

NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM IN JOHN MILTON'S
NATIVITY ODE

By

ROLAND E. SODOWSKY

Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

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Thesis Approved:

David S. Berkeley

Thesis Adviser

William R. Gray

D. D. Durham

Dean of the Graduate College

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PREFACE

In this paper I offer further and perhaps more convincing proof in support of a theory first advanced by Maren-Sofie Røstvig to the effect that Milton composed his Nativity Ode according to a system of numbers with symbolic meanings. My analysis is concerned only with the Biblically significant numbers, Røstvig having dealt with a series of numbers important in Platonic and Neoplatonic formulations. Proceeding on the assumption that Milton invited close inspection of his technique of composition in this poem through his unique stanzaic structure, I first elicit a series of numbers from that structure which all have well-established meanings according to Biblical and patristic thought. These meanings taken together comprise a statement which differs from what appears to be the literal meaning of the poem. A close reading of the poem supports this symbolic statement, and furthermore the same set of numbers reappears in the larger units of meaning, whose divisions are well-defined.

I have attempted to avoid some of the quicksands of numerological criticism, such as the forcing of numerical interpretations upon unapt material, the arbitrary assignment of meaning to a number, or the mingling of numerical meanings from different systems of thought.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. David S. Berkeley for his sound advice and many helpful suggestions, and particularly for his discovery of further evidence that Milton used symbolic numbers in his poetry, namely in Lycidas. Also, Dr. William R. Wray offered useful

suggestions at a late stage in the preparation of this paper. For first arousing my interest in numerology and its implications in sixteenth and seventeenth century poetry, I owe thanks to Dr. Alastair Fowler of Brasenose College, Oxford.

NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM IN JOHN MILTON'S
NATIVITY ODE

Certain numerical peculiarities in Milton's ode On the Morning of Christ's Nativity have led Maren-Sofie Røstvig to hypothesize the composition of the poem according to numbers which have symbolic values in Platonic or Christian schemes and which through those values structurally support the theme of the poem.¹ A re-examination of the numerical pattern within the Hymn's stanzas and of that pattern's relationship to the larger units of meaning in the Hymn will, I believe, disprove a portion of Røstvig's formulation but strengthen her general hypothesis that Milton imposed the poem on a complex framework of numbers which had symbolic importance for him and other learned men of the Renaissance and Reformation.

Numerological criticism of English poetry is scarce. A. Kent Hieatt in Short Time's Endless Monument² shows that Milton's master, Edmund Spenser, composed Epithalamion according to a numerical pattern which depicted not only the hours of the day and the days of the year, but also the sun's diurnal change of position as seen against the background of stars, and even the proportions of day and night which occur at a particular latitude on the date of the summer solstice. In defining the function of numerical symbolism in poetry, Hieatt says, "This method requires that beneath a simple literal surface profound symbolic communication of an integrated continuity should take place covertly, but in a way that will repeat itself to the intelligent and

sympathetic reader...."³ Hiatt suggests that Milton followed Spenser in using a numerical method of composition, but offers no evidence.⁴ Alastair Fowler in Spenser and the Numbers of Time⁵ demonstrates the bewildering complexity of Spenser's numerical symbolism in the Faerie Queene, where the poet weaves together patterns of numbers which derive meaning from systems of Pythagorean, astronomical, and Christian thought. Stating that "in the conduct of numerological criticism the temptation to project illusory patterns is so seductive that a strict procedural method is indispensable,"⁶ Fowler offers these guidelines:

The critic should confine his attention to the external sections of the work, or to passages that are clearly defined by discontinuities or prominent features in their contents.

...

'Type fallacies' are to be avoided. Thus, if the stanza-count of a passage is asserted to have an astronomical value the stanza-counts of complementary passages ought to have complementary astronomical values, not Pythagorean or Biblical ones.

...

No formal number should be broken down into component symbolic numbers (for example, by factorization) unless a precedent for the operation can be found in some probable source.

...

