Paul Newman and Geraldine Page in *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer / Photofest.

How to Fix a Second Act: The Film and Television Adaptations of *Sweet Bird of Youth*

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In order to appreciate fully what the writers and directors who adapted *Sweet Bird of Youth* to the screen were up against, and what they tried to accomplish, it is important to consider the evolution of the play through its composition and production. *Sweet Bird of Youth* is a play with a fundamental structural problem. As Dewey Wayne Gunn has amply demonstrated, its genealogy includes three different sets of sketches and manuscripts stretching back many years prior to the play's 1959 Broadway premiere. The three manuscript strands are based on the characters Boss Finley and Miss Lucy, Chance Wayne and Heavenly Finley, and Chance and the Princess Kosmonopolis / Alexandra del Lago (27–29). The Boss Finley character goes back to "The Big Time Operators," a play Williams was writing about Huey Long as early as 1948 (*Notebooks* 492n718), and his confrontation with Miss Lucy goes back to a sketch Williams called "The Pink Bedroom" (Murphy 135). The story of Chance and Heavenly is developed in a series of manuscripts that became *The Enemy: Time*, which is included in the 2008 New Directions edition of *Sweet Bird.* The story of Chance and the Princess originally was about a young gigolo and his middle-aged male lover, Artemis or Art Pazmezoglu (Gunn 29), but Williams changed Art's gender as he revised his drafts. The character appears at the end of *The Enemy: Time* as the Princess Pazmezoglu.

Commenting on the characters in *Sweet Bird*, Williams said: "I have to understand the characters in my play in order to write about them because if I just hate them I can't write about them. That's why Boss Finley wasn't right in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, because I just didn't like the guy, and I just had to make a *tour de force* of his part in the play" ("Williams on Williams" 103). The two characters he certainly understood from the inside out were Chance Wayne and the Princess Kosmonopolis. Williams had played the Chance Wayne role when he lived with Carley Mills, a successful songwriter, between April and June of 1942, one of his most down-and-out periods, as he tried to find a way

to stay in New York and keep writing after the disaster of *Battle of Angels*. At forty-five, Mills was fourteen years older than Williams, and Mills not only improved Williams's wardrobe appreciably but made him cash gifts as well. Williams wrote in his journal that Mills was "kinder to me than most anyone before. [. . .] I eat well and regularly, I swim and live selfishly and cynically as a wise old alley cat. Integrity—I wonder. I keep a sort of it still: my own brand. I am not a snob and I can feel things deeply" (*Notebooks* 285).

Much more immediate to Williams's experience as he was composing *Sweet Bird* was his relationship with Frank Merlo, eleven years his junior, in which he in some ways played the Princess to Frank's Chance. Although there was a great deal of mutual affection in their relationship, Williams was notoriously unreasonable with and demanding of Merlo. In most ways, Merlo played the role of the traditional wife to Williams, managing the house, shopping, cooking when necessary, arranging the couple's social life and travel, and acting as a sounding board for Williams's work, not to mention putting up with his increasingly erratic emotions and behavior. But Merlo's position with Williams did not have the social sanction of marriage. Williams recognized this; he told Audrey Wood, when settling a percentage of *The Rose Tattoo*'s royalties on Merlo, that "his position with me now lacks the security and dignity that his character calls for" (1950 300). In a rather startlingly honest letter to Wood, Williams gave his perspective on his relationship with Merlo, which was unraveling after a very difficult Roman summer in 1955. Williams thought Merlo was "haunted continually by the feeling of insufficiency, that he is dependent on me, and yet doesn't seem to be able to bring himself to the point of taking any positive action to change this state." He told Wood that "he touches me deeply, and while I doubt that I have ever deeply loved him, according to my extremely romantic conception of what love should be—as distinguished from the pleasures of bed—still, he's given me an awful lot in a period when it was needed. So I want to do all I can to help him find himself now [. . .]. He's a true person, honest, intelligent, warm. 'Attention must be paid to this man' before it's too late" (1955 586–87). Nevertheless, Williams was jealous of the very freedom he helped to buy for Merlo. In the summer of 1955, while they were in Rome, Williams complained to Maria Britneva that Frank was "always with that cynical street-boy Alvaro" and that his "character, each summer with Alvaro, is hardened and cheapened so that I can't stay with him but must keep flying around on these sad little trips" (*Five O'Clock Angel* 126).

