"Making the University less exclusive": The Legacy of *Jude the Obscure*

Jonathan Godshaw Memel
(University of Exeter, England, UK)

Abstract:
Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) condemns an elite and inaccessible system of Victorian higher education. While the influence of the novel on the social and political discourses of the 1890s is well known, its subsequent appearance in twentieth- and twenty-first-century debates on university access is less recognised. The four non-literary texts considered in this essay evoke *Jude the Obscure* in order to highlight particular aspects of higher education in their own time. They understand Jude in radically different ways, associating Hardy's character with either progressive or conservative conceptions of universities. This essay ends by considering recent developments surrounding access to higher education. It suggests that the continuing timeliness of *Jude the Obscure* comes from its imaginative evocation of a set of problems that remain unsolved.

Keywords: access, Crowther Report, Thomas Hardy, higher education, *Jude the Obscure*, John Henry Newman, Robbins Report, Ruskin College, universities.

*****

In 2010, the Sutton Trust reported that "the proportion of non-privileged students at the UK's most academically selective universities remains depressingly low" (Sutton Trust 2010: 6). While levels of admission are improving across the sector, comparatively few disadvantaged students are accepted into the most prestigious British universities. In 2011, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) described the underlying concern:

> Applicants with real potential are not making it through to our most selective institutions. The most disadvantaged young people are seven times less likely than the most advantaged to attend the most selective institutions. This is not good enough. Individuals with the highest academic

> potential should have a route into higher education, and the most selective institutions in particular. (BIS 2011: 5)

The traditional model of the university continues to be associated with social privilege, as the "most selective" institutions are overwhelmingly those with ideological origins in the nineteenth century.[1] Lawrence Goldman considers the legacy of the issue in his history of adult education at Oxford:

> It would be impossible to write about Oxford and adult education without being conscious, at almost every turn, of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Jude's vain struggle, over several years, to study at Oxford [...]. *Jude* reinforced a prevalent view of the University's exclusivity and sums [up] what is still a common image. (Goldman 1995: 10)

We are reminded that current understandings of universities are informed by nineteenth-century representations. Nowhere was a socially divisive institution depicted more memorably than in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

This essay explores the significance of *Jude the Obscure* in relation to debates about university access in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. I begin by considering the Victorian idea of the university, before focusing on four non-literary texts that appropriate Hardy's depiction in various ways: two post-war government reports, a 2006 speech by the then Shadow Minister for Higher Education, and a 2012 article in *The Telegraph*. By reading these pieces alongside Hardy's text I show how *Jude the Obscure* becomes aligned with various and divergent agendas in quite distinct ways. The novel is associated at different times with the progressive and the conservative strands of the Victorian university and is quoted by authors arguing both for and against mass higher education.

Considering the mutability of one particular nineteenth-century novel across various educational discussions brings "to the forefront of the debate a set of very *presentist* discourses", which, as Mark Llewellyn suggests, remain part of an "older, inherited tradition" (Llewellyn 2008: 172). The influence of Jude's class background is an uncomfortable reminder of the foundations of our current education challenges, yet our

attempts to remedy the situation also originate in the nineteenth century. As in the case of higher education institutions today, Victorian universities were subject to various interests and shaped by competing pressures. They were associated with privileged elites but were also claimed as public institutions through the great reforms of the era (Marquand 2004: 46-49). *Jude the Obscure* depicts this range of influence and introduces further questions regarding the very purpose of the university. In this sense, the continuing timeliness of the novel comes from its imaginative evocation of a set of problems and solutions that remain with us.

My forward looking reading is already suggested in Hardy's text when Jude anticipates his future legacy and states that "our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (Hardy 1998: 400). The novel situates itself at the beginning of a progressive movement that will correct the imbalance it exposes and critiques. "I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas", announces Jude; "What it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine", he continues, adding, "if, indeed, they ever discover it – at least in our time" (Hardy 1998: 327). In this curiously far-reaching perspective, Jude looks ahead to a time in which "social formulas" are still being contested. It may be that the novel's continued resonance comes in part from our failing to solve the fundamental problems that it raises concerning higher education.

