part one

The Annunciation and Birth of Christ
Fig. 3.—The Annunciation. First of four miniatures preceding the Amesbury Abbey Psalter, Oxford, All Souls College MS 6, fol. 3 (see Figs. 6 and 7). For more extended discussion, refer to the Notes to Illustrations.
Gabriel, from even-e-king
sent to þe maide swete,
broute þire blissful tiding
And faire he gan hire greten:
“heil be þu ful of grace a-ritch!
for godes sone, þis euene lith,
for mannes louen
wile man bicomen,
and taken
fles of þe maiden brith,
manken fre for to maken
of senne and deules mith.”

Mildeliche im gan andsweren
þe milde maiden þanne:
“Wichewise sold ichs beren
child with-huten manne?”
þangle seide, “ne dred te nout;
þurw þoligast sal ben iwrout
þis ilche þing,
war-of tiding
ichs bringe,
al manken wrth ibout
\textit{The Annunciation and Birth of Christ}

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{Wan} & \text{ he maiden understud} \\
\text{and \textit{bangle} wordes herde,} \\
\text{mildeliche with milde mud} \\
\text{to \textit{bangle} hie andswerde:} \\
\text{\textquote{\textit{hur} lordes \textit{heu}maiden iwis} } \\
\text{ics am, \textit{hat} her a-bouen is.} \\
\text{anentts me,} \\
\text{fulfurthed be} \\
\text{\textit{bi} sawe;} \\
\text{\textit{hat} ics, sithen his wil is,} \\
\text{maiden, withhuten lawe} \\
\text{of moder, haue \textit{he} blis.”}
\end{align*}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{Bangle} wente a-wei mid \textit{han},} \\
\text{al hut of hire sithte;} \\
\text{hire wombe arise gan} \\
\text{\textit{bur}w \textit{boligastes mithe.} } \\
\text{in hire was crist biloken anon,} \\
\text{Suth god, soth man ine fleas and bon,} \\
\text{and of hir fleas} \\
\text{iboren was} \\
\text{at time.} \\
\text{War-\textit{burw} us kam god won,} \\
\text{he bout us hut of pine} \\
\text{and let im for us slon.}
\end{align*}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{Maiden, moder makeles,} \\
of milche ful ibunden, \\
\text{bid for hus im \textit{hat} \textit{he} ches} \\
at wam \textit{bu} grace funde, \\
\textit{hat} he forgiue hus senne and wrake, \\
and clene of euri gelt us make, \\
and eune blis, \\
wan hure time is
\end{align*}
\end{quote}
THE ANNUNCIATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

to steruen,
hus giue, for þine sake
him so her for to seruen
þat he us to him take.
TO BEGIN TO SHOW HOW FUNDAMENTAL THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE THEOLOGICAL FORM BEHIND THE POEM IS TO ACHIEVING THE FULL READING OF A MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS LYRIC, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THE ENGLISH VERSION OF "ANGELUS AD VIRGINEM," THE SONG SUNG BY NICHOLAS IN CHAUCER'S MILLER'S TALE, AND SET IT BACK INTO ITS CONTEXT AS A LITURGICAL SEQUENCE COMMEMORATING THE COMING OF CHRIST. THE SEQUENCE IS AN APPEAL TO MARY BY VIRTUE OF THE BEAUTY OF HER VIRGIN MOTHERHOOD, AND IT WAS WITH HUMOROUS IRONY THAT CHAUCER PUT ITS WORDS INTO THE LECHEOUS CLERK'S MOUTH.

