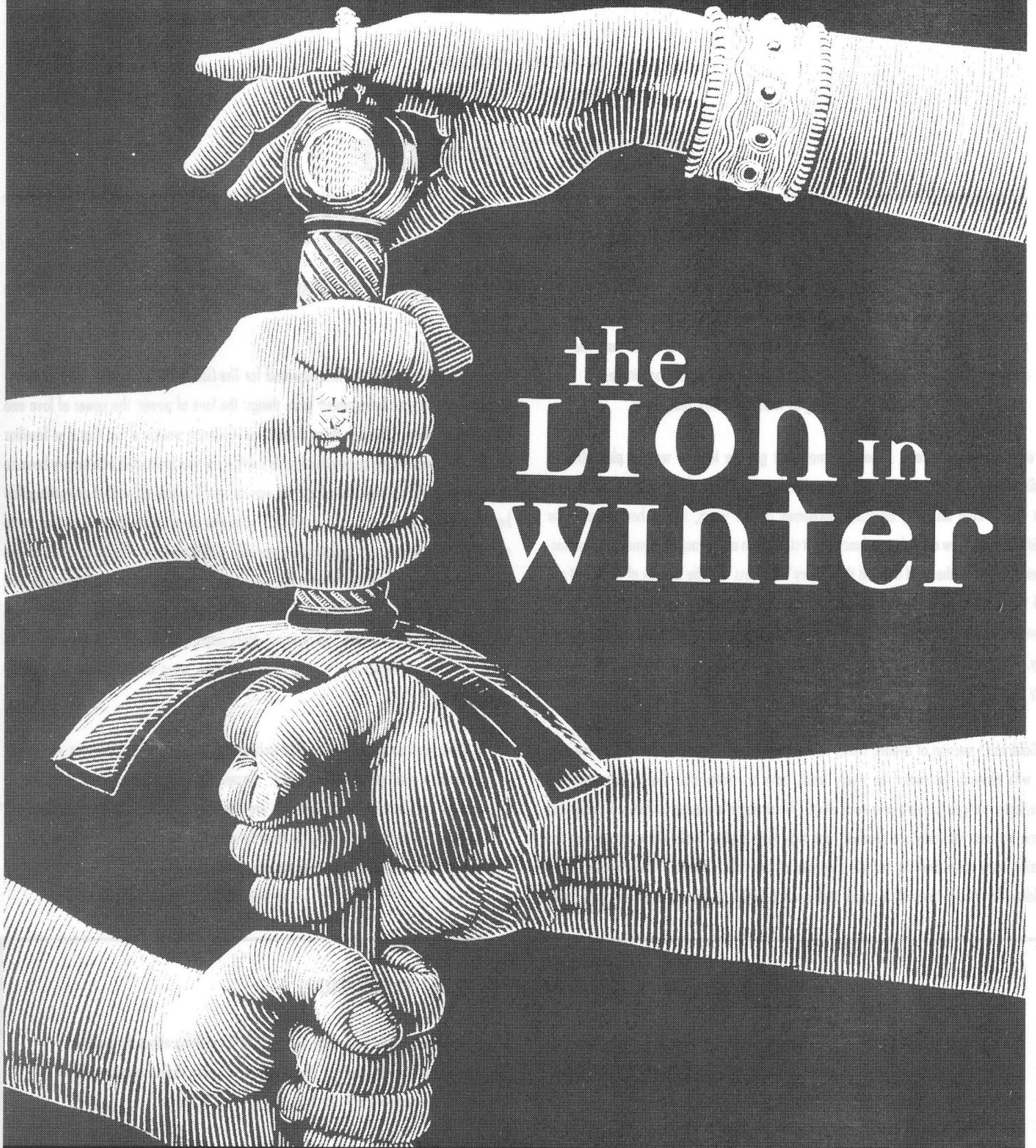


Roundabout Theatre Company



the  
**LION** in  
winter

The Chase Family Series Production Guide

# the LION IN WINTER

by **James Goldman**  
directed by **Michael Mayer**

## PRODUCTION GUIDE

### WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

*The time is Christmas, 1183, and the place is the castle at Chinon, France, late in the reign of England's first Plantagenet king, Henry II. He is desperate to name a successor but his three available sons are a thankless lot and of all his wars, the one with his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, has been the longest and bitterest.*

