

A Note on “A Whistle from the Other Shore:”

The original title of the great Yasujirō Ozu film "Early Summer" is "Barley Fall."

In this case, “fall” refers not to autumn but to the time when barley is harvested— early summer.

“Barley Fall” is a seasonal haiku word for summer

English depicts the double l’s in *fall* and *small* as images of barley stalks.

The Ozu movie takes place in Kamakura in early-mid May and the summer sea breeze is discernable.

The poem begins: four nostalgic images: barley the sky a bookmark and dogs.

And these set the stage for the poet’s attempt to hear the voices of the dead— voices from the other shore—

which, though inaudible, register through an attentive tuning (in)to signs.

When Gozo mentions

“writing a poem of a whistle (from the other shore),” he is using the term 詠む yomu as the verb writing but literally yomu means to read aloud.

In its doubleness writing a poem is also “listening to the inaudible.”

Parentheses have at least three roles in this poem.

They add referential information to phrases as in: (from the Other Shore).

They suggest ways of reading certain kanji, as in:

葉 (しおり) =

Bookmark (Bookmark)

They even offer variant possibilities for reading kanji. For example, in the line:

上の空 (うわのそら)

the parenthetical phrase lets us know that the first phrase

上の空

reads as

uwa no sora

meaning

absentminded deep in thought abstracted

But Gozo inserts “ruby” (small letter furigana) above the character 上 so that we read it as “ue.”

“Ue no sora” means “sky above.”

We process two meanings at once as though hearing stacked chords in music:

“deep in thought” and “sky above.”

Throughout “A Whistle from the Other Shore,” Gozo seems to be trying to recreate the breezy air of early summer in Kamakura west of Yokohama

and to fuse it with the happiness he derives from re-visiting scenes in Ozu’s “Early Summer.”

The film itself has a happy-ending and no one suffers or dies (although one imagines the old couple remaining at the end will die soon).

The poem’s emotional register, its expressive happiness, may be closely connected to a comfortable awareness of the constant nearness of death and the dead.

Certainly when we watch

when we watch a film  
especially an old film  
we see the dead rise.

Perhaps  
Gozo's dialogue early in the  
poem with

Miho Shimao

the famous author of the  
autobiographical novel

*Shi no Toge*

(d. 2007)

Perhaps this too is an  
attempt to raise the dead.

In Japan many superstitions  
surround whistling:

whistling as a means of  
connecting with the spirit  
world.

Gozo

uses forms of speech  
that personify things like  
the shadows of dogs  
and  
letters hand-written on signs.