

## Akutagawa Ryunosuke's "The Spider's Thread": Translation and Commentary

By Timothy M. Kelly

### Opening Remarks

As a university student struggling with the study of Japanese language and culture I first became acquainted with the short stories of Akutagawa Ryunosuke. Among his many stories I am particularly fond of "The Spider's Thread." My interest in it is twofold: as a reader, my intrigue lies in the story's imagery and parable-like quality; on the other hand, as a translator this short and seemingly straightforward story has provided me with a number of interesting problems. In the years that have passed since first translating this story as a student I have occasionally tinkered with it, but for one reason or another always put it aside. The translation prepared for publication here bears a resemblance to my previous efforts, but has been greatly reworked.[1]

Although the translation may be read without them, I have appended several footnotes with the aim of justifying my choice to leave several terms in the original Japanese. In the commentary following the translation I discuss the background of "The Spider's Thread," Akutagawa's sources of inspiration, and finally, argue against what might be called the common sense or Buddhist reading of the story.

Translation: The Spider's Thread by Akutagawa Ryunosuke[2]

### I

It so happens that one day the Lord Buddha is strolling alone on the shore of the lotus pond in Paradise. All the lotus blossoms blooming in the pond are globes of the whitest white and from the golden stamen in the center of each an indescribably pleasant fragrance issues forth abidingly over the adjacent area. Day is just dawning in Paradise.

In due course, the Lord Buddha pauses at the edge of the pond and beholds an unexpected sight between the lotus petals veiling the water's surface. Since the depths of Hell lay directly below the lotus pond on Paradise, the scenery of Sanzu-no-kawa[3] and Hari-no-yama[4] can be clearly seen through the crystal-clear water just as if looking through a stereopticon.

Then, the single figure of a man, Kandata by name, squirming there in the depths of Hell along with other sinners, comes into the Lord Buddha's gaze. This man Kandata is a murderer, an arsonist, and a master thief with numerous robberies to his credit. Yet, the Lord Buddha recalls that he had performed a single good deed. That is to say, once when Kandata was traveling through the middle of a dense forest he came upon a spider crawling along the roadside. Thereupon, he immediately raised his foot and was about to trample it to death. But, he suddenly reconsidered, saying, "Nay, nay, small though this spider be, there is no doubt that it too is a living being. Somehow or other it seems a shame to take its life for no reason." In the end he spared the spider rather than killing it.

While observing the situation in Hell, the Lord Buddha remembers that this Kandata had spared the spider. And he decides that in return for having done just that one good deed he would, if he could, try to rescue this man from Hell. Luckily, he sees nearby a spider of Paradise spinning a beautiful silver web on a jade colored lotus petal. The Lord Buddha takes the spider's thread gently into his hand and lowers it between the pure white lotus blossoms straight into the distant depths of Hell.

### II

This is Chi-no-ike[5] in the depths of Hell and along with other sinners Kandata is floating up to the surface and sinking back down over and over. No matter what direction one looks it is completely dark. And when one notices out there in that darkness the glow from the needles of the dreaded Hari-no-yama floating up vaguely into view, the feeling of helplessness is beyond description. Moreover, the surroundings are perfectly still, like the inside of a tomb. If a sound is to be heard, it is merely the faint sigh of some sinner. The sighs are faint because anyone who has fallen to this level of Hell is already so exhausted by the tortures of the other Hells that he or she no longer has even enough strength to cry out. Therefore, as one might expect, the master thief Kandata himself is unable to do anything but writhe, exactly like a frog caught in the throes of death, as he chokes on the blood of Chi-no-ike.

One day, however, something happens. Kandata happens to raise his head and spies in the sky above Chi-no-ike a silvery spider's thread, a thin line shimmering in the silent darkness, gently descending toward him from the distant, distant firmament as though it were afraid to be seen by the eyes of men. Upon seeing it Kandata involuntarily claps his hands for joy. If he were to cling to this thread and climb it to its end, he would surely be able to escape from Hell. No, if all went well, he would even be able to enter Paradise. And were this to come to pass, he would never ever be driven up Hari-no-yama again, nor would he ever have to sink again in Chi-no-ike.

