, act two, scene one

Life, if it's like anything at all, is like an avalanche. To blame the little ball of snow that starts it all, to say it is the cause, is just as true as it is meaningless.
- Eleanor, act two, scene one

Henry: The day those stout hearts band together is the day that pigs get wings. Eleanor: There'll be pork in the treetops come the morning.
- act two, scene one
Notes about the 12th Century

FRANCE’S RELATIONSHIP WITH ENGLAND

France, according to John of Salisbury, was “of all nations, the sweetest and most civilized.” The House of Capet had ruled the country since 987, when the feudal lord Hugh Capet had been elected King after the death of Louis V, the last monarch of the Carolingian dynasty, which descended from the Emperor Charlemagne.

In the early twelfth century, the kingdom of France found itself in a struggle for supremacy with feudal vassals who had extended their territories and become more powerful than the crown, whose own authority held little weight beyond the royal demesne [land holdings]. This comprised the Île de France, a small feudatory that had evolved from the Carolingian county of Paris, as well as Sens, Orléans, and part of Berry. The greatest threats to French expansion were posed by the Count of Blois, linked by strong family and political ties to the count of Champagne, and by the count of Anjou [Henry’s father], who was determined to annex the duchy of Normandy, which he claimed in right of his wife Matilda, heiress of Henry I, King of England. The Norman Conquest of 1066, which made the dukes of Normandy kings of England and gave them equal rank with their overlords, had dramatically altered the balance of power in northern France; the separation of Normandy from England would remain the aim of successive French monarchs, who knew all too well that the union of these powerful continental feudatories would encircle and isolate France and prevent her from further extending her territories and influence.


FEUDALISM

Historians wax both eloquent and wrathful over whether William [the Conqueror] introduced, invented or discovered feudalism, but everyone is agreed that whatever he did, he made feudalism work better in England than did any other monarch in Europe. Feudalism is the most important single term for comprehending English medieval history, but as a system it is almost impossible to describe, some historians going so far as to question whether it actually existed at all. Possibly this is why students so often confuse it with the “futile system.” Feudalism was both an attitude of mind and a political relationship supplying the human bonds that held medieval society together. In theory, it was a contractual but unwritten agreement between private individuals (the lord and his vassal) whereby the lord exchanged land for services, mostly military but sometimes legal and financial. Feudalism, although private, in the sense that the lord granted authority or dominium over land and the vassal in return took an oath of fealty to obey, was public in purpose. Its goal was to tie the political and military elite together into an organized and controllable unit that could be called upon to

Did you Know?

• Henry was the great-grandson of William I, (the Conqueror), the Norman who invaded England and became king in 1066.

• Eleanor and Henry’s fathers – William X and Geoffrey Plantagenet – joined together in an unsuccessful attempt to invade and conquer Normandy in 1136. Geoffrey succeeded in 1144 on his own.

• In order to protect his new interests in Normandy, Geoffrey Plantagenet declined to join Louis VII (and Eleanor) on the Second Crusade in 1147.

• The surname Plantagenet wasn’t used to designate the family during their lifetimes, but derived from Henry’s father, Geoffrey of Anjou. He wore yellow broom plant (planta genista) in his hat and was given the nickname during his lifetime.

• Eleanor (and others) probably didn’t know how to write. They learned to read, but used clerks for writing. Eleanor learned how to read her native tongue (Provençal), some Latin and French as well.
defend the Kingdom and enforce a minimum of law and order. It offered security in an era that was desperately short of ready money and had only land with which to pay for a professionally trained standing army. …

The vassal owed personal loyalty to his lord, and he tended to define himself in terms of the person to whom he had pledge his service and from whom he expected support. “Between lord and man there is only faith, and faith must be recognized and kept between them.” This was the motional cement that tied society together, and, as a result, any sense of obligation to a public authority, such as the state, was placed well below the private faith a man felt for his immediate overlord. The person and personality of the king were always far greater magnets for loyal than was the crown he wore. …

The central political issue of the day was how to get the vassals to live up to their oaths of fealty and be honest, faithful and true to their overlords, and how to get the top barons to wage war for the King and not against him.


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Did you Know? cont’d

- Henry spoke only Latin and French dialects upon becoming king of England, but he was competent in other languages.

- When Henry was 13, his father Geoffrey proposed to Louis VII that Henry marry Louis and Eleanor’s daughter Marie, then an infant. Geoffrey was looking to expand his influence. Louis said no.

- Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Histories of the Kings of Britain* (published mid-12th century) included a number of chapters about the prophecies of Merlin, the legendary magician. Some of these prophecies became associated with Henry II and his family. “This shall the eagle of the broken covenant gild over, and the Eagle shall rejoice in her third nesting” was connected to Eleanor, her divorce and the birth of Richard (third son, though sixth child including those with Louis) and “The roaring whelps shall keep vigil, and forsaking the forests shall follow the chase within the walls of cities. No small slaughter shall they make of them that withstand them, and the tongues of bulls shall they cut out. They shall load with chains the necks of them that roar, and the days of their grandsire shall they renew” is thought to describe Henry’s sons’ rebellion against him.
Biographies of the Historical Personages

Henry II, King of England (1133-1189, r. 1154-1189) was the first Plantagenet king of England, great-grandson to William the Conqueror, and son to Empress Matilda and Geoffrey, count of Anjou. Through his father’s death in 1151 and his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152, Henry became the lord of western France, which meant that he owned more French property than the French crown did. In 1154 Henry was crowned king of England after fighting his mother’s cousin King Stephen for the right of succession, making him the ruler over substantial lands of both England and France, all at the age of 21.

