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## Milton and the Fascists

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to recall the event itself more abstractly. All people clothe their memories in a narrative dress. Further research into published autobiographies will help to support or refute the hypothesis which is presently based on oral evidence.

## MILTON AND THE FASCISTS

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In August 1925 the Italians placed a memorial tablet honoring Milton on the wall of the Paradisino at Vallombrosa, where he is said to have stayed during his tour of Italy. Actual evidence that Milton was at Vallombrosa is scant; all we really have are lines 302-4 of Book I of Paradise Lost. Nevertheless, the Italians did place the memorial tablet in his honor. The question is why.

One critic seems to believe that the monks invented the story about Milton's visit and placed the tablet in his honor to attract tourists and sell liqueurs. This is doubtful, since the monks were not responsible for the tablet. All evidence points to the fact that the tablet was placed for political reasons. Mussolini had declared his dictatorship in January of 1925, and he wanted nothing more than to create strong political ties with Great Britain. This paper suggests that the ceremony represented an attempt to build these ties. Speeches given at the ceremony celebrate Milton's "moral purity" and his friendship with Cromwell, the latter of whom is compared favorably to Mussolini. The keynote speaker was Ugo Ojetti, said to be Mussolini's "chief spokesman on cultural matters."

Moreover, Mussolini was having problems in Italy convincing many intellectuals to join his cause. In 1925 a group of these intellectuals had gathered to make a collective statement on the compatibility between fascism and intelligence, and to carve out some new ideas about the function of art under the new regime. There was little agreement, and Mussolini, still recognizing the importance of the support of intellectuals, created what was essentially a propaganda ministry to sponsor events such as the one at Vallombrosa.

Interestingly enough, no one in either

Britain or America seemed to question the motives of the new Italian government. But, after all, it was brand new, and in reality Mussolini had strong support in England in the early 1920s. The only controversy generated by the presses centered on whether the trees at Vallombrosa were deciduous, just another sign of how non-threatening Mussolini's rise to power was to the West.

**THOMAS HARDY'S GOTHIC HERITAGE:  
A STUDY OF HIS MAJOR FICTION**

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A product of an isolated English village's store of dark, superstitious tales, and an avid reader of sensational literature from early childhood, Thomas Hardy the English novelist developed a strong Gothic sensibility for his Victorian readers. Hardy's unique Gothic aesthetic is seen most strongly and most effectively in his major novels, Far From the Madding Crowd (1874), The Return of the Native (1878), and Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891) among them. The tragic heights to which his characters reach and his particular use of language are the direct result of his strong Gothic heritage and use of classic Gothic narrative elements. These conventions and his use of a Gothic rhetoric enhance his creation of fascinating characters such as Queen of the Night, Eustacia Vye, and the Red Devil himself, Diggory Venn the Reddleman in The Return, of the duality of the real and a partly dream world presented with bits of horror and superstition and whims of fate in Far From the Madding Crowd, and of the archtypal Gothic heroine and villain in Tess. Upon close reading of these texts, we can "reconstruct" these major novels as Gothic tales with all the trappings of the convention: domestic situations to enhance terror and excitement, a supernatural atmosphere, grotesque characters, and irrational coincidence--all flavored with the literary Gothic's rhetorical excesses.

With this background, we can better assess the fiction in ways not done before. A deeper look at his use of Gothic conventions allows modern readers to undercut the historical barrage of critical controversy concerning