



wright should also be a visual artist since a play is, amongst other things, a set of moving pictures."

During his lean years, Albee also turned to directing. He's staged his own plays as well as works by Beckett, Mamet, Shepard and Lanford Wilson. But what of the theory that writers are too close to their own work to be its best interpreter? "It's a canard," says Albee, "put out by the Society of Stage Directors to protect their own members. There are some writers who shouldn't even be allowed in the theatre: I adored Tennessee Williams but he would change anything anyone told him to during rehearsals, which is why so many of his plays exist in multiple versions. But you could name plenty of other writers — Brecht, Beckett, Pinter for a start — who have directed their own work brilliantly."

Albee emerges, in the course of an hour's talk, as a serious craftsman, a natural teacher and a troubled American. But also as a sly humourist. Asked where the title for *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* came from, he explained how in the early fifties he used to frequent a watering-hole on New York's 10th Street where he saw the phrase chalked up on a mirror behind the bar. So a few years later he sat down to write a play called *The Excitement* before hauling that barroom scrawl out of his memory. "Do you know," he adds, "what the original title of *A Streetcar Named Desire* was? *The Poker Night*. Sometimes, I guess, you get lucky."

Three Tall Women opens at Wyndham's (071-929 1760) on November 15.

Billington On Albee Part Two

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