THE INNER FORM

MOTHER AND MAID

As part of the Mass the Latin sequence was composed to be sung after the Lesson containing Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin should conceive (Isa. 7:10-15) and before the Gospel reading telling of the annunciation by the angel and Mary's acceptance (Luke 1:26-38), and it opens with almost the same words as the Gospel, "MISSUS EST ANGELUS GABRIEL A DEO . . . AD VIRGINEM." The author of the English version has used the Gospel account and through Praising Mary's part in Christ's coming, he gives the Gospel its full context in sacred history. The manner in which the author has modified his account from that in the Gospel reveals the central focus of the sequence. The first three stanzas tell of the angel's coming to Mary. (See Figure 3.)
In the Gospel the focus is on the angel's annunciation of the moment of the coming of the Messiah. Immediately after the angel's salutation, Mary is troubled in her heart about the import of the angel's greeting. The angel, who reads her unspoken thoughts, tells her to fear not. With his next announcement, of the coming of Israel's King, he mentions Mary's motherhood, telling her that she will bear Jesus, Who will be called the Son of God and Who will reign forever. Whereas the Gospel account begins with the angel’s greeting and Mary's being troubled by what the salutation means, the English poem combines the angel's greeting with his announcement that she will conceive the King and begins by focusing on Mary's virgin motherhood: “heil be ful of grace a-rith! for godes sone . . . wile man bicomene, and taken/ fles of be maiden brith.” Because of His love, the angel continues, through the “maide swete” God will become man and will free man from sin and punishment. Mary is not disturbed, as she is in the Gospel, by the nature of the greeting, but by the fact that, vowed to virginity, she will conceive a child, and stanza two is devoted to Mary’s questioning of the angel and to his explanation. How can this birth take place without her having known man, she asks. The angel replies, through the power of the Holy Spirit. All men will be redeemed by her childbearing, he continues, his words “swete chilinge” suggesting both that Mary will remain a virgin at her Child's conception and bring forth her Child without pain.

In stanza three, speaking of Mary again as “maiden,” the poet gives Mary's acceptance. The first part (lines 29-33) paraphrases Mary's words of consent in the Gospel, “anenttis me, fulfurthed be/ ßi sawe.” The last three lines expand her reply, again shifting the words of the Gospel to emphasize the idea of her virgin motherhood, as if she herself had fully formulated the doctrine at that moment: “ßat ics, sithen his wil is,/ maiden, withhuten lawe/ of moder, haue ße blis”—that I according to His will shall have the bliss of maidenhood without the law of motherhood. This “law” refers to the punishment given by God to Eve for her sin: that she shall bring forth her children in pain and sorrow. Mary, the second Eve, contrasted to Eve by her obedience and humility, will bring forth the Son of God in joy.

In the fourth stanza, the poet tells of Christ's actual growth in Mary's womb, repeating the idea that Christ's flesh was her flesh, echoing the idea spoken in the Gradual of the spring and summer Masses of Mary: “O virgin mother of God, he whom the whole world cannot contain hid himself in thy womb, and was made man.” He tells that in time Christ was born for man's salvation.
Stanza five is the climax of the appeal to Mary in virtue of her virgin motherhood. "Maiden, moder makeles," Mary is addressed by a title that recurs often in Middle English. The word "makeles" had two denotations: the first, to be without an equal, matchless, peerless; and the second, a later use of the word, to be mateless. When applied to Mary, "makeles" has the same special connotations as the Latin singularis. Of all creatures, Mary is unique because she is the only woman to be both maid and mother. This matchlessness is the special sign of her closeness to God and also of the fact that her Son is divine. The address in this last stanza to Mary as "maiden, moder makeles" comes at the fitting moment, after the poet has defined her matchless quality, and it is with this title that the poet appeals to her mercy (lines 53-60).

Yet the event has been set also in a wider context. Mary has been conceived of always as the medium through whom God came, who opened heaven to man. The Feast of the Annunciation is Mary's feast, yet only because it celebrates her important role in sacred history before Christ Himself became manifest. At the same time as he has modified the account of the annunciation from that given in the Gospel into a full definition of the virgin motherhood, the poet has used the virgin motherhood he defines as a figure through which to show the importance of the annunciation in sacred history.

The Context of Sacred History

First of all, the concept of sacred history is important to the wider purpose and structure of the poem. Each of the first three stanzas which are given to recounting the Gospel event of the angel's coming and Mary's reply is placed by the poet explicitly in the context of the total plan of salvation. In stanza one, the angel is said to come from God with, in line three, "blisful" tiding. Seen in its context in sacred history, "blisful" suggests more than one joyful occasion. From Mary's perspective at the moment of the annunciation, "blisful" can refer to the joy of Christ's birth which will follow. From the full perspective of the soul living in the present age of the Church, who looks back on the annunciation, "blisful" refers to the bliss of heaven, which Christ's birth and death have opened for man. This is the point of view of the poet and the audience for whom he writes. The last three lines of stanza one make this full meaning of the bliss the angel announces explicit by
THE ANNUNCIATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

recounting Christ's coming as part of the total plan of sacred history: This Son of God will come to set man free from sin and the power of the devil.

