

Literary analysis on chrysanthemums

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Nessa Arr. November 1, 2010 Literary Analysis of The Chrysanthemums John Steinbeck's 1937 story "The Chrysanthemums" depicts women as typical housewives back in the 1930's only being allowed to cook, clean and mother. Elisa, who is the protagonist and the dynamic character in this story, is the typical woman for this time period but rather than mothering, Elisa uses her need for power and strength in gardening.

Gardening isn't necessarily Elisa's passion although in the story she claims she has "planter's hands" and a "green thumb" for planting anything in rich soil, I feel as though it is an act.

An act only because Elisa almost seems to make herself plant chrysanthemums because yes, she is good at it but if she didn't plant the flowers then relatively speaking she would have nothing else to occupy herself with. Elisa expresses herself through her chrysanthemums. I feel Elisa expresses herself this way because the chrysanthemums she grows are big, beautiful and noticeable something she deep down inside is but just not in the eyes of her husband or any other man. For they see past what really matters and stick to the stereotypical women of the 1930s.

Furthermore, relating to Elisa is her age.

Her age of thirty five is significant in "The chrysanthemums" because it shows how she needs passion and attention and that she has needs and wants that she desires to be fulfilled through intimacy but most likely won't because her husband Henry. Henry, who is a slight antagonist and static character in this story, doesn't seem to notice the intimate feelings that Elisa has. In attempt to make his wife content, Henry invites Elisa out that evening

to dinner then a movie. Henry does indeed love his wife or else he wouldn't try to help make her happy, but he doesn't understand the kind of happy she wants.

A simple marriage is what Henry and Elisa have together but it's a relationship that's barely being held together.

Back in the time frame of this story it was common for women to have children because that's how many women kept occupied, aside from other household duties. Though, it doesn't necessarily state it but perhaps Elisa wanted a child to fill the emptiness that she had acquired from her husband. As the story proceeds, Steinbeck adds excitement to the story by bringing in a Tinker. The man appears in this story as Elisa works in her garden. Elisa is distracted by the way the wagon rattles towards her house.

She notices a "big stubble-bearded man" who was driving an "old spring wagon with a round canvas top on it like the cover of a prairie schooner.

"Above the wagon Elisa notices words written in paint that read, "Pots, pans, knives, scissors, lawn mowers, Fixed." Elisa curiously observes the man's features. The man begins to ask Elisa for directions in which then their conversation takes a turn. The man put aside his questions and asked Elisa for work. The man was all about his business for that was the determining factor of whether he ate that night or not.

Quick as a fox Elisa hides her scissors knowing that the man was looking for something to fix.

Growing slightly irritated, Elisa continues to reassure the man that she had no work for him. The tinker notices her chrysanthemums and right then: “ the irritation and resistance melted from Elisa’s face. ” Elisa was thought into thinking that the man was truly interested in her beautifully grown chrysanthemums but really, he was trying to secretly entice her to give him work. Using his ways of trickery like many men did and still do to get their way with women. He told a lie saying he knows a customer who would love to have flowers like Elisa’s.

Elisa was letting another man into her world hoping to find some spark or connection by a simple conversation about her chrysanthemums.

That gave Elisa a bit of power for she knew that she was going to inform this man about something she very well understood. As Elisa prepares a pot of her chrysanthemums seeds for the man, she advises him on how to properly take care of it on his trip, but really he wasn’t listening. Elisa explains to the man that as she works with chrysanthemums she becomes herself, she tells the man: “ Everything goes right down into your fingertips. You watch your fingertips work.

They never make a mistake.

” Steinbeck adds in detail of the lust Elisa was feeling for the tinker by writing: “ She was kneeling on the ground looking up at him. Her breast swelled passionately. ” Although the man doesn’t want Elisa sexually they do have a moment in which they can both relate to emotionally. Elisa’s connection is with her chrysanthemums and the tinker, relates to traveling alone across the land. The conversation takes a sharp turn when Elisa’s voice

turns husky as she describes every star as being "...driven into your body... Hot and sharp and-lovely. " Elisa's hormones took over as "...her hand went out toward his legs...Her fingers almost touched the cloth...She crouched like a fawning dog.

" In an attempt to seduce the man, she failed. With embarrassment Elisa tried to regain her dignity and went back to the real reason the man was there, for business.

Elisa found a few pans the man could fix and right then the man was all about business. As the man repairs the pans, Elisa watches him and begins conversation about the way of life on a wagon. Elisa states, " It must be very nice. I wish some women could do such things.

" Steinbeck writes the man replying with: " It ain't the right kind of life for a woman. With the man saying that it shows again how women were depicted back in the 1930s. The man quickly repairs the pans and is paid and back on the road. As Elisa prepares herself for the evening she wants to lure in her husband with her good looks. Before Elisa met the tinker she wore a heavy apron and gloves which did no good to her figure.

Although, since the tinker had left Elisa felt that she does have the features of an attractive woman as she hopes her husband will like and accept the way she is dressed.

Henry was in awe when he first seen his wife. At first Henry tells her she "... looks so nice! Though, it wasn't enough for Elisa's confidence. The Henry tells her " You look strong enough to break a calf...", which offended Elisa for she knew she was strong. As they drove along the road to town, Elisa notices <https://assignbuster.com/literary-analysis-on-chrysanthemums/>

a “ a dark speck. ” At that moment Elisa knew that she had wasted her time with the tinker. All Elisa wanted was some attention, but she was disrespected.

At the end Elisa cries “ weakly-like an old woman”, because she then comes to realization that she will always just be an old woman degraded by humanity. Steinbeck in “ The Chrysanthemums” was trying to prove a point.

The point I believe he was trying to make was the major difference women and men had in the 1930s. Men were always above women with their job, strength and earnings. Women were not used for their intelligence, strength or common sense but only there cleaning and mothering skills.

I don't doubt the fact that many women felt like Elisa did but I also know that most men hadn't a clue about their wives wants and needs. This story is a good depiction of the past judgment of women. Thank goodness today women are their own person and they don't have to live through the shadow of their husbands.