

“Later, Buddy” : The Politics of Loss and Trauma Representation in *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann*

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Abstract The anime *Gurren Lagann*, known for its comedy, depicts a genuine sense of trauma following the combat death of Kamina. The contradictory messages encapsulated in imagery and dialogue simulate the loss of psychological integrity inherent to traumatic experience. In my article I focus on the protagonist Simon’s false assertion of recovery and self – validation through dialogue and the depiction of authentic posttraumatic experience through imagery. Ultimately, the series attests to the persistence and permanence of posttrauma and reconfigures the trauma paradigm to exclude combat loss.

Key words *Gurren Lagann*; mecha anime; trauma; posttraumatic experience; assumptive world

Although chiefly a comedy action series, the 27 – episode mecha anime *Gurren Lagann* presents viewers with a complex politics of loss through its depiction of peritraumatic and posttraumatic experience. Mecha anime, characterized by its use of giant, piloted robots or mecha, ranges from comedic to dramatic but always features fantastical, large-scale battle sequences. The genre’s reliance on the visual spectacle suggests an avoidance of peritrauma, or trauma experienced in the immediate wake of a catastrophe, as well as posttrauma, or the lingering effects of the individual’s damaged psyche. *Gurren Lagann*’s predominant characteristics are highly charged, unrelenting action, mecha called Gunmen, and excessive slapstick and innuendo. However, following the central traumatic event of Kamina’s combat death, the protagonist, Simon, embodies major diagnostic symptoms of trauma, shown by the hermeneutic divergence of visual and verbal representations. At first, the imagery and dialogue collude to convey positive messages about self-validation, human resilience, and the ability to overcome traumatic experience. These qualities constitute Kamina’s core beliefs and ultimately the belief system of Kamina, the remainder of Team Dai-Gurren, and viewers. This assumptive world—defined as the primary belief system whereby an individual orients and defines himself in relation to others and the world—is ultimately shattered by Kamina’s death. Afterward, Simon’s acute grief response and premature abreaction are seen in visual-verbal combinations in which the most explicit ele-

ment expresses positivity while secondary elements imply that trauma cannot be wholly overcome (Herman 12). Simon's dialogue recalls Kamina's pre-trauma assumptive world, but the cumulative meaning of reflexive imagery attest that the assumptive world, once violated, cannot be rebuilt. The resulting interdependent combinations, where the collaborative meaning is one neither element could independently convey (McCloud 155), adopt a conflicted stance toward premature abreaction of combat trauma, which the series ultimately presents as enduring and insurmountable.

Gurren Lagann is fundamentally a war narrative chronicling the conflict between Spiral beings, namely humans, whose tenacity allows them to evolve infinitely, and Anti-Spirals, who suppressed these abilities out of fear they would annihilate the universe. The series opens with timid fourteen-year-old Simon, an expert driller in an underground community where humans have been forced to live by their oppressor, Lordgenome. Simon discovers a drill that channels his Spiral power, or willpower and fighting spirit, and later finds the mecha it operates: the miniature but powerful Gunmen Lagann. Simon, his charismatic, eighteen-year-old mentor Kamina, and sharpshooter Yoko use Lagann to reach the surface, where Kamina steals the Gunmen Gurren. Due to Lagann's ability to assimilate other Gunmen, Gurren and Lagann can combine to form the Gunmen *Gurren Lagann*. *Gurren Lagann*'s exploits renew humanity's hope, and the resistance force, Team Dai-Gurren, amasses under Kamina's command. The team becomes renowned for their gung-ho attitude and refusal to retreat in the face of overwhelming odds, illustrated by Kamina's illogical yet revolutionary creed, "reject common sense to make the impossible possible" (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 1), that nevertheless unfailingly results in victory (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 1). Kamina's catastrophic death, however, shatters the assumptive world he established for Team Dai-Gurren. Simon is crippled by grief and recovers only after meeting Nia, the Anti-Spirals' biologically engineered emissary, with whom he falls in love. Only then is he able to replace Kamina as leader and defeat Lordgenome.