As in stanza one, in each of the next two stanzas the poet devotes the last three lines to giving the event its significance in the total plan of sacred history. In the second stanza, the angel repeats his explanation of the purpose of the Incarnation, but in a different manner from the first. The angel does not say that man will be bought by Mary's Child Himself, but, focusing on Mary's virgin motherhood, which we saw was the special focus of the poem, he says that man will be bought through Mary's sweet bearing of the Child. In other words, by means of the painless giving birth by a virgin mother man will be brought from pain. The concept of being brought from pain has the same references in time as the concept of "blis." There is a reflection backward and forward in sacred history of the figure of pain. If we think of past history, pain refers to the pain which has come as a penalty of the Fall; of the present, pain refers to the pain of this life; of the future, pain refers to the pain of an eternal hell. From the point of view of the events related in the poem, latent in this figure of pain is the pain that will follow from Christ's birth, the pain He will take on Himself in His passion and death and which will be the means whereby man will be released from pain. Christ's pain will be mentioned in stanza four.

The last three lines of the third stanza contain Mary's consent to God's will and the explicit theological formulation of Mary's painless giving birth, the "swete chiltinge" which was only suggested in the second stanza. They bring to a climax the focus of the poem on Mary. Seen from the perspective of the moment of the annunciation, this birth will be a source of "blis" to Mary by being painless. From the point of view of man in present time seeing the whole of God's plan, the "blis" of the painless birth will be the mark of her special grace with God. With these last three lines the poet has now completely formulated the meaning of Mary's virginal conception and giving birth to Christ.8

The first three stanzas together told of the event of the annunciation, giving in the last three lines of each stanza its significance through Mary in the context of sacred history. The last two stanzas, four and five, by making the implications explicit fulfill the first three.

Pangle wente a-wei mid Þan,
    al hut of hire sithte;
hire wombe arise gan
In the fourth stanza, to define fully the reason for joy, the poet tells of the events in sacred history which have occurred as a consequence of the annunciation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit (as the angel had said) Christ, true God and true man, was conceived, swelled in Mary’s womb, and was born. The last three lines here in stanza four speak of Christ in Whom sacred history centers, saying that through His conception and birth the rest of the events of the redemption were able to be fulfilled. Christ died, was resurrected and opened heaven (“god won”) to man.

In this stanza Mary’s painless conception and giving birth to Christ have yet another application, which is made clear by these last three lines. The angel had told Mary in stanza one that man would be bought through her virginal conception, that he would be freed from sin and the power of the devil. In stanza two the concept of painless birth was suggested and applied to the first stanza. The redemption of man through Mary’s “swete chiltinge” was expressed by the figure of release from pain. We find here in stanza four that the fulfillment of the angel’s promise is told in respect to a third pain. Through the crucifixion of Christ, His pain and death, man is bought and given heaven. The crucifixion is more explicitly treated in the Latin version of the sequence from the Arundel MS, where the last three lines read:

affigens humero
  crucem qui dedit ictum
  soli mortifero.9

Tracing the central emphasis of the poem as it has been developed, we see the following applications of the figure of pain and joy. Stanza one: through Christ’s birth from the virgin man will be bought. Stanza two: the painless “chiltinge,” a sign that the Child is God, will release man from the pain of
THE ANNUNCIATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

hell. Stanza three: a childbearing which is exempt from motherhood’s law of giving birth in pain—that is, the “blis” of Mary’s virginal childbearing—pre-figures man’s birth into joy and bliss. In the fourth stanza, the angel’s promise given in stanza one, that man will be bought, is explicitly fulfilled. As in stanza two, sorrow and joy are seen under the figure of pain and release. Mary’s actual giving birth in joy is juxtaposed to a second birth. Through the pain of Christ’s passion man is released from his pain into the joyful hope of heaven.

Thus in “Gabriel, fram evene-king” the event of Christ’s virginal conception and birth has been used as a principle of form. The poet has selected the figure of pain changing to joy and used it to make a symmetrical correspondence between the events he relates. And this poem provides our first example of a Middle English poet’s use of certain principles of proportion and symmetry in sacred history which, as was shown in the Introduction, are present in the liturgy.

