



Welcome to the December issue of *The Japan Society Review*! We are finishing 2023 with a great selection of literary works, from classic authors to new voices, from short stories to long historical novels, and the comeback of the iconic Godzilla. We hope you all have enjoyed our reviews this year and would like to thank once again our dedicated reviewers for their work. From 2024, *The Japan Society Review* will be switching from a bimonthly to a quarterly publication, but will still include stimulating suggestions to read, watch and learn more about/from Japan. Please let us know if you have any recommendations of books, films, plays, exhibitions, or events to review. We are always open to ideas and feedback from our readers.

The issue opens with a review of one of the most beloved classics of modern Japanese literature, *Night Train to the Stars* by Miyazawa Kenji. A collection of short stories, Miyazawa's fairy tales and fables captivate readers with unforgettable characters and descriptions of nature, while also offering insights into Japanese society, folklore and traditions. The issue also includes reviews of three

works written by women showcasing the wide range of topics, styles and concerns of contemporary female writers. The monumental *The End of August*, from the author of *Tokyo Ueno Station*, Yu Miri, explores the history, trauma and identity conflicts of the Korean population in Japan through a semi-autobiographical story. *Trinity, Trinity, Trinity* by Kobayashi Erika constructs a dystopian world where dementia, memory and the invisible thread of nuclear radiation are all intertwined. The short story of *Sasayama* by Nadifa Mohamed, originally published in *Granta* in 2014, details the young writer's experience of a summer in Sasayama, a rural city in Hyogo prefecture, and her reflections as a black woman in Japan.

The last pages of the December issue feature a review of the last instalment in the legendary film saga of Godzilla. *Godzilla Minus One*, directed by Yamazaki Takashi, returns to its origins in the postwar era, delivering a message that is at once hopeful and subversive.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Editor

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

Reviewers

Chris Corker, Laurence Green, Renae Lucas-Hall and Azmina Sohail.

Image: Detail from the cover of *Night Train to the Stars*.

Night Train to the Stars

by Miyazawa Kenji
translated by John Bester and David Mitchell

Vintage Classics (2022)
ISBN-13: 978-1784877767

Review by Renae Lucas-Hall



Night Train to the Stars is a collection of short stories written by Miyazawa Kenji (1896 – 1933), one of the most cherished and enchanting authors in modern Japan. Hailing from Hanamaki in Iwate Prefecture, an area renowned for hot springs and stunning mountain ranges, Miyazawa loathed his family's pawnbroking business because it took advantage of poor farmers, so he chose a career in agricultural science. Unfortunately, he passed away at the age of 37 without ever experiencing fame, despite having written over 100 stories and 800 poems. It was his family and friends who revealed his genius to the world. His Buddhist faith is evident in most of his stories, posing philosophical and religious questions and answers. Creating a world of fantasy comparable with Narnia in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950) by C. S. Lewis, Miyazawa 'mixed local elements with his imagination to create a literary world that is truly magical', according to the introduction by author and lecturer Nagai Kaori. 'Miyazawa called his fictional world Ihatov, which he defines as Iwate as a dreamland that really exists in his mind. In his dreamland, everything is possible' (p. xiii).

The first tale of the collection titled 'Night Train to the Stars' takes place in Japan on the day that celebrates "the Festival of the Milky Way". A young boy called Giovanni and the rest of his class are encouraged by their teacher to go outside and look at the stars after school. The first few pages are a lesson on the Tanabata festival or Star Festival that takes place once a year on the 7th day of the 7th month. Everything seems ordinary up until the section titled "Milky Way Station" when one is transported into a unique world of make-believe. Giovanni and his friend Campanella can run like the wind in this fantasyland without getting out of breath, geese taste like sweet candy, and maps given out at the Milky Way Station are made of obsidian. Giovanni's train ticket allows him to travel all the way to Heaven and beyond.

In Japan, fox spirits or *kitsune* can shapeshift, bewitch, and trick people. The theme is jealousy in the next story 'The Earthgod and the Fox'. This fox reminds us of people who stretch the truth to impress others.

However, the death at the end of this story proves that a lot of Miyazawa's fables may not be meant for children.