Henry’s greatest innovation came from the creation of the English common law, a system based on the circuit judge, the legal writ and the jury. However, Henry clashed with his former friend and chancellor, Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury. The two disagreed over where the line was between the church and state and including the trying of criminal clerks. In 1170, Becket was murdered by four of Henry’s knights, an act that Henry did not directly order but which the knights claimed he wanted done.

Henry also encountered great conflict with his own family over the years. Henry and Eleanor had eight children, seven of whom survived to adulthood and four of whom fought for control of the English crown. Throughout Henry’s reign there were several familial rebellions against him, the first of which led to Henry’s imprisonment of his Eleanor, the second of which ended with the death of his first son and presumed heir, Henry the Young King. During the latter half of his rule, Henry grappled with his sons over the issue of succession, ultimately being succeeded by Richard in 1189 after battling him and his younger son John over land in northern France.

Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204) was the countess of Poitou and duchess of Aquitaine, the richest and largest province in 12th-century France. She was first married to Louis VII of France in 1147 and had two daughters with him before their marriage was dissolved in 1152. Two months after the annulment she married Henry. Some say that Eleanor’s marriage to Henry caused the next 300 years of war between France and England, because Henry now controlled more of France than Louis did. Eleanor had eight children with Henry, five sons and three daughters, all but one of whom survived to adulthood. She was extremely invested in the future of her children. However, after a family rebellion against Henry in 1173, Eleanor was captured and imprisoned in southern England. Although she occasionally appeared at state occasions, she remained a prisoner until Henry’s death in 1189.

Upon Henry’s death, Richard claimed the throne and freed Eleanor, installing her as his trusted counselor. Eleanor held significant power and oversaw, among other things, the quelling John’s rebellion in 1192 when Richard was out of the country and the running of England when Richard was imprisoned by the Duke of Austria and the Holy Roman Emperor. (She also oversaw the gathering of Richard’s immense ransom, which she personally brought to his captors in Germany in the dead of winter in 1194.) After Richard’s return to England, Eleanor presided as queen at a ceremonial crown-wearing at Winchester.

Following Richard’s death, Eleanor supported John’s ascendancy to the throne and coerced the noblemen of Aquitaine and her other realms into accepting him as overlord. By this time, Eleanor was in her 80s, far beyond the normal 12th-century lifespan. She retired to Fontevrault Abbey, where her husband Henry and son Richard were buried, and spent her last days among the nuns there. She died in the spring of 1204, at age 82.

Philip II Augustus (1165-1223, r. 1179-1223) was the son of Louis VII and became the king of France by age 15. At the time, the actual royal domain of the French kings was small, consisting primarily of territory around Paris known as the Ile-de-France. To the north, west and south stretched the imposing Plantagenet empire controlled by Henry II, which included Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Touraine and Aquitaine.

Throughout his time as king, Philip partnered and/or fought with many men of the Plantagenet line in order to improve the prospects of his own territory. He was close with both Henry the Young King and Geoffrey, and he made an alliance with Richard in 1188 at the end of Henry’s reign.

Philip and Richard remained allies after Henry’s death in 1189, and together they led the Third Crusade into Jerusalem. At one point during their alliance, one chronicler noted...
that “Philip honoured Richard so highly that every day they ate at the same table and shared the same dishes; at night the bed did not separated them. The king of France loved him as his own soul and their mutual love was so great that the lord king of England was stupefied by its vehemence.” This quote has been interpreted in many ways over the years, with some believing that Philip and Richard were lovers, however this assumption can neither be explicitly confirmed nor denied. When John succeeded Richard as king of England, Philip capitalized on John’s lack of political acumen and military skill to win substantial territory for France. By the end of his rule in 1223, Philip had quadrupled the land that France controlled directly, mostly at the expense of English rulers, and the French government had also become more centralized in Paris, to adapt to the greater amount of territory to control.

**Richard I, the Lionheart** (1157-1199, r. 1189-1199), Henry and Eleanor’s second oldest son, was the duke of Aquitaine and Eleanor’s favorite son. He was betrothed to Louis VII’s daughter Alais in 1169, and four years later led his first military campaign, fighting alongside his brothers Henry the Young King and Geoffrey against their father for more autonomy of rule.

Although Richard and his brothers were defeated, 10 years later, Henry offered to make Richard the heir to the English throne, after the passing of Richard’s older brother Henry the Young King. However, in exchange for the crown, Henry wanted Richard to give his most prized possession, the Aquitaine, to John, who did not have lands of his own. Richard refused; over the next few years he developed an alliance with Philip of France. Between 1187 and 1189, Richard fought his father in battles across northern France, eventually securing his inheritance with the defeat and death of Henry. Unfortunately for Richard, his rule was plagued by military blunders and economic failures. After failing to recapture Jerusalem during the Third Crusade, Richard was taken prisoner by the Duke of Austria and the Holy Roman Emperor because of affronts he made during the crusade. After the first installment of his ransom was payed, Richard returned home to face a rebellious John and to fortify his land from outside attacks by his one-time ally Philip.

