

## *Giulietta degli spiriti*

sadness flicks  
across the face  
of Juliet  
like an old reel  
sprocketing  
across our past  
Nina Rota's score  
dances the guests  
through the frames  
a sculptress and  
her Adonis  
the lawyer friend  
the medium  
Giorgio the husband  
who has forgotten  
their anniversary  
Giulietta's  
disappointment  
hostess to all  
the play of spirits  
at a séance  
they mean no harm  
still it's serious  
the past haunts us  
I was thirty  
sitting at a table  
clairvoyant friends  
making contact  
*who is my father*  
Arthur had died  
when I was 9 mos.  
now he was here  
Christine saw  
his silver hair

cut close, plaid shirt  
rimless glasses  
the cigarettes  
in his shirt pocket  
this picture of him  
she had never seen  
nor would I for  
another two decades  
suddenly our hair  
rose on the backs  
of all our necks  
as the curtains  
billowed with  
a chill breeze  
unknown in Brea  
that wasteland of  
condos and malls  
south of LA  
and I knew  
right away  
it was Bill  
the stepfather  
who terrorized  
my family  
since I was three  
ready now to freeze  
our blood a decade  
after passing  
we broke it off  
Giulietta  
fainting at the table  
in her own house  
*this woman is very gifted*  
she wakes to find love  
all around her

none for herself  
love is a waltz  
with the unfaithful  
the androgynous Bishma  
tells her love is a religion  
your husband is your god  
then she knows messages  
from beyond are confused  
conflicting as advice  
from our good friends  
bitter sisters  
detectives with  
the evidence  
or—God help us—  
the party girls  
like neighbor Suzy  
inviting young  
men to come up  
to the treehouse  
Giulietta  
returning home  
who can tell us  
what we need to know  
as with Debbie  
when at sixteen  
she asked our priest  
if the foreign film  
I asked her to  
for our first date  
was a dirty movie  
the art cinema  
my friends and I  
had been watching  
a year or more  
foreign to her

as another language  
even *Elvira Madigan*  
Swedish romance  
so *tragique*  
belying hopes  
Hollywood had  
cast by '68  
what chance for her  
she told me once  
her father had  
tied her to a tree  
said he was going  
back to get his rifle  
I already knew  
that kind of man  
imagination  
bright as any poem  
for precisely  
the perfect torture  
to spoil any  
living moment  
the world outside  
not cruel enough  
by a long shot  
so they make home  
a living hell  
not that art films  
could save Debbie  
not the film George  
and I saw in '69  
in Isla Vista  
the title lost  
to me now  
but not my first

frontal nudity  
boyfriend on the john  
fondling his girl's ass  
while reading  
as she applies  
her mascara  
she left him  
when he drew on  
her breasts circles  
using a black  
magic marker  
wrote on her stomach  
words lost now  
vivid arrows  
point to her pubis  
we're each a text  
busy inscribing  
one another  
coming out of  
the theater  
we walk straight into  
the riots that  
the next night led  
to burning the B of A  
the bright orange flames  
a popular poster  
I saw hanging  
in shops next year  
so perhaps she  
was right to be  
cautious of art  
though there's nothing  
in *Madigan*  
that would hurt her

except the view  
of forces that  
constrain our love  
but that was not  
to be her way  
instead breaking  
my heart next year  
the popular girls  
could not fathom  
what she saw in  
the studious  
Catholic boy  
then she couldn't  
see it either  
it was over  
sitting back-to-back  
on the cul-de-sac  
looking up at stars  
heads resting together  
one last time  
then coming down  
San Marcos Pass  
at 60 in my  
'55 Plymouth  
with the white top  
pale green body  
how close I came  
to a quick jerk  
of the wheel  
to send me over  
the dark ravine  
but not that night  
afraid not of death  
I'd seen worse

but the pity  
of a mangled life  
I was not like  
the car salesman  
with his cold cash  
his apartment  
his brand new car  
Debbie took  
marrying after  
graduation  
I looked her up  
the next spring break  
already gone  
but her father  
offered me cash  
for a haircut  
I said sure  
holding out my hand  
he said *you're*  
*not going to*  
*cut it are you*  
straight at him—*no*  
perhaps she chose well  
or maybe her spirit  
is still tied to that tree  
Giulietta  
was tied to a grate  
for the school play  
by the good sisters  
head to toe in black  
burned at the stake  
to see God who  
the girl then missed  
because her father

the professor  
stopped the farce  
unbinding the girl  
before running off  
with the lovely  
circus *artiste*  
falling from grace  
fear was holding  
her fast in the  
paper flames of regret  
her spirit bound  
by mother's looks  
Giorgio's betrayal  
she all but lost  
as I was too  
from my own  
faithlessness  
is our spirit  
so delicate  
that we need  
intercession  
from the long dead  
voices we hear  
magic we see  
in child's play  
a bright beach of  
beautiful women  
passion of art  
a few men who  
might wish us well  
what good calls us  
what now binds us  
our fading past  
who are our guides



chiming in the  
cold sea wind