

# Creating a Monster with *Paradise Lost*

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September 18, 2018

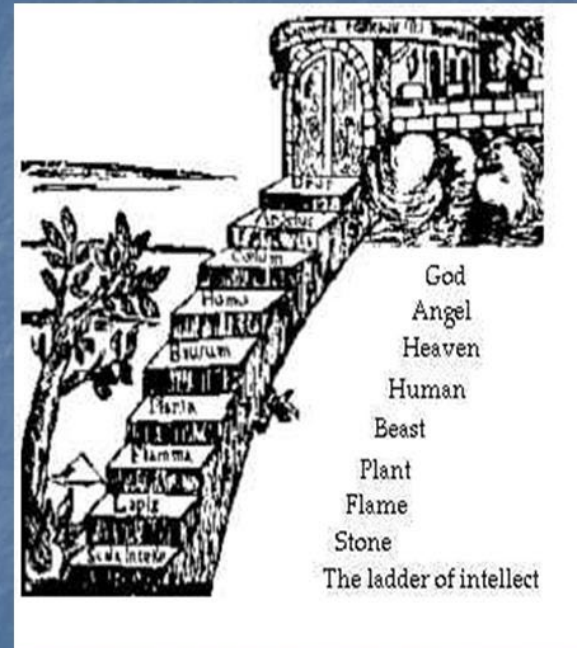
Frankenstein Bicentennial Celebration 2018

# The Renaissance World View: The Great Chain of Being

## The Elizabethan World Picture

- Elizabethans saw the world as a vast, unified, hierarchical order, or "Great Chain of Being," created by God.
- Every existing being, or thing, was ranked within a category on the chain.
- Categories were ranked by the attributes of their members, from the lowest group – all matter and no spirit – the highest group – all spirit and no matter.

(Keach, Richetti, and Robbins 139)



