

Shōjo Manga Elements Imported to Contemporary Japanese Literature – A Case Study of Miura Shion²

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Abstract. The present paper discusses how various elements in *shōjo* manga (Japanese comics for girls) have been incorporated in works of Japanese contemporary literature. The connection between *shōjo* manga and literature was pointed out for the first time when the novel *Kitchen* by Yoshimoto Banana was published in 1987. This paper argues that this connection has developed further since then, focusing on one of the most active writers in contemporary Japanese literature, Miura Shion². The paper briefly introduces the genre *shōjo* manga and describes its connection with the novel *Kitchen* before analysing a short story and an essay by Miura Shion, focusing both on their motifs and styles, to identify elements influenced by *shōjo* manga.

Keywords: *shōjo* manga; Japanese contemporary literature; Miura Shion; Yoshimoto Banana; Ōshima Yumiko.

[es] Elementos de manga importados en literatura japonesa contemporánea, con el ejemplo de Miura Shion

Resumen. En este artículo se analiza cómo varios elementos de *shōjo* manga (cómic japoneses para chicas) se han incorporado en las obras de literatura contemporánea japonesa. La conexión entre *shōjo* manga y la literatura se señaló por primera vez cuando la novela *Kitchen* de Yoshimoto Banana se publicó en 1987. La autora de este artículo argumenta que la conexión entre los dos géneros se sigue desarrollando desde entonces, tomando como ejemplo Miura Shion, una de las autoras más activas dentro de literatura japonesa contemporánea. El artículo introduce brevemente el género de *shōjo* manga y describe su conexión con la novela *Kitchen*, antes de analizar un cuento y un ensayo de Miura Shion, centrándose tanto en sus temas como en el estilo, para identificar los elementos que tienen influencia de *shōjo* manga.

Palabras clave: *shōjo* manga; literatura japonesa contemporánea; Miura Shion; Yoshimoto Banana; Ōshima Yumiko.

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. The Novel *Kitchen* and *Shōjo* Manga. 2.1. Motifs. 2.2. Style. 3. The Tradition Continues: Miura Shion as an Example. 3.1. Motifs. 3.2. Style. 4. Conclusion.

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses elements seen in some works of contemporary Japanese literature that originate in *shōjo* manga (a genre of Japanese comics targeting young girls), while considering the connections between these two cultural forms.

Shōjo is currently one of the most popular genres within manga and is felt to have started with *Princess Knight*³ by Tezuka Osamu in 1953, a story about a princess who was born accidentally with both a boy's and girl's heart, and who dresses and acts like a prince so that she can succeed her father's throne. As with this story, the first works of *shōjo* manga were created mostly by men, as is the case with *shōnen* manga (manga for boys). This changed in the 1960s upon the emergence of young female *shōjo* manga creators, who all but dominated the *shōjo* manga market.

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² In this paper, Japanese names are written in family name – first name order as is customary in Japan.

³ English title. When the work cited in this paper has an official English translation, the English title will be used. Otherwise, the original title will be used, followed by the translation by the author of this paper.

Since then, *shōjo* manga has explored numerous subjects of immediacy to many girls and young women in Japan. These include gender roles, sex, interpersonal relationships (with emphasis on romantic love), career, and family. Miyadai *et al.* argue that since the 1970s, *shōjo* manga has served as a resource by which girls learn about various models of interpersonal relationships as well as ways to interpret the world and oneself (Miyadai *et al.*, 2007: 76-77). Tomiyama talks about *shōjo* manga functioning as a “manual” for how women should live (Tomiyama, 2015: 117). Fujimoto, in her renowned critique of *shōjo* manga, *Watashi no ibasho wa doko ni aruno? Shōjo manga ga utsusu kokoro no katachi*⁴ (Where is the Place I Belong? The Psychology Reflected on *Shōjo* Manga), stated that *shōjo* manga is “a medium that has *compathy* as its very basic function” (Fujimoto, 2008: 8)⁵ and that she intended to “explore the changes in women’s consciousness over the past 30 years by studying *shōjo* manga” (Fujimoto, 2008: 8).

Normally, manga works first appear in manga periodicals of different genres (*shōnen*, *shōjo*, *seinen*, etc.) before appearing in comic books. Sales of manga magazines have been falling drastically since their golden era⁶, but at their peak in the 1990s, major *shōjo* manga monthly magazines, such as *Ribon* (Shueisha Inc.) and *Nakayoshi* (Kodansha Ltd.) that targeted younger teens, had monthly sales of around two million copies. If *shōjo* manga is indeed a resource for girls to learn about the world and the self, then this number suggests there to be generations of women who share similar values and similar understandings of the world. It would be natural to assume that these elements can be reflected in or imported to other forms of cultural creations as these girls grow up and become creators themselves.

