

# **Lancelot Study Guide**

## **Lancelot by Walker Percy**

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## Plot Summary

Lancelot is a novel by critically-acclaimed writer Walker Percy. Lancelot is a cuckolded man who finds himself locked up in a mental institution in the aftermath of a fire at his home, Belle Isle. Lancelot claims not to remember the circumstances that led up to his confinement until he sees an old friend, Harry, in the hallway. Lancelot shares his story with Harry a little at a time, showing the reader how Lancelot went from a mild-mannered, if bored, husband, to a murderer. Lancelot is a fascinating tale of madness that takes the reader into a world that could all too easily belong to anyone.

Lancelot welcomes Harry, the priest-psychiatrist, into his room at the mental institution, expressing confusion over whether or not he is a patient or a prisoner. Lancelot claims not to have known what circumstances brought him to this place until he saw his old childhood friend in the hallway one afternoon. Now Lancelot has chosen to tell his story only to Harry. Lancelot begins by telling Harry how he came to realize that his wife was cheating on him. Lancelot was in his study, a converted pigeonier, where he was reading a novel. Lancelot noticed an application for camp on his desk for his daughter that his wife wanted him to sign. Lancelot glanced the form over and saw that it had his daughter, Siobhan's, blood type listed. Lancelot realized almost immediately that the blood type listed was incompatible with his own. Lancelot called a friend, a doctor, and confirmed that his child would not have that blood type no matter what blood type the mother might be.

Lancelot then checked his files and realized that his wife, Margot, was in Texas at an acting seminar about the time she became pregnant, suggesting that Merlin, an actor, was the father. Ironically, Merlin and group of actors were staying at the house at that time making a new film at Belle Isle. Lancelot began watching this group of actors, attempting to find proof that his wife was having an affair. Lancelot stopped drinking and found himself moving out of the rut he has been in since his marriage began. At this point, Lancelot stops to talk with Harry about love and its meaning, discussing briefly his first wife, Lucy. Lancelot also talks with Harry about how he met Margot when she was working as a tour guide at his home and how her fascination with Belle Isle might have led to her fascination for Lancelot.

Lancelot returns to his story, telling Harry how he enlisted the help of his house servant, Elgin. Lancelot tells Harry that he sent Elgin to the hotel where the movie people were staying and had him spy on them. Unfortunately, Elgin could not get enough information to prove Margot was sleeping with any of the men associated with the movie. Lancelot then asked the owner of the hotel, a cousin, to close the hotel until after a pending hurricane moved on. This caused the movie people to move back into the house where they had been invited to stay as guests. Lancelot then had Elgin place hidden cameras in each of the guest rooms so that he could record their activities. These cameras caught proof of Margot's unfaithfulness as well as the corruption of Lancelot's eldest daughter, Lucy.



Lancelot tells Harry that he hopes to get out of the hospital soon. Lancelot will begin a new world with the woman in the room next to his, a new world in which women will be clear about the sexual identity, whether they be virtuous women or immoral women. Lancelot also plans to take custody of his young daughter, Siobhan, despite his conviction that she is not his biological daughter. When Lancelot returns to the story, he tells Harry how he piped gas from the basement of Belle Isle into the guest bedrooms. Lancelot then went into each of the bedrooms to make sure his victims were present. Troy Dana was passed out on the bed, but this did not stop his lover from seducing Lancelot and making love to him next to Troy. In Margot's room, Lancelot walked in on Margot and Janos Jacoby in the middle of love making. Lancelot climbed into the bed with them, provoking a fight. As the fight came to an end, Lancelot slit Janos' throat. Moments later, the gas ignited and blew Lancelot out into the front yard. Lancelot returned to retrieve the knife, sustaining the burns that were attributed to his attempts to save his wife's life in the press.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary

Lancelot Andrewes Lamar is the son of a family with deep Southern roots. Lancelot is in a mental institute after the death of his second wife, unclear if he is being treated as a patient or a criminal. Lancelot has denied knowledge of the events that have led to his confinement until he sees a friend in the hallway.

In chapter 1, Lancelot welcomes an old childhood friend into his room at the mental institute and recalls some of his fond memories of their childhood together. Lancelot claims to have begun remembering why he is in the hospital upon seeing his friend in the hallway the day before.

In chapter 2, Lancelot welcomes his friend, whom he calls Harry or Percival, and tells him that he has seen him walking through the cemetery that sits outside Lancelot's window. Lancelot asks his friend what he knows about love and being in love, suggesting Harry might be in love with a young woman who is often in the cemetery. This leads Lancelot to think about his first wife, Lucy Cobb, who died tragically after a few years of marriage. Lancelot also recalls his second wife, for whose death he finds himself in the hospital. Lancelot claims he did not recall the circumstances of his second wife's death until recently. Lancelot recalls his own heroic past, his athletic and academic achievements, and how his young life in no way prepared him for what his life has become. Lancelot asks Harry if he remembers the pigeonier at Belle Isle where they often spent their afternoons reading together. Lancelot tells Harry that Margot, his second wife, turned the pigeonier into a study. On the day Lancelot learned of Margot's infidelity, he was reading a book in the pigeonier. Lancelot compares his discovery with an astronomer's discovery of an asteroid on a path to destroy the earth.

Lancelot put down his book and found an application to camp for his daughter that Margot has left on his desk for his signature. On the application was Siobhan, his youngest daughter's, blood type. Lancelot knew little about blood type but knew his blood type was dissimilar to that of Siobhan. Lancelot called a friend and learned that no matter what blood type the mother was, Siobhan could not be his daughter. Lancelot then checked his records and realized that Margot was in Texas the summer Siobhan was conceived, attending an acting seminar that was being given by an actor who was currently a guest at Belle Isle. Margot was in the middle of filming a movie with movie friends of hers at Belle Isle. Lancelot realized that Margot must have been having an affair with Merlin, the actor, and that it was possible it was continuing at that moment in his very own home. Lancelot then changes the subject, telling Harry about the girl in the room next to his. Lancelot attempted to talk to the girl yesterday through a complicated knocking system but did not receive a reply. Then Lancelot tells Harry his theory on how love is the cause of all the societal downfalls in history, leading him to design a new world that will revolve around the New Woman.



## Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The first two chapters of the novel introduce the main characters. First is Lancelot, the narrator. Lancelot is telling his story to a friend, thus the point of view of the novel is first person and the language is something of a conversational tone. Lancelot is a man who has grown up in a Southern family with deep roots, causing him to be the kind of man who believes in chivalry and honor, like the Knight of the Round Table with the same name. Lancelot is a gentle man who believes in love and believes he was lucky enough to fall in love twice. However, something has changed to cause Lancelot to question his belief in love. While looking over an application for his daughter to go to summer camp, Lancelot discovered that his daughter might not be his because of her stated blood type. Lancelot is devastated by this news, a fact that is underscored by the fact that Lancelot is in a mental institution when the novel begins.

Lancelot begins telling his story, one he has kept closely hidden for the months or weeks he has been in the hospital, to a priest-psychiatrist whom he believes is a childhood friend named Harry. Harry never really speaks in the novel that the reader is aware of until the final pages, so the only things the reader knows about Harry are the things Lancelot tells the reader. The reader is not even sure if Harry really exists, an example of the unreliable narrator that Lancelot is slowly proving to be. Margot is also introduced in these chapters in a peripheral role. Margot is Lancelot's second wife and the woman who is apparently cheating on him, leading to some kind of disaster at their home, Belle Isle. Margot is an actress of some sort and she is in the middle of filming a movie when Lancelot learns about their daughter's parentage, ironically bringing into their home the man Lancelot suspects of being his daughter's biological father. This also brings into play all the characters necessary for the revenge plot that appears to be unfolding.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Lancelot tells Harry how he found money in father's sock drawer once when he was a little boy. This money seemed to prove that his father was a corrupt politician even though his mother swore that they were an honorable family and did not do that sort of thing. Lancelot compares the way he felt then with the way he felt when he learned of Margot's infidelity. Lancelot then continues with his story. That night, Lancelot asked Elgin what time the movie people had come back to Belle Isle after watching the rushes from the week's filming. Elgin said they did not return until after three. Lancelot then asked Elgin if the dumbwaiter beside the fireplace still worked. Lancelot pauses in his story then to tell Harry that Elgin is the son of the family's long time servants and that he is a student at MIT.

That night, Lancelot had dinner with Margot, the director, Janos Jacoby, and the actors, Troy Dana, Raine Robinette, and Merlin. Lancelot reports that the dinner went well, just as it had always gone. Raine flirted with Lancelot, making him feel important in the past but then caused him to wonder if it was out of pity because she knew Margot was unfaithful. Lancelot also recalls growing bored of their movie talking and finding the whole thing pretentious, especially Margot's attempts to prove herself knowledgeable. Lancelot left the table at the same time he normally would, in time to say goodnight to his daughter, Siobhan, where she was watching television with her grandpa, Tex Reilly, before settling down to watch the evening news. However, instead of going upstairs, Lancelot hid in parlor and watched as his wife appeared to be flirting with both Merlin and Janos.

Finally Lancelot went upstairs to say goodnight to Siobhan and Tex. Tex was irritating Siobhan, something Lancelot did not take the time to deal with, and began annoying Lancelot by once again nagging him about a gas well over which he had allowed Margot to rebuild a burned section of Belle Isle. Lancelot dismissed them both and went to the pigeonier. At this point, Lancelot pauses in his story to tell Harry how he had become complacent in his routine. Lancelot was once an attorney who fought for civil rights and cared about his job. However, after marrying Margot, Lancelot found himself going into the office less and less until he only went in in the mornings. Lancelot gave up golf and other pursuits, finding himself content to sit in the pigeonier in the afternoons reading and writing the occasional article on New Orleans's role in the Civil War. Lancelot had fallen into a rut that revolved around alcohol and the news. Upon learning of Margot's infidelity, however, Lancelot gave up alcohol and lost interest in the news. Lancelot wondered if he were strong enough to deal with his life, with the rut it had fallen into and the fool his wife was making of him. Lancelot then stops his story to discuss with Harry the girl in the room next door with whom he was trying to find a way to communicate.



## Chapter 3 Analysis

As Lancelot continues to grow suspicious of his wife, the reader learns more about his life. Lancelot has become complacent, no longer caring passionately about anything, including his wife and children. Touching on the theme of neglect, the reader sees that Lancelot is aware that his youngest daughter is not happy in the company of her grandfather, Tex, but has chosen to do nothing about it. Lancelot claims that he did not care about his daughter's unhappiness, but this lack of concern existed long before he knew his daughter was not his own. This inability to care reflects the dullness of Lancelot's life, his inability to be passionate about anything, and perhaps giving his wife Margot a motive for infidelity. At the same time, Margot's infidelity has given Lancelot something to be passionate about, a reason to move out of the rut his life has become and to stop drinking. It is ironic that the same thing that has resulted in Margot's infidelity has broken with Lancelot's knowledge of that infidelity.

The mention of the gas well in the basement of Belle Isle is interesting because the reader already knows that the house is destroyed in a fire, suggesting that perhaps Tex has unwittingly given Lancelot the means by which to kill Margot. It is also a foreshadowing of how Lancelot creates the fire.

Finally, Lancelot has repeatedly mentioned the girl in the room next to his. This girl is silent and refuses to respond to Lancelot's attempts at communication by tapping on the wall. Who this girl is and what this relationship means is not something the reader knows right now, but seems to be of some importance to Lancelot. Perhaps this girl symbolizes his passion to begin living again.





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Lancelot met Margot when she was a belle for the Azalea Festival. Belle Isle was chosen to be on the Azalea Trail and Margot was a belle who welcomed tourists at the door. The night this took place was rainy and Margot was drenched. Lancelot invited her into the pigeonier to dry off and they found themselves sharing a bottle of whiskey. They lie on a mattress together and talked. Lancelot was drawn in not so much by her beauty as by her overwhelming sexuality. As they spoke, they learned a great deal about each other. Margot also showed an interest in Belle Isle, suggesting renovations Lancelot could do to the pigeonier to turn it into an apartment.

The memory of meeting Margot leads Lancelot to recall his first meeting with Lucy Cobb, his first wife. The meeting was not as sexually charged, but Lancelot found himself in love just the same. Lucy was playing tennis in North Carolina, at a venue that left Lancelot feeling out of place. Lancelot was reluctant to let his feelings be known, so Lucy had to make the first move. Lancelot tells Harry that his marriage to Lucy was a normal one and that her death must have been tragic, but to him it was simply curious how someone could grow ill and die so quickly.

