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Elia Kazan and *Sweet Bird of Youth*

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I

Of the many studies that chronicle and describe the working relationship between Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan, Brenda Murphy's *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* remains the most thorough examination of the subject. Yet when Murphy published her book on the collaboration of Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan in 1992,¹ the Kazan archives housed at Wesleyan University in Connecticut were not open for inspection. Though there are still rather draconian restrictions on photocopying, referencing, and publication, this collection is now available and can afford insights into the development of *Sweet Bird of Youth* that supplement, and to some extent alter, the balance of Murphy's analysis.

¹² The material covering *Sweet Bird* is currently divided into six groups. The first contains Williams's second version of the full-length play, which another copy of the same version at Harvard dates "April 1958." To this early version, Kazan adds a few comments in the green ink he seems habitually to have used on early drafts. He had attended George Keathley's production of an earlier version of *Sweet Bird* at the Studio M Playhouse of Miami in April 1956, but the Wesleyan version seems to be the first text of the play he examined, so his initial responses are especially interesting. Though the draft offers two contrasting possibilities for a conclusion—Chance Wayne being led out at revolver point by anonymous "male figures" or, alternatively, his escaping via the verandah to join his Princess—Kazan asserts roundly in his green ink, "End a cheat. Chance should kill himself." He crosses out a long soliloquy by the Princess at the end and marks her earlier soliloquy in 1.2, "(To Aud[ience])." When the Princess talks of Chance as a scion of genteel southern stock, Kazan notes wryly that "TW. means this," then speculates, "She is attracted[,] tricked by his desperation—the audience will be too—he should have an innocence and an ineptitude." This is an interpretation he would develop more fully in his promptscript and director's notebook. When Williams calls for Handel's *Messiah* to be played at Heavenly's first appearance in 2.1, Kazan sardonically suggests that it be "mixed in with commercials"; and although he crosses this out, he returns to the idea later and removes most of that character's religious symbolism. Most interesting of all, at the bottom of the political rally scene in 2.2, he notes, "Suddenly on T.V. in bar—all listening." This reference to television was the germ for his most spectacular stage effect later, and notably was present in his very first read-through. The television reference and his comment about the end—his belief that Chance must be seen to punish himself deliberately—are significant early indications of the direction Kazan's interpretation would take.

¹³ The second group contains a later version of the text, dated "October 1958" on the title page, which is interleaved with blank pages that Kazan annotated liberally for use as his promptbook for rehearsals and for the

previews that opened at Philadelphia in February 1959. The text itself resembles that of a similarly dated copy belonging to the designer Jo Mielziner,² though it does not correspond exactly; and significantly, Kazan's copy lacks a conclusion. The interleaved notes provide an invaluable clue to Kazan's developing interpretation of *Sweet Bird* and his attitudes toward the text, the playwright, and the performers.

^{¶14} Another extremely rich source of information comes in the third group, which (besides a playbill for the Broadway opening on 10 March 1959) contains Elia Kazan's *regiebuch*—or director's notebook—entitled *Tenn. Wms. / "SB of Y,"* with the date "June 1958" deleted and replaced by "October 1958." Essentially, this 4" x 7" notebook of green graph paper comprises Kazan's notes to himself about the play and the production as he worked on them—like the similar commentary on *A Streetcar Named Desire* that has (in part) been published.³ It is divided into nineteen subsections (though "16" is repeated, so the numbering goes astray): (1) Subjective Scenery, (2) Subjective Sound, (3) the TRAP, (4) Escape from the TRAP, (5) Subjective Behaviour, (6) The Stage Building, (7) Music, (8) Chance, (9) Princess, (10) Boss Finley, (11) Directing, (12) Miss Lucy, (13) Heavenly, (14) Heckler, (15) Tom Junior, (16) Aunt Nonnie, (17—misnumbered "16") Scudder, (18—misnumbered "17") Theme, (19—misnumbered "18") Style. After this breakdown comes an extra item: "The Metaphor? Here is being tried what is really corrupt." Kazan diagnoses this as the complete surrender of self to the pursuit of success and fame.⁴

