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“EVEN IF IT MEANS OUR BATTLES TO DATE ARE MEANINGLESS”
THE ANIME GUNDAM WING AND POSTWAR HISTORY, MEMORY, AND
IDENTITY IN JAPAN

A Thesis Presented
by
GENEVIEVE R. PETERSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2020

History Program

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ABSTRACT

“EVEN IF IT MEANS OUR BATTLES TO DATE ARE MEANINGLESS” THE ANIME GUNDAM WING AND POSTWAR HISTORY, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN JAPAN

August 2020

Genevieve R. Peterson, B.A., Gordon College
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor Timothy Hacsí

Since 1945, three narratives have dominated Japan’s postwar memory landscape: the heroic narrative, the victim narrative, and the perpetrator narrative. There are few places in Japanese public discourse demonstrating an engagement with the gray areas between the narratives. What makes a hero? What kinds of visions do victims cast? How evil are perpetrators? While often absent in public discourse, these questions are frequently explored in Japanese popular media, including anime. When the 50th anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War occurred in 1995, Japan’s public figures attempted to lay its memory to rest. In the same year, on April 7th, an anime aired on Japanese television that dove into the depths of war memory. This thesis analyzes the anime *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing* as a probe

into postwar memories about the Asia-Pacific War and what those memories reveal about Japanese attitudes towards their history and identity in the late twentieth century.

DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to John A. Peterson, Preston Steinbar, and Bob Haas in honor of their example of hard work. Ecclesiastes 3: 9-14.

This thesis has been made possible by readers like you. A few are named here.

First, to Yatate Hajime and Tomino Yoshiyuki. For Gundam.

To my loving family. Special thanks to Rachele, my first Gundam Wing watching companion, and Dad, who taped the midnight run when I missed it during the afterschool block. I'm so grateful I didn't have to wait to watch Episode 30: Reunion with Relena.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

A note on Japanese names: The names of Japanese people discussed in the text follow the Japanese convention of giving the last name followed by the first name. Citations in footnotes and the bibliography, however, follow the conventions of western names in the Chicago Manual of Style.

A note on language: The textual analysis of Gundam Wing in this thesis is based on the direct English translation by Paul Baldwin. The English adaptation was produced by Bandai Entertainment Inc. in association with The Ocean Group.

Disclaimer: The author is well aware that being unable to access Gundam Wing in its original Japanese will result in some limitations to the following analysis; she looks forward to surpassing those limitations someday.

INTRODUCTION

The task of making a coherent story for the vanquished is...a painful probe into the meaning of being Japanese.¹ -- Akiko Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*

In Episode 25, the halfway point of the anime series *Gundam Wing*, its heroes come to a horrible reckoning: the colonies they swore to protect have embraced their enemies, the OZ organization. Further maddened by his father's tragic death, one of the series' eponymous Gundam pilots, Quatre, builds a new massive-scale humanoid machine, called a mobile suit. Its unusual mind-warping side-effects quickly cause him to target the colonies. Trowa, another Gundam pilot, blocks a laser beam from Quatre with his own mobile suit, defending a third Gundam pilot, Heero, and a nearby colony. Pulling away from them before his damaged suit explodes, Trowa tells Quatre, who has returned to his senses, that the Gundam pilots have become redundant soldiers. They should accept it. The most important battles we fight, he says, are "with[in] ourselves, within our hearts. And we have to be strict to come to the right conclusions. Even if it means our battles to date are meaningless."²

On April 7, 1995, *Gundam Wing* aired on Japanese television. It was four months before the 50th anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War. At that time, official

¹ Akiko Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

² *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing*, created by Hajime Yatate and Yoshiyuki Tomino, directed by Masashi Ikeda, first aired in Japan April 7, 1995-March 29, 1996 on TV Asahi; first aired in the United States March 6, 2000 on Cartoon Network. DVD set. Ep. 25.

commemorations abounded. Emperor Showa's death just six years earlier had inspired dialogue around the thorniest issues of war guilt and apologies.³ Despite thereflection and the ubiquity of commemoration, critics labeled most of these efforts as “unfocused,” failing to “engender any sharp images”⁴ of the country fifty years after war's end.

If speeches like Abe Shinzo's highly anticipated 2015 Statement can be taken as a template, the 75th anniversary commemorations of 2020 will be as dull-edged as those in 1995. As Tanaka Akihiko, an international politics scholar, stated in an op-ed about Abe's 2015 Statement, it was not so much that it “satisfied nobody perfectly” but that “no one was extremely dissatisfied.”⁵ The sharp edges war memories actually have are there; unfortunately, they have not yet been engaged to a successful resolution, a resolution that could positively impact Japan's relationships with its nearest geographic neighbors, especially China, the Republic of Korea, North Korea, and many Southeast Asian nations. While the memory wars of Japan have enormous geo-political ramifications, they are, as *Gundam Wing's* Trowa suggests, issues that must be dealt with at a fundamentally internal level. *Rekishiki nonshiki mondai* or Japan's history consciousness problem is a term often used to express the ambivalence of Japanese society's engagement with its postwar memory.

That it *does* engage with its wartime memories is an important observation; western media often accuses Japan of wartime amnesia. Not only does Japan engage its war memory,

³ Jane W. Yamazaki, *Japanese Apologies for World War II: A Rhetorical Study*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 10.

⁴ Morio Watanabe, “Imagery and War in Japan 1995”, in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, eds. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 129.

⁵ Akihiko Tanaka, “Abe Well-Suited to Uplift Japan's Asia Diplomacy,” *Daily Yomiuri*, October 26, 2015. Cited in Mike Mochizuki, “Japan: Contested History and Identity Conflict,” in *Memory, Identity, and Commemorations of World War II: Anniversary Politics in Asia Pacific*, eds. Daqing Yang and Mike Mochizuki (New York: Lexington Books, 2018), 46.

sociologist Hashimoto Akiko states, it does so in the form of a “fierce, multivocal struggle” that has no end in sight.⁶ From 1945 to the present, three dominant postwar narratives have vied against each other, their calcification producing a stalemate emblematic of the history consciousness problem. Each reflects an absorption with Japanese identity--past, present, and future. The heroic narrative asks if the Japanese can still be viewed as heroes, focusing on Japan’s ‘heroic’ wartime soldiers and leadership. A frequent narrative for public war commemorations, it is generally associated with nationalist politicians like Abe who, by reclaiming the heroism of Imperial Japanese soldiers, seek to project a Japanese future of heroic possibilities. The victim narrative asks what can be learned from the victims of war, amplifying the voices of Japanese civilians who survived fire-bombing, the dropping of the atomic bombs, and other wartime violence. Its pacifist imperative demands healing and human security. Its lack of focus on identifying victimizers has made it an even more palatable narrative in Japan and it is, undoubtedly, the most widely accepted.⁷ Finally, the perpetrator narrative seeks to understand the humanity of perpetrators, laying bare the violence of Japan’s imperial era, acknowledging the suffering of other Asians during the war. Adopting a message of reconciliation usually mixed with pacifism, proponents argue this leads towards recovering Japan’s “moral backbone.”⁸

There are few places where these distinct, intractable, and competing postwar narratives integrate in contemporary Japanese culture. Anime is one of the few. Flexible, imaginative, and far more inscrutable than the traditional forms of the narratives, *Shin Kidou*

⁶ Hashimoto, 9.

⁷ Ibid., 127-129.

⁸ Ibid., 8-13; 2.

Senki Gandamu Uingu or *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing* is one such anime.⁹ Within a science fiction setting, the themes of each of these postwar narratives are represented and problematized. Transcending the judgmental and traumatic referential work of reviewing the actions of real Japanese people, the postwar-generation creators of *Gundam Wing* created a space in which it was safe to engage the gray areas between the three dominant narratives, probing Japanese memories about the Asia-Pacific War and what those memories reveal about Japanese attitudes towards their history and collective identity in the late twentieth century. This thesis analyzes what the integration of narratives in *Gundam Wing* suggests about how the Japanese remember the war in terms of their collective identity as heroes, victims, and perpetrators, and the real and complex overlap between those identities.

Collective Memory, Cultural Trauma, and Japanese Identity

Studying a visual media that originally appeared in a foreign language in order to understand postwar memory is naturally a transdisciplinary undertaking and must be grounded in several theories. Foremost among these are collective memory and trauma.

Collective memory is the concept of categorizing narratives as definitive representations of large groups of people. Though dated by more than a half century, this sociological theory has nevertheless endured and continues to prove especially useful in understanding the war era of the 1930s and 40s of which Maurice Halbwachs, the theory's

⁹ *Gundam Wing*'s English-dubbed version was aired in the US from 2000-2001 on the Cartoon Network's after-school programming, *Toonami*. The author first saw the series at that time. For an overview of *Toonami*'s impact on anime's dissemination into American youth culture, see Bonsai Pop's Youtube video "Toonami's Lasting Legacy," posted March 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4sNeFFkv0U>.

originator, was a casualty.¹⁰ Specifically, Halbwachs refined the concepts of autobiographical memory, or memories based on lived experience, and historical memory, or memories based on written or other kinds of records. Halbwachs asked “[h]ow can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be recreated, when we can grasp only the present?” The hope of remembering, Halbwachs asserts, is in commemorative gatherings of groups of living generations who engage in, as editor and translator Lewis Coser summarizes, “imaginatively reenacting a past that would otherwise slowly disappear in the haze of time.”¹¹ *Gundam Wing*, created by a generation with historical war memories reflecting on the autobiographical memories of the preceding generation, will be analyzed in this thesis as an ‘imaginative reenactment’ of Japan’s wartime and prewar past.

The theory of cultural trauma similarly affirms the role of imagination in constructing narratives from collective memories. Moving away from prescriptive theories of trauma, Jeffrey Alexander writes in “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma” (2003) that the experience of trauma and its victims’ attempts to express it thereafter are deeply subjective.¹² While this implies endless narrative possibilities, Alexander argues--as Halbwachs also implies--that these possibilities do not preclude the emergence of a coherent story. “Imagination,” Alexander states, “is intrinsic to the very process of representation. It seizes upon an inchoate experience from life, and forms it, through association, condensation, and

¹⁰ After protesting the arrest of his Jewish father-in-law, Halbwachs was deported to Buchenwald. He died there in February 1945. See Lewis Coser’s 1992 introduction to Halbwachs’ *On Collective Memory*, 6-7. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 23-24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹² Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

aesthetic creation, into some specific shape.”¹³ As a result, the theory of cultural trauma, far from distancing traumatized persons from the ability to express their experience, affirms that “memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self.”¹⁴

Whereas this belief in the power of imagination is instinct to artists, historians have had a much more difficult relationship with it, particularly since the ascendance of empiricism in the nineteenth century. Relating responses to trauma--which are initially inchoate, usually messy, and always subjective--requires a kind of listening that presumes a release from certain vestiges of objectivity. An integration of the theory of cultural trauma into historical practice provides a framework for this approach. For example, the kinds of sources needed for the “aesthetic creation” Alexander describes above need not always be strictly factual. As he makes clear, the imaginative or creative element does not reduce the legitimacy of the representation, it simply reflects how others understand, interpret, and record trauma. Historians may realize some traditional sources lack certain kinds of information about a traumatic experience, and choose to use the lens of culture trauma to search out sources that provide information the traditional sources lacked. This thesis is an exercise in doing precisely that--elevating a fictional medium as a source in order to learn more information about the character of Japanese memory that is otherwise absent from more traditional non-fiction historical interpretations of Japanese history.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵ Another work that informed the author’s general understanding of abuse is Steven R. Tracy’s *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005).

In other words, analyzing the anime *Gundam Wing* is another way of listening to the Japanese.

Building on Historiographical Patterns in Modern Japanese History Studies

Studying *Gundam Wing* as a popular product of Japan's culture exhibiting postwar memory adheres to current trends in historical inquiry. It also meets the challenges of studying modern Japanese history in English by accessing Japanese postwar memory in new and enlightening ways. This is made possible by an evolution within the discipline to be more inclusive regarding what are deemed legitimate sources, a trend historians like Mikiso Hane, John Dower, and others began in the mid-20th century. It is also made possible by the extent to which Asia-Pacific war memories, in addition to facts, have become subjects of historical inquiry.

Major forerunners of the effort to explore Japanese history through its indigenous voices expressed in vernacular memory include Mikiso Hane, a first-generation Japanese-American interned during WWII and later a professor of history at Knox College, and John Dower, now professor emeritus at MIT. Hane and Dower tenaciously practiced citing non-traditional sources such as first person accounts by common Japanese people and analyzed products of material popular culture like cartoons and lyrics of songs.¹⁶ In Dower's estimation, no Japan scholar had done more than Hane to "enable Westerners to understand what Japan's modern history has really meant to the Japanese people." Dower's own

¹⁶ See Hane's *Peasants, Rebels, and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1982) and Dower's, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

scholarship represents a commitment to “letting the Japanese speak in their own numerous and varied voices.”¹⁷ This thesis builds on their legacy by elevating an anime series as its major primary source for the purpose of listening more closely to the voices of its Japanese creators.

This thesis also continues discussions of collective memory in a post-Cold War Asian context, contributing to the effort of sifting layers of experience, memory, and identity. In the years following the end of the Cold War era and the marking of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, focus on the subjectivity of postwar memory emerged as a more prominent topic in the field of modern Asian history. Contributors to collected works like *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (2001) concluded that the dominant narratives girding 50th Anniversary commemorations were insufficient insofar as they rang hollow and did not meaningfully contribute to healing between, and therefore better relations among, the Asian nations of the Pacific Rim. Contributors identified and legitimized alternative spaces for memory production, including anime.¹⁸ Six years later another collection, *Ruptured Memories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (2007), demonstrated a technical conversation about postwar memory and its implications, codifying at the same time a growing sense of a post-Cold War historiography.¹⁹ Both of these edited volumes evinced a self-consciousness about the ‘use’ of any and all narratives produced on war topics as a result of Asia’s contentious political climate. As John Dower says, “we use history in many ways:

¹⁷ John Dower wrote about Hane’s books in 1992. Quoted from obituary for Mikiso Hane, December 10, 2003, posted by Knox College, https://departments.knox.edu/newsarchive/news_events/2003/x6196.html.

¹⁸ T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter, eds., *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007).

consciously and subjectively, idealistically and perversely, to educate and to indoctrinate.”²⁰

This thesis is itself couched as a self-conscious contribution towards generating narratives that would help instead of hinder progress in geo-political relations.

The framework of three dominant postwar narratives in Japan--heroic, victim, and perpetrator--is relatively new, outlined by sociologist Akiko Hashimoto in *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan* (2015). Prior to this reframing, concepts such as “victim consciousness” and “victimizer consciousness” were primarily used to illustrate the tension inherent within Japanese society about postwar memory, including in *Perilous Memories* and *Ruptured Memories*.²¹ Hashimoto’s narrative concept expands the earlier binary--and therefore limited--framework. Additionally, discussing narratives instead of consciousness lends to more specific, focused, and concrete discussions. Scholars agree Hashimoto’s framework is “highly logical and effective” in representing Japanese postwar memory.²²

²⁰ John W. Dower, *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering: Japan in the Modern World*, (New York: New Press, 2012), viii.

²¹ See also Takashi Yoshida’s *The Making of the “Rape of Nanking:” History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States*, (Columbia University. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²² Ethan Mark, "Resituating Modern Japan in Empire, Fascism, and Defeat: A Review Essay," review of *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*, by Akiko Hashimoto, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 4 (11, 2017): 1110. See also Philip Seaton, "The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan," review of *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*, by Akiko Hashimoto, *Pacific Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2017): 147. Franziska Seraphim, "The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan by Akiko Hashimoto, And: Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory, and Japan’s Unending Postwar by Akiko Takenaka," review of *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*, by Akiko Hashimoto, *Monumenta Nipponica* 71, no. 2 (2016): 469-72.

Methodology--Analyzing Visual Media to Explicate Japanese History, Memory, and Identity

Although the legitimacy of audiovisual media as a source of historical inquiry has not yet reached the vaunted heights of the written word, it would be misleading to suggest it has not achieved increasing legitimacy in the past several decades. One of the major voices in historical analysis of audiovisual media is Robert A. Rosenstone. In his book *History on Film/ Film on History*, Rosenstone argues for the validity of films as “new form[s] of doing history.”²³ While *Gundam Wing* is not a “historical film” (Rosenstone studies films like *Glory* and *Schindler’s List*), Rosenstone’s validation of historians analyzing audiovisual content is another crucial foundation of this thesis, as is his assertion that we “should read all works of history, whatever the medium, for what they say about both past and present.”²⁴

Despite the increasing prevalence of works that seriously analyze media sources for the purpose of historical inquiry, there is currently no historiographical body of literature about fictional anime stories for the purpose of explicating historical events or memory.²⁵ American consumption of popular Japanese media like anime and manga markedly grew beginning in the 1990s when shows like *Sailor Moon* and *Pokemon* began airing in English

²³ Rosenstone claims “[History on Film/Film on History] is the first book, in short, to investigate the dimensions and implications that lie behind Hayden White’s neologism ‘historiophoty,’ coined in a response to one of my essays and defined as ‘the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse’.” Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film; Film on History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²⁵ However, as the existence of this thesis and the dissertations cited here may attest, it is likely such a body of literature will emerge.

on American television (1995, 1998 respectively).²⁶ It has since seen exponential growth throughout the 2000s and 2010s.²⁷ Quasi-academic interest in manga and anime first emerged in the form of layman's introductions functioning as cultural bridges rather than scholarly analysis, for example Frederik Schodt's *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, which was published in 1983, and Patrick Drazen's *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? and Wow! Of Japanese Animation* in 2002.²⁸ Scholarly works emerged in the late 2000s and 2010s, primarily from Japanese and Media Studies scholars like Susan Napier, Christopher Bolton, and Ian Condry. Reflecting an American society still broadly unfamiliar with anime, even these works are usually introductory in nature; moreover, with their more anthropological/ethnographic emphases, they often do not focus on how anime reflects Japanese history, memory, and identity.

It is perhaps unsurprising that one of the few sources available in English that explicitly makes connections between anime and Japanese history, memory, and identity is written by a Japanese author. In his chapter "Imagery and War in Japan 1995" Watanabe Morio points out that for its young Japanese audience of the mid-1990s, war-themed anime

²⁶ Gilles Poitras, *Anime Essentials: Everything a Fan Needs to Know*, (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2001). *Sailor Moon* was the author's first introduction to anime. It was absolutely captivating as a seven year-old.

²⁷ Reflecting a second generation of anime devotees, students in the anime club I supervised for three and a half years at Match Public High School in Boston include: *Black Butler*, *Fairy Tale*, *Blue Exorcist*, *Erased*, *Akame Ga Kill*, *Dragon Ball Super*, *Yuri on Ice*, etc.

²⁸ Professor of History at Oneonta College William Ashbaugh posits Schodt's title as a seminal work in his 2016 article for *The Diplomat*, "Gundam: Japan's Top Pop Culture Phenomenon," <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/gundam-japans-top-pop-culture-phenomenon/>. Drazen's *Anime Explosion* was the first published source that suggested to this author that anime, specifically *Gundam Wing*, is meaningful commentary on Japanese history, memory, and identity. About *Gundam Wing* Drazen writes, "...this conflicted series about the future may be the best commentary on Japan's conflicted past and present regarding warfare." *Anime Explosion! The What? Why? And Wow! Of Japanese Animation*, (Stone Bridge Press, 2014), 130.

served as “the dominant source of learning about wars.”²⁹ Of even greater relevance here, Watanabe posited that anime was a safe place for young Japanese to explore, explode and sometimes integrate the identities they were offered in response to national war memories.³⁰ This thesis agrees with Watanabe and builds upon his arguments.

Mobile Suit Gundam

In order to analyze *Gundam Wing* (1995), it is necessary to place it in the context of its franchise. In 1979 *Kidou Senshi Gandamu* or *Mobile Suit Gundam*, now known as *First Gundam*,³¹ appeared on Japanese television.³² Today the name *Gundam* and its franchise are as well-known in Japan as *Batman* or *Superman* are in the US. The name is a portmanteau of the series’ working name, *Freedom Fighter Gunboy*.³³ When referred to within a series, “a Gundam” is a non-sentient, large humanoid robot piloted in combat situations usually by the series’ hero or heroes.³⁴

When *Gundam* aired in 1979 it was a big risk. Previously, Japanese robot shows called “super robot” featured sentient, heroic humanoid robots, generally producing lighter entertainment fare. *First Gundam* took a consciously darker turn. “We struggled to make a

²⁹ Watanabe, 129.

³⁰ Ibid., 148-149.

³¹ As a result of more than twenty series that include “*Mobile Suit Gundam*” in their titles.

³² *Mobile Suit Gundam*, created by Hajime Yatate and Yoshiyuki Tomino, first aired April 7, 1979-January 26, 1980 on Nagoya TV, DVD set.

³³ Atsushi Tokuda, director, *Making Gundam--The Inside Story*, aired July 2019 on Japan’s Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), Accessed via YouTube in November 2019. Video has since been removed.

³⁴ There is no consistent definition of what “Gundam” means or refers to--the number of series and series’ producers has led to pushing definitional boundaries. Thanks to Thom of *Mobile Suit Breakdown: The Gundam Anime Podcast*, who offered the basis for the description here. Thom of *Mobile Suit Breakdown* podcast, email message to author, June 17, 2020.

show that rid itself of the kinds of lies (usoppoi) that characterized hero programs up to that point,” says Ueda Masao, a producer on *First Gundam*. This included making the robots, designed to be 50-65 feet tall, more realistic, non-sentient “weapons of battle” and striving to demonstrate the fear and even cowardice pilots experienced while piloting from the suit’s cockpit, which was usually situated in the suit’s chest area.³⁵ Initially cancelled for poor ratings and poor toy sales, the show gained a cult following among Japanese teens, including many girls even though boys were its target audience. The second series, *Zeta Gundam*, aired in 1985. By the late 1980s several other successful series and films had cemented *Gundam* in Japanese cultural memory. As of 2020 there are more than twenty *Gundam* series.

Gundam’s focus on humans, their conflicts, and the complexity of both have become hallmarks of the franchise. Illustrative of its opacity on difficult issues is the ongoing discussion of whether *Gundam* glorifies or condemns war. Instead of providing answers, *Gundam* suggests questions. It achieves this, as John Moore notes in his 2017 dissertation “Inside the Boy Inside the Robot: Mobile Suit Gundam and Interiority,” by maintaining an “exterior orientation--[of] violence and victories,” common to the “super robot” genre, with “interiority-inflected visual and narrative language,” the combination of which produced *Gundam*’s groundbreaking “real robot” genre.³⁶

While it shies away from offering moral platitudes about war, *Gundam* is “effective in portraying the consequences of [wartime] violence,” as John Tennant concludes in his

³⁵ Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan’s Media Success Story*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 123-124.

³⁶ John D. Moore, “Inside the Boy Inside the Robot: Mobile Suit Gundam and Interiority,” (Master of Arts thesis, University of Oregon, 2017), 42-43, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. For an excellent reflection on these complexities in *First Gundam*, listen to *Mobile Suit Breakdown: The Gundam Anime Podcast*, Episode 1.35: Aftermath, <https://gundampodcast.com/episode/e1dbb0b605e44176/1-35-aftermath>.

dissertation *Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War* (2006).³⁷ In particular, Gundam constantly exposes its audience to the impact committing acts of violence has on its characters, perpetrators and victims alike, whether “good, bad, or gray.”³⁸

First Gundam (1979) and *Gundam Wing* (1995) reflect two distinct generations in Japan. Much of *First Gundam*’s story elements were originated by Tomino Yoshiyuki, the creative genius behind *Gundam* and its director. Tomino went on to direct several other *Gundam* series, films, and even wrote *Gundam* novels. As a result of his creative significance he is credited in every *Gundam* series for the “Original Story,”³⁹ however, he did not contribute directly to series like *Gundam Wing*. Tomino was born in 1941 and grew up in bombed-out Tokyo. He has autobiographical memories of the war and the onerous rebuilding period that followed, which was overshadowed by the US Occupation. While the memory of the war was real and persistent at that time, the space to deal with it was limited in the face of survival and the tasks of proverbially getting back on one’s feet.⁴⁰

Sixteen years after *First Gundam* aired, *Gundam Wing* appeared on Japanese television directed by Ikeda Masashi. It is the sixth series in the Gundam franchise. Besides Ikeda, *Wing*’s major creative contributor was story supervisor Sumizawa Katsuyuki.⁴¹ Both

³⁷ John Tennant, “Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War,” (PhD diss., University Sheffield, 2006), 80, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272484323_Mobile_Suit_Gundam_and_the_Japanese_Memory_of_War.

³⁸ Ashbaugh, “Gundam: Japan’s Top Pop Culture Phenomenon.”

³⁹ Also credited is Yatate Hajime. The name is a pseudonym that acknowledges the animation staff’s contributions to any original work the studio Sunrise produces.