Despite his many victories and the glamor attached to them by minstrels and chroniclers, his war efforts led to severe economic difficulties throughout Richard’s realm and would later be a cause for the Plantagenet decline under John’s rule.

In 1199, Richard was hit in the shoulder by a crossbow bolt while fighting over a treasure trove in Limousin. He soon developed gangrene and died that April. John assume the throne as Richard’s heir, as Richard had no children.

**Geoffrey, Duke of Brittany** (1158-1186) was the second youngest son of Henry and Eleanor and the duke of Brittany following his marriage to Constance, the daughter of Conan IV, duke of Brittany, in 1181. Although Geoffrey not the oldest son and fought against Henry in multiple familial squabbles, Henry did at one point toy with making Geoffrey the next king, in order to tie Brittany permanently with the rest of the Plantagenet empire. But Henry did not follow through with his plan and the question of succession remained unresolved even after Geoffrey’s death in 1186. Geoffrey was in Paris at the time, attending a tournament held by his close friend Philip of France, when was wounded during the games. The wound became infected and Geoffrey died at the age of 28. Geoffrey left behind two children, Eleanor and Arthur, the latter of whom was born posthumously. When Richard became king, he recognized Arthur as his heir, as he had no children of his own. After Arthur became a ward of Philip, however, Richard put his favor behind John as his presumptive heir and when Richard died, John was recognized as the new king. This led to a war between John and Arthur, with John being the eventual victor. Arthur, age 15 at this point, was captured at the battle of Mirebeau-en-Poitou and imprisoned at Falaise. There are many rumors as to what happened to him, one of which claimed that in a drunken rage John killed Arthur with his own hands, weighted the body and threw it into the Seine. Arthur’s sister Eleanor on the other hand, who had also been captured at Mirebeau, was treated well. She was given an allowance, gifts and a modicum of free movement by John. She died in 1241.

**King John of England** (1166-1216, r.1199-1216), Henry and Eleanor’s youngest son, grew up in Henry’s court as his father’s favorite. As a fourth son not expected to become king, John was readied for a life in the church, living at the abbey of Fontevrault for at least five years of his adolescence. His position did not prevent him from being placed in the center of a battle for power between Henry and his other sons. In 1173, Henry attempted to give John some of his own land in order to improve John’s marriage prospects. Yet this land was part of the presumed inheritance Henry’s heir, Henry the Young King, would receive. Because of this, John’s brothers and his own
mother Eleanor rebelled against Henry, along with the help of Louis, king of France. John, who was age six at the time, did not participate on either side of the ensuing war. John was often on the sidelines for many of the family's quarrels, at least until 1189 when he joined his brother Richard to fight one last battle against their father. John's betrayal is believed to have hastened Henry's death after the battle.

Richard became king and although John remained generally loyal to his brother, he did attempt to take the throne from Richard during his Austrian imprisonment. Although John's rebellion had to be squashed first by Eleanor then by Richard upon his return, John remained in good favor with Richard and became king after Richard's death in 1199. John's reign would be even less successful than Richard's. By the end of John's rule, he had lost nearly all of England's holdings in France and had been forced to sign the Magna Carta, the first formal document stating that the monarch was under the same rule of law as his people, a dramatic curtailment of royal power.

Alais Capet (1160-unknown) was the fourth daughter of Louis VII of France and half-sister to Philip. At age 8 she was betrothed to Richard, Henry's second son, as part of a larger treaty to cement peace between Louis and Henry. She became Henry's ward in accordance with the treaty terms until she was old enough to be married, and by age 15 she was Henry's mistress. At one point, Henry pursued an annulment from Eleanor in order to marry Alais (who was still betrothed to Richard) and carried on openly with the Alais. The belief was that Henry intended to disinherit his sons with Eleanor in favor of new heirs with Alais. The annulment was denied.

After Henry died in 1189, Eleanor took Alais prisoner in order to prevent her marriage to Richard. At this point both Eleanor and Richard had decided Alais was no longer Richard's best option, since her affair with Henry could possibly provide grounds for questioning the legitimacy of any children Richard and Alais might have. Richard married another woman, Berengaria of Navarre, but did not release Alais because with her, he retained control over the Vexin, a key piece of French land given to the Plantagenets as part of Alais' dowry. These actions angered Philip, who was still unaware of the illicit affair between Alais and Henry, but after Richard produced evidence of Alais' affair, the betrothal was nullified. After another five years of quarreling between France and England, Alais at age 35 returned to France. Philip married her to William III, count of Ponthieu, one of his vassals, and nothing more is known about her.
Parents, Children and Siblings

In a study appearing in the journal Child Development, researchers led by Jennifer Jenkins, a professor of human development and applied psychology at the University of Toronto, report on the wide-ranging effects that playing favorites, known as differential parenting, can have on not just individual siblings but also on the behavior and mental health of all family members.

When parents provide more positive feedback and encouragement to one child while sending primarily negative comments to another, it’s no surprise that the negatively targeted child may develop more behavior problems and have a more difficult relationship with his parents. But Jenkins and her colleagues were interested in exploring how differential parenting affects all siblings in a family and in understanding some of the factors that might make such differential treatment more likely. ...

