

The Chrysanthemums

By John Steinbeck



1. The author

2. Plot

3. Characters

4. Symbols

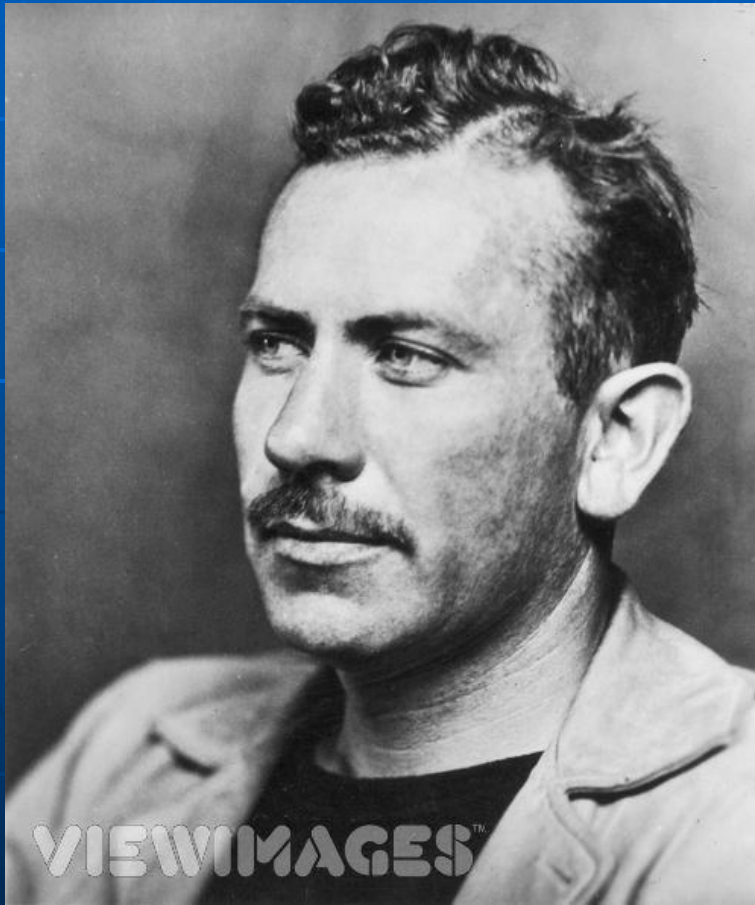
5. Point of view



John Steinbeck

约翰·斯坦贝克

(1902-1968)

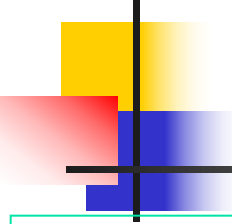




I. Social background

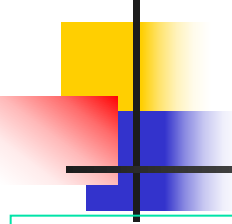
The Great Depression in 1930s

- a. The dim decade of 1930s replaced the glittering 1920s. Banks failed, factories closed and agriculture withered; Jobless millions roamed the street; the breadless stretched long; Absolute poverty and struggled for survival is a nightmarish experience of life.
- b. The physical waste land replaced the spiritual waste land represented by T. S. Eliot.



II. Biography of John Steinbeck

1. Born in Salinas, California.
2. Read widely especially in English classical literature under the influence of his schoolmaster mother.
3. Supporting himself from childhood, working at a variety of manual jobs: ranch hand, trainee carpenter, painter, laborer and chemist, which provided first –hand materials.
observations of the attitudes, manners and language of the working people, in particular, the migrant farm workers.



