Edward Albee’s
Seascape
by Edward Albee
Directed by Pam MacKinnon

The Geary Theater
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# Table of Contents

1  A.C.T.’s Production of Edward Albee’s *Seascape*

3  I Write Like Me
    A Brief Introduction to Playwright Edward Albee
    *By Elspeth Sweatman*

13  The Curtain Rises
    Director Pam MacKinnon on *Seascape* and Albee
    *By Simon Hodgson*

19  Love, Chess, and Chairs
    The Limits of Language
    *By Annie Sears*

25  From Cardboard to Creature from the Black Lagoon
    An Interview with *Seascape* Scenic and Costume Designer David Zinn
    *By Elspeth Sweatman*

28  Tales of Tails
    A Glimpse of Lizards and Evolution
    *By Kayla Minton Kaufman*

34  *Seascape* Synopsis

39  *Seascape* Glossary

48  Questions to Consider/For Further Information
A.C.T.’s Production of Edward Albee’s Seascape

Edward Albee’s Seascape premiered at Broadway’s Sam S. Shubert Theatre on January 26, 1975. It featured Deborah Kerr (Nancy), Barry Nelson (Charlie), Maureen Anderman (Sarah), and Frank Langella (Leslie), and was directed by Albee himself. The play was nominated for the 1975 Tony Award for Best New Play and won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was revived on Broadway in October 2005. This is the first time it has been performed at A.C.T.

Creative Team

Scenic and Costume Designer ................................................................. David Zinn
Lighting Designer .................................................................................. Isabella Byrd
Sound Designer .................................................................................... Brendan Aanes
Movement Coach .................................................................................. Danyon Davis
Dramaturg ............................................................................................... Joy Meads
Casting Director .................................................................................... Janet Foster, CSA
Vocal Support ........................................................................................ Christine Adaire
Stage Manager ....................................................................................... Elisa Guthertz
Assistant Stage Manager ......................................................................... Christina Hogan
Associate Artistic Director ..................................................................... Andy Donald
General Manager .................................................................................... Louisa Balch
Director of Production ........................................................................... Martin Barron

Characters and Cast (in order of appearance)

Nancy ....................................................................................................... Ellen McLaughlin
Charlie .................................................................................................... James Carpenter
Leslie ........................................................................................................ Seann Gallagher
Sarah ......................................................................................................... Sarah Nina Hayon
Understudies ........................................................................................... Trish Mulholland, Roger Grunwald, Göran Norquist, and Ash Malloy

*Information correct at time of publication.*
I Write Like Me
A Brief Introduction to Playwright Edward Albee

By Elspeth Sweatman

“Art is not pacification,” said playwright Edward Albee in a 1980 interview. “It’s disturbance.” Albee’s 34 plays do not pacify; each in its own way pushes its audience to reevaluate their perceptions and reexamine their lives. Using the elements of theater to their fullest, each play peels back the façade of the human condition to reveal what brings us together and tears us apart. Albee’s unique, provocative brand of truth-telling did not always sit well with audiences and critics, but it has secured his place in the American theatrical pantheon. “You either affect people or you leave them indifferent,” said Albee. “And I would loathe to leave an audience indifferent. I don’t care whether they like or hate, so long as they’re not indifferent.”

“I Did Not Write Catcher in the Rye or End as a Man, I Lived Them.”

Born on March 12, 1928, and adopted by Reed A. and Frances C. Albee—two members of the Larchmont, New York, elite—Edward Franklin Albee III had a coddled but lonely childhood. His parents bought him everything he could have ever wanted: Grenadier Guard toy soldiers, electric trains, a smoking jacket. He went to see Broadway shows and spent the winter months in Palm Beach, Florida. But material possessions and a lavish lifestyle could not hide the fact that his parents were unloving. “Whenever his mother became angry with him, she reminded him that he was adopted,” says biographer Mel Gussow. “The inference was in the air that, if he did not behave, if he did not measure up, he could be returned to the orphanage, like an unwanted possession.”

From an early age, Albee knew he wanted to be a writer. He began drafting poems at six, plays at 12, and novels in his teens. Albee’s dedication to his writing, however, got him in trouble at school. “On the surface he was a poser, a posturer,” said English teacher Porter Caesar, “underneath he was passionately honest, mature and perhaps even wise, with boundless energy for poetry, plays and literature and a bald unwillingness to be forced to do what he had no interest in doing.” Stubbornly refusing to attend classes he thought unnecessary, Albee was kicked out of Lawrenceville and Valley Forge Military Academy (the model for J. D. Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye). After getting his act together briefly at the Choate School, he was also dismissed from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut during his second year.

OPPOSITE Playwright Edward Albee. Photo courtesy University of Houston Photographs Collection.
The 20-year-old Albee initially returned home and played the dutiful son, but after an argument with his parents, he cut all ties. Following his love of writing and music, he moved to the artistic enclave of New York’s Greenwich Village. “I saw every gallery, every play, and every concert I could sneak into for free, trying to learn what living was about, what consciousness was about, what I was about,” said Albee. Over the next ten years, he worked a series of odd jobs: office boy at Warwick and Legler advertising agency, clerk in Schirmer’s record store and Bloomingdale’s, and messenger for Western Union. He continued writing, mostly poems and short stories. He sent submissions to literary magazines, but with no success. Nothing he produced sounded authentic, visceral, distinctive.

“A Playwright’s Voice Is the Sound That He Makes”

As his 30th birthday approached, Albee sat down at his kitchen table for one last attempt at writing. What emerged on the typewriter he had “liberated” from Western Union was The Zoo Story (1959), a one-act play in which strangers Peter and Jerry meet on a park bench. As Jerry describes his trip to the zoo, he tries to rouse Peter from his complacency and spur him to engage more fully in life. After premiering in Berlin, the play ran off-Broadway for over a year and toured North and South America. It was quickly followed by The Death of Bessie Smith (1960) and The American Dream (1961). In just three years, Albee became the “king of off-Broadway.”

Evident in these three plays are themes that Albee would explore his entire career: marriage and parenting, the subtle balance between love and hate, and our tendency to substitute artificial values for real ones. In The American Dream, Albee disrupts our unquestioned belief in the American dream of a white picket fence, 2.4 children, and no worries. Mommy and Daddy are childless, having killed their adopted son while trying to fix his perceived faults. Suddenly, they find themselves confronted with his twin: the Young Man, the “American dream.” They gladly exchange the reality of family life for the ideal. In the end, “everybody got what he wants,” Grandma tells the audience, “or everybody’s got what he thinks he wants.”

While the voice in these three plays is identifiably Albee’s, their structures could not be more different. The Zoo Story is naturalistic, but Bessie Smith is overtly political; it draws upon Brechtian techniques (such as defining a character by their role: The Nurse, The Father, The Intern) to distance the audience from the characters and encourage them to consider the play’s larger point about the inhumanity of racism. The American Dream is more absurdist; Mommy and Daddy’s guest, Mrs. Barker, responds to a series of questions—would she like a cigarette, a drink, to remove her dress—with “I don’t mind if I do.” Characters leave to fetch a glass of water and can’t find the kitchen. To outsiders, it may have looked like Albee was searching for his voice. But Albee knew that he already had it. “A playwright’s voice is the sound that he makes,” he said, “and the style that he works in doesn’t determine that at all.”

"Everybody Plays Games"

In 1962, Albee made a splash with his first full-length play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and its iconic, warring couple George and Martha. Continuing his exploration of marriage and the illusions we create to survive, the play features “people of more than average intelligence getting to the point where they can’t any longer exist with a whole series of games, tricks and false illusions, and then knocking down the entire untenable superstructure,” said Albee. “The end result: something may or may not be built in its place. Everybody plays games.”

As they drink, spar, and entertain their guests, George and Martha play a series of games, including “Humiliate the Host,” “Hump the Hostess,” and “Get the Guest.” Showing off Albee’s wit and bite, these games are amusing at first, but we quickly see that they are designed to put everyone on edge, including the audience. When Martha initiates the ultimate game—revealing their fake son to guests Nick and Honey—George punishes her. He brings the whole charade crashing down. “Truth or illusion, George; you don’t know the difference,” Martha spits at him. “No, but we must carry on as though we did,” responds George.

