

For copyright reasons, the frontispiece and all other illustrations in this volume have been blacked out. We are in the process of applying for permission to reproduce these illustrations electronically. Once permission is gained, the illustrations will be made available. We apologize for the inconvenience.

TRANSLATION

Ikkyū's Skeletons

TRANSLATED BY R. H. BLYTH

Introduction

THE late R. H. Blyth called Ikkyū "the most remarkable monk in the history of Japanese Buddhism, the only Japanese comparable to the great Chinese Zen masters." It is thus all the more regrettable he did not live to translate more of Ikkyū's writings for Western readers beyond the brief glimpse afforded in the Buddhist verse, the *dōka* or "Way poems," which appeared in the fifth volume of the *Zen and Zen Classics* series. When Dr. Blyth died in 1962, he left fragmentary translations of several of Ikkyū's *kana bōgo* (easy Buddhist sermons in the Japanese language) and a nearly complete manuscript translation of the *Skeletons*. These were intended, perhaps, for a book on Japanese Zen he is known to have planned. The manuscript of the *Skeletons* is the basis for the present translation. As far as I am aware, it is the first of any of Ikkyū's prose writings to be published.

The few facts of Ikkyū Zenji's life which need to be recalled in introducing this translation may be obtained from Dr. Blyth's essay on Ikkyū which appeared together with his translations of the Buddhist verse mentioned above. Although Ikkyū's skeletons belong of course to no particular century, some understanding of the age that produced them is nonetheless desirable. I have tried to provide a very brief background sketch of Ikkyū's times, and also a general description of the work itself.

A hundred and fifty years prior to Ikkyū's birth, the priest Nichiren (1222-1282) in his *Risshō ankoku ron* painted a picture of the social unrest of Kamakura times in which he made reference to earthquakes and fire, famine and epidemic, and described animals lying dead in the streets and public thoroughfares filled

with corpses and skeletons. It could as well have been a view of Ikkyū's times, for records show that such conditions continued more or less unabated on through the Muromachi period in which he lived, though actually the causes of suffering were if anything aggravated later by frequent riots and increasing feudal warfare. This culminated in the horrors of the Ōnin civil war, which reduced Kyoto and its palaces and temples to ashes. Throughout the uncertainties of fifteenth century life, disturbances such as those mentioned above often sent the upper classes fleeing to shelter in the country, and brought the remaining townspeople to the brink of anarchy, heeding neither governmental nor religious authority. These conditions constitute, on the one hand, the environment in which Ikkyū passed his entire life. The Ōnin war began in 1467 and ended in 1477, four years before his death.

On the other hand, cultural activities were pursued with a vengeance under the Ashikaga Shōguns during all the turmoil of the century, reaching their heights after 1450, especially in the period of the so-called Higashiyama culture, centered around the Silver Pavilion where Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435-1490) undertook lavish patronage of the arts.

The *Skeletons* seems to have been first printed in 1457 when Ikkyū was 63 years old. He had of course been a witness to the suffering of his times. By all accounts, he had also taken active part in many of its aesthetical pastimes. Modern critics credit him with having had an influence on many of the characteristic Japanese arts which were developing during this time, not to mention a determinate influence on subsequent vernacular language Zen literature, especially that which was produced in the Tokugawa period.

The *Skeletons*, in Japanese, *Gaikotsu* 骸骨, became in the course of time known by the popular title, *Ikkyū's Gaikotsu*. It is written partly in prose and partly in verse, and falls naturally into three sections. The first is mainly prose, with a few poems scattered at intervals, the middle portion a series of poems (*dōka*, 道歌, Buddhist *waka*) with illustrations, and the third, like the first, mostly in prose. The illustrations of skeletons and groups of skeletons engaged in various human occupations which decorate the central poem series are highly imaginative, humorous, but allegorical and didactic as well.

The earliest existing edition of the work is undated, but it is said to belong to the Muromachi period (1338-1573), whether actually during Ikkyū's lifetime or not is unknown. It is presumed to reproduce an illustrated manuscript

by Ikkyū himself, and in fact the calligraphy and illustrations do strongly suggest his own characteristic personality. Another printing, from the original woodblocks or in facsimile of them, was apparently made during the early seventeenth century. A photo-facsimile (undated, but described as a Muromachi edition), supposedly of the former book, was published in a reduced-size, limited edition by Ryūkyō University in Kyoto in 1924. During the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) there appeared two or three other editions, all showing important textual variation from the earlier work. Their illustrations are similar in format but different in artistic conception, the later ones embellishing the Muromachi originals. None are comparable to the delightful productions thought to be from Ikkyū's own brush. The illustrations reproduced here are from an early seventeenth century printed copy, and correspond exactly to the Ryūkyō edition described above.

