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Under the Greenwood Tree

THOMAS HARDY

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

or The Mellstock Quire

Thomas Hardy

With an Introduction by
CLAIRE SEYMOUR
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WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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This edition published 1994 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ
Introduction and Notes added 2004

ISBN 1 85326 227 7

Typeset by Antony Gray
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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or THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Under the Greenwood Tree, or *The Mellstock Quire* was written during 1871 and published in June the following year. Composed in the cottage in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset where Thomas Hardy was born and raised, it is one of his most bright and confident novels, its brevity, simplicity and positivism making it unique in Hardy's oeuvre. The essential optimism of the novel is perhaps surprising, for it was written at a time when, frustrated in his poetic endeavours and disheartened by the repeated rejection of his early poems (which were published as *Wessex Poems*, in 1898), Hardy had somewhat reluctantly resigned himself to writing prose.

Initially he met with little success. Hardy's first attempt at novel writing, *The Poor Man and the Lady, by the Poor Man*, was rejected by Macmillan on the grounds that it was too extreme in its social

critique.[1] Hardy later destroyed the manuscript and, on the advice of his publishers, attempted a radically different work, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), in which social and economic comment were replaced by mystery, melodrama, murder, suicide and sensationalism. However, this work was also a critical failure and was quickly remaindered.

Hardy submitted his third novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, to Macmillan in 1871. An ambiguous reply convinced him that he would once again face rejection and he abandoned the manuscript. Fortunately, a chance meeting with the publisher, William Tinsley, led to its exhumation and rapid publication. Hardy received £30 outright, and no royalties, for his novel, which appeared anonymously, in two volumes, at the cost of one shilling. *Under the Greenwood Tree* was a critical and commercial success, its unaffected representation of pastoral innocence and rural idyll appealing to the very audience whom Hardy had so disparaged and censured in his first, discarded novel.

Hardy spent his childhood amongst family and friends who were gifted narrators and musicians, their shared memories, anecdotes, folklore and songs forming a rich oral tradition. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* Hardy recreated these collective cultural memories, celebrating the world which was nearest to him. Many of the novel's characters – humorously yet sympathetically portrayed – were modelled on real people, some of whom still lie in the graveyard of Hardy's parish church at Stinsford:

> . . . the actual name of the shoemaker 'Robert Penny' in the same story was Robert Reason. He, like the Tranter and the Tranter's wife, is buried in Stinsford Churchyard near the tombs of the Hardys, though his name is almost illegible. [*Life*, p. 92]

However, Hardy's portraits, like his landscapes, are always an intriguing mixture of the real and the imagined. Thus, while the Dewys' cottage was modelled on Hardy's family home in Higher Bockhampton, he insisted, 'Old Dewy has been called a portrait of Hardy's grandfather, but this was not the case; he died three years before the birth of the story-

1 Hardy later described this work as a 'sweeping dramatic satire of the squirearchy and nobility, London society, the vulgarity of the middle classes, modern Christianity, church-restoration, and political and domestic morals in general . . . '
(Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p. 61). For full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of the Introduction. Interestingly, Macmillan's reader, John Morley, praised the pastoral scenes in *The Poor Man and the Lady*, noting in particular that 'the opening pictures of the Christmas-eve in the tranter's house are really of good quality' (*Life*, pp. 58–9). This scene and several other episodes were later revised and incorporated in *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

teller, almost in his prime, and long ere reaching the supposed age of William Dewy. There was, in fact, no family portrait in the tale.' (*Life*, p. 93). Hardy's personal experience and genuine sympathy for his characters and their milieu, endow his descriptions with a vividness and authority which must have seemed fresh and interesting to a middle-class, urban reading-public more used to clichéd, condescending depictions of the agricultural and labouring classes. Despite this, Hardy seems to have worried that he had patronised his peasants, for the *Life* records:

