In his 1929 warmemoir GoodbyetoAllThat, Robert Graves drawspen-portraitof Thomas Hardy,basedonavisithemade,withhis
wife Nancy Nicholson, to Hardy's Dorchester home, Max Gate, in the
summerof 1920. The representation of Hardy here is one of the reasons Sassoon and Graves fought so bitterly in the aftermath of
publication of Goodbye to All That. Sassoon complained to Graves in 1930 that 'There was too much about you and too little
about Hardy's greatness. The picture of him in your book is misleading, because it shows the multiplicity and profusion of his
character, and not his essential simplicity. It was there when it happened.' Graves responded with characteristic arrogance: 'I
admired Hardy as a good, consistent, truthful man. I don't believe in greatmen. I treat everyone as an equal unless they prove
themselves inferior.'

It's easy to dismiss the much snobbery in that statement, but there is a fair point in Hardy's vengence. Why? '...I talked of early literaryinfluences, and said that he had none at all for the first two or three years of his
life; that he was altogether beyond the thought and the manner of his
contemporaries. His thought and manner he could not have taken from the Morning Post account of the Red Tape and
Intrigue.'

The book is not without its defects as it is written in a style that is often
patronising and patronising. One of the reasons for this is that the
author's way of looking at the world is very much that of the
middle-class Englishman of the early 20th century. He was not aware
of the developments in literature and art that were taking place in the
world around him. This is evident in his treatment of Thomas Hardy, who
was a great writer, but whose work was not fully appreciated by
Graves. He was more interested in the literary and artistic cliques of
his time, and this is reflected in his writing. He was not interested in
the works of Hardy, and this is evident in his description of the
author as a 'great, consistent, truthful man.' This is not an accurate
description of Hardy, as he was a complex and multifaceted
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writer, and his works were not fully appreciated by Graves.
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 illiterate and Antaeus-like 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'), naive, and have done.

Three years later, in his influential study New Bearings in English Poetry (1922), Leavis draws on Graves's memoir to reinforce his own judgement on Hardy:

Hardy is an naïve poet of simple attitudes and outlook, . . . 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 that could come to nothing in England,' . . . The main impulse behind his verse is too commonly the mere impulse to write verse: 'Any little old song, will do'. As says. And, often to the horror of popular ears, 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 stays it itself habitually upon the simple piety of the quiet rhythms, and the immemorial ritual of rustic life, it is very largely in terms of the absence of those, or of any substitute, that the environment of the modern poet must be described.

New Bearings famously advocates Eliot's aesthetic in opposition to what Leavis sees as the defunct modes of Hardy, or of Georgian verse: Hopkins is rescued from the nineteenth century, and 'felt to be a contemporary'; 'but the real drive of the book is to argue that Eliot's is the "strong originality" that "triumphs over traditional habits", that "in his work by 1920 English poetry had made an attempt". That the selection of the poems and the selection of the poems...
Influence in England, he must be considerably removed in time: for a literature can be fertilised by its own earlier periods as well as by contemporaries from outside. If this already negates any possible tardy—perhaps beneficial—effect on English poetry, the point is then made explicit in the following comparison: 'Of the absolute greatness of any writer, men living in the same period can make only a crude guess. But it should be apparent at least that Yeats, as compared with whom, appears no greater, what he always was, a minor poet.'

If Leavis couldn't predict the future—witness his investment in Ronald Bottrall over W. H. Auden—though like all canon-makers he tried, his conclusions relating to poetry and rural culture, for instance, are more than open, if inadvertently, the reverse possibility—Yeats's beneficial influence on Irish poetry. Yet at the time, and in the decades following the publication of Niblet's Bearing, both Leavis's arguments and Eliot's habitual hostility towards Yeats's work were sufficiently influential to affect, adversely, Yeats'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-on effect on Hardy's reputation. If a reader, after death, the poet, as Auden famously said in his elegy for Yeats, 'becomes his admirer', then Hardy'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 Deceive in 1955, 'found' his own voice by exchanging Yeats's influence for Yeardy'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...[It is a particularly potent music]...and has ruined many a critical career. When Larkin reads Yeats's poems, it is through reading Yeardy's poems, that he learns coat London and Dublin before coming to London. He finds the esthetic and atmosphere of the city attractive, and the influence of London on Yeats, as compared with whom, appears no greater, what he always was, a minor poet.'
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, 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:

f—Hardy appears to have mistrusted, and certainly lead so others to mistrust, the claims of poetry to transcend the linear unrolling of recorded time. This is at once Hardy's strength and his limitation; and it sets him irreconcilably at odds with for instance Yeats, who exerts 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 to some degree) eternal. It might be possible for any reader to transcend both of these worlds, to enjoy and delight in both, and to admire and delight in both; but for an poet who finds himself in the position of choosing between these two masters, the choice cannot be fudged; there is no room for compromise.

