

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1980

Legends That Keep Us In Need

Daniel Mark Shapiro

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Shapiro, Daniel Mark, "Legends That Keep Us In Need" (1980). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2823.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2823>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT IN WHICH COPYRIGHT SUBSISTS. ANY FURTHER REPRINTING OF ITS CONTENTS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE AUTHOR.

MANSFIELD LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

DATE: 1980

LEGENDS THAT KEEP US IN NEED

by

Daniel Mark Shapiro

B.A. University of Pittsburgh, 1978

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

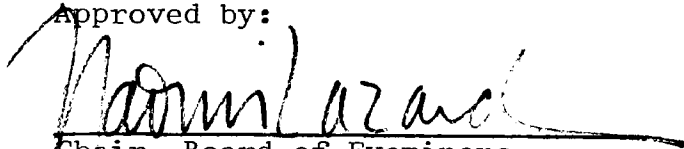
the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1980

Approved by:


Chair, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School

5-29-80
Date

UMI Number: EP35248

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35248

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

CONTENTS

Section I

Immigrant.	6
Intaglio	7
Pennies.	8
For the Length of the Concerto	9
Preserves.	10
Untitled	11
Called Home.	12
By Tide or Intent.	13
Living at Close Range.	14
Ways of Dying.	15

Section II

Heirloom	17
Retroussage.	18
The Halo	19
Dialogue	20
At Bottom.	21
Picasso at the Eastgate Bar.	22
Outsonnet.	23
Duel of Sun.	24
Mornings, Bloomington Indiana.	25
At the Foot of the Bell Tower.	26

for my Mother and Father

The heart and the mind
Grow stiff in the salt,
The bitter salt;
They take their places
Among the minerals.

--George Seferis

I

 sink back, subside,
ride in a blue world lower than light.

--Madeline DeFrees

IMMIGRANT

When Mae thinks of her homeland
it is the shape of a scarf
wrapped around her head. Once
she believed there was more
than one way to give feet to freedom
and hands to dreams. The old country
and the Singer sewing machine
made her life tight.
Both gone, she wears scarves like dust.

Sam, part-time machinist
never took free railway passes;
"A waste — no time for pleasure," she said
and walked beside him
back into the beet fields.
Carving horses for the children
he promised more than lice
on a fine-tooth comb, the raw earth.

The only child born here
breathed blood. Mae
went back to the fields
buried the child in a black scarf;
the milk in her breasts, the unused dreams.
Now she nurses the night. Survivor
with shrinking scarves pulled tight
under her chin.

She knew the moon was blooming
under the horizon.

--James Wright

INTAGLIO

I wait for morning breath to shake your body
watch Minersville Creek flow blue, steady
down your shoulder and hand, not letting go
of the farm we come from.

Where Mae rocked me
asleep singing, My love gave me a baby
with no crying.

Sophie, we walk bare soles
down the mountain, brown water ooze
between our toes. I sit,
register copper plate in alpine light.

Wire tools and acid dig the soft
cream skin of Mae. U-shape the chin
supple. Mulberry, Torinoko and Tableau
suck each fine V-shape furrow dry, leave
nothing but the old-fashioned wringer
squeezing your mother's voice, alive.
A calling I must answer.

Even now, my hands press dark ink
into the ground you leave.

PENNIES

The little girl's grandfather could not speak English but gave her pennies each time she visited. One night the little girl stayed with her grandfather and watched him die. The next day she took all her pennies to the river near his house. She walked over the bridge and threw the pennies in. For years she returned to the bridge looking into the river for her pennies. Sometimes she thought she could see them. But usually they looked as though they could be fish, sleeping very still under the bridge.

FOR THE LENGTH OF THE CONCERTO

You tried not to cry. Eva died soft as her pulse
 withdrew the pain, her swollen face no longer
 swollen. You wore the uniform of a proud son,
 camouflaged your strength, a birthmark
 measured in staccato walks down Raleigh Street.
 Rachmaninoff kept the beat instinctive;
 the soldier melting into leaves for cover
 hoping the enemy will slide by.

When you looked up
 her hair was combed full wave and blonde,
 highlights traced her brow. You could smell
 willow perfume as she drew closer, kneeled
 and fastened the snaps of your suspenders.
I want to grow old for you, Jewish men
need their mothers.

Father, we are both the third child.
 Our birthmarks repeat the movement
 in walks we take to the pond. Fishing poles
 tap our shoulders, familiar cacophony
 we can believe. The fish know we are here
 but not for them. You say, "we come to feed
 hard times, if they get greedy throw them back."
 For you it's the union, the line from your hand
 that bends the truth: The buoy's syncopated
 bobs of white and red, Eva's face
 gone like the silence that starts Adagio.

