

Of mice and men analysis

Literature, Russian Literature



Explore the way Curley's wife is presented and developed in 'Of Mice and Men' In this essay I will be exploring how Curley's wife is presented and developed in John Steinbeck's novel, Of Mice and Men, which is set in 1930s America and focuses on the lives of the workers on Tyler Ranch. Curley's wife is the only female on the ranch and Steinbeck examines how a hostile woman in a male dominated environment is portrayed, and then delves into her life and discovers the lonely, isolated little girl abandoned to live a life of a possession for a man who doesn't even allow her to be known as something other than "Curley's wife." Before Curley's wife's first appearance in the novel, the reader already has a negative image of her in their mind. Candy comments to George that "Curley's cockier'n ever since he got married." This suggests that Curley's wife has to be a special, flawless woman for Curley to be so conceited and proud of himself for wedding her. But the way she is described and Curley's reaction to marrying her is perceived to be negative as Curley is shown to be feeling superiority over others when it is claimed that "he's showin' off for his wife." This leads to the reader assuming she is a bad influence on someone who is already quite arrogant as he is the boss's son too. And as George and Candy continue to gossip it is revealed that Curley's wife gives other people "the eye" and the swamper's view of her is clear as he ends by calling her "a tart." The distasteful word "tart" implies that she presents herself in a flamboyant manner, which portrays her desperation to be noticed. This leads to the reader creating a judgement of Curley's wife before she even arrives in the novel, and emphasises how patriarchal the society was in the 1930s and how women were easily judged without even being seen. Candy's

perception of Curley's wife is further emphasised when she makes her first appearance in the novel. Steinbeck uses language to present the although alluring, but also unsuitable way she is dressed. Her "full rouged lips" were "heavily made up" and the way "her hair hung in little rolled clusters" also contributes to the idea that she spends quite a while getting ready because she wants to look as seductive as she can to catch the attention of the ranch workers. This supports the other character's perceptions and thoughts about her when they call her a "tart" and "rattrap." Her "cotton house dress" along with her "red mules" with "little bouquets of red ostrich feathers" are all impractical clothing to wear on a farm, even though Curley's wife is the boss's daughter-in-law and therefore isn't required to work. The repetition of the colour "red" has connotations of lust, and that is shown when she uses her feminine sensuality with her glamorous clothes to seduce men. The colour red also hints at danger and destruction. This foreshadows what happens later in the novel when Curley's wife is killed and also, indirectly, causes Lennie's death too. Curley's wife's cold beauty paired with her vindictive nature creates a terrible sight, and for Crooks, the stableman and only black man on the ranch, this forces him to abandon his little dream of working on a farm with George and Lennie. When he first allowed himself to get excited by the possibility and the fact that he fancied himself worthy and equal enough to be in on the plan with the guys, it was quickly shot down by Curley's wife. And when Crooks attempts to defend himself, Curley's wife's truly vicious side is introduced and she threatens to have him lynched. "You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?" This rhetorical question demonstrates her power and authority over the working men on the ranch.

She takes advantage of the fact that she's married to the boss's son and uses it to get her own way. She also gains momentum here as she is a well respected woman and he is considered to be just a black man, and not really good for anything. The way in which she glances at Crooks in "scorn" suggests how little she thinks of black men. Segregation in the 1930s made people like Curley's wife feel a superiority over marginalised people. The pronoun "I" implies that she is using her own power to make Crooks' life as miserable as she possibly can. The word "trap" is usually associated with the way she sexually lures in men but she turns the table on Crooks and essentially suggests that she doesn't want to hear another worthless word out of a black man's mouth. This emphasises how much racism there used to be in the 1930s, and how cruel people used it to gain what they wanted. However, it is soon discovered why Curley's wife's behaviour is so harsh and bitter. Her loneliness begins to seep through the cracks of her well out facade when she is told to leave the company of Candy, Lennie, and Crooks in the bunkhouse. This is where