It's easy to dismiss this as mere naffness, a kind of self-indulgence that your taste for the classic, the expected, and refined is your supporter when you find yourself writing the kind of thing that makes the historian or the literary historian look at you and wonder what it is you are trying to say. Graves, for all his pretensions to the status of a literary artist, has a remarkable lack of confidence in his own work. His is a good, even a great, generation, but not one which has made much of itself. He is too sensitive to the sneers of his contemporaries, and too busy with his own affairs, to give more than a passing glance at the work of others. His is a generation which has failed to seize its opportunities, and which is doomed to be remembered for its failures.

Graves is not above serving his own ends too:

I wrote out a record of the conversation we had with him. He welcomed us as representatives of the post-war generation. I asked whether he lived such a quiet life in Dorchester that he feared he was altogether behind the times. I asked, for instance, whether we had any sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, and whether he could trust the Morning Post's account of the Red Terror.

[...]

I asked whether I wrote easily, and I said, 'This poem was in its sixth draft and would probably be finished in two more.' 'Why!' he said, 'I have never in my life taken more than three, or perhaps four, drafts for a poem. I am afraid of it losing its freshness.'

[...]

Graves is not above serving his own ends too:

I wrote out a record of the conversation we had with him. He welcomed us as representatives of the post-war generation. I-Ic said that he lived such a quiet life in Dorchester that he feared he was altogether behind the times. I-Ic asked whether he had any sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, and whether he could trust the Morning Post's account of the Red Terror.

[...]

I asked whether I wrote easily, and I said, 'This poem was in its sixth draft and would probably be finished in two more.' 'Why!' he said, 'I have never in my life taken more than three, or perhaps four, drafts for a poem. I am afraid of it losing its freshness.'

[...]

Graves is not above serving his own ends too:

I wrote out a record of the conversation we had with him. He welcomed us as representatives of the post-war generation. I-Ic said that he lived such a quiet life in Dorchester that he feared he was altogether behind the times. I-Ic asked whether he had any sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, and whether he could trust the Morning Post's account of the Red Terror.

[...]

I asked whether I wrote easily, and I said, 'This poem was in its sixth draft and would probably be finished in two more.' 'Why!' he said, 'I have never in my life taken more than three, or perhaps four, drafts for a poem. I am afraid of it losing its freshness.'

[...]

Graves is not above serving his own ends too:

I wrote out a record of the conversation we had with him. He welcomed us as representatives of the post-war generation. I-Ic said that he lived such a quiet life in Dorchester that he feared he was altogether behind the times. I-Ic asked whether he had any sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, and whether he could trust the Morning Post's account of the Red Terror.

[...]
Once observed, "affection" for Hardy, the poet, is often ruinously shot through with protectiveness, even condescension. Hardy is not thought of as an intellectual force. Graves's pen-portrait of Hardy, the very fact of his recording the conversation, might be interpreted as literary adulation, but it reads rather more as anthropological curiosity—Hardy as the strange unworldly creatures sprung illegitimately from the soil. "Good," "consistent," "truthful" are admirable qualities: but one might as well add "mediocre," "uncritical" (in the pejorative sense of not knowing "good" literature from "bad"), and have done.

Three years later, in his influential study New Bearings in English Poetry (1932), LEavis draws on Graves's memoire to reinforce his own judgement on Hardy:

"Hardy is a naïve poet of simple attitudes and outlook, [..J. He was betrayed into no heroic postures. He felt deeply and consistently, he knew what he felt, and, in his best poems, communicated it perfectly. But there was little in his technique that could be taken up by younger poets, and developed in the solution of their own problems. His originality was not of the kind that goes with a high degree of critical awareness: it went, indeed, with a naïve conservatism."

"In his opinion," reports Mr Robert Graves in his superb autobiography, Goodbye to All That, "verses could come to nothing in England. [..] The main impulse behind his verse is the simple impulse to write verse: 'Any old little song will do.' And, often to the lilt of popular airs, with a gaucherie compounded of the literary, the colloquial, the baldly prosaic, the conventionally poetical, the pedantic, and the rustic, he industriously turns out his despondent anecdotes, his 'life's little ironies,' and his meditations upon a deterministic universe.

