

## Ibuse Masuji's *Kuroi Ame* (1965) and Imamura Shōhei's Film Adaptation (1989)

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According to John Treat in his monumental work on A-bomb literature, Ibuse Masuji's 井伏鱒二 *Kuroi Ame* 黒い雨 ("Black Rain"; 1965) is "far more widely read, translated, and taught than any other single example of Japanese A-bomb literature."<sup>1</sup> It won him the Noma Literary Prize in 1966, and with its excerpt often included in the high school textbooks, its canonical status as a pedagogical tool to draw lessons from Hiroshima is indisputable. Ibuse himself however is said to have been somewhat embarrassed by all the attention. As someone without the first-hand experience of the A-bomb himself, Ibuse famously refused to have it included in the anthology of A-bomb literature.<sup>2</sup> Imamura Shōhei's 今村昌平 filmatization of the novel, twenty-four years later, also received ample critical and popular attention, winning him five Japanese Academy Awards, even though it controversially missed the Golden Palm at Cannes.

Comparing these two works across media with focus on the process of adaptation will be the aim of the present essay, and there are a number of obvious axes of comparison for this: the change of time from 1965 to 1989, the change of medium from book into movie, and the difference between Ibuse Masuji and Imamura Shōhei,<sup>3</sup> their strategies and concerns as individual artists. Needless to say, the trajectories of these axes crisscross each other, making it sometimes difficult to distinguish between them. To complicate the comparison even more, there is another factor that we must reckon with, which is related to the position of the reader/spectator, a medium in its own right. Our response as the reader/spectator is triggered not only by the total sum of what a given novel and film have to offer, but also by the total sum of our insight accrued from our own life experiences. Both books and films, words and visual images, especially those dealing with traumatic events (which is definitely the case with *Black Rain*) are known to invoke widely disparate emotional reactions in us precisely because they do not mean things on their own. I will therefore give some thoughts to the reception of these works, acknowledging at the same

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<sup>1</sup> TREAT 1995: 263.

<sup>2</sup> TREAT 1995: 270. KUROKO 2014: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Imamura's *Black Rain* is a result of his collaboration with his team—most importantly Ishidō Toshirō 石堂淑朗 (1932–2011), who penned the film manuscript, and not least, Takemitsu Tōru 武満徹 (1930–1996) who provided the music score in the film, just as Ibuse's *Black Rain* is a product of his collaborative efforts with a number of archival materials and diaries.

time that what I present here is an interpretation based on my insight. According to Carl Plantinga, film studies now enjoy a healthy pluralism which allows one to combine different methods as the occasion demands, thanks to critics such as Noel Carroll and David Bordwell, who have made efforts to counter the effects of what they call “medium foundationalism.”<sup>4</sup> Following their cue, I will use a piecemeal approach, trying to answer specific questions about certain aspects of the two artworks, both of which are results of a complex synergy between words, images and history in the broadest sense of the term.

### The Change of Time: 1965 and 1989

First of all, I will examine the change in historical context, the first axis of comparison already mentioned. In his book on war memories in Japan, Tsuboi Hideto 坪井秀人 discusses the changing perceptions of Japanese war memories in the postwar-era through readings of *shasetsu* 社説 (“editorials”) in major newspapers. Comparing the 1960s with the 80s, he points out that in 1965, the year of Ibuse's *Black Rain*, those who had first-hand experience of the war were still a majority (51% to be precise) in the population, whereas the 1985 *shasetsu* in the Mainichi Shimbun, 4 years before Imamura's film, problematizes the fact that those with experience of the war had become a minority (31%). Tsuboi senses a concern in the 1985 *shasetsu* that something needed to be done to educate the younger generations of what happened during the war.<sup>5</sup> In other words, when Ibuse wrote his *Black Rain* in 1965, the memory of the war and the Hiroshima bombing were more freshly etched in the minds of the majority of the Japanese people, while in the 1980s, they had long lost that immediacy. Less and less people cared to remember, or could remember, these traumatic events. And no doubt, the death of the Shōwa emperor in January 1989, which lifted the taboo on discussing the emperor's war responsibilities provided welcome opportunities for “soul-searching over personal war guilt,” as James Orr points out, and unleashed a resurgence of interest in World War II.<sup>6</sup> Imamura's film joined this popular trend in reevaluating the Japanese people's war experience.

It should also be mentioned that the historical context around the relationship between Japan and the U.S.A. had drastically changed. By 1989, Japan had entered the era of the so-called bubble economy, and its economic hegemony in the world was drawing negative media attention in the U.S. The respect and awe in Ezra Vogel's *Japan as No.1*

<sup>4</sup> PLANTINGA 2006: 217. Noel Carroll calls it “mediumistic essentialism” and defines it as “the sort that attempts to deduce the potentials and deficits of every element of film in light of a putative identification and assessment of the essential medium of cinema.” He advocates instead a “piecemeal” approach “limited to answering [...] specific questions about this or that aspect of the moving image” (CARROLL 2003: xxiii).

<sup>5</sup> TSUBOI 2005: 138.

<sup>6</sup> ORR 2001: 15.