Overall, the negatively treated children tended to show more attention and emotional problems than their more positively treated siblings by the end of the four-year study, but all children showed higher rates of these problems compared with when the trial began. That, says Jenkins, was a surprise since previous work had only highlighted the effect of differential parenting on the targeted children.

“We would have thought that, on the basis of previous research, it would just be the disfavored children who are having problems, but that’s not the case,” says Jenkins. “Sometimes moms are very similar with their kids, and sometimes they’re very different with their kids. And when they advantage some and disadvantage others, it looks like it’s a problem for all of the kids in terms of their mental health.”


Every individual in your family has a separate, one-on-one relationship with every other individual, each of those relationships representing a discrete, stand-alone pairing. ...

Every such pairing in any one family has strengths, intimacies, and challenges that are peculiar to it, and this is particularly so in the case of siblings. The relationship between, say, two middle-born sisters will be very different from that between a firstborn son and a second-born son, a firstborn girl and a fourth-born girl, and on and on. ...

As with all environments, each of these can develop its own climate and ecology, and this is particularly so when it comes to the onset of storms. Parents who are asked how often their children fight will predictably answer with exasperated absolutes: “Constantly,” they’ll say. “When do they not fight?” Unscientific as these responses are, the fact is, they’re surprisingly accurate. Indeed, parents who lament what seems to be the almost hourly outbreak of hostilities in the playroom may actually be lowballing things. ...

For all these everyday provocations, however, the most common casus belli among siblings is property. Small children have almost no control over their world, and what little they do have concerns their possessions. They understand early on that toys that are presented to them belong to them, and while kids are perfectly willing to encroach on the property rights of another, they can’t abide someone else trespassing on theirs. ...

Close behind property as a trigger for sibling war making is the general concept of fairness. ... [A] small child’s sense of what’s fair and what’s not goes beyond the favor-for-favor, good-deed-for-good-deed arrangements of reciprocal altruism, extending to pretty much any transaction at all that involves a brother or sister. The cupcake must be cut precisely in half or the child who got stiffed will howl. ... When sibs grow up, they may realize the fundamental pointlessness of these arguments on principle, but when they’re children, the issues seem very, very real.

Select Glossary of Terms

**PEOPLE**

**Peter Abélard**
(ca.1079-ca.1142) was a French philosopher, theologian, poet, teacher and monk. He met Heloïse, the niece of the clergyman at the cathedral of Paris, in the 1110s when she became a private pupil. They fell in love, had a son named Astrolabe and then married secretly. Her uncle was furious, Heloïse fled to the Argenteuil convent outside Paris, and the uncle had Abélard castrated. Abélard then became a monk and made Heloïse become a nun, but both remained in or near Paris. Abélard’s book *Theologia*, was condemned as heretical in 1121. By the 1130s he became abbot of a new community of nuns that Heloïse had become the head of, and they put together a collection of their love letters and religious correspondence. He and Heloïse are buried side by side in Paris.

“I was a queen of fifteen in those days and on dull afternoons I’d go watch Heloïse watch Abélard spread heresy like bonemeal in the palace gardens.” (Eleanor, act one)

**Amazons**

in Greek mythology, a race of female warriors who lived just outside the sphere of Greece. One of Heracles 12 labors was to get the girdle of the Amazon queen, Hippolyta; another story has Penthesilea leading an army against the Greeks in support of Troy, but she was killed by Achilles.

“I even made poor Louis take me on Crusade. How’s that for blasphemy? I dressed my maids as Amazons and rode bare-breasted halfway to Damascus. Louis had a seizure …” (Eleanor, act one)

**Thomas Becket**

(1118-1170), chancellor of England (1155-62) and later archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170) during Henry’s reign. He was born into the merchant class and came to the notice of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, for whom he became a clerk and eventually the archdeacon of Canterbury. Theobald suggested to Henry that Becket would make a good chancellor, and he assumed that position in 1155 and performed extremely well with Henry’s trust. The breach between Becket and Henry began when Henry appointed Becket as archbishop of Canterbury upon Theobald’s death. Henry hoped that by having Becket at the head of the church that he could consolidate all power – church and state – in his own hands and strictly control the church. But Becket wasn’t going to be Henry’s lackey; instead he became a defender of the church and its rights, and even resigned the chancellorship. During this time, clergy who broke the law were tried by a bishop under canon law rather than by the state. Punishments were usually lighter, and Henry thought many crimes were going unpunished. Becket sided with the church and this argument eventually led to Becket going into exile for six years. After Henry had the Young King crowned by the archbishop of York in 1170, Becket and the Pope excommunicated everybody involved. Somehow Henry and Becket came to a kind of truce, neither admitting he was wrong, and Becket returned to Canterbury in December 1170. But he made Henry mad again because he almost immediately excommunicated more of Henry’s supporters, refused to un-excommunicate the archbishop of York and reveled in the cheers of the crowds that greeted him. Henry made a comment about the pesky Becket that led four of his knights to believe they were fulfilling his wishes when they murdered Becket in the Canterbury cathedral on December 29, 1170. He was canonized by the Pope in February 1173.