Foxes are mentioned again in the tale, 'General Son Ba-Yu'. 'They can put a whole army of close on ten thousand under their spell' (p.66). This is a story of three Chinese doctors who are also brothers living in a country called La-yu. General Son Ba-yu returns to his village from 'the sands beyond the Great Wall' but he has been riding for so long he is stuck to his horse and he cannot dismount! The doctors rectify all his pains and problems with their magic medicines and potions.

'Ozbel and the Elephant' is a story about greed and trickery. Ozbel puts an elephant to work and takes advantage of him until his friends rescue him. In 'The First Deer Race', the protagonist Kaju can suddenly understand what the deer are saying (deer are considered messengers to the gods) and the famous bear hunter Fuchizawa Kojuro can understand the bears talking in 'The Bears of Nametoko'. In this narrative, the death of the bear hunter is treated with a high level of respect showing the fine line between the living and the deceased as both are considered to be of great importance. This is connected to both Buddhism and Shintoism.

Mr Kaneta Ichiro is invited by the Wildcat to a trial as a judge in 'The Wildcat and the Acorns'. The fact there are 300 tiny acorns all wearing red trousers reminds the reader of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift and his interactions with the Lilliputians. The acorns are competing to be the roundest, the biggest, or the tallest. The Wildcat offers a reward to Ichiro for helping him which brings to mind the Japanese customs of *on* (benevolence) and *giri* (obligation). Gift giving is an essential aspect in Japanese culture for fostering social connections between friends and business partners. The Wildcat also arranges for a carriage to transport Ichiro back home. 'A magnificent carriage, constructed with a large white mushroom, materialized before them. It was pulled by a peculiar grey horse, resembling a rat in appearance'. Filmmaker Miyazaki Hayao, a fervent admirer of Miyazawa, may have been inspired by this mushroom carriage described on page 103. It could have potentially influenced the creation of the *nekobasu* or catbus in the Studio Ghibli animation film *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988).

Remember the 'Drink Me' potion in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll which makes the drinker shrink in size? What about the red and blue pill that Morpheus offers Neo in the film *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999) ? In another

Miyazawa's tale, 'The Man of the Hills', a Chinese man offers the protagonist a drink which turns him into a small box on page 136. Later in the story, he is offered a pill to change him back to his normal self.

'The Thirty Frogs' is a cautionary tale which is not unlike a yakuza trap in Shinjuku. These 30 frogs work hard and enjoy their daily tasks. Everything goes well for the frogs until they came across a new shop with a sign 'Imported Whisky – two and a half rin a cup' (a rin is one-thousandth of a Japanese yen) on page 166. This shop is run by a bullfrog who plies them with whisky. When they cannot pay their bills, he sets them to work, keeping them inebriated so they cannot escape but, in the end, the bullfrog does shows remorse.

One of the most charming stories is 'The Fire Stone' which features a young hare named Homoi who saves a baby bird from drowning and in doing so he receives a fire stone from the king. It is a special

and very beautiful stone, and he can see the Milky Way inside it when he put it to his eye. In this enchanting yarn, the animals gracefully emulate the Japanese tradition of bowing. A heartwarming moment occurs when the mother bird instructs her young lark to bid farewell with a proper bow. As readers delve into this delightful chronicle, reminiscent of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), they will find themselves captivated by its gentle lessons on goodness and kindness.

Miyazawa's fairy tales and fables not only captivate readers with their unforgettable characters and superb descriptions of nature, but also offer profound insights into society, relationships, the class system, values, vices, and the importance of acceptance. By reading his stories, we are enriched with a sense of joy and inspired to improve ourselves as individuals and as a collective. [S](#)

The End of August

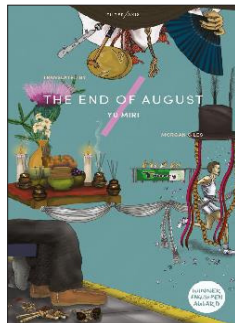
by Yu Miri

translated by Morgan Giles

Tilted Axis Press (2023)

ISBN-13: 978-191128469

Review by Laurence Green



How does one go about piecing together the minutiae of generational trauma? To unpick and unpack the heavy theme of postwar migration of Koreans to Japan in novel form, without appearing trite or superficial? If anyone is up to the challenge, then surely it is Yu Miri, whose *Tokyo Ueno Station* was a razor-like intervention into the much-overlooked theme of homelessness in Japan. Unafraid to tackle arguably taboo themes, Yu was well-deservedly rewarded when Morgan Giles' deft translation of *Tokyo Ueno Station* picked up a National Book Award in 2020, simultaneously prompting renewed interest in the book back in Japan.

