Gender and Shame in Masaccio’s *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*

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The recent cleaning of the Brancacci chapel frescoes in the church of the Carmine, Florence,1 has revealed not only Masaccio’s brilliant colour, but also, in the *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (plate 1), some anatomical detail obscured since the later seventeenth century by fig leaves, and has made more palpable the difference between the gestures of Adam and Eve. An analysis of these gestures and their contrapuntal relationship to each other indicates that Masaccio has used them to depict the primeval couple’s shame according to traditional gender stereotypes.

Although in images prior to Masaccio’s painting the couple during the Expulsion had been shown in a variety of poses, they very often shared a similar or common pose, as in Wiligelmo’s early twelfth-century sculpture on the west façade of Modena Cathedral and the fourteenth-century Neapolitan Bible known as the Hamilton Bible.2 When their poses did differ, as in the mosaic on the dome of the Florentine Baptistry and the relief on the façade of Orvieto Cathedral, they did not differ significantly; that is to say, the differences were not such that one might attach great symbolic, iconographic, or psychological importance to them.

In representations of the expulsion before the fifteenth century, such as the Florentine mosaic and the Orvieto relief,3 and, in the fifteenth century, Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise relief, the two figures are generally clothed in fig leaves (Gen. 3:7) or animal skins (Gen. 3:21), as called for by the biblical account. However, some representations, such as Jacopo della Quercia’s *Expulsion* (plate 2) from the Fonte Gaia, Siena, of 1414–19 (i.e., only slightly antedating Masaccio’s fresco), show the figures nude, thereby anamnestically collapsing the moment of the Fall with that of the Expulsion, as does Masaccio’s image. In noting that the nudity is not ‘required’ iconographically in the Expulsion, James Beck reminds us that Jacopo’s ‘fascination with the nude … places him in elite company among early quattrocento artists’,4 and the same may be said of Masaccio, but, at least in Masaccio’s image, as I hope to show, the nudity *is* required for the complete iconography, even if contravened by the biblical narrative.

Unlike Masaccio’s painting, Jacopo’s relief – now badly damaged – showed both the figures with arms pointing generally in the direction of their flight and conveying physical action rather than emotion; whatever psychological insight the relief displayed was provided not by the gestures but by the facial expressions.5 Masaccio’s depiction of the gestures with which Eve covers both her genitals and...
her breasts and Adam covers his face while leaving his genitals exposed is, on the other hand, much more purposeful. When Jacopo returned to the subject in his relief for the main portal of San Petronio, Bologna, of 1429/30–38 (plate 3), he clearly had learned a lesson from Masaccio. Even though Adam’s gesture (and its attendant emotion) differs from that in Masaccio’s fresco, Eve’s is very much derived from the Florentine work (albeit with an interesting shift of the right hand from the breasts to the throat, as if she were short of breath), and with both figures Jacopo has created much more strongly emotive characters than in his earlier relief.6

But Masaccio’s is still the more coherent work. He varied the couple’s gestures systematically, with the two arm positions participating in a series of oppositions between the figures: Adam’s head is down while Eve’s is up; he strides with his left leg forward, she with her right. Even the variation in the background landscape

elements suggests an opposition and is part of what Andrew Ladis has called ‘Masaccio’s habitual use of antithesis’. It is an early example of the Renaissance artist’s use of contrapposto, which, derived from ancient rhetoric and poetics, was a fundamental component of pictorial composition, both structural and ornamental. The juxtaposition of opposites in art – specifically with regard to the movements of separate figures – was recommended in the next decade by Leon Battista Alberti so that the painter might achieve the all-important variëta. But contrapposto was not understood as a purely stylistic device devoid of significant meaning. With Alberti, the variëta it engendered brought pleasure and, beyond that, instruction, in accordance with traditional goals of rhetoric and the arts brought into comparison with it. Furthermore, I would argue that Masaccio’s use of contrapposto is more specifically significant in the context of the subject of the Expulsion. Contrapposto, or the related comparatione that was also
fundamental to Alberti, is only possible if the juxtaposed elements are in some essential way related – such as aspects of the same thing (front/back), extremes on a scale (light/dark), or iconographic opposites (night/day or dawn/dusk). Such correlative opposites (including male/female), inherited again from antiquity, were fundamental to Renaissance thought.\textsuperscript{11} Built into the Adam and Eve story – indeed essential to it – are both similarity (humanness) and opposition (male/female). For the creation of the first human’s companion, she had to be like him (‘bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh’, Gen. 3:23) enough to fulfil a role that the animals could not, but different from him enough to establish human sexuality and, by extension, full human beings.\textsuperscript{12} Masaccio’s Adam and Eve stride together in the same direction, both experiencing, as we shall see, the same emotion, and their similarity heightens the contrapposto visible in gesture as well as in anatomy.

