

London Grip New Poetry Autumn 2011 features poems by:

\*Bert Almon \*James Norcliffe \*Roddy Williams \*Geoffrey Heptonstall \*  
Katrina Naomi \*Murray Bodo \*Leah Fritz \*Merryn Williams \*Sue Rose  
\*[Mario Petrucci](#) \*Geraldine Paine \*Elke de Wit

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### **Editor's introduction**

Welcome to the first poetry page of the re-launched London Grip. London Grip has been publishing exciting and original new poetry since 2008, under previous poetry editors Fred D'Aguiar and Robert Vas Dias and it is an honour to be following in their footsteps. Poems published in previous issues of London Grip are archived elsewhere on this site.

This latest selection (which includes poems chosen by Robert Vas Dias before he relinquished the editorial chair) features work by fine poets from Canada, New Zealand and the USA as well as Great Britain. Readers will find poems in a variety of themes and styles; but they may be as intrigued as I was to observe how many of the contributing poets have chosen to deal in some way with children and childhood.

I hope to be able to post a fresh selection of new poetry on London Grip about every three months. To submit poems to be considered for publication, please include them in the body of an email addressed to [poetry@londongrip.co.uk](mailto:poetry@londongrip.co.uk). **Please send no more than three poems; and include at most three short sentences about yourself.** (At the risk of stating the obvious, I should point out that we are not able to offer any payment to contributors. We cannot even offer a free copy of the magazine, since London Grip itself is free at the point of use.)

Michael Bartholomew-Biggs

## Bert Almon : Conjuring for Amateurs

1

Professor Watson's student began his paper on Dada by pretending to shoot himself in the head. He was lucky to miss: a blank cartridge at close range can fracture the skull. "If this nonsense is over now, may we have the report?"

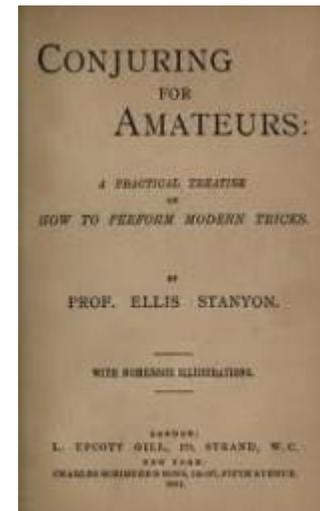
My own student introduced his paper on Yeats by performing three magic tricks and holding a séance. The tricks failed. Then he and a volunteer crossed broom straws: if the top straw jumped once, that would be yes, twice meant no. "Mr. Yeats, do you want to answer questions today?" The top straw jumped three times, baffling us all. Maybe it was pulled from a witch's broom, or perhaps Mr. Yeats was singing on a golden bough and left an apprentice in charge of his calls.

2

Walking late in London one night,  
I looked into the window of Watkins Books  
and saw *Conjuring Tricks for Amateurs:*  
*A Practical Treatise*, by Prof. Ellis Stanyon.  
That word "practical" charmed me.  
The shop was closed, but later the book  
appeared on the web as a PDF. What would Stanyon,  
who knew how to fold paper into Beefeater hats  
or the paddle boxes of a steamboat,  
make of having his book from 1901  
inscribed in magnetic traces on a spinning disc?

The real magic lay in the names of his exploits:  
Wizard's Breakfast, The Ubiquitous Thimble,  
Handkerchief Fired into Gentleman's Hair,  
Baby Linen (unused, I hope) Produced from Hat,  
Chameleon Balls, and Sympathetic Ink.  
I can close the PDF and *envanish* the book,  
as Stanyon would say, but that's not as good a trick  
as moving a watch, glass and handkerchief  
from a paper bag to boxes tied round a white rabbit's neck.

**Bert Almon** teaches a poetry masterclass with Derek Walcott at the University of Alberta. He has published eleven collections of poetry.



### James Norcliffe : Tennial draws Alice in a sea of tears

The salt water must be good for flotation  
because neither Alice nor the mouse  
looks to be in any real risk of sinking,

and I suppose mice can swim. Rats can.  
They have that habit of deserting sinking  
ships in their efficiently executed rat-paddle.

