San Fernando Valley State College

THE LION IN WINTER

A thesis production of a comedy-drama
written by James Goldman.

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

Drama

by

Gilman Warren Rankin

June, 1969
The abstract of Gilman Warren Rankin is approved:

[Redacted]

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Committee Chairman

San Fernando Valley State College

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ABSTRACT

THE LION IN WINTER

A thesis production of a comedy-drama

written by James Goldman

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Gilman Warren Rankin

Master of Arts in Drama

June, 1969

The purpose of this thesis production was to provide a theatrical experience that would be dramatically meaningful and aesthetically rewarding to San Fernando Valley State College audiences while posing at the same time a challenge in depth to student directors, actors and technicians.

The Lion in Winter, by James Goldman, is a comedy-drama of the genre referred to as "theatre of fact." It takes the audience back in time to 1183 A.D. Henry II, the first Plantagenet King of England, has convened a Christmas court at his castle in Chinon, France. Present in answer to his summons are his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, their sons Richard, Geoffrey and John, young King Philip of France, and his sister, Princess Alais. The story is concerned with the problems arising from King Henry's decision to name an heir to the English throne. The consequent conniving and maneuvering that takes place provides much of the action of the plot. The dialogue is witty, pungent, and often caustic, with moments of high humor, terrible cruelty, and deep emotion. Comic elements are frequently placed in direct
juxtaposition with tragic elements, each strengthening and enhancing the other, yet the script is a tightly knit, beautifully cadenced poetic unit. The result is so powerful as to hold an audience riveted in involved attention. Moreover, Mr. Goldman has created in his characters seven unique, individual human beings, each one a very real challenge for the student actor to explore in depth.

The theme of The Lion in Winter revolves around the idea of the continuity of life. Those who rise to the challenges of life despite its pain and suffering, man's inhumanity to man, and the obstacles and frustrations one encounters as he makes his way through life find their reward in the excitement of the challenge itself and in the knowledge that they have taken their world in their hands and shaped it as best they could for future generations. Very often, marital partners find that their efforts in shaping their world have separated them to such an extent that they cannot bridge the gap that has grown between them, that the remnants of a once great love can no longer exert the strength necessary to bring them back together. Such was the situation for Henry II and his Eleanor.

In designing a background for our players, I determined at the outset to keep the setting as simple as possible, merely suggesting the dank, cold massiveness of a medieval castle. Furniture and set pieces were held to a bare minimum. The focus was directed on the actors. The chief technical aids were concentrated in costume and lighting. Costume provided color and delineated character relationships. For instance, tones of red ran through the costuming of the Plantagenet family. Lighting was used as the prime aid to the actors
in focusing attention, building dramatic action, and in creating in
the audience a sense of virtual time and virtual space. Between
Henry and Eleanor we formed a vast gulf of space and time and a feel-
ing that this gulf had grown wider and deeper as time passed, inex-
orably separating them. Yet, the residue of their once great love
reached across that gap, still attracting, still tugging at their
hearts. Although they cannot regain all that they once shared, they
remember, and are warmed by the memory.

There is a timeless quality about this drama. Although it is
set in the year 1183 A.D., the play speaks to the present and the
author's style of writing is definitely contemporary rather than ar-
chaic. Artistically creative lighting, enhancing mood and action
should, and indeed, did create within the audience a sense of time-
lessness. Intermittent conferences with artistic designers brought
about a meshing of concepts, indicative of success in communicating
ideas.

Research added to my knowledge of the time, place and characters.
I consulted several histories of the period, as well as some histor-
ical novels. I found, in fact, that Mr. Goldman had built his entire
script on a firm basis of fact. Much of the research proved to be of
great value to the actors as they developed characters. Then, too,
research helped all to comprehend the situations existing within the
body of the drama. We all knew where we were and why.

Casting posed some problems. Certain characters, Richard and
Henry, for example, demanded definite physical characteristics, as
did Philip of France. Within a period of two evenings, 7:30 - 11:00
P.M., we auditioned seventy-five actors and actresses. Our callback audition involved eleven women and twenty-two men. By 11:30 P.M. of that third session we had settled on a cast. A further problem arose. One young man of our choice found that a previous commitment would interfere with our rehearsal schedule, so he withdrew. We made a replacement and our cast was set.