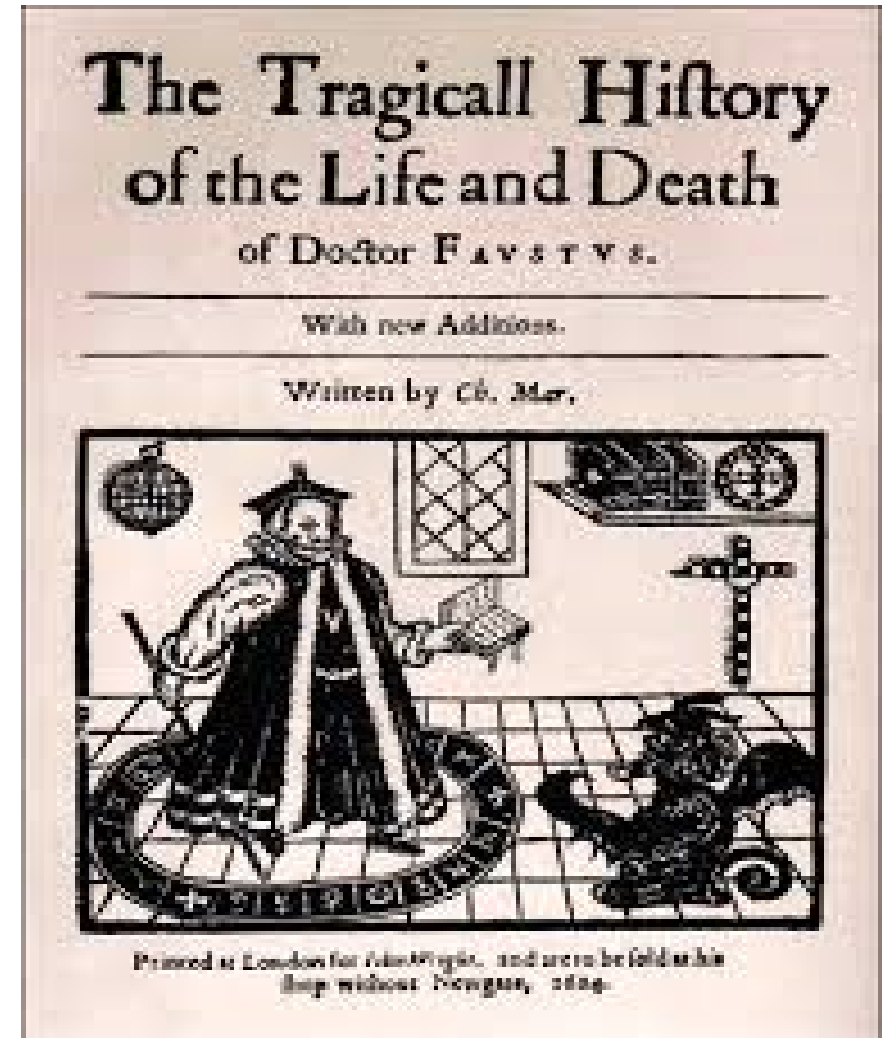
# Great Chain of Being

## HIERARCHY



# Myth and Tragedy

Prometheus



# Key Renaissance Characteristics

- Natural hierarchy, all leading to God
  - Great Chain of Being
  - Mankind's position between the Angels and the Animal World
- Age of Science:
  - i.e. Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*
  - development of the scientific method
- Reason vs Passion
  - i.e. Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*
  - Shakespeare's tragedies
- Pride vs. Humility

# Reason vs Passion

- Reason is gift from God and separates mankind from the animal kingdom
- Mankind's position in the universal hierarchy is between the pure reason of the angels and the base emotion of the animal kingdom
- Reason lives in the head (hence higher); emotion or passion in the heart and physical sexuality (hence lower)
- Mankind is urged to be more like the angels and less like the animals; that is, to control her/his emotions and passions with reason
- When passion and emotion dominate over reason, chaos ensues and leads to pride over humility and feelings of despair

# Reason vs. Passion

The Archangel Raphael describes Man's Reason as a gift from God (Bk 7, lines 505-515):

There wanted yet the Master work, the end  
Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone  
And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd  
With Sanctity of Reason, might erect  
His Stature, and upright with Front serene  
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence  
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,  
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good  
Decends, thither with heart and voice and eyes  
Directed in Devotion, to adore  
And worship God Supreme...

"A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquility. I do not think the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule"

(Victor Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein*, Vol. 1, chapter 3, section 12)



