Films for Swingin' Lovers: Frank Sinatra, Performance and Sexual Objectification in *The Tender Trap* and *Pal Joey*

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The figure of the playboy is one of the lasting masculine images of the 1950s. Its associations of sexual predatoriness and invulnerable confidence were set up as a stark contrast to the world of steady propriety within which the suburban husband was said to exist. Frank Sinatra seemingly fit the mould of this symbol of the age to a tee, his life and art combining in an image of the affluent urban swinger which stretched across the breadth of his popular cultural depictions of the American male. In cinematic terms, Sinatra brings this persona to the screen most obviously in the films *The Tender Trap* (1955) and *Pal Joey* (1957) which seem designed to illustrate his affinity with the playboy figure. Yet close examination of these texts reveals issues of performance and sexual objectification which disallow an uncomplicated reading of this persona. At the same time, the totality of Sinatra's star image, which brings into play questions of emotional vulnerability and working-class status, undercuts the surface sexual arrogance of these roles.

John Ellis' definition of a star as "a performer in a particular medium whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation, and then feeds back into future performances" is particularly apposite when considering Sinatra on screen. (Ellis, 1992: 91) A circular stream of influences and image making occurs as Sinatra's persona builds through a series of film appearances, his recording and television work, and a personal image derived from biographical revelations and publicity, all of which subsequently impacts upon future film performances. The strong influence which Sinatra's personal image would have upon his cinematic persona was signalled by his first acting role following early singing-only appearances on screen with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in the films *Las Vegas Nights* (1941) and *Ship Ahoy* (1942) and as a solo singer in *Reveille with Beverley* (1943). Though the mild mannered innocent he portrays in the 1943 film *Higher and Higher* is very much a studio creation, Sinatra appears as "Frank Sinatra", complete with the voice, the tuxedo, the bow tie and the swooning bobbysoxers. By the 1950s this benign image had become increasingly difficult to sustain. Sinatra's arrest in 1947 for an assault on Hearst columnist Lee Mortimer, and his numerous affairs that culminated in his divorce from Nancy Barbato and subsequent marriage to Ava Gardner suggested a persona that bore little resemblance to the Frank Sinatra appearing on screen. The 1951 film *Meet Danny Wilson* points to the more complicated image of Sinatra that would take shape during the decade. A semi-autobiographical tale, it charts the story of a popular singer's rise from the streets of New York to international stardom and is dominated by Sinatra mythology, from gangland connections to inequitable employment deals and from bobbysoxer riots at the Paramount Theatre to Hollywood film contracts. The similarities with Sinatra's route to fame were not lost on the critics. *Time* magazine, for example, chuckled that "fans may expect Ava Gardner to pop up in the last reel." (Ringgold and McCarty, 1989: 73) More importantly, the film establishes strong connections between many of the character traits by then associated with Sinatra's extra-cinematic image and his role on screen. Danny Wilson is, therefore, working-class and initially unsuccessful in his career; he has an eye for

women which develops into emotional dependency; and he exhibits a readiness to solve arguments with his fists.

Sinatra's recording work acts in a similar way as a means through which the Sinatra persona becomes evident. Henry Pleasants argues that in his musical performances Sinatra "was not presenting himself as an artist. He was presenting himself as a person, as Frank Sinatra, the skinny, hollow-cheeked kid from Hoboken, with a lot of hopes, a lot of problems -- ethnical, social, physical and sexual -- and a lot of frustrations, disappointments and hangups." (Pleasants, 1974: 97) Through the 1950s Sinatra's concept albums presented personas of, alternately, swingin' playboy and man in emotional crisis which appeared to echo the extreme elements of Sinatra's own existence. Therefore, songs like "I'm a Fool to Want You" were purported to be an expression of his volatile relationship with Ava Gardner and albums such as *Come Fly With Me* (1958) presented Sinatra as a carefree American bachelor.