⁴⁰ Tomino is the same generation as animation director Hayao Miyazaki (b. 1941) who directed the internationally recognized films *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Spirited Away*, and others.

⁴¹ See interviews with Sumizawa and *Gundam Wing*’s producer Hideyuki Tomioka: “Interview: Gundam Wing screenwriter Katsuyuki Sumisawa,” Zac Bertschy, *Anime News Network*, August 29, 2017,

were born in 1961. In the 1970s the famous textbook activist Ienaga Saburo won a lawsuit against the Japanese Ministry of Education and many materials, including information about Japan's nefarious wartime acts, became widely available, ranging from school textbooks to novels to documentaries. Such materials effectively "reproduc[ed] the cultural trauma of the war," touching off further need to reckon with Japan's history and Japanese identity.⁴²

Many of the similarities seen in *First Gundam* and *Wing* derive from the familiarity each series' creators had with the facts and traumatizing nature of the Asia-Pacific War.⁴³ For example, both series' cosmic conflicts between Earth and its orbital colonies consciously reflect a reckoning with the Asia-Pacific War more so than the proxy wars of the Cold War period, such as those in Korea and Vietnam.⁴⁴ Their representation of futuristic colonization evokes a two-pronged meditation on prewar colonization, that is, of the threat from western powers in the mid-late 1800s and its adoption by the Japanese as a means of asserting power and control from the 1860s to 1940s. Unsurprisingly, both series represent the problem of militarism. More uniquely, both series posit serious questions about the feasibility of pacifism. Finally, both series' protagonists are young people from common backgrounds thrust into extraordinary and complex circumstances. This likely reflects, as Morio Watanabe suggests, young teens serve as "potent metaphors" for the national self-image in Japan.

<https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2017-08-29/gundam-wing-screenwriter-katsuyuki-sumisawa/120652>; Jordan Ramee and Zac Bertschy, "Interview: Gundam Wing Producer Hideyuki Tomioka," *Anime News Network*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2018-05-11/gundam-wing-executive-producer-hideyuki-tomioka/131472>; Full series credits including script writers for individual episodes can be found at "Mobile Suit Gundam Wing (TV)," *Anime News Network*, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=26>.

⁴² Hashimoto, 13.

⁴³ In addition to the mimicry one expects in a series with self-conscious ties to an original series.

⁴⁴ Later shows like *Zeta Gundam*, the second *Gundam* series, are more analogous to conflicts of the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s.

Becoming an adult is a “crossroads” of human development and a time at which society is more willing to recognize that individuals can be both victims *and* aggressors.⁴⁵ The Gundam pilots of both *First Gundam* and *Wing* are all fifteen.

The two series’ differences illustrate how the two generations of its creators have internalized, examined, and expressed postwar memory. Where *First Gundam* is preoccupied with the internal crises of individuals, *Wing*’s characters are more clearly representations of the larger debate around postwar narratives. For instance, while both series present questions about war, justice, and peace, John Moore argues in his dissertation that in *First Gundam* such questions “are not nearly as prevalent onscreen as [its protagonist Amuro Rey’s] emotional experience.”⁴⁶ The opposite is true in *Wing*. While the interior life of characters like protagonist Heero Yuy is very significant, it is his representation of overarching themes that the creators of *Wing* appear most eager to represent.

This lends a certain coherent thematic significance to *Wing* that *First Gundam* seems to intentionally lack. Like the contemporary Japanese art of a recent exhibit in Osaka, if *First Gundam* “can function as the mirror of an age, then [the one it portrays] is broken and its fragments kaleidoscopic.”⁴⁷ *First Gundam* conveys the internalized chaos of the autobiographical memory of a wartime survivor (re: Tomino). In contrast, *Wing* conveys the contemplative sifting of historical memory made possible in the postwar context of a generation who never experienced war but is nonetheless well-acquainted with cultural trauma (re: Ikeda and Sumizawa).

⁴⁵ Watanabe, 148.

⁴⁶ Moore, “Inside the Boy Inside the Robot,” 51.

⁴⁷ Matthew Larking, “Japan’s Postwar Aesthetics: Compelling if Not Confusing,” *Japan Times*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2020/02/12/arts/aesthetics-contemporary-japan/#.Xp3GfP1KjFh>.

Gundam Wing's Universe and Storyline

Wing's absorption with meditating on war memory specifically is reinforced by the absence of themes common in other anime of the mid-1990s such as environmental degradation, critiques of Japanese affluence of the 1980s, and post-boom economic woes. Despite the absence of these, the After Colony Universe is visually and philosophically recognizable in the ways it represents the past, the present, and the future. For example, *Wing*'s military elite wear uniforms reminiscent of nineteenth century Prussia's, from which the Japanese military modeled their modern military uniforms. When wearing civilian clothing, *Wing*'s characters look to have walked out of the early 1990s, contemporary to the series' airing. While the colonies in outer space are certainly beyond the capabilities of technology today, their designs are likely based on the work of physicist Gerard K. O'Neill.⁴⁸ Noticeably distinct from *First Gundam*'s storyline is *Wing*'s lack of the psycho-fantastical element of the Newtype, or the development of telepathy as the result of spending extended periods in outer space. Even more so than *First Gundam* and its "real robots," *Wing* is truly about plain old humans and their existential war with the reality of their violent and warlike natures.

The storyline of *Gundam Wing* is told in After Colony (AC) years, that is, in how many years have passed since the first colony was built. The events of *Wing* occur within a single year, from April AC 195 to April AC 196. There are few flashbacks--the action

⁴⁸ "O'Neill Cylinder Space Settlement," *National Space Society* website, copyright 1998-2019, <https://space.nss.org/o-neill-cylinder-space-settlement/>. Directed to information by Nina and Thom on *Mobile Suit Breakdown* podcast.

remains rooted in the present moment of its participants. The setting is the Earth Sphere, the term used in *Gundam* to denote Earth and its orbital colonies.

The plot of *Wing* is both loved and hated for being intricate.⁴⁹ It revolves around many characters whose allegiances frequently change or simply become unclear; their personal beliefs are constantly forming and reforming. When we are first introduced to the Earth Sphere, the United Earth Sphere Alliance holds oppressive power over the space colonies. It becomes clear the Alliance is a well-established military organization that asserted itself in the past to quell previous conflicts, similar to a militarized United Nations. Within the Alliance is a special unit called OZ. Early in the series OZ, led by an aristocratic young officer named Treize Khushrenada, stages a coup d'état and ends the Alliance's hegemony. It soon becomes clear that even OZ is beholden to higher powers, an aristocratic organization called the Romefeller Foundation, which is deeply invested in mobile suit production. Yet even the Foundation is itself later transformed into a new entity called the World Nation, this time by a young leader with pacifist convictions named Relena Peacecraft. Her leadership, however, is short-lived when she steps down before a final series of space battles known as the Eve Wars break out between the World Nation and a new rebel group called the White Fang, which claims to represent the colonies' desires for sovereignty

⁴⁹ The editors of *Animerica's* 2002 *Gundam: Official Guide* reflect this perspective--"While it leans heavily on stock footage of the invincible heroes trashing legions of disposable enemies, and sometimes bogs down in extended speechifying about peace and human destiny, *Gundam Wing's* nifty gadgetry and the enigmatic charisma of its heroes make for an engaging romantic adventure. Attentive viewers can also occupy themselves by attempting to decipher its incredibly convoluted plot, rife with conspiracies, coups, and sudden reversals," 77. The author of this thesis disagrees with the characterization of *Wing's* speeches as 'bogging down' the action and its description of its plot as "convoluted."

and peace. After the war ends a diplomatic organization with no standing military is formed, named the Earth Sphere Unified Nation.

The numerous conflicts these shifts in power bring to the After Colony universe are poignantly experienced through multiple characters, foremost among them five fifteen year-old male Gundam pilots from the space colonies: Heero Yuy, Duo Maxwell, Trowa Barton, Quatre Raberba Winner, and Wufei Chang. As Dr. J, one of the men sending missions to the pilots, says of Heero, “He understands the emotional pains that the colony residents have endured over the years.”⁵⁰ Convicted by their own experiences and those of other colonists, the pilots, unknown to each other, set out at the beginning of the series on similar missions to attack the Alliance’s OZ organization. Their missions become far more complicated and eventually self-motivated when their superiors are captured and the colonies’ public opinion is turned against them. Filmic wrestling of the purpose of soldiers, the meaning of fighting, and the warrior’s role in obtaining peace ensues.

Wing has two major antagonists. Treize Khushrenada is slowly introduced in the show as the aristocratic founder and leader of OZ. At first, Treize is presented as a fairly unproblematized villain, ordering assassinations, orchestrating coups, and leading the organization the Gundam pilots are ordered to destroy. However, a closer watch of the series results in a more ambivalent understanding of Treize’s villainy. Halfway through the show, Treize voluntarily steps down from OZ, making statements of support for the Gundam pilots. In the series final episodes Treize assumes leadership of the World Nation when Earth is

⁵⁰ Ep. 5.

faced with the colonial rebel group White Fang. His strong leadership is uneasily paired with his own impenetrability, encountered by viewers in his public and private philosophizing.

Wing's other major antagonist is Zechs Merquise, a high-ranking, trustworthy subordinate of Treize. Despite some leadership ability, he is obviously most comfortable in a mobile suit on the battlefield. Eventually the series reveals one of its biggest secrets--Zechs was born Milliardo Peacecraft, prince of the Sanq Kingdom and heir to a pacifist royal family who were deposed when he was a child. We are led to believe Zechs, a name he is either given or assumes, eventually joins the Alliance in order to take revenge on his nation's attackers, a plan which dovetails with the schemes of Treize and OZ. Even after taking his revenge, however, Zechs never truly regains freedom. Convinced he cannot take responsibility for leading the Sanq Kingdom because of his now-bloodstained history, Zechs eventually takes on the leadership of the White Fang rebel organization that defies the World Nation. Pushed past hope, Zechs attempts to gain peace by destroying Earth--which he now deems a breeding ground for battles--by dropping an enormous spaceship onto it. This apocalyptic act is averted by the Gundam pilots.

The last character of note is Relena Darlian, also known as Relena Peacecraft. Relena is a major foil to the characters of Treize Khushrenada, Zechs Merquise, and the Gundam pilot Heero Yuy. Relena Darlian is first introduced as the daughter of an Alliance diplomat whose advocacy for peace is dangerous enough to warrant assassination per Treize's orders. On his deathbed, her father reveals she is in fact Relena Peacecraft of the ruined Sanq Kingdom. Inspired by the rebellious example of Heero, whom she meets in *Wing's* first episode, Relena attempts to shoot her adopted father's assassin but ultimately eschews

revenge to take up leadership of the freed Sanq Kingdom. After a brief but formative time immersing herself in the pacifist legacy of her birth parents, Relena surrenders the kingdom when it becomes the object of the established powers' wrath again, this time Romefeller's. Relena is pressured into taking a symbolic leadership role in Romefeller where, much to the surprise of the organization's scheming leaders, she begins effectively mobilizing for peace. She is soon removed from the position by Treize. In doing so, he obviates an otherwise bizarre confrontation between Relena and Zechs, who by this point know they are siblings. Although she spends the vast majority of the series professing pacifism, Relena appears in the series' final episode as Vice Foreign Minister Darlian of the newly formed Earth Sphere Unified Nation, signaling a profound grappling with her legacy and the experiences of her contemporaries.

Chapter Overview

The following three chapters analyze three major characters in *Gundam Wing* as they reflect and problematize the three dominant postwar narratives in Japan. In the first, Treize Khushrenada's heroic leadership is considered alongside his perpetration of violence via his leadership roles. The connections between him and Emperor Showa are explored, specifically the ways in which Treize represents a wishful re-imagining of the emperor's ability to contend with his war responsibility. The second chapter discusses Zechs Merquise and the painful dynamics of his double identity as victim and perpetrator in *Wing*. The connections between his story arc and Japan's prewar and postwar victim identity will be explored, which elevates the complicated and long-standing nature of Japan's self-

identification as a victim of the west. Finally, the third chapter examines Heero Yuy and the battle between his internalization of being a perpetrator and his ascendance to embodying the ultimate hero. His grappling with the reality of killing people while wanting to save people is explored in the context of the *heitai* or 'everyman soldier' of the Imperial Japanese Army and the possibility of a post-postwar Japanese identity.

CHAPTER ONE: TREIZE KHUSHRENADA and EMPEROR SHOWA

The first category of narratives emphasizes the stories of fallen national heroes. These narratives embrace a “fortunate fall” argument, which justifies the war and national sacrifices in hindsight by claiming that the peace and prosperity of today are built on those sacrifices of the past. These heroic narratives tend to promote a discourse of indebtedness that is heard often in official speeches at commemorations. It is an ameliorative narrative intended to cultivate pride in national belonging...⁵¹ -- Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*

Japan’s postwar heroic narrative focuses on Japan’s war dead, specifically its soldiers. In the heroic narrative, unlike in the victim and perpetrator narrative, its subjects are not able to tell their story. Instead, the heroic narrative has most frequently and vehemently been formulated by Japan’s postwar leaders, beginning with Emperor Showa⁵² in his surrender speech on August 15, 1945. Attempting to ameliorate the cultural trauma of his nation, the emperor forwarded the belief that Japan’s defeat was fortunate. While Japan had fallen, it could, at least, demonstrate its true nature by picking itself back up. That was how to honor the fallen dead. The imperative of the heroic narrative ties the commemoration of the war dead to a commitment to moving forward.⁵³

The heroic narrative is, perhaps, the one that eschews complexity the most. Let the dead be venerated, and may whatever they did during the war be buried along with them. The legacy of Emperor Showa was similarly regarded in the first four decades of the postwar era. After all, according to Japan’s 1947 Constitution, the emperor was “the symbol of the State

⁵¹ Hashimoto, 8.

⁵² Emperor Showa is the posthumous name conferred to Emperor Hirohito upon his death. His posthumous name will be used here.

⁵³ Hashimoto, 125-127.

and the unity of the people.”⁵⁴ His looming death in the late 1980s, however, unearthed doubts about his exoneration from war responsibility. As housewife Hakoto Atsuko wrote in a letter to the *Asahi Shimbun* at that time

Each year newspapers and television stations produce special reports on the War. Although these evoke the tragedy of war for the viewers, they do not often touch upon the Emperor, who must have been at the root of this War...no matter how many times one reads history books, it is clear that this War could not have been carried out without the Emperor’s orders. He held supreme command.⁵⁵

These were difficult doubts to raise. Since the emperor was the symbol of Japan and the unity of its people, the possibility of the emperor being labeled a war criminal even forty years later implied a national depravity that might reflexively imply a personal one. Yet, as Hakoto wrote, that the war could not have been carried out without his orders was “clear.”

The issue of regaining respect and experiencing belonging not only after defeat but *especially* after committing massive wartime violence is a major theme in the *Gundam* franchise. The main characters are always pilots of mobile suits, which, as a result of their size and advanced technology, are capable of mass destruction. *Gundam*’s most famous and popular characters are individuals who not only battle their enemies but often participate in the uglier high-level machinations of war. Sometimes these characters are antagonists; however, *Gundam* has consciously blurred the line between its ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ since 1979.

⁵⁴ *The Constitution of Japan* (1947), https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

⁵⁵ Atsuko Hakoto, “He Flung the Flag Onto the Ground,” in *Sensou: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War: Letters to the Editor of Asahi Shimbun*, edited by Frank Gibney; translated by Beth Cary (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2007), 285.

In *Gundam Wing*, the heroic narrative's interaction with these issues is explored through the character and story arc of Treize Khushrenada, the show's aristocratic antagonist. Like Emperor Showa, Treize is a major wartime leader in *Gundam Wing*'s universe. Steeped in ideologies about war, peace, and progress similar to those that fueled Emperor Showa and Japan's other wartime leaders, Treize represents a heroically-styled figure. Arising from these ideals, Treize frequently evokes a heroic narrative to explain his actions to himself and others.

Treize also represents a contention with the heroic narrative, specifically Emperor Showa's legacy. As *Wing* repeatedly shows its audience, Treize is a heroic perpetrator, earnest, perhaps, but deeply misguided insofar as his vision includes manipulation, massacre, and intentional orchestration of 'fortunate falls.' Unable to ever fully transcend the traditional ideals that underlay his heroic narrative, Treize's character represents a stillborn Japan postwar identity.

Treize Khushrenada: Chivalrous Antagonist, Heroic Perpetrator

Wufei Chang, *Gundam* pilot: You're only capable of looking down on people like this! You're only fighting to satisfy your ego. How many people do you think have died for you?!

Treize: Shall I tell you? As of yesterday, 99,822 people...I remember everyone who's sacrificed their lives in battle. Noventa, Septem, Ventei, Darlian, Walker, Otto, Bunt. How could I forget them? -- Episode 48

The creators of *Gundam Wing* complicate the heroic narrative's concept of a fortunate fall and the moral pass this affords figures such as Emperor Showa through their portrayal of Treize Khushrenada. His heroic posture is shadowed by what *Wing*'s audience is clearly

meant to identify as problematic moral leadership. While emphasizing his identity as a perpetrator, however, the series never dismisses Treize as pure evil. Instead of forfeiting his heroic attributes, *Wing* ultimately emphasizes the necessity of comprehending the complexity of Treize's identity, however unpalatable.

The first half of the series is when *Wing*'s audience most frequently sees Treize act like a perpetrator. However, he does not usually enact violence personally. By putting its audience in the room when Treize gives orders as well as allowing us to hear his interior thoughts, *Wing* makes it clear Treize is directly responsible for perpetrating acts of violence. When we are first introduced to the series' universe, the major power-holder is the United Earth Sphere Alliance and its military. While claiming to restore "Justice and Peace" to the Earth Sphere, the Alliance actually seizes control of space colonies, limiting communication between colonies and with Earth.⁵⁶ We learn that OZ, which Treize founded and leads in the first half of *Wing*, originated as a supplier of Alliance mobile suits. By the time of the events in *Wing*, the Alliance has allowed OZ to act independently for some time.⁵⁷ Ironically, this freedom affords Treize the opportunity to carefully engineer a coup d'état against the Alliance.

In Episode 7, Treize and his trusted subordinate, Lady Une, attend a large gathering at New Edwards Base, along with every major military leader of the Alliance, in which discussions about unilateral disarmament are voiced. Contrasting these public conversations are Treize and Une's quiet dialogs, which reveal their secret intentions to *Wing*'s audience.

⁵⁶ Ep. 1.

⁵⁷ Ep. 3.

Une has circulated a rumor indicating the conference is a gathering of only OZ officials, it having been established that OZ is the primary target of the Gundam pilots. The rumor is meant to entice their arrival at New Edwards and to harness their destructive power to kill the top Alliance leaders, doing OZ's dirty work for them. To further secure the elimination of the Alliance leaders, upon departure from the conference, Treize personally invites them to use his shuttle while he himself boards a different one. When the Alliance leaders' shuttle lifts off from the base, the Gundam pilots' intelligence indicates it belongs to OZ. Heero, one of the Gundam pilots, slices through it with a beam saber. It explodes in midair.⁵⁸

Treize and Une's manipulation goes one step further. They divert Alliance military General Septem, who expressed uncertainty during the conference peace talks, to the shuttle they board. Informed of the deaths of his fellow Alliance leaders and believing the Gundams were sent as representatives of the colonies' collective malcontent toward the Earth, Septem declares in a public broadcast to both Earth and the colonies, "We will not yield to the colonies! We must fight them to the bitter end!" With the General's proclamation legitimizing a renewal of outright conflict in the Earth Sphere, he has served his final purpose. Lady Une ejects him in-flight, shooting him in the head with a pistol as he falls through the air. The scene shifts to elsewhere on the plane where Treize sits alone and comfortable, his eyes closed. "The second act has just begun," he murmurs.⁵⁹

In addition to asserting Treize's perpetrator identity, *Wing* simultaneously anchors him as a recognizably heroic figure, arguably more so than any other character in the series.

⁵⁸ Ep. 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Treize has the visuals of a western knight, tall and handsome with the trappings of his culture's warrior class--military uniform, sword, even, occasionally, a cape.⁶⁰ Treize is first introduced in the series while attending an opera,⁶¹ casting him as an enlightened warrior.⁶²

While *Gundam Wing* explicitly tells its audience that Romefeller emerged from the European aristocracy,⁶³ it is possible this is a technique to obfuscate its true historical referents. Taken as a whole, Treize is more likely styled from the appearance of Japanese aristocrats in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who adopted western clothes and customs in addition to maintaining many attributes of bushido, the way of the learned warrior or samurai. Otherwise out-of-place scenes of Treize releasing songbirds from a cage⁶⁴ and putting scenes of nature onto the screens of a subordinate's mobile suit to calm them⁶⁵ would fit that context.⁶⁶ Moreover, Treize's demeanor has a zen-like quality to it. His focus and purpose are obviously refined to a point, resulting in his consummate leadership and evoking unusual devotion in the soldiers he commands. All of these attributes--and others that will be

⁶⁰ The English subbing and dubbing even uses the word "knight" in a speech by Duke Dermail to describe Treize's role in Romefeller: "This gentleman is a brave knight fighting for us..." Episode 14.

⁶¹ Ep. 1.

⁶² Ep. 3.

⁶³ Ep. 14.

⁶⁴ Ep. 6.

⁶⁵ Ep. 8.

⁶⁶ See Sachiko Koyama, "History of Bird-Keeping and the Teaching of Tricks to Using *Cyanistes Varius* (varied tit) in Japan," *Archives of Natural History*, (October 2015). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271525088_History_of_bird-keeping_and_the_teaching_of_tricks_using_Cyanistes_varius_varied_tit_in_Japan. "The novels and poems written about varied tits during the Kamakura Era were all by or about aristocrats and other noble people (for example, *Taiheiki* (Anonymous 1361), *Kokonchomonju* (Tachibana 1254), *Fubokuwakasho* (Fujiwara c. 1310)), which suggests that the keeping of pet birds was confined to people of high social status, and was a status symbol or luxury." However, this source goes on to say, "From the seventeenth century, records of keeping birds included many written by commoners..." 213-214.

examined in the next section--serve to anchor Treize as a heroic eastern figure and reinforce that *Wing* is absorbed with questions of the nature of the Japanese hero.⁶⁷

After establishing Treize as a heroic perpetrator, *Wing* eventually creates two instances in which Treize “falls” or loses. The losses follow major soul-searching on Treize’s part, although the impenetrability of his philosophical musings have led many viewers of *Wing*, not unlike various characters in the series, to dislike Treize a great deal.⁶⁸ After the massacre of the Alliance leaders, it quickly becomes clear Treize is not as supremely powerful as he first appeared; instead, he is a member of the Romefeller Foundation, characterized as a “brave knight” by Duke Dermal, a man who appears to be his superior. In Episode 14, for the first time we see a gathering of Romefeller’s members as the narrator tells us the Foundation was formed from European royalty who “with their enormous financial power and connections [] poured their energy into weapons development,” eventually becoming powerful enough to back the coup d’etat led by Treize. In a speech to the assembled group Duke Dermal clarifies the foundation’s philosophy and values, stating, “The world was corrupted with imperfect ideas like equality and freedom. The time’s arrived where we must once again take control.”⁶⁹ Treize appears to have no qualms with these principles.

⁶⁷ William Scott Wilson, translator, editor, *Ideals of the Samurai: Writings of Japanese Warriors*, (Black Belt Books, A Division of Ohara Publications, Inc.), 1982.

⁶⁸ Eric Vilas Boas, “How Treize Manipulated Everyone in ‘Gundam Wing:’ Meet the Gundam franchise’s Dick Cheney. Or Lyndon B. Johnson. Or Stringer Bell. Really, take your pick,” Dot + Line, April 29, 2019, <https://dotandline.net/treize-khushrenada-gundam-wing-essay/>. See also Alyssa Gonzalez, “Treize Khushrenada You Beautiful Asshole: Gundam Wing in the Age of Fascism,” The Orbit, February 17, 2017, <https://the-orbit.net/alyssa/2017/02/17/treize-khushrenada-beautiful-asshole-gundam-wing-age-fascism/>.

⁶⁹ Ep. 14.

In the meantime, the Gundam pilots are silenced by OZ's threat to target the colonies, unbeknownst to the colonies themselves.⁷⁰ As a result of this, when Lady Une goes to space as a diplomat claiming intentions of peace-making, the colony's representatives prove open to OZ's overtures and explicitly reject further efforts by the Gundams to defend and protect them. Elsewhere, Treize's other most trusted subordinate, Zechs, defects from OZ. Romefeller tests a new technology called the mobile doll, mobile suits operated by artificial intelligence.⁷¹

By the midpoint of the show, Treize, ever-attempting to follow the zeitgeist of the times, which he believes to be embodied by the Gundam pilots, voluntarily steps down from his leadership in Romefeller. In a scene in a large hall lined with raised seats of aristocratically-dressed all-male members, Duke Dermail announces the organization's plans to harness the imminent mass-production of mobile dolls in space by positioning them in "dispute-ridden regions in each country" on Earth. Such efforts will "show the entire world how powerful we are, and bring order to the world."⁷²

As he finishes, Treize walks down the middle of the hall toward Dermail's podium. He begins bluntly: "I can't support the Romefeller Foundation's current path." He continues at length, describing his disgust at the use of mobile dolls instead of human pilots and his growing admiration for the Gundam pilots' resistance to OZ in the face of demoralizing defeat. After several minutes of speaking, Duke Dermail tersely queries, "[W]hat are you getting at?" "I want to be a loser," responds Treize. Dermail confirms Treize's intention to

⁷⁰ Ep. 10.

