

GOWER AND THE DAUGHTERS OF EVE¹



IN THE BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTH BOOK OF HIS *CONFESSIO Amantis*, which he devotes to an extended discussion on marriage and incest, John Gower names two daughters of Eve, Calmana and Delbora, as the sister-wives of Cain and Abel, respectively. These two extra-Biblical daughters also appear within texts written both in Middle English and other medieval vernaculars. Earlier in the same poem Gower mentions that Delbora was the inventor of linen, an unusual detail, but not wholly unexpected, since traditionally her mother Eve is considered the first spinner and thus also weaver of cloth. In this article I will examine Gower's use of Calmana and Delbora within the wider contexts of Middle English literature and medieval literature, and show which other traditions concerning the daughters of Eve were known by a Middle English audience, and where Gower accords with these traditions, and where he contradicts them, and might have used other traditions. The book of Genesis names only three of the protoplasts' sons—Cain, Abel and Seth—but alludes to other (unnumbered) progeny in Genesis 5:4: “et facti sunt dies Adam postquam genuit Seth octigenti anni genitque filios et filias” (“And the days of Adam, after he begot Seth, were eight hundred years: and he begot sons and daughters”). The Bible never names any daughters (or additional sons) of the first human couple; it thus falls to non-Biblical texts to provide us the numbers and names of their progeny, both daughters and sons. For example, the *Vita Adae et Euae* 24:2 states that Adam and Eve had 30 sons and 30 daughters in addition to their three Biblical sons. Versions of the

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Latin *Vita* that survive in Greek, Armenian, Georgian, and Old Church Slavonic agree on the total of 63 children (Anderson & Stone 1994: 23), as do most redactions of the Latin *Vita* itself.² Numerous medieval Armenian Adambooks preserve a similar tradition, stating that Eve bore 60 children in total, in 30 births of twins during 30-year timespan; several of these texts name the twin sisters of Cain and Abel, and occasionally of Seth (Stone 1982: 22–23; Stone 1996: 92, 118, 194, 203). Other texts are much more modest: Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 1:1–4 names twenty of Adam's progeny (twelve sons and eight daughters), whereas *The Book of Jubilees* 4:1, 7–11 indicates that Eve bore only fourteen children (Charlesworth 1985: 304, 61). Aside from Cain, Abel and Seth, *Jubilees* names only Awan and Azura, the sister-wives of Cain and Seth. *The Cave of Treasures* 5:19–20 explicitly states that the first couple produced only five children (their three Biblical sons plus two daughters),³ and *The Combat of Adam and Eve with Satan* 2.2.8 and *The Book of the Bee* §18 agree (Malan 1882: 106; Budge 2006: 24–26).

Although these texts include the names and numbers of the protoplasts' children, they provide no additional details about

² Jean-Pierre Pettoelli's recently published critical edition of the Latin *Vita Adae et Euae* identifies two recensions ("latin-P" and "latin-V"), the latter of which is further divided into five redactions. The "latin-P" recension lists 52 sons and 72 daughters, but the "latin-V" recension consistently lists 30 sons and 30 daughters, plus Cain, Abel and Seth, with the exception of "E," the "rédaction anglaise." See further Pettoelli (2012a: 92–101), and the discussion on the Middle English *Life of Adam and Eve* below, which tends to follow the "rédaction anglaise" by listing 30 sons and 32 daughters.