In *The Tender Trap* and *Pal Joey* Sinatra therefore brought to the big screen a persona which, though only one element of his total image, he was simultaneously displaying on record and, according to all reports, in his private life. At the opening of *Pal Joey* it was therefore easy for *Variety* to conclude that, "Sinatra is potent. He's almost ideal as the irreverent, free-wheeling, glib Joey." (Ringgold and McCarty, 1989: 137) In addition, the way in which Sinatra presented himself on television during the late 1950s suggested that he represented ideal casting in this role. In 1957 Bing Crosby hosted a star-studded variety show which aired as a showcase for Ford's latest car, the Edsel. Since Sinatra's arrival on the recording scene as a solo artist Sinatra and Crosby had been set up as opposites, with jokes emphasising their contrasting weights, musical styles and financial status becoming a regular constituent of their appearances together. During *The Edsel Show* the contrast is presented as being between two masculine types so that Sinatra appears as urban swinger to Crosby's romantic family man. (Crosby's son, Lindsay, even appears on the show.) Therefore, as the stars move onto a set supposedly representing Paris, Crosby waxes lyrical on the subjects of couturiers and Arpège while Sinatra enquires: "Listen, while we're here, do you think there's a possibility of latching onto a few broads in this town?" He follows this by asking a couple of catwalk models: "Didn't I see you chicks in *Esquire*?" Sinatra's reference here to *Esquire* is interesting since it stood very much as a rival to *Playboy* and presented a much less combative image of American manhood for whom sexual activity represented only one of a variety of interests. Additionally, *Esquire*'s models were perceived to be less attainable for the average man. The element of fantasy rather than aspiration therefore makes Sinatra's reference somewhat safer than an allusion to *Playboy* might have been. (Nadel, 1995: 129-131) When the two performers later join Rosemary Clooney for a medley of songs, throughout which they vie for the singer's affections, they are again set up as opposing versions of the American male. Crosby performs as the steady romantic who enquires, "Would you like to swing on a star?", while Sinatra refers to himself as a "city boy" and asks Clooney, "Or would you rather swing at a bar?" Despite Crosby's retention into middle-age of an image of romantic sophistication, the impression given is that Sinatra's attraction and attractiveness to the opposite sex is of a much more modern and potent variety.

The live quality of the 1950s variety shows gives an impression of naturalness that is reinforced by the casual presentation style of these players. This, of course, conceals the fact that the show has been scripted and rehearsed and that the stars are therefore engaged in a performance. Therefore, it is necessary to note that, as Erving Goffman has observed, "in those interactions where the individual presents a product to others, he will tend to show them only the end product, and they will be led into judging him on the basis of something that has

been finished, polished and packaged." (Goffman, 1969: 38) In addition, with the stars appearing as Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra rather than as fictional characters, the suggestion is that the way they behave has a certain authenticity. However, it is pointed out by James Naremore that anything which occurs before a camera necessarily becomes a performance. Naremore cites the example of Chaplin's short film, *Kid's Auto Race* (1914), in which Chaplin's Tramp character descends upon a real-life event and members of the public are transformed into performers through being caught on camera. (Naremore, 1988: 9-17) In the 1957/1958 series of *The Frank Sinatra Show*, while appearing to present a version of his "real" self, Sinatra at the same time begins to signal the playboy persona quite obviously as a performance by connecting it to both his musical and cinematic imagery. With Sinatra opening editions of the show dressed in fedora and raincoat and strolling down the aisle of the theatre to the strains of "The Tender Trap", a direct connection is made with the persona represented on the covers of albums like *Songs for Swingin' Lovers* (1956) and additionally with characters like *Pal Joey*'s Joey Evans.

The effect of querying the veracity of Sinatra's star persona as playboy is that the stability of the roles with which it is connected is similarly questioned. The image is in any case burdened by the legacy of Sinatra's cinematic persona of the 1940s. In musicals like *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and *On the Town* (1949), Sinatra plays a romantic innocent whose modest success rate with the opposite sex comes about only with the assistance of Gene Kelly's confident characters. This image of Sinatra as far from equipped for the role of predatory male -- or "wolf", as *Anchors Aweigh* terms it -- lingers in *The Tender Trap* and underlies his depiction of the topical playboy. The intention initially, in the latter film, is to clearly place Sinatra within the context of the recognisable playboy lifestyle. In 1956 *Playboy* published a two-part article dedicated to describing the kind of apartment that was perfectly designed for its readership. The article distinguishes between the "quiet zone" of the bedroom, bathroom and study where the bachelor can contemplate his single lifestyle alone, and the "active zone" where he entertains. As Steven Cohan points out, "the 'active zone' of the apartment (kitchen, dining and living rooms) is an arena for performing bachelorhood before an appreciative audience of friends and guests." (Cohan, 1997: 272) In *The Tender Trap* Charlie Reader therefore uses as his base a functional, uncluttered apartment, the main foci of which are a couch on which he entertains a variety of women and a bar constantly in use. As the film opens, the connection with this kind of apartment-based performance is immediately made as the audience is introduced to Charlie draped around his latest squeeze on his living room couch. Her murmurings of approval are then felt by Charlie to be an insufficient rating of his performance, as he asks her, "Is that the best you've got to say?" Charlie's life consists of a constant round of open invitations from women who either telephone to check his availability or arrive at his door bearing gifts or offering to tidy up his home. In 1956 an article in *Woman's Home Companion* linked this lifestyle directly to Sinatra's own, revealing that, "Wherever Frank goes, there is usually a woman in the background, waiting for him to finish his business. At his duplex bachelor apartment in Westwood, Hollywood girls are always popping in (blonds, brunettes and redheads) -- just like in *The Tender Trap* -- ready to do little chores for him." (Taves, 1956: 40) The effect of bringing into direct play Sinatra's star image is, however, to complicate the playboy persona on screen with the various other characteristics that are an integral part of Sinatra's image.

