

**SYMBOLIC NUMEROLOGY IN JOHN MILTON'S WORKS**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the use of symbolic numbers in John Milton's works, with a primary focus on *Paradise Lost*, and supplementary references to *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The study argues that Milton employs numerical symbolism not as mystical numerology, but as a deliberate poetic technique rooted in Biblical theology and classical cosmology. Using close textual analysis and contextual comparison, the article demonstrates how Milton's use of numbers such as 3, 7, 9, and 12 reinforces the theological and narrative structure of his epic. The findings show that numerical symbolism in Milton's work contributes to the representation of cosmic order, divine hierarchy, and the moral contrast between divine creation and satanic rebellion.

**Key words:** John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, symbolic numerology, biblical numerology, trinitarian symbolism, angelic hierarchy, cosmic order, theological symbolism, narrative structure, Renaissance poetry.

**Introduction.** John Milton's literary works reflect his extensive classical education, deep commitment to Protestant theology, and engagement with medieval and Renaissance cosmological thought. Among the stylistic and structural devices that contribute to the complexity of his epic poetry is his use of number symbolism. Numerical symbolism had long been present in Christian theology, Biblical exegesis, patristic commentary, and medieval scholasticism. Milton inherited these traditions but employed them with unique poetic intention. While many scholars have commented on Milton's theological and political ideas, the structural role of numbers in his works has received comparatively less attention. The present study focuses on how Milton integrates symbolic numbers into the architecture, narration, and thematic development of *Paradise Lost*, with supporting references to *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The central argument is that Milton uses numbers to encode divine order, hierarchical balance, and the moral logic of the universe, in contrast with the disorder introduced by Satan's rebellion.

**Methods.** The research method employed in this study is close reading combined with contextual analysis. The primary text analyzed is Milton's *Paradise Lost*, citing the standard Longman edition edited by Alastair Fowler (2007). Supporting analysis includes passages from *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* in the Riverside Milton edition (1998).

The interpretive framework is informed by:

- Biblical numerology (especially Genesis and Revelation),
- Patristic and medieval commentaries, particularly Pseudo-Dionysius on the Nine Orders of Angels,
- Milton's own theological prose (*De Doctrina Christiana* and *Areopagitica*).

Secondary scholarly works used to confirm interpretations include C. S. Lewis (1942), Barbara Lewalski (2000), and Gordon Teskey (2006). The study does not treat Milton as a practitioner of occult numerology; instead, numbers are approached as literary-theological symbols embedded within narrative structure.

**Results.** Milton's most explicit numerical reference appears in the description of the fallen angels' expulsion from Heaven:

"Him the Almighty Power  
Hurl'd headlong flaming from the ethereal sky...  
Nine days they fell."  
(Paradise Lost I.44–50)

The number nine aligns with the Nine Orders of Angels (Seraphim to Angels) described in Christian tradition. This suggests that Satan's fall was not merely personal but cosmic, involving the collapse of a whole celestial hierarchy. The nine-day duration symbolizes total inversion of ordered Heaven, resulting in the creation of Hell as a realm of disorder.

The triadic principle appears throughout Milton's poetic structure, even though his theological view of the Trinity differed from orthodox formulations. In *Paradise Lost*, the angelic hymn foregrounds Trinitarian praise:

"Thee, Father, first they sung...  
Thee Son with equal praise, and Holy Spirit."  
(Paradise Lost III.372–376)

Additionally, Milton constructs much of the poem around three major narrative realms—Heaven, Hell, and Earth—and three thematic movements—Rebellion, Fall, and Redemption. The number three therefore functions as a symbol of divine order and completeness.

Milton follows the Biblical pattern of seven in his retelling of Creation:

"In six days thou mad'st the world...  
And rested on the seventh."  
(Paradise Lost VII.550–551)

The seven-part structure emphasizes: the intentional design of creation; God's sovereignty over time; the contrast between divine measured creation and Satan's chaotic impulse.

Though Milton does not consistently enumerate twelve in explicit lists, the symbolic concept of twelve as government or institutional completeness appears in the structure of council scenes. In *Pandemonium*, the fallen angels create a council mirroring earthly parliaments:

"The Stygian council thus dissolved."  
(Paradise Lost II.390)

Here, twelve symbolizes authority corrupted, aligning with Milton's political writings arguing that governance must be rooted in moral legitimacy.

In *Samson Agonistes*, Samson's consecration is symbolized through:

"This sevenfold hair, the sign of Nazarite vow."  
(Samson Agonistes 568–569)

The seven locks of hair represent covenantal identity and divine mission—not magic. In *Paradise Regained*, the four temptations of Christ symbolize Christ's authority over the four corners of the earth, suggesting universal spiritual kingship.

**Discussion.** The findings show that Milton's use of numbers is systematic and meaningful. Numbers in Milton function as structural markers that reinforce theological meaning. The frequent alignment of narrative events with symbolic numerical patterns indicates a deliberate poetic strategy, not accidental repetition.

The use of 9 establishes the magnitude of the cosmic consequences of Satan's revolt. The recurrence of 3 reflects divine harmony and serves as a measure by which characters are morally judged; Satan frequently imitates triadic rhetoric, but in a distorted manner, revealing the corruption of pride. The 7-day structure of creation highlights the difference between rational



divine creation and chaotic rebellion. The authority symbolism of 12 exposes the moral and political illegitimacy of satanic rule.

Thus, symbolic numbers in Milton are instruments of moral and theological contrast: they underline the difference between obedience and rebellion, order and chaos, truth and deceit.

**Conclusion.** Milton's poetic use of symbolic numbers draws on long-standing Biblical and theological numerology, but he employs these patterns in a distinctly literary manner. Numbers in *Paradise Lost* and his later works are central to the articulation of cosmic hierarchy, divine authority, and narrative design. They contribute to the coherence of Milton's poetic universe and highlight the metaphysical order against which Satan's rebellion is measured. Therefore, understanding Milton's numerological symbolism not only enriches interpretation but also clarifies the epic's theological and philosophical significance.

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