The gestures in Masaccio’s painting are, I believe, crucial to the work’s specific meaning. As recent studies have suggested, gestures in images can, with more or less precision, carry significant meaning.\textsuperscript{13} Given Masaccio’s reduction of the Expulsion story to the fewest possible elements, with the human figures bearing the burden of conveying the narrative, it is surprising that closer attention has not been given to the precise actions of those figures. Perhaps the apparent naturalness of their gestures has prevented commentators from interpreting them more closely, but as Peter Burke has argued, ‘all body languages are artificial, in the sense of being learned’,\textsuperscript{14} and therefore invite interpretation as social and historical constructs. Eve’s gesture has drawn somewhat more attention than Adam’s, owing to its similarity to the classical Venus Pudica type.\textsuperscript{15} While we may agree that her gesture does, in fact, have a classical prototype (if filtered through a medieval work such as Giovanni Pisano’s figure of Prudence on the pulpit of Pisa Duomo), with important connotations for Masaccio’s Early Renaissance classicism, this in itself does not explain the meaning of the gesture any more than a Renaissance fascination with the human body explains the nudity of Adam and Eve. The imitation of the antique was undoubtedly one incentive, but an antiquarian or even truly ‘renaissance’ impulse cannot account for the precise narrative function of the gesture, nor its adaptation by the artist from one of coy titillation to one of truly shameful modesty – ‘a cruelly ironic inversion of the sensuous classical source’, to quote Paul Joannides.\textsuperscript{16} Only Michael Baxandall has attempted to interpret the narrative meaning of both the gestures, suggesting tentatively on the basis of Benedictine sign language that ‘it is Adam . . . who expresses shame, Eve . . . only grief.’\textsuperscript{17} We might well find grief in Eve’s facial expression – possibly responding to God’s curse in Genesis 3:16: ‘I will multiply thy sorrows’\textsuperscript{18} – but less readily in her hand gestures. For Eve, the Benedictine sign (\textit{palma premens pectus}) adduced by Baxandall could only account for her right hand, making no sense for her left, which is clearly in concert with the other. Furthermore, it is Adam’s gesture of both hands to the face with head bowed slightly, rather than Eve’s, that can be found in a context which seems to suggest grief; thus John, in Donatello’s \textit{Entombment} on the Tabernacle of St Peter’s in Rome (c. 1432–33), covers his face (apparently with both hands) as he turns away from the dead Christ. The gesture also appears with four of the damned (two men and two women) in the fourteenth-century \textit{Last Judgement} in the Camposanto of Pisa, an image rich in gestural varietà,\textsuperscript{19} as well as with two of the damned on
Giovanni Pisano’s pulpit in the Pisa duomo, which has been cited as a source for Masaccio’s Adam. But even in these figures, given the range of possible emotions among the damned, the precise emotion depicted is not clear, although shame or despair seems the most likely. Furthermore, as I shall argue below, the gesture of the arms per se is only an indication of grief in so far as it is used to cover a facial expression more directly tied to that emotion.

As Baxandall himself recognized, the particular context of gestures is of the utmost importance in understanding their meaning, and great care should be exercised in interpreting them according to sources from other contexts. Peter Burke has suggested that there is a ‘complete repertoire of gestures available in a given culture, the “langue” from which individuals choose their particular “paroles” according to personality or social context’, but even if we accept the existence of such a ‘langue’, surviving sources are inadequate for its reconstruction, as Burke also recognized. The problem for the interpretation of visual art is compounded by the imitative tendency of artists by which formal characteristics, including poses and gestures, may be carried from one context to another without regard for specific meaning; such, in fact, may be the case with Masaccio’s adaptation of the Venus Pudica for the figure of Eve.

Because the biblical account of the Expulsion (Gen. 3:23–24) gives little explicit indication of the emotions experienced by the primeval couple on that occasion, artists had recourse to their own imagination or to references to pre-expulsion emotional states. There is, in fact, only one explicit reference to emotion; when the Lord calls Adam after the Fall, Adam replies: ‘I heard thy voice in paradise; and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ (Gen. 3:10) Fear may be written on the face of Adam (and Eve) in some images of the Expulsion, but it does not seem to fit Masaccio’s picture. Grief remains a possibility for Masaccio’s Adam, but I would argue, rather, that Masaccio has responded to the implication that both Adam and Eve experienced shame at their nakedness – hence the iconographic requisite of their nudity in the painting – and that, therefore, both gestures in Masaccio’s painting signify shame. A finer point may be made, however: that the gestures differ according to persistent, gender-specific notions of shame; namely, that the man, as a primarily rational being, experiences intellectual (or spiritual) shame and thus covers his face (or head) as the seat of reason, whereas the woman, as a primarily carnal being, experiences sexual shame and thus covers her erogenous zones. Overlapping and reinforcing this interpretation is another, grounded in anthropology, that argues that the representations of Adam and Eve are informed by Mediterranean concepts of honour and shame.