— Douglas Watt, *New York Daily News*

An avid reader of history, James Goldman first got the idea to write a play about a medieval royal family when doing some research on the reign of Henry II. When he read that Henry kept his wife, Eleanor, imprisoned for 16 years, letting her out only for Christmas and a few official state functions, it struck him as a strangely humorous situation. When he read further and learned that Henry's mistress was the fiancée of his oldest son and that Henry was continually trying to break the engagement and betrothe her to his youngest son, the playwright realized that he had the makings of a humorous yet poignant play. What would this family say to one another at their Christmas gatherings? How would they function as a family?

In Goldman's version of events, Henry II, the most extraordinary leader of his time, and his wife Eleanor, his match on every level, have a relationship that is founded on a love/hate struggle to overpower each other. The struggle is a game to them. A dangerous game, but one that they are good at; one they love to play. Sadly, the weapons they use against each other and the targets they aim at are their children. Unfortunately, their children don't have the stuff to match their parents in this game, and as Eleanor and Henry

block out the sun with the sheer breath of their power, their children struggle just to get a piece of their own.

In his opening remarks at the first rehearsal for *The Lion in Winter*, director Michael Mayer described the play as being about three things: the love of power, the power of love and the power of power. Through these three ideas, Goldman weaves a tale that is so familiar to us it might easily have occurred today. As a writer, he was fascinated with history because of its power to tell us about ourselves. He was intrigued by the notion that everything that happens now has happened before and that those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it. "The play is only apparently historical," Goldman says. "While founded on the facts we have, these facts reveal only the outcome of relationships — such things as who kills whom and when. The content of those relationships, the people and their passions while congruent with the facts, are fictions. More important, though, are the content and style of the piece which are — or, heaven knows, were meant to be — entirely contemporary."

*If there were an award for the most exhilarating anachronism of the year, James Goldman would win it with this play. Sometimes anachronisms occur in plays through carelessness, but Goldman's are there on purpose . . . The essentially modern speech makes it easy to identify with these people . . . We have not moved back into their time, they have moved forward into ours . . .*

— Norman Nadel, *NY World Telegram & Sun*

### HISTORICAL NOTE (FROM THE PROGRAM OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION)

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.

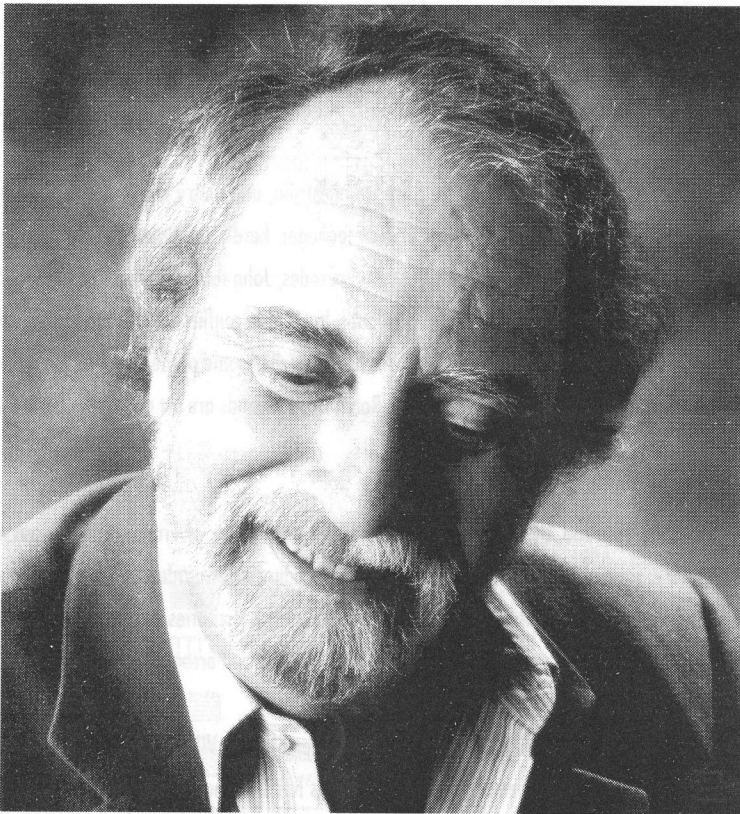
The facts we have, while clear enough as to the outcome of the relationships — such

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 fictitious.

