

Explore the ways in which the character of Curley's wife is presented and developed in "Of Mice and Men"

In "Of Mice and Men" it seems as if all the reader's sympathy is directed towards Lennie, the destruction of his dream, <sup>his</sup> naive innocence and limited understanding. At first it may look as if Curley's wife is the catalyst, that speeds up the amount of uncontrollable anger that Lennie displays and is ultimately responsible for his death. As the plot progresses however so does our understanding of her, and Steinbeck eventually guides us to the truth. The truth that, behind her make-up and hard exterior she is a naturally trusting person and as much of a victim of the solitude and prejudice on the ranch as Lennie.

Steinbeck introduces Curley's wife for the first time as "a girl" and not a woman. This immediately implies that she is looked down upon and not respected. It may also show her vulnerability and naivety due to her age. He then goes on to show how she attempts to mask her vulnerability and look glamourous but fails. She is described as "heavily made up" almost as if she is hiding behind her make-up and using it as a mask. It is evidently clear right away that Curley's wife stands out on the ranch. Her appearance a stark contrast to the poverty the workers endure. The clothes that she wears also show her attempts to look glamourous and seductive, she was wearing "red mule eschinch feathers" and even "her fingernails were red". The use of red connects Curley's wife to the girl in "Red" that caused Lennie's trouble in "Weed". This repetition gives a sense of foreshadowing about what she is going to do. The colour also signifies danger and the threat she poses to the men.

Despite her very best efforts Steinbeck implies that Curley's wife is physically unattractive. He uses unflattering similes to describe her how her hair "hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages" and how "her voice had a nasal, brittle quality" which suggests a harshness about her. The way in which

Steinbeck describes her reinforcing the men's earlier comments that she is a "tart". The first impression of Curley's wife shows her in a very negative light.

Throughout the novel Steinbeck frequently uses the theme of hierarchy and status within the ranch. Curley's wife, as the boss' son's wife ~~she~~ should technically have a high status but the workers have no respect for her and she therefore has no power over them. She often turns to her femininity and sexuality as her only weapon. Her status is a stark contrast to Slim the genuine skinner's who technically is of a lower status but highly respected and idolised by the men. They see Slim's "word" as "law" and Steinbeck even describes him as "God like".

Curley can be seen questioning ~~this~~ the men on the whereabouts of his wife several times during the novel. The fact that she is not being the traditional housewife and staying at home "where she belongs" but trying to interact and flirt with the men causes her own husband to lose any respect for her. This in turn reinforces the opinions ~~that~~ she is a "rattrap" and "jailbait".

Throughout the book she is only ever referred to as "Curley's wife" and her name is never revealed to the reader. The possessive apostrophe implies that Curley owns his wife. The only other character that is seen as someone's property is Candy's "dog". Lining a woman with a dog represents how low down on a hierarchy women were. This view is very realistic of how, in 1930's America women were thought of as their husband's property and not their own person. Even the women that live and work in the "whore houses", which the men frequently visit, have names unlike Curley's wife. Perhaps this is because they have a purpose and a place, however low down in society where as Curley's wife does not have a place, or fit or anywhere.

Another major theme in "Of mice and men" is loneliness. It plays a vital role in the story & with ~~even~~ the setting symbolising it. "Soledad" the nearest town to the ranch is the Spanish

## How does Steinbeck present Curley's wife in the Novel Of Mice And Men?

Of Mice And Men, by John Steinbeck is a Novel about two men working on a ranch in search of their dreams. Steinbeck uses the characters in this novel to comment on the social position of women in 1930's America.

Curley's wife, the ranch owners daughter in law, is often portrayed in a negative view, the way most men would have thought of women in the 1930's. She is characterized through her appearance and her dialogues with other characters throughout the novel. We first meet ~~Curley's~~ Curley's wife in Chapter 4 of the novel, Steinbeck uses Imagery to show the effect she was thought to have on people. "rectangle of sunshine was cut off"

This suggests she was blocking the light/sun out of George and Lenny's life, because as soon as she walks into the room, it's dark, and there is a quiet atmosphere. George and Lenny already think bad of Curley's wife because the first time we hear about her is when Candy calls her a 'tart' which happens earlier on in the novel, Steinbeck is prejudicing the reader before Curley's wife has even made an appearance. Curley's wife is immediately judged on her incongruous appearance when she first enters the barn. She is described as having "full rouged lips and wide space eyes heavily made up" also "her finger nails were red, she wore a cotton house dress and neck ruffles" thus implies immediately

Insight

that she's seeking attention as she is dressed more suitable for a town, and not a farm, her appearance is put across as very provocative.

Steinbeck uses the colour red to symbolise the danger in Curley's wife's personality, "red fingernails ostrich feathers, red mules" this suggests she is bringing danger into George and Lenny's life, this chapter foreshadows the rest of the Novel.

Curley's wife does not have a name and is therefore portrayed as an object, also, she is not described as a woman but a girl, "a girl was standing there looking in" their playful attitude is evidence of her only being a young girl, this is shown when she teases George and Lenny in the barn, when she is throwing her body around to try and provoke the boys when she realises they are scared of her.

Although throughout the ~~Novel~~, we develop a dislike towards Curley's wife, at the end of the Novel Steinbeck tries to make us feel sympathetic towards her when she is in the barn talking to Lenny. Lenny has been surrounded by people who think she is a danger "jailbait" and even a "Bitch" or "lulu", by using these phrases Steinbeck is immediately creating links to nature <sup>as</sup> Slim's dog is a "Bitch" <sup>called</sup> who's name happens to be "Lulu". Lenny doesn't know any better and so doesn't want to talk to her but she responds with "Why can't I talk to you?, I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely."

This suggests that Curley's wife is fed up of people ignoring her and just wants some attention so she looks to Lenny, the most vulnerable character on the ranch, she is almost taking advantage of him.

Analysis of language in some detail

Character as device

Precisely selected supporting text detail

Sustained engagement with writer's ideas

Perceptive insight

Whilst talking to Lenny, she admits she doesn't like Curley. She knows she has no power over Curley and is stuck in a love-less relationship, eventually towards the end of the Novel she is accidentally killed by Lenny when he gets scared and bites her neck. Steinbeck once again uses imagery to show her. She is finally set free "The sun-streaks were high on the wall by now, and the light was growing soft in the barn." this implies she was a 'light' happy character who was just in the wrong place, her red lips are again described by John Steinbeck but this time showing her yang, still beautifully graceful looking, ~~she~~. She is described as being 'alive'.

The Novel ends with George (Lenny's best friend) killing Lenny to get him out of trouble, when he dies ~~Lenny~~ is thinking about what he loves the most and so has a peaceful death, and like Curley's wife finally has a chance to be free.

A quite confident response to the task. Well focused on the way Steinbeck presents and develops the character. The way the characterisation is interpreted to show how a reader may have sympathy for the character is fairly assured and presented in convincing detail.

Mark: 10