**The Influences of Thomas Hardy’s Universe**

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The poetry and prose of late Victorian author Thomas Hardy are peppered with socio-religious critique. In Hardy’s works nature stands in constant opposition to the Christian religious establishment. Hardy feels a culture that rigidly adheres to religiously constructed mores becomes disassociated with humanity and unsympathetically complicit in the needless suffering of those determined to be transgressors. Examination of religious conventions inevitably leads to the conclusion that Victorian society is out of step with nature. In Hardy’s view, justified values and increased human happiness can only be achieved if the harmony between humanity and nature is reestablished. The prevalence of Pagan references and resonances in Hardy’s work attests to the desire for a return to the natural. Hardy’s work is also heavily influenced by the theories of Charles Darwin, whose scientific explanation of human origin was revolutionary to the growing religious critique of the period.

Despite being portrayed in opposition to bankrupt religious-based ethics, nature is not always a force for good in Hardy’s universe. In fact, Hardy’s nature is often described in violent terms, complicit in the brutal fatalism that dooms many of his hapless heroes and heroines. The explanation for this tension within Hardy’s characterization of nature can be found in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer’s cosmology—especially the idea of the Immanent Will, an all-pervasive force of perpetual striving that characterizes everything in existence—is foundational to Hardy’s particular variety of naturalism. Hardy’s nature, according to the dictates of the Immanent Will, is morality neutral and not cognizant of human suffering. Hardy places morality in nature even though he does not view nature as having anything near the benign aspect of the Christian God.

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**Funded by the Surdna Foundation Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program**