Lancelot tells Harry that the girl in the room next door answered one of his knocks with one of her own. Lancelot says the girl next door reminds him of Lucy, his virgin bride. Lancelot has learned that the girl next door is in the hospital because she was brutally raped by three men. Lancelot explains that despite this brutal sexual assault, the girl is still like his virginal Lucy because somehow the brutality of her experience has returned her to a more innocent place.

Lancelot then recalls how he waited up for Margot to return from watching the rushes on the night he learned of her infidelity, but she never did. Lancelot went to breakfast at the normal time and found Margot unapologetic. In fact, Margot most likely was not aware that Lancelot knew she did not return until morning because he has been banished to the pigeonier to make room for the guests. Lancelot went to the office as usual that day and returned at lunch. Lancelot then called for Elgin. Elgin would have done anything for Lancelot because he believed Lancelot had saved his family from a vengeful Grand Kleagle and helped him get a scholarship to MIT. In truth, the Grand Kleagle was a friend of Lancelot's from school with whom he had a civilized chat. Lancelot asked Elgin to go to the Holiday Inn and watch all the rooms occupied by the movie people, claiming that he was afraid Lucy was doing drugs. After figuring out a position from which he could watch all the rooms, Elgin agreed.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

Lancelot recalls how he met each of his wives and compares them to one another. Lancelot makes it clear that his attraction to Margot was sex from the very beginning, but his attraction to his first wife, Lucy, was something deeper. Lucy was a virgin and Lancelot valued this in her. Margot was not and her sexual knowledge made their lives together exciting. However, as Lancelot compares the girl in the room next to his own with Lucy, it becomes clear to the reader that he values virginal moralities more than Margot's sexual knowledge. In fact, Lancelot comes close to calling Margot a woman with loose morals while Lucy and the girl in the next room were pure, innocent.

Lancelot begins unveiling the plan he put into place as he describes to Harry how he had Elgin go to the hotel to watch his wife and the movie people. Margot and her friends go to the Holiday Inn each night to watch the day's rushes, and Margot often does not return home until late, if at all. This suggests to Lancelot that they are doing more than watching the day's rushes, making him think that an affair is still going on under his very nose. Lancelot wants proof, and he is using a family servant to get it, clearly unable or unwilling to do it himself. This speaks to Lancelot's character, suggesting he is not the chivalrous man his family history and his name might suggest.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Lancelot stops his story to discuss why he is telling it. Lancelot feels as though there is something in the story he needs to recall. Lancelot talks about the past, trying to tell Harry how he feels he needs to create a new life, a new world. Lancelot then talks about the girl in the room next door. Lancelot went to see her the previous day and she told him her name is Anna. Again Lancelot talks about how much she reminds him of Lucy Cobb, his first wife. Returning to his story, Lancelot talks about another dinner with the movie people in which the discussion centered around the semiotics of film, with Janos Jacoby dominating the discussion while Merlin appeared bored. At the same time, Raine was speaking to Lancelot about Ideo-Personal-Dynamics, the cult-like group she had just joined in Hollywood. Lancelot attempted to take part in Janos' conversation, but he misunderstood the point and embarrassed Margot. After dinner, Lancelot checked in on Siobhan and once again ignored her unhappiness in her grandfather's company.

Lancelot recalls his early relationship with Margot, how sex was a major part of their relationship. After the sex began to ebb, it was renovating Belle Isle that made Margot happy, but even that came to an end. Eventually Margot turned to acting to find the passion upon which she thrived. Lancelot repeatedly comes back to the question of whether or not he loved Margot. Lancelot cannot answer that he loved her, but he admits to a certain obsession with her.

Elgin returned with his report on the goings on at the Holiday Inn. Elgin could not see what was going on in the rooms but reported that Margot spent time in both Merlin and Jacoby's rooms. Lucy was there as well and spent most of the night in Raines' room with her and Troy, but Lancelot does not seem interested in this information. Lancelot admits to Harry at this point that he might have been wrong about Margot, since it appears she was ill that night and not sleeping with anyone. However, Lancelot continued to hold on to his doubts and is determined to find proof of Margot's infidelity.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Lancelot has grown obsessed with Margot's infidelity and news to the contrary seems to only make him more determined to learn the truth. Lancelot himself does not seem to know why he is obsessed or what drives him on. Lancelot cannot even say if he was in love with Margot or simply drawn in by her sexual appeal. Lancelot continuously compares Margot to his first wife, Lucy Cobb, placing Margot on the evil side of the scale and Lucy on the pure, innocent side, which is also where Lancelot places Anna, the poor rape victim in the room next door.

Lancelot appears to be growing more unstable as his story continues. Lancelot breaks into his own narration more often, going off on tangents like the meaning of love or the

meaning of infinity. The closer the story gets to the death of Margot and her friends, the more Lancelot becomes obsessed with Margot's infidelity and the more he loses touch with other things going on around him, like his sixteen-year-old daughter spending the night with two clearly unusual movie stars.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Lucy announced at lunch the next day that she was moving to Hollywood to work for Raine. Lancelot argued with her, but she was determined. Lancelot steps out of the story at this point to discuss why he is telling this story. Lancelot says he is reliving his quest, like Lancelot and Percival's quest to find the Holy Grail. Lancelot says it is no coincidence that Harry, whose nickname in college was Percival, is here to listen. Instead of looking for the Holy Grail, however, Lancelot claims his quest was to find sin, the kind of sin that is all around them, like the pornographic theater across the street from the hospital that he can see out his window.

Lancelot returns to his story to tell how he asked Elgin to make a movie for him. Lancelot arranged for Elgin to buy video equipment so that Lancelot can put a hidden camera in each of the guest bedrooms so that he could record what happened in there each night. That same afternoon, Lancelot went to the movie set to watch his wife do a scene in which she was supposed to be playing a librarian who was made love to in the stacks by a mysterious stranger. Lancelot spoke with Janos and Merlin for a while, listening to Janos explain the artistic meaning behind the scene. Merlin clearly was not buying this discussion any more than Lancelot was, so Lancelot rescued him by changing the subject. Lancelot then went into the office and found his daughter discussing Raine's spiritual convictions with the local librarian, who was clearly starstruck.

