

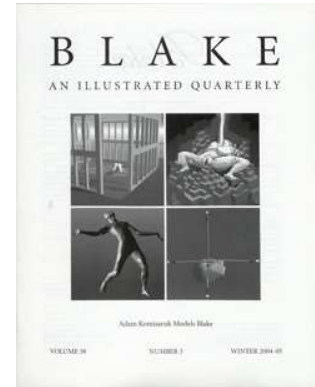
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

## The Program of the International Blake Conference Blake in the Orient and the Catalogue of a Concurrent Exhibition, The Reception of Blake in Japan

Yoko Ima-Izumi

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 38, Issue 3, Winter 2004/2005, pp.  
109-115



have purchased Thornton's translation of the Lord's prayer, he concludes of this "bloated translation set in an equally bloated farrago of opinions and quotations" (284) that, "written for tiny audiences of readers in the Blake-Linnell circle," the annotations are "uncompromising, sometimes fiercely so," in their presentation of Blake's later—and Gnostic—ideas (284).

Grant's imprint is, likewise, evident in those essays that, like Paley's, dwell on minute particulars. Take, for example, Catherine L. McClenahan's reflections on Erin who, alone among the female characters in *Jerusalem*, "is a thoughtful, analytical, critical, imaginative, creative, and above all effectively active participant in the 'public' domain of the work of Los and his allies" (157). Or witness Jennifer Davis Michael's remarks on "Blake's symbolic use of feet, ... intrinsic to his artistic project, fusing spiritual, sexual, and poetic acts into a single member" (206). Where Grant's imprint is most conspicuous, however, is in the essays by J. M. Q. Davies, Jon Mee, and Peter Otto that, as exfoliations of Grant's work on Young's *Night Thoughts*, are dedicated to sharpening perceptions and enlarging horizons.

In a richly suggestive essay, which calibrates yet again "the distance between orthodox Christianity and Blake's Christian humanism" (33), J. M. Q. Davies discovers within Blake's "imaginative freedom" (27) from Young's poem a critique no less applicable to Young than to Milton. Hence, Blake's *Night Thoughts* series, according to Davies, "provide[s] very specific clues to the direction of Blake's thought in the Milton illustrations" (30), whether it be through the bold suggestion that Adam tempts Eve (32-36) rather than the other way around (Grant trumps Davies in this argument,<sup>3</sup> I think) or in Blake's even bolder departure from tradition (see design NT 276) where "the figure being tempted is not another Eve or Adam but an angel" (39). Yet, it is in the coda to his essay that Davies scores his strongest points by observing the play between the conventionality of the representation of Samson and the deviational character of the accompanying iconography where, with one eye open and in upward gaze, Samson is figured alone—with no victims—as if to say that (at least in this depiction) Samson is portrayed as one of Blake's visionary company (46-49). In a turn of the lens, Peter Otto looks at the *Night Thoughts* illustrations, woven inextricably into the verbal and visual fabric of *The Four Zoas*, for what (as an interpreting context) those illustrations tell us about Blake's poem. Almost as a supplement to Davies's essay, Otto observes that "the two volumes of Blake's watercolor designs for *Night Thoughts* have as their frontispieces representations of the resurrection; but the series as a whole closes with Samson

pulling down the pillars of the temple" (260), underscoring (as *Milton* and *Jerusalem* will later do) the intimate relationship between renovation and apocalypse.

Of the three essays centered in Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations, the most dashing of them is by Jon Mee. Against the usual proposition that these illustrations reveal "a personal struggle to wrest visionary truth from a turgid eighteenth-century forebear," Mee pits his own formidable understanding of "Blake's illustrations in the context of the different ways in which Young's text circulated in the print culture of the time" (171, 172) and of the extent to which "politics and prophecy are fundamentally intertwined in his reading of Young's text" (190). Mee's essay goes a long way toward explaining why so few of Blake's 537 illustrations were actually published (just 43) by suggesting that Richard Edwards, commissioner of these illustrations, sought to prevent the seepage of "a radical millenarianism" from a poem Edwards "thought of as strengthening the moral fiber of the nation" (200). Blake's triumph was to leave to future generations what we should not willingly let die: what Benjamin Haydon would call "the poetry of the rainbow."<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, Grant's achievement, over nearly half a century, is, like Blake's, always to have kept faith in time of trouble and, even when his eye is on the tragedy of history, to think beyond it into a new future. In the eloquent testimony of all these essays, like the poet in which he has invested nearly half a century of dazzling scholarship, Grant is a mental prince who, as the provocation for this remarkable gathering of essays, places yet another plank in the floor of what one hopes will eventually become a newly energized Blake criticism.

4. Quoted from Eric George, *The Life and Death of Benjamin Haydon 1786-1846* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1948) 116.

