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From Japonism to *The Lighthouse*

Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, sun, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves, singing songs, drinking wine, and diverting ourselves just in floating, floating, caring not a whit for the pauperism staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call the floating world.¹

Asai Ryōi, *Tales of the Floating World*

Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* is undeniably her most art-oriented work in its examination of both writing and painting. Many literary critics have rightly and richly contextualized its imagery and philosophy in Woolf's understanding of contemporary Impressionist and post-Impressionist art through the theories of her friend Roger Fry in his text *Vision and Design*.² The comparison is

¹ Asai Ryōi was an author of the early Edo period. *Tales of the Floating World*, trans. Richard Lane, is quoted by Joan Stanley-Baker in *Japanese Art*, rev. and expanded ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 188.

² *Vision and Design* was originally published in *Athenaeum* in 1919 and in book form by London: Chatto and Windus, and New York: Brentano's, 1920. The connection between *To the Lighthouse* and Fry's work is enunciated through the correspondence of the two writers, including one letter from 5 May 1927—less than a month after the publication of *To the Lighthouse*—where Woolf wrote in response to Fry's compliments that "Now I wish I had dedicated it to you." See Letter #1764, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia*

Emily Cersonsky, « From Japonism to *The Lighthouse* », Jean-François Chassay et Bertrand Gervais [éds], *Paroles, textes et images. Formes et pouvoirs de l'imaginaire*, Université du Québec à Montréal, Figura, Centre de recherche sur le texte et l'imaginaire, coll. « Figura », n° 19, vol. 1, p. 87-105.

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complicated, however, as Woolf's application of Impressionist techniques in *To the Lighthouse* reveals the difference between her and Fry's theories of the relationship between art and life. In Fry's quintessentially Modernist conception, art is granted the power to present and to eternize the artist's self, which is otherwise unrepresented in the world, to demonstrate outwardly the inner person. In this sense, then, art is dislocated from the "life" which includes all the inexorably-destructive forces of nature, all the claims of the human body and of interpersonal relationships, and most of all (and included in these), all the ephemerally passing elements which, at one time or another, have taken a form which the artist represents in his work. Woolf, on the other hand, portrays art in *To the Lighthouse* as inextricable from the flow and ephemerality of human life and its context within nature, thus supporting a concept that the beauty of art is found precisely *in this transience*.

In light of these intervening complications between Fry's theories and Woolf's work, I propose to take a new vantage on the novel's concept of art and life. This will be a step back to the body of art which was one of the greatest influences not upon Woolf herself, but upon her influencers, that is, the Impressionists, Fry, and their contemporaries. This is the art of Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. As I will argue, the *ukiyo-e* techniques such as framing, superposition of perspectives, contrasting distances, and outlining, all of which stem from a Buddhist context, reflect a philosophy of life and art which is much closer to Woolf's than it is to Fry's. The shared philosophies

Woolf, ed. Nigel Nicolson III (London: Hogarth, 1977), 385-387. Woolf did not, in fact, dedicate *To the Lighthouse* to anyone. For criticism of the relationship between Woolf and Fry, the "ur-text" is John Hawley Roberts's "'Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf," *PMLA*, 61/3 (1946), 835-847; see also Fry's designation of Woolf as an Impressionist writer in "Modern French Art at the Mansard Gallery," *Athenaeum*, 8 August 1919, 723-724, re-published in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 339-342.

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of Woolf and the *ukiyo-e* artists on art and life, therefore, are better able to reciprocally illuminate their visual and verbal manifestations of art and life.