(1979) had changed into a mood of “Japan-bashing”. Ridley Scott’s famous Japan-bashing film, titled *Black Rain* featuring Michael Douglas and Takakura Ken 高倉健, was launched in 1989, the same year as Imamura’s *Black Rain*. The screening of Imamura’s *Black Rain* in the U.S. was delayed, most likely to avoid the association with Ridley Scott’s movies. In response to this atmosphere of Japan-bashing, the Japanese attitude toward the U.S. had perhaps become less “deferential,” which may have made it easier to “make a bolder claim of victimization,” as Carole Cavanaugh argues.<sup>7</sup> Another historical factor worth noting is the dispute surrounding the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific in the 1960s and 70s, which most likely reminded the Japanese public of earlier, controversial nuclear tests by the U.S.A.<sup>8</sup> The lingering menace of nuclear proliferation may have heightened the sense of urgency for Imamura to spotlight the threat of radiation, especially its after-effects. According to some sources, the film’s focus on the pernicious effect of radiation is, in fact, likely to have influenced the decision of the jury at the Cannes film festival in 1989 not to award *Black Rain* the Golden Palm, despite the enthusiasm with which it was received.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not these speculations are legitimate, they speak to the serious implications of the radiation issue that the film took up. What might appear to be Imamura’s “bolder” claim can, indeed, be seen as his response to these changes in the historical context, the increasing need to remind the public of the war, the A-bomb in Hiroshima and its devastating effects—there are, in fact, no less than four deaths from radiation sickness in Imamura’s film, which were not in the novel. I would argue, however, that the renewed focus on the Japanese victims in the film does not necessarily lead to a nationalist victimization claim “unencumbered by wartime responsibility,” as Cavanaugh suggests<sup>10</sup>, to which I will return later.

### **Ibuse Masuji’s Concerns in *Black Rain***

With regard to Ibuse’s original concerns as an artist, there is one issue that everyone seems to agree has loomed over the making of *Black Rain*; that is, how to represent in words an atrocity of such an unfathomable dimension without appropriating the survivor’s experience by subjecting it to a willful interpretation. Ibuse is not only a war-veteran and an ex-soldier, but is also a native of Hiroshima, who, however, does not have first-hand experience of the A-bomb himself. With a keen awareness of his outsider status, the problem of representing, on behalf of his fellow Hiroshima-citizens, something that is

<sup>7</sup> Cavanaugh 2001: 254.

<sup>8</sup> The notorious Lucky Dragon incident, a nuclear fall-out exposure of 1954, triggered anti-American, anti-nuclear movement in the 1960s. See also CHRISAFIS 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See for example “Kannu eiga sai no butai ura” (2015) and “Shikin’nan datta kuroi ame: Imamura kantoku ni atta kuroi sūokuen no ofā” (2012).

<sup>10</sup> Cavanaugh 2001: 266.

ultimately unrepresentable apparently weighed heavily on his mind. As many critics have suggested on various occasions,<sup>11</sup> it was most likely this concern not to compromise the otherness of the incomprehensible tragedy of Hiroshima that dictated Ibuse's choice of narrative strategies—its mosaic-like structure, multivoicedness, and its documentary style in subdued, unsentimental voices. How does Imamura as a film director, who has also endured the war, but also lacks first-hand experience of the Hiroshima atrocity, visually translate such a traumatic event? How does he cope with Ibuse's ethical concern about representation in his film? These are questions that I want to address in my paper, in dialogue with critics who have written on Imamura's *Black Rain*. No doubt partly because of the change of time, context and medium, Ibuse's novel and Imamura's film are very different, despite the superficial similarities of the theme and the setting. While Ibuse's novel strives to take a documentary approach with focus on August 1945, Imamura's film dramatizes the narrative present of 1950 through a number of cinematic as well as narrative techniques. Even though the film's black and white footage from the carnage in Hiroshima does give a documentary touch in the opening scene and another scene, these two flashbacks<sup>12</sup> together last a little over twenty minutes in a nearly two hour screening time, whereas in the original, the diary part which functions as a series of flashbacks constitutes nearly eighty percent of the novel, in my rough estimate. Imamura's priorities as he was adapting the source text for the cinematic audience of 1989 were obviously not the same as Ibuse's. Before discussing Imamura's strategies, I will examine some salient characteristics of Ibuse's source text.

As many critics have pointed out, Ibuse's *Black Rain* has a complex narrative structure of both a "palimpsestuous" and collage-like nature. Direct quotations from various diaries written after the bombing—Yasuko's diary, Shigematsu's diary, and Dr. Iwatake's diary, which the protagonist Shigematsu transcribes, dominate the novel, accounting for approximately eighty percent as noted. The longest is Shigematsu's diary: there are also records of the family's diet during the war and of Yasuko's illness by her aunt, which are added on to Shigematsu's main journal. As the narrator points out on the opening page, Shigematsu's major preoccupation is to find a suitable marriage partner for his young niece Yasuko, and to copy and present their diaries to refute the rumor that Yasuko was in the city center when the A-bomb fell. His own diary as well as Yasuko's trace the family's whereabouts in the days after the bombing and make it clear that Yasuko was in Furuichi at a safe distance from the nuclear blast. The remaining twenty percent, the non-quoted

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<sup>11</sup> John Treat insightfully summarizes the Japanese literary critics' almost unanimous embracement of *Black Rain* as an exemplarily non-obtrusive work of a non-victim, on one hand, and Ibuse's concern on the other, not to exploit the positive attention of the media out of consideration for the feelings of the victims (TREAT 1995:270–272).

<sup>12</sup> In addition to these flashbacks, there is a very brief flashback without a voice-over later in the film, triggered by Shigematsu's memory of Mr. Katayama, as he reads a sutra at his funeral.

part of the novel, is narrated by a third-person narrator who provides the context for the journals in retrospect, five years after, from Shigematsu's perspective.

