

= I syng of a mayden =

" I syng of a mayden " (sometimes titled " As Dewe in Aprille ") is a Middle English lyric poem or carol of the 15th century celebrating the Annunciation and the Virgin Birth of Jesus . It has been described as one of the most admired short vernacular English poems of the late Middle Ages .

Written by an anonymous hand , the text is now only to be found in the Sloane Manuscript 2593 , a collection of medieval lyrics now held in the British Library , although contemporary sources suggest it was well known in its day . Originally intended to be sung , no evidence of the work 's musical setting survives , and since its rediscovery and popularisation it has formed the basis for a number of modern choral and vocal works .

= = Analysis = =

The work has been described by Laura Saetveit Miles , a Yale University researcher of medieval manuscripts , as " one of the most admired fifteenth @-@ century Middle English lyrics [which] offers , within a deceptively simple form , an extremely delicate and haunting presentation of Mary (the ' mayden / þat is makeles ') and her conception of Christ (' here sone ') " . Primarily , the text celebrates the Annunciation of Mary as described in Luke 1 : 26 , but also widely references concepts from the Old Testament . Michael Steffes of University of Wisconsin ? Stevens Point notes that " ' I syng of a mayden ' is a very quiet and very beautiful meditation on the inward aspects of the Annunciation , on the immediate consequences of Mary 's acceptance of Gabriel 's message . " The concept of the choice of Mary is an important subtlety in the text . Derek Pearsall writes :

A brain and a subtle ear has gone into the making of this poem ... celebrating the mystery of Christ 's conception . Dew falling on grass , flower and spray (traditional imagery , deriving from OT texts such as Psalms 72 : 6) suggests ease , grace and delicacy generally (not progressive stages of insemination) . The emphasis on Mary 's freedom of choice , at the moment of the annunciation , is theologically strictly proper .

According to Miles , despite a celebratory opening , " Mary 's physical stillness as proof of her virginity remains the poet 's priority . " As a result , the poet repeats the phrase " He cam also styлле " in three of the five verses . " Styлле " had several implications ? the stillness of the conception of Mary and of the birth of Jesus Christ .

The poem is written from a first person point of view , and contains five quatrains . Below is the text in both its original Middle English , with spelling intact , and a modern translation .

= = Origin = =

The manuscript in which the poem is found , (Sloane 2593 , ff.10v @-@ 11) is held by the British Library , who date the work to c.1400 and speculate that the lyrics may have belonged to a wandering minstrel ; other poems included in the manuscript include " I have a gentil cok " , " Adam lay i @-@ bowndyn " and two riddle songs ? " A minstrel 's begging song " and " I have a yong suster " . The Chaucer scholar Joseph Glaser notes that 2593 contains the only surviving copies of several " indispensable " poems . These include the aforementioned poem " Adam lay i @-@ bowndyn " , " A Babe is born al of a may " , " Benedicamus Domino " and " Lullay , myn lykyng " .

In 1836 , Thomas Wright suggested that , although his fellow antiquarian Joseph Ritson had dated the manuscript from the reign of Henry V of England (1387 ? 1422) , he personally felt that although " its greatest antiquity must be included within the fifteenth century " , some lyrics contained within may be of an earlier origin . Wright speculated , on the basis of the dialect of Middle English , that the lyrics probably originated in Warwickshire , and suggested that a number of the songs were intended for use in mystery plays . More recent analysis of the manuscript places the dialect as being of East Anglian origin and more specifically Norfolk ; two further carol MS from the county contain duplicates from Sloane 2593 . However , " I syng of a mayden " is a unique instance of this lyric .

Although the Sloane Manuscript is the only surviving textual source , the bibliographer and

Shakespearean scholar W. W. Greg proposed that the poem 's similarity to a much earlier 13th @-@ century poem held at Trinity College , Cambridge (MS. B. 13 . 49) was unlikely to be accidental . Alan J. Fletcher , a specialist in Latin liturgical drama and the late Middle Ages , noted in 1978 that a set of contemporary sermons compiled by a writer called Selk (Bodleian MS Barlow 24) quote the final phrases of the poem in such a way to suggest the poem was more widely disseminated and known in its time :

Mayde , Wyff and Moder whas neure but ye
Wel may swych a ladye Goddys modyr be .

= = Musical setting = =

As most explicitly noted by the first quatrain , the poem was originally intended to be sung . Indeed , as noted by Stephen Medcalf , Emeritus professor at Sussex University , the text itself seems to imply melody and verse . However , due to the oral tradition of the time , the original melody of the song was not notated and over the course of time was forgotten .

Since the rediscovery of the text , many composers have set the text to music , amongst them diverse choral or vocal interpretations by Martin Shaw , Patrick Hadley , Roger Quilter , John Gerrish , Gustav Holst , Arnold Bax Peter Warlock , R.R. Terry , Lennox Berkeley , Benjamin Britten (" As Dewe in Aprille " in his Ceremony of Carols) , Ronald Corp (1975) , Philip Lawson a setting published by Walton Music , John Adams (as the chorus " I Sing of a Maiden " in his opera @-@ oratorio El Niño) , and Bob Chilcott (in his " Salisbury Vespers ") . The work is also regularly performed by the Mediaeval Baebes .