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# Oshima's Ghost Story

**By RICHARD SPRINGER**

“Empire of Passion,” Nagisa Oshima’s latest film, which brought him the best director award at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival, is a macabre ghost story that would be better titled, “Dead Spirit of Love,” a more literal translation of the Japanese title.

The basic plot can be detailed briefly. In 1895 in a poor mountain village, an unemployed army returnee falls in love with an older woman, wife of a rickshaw driver. Their affair is intense and he persuades her that they have to murder her husband for the affair to continue. Three years after they clumsily strangle the inebriated man, his ghost comes back to drive the guilty couple to discovery.

The film has been mistakenly linked to Oshima's sexually

explicitly "The Realm of the Senses," but it's more about dead spirits than passion or sex. Even the affair between the two lovers is tame and soon takes second fiddle to the comings and goings of the ghost.

"Empire of Passion," currently at the Surf Theater, is a superior ghost story by a talented director who is a master of mood, beautiful photography and characterization.

Incidentally, "Realm" caused Oshima to be accused of obscenity in Japan. He was acquitted in a ruling last year. Even so, audiences in Japan only saw an expurgated version of the film.

Oshima told the court before the verdict was announced: "Whether I am found guilty or not, I will declare that my battle will not end. What would I consider the end? I would say for the time being, the abolishment of Penal Code 175 and the Motion Picture Code of Ethics Committee. But I must say that even if this is achieved, I have a feeling that it is not going to be over yet. My life and movies will be affected in the future by this court case which I have been forced to enter." And in truth, there is a strong sense of unjust persecution that is felt throughout his follow-up film to "Realm of the Senses."

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Ex 17 of 2