

Whoever Wants Wisdom
Can Have It

SAMPLE

ALSO BY ANTHONY CALESHU

POETRY

Xenia, etc.

A Dynamic Exchange Between Us

The Victor Poems

Of Whales: in Print, in Paint, in Sea, in Stars, in Coin, in House, in
Margins

The Siege of the Body and a Brief Respite

Poetry and Covid-19: An Anthology of Contemporary, International,
and Collaborative Poetry (*Ed. with Rory Watermark*)

FICTION

Churchtown: The Tale of Suzy Delou and Faye Fiddle

CRITICISM

In the Air: Essays on the Poetry of Peter Gizzi (*Ed.*)

Reconfiguring the Modern American Lyric: The Poetry of James Tate

Poetry and Public Language (*Ed. with Tony Lopez*)

Anthony Caleshu

Whoever Wants Wisdom
Can Have It

SAMPLE

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by
Shearsman Books
PO Box 4239
Swindon
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-83738-044-2

Copyright © Anthony Caleshu, 2026.

The right of Anthony Caleshu to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.

SAMPLE

CONTENTS

Prologue / 11

1. FABLES

The Village of Jumping Fish / 15

The Swifts & The Bats / 17

The Stag & the Chicken / 18

The Dolphin in the Woods & the Boar in the Sea / 20

The Barn Owl & The Woodworm / 21

2. MAXIMS

On Speculative Futures / 23

On Night / 25

On Love / 27

On Watching Arrival / 31

On the Dawn of Idles / 33

On Apocryphal Hypocrisy / 34

Prompt to ChatGPT for a Single

Maxim to End All Maxims / 36

3. APHORISMS

‘LIFE IS SHORT AND ART LONG’

(AFTER STRANGER THINGS AND HIPPOCRATES)

1. Season 1 / 41

2. Season 2 / 44

3. Season 3 / 46

4. Season 4 / 50

5. Season 5 / 53

4. FABLES

- The Fox & the Hens / 57
The Seagull & the Sun / 58
The Seal & the Jellyfish, the Badger & the Porcupine / 59
The Dog & the Lobster / 60
The Sun & the Moon / 61

5. PROVERBS

PROVERBS: NEW AND REVISED

1. A proud look / 65
2. A lying tongue / 67
3. Hands that shed innocent blood / 68
4. An heart that deviseth wicked imagination / 69
5. In running to mischief / 70
6. A false witness that speaketh lies / 72
7. He that soweth discord among brethren / 73

6. SONGS

- Lullabye / 77
The Bridge / 79
Anamnesis / 81
On Playing 'Quim' for 15 Points / 83
Lullabye / 85
On Wisdom / 87

7. FABLES

The Raccoon & the Dumpster /	91
The Tick & the Tick /	92
The Cormorant & the Seal /	93
The Snake & the Rat /	94
Prompt to ChatGPT for a Fable about California Mice /	95

8. PARABLES

OCCUPATIONAL PARABLES

The Neurosurgeon /	99
The Basketball Player /	100
The Lifeguard /	101
The Intern /	102
The Influencer /	103
The Manager /	104
The Rockstar /	105
The Occasional Poet /	106

EPILOGUE / 108

NOTES

‘Who Shall Say’: On Fathers and Wisdom (A Late Epilogue of Epigraphs) /	111
--	-----

<i>Acknowledgements</i> /	117
---------------------------	-----

For my children, my wife, my mother, my father.

SAMPLE

The great majority of us poets, father, and youths worthy such a father, are misled by the appearance of right. I labour to be concise, I become obscure; nerves and spirit fail him, that aims at the easy: one, that pretends to be sublime, proves bombastic: he who is too cautious and fearful of the storm, crawls along the ground: he who wants to vary his subject in a marvelous manner, paints the dolphin in the woods, the boar in the sea.

—Horace, *Ars Poetica*

SAMPLE

SAMPLER

PROLOGUE

Whoever wants wisdom can have it, we said.

*As if we had wisdom to give / to rain / to burn – heavy with
infinitives and so the infinite.*

*Whoever knows the infinite about you knows the infinite
about us... which worries us:*

how wisdom shuts windows only after the rain stops.

*how like an unseen candle, wisdom burns through the
night after too much wine.*

*We dream long sleepless nights with you drinking wine
(which is not wise),*

reading How To guides (which are not wise),

*letting you sleep late... or waking you from your dreams
(neither seems wise)*

*In the morning sun, lying on the orange-blooming couch, we
pull back the candle-burnt black curtains.*

*Whatever movie we're watching, we recognise it from the
back of your head.*

Whatever wise words there are, none of us know them.

And the rain outside, it still hasn't told us how best

to want / to know / to worry...

to dream / to read / to wake...

to watch / to hold...

to told you.