Seven years later, however, war resumes as the Anti-Spirals' Human Extinction Program is activated by the rising human population. Simon, who is now similar to Kamina in manner and appearance and who possesses the same assumptive world, defeats the Anti-Spirals, but most of his comrades die in battle and Nia ceases to exist after the Anti-Spirals are destroyed. Simon erects her memorial near Kamina's grave, renounces his command, and spends the rest of his life wandering the world alone.

The trauma paradigm espoused by *Gurren Lagann* derives largely from the catastrophic circumstances of Kamina's death in combat and the consequent destruction of his assumptive world, which the series originally constructs as inviolable. As an individual's assumptions about himself and his environment, the assumptive world often includes the belief in a meaningful world, a worthwhile life, self-validation, and personal invulnerability, common core assumptions pre-reflectively formulated through interactions with loved ones and an unthreatening environment (Attig 55 – 57). The subjective truth of these assumptions is substantiated through trial-and-error experience, and they are instinctively maintained as long as they are not inordinately challenged or experientially invalidated (Attig 55).

Kamina's core assumptions—the strength of human willpower, resilience, and personal invulnerability—are proclaimed through complementary visual-verbal combinations where viewers are led to view Kamina and all he embodies as heroic, and then encouraged to view him as ridiculous. These portrayals are steeped in expressions of positivity, which collude additively, using visual-verbal juxtapositions to amplify meaning, or duo-specifically, using words and images to convey the same message (McCloud 153–54). Kamina is introduced as an idealistic, ambitious youth-in-revolt possessing boundless ebullience, self-confidence, and machismo, replete with visual signifiers of subculture cool: distinctive triangular red-orange sunglasses, tattoos, bare torso, nodachi, and red cloak. These signifiers initially mitigate his apparent lack of common sense. For instance, he confronts a Gunmen on foot, declaring, "You've got guts, plowing into my village with this big ugly mug of yours," but the over-the-top dialogue is juxtaposed with heroic imagery: bared teeth, glinting shades, triumphantly billowing cape, and gleaming nodachi, suggesting his bravado is warranted (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 1).

However, these duo-specific combinations swiftly become parodic. Instead of delivering the anticipated stirring speech, Kamina shouts, "Oi, oi, oi, oi, oi!" and the frame zooms in on his flying spittle (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 1). Viewers' incredulity is compounded by the following frame, where visual elements contrast the gigantic Gunmen with the cartoonishly rendered Kamina, his hip thrust forward in macho posturing exaggerated to the point of effeminacy. This incongruity alone imparts the full ridiculousness of Kamina's situation, and so viewers register Kamina's rousing self-introduction as comic grandstanding. Rather than being indifferent to danger, Kamina is blissfully oblivious and presumably survives due to good luck and others' intervention. Duo-specific combinations gradually correlate Team Dai-Gurren's successes to Kamina's brash stupidity, as he thrusts himself into peril with the same oblivious self-confidence despite the rising stakes but emerges unscathed, all while maintaining his signature stance of pointing to the heavens. The anxiety-relieving function of humor underpins viewers' security in his improbable survival, and, by proxy, in the inviolability of his assumptive world. In this way, comic relief facilitates viewers' belief in his personal invulnerability and advances our faith in his other core assumptions.

However, the true resilience of the assumptive world derives from its ability to be sustained through genuine psychodynamic struggle. As long as Kamina's assumptive world remains insufficiently challenged, the extent of its authenticity cannot be determined. Kamina's confrontation with mortality, which transpires when he commandeers Gurren, constitutes the first substantial challenge to his assumptive world. First, visual-verbal collusions portray Kamina's bravado: he poses on a rock, chin high, arms crossed self-assuredly as Gunmen wreak havoc nearby, and impulsively declares he's going to steal Gurren because he "likes [its] face" (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 2). Our expectation is that this hijacking attempt will be treated like his previous comical endeavors, but comedy is suspended when Gurren rejects Kamina as a suitable pilot. Its viewing monitors flash red as his shades, his omnipresent signifier of cool, are flung to the ground, revealing his vulnerability. The viewing screen clears to reveal a half-buried human skull, the universal symbol of mortality.

