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White Wings and Black Wings: Ambiguous Dichotomy in Manga and Anime

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Abstract: The deeply intertwined dichotomy of black/evilness and white/goodness continues to have profound influences on people's perspectives of others, often causing tangible and intangible pains to individuals and groups in many parts of the world. Because of the simplicity of the distinction such deeply metaphoric imagery can be ingeniously exploited as a powerful rhetorical form in numerous ways in literary and artistic landscapes as well as in our everyday lives. Relating critically to this intense, deep-seated dichotomy, this paper aims at gaining an insight into the possible meanings conveyed by the imagery in manga/anime of 'winged beings', e.g., angel-like human figures with white wings and/or black (bat-like) wings and question the relevance of the black/white dichotomy, Otherness of these beings, their ambiguous presence as non-human protagonists and the intertextuality of largely Christian iconography within Japanese cotemporary youth cultures. When only white, winged entities appear in the manga/anime narratives, their Otherness, ambiguity and fragility are frequently focused on, rather than their superiority over mere humans. When the black and the white wings are contrasted, the genuine, sympathetic soul often belongs to the black whereas righteousness, intolerance and lack of sympathy are associated with white wings. By characterising them in this way, such narratives can question the presence of the rigid boundary between so-called good and evil, indicating alternative ways of co-existence amongst multiple parties as Others. The manga/anime works being examined include Anno Hideaki's "Neon Genesis Evangelion", CLAMP's "X", Yuki Kaori's "Angel Sanctuary", Hikawa Kyōko's "Kanata kara" (From far away), Watase Yū's "Ceres, Celestial Legend", Miyazaki Hayao's short, music film, "On Your Mark", as well as Tezuka Osamu's stories.

Keywords: White Wings and Black Wings, Ambiguous Dichotomy of Black and White, Manga and Anime, Social Commentary, Youth Cultures

THE DEEPLY INTERTWINED dichotomy of black/evil and white/good has had, and still has, a profound influence on human perspectives, often causing tangible and intangible pain to individuals and groups in many parts of the world. As exemplified by animistic Japanese Shintō beliefs, 'white' often signifies purity, thus goodness and life, in contrast to 'black' with darkness and death. Because of the simplicity of the distinction, the set of imagery is ingeniously exploited as a powerful form of rhetoric in numerous scenes in the literary and artistic landscapes as well as in our everyday lives.

In relation to the intense, deep-seated dichotomy of black/evil and white/good, this paper aims to shed light on the imagery of winged beings, such as human figures with white feathery wings and black bat-like wings in manga and anime and to question the relevance of the black/white dichotomy, their Otherness, their ambiguous presence as non-human protagonists, and the intertextuality of the largely Christi-

an imageries within Japanese cotemporary youth cultures.

There is a strong affinity between the imagery of winged human figures such as angels and story-driven, iconographic manga and anime texts, in terms of their rich symbolism, strong ambiguity and emotionality and high intertextuality, hybridity and fluidity.¹ Manga/anime is a powerful medium with a strong focus on issues of Otherness and individuality, as pioneered and exemplified by Tezuka Osamu's works (Ishigami Mitsutoshi 1989; Sakurai Tetsuo 1990; Takeuchi Osamu 1992; Frederik L. Schodt 1993, 1996, 2007; Helen McCarthy 1999; Ōno Akira 2000; Sharon Kisella 2000; Susan J. Napier 2001/2005; Kusanagi Satoshi 2003; Fred Patten 2004; Anne Allison 2006 etc.). The visualised Otherness includes winged beings. In manga/anime, such imagery has been popularly employed under the influence of Christian imagery of angels. Light, soft, white feathers are also frequently and elegantly scattered in the background as a clichéd image typic-

¹ The medium has flourished in the post-war period under the strong influence of the West, particularly America. The developments in the stylistic innovation of manga/anime were largely achieved by the gifted, ambitious pioneer of the medium, Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), who is referred to as the "god of manga". His development of "story manga" as a graphic novel was particularly important, thereby the medium has become "another language" (Schodt 1996, p.26) and provides limitless fictional arenas for artists to explore "nearly every imaginable subject" (ibid., p.27). As for the characteristics of manga texts, see for example, Schodt 1983, 1996; Fujimoto Yukari 1998, 2001; and for anime, Napier 2001/2005.



ally in cases such as the death of a close person, as if s/he leaves their feathers on ascending to the heavens.