> He was accustomed to say that . . . he had rather burlesqued them, the story not so adequately reflecting as he could have wished in later years the poetry and romance that coloured their time-honoured observances. [*Life*, p. 12]

Moreover, in his 1912 Preface Hardy regretted that his representation of 'this little group of church musicians . . . [had been] penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at times.' In October 1873, Hardy wrote to Macmillan with regard to the illustrations for *Far From the Madding Crowd*, expressing his hope that 'the rustics, although *quaint*, may be made to appear intelligent, and not boorish at all.' (*Life*, p. 97)

The rural figures in *Under the Greenwood Tree* may have seemed quaint and picturesque to Hardy's newly-cultivated London eye, yet he succeeded in individualising and humanising his characters, employing a Chaucerian humour – sometimes coarse, elsewhere dead-pan – to dwell upon their idiosyncrasies and their meetings with life's ironies. In his essay, 'The Dorsetshire Farm Labourer', published in *Longman's Magazine* in July 1883, Hardy attacked the commonplace, condescending view of the agricultural classes, declaring:

> it is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed . . . Progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise. They [the labouring classes] are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators. [ed. Wright, pp. 15 and 20][2]

While he noted the improvements that had affected rural lives, he felt deeply the losses which had accompanied change, particularly in terms

2 See also, Millgate, 1971, pp. 206-20.

of sensibility of outlook, observing that increased mobility was resulting in a less intimate relationship with the land and a diminishing of the sense of local participation.

There are two separate but interrelated plotlines in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The first tells of how, in a remote rural parish, the old-fashioned village choir of instrumentalists and singers came to be replaced by a 'modern' harmonium; the second follows the courtship, with its inevitable impediments and glitches, and eventual marriage of Dick Dewy, the tranter's son, and Fancy Day, the well-educated schoolmistress. However, these intertwining narratives are not equal in status. The conventional romance is subordinate to the depiction of scenes and episodes from rural life, and it is the revivification of rural customs and traditions which dominates and enlivens the novel. Hardy's narrative priorities are evident in his 1896 Preface, which makes no mention of the love affair of Fancy and Dick, and in his preference for the novel's original title, *The Mellstock Quire*.[3]

Throughout his life, Hardy demonstrated acute sensitivity to, and derived great joy from, the sacred and secular music that he had heard and played during his youth. He treasured his father's violin and the old music books which had been written out by hand for use by Stinsford church choir, and he transcribed and preserved the words of traditional ballads, seemingly keen to retain links to the past which he rightly feared might soon be broken. For Hardy's family music-making was a major preoccupation, and although Hardy never saw Stinsford choir occupying its place in the church gallery (for it was removed during the 1840s), there was much music in the Hardy home. In the *Life* he recalls how, from an early age, the sounds of his father's violin could move him to dance and weep. The Hardys were well known as string bandsmen, and Hardy himself was a talented young violinist and singer, performing regularly with his family band at suppers, weddings and parties:

> Though healthy he was fragile, and precocious to a degree, being able . . . to tune a violin when of quite tender years. He was of ecstatic temperament, extraordinarily sensitive to music . . . under his father's instruction [he] was soon able to tweedle from notation some hundreds of jigs and country-dances that he found in his father's and grandfather's old books. [*Life*, pp. 15 and 22]

3 Hardy explains that the title was changed 'because titles from poetry were in fashion just then . . . ' (*Life*, p. 86); the substitute title, *Under The Greenwood Tree*, alludes to the song in *As You Like It* (2, 5, 1–8).

