

|Mendacity in Early Modern Literature and Culture: An Introduction

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Lying, cheating and deceiving can safely be assumed to be among the oldest forms of human behaviour. Yet while mendacity is a perennial social practice, its ethical implications have been viewed differently at different times and in varying cultural, political, religious and philosophical contexts. This issue sets out to explore the historical, cultural and epistemological underpinnings of mendacity in early modern England, including political and religious discourses that governed the codes of lying and truth-telling from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century. The essays in this issue allow us to see the extent to which plays, poems and narrative texts in the early modern period were sites of negotiation and, at times, of ideological warfare between the moral imperative of truth-telling and the expediency of telling lies. They draw on English literature from Shakespeare to Swift for their case studies, but their concerns are deliberately not confined to literature in isolation.

With regard to the topic of literature and lying, the early modern period is of particular interest because it is often regarded as a formative period for the emergence of imaginative writing in a modern sense. There is a strong line of thought in literary theory and literary history, following on from the classical tradition, which regards the early modern period as establishing for imaginative writing a relative autonomy from the norms of truth-telling that govern everyday communication: in Sir Philip Sidney's famous phrase, 'of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar' because 'he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth' (1973: 102).¹ Yet this subtle distinction between factual and fictional discourse, though theoretically present, was difficult to establish and maintain in practice. As the essays gathered here demonstrate, current scholarship is more likely to emphasise the precariousness of this distinction. According to some, the distinction itself has not yet fully emerged at this time; travel writing is one particular genre in which the boundaries between factual and fictional discourse are notably fluid in the early modern period (see the article by Kirsten Sandrock in this issue). According to others, the distinction is there but it is unstable and tends to break down under pressure and in moments of moral, political and religious crisis. Across different genres and forms, early

modern writing is entangled in questions of truth and lying that are not easily transcended and that tend, more often than not, towards the paradoxical as a way of describing cognitive dissonance and as a way of decongesting blockage effects.² For example, when Shakespeare has Touchstone in *As You Like It* compress the Renaissance debate about truth, falsehood and poetry into the aphorism ‘the truest poetry is the most feigning’ (3.3.15-16), he delivers more than a ‘witty deconstruction’ of a kind of poetry that is ‘designed to deceive, with a view to seduction’ (Corcoran, 2010: 153). His pun connects the creation of fictions with erotic desire (‘faining’), and in doing so it demonstrates the ‘scepticism’ which this play, but also many other Renaissance texts ‘extend[] to questions of truth in language’ (Bath, 1986: 31).

The most famous Enlightenment proponent of truth-telling as a moral imperative is certainly Immanuel Kant. Kant’s essay ‘*Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*’ (On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives) contains his famous dictum about lying: that even if you are faced with a murderer at your door, your duty is to tell the truth no matter what (Kant 1949 [1797]: 347). This is a convenient starting point for modern philosophical discussions of mendacity. For Kant, truth-telling is a moral imperative that must on no condition be violated. To lie is to diminish one’s status as a human being. According to this view, philosophical enquiry fails fundamentally if it is not underpinned with the basic assumption that each philosopher is telling the truth and is therefore limited simply by his or her errors, which can be pointed out by well-meaning disputants. To lie, to distort and warp an argument for motives other than establishing what is true is to destroy the purpose of human enquiry.

Although lying is not explicitly mentioned in Kant’s famous 1784 essay ‘An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”’, the critique of lying is a cornerstone of Kant’s understanding of this term. His target in this essay is childishness:

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding! (Kant, 1991: 54).

Kant demands that mankind sweep away anything that interferes with rational, dispassionate enquiry and so become adult. Lack of understanding is one thing, but it is something that can be challenged and eventually solved by confronting the truth when it is pointed out by your peers and teachers: lack of the attempt to try and understand is another. The essay on lying

