

The Battle of the Styles in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*:

Perpendicular, God-seeking Gothicism vs. Horizontally-extended,
Secular Classicism

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Thomas Hardy's Architectural Career

This paper intends to examine the ways in which the inner worlds of the characters in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* are depicted through the use of metaphors to reveal the antagonism between Victorian Gothic Revivalism and Victorian Classicism: the Battle of the Styles which Hardy himself had witnessed in his younger days.

When Hardy, the son of a stonemason and local builder, first became interested in architecture, ecclesiastical architecture was one of the major areas of work in the building profession. Hardy first became involved in this aspect of architecture in 1856, when he started working for a Dorset-based ecclesiastical architect, John Hicks, who designed and restored churches mainly in the Gothic Revival style.

In April 1862 Hardy, carrying two letters of recommendation, moved to London. One of these two letters was addressed to Benjamin Ferrey (Pl. 1) and the other to Arthur Blomfield (Pl. 2). Hardy first visited Ferrey. Ferrey had been a pupil of the late Augustus Charles Pugin and knew Pugin's son, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (Pl. 3) who died in 1852 at the age of 40, very well. Ferrey is mostly remembered today for his biography of the Pugins, published in 1861, not long before Hardy's first visit to him. Ferrey must have been a very well-known architect to Hardy, for it was Ferrey who had designed the Town Hall in Dorchester. Ferrey was very active in designing and restoring parish churches for the Church of England, and served twice as the Vice President of the RIBA: the Royal Institute of British Architects, to which he had been elected as one of its first fellows in 1839. Widely known at that time as the master of Gothic Revivalism, Ferrey received the Gold Medal of the RIBA, even today the highest recognition an architect can receive in Britain, in 1870.

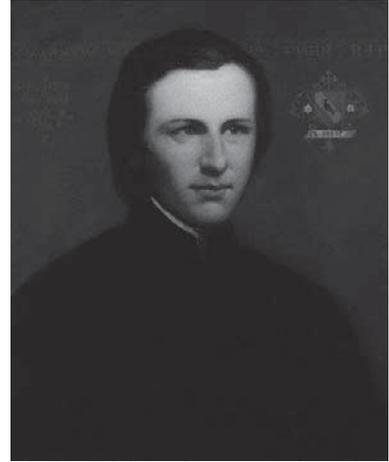
Although Ferrey would surely have been the best man for Hardy to work for, unfortunately Ferrey was unable to hire Hardy, so Hardy next went to Blomfield. Blomfield was the son of the



Pl. 1 Benjamin Ferrey (1810-80)
RIBA Library Photographs
Collection



Pl. 2 Sir Arthur Blomfield (1829-99)
National Portrait Gallery, London



Pl. 3 Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin
(1812-52) National Portrait Gallery,
London

late Bishop Blomfield of the Church of England, who served as the Bishop of London for 28 years. Arthur Blomfield was educated at Rugby and Trinity College, Cambridge, and later studied architecture under Philip Charles Hardwick. At the time Hardy visited Blomfield, Blomfield was the president of the Architectural Association. Hardy was accepted by Blomfield and in November of that year was recommended by Blomfield for membership in the Architectural Association. Although it took several more years for Blomfield to be elected as a fellow of the RIBA, Blomfield's practice must have been quite successful, since in February 1863 Blomfield moved his office to No. 8 Adelphi Terrace (Pl. 4), a grand urban complex designed by Robert and James Adam, the greatest architects of the second half of the eighteenth century in Britain.

The year 1863 must have been an unforgettable one for the young Hardy, since it seemed to be a promising start for him on his way to becoming a successful architect. Not only did he



Pl. 4 The Adelphi, London (1768-72) Robert Adam and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, vol. 3, London, 1822.

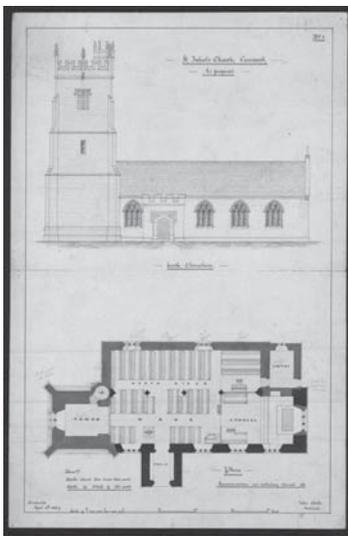
find himself in London, working for one of the rising stars in architecture, but he was also awarded the first prize in a competition held by the Architectural Association for a design of an imaginary house in the country.

