

# Godzillas transformation from monster to hero research papers example

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In James Morrow's novella *Shambling Towards Hiroshima*, a man is hired by the US government to put on a rubber monster suit and put on a demonstration in which he destroys a small city, in order to completely end World War II. As his main character says of his intentions for the beast, " I hope to make this magnificent lizard as famous a symbol for the abolition of nuclear weapons as Smokey the Bear has become for the prevention of forest fires" (Morrow 162). This scenario is an obvious homage to the Godzilla films from Japan's Toho Company in the 1950s - a distinct reaction to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki several years beforehand, and a nuclear cautionary tale in the guise of a kitschy monster movie. Godzilla himself, the radioactive green creature who breathes fire, has represented (in his film appearances) the varying changes in world opinion that nuclear power and weaponry has undergone in the decades since his 1954 Ishiro Honda-directed debut. Over the years, Godzilla has turned from monster to hero, to monster again, always reflecting Japanese public opinion over nuclear power.

When *Gojira*, the first Godzilla movie, was created in 1954, it was a far cry from the goofy, kitschy, funhouse-horror thrills of many of the later films in the series. Its metaphor for nuclear weaponry and devastation was clear, its tone solemn and its images harrowing. Instead of laughing at the goofiness of the beast, director Ishiro Honda showed a Japan traumatized by the constant attacks of the beast, echoing the dangerous attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US nuclear weapons. Godzilla is born of nuclear fire, a monster unleashed from the depths and hopelessly irradiated by A-bomb tests. There is even a subplot involving a plan to destroy Godzilla by a young

scientist, Dr. Serizawa, who must wrestle morally with the decision to use his water-evaporating weapon of mass destruction to take out Godzilla. In this way, the film explores both sides of the conversation about nuclear weapons: Godzilla terrorizes the Japanese people much as the A-bomb did, but Serizawa's moralizing about the dangers of using his own weapon echo those of Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project, who questioned the morals of using such a powerful weapon: " In a way, Godzilla's death is the movie's second reenactment of the atomic bombings, with the monster signifying the suffering of the hibakusha (A-bomb victims). At the same time, Serizawa's self-sacrifice symbolizes disarmament and an end to the reckless science that led the world to this fateful point, offering a glimpse of hope amid the sadness" (Ryfle). To that end, the first Godzilla movie treated the creature with as much fear and anxiety as the Japanese had about the A-bomb post-Hiroshima.

In the 1960s, Godzilla's personality began to soften - starting in 1962's King Kong vs. Godzilla and continuing through 1975's Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla, Godzilla was no longer a solitary threat to Japan, but one of at least two or more creatures the human population of the film would have to contend with. As these attacks grew, Godzilla gradually turned from an antihero to an active ally with humanity against the monsters that came to its door: " The character transformed from a nuclear terror into a run-of-the-mill monster on the loose and finally into a rather silly, Earth-defending superhero" (Ryfle). In these instances, Godzilla would have to fight other monsters and ostensibly defend Japan - while both creatures in general were still treated as threats, audiences were always meant to root for Godzilla to win against Mothra,

Rodan, Ghidorah and the rest of Earth's foes. This came in the light of a renewed optimism about nuclear power and energy; in 1966, Japan's first commercial nuclear power reactor began working, and the nuclear test ban was signed, creating a new horizon and new possibilities for nuclear power (Cirincione 33). With Japan's relationship to nuclear power becoming more positive, their relationship with Godzilla reflected that - they were no longer afraid of being hurt by him, but instead rooted for him to help them with their problems.

However, this positivity changed in 1979 with the meltdown of the nuclear plant at Three Mile Island; suddenly, even "safe" nuclear power (in plants, not bombs) was still a tremendous threat to people (Tsutsui 65). At this time, the Godzilla film series was on hiatus, and so this particular anxiety would wait until 1984's reboot of Godzilla, *The Return of Godzilla*, which would see him return to his darker roots. Godzilla this time around destroys fishing vessels and Tokyo once more, but this time he also feeds off nuclear power plants for energy - reflecting the new fear of nuclear power still being a force for evil. Godzilla even eats a Russian submarine, including the Russian Cold War and subsequent nuclear anxiety as part of the new monster's narrative. The Japan of this film categorically refuses the notion of taking nuclear weapons, resulting in a full-turn rejection of atomic power after over a decade of safe, enthusiastic use (Tsutsui 65). Japan was afraid of the atom once again, and needed a Godzilla indicative of that fear; the very same monster they believed would help them out turned on them, leaving Japan to effectively eat itself alive. Where once Godzilla had turned from a monster into a hero, he turned into a monster once more.

As Japan thoroughly absorbed the fear and despair of the nuclear bomb into their own culture, their relationship to nuclear power is reflected in their most potent cultural symbol - Godzilla (Anisfield 53). The appeal of Godzilla's randomness, and the fear that engenders, is perfectly encapsulated in *Shambling Towards Hiroshima*: "A behemoth is a capricious thing, after all, its behavior unpredictable compared with the purely technical problem of building an atomic bomb and delivering it to a target" (Morrow 152). Instead of creating an Other to fear based on the Americans who deployed the bomb, they chose to fear the weapon itself - nuclear power. When Godzilla started, Japan was still reeling from Hiroshima's devastation, and as such was a horrible monster who threatened the Japanese people. As time passed, and Japan started to take command of that same atomic power to use for energy, Godzilla started to become a friend to Japan, defending instead against all manner of alien creatures who might want Japan's resources. However, in light of the Three Mile Island meltdown and the subsequent anxiety about nuclear power, Godzilla came back as the same terror he started out as, this time involving nuclear power plants into the narrative itself. The result is a clear delineation between nuclear power and Godzilla's wrath, which changes along the years.

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