The influence of *shōjo* manga on contemporary literary works –or maybe the connection between them– became a field of academic research and literary criticism when the first novel by Yoshimoto Banana, *Kitchen*, was published in a literary magazine and won a *Kaien* literary prize in Japan in 1987 (the book was published in 1988). As the next part of this paper explains, the novel caused a sensation for both its motifs and style. To many literary critics, it was “a new sort of literature” (Nakamura quoted in Treat, 1993: 361). Its motifs and style were indeed new within the realms of Japanese contemporary literature; however, they were rather standard in the world of *shōjo* manga. Born in 1964, Yoshimoto names several *shōjo* manga artists –such as Ōshima Yumiko and Iwadate Mariko– as her sources of influence. This makes sense if we consider the aforementioned point by Miyadai *et al.* (2007), since Yoshimoto was of reading age in the 1970s.

Kitchen may have been the first case to show the clear connection between *shōjo* manga and contemporary literature, but is by no means the last. The works by Ekuni Kaori (b. 1964), who also published her first novel in 1987, are often associated with *shōjo* manga as well (see for example Kan, 2005).

It is also worth mentioning that outside the realm of *junbungaku* (“pure literature”), there has been a longer tradition of convergence between manga and popular literature. For example, *raito noveru* (“light novel” or youth popular literature) has always been closely linked to the world of manga, and the works of such authors as Himuro Saeko (1957-2008) show a world view very similar to that in *shōjo* manga. Many of her works, such as the *Japanesku* series (1984-1991), were made into *shōjo* manga. Thus, part of the novelty with Yoshimoto’s work is due to the fact it was published beyond the world of *raito noveru*. As Kan states, “Yoshimoto’s greatest accomplishment is to have made society realize the value of *shōjo* manga” (Kan, 2005: 17).

Shōjo manga features strongly in cultural studies, and the tradition that started with Yoshimoto continues. This paper uses one of the most successful authors of contemporary times, Miura Shion (b. 1976), as an example to discuss the link between *shōjo* manga and some works in Japanese contemporary literature. Its introduction provides a brief background to the possible influence of *shōjo* manga on generations of girls in Japan, exemplifying with Yoshimoto Banana. The following section will look more closely at what have been identified as common elements in Yoshimoto’s novel and *shōjo* manga, with reference to previous studies. The third section introduces the author Miura Shion and her connection with two manga genres: *shōjo* manga and BL manga. This will be followed by a comparison of Miura’s short story *Haruta no mainich* (“The Days of Haruta”) with Ōshima Yumiko’s *Keitogen* (“Woolen Chord”), an example of *shōjo* manga. Miura’s writing style will be compared with the language often used in manga, exemplified by one of her essays. In the conclusion, the significance of *shōjo* manga in the reading of examples from contemporary Japanese literary works will be considered.

2. The Novel *Kitchen* and *Shōjo* Manga

Kitchen is a short story about 18-year-old Mikage and the people in her life. When the story begins, Mikage has just lost her last family member, her grandmother who had been with her since her parents’ death. Alone in the apartment, Mikage sleeps in the kitchen where she feels most comfortable until one day Yuichi visits her and suggests that she live with him and his mother. Mikage hardly knows Yuichi, having met him only once at her grandmother’s funeral, yet she remembers him because of his uncontrollable crying over her grandmother’s death. (Yuichi worked at the flower shop the grandmother frequented, and they were friends).

⁴ Original title in Japanese. When there is no official translation, the original title will be followed by an English translation by the author.

⁵ My translation. Unless otherwise stated, the translations of original Japanese documents cited in this paper are the author’s.

⁶ For example, the average monthly circulation in the fourth quarter of 2020 was 133,000 copies for *Ribon* and 61,000 copies for *Nakayoshi* (JMPA 2021).

Mikage visits Yuichi's home, where she meets Eriko, his unbelievably attractive mother ("her whole being was radiating with some energy of life, it was as if she was not a human being⁷"), who turns out to be a transsexual who works at a gay bar. Eriko had been Yuichi's father, but when his beloved wife died because of an illness, he decided to become a woman, believing he would never fall in love again. Mikage loves their kitchen and decides to stay with them. By living with this family, with its beautiful, energetic, and open-minded mother and relaxed, gentle son, she finds a place of belonging –somewhere she can regain the strength to live.

