

SEA GLASS

New & Selected Poems

LUCI SHAW



WordFarm
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

WordFarm

334 Lakeside Ave S, #207

Seattle, WA 98144

www.wordfarm.net

info@wordfarm.net

Copyright © 2016 by Luci Shaw. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of WordFarm or the rights-holders as listed: Poems in the section “Angles of Light” are from *Angles of Light: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 2000 by Luci Shaw. Used by permission of WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. Poems in the section “Harvesting Fog” are from *Harvesting Fog*. Copyright © 2010 by Luci Shaw. Used by permission of Pinyon Publishing. Poems in the section “Scape” are from *Scape*. Copyright © 2013 by Luci Shaw. Used by permission of Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. All rights are reserved, and any third-party use of the material in these sections, outside this publication, is prohibited. Apply for third-party permission directly to Penguin Random House LLC, Pinyon Publishing or Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Cover Design: Andrew Craft

USA ISBN-13: 978-1-60226-017-7

USA ISBN-10: 1-60226-017-6

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition: 2016

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Shaw, Luci, author.

Title: Sea glass : new and selected poems / Luci Shaw.

Description: First edition. | Seattle, Washington : WordFarm, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016007761 | ISBN 9781602260177 (pbk.) | ISBN 1602260176 (pbk.)

Classification: LCC PS3569.H384 A6 2016 | DDC 811/.54--dc23

LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2016007761>

P 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Y 20 19 18 17 16

With gratitude for the ministry of Fr. Richard Rohr

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments xv

SEA GLASS (NEW POEMS)

Assent	3
Be Still and Know	4
The Generosity	5
A Celebration of Weeds	6
Mesa, Los Alamos	8
Speechless	9
A Cry for Possibility	10
Encarnate	11
The Coil of Prayer	12
What to Sing	13
Robin in the Late Afternoon	14
Upon Reading a Friend's Poems	15
Words Written on Soap: Irina Ratushinskaya	16
Dismantled	17
Veterans	18
Comeback for Snowy Plover	19
Fountain	20
Water	21
Particle	22
Total Recall	23
Witnessing	24
Fugitive	25
The Life of I	26
Heart in Three Voices	27
Echocardiogram	28
Contemplative Prayer, with Peony	29
Peeling the Onion	30
September Garden	31
Bloodline	32
Jesus Checks in for the Flight Home	33
There and Back	35

The Color of September	36
The Old Oak Remembers	37
Shaped	38
Environmental Art	39
A Square Is Not a Natural Shape	41
Fraction	42
Flowers in Winter	43

LISTEN TO THE GREEN

But Not Forgotten	47
Perfect Love Banishes Fear	48
Bride	49
Too Much to Ask	50
Made Flesh	51
Mary's Song	52
A Song for Simplicity	53
Night through a Frosty Window	55
Blindfold	56
Slow Passage— <i>Teel's Island</i>	57
Reluctant Prophet	58
The Flounder	59
Under the Snowing	60
Of Elms and God	61
Ever Green	63

THE SECRET TREES

In My Living Room	67
Behind the Walls	68
Winter Wheat	69
Getting Inside the Miracle	70
Power Failure	71
Image	72
Under the Skin	73
Materfamilias	74
Eternity Seen from North Avenue	75

THE SIGHTING

The Universal Apple: In the Fourteenth Year, February 14	79
Gifts for My Girl	80

Villanelle for a Season's End	83
Fire Place	84
. . . Let Him Hear	85
A Celibate Epiphany	86
The Sighting	88
Epithalamion	89
Prothalamion	90
Cathedral	91
Cosmos	93

POSTCARD FROM THE SHORE

Saved by Optics	97
Whenever	99
Trespassers	100
Split Screen: Naples, Florida	101
Mixed Media	102
Postcard from the Shore	103
The Comforting	104
Note	105
Freezing Rain	106
View from the Air: North Atlantic, May 1984	107
Home Movie	108
Going to Sleep in the Country	109
Highway Song for February 14	110

POLISHING THE PETOSKEY STONE

Polishing the Petoskey Stone	113
Conch	114
Worldview	115
The Amphibian	116
Raspberries	117
Slide Photography: Climbing the Mount of Olives	118
Omnipotence	119
Subliminal Messages	120
How to Paint a Promise in January	121
Road to the Oregon Coast	122
To a Winter Chestnut: Five Haiku	124
Designer	125