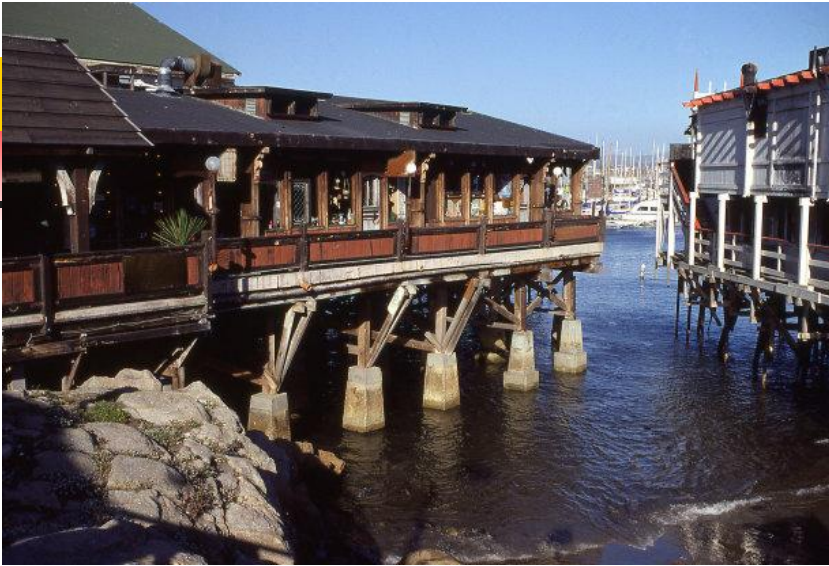
II. Biography of John Steinbeck

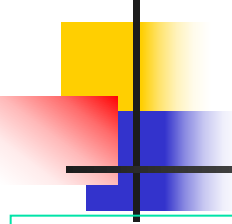
4. Entering Stanford University in 1919 as an English major and left without a degree due to the disturbance of various jobs.
5. In 1925, he went to New York pursuing a literary profession, both as a newspaper reporter and a laborer.
6. Publishing his masterpiece ***The Grapes of Wrath*** in 1939.

National Steinbeck Center, Salinas, CA



Cannery Row 《罐头厂街》 (1945) : Monterey, CA





II. Biography of John Steinbeck

7. In 1962, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, with the honorary words, for “his realistic and imaginative writings, distinguished as they are by a sympathetic humor and a social perception.”

“通过现实主义的、寓于想象的创作，表现出富于同情的幽默和对社会的敏感观察。”

8. He died of a heart attack on Dec.20, 1968 in New York.



III. Major works

1. First novel: *Cup of Gold* (1929) 《金杯》

2. Worker's Trilogy:

a. *In Dubious Battle* (1936) 《胜负未决》

b. *Of Mice and Men* (1937) 《人鼠之间》

c. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) 《愤怒的葡萄》

《愤怒的葡萄》被认为是“美国**30**年代大萧条时期的一部史诗”

3. *The Moon Is Down* (1942) 《月亮下去了》

4. *East of Eden* (1952) 《伊甸园以东》

Of Mice and Men

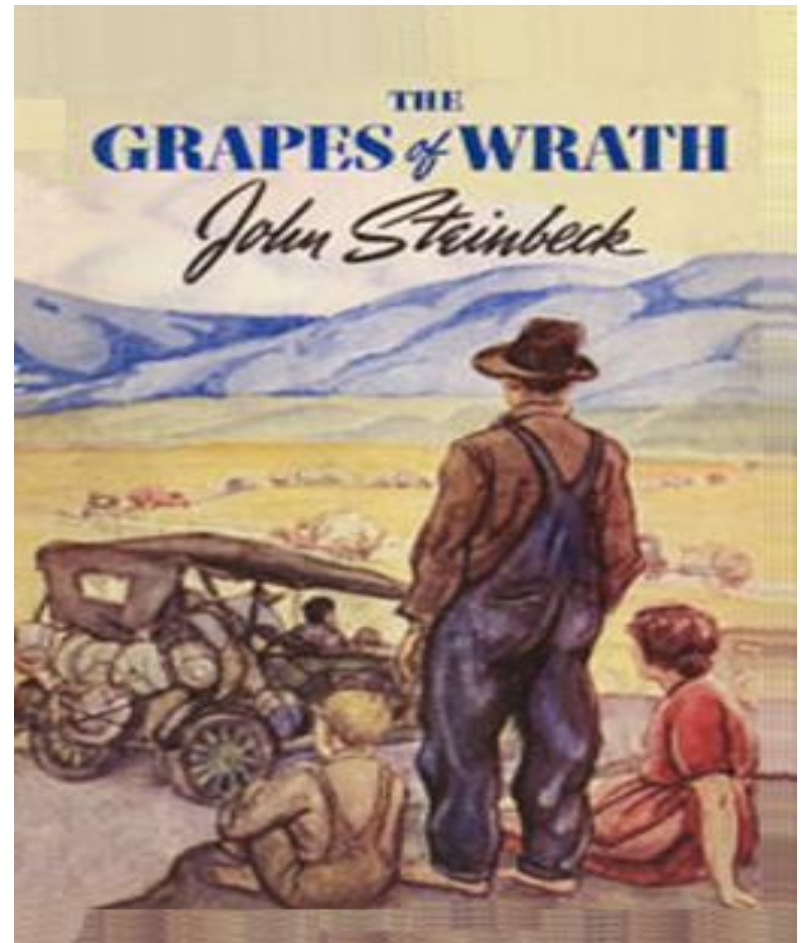
- 两位流动农业工人乔治和伦尼怀揣着拥有自己土地的梦想，在加利福尼亚的农场间漂泊；最终，在伦尼因误会酿成大祸后，乔治为了保护他免受私刑，不得不亲手结束了他单纯而强大的同伴的生命，从而终结了他们共同的梦想。