Lancelot walked home from the set trying to figure out the point to the sexually-charged plot of the movie, a plot that seemed to have no meaning or substance at all. Lancelot tells a story about his grandfather, one in which his grandfather killed a man in a gentleman's duel and had a hearty breakfast afterward. Then Lancelot turns to Harry, whom he now calls Percival, and tells him that he can no longer abide by the sexual freedoms expressed in the world today and will no longer live in this society that does abide them. Lancelot is intent on creating his own world where women will be treated with respect, chivalry and courtesy no matter how they choose to live their lives, . There will not be disrespect for authority or the sexual revolution that has gripped the rest of the world. In Lancelot's New World, there will be no confusion as to whether a woman is moral or amoral.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

In this chapter, Lancelot compares his quest to learn the truth about Margot's infidelity with the quest of Lancelot and Percival to find the Holy Grail. Lancelot calls Harry by the name Percival, claiming it was Harry's nickname in college; Lancelot compares the two of them to the Knights of the Round Table from medieval folk lore. Lancelot goes further and suggests that gentlemen duels and other Southern traditions were more chivalrous



than the sexual obsession of the current generation. Lancelot has found himself in a world of blurred boundaries that he does not like and has decided he will create his own world that will go back to the traditions of the past, returning to chivalry and chaste women. It is as though Lancelot is blaming sex and a lack of morals for Margot's death rather than his own actions.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Lancelot talks about the weather, telling Harry a story about a couple on the cusp of divorce who found themselves trapped in a hurricane. The couple confessed their unhappiness to one another and found themselves closer than they had been in years. Then the couple divorced. This connects to Lancelot's story because Hurricane Marie was coming toward New Orleans as the movie moved into its final day of shooting. Lancelot came home that day and found Margot attempting to close the windows in the belvedere. Lancelot suggested they spend some time alone, but Margot was distant and pushed him away. This memory causes Lancelot to recall the first time he made love to Margot, a story in which he confesses that Margot was often the aggressor in their relationship. Then Lancelot tells Harry that not only did Margot refuse to go away with him that day, but she announced that she was soon to leave for England in order to do another movie with Janos. This only made Lancelot more determined to find the truth.

Lancelot then begins to talk about how America is becoming an immoral place. Lancelot's own son has decided he is a homosexual, a decision Lancelot understands and can respect because of the immorality of women. Lancelot blames women for the sexual immorality that he claims is ruining the country. Once again Lancelot talks about the New World he is going to create built around the New Woman. Lancelot claims that in his New World there will not be any deception, that women will clearly be virtuous or not.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Lancelot's insanity, a theme of the novel, is clearly growing. Lancelot has decided that women and their lies about sex is what is ruining the nation. Lancelot has decided to begin his own nation, his New World where there will be the New Woman, a woman who will clearly make the choice between being virtuous or not and men will not be fooled again. This tirade comes out when Lancelot reveals that he asked Margot to go away with him one last time and she refused, instead deciding to go to Europe to make a movie with Janos. Later, when Lancelot discovers that Janos is Margot's lover, this simply adds insult to injury.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Lancelot continues with his story by reporting on the movies Elgin made for him. Elgin delivered the tapes and left Lancelot to watch them. One tape showed his daughter, Lucy, having sex with both Troy and Raine. Another showed Margot in bed with Janos. However, the quality of the tapes was poor and it was not completely clear who the actors were, but Lancelot felt as though he had his proof.

After watching the tapes, Lancelot made a list of things he needed to buy to complete his revenge. Before going to the hardware store, Lancelot went to see Tex and Siobhan. Lancelot convinced Tex to take Siobhan to Texas in order to avoid the hurricane. Lancelot then encounters Merlin, who was deeply afraid of the storm and decided to move on as well. Lancelot encouraged him to do so because Lancelot discovered he liked Merlin. Lancelot then went to the bank and removed seventy-five thousand dollars, telling the bank manager he was giving it to the Negro College Fund. Instead, Lancelot gave it to Elgin to complete his college career. Then Lancelot told Elgin to take his family and leave Belle Isle. Finally, Lancelot convinced Lucy to return to school to help calm the freshman girls left in the dorms.

The remaining guests, Raine, Troy, and Janos, were going to watch the storm blow in in the belvedere with Margot. Raine gave Lancelot a pill and it began to work as he spoke to Margot in the hallway. Once more Lancelot tried to convince Margot to go away with him, but again she refused. Lancelot went back to the pigeonier where he fell asleep under the spell of the drug. When he woke, Lancelot thought he saw a woman sitting at his desk. At first she was a stranger, then she was his mother. It is at this point that Lancelot confesses he knew his mother was having an affair with a family friend when he was a child and that his father most likely knew about it as well. In fact, Lancelot believes the whole town knew, except for him.

Lancelot has a strong family history of chivalry, but his own son refused to go to Vietnam. Lancelot tells Harry that he has asked Anna to join him in his new world and that she has agreed. In fact, Anna has just inherited land in Virginia and has agreed to let Lancelot begin his new world there. Lancelot then goes into another speech about the immorality of modern women and how that will be different in his new world.

Lancelot returns to his story, describing how the woman at the desk simply disappeared. Lancelot took a knife and the things he had bought at the hardware store and went into the basement of the newly built section of the house. The gas well is there. Lancelot rigs a pipe to the well so it will take gas up into the bedrooms occupied by the movie people and Margot. Then Lancelot takes two oil lamps upstairs. First Lancelot stops in Raine's bedroom. Raine is there with Troy, but Troy is passed out on the bed. Raine flirts with Lancelot and they end up having sex on the bed beside Troy. When it is done, Lancelot lights the lamp, leaving the shade on it, and leaves the room.





Lancelot goes to Margot's room. It is dark and he cannot see well, but he believes he can see two bodies writhing on the sheets. Lancelot lights the lamp, leaving the shade off this time. Lancelot then lies on the bed and smooths Margot with her lover's body. Janos convinces Lancelot to get up and they begin to fight. Lancelot gets the better of Janos and gets him in a head lock. Janos attempts a truce, but Lancelot pulls the knife from his pocket and slits Janos's throat. Janos knocks the knife away in his death throes. Lancelot then lies in the bed with Margot and they talk quietly until the gas reaches the lamp's flame and an explosion tosses Lancelot from the house. Lancelot returns to the house to find the knife.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Lancelot finds the proof he needs to prove to himself that Margot has been unfaithful to him. However, this proof is grainy and not conclusive. Not only this, but this evidence also shows that his daughter, Lucy, is having sex with two of the actors, a crime that should be just as outrageous as Margot's actions, but Lancelot does not even react to this realization. All Lancelot can see is Margot's actions, once again showing the reader how focused he was on Margot and how neglectful he was of reality. This adds to the overall sense that Lancelot is already insane when he learns of Margot's infidelity.

