

*A Dynamic Exchange  
Between Us*

SAMPLER

ALSO BY ANTHONY CALESHU

POETRY

*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*

FICTION

*Churchtown: The Tale of Suzy Delou and Faye Fiddle*

CRITICISM

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

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Anthony Caleshu

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*for Ciara, Parker, Caleb*

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Wonder – is not precisely Knowing  
And not precisely Knowing not –

Emily Dickinson

I am not quite you, but almost, the opposite of visionary.

Frank O'Hara

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WITH YOUR PERMISSION, ALLOW ME  
TO PERFORM EXEMPLARY SURGERY  
ON YOUR BRAIN

With your permission, allow me to perform exemplary surgery on your brain. The light breaking through your eyes may be lax but it's also enough to see that your ever-ecstatic memory is full of mnemonic enemies. Woeful of rebirth as a donkey or the fly on a donkey's tail, it's impossible to live a productive life of care without circumstance. It may be easy for me to say disregard the whip and long sword, but know that I know the rope-bridge you're standing on burns from both ends. Elbow-deep in your head, the surgeon of your dreams may not be me, prodding your temporal lobe with a virtual pen, but both of us can see there's much to be gained in terms of scintillation and smell. Though we aim to find and reflect all the mystery in the world, it's as hard to possess as it is to predict. A little to the left and one's thoughts of salvation slip into the water to swim with alligators and leeches. Too much to the right and we'll miss landing on the turtle's back, to harmonize with the river that winds like blood through our connected minds.

## WE ARE NOT OF THIS WORLD

Consider the dramatic events that become ordinary people like us. We're not feeling exceptionally valued, but well enough. Whoever amongst us is the most apprehensive and, similarly dictatorial, will understand the world by syllogisms: *I am not of the world. You are of the world. I am not you.* There's so much more to say, but let's say it later. For now, let's think about the phonetic, the diagraphic stickiness that comes when someone wants you gone from their world. There's more than a semantic difference between: *I want to spend a lifetime UN-knowing you,* and *Say another word, and I'll blow your brains out!* The word is both a blessing and a warning. I could say I love you – but then I'd have to kill you. You say this with a smile on your face. To those overhearing our conversation: listen closely and they'll hear you saving my life.

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## YOUR WORDS OF HURT AND HOLINESS

Your words of hurt and holiness stretch me into an ever-expanding mode of interiority. Over here, there's a projective experience to be had, a predicative mode of me drinking inside of me, even when I'm feeling outside my milieu, outside your window, outside this lake, which reflects the depth of the moon, the depth of all of our shadow-ness. Nightly I stand naked in the shadows, trying to understand the paradox that when drunk I can't remember what I can't forget when sober... making me leave this lake for the Waffle House. At the crossroads of life and death, this bellwether for the State of Emergency stays open, reminding us there's damage worse elsewhere. What I'm feeling right now, when the waffles are flowing in the right direction, is a shamanic, discursive, omnipotence that comes from believing I'm right about at least one thing in this world – whoever you are / whoever I am – this is a deictic moment in delineated time and amorphous space. Feeling morphs into new feeling, requiring me to barf up the moon, barf up the lake, barf up the waffles with a logic that's both fixed and denied, that turns my bones to batter, that makes my bones break.

BECAUSE I AM TO YOU A MESSENGER  
WORTHY OF ALL TRUST...

trust me to send this lukewarm chowder back to the kitchen. This think-tank we're in believes the world nigh, and yet we've just released data concerning the beginning of time. Allow me this moment to be dubious: Is this a date? Are you trying to kill me? Are you trying to kiss me? The pillow you carry in your handbag is packed with lipstick and punches. And now that you're punching me, really punching me, our place in the world is finally coming into focus. Our grappling under the table leads me to invite you back to my apartment – pigments interspersed at the tops of trees, the roofs of our heads camouflaged in the clouds. Though the valet points our way home, the threat of a cop with a breathalyser means we should take a cab. But we were only having mint tea. And I am only a cousin of the Maharaja. And you are only a cousin of the Maharani.

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THE CREATURELY AMONGST US  
ARE CELEBRATING THE ADVENT  
OF A VANQUISHED SPECIES

The creaturely amongst us are celebrating the advent of a vanquished species. It takes the fallen to know the fallen, say the fallen. In the desert, or alone at sea, all living things know no word can overcome another word – not *belief*, neither *doubt*. Our confessions about loneliness and congregation are the stuff of devotion: who sent me here (this island)? who called me here (the sky)? we ask ourselves daily. If there's a God within us, there's a God outside us: equal and opposite, and so on, and so on. We wander and return, getting lost in the spirit world, now rent but thick with so many of our kind. We reconstitute the wilderness within us constantly. From the backs of our throats, pooling up from the lungs, we sweat abjection until spontaneous-combustion. We make our way by the light in our bodies: shining out of every eye, every pore.

## THERE IS MASS CONFUSION ON THE HIGHWAY

There is mass confusion on the highway: gridlock, pile-ups, cars over-turned. On the outskirts of town, the wind whips the wrappers off cheeseburgers to swirl in a tornado. People flee what they know, as readily as what they don't, so we have the usual complications that come with proclamations of divinity. The way we once did business, trading life for death and death for life, correlated with a byzantine mode of bartering – swine for souls and souls for swine. Some of us became fearful, some of us nonchalant. But now we are moving again, *en route* to being borne again. We see clearly by the headlights of our SUVs, the lost and the dead wandering readily along the roadside. A shepherd in a wide-brim hat stops us from rubber-necking and, with a tired wave of the hand, directs us from one lane into the next.

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