



# Insights

*A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespeare Festival*



*The Lion  
in Winter*

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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# *The Lion in Winter*

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## Synopsis: *The Lion in Winter*

It is Christmas 1183 in King Henry II of England's palace in Chinon, France. Henry is discussing with his mistress, Alais, the upcoming day's events. Henry's family will be gathering for the holiday—his wife Eleanor, whom Henry has let out of prison for the occasion, and their three sons, Richard, Geoffrey, and John. Of course, much of the conversation and thought will center around Henry's successor to the throne. Henry makes it clear that he wants the youngest son, John, to be the next king, while Eleanor wants the oldest, Richard. Henry has also promised the young Prince of France, Philip, that Alais, Philip's sister, will marry Richard but he also promises Alais she can remain his mistress.

In another room the three sons are already gibling about who will be king, soon joined by their mother, and then by Henry and Alais. Henry then turns the discussion to the matter on everyone's mind: "Well—what shall we hang? The holly or each other?" Richard insists that he become king because he is the oldest and the most capable. John is sure he will inherit the throne because he is his father's choice. And Geoffrey, the middle son, feels unappreciated, with no chance at all of the throne. Then the sons and Alais depart, leaving Henry and Eleanor alone.

Much of the remainder of the play is filled with the duplicitous machinations of the various members of the family. At various times Henry courts each son, hoping to advance his agenda through lies and manipulation. Eleanor does the same. At times it is difficult to tell who wants what and what is the truth.

The three sons do the same thing, pairing up with each other in various combinations, hoping to get the help of the others. John and Geoffrey at one point even plan a war, with King Philip's help, to overthrow the plans of Richard and Eleanor and take the kingdom from Henry. At another juncture, Henry insists that Eleanor sign papers giving the Aquitaine, a valuable piece of land in France, to John, virtually guaranteeing his ascension to the throne. Eleanor, however, rebuffs his requests, and the two, once again, are at a stalemate. At one time, even Geoffrey tries to make an alliance with Philip, in his own grab for the throne.

Finally, Henry concocts one final scheme. He has his three sons locked in the wine cellar and plans to send Eleanor back to prison. Then he will go to Rome, force the pope to annul their wedding, and marry Alais.

She can then give him more sons, including a new king. Alais says, however, she can't marry him if the sons are left alive and a danger to her in the future; but Henry refuses to kill his offspring. Eleanor takes daggers to the boys in the dungeon, urging them to run, perhaps killing their father. However, they can't act either, unwilling to harm their father.

In the end, everything is as it was in the beginning. Eleanor is headed back to prison, the three princes are still squabbling over who shall be king, Alais is caught in the middle, and Henry still has no clear successor.

## Characters: *The Lion in Winter*

**Henry II:** The king of England, Henry is the husband of Eleanor of Aquitaine and the father of Richard, Geoffrey, and John. He also has taken Alais Capet as his mistress. In his fifties, Henry is nearing the years when most men of that age died; however, he still has remarkable vigor and wit, as well as physical prowess. His clear favorite for his successor is his son, John, but his main desire is to keep his kingdom together after his death.

**Alais Capet:** The sister of Philip Capet, Alais is of the royal blood of France and would thus, through a contracted marriage with Richard, ally the two strong countries of France and England. She was raised as a child by Eleanor, and is the mistress of Henry. She is no less a pawn in the machinations of Henry and Eleanor than are their sons.

**John:** The youngest of the three sons of Henry and Eleanor, John is described as pimply and an immature boy. He is, however, his father's choice for the crown, and he uses this knowledge in taunting his two brothers.

**Geoffrey:** The middle son of Henry and Eleanor, Geoffrey has no one fighting for his right to any throne, and he usually accepts his fate, but his does rankle him that he usually is not considered—in any matters of the heart or family. He is described as the most cerebral of the three boys.

**Richard:** The oldest of the three sons of Henry and Eleanor, Richard in later life becomes known as Richard the Lion Heart. He is his mother's choice for the next king, and is probably the best warrior of the three sons.

**Eleanor of Aquitaine:** The wife of Henry II and mother of Richard, Geoffrey, and John, Eleanor is a strong and powerful woman in her own right. She is still beautiful and still in many ways in love with her husband, although he keeps her in prison most of the time. She is a danger to Henry because of her strength and intelligence; and she champions the fight for Richard to be the next king.

**Philip Capet:** The king of France, Philip is also the brother of Alais. He is young, but has already become a strong monarch, although no match for Henry. His desire is to marry Alais to Richard and have Richard crowned king, thus cementing a relationship between the two countries.