“There was no Thomas Becket then, or Rosamund. No rivals — only me.” (Eleanor, act one)

**Charlemagne**

(ca.747-814), aka Charles I or Charles the Great, a king of the Franks (r.768-814) and first Holy Roman Emperor (r.800-814). At its height, Charlemagne’s empire included most of modern France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy.

“… and ruled, for thirty years, a state as great as Charlemagne’s.” (Henry, act one)

**Circe**

from Greek mythology: a sorceress who could transform humans into animals. In The Odyssey, Circe changes Odysseus’ men into swine. Hermes tells Odysseus how to protect himself with an herb, allowing Odysseus to make her change the men back. He stays with Circe for a year, and she tells him his journey goes through the Underworld and how best to navigate the Sirens and the Scylla-Charybdis monster-whirlpool hazard.
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Circe  
from Greek mythology: a sorceress who could transform humans into animals. In The Odyssey, Circe changes Odysseus’ men into swine. “… even Circe had her limits. No, I never poisoned Rosamund.” (Eleanor, act two)

Franks  
a Germanic-speaking people from the lower Rhine River that invaded the western Roman provinces in the 5th century and eventually occupied and dominated the area along the Rhine River that is present-day Netherlands, Belgium, western Germany and northern France (from whom it gets its name).

Holy Romans  
a collection of lands in western and central Europe that was presided over first by Frankish kings, then by German kings between 800 and 1806 as an inheritor of the mantle of the Roman Empire, and which stood in contrast to the Byzantine empire of the Eastern Orthodox Church. “You’d feed us to the Franks or hand us to the Holy Romans.” (Richard, act one)

Geoffrey, count of Anjou  
(1113-1150), Henry’s father, married Empress Matilda (daughter of Henry I, king of England) in 1128 when she was 26 and he was 15. His father Fulk V resigned the title of count upon the marriage, so Geoffrey became count of Anjou. Geoffrey died suddenly of a fever when Henry was 18. There is a story that Geoffrey and Eleanor had an affair – it’s said that Geoffrey told Henry about it when it became
clear Henry was going to marry Eleanor. Speculation would place the affair around 1146, “do you ever wonder if I slept with Geoffrey?” “With my father?” (Eleanor, Henry, act one)

**Henry the Young King** (1155-1183), the older brother of Richard, Geoffrey and John. Henry was the presumed heir for most of his life and was crowned co-king with Henry II in 1170 by the archbishop of York. Henry was crowned a second time in 1172, this time with his wife Marguerite being crowned queen as well, but he still didn’t get to share power with his father. The next year he started a rebellion against Henry, and was joined by Richard, Geoffrey, Eleanor and Louis of France. He was in the midst of a second revolt, this time fighting against Richard, when he died of dysentery on June 11, 1183.

Henry was immature, vain, hot-tempered and fond of tournaments. And a bit ungrateful: when he was crowned as co-king, Henry II honored his son by serving him at the coronation banquet, noting “It is surely unusual to see a king wait upon table,” to which York agreed, “Not every prince can be served at table by a king.” Henry the Young King responded, “Certainly, it can be no condensation for the son of a count to serve the son of a king.” “She knows young Henry’s dead. The Young King died in summer and I haven’t named an heir.” (Henry, act one)

**Louis VII** (1120-1180, r.1137-1180), king of France, Eleanor’s first husband and Philip and Alais’ father. Louis was the second son of Louis VI and became his heir when his older brother Philip died in 1131. Louis married Eleanor shortly after her father’s death; Louis VI died soon thereafter, leaving 17-year-old Louis and 15-year-old Eleanor in charge of France. As king of France, he was overlord to many duchies, counties and earldoms that spread throughout the continent and made up a good portion of what is modern-day France.

Louis and Eleanor’s marriage was annulled in 1152 after they returned from the Holy Land during the Second Crusade on grounds that they were too closely related in blood (fourth cousins), but most likely because Eleanor hadn’t given birth to a son. Eleanor almost immediately married Henry, taking the Aquitaine with her. Henry as duke of Anjou was Louis’ vassal, but as king of England, he was Louis’ equal. Louis’ reign was defined by his intermittent skirmishes and pacts with Henry.

Louis married two more times: Alais is the second daughter of his second marriage; Philip, his only son, was born to his third wife. “Let’s hope he’s grown up like his father — simon pure and simon simple. Good, good Louis …” (Eleanor, act one)

**Medea** from Greek mythology: the sorceress daughter of King Aeetus of Colchis who helped Jason with his tasks to win the Golden Fleece from her father then helped him and his Argonauts escape. She married Jason, had his children, but in Corinth Jason fell in love with the king’s daughter and arranged to marry her. He saw those plans derailed by a jealous Medea, who got her revenge by killing the princess and her own children with Jason before fleeing to Athens. “You are Medea to the teeth but this is one son you won’t use for vengeance on your husband.” (Richard, act one)

**Praxiteles**
4th century Greek artist, flourished 370-330 BCE. He improved the gracefulness, sensuousness and surface finish of Greek sculpture, and his “Aphrodite of Cnidus” was considered the finest statue in the whole world by Pliny the Elder. “Ask any sculptor, ask Praxiteles, ‘Why don’t you work in butter?’” (Henry, act one)

**Uncle Raymond** (ca.1116?-1149) Raymond of Antioch, 8 to 12 years older than Eleanor, the youngest sibling and only brother of her father William X. In 1133 or so, King Fulk of Jerusalem offered his ward Princess Constance of Antioch (in modern-day Turkey) to Raymond in marriage; they married in 1136 and he became prince of Antioch.

