

# A Study Guide

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**Compiled by Jennifer Shook, dramaturg**

*"This is the worm that dieth not, the memory of things past."—Bernard of Clairvaux*

*"The truth of things is always underneath. It has to be imagined."—James Goldman*

**James Goldman** was born in Chicago, June 30, 1929, and died in New York of a heart attack October 28, 1998. A playwright and screen writer, he's best known for the book for *Follies* and his screenplays, including *The Lion in Winter*, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, *Robin and Marian*, and *White Nights*. He also wrote a novel on King John, *Myself as Witness*.

## **The Players**

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**Henry II**, Henry Fitz-Empress, first Plantagenet: A Norman (born in Maine and raised in Anjou), Henry inherited from his father Geoffrey the title Count of Anjou and Maine, and Normandy, as well as the Plantagenet name (for the sprig of planter's wort Geoffrey wore in his hat). The Fitz-Empress came from his mother Matilda, queen by her father Henry I's decree, granddaughter of William the Conqueror, and widow of Emperor Henry V. Marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine added her lands in France, and upon winning a civil war against his brother Geoffrey and King Stephen, the Treaty of Winchester (or Wallingford) guaranteed him the English throne upon Stephen's death. One year later, 21-year-old Henry and Eleanor were crowned. Though officially a vassal to France, Henry held more land and power. A student of Roman history and an astute politician, Henry controlled the building of all castles in his realm, and arranged several marriages between rival families. He was known for his energy and practicality, preferring huntsman's clothes to regal frills. Of his many dalliances, Rosamund Clifford, the "rose of the world," received top billing. While perhaps best remembered for his connection to the murder of Thomas Becket, Henry is also known as the "father of the common law," for his development of the self-sufficient government and justice system.

**Eleanor of Aquitaine**: Granddaughter of the first troubadour, Duke William IX of Aquitaine, Eleanor grew up in a court of poetry and music. Unlike most 12th-century women, she was not only literate but well-versed in philosophy. When her father died he left 15-year old Eleanor in the care of King Louis VI ("Louis the Fat") who married her immediately to his son Louis VII in 1137, increasing the lands of France threefold. Louis died that July, leaving Louis and Eleanor king and queen. She bore two daughters and many rumors, annulled, and married Henry two months later. Eleanor encouraged her favored sons to fight for land, even against Henry, who imprisoned her in

retaliation from 1174-1183. After Henry's death in 1189, Eleanor took on the power she'd always desired, in influence over Richard and John. She retired to the high convent Fontevrault in 1202 and died in 1204.

Knightly hero of Robin Hood and Ivanhoe, **Richard the Lion Heart** spent less than one year of his ten-year reign in England. Recently his biographers have most hotly debated his sexuality. In Paris, where he earned the nickname "Coeur de Lion," "Philip so honoured him, that every day they ate at the same table, shared the same dish and at night the bed did not separate them. Between the two of them there grew up so great an affection that King Henry was much alarmed..." according to Roger of Hoveden. Of course Henry's alarm may have had more to do with conspiracy, but Richard's dramatic penances added fuel to the sex debate. Captured upon his return home from Crusades by Leopold of Austria and the Emperor of Germany, legend has it that Richard was found by the troubadour Blondel who heard Richard singing. Eleanor wrote to the pope for assistance, but eventually paid the ransom herself, putting the country into years of debt. Richard died riding by a castle under siege without full armor. Noticing a Bowman aiming at him, he stopped to applaud the man's daring, and in response got an arrow in his shoulder and fatal gangrene.

**Geoffrey, Count of Brittany**, had followed Young King Henry since his knighthood in 1178; according to Roger of Hoveden, when sent by the elder Henry to call the barons to a summit, Geoffrey instead encouraged them to a "hostile alliance," pushing Young Henry toward the Aquitaine. Gerald of Wales called him "soft as oil, able to corrupt two kingdoms with his tongue, of tireless endeavor, a deceiver and a dissembler." Geoffrey was nine when Henry took Brittany; Louis formalized the claim by assenting to Geoffrey's betrothal to the heiress Countess Constance. Geoffrey was sent to Paris with Richard as *custos* of Normandy, and consequently became closer to Philip than to his brothers. He died, however, either by fever or possibly kicked in the head by his horse. It's said that Philip nearly leaped into the grave after him in his grief.