^{¶15} The fourth group contains correspondence about the play, mostly copies of letters by Kazan to Williams, along with notes to himself that Kazan carefully jotted down before any major communication. These preliminary notes are often more sharply worded than the subsequent letters. There are also a few notes to Kazan or Williams from designer Jo Mielziner or producer Cheryl Crawford, as well as very interesting reactions by a number of people (not all of whom are identified) to the try-out opening in Philadelphia. A detailed four-page, single-spaced response by "MK," Kazan's wife, Molly Thacher Kazan, is of particular interest. Williams later complained of feeling "castrated" by too much advice from a person "other than the director,"⁵ and though Murphy suggests that this "advisor" was the producer, Cheryl Crawford (which is quite plausible), it may alternatively have been Molly Kazan. She and Williams had had a history of disagreements since *Camino Real* because she seems sometimes to have played "bad cop" to her husband's "good cop" as he maneuvered Williams into making alterations.

^{¶16} Group five is a collection of discarded pages and draft fragments that deserves a closer scrutiny than the present writer had time for, though for the most part the materials can be expected to duplicate similar discards in the Williams collections at Austin, Delaware, The Historic New Orleans Collection, and Harvard. Lastly, there is a sixth "miscellaneous" group of items with no relation to *Sweet Bird* except synchronicity of date. These are of no relevance to the present paper, though an article on "The Writer in Hollywood" by Budd Schulberg in *Harper's Magazine* (October 1959) serves as a useful reminder that Kazan had recently directed the Schulberg movie *On the Waterfront* (1954), whose portrait of an heroic loser was not unlike the way that Kazan would try to interpret Chance Wayne.

II

^{¶17} It is important to understand the relationship that had by this time been established between Williams and Kazan. Because of growing drug and alcohol dependencies, the late 1950s were a very bad time psychologically for Williams. He wrote to his friend Maria St. Just on 3 January 1957:

These last few months in my life are the worst that I can remember, and that's why I haven't kept in touch with you. I was too preoccupied with the necessary business of trying not to crack up, and I am far from sure that I have succeeded.⁶

Later that spring, the failure of his rewrite of *Battle of Angels* (as *Orpheus Descending*) unnerved and damaged his self-confidence ever further, particularly since Kazan had chosen not to direct it and instead had been very successful on Broadway with William Inge's *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* This increased Williams's conviction that only with Kazan as director could his new play be successful. By the time he began revising *Sweet Bird* in April 1958, his confidence was so shattered that two months later, in June 1958, he committed himself to a year of intense psychoanalysis that he described to Maria St. Just as "purgatory,"⁷ and this analysis lasted throughout the production period for *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

118 For his part, Kazan was still smarting under the professional and personal obloquy that had followed his naming of names to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952.⁸ He had more or less decided to withdraw from Broadway production to focus on making movies and writing—but, an inveterate counter puncher, he was determined to end his Broadway career with a hit. He looked to Williams to provide one, though relations between the two men had become distinctly equivocal. The critical furor that had arisen when Williams printed alternative Act 3's for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* had been compounded by the movie of *Baby Doll*, the text for which had been compiled by Kazan and Williams from two of Williams's one-acts that they finally settled upon. Though Williams did considerable textual revisions throughout the script writing, the process produced serious aesthetic disagreements between the two men. Williams even wrote Kazan a letter saying, "You are really ambivalent, the greatest living artist as a director, but as a script-doctor, a hang-over from the old Group Theater without Odets" (23 July 1955).⁹ And writing to Audrey Wood on the same day, Williams remarked ironically that Kazan probably wrote better than he read.¹⁰

119 At issue was Williams's whole manner of composition. He was never comfortable writing to a set plan but habitually wrote draft after draft at top speed until he finally arrived at a version he recognized intuitively was right. He described this procedure in an article for *Equity* as follows:

When I am working I don't stop and plan and reflect. I just sit there and I lose myself, or try to lose myself, in a kind of dream and in the dream of these characters and their situations, things happen . . . I believe writing must be spontaneous and it must well up out of the author's unconscious in order to have basic truths which are universal.¹¹

Redrafting to someone else's scenario short-circuited this "spontaneous" process and led to a situation that Williams analyzed as the third stage of collaboration in an important 1957 essay entitled "Author and Director: A Delicate Situation":