In *The End of August* - originally released in 2004 in Japanese, but appearing for the first time in English translation, again from Morgan Giles - Yu turns the lens on another complex, intimidating topic. Taking as its setting 1930s Japanese-occupied Korea, the plot centres around star runner Lee Woo-Cheol, who - in what is a deft bit of blurring between auto-fiction and reality - is the grandfather of Yu Miri. The novel plays out as a complex familial web of relatives and acquaintances, past and present intermixed and interwoven in much the same manner as the fraught

relations between Japan and Korea are exposed through characters such as a young teenager who is tricked into becoming a comfort woman for Japanese soldiers. Yu is present within the story as both potential authorial self-insert and character in her own right.

Touted as a semi-autobiographical dissection of nationhood and family, the novel goes to great pains to cut deep into the minefield of identity as comprised of what we are born into, and what is imposed on us. Yu's authorial voice is sharp and modern in its approach, mixing in a constant breath-like refrain of inhalation and exhalation (the ever-present rhythm of the runner), whilst simultaneously feeling in debt to classic familial sagas like Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters*. The result is a work that feels like a totem of high literary 'art' - impossible to consume as a straightforward narrative, but rather as a series of interlinked experiments; pen-portraits that need to be chewed over, savoured, and analysed in minutely slow page-by-page detail to extract maximum value.

What fascinates about Miri is her multifacetedness as a writer. The now sadly out of print *Gold Rush* saw her operating with a literary tone and pace that felt more akin to a crime thriller author, while some of the best moments of the aforementioned *Tokyo Ueno Station* felt like the script to a primetime TV documentary. *The End of August* feels like something else again; so lyrically (and sometimes quite literally textually) bold in places - with many passages of Korean language left largely untranslated in this English version - and yet offering a tale that is ultimately about the most

essential of human drives and desires. The novel feels intimately wrapped up in a zone of consciousness in which nation and body are inseparable - sex, language, blood, birth - all become an inseparable tangle of thoughtspace in which identity - Korean, Japanese, both, neither - become questions that require the space of 700 pages worth of textual disassemblage to get even halfway closer to answering.

The End of August stands as both a supreme literary accomplishment, and supreme literary challenge. Its intimidating length and style will prove

insurmountable for many - while for those with the patience to work at it, excavating its rewards piece by piece, the lyrical beauty at its heart will begin to shine through. For those new to Yu's writing, this is resolutely not a great entry point - but make no doubt about it, this hefty tome is another landmark entry in the career of one of Japan's most important contemporary voices, and the sheer accomplishment of its translation into English is an impressive statement of intent in allowing that voice to shine through to the widest possible audience. §

Trinity, Trinity, Trinity

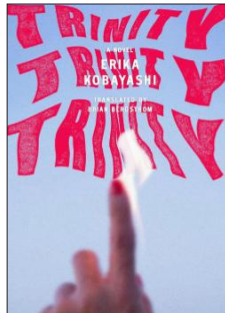
by Kobayashi Erika

Translated by Brian Bergstrom

Astra House (2022)

ISBN-13: 978-1662601156

Review by Chris Corker



There are a number of reasons for us to be afraid of nuclear radiation, but two in particular distinguish it from our other fears: its invisibility and its longevity. The first fuels paranoia, the second a sense of futility. Japan, the only country to have been the victim of an atomic bomb, continues to have a complicated relationship with nuclear material. In fact, it is difficult to overstate the ambivalence towards atomic energy and its role in a sense of modernising progress. For better or worse, nuclear power and radiation are now part of the Japanese national psyche. The 2011 Fukushima disaster was thus not an isolated disaster, but a resurfacing of an enduring social anxiety. Just as with the lifespan of radiation itself, an end to this ongoing threat can seem incomprehensible.

