

Metamorphoses of Mothra in the Kaiju Genre

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Abstract

In post-World War II Japan, Toho Studios created films with giant monsters that touched on societal concerns such as nuclear testing and ecological damage from radiation. Of these monsters (*kaiju*), one stands out as a beacon of environmental responsibility: Mothra. In her initial 1961 film, Mothra exhibited a single-minded focus on defending her island and its inhabitants, who revered her as a god. Over the subsequent five decades and dozen films, Mothra expanded her protectiveness to the Japanese homeland and the Earth's environment itself. Mothra holds a connection to humanity through her fairy priestesses, who convey Mothra's desire that mankind strive to care for the world around them as Mothra does. Mothra reiterates this message of mutual brotherhood through her self-sacrifice, death and rebirth multiple times since her original film in a reflection of the cycle of life and is truly the "Queen of the Monsters."

Keywords: Godzilla, King Ghidorah, Battra, Rodan, Shobijin, Ishiro Honda, Toho Studios, Japanese cinema, *kaiju eiga*, environmentalism in film, monster theory

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Metamorphoses of Mothra in the Kaiju Genre

Introduction: The Kaiju Film and Monster Theory

“If the world lives to see another century, please remember what Mothra did for you and the planet you live on.” Cosmos, *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1992)

A huge blue-green egg rumbles while two miniature fairies sing, encouraging the life inside to break out. The shell cracks, the egg hatches, and a brown larva emerges with a chirp. This image is iconic among fans of the Japanese film studio Toho’s giant monster films: the birth of Mothra’s larva. So iconic is this scene that it has reappeared many times from the 1960s to the 2000s. Mothra, also referred to as Mosura, is one of many *kaiju* monsters created by Toho as a result of the success and popularity of Godzilla. While Mothra may not be as internationally famous as Godzilla is, she quickly became the second-most popular *kaiju* created by Toho and has been dubbed the “Queen of the Monsters.”

Mothra is a giant divine moth, appearing in both imago and larval form across a dozen movies. Mothra was revolutionary for the time, being the first feminine and benevolent *kaiju*. Mothra’s destruction is not born of malice, but rather from the pursuit of her objective. She often comes to protect humans from external threats like the three-headed *kaiju* King Ghidorah at the risk of her own life. Mothra is a *kaiju* deeply rooted in spirituality and nature, but before she can be analyzed in depth, two aspects must be laid out: what precisely is a *kaiju* film and just how exactly can a *kaiju* be analyzed.

The Kaiju Film

In 1953, Warner Bros. released the film *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* about a prehistoric dinosaur, the Rhedosaurus, awakened by nuclear testing in the Arctic. The Rhedosaurus then proceeds to come ashore in New York, wreaking havoc and destruction until it is killed by a radioactive isotope. What followed was a boom of science fiction “creature feature” films related to radioactivity in the United States: *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula!* (1955), and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955). *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* likely inspired Toho’s *Godzilla (Gojira)*, released a year later in 1954. *Godzilla* is a monster awoken and mutated by nuclear testing in the South Pacific that waded ashore and caused massive destruction in Tokyo. The only way to kill *Godzilla* was with the Oxygen Destroyer, a weapon so terrible its creator decides to die with the monster rather than risk an arms race worse than that of the atomic and hydrogen bomb. Despite the apparent similarities, a major difference is that *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* is a science fiction film, whereas *Godzilla* is a *kaiju* film.

While at first glance science fiction and *kaiju* appear to be interchangeable, they are wholly separate genres. In his book *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema’s Biggest Monsters*, Jason Barr denotes that science fiction strikes a balance between the existing and illusory worlds in order for the audience to juxtapose the two. However, this balancing act often leaves little room for myth or folklore, ideas which *kaiju* films tend to embrace.¹ Barr references Susan Sontag’s work “Imagination of Destruction,” which

¹ Barr 8

states that science fiction is not about science, but instead about disaster and destruction.² While there is plenty of destruction in *kaiju* cinema, the difference lies in how that destruction is approached and handled. In science fiction, the disaster serves to elevate real world anxieties. Those anxieties are then allayed at the end of the film, usually through the use of science.³ *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* works around the anxiety of nuclear energy, but the Rhedosaurus is killed at the end with a nuclear isotope. Anxieties are allayed because the solution to the nuclear problem in the film is more nuclear power and technology. Meanwhile *Godzilla* preys upon similar anxieties, but those anxieties are only made stronger at the end of the film with Dr. Yamane proclaiming that if nuclear testing continues, another Godzilla will appear someday. Science has not solved the problem in *Godzilla*. Dr. Serizawa's Oxygen Destroyer may have killed Godzilla, but the solution was a weapon worse than the hydrogen bomb. As opposed to science fiction, many *kaiju* films do not resolve the real-world anxieties they comment on, instead only amplifying them at the end.⁴

Another major difference that distances *kaiju* cinema from science fiction is the idea of the Creature vs. the Monster. Jason Barr quotes Vivian Sobchack, who defines each in her work "Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film." Sobchack states that the Creature appears in science fiction and lacks a psyche. The focus on the Creature is not on why the Creature does what it does or what it feels, but instead on what

² Sontag 213

³ Barr 9

⁴ Barr 9

it will do. The audience rarely sympathizes with the Creature because it is just a thing.⁵ This can easily be seen in many of the American “creature feature” films of the mid to late 1950s: the mutated ants of *Them!* or the enormous spider in *Tarantula!* are just Creatures, merely things that must be stopped and destroyed. Meanwhile the Monster is an entity that appears in horror, and is described by Sobchack as something that is always at some point sympathetic to the audience. The Monster has a moment where the viewer sees things through its eyes. The Monster continues to fascinate us after the initial shock and horror of its appearance has worn off because there is always something the Monster stands for.⁶ *Kaiju* such as *Godzilla* or *Mothra* thus cannot be described as Creatures. *Kaiju* will inevitably change from movie to movie as they always display some form of psychic intention or motivation.

This does not mean *kaiju* films are a part of the horror genre. Some *kaiju* films do play on the tools of horror. For example, the reactions of the characters in *Godzilla* to multiple situations are noteworthy: screaming at the unseen force destroying a fishing village, running in terror away from *Godzilla* when he finally appears, and Emiko recoiling from seeing the effects of the Oxygen Destroyer. However, not all *kaiju* movies rely on horror. *Mothra* is a benevolent *kaiju*, and her design sparks admiration of her beauty instead of disgust and horror. *Mothra* relies much more on elements of fantasy and folklore. As Barr states: “*kaiju* themselves are borne out of the fantastic rather than the

⁵ Sobchack 32

⁶ Sobchack 31-32

scientific.”⁷ In order to understand *kaiju* films, one must understand that they belong to their own, separate genre that exists inside a triangle formed by science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Some lean further in one direction than others, but all *kaiju* films contain traits of these three genres.

There is no one description that will fit every *kaiju* film; however a basic framework can be formed for what constitutes a *kaiju* film. A *kaiju* film can be generally described as featuring a giant monster that embodies a worldwide issue. Barr claims the themes for *kaiju* cinema can be traced all the way back to *Godzilla* and *King Kong*, these themes being colonialism, pollution, manmade and natural disasters, international relationships, and the dangers of science.⁸ Through *kaiju*, regional problems can be made global as these issues are recognized worldwide. Barr also provides a second ingredient for a *kaiju* film, which he calls “anchors of reality.” Anchors of reality are easily identifiable landmarks whose existence and/or destruction balance out the fantastical giant monster and provide some “realism” to the film.⁹ *King Kong* had the ending set on the Empire State Building; many Toho movies have a scene where the Tokyo Tower or another national landmark is destroyed; and the 1961 British *kaiju* film *Gorgo* has the monster destroy Tower Bridge and Big Ben.

⁷ Barr 11

⁸ Barr 13

⁹ Barr 17

Monster Theory

Monster theory is a useful tool for undertaking the analysis of a *kaiju* film. No two *kaiju* are the same, and each *kaiju* offers multiple possibilities of meaning for the monster. The primary source for the monster theory essential for the analysis of Mothra and her movies is “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” by J.J. Cohen. Cohen outlined his seven theses as a way to analyze culture through a monster. While neither every monster film nor every monster adheres to all seven, there is always at least one theory that can be used to understand a monster’s meaning within a specific context.

Cohen’s First Thesis is that the monster embodies a cultural moment, incorporating a culture’s anxieties, fears, or desires. The monster signifies something other than itself, so the viewer must answer the question of what the monster has to say about the culture that spawned it.¹⁰ For example, Godzilla was born from the incorporation of three cultural moments. In 1952, the American military occupation of Japan and resulting censorship surrounding the atomic bomb in the Japanese movie industry came to an end. Next, the 1952 international re-release of *King Kong* and release of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* in 1953 sparked a giant monster movie craze. And finally, the inadvertent radiation poisoning of the Lucky Dragon fishing boat by a US hydrogen bomb test led to mass protests against nuclear testing in Japan.¹¹ The

¹⁰ Cohen 4

¹¹ Ryfle, *Godzilla’s Footprint*

combination of these three cultural moments led to the creation of Godzilla by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ishiro Honda.

According to Cohen's Second Thesis, the monster will always escape and then return because humans reignite the issue that created them. The monster may be "killed" but the threat of the monster remains, and in this way the monster is both corporeal and incorporeal.¹² *Kaiju* fit this well, as *kaiju* themselves are both material and immaterial. *Kaiju* possess a physical appearance as well as a thematic one. Godzilla may have died at the end of *Godzilla*, but Dr. Yamane's monologue that one day another Godzilla may appear should nuclear testing continue falls right in line with this thesis. Thus, whenever the monster "reappears," they must be analyzed according to the societal, cultural, or historical context in which they reappeared.

Cohen's Third Thesis states that the monsters cause category crises because they exist outside the norm and refuse easy categorization. Cohen writes, "In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble."¹³ The *kaiju* genre itself is an example of this category crisis. As discussed previously, *kaiju* films themselves exist beyond the boundaries of science fiction, horror, and fantasy, taking traits of each while resisting categorization into a specific genre. Godzilla is another example of a category crisis. The Japanese name for Godzilla is "Gojira", a combination of the Japanese words "gorira" for gorilla and "kujira" for whale.¹⁴ Thus, while Godzilla appears lizard or

¹² Cohen 5

¹³ Cohen 6-7

¹⁴ Kalat 16-17

dinosaur-like, he is also a cross between a land animal and a sea animal. Godzilla's design resists easy categorization, causing a category crisis.

Cohen's Fourth and Fifth Theses are similar to each other. The Fourth Thesis is that monsters become the embodiment of differences, which can be cultural, ideological, racial, sexual, etc. The monsterification of these differences can be used to justify taking action against another culture.¹⁵ Often in *kaiju* films, this takes the role of a monster embodying certain traits of another country. An example of this is *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*, which was released in 1974 during a time of strained relations between the US and Japan over Okinawa. The alien-controlled *kaiju* Mechagodzilla can be seen as representative of America, which violated several Okinawan traditions during its occupation of the island. The in-movie alliance of Godzilla and King Caesar (an Okinawan *kaiju*) can be seen as a desire for an alliance between the two islands to resist American influence.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the Fifth Thesis proposed by Cohen is that the Monster polices the borders of the possible. Those who venture beyond the borders set by monsters risk attack by the monster or turning into a monster themselves.¹⁷ In *kaiju* cinema, this thesis is most often found to fall along the borders of science. Pushing beyond the borders of atomic power spawned Godzilla and Gamera, who caused mass destruction. Dr. Serizawa pushed beyond the envelope of science and created the Oxygen

¹⁵ Cohen 7-12

¹⁶ Barr 99-100

¹⁷ Cohen 12

Destroyer, which so horrified him with its power he ended up taking his own life before it could turn him into a monster.

Cohen's Sixth Thesis is an interesting one: the fear of the monster is also a form of attraction. Monsters usually represent something forbidden, and as such they are repulsive to the audience, but also envied for the freedom they possess. Delight at the monster only turns to horror when the viewer realizes they are in mortal peril. Cinema and literature allow this attraction because the audience knows it is an imagined world and the destruction that is seen or read is only temporary.¹⁸ Godzilla may be popular on screen, but if he were to come rampaging through a city in real life people would run away in fear for their lives. Cohen asks if monsters truly exist and answers that they must, otherwise we could not.¹⁹

All of the above theory leads into Cohen's Seventh and final Thesis: "monsters are our children."²⁰ Monsters will always return home to their birthplace, and when they do they bring knowledge about ourselves and our place in the world. Monsters question us, asking why they were created, and in doing so force us to question our preconceived notions about others.²¹ *Kaiju* can be either punisher or protector, humbling humanity for its hubris in pushing too far, as did Godzilla, or defending us from both the outside and ourselves. In the case of Mothra, she is our protector.

¹⁸ Cohen 17

¹⁹ Cohen 20

²⁰ Cohen 20

²¹ Cohen 20

The 1960s: A Natural *Kaiju*

Mothra (Mosura)

Spurred by the successes of movies such as *Godzilla* and *Radon* in the 1950s, Toho released a revolutionary monster film in 1961: *Mothra*. In a departure from the serious and somber *kaiju* films of the past, *Mothra* is a film meant to emphasize beauty, environmentalism and delivering a message about the pitfalls of capitalism and selfish greed. Those who cling to their selfish, monetary desires end up dead or arrested; the destruction caused by *Mothra* lies on their heads alone. The true monster in this film is not *Mothra*, but the human antagonist Clark Nelson.