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 of what Henry did.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## JAMES GOLDMAN: 1927 - 1998



"I believe that the subject matter of comedy and tragedy is the same. What makes the difference is an author's view of life, whether he tends to see existence as a comic or tragic enterprise. I tend to see it comic. The basic source of comedy for me - now, at any rate - is that man has a natural need to make sense of life, to organize a world that resists being put in order. Concretely this means that we tend never to know what we're really doing, what we truly want or how to get it, but we spend our lives behaving as if we did."

— James Goldman

While *The Lion in Winter* may be James Goldman's best-known work, it is only one example of the time and energy he devoted to ferreting out nuggets from the past and infusing them with his own zest for life, wit and memorable language. From a list of his principle works it is clear that Goldman was a writer with a passion for history, but more than this he was a writer with a passion to explore the essential truths of human nature. He tried with his work not to provide an accurate recreation of history, but to use history as a lens with which he could reveal a picture of humanity that is as true today as it has always been.

A Midwesterner by birth, he came to New York after graduating from the University of Chicago and continued his studies at Columbia until he was drafted during the Korean War.

His first play, *They Might Be Giants*, about a man who believed he was Sherlock Holmes, was directed by the legendary Joan Littlewood in London, in 1961. It later became a film starring George C. Scott and Joanne Woodward. In 1966, *The Lion in Winter* opened on Broadway. Despite a cast led by the likes of Robert Preston and Rosemary Harris, and featuring a young Christopher Walken, it played only 83 performances and expired. Temporarily. Two years later, the film was made, Goldman won an Academy Award for his screenplay, and the play won a new lease on life.

The main characters of *The Lion in Winter* are the early ancestors of the Plantagenet family, whose members would rule England for three hundred years. They held a special fascination for Goldman, who returned to them twice more. His 1979 film *Robin and Marian* was a romance on the later life of the legendary bandit and featured a portrait of *The Lion in Winter*'s Prince John, now as King. Goldman wrote about John yet again in a novel, *Myself as Witness*.

In 1971, he wrote the screenplay for *Nicholas and Alexandra*, another historical subject, about the last days of the last Czar and the tumultuous Russian Revolution. That same year, he looked to the past once again and with Stephen Sondheim and Hal Prince created the landmark musical *Follies*, about the last reunion of the cast of a Ziegfeld Follies-like revue. Like *The Lion in Winter*, *Follies* has had a long, successful life. Its initial production ran on Broadway for 522 performances. It has also been produced in London where it garnered The Evening Standard and Olivier awards for best musical, was presented and recorded as a concert performance at Lincoln Center in 1990, and was revived this past fall in a star-studded production at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey.

If history held a fascination for Goldman, so did the cross-currents, conflicts and reconciliations of families. For as much as *The Lion in Winter*, *Nicholas and Alexandra* and *Follies* bring to life times long dead, they also examine the minute details of the struggles of family members to live with, and without, each other.

Of history as a subject, Goldman wrote, "Historians and storytellers don't have much in common, but they do share this: the past, once it gets hold of you, does actually come alive. For scholars, this is troublesome. For writers, it's the good stuff. Eleanor and Henry and their children sometimes seem as real to me as people I have dinner with. I feel as if I literally know them." And he has helped us to know them, too.

James Goldman died in New York City on October 28th. He was seventy-one, and still at work — on a musical version of (what else?) an historical novel, *Tom Jones*.

# WHO'S WHO IN *THE LION IN WINTER*



collector and law enforcer of the kingdom. Despite being a position of power, the chancellor's job is clearly a second place to being king. Though he appears to help his brothers, Geoffrey really has his own interests at heart.

**JOHN (played by Keith Nobbs)** is the youngest son, and Henry's favorite. In *The Lion in Winter*, John is an immature and petulant teenager, hardly the type one would expect to rule a country. Later, while Richard led the crusades, John took over much of the king's power. John became king after Richard's death, but due to conflict with his barons, he was forced to sign the Magna Carta in 1215, which relinquished some of the power of the crown and was the beginning of democracy. The Robin Hood legends are set during the period of John's reign.