The reader begins to better understand why Lancelot has become so obsessed with Margot's infidelity when he admits that his mother cheated on his father throughout his childhood. These deceptions by both his parents coupled with his mother's insistence that they were an honorable family must have confused and traumatized the young boy Lancelot once was. Lancelot has clearly lost sight with reality at this point, between his realization of his mother's deceptions and his wife's deception, and he begins to see people who do not exist. It is interesting that the image Lancelot sees is female.

Lancelot kills the movie people and Margot but not before he first has sex with Raine. It is interesting again that Lancelot does not feel that he must be faithful to his marriage vows, but Margot should. This reflects on the chivalry of Lancelot's heritage, a chivalry that he feels has died. Lancelot finds Margot in bed with Janos, at least this is what he tells Harry, and Lancelot kills Janos with a knife before the gas can ignite the entire house. Lancelot is thrown free—another irony since everyone else was killed. This leads the reader to wonder if perhaps Lancelot was in the house at all when the fire began. Lancelot then went into the house, claiming he went inside to find the knife; however, the press reports that Lancelot went in in an attempt to save his wife. The reader begins to wonder if perhaps Lancelot is not responsible for these deaths at all, but that it was an accident caused by the hurricane. This possibility seems logical, except that Lancelot claims he found excuses to send everyone else out of the house before the storm. However, it is possible that Lancelot sent everyone away for the exact reasons he claimed and that he then fell asleep in the pigeonier due to the drug Raine gave him and woke after the explosion. The reader might never know for sure, but it is clear that due to Lancelot's insanity, it is impossible to trust him as a reliable narrator.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Lancelot announces that he has been declared sane and will be leaving the hospital that day. Lancelot says he plans to go to Anna's land in Virginia. Lancelot plans to take custody of Siobhan again, despite the fact she is not his, but not right away. Anna will not be going with Lancelot just yet, but he hopes she will join him soon. Lancelot confesses that he felt little the night he killed four people, and that now he feels cold. Lancelot continues to claim that they are living in a modern day Sodom and that he plans to create a new world separate from this one. Then Lancelot asks Harry a few questions in which he appears to answer only with yes or no.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Lancelot says he is getting out of the hospital the day after he announces that he has killed four people. If this is true, the reader continues to wonder if it is possible Lancelot only believes he killed these people or perhaps he has only imagined that the doctors are planning to let him out. Lancelot continues to talk about a world with perfect women who do not deceive, leaving the reader convinced that nothing has truly changed for him. Lancelot then asks Harry numerous questions in which he seems to answer with only a yes or no. This seems odd and leaves the reader wondering if Harry was ever really there.



# Characters

## Lancelot Andrewes Lamar

Named for an English clergyman and scholar, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar is the only son of traditional southern family. Lancelot grew up with his father and mother, believing that both his parents were good, chivalrous people. However, as Lancelot grew older, he soon came to realize that his mother had had an affair with a distant relative during most of his childhood, and his father was taking bribes in his career as a politician. Despite these truths, Lancelot grew up believing in the values of the South and became a successful attorney, representing blacks during the sixties in multiple racial discrimination suits.

After the excitement of the sixties ended, Lancelot found himself disillusioned about his career and lacking in passion. Lancelot married a younger woman who filled the hole his career left for a time, but soon Lancelot found himself stuck in a rut that revolved around alcohol and the news. Lancelot was perfectly happy to let life pass him by, unconcerned for the activities of those around him, until the day he learned his daughter might not be his child. Lancelot becomes obsessed with the idea that his wife has been cheating on him, even convinced of who her lover was the summer she became pregnant with their daughter.

Lancelot began to spy on his wife, using a household servant who had been a part of his household since childhood. Lancelot got proof of his wife's infidelity, as well as the corruption of his eldest daughter, leading him to believe he was justified in acting out his own revenge. Lancelot causes a fire that kills four people, including his wife and her lover. Now Lancelot is in a mental institute fighting for his freedom so he can begin a new world in the hills of Virginia where a woman can never again hide her true sexual nature.

## Harry, the Priest-Physician, or Percival

While in the mental institution, Lancelot begins speaking to a priest-physician he often calls Percival. This man is supposed to be an old friend of Lancelot's from his childhood, a man named Harry, who grew up not far from Belle Isle where Lancelot grew up. Although Harry was richer than Lancelot and attended a private high school, they found themselves at the same college where they spent a great deal of time together. Harry went from college to become a psychiatrist, later entering the seminary for reasons that Lancelot can only guess at.

While in the mental institute, Lancelot sees Harry in the hallway. This sighting causes Lancelot to begin to remember the events that have brought him to this place. Lancelot begins inviting Harry to his room to tell him the story of what really happened that fateful night at Belle Isle. As they speak, Harry rarely asks questions or answers the many



questions Lancelot asks him. As Lancelot tells his story, he makes frequent reference to medieval folk lore, including the idea that Harry was once called Percival in college and that Lancelot and Percival were supposedly the only two Knights of the Round Table who ever set eyes on the Holy Grail. This idea seems to connect in Lancelot's mind with the idea that he and Harry are the only two who will ever know what really happened that night at Belle Isle. In the end of the book, the reader is left with the idea that Harry might not exist anywhere outside of Lancelot's mind.

## Mary Margaret

Margot Lamar is the daughter of a rich oil businessman. Margot came to New Orleans with her father as a young woman to become a part of the social society that flourishes there in the hopes of finding a good husband. While working with an organization that promotes the traditions of the South, Margot worked as a tour guide at Belle Isle. Lancelot met her there one night and they began a torrid love affair. Margot always showed interest in Belle Isle, suggesting changes and renovations Lancelot could make. Upon their marriage, Margot uses her father's money to renovate Belle Isle, putting her personal touch on the place.

After Belle Isle is finished, Margot grows bored. Margot begins dabbling in the idea of becoming a movie star. At some point Margot goes to Texas to take an acting seminar, and it is during this time that Lancelot believes Margot became pregnant with their daughter, Siobhan. This suggests to Lancelot that an actor named Merlin is Siobhan's father. Lancelot begins watching Margot as she interacts with her actor friends who have come to Belle Isle to film a new movie. Lancelot is convinced Margot is having an affair with one of these men and sets out to prove it. Once Lancelot has the proof, he plots to kill Margot and her friends.

