

'Shojo culture has excelled in its potential for creating emptiness as Banana Yoshimoto is influenced by Shojo/Manga culture in her writing would it be fair to say that the content of her novella 'Kitchen' is also empty. Discuss.

Shojo culture is becoming more popular, and in Yoshimoto's work this is evident. She incorporates many ideas from Shojo culture in her novella Kitchen - a girl's refusal to grow up; her rebellion against sexual maturity. Shojo represents pleasure and play. Even though there are traces of innocence and sexual immaturity in her novella, I don't think it is fair to go so far as to say that her work is 'empty'.

Yoshimoto is very much influenced by Shojo culture in her novella Kitchen. However, it wouldn't be fair to say that the content of her novella 'Kitchen' is also empty. There are some aspects of Shojo culture that are empty but there are also positive aspects of Shojo. Girls can learn how to be lovable for men from Manga and some Manga can even be seen as serious literature. Some people say that Shojo is empty because it is for men and they see the Shojo as an object for a man's desires. Shojo culture deals with issues such as love, culture, gender, identity and society. It also has deep insights into human relationships. 'Kitchen' is similar to Manga in that it is about a teenage romance. Shojo culture can be seen as a representation of Japan today. Conventional households are disappearing which Yoshimoto shows in her novel 'Kitchen'. The fathers are always distant in Yoshimoto's novels; therefore there are no male role models, which could be a cause in the girl becoming a Shojo. Shojo's are alienated from their biological families, which makes them different. This is true with Mikage as well as her parents died when she was young and she became an orphan. Traditional families are in their demise. Teenagers are alienated because no one represents them therefore Manga and Shojo culture have attracted teens to read them. Shojo culture reflects the habits and attitudes of the youth in Japan.

It could be seen that Kitchen is empty because Shojo influenced Yoshimoto in that Shojo's are seen as shallow. This is because Shojo's are in a stage in their life where they consume and make no contribution to society. In the beginning chapter of 'Kitchen', Mikage is a Shojo. Shojo's feel nostalgic and after the death of Mikage's grandmother, Mikage yearns for family, which causes her to become a Shojo. After the death of her grandmother, she loses her job, thus not giving back to the economy and she does not reproduce. In the beginning chapter of 'Kitchen', Mikage is a Shojo. Mikage was quite materialistic and goes out at night a lot. She was quite passive. She lost her sexual appetite after her grandmother's death and becomes asexual. She made a conscious choice to not have sex, 'I was too sad to be able to sleep in the same bed with anyone; that would only make the sadness worse'.

Mikage isn't a Shojo for long because in the second chapter, she becomes more independent and contributes back to the economy. She becomes less vain and

shallow. She questions the universe and thinks about meaningful things. She takes control of her life by renting an apartment and gains confidence which is evident by her going to find Yuichi. Mikage does everything happily and takes joy in the mundane such as peeling potatoes. Her character goes through a big change in the novel and transforms from a Shojo to a woman. She is determined, even when the hotel door was locked; she managed to climb up to Yuichi's window even though she hurt herself. She has mental strength and is spontaneous. In chapter two, she is grieving for Eriko and not her grandmother anymore. There is a return of her sexual appetite, which is apparent in her ability to taste food and by extension, sex. Mikage makes a joke about sex when Yuichi asks her why food always tastes better when she is with him, she asks Yuichi 'Could it be that you're satisfying hunger and lust at the same time?'

Overall, I don't think that the novel 'Kitchen' is empty because although Yoshimoto has been influenced by Shojo culture, it doesn't mean it is empty. Yoshimoto's novel is very popular which just shows that it is something more than an average romance story and I think it could be seen as good literature. Mikage isn't really a Shojo although she does have many similar characteristics as a Shojo in the first chapter, she transforms. Also, Mikage isn't a virgin like Shojo's are which is shown when she is talking about Sotaro 'I knew how wildly he tossed in his sleep'.