

Trouble

How we think we abhor it:
crossing the street to
avoid meeting up with it,
pretending—if it knocks—
not to be home,
going out of our way to
disavow any knowledge,
preferring to go it alone.

Who, in their right mind,
would look for it,
ask for it? Who wouldn't do
their best to stay out of it?
And yet, who is it always we
bring to the table?
Who, besides misery,
provides better company?

In Praise of My Dentist

First, for the pain, the exquisite pain,
the incomparable, egalitarian pain—
acidic, electric, lemony, metallic,
more taste than pain, the sharp
shrill of the drill, the tart
shriek of it, its slow grind, its
feathers, and then its beak.

And then for the innocuous conversation
between dentist and hygienist,
over my head, as if I'm not even there—
small gossip about (what was it today?)
parakeets! How his father raised
parakeets, how he bred them for pets,
in summer outside in the aviary,
in winter all over the house.

And then for the ultimate artistry,
as he sculpts a shrine in my mouth,
fills his gallery with silver and gold,
artifacts past which
a whole world of words will pass,
a hunger will always be filled,
the molars masticating the dark,
the canines and incisors gleaming
in what we now deem a smile,

but which once said *Keep Off! Stay Back!*,
this shield that still keeps us intact.

And did I mention the pain?
The colorful parakeet of pain?

In the Sweet B&B

in Brisbane, the butcher bird,
belying its namesake,
wakes us every morning to music,
a carol of flutes and bells.
Australia's in drought.
The news from the States:
war and sleet. And yet
this bird that we've never seen
cascades like a stream after rain,
swells and eddies around
what would otherwise be
the bone-dry swale of the day.
How pleasant to lie here,
half a world away
from everything we know, and be
blessed by this benediction
that rinses the whole sky clean!
Who could consider
rage or rapaciousness
with a bird like this on the wing?
Such trills and arpeggios,
such grace and such peace!
(At breakfast, the landlady
says she attracts them
by hanging up hunks of raw meat.)