Kamina's ensuing confrontation with mortality, typical to the trauma of armed confrontation, is represented through wordlessness and sensory imagery evocative of combat physioneurosis (Herman 37–38). Kamina's panicked breathing and pulse is juxtaposed with close-ups of his wide eyes and shrunken pupils, his body and skeleton fluorescing as the cockpit is swallowed by blackness. Rapid intercuts between Kamina's terrified eyes, the flashing red light, and the skull's empty eyes further stress the severity of Kamina's trauma. Despite this authenticating struggle, the use of reflexive imagery—such as the red light that recalls the sunset glare when Kamina's father abandoned him, and the parallel between the half-buried skull and his father's skull charm bracelet—magnifies our sense that Kamina's assumptive world is inauthentic. Thus far, it has been predicated on what Heidegger terms the “they-self,” whose choices are modified by external influence. The possibility of death, however, nullifies other possibilities, compelling the individual to reassess and choose based on the authenticity of the I-self, unaffected by outside pressures. As such, the experience of “Angst vor Dasein” (“anxiety in the face of existence”) generated by recognizing mortality impels Kamina to reevaluate his core assumptions and relinquish the inauthentic values of the they-self, retaining only the genuine, personally significant assumptions of the I-self (Heidegger 57–58). His final decision is that his assumptive world remains authentic. Out of all the possibilities available to him, he chooses to retain his assumptive world despite the fatal risks it poses. Consequently, our lingering impression of Kamina becomes one of strength, courage, and resoluteness, not of exaggerated stupidity or bravado. When he pronounces the series' signature phrase, “Who the hell do you think I am?!,” we register it as the authentic assertion of resilient selfhood, as his assumptive world emerged intact from his experience of Angst (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 2). By securing and reinforcing our belief in this way, complementary visual-verbal combinations validate Kamina's assumptive world as unassailable, authentic, and resolute. Thus, when Kamina's catastrophic death in Episode 8 overturns these parameters and shatters the assumptive world, our posttraumatic experience parallels that of the characters he left behind.

Following Kamina's death, which occurs because Simon fails to properly commandeer Lordgenome's gunship, Simon's trauma is simulated through additive, duo-specific, and picture-specific verbal-visual combinations that reinforce the destruction of the assumptive world and numbing, constrictive elements of trauma. The unbearable unspeakability of Kamina's fatal injury is depicted through the lack of dialogue and frozen, intrusive quality of the imagery. For the first time, expressions of positivity are disrupted or elided. The moment of his death is frozen, wordless, and intrusive, as we are shown four quick still images of the fatal attack, drawn in thick, smudged lines that speak to the moment's unbearable unspeakability. When Gurren is impaled, visual elements simplify and disintegrate, the lines of Kamina's body smearing into blotches of blood. He screams as Gurren partially explodes, unlike his usual show of defiance when Gurren takes damage. The killing blow pierces even the animation frame itself, thick, dark red fountains cascading on either side of the enemy's spearhead. The frame pulls back to reveal the gray, smoky desolation of the battlefield, the prostrate Gurren, and the stunned, horrified faces of Team Dai-Gurren.

The frame zooms in on Simon’s eyes as we see the first instance of the visual signifier of peritraumatic dissociation. His eyes dissolve to three trembling concentric bands in shades of gray encircling a black pupil before all color drains away, leaving only the iris outline and the pupil itself. This illustrates what combat survivors colloquially term the “two-thousand-year-stare[:] the anesthetized look, the wide hollow eyes of a man who no longer cares” (qtd. in Herman 43).

The intense pain of this moment invalidates positive imagery prior to Kamina’s death, such as the severely damaged Gurren posed in Kamina’s signature heaven-pointing stance, in addition to shattering the assumptive world that gave rise to such positivity. Even so, due to cognitive conservatism—the resistance to change fundamental core assumptions such as personal invulnerability—we latch onto hope as Simon does when Kamina revives himself in time to defeat the enemy.