Having thought thusly, Kandata quickly takes firm hold of that spider's thread with both hands and using all his might begins climbing up and up hand-over-hand. From long ago Kandata has been completely used to doing this sort of thing since he is a former master thief.

But because the distance between Hell and Paradise is some tens of thousands of ri,[6] try though he might, he is not able to ascend to the top easily. After climbing for a while, even Kandata finally tires; he is unable to continue for even one more pull on the thread. Having no other choice, he intends first to take a short rest. While hanging onto the thread he looks down on the distance below.

He sees that thanks to the efforts he spent climbing, Chi-no-ike, where he had just recently been, is now already hidden at the bottom of the darkness. He also sees that the faint glow of the terrifying Hari-no-yama is below him. If he were to continue at this pace, the escape from Hell just might not be as difficult as he had expected. Wrapping his hand around the spider's thread, Kandata laughs in a voice unused during his years in Hell, "I'm saved! I'm saved at last!" Then he suddenly notices that below him on the spider's thread, just like a line of ants, a countless number of sinners are following him, climbing up and up for all they are worth. When Kandata sees this, he momentarily freezes from shock and fear, his mouth agape and his eyes rolling in his head like an idiot. How could it be that this slender spider's thread, seemingly strained even under the weight of just him alone, is able to support the weight of that many? By some chance were the thread to break, he, the egotistical Kandata who at great pains had climbed this far, and everyone else would plummet headlong back into Hell. For that to happen would be a disaster. But, even as he says this, sinners, not by the hundreds, nor even by the thousands, but in swarms, continue to crawl up from the bottom of the pitch dark Chi-

no-ike and climb up the thin luminous spider's thread in single file. If he doesn't do something right away, the thread will break in two at the center and he will surely fall.

At this point, Kandata yells in a loud voice, "Hey you sinners. This spider's thread is mine. Who the hell asked you to climb it? Get down! Get off it!" Just as he screams at the other sinners the spider's thread, which till then had had nothing wrong with it, suddenly breaks with a snap right where Kandata is hanging. So, Kandata, too, is doomed. Without even time to cry out he goes flying through the air spinning like a top and in the wink of an eye plunges headfirst into the dark depths of Hell.

Afterwards, only the shortened spider's thread from Paradise dangles there, glittering dimly in a sky void of both moon and stars.

### III

The Lord Buddha stands on the shore of the lotus pond in Paradise having taken in everything from start to finish. When Kandata finally sinks like a rock to the bottom of Chi-no-ike he resumes strolling, his countenance seemingly creased with sadness. Seen through divine eyes, the Lord Buddha thought it wretched that Kandata's compassionless heart led him to attempt to escape by himself and for such a heart falling back into Hell was just punishment.

The lotus blossoms in the lotus pond of Paradise, however, are not concerned in the least about what has happened. Those blossoms of the whitest white wave their cups around the divine feet of the Lord Buddha and from the golden stamen in the center of each an indescribably pleasant fragrance issues forth abidingly over the adjacent area. Noon draws near in Paradise.

The End

### Commentary

#### 1. Background

Most previous translations of "The Spider's Thread" make no mention of the fact that it was originally published in the 1918 inaugural issue of children's literary magazine founded by Suzuki Miekichi (1882-1936) called Akai tori (Red Bird).[7] While one's reading and enjoyment of the story itself may not be affected greatly by not knowing that the author intended it as a story for children, such a fact can hardly be overlooked in any attempt to evaluate it. Likewise, a serious discussion of this short story must consider the relationship between the text of Akutagawa's stories and the sources he drew upon for inspiration.