⁷¹ Eps. 17-24.

⁷² Ep. 25.

step down from OZ's leadership, places a gold-detailed pistol on the podium while acknowledging Treize's service, and orders him confined to Romefeller's headquarters.⁷³

This speech, conspicuous at the series's midpoint, reminds us of Treize's philosophical moorings and how those sensibilities contribute to a heroic narrative he tells himself and Romefeller. Early in the speech, Treize states a phrase that may well be one of the most recognizable word-for-word evocations of the heroic narrative: "I'd also like to express my regret over the lost souls [in recent battles]..." He also indicates the root of his disagreement with Romefeller--"I believe what mankind needs is not absolute victory but a certain demeanor in fighting, an attitude towards it." This aesthetic of war is arguably the most characteristic and identifiable element of Treize's philosophy. His embrace of the fallen hero, however, is new, motivated by an admiration of the Gundam pilots. Highlighting their actions (which are visually reinforced by flashbacks to the last several episodes), Treize's admiration for them is clear when he observes, "Tradition appears blurred alongside their pure feelings...Winners of war will eventually decline in history to be losers; only then can they cultivate a new energy." With this last statement he establishes his concept of the "fortunate fall." He, like the Gundam pilots, can lose now in order to "cultivate a new energy" later--so he chooses to be a loser now.⁷⁴

Choosing to lose weighs heavily on Treize despite his ownership of it. In a fateful meeting with Gundam pilot Heero Yuy in Episode 34, Treize repeatedly gives the younger pilot the opportunity to kill him, holding out what appears to be the same golden pistol

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Dermail gave him. Heero refuses and Treize shows him the elite mobile suit, Epyon, he has created during his time in confinement. Epyon is a red suit with a scorpion-like whip and claws whose cockpit system pushes its pilots to psychological breaking points. After entrusting this seeming devil into Heero's possession, Treize largely disappears from the storyline until Zechs, his former friend, appears in space as the leader of White Fang. Assuming the leadership of Earth's World Nation from Relena Peacecraft in Episode 41, Treize's motivations are revealed in a monologue to an unconscious Lady Une, who is recovering from a bullet wound:

I want you to see how I handle things now. A fantastic battle will commence between Space and Earth and will end the pathetic history mankind has created. A star role in this final scene would be too big a burden for Relena Peacecraft. I must take on the role as leader. I must. She can establish the new history we'll lay out for her.⁷⁵

What this burden is and how Treize will lay out the future for another person's leadership becomes clear in his final scene in *Wing* where he exits the Earth Sphere's stage by suicide. In the penultimate episode, Treize appears in the refitted mobile suit Tallgeese and fights the Gundam pilot Wufei Chang.⁷⁶ This encounter echoes an earlier one in Episode 8 when Treize and Wufei face off in a sword duel, which Treize deftly wins. A close watch of their mobile suit battle in Episode 48 suggests a similar superiority on Treize's part; it even appears Treize is baiting Wufei. It soon becomes clear, however, that he is baiting him

⁷⁵ Ep. 41.

⁷⁶ In addition to having a conspicuously Chinese name, Wufei Chang is overtly portrayed as culturally Chinese. In *Wing* we are told he is descended from the Long clan, which was forced to go to outer space (Ep. 35). Wufei calls his Gundam "Nataku," the name of a being in Chinese mythology that was created in the Kunlun mountains and can take human form. In the canonical *Gundam Wing* manga *Episode Zero* we learn his colony was once targeted with a biological weapon. In light of Japan and China's shared wartime history, the inclusion of Wufei, especially as Treize's rival, is very intriguing. Story by Katsuyuki Sumizawa, *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing: Episode Zero*, art by Akira Kanbe, (San Francisco, CA: VIZ, LLC, 2003).

not with the aim of killing Wufei, but to bait Wufei into killing *him*. Talking throughout their battle, Treize winds his enemy into such a frenzy that Wufei fails to realize Treize does not defend himself when he makes his final charge. The beam trident of Wufei's Gundam stabs deep into the Tallgeese's left side, the redness of the area of the damaged white mobile suit evoking the mortal wound of a human. As Treize floats away in a haze of portentous static, he calmly says, "That was beautiful, Wufei," calling him his "eternal friend," and stating "I'm honored I could fight with you pilots." Moments later his suit explodes, confirming his death.⁷⁷

This scene underlines the evolution in Treize's perception of his identity as a perpetrator while continuing to express major aspects of the heroic narrative. Immediately prior to Treize's death, Wufei, angry and disgusted with what he knows about Treize's actions throughout the series' ongoing conflicts, accuses Treize of arrogance, yelling "You're only capable of looking down on people like this! You're only fighting to satisfy your own ego!" Visibly breathing hard not only from the exertion of fighting but from the emotional charge of his accusations, Wufei finally shouts "How many people do you think have died for you?!" Treize's bizarre response underlines his internalization of his perpetrator identity. Speaking calmly, as he has throughout the encounter, Treize tells a shocked Wufei "As of yesterday, 99,822 people," and inquires of Lady Une via a communication system between his suit and the World Nation's base of operations how many more people had died in battle

⁷⁷ Ep. 48.

that day. She reports back to him numbers for both the White Fang (82) and the World Nation's forces (105).⁷⁸

Treize goes on, his calm demeanor finally beginning to crack with emotion. "I remember everyone who's sacrificed their lives in battle. Noventa, Septem, Ventei, Darlian, Walker, Otto, Bunt. How could I forget them?" While the last three are OZ soldiers who served under Treize, the first four are targets Treize specifically ordered killed, including three Alliance leaders who died at the New Edwards Base. In naming those three men in response to Wufei's question, he takes responsibility for their deaths.⁷⁹

While he accepts his identity as a perpetrator, even in his last moments Treize articulates a heroic narrative. After giving the names of his subordinates and the victims of the military violence for which he is directly responsible, Treize's emotions shift from sadness to passion. Possibly alluding to regret, Treize tells Wufei, "I can only grieve over the lives lost by those who fought." Unwilling, however, to accept a helpless stance, Treize declares, "But at least try and understand this. Not one of those people died in vain!" He then charges towards Wufei to embrace the deadly destiny of the fallen hero. His death precipitates a "fortunate fall"--informed of his death, Lady Une announces the immediate surrender of the World Nation, effectively ending the Eve Wars.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Treize and Emperor Showa: Fallen Heroes

It is according to the dictates of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the [unavoidable] and suffering what is unsufferable...Unite your total strength to be devoted to the construction for the future. -- Emperor Showa's surrender speech to the people of Japan, Radio Broadcast, August 15, 1945⁸¹

Treize: I want you to see how I handle things now...I must take on the role as leader. I must. [Relena Peacecraft] can establish the new history we'll lay out for her.⁸² -- Episode 41.

The character of Treize Khushrenada demonstrates many of the defining characteristics as well as the prewar and wartime experiences of Emperor Showa. Treize's aristocratic and militarized background, the loyalty he receives, his uneasy existence between ancient and modern values, and his complicated perpetrator identity all reflect historical aspects seen in Emperor Showa's life, times, and war responsibility. Emperor Showa, like Treize in *Wing*, felt compelled to account for Japan's defeat not only to himself but to the collectivity he led, most notably through his August 15th surrender speech in 1945. His desire to ameliorate the collective trauma of massive wartime chaos and violence led to his articulating a heroic narrative arising from his cultural and wartime ideologies. Officially falling from godlike status to mere human in 1946,⁸³ Emperor Showa serves as Japan's ultimate fallen hero, representative of the many fallen heroes who served in the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War.

⁸¹ "Emperor Hirohito, Accepting the Potsdam Declaration, Radio Broadcast," Transmitted by Domei and Recorded by the Federal Communications Commission, 14 August 1945, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/hirohito.htm>.

⁸² Ep. 41.

⁸³ "Imperial Rescript Denying His Divinity (Professing His Humanity)," Issued January 1, 1946, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryo/03/056shoshi.html>.

Emperor Showa's Life and Heroic Legacy

In 1901 Emperor Showa was born heir apparent to the imperial throne of Japan. The country was still establishing its emergence into the industrial modern period, an emergence characterized by a sense of national survival and an intense focus on Japan's national identity--past, present, and future. He became regent of Japan when he was seventeen and emperor when he was twenty-four. He was commissioned in the army and navy as a young man and studied military science. The modernizing world he grew up in often affected the semblance of westernization, including both western-style military uniforms and the frock coat, necktie, and white-collared shirt of the European "dandy." Japanese elites at the time also engaged in western leisure activities like formal dances, banquets, and recitals.⁸⁴

Historians agree Emperor Showa was a smart, self-motivated man who took his responsibilities seriously, responsibilities which were often contradictory.⁸⁵ In his ceremonial roles he was taught to "be generous and think of the people as his treasure...he should labor to heighten his augustness and high virtues, yet also try to be gentle."⁸⁶ As Japan's divine sovereign he was, after all, "sacred and inviolable."⁸⁷ Yet he was also taught to recognize his capacity for more direct participation in Japan's affairs. To that end he was instructed to be shrewd, even to lay aside ethics in order to be driven utmost by a single question: Is it in the

⁸⁴ Jason G. Karlin, "The Gender of Nationalism: Competing Masculinities in Meiji Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 41-77.

⁸⁵ In addition to Bix's extensive research on this, see also John Dower's pithy summary in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1999), 289-290.

⁸⁶ Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 132-133.

⁸⁷ "The Constitution of the Empire of Japan," 1889, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/1889con.html>.

national interest?⁸⁸ Complicating his leadership role even further was his often-ambiguous relationship with Japan's Imperial Diet, which was led by the prime minister.

Emperor Showa's agency has long been downplayed and misrepresented, particularly by the Occupation's American leaders, who consciously de-emphasized their portrayal of the emperor's role in Japan's wartime actions in order to keep him on the throne to pacify and stabilize Japan's immediate postwar society.⁸⁹ However, since Emperor Showa's death, many historians have contested the image of the emperor as a "mousy and passive figurehead."⁹⁰ According to Herbert Bix, author of *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2000), Emperor Showa was usually well-informed of current events and proactive in directing the course of events when possible. Of the Manchuria Incident in 1931, considered to be the beginning of Japan's fifteen years of protracted conflict, Bix states the emperor "knew that the incident had been staged...knew who had planned it, who had ordered it, and who had carried it out... [he was] was totally aware that several senior officers had violated the army's own penal law."⁹¹ Despite this, by early 1932 he had issued an imperial rescript praising the branch of the Japanese military responsible for the incident, admiring how they

⁸⁸ Bix, 133.

⁸⁹ See Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 319-330. "Despite the charge to do so, neither SCAP nor the IPS ever conducted a serious investigation of the emperor's involvement in promoting aggression," 325.

⁹⁰ Excerpt from *Los Angeles Times* review of *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, back cover of *Hirohito*. See also *New York Times* opinion article from January 7, 1989, date of Emperor Showa's death. "The modesty of this shy, scholarly man became, in the postwar era, a blessing to his nation as it reinvented itself from amid the ashes of a devastating defeat. But his passive acquiescence to militaristic politicians was no blessing during the 1930's. In his exalted position, he might have helped spare the world limitless tragedy. Instead, war became inevitable." "Japan's Emperor: A Mortal Man," *New York Times* archive, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/07/opinion/japan-s-emperor-a-mortal-man.html>.

⁹¹ Bix, 240.

fought in “self-defense” against Chinese “bandits” as well as for having “strengthened the authority of the emperor’s army.”⁹²

From 1931 to 1945, his eagerness to enable whatever actions were required to “force the Chinese to reflect on their actions”⁹³ burgeoned into increasingly proactive, direct imperial orders. After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937, another instance of the Japanese military’s manipulative instigation of conflict, Emperor Showa encouraged his navy officers, according to Bix, to “accept [] the position of his admirals not reluctantly but actively, pressing his generals to move with decisiveness” to undertake several major maneuvers against China that would in five short months lead to the notorious Rape of Nanjing.⁹⁴

Furthermore, the emperor bore direct responsibility along with the Army Department for sanctioning the use of poison gas against Chinese and Mongolians, including both combatants and non-combatants. Chemical warfare had been explicitly banned after World War 1 in the Versailles Peace Treaty, which Japan signed and ratified in 1919. Nevertheless, beginning in July 1937 following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the emperor issued a directive stating “[Y]ou may use tear gas at suitable times.” This time he did not rubber-stamp a previous action--he opened the door for something new. According to Bix and Japanese historians Yoshimi Yoshiaki and Matsuno Seiya,

Gas was the one weapon over which Hirohito, the Imperial Headquarters, and the high command retained close, effective control throughout the entire China war...Gas could be employed only after explicit authorization had been requested and received

⁹² Ibid., 247.

⁹³ Ibid., 324.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 325.

from Imperial Headquarters-Army Department, usually in the form of “directives” issued by the chief of staff after having first obtained the emperor’s permission.⁹⁵

In light of such research, it is possible to conclude that Emperor Showa, like his prime ministers, his generals, his industrialists, and his millions of Imperial soldiers, was a perpetrator in the Asia-Pacific War.

The resistance to accepting this within Japan, even today, is grounded in the narrative created about the emperor after the war, as well as the relationship the Japanese were exhorted to adopt towards him during it. Considered the direct descendant in a 2,000 year lineage from Japan’s sun goddess, Amaterasu, the image of a divine emperor was ripe for wartime propaganda. Emperor Showa was the aspirational hero of all fighting men and every sacrificing civilian in Japan: everyone was called upon to emulate his virtues. This propaganda was so effective at mobilizing Japan’s loyal population it led to non-combatants who jumped off of cliffs and killed their own children before enemy troops arrived, rather than disgracing their emperor’s honor with their perceived failures. Beginning in 1943, when the war was already taking a desperate turn for the worst, his soldiers became *nikudan* or “human bullets” for him. In Japan’s final hour they became his *kamikaze* or “divine wind.” *Banzai* was their cry: “Long Live his Majesty the Emperor.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., 361. Based on research by Japanese historians Yoshimi Yoshiaki and Matsuno Seiya (1997). Research is still emerging on the topic of Japan’s use of chemical warfare during the Asia-Pacific War. In 2019, Matsuno Seiya unearthed a report detailing the Japanese army’s use of poison gases. It is the first such Japanese military document to be published. It is generally assumed similar materials were destroyed in 1945. “Report discovered detailing Japan’s wartime use of nerve agents,” *Kyodo News*, July 7, 2019, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2019/07/1454a917df00-report-discovered-detailing-japans-wartime-use-of-nerve-agents.html>.

⁹⁶ See David C. Earhart’s chapter “Dying Honorably, From Attu to Iwo Jima” in *Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media* for an overview of the propagandistic depiction in Japanese media of mass suicide attacks initiated in 1943 with Colonel Yamazaki’s last stand on Attu.

While the emperor proved hard-pressed to end the war, once he agreed to do so it was his responsibility to literally break the silence, which would end the war in the minds of his people. On August 15th, a day after the Japanese notified their acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, his voice crackled through the radio in arguably the most important narrative moment in Japanese collective memory in the 20th century. The voice, which almost no common Japanese person had ever heard, told them the war was over; mired in court language that was indecipherable to many Japanese and phrases that avoided bluntly stating the facts of Japan's disastrous failure, Emperor Showa attempted to lessen the moment's bleakness and his people's despair, stating:

We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all of you, our subjects. It is according to the dictates of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the [unavoidable] and suffering what is unsufferable...Unite your total strength to be devoted to the construction for the future.⁹⁷

Their suffering had purpose, he gently told his "treasured" masses.⁹⁸ Japan's sacrifices had paved a way for a "grand peace." He exhorted them to look forward, not backwards. Although the heroic narrative had been articulated at times earlier in the war,⁹⁹ it was with this last colossal and final defeat, with its utterance by the symbol of Japan itself, that it became established among Japan's postwar narratives.

⁹⁷ "Emperor Hirohito, Accepting the Potsdam Declaration, Radio Broadcast."

⁹⁸ Bix, 132.

⁹⁹ In *The Long Defeat* Akiko Hashimoto cites Captain Iwao Usubuchi's words immediately preceding the sinking of the battleship Yamato on April 7, 1945: "We will lead the way. We will die as harbingers of Japan's new life. That's where our real satisfaction lies, isn't it?" 10.

Treize as Analog to Emperor Showa's Life and Heroic Legacy

The similarities between Emperor Showa and the character of Treize Khushrenada are myriad, ranging from the superficial to the ponderously significant. Treize's appearance reflects western influences on Japanese military and civilian fashion. Canon information about Treize's age indicates he is twenty-four years old during *Wing*, the same age as Emperor Showa when he ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne.¹⁰⁰ Mired in an aristocratic, militarized culture, Treize demonstrates many distinctive attributes of the emperor including his formality, self-possession, and aloofness, underlining the symbolic as well as active leadership of each.

Of particular relevance are the similarities between the two leaders as objects of intense loyalty, their complex relationship with other powerholders, their identities as wartime perpetrators, and finally their identities as fallen heroes who offer a heroic narrative about their collectivities' wartime experiences. In *Gundam Wing*, the loyalty Treize inspires in his subordinates is shocking to the point of bizarre, similar to the loyalty demonstrated on the emperor's behalf during the Asia-Pacific War. In several scenes throughout the series, unnamed soldiers are depicted crying "Long Live Treize Khushrenada" before charging into death¹⁰¹ or begging survivors to continue protecting him.¹⁰² Echoing the dynamic between

¹⁰⁰ Information about Treize's age comes from "Treize Khushrenada," *GundamOfficial.com*, Copyright Sotsu Agency and 1999 Bandai America, Inc., https://web.archive.org/web/20120917000344/http://www.gundamofficial.com/www_ac/gw/characters/char_treize.html.

¹⁰¹ Ep. 42 An unnamed OZ soldier turned Treize Faction turned White Fang who then abandons the White Fang when Treize becomes leader of the World Nation. Pursued by White Fang as a traitor he is incidentally saved by a Gundam pilot, Wufei Chang, who is bent on destroying all mobile suits in space. After admiring the Gundam's efforts (similar to Treize), the soldier aids the Gundam pilot with his own suicide attack. The image is very reminiscent of the acts and purported philosophy of Japan's kamikaze pilots.

the emperor and Japan's primary governing bodies, the relationship between power brokers of seemingly equal but different statuses in *Wing* plays out between Treize and the Romefeller Foundation, particularly Duke Dermail, who is arguably a stand-in for the war-mongering Tojo Hideki.

Treize mirrors Emperor Showa as a perpetrator, engaging in what are widely considered to be illegal acts of war and violence. In the coup d'état Treize leads against the Alliance, we see how secretive his efforts are, a hallmark of the actions of Japan's Kwantung Army that instigated both the Manchuria and Marco Polo Bridge Incidents. The directness of Treize's role in causing the massacre at New Edwards while maintaining a distance from its bloody nature can be seen reflected in the emperor's active and even direct roles at various times throughout the Asia-Pacific War, including his directives to use chemical warfare against the Chinese.¹⁰³ The clouded responsibility of each leader enabled them to maintain a superficial purity that promoted the heroic image their followers worshipped, compelling those followers to greater acts of violence on their leaders' behalf.

Finally, Treize and Emperor Showa identified themselves as fallen heroes and banner bearers of heroic narratives, though the analogy here is less exact because of Treize's decision to commit suicide. In Episode 25, Treize steps down from Romefeller, identifying himself with the Gundam pilots he perceives as fallen heroes. In Episode 48, having concluded his role in past events obviates his ability to participate in the future he believes the pilots are harbingers of, he precipitates his own "fall" by committing suicide, declaring

¹⁰² Ep. 34.

¹⁰³ Ep. 10.

beforehand the value of the lives lost in the past year's conflicts and his hopes for a better future laid out, in part, by his own actions, heroic and perpetrator alike. In the summer of 1945, Emperor Showa pushed the war forward even when counseled to do otherwise,¹⁰⁴ but eventually decided to end the war before the Allies set foot on Japan's home islands, choosing loss. Moreover, when he and his government decided to do so, he took the unprecedented step of issuing his own voice into the public spaces of Japan, taking on the role of Japan's symbolic fallen hero.¹⁰⁵

Aspects of the way they choose to frame and articulate their own heroic narrative are also similar. Treize's speech to an unconscious Lady Une, though different from the emperor's surrender speech in being a private communication, is similar in expressing Treize's complicated vision for the future. "I want you to see how I handle things now," he tells her, indicating his resumption of leadership before the final battle in *Wing*. His leadership, however, will only occur as long as a certain "burden" exists, which he must contend with in order to leave Relena Peacecraft in a position to "establish the new history we'll lay out for her."¹⁰⁶ In his repetition of "I must take on the role as leader. I must," we hear his resignation.

Emperor Showa sets a similar tone of hopeful fatalism during his surrender speech in August 1945. "We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all of you," he states, aligning himself with the experiences of his subjects. Focusing on the hope of the future, he goes on, "It is according to the dictates of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a

¹⁰⁴ Fumimaro Konoe met with Emperor Showa on February 14, 1945. Bix, 489.

¹⁰⁵ See Bix, Chapter 13 "Delayed Surrender," 487-530.

¹⁰⁶ Ep. 41.

grand peace for all generations to come.” His burden, and that of the wartime generation he implies along with himself, has been extraordinary, “suffering what is insufferable...” Yet he, like Treize, commits himself and his people to “the construction [of] the future.” Like Treize, the time of opportunity for him to shape and form that narrative would close abruptly.

Treize and Emperor Showa’s Silenced Legacies: A Stillborn Japanese Identity

Lady Une: Treize is hoping we’ll put up a fight...Without fighting nothing can be created.¹⁰⁷ - Episode 22.

In a fictionalized version of the first meeting between Emperor Showa and US General George MacArthur, the 2012 film *Emperor* depicts the emperor kneeling down before MacArthur, willing to take responsibility for Japan’s defeat, willing even to die. MacArthur, gruff but human, extends mercy.¹⁰⁸ This scene, representing a common and popular narrative in the US and Japan, makes heroes out of both MacArthur and the Emperor and alludes to the reality that together the two perpetuated Japan’s heroic narrative. If Emperor Showa was not guilty of war crimes, how then could his people, of whom he was the symbolic representative, be guilty?

Gundam Wing’s portrayal of Treize Khushrenada as an analogy to Emperor Showa returns to questions about not making men like the emperor accountable for their war responsibility. Specifically it raises questions about the extent to which silencing the emperor from admitting war guilt was a disservice to the man himself and the people he was taught to “treasure”. Failing to contend with this legacy publicly may have acted as an impediment to

¹⁰⁷ Ep. 22.

¹⁰⁸ *Emperor*, directed by Peter Webber (2012; Lionsgate, 2013), film.

the reasonable and logical self-reflection necessary to Japan acknowledging its perpetrator role in the Asia-Pacific War, an acknowledgment necessary to moving past this identity, especially by other Asian nations. As the Tokyo housewife Hakoto Atsuko implied at the beginning of this chapter, not doing so produced a certain stasis to questions surrounding Japanese identity.¹⁰⁹ Treize's own deeply complicated road to recognizing his identity as a perpetrator strongly suggests that confronting these difficult realities is painful and perhaps even deadly. It does, at least, help people move forward.

While Treize represents the heroic narrative in many ways, his arc through the story of *Gundam Wing* ultimately sees him deviate from it in ways Emperor Showa was unable to do, taking action to acknowledge his perpetrator identity where Emperor Showa did not. Through Treize, *Wing* also explores the gray areas between the heroic and perpetrator narratives by demonstrating how the values underlying the heroic narrative can lead to becoming a perpetrator and, moreover, make it extremely difficult to acknowledge or contend with one's perpetrator identity.

Becoming a Heroic Perpetrator

Throughout *Wing* Treize consistently adheres to his heroic values. He accepts war as a valuable mode of human progress and defines peace as order and control. From Treize's

¹⁰⁹ "There is something that I have doubts about. Each year newspapers and television stations produce special reports on the War. Although these evoke the tragedy of war for the viewers, they do not often touch upon the Emperor, who must have been at the root of this War...no matter how many times one reads history books, it is clear that this War could not have been carried out without the Emperor's orders. He held supreme command." *Sensou: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*, 285.

point of view, wars and the soldiers who fight them are glorious.¹¹⁰ Treize's admiration for the Gundam pilots, while significant in his decision to step down from OZ, nevertheless seems to fit within his value system. His attempts to do this, however, are meant to be jarring. From Treize's conversation with Heero Yuy in Episode 34 it is clear the Gundam pilots do not share Treize's values.