Moreover, Hardy's grandfather and father had both been staple members of Stinsford church choir:

> On removing with his wife in 1801 to this home provided by his father John, Thomas Hardy the first (of these Stinsford Hardys) found the church music there in a deplorable condition, it being conducted from the gallery by a solitary old man with an oboe. He immediately set himself, with the easy-going vicar's hearty concurrence, to improve it, and got together some instrumentalists, himself taking the bass-viol as before, which he played in the gallery of Stinsford Church at two services every Sunday from 1801 or 1802 till his death in 1837, being joined later by his two sons, who, with other reinforcements, continued playing till about 1842, the period of performance by the three Hardys thus covering inclusively a little over forty years . . . They were considered among the best church-players in the neighbourhood . . . [*Life*, pp. 8–10]

Singing, dancing and music-making were therefore natural forms of expression for Hardy. There are about two hundred 'musical' poems, permeated with music of many moods; and there is scarcely a story or novel which is not coloured with musical details or which does not imply, explicitly or implicitly, the power of music and dance. Many of the musical episodes and anecdotes are based upon personal reminiscences. In poems such as 'A Church Romance', 'Winter Night in Woodland' and 'The Paphian Ball'; in *A Few Crusted Characters*, and the short stories of *Life's Little Ironies*; in *Under The Greenwood Tree* itself, Hardy relived his own and his father's musical memories through the exploits of the music-men of Mellstock parish:

> The parish being a large and scattered one, it was the custom of Thomas Hardy the First to assemble the rather perfunctory rank-and-file of the choir at his house; and this necessitated suppers, and suppers demanded (in those days) plenty of liquor. This was especially the case on Christmas Eve itself, when the rule was to go to the northern part of the parish and play at every house before supper; then to return to Bockhampton and sit over the meal till twelve o'clock . . . they then started for the other parts of the parish, and did not get home till all was finished at about six in the morning, the performers feeling 'no more than malkins' [a damp rag for swabbing out an oven] in church the next day, as they used to declare.
>
> [*Life*, p. 12]

In Hardy's works music takes many different forms of expression and serves multiple functions, both literal and metaphoric. Music and dance

are social pastimes, as well as art forms; but they are also the very texture of life itself, for Hardy perceives that there is music and dance within and without us all. He shares with his characters an intense emotional response to music, for he senses that the insistent pulse of the tune and beat of the dance is in accord with the beat of life, literally, the heartbeat.[4] Music flows through the Mellstock parish, sustaining the shared life-spirit of the community. Vitality and vibrancy are qualities that Hardy celebrates in his characters and in life in general, and a love of music and dance is frequently associated with a youthful love of life, most especially with sexual love and passion. Dance scenes and musical parties serve as a device to bring characters together and develop relationships, and in *Under the Greenwood Tree* the numerous country-dances are closely related to the theme of the choosing and exchanging of partners. Thus, the *perpetuum mobile* of the dance is allied to the urgency of youth to perpetuate life, which is in turn intensified by the seductive power of music.

Hardy's poem, 'The Fiddler', delights in music's erotic power:

> There's many a heart now mangled
> And waiting its time to go
> Whose tendrils were first entangled
> By my sweet viol and bow!

In the short story, 'The History of the Hardcombes', the two pairs of lovers are inspired by the intoxicating power of the dance to undertake an uncanny, irrational exchange of partners; similarly, Car'line Aspent is bewitched by the 'elfin shrieks' and 'unholy music' of Wat Ollamoor's demonic fiddling in 'The Fiddler of the Reels'. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* Hardy devotes two chapters to the gay rollicking of the Christmas dance at the tranter's cottage, at which the possible intimacies between Fancy and Dick are revealed. With sly humour, Hardy describes the seductive curves of Fancy's eyebrows – like 'slurs in music' (p. 33). During the exultation and intoxication of the reels and jigs, inhibitions are suspended and social barriers removed:

> Again and again did Dick share his Love's hand with another man, and wheel round; then, more delightfully, promenade in a circle with her all to himself, his arm holding her waist more firmly each time, and his elbow getting further and further behind her back, till the distance reached was rather noticeable; and, most blissful,

4 Hardy wrote of *Jude the Obscure* (1895): 'The rectangular lines of the story were not premeditated, but came about by chance: except, of course, that the involutions of four lives must necessarily be a sort of quadrille.' (*Life*, p. 273)