That the setting, explicit or implied, is generally rural is a point of critical significance. Hardy was a countryman, and his brooding mind stayed itself habitually upon the simple pieties, the quiet rhythms, and the immemorial ritual of rustic life.

It is very largely in terms of the absence of those, or of any

...
Influence in England, he must be considerably removed in time: for literature can be fertilised by its own earlier periods as well as by contemporaries from outside. If this already negates any possible tardy influence on English poetry, the point is then made explicit in the following comparison: 'Of the absoluteness of any writer, men living in the same period can make only a crude guess. But it should be apparent at least that Yeats has been and is the greatest poet of his time. Thomas Hardy, who for a few years had all the cry appears not what he always was, a minor poet.'2

Leavis couldn't predict the future—witness his investment in Ronald Bottrall over W. H. Auden—though like all canon-makers he tried. (I us conclusions relating to poetry and rural culture, for instance, are more questionable in the Irish tradition—of which more anon; similarly, Eliot's views on Yeats and English poetry leave open, if inadvertently, the reverse possibility—tardy's beneficial influence on Irish poetry.) Yet at the time, and in the decades following the publication of The 'Burial', both Leavis's arguments, and Eliot's habitual hostility towards tardy's work were sufficient to affect, adversely, tardy's critical standing. They were also sufficiently extreme to help prompt the anti-modernist backlash in England of the 1950s—abacklash which itself has a knock effect on Hardy's reputation. If a death, the poet, as Auden famously said in his elegy for Yeats, 'becomes his admirers', then I-tardy's admirer Larkin has also conditioned critical perceptions of his precursor—and not perhaps entirely in the way he intended. It is a critical commonplace to say that Larkin, between his first and second collections, The North in 1945 and The Less Deceived in 1955, 'found' his own voice by exchanging Yeats's influence for tardy's. 'I spent', he writes in 1965, three years trying to write like Yeats, not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas but out of infatuation with his music...[I]t is a particularly potent music and has ruined many a better talent. Every night after dinner before opening my large dark-green manuscript book I used to limber up by turning the pages of the 1933 publishing edition of Yeats's poems, through reading tardy's poems, it was undramatic, complete and permanent.'

Hardy's distance from metropolitan London appeals to a poet who writes of his own 'need to be on the periphery of things'. What he also learns from tardy is, he says in 1982, 'not to be afraid of the obvious.' Larkin takes some of the terms by which Leavis criticises Hardy and applies them to his own work. His distance from tardy's work is not, he claims, 'a sign of weakness in his own work'; he is 'not limited by the confines of his medium'.
represent twin poles of Larkin's aesthetic, complementary figures on whom lie projected different aspects of a divided self. But this is not how Larkin chose to view the matter in the Hardy affirmations found so habitually in his critical writings from the 1950s to the early 1980s, and the existence of this kind of Yeats-Hardy opposition is, on the whole, also how Donald Davie read the situation in the early 1970s. In Thomas Hardy and British Poetry (1973) Davie sets out the powerful thesis that 'in British poetry of the last fifty years (as not in American) the most far-reaching influence, for good and ill, has been not Yeats, still less Eliot or Pound, not Lawrence, but Hardy'. It is an influence, he concedes, that not all poets are prepared to acknowledge, notably in the case of Irish, Scottish and Welsh poets 'who don't care to be indebted to such an intransigently English poet as Hardy'. Yet while Davie, by contrast, rightly points towards Hardy's influence on Austin Clarke and others, he also argues that Hardy 'has the effect of locking a poet whom he influences into the world of historical contingency, a world of specific places at specific times', with the consequence that:

Hardy appears to have mistrusted, and certainly has made others mistrust, the claim of poetry to transcend the linear unrolling of recorded time. This is at once Hardy's strength and his limitation; and it set him irreconcilably at odds with for instance Yeats, who exerted himself repeatedly to transcend historical time by seeing it as cyclical, so as to leap above it into a realm that is visionary, mythological, and (in some sense or another) eternal. It is not possible for any reader to admire and delight in both Hardy and Yeats, if only because so much of the finest Yeats is concerned with the effort of transcendence, while so much of Hardy is concerned with the effort of transcendence taken as the only possible effort for any reader to make and defy the historical and contingent world that surrounds us. And yet, to be able to transcend, Hardy thought, was to be able to transcend his own poetry, which was no easy achievement or task. He had to be reconciled with his own inheritance, with his own history, with his own past, if he was to transcend, if he was to transcend poetry. And Hardy's history was not one that could be transcended by an poet of Yeats's class and quality. Hardy's history was one that could only be transcended by a poet of Yeats's class and quality, and Hardy was not that poet. And so the conflict between the two masters cannot be resolved. There is no room for compromise.

As Yeats himself on the subject of Hardy—whom he met in 1912, dining with Henry Newbolt at Max Gate and presenting Hardy with a Royal Society of Literature gold medal—his occasional comments are not encouraging, even if he did, along with 42 other poets, contribute to Hardy's 79th birthday, a handwritten poem in 1919 to mark Hardy's 79th birthday, a poem which Yeats read Lionel Johnson's The Art of Thomas Hardy in 1894 (a study of Hardy's first volume of poems, which did not appear until 1898) and observed: 'I feel... that there is something wrong about praising Hardy in a style so much better than his own. I wish [Lionel] had written instead of Dante or Milton.' As Louis MacNeice notes, when it comes to the poetry of the modern Irish, Yeats conveniently 'forgot about Hardy and Housman when it suited him'—more particularly when he wished to identify the trends and failings of modern poetry and associate them with England rather than Ireland. Yeats's argument that Irish poetry 'moves in a different direction and belongs to a different story' is an unnecessary distancing of himself from Eliot and modernism. In Yeats's introduction to the 1936 Oxford Book of Modern Verse, if Hardy does not benefit from Eliot (who, according to Yeats, 'produced his great effect... because he has described men and women that get out of bed or into it from mere habit'), the brief mention of Hardy is less than ringing endorsement, and his achievement compares unfavourably to Synge's: 'In Ireland, [there] still lives almost undisturbed the last folk tradition of western Europe... but there is no reaction from writers now and again, as upon my early work, of facile charm, too soft simplicity. In England, there are temptations. The Shropshire Lad is worthy of its fame, but a mile further and all that has been marsh. Thomas Hardy, though his work lacked technical accomplishment and impersonal objectivity, with his masterly, impersonal, objective technique, was able to do a different sort of thing, to give a different sort of thing, to give a different sort of thing, to give a different sort of thing.
If all this might seem to reinforce Davie's argument for irreconcilable difference between Yeats and Hardy, Davie's contemporary, Denis Donoghue, has painted a different picture (Davie and Donoghue were based, respectively, at TCD and UCD in the 1950s). Contributing to 'An Yeats Symposium' for the Guardian in 1989, marking the fiftieth anniversary of Yeats's death, Donoghue observes that:

"Increasingly, it seems unsatisfactory to think of Yeats in relation to Modernism; or, to be precise, in close association with Pound and Eliot. Released from these affiliations, Yeats now seems a major poet within the large context of post-romantic poetry; he is closer to Hardy and Stevensthan to Eliot, Pound, Joyce, or -Wyndham Lewis."

Donoghue's phrasing is ('seems') tentative, but to associate Yeats most closely, not with international modernism, but with a poet once seen as the quintessence of a provincial Englishness, marks a sea-change. And that sea-change probably owes something to the work of Irish poets who, from the 1970s-IOSO onwards, have asserted Hardy's relevance to modern Irish poetry. In that context, we might recall the review by A.N. Wilson in the Spectator in 1982 of Motion and Morrison's The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry:

"Yeats, Lugh MacDiarmid and Dylan Thomas all wrote English poetry. British poetry sounds about as appetising as Traveller's Fare on British Rail. This British business was started by the BBC when they began to flood the air with programmes and voices from Northern Ireland. Seamus Heaney is...described solemnly as 'the most important new poet of the last fifteen years' and the one we are promised by the television and radio. British poetry sounds about as appetising as Traveler's prose-poetry. British poetry sounds about as appetising as Traveler's prose-poetry."