Called **John** "Lackland" because he was too young to be counted into the division of lands, John was born on Christmas Eve 1167. During Richard's imprisonment he usurped the throne, but Richard condescendingly forgave him and named him successor. John lost most of England's continental holdings to Philip, was at one point excommunicated in an argument with the pope, and most famously signed the Magna Carta when his angry barons rallied against him. He did carry on Henry's administrative and judicial legacy, but suffered greatly in history as the villain of Robin Hood and the lonely king of A.A. Milne and Shakespeare.

*"Kings, queens, knights everywhere you look and I'm the only pawn."*

**Alais (or Alice) Capet** was betrothed as a child and raised in Henry's court in Normandy. She went to England with Eleanor en route to confinement—only Alais wound up in the English court, and her fate was debated in every conference between England and France for the next 15 years. Yet little is known about her. Daughter of Louis VII and his second wife, Constance of Castile, Alais's betrothal was a plot of Henry's to keep Louis from gaining more land. (Her actual dowry was the County Berry, not the Vexin, which was the dowry of Young Henry's wife Margaret (Alais's half-sister). Both were borders between the kingdoms.) By 1176 Alais was the only woman in Henry's court. Giraldus reports that Henry intended to have a child with her and then annul Eleanor by consanguinity, thus disinheriting all the princes as illegitimate. After Henry's death, John plotted to marry her as a step to the crown. Yet Richard disavowed her on the grounds that she had a child with Henry—historians cannot agree on the truth of this allegation; nonetheless Alais became a prisoner in the tower at Rouen, until she was given by Philip in a quiet but strategic marriage at the age of 33.

**Philip II (Augustus):** Born 1165 to Louis VII (Eleanor's first husband) and his third wife, Adèle of Champagne, he was crowned in 1179 by his ill father. Philip honed Paris' urban and cultural power, and with Richard won Acre back from Saladin on crusade in 1191. Under his reign the French middle class developed and gained power from the nobles. He created a central accounting bureau, paved roads, built markets, chartered the University of Paris (the Sorbonne), and began construction on the gothic Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral. Philip nearly quadrupled the holdings of France (including winning Normandy from John). Luchaire wrote that by his death "the [Capetian] dynasty was solidly established, and France founded."

## **The Times**

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A temperate time, the 12th century predated compasses and mechanical clocks, but saw growth in cities, improvements in agriculture and travel, and an early renaissance in architecture and philosophy. Henry's chroniclers coined the phrase *Anglia plena jocis* (Merrie England).

Primogeniture, the rule of inheritance by the eldest son, though a Norman custom, was not yet established for the English crown.

Remembered more kindly in death than in life, Henry the Young King (so known to distinguish him from John's son Henry III) became the hero of a play by Bertran de Born, one of the very men who helped turned him against his father. Bertran himself makes an appearance in Dante's eighth circle of hell, carrying his severed head in his hand because he "sundered those bound by ties of blood."

### **CHIVALRY:**

At its high point in the 12th and 13th centuries, chivalry fused Christian and military morals, elevating piety, valor, courtesy, and loyalty (to god, to king, and to lady love). When not at war, knights helped to centralize the show of power in the courts with tournaments. "Romance" referred not to a genre but to the vernacular French language *romanz*, as opposed to Latin, the language of history and law. The lyrics of the troubadours reinforced and circulated the form of chivalry known as "courtly love," a submissive but inspiring devotion to a lady.

Andreas Capellanus's "Art of Courtly Love" satirizes the ideals of courtly love in a dialogue between Eleanor and her daughter Marie (possibly the prolific troubadour Marie of France), where they hold a "court of love" to determine the most romantic of the courtiers.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's somewhat imaginative *Historia Regum Britanniae* came in handy for the Plantagenets, who could through his lineages trace their roots to Rome and Troy, as would James VI upon Elizabeth I's death. Geoffrey also popularized the tale of King Arthur (though many bits of the story, like the round table and Lancelot du Lac, would be added in later centuries), and introduced King Lear to an audience familiar with family feuds for the throne. The Welsh Geoffrey gave Britons at last a proud civilization origin myth.