Edenic sexuality – the ‘love story gone awry’ in Phyllis Trible’s term – is a virtually unavoidable aspect of the story of Adam and Eve. In the biblical text, nakedness is explicitly associated with innocence prior to the Fall (Gen. 2:25: ‘And they were both naked . . . and were not ashamed’), evident in Masolino’s fresco of the Temptation (plate 4) in the Brancacci Chapel facing Masaccio’s Expulsion, and implicitly associated with shame following it (Gen. 3:7–10). Adam and Eve cover themselves with fig leaves and hide from ‘the face of the Lord’ amongst the trees (Gen. 3:7-8), but this shameful hiding had often also been depicted with gestures covering the genitals, as in the Modena Cathedral sculptures. Augustine,
in his influential discussion of Edenic sexuality in the fourteenth book of the *City of God*, envisioned a pre-lapsarian state in which sexual intercourse and procreation would have been effected without lust or shame (the sexual organs responding to the human will as do hands and feet), and mothers would have been perpetually virgins. But Adam and Eve did not consummate their marriage in a state of innocence prior to the Fall, and, as a direct result of the introduction of sin into Eden, ‘the genital organs become as it were the private property of lust’, and sexual intercourse, whether connubial or otherwise, naturally occasions a sense of shame. Augustine points out that the genital organs are appropriately called *pudenda* – ‘parts of shame’ – and their covering in the biblical text and in representations of Adam and Eve exemplifies the shameful nature of sexuality.

For most Bible commentators, sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve was a direct result of the Fall and would not otherwise have occurred (or, as with Augustine, it would have been enacted in a virtually unrecognizable manner). In a fourteenth-century Italian legend of Adam and Eve, Adam implicitly recognizes the sexual connotations of sin. After the Expulsion, Adam and Eve ‘acquired’ two sons. On discovering Cain’s murder of Abel, Adam repents of his (original) sin and suspends sexual relations with Eve: ‘crying and lamenting very loudly, [Adam] said to Eve: “All this evil has happened because of the sin that you and I have committed”; and then there were two hundred years that he did not want intercourse [non volle usare] with Eve, until God the Father commanded him otherwise.’ But this uneasy celibacy could never constitute a return to the Edenic sexual innocence.

Most commentators, including Augustine, do not distinguish between Adam and Eve in associating shame and sexuality any more than do the biblical text or traditional representations such as Wiligelmo’s sculptures on the cathedral at Modena, but there are traditions in which, either explicitly or implicitly, Eve’s sexuality is considered the primary source of sin and shame (and Adam’s sexuality only a secondary source). Philo of Alexandria saw woman as ‘the beginning of blameworthy life’, specifically in the sexuality and bodily pleasure she occasioned. That bodily pleasure (including eating and ‘sexual lusts’) was ‘the beginning of wrongs and violation of law, the pleasure for the sake of which men bring on themselves the life of mortality and wretchedness in lieu of that of immortality and bliss’. More specifically, in some apocryphal or pseudopigraphal accounts, exegetical commentaries, and heretical versions of the Fall, Eve’s deception by the serpent (sometimes understood as a fallen angel, owing to a conflation of Genesis 6:1-4 with the Eden myth) included sexual intercourse, or Eve’s temptation of Adam was actually enacted through sexual seduction. The nature of the seduction may be implied in Masolino’s image of the Temptation (plate 4). Here Eve’s eyes lock onto Adam’s as she slowly lifts the forbidden fruit to her mouth. The fruit is, significantly, the fig, long considered by the fifteenth century an aphrodisiac and a symbol of the female genitalia in Italy. Of course, Eve’s sin that led to the Fall is not in the biblical text specified as a lack of chastity *per se*, but such accounts and interpretations are simply extreme combinations of the consistent association of sin and sexuality, specifically with regard to the Edenic couple, with an equally consistent blaming of Eve for her role in tempting Adam. The focus on Eve rather than on Adam as the locus of sexuality was
reinforced by the persistent view that women were inherently more concupiscent than men. Women were assumed to dress finely in order to please not their husbands but, illicitly, other men, and innumerable writers and preachers, from Tertullian and Jerome in the early church to San Bernardino of Siena in Masaccio’s day, consequently railed against cosmetics, ostentatiously fine clothes, and excessive ornamentation in women as indicative of vices to which women are more naturally disposed: vanity, pride and lechery. The propensity of some women to self-adornment led the late fifteenth-century woman humanist Laura Cereta to exclaim: ‘O the bold wantonness of lost modesty! O the weakness of our sex, stooping to voluptuousness!’ Masaccio’s image similarly maintains the association of shame and nakedness (and, by extension, sexuality) in the figure of Eve only, providing for Adam a contrasting gesture, which also signifies shame, but of a different sort. The contrapuntal arrangement of gestures gives visual form to the status of the couple as alike (sharing in the Fall) yet different (experiencing it in contrasting ways). In Eve’s gestures covering her breasts and genitalia, Masaccio identifies her sexuality as the site of her sin and shame.