Hardy won another medal in that same year for an essay in a competition organised by the RIBA. Hardy's essay, "On the Application of Coloured Bricks and Terra Cotta to Modern Architecture", was considered to be the best entry in the competition, but not quite good enough to win the Gold Medal; therefore, the RIBA decided to give him a Silver Medal without a monetary award. Although Hardy's achievement was quite an accomplishment, Hardy was stung and felt slighted by the architectural establishment. He ultimately decided to give up architecture in order to focus solely on a literary career.

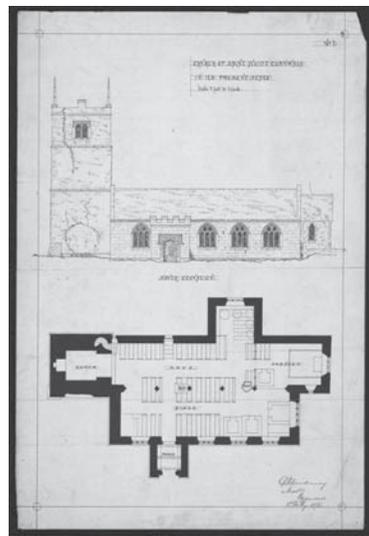
The Battle of the Styles: Gothic Revivalism vs. Neo-classicism

Nevertheless, Hardy continued from 1867 on to assist Hicks in church restoration and came to have an important relationship with architecture as well as being a full-time writer. Amongst the works that Hardy was responsible for restoring was St Juliot's Church, Cornwall (Pls. 5-1 & 5-2), the last project of Hicks, left incomplete when Hicks died.

1867 was also a notable year for British architecture in general because of an event which nobody related to the architectural profession, especially in ecclesiastical matters, could ignore.



Pl. 5-1 Thomas Hardy, *South elevation and plan of St Juliot's Church, Cornwall* (8 April 1867) Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin



Pl. 5-2 Thomas Hardy, *South elevation and plan of St Juliot's Church, Cornwall* (2 May 1870) Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

That year, a bizarre architectural controversy attracted wide social interest: the controversy as to who was the actual, *bona fide* architect of the Houses of Parliament (Pl. 6), Charles Barry or his assistant A. W. N. Pugin. The winner of the competition, held in order to redesign and rebuild the Houses of Parliament, which had been destroyed in a fire in 1834, was Sir Charles Barry. The success of his design, however, was often attributed to his decision to engage a young Gothic specialist, A. W. N. Pugin, as an assistant. The controversy became a matter of public dispute between the two men's sons, the Rev. Alfred Barry (Pl. 7), later the Bishop of Sydney, and the architect Edward Welby Pugin (Pl. 8). The issue was an emotional one, with each son demanding that his father be acknowledged as the rightful designer of the Houses of Parliament.



Pl. 6 Alfred Barry (1826-1910)
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra



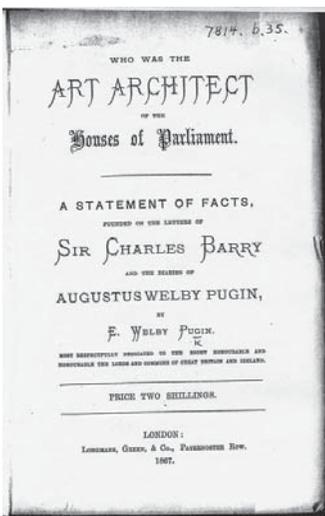
Pl. 7 Edward Welby Pugin (1834-75)
The Pugin Society



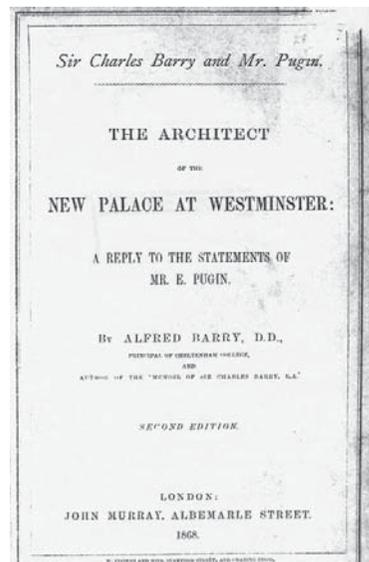
Pl. 8 Houses of Parliament (1835-70)

