

Women As Liars: Moral Gender Questions in Medieval French and Italian Educational Standards

Angela Giallongo

Former Full Professor, Università degli Studi di Urbino

e-mail: angela.giallongo@uniurb.it

After nearly five decades of studying women and gender in medieval Europe, it is worth examining those routes of ideas that represented the daughters of Eve as a sort of lying race. Indeed, without this kind of investigation, the history of the medieval mentality would lack an essential component. This contribution analyses lies as real historical evidence of gender issues. Medieval gender rules provided for only two options: “male” or “female”. This perspective yoked people to their biological features, but also morally differentiated between men and women at birth, a binary distinction that became a social and formative fact from that point on. This investigation identifies the impact of the Latin Church Fathers (Augustine and Jerome) on the dualistic allegorical representations (Truth vs. Falsehood) by artists and some vernacular writers of didactic moral literature in French and in Italy. The explicit instructions imparted during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, by Richard de Fournival on the sentimental education of adults and by both Filippo da Novara and Francesco da Barberino on the control of the verbal behavior of baby girls, are highlighted. Finally, important evidence is presented on Christine de Pizan, whose thoughtful, and very public, testimony at the beginning the fifteenth century provides a detailed account of the repercussions of the Truth versus Falsehood debate on the life of her contemporaries.

Keywords: Falsehoods, Exegesis, Medieval Didactic Literature, Women, Gender.

Le donne bugiarde: questioni morali di genere nella cultura educativa medievale in Francia e in Italia

Dopo quasi cinque decenni di studi sulle donne e sul genere nell'Europa medievale, pare opportuno esaminare quei percorsi di idee che hanno rappresentato le figlie di Eva come una sorta di razza bugiarda. Senza questo tipo di indagine, infatti, la storia della mentalità medievale mancherebbe di una componente essenziale. Questo contributo analizza le bugie come vera e propria testimonianza storica attinente alle questioni di genere. Le regole di genere medievali prevedevano solo due opzioni: "maschio" o "femmina". Tale prospettiva vincolava le persone alle loro caratteristiche biologiche, ma differenziava anche moralmente tra uomini e donne fin dalla nascita, una distinzione binaria che da quel momento in poi sarebbe divenuto un fatto sociale e formativo. La presente ricerca è volta a identificare l'impatto dei Padri della Chiesa latina (Agostino e Girolamo) sulle rappresentazioni allegoriche dualistiche (Verità contro Falsità) realizzate da artisti e da alcuni scrittori volgari della letteratura morale didattica in Francia e in Italia. A tale scopo sono evidenziate le istruzioni esplicite impartite nei secoli XIII e XIV da Richard de Fournival sull'educazione sentimentale degli adulti e da Filippo da Novara e Francesco da Barberino sul controllo del comportamento verbale delle bambine. Infine, vengono presentate importanti testimonianze su Christine de Pizan, la cui attenta e pubblica testimonianza all'inizio del XV secolo fornisce un resoconto dettagliato delle ripercussioni del dibattito Verità contro Falsità sulla vita dei suoi contemporanei.

Parole-chiave: Falsità, esegesi, letteratura didattica medievale, donne, genere.

Introduction

The potential value of lies as evidence of ideas, theories and emotions regulating social relations between the sexes is beyond question, and the issue has already been raised, for example, by Böhmsch (2015), and even earlier, in 1997, by Derrida, who perceived the need to study lies as 'intentional acts' and their interactions with sexual asymmetry (Derrida, 2002, p.28). In recent decades, other historians have likewise incorporated gender (the category coined by Scott in 1986) into their analysis. In particular, the historiography of gender in medieval Europe (Skinner, 2018) has opened up many

previously untouched lines of enquiry. Furthermore, there has been recent interest on the subject of falsehood, whose association with gender issues—it will come as no surprise—has not always been sufficiently appreciated. The most lucid approach to this issue has been broadened by Denery; no other researcher has delineated so clearly the significance of past masculine and feminine experiences in this regard. Denery's work on the long-term history of deception from Christian antiquity to the eighteenth century is a vital starting point for investigating this topic. Indeed, he proposed to 'tell a larger story about the domestication and naturalization of mendacity as it moves from being a devastating demonic disruption of the orderly world of paradise to being the source of worldly order itself' (Denery, 2015, p.17). From this fruitful perspective (the concept *longue durée* proposed by Braudel in 1958), I found particularly performative Chapter Five, which recalls the relevance of female cultural depositions as a way of improving our understanding of this unusual history in Western Europe.