The inciting incident of *Mothra* is a typhoon causing a Japanese shipping vessel to run aground on Infant Island, which has been contaminated by radiation poisoning after it was used for nuclear testing by the fictional country of Rolisica. When rescued, the survivors are amazingly untouched by radiation poisoning, which they theorize is because of the “red juice” given to them by natives. Rolisica is a clear stand-in for the United States: the people look American and the major Rolisican city on display is “New Kirk City.” However, as Sean Rhoads and Brooke McCorkle state in *Japan’s Green Monsters*, Rolisica was created by taking the worst traits of the United States and Soviet Union and combining them together. The name Rolisica is an amalgamation of the Japanese pronunciation of Russia and America, while the Rolisican flag borrows elements of both countries’ flags: a gold sickle and star in between red and white stripes¹.

¹ Rhoads and McCorkle 55

The major American trait on display is an obsession with capitalism: profit at any cost. The major Soviet trait lies in taking resources from contested territory, reflecting the diplomatic struggles over the Sakhalin Islands going on at the time.² Once more, Japan is stuck between the United States and the Soviet Union and suffers the consequences of their actions. The beaching of the Japanese fishing boat is also eerily similar to the Lucky Dragon incident, and the possibility of the natives' red juice purging radiation reflects a longing by Japanese society to reverse the deleterious effects of radiation caused by the atomic bombings and Lucky Dragon incident. The movie itself makes this explicit through the Nitto News reporter Zenichiro Fukuda, who claims three million readers want to know how men could be rescued healthy from an irradiated wasteland.

As a result of both the discovery of natives and a potential cure for radiation poisoning on Infant Island, Rolisica and Japan send a joint expedition led by the Rolisican Clark Nelson. The film sets up Nelson as untrustworthy, butting heads with the scientists who feel an academic expedition should be unimpeded, refusing to allow the press to join, and nearly shooting Fukuda after discovering he stowed away on the expedition. Upon arriving at Infant Island, the expedition is stunned to discover a lush, green jungle beyond the desolate outer landscape. Similar to the miracle juice that caused the expedition, the depiction of the lush jungle inside a veil of desolation is indicative of a desire of Japan to return to the pre-nuclear era, when their island was untouched by

² Barr 93-94

radiation and war. In this way, Infant Island is not merely just a stand-in for the Bikini Atoll, but also for Japan itself.³

It is here the movie introduces the Shobijin, which translates into English as “small beauties.” The Shobijin are tiny, twin fairies who are later revealed to act as priestesses for Mothra. A Japanese member of the expedition team, Shinichi Chujo, is saved by the Shobijin after becoming ensnared in a bloodsucking plant and later realizes they were attracted by the noise from his emergency alarm. Chujo lures them out the next day with the alarm and discovers the Shobijin communicate via song, asking for their island to be spared further nuclear testing. While the Japanese and Rolisican scientists agree that Infant Island should not be harmed any more, Nelson orders one of his cronies to seize the Shobijin as they are “rare specimens” that must be valuable. Surrounded by natives and under pressure from the Japanese and Rolisican scientists, who claim violence has no place on a scientific expedition, Nelson releases the Shobijin. The decision to make the Shobijin twin fairies is an interesting one. Twins are rare in Japan,⁴ and the fact that the Shobijin are played by twins Emi and Yumi Ito adds an exotic aura.⁵ Twins in society are often perceived as having a special bond, and the Shobijin’s telepathy extends that bond from themselves to Mothra.

The expedition returns to Japan without any findings announced, while Chujo and Fukuda discover Nelson had previously undertaken a failed expedition to the Amazon to

³ Rhoads and McCorkle 56

⁴ Kalat 52

⁵ Emi and Yumi Ito were well known in both Japan and America as the singing group *The Peanuts*.

find beautiful women for use in entertainment. This revelation proves prophetic as Nelson returns to Infant Island in secret and kidnaps the Shobijin, gunning down the natives who show up to free them. The natives of Infant Island in *Mothra* are unarmed; their only defense is banging stones and shells together to intimidate. Furthermore, they do not speak, leaving the Shobijin as the intermediaries between “primitive” and “civilized” societies, a split that is reflected between *Mothra* and humanity. The senseless slaughter of the natives by Nelson’s men also strikes home the idea that capitalistic greed makes a peaceful coexistence with the natural world impossible.⁶ Before dying, one of the natives calls out “Mosura!” revealing a massive egg.

Nelson puts the Shobijin on display in a “Secret Fairies Show,” performing for entertainment in Japan. The first song performed by the Shobijin is the famous “Mothra Song,” a prayer for *Mothra* to come save them. Ironically, this music that amazes the people of Japan is what will bring doom upon them all. Nelson, when confronted by Chujo, Fukuda, and Fukuda’s camerawoman Michiko, refuses to release the Shobijin, claiming they are not human, but merchandise. Nelson’s Japanese assistant brushes off the criticism in the newspapers as jealousy of the show’s success. The Shobijin warn Chujo, Fukuda, and Michiko that in order for *Mothra* to save them, many innocent Japanese people will suffer, even if not intentionally. In an interview, director Ishiro Honda stated that monsters are not evil by choice; they are born too tall, too strong, and too heavy. Destruction is caused because of that size, and mankind must respond to

⁶ Rhoads and McCorkle 58-59

protect themselves from harm.⁷ While Mothra's large size causes destruction, the reverse can also be applied when analyzing the Shobijin. Due to their tiny stature, Nelson and his cronies do not treat the Shobijin as human, viewing them instead as objects to be carted around and used. The Shobijin are indeed not human, but they are instead *more* than human, as the Shobijin represent the link between Mothra and mankind. These size issues instigate a category crisis both in Mothra and the Shobijin: Mothra's form is that of a moth, which should be a small insect, but she is instead massive in size; the Shobijin are human, but are so much smaller they cannot be described as human. The result of this crisis is Nelson's view of the Shobijin as mere objects, a perspective that sets the events of the film in motion when coupled with his greed.

The egg on Infant Island soon hatches revealing a Mothra larva that begins swimming towards Japan. A cruise ship is soon destroyed in the South Pacific after Mothra swims right through it. Public opinion starts to turn against Nelson, who refutes any connection between his show and Mothra. Chujo begs the Shobijin to turn Mothra back, but they sadly cannot, claiming, "Mothra does not know right from wrong," and only possesses the instinct to rescue her priestesses. There is an important distinction to make here: unlike Godzilla or Rodan, Mothra has a clear motive for her destruction, rescuing the Shobijin.

Things get worse when the Rolisican government initially sides with Nelson, claiming it has the right to protect its civilians overseas. Much like Nelson himself,

⁷ Kalat 52

Rolisica is driven by greed and profit. They only turn against Nelson once his show becomes unsustainable due to the damage and uproar caused by Mothra. The fallout resulting from Mothra's destruction of a dam and subsequent flooding causes the Rolisican embassy to order Nelson to release the Shobijin for the sake of good relations with Japan. Instead of complying, Nelson takes the Shobijin and flees from Japan incognito, hiding out in Rolisica.

Mothra finds her way to Tokyo, causing destruction on her search for the Shobijin. Unable to find the Shobijin after their telepathy is blocked, Mothra stops at the Tokyo Tower. The combination of military firepower and Mothra climbing up the Tower result in the half-destruction of the structure. Within the Tower's remains, Mothra sprays a silk cocoon, continuing on to the next stage of her life cycle, further solidifying her presence as a natural *kaiju*. The Tokyo Tower serves as the Japanese anchor of reality in *Mothra*. Rhoads and McCorkle note that the Tokyo Tower is a symbol of modern Japanese technology and mass media,⁸ while Jason Barr suggests that the urbanized city center destroyed by Mothra represents American capitalism.⁹

In an attempt to destroy Mothra, Rolisica sends its most advanced weaponry to aid Japan: the Atomic Heat Ray Cannon. While the Atomic Heat Ray Cannons set Mothra's cocoon ablaze, Mothra emerges in imago form unscathed. In the battle between Mothra and technology (nature versus mankind), Mothra emerges victorious. This is the

⁸ Rhoads and McCorkle 62

⁹ Barr 94

first time Mothra is seen in adult form, with vibrant colors and beautiful patterns adorning her wings. Mothra does not evoke disgust, but instead admiration and wonder. Mothra spreads her wings and flies off towards Rolisica, in pursuit of her priestesses.

Mothra's arrival in New Kirk City causes destruction as her wings send vehicles and debris flying. Boats are overturned and floodwaters splash onto land. New Kirk City is the other anchor of reality in *Mothra*, clearly meant as a stand-in for New York City. It possesses a similar skyline, name, and even a stand-in for the Brooklyn Bridge, which is subsequently destroyed. Nelson goes on the run once more, but is cornered by angry Rolisicans who blame him for the destruction that is befalling them. Nelson imagines the angry crowd of Rolisicans as the defenseless Infant Island natives. He pulls his gun out to destroy them, getting himself killed in a shootout with the Rolisican police.

The Rolisican government asks for Chujo, Fukuda, and Michiko to help them in dealing with Mothra and the Shobijin. Unsure precisely what to do, Chujo notices the sun behind a cross on a Rolisican church and realizes it looks the same as Mothra's symbol. Similarly, Michiko realizes that the ringing of the church bells sounds like the melody sung by the Shobijin. Fukuda goes as far as to say now the only hope is to leave things "to the grace of god" and crosses himself. This is another aspect of what makes Mothra a revolutionary *kaiju*, she is a monster-god. Mothra is worshiped by the natives of her island, instead of feared as King Kong and Godzilla were. It is only through submitting to the monster-god and giving her what she requires that humanity survives.

The religious imagery in *Mothra* has many interpretations. Some connect Mothra's symbol to Christian iconography, while some interpret it as viewing nature itself as a religion. Chon Noriega states the connection between Mothra and the Christian church symbolizes Japan's westernization and the repressed consequences of western actions.¹⁰ It was the actions of the West (nuclear testing) that caused the chain of events in the film, but the West also brings new spiritual ideas and socioeconomic potential. Noriega claims Mothra's transition from larva to moth is emblematic of Japan's post-war transition as well. Positive forces rise out from a negative.¹¹ Jason Barr takes an opposite stance. Barr views Mothra as embracing nature itself as religion.¹² Barr argues that Mothra's symbol, a cross with the sun behind it, is less of a Christian symbol than it is a natural symbol: an intersection that relies on finding a balance between all things good and bad.¹³ Both analyses have merit to them; it is up to viewers on how to interpret Mothra's religious symbology for themselves.

By drawing Mothra's symbol on an airfield and ringing all church bells in New Kirk City, the Japanese and Rolisicans are able to pacify Mothra, who lands peacefully on the airfield. Chujo, Fukuda, and Michiko release the Shobijin, who thank them and pray all people in the world can live in peace. They then run to Mothra and are reunited. Mothra flies off in peace with her priestesses, causing no further destruction. The monster wins. The last scene of the movie is of the Shobijin singing before the Infant Island

¹⁰ Noriega 70

¹¹ Noriega 70

¹² Barr 65

¹³ Barr 65

natives as they dance, which a voiceover claims is “a prayer for peace and prosperity to last for all eternity.”

Mothra is a unique *kaiju* film because it was the first where the monster wins. King Kong dies on the top of the Empire State Building after being strafed by airplanes, Godzilla was killed by the Oxygen Destroyer, and Rodan was overwhelmed by an induced volcanic eruption. However, in *Mothra* the Shobijin are returned and *Mothra* departs in peace, causing no more damage or destruction as she leaves. The Japanese and Rolisicans even wave goodbye to her. Naturally, this means Cohen’s Second Thesis is in effect as *Mothra* is still alive and could return in the future if her people are threatened. Human greed caused the destruction in the film, and if mankind continues to place personal profit above all else then it is possible a similar fate will befall them.

Mothra differs from *kaiju* such as *Godzilla* because she is a “natural” *kaiju*. Many of *Mothra*’s attacks evoke natural disasters, which themselves are not evil even though they are destructive. When *Mothra* destroys a dam, she causes a massive flood. *Mothra*’s wings create hurricane force winds that wreak havoc on New Kirk City. *Mothra* is the physical manifestation of a typhoon.¹⁴ Typhoons have significant cultural relevance in Japan, most notably in the “divine winds” or *kamikaze*. When most Americans hear the word *kamikaze*, their first thought may go to the suicide missions Japanese pilots made to crash their aircraft into American ships in World War II. However, *kamikaze* dates back to the 13th Century to two typhoons that sank two Mongol invasion fleets and prevented

¹⁴ Rhoads and McCorkle 62

Kublai Khan from invading Japan.¹⁵ Mothra in this film is a *kamikaze*, protecting Japan from outside influence with the strength of her wings.

We can understand the meaning of this cultural force with reference to Cohen's First Thesis of Monster Theory: Mothra's cultural body. With this subtext, Mothra can be seen as a divine wind protecting Japan from the dangers of foreign influence. The foreign influence in this film is unchecked capitalism, displayed by the actions of Clark Nelson. Many of the Rolisicans are not shown in the same light as Nelson, especially the scientists. One of the Rolisican scientists demands Nelson release the Shobijin when the expedition first encounters them. The true monsters of the film are those who care only about profit at any cost. Nelson goes as far as engaging in the monstrous practice of slavery for his own selfish benefit. The fact that one of Nelson's cronies is a Japanese businessman reveals that the American idea of profit at any cost has already infiltrated Japanese society. Mothra's rampage also destroyed several symbols of capitalism and technology, from the obvious symbols of the Tokyo Tower and city center to the subtle destruction of a Mobilgas station (an American corporation).

