The Mellstock-Quire
in *Under the Greenwood Tree*

*Under the Greenwood Tree*, the first of the Wessex novels, was published in 1872 by Thomas Hardy. It is a pastoral of English country life in 1830s, when the life of the community was still quite stable and secure. The rural community changed rapidly in the nineteenth century. Hardy himself underwent the rapid change of social, economical, and cultural standards. Looking back to the better, and simpler past with the nostalgic eyes, he interwove that image of the past with the light touch of the love story in *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

*Under the Greenwood Tree* is the love story of the heroine Fancy Day as the title of the novel comes from a song of the Shakespeare’s comedy, *As You Like It*. However, the story of dissolution of the parish choir is the very subject Hardy described most eagerly. The novel is a sketch of a rural community based on Hardy’s early experiences of Dorset village life. The Dewy family, who sponsor the Mellstock-Quire, and their household are based on the Hardys and their home at Higher Bockhampton, and the choir’s music-making reflects the Hardy family memories. Most of the characters in the novel are musicians and village dwellers who have lived in the parish for many generations and supported the church. Christianity is for them a musical religion. With the feeling of a duty to keep long-established tradition, they devote themselves to the church as musicians.

Time is changing, and fashionable barrel-organs are taking place of the old-fashioned string players in the other parishes, and the Mellstock-Quire, the last one left in the county, is also facing the danger of continuity. The barrel-organ is introduced by the new vicar Mr. Maybold. The churchwarden Mr. Shiner, who is a vulgar and coarse man, proposes to replace the Mellstock-Quire by a new organ. Both Mr. Maybold and Mr. Shiner are very interested in Fancy, who has just returned home as a new school teacher and has been trained to play the organ. Thus the old members of the Mellstock-Quire are swept away by the organ, the symbol of an invasion.

Fancy’s homecoming brings about a series of conflicts, which are harmoniously settled down, and the story is completed by her happy wedding under the greenwood tree. She chooses one of the members of the choir and a son of a tranter, Dick Dewy as her husband. She becomes a member of the Mellstock community by the marriage with Dick. Their marriage is a symbol of harmony and regeneration.
There are many moral conflicts between the country and the city the, community and the individual, and the native and the alien not only in Under the Greenwood Tree but in his later novels. Hardy depicts a drama of the traditional bands of string instruments which are replaced by the modern organ as church musicians in the novel. As I have already treated this novel as the root of the Wessex novels, I would like to discuss here in this essay mainly about a drama of the dissolution of the Mellstock-Quire.

『緑樹の陰で』におけるメルストック聖歌隊

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『緑樹の陰で』は、ウェセックス小説の最初の作品として1872年に出版された。作品の舞台は農村社会がまだ安定していた1830年代に設定されていて、トマス・ハーディは、古きよき時代を想いをこめて振り返っている。彼がこの作品で一番描きたかった主題は、ヒロインを巡る恋物語ではなく、メルストック聖歌隊と彼らの活動を再現することである。

ハーディの一家は、スティンスフォードの教会の聖歌隊を支えてきた音楽愛好家であった。ハーディの幼い頃のこの思い出は、同じくメルストック聖歌隊のスポンサーであるデューイ家と重なって生き生きと生き返り、ヒロインファンシーと彼女の恋人、ディック・デューイの恋の伴奏曲とも言うべき役割を果たしている。

村の中心的存在である素朴で質素な教会には、メルストック聖歌隊の奏でる弦楽器の響きこそまことに似つかわない。しかし、彼らも時代の流れには勝てない。新任の若い牧師マイロードと教区委員の二人が、当時流行の手回しオルガンを推進する。村の学校教師として帰郷したファンシーが、オルガン奏者として、聖歌隊に代わり、教会音楽を担うことになる。

村の伝統を長年にわたって支えてきた聖歌隊の解散と共に、信仰心からではなく、音楽を通じて教会に奉仕してきた村人達の教会への関心が薄れていく。彼らはオルガンの騒がしい音を聴きながら、遠外感すら感じるのである。

社会や経済が急速に変貌し、価値基準が大きく変わった19世紀に生きたハーディは、古きもののいかにして新しいものに没ぼされるいかという時代の真理に深い興味を示し、それを作品の中に描いた。「緑樹の陰で」はそうした新旧の交代劇のひとつが描かれているが、タイトルの示唆のように、万事がまるで治まるハッピーエンディングとなっている。ファンシーとディックが古い木の下で、伝統に則った結婚式をすることによって、古いものと新しいものが和合する。