“In a time, when—with [critic] Walter Kerr’s encouragement—domestic comedies like *Never Too Late* and *Any Wednesday* were turning Broadway into a desert,” says
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<td>2004</td>
<td><em>Peter and Jerry: Homelife and The Zoo Story</em> (later titled <em>At Home at the Zoo</em>)</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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*Plays that have been produced at A.C.T.
Gussow, “Virginia Woolf would force theatergoers to confront themselves.” Here were our petty quarrels, our quirks, our lies laid bare. This confrontation didn't sit well with some critics. While Richard Watts of the New York Post declared it “the most shattering drama I have seen since O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night,” the Daily Mirror's Robert Coleman called it “a sick play for sick people,” and the New York Daily News's John Chapman labeled it “three and a half hours long, four characters wide and a cesspool deep.” The bad press only fueled box office sales and firmly established Albee as one of America's leading playwrights. He received the Tony Award for Best Play (and almost the Pulitzer Prize for Drama1) and made enough money to buy a property in Montauk, Long Island, and establish the Playwrights Unit to support emerging writers.

“I'm Stuck with a New Reality”

For those who expected Albee to produce another Virginia Woolf, his next play was a real shock. Drawing upon the tradition of medieval mystery plays, Tiny Alice (1964) interrogates the perilous, corrupting effect of money on faith. Broadway critics, audiences, and even the main actor John Gielgud were so stumped by the play that Albee held a press conference to provide some insight into the work. The play only ran for five months on Broadway (compared to 17 months for Virginia Woolf). The few critical voices that doubted Albee's talent began to gain traction.

Unfazed, Albee kept exploring. “Each time I sit down and write a play I try to dismiss from my mind as much as I possibly can the implications of what I’ve done before, what I’m going to do, what other people think about my work, the failure or success of the previous play,” said Albee. “I’m stuck with a new reality that I’ve got to create.” Despite feeling that no adaptation managed to capture the voice and brilliance of the original novel or play, he tried his hand at adaptation with The Ballad of the Sad Café (1963), Malcolm (1966), Breakfast at Tiffany's (1966), and Everything in the Garden (1967). He embraced playwright Samuel Beckett’s aesthetic to create Box, a monologue from a disembodied voice, and mixed Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-Tung’s words with those of playwright Paul Claudel's work Partage de midi in its accompanying piece, Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (1968).

When he did address settings and themes similar to Virginia Woolf—friends arriving at their neighbors' house—he took a completely different tone. The Pulitzer Prize–winning play A Delicate Balance (1966) is Virginia Woolf through a more understated lens. Agnes and Tobias may not have the explosive battles that George and Martha do, but they can be just as biting. “The clashes, the hatreds, the bitchery—the Albee ‘trademarks’—are, in the characters themselves, muted and subtle,” wrote Albee’s former partner and longtime friend William Flanagan in a letter to Albee. “I guess that’s what I must have meant when I said it was V. Woolf written with a kind of Chekhovian, naturalistic, poetic restraint.”

1 The drama jury put forward Albee for the prize, but Columbia University’s trustees and the award’s advisory board refused to accept a play with sexual themes and profanity. There was no prize awarded that year, and two jury members resigned in protest.
Having interrogated so many aspects of contemporary life, Albee shifted his focus to something more fundamental: evolution. “I’m moving away from writing about people,” he said in the 1970s, “to writing about animals.” Are humans the master species? What truly separates humans from animals? How do we understand our behavior? “I question everything,” said Albee.

In his next play, *Seascape* (1975), “everything” included the topics discussed by his characters, the storytelling techniques he used, and the unspoken stylistic rules of Broadway. Newly retired couple Nancy and Charlie encounter a younger couple, Sarah and Leslie, at the beach. The catch: Sarah and Leslie are lizards. Face to face with the unfamiliar, Nancy and Charlie must confront their assumptions about instinct, logic, and consciousness. Knowing that he was using theatrical techniques—such as the blurring of the real and the strange onstage—with which the Broadway audience was unaccustomed, Albee decided to test the play out of town at Baltimore’s Mechanic Theater and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. There, he refined the piece, cutting the entire second act (a significant edit for a playwright that had previously altered only a word or two during previews). When *Seascape* arrived on Broadway, it received mixed reviews from critics and audiences; while it played for only 65 performances, the Pulitzer Prize committee awarded it that year’s prize.

Despite garnering his second Pulitzer Prize for *Seascape*, Albee found it increasingly difficult to work in the hostile New York theater community during the 1970s and ’80s. “One tries not to be paranoid, but I get the impression they’re laying in wait for me,” said Albee. “I seem to bring out an intensity of response in critics. I don’t get much indifference. If I’m going to be slammed, it’s almost with pathological hostility.” Critics and audiences hated the perceived self-consciousness and headiness of *Listening* (1976), *Counting the Ways* (1976), *The Lady from Dubuque* (1980), *Lolita* (1981), and *The Man Who Had Three Arms* (1982), the last of which Broadway critics viewed as a personal attack on them. *New York Times* critic Frank Rich accused Albee of creating “a temper tantrum in two acts” and compared the protagonist’s loss of his third arm to Albee’s loss of his talent.

Personally and professionally, Albee was struggling. He was drinking to excess and felt he was losing artistic control. These plays were somehow harder for him to shape; he found what he was striving for maddeningly beyond reach. As a playwright who was used to constructing his plays like a musical score, he was frustrated that directors, producers, and actors were making unauthorized changes to his work. Knowing that he needed a safe space to experiment with bold theatrical and thematic ideas, Albee broke ties with Broadway. He began teaching at the University of Houston and premiering a series of one-act plays at universities: *Finding the Sun* (1983), *Envy* (1985), and
Edward Albee was known for writing what I have always referred to as psychological stage directions. In addition to writing the common, yet very specific, physical descriptions—“Begins to crawl stage right,” or “Gives the stick to Charlie, who, without looking at it, raises it in his right hand,” or “Leslie and Sarah begin to move back, paw in paw, glancing back at the plane as they move”—Edward also described how certain moments should be played and maybe even felt by the actor. Like all playwrights, he was interested in the action contained in words, and like most playwrights (especially since him), he was interested in the music of his worlds. He often wrote down how he thought one could get there. He scored his scripts.

These stage directions are frequently frustrating to actors around week two of rehearsal, as lines start to be memorized but not yet deeply personalized. It then becomes my job as director, with one eye still on that score, to make sure that “It was terrifying!” is said with “some awe,” or “Um-hum; um-hum” is said while “Feigning enthusiastic belief.” How do I help translate Edward’s request for “bemusement” in the moment we have constructed? What are “Final words; some haste”? “Quiet hysteria”? “A bedtime story”? “Losing, but game”? “Shy, but helpful”? “Dogmatic; glum”? “Chuckles ruefully”? “Grim; gathers his tail in front of him”?

These are bread crumbs that lead us home, left behind to reveal character, tone, subtext, and the timbre of the moment, which when deeply owned and stitched together create our story. Edward has given difficult but fun marching orders. They are the how of what is spoken and done, how we now breathe and feel together.

“Three-and-a-Half”

In 1989, Albee’s mother died. Though mother and son had never been close—Frances refused to acknowledge her son’s homosexuality and his partner, sculptor Jonathan Thomas—her death freed something in Albee and provided the inspiration for Three Tall Women (1991). In the first act, we meet 92-year-old A, 52-year-old caretaker B, and 26-year-old lawyer C; C has arrived with paperwork that A has neglected. In the second act, these characters are revealed as three ages of the same woman. As they watch A die, they bicker, console, and reminisce. Three Tall Women was “not only about dying and death,” said Gussow, “but also about the changes that cumulatively define a life. Why do we become what we are? In that second act, three ages of woman confront one another, asking what we know, when we know it, and whether one can ever learn from experience.”

The play premiered at Vienna’s English Theatre—which had been an artistic home for Albee for a decade—before opening off Broadway in 1994. It was a critical success, winning the Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play, the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play, the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Having now received three (or as Albee was fond of saying, “three-and-a-half”) Pulitzer Prizes, Albee was back on top.
“Imagine What You Can’t Imagine”

As the American theater entered a new millennium, Albee’s place as one of the country’s master playwrights was secure. Yet between teaching, lecturing, supporting young playwrights, and attending rehearsals for his plays around the world, he kept writing and demanding that audiences engage fully with his art. In *The Play About the Baby* (1998), he returned to a technique he had first used in *The American Dream* and *The Man Who Had Three Arms*: he broke the fourth wall, involving the audience directly in the action.

“I don’t think audiences should be allowed to be disinvolved,” he said in a 2003 interview. Albee never tired of exploring the fusion of truth and illusion with which we anchor our lives. In *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (2000), he tackled the taboo subject of love between man and beast. But Martin’s love for Sylvia, a goat, is merely one of the topics discussed in this play, alongside alienation, longing, and the limits of tolerance. “Imagine what you can’t imagine,” Albee told television interviewer Charlie Rose. “Imagine that, all of a sudden, you found yourself in love with a Martian, in love with something you can’t conceive of. I want everybody to be able to think about what they can’t imagine and what they have buried deep as being intolerable and insufferable. I want them to just think freshly and newly about it.”