> swinging to places shoulder to shoulder, her breath curling round his neck like a summer zephyr that had strayed from its proper date . . . Fancy was now held so closely that Dick and she were practically one person. [p. 36]

Significantly, when the dance is over, normality is instantly restored, and it takes many months for their relationship to flourish. A piqued Dick observes:

> 'What a miserable deceiving difference between the manners of maid's life at dancing times and at others! . . . A flit is made upstairs – a hat and a cloak put on – and I no more dare to touch her than – ' Thought failed him, and he returned to realities. [p. 40]

In contrast to these exuberant exploits, musical metaphors which illustrate Hardy's sense of rural discontinuity and loss are also common in his works, and the theme of transition and change often assumes a specifically musical expression. The short story 'Absentmindedness in the Parish Quire' reproduces the central narrative of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. In this tale, Hardy combines personal reminiscence, joyful musical expression and cultural loss and discontinuity, with a typical mixture of dry wit, humour and melancholy, mourning the displacement of colourful old customs by new ideas and behaviour, more modern and advanced, but impersonal and dispassionate. Similarly, in the 1896 Preface to *Under the Greenwood Tree* Hardy laments 'the displacement of these ecclesiastical bandsmen by an isolated organist (often at first a barrel-organist) or harmonium player', noting that this dislodgment frequently resulted in the diminishing of the parishioners' interest in church matters. His account of the demise of Mellstock choir is instructive as well as entertaining, for the conversation between the musicians reveals that while one speaker will reject all but the stringed instruments, and another will tolerate the clarinet and the serpent, there are none who will accept the barrel-organ or harmonium.

Hardy's sensitivity to hymns was probably more emotional and aesthetic than religious. He includes many of his best-loved hymns in his novels, and the sentiment attached to these hymns complements the mood of wistfulness which characterises the attitude of both the author and his characters towards religion and the modern Church. Thus he regrets that the change in musical practices:

> . . . has tended to stultify the professed aims of the clergy, its direct results being to curtail and extinguish the interest of parishioners in church doings. Under the old plan, from half a dozen to ten full-grown 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. With a musical executive limited . . . an important union of interests has been lost.
>
> (1896 Preface)

The time-worn hymns had embodied a faith transmitted orally through several generations; but the function of the choir was not solely, or primarily, religious. The impassioned enjoyment and energetic transmission of a cultural heritage which embraced both the sacred and the secular, also upheld and preserved 'an important union of interests' which dissolves with the choir's demise. Hardy's use of the word 'isolated' is significant, for it is those who are considered socially superior to the community in which they live who precipitate the rural tragedy. Maybold is ignorant of and detached from the feelings of his parishioners; for Fancy, organ-playing is simply an amusing social accomplishment, and she possesses none of the committed passion of the men of the choir.

However, we should remember that while Hardy's characterisation is always sympathetic, he is not uncritical. In 'Absent-mindedness in the Parish Quire' it is the Mellstock musicians' propensity to alcohol which is the immediate cause of their dismissal, and a similar ambiguity is apparent in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Ostensibly, Fancy – whose return to Mellstock is the central activating event in the novel – is the direct cause of change: when she enters the church on Christmas morning, 'A new atmosphere seemed suddenly to be puffed into the ancient edifice by her movement, which made Dick's body and soul tingle with novel sensations.' (p. 27). Yet she is not an altogether willing agent, and insists, ' "I never wanted to turn you and your choir out; and I never even said that I could play till I was asked." ' (p. 88). Her 'ear is as fine as her face' (p. 15), and she demonstrates a sensitivity to music which softens the choir's judgment of her, in contrast to Farmer Shiner whose essential coarseness is confirmed by his rude rejection of the choir's Christmas offering and by the unsuitable, crude ballads which he sings in Fancy's presence. In fact, it is the unsuccessful lovers, Maybold and Shiner, who bring about change as a testimony of their love for Fancy, for it is their wish to attain a socially advantageous wife which leads them to encourage Fancy to play. As one musician pithily observes:

> 'Then the music is second to the woman, the other churchwarden is second to Shiner, the pa'son is second to the churchwardens, and God A'mighty is nowhere at all' [p. 63]

It might be even argued that Dick is himself partly responsible for the

choir's demise, for he defects during the Christmas Eve carolling leaving the choir to struggle on without their crucial treble man.