An early sign that Treize's values are inherently problematic is the confusion evident in his subordinates as they try to interpret his wishes. Several times in *Wing Zechs Merquise*, Lady Une, and OZ Lieutenant Lucrezia Noin disagree amongst themselves regarding Treize's orders. For example, in Ep. 10 Treize authorizes a mission to eliminate the Gundams, leaving its planning and execution to Lady Une. Ever eager to please him, when her first plan fails she threatens the Gundams into surrendering by aiming missiles at the space colonies. Zechs, dueling in his mobile suit with Heero Yuy, tersely comments, "Hell of a time for tasteless tactics!" before arguing with Une through a communication line, "That isn't what His Excellency wants!" When she refuses to listen, he bluntly tells her, "You clearly don't understand His Excellency." She ends their communication. Noin, who is serving in the command center with Une, starts in where Zechs left off, explaining "His Excellency doesn't want battles that involve civilians." In response, Une slaps her, yelling, "The colonies can be flattened with the most minute of attacks. They're insignificant worlds for the pathetic!" Shortly thereafter Noin receives a call-in from Treize. Refusing to hand

¹¹⁰ Ep. 14.

over the phone, Noin relates to Une, “He says for you to be more graceful. About everything.”¹¹¹

Wing demonstrates that Une, Zechs, and Noin all correctly interpreted Treize’s values in this scene. In Episode 8 Treize tells Lady Une she needs to “learn more about OZ,” reinforcing Zechs and Noin’s position that Une has grievously misunderstood Treize’s wishes. However, Une’s interpretation that large scale violence was a viable option also had a precedent by this point in *Wing*, as seen in OZ’s coup d’etat in Episode 7. Moreover, Treize is clearly willing to accept civilian fatalities in pursuit of a cause--in Episode 5 he explicitly orders Une to kill Relena after she witnesses her father’s assassination. OZ’s derisive view of the colonies is reflected in Episode 28 when Treize muses to himself, “The living environment of the colonies is bogus.” The lack of clarity among his subordinates is all the more significant as it results in them ordering atrocities. As a leader responsible for the actions of his soldiers, Treize bears the blame for these acts.¹¹²

Treize’s complicated and impenetrable ideologies and the puzzlement he causes those around him mirror both what is well-known and what remains mysterious about Emperor Showa and Japan’s parliamentary wartime leaders. In his surrender speech, the emperor perceived himself as the fountainhead of Japan’s national identity and ideology. He was, of course, taught to ascribe to and promote these ideals since childhood, and historians generally accept that he endeavored to live up to the aspirational legacies of his

¹¹¹ Ep. 10.

¹¹² There are several examples of Lady Une misunderstanding Treize. Eventually this persists to the point where she develops a split personality, which itself is likely a manifestation of the dissonance in Treize’s own thought. Treize himself alludes to this in Episode 22: “[T]here’s one other person who understands me. Her feelings towards me have given her split personalities.”

predecessors.¹¹³ His fervent commitment could not expunge the moral complications inherent in his role, however. Since his death, many histories have shed light on the nature of these complexities, many of which return to the issue of his wartime responsibility. While his death opened up the examination of these issues, the long-standing gaps about the nature of Emperor Showa's involvement continue to cause controversy.¹¹⁴ Unresolved questions about the emperor's war responsibility allow the heroic narrative to persist, a narrative in which Japan's responsibility for the war becomes fine print at best.

The Difficulty of Facing One's Perpetrator Identity

In *Wing*, Treize experiences a growing awareness of his perpetrator identity. Unlike the emperor, who was silenced by his own exoneration and the subsequent Occupation policies based on that exoneration, Treize eventually confronts his guilt. However, *Wing* makes it clear that doing so is not easy, simple, or painless. For Treize it proves to be the opposite--difficult, complicated, and painful.

Wing's first wishful rewriting of the emperor's life appears in Treize's difficult and apparently futile confrontations with Romefeller's militarists (re: Imperial Japanese Army) led by Duke Demail (read Tojo Hideki). Attempting to demonstrate the value of the human pilot inside mobile suits, Treize interrupts a mobile doll simulation by piloting a mobile suit,

¹¹³ Ref. Bix and Dower, who despite being extremely critical of his role in the war nonetheless characterize him as an intellectually competent and earnest leader.

¹¹⁴ In his review of Bix's *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, Ben-Ami Shillony cites several works written between 1990 and 2000 that also contested the dominant narrative of the emperor being a pawn of Japan's military leaders; however, the works clearly lack a consensus on the nature of the emperor's responsibility. Bix takes the hardest stance, writing the emperor is not only responsible but more responsible than his cronies. Despite what historians have said, Japanese society has not broadly dealt with his wartime responsibility. The issue, however, remains. Shillony, Ben-Ami. "Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan (Book Review)." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 141-46.

destroying the mobile doll test suits, then approaching the control room in which Duke Dermail and the engineer responsible for the dolls' invention stand. Looming over the facility, he orders the subordinate soldiers within to target the engineer. Demonstrating the zealous loyalty Treize inspires in his soldiers, they unhesitatingly turn their guns on men who are Treize's equals or possibly even superiors in Romefeller. Treize says, "Wars are about more than fighting with mobile suits...Mobile dolls and soldiers both take their orders from humans. I ask that you place more value on humans and learn to love them." He calls off his order to kill the engineer.¹¹⁵

Despite making his point, the mobile dolls prove too attractive to abandon. Not long after this confrontation, Romefeller moves ahead with the mobile dolls' mass production. Unable to accept the new status quo, Treize steps down from leading OZ.¹¹⁶ This too is a fanciful insertion, the historical conceit being Treize premeditating a "fortunate fall." In its own defeat, Japan did no such thing. Treize's proactivity contrasts sharply with Emperor Showa's known support for the war until the atomic bombs were dropped.¹¹⁷

Treize's defection from OZ, however, does not signal his recognition of being a perpetrator. Treize himself and the psychological process of identifying as a perpetrator are far more complicated. In his speech in Episode 25, he does not comment on his past actions. What he *is* able to articulate at this point is that he "wants to be a loser." In Episode 28 we see him brought to a remote castle and placed under house arrest. In an interior monologue he explicitly defends his past actions, stating "By appearing on the center stage of history we

¹¹⁵ Ep. 18.

¹¹⁶ Ep. 25.

¹¹⁷ Bix, 511.

directed the times in the right direction.” While his defection signifies a major shift in his ability to influence the future, it becomes clear how little his mindset has changed. “As long as mankind exists in this world there will always be battles. And denouncing battles will never lead to peace,” he muses. Still absorbed with the beauty of battle and its central figure--the soldier--Treize concludes, “It is because one faces an enemy that amid all the sorrow, a warrior’s soul shines nobly.”¹¹⁸

Emperor Showa’s surrender speech similarly distanced himself and his forces from the appearance of failure, and even more so from the appearance of any criminal wartime activity. He praised the efforts of “the gallant fighting of our military and naval forces” and called out Japan’s enemies for using “a new and most cruel bomb” that would, if used continually, “result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation.”¹¹⁹

When Treize finally reappears six episodes later, he remains unable to recognize himself as a perpetrator. However, it is clear he is increasingly burdened by some psychological weight. Crushed under a painful sense of purposelessness, he repeatedly asks Heero Yuy to kill him during their encounter. Heero refuses, which forces Treize to continue living with his past, his present, and the question of what to do with his future.¹²⁰

After Treize assumes leadership of the World Nation in Episode 41, we receive only a flicker of an indication that Treize has finally internalized his responsibility for some of the violence swirling around him. Responding to a subordinate’s incomprehension about his decision to personally lead the World Nation’s forces against Zechs’ White Fang, Treize

¹¹⁸ Ep. 25.

¹¹⁹ “Emperor Hirohito, Accepting the Potsdam Declaration, Radio Broadcast.”

¹²⁰ Ep. 34. While in *Wing* Treize lives in this tension for fourteen more episodes, Emperor Showa contended with a similar reality for over four decades (1945-1989; the end of the war to his death).

says, “A war with no civility only gives rise to massacres. That’s why past wars on Earth were so tragic.” For a moment after he says this, the scene focuses on his face. His expression is uncharacteristic--brows together, his gaze falling, he looks almost uncertain, even repentant. If he is referring to the massacre he himself engineered at the New Edwards Base, it could be the latter.¹²¹

Treize does not explicitly articulate his war responsibility until moments before his death. “How many people have died for you?” Wufei screams at him through the communicator between their cockpits. Treize gives numbers and names. The names include members of the Alliance who died at the New Edwards Base. While he says this, his head bows and his fingers cover his face. His eyes close and his eyebrows quiver, clearly meaning to convey the onset of strong emotion, likely sadness or, again, regret. Finally, his hand drops from his face, his eyes grow wide, and his voice fills with emotion, the first time Treize’s mask of calm and poise falls away. He asserts his heroic narrative one last time--“Not one of those people died in vain!”--and charges towards Wufei in his mobile suit. Treize follows this admission of war guilt with suicide, a highly significant sequence of events.¹²² *Wing* shows that Treize’s internalization of being a perpetrator leads to his wishing to die. At the same time, *Wing* also shows that Treize believes his death is a contribution to the future, an ideal that traces directly to his wartime ideologies of valorous sacrifice.

Intriguingly, *Wing*’s depiction of Treize’s eventual acceptance of his war responsibility shares resemblances with the posthumous glimpses we now have of Emperor

¹²¹ Ep. 46.

¹²² Ep. 48.

Showa's own inner struggle. In 2003 a draft of a 1948 speech written in the hand of the emperor's Imperial Head of Household, Tajima Michiji, was released for the first time. In it Emperor Showa said, "When I consider the dead and their families, I cannot repress my mental agony." On consideration of the "unprecedented national disaster" of the immediate postwar period," which caused "countless [Japanese] people to be in great misery...the flame of anxiety burns my body. Towards the public, I am deeply ashamed of my lack of discretion." He went on to admit his "deep shame" due to "my fault," indicating, according to commentators who found the document, that he may have been planning to claim responsibility for the war and apologize to his people. Another 1952 draft speech found in 2019 reflects similar sentiments.¹²³

The issue of war responsibility, according to Kobayashi Shinobu, Imperial Chamberlain from 1974-2000, haunted Emperor Showa until his death. In 2018, Kobayashi quoted the emperor saying in his final years "There is no point in living a longer life by reducing my workload. It would only increase my chances of seeing or hearing things that are agonizing."¹²⁴

In light of such sentiments, *Wing's* representation of Treize's death may not be a judgment of Emperor Showa; at least, not a judgment only. *Wing's* portrayal of Treize is ultimately a sympathetic, if perpetually complicated, one. Though it is not easy to identify

¹²³ "Apologetic Hirohito prepared for his sorry day but he never kept the date," *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), June 11, 2003, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/apologetic-hirohito-prepared-for-his-sorry-day-but-he-never-kept-the-date-20030611-gdgwsu.html>. It is interesting to note that these documents give no indication of his wanting to apologize to other Asian peoples. His greatest concern here appears to be for his nation's own. Also see "Emperor Showa prevented from expressing remorse over war in '52, newly disclosed documents reveal" *Japan Times*, (Tokyo, Japan), August 19, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/19/national/history/emperor-showa-prevented-expressing-remorse-war-52-newly-disclosed-documents-reveal/#.Xr1CJURKjFh>.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* Diary entry April 7, 1987. Interestingly, April 7 is the anniversary of the sinking of the battleship Yamato in 1945, which became a major media referent of postwar memory e.g. *Space Battleship Yamato* anime (1974-1975).

with Treize or the emperor as a result of their privilege, ideologies, and extended unawareness of their perpetrator identities, their deaths did ultimately make space for future generations to move on from the wars. Treize's death creates space for the Gundam pilots' and Relena Peacecraft's legacies. His diminishment (ideologically) and disappearance (physically) from the After Colony world *does* contribute to creating a path towards peace. The death of Emperor Showa similarly created space to move past the war era.

Yet, as Wataru Kurita said in an editorial following the emperor's death in 1989, the emperor's legacy "exemplifie[d] the unresolved contradictions" of the past, a stillborn legacy.¹²⁵ Even after his death, Emperor Showa's legacy has contributed to the current intractability of Japanese war memory.¹²⁶ Despite Treize's deviations from the heroic narrative--his desiring to be a "loser" and his acceptance of his perpetrator identity--his final action, honorable suicide, is still rooted in traditional values analogous to Japan's code of bushido. Treize chooses to die. The heroes of *Gundam Wing*, the Gundam pilots, choose to live.

¹²⁵ Wataru Kurita, "Making Peace with Hirohito and a Militaristic Past," *Japan Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (April-June 1989), 191-192. Cited from *Modern Japan: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed. by James L. Huffman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 188-189.

¹²⁶ Naomi Hirakawa, "Divine Right," *Japan Times*, Weekly international edition ed., Aug 1995, *ProQuest*.

CHAPTER TWO: ZECHS MERQUISE and JAPAN

as PREWAR AND POSTWAR VICTIM

A second narrative promotes empathy and identification with the tragic victims of defeat. Here a vision of “catastrophe” prevails--an unmitigated tragedy of epic proportions--accentuating the total carnage and destruction wrought by ferocious military violence¹²⁷...What emerged over time was an antiwar pacifism based on a desire for human security, regret for a violent past, and a promise to be model global citizens in the future.”¹²⁸ - Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*

Japan’s postwar victim narrative focuses on Japan’s civilian population who endured the ravaging demands total war inflicts on a defeated homefront. Its subjects are often perceived simply as “tragic victims of defeat,” blameless of the shameful acts of soldiers abroad and the deadly decision-making of leaders in distant halls of power. Especially compelling is the “catastrophic” nature of the event that traumatized them--the devastating carpet firebombing and the atomic blasts at the end of the war. Perhaps in part because of the scale of this destruction, the victim narrative does not linger on identifying victimizers. The narrative’s imperative of pacifism envisions a demilitarized future that precludes eruptions of violence.¹²⁹

The postwar image of the blameless or ‘pure’ victim¹³⁰ emerged later than the heroic, memorialized soldier, perhaps because soldiers were propagandized during the war. In

¹²⁷ Hashimoto, 8.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹²⁹ Hashimoto, 127-129.

¹³⁰ The term pure victim derives from Hashimoto’s *Long Defeat*, which references James Joseph Orr’s term “popular piety” in *Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*.

contrast, many victims of the war were initially ignored or discriminated against, as is the case with the *hibakusha* or atomic bomb survivors, and with war orphans.¹³¹ By the 1970s and 80s, however, several famous media had elevated victims' stories. Significant among these are *Barefoot Gen* (1973), the fictionalized autobiographical account of Nakazawa Keiji, who was a child survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), whose depiction of firebombing was informed by the childhood experiences of Studio Ghibli's co-founder Takahata Isao. Today the victim narrative is ubiquitous in Japanese media, its protagonists often standing in as plaintive messengers of peace to the future.

War orphans are a major motif in the Gundam franchise; many characters are war orphans. In *Wing*, we see the parents of only two major characters.¹³² However, unlike the orphaned protagonists of films like *Grave of the Fireflies* and other Japanese postwar media, the Gundam franchise and *Wing* in particular offer a critical analysis of the cycle of victimization that often follows conflict. In the franchise's many series, including *Wing*, there are no pure victims.

More often than not there are victim perpetrators. In *Wing* the most prominent of these is Zechs Merquise. Born Milliardo Peacecraft, a prince and heir to a pacifist legacy, his life is torn apart when the Sanq Kingdom, ruled by his pacifist father, is attacked by the Alliance military when he is six years old. Milliardo's story, however, does not end in his

¹³¹ Caren Stelson, *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story*, (Minneapolis: CarolrhodaBooks, 2016); Mariko Asano Tamanoi "The Origins and Plight of Sensō Koji (War Orphans) in Postwar Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 18, no. 13 (June 25, 2020), <https://apjif.org/2020/13/Tamanoi.html>.

¹³² Incidentally, both those parents--the fathers of Relena Darlian and Quatre Raberba Winner--are killed during the series.

childhood. We are first introduced to him thirteen years later as Zechs Merquise, elite soldier of the OZ organization and thus, by extension, one of the series's main antagonists. Zechs' attempts to envision peace propel him further into acts of perpetration, eventually engineering an "unmitigated tragedy of epic proportions." By depicting Zechs' early adult years following his victimization as a child, *Gundam Wing* illustrates how an otherwise pure victim can become a heinous, embittered perpetrator offering a twisted victim's vision of peace.

Zechs Merquise: The Making of a Victim Perpetrator

Thousands of families were broken up by the War and its aftermath. Their anguish remains.¹³³ -- From the introduction to the chapter "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" in *Sensou: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War*.

Zechs Merquise: May you rest in peace, the betrayed and outraged Milliardo Peacecraft. -- Episode 8

The creators of *Gundam Wing* complicate the typical narrative of victimhood in Japan by portraying a character, Zechs Merquise, whose story is rooted in a victimizing event but whose story arc explores his choices as a young adult. As such, *Wing* represents Zechs as both a victim *and* perpetrator of wartime violence. Unable to heal, he deals with his unresolved trauma by lashing out through corporate violence, perpetuating a cycle of victimization and sabotaging his own pursuit of authentic purpose and identity. As Cathy Caruth states in *Unclaimed Experienced: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, "the story of trauma...far from telling of an escape from reality--the escape from a death, or from its

¹³³ Frank Gibney, editor, *Sensou: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War: Letters to the Editor of Asahi Shimbun*, translated by Beth Cary (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2007), 100.

referential force--rather attests to its endless impact on a life."¹³⁴ Zechs, easily the most complicated and internally tortured character in *Gundam Wing*, manifests these realities to painfully unresolved conclusions.

Zechs Merquise is born into the After Colony universe of *Gundam Wing* as Milliardo Peacecraft of the Sanq Kingdom, a pacifist nation of whose royal family he is the eldest son and heir. Unfortunately, the ideals of Zechs' father attract the ire of the Alliance. In one of the few flashbacks in *Wing*, we see images of fire consuming a portrait of the royal court and the palace. This occurs when Zechs is six years old.¹³⁵ As such, we can assume he is old enough to know he was the heir to his family's pacifist legacy and remember the attack itself. Moreover, he is old enough to comprehend the basic consequences of the kingdom's ruin--the loss of his family and his inheritance.

Gundam Wing insinuates that both Zechs and his then-two year-old sister Relena were secretly saved; neither grows up as Peacecraft. Too young to remember the event at the time, Relena is not even told about her true identity until she is fifteen.¹³⁶ Although it is unconfirmed where and how Zechs grew up, *Wing* implies he was taken in by a member of

¹³⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 20th anniversary ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 7.

¹³⁵ Ep. 9.

¹³⁶ Ep. 5.

the Romefeller family.¹³⁷ This would explain why he takes on a new name and why he is deeply immersed in military life by the age of nineteen.¹³⁸

Wing's audience is first introduced to him by his assumed name and persona, Zechs Merquise, a high-ranking officer within OZ. *Wing* immediately hints that he has something to hide by depicting him wearing a mask; however, his birth identity is not fully revealed until Episode 9. In Episode 1 Zechs calls himself "a true soldier." In the following episodes, it becomes clear he genuinely feels most alive, excited, and purposeful in the cockpit of a mobile suit, underlined by his striving and succeeding to master the most advanced mobile suit technology.¹³⁹

With his adeptness at fighting and personal resonance with what he calls an "aesthetic sense [of] war,"¹⁴⁰ Zechs is set up in the first several episodes as a war-mongering antagonist, akin to Treize, making it easy to vilify him. However, *Wing* quickly erodes this perception by dropping information about him that leads to the revelation of his birth identity. *Wing* further elicits sympathy for Zechs by revealing this information through Lucrezia Noin, a young woman who trained with him in military academy and eventually confesses to being in love with him.¹⁴¹ Noin consistently serves to humanize Zechs' actions, reminding the audience

¹³⁷ Ep. 22. Meeting "Ambassador Milliardo Peacecraft," Lady Une says "His Excellency has had ties with the Sanq Kingdom since his youth." See also Ep. 42. Dorothy Catalonia, requesting to board Libra, asks Zechs, "Remember playing with Treize when we were kids?"

¹³⁸ In Episode 16 Zechs says he has been with OZ for "many years." In the manga *Episode Zero*, Zechs appears as a sixteen year-old soldier in OZ. His mobile suit combat abilities have already earned him the moniker "Lightning."

¹³⁹ Eps. 1-9.

¹⁴⁰ Ep. 16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

what his goals are: to protect Relena, his blood sister; to protect the Sanq Kingdom, his homeland; and to fight for peace.

Zechs' true motivations for allying himself with OZ are fully revealed in Episode 8 in which he is able to exact revenge against the man responsible for the Sanq Kingdom's ruin. After attacking a base in Nairobi as part of OZ's coup d'etat against the Alliance,¹⁴² Zechs finds the Alliance general responsible for the attack on the Sanq Kingdom thirteen years prior. After identifying himself as Milliardo Peacecraft, Zechs shoots the man with an ornate pistol at point-blank range.¹⁴³ In the following episode, he frees his homeland from Alliance control. However, despite meting out his long-held revenge and liberating the Sanq Kingdom, Zechs believes he cannot dismantle his current identity and resume leadership of the kingdom as Milliardo Peacecraft. In a poignant scene in which he removes his mask for the first time, Zechs walks into the still-ruined halls of the old palace. Standing before a portrait of his father, he says,

Please forgive me, Father. There's been much bloodshed along the way and I've only been able to live a lifestyle that counters your pacifist teachings. My hands are too stained with blood. I'm completely unfit to head the Peacecraft monarchy...I've failed you. Please forgive me.¹⁴⁴

While Zechs remains in OZ for several episodes thereafter, his loyalty begins to dissolve as his conscience leads him away from Treize, Une, and Romefeller's attempts to subjugate the colonies. Zechs' soul-searching pushes him towards better understanding his identity as a soldier, which feels most authentic to him. In a bizarre turn of events, he

¹⁴² Ep. 7.

¹⁴³ Ep. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Ep. 9.

rebuilds a Gundam pilot's mobile suit, which had been exploded by self-detonation in Siberia after Lady Une secretly threatened to fire missiles at the colonies.¹⁴⁵ Convinced the pilot Heero Yuy is still alive and obsessed with the experience of fighting him again, Zechs rebuilds the suit, despite being ordered to destroy it, brings it to Antarctica where a battle can go unnoticed, and finds the pilot, who agrees to resuming their duel.¹⁴⁶

The peculiarity of Zechs' action is highlighted by the way Heero responds to it. Zechs and Noin may perceive the rebuilding of the Gundam as an act of generosity within their aesthetic of war,¹⁴⁷ but Heero cuts through the philosophizing by bluntly telling them both "I'll thank him, but in my own way. I'll kill Zechs."¹⁴⁸

Fortunately, the duel is interrupted by a Romefeller search party looking for Zechs. His suspected treason is confirmed when he breaks away from the fight and begins attacking the search party yelling "Glory to the colonies!"¹⁴⁹ After he surrenders and is taken into custody, he tells Treize he is prepared to face a court martial; however, Treize has plans. Zechs is told he will be pitted against 70 mobile suits piloted by former Alliance members seeking to ingratiate themselves with Romefeller. If he can survive the battle, he will be free. Zechs destroys all the suits and their pilots, but, as per Treize's plan, is reported dead.

¹⁴⁵ Ep. 10.

¹⁴⁶ Eps. 11-16.

¹⁴⁷ Given Heero's attitude toward the Gundam, it seems altogether likely he is not pleased to have the Gundam returned. After being shot down in Episode 1 and separated from it, Heero attempts to destroy rather than retrieve it in Episode 2. Given that another Gundam pilot is able to successfully bring it to the surface of the bay it sank in, it seems clear Heero was not incapable of retrieving it but that he did not want to continue piloting it.

¹⁴⁸ Ep. 16.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

However, he survives, and is symbolically freed from his past when his mask shatters and drops from his face in the course of the battle.¹⁵⁰

Zechs embraces his new independence by traveling to space and appearing in public as Ambassador Milliardo Peacecraft. Despite this, Zechs dons his mask, apparently reformed, and jumps back into his mobile suit as frequently as he meets with colony leaders to discuss peace and self-sovereignty. Although it may be apparent to the audience that this exhibits a continued crisis of identity, Zechs exhibits no cognitive dissonance, likely because it is the first time in the series he is able to act of his own free will. He experiments with merging his identities--Peacecraft and Merquise, pacifist and soldier--while attempting to influence events in a more peaceful direction. "I think I understand the implications of war," he says to Lady Une in his first appearance as Ambassador Peacecraft, "So I thought I could give advice to the colonies desiring military power."¹⁵¹

While Zechs appears in space as Ambassador Peacecraft, the audience knows he is not actually representing the Sanq Kingdom, though he refers to it explicitly.¹⁵² However, his sister Relena's appearance in Sanq and her resumption of royal duties clearly traces back to him through Noin, who initially brings Relena to the kingdom after Relena learns of her birth identity. Noin thereafter acts as her imperial guard.¹⁵³ With Noin as proxy, Zechs keeps an eye on the Sanq Kingdom from afar, still distancing his blood-stained hands from its rule. Ironically, the nation's burgeoning influence under Relena's leadership again makes it a

¹⁵⁰ Ep. 18.