“Christmas was a time of great confusion for me: the Holy Land had two kings, God and Uncle Raymond” (Eleanor, act two)

**Rosamund de Clifford** (?-1176/77), daughter of Sir Walter de Clifford, a knight of Norman extraction who had an estate on the English border with Wales. Very little is known about Rosamund through contemporary sources and most stories have grown up in the time since. Though no start date to her affair with Henry is definitively known, it could be around 1165 (or maybe after Eleanor was past childbearing age), but it was not publicly acknowledged until 1174. Rosamund was thought to be very young at the start of the affair, doesn’t seem to have borne him any children but is said to be the love of Henry’s life.

Tales about Eleanor having poisoned Rosamund are unreliable. Eleanor was a closely guarded prisoner at the time of Rosamund’s death, so she likely couldn’t have done it, and the stories that she
did arise when she was an enemy of Henry and therefore a target for negative rumors.  
“And Rosamund.” (Alais, act one)

**PLACES**

**Aquitaine**  
a region in southern France bordering Spain and the Atlantic Ocean. Charlemagne made it a kingdom for his son Louis in 781. Invasions and civil wars in the 800s weakened control by Charlemagne’s descendants, so various feudal domains asserted themselves. The count of Poitiers, a city in Aquitaine, secured the title of duke of Aquitaine and the Poitier counts ruled and expanded the region so that the duchy became one of the most influential European states. Eleanor was the daughter and heir of William VIII of Poitiers, duke of Aquitaine. “The richest woman in the world. She owns the Aquitaine, the greatest province on the Continent…” (Henry, act one)

**Brittany**  
a region in northwestern France, the peninsula formed by the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay of the Atlantic Ocean. It was conquered by Julius Caesar and settled by Celtic refugees from Britain (thus its name) in the 6th century. It was under Frankish control until the 9th century, then under the overlordship of the counts of Anjou, of which Henry II was one. “We’ve made you Duke of Brittany. Is that so little?” (Henry, act one)

**Chinon**  
a palace built by Henry II on Fort Saint-Georges near the town of Chinon on the Vienne River in central France. Chinon lies at the intersection of the provinces of Anjou to the west, Touraine to the east and Aquitaine to the south. The castle was situated on a rocky spur of higher ground that was a prized strategic location since ancient times. It was one of the Henry’s strongest fortresses and one of his favorite residences. He died there in 1189 after being beaten in battle by Richard and Philip. “My Lord. Welcome to Chinon.” (Henry, act one)

**Damascus**  
the capital of Syria, which became a Muslim city in the 7th century. The city was under the rule of various Turks during the 11th century, and during the Crusades, the city endured sieges and attacks, but avoided occupation. “I even made poor Louis take me on Crusade. How’s that for blasphemy? I dressed my maids as Amazons and rode bare-breasted halfway to Damascus.” (Eleanor, act one)

**English Channel**  
the body of water that separates southern England from northern France. After the 1173 rebellion by the boys and Eleanor, Henry II imprisoned Eleanor in Sarum Castle near Salisbury, England. To get to Chinon, France, from her prison, Eleanor would have to cross the English Channel. “How was your crossing? Did the Channel part for you?” (Richard, act one)

**Normandy**  
a region in northern France that borders the English Channel. It was part of ancient Gaul, conquered by Julius Caesar then by the Franks in the 5th century and by the Norsemen in the 9th. In 911, the area was given to the Norseman Rollo, first duke of Normandy, by Charles III of France, and it’s from the Norsemen that it gets its name. Norman William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066 and united England and Normandy under his rule. “All of England’s land in France, from Normandy down to the Spanish border, once I’m King.” (Geoffrey, p.56)

**Provence**  
a region of southeastern France bordered by the Rhone River on the west, Mediterranean Sea on the south and Italy on the east. At the time depicted in the play, Provence was ruled by the Spanish in Catalonia. “Think: on the loose in London, winters in Provence,” (Henry, act one)

**Salisbury Tower**  
One of Eleanor’s prisons was thought to be Sarum Castle, near Salisbury, which dated to William the Conqueror’s time. The stone portion of the castle dates to Henry I’s time, and significant construction was done on the castle during the time that coincided with Eleanor’s imprisonment. But it’s possible she was moved between a series of castles in southern England, including Salisbury Tower in Windsor Castle west of London. “We’re launching her for Salisbury Tower when the winds change. She’ll be barging down the River Vienne by lunchtime.” (Henry, p.91)

**Stonehenge**  
a group of prehistoric standing stones on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire in southwestern England constructed between 3000 and 1500 BCE. “You’ll last. You’re like the rocks at Stonehenge; nothing knocks you down.” (Alais, act one)

**Vaudreuil**  
a castle in Normandy in a valley created by the confluence of the Seine and its tributary the Reuil.
It seems to date to the Romans at least in part, and appears to have been a vital link in a chain of fortresses in the region to protect Normandy. It's about 60 miles from Paris.