As Ibuse himself openly acknowledges, the main diary by Shizuma Shigematsu 関間重松 is based on a so-called true story, a "Journal of the Bombing" by a real-life Hiroshima survivor, Shigematsu Shizuma 重松静馬 (note that the last and first names were switched and *kanji* altered in the novel), which has invited discussions on whether or not it should qualify as fiction.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Ibuse borrowed so profusely from Mr. Shigematsu's journal that it has provoked irks of some A-bomb survivors, particularly a poet by the name of Toyota Kiyoshi 豊田清史 who called it a work of downright plagiarism. Toyota's insistent, emotionally loaded attack on *Black Rain* has resulted in a heated debate, engaging many critics over the years. The consensus among most seems to be, however, that there are sufficient alterations by Ibuse to make it novelistic rather than documentary writing, even though the controversy is far from settled.<sup>14</sup> Whether one calls it "plagiarism", "documentary" or not, I believe his attempt to rely on external sources (on Shigematsu's diary and other archival materials) tellingly throws into relief the extent of Ibuse's concern about the difficulty of representation. The necessity that Ibuse must have felt to draw on the voices of real-life survivors should be taken seriously. As Shigematsu reads and copies out his own diary, the third-person narrator zeroes in on Shigematsu's mind, as if it is "Shigematsu" from "real life" who has witnessed the bomb, that is telling the stories.<sup>15</sup>

It should be noted that it is this multivoicedness that echoes through the text that distinguishes Shigematsu's journal in Ibuse's version—its "polyphony" as it were, through which various voices from the past and present are layered and juxtaposed at the same time. As Ibuse's Shigematsu transcribes his own diary written earlier, he supplements its content with many forms of commentary; footnotes called *fuki* (付記) as well as

<sup>13</sup> Not only the main diary, but also other "sources", Dr. Iwatake's diary and the record of the Shigematsu family's diet during the war, for example, are based on real life sources according to Ibuse's own account (KUROKO 2014: 132).

<sup>14</sup> Defending Ibuse, Kuroko Kazuo has criticized Toyota Kiyoshi for his unreasonable claim of plagiarism, and has summarized the controversy in his book (KUROKO 2014:159–184). As Takiguchi rightly points out, however, even as recent research has found many faults with Toyota's claim, we must take his emotional reactions as a victim of the A-bomb seriously (TAKIGUCHI 2014: 274). Ibuse's modest dismissal of *Black Rain* as a "failure" (because of its failure to "communicate just how horrible" Hiroshima really was) may be seen as his efforts to respect the negative reactions not only by Toyota, but also by other *hibakusha* to his novel (TREAT 1995: 270). See also KURIHARA 2008:282–310.

<sup>15</sup> That is to say, even as the reader must be aware that "Shigematsu" in Ibuse's pen is ultimately a fictive persona. One might say that Ibuse's ethical concern here is comparable to that of the *shi shōsetsu* writers, their mission-like urge to ground their voices in real life personas outside the text, and even though it is narrated in the third person, it reads as if it is told in the first person, because of the substantial use of dramatic presence, monologues and omission of the third-person pronouns (which is not uncommon in Japanese narratives).

qualifications that come in parenthesis as *gojitsu dan* 後日談 (“postscript”) providing new information that was not available when it was written the first time—an endeavor that layers knowledge acquired at different times. Also included in the journal are various accounts and stories from the ruins of Hiroshima after the bombing. Some are direct quotes from *harigami* 張り紙 (“poster”) pasted on electric poles, *kabe-shinbun* 壁新聞 (“wall newspaper”) and *keiji* 掲示 (“notice”) from the municipal authorities, and *rakugaki* 落書き (“graffiti”) around them that protest against the official message; some are stories paraphrased by Shigematsu that he has heard on the train, or from people whom he has happened to exchange words with. In other words, his journal is interspersed with intertextual fragments of a palimpsestic as well as collage-like nature, either superimposed on, or set against each other (we should also remember that Shigematsu’s diary is already a “rewriting” of a “Journal of the Bombing” by Shizuma in real life).

The view of the communicative potential of language that comes to the fore through Shigematsu’s journal is rather pessimistic. As he observes a young boy on the train, showing reluctance when asked by a talkative old lady how he escaped the bombing, Shigematsu intuits the tragedy behind his flight, and becomes anxious, on behalf of the boy.<sup>16</sup> The boy was hesitant, but once he opened his mouth, words gushed out in a wave of uninhibited emotion, and the whole train got to hear how he miraculously escaped the encroaching fire from under the rubble, after being abandoned by his own father, and the awkward moments they endured when they were accidentally united afterward. He is now on his own, searching for his mother, he says, which, in turn, effectively shuts up the old lady’s mouth. Thrown into relief anew are the awkward moments of silence with all sorts of emotions and questions swirling in the air, that ensued, this time, among the passengers of the train, all victims of the A-bomb. Shigematsu presents himself as someone who has sensitive ears attuned to the subtle nuances in the tenor of the victims’ feelings, which necessarily vary according to the circumstances under which they became victims. The extent and the nature of their physical injuries and mental wounds differ widely, and consequently, the feelings that they induce in them are different, too. There is no language that can encompass or transcend them all. Sometimes silence is wisdom’s best, if not only, ally.

It is also worth noting that “polyphony” cuts across both the diary part of the novel in the past, and the third-person narration in the present. As Shigematsu becomes increasingly absorbed in copying his diary, his writing consciousness in the present is drawn into dialogue with what he transcribes. Reading anecdotes and rumors from the past triggers Shigematsu’s memory, which is sometimes commented on and entered into the diary as postscripts, or other times, remains in his consciousness as afterthoughts. In other words, throughout the whole novel, stories from different times are interpolated

<sup>16</sup> IBUSE 1970: 150–151.