The Program of the International Blake Conference *Blake in the Orient* and the Catalogue of a Concurrent Exhibition *The Reception of Blake in Japan*. The Blake Conference Committee: Kyoto, Japan, 2003. Program 46 pp.; catalogue ii + 93pp. ¥7,000.

Reviewed by Yoko Ima-Izumi

The international conference Blake in the Orient took place in Kyoto, Japan, during the beautiful autumn of 2003; a concurrent exhibition was also held displaying the earliest publications on Blake by Japanese writers, painters, and schol-

3. It seems that the fruit Adam holds in his right hand in figure 1 (32) is the same as Eve holds in the same hand in figure 2 (34), Blake thereby reinforcing the idea that Adam, not Satan, is the bearer of the fruit and source of the temptation; that if Satan falls self-tempted, Eve falls tempted by another.



ars dating from 1894 up to 1938. This exhibition was free for conference participants, and it remained open to the public for a month at nominal fees. Two cased volumes were on sale at the registration desk: one the conference program and the other the catalogue of the exhibition. They are in black and white and rather slender, the program being 46 pages long and the catalogue 93 pages. The price for a set, ¥7,000 (roughly US\$65), might seem rather expensive, but once one takes a look at the catalogue, it will not seem so.

The catalogue (not to mention the exhibition itself) offers the first large-scale survey of the earliest period of the reception of Blake in Japan in the fields of both literature and painting. I agree unconditionally with the conference organizers that this is "the most detailed catalogue ever to be published on the history of reception of Blake in Japan" (2). It provides a commentary on each item of the total 111, accompanied by photographs of 41 selected exhibits and 20 numbered figures. The catalogue not only lists the publication data and the name of every collector, but also comments usefully on how each relates to Blake's work. The catalogue is edited and published by the Blake Conference Committee, with the entries being prepared by Kozo Shioe and Yumiko Goto.

The first half of the catalogue is written in English and the second in Japanese. These are identical except that the acknowledgements appear only in English and the charted chronology of the "Early Reception of Blake in Japan" is provided only in the Japanese version as an appendix. This neatly drawn chronology lets us grasp, at a glance, when and where Blake-related events happened. It is noteworthy that this chart has a special section "Shirakaba, Yanagi, and Blake," apart from the main section called "Blake-related Publications." Judging from this arrangement, we can easily understand that the editors regard the achievements by Yanagi and a literature journal *Shirakaba* (with which Yanagi was involved) as exceptionally significant. It is indeed the whole catalogue's intent to clarify and re-evaluate the efforts of Yanagi and his fellow writers and artists to share with other Japanese the unforgettable impact of Blake's works.

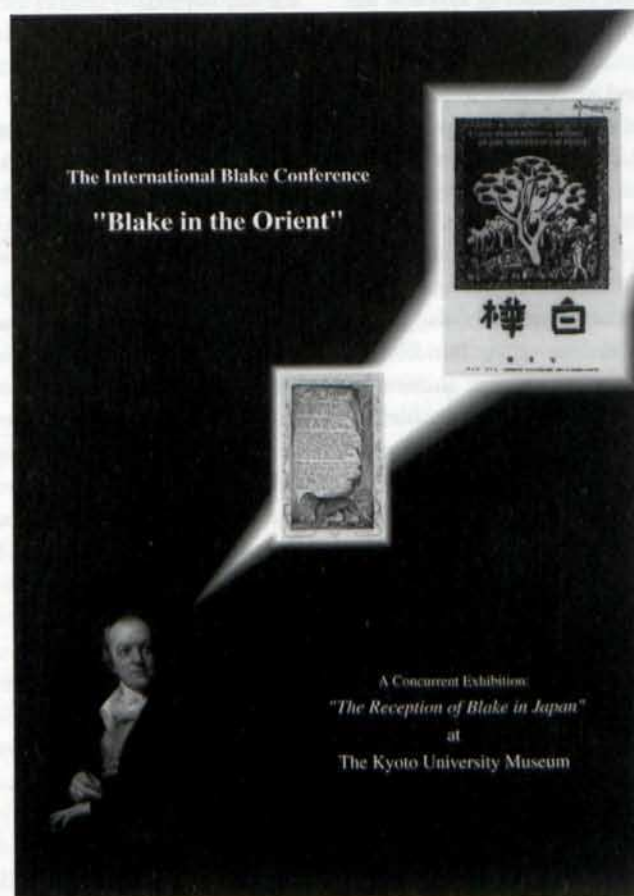
The main body of the catalogue is prefaced by two messages. One of them is, as one would expect, by the conference

organizers, Masashi Suzuki and Steve Clark. The other is by Sori Yanagi, the President of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, and we might initially wonder what the Japan Folk Crafts Museum has to do with Blake and who this man is. We soon learn that this mysterious president is in fact the son of that monumental figure, Yanagi, for his message begins: "My father, Soetsu (or Muneyoshi) Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, was only 17 years old when he first encountered the works of William Blake" (3). This son, soon to be ninety years old, understandably did not appear in person at either the conference or the exhibition, but it is

appropriate for him to give us a message, for over 30 percent of the whole exhibition is drawn from the collection of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, founded by his father and now directed by him.