³ *The Cave of Treasures* was originally written in Syriac, before being translated into Arabic, Ethiopic, and Georgian. Andreas Su-Min Ri edited critically and translated into French two recensions of the Syriac (1987); the Arabic has been edited critically and translated into Italian by Antonio Battista and Bellarmino Gabatti (1980); Sylvan Grébaud translated the Ethiopic into French (1911); and Jean-Pierre Mahé translated into French Ciala Kourcikidze's critical edition of the Georgian (1992).

them, with one notable exception. Several texts of the secondary Adam literature recount an alternative reason for Cain's murder of Abel. According to *The Cave of Treasures*, Cain and Abel both have twin sisters, named Lebouda and Kelimath, respectively. Adam decrees that Cain and Abel should each marry the other's twin sister. However, Cain tells Eve that he wishes to marry his own twin sister, because of her great beauty. Cain's desire for Lebouda and his jealousy of Abel spur him to slay Abel after the two of them return from offering sacrifices in the Cave of Treasures, before all four are to marry (*The Cave of Treasures* 5:18–32; cf. Genesis 4:3–5, 8).⁴ *The Combat of Adam and Eve with Satan* 1.78–79 (Malan 1882: 96–103) and *The Book of the Bee* §18 (Budge 2006: 24–26) repeat the same scenario, and Epiphanius of Salamis alludes to it in *Panarion* 40.5.4, as do certain Jewish rabbinical texts.⁵

Middle English texts exhibit a similar diversity. Most simply note that Adam and Eve bore some variant of “many sons and many daughters,” akin to Genesis 5:4; examples include the *Middle English Genesis and Exodus*, 412–414, 427–428 (Arngart 1968: 64), *The Historye of the Patriarks* (Taguchi 2010: 45), and the *Middle English Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, 247–248, which states that “Then scho suns and doughters sere, / the story says sixty and moe” (Livingston 2011: 52). The “story” mentioned here is probably the *Vita Adae et Euae*, either in the original Latin, or in Middle English translation. Three distinct prose versions of the Middle English *Life of Adam and Eve* survive, as do the stanzaic *Canticum de Creatione* and the incomplete Auckinleck Couplets.

⁴ Ri 1987: 18–21; Battista and Bagatti 1979: 45–46; Grébaud 1911: 170–171; Mahé 1992: 10–11. For commentary, see Ri 2000: 183–190.

⁵ “They [Archonitics] concoct another story and ⟨say⟩, “They were both in love with their own sister and that was why Cain attacked Abel and killed him” (Williams 1987: 266); cf. *Panarion* 40.5.7 and 40.6.9. The *Testament of Adam* 3:5 mentions the same scenario: “Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel out of passion for your sister Lebuda” (Charlesworth 1983: 994). The tradition also appears in Jewish writings, e.g., *Beresbit Rabbah* 22:7 (Ri 2000: 185, fn. 34).

These Middle English versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, while based on the Latin *Vita*, include additional material from Genesis and other apocryphal sources, such as Holy Rood legends. In fact two different copies of the Middle English *Life* contradict the Latin *Vita* in the number of children produced by the first couple. The copy in London, British Library, Harley MS 4775 notes that Adam begat 33 sons and 32 daughters whereas the copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 596 states that he begat only 30 sons and 32 daughters.⁶ The former figures seem to be the exception, since another copy of the *Life* found in London, British Library, Additional MS 39754 (the “Wheatley Manuscript;” Day 1921: 87) and the *Canticum de Creatione* 505–506 (Murdoch & Tasioulas 2002: 79), agree with Bodley 596, as does the Adam and Eve material appended to the Middle English *Gilte Legende* (Hamer & Russell 2000: 1002, 1014). The figures of 30 sons and 32 daughters are actually consistent with the Latin *Vita* in Pettorelli’s recent critical edition. While Pettorelli’s “latin-V” recension consistently lists 30 sons and 30 daughters, plus Cain, Abel and Seth, “E,” the “rédaction anglaise” of the “latin-V” recension instead lists 30 sons and 32 daughters (Pettorelli 2012b: 582). This variant was first noted by John Mozley in his edition of the Latin *Vita*, which, like Pettorelli’s “rédaction anglaise,” was based on manuscripts of British provenance.⁷

Besides the *Confessio Amantis*, the only Middle English texts to name Calmana and Delbora as the daughters of Eve are *The Historye of the Patriarks* and the *Cursor Mundi*. Each text, however, treats them differently. *The Historye of the Patriarks* comes closest to the

⁶ Carl Horstmann (1885: 345–365) has edited the Middle English *Life of Adam and Eve* from both these manuscripts; but compare to the copy of the *Life* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. MS a.1, the Vernon Manuscript: “Adam hedde xxx sones and moni doughtres withouten Caym and Abel” (Blake 1972: 113).