Nevertheless, when Fancy takes her place at the harmonium the emotional climax of the book is reached. She is associated with the pressures causing change even if she does not will them herself: indeed, she is ushered into the novel by a song relating the Fall of Man. As the sound of her harmonium rings out alienation is born, the seeds of tension are sown, and the centuries-old thread of cultural and religious continuity begins to unravel.

Harmony is the dominant concept in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. William Dewy, devoted to music and 'ready to die for the quire' (p. 50), is the most generous and tolerant figure in the novel. Thus, the dismantling of the choir, accepted by Dewy with stoicism and forgiveness, arouses unease and confusion amongst the Mellstock parishioners. Traditions, taken for granted by successive generations, are now destabilised. The living music, dancing and story-telling which has brought the community together in daily and special activities is fading and, viewed from the perspective of Hardy's later works, the demise of the Mellstock choir can be seen to be a quiet foreboding of future destruction and an emblem of greater social and economic upheaval.

Under the Greenwood Tree examines the changing structures of rural society, depicting economic, social and familial relationships in a community which was becoming increasingly educated, mobile and aspiring. The novel underlines the mild snobbery which Hardy observed among the peasantry: for example, Mrs Dewy chides her husband, 'Really, Reuben, 'tis quite a disgrace to see such a man . . . And the cŏllar of your coat is a shame to behold . . . ', complaining that his family were '. . . always such a coarse-skinned family' (p. 30). The Dewy family seems reasonably well-off, yet socially the tranter is placed just above the labourer. Throughout the stumbling love affair of Fancy Day and Dick Dewy, Hardy highlights the social distance between them: indeed, before he has even met Fancy, Dick surveys her delicate new boot, 'feeling that he had no right to do so without having first asked the owner of the foot's position' (p. 13).[5] Fancy's father, situated socially between the Dewys and Maybold, is typical of the more socially mobile rural classes: he has risen from an ordinary keeper to 'head gamekeeper,

5 Hardy described similar tensions in his own family: 'He [his father] was good, too, when young, at hornpipes and jigs, and other folk-dances, performing them with all the old movements of leg-crossing and hop, to the delight of the children, till warned by his wife that this fast perishing style might tend to teach them what it was not quite necessary they should be familiar with, the more genteel 'country-dance' having superseded the former.' (*Life*, p. 13)

timber steward, and general onlooker for this district' (p. 65), has saved a substantial sum of money and educated his daughter away from home in the hope that she will acquire the knowledge and accomplishments to enable her to marry a gentleman 'who sees her to be his equal in polish . . . [and] sha'n't be superior to her in pocket' (p. 113). Dick is disheartened by Mr Day's economic pragmatism, and wonders at his own presumption in asking for a woman 'whom he had seen at the beginning to be so superior to him.' (p. 113)

Fancy eventually rejects her father's plans, yet it is clear that she cares less about Dick than about herself, as the young tranter acknowledges:

> 'What she loves best in the world,' he thought, with an incipient spice of his father's grimness, 'is her hair and complexion. What she loves next best, her gowns and hats; what she loves next best, myself, perhaps!' [p. 103]

When Maybold approaches the picnicking couple she exclaims, ' "That's he coming! How I wish you were not here! – that is, how awkward – dear, dear!" ' (p. 75). She frequently criticises Dick's dress and manners, and patronises him during their journey from Budmouth:

> 'You do know, that even if I care very much for you, I must remember that I have a difficult position to maintain. The vicar would not like me, as his schoolmistress, to indulge in a *tête-à-tête* anywhere with anybody.' (p. 89)

