Seascape Study Guide

Seascape by Edward Albee

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

With *Seascape,* American playwright Edward Albee won his second Pulitzer Prize for drama. Albee himself directed this Broadway production, which opened on January 26, 1975, at the Sam S. Shubert Theatre. The play was published by Atheneum that same year. Like many of Albee's plays, *Seascape* focuses on communication in interpersonal relationships, in this case between couples. Albee's first successful play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), and his first Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *A Delicate Balance* (1966), also concerned this topic. *Seascape* is different from these dramas on several counts. The play is not strictly a drama but, according to various critics, has elements of comedy, fantasy, satire, and/or absurdism. In *Seascape,* Nancy and Charlie, an American couple on the verge of the major life change of retirement, are having problems in their relationship. They are discussing these matters on the beach when another couple appears, two human-sized lizards named Leslie and Sarah who speak: and act like people. The lizards have evolved to such a degree that they no longer feel at home in the sea and are compelled to seek life on the land What the lizards experience with Nancy and Charlie nearly drives them back to the sea, but with an offer of help from the human couple, they decide to stay. This relatively happy ending is not common in many of Albee's previous plays, and some critics find it refreshing. Critics are divided in their opinion of the play and its content. Some believe it is witty and original, while others find it to be pompous if not gimmicky, primarily because of the lizard characters. One critic who found *Seascape* noteworthy, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times,* writes, "it is a curiously compelling exploration into the basic tenet of life. It is asking in a lighthearted but heavy minded fashion whether life is worth living. It decides that there is no alternative."

Author Biography

Edward Franklin Albee was born March 12, 1928. probably in the state of Virginia. His place of birth is unknown because Albee was adopted when he was two weeks old in Washington. D.C., by a wealthy couple, Reed A. Albee and his third wife Frances. Reed A. Albee was the son of Edward Albee, Jr., a founder of the Keith-Albee theater circuit. The year Albee was born, Reed Albee retired from his work as part owner of the Keith-Albee. Albee grew up in a household filled with people from the theater and regularly attended theatrical events from an early age.

Albee's childhood was also unconventional in other ways. He had a privileged life, but his parents' marriage was strained, in part because of his domineering mother. Their problems proved a source of inspiration for Albee's plays. Because his father was retired, the family traveled regularly during the school year, interrupting Albee's early education. By the time Albee was eleven, he had been enrolled in and kicked out of several boarding schools. He finally graduated from the Choate School in 1949. After graduation, Albee spent three semesters studying at Trinity College.

Having become estranged from his parents when he was eighteen-in part because Albee admitted his homosexuality-he survived in New York City's Greenwich Village on a trust fund set up by his beloved maternal grandmother and by holding odd jobs, including delivering messages for Western Union. For the next ten years, Albee absorbed New York City's cultural life and concentrated on his own writing. He primarily wrote poetry, but he also wrote novels and short stories. The theater still intrigued him, but he only turned out one or two plays (none of them produced) before he turned thirty.

On his thirtieth birthday, Albee quit his job and began writing a play. This was *Zoo Story,* which was first produced in West Berlin, Germany, in 1959, after being rejected by New York producers. The following year, it was produced in New York to some acclaim, and it won several prestigious awards. Albee began to make his name as a young playwright first with short plays, then with his first massive success, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). This full-length drama is about a quarreling couple. Albee had mixed success with most of his subsequent plays in the 1960s. His only true success was another play about a troubled relationship, A *Delicate Balance* (1966), which won Albee his first Pulitzer Prize.

Albee produced only a few plays of note in the 1970s through the early 1 990s. Only *Seascape* (1975), which won Albee his second Pulitzer Prize, attracted any positive critical attention. Though many of his original and adapted plays were produced, most met with little or no success, especially in New York City. They were often produced abroad and in regional theaters. Albee's most recent important play was 1991 's *Three Tall Women,* which was inspired by Albee's mother. When the play made its way to New York City in 1994, it received positive reviews and Albee's third Pulitzer Prize. Albee continues to write plays in the twenty-first century and also teaches playwriting at the University of Houston.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Seascape opens on a beach. An older couple, Nancy and Charlie, has finished a picnic lunch. As Nancy cleans up, the noise of a jet flying low engulfs the stage. Charlie predicts that a jet will someday smash into a dune.

Nancy expresses her desire to be near the water forever. She loves everything about it and would like to travel from beach to beach. Charlie responds negatively to her dreams. He does not want to do anything or go anywhere.

Charlie's attitude angers Nancy. She points out that life is short. She threatens to have adventures on her own. Charlie's attitude changes after Nancy's outburst, and she retreats from her plan a bit. She is content to enjoy the moment.

After another jet passes by, Nancy reminds Charlie about his childhood desire to live under the water. Charlie tells her how he would sink to the bottom of a pool or lake and sit there until he had to breathe. Nancy encourages him to do this again and get in touch with his youth. Charlie refuses, embarrassed by her insistence.

Nancy changes the subject to their sex life. She tells him about a time in their marriage when she thought of divorcing him. There was tension, and she suspected that he was having an affair. Charlie denies this, and Nancy accepts his word.

Nancy encourages him to sink under the water again and to show her how he did it. Charlie again refuses and turns the conversation to her. He tells her that she was a good wife. Nancy says the same about him, listing the many ways in which he was a good husband. When she is done, she is bitter because the "good life" they have had seems limited to her. Charlie is hurt by her attitude. They argue. Nancy is still angry that his only interest is to rest, while she wants to experience new things.

During a pause at the end of their heated argument, Leslie, a human-sized male lizard, takes a peek at them Nancy tries to get Charlie to help write postcards, but he declines. Leslie peeks at them again, this time with his female mate, Sarah. Nancy sees the lizards and is intrigued Charlie is afraid.

Charlie demands that Nancy find him something to defend them with. When she can only find a small, thin stick, Charlie is peeved. Nancy remains interested in the lizards, but when Leslie clears his throat, she fears the lizards might hurt them.

When Leslie waves his large Stick, Nancy and Charlie admit their love for each other, Nancy more reluctantly than Charlie. As Leslie and Sarah move forward, another jet flies by and scares them away

Charlie tries to blame the whole episode on bad liver paste sandwiches. He believes they are dead from food poisoning. Nancy ridicules the idea.

Nancy is pleased when Leslie and Sarah return. To protect themselves, Nancy believes they should show submission by lying on their back with their legs and arms up, as a dog would. Charlie assumes the position, though with great reluctance.

Act 2

Act 2 opens where act I ended. Leslie and Sarah are unsure about Nancy and Charlie's submissive stance. When Leslie and Sarah approach, Charlie threatens to scream. Nancy is much calmer. Leslie pokes Charlie and Nancy in the side, but neither one moves Leslie and Sarah decide that Nancy and Charlie are relatively harmless.

Charlie is unsure about the creatures, while Nancy is fascinated by everything about them.

Leslie and Sarah decide to approach them again. Leslie pokes Charlie hard, causing Charlie to speak. Leslie replies several times, but Charlie will not speak to the creature. Nancy finally sits up and greets Sarah. Charlie only says hello after Nancy encourages him.

Sarah and Nancy believe that the tension has been diffused, but Leslie and Charlie are still uncertain of each other. With Nancy's prodding, Charlie assures Leslie that they are not unfriendly Though Leslie and Sarah speak English, they do not understand many of the words and Ideas that Charlie and Nancy use.

Nancy tries to shake Leslie's flipper, but Leslie cannot grasp the concept. Nancy and Charlie explain the concept of the handshake, as well as their differing anatomy. The lizards have only legs and flippers. Nancy finally shakes hands with the lizards. Charlie tries to shake hands with Leslie, but Leslie is still uncertain about him. Leslie and Charlie talk about their differences. Leslie asks about their clothing. Among other things, Nancy tells them that clothes cover their sexual organs.

This leads to a discussion of the humans' sex organs, especially Nancy's breasts. The lizards do not have these organs. Nancy shows Sarah, who is fascinated Leslie also wants to see, but Charlie is uncomfortable with the idea. To change the subject, Charlie asks about their children. Sarah and Leslie have produced seven thousand eggs. Leslie is appalled when he learns that the humans do not lay eggs. Nancy explains human gestation and that they have three children

When Nancy tells them that they keep their children for many years, she also explains the concept of love. This and all other emotions are foreign concepts to the lizards. Charlie asks how Sarah and Leslie became paired Leslie fought off other lizards when Sarah reached her maturity and started to mate. He wanted her, but emotions did not playa role.

Charlie brings up the idea of disloyalty in Leslie and Sarah's relationship. This upsets Nancy.

The issue also confuses Sarah and Leslie. Charlie is nearly attacked by Leslie when he angrily compares the male lizard to a fish. The women calm the men down and Leslie explains his disdainful attitude toward fish. They discuss the Ideas of prejudice and difference.

Sarah looks up and sees birds flying by. Leslie becomes defensive. Nancy explains to Sarah that the birds are seagulls. The females compare them to underwater rays. Nancy tells Sarah that she has seen photographs of rays. Nancy and Charlie cannot explain what photography is to her, so Sarah believes they are insulting her. When Leslie returns, Sarah explains what has happened.

Abruptly changing the subject, Nancy declares that Charlie believes that they are dead. She continues to dig into Charlie, sarcastically saying that no wonders are possible. Leslie and Sarah catch on to her meaning, to some degree, but Leslie is confused by the Idea that reality is an Illusion. When Leslie asks Charlie to explain It, Charlie becomes angry.