Albee wrote three more plays after *The Goat*—*Occupant* (2001), *Peter and Jerry: Homelife* and *The Zoo Story* (2004; later retitled *At Home at the Zoo*), and *Me, Myself & I* (2007). In 2005, he received a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement and in 2008, four New York theaters teamed up for “The Albee Season,” producing five of his short plays in celebration of his 80th birthday. Albee died on September 16, 2016 at his home in Montauk.

“All my plays are about people missing the boat, closing down too young, coming to the end of their lives with regret at things not done, as opposed to things done,” said Albee. “I find that most people spend too much time living as if they’re never going to die. They skid through their lives. Sleep through them sometimes. Anyway, there are only two things to write about—life and death.”

**Sources**
The Curtain Rises
Director Pam MacKinnon on Seascape and Albee

By Simon Hodgson

At the 2001 Eugene O'Neill Playwriting Conference in Waterford, Connecticut, two young East Coast theater-makers made a connection. Pam MacKinnon was an artist building a reputation as a director of new work with downtown New York theater companies such as Clubbed Thumb. Michele Volansky was a dramaturg and literary manager working at Philadelphia Theater Company (PTC). MacKinnon was at the O’Neill to direct a workshop of a new play by Sheri Wilner—“a mix of serious, surreal, funny, and drop-in loneliness,” she says. As soon as Volansky saw the workshop, she realized that MacKinnon would be a good match for PTC’s next show: The Play About the Baby, by Edward Albee.

The MacKinnon-Albee match was a great one. Over the next 20 years, the director would go on to become Albee’s foremost contemporary interpreter, helming productions of his work including The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? at Houston’s Alley Theatre, Peter and Jerry at Second Stage Theatre, Occupant at Signature Theatre Company, A Delicate Balance at Broadway’s John Golden Theatre, and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? at Steppenwolf Theatre Company. MacKinnon would take the last production—starring Tracy Letts and Amy Morton—to Broadway, winning the Tony Award for Best Direction in 2013. As she approached rehearsals for her 11th Albee production, she talked with us about Seascape, her plans for The Geary Theater, and her collaboration with the playwright.

Can you talk about your first meeting with Albee?

It’s the fall of 2001 and I’m cycling through Tribeca in Manhattan, remembering the words of wisdom from my agent. “Don’t be nervous, because if Edward detects that you’re nervous, he won’t respect you.” What a horrible thing to say to a young director. [Laughs] I wasn’t going to be nervous, but now I’m nervous! So I park my bike, find the address, and press the buzzer. And I’m waiting, wondering where he is. Only later did I figure out that the buzzer was in one place, the elevator in another. All of a sudden this voice comes from behind me. So I’m already feeling like I’m in the weird headspace of an Albee play. Then we cross the street to the restaurant and I have a hard time with the push-pull of the door. I’m getting turned around—and more and more nervous!

But it was a good meeting. It wasn’t “younger woman and famous older playwright having coffee for no good reason.” It was to discuss *The Play About the Baby*, a current work still present in his mind. I was incredibly fortunate to have first met Edward to direct his newer plays. I wasn’t the 17,000th director to helm *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at that first lunch. [Laughs]

How did you get from that initial Albee experience to directing the first regional production of *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* a year later?

*The Goat* was hugely successful on Broadway, and the Alley Theatre in Houston did the first regional production. The Alley was one of Edward’s artistic homes; he worked a lot there, particularly when he was less popular in New York. I’d directed a play at the Alley, and when Edward recognized my name on a list of possible directors, he picked me.

The Alley was ambitiously producing *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* upstairs with Judy Ivey as Martha, and *The Goat* downstairs. *Woolf* was a week ahead in rehearsal—a much longer play, one that Edward had seen hundreds of times—whereas I was downstairs, in a small theater, a week later in the rehearsal process, with a more contained play, and one he was still interested in. It was only its second production. I had the great luxury of Edward visiting my rehearsal room frequently. We had fun together.

What was he like in rehearsals?

Really generous. He had a reputation for being tough and he was. In his mind’s eye and ear, he knew what his plays should be. But he definitely empowered me as a director. Especially when I was a junior person in some of those rooms, he would give me the hard note in private, expect it to be taken, then put on the public face to say to the company, “I’ll see you all in two weeks, you’re in great hands.” He was demanding, but expected his collaborators to shine.
You’ve worked with dozens of actors in your 11 Albee productions. What have you learned about casting an Albee play?

There is something great about having at least one actor in a company who is also a writer, someone like Tracy Letts or Bill Pullman. And I’m about to work with playwright and actor Ellen McLaughlin again on Seascape. These actors understand that you can’t play a metaphor. Writers write metaphors, but actors have to ground them, to massage those lines into something that will hit your ear as nothing but human.

What is Albee exploring in Seascape?

This play is about love and marriage and what you want to do with your life. It’s an accessible play. All his plays feel richly funny, but Seascape feels much more comedy than tragedy, with an ending that looks ahead. I think the end of Virginia Woolf is hopeful, though it’s a hopeful that takes your breath away. Seascape feels unambiguously hopeful. I can picture what he was looking at when he wrote it—the waves of the Atlantic at the tip of Long Island. Edward had a house there, right on the beach at Montauk, that he built with the money he made from Virginia Woolf. I’m sure he wrote the bulk of Seascape there.

Seascape feels like a very relaxed play, a beach play. If a character is saying, “There was a time in our marriage when I felt you were cheating on me,” that’s a heavy-duty conversation. But if you say it at the beach, as opposed to 1 a.m. in a faculty housing living room with a bar cart behind you—that’s different. There’s something more side-by-side about the couple in Seascape, instead of being in opposition to each other. This is a play about transition. It felt appropriate, as I swap life as a freelance director in New York for the city by the bay with my partner of 11 years, John. I’m interested in the next challenge. Not just to continue but to jolt ourselves into a next chapter.
As we approach rehearsals, what are you looking forward to?

Working with the crew; [Head Carpenter] Miguel Ongpin and [Head of Sound] Suzanna Bailey, just to name two, are vital to this organization, with huge institutional memory. I’m also excited to collaborate with Danyon Davis, our new head of movement in the M.F.A. Program, in activating the physicality of Sarah Nina Hayon and Seann Gallagher, the actors playing lizards Sarah and Leslie.

Lizards are fascinating. When you look at marine iguanas [the inspiration for the lizards in our production], they’re fish with arms and legs—they’re on the seascape, in between the ocean and the earth. This is a play about evolution; and while people aren’t that far from the muck, lizards are further back on that continuum. Sarah and Leslie have language, but no emotion or psychology; they’re running on pure instinct. How does that manifest itself in a rehearsal process? It’ll be a physical-first approach, rather than setting down a purely psychological path.

What thoughts have you shared with Sound Designer Brendan Aanes, specifically on the jet planes?

They’re scary, right? It’s another nod to the surreal. Those planes—which are sound in our world—always get commented on in the same way after they go over; that’s not natural human behavior. That adrenaline shift of sound, of the unknown—I want that to be scary. It’s also a symbol of evolution, from the seagull to the jet plane. They tie in to one of the themes of *Seascape*—you can go anywhere, but it’s also dangerous. And if you only hook into the danger, you’ll never go anywhere. Thematically, the planes feel important.

How are your set design plans coming?

The opening line of *Seascape* is, “The curtain rises.” David Zinn, my longtime collaborator designing both sets and clothes, and I took that to mean that this world is set in a theater. I want to hear surf from behind the curtain when the audience arrives. Charlie will be seated on the dune, and Nancy will enter from the house, as if she’s just come back from exploring Geary Street.

What motivates those directorial choices? Is it instinctive, or more analytical?

In an Albee play, the text shows the way. But the idea behind that opening is that Nancy has bigger breath than Charlie. I want that movement: he’s settled and she’s on the move. That feels right. As opposed to curtain up—two static people. Nancy’s been out exploring. She is dissatisfied and wants. Edward wrote really amazing women. His women hold grudges. His women have sex drives. His women are funny. They are people, and as complex as his men.
Audiences haven’t seen Albee at A.C.T. in a decade. What are your thoughts about bringing him back to The Geary?

Edward wrote *Seascape* thinking about the theater in which it was going to be performed. This was written for a Broadway house. The Geary is a jewel box, a turn-of-the-century proscenium house—*Seascape* is written for that stage. I’m interested in both honoring that, and pushing it a bit further—to own The Geary as a new home for me as a director.