John Stephens and Robyn McCallum maintain that “stories retold from other cultures involve not just questions of trampling on religious beliefs in quest of some vague intercultural understanding... but also involve misapprehension and misapplication of metanarratives” (1998, p.7). The imagery of winged human figures in manga/anime has developed through deconstructing and/or subverting metanarratives and metaethics of the original (Western) sources and freely integrating incongruent sources either consciously or unconsciously. For example, manga/anime works include numerous Christian images of God, angels, Heaven and Hell not as a holistic entity but as dissected ingredients. Christ is generally absent from the imagery. God, if present at all, is often strongly humanised, and possibly comical, e.g., the winged god in Tezuka’s *Ribon no Kishi (Princess Knight, 1953-56)*. Clearly, gods in manga/anime are not the Christian God in a religious sense, but similar to the polytheist and human-like gods of Greece, Rome and Japan. These gods and angels, therefore, do not necessarily embody ultimate goodness. They are ambiguous, in the same way as their opponents such as Satan and Death, who are also humanised and not always bad and cruel.

Before examining the imagery of winged beings in manga/anime texts, the symbolism and implication of the colours and the shapes of the wings will be looked at. What do the colours black and white symbolise in Japanese texts? Are they absolutely polarised as opposites or do they share some commonalities or exchangeability?

Colours are a communicative medium and have conceptual and emotional meanings, similar to linguistic discourses (Matsuoka Takeshi 1983). They are not only perceived optically but also emotionally and invoke specific colour-related sentiments (Noguchi Hiromi 1982). Both white and black are achromatic yet to the human eye, they are perceived contrastingly. White is made visible by reflection and is susceptible to any taint, thus symbolising purity. In contrast, black absorbs all colours, thus implying impurity. Kojima Naomi however regards white as ‘light and cool’ and black as ‘heavy and hot’ (2002, p.194), a view which allows for the richness of these colours’ symbolic and artistic significance. Black and white have been regarded as two of four basic colours (blue, red, white and black) in ancient Japan (Satake Akihiro in Noguchi, *ibid.*), while Ihara Aki (1982) considers them as conceptual colours. As a result, in Japan the colours of black and white are strongly associated with formality and

a sense of spirituality, as evident in the dress favoured for ceremonial functions (e.g., weddings and funerals/mourning).

There is a widely held impression of black as dark and evil, as exemplified by expressions such as ‘black list’.² The dark image of black is seen in the outfits of wicked and/or ambiguous characters including *ninja* where it camouflages the wearer against the background.³ Under Chinese influence, in *Ni hon shoki (The Chronicles of Japan, 720)*, the concept occurs as a term which can be read as *kuroki* (black) or *kitanaki* (dirty) *kokoro* (mind and heart/soul) as opposed to *akaki* (red) or *akirakanaru* (white) *kokoro*, (Noguchi *op.cit.*). The contrast between black and white in a judgemental sense is typified by the terms *kuro* (black) for ‘guilty’ and *shiro* (white) for ‘innocence’. The word *kuromaku* (lit. black curtain) also means a manipulative mastermind generally in a negative sense. In order to show wickedness and/or extreme ambiguity, the word *kuro* also frequently appears in titles of works such as thrillers and dystopian fantasies in novels and manga/anime, including Okamura Tensai’s anime, *Darker than Black - Kuro no keiyaku-sha* (2007) where the main protagonist is ‘Kuro no shinigami’ (Black Death).

Black is however far more complex than just wickedness. It is also the colour of grief, formality, wisdom, fashionableness and so forth. According to a survey by Nihon Shikisai Kenkyūjo (Japan Color Research Institute), the standard Japanese image of the colour black includes the attributes of dark, gloomy, mature, deep, heavy, masculine, hard, quiet, sombre, intelligent, strong and cold (Noguchi, *ibid.*), whereby Noguchi deduces the essence of the image of the colour as both evil and sorrow.