Though the exhibition has concluded, you may visit the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo to view their collection for an admission of ¥1,000 (or free if you pay ¥5,000 for an annual membership). Details can be found on their web site <<http://www.mingeikan.or.jp>>. And, of course, you can turn to the catalogue, which may be purchased at ¥7,000 from the museum (email: [webmaster@mingeikan.or.jp](mailto:webmaster@mingeikan.or.jp)). This informative book readily provides us with significant facts about Blake's influence on Japanese art and literature. It will form a useful basis for further studies and is accompanied by some insightful speculations on the topic.

The seven sections of the catalogue are loosely grouped into two parts, the first four focusing on literary circles and the second three on the art world. In both parts, the names of Yanagi and the *Shirakaba* group appear frequently. Without Yanagi and his *Shirakaba* colleagues, Blake studies in Japan would have developed far differently from what they are now. Nor, without Yanagi's influence on Japanese art, would there have been Blakean paintings such as those by Ryusei Kishida and Kagaku Murakami. A representative of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, Teiko Utsumi, spoke at the reception of the conference and stirred our interest in the museum more than ever by her crisp and evocative remarks. Later, while she and I were communicating by email, she informed me of a previous exhibition entitled *The Great Encounter: Yanagi and Blake*, which was held in 1990 at the museum; G. E. Bentley,





Jr., came over to Japan for the event and highly praised Yanagi as "the first man to bring Blake to Japan."<sup>1</sup> Even though we are aware, as the catalogue demonstrates, that there were actually several predecessors of Yanagi, such as Takeki Owada, Lafcadio Hearn, and Ariake Kanbara, we are nonetheless convinced that Yanagi remains the primary figure in implanting Blake's ideas and works in the Japanese mind.

The first section of the catalogue is concerned with these earlier contributors: "Blake's name was first introduced to Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably when Bimyo Yamada (1868-1910) published the *Bankoku Jinmei Jisho*, a dictionary of famous names from around the world in 1893" (11). This item was not included in the exhibition, but the second earliest publication, *An Anthology of Western and American Poetry Part I* of 1894, translated and edited by Takeki Owada, was displayed as the first item in the exhibition. In this anthology "a Japanese translation of 'The Echoing Green' is collected" (12). Many Blake scholars in Japan might wonder why in 1894 this was selected as representative of Blake when there are other poems that might be thought to be more appealing. I think of my college days when one of my English professors asked me which poem of Blake was first translated into Japanese. I immediately and incorrectly answered, "The Tyger."

It is quite remarkable that some of the greats of Japanese literature and philosophy, who are introduced in the first section of the catalogue, encountered Blake's poems at a significant point in their careers and had each at least one publication devoted to Blake. For those who are not familiar with Japanese literature and philosophy, I shall list some of the leading figures whose names appear: Bin Ueda (scholar/translator), Shoyo Tsubouchi (scholar/translator), Lafcadio Hearn (novelist), Ariake Kanbara (poet), Tetsuro Watsuji (philosopher), Choko Ikuta (poet), and Rofu Miki (poet). At the conclusion of this section we are told that the future was to see Blake become even more prominent before the Japanese public: "By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, understanding of Blake in Japan had already progressed considerably and created a foundation for wider acceptance. However, during this period, Blake was mostly recognized as a poet and his other skills would have to wait until the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for an introduction from Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961)" (11). (Muneyoshi Yanagi is referred to as Soetsu Yanagi throughout the catalogue. These are simply different but equally acceptable forms of his name.)

Yanagi and the journal *Shirakaba*, of which he was one of the editors, begin to be highlighted in the second section of the catalogue. *Shirakaba*, founded in 1910, is defined as "a new kind of literary magazine, [which] not only stimulated new ideas in the Japanese literary world, but also functioned as an art magazine and had a large influence on art in Japan by introducing the new movements of Western art" (15). The commentary then refers to the first significant achievement

by Yanagi in his Blake studies: "In the April 1914 edition of *Shirakaba*, Soetsu Yanagi wrote 'William Blake,' his first article about the artist. This article not only shows Yanagi's unique perspective on Blake, but it was also the first time for one of Blake's visual artworks to be introduced to Japan, making it the document that started the Blake fever that followed" (16).