can be read as a companion piece to Kant's 'Enlightenment' essay; it forms a part of the Enlightenment project. Lying, for Kant, needs to be demolished, like the child's condition of immaturity, before proper enlightened enquiry can begin. Lying, in this view, betrays a lack of responsibility to the self and to others. It is an immature reaction to a difficult situation, whether that concerns a minor domestic transgression, a desire not to lose face in front of one's peers in a philosophical argument, or, at the very limits of self-interest, deceiving the murderer at the door. We should not be surprised that other major Enlightenment figures represented themselves in Kantian terms, awakening from a childish need to lie into adult maturity. Perhaps the pivotal moment in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) – certainly the one that readers remember – occurs when he confesses to lying about the servant girl, Marianne. Rousseau had stolen a ribbon, but blamed a fellow employee, Marianne, resulting in her being dismissed without a reference. Her dignified parting words are 'Rousseau, I thought you were a good person. You make me very unhappy, but I would not want to be in your place.' (cited in Williams, 2002: 176; original in Rousseau, 2013: 417). The story of the *Confessions* is that of a development from childish self-interest to an adult understanding of the need for enlightenment, which, for Rousseau, meant rediscovering the good that had been buried under layers of self-deception, hence the need for a confession of lies and other sins to purge the past and emerge anew. It is a Kantian project. And is it any accident that the most famous story about the first president of the new country that emerged from the Enlightenment involves the refusal of a child (George Washington) to lie about an event as relatively unimportant as chopping down a cherry tree? This is the sign of a man-boy, one destined to lead not just a country but the new country that redefined the aims of the Revolutions that swept through the world in the eighteenth century, as Hannah Arendt has argued (2006).

In the pre-Kantian world of early modern England, however, lying is not usually discussed in terms of a progress from mendacity to honesty or from childhood to adulthood. The best-known discussions about lying in the English Renaissance are not about truth-telling but about equivocation, about how to evade the hostile enquiries of curious authorities without actually lying and thus committing a sin. Thus a treatise like Father Henry Garnett's *Treatise of Equivocation* was designed to perform the neat trick of preventing very bad things, such as torture and execution, without imperilling the equivocator's soul. In this way the treatise as a how-to manual was in line with the views of the most stringent thinkers on lying available in this period, most significantly, Saint Augustine. In his *De mendacio*, Augustine argued in ways that bear many similarities to Kant. He is quite clear that lies are an abuse of

the ability to speak that God has given us, so they can never be justified. However, in his taxonomy of lying Augustine allows for one exception: lies can be told when they prevent harm to a person (Augustine, 1887). In his example about the murderer Kant is answering Augustine and closing down his one exception.

Garnett's writing can be placed in the same tradition. He clearly does not believe lying to be a good thing, but he tries to show how it can be avoided in extreme situations. He acknowledges that in swearing an oath one must tell the truth, but turns the need to avoid falsehood around for his own purposes:

Thou shalt swear (sayeth the Prophett Hieremy) our Lord liveth, in trewth and in iudgement, and in justice. Uppon w^{ch} place the holy doctor St. Hierom noteth that there must be three companions of euey oath, truth, iudgement, and justice. Of whome all the deuines have learned the same, requiring these three conditions in every lawfull oath, and condemning all oaths w^{ch} are made without all or any one of them. The reason heareof is, for that an oath beyng an invocation of the soueraigne ma^{tie} of God for testimony of that w^{ch} is sworne, wee ought always in such invocations to vse iudgement or discretion to see that wee do nothing rashly, or wthout dew reverence, devotion, and faith, towards so great a ma^{tie}. But we must especially regard that wee make not hym, who is the chiefe and soueraigne veritye and inflexible justice, a witnesse of that w^{ch} eyther is false or an uniuert promise ; for otherwise an oath wanting iudement or discretion, and wisdom, is a rashe oath ; that w^{ch} wanteth justice is called an vniuert oath ; and that finally, where there is not truthe is *adiudged a false or lyinge oathe, and is more properly then all the rest called Periurye.* (6-7) [our emphasis].

This is a fascinating and clever piece of casuistry, which comes close to performing what it describes. Trying to avoid the need to lie will result in far worse abuses of truth than actually being duplicitous. Garnett declares his belief in the value of oaths. It is the very truthfulness of the properly sworn oath which leads to an argument in defence of lying. The stronger the need for the truth, the clearer its definition, the more excusable will the lie be. For Garnett, the need for truth only leads to the chance to lie. For Kant the answer would surely have been different: you would explain to the authorities that you were a Jesuit and that you could not possibly swear such an oath and would then take whatever consequences resulted.

Equivocation was the doctrine designed to prevent this undesirable outcome. The aim was for the speaker to be able to preserve their status as a truth-teller before God, while deliberately misleading the authorities, keeping the torturers of this world from your door. In

the end God would know that you had tried to do the right thing, as long as you took some precautions to avoid the sort of bare-faced lies that troubled Augustine. Garnett clearly enjoys sailing close to the wind, as this cunning and punning example demonstrates:

We may use some quivocall word w^{ch} hath many significations, and we vnderstand it in one sense, w^{ch} is trewe, although the hearer conceive the other, w^{ch} was not trewe as the hearers vnderstood it, or in the pper meaning, whereby a sister signifyeth one borne of the same father or mother, or of both, but in a general signification, whereby a brother or sister signifyeth one neere of kynred, as Abraham called Lott his brother, who was but his brother's sonne ; and our Lord is sayed to haue had brothers and sisters, whereas pperly he had neyther. The like vnto this were if one should be asked whether such a straunger lodgeth in my howse, and I should aunswere, "he lyeth not in my howse," meaning that he doth not tell a lye there, although he lodge there (48-9).

