

The Moon's Invention – Hōzō Temple - *tsuki no hatsumei*.¹



Barefoot, he bends at the water's edge, peering in. Behind him, his walking staff bisects the moon's crescent in the dark sky. His white robe, bald head, blue sash, and my months of looking at this series of prints, tell me this man is a monk. The print's grayscale sky whispers down to meet the barely blue water. It soothes me like a low hum. It's one of my favorites in the moon series – a visual poem, an image to settle into for a meditative stay. But my eyes linger on that splayed stance, those muscled arms, the way they threaten the soft scene, and I'm afraid to know his revelation.

This is the mythic moment of the *kamayari*'s invention. Kakuzenbō Hōin In'ei was a Buddhist abbot of the Hōzōin temple in 16th century Japan. A monk who trained warriors in the art of spear fighting, a Buddhist who improved upon the viciousness of the weapon by attaching a sickle blade perpendicular to the one pointing forward. This is the *kamayari*. I wrestle with what seems incongruous to my western mind – Buddhist, warrior, monk – but history proves is not.

How deep would three polished points pierce me before pain came? Would rapture bloom, unexpected – the only way it can – at death's first whisper? Would I share the bitter intimacy, eye-to-eye, with the one who held me on the blades of the moon's invention? My bowels, cut by metal – would I feel them loosen; my intestines untied? Would there be a drop in pressure, a real estate adjustment in the center of my body? Would I catch my own hot blood?

¹ Print 95 in Yoshitoshi's series *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon*

Flip the roles; let my hands hold the weapon. Let my action slice a body's skin into wound. Let pain become particles traveling in both directions. Electrons collide. They charge from his blood-slick flesh, to my metal blades, to the shaft I hold in my hands, to the cells of my arms. They race through me the way fire follows fuel. I have killed things, some of them on purpose. By things, I mean living creatures, but I cannot imagine killing a human. Although if not, then what's this sense I feel of a body's wet weight balanced on the point of the spear I hold, and the ecstatic terror that pools in the hollow below my throat, like the weight of a lover's thumb?

Don't let them blame the moon for this.

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These are the things I've killed:

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Field notes: March 17, 2020.

Rapidly spreading novel coronavirus. I can't make it sound poetic. The R-naught alarms. Situations change by the hour. People die. We are all, everywhere, from everything, isolating. Locking ourselves in, away, afraid to touch, to be in the same rooms, even with ourselves.

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Corona – some definitions

PHYSICS:

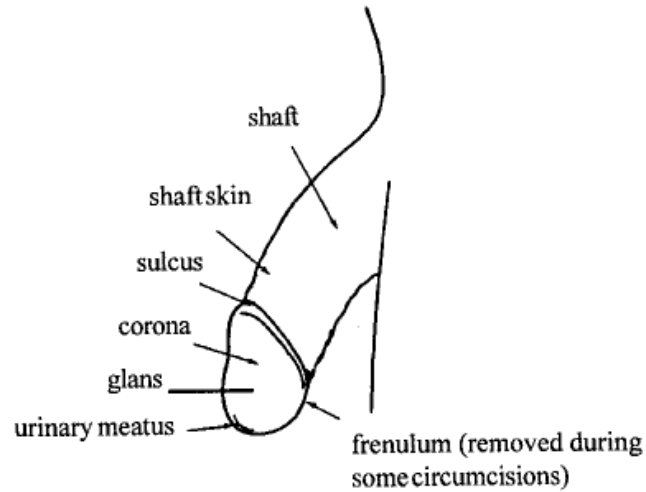
a small circle of light seen around the sun or moon, due to diffraction by water droplets.

ANATOMY:

a part of the body resembling or likened to a crown

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Bodies the moon has known: American, White, Christian, Male. Mostly only, or first-born, sons.



Bodies I have known:

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Let's say I was 10 the first time I killed something. I'd been lifting flat rocks, hooking my fingers under the edges of gray slate to find beneath them things that squirmed: amphibians, crayfish, worms. Under one I found a toad. It hopped away from my grabbing hands toward the crease between soil and slate, determined to be left alone. Benevolent child, I laid the rock back down.

Feel it with me: the strange-familiar squish of creature-flesh. Is it something we're born with, the cellular knowledge of death at our fingertips, message traveling from creature to rock to finger to arm to brain to heart? I knew what I'd find when I lifted the rock again, but I did it anyway. I had to see my sin. Let's say it wasn't fully dead, but dying. Things meant to be inside had spilled out, intestinal and red.

I went away, crying. Between the hemlock and oak, I wandered, sobbing apologies. To God, or maybe to Mother Nature – back then I didn't know the difference. "I'm so sorry, so sorry so sorry," I cried. "I didn't mean it. So sorry, sorry, sorry..."

How many must you incant to change the end of an already finished story?

² taken from <http://www.cirp.org/pages/anat/>