The sad image of black particularly associates with (Buddhist) mourning attire from the ancient period (e.g., Ihara 1967), in which not only people, but also the residence, has been furnished in black (or dark gray, depending on the relationship with the deceased) during mourning (Ike Kōzō 1989). Buddhism in Japan strongly relates to death as it generally pertains to death-related ceremonies and burial, unlike Shintō which abhors deaths as impure. Accordingly, the colour black in the Japanese cultural context strongly associates with grief, rather than darkness. Black had been, and became normal mourning attire in Japan again, in the early 20th century under the influence of the West. Throughout history, Buddhists’ robes are mainly black.

White in Japan, on the other hand, has been regarded as a symbol of sanctity, spirituality and cleanliness. In addition, cleanliness has often signified goodness. As a colour of garments and furnish-

² The colour and word black are also used in a positive sense, e.g., *kuro-obi* (black belt) in martial arts.

³ Similar black clothing is also used by puppet theatre stage assistants called *kuroko* (lit. black child).

ings, white has been used to symbolise and empower with spiritual and/or religious significance. In the Heian period (794-1185), for example, an expectant mother, people around her, and the room for giving birth were all attired in white as depicted by Murasaki Shikibu (a Heian court lady and the author of the *Tale of Genji* around 1008).⁴ The formal attire (*sai-fuku*) of priests (*kannushi*) and female attendants (*miko*) in Shitō shrines are white.⁵ However, the formal costumes of people who go on Buddhist pilgrimage to the island of Shikoku are also white, and the dead body has been dressed in white before farewelling close family members. Mourning attire was also white in Japan between the Muromachi period (1336-1573) and the early 20th century.⁶ This suggests the border between black and white is not absolute and is sometimes crossed over.

In relation to the colour implications, images of black and white birds offer some insight. Large white birds like swans and egrets signify dead souls in Japanese mythology. For example, after his death, Yamato Tateru's soul becomes a large white bird and flies around with his wives following him until finally it disappears in the sky (*Kojiki* in 712 and *Nihon shoki* in 720). The general images of the birds are gentle, delicate and ephemeral, partly because they are generally birds of passage, with the accompanying association of melancholy. They are a suitable symbol of pure and innocent souls, and fleeting life.

In contrast, the most popular black birds in Japan are crows (*karasu*), known for the strength of their resilience, ingenuity and adaptability, even to today's city life (Karasawa Kōichi 1988). In many parts of the world, they have been regarded as a sacred bird (related to the Sun), a guide (both in this world and in the other world), and a symbol of the war god, whilst also being seen as a harmful bird. For example, in ABe Yoshitoshi's anime, *Haibane Renmei* (*Charcoal Feather Federation*, 2002),⁷ a crow-like black bird plays an important role as a spiritual guide for Rakka, the protagonist, serving as a bridge between her lost previous life and the current life known as Haibane (lit ash-coloured feathers). Crows commonly appear in mythologies, folktales, Aesop's Fables, and even in biblical texts. In Japanese mythology, in the ancient chronicle *Kojiki*, for example, Yata-karasu is a guide sent to assist a legendary, founding emperor Jimmu. Like those which appear

in Chinese and Greek mythologies, Yata-karasu has three legs and is also respected as a messenger of Kumano Shrine. Its physical, psychological and intellectual strength is evident.

The negative perception of black has altered in recent decades, particularly in relation to the appreciation of its visual richness and fashionableness in 1980s Japan. Wearers of black were sometimes dubbed *karasu-zoku* (tribe of crows). The prevalence of fashionable black has been influenced and typified by, for example, the fashion designer Kawakubo Rei's *Comme des Garçons* brand. Currently, black outfits are again discernible both in everyday life (especially waiters and waitresses) and filmic and manga/anime landscape (e.g., Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* and Larry and Andy Wachowski's *The Matrix* as well as CLAMP's *X*, Kikuchi Hideyuki's *Vampire Hunter D*, Kubo Tite's *Bleach* and its protagonist Kurosaki Ichigo and Ōba Tsugumi's *Death Note*). These protagonists are generally dressed in black and bestowed with strong Otherness with extraordinary strength, ambiguity and complexity, rather than simply evil.