As before, this is an excellent and witty piece of writing, which illuminates and deceives at the same time, making a serious point if you are sharp enough to read the words correctly. The two examples are not, of course, the same. The first example is a piece of shorthand, whereby a relationship is used to characterise a series of different ones for ease, a synecdoche. Exactly the same process whereby children call favourite friends of their parents 'auntie' or 'uncle', or 'cousin' is used ubiquitously in this period. Then he gives the real example which may be of use to those harbouring priests, a homonym that joins two entirely different meanings: lying, meaning to not tell the truth and lying meaning not to stand or sit up, signifying in turn, as a synecdoche, staying. Garnett cannot have written this passage innocently as if the disparity of the examples had not occurred to him. The choice of word 'lying', placed next to three Biblical examples, two well-known sibling relationships from the Old Testament, and one involving God himself, suggests a certain brio, a sparkling confidence demonstrated to help inspire an audience who felt themselves under serious threat. If a Jesuit, a man who faced the severest possible dangers, could write with such insouciance, then surely all would be well, is what this passage suggests.

A long-time student of religion, Perez Zagorin recognised that the intellectual temper of the Continent was characterised by widespread and wide-ranging modes of such sharp practice. For him, this was the 'Age of Dissimulation' (Zagorin, 1990: 330). He does not make the case but the point is surely that the Age of Dissimulation precedes the Age of Enlightenment. For Zagorin, the story is one of religion and religious identity. Truth-telling/lying constituted a moral and theological problem, with a vast number of Europeans

eager to find some way of escaping persecution for heresy, either by adopting a clear-cut belief in a land where religious divisions were straightforward – notably, Spain; adopting a more double-sided belief that could be switched either way as circumstances demanded; or, finding a means of saying one thing to the authorities and another to God, as the Jesuits did in England and those labelled the Nicodemites by Jean Calvin did to cope with the deep-seated religious divisions in France. Kant’s intervention in the truth/lying problem presupposes a civil society that accepted a public culture beyond that of private religious belief. To imagine the murderer as a feasible interlocutor who had a right to expect the delivery of the truth one had to accept that public duties existed between subjects that could not be subsumed within disputes about religion. You had to have a public sphere.

Perhaps this is not, strictly speaking, accurate. In Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine, Part Two* (1587-8), we witness the Christian forces led by Sigismund of Hungary decide to break their oaths to the Turks because making a promise to an infidel is not binding:

Frederick. Now, then, my lord, advantage take hereof,

And issue suddenly upon the rest:

That in the fortune of their overthrow,

We may discourage all the pagan troop,

That dare attempt to war with Christians.

Sigismund. But calls not then your grace to memory

The league we lately made with king Orcanes,

Confirmed by oaths and articles of peace,

And calling Christ for record of our truths?

This should be treachery and violence

Against the grace of our profession.

Baldwin. No whit, my lord: for with such infidels,

In whom no faith nor true religion rests,

We are not bound to those accomplishments,

The holy laws of Christendom enjoin:

But as the faith which they profanely plight

Is not by necessary policy,

To be esteemed assurance for ourselves,

So what we vow to them should not infringe

Our liberty of arms and victory.

Sigismund. Though I confess the oaths they undertake,

Breed little strength to our security,
Yet those infirmities that thus defame
Their faiths, their honours, and religion,
Should not give us presumption to the like.
Our faiths are sound, and must be consummate,
Religious, righteous, and inviolate.
Frederick. Assure your grace, 'tis superstition
To stand so strictly on dispensive faith. (2.1.22-49)

Faith over-rides any public duty to tell the truth. It is the same case as that made by Garnett in his treatise on equivocation, here represented with rather more drama and dispassion.

Marlowe has based his episode on the historical source, but has altered the details so that we can be clear that the breaking of a promise is the issue at stake. The Christian perfidy misfires and they are overwhelmingly defeated by the Turks in battle in the next Act, perhaps a sign that God was really on the side of the Turks, or that he is indifferent to human actions.