2.1. Motifs

Appraised by literary critics for its "newness" in terms of both motifs and style, the novel was a huge success and sensation upon its 1987 publication. However, as Kan states:

Banana's works with such characteristics were highly appreciated by much older, male critics. Yet for Banana's real readers, who were women in their teens and twenties, such characteristics were nothing extraordinary since the motifs found in Banana's works had long been explored in various ways within the world of *shōjo* manga, another cultural form for young women (Kan, 2005: 13).

What exactly are these "characteristics" or motifs that were so new to Japanese contemporary literature yet somewhat banal within the world of *shōjo* manga? Several are identifiable even from the short plot summary above.

First, issues concerning family –not the stereotypical nuclear family, but rather the atypical family that results from, for example, death or difficult relationships between members—are a recurrent motif in *shōjo* manga⁸. This relates to another motif, that being the discovery or establishment of the pseudo-family: by this I mean a type of community without blood relations, such as a group of friends or roommates that provides the protagonist with a place she feels she belongs (see, for example, Fujimoto, 2008).

Another such motif is the questioning of stereotypical gender roles. Experimenting with the idea of gender roles has all but been a tradition in *shōjo* manga since the 1970s alongside heteronormative romantic love ideology: the protagonist is "chosen" by her love interest to become his partner. Some motifs in *Kitchen*, such as the young man working as a florist and the transsexual father (now mother) working at a gay bar, are somewhat typical in the world of *shōjo* manga. Cross-dressing, both men as women and women as men, is extremely common⁹. When it comes to men dressing as women, the aim is to have them be even more feminine and beautiful than the female characters. The androgynous "beautiful boys" are also typical in *shōjo* manga¹⁰, although discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. Significant is the reason Eriko becomes a woman: "He thought he would never fall in love again¹¹". Apparent here is a hint of both romantic love ideology and heteronormative thinking (why did he need to cease being a man just because he would never love another woman?), combined with the questioning of stereotypical gender roles.

With an abundance of works treating such motifs, these common features are evident to readers of *shōjo* manga. Indeed, the similarity between the motifs in *Kitchen* and various *shōjo* manga works was noted almost immediately upon the novel's publication (for example, Takahashi, 1988, quoted in Hara, 2012: 67). However, until recently there had been no attempts to compare it with certain *shōjo* manga works to identify common elements. In her two studies, Hara (2012, 2013) compares *Kitchen* to two works by Ōshima Yumiko (b. 1947). Ōshima is one of the classical *shōjo* manga artists who have revolutionised the genre by broadening its themes and developing techniques to express the inner world of characters¹². Hara points out that Yoshimoto names Ōshima in her essays and interviews as being a strong influence in her work (Hara, 2012:54-55). In her 2012 study, Hara compares *Kitchen* and its sequel *Kitchen 2* to Ōshima's *Shichigatsu nanoka ni* ("On the Seventh of July"), published in 1976, to identify the similarities and differences in terms of plot and motif. Although there are several differences in setting, structure and theme, Hara identifies key similarities between the two. These include the existence of the beautiful "mother", who is actually a man (and the reason for the cross-dressing is the death of his loved one), and the orphaned protagonist is given a "pseudo-family" (Hara, 2012: 59). In her 2013 study, Hara compares *Kitchen* to another famous work by Ōshima, *Banana bureddo no puding* ("Banana Bread Pudding"), published in 1977, and many other works by the same author in order to deepen the analysis of the concept of "pseudo-family" that is so prevalent in the world of *shōjo* manga.

⁷ *sono zentai kara kamoshidasareru seimei no yure mitaina azayaka na hikari –ningen ja nai mitai datta.*

The version of the novel *Kitchen* used in this paper is an e-book on the website booklive.jp; therefore, the citations do not have page numbers.

⁸ The atypical family and pseudo-family can be found in numerous *shōjo* manga works, for example, *Nana* (2000-) by Yazawa Ai and *Umimachi daiari* ("Seaside Town Diary") (2006-2018) by Yoshida Akimi, to name two.

⁹ The protagonist of *Princess Knight* (1953), as explained in the Introduction, is a cross-dresser. Cross-dressing features in many other manga genres but has always been particularly prevalent in *shōjo* manga (e.g., the famous lady Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles* by Ikeda Riyoko, 1972-1973).

¹⁰ The tradition started in the early 1970s, love and relationships between androgynous *bishōnen* (beautiful boys) being the central theme in some classical works such as *The Heart of Thomas* (Hagio, 1974) and *Kaze to ki no uta* ("The Poem of Wind and Trees") (Takemiya, 1976-1984).