For the purposes of this article, I chose to develop an analytical framework with which to explore premodern sources (visual and written), seeking out the pathways by which the ideas that had defined the social use of Truth and Falsehood and its problematic implications for gender roles had been laid down. Little is known concerning the normative discourses emerging from these messages, which nevertheless shaped a controversial, binary conception of masculine and feminine models and behavior. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the challenges of studying medieval concepts about lying than the dominant trends stemming from the early (such as Augustine and Jerome) and later medieval periods (such as French and Italian iconography and didactic literature).

My objective, as part of a continuing investigation into educational history of gender, was to map, interrogate and interpret the strategies of public teachings, through the sources here provided and relative contemporary scholarship useful for this argument. In brief, I raise further questions on the medieval battleground of Truth and Falsehood, characterized by a long-term trajectory. With this methodological approach, I select certain tendencies of artistic output, and the conceptions which had represented, since early Christianity, the daughters of Eve as a sort of lying race, which became a generally accepted "truth" of Western culture. In addition, I contextualize this topic in its connections with the main pedagogical decisions enacted during the second millennium, especially in Italian culture.

Artistic and Literary Allegories

Florence courthouse once housed a sinister fourteenth-century fresco by Taddeo Gaddi in which an allegorical Truth was depicted snatching the tongue from the mouth of Falsehood. Now lost, we know of the scene thanks to 1550 *Vite* by Giorgio Vasari, the first Italian art historian (Vasari, 1997, p.578). The intentional use of this kind of spectacle as a tool for teaching the illiterate had been already authorized by Filarète (Antonio di Piero Averlino, c.1400-c.1469) in his *Treatise on Architecture*. This had inspired three other moral exempla, painted for the palaces of the magistrates of San Gimignano in the first half of the sixteenth century. Here Truth is depicted ‘naked, beautiful’ and barely covered, holding an olive branch and a white dove on her head; her counterpart, the Other, is ‘a female dressed in black’ with a snake entwined around a rod in her hand and a crow perched atop her head. Then, violently, with twin flickers of movement: ‘Truth snatches the tongue from Falsehood with a pair of fire tongs, just as the dove snatches the tongue from the crow’ (Filarete, 1972, p. 264)¹.

In turn, Cesare Ripa, in all seven successful editions of his *Iconologia*, citing St. Augustine, described in 1593 Falsehood as an ugly lame woman, sometimes equipped with a black tail, in stark contrast to the white, naked Truth, shining with beauty, divine light and goodness. (Ripa, 1992, p. 82; Figure 1).



Figure 1. The opposition between Truth and Falsehood, here depicted lame, as illustrated in the 1611 edition (Padua) of the Ripa's *Iconologia*.

¹ No pun intended: “la Verità cava la lingua alla Bugia con uno paio di tenaglie di fuoco; e così la colomba cava la lingua al corvo” (*ibidem*).

Thus, Truth and Falsehood offered their viewers an ostentatious rivalry. The didactic intent of these subjects, handed down from French and Italian Romanesque religious art, is palpable in Tuscan civic paintings from the fourteenth (Donato, 1994, p. 500) to the nineteenth century. For example, among the paintings by Tommaso De Vivo in the Italian post-unification period, including the pictorial trilogy inspired by Dante's *Comedy*, appeared in 1881 *La possa del tempo scopre la verità. La verità strappa la lingua alla menzogna*. As in the fourteenth century, the inexorable hand of the young, naked Truth tears the tongue from the old, cloaked Falsehood.

This image can also be taken as a measure of the medieval tension between truth and falsehood through female representations. According to Burke, this trick of visualizing abstract concepts had been inherited from classical Greece: a successful gimmick recycled in the figurative codes of the Middle Ages and beyond (Burke, 2001, p.71). The theological, moral and cardinal Virtues and the Liberal Arts were often depicted in female guises, especially in the Carolingian Empire. These depictions included Justice—recruited from Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua—and Law—this although jurists and legislators mostly legitimized the disparity of treatment of women (Minucci, 1989). Even Strength was portrayed by the fourteenth-century sculptors of French cathedrals as an armored gentlewoman, skillfully handling shield and sword.