# About the Playwright: James Goldman

By Kelli Frost-Allred

Long before the term “dysfunctional” was commonly applied to families, James Goldman gave the world a glimpse of this age-old phenomenon by creating for the stage the members of England’s original Plantaganet family: King Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their sons. Although best known for this play, *The Lion in Winter*, and the screenplay for the resultant movie, Goldman was a prolific writer who based many of his novels, plays, and screenplays on history, a subject he dearly loved.

Goldman’s written corpus is evidence of this fascination with history. Russian history studies led him to write about Tolstoy, Czar Nicholas, and Anna Karenina. But his specialty seems to have been English history, with twelfth century ruler Henry II as the central character in *The Lion in Winter*, and he used thirteenth-century King John as the subject of his novel *Myself as Witness* and in the film *Robin and Marian*. “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 really like, of course, no one will ever know,” wrote James Goldman in his preface to *The Lion in Winter*. In 1980 he wrote, “The truth of things is always underneath. It has to be imagined.”

Audience members mustn’t be misled into thinking that *The Lion in Winter* is a drama. “He understood what comedy was about,” said his agent and wife of twenty-seven years, Barbara Goldman, in an interview with the Utah Shakespeare Festival. “*The Lion in Winter* could have been a tragedy as easily as a comedy. And it has to do with his point of view of the world. He viewed himself as a comedic writer. I think his sense of humor was everything about him.”

“Does it matter what comes after us?” Eleanor asked in the play. It mattered terribly to Eleanor, but not to James Goldman. His outlook on life prevented him from worrying enough about such mortal trivia to bother answering his own question. And while King Henry may have said “My life, when it is written, will read better than it lived,” the man who invented these words for Henry did not share his zeitgeist.

“Jim was not a man who would have taken something and been pompous about it,” Mrs. Goldman said. His Oscar sits “somewhere on a bookshelf” in the Goldman home.

Goldman wrote every day, seven days a week. “He did not write on a computer; he would only write using an IBM Selectric— you know, the kind with the golf ball,” Mrs. Goldman attested. “Jim called his typewriter ‘Big Jack’ in honor of his favorite golfer, Jack Nicklaus.”

James Goldman was born in Chicago on June 30, 1927. Four years later, his brother William (author and screenwriter of *The Princess Bride*) was born into the family. The two brothers would remain close, and eventually both became writers. In fact, the two wrote collaboratively for film, television, and theatre (*A Family Affair*, *Stanley Poole*). Both received Academy Awards for their screenwriting, but at separate times for separate films: James won for *The Lion in Winter* (1969) while William won for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1970) and *All the President’s Men* (1977). James collaborated with Stephen Sondheim on *Evening Primrose* (1966) and on *Follies* (1971). Goldman began writing *Follies* in 1965 as a murder mystery, but eventually took it to Broadway and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical (1971). The 1987 London revival of *Follies* garnered the Olivier Award for the year’s best musical.

After earning an undergraduate degree from the University of Chicago, Goldman was drafted and served in the U.S. Army. He later attended Columbia University in New York City, where he studied musicology, but eventually decided that writing would be his career. He married Barbara Goldman, a producer, in 1971. A very private family, the Goldmans seldom socialized with business associates in the entertainment field, in spite of the fact that James worked with such

Broadway heavyweights as Emanuel “Manny” Azenberg, Harold Prince, and Stephen Sondheim.

Hollywood has transformed many theatre scripts into huge film successes, and although *The Lion in Winter* is among those plays, it remains a classic of modern theatre as well. Goldman wrote that “*The Lion in Winter* was more than reprieved by the movie. It was transformed into a theatre work that has been performed all over the world.” The original stage cast included Robert Preston as Henry II, Rosemary Harris as Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Christopher Walken as France’s Philip Capet. The film version of *The Lion in Winter* marked milestones in several careers: Goldman’s first and only Academy Award (for his screenplay adaptation) as well as a Golden Globe nomination; Katharine Hepburn’s third of four best actress Oscars; an Oscar nomination and Golden Globe Award for Peter O’Toole (best actor); the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Film of 1968; Anthony Hopkins’s film debut playing Henry’s son, Prince Richard; and Timothy Dalton’s film debut as Prince Philip.

