

# The ways steinbeck creates dislike of and sympathy for curley's wife in his novel...

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'Of Mice and Men' is a short novel by John Steinbeck, which is set in 1930s America. At this time in American History they were suffering from a hard hitting economic depression. This book is set on a ranch in Soledad, California. Throughout this novella, Steinbeck addresses key themes, for example discrimination, loneliness and the American Dream. Curley's wife is a complex character. She is the only woman on the ranch. Curley's wife is used as a plot device by Steinbeck to explore themes like discrimination and attitudes toward women in the 1930s.

Although, she is thought of as a 'tart' at the beginning, throughout the novel we develop our opinion of Curley's wife. Steinbeck introduces us to Curley's wife through the opinion of Candy. His views and opinions are misogynistic, when he calls her a 'tart', making the reader prejudiced towards Curley's wife before we even meet her. Candy mentions that she 'got the eye' explaining that she is being flirtatious and immoral as we are told that she is flirt with other men straight after we are told that she married to Curley.

Candy makes us anticipate her entrance 'Wait till you see Curley's wife', Steinbeck uses this technique to make the reader want to read on and find out more. When Curley's wife is first introduced we gain a biased impression from her description 'She wore a cotton house dress and red mules' reinforcing our original opinion of a 'tart'. The clothing she wears is also incongruous on a working ranch and expensive during the economic depression showing that she wants to impress. She is high maintenance as 'She had full rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up' showing to the reader that she has to look perfect before leaving the house and

needs to look pretty to the men. Steinbeck fully describes the actions of Curley's wife. This shows physical awareness the men have towards her, ' She put her hands behind her back and leaned against the door frame so that her body was thrown forward' Steinbeck's description of Curley's wife actions is not only to describe the men's physical awareness of the character but to show the desperation of Curley's wife and other women in the 1930s.

Throughout the speech between George and Curley's wife, she doesn't sustain eye contact, ' She looked at her fingernails' this implies that she is trying to flirt with her eyes. This use of body language is in a flirtatious and provocative way. When Curley's wife enters ' The rectangle of sunshine in the door way is cut off' Steinbeck uses this blocking light to suggest that Curley's wife is an obstacle, to Lennie's and George's ' light' which is referring to their dream. This means we do not like Curley's wife as she poses a threat. The fact that George calls Curley's wife ' tramp' makes us immediately dislike her as we trust George's opinions. As her appearance is described first this suggests that others judge her on the way she looks and her appearance is regarded as her most important feature. This idea is developed through Curley's wife's sexuality which is evident in her obvious flirting when she moves so that ' her body was thrown forward' and speaks ' playfully'. Through Curley's wife actions, Steinbeck suggests that her sexuality is the only form of power she has and is the only way she knows to gain attention. The first entrance for Curley's wife lives up to and confirms the impressions created by Candy.

Although initially we believe what Candy said, as the novella progresses more of her character is revealed. When Slim finds Curley's wife, at the end of her first entrance 'She was suddenly apprehensive' which could suggest that Curley's wife is scared of Curley and suggests that he is aggressive towards her linking to the theme of violence. The reader is apprehensive of Curley's wife and the damage she may cause. The men of the ranch think she is 'jailbait', and they are scared that they may lose their job. The reader agrees with what the men on the ranch think as she may lead to the downfall of George and Lennie. At this point in the novel, Curley's wife is seen with contempt and there is little sympathy for her. The repetition of the colour 'red' suggests danger and passion, supported by similarities between her and the girl in Weed. Not only is Curley's wife described as a floozy, but also as threatening. When she enters the barn where Crook and Candy are, they are both afraid and 'were scowling down away from her eyes' this prevention of eye contact could be seen that she is exerting power over the men. She exercises her power by threatening to hang Crooks, 'I could get you stung up on a tree so easy', this links to the theme of violence as she acts meanly and cruelly which reflects the social hierarchy of the time. She goes from being bullied by the men to bullying the 'weak ones'.

Curley's wife gets frustrated by their unresponsive behaviour towards her. She is used to highlight the racist society and to show the status of black people at that time in America. The reader maybe apprehensive toward Curley's Wife, yet it is obvious that she may be lonely. Curley's wife has too much time on her hands 'Her face was heavily made up' this is shown by how much make up she is always wearing. None of the men on the ranch will

talk to her as they are scared that they may be tempted ' Maybe you better go along to your own house now' The reason they don't talk to her is that they are scared that they could get into trouble with Curley. Steinbeck does this to show how isolated women were in the 1930s. Even though Curley's wife has only been married two weeks we get told that Curley is at the ' Cat house' and isn't with his new wife which would suggest that he has no time for her and a lack of love. When she is in the barn with Crooks, Candy and Lennie ' talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs -a nigger an' a dum-dum and a lousy ol' sheep- an' ' liken' it because they ain't nobody else' this shows she will go to great lengths to talk to somebody and will even talk to the ' weak ones' when nobody is around. When she is alone in the barn with Lennie, she expresses her loneliness ' I get awful lonely' she does this to gain sympathy from the reader, although she is telling the one person who won't understand what she is saying.