He resiliently invents the unnamed multi-drill attack that prefigures Simon’s later, inadequate Giga Drill Maximum attack, and the Giga Drill Break, which leads to victory and becomes an enduring signifier of Kamina and his core assumptions. However, our renewed belief in Kamina is subverted as the triumphant overture is punctured by silence and Kamina becomes a pencil sketch on a white background, literally drained of vitality, eyes closing, head and mouth slowly going slack as he whispers, “Later, buddy” (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 8). This recursive use of his father’s final words to him is significant because it is the first time a signifier of trauma is not successfully integrated and made positive. This also marks the first hermeneutic divergence, as the words juxtapose with Simon’s happy, illuminated face, the light swiftly fading as comprehension dawns on him and he utters, “Bro?,” after which the frame cuts to blackness (Ep. 8).



The next three episodes depict Simon’s peritraumatic experience, where genuine, recurring posttraumatic symptoms are found in imagery while the invalidated pre-trauma core assumptions he is unable to relinquish persist in dialogue. This sets up Simon’s survivor guilt, a key feature of combat trauma. Psychiatrist Judith Herman divides trauma into three major symptom categories: physical hyperarousal, the intrusion of traumatic memory or the present, and the numbing response of constriction (Herman 35–43). All three are depicted during Kamina’s death and recur and accumulate meaning through reflexive use around Simon’s peritraumatic and posttraumatic experience.

The assumptive world violation results in the proportional disruption of Simon’s selfhood, which is based largely on his mentor Kamina’s self-concept. Because of

Kamina's exhortations, Simon believes in himself, human willpower, resilience, and the possibility of victory. As such, Simon's identity is the they-self, predicated on Kamina's life; accordingly, Kamina's death causes him to exhibit conspicuous visual signifiers of peritraumatic distress. This depiction entails accurate trauma symptoms, such as intense grief, aggressive outbursts and hostility, self-isolation, dissociation, and helplessness (Herman 42 – 46). Simon's ordinarily bright clothing is portrayed in grayscale. He demonstrates hyperarousal, or permanent psychological and physiological alertness (35 – 36), in the constant, defensive tension in his stance. He evinces combat physioneurosis through frequent eye ticks, fixed postures, and unresponsiveness. Lastly, he is surrounded by imagery that evokes constriction, or powerlessness, numbness, paralysis, and total surrender to circumstance (42): for example, his dissociated stare and the frequent barrel distortion of the frame represent his shattered assumptive world and consequently distorted view of reality (35 – 36). Even previously positive images are overwhelmed by trauma, such as the green glow of Spiral power, which Lagann emits as explosive vomit in an externalization of Simon's emotional state. Additionally, Simon takes savage pleasure in taunting the most polite and well-meaning team member, Rossiu, without provocation, seen in progressive close-ups of his furrowed brow and quivering, colorless stare (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 9). In fact, Simon's irises are a central visual signifier of trauma and mirror their appearance when Kamina was fatally attacked: three trembling concentric circles. The imagery's overall effect is to show Simon's surrender, as his stare is perpetually unfocused, detached, and numb to the events it ostensibly observes, focused inward instead of on the unbearable events of memory (Herman 35).

Furthermore, Simon displays reenactment or repetition compulsion, an involuntary, death-drive behavior resistant to change, adaptivity, and conscious intent (Herman 41). Reenactment is the impulse to "re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form. Sometimes people reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter. In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm" (39). Following Kamina's death, Simon chants that he must become tough enough for both himself and Kamina, as though attempting to retroactively save Kamina's life. He obsessively seeks out enemies in an empty show of Kamina's exuberant recklessness, futilely striving to replace his violated self-concept by assuming Kamina's identity.



The imagery further attests to repetition compulsion, such as when Simon numbly prepares to face a Gunmen on foot to protect Nia. The reflexive image underscores the

radical difference between Simon and Kamina and the folly of adopting another's identity to bypass traumatic stress. While viewers accepted Kamina's immunity to harm in such a situation, we recognize that Simon will die in this confrontation. Similarly, when Nia is captured by another Gunmen, Simon views her as both impetus to become Kamina and the opportunity to revise Kamina's death; that is, rescuing Nia is equivalent to retroactively saving Kamina.