It is not coincidental that Williams was working on *The Enemy: Time* and turning it into *Sweet Bird of Youth* in the fall and winter of 1955–56, nor that, as he did so, the Princess's relationship with Chance drew much more of his interest than the Chance-Heavenly plot that dominates the earlier play. He wrote to Wood, "[T]his is the first time in years that I have been able to work with unflagging interest on a play script for six and eight hours a day" (1956 605). Two of the most significant speeches in *Sweet Bird*

reflect Williams's relationship with Merlo. The "life story" that Chance tells the Princess in act 1 reflects many of the details of Merlo's life. Like Chance, Merlo had tried to make it in the movies. He had had two small roles before World War II, in *Buzzy Rides the Range* and *Buzzy and the Phantom Pinto*, and then had his career interrupted while he served in the Navy. After the war, Merlo returned to Hollywood and tried again to get into the movies. He worked as an extra in at least eight movies in 1946 and 1947, but he had no more success than Chance did. Like Chance, he was a success at love, however, having relationships with the composer John La Touche and the famous newspaper columnist Joseph Alsop before he met Williams. Merlo was not a beach boy when they met in Provincetown in 1948, but the first night they spent together was on the beach. When Williams saw him again in New York, Merlo immediately moved in with him. Williams's perception that Merlo was being corrupted by streetboys like Alvaro and the underlying suggestion that it was he who brought contamination to their relationship—although Williams was at least as promiscuous as Merlo was—is reflected in the Minnie story that Tom Jr. tells in act 2, scene 2 of *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

The most devastating portrait of their relationship is in the Princess's speech in act 3, in which she justifies her callous treatment of Chance by her accomplishment as an artist: "We are two monsters, but with this difference between us. Out of the passion and torment of my existence I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil" (120). She refers to Chance as "a beach-boy I picked up for pleasure, distraction from panic" (119). She accuses him of using her and tells him he has "gone past something you couldn't afford to go past; your time, your youth, you've passed it. It's all you had, and you've had it" (119). Chance admits that he is "[n]othing" and that his age can only be calculated by the "level of—rot" in him (122), condemning himself to suffer castration as atonement for his sins.

The first result of Williams's work on the play was the April 1956 production in Coral Gables, Florida. George Keathley, who directed it, reported that once, when Williams read a revised scene aloud, he turned to Merlo and asked: "'Do you like it, Frankie?'—'No, I don't!'—'Why not?'—'I don't know, I just don't!'—'But why *not*? What's wrong with it?'—'Don't ask me, I'm not your goddamned yes-man!' And with that Frank ran into another room, packed his bags and took off for a few days" (qtd. in Lahr 327). It is not hard to understand Merlo's reaction to the play. After the production, a seemingly oblivious Williams reported to Maria Britneva that he was worried about Merlo: "For the first time since I've known him, he's started drinking a lot, and is full of complaints about his health and generally depressed and distrait" (qtd. in Lahr 327–28). While Merlo stayed with Williams and supported him throughout the Broadway production in 1959, he left for Key West immediately afterward, making it clear he wanted to be alone there.

Williams continued to make major changes to *Sweet Bird of Youth* even during the rehearsal process for the Broadway production in 1959. He revised the script after it was in galleys for the April 1959 issue of *Esquire*, and additional changes were made for the reading version published by New Directions in 1959. Many of the changes he made during this period diminished the importance of the Chance-Heavenly relationship, the natural focus of the play's traditional melodramatic structure, and intensified the relationship between Chance and the Princess, which in *The Enemy: Time* occupies just two pages. In July of 1958, he wrote in his journal that he had had a talk with producer Sam Spiegel, who had not liked *Sweet Bird*: "He said I'd brought in too many elements that were foreign to the main story, Princess and Chance. I agreed with him about it and will try to cut these extraneous things down before it goes into production" (*Notebooks* 717). Two weeks later, he had reduced the contact between Chance and Heavenly to a telephone scene, but he wrote to the play's Broadway director, Elia Kazan, that he thought even that was a mistake: "They should never have any contact or communication with each other in the play" (*Notebooks* 716n1024). In the version that was produced on Broadway, they did not.