When my line is cast and down I meet the soldier,
 exchange glances of fear both recognize.
 He's a captain now. Grieves with a straight back,
 past old houses and people with dry tongues
 from years of compensating. The same as you.
 A woman rakes leaves like dead promises.
 She's seventy today under the willows, your hand
 in mine, counting leaves.

You pull away
 from the ground, take it all back
 and hold on.

PRESERVES

for my sister

Two years tightened by rust, makes a sure fit
and there's no escape. I know this cycle.
You sit in the middle of the floor, squeeze
into the string all the tone it holds.
The peg searching your voice for the key of A.

We talk about indifference to small things:
standing in the piss beneath the urinal
or the crazy woman who screams all night — didn't.
You found a note, "We commit the murder of ourselves."
Here in Montana we call it land.

You explain each nick and chip in the pale
wood frame as a measure of time. This one
is Alpine, New Jersey and the comforts
of not being known. Neighbors and our family
a noose around your neck.

Simple chords resonate — brother
mother, father. Each implicates the other.
You put down the guitar, unconscious of your screams
and the breakdown in my face as you lie
on the floor, spreading yourself too thin.

We curl against each other in the jar.

UNTITLED

rained
during the funeral
no eulogy
people walk
past the graves
of Mae and Sam
walk down
the leaf-covered pathway
afraid of waking me

CALLED HOME

Found you already buried. The price of silver
too high even for you. Drove through Reno
and Wells, lurid sunsets we never shared
till now. Remember your rolled lips
like a page of Hawthorne folded neatly
in a drawer.

Casino Winnemucca
slam of slot machines, the house
plays the desert god. I bet my shame
on a weak hand with silver dollars
you gave me. Tonight,
I see family greet guests with what remains
of you in them, pouting lips pushed into one.
They too believe in cold grey ground.

If my voice dies on land,
 take it down to the sea
 and leave it on the shore.

--Rafael Alberti

BY TIDE OR INTENT

for Madeline DeFrees

The storm slides
 beneath our feet, takes hold like mother
 tongues tangled in brine, a hundred
 at once.

You just have to know where to look.
 Rucked and seamed between the boards,
 tiny as lichen, always a step
 ahead: impalpable as sunken

treasure. Like children dancing
 the dock, scavenger gulls grab
 bursting bubbles for clues to an old
 grammar.

And so do we
 share the same pleasure, after all; you give
 it away and it laps our feet, searching
 for our imaginary ancestors. Tide-

bound to years of storm's residue; cigarette
 stubs. notes without bottles and shells'
 broken tones. The music is here, your voice
 in the backwash.

LIVING AT CLOSE RANGE

for Sharon Louise

Eagles spread out in the gray-green line
of cottonwood. Two share the same limb.
Three more knee-deep in slough
eye the water, the fins and swirls
of spawning salmon. They wear the smile
of the victor without a victory.
We have passed these salmon drying out
for years on the bank and you have never
seen a fish underneath our boat.
Birds sing on all sides, cooing our sails
into the dock.

Blackearth shows in the path
where the snow still melts and runs.
We plough and sow this soil that won't let go
what it can't bring back. Twist flat seed
between our fingers: yellow secrets
score the skin. Each now contains a legend
to break the frozen lawn, start again the wild
scent swaying in Bull River. This land
ransomed from water.

WAYS OF DYING

WW II, Holland. Soldiers move the nothern border, run their horses into barbed wire traps sprung at night. All I hear are screams and they sound human. In the morning the dead burn in the sun and no one brings a wreath or a plant and no one says a prayer. Dog tags rattle every silent name: cling to the skin and muscle of brown horses.

We are a brigade of tiny crabs in wet sand, abandoned by the outgoing tide. A pelican in flight takes its rhythm from the bird ahead. And so do we die in circles, our heads hunched back on our shoulders.

I remember when Mae passed away. We burned her mattress, folded the cloth and closed the door. I wore black gloves, black buttons, a band of crepe on my sleeve. For seven days we sat shivah and Grandpa never took off his hat. He just sat in his chair and picked his teeth, always starting from right to left like Jewish law. I thought everyone went this way

but I was wrong. One of my men is Indonesian and death is a stairway to a ridge-top town, the holy Agung. The priest lays bits of mirrored glass on the eyelids, slivers of steel on the teeth and iron nails on the limbs. The coffin's inner walls snare demons who can't climb or turn sharp corners. Arms wave and bodies writhe attack, the gongs and bells of Sadripu:

"Agung is the player and we are the puppets. At night when the scene is finished he puts us all in the same box."