Trinity, Trinity, Trinity by Kobayashi Erika is a rumination on incomprehensibility. This sounds like a bit of a contradiction, but all philosophical speculations begin by trying to understand what cannot be understood, and this book is as much a philosophical speculation as it is a novel. *Trinity* takes place during the run up to the 2020 Olympics (although, being written before the games, much is imagined) and centres on a grandmother suffering from dementia, in addition to her daughter, who seems to be on the verge of her own form of physical and mental breakdown. Both of these deteriorative conditions are somehow linked to radiation, the fear of which is beginning to divide society at large. As elderly people begin to carry radioactive rocks, a symptom of a new

onset of dementia dubbed 'turning Trinity', the stigma around both radiation and old people deepens.

While the emotional core of the novel is a grounded and touching tale of ageing and the fading of memory, housed within the feverish prose is an attempt to come to terms with the aforementioned nuclear heritage. This is not a novel about what will happen if the world becomes irradiated; this is a story about what we have to do now that the world is already irradiated. How can we, as human beings, live with this invisible threat, and how can we respect radiation without revering it?

Also a visual artist by trade, Kobayashi states on her official website that the aim of her work is to represent the invisible. In one section of *Trinity*, this is illustrated by the tireless efforts of Marie Curie to give a face to the radium she had proved only in theory, but alongside this is the repeatedly mentioned 'unseen force' that thrives in invisibility, opening doors, running taps and even unlocking mobile phones without the need of touch. While the danger of Curie's work was plain to see in her physical deterioration, this 'unseen force' is an apparently benign convenience that is in truth still dependent on the invisible threat of nuclear radiation.

With convenience and invisibility comes ignorance, and this forms the backbone of the generational conflict in the book, a war waged between the elderly who want to remember the cost of the modern world and the young who want to forget it. The rocks that the old carry are thus physical representations of a phenomenon the young have forgotten altogether. Even while it remains.

An old man arrested for handing out irradiated bills delivers the following message in his online manifesto: 'If making visible the suffering and anguish of the invisible is terrorism, then call me a terrorist. This is the beginning of the revenge of the invisible.'

Revenge is a dish best served cold, but tensions run hot as the younger generation fight to combat this retribution, even if its only purpose is to get them to acknowledge a hidden reality. The novel itself, which never condescends to its reader, does not shy away from incomprehension but rather embraces it as the first step towards understanding. The timeline is not always clear, giving the feeling that what is happening is not only happening now but always, that the future and past have seeped into the present like poison. The 1964 and 2022 Tokyo Olympics form two points on a Mobius strip so that celebration always leads to concealment (and concealment to celebration): spiring away the homeless before the opening ceremony, the big questions of societal ill are forgotten in the fanfare. This concealment leads the mother's teenage daughter to conclude that reality seems 'obviously fake'.

Much of the world we live in now is invisible or, we could say, virtual; but it is only when we stop taking these virtual things (those 'unseen forces') for granted that we can question at what cost comes their invisibility. This effort to know – even to know ugliness – is key in *Trinity*.

Informed by contemporary reality and painstaking in its historical research, there is a different kind of incomprehension at work outside of the narrative. Translator Brian Bergstrom has done an admirable job capturing Kobayashi's quick-fire style, what we might call "memo-prose". The novel is so stuffed with imagery that it leads to a literary FOMO in which the reader suspects some deeper truth just beyond their reach. A familiarity with modern Japanese society and its challenges, especially the ageing population and controversies surrounding TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) during the Fukushima disaster, however, should help those feeling overwhelmed. Knowledge of the Manhattan Project would also be a plus, but a certain newly-released blockbuster movie will help with that.

Even for the uninitiated, the array of imagery and metaphor in *Trinity* is enticing. Images cascade in the blinding inundation of a death dream. Lead, the Rising Sun, a shaking bed. A black cylindrical object atop a Mahogany chest of drawers. There is a heavy metal band named after the late pastor John Donne, whose final sermon was considered a pronouncement of his own demise. Several times an isolated countdown runs down the page: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

But counting to what? Ignition, detonation, extinction. The music of an alarm clock is the tolling of a bell. A chime announcing a birth and a death at the same time. The two are conflated so that the ejected ovarian eggs of the mother are always accompanied by a deluge of blood, 'flowing forth to be flushed away, to disappear completely, meaninglessly, creating nothing, being nothing'. As with Tawada Yoko's equally haunting *The Last Children of Tokyo* (2014), the future for subsequent generations is bleak, the noted miscarriage of Marie Curie's own baby a dark premonition for those that follow in an age of nuclear contamination.

