

Ananas

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Word Count:

In *Kitchen*, written by Banana Yoshimoto and translated by Megan Backus, Yoshimoto highlights the fact that people find comfort in chaos through contrasting imagery. *Kitchen* is, in itself, a novel of contrasts. Yoshimoto repeatedly contrasts images of light and dark, warm and cold, and noise and silence. The dark, cold, and silence are all controlled systems, but are, as a result, devoid of interaction. In contrast, the light, warmth, and noise are messy and imperfect. However, Yoshimoto, through Mikage's attraction to light, warmth, and noise suggests that that is the crux of life, and is something to be sought and embraced. Through contrasting imagery, Yoshimoto illustrates how chaos is inherent—and required—in life.

Yoshimoto's contrast of light and dark calls back to a time when humans were primitive, and all life revolved around the fire. Mikage, in the much more modern time period of the 1980s, finds her own fire, revolving around "[t]ruly great people [that] emit a light that warms the hearts of those around them" (Yoshimoto 55). Yoshimoto suggests that, indeed, truly great people are like small fires, beacons of light in the darkness. However, the nature of the fire is still chaotic,

as a fire can just as easily burn down a mountainside as it can thaw frozen hearts. Mikage, after her grandmother's death, begins to believe that life is a "truly dark and solitary path" (Yoshimoto 21), which is a direct and symbolic reference to her loneliness. Yoshimoto emphasizes the fact that darkness is lifeless through the words "solitary path." There is no guidance and no interaction in loneliness. Furthermore, Mikage notes that "when [a] light is put out, a heavy shadow of despair descends" (Yoshimoto 53). Yoshimoto reaffirms the fact that companionship is like a fire, giving off light, and that the shadows—the lifeless—take over in the darkness. After Eriko's death, Mikage's "mind was blank; in [her] eyes, everything was dark" (Yoshimoto 49). In Turkish, when one says their eyes are dark, it means they have lost consciousness. In Japanese, this would translate to "go to the end." Looking at the above quote from that perspective suggests that Yoshimoto is emphasizing the finality of darkness. There is no interaction at "the end." There is no life at "the end." On the other hand, Mikage states that the moon "[that] was almost full shed an incredible brightness" (Yoshimoto 61). Yoshimoto suggests that even when someone is shaken, the light of companionship is still strong. The fire still burns bright, and interactions can still occur.

The warmth of the fire was just as important as the light it cast into the night. Mikage, while visiting her old apartment, notes that it is "cold and dark, [with] not a sigh to be heard" (Yoshimoto 22). The fact that Mikage notes the coldness of the apartment emphasizes its lifelessness. Just as a corpse gets cold over time, the apartment gets cold when there is no life, and, as such, feels dead to Mikage. Mikage even notes that "time died" in the apartment (Yoshimoto 22). Yoshimoto emphasizes the stagnant nature of the apartment; the dynamic chaos of life has left it. In contrast, when a spring storm strikes, Mikage notes how a "warm wind came roaring up" (Yoshimoto 28). The storm symbolizes the chaos of life, warm and swirling, just like the warm winds. Yoshimoto

emphasizes how even though the storm can be destructive, it is simply a part of nature, just as chaos is a part of life. In that regard, Mikage notes that “it’s cold [when she’s] all alone, [and when] somebody’s there... it’s warm” (Yoshimoto 4). The fire of companionship will warm those around it.