



JENNIFER ZILM

WAITING

ROOM

POEMS

FIRST EDITION
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Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Financé par le
gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

The production of this book was made possible through the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. BookThug also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Book Fund.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA
CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Zilm, Jennifer, author
Waiting room / Jennifer Zilm. – First edition.

Poems.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77166-214-7 (PAPERBACK)

ISBN 978-1-77166-215-4 (HTML)

ISBN 978-1-77166-216-1 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-77166-217-8 (MOBI)

I. Title.

PS8649.I52W53 2016 C811.6 C2016-900591-7
C2016-900592-5

PRINTED IN CANADA

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*There is no refuge from listening to your own silence in the academy,
in the pulpit, or in the safety of institutional bureaus and boards.*

—Noah Eli Gordon, *The Source*

I. Sugar Discipline

LONG-LINED SONNET FOR DR. YOUNG

At the end of my benefits my mouth holds a temporary crown.
Along the Naugahyde arms of the tilted-back chair, my arms are
smooth and thick—the skin of an endangered African animal.
My iPod holds a slight density against the swell of bare belly,
cold beneath my T-shirt. One earphone is in, Eliot speaks with
the voice of the poet—St. Louis faking Queen’s English—over
the buzzing insistence of the drill, latex fingers pulling at
my swollen, etherized gums: *these were the bones that were his eyes?*
The hygienist, middle-aged, Mexican, comments on the plasma screen
“the one hockey game I went to was Queen Elizabeth in her red dress,
dropping the—what do you call the rubber disk?—onto the ice.”
Dr. Young, twenty-four and carving, ignores her. Beneath her breath
she remarks that beneath amalgams there is almost always decay.
Shaved calcium, dental cement, in my raised chair: I am enthroned.

REASONS YOU LOVE THE DENTIST

1. Your mouth straightjacketed
you can finally stop
talking.
2. You will be rewarded
with paste and waxed paper
for keeping still.
3. The drill is white noise: you
creatively attend to silence.
4. A rush of water squirted into the
lower bowl of your mouth
reassures you: you won't ever be thirsty.
5. In the late 1980s, Dr. Killick patiently
explained his sterilization techniques to your
eight-year-old sister so she wouldn't fear
contracting AIDS.
6. The chair is a classroom:
you are privy to a new
discourse, new words, old
words reformed.
7. You are
the centre of
attention.

8. There are minerals in your mouth
that you have never even considered.

9. Soon your swollen lips will thaw.
Your gums will resurrect and your tongue
will explore Dr. Young's architecture.

10. Now this hygienist
whose Christian name you've forgotten
acts as a pushy yoga instructor,
forcing you to focus on breathing:
through your nose, through your nose.

11. You grind your teeth,
a war vet digs holes in your molars,
carves crevices at the back of your incisors.
Yet Dr. Young patiently rebuilds,
adds height, matches shades of off-white
and says that despite the grinding, the acid erosion,
the slant of your bite, your damaged sibilants,
you are "the most relaxed patient" she's ever had and

12. also you are lucky, you are still young
you still have good bones.

MOUTH.

Molded to
your reconstructed
translucent, a
molar
hypothetical
future
bridge.
over the
bottom

GUARD.

the specifics of
mouth,
ghost of
allowed for,
mass of porcelain;
implant or
Clasp it
half-moon,
teeth.

Cripple your sibilants.

Go to bed.

II. Academy of Fragments

*“Erase everything you have written,
but keep the notes in the margins.”*

—Osip Mandelstam

THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Jet-lagged, you say to the Doctors
who have gathered before you:

*Whenever I stand to present
a paper I feel like a charlatan.*

Your Swedish Doctor (associate)
bald with ginger stubble, responds:

*I am afraid this noun is not part
of my English vocabulary.*

Pop quiz: How many synonyms
can you think up in the next
twenty seconds? You say: *a faker.*

Suddenly there is scholarly consensus.

Your American Doctor (assistant)
clean-shaven with a Tyrolean chin
and the faint scent of a near-forgotten
stint at a Jerusalem Bible College, says:

*There was a recent article about
this—peer reviewed—in the*

Journal of Higher Education:

80% of academics feel the same way.

Your Head Doctor, the white-haired nun,
is outnumbered. Smiles ensue and satisfy.

It's never scholarship until statistics
are involved.