SAMPLER

1. Fables

SAMPLE

SAMPLER

THE VILLAGE OF JUMPING FISH

In the village of jumping fish there is a dog. Every morning the dog wakes later than the day before. And because he is a tired dog, he wakes twice as tired after a night spent guarding his food from the village cat. The villagers love the dog and feed him so much during the day, instead of a tail he grows a second poo-hole. He poos twice as much as any other dog, but not in the river. Because he is a clean and conscientious dog, he poos in the nearby park, bags it and throws it into the bin at the entrance to the park, where the river begins to burble.

The villagers also love the village cat, possibly even *more* than the dog. They laugh out loud watching the cat mock the village dog who spends his night on the couch, staring out the window. Throughout the night, the village cat fights with other cats, breaking into houses and stealing food and so on. Every morning, when the sun comes up, the cat stops mocking and fighting and breaking and stealing and leaps into the sky to kill a songbird to deposit at one of the villager's doorsteps, a sign of love and affection.

It is not the cat that decorates the sky – flashes of blue and yellow and red and black – it is the songbirds, who, if truth be told, the villagers possibly love *even more* than the cat. And it is not the cat, but the *songbirds* who steal the orange and black fish from the river. If the villagers had to choose, they'd choose the fish in the river who, they decide, they love *even more than* the dog, the cat, and the songbirds combined.

With their guns taut against their shoulders, the villagers shoot at the songbirds in the sky, hitting instead the ancient oak which they *love as much* as any living and breathing dog, cat, bird, or fish. All year long, they decorate the oak with fairy lights and their own

hand-made birdhouses, which hang from the eight branches that spring from the tree like the arms of an undiscovered god.

The Village of Jumping Fish could have been called *The Village of the Fallen Tree*, because the tree fell from all the shot and damned the river. Or it may have been called *The Village of the Dead Dog*, because the dog was killed instantly by the falling tree. Or *The Village Whose Cat Got Lost in the Woods*, because without the dog the cat became depressed and slunk into the woods. Or, just as surely, *The Village with No Birds*, since no birdhouses and no fish meant the birds flew off into the sky. With no fish, no tree, no dog, no cat, no birds in the village, the villagers ask themselves: what is the point of *love* if everything they love is only to be taken away? As they scratch their heads, they watch the fish jumping over the fallen tree, wondering if the fish even know that the village is called by their name.

SAMPLE

THE SWIFTS & THE BATS

The swifts whistle past dusk, riding the wind above the church, a flirtation with death, though nobody has died, and in fact a wedding is about to begin.

The bats mock the swifts... but the bats are only jealous of the swifts' stamina, collective consciousness, and their ability to win people over with ice-breakers of indistinct words that share vowels.

The nuptial couple exchange vows, and a swift swoops to steal the veil from the bride to unravel across the night sky like a jet-stream of entrails.

The signs are everywhere, say the wedding guests, when a bat tangles in the bride's hair, passing the day into dusk to break up the monotony of summer.

The sky could have been an exercise in a couple changing their minds, or of the sun changing place with the moon, a lunar eclipse blowing the wedding apart like black snow into black drifts.

Instead, the bats and the swifts appear like wedding gifts – a new toaster, a pretty set of crystal wine glasses – bringing new sight to the couple and blindness to their guests who share neither their light nor love.

THE STAG & THE CHICKEN

The stag stands obscured by the woods at the edge of the highway, antlers glinting in the moonlight. Next to the stag a chicken shivers with roughed-up feathers full of rain, with a stain of what looks like a drop of blood on its right wing.

Moonlight lights the road, which is slick and sticky with heat, red as a flood of adrenaline and epinephrine through the body, bringing the stag and the chicken to ask each other existential questions about: *how to be* and *why?* *how to live* and *when to die?* The chicken studies the stars while the stag studies the cars whizzing around the bend.

To cross the road requires perfect timing, says the stag, while the chicken flaps its wings and the stag coils its legs like a spring: moonlight lights the road, red as dragonflies mixed with butterflies.

The stag is half-the-height of the stars looking heaven-ward when the Range Rover hits him. His antlers puncture the windshield, spearing the driver through the chest, and bringing the Range to roll before collapsing in on itself causing a massive pile-up.

The accident is replayed throughout the night, over-and-over until, on the morning TV, the road appears slick and sweet, and sweet: red and sticky as strawberry jam, breakfast regrets and roasted red meats.

Over and above the scene, uncaptured by the footage, the chicken roosts in a tree on the other side of the highway, the first in what will be a long number of crossings – *back-and-forth* and *back-and-forth*. Each with seemingly less purpose than the previous, but with more knowledge and depth of the red road – as a river of dahlias and fallen autumn leaves – than any who'd come before.