After Nancy calms him down, another jet flies by. Leslie and Sarah are fearful. Nancy and Charlie explain the Idea of the airplane. Charlie talks about other machines including those that go undersea. Nancy tells the lizards about the times in Charlie's youth when he would sink under water and stay there. Angry at Nancy, Charlie changes the subject and asks the lizards why they came out of the sea in the first place. They do not know, other than they have changed somehow and do not belong there anymore.

This prompts Charlie to explain the idea of evolution, but Leslie and Sarah do not understand it fully. The lizards can only think in terms of themselves. When Sarah asks if progress is good, Charlie is uncertain. Every term and idea has to be explained to the lizards, leading to more frustration for Charlie, as well as Leslie and Sarah.

Charlie asks Sarah what she would do if Leslie went away and did not come back. Nancy becomes angry at him for asking. Sarah is upset by the question and wants to go back to the sea. Leslie hits and chokes Charlie for making Sarah cry. Leslie and Sarah decide to go back Nancy tells them to stay because eventually they will have to come back Nancy, and to some degree Charlie, offer their help Leslie accepts their offer.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Seascape opens on a beach where an older couple, Charlie and Nancy, has just completed a picnic lunch. The sound of a jet overhead interrupts their conversation as Nancy tidies their lunch items. Nancy is in awe of the aircraft but Charlie thinks that one will crash into a sand dune one day.

Content after his lunch, Charlie is prepared for a nap but Nancy is in a mood to talk about her love of the water and the desire to be near it forever. In fact, her ideal life would be to travel all over the world going from one beach to another. Charlie is less than enthusiastic about her dream, preferring to not do anything or go anywhere.

Angered by Charlie's blasy attitude, Nancy rants that life is short and they need to plan some adventures. If Charlie is unwilling to go along, Nancy will proceed with adventures of her own. Weary of this line of conversation, it seems as if Charlie may be content to go the way of a retirement home for some rest, while that is the last thing on Nancy's agenda.

A jet overhead again distracts the couple and Nancy steers the conversation back to finding their zest for life again. Nancy reminds Charlie of his childhood dream to live underwater. Stirred by this fond memory, Charlie relates how he used to hold two heavy rocks and let himself sink into the lake to see how long he could stay underwater. Despite Nancy's attempts to encourage Charlie to try this again, Charlie obstinately refuses, passing the idea off as childhood fancy.

Desperately trying to get some sort of reaction from her husband about anything, Nancy brings up the subject of their sex life, and the question of whether Charlie has ever had an affair. At one point when the couple had been married ten years, Nancy suspected Charlie's infidelity because of his indifference and tension. Charlie affirms that Nancy's suspicions are just that and there is no truth to the issue.

Satisfied for now, Nancy again brings up Charlie's dream of living underwater and urges him to try it again, even offering to go with him if he would demonstrate how to do it. Charlie refuses again and diverts the conversation back to their marriage, telling Nancy that she has been a good wife. Nancy replies with statements validating Charlie's merits as a good husband and father, but there is an edge of sarcasm and wistfulness in her tone. This hurts Charlie and the couple argues.

Nancy cannot comprehend that Charlie is content to spend the rest of their life together resting when there is so much to see and do in the world. Unbeknownst to the couple, a large lizard creature peeks out from a rock behind them. Nancy mentions the need to write postcards to the family and tries unsuccessfully to get Charlie to join her.

Now a female lizard joins the male lizard and the two peek out behind rocks. Sensing a presence behind him, Charlie turns to see the two lizards. Nancy's gaze follows his and she, too, sees the lizard creatures.

Nancy, who is in the mood for adventure anyway, is delighted at the sight of the creatures, but Charlie is afraid and urgently asks his wife to find a stick for defense against them. Nancy produces a very inadequate twig, which further enrages her husband. Only when the male lizard makes a frightening noise while clearing his throat does Nancy show any sign of fear.

Having located a more appropriate sized stick to use as a possible weapon, Charlie brandishes it above his head. The couple declares their love for each other as if they are in danger of imminent demise. Suddenly, the two lizards move forward a bit just as another jet flies overhead. The sound frightens the lizards back behind the rocks.

For a moment, Charlie and Nancy have a chance to collect themselves and Charlie feels sure that the creatures must surely be the result of having eaten rancid liver paste for lunch. Perhaps the whole scene had been a fantasy witnessed in the almost certain death that bad liver paste would cause. Nancy is not fazed by her husband's raving and is delighted when the lizards reappear.

At this point, Nancy is the clear-headed one and suggests lying on the ground to show submission so the lizards will not attack. Charlie's dignity completely affronted now, he agrees to lie on his back with his arms and legs extended in an animalistic gesture that he hopes will save them from whatever cruel fate the lizards could inflict. As one last effort, Nancy encourages her dour husband to smile and mean it.

Act 1 Analysis

The beach location of the play sets up the theme of evolution, alluding to the theory that humans evolved from sea creatures. The jets overhead help to identify the time period and show the element of progress that humans have made. On a micro level, the relationship between Charlie and Nancy is evolving now that they face retirement and empty nest syndrome.

The lizards parallel the evolution of man, and Charlie and Nancy can glimpse the beginnings of primal education of the two creatures and somehow see into their own lives.

More important in this act, though, is the theme of the challenges of communication. Charlie and Nancy have reached a difficult place in their marriage and seem almost paralyzed in their ability to bridge the gap. Charlie is indifferent to Nancy's attempts to infuse enthusiasm into the relationship, which further alienates Nancy. The tension created is still not enough to silence Nancy, who bravely pushes for intimacy and connection.

The author uses Nancy to shed light on critical events of the 1970s, when the play was presented. With the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement, women were facing more life options at the same time that mothers faced empty nest syndrome. Suddenly, women had much more free time and the permission to use it, but they were baffled by how to do that. Up until that time, the woman's role was to serve in the home, and now the additional options were a double-edged sword of opportunity and confusion. Albee masterfully presents this concept in Nancy as well as Charlie, whose indifference is not meant to be hurtful, but merely the enactment of the role he had been trained to portray.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

As the act opens, Nancy and Charlie are still in their submissive positions as Leslie and Sarah, the lizards, tentatively approach. Nancy is completely open to the experience but Charlie is in a state of panic, declaring that a poke from one of the creatures will guarantee a scream. After poking the humans, who don't move, Leslie and Sarah determine that there is no immediate danger.

True to their personalities, Nancy is fascinated by the lizards while Charlie is apprehensive. Leslie and Sarah approach the humans again, with Leslie poking Charlie hard in an effort to elicit a response. Finally, Charlie engages in conversation with Leslie after Nancy has spoken to Sarah.

Nancy and Sarah are comfortable with each other right away but Charlie and Leslie remain uncertain. Nancy urges her husband to talk to Leslie, assuring Charlie that the lizard creatures seem harmless. Because of the language problem, communication is frustrating at best, so each couple tries to engage with physical communication. Even the simple act of shaking hands is challenging so that the lizards will not perceive the humans to be too aggressive.

Once the protective barriers have been dropped, Leslie engages a bit more by asking the purpose of Charlie's clothes. A simple explanation of the purpose of clothes as a cover leads to the discussion and ultimate exposure of Nancy's breasts to Sarah, who has never seen mammaries. Charlie thwarts Leslie's view, as he is not willing to let a male of any species view his wife's breasts.

This topic naturally leads to the discussion of procreation and child rearing. To the amazement of the humans, Sarah reveals that she and Leslie have produced at least 7,000 eggs, most of which were eaten or lost in some way. When Nancy explains human reproduction, the lizards are incredulous at the small number of humans produced at one time and the relatively long gestation period. The lizards are also amazed to learn that humans keep their offspring for many years, until the children are prepared to take care of themselves.

The biological information explained, Nancy ventures a little further and explains that parents keep children not only for rearing but also because of love. The lizards are unable to grasp the concept of emotions so Charlie tries another tact to help them understand. Charlie asks Leslie how he and Sarah came to be a couple, in the hopes that Leslie might understand that anything he experienced might be equated with love. Unfortunately, Leslie's pairing with Sarah was purely instinctive, with Leslie being the strongest lizard in the group and able to fight off any other potential mates. Ultimately, Leslie wanted Sarah but not in a way that would help with Charlie's explanation of love as an emotion.

The conversation then veers toward exclusivity in mating and the possibility of unfaithfulness, a topic that visibly upsets Nancy. The concept of exclusivity confuses Leslie and Sarah and threatens to create a problem when Sarah realizes that the idea of having a faithful partner sounds appealing. However, Leslie cannot concede complete loyalty, and the two men engage in a verbal attack on each other when Charlie compares Leslie to a fish, in the sense that there are millions of them in the ocean and none distinguishable for individual characteristics.

Finally, the two women calm the men and a flock of seagulls overhead interrupts the group. Fresh from the discussion of fish, Sarah notes that the birds are swimming and Nancy corrects her with the explanation of flight.

The humans and the lizards are getting weary of alternately not understanding the other species and having to explain in terms that still do not help to clarify much. Nancy takes the opportunity to change the subject and tells their new friends that Charlie believes himself and Nancy to be dead. The lizards want further clarification of whether that means that they too are dead, but Charlie is impatient with ambiguities and that line of conversation is abruptly ended.

The appearance of another jet overhead frightens the lizards and Charlie tries to explain the concept of machines that fly and do many other amazing things such as go underwater and remain there with men inside. Nancy takes this tidbit to bring up Charlie's childhood wish to live underwater, which infuriates and embarrasses him.

Quickly averting any further questions, Charlie asks the lizards what made them leave their homes in the sea. The lizards cannot name the source of their unrest but know that something has changed somehow and the two of them no longer feel that they belong. This is a perfect segue for Charlie to share the theory of evolution, with man having evolved from creatures from the sea. The lizards cannot fully grasp the concept but do understand enough to ask Charlie if change is good. Charlie is unsure how to respond and the stilted efforts at communication again become too overwhelming for the humans and the lizards.