Goldman distinguished himself as a writer in several genres, including novels (*Myself as Witness*, *Waldorf*, *The Man from Greek and Roman*, *Fulton County*), short stories (*White Nights*), theatre (*The Lion in Winter*; *They Might Be Giants*; *Blood, Sweat, and Stanley Poole*), television (*Anastasia: The Mystery of Anna*), film (*The Lion in Winter*, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, *Robin and Marian*, *White Nights*), and musical theater (*Follies*, *Evening Primrose*). At the time of his death, Goldman had just completed the script for a musical based on the novel *Tom Jones*, which is currently being planned for production.

Through the voice of an aging queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Goldman asks: “For the love of God, can’t we love one another just a little? That’s how peace begins. We have so much to love each other for. We have such possibilities, my children; we could change the world.”

James Goldman died unexpectedly on October 28, 1998, after suffering a heart attack. Goldman did not leave us with an account of his life. The narrative that was his life has yet to be told, but his legacy is left to us in words. “*The Lion in Winter* has relevance today. This is why we’re doing it in New York this year, for the first time since the original production in 1966,” said Mrs. Goldman proudly.

# Is It True?

By Ace Pilkington

From *Midsummer Magazine*, 1999

“Is it true?” That’s one of the first questions audience members ask about a historical play such as *The Lion in Winter*. The answer, of course, is, “yes, no, and maybe.”

James Goldman said, “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 available data” (*The Lion in Winter* [New York: Penguin Books, 1983], ix). He admits that he got John wrong, that his dissatisfaction is rather like “what biographers must feel at having missed the . . . essence of their subject” (vi). For the others, he feels he has reached that essence, arguing that the depths of fiction are often more revealing than surface facts: “The truth of things is always underneath. It has to be imagined” (vii).

The big picture Goldman paints of a family at war with itself and its neighbors is not in doubt. The constant fight was as much a family heritage as the lands about which they fought. The Angevins (from Anjou their ancestral province; Plantagenet, a popular nickname centuries later, refers to early family members who stuck sprigs of broom in their caps) were a superbly capable, astonishingly irascible bunch. They believed they were descended from the devil, and most people who got in their way agreed. Henry II’s sons repeated what Abb, Bernard said about their father as an infant, “From the devil he came; to the devil he will go” (Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950], 170).

Henry II’s father, Count Geoffrey of Anjou (Henry also had a brother and a son named Geoffrey.), finding himself in a dispute about whether he or the canons of the bishopric of Seez should select the next bishop, had the canons and their bishop-elect castrated (Alfred Duggan, *Devilr Brood* [New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1957], 10). Following her divorce from King Louis VII of France, Eleanor, who probably already had an understanding with Henry, was ambushed by “Geoffrey of Anjou (aged sixteen), the enterprising younger brother of Henry who . . . plotted brigand-wise to possess himself of her person and her fiefs” (Kelly 80). Eleanor’s escort defeated him, but he was a faithful harbinger of the family feuds to come. Such squabbles were, as Goldman shows, continued in the next generation. Henry barely survived the revolt by his wife and sons for which he imprisoned Eleanor, but as Philip Warner says, his “personal troubles were not over, and never would be. When not jealous of their father, his restless sons were jealous of each other” (*Sieges of the Middle Ages* [New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1968], 116).

*The Lion in Winter*’s portrait of these family rivalries is essentially correct. Goldman has Richard say, “I’m not a second son. Not now. Your Henry’s in the vault, you know” (49).

“Of all his sons Henry loved this eldest one [who died before the opening of the play] with special predilection” (Kelly 171), and Richard was painfully jealous. With the death of young Henry John became his father’s favorite (Richard Barber, *The Devil’s Crown* [Pennsylvania: Combined Books, 1997], 67), and Richard had yet more to resent. Part of the trouble between Henry and Richard was, as Goldman shows, that Eleanor preferred Richard (Kelly 173).

Goldman’s characterizations are also basically accurate. Richard was as ruthless and Geoffrey as deceptive as the play suggests. Richard, in Amy Kelly’s words, “took the fortresses of his enemies, razed their castles, burned their towns, uprooted their orchards and vineyards, sowed their fields with salt, ordered the hands of his captives cut off and their eyes gouged out, and dishonored the women of his hostages with a very sovereign severity” (195). And Geoffrey was even more brilliantly devious in real life than he is in the play, with, Kelly says, “an extraordinary ingenuity in intrigue and a persuasiveness that few could resist even when they knew they could not rely upon his plans or promises.” She continues with what might almost be a summary of one of Goldman’s scenes: “Confronted with his own crookedness, he was shameless, crafty, full of excuses” (174).