I’m interested in breaking down the barriers between actors and audiences. With *Sweat*, I encouraged director Loretta Greco to really push the action far downstage, to be close to us. And for *Her Portmanteau* in The Strand, I know director Victor Malana Maog is thinking the same way. I am taking that charge myself.

To confront the audience with the storytelling?

Yeah. You’re *in* that room. That’s important to me. Theaters can feel grand and presentational, at a remove. How do we mix that up? In *Seascape*, we have the opportunity to take over The Geary. I’m curious about the moments when the play pours into the laps of the audience. How can we make these rooms our own?
Love, Chess, and Chairs
The Limits of Language

By Annie Sears

If a Martian were to visit earth, American theoretical linguist Noam Chomsky mused, he might determine that all humans speak dialects of the same language. Sure, humans classify our communications into over 7,000 different languages, each specific to a community. But we all use nouns and verbs, subjects and objects. We all transform words into statements and questions, crafting original sentences as opposed to regurgitating a preset response. We don't have to be taught how to operate within a language, and nobody has to instill in us the desire to communicate. We do it as infants, from the moment we first cry for food.

Chomsky concluded that our brains must be genetically predisposed to language. Communication is an evolutionary instinct, reflected in ants’ pheromones, gorillas’ gestures, and of course, humans’ spoken and written languages. In Edward Albee’s Seascape, Leslie, Sarah, Charlie, and Nancy all use English as a means of forging a relationship. Like us, they communicate to publicly express their private lives, to bridge gaps between their subjective experiences of reality, and satisfy their inherent desire to connect with one another. Even so, language is imperfect. What are we to do when language proves a barrier?

What is language?

The most basic unit of language is a word: a collection of sounds and symbols assigned to an object. The specification assigned is important; there’s no inherent connection between the sounds we make for an object and the object itself. There’s nothing about my chair that means I have to call it a chair, but I call it a chair because the English-speaking community has designated that particular series of sounds for that particular object. Austrian British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) argued that we think in images, a sort of pictorial language. When I hear or read “chair,” I conjure an image of a chair in my mind; you do the same every time I write it here, so you and I are able to communicate by translating words into pictures.
But when someone speaks the word “chair,” I don’t always imagine a specific chair. I’m able to generalize, to cluster entities together under a single term. Wittgenstein compared this phenomenon to familial resemblance. Some family members share the same eyes, others the same gait. Each individual maintains a unique set of features, but there’s enough overlap that those individuals can easily be identified as belonging to one another. We’re able to generalize and categorize, to understand that a singular word refers to multiple objects.

On the other hand, we also understand that multiple words can refer to a single object. The term “house,” for instance, refers to a physical place where one lives. But we could also call a house “a residence,” “a dwelling,” or “a home,”—words which share a direct definition but have quite different connotations. “Residence” feels more official, “dwelling” more primal, and “home” more intimate. German philosopher Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) explained this phenomenon by differentiating between a word’s reference—the physical object or action that the word refers to—and a word’s sense: the presentation of the word, the way it designates that object. A word’s sense is the difference between a smile and a smirk, a cat and a kitty, a daddy and a patriarch.

How does language form?

We learn what words mean—both sense and reference—by listening to the way other members of our linguistic groups use them. If words are arbitrary and mean whatever we decide they mean, we need only know what others intend them to mean in order to communicate. In Seascape, for example, Nancy and Sarah belong to different communities that both use the word “mother” to mean a creature that has given birth to other infant creatures. Yet their senses of the word differ entirely. Lizard mothers lay their eggs and do not nurture their offspring after hatching, whereas human mothers assume responsibility for their young until they’re capable of caring for themselves. The sounds and symbols assigned to that familial role are identical for both mothers, but their meanings differ because because context—how your community uses the word—determines meaning.

Not only is a word’s meaning determined by the way it’s used, but a word is meaningless apart from its use. If you and I play chess, I’ll need help learning the rules. If you hold up the king and tell me it’s a king, you’ve given me the definition of the object. But if you don’t tell me which direction or how many spaces the king can travel per turn, I may know what the king means, but it doesn’t mean anything to me. In Seascape, Charlie uses this principle to taunt Leslie. Charlie is exasperated with all the explanations he and Nancy have to provide, so he tosses around words that he knows Leslie will not understand—primordial soup, treble clef, diesel engine—and refuses to define them. But even if Charlie were to give a referential definition, Leslie wouldn’t truly understand. This is why “whale” means nothing to Sarah and Leslie until they realize that they’ve seen one.
But can language really define everything?

As the characters in *Seascape* soon learn, we’re not able to give every word a reference-and-sense definition. What about the word “not”? Or “length”? Or, as proves troublesome for Charlie, “love”? We can describe love as a feeling of affection for another, but then we need to define affection. Perhaps a desire for the other? But how do we define desire. Longing? Pining? We get trapped in a circle of synonyms, able only to define a word with another word. We arrive at a point where we implicitly know, but cannot articulate, an answer.

Because they aren’t tied to any physical objects that can serve as an absolute reference, these terms for intangible, conceptual matters are subjective, defined best through experience. Consider pain. Perhaps we describe it as an unpleasant sensation or a discomfort, but that’s the best we can do. We come up with descriptors for pain: stinging, shooting, aching. But can I define those descriptors? Can I explain what aching pain feels like, and can I know that your experience of an ache is the same as mine? I can’t, which means the word “pain” doesn’t define pain itself, but indicates the sensation of pain and the manifestations of that sensation. “Pain” isn’t pain. It’s saying, “Ouch!” when someone steps on your toe. Similarly, for the lizards in *Seascape*, “love” isn’t love—or affection, affinity, or desire. It’s Leslie causing a rumpus so the other lizards leave Sarah alone so he can mate with her.
What does language do?

Some argue that a language’s words, meanings, and structures inform its speakers’ sense of reality; our understanding of the world is shaped by the way we describe and make sense of it. For example, it was previously thought that humans lacked the capacity to be inherently aware of their cardinal directions. Birds are able to decipher which direction is north, some biologists argue, because they have a magnetic bit in their beak. Ants are able to orient themselves using reflective surfaces on their backs to measure the angle at which the sunlight hits them. But humans have no such biological advantage and were traditionally thought incapable of maintaining this spatial awareness. However, the Australian aboriginal Guugu Yimidhirr group doesn’t use the categorizations “left” or “right,” but instead uses “north, south, east, and west.” Rather than saying, “The lizards entered from stage left,” members of this specific linguistic community might say, “The lizards entered from the west.” In order to communicate, these speakers must retain a sensory awareness of their cardinal orientation. Because of their language structure, they perceive the world differently than English speakers.
The theory that our language shapes our perception of reality is called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and it’s a bit controversial because it’s so difficult to test. After all, how can we know whether our language shapes our reality, or whether our reality, as rooted in our culture, shapes our language? In America, we tend to distinguish between a nurse and a male nurse; as a society, we have historically viewed nursing as a feminine profession. But did our view of nursing stem from the meaning of that word or our society’s views?

Are Nancy and Sarah’s respective understandings of motherhood in Seascape informed by the sense of the word (literally, someone who has given birth to offspring), or is their sense of motherhood formed by their respective communities and reinforced by the word’s continual use? Does Nancy view motherhood as nurturing a child until maturity because she has been brought up in a community that values it that way? It’s difficult to determine whether language shows us how to think or whether our thinking shapes our language. Regardless, there’s undeniably a connection between the two.

And when language falls short?

Thankfully, because language is rooted in our communities, it’s a living phenomenon. Our language will adapt with our societies as they grow and change. New words will be invented, new meanings will be assigned to old words, and we’ll adapt by listening to one another. Think of Leslie, Sarah, Charlie, and Nancy’s elation when they discover touchpoints they can all understand—coupling, whales, rays. At its core, language is a means to relationship. Though it will fail us at times, language will surely evolve, always developing until we’re better connected.

From Cardboard to Creature from the Black Lagoon
An Interview with Seascape Scenic and Costume Designer David Zinn

By Elspeth Sweatman

Not many people grow up to do the job they dreamed about as a kid. As a seven-year-old, David Zinn came home from a local production of Annie and built a miniature copy of the set out of cardboard. By the time he was in eighth grade, he was taking steps to turn his dream of designing for the stage into a reality. During high school, he interned at community theaters throughout the Seattle area. After moving to New York and graduating with a BFA in design from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, he made a name for himself off Broadway. He designed costumes for multiple productions at Target Margin Theater, including Mamba’s Daughter, for which he received a Special Citation Obie Award.