The thought of a line of female descendants is something that soothes the mother, but as the novel draws to a close it becomes clear that her line has been cursed to suffer her own fate of destructive morbidity. A Donne poem quoted in *Trinity* ends: 'one short sleep past, we wake eternally. And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die'. The only eternal entity here seems to be radiation, levels of which, Kobayashi writes, are still detectable in the graves of the long ago deceased.

While the symbolism of the rock as radioactive vessel is most apparent in *Trinity*, an arguably more important symbol is that of fire, the most enigmatic of humankind's symbols. Just as Oppenheimer and his scientists in New Mexico gathered around 'the gadget' and hoped for a flame, so the characters here crowd around the television for a glimpse of the Olympic torch. As she does so well elsewhere, Kobayashi manages to intertwine two Promethean conflagrations representing progress and its cost. 'As long as there was fire,' thinks the mother in *Trinity*, 'they were powerless not to fly into it'. Detonation and jubilation seem to go hand in hand.

To return to the epigraph at the beginning of this review, *Trinity, Trinity, Trinity* asks how the Japanese people can hope to contest with an invisible and undying threat. Perhaps the simplest answer the book has to offer is that we must first recognise that it exists. Kobayashi has written a novel that does a truly impressive job of threading modern anxieties into a compelling story that is informed by both wartime history and contemporary societal issues. Like all good works of art, this one does not preach but asks the reader to begin searching for answers themselves, because to understand the incomprehensible you must first admit that you don't know what it is.

And then, that you want to learn. §

Sasayama

by Nadifa Mohamed

Granta (2014)

Review by Azmina Sohail

When reading about meetings between Eastern and Western cultures we often associate it with contrasts between an Asian tradition and a European tradition. But what happens when the Eastern culture is Japanese and the 'Western' culture is African, or in the case of Nadifa Mohamed's essay, Somalian? *Sasayama*, published in *Granta* in 2014, details the young writer's experience of a summer in Sasayama, a rural city in Hyogo prefecture and her reflections as a black woman.

It can be argued that one of the outstanding physical qualities of a black woman is her hair. The beauty of the Afro is that it is a particular texture that requires specific care and treatments. Mohamed is fully aware of this and implies that it was unlikely she would meet a black hairdresser on her trip so had brought products from London, namely "relaxers". On this occasion however, she had had a mishap after using 'a home-dye kit' and resorted to visiting a salon.

Her cycle ride through Sasayama to the salon details the epitome of rural Japan with the 'heavy washing machines spinning in yards, discarded snake skins... rice paddies sibilant with crickets and tended by bent-backed old women wearing neon plastic visors'. The imagery here connotes a homely life with laundry, food, and families - a stark contrast to her life in London she details later on. She ultimately enjoys her environment stating 'I felt far from home and free'.

When she arrives at the salon, her insecurity of appearing different is made apparent. She gestures to the owners in 'the stiff-necked way that the local teenage boys seemed to find so amusing' to blow dry her hair. The owners seem happy to help by exclaiming 'Hai! Hai' (Yes! Yes) and lead her to the central chair in the room. They then attempt to style her hair with 'paddle brushes', dryers and flat irons, 'sweating' and 'flushing'



around her. What's interesting is that the owners themselves look different from what is associated with rural life. The man is wearing 'tight black trousers', has 'heavily plucked eyebrows' and a 'line of foundation along his jaw' whilst the girl has a 'row of empty piercings along the cartilage of her ear'. It's possible that their appearance may have caused them insecurity living in Sasayama; in this moment the notion of "appearing different" actually binds them together but it's unclear whether Mohamed herself recognises this.

Mohamed then thinks back to her life in London which is equally busy, fast-paced and full of life. In contrast to Sasayama, London was uncertain, where 'decisions need to be made, seemingly so quickly about where to work, where to live' and 'who to be'. It seems to match the uncertainty of the hairdressers and how to treat her hair. Despite their efforts, her hair turns out to be 'large, newsreader-style and brittle with hairspray' which she quietly accepts eventually cycling back home 'letting the breeze do the rest.'

