

EMA: THE NEW FACE OF JANE AUSTEN IN JAPAN¹

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Jane Austen (1775–1817) has had a surprisingly large presence in Japan, for a country girl who never traveled outside of England in her life. Stemming largely from Natsume Sōseki's avowed interest in Austen, other Japanese authors such as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Nogami Yaeko, and Kanai Mineko, have all paid homage to Austen or developed their own narratives in relation to her work. So, Austen's face (or at least her name) is not new to Japan; however, Austen's most recent tribute has taken on a new and more visual character with Kaoru Mori's award-winning *manga* series *Ema*, published from 2002 to 2006 in Japan, as well as the *anime* series that it inspired, which aired on Japanese television from 2006 to 2008.² *Ema*, however, is no ordinary translation or even transposition of Jane Austen's fiction into another time and genre. Mori's connection to Austen is subtler and more difficult to ascertain, leaving many readers on the Internet, for example, struggling to assess whether or not there is any connection at all between Austen's novel about a woman coming of age in an early eighteenth-century English countryside, and Mori's *manga* about a woman coming of age in urban Victorian London, set some 75 years later.

Kaoru Mori's *Ema* series has experienced wide-spread success among younger generations in Japan, the United States, and parts of Europe. *Ema* won the 2005 Excellence Prize in the Manga Division at the 9th annual Japanese Media Arts Festival. Subsequently, the English translation was listed by *Library Journal* as one of the best graphic novels of 2007.³ The target audience seems to be girls in their teens: the Young

¹ Many thanks to the encouragement of Jan Bardsley and to the two anonymous reviewers for very helpful critiques.

² When the title (which is pronounced "Ema," rather than "Emma") is written in the Roman alphabet, it is transcribed as "Emma," just like Austen's novel; however, for the sake of clarity when contrasting the two works, I will refer to Austen's work and eponymous heroine as *Emma* (or Emma) and Mori's as *Ema* (or Ema).

³ See "Manga Named to Librarians' Great Graphic Novels List," Anime News Network, January 16, 2008 (accessed August 8, 2009, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2008-01-16/manga-named-to-librarians-great-graphic-novels-list>).

Adult Library Services Association also named it as among the 10 best graphic novels for teens for 2008.⁴ *Emma* was initially serialized in the Japanese *Monthly Comic Beam* magazine from January 2002 until May 2006. It was then rapidly translated and published in Sweden, North America, Spain, Finland, and France between 2006 and 2008, and subsequently inspired the anime series *Eikoku Koi Monogatari Emma* or *Emma: A Victorian Romance*, which was produced by Studio Pierrot, and subtitled in English. While *Emma* was not initially serialized in a *shōjo manga* (teenage girls' manga) magazine, it bears many of the features of the *shōjo* genre, and its age guide also recommends it for teens. There are subplots in the manga series that involve nudity and prostitution, however, and stray from the characteristic *shōjo* content to something more adult in nature. In that regard, the *Emma* manga series could be conceived of as a *shōjo* main plot, with a backdrop of what Fusami Ogi calls "young-lady manga" emphasis on social realism, particularly in its subplots and backstory.⁵ This hybrid genre can perhaps appeal to a wider audience and both male and female readership.

The *Emma* series and its heroine have also inspired "cos-play" enthusiasms (an abbreviation of costume play, where young adults dress as their favorite anime or manga characters). Although Mori herself has denied such explicit influence,⁶ critics continue to credit Mori's manga for inspiring the maid café phenomenon that began to spread in the Akihabara district of Tokyo. Kai-Ming Cha, for example, writes: "The manga series [*Emma*] is said to be responsible for the Japanese maid phenomenon, where women dress up as English maids, complete with elaborate maid uniforms, aprons and bonnets." The official *Emma* maid costume retails for ¥45,000 on the series website, and there is a special "maid café" in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo explicitly dedicated to the heroine Emma and her Victorian world in London, as seen in Figure 1.

⁴ For the full list, see "2008 Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens," American Library Association, January 15, 2008 (accessed August 8, 2009, <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/greatgraphicnovel/sforteens/annotations/08ggnt10.cfm>).

⁵ Fusami Ogi, "Female subjectivity and Shoujo [girls] Manga [Japanese comics]: Shoujo in ladies' comics and young ladies' comics," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36/4 (2003): 798–803.

⁶ Chih-Chieh Chang, "Interview: Kaoru Mori," Anime News Network, September 1, 2006 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.anime-newsnetwork.com/feature/2006-09-01/6>).



Figure 1. The interior of the *Ema*-themed maid café in Tokyo.

At the maid cafés, young ladies dressed in quaint and often enticing maid costumes give special personalized welcome to their customers, explain the menu on bended knees, and serve food with personalized decorations. These maids use very traditional phrases to emphasize their role as catering to the supposed lord of the manor (*go-shujin-sama*), returning to his estate after a long day's work.⁷ And while most customers of maid cafés are male (primarily *otaku*), there are maid cafés that appeal to young women also, and where women form the majority of customers.

As for the connection to Austen, the Internet is full of speculations and denials. Most disclaim any possible connection, but there is a perplexing insistence on *making* connections to Austen, only to *dismiss* them again. Even those who find no connection to Austen feel the need to cite her: Animesuki's article "Torrents for Emma" reviewed the *Ema* anime, for example, explaining curtly that the anime is "based on the manga

⁷ Sakurada Yoko and Torikai Shin-ichi, "Welcome to Fantasyland: Maid Cosplay," *Nipponia* 46 (2008), p. 12.

by the same name by Kaoru Mori. No relation to the novel by Jane Austen.”⁸ Other reviewers claim a vague romantic connection: “A very fine romance along the lines of the best of Jane Austen”⁹ or assume an implicit kinship that would suggest that Austen readers are likely to become Mori readers: *Emma* is “[a] must see for Jane Austen fans and those who love period romances such as *Pride and Prejudice*.”¹⁰ At least one review mentions the similarity of Mori’s central heroine with Austen’s sensible, quieter heroines: “This upstairs-downstairs romance is very restrained, almost to the point of being subdued. Emma is a character firmly in the traditions of Jane Austen’s quieter heroines (think Fanny Price and Anne Elliott, not Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse); she says little, keeping her own counsel, but her personality shines through all her interactions.”¹¹

Others, such as Robin Brenner, note the authors’ similar emphasis on social criticism: “The cover certainly does promise pretty maids and, with its creamy tones and textured paper, a whiff of nostalgia for a past we never knew. What you can’t tell from the cover is that alongside the lace and tea there is a laser-sharp criticism of society’s rules and the overarching

⁸ “Torrents for Emma,” AnimeSuki, April 2005 (accessed June 1, 2009, <http://www.animesuki.com/series.php/569.html>).

