

How to Present Dickinson to Children

Masako Takeda

This is a sequel to the previous paper titled “Presenting Dickinson to Children.”¹ The first section is a supplement to the former paper; the second section consists of a collection of ideas on how to present Dickinson to children, based on interviews with guides at the Dickinson Homestead (also referred to as the Homestead) in September, 2000. Also, at the end is an Appendix, the record of my teaching experience in an American high school in 1993.²

Section I (Sequel to “Presenting Dickinson To Children”)

1. Translating “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” for children

In 4. a) of my previous paper, I pointed out that “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” (J288) is considered a favorite Dickinson poem by compilers of Dickinson anthologies for children. Yet, I had to regrettably admit that linguistic and cultural obstacles have prevented this poem from being enjoyed by Japanese children. Given this fact, one of the Homestead guides suggested presenting the first line as “I’m not famous! How about you?” This way, they can get one of the meanings, although the charm of Dickinson’s wording may be lessened considerably.

When I read the previous paper at the fourth international conference of Emily Dickinson International Society held in Trondheim on August, 5 in 2001, Dr. Gudrun M. Grabher, Professor of the University of Innsbruck, suggested “I’m zero” as a translation of “I’m nobody” (the title of the conference was “Zero at the Bone”). Every translation can be considered an interpretation, but the use of “zero” would make for a bold one, for “zero” is a profound and provocative word. At least, it can safely be said that the response of Japanese children to the Japanese equivalent of “I’m zero” will be almost the same as that of American children to “I’m zero.” [cf. In the Japanese language there are two words meaning “zero.” One is “rei” and the other is “zero,” almost of the same pronunciation as the English word.] I surmise that they will be puzzled by this expression, rather than charmed as they would be with, “I’m nobody.”

Both suggestions have proposed interesting points and lead to the question of how much the original wording can be twisted and still convey its meaning, especially in the case of poetry.

2. Presenting Dickinson to Japanese children vs. presenting her to American children

“I’m Nobody! Who are you?” serves as the best example of a favorite Dickinson poem of American children that is unpresentable to Japanese children, and now I would like to include additional examples out of the most selected poems in Dickinson anthologies for children and look at each poem to see if it is presentable to Japanese children or not.

Several poems have cultural obstacles, that is, they have words which represent Western things rather foreign to the Japanese, especially Japanese children, such as “a dominie” (J318), “a duchess” (J333) and “Boanerges” (J585), the last one needing explanation even for a native speaker.

When it comes to linguistic issues, in the process of wondering how to translate for Japanese children the list of poems most anthologized, I came face to face with a significant problem. As in English, writing for children is something different from writing for adults—words, expressions etc. etc., summarized as the whole dynamics of why and what to write. Simply to translate Dickinson (whose English is not always orthodox) into readable Japanese is a daunting business. Translating Dickinson for children has many obstacles to overcome. And at the same time, it does not seem worth the trouble. For children, each reading is a significant step toward acquiring their own language, and poetry embodies the essence of the language. Therefore, it may be wise to give them good poetry written in their own language rather than translations which may be awkward and seem artificial.

And what about *haiku* and American children’s enjoyment of it? I touched on this in my previous paper, and now it may safely be said that the question is based on a “misunderstanding,” for American *haiku* is simply a short form of poetry, while Japanese *haiku* is a refined art form only for adults. However, this is a *happy* misunderstanding, if the word “misunderstanding” is too strong.³ What with linguistic and cultural obstacles, it is rather unlikely that Dickinson is to have this kind of happy misunderstanding.

Making efforts to present Dickinson to American children does not always run into the same issues. It is a worthwhile endeavor and has been done wonderfully, as I discuss in Section II. It is important for children to get in touch with the great poets of their own country. In the movie “Autumn in New York,” the heroine was surrounded by girls asking her to tell a story. She took out two paper butterflies and began to recite “Two Butterflies went out at Noon—” (J533). This is a fictional scene, yet it presents a clear example of how Dickinson is enjoyed by American children.

3. Presenting Dickinson to Japanese Young Adults

As discussed in the previous part, it is now evident that Dickinson can be presented to Japanese young adults, as long as they are mature enough to read Japanese translations

for adults, although selection is still something to think about. In fact, there are already several publications of this nature.

