



Tommaso Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1427) Chiesa del Carmine, Firenze

John Milton (1608-1674) is one of England's most important and influential Renaissance poets. He lived in a tumultuous period which witnessed the beheading of Charles the First, followed by Cromwell's introduction of republican government (the English Commonwealth and the Protectorates) after which monarchy was reinstated. Milton was extremely well-read, indeed he is supposed to have read everything written in English, Greek, Latin and Italian which was published at his time. This extensive reading weakened his eyesight so greatly that he turned blind.

Milton's most famous works are the two classically inspired epic poems *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* which in iambic pentameter (i.e. blank verse) tell the biblical stories of how Satan lost his position in Heaven, of the temptation of Eve, of Adam and Eve's banishment from Paradise and finally of Christ's temptation in the wilderness.

from *Paradise Lost*

John Milton

The Banishment (XII) (1667)

So spake our mother Eve, and Adam heard
Well pleased, but answered not; for now too nigh
The Archangel stood, and from the other hill
To their fixed station, all in bright array
5 The Cherubim descended; on the ground
Gliding metéorous, as evening mist
Risen from a river o'er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,
10 The brandished sword of God before them blazed
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,
Began to parch the temperate clime; whereat
In either hand the hastening Angel caught

banishment *sb* fordrivelse
spake = spoke
nigh = near
fixed *adj* fast
a'rray *sb* 1) opstilling 2)
klædedragt
cherub *sb* (pl cherubim)
kerub, engel
me'téorous = meteoric
adv som en meteor
mist *sb* dis
marish = marsh *sb* marsk
brandish *vb* svinge, true
blaze *vb* flamme
fierce *adj* voldsom
torrid *adj* brændende
vapour *sb* damp
Libyan *adj* libysk
a'dust *adj* afsveden
parch *vb* udtørre
temperate *adj* behagelig
clime = climate
where'at *konj* hvorpå

lingering *adj* nølende
 subjected *adj* lavtlig-
 gende
 be'hold *vb* (glds) se
 late = recently
 seat = home
 brand = sword
 throng *vb* stikle sammen
 fiery *adj* gloende
 Providence *sb* forsynet

Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
 Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
 To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
 They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
 Of the Paradise, so late their happy seat,
 Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate
 With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.
 Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
 The world was all before them, where to choose
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
 They hand in hand, wandering steps and slow,
 Through Eden took their solitary way.

Analysis and Interpretation

1. Read the poem out loud. Characterize the poem's use of rhyme and rhythm.
2. Milton wrote the poem in 1667 and the language reflects his time. Find examples of old and archaic words and phrases.
3. Examine how Milton describes the angels. What images and metaphors does he use? What is the effect?
4. How do Adam and Eve react to the situation?
5. After the gates of Paradise have been closed behind Adam and Eve, there seems to be a change in the mood of the poem. Discuss this change (the last five lines).

Post-reading

1. What do you think Eve said to Adam ("so spake our mother Eve and Adam heard well pleased")?
2. At the end of the poem Adam and Eve leave the safety of Paradise and enter a completely unknown world. They have actually become the first travellers of the world.

Choose between the following assignments:

- a. Re-create their conversation and act it out.
- b. Use your imagination and describe what the world looks like.
- c. How are Adam and Eve equipped for their journey – and how should they in your mind be equipped?
3. Find pictures and paintings that illustrate the story of Adam and Eve; how do the pictures correspond with Milton's version? You can use the illustration on page 10 as a starting point.