WRITING THE RIVER

Writing the River	129
On the River Bank, Bibury	130
Sailing San Francisco Bay	131
At the Cloisters	132
Labor	133
Sunday Afternoon at the Nursing Home	134
When Your Last Parent Dies	135
Evaporation	136
The Overshadow	137
Virgin	138
St. Frideswide's Chapel	139
A Bird in the Church	140
Sparrow Falling	141
Diamonds that Leap	142
Light Goes to These Great Lengths	143
Three Haiku: Queen Anne's Lace	144
Mobile	145
Golden Delicious	146
M. C. Escher's Three Worlds	147
Forest Green	149
What We Say We Want	150

THE ANGLES OF LIGHT

What the Wind Can Do	153
Folio	154
Puzzle: Tuolumne River	155
At the Edge	156
We Know This to Start With	157
What Secret Purple Wisdom	158
The Labors of Angels	159
Advent Visitation	160
Bubble	161
The Writing on the Rock	162
At West Beach, Lummi Island	163
Glass Beach	164
Morning at Legoe Bay, Lummi Island	165
In the Tent: Flathead Lake, Montana	166

Campfire, State Park	167
St. Teresa Speaks to God, “A Consuming Fire”	168
Some Mornings She Simply Cannot	169

WATER LINES

Between the Lines	173
Against Entropy	174
Inside/Outside	175
Birthright	176
Raining	177
Fraction	178
The Golden Ratio & the Coriolis Force	179
Below	180
Singing Bowl	181
Jordan in the Cascades	182
Bluff Edge, Whidbey Island	183
Amazed by Love	184

WHAT THE LIGHT WAS LIKE

Tenting, Burr Trail, Long Canyon, Escalante	187
The Simple Dark	188
Without a Shadow	189
Getting on Board	190
Into the Blue, Alaska	191
Life Drawing	192
Breath	193
Botticelli’s <i>Madonna and Child, with Saints</i>	194
Rounding	196
What James Didn’t Say About the Tongue	197
Without Words	198
Deluge	199
Storm at La Push, Olympic Peninsula	200
The Fixer-upper	202
Draw Me	203
God Speaks in Blue	204

HARVESTING FOG

Consider	207
Canaan Valley, October	208

Wind & Window	209
December	210
The Generosity of Pines	211
Leaf: Fallen	212
Weight Loss	213
Massage	214
Frio River	215
No, I'm Not Hildegard	216
Caunes-Minervois	217
Now, Order Your Pre-paid Cremation	218
Attendez!	219

SCAPE

The Slow Pleasures	223
Reading Lesson	224
Deconstruction	225
So It Is with the Spirit	226
Under the Skin	227
Catch of the Day	228
The Golden Carp	229
Verb	230
Open End	231
Collection, Recollection	232
To Be a Bird	233
Cave Art	234
The Possibilities of Clay	235
What to Do with Bits of String	236
Iron	237
Secure	238
States of Being	239
<i>About Luci Shaw</i>	241
<i>Also by Luci Shaw</i>	243

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MY GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT goes to the publications in which originally appeared several poems featured in the first section of *Sea Glass: New & Selected Poems*. These are *The Anglican Theological Review* (“Fountain”), *Books & Culture* (“Encarnate”), *The Christian Century* (“Robin in the Late Afternoon,” “Peeling the Onion,” “Comeback for Snowy Plover,” “The Coil of Prayer,” “Bloodline” and “Contemplative Prayer, with Peony”), *The Molehill* (“The Color of September”), *The Pinyon Review* (“Fugitive”), *Poetry East* (“A Celebration of Weeds”), *Radix* (“Robin in the Late Afternoon”), *Relief* (“Dismantled” and “Upon Reading a Friend’s Poems”), *Seen* (“Environmental Art”), *Tweetspeak* (“Words Written on Soap: Irina Ratushinskaya” and “What to Sing”), *Weavings* (“The Old Oak Remembers”), and *Whale Road Review* (“Environmental Art”).

I also thank each of the publishers of the poetry collections showcased in the second through twelfth sections of this book who have supported my work through many years and who have given permission (in cases when I did not already have it) for poems from those earlier collections to be reprinted in this new one. These are Harold Shaw Publishers (*Listen to the Green*, *Postcard from the Shore*, *The Secret Trees* and *The Sighting*), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (*Water Lines*), Regent College Publishing (who brought two earlier books back into print, *Polishing the Petoskey Stone* and *Writing the River*), Waterbrook Multnomah (*The Angles of Light: New and Selected Poems*), WordFarm (*What the Light Was Like*), Pinyon Publishing (*Harvesting Fog*), and Cascade Books (*Scape*).

SEA GLASS (NEW POEMS)

ASSENT

If you build your house
next to the river of love
you will come to recognize
the divine, whether an angel or
an open parking space.
Even the dust motes that
make a chain of light settling
on the office chair arm are
a sign. Reckon with the truth
that the whole universe flares
with just-born light. And
that even in winter's ink-black dark
every flame live enough
to burn will matter.

