Chance's Main Chance: Richard Brooks's *Sweet Bird of Youth*

R. Barton Palmer

Though sensations for the most part on stage, the early plays of Tennessee Williams have only became widely known to the American and world public through their re-production by the Hollywood cinema. All of Williams's commercially produced plays of this period, *Camino Real* alone excepted, were made into commercial films, a record matched by no other playwright. To be sure, these varied considerably in terms of artistic and box office success, while generally offering film viewers a quite different experience from that enjoyed by Broadway theatergoers. But what is beyond any doubt is that Hollywood served no other contemporary playwright so well, swiftly bringing Williams into prominence as a highbrow yet raunchy purveyor of tales of psychological dysfunction, social marginalization, and sexual degradation, mostly in the tradition of contemporary Southern Gothic.

Among this body of films, two of the most important for establishing Williams's artistic reputation—and of course notoriety—were the two adaptations written and directed by Richard Brooks, the first of which, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, I discussed in last year's issue of this journal. Brooks's *Cat*, I there proposed, is faithful to the original Broadway production in a somewhat unusual sense, for it completes the melodramatization whose main outlines had already been sketched out by director Elia Kazan. The three substantial changes Kazan suggested were incorporated by Williams in his rewrite for the initial Broadway production, and all were taken further by Brooks in his screenplay. Here I will argue that Brooks's approach to the filming of *Sweet Bird* was quite similar, *mutatis mutandis*, even following the pattern established by *Cat* as far as practicable and possible. In so doing, Brooks was forced to alter his source substantially. Additional changes had to be made so that the protocols of the Production Code would not be violated, while the film's producers insisted on a happy ending. Because Williams's version of *Sweet Bird* was much transformed as a result, this second adaptation did not meet with the same critical approval granted the first. And yet both films, I hope to show, present a consistent and coherent version of related central themes in the original playscripts.

Brooks certainly hoped to repeat the financial and critical success of his *Cat*, and *Sweet Bird* was in some ways the ideal property for a sequel in the traditional Hollywood sense. The two plays are variations on a theme since they both focus on young men who are enduring a crisis of sexual desire and identity. These moments of anger, pain, and lost direction differ in important and interesting ways, but both are developmental (or so Brooks reinterprets them). As the films open,

both Brick and Chance, who have barely survived an extended adolescence, must reconcile themselves to assuming adult responsibilities and growing into monogamous heterosexuality. It is this point of contact between the two films that permitted the same actor, the vigorous, handsome, but sensitive Paul Newman, to star in both screen versions (and also in the Broadway production of *Sweet Bird*).

In terms of what we might call the philosophy of adaptation, moreover, *Sweet Bird* bears many similarities to *Cat*. Certainly in the case of both projects Brooks tried to follow the spirit of Williams's conception when this proved possible, though of course he had to work within the quite different institutional limitations and marketing requirements of commercial cinema. Brooks even reports that he tried to retain the essence of Williams's original tragic finale:

> I had a different ending for *Sweet Bird*, but they wouldn't let me use it. What I wanted Chance Wayne to do was this…. He goes to the house, calling for the girl. The brother shows up with the boys and they drag him over to the car. They begin to destroy him. You don't have to see the castration, but first they destroy his looks, and then they go to work on him…. You dissolve, in my other ending, straight to the ferry. At the beginning of the picture you saw the ferry as they arrive. The Princess and Lucy are leaving in the car and they stop for a moment. Once they're on the ferry boat, they're out of that town…. The boat slows down, toots its horn, pulls away a little bit to cross over, because passing is a garbage scow. On that scow is Chance Wayne (Brooks 1965, 8).

MGM, not surprisingly, nixed this ending, at least for the initial trade show version. Few Hollywood films of the period kill off the leading man at the end, leaving the heroine's erotic expectations forever unfulfilled. Brooks, however, did not shoot the necessary footage during initial production so that he might substitute his preferred ending if the executives had an unpredictable change of heart. The director declares that the studio "felt it was bad enough they were doing this picture." This hardly seems likely since Williams had been paid the then princely sum of $400,000 for the screen rights even before the Broadway production had proved successful. Like the director, MGM was banking on another critical and box office success from a hot Williams property, whose extraordinary qualities they were surely not eager to homogenize any more than was necessary. Yet in this interview, Brooks presents himself as an embattled *auteur*, struggling against the Philistine forces of bottom-line thinking in order to remain true to both his own artistic vision and an honored source. He only agrees to compromise after receiving promises that he can return to shoot this alternate ending after the preview. But that opportunity never materialized, he wryly comments.