A Background for Comparison

We do not know whether Woolf ever saw *ukiyo-e* prints, but we do know that she was surrounded by them. Since the opening of the Japanese ports in 1854, prints flooded the European art scene, from Paris to London. Woolf had ample access to them through the huge collections at the London museums,³ as well as through their influence on the artistic works of her Bloomsbury friends and relatives. These include the paintings of her sister Vanessa Bell, which often depict women with markedly oriental eyes, and which also use flat planes combined with a radically downward perspective, techniques derived from Japanese prints.⁴ The catch in this European craze for “Japonisme,” though, was that it often stopped at techniques; except in a few cases, the Japanese culture behind the art remained largely ignored or stereotyped in the West, as can be seen in Claude Monet’s famous *La Japonaise* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

The main cultural elements which *actually* lay beneath Japanese art came from Zen Buddhism, and the name *ukiyo-e* manifests the connection, as it has morphed from the medieval

³ There is a famously extensive collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum (just down the Cromwell Road from Woolf’s childhood house in Kensington). Just after the Stephen children’s move north to Bloomsbury, the nearby British Museum acquired 1,851 prints from the collection of Arthur Morrison (in 1906). See Hugo Munsterberg, *The Japanese Print: A Historical Guide* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982), 9.

⁴ See, in particular, Bell’s *The Tub*, The Tate Gallery, London. A reproduction can be seen in Henry R. Harrington, “The Central Line down the Middle of *To the Lighthouse*,” *Contemporary Literature* 21/3, Art and Literature (Spring 1980), 363-382 (374).

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Japanese Buddhist expression for “this world of pain” (written with the Chinese characters for “sad world”) to “this transient, unreliable world,” and finally, “this fleeting, floating world.”⁵ The implication of the word’s origin is that even later *ukiyo-e* prints were created in the tradition of Buddhist philosophy. As Sandy Kita writes

the Buddha warned against clinging to the ephemeral, such as life. Buddha said that sorrow inevitably results from the unwise desire to maintain what must disappear.... What is then crucial to understanding the concept of *ukiyo-e* is the close relationship between the ephemeral and sorrow in Buddhism. Life may be ephemeral, but who does not cling to it? Our world, understood as a *floating world*, therefore, is inherently a *sorrowful world*.⁶

In a similar, though secular vein in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf confronts the reader as well as her characters with the disorienting sense of having been dropped repeatedly into an inexorably passing, uncontrollable life, or in classical terms, *in medias res*. The book begins with a response – ““Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,””⁷ – and we must spend the remaining pages attempting to discern the corresponding question, trying to understand all the interpersonal import that hinges on the trip to the lighthouse. The single matter of the lighthouse is a microcosm, a representative beacon for the larger forces

⁵ See Richard Lane, *Images of the Floating World: the Japanese Print* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1978), 10; and Frank Whitford, *Japanese Prints and Western Paintings* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 57.

⁶ Sandy Kita, “From Shadow to Substance: Redefining Ukiyo-e,” *The Floating World of Ukiyo-e: Shadows, Dreams, and Substance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 27-79, quoted from 56.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1955), 9. Further references to this text will be given in parentheses after the quotation, preceded by the abbreviation *TL*.

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of nature and the passing, floating human life into which all human beings are thrown and re-thrown.

In Woolf's novel and in *ukiyo-e* prints, nature – the overwhelming, uncontrollable facet of “life” – envelops the work of art from all sides. The work itself, its artist, and the objects that he represents are all subject to its destructive elements, for, as Woolf asks rhetorically,

Did Nature supplement what man advanced?
Did she complete what he began? With equal
complacence she saw his misery, his meanness,
and his torture. That dream, of sharing,
completing, of finding in solitude on the beach an
answer [...] was impossible.

The power of nature is always our scene, we are
always dropped into it *in medias res*, and even
on idyllic days (such as that of the novel's first
section at “The Window”), when “the nobler
powers” seem to “sleep beneath,” nature is never
truly submissive to our artistic desires. This is
because nature is the only entity not concerned
with artistic vision: it “behold[s] nothing” and
is beholden to nothing, it is “eyeless, and so
terrible.” (*TL*, 202-203.)

