

## Paul Lake

### *The Man Who Knew Why Stars Shine*

*"One of the most impressive discoveries was the origin of the energy of stars, that makes them continue to burn. One of the men who discovered this was out with his girlfriend the night after he realized that nuclear reactions must be going on in the stars in order to make them shine. She said, 'Look at how pretty the stars shine!' He said, 'Yes, and right now I am the only man in the world who knows why stars shine.' She merely laughed at him." --Richard Feynman, **Six Easy Pieces***

He knew why stars shine  
But still hadn't learned  
That a girl, growing tired  
And bored, never yearned  
To hear the one man  
Who knew why explain  
How the stars shine so prettily  
Without commenting on  
Those stellar attractions  
Much closer at hand.  
And so with face fired  
By internal reactions  
He watched as the one  
Girl he deeply desired  
First laughed at his gravity  
Then left him to burn.

## ***The Book of Daniel***

Who wouldn't want to change  
his name to Belshazzar, from Daniel,  
and wear billowing robes and stroll  
through Babylon's fabled gardens,  
refusing to bow down  
to the king's law  
or the age's idol.

Who wouldn't rather live  
among courtesans and dwarves  
in a more lucid narrative,  
where dreams are solved like crossword puzzles,  
and Day-Glo script appears  
on palace walls,  
shimmering with portent  
like a desert mirage,

or lives in memoirs  
under shading palms  
in distant spas.

Who wouldn't choose to dwell  
in an ancient chronicle  
where lions rasp  
your martyr's flesh  
with emery tongues,  
till you emerge  
alive and fresh  
from their dark dens  
with a loud *Ta-dum*

and your trio of doomed companions  
with curling beards and biblical names  
step from fiery ovens  
like Hansel and Gretel--

thin gingery shadows  
shaped like men  
and browned to tan,

hurling taunts  
down dusty roads  
like a backward moral.

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A professor of English and creative writing at Arkansas Tech, **Paul Lake** has published two books of poetry, *Another Kind of Travel and Walking Backward*, and one novel, *Among the Immortals*. He has just completed a new poetry collection, *The Republic of Virtue*. He is currently the poetry editor of *First Things*.