

Hardy's portrayal of
both men and women
in "tony kytes, the
arch deceiver"



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Thomas Hardy, from reading and analyzing both *Tony Kytes* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, we can see feels very strongly about the roles and status in society of men and women in general. He metaphorically paints a picture for us of the way in which he feels men and women were appreciated in society in the 19th century. The title of this story is perceived throughout and Hardy often refers back to the title as an aid of expression.

Tony Kytes is essentially an attractive young man who believes that because of his charm and handsome physical appearance he can play around with women as if they were mere objects of his own personal desire and his relationships with them are less than substantial and have no real depth or meaning, rarely being committed to one woman, page 1 shows us this: “ He was quite the women’s favorite and in turn for their likings he loved them in shoals”. A modern day representative of Tony would be called a “ player”. In this sense it means he is fully aware of his own physical attractiveness and uses it to his advantage and exploits it by `wooing` girls when he is engaged to be married to Millie Richards. In the 19th century, prior to the contrasting views of 20th and 21st century, a man with any dignity and respect was expected to be loyal to the woman of his choosing and once either engaged or dating someone they should be loyal and faithful and certainly not a cheat. Love or romance is a big theme in this story, along with the portrayal of men and women, and many others of Thomas Hardy’s books. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*” brings up the same sort of issues in it, how a man takes his wife for granted and lets his drink get the better of him.

Eventually he sells his wife at a fair! Hardy is trying to show us how men, who believed themselves to be superlative and flawless nearly, were

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covering the truth with an aura of superiority around them. Men would do the asking out, the choosing and the judging too; women would wait to be asked out because it was thought to be wrong for women to take the role of masculinity. Even if a woman did ask out a man this was thought to be a slur on the status of the man so he would be obliged to refuse. These show us how the status of women was inferior to that of the men, men had more power. In “The Mayor of Casterbridge” Elizabeth Jane (the wife of Michael Henchard) would have been slaughtered and appallingly frowned upon if she had sold her husband for instance. Michael Henchard however, was looked upon in a dreadful way but nothing was said or done to corrupt the views of men in general and he was treated almost the opposite of what he would have been treated like had he been a woman, this was unjust and an iniquitous view upon society in the 19th century.

During the story Tony is meant to be meeting his fiancée (who he is engaged to!) in town but coincidentally forgets which shows how his priorities are either wrong or with something else. He picks up Unity Sallet on his way home and due to his lack of morality and excessiveness of charm they begin flirting. It actually gets to the stage where he questions his declaration to Milly. Unity is by reputation a “forward girl” and Michael is by reputation a cheat or “love rat”.

This just adds to their reputations as Unity is so confident in her looks that she is constantly telling Tony about why and how she would be a better wife than Milly would, and Tony plays along to it and does look at her and he does begin to realize she is pretty, maybe even more so than Milly. Reputation, just like in other of Hardy's stories, was so important for many reasons.
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Firstly if men had a good reputation or/and were considered of high status they were fondly looked upon. More importantly however, women needed a good reputation because in Victorian days it was men who posed the questions and women had to wait so having a good reputation increased their chances of being asked. The theme “Your past catches up with you” was greatly expressed in both *Tony Kytes* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

In *Tony Kytes*, Tony played around with the women as if they were toys and there for his amusement, he cheated lied and played the ‘loyalty card’ to three girls and for this he ended up with a bad reputation and the girl who, in his opinion, was the least attractive. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard was a lousy drunk, an awful husband and an abuser of power. For this, he payed the price. His past caught up with him and once he was Mayor things went very bad as his wife came into town. As the story progresses, Tony has to ask Unity to secrete herself under the wagon tarpaulin as Milly came along.