1. Victorian Jude

In 1888 Thomas Hardy recorded his initial ideas for *Jude the Obscure*. He envisaged a "short story of a young man – 'who could not go to Oxford' – His struggles and ultimate failure" (Hardy 1998: xxi). In this, he wrote, "there is something the world ought to be shown, and I am the one to show it to them" (Hardy 1998: xxi–xxii). Hardy's plans for the novel had changed in many ways by the time of its publication in 1895. It was longer in length and it combined Jude's exclusion from the university at Christminster with challenges to the Victorian institutions of religion and marriage. The theme of education nonetheless remained an important legacy. The novel depicted what Hardy was to later call "the difficulties of acquiring knowledge in letters without pecuniary means" (Hardy 1998: 467) and soon came to be associated with the issue of university access.

Hardy conflates Jude's view of Christminster with the ideal of a university associated in the nineteenth century with the theologian Cardinal

John Henry Newman. Prior to the establishment of the Catholic University in Dublin, Newman delivered a series of lectures in which he outlined the principles of a liberal education, published the same year as *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education* (1852). Newman's contribution became the seminal defence of traditional values at a time when the role and function of universities were being vigorously debated and became better known under its later title, *The Idea of a University* (1873). Newman's view of higher education emphasised character development, a broad curriculum, and the dissemination of existing knowledge. Liberal education occurred in particular spatial conditions which, as Sheldon Rothblatt has shown, tended to call upon the spiritual power of the Oxford atmosphere (Rothblatt 1997: 50-105). Jude recalls Matthew Arnold's love of this ideal upon arriving in Christminster: "Beautiful city! so valuable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene! [...] Her ineffable charm keeps ever calling us to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection" (Hardy 1998: 81). Hardy aligns his protagonist's ambition for learning with this vision of traditional Oxford, idealised as a refuge from worldly concerns.

Newman stresses "inutility" and "remoteness from the occupations and duties of life" as admirable features of higher education (Newman 1996: 15). In *The Idea of a University*, the development of intellectual faculties is the privilege of the few while, in contrast, applied forms of work and knowledge are the "duty of the many" (Newman 1996: 84). In the 1860s, the Schools Inquiry Commission (SIC) consolidated such distinctions under the leadership of Henry Labouchere (Lord Taunton) when it determined the allocation of preparatory schooling according to social and economic background. Pupils from the highest classes studied classical subjects until their late teens in preparation for university, while those from the lower middle classes focused on applied subjects until the age of fourteen. "It is obvious," the report stated, "that these distinctions correspond roughly, but by no means exactly, to the gradations of society" (SIC 1868: 16). The Bryce Commission (1895) re-evaluated the system and found few problems with the existing divisions after surveying school provision in the years immediately prior to the publication of *Jude the Obscure*. The commissioners agreed that entrance to the traditional universities was suitable for the upper and upper middle classes from the public schools and first-grade secondary schools, who had been prepared with an extensive

classical education up until the age of eighteen. Very few places existed in the upper-tier schools for pupils like Jude to be taught the subjects required to enter university.

This distinction between practical work and abstract thought is a recurrent theme throughout Hardy's novel. Jude learns of his expected occupational role from two coal carters while gazing down at Christminster. Although the scholars "never look at anything that folks like we can understand", the carters consider academic teaching equivalent to other forms of work: it is "their business, like anybody else's" (Hardy 1998: 24). Mind and body constitute two ways of earning a living – "we be here in our bodies on this high ground, so be they in their minds" (Hardy 1998: 24-25) – and when Jude reaches Christminster he considers that the two roles may exist harmoniously. He realises that without the stoneworkers "the hard readers could not read nor the high thinkers live" (Hardy 1998: 116). The tension emerges from the relative value accorded to these distinct occupational areas. The carters have heard that some professors "earn hundreds by thinking out loud", while the utility of building work remains "unrecognized" by society (Hardy 1998: 25, 116). It is the imbalanced, arbitrary nature of this social division that underpins Jude's tragedy, as his occupation runs against his aspiration. Hardy was subjected to similar assumptions. Upon arriving in London with literary ambitions he was told that "only practical men are wanted here" (Hardy 1984: 40).