The catalogue includes photographs of three issues of *Shirakaba*, in all of which the influence of Blake is clearly seen. The title page of volume 4 of *Shirakaba* in 1913, for example, is inscribed with two lines from Blake's "The Tyger": "TIGER TIGER BURNING BRIGHT / IN THE FORESTS OF THE NIGHT." It was designed by Bernard Leach, the only Westerner in the *Shirakaba* group. This "was used as a title-page design for the whole numbers of volume 4 of *Shirakaba* in 1913" (17).<sup>2</sup> Volume 5, number 4 of *Shirakaba* (1914) is another significant publication noted in the catalogue, for it is a special "Blake Issue." It included "16 designs of Blake" along with articles on Blake by Yanagi, Leach, and other *Shirakaba* members.

What comes next, however, is regarded as really "monumental and epochal" in Blake studies in Japan. It is Yanagi's 750-page book on Blake, with "copious quotations from Blake and 60 designs" (18). These copious quotations from Blake's works are in English (though the catalogue does not make this clear), making the book a collage of two different languages. I think this is intentional, for Yanagi always aimed at such blending of east and west. The catalogue also introduces Bunsho Jugaku, another Blake scholar, who said that "Yanagi's book marked the dawn of Blake studies in Japan" (18). And it demonstrates that subsequently influential literary magazines such as *River of Life* and *Arts* used Blake designs for their title pages.

Towards the end of the second section, a couple of reproductions of Blake's works done by W. Muir and others in London are introduced. But the intent of the catalogue is not simply to show these reproductions but to tell us about the contribution of the Jugakus: "With Muir's edition as a model, Bunsho Jugaku and his wife Shizu produced the illuminated books (reproductions) from their private press *Kojitsuan* [the Sunward Press]" (20). It is remarkable that the Jugakus, Bunsho and Shizu, actually engaged themselves in reproducing Blake's illuminated books in the same manner as did the Blakes, William and Catherine. I believe that there should be a greater effort to explore the achievements by the Jugakus in relation to Blake, with particular attention to the role of two important women, Catherine Blake and Shizu Jugaku. Little has been written on Catherine Blake, and virtually nothing on Shizu Jugaku.

The third section of the catalogue focuses on Blake exhibitions organized by the *Shirakaba* group. It is predictably Yanagi who played the leading role in these exhibitions. We

1. Teiko Utsumi, email correspondence with the author, 4 December 2003.

2. The issue of *Shirakaba* pictured on page 17 of the catalogue is volume 4, number 7, though the caption says that it is the title page for volume 4, number 1. The discrepancy does not really matter, since this title page was used for all the numbers of volume 4.



can see in the catalogue his slightly overstated introduction of Blake as "the only world-famous artist England has ever produced" (23). This statement actually appeared in the 1919 *Annotated Catalogue of an Exhibition of Reproductions from the Works of William Blake: For the Establishment of Shirakaba Art Museum*. The exhibition took place in Tokyo and Kyoto in November 1919, but according to the catalogue description, "before the Exhibition in Tokyo and Kyoto, it was held at several places in Nagano Prefecture from 3-10 September 1919" (23). It should be noted that Yanagi selected the rural locale Nagano to propagate Blake's art, poetry, and ideas. He also gave a series of lectures on Blake in that city. Though it is not mentioned in the catalogue, he came back to Nagano in 1921 to give more lectures on Blake to schoolteachers. Aside from one book that records the *Shirakaba* group's activities in Nagano,<sup>3</sup> no research has been done to elucidate the significance of the Nagano locale for Yanagi.

There is a 1919 picture of "Yanagi giving a lecture on Religion in Blake's Art" (21, 23), again significantly in Nagano. Instead of arguing the importance of the conference's location, however, I would rather call attention to the striking contrast between Yanagi's clothing and that of his audience (the catalogue does not comment on this). Yanagi, sitting at the lecture table, wears a Western white suit, and his companion, sitting relaxed on a chair and looking at the speaker, is also in white and is wearing Western shoes. The audience wears the traditional Japanese *kimono* and *zori* or flat straw sandals. The contrast between Western and Japanese clothing corresponds to the distinction between sender and receiver, educator and educated, and illustrates dramatically the integration of Japanese and Western culture that was taking place at that point in the history of Japan.

The catalogue contains another picture (25) related to Yanagi and his Blake exhibition. Again, the picture illustrates a phase in Japanese history. It is a member's card for the 1922 Exhibition of Reproductions from the Works of William Blake, which was held in Seoul, Korea, when that country was occupied by Japan. This was the time when Japan was expanding its territory by oppressing the indigenous peoples in Korea, China, and other East Asian regions. But as the catalogue emphasizes, "Yanagi expressed his protest against the suppression by the Japanese government of the campaign for independence in Korea" (25). It is also known that he paid due respect for Korean arts and in 1924 established the Museum of Arts of the Korean People.