As [or 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 41 other poets, contribute 16 to Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, 3—4.]

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18 Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, 3—4.
Ill.
If all this might seem to reinforce Davie's argument for irreconcilable differences between Yeats and Lally, 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 'AYeats Symposium' for the Guardian in 1989, marking the fiftieth anniversary of Yeats's death, Donoghue observesthat:

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 Stevens than 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 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 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 15 years' and the one 'whom we very deliberately put first in our anthology'. Important is the giveaway word here. No one can seriously pretend that Heaney is a particularly good or interesting poet. He certainly is not in the same class as Yeats, with whom he has been compared. He is not half as good as Geoffrey Fuller or 'red' Hughes. Yet for some reason he was taken up by the Sunday newspaper dons...since when his quiet, minor accomplishments have been smothered in self-importance, his own and that of his admirers. If Heaney is 'major', what word do you use to describe Wordsworth? At his best, Heaney writes sub-Paterian prose-poems, with the rural life of Ulster as his theme. But...Jeaney has nothing whatevertosay.

24 A.N. Wilson on Heaney in 1982, in one of the worst instances of getting it wrong, is rather reminiscent, in its essentials, of ER. Leavis on Hardy in 1932 (although Wilson's deliberately provocative mud-slinging here is a far cry from Leavis's considered scholarship). Both Hardy and Heaney are minor poets of minor accomplishments, with rural life as their principal concern. In effect, this is a reaffirmation of a provincial perspective on modernism, coupled with an admission that these perspectives matter, so that we may begin to reassess Yeats's importance. ['Sounding' poetry is 'ecological', but to ascribe Yeats's value in these terms by which Leavis dismisses Hardy as negligible, 'a countryman' writing about 'rustic life' with a supposedly 'naive' formal conservatism and an 'outsider's status' — the ones which now seem to confirm his importance (Not least, the ecocritical debates of recent years have put the rhythms...of rural culture). When Leavis observed that there was nothing,

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that give Jean 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 consolation of normative grief to the more intense self-criticisms and vexatious melancholic mourning'.

Where Yeats links his mourning work to 'a disappearing aristocratic vision', Hardy associates his... with the intensities of the Northern Irish experience over the last four decades, as a site of contested memory and space, with its tensions between religious tradition and secularity. The Great War protest-elegy offers 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 becomes something to differentiate with Yeats's more exclusively with Yeats's The Phenomenon: when Yeats criticizes Hardy for adherence to traditional forms and rejects a too-easy association of experimental form with anti-hierarchical politics. And, not least, Hardy as the poet of place plays an important role in the aesthetic development of Heaney, Longley, or Paulin. It's possible to imagine the influence of Hardy's presence in the contemporary Irish poetry scene (an notable exception is Tara Christie's article, 'Seanius Heaney's Hardy' from 1994). This is not necessarily true of the poets themselves. Torn Paulin's first critical book is Thomas Hardy: The Poetry and a Perussion (1975), based on Insgraduatethesis. It bearsthemarksofhisfriendship with (and mentoring by) Douglas Dunn, both of whom studied at Hull, overlapping with Larkin's time as librarian there. In the introduction to the hook, Paulin's concern is, in part, to differentiate his work from, and quarrel with, Davie's 1973 Thomas Hardy and British Poets. Davie comes under fire for insufficient appreciation of Douglas Dunn's work and for overdrawing the contrast between Hardy's poetry and that of his modernist contemporaries. Paulin also rescues Hardy and Larkin from Davie's critique of their limited horizons, and in doing so (as elsewhere in the book) opts for comparison with Yeats on some fundamental principles, in spite of their obvious differences:

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1. Ibid. 19.
In their Sundaysuits, the Barretstalked together,
Smiled shyly at the visitors who packed the church
In summer...

Then, before the recognitions and the talk,
There was an enormous sight of thesea,
A silent water beyond society.