II

When he looked at himself in a mirror,
he was always tempted to wipe the glass.

--Jules Renard

HEIRLOOM

The photograph hangs my face
between your shoulder and neck.
Raw red light where night
winds around the locks of old chests, cedar
and army. Inside, opal stickpins
pick memories of wars fought on postcards.
Words lost in aftertones of us laughing
at a world whose shape changes
and the only people who take note
are landlords with buildings on a slant.

 This is where we live legends
that keep us in need, my eyes
pressed to your throat
and the roof caved in.

THE HALO

When Diana dots
the night
with her moon

I see below in the green
very blue horses
with amorous eyes and necks

as long as mangrove roots:
straining to see the slanted
wings of distant gulls.

When green curls in the manes

I know I am old, green-necked
and reefed like a tortoise.
For years I have circled

the moon. I am the halo
careful to keep my secret
life. The moon

a singular lover, sleeps
soundly, draws estuaries
the length of my pillow.

DIALOGUE

Swallow this.

What is it?

A swallow is a bird.

But you make it sound like a verb.

Well then swallow it.

What will happen?

You will fly away.

AT BOTTOM

I cross the Montana border with my roots
in the trunk of the car. Stereo.
Dogfood. Typewriter.
Five bucks in my back pocket.
It's easy to tell I'm eastern
and not proud of it.
I believe in art for art's sake
and that good intentions are not enough.
Thinking back, every myth was fated
to become an old wives' tale. Magic —
black or white — was au fond
a thing of shreds and patches.
I'm the romantic who took to debunking.
Behind the laughter the clown, tilting
his eyebrows in front of a small mirror.

PICASSO AT THE EASTGATE BAR

Montana is having its Golden Age, a cross
between a deaf man at Custer's grave
and a cowboy in strong light. Below the
window, a little vase on the sill
and one curtain drawn. Need I go on? This
town where everything smells: hot oil,
sour wine. People's noses change
to muzzles, eagles hollowed and fishermen
our prophets. Two 1901 paintings of the bull ring
hang in every bar: the bull charges
and the woman sleeps. The stake, skull and womb.
Ashes pile in front of the stove.
Chairs and tables littered with rubbish
and valuables. The cold lines on the floor blocks
split like splintered ice. At last the woman
turns over in her sleep; with a fingerless hand
touches the bull's horn rising with the horizon.
Three cowboys look on, their tough hides
softened with pink sunburnt flesh. One
is old, forward on the ring,
basking in the warm wind of his smoke.
The others are young and wooing a lady
with a two-penny song.

OUTSONNET

The day the wind led her to the sea

waves like fists
threw shells wrapped in sand

challenging her to catch them.
But she could not

when the wind pushed her nose
inside her face, eyes only creases

hair flying away
leaving her empty.

Then, sending seafoam
burning through her lungs

the wind swallowed her eyes
unclasped her hands

and slipped her off like a dress,
a shadow on its back.

DUEL OF SUN

You see strange things
at dusk
as you keep moving

into the sun.
You believe
you can burst

with power
where the blue
meets the blue.

And these ranges of rock
hard as hell,
not a tree or shrub;

rocks jut
like fingers.
You stare till you feel

like the rocks
and the blue heading
straight for the sun,

nothing living in sight.
Sun jerks closer
where the blue meets

the blue, slowly sinks.
You begin to sadden.
You know you can't

make the sun burn.

MORNINGS, BLOOMINGTON INDIANA

I wake to the sound of snow crystals
on the window. My eyes open

reflexive turn of the head
to the slightest breath on the neck.
The prism hangs by teeth, revolves

and I am frozen with my dream
looking for any country road

with snow spines to walk on.

AT THE FOOT OF THE BELL TOWER

In Venice tall windows are the rule.
Fake balconies, white-knuckled in a lover's clinch
bring Quattrocento back to life. Golden horses
on slanted roofs guard the canal with each turn: stiff
reflection of brazen light.
There are no people to break the slow
symmetry of arced bridges, peagreen moss
and water no one knows how deep.

The overgrown ivy
spreads low and thin into my room, folds
down the curve of yesterday's sun on my body.
I watch river run with evening, break
into a thousand canals: San Marco pigeons
shatter a stained-glass city. Freefall.
Halfway between east and west. Mercury and Apollo
lean against the alabaster staircase.
I walk down the same spiral.