In 1893, the accredited scientific explanations by Ferrero and Lombroso of socially deviant female behaviors borrowed from the medical arts of the Middle Ages, linking them to the influence of the menstrual cycle (Ferrero, Lombroso, 2009, p. 89).

Such personifications, in any event, were not realistic, they did not reflect social reality, instead they distorted it.

Thus, Truth and Falsehood, problematic female allegories of Italian art, over the centuries followed a tried and tested scheme that, didactically speaking, had replaced the reading of sacred texts. As St. Gregory the Great (590–604) had intuited at the end of the sixth century, painting was the most reliable instrument for the moral instruction of the illiterate (Chazel, 1990). Indeed, not even the least educated could escape the contrast between the light of Truth (veil/dove) and the dark of Falsehood (dress/crow).

Illiterate had also long been conditioned to associate the slimy presence of the snake with lies. Though visual lessons they had learned that the first lying lips belonged to the snake, and its accomplice, Eve. The total

rejection of lies was a central paradigm of the doctrinal culture of the second millennium, which prohibited both educated and uneducated Christians from lying, through the written and visual arts, respectively. Liars, in fact, were excoriated by the Bible—the ninth commandment expressly forbids lying—and excluded from the city of God (Bible, Psalm 101:7).

The duty of Truth, the art of the perfect soul, was emphasized by the patristic theorists, who, with Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian, Jerome and Augustine, in parallel drew a straight, clear line of demarcation between men and women. While it might have been true that all, regardless of their sex, were seen as liars and sinners, it was also true that women fell more on the wrong side. There was a visible distinction in the antagonistic and hierarchical analogy according to which women were to men as the body is to the soul, matter to the spirit, and the senses to reason. For the visual representations of the Fall, it had to be ‘true’ that it was the female descendants of Eve who were more prone to lying.

This distinction was no longer so evident with Dante; his *Comedy* heaps all the malice contained in the Eighth Circle of Hell on the grotesque devil Malacoda, head of the fifth Bolgia – the realm of fraud – pointing to him as “a liar and the father of lies” (*Inf.* XXIII, vv. 142-146).

Although a greater number of women reach Dante’s Paradise, based on the recognition of their spiritual value for the conquest of eternal truth, they remain less represented throughout the *Comedy*, and in Hell, there are very few. In fact, among the four ranks of counterfeiters (of metals, people, money and words) there are five men and only two women. The balance is more or less the same in all 33 Cantos, in which more of the ‘thousand and more souls’ (*Inf.* V, v. 67) damned are men. Such a disparity in number testifies that there was a wide gender gap in the afterworld too.

Two more of Dante’s female culprits hark back to the established mythological and biblical tradition and, as elsewhere, are punished for sexual transgressions. The incestuous Myrrha, for giving in to the desire to lie with her father while in the guise of another woman (*Inf.* XXX, vv. 37-4), shares with another damned soul the torments reserved for “forgers of people”; while Putiphar’s wife, who had falsely accused Joseph, loyal servant of her husband, of attempted rape, numbers among the “forgers of speech”. Like the Greek, Sinon of Troy, she is punished with a delirious fever, which disfigures their bodies with the same virulence with which they had altered the truth, marking them out with a nauseating smell (*Inf.* XXX, vv. 97-99). It makes sense that

anyone who has violated the social mores is condemned in the same way, but in Dante's text it is the overbearing loquaciousness of Sinon of Troy that stands out, while Putiphar's wife remains mute, voiceless, all but negligible.

The Comedy, despite recording predominantly male values, represents a most reliable source of information on the medieval representation of the female (as claimed by Shapiro (1975) and Kirkham (1989)). In this regard, Dante diverted the trajectory of exegetical and theological tradition with a giant leap when he orchestrated Eve's presence in Purgatory and Paradise rather than Hell. After having set up anguished literary images on the consequences of the falsification of Truth, he judged Eve, like Adam, not to be guilty.