When one noted that there was little of Heaney's to hear in the review by A.N. Wilson in the Spectator in 1982 of Motion and Morrison's The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry, in reference to modern Irish poetry, A.N. Wilson wrote:

"I'm rather reminiscent, in its essentials, of E.R. Leavis on Hardy in 1932 (although Wilson's deliberately provocative mudslinging here is a far cry from Leavis's considered scholarship). Both Hardy and Heaney are minor poets of more or less equal merit. But it is Hardy, not Heaney, who is the true poet, the one who has a genuine gift for poetry, a genuine gift for poetry."

Leavis gave the following advice to Hardy:

"When asked what kind of poetry we need today, Hardy replied: 'I think the kind we need is the kind that is learned by reading, not by writing.'"

Leavis's advice to Hardy was: "The kind of poetry we need today is the kind that is learned by reading, not by writing."
that give Jeaney the 'international' purchase which for Leavis would have been, ironically, one of the measures of greatness. It's Leavis's 'metropolitan' stance and his association of vers libre with originality that now look rather dated, not Hardy. And Leavis also overlooks the area where Hardy helps to define a genre for his inheritors, which is a elegist. As Jahan Ramazani argues, in his study of modern elegy from Hardy to Heaney, Hardy 'reinvigorates the elegy by helping to shift its psychic bases from the rationalizing consolations of normative grief to the more intense self-criticisms and vexations of melancholic mourning'. Where Yeats links his mourning work to 'a disappearing aristocratic vision', Hardy associates his... with the threatened rural outlook. In that sense he is an important influence for a contemporary generation, repelled by Yeats's autocratic politics if not by his forms. Ramazani argues convincingly that Hardy's elegies anticipate those of Yeats, Eliot and Pound, that he is a 'key transitional figure' who 'presages the tension in much 20th century poetry between the elegiac and the anti—elegiac'.

The intensities of the Northern Irish experience over the last four decades, as sites of contested memory and space, with its tensions between religious tradition and secularism, have brought elegy into particular focus. The Great War protest—elegy of one model for Northern Irish poets; and behind it is Hardy's Poems of 1912—13. (One of the poems A.N. Wilson derides—Heaney's 'Casualty'—is in an obvious rhythmical dialogue with Yeats, more particularly with Yeats's 'The Fisherman'; but its speaker's guilt in the mourning process also owes something to Wilson's derisive, 'brutal', or later of Heaney's desire to 'take the English lyric and make it eatable'.

Hardy is also 'both conservative and radical in matters of form': he 'adheres to the metered line but roughs up prosodic and syntactic polish; he appropriates Romantic diction but fashions many jarring locutions'. There are echoes of J.M. Synge's expressed need for verse to be 'brutal', or later of Heaney's desire to 'take the English lyric and make it eatable'.

Paulin's study also comes at a time when he was working on his first book in verse, its theme is also close both conditionally and culturally to that of the post—World War I generation. When Jane Elizabeth Harding and Arthur Harding Ryder, Hardy's biographers, published their book in 1975, Hardy and his poetry were a cliché of their time. Ryder's and Harding's biographers, Martin Harding and Peter J. Wilson, though sympathetic to the literary achievement of Hardy's poetry, have described it as often detached from its context. The introduction to their book contains a passage which draws on a common narrative of Hardy's life story. It begins, 'Hardy was born in Dorset in 1840, the son of a farmer and a seamstress. He was educated locally and went on to study at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He worked as a schoolmaster before becoming a writer. From that time on, he was always a writer. His early work was published in magazines and newspapers, and his poetry began to be noticed.'