As Eve covers her erogenous zones, so Adam covers his face. Philo noted that in giving life to the first man God breathed into his face (Gen. 2:7). Though the face was the seat of the senses, it was also to be equated with the mind:

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\text{The breathing ‘into the face’ is to be understood both physically and ethically: physically, because it is in the face that He set the senses: for this part of the body is beyond other parts endowed with the soul: but ethically, on this wise. As the face is the dominant element in the body, so is the mind the dominant element of the soul: into this only does God breathe, whereas He does not see fit to do so with the other parts, whether senses or organs of utterance and of reproduction; for these are secondary in capacity.}
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Philo goes on to note that ‘the mind imparts to the portion of the soul that is devoid of reason a share of that which it has received from God, so that the mind was be-souled by God, but the unreasoning part by the mind.’ Paul makes a similar association in 1 Corinthians 11:3: ‘the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.’ Thus the mind, represented by the face covered by Adam in Masaccio’s painting, dominates and is superior to the other, ‘unreasoning part’ of the soul, represented by the rest of the body, including the reproductive parts covered by Eve. And that ‘unreasoning part’ is a seductive attraction to the mind; Thomas of Aquinas’s praise for virginity includes the comment that ‘nothing so casts down the manly mind from its heights as the fondling of women, and those bodily contacts which belong to the married state.’ For Athanasius, the Fall was precisely the carnal seduction of the ‘manly mind’ from spiritual contemplation: ‘For he [Adam] also, as long as he kept his mind to God, and the contemplation of God, turned away from the contemplation of the body. But when, by counsel of the serpent, he departed from the consideration of God, and began to regard himself, then they not only fell to bodily lust, but knew that they were naked, and knowing, were ashamed.’
These voices are unexceptional examples of writers in the Western tradition who have associated maleness with reason. The corollary is, as Genevieve Lloyd has put it, that ‘[f]rom the beginnings of philosophical thought, femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind.’\(^\text{39}\) This ‘residue’ of reason, as it were, might include earthiness, indeterminacy, vagueness, disorderliness and fertility. We can find an echo of the rationality of the male but not of the female human in a text as close to Masaccio as Cennino Cennini’s late-fourteenth-century handbook for artists, *Il Libro dell’Arte*. In discussing human proportions Cennini limits himself to those of a man, disregarding those of a woman, ‘for she does not have any set proportion’, as well as those of ‘the irrational animals’, who also lack ‘any system of proportion’.\(^\text{40}\) The dichotomy Lloyd describes was traditionally supported by Aristotelian physiology which asserted that in procreation the human body was produced by the mother and its animating form provided by the father.\(^\text{41}\)

The Judaeo-Christian perpetuation of this idea is most evident in interpretations of the first three chapters of Genesis. Even a Quattrocento woman humanist like Isotta Nogarola, in defending Eve against charges that her sin was greater than Adam’s, relied on the conventional notion that Eve ‘was weak and [inclined to indulge in] pleasure’ and was less rational than Adam: ‘For where there is less intellect and less constancy, then there is less sin; and Eve [lacked sense and constancy] and therefore sinned less.’\(^\text{42}\) On an allegorical level, Eve was equated with the Senses and Adam with Reason. Philo interpreted the Serpent as Pleasure, and

Pleasure does not venture to bring her wiles and deceptions to bear on the man, but on the woman, and by her means on him. This is a telling and well-made point: for in us mind corresponds to man, the senses to woman; and pleasure encounters and holds parley with the senses first, and through them cheats with her quackeries the sovereign mind itself.\(^\text{43}\)

Ambrose’s allegorical interpretation of the Adam and Eve story in his *Paradise*, in which he explicitly follows Philo, is unequivocal: ‘The woman stands for our senses and the man, for our minds.’\(^\text{44}\) Nearly a millennium later, Giordano da Pisa concurred: ‘the soul is signified by Adam, because he is male; the flesh is signified by the female.’\(^\text{45}\) This interpretation of the Adam and Eve story, grafted onto the ancient pagan notions of gender differences, was extrapolated into a male/female dichotomy pervasive in Western culture fundamentally understood – albeit with numerous exceptions, qualifications, or nuanced variations that need not concern us here – in dualistic terms as spirit/flesh or even divine/human.\(^\text{46}\) Adam’s gesture of shame, then, is a covering of the higher part of the human self – the mind and reason – and it is a symbol of his alienation from God,\(^\text{47}\) an alienation of which Eve partakes only secondarily; as Paul wrote, ‘The man indeed ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.’ (1 Corinthians 11:7)