In 1988, I had published *Love Poetry of Emily Dickinson*, a translated anthology of 186 love poems. I was surprised by two publishers who wanted my translations in their anthologies. One was a palm-size anthology of love poems by different poets (*Love, A Collection of Poems and Illustrations*. Tokyo: Sanrio, 1992); Dickinson poems are “To wait an Hour—is long—” (J781), “Society for me my misery” (J1534) and “Sometimes with the Heart” (J1680). The latter two are my translations. The other was *North American Poetry* in the series of “World Poetry for the Young” (Tokyo: Asunaro Shobo, 1994) which included “Spring comes on the World—” (J1042). When I had published my book, it was meant mainly for adults, although I hoped to reach younger generations in some way. So this was a happy surprise, and I was interested in the publishers’ choice of poems.

4. Rhythm

The train poem (“I like to see it lap the Miles—” J585) should be added as a very good example of rhythmical poetry that children might easily enjoy.

5. Misuzu Kaneko

In the previous paper, I introduced Misuzu Kaneko, a Japanese poet recently rediscovered and now widely adopted in textbooks for elementary schools. The following poems are two examples of Kaneko’s works translated by D.P. Dutcher.⁴

Big Catch

Red skies, sunrise.

Big catch!

Big catch of

herring!

Up on the beach

It’s a carnival, but down in the sea

they’ll mourn

For thousands on thousands of

herrings.

Me, a Songbird, and a Bell

Spread my arms though I may
I'll never fly up in the sky.
Songbirds fly but they can't run
Fast on the ground like I do.

Shake myself though I may
No pretty sound comes out.
Bells jingle but they don't know
Lots of songs like I do.

Bell, songbird, and me
All different, all just right.

Do they remind you of the following two poems in *Sing-Song* by Christina Rossetti⁵? In fact, Kaneko's mentor, Yaso Saijo (1892-1969), referred to Rossetti thinking that her poems might serve as an introduction to Kaneko's work.

Sing me a song—
 What shall I sing?—
Three merry sisters
 Dancing in a ring,
Lights and fleet upon their feet
 As birds upon the wing.

Tell me a tale—
 What shall I tell?—
Two mournful sisters
 And a tolling knell,
Tolling ding and tolling dong,
 Ding dong bell.

The dog lies in his knell,
 And Puss purrs on the rug,
And baby perches on my knee
 For me to love and hug.

Pat the dog and stroke the cat,
Each in its degree;
And cuddle and kiss my baby,
And baby kisses me.

6. About *Emily Dickinson's Letters to the World*

The year 2002 saw the publication of another charming Dickinson book for children. It is *Emily Dickinson's Letters to the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Frances Foster Books) whose story and pictures are by Jeanette Winter. In the book, after the death of Emily Dickinson, her sister Lavinia finds bunches of poems. [One interesting anachronism is to be found: there is a picture depicting Lavinia lamenting over Emily's tombstone, which, in reality, would only be erected years later by her niece Martha.] Following are the poems introduced in the book: (Notations are as presented in the book and asterisks show the poems found on the list of poems most anthologized.)

- J150 She died—*this* was the way she died.
J441 This is my letter to the World
J3 It *was* the brave Columbus (10th stanza only)
J36 I counted till they counted so
*J288 I'm Nobody! Who are you?
*J520 I started Early—Took my Dog— (first two stanzas only)
J636 The Way I read a Letter's —*this*— (ditto)
J136 Have you got a Brook in your little heart, (ditto)
J107 'Twas such a little—little boat
J875 I stepped from Plank to Plank
J1138 A Spider sewed at Night (first stanza only)
J265 Where Ships of Purple —gently toss—
*J1755 To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
J737 The Moon was but a Chin of Gold (first and last stanzas only)
J101 Will there really be a "Morning"?
J919 If I can stop one Heart from breaking
J661 Could I but ride indefinite (first two stanzas only)
J324 Some keep the Sabbath going to Church— (first stanza only)
*J1263 There is no Frigate like a Book (first half only)
J1052 I never saw a Moor— (first stanza only)
J76 Exultation is the going

*J254 “Hope” is the thing with feathers– (first stanza only)

Section II

When we visit a museum in the States or in Europe, we sometimes come across a guided group of children. In Japan, schools have conducted short/long tours and factory visits, but visiting museums is rather a recent thing. It was thought that children were too young to appreciate art and might disturb others. In the hope of getting to know manuals for guides aimed at children, I approached the Dickinson Homestead. What follows are some of the materials to which the Homestead kindly allowed me to have access.

