



*The people in this weekly out-patients clinic have come for treatment either for Broken Limbs or for Chronic Pain*

## Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, Kent

### Chronic Pain Unit

Reading on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Poets : Miriam Obrey, Caroline Carver, Rogan Wolf

Singer : Nicola Clark

Photographs by Pierre Bascle



*Posters advertising the reading had been sent ahead of us, as usual, and were on display when we arrived. But we quickly realised that few patients waiting there could have seen the posters in advance or knew the reading was taking place. This weekly clinic was simply too busy.*

*It was therefore our task to surprise the patients waiting here with the news that they were now, for a short while, to become an audience. We felt a bit like buskers taking over a train carriage and it led to some agonising.*



## Journey to a Bexley Waiting Room

1.

A woman from India  
waits in Bexley  
for the doctor to call her name.

I interrupt  
with a poem about waking  
by the Grand Trunk Road.

The poem is in English.  
Debjani wrote it  
in celebration of origins.

The woman's face lights up:  
*"This poem has carried me  
back to my earliest days."*

2.

I did not foresee the pain of this.  
Convinced that poetry's home  
is a waiting room

I'm taking us where  
we don't at first  
seem to belong.

I cringe  
from the pain  
of foreignness, of being unwelcome.

I'm saying, "you're in luck today. Listen to this !"  
But feeling, "don't turn away,  
don't be unkind. Please be glad of me."

3.

We storm castles with song and scrupulous words  
we surprise windows from blank walls  
we conjure sweetness from racket and desolation.

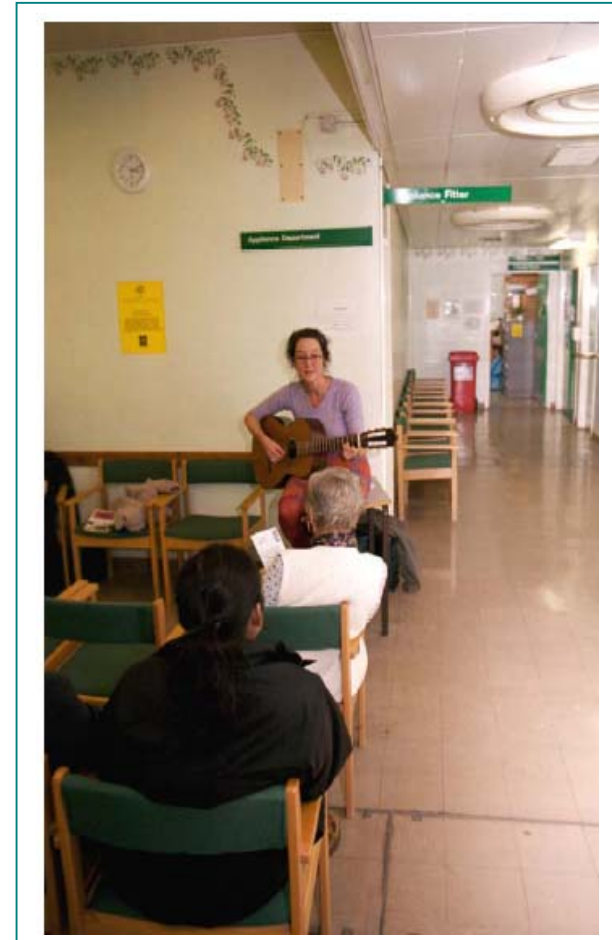
*Rogan Wolf*

*Note : The Grand Trunk Road is a famous highway of  
Northern India. It goes through Old Delhi.*



*“But [recent experience] has made me treasure those crossing-boundaries readings, taking those risks readings. It's something like that I'm trying to say... surely if poetry means anything, it should connect us in unexpected and risky ways.”*

*David Hart*



*Nicola Clark singing*



*“On the business of the captive audience, I understand completely what you are saying and you are probably better placed than I to know how patients feel. However I suspect that if you asked them if they wanted some entertainment they would be likely to say 'no', but that by giving it to them - and allowing them to walk out if they feel like it - you will have a larger audience of happier people...”*



*Caroline Carver reading*

*...It would be interesting to know what the managers feel about it, post-performance.”*

*Caroline Carver*



*Miriam Obrey reading*



Queen Mary's Sidcup   
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6 March 2002

Dear Rogan

A huge thank you to you and your team for the 'Poetry in Waiting' reading and singing to patients in our Outpatients department yesterday afternoon. The event provided a very welcome distraction in what can sometimes be an anxious environment.

I have already had some positive feedback from staff who felt that the poetry and songs were able to reach the patients without being imposing or intrusive.

I will write to you again when I have had the opportunity of speaking to more of the staff and patients.

On behalf of Queen Mary's, many thanks. The event made a real difference.

Yours sincerely

Barbara JM Hudson  
Communications Manager





## Giving Shape to My Pain

1.

I have a genie in my life,  
that's out of hand.  
It lours over me  
whenever it chooses,  
roaring with pride  
in its boundless powers.

2.

My genie  
hangs  
between me and the sun  
and covers my life in shadow.

3.

I have a genie in my life  
that's made my body its housing.  
It rubs me raw  
until I scream.  
I am a lamp  
that screams.

4.

I have decided to become an artist,  
a maker of genie artefacts.  
I weave a genie shape to wholeness  
with my hands.  
I make it the size I want it to be.  
I make it smaller than me.

5.

Oh genie,  
keep your distance.  
I shall examine you now  
from the distance I have made.  
My distance  
is your limitation.

6.

Genie, oh genie,  
Let me stroke you,  
let me arouse you,  
let me know you intimately –  
since I must.  
Let me name you  
with my name –  
since I must.  
Let me name you  
tenderly.  
Let me be named  
tenderly.

*Rogan Wolf  
April 2002*