The contrasting qualities of black and white have been explored in manga/anime, often through questioning the dichotomy of black/evil and white/good by suggesting the shallow coldness and righteousness of white and humanistic sorrow and profundity of black. By characterising winged beings in this way, a number of magna/anime narratives challenge the presence of the boundary between so-called good and evil, indicating an alternative, symphonic co-existence of diverse entities of Otherness.

The ambiguity of winged beings is complicated by the black/white dichotomy and a disparity between feathery wings and bat-like wings. Generally, white and feathery wings belong to angels and represent goodness and spirituality, whilst bat-like black wings are seen negatively and used to characterise demonic beings e.g., Satan and Dracula.

The presence of angelic figures is ubiquitous in Japan. However, they were originally rare in Japanese culture. Limited examples may be the masculine *Karura/Duruda* (a bird-like disciple of Buddha originating in India) and/or his descendant, *tengu* (lit. heavenly dog) with its huge, protruding nose, particularly apparent in the medieval imagination.⁸ They are highly hybrid (e.g., Iwai Hiromi 1990) and generally depicted with large feathery wings (either

⁴ The *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* is considered to be completed by 1010. A focus of the diary is the birth of Prince Atsuhira in 1008. For an English translation, see *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* translated by Richard Bowring (1996).

⁵ Female attendants generally wear white top and red *hakama*, although in 'Miko-mai' (Miko's dance), Fukushima prefecture's important intangible cultural heritage, dancers are attired in white.

⁶ The Japanese mourning wear became black under Western influence. In many Asian countries (e.g., Korea), white mourning attire is still commonly used.

⁷ *Haibane* evolved from ABe's *dōjinshi* work, *Old Home no Haibane-tachi* (lit. Haibane in Old Home) and Murakami Haruki's novel, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in 1985 (Mio Bryce, 2006).

⁸ *Tengu* is also often depicted without wings but with a fan (*ha-uchiwa*, lit. feathery fan) for flying.

white or black), although some are shown with bat-like wings.

The imagery of winged angels outside Japan has also evolved intertextually, absorbing different perceptions from periods, places and cultures (e.g., Michel Serres 1993).⁹ The imagery of angelic wings in Christianity derived from winged gods (and angels) in pre-Christian polytheism (e.g., Greek mythology), and other sources including Zoroastrian and Islamic angels. The image of a cute Eros (Cupido in Roman mythology, which is more familiar to Japanese) is particularly popular. The Greek goddess of Victory, Nike is also well known.¹⁰ Wings were not originally essential for Christian angels and were rarely depicted in the Bible; for example, when Abraham receives three angels without knowing their identities. Moreover, angelic wings were not necessarily perceived and illustrated as white but also other colours such as red, blue, gold, brown, gray and even almost black.¹¹ The number of wings was not necessarily two, but sometimes three, four or six.¹² Jutta Ströter-Bender (1988/1996) perceives angelic wings as a vision of the angel's spiritual mobility and freedom and also an embodiment of their aura, i.e., radiation of their energy.

Contemporary imagery of angels is typically androgynous with a strong element of femininity. Their white, feathery wings match their soft femininity. However, this was not so in early Christianity where their masculinity was evident.¹³ The feminine beauty of angels increased through the medieval period, as seen in art works. This trend intensified in the modern period, along with their increased commodification for children, as exemplified by the proliferation of cute Eros-like angels.

Although there are limited examples of almost black feathery angelic wings in paintings,¹⁴ general imagery of black winged beings has developed associations with bat-like wings and malicious personalities, as typified by Gustave Doré's illustration of 'Demons'.¹⁵ Bat-like black wings can be seen as representations of abject abnormality and the cause of severe victimization. Quoting Cirlot, Shelley Chappell (2007, p.87) depicts bats as having "long been culturally abhorred because of their "ambiguous nature", blurring boundaries between rodents and birds, and their wings have been considered an "infernal attribute" (Cirlot 1962 22)". In Bill Brittain's

Wings (1991), a boy Ian develops bat-like wings enabling him to fly, but finally decides to amputate them to pursue a normal life. His wings are hated by his family also due to their shape and colour. Chappell regards Ian as having "a liminal and potentially abject adolescent body", while the development of the bat-like wings is "regressive hybridity".