into the narrative to cast doubt on the veracity of any one account of the bombing, or of any other issue at hand. They all contribute to giving a palimpsestic, and collage-like impression with multiple perspectives, that the entire novel is woven out of many smaller texts, based on hearsay, some of which are more reliable than others, but none completely so. And the narrative voices throughout are kept matter-of-fact, unsentimental, and unobtrusive to match the documentary “feel” of the archival materials. The ultimate irony is that the “truth” about his niece Yasuko, which Shigematsu seeks to present through copying the diaries, turns out to be untrue after all. As noted, a pretext for transcribing the journals was to refute the negative rumors about Yasuko’s health. When they discover, with only three days of copying left, that Yasuko has had symptoms of radiation sickness for quite some time, the mission loses its original purpose. She *was*, after all, exposed to enough radiation, mostly from black rain, to develop radiation sickness. Shigematsu nevertheless continues to work on his diary. It is almost as if the novel, by being written down, throws into relief the irony of such an impossible mission itself, confirming Shigematsu’s suspicion about the limit of language itself: “I haven’t got down on paper one-thousandth part of the truth, all the things I actually saw. It’s no easy matter to put something down in writing.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite the obvious limits he sees in verbal communication, Shigematsu continues to write. Or, rather, Ibuse does not let Shigematsu abandon his project of writing about Hiroshima, as if to tell us that it is the process of writing itself, of a struggle to write itself, that is worthwhile, that has a therapeutic effect on our lives, and not necessarily its end-product. As John Treat ends his chapter on Ibuse, “[l]ike the lives of the victims it portrays, *Black Rain* too is a struggle, albeit not one between life and death [nor truth and gossip] but rather between the wholeness of life and our recent, irrefutable evidence to the contrary.”<sup>18</sup> Writing is valued for its performative effect rather than for its communicative one—for what “words do” rather than what they mean, as in reading sutras or composing poems, to come to terms with one’s past or imagine the wholeness of life. The question is how Imamura lets the characters cope with this irony and struggle in his cinematic adaptation.

### **Adaptation from Novel to Film**

In a book titled *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon tries to dismantle a bias many of us have about adaptations from the telling-mode on the printed page, typically novels, to the showing-mode, typically cinema, that they are necessarily derivative or inferior to the original. She urges us to focus on the process of adaptation, transcoding from one set of

<sup>17</sup> IBUSE 2012: 60 (slightly modified).

<sup>18</sup> TREAT 1995: 299.

convention to another, rather than to deplore the loss that it is often said to suffer. While it is admittedly more difficult to represent in the movie the complexity of interiority in minute detail, Hutcheon reminds us that there are a wealth of techniques that can do interiority, such as voice-over, close-up shots, long shorts, slow motion, rapid cutting, lighting, music. Quoting Susan Sontag, she points out that editing becomes “an equivalent to the magician’s sleight of hand.”<sup>19</sup> That said, however, she also notes that there are certain generic, media related differences that the “magician’s sleight of hand” cannot do so much about. One is a relatively common phenomenon of reduction in scale that usually happens in the cinema because of the time-limit.<sup>20</sup> Another difference is that the novel relies predominantly on the realm of imagination, whereas the cinema relies on the realm of direct perception. Even though there are, no doubt, overlaps between those two modes in each media, these differences might have implications, to which I shall come back later.

With these general practical points in mind, I will discuss Imamura Shōhei’s strategy in translating Ibuse’s novel into the medium of film. Even as Imamura follows most of the plot line in Ibuse’s novel that I have just outlined, the particular aspect of Ibuse’s novel, its multiple narrative perspective which calls into question the status of the truth, was not transferred into the film. The irony of pursuing truth through writing is less poignantly foregrounded. Imamura shoots the entire film in black and white with the camera stably placed at a low angle, in a quasi-Ozuesque manner, which does give a sober, documentary feel, as critics have argued. However, reporting on the aftermath of the bombing in the two flashback scenes with a voice-over, as noted, occupies less than twenty percent of the entire film.<sup>21</sup> In the rest of the film, the focus moves to the drama that transpires in the narrative present in 1950, with a colorful gallery of additional characters from various stations of society in Kobatake village, struggling to adjust to a new way of life after the war. Imamura’s *Black Rain* draws a lively, sometimes tragi-comic picture of the villagers with a far more zestful, action-packed, and dramatic impact than in Ibuse’s novel. In other words, the dramaturgy in most of the film sharply distinguishes itself from the unsentimental minimalism of the novel. A middle-aged widow selling cigarettes, and her daughter, a cabaret waitress who comes home to escape her gangster-boyfriend, and their loud complaint about the discrimination among the villagers, adds very much to the folkish or even the proletarian touch in the film.<sup>22</sup> The most important additional character, however, is Yūichi, a farmer’s son and veteran soldier suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic

<sup>19</sup> HUTCHEON 2006: 59.

<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon talks about the “pragmatic necessity of cutting a sprawling novel to make it fit the screen in terms of time and place because it usually takes longer to perform an action than to read a written record of it” (HUTCHEON 2006: 37), which may be relevant here too.

<sup>21</sup> As noted in an earlier footnote, there is a brief, third flashback without a voice-over, but this is connected to Shigematsu’s memory rather than to his diary.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed description of the human drama in the village added in Imamura’s version, see Tachibana Reiko’s thoughtful analysis of the film (TACHIBANA 1998).

stress disorder), who falls in love with Yasuko. He spends most of his time carving *jizō*<sup>23</sup> figures in stone, with emotionally distraught faces. Every time he hears the sound of a motor from any vehicle passing by, he stirs up a commotion in the neighborhood by imagining himself on a battlefield, noisily charging against an “American tank”. The neighboring villagers led by his own mother all run out to play along with the crazy Yūichi, trying to convince him the mission is completed so that he can return home.