⁹ Kaoru Mori, “Emma Vol I-V,” Bold Blue Adventure, July 20, 2009 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://boldblueadventure.blogspot.com/2009/07/emma-vol-i-v.html>).

¹⁰ Holly Ellingwood, “Emma: A Victorian Romance – Season 2,” Active Anime, April 12, 2009 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.activeanime.com/html/content/view/4828/57/>).

¹¹ Joy Kim, “Mori, Kaoru: Emma, vol. 2,” Joy Kim: Manga Reviews-Seinen Manga, February 4, 2008 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://joykim.net/posts/mori-kaoru-emma-vol-2/>). See also Karon Flage, “Tart Tastes: Comics for Mom,” Sequential Tart, May 1, 2006 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.sequentialtart.com/article.php?id=136>): “[*Emma*] is the *Upstairs, Downstairs*-as-written-by-Jane Austen-like story of William, a good-looking but shy young man from a nouveau riche merchant family who falls in love with his retired governess’ intelligent, bespectacled maid [*Emma*]. In contrast to the more usual pattern in English-language romance novels involving cross-class romance, William is attracted to Emma despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that the rather introspective object of his affections is far too sensible and reserved to flirt with gentleman callers or daydream about love interests above her station.”

understanding that all the love in the world cannot easily overcome significant gaps in wealth and upbringing...Prepare...for a historical drama inspired by Austen, Wharton, or Eliot, and dive right in.”¹² Or finally, there are those who simply muse: “No this is not Jane Austen Manga. But it almost could be!”¹³

Despite the radically different narrative techniques of their respective genres, I will argue that the connections between Austen and Mori are manifold. Mori borrows plot elements from several Jane Austen novels, as well as visual images from the films of those novels. In addition, she shows a similar thematic concern for society and rank, especially debates over the concept of the “gentleman.” While the change in setting seems strikingly different, Mori chooses the time that Austen was imported to Japan as her setting for her own transportation of an Austen-related story back to England. In other words, there is actually a link between Mori’s Victorian setting and Meiji Japan. In fact, strange as it may seem, the choice of the Victorian setting may well be due to nostalgia for Meiji Japan. It is worth noting that, as different as they are, Meiji Japan and Victorian England actually overlapped by three decades. Finally, in order to contrive her character’s own mix of traditionalist and feminist appeal, Mori alludes to several Japanese female prototypes, including such disparate characters as the geisha, the “New Woman,” and the *jogakusei* (girl student), in addition to the contemporary appeal of the English maid. Mori’s eclectic borrowings and multicultural allusions contribute to her overall ends.

In elucidating some of Mori’s allusions and narrative strategies, I hope to suggest some possible future work on what this new face of Austen can tell us about contemporary Japanese girl culture. What we have is at least a very interesting cultural phenomenon. Austen’s most socially and financially independent heroine is transported from the countryside of Regency England into poverty and a life of servitude in Victorian London. And of course this temporal fusion is conveyed in the most postmodern of media: the graphic novel and anime film. Meanwhile in contemporary Tokyo, partly due to the popularity of maids in video and computer games, voluntary servitude is replayed in “maid cafés,” where customers pay to be

¹² See “Emma,” *Graphic Novel Reporter*, July 20, 2009 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.graphicnovelreporter.com/content/emma-volumes-1-7-review>).

¹³ See “Emma by Kaoru Mori,” *Things Mean A Lot: A Place Where I Talk About Books*, July 20, 2009 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.thingsmeanalot.com/2009/03/emma-by-kaoru-mori.html>).

waited on by young women dressed as maids, including Ema look-alikes, as discussed above. Adding to this cultural fusion, the maid café itself is an urban, pop-culture transformation of the older Japanese tradition of geisha serving at upper-class tea houses. It seems that Japanese girls and young women resort to the *cos-play* described above to experience nostalgia for older forms of relationship, dress, and expression while also appearing “cute” and attractive according to media-influenced styles.

We will investigate this cross-cultural and multi-media collage to probe further into Mori’s implicit statement about women, individualism, and modernity. Building on the similarity one finds between Meiji history and Mori’s depiction of Victorian times, I will show that Mori’s characteristic fusion of traditionally subservient female roles, set within an atomistic urban setting, allows her heroine to succeed in achieving both love and upward mobility. It may well be that the reason behind this series’ popularity among contemporary young Japanese women lies precisely in Ema’s bivalent aspirations – the nostalgic longing for traditional forms of femininity along with the desire for freedom and upward mobility – a combination evinced by the heroine herself. *Ema* thus suggests a tacit post-feminism among contemporary Japanese women.

Emma versus Ema

Austen’s *Emma*, published in 1815, is often considered her masterpiece of narrative form and free indirect discourse. It treats a heroine who has a privileged but highly faulty perspective on life in her Regency England setting. It might seem odd to compare this classic novel with a contemporary graphic novel set in a different time, place, and involving a different socio-economic class. One must indeed acknowledge that superficial ties between Mori’s *Ema* and Austen’s *Emma* are hard to perceive. To the initial reader, it might seem as though the title is the *only* possible connection. Be that as it may, Mori, an avowed Anglophile and bibliophile, has explicitly drawn from a large number of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literary and historical sources, such as Brontë, Dickens, Disraeli, Charlotte Smith, and Hannah Maria Jones. It seems unlikely that she was not fully aware of Austen’s use of the same title for her strong and attractive central heroine.

Yet what can Austen’s most socially and economically independent heroine have in common with an orphaned and destitute young girl who initially views the life of a maid as an almost unreachable social goal? Austen opens *Emma* with the following description of her heroine: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home

and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.” In fact, her major challenges, according to Austen’s narrator, are “the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments.”¹⁴ Emma is the mistress of her father’s household, with very little to check her enjoyments or her privileges in a society, where she ranks as “first” in society as well as in the eyes of her doting father and governess.