In comparing Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* with Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, I will focus particularly on the mid-nineteenth-century works of Ando Hiroshige, whose landscape prints exhibit a philosophy on human art within nature which most approximates Woolf's own. In his work, Hiroshige “confronts us directly with nature” and teaches “people to see the inherent poetry of nature” by “reaching the heart of the common man.” Like Woolf, he strives toward “the creation of an image of the natural world diffracted through the prism of human emotional perception, an image that would at the same time act on the viewer's psyche, creating a particular mood depending on the

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state of nature shown.”⁸ In other words, for Hiroshige as for Woolf, art is created in the midst of nature and life.

Inherited Impressions: Thought through Technique

But how is this philosophy expressed in Hiroshige and Woolf’s art? It is clear to the eye how artistic techniques passed from *ukiyo-e* to the Impressionists and their progeny (including Fry and Bell) and on to Woolf’s novel. What remains, then, is to take stock of how these techniques were used by the first and last members of this chain to present a philosophy which is absent in the middle-man.

One of the most striking aspects of *ukiyo-e* prints is their framing. Unlike a traditional Western painting where aspects are balanced across the depicted scene, *ukiyo-e* prints set their frame as if in compulsory, ironic acknowledgment that balance is, ultimately, not in the control of the artist, who himself lives and works ephemerally within the overarching forces of life and nature. Hiroshige’s *Takinogawa in Oji* (fig. 1)⁹ shows how the artist exhibits the insufficiency of framing by emphasizing what isn’t included in the frame. The elimination of the ends of the bridge on the left underlines the incomplete control of the artist in placing the frame, for it implies that while Hiroshige *could* move his view to include the ends of the bridge, something would always be left out wherever he moved the frame. It also stresses the

⁸ Lane, 184, 172. Mikhail Uspensky, *Hiroshige: One Hundred Views of Edo* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, in association with Sirrocco-Parkstone International, 2005), 17. Hiroshige was extremely prolific, creating hundreds of prints throughout his lifetime, but I have limited this discussion to the *Views of Edo* (1856-1858) because this is his last, largest, and most varied series, and suffices to represent the techniques discussed.

⁹ The images of Hiroshige’s prints which appear in this article were taken from *Hiroshige: One Hundred Views of Edo* and are reproduced with the permission of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

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relative unimportance of the bridge's ends to the bridge itself, which in *ukiyo-e* as elsewhere serves to represent the present, ephemeral moment. Further, on the right of the cliff (the right-hand side of the print), two normally-centralized objects are pushed to mere echoes in the margin: at the bottom is the waterfall, an important landscape element and artistic motif (one which merits its own print: "The Fudo Waterfall, Oji"), and on the top is the famed Kongoji monastery, the place that alone justifies this print's inclusion in Hiroshige's series "One Hundred *Famous Views of Edo*." Hiroshige's framing in this print serves doubly: it represents the human inability to catch the entirety of any one concept, and also shows how important places and destinations so soon and ungraspably pass out of our ephemeral vision.

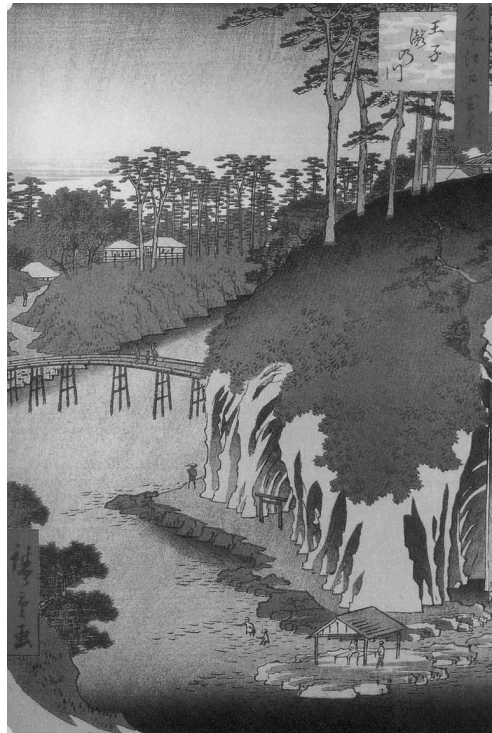


Figure 1. *Takinogawa in Oji*,
courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