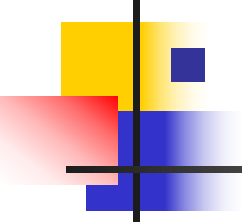
美国中学生十大阅读经典之首！
欧美国家高中必修课书目



The Grapes of Wrath

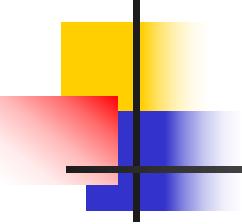
- 讲述了美国大萧条时期，俄克拉荷马州佃农乔德一家因干旱、机械化和银行收地而失去家园，被迫沿着**66**号公路向西迁徙到加利福尼亚州寻找工作与希望的故事。然而，他们到达后却发现那里充斥着剥削、饥饿与偏见，梦想中的乐土不过是另一片苦难之地，但家人在极端困境中依然展现出坚韧的生存意志与团结互助的人性光辉。

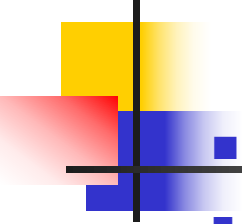




■ Eight major periods/trends in American literary history

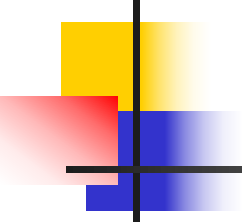
- **1. Colonial & Puritan Era (c. 1620–1750)**
- Core Concept: Religious devotion and divine mission. Literature served to record God's providence, examine the soul, and build a "City upon a Hill."
- Key Features: Plain style, didactic, allegorical, journal and sermon forms.
- Representatives: Anne Bradstreet, Jonathan Edwards, William Bradford.

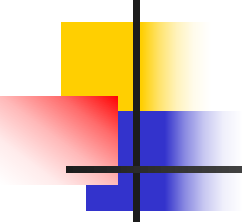
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- **2. Revolutionary & Enlightenment Era (c. 1750–1800)**
 - Core Concept: Reason, science, natural rights, and nationalism. Literature was a tool for political argument and nation-building.
 - Key Features: Persuasive essays, aphorisms, speeches, logical clarity.
 - Representatives: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson.

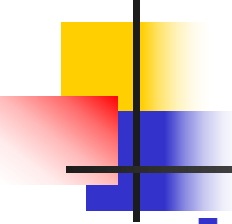


■ **3. Romanticism (c. 1800–1865)**

- Core Concept: Individual emotion, intuition, imagination, and nature. A reaction against industrialism and rationalism.
- Key Features: Symbolism, mysticism, celebration of American landscapes.
- Sub-genre – Transcendentalism: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau.
- Dark Romantics/Novelists: Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Scarlet Letter*), Herman Melville (*Moby-Dick*), Edgar Allan Poe.
- Poets: Walt Whitman (*Leaves of Grass*), Emily Dickinson.