In his essay "A Measure of Man," John Block Friedman discusses five "measures of a man" that separate man from the monstrous. These five "measures of a man" include speech, clothing, and weaponry.¹⁶ The Shobijin exhibit differences in all of these three measures that separate them from humanity. While the Shobijin understand and can

¹⁵ Nuwer, "Typhoons Saved 13th Century Japan from Invasion"

¹⁶ Friedman 20

speaking Japanese, they are introduced using song as a language. On Infant Island, the Shobijin wear plain tan toga-like outfits with flowers in their hair, far from what the average Japanese person would wear. Several times during Nelson's show, the Shobijin are dressed in traditional attire such as a kimono, an attempt to "civilize" the primitive and exotic. Weaponry is an interesting factor as well. The Infant Island natives use stones that they bang together to intimidate and are defenseless against the modern firearms used by Nelson and his cronies. The Shobijin have an unconventional weapon: their song. The Shobijin sing to summon Mothra, their protector. Nelson mocks the Shobijin for singing, not recognizing that singing is what brings his own destruction.

The Shobijin's song evokes positive emotions in the listeners from its harmony to its near hypnotic, upbeat tempo. Despite the outward appearance, the Mothra Song itself is a prayer for deliverance. Its memorable nature, combined with Mothra's connection to nature and femininity, ensured the success of Mothra's first iteration and prompted an eventual sequel.

Mothra vs. Godzilla (Mosura tai Gojira)

Following the success of *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in 1962, Toho decided to create another *kaiju* film pitting two great monsters against each other. Godzilla's opponent this time would be Mothra, whose original film was also highly successful. *Mothra vs. Godzilla* continues many of the themes set forth in that first film: most notably the dangers of capitalism, the struggle between humanity and nature, and Mothra's presence as a "monster-god." Beyond themes, both movies have several surface similarities: the

main characters are a female photographer, a male reporter, and a male scientist. The three find themselves pitted against venture capitalists who seek to exploit something that is not theirs for monetary gain. Most importantly, this is the film that solidified *Mothra's* role as Japan's protector.

In an additional similarity to *Mothra*, *Mothra vs. Godzilla* begins with a typhoon. This time, the storm wreaks havoc on a recently completed reclamation site. The typhoon sets up the conflict between mankind and nature, with the typhoon (nature) damaging mankind's industrial project and setting it back. As reporter Sakai and photographer Junko arrive, a local politician complains about how an article written by Sakai describes the damage done to the project. He confidently says it will be done on schedule, even if he must double the machinery brought in. The politician claims he's never told a lie, which is followed by a cackle that clearly demonstrates the opposite is true.¹⁷ Unbeknownst to all characters, a greater danger lies buried beneath the mud and debris.

Nearby, the typhoon has also caused a massive egg, which the audience knows to be *Mothra's*, to float near the shore of Japan. Fishermen are initially reluctant to approach it, but are convinced by a Shinto priest. Much like the original *Mothra*, the scientific inquiry into the egg, led by Professor Miura, is impeded by venture capitalists, this time in the form of Mr. Kumayama of Happy Enterprises who buys the egg from the fishermen for 1,224,560 Yen, rationalizing that the egg is 153,280 times larger than a

¹⁷ Rhoads and McCorkle 64

chicken egg and multiplying the price of a chicken egg by that amount. He even displays a receipt.

According to Rhoads and McCorkle, Mothra's egg stands for two things in *Mothra vs. Godzilla*: the feminine form and nature.¹⁸ Everyone obsessed with the egg is male: the fishermen and Shinto priest, the scientists, the reporter, and eventually the venture capitalists. Rhoads and McCorkle view this as a subtle criticism of gender roles in Japan in the 1960s. The female (egg) is subject to study, spectacle, and exploitation by men.¹⁹ Meanwhile Kumayama's purchase of the egg, while following a certain form of logic, is ridiculous in that it attempts to place a price on nature, which itself is priceless. Additionally, his purchase illustrates his view that the egg is merely an item to be possessed, rather than an unknown species' offspring. Kumayama harnesses the Other and brings it into the world of market prices and capital to exploit it, displaying the relationship between capitalism and nature.²⁰ By taking "ownership," Kumayama effectively enslaves the egg just as Clark Nelson enslaved the Shobijin in *Mothra*.

As Kumayama and his financial backer, Jiro Torahata, plot how to monetize the egg, they hear two high-pitched, feminine voices: the Shobijin. The Shobijin beg for the egg to be returned, but the venture capitalists try to grab them instead. The Shobijin escape and later request the help of Professor Miura, Sakai, and Junko. They claim that when Mothra's larva hatches, it will cause chaos and destruction while searching for

¹⁸ Rhoads and McCorkle 64-65

¹⁹ Rhoads and McCorkle 64

²⁰ Rhoads and McCorkle 64-65

food, and the peace-loving Infant Islanders wish to avoid any and all violence. Miura, Sakai, and Junko wish to help, but there is little they can do. Kumayama refuses to return the egg and offers to purchase the Shobijin, an offer the trio soundly refuses in disgust. Much like Clark Nelson in the first film, Kumayama and Torahata do not see the Shobijin as human but rather as a source of profit. Their greed causes them to try to buy the Shobijin to use for advertising their new amusement park built around the egg. The Shobijin and Mothra leave in disappointment that no one in Japan could help them in their time of need.

Miura later reveals to Sakai and Junko that a shimmering piece of debris they found after the typhoon was radioactive. While testing for radioactivity where the debris was found, Godzilla appears from the mud, having been washed ashore and buried by the typhoon. It is no coincidence Godzilla appears in the middle of what a politician proudly proclaims will be his prefecture's future industrial belt, or that his subsequent rampage shows the destruction of industrial factories and Nagoya Castle, which had just been rebuilt after it was destroyed during World War II.²¹ In 1960, Japan's new Prime Minister Hyaoto Ikeda promised to double the income of Japanese people in a decade, succeeding in doing so in eight years. By 1968, Japan's economy was second only to that of the United States.²² The arrival of Godzilla from beneath a planned industrial area and the subsequent destruction of industrial facilities is a commentary on Ikeda's Economic

²¹ Rhoads and McCorkle 67

²² Kalat 69

Miracle: the sudden wealth that had sprung up could disappear just as fast.²³ Godzilla in this film is the harbinger of that potential disappearance.

Without any other choice on how to deal with Godzilla, Miura, Sakai, and Junko travel to Infant Island to appeal for Mothra's aid. These scenes form the emotional and thematic core of the film. Japan refused to help Infant Island when they begged for Mothra's egg to be returned and did not help them when the island was used as an atomic test site, yet now they selfishly beg for Mothra's help. The Infant Island chief blames the Japanese for "playing with the devil's fire" when they say Godzilla is rampaging through Japan. The Infant Islanders have no faith in outsiders after their verdant island was reduced to an irradiated wasteland and refuse the Japanese request. Their refusal is understandable. Though this film and the original do not completely line up in continuity, if they are deemed to be connected then outsiders did nothing but take from Infant Island. They took the natural paradise away from the natives with nuclear testing, kidnapped the Shobijin and massacred the natives, did nothing to rescue the Shobijin from Clark Nelson's slavery, have been unable to return Mothra's egg, and must now ask for more when they have already taken so much. There is a great feeling of shame cast on human society, making this scene especially painful for a society like Japan that prizes saving face above all else.²⁴

²³ Kalat 70

²⁴ Kalat 68-69

Infant Island is also slightly different from the previous film. The beach is barren and desolate, populated only by the bones of animals killed by nuclear testing and radiation. Junko claims she feels somehow responsible for the destruction. Instead of the lush jungle shown in *Mothra*, only a small oasis of greenery remains in *Mothra vs. Godzilla*. It is here the Japanese party finds the Shobijin, singing “Sacred Springs.” “Sacred Springs” is a slow, mournful song that laments the destruction of the natural world. The lyrics, which are not translated in the film, are a simple message, inviting the listener to come and sit and enjoy the beauty of the oasis.²⁵ The juxtaposition of the small oasis amidst the vast swath of desolate landscape builds sympathy for the Infant Islanders, and only amplifies the feeling of shame underlying the scene.

The Shobijin also refuse the Japanese request for *Mothra*’s aid by stating they’re very sorry, but they no longer have faith in the outside world. Junko makes an impassioned plea, claiming that many good, innocent people are dying from *Godzilla*’s rampage, but that even bad people have a right to live. She states that all humans are equal before the gods, who don’t pick sides. Her plea visibly moves the Infant Islanders, and Sakai continues: “Just as you distrust us, so we distrust others as well. It’s wrong. We’re all human. As humans we are responsible to each other. We are related. Refuse us and you abandon your brothers. We must learn to help each other.” This monologue by Sakai is the “Brotherhood of Man” theme, which was added to the script by Director Ishiro Honda.²⁶ The “Brotherhood of Man” is the second major theme of the film, and

²⁵ Rhoads and McCorkle 68

²⁶ Kalat 69

revolves around the idea that humanity must put aside our differences and grudges for the greater good of mankind. Connecting this to Cohen's Fourth Thesis, Godzilla dwells just beyond these differences. It is the differences between the Japanese and Infant Islanders that allows Godzilla's rampage to go unchecked. Instead of monsterizing these differences, they are reconciled through the "Brotherhood of Man."

Mothra then chirps in response. The Shobijin interpret, telling the Japanese that Mothra will come to their aid with the last of her strength. Mothra is dying, and when she leaves she will never return to Infant Island. However, as the Shobijin claim, Mothra never really dies, as new life will be born from her egg. It is worth noting that Mothra's chirp is the first response to Junko and Sakai's speeches, and her agreement with their claims places Mothra as a spiritually and morally superior being.²⁷ Mothra holds no obligation to the outside world: they have done nothing but harm her people. Yet despite that fact, Mothra still agrees to help without hesitation, knowing she will die in the process. Mothra's belief in the "Brotherhood of Man" creates a moral relationship between Mothra and Japan and sets the stage for her upcoming battle to stop Godzilla.

As Godzilla's rampage continues, Kumayama storms into Torahata's room demanding money. Torahata had tricked Kumayama into putting up all the money upfront, leaving Kumayama with nothing. They fight, first with words, then with fists as Kumayama tries to take the Yen kept in Torahata's safe. A bloodied Torahata shoots Kumayama in the back as Godzilla approaches, but instead of fleeing immediately he

²⁷ Kalat 69

wastes time grabbing as much money as he can. Godzilla destroys the hotel with his tail, and Torahata is crushed by a falling pillar as he tries to escape. The grisly on-screen deaths of Kumayama and Torahata are a rarity in the *kaiju* genre: the deaths of named human characters were usually kept off-screen.²⁸ Much like how Dr. Serizawa's death in the original *Godzilla* furthered the message that the only thing that could defeat the nuclear bomb (personified by Godzilla) was an even more terrible weapon, the death of Kumayama and Torahata further the film's message against human greed and unchecked capitalism. Kumayama and Torahata's fight is the antithesis of the "Brotherhood of Man"; consequently they both die.

Mothra arrives to protect her egg from Godzilla. The fight between the two *kaiju* is short but fierce and ends with Mothra retreating to die next to her egg. Sometime later, encouraged by both the singing of the Shobijin and the prayers of the Infant Islanders, the egg hatches, birthing twin Mothra larvae who immediately follow Godzilla to a nearby island. Once again, twins are used in relation to Mothra: this time in Mothra's offspring. It is possible this was done to make the larvae stand out with a special bond, similar to the Shobijin.

In the climactic final battle, the Mothra larvae are victorious, forcing Godzilla to fall into the sea through a combination of tail-biting, rock and atomic breath dodging, and cocooning Godzilla in silk. This is not a death for Godzilla however, and it is likely that Godzilla will free himself from the silk and be free to return again someday. The monster

²⁸ Rhoads and McCorkle 69

always escapes, as Cohen reminds us. As the larvae and Shobijin swim back to Infant Island, Sakai and Miura agree the only way to truly thank Mothra, the Shobijin, and the Infant Islanders is to create a better world: a world built on trust.

Mothra vs. Godzilla is widely viewed as one of the best *kaiju* films of the Showa Era for good reason.²⁹ The film is expertly paced, has a solid cast of characters, and features special effects that, while dated, still look impressive even in modern times. The film's fight scenes are entertaining and fun to watch. Furthermore, the film expands on the themes that made 1961's *Mothra* a success.

A comparison of Godzilla and Mothra in this movie reveals important differences. Godzilla is menacing and brutish, but also somewhat clumsy. He gets his tail caught in a tower, pulling it down, and slips and trips into a castle. Meanwhile, Mothra is graceful and beautiful, but fragile and delicate. It only takes one direct hit from Godzilla's atomic breath to bring Mothra down. This fragility and grace coupled with Mothra's selflessness and self-sacrifice intensifies Mothra's femininity as a part of her overall mythos.

The most notable of the themes in the film is the dangers of unchecked capitalism. Kumayama and Torahata are entertaining and effective human antagonists that make the same mistakes as Clark Nelson, except this time they are Japanese instead of foreign. They view both Mothra's egg and the Shobijin as merely items to be bought and shown for spectacle, not supernatural entities worthy of respect. Kumayama, Torahata, and Nelson all cross the border of the possible in unethical attempts to harness nature for their

²⁹ The Showa Era is the period of Japanese films from 1954-1979.

own gain. As a result of Mothra's unrelenting search for the Shobijin, Nelson goes mad and views his fellow Rolisicans as primitive natives, getting gunned down as a result. Kumayama and Torahata turn on each other, rejecting the "Brotherhood of Man." Torahata kills his former partner, but is killed by Godzilla as a result of his greed. Cohen's Fifth Thesis is prophetic for these three capitalists: those who push beyond the borders of the possible risk becoming monsters themselves.³⁰

Mothra's religious iconography returns as well, amplified from the previous film. Noriega states that *Mothra vs. Godzilla* places the nuclear dialectic of Japan's westernization in the previous film into open conflict: Mothra (Christian morals) vs Godzilla (the bomb).³¹ The scenes on Infant Island make nuclear testing an explicit concern of the film. Interestingly, nuclear testing, even while not committed by Japan, is something for which the Japanese feel guilt. Godzilla, the symbol of the bomb, comes out of the ground underneath Japan at an industrial site used to rebuild the country. Godzilla's later defeat is not a destruction of concerns, but instead a temporary repression. However, the film points to Mothra and her moral superiority as a means to protect the homeland.³² This moral relationship between mankind and Mothra creates a symbiosis that allows them to deal with the issues of unchecked capitalism and nuclear weapons. The next time Japan is threatened, its people know they have a new ally: Mothra.