This dispute arose primarily through the publication of claims of authorship by both men in consecutive pamphlets which appeared in the late 1860s. In 1867 Edward Pugin published *Who Was the Art Architect of the Houses of Parliament: A Statement of Facts, Founded on the Letters of Sir Charles Barry and the Diaries of Augustus Welby Pugin* (Pl. 9), in which he explained that “my desire is that my father should receive his fair share of that fame which is now wholly accorded to one, who has hitherto been regarded as the sole designer of that which my father mainly originated.”¹ Edward Pugin’s claim was mainly characterized by his strong suspicion that Barry had ignored his father’s contribution to the design. Alfred Barry published his reply to Pugin’s pamphlet in the following year under the title of *The Architect of the New Palace at Westminster: A Reply to the Statements of Mr. E. Pugin* (Pl. 10). This was followed by another attack by Edward Pugin in the same year in the publication of *Notes on the Reply of the Rev. Alfred Barry, D.D. to the “Infatuated Statements” Made by E. W. Pugin, on the Houses of Parliament* (Pl. 11).

The architecture itself made this controversy even more complicated, as the plans and facades of the Houses of Parliament evinced a design essentially symmetrical, a bold mixture of Italianate ideas and the Gothic spirit and the conflict between these two styles which ensued. Barry was recognised as an essentially Classic or Neo-Renaissance architect and admired as such.



Pl. 9 Edward Pugin, *Who Was the Art Architect of the Houses of Parliament: A Statement of Facts, Founded on the Letters of Sir Charles Barry and the Diaries of Augustus Welby Pugin*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1867.



Pl. 10 Alfred Barry, *The Architect of the New Palace at Westminster: A Reply to the Statements of Mr. E. Pugin*, London: John Murray, 1868.

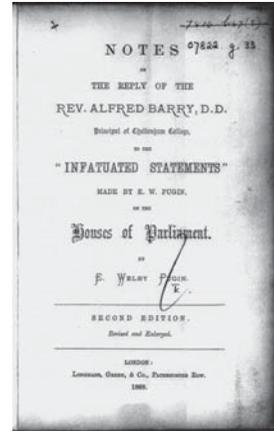
1 Edward Pugin, *Who Was the Art Architect of the Houses of Parliament: A Statement of Facts, Founded on the Letters of Sir Charles Barry and the Diaries of Augustus Welby Pugin*, London, 1867, p. XVI.

Pugin, on the other hand, was widely seen as a medieval architect, deeply imbued with the spirit and feelings of medieval-craftsmen. The controversy over who was the real architect of the new Houses of Parliament stems, therefore, from the attempt to make an appraisal of the significance of both Italianate and Gothic-medieval influences in the executed design of the Parliament, then undoubtedly the grandest symbol of Victorian Britain.

The controversy was not merely a matter of differing styles for Gothic Revivalists. Although for Neo-Classists the discord between the two styles was a purely aesthetic matter, for Gothic Revivalists it was also a religious and spiritual issue. Neo-Classicists believed Classical architecture, with its grandeur of scale and superb decorations, best represented the prosperity of Great Britain. Gothic Revivalists, on the other hand, were convinced that Gothic should be the national style of Britain, being a Christian style for a Christian kingdom. In the eyes of Gothic Revivalists, neo-classical art was depraved. Referring to the sixteenth century, when Renaissance styles first reached England and the Reformation took place, Pugin maintained that

The change which took place in the sixteenth century was not a matter of mere taste, but a change of soul; it was a great contention between Christian and pagan ideas, in which the latter triumphed, and for the first time inconsistency in architectural design was developed. Previous to that period, architecture had always been a correct type of the various systems, in which it was employed; but, from the moment the Christians adopted this fatal mistake, of reviving classic design, the principles of architecture have been plunged into miserable confusion.²

The medievalist campaign of those who sided with Gothic architecture was thus characterised by their intense identification of the medieval art of Gothic architecture with the Christian faith.