But Brooks surely protests too much. The ending that was shot (boy gets the girl he comes for only after paying for his many misdeeds and discovering what is

truly important) not only fits the prescribed Hollywood formula but also the overall pattern of adaptation. And Brooks, occupying the unusual position of writer/director, exercised a great deal of control over that pattern. As Gene Phillips has perceptively remarked, "the upbeat ending of the film does grow out of the foregoing two hours with logic comparable to that with which the downbeat ending of the play develops out of its foregoing two hours" (Phillips 165). The appropriate ending can hardly be the result of a happy accident, with the proverbial studio hacks knowing better than the very talented Mr. Brooks how to resolve the drama of Chance's quest for self and Heavenly.

In any case, Williams found much to like in the film version, the happy finale excepted: "*Sweet Bird of Youth* was a brilliant film until the end" (quoted in Phillips 165). Critics, in contrast, have generally been dismissive of Brooks's achievement (see Yacowar 1977 for especially vitriolic commentary). The standard view is that Williams's *risqué* and tragic story of maladjustment, anomie, and the horror of aging has been transformed into a more conventional screen romance that ends with the young lovers together and alone at last.

Brooks, we have seen, maintains that he resisted turning *Sweet Bird* into a story whose values are more socially conservative and optimistic. I would suggest, however, that the changes he made in *Sweet Bird* were designed to deepen the similarity to his film of *Cat*, which, in his hands, certainly was aligned more carefully with traditional values. In both films, Brooks emphasizes only one of the several themes in the originals: masculinity in a crisis of desire and purpose. Most of the other major Williams films of the period, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Rose Tatoo*, and *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* chief among them, focus on women stymied by unfulfilled desire, personal failure, or family hostility.

Brooks's two Williams films, in contrast, find a resonance with one of the preoccupations of American culture and, thus, the Hollywood cinema during the 50s and early 60s. Many acclaimed and serious films of the period, ranging from *On the Waterfront* to *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, focus on men who, caught in moral dilemmas or failing in their drive to achieve, cannot easily reconcile themselves to the mature demands of career and marriage. Paul Newman, we might even say, more or less specialized in such stories. *From the Terrace*, *The Young Philadelphians*, *Hud*, and *The Hustler*, among other films, showcased Newman as an angry young man searching for direction and authenticity in a world of exploitative women, misleading father figures, and fierce competition for success. To that list, we can certainly add Brooks's *Cat* and *Sweet Bird*. Maggie the Cat and the Princess may be two of Williams's most remarkably complex and compelling female characters, and their power still makes itself felt in the two Brooks films. But in the end, Maggie and the Princess find themselves fixed within a restored patriarchal order, occupying positions of acknowledged subordination and weak strength. If the principal theme of melodrama is the re-establishment of a "just" or "natural" order for family and society, then the film versions of both *Cat* and

Sweet Bird are indeed melodramatic, with wayward women, uncertain or ineffectual patriarchs, and directionless young men finding themselves "properly" situated after all dramatic conflicts have run their course.

In the case of *Cat*, Brooks could travel further down the path of melodramatization already blazed by his theatrical counterpart, Elia Kazan. Although he also oversaw the initial Broadway production of *Sweet Bird*, this time Kazan did not ask Williams to change substantially what he had written (or so the director says). He did believe that this play, like *Cat*, suffered from a major structural problem. Kazan publicly identified what he thought was not quite right after the play's run, but, diplomatically perhaps, said nothing about making any suggestions to Williams about how the problem might have been solved:

> I said at the time I was directing the original Broadway production of *Sweet Bird of Youth* that it seemed to be two one-act plays, one about the Princess and one about Chance Wayne and his girl, but that is not a very perceptive remark since the Princess is hardly in the second act at all. I thought that this created something of a structural problem, but Williams carried it off with his virtuosity. (as quoted in Phillips 155)