Fancy embodies the generalised idea of an attractive, flighty young woman. She anticipates the dilemma faced by Hardy's subsequent female protagonists in being forced to choose between two or more lovers, yet she is in many ways an atypical Hardy heroine for she does not really suffer for her love. Her essential shallowness is implied by her name, and Hardy's portrait is a satire on the average character of a good-looking girl, capable of honest affection but too readily flattered by charm and attention. However, while Fancy *can* be vain and trying - she flirts with Shiner, feigns illness at the advice of a white witch, impulsively gives in to temptation and accepts Maybold when betrothed to Dick – Hardy suggests that she does genuinely love Dick. Having agreed to be Dick's wife, she struggles to reconcile herself to the plain, mundane outcomes resulting from her choice, 'looking into vacancy with those beautiful eyes of hers – too refined and beautiful for a tranter's wife; but, perhaps, not too good.' (p. 138). Does Fancy experience a fleeting moment of self-knowledge? Or is Hardy's narrator hinting at the existence of a system of values deeper than mere manners and beauty?

* * *

Both the descriptive language and the formal structure of Hardy's works demonstrate the influence of traditional landscape painting on his literary technique. Indeed, to recall a Hardy novel is in many ways to bring to mind visual scenes and impressions: frequently, less is verbally articulated by Hardy or his narrators, and more is silently observed by his characters and readers. He is concerned with modes of perception, visual and intellectual, literal and moral, and repeatedly the reader is invited to stand beside the narrator or the characters in the role of 'voyeur'. Thus, for example, Hardy's portrait of Fancy at the tranter's dance is preceded by the invitation, 'We gain a good view of our heroine as she advances to her place in the ladies' line.' (p. 32). Similarly, the reader joins Fancy and Dick in their carriage as they drive from Budmouth to Casterbridge, sharing their vision:

> ... as their eyes had nothing else to do, they both contemplated the picture presented in front, and noticed how the farmer's wife sat flattened between the two men, who bulged over the end of the seat to give her room, till they almost sat upon their respective wheels ... The farmer's wife, feeling their eyes sticking into her back, looked over her shoulder. [p. 85]

Hardy's interest in painting developed during the 1860s when, as an apprenticed architect in London, he formed the habit of regularly viewing the old masters at the Royal Academy, sampling new art at the French and Grosvenor Galleries, and visiting the National Gallery, where he devoted 'twenty minutes after lunch to an inspection of the masters hung there, confining his attention to a single master on each visit ...' (*Life*, p. 52) In 1863 he made a list of paintings in his Notebook, and his novels are marked by many allusions to the work of the Italian Renaissance, Dutch seventeenth-century art and Classical sculpture.

Under the Greenwood Tree is subtitled, 'A Rural Painting of the Dutch School'. The art of this school is noted for its accuracy and finish, and its warm fidelity to local truth and beauty, rather than grandiose visual declarations in an ostentatious style. In the same way, Hardy paints a realistic and detailed, if somewhat idealistic, portrait of rural life, focussing on the intimacies and interiors of the small Mellstock parish, celebrating the quiet dignity of village life. The tranter's cottage:

> ... was a long low cottage with a hipped roof of thatch, having dormer windows breaking up into the eaves, a chimney standing in the middle of the ridge and another at each end. The window-

> shutters were not yet closed, and the fire- and candle-light within radiated forth upon the thick bushes of box and laurentinus growing in clumps outside, and upon the bare boughs of several codlin-trees hanging about in various distorted shapes . . . The walls of the dwelling were for the most part covered in creepers, though these were rather beaten back from the doorway – a feature which was worn and scratched by much passing in and out, giving it by day the appearance of an old keyhole. [p. 6]