Masaccio would have been familiar with the traditional arguments outlined above, both as they pertained specifically to Adam and Eve and more generally to gender differentiation, if perhaps only in broad terms: by the fifteenth century
they were cultural commonplaces as well as part of Masaccio’s specific anthropological context. In the last few decades anthropologists have identified a zone of anthropologically related societies around the Mediterranean, including Italy, the common elements of which have manifested themselves in pre-modern as well as modern times. Beyond the latent ahistoricity of some anthropological structures, theories of Mediterranean anthropology – even the existence of an identifiably cohesive zone – have been tentatively advanced and are still much debated, and thus offer insecure foundation for constructing interpretations of specific historical moments. Nonetheless, they have recently been applied with appropriate caution to some analyses of early modern Italy. My references to such theories here are not intended as concrete evidence for my interpretation of the Expulsion, although they may prove suggestive or even illuminating. If anything, Masaccio’s painting may indicate the currency in the fifteenth century of certain transhistorical concepts prevalent in the Mediterranean and thus may support the validity of a Mediterranean anthropology, rather than vice versa, although it cannot indicate the geographical parameters of an anthropological zone; that is, it cannot contribute to the vexed problem of whether Mediterranean anthropological structures are unique to the Mediterranean or even more prevalent there than elsewhere.

Structural dualities have considerable force in Mediterranean societies, and especially significant among them is the opposition of honour and shame, which relates to (and derives from) the more broadly Western gender distinctions drawn above. This duality is specifically relevant to Masaccio’s image in its attempt to represent shame, and was certainly current in fifteenth-century Italy. This period, in Florence in particular, was marked by an intensified discourse on honour, marriage and female sexuality, in part because of the establishment in 1425 of a municipal dowry fund. As Leon Battista Alberti put it in his I libri della famiglia, a dialogue of 1434–43, ‘a man who does not feel the distinction between honor and shame and does not control the movement of his mind and of his body with thought and discretion seems hardly alive at all.’ For him honour was the most important thing in anyone’s life. It is the one thing without which no enterprise deserves praise or has real value. No authority or dignity can be maintained without it. It is the ultimate source of all the splendor our work may have, the most beautiful and shining part of our life now and our life hereafter, the most lasting and eternal part . . . In every thought and action, in every deed and habit, work and occupation, in word, hope, longing, in our entire will and desire, in absolutely everything that concerns us, let us always take the counsel of honor. Honor remains ever the best teacher of virtue, the loyal companion of our good name, the kind sister of right conduct, and the most pious mother of calm and blessed peace.

According to David Gilmore, the ‘basic currency and measurement’ of the honour–shame paradigm ‘is the “shame” of women by which Mediterraneanists mean female sexual chastity.’ For Alberti, whose views here are in no way unusual, ‘beauty of mind, that is, good conduct and virtue’ is among the most important of qualities in a prospective bride (in addition to potential for child-
‘A woman worthy of praise must show first of all in her conduct, modesty and purity.’ In dress, speech and behaviour, women must be neat and clean, avoiding any cause for scandal. A requisite of an honourable woman was a sense of shame, or vergogna. In the second half of the fourteenth century, Paolo da Certaldo described this virtue:

It is very well for a woman to be vergognosa, for several reasons, but the woman who has vergogna will not be without chastity. Also, the woman who has vergogna is taken by everyone to be wiser and more honest than the dishonoured [woman]. Also, the woman who has vergogna is much more resplendent in manners and beauty than the dishonoured [woman]; and many other similar virtues are born in the vergognosa woman.

He warned that ‘[t]he reputation of chastity in women is a tender thing, and, like flowers, it is most beautiful: Therefore, you, woman, always be attentive not to incur a bad reputation as a result of evil deeds and habits, because then it is much too difficult to shed this reputation.’ Conversely, male chastity and modesty were not a point of honour, except in so far as a man dishonours another man in committing adultery with his wife. In response to the inevitable flirtations between young men and young women, when the former are admiring the latter, Paolo instructs: ‘Do not allow furor or even anger to move you against these young men, but rather punish and admonish the girls.’ Whereas the young men are not faulted for their overt expressions of sexuality, the young women are to be punished for simply allowing themselves to be the passive objects of such expressions, whether willingly or not. The ideal modesty and vergogna of women, the undesirability of exposing the female body, and the male propensity to admire female beauty (chastened only by the woman who seeks to protect herself, rather than by social mores) are evident in an anecdote related by the Venetian Francesco Barbaro in his treatise De re uxoria, of 1415–16. Drawing on Plutarch (a conventional renaissance move, but also suggesting the perpetuation of classic Mediterranean precepts), Barbaro writes:

When a certain young man saw the noble woman Theano stretch her arm out of her mantle that had been drawn back, he said to his companions: ‘How handsome is her arm.’ To this she replied: ‘It is not a public one.’ It is proper, however, that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.