It would not have been easy to convince his readers—with the exception of Cristine de Pizan—to embrace this new ideal. After seven hundred years, Italians could rely on the common prejudice “women are born liars”, but many would likely not take seriously the idea of the lie as sacrilegious. In fact, they would probably agree with Oscar Wilde, when in his *The Decay of Lying* (Wilde, 1889), he hailed the first ancestral liar as a brilliant promoter of rewarding social relations.

However, modernity actually arrived when Europeans stopped measuring mendacity with the yardstick of sin, and instead began to evaluate it, depending on the circumstances, as an acceptable strategy of defense and personal promotion. Denery examined this issue, revealing the complicated plots of the history of lies and the changes that occurred in the long medieval transition to modernity. He explained how lying was a dominant theological issue for apologists, Church Fathers, philosophers and preachers, who, during the first centuries of Christianity, were convinced that every lie was sin and that all sins originated from the first lie. Hence, the doctrinal theories, favoring the thesis of the congenital falsity of the daughters of Eve, justified the sexual hierarchy (Denery, 2015, pp. 199-216).

Indeed, even in the popular imagination today, according to a proverb from Abruzzo: “a lying woman, if not a whore, is not far off”.

The Lying Serpent

In the Middle Ages, cultural production (written, visual and oral) developed the ophidian symbolism, and adapted it to an alarming alliance

with the female gender (Giallongo, 2017, p. 159). The confidence of Christian thinkers in the biblical version of creation had led them to interpret the impenetrable divine designs through the distinction between the truth and a lie. This is what Augustine of Hippo had reasoned in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401-416), when he reflected on the fact that the evidence that human nature had been seduced at its origin by the serpent's conversation with the woman was not negligible:

When would the woman have believed this assertion, telling them they had been held back by God from something good and beneficial, if there had not already been in her mind that love of her own independent authority and a certain proud over-confidence in herself, of which she had to be convicted and then humbled by that very temptation? (Augustine, 2002, pp. 30-38).

This question highlighted Eve's guilty complacency in the outcome of the reptile's mendacious words, and has led to fascinating current research (Flood, 2011). Phillips, for example, revealed how the interdependence between Eve and the serpent, and between the serpent and Satan, arising from the Jewish and Arab tradition, has been continually revived in Western Christian interpretations of the history of creation and the Fall of the first humans (Phillips, 1984, p. 57).

This *idée fixe*, which had the corrosive tenacity of an incurable disease, had become an effective public teaching tool of the Church. The framing of Eve as an intermediary of the serpent arose from the exegesis of the Latin Fathers of the Church, to whom the thesis of female responsibility in original sin was very appealing. For centuries, theological and secular writers played with this idea as if they were playing ball, throwing it from one generation to the next.

Discourse on the subject of lying accompanied the pessimistic turn of Christian culture which, as compared to the classical age, transformed it into a taboo, to be accompanied, according to Jankélévitch in *Du mensonge* (1942), by a sense of guilt. Even in the thirteenth-century debate on ethics, clerics were very interested in the relationship between sin, society and the word (Casagrande, Vecchio, 2018). While thinkers and theologians picked their brains in search of the root cause of original sin, religious visual propaganda constantly reminded generations of the faithful of the popular

alliance between the mendacious tongues of both the serpent and Eve.

Durand's anthropological interpretation of the intertwining in the Christian view of discussions of lies and gender relations is illuminating. His analysis reveals how the feminization of Original Sin was deeply emphasized by the nocturnal imaginary with a sexually explicit regime focused on stigmatizing the opposite sex, deeming it a secret ally of dark forces, which were generally personified by the serpent and the devil (Durand, 1999, p. 113). In this way, the lying serpent, the devil, the progenitor of falsity (depicted in the Old Testament in reptilian form), and Eve had been identified by Augustine as "persons" to be equally deplored for their "lust for power" (Augustine, 2002, pp 30-39).