But Zinn didn’t want to design just costumes, he wanted to create a complete universe onstage. Without a large portfolio, however, it was a challenge to get scenic design work. After being rejected by the George Street Playhouse because of his lack of experience, Zinn looked farther afield for opportunities, finding work not in New York, nor in theater, but at the Santa Fe Opera, where his designs were well received. Now he had “these big set designs I could show people and they would say, ‘Oh you do those things,’” said Zinn in a 2015 interview with American Theatre magazine. “New York people saw these designs and realized I understand big spaces and I understand the vocabulary.”

Since that big break in 2002, Zinn has become one of New York’s most sought-after designers. Audiences have seen his work in more than 80 off-Broadway productions and 26 Broadway shows, including In the Next Room (or The Vibrator Play) (2009); Other Desert Cities (2011); Rocky (2014); Fun Home (2015); An Act of God (2016); and A Doll’s House, Part 2 (2017). His scenic and costume designs have received critical acclaim, including the 2008 Obie Award for Sustained Excellence of Costume and Set Design. He has been nominated for seven Tony Awards, winning two (Best Scenic Design for a Play for The Humans and Best Scenic Design of a Musical for SpongeBob SquarePants: The Broadway Musical). In the current 2018–19 Broadway season, he has designed sets for The Waverly Gallery and Torch Song, and sets and costumes for The Boys in the Band and Choir Boy.

OPPOSITE Scenic and costume designer David Zinn. Photo courtesy David Zinn.
Despite his busy schedule, Zinn wasn't going to miss the opportunity to work with director Pam MacKinnon again. The pair have a long-running collaboration, after working together on three plays by Berkeley native Itamar Moses—Bach at Leipzig (New York Theatre Workshop, 2005), The Four of Us (Manhattan Theater Club, 2008), and Completeness (Playwrights Horizons, 2011)—as well as Amélie, A New Musical (Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 2015; Center Theatre Group, 2016; and Broadway, 2017). Now they team up once again, this time at The Geary. In between opening nights for two of his Broadway productions, we chatted with Zinn about Edward Albee, lizards, and the Geary stage.

You designed costumes for Albee’s Three Tall Women at Intiman Theatre. What’s it like designing for an Albee play? Do you prepare for his work differently?

I approach his plays in the same way I approach every project. I start with the text: who are these people and what do they say about the world they’re in, both spoken and written in the author’s stage directions or notes. I look for clues there, but not answers. For Seascape, that clue was the first stage direction: “A curtain rises. Nancy and Charlie on a sand dune.” I thought it was interesting that the curtain is included. We are clearly in a theater. And there’s sand.

What challenges of putting a sand dune on the Geary stage?

The Geary is such a gorgeous theater and I’m honored to get to design for it, but it has the challenges that befall any theater built on the 19th-century model: the sightlines are hard. Trying to make an expansive world where the important staging can be seen by everyone is always a challenge.

What conversations have you had with Pam and the design team?

Our main conversation was about the mix of “real” and “theatrical” in the play. The audience in the theater is obviously not at a real beach with a real ocean, so what does having a sand dune inside a theater’s walls mean for the play? Does it need a sky? What is the sun here? How deafening is the plane noise? Where is it coming from? These can seem like parodies of questions, but they’re actually very important to how we make choices in design meetings and rehearsals.

Is it easier when you are the scenic and costume designer?

I’m not sure it’s easier, but I definitely like doing both. Depending on the show and my strengths as a designer, I try to do what fits me best. When I’m doing both elements, it makes the idea of keeping a similar world onstage easier. I always joke that it’s a little
easier to schedule meetings with the design team, but sometimes it’s nice to have a point of view in the mix that’s not my own. I’m flexible about it—happy for the control of the whole “world” onstage, and happy to release that control too. It depends on the project.

**Where do you get your inspiration from as a designer?**

From everywhere, but mostly from pictures. I’m not a super academic person; I don’t do tons of reading before working on something, probably to my detriment. I do have a healthy collection of picture resource books, and draw on them deeply. I rely mostly on a strong and mysterious emotional intelligence as it relates to images. Always research, always.

You’ve designed costumes for a wide variety of shows, from the realism of *Fun Home* to the energetic sea creatures in *SpongeBob SquarePants: The Broadway Musical*. What’s your process for creating costumes?

I sketch first to give a general shape, but I’m always thinking of the materials as I draw, especially with something like those lizards—they’re kind of marine iguanas crossed with the *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. You really are working it out as you draw. I don’t always draw; sometimes I just collect research if it’s a show that I’m just going to shop [find preexisting clothes], but even spending a little time noodling with a drawing does a great amount to help you see how the thing might come together.

**What are you most excited about with this production?**

Working with Pam again. She’s a frequent and beloved collaborator, and I have such admiration for her intelligence and savvy—I’ll follow her anywhere. I’m thrilled that in this case, “anywhere” is San Francisco.

Pam really trusts the artists she works with to translate dramaturgy into physical space. She has a really expansive and theatrical mind, and she has a great handle on the text, much better and deeper than I can ever hope to muster. She’s an encouraging guide to explore a new world with.

**What advice would you give someone who is interested in being a scenic and costume designer?**

I always give the same advice: be a deeply interesting person. Be engaged, have interests, have obsessions. Never stop thinking about it, or filling your well of visual and emotional intelligence. Say yes. Be empathetic. And see everything you can all the time.
Tales of Tails
A Glimpse of Lizards and Evolution

By Kayla Minton Kaufman

Even before Edward Albee’s *Seascape*, humans have had a complicated relationship with lizards. In his 1835 voyage to the Galapagos Islands, evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin was repulsed by the sheer number of iguanas (there was barely space to pitch a tent, the naturalist noted) and by the creatures’ “singularly stupid appearance.” Modern-day US herpetologist Eric Pianka, by contrast, describes lizards as “spectacularly beautiful terrestrial fish.” No matter how we see them, lizards have helped biologists understand evolution on a deeper level.

Leaping Lizards

Lizards offer extraordinary variety, from the tiniest species (the dwarf gecko) that’s smaller than a dime to the largest—the 10-foot long Komodo dragon. They can have no legs, two legs, or four legs, all decked out with toepads, claws, special scales, and more. The number of legs depends on the evolutionary needs of these reptiles: some species of underground lizards only have two legs so they can dig into the ground with less resistance, while some have none, enabling them to “swim” through the sand. Legs grant lizards a vast range of activity, including swimming, climbing, burrowing, gliding through air, leaping, running on water, and walking upside down across ceilings.

For both herpetologists and animal lovers, one of a lizard’s most remarkable abilities is the capacity to jettison its tail to avoid capture. Depending on how a species has evolved, tails can also serve one or more of five functions. Tails can act as a “fifth leg,” says Pianka, an additional way to propel the lizard through the world. Climbing lizards use their tails to ascend trees: part extra limb, part safety harness. For lizards like Leslie and Sarah—based on the swimming marine iguana—their strong, slightly flattened, oarlike tails help propel their bodies through water. Speedy terrestrial lizards rely on their tail for additional upright support. For these reptiles, losing their tails can mean losing their balance.

Whether slender or wide, tails often have the ability to store fats that help lizards survive hibernation (when a lizard shuts down its body in cold weather), estivation (dormant behavior in hot climates), or times of food scarcity. Gila monsters, for instance, survive for months solely on the fat deposits in their tails when food sources run short.
Scale Model

With communication that’s heavily dependent on visuals, looks matter to lizards. These reptiles keep their scales sleek and smooth, shedding old or rough skin in patches rather than in one piece like snakes do. All the ornamentation found on lizards’ bodies—horns, spikes, collars, and fringes—is made up of scales. Even the decorative crests on marine iguanas that run from head to tail, such as those on the Seascape costumes, are formed of long, pointed scales.

The coloration of these scales provides signals to any lizard (or researcher) who can read the code. Color can indicate a lizard’s age, sex, mood, and health, as well as the season and environment. Chameleons, famous for their ability to change color, can not only camouflage themselves with their environment to avoid predators, but they can also entice a potential mate by displaying bright, contrasting colors. This shade-shifting doesn’t have to be used for external messaging; if you watch marine iguanas lounging on lava rocks, you may detect a shift from black to red to gold depending on the heat or brightness of the sun and the iguana’s temperature.

Sixth Sense

For many lizards, vision is the most important of the five key senses. Often protruding from the sides of the face, lizard eyes are outstanding in their abilities. These reptiles’ unique eyelids allow for “lens-squeezing,” enabling lizards to focus on distant objects and enlarge images on their retina, much like a telephoto lens. Others, such as the panther chameleon, feature independent eye operation, allowing for 180-degree viewing from either eye. Some lizards even have a rudimentary third eye on the top of their heads; scientists have yet to fully understand its function.