¹⁵¹ Eps. 22-37. Quote from Ep. 22.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Eps. 11, 14.

target, this time to Romefeller. When Zechs learns of the all-out assault on the Sanq Kingdom, he immediately leaves space for Earth;¹⁵⁴ however, he arrives well after Relena surrenders the kingdom in order to avoid the conflict her pacifistic philosophy eschews.¹⁵⁵ By chance, Zechs encounters Heero, who by chance had ended up in the Sanq Kingdom. Coming upon each other in mobile suits newly enhanced with mind-warping capabilities, Zechs and Heero engage in a futile battle, externalizing their despair at failing to protect the Sanq Kingdom by fighting until their bodies and mobile suits reach a point of exhaustion. The fight--ending in a draw--underlines Zechs' search for meaning and the persistent futility of his efforts.¹⁵⁶

When Zechs next appears, his dejection is evident. Up to this point he was motivated by the search for his purpose and identity. Sitting at a bar somewhere on Earth, however, Zechs tells the barkeeper, "For me, the war is over. My own country's destroyed, so I have nothing to protect. Once again I've lost any reason to fight." Although the scene is brief, the fact that Zechs has failed at precisely what was most important to him is extremely significant. As a traumatized victim, Zechs, like many victims of trauma, essentially swore never to allow his trauma to repeat.¹⁵⁷ Yet he failed at exactly that--failed to protect Relena

¹⁵⁴ Ep. 37.

¹⁵⁵ Eps. 31-36.

¹⁵⁶ Ep. 37.

¹⁵⁷ Revictimization is frequently discussed in academic literature in the context of sexual abuse; nevertheless, statements like the following are applicable to Zechs: "The first time an individual is victimized, they often take on the responsibility for the abuse. This can be a way for a victim to reclaim control. It is reassuring to believe that changing habits, behaviors, or interactions will ensure that the abuse will not reoccur. When someone is victimized a second or third time (or more), research shows they are even more likely to feel guilt and shame and to judge themselves harshly." Keith Fadelici, "Revictimization: How Can This Keep Happening?" *Psychology Today* online, (Posted May 4, 2020), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fostering-freedom/202005/revictimization-how-can-keep-happening>.

and the Sanq Kingdom, and failed to establish the peace he believed his legacy demanded. At this vulnerable moment Zechs is approached by a man named Quinze and invited to lead the White Fang rebel group in space, not as Zechs Merquise, but as Milliardo Peacecraft, with mobile suit in tow. Eager to merge his identities once again, Zechs agrees.¹⁵⁸

Zechs' response to the trauma of the Sanq Kingdom's first fall was to take revenge on the Alliance. His response the second time runs along the same lines, but on a larger scale-- he attempts to destroy the Earth itself.¹⁵⁹ In Episode 40, Zechs announces his leadership of White Fang to the Earth Sphere. He identifies himself as Milliardo Peacecraft, appears unmasked, and states, "We will eliminate Earth."¹⁶⁰ Thus begins Zechs' catastrophic downward spiral towards genocidal perpetration against the very Earth where his ruined nation remains. The shock of his assumption of this patently incompatible role is expressed by Relena and Noin. Listening to his announcement, their eyes widen, confusion evident in their voices. In the following episodes both characters--who care deeply about Zechs--have to contend with the dissonance of this final choice. Meeting him for the first time in Episode 44, Relena confronts him directly, saying, "I don't know if I'm in the arms of my beloved brother or the bloodstained hands of Zechs Merquise."¹⁶¹

Zechs responds to his re-traumatization by exploding it a thousand-fold, entrenching himself as a perpetrator while desperately attempting to bring about some greater good. This is manifested in *Wing's* final episodes. In a longer speech conveyed once again to the whole

¹⁵⁸ Ep. 39.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ep. 40.

¹⁶¹ Ep. 44.

Earth Sphere, Zechs lays out his understanding of history, his ideologies on war and human nature, and his objectives as leader of the White Fang. Reflecting the power shifts of the last year and identifying his own initial victimizer, Zechs begins his speech railing against the Alliance: “Did that ridiculous organization eliminate wars and make world peace a reality? Of course it didn’t! Under the guise of “Peace and Justice” the Alliance came to the colonies with its overwhelming military force.” His second indictment, however, appears to include Relena’s actions. After her surrender of the Sanq Kingdom and ascendance to chief representative of Romefeller, Relena sought to end conflict by uniting the world’s nations into one single entity, the World Nation. In response to this Zechs states, “The eradication of wars cannot be achieved simply by uniting nations.” Betraying his soldiers’ sensibilities, Zechs declares, “fighting is human nature!” Revealing his dissonant internal reality, he goes on to say that people on Earth have proved violent, whereas colonists have not because they are “a new breed of humans with the ability to gain true peace by controlling their instincts to battle.” He concludes the speech with the radical demand “that the Earth be eliminated from the universe. If you [meaning Treize Khushrenada, now leading the World Nation] cannot abide by this demand then we’ll have no choice but to start a war to end all wars!”¹⁶²

Before giving this speech Zechs puts words to his ongoing internal dissonance, saying to himself, “Our actions don’t reflect our personalities, do they Treize?” In a later conversation with Noin, Zechs describes himself as a professional in combat, just like the Gundam pilots, and self-identifies as Zechs Merquise.¹⁶³ This suggests that while he has

¹⁶² Ep. 42.

¹⁶³ Ep. 48.

chosen to lead White Fang as Milliardo Peacecraft, he still does not truly identify with either that name or what it represents to him or to the Earth Sphere.

In Episode 49, it finally becomes extremely clear Zechs has not been able to resolve his competing identities; as a result, he wants to die. Fighting Heero in their final mobile suit battle, Zechs, like Treize in his duel with Wufei, makes a final charge. When Heero only slices off the left arm of Zechs' mobile suit he angrily asks him, "Why don't you kill me?" clarifying that Zechs' charge, like Treize's, was suicidal. Heero, set up in *Wing* as a foil to Zechs' character, anticipates Zech's suicidality and chooses to extend mercy to him. Unable to follow through with any of his plans, including killing himself, Zechs finally accepts he is fated to live. This realization does not bring him joy. Fully aware of his perpetrator identity, Zechs is convinced his destiny is "smeared with blood" and that if he must live it will be "right to the bitter end!"¹⁶⁴ Thus Zechs exits *Wing*'s final episode as a devastatingly tragic character, a failed victim visionary become horrifying perpetrator in response to his own trauma and irreconcilable identities.

Victims of Circumstances, Perpetrators of Choices: Zechs and Modern Japan's Spiral from Tragic Victims to Perpetrators of Military Violence

The United States of America and the British Empire have in seeking their own prosperity oppressed other nations and peoples. Especially in East Asia, they indulged in insatiable aggression and exploitation, and sought to satisfy their inordinate ambition of enslaving the entire region, and finally they came to menace seriously the stability of East Asia. Herein lies

¹⁶⁴ Ep. 49.

the cause of the recent war.¹⁶⁵ -- Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference, November 5, 1943

Then why did we stand up on [the space colonies'] behalf? Because the old breed of mankind that loves to battle remains on their comfortable Earth and tries to conquer those of us who are defenseless. It has been 200 years since our people began living in space. Isn't it time that we end this history filled with disputes?..We demand that the Earth be eliminated from the universe. If you cannot abide by this demand then we'll have no choice but to start a war to end all wars! ¹⁶⁶ -- Zechs Merquise, Final Announcement to Earth

The character of Zechs Merquise personifies two moments in modern history when the Japanese collectively internalized a victim consciousness. As a child Zechs assumes the image of one of Japan's most recognizable and potent depictions of Japanese victim consciousness produced and reproduced in the postwar period--the war orphan. Zechs' experiences throughout the series as an adult character struggling with his identity and purpose in response to repeated victimization is analogous to Japan's collective perception of being forced to join a globalizing world already shaped by western nations' conquering, colonizing, and imperialistic efforts. Eventually, Japan's responses to these pressures culminated in its embrace of total empire and total war in the 1930s and 1940s, efforts alternately marked by power and desperation similar to Zechs in the final episodes of *Wing*.

Six Year-old Zechs as Analog to Japanese War Orphan

Japan's postwar victim consciousness derives primarily from the experiences of nameless civilians. Among these were war orphans. According to its Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1948 the number of orphaned and homeless children in Japan was around 123,000, a very conservative number when accounting for the chaos of the era. The report

¹⁶⁵ "Greater East Asia Conference," *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, accessed July 2020, <http://worldheritage.org/article/WHEBN0016881276/Greater%20East%20Asia%20Conference>.

¹⁶⁶ Ep. 42.

stated that the number who had lost their parents through air raids was 28,248; the number of those who lost a parent in the chaos that followed the war's end was 81,266.¹⁶⁷ Zechs and Relena's experience of the first fall of the Sanq Kingdom evokes this image of the helpless war orphan subjected to circumstance and fate.

Modern Japan's Spiral towards War

Japan's first experience of collective victim consciousness in the modern period emerged when after over 200 years of *sakoku* or isolation Japan was forced to trade with western powers by the United States in 1854. By all accounts the 1850s and 1860s were a traumatizing period for Japan as it wrestled internally with the need to respond to the external pressure from the United States, Britain, and other western imperial powers. Japan's long-internalized identity, founded in national myths about its elevated place in the world, was challenged by this new exposure. The power western nations wielded, manifested in the unequal treaties brokered with Japan in the 1850s,¹⁶⁸ brought all that glory and splendor into question. Propelled by a fear of losing its sovereignty and dignity, which it saw playing out elsewhere in Asia, Japan committed to assimilating western influences.¹⁶⁹

Japan exceeded expectations. By 1910 Hokkaido, Taiwan, Okinawa, and Korea were Japanese colonies and wars had been won against China (1894-1895) and Russia (1904-1905). In observance of these attainments, by 1911 all western nations conceded to end their

¹⁶⁷ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ Convention of Kanagawa (1854); Harris Treaty (1858).

¹⁶⁹ See Japanese intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi's 1885 essay "*Datsua ron*" or "Cast-Off Asia." Ironically, Fukuzawa's argument at this time was to "simply erase from our minds our bad friends in Asia," a perspective quite opposite the Pan-Asianism promoted by the GEA. Cited from *Modern Japan: A History in Documents*, by Huffman, 76-77.

unequal treaties with Japan by recognizing Japan's tariff autonomy and equalizing relations. For a time, Japan appeared to have achieved equality with the west. Thereafter it pursued opportunities to act as a major player on the world stage. In 1914 Japan declared war on Germany, honoring an Alliance made in 1902 with Great Britain. After the Entente Powers won the war, Japan became a charter member of the League of Nations in 1920 and served as one of four permanent members of the League Council.¹⁷⁰

However, any sense of progress diminished, then died altogether as discrimination and exclusion by western powers persisted, albeit in different forms. In 1919 the League of Nations rejected Japan's request for a racial equality clause in the Treaty of Versailles. In 1924 the US passed the Asian Exclusion Act of the US's Immigration Act.¹⁷¹ These bitter reminders of Japan's perceived inferiority by the west, in combination with the global recession of the 1930s, reinforced Japan's feelings of alienation and oppression. Eventually Japan began breaking ties with western powers. In 1933 it left the League of Nations in dramatic fashion.¹⁷² With the outbreak of war against China in 1937, Japan broke decisively from the post-WWI vision of liberal internationalism that the west, led by American

¹⁷⁰ See Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 1-22.

¹⁷¹ Browne, 31-34. Tojo Hideki, who had traveled in the US in 1922, was struck by the movements by American politicians to include the Japanese in new immigration laws that would exclude Asians generally from immigrating to the US. These plans were solidified in 1924, leading to indignation on the part of many Japanese. It is important to note that part of this indignation was the result of being put in the same category as other Asians, such as Chinese workers, who the Japanese saw as inferior to themselves

¹⁷² British Movietone, "Japan Walks Out of Geneva Assembly," YouTube video, 2:28, July 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hStmrz3N46U>.

President Woodrow Wilson, had laid out. Instead Japan committed to a vision for a *shinchitsujo* or “new order” that would eventually lead Japan to total war.¹⁷³

The name this new order would eventually take was the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (GEA). In the 1930s, Japanese intellectuals and politicians began racking their brains to generate a vision significant enough, palpable enough, and big enough to contain everything Japan hoped for and desired. Following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937, public intellectuals like Kiyoshi Miki began advocating for *Toua Kyoudoutai* or “East Asian Cooperative Community”.¹⁷⁴ The concept was taken up by Foreign Minister Arita Hachirou and later his successor Matsuoka Yousuke, who would formally declare the Sphere’s existence in an August 1940 radio address.

The GEA concept emerged as a belief in the power of Asian cultural and economic unity. It was formed in opposition to Asia’s dominance by western powers in the preceding century. The language of the GEA declared it brought member nations together for the benefit of all, with one major caveat--that Japan would be its de facto leader. However, when the GEA was announced in 1940 it was still a very abstract concept. When Japan gave the name Greater East Asia War to its newly-defined conflict against not only China but the US, the UK, and their allies on December 10, 1941, the GEA became Japan’s national policy and central war aim.¹⁷⁵ In 1943 Japan held the first Greater East Asia Conference in Tokyo, bringing together the heads of its six member nations to reaffirm their commitment to “liberating their region from the yoke of British-American domination, and ensuring their

¹⁷³ Yellen, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁵ Yellen, 4.

self-existence and self-defense, and in constructing a Greater East Asia...” By 1945 the Sphere comprised ten nations being Japan, China, Manchuria, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Burma, Kampuchea, and Luang Phrabang.¹⁷⁶

The GEA was Japan’s victim vision of a pro-Asian future, but it was rife with flaws. Perhaps fortunate among them was its persistent lack of definition; what the GEA was and what it meant was never fully fleshed out. By the time the 1943 conference formalized the GEA’s goals, the war had already turned against Japan. The GEA’s far more notorious flaw was the stark contrast between its high-flown language of “world peace...prosperity...and mutual aid and assistance...” and its brutal implementation.¹⁷⁷ The “grotesque realities of pan-Asian brotherhood,” as historian James McClain writes, included laser-focused economic exploitation, systemic acts of physical brutality perceived as necessary to control native populations, and death on a massive scale.¹⁷⁸ When Japan lost the war, its dream of the GEA evaporated. The bitter memory of it, however, was not quickly forgotten in Asia.

Zechs as Analog to Modern Japan’s Spiral towards War

Japan’s struggle to define its identity in response to its perceived victimization by the west by ultimately fighting a total war is represented in the story of Zechs Merquise. Japan’s struggle between a modern, western-influenced identity and an ancient Asian one is reflected

¹⁷⁶ “Greater East Asia Conference,” *World Heritage Encyclopedia*.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ In Vietnam, the confiscation of the 1944 rice harvest for Japanese soldiers in the Philippines led directly to famine and nearly 1 million deaths by 1945; on Java and its neighboring offshore islands, 4 million natives were killed by the Japanese or died from starvation, disease, and lack of basic medical care; like many estimates of this kind, it is difficult to know how many Korean, Chinese, Filipina, Indonesian, and other women died servicing Japanese soldiers as sex slaves. James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 494-498. Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 3rd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), 209.

in Zechs' constant pursuit of purpose, vacillating between his inherited pacifist identity and his assumed soldierly one. Japan's attempts to assimilate to the west in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are mirrored in Zechs' acculturation to the world he was raised in after he was spirited away from the Sanq Kingdom, culminating in his military service with OZ. Japan's successful participation in WWI reflects Zechs' participation in Treize's coup d'etat--through its participation, Japan was seemingly able to achieve its own personal goal of establishing equal standing with the west, thereby anchoring its popular sovereignty in the face of continued western imperialism throughout the rest of Asia. Similarly, Zechs's role in OZ would seemingly bring about his own personal goals--revenge for and liberation of the Sanq Kingdom. For Japan, participation in the war seemed to open the door to even greater power and freedom to do as it pleased, signified by its role in the League of Nations. For Zechs, the coup eventually led him to defect from OZ altogether, enabling him to appear in space as Ambassador Peacecraft.

Zechs' eventual failure to transcend his victim consciousness reflects Japan's own prewar and postwar experience. The incredible vulnerability of Japan's national identity in the 1920s and 30s was revealed when Japan faced blunt reminders from the west that Japan--and Asia--remained in a category other than the powerfully superior one the US and UK maintained when they denied Japan's proposal for a racial equality clause in the Versailles Treaty and enacted anti-Asian immigration policies at home. After pushing against this categorization for nearly 100 years, Japan resolved to find a wholly different path from the assimilation it had pursued up to that point. This path seemed portentous, a *dai tenkanki* or

“great turning point.”¹⁷⁹ It would lead to the Greater East Asia War, with the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as its objective.

Japan’s renewed sense of victimization followed by its resolve to pursue the GEA is mirrored in Zechs’ response to the second fall of the Sanq Kingdom and his leadership of White Fang. At first he is miserably disappointed. Later, he resolves to fully commit to a wholly new plan of action. Japan’s efforts would devolve into the subjugation, suffering, and deaths of innumerable Asian people. Zechs’ leadership of White Fang would put him at the helm of an apocalypse.

It is worth repeating that *Wing* portrays Zechs’ final genocidal actions as rooted in victimization and his sincere desire--however misguided--for peace. This portrayal draws out similar complicated realities and desires for prewar and wartime Japan; apparent in the disparate origins of the GEA itself. Kiyoshi was the concept’s philosophical originator, Arita and Matsuoka were its foreign policy advocates, and Prime Minister Tojo was its political champion. Kiyoshi was a nationalist but abhorred Japan’s 1940s militarism (he died as a Japanese political prisoner in 1945); Arita advocated for improved relations with the US; Matsuoka and Tojo arguably co-opted the idea of the GEA for the purpose of war, which led to incredible suffering, but nevertheless did so, as Jeremy Yellen argues in his recent research on the GEA, as “a sincere attempt to envision a new type of political and economic order for the region during a time of global crisis.”¹⁸⁰ Zechs represents aspects of all of these individuals--from philosophizing soldier to pragmatic diplomat to catastrophically

¹⁷⁹ Yellen, 4.

¹⁸⁰ Yellen, 5.

destructive captain at the helm of a war juggernaut. In other words, Zechs' trajectory through *Wing* represents the devolution of the GEA into an ultimately brutal form. However, it also represents the GEA's idealism and tragedy.

The extent to which Zechs' experiences and vision are reflective of the GEA is apparent in the similarities between the Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference and Zechs' final announcement to Earth as White Fang's leader. In 1943 the Joint Declaration accused the US and UK of "seeking their own prosperity [by] oppress[ing] other nations and peoples." Reinforcing the perception of the region's victimization, the declaration highlighted how Anglo-Americans had "indulged in insatiable aggression..." which eventually led to their "menac[ing] seriously the stability of East Asia." These aggressions were "the cause of the recent war." Similarly, in Episode 42 Zechs accuses the Earth--identifying both the deposed Alliance and the current World Nation--of "conquering those of us who are defenseless," meaning the colonies (re: Greater East Asia). He derides earthlings as an "old breed of mankind that loves to battle" and who are, moreover, "comfortable" with the status quo (re: US and UK). "Isn't it time that we end this history filled with disputes?" he asks. Having already taken this task into his own hands, he challenges anyone who opposes him: "If you cannot abide by this demand [to eliminate the Earth] then we'll have no choice but to start a war to end all wars!"¹⁸¹ The phrase "war to end all wars" is an allusion to the phrase popularized during WWI that, as a result of proving untrue, took on a deeply cynical meaning through the rest of the twentieth century.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Ep. 42.

¹⁸² William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 792-793.

In the end, Japan's and Zechs' visions were not realized. While *Wing's* portrayal of Zechs' failed attempt to drop a spaceship on Earth illustrates how fortunate the failure of victims' visions is, it serves to powerfully underline three interrelated realities of the GEA. First, that the emergence of the GEA was rooted in Japan's internalization of a victim identity from the 1850s to the 1930s. Second, that the duality of its high-minded idealism and cruel implementation in the 1940s reflects Japan's crisis of identity and purpose that culminated at that time. Third, that the Japanese undeniably descended down a road of perpetration that would sear the minds of its victims for generations to come. All of these realities currently remain absent from Japan's postwar victim narrative.

Failed Victims' Visions: A Bitter Japanese Identity

The work of diplomats is to avoid conflict as much as possible. War represents bankruptcy to diplomats. However, if you carry on, thinking only, "We must prevent war," you may end up inviting war." Kase Toshikazu, Chief Secretary to Japan's foreign ministers from 1940-1945.¹⁸³

Zechs: I'm going to live right to the bitter end!¹⁸⁴ -- Episode 49.

Gundam Wing subverts a major aspect of the victim narrative--its current absorption with *only* Japanese victims. *Wing* does this by portraying its analogous Japanese victim--Zechs--as a profoundly heinous perpetrator who creates victims. This highlights the sometimes problematic nature of the visions victims have. When such visions emerge from inflicted hurt, the result can be a high-flown and self-serving vision, similar to the GEA. This

¹⁸³ Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, (New York: The New Press, 1992), 90.

¹⁸⁴ Ep. 49.

misplaced vision, based in distrust, produces a cycle of victimization that hinders the healing and reintegration of defeated societies, both within themselves and in relation to their wider communities.

A Cycle of Victimization: The Victim Perpetrator's Bloodstained Vision for Peace

While *Wing's* portrayal of Zechs is sympathetic, the focus on his identity as a perpetrator clarifies Zechs' role in perpetuating a cycle of victimization. Zechs' portrayal represents and engages war memory issues between Japan and its Asian neighbors. On one hand, it recalls how Japan's attempts to cast a vision for Greater Asia descended into acts of perpetration unprecedented in the history of the modern world. At the same time, Zechs' humane characterization acknowledges Japan's recognition of Asian interdependence.

Recently, a growing number of historians have explored the formation and influence of the GEA, and highlighted some of its positive results.¹⁸⁵ The infrastructure built so frenetically and often injuriously during the war laid the groundwork for economic development from which GEA member countries benefited in the postwar period.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, various independence movements were able to manifest despite resistance by former western occupiers. These gains, specifically in non-Communist Asian countries,

¹⁸⁵ Yellen's *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War*; ALSO Jessamyn Abel, *The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964*. Honolulu, HA: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015; ALSO Aaron Stephen Moore's *Constructing East Asia*, reference in Footnote 167.

¹⁸⁶ Gordon, 222. See also Aaron Stephen Moore, *Constructing East Asia: Technology, Ideology, and Empire in Japan's Wartime Era, 1931-1945*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013)-- "We should not therefore simply dismiss the technological imaginary's transformative, participatory messages that appealed to people's hopes and desires for a better life as empty ideology, as it also created powerful modernist development initiatives and an array of institutions that called for innumerable sacrifices to be made in its name while entrenching the interests of the elites who articulated that ideology. It is this new mode of power and mobilization that survived relatively intact after the war, pushed by many of the same bureaucrats, engineers, and intellectuals as the recipe for postwar prosperity and development throughout Asia." 20.

continued for decades into the postwar period. Ironically, they were often supported or even enabled by Japan, which benefited massively from its Cold War era alliance with the US. In 1989 Japan was buying 21 percent of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation's (ASEAN) exports, provided 64 percent of nonmilitary aid, and owned between one fifth and one half of foreign investment in every ASEAN country at the time,¹⁸⁷ excepting oil-rich Brunei and the US-supported Philippines.¹⁸⁸

Despite these demonstrations of economic benefit between Japan and the former GEA members, the postwar years leading up to *Wing's* release continued to see the residual distrust Japan's unresolved wartime victimization caused. For Japan's neighbors, these benefits could not cover over the memory of grinding labor, cultural discrimination, and death the GEA era inflicted. "Even though there is a new generation," Rafael Ileto, national security advisor to the Filipino president, said in 1989, "the fathers know the Japanese and remember the brutalities, and they worry it could happen again." Moreover, the evident hegemony of Japanese economic soft power felt too familiar, fueling fears of the renewal of Japanese militarism in spite of its pacifist constitution. In a 1988 poll conducted by Japan's own government, 37 percent of respondents from ASEAN countries viewed Japan as a military threat. In a poll conducted of Thai people in 1987, 46 percent said Japan was "not a true friend;" and 70 percent felt Japan's economic relationship with Thailand was "of an imperialistic nature."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei. As of 2020 ASEAN has 10 member countries.

