

Matt Dennison

The Operating Mystique

*i.*

Born empty-I'd, the agency of substitution  
tours the house of exhaustion, that cleansing

debate wherein muscles born of whoosh-work  
hover to snip shelter from exclamations mis-

spoken: darkened bowels, visceralia nibbling  
the falling river, the bitter pulp, the desiccated

quill-mouthed squirrel's non-pleasured delight  
bright semen'd across Instruction's tournure.

*ii.*

Ending yesterday, the ambiguous hours of how  
escaped the blessings of thinning oneself with spires,

descended all, turned back the gathering blossoms'  
netherine lips of time shaken sideways—all the signs

except immediacy, wherein my rubbing lies, where even  
music meant to invite weathers the temple hard-shat,

flies muscling that carrion of cats prowling closer,  
expanding the time-diced hours of night into now.

*iii.*

Looking for new faces in the floor, reclined in stone,  
the slumberer invokes beyond and larger the Lady,

only always now the rich and unexplored pig-nosed  
flowers, the defect in the cuirass, the fistulas huddle-

facing north via diction's retreat endure. Dainty  
bastards in the ship at the top of the stairs sitting or

elbowed make clay-pot money to pay fragility's salt,  
sickened for the safety of expiation's once-withered.

*iv.*

*Divide*, said Floor. Imbibed, the awkward earth invites—  
though still you must swallow the phlegm of sin, the rust

thermometer, the tiny bubbles born—harvest the garlic,  
work the flat-puzzled symptoms of the process, rotate

the entire tower—percuss the elements of bloom, still  
the dirt-child, ensure the womb-air of death, that intense

house, that taste, that hint, that tenth—one of the rough  
games God must play—but you are that house no more.

## CEREMONY

Your father went  
fishing with his father  
for what both knew  
would be the last time  
(headlamp-  
cartographers,  
castrate-battalions,  
slow-worms and  
black-toots, though  
more than welcome,  
could not have made  
the trip, what with  
every colon-clown's  
second-in-command's  
funfair being booked)

and they had  
a pretty meal:  
Electro-Teats™  
Bastard Coffee™  
Idiot Bread™  
(slunk-metal-chop-dog-on-toast  
being the preferred iccholic repast,  
but timersualitions prevail, eh, Avendi?)

while listening  
to your father's  
store-bought collection  
of Hawaiian background  
music records, the player  
balanced on their knees  
(one helluva red drop  
bloating the air's  
hung note they  
labored like a gong)

then so and through the  
lake they cut  
and caught a fish,  
a Doctor Fish  
with Crapscent Oil™

I believe he said  
    (back-of-the-neck-  
        under-the-hair pretty  
            it were, possessed  
                of quaquaversals,  
                intesticle yearning,  
                a patience of concern  
                over devilic hard secrets'  
            excreta performed with mineral gore)  
and they laid  
it—the fish—on ice  
and cut it open  
    (*What's that?*  
    I suppose it was  
    out her eyes and  
    over that piece a'  
    fiddle-fiddle  
    the scalp)  
and in its belly  
was a snake and they  
looked at the snake  
and then each other  
until your father  
resembled that  
bundle of legs  
on your  
plate  
so take  
this flesh  
and love,  
my love,  
for the world  
is held in hurtful bowls  
no bigger than our thumbs.

## The Man Speaks

He lived in the top story of a very tall house on an even higher hill far above a little village that appeared as dry and dusty as his own world was lush and green. He would spend long hours looking out his window, trying to imagine the lives of the people below, which was very difficult to do as he had never once left the house, let alone descended the hill to feel that foreign soil beneath his feet. For all he knew, they were not even aware of his existence, while they were his only distraction from the complete solitude in which he dwelled. He did something—what, exactly, he was not sure, as walking from room to room constituted the main of his activities—that allowed him to eat regularly. Being provided for in this manner, he found life to be lacking in the necessary frictions, so he looked for things to cause him trouble and then fought with them for however many hours a day he could before he fell asleep or, as he called it, evaporated. But still, between the gazing and the fighting, he felt something was missing. A need, an emptiness remained.

So, being of the practical sort, he simply filled himself with whatever was at hand, being careful not to be too careful with what he chose so that he would be well-rounded in his fullness. But what of the need? Or, for that matter, the responsibility that goes with such a satiated state? He decided that he must share his new-found fullness with the villagers below. Thus began his habit of taking out the things he had placed inside himself and carrying them down the hill to the market

where he would spread them on the ground and speak. Or, as he called it, Teach the Gloryness of Fullness, often in parable, seldom understood, his favorite being one he assumed he had learned in his assumed youth about a fisherman whose reputation for bungling had spread so far and wide that it had become a matter of pride for the man. Once day the other fishermen saw him up on the cliffs, eating gull droppings and pebbles, both hands going at once, now and then making wild gestures in the direction of the sky. When asked what he was trying to do, he had called back, 'To become as stupid as the sun! I'm already better than the rest of you! He felt there was great wisdom in this story and that if he repeated it often enough someone would surely approach and explain it to him. But no, whenever he entered the market the people would look up from their dealings and, upon seeing who it was, gather up their wares and walk away, muttering under their breaths and being very generous with their evil looks which, due to the rather dry and wizened appearance of these people, were quite evil indeed. He would reflect on this, silently praising them for their enviable consistency of behavior, and begin spreading his taken-out-things in front of himself, doing a little dance every time he came to a particularly pleasing one.

One day, after yet another impassioned rendition of the fisherman parable with its usual results, equally impassioned, he realized that if he were ever to make contact with these people—let alone be informed of the meaning of his favorite story—he would have to try something new. So he packed up his things and trudged back up the hill where he set about thinking of a plan. Several days later he rose with the sun, took out what he

had placed in himself and marched down to the market. Only this time, instead of repeating the parable of the fisherman, he watched the people walking away and then, before they had gone too far, called out, A visitor! A visitor has come! The people slowly halted their exodus and turned around, for it was a very small village and visitors were rare indeed. Lured by the prospect of a new customer, a few stepped forward, hoping to be the ones to claim the coins in his pockets. When a small crowd had formed, he quickly began gathering his collection of taken-out things and molded them into a sizable mound which he set about climbing, for he had something to say, something of undeniable importance for all, of that he was sure.

He climbed and climbed and struggled and sweated and cursed in his effort to reach the top before the people discovered the extreme lack of visitors and left. Surely they will listen this time! he panted to himself as he wiped the sweat from his eyes. Surely they will understand everything I have ever said this time! Glancing behind himself he could see there were still a few people watching him. He must hurry! And when at last he stood, alone and free at the top, shading the sun from his eyes and preparing to speak, he had just enough time to notice one very old woman looking at him very intently before he sank.