Among these elements is the image Sinatra has as a working-class American. One of the reasons that the playboy figure struck a chord among American men is that it connected with the same philosophy of affluence and consumerism that had become the motivating force behind the middle-class suburban male's drive for success. Therefore, just as American

husbands found a sense of status in their houses, cars and domestic appliances, the single, urban male was equally identifiable as an example of middle-class success due to, as Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, "not the power lawn mower, but the hi-fi set in mahogany console; not the sedate, four-door Buick, but the racy little Triumph; not the well-groomed wife, but the classy companion who could be rented (for the price of drinks and dinner) one night at a time." (Ehrenrich, 1983: 50) While songs like "Come Fly With Me" exude a similar feeling of high living decadence as Sinatra sings of indulging in "exotic booze" in "far Bombay" -- even though the same album cover shows the singer hitching a lift -- Sinatra's screen persona and personal image take him out of the realms of successful consumerism and return him to an idea of working-class American masculinity with which he was readily associated. For example, roles such as eternal underdog Private Angelo Maggio in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), world-weary saloon singer Barney Sloane in *Young at Heart* (1954) and even *The Man with the Golden Arm*'s (1955) Frankie Machine, the heroin addict who dreams of jazz drumming stardom, emphasise an image of Sinatra as existing on the same disadvantaged level as much of America.

The notion of Frank Sinatra as an ordinary American had been established during the 1940s through a relationship with his audience which dissolved differences of fame and financial standing, suggesting that, in spirit at least, he remained strongly connected to the environment from which his success had in practical terms removed him. An article in *The New Republic* in 1944 discussed this element of the Sinatra persona, the author, Bruce Bliven, arguing that, "He represents a dream of what they themselves might conceivably do or become. He earns a million a year, and yet he talks their language; he is just a kid from Hoboken who got the breaks. In everything he says and does, he aligns himself with the youngsters and against the adult world. It is always 'we' and never 'you'." (Petkov and Mustazza, 1995: 33) In the same way, Sinatra's Italian-American background consistently positioned him at a distance from the WASP society that was thriving in the post-war years. A 1955 *Time* magazine article entitled "The Kid from Hoboken", wherein Sinatra is derided for his monetary largesse and his "George Raft kind of snazziness", is one of many which appeared during the 1950s, each implying that what the authors viewed as Sinatra's blatant ethnicity would see him excluded from an Anglo-Saxon establishment. Sinatra's response to such attitudes in refusing to change his name to something less obviously Italian -- as his early boss, bandleader Harry James, had requested -- or alter his behaviour to fall in line with middle-class ideas of acceptable conduct, reinforced an image of maintained alienation from America's dominant culture. Between 1957 and 1958 Herbert Gans conducted a study of Italian-Americans in the West End district of Boston during which he discovered that Sinatra was "almost worshipped" by the male youth of the community largely for this reason. Sinatra was perceived to have retained his working-class Italian-American character as evidenced by, among other things, his willingness to fight physically against those who were purportedly attempting to sabotage his career, and his supreme loyalty to friends whom mainstream society rejected as disreputable. According to Gans, the general view seemed to be that "despite his success, he has not given up the old values; he has remained what he was originally - a seeker of action with peer group values." (Gans, 1962: 192-3)