BE STILL AND KNOW

Deepening dark, with a chill
wind and the uneven sounds of sheep
cropping on the stubble hill.
For now, simply stand still
under the slow stars' glisten
and sky creep. Wait. Do not sleep.
But listen.

Deep silence and shadow tells
the essential story.
No trumpet blare. Not a single bell.
Watch as the clarity of dark
shows up a minor spark—
an oil lamp flickering
in a cave under the hill.

With that wick's brief bud of light
a child's first ragged cry
splits this night.
Pray that his just-born bright-
ness will flare and fill all space—
until the dark's annihilated
by the glint of grace.

THE GENEROSITY

What well-chosen small presents
arrive almost every day, wrapped
in the newspaper of the ordinary!

No ribbons. No gift cards.
Just the coin of the sun glinting
behind a gray broth of clouds.

A knuckle of dark rock exposed as
a freeze lets go and the snow
settles in its own melting. Trees

showing off their good bones, skeletal,
naked—their fractal structures
echoing the repeating patterns of atoms.

Last week a tender rain came and went,
and our roof gutters gurgled their watery
joy at being useful.

And today, a raven feather on
the sidewalk and wings in the sky,
memos from heaven everywhere.

LISTEN TO THE GREEN

BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Whether or not I find the missing thing
it will always be
more than my thought of it.
Silver heavy, somewhere it winks
in its own small privacy,
playing
the waiting game with me.

And the real treasures do not vanish.
The precious loses no value
in the spending.
A piece of hope spins out,
bright, along the dark,
and is not lost in space;
love is out orbiting, and will
come home.

PERFECT LOVE BANISHES FEAR

1 John 4:18

The risk of love
is that of being unreturned.

For if I love too deep,
too hard, too long,
and you love little
or you love me
not at all,
then is my treasure given,
gone,
flown away lonely.

But if you give me back
passion for passion,
return my burning,
add your own
dark fire to flame my heart,
then is love perfect,
hot, round, augmented,
whole, endless, infinite,
and it is fear
that flies.

BRIDE

The thin smooth eggshell of her
rigid, indrawn by a private gravity—
her convex surface
offers no toe-hold for analysis.

But perhaps the perfect smile—
the self-assured sheen—
her insularity's bright
white carapace that shuns another's touch
ask of you:

Is it her coolness or her cowardice
(or are they one?) that closes in-
ward on itself
denying entrance?

The probes of God's sharp grace,
his bruising mouth (and yours),
threaten to broach her brittleness.
And heaven's breath, hot—
see how she shrinks from it
on her ice palace
as from all passion that seeks
center
in her hidden hollowness.

Not knowing she's destined for shell
shock,
vainly she shields her vulnerable vacuum—
postpones the breaking and entering—
loves emptying of
her chilly emptiness.

THE SECRET TREES

IN MY LIVING ROOM

I have a carpet green as outside grass.
Its short, dense, woolly blades all seem to wait
for the old Hoover to mow down the dirt
and rake dead fibers, miscellaneous leaves
of lint, into itself. I almost wish
the rain would pour down from the ceilinged sky,
silver and fresh, onto this inside lawn.
Then from the hanging corner globe, switched on
(sun breaking through after the shower's over),
a flood of yellow sunlight might bewitch
a robin into pulling at a worm
daring to tunnel the close-woven sod.

BEHIND THE WALLS

Along the street a new house
is going up among the trees.
The open air of Wheaton
is being boxed in there, closed off
from rain, birds, light, leaves.
Day by day another kind of space
is being defined
by upright beams of pine, narrow
yellow in this morning's sun,
sentenced to the long darkness.
Months from now, when it is
all done, I shall walk by.
Where others notice siding,
shutters, paint, I shall see
behind the walls the secret trees,
still standing, straight and
strong as the pines in the
free groves outside.

WINTER WHEAT

Even the oaks
are almost naked.
The fall flames of rose and gold
have died out under
the dark rains.
The ground underfoot
is rimed with the cold ashes
of the wind, the bleached
stubble, the clotted
wheat heads.

But see,
over there, like a
green blaze on the shoulder
of the hill, like a new patch
in the quilt,
a square of quite improbable
emerald.
With what audacity
the bright velvet
assaults our autumn senses:
each blade a reversal
of seasons, an upstart shoot
flagging the brief sun bursts,
sap juicing to its tip,
ready now, in November,
for the new year!

The oaks are bare
and the sky heavy with
first snow, but my rebel blood
beats higher now
against the winter night
coming.