# RENAISSANCE WISDOM TRADITION

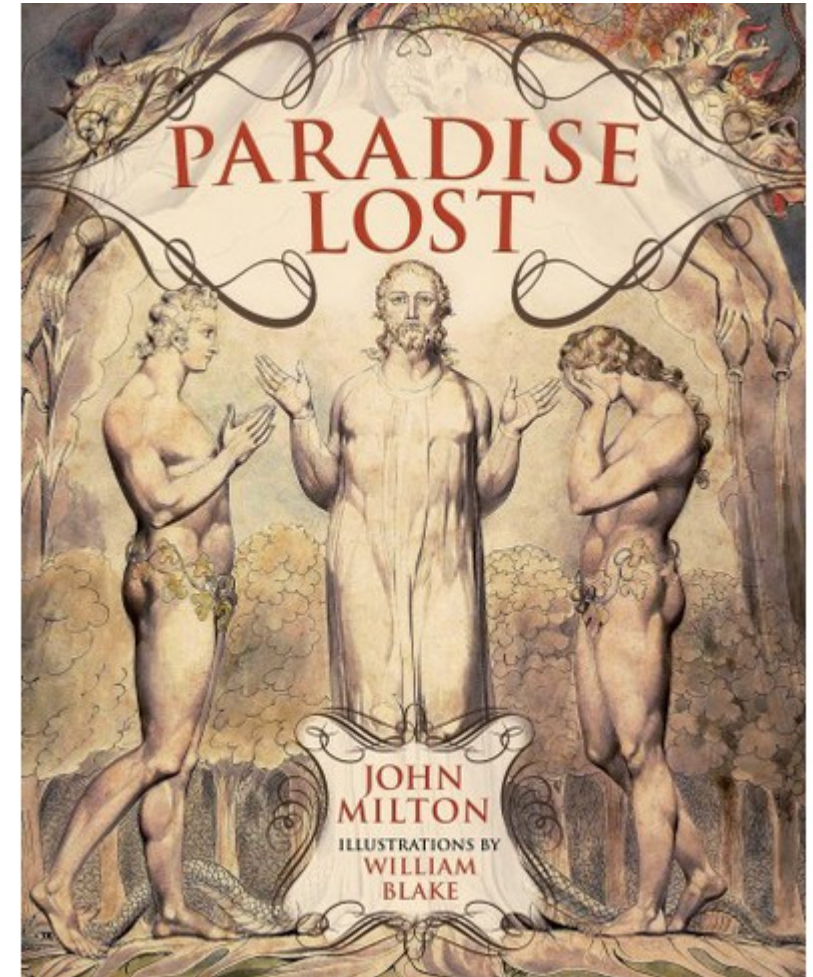
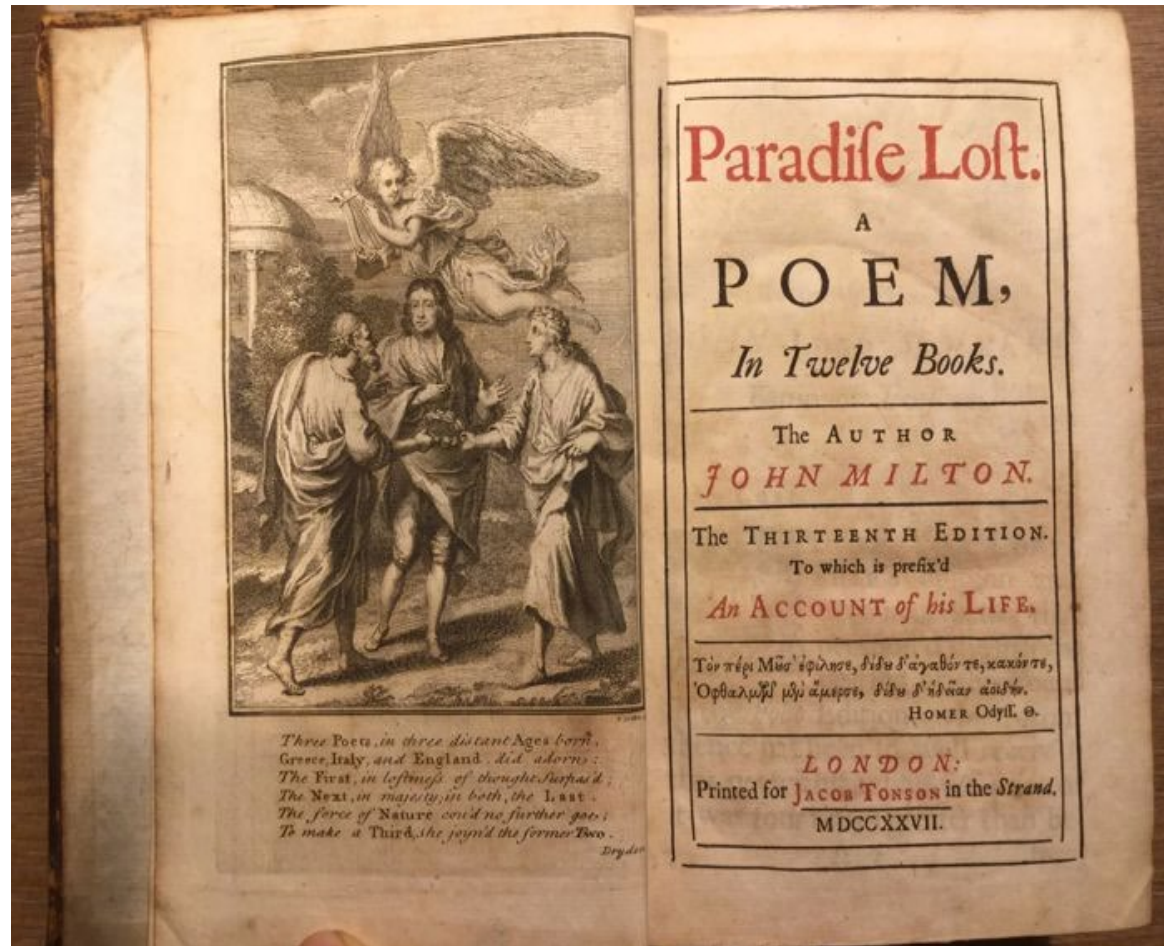


Pierre Charron  
1541-1603

- ❖ These traditions continue to the Renaissance, when wisdom is again secularized (Rice, 1958)
- ❖ **Culminating example:** Pierre Charron's (1601) *de la Sagesse* (on Wisdom).
- ❖ Distinguishes three kinds of wisdom:
  - ❖ **worldly** wisdom needed for material and social success(expertise),
  - ❖ **human** wisdom needed for the art of living, and
  - ❖ **divine** wisdom, a gift of God that brought ultimate truth and meaning about human life.
- ❖ *de la Sagesse* mainly concerns human wisdom and had a strong ethical dimension.
- ❖ Charron also laments that there is no public schooling and so much human potential is wasted.
- ❖ After the Renaissance, pursuit of wisdom and happiness is abandoned for the pursuit of truth and utility



# Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667)



# Why Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

- First Published in 1667, following the close of the English Civil War and Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660
- An epic poem in 12 books
- Key characters: Narrator, Satan, Adam & Eve, God, His Son, the Angels
- Based on the story of Creation in Genesis, *Paradise Lost* focused on the civil war in heaven caused by Lucifer's rebellion against God, an act of supreme pride; thrown into Hell and becomes Satan; seduces God's newly created creatures Adam & Eve in the guise of a serpent; the consequences of humankind's loss of paradise; and God's final triumph through the resurrection of His Son
- Pre-Lapsarian (Unfallen; knew Good intuitively) vs Post-Lapsarian (Fallen; knew Good in contrast to Evil) world: Ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; Creature learns difference between Good and Evil by reading *Paradise Lost* and its account of the Fall of Mankind



# Despair and Happiness

Satan



Adam & Eve with the Archangel Raphael



# Frankenstein's Creature: From Adam & Eve to Satan

Milton's *Paradise Lost* helps us understand the Creature's evolution from Adam & Eve to Satan:

The Creature as a perverted image of Adam & Eve, alike but very different:

- Created outside of the natural process, by a Creator (God vs. Victor Frankenstein)
- Innocent and childlike (Eve's narration of her creation; the Creator's similar narration of his first days)
- God created mankind out of love; Victor created the Creature out of *hubris*
- God loved his creations; Victor was aghast from the moment he saw life in the Creature
- Benevolent and full of Reason; need for Companionship (Adam asks God to create a companion for him, as the Creature does with Victor) ; God complies, Victor ultimately refuses

# Innocence of God's Creatures before the Fall

- Paradise Lost, Bk 3, lines 681-689:

So spake the false dissembler unperceiv'd;  
For neither Man nor Angel can discern  
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks  
Invisible, except to God alone,  
By his permissive will, through Heav'n and Earth:  
And oft though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps  
At wisdom's Gate, and to simplicity  
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill  
Where no ill seems.

## Eve's Recollection of her Creation: A Glimpse of Beauty

### A tale of innocence (PL, Book 4, lines 449-469):

That day I oft remember, when from sleep  
I first awak't, and found myself repos'd  
Under a shade on flow'rs, much wond'ring where  
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.

...I thither went

With unexperienc't thought, and laid me down  
On the green bank, to look into the clear  
Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky.  
As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd  
Bending to look, just opposite,  
A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd  
Bending to look on me, I started back,  
It sharted back, but pleas'd I soon return'd  
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks  
Of sympathy and love...



## The Creature's Recollection of his Creation: A Glimpse of Horror

Echoes of Eve's Sense of Innocence in the Creature's language:

(Vol. 2, chapter 4, section 13)

"I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity."

# Victor's Faustian Pride

The Creature to Victor, drawing direct comparison between himself and Adam, and by implication, between Victor and God;

A sign of Victor's Faustian pride:

(Vol 2, chapter 2, section 11):

"Remember that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous."

# Creature Compares his Creation to that of Adam

Vol. 2, Chapter 7, section 7:

"But Paradise Lost excited different and far deeper emotions....I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me."

# Frankenstein's Creature: From Adam & Eve to Satan

The Creature (and Victor) becomes like Satan:

- Dominated by thirst for knowledge without limits
- Characterized by pride; belief in godlike powers
- Absence of companionship, isolation
- “Wherever I am is hell”

# Isolation and Despair

The Creature describes the isolation that leads to his despair; contrasts his condition with that of Adam's; underscores the vast difference between God the Creator and Victor the Creator:

Vol. 2, chapter 7, section 11:

“...sometimes I allowed my thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathizing with my feelings and cheering my gloom; their angelic countenances breathed smiles of consolation. But it was all a dream: no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator; but where was mine? he had abandoned me; and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him.”

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Implications: Technology and Humanity

What lessons do *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* provide us in the transformative 21<sup>st</sup> century economy?

Some idea for discussion:

- What are dangers of unfettered dedication to scientific discovery without attention to consequences?
- What results from little concern for impact on human life and community?
- When happens when a strong seduction of new discoveries in technology becomes an obsession?
- How does a proliferation of negative impacts of technology impact our humanity?
- How do we guard against pride, isolation and despair when we push the boundaries of technology and knowledge?