
If one were to understand a film remake and the original as in some sort of father-and-son relationship, then the latest *Godzilla* would unquestionably qualify as a good son. With filial devotion, the offspring is faithful to the parent as it recreates in many details the eponymous monster of the 1954 Japanese original, from the monster's sturdy frame to its back plates that glow whenever the lizard belches its radioactive flame. In various ways, Edwards also nods knowingly to the fans of the Japanese series, as in using the surname of the scientist in the 1954 film for the Japanese scientist Dr. Serizawa (Ken Watanabe) in the remake. Furthermore, the remake appears to allegorize its status as the legitimate son of the original film through the recurring motif of sons endeavoring to accomplish tasks passed down by their respective fathers: the protagonist Ford (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) sets out to follow the words of his father Joe (Bryan Cranston) to “keep [the family] safe,” something the father could not accomplish fifteen years earlier; likewise, in his determination to prevent another nuclear catastrophe, Dr. Serizawa carries the baton received from his own father, who survived Hiroshima in 1945. With blind love and respect for the original enhanced by state-of-the-art CGI technology, this fresh recreation completely overshadows Roland Emmerich’s first Hollywood *Godzilla* (1998), which had introduced a black sheep to this reptilian family, a monster that seemed more fit for *Jurassic Park* than for the Japanese franchise.

Among the treasures that the new *Godzilla* inherited from its “father,” the most prominent is the use of a nuclear crisis background, but with a notable difference. The 1954 film emerged following a series of American nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll, during which the crew of a Japanese fishing boat were exposed to radioactive fallout, resulting in one death. Using the pretext of a monster movie, the original film tacitly criticized the US military’s nuclear development, at the time a taboo act in a country which, having suffered defeat in the war following the dropping of A-bombs, was subsequently occupied by US forces until 1952. Although the two films seemingly share the same nuclear background, Edwards’s remake is not channeled toward a straightforward anti-nuclear message. Rather, the
nuclear testing of the 1950s is reinterpreted, and even justified, as an early military attempt to kill Godzilla. Moreover, though evoking the memories of the 2011 disaster in Fukushima, the film’s nuclear reactor meltdown is attributed to the action of the MUTO, a villainous creature that feeds upon radioactive substances.

The notable lack of an anti-nuclear message, however, does not make the new *Godzilla* a brainless, popcorn movie. On the contrary, the nuclear background setting in the film enables expression of skepticism toward political secrecy and public indifference concerning nuclear issues. For example, in the opening credit sequence, numerous words are concealed under bold white lines, implying censorship and cover-up. This concealment foreshadows Joe’s suspicion that the authorities have used the quarantine zone of the meltdown disaster for hiding something. Driven by the loss of his wife Sandra (Juliette Binoche), Joe’s “long crusade for the truth” drags Ford back to the past, from which Ford had been turning his eyes as if subconsciously covering up his trauma. Given the collective, and seemingly willful, amnesia within both Japan and the rest of the world concerning the Fukushima nuclear disaster and the ongoing radioactive contamination, it is significant how *Godzilla* uncannily reawakens the sleeping monster of suppressed anxiety.

Another departure from the Japanese original is in the characterization of the monster. Unlike the 1954 film, in which Godzilla is a threat to humanity that must be destroyed, the remake presents Godzilla as a hero who saves humans from destruction caused by a pair of MUTOs. Though a good Godzilla is not surprising to those familiar with the original film’s numerous Japanese sequels, the remake seems to lack any underpinnings for Godzilla’s act of leaving his undersea den in order to pursue the two MUTOs. If the MUTOs are indeed lethal parasites for the Godzilla species as claimed in the film, wouldn’t the lizard probably prefer to keep away from them rather than risking its life to chase them? In order to make sense of the unreserved benevolence of the new Hollywood Godzilla, one may need to think of this CGI monster not only as a son of the Japanese original, but also as the Son, in the Christian sense. Transplanted to the Western cultural context, Godzilla appears, (nearly) dies, and rises again for the benefit of humanity, in order to “restore the balance” wronged by the humans’ arrogant attempt to nurture the uncontrollable nuclear monster MUTO. The religious overtone can be sensed even in a news
headline displayed at the end of the film, “KING OF THE MONSTERS—SAVIOR OF OUR CITY?”—a phrase which, while alluding to the initial English title of the original film, raises the lizard to a status near that of the biblical messiah sent by God, the Father.

In this story where father and son dominate the central stage, mothers are shown to be strikingly dysfunctional. Ford’s mother, a nuclear specialist, dies at her work, embittering her son’s memory of his childhood. Moreover, while fulfilling her duty as a nurse, Ford’s wife Elle (Elizabeth Olsen) reluctantly leaves her son to her colleague and unintentionally brings him in dangerous proximity to Godzilla. Even the female MUTO, which poses a greater threat to Godzilla than does her male counterpart, fails to protect her eggs during her fight with Godzilla. Through such portrayal of mothers, the film appears to resurrect age-old sexism, the view that the mother’s profession—be it nuclear research, nursing, or fighting Godzilla—is detrimental to her fundamental role of guarding her offspring. Is this perhaps an emotional hang-up of the son who cannot monopolize his working mother whenever he wants? Correspondingly, is Godzilla’s act of kissing his flame into the female MUTO’s mouth symbolic of a matricidal love-and-hate relationship between the son and the mother? I sincerely hope that the recently green-lighted sequel of this remake resolves these unanswered questions by delving more deeply into Godzilla’s own family background.

**Works Cited**