³⁰ Cohen 12

³¹ Noriega 70

³² Noriega 71

Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster (San Daikaijū: Chikyū Saidai no Kessen)

Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster begins with a series of strange occurrences. A heatwave in January, a meteor shower, and a UFO warning a princess that her airplane is about to explode. The princess later shows up in Japan, claiming to be a prophet from the planet Venus. Her message is dire: Earthlings must become aware of their responsibilities as citizens of the universe, for their planet is on the brink of destruction. She reveals three imminent catastrophes: Rodan will awaken from Mt. Aso; Godzilla will surface and destroy a ship; and the last and most terrible, King Ghidorah will arrive to destroy civilization on the planet. Unknown to everyone, King Ghidorah has already arrived on Earth in a meteorite currently being studied by Professor Murai.

Interestingly, the Shobijin return to Japan, appearing willingly on a Japanese entertainment show. It is revealed one of the Mothra larva from the previous movie died, but that the other one is alive and keeping the peace on Infant Island. David Kalat provides a potential explanation for why one of the larvae died between films. The larva's death does not have anything to do with iconographic or cultural significance, but instead relates solely to movie production aspects. There were only eight months in between the release of *Mothra vs. Godzilla* and *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster*, and Toho released another film called *Dogora the Space Monster* four months between the other two.³³ Kalat also mentions that the Mothra costume used in *Ghidorah* was one

³³ Kalat 73

of the two from the previous film. The Godzilla suit from *Mothra vs. Godzilla* had to be renovated and the Rodan suit had to be fully rebuilt, having rotted since Rodan's first appearance in 1956.³⁴ While Kalat does not explicitly state it, the assumption can be made that only one of the Mothra costumes was in usable condition and the quick production cycle did not allow time for the second to be renovated or rebuilt. Thus, the statement that one larva has died in between the movies would explain its absence.

At Mt. Aso, the Venusian reappears, warning everyone to leave, but she is once again laughed at and ridiculed. A gust of wind blows a tourist's hat into the crater, and another offers to retrieve it for 200 Yen. Rodan appears, causing the man who offered to retrieve the hat to scream out for help and sending the rest of the tourists running away in a panic. While the man's fate is left unclear, the message of this scene is that fixation on money and material possessions is dangerous.

Later, the Shobijin are preparing to leave for Infant Island on a ship. Reporter Naoko asks the Shobijin if they will come again if Japan asks, to which the Shobijin reply "with pleasure." The Venusian Prophet reappears, claiming the ship must not sail. The captain of the ship dismisses the warning and demands she be removed from the ship, arrogantly claiming that he gives the orders. Naoko takes the Venusian to a hotel as the Shobijin slip away, unseen by everyone present. The Shobijin later reappear at the hotel, saving Naoko, her police officer brother, and the Venusian from assassins sent to kill the Princess. When Naoko asks why they did not stay on the ship, the Shobijin explain they

³⁴ Kalat 76

understood the Venusian's warning. Godzilla surfaces and blows up the ship as it sails through the ocean. Godzilla then makes his way to Japan and destroys a harbor. Spying Rodan flying above, Godzilla trails the pteranodon, leading to a fight between the two *kaiju*.

The Venusian reveals that King Ghidorah will turn Earth into a tomb like it did to Venus. Meanwhile in the Japanese mountains, the meteorite breaks open, releasing the space monster, who immediately begins causing destruction. Faced with Godzilla, Rodan, and King Ghidorah, Japan must once again turn to Mothra for aid. In a continuation of Mothra's role as Japan's protector, the Shobijin agree to summon Mothra to help. They do hesitate, however, fearing that Mothra will not be able to defeat Ghidorah alone, and say the only hope is for Mothra, Godzilla, and Rodan to work together and fight the space monster. Mothra arrives in Japan and breaks up Godzilla and Rodan's fight. She tells the quarreling monsters they must put aside their differences and fight Ghidorah. Godzilla and Rodan refuse, claiming they have no reason to help humanity. Mothra counters that the Earth belongs to all, including both monsters and humanity, and that it is their duty to protect it. Her argument falls on deaf ears, as Godzilla and Rodan are not convinced.

Mothra goes off to fight Ghidorah alone, getting pummeled in the process in a one-sided fight. However, Mothra's bravery inspires both Godzilla and Rodan to intervene and join forces with Mothra. During the course of the fight, the leader of the assassins trying to kill the Princess/Venusian manages to shoot her but is then killed in a landslide. The bullet wound results in the Princess remembering who she is, having no

memory of her claim to be from Venus. The trio of Earth *kaiju* finally defeat Ghidorah, with Mothra riding on Rodan's back to spray Ghidorah with silk. Ghidorah is then thrown off a ridge by Godzilla and flies away in retreat as Godzilla, Rodan, and Mothra roar and chirp in victory.

Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster departs from the danger of capitalism theme, instead focusing on the "Brotherhood of Man." Mothra's argument to Godzilla and Rodan that the Earth belongs to both monsters and humanity mirrors Junko and Sakai's pleas in the previous films. As Kalat puts it: "the 'Brotherhood of Man' theme from *Mothra vs. Godzilla* has now become the brotherhood of monsters."³⁵ This is the film that changed Godzilla from a marauding destructive force to a defender of Earth. In every subsequent film from *Ghidorah* until 1984's *The Return of Godzilla* brought Godzilla back to his dark roots, Godzilla is portrayed as a softer, more friendly monster defending Japan from attack, usually from space aliens. This softening culminated in Godzilla becoming a full-fledged superhero as his movies became more and more campy and child-friendly, and it all started with Mothra's argument in this film.

Since this is a reappearance of all monsters except King Ghidorah, Cohen's Second Thesis once again applies to ask the question of why any changes in monster character occurred. There are two potential historical explanations. In 1963, both the United States and Soviet Union signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty which prohibited atmospheric nuclear tests. This treaty resolved most of the issues at the core of monsters

³⁵ Kalat 80

like Godzilla and Mothra.³⁶ In *Mothra* and *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, Infant Island was devastated by nuclear testing. Similar continued messages would have fallen flat as the treaty put an end to any potential future Infant Islands. Instead, according to Noriega, Toho decided to tailor Godzilla and their other monsters towards a younger audience: children.³⁷ This would explain why the monsters are much “sillier” in terms of personality. In one scene Rodan cackles after Godzilla is sprayed with silk by Mothra, only to be sprayed with silk himself as Godzilla chuckles. Godzilla is portrayed as a grump, while Rodan’s appearance is jovial and slapstick.

The other potential historical moment for the film’s “Brotherhood of Man” theme is the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics. The 1964 Olympics prompted Japan, a nation famous for having a cloistered society, to open its borders to the rest of the world. *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster* embraces this new openness with a statement about mutuality through Mothra, Godzilla, and Rodan.³⁸ It has been speculated that King Ghidorah represents China, which had just tested a nuclear weapon in 1964.³⁹ However, in a 1992 interview Ishiro Honda claimed King Ghidorah was meant to be a modern interpretation of an eight-headed snake from Japanese mythology. Furthermore, Honda specified that *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster*’s screenplay was written by Shinichi Sekizawa, who avoided placing politics in his work.⁴⁰

³⁶ Noriega 71

³⁷ Noriega 71

³⁸ Kalat 81

³⁹ China did not sign the Limited Test Ban Treaty.

⁴⁰ Milner, “Ishiro Honda Interview”

Despite Honda's statement, the idea that King Ghidorah could stand for a nuclear China is still a valid theory. When analyzing monsters, there is rarely a singular interpretation. The timing of the movie's release with China's first nuclear test may simply be coincidence, but it allows for this potential explanation. Regardless of King Ghidorah's meaning, Mothra's message in this film remains the same and is still important today. In the face of a common threat, mankind (and monsters) must stand together for the greater good. There will not always be a benevolent monster to save us.

Mothra would go on to appear two more times in the 1960s in the films *Ebirah*, *Horror of the Deep* and *Destroy All Monsters*. In *Ebirah*, Mothra shows up at the finale to save her people who are being used for slave labor by a terrorist organization. *Destroy All Monsters* name drops Mothra, featuring her in the film without any of the spirituality that her previous installments have. The Shobijin are not included in the film and Infant Island is not mentioned once. Mothra appears once at the beginning on "Monster Island" with Toho's other *kaiju*, causes destruction while under the control of invading aliens, then appears at the final battle to fight and kill King Ghidorah. However, *Destroy All Monsters* was meant to be the last Godzilla film Toho made.⁴¹ As a result, it was a celebration of all the *kaiju* Toho had created. After this film, Mothra lay dormant for over two decades until it was time for her to be reborn in a new era of Toho films: the Heisei series.

⁴¹ Kalat 105

Rebirth in the 1990s: Mothra, Defender of Nature

While *Destroy All Monsters* was meant to be the end of the Godzilla franchise, another *kaiju* franchise led to Godzilla surviving until 1975. In 1965, Daiei Studios created the *kaiju* Gamera, a massive fire-breathing turtle, to compete with Godzilla. Despite two serious films, the Gamera franchise soon became wild low-budget action films about Gamera as a superhero monster who was the “friend of all children.”¹ Toho decided that Godzilla could continue if it followed suit. Therefore, Godzilla became a full-fledged superhero monster of his own. To compensate for the collapse of the Japanese film industry and dwindling audiences in the 1970s, the Godzilla films of that decade had their budgets slashed, taking themselves less seriously with each new installment. This decade was the height of campiness in the Godzilla franchise: the cockroach aliens and Godzilla Tower of *Godzilla vs. Gigan*, Godzilla’s infamous tailslide kick in *Godzilla vs. Megalon*, and Godzilla fighting a robotic version of himself controlled by space apes in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* are just a few examples. In 1975, Toho pulled the plug after *Terror of Mechagodzilla* did extremely poorly at the box office.²

However, Godzilla would not stay dormant for long. With Cold War tensions at a high level in 1984, Toho revived the Godzilla franchise after nine years with the aptly named film *The Return of Godzilla*. This film brought Godzilla back to his dark, serious

¹ Kalat 107

² Kalat 145

roots compared to the ever-increasing campiness of the late 60s and early 70s Godzilla films. What followed is known in the *kaiju* fandom as the Heisei series, which ran from the release of *The Return of Godzilla* to the end of the century.³

The success of the early Heisei era Godzilla films led Toho to consider reviving Mothra as well. In 1990, Kazuki Omori, director of *Godzilla vs. Biollante* and *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah*, began writing a script for a movie called *Mothra vs. Bagan*. Bagan, inspired by a Chinese Dragon, was written as a god charged with defending the Earth's environment who was awakened by the changing climate. In response, Bagan would attack humanity, seeing them as the greatest threat. Mothra would then arise as the god of peace and defend humanity from Bagan.⁴ Toho originally planned to follow *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* with a sequel also featuring the three headed monster, but polls revealed Mothra was more popular with women who made up a majority of the Japanese movie audience.⁵ Thus, the decision was made to revive Mothra instead of Ghidorah. While *Mothra vs. Bagan* never got past the planning stage, Omori would pull many elements from it when writing the screenplay for 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra*.

*Godzilla vs. Mothra (Gojira tai Mosura)*⁶

Godzilla vs. Mothra serves as a sort of remake of *Mothra* and *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, echoing many themes from the earlier films while adding a heavy dose of

³ Barr 21-22

⁴ Kalat 180

⁵ Kalat 187

⁶ *Godzilla vs. Mothra* is also sometimes referred to as *Godzilla and Mothra: Battle for Earth*.

environmentalism. The film begins with a meteorite falling to Earth and landing in the Ogasawara Trench near Japan, awakening Godzilla. A typhoon then sweeps through the South Pacific, unearthing Mothra's egg on Infant Island much like in the 1964 film.

The environmentalist message in *Godzilla vs. Mothra* is blatant and borderline smothering at times, being thrown into the audience's face within the first 10 minutes of the film. A Japanese professor mentions how humans are depleting the ozone layer through their reliance on Earth's resources, while another mentions that the meteorite impact has only made things worse: air deteriorating, sea levels rising, and tectonic plates shifting. The meteorite's impact is something beyond human control, a natural event, but the cast claim that humanity had "built the gun" for the meteorite to trigger. The film relies on a core tenet of climate change: a small change in environmental conditions can lead to radical changes elsewhere.⁷ Compared to the subtlety of the earlier Heisei era films, the blatant environmentalist messages reek of "author's message."⁸ A potential explanation however is that the director and writers felt the message was too important to be subtle.

Meanwhile, archeologist thief Takuya, his ex-wife Masako, and Marutomo Company representative Ando are sent by Japan's Environmental Planning Bureau to Infant Island to investigate a strange satellite image of Mothra's egg. Infant Island is no longer an irradiated wasteland, instead being a lush, green jungle. Instead of radiation,

⁷ Barr 64

⁸ Kalat 185

Infant Island faces a new threat from mankind: deforestation. Takuya, Masako, and Ando come across a large mound of dirt, from which trees fall down. Masako laments that places such as Infant Island must be protected, because humans will carelessly destroy them. Once again, the environmentalist message is made blatantly clear.