There must be congruence between the meaning assigned to the formal number and the meaning of the passage it measures.⁷

Fowler refers to "line-count numerology" in Paradise Lost⁸ but does not comment on Milton's shorter poetry. Gunnar Qvarnström in The Enchanted Palace⁹ demonstrates a symmetrical 33-day chronology in Paradise Lost, many speeches which have numerically significant line-

count totals, and a correlation between the arrangement of divisions into four "epic blocks" (in the 1667, ten-book edition) and theories of musical harmony. Like Heatt, Fowler, and Røstvig, Qvarnström is concerned to show that Milton, Spenser, and some lesser poets-- Alexander Ross, Edward Benlowe, George Chapman, and Henry More, for example--of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempted to use numbers with connotative meanings as integral parts of the communication of their poetry; he says Heatt's analysis of Epithalamion shows "...that the intricate formal pattern is no strait-jacket for the poetic imagination, and no external husk around a core which alone has poetic vitality, but on the contrary that the numerical pattern forms a relevant and active part of the poetic process of mimesis."¹⁰

Qvarnström does not consider Milton's shorter poetry in his book. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. in a recent article which attempts to demonstrate a formal circular pattern in the rhyme scheme of Lycidas utilizes some of the numerological connotations of the number ten in his argument.¹¹ Wittreich refers to Røstvig's findings concerning numerical composition, but does not examine the numbers in the Nativity Ode.¹²

In addition to the Nativity Ode, Røstvig examines Comus, some of Spenser's shorter poems, and poems by Henry More and George Chapman. In Comus Røstvig sees correlation between the contents of certain speeches and the total number of lines in them. For instance, Comus' "numbers" are multiples of five in his long speeches because five is the number of the world of the senses. Røstvig also cites Biblical authority for the evil connotations of five: the five-and-twenty men who worship the sun in Ezekiel 8 and give wicked counsel in

Ezekiel 11 and the five kings of Midian in Numbers 31. On the other hand, the Lady and the Attendant Spirit in Comus prefer the number six in its various forms--12, 16, 60, 36--in their speeches. Again, Ezekiel 9 provides authority in the six armed men who, Røstvig says, are "God's chosen agents," representing the "power of God."¹³ Six is a "perfect number" in that it equals the sum of its divisors (1, 2, and 3), and thus it "is an apt symbol of that Nature, whose gifts should be dispersed in 'unsuperfluous even proportion'" [Comus, l. 773].¹⁴ Røstvig mentions elsewhere (p. 42), but does not apply here, the perfection associated with the number six because it symbolizes the created universe (God finished the task in six days), an association which one might make with the virtuous heroine of Comus.

In the Nativity Ode Røstvig sees in the four stanzas of seven lines each in the poem a numerical representation of the temporal world: seven days in the week, seven ages of man, four seasons of the year, four weeks in the month, four elements, humors, winds, etc. From the temporal world one enters "the eighth age of the reign of Christ"¹⁵ in the Hymn, which consists of twenty-seven stanzas of eight lines each. In choosing this pair of cubed numbers ($2^3 = 8$ and $3^3 = 27$), Milton was aware of the implications of the numbers in the lambda of the Platonic theory of creation,¹⁶ according to Røstvig: "eight symbolises the passive matter out of which the Hymn is created by means of the active principle of form symbolised by the cube of three. And as a result of this juxtaposition...harmony is again created, namely that harmony between form and matter, unity and multiplicity, God and man which was destroyed at the Fall, and the re-establishment of which became possible with the redemptive action of Christ."¹⁷ Røstvig notes