A similar process of undercutting of the affluent playboy image can be seen at work in Sinatra's television appearances during this time. In the opening show of his 1957/1958 series of *The Frank Sinatra Show*, Sinatra takes part in a sketch wherein he and Bob Hope trail Kim Novak around the world in a tussle for her affections. Denise Mann points out that 1950s variety shows set film stars in exotic, if fabricated settings as a means of raising the televisual experience above the everyday. Mann writes: "By evoking memories of intensely felt

emotions and an opulent world that existed outside the home, these programs provided a much needed antidote to the homogenizing tendencies of so much of the popular culture imagery of the postwar period." Yet she also examines the way in which a star such as Martha Raye was able to reduce the distance between performer and audience because of her depiction of herself as something other than a glamorous film star. (Butler, 1991: 340-351) Prior to the above sketch, Sinatra's star status has already been reduced by Bob Hope's jibes at two of Sinatra's recent films, *Johnny Concho* (1956) and *The Pride and the Passion* (1957). Further, the glamour of travelling the globe to make the various movies that Sinatra details is denied as he complains of having a passport photo that looks better than he does. The sketch itself is presented as a film which Sinatra and Hope sit down to view as members of the audience. When Sinatra then reaches Novak in Paris she asks him, "Why did you follow me?" His reply that, "I didn't follow you, I won a contest", again distances him from the role of glamorous jet-setter, and positions him as an ordinary member of the game show watching public.

The result is that both an unattainable high life and Sinatra as playboy become weakened images. Sinatra's characterisations of the American male often begin as parodies of machismo in order to reveal the performance quality of this style of masculinity. In *Some Came Running* (1958), for example, Sinatra's war veteran disturbs the self-satisfied sensibility of suburban America with his excessive drinking, womanising and general carousing which is later revealed as a manifestation of his emotional vulnerability and inability to settle back into a life of perceived normality. His reference to his uniform as a "costume" indicates the masking quality of the displays of machismo that were necessary in the wartime experience but which are unacceptable on the post-war home front. Similarly, in *Suddenly* (1954) Sinatra takes on the role of a presidential assassin and parodies the sneers and arrogance of cinema's tough guys while revealing the psychological damage done to his character by the pressure to conform to a masculine stereotype. In *The Tender Trap* Sinatra's inability to portray a "real", or uncomplicated swinger is again expressed through excess. During the opening titles, for instance, a cartoon version of Sinatra being chased by three women gives an indication of the exaggerated nature of the imagery that will follow. In *Pillow Talk* (1959), another film addressing the issue of the zeitgeist playboy, Doris Day redecorates Rock Hudson's apartment in the style of an eastern bordello in order to highlight the excessive importance he places upon his sexual life. In *The Tender Trap* Charlie Reader adorns the screen in loud red shirts, and his old school friend, Joe (David Wayne), is moved to refer to him as "sultan" and "sheikh" as he is hit by the ridiculous picture of an apartment with hot and cold running women.

This is presented as a bizarre situation, additionally, because the reason for Charlie's ability to attract the opposite sex seems lost on those who know him. A discussion regarding a paternity suit slapped on Charlie in his youth reminds Joe of his wife's comment at the time that Charlie "couldn't have done it. He hasn't got the know-how." Charlie's initial explanation for his talent to attract is "because I'm big and strong and fat", bringing into play the Sinatra physique. Some rare glimpses of the muscle-free Sinatra torso emphasise the fact that it fails to correspond to traditional ideals of male attractiveness. Sinatra's slight appearance was the butt of jokes throughout his career, and nicknames like "bones" were part of the reason why commentators in the 1940s were mystified by his massive appeal for teenage girls. Psychologists were even called upon to offer explanations that ranged from his representing a father figure to America's female youth to his standing as a symbol of the young men overseas. (Peters, 1982: 63) This continued into the 1950s so that in 1956, the same article in *Woman's Home Companion* that was reporting on Sinatra's reputation as a ladies' man points

out what it sees as his lack of qualifications as Hollywood leading man material: "In appearance Frank Sinatra lacks almost everything you'd expect of a movie star. His ears stick out. He has a scar on his neck. He is far from handsome in the conventional sense. And he doesn't have the build of a Burt Lancaster or a Rock Hudson." (Taves, 1956: 39)