¹¹ "Mou daremo sukini narisouni naikarattesa"

¹² For example, Fujimoto, in an interview, suggests that Ōshima might have been the first *shōjo* manga artist to try constructing the story based solely on the subjective viewpoint of the protagonist (Fukuda *et al.*, 2014: 188). It can be argued that *The Star of Cottonland* by Ōshima, which is discussed in section 3.1. of this paper, is a good example of this: it is narrated from the viewpoint of a kitten who believes she will grow into a human, and therefore all cats including herself are depicted in quasi-human form.

Treat (1993) analyzes Yoshimoto's work in relation to more general *shōjo* culture, which includes *shōjo* manga. For example, he points out the frequent lack of stereotypical patriarchal family and the absence of a father in Yoshimoto's novels (Treat, 1993: 370), although the idea of family as a kind of sanctuary is evident: "The ideal family in Banana's stories, as I have indicated, is never a genetic given but instead a willed construct" (Treat, 1993: 374). Here again we note the importance of pseudo-family that can give a person a place to be and to return to. Treat also describes how "(y)oung male characters in her fiction, the characters to whom *shōjo* are emotionally attracted, are very *shōjo*-like themselves: they are rather effeminate, prone to tears, and attuned emotionally to their *shōjo* friends" (Treat, 1993: 375) and suggests they are similar to the male characters "in the manga culture out of which Banana emerges" (1993: 375).

2.2. Style

The similarity between Yoshimoto's work and *shōjo* manga is not limited to the motifs and themes, as it is also apparent in the use of Japanese language. It is not easy to discuss the differences between various Japanese language styles in English; however, in short, Yoshimoto's style can be described to be simple and easy to understand, as if the spoken language was written down without any change. Treat also comments on Yoshimoto's language: it is "easy to understand" and is both "colloquial" and "real" but, more interestingly, it is a style that can only be approved "if the *world of girls* therein described is the idealised ideological *lived* experience of those fans themselves" (Treat, 1993: 360).

Indeed, when the novel was published, the newness of its simple and colloquial Japanese was immediately apparent to readers. Colloquial Japanese is used throughout the narration, as is the shortened form (for example, *donnano demo*¹³), onomatopoeia and mimetic words. Another feature is the combining of different registers –for example, informal spoken paraphrases written in *hiragana* combined with *kango* (words written with only ideograms), which are closer to the written formal language (for example, *honno sukoshi mashi na shisou*¹⁴). This creates a feeling of exaggeration in descriptions of quotidian matters, something common to the language of *shōjo* manga. The same can be said about cutting sentences in the middle or using exclamation marks after the first word in a sentence (for example, *Shikashi! Soushite bakari mo irare nakatta*¹⁵). The use of irregular units of sentences, both in narration and dialogue, is reminiscent of the speech balloons used in manga that can divide one sentence into two or three units. Such features create what Treat describes as "(t)he effect of direct, intimate, and subjectifying address: that Banana is literally speaking privately and in confidence to a reader assumed to be a fellow *shōjo*" (Treat, 1993: 361). This feeling of intimacy is strongly reminiscent of the definition of *shōjo* manga by Fujimoto, which was cited in the first section of this paper: "a medium that has *compathy* as its very basic function" (Fujimoto, 2008: 8).

Haga points out that Yoshimoto's writing style has been highly criticised in the U.S. for being "monotonous", "banal", "clichéd", and "jejune". He argues that it would be difficult, first, for readers to understand and appreciate Yoshimoto's style if they are unfamiliar with *shōjo* manga.

Yoshimoto's style is similar to the style of poetic and sentimental monologues that are frequently found in *shōjo* manga. If the reader is familiar with *shōjo* manga, then s/he can enjoy the images of beautiful characters and scenery associated with such style and feel consoled and relaxed, just as they would from reading manga (Haga, 2013: 97).

Haga values this style and in the same study explains that:

It is said that one of the distinguishing features of Yoshimoto's novels is their original writing style, which is simple and light, influenced by *shōjo* manga and popular youth literature (*raito noveru* or light novel)¹⁶. Such a writing style, which represents *shōjo* culture, creates somewhat comical, cool and objective expressions that attract readers who are constantly fighting against the tough reality and who are looking for a form of escape (Haga, 2013: 104).

It is not only a lack of cultural knowledge that may prevent readers from appreciating Yoshimoto's style, but also, suggests Haga, the fact that readers of the English version cannot truly appreciate the innovative writing style of the Japanese original (Haga, 2013: 104). He cites Maynard, who identifies five types of rhetoric used by Yoshimoto and argues that they are all lost in the English translation. Haga suggests that three of these five rhetoric types, "self-quotation", "style shifts", and "the self-referencing manipulation", are features "prevalent in *shōjo* culture, such as manga and youth popular novels, and the daily conversation of *otaku* girls" (Haga, 2013: 106). In the following sections, we will examine whether or not these features and the characteristics mentioned earlier (shortened form, combinations of different registers, etc.) appear in Miura's work.