In 'The Victorian University and Our Own', Carol T. Christ reads the final scene of *Jude the Obscure* as the symbolic conclusion to Hardy's critique of higher education. Jude's corpse is described alongside the sounds of an academic ceremony nearby, figuring as a "a stark rebuttal to the democratic project on which Newman and many of his contemporaries embarked, of extending higher education to those who had been denied it" (Christ 2008: 293). Christminster is an institution that depends on various forms of exclusion for its proper functioning, from the popular life of the town to the work of a stonemason. While Jude demonstrates growing insight, independence of thought, love of reading, and will to study, the university cruelly insists that he is unworthy of matriculation. His failure is all the more tragic because of his whole-hearted identification with the ideals and values of the university. Jude maintains that he is well suited to fulfil the institution's core function, to "accumulate ideas, and impart them to others" (Hardy 1998: 398). He largely attributes any ill feeling to his own

failings and announces that "I still think Christminster has much that is glorious; though I was resentful because I couldn't get there" (Hardy 1998: 150). His insistence that intellectual enquiry be undertaken according to this particular vision of dreamy spires is somewhat dogmatic, and, perhaps, as Patricia Ingham suggests, Jude's mistake lies in persistently directing his educational hopes at an increasingly estranged institution (Ingham 2000: 24). However, there exist few alternatives to Christminster for Jude himself. He describes it as "a unique centre of thought and religion – the intellectual and spiritual granary of this country" (Hardy 1998: 112) and repeatedly associates its founding principles with his own passage of learning.

When looking for work, Jude notices that "the conversation of some of the more thoughtful" undergraduates seem "peculiarly akin to his own thoughts" (Hardy 1998: 86). The idea that a liberal education could bring together aspiring members from all classes was to prove crucial to twentieth-century attempts to reimagine the role of the university. But as Jude's lover Sue Bridehead realises early in Hardy's novel, this type of education remains quietly motivated by entrenched interests. Sue aspires to teach in working-class elementary schools but notices that universities operate on quite different principles. Sue explains to Jude: "You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons" (Hardy 1998: 151). The ideal of a Victorian liberal education is undercut by its economic reality, ensuring that only the most privileged students benefit. Admission reforms enhance the prospects of the wealthy middle classes, but Sue notes that wider access rarely extends to working-class students.

Jude climbs a ladder for his first view of Christminster, anticipating the channels of educational mobility to be more open than they turn out to be. Hardy's novel describes the material conditions through which entrenched, institutionalised patterns of exclusion are imposed. As the plot darkens, Jude finds greater resonance with the older built structures of the university. Architecture reveals the increasing distance between Jude and the institution, as "only a wall – but what a wall" comes to divide him from the undergraduates (Hardy 1998: 86). For Roger Ebbatson, the walls of Christminster symbolise the "class separation and oppression" that prevent Sue and Jude from transcending existing boundaries and entering the

university (Ebbatson 2009: 163). Architecture remains a tantalising obstacle when Jude resides in a college close later in the novel. "Only a thickness of wall" divides him from the students, whose lives nonetheless remain "so far removed from that of the people in the lane" that it seems they live on "opposite sides of the globe" (Hardy 1998: 329).

In nineteenth-century literary circles a common response to the novel was to reject Jude's failure as unrealistic. The American novelist William Dean Howells wrote in 1895: "Commonly, the boy of Jude's strong aspiration and steadfast ambition succeeds and becomes in some measure the sort of man he dreamed of being" (Howells 1979: 254-255). Meanwhile, the British writer Margaret Oliphant thought Jude had a "conviction of being able to triumph", which had "often in real life succeeded" (Oliphant 1896: 139). Edmund Gosse, a critic and friend of Hardy, observed Jude's "brightness" in 1896 and concluded that "this young man might have become fairly distinguished as a scholar" (Gosse 1979: 266). But Hardy had insisted in a November 1895 letter that the story would only be fully appreciated by "those into whose souls the iron has entered, and has entered deeply, at some time of their lives" (Hardy 1998: xxx). H.G. Wells highlighted this marginal perspective in his account of *Jude the Obscure* as the "voice of the educated proletarian, speaking more distinctly than it has ever spoken before in English literature" (Wells 1896: 154). Indeed, the working-class movement for higher education was growing. Ruskin College was founded at Oxford four years after the publication of Hardy's novel to provide university access to the less privileged. In 1912, Hardy acknowledged the claim by some readers that Ruskin "should have been called the College of Jude the Obscure" (Hardy 1998: 467). By this time Oxford had responded to claims of elitism by offering minor reforms, following the University's own 1908 publication of *Oxford and Working-class Education.*