In a cavern behind a waterfall, the trio discover ancient cave paintings that record a battle between Mothra and another dark-colored moth. Following the cavern, the trio emerge at the base of Mothra's egg where they encounter the fairies, accompanied by the swelling of "Sacred Springs" in the soundtrack. "Sacred Springs" in the 1964 film was a somber piece, meant to allow the audience to empathize with the plight of the Infant Islanders: mourning how the once beautiful island was reduced to a single small oasis in a desolate landscape. In this film, "Sacred Springs" represents nature's purity, as it only sounds when Mothra, the pure, benevolent natural *kaiju*, is onscreen.⁹ In this initial scene with the egg amidst damage dealt by human development, the choice of "Sacred Springs" could have a similar message to the 1964 film: lamenting the beauty of nature amidst environmental destruction.

Mothra's fairies are renamed "the Cosmos" in this film and claim to be placed on Earth to keep it in harmony. The Cosmos explain that twelve-thousand years ago their civilization lived in harmony with the Earth, protected by Mothra. However, a group of scientists created technology to control Earth's climate. In response, the Earth created the Black Mothra to protect itself, a *kaiju* referred to in the film as *Battra*. Mothra defeated

⁹ Rhoads and McCorkle 167

Battra, but not before the weather-control machines were destroyed and a flood demolished the Cosmos' civilization. The changes in this scene are worth noting: Mothra and her fairies' origins are altered. In the 1960s, Mothra was from Earth; now Mothra and the Cosmos came to Earth from the stars. Mothra is made even more Other than she was in the 1960s, yet she is now even more divine: astral and unassailable.¹⁰

The Cosmos state they fear Battra has also awakened; which it has. In response to the shifting climate, a dark larva emerges from the arctic. Battra appears on a monitor in the National Environment Bureau's command room and an official asks "what's happening with our planet?" A cut to the Marutomo Company excavating a forest near Mt. Fuji provides the answer. Marutomo CEO Tomokane is this film's Kumayama, attempting to harness nature for his own profit. Tomokane tells Ando to bring the egg to Japan. While Masako is skeptical of Marutomo's intentions, the Cosmos agree to trust the humans claiming they wish humans to avoid the mistakes of the Cosmos' civilization.

Battra makes landfall in Japan and causes destruction in Nagoya before disappearing underground. It is worth mentioning that Nagoya was the same city Godzilla destroyed in *Mothra vs. Godzilla*. The scenes of destruction represent nature's vengeance wreaked upon a major seat of Japan's industry.¹¹ Meanwhile, as Marutomo tows Mothra's egg back to Japan, Godzilla rises from the sea next to the ship. Takuya releases the barge carrying Mothra's egg as its shell starts to crack. Ando tries to stop him

¹⁰ Rhoads and McCorkle 161

¹¹ Rhoads and McCorkle 162

and they fight - in complete silence. No music accompanies their fight. Unlike the monsters, Takuya and Ando are not deserving of the emotional weight carried by music.¹² This lack of music and its subtle meaning provides some foreshadowing for the future actions of both men.

Mothra hatches from the egg and engages Godzilla in a fight, but is vastly outmatched. Battra arrives and makes a beeline for Godzilla, allowing Mothra to escape back to Infant Island. Battra and Godzilla's fight ends when both are swallowed up by underwater volcanic activity. Battra more or less ignores Mothra to fight Godzilla, perhaps because Mothra and Battra are both natural *kaiju* while Godzilla was created by mankind.¹³ As a result, Godzilla is the embodiment of ecological destruction and Battra sees Godzilla as an affront to Earth.¹⁴

As Ando laments the loss of the egg, Takuya and Masako agree that Marutomo would likely have used it for spectacle. This scene serves to recall the 1964 film and Kumayama and Torahata's plan to build an amusement park around Mothra's egg. In the morning the Cosmos are missing, having been kidnapped by Ando and brought to his boss to make up for the loss of Mothra's egg. Tomokane intends to use the Cosmos as spokespeople for publicity, evoking shades of Clark Nelson from 1961's *Mothra*. Much like Nelson, Kumayama, and Torahata, Tomokane does not see the Cosmos as human due to their small size. Instead of recognizing their existence as intermediary between

¹² Rhoads and McCorkle 162

¹³ In the previous film *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah*, the reason for Godzilla's creation was altered to be through radioactive pollution, not nuclear testing.

¹⁴ Rhoads and McCorkle 163

mankind and the Other, he sees them as less than human. His order to Ando to buy a dollhouse for them sums up how he views the Cosmos: dolls and mere objects to be used for his own ends.

Just like Clark Nelson, Tomokane refuses to return the Cosmos, claiming ownership of them. In an updated rendition of the Mothra Song, the Cosmos summon the larva who starts swimming to rescue them. Despite the imminent destruction, Mothra swims with the sun on the horizon, a symbol for Japan, signifying Mothra's identity as a part of the nation. While Masako states Mothra is benevolent, the Japanese military argue that Mothra can still cause major destruction in Tokyo, and they must defend against her. The idea revealed in Ishiro Honda's interview that monsters are tragic beings still applies. Mothra is too large not to cause destruction, and as a result mankind must fight back.

Unfortunately, Takuya has stolen the Cosmos from Marutomo and attempts to sell them to an American for one million dollars, a number at which the American balks. This scene serves two purposes. The first is that for all his distrust in the Marutomo Company, Takuya reveals himself to be no better than they. Although he may frame his motives as a good way of providing for his family, he is still placing personal, selfish needs above those of his country and his planet. Secondly, the use of an American businessman portrays the American ideas of self-interest and monetary pursuit as having a negative influence on Japan.¹⁵ The fact that Takuya's request for \$1,000,000 makes the American

¹⁵ Rhoads and McCorkle 165

shocked could also be a statement that American influence has made contemporary Japan even more selfish than America.

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces open fire on Mothra but are unable to stop the larva. In one scene, Mothra plows through a JSDF warship, blowing it apart as the Cosmos continue to sing the Mothra Song caged in Takuya's room. The message of this scene is hauntingly stark: Takuya's greed is responsible for the deaths of innocents.

Mothra lands in Tokyo, causing inevitable damage as she searches for the Cosmos. As Tomokane and Ando watch the destruction, Ando tells his boss that it is their fault Mothra is in Tokyo; but Tomokane angrily yells at Mothra to destroy the whole city, claiming he will just rebuild it all. This scene initiates the arc of Ando's repentance, as he recognizes his company's role in the carnage. The acceptance of blame results in healing while denying blame only leads to more destruction.¹⁶

Masako and her daughter Midori locate the Cosmos and confront Takuya as Mothra arrives. Takuya must choose between his own self-interest and rejoining his family, a decision that is the lynchpin of the movie's human plot. In order to restore his family, Takuya must let go of his own monetary selfishness and accept his responsibility as a father. Furthermore, Mothra will stop her assault on Japan if Takuya releases the Cosmos. Takuya chooses to restore his family and returns the Cosmos to Mothra.

¹⁶ Rhoads and McCorkle 164

As Mothra leaves the hotel content that the Cosmos are safe, the JSDF starts shelling Mothra with artillery and tanks. Wounded, Mothra makes her way to the National Diet Building. Mothra begins weaving a cocoon in a scene reminiscent of 1961's *Mothra*, this time to the tune of "Sacred Springs." Nature envelops the political to destroy it, symbolizing the Japanese government's failure to protect the environment.¹⁷

As Takuya, Masako, and the Cosmos stand vigil at Mothra's cocoon, Mount Fuji erupts. Tomokane breaks down in self-pity and throws a childish tantrum about how all of his industrial plans have been thwarted. Ando rebukes him and states the Earth is getting revenge on Marutomo for threatening the planet. He leaves when Tomokane angrily fires him. This is the last time either character is shown on screen. We see Ando earn his spiritual redemption, but Tomokane does not get what he deserves. The one character apathetic towards the environment and the man most responsible for the destruction that has happened does not receive a similar fate to Kumayama and Torahata. Omori's screenplay places the blame on humanity, yet allows the culprit to escape consequences.¹⁸ It is possible that this might be a commentary on how those at fault rarely receive their comeuppance. It is also possible that Tomokane's ambiguous fate could indicate how insignificant individual people are to the Earth itself, no matter how much those people value themselves or their own achievements and ambitions.

¹⁷ Rhoads and McCorkle 165

¹⁸ Kalat 185

Things get even worse as Godzilla emerges, having swum through magma to reappear at Mount Fuji. Such a feat should be impossible, yet Godzilla did it. A Japanese scientist watching the *kaiju* move inland states: “This is beyond our present knowledge and understanding.” While this is not exactly a category crisis, this moment does fulfill one of the components of Cohen’s Third Thesis: scientific inquiry and rational logic crumbles in the face of the monster.¹⁹ As Godzilla makes his way from Mount Fuji, Mothra breaks out of her cocoon in imago form in a cloud of gold dust in a scene once again accompanied by “Sacred Springs.” As Mothra flies off, the Cosmos reveal she is going to fight Battra, who is also not dead and has undergone a metamorphosis of its own.

Mothra and Battra fight in the skies over Yokohama, but their fight is interrupted by Godzilla’s arrival. Battra is wounded by Godzilla, but saved and rejuvenated by Mothra through the stream of the gold dust emanated by Mothra’s antennae. The action also causes the Cosmos to glow gold, visualizing the link between the Cosmos and Mothra. Mothra again uses the golden dust against Godzilla; the Cosmos describe it as Mothra’s most powerful weapon. Given Mothra’s connection to nature it is likely the gold dust has something to do with the Earth’s energy itself, although a clear explanation for what it is has not been found. A pulse from Godzilla knocks Mothra to the ground, but Battra intervenes to save her.

¹⁹ Cohen 6-7

Both moths team up against Godzilla. Working together, the moths bring Godzilla down and start flying Godzilla out to sea. However, Battra is mortally wounded by Godzilla in the process. Mothra drops both into the ocean and seals them underwater by flying in the pattern of her symbol. The site of the battle in the Minato Mirai business district of Yokohama and its destruction are used as a critique against rampant hyper development.²⁰ Battra and Mothra are two different sides of nature: Battra is nature's vengeance unleashed when the Earth is offended; while Mothra is nature's benevolence that is received when nature is respected. Godzilla is a man-made perversion of nature and represents mankind's heedless destruction of the environment.²¹ In this way, the monsters themselves are reflections of humanity's relationship with nature. Godzilla must be destroyed (or at the very least defeated) as he is a symbol for mankind's arrogance and ignorance of the natural world.

The next day at an airfield in a scene reminiscent of the 1961 film, the Cosmos reveal that Battra was waiting to destroy a large meteor that would destroy the Earth at the end of the 20th Century, but since Battra is dead, Mothra must now destroy it. The Cosmos fly to and merge with Mothra as she lifts off. Midori asks her parents if Mothra will ever return, a question to which they say Mothra will return someday, but until then it is up to humanity to protect the Earth. The final shot is Takuya, Masako, and Midori (the nuclear family) united together with the military and bureaucrats as Mothra flies off into space, ready to become the protector of Earth. The combination of humans at the

²⁰ Rhoads and McCorkle 166

²¹ Rhoads and McCorkle 166

airfield shows the path to environmental protection: a stable family and society is needed for a stable relationship with nature.²²

Rebirth of Mothra

The Heisei Era Godzilla movies ended in 1995 with *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah*, but Toho was not finished making *kaiju* films. For the first time since her original 1961 debut, Mothra returned in her own standalone films: the aptly named *Rebirth of Mothra* trilogy. Just like 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, this trilogy had a heavy focus on environmentalism and Mothra serves a similar role as protector of Earth and the environment. Unfortunately, the trilogy's message is somewhat trivialized by a heavy focus on children, especially in the second film. Each of the films feels like a missed opportunity, proposing compelling ideas but failing to fully realize them. However, if one is able to look past the slow child-focused scenes, the first and third films especially offer entertaining *kaiju* action and some unique takes on Mothra's established lore.

Perhaps the biggest difference is the use of three fairies instead of the usual two. These fairies are known in the films as the Elias. Unlike the Shobijin and the Cosmos, the Elias also have separate personalities and appearances. Two of the Elias, named Moll and Lora, take on the role of the Shobijin and Cosmos as the "good" fairies, while the third, Belvera, often takes the role of antagonist as she is vengeful against mankind. This is reflected in their choice of mount: Moll and Lora fly around on a miniature version of Mothra called Fairy Mothra while Belvera rides a biomechanical dragon-bat called

²² Rhoads and McCorkle 166

Garugaru. It is also revealed that the fairies' telepathy has evolved to include telekinetic and mind control powers.

Rebirth of Mothra, simply titled *Mosura* when it was released in Japan in 1996, takes aim at deforestation. The opening shots of the movie show the lush green forests of Hokkaido being cut down by a logging company as wildlife runs away. The loggers unearth a strange rock formation and the supervisor, Goto, unknowingly removes the sacred "Seal of Elias" that kept an ancient monster trapped in the formation.

Goto struggles between his work and duties as patriarch of his family, which puts a strain on his family relationship. Goto is never around when his wife or kids need him. Much like Takuya and Masako in 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, the film uses Goto's struggling familial relationship as a metaphor for humanity's faltering connection with nature.²³

An interesting scene worth mentioning in the beginning of the film is when Goto and his wife remark on how much junk mail they receive and how it is a waste of paper. Goto's job may involve cutting down forests, but he recognizes how paper is wasted for useless advertisements. This scene adds some nuance into the main characters, as opposed to *Godzilla vs. Mothra* where all but one character was pro-environment. Goto's job damages the environment, but despite his awareness about this wastefulness he subordinates that recognition to his own need to provide for his family.

²³ Rhoads and McCorkle 168

After an encounter with Belvera at the Goto house, Moll and Lora reveal to the Goto family that the strange formation Mr. Goto found imprisons a *kaiju* named Desghidora,²⁴ a space monster that consumed the energy of planets but was defeated by the Elias' ancestors and Mothra. Since Mr. Goto removed the Seal of Elias, the monster can be reawakened if someone uses the Seal of Elias with ill intentions.