I saw a rat swim once. A small inexplicable lump  
moving unnaturally across Horseshoe Lake  
and only when it climbed a willow branch

dangling on the far shore did the lump reveal  
itself to be a very wet rat with excellent water skills.  
But we're forgetting the paradox of the tears:

Alice, not drowning in, but sustained by her tears  
and the mouse beside her as collateral damage.  
and more alarmed by talk of cats and dogs,

talk which should have alarmed Alice as well  
but she was shocked out of her lachrymosity  
by the shape-shifting Micky Finn she'd been slipped

by the Reverend Dodgson, yet another reminder,  
were one ever needed, not to down drinks offered  
by dodgy writers nor to allow the consequences

to be witnessed by graphic artists with an eye  
to your humiliation: diminished with a wet rodent  
and your hair streaming about you like wonder.

### James Norcliffe : The amnesia aquarium

Through the murky water  
in the Amnesia Aquarium  
forgotten fish flicker in and out of view.

With globular eyes as cloudy as milk  
or bleary glass they stare at you open-

mouthed without recognition before turning away  
to gutter slowly into a green distance of trembling water weeds.

As they catch the fluorescence of the aquarium lights  
their scales for a moment are vaguely recognizable,

round, bright & tessellated like the upturned  
faces in a photograph from an old yearbook.

When the yellow-finned tuna is delivered  
it is seared on a bed of pickled seaweed.

You smear a smudge of wasabi on the red flesh

but it is of little use -  
there are just too many fish,  
shoals of them,  
wheeling away through the dark water  
nebulae you can barely remember  
shining in a familiar sky.

**James Norcliffe** is a New Zealand poet. He has published six collections of poetry, most recently *Villon in Millerton* (AUP). He has also published a collection of short stories and number of fantasy novels for young readers, most recently the award-winning *The Loblolly Boy* published in 2010 in the US as *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Egmont USA) and its sequel *The Loblolly Boy & The Sorcerer*. His work has appeared in *The Literary Review*, the *Cincinnati Review*, *The Iowa Review* and many other journals.

### **Roddy Williams : tom waites is missing**

we can't recite our canon of cds  
unless we have just three  
or too much time on our hands.

but we know them when we see them  
like the faces of celebrity saints  
from the hello bible.

i believed  
that tom waites was present,  
safe as gospel  
between the book of verve  
and the books of whitesnake  
but he's not.

the title hovers at the edge of recall  
like a maddening psalm. it tests my faith.  
i pray for tracks  
into empty silence, void.

then i reach that point of  
shuddering revelation

the liberating moment when  
i'm suddenly aware  
of the loss of  
something that was never there.

**Roddy Williams** is a Welsh exile who now lives in West London. His work has been published in South, The Rialto, 14 and Obsessed with Pipework. His recent obsessions include infrared photography and Thai cookery.

### **Geoffrey Heptonstall : In the world we have created**

The statue casts a shadow in the square.  
The astronomer's eye  
Makes calculations  
Of the hour of the day  
According to the Sun.

His world is turning  
Even as he stands  
By his calculations.  
He has seen how stars have life,  
And that their light may die.

The Earth is not eternal.  
God makes bounds to His creation.  
He has touched an enquirer's heart.  
In time Madonnas shall weep for him.  
A pitiless Inquisitor will smile.

But on this afternoon  
There is peace in the colonnades.  
The man of learning savours his wine.  
A beauty passes the window.  
Her face, alert and kind,

Renders the scene so gracious  
It may seem the whole truth.  
Later he sees among the stars  
How no-one need fear  
That truth shall ever die.

**Geoffrey Heptonstall's** poems have been widely published – recently, for instance, in Adirondack Review, Decanto and Turbulence. He founded Cambridge Café Lit in 2005 and is a Contributing Writer at Contemporary Review.

### **Katrina Naomi : On leaving Portugal**

Time has slowed or I have slowed.  
It is almost a month. There are still benches  
on which I have not rested. I tell myself  
I'll lift the piano's lid, this evening  
perhaps, or fetch the watercolours  
or pedal that bicycle into the woods.  
I'm not used to the fullness of village life.  
I've watched the cargo of tractors,  
the women balance loads on their heads –  
suddenly taller. I could flag down  
the bus or watch this unknown tree  
shower the workshop white.  
This is what old age will be like.