To recall briefly what we saw defined by the readings of the Mass of the Annunciation and the homily of St. Ambrose, the proportion and symmetry between the events of sacred history are based on the doctrine that the first creation, which fell, has been recreated by Christ Who is the New Adam. There are three principles of proportion between the first creation and its re-creation. First, the events of the new creation, the Incarnation and Redemption, have occurred in a fitting correspondence to the events of the first. They have been applied like poultices to heal the wounds of the old, or like lights to transfigure them, in a way which does not destroy but is appropriate to them. Second, not only does the new creation assume and transform the old, but because Christ, through the Incarnation, is their redeemer, or re-creator, all events which lead to Christ’s coming find their end and significance in Him. The focus in Christ establishes the third principle of proportion. Because their significance can be fully defined only in terms of the events of the new creation, the events which lead to the coming of Christ have their full meaning and value only as they prefigure the new. As we have seen in regard to both Scripture and liturgy, the Old Testament events are significant not only in themselves but as types of the events to come in the New.

The symmetrical proportioning of the events of the old and the new creation has been used by the Middle English poet as a structural principle of the poem we are studying. In the first three stanzas the poet uses the event of Mary’s painless childbearing, her virgin motherhood, as a figure through
which to formulate the truth of the second event, man's spiritual redemption from the pain of sin and death. In the fourth stanza in a second juxtaposition of events, the birth of Christ, which for Mary was painless, is contrasted to the spiritual rebirth of man through the pain and death of Christ at His crucifixion. This pain of Christ reflects a further correspondence, going back to the Fall. Mary bore Christ "withhuten lawe/ of moder." But in her compassion at Christ's death, Mary suffered the pains from which she was exempt in Christ's birth. Thus, through her pain during man's spiritual delivery, she becomes the spiritual mother of mankind. In Part II we shall see the significance of this concept developed fully in the poems on Mary's suffering at the crucifixion of Christ:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nu is time } & \text{bat } \text{þu gielde} \\
\text{kende } & \text{bat } \text{þu im withelde} \\
& \text{þo } \text{þi child was of } \text{þe born;} \\
\text{Nu } & \text{he hoschet wit goulinge} \\
& \text{þat } \text{þu im in } \text{þi chiltinge} \\
& \text{al withelde } \text{þar biforn.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nu } & \text{þu fondest, moder milde,} \\
\text{wat wyman drith with hir childe,} \\
& \text{þei } \text{þu clene maiden be;} \\
\text{Nu } & \text{þe's } \text{giolden arde and dere} \\
& \text{þe } \text{þine werof } \text{þu were} \\
& \text{ine ti chiltuing quite and fre.}^{12}
\end{align*}
\]

**The Final Purpose, or the Full Form**

The fifth stanza makes the ultimate purpose of the poem explicit. It is the culmination of the third movement in the poem and subsumes the other two. The first focus was on Mary's virgin motherhood. The poem is a sequence in her honor, telling of her as the medium through which Christ came. This focus culminates in stanza three. The second focus was the relationship of Mary's virginal conception and "chiltinge" to the redemptive plan of history. In stanza four the angel's promise is fulfilled. The sweet birth with the
corresponding painful death of Christ has released man from pain and opened heaven to him. Now, in the fifth stanza, these two movements are drawn into a third focus, which is the present moment in sacred history. This is the full context in which the poem has been conceived. In terms of sacred history, the present moment, as we have seen, refers to the time of the Church, which stands after the Incarnation and Crucifixion, after Christ's ascension, and looks with hope towards Christ's second coming in glory. In terms of the poem, the present moment is also the time of the actual participation in the poem by the speaker or singer and his audience, and it is for those living in this moment that the poet shapes his poem into a prayer to Mary.

Maiden, moder makeles,
of milche ful ibunden,
bid for hus im þat ðe ches
at wam þu grace funde,
þat he forgiue hus senne and wrake,
and clene of euri gelt us make,
and eune blis,
wan hure time is
to steruen,
hus giue, for þine sake
him so her for to seruuen
þat he us to him take.

Mary's title “Maiden, moder makeles” has been prepared by the account in the earlier stanzas. But now it is joined with a second title she has received by the fact of Christ's death for mankind, Mary “of milche ful ibunden,” full ready with mercy. “Bid for hus,” the poet petitions Mary in virtue of the events that have been related, that we who are living in the hope established by the angel's coming, by Mary's acceptance, and by the birth and death of Christ, may, for Mary's sake, have the joy of heaven.