Commenting on his romance with Yasuko, Carol Cavanaugh argues that by leading the audience to “transfer Yasuko’s indisputable innocence to Y[ūi]chi,” it invites us to feel that “her genuine victimization is shared equally by him” and that soldier and civilian have both suffered and their suffering is the same.<sup>24</sup> She reads the novel ultimately as a “documentation of the current consensus in Japan” on “national victimization unencumbered by wartime responsibility, a consensus [as of 2001] defended by the bombing of Hiroshima.”<sup>25</sup> In critical response to Cavanaugh’s claim, I would like to problematize what Yūichi and Yasuko are victims of—they are not simply victims of the war alone. In adding the character Yūichi, Imamura has obviously drawn on Ibuse’s novella, *Yōhai taichō* 遥拝隊長 (1950; *Lieutenant Lookeast*, 1971), which is about an ex-lieutenant with the exact same name, who refuses to acknowledge the Japanese defeat, a lunatic and a laughing stock of the entire village. True enough that Yūichi in the film is portrayed as less tyrannical, and more innocent than Yūichi in *Lieutenant Lookeast*, but what comes across most poignantly in the insertion of Yūichi, I would argue, is the film’s implicit criticism of a certain post-war attitude prevailing among the villagers which marginalizes victims such as Yūichi, as in Ibuse’s original short story.<sup>26</sup>

The narrator in Ibuse’s *Lieutenant Lookeast* draws attention to the fact that the villagers not only did not consider him strange when the mentally injured Yūichi came home during the war, but they were also rather proud of him (his physical injury was a limp, just as in Imamura’s film). He only became an embarrassing lunatic in their eyes after the war ended, because Yūichi persisted in his militaristic manner of behavior and language. The narrator inserts an episode about an ostensibly democratic youth who indignantly shouts at Yūichi for being “such a crazy ghost of imperialism” in the “pacifist, anti-militarist country” that Japan has become. The narrator sarcastically refers to him “as a skillful master of fashionable words in the spirit of time.”<sup>27</sup> Highlighted here is the swiftness with which some people learned to act according to the dictates of the new age.

<sup>23</sup> *Jizō* is the Japanese version of the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha, regarded as the guardian and savior of (deceased) children and as the savior of souls suffering in hell.

<sup>24</sup> CAVANAUGH 2001:255.

<sup>25</sup> CAVANAUGH 2001: 259 and 266.

<sup>26</sup> In his insightful analysis of *Lieutenant Lookeast*, Takiguchi Akihiro points out that the novella poignantly throws into relief the villagers’ complicity as victimizers by acknowledging Yūichi’s own double role as both victimizer and victim (TAKIGUCHI 2012: 268).

<sup>27</sup> IBUSE 1953: 154.

As Takiguchi Akihiro 滝口明祥 points out, the phrase, “a skillful master of fashionable words in the spirit of time,” was added by Ibuse in the new 1951 edition, one year after its original publication, presumably to make his critique explicit.<sup>28</sup> It perhaps demonstrates Ibuse's increasing critical awareness of the complacent postwar mentality. And in that sense, the inclusion of Yūichi's story in Imamura's film is a tribute to Ibuse's concern, even though Yūichi was not in *Black Rain* itself.

Just as in Ibuse's short story, village people deal with the symptoms of Yūichi's wounds when they create problems for their everyday life routines, but no one takes his post-traumatic, emotional needs at the root of the problem seriously (except possibly his mother). As a lunatic, he is left to his own devices as long as he does not make trouble. Yasuko is also marginalized albeit in a less obvious manner than Yūichi, and it is this feeling of alienation that unites them as a couple across the class difference. She is in a double-bind, because of the invisible pressure to act normal, being exerted on her through Shigematsu's tireless pursuit of a suitable bridegroom for her, on the one hand, and her growing suspicion that she might be actually getting sick on the other. Their single-minded efforts at correcting the wrong rumors about Yasuko, with the best intention, make it morally difficult for her to come out of the closet about her radiation sickness. The village people, including Shigematsu and Shigeko, refuse to see the real suffering of both Yūichi and Yasuko, and a nudge at them can be seen as a warning against hasty aspirations toward normalcy.

There is an episode both in the novel and the film, which gives us a similar example of the problematic postwar attitude. A war widow by the nickname of “cigarette woman” in the film (a war widow referred to as auntie from Ikemoto in the novel) observes Shōkichi and Shigematsu fishing in a pond, and sarcastically comments that they are lucky to be fishing while everyone else is busy working. The infuriated Shōkichi retorts the “cigarette woman” as follows:

“That's enough! Shut your mouth! [...] I suppose you've forgotten how you came to see me when I got back from Hiroshima, have you? Or were they crocodile tears? I remember you blubbing and calling me a 'precious victim' at the time.”

“Did I now? But that was before the end of the war. Why---everybody said that kind of thing during the war. If you ask *me*, I think you're trying to pick a quarrel or something, to start bringing up things like that now.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> He inserted in the text “*Jiryū ni tōjita genji o rōshite*” 「時流に投じた言辭を弄して」 (TAKIGUCHI 2012: 253).

<sup>29</sup> IBUSE 2012: 28–29 (with emphasis as in the original). This dialogue is reproduced in the film in its entirety.

Shōkichi indignantly adds that everyone forgets Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the hell of fire, and is just “prancing and shouting” about “damned anti-bomb rallies.”<sup>30</sup> As if to echo the narrator’s critique of fashionable words in *Lieutenant Lookeast*, Shōkichi criticizes their eagerness to follow the dictates of the new era, glossing over the traces of wounds suffered during the war. The “cigarette woman”, along with others, said things that were expected of them before the end of the war. A wounded survivor of the bomb (like Shōkichi), and a wounded soldier of the war (like Yūichi), were both honored and respected as “precious victims”. The value of their sacrifice for the nation was indisputable. But now that it has become clear that they were all duped, fighting for a terribly wrong cause, their attitude toward the victims has subtly changed. They are not so “precious” anymore—they are perhaps pitied, but are treated more like burdensome guests who do not productively contribute to the new vision of the nation, or as an unwelcome reminder of the “wrong” past at best. In that sense, the insertion of Yūichi into the story is an important addition that connects Imamura’s film to Ibuse’s concern that the past is quickly being dismissed as irrelevant or uninteresting.

