

How Steinbeck presents the character of Curley's wife



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Examine how Steinbeck presents the character of Curley's wife in 'Of Mice and Men'. Refer closely to the text in your answer to support your views. Throughout the novel Steinbeck presents the character of Curley's wife in a number of ways. Initially he tells us that she is a beautiful girl who is lonely and she is the only female on the ranch. Steinbeck explains that she is presented as a sexual object for Curly. Even though she is the boss's son's wife she is still low in the hierarchy within the ranch. She clearly uses her sexuality as a weapon and is seen as a sexual predator.

This is shown as she wears a lot of red and ostrich feathers. The red signals love, danger and sex. Unfortunately her sexuality has no impact on the farm because everyone is scared of being friendly or seen with her due to her husband's power. She is flirtatious 'you guys seen Curly anywhere?' She asks this just to be able to enter the stable to be with the men and this is used as a decoy to get her to be able to socialise with the men. Steinbeck is giving the reader a negative image of her, almost as a sex slave.

We see this negativity in other characters' descriptions of her: George states she is a 'rattrap and a tramp', Lennie calls her 'purdy', Candy states 'well that gloves full of Vaseline' this refers to the idea that Curley's wife is merely viewed by all as an object of sexual desire yet men are wary of her and avoid contact where possible. She seeks out greater weaknesses in others in order to protect herself or to survive. This she does with her appearance: 'full rough lips, heavily made up eyes, finger nails red, her hair hung in little clusters'. Her choices of clothes are very feminine and tempting.

She wants to be admired and noticed. Her actions and mannerisms are also very sexual 'leans against the door frame so her body is thrown forward.'
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Steinbeck is trying to present the character as a tease and an object of desire. This however clearly shows that she is a beautiful and desirable woman who is merely seeking reassurance and love. Steinbeck presents Curley's wife as not being important. This is evidenced by the fact she has no name and is only defined by her relationship with Curley. This is quite sad and emphasises that she has no real family, friends and is the only female.

She is Curley's possession and is used in the novel to show his masculinity and that she is trapped in a loveless marriage. Yet despite being unimportant she has a big impact on George, Lennie and Candy's future dreams - they disappear on her death. Steinbeck shows the hierarchy of people clearly in the novel. Curley's wife has little power as men are portrayed as more important. This is shown when Curley orders her to go back to the house and he treats her as a possession. Sadly the novel refers to her background as not being happy as her mother instructed her not to marry Curley but she did.

Curley's wife is shown as a lonely character who is desperate for companionship. She flirts with the men on the ranch and forces her company on them. Sadly she pays the price for her need of company when she encourages Lennie to stroke her hair and he overpowers her and accidentally kills her. The American dream is key to the novel - this means everyone should have equality and hope for the future. Curley's wife has a dream of becoming a Hollywood star, 'says I was a natural' and 'I could have been in the movies' This is still her dream to escape from the ranch.

This emphasises her innocence as she still believes she will get her chance in life and these were her last thoughts before she was killed by Lennie.

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Steinbeck shows Curley's wife as a victim - sweet and innocent in death. No one is sad for her - they only worry about Lennie- George is only worried about Lennie's mistake, Curley wants revenge and to be seen as a strong man ' I'm gonna shoot the guts outta the big bastard' Throughout the novel no one shows her any sympathy: Candy is angry as his dream has been shattered now ' you god damn tramp.... you messed things up'. She has lived a life without love and without achieving her dream.