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Colossal

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Colossal* (2017) directed by Nacho Vigalondo.

Keywords

Monster movies, Feminism, Alcoholism

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture* (2015). He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



Colossal (2017), dir. by Nacho Vigalando

Gloria has a drinking problem. She loses her job because of it, and her boyfriend Tim throws her out of the apartment because of it. She drinks to excess and forgets what she does while drunk; she can barely function. In this situation, she moves back to her parent's house in her hometown, with no money and no furniture and no plan.

Her childhood friend Oscar helps her get furniture for the house, and gives her a job at his bar. This gives her more occasion to drink. In the midst of this pedestrian life, Gloria finds that she has an avatar, a giant monster that appears in Seoul, Korea at 8:05 AM her time for a few minutes each day if she walks through a local park at that time; the monster then mimics her physical motions exactly, moment by moment, whether she intends this or not.

I had thought that this movie would use the monster as a metaphor for her inner demons, or her drinking, which finds uncontrolled angry expression in the external world. In fact, the phenomenon is ultimately given a relatively logical (for a monster movie) explanation from events

in her past, and the destruction she causes to the city is totally accidental. But she does realize that she has to give up drinking to avoid the sort of unintentional damage that might result from lack of caution in regards to her “superpower.” She is not tempted to use it for any selfish reasons, as she is really a kind person who does not want the power at all.

But the plot takes a new turn when another character discovers a similar superpower, and he wants to use it to control and intimidate others, including Gloria. Now the movie becomes one about female empowerment and righteous anger, as she learns to stand up to men in a way that she never has before. She has had low self-esteem and has been controlled by men, but now she has the ability to find her inner Godzilla. And just like those old Japanese monster movies, she becomes a “monster for good” that battles the evil monster to save the city, not to mention herself.

Director Nacho Vigalando said at the Q&A that this is a film about female agency and “male bullshit.” He didn’t want to make a movie in which two men fight over a woman, or in which the woman is a sidekick to the male hero, but one in which the female is really the hero who stands up to male violence. It is really a feminist monster movie, which is no doubt why when Anne Hathaway read the script she instantly wanted to do it. Vigalando said that he expected this to be a small Spanish language film, but Hathaway opened doors and this led to other major actors and major financing.

Movies with strong women seem to be prominent at this year’s Sundance Film Festival, which is a nice corrective to longstanding Hollywood traditions of marginalizing female characters as secondary or eye-candy. Hathaway brings her characteristic humor and honesty to the role, playing an ordinary woman called to be extraordinary in defense of right. This is a very funny movie, but it is also a great story about righteous female anger—which also seems to be rather topical these days. The movie will be released to theaters in April. See it with your daughter.