There is the danger that the playwright may be as abruptly divested of confidence in his own convictions as that confidence was first born in him. He may suddenly become a sort of ventriloquist's dummy for ideas which are not his own at all.¹²

110 He goes on to say that this only happens to hack writers and that a serious playwright can always profit from his director's creativity, but the qualification is distinctly temporizing. Although after its success Williams was very willing to praise *Baby Doll*, when the film first appeared he told an interviewer, "I think Kazan did a fine

job, but the movie has many things in it that I did not write. It has at least one scene that I objected to when it was being filmed. It was symbolic in a way that I considered bad taste.”¹³ Like *Cat*, in fact, the text for *Baby Doll* that Williams chose to put in print differs from Kazan’s film.

III

^{¶11} What has hitherto not been realized about the collaboration on *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and what is perhaps the *most important* piece of evidence to be gleaned from the Kazan archive on the play, is that this text too, like *Baby Doll*, was put together largely by Kazan, with Williams playing the more minor role. The evidence for this is a letter from Kazan to Williams dated 27 October 1958, in which Kazan urges Williams to come to New York because rehearsals for *Sweet Bird* are to begin the next day. Kazan says he has had to put the rehearsal script together himself, conflating five versions of Chance Wayne’s soliloquy at the end of Act 1 and, more importantly, creating an extra-long Act 2 (70 pages, compared to Act 3’s 16 pages) by linking separate draft fragments of Chance and Aunt Nonnie on the terrace, the phone call between Chance and Heavenly, Chance’s encounter with his old acquaintances in the cocktail lounge, and Boss Finley’s political rally. Kazan also says he has added his own stage directions as necessary.

^{¶12} This not only helps explain a certain variability in rehearsal texts bearing the October 1958 date but also throws light on Williams’s stormy reaction to the first read-through, which he describes himself in his *Memoirs*:

The reading begins.

About halfway through it I leap from my chair and cry out, “Stop it, stop it! It can’t go on, it’s too awful.”

A total hush descends upon the rehearsal hall as I stride deliriously out into Times Square. I go home and knock myself out with booze and pills. . . . Evening comes in due course. Then there is a strong knock at the door: the sort of knock that says, Open up in the name of the law!

I open up and there stand Molly and Gadg Kazan sweetly and genially smiling as if nothing has happened of an unusual nature. . . . I am now dreadfully ashamed of my conduct before the company but not yet swerved from my conviction that the play should not go on.

Gadg and Molly talk to me as you do to a wounded animal or a sick child. Gradually my desperate resolve crumbles: I love them. I decide to trust them.¹⁴

In his own account of this incident in his autobiography, though he claims to believe that Williams was upset mainly by Geraldine Page’s inadequate reading as the Princess, Kazan admits:

I believe that only the rather mystical faith he had in me persuaded him to go ahead. I had never seen him so timorous after the first reading.¹⁵

^{¶13} In particular, the long prefabricated Act 2 created trouble for Williams in revision because once again, he was writing from the intellect down, trying to match a scenario that was not his own. Two weeks after the opening, he wrote the New York critic Brooks Atkinson that the rehearsal period had been the most grueling of his whole career; with at least ten versions of Act 2 in play, he still was not sure whether they had ended up with the right one.¹⁶ In his interview for *Equity* at the end of the year, he told Dick Moore:

When we were in Philadelphia with “Sweet Bird,” I had reached the absolute end of my strength. I was just exhausted and I didn’t think I could physically survive another ordeal like that.¹⁷

^{¶14} And in a later interview with Arthur Gelb, he elaborated further:

The truth is, the second act of that play is just not well written. I was in a terrible state of depression at the time, and couldn't function except on just a craftsmanship level. Kazan wanted a great second act, and I couldn't give it to him. I'm rewriting the act now, for the published version [by *Dramatists Play Service*]; I'm going to stick with my two main characters, whom I should never have left in the first place. The act is weak because I couldn't really identify with Boss Finley.¹⁸

IV

^{¶15} The root of the trouble, in my view, was the almost polar opposition of Kazan and Williams as personalities (to which I think Murphy pays too little attention). Though both men had very real affection and admiration for each other, they were emotionally very different: a difference that could be creatively complementary, but in the case of *Sweet Bird* led to cross purposes. For all his charm, charisma, imaginative brilliance, and ability to empathize with the ambiguity of human motives (which Williams particularly admired), Kazan was an alpha-type, aggressive and macho, as his autobiography makes amply clear—not one ever to accept defeat and failure. Both the promptbook and the director's notebook for *Sweet Bird* show that he had little sympathy for the emotional spine of the play as envisaged by Williams, which combines fears of aging and artistic failure with nostalgia for the past. Both documents show Kazan constantly trying to maneuver Williams's text into a more existentialist mode of assertion by making Chance Wayne into a more central and morally decisive character.