Unlike Kazan, Brooks did not have to consult with Williams about his production and so could be less inhibited about changing the playwright's conception. For him the structural problem identified by Kazan was more pressing since he could not rely on the script's poetic qualities to mask it. Poetry, however filed with virtuosity, matters less in a medium where the image, not the spoken word, is primary. Thus, Brooks had to deal somehow with the fact that the Princess dominates Act I but then recedes in importance until close to the finale, when she offers Chance an opportunity (which he declines) to escape from the tragic circumstances in which he finds himself embroiled. In Kazan's view at least, *Cat* posed a somewhat similar problem in emphasis. Williams's original script made Big Daddy an important presence in the first two acts, but he did not reappear in Act III. This was easy to remedy, however, as Kazan advised Williams, by bringing back Big Daddy in the final act. Brooks increased this sense of male presence and drama by staging a long scene between Big Daddy and Brick in the mansion's basement. There father and son come to an understanding of the relative values of truth and mendacity for responsible and satisfying living. In the end, the reconciled and reassured males ascend to put an end to the wrangling between Big Mama and Mae, even as Brick, in what now is clearly a show of strength, agrees to Maggie's lie and thus takes his place in a patriarchal succession that will include his as yet unconceived child.

In the case of *Sweet Bird*, however, such a solution would not work since the difficulty was that the Princess is too powerful a presence. She takes attention away from the frustrated desire of the nominal protagonist, a desperate Chance for whom the Princess is at first no more than a means to an end.

Counter to Maggie's case, moreover, the Princess's dissatisfaction has nothing to do with a disturbance in the established family order. Her drives for creative expression, popular acclaim, and power over others are rooted in a desire for self-sufficiency, which is traditionally a masculine, not a feminine trait. With the important exception that Chance also desires Heavenly and thus the spiritual satisfaction of romantic love, he wants exactly what the Princess has had and is eager to regain. Protagonist and antagonist are much the same. Thus, the first act of *Sweet Bird* differs considerably from that of *Cat*, where Maggie fights for a re-establishment of her position in the Pollitt family, which Brick's despair and anger have taken from her. The first act of *Sweet Bird*, perhaps unconsciously on Williams's part, is intensely self-reflexive. It is no less than a figuration of the conflict between the two opposed, rather than connected, stories that define the play's compositional origins.

Act I stages the *agon* between Chance and the Princess, with the latter, despite her dependence on drugs, her hypochondria and disorientation (she is on unknown ground), managing to retain her dignity and control in the face of Chance's attempt to objectify her, to change her into a stepping stone for his career. In the end, she forces Chance to deliver on his promise of sexual service in the teeth of his pathetic blackmail attempt. In a sense, Act I even thematizes the play's structural problem, foregrounds it as a dramatic question that succeeding acts will have to answer. Who in fact is the main character? Chance's actual antagonists, Boss Finley and company, do not make an appearance until Act II, although this struggle is introduced in the brief conversation between Chance and George Scudder. It is then displaced by the encounter between Chance and the Princess. In any event, Chance certainly does not lay clear claim to the role of protagonist early in the play, but he does so in the film. Brooks's successful reformulation of the relationship between the Princess and Chance is thus an important element in the masculinizing (which is also the melodramatizing) of *Sweet Bird*.

Such a plan meant that Brooks could not follow through on one of his intentions: to remain fairly faithful to the playscript. A comparison of the film to the stage version published by New Directions shows clearly that Brooks made extensive changes; these have been catalogued exhaustively elsewhere (in Yacowar 1977 and Phillips 1980). We should look first at what was required to make the resulting film acceptable to its potential distributors. The producer, Pandro S. Berman, had to conform to some of the protocols of acceptable film content as these continued to be enforced by the Production Code Administration. At the time, the PCA still had the considerable power of granting or withholding a certificate of acceptability, though releasing a film without a PCA certificate no longer spelled box office doom. Some material from the stage version had to be excised or altered in the adaptation of *Cat*. Most notably, any implication that the relationship between Skipper and Brick had been in some sense homoerotic needed to be eliminated. Accordingly, the film version not only establishes that Brick is heterosexual, only too attached to an adolescent camaraderie; it also absolves Maggie of

having gone through with bedding Skipper, thereby not only eliminating adultery as one of the film's themes, but also easing the eventual reconciliation between husband and wife.