The apparent unsuitability of both Sinatra and Charlie for the role of playboy suggests an element of performance that is corroborated by Charlie himself. After retreating from the "active zone" of the living area to the "quiet zone" of his bedroom, Charlie reveals to Joe that on first coming to New York he was greeted by an "underground of women", each somehow aware of the arrival of a new single male. Charlie explains to Joe that it is irrelevant that he is not particularly attractive because, "It's not what I've got. It's what I haven't got: a wife." One of his steadier dates, Sylvia (Celeste Holm) is in accord with this theory, explaining to Joe that Charlie's popularity with professional single women of a certain age rests on the lack of available men in New York. Charlie is performing a role demanded of him by others, which consists of his playing the opposite of the reliable suburban husband. Just as *The Edsel Show* sets up Sinatra as the swinger to Crosby's family man in order to create a light and shade of masculinity, *The Tender Trap*'s version of the domestic male is Joe, who paints his home life as a stagnant trap of wall to wall carpeting and children's dental work. The suggestion is that in rejecting what Sylvia refers to as "the boys back home", New York's career women come in search of the opposite and that is what Charlie provides.

The theory of manufactured masculinity is strengthened by Charlie's tale of his school dance where he chose a statuesque dance partner and missed out on the woman who would become Joe's wife. Charlie's playboy persona is more a case of luck -- good or bad -- than of natural inclination, and his idealising of Ethel and Joe's married life points to an attraction to a lifestyle in opposition to the one he is currently supposed to be enjoying. The suggestion that Charlie's behaviour as a swinger is merely a performance that covers an underlying desire for domesticity is made plain by Julie (Debbie Reynolds), the woman who will aid him in becoming the cultural ideal of masculinity. Charlie holds no fascination for Julie when he attempts to charm her as a confident theatrical agent whom the newspapers refer to as the theatre's "man-about-town". It is only when Julie sees him within a suburban home setting at the American Home Show that she finds herself attracted to him. Unlike the other men Julie has asked to "perform" as her husband in the armchair of the exhibition's ideal home, Charlie appears to fit naturally into his surroundings. Despite this, there is still a sense in which Charlie fails to conform to this particular ideal of masculinity. Julie threatens that "I'm going to try to make a man out of you", suggesting that Charlie does not lean completely towards an existence of conformity. In addition, the ambiguous nature of Sinatra's image as swinger, wounded male and ordinary American has an impact which disturbs this kind of uncomplicated representation. Nevertheless, the film attempts to enforce dramatic closure with Joe returning to suburbia, Sylvia finding a husband and Charlie becoming convinced of his destiny to marry housewife in-the-making, Julie.

Pal Joey's Joey Evans in many ways represents the most complete characterisation of Sinatra's playboy, and yet, through the influence of Sinatra's star image, the film calls into question the notion of the playboy as a symbol of male sexual dominance. Like *From Here to Eternity*'s Angelo Maggio, the role of nightclub master of ceremonies Joey Evans was one which Sinatra confided that he felt predestined to play. In addition, he explicitly aligned himself with the character by adopting Joey's distinctive vocabulary and making it a part of the Sinatra persona. The cinema trailer for *Pal Joey* illustrates the importance of "Joey's Jargon" to the image of Joey, as Sinatra poses beside a blackboard to explain to audiences the

meaning of words such as "gasser" and "mouse". In the press book for *The Joker is Wild* (1957), Sinatra is quoted at the end of filming as declaring: "Boys, we've got a gasser. The most." Such phraseology was also incorporated into Sinatra's music with, for example, the 1961 album *Ring-a-Ding-Ding*. This apparently seamless link between Sinatra and Joey Evans brings the full weight of Sinatra's image to bear on his screen role. There seems some recognition of this in the *Los Angeles Times* review of *Pal Joey* wherein Philip Scheuer comments: "His Joey is a rat, all right, among mice, but his environment has a lot to do with making him one and you can't quite submerge a sneaking sympathy for the Frankie part of him." (Ringgold and McCarty, 1989: 138) The suggestion is that Sinatra's star image undercuts the surface sexual arrogance of the part. Joey's ruthless attitude to his career and relationships alike therefore comes to be seen as a defence against managers "beltin' me around" and a belief that his past behaviour disallows him from a "decent" relationship.