¹³ "Whatever sort". If it is not shortened, it would be "*donnamono demo*".

¹⁴ "A thought that is a little better (than...)". *Honno sukoshi*, or "a little bit", is a colloquial expression, whereas the term *shisou*, which means ideas/ideology/philosophy, is a *kango*.

¹⁵ "But! I could not just stay like that."

¹⁶ Note added by the author of this paper.

3. The Tradition Continues: Miura Shion as a Case Study

As we came to understand in the previous section, a number of researchers have studied the connection between Yoshimoto Banana's works (especially *Kitchen*) and *shōjo* manga. This is not surprising since *Kitchen* is considered the first work to import so many features of *shōjo* manga into Japanese contemporary literature. Since its publication more than thirty years ago, the examination of features that were common between manga (including *shōjo* manga) and works of contemporary literature ceased to be extraordinary. Boundaries are not as great between contemporary literature and various forms of popular culture, and many novels have been rewritten as manga (for example, *The Briefcase* by Kawakami Hiromi, and *The Professor and His Beloved Equation* by Ogawa Yōko) and as *anime* (for example, *Run with the Wind* by Miura Shion). The media mix between manga, youth popular literature (*raito noveru* or light novel), and *anime* has been a long tradition, but what we see today is the inclusion of more "literary" works. One contemporary literary author who is most frequently associated with both *shōjo* and BL manga is Miura Shion. (BL stands for Boys' Love and is a genre targeting heterosexual women that derives from *shōjo* manga; its main theme is romantic and sexual relationships between male characters).

Born 12 years after Yoshimoto, Miura was 24 when she published her first novel in 2000: *Kakutou suru mono ni maru* ("Approval for Those Who Wrestle"). It is about the job-hunt struggles of final-year university students. Since then, she has published more novels as well as essays, winning several literary prizes including Naokishō, one of Japan's best-known literary prizes, in 2006. Her novels, many of which have been made into other forms of popular culture—including *anime*, manga, TV series, and films—have a variety of themes. Some are based on very detailed and thorough research on specialised professions (such as *The Great Passage*) or traditional performance art (such as *Bukka wo ezu* or "Yet to Become Buddha"), and sports (such as *Run with the Wind*). Others are more centralised in relationships (including romantic relationships) between characters that develop within rather extraordinary settings, such as an odd-job company or a house shared by women of various ages, with or without blood relations. Human relationships are a central theme in them all.

Miura has also published an extensive number of essay collections, which are mainly book reviews, literary criticism or narratives about her daily life. Relevant among these is the last type, in which her writing style is clearly both colloquial and comical. Indeed, we can find all the characteristics identified in section 2.2. about Yoshimoto's writing style in Miura's essays. Section 3.2. provides examples that allow for an examination of the common elements between her writing style and the language used in manga.

Finally, Miura is known for being a prolific reader (as demonstrated in her essays on books), including manga. She is a novelist and essayist strongly associated with manga, and we see this in various ways. For example, *shōjo* manga artists such as Matsunae Akemi and Unno Chika illustrated (and wrote afterwords in manga format for) Miura's essay volumes, and Miura wrote the afterword for one of the most influential critiques of *shōjo* manga, *Watashi no ibasho wa doko ni aruno?* ("Where is the place I belong?") by Fujimoto, the work cited in this paper's introduction. Here, Miura begins her afterword with the following passage:

If there was no manga in this world, I would have been able to spend more time on love affairs or on work or on washing my face. However, if there was no manga in this world, I would not have known most of the pleasures of life, and would not have had any viewpoint from which to think about society and human beings, and that would have been very unfortunate (Miura in Fujimoto, 2008: 443).

In the same afterword, she writes that the "largest part of my mind and body is made of *shōjo* manga" (Miura in Fujimoto, 2008: 444). Miura herself has written a collection of essays/reviews on BL manga. *Shumi ja nainda* ("This Is Not Just a Hobby"), published in 2006, introduces various BL manga and their authors, with illustrations by Atori Keiko, a manga artist also known for her illustrations for BL novels. In the foreword, Miura explains why she wrote so many essays about BL manga:

[...] since then, I continued writing about Boys' Love manga for four and a half years, for the following reasons:

1. Because I love it.
2. Because I wanted to think about why I love it.
3. Because I wanted to talk with someone about the works I love (Miura, 2006: 6).

These factors confirm that Miura Shion is a good case to use in the examination of the connection between *shōjo* manga to Japanese contemporary literature, a connection that began with Yoshimoto Banana.