Among Church Fathers, Doctors and Paladins of Truth

Since the dawn of Christianity, the gender model thereby constructed took on a specific typology, distinct from previous traditions (Jewish and Greco-Roman). The pioneering R. H. Bloch identified in this new standardization of the female — conforming to the canons imposed by the representation of a nature removed from reality and history — the misogynistic turning point initiated by the Latin Fathers of the Church. The constant reproof directed at Eve's daughters depended on the discovery of other truths about the congenital anomalies characterizing the opposite sex. Eve was not the barometer of divine creation, but rather a by-product, a theologically approved ontological diversity. This new form of objectification provided a firm foundation for a theory of creation that excluded equality of rank.

Along these lines, the ritual denunciation of the shortcomings of women, which had been a cultural constant of Ancient Greece and classical literature, as well as a fixation of the Old Testament, became predominant in the Latin tradition of not only ecclesiastical and theological writing and sermonizing, but also scientific, medical and philosophical treatises and subsequent educational works of vernacular literature.

According to Rieder, different forms of anti-female attitudes coexisted alongside complex forms of clerical, monastic and secular misogyny in these scenarios (Rieder, 2012, p. 4). The examples cited by Bloch reveal the trend that developed from the fifth to the fifteenth century, in which women were mainly charged with verbal abuses (Bloch, 1987). This conviction

had also influenced the French cleric, Richard de Fournival, proponent of the so-called 'courtly love'. His popular *Bestiary of Love*, (1250), copied in Northern Italy, warned against the insidious power of the female voice. He shared with his readers that, after being "captured" by the driving force of his lady friend's sweet words, he was moved by a strong impulse of reluctance: "And yet I did not know why this was, except that it was like a warning of the misfortune that has since befallen me" (*ivi*, p. 50). The thread linking all the vices and defects attributed to women in the Middle Ages is that they are often ascribed to their verbal incontinence. Medieval women were portrayed as over-talkative, deceitful, flattering, duplicitous and unfaithful. They could not be trusted. This was more than enough to induce men to be inherently suspicious of women, and to take steps to force them to keep their mouths shut, stifling any vocation they may have had to the spoken or written word.

It also proved sufficient to hinder, through Francesco da Barberino, the debate begun in the fourteenth-century Europe in favor of female literacy. In this regard, the female pupils in Florence, among the first Italian cities to inaugurate municipal schools, were an exception (Frova, 2019, p.286).

Several examples from the latin pedagogical tradition and secular vernacular literature recall the pressures exerted in everyday life on the verbal behavior of Eve's daughters.

Jerome, while admiring the intellectual enthusiasm for biblical studies shown by the cultured and converted Roman noblewomen, had instead another lesson in mind. He had in fact successfully planned other spiritual experiences for them in Europe and the East between the fourth and fifth centuries. In his *Letters*, read and reread throughout the Middle Ages, the litmus test is the *Letter 107* (A.D. 401-2), above all the following key passages on learning the truth transmitted by the sacred scriptures. The pedagogical method reminded Laeta, the mother of Paola, the consecrated newborn: "let her regard lying as sacrilege", specifying: "remember that you are a virgin's parents and that you can teach her better by example than by words. [Her soul] must have no comprehension of foul words, no knowledge of worldly songs, and its childish tongue must be imbued with the sweet music of the psalms." Also: "It must learn to hear nothing and to say nothing save what pertains to the fear of the Lord."

The close connection between Truth and Falsehood seems to suggest that baby girls consecrated from the late Roman Empire onwards should above all learn the importance of verbal conduct. This was based on a calculated

intuition: “The first impression made on a young mind is hard to remove” (Jerome, 1962, vv. 3-4-9).

Regardless of Jerome’s intentions, his experiment can be considered successful in that ten centuries later a Tuscan preacher reiterated, “especially for the virgin it is befitting more to listen than to speak” (Petrocchi, 1974, p. 115)².

Even the Lombard jurist De Navarre Philippe, serving as a diplomat at the French court, took up the message, when in 1260 he dedicated eleven paragraphs to the education of the secular child, and pointed to the talkativeness of girls as a kind of social disturbance. Their private and public verbal impulses were now to be regulated for another reason: in the name of the marriage contract. In accordance with biblical and patristic authority, girlish chatter offended the ears of adults³.

Augustine himself regretted having been a “chatty child” (*Confessions*, I, 8). Indeed, chattering could be considered a sort of gateway towards lies.