**PHILIP II (played by Roger Howarth)** is the young King of France, and the son of Eleanor's former husband. He was also called Philip Augustus due to his power and magnificence. During his reign, he greatly expanded the territories of France, which had shrunk during his father's rule. In the play, he is a proud and arrogant man.

**ALAIS (played by Emily Bergl)**, as the daughter of Louis VII, is also the half-sister of Philip II. Though she is betrothed to Richard, Alais has been having an affair with Henry. She is sensitive and tries not to become involved in the machinations of the Plantagenet family, but is pulled in despite herself. To the Plantagenets she represents land and power and therefore becomes a pawn in their games.

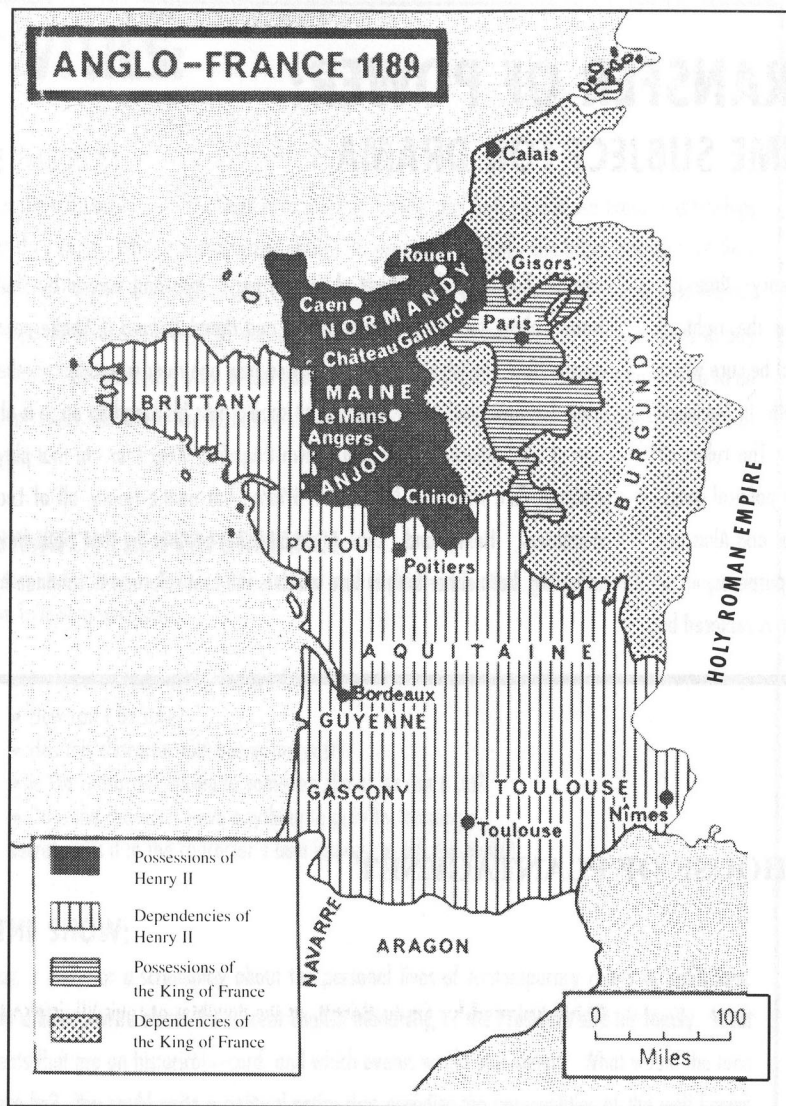


**HENRY II (played by Laurence Fishburne)** became king of England in 1154 at age 21. He was well-known for his brilliance as a warrior and as an intellect. During his reign, Henry subdued the English barons, and invaded Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Among his accomplishments were the creation of common law and the formation of the jury system. He is the lion of the play's title, one of the most powerful rulers of his time, who is facing his declining years (the play is set only a few years before his death.)

**ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE (played by Stockard Channing)** was a legendary queen even in her own time. Before marrying Henry, she was the Queen of France. Her reputation was based not only her station, but on her intellectual and literary accomplishments. Her romantic adventures were also a subject of legend and rumor. In 1173, she rallied her sons in a revolt against Henry. When they lost, Henry imprisoned Eleanor in Salisbury castle. She lived to be 82 years old, which is remarkable for her time. In *The Lion in Winter*, Eleanor is locked in a power struggle with Henry over which of their sons will inherit the throne.