We deliberately set up a rehearsal schedule spanning eight weeks, rather long for our college situation, but it gave us time in which to build character, situations and action carefully, in a detailed manner. Bit by bit, piece by piece, scene by scene we structured our sequence of action. By the time we reached technical and dress rehearsals we had developed a tightly knit, cohesive ensemble. A true "esprit de corps" pervaded the entire group.

The performance confirmed our efforts to achieve desired results. We had sold-out houses throughout our eleven performance run. The reward to the entire company was found in the enthusiastic response of our audiences. Conversations with individual members of each audience convinced us that our aesthetic goals had been achieved. The impressions and inner feelings we had hoped to arouse had, in fact, come to be. Audiences were involved in the action and the emotion and found meaning in the play. Insights and greater understanding of the human condition came to them as a result of the things the play had to say and the way in which our production said them.

Though we certainly did not attain perfection in our production, we were made aware of many achievements. Audiences did receive dramatically meaningful and aesthetically rewarding experiences.
young players did meet the challenge of depth in character; each one gained in powers of concentration, control and consistency. Their artistic talents were extended and enlarged in many ways, and their personal lives may have been enriched through working together as a unit, dedicated to each other and to the company as a whole. The student technical crews involved also extended the scope of their abilities and knowledge, and earned their portion of the audience response.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


THE VALLEY STATE COLLEGE THEATRE

Presents

THE LION IN WINTER

by

James Goldman

Directed by

GILMAN RUNKIN

Set & Costume Design
JOHN FURMAN

Lighting Design
WILLIAM BELLMAN

Music for the Christmas Carol
composed especially for this production

by
Willard W. Jones, Jr., ASCAP

THE CAST
(in order of their appearance)

HENRY II, King of England .... Michael Levine
ALICE, A French Princess .... Robin Neal-White
JOHN, the youngest son .... Robert C. M. Decker
GEFFREY, the middle son .... Tony Muhl
RICHARD LIONHEART, the eldest son .... Paul White
SLEMMER, Henry's slave .... Maryellen Clemons
PHILIP, King of France .... David Gurian

THE TIME: Christmas, 1183
THE PLACE: Henry's Castle at Chinon, France

There will be a ten minute intermission between acts.
PRODUCTION STAFF FOR
THE LION IN WINTER

Faculty Adviser . . . . . . . . Dr. Louis Palfy
Technical Director . . . . . . John Furman
Associate Director . . . . . . Dan Berrigan
Assistant Director . . . . . . Holly Sherman
Stage Manager . . . . . . . . Marc Mandemaker
Shop Supervisor . . . . . . Al Lyons
Lighting Supervisor . . . James Schappe
Lighting Supervisor . . . Christopher Housman
Costume Supervisor . . . Steffy Bresard
Make-up Supervisor . . . Paul White
Sound Supervisor . . . . . Ron Pavlak
Publicity . . . . . . . . . . . . . Marc Fendg
Poster and Program Design . . James Schappe
House Manager . . . . . . Timothy Ogney
Photography . . . . . . . . Steve Arja

ENM FACULTY

Helen Backlin, William T. Bello, Margaret E.
Bennett, James W. Brench, (Chairman, Department
of Drama), Mary Jane Evans (on leave), Heinrich
Richard Falk, John S. Furman, Adolfo Hally-Bula,
Lewis Palfy, William E. Schlosser (on leave to
Art Department), Gwen W. Smith.
Lecturers: Jeff Corey, Robert Eilenstein, Alan Kliner,
William Newgard, Wayne Pelts, Olman Rankin, Dori
Wolfe.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Alan Kliner, James Mapes
Olman Rankin, Paul White

Performances of THE LION IN WINTER:

April 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, May 1, 2, 3, and 4,
1969. Matinees April 27 and May 4, 3:30 p.m.

COMING ATTRACTION

B o o m  o f  t h e  G r o s s a p i n t ,  S m a l l  o f  t h e  C r o w d
Campus Theatre
8:30 p.m.
May 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29.