The translator used the text of a modern edition for his translation. As with all other modern editions, it is based on the later woodblock versions that show considerable variance from the earlier text. I have not indicated these variants, though it should be pointed out that they do exist.

Dr. Blyth's manuscript dates most probably from the mid-1950s, perhaps even earlier. It lacks a portion of the prose text and a few of the poems scattered throughout the work. In preparing it for publication, editorial revisions and footnotes have been kept to a minimum, although in order to make the translation complete I have thought it desirable to translate the portions of the text Dr. Blyth left unfinished. These additions are indicated by the use of italic type. The two footnotes not marked Ed. are Dr. Blyth's own.

N. A. Waddell

Ikkyū's Skeletons

(text)

THE myriad Laws are seen written in thin Indian ink.¹ But the beginner must do zazen earnestly. Then he will realize that there is nothing born into this world which will not eventually become "empty." Oneself and the original face of heaven and earth and all the world are equally empty. All things emerge from the "emptiness." Being formless it is called "Buddha." The Mind of Buddha, the Buddhahood, the Buddha in our minds, Buddhas, Patriarchs, and Gods are different names of this "emptiness," and should you not realize this you have fallen into the Hell of ignorance and false imagination. According to the teaching of an enlightened man, the way of no return² is the separation from Hell and rebirth, and the thought of so many people, whether related to me or not, passing through reincarnations one after another, made me so melancholy, I left my native place and wandered off at random.

I came to a small lonely temple. It was evening, when dew and tears wet one's sleeves, and I was looking here and there for a place to sleep, but there was none. It was far from the high way, at the foot of a mountain, what seemed a Samadhi Plain. Graves were many, and from behind the Buddha Hall there appeared a most miserable-looking skeleton, which uttered the following words:

¹ The first sentence reads literally, "It is because they are written in thin Indian ink letters that the myriad Laws (Dharmas) are seen"; Ikkyū seems to be suggesting that the truth can be seen more readily in an informal, easily written work like this than in some elaborately conceived philosophical discourse. "Thin Indian ink" probably refers as well to the fact the work is written in Japanese instead of the Chinese usually employed by Buddhist writers. Ed.

² "The way of no return" seems to refer to enlightenment; once gained one never again falls back into illusion. Ed.

IKKYU'S SKELETONS

The autumn wind
Has begun to blow in this world;
Should the pampas grass invite me,
I will go to the moor,
I will go to the mountain.

*What to do
With the mind of a man
Who should purify himself
Within the black garment,
But simply passes life by.*

All things must at some time become nought, that is, return to their original reality. When we sit facing the wall doing zazen, we realize that none of the thoughts that arise in our minds, as a result of Karma, are real. The Buddha's fifty years of teaching are meaningless. The mistake comes from not knowing what the mind is. Musing that few indeed experience this agony, I entered the Buddha Hall and spent the night there, feeling more lonely than usual, and being unable to sleep. Towards dawn, I dozed off, and in my dream I went to the back of the temple, where many skeletons were assembled, each moving in his own special way just as they did in life. While I marvelled at the sight, one of the skeletons approached me and said:

Memories
There are none:
When they depart,
All is a dream;
My life,—how sad!

If Buddhism
Is divided into Gods
And Buddhas;
How can one enter
The Way of Truth?

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

For as long as you breathe
A mere breath of air,
A dead body
At the side of the road
Seems something apart from you.