^{¶16} Kazan explains the character of Chance by interesting comparisons to Williams himself (as well as others¹⁹), noting Williams's feeling that the whole world is a trap and "enemy territory" and especially emphasizing the playwright's self-punishing sense of guilt. "This is the most frank and honest self-portrait TW. has ever drawn,"²⁰ says Kazan, speculating that Williams now sees death as his only means of personal atonement.

^{¶17} But when Kazan goes on to assert in the same section of the *Notebook*, "ONLY the corrupt one, the scorned one, the Excluded one, the outcast knows and tells the truth," he seems to be losing touch with the characterization of Chance Wayne, and when he concludes that Chance is ready to punish himself "to be ACCEPTED BACK INTO THE HUMAN RACE," I think we can hear echoes of Kazan's own touchy mood after the reaction against his testimony to HUAC, rather than anything basic to *Sweet Bird of Youth* or, indeed, to Williams himself. Kazan's startling comment later in the section that "Chance is not so far from you, you LIAR!!" sounds very personal, and anticipates the in-your-face theatricalism of Chance's final speech in which he demands the audience's sympathy by identifying them with himself. There seems to be an interesting slippage of influences going on here.

^{¶18} From his first green-ink notes on the April 1956 text, Kazan had rejected any ending in which Chance should either escape or passively accept castration or death. That first note says flatly, "Chance should kill himself," and Kazan makes the same point in a letter of 20 May 1958 (Wesleyan), where he adds that castrating Chance is too much like the conclusion of *Orpheus Descending*, where it hadn't worked well either. (Molly Kazan, too, was vehement against castration.) To another letter from Kazan of 15 December 1958 (Wesleyan), reiterating the point, Williams replied on 29 December (Texas) that he had intended "from the very first" that Chance should make the "quixotic, almost ridiculous, choice to stay and atone," as in the Coconut Grove production, but was "afraid and thought you would be afraid about a play about an actual, physical castration, so, at one point, last Spring, I tried to turn it into a psychological castration." This misses Kazan's point. The director was as opposed to a masochistically passive surrender to punishment as he was to an escape. The drafts

show Williams vacillating about this issue, and Kazan is still reiterating his arguments as late as 4 January 1959 (Wesleyan). Both the promptbook and the director's notebook emphasize that for Kazan the text's most important decision is that Chance, who is given an opportunity to escape, *chooses* not to leave in order to punish himself: "The Thing is not a tragedy of size unless he chooses to stay in the TRAP."

¶19 This attempt to make Chance more centrally responsible for his fate involved a great deal of maneuvering with the "Garden of Allah" speech in which Heavenly (in the October 1958 rehearsal script) explained to Chance how she had been gang raped while trying to visit him in California, contracted a venereal disease, then suffered an hysterectomy. Placing this early in Acts 1 or 2, as Williams had done, created difficulties. The story was intended to exculpate Chance from personal blame (since he was in prison at the time of the rape—or, in another variant, stoned) at the same time that it made clear to him that Heavenly was no longer available for his dream of escape. However, the rest of Chance's behavior and the audience's sympathy depend on his not knowing this story until close to the end of the play. Williams's attempt to solve the problem by having the story somehow fail to register with Chance—who keeps stubbornly reiterating, "Heavenly, what happened?"—may be intended to show just how willfully committed to his own dream world Chance is, but it makes him seem incredibly obtuse and does not work dramatically. Kazan's solution, vehemently supported by his wife, was to move Heavenly's revelation to late in the last act, thus providing a motive for the collapse of Chance's belief that he and Heavenly can somehow renew their life together and influencing Chance to stay and accept castration as a punishment, paralleling Heavenly's rape and hysterectomy. Cheryl Crawford backs this up in a note to Williams on 6 January 1959 (Wesleyan), and Kazan elaborates on it in notes for a dinner conversation he would have with Williams on 21 January 1959 (Wesleyan).