1. Dickinson Homestead School Visit Evaluation Form and Summary of Answers.

(ED=Emily Dickinson)

1. *What did you like most about your visit to the Homestead?*

ED's bedroom/ pictures of ED's family/ garden/ learning about change in writing style/ train station/ question and answer session at beginning of tour/ walk outside/ map of old Amherst/ being in ED's environs/ writings on desk (in bedroom)/ secret staircase/ gingerbread

2. *What did you learn about Emily Dickinson that you did not already know?*

The conservatory/ trees were a hedge/ herbarium/ recipe for black cake/ hid from visitors/ the significance of the white dress/ father owned the railroad/ hat factories in Amherst/ only one photograph of ED/ little kids had short hair/ ED had red hair

3. *If you could design a tour of the Homestead, what might you change about the experience to make your visit more meaningful?*

More rooms/ sample food/ more hand-on interactive stuff/ re-model the kitchen/ more furniture/ more information near the pictures/ read more poetry/ actors to portray ED and family/ bring other rooms up to par with ED's bedroom/ touring the Evergreens

4. *If you could meet Emily Dickinson, what three questions would you ask her?*

2nd grade:

Wouldn't she want the town to use \$ to rebuild the conservatory? (This was important to her after all.)

Did you isolate yourself or did your father not permit you to go out and socialize?

Were you sad-we wish that you wrote happier poems?

Are there more pictures of you hidden away?

7th grade:

Why did you wear white?

What was "the terror"?

Why would she burn the letters?

Why were you so shy?

What inspired you to write your poems?

Why didn't you go out?

Were you ever in love?

Do you think you had a good life?

Why didn't you title your poems?

8th grade

Who was the Master?

Did her self-imposed reclusivity [*sic*] cause her to be more creative?

Was her family truly dysfunctional?

11th grade:

What happened to all your furniture?

Whom, if anyone, did you model yourself after?

How do you feel about people's interpretations of you?

Were you ever in love?

Why were you so withdrawn from society?

What did you do for fun?

If you could write a letter to today's world, would it be much different from your original letter?

How do you feel about people publishing your work without your permission?

Do you believe the art works at the Mead reflect your poetry?

[cf. The Mead Museum in affiliation with Amherst College exhibited works of art inspired by Dickinson's poems in 1997.]

What do you think of other writers?
What makes you so reclusive?
Why did you use those crazy dashes?
Did you really wear white all the time?

Among the files of the answer sheets, there are some interesting remarks such as the following: (H.S. stands for answers from high school students.)

To question 1
(H.S.) seeing her poems in different languages

To question 2
I didn't even know that she had lived in Amherst!
learned more just by reading her poems
(H.S.) It seems like no one really knows who she is.
(H.S.) It was good to see devoted people like you who share one of your possessions with us in such a hands-on way.
(H.S.) I think it's really nice of people like you to devote their time to help people expand their knowledge in interesting people.

To question 4
(H.S.) Would you have been happy if more poems were published?
(H.S.) How do you feel about the fans you have earned over the years?

2. Some examples of the tools to interest children prepared at the Homestead.

letter seal
daguerreotype pictures
illustration of how to take daguerreotypes
ginger in a bottle
herbarium
examples of poems in facsimile
coal
pocket Bible

3. Some projects by children on Dickinson.

Before and after the visit at the Homestead, some teachers give their children projects

on Dickinson: memorize some poems so that they can recite from memory; study some poems; illustrate some poems; or write poems in Dickinson's style.

For example, these are the poems chosen for children to illustrate:

- J288 I'm Nobody! Who are you?
J533 Two Butterflies went out at Noon -
J986 A narrow Fellow in the Grass
J1263 There is no Frigate like a Book
J1755 To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,

When it comes to writing poems, children are shown some seasonal poems relatively easy for them to understand (for example, "The morns are meeker than they were—" (J12) for autumn; "It sifts from Leaden Sieves—" (J311) for winter; "Dear March—Come in—" (J1320) and "Bee! I'm expecting you!" (J1035) for spring). Then they are asked to write their own seasonal poems. In another case, they write riddle poems after reading some of Dickinson's (for example, "She sights a Bird—she chuckles—" (J507), a cat; "A narrow Fellow in the Grass" (J986), a snake; "The Wind begun to knead the Grass—(J824), a storm). And here are two examples of the poems written after Dickinson:

I'm nobody? Are you a nobody too?
What's your name? How are you?
I don't like the public.
Let's write notes to keep private.