Charlie is feeling a little antagonistic now and asks Sarah how she would feel if Leslie were to leave, never to return. Nancy is outraged at her husband's insensitivity. Angry now, Sarah cries and wants to return to the sea. Leslie attacks Charlie for making Sarah cry and the lizards decide to return to their home. Nancy tells the lizards that they should stay because they will just return at some point. The human couple offers help to the lizards and Leslie finally agrees that he and Sarah will stay.

Act 2 Analysis

Communication continues to be the primary theme in this act of the play. Extending the communications challenges between Charlie and Nancy in the first act, the couple continues to frustrate each other throughout this act. Nancy wants interaction so

desperately that she will entertain friendship with a couple from another species just to have some dialogue and the potential for an adventure.

The lizard couple is better at communicating with each other and seems to have inherent gender-based communication skills.

The theme of evolution is even stronger in this act with the introduction of Leslie and Sarah, who are in the process of evolving although they do not know it. At the end of the play, Charlie asks Leslie why the lizards left their home and the response is that he and Sarah are not exactly sure why but they just don't feel they belong anymore. All the while, there are symbols of progress literally over their heads in the form of the sea gulls and airplanes.

Edward Albee won the Pulitzer Prize for this play for its masterful depiction of relevant topics of the 1970s. Touching on the areas of evolution, communication, the women's movement, new family dynamics and even environmental issues, the play covers many pertinent topics in a story that encompasses both fantasy and reality. Perhaps the author is encouraging us to pay attention to the important issues but to not take ourselves so seriously on issues of lesser consequence.

Characters

Charlie

Charlie is married to Nancy and is part of the human couple at the center of the play Unlike his wife, Charlie is fearful and passive. While Nancy wants to have an active retirement, Charlie wants to rest and do nothing. He does not understand his wife's need to connect with the past and explore the world they have not seen. Charlie admits to having a more adventurous spirit in his youth. He would release his breath and sink to the bottom of pools or other bodies of water until he had to rise to breath again Charlie liked to do this then but has no desire to do it now He is content with the way things currently are in his life and does not like to be challenged.

It is Nancy who first antagonizes him Nancy's idea about living at different beaches for the rest of their lives is distasteful to him. He will not let her push him into even considering such a lifestyle. Nancy later tells him, much to his surprise, that she considered divorcing him a long time ago because she believed he was having an affair. Charlie tells her he did not have such a liaison, and she believes him. Charlie was happy with the way his life with Nancy was and still is. Their disagreements over tins matter are overshadowed by the appearance of the lizards.

If Charlie is uncomfortable with Nancy and her desires, he has bigger problems with the lizards. At first, he insists that they are a death hallucination caused by rotten liver paste sandwiches. While the creatures intrigue Nancy, Charlie continually acts with fear and resistance. He follows his wife's lead on posing submissively when the creatures first approach, but he will not respond to them until she orders him to. Even after the ice has been broken, Charlie remains uncertain about the creatures and their intentions. Leslie and Sarah's ignorance on many things (emotions, anatomy, etc.) adds to Charlie's negative attitude When he has to explain these Ideas to them, he is easily frustrated and often condescending. He drives Leslie to beat and choke him. Yet at the end, Charlie agrees with Nancy that the lizards have to stay on land and not go back into the water. Though he helps because Nancy will do it whether or not he agrees, Charlie does offer to take them by the hand.

Leslie

Leslie is the male lizard who appears at the end of act 1. Like Charlie, Leslie is a bit more fearful, defensive, and mistrusting than his mate. It is he who first watches the human couple. Leslie is also the first to approach Nancy and Charlie, poking them in the side. When Charlie does not reply right away, Leslie becomes frustrated While Leslie's guard remains high, especially around Charlie, for most of the play, he is also curious, much more so than his human male counterpart.

Both Leslie and Sarah speak English, though they do not understand many words and concepts of human life. Leslie does not know what emotions are, what cooking or clothing is, or what the names of limbs are. When Nancy tries to shake hands with him, he is completely unfamiliar with and mistrustful of the process Though Leslie wants to understand for the most part, he becomes impatient when the humans cannot easily explain complex things like love or consciousness.

Though Leslie does not possess or understand some human Ideas like love, he does have prejudices against others. Charlie tries and fails to explain what bigotry is to the lizard after Leslie speaks badly of fish. Leslie thinks they are dirty and too numerous. He also looks down on humans because they do not lay eggs. Yet Leslie also has some empathy for the humans. Leslie knows that he and Sarah must look odd to Charlie and Nancy. He also understands that Charlie is being difficult when Nancy mentions that her husband thinks they are dead and that this situation is some sort of hallucination

Leslie acts most often on instinct, like an animal. When birds and jets fly overhead, he runs to find an escape route. Leslie is very protective of Sarah. When Charlie hurts Sarah-asking her what she would do if Leslie left and never came back, Leslie attacks him. After hitting him, Leslie nearly chokes him until the females intercede. After the incident, Leslie decides that he and Sarah will go back into the sea, to escape this threat. When Nancy tells him that they will have to come back eventually and offers them help, it is Leslie who accepts this fate.

Nancy

Nancy is the female half of the human couple in the play; she is married to Charlie. Unlike her husband, Nancy is vibrant and curious about the world. When the play opens, she wants to live at the beach forever. Now that her children are grown, Nancy wants to have adventures. Charlie does not share her desires and does his best to discourage them. Despite Charlie's negative attitude, Nancy remains open to what comes her way, including the lizards.

Nancy's relationship with Charlie is somewhat strained. Nancy is angry at Charlie's passivity. Her attempts to encourage Charlie to sink underwater as he did as a child meet with a negative response. This frustrates her. Over the course of the first act, it is revealed that she once considered divorcing him because she believed that he was having an affair. Though she readily accepts his word when he says he did not, she does not think the "good life" they had together has been all that it could be. Still, Nancy remains loyal to Charlie. While she threatens to have adventures on her own, she does nothing about it.

When the lizards approach them, Nancy is fascinated but a little afraid. She remains close to Charlie. Though she does not agree with him, she does find him a small stick to use as a defense. It is Nancy who comes up with the idea of lying down in a submissive posture when Leslie and Sarah come near. Charlie follows Nancy's directions in most of the dealings with the lizards. After it becomes clear that the lizards will not harm them,

Nancy is excited by their presence. She does everything she can to learn about them and make a connection with them. She wants to shake hands with them first.

Charlie is uncomfortable with the lengths to which his wife goes to connect with the lizards. Because Sarah has never seen a mammal's mammaries, Nancy shows Sarah her breasts and explains their function. Nancy would also have shown Leslie except for Charlie's protestations. While Nancy does become a bit frustrated with the lizards' intellectual limitations, she becomes increasingly annoyed with Charlie's condescending attitude toward them. Yet, when the lizards want to go back-after Charlie drives Sarah to tears, and Leslie beats him up-Nancy wants them to stay and offers them help. This experience has given Nancy the excitement she craves, and she ensures that it continues.

Sarah

Sarah is the female half of the lizard couple, the mate of Leslie. Like her mate, Sarah is cautious and fearful around the humans. Yet like Nancy, she is curious about them and tries to make a connection. Though Sarah defers to Leslie much more than Nancy does to Charlie, she does playa buffer role between the couples. Leslie often consults Sarah on what he should do and what she thinks about the humans and the situation at hand. At first, Sarah urges Wariness, but she also emphasizes the importance of contact

Though Sarah is more deferential than Nancy, she does assert herself to Leslie when an experience is important For example, she insists on accompanying Leslie when he approaches the humans in act 2 after they have taken their submissive pose Sarah wants to see everything for herself. Most of the new things she encounters intrigue her the handshakes; Nancy's breasts; human gestation; and the birds flying above them, among other things. But she is also fearful The Jets frighten her, as does Charlie when he asks her what she would do If Leslie went away and never came back. Like Leslie, Sarah does not grasp many human concepts like emotions and non-aquatic animals, though she tries.

Sarah is also more open to explaining their way of life to the humans than her husband is. Leslie tries to curb her, but Sarah says what she believes she should say. Sarah does not fully share Leslie's prejudices and tries to make the humans understand her. For example, Sarah shares information on their reproduction and how she and Leslie met. It is also Sarah who tells the humans why they decided to come out of the sea. Leslie is reluctant to part with this information.

After Charlie asks the question, which makes her cry, Sarah wants to go back into the sea. Leslie agrees with her. Later, Sarah intercedes when Leslie tries to beat up Charlie over it. Though Sarah wants to return to their home, Leslie decides, with Nancy' s help, to stay.

Themes

Communication and Understanding

At the thematic center of *Seascape* are issues related to communication and understanding. Though all of the characters speak English, when each of the four tries to communicate with the others, only varied success is achieved. The theme of communication takes on several forms in the play.

First, there is the communication between each member of a couple with their respective mate. Nancy tries to engage her husband, Charlie, in a mutually beneficial discussion about her needs and their future, but he derides her ideas. Nancy wants to explore and be adventurous in their retirement, while Charlie wants to rest and do nothing. Throughout the play, their mobility to communicate and understand each other's wants and needs creates tension and hostility.

Leslie and Sarah have fewer problems communicating. Leslie is dominant in their relationship, and Sarah is generally content to playa subservient role. Leslie consults Sarah on most decisions and generally respects her input Sarah speaks up when she feels Leslie is acting inappropriately, and Leslie usually listens.