¶20 Williams seems to have resisted Kazan's solution partly because he considered such a patterning too "ritualistic." In an interview with Jeanne Fuyard, he complained that in his opinion Chance failed to be effective as a character because he was "used in a symbolic manner. It is a ritualistic death, a metaphor. He had to be real to be important. You cannot use a character as a dramatic symbol if he is not first real for you. I didn't discover his real value till the end."²¹ For Kazan, however, Chance was always a "type," an epitome of twentieth-century American decadence: "ALL AMBITION/NO TALENT. That is . . . so significantly American. They are pumped full of ambition."²²

¶21 Kazan's attempt to make Chance more central to the action ran into particular trouble in the Boss Finley rally scene that provided the climax for Act 2. Williams's original idea was to have Boss Finley treat the audience as his political constituency, addressing them directly like voters, but Kazan dismissed this as clumsy and old hat.²³ From his very first green-ink notations, Kazan had entertained the idea of experimenting with a simulated television screen to mingle the effects of theater and film. This was an experiment in what his *Notebook* characterizes as "Subjective Scenery," whereby he was trying to take the metatheatrical blend of subjective and objective that he and Jo Mielziner had explored in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* a whole degree further. As Chance came downstage, with lighting reduced to a follow spot on his face, realistic scenery faded, and on the large television screen behind him the audience saw projected his subjective reactions: "what he sees—as he sees it—the huge menacing shots of B[oss Finley]."²⁴ This effect, though brilliant in itself, had some obvious disadvantages. Although in his letter to Williams of 2 September 1958 Kazan disingenuously credits Jo Mielziner with the concept of the television screen,²⁵ in fact Mielziner disapproved of it because, as he quite rightly pointed out, the clash between Finley's magnified image and amplified voice and the merely human

scale of Chance (further diminished in a pinspot) diverted the audience's attention too radically from the latter.²⁶ Kazan's method of trying to rectify this was to elaborate the agit-prop figure of the Heckler,²⁷ involving him increasingly with both Chance and the Boss's mistress Miss Lucy in the bar scene so that he would become what Kazan calls a "proxy" or surrogate for Chance, and his ejection from the rally and savage beating in the bar could provide a foreshadowing of Chance's final castration.

^{¶22} The device of the television screen exemplifies both the strengths and weaknesses of Kazan's direction. In fact, it was a brilliantly innovative effect (remarked on by every reviewer), but it was nugatory in regard to the text, because the Heckler remains a two-dimensional symbolic figure with whom the audience feels little rapport.

V

^{¶23} Though Williams saw both Chance Wayne and the Princess as linked and equal reflections of his own fears of aging and artistic failure,²⁸ Kazan tried to diminish the role of the Princess and showed very little awareness of her relation to Williams. He does mention "a charming camaraderie in villainy" between the Princess and Chance, noting that "they laugh & [sic] joke together sometimes, like Maria [St. Just] and Tenn., enjoying each other's bitcherie, enjoying getting the better of ea. other. They are two of a kind in enemy territory." He also notes that Chance's resentment at being a kept man has resemblances to the occasional petulance of Williams's long-time lover, Frank Merlo (*Notebook* 6). Mostly, however, he undermines the Princess's status in the play and reduces possible sympathy for her. This was partly because he considered that the script's split between two protagonists was a weakness: "*SB* was a script with . . . a serious fault: its interest was split between two characters" (*Notebook* 18—ie. 19). And because of this fault, Kazan felt the production required some directorial "stunts." More basically, however, Kazan seems to have lacked sympathy for the Princess herself and regarded her with something like fascinated contempt as the "monster" she claims to be. Comparing her to Marlene Dietrich, Stella Adler, Tallulah Bankhead, Frederick March, Lucinda Ballard (the designer of *J.B.* with whom he had quarreled), and surprisingly Winston Churchill (for her pugnacious addresses directly to the audience), he states immediately that, though she may be a star, she is a "bad actress"—a decision without grounds in Williams's script—and henceforth talks of her exclusively in terms of sexual predation (sometimes very vulgarly). His favorite designation for her is "the old cunt," and one of his first notes says she is such "a snotty superior self indulgent condescending bitch" that the audience will want to see Chance "take" her. Chance's "cock," says Kazan, "is his equalizer" (*Notebook* 16). He describes her being attracted by Chance's very ineptness as a blackmailer in luridly sexual terms; and when Geraldine Page was nervous about the Princess's direct addresses to the audience, Kazan told her, "Every time you go down there and you get scared, get louder and nastier."²⁹ This worked brilliantly in performance but was much more alienating than Williams's intention. The only time Kazan has a good word for the character, in fact, is when, for a brief while, the Princess says her heart has been touched by Chance, thus focusing on the person Kazan believed should be the central and only protagonist, instead of diverting sympathy from him.