How boring to be famous!
How garish like a tropical fish!
Swimming around waving their fins,
Making their mouths say "Kiss me, kiss!"

I'm Nobody! Are you?
Are you in the blues?
It's fun to go your own way.
And go anywhere you want.

How eerie to be a super star?
How loud like a lion.
Roaring and shaking his mane

For the crowd in the zoo.

While looking at these examples, I came up with some more ideas for presenting Dickinson to children; for example, writing a letter-poem from a creature in nature to another in a Dickinsonian way, as “Bee! I’m expecting you!” (J1035); writing a poem on a fragment of paper as Dickinson did (an example is found in Appendix); creating some craft based on a Dickinson poem and presenting it, as in the movie “Autumn in New York” I could not help but realize how powerfully Dickinson’s poems work as an incentive to enjoy poetry.

Taking advantage of the fact that Amherst is Dickinson’s home, Hitchcock Center for the Environment, an environmental education center in the town, had a summer camp program called “Emily Dickinson Quest” in 2000. It is like a nature quest to learn about their local surroundings by participating in and creating treasure hunts, or “quests.” This is a good way for children to get in touch with or to know more about Dickinson.

4. Talking with people who have experience presenting Dickinson to children.

Among nineteen guides at the Homestead, four were specialized in presenting Dickinson to children (in 2000). I had a chance to talk with three of them (Nonny Burack, Anne Cann, Joan Langley). I also talked with Amy Anaya, a librarian at the Jones Library (the town library of Amherst), who often presents Dickinson’s poetry to children, and to Sean Vernon, a high school teacher who has set many Dickinson poems to music. I asked the following questions.

Along with presenting other poets, have you noticed a particular enthusiasm for Dickinson in children?

Do you make a distinction between presenting to children and young adults:

- the selection of poems to be presented?
- presenting picture books?

Have you seen a difference of attitude toward Dickinson among male and female children, or among male and female young adults?

Have you sometimes found them to be more interested in Dickinson’s life than her poetry?

Do you explain difficult words?

Do you sometimes play songs composed on Dickinson’s words?

Do you think the rhythm in her poems helps children get closer to the poems themselves?

- # Do you ask children to read Dickinson poems aloud?
- # Have you ever presented riddle poems by Dickinson? Were they easy for children to understand?
- # Do you sometimes use tools, such as picture cards, in presenting her poems?
- # How do you think children understand metaphoric poems like ““Hope” is the thing with feathers–” (J254), and “There is no Frigate like a Book” (J1263)?
- # Have you presented the strawberry poem –”Over the fence–” (J251) to children?
What was their reaction? Did it tend to differ between boys and girls?
- # Have you presented “I started Early –Took my Dog–” (J520)? [At a workshop of the annual meeting of EDIS in St. Paul in 2000, there was a lively discussion about this poem– whether it is conscious or subconscious, erotic or horrible, etc. Some also talked about how children enjoy this poem.] Have you noticed special reaction from children?
- # If you are asked to present two Dickinson poems to children and to young adults, what poems would you choose respectively?

Since it was considered undesirable to make the interviews too formal, considering the nature of its theme, what we had were rather leisurely talks. Not every question was asked, and, in fact, questions served as a lead in talking about Dickinson and how to present Dickinson to children. As expected, answers to the questions were varied and were not strictly “yes” or “no.” Out of what we discussed, here follow some of their reactions.

The guides seldom present picture books to young adults, since they might feel insulted to be treated like children, whereas the guides have found that picture books like *Emily* serve as a very good introduction for children.

One of the guides mentioned that, for boys (8-10 grades), she prepared games to help them to get to know Dickinson, since boys often take poetry as “women’s stuff.” On the other hand, girls showed special zeal toward Dickinson in the absence of boys.

When it comes to difficult words, one guide says that she tries not to explain and, instead, leaves children to understand by intuition; another asks children the meanings of these words. This difference in policy can also be found in picture books. Some of them have lists of difficult words and their definitions either at the end of each poem or at the end of the book in the form of a glossary; others are without definitions at all.