Nia herself facilitates this reenactment through substitution fantasy, as Simon's love for her obscures Kamina's absence. She catalyzes Simon's abreactive process, her cheerful, naive dialogue restoring normalcy to his dissociated gaze, her bright coloration the only quality able to penetrate the gray haze of Simon's fugue state. However, imagery suggests that substitution fantasy is an inadequate coping mechanism by depicting Nia's influence as temporary. Simon's eyes reacquire their traumatized appearance whenever mention or memory of Kamina intrudes. When he tells her, “I can never be like Kamina,” the juxtaposition of this dialogue with the shadowy room and gray statues of Kamina emphasize his desolation, which is unaffected by Nia's suggestion that Simon is not Kamina and instead should just be himself (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 11). Nia and Team Dai-Gurren are captured immediately after this, and the frame cuts to the shattered face of a Kamina statue lying beside Simon's abandoned drill, which Kamina conflated with Simon's soul. This image illustrates the extent of Simon's fragmented emotional state and the impossibility of reconstructing the pre-trauma assumptive world.

Even when Nia's affirmations are incongruously juxtaposed with Simon's unrelenting grief, she provides the impulse for cathartic revision of the assumptive world. She recognizes that it must be authentically based on the I-self, as she verbally affirms Simon's unique individual self, insisting he “must not keep dwelling on a dead man” (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 10). In short, in order to recover, Simon must relinquish the core assumptions and interpretive frameworks invalidated by Kamina's death. According to Herman, the honest and detailed articulation of emotional response, traumatic imagery, and bodily sensations engendered by the event is imperative to trauma recovery, as is the revision of the self-narrative to reflect post-trauma circumstances (177). Simon, however, resists this. After Kamina's death, he narrates, “This is the tale of a man who continues to fight against fate. This man lived a life of desire, loyalty, and extravagance, he loved his companions, and he strove for freedom. And then, abruptly, he died. But even so, Simon lives on. He must go on living” (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 9; emphasis mine). Speaking of himself in the third person suggests Simon must maintain affective distance between himself and the traumatic memory. Notably, although images of Kamina explicitly show that “this man” is Kamina, Simon does not verbally confirm this, implying that doing so is still too painful. Also, his use of the present-tense “continues” attests to his need to preserve the illusion of Kamina's continued presence, even as the grainy, washed-out montage of Kamina's life and death recedes into blackness, the ultimate message being that Kamina is dead and Simon must accept this.

The closest Simon comes to acknowledging this is with Nia, but the fact that he only does so while drilling numerous Kamina statues further suggests he can only con-

front the memory under the illusion of Kamina's presence. Moreover, he remains emotionally reticent even at 41 years old, when the memory is still so painful that he cannot even verbalize it. Instead, he constrains his emotional expression to the wordless, constrictive image of convoluted tunnels traveling into darkness, eventually converging on fourteen-year-old Simon, haggard, colored in white, bundled in a blanket on a dark, distorted floor (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 11). The disjuncture between verbal and visual elements in Simon's narration of traumatic events twenty-seven years later shows that he has not become desensitized to the memory by properly processing and integrating it, and therefore he has not recovered (Herman 40 – 41, 174). The affective distance he maintains precludes full disclosure of emotion, without which trauma cannot be genuinely resolved.

Simon's peritraumatic experience is depicted as the entirety of posttraumatic experience, one that culminates in a straightforward, conclusive recovery. As such, the series constructs Simon's recovery process as prematurely abreactive and false, born solely of his desire to save Nia. However, since we do not witness his coping and integration process, his self-assertions ring false. After rescuing Nia, Simon acknowledges Kamina's death and proclaims his integration of the traumatic event in all the trappings of defiant self-validation: "My Bro is dead. He's gone. But he's on my back! In my heart! He lives on as a part of me!" (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 11). This indicates he has taken steps toward recovery, also implied by the renewed brightness of his coloration. However, the entire sequence is couched in reflexive imagery associated with Kamina and his assumptive world. The triptych frame recalls two similar frames before it; one centering on Kamina, the other on Gurren.



Subsequently, a montage of reflexive imagery of Kamina's life and death intrudes on and overwhelms Simon's present reality.

Simon pulls down his goggles in a gesture coopting the culture of cool associated with Kamina donning his shades. He then appropriates Kamina's declaration of authentic selfhood following *Angst vor Dasein*, "Who the hell do you think I am?!" (Ep. 11). Thus, Simon's new identity is constructed again as a substitute Kamina. His verbal claims of recovery are not supported by the revision of his self-narrative or shattered assumptive world.

