

THE LION IN WINTER

James Goldman's notes from the 2nd draft of his screenplay.

A WORD ABOUT CASTLES

THE LION IN WINTER was a special and peculiar sort of history play. To make its style and intention clear on film, the look of the castle where it occurs and the sense of castle life need to be earthly real and, at the same time, strikingly different from what we're used to seeing in King Arthur movies.

Almost nothing is known about the castle at Chinon as it was in Henry's time; and little enough is known about 12th century castles in general. One thing is clear, however, and important for our purposes: only that such castles looked nothing like what we expect.

The stone fortresses that remain today were only the shell of castles as they were lived in. Most of the shelter for most of the staff, all of the workshops -- the armories, forges, stables and so on -- were made of wood. A castle courtyard was a crowded, teeming, dirty place with much more wood than stone to greet the eye.

A major castle, as Chinon was, was like a miniature town. Everything necessary to the life of the establishment existed inside the walls. Poultry, livestock, looms and tailors, mills for grinding grain, vast storerooms, water wells, boot makers, gardens -- everything vital to life under siege was somehow packed in.

At special times, like the Christmas Court during which the film occurs, the congestion was even worse than usual. All guests, the visiting nobles and clergymen, traveled with trains of varying size. So that, in addition to the usual crowding, we find hundreds of soldiers and servants living outdoors, jammed together in tents, huddling for warmth around dozens of fires.

Living conditions, even for royalty, were crude and rough. The castle rooms were spartan: a bed, a few chairs, chests for storage, clothes hung in the open on racks. Floors were covered with straw, which was swept away and replaced only occasionally. Interiors at high noon on a clear day were always dark, illumination coming from extremely smoky torches and candles. In winter, wind whistled through the open slit windows and the place was freezing cold.

A lot of their habits seem oddly contradictory. In spite of the cold, everyone from the king to his vassal slept naked. In the midst of the general crudeness, nobles wore the most exquisite fabrics - cloths of gold and silver, delicate brocades. Clothing was generally dirty and even at a Christmas Court, nothing looked clean. Tables were set with fine linen and napkins of a kind were used; yet most of the eating was done with fingers. Sanitary conditions were appalling. For some reason, castles, in addition to their human tenants, were populated by hundreds of dogs.

All these things -- the grime and dirt and cold, the coarseness and crudity of life in general -- are vital to the look of the film. On the whole, there are few specific references to these

elements in the screenplay. Rather than clutter up the goings-on with data, it seemed better to suggest them here and let the castle that the story moves in be imagined.

A NOTE ABOUT MUSIC

On the stage, Christmas carols were used for incidental music in good effect. Carols used were from all periods. There is something available through musical style – using medieval instruments to play 19th century tunes with contemporary harmonizations – that should have a considerable help in letting an audience know that it's an odd and different kind of history show that they're seeing.

The point to be made here is that the music is a useful and important element. It wants to be crisp, clear, spirited and, above all, distinctive; that is, it needs to have a sound we haven't heard before. And because the style of the writing involves a mixing of odd elements it seems right that the freshness of musical sound should be achieved the same way.