The other significant form of communication is between the two couples and is different between the genders. Nancy is very curious about and open with the lizards. Though she does become slightly frustrated by their limitations, she tries to help them by explaining aspects of human life they do not understand. Her general kindness toward them and offer of help when the lizards are deciding whether to stay on land or to go back to the sea influences their decision. Charlie is less forthcoming and more suspicious. He has a hard time accepting the lizards and quickly becomes testy when they do not understand his explanations.

The lizards' communication is somewhat similar to their human counterparts. Like Nancy, Sarah is more open to the humans and more interested in their world She is also emotional, and when Charlie asks her a question that is hard for her to understand (what she would do if Leslie disappeared), she becomes distraught, leading to a confrontation. Leslie shares Charlie's attitude; he does not trust the humans and regards most everything they say with skepticism. Despite these problems, at the end of the play, some measure of trust is reached between all of them. Leslie decides that he and Sarah will stay on land when Nancy and Charlie, albeit reluctantly, offer to help them.

Evolution and Progress

Another prominent theme in *Seascape* is that of evolution and progress. This theme manifests Itself in several ways in the play. One is subtle. The relationship of Nancy and Charlie is in the process of evolution. They are on the verge of a major life change,

retirement. Char he would like to use this time to rest and do nothing Nancy sees this desire as regression rather than evolution. Her family responsibilities fulfilled, Nancy wants to explore the world, perhaps moving from beach to beach, meeting new people, and having new experiences. The couple's relationship will change, and Nancy tries to move it forward. Charlie wants things to stay the same.

Evolution has a different meaning in terms of the lizards. Leslie and Sarah are literally evolving. They were creatures that lived in the sea but apparently developed beyond their species. They were compelled to move to the land, though they do not really understand why. Though Leslie and Sarah are somewhat fearful of the change, they do accept the help that Nancy, enthusiastically, and Charlie, reluctantly, give them. At the end of the play, rather than go back into the sea where they might feel safer, they remain on land.

Alienation

A more subtle undercurrent in *Seascape* is the idea of alienation. In terms of this play, to be alienated means to feel withdrawn or exist in an unfriendly environment. Alienation was one of the reasons that Leslie and Sarah left the sea. In act 2, Sarah tells the humans, "it wasn't. . . comfortable any more. I mean after all, you make your nest, and accept a whole. . array.. of things... and. . . we didn't feel we *belonged* there anymore." It could be argued that this alienation was a step in their evolution. Nancy and, to some degree, Charlie also feel alienated in their lives. In act 1, Nancy describes several ways in which she feels alienated, mostly in her relationship with Charlie. She does not share his views on what their life was, is, and could be; she wants to do more than retire. Though not as vocal, Charlie, in turn, feels alienated from her because of her curiosity and her desires. The strains caused by alienation affect the direction of the characters and the action of the play.

Style

Setting

Seascape is set on a beach in a time contemporary with when the play was written. Though It is unstated in the text, several critics have assumed that the action takes place somewhere on the east coast of the United States. All of the play is confined to one afternoon. This physical setting emphasizes the transitional state of the characters lives. It is one of many symbols in the play.

Fantasy

There is critical debate over exactly what genre of play *Seascape* is. Some believe it is a comedy, while others see it as absurdist, satirical, or allegorical. Most agree that there is an element of fantasy involved. While Nancy and Charlie are humans and act accordingly, Leslie and Sarah are fantastic creations. They are human-sized lizards that have left their life ill the sea to live on land. They speak: perfect English and understand some aspects of human life. Charlie has a hard time accepting that they are real. He wants to believe that he and Nancy see them because they are suffering from food poisoning or are dead. In terms of the play, however, Leslie and Sarah are very real, a fact that Nancy immediately grasps and embraces. The fantasy aspect of the play creates dramatic tension and allows Issues such as progress, values, and differences to be discussed.

Symbolism

Many symbols are employed by Albee to underscore the action and themes of *Seascape.* The most obvious symbols are the lizard characters, Leslie and Sarah. Because these are anthropomorphic creatures (that is, animals with human qualities), they can be used to illustrate Albee's ideas about humans and their relationships. Leslie and Sarah represent many things, including a literal depiction of evolution and progress and an Ideal of a relationship that works in stark contrast to Nancy and Charlie's relationship.

The setting itself is also symbolic. The beach-where land and sea meet-represents a place of progress. In the theory of evolution, creatures emerged from the sea to live on land like Leslie and Sarah do in the course of the play. Changes for all four characters are taking place at the beach. Another symbol is the jet planes that zoom overhead. The jets are another symbol of progress, but a more mixed one than those already discussed. The Jets are described to Sarah as the mechanical evolution of the seagulls that fascinate her. Yet Charlie worries that a jet will one day crash into the dune-a temporary if not symbolic end to evolution. The Jets also scare both Sarah and Leslie But the jets continue to fly and never crash, and the lizards decide to embrace their

evolution. Though feared by everyone but Nancy In *Seascape,* change seems endorsed by the play's complex symbolism.

Historical Context

Family Life

In the 1970s, American society was ill transition, undergoing radical changes in a number of areas including family life. The 1970s were known as the "me" decade; people were passive and self-absorbed, concerned primarily with their own personal happiness and self-fulfillment During this era, the divorce rate rose, and there were more nontraditional families because of divorce and remarriage Another prominent aspect of this time period was the "empty nest syndrome" Children who left home at the age of eighteen to attend college did not return after graduation. Because there were no children in the home, many mothers felt loss Women's lives changed. Some entered the workforce or continued their own education; others did volunteer work.

Women and Feminism

As women's role in the home changed, so did their role In society. Some historians consider the burgeoning feminist movement of the 1970s as one of the most important social elements of the decade. The women's movement emerged from the social revolution of the 1960s and shared many aspects with the civil rights movement. Through the efforts of feminists, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was passed by the senate In 1972 and was ratified by states throughout the decade. Similar to the Civil Rights Acts, this amendment to the Constitution would have guaranteed equal rights for women under the law in a number of areas. The ERA was never ratified by three-quarters of the states as requited by law and thus it ultimately failed. Its failure was due in part to the efforts of those who feared change in society. Some believed empowering women would destroy the family.

Though the ERA failed, women's issues were addressed by legislation that was passed by federal and state legislatures as well as court rulings. Because more women were entering the workforce (about forty percent of the workforce was women In 1975), sex discrimination was outlawed in a number of areas, including the right to have pensions and nondiscrimination in hiring. More educational opportunities were opened to women In 1972, Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act guaranteed women equal access to higher education and athletic opportunities. Despite such positive steps, many women did not receive equal pay for equal work, Women sometimes earned only two-thirds to three-quarters of what men earned for performing the same job.

The year 1975 was particularly important to women on a global scale. It was declared the International Women's Year by the United Nations.

Among the events was a conference sponsored by the United Nations in Mexico City, Mexico. Women representing countries around the world gathered to talk about women's issues and to work to improve their status.

Environmental Issues

In the 1970s, environmental and ecological concerns took center stage in the United States. Many people spoke out about the impact of industry on the environment. There was widespread interest in environmental organizations like the Sierra Club. Of particular concern were air and water quality, and the limiting of pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency (EP A) encouraged water conservation by regulating the quality of drinking water. Environmental laws affected the licensing of nuclear power plants. One controversy of the time period focused on the regulation of the height of smokestacks: the taller they were the more pollution they could emit because it could be spread over a wider area making it seem as if the actual amount of pollution was less. Other concerns included the disposal of radioactive waste and the affects of aerosol cans on the ozone layer. Within a few years, these cans came under strict scrutiny.

Dissatisfaction with urban life and related problems led to a back to earth/New Age movement, primarily among hippies. A significant number of hippies moved from cities to rural communities to farm organic food. Because of concerns with farming practices, including the potential danger of pesticides, growth regulators, and other synthetic compounds, organic food became a fad during this era. Organic food was grown using "natural" biological practices. This fad soon became a common and accepted method of farming.

Critical Overview

Before Albee won the Pulitzer Prize for drama for *Seascape,* many critics reacted negatively to the first production. Only a few had generally positive responses. One was Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* who writes, "What Mr. Albee has given us here is a play of great density, with many interesting emotional and intellectual reverberations." *The Nation's* Harold Clurman places *Seascape* in a positive context in terms of Albee's development as a playwright. He believes, "It is his most relaxed play, a 'philosophical' whimsy. You may find it delightful. . .. It is a step in Albee's still green career, a step which, seen in a certain light, augurs well for the future. In an agreeable sense, it is a 'little' play."

Other critics had a more mixed response to *Seascape.* While they found something to praise, other aspects brought the experience down for them. John Beaufort of the *Christian Science Monitor* writes, "As cerebral comedies go, *Seascape* is provocative and tantalizing rather than profound, and perhaps too whimsical for its own good." Edwin Wilson of the *Wall Street Journal* wants more from Albee. He argues, "The disappointing thing is that the playwright, having given himself a theatrical device with potential and the performers to make it work, has proceeded to squander his opportunities.' ,

Many critics who wrote mixed reviews commented on Albee's use of language. This had been a positive point in many of Albee's previous plays and critics were divided over its success in *Seascape.* Howard Kissel of *Women '.I Wear Daily* believes, "Albee's lines have a pleasurable cadence, a naturally engaging rhythm even if they seldom grow out of character or intensify the admittedly diffuse drama." In his more negative review, Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* writes, "in *Seascape* that long-windedness has become a constipated language that moves in colonic spasms.. .. Albee achieves only the ultimate in pure nagging."_

A number of critics could find little redeeming value to *Seascape.* Commenting on the use of the lizards, Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic* writes, "This is hardly a startlingly original idea for a play, but it's not a bad one. The play itself *is* bad because it is nothing more than its idea." The *New York Post's* Martin Gottfried shares Kauffmann's negative opinion. Gottfried argues. "There is no way for *Seascape* to be touching because there is so little craftsmanship in it, so little artistry and. crucially, so little humanity and heart.'"