Under Belvera's control, Mr. Goto drives a bulldozer rigged with dynamite into the rock formation, unearthing Desghidora. Belvera then uses the Seal of Elias, which she had stolen from Goto's daughter Wakaba, to awaken the creature. Desghidora immediately starts rampaging through the Hokkaido forests and consuming their energy.

Moll and Lora have no choice but to summon Mothra to fight Desghidora. Lora objects as Mothra is old and weakened from creating her egg; she asks Moll why they can't just let Mothra rest in peace. Furthermore, Lora points out there were many Mothras back when Desghidora was first defeated, and Mothra is the only surviving member of her species. Moll answers that only Mothra can defeat Desghidora and asks Lora what Mothra would do. They summon Mothra once more with the Mothra song.

This scene is one that sets Mothra apart from other *kaiju*. Even on death's door, Mothra does not lie down and rest easy. Even if Mothra cannot win, she will still fight. She embraces the possibility of death as a part of the natural cycle, knowing new life will be born from her egg and the cycle will continue. It is very similar to Mothra's decision

²⁴ Desghidora is also known as Death Ghidorah.

to fight in 1964's *Mothra vs. Godzilla* and the Shobijin's comment that Mothra never dies. Even though Mothra knows she will not return from the battle, she fights regardless.

Mothra engages Desghidora, blasting her foe with ray beams from her antennae and dropping gold dust from her wings, but she is badly injured in the fight. Sensing this, Mothra's larva hatches prematurely to help its mother. Even though it is not fully grown, the larva makes its way to Hokkaido and joins the fight. The two Mothras, parent and larva, engage Desghidora together but are still outmatched. The adult Mothra tricks Desghidora into destroying a dam that carries it away in a flood, then Mothra picks up and carries her larva to safety.

The dam in this scene serves two purposes. The first is it represents mankind's attempt to control nature.²⁵ Despite mankind's efforts, it cannot stand against the forces of the monsters. The second purpose is a callback to the original *Mothra*. Mothra destroys a dam in the original 1961 film, causing a massive flood. Mothra once again acts as *kamikaze*, a divine wind that in this scene saves her offspring (who will go on to save Japan).

Mortally wounded and unable to stay airborne, the adult Mothra falls into the ocean. Unable to stay above water, Mothra dies and sinks below the surface, leaving her larva to transform into a fully-grown moth. The larva swims past the sun on the horizon, an image that connects Mothra's benevolence, sympathy for nature, and self-sacrifice to

²⁵ Rhoads and McCorkle 169

traditional Japanese values.²⁶ These values must be reclaimed, and Mothra is the *kaiju* to bring about that change. As the larva arrives at a nature preserve on a nearby island to spin a cocoon, it does so underneath a 10,000 year-old cedar tree. Cedar trees hold special cultural significance in Japan. Cedar trees are associated with Shintoism and their branches are often painted on Noh theater backdrops to signify a divine presence. The larva spinning its cocoon under a cedar tree connects a Japanese national identity with traditional values and environmental protection.²⁷

Meanwhile at a hospital in Hokkaido, Taiki and Wakaba water a plant while the Gotos watch on. The meaning of this scene is clear: preserving nature is a task the younger generation must acknowledge and accept. A reporter from the logging site sees Mr. Goto and blames him for everything that happens. While Mrs. Goto claims he could not have known what would happen, Mr. Goto says nothing and quietly accepts the accusation and responsibility.

The larva hatches in a stream of small moths that coalesce into a new adult Mothra: Mothra Leo, a divine protector of both the Japanese people and environment. Mothra Leo flies back to Hokkaido and relentlessly engages Desghidora once more in an intense fight that ends with Desghidora defeated and sealed underground once more. However, the damage has been done.

²⁶ Rhoads and McCorkle 169

²⁷ Rhoads and McCorkle 169

The landscape is desolate, burned, and barren, consumed of all energy. Many scenes before, during, and in between the fights showed the ecological destruction wrought by Desghidora: forests on fire, chasms opened in the ground. Desghidora is a metaphor for deforestation run amok.²⁸ While this devastation was caused by Desghidora, the *kaiju* was only released because of the actions of humans. Goto's company logging trees in the area unearthed Desghidora's prison and Goto unknowingly removed the seal that kept the *kaiju* imprisoned. Humanity is responsible by extension for the devastation caused by Desghidora.

As the Gotos watch their children ride around on Mothra Leo's back, Mr. and Mrs. Goto lament the environmental destruction for which they feel responsible. Mr. Goto says it may not be too late to save the forests, but it will require many years of hard work. Mrs. Goto says she hopes their grandchildren will grow up in a world where human beings respect nature, and that they must work to make that dream a reality. It is a message about stewardship and optimism for the future, however the movie potentially defeats this message in the very next scene.²⁹ Mothra Leo releases a cloud of green dust that restores the vitality of the environment. Trees and grass grow quickly, what was once barren is now covered in greenery. The message about restoration falls flat because the hard work has already been accomplished. It is possible though that this scene is meant to

²⁸ Rhoads and McCorkle 169

²⁹ Rhoads and McCorkle 170

give the humans a second chance. Mothra Leo has restored the environment, but it is on mankind to take care of it now.

As the Elias and Mothra Leo fly off, the last shot of the movie is of the Goto family united, much like the ending of the 1992 film with Takuya, Masako, and Midori. Once again, the notion is that a united family structure mirrors a healthy relationship with the natural world. Mr. Goto is confined to a wheelchair, his scars reflecting the scars his career inflicted on the environment. However, he now has a chance to mend his family bonds and do what is right as a result.³⁰

An interesting facet of the Rebirth of Mothra trilogy is in Mothra Leo himself. In a departure from previous films, Mothra Leo is male instead of female.³¹ Mothra Leo has a more angular wing shape and the color scheme of his wings tends towards more blues and greens. The classic color scheme of Mothra was dominated by vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows. The Mothra films of the 1990s are all about balance: balancing family relations and humanity's relationship with the environment. Mothra Leo being a male moth contributes to that sense of balance, this time between the feminine and masculine. However, this decision undermines part of what makes Mothra special in the *kaiju* genre: her femininity.

The other two films in the trilogy do not go nearly as in-depth on environmental issues like *Rebirth of Mothra*, but both hold themes that are worth mentioning. *Rebirth of*

³⁰ Rhoads and McCorkle 170

³¹ Barr 65

Mothra II, released in 1997 as *Mosura II: Kaitei no Daikessen*, is by far the weakest film in the trilogy. Even more emphasis was placed on the child cast and the screenplay is much more campy than the other two *Rebirth of Mothra* films. However it still manages to deliver a decent message about oceanic pollution through the use of its villainous *kaiju* Daghara.

Rebirth of Mothra II follows three Japanese children who discover a small, fuzzy, mystical creature named Gorgo and are recruited by Moll and Lora to help recover the lost treasure of Ninai Kanai. Ninai Kanai was an ancient civilization near Okinawa that sank under the sea, similar to the legendary lost continents of Atlantis and Mu. Moll and Lora state the treasure must be found to stop Daghara, an aquatic *kaiju* created by Ninai Kanai to consume ocean pollution. Unfortunately, Daghara had a defect: when it consumed pollution it also created Barem, a poisonous starfish. Moll and Lora tell the children that if Daghara is not stopped, the Barem will kill all marine life.

Through Dahgara, *Rebirth of Mothra II* takes aim at ocean pollution. In the beginning of the film, a pair of fishermen haul nets filled with trash out of the water. One laments that people treat the ocean like a landfill; he is subsequently blinded by a Barem. Several other scenes show beaches and coastlines choked with Barem, a visual indication of just how much pollution is in the ocean.

With the help of Gorgo and the Elias, the children find and explore the pyramid remains of Ninai Kanai, which rise above the water due to the Gorgo. Daghara appears and begins attacking the pyramid and a nearby town, leading Moll and Lora to summon

Mothra Leo. Mothra Leo has the upper hand initially against Daghara, but is caught in a waterspout caused by Daghara and is covered in Barem and dragged underwater. Mothra Leo manages to escape above water, but crashes onto the top of the pyramid.

The child protagonists, Moll, Lora, Belvera, and her two adult thralls (who are motivated by greed) all arrive at the central chamber of the pyramid where they meet a hologram of a Ninai Kanai princess. The princess demands to know why each party seeks the treasure of Ninai Kanai, blasting one of the greedy adults. Moll and Lora answer they want to stop Daghara. Belvera claims she wants to destroy humanity for destroying the environment, while Moll and Lora claim that humans are a part of the ecosystem as well, and that just because some are guilty, not all should be held responsible. The princess reveals that Gorgo is the actual treasure of Ninai Kanai and that it wishes to help the children and Elias.

The humans escape to the top of the pyramid, where Mothra Leo still sits injured and covered in Barem. Gorgo then ascends into the air and disintegrates into a shower of particles that cleanse Mothra Leo of the Barem and gives the giant moth a new appearance: Rainbow Mothra.³² Moll says it is a miracle, and that the ocean has brought forth new life. Gorgo's healing powers had been showcased before: its secretions are capable of mending wounds.

One scene right before the final battle contains an interesting piece of religious imagery: Rainbow Mothra parts the water from the pyramid to the coast, providing a

³² It should be noted that Rainbow Mothra and Mothra Leo are interchangeable names.

stretch of dry land for the humans to escape on. The scene evokes the biblical image of God parting the Red Sea to allow Moses and the Israelites to escape Egypt. It is a curious moment, as the Mothra films of the 1990s do not contain much religious imagery beyond Mothra's symbol. There are no worshipping natives like there were in the 1960s, Mothra's only people are the Cosmos and Elias.

Rainbow Mothra defeats Daghara by changing into another new form: Aqua-Mothra (a streamlined version with four diagonal wings instead of two and fins for a tail). Battling Daghara underwater, Aqua-Mothra splits into many smaller Aqua-Mothras (a move Mothra Leo used in the previous film against Desghidora) and swims into Daghara's mouth to destroy the Barem inside the *kaiju*. Aqua-Mothra then transforms back into Rainbow Mothra as it flies above water once more, pulling Daghara's body up before dropping it onto the exploding Ninai Kanai pyramid.

As Rainbow Mothra and the Elias fly off, the child protagonists, but not the two adult humans, hear the voice of the Ninai Kanai princess telling them the future of the world is in their hands. Shiori, the female child, holds a pearl from Gorgo in her hands. As the princess finishes speaking, the pearl transforms into a miniature Earth, a visual indication of the princess' statement.

Rebirth of Mothra III, released in Japan in 1998 as *Mosura III Kingu Gidora Raishū*, is a unique film in this trilogy as it does not include a direct environmental message. Instead, *Rebirth of Mothra III* tells a coming of age story about a young Japanese boy named Shota helping Mothra Leo and the Elias to defeat King Ghidorah.

King Ghidorah in this film arrives on Earth to consume the life force of Earth's children, directly threatening the future. Strung together with the first two films' messages that it is incumbent on the next generation to save the environment, *Rebirth of Mothra III* is the capstone of the trilogy: in order for them to become stewards of the environment, children must be protected.

The film wastes no time jumping straight into the action. Belvera breaks into a temple on Infant Island and tells her sisters Moll and Lora that "The King of Terror" is coming. Shortly afterwards, King Ghidorah arrives and begins abducting Japan's children. Upon discovering this, Moll and Lora realize they must immediately summon Mothra Leo to battle the three-headed dragon. Mothra Leo is badly outmatched and barely escapes the fight alive. The only hope for Earth is for Mothra Leo to travel 130 million years back in time to defeat King Ghidorah when he first appeared on Earth. It is a suicide mission, Mothra Leo knows he will not return, but Moll explains to Shota that it is a battle that must be fought. Since Lora is missing, having been possessed by King Ghidorah, Moll must use all her energy to help Mothra Leo travel through time, falling into a state of suspended animation as a result.

As a last promise to Moll, Shota allows himself to get captured by King Ghidorah in order to find and redeem Lora. Shota succeeds, and Lora recovers enough to strengthen Mothra Leo, who is losing to the prehistoric King Ghidorah. Emboldened, Mothra Leo rises and manages to pick up King Ghidorah, dropping the King of Terror into a volcano. A badly wounded Mothra Leo collapses after being thrown out of the volcano, but is

cocooned by three prehistoric Mothra larvae. However, a severed piece of Ghidorah's tail buries itself underground, allowing King Ghidorah to return in modern day.

A new Ghidorah, sprung from the severed tail, appears and begins abducting Japanese children once more. However, Mothra Leo hatches from a fossilized cocoon in a new form: Armor Mothra. Coated in metallic armor, Mothra Leo battles King Ghidorah once more. This time it is King Ghidorah who is no match, as Mothra Leo's new Armor Mothra form is impervious to all of King Ghidorah's attacks. King Ghidorah is obliterated in the fight, with Mothra Leo cutting off one of Ghidorah's wings and then disintegrating the three headed dragon.

With the help of Mothra Leo, who has changed appearance once more into "Eternal Mothra," Lora and Belvera revive Moll as the captured children return to their families. The film ends with Mothra Leo flying away with Moll and Lora as Shota's family recognize his development into a young adult and wave goodbye. It is a very similar ending to both *Godzilla vs. Mothra* and *Rebirth of Mothra*, and the connection between the family and environment is still the same.³³

Rebirth of Mothra III adds some new elements to the trilogy: mostly in the form of the "Elias Triangle." The three points of the "Elias Triangle" are wisdom, courage, and love: each of which is personified by one of the Elias siblings and relates to their personalities. Moll's is wisdom, exemplified by her more subdued, big picture disposition; Lora's is love, evident by her being the most outwardly emotional of the

³³ Rhoads and McCorkle 172

three; and Belvera is courage, which is perhaps manifested in Belvera's willingness to stop at nothing to protect Earth, even from humanity. It's a fair assumption that the Elias are personifications of what makes Mothra the *kaiju* she/he is. Wisdom, courage, and love are all traits that Mothra has exhibited in past films.