⁷ “Et uixit Adam postquam genuit Seth dccc annis et genuit filios xxx et filias xxxii qui multiplicati sunt sumper terram in nacionibus suis” (Mozley 1929: 135).

secondary Adam literature, for it notes explicitly that Calmana and Delbora were the twins of Cain and Abel, respectively (Taguchi 2010: 37):

Wherfor Adam [...] knewe Eve his wyf carnally and begat
a son named Caym and a doughter named Cha[lmana].
Furthermore, fyftene yere after that, Adam bygat his second
son Abel and his suster Delbora.

The *Historye*, however, does not tell us which sister married which brother; instead, this is noted by *Cursor Mundi* 1215–1222, 1449–1450, 1501–1502 (Morris 1874: 78–79, 90–91, 94–95; cf. Horrall 1978: 71, 79, 81):

Vs tells of adam his stori;
O suns þat he had thirti,
And he had doghtres als fel,
Wit outen caym and abel.⁸
þe sister giuen was to þe broþer,
þe lagh moght certayn be non oþer;
Sua wald drightin, and behoued nede
To do þair kin al for to sprede. [...]
Seth spused his sister delbora,
For drighten self had biden sua; [...]
Til him [i. e., Cain] was spused calmana,
Als giuen to seth was delbora

and *Confessio Amantis* viii.59–72 (Macaulay 1901: 387–388):

A Sone was the ferst of alle,
And Chain be name thei him calle;
Abel was after the secounde,
And in the geste as it is founde,
Nature so the cause ladde,
Nature so the cause ladde,
Tuo douhtres ek Dame Eve hadde,
The ferste cleped Calmana
Was, and that other Delbora.

⁸ The *Cursor Mundi* provides another set of numbers for the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, 32 and 30 respectively.

Thus was mankinde to beginne;
Forthi that time it was no Sinne
The Soster forto take hire brother,
Whan that ther was of chois non other:
To Chain was Calmana betake,
And Delboram hath Abel take

Unlike *The Historye of the Patriarks*, neither the *Cursor Mundi* nor the *Confessio Amantis* give any indication as to whether Calmana or Delbora were single births or twins to their brothers. From the *Confessio* we might infer that Calmana was the elder of the two daughters at least, since she is named first, as Cain is. Both the *Confessio Amantis* and the *Cursor Mundi* state that sisters married brothers in order to fulfill God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Both, however, indicate a different husband for Delbora: the *Confessio* names Abel whereas the *Cursor Mundi* notes that she married Seth; the *Cursor Mundi* is unusual, but not unique, in this regard (Murdoch 2009: 220, 240). Of course, given Abel's early death, there is nothing to prevent Delbora from subsequently marrying Seth, perhaps anticipating the levirate marriage arrangement described in Deuteronomy 25:5–6. Among the medieval texts that mention Delbora, none indicates that she was the wife/widow of Abel *and* subsequently the wife of Seth; she is only ever mentioned as the wife of one or the other (and usually, it is Abel).

Gower mentions Delbora only one more time (*Confessio Amantis* iv.2435–2438; Macaulay 1900: 367):

The craft Minerve of wolle fond
And made cloth hire oghne hond;
And Delbora made it of lyn:
Tho wommen were of great engyn.