THE SIGHTING

THE UNIVERSAL APPLE: IN THE FOURTEENTH YEAR, FEBRUARY 14

His tongue tests the waxed skin; his teeth
invade the red, crushing at every bite
a thousand cells for their sweet cider.
Without ever thinking about it, the boy knows
he is eating a way back into his feral self,
intense, white-fleshed, veined, full
of sap and seed. He is as packed with cells.
As primal, as the apple whose stalk
has dropped away, forgotten as cleanly as
his own umbilical cord. Still
hungry, he sizes up another apple to juggle
in the air, to rescue from its brief,
ungainly orbit, to hold with ardor, its hard
heart shape robust as any girl's between
his palms. Richer than a printed valentine,
the earnest crimson captures all his senses,
incarnate and incarnadine. Its wholeness
circles his own core. But curiosity
conquers esthetics: pocket-knife slicing,
jagged, along its equator, he dissects
the small planet, laying its northern hemi-
sphere back on its buttock. And there,
from the center of its gravity,
all five valves filled with a secret semen,
shines every schoolboy's model for a star.

GIFTS FOR MY GIRL

At eleven, you need new shoes
often, and I would give you
other things to stand on
that are handsome and useful
and fit you well, that are not
all plastic, that are real
and knowable and leather-
hard, things that will move
with you and breathe rain
or air, and wear well in all weather.

For beauty, I would buy
a gem for you from the earth's
heart and a ring that is gold
clear through and clothes the colors
of flowers. I would cultivate in you
a gentle spirit, and curiosity,
and wonder in your eyes. For use,
in your house I'd hang
doors that are solid wood
without hidden panels of air, set
in walls built of brick more
than one inch thick.
On your floors I'd stretch fleeces
from black sheep's backs,
and for your sleep, sheets
spun from fibers that grew, once,
on the flanks of the fields.
I'd mount for you one small,
clean mirror for a grinning
glimpse at yourself, and a whole
geometry of windows to the world
with sashes that open hard, but
once lifted, let in a breath
of pure sun, the smell of a day,

a taste of wild wind, an earful
of green music.

At eleven, and always,
you will need to be nourished.
For your mind—poems and plays, words
on the pages of a thousand books:
Deuteronomy, Dante and Donne,
Hosea and Hopkins, L'Engle and Lewis.
For your spirit, mysteries and praise,
sureties and prayer. For your teeth
and tongue, real bread the color
of grain at a feast, baked and broken
fresh each day, apricots and raising,
cheese and olive oil and honey
that live bees have brought
from the orchard. For drink
I'd pour you a wine
that remembers sun and shadow
on the hillside where it grew,
and spring water wet enough
to slake your forever thirst.

At eleven, the air around you
is full of calls and strange
directions. Choices pull at you,
and a confusion of dreams.
And I would show you a true compass
and how to use it, and a sun steady
in its orbit, and a way
through the woods by a path
that will not peter out.

At eleven, you know well
the sound of love's voice,
and you have, already, hands
and a heart and a mouth
that can answer. And I would
learn with you more

of how love gives and receives,
both, with both palms open. I
am standing here, far enough away
for you to stretch and breathe,
close enough to shield you from
some of the chill and to tell you
of a comfort that is stronger,
more real, that will come closer still.

—*for my youngest daughter, Kristin*

VILLANELLE FOR A SEASON'S END

Autumn is here, and summer will not stay.
The season cuts a bloodline on the land,
And all earth's singing green is stripped away.

Your leaving drains the color from the day.
The oak leaves' red is clotting in my hand.
Autumn is here, and summer will not stay.

The sea fog settles. Even noon is gray.
The light recedes as though this dusk were planned.
The green of field and tree has slipped away.

I shiver on the beach and watch the way
The berries' blood is spilled along the sand.
Autumn is here, and summer will not stay.

In the chill air the knotted weed heads sway.
The waves have swept your footprints from the sand.
The green of all our fields is stripped away.

See how the wind has scattered the salt hay
Across the dunes! Too well I understand:
Autumn is here, bright summer will not stay,
And all earth's love and green are stripped away.

POSTCARD FROM THE SHORE

SAVED BY OPTICS

First, you must find a chip
of cold

that has always wanted to see,
to channel the light.
Then, with hands devoid
of electricity

without matches, even,
and with only splinters
of strength left,

you must carve it out—the rough
eyeball—from under the brow
of this ice continent

and polish it between
your curved palms' last warmth
into the double convex
of a lens,

a gem without frost or crack,
cleansed by the flow of
its own tears.

Next, you must wait, shivering
for the slow sun
to reach the zenith
of his readiness

to work with you. *Now.*
Focused in the eye
of ice

(angle it exactly
though its chill finds each
of your fingers' bones)

a matchless flame collects
until the scrutiny
of light

reads the dry tinder into
a saving kindling—ice's gift
of heat and paradox.