## Siobhan Lamar and Tex Reilly

Siobhan Lamar is Margot and Lancelot's young daughter. When Lancelot looks over an application to camp for Siobhan, he notices that her blood type is not compatible with his own. Lancelot deduces from this that Siobhan is not his daughter and that her father is most likely an actor with whom his wife, Margot, is associated. This sets off a plot in which Lancelot begins attempting to discover the truth and murder his wife.

Grandpa Tex Reilly is Margot's father. Siobhan and Tex are often banished to a room upstairs because Tex is embarrassing to Margot in front of her movie friends. Tex is also annoying to Siobhan, but she continues to spend time with him every night because she has been told that this is her place and she will not be allowed to interact with any of the guests. Siobhan and Tex are like ghosts in this story, a memory rather than tangible characters. Their only purpose seems to be motive and means, as Siobhan provides the reason Lancelot believes his wife is cheating and Tex provides the means to kill Margot and her friends by repeatedly arguing with Lancelot about a gas well over which part of Belle Isle is built.



## Lucy Lamar

Lucy Lamar is Lancelot's eldest daughter, a product of his first marriage. Lucy is starstruck by Troy Dana and his girlfriend, Raine Robinette. Lucy hangs on everything Raine says and desires to be just like her. When Lancelot has cameras hidden in the guest bedrooms, he discovers that Lucy is having a sexual relationship with Raine and Troy despite the fact that Lucy is only sixteen. Later Lucy tells Lancelot that she is moving to Hollywood to live with Troy and Raine. Lancelot never says anything to Lucy about this relationship and does not seem moved by the fact that his daughter is being taken advantage of by these older people. In the end, Lancelot sends Lucy back to school before the hurricane hits, removing her from the danger he plans for the movie people.

## Elgin

Elgin is the son of house servants who have worked for the Lamar family since Lancelot was a small boy. Elgin is college age, the same age as Lancelot's own son. In fact, Lancelot was instrumental in helping Elgin secure his place at MIT. Elgin is home from school for the summer and agrees to help Lancelot spy on his wife, believing Lancelot is doing this to prove that Lucy is using drugs. Elgin is unhappy with the idea of spying but likes the problem-solving issues that are included in the spying. Elgin comes up with the idea of using video tape to watch the activities taking place in the guest rooms at night, helping Lancelot get the information he needs to go forward with his plans of revenge.

## Troy Dana and Raine Robinette

Troy Dana is an actor who plays the hero in the movie being made at Belle Isle. Troy appears to lack the intelligence necessary to be a success at any other career, but he is well liked in the movies and does well in his acting. Raine Robinette is also an actor and is Troy's girlfriend. Raine is a follower of a cult-like group that believes in auras and spirituality. Raine uses this interest to pull Lucy Lamar in and convince her to not only become her lover with Troy but to move to Hollywood and become her assistant. Raine is highly sexual and also comes on to Lancelot several times during the story, even sleeping with him beside her passed out boyfriend in the hour before her death.

## Janos Jacoby

Janos Jacoby is a highly-celebrated director who is directing the film being made at Belle Isle. Jacoby is interested in artistic films that are more about the visuals than about a plot or entertaining the movie goers. Lancelot finds him boring and obnoxious. However, it is Janos Jacoby that Lancelot ultimately learns is having an affair with his wife. Lancelot breaks into his wife's room the night of the hurricane and attacks Margot and Janos as they lie in bed. Lancelot and Janos begin to fight and Lancelot pulls a



knife, slicing Janos' throat as the man pleads for a truce. It is in retrieving the knife that Lancelot burns his hands.

## **Merlin**

Merlin is an actor who gave an acting seminar the summer Margot became pregnant with Siobhan, leading Lancelot to believe he is Siobhan's father. Lancelot also believes for a while that Margot is continuing to have an affair with Merlin. However, when faced with the fact that Margot is not having an affair with Merlin, Lancelot softens on the older man. In fact, Lancelot lets Merlin go when Merlin wants to leave Belle Isle rather than stay and wait out the hurricane.

## **Lucy Cobb**

Lucy Cobb is Lancelot's first wife. Lancelot and Lucy met while Lucy was playing tennis one summer afternoon. Lancelot believed himself to be deeply in love with Lucy, grieving her deeply upon her death a few years later. However, Lancelot finds himself questioning what love means after meeting, falling in love with, and killing his second wife, Margot.



# Objects/Places

## Camp Application

Margot gives Lancelot an application for their daughter, Siobhan, to go to camp. The application lists Siobhan's blood type, leading Lancelot to believe Siobhan is not his daughter because their blood types are not compatible.

## Knife

Lancelot kills his wife's lover with a knife and is burned when he must return to the home to retrieve it after the fire has begun burning.

## Gas Well

There is a gas well under Belle Isle that contains methane gas. Lancelot pipes this gas into the bedrooms of Belle Isle in order to kill his wife, her lover, and her friends.

## Movie

Friends of Margot Lamar come to Belle Isle to shoot a film that is about the coming together of a odd mixture of people during a hurricane.

## Video Cameras

Lancelot has his servant, Elgin, videotape the activities in the bedrooms of his home one night in order to find out if his wife was having an affair with one of her movie friends. Elgin videotapes these activities with hidden cameras in the rooms.

## Thunder Machine

The movie people use a thunder machine to simulate a hurricane for the movie they are making at Belle Isle.

## Hurricane Marie

The night Belle Isle burns down, a hurricane that is later named Marie descends on New Orleans.



## **Institute for Aberrant Behavior**

Although Lancelot never mentions the name of the hospital where he is being kept, clues from the scene he describes outside his window suggests he is being kept in the Institute for Aberrant Behavior in New Orleans, Louisiana.

## **Pigeonnier**

There is a pigeonnier on the property of Belle Isle that was once used for storage. When Lancelot married Margot, she had the pigeonnier converted into an office for Lancelot.

## **Holiday Inn**

Lancelot sends Elgin to the Holiday Inn to investigate the possibility that Margot is having an affair. However, Elgin cannot find any proof, so Lancelot has the hotel shut down, using the hurricane as an excuse, and invites his wife's friends to stay at Belle Isle where he can spy on them more efficiently.

## **Belle Isle**

Belle Isle was once a glorious plantation outside New Orleans but is now a large home owned by Lancelot Lamar and is often opened for tourists. It is this home that burns down before the opening of the novel and leads to Lancelot telling his story to his friend, Harry.

## **Odessa, Texas**

Margot Lamar and her father, Tex Reilly, are from Odessa Texas. It is in Odessa where Tex discovered oil and became rich.