2. Post-War Jude

Notwithstanding the developments above, higher education largely remained an elite exercise for the first half of the twentieth century. Only twenty young people in a thousand attended university in the 1950s (Sanderson 1972: 363). Following the Second World War, British education was judged to be ill-equipped for a changing economy and a formula for national decline. International competition required a greater proportion of

young people to be educated than the two-fifths then in either full or part-time education. Of those, more were needed to progress to higher education. The post-war 'bulge' in birth rates furthered the need for educational expansion. In 1956 the editor of *The Economist*, Sir Geoffrey Crowther, was asked by the Minister of Education to lead an investigation by the Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE) into "the education of boys and girls between 15 and 18", charged with considering the opportunities open to young people "in relation to the changing social and industrial needs of our society" (Crowther 1959: xxvii). Beyond economic considerations, the nation's young were "at a highly impressionable age, with their characters still being formed and, except in rare instances […] their minds still capable of considerable development" (Crowther 1959: 3). Children of manual workers were experiencing the most serious deficiencies, with 92 per cent of students from such backgrounds then leaving school aged fifteen or younger.

Crowther recognized that in the previous century students such as Jude – explicitly referenced in the subsequent report – had struggled under an imbalanced educational structure. "The door was not closed on a poor boy of talent, but it was not open very far", writes Crowther of the 1890s situation, adding that "Jude was still likely to remain obscure" (Crowther 1959: 11). The report describes Jude's earlier school preparation as the major obstacle preventing him from passing through the university's door. Similarly, the report connects uneven school provision in the post-war years to the low levels of working-class students at the universities. But for Crowther the 1890s also marked the beginning of "Sixty Years of Growth" (Crowther 1959: 3). In the report, Christminster comes to be understood as a symbol of the Victorian past against which modern reforms can be measured (Crowther 1959: 3). Crowther notes that of the 4,200 undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge in 1894, the majority were drawn from the eighty-nine prestigious schools represented at the Headmasters Conference, and "two per cent only came from the ranks of pupil teachers, teachers' training colleges or public elementary schools" (Crowther 1959: 11). Although reforms instigated by the 1895 Bryce Commission meant that gifted working-class students *could* climb a scholarship ladder from elementary to grammar school and then university, the conclusions of the *Crowther Report* indicate that there had been little overall effect on the social background of undergraduates.

Jude's early disadvantages are occasionally considered in the novel itself. His formal education ends at the age of eleven so that he can earn money for his great-aunt, but, even then, provision is only by way of a night school. Given that Jude moves from Marygreen a year before the opening of the novel, his full-time schooling lasts until he is aged ten at the latest. Jude attempts to meet the requirements of Christminster through self-study, but he lacks the guidance of a secondary school to help him to learn the classical grammars. When Jude realises the extent of memorisation required he questions his own ability rather than his lack of formal preparation. "What brains they must have in Christminster and the great schools", he reflects, quickly concluding that "[t]here were no brains in his head equal to this business" (Hardy 1998: 31). Jude's autodidactic learning has him pursuing admission criteria too vaguely, "without seeing clearly where I am going, or what I am aiming at", and the scholarships intended for working-class students are instead claimed by "those who had passed their lives under trained teachers and had worked to ordained lines" (Hardy 1998: 113, 115). For one "reading on his own system", Jude realises that his only access route is that "of buying himself in", which poses obvious problems for a lowly-paid stonemason. He learns that the only hope for his own son is to "educate and train him with a view to the University" from the outset (Hardy 1998: 115, 278).

The *Crowther Report* focuses on the systematic causes of the struggles faced by young people like Jude. If such causes remained largely unacknowledged in 1895, it was in this post-war period that the reality of Jude's plight was taken more seriously. The report cites statistics on the 1890s that substantiate the novel's grim depiction of inequality and employs new methods of social research to show how the educational circumstances of the 1950s were still discouraging working-class students with ability and motivation.

3. Robbins and Jude

The influential *Robbins Report* (1963) was the next major educational report to be published in the post-war decades. It revealed unprecedented competition for university entrance following a sudden increase in the number of students qualified to enter higher education, in itself a result of Crowther's changes to secondary schooling, growing national prosperity and improved educational attainment among parents (Robbins 1963: 54-55).

Drawing on extensive research at the London School of Economics, the *Robbins Report* overturned the claim made by the psychologist W.D. Furneaux in *The Chosen Few* (1961) that the maximum number of people who could ever benefit from university was limited. The report demonstrated that a significant increase in university places could – and should – be introduced without reducing entry standards, challenging the novelist Kingsley Amis's memorable warning that "more will mean worse" (Amis 1960: 9). The report's central principle that "courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so" energized British higher education for the rest of the century (Robbins 1963: 8). The report set in motion the kind of scheme "for making the University less exclusive, and extending its influence" that Jude had described in the previous century and in the process overturned the injustice, so memorably exposed in *Jude the Obscure*, of a young person being denied an education that they are able and willing to pursue (Hardy 1998: 399). The changes transformed the lives of a new cohort who went on to shape literary and popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s, as Carolyn Steedman shows in her recent consideration of Margaret Drabble's novels in this context (Steedman 2017: 31-32).