¹⁸⁸ Steven Erlanger, "The World: In Southeast Asia, Japan Dominates in Aid, Trade and Old Resentments," *New York Times* archive, July 2 1989, *ProQuest*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

For Japan, the ability to face its victim perpetrator identity remained difficult if not impossible in public discourse. In the early 1990s Takashima Nobuyoshi, a teacher and textbook writer in Tokyo, attempted to record in a Japanese high school history textbook that the GEA victimized other Asians during the Asia-Pacific War. However, he also described how these “atrocities” and other forms of victimization were the result of Japan’s modernization efforts, which were themselves a response to the pressures of the west during the Meiji Restoration. Despite the implied contextualization of Japan’s prewar victimization, the statement was deleted in a screening by Japan’s Education Ministry in 1993.¹⁹⁰

That Japan and its Asian neighbors remain at an impasse of war memory that deeply affects every aspect of their interdependence is as evident in 2020 as it was in 1995, if not more so. It is an extended failure, an unresolved issue harkening back to the GEA. As Yellen remarks about Japan’s attempts at pan-Asian unity in the 1930s and 1940s, “Ultimately, it is a history of failure. The [Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity] Sphere, after all, was the stillborn intellectual child of Japan's revolt against the old order.”¹⁹¹ Still unable and unwilling to deal with that failure, Japan’s relationship with its neighbors remains static as it resists acknowledging and facing its victim perpetrator identity.

A Failure to Face Trauma

Through its fictional format, *Gundam Wing* explores these extremely complicated issues that currently exist in a state of gridlocked tension between Japan and its Asian

¹⁹⁰ Tai Kawabata, "Screening Deleted Section on Japan's Victimization of Asia," *Japan Times*, Weekly international edition ed., May 1993, *ProQuest*.

¹⁹¹ Yellen, 21.

neighbors. As a meditation on Japanese identity, Zechs' character highlights the challenges of admitting and facing one's victim perpetrator identity. Both identities must be faced, together and in their toxic combination. Zechs, like Treize, is never fully able to do this. However, when Zechs' suicide attempt fails, his frustration manifests in bitterness. When Zechs says he is going to live "to the bitter end" in Episode 49, it is a revealing expression of his authentic interior life. Zechs is *resigned* to living. Death was going to free him from his failure to heal his victim wounds. Death was also going to free him from his guilt. Heero's mercy precludes both results. Unwilling and unable to accept the gift, Zechs sits in bitterness.

Bitterness is a rarely-discussed but ever-present aspect of Japan's postwar memory experience. Describing the Japanese victim narrative of *Barefoot Gen*, about a child atomic bomb survivor, Akiko Hashimoto puts it this way, "Thus, even as the story progresses from obliteration to rebuilding new life, [Gen's story] carries a bitter undertone, since nothing can really undo the permanent damage to people's lives..."¹⁹² However, this only addresses Japan's victim experience. Japan may also experience bitterness regarding the attempts it has made to address its perpetrating past. For instance, Japan has made dozens of official apologies regarding its wartime actions in the postwar period.¹⁹³ Variance in earnestness and action notwithstanding, Japan has made some attempt at making amends.

The most surprising implication of Zechs' story arc is that Japan's pacifist response to its wartime behavior, arguably its primary attempt to avoid becoming a perpetrator again, will fail. Zechs' attempts to bring about total pacifism results in total war. Moreover, at the

¹⁹² Hashimoto, 11.

¹⁹³ See Yamazaki's *Japanese Apologies for World War II: A Rhetorical Study*.

end of the series he identifies as Merquise, not Peacecraft; his soldier's identity proves more authentic to him than his pacifist one. Finally, his sister Relena, who has more accurately embodied the non-violence typically associated with pacifism, is not successful in bringing about total peace either. Although both Treize and Zechs claim their actions pave the way for Relena as a symbol and banner bearer of pacifism, she ultimately rejects that identity. In the final scene of *Wing* she is addressed as Vice Foreign Minister Darlian, the same name and title of her adoptive father who worked within the Alliance to advocate an imperfect but workable interdependence between Earth and the colonies.¹⁹⁴ Both siblings serve to underline the same point: they discard their victim identities and its pacifist imperative in order to move forward.

Zechs ultimately does move forward, although his bitterness underlines his reluctance. Much earlier in the series, Noin identifies another way he could have dealt with his trauma. In Episode 5 Zechs and Noin watch a news broadcast about Relena's return to Earth after her adopted father's assassination. "Still worried aren't you, Zechs?" Noin asks him, aware Relena is his sister. "Worried about what?" Zechs replies. Avoiding any further inquiry, he walks out of the room. Heard only by *Wing*'s audience, Noin quietly says, "Open up your heart. You're hiding too many secrets."¹⁹⁵ Her entreaty, unheard and ignored, is in fact the first step to dealing with trauma: facing it.¹⁹⁶ Over and over in *Wing*, Zechs chooses

¹⁹⁴ Ep. 49.

¹⁹⁵ Ep. 5.

¹⁹⁶ "In order to regain control over your self, you need to revisit the trauma: Sooner or later you need to confront what has happened to you... People cannot put traumatic events behind until they are able to acknowledge what has happened and start to recognize the invisible demons they're struggling with." Kolk, 204, 219.

not to face his trauma. Zechs' rival, Heero Yuy, also a victim and perpetrator, does. This ultimately makes Heero the hero of *Gundam Wing*.

CHAPTER THREE: HEERO YUY & the HEITAI, IMPERIAL JAPAN'S

“EVERYMAN SOLDIER”

Japanese perpetrator narratives [] expose malevolent acts committed by their own people, based on the belief that uncovering and facing your own people's dreadful past is intrinsically important for individuals and society alike. Moving forward, turning a new page, and making a clean break from the past call for self-examination of one's moral failures. When it comes to recovery and healing from military violence in particular, this approach presumes the necessity of facing squarely the darkest and least acceptable aspects of the self.¹⁹⁷ -- Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*

Japan's postwar perpetrator narrative focuses on the widespread and wide-ranging acts of wartime violence the Imperial Japanese Army committed during the Asia-Pacific War. More so than the others, the imperative of the perpetrator narrative is essential to its definition. After one's "descent" into hellish behavior is confessed, "recovery and healing" is possible, not only with oneself but with one's former victims. As a result, a narrative that would otherwise be unbearable becomes one of profound hope.¹⁹⁸

It may be that the perpetrator narrative is in fact the most forward-facing narrative of the three, despite ardent claims to the contrary by many of Japan's current politicians (re: heroic narrative) and its pacifists (re: victim narrative). *Wing*'s creators may have considered this when the issue of the impact of militarized violence on its participants reared its head in Japan for the first time since 1945. A few years before *Wing* was produced an amendment was proposed to the Japanese Self Defense Force law that would allow Japan's de facto

¹⁹⁷ Hashimoto, 12-13.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-133.

military to participate in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations.¹⁹⁹ Would Self Defense Force (SDF)²⁰⁰ members be allowed to harm others and/or be put in harm's way? The amendment was passed in 1992.²⁰¹

While *Wing* represents all three of Japan's dominant postwar narratives, it is undeniably the perpetrator narrative it most nearly aligns with in its final episodes. However, by interacting with and ultimately incorporating elements of the other narratives, *Wing* posits a post-postwar Japanese identity by elevating a sympathetic perpetrating character to hero status, who not only accomplishes the series' final heroic act but embodies the integration of the three narratives.

Wing's Gundam pilot Heero Yuy is simultaneously portrayed as hero, victim, and perpetrator. His characterization is analogous to the experiences and testimony of former soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), specifically those who confessed to wartime atrocities. The character of Heero represents how the narratives might be integrated through his interactions with Treize and Zechs, who represent major aspects of the heroic and victim narratives, and Relena Darlian, who like Heero is set up as one of the true heroes of *Wing*. It

¹⁹⁹ Passed in 1992, it is called the Law Concerning Cooperation in U.N. Peacekeeping and Other Operations (Peacekeeping Law). For an overview, see Akiho Shibata, "Japanese Peacekeeping Legislation and Recent Developments in U.N. Operations," *The Yale Journal of International Law*, 19, no. 307, (1994), <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1648&context=yjil>.

²⁰⁰ Lucretia Noin's formation of a self defense force in the Sanq Kingdom is analogous to the SDF. See Eps. 31-36.

²⁰¹ Hashimoto, 15. As of 2018 when Atsushi Yasutomi's article (below) was published, no Japanese had died in UN Peacekeeping Operations in combat-related deaths (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities>). By 2020, six were reported; however, it is unclear from this information if any were combat-related; fatalities listed also include accidents and illness. For more information on the continuing concern within Japan regarding this issue, see Yasutomi's incisive article "Combat-Related Death of Soldiers and Public Support for Military Missions Abroad: The Case of Japan" in *Comparative Culture: The Journal of Miyazaki International College*, 23 (2018), 48-56 https://www.mic.ac.jp/files/uploads/Comparative_Culture2018.pdf#page=48.

is Heero alone, however, who embodies all three narratives and thus emerges as the embodiment of a hopeful post-postwar Japanese identity.

Heero Yuy: Humanity Lost, Humanity Regained

Trowa Barton, Gundam pilot: I've fought all this time. And with each battle, I've been killing my own heart. My heart's been completely void of feelings for a long time. Maybe my life doesn't have value anymore. But I have to keep on living.

Dorothy Catalonia: Why?

Trowa: I have a home to return to.²⁰² -- Episode 49

Critical to *Wing's* integration of the three narratives is its collapse of the distinction between perpetrators and soldiers while still strongly asserting the humanity of soldiers. *Gundam Wing* achieves this by elevating the interiority of main character Heero Yuy. Doing so underlines that the suicidality he exhibits from Episode 1 to Episode 49 is the result of his own wartime victimization, as well as the revulsion he feels for himself as a perpetrator of wartime violence. Due in part to his interactions with Relena throughout the series, these feelings eventually coalesce into an empathy that enables him to understand and show mercy to his fellow perpetrators, Treize and Zechs, and eventually drives him to protect his former victims, specifically Relena. These actions posit him as *Wing's* ultimate hero.

²⁰² Although the other Gundam pilots are not discussed at length here, Heero is in many ways representative of them. Together the five Gundam pilots convey the hope of a future collective Japanese identity. As such, Trowa Barton is quoted here as a proxy for Heero's sentiments, specifically what Trowa says about his heart being "completely void of feelings for a long time" but deciding to live anyway. Heero himself rarely says such things explicitly as a result of his quiet albeit thoughtful characterization. That Trowa in particular lends voice to Heero's thoughts is especially likely since they have the most in common among the five pilots--raised as soldiers from childhood; orphans; officially nameless (both have codenames), etc. They are also the two pilots who appear to die committing sacrificial acts, only to reappear later in the show.

In the ninety second opening sequence of the series, Heero is visually positioned as the main character and likely hero of *Gundam Wing*. In the series' first scenes, however, Heero acts nothing like the heroic archetype. If it is not obvious that he is a perpetrator, it is evident that he is extremely dangerous. Immediately after Heero first appears in a capsule heading towards Earth from space, he notices that a civilian shuttle is blocking his trajectory. Without hesitation, he targets the shuttle and says, "Ready to shoot down obstacles."

The civilian shuttle and its passengers are unwittingly saved by the appearance of an OZ mobile suit carrier captained by Zechs Merquise. Unbeknownst to either Zechs or Heero, whose relationship eventually becomes the series' major rivalry, they have just crossed paths for the first time. In the following incursion, Zechs leads a spontaneous attack on Heero's capsule. Heero's mission is clearly meant to be secret, a fact reinforced by comments both Zechs and Heero make. Once Heero arrives in Earth's atmosphere, the nature of his mission becomes somewhat clearer to us. Initially intent on escaping, Heero receives a message to "Alter mission" and is informed that the carrier pursuing him is not just the Alliance but OZ, which at this point is still a special unit within the Alliance forces. Heero goes on the offensive. He initiates the transformation of his entry capsule into the Gundam's humanoid form. When two OZ mobile suits approach, we get the first sense of how powerful his Gundam is as his buster rifle incinerates the two suits in a single blast. Realizing that he and his crew are outmatched, Zechs tackles the Gundam in another mobile suit, immobilizing it.

As Zechs floats away in a parachute after jumping from his own suit's cockpit, he watches the suits crash into the ocean below.²⁰³

It seems that after five minutes, the hero is dead. Moreover, Zechs' subordinates ominously mention suicide several times. Zechs, however, is unconvinced. He blithely responds, "He won't commit suicide before setting foot on [Earth]."²⁰⁴

The audience is led to believe otherwise. When Heero is discovered washed up on a beach later in Episode 1, he pushes a button on the front of his pilot suit that explodes, propelling him backwards. Looking aggrieved, as if the initiated action has malfunctioned, he runs away.²⁰⁵ In the following episode he attempts to destroy his Gundam when it is raised to the surface. Manually activating torpedoes, he jumps off them as they shoot towards the Gundam. Falling towards the ocean waves below, Heero says, "Finally, everything is over. Mission complete."²⁰⁶ Pulled from the water, he ends up recuperating in a hospital in Episode 3. When another Gundam pilot breaks him out of the hospital, the two leap from a hole blasted in the tall building. Although given a parachute, Heero falls once again, this time towards the solid ground below. Shouts from the other pilot do not arouse him. Heero only pulls the parachute cord after he hears his name yelled by another voice, the voice of Relena Darlian.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Ep. 1.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. A scene in the manga *Episode Zero* device confirms this to be a self-detonation device. When Dr. J, who sends Heero missions, discovers Heero has installed the device before leaving for Earth, he has it altered so it will not be fatal when activated.

²⁰⁶ Ep. 2.

²⁰⁷ Ep. 3.

Relena's voice is an extremely significant one in *Wing*--to Heero specifically and to the After Colony world generally when she becomes princess of the pacifist Sanq Kingdom and later Queen Relena, chief representative of Romefeller and the World Nation. Before all these, however, Relena is introduced to *Wing*'s audience as a passenger on board the civilian shuttle Heero almost shoots down in Episode 1.²⁰⁸

The first time Heero hears Relena's voice is when he washes up on the beach. Relena, having called an ambulance then returned to his body, removes his helmet, which revives him. Angry he's still being alive and seriously displeased about being seen, Heero covers his face, realizes she has seen it already, attempts to initialize the self-destruct device in his suit (which fails), and finally runs away from her. In this first meeting he does not attempt to hurt her; however, he makes it clear to her that he is a dangerous person when, in the process of running away, he knocks three medical responders off a stairway leading down to the beach, kicks through the glass of the ambulance's passenger side door, shoves the driver out, and drives away. Relena, obviously fascinated, runs up the stairs to watch him flee, momentarily unaware of the four first responders strewn about the ground off-screen.²⁰⁹

Heero meets Relena again when, by chance, the school at which he has enrolled as a cover for his missions turns out to be her school. When she recognizes and approaches him in an attempt at friendliness, despite knowing how dangerous he is, Heero reminds the audience how willing he is to eliminate obstacles. "I will kill you," he threatens her.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Ep. 1.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

To Heero's annoyance, confusion, and eventual salvation, however, Relena does not respond to threats the way that most people would. In Episode 2, she follows him to a base, where he activates torpedoes to destroy his Gundam. The scene offers our first glimpse of a part of Heero that is unlike the dangerous, taciturn, and isolated image *Wing* consistently portrays. When Relena approaches him, he looks over his shoulder toward her and says her name softly, his gaze absent its usual glare. When he fully turns around, however, he points a gun at her. In his usual monotone voice he says, "You're in over your head." His finger closes in on the trigger. For the second time in two episodes, he almost kills her.²¹¹

He is stopped short by another character, who shoots and injures him. To his shock, Relena puts her body between himself and the shooter, arms outstretched, yelling, "What do you want to shoot him for?" Initially, the question seems absurd. The audience has been given every reason to believe that Heero was actually going to shoot her.²¹² And yet, Relena's act of valuing his life reverberates through the rest of the series. Although completely flummoxed, Heero is immediately impacted by her actions. In the following episode when he plummets headfirst towards the ground, her voice alone causes him to pull his parachute. He had not wanted; this is clear when he survives the fall and slowly stands up. Fist clenched and brows furrowed in anger, Heero says under his breath, "I shouldn't have released my parachute!" Thus it becomes undeniably clear his intent was suicide.²¹³

In these early episodes, the root cause of Heero's suicidal behavior is unclear. His externalized responses to being a perpetrator vacillate. On one hand, these are the only

²¹¹ Ep. 2.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ep. 3.

episodes in which we see him laugh. In both instances it is clearly bravado, laughing wildly after he kills Zechs' subordinates in Episode 1, after shooting down a military transport plane in Episode 4, and after appearing to threaten another Gundam pilot in Episode 5.²¹⁴ On the other hand, by Episode 2 Heero attempts to destroy his Gundam, then declares his mission is over. In the following episode he blatantly tries to commit suicide. Moreover, Heero's affect is cold, from his monotone voice to his loner behavior.²¹⁵ These all suggest his interior world is cold, harsh, and bleak, a reality that continually manifests in further suicide attempts as well as a generalized lack of interest in living expressed throughout the series.

In Episode 5, it becomes clear that some of Heero's affect is the result of trauma. Like Zechs and Relena, he is a victim of wartime violence. As with Zechs and Noin, we learn this and largely sympathize with him through a female character, Relena. Everything the audience learns about Heero's past is disclosed to her in a conversation she has with one of the men who trained him, the Gundam engineer, Dr. J. In this conversation we learn that the colonial rebellion group Dr. J works within "brought [Heero] up as a professional assassin." This suggests that Heero is either an orphan or was kidnapped, after which he was raised as a child soldier (he is only fifteen in *Wing*).²¹⁶ Looking visibly angry, Relena retorts, "Why do that?!" a statement likely to be intuitive to *Wing*'s audience and thus more

²¹⁴ Ep. 1,4,5.

²¹⁵ In the apt words of Duo Maxwell, another Gundam pilot, "He's anti-social, thinks he's Evel Knievel, and hardly speaks. You're so gloomy! Why not stop pretending to be human?" Ep. 4.

²¹⁶ In the manga *Episode Zero* Heero is explicitly portrayed as a child soldier, eg. he is shown being taught how to hold a handgun. He looks to be about five years old.

sympathetic than Dr. J's rationalization that Heero serves to "attack the dangerous, evil people responsible for starting wars."²¹⁷

Compounding this trauma, *Wing* portrays Heero as being further victimized throughout the series' conflicts. Most notably, he is manipulated by Treize into killing the Alliance leaders who, just prior to their deaths, had been sincerely discussing demilitarization and improved relations with the colonies. After realizing his mistake, Heero is initially catatonic inside his Gundam, even as mobile suits attack him. Eventually galvanized into action, Heero concludes the episode yelling "I totally screwed up!" into a darkening sky.²¹⁸

In the episodes that follow, he and the other Gundam pilots are stymied again, this time by Lady Une's over-the-top tactics in Siberia. Targeting the colonies and threatening to fire a missile, Heero responds to her threat by self-detonating his Gundam. Lying face-up on the ground, blood pouring from the back of his head, it appears once again that the story's hero is dead.²¹⁹

After being unconscious for a month, Heero finally wakes up, nursed back to health by another Gundam pilot, Trowa Barton. He learns from Trowa that the pilots are no longer getting orders since the Siberia incident. In the following episodes, Heero seeks out judgment against himself from the members of the Noventa family, whose patriarch he mistakenly killed at New Edwards. Despite his own victimization at the hands of Treize, he fully faces the reality that the deaths were his responsibility. Each family member refuses the chance to take revenge against him. In a letter that falls into Relena's hands, Mrs. Noventa, the wife of

²¹⁷ Ep. 5.

²¹⁸ Eps. 7-8.

²¹⁹ Ep. 10.

General Noventa, encourages Heero to stop suffering from his mistakes and move forward. “My husband and [General] Ventei died trying to build a world where genuine young men like yourselves could live happily,” she writes. Projecting a vision of his humanity like that of Relena’s, she concludes, “Our family is honored to have met with you.”²²⁰

After fighting Zechs in Antarctica, Heero and Trowa separately head for outer space, but eventually end up working together when Heero is captured by OZ’s space forces, which Trowa has infiltrated as a spy. Heero experiences another major trauma when a fellow Gundam pilot, Quatre Raberba Winner--who is suffering from the mind-warping effects of a new Gundam called *Wing Zero*--confronts him and Trowa in space. Trowa, the closest thing to a friend Heero has in *Wing*, sacrifices himself to block Quatre’s attack on a colony and is thrown out of his mobile suit, presumed dead.²²¹

The next twelve episodes reflect a chaotic period in the After Colony world. Romefeller emerges from the shadow of OZ as the Earth Sphere’s new power. Its key leadership of military industrialists begins to take over the world by force, specifically through the mass production of mobile dolls. While conflict in the colonies temporarily dies down with OZ’s ascendance and tacit acceptance by colony representatives, wars break out on Earth between the new OZ and the Treize Faction, which has splintered from OZ following Treize’s defection. Execution orders are issued for the Gundam pilots. In the midst

²²⁰ Ep. 15.

²²¹ Eps. 17-25.

of this chaos, the Sanq Kingdom emerges as a rallying point for nations on Earth longing for an end to conflict. Its growing influence attracts Romefeller's attention.²²²

In the midst of this, Heero returns to Earth with the Gundam pilot Quatre, who has regained his sanity and who, like Heero, is burdened by enormous mistakes and a gnawing sense of purposelessness in the new global climate. Through these episodes Heero remains inclined toward suicide; however, reflecting the kindness he has received from Relena, Trowa, and the Noventa family, this predisposition has become more latent. Instead of blatant attempts to end his life like the parachute incident, in these episodes Heero consistently puts himself in danger even though the purpose of doing so is questionable. As Quatre tells him after Heero joins the Treize Faction rebels' guerilla operations, "This is totally absurd, Heero...Getting involved only makes you a target." Heero replies blandly, "A target? Fine with me..."²²³ In the previous episode Heero's viewpoint is even clearer-- "As long as Earth's a warzone, I'm gonna fight. You have no choice but to fight either. Because we're Gundam pilots." Although his commitment to fighting can be construed as a will to live, therefore marking some kind of evolution in his interior development, it is clear in this scene and throughout the ones following that Heero's efforts to continue fighting are rooted in resignation. "The battlefield is the only place we're allowed to live," he tells Quatre. "For us, I guess the meaning of life is to survive battles."²²⁴

In the context of this resignation and, for Quatre at least, a continued sense of searching for greater purpose, the two pilots end up at the Sanq Kingdom from Episodes 30-

²²² Eps. 26-37.

²²³ Ep. 30.

²²⁴ Ep. 29.

36. This is in part a result of the Sanq Kingdom's search for Heero, and also Quatre's decision to go there after hearing about the Kingdom's influential power and its need for protection from Romefeller. Resigned to the fate that brings him there and exhausted from his recent participation in guerilla warfare, Heero nevertheless makes it extremely clear he does not want to stay. Despite this, Relena, demonstrating her brilliance for negotiation, persuades him to stay by telling him that she is putting resources into finding Trowa. Looking Heero directly in the eye she simply says, "Noin tells me he's an important person."²²⁵

Heero waits for an opportunity to pay back the favor, after which he plans to leave. He gets his chance when the Romefeller Foundation pushes a Treize Faction unit into the Sanq Kingdom. Pretending it is defending the Kingdom against the Faction, Romefeller pushes its attack towards the Kingdom's capital. Heero approaches the Faction's leader and organizes them to fight back. Heero leads them in his Gundam.²²⁶

Afterward, when Relena confronts Noin, Heero, and Quatre about the incident, Heero tells her that he has paid back the favor and is leaving. Momentarily vulnerable she asks him "Is my idea just a dream? Or even a mistake?" Heero's answer is practical--that Romefeller obviously eliminates anything it finds "inconvenient"--including himself, the other Gundam pilots, and now her and the Sanq Kingdom. As he turns away towards his Gundam she asks, "If you were me, how would you lead the Sanq Kingdom?" He replies that he would create a defense force, like Noin. Defying everyone's expectations, Relena relents, approving Noin's

²²⁵ Ep. 31.