Marlowe's play came in the wake of Elizabeth's *Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists* (1585), and the execution of Mary Stuart (1587). *Tamburlaine* could therefore be read as an anti-Catholic play, reflecting on the devious practices of those who would undermine the realm with their lies, especially as Marlowe is following John Foxe and Martin Luther's telling, which represents the events in this way (Thomas and Tydeman, 1994: 78). But it does not seem like a play directed at an enemy within or one that champions Christendom against its external enemies: the Turks are able to reflect on the defeat of the Christians and express their shock at their duplicity. The words of Orcanes, King of Natolia, draw attention to the duplicity of the Christians:

Can there be such deceit in Christians,
Or treason in the fleshly heart of man,
Whose shape is figure of the highest God?
Then if there be a Christ, as Christians say,
But in their deeds deny him for their Christ,
If he be son to everliving Jove,
And hath the power of his outstretched arm,
If he be jealous of his name and honour
As is our holy prophet Mahomet,

Take here these papers as our sacrifice
And witness of thy servant's perjury (2.1.36-46).

Rather, *Tamburlaine* reads like a critique of bad faith, of self-interest disguised as a holy principle that needs to be exposed and ridiculed.

Was Marlowe, then, ahead of his time? Is *Tamburlaine* advocating the need for public honesty along the lines that Kant was to indicate as necessary? This is hard to tell and it is not as if Marlowe was the only writer who got hot under the collar about dishonesty and double standards. But it is further evidence of the ubiquity of lying as a major issue that defines the Age of Dissimulation, an episode that forces the audience to consider when lying might be appropriate and/or justified. Did Catholics behave any worse than infidels? Did Protestants? Did either of them behave any better? Should any of them be expected to behave any better?

It is possible that we are looking at the problem from the wrong angle or with too narrow a focus. Lying was not simply a problem relating to religion and it may be that Kant's issues with truthfulness in defining his age have another particular source, namely, the practice of rhetoric. The study of rhetoric, as virtually every historian of education, whatever their exact views, has argued, was the focus of the educational reforms of the sixteenth century and characterised educational systems in Europe until the eighteenth century. Concentrating on rhetoric was part of a transformation in school and university teaching that witnessed traditional medieval practices which prepared the educated for clerical life mutate into teaching methods that prepared students for a wider range of professions and careers, teaching them how to write and argue and so be employable as secretaries, bureaucrats, teachers, and also writers. As numerous studies – most recently Lynn Enterline's (2012) excellent book on her understanding of Shakespeare's fractious relationship to his experience in the classroom – have pointed out, cultures of education, religion, work and writing were in step. Rhetoric brought with it great benefits: an ability to write, argue, and speak in a variety of sophisticated ways for any number of causes, learned through the practice of studying topics in *utramque partem*, on both sides of a question. But it also brought with it attendant anxieties which are, we suspect, in Kant's mind, as characteristics of the culture he wishes to sweep away in favour of a return to logical inquiry. In England, as Peter Mack (2002) has pointed out in his authoritative history of Elizabethan rhetoric, the standard university set text was Quintilian, along with Cicero's speeches, which were the principal examples used in *The Orator's Education*. Quintilian is certainly anxious about the misuse of rhetoric to produce falsehood, but his defence of the art is based on his assertion that the skilful rhetorician will

know that he is lying, which proves rather than answers Kant's fears as we understand them.

In Book 2, Quintilian responds to objections that rhetoric is not really an art:

Their second slander is that no art assents to false propositions, because it cannot exist without a cognitive presentation which is invariably true, whereas rhetoric does assent to falsehoods, and therefore is not an art. I am prepared to admit that rhetoric does sometimes say untrue things as if true, but I would not concede that it is therefore in a state of false opinion; there is a great difference between holding an opinion oneself and making someone else adopt it. Generals often use falsehoods: Hannibal, when hemmed in by Fabius, gave the enemy the illusion that his army was in retreat by tying brushwood to the horns of oxen, setting fire to them, and driving the herd at night up the mountains... Similarly an orator, when he substitutes a falsehood for the truth, knows it is false and that he is substituting a falsehood for the truth; he does not therefore have a false opinion himself, but he deceives the other person. When Cicero boasted that he had cast a cloud of darkness over the eyes of the jury, in the case of Cluentius, he saw clearly enough himself (Quintilian, 2001: I, 385-7).