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- **4. Realism (c. 1865–1910)**
 - Core Concept: Objective and faithful representation of everyday life. Focus on the middle class and contemporary social problems.
 - Key Features: Detailed description, use of dialect (local color), rounded characters.
 - Representatives: Mark Twain (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton.

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- **5. Naturalism (c. 1890–1920)**
 - Core Concept: Humans are determined by environment, heredity, instinct, and socioeconomic forces. Pessimistic and often brutal.
 - Key Features: Focus on the lower classes, detached objective narrative tone, strong sense of fate
 - Representatives: Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser (*Sister Carrie*), Jack London

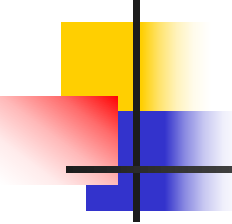


6. Modernism (c. 1914–1945)

- Core Concept: Loss of faith in traditional values after WWI. Embraced fragmentation, alienation, and the inner self (stream of consciousness).
- Key Features: Fragmented narrative, multiple perspectives, irony, experimental language
- “Lost Generation” Writers: Ernest Hemingway (Iceberg Theory), F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*)
- Stream of Consciousness: William Faulkner (*The Sound and the Fury*)
- Poet: T.S. Eliot (*The Waste Land*)

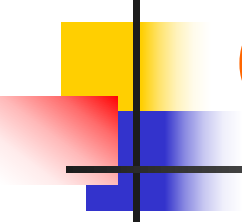
- **7. Depression-Era / Leftist Literature (c. 1930–1940)**

- Note: Often considered a significant branch of 1930s Modernism.
- Core Concept: Social protest and class struggle. Focused on the plight of the working class, farmers, and the poor during the Great Depression
- Key Features: Epic scale, sympathy for the oppressed, political awareness
- Representatives: John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men*)



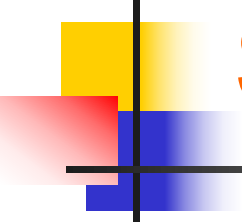
8. Postmodernism & Contemporary (c. 1945–present)

- Core Concept: Playfulness, metafiction, and the rejection of absolute truth. The world is seen as a constructed, fragmented, and often absurd text.
- Key Features: Pastiche, parody, black humor, metanarrative (breaking the fourth wall), irony
- Representatives: J.D. Salinger (*The Catcher in the Rye*), Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*), Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison (Multiculturalism), Don DeLillo



Characters

- Elisa Allen (para.4)
- Henry Allen (para.4)
- The unnamed tinker (补锅匠) (para.28)



Setting

Time: (para.1)

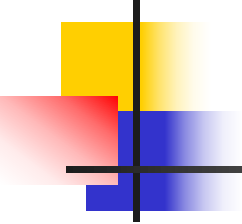
a winter day with the high gray-flannel fog

一个冬天的早晨，空中呈现出灰法兰绒色冬雾

Place: (para.3 & 107)

(1) on Henry Allen's foothill ranch in the Salinas Valley

(2) on the road to the town



Point of View

The Chrysanthemums adopts

the third-person point of view

_____ as the

narrator is non of the characters in the fiction.

Plot

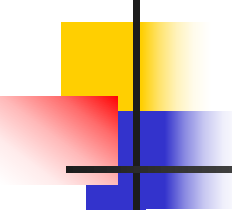


Exposition (para.4, 5, 10-23)

On Henry Allen's foothill ranch, Elisa Allen is working in her flower garden while her husband, Henry, is talking with two business men over the cattle deal.

While talking with Elisa, Henry says that it would be better if Elisa could apply her planting gifts in the orchard rather than in the flowers.

In order to celebrate the deal, Henry is going to take Elisa to eat in the town.

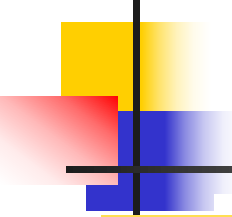


Rising action (para. 28, 34, 40-49)

While Henry Allen is away to bring down the steers from the hill, a tinker stops by Elisa's house for direction.

While talking, Elisa expresses her admiration for the tinkers' free lifestyle.

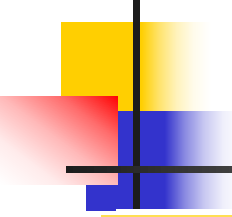
Then the tinker wants Elisa to give him something to fix, but Elisa refused him directly which disappoints the man.