According to Herman, once the assumptive world and psychological structures of selfhood are ruptured by traumatic loss, reconciliation with the memory and selfhood is critical to renewing indestructible inner life (188). Identity determinants are simultaneously violated with the assumptive world, particularly the self-narrative, which

constitutes the continuous development of the individual’s “life story.” The self-narrative organizes and interprets emotionally relevant experiences and beliefs. When the adequacy of the pre-trauma self-narrative is challenged by profound traumatic loss, the individual struggles to integrate intrusive trauma memories with the pre-trauma self-narrative. Since the two are radically incompatible, the posttraumatic identity predominates the individual’s interpretive framework. Until the pre-trauma self-narrative is revised to reflect post-trauma circumstances, the individual will not recover (Neimeyer and Tschudi 167 – 69). Therefore, Simon’s attempts to maintain Kamina’s shattered assumptive world through reenactment prevent his genuine recovery.



After the seven-year time skip, the series emphasizes that time has only deepened Simon’s wounds. Verbal components remain firmly positive while visual elements increasingly point to deep-seated posttraumatic grief as Simon appropriates more and more of Kamina’s identity and invalidated core assumptions but, unlike Kamina, rarely succeeds. This hermeneutic divergence results in Orwellian doublethink, a post-trauma characteristic typified by the conscious and subconscious process of “holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them” (Herman 87). Doublethink attests that Simon’s traumatic memory has only been suppressed. For instance, when the Anti-Spirals first attack, Simon recklessly engages them with Kamina’s gung-ho aggression, but when he Giga Drill Breaks the mecha, it fragments into explosives that destroy the city sector below, whereupon Simon’s eyes revert to the “two-thousand-year-stare” of combat trauma (Herman 43). Similarly, his multi-drill Giga Drill Maximum attack, an evolved version of an attack Kamina invented and successfully used, also fails to stop the enemy (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 19). Viewers are bluntly reminded that, much as Simon clings to Kamina’s shattered assumptive world, parts of it are irreparably defunct.

In the rare instance Simon’s reenactment succeeds, it is grounded in signifiers of Kamina. For instance, Simon thwarts Rossiu’s suicide attempt by punching him in the face, a reflexive image of Kamina punching Simon after Simon’s failure to commandeer the gunship in Episode 8. Simon shouts, “Grit your teeth!,” Kamina’s words to him, before reassuring Rossiu (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 23). Here, Simon grasps at a genuine emotional truth about the moment Kamina punched him, recognizing the detriment of self-punishment, which typified his peritraumatic experience. Notably, however, that he is unable to assert his reassurance as fact, qualifying it with “probably” and “I think,” and cannot name Kamina as the one who punched him (Ep. 23). This implies that he is aware that mentioning Kamina’s name will trigger the intrusive traumatic memory. When Simon concludes his reassurance with a version of

“believe in the [me] that believes in [you],” a philosophy that originated with Kamina, viewers understand that Simon is simply appropriating another core assumption without properly integrating traumatic memory (Ep. 23).

Finally, the series values the severity of combat trauma while downplaying non-combat trauma. Simon witnesses several potentially equally traumatizing events: the Anti-Spirals’ possession of Nia, the combat-related sacrifices of six Team Dai-Gurren members, and the self-sacrifice of Kittan, a mirror-figure to Kamina whose death is saturated in visual signifiers of Kamina. Kittan dies performing a Giga Drill Break in a kamikaze attack, just after conflating the drill he carries with Kamina’s, Simon’s, and his own soul (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 25). Because he is so similar to Kamina, viewers assume Simon will suffer another peritraumatic experience. However, Simon neither grieves nor attempts to reenact any of these traumatic losses, and his assumptive world remains undisrupted by them, and he does not waver in his expressions of positivity. Significantly, while most of these deaths occur during battle, they are non-combat casualties, as Kittan and the others sacrifice themselves to save the rest of the team, and Nia dies after the war. Rather than verbalize grief, Simon expresses gratitude, renewed willpower, and acceptance, erecting memorials to his friends near Kamina’s grave (Ep. 27).