Continuing Mothra's association with nature and the cycle of life, Mothra and Mothra Leo are reborn multiple times across each film in the trilogy. Mothra dies but is reborn through Mothra Leo in *Rebirth of Mothra*. Mothra Leo is reborn as Rainbow Mothra and Aqua-Mothra through Gorgo's sacrifice in *Rebirth of Mothra II*. Finally, Mothra Leo is reborn once more after his sacrifice traveling back in time, hatching from the fossilized cocoon in modern day as Armor Mothra. Much like previous films, both Mothra and Mothra Leo fight regardless of the possibility of death because death is a part of the natural cycle of life.

While the *Rebirth of Mothra* trilogy may be a series of flawed movies that missed several opportunities through a focus on children, they make an excellent capstone to Mothra in the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War and subsequent easing of nuclear concerns, societal focus naturally shifted to the environment. While *Godzilla vs. Mothra* and *Rebirth of Mothra* are not continuous, they echo many similar themes about environmentalism and restoring harmony to the family and environment.

Mothra in the New Millennium: A Mix of New and Old

At the turn of the millennium, Toho revived the Godzilla franchise with the aptly named *Godzilla 2000* in an attempt to capitalize on the critical failure of the 1998 American *Godzilla* released by TriStar. *Godzilla 2000*, the first film in the new “Millennium Series,” was a success, but the subsequent film *Godzilla vs. Megaguirus* was the lowest grossing box-office Godzilla film since *Terror of Mechagodzilla* in 1975.¹ In response, Toho hired Shusuke Kaneko, the man who had saved Gamera from the pit of campy, kid-friendly silliness and starred the giant fire-breathing turtle in a trilogy that rivaled and even surpassed the best Godzilla films.

Kaneko initially wanted to pit Godzilla against the *kaiju* Baragon, Anguirus, and Varan, as those three were earthy and animalistic. However, Toho was desperate for a box office hit after the failure of *Megaguirus*, and requested Kaneko include Mothra and King Ghidorah, their two most popular monsters besides Godzilla.² Kaneko agreed, replacing Anguirus and Varan with the more popular *kaiju*, and thus Mothra would return for the new millennium, albeit in a smaller role than before.

¹ Kalat 237

² Kalat 240

*Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack (Gojira, Mosura, Kingu Gidora: Daikaijū Sōkōgeki)*³

GMK is a unique film. Director Shusuke Kaneko rewrote the lore behind all of the titular *kaiju* to tell a story steeped in fantasy and mysticism, placing a more spiritual twist similar to his work on the Heisei Gamera trilogy. *GMK* seeks to answer the question of why giant monsters always attack Japan and only Japan. In answering that question, the film is perhaps one of the darkest Godzilla films since the original 1954 film and 1984's *The Return of Godzilla*. Godzilla is essentially a horror villain; his whole appearance exudes evil and malevolence. The only hope for Japan lies in the “Guardian Monsters” of Baragon, Mothra, and King Ghidorah.

The film begins with an American nuclear submarine going missing off Guam. A Japanese rescue team finds the wreckage of the American sub, the hull shredded and torn. One member of the Japanese team sees glowing spines off in the distance, indicating a horrible truth: Godzilla has returned.

Meanwhile at a village near Mt. Myoko, a village elder demands that a low-budget TV company stop filming near their town, as he does not want low-budget TV to ruin the reputation of hard working villagers. The main protagonist of the film, Yuri Tachibana, convinces the elders to let them film by saying people love monsters, and that

³ For the sake of brevity, this film will be referred to as *GMK*.

his town would see an influx of tourists if a monster like Godzilla appeared. The lure of tourists visiting his village convinces the elder.

Later that night the same village elder and a truck driver are harassed by a gang of young Japanese bikers who also carelessly destroy a shrine. A landslide caused by Baragon buries the bikers in a tunnel. The traumatized driver identifies the monster as Godzilla. Next, at Lake Ikeda, a beach party of young adults break into a store, defile another shrine, then attempt to drown the dog of the store owner. Their boat is capsized and they are pulled underwater, while the rest of the beach party-goers are killed by Mothra after she rises from beneath the waves. The bodies are later found trapped in a cocoon on the lake. The dog is later shown to have survived the ordeal while the humans did not.

Yuri, her friend Takeda, and a coworker visit an elderly hermit at a police station who tells them that Godzilla has returned, and that they must reawaken the Guardian Monsters. The old man tells Yuri that Godzilla is the embodiment of the restless souls of those killed in the Pacific Theater of World War II. They want to destroy Japan because the Japanese people want to forget their role in the conflict. Godzilla is a new monster in *GMK*, a vengeful spirit come back from the dead to wreak destruction upon modern Japan. Godzilla's transformation into this vengeful spirit is a response to a change in the Japanese movie industry and the increasing popularity of J-Horror.⁴

⁴ Kalat 240

Meanwhile a Japanese businessman uproots a third shrine near Mt. Fuji as a platform from which to hang himself. The ground collapses underneath him and the businessman finds himself at Ghidorah's resting place. The panicked man makes it back to a local police station, but is brushed off by an officer who does not believe his tale, callously telling the businessman to put his story on a website. The policeman's remark highlights the internal debate in *GMK* between new and old beliefs, as even the police have shifted from a personal to impersonal model. Claims that are fantastical are simply brushed off, even if they might be true.⁵ Baragon surfaces at the police station, but is once again mistakenly identified as a "red Godzilla." Baragon's misidentification is a depiction of Japan's societal forgetfulness about the past: modern Japan is so far removed from their history that they forget what Godzilla truly was.⁶ Godzilla's name no longer has meaning to most Japanese; it is now a label given to every giant monster.

Yuri tries to convince her father, a naval commander in the Self-Defense Forces, about the Guardian Monster legend, placing emphasis on how they are protectors of the Japanese homeland, but is unsuccessful. After a search for Godzilla turns up nothing, the government calls off all activities, with some ministers not believing Godzilla has truly returned. Cmdr. Tachibana laments that years of peace have dulled people's memories of Godzilla's original attack. In a stirring monologue, Cmdr. Tachibana recalls the 1954 attack and the loss of his own family.

⁵ Barr 84

⁶ Barr 83

The real Godzilla soon surfaces at a harbor and starts wreaking havoc. In a scene reminiscent of a horror film, Godzilla approaches a hospital where a teenage girl has a broken leg. Unable to run away, the girl can do nothing but scream as Godzilla nears closer and closer to her window, before moving past it. The girl takes a deep breath of relief, moments before Godzilla's tail destroys the hospital. It is a cruel scene, but the cruelty serves a purpose. *GMK* does not bring any of the light-hearted fun previous movies may have had. No one is safe; this Godzilla must be destroyed or else he will not stop until Japan is in ruins.

Godzilla and Baragon face off in a lopsided and brutal fight. A news helicopter covering the fight and commentating on it as if it were a sporting event is destroyed when Godzilla throws Baragon into the chopper's flightpath. Baragon does not last much longer, being brutally killed by a prolonged blast of Godzilla's atomic breath.

The military attempts to kill Godzilla but is unsuccessful. Cmdr. Tachibana questions the defense minister to discover how the original Godzilla was actually killed. The minister reveals that the JSDF was powerless against Godzilla, and the creature was only killed by the Oxygen Destroyer. The government covered up the existence of the Oxygen Destroyer to prevent their armed forces from being ridiculed.

As Godzilla makes his way towards Tokyo, the old hermit awakens Ghidorah. Similarly, Mothra hatches from her cocoon on Lake Ikeda. *GMK* Mothra is vastly different from previous incarnations of the *kaiju*. First, there are no fairies. *GMK* does include a shot with two similar looking girls in a marketplace dressed in white as Mothra

flies overhead; however, this is likely just a nod to the Shobijin/Cosmos/Elias, as it is the only scene in which they appear. In the previous films, Mothra's fairies were the link between monster and man. Through the fairies, the humans could interact with Mothra and understand her. Their absence represents how Mothra does *not* have a link to mankind in *GMK*. Yuri explained earlier in the film that the Guardian Monsters defend the homeland of Japan. The homeland is the land itself, dirt, trees, animals, water, and air; not the Japanese people themselves. The shrines to the Guardian Monsters take the role of the fairies as the monsters do not act until after the shrines are desecrated. The biker gang broke one shrine in half and were subsequently buried by Baragon. The beach party attempted to use another shrine to drown a dog that was annoying them, leading to Mothra killing them all. The businessman uses a third shrine to try to hang himself, but the ground gives out underneath and drops him into Ghidorah's resting place.

Mothra's appearance is much more insectile and wasp-like in *GMK*, and her attacks are also all natural attacks: winds from her wings, grappling with her legs, and stingers shot from Mothra's abdomen. Gone are the beam attacks of the 1990s, and their absence fits Mothra's new origin as a Guardian Monster. Mothra's behavior is also different. This is the first film where Mothra has intentionally killed people. However, these deaths were in retribution for the arrogance of the humans in the beach party. She is still a protector, but this time she is a protector of the homeland instead of the Japanese people who inhabit the homeland. Mothra protected the dog, and the humans that do not disrespect her are not harmed either.

Mothra's penchant for self-sacrifice returns as well. Mothra sacrifices herself twice in *GMK*, once to intercept Godzilla's atomic breath and save Ghidorah. The second time Mothra rises to attack Godzilla while he is distracted by a JSDF ship, but instead is obliterated by a point-blank blast of Godzilla's breath. Mothra dissipates into a gold cloud of energy that coalesces around and revitalizes Ghidorah, transforming him into the thousand year old dragon King Ghidorah. With Mothra's energy, King Ghidorah is able to wound Godzilla on the neck.

As Godzilla and King Ghidorah fight both above and below water, Cmdr. Tachibana plans to shoot a D-03 missile (a missile with a drill on the front) into Godzilla's wound to kill him. When questioned why he has to be the one to execute the mission by Yuri, Cmdr. Tachibana explains that he has the most experience and it is his duty to lead by example. He also gives his daughter permission to stay near the battle to record the struggle to protect the nation from Godzilla.

Unfortunately, the military's attack distracts King Ghidorah long enough for Godzilla to incapacitate him with a blast of atomic breath. As Yuri and Takeda fall from a bridge destroyed by Godzilla in the course of the fight, a fragment of one of the Guardian Monster shrines slips from Takeda's pocket into the water, revitalizing King Ghidorah once more. However, not even King Ghidorah can withstand Godzilla's fury, being blown apart with another point-blank blast from Godzilla's atomic breath. The spirits of the Guardian Monsters materialize as a cloud of gold energy and drag Godzilla underwater. Despite the build-up of the Guardian Monsters as Japan's only defense

against Godzilla, they are easily overwhelmed. New traditions of forgetting the past annihilate ancient heritage.⁷ Old traditions, symbolized by the Guardian Monsters, are not strong enough to defeat newer ideas by themselves.

The Guardian Monsters' last act allows Cmdr. Tachibana to pilot his submersible into Godzilla's mouth.⁸ He manages to fire a missile through Godzilla's vulnerable wound as the *kaiju* surfaces. Godzilla prepares to kill a helpless Yuri and Takeda with his atomic breath multiple times, but the beam escapes through the open wound instead. Godzilla falls underwater and tries to use his atomic breath once more, but he instead disintegrates. It is fitting that Cmdr. Tachibana would be the one to deal the death blow, as he is the only older character who appears to care about the past. His emphasis on preparing for Godzilla's potential return and his monologue to his daughter emphasizes that he remembers Japan's history.⁹ Much like the Guardian Monsters themselves, he cannot defeat Godzilla alone. Older traditions and the Japanese people must work together to prevent the next generation from forgetting their past.

As Yuri's coworkers plan to release a special program about the events of the film, one of them reveals that the old hermit was a man named Professor Isayama, but that the Professor died shortly after the first Godzilla attack. Furthermore, the hermit is no longer on the tapes filmed by Yuri. The implication is that the old man was either a ghost

⁷ Barr 85

⁸ Interestingly, Kaneko cast Ryudo Uzaki as Cmdr. Tachibana because he did not look like a typical military man to avoid any militaristic connotations, especially as his actions here evoke imagery of the *kamikaze*. Kalat 241

⁹ Barr 85

or spirit, come to warn Japan of its imminent danger. This only adds to the sense of fantasy and spirituality pervading the film.

The movie ends with Cmdr. Tachibana acknowledging that it was the combined efforts of himself, his comrades, and the Guardian Monsters that saved Japan from Godzilla. He salutes them as the film cuts to an underwater shot that pans to Godzilla's disembodied heart. It continues to beat as the Godzilla theme plays. The implication is clear, Godzilla may return someday, the issues that spawned this Godzilla are still unresolved. Just as Cohen states in his Second Thesis, the threat posed by Godzilla still exists even if his body has been destroyed. Moreso in *GMK* than any other Godzilla film, Godzilla is a corporeal and incorporeal entity at the same time.

The largest recurring theme in *GMK* is that Japan is losing touch with its history. This theme can be analyzed by Cohen's First Thesis, as it grows out of a specific cultural moment. In the period between 1998 and 2009, the Japanese government issued a string of at least twenty apologies to other countries for actions in the Second World War.¹⁰ As a result, fierce debate broke out over whether Japan should apologize for their past actions, ignore them, or refuse to acknowledge them.¹¹ *GMK* comments on that debate through the fighting between Godzilla and the Guardian Monsters. Godzilla seeks to destroy Japan because of that desire to ignore the past. The film brings up images of the past in some scenes: Godzilla's atomic breath causes a mushroom cloud and a poster of

¹⁰ These apologies ranged from the use of comfort women to the Bataan Death March.