“The fortress at Vaudreuil has dungeons down two hundred feet.” (Richard, p.95)

Vexin
a region in northern France south of Rouen, along the Seine and Oise rivers, which was a border area between the kingdoms of Normandy (Henry’s) and France (Philip’s). In 1077 William the Conqueror, the first Norman king of England, lost his part of the Vexin to the play’s Philip’s great-grandfather. Philip’s father Louis made the Vexin part of his daughter’s dowry when betrothed to Henry’s son. Paris is about 25 miles from Pontoise in the southwestern part of the Vexin.

“The Vexin is a little county but it’s vital to me.” (Henry, act one)

Wales
an area on the west coast of the isle of Britain which in the 12th century was a collection of little kingdoms; three in particular were able to resist Norman/English direct rule but paid homage to the king of England.

“He found Miss Clifford in the mists of Wales and brought her home for closer observation.” (Eleanor, act one)

Westminster
Westminster Abbey, the church in London where the kings (and queens) of England have been crowned since William the Conqueror in 1066. Henry II was crowned there on December 19, 1154; Richard on September 12, 1189; John on May 25, 1199. The current building dates to the 13th through 16th centuries; the church in which the Plantagenets would have been crowned was built by Edward the Confessor in the 11th century.

“... at Westminster, they’ll sing out Vivat Rex for someone else.” (Henry, act two)

**THINGS**

chancellor
the king’s right-hand man, the highest administrative and judicial official in the country, ranking above everyone except princes and the archbishop of Canterbury.

“And I’m to be his chancellor. Has he told you?” (Geoffrey, act one)

Christmas Courts
Christmas courts since William the Conqueror were times of great celebration from December 25 to January 6, with feasts, masquerades and much politicking. Nobles invited to a Christmas court really couldn’t (and wouldn’t want to) refuse. Henry let Eleanor out of prison on at least a couple occasions.

The second time came in late 1184. Henry made all his children join him in Westminster and brought Eleanor out to join them, hoping she’d support his plans for their inheritances. (She refused.) This is the Christmas court that inspired in part the events of The Lion in Winter.

“Still, as long as I get trotted out for Christmas Courts and state occasions now and then ...” (Eleanor, act one)

Crusade
the Second Crusade to the Holy Land began in 1147. After a difficult journey that included an attack on Louis’ army when the vanguard didn’t follow orders and an outbreak of plague, Louis and Eleanor met her uncle Prince Raymond in Antioch in Syria.

There is a legend that Eleanor and the other women dressed themselves as Amazons and galloped among the crowds. But no contemporary record of the event is recorded, so it’s likely a story created after the fact.

“I even made poor Louis take me on Crusade. How’s that for blasphemy?” (Eleanor, act one)

excommunication
a punishment in which a person is not allowed to participate in the rites of the church.

“He’s excommunicated you again.” (Alais, act two)

Plantagenet
the surname derives from the Latin name (Planta genista) of the yellow broom plant that Henry’s father, Geoffrey count of Anjou, wore in his hat.

“Henry Fitz-Empress, first Plantagenet, a king at twenty-one, the ablest soldier of an able time.” (Henry, act one)

rhetoric
the art of using language to persuade and influence people, especially within the rules for eloquence as devised by ancient Greeks.

“I’m rather proud; I taught her all the rhetoric she knows.” (Eleanor, act two)
From the Director: Kevin Moriarty

The Many Shades of Family

_The Lion in Winter_ is not a history play. Despite being set in 1183, featuring characters who are all significant figures in European history, and with a plot focused on royal succession, history is simply the framework that James Goldman used to create a play about more personal themes.

When _The Lion in Winter_ premiered in 1966, America was deeply invested in a postwar vision of the traditional nuclear family. Throughout popular culture, religion and politics, the dominant image of the family was one led by a gently patriarchal father and a supportive stay-at-home mother, devoted to raising their loving children who were positive reflections of their parents’ virtues. From “Father Knows Best” to “The Cosby Show,” this idea of an ideal family held great power for several generations.

But it wasn’t true. Beneath the seemingly placid surface of suburban life, a revolution was brewing. Within a decade much that had been oppressed or denied would burst forth into public consciousness: divorce, homosexuality, women’s liberation, the counterculture rebellion, and disillusionment toward authority. Goldman saw this clearly and audaciously applied it to famous historical characters, imagining their richly complicated relationships and psychology, and upending these notions of domestic harmony.

At the start of _The Lion in Winter_, Henry clearly sets forth a wise political plan. If he divorces his wife, imprisons his sons and marries his mistress, he can establish peace for generations to come. This should be easy, since Henry has been in constant discord with his wife and seemingly has little love for his sons. And yet, it turns out not to be so easy for Henry or anyone else, as the love for power comes into direct conflict with the power of love.

Perhaps you can relate to this. At this time of year many families gather for holiday meals, which often descend into subtle (or not-so-subtle) battles about past slights, personal identity, political beliefs, power and respect. “Mom always liked you best!” At times you may think, “This isn’t worth it,” and decide to walk away from your family entirely. But we rarely follow through. As _The Lion in Winter_ demonstrates, the remarkable thing isn’t that family battles continue year after year, but rather, that we keep coming home to re-engage.