## **New Orleans, Louisiana**

The novel is set in New Orleans, Louisiana and its surrounding area.





# Themes

## Infidelity

Lancelot believes himself to be a happily married man. Lancelot has become comfortable in his life, no longer passionate about anything. Lancelot was once a talented lawyer who fought for civil rights, but now that the sixties are over, Lancelot no longer finds himself needed in this capacity. Lancelot's law career has transformed from liberal lawyer to probate lawyer for the local old ladies. Lancelot's marriage has also cooled; a marriage that once was filled with passion and excitement is now complacent and boring. Lancelot spends his mornings at the office, but his afternoons drinking alone at home. Lancelot has developed a routine that centers on drinking and the news.

One afternoon while reviewing an application for his daughter to go to camp, Lancelot notices that his daughter's blood type is incompatible with his own. Lancelot calls a friend and learns there is no way he could have fathered a child with this blood type. Lancelot looks back in his financial records and realizes that his daughter was most likely conceived while his wife was in Texas attending an acting class. The teacher just happened to be an actor who is at that moment a guest in his home while filming a movie at Belle Isle. Lancelot suspects that this actor, Merlin, is the real father of his daughter.

Lancelot immediately stops drinking and begins observing his wife as she interacts with her actor friends. Lancelot notices small things that might be innocent but which he believes hide the truth. Lancelot believes his wife is sleeping with Merlin still. Lancelot also begins to suspect the director of the current film, Janos Jacoby, is also his wife's lover. Lancelot begins hanging around his wife a little more, breaking with his old, comfortable habits, determined to catch his wife in the act before making an open accusation. To do this, Lancelot enlists the help of a trusted servant. When Lancelot comes across proof of the affair, he acts, destroying everything that once mattered to him in a swift and final act.

## Insanity

When the novel begins, Lancelot is locked in a mental hospital. Lancelot questions whether this is a hospital to help him recover or if it is a prison. Lancelot has not told his story to anyone since coming to the hospital and has kept to himself, not even sure if he can remember the reason why he is there. When Lancelot sees his friend, Harry, the priest-psychiatrist in the hallway, he begins to remember. Lancelot tells his story a little at a time, explaining to Harry how he felt about his wife and why learning about her infidelity had such a terrible impact on him.

As Lancelot begins to tell his story, the reader becomes aware of certain things that make his story appear to be revealing the depths of his insanity more than the truth



about his acts. Lancelot became obsessed with the idea of his wife's infidelity, yet he never accused her of cheating on him. In fact, he cheats on her openly and without remorse. The reader will also notice that the psychiatrist to whom Lancelot is speaking never says a word to him until the final pages of the novel. These words are not spoken or reflect answers a psychiatrist might actually say to a patient, suggesting that the psychiatrist himself is a figment of Lancelot's imagination.

Throughout the novel, the reader will notice Lancelot's apparent affection for medieval tales and legends. Lancelot's name alone opens the door to this affection, which is continued in the names of the characters that fill his story. There is Troy, Merlin, and Percival, all characters who play an important part in Lancelot's story. There are also stories of gallantry or heroism beyond expectation, even as Lancelot admits to living a life of passivity and boredom. In telling his story, Lancelot also speaks of a new world he plans to create, a world where women have a new and unique role that eradicates the possibility of infidelity. Finally, there is Anna, the horribly abused young woman in the cell next to Lancelot's with whom he becomes unexpectedly obsessed.

## Neglect

Lancelot has three children, a beautiful young wife, and a father-in-law who lives in his home. Lancelot is not close to his two older children who are products of his first marriage. In fact, Lancelot's son is not even at Belle Isle during the time in which this story takes place. Lucy, Lancelot's oldest daughter, is at Belle Isle; she becomes dangerously involved with the movie people Margot has brought to the house, but Lancelot is so obsessed with the idea of his wife's infidelity that he does not notice the danger in which his daughter has placed herself. Lancelot's only concern is that his third child, a daughter, might not be his as a result of infidelity.

Lancelot was not close to his own parents and believes that the root of his obsession with Margot's infidelity is his own father's lies and deceptions when he was a child. Lancelot does not notice that his daughter, Siobhan, is uncomfortable in the care of her grandfather, leaving her to the old man's irritating behavior. Lancelot is oblivious to everything around him, but he claims that he loves his wife and that he expects her to be true to him no matter what. The reader recognizes that Lancelot cares little for the people in his life and that his obsession with his wife's infidelity is most likely the product of his own pride rather than a breach of trust.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The novel is written as though Lancelot, the main character, is having daily conversations with a priest-psychiatrist who happens to be a good friend of Lancelot's from his childhood. The conversations revolve around a crime that took place at Lancelot's home and that he is now accused of committing. Lancelot is in a mental institution in New Orleans and has up to this point refused to speak to anyone or to leave his room except when forced to attend a meeting with his psychiatrist or to go to group counseling sessions. Lancelot chooses only to speak to this one person, a friend whom upon seeing him again helped Lancelot recall the events that led to him being locked in this place.

The point of view of this novel is unique in that it is not a typical first person narration. This point of view is first person, but it is told through conversation rather than exposition and observation. The novel does include dialogue, but this is in the form of conversations that the narrator is recalling as he tells the story of how he happened to find himself locked in a mental institution. Telling the story in this way creates an unreliable narrator. The reader has no idea if what Lancelot is telling the reader is the truth or simply the truth as he sees it through his growing insanity. The reader cannot even be sure if Lancelot is his real name, or if the characters that populate his story really existed. In fact, the reader is not even sure if Harry, the priest-psychiatrist he is making this confession to is real.

## Setting

The novel begins in a psychiatric hospital. The reader is never told the name of this hospital and even the main character questions whether or not this hospital is a private mental institution or perhaps a hospital for the criminally insane. The narrator often remarks about the things he can see outside his window of his cell, telling the reader that the hospital is most likely the Institute for Aberrant Behavior in New Orleans. As the narrator begins to tell his story, the setting changes to Belle Isle, an old plantation set on an island just outside New Orleans. This home is the Lamar family home and was left to Lancelot upon his father's death. The home has great historical significance and is often open to tourists. In fact, it is through this tourist trade that Lancelot met his second wife, who is the motive behind the crime that brought Lancelot to the mental hospital.