WHENEVER

Whenever a day's plans are aborted (like this morning, as the blizzard closed in and tethered us to the kerosene stove), I think of possibilities that have never come real—the white oak out front that would have touched the sky if lightning hadn't lopped it, last fall's green-blooded tomatoes nipped by frost, the writer who might have become my daughter-in-law. Less obvious are the poems I may never finish, each a fetus, waiting, wrinkled, for an image to break the waters.

Today my world is an envelope of snow without a stamp. Like me, it is going nowhere, caught in the tail of a dream like the one pinched off last night by a sudden buffet of north wind. I was about to fly again. Now I may never know if I can.

TRESPASSERS

The horizon is clear
cut, an apricot silk
stretches over the hills'
dark profile, and now
that the wind has moved on,
a crystal stillness
presses in place
every tree and blade in
the shallow valley
(our eyes are not
strong enough to prove
this, but skin feels
the weight of dusk).
In the oblique light
each leaf is layered,
green as glass, on its
singular stem. The road
moves cleanly, bisecting
the view. Fields obey
their fences; the whole
view waits for us
to make a mistake,
to tear a ragged corner.
We hesitate even
to speak, to smudge
the silence, to move
the air with our breath,
to disturb sod or stone
with a single step.

POLISHING THE
PETOSKEY STONE

POLISHING THE PETOSKEY STONE

*Petoskey Stone (Hexagonaria)—a petrified colony coral
350 million years old, found on beaches in Michigan*

My friend says, “Spit on it, and rub
the surface. See the pattern?”
In its hammock of lines I lift the pebble
the color of a rain cloud, cradle it
a thousand miles. Holding

the steering wheel in one hand, the gray
oval curved to my other palm, we move,
a ripple across the map to Kansas, while
I rub its softness in ellipses
against a rough shore of denim and wool.

The second day it starts
to shine like glycerin soap. As I buff it
smooth, the print rises to the surface—
the silk stone honeycombed with
eyes opening from a long sleep

between lashes of fine spines. Born
eons ago in a warm sea over
Michigan, buried in a long, restless
dream, now the old coral wakes
to the waves of cloth.

CONCH

Its open mouth corresponds
to your own hunger to hear.
Rough as the bleat
of gulls, its edges
rasp your cheek, cold as salt;
the surge of sound floods
into your own convoluted
shell of an ear
through tympanum, stapes, cochlea.

You lean into the roar—a tide
of air and water trapped
at the pink helical heart—
an ocean tumbling over
and over. Breath still moves
on the face of the deep,
you ache to its
tempest at your cheekbone.
And the inside tremor—the thunder,
the wave that breaks over
more than your bare feet.

Listen deep until it drowns.
Know the whole world
a shell, and you the grit
caught in it, being pearled over.

WORLDVIEW

*“Color pattern on underside of tail can be read
like a fingerprint. Reaches 50’ long.”
—from a New England postcard picturing a humpback whale*

Like a flag in a gust
she unfurls. The present
tense, she powers up
from the pull of gravity.
Breaching in gargantuan play,
fluting her flukes’
unduplicated undersides
she leaps—slow motion—
shedding a shroud of foam.
Ropes of watered pearls slide
from her shoulders. When she blows,
it is a triumph of spume
inviting rainbows.

Standing on her single, muscular
root as if the sea were solid—
a pedestal for sight-
seeing, she views the world.
Lifting that great weight
like an offering,
she swims the oceans of air, flouts
the horizon’s rule. In one
steel fling she sounds the sky,
flashes, falls, sinks, begins
again the search for the deep place
of her final and inevitable sleep.

WRITING THE RIVER

WRITING THE RIVER

After two days' rain heavy enough to
circle the view with descending silver,
Austin Creek has grown to the size of

a metaphor—rising fast from summer,
slow over pebbles, to this rowdy
torrent. Under my window it hurls itself

with the force of myth, over river stones,
down rapids, riddled with small fish.
All day the voice of water roars

behind my writing—all day, while I'm
making soup, stoking the woodstove
(the flames rushing their orange rivers

up the flu). Under a darkened sky
I step out on the porch to check its
scouring race, and is it rising still? I know

it is myself I am checking, keeping
the window open all night to that naked,
splendid sound, dusky as pewter. Rainfall

and river together—rinsing the room,
soaking my dreams. In one dream
I am a salmon working my way up

the valley, grazed by rocks. I am living
a creek, writing a river. Downstream,
a trace of my blood feeds the lake.