In this caricature of the postwar mentality in Imamura’s film (which the tragi-comic figure of Yūichi definitely enhances), I would argue, one can read a subtle criticism of the “victimizer” aspect of the Japanese people. It is surely the same sort of passive, uncritical mentality of the ordinary Japanese who lived according to their survival instinct, adjusting their antenna to the winds of the time, which indirectly contributed to spreading of the nationalist ethos both before and during the war. The setting has changed, and so have the values of the time, but the people’s thoughtless, and yet shrewd (some might call robust or even resilient) mentality has remained more or less the same and Shigematsu was perhaps no exception, until Shōkichi jolted him out of habitual stupor.<sup>31</sup> The decisive and climactic jolt for Shigematsu in the film comes when Yūichi’s mother unexpectedly comes to ask for Yasuko’s hand on behalf of her son—a marriage match across class division, which would have been unthinkable in older times. Responding to Shigematsu’s bewilderment, Shigeo slowly opens her mouth:

Since the go-between has always kept the talk about radiation sickness secret, Yasuko has never had a relationship she felt completely at ease in. When I think of Yasuko and Yūichi together, talking about the war and radiation sickness that weigh

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: 30.

<sup>31</sup> In their review of Imamura’s film, Thomas Keirstead and Deidre Lynch see an ambivalence in this: Constructing a “people’s history”, Imamura seems both to admire the resilience of ordinary people and to condemn them for acquiescing in their role as those who look on while history happens (KEIRSTEAD/LYNCH 1991: 1117).

heavily on their mind, to their heart's content, I cannot help but sympathize. It may be cruel not to let them spend time together.<sup>32</sup>

To which Shigematsu replies with thoughtful pauses in between: "Is that what you think? That may really be the case. You may, indeed, be right," as if to slowly acknowledge the "true" state of the matter.<sup>33</sup> As it apparently dawns on Shigematsu's mind for the first time here, what unites the two is their shared lot as unwelcome reminders of the painful past everyone wants to forget. They have both been prevented from addressing their not-so-visible wounds and anxiety head-on because of the aforementioned postwar mentality, which necessarily marginalizes them as non-productive members of the new order. With his "you may indeed be right," Shigematsu, for one, clearly signals that he is capable of change. He realizes that he may have been too blindly caught up with traditions (with regard to marriage, class distinction, and social propriety), which have a conservative tendency to prize stability and the status quo. It is not an exaggeration to say that this mental inertia is an extension of the same conservative inclination that led him to support the nationalist ethos during the war.<sup>34</sup> Seen this way, I believe Imamura's film does take a critical stab at the victimizer aspect of the Japanese people.

One can also say that the insertion of Yūichi in Imamura's film expands on the theme of victimhood present in Ibuse's novel, in a way that problematizes an easy dichotomy between victims and victimizers—an assumed dichotomy in what James Orr calls "the mythologies of Japanese war victimhood." These mythologies, which dominate the popular sentiment in postwar Japan according to Orr, thrive on an "image of self as victim, to the neglect of consciousness of self as victimizer."<sup>35</sup> Scapegoating the military as the sole bearer of responsibility, they have exonerated ordinary people (and the emperor) as victims, and in his view, popular works of classics such as *Black Rain* (both the novel and the film) have helped reinforce them. Contrary to Orr's suggestion, then, I would argue that Imamura's Yūichi, the war veteran, is an epitome of someone who bears the burden of guilt for both the military and the ordinary people, bridging the gap between what were thought to be a decisive division among the Japanese people.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to Cavanaugh, who is skeptical of their romantic union because it transfers Yasuko's innocence to Yūichi, I

<sup>32</sup> IMAMURA 1989: 01:37:29–01:38:22. (My translation).

<sup>33</sup> "Sōka nō, sō kamo shiren nō, sō iyā, sō yo nō." IMAMURA 1989: 01:38:32–01:38:40. (My translation).

<sup>34</sup> Ibuse's Shigematsu admits to his habitual stupor during the war more explicitly in his journal (IBUSE 1970: 360). In Imamura's film, the reader must interpret Shigematsu's facial expressions as he speaks to his wife and others on various occasions.

<sup>35</sup> ORR 2001: 3.

<sup>36</sup> Especially if you supplement Imamura's film with Ibuse's *Lieutenant Lookeast* as an intertext, the ambivalence in Yūichi becomes even greater, because he was clearly a victimizer during the war, and yet, comes across as such a helpless ordinary man of common origin, a farmer's son after the war.

would argue that it transfers the burden of responsibility to both across this divide by making even Yasuko realize her own complicity in the race toward normalcy.

There is also a more media specific aspect of Imamura's version of *Black Rain* which might be considered. As Hutcheon points out, both the realm of imagination (novel) and the realm of perception (film) have their respective strengths and weaknesses. One might say, however, that there is a special challenge in the latter, when the aim is verisimilitude, and the object, the A-bomb carnage. Because a film necessarily provides concrete pictures, it gives less room for imagination to expand or compensate, if one, for example, detects that the shabbiness of the appearances is not real, or that the actors and actresses are not fatally wounded.<sup>37</sup> The artificial nature of the carnage constructed from scratch in a studio might be visible in a way that is not for the reader of the novel, and this can explain, at least partly, why Imamura drastically cut down on the flashback scenes from the past.

On the other hand, the realm of direct perception can effectively evoke powerful emotions, especially if it is combined with a close-up shot and music. Throughout the film, the camera is stably placed at a low height, shooting from a distance, only occasionally interrupted by close-up shots of the characters' faces at the most dramatic moments. But precisely because there are relatively few of them, these interruptions work effectively in soliciting the spectator's emotional reactions. When we see Yasuko's uncanny look at discovering her hair falling off, or her aunt's horrified look at Yasuko staring at her own hair through the bathroom window in close-up shots, accompanied with the loud, ominous music of Takemitsu Tōru 武満徹 (1930-1996), whipping up a sense of anticipation, our reactions are visceral, making us feel as if we are witnessing the scenes here and now. Even as it should be possible to achieve the same sort of effect in a written account, for example, through the use of indirect free discourse or interior monologues, Ibuse, the writer, does not choose these tactics. In the novel, the truth about Yasuko's condition is first mentioned in Shigematsu's five page *gojitsuki* 後日記 ("postscript") in his diary, reflecting upon the unfathomable effect and *osoroshisa* 恐ろしさ ("scariness") of the A-bomb which makes people sick many years after the initial exposure,<sup>38</sup> and is also later alluded to by her aunt. In other words, Yasuko's inner experience of the impact of the discovery is never depicted in the novel. Her radiation sickness is reported as one of numerous cases that instill pity, fear and awe in Shigematsu, whereas in the film it is part of the ongoing event that materializes at the narration time.