3.1. Motifs

In section 2.1., we saw several motifs and themes used by Yoshimoto that are identified as common in both her works and *shōjo* manga. Before we compare a short novel by Miura, *Haruta no mainichi* ("The Days of Haruta"), with a work by Ōshima Yumiko, it would be worth examining if and how the motifs identified in section 2.1 appear in works by Miura.

The first element was about family: the loss of family or atypical forms of family, and the creation of a pseudo-family, which provides the protagonists with a “place to be”. This motif is present in many of Miura’s works as well. For example, in *Haruta no mainichi*, the parents of Asako, a young woman who is the object of love of the protagonist, Haruta, died many years earlier (this is hinted at in the work) and Asako lives totally alone. As for the creation of the pseudo-family, probably the most salient example is *Ano ie ni kurasu yonin no onna* (“Four Women Living in That House”), a novel published in 2015. The main theme is the development of intimate and family-like relations between three women in their 20s and 30s who are not related to each other and the mother of one of them, who live in the same house. Unlike Yoshimoto, many of Miura’s protagonists are not *shōjo* –they might be too old to be *shōjo*, or they might be males, even animals. Still, we can see this theme of pseudo-family and communities without blood relations where protagonists feel a sense of belonging. This motif of community is often expressed in high-school and junior-high-school settings in *shōjo* manga. When authors want to create deeper relationships that develop as a result of the sharing of daily life, then a dormitory setting is often used: the most famous example of this is *Here is Greenwood* (1987-1991) by Nasu Yukie. The community-building between young male students that results from their sharing daily life, which is the main theme of this manga, can also be found in a novel by Miura published in 2006, *Run with the Wind*. The story is about ten male university students, all very different in character and abilities, who as a team train to compete in the intercollegiate marathon relay race. While living together in a student house, they develop into a closely-knit community. Thus, pseudo-family seems to be an important theme in Miura’s works as well.

The second element mentioned in section 2.1. is the questioning of stereotypical heteronormative gender roles. An example of this can be found in Miura’s debut novel *Kakutou suru mono ni maru* (“Approval for Those Who Wrestle”). A best friend of the protagonist is gay, and although the character himself never talks openly about it, his secret affection towards one of the male professors at the university is clear. Other examples are the two related short novels in the collection *Kimi wa Polaris* (“You are Polaris”) published in 2007. The protagonist and his male friend are university students who have been close since childhood. The protagonist knows that what he feels towards his friend, Terashima, is romantic love, but Terashima is oblivious to the protagonist’s feelings. The protagonist, as a good friend, has to help Terashima each time he falls in love with a woman. The story focuses on the protagonist’s bitter-sweet feelings, with some comical elements. Another example of same-sex romance and friendship is in the more recently published novel *Nonohana tsūshin* (“Wild Flower Correspondence”, 2018), which is about a decades-long romantic relationship between two women.

As such, we can find both elements discussed in section 2.1. in works by Miura; furthermore, in a comparison of one of her works with a *shōjo* manga work, we can see further similarities.

The work used as the example here is *Haruta no mainichi*, a short story from the collection *Kimi wa Polaris*. The overall theme of the collection is romantic love, as it is in this story, except here the protagonist, Haruta, is a dog who is in love with his owner, Asako. The story is narrated by Haruta, who uses the personal pronoun *ore* (which means “I” but which is normally used in male informal speech). What he says to Asako or her lover, Yonekura, is indicated by quotation marks to distinguish it from the narration, which is in the first person (the voice of Haruta). Because the other characters talk to or answer him in the way people do with dogs, the conversation seems to flow without miscommunication, and it is easy to forget that the protagonist is a dog.

The story is about Haruta, Asako and Yonekura. Haruta, a young male dog, was a stray before Asako, a young female freelance book designer, adopts him three years prior to when the story begins. Having lost both parents, Asako lives alone in a house, and Haruta becomes her only family and partner... or so Haruta believes. One day, Asako invites Yonekura home. Yonekura asks Asako to marry him, which infuriates Haruta. However, various incidences cause Haruta to accept Yonekura, be it unwillingly. Haruta thinks:

Asako’s heartbeat is much slower than mine. Because the speeds of our lives are different. It is painful and I am sad. I feel Asako’s sadness, but there is just so little I can do for her (Miura, 2011: 318).

Realizing that as a dog he will not live as long as Asako, Haruta decides to accept Yonekura, his rival. Yet he thinks:

No matter what I do, I will die before Asako. It is painful, but nothing can be done about this. But I will not be scared to love her because of that. As long as I live, I will be with her and make her happy. I know I can do this.