The fourth section of the catalogue covers the period around the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Blake, and summarizes the achievements of *Shirakaba* as follows:

3. Nobuo Imai, *The Periphery of the White Birch Journal: The Intersection of the White Birch Movement and School Education in Nagano* (Nagano: Shinano Educational Committee, 1986).

After introductions in *Shirakaba* and in the other writings of Soetsu Yanagi and Makoto Sangu, references to and articles about Blake began to appear one after the other in the 1920's in art and literary books and journals. Early on, many of these were by *Shirakaba* members and their associates, but after the 1919 Blake exhibition organized by *Shirakaba*, the extent of interest grew greatly. *Shirakaba* was becoming a central establishment in literary circles, and many journals similar to *Shirakaba* were published that also featured Blake's art and poetry frequently. The existence of Blake's powerful work was the impetus for creating the *Shirakaba* atmosphere. (26)

Newly issued journals featuring Blake's works (and modeled on *Shirakaba*) are entered in the catalogue. In their title pages, "Blake's designs were used as a symbol" (29). Such journals include *New Currents of Thought*, *Water Pot*, *Earth*, *Rainbow*, *The Muse*, *Sunflower*, and *Blake and Whitman*. The last one is particularly significant: it shows Yanagi and Jugaku's passion for and infatuation with handmade things. *Blake and Whitman* was a monthly literary journal, coedited by Yanagi and Jugaku, and was not only printed on precious handmade paper but also was hand bound by Jugaku and his wife Shizu. In other words, this journal was produced in the same spirit as Blake's creation of his handmade books. Scholarly works exclusively devoted to Blake and translations of his poems were also produced en masse around the time of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. Among them were Makoto Sangu, trans., *A Selection of Blake's Poetry* (1922), Masao Hataya, *William Blake* (1927), Masao Hataya, trans., *Blake's Poems* (1927), Bunsho Jugaku, ed., *William Blake: A Bibliography* (1929), Makoto Sangu, *Essays on Blake* (1929), Bunsho Jugaku, *Collected Essays on Blake*, ed. Soetsu Yanagi and Mitsuharu Hashizume (1931), and five translated works by Bunsho Jugaku from Blake's poems including *William Blake, Songs of Innocence* (1933), *William Blake, The Book of Thel* (1933), and *William Blake, Songs of Experience* (1935).

The catalogue hints at the possibility of a comparative study of Blake and notable Japanese men of letters such as Haruo Sato and Ryunosuke Akutagawa. It explains that at the end of Sato's short story "The Sick Rose" "appears a refrain 'O Rose thou art sick,'" though "after many revisions and additions, it was published ... in 1918 under the title of *Den-en no yu-utsu* [A Pastoral Elegy]" (28). As to Akutagawa, a great novelist of whom Japan is very proud, the catalogue recounts the occasion when he gave all the money he had to buy a reproduction of Blake's "The Soul Hovering over the Body Reluctantly Parting with Life," and adds the striking detail: "It [the Blake reproduction] was hung on the wall in his study placed on an easel of his own invention until he died" (37). We are given supplementary information about Blake's possible influence on Akutagawa: "Some scholars of Japanese literature say that influences from Blake could be found in his other works as well" (37).

Two exhibitions of Blake that took place in 1927 are mentioned, one organized by Soetsu Yanagi, Makoto Sangu, and



Bunsho Jugaku, and the other by Masao Hataya. These commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Blake. The trio of Blake scholars—Yanagi, Sangu, and Jugaku—edited a catalogue with entries for “208 documents, 132 engravings and 31 letters by Blake scholars and others” and “bibliographical notes by Jugaku, and annotations on engravings by Yanagi” (31). It was certainly an enthusiastic and extensive project, but the other exhibition, organized by Hataya and held in the Asahi newspaper building in Tokyo, was also impressive. The catalogue reflects a touching moment during this occasion: “Masao Hataya, the exhibition planner was devoted to ‘popularizing’ Blake, and from 6pm on August 12, the time of the artist’s death, he broadcasted a 30-minute radio program called ‘100 Years since Blake’s Death’” (26). The picture of the exhibition by Hataya is included in the catalogue (31). Such images always tell something about the time and place in which they were taken. Here in the picture of Hataya’s exhibition, we have five eager visitors, two women in magnificent traditional kimonos, and three men in Western suits and, interestingly, with Western hats on their heads. The formal attire of the intellectual at that time in Japan was clearly subjected to gender difference.