One of the conceits held in societies of universal or nearly universal literacy relegates stories such as parables and fables, Aesop's Fables for example, to the realm of juvenile literature. Before widespread literacy, however, parables and fables were part and parcel of a society's oral tradition.[8] They were a social event, spoken and listened to; they were not meant to be read by individuals, child or adult. Nor were they merely stories told for the purpose of entertainment, but rather they had some underlying point to make, usually of a moral or religious nature. The point or moral of the story was easy enough to grasp and the story itself served as a point of departure for social and moral discussion, hence, they figured in the construction and maintenance of social reality.[9] Today these same stories, compiled, edited, and codified as juvenile literature seldom achieve such a grand function. Akutagawa's "The Spider's Thread" is a parable with enormous potential for lending itself to moral discussion or even to the discussion of human nature itself. Despite being reprinted in numerous hardback and paperback collections of his stories, and despite being read by most Japanese students in a modern Japanese literature course at school, it has little or no impact as a parable. [10]

#### 2. Sources

Akutagawa's dependence upon various sources for inspiration has been seen by some critics as evidence of his lack of creativity or originality. Donald Keene notes, for example, that Akutagawa's critics compared him to a mosaicist because of his tendency to piece materials from different sources into a single story.[11] In my opinion such criticism can hardly be sustained with argumentation. That researchers or critics have discovered the roots of an Akutagawa story does not speak to the quality of the story nor should it be considered a weakness of Akutagawa as a literary artist. The story must stand or fall on its own merits or lack thereof and Akutagawa must be evaluated on the quality of his creative act, the storytelling. Furthermore, such criticism of Akutagawa and his work must be considered petty and trivial in light of the pervasiveness of the "I-novel" (fictionalized-autobiography / autobiographical-fiction) tradition and the historical fiction tradition in modern Japanese literature.

In the case of "The Spider's Thread" three separate sources served as Akutagawa's inspiration[12] : 1) a fable found in The Brothers Karamazov, 2) a captioned illustration found in The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, and 3) a story titled "The Spider's Web" in Karma: A Story of Early Buddhism.[13] Simply uncovering or naming the "sources" is insufficient. In order to appreciate Akutagawa and "The Spider's Thread" properly, these sources must be examined closely.

Akutagawa read The Brothers Karamazov by the famous Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's (1821-1881) in English translation during the period from October 1916 through July 1917.[14] The fable he gleaned from this novel is relatively short and is given here in its entirety.

Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was wicked as wicked could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her. The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire. And her guardian angel stood thinking: what good deed of hers can I remember to tell God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a beggar woman. And God said: now take that same onion, hold it out to her in the lake, let her take hold of it, and pull, and if you pull her out of the lake, she can go to paradise, but if the onion breaks, she can stay where she is. The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her: here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I'll pull. And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all the way out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her feet: 'It's me who's getting pulled out, not you; it's my onion, not yours.' No sooner did she say it than the onion broke. And the woman fell back into the lake and is burning there to this day. The angel wept and went away.[15]

There is an illustration found in *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*[16] of Buddha extending his hand to a sinner in hell. The caption reads: The goodwill that a poor wretch had shown in his former life to a spider, his only good deed, serves him in hell as a means of escape.[17] It turns out that this picture is a reproduction from an illustration in *Karma: A Story of Early Buddhism*. [18] The story accompanying the illustration, "The Spider's Web," is as follows:

I will tell you the story of the great robber Kandata, who died without repentance and was reborn as a demon in Hell, where he suffered for his evil deeds the most terrible agonies and pains. He had been in Hell several Kalpas and was unable to rise out of his wretched condition, when Buddha appeared upon earth and attained to the blessed [state] of enlightenment. At that memorable moment a ray of light fell down into Hell quickening all the demons with life and hope and the robber Kandata cried aloud: "O blessed Buddha, have mercy upon me! I suffer greatly, and although I have done evil, I am anxious to walk in the noble path of righteousness. But I cannot extricate myself from the net of sorrow. Help me, O Lord; have mercy on me!"

