Under the Greenwood Tree is a wonderful picture of the rural life. Hardy derived the title *Under the Greenwood Tree* from Shakespeare’s drama *As you like it*. Like Shakespeare’s comedy the novel also presents a love-story but its characters are struck with the note of idyllic ease and pastoral mood of the novel. It is the first successful novel of Thomas Hardy. The world of *Under the Greenwood Tree* is confined to the people who live in harmony and peace and truly belong to their world. Lives of the characters are woven around the relationships with each other as Andrew Enstic comments:

It is the sophisticated web of relationships, built up over centuries of village life and adapted by each succeeding generation that gives the depth needed in the novel. The subtle relationship of man and stone seen in Casterbridge, is here ‘replaced by the subtle relationships of men.’

Under the Greenwood Tree, according to its author’s 1912 “Preface” deal with the story of the church musicians and their eclipse “lightly, even... farcically and flippantly at times.” The text focuses upon a tension between tradition and modernity, individualism and community. It presents a group of men - the Mellstock Quire - for whom the order of things, social as well as natural lies in cycle and repetition. The story narrates the cycle of seasons presenting the communal festivities of Christmas to those of Dick and Fancy’s wedding. Against this background two individual - Parson
Maybold and Fancy Day are to rupture the cyclical pattern and disrupt the status. The story runs in the village of Mellstock. The questions of the church music is central to the story of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Hardy himself attached much significance to the issue of displacement of these ecclesiastical musicians. In his ‘Introduction to *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Geoffery Grigson remarks:

Hardy was delighted and intrigued by his father’s recollections of the church orchestras and choirs which once played and sang in the west galleries. The Victorian clergy replaced this old instrumental music with organs or with harmoniums or small American organs. So violin, bass-viol, serpent and clarinet stood for the past or the passage of time, especially with Hardy, since both his father Thomas Hardy the builder, and his grandfather, yet another Thomas and also a builder, had both of them been such orchestral performers in the gallery of their church at Stinsford. His mother had first seen his father playing the violin in the Stinsford gallery. His father would tell him stories of these church musicmen, meeting, practising, preparing and being entertained with beer and cider in the Cottage of Hardy.³

Hardy’s love for music is shown by the fact that in the *Life* he chose to date the historical moment of his coming to consciousness by reference to the death of the Stinsford parish choir.
So here was one act of family piety performed, one facet of the mystery of passing time and of the past acknowledged, one item of old days preserved, when Hardy recreated the music-men in *Under the Greenwood Tree*; for which his first and own preferred title had been 'The Mellstock Quire' when Hardy recalls his book, it is on account of the village musicians, and the Christmas Eve Carol - singing, not the love story he tacked on to them.⁴

The novel shows the displacement of the Mellstock Quire and its old established west gallery musicians by an isolated organist. The novel vividly portrays church-musicians, their round of Christmas carols and their efforts to prevent harmonium player to supersede them. The appearance of church choir, with “bass-viols, fiddles, and flutes under their arms”⁵ gives a specific reminiscence of the Mellstock world. Because of increasing decrease in the importance of their age old honorable profession, they feel themselves unwanted and superfluous. Farmer Shiner, a fairly richman, has no respect for music and dance:

"All I meant was," said Dick, rather sorry that he had spoken correcting to a guest, "that 'tis in the dance; and a man has hardly any right to hack and mangle what was ordained by the regular dance-maker, who, I daresay, got his living by making 'em, and thought of nothing else all his life."
"I don't like casting off: then very well: I cast off for no dance-maker that ever lived."6

But as he wishes to marry Fancy, he asks Reverend Maybold to employ her as an organist. Mr. Maybold himself loves Fancy and so he employs Fancy. On the day Fancy makes her debut as an organist in the church, the members of the old choir, with humbled hearts are scattered in the church. They feel that they have become obsolete. It is for the first time in their lives of that service. Thus the respectable members of the Mellstock Quire withdrew in a peaceful, dignified way to make room for the barrel organ that Maybold Shiner, and especially Fancy introduce. Hardy in his August 1896 "Preface" to the novel tells:

Under the old plan, from half a dozen to ten full-grown players, in addition to the numerous more or less grown-up singers, were officially occupied with the Sunday routine, and concerned in trying their best to make it an artistic outcome of the combined musical taste of the congregation... The zest of these bygone instrumentalists must have been keen and staying, to take them as: it did, on foot every Sunday after a toilsome week through all weathers to the church, which often lay at a distance from their homes. They usually received so little in payment for their performance that their efforts were really a labour of love.
Now they are disappointed. They recollect their by-gone glorious days. Michael Mail, a member of the choir in the novel observes, "Times have changed from the times they used to be. 'People don't care much about us now. I've been thinking we must be almost the last left in the country of the old string players? Barrel- organs, and the things next door to 'em that you blow wi' your foot, have come in terribly of late years."