Pl. 11 Edward Pugin, *Notes on the Reply of the Rev. Alfred Barry, D.D. to the "Infatuated Statements" Made by E. W. Pugin, on the Houses of Parliament*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1868.

² Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture*, London: John Weale, 1843, p. 7.

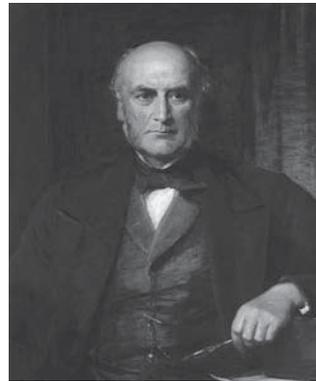
God-seeking Gothicism vs. Secular Classicism in *Jude the Obscure*

Through his personal interest in the restoration of ecclesiastical architecture, Hardy was well aware of this notion of Gothic as the legitimate architectural expression of the Christian faith, and it is well known that he was influenced by George Edmund Street (Pl. 12) and other then well-known medievalist architects such as George Gilbert Scott (Pl. 13), William Burges (Pl. 14) and William Butterfield (Pl. 15). Thus Hardy was able to apply this knowledge of Gothic art and architecture to his descriptions of the emotions and temperaments of the characters in his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*.

It is evident throughout *Jude the Obscure* that Gothic is depicted as the legitimate architectural form for the Christian faith, while Classical art and architecture become symbolic of hindrances to the pursuit of Christian faith. Jude, for instance, in his ardent aspiration to be



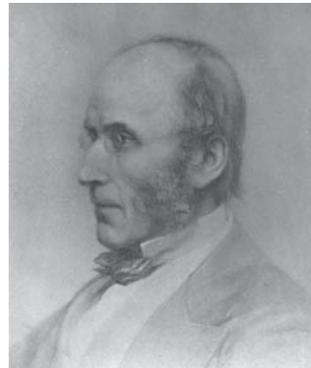
Pl. 12 George Edmund Street (1824-81) National Portrait Gallery, London



Pl. 13 George Gilbert Scott (1811-78) RIBA Library Drawings and Archives Collections



Pl. 14 William Burges (1827-81) National Portrait Gallery, London



Pl. 15 William Butterfield (1814-1900) RIBA Library Photographs Collection

a High-Anglican clergyman and his struggle to live a righteous Christian life, is shown to admire Gothic architecture and love anything medieval.

After Jude settles in Christminster, “the most Christian city in the country”,³ he reads “numberless architectural pages around him [...], naturally, less as an artist-critic of their forms than as an artizan [sic] and comrade of the dead handicraftsmen whose muscles had actually executed those forms.”⁴ Hardy here draws an analogy between Jude’s attitude to architecture and that of medieval craftsmen who dedicated their talents solely to Christianity. Jude admires medieval craftsmen as men of God and Gothic architecture as symbolic of faithful Christian life.

On the other hand, Jude is a man who repeatedly despairs of being “a good Christian” in his continual involvement with life which is not related to the Gothic world. Sue Bridehead initially seems to Jude to be a perfect companion for him in his attempt to live a faithful life because she had been “not only assisted but lodged” in “the ecclesiastical establishment”.⁵ However, she turns out instead to embody the temptation of the secular world for Jude. She is a secular, almost pagan being who holds strong anti-Gothic, anti-Christian sentiments.

The contrast between Jude the faithful and Sue the secular is analogous to the Battle of the Styles between Gothicism and Classicism. This is cleverly alluded to in the way in which Sue is described as having a taste for “plaster statuettes” of Greek gods and goddesses. Hardy suggests the conflict between the two styles, *viz.*, Gothic and Classical, and the contrasting set of religious sentiments behind it in his description of Sue’s feelings when Classical plaster statuettes first come into her sight during her stroll into the country on “an afternoon’s holiday”⁶: “being almost in a line between herself and the church towers of the city they [i.e., the reduced copies made out of either plaster or bronze of ancient marble statues] awoke in her an oddly foreign and contrasting set of ideas by comparison.”⁷ Hardy has Sue tell herself, after purchasing some of the miniature Classical statuettes from a foreigner, “Well, anything is better than those everlasting church fal-lals!”⁸ Hardy underscores once more that Sue sides with secular Classicism against Christian Gothicism.