Rising action (para.50-58, 61, 64, 71-75)

Being rejected, the tinker doesn't leave immediately. He notices the chrysanthemums and says that a lady entrusts him to bring some chrysanthemums seeds.

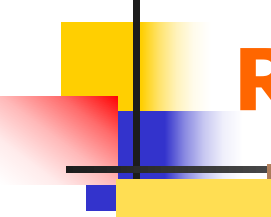
Hearing this, Elisa is excited and eager to prepare some sprouts to that lady. She even teaches the tinker in detail how to take care of the chrysanthemums so that the tinker could tell the unknown lady. Elisa is so absorbed in her teaching that it seems to arouse some resonance in the tinker which touches Elisa a lot.



Rising action (para.76, 78, 80-88, 90, 92)

Feeling understood by the tinker, Elisa couldn't help showing sympathy toward the tinker. So she finds two articles for the tinker to fix. While talking, Elisa again expresses admiration for the tinker's free lifestyle.

Before the tinker leave, she again tells the tinker to take good care of the chrysanthemums. Watching the wagon leave, Elisa whispers: "That's a bright direction. There's a glowing there."



Rising action (para.93-94, 99-104, 106)

In the bathroom, Elisa gives herself a good washing and stood in front of the mirror to appreciate herself. Then she puts on all her newest and nicest garment and dresses herself up.

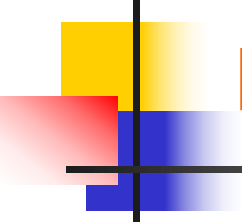
Her sudden change gives Henry a little startle and Henry says that Elisa looks different, strong and happy. Before they leave off, Elisa appreciates herself again.



Climax (para. 107-110)

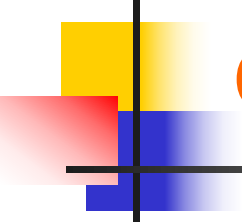
Elisa and Henry are driving to the town and on the road, Elisa catches sight of a dark speck which she recognizes immediately.

She doesn't even have courage to look straight into the wagon when their car passes by.



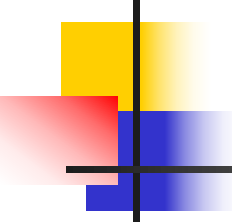
Falling action and resolution

After they pass by the wagon, Elisa suggests drinking wine at dinner and enquires about prize fight. But in secret, she was crying weakly like an old woman.



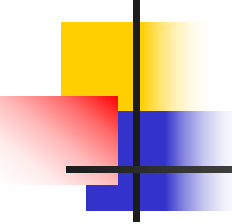
Characterization

- Elisa Allen
- Henry Allen
- The unnamed tinker



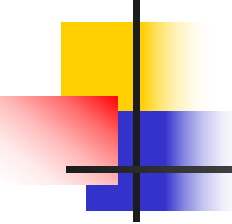
Elisa Allen

- Para. 5-7
- Para.16, 22, 40-41,80-82, 113
- Para.51, 64, 71-72
- Para. 75, 83-88, 92-94, 104, 106
- Para. 118



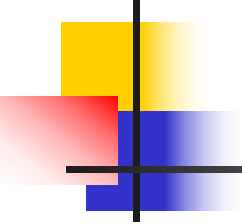
Diction

- Para.6 Her face was **eager** and mature and **handsome**; even her work with the scissors was **over-eager, over-powerful**. The chrysanthemum stems seemed **too small and easy for her energy**.
- Para.7 It was a **hard-swept** looking little house with **hard-polished** windows, and a **clean** mud-mat on the front steps.