Ema, on the other hand, is an orphaned child with unknown parents who is abducted as a child and barely escapes being sold to a brothel. She fights for subsistence by selling flowers in a public square, until she is taken in by a former governess named Kelly Stownar. Mrs. Stownar, a widow, takes her in to teach her to be a maid, and is impressed by her abilities. Gradually she learns the tasks of a housemaid and also some unusual accomplishments (such as speaking French) along the way. All is well until Mrs. Stownar dies, forcing Ema to find a new way to support herself. She moves from position to position, struggling to make ends meet, yet she is understatedly upwardly mobile, making a positive impression on her mistresses, who increase in wealth and prominence in the course of the series. She is indeed “first” in the governess’ eyes, but in no other’s eyes until young William Jones, heir to a large fortune, falls in love with her.

While the similarities are limited, both Emma and Ema are motherless and have loving governess figures who teach them appropriate skills. Their troubles and adventures start at age 20, on the cusp of independence, when these governesses depart – either to marry (in Emma’s case) or die (in Ema’s). Both motherless young women make new worlds for themselves and eventually grow into the mistresses of great estates. They both stand out among other women for their beauty, elegance, and intelligence. Both women are admired by many men and receive several proposals of marriage; in both cases, they reject dashing rakes and eventually shape their world through choice of a spouse. Unlike most historically set *manga* and *anime* that reach U.S. audiences, Mori’s characters have access to no supernatural powers to release them from their limited opportunities. Like Austen, Mori chooses to depict only common occurrences and realistic character traits.

¹⁴ Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 5. All citations of Austen’s *Emma* are from this edition.

It is tempting, when comparing *Ema* and *Emma*, to say that Ema has more in common with some of the minor characters in Austen's novel. Like Harriet Smith, she is the *subject* of matchmaking and romantic speculation, as well as makeovers, all of which are not equally well-intentioned or successful. Like Jane Fairfax, she lives on the cusp of social respectability to the gentry: it is unclear whether she will ultimately be a governess for hire or a landed lady. Austen uses Miss Bates to show what can happen to a woman without means when she does not marry. Yet Mori's distinctions are equally important. While Emma's attempts at a makeover of the orphaned Harriet Smith are disastrous, all the attempts to reform Ema for higher rank and glamour are successful. Whereas Austen shows her heroine Emma falling into the trap of designing a stereotypical romance for Harriet complete with rags-to-riches conventions, Austen ultimately ridicules what Mori embraces. For Mori, the rags-to-riches plot is central and unironized.

In reading Mori's manga series, there are many plot devices and conversations that echo Austen's oeuvre; these similarities seem to increase as the manga series progresses. Just to name a few, an outdoor picnic reveals private disputes and secrets, as does the picnic at Box Hill in *Emma*. A conversation about what constitutes an adequate income parallels the discussion between the sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*. Amateur theatricals are contemplated among the young people, and the hero offers the use of his own house, just as in *Mansfield Park*. The play (in this case *Romeo and Juliet*), is similarly chosen to reveal the private conflicts of the group. When a couple disappears, they are thought to have eloped to Gretna Green, as in *Pride and Prejudice*. And an opera scene is also used to similar effect as in *Persuasion*.¹⁵

Despite Mori's choice of title, in many ways, *Ema*'s plot actually has most similarities with the better known novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Austen's most beloved novel, and one of the most influential novels written in English. From the opening scenes of *Ema* as well as *Pride and Prejudice*, we see the wealthy hero-to-be embarrassing himself and behaving with an awkwardness that invites censure among onlookers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, it is Darcy's behavior in rudely refusing to dance at the Meryton assembly; in *Ema*, William sheepishly hesitates on the

¹⁵ Kaoru Mori, *Emma*, trans. Sheldon Drzka (La Jolla, CA: WildStorm Productions, 2006–2008). These scenes appear in volume III.22–45; III.39; III.55; IV.19; IV.29, respectively. All subsequent quotations from Mori's *Ema* are from this edition.

doorstep of his former governess' house and as a result is smashed in the face by a door, gets a red nose, and later suffers questioning about bed-wetting from his former governess.

In a famous scene of *Pride and Prejudice*, several characters compare their opinions about what is required for a woman to be considered "accomplished." While the easy-going Charles Bingley is impressed that so many young ladies "paint tables, cover screens, and net purses," his ambitious sister Caroline takes the opportunity to promote herself with a much longer list: "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved." Darcy only adds intellectual qualities to Caroline's more theatrical list: "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading." Elizabeth famously responds: "I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*."¹⁶ Darcy's reflections over the requisite (and nearly unachievable) characteristics of "an accomplished woman" are echoed in Mori's novel. Mr. Jones' remarks on the requisite qualifications of a wife: "a wife must play valuable roles. She must host banquets, balls, tea parties...She must speak on suitable subjects according to occasion. She must be aware of details...acquire a taste for culture...speak King's English. Can a mere maid do all that?"¹⁷ While somewhat more manageable than Darcy's list, the high expectations accorded to rank are nonetheless demonstrated. Despite this social pressure, both heroines dare to reject their prominent and wealthy suitors and forego the practical relief and comfort such marriages could provide, choosing a life of dependency and likely poverty rather than risk injury to their sense of self-respect.

Ultimately, both novels share in the happy ending and romance plot for which Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is most commonly known today. *Pride and Prejudice* provides the inspiration for the archetypal romance plot, where the wealthy aristocratic man falls in love with and eventually overcomes societal obstacles to marry a woman of impoverished means but superior virtue and intelligence. As a result, his estate is enlivened with a democratic fervor, resulting in a happy, heterozeitgot

¹⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 39.

¹⁷ Mori, *Ema II*, p. 58.

combination of influence and virtue, where individual happiness and societal obligations are balanced with care.