The reconception of the play made for some fundamental difficulties when it came to production. First, as Barton Palmer has pointed out, the Chance-Heavenly relationship follows a traditional melodramatic plotline, in which the relationship of two young people is blocked by an evil father (32). In addition to Boss Finley, the melodrama has a second villain in the person of the Princess, who blocks Chance from fulfilling his dream of appearing in a Hollywood film. Putting the relationship between the Princess and Chance at the center of the play disrupts audience expectations and requires a new throughline to provide coherence. As director Kazan put it, *Sweet Bird* "seemed to be two one-act plays, one about the Princess and one about Chance Wayne and his girl" (qtd. in Phillips 155). Second, *Sweet Bird* has a weak second act; Williams rewrote it many times, but never to his own or his collaborators' satisfaction. In the version that was produced on Broadway and printed by New Directions, neither Chance nor the Princess appears in act 2, scene 1, at the Finleys' house, and the Princess appears only for a few minutes at the end of scene 2, in the bar. Williams said that he was unable to come up with a satisfactory act 2 because he had no interest in Boss Finley or Heavenly as characters, and he was in "a terrible state of depression" at the time (Gelb 3). In trying to bridge acts 1 and 3, Kazan said he "did some stunts with that play because I thought it needed it" (81). Finally, there is the problem of the ending. Should Chance end up with Heavenly, and thus fulfill the audience's expectations for the play? Should he leave with the Princess, providing an alternative but satisfying closure for the audience? Should he be castrated as atonement for the "level of—rot" he confesses to? Williams decided on the last option.

When approaching the script for production, Elia Kazan saw the necessity of doing what he had done for *Camino Real* six years earlier: creating a strong throughline based on a single protagonist. For Kazan, there was no doubt that the central character was Chance Wayne, whom he saw as "the most frank and honest self-portrait TW has ever drawn" (Parker 43). Kazan focused his interpretation on characteristic Williams themes, entrapment and guilt and atonement. Williams said that he had intended from the first for Chance to make the "quixotic, almost ridiculous, choice to stay and atone" (qtd. in Parker 43). As Brian Parker has noted, the most important thing for Kazan was that Chance was making an active choice to stay in order to punish himself. Kazan observed "The Thing is not a tragedy of size unless he chooses to stay in the TRAP" (qtd. in Parker 43).

The extensive revisions made during the rehearsal period kept the focus relentlessly on Chance, except at those times when the Princess spoke her grand monologues, when Kazan had her go to the front of the stage, stand in a spotlight, and address the audience, the full expression of the "monster" that Chance was facing. In act 2, Kazan made Chance the focus of the bar scene by having the Boss's rally speech projected on a giant screen and keeping a spotlight on Chance as he reacted to it. The Finleys became ancillary characters in Kazan's version of the play: there was no interaction between Chance and Heavenly or Chance and Boss Finley, and Tom Jr. was the embodiment of the Finley menace. Reviews of the play saw the structure as a bit muddled and the details about the Finleys as largely unnecessary. Williams wrote to critic Kenneth Tynan, "You were obviously totally alienated by the dreadful but necessary Act Two. It is dreadful in *my* opinion. Maybe it really isn't dreadful at all but a very accomplished way of linking up the elements of a little play to those elements that make it a big one. That is Kazan's opinion, at least, anyhow, and I think Kazan has this time done a really wonderful job" (qtd. in Lahr 394).

In approaching the 1962 film adaptation of the play for MGM, Richard Brooks followed Kazan's lead in placing Chance at the center, but, as Barton Palmer has noted, he reworked the plot to fit the demands of Hollywood melodrama: "Brooks's Chance must abandon his swaggering phallicism and suffer a symbolic castration that delivers him to monogamous love" (34). Palmer sees the physical wound that Chance (Paul Newman) suffers at the end of the film, when Tom Jr. (Rip Torn) smashes his face, as "the outward sign of psychic wholeness" and the film as "melodramatic in the conventional Hollywood sense, endorsing sexual normalcy, emotional wholeness, the superiority of the spirit to what the world defines as success" (35). In order to shape this melodrama, Brooks had to change the ending, a decision that proved controversial. He also had to create a more threatening nemesis for Chance in Boss Finley (Ed Begley) and a more suitable heroine in Heavenly (Shirley Knight). In addition to the inevitable problem of