After its original run and its Pulitzer Prize, *Seascape* was still performed on a regular basis, primarily in repertory productions. Critical opinion generally became more positive with time. Of a 1996 production in San Francisco. Steven Winn of the *San Francisco Chronicle* writes, "Fanciful and philosophical, like many of the playwright's more abstruse chamber pieces, it also flashes the combustive marital combat and dismay that ignited *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 34 years ago.'" However, not all critics were completely positive. Of a 1998 production in Los Angeles, Robert Koehler of the *Los Angeles Times* argues, "Even when Edward Albee is not at his best-and with *Seascape,*

his language and character dynamics feel wearied-his work is the result of a distinctive mind obsessively probing life's recesses for meaning.'"

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Petruso is a freelance author and screenwriter in Austin. Texas. In the following essay, she explores how the female characters and the dynamics of their relationships with their male counterparts reflects the changing status of women in the United States in the mid-1970s.

In Edward Albee's *Seascape,* there are two female characters, each part of a couple One, Nancy, is a human being, in a struggle with her husband, Charlie, over their future. She is more dominant than her husband and wants to take chances. The other female character is Sarah, the human-sized lizard who has just emerged with her mate, Leslie, from the sea to live on the land. Sarah generally defers to Leslie, giving her opinion when asked but rarely acting completely on her own. The contrast between these two characters echoes some of the changes women's status and position in the United States were undergoing when the play was written. Nancy is depicted as more evolved (liberated) than Sarah, literally and physiologically.

In Edward Albee's *Seascape,* there are two female characters, each part of a couple One, Nancy, is a human being, in a struggle with her husband, Charlie, over their future. She is more dominant than her husband and wants to take chances. The other female character is Sarah, the human-sized lizard who has just emerged with her mate, Leslie, from the sea to live on the land. Sarah generally defers to Leslie, giving her opinion when asked but rarely acting completely on her own. The contrast between these two characters echoes some of the changes women's status and position in the United States were undergoing when the play was written. Nancy is depicted as more evolved (liberated) than Sarah, literally and physiologically.

The 1970s were a dynamic time in American history, especially for women. After the civil rights movement and the social activist revolution of the 1960s, feminism and the rights of women emerged as one of the major social issues of the time. Many women no longer regarded homemaking as their primary goal in life. Greater numbers of women were becoming more educated and/or entering the workforce. More education meant more employment opportunities and life options for women. Women became more outspoken about what they wanted in their own lives and from their partners in a number of areas. Still, feminism was controversial in American society. A number of men and even some women feared these changes would negatively affect the family and threaten the status of American men In some ways, these opponents were correct; for example, the divorce rate did rise IN this time period. These Issues about women and related controversies were examined on a number of fronts in popular culture, including films, television programs, and plays.

These ideas comprise one subtext of *Seascape.* Arguably, the main character and the vital life force of the play is Nancy. Nancy is near retirement age, but her actual age is not stated. Though it is implied that she stayed home and raised her family while her husband worked, Nancy is ready to experience more of life now that they are free. Like many women of the 1970s, she is suffering from empty nest syndrome. All of her three

children have been raised and have left home, indeed, Nancy and Charlie have grandchildren When Charlie retires, he would like to rest and "do.. nothing." She would like to meet new and interesting people and go out and see the world. Nancy wants to evolve away from her role as "mother" in order to create her own identity. Charlie wants no part of it.

Nancy repeatedly expresses her dissatisfaction with her role as wife and mother. Reflecting on a time earlier in their marriage when Charlie was distant and their problems were not discussed, Nancy muses to him, "Good wife, patient, see him through it, whatever It is, wonder if It isn't something *you* haven't done, or have; write home for some advice, but oh, so busy, with the children and the house. Stay neat; don't pry; weather it." Later, when Charlie reminds her of what a good husband and family man he has been to her, Nancy agrees but is also "slightly bitter" as the stage directions describe her. She tells Ium, "Well, we'll wrap you in the flag when you're gone, and do taps." Nancy cannot accept that they have had the "good life" that Charlie keeps going on about, because for her, life is not something ill the past that is over and done with.

Charlie plays the role of the threatened man of the time period. It is Charlie who puts a damper on Nancy's plan to live traveling from beach to beach.

He repeatedly dismisses her needs and desires. Charlie tells Nancy over and over in act 1 that she would not like living at the beach or any other active lifestyle She resists his attempts to control her, and goes as far as to admit she might like to have her ideal life without him. In act 1, she tells him, "I suppose I'll do the tag without you Selfish, aren't you-right to the end." Though she eventually retreats somewhat from her beach-combing plan in act 1, the Idea of divorce reoccurs later in the act, and she threatens to travel alone several times in act 2 Nancy surprises Charlie by telling him that during a problematic time in their marriage, she thought he was having an affair. For a time, she considered having an affair herself as well as divorcing him. Charlie shows that he is repeatedly concerned with his own plans for the future and wants no part of Nancy's adventurous Ideas. He cannot see what he specifically and they as a couple would gain He seems unconcerned, perhaps unbelieving, that he might lose her.

When Leslie and Sarah, the human-like lizards, appear on the beach at the end of act I, these characterizations of Charlie and Nancy are put into action Charlie becomes defensive and wants to be prepared for battle. He is protective of Nancy. Nancy regards the lizards as interesting and wants to know more She reluctantly finds Charlie a small stick to defend them with, but It is not good enough for him. This could be seen as a symbol of their marriage, minimal compliance and missed gestures. After the creatures leave for the first time, Charlie is in complete denial about what he has seen. At first, he can only believe the lizards are part of a death hallucination brought on by food poisoning. Nancy cannot believe what her husband is saying, which drives them farther apart Neither can accept the other's chosen role.

This division continues when they begin to interact With Leslie and Sarah. Nancy remains open to possibilities and wants to help them, Charlie is unsure and sarcastic Charlie antagonizes everyone with his attitude It is only at the end of the play that he

reluctantly supports his wife when she offers her help to the lizards after they decide to stay on land.

Sarah has a very different kind of relationship with Leslie. She is a much more traditional, deferential kind of mate to him. Because she is depicted as a lizard and because of her more retiring attitude, Sarah can be seen as a symbol of where women were before women's liberation, feminism, and the women's movement in the 1970s. She is literally the unevolved woman, defined by her relationship with Leslie. At one point, Sarah tells Nancy and Charlie, "He's kind and he's a good mate, and when he tells me what we're going to do, I find I can live with it quite nicely." Thus Sarah is supportive of Leslie, but rarely offers her own opinion to him unless she is asked. Leslie does ask for her input-especially early in act 2 when they are trying to figure out if the humans will harm them-but is annoyed by her mother-like admonishments to "be very careful." When they have a bit of an argument over whether or not Sarah should accompany him when he first approaches the humans, the stage directions call for her to be "feminine, submissive."

Fulfilling some stereotypes of a "good wife," Sarah is friendlier than Leslie. Sarah encourages him to be polite. When Leslie is unsure about shaking hands with Nancy, Sarah encourages him.

The fact that she might like to shake hands first is never considered by either of them. She and Nancy shake hands second; Sarah's enthusiasm is childlike. That enthusiasm spills over into curiosity, though not to the same degree or in the same way as Nancy. Sarah asks questions about the names of things and ponders the humans' answers thoughtfully. For example, Sarah is enthusiastic about examining Nancy's breasts to understand the differences between the humans and the lizards. Yet because Charlie is uncomfortable with Leslie seeing Nancy's breasts, Sarah has to play another role, acting as a go-between-relaying information between her husband and others.

As Sarah grows friendlier with Nancy, she acts less deferential and becomes more evolved in some ways. Despite Leslie's discomfort, Sarah reveals that they "couple" to mate. When Charlie asks Leslie if he and Sarah are monogamous, Sarah is "fascinated," (according to the stage directions) much to Leslie's annoyance. Later, when Leslie is insulted by Charlie's implication that he is somehow like a fish, Sarah becomes more insistent that Leslie remain in control Sarah even contradicts Leslie when he insists that all fish are stupid. She reminds him that porpoises are not. Sarah asserts herself further when Leslie cannot explain to the humans why they came out of the water. Sarah tries to express herself accurately on what made them make this decision, despite Leslie's repeated attempts to silence her.

Like Charlie, Leslie is a stereotypical male, protective of his mate. When Charlie makes her cry, Leslie begins to beat on him and nearly chokes him to death. Though the women help break them apart, Sarah wants to retreat to the sea. Unlike Nancy, Sarah is somewhat sure about her changing life as a woman. Yet the ending of *Seascape* is affirmative about the changes women will inevitably make, both in the play and in society. Because of Nancy's offer to help, Leslie decides that he and Sarah will stay.

Though Sarah is depicted as having no input in the decision, Albee's positive ending gives hope that women like Sarah will evolve and that women like Nancy will help them.