Curley's wife is the only woman on the ranch and this could link to her loneliness. This links to one of Steinbeck's themes, loneliness and how Curley's wife being female means that she is constantly segregated and isolated because of her gender. As the reader reads on we start to realise that Curley's wife isn't what we expected. We start to see that she is more of a victim. Her name Curley's wife suggests that she is a possession of Curley's ' Curley's is even cockier'n ever since he got married' this suggests that she is something that Curley can show off to the other men on the ranch. Also Slim's dog and Aunt Clara all have names but Curley's wife doesn't which even more suggests that she is an object in society. She is also married to Curley who isn't spends his Saturday evening in the ' Cat house' which does suggest

that Curley has no love for his new wife. Curley's wife has an innate understanding of society. She understands her positions and knows what she can and can't do. 'nobody'd listen to you' they are all helpless as society is harsh and what Curley's wife says applies to all of them in the barn. Curley's wife is only flirtatious and mean to men because it is the only way she knows who to talk to men.

Although she is portrayed as a victim and as lonely, we still see as manipulative when she talking to Lennie nears the end of the novel. As Curley's wife describes to use the reason why she is married to Curley it come apparent that she married Curley to get away from her Mother and then she wants to use Lennie to get away from Curley, Steinbeck has used this to make the reader feel that Curley's wife is naive and has poor judgement. The reader can tell that Curley's wife has thought through what she wants Lennie to do and she thinks that she can use him to her advantage. In this section she is being manipulative 'you can break his other han'' She can see that Lennie can stand up to Curley even if it is only to a basic level. Although you could argue that Curley's wife was described as a 'girl' which suggests innocence and naivety. She is in some ways like Lennie in that she doesn't think before the action. The clothes she wear can be seen as to be dressing up to look like idols and is hiding under her makeup. If this is all true then Curley's wife suffered a horrid death which she doesn't deserve the death she was given. Throughout the novella, Steinbeck looks at the idea of the 'American Dream', like George and Lennie, Curley's wife has a dream and that was to be in the 'pitchers'.

Her dream is to be actress but is it really the idea of being an actress or the reason was that she wanted the money so she would be able to buy the clothes but not to do the work. She met a man who said she could be in the movies but never got letter, she blames her mother for never getting letter but it is possible that the man never actually was from the movies and if he was at the movies then why was he a unknown riverside dance. Also the fact that we are told about the nasal voice ' Her voice had a nasal, brittle quality' show to the reader that she is deluded and that she will never make her dream but has them to keep going in what is a miserable life. Men are prejudice towards Curley's wife on the way in which she looks. Steinbeck's initial portrayal of Curley's wife shows her to be a mean and seductive temptress, and alive she is the connection to Eve, she brings evil in to men's lives. She is also blamed for many of the action of Curley's and she is thought of only by how she looks not by how she is. The final scene for Curley's wife is her death. When she is getting murdered, the sympathy lies with Lennie. Steinbeck did this to create more sympathy from the reader for Curley's wife.

This is what Steinbeck has been leading up throughout the book and to the downfall of the relationship between George and Lennie. Her beauty is shown though when she is dead ' she was very pretty and simple', this creates more sympathy from the reader by showing how simple and pretty she was. Also the to link with the description the word ' girl' is used, to create innocence. The reader perception of her has changed ' Ache for attention all gone' Steinbeck wrote this to make the readers realise the abnormality of what has been done and how we can only see her innocence,

simplicity and beauty. The final description of Curley's wife shows us the girl beneath what the world she lived in made her.

Although we see this different side to Curley's wife, Candy still has his misogynistic opinion of Curley's wife, ' Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up' this shows that Candy blames Curley's wife for what has happened even though Lennie was the one who murdered Curley's wife. Candy's lack of sympathy towards her creates more sympathy from the reader. Steinbeck does this to show that women got blamed for what the men did even if they had nothing to do with it. In conclusion, Curley's wife was in fact the victim of her society and although some of her actions were in some ways indecent for a newly married woman, in some way this shows how much she was actually a victim. Also she was just copying the actions and dressing like the actors which she idolised. I personally believe that Curley's wife was not all to blame for her actions and therefore she did not deserve the death that she got as it was harsh and brutal.