There is comedy in this – which Goldman’s play so brilliantly captures – and there is tragedy, as well, but there is also hope. Those ties that bind also connect us, and, through our family battles, give us the possibility of experiencing love and discovering deeper truths about each other and ourselves. For better or worse, we are not alone.

Happy holidays from the Plantagenets!
Kevin mentioned how we’re going to be brought really far down stage in the proscenium. There’s no apron protruding into the house: the front of edge of the proscenium stage is the front edge of our set. We will use our main curtain between acts, so that will be on the very edge.

The set is setup as a disk down on the floor. Much like Scrooge’s house in *A Christmas Carol*, for those who have seen that, our set does rotate. And what rotates downstage, as each scene progresses, is the person’s room in which we are staging each scene. Each room is a small part of this rotating set. The set will turn and put down front and center the room for each scene we’re doing.

Our last scene down in the cellar, when we’ve got the family trapped down there for murder and mayhem, we’ve got an elevator very front down center on this set disk that will rise above the floor to be the room in which that scene takes place.

The backdrop is a plain cyc with a bounce. We’ve got a lot of snow! We’ve got some snow dropping machines up there, and we’ll be using the same type of shredded polyethylene we use in *A Christmas Carol* to put snow around the set’s disk.

There are a whole lot of candles — 455 candles, all of those are being put together, wired and manufactured in-house and set in place in the upper reaches of the framework of the set. Those are all individually controlled.

*Edited from comments made by stage manager Chris A. Code on the first day of rehearsal.*
I have worked at Kevin’s theater in Dallas, which is how I know Kevin and how we met. We were just doing *Dreamgirls*, which is a beast, and he asked if I wanted to do this. And I was like, “Are you serious? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. I am available. Yes. Where? The Guthrie? Yes!” That was honest. I’m not faking that.

And I thought about it for a few seconds and I was like “Let me ask him ... are we doing this when?” Because I already knew Kevin’s reputation for where he might put things and place things, so I thought, “Now are we doing *The Lion in Winter: Empire*?” (Anyone who has ever seen the TV series by Lee Daniels, “Empire,” you know it is literally *The Lion in Winter*.) So I had to check because I didn’t know. “Okay, so am I doing it Cookie style or ...?” He said, “No. No, we’re going to—” and I was like “Oh, okay! Good.”

Kevin talked through how the play reflects the 1960s, that whole Americana idea of people and family — and privileged family, about whom I think we all wonder: “Why are they acting like that? They have money” or “Why are they acting like that they have breeding?” I saw the movie *The Lion in Winter* before I read the play. I grew up in Harlem, U.S.A., so as a kid, things had to kind of come to me, and we did have a TV, so if it came through the TV then I could go and find it. I remember seeing Katharine Hepburn and Peter O’Toole and Anthony Hopkins and knowing that I was looking at something that was yes, funny, and scandalous, but not really completely understanding all of it.

So in reading it, it did read a tiny bit different than what I saw, but the whole essence of it is still there because it was the same, it was the same writer. The idea that this was not *Camelot*, which I had also seen, was really delicious. That’s what made it more special to me than *Camelot*. I like *Camelot*, but this had teeth. This was almost looking at real people, who just happened to be a king and a queen and a prince and so forth. With the media that we have now, we look behind the curtains, the closets and the bathroom doors more times than we even care to — we see how the world really lives and how the world really thinks than we did then. For me this play is timely, particularly during this political season. Everything I’ve seen this weekend at the Guthrie, from *We Hold These Truths* to *The Parchman Hour* to now this, all ties into this political era, this election season that can’t be over quick enough.

November 10 cannot show up fast enough for me. But with that I will close and just say thank you. My week here has been absolutely amazing. The colors and fabrics and I’m so happy to just see a bit of the set stripped down because so much of the colors will be the costumes and the fabric and the actors acting and their nuance.

*Edited from comments made by Ms. Perry on the first day of rehearsal.*
For Further Understanding

EDITIONS OF THE PLAY

The Lion in Winter: A Play by James Goldman, New York: Random House, 1966


ALSO BY JAMES GOLDMAN

For the theater

A Family Affair, a musical by James Goldman, William Goldman and John Kander, 1962


They Might Be Giants, New York: Lancer Books, 1970

Tolstoy, 1996

Novels

The Man from Greek and Roman, a novel, New York: Random House, 1974


Waldorf, New York: Random House, 1965

RELATED DRAMAS

Becket by Jean Anouilh
Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot
King John by William Shakespeare

TWELFTH-CENTURY HISTORY


Weir, Alison, Eleanor of Aquitaine, New York: Ballantine Books, 1999


FILM/TELEVISION


The Lion in Winter, screenplay by James Goldman. Anthony Harvey, director. Katharine Hepburn as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Peter O’Toole as Henry II, Anthony Hopkins as Richard, Timothy Dalton as Philip. 1968

Nicholas and Alexandra, screenplay by James Goldman, based on the book by Robert K. Massie. Franklin J. Schaffner, director. Michael Jayston, Janet Suzman, Michael Redgrave, Laurence Olivier, Irene Worth, Brian Cox and Ian Holm. 1971