Standing at the gate before the service started,
In 1986, Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception was published in a second edition, with a new introduction. This time Paulin begins, not with Grigson, but by ecumenically associating Hardy with Hopkins, and the positioning of the work on Hardy has completely changed. Paulin is no longer tinkering around the edges of Donald Davie and British poetry; this is a new 'funky' Hardy for Ireland in the 1980s, and for a new Toni Paulin. Both Hopkins and Hardy, he argues, hold to an aesthetic of "cunning irregularity" and aim for a poetry of syncopated texture rather than melodious veneer. For them, the highest form of poetic language is rapid, extempore, jazz-like and funky. Both are associated with a Gothic tradition. That tradition is northern and consonantal, and its roots are in the people rather than in the court. The Gothic poet writes poems that have a fricative, spiky, spoken texture... with a populist delight in rough, scratchy sounds... Through such writers, he argues, "literary English has been periodically refreshed by an Antaeus-like contact with the earth". Furthermore, Hardy (like Paulin himself?) is, in this reading, anti-(British) establishment: Imperialist, racist, reactionary, sexist... Tennyson is in brilliant command of a dead language. Hardy belongs outside this institutional, official reality. He grew up in a rural society where most people spoke dialects and wrote dialect, not aural, language. As a writer, Hardy was caught between a provincial oral culture of legend, talk, song, and a metropolitan culture of print, political power and what linguists used to term R.l... And when Hardy asserted that a "certain provincialism of feeling" was invaluable in a writer and set that idea against Arnold's idea of culture—an idea hostile to provincialism—he was referring to a mode of feeling that is bound in with song, dialect, physical touch, natural human kindness and what he terms "crude enthusiasm". That does not mean provincial in the Chekhovian sense of stilled ambition and anxious mediocrity.

Partly the revision of the introduction here brings it into line with Paulin's changed political thinking in the 1980s, as a Protestant republican concerned with the "Language Question" in Ireland, about the politics of Ulster—Scots and Irish language use. The Paulin of a poems such as 'Off the Back of a Lorry' from Lthertree (1983), with its 'gritty/sort of prodbaroque/Imustreturnto/likemyownboke', has travelled some way from Inishkeel Parish Church. In changing the terms of the debate about Hardy, Paulin separates himself from the Anglocentricity of the Davie/Larkin axis. And Hardy becomes a fellow-traveller on this journey. 'Funky' language Hardy, dialect, song: these all connect to Paulin's own language preoccupations in Ulster; the 'northern Gothic' obliquely evokes an Anglo—Irish Protestant Gothic tradition from Edgeworth to Stoker. He also asserts the margin against the 'centre', a post-colonial reinvigoration of a dying English tradition. In an interview with the poet with whom he shares a name, David, Hardy's lines have as profound an effect on this vanity as on the other poems in the introduction, in which the poet has been associated with a recognition of the verbal power of words. Hardy's lines draw profoundly on the folk imagination, and... that imagination overridesthe great division between life and death— it locates the resurrection in the self-delighting wildness of sheer presence, a passion at rhythm preserves and transforms personal emotion by lifting it out of history into the realm of the impersonal, fixed, fate. And this resembles Yeats's remark that passion at rhythm preserves and transforms personal emotion by lifting it out of history into the realm of 'impersonal meditation'.
Hardy is closest to Yeats in the connection which lies between vocal rhythm and mystery. As if the muse visits him only when he learns to reject the instrumental will (rhythms of choice) for a more intuitive, 'rougher' type of verse which is rooted in rural speech, the Dorset accent and the formally very sophisticated dialect verse of William Barnes. This can only be discovered through a surrender to natural magic and superstition, through a creative idleness rather than forcing ambition.

Where Larkin's own creative process required the artificial separation of Hardy and Yeats, Paulin's requires their artificial yoking together. Whether or not these sentences are wholly convincing, it's notable that they litter a description of Hardy with Yeatsian terminology—'the great division', 'resurrection', 'self-delighting', 'Antique-like', 'mystery', 'natural magic' (which is for Yeats, in 'The Celtic Element in literature', Ireland's 'ancient religion').