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As with Hiroshige's framing, Woolf's use of bracketing in *To the Lighthouse* shows visually and linguistically how no artistic vision can encompass anything more than a glimpse, a tiny passing piece of life. Her brackets act on several levels, beginning with the novel's book-covers. Not only is this Woolf's most art-oriented novel, but it is also her most autobiographical, her "ghost story." But for all that the writing of the novel quieted the phantom of Woolf's mother in her own mind, it is inevitable that the words and story fail to enclose and impart to the reader the totality of the author's thirty-year-long heartache.¹⁰ In the reader's realm, the words ascribed to Mrs. Ramsay's death, though poignant, no longer hold any reference to a real Julia Stephen, a real mortality, the weight of which might exceed and live beyond its inscription on the page. These words, as ever, have died to the totality of their original import; they are frames which fail to capture permanently the passing, floating world.

Like a *Matryoshka* doll, within the book-covers of *To the Lighthouse* is another level of brackets, another embedded frame within the novel itself: its sectioning. Distinguished by its verb-infused, kinetic title, the central section, "Time Passes," is comprised of fractionally fewer pages than either of the day-long first or third parts, yet it strives to enclose an entire decade of radically changing life. In order to achieve Woolf's larger novelistic goal—to show how art is circumscribed by nature—this section inevitably fails at its absurd task, most patently through the inability of its actual, punctuational brackets to enclose the acts of life and death which are interpolated amongst the passing movements of nature. In the most startling of these, a single sentence announces the death of Mrs. Ramsay:

Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage on a dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay

¹⁰ Concerning the impact of Woolf's mother on this "ghost story," see Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 132, 476. See also Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," *Moments of Being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvest, 1985), 80-81.

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having died rather suddenly the night before, his
arms, though stretched out, remained empty.
(*TL*, 194.)

Yet even the event of death itself escapes the bracket (it was the night before), and the import of Mrs. Ramsay's life fully overruns this punctuation, dominating the remainder of the novel. Mr. Ramsay's outstretched arms, which cannot enclose Mrs. Ramsay's ghost, form brackets within this short passage; they are yet another form of artistic imposition, of striving and failing to enclose life. And finally, the letters and words themselves must be seen as the ultimate level of unsuccessful artistic brackets, which perpetually try to capture life and death in figures which are always malleable and always leave an inexpressible trace.

In a similar manner to Woolf's sectioning and bracketing, Hiroshige puts a stress on the frame's malfunctioning presence by reiterating it within the picture. The human artist's imposition of a frame is made especially apparent in his *View from the Massaki Shrine of the Uchigawa Sekiya-no sato Village and the Suijin-no mori Shrine* (fig. 2), where within the border of Hiroshige's print (his frame), the round window and the partially-open shutter (both human constructions themselves) obscure almost half of the view in order to frame it more perfectly within a semi-circle. The artist's vision strives to enclose a view of nature yet by its essential finitude always fails to enclose nature completely, implying precisely the reverse—that nature contains and contracts all human creations, all art.

Hiroshige's inclusion of this window-frame is also a gesture toward the gestural, the physical aspect of human arts. This is another manifestation of how art is always enclosed within life, for by stepping out of the realm of thought and resorting to the physical, gestural method used by nature and the extra-mental life, the artistic vision again ruptures Fry's supposedly

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closed system of eternizing art. The inclusion of artistic gesture is an important aspect of the economical, indelible black ink strokes in the Zen Buddhist paintings, which were precursors to *ukiyo-e* prints, and whose highest aim was “intelligible simplicity” and “progress back to the primal formation of things.”¹¹ It is also prominent in *To the Lighthouse*.