### **Katrina Naomi : After Vietnam**

The first time we saw beauty in their silver  
their shimmer their drone as they joyed  
on air We'd seen nothing like those insects  
which turned into dragons we'd seen nothing  
then. Forests and villages offered themselves up  
We prayed to the noise as they rose then dipped  
through the golden trees Those of us left burnt  
incense This I still taste on Ontario's breeze

**Katrina Naomi's** first collection *The Girl with the Cactus Handshake* was shortlisted for the London New Poetry Award. She won the Templar Poetry Competition with her pamphlet *Lunch at the Elephant & Castle* and was the first writer-in-residence at the Bronte Parsonage Museum. [www.katrina-naomi.co.uk](http://www.katrina-naomi.co.uk)

### **Murray Bodo : Ascension**

This recalcitrant ascension  
into Jerusalem's sky  
slows its steep arc before it  
reaches high heaven's threshold

Its heart-breaking music's paused  
No saving message for them  
No Spirit hovers, no songs  
With harp and ten-stringed lyre

They go about their doings  
Christian and Jew and Muslim  
Unaware that they will die  
untransformed, flesh in tatters

when gravity prevails and  
the quiet mortar falls

**Murray Bodo : Arizona grave**

Of the brave open flowers  
only broken stems are left  
dry and brittle in the wind

For Memorial Day I  
left pink roses trimmed in red  
yellow lilies white daisies

Sun-drenched triumphant trumpets  
in the windless mountain air  
I left hopeful all would bloom

When I returned in a week  
they'd all been eaten by elk  
the stems ragged as old teeth

It's what I meant but lovely  
something actual some thing –  
more left behind than leaving

to make the elk lift their ears

**Murray Bodo** is a Franciscan Friar from Cincinnati whose present ministry is leading pilgrimages to Assisi, Italy, and writing. His latest volume of poems is *Wounded Angels* (Blissfool Books, 2009); and in 2012 St. Anthony Messenger Press will release the 40th Anniversary Edition of his first book, *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*. Fr. Murray's web site is [www.murraybodo.com](http://www.murraybodo.com)

**Leah Fritz : Like porcelain**

Like porcelain in pink and Sevres rose,  
his skin is glazed to an unearthly shine.  
I observe more than one might suppose.  
The eye that's central to this case is mine.

His skin is glazed to an unearthly shine.  
One eye gleams like marble in the sun.  
The eye that's central to this case is mine.  
My history determines who has won.

One eye gleams like marble in the sun.  
The other shades itself as if in thought.  
My history determines who has won.  
He's in my sights. The very air is fraught.

The other shades itself as if in thought –  
planning, no doubt, strategically to strike.  
He's in my sights. The very air is fraught.  
How much are hidden enemies alike!

Planning, no doubt, strategically to strike,  
I observe more than one might suppose.  
How much are hidden enemies alike...  
like porcelain in pink and Sevres rose..

### Leah Fritz : Child of air

*And it is but a child of air/ Who lingers in the garden there.* – Robert Louis Stevenson.

she wrote:

'I built a house  
out of adobe.

The pay is good.'

running, she put her father  
out of breath  
laughing to catch up.

in the wood stove  
her bread rose  
brown as the tree  
she brought to rest.

absorbed, she combs her long hair,  
twists an earring through a lobe  
in my reflection.

Since her arrival on these shores in 1985, New York born writer, **Leah Fritz**, has had four collections of her poems published in Britain. Her next volume, *Whatever Sends the Music into Time: New and Selected Poems*, will be published by Salmon in 2012.

### Merryn Williams : Disappearances

The marks that Handel made on paper,  
that instrumentalists  
translated into sound  
persist, though he and they are underground.

Three hundred years. I see him in his attic,  
hear each strong note;  
twenty-four days to finish *The Messiah*,  
and he was slowly going blind, but wrote.

I scan the census.  
Of all those Mary Smiths and Thomas Joneses,  
those male and female infants  
whose names are listed in the Foundling Hospital,

by this time, what is left but marks on paper?  
a single keyboard  
that stood within a long-demolished chapel  
in which the children crowded, to sing Handel?

**Merryn Williams** was the founding editor of *The Interpreter's House*. Her latest work is *Effie: A Victorian Scandal* – the story of Ruskin's wife.

## Sue Rose : Child's Mark

*after the London Foundling Hospital's exhibition of textile tokens*

Each swatch of cloth is a tongue,  
a register in warp and weft, a roll  
of foundling names. Here, mothers laid  
their hearts on scraps: silk or wool,  
splayed cards on cotton, each hand  
a wager made for losing, or half a heart  
rough stitched in red then split  
along its plumb, a promise kept—

though most were not. Ledgers closed,  
their fabrics claimed by dirt and fray.  
Calico birds darken as they sing  
of market bales, money owed;  
linens that bellied over supple skin  
wither in a breath of thyme.