Now, it is the law of karma that evil deeds lead to destruction, for absolute evil is so bad that it cannot exist. But good deeds lead to life. Thus there is a final end to every deed that is done, but there is no end to the development of good deeds. The least act of goodness bears fruit containing new seeds of goodness, and they continue to grow, they nourish (the soul in its weary transmigrations) (the poor suffering creatures in their repeated wanderings in the eternal round of Samsara) until (it reaches) (they reach) the final deliverance from all evil in Nirvana. When Buddha, the Lord, heard the prayer of the demon suffering in Hell, he said, "Kandata, did you ever perform an act of kindness? It will now return to you and help you to rise again. But you cannot be rescued unless the intense sufferings which you endure as consequence of your evil deeds have dispelled all conceit of selfhood and have purified your soul of vanity, lust, and envy." [19]

By reviewing Akutagawa's sources we are able to see clearly for ourselves just how he "borrowed" from them in the making of his own short story. It should be quite clear that Akutagawa did not simply copy or borrow wholesale from either of the above stories. As has been claimed, we can also see that Akutagawa did indeed piece together the two stories and the illustration, employing what was useful to him and equally importantly discarding what was not. He did take the main character's name (Kandata), his former occupation (criminal, thief), and his present whereabouts (Hell) and circumstance (suffering) from the karma story. The salvation motif, including the failure, he derived from the onion fable and the spider's role comes from the illustration accompanying the karma story. It's also instructive to note that Akutagawa completely cut out the heavily Buddhist flavored dialogue between Kandata and the Lord Buddha and the role of the guardian angel. Akutagawa's version, his contribution as a literary artist, is the unique blending of the two stories. The question arising from Akutagawa's blending of an obviously Buddhist story and equally obvious Christian fable, for me at least, concerns the nature of the product. That is to say, should Akutagawa's "The Spider's Thread" be read as a Buddhist story, a Christian story, neither, or both? I fully realize that this question may never have occurred to any of Akutagawa's juvenile readership. In fact, a Japanese acquaintance recently commented that my question is not one that would likely present itself to a Japanese reader's mind, certainly not to his. My reading of the secondary literature, while admittedly less than complete, seems to substantiate his point.

### 3. A Buddhist Story??

When we consider the question of whether or not "The Spider's Thread" should be read as a Buddhist story we are confronted with two obstacles. One, on the surface there are the trappings of Buddhism: the Lord Buddha, the lotus blossoms, Paradise, Sanzu-no-kawa and so forth, all of which beg for a Buddhist reading. And second, "common sense" [20] among readers, particularly Japanese readers, seems to indicate that a Buddhist reading is so natural that the question itself borders on the ridiculous; put otherwise, the very question, as my acquaintance suggested, flies in the face of common sense. These two obstacles are of course related. To refute them we must ask if the story is based on or in line with Buddhist thought and teachings?

Following the salvation motif of the onion fable, the Lord Buddha of Akutagawa's story extends to Kandata a chance to redeem himself. Is this action consistent with the Buddhist tradition? Does the historical Buddha, provide such opportunities? I don't believe this to be the case, but would be happy to review concrete examples, should Buddhist scholars or others more knowledgeable than I be kind enough to point them out to me. Of course, the Greater Vehicle Buddhist tradition (Skt: Mahayana, Jpn: Daijō) is replete with examples of bodhisattva employing "skillful means" (Skt: upaya, Jpn: hōben) in assisting sentient beings to break the cycle of rebirths (achieve extinction, Nirvana), but the Oshaka-sama of Akutagawa's story is Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, not one of these bodhisattva. Similarly, it must be asked if it is consistent with Buddhist thought that the cycle of rebirths can be broken by "demons" or souls consigned to suffer the consequences of their evil karma. Answering this requires that we know more about the Buddhist worldview.

Of the Ten Realms (Jpn: jikkai) delineated in Mahayana thought, the first six are non-enlightened worlds (Jpn: rokudo, rokubon), and the latter four are enlightened worlds (Jpn: shisho). Here we will be concerned only with the non-enlightened worlds, which are: hell-being ("demon"), hungry ghost, animal, asura ("evil spirit"), human, and deva (god). [21] Of these, the first three are the Three Evil Destinies (Jpn: san'akudo, san'akushu) and being reborn into any of them is the result of evil karma (Jpn: akugo). In the first seven days following death the deceased hopes to traverse these three evil destinies, which corresponds to crossing the Sanzu-no-kawa -- an image appearing in "The Spider's Web." This Sanzu-no-kawa is a metaphorical river composed of three currents or channels. Literally, it might be translated as river of three currents. The first current is of fire (Jpn: kazu) and the torture of the hell-beings residing in it, as one would expect, is being burned. The second current is of swords (Jpn: tozu) and the hungry ghosts reborn here are tortured with them. The third current is of blood (Jpn: kechizu) because the animals reborn here devour each other. Presumably those reborn in any of these currents will suffer there until the effects of their evil karma expire, at which point they would be reborn and again seek liberation from the cycle of rebirths. According to this worldview, then, it's difficult, if not impossible, to conclude that Kandata could achieve paradise directly from hell. [22]