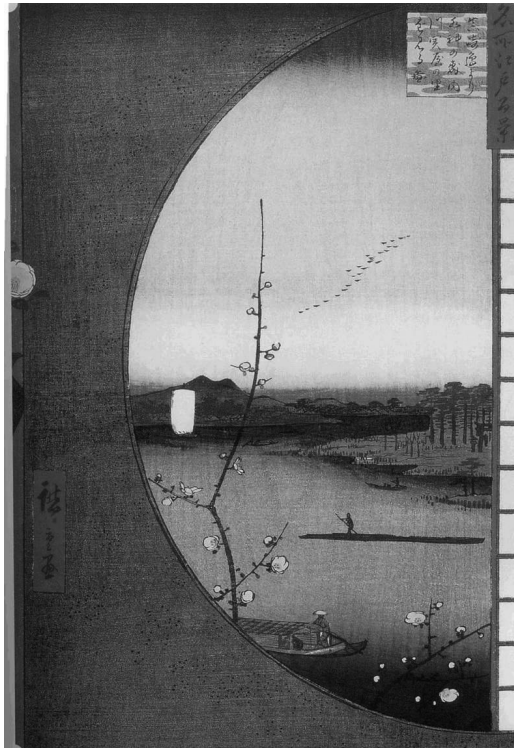


Figure 2. *View from the Massaki Shrine of the Uchigawa Sekiya-no sato Village and the Suijin-no mori Shrine*, courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

¹¹ Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese influence on Western art since 1858* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), 159.

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In creating her painting in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe realizes that the physical gesture, the tangible life of the artist, is inextricable from his mind and his work of art, or as she says, that

there was all the difference in the world between this planning airily away from the canvas, and actually taking her brush and making the first mark.... All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex. (*TL*, 234-235.)

The action of making art is a return to the body, an embodiment,¹² and because of this physicality, it is placed at the mercy of life and nature just as people and other physical objects—Rose Ramsay’s fruit arrangement for example—are eaten away by these surrounding forces. Lily’s painting is ephemeral, and it is the nonphysical, living memory of the dead Mrs. Ramsay which gains the power to “put her hand out and wring the heart thus,” and cannot simply be “brushed [...] aside.” (*TL*, 260, 266.) As Lily recognizes, picking up her paintbrush releases her mental vision to all of the dangers of physical life; these exterior forces, including the force of Mrs. Ramsay’s memory, then reach back to mentally effect and control her artistic conception. In the end, whether in the mind or on paper or canvas, the artwork is never free from the gestures of the physical world.

Caught Between Frames

The gestural aspect of art as well as the instinctual, inescapable framing-action of the human eye are emphasized by Hiroshige’s application of the classically *ukiyo-e* techniques of dark-outlining and strong colour-contrast. This is especially noteworthy in the famous *Fireworks by the*

¹² Cf. Randi Koppen, “Embodied Form: Art and Life in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*,” *New Literary History* 32 (2001): 375-389.

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Ryogokubashi Bridge (fig. 3), where the obvious outlining of the fireworks against the all-enveloping night sky emphasizes the artist's intrusion into the scene, just as the fireworks are a human intrusion into nature (which, especially in the case of fireworks, is ephemeral). The outlining, too, is yet another sort of bracket, which Hiroshige accentuates in acknowledgment that we cannot enclose this explosiveness.

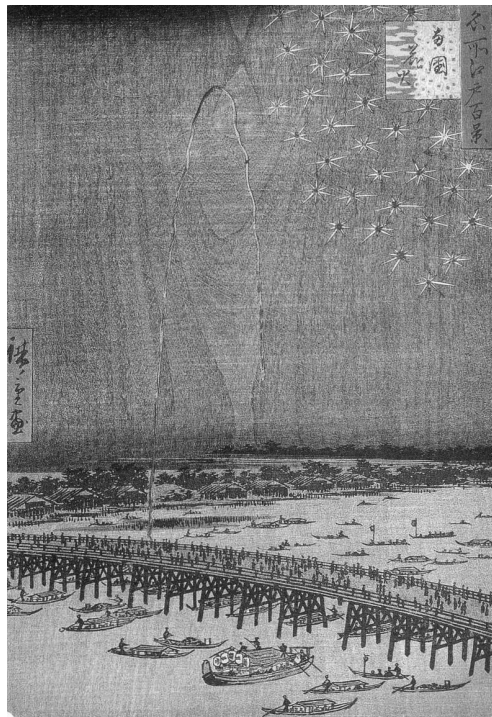


Figure 3. *Fireworks by the Ryogokubashi Bridge*, courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

