

Discussion Questions

- 1** The redeeming power of true love is a central subject of Thomas Hardy's novel. How does that love challenge and create conflicts between the residents of Mellstock? What stumbling blocks do the main protagonists encounter along the way? How are those barriers different in the novel and in the film? Do Fancy Day's suitors (Frederic Shiner, Mr. Maybold, and Dick Dewy) express their love in similar ways? Does Hardy seem to value one form of expression over another? Is all love equal under the greenwood tree?
- 2** Fancy Day's education elevates her from simple country girl to sophisticated lady. How does this evolution stand in the way of her marriage to Dick Dewy? Why is her father opposed to their union? What is the role of money in *Under the Greenwood Tree*? In what ways do financial position and social class dictate the characters' choices? Does our own society present us with similar dilemmas, or does our social mobility free us to live as we choose? According to Hardy, is it possible to strike a balance between improving oneself and putting on airs?
- 3** Mellstock village life is built around the local church. What is the nature of religion (and religious life) in Mellstock? As depicted in the story, how is church-going different from actual worship? How does Mr. Maybold, the town vicar, clash with Reuben Dewy and his friends?
- 4** In the novel, Fancy Day accepts proposals of marriage from both Dick Dewy and Mr. Maybold. How is this different in the film? Why do you think the filmmaker chose to alter the plot in this way? The novel also has Mr. Maybold refuse to perform the wedding of Dick and Fancy (a ceremony he agrees to lead in the film). Does Mr. Maybold's emphasis on earthly pleasures and self-satisfaction interfere with his duty to the Church? Does the author seek to reconcile these ostensibly distinct pursuits?
- 5** Music plays a prominent role in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Discuss the struggle between the village choir and Mr. Maybold. Why is the vicar so intent on replacing the choir with the harmonium? Why does Fancy Day's involvement in the musical life of the church cause such consternation? How is the music sung in church different from that played on more festive occasions? Does this shift in musical tone parallel changes throughout the story?
- 6** *Under the Greenwood Tree* is divided into five major sections, four of them relating to the seasons (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall). How do these divisions relate to plot development? How is each season appropriate to its corresponding section? Is this idea given equal treatment in both the novel and the film? Why is weather so important to

daily life in Mellstock? Do seasonal shifts affect us in the same way today? What is the symbolic relationship between the seasons and the different stages of a person's life?

- 7 Throughout *Under the Greenwood Tree*, characters continually face, and are resistant to, change. What types of change do they encounter? In the film, how does the choir seek to subvert Mr. Maybold's plan to use the harmonium? The novel depicts the Mellstock choir as one of the last left in the country; modern tastes lean more towards new instruments. The choir members refer to these modernists as "miserable dumbledores." Why? What is behind their obvious disgruntlement? Why does Reuben Dewy react to his son Dick's desire to grow the family business? What does Mr. Maybold mean when he says he believes in progress "after a fashion"? In the novel, why does Fancy feel a need to temper her modern tendencies? Does she similarly restrain herself in the film? Do any of these characters ultimately come to embrace the changes they initially fear?
- 8 Why did Thomas Hardy title his novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*? What do the tree represent? How does Hardy depict rural life? What kinds of emotion does his imagery evoke? How does his treatment of the countryside and nature shape the central theme of the story? In what ways does the greenwood tree bring together the three rivals for Fancy Day's affection?

Under the Greenwood Tree, or, The Mellstock Quire: A Rural Painting of the Dutch School, by Thomas Hardy, was first published in 1872. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *Under the Greenwood Tree* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/greenwood/>.



You can purchase the *Under the Greenwood Tree* DVD at shoppbs.org. Enter code BOOKANDFILM to receive a 15% discount.

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