that the Hymn contains two other cubes, $64(4^3)$ and $216(6^3)$, the number of syllables per stanza and the total number of lines; through the various cubes, "everywhere perfection is in this manner made permanent and lasting."¹⁸ Also, the "ninefold harmony" of line 131 is a broad hint to the reader concerning the poem's structure: that is, the poem consists of three units of nine stanzas each, describing the first Christmas, the harmony holding "Heaven and Earth in happy union," and the routing of the pagan gods. "Thus 999 is the number of the great name of God written with letters signifying the four elements...." The three nines are in the Hymn's external form, and it "'runs' towards Christ with a course that is harmonious and sweet."¹⁹ Although concurring with Røstvig's interpretation of the poem and the cubed numbers of the Hymn, I do not believe the structure of the Hymn supports her theory of the "triple nines," for these reasons: on a purely narrative level, no break occurs between stanzas IX and X, where the unit about "harmony" should begin; the past tense verb forms continue through stanza X and the narrative sense is unbroken up to stanza XIII, where a definite shift--to direct address--takes place. In Røstvig's second "nine" (stanzas X-XVIII), the persona, or "singer," of the Hymn deals with many subjects other than "harmony"; also, though there is much of this quality in the poem, it is not of the earth but of the angels--for as the Hymn's persona plainly states in stanza XVI ("But wisest Fate says no"), the "crystal spheres" which he addresses in XIII do not "ring out," any more than Time fetches back Vergil's Age of Gold in XIV. Of all the commentators on the Ode, only Rosemond Tuve seems to have grasped this point.²⁰ Finally, the routing of the pagan gods, Røstvig's third "nine," actually covers only eight stanzas, XIX through

XXVI; the sense of stanza XXVII--"But see! the Virgin blest, /Hath laid her Babe to rest" (ll. 237-238)--is worlds away from "Libyc Hammon" or "sullen Moloch." The "triple nines" exist here only in that three nines equal twenty-seven, and one expects even the young Milton to draw out the senses more variously than that.

Rather than this triad of equal units and their inaccurate correspondences with the meaning of the material they are supposed to contain, I think a more realistic division of the Hymn's subject matter unveils a series of numbers which are significant according to a system of Biblical and patristic symbolism and which not only correspond to the meaning of the units of thought they number, but intensify and clarify that meaning. That Milton was aware of the connotative values in Platonic and Neoplatonic systems of the cubed numbers in the poem is likely, I think, and he probably chose them as external structural devices because of their associations with solidarity, harmony, and wholeness;²¹ but these numbers are not embedded in the meaning of the poem and their thematic contribution is less than that of the Biblically important numbers six, one, eight, and twelve, which occur within each stanza and also number the thought units of the poem. These numbers, plus another cubed number which Røstvig failed to uncover, comprise a thematic statement, a meaning which has been "suffused by the light of numbers,"²² to use St. Augustine's words.

Milton in his vast reading could hardly have avoided the subject of numerology. The literature relating to numerical symbolism in the seventeenth century appears to have been immense and to have represented many ages and schools of thought. Henry Reynolds in an essay, "Mythomystes," written about 1633, calls Pythagoras the "Master of

Silence" because "that great Master aduertiseth that wee ought not to communicate to vnworthy mindes. . . ." ²³ Milton was aware of this tradition even as a schoolboy, as his Prolusion II illustrates:

...he [Pythagoras] seems to have followed the example of the poets--or, what is almost the same thing, of the divine oracles--by which no sacred and arcane mystery is ever revealed to vulgar ears without being somehow wrapped up and veiled. (p. 603)

The Timaeus of Plato greatly influenced Augustine, ²⁴ and likewise, Milton has been shown to have used Plato's theory of creation in Paradise Lost, a theory inseparably connected to the numerical lambda of the Timaeus. ²⁵ Throughout his writings, Augustine is concerned with the symbolism and "wisdom" of numbers. In De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis, for example, he translates Hebrew cheshbon as "number" in Ecclesiastes 7:25: "I and my heart have gone round, that I might know, and consider, and inquire the wisdom and the number." The Vulgate here has sapientiam et rationem, "reason," instead of sapientiam et numerum. ²⁶ Discussing a poem in The City of God, he comments that "the verses are in all twenty-seven, which make a trine, fully quadrate, and solid. For three times three is nine, and three times nine is twenty-seven." ²⁷ In De Vera Religione he refers to "the deep ties of nature which are arranged by the unchangeable law of numbers." ²⁸ Besides the certain influence of Plato, Augustine, and Spenser, Milton probably encountered numerological lore in cabalistic writings, in which he was widely read, according to Marjorie Hope Nicolson. ²⁹ Another source would have been The Devine Weekes and Workes of Du Bartas, which Milton has been shown to have used both early and late in his career. ³⁰ A contemporary of Milton's, Sir Thomas Browne, wrote in Religio Medici (ca. 1635), "I have often admired the

mystical way of Pythagoras, and the secret Magick of numbers",³¹ his Garden of Cyrus (1658), which is appropriately divided into five chapters, finds symbolic meanings for the quincunx and the number five everywhere in the created universe.