In line with Mori's very eclectic style of historical adaptation, the many plot parallels to Austen's novels could have been partially spurred by the success of the film versions of Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* (directed by Ang Lee) and *Emma* (directed by Douglas McGrath), released in Japan in 1996 and 1997, respectively. While Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was first translated into Japanese in 1926, it achieved widespread notoriety much later through the film adaptations starring Colin Firth (1995) and Matthew McFayden (2005) as Mr. Darcy. In fact, Hans, one of Ema's suitors in the *manga*, also disdains dancing in a Darcyesque manner. When asked if he would like to dance, he replies "I can think of nothing less appealing."¹⁸ His role as rival for Ema's affections is much amplified in the anime series, which was produced after the release of both versions of *Pride and Prejudice* in Japan. The Hans character bears an uncanny resemblance to Matthew McFayden as Darcy as well as to Alan Rickman in *Sense and Sensibility*, whose film preceded the *manga* (see Figures 2–4).



Figure 2. (Left) Hans from Mori's *Ema in Pride and Prejudice* (2005) (IV.108).
Figure 3. (Right) Matthew McFayden as Darcy.



Figure 4. Alan Rickman as Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995).

¹⁸ Mori, *Ema III*, p. 101.

In short, Mori draws upon both Austen novels as well as the films of Austen novels for some of the visual and thematic content of her *Ema* series.

Austen Before Mori

Mori is undoubtedly aware of Austen's initial reception in Japan, especially the positive attention Austen's novels received from Meiji Japan's premiere English literary scholar, Natsume Sōseki.¹⁹ One chapter of the lengthy *Bungakuron*, or *A Discourse of Literature* contains Sōseki's detailed thoughts on Austen's style, which are now quoted in almost all Japanese works devoted to Austen. The section begins: "Jane Austen is the leading authority in the world of realism. Her ability to score points while putting the most commonplace situations to paper far outstrips that of her male rivals. Take this on my authority. Anyone who is unable to appreciate Austen will be unable to understand the beauty of realism." After this brief introduction to Austen, Sōseki then quotes the entire first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* in English. Sōseki ends his sixteen-page section on Austen stating that "[Austen's] authority in realism will reign for a hundred generations."²⁰ By 1907, Natsume Sōseki had become a devoted fan of Jane Austen's work. As interest in Austen and her works grew, translations and

¹⁹ Yoko McClain, "Sōseki's Views on Women Writers," in Takehisa Iijima and James Vardaman Jr., eds., *The World of Natsume Sōseki* (Tokyo: Kinseido, 1987), p. 95. Sōseki was the first ever to publish on Jane Austen in Japan. His first references to Austen appear in the collected published lectures that would become one of the most influential Japanese works on English literature. Then, in 1909, in his work entitled *Literary Criticism* (*Bungaku Hyōron*), Sōseki again focused on eighteenth-century British literature. Even after he retired from his teaching position at Tokyo Imperial University, Sōseki persistently, almost instinctively, returned to his favorite British authors – particularly Sterne, Swift, and Austen – in his on-going conversations with students about European literature. See also Inger Sigrun Brodey, "Natsume Sōseki and Laurence Sterne: Cross-Cultural Discourse on Literary Linearity," *Comparative Literature* 50/3 (1998): 193–219.

²⁰ Natsume Sōseki, *Bungakuron* [A Discourse on Literature] and *Natsume Sōseki zenshū* [The Collected Works of Natsume Sōseki] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1965), pp. 365 and 381. I have used a new translation by Joseph A. Murphy from Natsume Sōseki, *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, eds. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 107 and 120.

at least one adaptation of her novels began appearing in Japanese in the 1920s and 30s.²¹ Oddly enough, due to the timing of this importation, Austen's reception in Japan was mediated by the simultaneous arrival of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British and European authors, after the long seclusion of the Tokugawa rule. Due to this accidental compression of history, Austen became synchronous with authors like Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855), Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), and George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950).

If one compares Natsume Sōseki's importation and treatment of Austen with the somewhat later but passionate engagement of Yaeko Nogami (1885–1985), one of Japan's most preeminent women authors and important woman's rights proponent, we can see that in both cases, these authors use Austen to help them navigate the transitions associated with rapid modernization of the Meiji period, perhaps without realizing the degree to which Austen's England was also undergoing social transformations. In the hands of Sōseki, Austen serves as a useful example in Japan's political disputes surrounding narration, which were tied to issues of national identity and even national security.²² At the same time,

²¹ See Eleanor Hogan, "A New Kind of Woman: Marriage and Women as Intertext in the Works of Nogami Yaeko and Jane Austen" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 2001), especially Chapter 3.

²² Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911–1916* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2008), p. 10. Debates over literature in this same Meiji culture were thus thinly veiled discussions of national identity, particularly of Japan's place in relation to its expanding world and the "West." Translating western works of literature and philosophy into Japanese therefore also became, as Jan Bardsley writes, "a matter of national defense as well as of intellectual excitement." According to Etō Jun, "Natsume Sōseki: A Japanese Meiji Intellectual," *The American Scholar* 34 (1965), p. 603: "No matter how radically they differed from one another in their literary or political opinions, Meiji writers shared in the dominant national mission of their time: the creation of a new civilization that would bring together the best features of East and West, while remaining Japanese at its core." See also Eleanor J. Hogan and Inger Sigrun Brodey, "Jane Austen in Japan: 'Good Mother' or 'New Woman,'" *Persuasions On-Line* 28/2 (2008), (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/online/vol28no2/brodey-hogan.htm>); and Brodey, "Natsume Sōseki and Laurence Sterne," pp. 193–219.

Sōseki's writing and reported comments about Austen suggest that his admiration of her modern narration was counterbalanced – or even potentially based on – very traditional, conflicted views of womanhood and a complete ignorance of Austen's biography. Sōseki assumed, for example, that Austen married, had children, and composed her novels while “cooking potatoes” for her family.²³

Nogami, like Sōseki, finds Austen useful in her response to the pressure to fuse old and new. Both Sōseki and Nogami found in Austen an author they could use to navigate the seas of change and modernization. Nogami wrote two novels that adapted Austen's work to a contemporary Japanese setting and also translated *Pride and Prejudice*. In 1965, she wrote an introduction to a new edition of *Emma*, called “On First Reading Jane Austen.” Speaking of the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, Nogami wrote: “certainly, this beloved daughter must be the most charming girl in modern English dramas and novels. If Lady Macbeth or Ophelia were brought to life, it would be difficult to imagine the kind of life they would live. However, if Elizabeth were brought to life, it would be easy to picture her stepping lively down the streets of today's London.”²⁴ This is, in a sense, the achievement of Kaoru Mori.