Women’s bodies and speech are associated explicitly in an anonymous and slanderous accusation against the learned Veronese noblewoman Isotta Nogarola. After accusing Nogarola of sexual promiscuity and incest, the writer generalizes: ‘this saying of many wise men I hold to be true: that an eloquent woman is never chaste.’

In early modern Italy, female honour was construed as a ‘quasi-material good’ controlled by men, who could both take it away and restore it. As a scarce resource, ‘female sexuality, with its procreative potential’ is literally veiled or
hidden in Mediterranean societies, guarded by its male owners. Gilmore says that ‘throughout the Mediterranean area, male honour derives from the struggle to maintain intact the shame of kinswomen.’ While it would be an exaggeration to claim that this is the exclusive source of honour for Mediterranean males, it is nonetheless of considerable importance. Women were, of course, in part responsible for their own chastity — and to this end Barbaro suggests that they ‘take care first of all to abstain from those things that encourage, instil, or increase the desires of the flesh’ — but ultimate responsibility fell to the men because the ‘uncontrolled Mediterranean woman’, true to her status as embodiment of the Senses, might be incapable of controlling herself. Marriages for Florentine girls were arranged — primarily by their fathers, and secondarily by other male ascendants — at as young an age as possible, thus reducing the chances of sexual misconduct and transferring the onus of responsibility for her honour to another family. Paolo da Certaldo averred that ‘all great disonor, shame, sins and expenses are incurred because of women.’ Even if he would acknowledge that women themselves might suffer dishonour and shame, surely their experiences would shrink to insignificance beside those of the men responsible for preserving their honour and purity. At stake is the honour not just of the husband but of the entire family; Alberti balances the disastrous effects of a woman’s dishonour against the possibility of the extinction of a family line: ‘I myself do not know which is the worse fate for a family, total celibacy or a single dishonored woman.’ In the context of the Eden myth, Eve’s dishonour had a disastrous effect of truly cosmic proportions on her family, the human race.

In what sense, then, might we suggest that Masaccio’s image conforms to the honour–shame paradigm of the Mediterranean in general or Renaissance Italy in particular? If Francesco Barbaro’s Theano, in inadvertently baring her arm, might give cause for scandal, how much more remarkable is the nudity of Masaccio’s Eve?

When Poggio Bracciolini visited the public baths at Baden in 1416, he could not help remarking on how different in Germany were the apparent attitudes toward nudity (especially female) and the relations between the sexes. In a letter to Nicolaus de Niccolis he described the baths where men and women were separated by an open fence which neither obscured sight nor impeded contact. Above the pools was also a walkway ‘on which people stand to stare and gossip’. The entrances to the baths were often the same for men and women, ‘so that it often happens that a man and a half-naked woman or a woman and a naked man come face to face. The men wear nothing but a leather apron, and the women put on linen shirts down to their knees, so cut on either side that they leave uncovered neck, bosom, arms and shoulders.’ The girls and women were young, old, married, unmarried, and ‘ripe for a husband, already of marriageable years, good looking and well-born and in manner and form like a goddess’. The few clothes that the participants wore would have been unequal to the task of appropriately covering the body — from an Italian point of view — even when dry, much less when wet and floating up on the water. Bracciolini found it ‘comical to see decrepit old women as well as younger ones going naked into the water before the eyes of men and displaying their private parts and their buttocks to the onlookers’. Bracciolini was most impressed with the equanimity with which the men viewed their own wives’ public appearance.
Men watched their wives being handled by strangers and were not disturbed by it; they paid no attention and took it all in the best possible spirit. . . . [T]hey see them flirt with strangers, even en tête-à-tête, and they are unmoved by it. They are not surprised; they think it is all done with the best and most home-loving intentions. And so the name of a jealous husband, which weighs upon nearly all our husbands at home, has no place among them. The word is unknown, unheard, they do not know this kind of disease; they do not even have a name for this ailment and it is no wonder that its name does not exist among them when its substance is not there. For no one has up to now been found among them who is a jealous husband. Oh how different their customs are from ours!