In *Susaki and Jumantsubo in Fukagawa* (fig. 4), the starkness of the black outline imposed on a light-blue to white background allows Hiroshige to further illustrate the

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ineffectuality and breakdown of outlining and contrast. In the print, no line completely separates the distant mountain from the vast expanse of sky, nor the mountain from the water in the foreground, and the similarity of the background-colouring throughout further fails to differentiate these features. In the interceding white space, the only outlines of trees are mere sketches, for as Mikhail Uspensky explains, the “landscape is deserted and the hand of man is only hinted at.”¹³

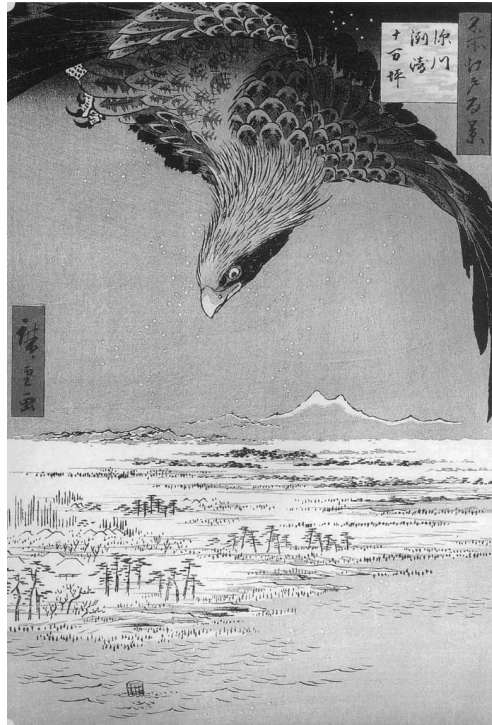


Figure 4. *Susaki and Jumantsubo in Fukagawa*, courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

¹³ Uspensky, *op. cit.*, 230.

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The commentary on art and life which Hiroshige presents in *Susaki and Jamntsubo* is echoed in *To the Lighthouse* as Lily recognizes the “distant view” that “seem[s] to outlast by a million years...the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest,” or how “the sea and sky looked all one fabric, as if sails were stuck high up in the sky, or the clouds had dropped down into the sea.” (*TL*, 34, 271.) Woolf’s technical equivalent for Hiroshige’s outlining is her prevailing contrast between the “distant view” and the capabilities of the human artists, the human eye which only ever has access to a close-up, obstructed vision. Because of our mortal short-sightedness, we are unable to see the ephemerality of individual entities amidst life and nature’s mingling and unending transition of all things, and hence we impose outlines or, in Roger Fry’s conception of Modernist art, assert our inner self over and above life.

In the novel, it is Mrs. Ramsay who criticizes this habit of “inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that.” (*TL*, 17.) Perhaps her insight stems from her inability to be struck by her own beauty; the ideological downfall of nearly all the other characters is grounded in their separate efforts to “invent differences” in order to fix her transfixing beauty with a finality that is belied by any such artwork’s eventual destruction by time, as we see with Mrs. Ramsay’s abrupt death. Charles Tansley makes her a superlative, “the most beautiful person he had ever seen,” (*TL*, 25) her daughter Prue makes her an essence, “the thing itself,” (*TL*, 174) Lily calls her “unquestionably the loveliest of people,” (*TL*, 76) and the two scientifically-minded men, Mr. Bankes and Mr. Ramsay, compare her to “signif[y]ing] some conclusion” or “the solution of a scientific problem.” (*TL*, 66, 74.) Each asserts his own outline, which fails to hold Mrs. Ramsay’s actual presence.