Ranking the Gentlemen

The distinctions of rank and wealth form a major theme in Mori's *Ema*, as in all of Austen's fiction. William's father expresses the distinction in terms borrowed from Benjamin Disraeli: “Great Britain is one...Yet within it are two countries...Marriage between two people from the same *country* is to be desired.”²⁵ This is reminiscent of the tirade in *Pride and Prejudice* by Lady Catherine (Darcy's nearest relative and head of his

²³ See Hogan and Brodey, “Jane Austen in Japan” for further treatment of this topic. It may be that in order to accept Austen as a female writer of importance, Sōseki needed for her to be a mother; in other words, Austen's ideas and writings were rendered “safe” through his constant references to motherhood.

²⁴ Yaeko Nogami, “Hajimete Austen o yonda hanashi” [On First Reading Jane Austen], *Nogami Yaeko zenshū* [The Collected Works of Nogami Yaeko] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1982), p. 362.

²⁵ Mori, *Ema* II, p. 15. Mori herself points out in *The Emma Victorian Gazette* that this is a reference to a novel by Benjamin Disraeli: *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), referring to “the wealthy and “the poor” (Mori, *Ema* II, p. 88).

extended family), in attempting to prevent Darcy's union with his social inferior Elizabeth: "are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?"²⁶ In Austen's oeuvre, one can easily detect the broader changes in England's social and economic structure – the shift from an agricultural to a mercantile economy, and the diminishing distinction between the landed gentry and the merchant class, as wealthy tradespeople purchased landed estates, blurring the line between self-made fortunes and inherited fortunes. This theme appears in each of Austen's novels, and becomes increasingly prominent as she writes later in life. These themes are even more apparent in the historical setting that Mori chooses, some 75 years later in metropolitan London. William Jones' family (the Knightley–Darcy equivalent), is very wealthy, but their rank in society is precarious because their fortune was made through trade (and thus have more in common with characters like the Bingleys in *Pride and Prejudice*). This is the source for the pressure William feels to marry well – that is, to marry a woman of title and "good family."²⁷

In fact, Volume V opens with a statement that combines events of *Pride and Prejudice* with the sentiments that inform *Persuasion*: "Some upstart in London has bought 200 acres of land!"²⁸ In both Austen's world and the one that Mori creates, the landed gentry are being displaced and the growing pains are felt on both sides of the social divide. The landed gentry are striving to distinguish themselves from "upstarts" in both cases (also from immigrants, in the case of *Ema*). Yet, in general, both authors favor the upstarts. In *Persuasion*, Austen focuses on the shift of economic and moral authority from the Elliots to the Crofts, as the Crofts rent Kellynch Hall, when Sir Walter no longer can afford to live there. In *Ema*, the only characters who are confident in their social status (particularly the head of the Campbell family) are similarly shown to be growing morally and economically bankrupt.

As a result of this atmosphere of social change, the issue of what constitutes a "gentleman" is under fire in both settings. In particular, the question is whether the qualities that mark one as a gentleman are the result of external circumstance (such as birth or rank) or whether they can be

²⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 357.

²⁷ See Mori, *Ema* I, pp. 136 and 157. Mori's early volumes in the series show initial confusion regarding terminology for rank in Victorian England, calling the same characters all of the following, as though interchangeable: "high born," "upper-class," "royalty," "nobleman," "aristocrats."

²⁸ Mori, *Ema* V, p. 3.

earned or learned. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth asserts her equality with the formidable Lady Catherine de Bourgh by claiming she is a "gentleman's daughter": "In marrying your nephew I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter: so far we are equal." Yet, for Lady Catherine, Elizabeth does not fully qualify as a "lady" because her mother's family was in trade. "True. You *are* a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."²⁹ Thus, the dispute here is to what extent parentage or marriage can dilute one's membership in the gentleman-class. Earlier, in Chapter 34, Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy's first proposal includes the following censure: "You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner."³⁰ Elizabeth sees "him start at this," because she has cut him to the quick: the suggestion however, is not that he does not belong to the class of gentleman, but that he is not behaving *like* the gentleman. In other words, within the novel, "gentleman" connotes both position and character/virtue. The one is due to the accident of birth; the latter can be lost or presumably also earned.

Within *Ema*, this debate reappears when William is discussing with his father whether or not he should be allowed to marry a maid. William argues through analogy to the question of the "gentleman": "A long time ago, you told me that one isn't born a gentleman. One becomes one." His father replies with yet another analogy: "Depending on its qualities and training, a horse can become an excellent steed. But a cat can never become a horse. It lacks the necessary prerequisites."³¹ In both cases, the terms are undergoing a shift – and both Austen and Mori sympathize with those who define the term more liberally, supporting a hierarchy more based on virtue than heredity.

Trains, Queen Victoria, and Emperor Meiji

Mori is not the first to transpose Austen into Victorian garb, moving her later by more than half a century. When Nogami Yaeko serialized a loose translation of *Pride and Prejudice*, beginning in 1935, it featured the characters in Victorian dress and Victorian coiffures (Figure 5).

²⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 356.

³⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 192.

³¹ Mori, *Ema II*, p. 59.



Figure 5. The pages of *Niji no hana*, as it was serialized in *Fujin kōron*, beginning in 1935, including portraits of the characters in Victorian garb.

The first English-language film version of *Pride and Prejudice*, made in 1940 by MGM, starring Greer Garson and Lawrence Olivier, also placed the characters in Victorian dress (supposedly because Greer Garson thought she looked better in them). Several of the Internet comments comparing Austen and Mori also reveal contemporary audiences that mistakenly think Austen's novels are set in Victorian times.³² This is perhaps partly due to

³² Holly Ellingwood, "Emma: A Victorian Romance – Season 2," Active Anime, April 12, 2009 (accessed August 10, 2009, <http://www.activeanime.com/html/content/view/4828/57/>). Holly Ellingwood, for example, writes in her review of the second season of *Emma* the anime series: "[*Emma*] is a lovely period account that beautifully captures the essence and era of Victorian romances. It has done so with such artistry and so artfully that I immediately longed to watch Kiera Knightly in *Pride and Prejudice* yet again and delve into my share of Jane Austen books... A must see for Jane Austen fans and those who love period romances such as *Pride and Prejudice*. Although not to be confused with Jane Austen's *Emma*, Kaoru Mori's story is one just as convincingly Victorian in tone and hopeful aspirations for the virtuous at heart."