The changes required in the case of *Sweet Bird*, however, were somewhat more extensive because this play's themes were more *outré* and thus conflicted more obviously with the bourgeois moralism of the Code. *Cat*, after all, is at bottom a family melodrama, whose dramatic action is contained by the boundaries of the Pollitt household. The mansion is the appropriate setting for the dramatic settling of family business, including, most obviously, determining who is to succeed to the position of patriarch soon to be vacated by Big Daddy.

Sweet Bird, in contrast, opens in a hotel room occupied by a couple who are not only unmarried but not even romantically involved. Act II moves to a family mansion presided over by an ostensibly powerful man, but Boss Finley is soon revealed as a vicious and self-serving tyrant who can no longer satisfy his mistress and is only too ready to prostitute the beautiful daughter, for whom his feelings are nearly incestual. The remainder of the dramatic action, however, unfolds in the hotel, which is the appropriate setting for damaging public revelations and the frustration of a desire that cannot get beyond the impersonal and impermanent. With some understatement, Richard Brooks has admitted that "*Cat* was more adaptable to the screen than *Sweet Bird* in terms of having less material that was censorable" (Phillips 161-2).

Somewhat surprisingly, Berman and Brooks were able to keep the play's dramatization of illegal drug use. This subject had been prohibited by the Code (promulgated in 1934), but some quality films that dealt seriously with addiction, including Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1956) and Fred Zinnemann's *A Hatful of Rain* (1957), had necessitated a relaxation of that particular prohibition. Venereal disease, however, was another matter, and Brooks wisely altered Heavenly's gonorrhea (that leads to a hysterectomy). Instead, the legacy of Chance's return to St. Cloud is a pregnancy that requires an abortion, but only to protect Boss Finley's political position as a moral paragon. Similarly, the castration that is Chance's just and accepted punishment for having caused Heavenly's mutilation would also have to be eliminated; Brooks has Chance suffer instead a more symbolic destruction of his masculinity, a career-ending blow to the handsome face of this would-be actor. In the play, Chance is a not inexperienced prostitute who delivers the services the Princess requires once he has attempted, somewhat successfully, to raise their value. In Brooks's revision, Chance is an amateur (if still immoral) tease who holds out the promise of sex only to secure the Princess's collaboration in the launching of his Hollywood career.

In writing both film scripts, Brooks was thus obligated to conventionalize Williams's sexual themes somewhat, but hardly completely. After both *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1950) and *Baby Doll* (1956) achieved a *succès de scandale* with the filmgoing public, no Williams adaptation could dispense with the erotic unconventionality that, rightly or wrongly, had become the playwright's most bank-

able asset. On the silver screen, *Cat* still traces the trials of a young man who has stopped sleeping with his beautiful wife in spite of, or perhaps because of, her strong desire for him. *Sweet Bird* still dramatizes the difficulties encountered by a young man willing to use his physical charms to get ahead and who, even less admirably, stoops to blackmailing his most influential "client" so that he can swindle his way to success and thereby merit the hand of his sweetheart, who is recovering from aborting his child. In both cases, Brooks altered only what would not be acceptable to the PCA or to distributors and audiences. He did not relieve either property of its often shocking unconventionality.

Even more important, these changes contribute substantially to Brooks's evident plan to masculinize the narrative, make it closer to his version of *Cat*. Since his Brick is certainly not a homosexual, he can be fully restored to the unrivaled male strength of which Maggie's frustrated desire (in its connected familial and sexual senses) is at first the only index, especially in light of Gooper's obvious procreative abilities. Brick's resumption of the role as presumptive heir to the dying patriarch is both re-established and figured by his closing gesture, a key Brooks addition. After reconciling with his father and helping Gooper put Mae in her proper place, Brick summons his now obedient and uncomplaining wife to the upstairs bedroom, where he casually throws his pillow back on the marriage bed in an obvious prelude to making good Maggie's lie.