Source: A. Petruso, Critical Essay on *Seascape,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Adler examines Seascape *as "a reverse mirror image" of* A Delicate Balance, *a play Albee wrote ten years earlier.*

In reviewing Edward Albee's *Seascape-winner* of the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for Drama-, Clive Barnes concurred with the playwright's own statement that this work should be regarded as "a companion piece" to the play that immediately preceded It, *All Over* (1971), adding the proviso, "but this is an optimistic play, a rose play rather than a black play, as Jean Anouilh would have said." Placing the final curtain lines of the two side-by-side allows one to see readily the basis for the distinction Barnes was making *All Over,* Albee's much underrated drama about death and egocentrism, about the refusal to commit oneself unselfishly to those one *says* one loves, ends, appropriately enough, with the words "All over", *Seascape,* on the other hand, concludes with a challenge: "Begin.' , Yet the note of pessimism that pervades *All Overdid* not signal an abrupt shift in Albee's perspective, for ever since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962)-still his greatest critical and popular success-Albee's tone has progressively darkened as he has explored "how much false illusion" man must surround himself with "to get through life." And so one needs to go back farther than *All Over,* specifically to Albee's other Pulitzer Prize-winning drama. *A Delicate Balance* (1966), to find the true "companion piece" to *Seascape.* Indeed, the most fruitful way to approach *Seascape* is to examine it as a reverse mirror image of the earlier play.

Whereas the central couple in *All Over* are ill their seventies, Agnes and Tobias in *A Delicate Balance* are, like Nancy and Charlie in *Seascape,* in their fifties. Furthermore, the concluding hue of *Delicate Balance,* Agnes's ironic "Come now, we can begin the day," provides a more subtle and telling juxtaposition with *Seascape's* "Begin." Since both these dramas about people in their mid-middle age concern themselves with the effects of time on human choice and the possibility for change, it seems that Albee (himself now middle-aged) is in his latest full-length drama intentionally going back and giving his characters a second chance to not make such a muddle of their lives, as if to say things need not be so bleak. Though separated by nearly a decade in production, *Delicate Balance* and *Seascape* thus form an Albee diptych, in much the same way that *Ah, Wilderness!* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* do for O'Neill.

Almost the entire first act of *Seascape* is a "two-character play," taken up with Nancy's and Charlie's diametrically opposed viewpoints on where they go from here-a conflict so basic and yet so shrouded by an aura of ordinariness as to seem like no conflict at all, which several critics claim is the case. But it is typical of Albee's later dramas that the outward action has become more sparse while the language has become increasingly more poetic rather than naturalistic and colloquial. Yet here the battle lines between the urge to ever fuller life and the opposing urge to death are drawn early and in no uncertain terms. As Charlie languishes on the seashore after a picnic lunch, he revels in the prospect of gradually and painlessly easing out of the picture by withdrawing from all purposive activity "1 don't want to do . . . anything. . . I'in happy. . . doing... nothing." Faced with Charlie's desire to spend his waning years calmly wasting away, Nancy

chides him, "all *you* want to do is become a vegetable.. a lump" Lying just beyond the sand dunes ill the stage set is the sea, archetype at one and the same time of both life and death; once symbolic of Charlie's life-wish, it now symbolizes his willed movement towards inertia and death He has confessed to Nancy that as "a little boy" he "wanted to live in the sea," and recounts with great nostalgia that in his more adventuresome adolescence he would go into the water, take two stones, as large as [he] could manage, swim out a bit, tread, look up one final tune at the sky, relax, begin to go down. Oh, twenty feet, fifteen You can stay down there so long' . . . one stops being an intruder, finally-Just one more object come to the bottom, or living thing, part of the undulation and the silence. It was very good.

Yet if this "game" once served as a confirmation of life, implicit in it all along was the pull towards death: We rise from the sea at birth only to return to it at life' s end. Like the persona in Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead," Charlie now "sigh[s] still for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom / of the fish and reptile," a vision of a place where life goes on without burden and responsibility A place where one can retreat into a pre-moral condition, Charlie thinks, free from the terror that is an inescapable part of life, which Albee here symbolizes by a recurrent sound effect. four times "a Jet plane is heard from stage right to stage left-growing, becoming deafeningly loud, diminishing." Feeling existential man's *angst,* terrified by "deep space? Mortality? Nancy.. .not.. . being with me?" and the possibility that even life itself might be just "an illusion," Charlie yearns for "Death [as a] release" since he has "lived all right." So the sea becomes for him a thanatopsis.

If Tobias in *Delicate Balance* has as his motto, "We do what we can"-attesting to his refusal to go that extra distance, if necessary, to love instead of Just being loved-, Charlie in *Seascape* has adopted as his watchword "We'll see," which is essentially another way of saying that something is "then put off until it's forgotten." Such delaying tactics In answering the call to action harbor within them, however, the potential for finally stultifying the very ability to act. As Agnes in *Delicate Balance* wisely perceives: "Time happens, I suppose. To people everything becomes. . . too late, finally. You know it's going on. . up on the hill; . . . but you wait; and time happens. When you *do* go, sword, shield.. . finally. . there's nothing there . . . save rust, bones; and the wind" Life is a matter of diminishing possibilities; the "road not taken" can never be traversed. Every choice one makes limits all of one's future choices, for each time one chooses A over B, one's options at the next moment of choice are automatically halved: If one chooses A, the possibilities that would have opened up if he had chosen B instead are lost forever, and vice versa. Eventually, with the passage of time, the pattern has been so firmly fixed that man becomes locked in It, and it is then "too late" to break from it.

Albee shares with O'Neill this notion of man' s possible choices becoming fewer and fewer with the passage of time and as finally determining his fate. In one of the central passages in *Long Day's Journey,* Mary Tyrone's words presage Agnes's: "None of us can help the things time has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." In *Virginia Woolf?,* George poses much the same question about time's effect on human choice in an

evolutionary metaphor that is a particularly apt gloss for *Seascape* as well. "man can put up with just so much without he descends a rung or two on the old evolutionary ladder. . and it's a funny ladder. . you can't reverse yourself. . . start back up once you're descending." It is at this decisive point-poised between going onward into the unknown or succumbing to the urge to descend (metaphorically) back down into the sea-that Charlie finds himself.

Nancy insists that they not spend what time they have left, however long or short it might be, in a retreat from life; she refuses to vegetate in a period of inactivity that would be like condemning themselves to a "purgatory *before* purgatory," demanding instead, "We will do *something."* She believes that man must create his own happiness, must make a Klerkegaardian leap of faith and find some positive value in life. The gift of life is precious in and of itself and, in fact, is all that any of us have a right to ask for. Simply by having lived as long as they have, they "have earned a life" and the time to *"try* something new" Whereas Charlie, afraid of change, desires stasis, Nancy accepts flux as a part of life, as, indeed, the necessary precondition for progress and growth Life, according to her, should never be in the "past" tense. Her motto, were she to formulate one, would be something like: Experience as many new things as possible, in one's fantasies if not in reality. Such a philosophy has helped her weather and turn to a positive advantage the rough times of loneliness within her marriage, for when Charlie lost all interest in sex during his "seven-month decline," she thought of something she had never imagined before, not even in her dreams, and that, without his "inertia" and inattention, might have been lost to her forever: "A child at thirty, I suppose. Without that time I would have gone through my entire life and never thought of another man, another pair of arms, harsh cheek, hard buttocks, pleasure, never at all."

Nancy has hardly completed her admonition to Charlie that they "do something" when the opportunity to respond to "something new" startlingly present itself with the appearance of "two great green lizards." Without pursuing the point any further, in IDS review of the original production Howard Kissel detects in *Seascape* a continuation of the recurrent pattern in Albee's dramas of a person or persons arriving at the home-or territory-of someone else, with one or other of the parties then subjecting the other to a potentially salvific test, "prodding the others into a traumatizing outburst of emotion and violence." In *The Zoo Story* (1959), for instance, Jerry arrives in Central Park and accosts Peter on his comfortable bench; in *Virginia Woolf?,* Nick and Honey come for an early morning round of "fun and games" at the home of George and Martha; in *Tiny Alice* (1964), Brother Julian arrives for his "dark night of the soul" at the Gothic residence of Miss Alice, in *Delicate Balance,* Harry and Edna come to Agnes's and Tobias's demanding to be given shelter from the terror; and now in *Seascape,* Leslie Lizard and his wife Sarah arrive on the beach to confront Charlie and Nancy about admission to the human race.

The parallel between *Seascape* and *Delicate Balance* is, however, the most emphatic, for in these two cases the couples who arrive are designed more as allegorical personages than as fully-dimensioned characters, which contributes to the distinctive parable-like quality of the two plays. Leslie and Sarah exist at some pre-human stage on the evolutionary scale, while Harry and Edna are, as the List of Players indicates,

"very much like Agnes and Tobias." They thus function as mirror Images so that Agnes and Tobias can see themselves as they never have before. Brought face-to-face with the existential void ("We were frightened. . and there was nothing" and now in need of "succor" and "comfort," Harry and Edna bring "the plague" and "terror" of self-knowledge into the home of Agnes and Tobias, who can see reflected in their hesitancy to assuage their best friends' needs the failure of their own existence.

In *Seascape,* Leslie and Sarah, instead of functioning as mirror images of what Charlie and Nancy now are, serve as recollections of what the older couple once were, for, as Charlie says, "there was a time when we *all* were down there" before one of our ancestors "came up into the air and decided to stay." Like Harry and Edna before them, Leslie and Sarah are afraid, but whereas the former couple was frightened by the prospect of the nothingness after death, the latter couple is terrified by "what [they] don't know," by the challenge of a more highly developed-which is to say, more fully human life on earth. If life in the sea was unterrifying because a known quantity, it was also restrictive and limiting; as Sarah points out, they outgrew what was down there, and "didn't feel [they] *belonged* there any more." They experienced, as Nancy would put it, the dissatisfaction which can be redirected in either a positive or a negative way. In a very basic sense, every living creature must be "dissatisfied" with the way things are, or there could be neither movement nor progress in human history The condition of stasis, of "delicate balance" in a comfortable routine that Tobias and Agnes nurture and cling to, can have as its result only death-in-life. So Leslie's and Sarah's predicament-faced as they are with the attractive temptation of "making do down there," of taking comfort in passively settling in and thus settling for less than a full life-exactly parallels Charlie's.