The passage is characteristic of Quintilian's style and method: a definition followed by an illustrative example. But here, one suspects, the educator is less than comfortable with what he is forced to admit. Rhetoric does not deceive those educated in rhetoric who know how to use and read it correctly. But it can and does mislead others who are taken in by its wiles. Rhetoric can be an art of lying. The example of Hannibal's skilful generalship does not really help as this is an extreme case in which the deceiver is placed in a position in which deception is the best pragmatic course. It does not answer the question of how a rhetorician may deceive an audience when he simply wants to or whether rhetoric can be used to defend tyranny rather than republicanism or democracy. The second example of Cicero bamboozling a jury and openly boasting of his triumph brings us back to the Platonic problem of the philosophical pursuit of truth pitted against the wiles of rhetoric, an issue that this passage acknowledges but does little to solve.

In the concluding book of *The Orator's Education*, Quintilian tries to resolve this dilemma through his contention that Cato's definition of the orator as 'a good man, skilled in speaking' should define the process of creating the *homo rhetoricus*. But the door is open to the old charge that the art of rhetoric is the art of lying. And, indeed, this was precisely the anxiety that would not go away. Only one substantial treatise on lying was printed in sixteenth-century England, *a Politique discourses upon trueth and lying An instruction to princes to keepe their faith and promise: containing the summe of Christian and morall*

philosophie, and the duetie of a good man in sundrie politique discourses vpon the trueth and lying. This translation of an original work by Martyn Cognet, published in 1586, was produced by Sir Edward Hoby, the nephew of the translator of Castiglione. We would suggest that, although separated by over twenty years, the two works should be seen as related projects, part of a series of shared interests in behaviour, conduct and the relationship between the self and truth/lies. While Sir Thomas Hoby's translation deals with public performance and disguise, Sir Edward's adopts what we might think of as a maximalist definition of lying, one that provides a simple –and unworkable – answer to the dilemma outlined by Quintilian.

Cognet follows an Augustinian definition of truth as an imitation of God: 'for so much as there is nothing more proper to man, being formed according to the image of God, than in his words and manners to approche him the nearest that he is able, & to make his words serue for no other ende, than to declare his good intent & meaning, whereby he may be better able to informe his neighbour' (1). Lying, as Cognet recognises, is the opposite of truth. Again, he follows Augustine, but a precise definition proves elusive: 'So haue we of purpose discoursed of the trueth, before we com to shew the vice of lying, the which we may define by a contrary signification vnto the truth when one speaketh of things vncertain, contrarie to that which one knoweth, making them seeme other then they are. S. Augustin writeth to Consentius, that it is a false signification of spech, with a wil to deceiue' (127). Cognet accepts that even speaking the truth is a hazardous enterprise and open to misinterpretation, which was what persuaded poor, silly Lucrece to commit suicide, so fearful was she of the malign readings of her fate by the mob. Cognet is, yet again, following Augustine, who famously condemned Lucrece for the un-Christian manner of her death. Cognet reproduces Plato's strictures against poets and painters:

Painting is a dumme Poesie, and a Poesie is a speaking painting: & the actions which the Painters set out with visible colours and figures, the Poets reckon with wordes as though they had in deede beene perfourmed. And the ende of eche is, but to yeeld pleasure by lying, not esteeming the sequele and custome, or impression, which hereby giue to the violating of the lawes and corruption of good manners (160).

Cognet finds it easy to divide the world into the truthful good and the wickedness of lying. Accordingly, theatres are also wrong, as are flatterers and the passions. In order to make his case, Cognet has to cast Cicero, whose work is cited sparingly, in a particular role at odds with his significance in Quintilian: 'Cicero was of opinion that there was no difference betweene the lyar and the periured person, and that God had ordained to eche like punishment,

and that he which was accustomed to lye, did easily periure himselfe. The which opinion sundry doctors of the church haue in like sort helde' (131). Cicero, in effect, becomes Tertullian, an authority who can be cited to support the conclusions of the pious modern thinker.

A number of questions might be asked about this. Does Coignet know what he is doing in flattening out the material he is citing? Whereas the exponent of rhetoric, Quintilian, is honest about the problem at the heart of his enterprise, Coignet could well be accused of being dishonest about his, perhaps even of lying in his attempt to make everything black and white. What Coignet does might simply be the effect of the common practice of citing a series of authorities. The danger is that the ancients – here as elsewhere – can be looted for juicy quotations, and so all sound the same, saying exactly what the author wants them to say. This is clearly the case here, so that Cicero is cited in Quintilian as the great exponent of rhetoric who admits that eloquence can lead one into deception, deception which can only be the result of lying. Coignet is more eager to maintain his case and to preserve a clear distinction between truth and lies, so he cites Cicero as a harsh opponent of any attempt to soften these divisions. The problem is that in order to do so he undoubtedly misuses his authorities and so either misleads the reader because he does not understand the truth of what he is saying or he deliberately misleads them and so lies. Coignet may not mean to be a rhetorician like Cicero or Castiglione but that is what he is.

