

OF MICE AND MEN

CURLY

- Curley is the most hated figure on the ranch and in the novel. He is described and portrayed in an exaggerated manner so as to become almost a caricature of the stereotypical 'little man'
- He is the boss's son.
- He demands respect because of who he is but does not gain this through good relationships with the men. He rules by fear.
- He is a coward who hides behind his father – he could easily get any of the men sacked.
- He is a bully and a thus who only picks on those weaker than himself – his wife, Lennie, Candy.
- He is insecure in his masculinity and makes a big show of his gloved hand and his boxing prowess.
- He is intelligent enough to be cunning.
- He has little or no control over his temper and will fight first, ask questions later.
- His marriage is dominated by his violence and inability to control his wife.
- He is set on proving to the world he is a big man – he even wears high heeled boots to make himself appear bigger – he is very vain.
- He visits the brothel on a Saturday night with the other men despite the fact that he's newly married.
- He will never take on responsibility for his own actions – everything is someone else's fault.
- He is universally hated by all on the ranch and is a laughing-stock amongst the other men for his inability to control his wife.
- When Curley first meets George and Lennie he immediately singles out Lenni – this backs up the point made by Candy that he only ever picks on big guys – that way he won't look stupid if he loses:

Let the big guy talk.

Lennie twisted with embarrassment.

George said s'pose he don't want to talk?

Curley lashed his body round. By Christ he's gotta talk when he's spoke to.'

- This passage demonstrates clearly his singling out of anyone bigger than him, as if he's weighing them up, seeing if they are a potential threat. The use of the verb 'lashed' is particularly appropriate for the way he moves – it is usually used to describe the movement of a whip – fast and sharp – it is the same with Curley – he will not let anything go, is very confrontational and wants to cause as much harm as he possibly can.
- The initial description of Curley tells the reader a lot about him:

'At that moment a young man came into the bunkhouse; a thin young man with a brown face, with brown eyes and a head of tightly curled hair. He wore a glove on his left hand, and like the boss, he wore high-heeled boots.'

- It is not so much his appearance, but what he is described as wearing that singles him out here. The high heeled boots are worn by his father as well but unlike Curley, his father doesn't seem like he has the attitude to go with them. The boots signify their elevated position on the ranch and their importance over the other men.
- The reader later discovers that Curley not only wears the high-heeled cowboy boots but that his have spurs attached to the back. These would be used to dig into the side of his horse to make it go faster – another cruel and aggressive indication of Curley's character.
- Most of Curley's appearances in the novel are precluded by the fact that he is looking for his wife. This indicates two things. Firstly he has no control over her and never knows where she is. Secondly that he doesn't trust her and knows that the other men, particularly Slim are far better company than he is.
- On his first such encounter with George he also reveals a further disturbing habit – that of sizing up all the men he meets, as if for a fight:

'You seen a girl around here? He demanded angrily.

Well what the hell was she doin'?

George stood still, watching the angry little man.

His eyes flashed over George, took in his height, measured his reach, looked at his trim middle'

- The use of the verb 'flashed' is worth commenting on. All of Curley's movements are fast and angry – just like him. He seems to be full of nervous energy and is never able to relax.
- The set-piece in the middle of the story where Curley has his hand crushed by Lennie is an episode that Steinbeck has built up from their first meeting. It is clear from the beginning that something will happen between these two – the reader has really just been waiting to find out what it is.
- The episode itself is described as if it is in 'real-time' – it is very quick and unexpected. In this way we can see that Steinbeck has used this technique to make the whole episode seem more realistic.

'Curley's rage exploded.

Come on ya' big bastard. Get up on your feet. No big son-of-a-bitch is gonna laugh at me. I'll show you who's yella.'

Curley was balanced and poised. He slashed at Lennie with his left, and the smashed down his nose with a right. Lennie gave a cry of terror. Blood welled from his nose. George, he cried. Make 'um let me alone, Goerge. He backed against the wall, and Curley followed, slugging him in the face. Lennies hands remained at his sides; he was too frightened to defend himself.'

- Curley's attack is made with the speed and precision of a professional boxer – Lennie doesn't stand a chance.
- The verbs used to describe the way Curley attacks Lennie are important – slashed and smashed use onomatopoeia to reflect the speed and movement of Curley's fists. This is very brutal language being used to describe a violent assault.
- The fact that Lennie ends up backed against the wall shows that he is being submissive and not trying to fight back. It is like a boxer cornered in the ring – except that Lennie is not a boxer – just a very frightened man.

- The next move by Curley is 'slugging' – this verb suggests that his blows are relentless and powerful – intended to inflict as much damage as possible.
- The level of violence used by Curley is sickening, and quite deliberately so. Whereas one punch would have been enough to silence Lennie, Curley keeps hitting him until Lennie forces him to stop. Both men have uncontrollable tempers. Curley seems to enjoy inflicting pain though, whereas Lennie definitely doesn't.
- Curley's attack continues much longer than is necessary:

'Curley attacked his stomach and cut off his wind....'

Curley slashed at his eyes'

- These are the actions of a boxer finishing off his opponent, not a man trying to scare someone. His approach is systematic and professional. Again Steinbeck has used an onomatopoeic verb in his description – 'slashed'. It is a violent and aggressive action.
- Steinbeck uses the image of a fish on a line for the first time here – he returns to repeat the image when Lennie has killed Curley's wife:

'The next minute Curley was flopping like a fish on a line'

- The simile is an appropriate one. Curley has been caught off guard by Lennie's sudden and ferocious attack. It also emphasises the difference in size between the two men – Curley suddenly looks small and insignificant like a fish trapped on the end of a fisherman's line. The verb flopping contrasts with the violent and aggressive verbs used to describe Curley's actions earlier in this section – slashed etc. The reader can see him for what he is a coward.
- The next, and final encounter the reader has with Curley is at the end after Lennie has killed his wife. Interestingly, when all the men come in to the barn to see the body, Curley does nothing at first – it is left to Slim to check if she is dead. There is no sign of affection or loss from Curley- just an outburst of aggression when he realises that Lennie must have done it:

'That big so-of-a-bitch done it... I'm gonna get him. I'm going for my shotgun. I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch myself. I'll shoot him in the guts.. He ran furiously out of the barn'

- His reaction requires some careful thought. His wife has just died but he is immediately out for revenge – is it for the death of his wife or payback for the humiliation of having been so soundly beaten by Lennie.
- The reader can only speculate but the odds seem stacked in favour of the latter explanation. He does not go back to touch his wife or even cover over her body he simply goes and gets his gun as if he were off on some hunting expedition and in many ways that is exactly what this is.
- Even when Slim suggests to him that his place is with his wife, Curley is adamant about what he needs to do. It is a very telling point about him and his relationship with her.
- She may have been called Curley's wife, and be treated as a possession all the way through the story but was she ever really his wife in any way that mattered – they certainly didn't love each other, in fact they didn't even like each other and this is made abundantly clear in this final scene:

'Curley – maybe you better stay here with your wife. Curley's face reddened. I'm goin, he said. I'm gonna shoot the guts outta that big bastard myself, even if I only got one hand.'

- Finally after all his looking for her he has her but doesn't want her – he just leaves her in the barn.