transforming dialogue into images, Brooks faced the same structural problems that had bothered Kazan. Because he was both writing the screenplay and directing the film, he had the freedom to choose the techniques he deemed appropriate for creating a coherent film. In general, this involved reworking the characters of the Boss and Heavenly; developing the relationship between Chance and Heavenly more fully without sacrificing the Chance-Princess scenes; and integrating the Chance-Princess plotline more naturally with the Chance-Heavenly plotline. The questions of what Chance has done to Heavenly—the subject of a great deal of revision in the play—and of what would be done to Chance at the end were in some sense dictated for the film by the Production Code Administration, since neither venereal disease nor castration were possibilities. Instead of having Heavenly infected with a venereal disease that resulted in a hysterectomy, Brooks has her becoming pregnant and then having George Scudder (Philip Abbott) perform an illegal abortion. While Boss Finley threatens to "fix" Chance as he has one of his dogs, the castration he undergoes at the hands of Tom Jr., when his good looks are destroyed, is only symbolic.

Brooks establishes the relationship between the Princess and Chance in the film's opening sequence, the only part of the film that makes much use of the Cinemascope he hated.[1] The opening shot is of Chance driving an enormous Cadillac convertible along the coast, which a "Leaving Florida" sign tells us is the Gulf of Mexico. The Princess (Geraldine Page), lying in the back seat, sits up and says "Hey, hey you, whoever you are. I want a drink." When Chance says, "Soon, Princess," she throws her empty bottle into the front seat and says, "I want it now!" Chance pulls into a package store in a beach town and comes out with a bottle of vodka, which he hands to the Princess. Then he takes a matchbox out of his pocket and hands it to her. She takes a pill from it, washes it down with the vodka, and settles back on the seat. The Princess's devotion to alcohol and drugs and Chance's subservient role established, we see Chance driving into the rainy night, getting on a ferry, and entering St. Cloud, then driving up to a hotel, where he is known to the desk clerk and bellboy, and booking a room for himself and the Princess Kosmonopolis. The desk clerk calls Dr. Scudder as Chance carries the unconscious Princess up the stairs, dropping and smashing the empty vodka bottle. Brooks also includes a number of scenes that are only mentioned or alluded to in the play, including one in which Heavenly drives a powerboat in circles, shouting at Chance to leave—an incident that Chance recounts in the play as having occurred during his last visit.

The most obvious film technique that was available to Brooks for creating greater integration was intercutting. The play includes four distinct scenes: Chance and the Princess in the hotel bedroom; the Finleys on the terrace of their house; Chance and a variety of others in the hotel bar; and Chance and the Princess in the hotel bedroom again. With the freedom of film, Brooks was able to create a much more coherent sense

of the action by intercutting the scene in the bedroom with the scene in the bar, thus reducing the focus on the Princess at the beginning and emphasizing Chance's return to St. Cloud, the theme of "the enemy time," and the ominous feeling that surrounds Chance's interaction with the hostile members of the town. Brooks's intercutting of the second hotel room scene (act 3 of the play) with the rally scene (act 2, scene 2) serves the same purpose. Brooks gives the sense of the all-pervasiveness of Boss Finley by filming the rally outside the hotel, having it prominently featured on a television set in the bar, and having it invade the bedroom as well. It is only at this point in the film, hearing political opponents ask the Boss about Heavenly's operation, that Chance realizes Heavenly has had an abortion. This is a second revelation; the Boss had told him she was pregnant at the church on Easter Sunday. It gives him the motivation for going to the Finley house and desperately shouting Heavenly's name (an obvious reference to *A Streetcar Named Desire*), submitting himself to Tom Jr. for punishment, and then being rescued by a forgiving Heavenly and driven away for what will presumably be a monogamous happy-ever-after away from St. Cloud.

