

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Kuroi ame</b>
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1989 May 24
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kuroi ame (Black rain), Imamura, Shohei, 1989

**Kuroi Ame** ✓  
**(Black Rain)**  
**(JAPAN)**

**Cannes** A Toei Co. release of a Imamura Production Ltd., Hayashibara Group, Tohokushinsha Film Co. production. Produced by Hisa Iino. Directed by Shohei Imamura. Screenplay, Toshiro Ishido, Imamura, based on the novel by Masuji Ibuse; camera (black & white), Takashi Kawamata; editor, Hajime Okayusu; music, Toru Takemitsu; art direction, Hisso Inagaki; sound, Ken'ichi Benitani; lighting, Yasuo Iwaki. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing), May 17, 1989. Running time: 123 MIN.

Yasuko ..... Yoshiko Tanaka  
Shigematsu ..... Kazuo Kitamura  
Shigako ..... Etsuko Ichihara  
Shokichi ..... Shoichi Ozawa  
Kotaro ..... Norihei Miki  
Yuichi ..... Kaisuka Ishide

■ **This is a rigorous, highly disciplined film that like the superb novel on which it is based treats a terrible, albeit familiar, subject — the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945 — with an admirable absence of special pleading.**

Because "Kuroi Ame" (Black Rain) builds its considerable emotional punch by meticulous observation of detail rather than melodramatic flagwaving, it emerges as an exceptionally strong film and a probable Cannes prize-winner of some sort.

More importantly, it marks the return of director Shohei Imamura to an earlier, more fruitful phase of his career. He provided an obvious misfire at Cannes four years ago with "Zagan" after triumphing in 1983 with "Narayama Bushiko" (The Ballad Of Narayama), which copped the Golden Palm.

"Black Rain" is more reminiscent of the director's previous pics such as "Nippon Konchuchi" (Insect Woman). "Rain" uses the bombing and devastation as a point of departure for a tragic sequence of events afflicting ordinary people: a young woman and her immediate family.

Because they were traveling just outside the city of Hiroshima, they survived the immediate devastation only to pay an even more insidious price — lingering death by nuclear radiation. Imamura vividly symbolizes the initial contamination when the woman (Yoshiko Tanaka) is splattered by inky drops of rain during a ferry ride to her uncle's home.

The ruthless aftermath of the bombing is effectively handled early in the film. As the girl and her uncle (Kazuo Kitamura) examine the debris, they witness: a woman succoring a charred infant, a blinded man falling out of a window, a wrenching encounter of a boy deformed beyond recognition and his brother who can't recognize him; tough stuff made poignant by Imamura's restrained treatment.

The film concentrates on the ensuing five years as the family unsuccessfully tries to marry off the young girl — tainted as a virtual social pariah because of the radiation exposure. Imamura here plays to his strength. He presents a telling array of physical detail of rural Japanese life that blends with

his characterizations — giving them extraordinary appeal. Although shot in black & white, "Rain" is unusually handsome. (Budgeted at about \$3.5-million, it was lensed from June to the end of last year in a small mountain village in Okayama Prefecture, facing the Sea of Setonaikai off the southern Japanese island of Shikoku.)

The minor characters are convincingly drawn, although the director appears less sure how to handle a crazed soldier with whom the girl finds warm romantic rapport. Nonetheless, the overall effect facilitates an inevitable ending conveyed with enormous grace and even a touch of surprise.

There are some flaws. The film tends at times to be paced monotonously, a situation that isn't helped by Tanaka's passive portrayal of the young woman. The plot is moved along by the all-too-familiar device of off-screen narration, a reading of the uncle's diary compiled to medically certify the young woman as cured. And, the special effects are wanting in some respects. The charred corpses occasionally resemble rejects from a low-budget special effects department.

These are minor glitches. Takashi Kawamata's photography is excellent. Toru Takemitsu's score is fittingly spaced but very moving. Kitamura as the uncle is a standout.

In all, an uncompromisingly strong film. —Sege.

*Variety, 5/27-30/89*