The essay gives a brief but strong insight into the notion of cultural diversity within rural Japan. Mohamed is fully aware that this is something yet to develop but appreciates the efforts being made. "Difference" comes in all shapes and sizes with the hairdressers themselves appearing different from those traditionally associated with rural Japan. It will only take time and exposure to people like Mohamed for the people of rural Sasayama to fully embrace and understand the life of a young black woman. §

Godzilla Minus One

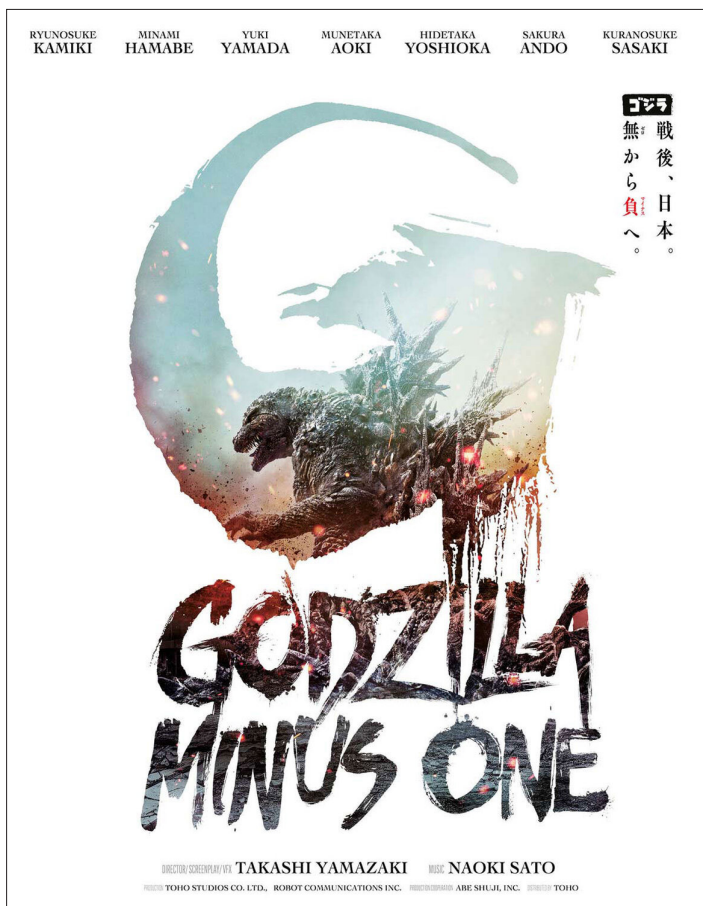
Directed by Yamazaki Takashi (2023)

Cast: Kamiki Ryunosuke, Hamabe Minami, Yamada Yuki

Review by Chris Corker

There is a tendency to think lightly of the Godzilla franchise, to chalk it off as a popcorn entertainment

that is principally for those in their mid to late-teens. This view undervalues its cultural significance. While the original movie may have its origins in the less-than-stellar American monster flick *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) – itself an adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *The Fog Horn* (1951), in which a dinosaur rises from the depths to answer the low moaning call of a lighthouse – the Godzilla movies have from their beginnings been intertwined with a postwar moral



reconciliation and the ongoing threat of nuclear disaster. While some of the films in the franchise embody the more lurid delights of the aforementioned *The Beast*, others have embraced postwar tragedy for a more elegiac tone similar to that found in the Bradbury short story.

Minus One is most certainly an elegy. In interviews director Yamazaki Takashi has been keen to stress that this movie is a very different beast (get it?) from 2016's *Shin Godzilla*, and it is difficult to overstate how disparate the two films are. Where *Shin*, a satirical take on the ineptness of the government during the 3/11 Tohoku disaster, is darkly comical in tone, *Minus One* is a film that takes itself entirely seriously, at times perhaps to the extent of feeling overwrought. Given the directness of its historical setting in the years immediately following 1945, however, and an approach that does not squirm away from the ugliness left behind as the shadow of war recedes, *Minus One* still packs an emotional punch. Moreover, a switch from what Yamazaki calls the 'creepy' design of *Shin's* Godzilla to the intensely wrathful version found here results in a genuine malice to the creature that it could be argued has not been seen since the original 1954 design.