^{¶24} The other woman figures were also diminished by this most macho of directors. Besides having the "miracle" of her false healing first reduced to a short narrative by Tom Junior, then cut altogether, Heavenly was directed to seem lifeless and unresponsive, because Kazan decided that "THE ONLY WAY SHE CAN LIVE IS BY BEING DEAD/Determined not to feel" (*Notebook* 20). This was varied occasionally by having her

unexpectedly and unnervingly scream. And after praising the scene in which Aunt Nonnie reminisced with Chance about the drama contest she had chaperoned and his early love for Heavenly,³⁰ Kazan had eliminated the scene and the character of Nonnie altogether by the time of the Philadelphia opening because they disrupted the flow of action he himself had constructed for Act 2. The stage presence of these diminished female characters was replaced by unscripted anonymous male hoodlums who gradually infiltrated the bar scene to enact typical Kazan scenes of entrapment and violence, first with the Heckler at the end of Act 2, then with Chance in the conclusion.

^{¶125} Kazan's lack of sympathy for the Princess was balanced by a surprisingly positive view of Boss Finley, whose "sincerity" Kazan stresses both as a political "MARTYR and HERO" and as a father whose love is "deeply, truly emotional: he takes easily to tears" (*Notebook* 17). Kazan suggests that Miss Lucy likes the Boss "because he is BIG, GENEROUS, FUN, DARING. And in most regions, *honest*" (*Notebook* 19). He seems to have wanted to portray him as a bigoted but life-affirming rough diamond like Big Daddy in *Cat*, with prodigious powers of persuasion: he notes that Boss Finley seems always to be addressing a meeting, fitting the metatheatrical bias of the production's whole approach. And, as Murphy documents, by the New York opening Kazan had removed most of the details Williams had included to suggest that Boss Finley was a monster: the relishing detail with which he had planned Chance's castration and disposal on a garbage scow; his brag to Heavenly of having taken her fair-skinned mother by force because she "wasn't *warm-blooded* like I was"; most of his more racist remarks; and Chance's accusations that Finley rode "the racial hate horse" and opposed his marriage to Heavenly because he was planning to marry her to an old business crony (Murphy 152-53).

^{¶126} All this was diametrically opposed to how Williams saw Boss Finley and constituted a major problem for his redrafting of Kazan's scenario. In a 1962 interview, Williams says he thinks he failed with the characterization because:

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. . . . The only thing I cannot—I can understand may be—but, no, I don't even understand that kind of self-infatuated, self-blindness and cruelty, you know, such as he—Finley—personified.³¹

VI

^{¶127} These divergencies are not the only things revealed in the letters, promptscript, and director's book, of course. Elia Kazan was undoubtedly a genius in his own right, probably the most gifted theater director in twentieth-century America (certainly in the two decades after World War II), and it is exciting to follow the vigorous, thrusting intelligence and imaginative invention of his line-by-line responses to the text—from big innovations like the television screen and his concept of "Subjective Staging" to such small acting insights as a suggestion that George Scudder would probably wear tight collars or that the conflicted Tom Junior might stutter. Murphy's chapter on the play goes into illuminating detail about major aspects of this staging: its metatheatrical mingling of subjective and objective; Jo Mielziner's innovative lighting design that gave the theater almost as much fluidity as film; and the distinct body languages Kazan invented for each of the major characters (which in the *Notebook* he calls "dances"). The only major item that can be added to her account from the archives is that Kazan also went to considerable trouble to roughen and diversify the surface of the play (what the Renaissance