Goldman's Eleanor and Henry are also much like their historical originals. Eleanor herself was brilliant, charming, much concerned with growing old (Marion Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography* [New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1977], 247), and an enormously troublesome wife. Her first husband, Louis VII, when he and Eleanor were on crusade and she demanded a divorce, also found it necessary to hold her captive (Kelly 60-2), and Henry considered a variety of options for dealing with her, including divorcing her and then imprisoning her in a nunnery (Kelly 190). Henry had most of the good and bad traits of the Angevins: ferocious energy, a fierce temper, an appetite for mistresses, and impatience with the powerful (Warner 116). He also had other qualities

Goldman claims for him, a preference for peace over war and a genius for making just laws and good government (Kelly 203-04). However, not all of Goldman's materials are equally reliable. The rumor that Eleanor had had a sexual relationship with Henry II's father, Count Geoffrey the Handsome (so called for his appearance, not his behavior), is probably untrue (Desmond Seward, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Mother Queen* [New York: Dorset Press, 1978], 60). Much more likely is the affair between Alais and Henry and Henry's plan to start a new family while disinheriting the old one (Kelly 192-3). Perhaps the most misleading use of rumor in the play is the suggestion that Philip and Richard had a homosexual relationship. Both Anthony Bridge (*Richard the Lionheart* [New York: M. Evans & Company, Inc., 1989], 141) and John Gillingham (*Richard the Lionheart* [New York: Times Books, 1978], 161-2) cite rumors that suggest Richard was an extremely active heterosexual. Perhaps a more serious issue than choosing which rumors to believe is what Goldman calls "simplifying the political maneuvering." He has deliberately distorted Henry's goals for and attitudes about his empire. In all probability, he was not trying to secure the crown of England for John but to put Richard in the position of eldest son following young Henry's death. Since Richard was now to receive his father's lands of England and Normandy, his mother's property—Aquitaine—should go to John, who, at that point, had nothing. Richard was distrustful and understandably reluctant to trade actual rule of "the richest province on the Continent" (Goldman 43), where he felt at home, for a promise of power in the alien north. Henry's policy of trying to give each of his three sons something while simultaneously trying to deprive the most warlike and dangerous of them of his power base makes excellent sense, as does Richard's resistance (Richard Barber, *Henry Plantagenet, 1133-1189* [New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1964], 212-13).

Ultimately, though, all plays, historical or not, must be judged not according to how accurately they have employed facts but how profoundly they have explored truths. In her director's notes, Kathleen E Conlin says, *The Lion in Winter* is "about the demotion of royalty into the messy, psychological passions of human frailties and human families." Goldman has his Henry tell us that he has much in common with King Lear, another king demoted to the status of troubled father. However, in the end these plays about families must also be capable of raising their characters to transcendent heights—beyond the vicissitudes of family and royalty to central truths about humanity. Shakespeare's *King Lear*, of course, does so. Has James Goldman also succeeded? That is a question, not for a historian, but for a theatre audience.

# Filial Rebellion

By Heidi Madsen

“Henry . . . had that goodly household, valiant, wise, and prudent; father of the young king who jousted with such ardor; father of Richard the cunning, who was so wise and shrewd: father of Geoffrey of Brittany, who likewise was a man of great deeds; and father of John Lackland, because of whom he suffered much strife and warfare” (Ambrose, *L’Estoire de le guerre sainte*, cited in Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950], 170).

In James Goldman’s play, *The Lion in Winter*, it is winter, 1183; cold implications of an approaching holiday permeate the air in an arguably uncivilized world. Henry II and his wife, Eleanor, are fighting over which of their three sons should be the next king: Eleanor wants Richard, Henry wants John, and no one wants Geoffrey. All three of Henry’s sons either already have or soon will rebel against him. Eleanor has been rebellious too, a crime for which her unforgiving husband keeps her bricked in (that is unless he needs her diplomatic skills), but she is to be liberated for a Christmas celebration in France at the palace of Chinon.

Peter O’Toole called *The Lion in Winter* “a witty, literate, modern appreciation of the intrigues and bitchery between Henry II, his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their three sons” (Nicholas Wapshott, Peter O’Toole [Sevenoaks, Kent: New English Library, 1983], 145), but it is much more. This is a play about power and control, and it is also a play about family. Henry II needed an “heir to all the king’s own striving and contriving” (Kelly 171). Children are extensions of their parents, and perhaps this is an assurance of continuation; holding on to the world is in this way possible. Soon, however, growing limbs, growing mentalities--individual ideas and thoughts--extend distinctly gnarled fingers out into society. Henry probably could never have anticipated the contention and strife his sons would eventually initiate; but were they somehow connected to the fact that the boys were his royal-blooded sons?