²²⁶ Ibid.

creation of the defense force and its continued existence despite its existential clash with the total pacifism she is trying to promote. Her reason for doing so, however, is perhaps as sensible as Heero's response to her query about pacifism being a dream or a mistake. She says, "How can I expect to come up with a position the world agrees to if I can't even agree with the people closest to me?"²²⁷

Relena's willingness to be malleable appears to evoke the same from Heero. After she speaks he turns away from the Gundam back towards her. In the following episodes he remains in the Sanq Kingdom and acts to defend it. However, we continue to see him struggling internally. In a later scene Relena comes across Heero sitting on a bench reading. She sits down next to him and proceeds to ask why he has chosen to stay. Continuing without a response, Relena narrates her perception of the events of Heero's life in the past months, how in the past he would have left. However, as Relena is well aware, the colonies rejected the Gundam pilots' return in favor of OZ's deceitful overtures. Relena sympathizes, "It must've been hard." Still, Relena presses on, "you keep on fighting. You've still got an intensity in your eyes that hasn't changed since I first met you."²²⁸

When Relena initially sits on the bench, Heero barely makes eye contact with her. As she begins speaking, he simply stares at the book, the image of the interrupted, annoyed reader. As she continues, he looks at her out of the corner of his eye. When she comes to the end of what she has to say, he finally meets her eyes but his face leans away from her in a

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ep. 33.

posture of shock. He begins to say, “I just...” suggesting that he is about to protest, when they are interrupted by a messenger bringing Relena an invitation to meet with Romefeller.²²⁹

Before Relena departs in the following scene, she asks him to promise that he will tell her before he leaves. He nods. She leaves. Heero immediately gets in his Gundam and leaves without telling her. When Noin joins Quatre watching Heero’s departure, he tells her “Heero has made a decision to fight a battle with the least chance of survival.” Heero’s rejection of how Relena sees him manifests in this last intentional attempt to kill himself.²³⁰

Heero arrives at Luxembourg Base, where he attempts to take on hundreds of mobile dolls sent there to destroy the Treize Faction’s headquarters. After being saved by a Treize Faction soldier, Heero learns Treize is in a building near the base. When he finds and confronts him, they share an oddly empathetic moment in which both divulge their feelings of purposelessness. Ironically, they are able to see purpose in each other’s lives. Heero refuses to kill Treize; Treize chooses not to kill Heero. In the end, Treize gives him a new Gundam, Epyon, which he designed while in confinement--a monstrous suit whose mind-warping side effects are reminiscent of the Gundam in which Quatre went berserk in Episode 25.²³¹

One of Heero’s most obvious and terrifying incidences of perpetration occurs when Heero succumbs to the suit’s indication that *anyone* fighting at the base is his enemy. He

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ep. 33-34.

proceeds to destroy everyone and everything regardless of whose ‘side’ they are on--mobile suits, their pilots, and the infrastructure of the base itself.²³²

After surviving this gauntlet experience, Heero returns to the Sanq Kingdom in time for it to be attacked again. Fearing the mind-warping effects of Epyon, Heero attacks mobile dolls far away from the capital. At one point, hallucinating, he sees Relena being killed by beam cannon fire. Relena, however, is in fact still alive and resigns to dissolve the Kingdom and surrender herself to Romefeller.²³³

His efforts proving futile once again, Heero gives full sway to his cockpit’s mind-altering system and his own destructive potential and rages against the enormous mobile doll force for hours after Relena announces her surrender. When Zechs finally arrives from space, he finds Heero possessed by battle rage fueled by his helplessness. They clash for the first time since Antarctica, battling until they are exhausted, but without real purpose, both having failed to protect Relena and the Sanq Kingdom. When they leave, Heero takes Zechs’ mobile suit, and Zechs takes Epyon.²³⁴

The battle seems to exorcise something out of Heero. In the final arc of the series, other characters consistently remark that he has changed. When, for instance, he does not refuse another character’s help in returning to space, she says, “He seems kind of different this time.”²³⁵ When the five Gundam pilots--including Trowa who reemerges in Episode 36--

²³² Ep. 34.

²³³ Eps. 35-36.

²³⁴ Ep. 37.

²³⁵ Ep. 41.

assemble on Peacemillion to confront Zechs' White Fang and Treize's World Nation together, Heero clearly emerges as their leader.²³⁶

In particular, Heero chooses to take one highly uncharacteristic action--telling no one on Peacemillion where he is going, he infiltrates the spaceship Libra in order to find Relena, confront Zechs, and get Relena off the battleship. Even Relena is surprised, exclaiming, "I never would've expected you to come for me." Heero's response that "Noin and the others are uneasy with you still here," only serves to highlight the fact that if the others were so concerned about her, they could have come themselves.²³⁷

Although his acceptance of his role on Peacemillion suggests he has made some peace with his perpetrator identity by the end of the series, Heero's sense of worthlessness persists to the final episode, a fact which once again becomes clear in direct response to interacting with Relena. When she tells him on Libra how he has given her "hope and strength to live" he simply responds, "I'm nothing compared to you." In a later scene when, convinced that he is on a suicide mission to end the final conflict, Relena attempts to contact him in his Gundam, he clicks off the transceiver and roughly says, "Life is cheap. Especially mine."²³⁸

In the final episode, Heero finds Zechs and they duel in their mobile suits. Able to speak to each other through their mobile suit communication systems, they also spar verbally. In response to Zechs' assertion that "the strong make [the weak]," Heero argues "everyone is weak, and that includes you and me." That Heero is trying to make a bigger

²³⁶ Eps. 43-49.

²³⁷ Ep. 46.

²³⁸ Ep. 48.

point to Zechs finally comes full circle when in their final charge he spares Zechs' life. When Zechs, voice filled with quiet anger, asks Heero why he won't just kill him, Heero only says, "Relena would be sad."²³⁹

Having demonstrated mercy to Zechs and empathy with Relena, Heero is finally tasked with using his buster rifle, an unrivaled weapon capable of mass destruction, to blow up a piece of the spaceship Libra. Flying in front of the piece, his mobile suit shaking from the effort of simultaneously staying in front of it and attempting to stabilize for a precise shot as he enters Earth's atmosphere, Heero finally yells, "I will...I will...I will survive!" With his final statement, we realize his victory is double--the external victory of catastrophic damage avoided and the internal victory of accepting one's self worth.²⁴⁰

Traumatized by Killing: The Interior Narratives of Soldiers

Without paying close attention to the actions of individuals in creating their sense and experience of selfhood, we will have considerable difficulty discussing the ethical responsibility for their behavior, which is a dangerous road to go down when it comes to the study of war.²⁴¹ -- Aaron William Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire*

For the first time, I understood the mind of those prisoners. Up to that moment, I'd excused myself from responsibility on the grounds that I was myself ordered to commit such acts by regimental commanders. From the point of view of those murdered, though, it didn't matter whether the act of killing was a voluntary one or done under orders. I now realized that first I had to take responsibility myself...²⁴² -- Tominaga Shouzou, former Imperial Japanese soldier in China.

²³⁹ Ep. 49.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Aaron William Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 11-12.

²⁴² Cook & Cook, 466.

As Aaron William Moore states in his research on soldiers' diaries in the Asia-Pacific War, understanding soldiers' sense of self necessarily precedes questions of the responsibility of perpetrators in wartime. This section delves into the interior landscape of Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) soldiers represented by a member of the war veterans association Chuukiren,²⁴³ Tominaga Shouzou, and his postwar reflections on his wartime actions in an interview conducted with Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore Cook in the 1980s. Many of his experiences are consistent with Heero's, including the experience of dehumanization through military training and combat experience, its impact on soldiers' interactions with those experiences through memory, and a successful reckoning with complex perpetrator identities that enable former soldiers to reconnect with their humanity.

The Testimony of Tominaga Shouzou, Former Imperial Japanese Soldier

Tominaga Shouzou was twenty-six years old when he was drafted and sent to China in 1941. Early in his training, Tominaga and his fellow candidate officers were brought to a detention center where Chinese prisoners were being held. "We were astonished at how thin and emaciated they looked," he recalled to an interviewer in the late 1980s. An officer told him "These are the raw materials for your trial of courage." The following day Tominaga was placed in a line of candidate officers who were to prove their courage. One by one each candidate was directed to chop off the head of a prisoner with his sword. Tominaga begins,

²⁴³ Chuukiren is an abbreviation of Chuugoku Kikansha Renrakukai, The Association of Returnees from China. Chuukiren's members served in China during the war and were detained there afterward for several years while they underwent "thought reform." The effort, which involved intense self-reflection on their wartime actions, resulted in written affidavits regarding their war guilt. All were returned to Japan by 1964; none were executed. They are the only war veterans association whose members have spoken out about wartime atrocities; they consistently characterize the war as "aggressive" and raise the issue of Emperor Showa's war responsibility. They hope their testimonies contribute to peace between China and Japan. Cook & Cook, 44.

“The scene was so appalling that I felt I couldn’t breathe...When my turn came, the only thought I had was “Don’t do anything unseemly!” I didn’t want to disgrace myself...”²⁴⁴

In these comments Tominaga relates his physiological response to the situation. His assessment of the situation as “appalling” suggests a moral aversion that appears here more as a simple, gut-level response. Further highlighting the unconsciousness of his reaction, he relates how his body responded physically by restricting his breathing. Despite these sensations, Tominaga pressured himself to follow through by aspiring to his own constructed self image, one in which he would not “disgrace” himself. He continues:

Contrary to my expectations, my feet firmly met the ground...I unsheathed my sword...I took a deep breath and recovered my composure. I steadied myself, holding the sword at a point above my right shoulder, and swung down with one breath.²⁴⁵

Tominaga’s comments reinforce the banality of his actions: after taking normal measures to focus--feet firmly on ground, steadying breath--he was able to pressure himself into becoming an active participant in the “appalling” scene. “At that moment,” he concludes, “I felt something inside me. I don’t know how to put it, but I gained strength somewhere in my gut...”²⁴⁶

This scene illustrates what Aaron William Moore calls “creating [a] sense and experience of selfhood,” which participating in wartime acts necessarily elicits.²⁴⁷ Tominaga had tremendous pressure to behead the Chinese prisoner in the authoritative presence of his commanding officer and the peer pressure of his fellow candidate officers; however, it was

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 41

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 42.

²⁴⁷ Moore, *Writing War*, 11-12.

he who swung the blade. As a result, the “strength” he found within himself he internalized as his own.

Tominaga became an officer and served until the war ended. In 1945 he was captured by the Soviet Union and brought to a work camp. In 1950, the Soviets returned him to China, where he assumed he would trade brutal labor for war trials under China’s new communist regime.

What he and the other prisoners experienced, however, was not what he expected.²⁴⁸ Over the next five years, he and the others underwent a process of “thought reform” in which they questioned their basic assumptions about their participation in the war. To their surprise, this did not involve beatings or torture. Instead, prisoners were continually urged to reflect-- on paper, in isolation, in conversations with one another, and finally in response to listening to the anger of Chinese who had survived the war. “Most of us thought then that murdering, raping, and setting fire to villages were unavoidable acts in war, nothing particularly wrong,” he states in his interview.²⁴⁹ “Good soldiers were those who were able to kill...Everyone became a demon within three months. Men were able to fight courageously only when their human characteristics were suppressed.”²⁵⁰ Over the course of his time in China, however, he began to understand the minds of his victims better. During one particular incident he was thrown into isolation in a former Japanese prison, whose walls bore the bloody epithets of Chinese prisoners. Here, Tominaga had a revelation. In the days following he wrote his

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 462-464.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 462.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 41. For another fictional meditation on physical violence in samurai culture, see Tsukamoto Shinya’s *Killing* (2018). See also film review by Mark Schilling, “‘Killing’: A Modern Take on a Samurai Staple,” *Japan Times*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2018/11/27/films/film-reviews/killing-modern-take-samurai-staple/>.

thought reform assignments “from the viewpoint of the persons whose houses we burnt down and whom we killed...I wrote my self-examination based on the results of my acts...I now realized that first I had to take responsibility myself.”²⁵¹

Tominaga’s postwar experience from 1945-1956 is notable for several reasons. First, unlike the vast majority of soldiers who returned to Japan immediately after the war and who did not begin to wrestle publicly with its legacies until the 1980s (if at all), Tominaga confronted his actions sooner than later. More importantly, he was forced to do so. During several years in China, he was directly and repeatedly exposed to his victims’ pain through the memories of deceased or unknown victims as well as from contact with survivors. Over and over he was required to reflect on these now shared memories. For Tominaga, as well as for many other members of Chuukiren, this thought reform experience eventually caused him to accept the nature of his wartime actions as “malevolent.” Moreover, it precipitated his “facing squarely the darkest and least acceptable aspects” of himself.²⁵² Finally, in response to all this, he internalized a desire for peace between China and Japan and contributed to such efforts by acknowledging and sharing his experiences when he returned to Japan.²⁵³

Heero Yuy as Analog to the Testimony of Tominaga Shouzou

Though there is no postwar period in *Gundam Wing*, Heero’s character mirrors many of Tominaga’s thoughts and experiences. There are differences as well, for instance between the representation of Heero’s suicidality and Tominaga’s seeming wartime acceptance of his

²⁵¹ Ibid., 466.

²⁵² Hashimoto, 12-13.

²⁵³ Cook & Cook, 145.

actions. This difference, however, points to the silences in many veteran's narratives which, through increased research on the psychological effects of wartime trauma on soldiers, are now better understood.

Similar to the Imperial Japanese Army's deadly presence in China from 1937-1945, Heero and the other Gundam pilots kill hundreds if not thousands of people in the course of the series. This fact alone is one of the major ways in which *Wing* and the Gundam franchise have explored the gray area between the heroic and perpetrator narratives. Heero is particularly destructive. In a stark departure from protagonists in the original *Gundam* series, who are thrown into warfare after otherwise 'normal' childhoods, Heero is highly trained and extremely good at what he does from the series' first scenes.²⁵⁴ Within the first seven episodes he kills several mobile suit pilots in combat, shoots down a mobile suit transport carrier, and significantly damages several military bases.²⁵⁵ This reflects the incalculable damage the Imperial Japanese Army wrought in China. Highlighting the difficulty of even calculating the damage in terms of Chinese deaths, John Dower wrote, "So great was the devastation and suffering in China that in the end it is necessary to speak of uncertain

²⁵⁴ In stark contrast, Amuro Ray, protagonist of *First Gundam*, is literally reading the Gundam's manual when he pilots it in combat for the first time. *Mobile Suit Gundam*, Episode 1.

²⁵⁵ This is also possible because, in addition to his personal destructive power, Heero's Gundam is equipped with the most destructive weapons. His buster rifle, a beam weapon, has a radius of 150 meters and a range of tens of kilometres. In the course of the series, it incinerates groups of mobile suits and blows up battleships and large military aircraft, each with a single shot. Consistent with its intent to be a more realistic representation of war and its effects, Gundam creators have paid significant attention to actual military technology and other scientific innovations in order to inform the capabilities of the technology that is portrayed in the Gundam universes. Additionally, the technical information noted here is the result of the franchise's symbiotic relationship with model kits. These kits, whose production essentially launched the original series out of commercial failure and has played a major role in its success ever since, are extremely detailed. They are marketed towards older teens and adults. See Condry, *The Soul of Anime*, 123-127. The information about the buster rifle itself comes from the Gundam Wiki page on Heero's mobile suit, "XXXG-01W Wing Gundam," https://gundam.fandom.com/wiki/XXXG-01W_Wing_Gundam.

'millions' of deaths.’²⁵⁶ John McClain asserts the official figure for Chinese soldiers killed between 1937 and 1945 is 1.3 million. The figure for civilian deaths ranges from 9 to 12 million, the highest for any single country during the war.²⁵⁷

Heero’s attitude to destroy “any obstacle” is also noteworthy. The mindset that any obstacle to a mission is forfeit, including non-military targets, could be perceived as more akin to terrorism than what national militaries officially espouse as wartime policy; however, this describes the behavior for which the IJA remains notorious, including, as Tominaga describes, chopping off prisoners’ heads as a macabre hazing ritual for officers and “[m]assacres of [Chinese] civilians were routine...”²⁵⁸ In portraying its heroes acting from the same kind of mindset, *Wing* blurs the line between atrocities and otherwise tacitly approved wartime violence.

Wing also makes the point that Heero’s response to being an elite soldier is to perceive himself as less than human. This emerges throughout the series as Heero identifies certain human traits which he believes he and the other pilots cannot afford to exhibit. For instance, when Quatre asks him, “Is kindness necessary in a war?” he bluntly replies, “No. Not while you’re fighting.”²⁵⁹ Gundam pilot Trowa Barton puts it most plainly when in a conversation that likely speaks for all the pilots, he says, “I’ve fought all this time. And with each battle, I’ve been killing my own heart. My heart’s been completely void of feelings for a

²⁵⁶ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 295.

²⁵⁷ McClain, 498.

²⁵⁸ Cook & Cook, 44. Victimization of civilians is ubiquitous in Gundam series, if not always thematic. See Tennant’s dissertation for statistical information on *Gundam* series’ representation of violence against combatants and non-combatants, 69.

²⁵⁹ Ep. 29.

long time. Maybe my life doesn't have value anymore."²⁶⁰ These sentiments echo Tominaga's when he summarizes the essential nature of "good soldiers" in the IJA: "Good soldiers were those who were able to kill...Everyone became a demon within three months. Men were able to fight courageously only when their human characteristics were suppressed."²⁶¹ These realities also underline how problematic it can be to ascribe to the perpetrator narrative. Identifying oneself as a "demon" can produce, as *Wing* illustrates, extremely negative and potentially destructive self-perceptions. Treize succumbs to this by committing suicide at the end of *Gundam Wing*.²⁶² When Zechs is unable to do the same, he becomes bitter.²⁶³ The perceived worthlessness that fuels Heero's suicidality is sustained throughout the entire series.

Just as Tominaga was reluctant to behead the Chinese prisoner, Heero frequently hesitates and even avoids killing.²⁶⁴ In addition to the especially significant scenes in which he hesitates to kill Relena, as well as his outright refusal to kill Treize and Zechs, Heero frequently opts out of various killing missions, both ordered and self-directed. In Episode 19 upon hearing that Duo, a fellow Gundam pilot, has been caught and imprisoned, Heero determines to kill him before OZ can continue using him as a propaganda tool to turn the colonies against the Gundams. When he reaches Duo, however, he chooses to help him escape. Heero's aversion to involving civilians is highlighted in Episode 30 when, while

²⁶⁰ Ep. 49.

²⁶¹ Cook & Cook, 43.

²⁶² Ep. 48.

²⁶³ Ep. 49.

²⁶⁴ This is a running theme in the *Gundam* franchise and is, in fact, much more overt in the first two series. Amuro Ray, the protagonist of *First Gundam* (15 years old) and Kamille Bidan, protagonist of *Zeta Gundam* (17 years old) both frequently yell at their enemies from within their mobile suit cockpits that they do not want to kill anyone, often accusing their foes of "making" them do so by attacking in the first place.

fighting with the Treize Faction rebels, he realizes that a town center has not been evacuated. He flagrantly disobeys orders and alters the mission until he confirms that all civilians have fled.

The major differences between testimonies like Tominaga's and story arcs like Heero's highlight some of the silences that remain in many veterans' testimonies. In Tominaga's, for instance, it is unclear if he continued to experience reluctance when hurting others. Moreover, he does not allude to a sense of worthlessness or suicidality. Although in his testimony he described experiences like chopping off the heads of Chinese prisoners as the beginnings of becoming a "demon," there is no indication from his testimony that he felt self-loathing either during his deployment or during his five years in Russia as a prisoner of war. In fact, when Tominaga was brought to China in 1950, he and his fellow inmates at first complained of a sign reading "Japanese Military War Criminal Management," claiming that "the Emperor, the cabinet ministers, and the military commanders...were the ones who had led us into the war...Small fish and hooligans like us weren't war criminals."²⁶⁵ By contrast, Heero, the other Gundam pilots, and arguably Treize and Zechs feel the burden of their perpetrator identities throughout the series.

There is, however, good reason to believe soldiers like Tominaga struggled enormously with the trauma of participating in wartime violence, which for many included killing. Acknowledging the real effect of war on its frontline soldiers has long been unpopular to the point of being taboo. For example, when shell shock began to compromise the efficiency of fighting forces in Britain during WWI, an order was issued stating "In no

²⁶⁵ Cook & Cook, 464.

circumstances whatever will the expression ‘shell shock’ be used verbally or be recorded in any regimental or other casualty report, or any hospital or other medical document.” In Germany it was treated as a character defect managed by painful treatments including electroshock.²⁶⁶ As trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk puts plainly, “Nobody wants to remember trauma. In that regard society is no different from the victims themselves.”²⁶⁷

In Japan, this desire to avoid facing trauma goes even deeper, since addressing war-related cultural trauma requires dealing with Japan’s defeat. As much of postwar media that references the Asia-Pacific War--like *Gundam Wing*--suggests, the process is extremely complicated. Furthermore, as Akiko Hashimoto concludes in her research on cultural trauma and Japan’s defeat, “The task of making a coherent story for the vanquished is...a painful probe into the meaning of being Japanese.”²⁶⁸ Tominaga’s silence regarding any internal contention with his humanity may reflect this.²⁶⁹ Even *Gundam Wing*’s postwar-generation creators explored these issues at the safe distance of fiction.

In *Gundam Wing*, Heero faces his trauma; specifically, he confronts his internalized perpetrator identity and the worthlessness he feels as a result of it. He is able to do this by encountering his victims, listening to their experiences, and building mutual respect and trust with them. This is especially apparent in his relationship with Relena. Relena initiates this

²⁶⁶ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, (New York: Viking, 2014), 185.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²⁶⁸ Hashimoto, 2.

²⁶⁹ In the epilogue to his major work on comfort women, Tanaka Yuki wrote “This book is an initial step in the journey of research, which, I hope, will eventually lead Japanese men (and here I include myself)--the sons and grandsons of Japanese Imperial soldiers--to critically and productively re-examine our own history and culture.” These are the final words of his book. The first words, which follow his title page, are “What our fathers did not tell us.” *Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 182.

process by giving him opportunities to return the respect and trust she extends to him, despite having been threatened by him several times.²⁷⁰ She is only able to do so based on a recognition that their relationship is not wholly defined by victimization, which belies the recognition of his humanity, particularly the more positive aspects of it.

This process is similar to Tominaga's thought reform experience. Before being told to self-reflect, Tominaga details how, when he first returned to China, he and the other prisoners were put on a passenger train instead of a freight train and fed white bread instead of a presumably coarser black bread. He feared the Chinese were treating them kindly at first only to "kill us suddenly" later. In the years that followed, when prisoners became ill, they were taken care of "even in the middle of the night." At that point, Tominaga recounts, "We began to realize that human beings should be treated this way and [we] began to reflect on our treatment of Chinese during the war."²⁷¹ The process Tominaga and the others went through thereafter brought them to a place where they were able not only to accept their war responsibility *and* their humanity, but also to desire peace between themselves, their former victims, and their societies.

Heero ultimately aligns himself with the suffering of his victims as well as current and former enemies, choosing to support and engage with the world around him while fully acknowledging his participation as a perpetrator during the war. As an analogy to a fringe group such as Chuukiren, the elevation of Heero as *Gundam Wing's* hero reinforces its creators' willingness to engage unpopular and difficult wartime memories.

²⁷⁰ Disclaimer: *Gundam Wing* is fictional; it is by no means a textbook for how to deal with trauma. While Relena's actions in the series ultimately lead to a productive end, many of her actions, particularly at the beginning of the series, are highly imprudent and dangerous.

²⁷¹ Cook & Cook, 463-464.

The Final Victors: Perpetrators as the Cornerstone of a Post-postwar Japanese Identity

Heero: If anything has ended, or rather, if anything should end, then it's my own miserable and useless resistance. -- Episode 34.

Heero: I will...I will...I will survive! -- Episode 49.

The idea of “living” being enough to bring Japan into a post-postwar world resonates throughout the anime world. “The wind is rising...we must try to live!” may well have been the final message from internationally famous filmmaker Miyazaki Hayao in his last film, *The Wind Rises* (2013). Similarly in *Gundam Wing*, Heero's final statement--“I will...I will...I will survive!”--is more than a statement of physical survival. It is a profound decision both to live with trauma and to move beyond it.²⁷²

Gundam Wing's portrayal of Heero Yuy as an analogy to the *heitai* or “everyman soldier,” men like Tominaga Shouzou, demonstrates an effort to integrate the worst and the potential best of modern Japanese history. Sent off as heroes, returning as failures, former Imperial Japanese soldiers did what many people impacted by war did in order to reintegrate into postwar society--they attempted to suppress their memories. This silence was possible in Japan, unlike in Germany where a broader sense of public and private culpability for the war and the Holocaust eventually emerged. However, as the memory wars of Asia now underline, full reintegration has not happened. Some war wounds are not healed; so they fester. As Tominaga's testimony and *Wing*'s story show, perpetrators of wartime violence hold a

²⁷² Ep. 49.

unique role in supporting Japan's efforts "to heal, bring justice, and regain moral status in the world."²⁷³

While Heero embodies the perpetrator narrative, his character also moves beyond it, which suggests potential ways of engaging the heroic and victim narratives that remain absent or infrequent in Japan. His interactions with *Wing*'s two major antagonists as well as its other major hero demonstrate this integration while reflecting the value *Wing* places on each narrative--the heroic narrative is the most problematic; the victim narrative is more legitimate but deeply flawed; the perpetrator narrative, though most difficult to embrace, holds the most hope for a holistic Japanese identity going forward. In Heero's final confrontation with Zechs and Treize, his perpetrating enemies, and Relena, his former victim, and finally with his victimized but perpetrating self, he emerges as a hopeful projection of a future Japanese national identity.

Heero, Treize, and Zechs: Empathetic Rejection

Heero is the obvious hero of *Wing*; however, from the beginning of the story Heero's suicidal behavior suggests he perceives himself as a perpetrator. This stands in stark contrast to Treize and Zechs, who are eager to be considered heroes and resistant to recognizing their perpetrator identities. Heero's interactions with both Treize and Zechs serve to highlight the complicated nature of the perpetrator identity through the empathy that Heero, despite being an enemy of both, nevertheless extends to them.