called “asprezza”) by breaking it up into smaller units, each with its own theatrical objective and its own subtitle (as was usual in the Actor’s Studio); and, especially, to inject humor wherever possible to mitigate a lugubrious tone that sometimes verges dangerously on self-pity. For example, in his promptbook the first scene is broken down into fourteen subsections, and the scene in Act 2 when Chance encounters his old acquaintances in a cocktail lounge has seven distinct units, each with a comical subtitle: “The Show-Off,” “Enter the Comic Soubrette” [Miss Lucy], “Enter the Rube” [the Heckler], etc. And Kazan makes a further note to himself: “TRY ‘Song-TITLES’/like ‘When We Were Happy’/& give each sc./a sharply divergent/treatment that/comes from the title” (*Notebook* 18 [19]). To loosen up Paul Newman from his Actor’s Studio “Method,” Kazan even had him *sing* his role as Chance in some rehearsals.

VII

¶28 *Sweet Bird of Youth* was a considerable commercial success, running for 375 performances on Broadway and also doing well as a film directed by Richard Brooks; and the credit for this is almost entirely Kazan’s, with an invaluable “assist” from Mielziner. Williams at that period was a seriously sick and troubled man who might never have pulled the play together without Kazan’s energy and determination. That is the up-side of the production. The down-side, however, as the archive makes painfully clear, is that in his determination to have a hit to end his Broadway career, Kazan pushed *Sweet Bird of Youth* into production before Williams had fully conceived it. He presented Williams with an Act 2 scenario that Williams found impossible to revise, partly because it short-circuited his tapping into his own deep intuitions by less-directed drafting and partly because Kazan’s reading of the characters was antipathetic, swinging too much attention toward Boss Finley, the Heckler, and Tom Junior, and away from the Princess, Heavenly, and Aunt Nonnie, which Kazan saw as the more personal, less political aspects of the play.

¶29 Kazan, moreover, was quite aware of what he was doing. In his autobiography he states that he “took over” the production of *Sweet Bird* as he had earlier taken over the production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, pushing for a less realistic treatment of the play than Williams would have preferred and taking advantage of the playwright’s emotional dependence on him:

Again I had the feeling that I was violating the author, and that there was a gap between us, on one side of which I was satisfied, while he, on the other, was not. I was again determined, however, to go my own way and produce the play as I saw it. (*Life* 545)

The basic difference between the two artists, however, was not only a matter of realism versus theatricalism. It was also the fact that Kazan could apparently respond to the idea of self-punishment but not to Williams’s more somber acceptance of failure.

¶30 As he discusses so tormentedly in the essay “Author and Director” (see note 11), Williams may have been ready to acknowledge theatrical creation as an equal partnership, but by this stage in their relationship Kazan was determined to control productions. Ironically, the textual result—Kazan’s “stunts” of staging apart—is a play about the experience of failing that is itself a failure. An original and painfully personal insight has been reduced to a compromise neither partner really wanted. After the Philadelphia opening on 15 February, Kazan added a final item to his *Notebook*. Recognizing that the production was now set, and it was too late for further changes, he concludes wryly: “Simply, TW. does not think it is a major play about *Chance*.” Williams continued

to insist on *Sweet Bird* as a play in which the careers of Chance Wayne and the Princess provide complementary illustrations of America's adulation of youth and the collapse that ensues for people who follow this dream once their youth has fled. "Both are finished," Kazan concludes sadly but resignedly. His struggle to influence Williams had ended in a stand-off, a stalemate that pleased neither artist fully.³²

Notes

¹ Brenda Murphy, *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992).

² University of Delaware, F 71.

³ Elia Kazan, "Notebook for *Streetcar Named Desire*." *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre*, ed. Toby Coles and Helen Krich Chinoy, 2nd (rev.) ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976) 364-79.