Because Asako is my first and my last... my most precious love (Miura, 2011: 329).

This novel can be compared to a *shōjo* manga work by Ōshima Yumiko entitled *Keitogen* (“Woolen Chord”), which uses similar motifs. *Keitogen* was first published in 1981 as an independent chapter in *The Star of Cottonland* (1978-1987), which comprises a series of episodes about a white kitten called Chibineko. In the series, illustrations of Chibineko are of a little girl aged about six, dressed in a white, frilly apron dress. She believes she will become a human one day, and the only features to indicate that she is a cat are two big ears poking through her wavy hair and the tail poking from beneath her dress. In this world, all cats are depicted in this quasi-human form. The words spoken by Chibineko and the other cats to humans appear in speech balloons. The cats understand what the humans say, just as Haruta understands everything Asako says, and they talk to humans even though humans do not understand them.

Keitogen is an episode about a middle-aged cat (“nice middle” as he describes himself) called Nyaanya and his owner, Mikan. Mikan is a high-school student who brought Nyaanya home four years earlier after finding him on the street. Now Nyaanya is an adult cat, depicted as a man of about forty-five, who is tall, slim, and handsome, and who wears a white shirt, black waistcoat and bow tie, and whose cat ears protrude from his hair. He sees Mikan and ponders:

Four years ago, Mikan was already as she is today, but I was just a little baby. It does not make much sense that although we have spent the same four years together, I am now much older than her. I feel my age would be just before “nice middle” if I were a human. In these four years, Mikan has become my parent, big sister, friend and little sister, but she has always been and probably always will be my dearest love (Ōshima, 1994: 16).

This monologue can probably be categorised in terms of what Haga defines as a “poetic and sentimental” (Haga, 2013: 97) style of *shōjo* manga. Unlike Asako, Mikan is not an orphan. However, her parents do not understand their growing daughter who is uncomfortable in a rigid and controlled system of high school. She tries to escape from all this with Nyaanya and decides to become a cat, but without success. Mikan plays truant from high school one day and goes to a field with Nyaanya, where she tries to imitate Nyaanya’s behaviour, finding food, rolling around and scratching. What she does not know is that all of this is observed by a student, who is known for his bad behaviour, from her high school called Hayakawa, a boy who is interested in making a film. He asks Mikan to star in his film, and although both a high-school teacher and Mikan’s parents disapprove of Hayakawa, a mutual attraction gradually grows between Mikan and Hayakawa. Hayakawa films Mikan and Nyaanya, and seeing them together, Nyaanya thinks:

Eventually the parents will give in, just like I got used to Hayakawa holding me. He comes to hold me without warning when I am asleep.

My winter hair is shining on the blanket...

Within two or three years, I might be old and fragile. But in that film, Mikan and I will still be jumping and running around just like now. Mikan will look at it and will remember me even when I am dead. I can forgive Hayakawa for that reason (Ōshima, 1994: 53).

The similarities between the motifs are clear. Furthermore, both works use *gijinka* or anthropomorphism as the central technique. Probably the most famous work in modern Japanese literature to use this technique is *I Am a Cat* by Natsume Sōseki at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which the protagonist cat observes and criticises human society. This technique, however, is much more prevalent in works of manga and *anime* (for example, Endo, 2017). As manga has illustrations, the anthropomorphism in *The Star of Cottonland* is more evident: Nyaanya the cat is a handsome, middle-aged man dressed in a waistcoat, although his ears protrude from his hair. However, even though there is no illustration, Haruta’s description of himself at the beginning of the story could readily be interpreted as that of a young man, not a dog (there are no illustrations):

I am rather popular with girls. Oh, well, to tell you the truth, I am extremely popular with all sorts –whatever sex, age or race. You know that, Asako, don’t you?

So don’t be jealous every time I talk to other girls. It is not my fault that I am popular. I am good-looking, kind, and I have a charm that comforts people. It is inevitable that I would be popular. If you want to complain, complain to the God who made me such an attractive man (Miura, 2011: 293).

There are other commonalities in the way anthropomorphism is used. For example, both Haruta and Nyaanya talk to humans, their speech distinguishable from their narration through the use of quotation marks or speech balloons. As explained above, humans talk to them and they answer, and although humans do not understand them, the conversations continue. Both are passionately in love with young women who found and adopted them when they were little, although their reactions differ when they see their human rivals. Haruta thinks, “If the one Asako really loves is only me, then that is fine. I believe it and I will forgive Asako with my big heart even if she has flings with men from time to time. I can’t help it, I love her. I love her, so I can forgive everything” (Miura, 2011: 296). Meanwhile, Nyaanya thinks, “My heart sank, because Mikan’s heart was pounding thinking of that man. Her heartbeat is lighter and faster than yesterday, and will become even more so tomorrow, and the day after... If Mikan one day goes away from me, if I think about it, then it might be easier to bite her neck vertebrae right now and just kill her” (Ōshima, 1994: 50). Their feelings are both deep and sincere, and eventually both accept the human rivals for the same reason –that their lives, as a dog and a cat, will be shorter than those of the humans, and therefore they need someone to entrust their loved ones to.