Reading the *Robbins Report* alongside *Jude the Obscure* illuminates various contrasts between post-war statistical reporting and late-Victorian realism, but it does reveal one shared characteristic: a committed outrage at the costs, whether human or economic, of obstructing talent. It is this that H.G. Wells noticed in *Jude the Obscure* when he described the novel as 'Mr. Hardy's tremendous indictment of the system which closes our three English teaching Universities to what is, and what has always been, the noblest material in the intellectual life of this country—the untaught' (Wells 1896: 154).

Although the *Robbins Report* advises great increases to university places, it suggests remarkably few changes to the nature of higher education itself. Here the report lacks the imaginative reach of *Jude the Obscure*, which, as will be seen, prompts readers to rethink the function of universities and their relationship to public life. Instead, the report in many ways envisages an extension to the nineteenth-century conception of a university, which includes a focus on "the general powers of the mind" to produce "not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women" (Robbins 1963: 6). "The advancement of learning" remains a priority over

research and a Victorian interest in "the transmission of a common culture" is a further aim (Robbins 1963: 7). The report sought to democratise Newman's model of the university without radically changing it. Historians have shown that the new 1960s campus institutions established prior to and following the *Robbins Report* were influenced by the traditional residential ideal of Oxbridge, emphasising communal life and personal relations between teacher and taught (Anderson 2006, 147-162). The sociologists A.H. Halsey and M.A. Trow criticise this straightforward endorsement of an existing university model and regret that more progressive models of education were not considered, arguing that "[t]he expansion of the 1960s has been strongly contained within the English idea of a university" (Halsey and Trow 1971: 83).

4. Twenty-First-Century Jude

The third evocation of Hardy's novel comes in a speech by Boris Johnson as Conservative Shadow Minister for Higher Education. 'Aspire Ever Higher: University Policy for the 21st Century' was delivered in 2006 to Politeia, a centre-right British political think tank. Johnson asks his audience to "spool back 100 years to the greatest story of university admissions", describing Hardy's novel as "the first great literary treatment of the idea that talent can be wasted by exclusion from university" (Johnson 2006: 4). In Johnson's view, *Jude the Obscure* begins a modern trajectory towards fairer access. He compares the 2004 figures, which show 43 per cent of young people attending university, to the equivalent in the 1890s when just 0.9 per cent became undergraduates. Johnson follows Robbins in advocating a liberal university model for current needs. Traditional institutions had provided "the yeast in the rise of the British middle classes" in the second half of the twentieth century, bringing university education and its individual benefits to a greater proportion of the population (Johnson 2006: 3). Johnson also repeats the principle from Robbins that those with the ability and will to study at university should be able to do so, but is concerned that access will be compromised in contemporary discussions about university funding. The government's allocation of teaching grants to English universities had declined from eight to five thousand pounds per student per year over the previous decade, prompting calls to increase student fees and ensure the sector remained properly resourced.[2] Johnson wants "to ensure that whatever arrangement we come up with does not discriminate against poor

Jude, but encourages and helps him" (Johnson 2006: 9). Worthy Jude is transported from his origins in the Victorian novel to embody the disadvantaged modern-day student by which the moral implications of twenty-first-century political decisions are measured.

Johnson reiterates that the "potential Judes out there" can still profit from a liberal education (Johnson 2006: 8). But he barely mentions the polytechnics that were established following the Woolwich Speech in 1965 to work alongside the campus universities endorsed by Robbins. Structured according to vocational outcomes, these institutions focused on more applied subjects and were often favoured by working-class students over the universities of the traditional model. In an attempt to create parity of esteem, this binary system ended in 1992 when both types of institutions became categorised as universities. Distinctions between academic and vocational courses were then reasserted, whereby the non-applied subjects taught in universities of the old model were judged to be more prestigious than the seemingly less rigorous 'new' subjects. Competitive admissions exacerbated these hierarchies, as unequal levels of schooling meant that non-privileged students largely remained in the former polytechnics. Meanwhile the more selective, traditional universities continued to accept disproportionate numbers of students from more privileged backgrounds. Reacting to this stratification, Conservative policymakers wanted to limit public money to the second group of institutions and thereby "reserve scarce taxpayers" money for "real students" and "real degrees" (Johnson 2006: 6).