Hikawa Kyōko's manga *Kanata kara (From Far Away)*, 1993-2003) eloquently utilises the paradigm of black=bat=bad vs white=feather=good to symbolise Izark's dramatic metamorphosis from a human shape to a monstrous figure with bat-like wings, then to an angel-like shape with white, feathery wings, which is seemingly made of light. This fantasy visualises Izark's Otherness and his intersubjective maturation from self-alienation through his love and association with Noriko who has suddenly slipped into a parallel world as Mezame (Awakening) to wake Izark as *Tenjōki* (lit. heavenly demon; a tool of the Source of Darkness to conquer the world).

Izark's first transformation embodies his innate explosive power. It occurs when Noriko has been pinned under rocks. His shock, resentment and desperation releases his violent power, resulting in his full body transmutation into the monstrous *Tenjōki* with bluish-black hard scales, bat-like wings, a horn, sharp fang and claws and cat-like, piecing sky blue eyes and blue gray hair. There is however a conspicuous absence of evil in Izark. Instead, he is full of shame and fear for Noriko's rejection, due to his abject body. He regains his normal self and body, with Noriko's desperate effort to keep him with her, saying, "No! Please don't go... I love you Izark. I don't mind what shape you have. I don't mind who you are. I love you, Izark". She then kisses him and faints. This episode encapsulates Izark's fear (and experience) of victimisation for his 'abject' Otherness, thus the significance of Noriko's genuine love for him. Izark's second metamorphosis into *Tenjōki* is again triggered by Noriko's perils and this time he loses himself due to his extreme anger, grief, fear and frustration in fighting with countless enemies to reach Noriko, until she comes and hugs him. In both cases, evil is entirely absent in Izark and instead, his hopelessness is highlighted.

Izark's white feathery wings are associated with a more typical representation of goodness and/or spirituality. They are as if made of light, matching

⁹ There is even an idea of bodiless angels, that is, 'angels are pure spirits and so should be presumed to be bodiless and, hence, sexless' (Gustav Davidson 1967, p.xxi).

¹⁰ The marble statue, Nike of Samothrace (Winged Victory of Samothrace) in The Louvre Museum is famous and inspirational.

¹¹ See for example, Marco Bussagli's *Angel* (2006/7), a comprehensive collection of Christian paintings of angels.

¹² There are also peculiar animalistic beings with wings, such as unicorns, Pegasus, winged dragons and the Sphinx with human female face, breasts and white wings.

¹³ An image of a masculine angel is visualized, for example, in 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' by Delacroix.

¹⁴ For some examples of black angelic wings, see Bussagli, pp.134, 214 and 252, although they may be considered as shadow and/or dark brown or gray.

¹⁵ See Rosemary Ellen Guiley 2004, p.97

Ströter-Bender's perception of angelic wings as an embodiment of their aura. They first appear at his most critical point – when he has been caught, severely injured and nearly thrown to the bodiless Source of Darkness to amalgamate with it, while he is asking himself who he is. At the exact moment, Noriko rushes in and jumps onto him. When he sees her falling towards him, he finds his answer – “I am not *Tenjōki*. I am Me!” Light immediately emanates from him. Noriko sees him flapping large, white feathery wings and opening his arms for her. These wings are proof that he belongs to the light. They reappear in the final battle with Darkness. Having white wings does not however sublimate him. The story suggests that Izark and Noriko will live, not as heroes but as quiet yet committed members of the community.

Black represents darkness and white represents light in the story. Nonetheless, white does not signify any moralistic and/or religious quality. Rather, it represents his integrity, self esteem, self control and desire for light. Similarly, demonic evil is absent in his shape as a blackish monster. The positive nuance is also endowed by the bluish colouring of his body, as blue is a sacred colour. It indicates that his inherent, potentially dangerous aptitude does not determine his fate as a monster as prophesised, but becomes his real strength under his own control and his intrinsic tendency for light. In addition, the story repeatedly indicates that people are caught and obsessed by darkness due to their despair, loneliness and lack of self esteem. Black wings show Izark's loss of self. That these metamorphoses are caused not by evil but by fear, grief and desperation, indicates the possibility of one's despair as a trigger to join darkness.

