

# Of mice and menquestions essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In order to discuss how Steinbeck presents Curley's wife to the reader one would determine that many readers would interpret her character and importance in many diversified ways. In this essay, one must elaborate on Steinbeck's true definition of the one and only female in the novel. First and foremost other females in the novel are mentioned but not greeted with a presence like Curley's wife.

A girl that Lennie scares in ' Weed' is mentioned in a past tense and most importantly Lennie's Aunt Clara is mentioned several times where sometimes she can be perceived as the absent centre. Nonetheless the reader is finally graced with Aunt Clara's presence towards the end of the novel as an imaginary figure to Lennie's symbolic vision. Be that as it may, Curley's wife is the only female character that the reader is properly acknowledged with. As she is the only female in the novel which is set in a man's world, one would come to the conclusion that Curley's wife is possibly the loneliest character in the novel. Steinbeck presents Curley's wife as a lonely character by reason of her being introduced through the view point of other characters.

In other words she is used as a product of gossip [. Candy, the old Swamper, will attempt to entertain George and Lennie by making harsh accusations about her at Curley's wife expense. She is presented as a flirt with loose sexual morals. " She got the eye". She's " Jail Bait". As the ranchers have these subjected views of her they believe the famous saying ' The female of the species is more deadly than the male.

'In Curley's wife case, it is simply not true. She is extremely lonely and therefore craves the attention of other men just so that she can be stimulated by innocent conversation, nothing more. " Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely". This is evidence enough of her lonely status. Steinbeck presents all of the characters in the novel as being lonely.

However, they are all lonely in different ways, Curley's wife is lonely due to the fact that she is a newly married woman. She is neglected by her husband Curley as she is used as an object for Curley's sexual desires. She is viewed with suspicion as a " tart", by the ranch hands. Most importantly Candy is the main person who gossips about Curley's wife. The technical term for this is that he narrates the gossip in third person. He tells George and Lennie that " Curley keeps his hand soft for his wife".

He implies that Curley puts " Vaseline on his hand". This Vaseline passage absorbs the reader and disgusts them. We gather from this statement that the ranch hands have no respect for Curley's wife as she is treated as only being there for her husband's sexual desires. This extenuates how Steinbeck has made her character to be the true outsider of the novel. Lennie is the only character who falls under her seduction, as he says " She's purty". The word ' purty' is deliberately spelt wrong due to the fact, that Steinbeck wanted realism and authenticity in the sound of working class American accents.

This adjective is used to describe Curley's wife through out the novel, and finally towards the end of the novel when she dies, the word ' purty' is spelt

correctly as the narrator describes her features and not a character in the novel. " She was very pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young". From Lennie's ' purty' comment, George becomes angry and makes oft-repeated assertions that the girl will bring nothing but trouble. George demands that Lennie stays away from her as he perceives her as a hindrance on their ability to achieve their dream of living off the fat of the land.

George is obviously concerned about Lennie's wellbeing as he does not want a repeat of what happened between Lennie and the girl in Weed. Curley's wife may be " Jail bait" in the eyes of the ranch hands but she is never really evil. Her punishment of death outweighs any crimes she may have committed. Perhaps she could even have been a loving wife had she met the right man.

Steinbeck has quoted in the past, " Curley's wife is essentially a good and trusting person who grew up in an atmosphere of fighting and suspicion". Her pretence of hardness is largely a sham. It is all that she knows. She is not particularly over-sexed, but has been forced to recognise that her sexuality is the only weapon she has and the only thing for which she is noticed. However, her weapon of sexuality backfires as it will be the death of her. Lennie's naivety is finally seduced by her sexuality and he commits manslaughter on her as he's unaware of his vast strength.

Like Curley's wife's weapon of sexuality, Lennie's weapon is his amazing strength. In the situation of Lennie's strength versus Curley's wife sexuality, Lennies strength results in his demise just as Curley's wife sexuality did.

Ostensibly Curley's wife is capable of exuding a huge sexuality, but she combines it with innocence, vulnerability and an inability to enjoy sex. The vulnerable and insecure side of Curley's wife is what makes her good and pure. She was almost certainly a virgin before she married Curley because she has had it preached at her so hard from her upbringing that it is the only way that she can get a husband. The narrator's description of Curley's wife physical appearance is figuratively sexual " She had full rouged lips" implies that her lips are for the purpose of kissing and possibly to perform fellatio acts.