The fourth book of the *Confessio* discusses the sin of sloth, and it provides many examples of both slothful and industrious individuals. These four lines appear in an extended section (iv.2396–2450) listing the inventors of numerous human crafts and trades;

most of the other inventors are either classical deities or Biblical personages. Here the Roman goddess Minerva and Delbora are named the inventors of weaving. Minerva, the Roman counterpart to Athena, has a strong connection to weaving through the myth of Arachne; moreover, her surname *Mercanitis* (“inventor”) alludes to presiding over and instructing humanity in all manner of arts (Bell 1982: 302). Delbora’s connection to weaving derives from her mother. Eve has a long-standing connection to weaving in popular tradition as evidence by the fourteenth-century proverb “When Adam delved, and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” The character Eve refers to spinning thread after the Fall and Expulsion in the Chester Mystery Cycle as a result of her sin (Lumiansky & Mills 1974: 33), and Adam makes a similar reference in the *N-Town Play* (Spector 1991: 34).

Delbora’s status as an inventor of weaving in the *Confessio Amantis* actually contradicts *Cursor Mundi* 1523–1526 (Morris 1874: 96–97; cf. Horrall 1978: 81) and *The Historye of the Patriarks* (Taguchi 2010: 43), both of which state that Naamah (in the Greek Septuagint: Noema) was the first weaver. Although Naamah herself is not considered such within Genesis, her brother Tubal-Cain and two half-brothers Jubal and Jabal introduce smithing and musical instruments to humanity (Genesis 4:22; cf. *Confessio Amantis* iv.2016–2033). They are the children of Lamech and his wives Zillah and Adah, and thus the great-great-great-great-grandchildren of Cain. Both the *Cursor Mundi* and *The Historye of the Patriarks* follow the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor: “De generationibus Caym [...] Soror uero Tubalcain Noema, que inuenit artem uarie texture” (Sylwan 2005: 55).

Other examples of medieval Insular literature, however, demonstrate that there are several contenders for the inventor of weaving: for example, Irish texts can be found to support either a daughter of Eve or Naamah or both as the first weaver. The poem *Dúan in chóicat cest* §19 asks “[w]hich woman did weaving before every woman?” answered by the gloss “that is, Eve wove

palm leaves, or Cataflua, or Olivana wife of Japheth.”⁹ The prose *Banshenchas* in the Book of Leinster, however, names Naamah as the first weaver (Dobbs 1930: 316), and *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* mentions either Cataflua or Naamah as the first weaver in different contexts (Macalister 1938: 90–91, 189–190).

Gower’s mention of Delbora as the creator of linen specifically, while not found in contemporary (or prior) surviving Middle English texts, is later incorporated by John Lydgate in his *Pageant of Knowledge* 89–90 (MacCracken 1934: 727). Gower himself fails to be consistent even within the *Confessio Amantis*: later, in the fifth book, he declares that Minerva is the creator of both woolen cloth and linen (*Confessio Amantis* v.1202–1205). Given that Gower states that Delbora is the wife of Abel—a herder of sheep—one would assume her to have spun wool; Calmana, the wife of Cain—a farmer—would be a more logical choice as a spinner of fibers from flax, a plant. Even if one assumes that linen, as a symbolically more pure fabric (because it is produced from a plant, and not an animal), would more appropriately be woven by the wife of Abel instead of the cursed Cain, it would be even more appropriately woven by the wife of Seth (the ancestor of the promised Christ); but Gower does not explicitly name Delbora as such.

Where do the names Calmana and Delbora come from? Delbora appears as a variant of Deborah, the name of the nurse of Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, in Genesis 35:8 and a Judge of Israel, whose story is told in Judges 4–5. Indeed, her name appears thus in both contexts within the Wycliffite Bible (Lindberg 1959: 79). The names Calmana and Delbora are not otherwise attested in either the Bible or any of the apocryphal sources I mentioned above, although they are included in a single late Latin version of the *Vita Adae et Euae* found in Oxford, Balliol College, MS 228, as noted

⁹ “Cía ben doringe fighe / ria cach mnái co míngile,” with the accompanying gloss: “.i. Eua rofig duili na pailme nó Cata Fluaia .i. Olivána bean Iáfeth” (Meyer 1903: 236); translation mine. According to Irish lore, Cataflua is one of the names attributed to Eve’s daughters; see further Glaeske (2006).

in the editions of Mozley and Pettorelli.¹⁰ They likewise appear in the Welsh translation of the *Vita Adae et Euae* (the *Ystoria Adda ac Efa*, preserved in the White Book of Rhydderch [Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 5] and in the Red Book of Talgarth [Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Llanstephan MS 27]; Murdoch 2009: 123).