⁴ Incidentally, on the flyleaf of this *Notebook* there is also a vivid description of Williams's disorderly habits of revision:

TW. brings you rewrites on odd pieces of label stationery—he has forgotten which pocket these bits are in—and [sic] pulls out the contents of one pocket after another—money, letters, order notes, etc., then finally the right bit of paper. (Wesleyan)

In regard to all Wesleyan manuscript documentation, the Wesleyan archive forbids precise box, folder, and file references to its holding. Adhering to these limitations, I use a mixture of parentheses and notes, endeavoring to blend clarity with concision in all documentation of these sources.

⁵ Qtd. in W. J. Weatherby, "Lonely in Uptown New York," *Manchester Guardian Weekly* 23 July 1959, rpt. in Albert J. Devlin, ed., *Conversations with Tennessee Williams* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 60.

⁶ *Five O'Clock Angel: Letters of Tennessee Williams to Maria St. Just 1948-1982* (New York: Knopf, 1990) 139.

⁷ *Five O'Clock* 151.

⁸ For an insight into Kazan's complicated mixture of guilt, rage, defiance, and resentment at this time, see: Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971) 83 ff.

⁹ HRHRC, University of Texas at Austin: Box 54, folder 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cited by Murphy 131. Williams was commenting on Jack Warner's enthusiasm for the script.

¹¹ Dick Moore, "Tennessee Williams," *Equity* (Dec. 1959) 8-14.

¹² "Author and Director: A Delicate Situation," *Playbill* (30 Sept. 1957), rpt. in *Where I Live: Selected Essays by Tennessee Williams*, ed. Christine K. Day and Bob Wood (New York: New Directions, 1978) 95.

¹³ Louise Davis, "That Baby Doll Man: I," *The Tennessee Magazine* (3 Mar. 1967), rpt. in Devlin 44.

¹⁴ *Tennessee Williams: Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1975) 173-74.

¹⁵ *Elia Kazan: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1988) 545.

¹⁶ Unpublished letter of 27 March 1959, in the Billy Rose Theater Collection of the New York Public Library; cited by Murphy 142.

¹⁷ Moore 14.

¹⁸ Arthur Gelb, "Williams and Kazan and the Big Walk Out," *New York Times* 1 May 1960, sec. 2 and 3, rpt. in Devlin 66.

¹⁹ For example, Sam Spiegel, Jack Wildberg, Charles Feldman, and Montgomery Clift.

²⁰ *Notebook*, sec. 16, p. 3.

²¹ Jeanne Fayard, "Meeting with Tennessee Williams," *Tennessee Williams* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972), rpt. in Devlin 103.

²² *Notebook* 4. In a letter to Williams of 20 May 1958, Kazan calls Chance Wayne "a grotesque mid 20th-century Hamlet," and repeats the argument that he is a "20th-century epitome" in another letter of 15 December 1958 (Wesleyan).

²³ Letter from Kazan to Williams of 20 May 1958 (Wesleyan).

²⁴ *Notebook*, section 1.

²⁵ Wesleyan; Kazan forgot he had already made the argument himself in an earlier letter of 20 May 1958.

²⁶ Jo Mielziner, *Designing for the Theater: A Memoir and A Portfolio* (New York: Bramhall House, 1965) 202.

²⁷ Interestingly, there is a fragmentary draft of *Baby Doll* in which a redneck heckles a senator (Texas: Williams *Works*, Box 8, Folder 1), though in that case the heckler is conservative and the senator a liberal reformer. Kazan suggested expanding the Heckler role in *Sweet Bird* at least as early as a letter to Williams of 2 September 1958 (Wesleyan).

²⁸ In early drafts, the character was, in fact, an aging homosexual called Artemis Pasmazoglu, where the parallel to Williams himself is clear. As Murphy documents (176, n. 51), the name “Pasmazoglu” was changed to “Kosmonopolis” soon after the New York opening, when lawyers for a childhood playmate of Williams (whom he claimed to have forgotten) objected to the use of her surname.

²⁹ “The Bottomless Cup: An Interview with Geraldine Page,” *Tulane Drama Review* 9 (1964) 115.

³⁰ Kazan letter to Williams dated 2 September 1958 (Wesleyan).

³¹ Lewis Funke and John E. Booth, “Williams on Williams,” *Theatre Arts* (Jan. 1962), rpt. in Devlin 103.

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