In response to claims that a wider intake had compromised value and quality, Johnson draws on *Jude the Obscure* to substantiate the ongoing importance of a liberal education. This particular form of learning is deemed "the best natural solvent of social rigidities" (Johnson 2006: 8). But Hardy shows Christminster and its liberal education reproducing, rather than easing, existing social divisions. Jude's letter of rejection from the university directly invokes class-based distinctions between applied and non-applied learning. The advice that the Master of "Biblioll College" – the fictional version of Balliol, Johnson's former college – gives to Jude as a "working man" is that "you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade" (Hardy 1998: 117). This idea of a university, put forward by the Master of Biblioll, Newman and Johnson, relies implicitly on distinctions between education and applied work to ensure its continuing sense of prestige and esteem. As

Jude the Obscure shows, liberal education was rarely the disinterested ideal it claimed to be. While severely ill, Jude says of Christminster: "I love the place – although I know how it hates all men like me – the so-called Self-taught – how it scorns our laboured acquisitions, when it should be the first to respect them" (Hardy 1998: 320). Here, Jude seems to be coming to a more critical view of the university and its ideological opposition to labouring people and their ideas. Physical work provides an activity through which the divisive nature of the university can be conceived. This follows an earlier instance in the story, when "there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges" (Hardy 1998: 84-85). However, Jude soon loses this insight "under stress of his old idea" (Hardy 1998: 85). The critique is instead taken up by the narrator, who observes how Jude's manual work helps to maintain the university's division from wider society: "he daily mounted to the parapets and copings of colleges he could never enter, and renewed the crumbling freestones of mullioned windows he would never look from, as if he had known no wish to do otherwise" (Hardy 1998: 343-344). Jude's labour upholds an embedded system of intellectual exclusion, recalling the prediction of the early nineteenth-century philosopher William Thompson that "the man of knowledge and the productive labourer" were to become more "widely divided from each other" (Thompson 1824: 274).

5. Jude Today

In his 2012 article in *The Telegraph*, the columnist Charles Moore recalls the same Victorian binary of applied and non-applied knowledge to justify continuing stratification in the higher education system. While Johnson presented *Jude the Obscure* as a precedent for increasing access to liberal education, Moore uses the novel to argue for the maintenance of elite institutional prestige. A new fee regime was introduced at the time of Moore's writing, which Parliament had debated in the intervening six years since Johnson's speech. The changes enabled English universities to charge as much as £9,000 a year for tuition fees. At the same time, government allocations of teaching grants were significantly reduced. Students were required to accrue greater debts in order to access a university education associated with higher incomes. Concerns were expressed regarding the effect of this university marketization on disadvantaged students. The Office

for Fair Access (OFFA), chaired by former Vice-Chancellor Professor Les Ebdon, was given the remit of ensuring that higher fees would not inhibit equal opportunity and administering outreach activities for non-privileged students. Much of the Office's work focused on the traditional, highly-selective research universities that accepted far fewer numbers of poor students compared to the newer universities. The fear was that particular types of institution were becoming further associated with certain social backgrounds.

In his 2012 article, 'There's No Place for Dreaming Spires in Professor Les Ebdon's World', Moore argues that the work of OFFA undermines measures of prestige and excellence in the university system. He aligns Jude's valorisation of Christminster with the need to protect the existing status of the most selective institutions against schemes to widen access. Hardy's novel is read alongside efforts to preserve, rather than challenge, the social exclusivity of universities. Moore opposes recent initiatives that aim to demystify universities and encourage disadvantaged students to apply; recalling Jude's sense of intimidation at Christminster, he suggests that the "frightening quality of a great university is part of its allure" (Moore 2012: n.p.). "The fear one feels", he argues, "is a function of one's respect for something great and challenging – for the best, in its field, that there is. It is a proper fear, and if you don't feel it, you probably aren't cut out for a really good education" (Moore 2012: n.p.).