An important cohesive element in Brooks's version is the development and interweaving of Boss Finley throughout the film. In order to keep the focus of the film on Chance's quest to win back Heavenly, it was important to establish Boss Finley as his clear antagonist, a powerful and brutal force that was keeping the young lovers apart. Brooks defined the Boss's character by introducing a scene in which he and the other town big shots watch a television documentary attacking his political record and by showing him break Miss Lucy's finger rather than having her narrate the story as she does in the play. Two flashbacks establish the Boss as the force that is keeping Chance and Heavenly apart, although Brooks said that he "wanted more" than flashbacks: "It was supposed to be done with cuts, but [MGM] said—They [the viewers] want to know where you are and what's happening. Let's not get arty" (Brooks 8). In the first flashback scene, the Boss tells Chance, "This here's America. Today you're nobody. Tomorrow you're somebody. But you got to think big, act big, and you'll be big . . . in this world there's only one payoff window, number one, the winner, success." "A man who's going places," the Boss says, needs a place where he can "climb, bust out, a place like New York." He sends Chance out of town with a bus ticket to New York and $100, telling him he has sent Heavenly and Aunt Nonnie (Mildred Dunnock) on a trip to Europe. In the second flashback, after Chance has returned to town after some minor success in his career, the Boss holds a rally in which he maneuvers Chance into volunteering for the army in the Korean War. In the present, during the scene at the church, Brooks has the Boss threaten Chance overtly with castration after revealing that Heavenly became pregnant during his last visit to St. Cloud. By placing the final sequence of the film in front of the Finleys' house, Brooks makes the direct connection between the Boss's threat and the symbolic castration of Chance.

The expanded role of Miss Lucy (Madeleine Sherwood) provides something of a counterpoint to that of the Boss. The visually effective introduction of Lucy in her habitat and the grim determination of her attempt to be attractive to the Boss humanize her in the eyes of the audience. When the Boss slams the lid of the artificial egg on her finger and she screams in agony, only stopping when he slaps her, Lucy becomes representative of everyone who is the object of the Boss's cruelty, from Chance and Heavenly to Tom Jr. and Dr. Scudder. The viewer is on Miss Lucy's side when she makes her call to the Boss's political opponent, tipping him off to look into Dr. Scudder's promotion at the hospital. Lucy is further humanized when she shows genuine kindness to the Princess, and she provides closure to the Chance-Princess plot by serving as the Princess's new driver as they leave together, shedding the town, Boss Finley, and everything he stands for.

Brooks also used several flashbacks to develop the relationship between Chance and Heavenly, effectively counteracting Williams's determination that they should never interact in the play by introducing a rich visual text that keeps their romance constantly in the spectator's consciousness. During the singing of Chance's theme song, "It's a Big Wide Wonderful World," in the bar, Brooks flashes back to the scene of the diving competition at the country club, which in the play is only described by Miss Lucy. In a scene filmed in impossibly perfect technicolor, indicating Chance's romanticized view of the past, Chance does a perfect swan dive in front of an adoring group of spectators. Brooks cuts to the Boss, looking sharply at Aunt Nonnie's adoring applause and then, after Chance rises out of the water to kiss Heavenly, who is bending fondly over him, shows the Boss glowering at the two of them. This sequence both introduces the idealized way in which Chance looks at his romance with Heavenly and sets up the next flashback when the Boss sows the seeds of its destruction by sending Chance away to New York to pursue his dream of success.

Another flashback—the visual image of Chance's highest moment—shows Chance returning in triumph to a party, complete with a "Welcome Back Chance Wayne" banner, with adoring looks not only from Heavenly and Nonnie but also Tom Jr. During the Easter church service, a flashback reveals the consequences of the Boss's action in Chance's degeneration. A destitute Chance returns to St. Cloud on a freight train and meets Heavenly in an abandoned lighthouse. After they make love off camera (presumably the cause of Heavenly's pregnancy), Heavenly tries to suggest to Chance that he give up trying to succeed in show business, but Chance by this time is thoroughly infected with the desire to make it. He says he's been learning how to "operate, how to beat the game," insisting that "next time I'm going to get lucky." Heavenly tries to talk him out of it, insisting that "my Papa sold you that phony dream and you're still buyin' it. . . . Anyone can be a millionaire so everybody's got to try it." Chance is now deluding himself that his new job as a beach boy is the key to his future. Brooks ends the sequence with Chance

begging Heavenly, "Don't ask me to give up my dream" and Heavenly embracing him. By delineating Chance's rise and fall as due to his succumbing to the Boss's corruption, this series of flashbacks carries the tragic subtext of the play within the movie's melodrama.