The plot follows a former kamikaze pilot, Shikishima who, with the war coming to an end, withdraws without orders from the front lines to a repair base on Odo Island. Already filled with shame,

an encounter with an as yet un-irradiated Godzilla on the island once again sees him paralysed with fear and unable to take action. While his life is spared, he carries the further burden of those he believes died because of his inability to act. While he might expect his return to Tokyo to be a form of escape from the horrors of the war, in the ruins of his former community he finds only further death, guilt and misery. When the now gargantuan Godzilla begins to run amok in the ward of Shinagawa a year later, Shikishima must muster the courage to protect his adopted family and the modest life they have managed to make for themselves.

What *Minus One* captures best is a sense of helplessness, important given the historical context. The characters in this film have little with which to combat Godzilla, a monster taller than a skyscraper, fuelled by a seemingly endless supply of nuclear energy and with the ability to regenerate its wounds. One of the tensest scenes in the film features a sea bound chase reminiscent of the film *Jaws* (1975), with our heroes trying to defeat the creature with a small mounted automatic gun and recommissioned mines. When a Japanese battle cruiser arrives to assist, it becomes clear that no matter the size of the gun, no matter the ferocity of the weapons that have taken the lives of so many humans, they are no match to Godzilla, the result of savage prehistorical evolution and a potentially world-ending elemental force. As has been noted by scholars writing on the Godzilla movies, such as William Tsutsui, there is a strange catharsis in viewing this hopelessness. Hubris reduced to futility thrills as much as it disconcerts.

In the face of such overwhelming power, only a miracle can save the day. In the Showa era (1926-1989) original, this was the development of a new deadly weapon that its creator, Doctor Serizawa, believes is so dangerous that he takes its secrets to his early grave. This gives the film, even as its heroes celebrate at the conclusion, a sombre tone, as well as leaving the audience with the unsettling idea that the advancement of lethal technology will never cease.



As much as it echoes the original, one of *Minus One's* real strengths is in its deviation from that conclusion. Yamazaki has told interviewers that while *Shin* was concerned with the government, this new film is about civilians; and here those civilians are not only victims but the basis for a miracle that comes from community rather than government. And, while the technology used is hardly benign in its application, it is starkly different to the destructive force that gives birth to Godzilla. In reality, the weapons here are ones intended for military use but put to new purpose, a reapplication in fitting with the overall credo of the characters here: we must live beside this postwar legacy but move forwards and away from it.

Minus One delivers a message that is at once hopeful and subversive. It is an assertion that governments cannot be trusted to deal with an evil that they help to spread. In our modern ecological situation, in which nuclear contamination can be replaced by a number of other forms of insidious harm, the film contains a call for communities to come together to combat a legacy of destruction that those same governments are seen as incapable of fixing. In this, *Shin* and *Minus One* are similar. But while the ending of *Minus One* stops only marginally short of saying 'Godzilla will return', its tone is not as sombre, even if there is a closing hint at the radiation-based sickness that is left in Godzilla's wake. There are some mistakes, after all, that do not permit recovery without a caveat.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Peter Bebergal describes the 'paradox' of Godzilla as a character of both joy and fear, concluding that the monster has evolved so far beyond his original metaphor for scientific hubris that he can never return. But is this versatility not the strength of such a cultural icon? I would argue that



Godzilla has never been entirely cut loose from his ties with nuclear disaster and the 1954 Daigo Fukuryu Maru incident, and those ties are no clearer than in *Minus One*. Closing in on the 70th anniversary of the franchise, this film is a return; it is a return to a Godzilla with the presence to incite terror, and a return to a landscape ravaged by war, but it is also a return to the true cautionary warning that Godzilla embodies: the pitfalls of unshackled progress. Now that the word has entered common parlance we can add another tag to this versatile character: Godzilla is the product of the Anthropocene.

Despite all of this subtext, *Godzilla: Minus One* manages somehow to be an entertaining blockbuster that, while sometimes overt in its use of pathos, for the most part earns its emotional highs and lows. It is also a movie that deserves to be seen on the big screen, to feel that strange viewing catharsis as the power of Godzilla's roar hits you like the train he throws so effortlessly through the sky. *Minus One* is one of those rare films that delivers both in ecstatic thrills and sobering reflections: in sum, it is a film that fulfils the potential the films have always possessed, even if only a handful have realised it. §