3 Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, London: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 94.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

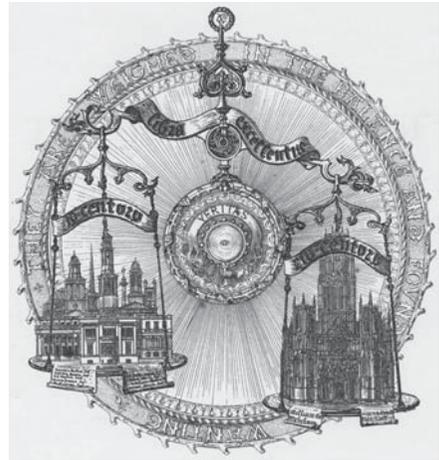
6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

Sue, a Classicist, thinks Christian faith and art have no place in modern secular life. Thus she says, “The mediævalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go.”⁹ Jude’s discouragement and setbacks in his pursuit of a faithful life are directly related to his relationship with Sue, who tells Jude, “You ought to have learnt classic. Gothic is barbaric art, after all”.¹⁰

Hardy’s most direct use of the plot of the Battle of the Styles is when he has Sue say, “Pugin was wrong, and Wren was right”.¹¹ These are the words of a Classicist, directly opposing the faith-based apology for Gothic Revivalism by Pugin, a Gothic Revivalist, which had been made, with illustrations, in his first publication, *Contrasts* (1836) (Pl. 16).

The conflict between Sue and Miss Fontover, one of the partners who runs the ecclesiological shop for which Sue works, is also a case of Gothicism vs. Classical paganism. Miss Fontover is depicted as an elderly lady who worships “at the ceremonial church of St. Silas” (Pls. 17-1 & 17-2), the very church which “Jude also had begun to attend”,¹² and thus a duplicate of Jude the faithful. The model of “the ceremonial church of St. Silans” is St Barnabas Church of the parish of St Barnabas and St Paul in Oxford, a church well-known for its Anglo-Catholic liturgy, which was designed by Sir Arthur Blomfield, Hardy’s former teacher in architecture, in 1896.¹³ Blomfield’s design is not Gothic but Romanesque; yet it is still a medieval building, not Neo-classical, an appropriate setting for the Anglo-Catholic liturgical tradition and the last place where a secularist like Sue would have



Pl. 16 A. W. N. Pugin, *Contrasts: A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; shewing the Present Decay of Taste: Accompanied by appropriate Text*, Salisbury, 1836. In this illustration, Pugin weighs the value of Gothic architecture and Neo-classical “pagan” architecture and suggests that Gothic style is more valuable than Neo-classical architecture.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 306.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

13 The founders of St Barnabas Church were the well-known Victorian High Anglicans Thomas Combe (1796-1872), director of the Clarendon Press and Printer to Oxford University, and his wife Martha Combe (1806-93). The couple was also well-known for their patronage of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

wanted to be.

Miss Fontover furnishes the chamber where Sue lodges with “Gothic-framed prints of saints”, “Church-text scrolls,” etc.¹⁴ When Miss Fontover asks Sue what Sue bought on her “afternoon’s holiday”, Sue answers, “just something to ornament” her room so that she won’t have to tell Miss Fontover exactly what she bought that day. Sue knows very well that Miss Fontover won’t like the statuettes that Sue has just purchased. One of the statuettes, in fact, offends Miss Fontover later, and Sue tells Jude how Miss Fontover furiously destroyed it: “She found it in my room, and though it was my property she threw it on the floor and stamped on it, because it was not according to her taste, and ground the arms and the head of one of the figures all to bits with her heel”.¹⁵

The scene of the short trip to Wardour Castle that Jude and Sue enjoy is another passage in which Hardy employs the conflict in the Battle of the Styles to highlight the differences between Jude and Sue. When Jude suggests that they both make a short trip together to Wardour Castle, Sue rejects the idea. “I hate Gothic!” she says, assuming the castle to be a Gothic ruin. Being informed, however, that the castle is in fact a classic “Corinthian” building, she changes her mind and agrees to go. Hardy’s depiction of the difference in how Jude and Sue wander through the “picture-galleries” of the castle reflects the conflict between Christianity and secular Classicism: Jude stops “by preference in front of the devotional pictures by Del Sarto, Guido Reni, Spagnoletto, Sassoferrato, Carlo Dolci, and others”, while Sue moves ahead to wait for Jude in front of “a Lely or Reynolds”.¹⁶ In this scene, what



