

Tony and His Women, a study in intimacy

by Phillip W. Weiss

Women almost always outsmart men and can bring even the strongest macho men to tears. Women's power over men was dramatized in the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. Although a work of fiction, the movie accurately depicted how two women, independently of each other, influence the life of the principal character, Tony. One of the women, Annette, has Tony's number. She sees right through Tony's machismo exterior, and Tony doesn't like it because he wants to hide his own vulnerabilities. Although depicted as plain looking, Annette is the most beautiful women in the movie. She doesn't need to be loud or flashy to project her sexuality. She is short, modestly attired, but radiates a sexual power that drives Tony crazy to the point of distraction. Tony wants Annette and wants her badly but to get Annette he would have to do it on her terms, conditions that Tony cannot meet because it would mean discarding the macho crap that he uses to get through the day and night. So, instead of getting Annette, he pushes her away, makes her cry and gets her so angry that she fucks Tony's best friend, which just makes matter worse for Tony. Then there is the other woman, Stephanie. Stephanie is a female version of Tony. Externally she is tough and cool but internally an emotional wreck as she struggles to attain a higher quality of life. But instead of improving herself and her social status, she comes off as a snob and whore who is willing to put out for men just to get in with the crowd. Tony, of course, falls in love with Stephanie who, while intrigued by Tony, rejects him

as a romantic partner as he is to her as Annette is to Tony, that is, a symbol of the neighborhood and culture they are trying to escape from. Both women affect Tony, but in different ways. The net result is that Tony strikes out with both women, both of whom like him and would have gladly let him get close to them if he had his head on straight and stopped playing games and just be himself.

I would have done a total re-write of the story. Tony would still be the self-styled self-centered narcissistic king of disco but with a classier and more self-assured come on that would have put Annette at ease and Stephanie more receptive and not the brash and moody Tony who is reactive to both women's games, for they too are playing games, and as a result gets mixed up,. emotionally labile, angry, moody, confused and out of sync with life. Regarding Annette, the character is played by Donna Pescow who delivers a terrific performance as Annette. Pescow caught the essence of the character and had real strong chemistry with John Travolta, the actor who played Tony. Pescow was physically perfect for the role. She was short, plump, voluptuous and exuded sexual energy. Also, Pescow was from Brooklyn and so was familiar with the Brooklyn subculture. I would have changed the ending of the story. Tony flops with Stephanie, has an epiphany about life and his relationship with women and what women are about, runs into Annette on East 86th Street at 12 noon, no disco, no distractions, no noise, just the street. Tony looks at Annette, Annette looks at Tony, they smile, hug, kiss, and the next scene they are frolicking in the waves at Brighton beach, as happy as larks, not a worry in the world, all to the accompaniment of raucous disco music that gradually fades and

is followed by a Frank Sinatra love song that builds in volume and strength as the two lovers embrace in the waves, oblivious to the world, madly and passionately in love.

More thoughts about Annette and Stephanie from Saturday Night Fever.

Stephanie had pretensions of stardom. She wanted to break away from the rut that she found herself in where she was nobody and transform herself into a star who would be noticed and admired as an artist and someone worthy of attention and who was special. In other words, Stephanie was trying to actualize a dream, act out a fantasy that was in stark contrast to the reality of her life, which to her was drab, empty and meaningless. For her, being the star gave meaning to her life. She had something to show and felt herself unique and gifted, and wanted to capitalize on that gift if she only had the chance. She was one of those wannabes that show up at auditions or dress flashy at social gatherings and try to act sophisticated no matter how phony the act. For Stephanie is an actress. She is acting out a script that she wrote in her mind, a script that was based on a fantasy, but which Stephanie wants to make real. So, she meets Tony who to her is the means through which she can show off her stuff and grab center stage with Tony as a human prop to help her meet her goals that have nothing to do with Tony who is clueless as to his role in Stephanie's life. For Stephanie, Tony is not a love interest because he is in no position to help her advance socially or professionally except as her partner. Tony however will never accept being used by a woman and rebels against her, creating a conflict centered around a serious misunderstanding of his role in her life. As for Annette, she is far

from just a starry-eyed waitress who idolizes Tony and craves his attention and affection. She sees right through Tony's brazen machismo and admires him and wants to love him. Annette is the opposite of Stephanie. She does not want to use Tony. Rather, she wants to BE with Tony, to love him, to enjoy life with him. Annette does not want to join the disco scene. He does not want to show off on the dance floor. She does not want to make a spectacle of herself. He wants TONY and will do anything to have him. Of course, Tony brushes off Annette not because he isn't attracted to her but because it would conflict with his own obsessive drive to be a star. Annette would not make a good dance partner, nor does she possess the flashiness that Tony likes in women who admire him. Instead, Annette is the plain Jane competing in a world that rejects the nice girl image. Annette cannot be cool because Annette is passionate and in love with a man who cannot love her back. Further, Annette is voluptuous and possesses a sexual energy that she can barely control and eventually loses control leading to terrible consequences including rape. While Stephanie is style, Annette is substance. Stephanie projects the image of being hot when in fact she is cold to the point of snobbery, while plain looking Annette is genuinely hot-blooded, ready to love, ready to act, and ready to do whatever she must to have Tony, even if he is rejecting her.