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P O E M

On Blake's Painting of Jesus and the Woman
Taken in Adultery

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interprets Blake as regarding those to be surmountable "through an increasing understanding of their roots in insufficiently radicalized institutions and ideologies" (pp. 85–86). I *guess* that means there weren't enough Orcs around to radicalize these roots, for Los's—and Blake's—vision of history is based on "the class struggle of Orc against Urizen." Yet, the more Orc "radicalizes" institutions and ideologies, the more he risks "mere insurrection" that will "consume itself." If this does not come as a "discovery" to most of us, perhaps we can charge the tone of discovery off to the fact that the book is almost seven years old at publication time.

"The Universal Family & that one Man / They call Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them / Live in Perfect harmony in Eden the land of life" (FZ 21:1–6) is "the social unity of tribal society . . . ; with social atomization and exploitation" this unity is lost, then forgotten and denied—that is, DiSalvo tells us, misappropriating a passage from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (p. 170). It's a rather neat way to avoid the issue (here put, tellingly, in the passive) of which came first, "social atomization and exploitation" or men forgetting where deities reside—and to avoid the implications of quoting this particular passage from *The Marriage*, which has nothing to do with a "Universal Family" or "Jesus the Christ" or "Eden" or "social unity" or tribalism or "social atomization." Similarly, when DiSalvo describes Night IX of *The Four Zoas* as showing "that along with the rise of property and the family there is a diminution of human science," and that man "undergoes a kind of reversed metamorphosis" (pp. 181–82), the reader would be well advised to have page 133 of *The Four Zoas* open here, if only to make sure he and DiSalvo are reading the same poem. Indeed the *Zoas* needs to be opened to virtually each passage she cites in support of her thesis. Other occasions, of particular note, of the need to carefully check Blake's text against DiSalvo's interpretation occur on pages 200, 206–07, 209–11, 217, 222–23, 226, 230, 284, 308, 319–20, and 345.

It is no doubt unnecessary for me to conclude by saying that this is a provocative book. I suppose my capitalistic upbringing made me more prone to be provoked by the sort of reductionism I find almost always in critical approaches such as DiSalvo's. But hostile reader or no, any reader who cares for what Blake wrote ought to be provoked to irritation by biased handling of the evidence—in both Blake and Milton. Too bad, for there is much here that is provocative in the salutary sense, and even *I* find the core of the book, Chapter 8 on "The Politics of *Paradise Lost* and *The Four Zoas*," a rewarding discussion. The fact that it stands very well on its own says something about the superstructure the other chapters form. That superstructure seems to me to result from DiSalvo's inability to see that her sense of Blake's

anticipating of Marx's manifesto is not really a very important issue to argue for *or* against. If Marx picks "up his hammer" and rekindles Los's "furnaces" (as she not very disarmingly puts it on her penultimate page), that "fact" was not only not worth the anachronistic procedure of her book but was, finally, not very illuminating with respect to Blake and Milton beyond what we already know—even if what we already know is not talked of or written about in DiSalvo's language.

On Blake's Painting of Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery

WARREN STEVENSON

The scene, as Blake portrays it, is perfect: the accusers departing discomfited, the woman lissome, bare-breasted her hair dishevelled her face, slightly flushed, resembling Jesus' as a sister her brother.

But what is Jesus drawing as he bends toward the ground? His right hand forms a compass like Newton's or that of the Ancient of Days. Is he having a private joke—perhaps mocking the Old Man's creation of forked Adam, cleft Eve?

The woman stands straight—her wrists bound behind her—with her head slightly bowed her gaze intent on the doodler's hand. She knows there remain only herself and this ironic jester—no more fucking sin.