In short, the tenacious efforts of even the secular treatise writers from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century were aimed at curbing the verbal interaction of the younger generations with adults, especially those of the opposite sex. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that female members of the court and urban elites learned to fear opening their mouths in the presence of males; they were taught to speak in hushed tones.

The demand for them to speak little, just enough so as not to appear mute, evokes the normative model in vogue at the time of Dante. And Francesco da Barberino, in his *Del reggimento e costumi di donna* (1318–1320) echoed the theories shared by most of the Florentine municipal reality. His treatise makes evident the priority for learning gestural and behavioral rules on verbal communication skills, with respect to schooling. In this sense must the pressures placed on newborn girls be understood. Probably their first babbles were poorly tolerated by male relatives, who, already intolerant of the alleged garrulity of their female blood relatives, would not countenance their vocal progress (Da Barberino, 1875, p. 59). It is no wonder, then, that Francesco da Barberino’s singular interest in language acquisition concerns

² “spezialmente alla vergine s’appartiene più di ascoltare che di parlare” (Petrocchi, 1974, p. 115).

³ “Fame ne doit estre abandonée ne baude de mavaeise paroles ne de vilaine ouvres”; &21, 22; Ivi, “En toute menieres se doit on porveoir de les garder destroitment er chastier asprement, en dit et en fet, dès petitece” (De Navarre, 1888, p. 27).

only the actual words uttered in the first two years of life by male infants (*ivi*, p. 125).

Despite these tours de force, the outcomes must not have been appreciable if in Florence it was believed that it was easier to raise male than female children (*ivi*, p. 229).

A Race Apart

For this analysis, the *Cité des Dames* (1404-5) by Christine de Pizan is fundamental, as this testifies to the otherwise undocumented female point of view. She was the first to publicly express — during the debate known as the *querelle des femmes* — the interests of her gender. She brought a unique perspective, thanks also to her dual belonging to the Italian and, above all, French culture. In Paris, then the intellectual center of Europe, she rejected the esprit de corps of her male contemporaries, caustically observing that “all speak with one and the same mouth” (de Pizan, 1982, p. 63).

From the very first pages she likens these voices to fountains gushing with preconceptions, prejudices and, above all, lies about women. Led by the clerics, this large chorus, all jabbering in unison, should “lower their eyes, ashamed for having spoken so badly, in view of the truth that runs counter to their poems” (*ivi*, p. 162), and for having written books “composed of lies” (*ivi*, p. 88). She wanted to expose — without recording all their names, because the list “would be too long” — the theologians, preachers, men of science, philosophers, poets, writers, doctors and jurists who had availed themselves of the right to “attack all women in general” (*ivi*, p. 82). She complained that:

To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken so falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was (*ivi*, p. 64).

Unsurprisingly, she used three female allegorical figures (Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude and Lady Justice) — higher beings and special daughters of God — to refute all those lies, both written and spoken (*ivi*, p. 66). Lady Reason was the device by which she aired the problem that was closest to her heart, that is to say that even the greatest philosophers had been unable to distinguish the false from the true, because, from Aristotle to St. Augustine, and including the other Doctors of the Church, they had continually contradicted and criticized each other (*ivi*, p. 67). Hence, she was to construct a city so attractive as to frustrate any further attempt at erroneous definitions of the feminine (*ivi*, p. 73). All her stories of Reason, Rectitude and Justice are outright rejections of lies, and in fact exalt an unexpected truth: the intelligence of women (*ivi*, p. 159).

The traditional expedient of the narratives involving mythical and historical female figures from the past served to open a breach in the walls thrown up by the preconceptions and moral prejudices that had reserved literacy and higher-level education (both professional and the liberal arts) for males.

At the same time, de Pizan crossed another boundary: following in the footsteps of Dante she argued for the redemption of Eve, shaping her in the image of the Creator and endowing her with a soul that was as pure and noble as that of Adam. She instilled doubt about the authority of the interpretations that had held the first sinner's Fall against her female descendants, saying "How was she formed? I don't know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint?" (*ivi*, p. 89).

Finally, de Pizan turned her intelligent irony on public opinion: "For the law does not maintain, nor can any such written opinion be found that permits [men] and not women to sin, that their vice is more excusable", noting that their misconduct was seen as "peccadillos" while that of women as "crimes" (*ivi*, p. 257), as if it were the latter who were responsible for the atrocities of the world (*ivi*, p. 298).

