

From the Playwright – Steven Fechter

Every play I write begins with an impulse to simply tell a compelling story. And so it began with Lancelot. In writing Lancelot I was able to bring together themes that interest me a great deal. Those themes include the role of the artist in society, the Outsider who breaks social and sexual boundaries, and male identity in America.

Lancelot is set in the American West – Oklahoma to be exact, where I have some family roots. I have set a number of my plays in small rural towns in the Midwest and West. If you're an Outsider the stakes always seem higher in a small town than in a big city. The Outsider just sticks out more. The things that attract me about the West are its rugged, desolate, and bleak landscapes peopled by tough, gritty, bruised characters.

In *Lancelot* the protagonist is Ryan. He works hard, goes to church, and plays by the rules. On the surface Ryan represents the ideal young man of the Western heartland. But underneath Ryan typifies a very different American male icon – the artist as outlaw and sexual rebel. Whether he is able to reconcile those two opposing sides of American maleness is the play's big dramatic question. Ryan, a survivor of a catastrophic childhood trauma, was able to remake himself into what he believed would be a normal decent man in the eyes of the community. When one day the past catches up with him, Ryan must make the most difficult choice of his life.

In the end I wrote *Lancelot* to challenge actors and audience members alike and to emotionally move them to a place they've never been to before.

LANCELOT

Synopsis

CHARACTERS:

RYAN, 25

TARA, 30

GINGER, 38

BOY, 15

TIME & PLACE: Present. United Goods Store and a motel room in Oklahoma

ACTION: Ryan is a proud manager at United Goods (think Wal-Mart). His girlfriend Tara is a co-employee. Maybe one day they'll marry. No one knows of Ryan's buried past – until Ginger arrives. An arty looking beauty just south of 40, Ginger waits for Ryan in the United Goods employee parking lot by her white Corvette. Ryan is upset to see her. Ginger tells him she's staying at the motel just off the Interstate. An aggressive adolescent Boy also visits Ryan. This Boy seems to know all about Ryan and Ginger then he disappears. Tara lets Ryan know that she is suspicious of this strange woman in the stylish clothes. Ryan says she's an old friend passing by to say hello. Tara tells Ryan to come over for dinner. She has a surprise. That night Ryan sees Ginger in her seedy motel room. In catching up, Ginger recalls one of her students in her middle school art class, a beautiful boy with rare artistic talent. Their love affair lasts two years. Ginger and the Boy relive the affair before Ryan's eyes. The affair ends when Ginger's husband catches them. He would have killed Ginger if the boy hadn't stabbed him to death. Ryan doesn't remember that part. Ginger is sent to prison. The boy is sent to a

mental institution. They never saw each other again – until now. Ginger has become a successful artist in New York City. Ryan hasn't touched a brush since Ginger's trial. Ginger asks Ryan to come to New York with her and be an artist again. Ryan says no. But he stays the night. Next day at work Tara corners Ryan. Upset that he stood her up, Tara blurts out her surprise. She's pregnant, she's keeping it, and they're getting married – soon! That night Ryan again stays with Ginger, swearing it's their last time together. At work Ryan is a mess. While giving a rambling pep talk to his department he breaks down. On the third night Ryan is ready to leave with Ginger. As they are about to go, Tara arrives. She informs Ryan that she researched online and knows all about his sordid history. But she's prepared to fight for him because he belongs with her. Ryan realizes he can't leave before learning two things: What happened the day he killed Ginger's husband and is he a true artist? The motel room turns into a courtroom. Ryan, Ginger, Tara, and the Boy reenact the trial. On the witness stand Ryan learns the awful truth. Next he attempts to draw Tara's nude portrait. His strokes are awkward. The Boy flees. Ryan turns violent against himself. Ginger and Tara hold him down. Two months later Ryan has married Tara, who is noticeably expecting. Our final image: Ryan stands alone in the United Goods parking lot, sketching the flat horizon on a small pad. His drawing strokes flow with ease.

RUNNING TIME: Approximately 90 minutes