Bowman and old William agree to Mail’s observations, another member of the Choir says, "Time was- long and merry ago now ! - when not one of the varmits was to be heard of, but it served some of the quires right. They should have struck to strings as we did, and kept out clarinets, and done away with serpents, if you’d thrive in musical-religion, stick to strings, say I !" All the members of choir have immense love for their art and instruments. They hate the new intrusive instruments. The eldest Dewy points out : “… nothing will spak to your heart wi’ the sweetness O’ the man of strings ! The church – singers are alienated only in the sense that they feel rejected and powerless before the new mechanical world of new order. Mark the following lines :

... Hardy hints at what will become a central concern in most of his other fiction : the conflict between the old and the new ; between the simple, unreflective, rural life and sophisticated, speculative, mechanical world of a new order. The choir, particularly, is opposed to change, the old ways, the old tunes, and the old instruments being automatically the best.
The members of the choir are shocked when on the Christmas morning their exclusive right of singing in the church is encroached upon by the girls. The intrusive voice of the girls becomes as mighty and achieves as much independence as that of the choir itself. This has never happened before. This independent singing by the girls causes disappointment among the gallery musicians which becomes apparent in their throat and singing as Mr. Penny says,” ‘Tis the gallery have got to sing, all the world knows.”¹¹ Perhaps this violation of the solemnity and sanctity of their profession once again gives stress upon the mind of Mr. Spinks who remarks, “Really. I think we useless ones had better march out of church, fiddles and all !”¹² The words ‘useless ones’ reveals the agony of the hearts of these uncared.

In Under the Greenwood Tree we do not have the kind of adverse influences of new ways found in the novels like Tess, Jude and The Return of the Native etc. Michael Millgate observes:

> The society presented in the novel is, in pastoral fashion, both remote and remarkably homogeneous : there is scarcely a murmur of the world outside, and Hardy may deliberately have excluded the inhabitants of the local manor house in the interests of limiting the greenwood world to those who truly belong there.¹³

There are no characters who feel alienated like Tess or Jude and Sue. They live in a homogeneous society.
In *Under the Greenwood Tree* Fancy because of her superior education feels herself higher from the rural people. Like Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* she returns home with all the charm and accomplishments of education and sophisticated culture. New ways in the person of Fancy invade the pastoral world of Mellstock. Like Grace she has been educated above her station and this fact creates ripples in an otherwise placid life of the novel. In fact, she is prototype of Grace, Bathsheba and Eustacia Vye. She oscillates between her native world and world of so-called sophisticated culture by which she feels fascinated. In this sense, she is rootless character bringing disaster to the old established pattern of village. Like Bathsheba and Grace, she has two lovers of different social status. On the one hand, Dick Dewey, a simple rustic young man like Gabriel Oak loves her sincerely and passionately and Maybold, a vicar, likes her on the other. Mr. Day attempts to prevent Fancy marrying Dick. Her choice among available suitors represents a choice among attitudes to community and tradition. At the same time, Dick's doubts and confusion are scrupulously reported to the reader:

This brought another meeting, and another, Fancy faintly showing by her bearing that it was a pleasure to her of some kind to see him there; but the sort of pleasure she derived ... he could not any how decide, although he meditated on her every little movement for hours after it was made."¹⁴
Consequently, Fancy often comes to appear a skillful manipulator, possessed of mysterious and unexplained knowledge about the ways of the world. Her higher education and love for sophisticated manners make her feel superior to her lover Dick Dewey as Michael Millgate remarks:

The disruptive side-effects of Fancy’s education are evident enough: that she becomes entangled in disagreements between the vicar, the church warden, and the choir is not simply because she is pretty but because she has been taught to play the organ, and if she is not herself an active innovator she is inevitably associated with the pressures making for social change. Hardy also emphasizes that she, like her father, belongs not to Mellstock itself but to a neighbouring parish.\textsuperscript{15}

As a teacher and musician, she is one of the potent forces which create danger for the old traditional order. Like Troy and Fitzpiers, she also serves as an alien in the rustic atmosphere of village. It is noticeable that education which proved for Hardy a means of social advancement in his own life is shown in his novels as a force which separates man from his village community. As a consequence of her education she introduced new standards of living unknown to the village Mellstock.

Her behaviour becomes capricious and her area of choice widens so much as to include Farmer Shiner and Parson Maybold. Dick Dewey may not have easy and
harmonious relationship with his wife Fancy Day who has class – consciousness and superior education. Mark the following lines:

The propriety of every one was intense, by reason of the influence of Fancy, who, as an additional precaution in this direction, had strictly charged her father and the tranter to carefully avoid saying ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of newer taste; also that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking ... A local English custom of extraordinary antiquity, but stated by Fancy to be decidedly dying out among the better classes of society.¹⁶

Dick Dewey is a son of poor pedlar who passed his whole life without being settled in a single profession. In this novel Fancy’s superior education her ‘newer taste’ and predilection for refinement do not create so much havoc and upheaval as we see Grace do in Woodlanders.

To conclude it may be said that Fancy Day serves as an alien. She disturbs and disrupts old established pattern of church as she takes right of singing away from the old established west gallery musicians. But the close inter-personal relationships and well-knit society of the church – musicians enable them to withstand intrusion of the alien. Richard carpenter says:
Despite the serious implications of the struggle between two worlds, *Under the Greenwood Tree* never allows a truly somber note to mar its idyllic tone. At this point in his career Hardy could permit the bucolic to triumph over the sophisticated without untoward results. Later on, he would explore with increasing rigour the tragedy which could come from such a clash, but in this novel the pastoral atmosphere is maintained with complete consistency .... Tragedy does not lurk beneath its surface. Only through comparison with the major tragic novels can one perceive the qualities which can lead to disaster.  

REFERENCE

4. *Ibid*, p. 18
7. *Ibid*, p. 58
8. *Ibid*, p. 58
9. *Ibid*, p. 60