Elisa Allen

- 35-year-old housewife with no child, isolated from the outside world
- Masculine image
- Hard-working, energetic
- Skillful gardener
- Being confined in the limited space and eager for a life of freedom
- Eager to be appreciated in her work and to prove her value
- Innocent
- disillusioned



Henry Allen

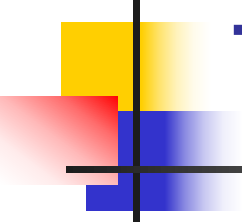
- Para.10,12
- Para.16
- Para.99-103

A practical man who manages the outside business

Hard-working

Unimaginative

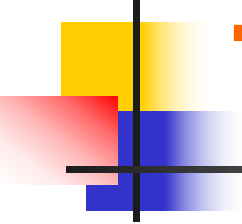
Not romantic



The unnamed tinker

- Para.50-58
- Para.76
- Para.79
- Para. 89, 109

A practical, cunning and skillful tinker. In his heart, he doesn't think much of Elisa's work and thinks that woman's position is at home. In this point, he is like Henry, which leads to Elisa's disillusionment.



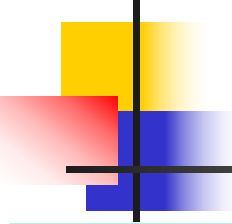
Tone (para.1)

- On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot.

雾气锁着山头，四面象顶盖子，而山谷则成了一口盖得严严实实的深锅。

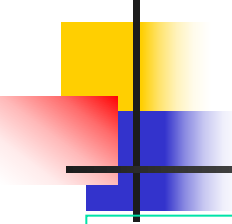
- grey
- pale cold sunshine

The tone of the Chrysanthemums is depressive.



Theme

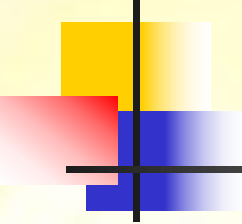
In the fiction, Elisa is a devoted housewife and tries to demonstrate her value through housework and the gardening. But she is too energetic. she is not satisfied with her isolated world and wants her work and value to be recognized by people outside. Not knowing that it's the tinker's trap, Elisa put all her hopes on the chrysanthemums which would be brought outside by the tinker. In the end, **the chrysanthemums are discarded and Elisa is disillusioned.**



Theme

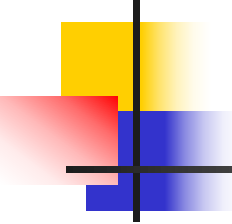
Through this fiction, the author tries to make the following points:

- (1) In the patriarchal society, women's role is fixed as housewife which greatly limited their world. They are ignored and their work is not appreciated by men.
- (2) No matter how intelligent and hardworking they are, their value and work is not approved by the society, specifically, by the men.



Symbols

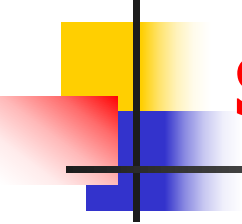
- Chrysanthemums
- Setting-the Salinas Valley
- Fences
- Elisa's clothing



Chrysanthemums

The chrysanthemums symbolize both **Elisa and the limited scope of her life.**

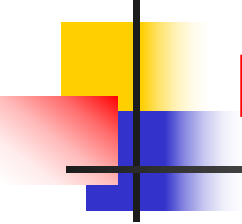
Elisa explicitly identifies herself with the flowers. When the tinker notices the chrysanthemums, Elisa visibly brightens, just as if he had noticed her instead. In Henry and the tinker's eyes, **both the flowers and women are merely decorative and add little value to the world.**



Setting-the Salinas Valley (para.1)

The valley symbolizes **Elisa's enclosed and oppressive environment-the patriarchal society.**

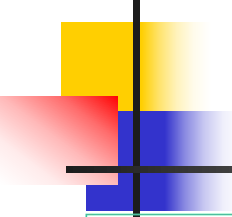
No matter what efforts she makes, Elisa can't escape from her small world and make the world recognize her values.



Fences (para.9, 33, 42, 58)

Fences symbolize **the barriers that separate Elisa from the rest of the world, including her husband Henry.**

Her fences protect flower garden from cattle, dogs, and chickens which represent her husband's world while her flower garden represents Elisa's world.



Elisa's clothing (para.5, 94)

Elisa's clothing symbolizes **her mental state**.

Before the tinker's visit, Elisa lives an oppressive life just like the heavy clothes she wears. After the visit from the tinker, she feels appreciated and confident as she could realize self-value through the tinker. Elisa's clothing changes from masculine to feminine.