*The Lion in Winter* is a play about a royal family tree, its roots in all of England and three quarters of France. Henry’s large domains were called the Angevin empire, since the family’s original holding was the French province of Anjou. Legend, however, would have us believe that their inheritance amounted to more than property: “The Counts of Anjou were descended from the Devil, which went some way to explain their ferocious behavior” (Alfred Duggan, *Devil’s Brood* [New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1957], ix). Could such a lineage perhaps even condone a somewhat involuntary rapaciousness?

Goldman professed to know the non-fictitious faults of Henry II, Eleanor, and their contumacious sons (of course, he is more than familiar with those charismatic blemishes of character he himself imaginatively appended); but he loves them regardless (*The Lion in Winter* [New York: Penguin Books, 1983], vii). This apparent passion allows one to sit back, fearing nothing, and become intimately acquainted with the characters, confident in Goldman’s astounding loyalty.

How easy would it be to write a play about the real Angevins? Historically, Henry II was “short and sandy-haired . . . notoriously lecherous” (Duggan 37), a man who supposedly once ate his bedding in a fit of temper (Duggan 38-39). Richard the Lion-Heart has been documented as a “brave, cultivated but cruel and tempestuous man, dogged by ill-health” (John Cannon and Ralph Griffiths, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Monarchy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988, reprinted with corrections 1997], 159). However, Goldman’s Richard seems almost naïve—childlike—in conversation with his mother, and with his (supposed) lover, Philip II of France. (The fictional Richard may be more worthy of sympathy.)

Geoffrey perhaps was neglected, overlooked, underestimated in medieval reality as well as in *The Lion in Winter*. He was not given the same opportunity as his brothers; made duke of Brittany, he was not even considered for the crown. Nevertheless, he may have been, second only to Eleanor herself, the most insidious and the most intellectual, infecting everyone with his schemes and ideas on the sly. (Though Cicero would assure us that trickery and intelligence are “entirely different and remote from one another” (Cicero, *Selected Works*, translated by Michael Grant [Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books 1960,

reprinted with revisions 1967], 185). Still, Goldman shows him to be always thinking, “humming treachery” (8), until he seems almost inhuman. “He isn’t flesh: he’s a device; he’s wheels and gears” (Goldman 84). Oddly, however, there is a sensitivity distinguishable in Geoffrey—a sore spot for a lifelong memory of the indifference between his parents.

The youngest, the most susceptible to Geoffrey’s machinations, is the romantically infamous Prince John. A villain we love to hate in other stories, in *The Lion in Winter*, he represents what can only be described as unattractive and thoroughly undesired. A hunched and pitiful jester, as far from courage as he is from comeliness, with a whim, much like the motivation behind a child’s tantrum, for his father’s acceptance and his crown. These royal brothers may all suffer side effects from a childhood void of all sentiment; though all are of an entirely separate psychological variety. Still they are united in the one desire that most completely divides them—an inherited lust for the crown, which they would peck and claw to obtain. Henry said, “Thus will they pursue me till I die” (Kelly 170). All of these faults, yet still they are thought of fondly?

Also participants in the holiday intrigue are two outside the family: King Philip and his older sister Alais, an adopted pawn taken in by Henry sixteen years earlier. (How was Henry to know she would grow up to be so appealing?) Intended for Richard, promised to John, and loved by her king, Alais is caught in a bizarre triangle of potential husbands, though deriving no pity from an unemotionally involved brother. Among these players, ever shifting islands of alliances form, and, as the tide, loyalties remain elusive. The brilliant wit and biting sarcasm that all the characters possess enhance the twilight trysts and assure the eventual exposure of every secret contrivance.

“What shall we hang? the holly or each other?” Henry asks (15). Mercy could very likely be the answer that this Christmas play gives. Henry can neither keep his sons imprisoned nor have them executed, and they, in turn, cannot kill him. Is it accidental that the candles Henry steals (and the light on this final scene) belong to Jesus—who won’t begrudge them? Henry must give up much of what he wants, has to live with disappointment, and, as everyone else in the story must also do, even condone betrayal. It is not the end, however; forgiveness is. Nothing is finally gained or completely lost; within the family, there is always another beginning.