In a number of manga/anime narratives, the contrast between white, feathery wings and bat-like black wings is often used to ironically reveal a genuine, sympathetic soul in the black ones and a righteousness, and lack of sympathy and tolerance in the white ones. For instance, Suetsugu Yuki's *Kuroi hane* (lit. black feathers) demonstrates the goodness of a female *akuma* (Demon or Death) with bat-like wings and her intention and capability to seduce men to Hell. With such an intention, however, she falls in love with a caring boy and ends up sacrificing herself to cure his long-term girlfriend's illness. A male *akuma* also sympathises with a boy, who wants to be an astronaut but has to fight with AIDS, by showing him Earth from space before his death and sending his soul to Heaven. The manga includes several *akuma* with black bat-like wings who are assigned to take bad people's souls to Hell and angels with white feathery wings, whose task is

to take good people's souls to Heaven. In this context, their wings are like professional uniforms. They are equally humanistic and often humorous, although the former exhibit a more compassionate understanding of humans due to the conflict between their tasks and their sympathy and emotional commitment toward specific individuals.¹⁶

Nagai Gō's manga *Devilman* (1972-1973) and *Devilman Lady* (1997-2000) utilise and critically subvert the Christian motifs, by positioning the devilman and devilman lady as fighters for humans. The *Devilman* also characterises Satan (an androgynous fallen angel) as compassionate and portrays Satan as fighting (and winning) against the god and his angel army because the god has created demons and then tried to destroy them as rejects when they turned out to be bad.

Yuki Kaori's *Tenshi Kinryōku* (*Angel Sanctuary*, 1994-2000) also extensively exploits the Christian motifs and hierarchical structure of Heaven and Hell and associated angelic and satanic residents, by frequently displacing and reversing their order. For example, although Rosiel is a beautiful angel, he is powerful, cruel and mad. He is regressive and decayed inside. His beautiful exterior with three wings does not originally belong to him but to his twin sister, Alexiel, who has been punished as a fallen angel. Lucifer (with four wings) in Hell, and Uriel in the country of death, display sensitive, complex and tormented personalities. In these narratives, the dichotomy of black and white, good and evil is seriously questioned.

Freed of Christian connotations, white winged beings are also ambiguous. When only a white, winged being appears, its Otherness and ambiguity tends to be focused, rather than conveying simple sublimity and superiority over mere humans. Watase Yū's *Ayashi no Ceres - Tenkū Otogi-zōshi* (*Celestial Legend*: 1996-2000) portrays white winged beings with remarkable hybridity. The story utilises folkloric tales of *ten'nyo* (lit. heavenly woman) which in turn relates to tales of swan maidens. The story evolves around Aya, the girl protagonist and the reincarnation of the *ten'nyo* (alien) Ceres who neither has nor needs wings to fly. Instead, the wings are given to Tōya, Aya's mysterious lover, who evolved from *hagoromo* (or *mana*¹⁷ as Ceres terms it) in order to return it to her. *Mana* is the essential source of the *ten'nyo*'s life and a mechanism to instantly re-organise genes to change body shape and ability. Thereby Tōya is able to change form and have wings. Despite the sublime aura of his wings, they have no spiritual or religious significance, instead, embodying his

¹⁶ The popular *Batman* series have added some positive imagery to black bat-like wings.

¹⁷ Christian imagery is linked here as Ceres declares that *hagoromo* (lit., a feathery robe) is the essential source of her life, which she calls *Mana* (a homonymic echo of the Christian *manna*).

Otherness and super-human capability, neither goodness nor evil.