Once milly got into the wagon Tony made her hide under the sheets in the front as to hide herself from Hannah's glare. Then once Hannah got in things got out of control as he, knowing full well he was in earshot of both Unity and his fiance Milly, started telling Hannah of his sweet little nothings. I believe Hardy portrayed this scene as an illustrated metaphor of Tony's life; once a good looking girl comes into the scene he flirts and flatters them into believing he is really taken by her beauty but when a better or more attractive girl comes along he “hides” them so he can start his false sweet-talk all over again in an attempt to woo her and if he succeeds then he will forget about his previous sweetheart and shatter her feelings and emotions, <https://assignbuster.com/hardys-portrayal-of-both-men-and-women-in-tony-kytes-the-arch-deceiver/>

not caring about how she feels as long as he's happy and with the "new girl on the block". Tony is a very good (or bad) liar to women when it comes to relationships, which is an unpleasant trait because it means he has experience of it.

The women in this story all comply with Tony's wishes when he asks them to hide as status and society come in to place once more. Women were afraid to go against the wishes of men, however outrageous they were, because they didn't want to upset them as it could prevent a loss of either husband or boyfriend. Women were of subordinate, inferior status to men so society expected them to agree with the actions of men, unfair or fair. This is how Tony could persuade them to hide for him.

Hannah is exactly like Unity in the sense that she is a forward, confident girl and although she is fully in the knowledge of Tony and Milly's engagement she flirts and consistently goes on about why she and Tony would be a better couple and why she chose Tony. Hannah is a very bold and she knows that deep down Tony would choose her over any of the other three girls in question, "Tony, do you like her better than me?" This asks him to re-evaluate his other relationships. She also uses body language and a dim, soothing tone to get what she wants. In contrast to Hannah and Unity, Milly is the girl of lesser beauty.

It wasn't very commonplace for a lady in the 19th century to be chasing a man and trying to divert his attraction from his fiancée. However, Hannah was different, because of her good looks, boldness and desire she acts "out of place". When Tony thankfully returns home he immediately runs to his father

as the situation is too awkward and heated. This shows to us that Tony, beneath the surface, is in reality a coward and he's not man enough face up to the problem he got himself into. His father tells him to "take control of the wagon" when he sees that Hannah has been left in control of it and not doing a very good job.

Although he said this intentionally for Tony to do, it is also a direct metaphor of his life. How it is out of control and the situation he is in is a metaphor of his views on women and how he sees them as inferior and as objects to his own desire. Milly was obviously distressed by what Tony was saying to Hannah as he completely disregarded Milly's presence who was in earshot of everything he was saying. This shows to us that Tony clearly had no respect for Milly and although he was engaged to Milly, his shallow nature came out and Hannah's good looks got the better of him.

Tony believes that he is God's gift to women and because of this conceited, pretentious view he has of himself, he believes women and love is an easily won game for him. Towards the end of the story after Tony had played all three girls into believing he wanted them, he was faced with a situation which was more or less 'make or break'. When the heat of the situation reached its peak Tony came out with the question to the girl who was the most beautiful on the surface, Hannah. Hannah refuses Tony for two main reasons; firstly because of what she recently discovered (about the two other girls he had been playing about with who were also in the wagon) and secondly because her father was there. Male status and standing in society were generally superior to that of women. So gaining the respect of men was a valued aspect of life, this is why she refused him in front of her dad.

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If she had any personal pride she would of rejected Tony and gained the respect of her father. Unity however, had no one to gain respect from or be 'judged' by – apart from herself. She rejected Tony outright and this shows that she has even greater pride and status then Hannah does. Tony's declaration to Milly was far from sincere and meant as much to Tony as a grain of sand does to a beach. He has taken Milly as a last resort as he has been rejected by Hannah and Unity so he doesn't want to be left with nothing. Although it wasn't written by Hardy, the story Tony Kytes bares resemblance to Shakespeare's " Much ado about nothing" in the way women were treated unequally to men and women shouldn't speak of place or act inexplicably, abnormally from what they were expected to or they would lose their (if they had one) good reputation or standing in society.

However it was okay for men to act accordingly.