Besides his reading, Milton even as a grammar student probably encountered the "science" of numerical symbolism through one of his teachers, according to Harry Francis Fletcher, who discusses Milton's mathematical studies in The Intellectual Development of John Milton: "Gill's [Alexander Gill, Sr., the high master at St. Paul's] own mathematical interests are rather shakily discernible in the numerology of his cabalistic citations and quotations...."³² Furthermore, Joseph Mead, one of Milton's tutors at Cambridge, appears to have had a similar numerological interest, judging from a statement by John Worthington, editor of Mead's Works (1664): "His Humanity-Studies and Mathematical labours were but Initial things, which he made attendant to the Mysteries of Divinity...."³³ The problem then is not to show that Milton was familiar with the mysteries of numerology, but to determine whether he actually used symbolic numbers, and, if he did, which system or systems. In the Nativity Ode, he appears to have used such numbers, and his method is syncretistic, involving Platonic and Biblical schemes. Since Røstvig has explicated the Platonic numbers, I am here concerned only with the Biblical series.

The stanzaic structure which Milton devised for the Nativity Ode has unique characteristics, traits peculiar enough to warrant minute examination. The stanzas, eight lines long, have a rhyme scheme of aabccbdd; within most stanzas, divisions of thought occur according to the scheme aab, ccb, dd (stanzas III, XIII, XVI, XVIII, and XXVI are

exceptions); the b rhymes function to bring together the meanings of the first six lines, and the final dd verses slow the pace and round off, so that each stanza is self-contained (except for XVI, which runs on strongly into XVII). The verses aa and cc contain six syllables per line, the bb pair has ten syllables each, and dd has eight in the first line and twelve in the second. Thus the lengths of the lines function integrally in the communication of the meaning of the stanzas: the quick, insistent sounds of the aa and cc pairs are tempered each time by the longer b verse, and the intermediate eight-syllable line prepares for the finality of the alexandrine, so that the rhythmic six-six-ten, six-six-ten, eight-twelve series comprises three sets of "waves," the first two building up, the third culminating and resolving in the slower, more stately sound of the alexandrine. Stanza V illustrates this movement well:

But peaceful was the night
 Wherein the Prince of light
 His reign of peace upon the earth began:
 The Winds, with wonder whist,
 Smoothly the waters kiss't,
 Whispering new joys to the mild Ocean,
 Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
 While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

The Biblical significance of the numbers which appear in this stanzaic structure--six, ten, eight, and twelve--may be readily aligned with the general meaning of the poem: Christ's birth brings temporary peace, is a means of closer association between God and earth, and is the initial event in that long, painful process of rebirth which the world must endure before final union with God, before the celestial marriage of the Lamb and the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21.

In Biblical and patristic terms, six is the number of creation and therefore of the world and man. Augustine says, "...these events of

creation were performed in six days because of the perfection of the number of six... six... is made of the conjunction of the parts; and in this did God make perfect all his works."³⁴ The relationship between six and ten in the "six-six-ten" sets within the stanza represents the relationship, or perhaps yearning, of the created for its creator, that is, of man for God; ten, in patristic, Platonic, and Pythagorean systems, represents "the point at which all numbers return to their sacred origin, the number one,"³⁵ the monad, which "... is not a number, but a principle, an essence rather than a being; it is indivisible and uncreated."³⁶ Most systems regard ten and multiples of ten (100, 1000, etc.) as having the same meaning as the monad,³⁷ which Macrobius calls "... the beginning and ending of all things, yet itself not knowing a beginning or ending..."³⁸ In other words, the monad represents God. Thus the first two numbers in the stanzas of the Ode express a need for union between the world and God. The second pair, eight and twelve, represent the means, or the rebirth, which must occur before this union is possible. Eight, the ogdoad, is richly symbolic in the Christian mysteries, being especially the number of the resurrection of Christ. Jesus arose from the grave on the eighth day; this day follows the Sabbath, begins a new week, and is thus the "first day" of a new age, a renewal, a rebirth. Augustine and other church fathers, notably Ambrose, regarded the number as symbolic of eternal peace and repose.³⁹ The flood is regarded as the type of Christian baptism in I Peter 3:20-21, and the number of the eight persons saved in the Ark appears in the octagonally shaped baptismal fonts used in the symbolic act of regeneration. Twelve is perhaps the most common and obvious Biblical symbol of all, representing the twelve tribes of Israel