Queen Victoria's conscious promulgation of rules of etiquette, resulting in the Victorian Period's becoming synonymous with codes of manners in the popular imagination.

In Mori's case, it seems she chooses urban, Victorian London rather than Austen's rural settings to emphasize socio-economic discrepancies and the speed of social change. Mori constantly reminds the reader both verbally and visually of the changing society of *Ema*, as the pages in Figure 6 demonstrate. Mori describes the Industrial Revolution and even details like Watt's invention of the steam engine, providing concrete examples of material culture that influenced the economic structures of the time.³³ As the example of Figure 6 shows, Mori is committed to showing the benefits and losses of these changes, but the emphasis of Mori's narration is squarely on the benefits to the newly upwardly mobile, like Ema and the Jones family, despite the differing social status of these two examples. In short, the Victorian period's rapid developments in industry

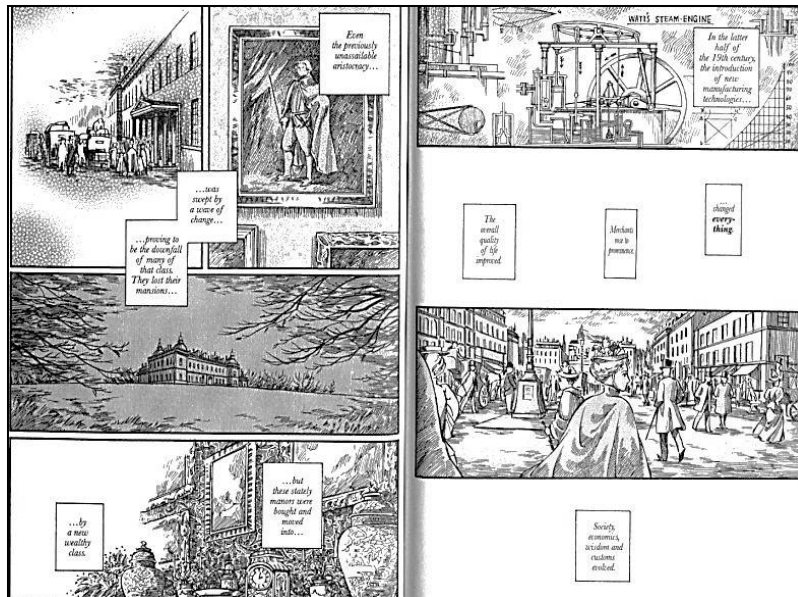


Figure 6. Mori displays the changing society of *Ema*.

³³ Mori, *Ema III*, pp. 137–138.

and science form a central underlying theme in *Emma*, partly because the emphasis on industrialization and urbanization enables the change in status and the diffusion of rank. Yet permeating the work more subtly is a nostalgia for lost traditions and social forms.

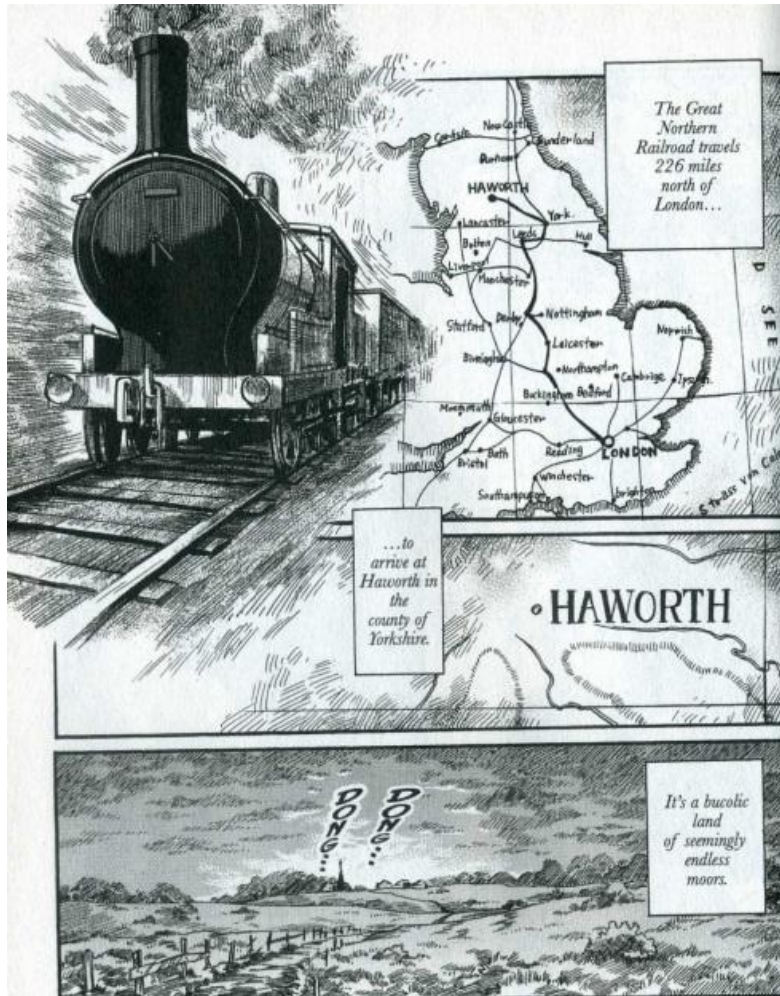


Figure 7. The Steam Locomotive in *Emma*.

The most blatant symbol for this change is the train, or steam locomotive. The train was also considered one of the primary symbols of modernization in Meiji-era Japan, which overlapped roughly three decades with the Victorian Period in England. Thus the *Ema* set in Victorian England is also a reflection of Meiji Japan. To remember the multivalent symbolism associated with the train in Meiji Japan, one need only recall the train imagery in Natsume Sōseki's *Sanshirō*, where the hero discovers a body that has been severed in half by a train. The reactions are divided between the modern scientist, who is intrigued to see the insides of the body, and Sanshirō, who feels all the pain of the probably suicide victim. In Volume III of *Ema*, the train receives a title role (see Figure 7).