ON THE RIVER BANK, BIBURY

Why do you suddenly ask me am I happy?
I am only combing my mind, like water
searching the green weed. Under the plane
tree, in this confusion of suns, crescent

trout flip their golden spines
into the air, then straighten,
heads upstream, in the clear path of water.
I know now it is their bliss to be still

in a current. The grassy fringes between glare
and dusk teach them how a river bank
casts a shadow of rest; how fixed and tranquil
lie the dark stones at river bottom.

SAILING SAN FRANCISCO BAY

She braces—one hand
on the forestay. Her other hand
curves around to the outside of the jib,
its belly heavy with wind.

Pressing against her hand heel,
deceptive as silk, the air
fills the sailcloth until it bulks
as pregnant as her own body
before each birth. Out there
on the Catalina's prow, with
the small waves swelling against
the hull under her so that
through the soles of her deck shoes
she feels the waters breaking,
she is alone, letting it all go
with the water sliding away below.
The other sounds—curlew cries across
the water, Mozart on the portable player,
the glasses and voices from the cabin—
all trail behind, like the faint call of her
grown children, gone in the green wake.

It is all such old magic—bittersweet
like birth, the melting sea silver,
stained sky red, vanishing between
her legs like the last light being sucked
down through the bones of the mountains,
there, in a bloody show.
She flattens her hand and pushes hard
against the blue cloth so that the sail
spills some of its wind,
giving it back to the bay.

THE ANGLES OF LIGHT

WHAT THE WIND CAN DO

Twilight. With darkness coming on
through the open door, I am losing more and more
of the gold. From the field next to the barn
a fog spreads over the house, taut and clean as a bedsheet,
a blotter. Light still falls from the height
but in particles, the way pollen drops to the hand
under an open sunflower.

Then, like a sigh, the night opens its mouth, breathes.
With fog sliding north on this sled of air, a new dime
of light appears like an offering, a lost coin just found,
over a horizon liquid with trees beginning to sway.
Even the dirt road glistens like a river. Oat fields tilt,
undulate under the kneading air, a Welsh green, the stalks
splinters of moon, the body of night a dancing silver.

FOLIO

Flattened like coins on train tracks
the *prunus* leaves unfurl along their twigs
in copper ovals. She bends down,
peers in. Shadowed underneath,
each leaf greens in its
charcoal dark, laced with veins
rosy as human arterial blood, delicate
as her own most minor capillaries.

Here are two secrets: the bud
bursting pink from the groin where
leaf stem embraces branch; the curled worm
slung in its pale cocoon, waiting.

Here is another: she has walked around
all day, feeling raw as that bloody leaf,
or worse, a blank page. Priceless
as a flat penny, she'll end up
shriveled for sure, food for the worm.
Against the odds, maybe she'll bloom first.

PUZZLE: TUOLUMNE RIVER

Just now, a yellow leaf the shape of an eye
flying, settling on glacial rock, watching us;

the river, spilling its slow snowmelt, conserving
its ancient secrets, its questions;

each hour a new riddle showing: the way water,
in its softness, knuckles holes in granite;

the sun's burn across ripples, crowding
the chill olive of shadow; the wedlock

of moss with pine root; your cascade's
cursive eloquence that drowns my mineral hush.

WATER LINES

BETWEEN THE LINES

I can't help noticing
how falling leaves and rain
print their trajectories—
traces in the air, on the window glass—
as if writing some cosmic equation.

My algebra was always bad, but
trigonometry—its angles
and curves, its tangents and sines
and signs—always wakes something
quite beyond logic in my heart.

As if the mystery of existence were becoming
visible—my small gasps of prayer,
meant to rise, not fall, triangulating
in the wind. And the simple
snow—each flake unique, intact, as it

flies through space—giving chaos
a chance to reintegrate to a kind of holy
order, filling cracks, hollows—the muddy ruts
in the playing field behind the school
white, beautifully level again.

AGAINST ENTROPY

Consider our perception of glaciers—
the shoulders of mountains scaffolded with ice
as if their age-old bulk might collapse under
its own weight, needs shoring up.

Or the shape-shift of rain to crystals,
gravity settling the grainy flakes, the wind picking up,
wrapping the houses with false comfort—
a fleeced scarf that grows to a drift. As if
the world, in its bleakest season,
craves warmth, is reaching for refuge. Ponder

the limbs of trees with their sloping
shelves about to fall, the rib cage
around the singing lungs not
giving in; the brittle bones still upholding
the ripening body like crutches
against collapse. Even a minimal movement,
like closing a window against the draft,
or lighting a small fire, reverses
entropy, thaws the iron authority
of the season. Tomorrow, when sunlight hits,
the frost will steam up from our sidewalks,
the black ice will melt on the pass.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE

Inside the house, all
you can see are the streams of rain
down the windows. Outside,
even a minute exposes you to
the chill splash of truth as the singular drops
filter through your dark hair
and trickle down your scalp,
soaking the collar at your neckline.
Shivering, you intuit the needle of ice
that still lives like a seed
at the heart of each drop—it feels
that cold.