Significantly, it is Charlie, himself afraid, who convinces Leslie and Sarah to remain up on earth rather than return to their familiar habitat. And in the moment of convincing them, he himself undergoes a regenerative epiphany, moving from his customary stance of "put off" and "make do" to beginning again. Walter Kerr confesses some mystification over exactly what occurs at the climactic point in *Seascape,* feeling that Albee somehow misses his chance to connect the fate of the humans with that of the lizards:

But there is at last an Issue, a emesis, and It seems, as Issue and crisis, very much related to Mr Nelson's [Charlie's] earlier urge to surrender Why is that not now picked up, toward one end or another? Since the very problem so much *concerns* Mr. Nelson, why does he not engage himself, as devil's advocate, as newly enlightened human being, as something? His very boyhood games seem to make him a lively participant in the struggle-to advance or not to advance-and we watt for connections, for a door to be opened that will disclose whatever futures humans and lizards choose But with the key in His hand and a carefully built-up promise, Mr Albee will not use It . . . neither she [Nancy] nor the new arrivals have any [effect] on the man in the ease-or on the relation between man and wife-and the encounter comes out lopsided, lopsided and rather bland.

Yet the connection is there, and It is precisely the same kind of connection as in Albee's earlier plays. The pattern of saving-others-in-order-to-save-oneself that recurs here

should be familiar to students of Albee's work: in *Zoo Story,* Jerry (at least in Rose Zimbardo's widely-known and influential interpretation) sacrifices himself, Christ-like, so that Peter might be redeemed from his vegetable like complacency; in *Virginia Woolf?,* George and Martha destroy the sustaining illusion of the child so that Nick and Honey can see the sterility of their own marriage-and, in the process, George and Martha achieve a firmer communion within a marriage now rebuilt on a stronger foundation; in *Delicate Balance,* Harry and Edna offer Tobias and Agnes a chance to be "good samaritans" and thereby redeem their "empty" existence, but the chance for salvation is rejected.

At the climactic point in *Seascape,* Charlie, like George and Jerry before him, hurts Sarah (and Leslie) in order to help them. Like Jerry-and this may well be the key line for understanding what happens in Albee's dramas-, Charlie realizes "that neither kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each other, creates any effect beyond themselves," and that oftentimes "we neither love nor hurt because we do not try to reach each other."

Recognizing that what separates man from beast is precisely man's "aware[ness that] it's *alive,* [and] that it's going to me," Charlie sees that to complete the transformation from beast to man that Leslie and Sarah embarked on with their sense of uneasiness in their old life in the sea, he must make them experience truly human emotions. playing on Sarah's fear of Leslie leaving her and "never coming back," he deliberately makes Sarah cry, which, in turn, makes Leslie so defensive and angry at Charlie that he hits and chokes him. Having tasted these dark human emotions of sorrow and wrath, Sarah and Leslie want more than ever to return to the pre-human security of the sea The only thing that quenches their fear is Nancy's and Charlie's pleading with them not to retreat, and extending their hands in a human gesture of compassion and solidarity-a clear visual echo of the dramatic gesture which also ends *Virginia Woolf?* In helping Leslie and Sarah to cross the threshold from animal to man, to take the mythic journey from the womb into the world that, however traumatic, must sometime be taken, Charlie simultaneously leaves behind his earlier attempts to escape from life and asserts once again his will to act, to live. And if one views Charlie as not only an individual but also as a representative, middle-aged Everyman who has fallen prey to ennui and despair, then Leslie's "Begin" on which the curtain falls is an act of faith and hope uttered not just for himself and Sarah and for Charlie and Nancy, but for all humankind who, with the passage of time, must be periodically rescued from the temptation of being "half in love with easeful death" and inspired to continue its arduous Journey despite the inherent dangers.

Reportedly, it was Thornton Wilder who first suggested to Albee that he take up playwriting, and *Seascape,* Albee's most optimistic drama so far, might be seen as his homage to Wilder, since it contains not only verbal echoes to Wilder's plays but is likewise imbued with his positive tone and philosophy. In his review of *Seascape,* Brendan Gill succinctly capsulizes its theme-- "Boldly and simply, it asserts that, at no matter what age and in no matter what time and place, acts of discovery remain to be undertaken"-and likens it to "some superb long poem." Certainly, one does find in it the repetition of imagery and verbal motifs, particularly of the words "wondrous" and

"adventurous" or some form thereof, that one expects to find in poetry. Interestingly enough, Wilder designates one of these concepts as "the moral" of his delightful farce, *The Matchmaker,* with Barnaby saying in his curtain speech to the audience, "I think [the play's] about adventure . . . we all hope that in your lives you have just the right amount of-adventure!" Nancy displays a childlike enthusiasm for "every bit" of the world and wants to be immersed in it. Leslie and Sarah share Nancy's capacity for awe, he punctuates his language with phrases like "My gracious" and "Wow" in response to even the ordinary facts of life usually taken for granted, revealing that he already possesses the insight that Emily in Wilder's *Our Town* can reach only in death: "Ob, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. . Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?-every, every minute?" Nancy's reaction of "great awe" and "infinite wonder" at first setting eyes on Leslie and Sarah reminds one of "stout Cortez" in Keats's poem; the empirical-minded and prosaic Charlie (he has, Nancy claims, "no interest in imagery") long ago "decided that wonders do not occur" and so concludes that they must be dead-as he metaphorically is-in order to see such creatures. Finally, however, Charlie perceives that he cannot spend the rest of his life on the plain or in the valley; he must dare "the glaciers and the crags." Most of all he learns, like the Antrobuses in Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth,* about man's capacity for achieving progress in the long run If he only has the courage and confidence to always begin anew, often in the face of what seem like insurmountable odds. As George Antrobus, representative of mankind, expresses it at the end of that play: "Oh, I've never forgotten for long at a time that living is struggle. I know that every good and excellent thing in the world stands moment by moment on the razor-edge of danger and must be fought for-whether it's a field, or a home, or a country. All I ask is the chance to build new worlds and God has always given us that." Nancy's words quoted earlier, about being given the time to "try something new," might be seen, therefore, as Albee's measured confirmation of the philosophy Wilder put forth through Antrobus.

Source: Thomas P. Adler, "Albee's *Seascape'* Humanity at the Second Threshold," in *Renascence,* Vol. XXXI, No 2, Winter 1979, pp. *101-14.*

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Stenz provides an overview of Seascape.

Mutate or perish Let your tall drop off, change your spots, or maybe Just your point of view.

In an interview a few years ago Albee said, "When I write a play I'in interested in changing the way people look at themselves and the way they look at life. . . . The knowledge that you are going to die should present (an) intense awareness of life. People should be aware of all things at all times, they should experience the extremities of life, fu1fill themselves completely. Why does anyone want to go to sleep when the only thing left is to stay awake". In 1968 he started to think about writing two one-act plays, companion pieces called "Life" and "Death". The latter grew into the full-length drama, *All Over* "Life" became *Seascape,* a comic fable which lightly deals with a number of themes that concern the author in all his work: "people closing down, how people get along with one another, how they make a marriage". The action involves a meeting at the seashore between a middle-aged couple and a pair of talking sea-lizards. Typically, there is a confrontation, a little cruelty and violence and, ultimately, an awakening for all which represents the passage or evolution from one phase of life into the next. Albee has wryly commented that *Seascape* is a "true-to-life-story" and that it all could happen. "There are still prehistoric fish at the bottom of the ocean. It's conceivable that they evolve." In the course of the play, however, "the evolutionary pattern is speeded up billions of revolutions" .

The curtain opens on brightly lighted dunes under a blue sky that has a few clouds. A retired couple are enjoying a tranquil vacation at the beach and have just finished a delicious picnic lunch of "roasted chicken.. peaches... brie and bread and wine". The husband, Charlie, is comfortably stretched out on a blanket, dozing. His wife, Nancy, perched high up on a dune, is painting a seascape. A long, blissful, quiet moment is shattered by the roar of a low-flying jet. With this Ominous introduction of another dimension of contemporary reality, the action begins.

Thus far Nancy and Charley are undoubtedly Albee's most attractive middle-aged married couple. They frankly love each other and shyly admit that they have been faithful to one another for some thirty years. They are close; they have a warm, good-humored rapport. There is no question of a state of "solitary free passage" in the case of these two people who have nicely weathered the private crises of a long marriage: the self-doubt, melancholia, imagined infidelities and sexual fantasies Three children, "precarious, those, for a while, but nicely settled now" , reflect the fortunes of their parents' relationship. There are grandchildren already and more are on the way. Nancy observes:

"We've served our time.. the pyramid's building by Itself, the earth's spinning in Its own fashion without any push from us; we've done all we ought to .. and isn't it splendid we've enjoyed so much of it"

Until quite recently, Nancy, whose life's ambition was to be "a woman" and "all it had with it" has fulfilled herself by keeping "busy, with the children and the house". Charlie has been a fine husband and father, and a good provider. They both share an interest in French literature and, so it appears, in the *National Geographic Magazine.* However, as this pair enter into the second phase of their lives together with "nothing binding (them)"just each other and some time-a subtle conflict is brewing.