Moore claims that Professor Ebdon "will never understand poor people like Jude the Obscure" (Moore 2012: n.p.). Jude's view of Christminster epitomises the sense of detached exclusivity that, in Moore's opinion, the most elite institutions should endeavour to maintain in an age of mass higher education. And, as with Newman's original idea, Moore's separation depends on the distinction with practical work. Bringing the twenty-first and nineteenth centuries into an unusual juncture, Moore derides the ex-polytechnics for their association with applied knowledge by doubting if "latter-day Judes climb barns to gaze upon [… the] Luton campus and dream of what they might learn there" (Moore 2012: n.p.). Here, the University of Bedfordshire's Luton campus symbolises the new generation of universities built in response to growing demand. In Moore's view, the institution's lack of prestige is due to its welcoming – rather than excluding – students like Jude.

6. Jude's Legacy

Jude defers to future "men or women with greater insight" to solve the educational problems that the novel raises (Hardy 1998: 327). The comment serves as an intriguing invitation for subsequent readers to think through the challenges that Jude's life poses in their own time. Crowther emphasised the "distance that we as a nation have come in the last hundred years" in 1959, but by 2006 "poor Jude" still embodied the unfulfilled goal of bringing about fair access to higher education (Crowther 1959: 3; Johnson 2006: 9).

Jude's afterlife also shows how one particular way of retelling Hardy's story has tended to dominate subsequent understanding of the novel in relation to education. Both Johnson and Moore suggest that *Jude the Obscure* depicts the traditional liberal model of the university in straightforward and uncritical terms. However, by neatly relating progressive efforts to a recognisable figure in this way, educational commentators and policy-makers overlook the most radical sections of *Jude the Obscure*. Certain passages reveal an inherent disjuncture between an out-dated model of elite, non-applied education and the diverse social and economic world in which universities must exist, offering a far more critical view of the institution than the "reverence for learning and blubbing at the beauty of the spires" that Johnson claims to find throughout the novel (Johnson 2006: 5).

By returning to neglected aspects of Hardy's novel for their continuing relevance to present concerns, I follow Dinah Birch's proposal that

> Victorian ideas can give us a clearer understanding of the origins of our present problems, showing how our tangles over education and class, gender and religion took root in the first place. I want to argue that they can serve a still more useful purpose in suggesting ways in which we can begin to extricate ourselves from our difficulties. (Birch 2008: 144-145)

Jude the Obscure shows such "tangles over education and class, gender and religion" in abundance, and, although the novel is perhaps less forthcoming than other texts in offering solutions, it does propose that universities look beyond their walls for future direction. As Phillip Collins suggests, the

novel makes "urban proletarian life operate as a substantiated critique of traditional high culture" (Collins 1980: 70).

In Hardy's novel, it is Sue who prompts these more critical views of the university. She challenges Jude on his continued support of the mid-nineteenth-century view of liberal education and suggests a provocative metaphor for what she understands to be its irrelevance: "intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles. The mediævalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go" (Hardy 1998: 150). The university is compromised by its inheritance of embedded class associations, and, in failing to modernise, is ignorant of its own relation to surrounding life. Sue identifies with a more outward-looking institution and, through recourse to the working lives of the surrounding town-dwellers, questions Christminster's role altogether. She says that "the towns-people, artizans, drunkards, and paupers" possess a more enlightened view than those in the university: "*They* see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do" (Hardy 1998: 150–151). Here, the university seems to require a more substantial change than the increase to student places that the *Robbins Report* recommended over half a century later. Sue calls for more drastic reform, informed by the needs, experiences, and ideas of a wider section of the population.

This more difficult legacy of *Jude the Obscure* emerges from the structural exclusion it depicts as embedded in the traditions of the university. If we underestimate the extent to which Christminster's institutional ills have continued into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we inadvertently hamper the attempts of today's disadvantaged students to enter the esteemed universities to which their Victorian predecessors aspired. The increasing cost of higher education represents the chief means through which such educational inequalities are reproduced. In 2016 maintenance grants for students from low-income families at English universities were abolished and replaced with additional loans, bringing the highest levels of debt to the least wealthy. As a report by the Independent Commission on Fees (ICF) shows, the poorest 40 per cent of students will now owe an average of £53,000 from three years of study (ICF 2015: 30). While the loan system seems to have had less effect on university applications than expected, the most selective institutions continue to accept far higher levels of students from advantageous backgrounds. The most recent calculations indicate that the least privileged students are over eight

times less likely to be accepted into the top thirteen institutions than their peers from the most prosperous backgrounds (ICF 2015: 24).