### **CHRISTMAS:**

Goldman plays freely with anachronisms even as he draws upon tradition. Christmas, for instance, held great significance in the medieval courts. Although gifts were generally given on New Year's or Twelfth Night (the Christmas Day wrapped-gift exchange being a Victorian invention), and Christmas trees were still only outside, decked with fruit, the English had already borrowed the Yule log and the hanging of evergreen and holly from the Druidic and Scandinavian traditions.

## THE CRUSADES:

In 1095, Urban II called for a crusade, in response to a call for help from the emperor in Constantinople; the pope's fiery rhetoric launched an initiative to "recover Jerusalem from the infidel." By 1099 four crusading states were born, which then needed further defense, leading to the what's generally known as the Second Crusade after the fall of Edessa in 1143 (it ended in failure after much infighting between the Latin princes, including Louis VII and Eleanor's Uncle Raymond). In the Third Crusade, Richard and Philip fought Saladin (king of Egypt and Syria) for Jerusalem in 1187.

## **Notable Dates**

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1066

Edward the Confessor dies, and Harold Godwin is crowned. Harold's brother Tostig and Harold Hardrada of Norway invade England: Harold defeats them, killing both; 19 days later William of Normandy, claiming Harold swore to support his kingship, lands, defeats and kills Harold at Battle of Hastings. Thereafter known as William the Conqueror, the first Norman King of England imports the Norman Conquest with his coronation on Christmas Day.

1086

Domesday (Doomsday) Book, an inventory of all English holdings, is completed.

1099

Crusaders capture Jerusalem and establish four Christian kingdoms.

1100

William's youngest son Henry I becomes king, following his kingly brother's hunting "accident."

1106

Henry I defeats his brother Robert, Duke of Normandy; Robert remains captive for life.

1120

William, heir of Henry I of England, is drowned in wreck of the "White Ship." Henry asks his barons to accept his daughter Matilda (Maud) as his heir.

1122

Eleanor of Aquitaine is born.

1129

Matilda, Empress by her first marriage, marries Geoffrey the Handsome, Count of Anjou, nicknamed "Plantagenet."

1133

Henry Plantagenet is born in Le Mans.

1135

Henry I dies. Eighteen years of civil war begin between Matilda and her cousin Stephen, favored by the Anglo-Saxon barons.

1136

Geoffrey of Monmouth completes the *History of the Kings of Britain*.

1137

Eleanor marries Louis VII of France.

1141

Matilda captures Stephen and reigns briefly before she's driven out and Stephen restored. The war continues, and even Matilda's son 14-year-old Henry Plantagenet sails from the continent to fight. Henry also helps his father capture Normandy from Stephen.

1144

The Turkish Muslim forces of Nurredin capture Outremer. Louis and Eleanor set forth on Crusade the next year.

1152

Marriage of Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine is annulled on grounds of consanguinity (blood relations); Eleanor (29) marries Henry Plantagenet (18), allying Aquitaine to his lands of Anjou and Normandy, two months after her divorce. Louis colludes with King Stephen and marries his sister to Stephen's son Eustace.

1153

Henry Plantagenet invades England and forces Stephen to make him heir to the English throne.

1154

Henry II and Eleanor are crowned as king and queen of England (and over half of modern-day France). They will have 8 children; the first, Young Henry, in 1155.

1155

Henry II appoints the Archdeacon of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, as Chancellor. Monmouth's *History* is translated from Latin into Anglo-Norman French (the common court language) and English.

1157

Richard is born.

1158

Geoffrey is born.

1160

Alais is born.

1162

Becket is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and at once quarrels with Henry over the Church's rights.

1164

Henry reinstates the Constitutions of Clarendon, governing trial of ecclesiastics in England; Becket flees to France.

1167

John is born.

1170

Upon shaky reconciliation, Becket returns to Canterbury. Young Henry is crowned King, with the understanding that Henry II will keep the real power until his death. Eleanor confirms Richard Duke of Aquitaine and establishes a separate court at Poitiers. On Christmas Day, Becket denounces the bishops who let the Archbishop of York anoint Young Henry (his job); he is murdered by four knights inspired by Henry's outrage.