The fifth and sixth sections of the catalogue concentrate on works by Japanese painters who were influenced by Blake’s art. Ryusei Kishida, a renowned Japanese painter, “was greatly influenced by the Blake articles in *Shirakaba*” (38). Here, as elsewhere, Yanagi is mentioned as the significant gateway into the world of Blake: “That influence began to become apparent after Yanagi’s article on Blake in *Shirakaba* in 1914” (38). Kishida was not only influenced by *Shirakaba* but also eagerly engaged himself in designing the title page for the journal from July 1918 to May 1923 (39–40). As we might expect, he took designs and compositions from Blake’s art when producing his own paintings (42–44). A brief survey of Japanese painting in the first two decades of the twentieth century shows how deeply Blake’s influence permeated even Japanese-style painting. The catalogue pays special attention to the fact that the “group of young Japanese-style painters in Kyoto [Japan Association for the Creation of National Painting] ... tried to absorb Western art and came to admire Blake through reading Soetsu Yanagi’s articles and seeing his artworks in *Shirakaba*” (46). And these painters “published the journal *Seisaku* [Creation], modeled on *Shirakaba*” (46). As members of the Japan Association for the Creation of National Painting, such names as Bakusen Tsuchida, Kagaku Murakami, and Hako Irie are listed. Murakami “acknowledged himself as a ‘Blakean’” (46), and his painting *Female Nude* is presented as an example in the catalogue (49). Hako Irie’s *Land of Enlightenment* is also described as Blakean: “In drawing this painting, Irie might have recourse to, for example, *River of Life*, one of the inserted designs in *Shirakaba*” (50).

The final brief section concerns a collector named Taro Nagasaki, who collected Blake works and documents while he was working in the New York office of the ocean transport

company Nihon Yusen in 1920–24. His collection was partly given to, and partly bought by, the Kyoto City University of Arts, because Nagasaki served as president there after he left the transport company. Considering that the Nagasaki collection was unknown until some twenty years ago, we might suspect that other collectors of Blake’s works may lie hidden in Japan today.

Interesting questions are why did Yanagi, obviously the key figure in the importation of Blake into Japan, feel so drawn to Blake, and why did so many Japanese who were influential in literature and the arts follow his inclination? But an endeavor to answer them lies outside the scope of this review. I quote, however, some significant remarks from the catalogue to hint at possible answers:

Yanagi defined Post-Impressionism as the work of “expressive artists” who reveal their personal inner feelings and desires, and saw art and the life of individuals as one and the same. This perspective on art also appeared later in Yanagi’s analysis of Blake. (15)

To the members of the *Shirakaba* group, these artists [Munch, Rodin, Renoir, da Vinci, Michelangelo, and so on], including Romain Rolland, Whitman, and Beethoven whom they revered as the representative composer, were artists who had “brought the self to life” in their work, and realized the *Shirakaba* goal of revering individuality. In short, for the members of *Shirakaba*, the work of artists was the best way to “let the self live.” (21)

The second of the two cased volumes is the program of the conference. The conference was as successful as the exhibition. The program compiles the abstracts of two plenary lectures and 32 papers. These speakers and nearly two hundred people in the audience gathered at the Kyoto University Hall for two days of highly intellectual interchanges. The presentations were presided over by two committee organizers, Masashi Suzuki and Steve Clark, who indeed conceived the whole conference from scratch.

The plenary lecturers were David Worrall and Elinor Shaffer. Worrall’s lecture, “*The Book of Thel* and the Swedenborg Project for an African Colony,” sheds new light on the meaning of Africa in Blake’s work through an examination of the Swedenborgian teaching that “Africans held a particularly pure reception of the idea of God” (8). Especially important are Worrall’s accounts of historical facts relevant to understanding Blake’s *Thel*. He elucidates, for example, the plans of Wadström and Nordenskjöld “to establish a colony on West coast of Africa in the area of Sierra Leone which would be based on the Swedenborgian principles of conjugal love” (8), and gives an inspiring interpretation of *Thel* in the light of such plans for a new colony. By showing that “Blake met Wadström and Nordenskjöld,” Worrall also invites us to read Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” as an allusion to a real black boy, “Peter Penah, rescued from slavery,” who received “Wad-



ström's protection" (8). By calling Blake "an international Blake," Worrall intends to show that "Blake was at the centre of a much wider set of international issues and influences than has hitherto been suggested." Worrall's presentation itself was as fruitful and pleasant as his abstract in the program. He is a thoughtful and supportive scholar from Nottingham Trent University, and I suppose that the surprisingly large number of speakers who came from that university might be the result of his constant concern to encourage and inspire other Blake scholars/students around him.

The second plenary lecture, by Elinor Shaffer of the University of London, is entitled "The Reception of the British Romantics over the Waters." She shares with us a fascinating account of her research project, which was "initiated in 1996 in the British Academy." In this project she explores "the receptions of writers—not only literary, but also historians, philosophers, scientists—in Europe in a systematic way" (9). She observes that "the Romantics form a particularly interesting group in this respect," and adds (in a comment of special interest to the audience at this conference) that "reception abroad extends beyond Europe, and we are especially keen to join with the Japanese, who have done so much for this more extended inquiry, in order to arrive at a world-wide reception" (9).