The setting of the novel is the Deep South, a place filled with chivalry and history. The reader expects a story that reflects these traditions and discovers instead a story that seems to rebel against these traditions. Lancelot compares himself to the great knight of the round table with whom he shares his name. However, instead of being the one to betray those he loves in a torrid affair, it is the woman Lancelot loves who breaks their vows of fidelity. The tables are turned on Lancelot, on the reader as well, as Lancelot



begins to plot revenge. The setting of this novel is used in a unique way to not only establish characteristics of the characters but also to serve as an ironic backdrop to the slow development of insanity within the main character.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple English. The words are often those used by an educated person, lacking the slang that often marks less formal speech. The words also include some phrases of a foreign language that are not often explained in the text. However, the reader comes to understand their overall meaning through their use or the tone of the passage in which they appear. The novel also includes many words associated with the film industry because the novel's main story takes place during a time when a film crew is making a major motion picture at Belle Isle. Finally, the novel also includes many names and references to medieval folk lore, implying a connection between the time of Camelot and the setting of the novel's main plot.

The language of this novel works well with the main plot. The novel is told in the words of the main character, a highly-educated, wealthy lawyer. The language also reflects the setting of the novel, often making reference to Camelot and comparing it to the traditions of the Deep South. The novel uses language in a way in which it complements the main plot and helps in the development of the characters, as well as expressing some irony regarding the plot and its climax.

## Structure

The novel is divided into nine chapters, each chapter suggesting a new day in which Lancelot tells his story to his friend, Harry, the psychiatrist-priest. Each chapter begins in Lancelot's voice as he greets his friend or takes him out of the story to discuss some other aspect of his situation, such as his deep devotion to his second wife. The novel is told as though as a conversation between two friends, often wandering from one subject to the next with little or no segue. The story that Lancelot is telling his friend is encapsulated in this wandering tale, beginning with the day Lancelot discovers Siobhan is not his daughter and ending with the deaths of everyone left in his house the day the hurricane hits.

The novel has one main plot, but several subplots that shoot off its story line. The main plot revolves around Lancelot, an intelligent, successful man who has found himself locked in a mental institute after the death of his wife and several of her friends in a fire at his home, Belle Isle. The reader is unclear, as is the narrator, whether or not Lancelot is in the hospital because he has gone insane with grief or because he is suspected of a crime. In fact, Lancelot claims not to remember the circumstances that brought him to this hospital until he sees an old friend in the hallway. The plot then shifts as Lancelot begins telling the story of how he learned his wife was cheating on him and the risks he took to learn the truth. From this plot, several subplots develop regarding Lancelot's relationship with his wife, his relationship with his first wife, as well as his relationships

with his children and his wife's friends. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



## Quotes

"Come into my cell. Make yourself at home." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"I perceive that you're not a patient but that something is wrong with you. You're more abstracted than usual. Are you in love?" Chapter 1, pg. 6

"Do you remember 'falling in love,' 'being in love'?" Chapter 2, pg. 11

"Then you know my story? I know it too of course, but I'm not sure how much I really remember." Chapter 2, pg. 13

"One has to know for sure before doing anything. I had to be sure about Margot, about what she had done and was doing now. I had to be absolutely certain." Chapter 3, pg. 43

"How strange it is that a discovery like this, of evil, of a kinsman's dishonesty, a wife's infidelity, can shake you up, knock you out of your rut, be the occasion of a new way of looking at things." Chapter 3, pg. 51

"Belle Isle burned to the ground except for twenty snaggle-toothed Doric columns. My hands burned trying to save Margot." Chapter 5, pg. 105

"Did I love Margot? I'm not sure what you mean, what that word means, but it was good between us." Chapter 5, pg. 117

"How come you're wearing your priest uniform today? Are you girding for battle of dressed up like Lee for the surrender?" Chapter 7, pg. 163

"Freedom? The New Woman will have perfect freedom. She will be free to be a lady or a whore." Chapter 7, pg. 179

"An odd thing about New Orleans: the cemeteries here are more cheerful than the hotels and the French Quarter." Chapter 9, pg. 249

"Not even the knife at his throat seemed to make any difference. All it came down to was steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells." Chapter 9, pg. 254



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Lancelot? Where is he living when the novel begins? Who is Lancelot speaking to at the beginning of the novel? Why does Lancelot begin telling his story to this person? What impact has this persona had on Lancelot's life? What comparisons does Lancelot make between his own life and the life of the person to whom he is speaking? How do these comparisons make it easier for Lancelot to tell his story to this person?

Who is Margot? Why is she interested in the movie business? Why does Lancelot believe she is interested in the movie business? Why does Lancelot believe Margot married him? Did it have anything to do with love? Why did Lancelot marry her? What was their marriage like in the beginning? How did it change? What does Lancelot blame for this change? What is the true blame for this change?

Discuss Merlin, Troy, Jacoby, and Raine. Who are these people? Why are they in Lancelot's house? What does Lancelot think of them before discovering his daughter's blood type? How does Lancelot feel after this discovery? Why does his opinion change? Who does Lancelot think is the father of his child? Is this person the father? Which man is Margot's lover? How does Lancelot learn this truth? Can the reader believe this is true? Why or why not?

Who is Siobhan? How is she the catalyst that causes the events that take place in this novel? What impact does she have on the overall plot of the novel? Why is she always hidden upstairs with Tex Reilly? Does Siobhan really exist or is she a figment of Lancelot's imagination? Who is Tex Reilly? What part does he play in Lancelot's meltdown? How does Tex give Lancelot the idea he uses to kill the movie people?

Who is Lucy Lamar? What is her role in Lancelot's meltdown? How does Lucy become involved with the movie people? What is unusual about Lancelot's reaction to his daughter, Lucy's, involvement with the movie people? How does Lucy escape injury at the end of the novel? What does this say about Lucy's relationship with Lancelot? Was Lucy real? Explain.

Discuss the concept of an unreliable narrator. What is an unreliable narrator? How is it used in literature in general? How is it used in this novel? What is the first clue that the narrator of this novel might be unreliable? Can the reader trust anything Lancelot tells the reader? Why or why not? What really happened that night at Belle Isle? How can the reader discover the truth of Lancelot's story? Was Lancelot's crime justified?

Discuss insanity. This book is hailed as one that shows the development of insanity in the mind of the main character. Is this true? Can the reader see where Lancelot begins to go insane? What causes this to begin? What impact did Lancelot's use of alcohol during the development of his insanity have to do with that development? What behaviors suggest Lancelot's insanity? What behaviors suggest he was in control of his mind? Could someone have stopped Lancelot? Why or why not?