

OF MICE AND MEN

CANDY

Like many of the characters, the first description of Candy is when he enters the Bunkhouse. The description of him is short when compared to that of Slim:

'A tall, stoop-shouldered man came in. He was dressed in blue jeans...'

'He pointed with his right arm, and out of the sleeve came a round stick-like wrist but no hand.'

The rest of what we learn about Candy comes later in the story – his character is revealed in small parts rather than all at once. What Steinbeck does do with his introduction to Candy is mark him out as somebody different because of his disability.

He is identified as a **'swamper'** – someone whose job it was to clean up after the other men – it is the lowest position on the ranch as it would be a filthy job that no one else would want to do. Candy does the job because he has no choice. His position is one of the few permanent jobs on the ranch but it is pitiful that an old, disabled man is reduced to Candy's position in order to survive. It isn't really living – just waiting to die.

Much is revealed about Candy and the other characters through what he says about them. Steinbeck, for example uses Candy to make the reader feel prejudiced towards the character of Curley's wife before we even meet her.

He also warns George about Curley:

'That's the boss's son, he said quietly. Curley's pretty handy. He done quite a bit in the ring. He's a lightweight, and he's handy'

In this way Steinbeck uses Candy as a tool to reveal detail about the other characters. He is in apposition to know all about the goings on at the ranch because he stays there all the time – not only is his position permanent but he doesn't go out to the fields with the other men so he has a more complete view of the day- to -day happenings at the farm house.

Candy demonstrates his fear of Curley when he lowers his voice and makes sure that Curley has completely left before he starts talking about him.

He reveals what he knows will be useful to George about Curley – he has immediately seen that there will be trouble for Lennie and his warning is clear:

'Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy..'

'S'pose Curley jumps a big guy and licks him. Ever'body says what a game guy Curley is. And s'pose he does the same thing and gets licked. Then ever'body says the big guy oughtta pick somebody his own size, and maybe they gang up on the big guy'

Candy provides the reader with detail here, and as an observer of how Curley behaves throughout –his view is a pretty accurate one. George is warned for the first time here in an explicit way he knows from his first meeting with Curley that he could be potential trouble for Lennie – Candy just confirms it.

Candy waits for George to confirm that he doesn't like Curley before expanding on the conversation he has started about Curley. He goes on to provide a piece of gossip that is crude and confirms the reader's opinion of Curley as someone thoroughly rotten:

'You seen that glove on his left hand?

Well, that glove's full of Vaseline.

Curley says he's keeping that hand soft for his wife.'

The crudeness of this piece of information is striking. It reminds the reader that this is a community dominated by males almost starved completely of female influences so crude talk would be common-place amongst the men. It also says a lot about Curley and his complete lack of self-confidence – it is as if he constantly has to prove himself as the alpha-male to them – the only one on the ranch to have a wife. It also indicates to the reader that he treats her with contempt.

Again, the reader would not have this information if it wasn't for Candy.

He goes on to form the reader's first impressions of Curley's wife:

'Well I think Curley's married... a tart'

Again detailed personal opinion is imparted to the reader through Candy.

Candy is obviously a very lonely and in many ways, an isolated character. The only constant companionship he has had throughout his life is that of his dog. When the dog is shot he is completely alone.

He is given hope for a better future when he agrees to put his money in with George and Lennie to get themselves some land. He will finally have some companionship and be able to take it easy in his old age. Like all the characters

Stienbeck gives hope to in the novel, it is cruelly snatched away from him again – a reminder that there are no happy endings for most of these men – reality creeps in and destroys everything.

Candy seizes the opportunity to put his stake in with George and Lennie as soon as he hears them discussing their future. His excitement is clear in the language used and the way the words come tumbling out really quickly:

I ain't much good with on'y one hand. I lost my right hand here on this ranch. That's why they gave me a job swampin'. An' they give me two-hundred an' fifty dollars'cause I los' my hand. An I got fifty more saved up right in the bank, right now. Tha's three hundred, and I got fifty more comin' at the end of the month. Tell you what...he leaned forward eagerly...'

The repeated use of 'and' throughout this passage helps the reader to feel Candy's excitement. This is at a point in the story where the reader is desperate for some hope for these men and this gives just a glimmer of a better future.

Candy represents what all the men are in danger of becoming. It seemed at the time that there would be no end to the life of poverty that they had been forced in to, just as in real life there seemed no end to the depression and no hope for a brighter future.

His hopes are crushed at the end when Lennie kills Curley's wife, yet he still desperately clings on to his dream of a better life. After Curley's wife is discovered by Candy and she has been confirmed killed by Lennie, Candy's thoughts immediately return to the dream:

'You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George? Can't we?'

Candy's biggest fear is being left to die on the ranch, surrounded by unfamiliar people.

SEE SEPARATE NOTES ON CANDY'S DOG