Nocturnal lizards rely more heavily on their hearing abilities than daytime species (even though you can shoot a gun near a sleeping monitor lizard and not wake it up). Some lizards have evolved to respond to sound—especially at low frequencies)—through lateral body walls or lungs, which can be useful for hunting prey or finding safety in their environment. Lizards can also receive vital information to understand their surroundings through smell and taste; just like snakes, they flick out their tongues to take in airborne particles.

One of the lizard’s most extraordinary senses originates in its Jacobson’s organ, a body part found in the olfactory systems of several reptiles, which provides chemical-sensing abilities, or chemoreception. Using this, lizards are able to track prey, taste food, recognize friends, and court mates—a realm of sense and communication that far surpasses both the capacities and comprehension of humans.

A whole other set of senses comes with ectothermy, the reliance on outside sources for body heat. Ectothermic creatures such as lizards, crocodiles, and snakes use a variety of methods to regulate their blood temperatures. When diving into the freezing ocean, marine iguanas slow their heartbeats to half the rhythm they have on land, saving energy while they graze on algae. Returning to land, they laze on black lava rocks to absorb radiant warmth in the daytime, or crawl into piles of iguanas to stay warm at night.
More than Words

While *Seascape’s* lizards speak English, they also communicate in more lizard-like manners, through vocal communication including growls and barks, and physical communication featuring sniffing and poking. Though few have vocal cords that allow for Albee-style speech, lizards are known to grunt, squeak, click, chirp, hiss, cluck, and croak. More commonly, they use chemoreception and visual displays such as posturing to communicate with other lizards.

For territorial lizards, aggressive ownership attitudes drive much of their communication. Anoles squeak, iguanas hiss, and horned lizards vibrate their tails in dry leaves to create ominous rustling. Most lizards usually ward off intruders with physical, rather than sonic, displays—head-bobbing, vigorous push-ups, inflating their bodies, showing their teeth, or lashing their tails. More theatrical lizards erect frills, change colors, or expand their dewlaps, the loose skin around a lizard’s throat.

When push comes to shove, lizards will move from aggressive communication to physical hostility, including the butting and shoving familiar to marine iguana brawls. However, as masters of fleeing and hiding, these ingenious reptiles have evolved to innovate surprising lines of defense, as lizards puff up, hiss, cry, squirt blood, roll into a ball, feign death, defecate, vomit, shed their tails, or even shock-shed their outer layers of skin.

All this communication has one ultimate goal: courtship. In Act Two, Leslie responds to Charlie’s question about why he fell for Sarah with, “She *smelled* all right.” Whether it’s love at first sight or first smell, several senses are involved in courtship. Lizards may release their mating scents, heighten colors on flanks and undersides, or do push-ups. Once interest is established, courtship behavior continues to more intimate displays—nudging, licking, or biting on the flank. Like Leslie and Sarah, some lizards, such as the shingleback skink, stay together for life, with some timelines of loyalty extending past the average lifespan. Other species, including the whiptail lizard, may choose to shirk courtship entirely and instead choose parthenogenesis: producing offspring asexually (without the need for a partner).

Animal Instinct

As Charles Darwin’s derogatory remarks on lizards illustrate, humans have long believed that lizards lack basic reasoning. Our primitive understanding of their brains is clearly demonstrated by the phrase “lizard brain.” This pejorative description has historically been applied to the most primitive part of the human brain, dedicated to basic body functions and instinctive acts such as aggression and defensiveness.

Human understanding of lizard cognition, however, *is* evolving. Earlier studies of lizards were conducted in ways identical to mammal cognition tests—a critical error on the part of the human researchers. Distractions such as bright lights and loud sounds often affected reptiles adversely, while making negligible or positive differences for test mammals. In addition, mammals’ ability to self-regulate their internal temperature made
Becoming Lizards: A Note from A.C.T. Head of Movement Danyon Davis

People often confuse “movement work” in theater with dance or choreography—but they are actually two distinct art forms. In dance, the body is used to illustrate mood and convey emotion. Often the shapes and gestures are imposed on the performer by the choreographer. In theater, however, the body must serve the text. Physical actions onstage must help actors to clarify intentions, deal with obstacles, and obtain objectives. The actors themselves make choices in action and these actions pertain directly to the exact circumstances of the play and what the actor knows about the nature of the character. As a movement coach, I function like an editor: I help the actors to be clearer in their expression, adding things that were previously unaccounted for or stripping away something extraneous. The biggest part of my job is to help the actors make artistic choices that fall in line with the director’s overall vision for the play.

In our discussions so far for Edward Albee’s Seascape, Director Pam MacKinnon has emphasized the need to help the actors discover the physical life of a lizard. We’ve talked about the “enteric brain,” the instinctive part of our brains that contains the hardwiring for our emotional lives. Most animals act immediately on their feelings—there isn’t a whole lot of protracted consideration or debate. Part of my task will be to help the actors to bypass the “control tower brains” above their shoulders and connect more with the immediacy of their “gut-brains.” I’ve been sketching in some lizard-like movement vocabulary on my own as I prepare for rehearsals to start, but ultimately it will be up to the actors to pick up what they find useful and to create their own physical score. Like any good coach, I make sure the players are mentally prepared and capable of sustaining a high quality of effort. The work is successful if I am enhancing strong artistic choices, not necessarily providing them myself.
them able to conduct tests in most lab room conditions. By contrast, cold-blooded lizards weren’t able to show their smarts in early testing because they weren’t able to regulate their temperature, and were labeled as stupid.

That viewpoint is shifting, as recent tests unlock lizard intelligence. In one study at the University of Missouri, anoles deduced where insect larvae were hidden, figured out how to open a hiding device very different from their typical obstacles, and adjusted and relearned when larvae were hidden elsewhere. In an Australian experiment at Macquarie University, tree skinks learned from videos of other skinks solving problems that they later faced. These studies, among others, have proved that lizards are capable of behavioral flexibility, creative problem solving, and social learning. That’s why they have been able to adapt and survive for so long on earth. Though scientists are only beginning to understand lizards’ evolutionary prowess, these creatures clearly have more to teach us than Darwin imagined.

A Seascape Synopsis

Act One

On an isolated beach, retired, married couple Nancy and Charlie relax amidst the sand dunes. Charlie is lounging; Nancy is painting. An airplane soars overhead, and the couple comments on how loud it is.

Smitten with the scenery, Nancy suggests that she and Charlie become “seaside nomads.” She would love to explore the beaches of the world, seeing different colors of sand, varieties of plants, and races of people. Charlie, however, is content to settle. “We’ve earned a little rest,” he says. Charlie’s desire to do nothing irritates Nancy; she thinks it’s selfish of him to deny her these adventures. Doesn’t he love her? She would poison herself if Charlie were to die. Wouldn’t he do the same for her? Charlie assures her that he would, and if Nancy wants to travel, they can travel. But Nancy knows he doesn’t mean it.

An airplane soars overhead, and just as before, the couple comments on how loud it is. Looking toward the sea, Nancy notices that they’re no longer alone on the beach. Their neighbors are too far away to make out. They seem to be swimming.

Nancy reminds Charlie of one of his childhood fantasies: to live underwater, like a fish. Charlie wistfully remembers forcing all the air out of his lungs and sinking to the bottom of the cove floor, where he’d open his eyes and wonder at the sea-life milling about him. When he’d resurface, Charlie would splay on the rocks—naked. Nancy encourages him to reenact this memory. Except for the distant couple—are they getting closer?—they’re alone, and Charlie is “quite presentable.” But Charlie refuses. He’s too old, and he’s forgotten how.

Exasperated, Nancy reveals that she once thought of divorcing Charlie. He had been ignoring her sexually, and she was concerned he was cheating on her—perhaps not in reality, but in his mind. Charlie promises that he’s never considered another woman. Reassured, she insists that Charlie teach her how to sink. Tomorrow, he says. Nancy knows he won’t.

Yes, their neighbors are getting closer, but they’re still not close enough for Nancy to see clearly. Charlie teases her: if he were to take her underwater, her aging eyes wouldn’t allow her to appreciate it. They both laugh. Charlie tells Nancy that she is a good wife, and she reciprocates. She happily lists all the ways Charlie has been good to her. “You have had a good life,” he tells her. Frustrated, Nancy says that she doesn’t want to have had a good life; she wants to be having a good life.

The other couple pops up over a nearby sand dune. Charlie and Nancy are so engrossed in their bickering, it takes them a moment to notice the newcomers, two human-sized lizards. Charlie is horrified. He orders Nancy to find a stick that he can wield in self-defense. Nancy’s in no rush; these lizards fascinate more than terrify her. The best she can find is a twig. The male lizard finds a sturdy stick and raises it above
his head, ready to attack. But an airplane soars overhead, sending both lizards scurrying behind a dune in panic.