Pl. 17-1 Exterior of St Barnabas Church, Oxford (1869)



Pl. 17-2 Interior of St Barnabas Church, Oxford (1869)

¹⁴ Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

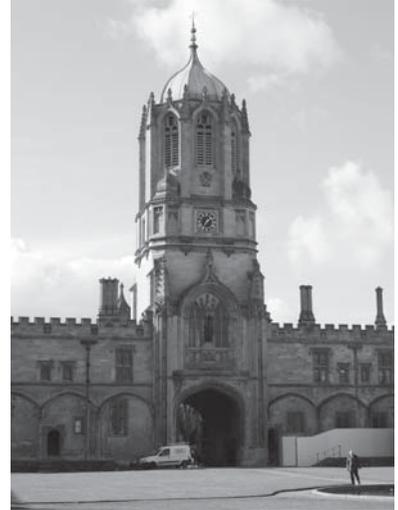
captures Jude’s attention is not Gothic art, but works of the high Renaissance and the Baroque eras — naturally, as he is visiting a Classical castle. The trip itself is an acknowledgement of Jude’s defeat at the hands of the “secular”, anti-Gothic Sue. Yet all the paintings he stops to appreciate are “devotional pictures”, symbolising artistic dedication to the Christian faith. His appreciation is an expression of his resistance to a non-Christian, secular way of living, symbolised by Sue in her preference for being surrounded by works of Sir Peter Lely and Sir Joshua Reynolds, both non-devotional portrait painters of the past.

The conflict of Jude, confusedly oscillating between his desire for a faithful life and secular temptation, is also represented by his architectural experiences of both Gothic and non-Gothic styles. When Jude first arrives in Christminster, what he perceives from his window is the spire of the Christ Church Cathedral of Oxford (Pl. 18) and “the ogee dome”, Christopher Wren’s Tom Tower at Christ Church, Oxford (Pl. 19).¹⁷ Hardy writes that Jude uses “these objects” — the spire of a Gothic Cathedral and a dome built in a Late Gothic Style — as “stimulants when his faith in the future was dim”.¹⁸ It is yet another example of Hardy using the Battle of the Styles as symbolic of Jude’s own mental turmoil, with Gothic as representative of a good and faithful Christian life.

Later, when Jude is awakened to a sense of his limitations as a good, faithful Christian, he finds himself going up to “an octagonal chamber in the lantern of a singularly built theatre.” This theatre is an allusion to the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford (Pl. 20), designed by Wren in his



Pl. 18 The Spires of the Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford



Pl. 19 Tom Tower, Christ Church, Oxford (1681–82)



Pl. 20 Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford (1664-69)

16 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

17 See *Ibid.*, p. 87.

18 *Ibid.*



Pl. 21 “The view of the medieval town of Christminster” from the belvedere at the top of the Sheldonian Theatre

favourite “pagan” Baroque style. Jude’s visits to Classical buildings underline the idea that, whenever Jude feels discouraged in his pursuit of a faithful life, he sets out (unconsciously) for a non-Gothic, pagan Classical building. There, in the belvedere at the top of the theatre, through the windows set all round it, Jude’s eyes “[sweep] all the views in succession, meditatively, mournfully, yet sturdily”: views of the medieval town of Christminster and its Gothic edifices, emblematic of the world of the faithful that “his destiny lay not with” (Pl. 21).

Concluding Remarks

The repeated contrast of the two worlds of Christian Gothicism and secular Classicism in *Jude the Obscure*, the opposition of the faithful Medievalists to the secular Classicists, is symbolized time and again in Hardy’s last novel by the analogy to the Battle of the Styles. Jude and Sue embody the dialog between the “perpendicular, God-seeking” Gothic style and the “horizontally-extended, secular grandeur” of Classicism, and the discrepancies between religious sentiment and ideas in both Gothicism and Classicism. This dichotomy is succinctly summed up in the opposing statements of Jude and Sue when they have the following conversation: “I care for something higher,” says Jude; “I for something broader, truer,” insists Sue.¹⁹

Acknowledgements

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

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