Brooks repeatedly insisted that he did not like the ending of the movie. He felt that the ending of the play did not ring true because "no man waits to be castrated." He wanted Chance to "do something more: to go and look for the trouble"—thus the filming of the final sequence at the Finleys' house, where Chance comes to claim Heavenly. According to Brooks, when Tom Jr. and the other thugs attack Chance, "you don't have to see the castration, but first they destroy his looks, and then they go to work on him. You leave the scene right there." Brooks would have preferred to film an ending in which Chance leaves St. Cloud in a garbage scow, fulfilling the Boss's threat, but the executives at MGM said, "Hey! You can't do that. He came for the girl. He doesn't get the girl" (8). And so, instead, Brooks filmed an ending in which Chance is disfigured by Tom Jr. but leaves with Heavenly—which, as Palmer and Robert Bray have noted, fulfills the audience's expectations for Hollywood melodrama even as it completely undermines Williams's play: "The end of his sex appeal will, so it is implied, ease the process of domestication with Heavenly" (189). The suggestion that the Boss will get his just deserts is contained in Aunt Nonnie's final line in the film: "You can go straight to hell."

In the television adaptation of *Sweet Bird*, directed by Nicolas Roeg, which aired on NBC on 1 October 1989, the focus was clearly on the Princess, played by Elizabeth Taylor. "We always knew it would be Elizabeth Taylor," said one of the producers; "after all her *life* is a Tennessee Williams play" (qtd. in Grant, "What Becomes" N5). The fifty-three-year-old Taylor, an interviewer noted, had been talking about playing the Princess for ten years, and he asked her why she was taking on the role then. "Why not?" she replied. "It just seemed like now is the right time. And it just fell into the right place. Even weight wise, it was perfect. I would have had to put on weight if it had happened earlier, like I did for 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'" (qtd. in Grant, "What Becomes" N5). Since Taylor was playing the diva on the set as well as in the role of the Princess, Roeg's position as director was a difficult one. His rather subservient role was dramatized when, in between takes in the bar scene, Taylor's assistant brought her a small, battery-operated fan. A newspaper reporter wrote, "Nick Roeg grabs the fan from the assistant and steps in front of the camera, wielding the fan in front of Taylor. Taylor swoons. 'Oh, you're such a treasure . . . (dramatic pause) . . . to my chest'" (Grant, "Role" J18). Taylor insisted that "a strong director *does* leave you to your devices. A strong director allows you to be free and you trust that he's there and he will tell you if you've gone too far" (qtd. in Grant, "What Becomes" N77).

The screenplay by Gavin Lambert, a two-time Oscar nominee and friend of Tennessee Williams, was constructed to place the Princess at the center, weaving her

character throughout. Roeg's film executes this intention and builds on it. The adaptation begins with a sequence showing the Princess's comeback being played over the opening credits. The theatre employees nervously spruce up the lobby, which is decorated with Alexandra del Lago posters, featuring a young Elizabeth Taylor, while the movie is heard in the background, and then the Princess comes running through the lobby and out the door, calling for a taxi. In this version, Sally Powers (Ruta Lee) runs after her, trying to reassure her that her performance was good: she may look "different," but anyone who'd been away from the screen for seven years would look older. Sally is exasperated as the Princess gets into the taxi and leaves. The next scene is the Miami hotel where Chance is employed as a beach boy. Roeg cuts to a tight close-up of Taylor's face, still strikingly beautiful, as the Princess mutters about the shock of that "first close-up." This metatheatrical moment, foregrounding the beauty of the Princess via Taylor, foreshadows the ending, when the Princess hears that her comeback has been a success after all.