Charlie is in awe. Something so otherworldly shouldn’t exist on an everyday beach. They must have already died and entered another realm. He blames the liver paste Nancy put in their sandwiches; it probably spoiled and poisoned them. His lament doesn’t last long, as the lizards soon reemerge.

If they’re not dead, Nancy reasons, their best chance to survive is assuming a submissive pose. They lie on their backs with their legs in the air, as the two huge lizards approach.

**Act Two**

The couples eye each other, unsure of how to proceed. Leslie, the male lizard, slithers over and gives both humans a sniff. Charlie quivers; Nancy smiles. Sarah, the female lizard, decides to join Leslie in inspecting the humans. There’s no telling what trouble he may get into alone.
Nancy wants Charlie to greet Leslie, but Charlie is put off. Sensing Charlie’s nerves, Leslie raises a threatening claw. Sarah scolds him and spurs Leslie to address Charlie verbally: “Pardon me?” In response, Charlie announces that he’s on his guard; after all, what if the lizards try to eat him? Leslie and Sarah are confused—of course they weren’t going to eat the humans, but were the humans going to eat them? That’s ridiculous, Charlie says. He’s the one who has the right to be scared. The lizards are strange, and he can’t anticipate their habits. “You’re pretty odd yourselves,” says Leslie, “though you’ve probably never looked at it that way.”

Nancy tries to shake Leslie’s hand. But the lizards don’t understand that custom, nor do they know what hands are. Or cows. Or cooking. Or many of the other things Charlie and Nancy mention. Both lizards are open to learning. They each shake Nancy’s hand, but Leslie refuses to extend Charlie the same courtesy. Pointing disdainfully at Charlie’s shirt, he asks, “What is it?” Charlie sneers: What is it?! He thinks it should be obvious, but Nancy is more patient. She explains that humans wear clothes to cover their sex parts, such as breasts. Leslie and Sarah don’t know what breasts are. It seems easier to show rather than tell, so Nancy invites Sarah to peek down her shirt. Sarah recalls a large fish that had its young attached to its underside somehow. Yes, whales—something they all know about!

Attempting to be cordial, Charlie asks Sarah if she has any young. Sarah has laid 7,000 eggs, Leslie boasts. Nancy wonders how they keep track of them all. They don’t,
Sarah admits. Some get caught on plants. Some float away. Some get eaten. Nancy clarifies that humans “couple” just like lizards, but usually have one child at a time. Nancy has three total. Leslie scoffs; that’s nothing compared to Sarah. And what do humans do if their young die? Well, Nancy explains, humans protect their young until they’re ready to be on their own. Because we love our children, Charlie adds.

Love? The lizards don’t understand. It’s an emotion, Nancy says. She lists off several other emotions, hoping that Leslie and Sarah will recognize one. Doesn’t Nancy realize this is futile? Charlie says. He has a better idea: define love using examples from Leslie and Sarah’s own lives. He asks them to remember how they met. It was mating season, Leslie recalls. Sarah was reaching peak maturity, and Leslie drove off the other male lizards. There, Charlie says. Leslie wanted Sarah, so he must have loved her. The lizards look at Charlie blankly. “Might as well be talking to a fish,” says Charlie. Leslie takes great offense. He hates fish; they overrun the water, they take over where you live, and they’re stupid. Charlie laughs—Leslie is a bigot!

Nancy reminds Charlie that none of this matters. In his mind, they’re all dead. She ridicules Charlie’s distrust of anything extraordinary. Charlie shouts that he’s glad he’s dead. He could never live with Nancy ever again anyway. Leslie is concerned. If Nancy and Charlie are dead, do he and Sarah exist? “I think I exist,” he says. Leslie is unknowingly quoting Descartes, notes Charlie, but that’s too complex a concept for a lizard. When Nancy reprimands him, Charlie bristles. Still believing he might be dead, he questions why death isn’t the release he expected. Shouldn’t that be a reward for a life well-lived? Seeing his distress, Nancy kisses Charlie and promises that everything will be all right.

An airplane passes overhead. As Leslie and Sarah scamper into hiding, Nancy and Charlie comment on how loud it is. Seeing the lizard’s fear, Nancy and Charlie try to explain the invention. Humans have manufactured airplanes to explore the sky, and also submarines to explore the ocean floor. Nancy recounts Charlie’s personal ocean-floor exploration for Leslie and Sarah, but Charlie brushes it off. It was nothing, really. To Nancy, though, it’s everything; it used to make Charlie happy.

Charlie asks Leslie and Sarah why they came up on land in the first place. We just felt like we didn’t belong anymore, says Sarah. That’s evolution, Charlie explains. Creatures have become more and more complex, leading up to humans—who have made tools and art, and are aware of their own mortality. Leslie wants definitions, but Charlie offers only an insult: those characteristics separate humans from brute beasts. Leslie doesn’t know what that means, but he doesn’t like it. He attacks, choking Charlie until Nancy and Sarah’s screams loosen his grip.

Leslie decides that he and Sarah should return underwater. As a parting gesture, Charlie and Leslie shake hands. They’ll inevitably return to land someday, Nancy councils, so why not stay? Charlie and Nancy could teach them how to adjust. Leslie settles. “All right. Begin.”
Aerodynamics is the study of moving air, especially as it moves around an object such as an airplane, kite, or bird. Aerodynamics looks at the forces of lift, which enable an object to defy gravity, as well as the forces of drag that keep an object grounded.

An agnostic is someone who believes that it’s impossible to know whether or not God exists, whereas an atheist holds that God does not exist. In Seascape, Nancy argues that Charlie is an atheist; he is no longer open to the possibility of anything beyond his everyday experiences.

When Nancy describes herself as “all pink and ribbons,” she’s referencing her femininity. Nancy views herself as desirable, but Charlie shows no sexual interest in her.

The Amazon is the Earth’s largest rainforest, spanning regions of Brazil, as well as parts of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela.

To be ambidextrous is to be able to use both one’s right and left hands equally well.

Apprehension is the fear that something bad will happen.

Arthritis refers to pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints that can hinder mobility and one’s ability to carry out daily tasks. Arthritis is America’s most prevalent disability, with over 50 million Americans suffering from it.

Beachcombing is a recreational activity in which participants search a beach for tidal treasures such as sea glass, stones, seashells, and driftwood (a piece of wood that has washed ashore).

A bigot is a person who stubbornly holds to their own opinions and is prejudiced against, or intolerant of, people that hold different opinions.

Brie is a creamy, white cheese within a firmer rind of edible, white mold. Brie originated in the northern French region of Brie.

Canasta is a complex card game with several variations. Canasta usually involves two full decks and two pairs of partners collecting sets of three or more cards known as melds. The game originated in Uruguay in the late 1930s, and became popular in America in the 1950s.

Cannibals are creatures that eat the flesh of their own species.
A chattel is any sort of personal possession, (but not real estate). Historically, this word has also been used to refer to wives, children, and slaves.

**Conceptual matters** refer to abstract ideas, such as love and happiness, rather than physical objects.

**Courting** is similar to dating, with potential romantic partners spending time with one another to determine if they should marry, guided by parents or mentors. Various cultural and religious communities have different rules for courtship, but generally, it is seen as a more serious emotional investment, whereas dating can be casual and driven by sexual desires rather than emotional or spiritual connections.

**Coral** is a stony, often colorful substance made when coral polyps—tiny, soft, marine creatures that secrete calcium to form a hard protective shell—attach themselves to solid, underwater surfaces such as rocks. When lots of coral settle in one area, a coral reef forms.

A **corset** is a woman's undergarment designed to better shape one's figure. In **Seascape**, Nancy refers to this garment in a list of things she could give up if she and Charlie were to retire and cease engaging with the world.

A **crag** is a steep, jagged cliff.

“**Crazy as a loon**” describes someone with bizarre behavior. The phrase has two possible origins. One is the common loon, a peculiar species of bird with an off-putting call. Loons are often vocal at night, when most other birds are silent. The other possible origin is “loon” as a shortened form of “lunatic,” or a person suffering from mental illnesses or disorders.

A **culvert** is a man-made tunnel that carries water under a road.

**René Descartes** (1596–1650) was a French thinker credited as the father of modern philosophy. He was particularly concerned with proving the existence of the world, of God, and of himself. In **Seascape**, Charlie references Descartes’s most famous musing: “**Cogito ergo sum**,” or “I think, therefore I am.”

To be **devious** is to be deceitful, attempting to get what one wants by being sneaky.