From all the fresh air and the wine and the sun, Charlie is feeling drowsy and self-satisfied. "The house, the kids, *their* kids, friends, all that" , for him it is enough-or so he implies Charlie would like to just settle in now and do nothing. "We've earned a little rest", he says. Nancy, on the other hand, feels refreshed and invigorated by the sea and the wind; all her senses are alert. Yet she is aware of her limitations: "Well, there's the arthritis in my wrist, of course, and the eyes have known a better season, and there's always the cancer or the heart attack to think about if we're bored." Nevertheless, she is filled with enthusiasm for a new life. With her paint box near by and a brush in her hand, she strains to take in each glorious detail around her the sand and the beach grass and the flies, the white clouds, the gulls, and the shells. Also the two people she thinks she sees climbing up the dunes. "I love every bit of it, Charlie", she says laughing gaily. "Seaside nomads, that's what we (could) be." Looking toward the future Nancy is filled with curiosity and a sense of adventure:

"One great seashore after another; pounding waves and quiet coves, white sand, and red-and black.
palms, and pine trees, cliffs and reefs, and miles of jungle, sand dunes.. and all the people! Every . language. every race"

Charlie, however, does not share his wife's enthusiasm. When he prevaricates, Nancy gets testy: "Figure out what you'd really like . . . put it in your mind, then make all the plans." Even If it is only the principle of the thing, she has no desire to surrender to time. "We've earned a *little life,* if you ask *me",* Nancy mutters as the easy back-and-forth chatter of the couple in the opening scene develops into a tense if muted altercation So many things go, she says. Sex diminishes. There is an echo of the words of Agnes in *A Delicate Balance:* "The gradual. . . demise of intensity, the private preoccupations, the substitutions We become allegorical... as we grow older." But Nancy is a fighter:

"Is that what we've come all this way for? Had the children? Spent all the time together? All the sharing? For nothing? To he back down in the crib again? The same at the end as at the beginning? Sleep?"

She does not want to give anything up before it is absolutely necessary. Nor does she want her husband to.

When he was a boy, Charlie's dream was to live in the sea. Nancy prods him into recalling for her things he talked about years before-how he used to find a protected cove, take two heavy stones and sink gently to the sandy bottom. He reminisces about the way he loved to stand among the ferns and lichens and, full of wonder, watch the underwater world move around him. It had made him feel very alive. Yet, in his cramped

response to the recollection of something which once represented the stirring of an inquisitive spirit, Charlie defines his death-in-life mentality. When Nancy wants him to try it again, the first thing he worries about is what "people" will say: "They'd think I was drowning." Charlie does not have the courage to "be young again" In his failure of nerve and lack of direction, there is an echo of the nostalgic reflections of the Voice in *Box;* It appears that great beauty for him is now something which does not bring him closer to everything anymore but is "a reminder not of what *can.* . . but what *has".* In essence Charlie is not altogether unlike Peter in *The Zoo Story* or Daddy in *The American Dream* or Tobias in *A Delicate Balance,* for after a life which to all appearances has been dedicated to upholding the status quo, his imagination and spiritual vitality have been snuffed out. When in so many words he refers to his life with Nancy in the past tense, she loses her temper. "Why not go to those places in the desert and let our heads deflate, if it's all in the past?" she queries angrily. Central in Act One is Nancy's determined provocation of her husband from a mindless readiness to live as if he were not alive back into wakefulness: "Words are lies; they *can* be, and you *use* them, but I know what's in your gut."

Near the end of the first act, two great green, human old lizards suddenly appear at the edge of the dunes. Albee says, "They should be quite frightening. Seeing them for the first time the audience should have that shock of recognition. After all, It's what we all were". The tensions between Charlie and Nancy dissolve in a hilarious scene in which the two couples-in particular the males-try to decide what to do about each others' unexpected and unfamiliar appearances. However, Act Two is primarily concerned with the process of Charlie's opening up and his reaffirmation of life. His realiza tion that "the wonders do . . . occur" and that he is not "dead" is dramatized in a whimsical and charming way.

Thrust out of the sea by an inexplicable but inevitable urge for change and upward movement, Leslie and Sara-in spite of their "carapaceous bellies, long tails and knobbing down their backs" and their limited vocabularies-psychologically confront the middle-aged couple with mirror images of themselves. Sara puts into words the very same feelings that Nancy is trying to express to Charlie in the course of her petulant and peevish proddings in the middle of Act One:

"It was a growing thing, nothing abrupt, nor that anything was different, for that matter.. in the sense of having changed; but *we* had changed all of a sudden, everything. . . down there was terribly interesting, I suppose, but what did it have to do with us anymore? And it wasn't comfortable any more. I mean, after all, you make your nest, and accept a whole.Array of thingsand we didn't feel we *belonged* there anymore And, what were we going to do?! Make (do) down there or try something else. But what?" Charlie's efforts to accept the existence of the sea-creatures and their evolution represent the unconscious stirrings going on inside himself, the consequence of Nancy's attempts to keep him from "cav(ing) in" and "clos(ing down)"

Nancy and Charlie take great pains to describe life *"up* here" as if to children of five or six years old. In the humorous and often touching exchanges between the two couples, Charlie guides the lizards step by step through the stages from instinctive behavior to

the pain of consciousness. First his incredulity and then his anger at their innocence become metaphors for his own emotional and spiritual rebirth. Because of the struggles and disappointments over the years, something vital in Charlie has become numbed. Nancy explains It to Sara: "He's been through life, you see" In his way Charlie is as much a "brute beast" as Leslie is in his. In the process of trying to explain to the lizards about their eating habits and greeting customs, about arms and legs and Nancy's breasts, in the talk about coupling and birthing, about birds and aerodynamics, photographs and carrots, in all the discussion about existence and evolution, with growing feelings of Irritation and impatience-and sometimes desperation-Charlie is shaken out of his ennui.1f the lizards have a lot to learn, like Peter in *The Zoo Story,* so has he. Leslie and Sara represent the "glaciers, and the crags", the unexplored regions, the unknown They help to fill Charlie with Nancy's sense of all the things that there are still to do and with the desire to keep searching for them.

Source: Anita N. Stenz, *"Seascape"* in *Edward Albee The Poet of Loss,* Mouton Publishers, 1978, pp. 123-27.

Topics for Further Study

Research the theory of evolution, focusing on the tune when scientists theorize that creatures emerged from the water to the land. Using your research, discuss what scientists believed compelled these animals to leave the water and compare this motivation to the depiction of the lizards, Leslie and Sarah, in *Seascape.*

Explore readings about interpersonal communication and marriage. How could Nancy and Charlie have solved their differences more constructively? Compare their communication style to that of Sarah and Leslie.

Research the effects of retirement on the retiree and his or her partner. What changes take place? Discuss options Nancy and Charlie could explore as retirees How does Nancy's dream of moving from beach to beach fit in with your findings?

Compare and contrast the two couples in *Seascape* with the troubled couple depicted in Albee's famous play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). What common communication Issues do these couples share?

Compare and Contrast

1975: Though it is the International Women's Year, many women in the workplace face discrimination, especially in terms of pay. Women generally earn about a quarter to a third less than men for doing the same work as men.

Today: Though the "glass ceiling" has been broken and many more women work, women still generally earn only about 80 to 90 percent of the salary of their male counterparts.

1975: Organic foods are a relatively new concept, a fad among hippies concerned with environmental and ecological issues. Their availability is limited but growing.

Today: Organic farming is an accepted practice, and organic foods can be found in many grocery stores.

1975: There is controversy over the effects of the use of aerosol cans on the environment, especially the ozone layer. Within a few years, their use is regulated.

Today: The hole in the ozone layer has grown significantly since the 1970s. Though the use of aerosol cans is regulated, many scientists agree that their use played a role in the hole's size.

1975: The United States is still recovering from the OPEC crisis of 1973-1974. The crisis limited the amount of oil that the United States could import, creating an energy crisis. Many called for the exploration of alternative sources of energy.

Today: The use of alternative energy in the United States remains limited, though the calls for its exploration are ongoing. American consumption of oil has not decreased, and some have considered drilling untouched, hard-to-reach places under the sea to find more oil.

What Do I Read Next?

The Sandbox (1959) is another play by Albee that deals with conflicts within a tense marriage.

Happy Days (1961) is a play by Samuel Beckett about a couple whose relationship problems are similar to those of Nancy and Charlie.

Landscape (1967) is a play by Harold Pinter, which consists of two monologues by a couple with relationship problems. An undercurrent of the play is a desire to retreat from life.

All Over (1971) is a play by Albee, which he described as a complement to *Seascape.*

Breaking the Watch: The Meaning of Retirement in America (2000) is a nonfiction book that discusses aspects of retirement, including how it affects the retiree and his or her relationships.

Further Study

Gussow, Mel, *Edward Albee' A Singular Journey,* Simon & Schuster, 1999.

This biography covers the whole of Albee's personal and professional life and was written by a fanner *New York Times* theater critic.

Hirsch, Foster, *Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?,* Creative Arts Book Company, 1978.

This monograph provides critical commentary of Albee's plays and career, from 1959 to the mid-1970s.

Kennedy, Pagan, *Platforms, A Microwaved Cultural Chronicle of the 1970s,* St Martin's Press, 1994.

This nonfiction book discusses social and cultural aspects of the United States in the 1970s.

Kahn, Philip C, ed., *Conversations with Edward Albee,* University of Mississippi Press, 1988.

This is a collection of interviews With Albee, which were originally published between 1961 and 1988.

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Kroll, Jack, "Leapin' Lizards," in *Newsweek,* February 10, 1975.

Wilson, Edwin, "Disturbing Creatures from the Deep," in *Wall Street Journal,* January 28, 1975.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

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