1173

In an effort to balance power, Henry grants some of Young Henry's holdings to John (nicknamed "John Lackland"), sparking a rebellion of Young Henry, Richard, and Geoffrey, supported by Eleanor and by Louis VII. In the eventual peace, the sons promise never to "demand anything further ... beyond the settled agreement and withdraw neither themselves or their service." Henry puts Eleanor under house arrest.

1180

In one of his first acts as King of France, Philip Augustus signs a non-aggression pact with Henry II.

1183

Richard fights against his brothers when they support rebellion in Aquitaine. In another quarrel between the Henrys, the Young King responds to economic cutoff by plundering and dies (probably of dysentery) shortly after, asking his father to have mercy on Eleanor. Henry and Philip meet at Gisors to discuss Alais and the Vexin.

*\*\*\* Goldman combines the St. Nicholas day meeting of Henry and Philip at Gisors Dec. 6, 1183 (where Henry refused to return the Vexin and responded to Philip's demand for Richard to marry Alais by suggesting John) with the Windsor Christmas court of 1184 (perhaps the first time Eleanor had seen her sons in 10 years, where Henry announced his intention to endow John with the Aquitaine).\*\*\**

1184

Eleanor crosses the channel at Henry's bidding to tour her lands. She spends Christmas at Windsor with Richard, John, and Geoffrey. Eleanor refuses to give John the Aquitaine and appeals to Philip to support her and Richard as vassals. Geoffrey goes to Paris.

1185

John makes a brief expedition into his territory of Ireland.

1186

Henry regains Aquitaine. Geoffrey dies—from a horse kick?

1187

Henry and Philip barely avoid all-out war. A two-year truce is declared.

1188

Richard does homage to Philip for his lands in France; they hold a joint Christmas court in Paris.

1189

Richard and Philip attack Henry's lands, and Henry, ill, loses. Legend says after seeing John's name on the list of conspirators, he retires to Chinon to die "of a broken heart." Richard I, Coeur de Lion, becomes king. Eleanor matchmakes Richard with Berengaria of Navarre; Philip reminds

Richard of his betrothal to Alais but Richard claims that Alais had a child with Henry. Alais, nearly forgotten, becomes a prisoner at Rouen.

1191

The bodies of King Arthur and Guinevere are reported to have been exhumed from a grave at Glastonbury Abbey; Richard I with uneasy ally Philip conquers Cyprus and captures the city of Acre.

1192

Richard I captures Jaffa, makes peace with Saladin; on the way home he is captured by Duke Leopold of Austria. In his absence, John makes a bid for the throne, aided by Philip.

1193

Alais, aged 33, finally escapes Plantagenet control, married off by Philip to a strategic noble.

1194

Richard is ransomed and returned to England; wars with Philip for five years.

1199

Richard dies of gangrene from an arrow wound. Philip allies barons behind Geoffrey's son Arthur of Brittany, who does Philip homage for Anjou, Maine, and Touraine. John and Eleanor, with the help of Richard's army (and 77-year-old Eleanor marching with them), win the crown for John.

1200

Eleanor makes her last match, of her granddaughter Blanche of Castile to Philip's son Louis.

1203

Arthur of Brittany is murdered, possibly at John's orders, possibly by John.

1204

Eleanor dies. Philip takes back Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and Poitou.

1209

Cambridge University is founded.

1213

Innocent III declares John deposed for refusing to let the pope's new Archbishop of Canterbury (Stephen Langton, the man who divided the books of the Bible into chapters) take office.

1214

Yet another of Philip's victories makes France the leading European power.

1215

Beaten by his barons, John signs the Magna Carta.

1216

John dies, leaving his nine-year-old son Henry III king.

1223

Philip Augustus dies.

1295

First representative parliament in England.

1329

Edward III of England does simple homage for Aquitaine, but refuses to do liege homage.

1337

Philip Valois attacks the Aquitaine; Edward III, provoked, declares himself king of France; "The Hundred Years' War " begins (ends 1453).

1348

Black Death (bubonic plague) reaches England.

1360

Peace of Bretigny ends the first stage of the Hundred Years' War. Edward III gives up claim to French throne.

1369

Second stage of war between England and France begins.

1381

Peasants' Revolt in England.

1387

Geoffrey Chaucer begins work on *The Canterbury Tales*.

1415

Henry V invades France, and defeats the French at Agincourt.

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