in the Old and New Testaments and the disciples of Christ in the New Testament. In the Revelation of St. John, however, the number assumes new significance: it becomes the number of the "elect," 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes, and finally of the New Jerusalem, a city having twelve gates, measurements of 12,000 furlongs, twelve angels, twelve foundations, and a tree bearing twelve kinds of fruit (Rev. 21 and 22). This number in association with the ogdoad completes the symbolic statement of the stanzaic form: man (six) desires union with God (ten, or one), but a series of events involving the resurrectional aspects of Christ (eight) and culminating in the Apocalypse of John (twelve) must purify the earth before this union is possible.

Although the Biblical and patristic connotations of these numbers correspond well with the meaning of the Hymn, further evidence that Milton used them according to their values is desirable. Such evidence exists. The subject matter of the Hymn divides logically into the same four numbers in a different order--twelve, six, eight, and one (ten) stanzas, and the meanings for the numbers extracted above correspond, I think, unquestionably to the contents of these larger units.

Stanzas I to XII of the Hymn describe a pre-dawn world on the day of Christ's birth when the stars and time are momentarily arrested and an angelic choir fills the mundane sphere with celestial music, almost convincing Nature that her role is finished, that the "happier union" of Heaven and Earth has occurred (stanza X). The unit is full of images of peace and harmony: "meek-ey'd Peace" (l. 46); "mild Ocean" (l. 66); "Divinely-warbled voice" (l. 96); "loud and solemn choir" (l. 115). Yet despite the heavenly qualities of this scene, it is nevertheless temporal; the stars pause, but "their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go"

(l. 78); and Nature is only almost "won/To think her part was done" (ll. 104-105). This section of the Hymn reverently observes Christ's birth, but it also looks forward to the eternal peace and total harmony of the New Jerusalem, symbolized by the number twelve.

The "singer" of the Hymn abruptly expresses man's yearning for this final unfulfilled harmony as stanza XIII begins; the narrative sense of the first Christmas ends with stanza XII and a new movement, stanzas XIII-XVIII, symbolized by the number six, begins. God made his works--the created universe--perfect in six days; but Adam, tricked by Satan, corrupted God's creation and was left with only the memory of Paradise, a place not to be found on earth again; Milton's use of the number indicates that man is still on earth, still waiting to escape the post-lapsarian world. Thus the "singer" regretfully turns from the heavenly vision of stanzas XIII-XV to the "wakeful trump of doom" of XVI and the cacophonous "horrid clang" of XVII; the Last Judgment stands between God's union with New Jerusalem. Christ's arrival, according to stanza XVIII, signifies that this bliss "But now begins" (l. 167); the "old Dragon" (l. 168) of Rev. 12:9 is restrained, and in the next section the pagan gods will fall.⁴⁰

Eight stanzas comprise the unit of which the vanquishing of the pagan gods is the subject. Eight, the number of Christ, symbolizes rebirth and resurrection. Here the earthly presence of the infant Christ routs the heathen deities amid "hollow shrieks" (l. 178), "weeping" and "loud lament" (l. 183), "moan" (l. 191), and "drear and dying sound" (l. 193); so that the effects of Christ's birth remind one of his prophecy in Matt. 24:8, "All these are the beginning of sorrows [throes, birth pangs, anguish]."⁴¹ The world must endure the agony of death

and rebirth, a time of trial, "of wars and rumours of wars... for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6), before the new, everlasting order envisioned in stanzas XIII-XV can be realized. The regenerative qualities associated with the number eight suit it exactly to the contents of this passage.