Bracciolini conceived of the people as happy innocents: ‘I have privately wondered at the simplicity of these people who do not stare, suspect evil, or speak it.’ For him, the place was a prelapsarian Eden: ‘I believe that this is the place where the first man was created, which the Hebrews call Ganeden or the garden of delight.’ By implicit contrast then, Bracciolini’s Italy, where the baring of flesh and the admiration of women in public were not to be tolerated, where shame and dishonour perpetually threatened, was a postlapsarian world, precisely that represented by Masaccio in the Expulsion. Here both gestures – Eve in covering her erogenous zones, Adam in leaving his exposed and in covering his face – suggest that, in conformity with Italian mores, it is only the woman’s sexuality that is at issue and that the sin associated with her sexuality dishonours the man. Adam’s exposure does not dishonour him; rather it serves to draw the insistent distinction between men and women, fundamental to the honour–shame paradigm, which is manifested most recognizably in anatomy. Whether or not Masaccio’s painting, since its cleaning, gives evidence of the idea that Mediterranean men ‘honour the penis as the repository of manhood and the mirror for the masculine ego’, it does emphasize the anatomical distinction in displaying so saliently Adam’s ‘instrument created for the task’ of sexual intercourse, in Augustine’s phrase.

Essential to the honour–shame paradigm is the public nature of the shame. While we might not think of the experiences of Adam and Eve as public, they were in fact conscious of their appearance before each other and before God. The facial expression of Eve and the facial expression that the viewer is to imagine Adam is covering might best be thought of as indicating grief. Although, as I have argued, Adam’s arm gesture, like Eve’s, signifies shame, and is not in and of itself a gesture of grief, it is clearly associated with grief by covering from public view such an expression. As with the expression of shame, the fact of either covering or discovering an extreme expression of intense grief is represented in Masaccio’s fresco according to gender-specific notions of decorum. Public and private were correlated in the fifteenth century with male and female. As Alberti describes – and he is speaking here exclusively of men – complements to ‘private honour’ are established in public: ‘Fame is born not in the midst of private peace but in public action. Glory springs up in public squares; reputation is nourished by the voice and judgment of many persons of honor, and in the midst of the people.’ Women, on the other hand, were to remain at home, as Paolo da Certaldo
explained, following the example of the Virgin Mary, who ‘didn’t stay outside the home, and didn’t go about talking, neither down nor up nor here nor there, neither hearing nor looking at vain men nor other vanities; rather, she remained enclosed and shut up in a hidden and honest place.’ The separate domains of men and women, as well as the impact of a woman’s behaviour on the honour of a man, are evident when Alberti notes that ‘it would hardly win us respect if our wife busied herself among the men in the marketplace, out in the public eye. It also seems somewhat demeaning to me to remain shut up in the house among women when I have many things to do among men, fellow citizens and worthy and distinguished foreigners.’

Uncannily similar is a description of the Algerian Kabyles by Pierre Bourdieu: ‘A man who spends too much time at home in the daytime is suspect or ridiculous: he is “a house man”, who “broods at home like a hen at roost”. A self-respecting man must offer himself to be seen, constantly put himself in the gaze of others, confront them, face up to them (qabel). He is a man among men.’

Cornutes, men who have been cuckolded – and here we might reasonably, if only metaphorically, include Adam – have ‘lost face’ and their honour, dependent in part on the sexuality of their wives. In modern Sicily, as Anton Blok notes, they ‘try to avoid the public realm, thus aggravating their disgrace.’

A correlate to the public presence of men was that they were not to indulge in public displays of emotion, including grief, in keeping with their presumed rationality and the traditional notion of Reason’s control over the Body. This was especially true for public officials, at least in the ‘culture of humanism’ of Renaissance Florence. Conversely, women carried the burden of the more extreme displays of emotion in public, and were generally given a ‘ritual license’, particularly in practices of mourning. Thus Masaccio’s Adam – like Odysseus weeping at the feast of the Phaiakians, or Donatello’s Saint John mourning at the death of Christ, or the Camposanto damned grieving at their own punishment – hides his face, whose expression of emotion the viewer can only surmise. Eve, on the other hand, wails openly, publicly, her gesture of shame centred on her body.