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 position 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 consonant and its roots are in the people rather than in the court. The Gothic poet writes poems that have a fricative, spiky, spokentexture... 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 dialect and where literacy was normal. As a writer, Hardy was caught between a provincialoral culture of song, talk, legend, and a metropolitan culture of print, political power and what linguists used toterm 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". It 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 poems such as 'Off the Back of a Lorry' from Lihert Tree (1983), with its 'gritty/sort of prodbaroque/Imust return to/like my own book', has travelledsomeway 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 invokes an Anglo-Irish Protestant tradition from Edgeworth to Stoker. He also asserts the margin against the 'centre', a post-colonial reinvigoration of a dying English tradition: Hardy, outside this imperial and institutional centre, thus becomes the bedfellow of Yeats and Joyce, as of Lleaney and Paulin—those who took, as Joyce has it in Portrait of a Young Artist, the language that was not 'theirs', and yet made it their own.

In 1986, Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception was published in London. 

A short work of profound society.
There, before the recognitions and the talk,
Said, 'in summary...'
Hardy is close 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').

Where 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, manifested in the influence of the poet on the poet. The Return of the Native is a pivotal point in Heaney's own development, especially in his protest elegy when he wrote of the poet's death, 'When Thomas Hardy died his widow gave Blunden an inscription of many visits to Max Gate/Her treasured copy of Edward Thomas's Poems.' For Longley, Hardy's love poetry infects Longley's own marital love poems; his 'Mayo Monologues' cross Kavanagh's influence with Hardy's. For Heaney, as Tara Christie persuasively denounces, his 'fifty-year engagement with the work of Thomas Hardy has played a central, sometimes contradictory, role in the work of the Northern Irish poet. The poet of the Derry Bogside is also the poet of the Dower House. Hardy's influence is also a different kind of influence, a creative engagement with the poet's imaginative and aesthetic vision.
An anecdote (in fact, 'I went down on all fours, sought the creatures facetoface') as Tara Christie points out, Hardy's childhood, through themisremembering, thus merges with Heaney's own, in which Heaney would visit the cattle-shed, to sit or stand quietly beside these big peaceful beasts, wondering if they were taking any heed of me or not. 'Similarly, 'The Birthplace' while returning to its origins, also makes him resonate in a new context. Section I is obliquely evocative of Yeats, with the 'stir' of Hardy's 'reluctant heart', as it echoes early Mahon too, the Mahon of 'The Studio' or 'Courtyards in Delft' ('The dealtable where he wrote, so small and plain, / the singlebed adream of discipline...'). The linebreak after 'That day, we were like one', momentarily implies the two poets' affinity, only to transform the speaker into a (suffering) character in one of Hardy's novels: 'like one of his troubled couples, speechless/until he spoke for them'. The poem allows Hardy (the novelist, also the Hardy of 'The Voice') to articulate Heaney, while speaking both to and for Hardy, Heaney simultaneously creating a character of his own.

Aldith the opening of section II — 'Everywhere being nowhere/who can prove/one place more than another' — is not so much a denial of specificity but a recognition that Hardy, like Heaney after him, has 'proved' a particular place, be it Wessex or Anahorish, against those who would dismiss it as insignificant — 'utterly as source', 'utterly empty'.

In Edna Longley's Burnaxe Book of 20th-Century Poetry (2000), Hardy anticipates thecondition on which the whole book hinges: 'The season's importance in the condition on which the whole book hinges'. We note the opening lines: 'Our master's grave is the same space and depth. The seasons / dividers of time', 'the poet's flesh of his soul'. A different immortality. What he offers the reader and other poets than the writer who has been dead for so long. He has returned to us with a voice, a presence, a life of his own. He has been resurrected in the poems of Edna Longley.
It is evident, even looking briefly at his reception in England and Ireland, that Hardy is different things to different people: Eliot’s Hardy is not Larkin’s, or Paulin’s, or Heaney’s. In standing at a crossroads, he leads in multiple directions, and the danger is that in doing so once everywhere he is fully appreciated nowhere. Yet more positively, the chosen lines of Heaney’s ‘Lightening’ might serve as metaphor for Hardy’s reaching ‘outward’ into his own time and place in the criticism of modern poetry:

Inside him at his best circumferences,
Outward from there, to be the same triple
Of a triple that would have eighty years
In the fleece, the purple, was the original.

That is, he caused:

The proper place in the criticism of modern poetry
This proper place in the criticism of modern poetry,
Teaching outward in terms of influence, as well as being returned to
Teaching outward in terms of influence, as well as being returned to
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