Moreover, in rejecting literature tout court, Coignet is rejecting one of the most obvious places where discussions of lying could take place. Literary texts, not being bound by the need to be truthful and so not forced to lead the reader to a definite conclusion, could explore the meaning, significance and effects of lying in much more nuanced ways than those bound by rules of truth and lying. Indeed, precisely because they were already involved in discussions of truth and lying regarding their very existence, literary texts invariably foreground these very debates. An obvious example is *The Faerie Queene*. There are clearly moments of particular significance, although, oddly enough, there is no one single article on Spenser and lying. It is noticeable how infrequently Spenser actually uses the words 'lie', 'lying' or 'liar', although it is clear that he is writing about identical, similar or related phenomena. Take three examples:

For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas;
He told of Saintes and Popes, and euermore
He strowd an Aue-Mary after and before (I.i.35, 6-9).

Is Archimago actually lying here? An interesting point. He is clearly deceiving them in the narrator's eyes (can we trust the narrator?) and the image that he could file his tongue as smooth as glass is clearly the opposite of truth-telling and so lying if we believe Coignet, not necessarily if we follow Quintilian. Then again, does it matter if he is lying anyway? Isn't what he is doing just as bad even if it cannot be defined as lying, as, if we accept the truth of Protestantism this is all Romish lies as Protestant polemicists such as John Bale state frequently enough? Or is Spenser deliberately avoiding using the term because what he is saying is not quite what you think?

An equally well-known example is the following:

There as they entred at the Scriene, they saw
Some one, whose tongue was for his trespasse vyle
Nayld to a post, adiudged so by law:
For that therewith he falsely did reuyle,
And foule blaspheme that Queene for forged guyle,
Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
And with lewd poems, which he did compyle;
For the bold title of a Poet bad
He on himselfe had ta'en, and rayling rymes had sprad.

Thus there he stood, whylest high ouer his head,
There written was the purport of his sin,
In cyphers strange, that few could rightly read,
BON FONT: but bon that once had written bin,
Was raced out, and Mal was now put in.
So now Malfont was plainely to be red;
Eyther for th'euill, which he did therein,
Or that he likened was to a welhed
Of euill words, and wicked sclaunders by him shed (V.ix.25-26).

Note that here, Spenser uses a whole series of words defining and explicating deception and deceitfulness, 'blaspheme', 'forged guyle', 'bold', 'blazed', 'lewd', 'rayling', 'cyphers', 'euill words' and 'wicked sclaunders', but he never once actually says the poet lies. We are told that we can read this incident clearly now that the poet's name is given in black capitals, but

we are not actually told that he does not tell the truth, that he lies about anything. What he says may offend people and seem misleading as well as offensive. But it may well be true.

The caveat is clearly important. What we witness in *The Faerie Queene* is a language about deception, about truth and lying, that very rarely mentions the word 'lie', even when you imagine that it might do. Indeed, apart from one quibble on 'lying', meaning remaining supine and failing to tell the truth, as appeared later in Garnett's equivocation treatise, the word 'lie' only appears twice in the long poem (although then pun remains active throughout). Scudamore accuses Duessa of lying when she reappears at the start of Book IV but the most significant example surely occurs very near the end of Book VI, when Calidore approaches the Blatant Beast:

Tho when the Beast saw, he mote nought auaile,
By force, he gan his hundred tongues apply,
And sharpely at him to reuile and raile,
With bitter termes of shamefull infamy;
Oft interlacing many a forged lie,
Whose like he neuer once did speake, nor heare,
Nor euer thought thing so vnworthily[.] (VI.xii.33, 1-7).

At last, we have the truth about lying, because we have known all along that Book VI is really about this issue which is inextricably related to courtesy and courteous behaviour (again, you can see why it is no surprise that the Hobys want to think about truth and lies alongside courtly behaviour). Courtesy is the root of 'civil conversation' but the Knight of Courtesy loves 'simple truth and stedfast honesty', two definitions that are not necessarily at odds but which might be and which also raise the spectre of the binary divisions established by Coignet following Augustine. Rhetoric is the basis of the art of civil conversation so it is important to note that Spenser locates the problem of truth/falsehood here rather than in debates about religion. For Coignet lying is an offence against God and one's neighbours, but Spenser seems to turn these common assumptions upside down. It is only when the beast attacks and despoils a monastery that s/he is defined as a liar. As with *Tamburlaine*, it is not clear that the text supports an easy and satisfying discourse of religious truth and diabolic lies even when it seems to. Ben Jonson suggested that Spenser was attacking the Puritans when he represented the Beast rampaging through the established church (Cummings, 1971: 136), but the truth may be more complicated, with Spenser showing how practices of lying lead eventually to sacrilege, not vice versa.