By the petition in stanza five the initial words (stanza one) of the angel's salutation are given their full meaning. The poet asks Mary by virtue of the fact that Christ chose her (line 51), “Gabriel, fram evene-king/ sent to þe maide swete,” and he asks her because she found grace with Him (line 52). Corresponding to the title with which the angel greeted Mary, “Heil be þu ful of grace a-rith!” (line 5), the title “of milche ful ibunden” serves as its
ultimate interpretation: Mary was full of grace, of God's favor; in time she
became full of Christ, for "in hire was crist biloken" (line 41); and now,
finding grace with Christ, Mary is a source of grace for man. Implicit in this
final petition is Mary's position as Queen of Heaven, in the perpetual present
that will last until the end of time and transcends time. She, being the
medium of Christ's coming and redeeming, can ask that He forgive us our
sins and free us from His vengeance, and that when we shall die, He give us
the "blis" of heaven. This is the full meaning of the "blisful tiding" (line 3)
brought by the angel.

But the last three lines develop the petition to enter bliss in another way,
making it more exact. Bliss is spoken of as Christ Himself. Not only the
future, but the course of man's life is assumed into Him, bringing the subject
of the poem to the full circle characteristic of sacred history: God is the
beginning—the angel is sent by God; Christ, God and man, is the middle or
center—He is conceived and born into the world. He suffers and dies, and
then raises Himself and ascends to the Father. There He reigns as heaven's
King and man's hope and final end.

The way the whole poem moves to a petition and the way the petition is
formed in terms of sacred history is analogous to the Mass liturgy. Just as the
Mass is the re-enactment of the crucifixion to unite the present congregation
to God, so the poem which relates the event of the annunciation to the
crucifixion of Christ is made by the poet into a prayer in order to apply the
events to himself and his listeners for their "god won." In the Collect for the
Feast of the Annunciation the address to God is amplified by a relative clause
which incorporates the significance of the feast day, beginning "O God, who
wast pleased that thy Word should take flesh in the womb of the blessed
virgin Mary, through the message of an angel. . . ." In the poem the
petition has two relative clauses, "pat þe ches/ at wam þu grace funde," but
they refer not directly to the subject of the feast, the fact that God took flesh,
but to the central fact by which the poem was formed; that is, to Mary's own
special relationship with God, her virgin motherhood.

The External Form

Up to this point in our explication of the poem, we have seen that the poet
adapts the theological concepts of Mary's virgin motherhood and of sacred
history in a manner analogous to their formulation by the liturgy, and it is
the study of these theological concepts that has revealed both the over-all form and the purpose of the poem. We have noticed also that sacred history is both the subject matter of the poem and the method by which meaning itself evolves. The poem tells of the past time when Christ entered history, how He redeemed man. This coming is applied through Mary to the present moment in hope of the future bliss of heaven.

The external form mirrors this movement. The whole consists of (1) the first three stanzas, presenting the annunciation of Christ’s coming, its implications, and Mary’s consent; (2) the last two, presenting the fulfillment of the promises, as stanza four recounts the actual coming of Christ and the redemption of all men, and as stanza five, in virtue of the first three stanzas, petitions for the future fulfillment of those in the present. The overall structure is a theme—the birth of Christ through Mary—and its fulfillment.

The structure of the individual stanzas mirrors the structure of the whole. The first three stanzas provide a clear example of the form. Each stanza consists of an opening statement presented in a quatrain, then a couplet which introduces the main theme of the stanza, and finally an elaboration of the theme which extends to the last three lines. The last three lines relate the theme explicitly to the full context of sacred history. A study of the structure of the melody to which the poem was set supports the conception of the form we have reached through analysis of the meaning. The music would strongly affect how the parts of the sequence would be felt and understood by both the singer and the listener.

The music is based on a single melody which is developed in two ways, and each section of the melody, the theme and its two developments, is repeated. The first unit of melody, the statement of the theme, corresponds in the stanza of the poem to lines one to four—the basic melody with lines one and two, the repetition with lines three and four.

Gabriel, from even-e-king
    sent to be maide swete,
broute hire blissful tiding
    And faire he gan hire greten

Thus the opening quatrain of each stanza, with its abab rhyme (except the first, which has an imperfect b rhyme) corresponds to the first unit of the melody which states the theme. In each of the first three stanzas of the poem this quatrain tells the action. The rest of the stanza, lines five through twelve, in the same way as the music, develops the opening melody.
In the music, lines five through twelve are two developments of the melody each based on a melodic inversion of it; that is, the higher tones are substituted for the lower ones—the melody is turned inside out. The first musical inversion (lines 5-6) is shorter than the original melody. Line six is the repetition of line five. In the stanza, this first short development of the melody corresponds to a rhymed couplet which introduces the central theological idea which the rest of the stanza develops.

heil be ūful of grace a-rith!
for godes sone, his euene lith

The couplet provides the third rhyme of the poem, which is repeated later in the last three lines of the stanza (10–12).