The key melodramatic element here is the inseparability of sexual pleasure and procreation, for the family is the structure within which desire assumes proper regulation. Big Daddy's confession of disgust at the prospect of sleeping with Big Mama, and his taking of a mistress, limn a division of loyalties and energies that the "love match" between Brick and Maggie will perhaps remedy in the next generation. In the stage version of *Sweet Bird*, by way of contrast, Chance's sexual power destroys rather than creates life, making it impossible for it to be accommodated within family life. The gonorrhea with which he infects Heavenly (the index and figure of his destructive promiscuity) results in her hysterectomy. This loss of the ability to procreate is fittingly matched by the castration with which Chance is served by her rightfully angered family. The disconnection between desire and procreation is also evident in the *agon* between the Princess and Chance, which mirrors, if only ironically, that between Maggie and Brick in Act I of *Cat*. Both acts thematize what was a surprising understanding (for the time) of sexual politics since they each involve sexually aggressive women who are eager to sleep with reluctant men. There the resemblance ends, however. For Maggie (it becomes evident) wants Brick as much as she wants Brick's baby. In contrast, the Princess desires only an impersonal sexual release, something she can purchase from a subordinate male.

And Chance, to make the obvious point, finds himself with a woman he doesn't want (a just consequence of his way of life), hoping that she will somehow transform him into a man whom the woman he does love could want. The woman's role in *Sweet Bird* is split, an index of the division between Chance's

sexual identities, between his desire for fame and his desire for an idealized romantic fulfillment. Brooks's changes, though prompted by PCA protocols, restore the inseparability of desire and procreation, or at least make possible such a restoration once the disruptive presence of the Princess has been neutralized. For the film's Chance is not promiscuous, only a willing exploiter of his looks.

Moreover, Heavenly and Chance demonstrate that their love can lead to a pregnancy, which is aborted not because of Chance, but because of Boss Finley. He not only wishes to use the illusion of his daughter's purity as an election ploy, but intends marrying her off to a man of his choice, Dr. George Scudder, whom Heavenly does not love and who gives no sign of loving her. Most important, perhaps, Heavenly and Chance remain "whole" at film's end and thus capable of beginning family life together now that they have evaded the evil father, melodrama's typical blocking character. The thematic logic of these changes (Chance's innocence as far as Heavenly is concerned, in particular) means that a happy ending makes better sense. To have Chance murdered at the end is simply to endorse the power of Boss Finley to destroy thoroughly any chance for his daughter's happiness. This makes little sense in terms of the changed moral valence in the rivalry between Boss Finley and Chance for control of Heavenly.

If Brooks has effected some essential changes in the playscript, we should recall at this point that the version of *Sweet Bird* produced on Broadway and subsequently published, in its essentials at least, by New Directions is only one version of this material, and does not even represent Williams's last thoughts. For the acting version, Williams provided a different kind of happy ending, with the Princess and Heavenly finding themselves together after Chance's destruction. Even more than in the case of his other plays, with whose structure he was always tinkering, Williams experienced great difficulty in constructing a version of *Sweet Bird* that he found entirely satisfactory. After a thorough review of all the relevant archival materials, Drewey Wayne Gunn concludes that this play has suffered through a "troubled flight" because of Williams's uncertainty about how best to dispose and connect its varied elements:

> As he reworks a play, he usually tightens its structure and sharpens its dramatic values. However, one notable exception to this pattern exists: *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The three successive texts, 1959-1962, represent rather a sequential degeneration of Williams's artistic control, for in each revision the structure, the development of the characters, and the focus of the play become progressively less coherent. (Gunn 1981, 26)

As Gunn shows, Williams combined (not an extraordinary practice for him) disparate materials to create the finished play. *Sweet Bird* brings together three separate characters, or sets of characters, developed initially in different groups of sketches. The first centers around Boss Finley, a corrupt Southern politician with an innocent, troubled daughter and an unhappy mistress. A second concerns a

failed and quickly aging but still young actor who has become a gigolo though he still hopes to marry the girl of his dreams, whom he has infected with gonorrhea. The third features, at first, a world-weary man with Hollywood connections who has picked up a male prostitute, but, later, as Williams adapted his vision to the realities of the contemporary stage, "he" becomes a "she," an aging actress, married to an aristocrat, whose film career may be over after a disastrous comeback attempt.

