ABSTRACT

AUSTIN JENKINS. “Dubious Battle: Gender and Gardens in Steinbeck’s *The Long Valley*” (Under the direction of Dr. Anne Baker.)

While generally known and regarded for his novels, John Steinbeck’s early career writing short stories informs the central ideas of the natural world and humanity’s place in it that his later career and life explore. Through an examination of a curated cross section of his short stories, this project focuses on unifying Steinbeck’s exploration of how humanity controls, manipulates, and represses both the natural world and those most emotionally connected to their own ecological environment. First published in 1938, *The Long Valley* is composed of eleven short stories and one novella. Three stories in this collection highlight Steinbeck’s struggle with repressing, conforming, and exploring one’s own identity through structured marriage narratives, each focusing on the relationship between a husband and a wife living in rural California during the 1930s. “The Chrysanthemums,” “The White Quail,” and “The Harness” all examine troubled marital relationships, societal expectations for men and women, and the simultaneous symbiotic and symbolic relationship between humans and nature during the Great Depression, indicating the importance of the natural world in Steinbeck’s earliest writings.