The Otherness and vulnerability of a winged girl is depicted in Miyazaki Hayao's short, experimental musical film "On Your Mark" (1995) for Japanese pop singers Chage & Aska. It depicts two policemen (seemingly Chage and Asuka) who find an imprisoned girl with feathery white wings and try to rescue and release her. As a backdrop, the film depicts the unsettling (post-disaster) imagery of a nuclear reactor, an empty village and fields. The film includes multiple possible consequences of their rescue attempt. The girl has short hair like Nausiaä in *Kaze no Tani no Nausiaä* (*Nausiaä of the Valley of Wind*, 1984), however, she appears to be far more feminine and fragile. It is unclear whether she is an angel, alien or mutant due to the effects of radiation from the nuclear reactor disaster. There is no sense of spiritual/religious supremacy. In fact as one scenario shows, she is in obvious danger of being chased as a specimen for a scientific investigation or a spectacle.

Overpowering images of winged female figures are also seen, for example, in *Hime* in Narushima Yuri's *Shōnen mahōshi* (Boy Magician, 1995-) in *Wings comics*(!). Here the character has enormous white, feathery wings which signify her tremendous yet possibly neutral power. Similarly, yet not feathery, the clone Ayamani Rei in Anno Hideaki's *The End of Evangelion* (1997) grows into an awesome gigantic white winged creature who eradicates the AT field – an individual's mental and spiritual barriers – and lets them die. This winged Rei, glowing white, is an awesome image of a goddess of Death who brings wholesale slaughter yet has a bizarre sense of beauty, calmness and comfort. Similarly, Chise in Takahashi Shin's *Saishū heiki kanojo* (*She, The Ultimate Weapon*, 2000-2001) also has white metal wings when she fights and destroys cities.

Is the black-white dichotomy utilised to depict inner conflict or contradictory qualities within one character? The inner cover of the first volume (1996) of Narushima's *Shōnen mahōshi* portrays the protagonist, Carno, with short, gray wings. The colour and size of the wings are suggestive of his extraordinary power and potential to belong to Darkness and Light. Carno is originally human, but born with immensely destructive power. He also has the ability to merge with other beings, such as demons. His demonic power actually derives from demons he has 'eaten'. With such power, he has unwittingly killed his own family.

The ambiguity of the dichotomy of white, feathery wings and black bat-like wings is further represented in CLAMP's *X* (1992).¹⁸ The vision of the main

protagonist Kamui (lit. god's authority) with a black bat-like wing and a white feathery wing¹⁹ indicates his potentials/choices, either to belong to the Dragon of Heaven to protect human civilization or the Dragon of Earth to rescue the severely damaged Earth. The opposing teams hold seven humans with special powers, whose names are significantly Seven Seals for Heaven and Seven Angels for Earth. When Kamui has chosen the former, unexpectedly, Fūma, his best friend and a brother of his love, Kotori (lit. small bird), becomes another Kamui for the Dragon of Earth. Kamui is portrayed with bat-like black wings, whereas Fūma is shown with white feathery wings and belongs to the Earth. Their actions and capacities are also ambiguous. Kamui has chosen to join Heaven out of a personal, but ultimately futile, desire to protect Kotori and Fūma. In contrast, Fūma is characterised as selfless, and has a capacity to fulfil a person's true desire, e.g., to die.

This complex story with a strong fatalistic tone deals with themes of fate and individual choice and questions dichotomies (e.g., good and evil). This is exemplified by Kamui's name, which means a person who acts with a god's power, but at the same time it may also signify a person who hunts a god's power. The two Kamuis are embodied by Kamui himself and Fūma, the shadow Kamui, who is destined to fill the void left by the other team. Obviously the god here is not the Christian God, but human will and power over Nature. If the white feathery wings represent goodness, it is from the injured Earth's perspective. Furthermore, Fūma's name, "true seal", is extremely evocative. He may have originally been destined to belong to Heaven, or he is the final solution to the conflict between humans and Nature. Because the story is incomplete, we cannot determine how it ultimately treats the black and white dichotomy, but the devastating defeat of the Seven Seals and Kamui's hopelessness are evident, in contrast to the increase in Fūma's control, and the ambiguity and significance of his complex role in the story.