An **eddy** is a specific type of water current that moves circularly against the primary current, creating a small whirlpool. Eddies form when the normal flow of the current is interrupted, often by a boulder or some other obstruction in the waterway. In **Seascape**, Nancy confuses an eddy with a rip current, the return of water to the sea from the shore. Rip currents can be dangerous, as they can sweep swimmers out to sea at a speed of eight feet per second.

**An eon** is a unit of time that is technically equal to one million years, but it is often used to exaggerate time, equating it to eternity.

**Evolution** is scientist Charles Darwin’s (1809–82) widely accepted theory that all organisms have developed from other organisms; for example, humans have evolved from monkeys. Darwin hypothesized that the first organism emerged when ultraviolet radiation—a
Nancy mentions several places she would like to visit:

**The Alps** are a mountain range that extends through France, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, and Italy. Offering spectacular views and exceptional recreation, the Alps attract mountain climbers, skiers, hikers, and swimmers.

**The Copacabana** is one of the most famous neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Its 2.2-mile beach makes it a popular tourist destination in South America.

**Martha’s Vineyard** is an island off the coast of Massachusetts known as a summer-getaway location for affluent vacationers.

**Pago Pago** is the capital of American Samoa, a group of islands in the south-central Pacific Ocean 2,200 miles southwest of Hawaii and 1,600 miles northeast of New Zealand.

**Riviera** is the Italian word for “coastline” and is most likely a reference to the French Riviera, the Mediterranean coastline in southeastern France (also known as the Côte d’Azur).
An exhibitionist is someone who intentionally draws attention to themselves through bawdy behavior, often by exposing their genitals.

To “give [someone] the pip” is to annoy them. The phrase stems from a respiratory disease that afflicted birds in the mid-15th century. By the 19th century, the word had transitioned to describe someone who is angry, as in, “She’s got the pip.”

Gills are the organs that fish and amphibians use to breathe underwater. Gills filter oxygen out of the water and transport it through the respiratory system.

A hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration. For example, “I’ve reminded you a million times” or “This is taking forever!”

type of electromagnetic ray with a wavelength shorter than violet rays but longer than x-rays—encountered a primordial soup, a liquid solution that contained oxygen, carbon, and amino acids (the building blocks of proteins) among other elements necessary for life. Since that initial catalyst created living organisms, those that inherited genetic traits best suited for their environment have survived the longest and reproduced the most successfully. With each new generation, genes mutate, or change. A change in genes yields a change in an organism’s biological makeup. Over millennia, these series of genetic mutations will cause organisms to become so different from their predecessors that they can be classified as a separate species.
Icarus and his father Daedalus are Greek mythological figures who constructed artificial wings, held together by wax, to escape their imprisonment on the island of Crete. Daedalus warned his son that soaring too close to the sun would prove perilous, but Icarus was curious. When he followed the sun's rays higher, the wax on his wings melted, and he plummeted into the ocean.

Imagery is the literary term used to describe language that appeals to the five senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. Through imagery, a reader can recreate the scene being described in their mind.

If something is implicit, it is obviously true; it either doesn’t need to be stated expressly, or it can be implied.

To inundate is to overwhelm someone or something, for example inundating a person with information or a city with flooding.

La petite morte (French for “the little death” or “the brief loss of consciousness”) refers to the transcendent sensation of orgasm, which sometimes leads to feelings of sadness.

A lean-to is a temporary shelter that is supported by another, stable structure such as a tree or an existing wall.

Leviathan traditionally refers to a monstrous sea creature that appears in several biblical accounts, such as the book of Jonah. The term is also often equated with large and formidable organizations, governments, or vehicles. For example, the Titanic was a leviathan of a ship.
Levitation is the act of causing an object to float in midair.

Liver paste, also referred to as liver pâté, is a dish of minced meat popular in Northern and Eastern Europe. Pâté combines organ and muscle meat—most often chicken, pork, or duck—with a variety of spices to create a meatloaf-like dish. Some pâtés are thin enough to spread on bread or crackers.

A lichee nut (also spelled lychee) is a fruit most commonly found in southeast Asia. Lychees are small, succulent pieces of white flesh surrounding an inedible, pit-like center and enveloped in a rough shell, giving it a nut-like appearance. When the fruit portion is dried—similar to a raisin—it is referred to as a lychee nut.

A lichen is a slow-growing, plantlike organism that forms on solid surfaces such as rocks and trees.

Lotto is a shortened term for “lottery,” a game of chance in which people buy a ticket featuring random numbers, in the hope of earning a prize—often a sum of money—should their numbers be chosen.

Mammaries are breasts, physical features unique to female mammals—such as whales and humans—which produce milk for their young.

The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife is a play by French writer Anatole France (1844–1924). The term “dumb” in this title refers to someone who cannot speak. In Seascape, Nancy cannot remember the play’s author. She suggests Molière (1622–73) and Beaumarchais (1732–99), two other French playwrights best known for their comedies. Molière wrote Tartuffe (1665) and Le Misanthrope (1666). Beaumarchais wrote Le Barbier de Séville (1773) and Le Mariage de Figaro (1778).

Melancholia refers to the four humors, an ancient Greek belief in the four fluids of the body: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. These four humors corresponded with certain personality traits and ailments. Someone who was melancholy or depressed was believed to have too much black bile in their body. The idea of balancing the four humors continued to influence medical practices well into the 19th century, and became the foundation of Western medicine.

Moles are brown or black spots on the skin that occur when melanocytes—the cells that contain skin pigment—grow close together rather than evenly throughout the skin. Moles are usually harmless, but can develop into skin cancer.

A nomad is a member of a community (or an individual) unattached to a specific location. Nomads have no permanent home; they travel to find what they need.

Palsy refers to paralysis and muscle spasms. Types of palsy include cerebral palsy—a lifelong condition that is caused by abnormal brain development and affects one’s ability to control all muscle groups—and Bell’s palsy, a temporary condition resulting from a virus that affects the facial muscles.

The term pert means attractive or lively.
Rays are sea creatures with flat, diamond-shaped bodies composed primarily of cartilage. To propel itself through the water, the ray undulates its wings, or flaps them in a wave-like motion. There are over 500 different species of ray; the most common are the manta ray and the stingray.

The phrase “retirement farms” refers to nursing homes, multi-unit housing facilities designed for the elderly to live together in a community and receive assistance completing their daily tasks.

Romeo and Juliet is a play by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) that chronicles the tragic love story of the title characters. Caught between their feuding families, Romeo and Juliet make a plan to be together; Juliet takes a potion that makes her appear dead, but the letter to Romeo explaining this doesn’t arrive. When he sees her lifeless body, he stabs himself. Juliet awakens to find Romeo’s body and, overcome with grief, she also stabs herself. In Seascape, Nancy insists that she would poison herself if Charlie were to grow ill. When Charlie agrees that he would do the same, Nancy comments that she, like Juliet, would likely come back to life.

A rumpus is a loud, disorderly commotion.

Sand fleas are small crustaceans that burrow in beach and desert sands. Like mosquitoes, sand fleas suck human blood when they bite and leave saliva behind, resulting in itchy, red welts. Bites are most common on the feet and ankles, as sand fleas cannot jump very high.
To be standoffish is to be antisocial. Sometimes, standoffish people can also be curt—short, cold, and distant—in their conversations.

Taps is a special bugle melody played at military funerals and memorials.

To be unfettered or unencumbered is to be free of burdens.

A vegetable can refer to an edible plant or, in slang usage, to a person whose mental and physical functioning is so severely impaired that they lack normal responsiveness.

“The sound of one hand clapping” is a famous riddle in Zen Buddhist philosophy to which there is no answer. The student meditates on the riddle until they attain some sort of insight. In Seascape, this reference is ambiguous. As Leslie and Sarah approach, Nancy exclaims, “We’re making history, Charlie!” Charlie, believing he’s already died or is about to be killed by Leslie, may be using the riddle to dismiss the importance of making history. The sound of one hand clapping is nothing, and if they die without witnesses, making history means nothing.
Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think Edward Albee decided to make the younger couple lizards? How would this story be different if it featured two human couples?

2. In what ways does Seascape explore ideas of change, transition, and evolution? In what ways do we evolve or transition as individuals or as communities?

3. Are we too quick to judge strangers by our differences rather than our similarities?

4. Language is an expression of our experiences. What are some aspects of our lives in 2019—such as the cloud or Twitter retweets—that are hard to define?

5. Do you agree with Charlie, that retirement is a time to do nothing, or with Nancy, who wants to explore the world now that they have the chance?

6. Albee was a playwright who wanted audiences to engage with art, to question their assumptions and think about their own lives. How do great artists like Albee get us to look at our world in a different way?

For Further Information


