

SELECTIONS FROM TREATISES OF THE BASHŌ SCHOOL

Translated by David Landis Barnhill

THE REDBOOKLET

1. Constancy and Transformation [NKBZ 545-546]

In the master's view of the *fûga* (poetic spirit), there are two principles: constancy through ten thousand generations, and transformation of the moment. Everything is contained in these two principles, and the two are rooted in one thing. That one thing is the *makoto* (genuineness) of *fûga*.

If one does not understand constancy, one can truly understand nothing of *fûga*. Constancy is unrelated to whether something is new or old; it is not concerned with transformation or the flow of change. It is based firmly on *makoto*.

When we consider the verse of the generations of poets, we find generations of change. Yet whether the poems are new or old, what moves us today has not altered from what was moving in the past; many are the poems with *aware* (deep feeling). This we should understand as constancy.

On the other hand, it is the law of nature that life undergoes a thousand transitions and ten thousand changes. Were there no transformation, aesthetic style could never be made new. That style does not change is because it remains confined to the currents of one time only, and there is no pursuit of *makoto*. One who does not concentrate his mind on this pursuit does not realize the transformation inherent in *makoto*. He merely follows after others. One who does pursue *makoto* simply cannot stop at one place; he advances naturally to the next step.

As time moves on, the art of haikai will go through its own thousand transitions and ten thousand changes, but all transformations based on *makoto* will be part of the master's art. The master said, "Never content yourself with the drivel of the ancients. Just as the four seasons change, all things become new. Everything is that way."

A disciple asked the Master on his deathbed about the future of *fûga*. The Master said: The Way that originated with me will undergo a hundred transitions and changes. However, it will never depart from the three modes of *shin*, *sô*, and *gyô*. Among the three, I have yet to exhaust even one or two." While he was alive, he would joke at times "I haven't even untied the mouth of the straw sack..."

2. Great Enlightenment and the Return to the Common [NKBZ 546-547]

The master taught: "bring your mind to a high degree of enlightenment, and return to the common world." In other words, pursue and awaken to the *makoto* of *fûga*, and return to the world of haikai.

For the poet who dwells in accord with *fûga*, the mind's movements merge with the object, and in this way the form of the poem emerges. The object is taken in its nature, without obstruction. If, however, the mind lacks refinement, the poet resorts to artificial expression. This reveals a vulgar mind that does not pursue *fûga* ceaselessly.

In striving after *makoto*, one should search for the mind of *fûga* in the ancients, and, in our time, one must know well the mind of the Master. If one does not understand the Master's mind, there simply is no path to follow toward *makoto*. In order to understand his mind, one needs to follow the traces of his poetry, know them well, and thereby correct the course of one's mind. To endeavor to understand by

submitting in this way can be called striving after *makoto*.

Some disciples do not unify their mind with the course of the Master's. Instead they find pleasure in their conception of his path and delight in being considered his disciple. But they only follow their own path. Disciples must strive to rectify themselves thoroughly.

3. *Being detached from the self* [NKBZ 547-548]

The Master said, "Learn of the pine from the pine, learn of the bamboo from the bamboo." In other words, one must become detached from the self.

If one understands this idea of "learning" in one's own way, the result will be no learning at all. "To learn" means to enter into the object and to feel the subtlety that is revealed there; then the poem grows. For example, no matter how clearly one represents an object, if the poem lacks the feeling that arises naturally out of the object, the self and the object would form a duality and the feeling would not have attained *makoto*. The poetic meaning would have come from the self.

Disciples simply should strive ceaselessly to realize the Master's mind, thus elevating their own mind, and then returning to what is at hand, pursue haikai. If they seek the Master's mind relentlessly, their own mind will become tinged with its hue and scent. But if they do not probe in this way, their seeking inevitably will be contaminated by the self. Those who pursue the Master's mind by probing and searching in the end will be on the path to detachment from the self. Simply probe and search unswervingly. Make this the main task. It is called "foundation building," and it is the motto of the followers of *fûga*.

4. *The disease of the skilled* [NKBZ 548-549]

There is a disease characteristic of the skilled artist. In the Master's words, "haikai should be entrusted to the very young" and "it is the poetry of those with a beginner's mind that is most trustworthy." He often made comments such as this, and would point out all the maladies of the skilled.

Upon entering the inner life of an object's *makoto*, one can either cultivate the spirit or kill it. If one kills the creative energy, the poem cannot move with the spirit. The Master said, "haikai should move with the spirit," and "if the rhythm is bad, the harmony will be spoiled." In this way the spirit is disrupted and killed.

In addition, sometimes the Master even said "in making a poem it may be good to coax the spirit." This is an injunction to cultivate it by beguiling it back to life.

Skilled disciples can lapse into bad habits, fostering a self which desires to make only excellent poems. Their discriminating minds then shut the gate to free expression, and they grow weary in their deliberations. In this condition, they are oblivious to the spirit, and their minds are foolish.

In another book on haikai, the Master is reported to have said, "a person who has attained mastery in another art can penetrate into haikai more swiftly than someone who has been devoted to it for many years.