The subject matter of the last stanza is an abrupt change from the preceding rout of the gods; stanza XXVII stands alone, representing the oneness and unity of God. Between stanzas I-XII, representing the peaceful world as a momentary type of the New Jerusalem to come, and stanza XXVII, the inseparable, numberless quality of God, intervene the sections XIII-XVIII and XIX-XXVI, each containing events which must happen before the marriage of the Holy City and the Lamb, when God shall dwell with men (Rev. 21:3).

Generally, the numbers of the poem considered so far illustrate Milton's fondness for syncretic combinations only in that he has used both pagan and Christian systems of numerical symbolism. The numbers of the poem and the cubed numbers of the Hymn which Røstvig explicated have meaning according to pagan thought primarily, and I have discussed the Christian significance associated with the numbers of the lengths of verses and units of thought in the poem. That the two groups are distinctly separate enables one to avoid the danger of mixing systems injudiciously, but one suspects that Milton might find a number which blends significant and compatible meaning from both modes of thinking. Such a number occurs in the syllable-count of the Hymn, which totals 1,728. According to Fowler (pp. 36-39), some authorities deduced this figure as the Platonic Number, sacred to neo-Pythagoreans and Platonists because of the many numerical associations of its

parts:⁴² 1,000 denotes the firmament of fixed stars and is the cube of ten; 700 denotes the seven planets; twenty-eight is the number of the lunar cycle and is a "perfect number" because it is equal to the sum of its divisors; and finally, 1,728 is a cubed number, 12^3 . At this point a Christian association with the number appears which is particularly relevant to the Nativity Ode. So far as I know, the only purposely cubed number in the Bible occurs in Rev. 21:16: "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." The city, of course, is New Jerusalem; and in his remarkable ode, with its measurements of 12 x 12 x 12, Milton has worked into the very fiber his vision of what St. John saw "descending out of heaven from God."

This further explication of the numbers in the Nativity Ode, if accepted, can only reinforce the general theory first offered by Røstvig. Besides being valid in itself, as I believe, my formulation serves to place Milton's use of numbers in closer alignment with what characterizes much of his poetry, that is, extensive pagan-Christian syncretism. The numerical meaning in the poem re-emphasizes what is already there in the verbal statement, according to my reading: rather than a tender, peaceful re-telling of Christ's birth as it appears in the Gospels, the poet is primarily concerned with the initial impact of Christ upon mankind, the "beginning of throes," and with the events of the Revelation of St. John. Twentieth-century readers, living in an age of specialization in which there is little rapport between the worlds of mathematics and poetry, may find the idea of poetic composition according to a strict and highly involved numerical system disagree-

able; but this inter-disciplinary method is indicative in a small way of what "learned" meant in the Renaissance and Reformation. Men such as Milton tried to be knowledgeable in all areas of learning in the created universe, and all aspects of it were valid material for their poetry.

FOOTNOTES

¹"The Hidden Sense: Milton and the Neoplatonic Method of Numerical Composition," The Hidden Sense and Other Essays (Oslo, Norway, 1963), pp. 3-112.

²(New York, 1960).

³P. 6.

⁴P. 6.

⁵(London, 1964).

⁶P. 251.

⁷Pp. 251-252.

⁸P. 247.

⁹(Stockholm, Sweden, 1967).

¹⁰P. 76.

¹¹"Milton's 'Destined Urn': the Art of Lycidas," PMLA, LXXXIV (1969), pp. 60-70.

¹²Dr. David S. Berkeley has brought to my attention what appears to be additional evidence of numerical composition in Lycidas. He regards Lycidas' sojourn at Cambridge, described in lines 25-36, as an earthly type of the Heaven to which Lycidas has "mounted high" in lines 174-81. Twelve is a number which can symbolize both earth and the Heaven of Revelation, as is shown elsewhere in this paper, and thus is suitable for the contents of the Cambridge passage; eight, the number symbolizing peace and repose achieved through the regenerative actions of Christ, aligns well with the meaning of lines 174-81.

¹³P. 64.

¹⁴P. 65. Subsequent quotations of Milton's poetry and prose are from John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), and line numbers appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵Røstvig, p. 56.

¹⁶Timæus, 35 A-C.

¹⁷P. 57.

¹⁸P. 58.