Even if we disregard the above objections to Akutagawa's story, there are other points to contest. The spider's thread that was Kandata's means of escape from hell, like the onion of the wretched woman in the fable, broke when the protagonist balked at others trying to make their escape. The parallel between the two stories is only too obvious. It can be argued, however, that Kandata's failure was sealed the instant he thought he could

escape. Firstly, in attempting to escape without so much as a word to the others suffering with him, Kandata did not exhibit any compassion. Considering its importance in the Buddhist tradition, would a human, let alone a demon, who lacked compassion be able to achieve paradise? Secondly, in Buddhist thought from the Age of the End of the Law (Jpn: mappo), salvation through one's own efforts (Jpn: jiriki) is not possible. [23] Kandata's hand-over-hand efforts, then, could just not have achieved his hope of entering paradise.

In this section I have presented a roughly sketched argument against reading "The Spider's Thread" as a Buddhist story. In light of my argument I would submit that Akutagawa did not successfully blend his sources in such a way as to make the resulting story intellectually compelling. This might be somewhat mitigated by the argument that in writing the story specifically for a juvenile readership he never intended it to be consistent with the teachings of the Buddhist tradition. An appeal to a certain amount of artistic license might also help to mitigate my case against his story. In spite of the criticism I have leveled against Akutagawa and in spite of the flaws I have found in my reading of "The Spider's Thread," I would not hesitate in recommending it. As a story it's finely crafted and Akutagawa's use of simile invites the reader to reproduce graphically in his or her mind's eye images that are from and outside of everyday experience.[24] In that sense I will continue to enjoy and appreciate the story, but it would be less than honest were I not to add that for me the story has paled in significance as a result of probing into it. In the final analysis, however, readers will have to decide for themselves if the story warranted the time they spent reading and thinking about it.

### Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Professor Laurel R. Rodd for reading and commenting on an earlier version of the translation. I would also like to extend thanks to my former graduate school colleague at the University of Tsukuba, Sugamoto Hirotsugu, for discussing the Japanese text with me on several occasions. Some of their suggestions have been incorporated in the translation, however, any mistakes or inadequacies are my sole responsibility.

2 The Japanese text upon which this translation was based can be found in Akutagawa Ryunosuke Zenshu (Gendai Nihon Bungaku Taikei 43) Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1968.

3 In four of the five English translations I've checked Sanzu-no-kawa was rendered as the River Styx. In so far as both are underworld rivers, this practice is not completely off mark. It is nevertheless a questionable practice because the analogy is strained and misleading. The origin of River Styx is in Greek mythology, while Sanzu-no-kawa is Buddhist. Some middle ground, like the River Sanzu or Sanzu River, might be acceptable, but as this also begs for explanation nothing is really gained.

4 Hari-no-yama is literally mountain of needles or Needle Mountain. As the nature of this image is made clear later in the story, nothing is gained in translating it. Again, some middle ground like Mt. Hari might be acceptable, but not especially helpful.

5 Chi-no-ike is literally lake of blood or Blood Lake.

6 A ri is a unit of distance equivalent to 3.9273 km. (2.44 mi.). As this unit is no longer used in Japan, it functions much like the word "league" (3 mi., 4.8 km.) does for modern speakers of English. For the purpose of the story, the exact distance is far less important than the sense that it's a rather long distance. There being some tens of thousands of ri between Paradise and Hell serves to extend the sense of unknown distance to that of a distance so vast it borders on the inconceivable.