She urged her female readers to realize "from your own experiences" that their words had seldom harmed anybody, and that there was no truth to such affirmations; in fact, they were "outright lies" (*ivi*, p. 88). With these strategies she attempted to understand "in good conscience and without favor" (*ivi*, p. 64) how she could, from outside the established male framework, distinguish truth from falsehood.

Conclusion

The memorable dualistic images of the medieval Italian Truth and Falsehood are emblematic of the didactic intentions behind religious and secular art.

What is certain is that it was Augustine's position on the conflict between truth and falsehood that paved the way to accredited interpretations of the daughters of Eve as a sort of deceitful race of humans. We can see through Greenblatt the range of reactions that the Genesis story has aroused in social life of both genders in countless communities over the millennia (Greenblatt, 2017, p.18).

Here I have highlighted how these routes of ideas encouraged, albeit with rare exceptions, non-osmotic formative experiences in personal and public relations between men and women. Built on the solid shoulders of a pagan past, certain behavioral codes had been constructed that provided for only two options for gender roles, "male" or "female".

There was a clear antagonism between the two, based on the accepted hierarchical schema; just like Truth and Falsehood. With the feminization of Original Sin, as identified by Durand, arose a sense that lying was not gender neutral.

This idea was backed up by the prevailing ideologies and the multiple negative tendencies that collaborated in the spread of this new truth. Reexamination of the Latin literature (Augustine and especially Jerome) and the vernacular writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Filippo da Novara and Francesco da Barberino) reveals how the verbal conduct of the "Other" sex was subjected to rigid and strategic control and containment from early childhood. As we have seen, the first decisive blow to the special bond constructed between falsehood and the daughters of Eve was struck by Christine de Pizan at the dawn of the fifteenth century. Thanks to her thoughtful, and very public, testimony, we have a detailed account of the consequences of male 'lies' on the experiences of her contemporaries. Whether in Paris or in Florence, both capitals of European culture, they were paralyzed, first by the fear of raising their voice and then the shame of giving birth to daughters.

She highlights how the power of the sexual hierarchy had been criss-crossed by the tension between truth and falsehood, and how every kind of falsification—including slander—had been passed on from one mouth

to another, and by writers across the generations, and had ultimately been internalized by men and women from all social classes.

The pages of de Pizan's *City of Ladies* are therefore a fundamental starting point for anyone who intends to delve deeper into the genesis and development of the link between woman and falsehood in Western history.

Many research questions still remain to be answered, for example, whether this belief weakened during the Modern Age, in light of our willingness, posited by Denery, to accept lies as a tool for personal promotion, or whether instead it blossomed, to the exclusive self-gratification of males.

Accurate and circumscribed investigations are also needed to establish whether, in the centuries that followed, the convictions and training conventions in this regard were the same everywhere (i.e., in both European and non-European countries).

To conclude, researching gender education history as interpreted through the filter of lies requires a lot of effort and comparison between various sources, especially those documenting social practices and related mental standards of the collective imagination, expressed by contemporary visual representations.

However, without raising any other issues, I just need to remember that both Dante and de Pizan worked hard and sweated to change the rules of the game (Richards, 1985).

As attentive reader of the *Comedy*, in 1403 de Pizan had been inspired by a verse from the *Inferno* (*Inf.* I, 82–84); following the example “of the great poet”, she had in fact said to herself “may the long road of learning aid me” (De Pizan, 2000, pp. 1132–1148; *ivi*, pp. 1388–1392).

Both wrote their influential pedagogical encyclopedias because they had learned first-hand that it was precisely the impostures that forced upon them the arduous search for the truth.

In the inexhaustible reservoir of distorted perceptions about the feminine, how could the European history of the lie be enriched without the “truthful” mirror of the *City of Ladies*, born also of *the* great love for the search for truth? (De Pizan, 1982, p. 53).

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⁴ On the site dedicated to Cesare Ripa see allegorical representations of the Truth and the Falsehood during 16th century and 17th century: <http://www.unibg.it/ripa-iconologia>.

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