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Notes

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2 The Hamilton Bible has been brought into connection with the Brancacci Chapel frescoes, albeit in terms of Genesis-cycle iconography rather than gestures in the Expulsion scenes, by C. de Tolnay, ‘Note sur l’iconographie des fresques de la chapelle Brancacci’, in Arte Lombarda, 1965, pp. 69-74.
4 ibid., vol. 1, p. 91.
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5 The original placement of the arms is evident from a cast of c. 1500 (ibid., vol. 1, p. 90).
6 Connections between Masaccio’s painting and both of Jacopo’s reliefs are suggested by L. Berti, Masaccio, University Park, Pa. and London, 1967, p. 96. Masaccio’s innovative pairing of gestures was followed most fully by Raphael in the Vatican (see B. Davidson, Raphael’s Bible: A Study of the Vatican Logge, University Park and London, 1985, fig. 24), though without the same emotional impact.
9 ibid., p. 342.
10 ibid., p. 344.
12 M. Bal, ‘Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1-3)’, in The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. S. Rubin Suleiman, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, p. 322. Whether the first ‘earth creature’ was already, if only implicitly, male or only became such with the creation of a differentiating female, is a debated question; see D.N. Fewell, ‘Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism’, in S. McKenzie and S. Haynes (eds), To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Application, Louisville, 1993, pp. 240ff. Ladis, op. cit. (note 7), p. 32, describes the simultaneous differentiation and fusion of Masaccio’s two figures; see also J.T. Spike, Masaccio, New York, 1995, p. 98.
13 P. Burke, ‘The language of gesture in early modern Italy’, in A Cultural History of Gesture from Antiquity to the Present Day, eds J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg, Cambridge, 1991, p. 73, has also pointed to the potential use of art in constructing a history of gesture (with the recognition of a ‘distance between painted gestures and gestures in daily life’).
14 ibid., p. 79; apparently Burke does not recognize as distinct from conventional gestures spontaneous and involuntary ones – the ‘instinctive gesticulation’ that also pervades the animal kingdom’ (M. Barasch, Giotto and the Language of Gesture, Cambridge, 1987, p. 3).
19 M. Barasch, Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art, New York, 1976, p. 5, discusses this portion of the fresco but only with respect to figures with a hand raised to the mouth.
21 The gesture of one hand, rather than two, to the face, as with one of the mourners in Fra Angelico’s fresco of the Crucifixion in the Chapter House of San Marco, where it is clearly an expression of grief, derives from the ancient gesture of mourning in which one hand is touched to the forehead (see Barasch, Gestures of Despair, op. cit. (note 19) pp. 9–10 and 128, n. 4) and should clearly be distinguished from that of Masaccio’s Adam.
22 Burke, op. cit. (note 13), pp. 72–3.
23 For some of the emotional possibilities of the Expulsion, with a suggestive reference to medieval mystery plays, see Barasch, Gestures of Despair, op. cit. (note 19), pp. 12–17, who, however, focuses his attention on acts of self-injury.
she is speaking specifically of those of the Virgin Mary and Christ, respectively) – would not have been primarily associated with sexuality in the Late Middle Ages. See, however, Steinberg, *Sexuality*, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 380–3, and, for Baldung’s images of the Fall, Hieatt, op. cit. (note 30), pp. 290–304.


37 Quoted by McLaughlin, op. cit. (note 33), pp. 233–4.


44 Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and
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Abel, trans. J. Savage, The Fathers of the Church, New York, 1961, p. 351 (cf. p. 294, here as elsewhere explicitly following Philo); quoted by Miles, op. cit. (note 24), p. 92. Cf. Augustine, in The Literal Meaning of Genesis, wondering how Adam, a ‘spiritual man’, could have been duped by the serpent: ‘Was it because the man would not have been able to believe [the transparent lies of the serpent] that the woman was employed [by the serpent] on the supposition that she had limited understanding, and also perhaps that she was living according to the spirit of the flesh and not according to the spirit of the mind?’ quoted by Miles, p. 97. Augustine is, however, the author of a counter tradition which would associate Eve symbolically with Reason, but hers is still the lower order of reason, scientia, and Adam’s the higher, sapientia (see A.K. Hieatt, ‘Eve as Reason in a Tradition of Allegorical Interpretation of the Fall’, in Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, vol. 43, 1980, p. 221).


47 Cf. Ambrose, op. cit. (note 44), p. 346, who notes that the ‘sinner . . . had tried to hide away from the sight of God. He wished to conceal himself in his thoughts . . . . The just man saw Him face to face, because the mind of the just man is in the presence of God and even converses with Him.’


54 ibid., p. 149.


58 Paolo da Certaldo, op. cit. (note 57), p. 73, no. 59: ‘Tenera cosa `e nelle femine la fama della castit`a e come fiore bellissima: – e pero` sempre ti guarda tu, femina, di non correre per tuoi mali atti e costumi in mala fama, ch`e troppo fia` malagevole a uscirne’ quoted by Molho, op. cit. [note 52], pp. 207–208).


60 Paolo da Certaldo, op. cit. (note 57), p. 198, no. 331: ‘Ancora ti ricordo e dico che, se tu a`i in casa fanciul`e o donne giovani, che tu loro gastighi e tenghi a freno. E ben che, come molte volte avviene, ch’elle o alcuna di loro sieno guatate da giovani, non ti muovere a furor`e ne` a ira contro a tali giovani, anzi gastiga e ammonisci le dette fanciul`e’ quoted by Molho, op. cit. [note 52], p. 207).


See Cavallo and Cerutti, op. cit. (note 49), p. 76.


For the association between honour and the physical person, especially the head, see Pitt-Rivers, op. cit. (note 57), p. 25.

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