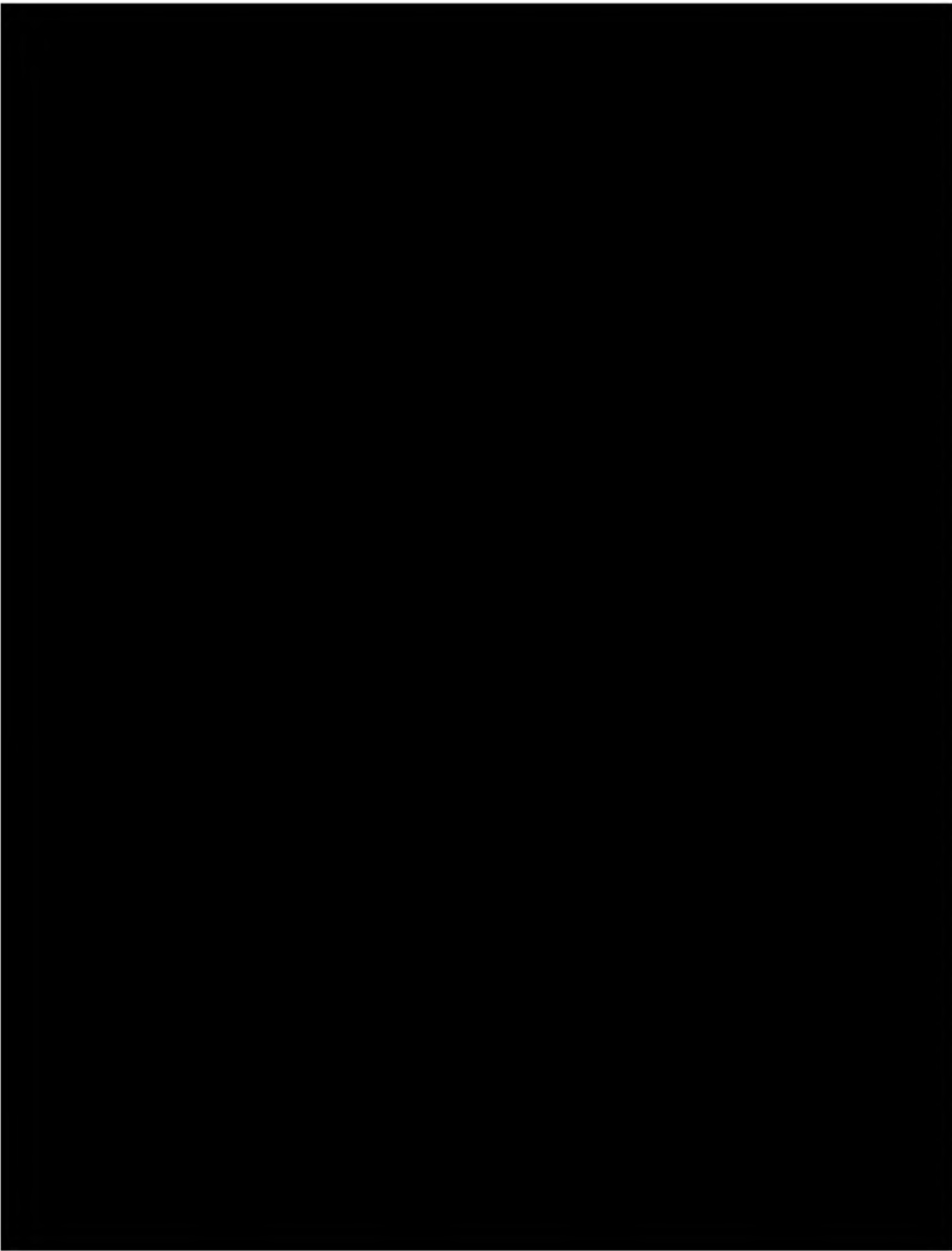
Well, we enjoyed ourselves together, the skeleton and I, and that illusive mind which generally separates us from others gradually left me. The skeleton that had accompanied me all this while possessed the mind that renounces the world and seeks for truth. Dwelling on the watershed of things, he passed from shallow to deep, and made me realize the origin of my own mind. What was in my ears was the sighing of the wind in the pine trees; what shone in my eyes was the moon that enlightened my pillow.