7 I know of eight published translations of this story. Eric S. Bell and Ukai Eiji, "The Spider's Web" in *Eminent Authors of Contemporary Japan*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha, 1930-1; "The Spiderthread" in F.J. Daniel, *Japanese Prose*. London: Lund Humphries, 1944; Sasaki Takuma, "The Spider's Thread" in *The Three Treasures and Other Stories for Children*. Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1944; Glen W. Shaw, "The Spider's Thread" in *Short Stories by R. Akutagawa*. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1930; Kojima Takashi, "The Spider's Thread" in *Japanese Short Stories*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1961, republished Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1981; Beongcheon Yu, "Spiderthread" in *Akutagawa: An Introduction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972; Howard Norman, "The Spider's Thread" in *Cogwheels and Other Stories*. Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1982; Dorothy Britton, "The Spider's Thread" in *The Spider's Thread and Other Stories*. Tokyo: Kodansha Publishers Ltd., 1987.

8 For exposing me to the importance of orality in the understanding of the human enterprise I am indebted to the American historian of religion Sam D. Gill.

9 I mean to imply here a sociology of knowledge, my understanding of which derives from the work of American sociologist Peter L. Berger and German sociologist Thomas Luckmann.

10 For about fifty "one-liner" examples of comments made by junior high schools after reading "A Spider's Thread," see Shimozawa Katsui, "Kumo no ito" in Akutagawa Ryunosuke sakuhin kenkyu; (Kindai bungaku kenkyu sosho) (Tokyo: Yagi Shoten, 1969), p.49-52.

11 Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era - Fiction*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987), p.564. The intent in labeling Akutagawa a mosaicist was neither complimentary nor purely descriptive. Akutagawa's literary views and his disputes with other writers of his time are beyond the scope of this paper.

12 Ibid, p.565 Keene mentions only two sources.

13 Shimada Kinji, "Akutagawa Ryunosuke to Roshia shosetsu" in *Akutagawa Ryunosuke I*, (Tokyo: Yuseido, 1985) p.278-9. Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in 1879-80 and was his last novel.

14 Ibid, p.280.

15 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Pevear and Volokhonsky, translators. (New York, Vintage Classics, 1991), p.352.

16 Op. Cit., p.278. According to Shimada the illustration is on page 136 of Paul Carus, *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1900).

17 As quoted in *ibid*.

18 *Ibid*, p.279. *Karma: A Story of Early Buddhism* was published in Tokyo in 1895 and contains five stories including one called "The Spider's Web."

19 As cited in *ibid*.

20 When I speak of common sense, I am referring to the natural attitude or state of being wide-awake that individuals exhibit in the reality of their everyday life (paramount reality). Existence in and apprehension of the reality of everyday life is natural, self-evident, taken for granted, and shared with others. See, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), especially Chapter 1.

21 These correspond to *jikoku*, *gaki*, *chikusho*, *ashura*, *jin*, and *ten* in Japanese.

22 For the information contained in this section I have consulted Nakamura Hajime, et al. Eds, *Bukkyo jiten* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989) and an online dictionary of Buddhist terms.

The correspondence between *Hari-no-yama* and the current of swords as well as that between *Chi-no-ike* and the current of blood should not be particularly surprising. It deserves mention, however, that the correspondence was revealed as a result of explicating *Sanzu-no-kawa*, which seems in "The Spider's Thread" to have an existence apart from *Hari-no-yama* and *Chi-no-ike*.

23 Pure Land Buddhism flourished in East Asia in response to the Age of the End of the Law. In Japan during the late 12th century Honen was the main proponent of Pure Land Buddhism. Its most important tenet involves placing one's salvation in the hands of another (Jpn: *tariki*). Specifically, this means in the hands of the buddha Amitabha (Jpn: *Amida*) who vows to save all sentient beings in his Western Paradise before achieving perfect enlightenment himself.

24 Examples of simile -- as if looking through a stereopticon; like the inside of a tomb; writhe, exactly like a frog caught in the throes of death; as though it were afraid to be seen by the eyes of men; like a line of ants; like an idiot; spinning like a top.

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