Hardy frequently employs pictorial metaphors and allusions: sometimes they are simple and direct, elsewhere they imply secondary associations and symbolic inferences. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the choir gathers outside Mr Penny's workshop, 'all brightly illuminated, and each was backed up by a shadow as long as a steeple . . . His visitors now came and stood on the outside of his window, sometimes leaning against the sill, sometimes moving a pace or two backwards and forwards in front of it.' (pp. 47–8). Mr Penny himself is 'enthroned in the shadow of the interior', a picture within a picture, 'invariably seen working inside, like a framed portrait of a shoemaker by some modern Moroni.' (p. 48). Similarly, Fancy Day is first revealed 'framed as a picture by the window architrave, and unconsciously illuminating her countenance to a vivid brightness by a candle she held in her left hand, close to her face, her right hand being extended to the side of the window.' (p. 20). Hardy is sensitive to the sentiments generated by a picture and to the emotional qualities which arise unspoken from the formal arrangement of a scene, and his carefully composed scenes are charged with possible meanings for both characters and reader. This 'spiritual vision' of Fancy, tantalisingly brief, stirs in Dick an inventive, exuberant idealism, which contrasts with the usual common sense of the choir.

Yet, despite the repeated use of such 'framing' techniques, Hardy retains a strong sense of realism, as Joan Grundy observes:

> Most of the time in reading [Hardy's] work, especially the novels, we know, though with varying degrees of awareness, that we are looking at pictures. But the effect, after that first sense of alienation . . . has worn off, is to heighten rather than to diminish our sense of reality. The pictures are so vivid that they have life, as actual pictures . . . have it. Their effect is simultaneously to idealise and to reify. The pictures have such finish and perfection as pictures that we seem to see the scenes and objects depicted with an almost hallucinatory clarity. [Grundy, p. 23]

The following description of the tranter's cottage illuminates this 'almost hallucinatory clarity':

> A curl of wood-smoke came from the chimney, and drooped over the roof like a blue feather in a lady's hat; and the sun shone obligingly upon the patch of grass in front, which reflected its brightness through the open doorway and up the staircase opposite, lighting up each riser with a shiny green radiance, and leaving the top of each step in shade. [p. 65]

Grundy suggests that in this passage Hardy creates a mood of timelessness: details such as the sunlight and the 'green radiance' have a pictorial quality which stirs strong memories of actual pictures. However, paradoxically, this arrested moment also possesses a convincing temporality. The open door invites us into the warm, brightness of the Dewys' home – 'We see the bloom on the picture, yet we feel its actuality too.' (Grundy, p. 24).

The villagers of Mellstock – Mrs Day, the innkeeper, the butcher, Enoch – are revealed to us in brief sketches, partaking in everyday actions; only Maybold and the two lovers are more fully portrayed. Thus, when we first meet Dick's father, Reuben – 'a stout florid man about forty years of age, who surveyed people up and down when first making their acquaintance, and generally smiled at the horizon or other distant object during conversations with friends, walking with a steady sway, and turning out his toes very considerably' – he is 'occupied in bending over a hogshead, that stood in the pantry ready horsed for the process of broaching, [and] he did not take the trouble to turn or raise his eyes at the entry of his visitors, well knowing by their footsteps that they were the expected old comrades.' (p. 6). Hardy's descriptions are attentive both to accurate details of dress and demeanour, and to the sensibility and sympathies which these arouse in others. This effect is most marked in Grandfather William:

> . . . an ardent vitality still preserved a warm and roughened bloom upon his face, which reminded gardeners of the sunny side of a ripe ribstone-pippin; though a narrow strip of forehead, that was protected from the weather by lying above the line of his hat-brim, seemed to belong to some town man, so gentlemanly was its whiteness. His was a humorous and kindly nature, not unmixed with a frequent melancholy . . . But to his neighbours he had no character in particular. If they saw him pass by their windows when they had been bottling off old mead . . . they thought concerning him, 'Ah, there's that good-hearted man – open as a child!' If they saw him after just losing a shilling or half-a-crown . . . they thought, 'There's