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VENGEANCE IS MINE

(*Fukushu Suru wa Ware ni Ari*), 1979.

A Shochiku film. Color, 125 min.

Screenplay: Ataru Baba, based on a novel by Ryuzo Saki.

Photography: Shinsaku Himeda. **Music:** Shinichiro Ikebe.

With Ken Ogata, Mayumi Ogawa, Mitsuko Baisho, Rentaro Mikuni, Nijiko Kiyokawa.

Vengeance is Mine, Imamura's newest film after an eight-year hiatus, is perhaps his most complex and mature work. It is based on Ryuzo Saki's "nonfiction novel" that won the 1976 Naoki Prize; both novel and film derive their title from the Bible (Romans 12:19). The film is a harrowing examination of an unregenerate criminal mind, punctuated with grisly humor. Based on an actual multiple-murder case, the film follows the flight of Iwao Enokizu, a Kyushu worker who kills two fellow workers and manages to elude a nationwide police manhunt for eighty days. Imamura pursues at length Enokizu's quirky entanglement with the lonely proprietress of a low-class inn, where he passes himself off as a Kyoto University professor. In Imamura's words, Enokizu is "a man without a heart," and indeed the concept of

remorse never enters his mind. Enokizu's few brief moments of reflection on his fate are presented not as soul-searching or regret, but as striking visual metaphors, as when he glances at the cemetery outside his bedroom window and sees it in a blinding light which gradually dissolves to total darkness. Enokizu's wretched life, presented in flashbacks, is viewed with neither sympathy nor scorn. When Enokizu's true identity is learned by his innkeeper mistress and her perverted old mother, the mother—herself a convicted murderer—tells him that his fatal weakness is simply that "you never kill the people you really wanted to." Before his execution, Enokizu confronts his sanctimonious Christian father and says: "If I had to kill, you are the one I should have killed."