The train not only serves as a technological marvel, but as a new social opportunity, dividing individuals from or connecting individuals to their personal pasts with a new fluidity. In addition, as the train slices through the visual landscape, it also replicates the class system in its ticket structure. Ema accidentally purchases a first-class ticket, for example, and while this embarrasses her, it also provides her with new social opportunities and suggests her implicit social mobility and enables her to meet her next employer. And just as this mobility serves Ema for the purposes of escape from the Jones family, it also symbolizes a newly atomized society, where one can more readily achieve anonymity and sever one's ties to the past. Using the train and other industrial inventions, Mori takes themes that are present in Austen as well and makes them more explicit through the direct reference to material culture in the Victorian/Meiji period. In this way, Mori provides an opportunity for her heroine to emerge and defy hierarchies, revealing a natural grace in the midst of the shifting social strata.

Mori's choice of a Victorian setting for her story may stem partly from a nostalgia for an early Meiji world. In fact, the dates of *Ema*'s setting (1895–1896) correspond to a time in Japan when Emperor Meiji had just promulgated the Meiji Constitution, officially eliminating many of the traditional distinctions and privileges of the samurai class and allowing intermarriage between the classes in 1890. Japan had an international debut by exhibiting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893; the first liner to Europe left Yokohama port in 1896; and the first express train was built between Shinbashi and Kobe in 1896. Mori's London is the London that Natsume Sōseki visited only 6 years later. The England that Mori depicts is the England that the Japanese encountered in early Meiji – an England undergoing similar growth pains as those faced by Japan at least twice in its history – once with the Meiji restoration and once in the

occupation following its defeat in the Pacific War (WWII). Victorian London may, in fact, be more similar to Meiji Japan than first appears. Audiences view Meiji transformations as the definition of extreme and rapid progress at a price, just as Mori capitalizes on these associations in her setting of *Ema*.

Maids, Geisha, and Jogakusei

As much as Mori borrows from Austen and Austen-related sources, the fact remains that Ema is most conspicuously defined by her profession: a maid. There are no maid-heroines in Austen. She also differs from Victorian authors such as Brontë and Dickens, whose working-class heroines are described with greater social realism and much more menial labor and hardship. The contemporary appeal of maids in twenty-first century Japan is more overtly eroticized than the British maid in Victorian literature, more reminiscent of the stereotypical French maid, but also with an intellectual element added. The missing link between this Victorian-maid setting and contemporary taste is the geisha tradition, where beauty and eroticism combines with skill and intelligence. In geisha training, *maiko* were first trained from a young age under one roof and moved to a different house for additional training before qualifying for entrance into and performance at the teahouse. With this long period of disciplined training and seclusion, the geisha tradition emphasized beauty, grace, arts, and intelligence (primarily in the form of conversability).

In some ways, Ema resembles a poised and refined *maiko* or geisha more than she does an English maid. In fact, Ema's training resembles the progression of a *maiko* under Kelly Stownar's roof, to a self-standing geisha, when she is accompanied and trained by the joined forces of the German Mrs. Mölders and the exotic British New Woman Mrs. Trollope. When one considers the professional activities in which Ema is engaged, she is nearly always shown as making and pouring tea, especially while she is in the employ of Mrs. Stownar. Historical geisha, on the other hand, generally served alcohol in their public performances, and the serving of tea, while also done by women, was considered a more domestic activity. Here the activity of tea pouring moves to a liminal position between domestic and public, as Ema is on display pouring tea as a part of her profession. It is, for example, the first thing that Ema does after meeting William. Mori uses tea, which of course is a British as well as a Japanese obsession, to show Ema's changing status as well. At one point, when Ema and Mrs. Mölders are visiting Mrs. Trollope, Ema is suddenly treated as a guest rather than servant: she is *served* tea rather than doing the serving for

others. Mori emphasizes the significance of the occasion with a point-of-view close-up of the tea cup that Ema is served. The tea cup thus suggests her changing position in society, while also pointing to her long-standing position of servitude. Mori thus indirectly uses the geisha tradition to suggest Ema's superior qualities and training, as well as her particular aptitude.

And yet, geisha are also trained in the arts of conversation, and what is particularly striking in *Ema* is the heroine's near silence. Her intelligence is not conveyed through conversation, but rather visually, through references to the geisha tradition and through the complex semiotics of spectacles, to which I return below.

Mori's New Woman: Spectacle(s) of Intelligence

In Japan, the twentieth-century feminist interpretation of Austen (championed by Nogami) was highly influenced by the discourse surrounding the New Woman, or *atarashii onna*, a progressive ideal inspired by Ibsen and Shaw in late Victorian England and imported to Japan during the early twentieth century. New Women, including their *jokagusei* subset, are a Victorian–Meiji phenomenon, at least in origin. Thus, in both Nogami Yaeko's case and in Mori's, we see that the importation and influence of Austen is closely tied to broader concerns – whether cultural, political, or societal. It may seem strange to many Western readers today (who despite recent trends in Austen scholarship may still view Austen as apolitical) that Austen was chosen as a model author to help guide Japan through its modernization and Westernization during the first three decades of the twentieth century. And yet, I would argue that Mori continues in this vein, established by Nogami and continued by other prominent feminist authors such as Kanai Mieko (b. 1947) and Kurahashi Yumiko (1935–2005).³⁴

By incorporating New Woman and *jokagusei* iconography into her manga series, Mori emphasizes this early feminist connection, albeit somewhat anachronistically. Through her complex and multicultural semiotics, Mori proposes Ema as a New Woman who is both old and new. Maids of course, like the *jokagusei*, are “easily distinguished by their

³⁴ Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley have both written interesting articles about Kurahashi and Kanai's relationship to Jane Austen. Both use direct and indirect references to Austen to create their more contemporary parodies of the romance genre.