Chance (Mark Harmon) is introduced from the Princess's point of view. She observes him giving a massage to an appreciative middle-aged woman. Then we see Chance coming to the Princess's cabana for a papaya cream rub. This is followed by a driving scene in which the Princess is seated in the front seat of a Cadillac with Chance. Unlike the Brooks film, in which Geraldine Page was unconscious during their arrival at the hotel, this one presents the Princess as just a little unsteady on her feet as they check in. The more sober state of the Princess makes for some awkward inconsistencies. She still calls for her oxygen and suffers from "memory blockage" when she wakes up in the hotel room, although she shows little ill effect from the vodka she has consumed except for a slight hangover. Roeg puts off the blackmail scene until after an interpolated scene in which Chance and the Princess have breakfast on the hotel terrace. Later, Chance tells the Princess his life story at the demolished Eldorado Arms hotel. After the first bar sequence, the Princess is a more or less constant presence there, even if only as an observer. In a second, interpolated, scene at the bar, the Princess is rude to Miss Lucy (Valerie Perrine) and shows jealousy when she hears that Chance is still in love with Heavenly (Cheryl Paris). While Chance is away with Heavenly, the Princess bonds with Miss Lucy over the story of the diamond clip and Miss Lucy's injured finger in the bar, and she is already sitting there at the beginning of the rally scene. She doesn't leave, as she does in the play, but is seated by Fly (Teddy Wilson) in an armchair.

In her final scene with Chance, the Princess becomes a completely sympathetic figure as she offers to take him with her and help him: "You're so lost. Let me help you to find yourself." Lambert even gives her Chance's famous curtain line as she looks into his face and says he is trying to tell her something: "You're asking me to recognize myself in you, to recognize the enemy, time, in all of us." But she tells him they must move on, past

their youth. When Chance at last refuses to go with her, she leaves with dignity for New Orleans with the Highway Patrol driver that Boss Finley (Rip Torn) has provided for her.

Through this series of revisions and interpolations, Elizabeth Taylor is kept on camera, often in close-up, for most of the film. It is the Princess-Chance relationship that provides the coherence for the action, while the roles of the Finleys are correspondingly diminished. As in the play, Boss Finley appears only in the scene at the Finleys' and at the rally scene, and during the rally, the Boss is primarily shown on a small black-and-white television set in the bar. There is none of the character development seen in Brooks's film, but the Chance-Heavenly story receives a little opening out, which clarifies the motivation for the events of the plot. Since Heavenly sees Chance drive into town with the Princess, she is prepared when he calls her from the hotel room; after at first saying she doesn't want to see him, she arranges to meet him that afternoon at the Eldorado Arms. When Boss Finley tells her she will have to be present at the rally if she doesn't want Chance to leave in the "barge that dumps the garbage in the gulf," he gives her the motivation for telling Chance to leave town when they talk through the fence at the Eldorado Arms site. She does not tell him about the Boss's threat, but Tom Jr. (Kevin Geer) tells Chance that he is going to get "the knife" if he is still in town after the rally. Heavenly's appearance at the rally is thus motivated by her love for Chance, but she leaves the stage and runs away after the Heckler asks about her operation. The last shot of Heavenly shows her at home, sobbing on her bed.

It is the degenerate beach boy rather than the hometown hero that is emphasized in this characterization of Chance Wayne. The fact that the audience is introduced to Chance as a beach boy seen from the Princess's point of view establishes this identity for him, and there is nothing in the film that suggests he is anything else. The only flashback scene is of his first sexual experience with Heavenly at the Sazarac Arms, where they behave like two eager kids in a motel for the first time. There are no scenes showing the town's former adulation, and the scenes in the bar show him in a more pathetic light than in the play or the Brooks film. While the bar in Brooks's film is light and elegant, the bar in the Roeg adaptation is small and dark and noisy. The piano player is off in a corner. He doesn't know Chance and doesn't even know "It's a Big Wide Wonderful World." He plays it from a bedraggled piece of sheet music that Chance pulls from his pocket. Scotty and Bud sing along with Chance and the lounge singer in the Brooks film, but Roeg has Chance singing by himself and being unable to get even Miss Lucy to sing with him. He tips the piano player and sits down, unnoticed by the crowd in the bar. One seemingly irrelevant interpolated scene is added after the rally scene, when Chance goes to a segregated bar whose patrons are African American and says the drinks are all on him. The woman singer dances with him while she sings "It's a Big Wide Wonderful World." This is followed by the final scene with the Princess in the hotel room.