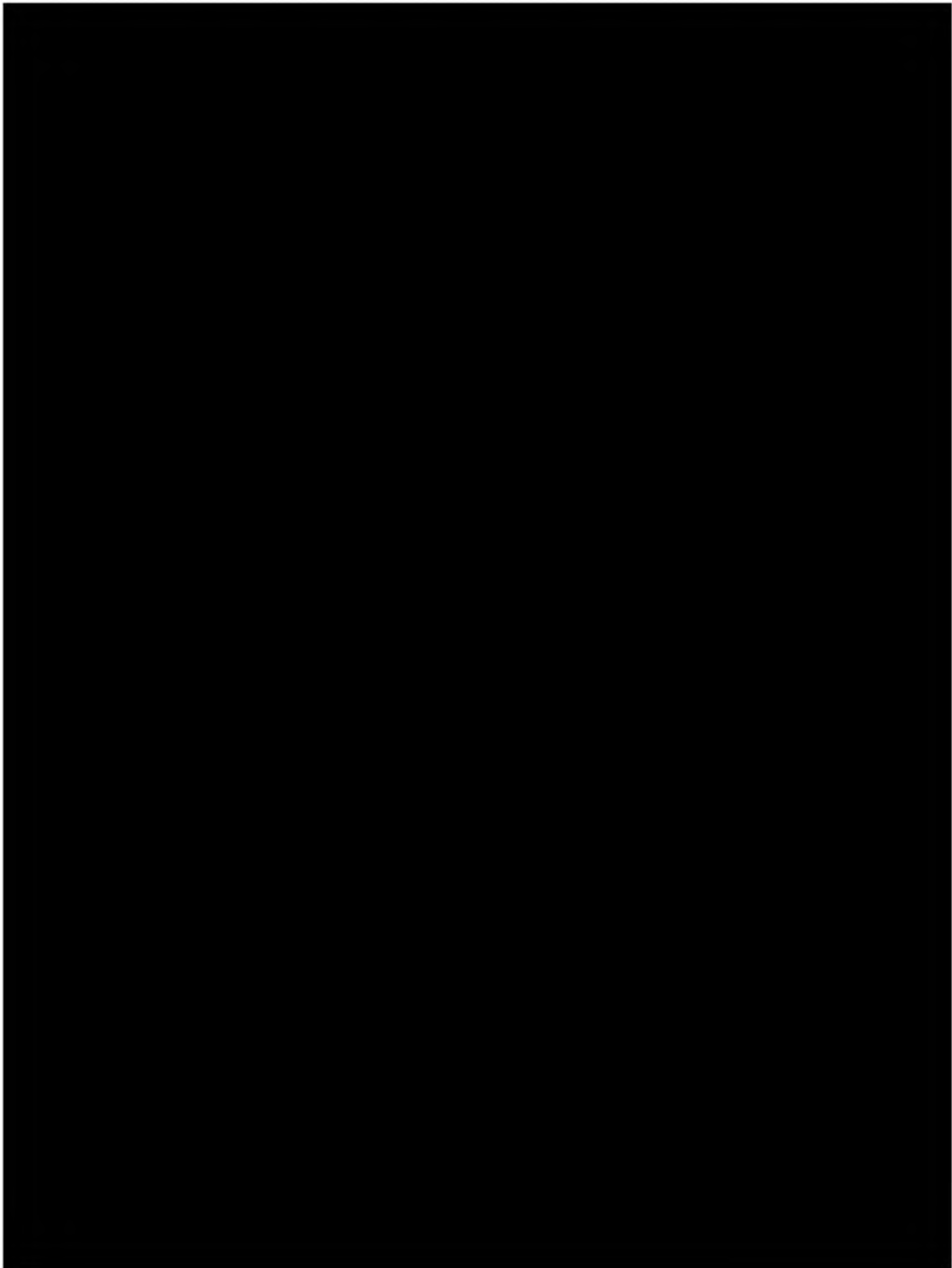
But when is it not a dream? Who is not a skeleton? It is just because human beings are covered with skins of varying colors that sexual passion between men and women comes to exist. When the breathing stops and the skin of the body is broken there is no more form, no higher and lower. You must realize that what we now have and touch as we stand here is the skin covering our skeleton. Think deeply about this fact. High and low, young and old,—there is no difference whatever between them. When we are enlightened concerning the One Great Causality we understand the meaning of unborn, undying.

If a stone
Can be the memento
Of the dead,
Then the tomb-stone
Would be better as a lavatory.

How dangerously foolish is the mind of man!

We have
One moon,
Clear and unclouded,
Yet are lost in the darkness
Of this fleeting world.





IKKYŪ'S SKELETONS

Think now, when your breath stops and the skin of your body breaks, you will also become like me. How long do you think you will live in this fleeting world?