**RICHARD (played by Chuma Hunter-Gault)** was called "The Lionhearted" due to his brilliance as a soldier. He succeeded Henry as king and led one of the crusades to the Holy Land. In the play, he is a serious man who is driven by ambition. Though he appears to have little interest in romance, he has had a secret affair.

**GEOFFREY (played by Neal Huff)** is the middle son and preeminent schemer of the family. He says he will accept the role of Chancellor, which would be the principle tax



## "WHY IS THE KING OF ENGLAND LIVING IN FRANCE?"

### A GUIDE TO POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY IN 1183AD

In Medieval times, the countries and politics of Europe were much different from their condition today. Instead of the large countries like England, France, and Germany, that we are familiar with, Europe in the Middle Ages was composed of many small regions that shifted from one ruler to another. In an era before quick communication, these regions (also called duchies, counties, or baronies) were relatively isolated and independent. The dukes, counts, and barons that controlled these regions, were important intermediaries between the common citizens and the monarchy. The king and queen relied on the barons to collect taxes and insure loyalty to the crown, while the barons and dukes needed a connection with the throne to insure peace with neighboring regions. If a king became too weak, or a baron became too strong, the political and geographical map could change significantly.

As rulers became more powerful and took control of more land, they would acquire more titles. Henry in *The Lion in Winter*, for example, in addition to being King of England, was also the Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and the Count of Anjou and Maine. In fact, though Henry was the ruler of England, his ancestral roots came primarily from France. One of Henry's ancestors, William the Conqueror, crossed the English Channel from France in 1066 and defeated the British. Though Henry spent time in England keeping control of the barons there, he also spent time on the continent maintaining control of his lands, which were coveted by the King of France. The English rulers maintained control over some lands in France for centuries, until they were defeated in the 1400s by armies lead by Joan of Arc, among others.

## KEY TERMS AND PLACES MENTIONED IN *THE LION IN WINTER*

**Aquitaine** - a region in southwestern France, near the coast. Eleanor inherited control over this region, but when she married Henry, he took dominion over these lands. They later handed them over to Richard.

**Chinon** - (pronounced "shee-non"), the town in Anjou, a region in central France, that is the setting of *The Lion in Winter*.

**Vexin** - a small region near Paris. Henry acquired control of the Vexin in a deal with Louis, the former King of France. Louis gave Henry the Vexin when Alais was betrothed to Richard. Since the wedding between Richard and Alais has yet to occur at the start of *The Lion in Winter*, Philip is demanding that Henry return the Vexin. Because the region is within a short marching distance to Paris (the capital of France), Henry wants to maintain control of the Vexin for strategic purposes. Likewise, Philip wants the Vexin back because he is vulnerable as long as it remains in foreign hands.