The second melodic inversion corresponds in the poem's stanza to lines seven through ten, its repetition to lines eleven and twelve. Lines seven through ten introduce the fourth and fifth rhymes, with line ten repeating the rhyme of the couplet:

for mannes louen
wile man bicomen,
and taken
fles of þe maiden brith,
manken fre for to maken
of senne and deules mith.

But the repetition of the second development of the melody is irregular. One melodic phrase has been omitted. The fact is reflected in the poem's stanza, where the last two lines, lines eleven and twelve, do not correspond in length exactly to lines seven through ten. According to the structure of the melody, line eleven in the stanza corresponds to the phrases developed in lines seven through nine. Nothing in either the original Latin or the English line eleven indicates the melodic parallel. Lines ten and twelve, which rhyme, are musically identical. The effect of the omitted melodic phrase is to make the repetition of the second development flow as a further development and to make the musical setting of lines seven through twelve sound more like an evolving unit. Finally, the rhyme scheme, which has supported both the melodic and stanzaic structure of lines one through six, in the last four lines.
works against both the music and the syntax to bind them into a unit whose
rhyme ties them to the couplet.\textsuperscript{17}

It is important to realize that the music these words were written for is not
in a metrical phrasing of notes. The music was adapted to the clear articula­
tion of Latin words. It does not follow a rhythm of regular measure, but
flows in groups of neums, or clusters of notes which are determined by
syllabic shift and accent of the words they are set to, the clusters being made
up of units of one, two or three notes.

The formal relationship between the sections of the melody would have
affected the listeners' understanding of the relationship of the parts of the
stanza. In music a sense of form comes from a relationship between levels of
pitch and extension of phrases in time. Although the music of "Gabriel, fram
evene-king" develops one basic melody, each of the two developments of it
contrasts and is set in a symmetrical relationship of height and length to the
other. The first statement of the melody provides the mean. The first section
of the melodic inversion (lines 7-10) ascends to the highest point of the
music in a succession of phrases climaxing at line nine, which is the shortest
line of the stanza and the one which precedes the final group of three lines
that relate the whole of the first part to sacred history. It then drops abruptly
an octave below its last phrase to the lowest position. The shortened repeti­
tion retains and echoes the climax and the drop. This means that the tenth
and twelfth lines are the lowest, contrasting radically in pitch to the ninth
and eleventh which lead to them. The correspondence between lines ten and
twelve makes the last three lines into a concluding unit. Approximating in
length the opening statement of the melody, the last three lines bring the
final repetition back into relationship with the opening.

The music, then, is one theme that unfolds by two developments of its
inversion. It reaches a climax at line nine and resolves in the last three lines
by the symmetry of the contrasting low lines ten and twelve, which in the
stanza rhyme with the couplet (lines 5-6) of the first development. The form
of the music, statement (lines 1-4), development (lines 5-12), with a conclu­
sion (lines 10-12), is reflected in the stanza form. Not only do the music and
the stanza form correspond to each other, but they correspond to the develop­
ment of meaning within stanzas one through three, in which lines one
through four describe the action and the succeeding lines develop its signifi­
cance, first through a statement of the theological truth (the couplet) and
then its expansion (lines 7-9), and finally through showing its relationship to
sacred history (lines 10-12).
THE ANNUNCIATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

However, after stanza three, this correspondence shifts when the poet begins to set the event of the annunciation that the whole poem celebrates in its full and present context of sacred history. If we stand back for a moment from the individual stanzas, we can see that there is a parallel between the development in one stanza and the development in the whole poem. Just as in each stanza lines five through twelve develop the event told in the opening quatrain, so stanzas four through five are the development of the event of the annunciation related in stanzas one through three. Just as lines ten through twelve relate the first part of the stanza to sacred history, so the last two stanzas relate the whole event to sacred history. Stanza four modifies this development of meaning by narrating the fulfillment of the event told in stanzas one through three. The fact that each stanza is sung to the same music suggests to the listener that the development in stanza four is an application to the old, and in stanza five suggests it again, as the poet applies the whole sequence of events to the present moment.