Born in London, **Sue Rose** now lives in Kent where she works as a literary translator. She won the Troubadour Poetry Prize in 2009 and the Canterbury Poet of the Year competition in 2008. Her debut collection, *From the Dark Room*, is published by Cinnamon (2011).

## Mario Petrucci : what wakeful work

*for a newborn son*

to jerk out  
fists & up to keep  
sleep's transparent maw from  
closure though now it  
clamps you

from below to  
slow & billow you  
spine to chest dampened sense  
half-clung to lashes  
as dew

about to con  
densate that jet  
sun inverting defence so all  
struggle continues  
darkly inward

till i see eighty  
years hence the cot  
-bound time-worn baby  
reaching one fist out  
for mothers

long dead

**Mario Petrucci : now resist**

*for a newborn son*

raise an arm to it  
as if to be excused  
the fall that kick

toward waters long  
evaporated to thinly  
eerie salts your rage

kin to bared sea-bed  
detached & innard-  
calm against living

light while rolled on  
your side your spine  
arches pained to let

skiffy vapours tic  
under on last-puff  
dread each enzyme

pulling as it must  
until the sheet you  
worry to cast-off

cloth shrouds you  
whitely careless as  
though you had fled

breath but were still  
so warm no mother  
tidal with pity nor

callused hand too  
long below had  
stowed courage

or could stir in  
themselves that  
slimmest billow

to trim you

**Mario Petrucci** has been poet-in-residence at the Imperial War Museum and BBC Radio 3 and his poetry has won prizes in the Bridport, National and Arvon competitions. The poems published here are from his *crib* sequence which sits within a major modernist project entitled *i tulips* – one instalment of which was published by Enitharmon in 2010.

### **Geraldine Paine : Release**

This must be achieved noiselessly, don't draw attention to yourself, they will count scores to keep you longer in the dark. Now, pull hard. But take good care. The shutters are full of splinters. Gently. That's it. You can see green ivy climbing the trunk of a tree, such fine leaves, so determined; and the slow water, that's a kind of green too. As though someone has added milk. The sun is just reaching the front steps; as it mounts, it must penetrate this stone grey room. Come, you'll say, it's been so cold without you. Every day I've worked a little more to let you in, to feel a remembered touch on my skin.

Award-winning poet **Geraldine Paine** has been published widely in magazines and anthologies. Her first collection *The Go-Away-Bird* was published by Lapwing Publications (Belfast) in 2008.

### **Elke de Wit : Scene Three Times**

I tried, several times to pass the man with the swaying walk. His legs flicked outwards with every step. Both had been amputated and the feet in the shoes that walked the pavement were not his own.

A woman on the bus held her baby whilst she fed it. The baby's eyes were starting to close and the woman shifted in the seat as if to make herself more comfortable before it fell asleep. Her left arm moved further under the child's body, although in fact it was not her arm.

At the fitness centre the man took my card and opened the file to enter the information. He held the right side of the file down with curved, static fingers that had never felt anything hot or cold or wet, or the love of another hand.

### **Elke de Wit : Bird Song**

The spring clean took ten days whether you rushed it or not. She started in the attic room. Under each bed she found soft down feathers. When she mopped the floors she stopped several times to deal with patches of bird droppings. On the first floor there were more feathers. One bedroom had a large wardrobe with a mirror. When she tried to clean it she realised that the white, erratic marks were not the leftover crayon marks made by the unsupervised child of a guest, but etched-in beak marks. The squiggly patterns started in the centre of the mirror and continued almost to the bottom. She used glass cleaner on them, then cream cleaner, and in desperation, salt. Her hand moved over the offending areas again and again and again. She caught sight of herself in the mirror, frown lines deep between her eyebrows, and moved on to do the dusting instead. On the wooden bedsteads and walls she found more bird droppings. They were smaller and looked more watery than the ones in the attic. A damp cloth wiped them away.

On the seventh day she reached the master bedroom, their favourite room and the one they used when they came to stay. She checked the mirror on the wardrobe for marks, but there were none. She came to mop the floor on her side of the bed, the far side, exactly where she was in the habit of placing her feet to get in or out. There, in the narrow gaps around the chunks of pale parquet, were streaks of red that not even a toothbrush could remove.

**Elke de Wit** is a writer, film journalist and actor. She was born in Liberia, grew up in Kenya, Tanzania and Hong Kong, and now lives in London. Her prose poetry / flash fiction has been published in *Tears in the Fence*.