**Poitiers** - (pronounced "pwa-tee-ay"), a city in the Aquitaine, south of Chinon, where Richard keeps his soldiers.

**Brittany** - an area of the northwest French coast that is controlled by Geoffrey.

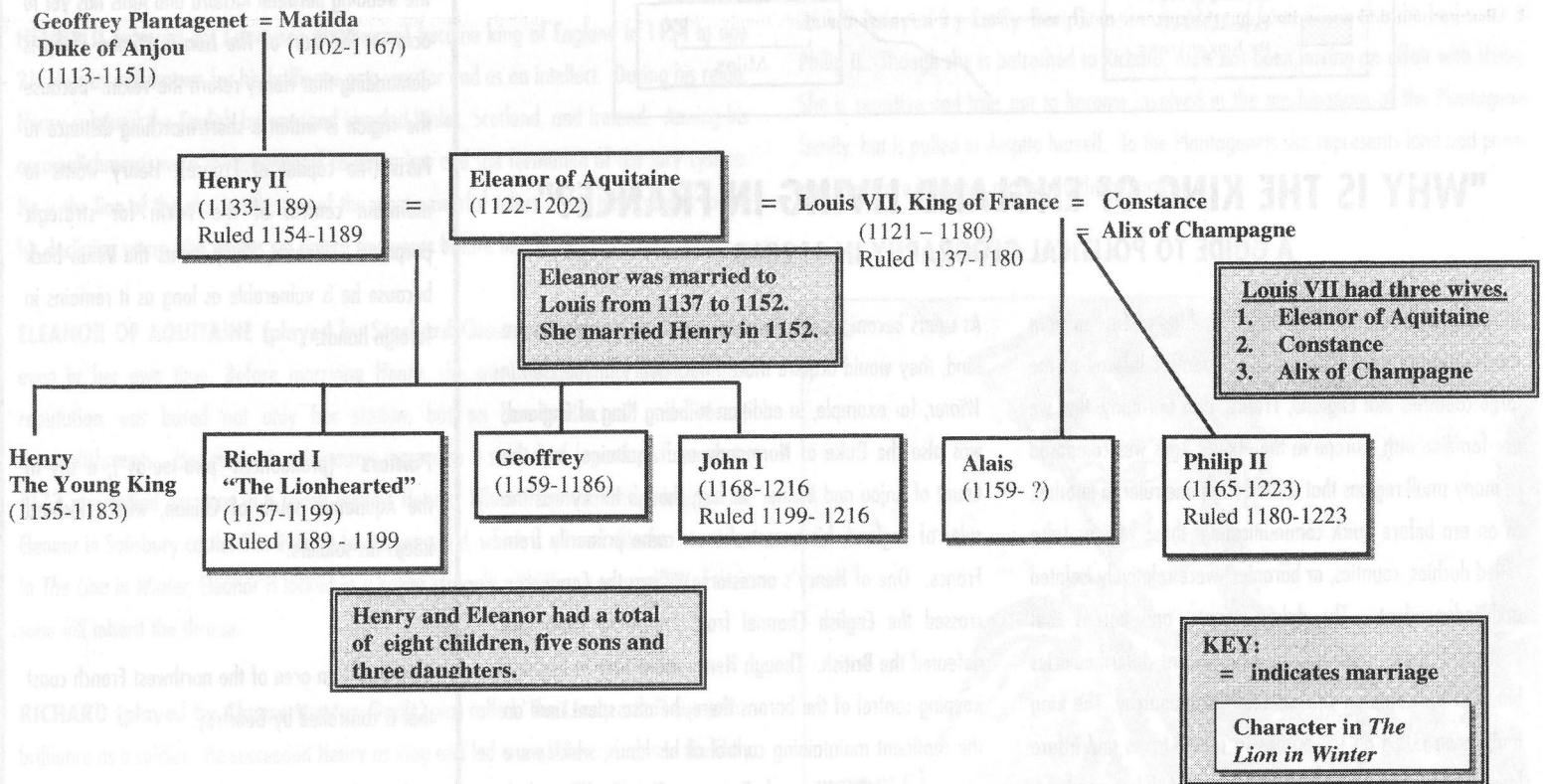
**Salisbury** - the town in Southern England where Eleanor is kept captive in a castle by Henry.

# THE TRANSFER OF POWER: A PRIME SUBJECT FOR DRAMA

The transfer of power is a central theme in *The Lion in Winter*. During Henry's time, the tradition of the first born son inheriting the monarch's crown (called the right of primogenitor) had not been firmly established. Henry, therefore, could not be sure which of his sons, or if any of his sons, would follow him as king after his death. In Medieval times, political power was also transferred through arranged marriages. The rulers of different countries might agree to have their children marry in return for political gains, such as control over a specific region. In *The Lion in Winter*, both Eleanor and Alais are women who face or have faced the condition of being a bride for political purposes. This theme is one that is well-suited for the stage. How one king or queen is replaced by

another has been the subject of several plays, including several by Shakespeare. In his history plays, such as *Henry IV parts I and II* and *Richard II*, Shakespeare presented the events from English history that explored how one ruler succeeded another. The idea of a king deciding which of his children he should pass his kingdom on to is also the subject of one of Shakespeare's most well known tragedies, *King Lear*. In that play, Lear has three children, like Henry in *The Lion in Winter*, but unlike Henry, all of Lear's children are daughters. Henry and Lear resemble one another in that both have their favorite offspring, but neither king is sure which is the best selection to continue his reign.