In addition to this the phrase " Heavily made up" is a bad reference to the fact that she could be a prostitute as the stereotypical prostitute smothers themselves in make up. Most essentially the quote " her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages" is a very obvious symbol of sexual innuendo. The simile ' Like sausages' is a phallic symbol for penis. The colour red is also an emblem of sex.

" Cotton house dress and red mules". " Bouquets of red Ostrich feathers", " Her finger nails were red". These descriptions insinuate that she is a loose woman. Little does the reader know at this point that she is none of the above. Steinbeck leads the reader on, making them speculate whether or not she is a ' tart'. In reality she is not.

Instead these metaphoric symbols are really foreshadows or hints as to what will happen to her in the end. Of Mice and Men is not a novel of suspense but a novel about characters. Nevertheless, it might be felt that some of the hints he offered are rather heavy handed. " Her voice had a nasal, brittle

quality" implies that her voice is deep and husky, this signifies that her speech does not match her tarty image. The 'jerk line skinner' Slim harmlessly flirts with Curley's wife. "Slim's voice came through the door", "Hi, good looking".

Saying these words to a married woman is hardly flirtatious. The foreshadow 'Jail bait' implies that she is under age. Curley's wife is not under age as she is married. We are told that Curley is very concerned about his wife, whom he married a fortnight ago, because she is giving all of the men "the eye", suggesting that she wants to sleep with them.

Again this is not the case. she just wants to engage in conversation and uses the excuse that she is looking for her husband when really she is not. "I'm looking for Curley" she said. Curley's wife is truly the victim and not the attacker. There is a strong possibility that Curley hits his wife as she says when she goes into Crooks room "Curley's gonna lead with his left twice and then bring in the ol' right cross? One two," she says.

This is enough evidence to suggest that Curley preys on her. Even worse, she receives no sympathy as Candy says "You gotta husban! You got no call foolin' aroun' with other guys causin trouble". From this comment Curley's wife has no one to turn to which is why people think that she is misunderstood but truthfully towards the end of the novel the reader perceives her as a poor tormented soul. The foreshadowing and hints are finally revealed towards the final act. Curley's wife finally persuades Lennie to talk to her after several strategic tactics. When the narrator describes the repetition of her physical description of "red ostrich feathers", and other

red features, the colour red now indicates danger, Steinbeck has deliberately deceived the reader to make them think that her red features describe her to be a 'tart', but the colour red has foreshadowed that danger will creep up on her.

Curley's wife's tactics of getting Lennie to confide in her are reassuring him with flattery. "If Curley gets tough, you can break his hand". She also seduces Lennie into sympathising with her. "Why can't I talk to you?...

I get awful lonely" In return she provides sympathy for him. "She consoled him". She spoke soothingly. Once she has confided in Lennie by talking about her hopes and dreams of becoming an actress, but failed. The reader now sympathises and no longer judges her to be a loose woman. It can now be notified that she has been mistreated by people her whole life which is what made her vulnerable and insecure.

Nonetheless the plot thickens. Once Lennie tells her that he likes to pet soft things, she embraces the comment and lets him stroke her hair which eventually leads to a panic and her death. "For Lennie had broken her neck". The foreshadows in the novel which lead to her death are when they constantly move closer together and danger begins to approach as the barn darkens. Steinbeck's use of setting her to foreshadow disaster is most intriguing.

"The light was lifting as the sun went down". Darkness has always appeared to be dull, gloomy and dangerous. Ergo danger had finally got the better of her. Steinbeck changes the view of the reader's opinions when Curley's wife lies dead in the hay "The discontent and the ache for attention were all

gone from her face." Curley's wife is now finally set free. In death she is beautiful, " Her face was sweet and young".

Her descriptions are a metaphor to sleeping beauty. She is now an angel and set free. In conclusion, one's subjective conjecture believes that Curley's wife was a temptress to an extent. Most essentially a misguided and naive individual. Her ignorance is what makes her innocent and vulnerable.

The reader is meant to believe in the novel that she is a ' tart'. However, Steinbeck turns the tables around and makes her the victim that the reader must empathise with. Curley's wife is a tragic figure at the end of the novel. She is a symbol of the destructive and hopeless existence suffered by poor Americans during the great depression of the 1930's.

Is the female of the species more deadly than the male? In Curley's wife case, the answer is no.