This Chance is a played-out character, grasping at one last straw to restart his career and win Heavenly back. Unlike Brooks, who refused to depict Chance as passively waiting to be castrated, or Kazan, who insisted that Chance must actively seek his atonement, Roeg presents him as paralyzed in the final scene. Roeg's giving the curtain line about "the enemy, time" to the Princess was probably a concession to Taylor, but it is in character for this Chance to be unable to articulate it. After telling the Princess he can't follow her to grand hotels all around the world, he pathetically calls, "P . . . Princess" after she has left the room, but he can't get the word out loud enough to be heard. He just paces about the room randomly, waiting for Tom Jr. and his henchmen to show up. When they do, looming behind him, he looks desperately in the mirror as he delivers the lines adapted from the play, "Something's got to mean something, don't it? Even though your life means nothing, except you could never quite make it. Something's still got to mean something." The last thing the audience hears of Chance is his scream behind the closed doors of the bedroom. This is followed by a shot of Heavenly sobbing on her bed and the Princess leaving town.

Unlike Brooks, Roeg did not feel a compulsion to tack a happy Hollywood ending onto his adaptation. His work embodies a harsh sense of moral closure that was enough to please the television network censors. Chance doesn't get the girl, and his castration is just the kind of punishment that Boss Finley wants to hand out to anyone who corrupts "southern womanhood." For her sexual sins, Heavenly suffers not only sterility but the loss of her beloved Chance. On the other hand, except for her loneliness and the recognition that she is aging, the Princess seems to get off scot-free. She is the one character who learns something worthwhile in the film, telling Chance that it is time for both of them to stop pining for their youth and move on. She does not speak Williams's lines about her art justifying her being a monster, but she makes it clear that art is what matters. The Princess is going to Hollywood to play the role of a mother, and she is willing to do that if it's what she has to do to revive her career. In this sense, Roeg's adaptation places the thematic emphasis in the same place as Williams's script. This film is excessive in its focus on the Princess, but it provides an interesting contrast to the tendency to force Chance Wayne into the role of a traditional protagonist that was begun with Kazan's production. Williams, after all, was writing about himself and his career, however he might try to mask it with a traditional love story and two characters representing "Youth."

It was fortunate in some ways that the weakness in Williams's play gave these writers and directors the freedom to explore the possibilities of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The Brooks film, with its Cinemascope; its brilliant color; its large, light spaces; and what Brooks called the "M.G.M. stamp" of "a certain style . . . a certain density in the film, a certain softness for the ladies, a certain sharpness for the gentlemen" (5) comes off as a grander

work than Roeg's made-for-television movie of the 1980s, with its darker colors and claustrophobic spaces intended for the small screen. Since it was made during the period it depicts, Brooks's film has almost by default a greater authenticity when it comes to background and cultural elements than does Roeg's television adaptation, made thirty years after the play was produced, which treats the 1950s with nostalgia. The musical score for Brooks's film features raw, sexy jazz and Great American Songbook standards that match the jaded sophistication of Chance and the Princess. Roeg's adaptation features some jarring teenage rock and roll, like Dion and the Belmonts singing "I Wonder Why" (1958) and "Oh What a Nite" by the Dells (1956). This is authentic to the 1950s but probably not the kind of music the Princess and Chance would have listened to. Brooks's actors, Ed Begley, Paul Newman, Geraldine Page, Madeleine Sherwood, and Rip Torn, had profited from 375 Broadway performances in which to explore the nuances of their characters; Begley's performance won an Oscar. Roeg's tentative direction of Taylor allowed her to fall back on some clichés and mannerisms that a stronger director like Mike Nichols, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, was able to keep out of her performance. Mark Harmon was for the most part reduced to lost, soulful looks to convey the inner life of Chance. Rip Torn was allowed to chew the scenery in his brief appearance as the Boss. The actors probably would have profited from a stronger directorial hand, one more certain of the material.

Richard Brooks's placing of Chance Wayne at the center creates a film about the threat of corruption and, with Brooks's despised ending, the triumph of love over the "phony dream" of success. Nicolas Roeg's centering of the Princess creates a darker film about the inevitable loss of youth and the despairing or resilient responses to it that are possible. In juxtaposition, these two adaptations provide a revealing look at two strikingly different approaches to fixing *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Note

[1] Brooks told an interviewer, "I never want to make anything in Cinemascope, but it's no use any more" (8).

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