unusual clothing choice.”³⁵ But the most explicit example of the liberated, educated woman in the *Ema* series is not the heroine herself, but William Jones’ mother, who lives alone and goes by the pseudonym of Mrs. Trollope. She lives apart from her husband and children because the couple could not agree about societal conventions. She sports short hair (to her husband’s chagrin when they meet), a Japanese kimono, and radical ideas.³⁶ She gives away jewelry to a female friend (usually a man’s prerogative), and designs her own home as an imitation of the Crystal Palace exhibit. As Rebecca Copeland has indicated, citing outraged Meiji editorials and authors such as Atomi Kakei, short hair was a radical statement among the *jogakusei* of Meiji Japan: “A woman with cropped hair is practically indecent. Although we see such creatures in the cities now, such a practice did not exist of old...In any country, a gentle and temperate lady has long hair which she dresses.”³⁷

In fact, this new custom of cropping hair so shocked Meiji society, that an 1873 law prohibited women from cutting their hair.³⁸ Within the world of *Ema*, Mrs. Trollope stands apart for her radical notions. It is, notably, *not* the heroine Ema who has the cropped hair.³⁹ Mori’s Ema remains docile, quietly elegant, and ultra-feminine. And yet, Ema has one characteristic that could also mark her as a *jogakusei*: the conspicuous spectacles or glasses that she is given by Mrs. Stownar (see Figure 8).

They form, in effect, part of the education and pedigree that she receives under Mrs. Stownar’s tutelage. Ema combines the glasses and the tacit degree of erudition (her knowledge of French) that mark her as an echo

³⁵ Rebecca Copeland, “Fashioning the Feminine: Images of the Modern Girl Student in Meiji Japan,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal* 30–31 (2006), p. 32.

³⁶ It is interesting that in this world of reversals that the kimono is used as a symbol of her radical adoption of foreign ideas and cultures, whereas in Japan it is a sign of traditional femininity.

³⁷ Meiji newspaper article quoted and translated by Liza Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 75 (cited in Copeland, “Fashioning the Feminine,” p. 16).

³⁸ Copeland, “Fashioning the Feminine,” p. 16.

³⁹ In contrast, the MGM version of *Pride and Prejudice* sets its heroine apart in much the same way as Mori does Mrs. Trollope. Unlike all the other female characters, Elizabeth Bennet’s attire is marked by prominent masculine features, such as ties and lapels, connecting her heroic qualities with intelligence and a masculine outspokenness. Thanks to Jade Bettin for this observation.

of the *jogakusei* inhabiting Japan at the same time as her fictional world. In Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo*, for example, the character Osei wears eye glasses "even though they ruin her perfect vision."⁴⁰ But whereas some *jogakusei* would wear glasses just for effect, Ema differs in that she needs these glasses to function well in society. Without them, she breaks dishes, stumbles, and cannot recognize people.



Figure 8. Cover of first volume of *Emma* manga in English translation.

Mori suggests the desirability of a hybrid of traditional femininity and companionate marriage alongside social mobility, intelligence, and independence. Ema would seem to be one of the few characters who achieve these characteristics without isolating themselves from society. Yet here we are limited by an interesting narrative choice made by Mori. Mori does not use thought bubbles; the reader is never privy to Ema's private thoughts, except by reading her facial expressions. This is particularly

⁴⁰ Marleigh Grayer Ryan, ed. and trans., *Japan's First Modern Novel: Ukigumo of Futabatei Shimei* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 210. Many thanks to Jan Bardsley for this helpful suggestion.

striking given her nominal heritage from Austen's *Emma*, where the heroine's perspective dominates the entire narrative. Mori's Ema does not share her internal thoughts through words. She remains a silent spectacle, leaving a gap for readers to interpret. In this way, Mori significantly diverges from traditional narrative techniques of the *shōjo manga* genre, where copious use of thought bubbles allows readers to develop intimacy with the youthful heroines. Interestingly, Mori's reader must acquire such intimacy through non-verbal interactions, such as silent frames and body language instead.

In this series, Ema says almost nothing to anyone other than her mistresses; her social interaction is otherwise limited to serving tea, except for her few outings with William Jones. Even there, William does almost all the talking. It seems that Emma's silence contributes to her femininity and grace. The most outspoken female characters are prostitutes, exiled wives, and masculinized cooks. It appears that Ema's intellect or thoughts must be sacrificed in order for the comic resolution to occur. The attractive character of Mrs. Trollope also does not achieve a functional blend of traditional femininity, companionate marriage, and independence: she is still outcast within her own family's society, as the idea of living under a pseudonym suggests. In fact, her pseudonym suggests that short hair and independence are still associated with ill-repute or "indecent" – that the appearance of intelligence must compromise female modesty or virtue.

At an interesting turning point, when Ema is at the peak of her final makeover, resplendent in a gown and jewelry, Ema is forced to remove her glasses. As a result, she does not recognize others in the ballroom, including William Jones. She does not cut her hair, but she must take off her glasses to wear a ball gown. And therefore, symbolically, she must blind herself in order to fit into society. While Mori's literary move to Victorian England in some ways allows for the celebration of a virtuous and talented orphan to rise in status as her virtue deserves, it also expresses a nostalgia for Meiji Japan – or a nostalgia for a world in transition – where possibilities for change existed alongside a very traditional class structure. In other words, it celebrates dependence and nostalgia along with liberation, yet is also reveals a significant cost to her social mobility.

Just as Austen's reputation in the United States is divided among those who look to her for examples of refinement and domestic elegance and those who look to her for rebellious wit and social commentary, if not proto-feminism, so too in Japanese literary and popular culture Austen functions as a symbol of both conservative and progressive elements in society – of tradition as well as liberation. And as Mori innovatively

interprets Austen's complex and multicultural literary inheritance in her *manga* series, she also teases post-feminists into a possible complacency about the implications of Ema's silence and objectification. Meanwhile, Mori's transformation of Ema into silent spectacle opens the door for the heroine's reappropriation and popularization into the world of *cos-play*, maid cafés, and even personal robots.⁴¹

⁴¹ Sega Toys has just introduced EMA, a new, "interactive personal robot," which obeys voice commands and even has a "kiss" function, when a face approaches her. This latest "Ema" in Japan has taken servitude and objectification one step further and commodified it. In this case, the name EMA is an acronym for "Eternal Maiden Actualization." Thankfully, Mori's adaptations of Austen are more nuanced.

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