The failure of the outline to contain the passing, floating world is a matter of the inferiority, fluidity and changeability

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of the single human perspective within nature and the great, overarching “life.” In *ukiyo-e*, the single perspective is embraced through a refusal to rearrange and represent natural elements so that they might fit the finite eye. As an artist of landscapes, Hiroshige depicts nature’s power to obscure human, limited apprehensions by way of his allowance that “trees happen.” In other words, he makes it clear there is no necessity to impose the artist’s personal desire in order to manipulate these leafy impediments so that they frame the picture perfectly, for the reality is that nature and trees *do* constantly envelop and intrude upon art.

In *The Plum Orchard in Kamata* (fig. 5), three trees dominate the foreground, and while Hiroshige does push one tree to the left-hand frame in what would seem to be a European style, he makes it clear that this is only a matter of happenstance. This tree is almost identical to the other three trees, which hints that each could, in turn, serve as a boundary for this view, as could the countless trees mingled in the far background of the composition, with each new boundary producing a new frame and a novel perspective on the scene. That these trees obscure little of the background is unusual; generally, Hiroshige makes no pains to impede nature’s imposition whatsoever, as in *The Plantation of Paulownias in Akasaka* (fig. 6), the backgrounded shrine is dwarfed and obscured by the tree that runs straight down the centre of the composition from top to bottom. Not only does this tree itself depict the imposition of nature and life over human artifice, but it also symbolizes it, for as Hiroshige knew, it was one of very few remaining Akasaka paulownias after most were felled in 1811 to make way for resorts and dwellings.¹⁴

Perhaps through its passage into Impressionist art, the intruding tree serves a similar visual and symbolic purpose in *To the Lighthouse*. Here, Lily’s attention wavers between the diverse “fissures and humps” of the tree, the “undeniable,

¹⁴ Uspensky, *op. cit.*, 120.

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everlasting, contradictory things” of life, (*TL*, 40) and the smooth kitchen table which she imagines in order to understand Mr. Ramsay’s philosophy of material continuity (objects persisting outside of and beyond the present consciousness). The homogenously-textured table tears Lily and her art away from life’s multifarious ephemerality, but the tree returns her to it. Moving the tree to the centre of her composition, just as Hiroshige does in his print, unifies her painting by allowing nature to assert itself at the centre of all the other passing elements, such as Mrs. Ramsay’s life and death. The tree connects the two sides of the ten-year gap which stands at the centre of Woolf’s novel and of Lily’s creation of the painting, and it does so by obscuring the discord and change that has happened between them, just as Hiroshige’s defiantly surviving Paulownia stands in front of modern changes in Edo.

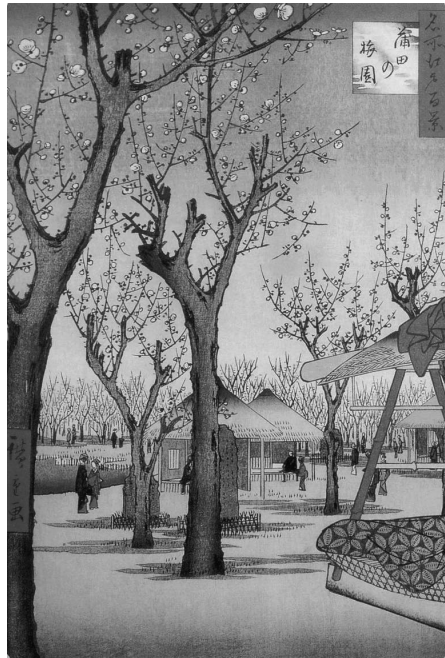


Figure 5. *The Plum Orchard in Kamata*, courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