By first studying the three movements of the whole poem—the focus on Mary’s maiden motherhood, the context of sacred history, the movement towards petition—and by describing the stanza form through using the structure of the music, we have found that the poet develops his theme by a series of juxtaposed statements which are proportionately related. The structural principle of the poem seems to be developed by an ordered series of correspondences, the later ones fulfilling the earlier.

We noted above that the events of sacred history have a proportion and symmetry. The coming of Christ into history is a re-creation by which the events of the first creation are sanctified and fulfilled. We saw, by juxtaposing the events told in one stanza of the poem to those of another in the same way as the succeeding events are juxtaposed in sacred history, that the corresponding parts of the succeeding stanzas in the poem could be seen to fulfill the preceding ones. Thus, the painless birth was seen as a figure, but also as an effective cause, of man’s delivery from death—all men, and particularly those still journeying to future joy. The painless childbearing was seen to gain its effect for man by Christ Himself taking on the pain through His passion and death to secure man’s rebirth into grace.

Now that the units which compose each stanza have been singled out and confirmed by a study of the music, we can see an analogous symmetry and proportion present in the poem’s external structure. As the whole poem develops from the Annunciation to the petition in present time, each part of the individual stanza can be seen to be related to the corresponding section.
of the preceding stanzas. Thus, if we juxtapose the opening quatrains, we find they present the simple narrative sequence of the poem: (1) Gabriel descends and greets Mary; (2) Mary questions how she can bear a child without having known man; (3) when she has understood, she answers Gabriel; (4) then, after the angel leaves, the Child swells in Mary's womb; (5) the poet addresses Mary: Maiden and mother, pray for us to Him Who chose you and with Whom you found grace.

If we juxtapose the couplets, we find the theological statement of truth developing the narrative quatrain: (1) the angel hails Mary and announces God's Son; (2) in stanza two he tells her the coming of God's Son will be accomplished by the Holy Ghost; (3) in stanza three Mary begins the response of obedience upon which the salvation of all depends; (4) in stanza four the poet tells how it was Christ, true God and true man, of flesh and bone, Who was "biloken" in Mary; and, finally, (5) in stanza five he forms the petition of what man desires, the forgiveness of his sins.

It is wrenching the context, however, to consider the couplet separately, for in each stanza it initiates the lines which follow. In the first three stanzas which tell of the annunciation, lines seven through ten complete the development of the theological idea begun in lines five and six, as (1) in stanza one the angel continues to explain that God's Son Whom he announces will take flesh of Mary; (2) in stanza two he finishes explaining that the events he bears tidings of will be accomplished through the Holy Ghost; and (3) in stanza three Mary completes her response to the angel and declares herself obedient to his words. But just as in the whole poem stanzas four and five act to fulfill the event recounted in stanzas one through three, so within the development of these two stanzas themselves, lines seven through ten act to fulfill what was presented by lines one through six, as (4) stanza four recounts that which follows from Mary holding Christ within her, the event of His birth; and (5) stanza five formulates that which man desires as a consequence of the forgiveness asked for in the couplet, the fact of future entrance into "eune blis."

Finally, if we juxtapose the last lines of each stanza, which we have already seen to establish the principle of proportion for the whole poem in relation to sacred history, we find the development of the event's deepest significance for man as (1) in stanza one the angel explains that God will take flesh of the sinless maiden to free man from sin; (2) in stanza two he says that through her painless childbearing man will be bought from pain; and as (3) in stanza three, which formulates God's plan of the Incarnation in
relation to the central figure of Mary’s painless giving birth, Mary accepts God’s plan that she be mother and maiden, exempt from the penalty of Eve. In the last two stanzas, which reflect the modification in the development of the whole poem, lines ten through twelve apply the painless birth of Christ to the poet and his audience to establish the final point of view in sacred history, as (4) in stanza four these lines recount Christ’s crucifixion, which accomplished the liberation of all mankind from pain and which makes possible the petition formed in (5) stanza five where the last three lines recall the deepest meaning of man’s rebirth from pain: So let us serve Christ here on earth, the poet prays, that when we die, Christ will “us to him take.” And the poem ends suggesting the fact that rebirth into bliss is rebirth into union with Christ Himself.
S. nimirum commonebat panem
et vinum quoniam non
sedea tuum sanctum et salutem.

Low lauda Sanctum, Nostro Domino,
substantia condita quae

Gregis est hominum.

Sed meliora tua nostra

Her manu repitur venustate p.e.

Nec cunctum sanctorum.

Nececit nomen eius magnus.