Would you wish yourself innocent
of ice, shielded? This is a poem
you could never have written, a frost
you would never have let yourself feel.

WHAT THE LIGHT WAS LIKE

TENTING, BURR TRAIL, LONG CANYON, ESCALANTE

Even when I close my eyes, even later in
the tent, dreaming, I see banks and rivers running red.
My blood has drunk color from the stones as if
it were the meal I needed. I am ready to eat
any beauty—these vistas of stars, storms.
The mesas and vermilion cliffs. The light they magnify
into the canyon. The echoes, the distances.
The rocks carved with ancient knowledge.

But after vast valleys I am so ready for this
low notch in the gorge, the intimate cottonwoods
lifting their leafy skirts and blowing their small
soft kisses into my tent on the wasteland's
stringy breath. The spaces between the gusts are rich
with silence. I am ready to stay in this one place, sleep,
dream, breathe the grace of wind and earth that is
never too much, and more than I will ever need.

In this parchment land, the scribble
and blot of junipers and sagebrush, each crouched
separate, rooted in its own desert space,
spreads low to the sand, holding it down
the way the tent pegs anchor my tent, keep it
from blowing away. The way I want my words
to hold, growing maybe an inch a year,
grateful for the least glisten of dew.

THE SIMPLE DARK

Black birds slice their evening patterns—
long curves in the sky. Everything
is drawing down into shade.

But the dark, which is at first so simple
is not simple. Away from the farmhouse
with its slits of yellow, the monotone
develops like a print in the chemical bath.

The unbroken velvet swims
with complications so subtle that
seeing and hearing must take their time
to know. The shadow purples,
the dusk intricate with crickets. The sky
infested with pricks of light.
My whole body an ear, an eye.

WITHOUT A SHADOW

The hill is steep and the walking slow,
and when I look back, the road fades
to a pale nothing behind me.
Fog follows me, the drift of it
a clinging dampness that melts
the angled ghosts of cedar and fir.
Blotted out, their pungent scent intensifies.

The blurred red hydrant, the houses
below, the edge of the invisible shore,
are buried by a relentless creep
of skim milk, opaque, as if the view
has drained through the sinkhole
of the lake (whose delicate
fog-blunted lapping rises to my ear).

Not exactly dark, but without shade,
the sharp purity of morning has been
diminished. I read somewhere that
“only full light reveals shadow.”
Moving through fog, living
is a blindness, a yielding
of my layered ignorance to the mist.

A gleam on the tarmac
and indistinct tree shapes
angle across the road. A rumor of blue
begins to kiss its way through.

HARVESTING FOG

CONSIDER

Sidereal: of or pertaining to the stars

Glass can never be thin enough
to translate out from in, unaltered.
I open every window to entice air
and with it the landscape—its dark bulk.

A peep shot (through a squared frame
of thumbs and fingers). Only a tittle
of indigo, barely a jot of enormity,
but some kind of edge shatters out there
and in here. And speaking of stars,
the word *desire* itself. The sky a whole,
filling the hole in the heart.

CANAAN VALLEY, OCTOBER

We've come to expect it from trees, but here even the ground blazes, packed deep with leaf foil red as red gold. At every turn in the road we're jolted by another roar of color—whole hillsides belting out the flush the sun has invested in West Virginia foliage all last summer.

I'm hearing a story from 1910. Settlers, determined to clear the land, cut down every tree along the mountain's backbone. They had themselves pictured, triumphant, standing on stumps. When the exposed leaf-peat caught fire it burned away, burned clear down to the limestone bones of the hills.

This morning the defiant blaze of fallen leaf on every side campaigns for revival. No cautious pigment, just the bright brush of a view through the car window that sweeps all the old years' records clean. A flame that refuses to go out, to join the lost history of leaves.

Oceans may muddle salt with fresh so that sources are forgotten. Glass cannot tell you from which of millions of sand grains it has been melted and cooled to clarity. But mountains are made

of memory, eons of it, an ancient narrative held tight in the rocks; their deep hum of survival a *sostenuto* all winter, inaudible to us. But come spring, we'll know to watch for a green fire singing along the hills again.

