

Of mice and men;
how does john
steinbeck portray
curley's wife? essay
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On the ranch there is a well known woman merely referred to as 'Curley's Wife'. Her lack of identity could imply she is not woman but rather a possession of her husband. She is shown to represent the lost of identity after being associated with something or someone. That is why she has no name; her identity is being someone's wife. As this character develops we find that she is not in fact the unimportant, nameless character we first perceive her as, but rather she is a relatively complex and interesting character, with much more to her than we first gather. Alternatively, it could suggest she is insignificant and not as important of a character as George, Lennie or any of the other men on the ranch. It could also be referring to how during the great depression women were oppressed and treated less equally. Steinbeck may have portrayed women in this light to allow the reader to recognize the inferior role of women at that time.

The lack of name demotes Curley's wife to insignificant status. In chapter four she joins Crooks, Lennie and Candy whilst on one of her 'looking for Curley' routines, where she says, 'They left all the weak ones here' alluding to the three men, all 'weak' in their respective ways. However there is a sense of irony because she is not even considered a real person but a possession. Therefore this comment is ironic because she seems to think of herself as higher in status than the men; however she is seen as unworthy of a name thus we can conclude that is she unimportant. Curley's Wife is first presented to us through the dialogue of ranch-hand Candy, when he describes her to George.

She is perceived by Candy to be the cause of all that goes wrong in Soledad:

'Ever'one knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good'. He uses

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expressions such as ' she got the eye' and goes on to describe her as looking at other men, before eventually calling her a ' tart'. Through Candy's words, we develop an initial perception of Curley's Wife as flirtatious ' tramp' and even immoral. The word ' tart' suggests she presents herself in a flamboyant manner, which portrays her desperation to be noticed. Steinbeck enables the reader to see Curley's Wife through Candy's eyes on their first encounter with her. This perception is further emphasized by Curley's Wife's first appearance in the novel. Her physical appearance of ' full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made- up', as well as ' fingernail painted red' and elaborate hair, further build on our preconceptions of her.

Red, the colour of her attire and the style of her hair and makeup suggest some sexuality. Also, she use suggestive and provocative body language, ' she put her hands behind her back and leaned against the door frame so that her body was thrown forward', and her flimsy excuse to be with the men in their quarters contribute to the rancher's view of her as a 'tramp'. She both talks and acts playfully and flirtatiously in front of the other ranch workers. In my opinion she behaves in this manner because her sexuality is her only weapon to gain attention. Red is also a colour symbolising an impure woman suggesting she is immoral. Through her physical appearance and her own actions, Candy's description of Curley's Wife seems accurate after her first appearance in the novel.

On the other hand, Curley's Wife's appearance could be seen as naivety and simply youthful desire to be found attractive. Red is a primary colour

therefore children are attracted to it, it is a colour children want to wear

because it is bright and has an element of happiness in it. Therefore Curley's
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Wife wearing the colour red may symbolise a child's attraction to bright colours portraying her as youthful. Her naivety is also shown through her appearance. Recent science studies suggest wide spaced eyes are a sign of telling is someone is naive or not. Steinbeck may have portrayed Curley's Wife with wide eyes to illustrate her as naive character. In addition, another connotation of the colour red is danger. A reason for Steinbeck portraying her as an associate of the colour red may be to foreshadowing the blood that was to be shed. In Chapter four, her appearances become more complex as the lonely and hostile side of this woman is further revealed. In a confrontation with Crooks, Lennie and Candy she admits to feeling a kind of shameless dissatisfaction with her life. It is here the reader discovers why Curley's Wife acts as such a temper-tress, and begins to feel sympathy for her character when it is discovered she is in fact very lonely. Once again we find she uses the excuse of ' looking for Curley', I think