¹¹ Barr 82-83

the Lucky Dragon fishing boat is seen on a wall. Godzilla even comes ashore at the same port which the Lucky Dragon called home.¹² The Guardian Monsters are a part of the history that Japan must remember and support, because both they and the Japanese people alone are not strong enough to defeat the new beliefs that spawned this Godzilla.

A byproduct of that debate and loss of touch with history is another major theme of *GMK*: many Japanese people do not realize how much danger they are in until it is too late. As a typhoon approaches the Bonin Islands, a group of younger Japanese make light of Godzilla after looking at some pictures on an elderly lady's wall. One of them even says Godzilla would be great as a pet. Soon afterwards, they are killed when Godzilla crushes the house where they are staying. Once Godzilla comes ashore in Japan, a woman in a supermarket claims Godzilla is only a myth before screaming in terror at the sight of the beast. Just before Godzilla and Baragon fight, Japanese tourists talk about how Baragon is "cute" and take pictures of themselves with Baragon in the background. They are killed a few moments later when Godzilla arrives. Similarly, the occupants of the news helicopter recording Godzilla and Baragon's fight are oblivious to the mortal danger they are in until Baragon is thrown into the chopper's flightpath.

This obliviousness plays into Cohen's Sixth Thesis, which states people are attracted to monsters from afar. The forgetting of the younger generations about their country's past includes forgetting the trauma of Godzilla's initial attack. Cmdr. Tachibana is the only one who remembers. Delight at the monster only turns to horror

¹² Barr 83

when the viewer realizes the mortal peril they are actually in.¹³ By the time they recognize the danger in *GMK*, it is too late. The people taking photos of themselves with Baragon are crushed by a landslide caused by Godzilla. The teens joking about how Godzilla would make a great pet are crushed when Godzilla stomps on their house. The young Japanese at the beach party do not react with horror until Mothra swims ashore to kill them.

Much like previous Mothra films, *GMK* ends with a message of mutuality. The only way for Japan to survive the ghosts of the past is to recognize their history, good and bad. Trying to forget this history, however uncomfortable it may be, is what brought back Godzilla and the Guardian Monsters. Godzilla was only defeated through combined efforts, but his heart still beats on the ocean floor. The fight is not yet over. A resolution to the debate on how to approach the nation's role in World War II must be found before Godzilla returns again.

Under Kaneko's direction, *GMK* was the box office hit that Toho had been hoping for and convinced the studio to continue the Godzilla franchise for a few more years. However, Kaneko would not return to direct another Godzilla film, as he and Toho had clashed several times during the production of *GMK*.¹⁴ Instead, Toho returned to the director of *Megaguirus* for the next film. Mothra would appear in two more films before Toho pulled the plug on the Godzilla series in 2004, reviving the series in 2016.

¹³ Cohen 17

¹⁴ Kalat 242

The Last Appearances of Mothra

Mothra's final two appearances in Toho's films are a disappointing regression coming off of the ingenuity and mysticism of *GMK*. Instead of doing new things with Mothra, *Godzilla: Tokyo SOS* in 2003 and *Godzilla: Final Wars* in 2004 simply retread things seen before. *Godzilla: Final Wars* provides nothing new for the monster. The film is meant to be a 50th Anniversary celebration of the Godzilla franchise in a vein similar to *Destroy All Monsters*. Mothra is the only *kaiju* allied with Godzilla as he fights through a horde of *kaiju* from previous films in the franchise unleashed by an alien invasion. Mothra fights Gigan, a cyborg space monster sent to Earth that Mothra defeated in ancient times, defeating the cyborg by sacrificing herself in a suicide run after being set ablaze.

Godzilla: Tokyo SOS is the more frustrating of the two films because it begins with an interesting premise on Mothra, before devolving into familiar territory and missing a golden opportunity to do something new. In *Tokyo SOS*, the JSDF has created Mechagodzilla (named Kiryu in the film) as a weapon to protect themselves against Godzilla, but in order to do so they used the skeleton of the original Godzilla killed in 1954. Mothra and the Shobijin arrive in Japan and appear before Chujo, the same scientist from the original Mothra. The Shobijin tell Chujo that the decision to use Godzilla's bones in Kiryu's construction is an affront to the Earth, claiming "no human may interfere with the bones of the dead." Mothra delivers an ultimatum: Kiryu must be returned to the ocean floor or else Mothra will declare war on humanity. If Japan accepts,

Mothra will take on Kiryu's role as Japan's protector. It is a dilemma of massive proportions: placing all faith in the word of a *kaiju* that damaged Japan in the past or reject the ultimatum and potentially face assault from two *kaiju*.¹⁵

Mothra's ultimatum is a change for the usually benevolent *kaiju* and adds lots of room for interpretation. In the past, Mothra did not cause deliberate destruction; it was merely a byproduct of her size and power. In *Tokyo SOS*, Mothra sees Kiryu as such an abomination to the natural order that she is willing to deliberately cause death and destruction to restore that natural order. Kiryu is a category crisis: bones that are of the dead are used to create a machine that imitates life. Kiryu is in essence a zombie Godzilla.

Kalat proposes that the ultimatum is a metaphor for Japan's relationship with America. According to Kalat's interpretation, Mothra is also a former friend turned foe that attempts to set the conditions of Japan's demilitarization. In 2003, America requested Japan provide troops for the upcoming Iraq War, a request Japan refused as they were bound by their Constitution to do so. The American Press then lambasted Japan for failing to stand by its ally.¹⁶ Kalat's proposal places Mothra as a depiction of America, a radical change that the movie itself refutes. Mothra is seen flying into battle silhouetted by the rising sun, symbolizing Mothra's allegiance to Japan. Jason Barr provides an alternative opinion, stating that Mothra does not take on the role of America dictating

¹⁵ Kalat 247-248

¹⁶ Kalat 248

Japanese martial strength, but instead as a seeker of balance.¹⁷ Kiryu upsets the balance of the natural world by disturbing the bones of the dead. Barr also points out that America sought to militarize Japan in 2003, not demilitarize it. Kalat may have the roles flipped in that case: in which case Kiryu represents militarism encouraged by America, while Mothra stands for traditional Japanese morals and refusing that temptation.

Unfortunately, Mothra's ultimatum is never brought up again after this scene, as the film devotes its entire second half to a massive fight between Kiryu and Mothra against Godzilla. Mothra flies in to battle Godzilla after being summoned by Chujo and his grandson creating her symbol, even fighting beside and taking damage intended for Kiryu, even though the cyborg's mere presence should be an affront to her. Perhaps this is a continuation of Mothra's selflessness and letting go of her grudges to do what's right and protect Japan from Godzilla, but it is frustrating the film sets up a complex and interesting ethical dilemma only to abandon it immediately afterwards.

Tokyo SOS is almost a complete recreation of 1964's *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, with many similar plot beats. Mothra arrives to fight Godzilla and her egg hatches twin larvae who come to fight with their mother. Mothra then sacrifices herself to prevent Godzilla's atomic breath from killing her children. After Kiryu is damaged, Mothra's larvae are the only ones to hold the line against Godzilla and begin spraying him with silk. The movie even ends in a similar way to the 1964 film with Kiryu flying a cocooned Godzilla out to the ocean and both sinking to the bottom of the sea. The film seems content to recreate

¹⁷ Barr 68

scenes from previous films, and in doing so forever remains in the shadow of those earlier movies.

Mothra is consistent in *Tokyo SOS* and *Final Wars* with her previous portrayals, but instead of seriously pursuing new ideas her appearances in 2003 and 2004 are content to be derivative of previous, better films. After the interesting spin *GMK* put on the *kaiju*, Mothra's final two appearances in Toho films are simply a missed opportunity to deepen our understanding of Mothra's connection to the natural world.

Conclusion: Mothra, Queen of the Monsters

Having considered Mothra's journey from her first appearance 60 years ago to the early 2000s, what can Mothra tell us? What knowledge about ourselves does Mothra bring with her? Much like how all of Cohen's theses build up into the Seventh Thesis, all interpretations of Mothra must be put together to answer those questions. Mothra is nature itself, benevolently protecting and supporting us when she is respected. Mothra brings retribution and punishment upon greedy or arrogant men who seek to exploit the natural world for their own gain. Noriega wrote that Mothra was a monster in transition,¹ but Mothra also causes transition and redemption in others. Rolisica changes its stance on Nelson and his show because of Mothra's actions in the original film. Godzilla and Rodan transitioned from destructive, malevolent forces in the 1950s and early 1960s to defenders of mankind and the Earth in the late 1960s and 1970s as a result of Mothra's entreaties and actions in *Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster*. Ando and Takuya are redeemed in 1992's *Godzilla vs. Mothra* because they saw Mothra as the force of the Earth itself. Mr. Goto in *Rebirth of Mothra* recognized his actions damaged the Earth, and Mothra Leo guided him to his new outlook on stewardship and responsibility.

Mothra is also revolutionary in her subtle undermining of Cohen's Sixth Thesis. Many of the "creature feature" films of American cinema in the 1950s sci-fi boom used insectoid creatures for a reason. The mutant ants of *Them!* and the giant praying mantis of *The Deadly Mantis* were chosen because insects evoke a sense of disgust in the viewer,

¹ Noriega 70

capitalizing on the repulsion felt towards “creepy crawlies.” Mothra instead turns a repulsive insect into a thing of beauty. Mothra’s imago form evokes admiration with her graceful patterns and colors. While her larva does not have the same level of beauty that her adult form has, the larva still has a sense of cuteness and vulnerability that makes the audience feel sympathy towards it and root for the *kaiju* to succeed.

In furtherance of Mothra’s identity as a natural *kaiju*, many of Mothra’s attacks are emblematic of natural phenomena. Mothra’s wings create powerful winds that send cars flying and waves crashing ashore in the original *Mothra*. The Shobijin state that Mothra does not know right from wrong in explanation of Mothra’s apparent destructive nature. Mothra is single minded in her purpose, whether it be in rescuing the Shobijin or Cosmos or protecting the Japanese homeland from malevolent *kaiju*. The destruction of property and related deaths is an unintended consequence of Mothra’s pursuit of purpose. Humanity is simply caught in Mothra’s path, similar to the destruction of property and loss of life of those caught in the path of a typhoon. Much like the natural elements of wind and water, Mothra’s wings are both benevolent and destructive. They cause death and destruction through their massive power, yet that destruction allows room for metamorphosis and rebirth. Later films show Mothra releasing golden dust at key points. This golden dust seems to be nature’s energy, as it can be used to both attack opponents and heal allies. The Cosmos glow gold when Mothra revitalizes Battra with the dust, supporting the idea that the dust is some form of energy. Mothra’s son Mothra Leo utilizes a blue-green dust to restore vitality to the environment and attack opponents who

harm the Earth. The use of energy dust showers is a power unique to Mothra and Mothra Leo alone among *kaiju*.

A constant of *kaiju* cinema and a major difference between Japanese and Western films is the lack of a “happy ending.” While Mothra’s original film had a relatively happy conclusion, with the Shobijin returned and Mothra leaving for Infant Island in peace, many of Mothra’s films leave some issue unresolved at the end. The greed that drove Nelson, Kumayama, and Torahata to commit their monstrous acts is not limited to them. Godzilla falls or is dropped into the sea in several films, but not killed. Godzilla survives to maraud again. The environmental issues of the 1990s films are not resolved either. Mothra Leo may have restored the trees in Hokkaido, but it is on humanity to show stewardship and care for nature to keep the environment in a healthy state. Finally, the debate at the core of *GMK*, between remembering or ignoring the past, is still unresolved when the film ends, but now Mothra and the Guardian Monsters are no longer corporeal. The anxieties at the core of Western science-fiction films are resolved at the conclusion, while the anxieties of Mothra’s films remain. Mothra’s films end by placing the burden of action on humanity’s shoulders to follow through on the film’s message, as opposed to Western science-fiction films where new technology and intellect “save the day.”

Mothra confronts greed, power, and selfishness in every movie she appears in, and thus is the natural counterpart to these characteristics. In this way, Mothra rises as a morally superior being and serves as an example of what we could be at our best. In an answer to Cohen’s Fifth Thesis, Mothra stands at the border of moral responsibility, not

just as our creation but as a maternal figure calling us away from selfishness and greed to do what is right for all instead of just ourselves. Mothra calls on us to help both our fellow human beings in times of need and protect the planet we live on.

Mothra shares a dichotomy with Godzilla as a result, which explains why both their franchises are so intertwined. Mothra represents what has been traditionally considered as feminine: selflessness, nurturing and protective of those that respect her. Her benevolence is indiscriminate, protecting even those who may not be worthy of her self-sacrifice. In a reflection of her natural metamorphosis, her character arc also displays evolution from a monster-god who only protects her people to a protector of the Earth and the natural world. Mothra embraces the cycle of life, dying and being reborn again and again. With each death and rebirth as her series progresses, Mothra moves further along her transition as the defender of the Earth. Meanwhile, Godzilla can be seen to represent stereotypical masculinity: destructive brute force that punishes mankind indiscriminately for its hubris and arrogance over their attempts to control the environment.² Mothra progresses further and further into an incarnation of life itself, while Godzilla was transformed into an instrument of death. Mothra's strength lies in her constant state of metamorphosis and rebirth, and this power counterbalances Godzilla's durability and brute force. Thus, Mothra and Godzilla are perfect foils to each other. If Godzilla is the "King of the Monsters," then Mothra is well deserving of her title as the "Queen of the Monsters."

² This role is also filled by Battra in *Godzilla vs. Mothra*.

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