Iv.

Whether putting the Ulster into Essex or the Essex into Ulster, this criticism stands as a testament to Hardy's cultural (and political) significance for the Northern Irish writer at a particular moment in history. That significance is also, in a different way, for Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney. Longley's 'Poetry', from The Veil in Japan (2000), traces the link between Hardy and the poetsofthe Western Front—among them Edward Thomas—whose influence pervades Longley's own work too: 'When Thomas Hardy died, his widow gave Blunden / as a memento of many visits to Max Gate / his precious copy of Edward Thomas's Poems.' For Longley, Hardy's 'poetry affects Longley's own marital love poems; his "Mayo Monologues" cross Kavanagh's influence with Hardy; and as one of the outstanding elegistsofhis generation, for whom the Great War protest-elegy looms large in his own development, Hardy's refiguring of elegy affects Longley's own practice, even if at one remove.

For Heaney, too, because his influence was so intimately and seamlessly blended into his poetic vision, essays made toHardy's poetry have gone largely unnoticed. For Heaney, Hardy's influence on his own work is so subtle that Heaney's presence in Hardy's poetry has gone largely unnoticed. For Heaney, Hardy's influence on his own work is so subtle that Heaney's presence in Hardy's poetry has gone largely unnoticed. For Heaney, Hardy's influence on his own work is so subtle that Heaney's presence in Hardy's poetry has gone largely unnoticed.
When Heaney returns to Hardy, he reads perhaps the first time to finish 'The Turn of the Native', and potentially for the first time from a poem's opening. Heaney, as a poet who makes sense to himself, who, like himself, is a poet whose roots cross with his reading, whose rural background is the foundation on which he will later 'sing the perfect pitch of his own'.

Once, as a child, out in a field of sheep, Thomas Hardy pretended to be dead and lay down flat among the dainty shins. In that sniffed-at, bleated—into, grassy space he experimented within infinity. This might seem to be a version of the natural, unsophisticated, grounded Hardy, derided by Leavis and Eliot, celebrated, conversely, by Heaney, and far away from Paulin's gritty, funky, political Hardy. Nevertheless, Heaney here creates his own Hardy too, and for different ends. Heaney's Hardy is also a visionary poet, experimenting with 'infinity', and the poem, as 'Lightenings vii' then shows, finds the vision very ambitiously in Hardy in part because it illuminates the way Hardy apprehended the weariness and tedium of the poetic present. To Hardy, the 'days of the year from the ploughing brain', political, by Heaney, and in that, by the other, celebrated, contrary.

In that moment, 'Hardy's Place' (Hardy then the novelist, also the Hardy of 'The Voice') to articulate Heaney, all the while speaking both to and for Hardy, Heaney simultaneously creating a character of his own.

A different familiarity might encapsulate Hardy's appearance in two poems from 'Seeing Things' (1991), 'Lightenings vi' and vii. In them, we find a Hardy who makes sense to himself again, 'Lightenings vii' (1999), 'Luminous and dry', in terms of vision. Poems from 'Seeing Things' (1991) and 'Luminous and dry', the poet and the page into which the poem longed to see, that page that the poem itself could sometimes make sense of. The very first poem in that anthology—Hardy's 'Flie Darkling Thrush'—defines both a century's end and its beginning, and is evoked by Heaney in his 'millennium' poem quoted as epigraph to this essay.
Inside him at his best circumstantial
Outward from there, to be the same triple
Of a triple that would travel eighty years
In the fleece, hustle was the original
That shit he caused.

What proper place in the citizen of modern poetry
Is Hardy's influence of influence, as well as being returned to
Teaching, outward in terms of influence, as wilderness begins, the
Lights of Hardy's more positively the citizen the
Fully appreciated nowadays. Yet more positively, the citizen begins
Things to different people. But Hardy is not thinking of
Plotting or his reception in England and Ireland. That Hardy is different
Bracketing the same and modern way. It is apparent even looking

Losing Lines of Heaney's 'Lightening'...