Among all these interviewed, Sean Vernon is the only person who sings songs he has composed to Dickinson’s words. In 1995, he released “Wider Than the Sky,” a collection of his songs set to Dickinson poems. In an article titled “Nursery can turn kids on to a lifetime love of poetry” in the local newspaper *Daily Hampshire Gazette* (May20-21, 2000), he said, “Reading aloud poetry is especially meaningful to young people because they don’t have to

sit alone puzzling over the meaning. Instead, (listeners are hearing) images and feelings and observations and thoughts. They may not get it all, but they get enough for the poem to have made a difference to them.”

Many refer to the special charm of Dickinson’s riddle poems, although sometimes children miss the answer: for example, some guess “a mouse” for “a snake” in “A narrow Fellow in the Grass” (J986).

The strawberry poem depicts a little girl who has found berries growing over a fence and thinks “I could climb –if I tried, I know–.” The second stanza gives us “But – if I stained my Apron–/ God would certainly scold!/ Oh, dear, –I guess if He were a Boy–/ He’d – climb – if He could!” Although the poem had not been highlighted, after the feminist movement, this has been regarded as a woman’s cry, suppressed in the patriarchal society. [This is a reading accepted in general, but a Dickinson scholar suggests that the narrator could be a boy as in the case of some Dickinson poems, since in those days boys also wore aprons. Then, the poem could be read as a human being vs. God.] Although the poem looks presentable to children with easy words used, somehow this has been taken up only once in the listed anthologies mentioned in the previous paper and not even in the new book, *Emily Dickinson’s Letter to the World*. And no Homestead guide had ever presented the poem to children.

In presenting Dickinson, some use tools like Dickinson’s basket (a replica) which she might have used to give cookies from her room to children waiting for them on the ground. And some other historical tools of the period also are found useful.

Poems guides suggested as suitable to present to children are:

- J288 I’m Nobody! Who are you?
- J311 It sifts from Leaden Sieves
- J318 I’ll tell you how the Sun rose
- J324 Some keep the Sabbath going to Church
- J328 A Bird came down the Walk
- J507 She sights a Bird –she chuckles–
- J585 I like to see it lap the Miles

One more thing to be added is that one guide puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that Dickinson checked her own writing over and over again.

In every case, people interviewed agreed that how children are prepared beforehand by the guidance of teachers and/or parents is the key point. One of them noticed a particularly good introduction was found when a grandmother brings her granddaughter to the

Homestead.

Since two years had passed since the initial interview and the writing of this paper, I had another interview with Wade Durston Evey. We spoke in August, 2002 through the kind arrangement again of Cindy Dickinson, director of the Homestead. It is quite nice to have a male guide like him, especially for boys who may feel uncomfortable about reading the woman poet. Wade talked about his experience as a guide at the Homestead and also as a volunteer teaching Dickinson to children. His daughter of ten likes Dickinson because for her the poet is “fun and deep.” He does not put too much emphasis on rhythm, since that will take children’s attention away from the words themselves; he prefers to recite each poem himself and then have the children recite. Mr. Evey explained how children enjoy “Ample make this Bed-” (J829), which, incidentally, is his daughter’s favorite, and how quickly they grasp the metaphoric use of “bed” as “death.” This contradicts adults’ usual impression that this poem may be too difficult a poem for children. When he presents Dickinson, time is usually limited. So Mr. Evey normally presents three poems, including “A narrow Fellow in the Grass” (J986). Yet he is not particularly interested in riddle poems. He rather enjoys presenting another metaphoric poem “I had a Jewel in my fingers-” (J245). At first, children just take “a jewel” as “a jewel” and then he explains it as “something important which is lost.” Another metaphoric image, the horrible sea in “I started Early -Took my Dog-” (J520), he notices, is a lot of fun for children, since for them a horror is fun. Lastly, Wade promised me to present the strawberry poem (J254) to his daughter who is a feminist!

Conclusion

It is quite seldom that children get in touch with poetry entirely on their own. Such being the case, it mainly depends upon the endeavors on the adults’ side to determine children’s attitude toward poetry. After all, the adults’ zeal is everything. Although children may be still unaware, high school students begin to notice this as shown in their remarks. There is a possibility that those efforts go too far. To see several students’ versions of “I’m Nobody!” is heart-warming, but to see bunches of them is rather tiring, or as one of the guides remarked, “corny”. This may be too much of *tour-de-force* on the part of a teacher. However, this does not lessen my admiration.