To prove
His reign
Is eternal,
The Emperor has planted
The pine trees of Sumiyoshi.³

Give up the idea, "I exist." Just let your body be blown along by the wind of the floating clouds; rely on this. To want to live forever is to wish for the impossible, the unreal, like the idea "I exist."

This world
Is a dream
Seen while awake;
How pitiful those
Who see it and are shocked!

It is useless to pray to the gods about your destiny. Think only of the One Great Matter.⁴ Human beings are mortal; there is nothing to be shocked about.

If they can serve
To bring us to loathe them,
The troubles of this world
Are most welcome.

Why on earth
Do people decorate
This temporary manifestation,
When from the first they know
It will be like this?⁵

³ The Sumiyoshi Shrine in Osaka. Ed.

⁴ The matter of birth and death. Ed.

⁵ That is, like a skeleton. Ed.

The body of a thing
Will return
To the Original Place.
Do not search,
Unnecessarily, elsewhere.

Not a single soul
Knows why he is born,
Or his real dwelling-place;
We go back to our origin,
We become earth again.

Many indeed
The ways to climb
From the mountain foot,
But it is the same moon
That we see o'er the peak.

If I do not decide
The dwelling place
Of my future,
How is it possible
That I should lose my way?

Our real mind
Has no beginning,
No end;
Do not fancy
That we are born, and die.

*If you give rein to it,
The mind goes rampant!
It must be mastered
And the world itself rejected.*

IKKYŪ'S SKELETONS

Rain, hail and snow,
Ice too, are set apart,
But when they fall,—
The same water
Of the valley stream.

The ways of preaching
The Eternal Mind
May be different,
But all see the same
Heavenly truth.

Fill the path
With the fallen needles
Of the pine tree,
So that no one knows
If anyone lives there.

How vain
The funeral rites
At Mount Toribe!⁶
Those who speed the parting ghost
Can they themselves remain here forever?

Melancholy indeed
The burning smoke
Of Mount Toribe!
How long shall I think of it
As another's pathos?

⁶ Mount Toribe is a hill east of Kyoto where corpses were cremated. The words "the smoke of Toribeyama" occur frequently in older Japanese literature. Ed.

Vanity of vanities!
The form of one
I saw this morning
Has become the smoky cloud
Of the evening sky.

Look, Alas,
At the evening smoke
Of Mount Toribe!
Even it falls back and billows
With the rising of the wind.

*It becomes ash when burned,
And earth when buried—
Could anything
Remain as evil?*

With the sins
That I committed
Until I was three years old,⁷
At last I also
Disappeared.

This is the way of the world. Realizing how foolish they are who, not knowing that all things are and must be temporary and transient, are astonished at it, someone this very day asked how we should live in this fleeting world. A certain man⁸ answered, "Quite different from past times, priests nowadays leave their temples. Formerly those who were religiously inclined entered the temples, but now they all shun them. The priests are devoid of wisdom; they find zazen boring. They don't concentrate themselves on their kōan and are interested only in temple furniture. Their Zen meditation is a mere matter of appearance; they are smug and wear their robes proudly, but are only ordi-

⁷ Does this mean that one of the skeletons dies at the age of three?

⁸ Ikkyū himself, I suppose.

nary people in priestly garments. Indeed, their robes are merely ropes binding them, their surplices like rods torturing them."

When we think about recurrent life and death, we know that we fall into Hell by taking life; by being greedy we turn into hungry devils; ignorance causes us to be reborn as animals; anger makes us demons. By obeying the Five Commandments⁹ we come back to earth as Men, and by performing the Ten Good Deeds¹⁰ we are resurrected in Heaven. Above these are the Four Wise Ones;¹¹ together, they are called the Ten Worlds.¹²

When we see this One Thought,¹³ there is no form, no dwelling place, no loathing, no rejecting. Like the clouds of the great sky, the foam on the water. As no thoughts arise there is no mind to create the myriad phenomena. The mind and things are one and the same. *They do not know men's doubts.*

Parents may be compared to the flint and the steel used for making fire. The steel is the father, the stone is the mother, and the fire is the child. The fire is ignited with tinder material, and it will die out when the contributing causes of the fire, the wood and the oil, are exhausted. It is similar to this with the production of "fire" when father and mother make love together.