The story emphasises the inseparableness of light and dark, life and death, desire and selfishness. Black does not represent evil and white does not signify good. They are equally situated in opposition, yet are deeply and ambivalently connected, as evidenced by the genuine affection between Neko (Heaven) and Kusanagi (Earth), and the sympathy between Karen (Heaven) and Nataka (Earth). Despite their desperate fights and numerous deaths, oneness, rather than any clear-cut polarity, is indicated. White and Black, life and death, Heaven and Earth, love and hatred etc. are different facets of the same entity and inextricably linked. Love and desire can result in selfishness. Even killing may be a form of mercy, if

¹⁸ *X* contains depictions of violent acts and strong fatalism. It is currently incomplete due seemingly to criticism of violence in the story.

¹⁹ Kamui's aunt, Tokiko, is also depicted in the same way (3:126).

this is a victim's true desire. Kayō (the Dream Reader for Dragon of Earth) insists to Kamui that everyone has two conflicting selves and that the other Kamui, who tortures him, is in fact himself.²⁰ The repeated vision of Kamui with a bat-like wing and a white feathery wing signifies the oneness of black and white. Vol. 18 (the final vol. in the current series) of the comics has an illustration of a person whose back has small white feathery wings whilst he is embraced by black bat-like wings from his front, as if they have grown from his upper chest.

As a final example of winged beings in this paper, let us look at *Haibane Renmei*. The protagonists are a group of teenage female Haibane, who live in a mysterious walled town. The term Haibane and the colour of 'ash' (*hai*) imply a presence suspended between the two: life and death or death and rebirth, either real or symbolic. It also suggests Haibane's ambiguity and hybridity – a being who goes through different stages of an evolutionary process, starting as a sprout, growing in a cocoon like an insect, and emerging in human form but soon gaining a halo and growing feathery wings. Growing wings is quick yet painful, as vividly displayed by Rakka's excruciating experience. Her wings thrust out, becoming stained in red – almost grotesquely. Through the night, she suffers pain and high fever. The scenes have strong overtones of corporeality rather than spirituality.

Haibane have no memory of who they were and where they came from. Their lives are under the supervision of the Haibane Renmei and regulated by peculiar rules (e.g., having a job and using only second-hand products and a special passbook instead of money). Their time there is limited until each Haibane's Day of Flight (*sudachi no hi*; lit. day of leaving the nest). At the time of the event, s/he emits light towards the sky, leaving a faded halo and a few feathers. Are they half-bird or angel? Are they unborn, and/or disqualified angels? Or, are they suicide victims, as Napier (2005) suggests?

One important issue in this anime is the perception of 'sin', which is also used as a synonym for '*noroi*'

(curse). Rakka is stigmatised as 'sin-bound' when her feathers develop black stains after her friend Kū disappears for her Day of Flight. Rakka's unrelenting grief and depression stains her feathers. Reki is worse, as she is born with black stained wings signifying innate sinfulness, which have further darkened with her extreme grief after the departure of her mentor-like caretaker, Kuramori. Why should grief at the loss of a beloved become 'sin' and a 'curse'? This reminds us of the issue in *X*, - love for a particular person can result in selfishness and self-alienation. Many of the above stories show that people can be easily trapped by Darkness, by their grief and despair, as exemplified by Izark as Tenjōki. Grief is not initially evil but may lead to distrust, self-centredness and self-alienation, as Reki's painful journey reveals in *Haibane*.

This paper has examined various metaphoric representations of black bat-like wings and white feathery wings and the manner in which manga/anime use these to question the established dichotomy. It has argued that black is associated with, and symbolises grief, rather than evil in such narratives, thus the ambiguity and possible irrelevance of the intertwined dichotomy. The examples used demonstrate that along with the increased prominence of black, the colour has taken on more positive overtones, while a number of manga/anime works actually reverse or obscure the dichotomy, thereby critically interrogating it and proposing an alternative way of co-existence amongst multiple parties as Others.

As one of the major players in popular culture today, the imagery projected by manga and anime exerts undeniable influence globally, and on youth culture in particular. An understanding of the deconstructed dichotomy of black/evil and white/good embodied by black and white winged characters in such narratives can help give the individual reader/audience an awareness and more critical reading of powerful rhetoric forms of discernment and discrimination in our everyday lives.

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²⁰ Similarly, the critical reversion is embodied by Dream Reader Hinoto, who has initial leadership of the Dragon of Heaven and is overwhelmed by her other; a dark self, who is hideous and manipulative.

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