Outside of vernacular versions of the Latin *Vita Adae et Euae*, the names Calmana and Delbora are recorded within several medieval chronicles, both from the continent and from England. Middle High German metrical chronicles record both names, as does the *Weltchronik* of Heinrich von München and the prose chronicle of Jean des Preis (Murdoch 2009: 123, 146, 151; Murdoch 2003: 11, 61). Among Middle English chronicles their names appear both in *Polychronicon* ii.4 of Ranulph Higden and the English translation made by John Trevisa, as well as the *Chronica majora* of Matthew of Paris and the *Eulogium historiarum* (Murdoch 2009: 114, fn. 58). Many of these texts cite their source as Methodius, and Trevisa translated a tract ascribed to him, which does mention the two sisters (Perry 1925: 95), but all of these chronicles are largely indebted to the late twelfth-century *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor, and it is there where we find the earliest mention of Calmana and Delbora as the twin sisters of Cain and Abel: “De generationibus Ade: Adam cognovit uxorem suam [...] Et anno vite Adam decimo quinto natus est ei Caym et soror eius Calmana [...] Post alios quindecim annos natus est ei Abel et soror eius Delbora” (Sylvan 2005: 48).

To conclude, Gower’s use of Calmana and Delbora as the daughters of Eve seems to derive either directly from the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor, or indirectly from other Middle English texts that used it as source material. Gower does not appear to have known any of the texts of the secondary Adam literature (i. e., *The Cave*

¹⁰ “Et genuit filios xxx et filias xxx preter Caym et sororem eius Calmanam et Abel et sororem eius Deboram et Seth et multiplicati sunt in nacionibus super terram” (Mozley 1929: 135). For further discussion concerning this specific manuscript, see Pettorelli 2012a: 76–77, and Pettorelli 2012b: 536–544.

of *Treasures*, *The Combat of Adam and Eve with Satan*, or *The Book of the Bee*), as he does not refer to the alternative rationale behind Cain's slaying of Abel, surely its most noteworthy addition to the Bible. This seems clear, given the context of the *Confessio Amantis* where he includes Calmana and Delbora: although the secondary Adam literature is never explicit on this point, the reason for Adam to decree that his sons not marry their own twin sisters, seems to be because he considered doing so somehow to be less incestuous. For Gower not to mention Cain's incestuous desire for his own twin sister as the impetus for killing his brother strongly suggests that he was unaware of this tradition; had he known it certainly he would have mentioned it in the eighth book of the *Confessio Amantis*. In fact, Gower does not explicitly describe Calmana and Delbora as the twins of Cain and Abel, although the *Historia scholastica* and other Middle English texts all seem to suppose so.

Gower's designation of Delbora as the inventor of linen remains puzzling. It contradicts other surviving Middle English texts, which do not mention Delbora (or any daughter of Eve) as a weaver at all: they either attribute the discovery of this craft to her mother Eve or to Cain's descendant Naamah, following either popular tradition or the *Historia scholastica*.¹¹ This association of weaving as a result of the Fall, and/or with one of the descendents of Cain (but also with a Roman goddess) suggests a symbolic ambivalence with the craft. Since Gower appears not to have derived this designation from contemporary Middle English texts, it suggests that he knew other traditions concerning the two sisters, possibly from other insular texts.

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¹¹ Contemporary iconography supports this supposition: a miniature of Naamah sitting at a loom appears in the Egerton Genesis Picture Book (London, British Library, Egerton MS 1894, f. 2v).

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