²⁷³ Hashimoto, 5.

The gray area between Heero's and Treize's hero and perpetrator identities is illustrated in Episode 34, the only time they come face to face. By this point Heero has been victimized by Treize's manipulative scheming, when Treize tricked him into killing the Alliance leaders at the New Edwards Base. However, by Episode 34 much has changed-- Treize has left Romefeller; Heero has just arrived from supporting the Treize Faction rebels. The scene plays with their similarities and differences, establishing through dialogue how they perceive themselves, each other, their roles in the current conflict, and their futures. Their conversation, however, is almost pathetic, each convinced their own life has become meaningless. When Heero enters the estate's library and finds Treize, he immediately invites Heero to kill him, saying, "Now go ahead and shoot me. End this battle." He closes his eyes, waiting. Insisting that Treize's purpose lies in the soldiers still fighting for him, Heero demonstrates a level of honesty he has not shared with anyone--"If anything has ended, or rather, if anything should end, then it's my own miserable and useless resistance." Mired in this perspective, neither is able to summon the conviction to kill the other.²⁷⁴

In many ways, Heero's final face to face confrontation with Zechs mirrors the one with Treize. In both Heero is pointing a gun and seems more interested in understanding his enemies, a departure from his usual willingness to shoot first and never ask questions. However, the scene with Zechs departs from the one with Treize in significant ways. Relena is present. Also, Zechs' appearance is a hologram. If Heero is aware of this, then he knows his gun-pointing is unnecessary; it is solely the answers to Heero's questions that are at stake. Similar to the scene with Treize, Heero asks open-ended questions in a tone that is firm but

²⁷⁴ Ep. 34.

not angry, which contrasts Relena's raw shock and confusion. "How about explaining what you meant when you said this battle has meaning?" Heero asks, referring to the enormous battle Zechs and Treize have staged at the end of the series. Zechs replies, "Unless we fight no one will learn how foolish fighting is! We must make all of mankind realize that!" Given Heero's rejection of Zechs' offer to join White Fang moments before, we know Heero does not think this is a great idea. Instead of trying to convince Zechs otherwise, however, he simply asks, "Why'd you take on the job?" Zechs explains, which sets Relena off again. Heero, however, reaches some sort of satisfaction with the conversation. His simple, "I understand," suggests that, as with Treize, he is able to empathize with Zechs, regardless of his own opinions.²⁷⁵ This empathy is critical in establishing that Heero's character embodies the *integration* of the three narratives, not an outright rejection of the heroic and victim narratives.

However, it is also clear through Heero's character that *Wing* does reject some elements of those narratives. When Heero faces Zechs in their final mobile suit duel, he directly argues with Zechs's plan to destroy Earth. "The people who've lost Earth will despise you," he yells at Zechs as they continue fighting, "and the colonies will rely on you. The same mistakes will be repeated endlessly as long as you live!" He goes on to include Treize in his critique. "You're the same as Treize, claiming to fight for justice to protect the weak! But in fact you're not helping the weak at all!" This evolves into a back and forth on the nature of weakness. Zechs says the strong create the weak. Heero, on one hand, seems to agree. "I can't tolerate such people!" to which Zechs rejoins, "Strong people make them that

²⁷⁵ Ep. 46.

way!” Heero cannot, however, agree with this. “Zechs,” he says, “nobody is strong. All of humanity is weak. And that includes you and me!”²⁷⁶

This statement flies in the face of Treize and Zechs’ wartime ideologies. Several times throughout the series, both Treize and Zechs, as well as Lady Une²⁷⁷ and Noin, describe Heero and the other Gundam pilots as “pure.” Noin does in Antarctica.²⁷⁸ Treize does in his defection speech to Romefeller.²⁷⁹ Zechs asserts it even at his own “bitter end,” calling Heero “pure and kind” after their duel. Treize and Zechs’ conceptualization of purity resonates with themes Japan tirelessly messaged during its wartime period, much of which had a basis in premodern Japanese thought. Purity was (and is) highly valued in Japan. The idea that warriors could attain purity was not at odds with the reality that warriors kill people. This ideology arguably saw its purest and most terrible form in the kamikaze.²⁸⁰

With Heero’s final declaration that “All of humanity is weak,” he utterly refutes this ideology.²⁸¹ At the same time, Heero’s words do not seem to imply the self-hatred he has experienced through much of the series. This appears to be in large part the result of continually being confronted by Relena’s perception of him. Her admiration is not rooted in his identity as a soldier but as a person, which serves as a conduit for Heero to perceive himself as a human instead of--in Tominaga’s words--a “demon.”

²⁷⁶ Ep. 49.

²⁷⁷ Ep. 25.

²⁷⁸ Ep. 15.

²⁷⁹ Ep. 25.

²⁸⁰ To many young American viewers of *Gundam Wing* (including myself), this language of “purity” may have seemed distinctly odd; however, after learning about the ubiquitousness of the value of purity in Japanese culture and its use in propaganda, especially applied to Japanese soldiers during the Asia-Pacific War, these characters’ statements take on significant cultural meaning. See “Chapter Eight: The Pure Self” of *War Without Mercy* by John Dower, 203-233.

²⁸¹ Ep. 49.

Heero and Relena: The Realist and the Idealist

Like many stories Japanese and otherwise, *Wing* illustrates the dynamism of philosophical give and take through a male and female character. In *Wing*, these two characters are Heero and Relena. Heero--cold, taciturn, yet the hero of *Wing*--ultimately represents imperatives of the perpetrator narrative: he reckons with the truth of the destruction he has committed but chooses not to be defined by it, instead contributing to reconciliation with his victims and peace generally. Relena--orphaned at two years old, innocent of hurting others, and as pure in her intentions to bring about peace as any character in the show--embodies the pacifist imperative of the victim narrative during the majority of the series.²⁸² Unlike his limited interactions with Treize and Zechs, Heero and Relena spend significant time with each other throughout the series, developing an undeniable if unusual connection as a result of their initial victim-perpetrator relationship. Moreover, where Heero's character represents a meditation on the purpose of fighting, Relena's represents a meditation on the nature of peace.

Wing sustains the tension between Heero and Relena through their perpetrator and victim identities, their soldier and pacifist roles, as well as through Relena's unreciprocated curiosity about Heero. By Episode 46 Heero finally settles on how to interact with her--instead of killing her, he will protect her. Episodes 46, 47, and 48 show Heero infiltrating Libra in order to find her, speak to Zechs, and bring her to safety on his and the other pilots' base of operations, the spaceship Peacemillion. Yet even these episodes sustain the friction

²⁸² Eps. 14-49. In Episode 14 she appears as Princess Relena Peacecraft for the first time. During her time as Queen Relena of the World Nation and even after she steps down and appears in space to dissuade Zechs from his final plans, it remains clear that she identifies as Peacecraft and espouses pacifism.

between their assumed identities and the narratives they represent. Although aware they are essentially ‘on the same side,’ their decisions about what to do next differ drastically.

Following their joint confrontation of Zechs on Libra, Relena insists through two more episodes and four more scenes that speaking to Zechs can and will result in his abandoning his apocalyptic plans. Heero bluntly disagrees.²⁸³

While Relena’s agitation about their disagreement appears to grow, Heero’s acceptance of the situation and his role in it settles even further. Finally, the tension between their perspectives reaches its climax in Episode 48. Having returned to Peacemillion with Relena, Heero prepares to leave and fight Zechs in his Gundam. Relena believes the war is over since the spaceship Peacemillion rammed Libra, destroying its main cannon. Still deeply committed to her pacifist ideology, she confronts Heero as he sits in the Gundam’s cockpit making final preparations to depart. Standing at the cockpit’s opening, brows furrowed in what increasingly appears to be anger, Relena finally bursts out, “You think if you go, the war will come to an end?!”²⁸⁴

The significance of what happens next is underlined visually, auditorily, as well as contextually. Heero stands up and, reaching behind her helmeted head, brings their faces close together. With a calm, even tone he tells her, “I’ll go get Zechs, then Treize. Then the war will be over. If you survive, there will be peace. This is the only thing I can do for you.” Momentarily lulled by the unexpectedness of Heero’s demeanor, Relena returns to her earlier combativeness when he reiterates his decision to fight, even asking her to allow him to do so.

²⁸³ Eps. 46-48.

²⁸⁴ Ep. 48.

Relena's "No" is quick and adamant. The last thing Heero says before gently pushing her away to close the cockpit hatch is: "Trust me."²⁸⁵ She floats through the hangar in zero gravity, eventually grasping the railing of a perimeter walkway. Relegated to the position of bystander, a role she endures to the end of the series, she watches him leave.

In some ways this scene is symbolic of the discussion between the perpetrator and victim narratives as they are currently defined. With Heero as former perpetrator and Relena his former victim, the scene represents the "mutual respect and, ultimately, mutual trust" Hashimoto says are the hallmarks of the imperative of the perpetrator narrative.²⁸⁶ That Heero and Relena mutually respect each other is established in an earlier scene on Libra where Relena tells him, "You really are amazing" to which he replies, "Look who's talking," their tones of voice reflecting their sincerity.²⁸⁷ The cockpit scene in Episode 48 cements their trust when, after being pushed out of the Gundam by Heero, Relena finally says into the communicator in her helmet, "Heero, I do trust you," before he leaves.²⁸⁸

However, situating this story in the context of Heero's departure to fight in a battle subverts other imperatives of the perpetrator narrative, for instance, that many of its present-day advocates in Japan assume pacifism as a legitimate and workable national policy. *Wing's* deviation away from an overt antiwar stance is set up through Relena when she asks Heero if he really thinks his leaving (and fighting) will help end the war. She obviously thinks the answer is 'no.' Heero leaves, indicating he believes the answer is 'yes.'²⁸⁹ In this one

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Hashimoto, 130.

²⁸⁷ Ep. 46.

²⁸⁸ Ep. 48.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

instance Heero's stance functionally aligns with Treize and Zechs' basic belief that fighting is sometimes necessary.

It is hard to imagine *Wing*'s creators suggesting something more sensational and unexpected than that Japan should remilitarize and that doing so could be based on the premise of 'being realistic.' Japan has effectively been a pacifist country for seventy-five years; while it is easy to argue that this has not been perfectly manifested,²⁹⁰ its legacy has deeply impacted Japanese national self-perception. A pure, pacifist postwar identity would appear to be the opposite of an ugly, perpetrating wartime one.

Yet as the deeply graven fault lines between the three narratives indicate, not all Japanese feel this way about Japan's pacifist identity. Although the perpetrator narrative has long been overshadowed by the victim narrative, it may be that as the passage of time dulls the vivid pain felt by Japan's domestic wartime victims, the country may see the victim narrative's pacifist imperative erode. As a college student stated when contingency laws were proposed to Japan's Article 9 in 2002,²⁹¹

Sentimental chants of "Peace! Peace!" alone can't bring any peace...around the world [] there are nations that will violate the peace of others. If Japan is invaded, how are we going to confront it? [The contingency law] is important...in order to realize the ideal of peace and to maintain Japan's sovereignty."²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Critics point to Japan's longtime postwar relationship with the US beginning with the Korean War. Japanese soil has served as a launchpad for US military operations up to the present day. See "About USFJ," U.S. Forces, Japan: The Cornerstone of Peace and Security in the Pacific, <https://www.usfj.mil/>. Critics also point to legislation that has increased the powers of Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF), see Kanako Takahara, "SDF Emerging as the Military It Truly Is," *Japan Times*, April 17, 2007, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2007/04/17/reference/sdf-emerging-as-the-military-it-truly-is/#.XrDAPp5KjFh>

²⁹¹ "Japan: Interpretations of Article 9 of the Constitution," Library of Congress, last updated August 18, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/japan-constitution/interpretations-article9.php>. See also Shibata Akiho's article referenced earlier.

²⁹² Hashimoto, 117.

Commenting on the student's remarks, Akiko Hashimoto notes how "the moral framework that consigns war to the category of "absolute evil [can undermine] an understanding of the vastly complicated world of human animosity, greed, conformity, and self-preservation," which *Wing* willingly engages in its fictional narrative. Similar to the college student, Heero's acceptance of a plan involving military action does not mean rejecting peace outright; in fact, when he tells Relena, "if you survive, there will finally be peace," it is clear he believes in pursuing peace by peaceful means, which she has done throughout *Wing*.²⁹³

Once again, it is important to highlight the significance of the subversive decision to raise Heero's voice over Relena's, considering Japanese postwar memory. As Daqing Yang says in his article "Living Soldiers, Re-lived Memories?" "Veteran's voices never became prominent in postwar Japanese society, for they always had to coexist or compete with voices of A-bomb victims, bereaved families, and others," whose stories were more palatable because of their focus on Japan's victimization and their absence of a clear perpetrator.²⁹⁴ The opening of Hashimoto's *Long Defeat* reinforces this image of the ignored veteran. Hashimoto recalls traversing a walkway in downtown Tokyo in the 1960s lined with "amputated middle-aged men wearing tattered cotton military uniforms."²⁹⁵ Yet both these

²⁹³ Ep. 49. That the peaceful future envisioned by *Gundam Wing*'s creators is not necessarily a pacifist one is further underlined in the final moments of the series. Three months after the war ends, we see Relena about to depart on a space shuttle. When she is addressed by her new title it is not "Princess" or "Peacecraft," but "Vice Foreign Minister Darlian." The role change and reversion to her adopted father's name strongly suggest she eventually submitted to Heero's perspective. Additionally, the narrator's final statement simply states that when the Eve Wars end, a new organization called the Earth Sphere United Nation is formed between the Earth and the colonies. Nothing is mentioned about disarmament or wars ending forever.

²⁹⁴ Daqing Yang, "Living Soldiers, Re-lived Memories? Japanese Veterans and Postwar Testimony of War Atrocities," in *Ruptured Memories*, 82.

²⁹⁵ Hashimoto, 1.

men and the aforementioned A-bomb and other civilian Japanese victims were invisible for the first three decades of the postwar period, waiting to see themselves represented sympathetically in the media, fictional or otherwise. Thus as Yang says, the victims' and perpetrators' narratives were set up to compete with each other. Given that both narratives were rooted in silenced trauma, such competition was bound to be especially difficult and painful, as the creation of space for one might appear to take space from the other. To date, attempts at sustained discourse between the two perspectives have largely proved unsuccessful.²⁹⁶

How then does *Wing* attempt to elevate Heero as its ultimate messenger of peace? How does Heero, a perpetrator, successfully confront his former victim's idealistic and futile vision, which arose in part from her traumatic experiences? By finally acknowledging the respect he has been offered, and returning it. By accepting the fact that, at that moment, fighting is "the only thing" he can do for her individually and for the Earth Sphere corporately. By sharing her hope for peace. By admitting that, despite all odds, their relationship has become one of mutual respect and trust.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 127-133.

²⁹⁷ Ep. 48.

CONCLUSION

But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound.²⁹⁸ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*

A final large piece of the spaceship Libra fell towards Earth, the red haze of atmospheric entry surrounding it in an apocalyptic glow. The piece was still big enough for its impact with the planet to produce enough dust to block the sun's rays and cause a never-ending winter on Earth. Like much science fiction media in Japan, *Gundam Wing's* final episode features the possibility of incomprehensible annihilation.

When Heero Yuy's Gundam is displayed flying ahead of the piece on a monitor in the control room of the resource satellite Lady Une, Noin, Relena, and have gathered in, an unnamed soldier yells, "He's not gonna make it!" as the red haze envelopes Heero's Gundam. Lady Une disagrees-- "From what I've seen, the Gundams have overcome all difficulties." For Une, this is both a fact and a belief: the Gundams thwarted every attempt she made to destroy them at the beginning of the series. Now, like Treize, she has come to believe in the righteousness of their cause. Relena, standing next to her and having forgiven Une moments before for her father's assassination, reinforces this statement. "That's true," she says, "We can believe in him! Because Heero can give everyone hope!"²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Caruth, 8.

²⁹⁹ Ep. 49.

And he does, of course. He even manages to survive. Flying through the bright light emanating from the piece's explosion, Heero flies towards the other Gundam pilots. While they all comment on this final, incredible act, Quatre's words stand out. With the white light from the blast streaming into his cockpit from his vidscreens, Quatre exclaims, "Heero himself is the heart of outer space!"³⁰⁰

As Morio Watanabe states in his article "Imagery and War in Japan 1995," heroes of popular Japanese media are often conceived of as aspirational metaphors of Japanese national identity in the context of Japan's fraught memory wars.³⁰¹ In the preceding chapters, the characters Treize Khushrenada, Zechs Merquise, and Heero Yuy were analyzed as analogs of Japanese history, narrative, and identity. As representatives of the currently dominant postwar narratives, their portrayals reflect sincere, sympathetic, and ultimately empathetic grappling with a problematized Japanese national self-image, one which can at times be heroic, vulnerable to victimization, and capable of perpetrating terrible acts.

In Treize, we see how difficult and perhaps impossible it was for Emperor Showa and the war generation to confront their perpetrating past, rooted in and inculcated as they were in a prewar and wartime identity of heroism based in *kokutai*, a perceived uniqueness of being Japanese that was directly linked Japan's ancient culture, including the emperor and the values of bushido. *Wing* may even be subtly suggesting that only after the passing of that generation--and the resultant space for public discourse--will the Japanese be able to

³⁰⁰ Ep. 49.

³⁰¹ Watanabe, 148-149.

successfully address and move beyond the consequences of that generation's initial silence about the war.

In Zechs Merquise we see Japan's multiple victim identities--first, the widely acknowledged postwar identity embodied in war orphans; and second, the prewar one in which Japan responded to western imperialism and discrimination by casting a devastating vision premised on peace for all Asians. By highlighting the connection between Zechs' victimization and his eventual spiral towards destructive actions, *Wing* hints at a need to refocus on the reasons for Japan's own spiral into warfare--rooted not only in its blatant descent into militarism of the 1930s but also in its dogged pursuit of national survival, precipitated by the US military's arrival in Edo Bay in 1853. Zechs' downward spiral, the result of his own victimization and his eventual victimization of others, is perhaps *Wing's* cautionary warning to a postwar Japan whose attachment to pacifism is as ardent as Zechs'.

As for Heero Yuy, I have wondered for years what Quatre can possibly mean when he calls Heero "the heart of outer space" or, as a different translation reads, "the soul of the universe,"³⁰² *Wing* consistently stays within the realm of realistic science fiction, avoiding the fantastical elements that many other science fiction anime exhibit, including earlier

Gundam series. Nevertheless, the odd phrase may be an allusion to a critical element of the

³⁰² The phrase Quatre says is *Uchuyu no Kokoro wa kare dattandesune*. It is in the past positive tense. "The phrase implies a concept called "the soul of the universe" (or heart of space), and that the speaker and listener are familiar with its meaning of the concept. The phrase is spoken as a revelation: ... "so HIRO was the soul of the universe!" (Emphasis on the HIRO)." Anna Novick, email message to Pamela Lee Novick, July 20, 2020. Forwarded from P. L. Novick to Genevieve Peterson, July 21, 2020. The variance between this translation and Paul Baldwin's may reflect the difficulty of expressing the phrase's cultural potency into English. The author is highlighting the difference here because it seems to her that the phrase is meant to identify Heero as a symbolic unifier of space *and* Earth, which is more apparent in Novick's translation of *uchuyu* as "universe."

original series that is wholly absent in *Wing: the Newtype*. Newtypes are humans who have become psychically powerful due to spending extended periods of time in space. In the most powerful moment in *First Gundam* in which this is on display, two enemies' minds meet. What results is a transcendent moment of connection underscored by a profound sense of empathy. "People are changing. They're becoming like us," Lalah, a mobile suit pilot, tells Amuro, *First Gundam's* protagonist. He agrees. "Do you really believe that, Amuro?" she asks. "I do," he responds, "Because you and I were able to understand each other."³⁰³

In a much more grounded way, Heero embodies this empathy in *Gundam Wing*. His empathy is rooted in his experience of being victimized as a child and adolescent soldier, his perpetration of wartime violence, and finally his decision to enact good for himself and those around him. Moreover, his empathy demonstrates an integration of his own experiences with the victim and perpetrator experiences of others. Symbolically, this is what Une may mean when she says the Gundams "have overcome all difficulties." In the same vein, it is the basis for Relena's assertion that "Heero can give everyone hope." Heero *is* the soul of the universe.³⁰⁴

Therefore, in Heero Yuy we see not only the "everyman soldier" of the Imperial Japanese Army sacrificing their humanity to become demons on the battlefields of China, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, but also the aspirational postwar "everyman" and "everywoman" for which each of the three narratives ultimately seeks to make a path. By acknowledging the hero, victim, *and* perpetrator in their national identity, such men and

³⁰³ *Mobile Suit Gundam*, Ep. 40: Cosmic Glow.

³⁰⁴ *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing*, Ep. 49.

women would be able to develop, as Hashimoto says, “a clear, expressive vocabulary to articulate feelings and understandings of moral conscience, guilt, responsibility, and injustice that lie in the gray zone between the binary formula [of good and evil].”³⁰⁵ Heero himself acknowledges that “everyone is weak,” including himself. Yet his empathy for the weakness of all mankind makes him the “soul of the universe.” Living with such complexities, *Wing* suggests, is the only way to truly moving forward.³⁰⁶

This thesis has focused on the heroic, victim, and perpetrator narratives as they were constructed, articulated, and used by the Japanese. It has also explored the Japanese’ responsibility for creating these narratives. Yet, the Japanese are not the only ones who contributed to their distinctiveness and intractability. Much remains to be researched about how these narratives were formed and impacted by western powers, particularly the United States.

An analysis of *Gundam Wing* makes these inquiries possible from the Japanese viewpoint. It subversively suggests that Japan’s *rekishi nonshiki mondai* or “historical consciousness problem,” is not solely Japan’s. This is represented, for instance, in *Wing*’s depiction of colonization, which could equally reflect the threat of western imperialism in the nineteenth century and Japan’s own imperialist efforts from 1868-1945. Even more intriguing, it could reflect a sense of Japan’s quasi-colonization during the Occupation period (1945-1952), as well as Japan’s current dependence on the US for its national security. As Rana and Mitter assert in the introduction to the edited volume *Ruptured Memories*, “The

³⁰⁵ Hashimoto, 117.

³⁰⁶ Ep. 49.

U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-South Korea security relationships [] represent one of the longest-standing restraints on war memory throughout the Cold War period.”³⁰⁷ In her article “Imperial Army Betrayed,” Yingzhen Chen bluntly spells out the consequences of these restraints: “In its status as the most beloved child of the United States, Japan has been able to prudently insist on withholding apologies and compensation for war crimes committed and damage inflicted on Asian peoples.”³⁰⁸

In 1995 *Gundam Wing* created a space to consider broadly the loser’s narrative. However, as both *Wing* and the title of Hashimoto’s research--*The Long Defeat*--suggest, losing is a nuanced and complicated endeavor; it can be difficult even to distinguish who the winners and losers are. In its representation of multifaceted heroes, victims, and perpetrators, *Wing* suggests not only that the Japanese were, are, and can be heroes, victims, and perpetrators, but that their enemies in the Asia-Pacific War were, are, and can be all of these, as well. The US, for instance, has long been upheld as a hero not only of the war but of Japan’s postwar survival. American soldiers--ambushed, imprisoned, and tortured--are considered victims. In addition to these dominant narratives, the US could be seen as perpetrators--detonating the only nuclear weapons ever used in armed combat, killing hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians by carpet firebombing,³⁰⁹ overlooking the

³⁰⁷ “Introduction,” *Ruptured Memories*, 7.

³⁰⁸ Chen Yingzhen, “Imperial Army Betrayed,” in *Perilous Memories*, 197.

³⁰⁹ This number is disputed. The bombing of Tokyo on 9-10 March 1945 alone is traditionally estimated at 100,000 civilian deaths; however, many historians put the number much higher for this single event, as well as the total for all firebombing in Japan. See Mark Selden, “A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities & the American Way of War from World War II to Iraq,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 5, no. 5 (May 2, 2007), <https://apjif.org/-Mark-Selden/2414/article.html>.

existence of Unit 731,³¹⁰ stating that comfort women were “nothing more than...prostitute[s],”³¹¹ and “[coming] close to turning the entire issue of ‘war responsibility’ into a joke” by exonerating Emperor Showa from war responsibility.³¹²

Despite these implications, *Gundam Wing*’s primary focus is not one of blame. It serves instead to complicate the binaries humans cling to after experiencing wartime violence. Created by a postwar generation deeply affected by the cultural trauma of Asia-Pacific War memories, *Gundam Wing* reminds its viewers of the gray areas between good and bad, loser and victor, and hero, victim and perpetrator.

³¹⁰ Cook & Cook, 158-159.

³¹¹ Erin Blakemore, “Comfort Woman” Statue Stokes Old Tensions Between Japan and South Korea,” *Smithsonianmag.com*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/comfort-woman-statue-stokes-old-tensions-between-japan-and-south-korea-180961628/>.

³¹² Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 27-28.

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