As the relationship of the university to society is once again debated, Hardy's critical interrogation of the function and value of a university remain as relevant as ever. While the legacy of *Jude the Obscure* was once concerned with the demographic of students to which a university might one day open its doors, we might now ask if the Christminster education is so bound up with damaging social divisions that it compromises itself as a suitable form of learning for a democratic society.

Notes

1. Six of the thirteen institutions identified by the Sutton Trust as the most selective were founded in the nineteenth century (Sutton Trust 2010: 6): University College London (1828), Durham (1834), Bristol (1874), Birmingham (1880), Nottingham (1881), and The London School of Economics (1895). Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrews, and Edinburgh all have earlier origins, but underwent significant reform in the nineteenth century. Only three institutions were established in the twentieth century: Imperial College London (1907), York (1963), and Warwick (1965).
2. A report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Higher Education Funding in England: Past, Present and Options for the Future* (2017), summarizes higher education funding in England and the changes of the past two decades to which this essay refers. It is also worth noting that higher education is now an area devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the situation therefore varies significantly across the U.K. I have chosen to focus on England because, as this essay shows, *Jude the Obscure* relates most closely to Oxford and the institutional model that it represents.

Bibliography

Amis, Kingsley. 1960. 'Lone Voices', *Encounter* (July): 6-11.

Anderson, R.D. 2006. *British Universities: Past and Present*. London: Hambledon Continuum.

Birch, Dinah. 2008. *Our Victorian Education*. Oxford: Blackwell.

BIS: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. 2011. *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. London: HMSO.

Christ, Carol T. 2008. 'The Victorian University and Our Own', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 13:2: 287-294.
Collins, Phillip. 1980. 'Hardy and Education', in Page, Norman (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and His Background*. London: Bell and Hyman, 41-75.
Cox, R.G. (ed.). 1979. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge.
Crowther, Geoffrey. 1959. *The Crowther Report: 15 to 18*. London: HMSO.
Ebbatson, Roger. 2009. '"A Thickness of Wall": Hardy and Class', in Wilson, Keith (ed.), *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 162-177.
Goldman, Lawrence. 1995. *Dons and Workers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Gosse, Edmund. 1979. 'Review in *Cosmopolis*' [January 1896], in Cox (1979): 262-270.
Halsey, A.H, and Martin Trow. 1971. *The British Academics*. London: Faber and Faber.
Hardy, Thomas. 1998. *Jude the Obscure* [1895]. London: Penguin.
——. 1984. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (ed. Michael Millgate). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Howells, W.D. 1979. 'Review in *Harper's Weekly*' [7 December 1895], in Cox (1979): 253-256.
Independent Commission on Fees (ICF). 2015. *Final Report*. London: Sutton Trust.
Ingham, Patricia. 2000. '*Jude the Obscure*', in Boumelha, Penny (ed.), *Jude the Obscure: Contemporary Critical Essays*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 20-31.
Institute for Fiscal Studies. 2017. *Higher Education Funding in England: Past, Present and Options for the Future*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.
Johnson, Boris. 2006. *Aspire Ever Higher: University Policy for the 21st Century*. London: Politeia.
Llewellyn, Mark. 2008. 'What Is Neo-Victorian Studies?', *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1:1 (Autumn): 164-185.
Marquand, David. 2004. *Decline of the Public*. Cambridge: Polity.
Moore, Charles. 2012. 'There's No Place for Dreaming Spires in Professor Les Ebdon's World', *The Telegraph* (10 February), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/9074406/Theres-no-place-for-dreamingspires-in-Professor-Les-Ebdons-world.html (accessed 4 December 2017).
Newman, John Henry. 1996. *The Idea of a University* [1873]. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Oliphant, Margaret. 1896. 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January): 135-149.
Robbins, Lionel. 1963. *Higher Education: Report of the Committee*. London: HMSO.
Rothblatt, Sheldon. 1997. *The Modern University and its Discontents: The Fate of Newman's Legacies in Britain and America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sanderson, Michael. 1972. *The Universities and British Industry, 1850–1970*. London: Routledge.
The Schools Inquiry Commission (SIC). 1868. *Report of the Commissioners*, vol. 1. London: HMSO.
Steedman, Carolyn. 2017. 'Middle-Class Hair', *London Review of Books* (19 October): 31-32.
Sutton Trust. 2010. *Widening Access to Selective Universities.* London: Sutton Trust.
Thompson, William. 1824. *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness.* London: Longman.
Wells, H.G. 1896. '*Jude the Obscure*', *Saturday Review* (8 February): 153-154.