

## **Beware the Wooing Wandering Star**

Last night, after “words” with my beautiful better half, my sleep was visited by an invasion of lyrics from my favorite Broadway musical, “The Most Happy Fella.” When that show appeared back in the late 50’s, I found its songs so addictive that I nearly played the grooves off our lp, “Greatest Hits from the Most Happy Fella.” That show opened frontiers for me not just in pop music but in novelty and especially opera. I found its arias amazing. I considered Frank Loesser, who imagined all twenty of its songs in all three of those genres to be a genius.

It became “ear worm candy, supplying me theme songs for many events touching my just home from the air force, new life. When I had a success, such as selling a Kirby vacuum cleaner, all the way home from my demo I’d be singing, “I’m the most happy fella,/ In the Red River Valley/ I’m the mosta happy fella/ The mosta happy man/ That’sa me!”

It occurred to me, after being revisited in my sleep by re-plays of the “Fella” song “Joey,” that *Screwtape*, C. S. Lewis’ imaginary devil, can use ear worms to serve his demonic purposes too, by down-loading vagrant impulses into our sub-conscious.

The character in the play who sings that song is Joe, a seasonal farm hand who drifts from place to place following the harvests of the many crops blessing California. In this case, it’s Napa Valley grapes, and his song is especially attractive to people “born under a wandering star.” The melody uncannily echoes “the wayward wind” pushing all children of the tumble weed to move on.

If you've ever watched "The Joey Bishop Show," the first three words form his theme song. But the first verse goes like this: "The wind blows in,/ and it sings to me cause I'm one of its wandering kin,/ It sings "Joey, Joey Joey,/ Joey, Travel on// You've been too long/ In one town/ And it's time to go,/ Time to go oooh.// That's what the wind sings to me,/ When the bunk I been bunkin' in/ Gets to feelin' too warm and cozy// When the food they been feedin' me/ gets to tastin' too good,/ When I've had all I want of the women in the neighborhood,/ It sings, 'Joey.'

The Joey figure is everywhere in the movies. He's the handsome loner, like William Holden in "Picnic," who returns home, sweeps Kim Novac off her feet, then realizes there's no place for him in his old home town; they know him too well.

A novelty song in "Fella" gives him away: "Standing on the Corner watching all the girls go by/ Standing on the corner giving all the girls the eye.// Brother you don't know a nicer occupation,/ Mater of fact/ Neither do I/ Than standing on the corner watching all the girls/ Watching all the girls/ Watching all the girls go by.// Saturday, and I'm so broke/ Couldn't buy a gal/ A nickle Coke"/ But I feel'n like a millionaire,/When I take me down to main street/ And I survey the harem/ Parading for me there."

A true dilemma haunts so many of the beautiful movie stars. Consider Brad Pitt.

I watched "Entertainment Tonight" lately and they recounted all of the many women Brad Pitt has attracted. A few are first-name famous: Gwineth, Jennifer, Angelina, but sadly few of his marriages last. Lately he seems to be

in dispute with a gorgeous lady not yet first name famous, over a winery he owns in Italy. Given his past history, I doubt the settlement will turn out to the benefit of either.

It's the "Joey" spirit that plagues so many stars, cursed with "burdensome beauty." That spirit, haunting places like Napa Valley, is not just the spirit of the wine; it's also the wind – Gogi Grant's "Wayward Wind." "Oh the wayward wind/ Is a restless wind/ A restless wind/ That longs to wander// And I was born, the next of kin/ The next of kin/ To the wayward wind."

I think we should invoke once more Yeats' worried parent poem, "A Prayer for My Daughter." "May she be granted beauty, and yet not/ Beauty that will make a stranger's eye distraught,/ Or hers before a looking glass// For such, being made beautiful over-much/ Lose natural kindness and maybe/ That heart-revealing intimacy that chooses right/ And never find a friend."

That whole story line is a huge temptation waiting to lure the "beautiful people" out, over their depth. Celebrity is fame many long for, but be grateful if your beloved vows to stick with you, warts and all, clear to the end. That may well be the greatest blessing. And remember, if Joey does drift on, Jesus will still stay faithful come what may. (Is 54: 4,5)

Gene Pinkney/ for the Daily News/ 12-27-23