What we witness in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene* is the initially comic and eventually terrifying realisation that there is no central concept of truth, nothing that holds everything together as Coignet asserts that there is (God, the monarch). Calidore is forced to ‘tread an endlesse trace withouten guyde’ because he is supposed to be courteous and follow the truth without any means of connecting the two in a coherent model established by a strong central authority. Calidore is clueless and situations drift so that we are not sure what the truth actually is. He comes across Calepine and Serena *in flagrante delicto*, which leads to a comic series of misunderstandings:

With which his gentle words and goodly wit
 He soone allayd that Knights conceiu'd displeasure,
 That he besought him downe by him to sit,
 That they mote treat of things abroad at leisure;
 And of aduentures, which had in his measure
 Of so long waies to him befallen late.
 So downe he sate, and with delightfull pleasure
 His long aduentures gan to him relate,
 Which he endured had through daungerous debate.
 Of which whilest they discoursed both together,
 The faire Serena (so his Lady hight)
 Allur'd with myldnesse of the gentle wether,
 And pleasaunce of the place, the which was dight
 With diuers flowres distinct with rare delight,
 Wandred about the fields, as liking led
 Her wauering lust after her wandring sight,
 To make a garland to adorne her hed,
 Without suspect of ill or daungers hidden dred (VI.iii.20-21).

Certainly Calidore exercises his skills in ‘civil conversation’ and appears to get himself out of an embarrassing situation. But surely things cannot be quite as they seem: the opening lines are arch in the extreme, as is the description of Serena wandering off because it’s a lovely day. This is a situation of extreme embarrassment and either the people involved are a bit odd or they really don’t mind such an interruption (perhaps a straw poll of the audience could establish this once and forever?). It is likely, therefore, either that the narrator is lying to us or that Calepine is lying to Calidore, having to act courteously and hide the truth of his feelings. A mild enough example, of course, but one that shows just how out of joint the times are for

equating truth and courtesy against lying and falsehood. And the Blatant Beast, later a figure of lying itself, then appears to whisk Serena away, a sign that we are witnessing the slippery slope from white social lies to ones of cosmic significance.

Spenser was not, needless to say, alone in thinking about lies and lying – almost any number of authors could be summoned to make a similar case. But what is especially interesting about Spenser's writing is that he does not base his understanding of lying and its significance on religion. In fact, after an initial opening book about Holiness, *The Faerie Queene* moves ever further away from religion, suggesting that Zagorin's understanding of the early modern period as 'an age of dissimulation' is indeed right, but that religion is probably not all we need to think about. The culture of lying went much further.

Later, towards the end of the seventeenth century, at the time of the 'Glorious Revolution' that implemented a more liberal cultural ideology, including (for Protestants, at least) religious toleration, social and political pressures towards dissimulation moved away from faith altogether and were funnelled into the philosophical and moral terms of common sense and politeness. One need only point to Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* to realise the extent to which the promotion of a plain style paves the way for a Kantian highmindedness about rhetoric, which is understood as an 'Abuse of Words' and nothing but a 'powerful instrument of Error and Deceit':

But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat[.] (3.10.34, Locke 1979: 508)

John Dryden, in his *Religio Laici* (1682), concurs that '[a] Man is to be cheated into Passion, but to be reason'd into Truth' (1972: 109). The antinomy of passion and reason continues into the eighteenth century, particularly in discourses concerning the epistemological problem of 'enthusiasm', as in Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis* (1709; cf. Heyd 1995). Because, for Locke and many of his contemporaries, language is predominantly a social and intersubjective medium of exchange, 'the great Bond that holds Society together' (*Essay* 3.11.11, Locke 1979: 509), questions of style and propriety also have important social and political implications. In England in particular, after the perceived excesses of religious fundamentalism and puritanism during Civil War and 'Interregnum', it was a predominant

concern to curb any such extremes for the sake of maintaining what Dryden called ‘Common quiet’ (1972: 122). Ideals of civility and sociability, including plain-speaking and truth-telling, are upheld in order to accommodate or, if necessary, suppress political and religious differences in order to banish the spectre of civil war and to hold the Hobbesian state of nature at bay – where, we may assume, lying would have been *du jour* as a common weapon in the war of everyone against everyone else. (According to Hobbes in *De homine* 10.3, the ability to lie is one distinguishing feature between human beings and other animals.) The Restoration comedy of manners, from Etherege’s *Man of Mode* to Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, thrives on the double standard of, on the one hand, an official culture of plain-dealing and plain-speaking, and on the other hand, of the regular employment of lies and general manipulative behaviour as a means to achieve social goals.

