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His first book, *Talking to Shadows*, is available for purchase locally at *Prospero's Books* on 39th and Bell or at www.mainstreetrag.com/store/books.php.

A graduate of the University of North Carolina's Undergraduate Honors Creative Writing Program, he likes his Tom Waits loud, his bourbon single barrel, and his basketball Carolina Blue.

His poems, essays, and journalism appear in a variety of national and regional publications. For 2010, Shawn is a "Poet In Residence" for www.presentmagazine.com.

Ladder to the Moon

for Georgia O'Keeffe

When it's time, you'll know.
You'll see it hanging in front of you
as if it had always been there,
a hand-made wooden ladder
above night-blackened red desert hills,
its bottom rung too high to even jump for,
top rung reaching nothing
save the space between earth sand and moon soil.

And somewhere past this desert,
past every thing,
strains a music of cinder blocks,
choirs of cranes and car horns,
and towers in New York reverberating a struggle
to reach only higher than they can.

If you can just see what is here,
then maybe a ladder will fall within your reach,
maybe it will carry you up
to touch and stand on a moon of your own,
to look down on towers of concrete, steel, and glass

that seem so small from there.

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At The Waffle House

*"Behold, I show you a mystery;
we shall not all sleep
but we shall all be changed"*

--- 1st Corinthians 15:51

Out of beer and out of time,
last call puts Tyler and I in a place
where mysterious blendings of caffeine and nicotine
work our Budweiser dulled brains awake,
where redneck jukeboxes full of whiskey voices
lament great losses of the true ones
and how we all get stomped
flatter than lonely Texas highways
complete with tumbleweeds and dust devils
simply by love.

So where are the rest of those Hank Williams poets
whose tears fall to the ground like rain
making puddles only bleary-eyed drunks
drinking their way through their blues can see?

When thy cup is empty, it shall be filled.
When she gets around to it and isn't bellowing side orders
of bacon with those hash browns.

So go ye then on down to a place
where things somehow come to short order
in those small hours before dawn
through fogs of conversation
rambling through coffee steam
and cigarettes piling dead in testament
to a new faith healing
busted hearts in confirmation

that you will never be the same.

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Cold Afternoon

*snowfall makes no noise,
falls as forgetting falls,
flake after flake.*

~~ Miguel de Unamuno, "The Snowfall Is So Silent,"
as translated by Robert Bly

We imagine ourselves atmospheric,
waiting for a thick covering of snow
that we know will come.
I build a fire.

We blanket ourselves before it,
fill our space with warmth –
these rooms from which we will see
white flakes fall from the gray sky

through the cold glass of windows
shut tight against the Kansas wind
that seems to seep, still, through
cracks and seams around frames, under doors.

It is like this in winter.
It is like this when skin
shivers at the touch of air
colder than water frozen in the ground.

We settle in, adjust to walls familiar
and worn, to furniture that holds our shape,
to the warmth of our blanketed bodies.
The tea kettle whistles,

steams the windows. Outside,
we could see our breath and imagine
ourselves as storm clouds
shedding snow crystals over the stubbled plains,

as snow clinging to the bare branches of maples,
to the needles and cones of pines,
coating browning lawns, covering
the sidewalks and the streets.

We imagine the quiet and imagine the snow,
imagine a day spent bundled up
in the warmth of each other,
hastening that which we know will come.

Tempus Fugue

*"Do I dare disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse."
-- T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

And on the moonlit sundial on Morehead planetarium's lawn
we lay right down
you and I
accompanied by trumpets of breeze moving the flesh
of raven leaves resonating eternal rhythms
of chlorophyll filled veins stiffened toward stars in prayer
in the center of all things born and dead and unborn
echoing at once
a symphony of spheres staining the night in a resolute
paradox of existence and non-existence
light and dark
all time and no time without time to measure

and we
drunk on complexity's thick nectar
of chaos and order
bound to all things here and there
now and forever
then and never
by grace

became travelers in time and space
grasping at the impossibility of moments just passed
giddy like children

when at that moment a camera
would have captured us static on our backs
lying in the middle of the round ball of all time
your tiny slender fingers woven into mine
creating a single connection
on a dial unlit by sun
calculating nothing
as two dark bodies at rest stared
pupils wide
up to where explanation finds only mystery
and God balancing
now and never
then and forever
amen.

Rumbling Through Dreams

- I.**
At midnight and two, it shook walls
with a diesel and steel roar
that could wake the deaf,
yet in a little house built next to tracks,
my brother and I,
stacked in bunk beds,
slept a practiced sleep
as the Burlington Northern rumbled West through our dreams.
- II.**
Walking in measured steps
from crosstie to crosstie,
I followed that line,
eyes forever to the horizon,
never losing sight of the point
where it all comes together,
stopping only to mine the best pieces of rose quartz,
mica, and coal,
from beside the tracks.
- When a train would come, off in the distance,
before moving clear,
like an Indian, I put my ear
to the rail just to hear
the music of steel rolling over steel.
- And, at the end of the day,
all walked out,
I dropped my treasure in a tattered sneakers box
with collected stamps, Bicentennial quarters,
Navajo tears, and letters from grandparents
half a continent away.
- III.**
In the mornings before breakfast
in arid Colorado summers,
I ran to the tracks
to the special place on the rail where I put pennies
the night before,
smoothed flat by impact and mass
of trains carrying coal from the mountains,
sugar beats from the eastern plains,
delighting in the occasional remnant of Lincoln—
a nose, an ear, an eye, a texture of beard,
an *e pluribus unum*,
each atom of currency destroyed each a different way.
- IV.**
I dream of riding trains,
of snaking serpentine through
the American patchwork.
East Coast forests blending
into Great Plains wheat,
rolling Ohio hills flattening
into the Kansas horizon
slamming into the sheer granite faces
of Rocky Mountain cliffs
and then, through desert sand,
to the sea.
- I dream of salt mist and factory smoke,
ponderosa pine and sequoia,
of rain pelted windows and thick valley fog.
I dream and in my dreams, I ride trains
and do not make good time
but rather ride forever on trains that never stop,
longing to reach the place just ahead,
the elusive point of perspective
where the rails merge,
where the separate become singular,
where all things bind together
to be the one thing, whole.