The abstracts of the papers are listed in alphabetical order of the speakers' last names. There are, not surprisingly, a large number of papers—indeed, a quarter of the papers delivered—that deal with Yanagi's (or the *Shirakaba* group's) work on Blake. The beautifully drawn poster for the conference—now used as the cover for both the catalogue and program—encourages us to attempt an exploration in this light, because it includes, together with the portrait of Blake by Thomas Phillips (1807) and Blake's "The Tyger" (1794), the enlarged title page of *Shirakaba*, volume 4, number 7 (1913) designed by Bernard Leach, a member of the *Shirakaba* group. An observant viewer will notice that Yanagi's signature is visible at the top right of the title page to indicate his ownership of the document. Eight conference speakers address the subject of Blake, Yanagi and the *Shirakaba* group: Yumiko Goto ("The *Shirakaba* Group and the Early Reception of Blake's Art Works in Japan"), Yoko Ima-Izumi ("The Female Voice in Blake Studies in Japan, 1910s-1930s"), Hiroko Nakamura ("Blake's Influence on Muneyoshi Yanagi and his Pilgrimage to Buddhism"), Hatsuko Niimi ("Self-Annihilation in *Milton*"), Kazuyoshi Oishi ("A Curious Symmetry of William Blake and Muneyoshi Yanagi"), Kozo Shioe ("Blake and Young Painters of the Kyoto School"), Shunsuke Tsurumi ("Yanagi and Jugaku in the Fifteen Years War [1931-45]"), and Ayako Wada ("Blake's Oriental Heterodoxy: Yanagi's Perception of Blake").

Tsurumi's presentation is unique in that he presents a precious memoir of Yanagi in "summer, 1940, [when he] ... had a visit with Yanagi" (40). It is a tribute to Yanagi that Tsurumi, now in his nineties, turned out. There are not so many people today who could provide us with this kind of firsthand information about Yanagi. Other speakers, although not privileged

with a personal acquaintance with Yanagi, nonetheless eagerly step inside the world of Yanagi and his fellows. Some papers bring out specific aspects of the relation of Yanagi (or the *Shirakaba* group) with Blake. Shioe, for example, reveals that, in the paintings of Bakusen Tsuchida, Kagaku Murakami, and Hako Irie after their encounter with Blake via *Shirakaba* in 1914, celestial beings are deprived of "the weight of material form" (33), this being the way Blake painted his angelic forms. Goto focuses on two of the Blake exhibitions in the 1910s and notes their influence on painters in Tokyo and Kyoto. She clarifies "the image of Blake which the *Shirakaba* group including Yanagi Muneyoshi ... built up" (17) in contrast with the images which other Western artists such as Rodin, Cézanne, and van Gogh present. Ima-Izumi shows how sensitive Yanagi and Jugaku were to the lines uttered by the female characters in Blake's poetry, and considers their fascination with the female voice "against a backdrop of the burgeoning feminist consciousness in early twentieth century Japan" (19).

Besides the reception of Blake in Japan, there are various other approaches to the central issue Blake in the Orient. The phrase "the Orient" can be ambiguous, and unsurprisingly there are papers here which consider theory-oriented issues such as nation, empire, and history. They uncover historical incidents in Australia, China, Egypt, India, and other Oriental countries and, by establishing a connection between the incidents and Blake's art and poetry, they explain a hitherto unrevealed aspect of Blake's work. Tristanne Connolly ("Blake and Wilkins' Translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*") begins with Blake's reference to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which was published by the East India Company and introduced by Warren Hastings, and compares Blake and Hastings, showing that "Blake installs the British in Indian culture, reflecting Hastings' insistence that the Hindus more readily shared their 'mysteries' with the sympathetic English than other 'intolerant' oppressors" (13). Keri Davies ("Rebekah Bliss: Collector of William Blake and Oriental Books") calls attention to Rebekah Bliss (1747-1819), who is "the earliest collector known to have owned anything by Blake" and "a prominent collector of Oriental books," and invites us to consider the influence of Oriental art on Blake's work by suggesting that Blake and Bliss "had some personal acquaintanceship" (14). Peter Otto ("Nebuchadnezzar's Sublime Torment: William Blake, Arthur Boyd, and the East") compares the representations of Nebuchadnezzar by Blake and the Australian painter Arthur Boyd (1920-99), and points out that "for both Blake and Boyd, Nebuchadnezzar's sublime torments mark the collapse of the division. ... between mind and body, Europe and what it tropes as its others" (30). Questioning the meaning of Orientalism, Edward Larrissy ("Blake and Orientalism") suggests that "those wonderful originals" in Asia are possible objects for imitation by Blake, and suggests further that "it is possible to claim that he thought of his own works as oriental in a positive sense" (23).