Such a method of composition forced the playwright in this case to solve difficult problems of emphasis and subordination. As he worked through three drafts of the play, Williams decided to downplay (but not eliminate) the political aspects of the Boss Finley material, while building up the two central relationships that are emphasized in all versions: the idealized romance between the actor turned gigolo, now named Chance Wayne, and Finley's daughter, now named Heavenly; its mirror opposite, the cash for sex connection between the aging actress, now called the Princess, and Chance, in his other avatar as "paid companion."

Most important for our present purposes, perhaps, is the strong moral character of the rivalry between the Boss and Chance for control over Heavenly. Like his counterpart (perhaps model) in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Boss Finley represents a hypocritical, tyrannical Southern populism, a demagoguery that depends on the leader identifying himself, with a sense of charisma borrowed from revivalist fundamentalism, as a reformer come from the country to cure evils, social and political. Finley's public piety contrasts with his sinful private life. Deceived by the Boss, Chance is only indirectly responsible for Heavenly's infection with gonorrhea. He is a sympathetic character, truly in love with Heavenly; the couple are destroyed when the Boss's thugs castrate Chance, an act that has both personal and political significance since it is part of the demagogue's denial of liberty and happiness to his opponents.

Thus *Sweet Bird*, like *Cat*, makes interesting use of what might be called the plantation myth, an element of the Southern Gothic tradition that some literati had faulted Williams for exploiting in the earlier play. *Sweet Bird*, however, thoroughly rejects the more socially conservative configuration of that myth in *Cat*. Instead, Williams here explores the darker, dysfunctional side of patriarchy in the expanded context of the American dream, which seems so dependent on safe Oedipal passage. Unlike *Cat*'s patriarch, Boss Finley obstructs the emergence of any successor, keeping his son in a state of perpetual subordination and preventing his daughter from marrying Chance and thus making possible a new generation. Crucial to the configuration of the plantation myth here is the fact that Chance is a sympathetic character, more sinned against than sinning, a victim of Aunt Nonnie's foolish encouragement of his affair with Heavenly (more emphasized in drafts one and two) and of Boss Finley's fiercely Oedipal opposition.

In the third draft of the play, however, Chance is transformed into a much less admirable character. Gunn suspects that Kazan may have played a role in prompt-

ing, among others, this particular change (there is no evidence to support such a claim, however). In any case, Gunn thinks that as he did his rewrite, Williams "lost sight of his initial concept":

> A most significant alteration—and a completely inexplicable one—occurred with Chance's character. Williams made him decidedly responsible for infecting Heavenly and then callously guilty of not informing her he had a venereal disease. In addition, Chance now shows little grief for his mother's death. (Gunn 1981, 33)

Perhaps the change is not "inexplicable," however. Kazan might have reminded Williams that more catharsis might be wrung from the tragic finale if Chance were made truly responsible for the destruction that comes upon him. It is classic Aristotle, after all, for the tragic protagonist to in part cause his downfall, rather than simply be an innocent victim of a malevolent fate. In so doing, Kazan would be urging Williams toward the judicious moral balance at which he ultimately arrived in fixing Blanche's character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blackening Chance's character, however, had the unfortunate effect of providing Boss Finley with good reason to seek vengeance on him, thus reducing to relative inconsequence the Boss's crimes, particularly those that victimize Heavenly.

In any event, Brooks's melodramatizing has the effect of restoring the black/white moralism of the first two drafts, preparing the way for Chance's final meriting of Heavenly's love through suffering and self-sacrifice. Williams's Chance is forced to abandon his illusion of success and accept the failure that is in some sense the consequence of his misdeeds. In Brooks's reformulation, Chance realizes the emptiness of his youthful dreams, which depend on his good looks alone. He then rejects the genuine opportunity for the Hollywood career he had long sought, the offer that the Princess makes of helping him.