Since father and mother are beginningless too, they decline finally to a mind of burnt-out passion. In vain are all things of this world brought up from emptiness and manifested into all forms. Since it is freed of all forms, it is called the "Original Field." All the forms, of plants and grasses, states and lands, issue invariably from emptiness, so we use a metaphorical figure and speak of the Original Field.

*If you break open
The cherry tree,
There is not a single flower.
But the skies of spring
Bring forth the blossoms!*

⁹ Not to take life, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, drink intoxicants. Ed.

¹⁰ This includes obeying the first four of the Five Commandments in addition to the bans on immoral language, slander, equivocation, covetousness, anger, and false views. Ed.

¹¹ The four kinds of holy men—*śravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas*. Ed.

¹² The ten worlds or states of existence: the states of the Four Wise Ones together with the Six Ways of sentient existence previously mentioned: of the Hell-dwellers, hungry devils, animals, demons, men, and heavenly beings (*devas*). Ed.

¹³ Each thought-instant is said to encompass all the Ten Worlds in their totality. Ed.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

Though it has no bridge,
The cloud climbs up to heaven;
It does not seek the aid
Of Gautama's sutras.

When you listen to Gautama's preaching of more than fifty years, and practice exactly as Gautama preached, it is just as he taught at his last preaching when he said, "From beginning to end I have preached not a single word," and held out a flower, bringing a faint smile to Kasbapa's lips. At that time he told Kasbapa: "I have the exquisite mind of the right Dharma, and with it I acknowledge your understanding of the flower." When asked what he meant, Gautama said, "My preaching of the Dharma for more than fifty years may be likened to saying there is something in your hand in order to bring near a small child you want to take in your arms. My fifty years and more of Dharma-preaching have been like a beckoning to Kasbapa. That is why the Dharma I transmit is like the taking up of a child to my breast."

Yet this flower is not to be known by bodily means. Nor is it in the mind. It cannot be known even though we speak of it. We must fully understand this present mind and body. Even though one may be called knowledgeable, he cannot therefore be called a man of the Buddhist Dharma. The Dharma Flower of the One Vehicle,¹⁴ in which all buddhas of past, present, and future have appeared in this world, is this flower. Since the time of the twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs there has never been anything in the world apart from the Original Field. As all things of the world are beginningless they are said to be Great.¹⁵ All of the eight consciousnesses¹⁶ appear from emptiness. Yet the flowers of spring and the plants and grasses of summer, autumn, and winter come from emptiness too. Again, there are Four Great Elements,¹⁷ Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind (Air), though people are ignorant of this fact. Breath is wind, fire is what makes us hot, water a vital liquid that makes us wet; when we are buried or burned, we become earth. Because these too are beginningless, none of them ever abides.

¹⁴ I.e., the Mahayana teaching. Ed.

¹⁵ "Great" in the sense of absolute, eternal. Ed.

¹⁶ In Sanskrit, *vijñāna*; the eight consciousnesses all sentient beings possess; sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and three different operations of the mind. Ed.

¹⁷ The Four Elements (*ibidai* 四大) said to constitute all matter. Ed.

IKKYŪ'S SKELETONS

In this world
Where everything, without exception,
Is unreal,
Death also
Is devoid of reality.

To the eye of illusion it appears that though the body dies, the soul does not. This is a terrible mistake. The enlightened man declares that both perish together. Buddha also is an emptiness. Sky and earth all return to the Original Field. All the sutras and the eighty thousand dharmas are to be chucked away. Become enlightened by these words of mine and become a man of ease and leisure! But,

To write something and leave it behind us,
It is but a dream.
When we awake we know
There is not even anyone to read it.

The 8th day of the 4th month, the 3rd year of Kōshō (1457)
Ikkyū-shi Sōjun, formerly of Daitoku-ji, Tōkai
Seventh generation from Kidō¹⁸

¹⁸ Kidō is the Chinese Zen master Kidō Chigu 虛堂智愚 (Hsü-t'ang Chih-yü, 1185–1269), the master of Daiō Kokushi (1235–1309), the founder of the main Japanese Rinzai line. Ikkyū's colophons often contain reference to him. *Tōkai* 東海 refers to Japan.

The final page of the Ryūkoku edition contains a head and shoulders image of Bodhidharma, with an accompanying *dōka*: Even doing nine years of zazen/Becomes hellish—/This body that becomes/The Earth of Emptiness. Ed.