An underlying sense of powerlessness to counteract the uncomplicated playboy is signalled by the design of the original UK exhibitors' poster for *Pal Joey*. In it, Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak as Vera Prentiss-Simpson and Linda English stand confidently in glamorous poses, while Sinatra as Joey sits between them with his dog Snuffy, leaning on his chin and seemingly fed up. The accompanying copy asks the prospective audience to: "Celebrate the story of Joey (*the heel*!) and his bosom pals! Both stacked: one rich (*the doll*!), one poor (*the mouse*!)…with y'r pal Joey caught in the ever-lovin' middle!" The impression given is that although Joey is surrounded by beautiful women and uses his unique style of language to objectify them, it is not a situation in which he has any amount of control. Some similar imagery appears in another edition of *The Frank Sinatra Show* in which Sinatra begins singing "This Must Be Love" surrounded by a bevy of scantily clad women, suggesting that the swinger is in his preferred environment. Yet Sinatra's behaviour disputes this as he stumbles up the steps behind him, retreating from the showgirls who are advancing upon him and looking fearful of an unwelcome assault. Audiences would not have been unfamiliar with the idea of Sinatra as an unwilling recipient of female attention. From the early days of *Higher and Higher* and *Step Lively* (1944) up until his last role as an MGM contract player in *On the Town* Sinatra had spent much of his time being chased, literally, around the screen by a variety of women eager to secure his characters' attention. While, as Barbara Ehrenreich points out, *Playboy* magazine had at its core the idea of the predatory woman, the impression in each of these cases, as with Vera Prentiss-Simpson, is of women not in search of a male provider but who are intent on seizing the sexual initiative and in this way disempowering the male. (Ehrenreich, 1983: 42-51) The opening scene of *Pal Joey* establishes this duality of the playboy and the powerless in the persona of Joey Evans. He is immediately set up as sexually liberated by tales of his entertaining a girl in his hotel room. However, the girl in question turns out to be the mayor's under-age daughter, and Joey's sexual transgression sees him being dismissed from small town America by two burly policemen who throw him face first onto a departing train.

Much of Joey's diminished power is achieved through his presentation of himself as a sexual object. In her classic article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey argues that women alone are sexually objectified on screen by the male "gaze" since, "according to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification." (Braudy and Cohen, 1999: 838) When, in contrast to Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane acknowledges the possibility of a female gaze upon the male, she qualifies this with the assertion that such instances merely uphold the system that in most cases allows the male to become the bearer of the look. Doane argues: "The male striptease, the gigolo -- both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself,

constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgement simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy." (Doane, 1991: 21) Yet a recognition of a more widespread use of male stars as objects of the female gaze tends to erode the idea that such examples are mere "aberrations". Steven Cohan's examination of *Picnic* (1956), for instance, reveals the objectification of William Holden in both the film and the publicity material that surrounded it. On the film's poster, for example, Holden's chest can be seen exposed through a torn tee-shirt as his co-star, Kim Novak, grasps at his body, a scene which does not appear in the film. In *Picnic* itself Holden becomes the object of the female gaze almost immediately as his first appearance among the main characters gains him a group of female onlookers who watch him bathing shirtless in the sunshine. (Penley and Willis, 1993: 202-232) Additionally, Miriam Hansen's analysis of Valentino discusses the way in which the silent star's image as the focus of female desire becomes the defining element of his persona. Hansen argues that, rather than being confined to the issue of subject/object and male/female opposites, it is more useful "to approach the textual difference of a male erotic object as a figure of overdetermination, an unstable composite figure that connotes 'the simultaneous presence of two positionalities of desire' (Teresa de Lauretis) and thus calls into question the very idea of polarity rather than simply reversing its terms." (Butler, 1991: 272) Although in Valentino's case this gives rise to questions concerning his sexuality, this approach does open up the issue to more complicated readings.

In the same way, Sinatra's constant presentation of himself as a willing sexual object contests the notion that the subject/object system is necessarily associated with male subjectivity, and extends discussion of the objectified male to the issue of gender roles. From the earliest days, Sinatra presented himself visually and musically in sexual terms. Despite, as revealed earlier, some commentators and psychiatrists being nonplussed by his appeal, Sinatra's actions, such as unravelling his bow ties and throwing them out to his audiences, were a direct attempt to become the object of young girls' affections. More than that, his manner of curling notes at certain points in his performances and, as a consequence, engendering the sighs of the bobbysoxers undoubtedly contributed to his chart appeal. In an article written on the eve of Sinatra's televised Madison Square Garden concert in 1974 journalist Martha Weinman Lear recalled witnessing one of Sinatra's famous performances at New York's Paramount Theatre over thirty years earlier: "The voice had that *trick*, you know, that funny little sliding, skimming slur that it would do coming off the end of a note. It drove us bonkers…He'd give us that little slur -- 'All…or nothing at *aallll…*' -- and we'd start swooning all over the place…It was like pressing a button. It *was* pressing a button." (Petkov and Mustazza, 1995: 48) By the 1950s Sinatra had not discarded this element of his performance style, particularly when given the opportunity to play to a live audience. On an edition of *The Dinah Shore Show* in January 1958 Sinatra performs a duet with his hostess wherein he consistently upsets the cosy style of this staple of the variety genre. In a suggestive version of "All of Me", for example, he exchanges the line "why not take all of me?" for "why not grab all of me?", eliciting screams from the female members of the audience. The October 1957 edition of *The Frank Sinatra Show* is also interesting in this respect since a part of the show was given over to advertising the soon to be released *Pal Joey*. When co-star Kim Novak arrives on the set the two actors recline on some steps and a discussion follows with regard to the film. When Sinatra begins to sing "I could write a book" Novak attempts to seduce him, covering his face with kisses. With Sinatra singing a song from *Pal Joey* and adopting Joey's terminology with phrases like "*Pal Joey* is a gasser" and "ring-a-ding", a direct connection is made between Sinatra's objectification by Novak and the masculine persona he reveals on screen.