Just as I concluded the previous paper with the claim that the Japanese should think more about how to inherit their own poetic legacies, here again I would like to repeat it, taking all the American efforts to present Dickinson to children into consideration. And also, the Japanese should consider more seriously the issue of exporting their legacy. For example, as I noted in the previous paper, so many well-made picture books of *haiku* have been

published, but few are done by Japanese illustrators. It does not mean that Japanese illustrations are authentic, since what is wonderful about art is that it is open to a variety of interpretations. Japanese works should simply be counted among them.

Thus, it is through Dickinson that the viewpoint to look at my own culture in the comparative way has been gained.

[Notes]

All the Dickinson poems are cited with the Johnson numbers according to the following edition for the same reasons as I gave at the beginning of my previous paper.

Johnson, Thomas H., ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1955.

1. *Osaka Shoin Women's University Collection of Essays*, No. 38, 2001. p.31-56.
2. Much of the contents is to be found in Japanese in the 10th chapter of *From Japan to Amherst, My Days with Emily Dickinson* (Osaka, Henshu-kobo Noah, 1996).
3. Harold Bloom uses the word "misreading" in his book, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York, The Oxford University Press, 1973), although what he discusses is influence between poets.

Haruo Shirane argues in his *Landscape and Cultural Memory: The Poetics of Basho* that one of the most interesting characteristics of the Japanese art in general is that it has no center but an ending which is open. How this is filled in depends on "coded" imagination. Each *haiku* is connected with a broader cultural landscape, the Great Seasonal and Topographical Anthology, through the use of *kigo*, season indicator words.

In the afterword of the Japanese translation of the book, he points out: (translation mine: approved by the author himself who visited our university as a lecturer on November 9, 2002) Haiku has been regarded as one of the most successful cultural exports from Japan. It has not only been translated and read by western people but has given birth to "English haiku," which has been often taught in American elementary and junior high schools. However, what is to be noticed is that English *haiku* does not have *kigo* season indicators, which evoke coded connotations and link poetry and readers.

4. *Something Nice*, a collection of her translation in English (Tokyo: JULA, 1999). p. 80, 10.
5. *Christina Rossetti, The Complete Poems* (Penguin Classics, 2001). p. 244, 243.

[Acknowledgements]

I'd like to express my thanks to all the people whose names are mentioned in the paper and with whom I enjoyed very much discussing the presentation of Dickinson to children.

My special thanks go to Cindy Dickinson, the Dickinson Homestead director, who graciously and generously gave me the access to the manuals at the Homestead. I am greatly indebted to Sean Vernon and Daniel Lombardo for their editorial help.

My stay in Amherst in 2000 when I had interviews was made possible thanks to the Fulbright program.

[Appendix]

The Record of My Teaching Experience at Simsbury High School, Connecticut, in 1993

[based on *From Japan to Amherst: My Days with Emily Dickinson* published by Henshukobo Noah in 1996.]

During my ACLS fellowship period, I had a chance to teach for two weeks at Simsbury High School in Simsbury, Connecticut. (I came to know Marilyn Strelau, a teacher at the school when she attended the Summer Institute on Dickinson for American high school teachers.) First I was to observe, and then to participate in, classes on American Literature, Poetry, Multicultural Literature, the Short Story and Japanese.

In the American Literature class, we read Dickinson for a special extended period of two weeks. Usually Marilyn does not spend as long as two weeks on only one writer. Taking advantage of her experience at the Summer Institute, she showed slides that she had made and a video of a monologue that she had written about Dickinson's life. This had been broadcast on the local TV station. She encouraged her students to write poems using Dickinson's first lines: "We learned the Whole of Love—" (J568/Fr531) and "Surgeons must be very careful" (J108/Fr156). Some students wrote unique poems. In Japan, I am afraid, senior high school students are not often required to do this sort of creative work.

I talked about translating Dickinson, read aloud some translations for them to appreciate the Japanese sounds, and distributed photocopies of the translations in order for them to see how the Japanese characters looked on paper.

When we began to deal with Dickinson, I found most of the students had a stereotyped image of her as "a recluse" and "a death poet." Since death is an integral theme in Dickinson poems, it was rather difficult to wholly get rid of the stereotype. Marilyn reported to me later that, in their answers to examination questions, the students called Dickinson "Emily" like someone they knew. She was happy that she and I had given them that feeling of closeness.