Following up on the "scariness" of radiation in Ibuse's *Black Rain*, Imamura chooses a different strategy, by dramatizing, through the various use of close-up shots, not only the

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<sup>37</sup> Even though in principle, you can argue that a poorly described scene in a written document can do the same damage, you can resort to a minimalistic description, leaving the rest to the reader's creative imagination—the same option is not available in a film, at least in one of the "realistic" kind.

<sup>38</sup> IBUSE 1970: 279.

sudden eruption of sickness in Yasuko, but also in other survivors—Mr. Katayama, Shōkichi and Kōtarō. After showing the dramatic collapse of Mr. Katayama in front of the house, gasping for air and water, the camera swiftly moves to his funeral scene. With a close-up shot on Shigematsu's face as he reads the sutra, there is a flashback scene from the survivors' shelter in Hiroshima the day after the blast, where Shigematsu is united with Mr. Katayama, Shōkichi, and Kōtarō (this two-minutes flashback, mentioned earlier, functions as a cinematic probe into Shigematsu's consciousness, triggered by his memory of Mr. Katayama, and echoes Shigematsu's postscript about the deaths of many participants in the rescue operation at the shelter in Ibuse's novel). Among those who rejoiced at having survived the bomb, one after another dies of radiation sickness except for Shigematsu. After Katayama, Shōkichi falls ill. A shot of many feet wrapped in white *tabi* 足袋 ("Japanese socks") and *zōri* 草履 ("sandals") walking in the funeral procession is followed by a close-up shot of Shōkichi's widow holding his picture. We catch a sight of Kōtarō's wary face moving right behind her only to see his picture in a black frame in the next shot, following this time his funeral procession. The whole sequence ends with Shigematsu's voice-over<sup>39</sup> that he has lost two of his friends in a month, while he is still miraculously alive—the words that build up tension and suspense, prefiguring yet another death. Imamura eventually lets even Shigeko, the wife, die of radiation sickness, increasing the number of victim to the total of four. These deaths uncannily bring back the image of an earlier flashback scene from Hiroshima, in which Yasuko frantically tries to wash off the dark traces of black rain in her clothes. Like the stains from black rain, insidious radiation cannot easily wash away, and catch you unawares when you least expect them.<sup>40</sup>

To sum up, Imamura's emphasis on insidious radiation can be seen as his response to the need to alert the public, as a series of atmospheric nuclear tests were being conducted by France in French Polynesia in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>41</sup> Imamura's strategy, which is much more oriented toward human drama centered around the life and death of *hibakusha* 被爆者 ("survivors of the A-bomb") five years after the war, invites us to identify emotionally (some might say excessively or even sentimentally) with the characters in the film, to a greater degree, than in Ibuse's novel. With the help of the skillful performances of his actors—Kitamura Kazuo 北村和夫 (1927-2007), Ichihara Etsuko 市原悦子 (1936–), Tanaka Yoshiko 田中好子 (1956-2011) and his team,<sup>42</sup> he lets words, images and sound work in collusion to elicit the spectator's emotional reactions, inviting us to participate in the

<sup>39</sup> There is no counterpart for this voice-over in Shigematsu's diary in Ibuse's *Black Rain*, because none of them die in the novel.

<sup>40</sup> James T. Dorsey and Naomi Matsuoka have a thoughtful discussion on the symbolic role of black rain (DORSEY/MATSUOKA 1996: 208–209).

<sup>41</sup> CHRISAFIS 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Tanaka Yoshiko and Ichihara Etsuko won the 1989 best actress, and best supporting actress award respectively in Japan for their role in *Black Rain*.

ongoing event of victimization seen from the characters' points of view. Ibuse's novel, in contrast, focuses more on the impossibility of getting at the truth status of numerous stories that are in circulation in the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing, and the therapeutic effect of writing.

## Conclusion

Imamura's film has won both critical and popular recognition as one of the most important films on Hiroshima in Japan, and if you judge from the numerous blogs and comments of recent origin posted in Japanese, it apparently continues to move its audience, thanks to the availability of the film on DVD.<sup>43</sup> Even though Imamura has presumably said "that this film should not speak loud, but must speak in a low voice" and has taken care to be relatively faithful to the original plot,<sup>44</sup> he has made strategic adjustments to make it appeal to the popular sentiment of the Japanese audience. Some of them were perhaps motivated by the historical context in the eighties, and the specificity of the media; others, perhaps by his artistic vision and even commercial interests that a film production necessarily involves. Whatever reasons, the film singles out Yasuko as the protagonist of the story, dramatizing her love relationship with Yūichi and the wounds that unite them, turning Ibuse's multiple testimonial narratives into a more straightforward linear narrative. For critics such as Cavanaugh, this transformation is symptomatic of the larger ideological battle on war memories and victimization being fought in the Japanese discourse on a macro-level, and Imamura's film, in her view, gives support to the nationalist side. By adding "the mentally tormented veteran Yūichi to Yasuko's story", the film gains an "ideological supplementation that encourages the audience to fill in the victim status of Hiroshima," as she puts it.<sup>45</sup> Referring to Yūichi's therapeutic stone carving, Cavanaugh argues that the *jizō* statues "iconically cement together the victims of Hiroshima with Japanese soldiers in battle," and claims that the film thereby "*styles itself as history* to give validity to a consensus in Japan on national victimization unencumbered by wartime responsibility" (emphasis added).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See for example, KIMURA 2012: "Kuroi Ame/Black Rain (89nen Nihon)".