When Joey Evans first arrives at San Francisco's Barbary Coast Club his reputation precedes him. On hearing his name, the manager warns Joey that he will not tolerate his penchant for female customers that has created disturbances at his previous establishments. Additionally, one of the showgirls lets him know that she is aware of the predatory way he behaved when he worked with her sister. Joey defines himself sexually and is seen in the same terms by others. When he jumps onto the stage uninvited the female performers congregate behind the curtain to sneak a glimpse at him, one of them squealing, "he's cute!" This is part of Sinatra's intentional presentation of himself as a figure to be desired: he is quoted as once remarking, "I am a thing of beauty" and Vera's nickname for Joey will, in fact, turn out to be "beauty". (Lacayo, 1998) However, female characters are attracted to Sinatra not because of his physique but due, in part, to his stylish mode of dress. Bill Zehme's recent publication *Frank Sinatra and the Lost Art of Livin'* (1997) recognises Sinatra's close association with a certain style which then extends to a way of life. In *The Tender Trap* Charlie's appearance in a tuxedo causes Sylvia to comment: "My, but don't you look pretty?" Additionally, Joey Evans' first pay cheque goes on having his suits altered for a perfect fit.

Sinatra's attention to his appearance therefore becomes a way in which he is fetishized for the female viewer. His bow ties, and later his fedora and raincoat are part of the iconography of Frank Sinatra and, as Steven Cohan points out with reference to Fred Astaire's wardrobe, "insist upon the spectacle of his body in ways that go against the grain of Hollywood's typical treatment of a leading man." (Cohan and Hark, 1994: 63) Both *The Tender Trap* and *Pal Joey* see Sinatra put up for display in this way whether changing in and out of a multitude of brightly coloured shirts or lounging around in a silk dressing gown and monogrammed slippers. Equally, Sinatra's distinctive caressing of the microphone contains a fetishistic element that tends to eroticise him for the audience. In an interview with *Life* magazine Sinatra commented on his use of the microphone, "It's like a geisha girl uses her fan." (Lahr, 1997: 80) In his performance of "There's a Small Hotel" in *Pal Joey*, this becomes apparent as Sinatra strokes the microphone while flirting with Rita Hayworth as she dances a few feet away.

The issue of performance is significant since throughout *Pal Joey* it is revealed as a means by which the film's stars are objectified. This is established in the first instance by the way in which the film presents Rita Hayworth. As a veteran of Hollywood musicals like *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942) and *Cover Girl* (1944), Hayworth brings with her the association of what Laura Mulvey terms female "*to-be-looked-at-ness*". (Braudy and Cohen, 1999: 837) In *Pal Joey* this is illustrated perfectly in her performance of "Zip", a song which tells the tale of a former stripper of the "intellectual kind". Within the narrative Joey defines Vera as a sexual object by reminding the society hostess of her beginnings as a stripper and engineering circumstances so that she is forced to revisit her past as a performer. When Vera then effects a strip, peeling off her gloves and wiggling in a strapless dress before Joey and her guests, the film's audience is reminded of Hayworth's rendition of "Put the Blame on Mame" in *Gilda* (1946) which saw her engaged in a similar performance for the benefit of both the diegetic audience and those in the theatre.