Brooks's Chance Wayne is thus no longer what his name suggests, a child of fortune whose luck is running out. In the film version, Chance discovers no dead end as he progresses toward self-understanding. He embarks upon a penitential, Oedipal journey that saves him from himself and delivers him from the malevolent opposition of the evil father, Boss Finley, whose insincere attempt to keep her a virginal child helps frustrate Chance. Brooks's narrative thus delivers Chance from the calculating self-absorption and misogyny that in the play provoke a disastrous sexual vengeance. His Chance finds that foolish posturing and the exploitation of women bring him to a failure that paradoxically offers him his main chance, which is to adopt a humbler masculine style that admits of true pathos.

Whereas Brooks's Brick purges himself of anger, guilt, and self-doubt in order to resume the sexual command that is his birthright in several senses, Brooks's Chance must abandon his swaggering phallicism and suffer a symbolic castration that delivers him to monogamous love. Brick overcomes the wound he

has suffered through experience and his own willfulness, the broken leg that signals the end of an adolescent devotion to games. Chance, in contrast, must suffer the restorative wound he merits, for this physical scar is the outward sign of psychic wholeness. In their different ways, however, both films are melodramatic in the conventional Hollywood sense, endorsing sexual normalcy, emotional wholeness, the superiority of the spirit to what the world defines as success (athletic prowess, fame and fortune as a screen celebrity).

In this progress toward an endorsement of traditional moral values (family and love as opposed to self-serving careerism), the Princess now occupies the position of object lesson, a endorsement of the road not taken. At the film's beginning, Chance is imaged complexly as her superior and servant. The opening sequences show him in obvious charge of their southern swing, motoring down the Gulf Coast highway, stopping to fetch her a bottle of liquor, and driving with confident abandon. Arriving in St. Cloud, he arranges for their hotel accommodation, carries her (the Princess is in a drunken stupor) up to the room, and makes sure she is comfortably bedded down. What this part of the film shows is that Chance has considerable charisma and personal power, yet he has put himself in a position of servitude to the fading star in order to further a career for which, it soon becomes evident, he has no aptitude. The *agon* with the Princess that immediately follows gives evidence of Chance's charisma; she is touched by his situation and, later, offers him, with some affection, a chance for a film career. Like Heavenly, the Princess facilitates Chance's maturation, providing him, with both her offer and the example of her own life, an alternative to life with Heavenly. At film's end, Heavenly drives the mutilated Chance out of town in yet another fancy convertible; the Princess had earlier left alone in hers. This complex rhyme with the initial sequence shows what Chance has lost and gained in the course of the dramatic action.

It is interesting that *Cat* could be so readily accommodated to time-honored Hollywood patterns of dramatic resolution, with its accompanying endorsement of conservative social values, including the sanctity of marriage and the endurance of family across generational change. Though *Sweet Bird* required considerably more alteration to achieve something of the same effect, it is interesting once again that Brooks was able to bring off such a transformation while preserving the play's basic elements, including the Princess, whose presence might be thought beyond any melodramatic recuperation. The unexpected popular success of Brooks's two Williams adaptations meant that many, perhaps most of those who became familiar with the playwright's work in this period were introduced to him by the film versions of *Cat* and *Sweet Bird*. It was a melodramatized Williams this public came to know and love. They discovered a playwright who could celebrate the difficult passage to independence and reconciliation, not the poet of insufferable despair and loneliness or the modern artist unhampered by traditional canons of realism and dramatic structure. But can we say in the end that this "implied self" is all Hollywood distortion and canny commercial packaging? What Drewey

Gunn has called the "troubled flight" of *Sweet Bird*'s textual history, including its Hollywood adaptation by Richard Brooks, suggests that in this play Williams had difficulty choosing between tragic and melodramatic alternatives. This film perhaps gives us a side of the playwright that he could not, or would not, allow theatergoers to glimpse. It therefore holds considerable interest for us as a contrasting production, an interpretation both faithful and revisionist of a difficult yet engaging text.

Works Cited

Brooks, Richard. "Richard Brooks." *Movie* 12 (1965): 2-9, 15-16.

Gunn, Drewey Wayne. "The Troubled Flight of Tennessee Williams's *Sweet Bird*: From Manuscript through Published Texts." *Modern Drama* 24.1 (1981): 26-35.

Phillips, Gene D. *The Films of Tennessee Williams*. London: Associated University Presses, 1980.

Yacowar, Maurice. *Tennessee Williams and Film*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1977.