WIND & WINDOW

No snow, but the sleet
tapping loud on the skylight,
like stars seeking entry.
A message keeps coming—
wind humming a tune
in the branches of cedars,
a rumor of heaven,
a whisper of God.
No snow, but a sound
penetrating your window.
You can't see the gusts,
but listen, and sense me—
I'm the spice in the air,
the cool on your cheek,
a shift of the season,
a change in your weather.
Swing wide your window
to hear what I'm saying,
like Mary, who listened,
her heart thrown ajar.

SCAPE

THE SLOW PLEASURES

So, the words come slowly, like
the minutes in an hour, or even
the hours in a day—one by one.

In the cave of your mouth they taste
like oranges, green melons. Each offers its own
tang, its own unhurried flush that glazes

your tongue. A delicious vowel flourishes
there, rounding, a flame struck by the match of
a fricative, a plosive, a sibilant—C, V, P, S, T, Z.

Each mouth sound knows this is not its end;
that even after being swallowed,
mated, subsumed, essences persist.

For now, let them re-echo in porcelain,
crimson, onion, ivory, ovary, zither.
Allow each the slow pleasure of being.

READING LESSON

The forest is a library of trees
whose books, in autumn, open
for our education to pages,
leaves that turn and turn, under
the air's inquiring fingers.

On the ground, light and shadow.
The maples drop their syllables until
the grass burns with words.
I pick up one, two, to take home.
Together they spell "Splendor."

DECONSTRUCTION

When I try to carve in air
an outline of what was there,
a memory of presence, I can only
think about absence.

When we built our new
house on the hillside next to
the giant Douglas fir,
the machines dug deep for
a foundation so that the naked roots
stuck out like live wires, knowing
air and sky for the first time.

Tall enough to be
unsafe in a high wind, they said,
like a green sail on the Bay,
heeling over at the will of any gust.

We knew then, we and our neighbors,
what had to be done. It was murder.
The saws took only an hour to erase
the splendid sound of wind through needles,
the landmark muscle of trunk,

and the hollow at the foot where,
in spring, the deer always gave birth.

ABOUT LUCI SHAW

LUCI SHAW WAS BORN IN 1928 in London, England, and has lived in Canada, Australia and the U.S.A. A 1953 honors graduate of Wheaton College in Illinois, she was cofounder and later president of Harold Shaw Publishers, and since 1988 she has been a Writer in Residence at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Shaw is a frequent retreat facilitator and leads writing workshops in church and university settings. She has lectured in North America and abroad on topics such as art and spirituality, the Christian imagination, poetry-writing, and journal-writing as an aid to artistic and spiritual growth.

A charter member of the Chrysostom Society of Writers, Shaw is author of more than a dozen volumes of poetry and editor of three poetry anthologies and a festschrift. She is also author of several nonfiction prose books, including the recent books *Adventure of Ascent* and *Thumbprint in the Clay* (both from InterVarsity Press) and three books coauthored with Madeleine L'Engle, *WinterSong* (Regent), *Friends for the Journey* (Regent), and *A Prayer Book for Spiritual Friends* (Augsburg/Fortess).

Her poems and essays have been widely anthologized, and they regularly appear in periodicals such as *Books & Culture*, *The Christian Century*, *Crux*, *Image*, *Nimble Spirit*, *Radix*, *Rock & Sling*, *Stonework* and *Weavings*. Musical settings for several of her poems have been composed by Knut Nystedt, Alice Parker, Frederick Frahm and Allen Cline.

Shaw is poetry editor and contributing editor of *Radix*, a quarterly journal published in Berkeley, California, that celebrates art, literature, music, psychology, science and the media. She is also poetry and fiction editor of *Crux*, a quarterly academic journal published by Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

She and her husband, John Hoyte, live in Bellingham, Washington. Her website (lucishaw.com) reflects some of her many interests, including sailing, tent camping, knitting, gardening and wilderness photography.

ALSO BY LUCI SHAW

POETRY

Listen to the Green (1973)
The Secret Trees (1976)
The Sighting (1981)
Postcard from the Shore (1985)
Polishing the Petoskey Stone (1990)
Horizons (with Timothy Botts, 1992)
Writing the River (1994)
The Angles of Light (2000)
The Green Earth (2002)
Water Lines (2003)
Accompanied by Angels (2006)
What the Light Was Like (2006)
Harvesting Fog (2010)
Scape (2013)

FOR CHILDREN

The Genesis of It All (with Huai-Kuang Miao and Mary Lane, 2006)

WITH MADELEINE L'ENGLE

WinterSong (1996)
Friends for the Journey (1997)
A Prayerbook for Spiritual Friends (1999)

NONFICTION PROSE

God in the Dark (1989)
Life Path (1992)
Water My Soul (1997)
The Crime of Living Cautiously (2005)
Breath for the Bones (2007)
Adventure of Ascent (2014)
Thumbprint in the Clay (2016)