Furthermore, the series describes noncombat, non-theater catastrophes as having little emotional impact. In Episode 1, viewers are shown four quick, still images depicting Simon’s parents being crushed to death in an earthquake, as Simon helplessly watches them die (*Gurren Lagann*). Similarly, it is heavily implied that Rossiu, whose poverty-stricken village practiced lottery sacrifice, witnessed his mother’s certain-death exile (Ep. 5). Catastrophic parental death is extremely traumatic for children and gives rise to mourning syndrome, assumptive world violation, and loss of trust in caregivers and their sense of security in their environment. Children who lack experience in defending or revising the assumptive world are vulnerable to trauma, since they do not possess tested coping skills (Rando 182-87). However, although Simon’s flashback depicts trauma symptoms such as constriction and numbness, the memory is hardly intrusive, and he fully recovers in Episode 2. Also, Rossiu never experiences intrusion and speaks of his mother’s death casually, demonstrating his full integration and resolution of the traumatic event. Therefore, the first traumatic event the series treats seriously is Kamina’s confrontation with mortality, which occurs during combat. Kamina’s combat death is the sole traumatic event illustrated as persistent and insurmountable.

Unaffected as he is by noncombat losses, Simon remains visibly hypersensitive to the mention or memory of Kamina in any context. When angry citizens tear down the Kamina monument, which Simon singlehandedly constructed, he watches in flickery slow-motion as though it is too unbearable to process in real-time. His haggard gaze, accented by linear hatching, further recalls his peritraumatic dissociation (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 19). Additionally, when Rossiu remarks that Kamina’s death propelled Team Dai-Gurren forward, Simon experiences intrusion and numbing constriction, as unspeakable blackness overwhelms his present reality. Thus, *Gurren Lagann* operates on a complex trauma paradigm that distinguishes between death directly caused by en-

emy action and death indirectly resulting from combat.

The series’ final attempt to convince us of Simon’s recovery appears in the inclusion of wish-fulfillment alternate universes in which Simon encounters two Kaminas. The Kamina that Simon imagines, who appears first, is a weak-willed, groveling thief, antithetical to the true Kamina. Later, the true Kamina—the genuine idealistic leader, Simon’s mentor—confronts Simon to help him authenticate his selfhood. This Kamina is pivotal to freeing Simon and Team Dai-Gurren from the Anti-Spirals’ multidimensional labyrinth. Before the true Kamina appears, Simon displays defining peritraumatic symptoms, but afterward, the images and dialogue collude to formulate a positive sense of overcoming. Simon is forced to face the pain of Kamina’s death and affirm his own identity, his dissociated eyes returning to normal. After Kamina reassures him, Simon finally proclaims, “My drill is the drill that will pierce the heavens! My drill is my soul!” (*Gurren Lagann*, Ep. 26). This self-affirming declaration pierces the gray postwar landscape with light, but the dialogue, taken almost verbatim from Kamina’s core assumptions, undermines Simon’s moment of alleged self-reclamation. Kamina does not ask Simon to choose a possibility out of all the possibilities available to him, but out of the two Kaminas that present themselves in the multidimensional labyrinth. Thus, when Simon distills his possibilities to the invalid assumptive world he continues to rely on, we see that his total potentiality has been determined not by the I-self, but by the they-self, influenced by Kamina’s prompting. Consequently, nothing has changed in Simon’s formulation of identity. While he appropriates Kamina’s dying words, saying, “Let’s go, buddy!,” it ultimately represents his lingering attachment to Kamina, not his true processing of his traumatic memory (Ep. 26).

Kamina is an ideological symbol for his comrades, and his death leaves a vacuum that overshadows all other losses. It is inarguably the central catastrophic loss that triggers the most enduring peritraumatic and posttraumatic symptoms and constitutes the sole combat-related, in-theater death in the series. While noncombat deaths are resolved neatly and permanently, combat death leaves a lasting mark. Although resolution of traumatic experience is never final and recovery is never complete, regardless of type, *Gurren Lagann* reconfigures trauma dialectic to exclude noncombat loss. By emphasizing combat death, the series redefines the conventional trauma paradigm as one that is hierarchical, persistent, and inescapable.

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