¹⁹Røstvig, p. 56. Douglas Bush challenges most of Røstvig's assertions about numerical composition in the Nativity Ode in "Calculus Racked Him," SEL, VI (1966), 1-6, an extremely emotional, hyperbolic article. Accusing Miss Røstvig of being "intoxicated by the spongy air of dazzling spells and blear illusion," Bush notes her admission that Milton made only one direct reference to numerical connotation in his prose (Christian Doctrine II. vii; Columbia edition, XVII, 183), and he cites several poems which are in some way numerically similar to the Nativity Ode, but which differ widely in meaning. He rightly warns against the arbitrary imposition of theories of numerical symbolism on the basis of slender evidence. However, Bush ignores the fact that in this poem the curious stanzaic structure and the several cubed numbers occurring in the line-count and syllable-count totals, considered together, make it unlikely that Milton was not aware of the numerical relationships he was building. Also, Bush even seems reluctant to accept the well-documented evidence that what he calls "occult arithmology" was a serious subject for some writers and thinkers in Renaissance England.

²⁰Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton (Cambridge, 1957), p. 59.

²¹Macrobius in Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (I. v. passim), St. Augustine in The City of God (XIV. xxiii), Plato in the Timæus, and Du Bartas in Bartas: His Devine Weekes and Workes ("The Columnnes," second week, second day, fourth book) are among the many sources from which Milton might derive such interpretations.

²²De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis, II. xi.

²³Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Bloomington, Ill., 1957), p. 158.

²⁴See The City of God, VII. xi. ff., for example.

²⁵Edward Chauncey Baldwin, "Milton and Plato's Timæus," PMLA, XXXV (1920), 210-217.

²⁶II. viii. 24. Luther translates the word as Kunst; the King James Version has it "the reason of things."

²⁷XIV. xxxiii.

²⁸xlii. 79.

²⁹"Milton and the Conjectura Cabbalistica," PQ, VI (1957), 5 and 8.

³⁰George Coffin Taylor, Milton's Use of Du Bartas (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), p. xv.

³¹(London, 1934), p. 14.

³²I, p. 357.

³³Quoted from Fletcher, II, p. 311.

³⁴The City of God, X. xxx.

³⁵Qvarnström, p. 131.

³⁶Røstvig, p. 12.

³⁷Røstvig, p. 13.

³⁸I. vi. 8.

³⁹F. J. Dölger, "Zur Symbolik des Altchristlichen Taufhauses: Das Oktagon und die Symbolik der Achtzahl," Antike und Christentum, IV (1934), 161 and 168 ff.

⁴⁰It is tempting to relate to this section a formulation by Du Bartas in the Devine Weekes (second week, first day, fourth book) of "seven ages" in which the sixth and present age is that of Messias, Christ, and the seventh, the "Sabbath of God," follows the Last Judgment; thus, one more meaning for six and an excellent reason for the omission of the number seven in the Hymn would emerge. However, I have found no authority for Du Bartas' version of the "ages."

⁴¹KJV translates $\omega\delta\iota\upsilon\omega\nu$ as "sorrows"; Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon gives "pangs or throes of childbirth, travail, or

anguish" as primary meanings.

⁴²Fowler quotes Marsilio Ficino, Opera Omnia, for this information.

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VITA^v

Roland Earl Sodowsky

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM IN JOHN MILTON'S NATIVITY ODE

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Fairview, Oklahoma, March 17, 1938, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Willard T. Sodowsky.

Education: Graduated from Cheyenne Valley High School, Orienta, Oklahoma, in May, 1955; received Bachelor of Arts degree from Oklahoma State University in 1967, with a major in English; attended University of Massachusetts in summer, 1967; completed requirements for Master of Arts degree at Oklahoma State University in August, 1969.

Professional Experience: Editor and Publisher of Perkins, Oklahoma Journal, 1959-65; Editor and Publisher of Glencoe, Oklahoma Tri-County Hopper, 1961-65; Editor and Publisher of Yale, Oklahoma Record, 1962-65; student teaching assistant, Department of English, Oklahoma State University, 1966-67; graduate teaching assistant, Department of English, Oklahoma State University, 1967-69.