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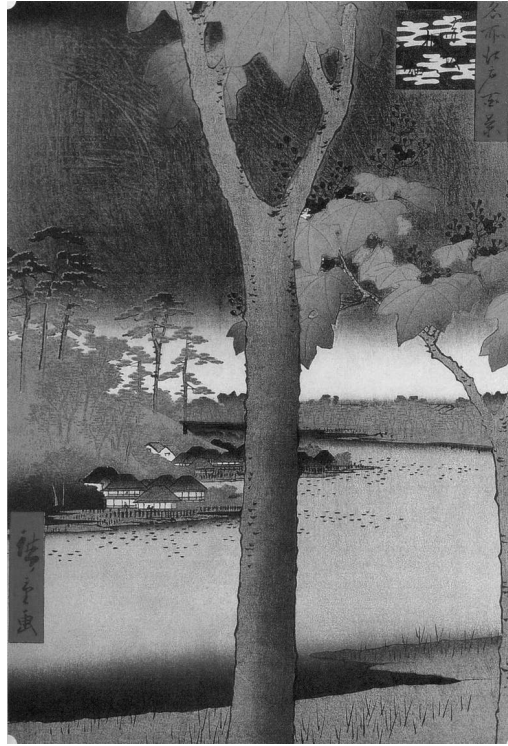


Figure 6. *The Plantation of Paulownias in Akasaka*, courtesy of Sirrocco-Parkstone International.

The motif of the tree extends even to the structure of Woolf's novel. As Henry R. Harrington writes, "At the centre of the novel is the 'Time Passes' section, the line which simultaneously unifies the narrative design and distorts, by what it represents, the more conventional view of reality portrayed by the other two sections."¹⁵ It is as if the lives in the novel have been caught between two film frames, and the "Time Passes" section running starkly, blackly down the middle allows us to only see "half" of either side, the day at

¹⁵ Harrington, *op. cit.*, 364.

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“Window” or the “Lighthouse.” The line’s simultaneously obscuring and connecting function represents the control of life over art: human experience does not consist of neat, controlled, man-made frames so much as knit-together interruptions and distortions, film-frames running through an unreliable and inexorable projector.

To use the tree or line to join multiple perspectives into a single picture is to utilize art to represent the state of its own existence within life, or in *ukiyo-e* terms, within the “floating world.” Though Hiroshige’s prints show various techniques for exhibiting a multiplicity of perspectives, his most potent symbol for this is a swooping bird, whose motion of fleeting vision is shown to begin from a distant, very un-Westernly downward view which rushes through multiple perspectives and distances as he comes to earth. The potential visionary energy of the hawk in *Susaki and Jumantsubo in Fukagawa* is reiterated through Woolf’s Mrs. Ramsay, who recognizes and respects the ephemerality of human life, and once, only “[f]or the moment” allows herself to

Hover...like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated
in an element of joy which filled every nerve of
her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly
rather, for it arose [from] this profound stillness.
(*TL*, 157-158, 161)

For a moment, she sees distantly before she swoops back down to her kitchen table. Even the vision of the hawk or the beautiful Mrs. Ramsay, after all, is always had while rushing ineluctably through life.

The hawk, the tree, the frame—these are just a few among endless examples of techniques and tropes that bring together the philosophies of art and life in *ukiyo-e* prints and *To the Lighthouse*. The passage of technical and ideological influence is circuitous but worth retracing: Woolf’s novel is a collection of words about art, its art was inspired by the Impressionists

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and Roger Fry, these painters took many of their innovative techniques (but not necessarily their philosophy) from Japanese prints, and finally Woolf, in adopting the Impressionist techniques, chose to set them to a philosophy and theme which correlates much more strongly with that of the Eastern artists than with their Western counterparts. Hence, it is illuminating to recognize the similar themes in Woolf's novel and in Japanese prints (particularly those of Hiroshige), so as to gain a new perspective on her philosophy, namely, how art is never able to step outside of and control life, and how it is always created and originated from within life's bounds. I confess that it would be fascinating to know what Woolf thought of these Japanese prints, what she would have said about their Buddhist-inspired theories, but her art, as well as theirs, is itself encompassed within an ever-passing, "floating" life, within a context and a world, and on these matters we might only guess.