There are more abstracts in the program, which deserves the attention of all those who are interested not only in Blake's art



and literature but also in his worldwide influence. Kenzaburo Oe, a Japanese winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1994, is one famous example of such connections. He started reading Blake's poems when he was a student and, since then, has been making full use of the ideas and images of Blake's poems in his own novels. This indicates that the strong tradition of the reception of Blake in Japan continues into the present.

When Yanagi, Oe, and other Japanese readers encountered Blake in the 1910s to 1980s, there was no complete translation of Blake's work. The research environment has been different since Narumi Umetsu published, all by himself, the two-volume translation of Blake's writings (including his letters and annotations) into Japanese in 1989.<sup>4</sup> These volumes give the Japanese easier access to Blake's work and thereby help them to pass on to future generations Blake's unique and continuing impact in Japan.

Yanagi's position, no matter how unique it may be, can be more easily understood in the international perspective. A kindred mind that immediately occurs to us would be William Morris (1834-96), who commenced the Arts and Crafts movement in England. Yanagi, 55 years Morris's junior, empathetically read Morris and published an essay entitled "William Morris' Works" for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Morris' birthday in the journal *Crafts*, which Yanagi himself launched in 1931 as one of the means to pursue the Folk Crafts movement in Japan. He had been impressed by Morris's Kelmscott Chaucer earlier on when he visited Morris's house in London in 1929. This direct encounter of Yanagi with Morris's work may explain his insistence on having paper of the highest quality for *Blake and Whitman*. He chose Echizen handmade paper and had watermarks of his own design imprinted on the paper.

Yanagi and the *Shirakaba* group also had kindred spirits among their Western contemporaries. Roger Fry (1866-1934) in England, for example, is comparable to Yanagi in that, among many other things, he showed a keen sensitivity to what he termed "post-impressionist" painters such as van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso. One might suspect that some invisible power prompted Fry to mount the first exhibition of post-impressionist paintings in 1910, the year when Yanagi launched the journal *Shirakaba* which admired those very post-impressionist paintings as an ideal artistic model. The *Shirakaba* group (together with its female version, the *Seito* group, which the catalogue does not mention) is comparable to the Bloomsbury group in many ways. But it is not just in England that we can find an artistic group of the 1910s to 1930s whose activities are analogous to those of the *Shirakaba* group. In Canada, there was a group of painters called the Group of Seven, which was officially founded in 1920 and was led by A. Y. Jackson (after the sudden death of Tom Thomson in 1917). The members were endeavoring to establish Canada's national identity in art. (It is interesting to note that there was

the Canadian women painters' group called Beaver Hall Hill group, and that it was related to the male Group of Seven in a way similar to the *Seito* group's relation with the all-male *Shirakaba* group in Japan.) The activities of Yanagi and the *Shirakaba* group were not an isolated case, but can be thus located in the global network of the advancement of arts and crafts.

I wish to add a few words, in closing, about what will emerge from the conference on Blake in the Orient. The organizers hope to publish the conference papers in the form of a book. The program might therefore be replaced by a more comprehensive publication in the future, but even so the catalogue of the exhibition will long stand as one of the most solid and reliable accounts of Blake's legacy in Japan.

## Blake at Work Exhibition. Tate Britain, London.

Reviewed by Antoine Capet

*Editors' note: This review of the Tate's Blake "collection display" first appeared online at H-Museum, the H-Net Network for Museums and Museum Studies <<http://www.h-museum.net>>, on 13 August 2004. It is reprinted here by permission of the author and of H-Museum.*

Subscribers interested in William Blake (1757-1827) may remember the major exhibition devoted to him at what was then the Tate Gallery, now Tate Britain, London, in 2000-01.<sup>1</sup> This year, Tate Britain has allocated a full room to a particular aspect of Blake's art, viz. Blake at Work, exploring his painting and printing methods through 37 representative works by him and some contemporaries,<sup>2</sup> notably George Richmond (1809-96)<sup>3</sup> and some pieces of equipment, like his box of watercolors.

What makes the current exhibition so valuable is that it provides not so much a lesson in "art appreciation" from the usual aesthetic point of view as a magnificent introduction to "art appreciation" from the point of view of the media used

4. Narumi Umetsu, trans., *The Complete Works of William Blake*, 2 vols. (Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 1989).

1. Comprehensive information on that exhibition is still available at <<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/blake.htm>>.

2. Listed and illustrated, with captions, at <<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/CollectionDisplays?roomid=2780>>.

3. See caption of Richmond's *Abel the Shepherd* (1825, tempera on oak): "Richmond had asked Blake's advice about using tempera. Blake copied out for him a passage from a modern edition of a fourteenth-century treatise on art by Cennino Cennini" (reproduced on a panel to the left of *Abel the Shepherd*).