<sup>44</sup> Imamura has made a 19 minute epilogue for the film, in which Yasuko in shabby appearance is seen making a pilgrimage to graveyards in Shikoku in 1965. It was filmed and edited, but after much deliberation, Imamura decided not to include it in the film. The epilogue is however included in the DVD version of *Kuroi Ame* as an independent short sequel. This might be also indicative of the degree to which he prioritized being faithful to the original plot in Ibuse's novel. See NISHIOKA 2007: "Kuroi ame (Imamura Shōhei) no mikōkai bubun."

<sup>45</sup> CAVANAUGH 2001: 255.

<sup>46</sup> CAVANAUGH 2001: 265 and 266. Albeit less explicitly, James Orr also seems to suggest that *Black Rain*, both the novel and the film, reinforce the myth of Japanese victimhood at the expense of victimizer consciousness (ORR 2001: 109).

I wish to counter her claim, however, by arguing that her view of history is rather narrow—as her rhetoric, “styling itself as history” seems to suggest, she does not consider Imamura’s film properly historical. Drawing on Pierre Nora’s analysis of an explosive interest in commemoration, Tessa Morris-Suzuki asks us to acknowledge an inherent tension between two dimensions of history, “history as interpretation” (scholarly history with focus on reason) and “history as identification” (history that involves empathy and emotion), arguing that “our understanding of history is never just an intellectual matter, but any encounter with the past involves feelings and imagination as well as pure knowledge.”<sup>47</sup> Warning us that academic history has tended to be “too wary of emotions, treating history as though it were a form of pure reason existing beyond the sully realm of passion, fear, hope or sheer pleasure,” she argues that we must acknowledge the necessity of both dimensions, and try to understand how they are intertwined.<sup>48</sup> She is certainly not alone in reminding us of the need to come to terms with both, as David Lowenthal and others have discussed a similar tension between history and heritage.

While distinguishing history and heritage as separate lines of practice, Lowenthal emphasizes their complementarities at the same time, especially regarding the role which heritage plays in making history more accessible to laypersons by enlivening it. “Dealing with distant times and events beyond their own ken, many see history as inaccessibly alien,” and “[e]ven the most striking events fade away as they recede into the distant past,” he writes. Heritage necessarily entails emotional identification and empathy, and thus “[f]or Israelis, the Holocaust is heritage; elsewhere, the most vigilant memorialists cannot keep it from fading away into history.”<sup>49</sup> Even as he justifiably warns against the chauvinism inherent in heritage, he argues that history nevertheless needs heritage to carry conviction in order to make it “alive and kicking.” Imamura’s film strikes emotional chords in the traumatic war memories of the Japanese people first of all because the human interaction dramatized in it concerns them. It not only reminds them of the presence of marginalized victims of the war among their fellow citizens, but also gives them an opportunity to reflect on their own attitude, the post-war mentality that has single-mindedly strived after prosperity by forgetting the painful past. This realization can perhaps make it easier to imagine the existence of other marginalized victims *elsewhere*. We can even envision the possibility that it might prevent the most striking *atrocities* all over from fading away, making them “alive and kicking” for the future generation.

I do not mean to suggest that Ibuse’s novel is less emotionally appealing, however. Fictional writing has its own coding and decoding system, and can manipulate your feelings just as well, albeit on different premises. Using different techniques and strategies, as we have seen, both Ibuse’s novel and Imamura’s film invoke affective reactions in us, helping

<sup>47</sup> MORRIS-SUZUKI 2005:22.

<sup>48</sup> MORRIS-SUZUKI 2005: 24–25.

<sup>49</sup> LOWENTHAL 1998: 123.

us emotionally connect with the past. Not all of us respond equally enthusiastically to their call, as already mentioned. Some remain critical (Cavanaugh, to the film); others get angry (the poet, Toyota Kiyoshi at the novel), or are doubtful or even envious (*hibakusha* readers of Ibuse's *Black Rain*)<sup>50</sup> and yet others respond under the influence of external agenda or interests (presumably the jury at Cannes Film Festival). Some might find Imamura's dramaturgy surrounding love and deaths among the villagers sentimental or overwhelming. Needless to say, there are also variations in reception among the enthusiasts, especially with regard to Ibuse's *Black Rain*. Conservative critics embraced it as an "affirmation of traditional Japanese values," thereby making "atomic victim mythology more acceptable" in Orr's words, while others have countered that claim by nuancing or refuting the argument from various perspectives.<sup>51</sup> As many affect theorists have reminded us in recent years, the feedback mechanism of affect/emotion is complex, and its trajectory, often unpredictable, as it is influenced by both worldly and personal contexts.<sup>52</sup> The diversity and controversy in the reception of Ibuse's novel and Imamura's film speak to us about the messiness of history, precisely because history can never free itself from emotions. And I suggest that the disparate reactions to the novel and the film should be seen as a token of the vibrant openness of the reader-text/film exchange and the web of emotional networks that they create or do not create. Emotions sometimes mess things up, but other times they help us empathize with strangers, making us more charitable.

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<sup>50</sup> Joh Treat writes: "Many of these doubts came from hibakusha themselves, who perhaps understandably resented the fact that such success was to be earned not by one of their own, such as Hara [Tamaki] or Ōta [Yōko], but by a non-hibakusha such as Ibuse" (TREAT 1995: 271).

<sup>51</sup> ORR: 10, and 109. See also John Treat's thoughtful summary of the initial reception by prominent Japanese critics, such as Etō Jun and Ōe Kenzaburō, in his chapter on Ibuse Masuji, TREAT 1995: 261–299.

<sup>52</sup> See GREGG/SEIGWORTH 2010, for example.

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