3.2. Style

In section 2.2., we see the features of Yoshimoto’s writing style that are similar to the language used in *shōjo* manga. In this section, focus will be on finding these features in Miura’s work.

As mentioned, Miura is both a novelist and an essayist. The features discussed in section 2.2. are prevalent in her essays on matters of daily life. However, this is not to say that these features do not exist in her works of fiction: for example, *Haruta no mainichi* is written in first-person informal spoken narrative. Haruta calls himself *ore* like a young man, and in the narration we find many interjections such as “*Ah*” (Miura, 2011: 296), “*Oh, Asako!*” (Miura, 2011: 296), and “*Oioi* (Oh, dear)” (Miura, 2011: 298). These features draw similarities with Yoshimoto’s style described in section 2.2.

However, if we turn to her essays, the similarity between the language used in them and in manga, including *shōjo* manga, becomes much clearer. We will look at one short essay, *Ore no i, soakuhin* (“My Stomach, an Inferior Product”), in the 2008 essay compilation *Otome nageyari* (“Slovenly Maiden”).

The essay talks about various episodes such as the price increase of tobacco; thoughts about a digital female voice that gives automatic instructions on the use of electrical home appliances; and comments on various books read by Miura, all intertwined with lamentations about her stomach upset. It is written in first-person, informal spoken language; however, in the title she refers to herself as *ore*, which is the first-person pronoun used in rough male speech. In the rest of the text, meanwhile, she refers to herself as *watashi* (“I” in neutral form, often used in female speech). This type of language or style shift occurs often in her essays, going back and forth between male and female speeches, which gives the impression that she is “acting” the part of characters. The exaggerated use of various speech styles in Japanese to show the stereotypical prototypes of characters is a technique frequently used in manga and *anime*: it is termed “role language” (Kinsui, 2017). Also frequent in her essays is the type of style shift that Maynard (1999) and Haga (2013) discuss, that being a sudden insertion of the long-form verb conjugation in direct addresses to the audience within the text written using the short-form conjugation (which is closer to written language and often used in monologues or third-person narratives). This is the rhetoric that Haga explains as being “the style change that makes the readers realise the existence of the narrator who distances herself slightly from reality” (Haga, 2013: 106) and considers as being a feature of language used in *shōjo* culture products (2013: 106).

Another feature mentioned in section 2.2. is the use of informal, spoken shortened forms in the text that are frequent in the essay. Some exaggerated forms of spoken language, which are very similar to the spoken language in manga, are also frequent. For example, in the narration there are phrases such as “*Na, nanigoto?* (Wha... what?)” (Miura, 2008: 98) and “*Uuu, giboichi warui* (Uhhh, I feel sick)” (Miura, 2008: 97). The second example is especially interesting, as *giboichi warui* is the “sick version” of the phrase *kimochi warui*, which means “I feel sick”. This type of exaggerated speech is also common in the language used in manga.

Finally, the combination of words and paraphrases with different registers that are used to achieve comical and exaggerated effect, as mentioned in section 2.2., is also common in Miura’s essays. This can be seen in such a sentence as “*Habu to manguuse ga waga fukukou nai de shitou wo kurihirogeteru kanji da* (it is as if a habu and a mongoose are in mortal combat within my abdominal cavity)” (Miura, 2008: 97), which describes her stomach upset.

4. Conclusion

As described, the tradition of importing manga elements into literature, which began with Yoshimoto Banana’s novel *Kitchen* in 1987, seems to continue, with strong connections between *shōjo* manga and the work of one of Japan’s most active contemporary authors. This is not surprising if, as Miyadai *et al.* argue (2007), the influence of *shōjo* manga media did indeed increase in the 1970s among girls of a certain age. The connections can be seen in both motifs and writing style. Although Miura is the author most strongly associated with manga, it may be possible to find this type of connection in the work of other, especially female, authors as well, which is a subject for future studies.

This connection certainly relates to the phenomenon of convergence between various cultural forms we observe today since more novels and literary works, including those by classical authors, are being transformed into manga and *anime*. Sharing common elements in different cultural forms, as shown in this case study, could be one of the factors promoting this convergence.

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