## THE ROYAL HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET



# ACTIVITIES:

## BEFORE THE PLAY:

Think about the relationships in your family or another family, and how people use those relationships to get what they want. What are the tactics used? Do people try to bully the other members of their family, or do they try to sweet talk them? Which techniques do you use on your family and friends when you want to persuade them? If you wanted to borrow some money from your parents to buy expensive clothes, for example, what would you say or do? Or, if a brother or sister wanted you to do something for them, like wash the dishes or clean the house, would they use the same techniques of persuasion?

## AS YOU WATCH THE PERFORMANCE:

The characters in *The Lion in Winter* often deceive and mislead each other. As you watch the play, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this character telling the truth?
- How can I be sure?
- Has this character told lies in the past?
- Is the character talking to someone she or he can trust?
- Does the character have anything to gain by keeping a secret, or is it in the character's best interest to tell the truth?

## AFTER THE SHOW:

Write a play, a story, or a screenplay about the personal lives of contemporary rulers or politicians. Perhaps you'd like to write about the current English monarchy, or the President and his family. What are the events that are on historical record, and which events would you invent? What would the tone of your piece be? You could write a political satire that parodies the personalities of the well-known figures, or you could adopt a style similar to James Goldman's that depicts both the characters' strengths and their weaknesses at the same time.

When you're finished, send your completed story or script to Roundabout and we'll share it with the company of *The Lion in Winter*. Send it to the attention of:

**Margaret Salvante**, Education Director, Roundabout Theatre Company  
1530 Broadway, New York, NY 10036  
or send an E-MAIL to: [margies@roundabouttheatre.org](mailto:margies@roundabouttheatre.org)

## OTHER CHARACTERS WHO ARE MENTIONED IN *THE LION IN WINTER* BUT DO NOT APPEAR ON STAGE.

**Henry "the Young King,"** was Eleanor and Henry's oldest son. The older Henry crowned the younger Henry as king in 1170, which was the only time in English history in which there were two reigning kings. After the Young King died in 1183, the position of successor to Henry's throne was left open.

**Thomas à Becket** was the Archbishop of Canterbury. When Henry II assumed the throne, he appointed Becket to become the Archbishop, which was one of the highest positions within the church in England at that time. Despite his past friendship with Henry, Becket was obliged to obey the Pope, not the King. As a result, Henry and Becket quarreled frequently, especially over the different court systems for the church and the state. In an attempt to display their loyalty to Henry, four knights went to Canterbury in 1170 and murdered Becket in the Cathedral. The slaying shocked Christendom, and Becket was quickly canonized.

**Louis VII** was the King of France and Eleanor's first husband. Their marriage was annulled after their marriage produced only two daughters. Louis was also Philip and Alais's father, though they had different mothers.

**Rosamond** was a Welsh woman who became one of King Henry's lovers after Eleanor was imprisoned. Rumors claim that Eleanor had Rosamond killed, but no evidence exists to prove this claim.

**Geoffrey of Anjou** was Henry II's father. Though he was never king, Geoffrey had a significant impact on Henry's kingdom, since it was through Geoffrey that Henry acquired many of his lands in France. It is rumored that before her marriage to Henry, while she was still Queen of France, Eleanor and Geoffrey had an affair.

Be sure to check out Roundabout's website for more information on this production, the rest of our season and all of Roundabout's activities

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org>

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## PRODUCTION GUIDE FOR *THE LION IN WINTER*

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**Production Guide**  
**The Lion in Winter**

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**Welcome to The Chase Family Series at Roundabout!**

***The Lion in Winter* : Saturday, May 15, 1999**

***Show begins at 2:00pm***

***Preshow reception begins at 1:00pm***

Your family subscription includes:

- a production guide for you to review as a family before coming to the theatre;
- admittance to our pre-show reception for family subscribers only, scheduled to take place before the show in the lobby;
- participation in a post-performance discussion with members of the cast.

Remember to come early **Saturday, May 15, 1999 at 1:00 PM** to enjoy refreshments and participate in a discussion with our Education Director before seeing the show. Please note that all discussions are reserved for young subscribers and their adult guests.

***The Roundabout Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges  
The Chase Manhattan Bank for its generous support of this important program.***

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