However, Sinatra too puts on performances that very clearly present him as a sexual object. Apart from the final "What do I care for a dame?", each of Joey Evans' songs is performed on stage and each has a captivated audience that is seduced by his performance. When he seizes the stage to sing "I Didn't Know What Time it Was", it is the response of the female clientele, who are described as being "in a trance", that secures him a job. Additionally, his performance of "I Could Write a Book", during which he persuades Linda to join him, is

described by Joey as a case of "baiting the trap" as he attempts to win Linda over. The erotic performance is most obviously apparent, however, in the "The Lady is a Tramp" number. Here, Vera signals a reversal of roles by arriving at the club after hours and demanding that Joey perform for her. His performance is one of pure erotic display, despite his being fully suited and bow tied. He begins the song seated at the piano while Vera sits front centre. As the song progresses Joey moves centre stage and pushes the piano to one side, leaving nothing on stage to obstruct Vera's view of him. This action has an air of laid-back choreography, with even Sinatra's dispersal of the smoke from his cigarette seeming suggestive. As the music builds and Joey becomes more animated, Vera's response is marked as clearly sexual as she looks him up and down in the same way that Joey had observed her "Zip" routine, eases back into her chair, and strains to keep him within her field of vision as he moves around her table. Joey has previously answered Vera's feigned lack of interest by telling her, "If you knew what you were throwin' away, you'd cut your throat." His presentation of himself for her delectation seems clearly designed to reveal just what she is missing.

The Sinatra persona again has a part to play in this. Sinatra's performance of "The Lady is a Tramp" has a narrative function in providing an arena for Joey to seduce Vera and for Vera to allow herself to be seduced. When Joey and Vera subsequently retire for the evening to the lady's yacht and the following morning sees a contented Vera in a flirtatious rendition of "Bewitched" -- the original lyrics of which include the line, "horizontally speaking, he's at his very best" -- it is clear that this goal has been accomplished. Joey's performance then, additionally, exceeds the narrative by displaying Sinatra in an erotic performance. The bandleader's nods of approval during the number, firstly, remind us that this is SINATRA. As confirmation, Dilys Powell has written about her attendance at the original press screening of the film where she witnessed, for the first and last time, a round of applause from hardened critics after the "Tramp" routine. The finger snapping and shoulder shrugs acted out by Joey are trademarks of the Sinatra style and are part of a particularly sexually charged performance. Similarly, Sinatra's low slurring of words and his sharp turns of the head that correspond with blasts of the trumpet are all signs of a potent Sinatra performance that demands to be viewed. Towards the end of the song, Sinatra even freezes on stage after the line, "it's oke", and stands with arms outstretched, placing himself on display for Rita Hayworth and the cinematic audience alike.

Within the narrative, the result of this sexual objectification is that Joey and Vera in effect switch gender roles. While Joey brings his sexuality to their relationship, Vera provides the finances for him to open a club on San Francisco's Nob Hill. While she hosts society parties and fails to invite him, he waits on her yacht, suitably primed for her return. Steve Neale suggests that when male bodies are displayed cinematically, the patriarchal Hollywood system demands that the eroticism in such a deviation from the norm be displaced. Neale cites the examples of westerns which achieve narrative closure while displaying the male form in shoot-outs, and the feminisation of Rock Hudson's body when it is revealed on screen. (Cohan and Hark, 1994: 17-18) Certainly, Joey's readiness to occupy himself as a gigolo in order to achieve club ownership takes him out of the realms of normative masculine behaviour and places him in a feminised position of financial dependency. In a scene reminiscent of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) Vera is therefore seen deciding upon the cut of Joey's suits. However, the extent to which Sinatra's various depictions of the American male stray from the masculine ideal through their working-class ethnicity or their display of emotional vulnerability suggests that he in any case assumes a marginalised position and resists definition as a male with indisputably masculine traits. Just as importantly, any narrative

intent to disavow his sexually objectified stance is countered by Sinatra's consistent willingness to present himself on all other performance stages as an object to be desired.

Sinatra has, to a large extent, been cast in the public consciousness as the epitome of the 1950s urban swinger. His persona, drawn from film roles and his widely reported private life, seems to encompass all the elements of the decade's playboy figure. Yet closer inspection reveals how ideas of middle-class affluence and sexual power are consistently challenged by the totality of Sinatra's star image. The extent to which ethnic and class alienation, emotional frailty, and sexual self-presentation are an intrinsic part of the Sinatra persona means that issues of performance and objectification necessarily come into play. Ultimately, the textually complex and varied nature of Sinatra's star image means that simplistic definitions of masculinity become irrelevant, and has the effect of producing an equally multi-shaded representation of the American urban swinger.

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