The Enlightenment dream of a perfect society with no need for lying or deceit is part of a utopian tradition that includes Montaigne’s essay ‘Of the Cannibals’, which claims that these inhabitants of the New World had no use for lying: ‘The very words that import lying, falshood, treason, dissimulations, covetousness, envie, detraction, and pardon, were never heard amongst them’ (1: 220). The distance between that world and ours is – painfully, though humorously – marked by Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, in which only the Houyhnhnms are incapable of telling lies. In their essay for this volume, Brean Hammond and Gregory Currie explore what this tells us about Swift’s attitude towards truth and mendacity in the context of early eighteenth-century politics and imaginative writing; they also engage in an interdisciplinary debate, highly appropriate for this discussion of early modern mendacity, between literature, linguistics and philosophy. Readers will also find it useful to compare this perspective on Swift’s satirical travel-writing with Kirsten Sandrock’s exploration of how generic conventions in English Renaissance travel literature change ‘from mendacity to veracity’. In her view, early modern travel writing inhabits a transitional boundary zone between fictional and non-fictional modes of reading and writing. Reading two texts from the early 17th century, Coryat’s *Crudities* and Lithgow’s *Totall Discourse*, she shows how the travelogue in this period negotiates uneasy and unstable compromises between an emerging convention of factuality in travel-writing and a residual discourse of myth-making and fiction..

In her article on ‘John Donne and Catholic Recusant Mendacity’, Shany Altman argues that the religious division wrought by the Reformation made the need to lie a fact of life for many early modern Englishmen and women. People may have condemned duplicity

and mendacity as abstract vices and pledged a need to articulate the truth but, King James's imposition of the Oath of Allegiance on his subjects meant that many had to mislead in order to survive, as John Donne recognised in his treatise urging Catholics not to seek death for their cause, *Pseudo-Martyr*. Anna Swärdh explores a very different kind of deception in two narrative poems, Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* and John Trussell's rather less celebrated *First Rape of Fair Hellen*, published a year later (1595). Swärdh shows how rhetoric, an art that could lead to truth or deception, enabled virtuous women to disguise their vulnerability and so protect themselves, and also exposed the dishonest strategies of their rapacious pursuers. Equally nuanced is Eric Pudney's exploration of kingship in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Richard III*, which also shows how literary works emerge from a humanist culture based on rhetorical training and argument. While *Henry V*'s lies can be read as strategically useful deceptions for a higher purpose, those of *Richard III* cannot be redeemed and almost become ends in themselves. Concentrating on a later text Anne-Julia Zwierlein explores the troubling question of Milton's representation of Eve in *Paradise Lost* and her role in the Fall of Mankind. Zwierlein finds that Milton's interest in science and scientific language forms a crucial context for our understanding of Eve's transformation to a fallen woman, especially if one reads her against the virtuous lady in *Comus*. Eve's inability to understand Satan's rhetorical sleights of hand allied to her natural curiosity lead to disaster as she cannot understand the truth, a pointed contrast to the insight of the lady who can spot mendacity when she sees it.

Taken together, the essays in this issue challenge supra-historical or ahistorical views of truth-telling as a universal norm. They explore the particular ways in which codes of truth and falsehood are embedded in early modern English culture, and the ways in which they were subject to historical and cultural change. They investigate the cultural norms of truthfulness and lying that were valid during this period, and the basis on which they were constructed. And while this can only be the starting point for a more extended conversation, they also return us to the question of the role, or roles, that imaginative writing was able to play in this construction.

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¹ This introduction is not the place to discuss the concept of fictionality in the early modern period in detail, nor the competing theories of fiction in modern philosophy and literary theory. For an exemplary discussion of both, based on early modern pastoral poetry, see Lser 1993, and also cf. Pfeiffer 1990, Berensmeyer 2003. Both Currie 1990 and Walton 1990 offer philosophical perspectives on fiction as a form of 'make-believe'. For the historical origins of fictional discourse in classical antiquity, see Gill and Wiseman 1993. For a related discussion of literature and lying in the early modern period, see Hadfield 2014.

² This way of putting it is indebted to sociological systems theory; see in particular Teubner 2011, who in turn refers to Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1988. For reasons of space, we have to neglect the important distinction between logical and rhetorical paradoxes here. The topic of Renaissance paradox is explored, for example, in Platt 2009.