Generally speaking, students seemed estranged, not from the poetry itself, but rather from Dickinson's lifestyle. This response might reveal their American-ness, which might relate to what we touched on in the Multicultural Literature course: being extroverted, Americans say what they think. In the classroom, students are encouraged to speak out, to share their ideas with others. At home, while Marilyn and I were discussing how to present Dickinson the next day in the classroom, Marilyn remarked, "Emily barely published her works. I think she was unfair not to share." I found the opinion very American and at the same time very appropriate for a teacher. Helen Hunt Jackson, a friend of Dickinson's and a renowned writer of the period, once wrote the poet to urge her to publish: "...it is a

wrong to the day you live in, that you will not sing aloud" (L444a). It seemed that this and Marilyn's remark had something in common. In the States, it is not wrong at all to put yourself forward as much as you can and aim to be famous. Considering this ethos, Dickinson's preference to avoid publication and fame might be somewhat incomprehensible, especially for senior high school students full of hopes for the future. One of the students even asked, not jokingly but rather seriously, "Can we become famous later if we stay home, write poems, and never publish them?"

Compared with Americans, Japanese people are introverted enough to understand Dickinson's lifestyle. One Chinese scholar even finds Orientalism in Dickinson, comparing her to Chinese poets who did not seek fame, but were satisfied with honest poverty. This kinship might be one of the remote reasons why Japanese like Dickinson. However, as the Japanese phrase goes, "Those which look alike are often completely different." This superficial affinity could be, in fact, a big difference. The Japanese people avoid speaking out in order to maintain harmony with others. Thus, they lose each individual face, while Dickinson holds her individuality inside. To put that the other way around, she chose to confine herself in order to establish herself the more firmly.

Poetry class was an elective course for seniors. I participated in two classes, in which there were comparatively many students and the teachers conducted their classes briskly. For example, a teacher asked students to speak briefly one by one, according to their seating order, about what they thought about one Dickinson poem. Some simply said whether they liked it or not; others offered some penetrating insight. One said "Dickinson's poems are a waste of paper." Then, I was told, "From now on, the classroom is all yours. Say what you like." I had been in Marilyn's class for several days, and that made the students and me familiar with each other; now, however, I was no longer an observer, but suddenly a part of the class. I had to say something, since the teacher kindly gave me some of his limited time. Taken aback, I was a little panicked; then I talked about translation. The teacher asked me, "What do you think about the students who said they don't like Dickinson?" I said to the students, "Well, you cannot satisfy everyone. So it is quite natural that some like Dickinson and some don't. However, what I want to ask you to keep in mind is that I hope you won't hate poetry itself simply because you don't like one poet. You are sure to come across poets you like, or you may come to like Dickinson in the future even if you do not like her now." The teacher nodded in affirmation. Now I think I should have added one more thing—to come across poets you don't like is also an important discovery for you. To know what poems you like and don't like, to know what poets you like and don't, is a way to know yourself better. It is a way to self-discovery!

When it comes to self-discovery, thanks to American Literature classes and Poetry

classes, I came to see one of Dickinson poems from a new viewpoint. So far it had been somewhat hard for me to understand. Here is the poem:

“Faith” is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can *–see–*
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency. (J185/Fr202)

One of the teachers suggested the interchange of two words. One student said that to make one affirmative sentence into negative would make more sense. These two remarks, uttered in different situations, gave me the idea to combine these to give birth to a new version of the poem. The underlined are changes from the original:

Microscopes are fine inventions
When Gentlemen cannot see
But faith is prudent
In an Emergency.

I showed this to students, saying, “See? This makes sense. But this is just common sense. We say, ‘Aha!’ and that’s all. It is not interesting at all, nor stimulating. Compare this with Dickinson’s original and consider why it is a poem.”

At the end of my Connecticut stay, Marilyn and I evaluated what had occurred and we chose this poem as a poetic summary of our experience. Dickinson refers to individuals in the following poem. Still, interestingly, the poem could also apply to the relationship between countries:

We introduce ourselves
To Planets and to Flowers
But with ourselves
Have etiquettes
Embarrassments
And awes (J1214/Fr1184)

[In the Appendix, Dickinson poems are cited with the Johnson numbers and the Franklin ones according to the following edition:

Franklin, Ralph W., ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum Edition.
3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap P of Harvard UP 1998.]