

regulars - local profile

Poet Mario Petrucci has lived in Enfield for 30 years. In a modern world where we are often defined by the work we do, his biography is a complex one which challenges the convention of being pigeon-holed by our job title. For the past decade, he's been the recipient of dozens of prestigious poetry awards and his poetry performances attract international recognition. He now works as an educator, a radio & tv broadcaster and creative writing tutor for all ages.

A scientist with a PhD in optoelectronics, Mario Petrucci was, until recently Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Oxford Brookes University. He has spent time teaching, organic farming and goat herding before moving into freelance writing. With his website describing him as 'poet, teacher, performer, scientist, ecologist, warpoet' when asked, "What do you do?" Mario's response is now simply, "Poet. I used to avoid saying that because I was unclear in my own mind what it meant. It was something I was still exploring. Also because you tend to get peculiar reactions. Now I welcome that."

It's clear that Mario has spent time examining the significance of poetry. 'For me it's a means of achieving intensity and clarity together. In particular it's a way of clearing illusion. Every age has certain possibilities into which poetry can distil something important. Our age is an age of decline in resources and overconsumption. Oil is about to run out in the next few decades, so there are some very tough times ahead. Art is a crucial way to decide what we are going to be as a species, as humanity. It's that big. Most of society at any time is asleep, or half awake, so any artform that wakes society up, if it's genuine, will be an alarm bell. It will reflect to society that it's time to react, to think, to explore what we are.



The very best art and poetry is like the aroma of coffee drawing you out there, half asleep, into getting on with your life. It entices you into that. It has nothing to do with being brow-beaten. It's being fully active in your own life, not a tourist in your own existence.'

So how is poetry different to other writing? 'To a writer the difference between a book of poems and a book of prose is about £10k. (Mario laughs, knowingly.) So many people assume that poetry is on an equal footing in culture with other forms of writing and it isn't. How often do we find that the very best things are sought out by a minority, whether that's gourmet food, or learning or poetry? They're not things, that until we're very enlightened as a species, that are going to be mass produced or widely accessed. So the main difference between poetry and other writing is that not many people read it. But if you're looking at the intensity it has, the power it has, poetry is language right on the edge of what it can be. Mostly, though,

when we do encounter poetry, it's not necessarily of that kind. Much of popular poetry is akin to entertainment. But where is the meaning in that?'

Does poetry have a place in the modern world of digital media and 24/7 entertainment? 'Living on entertainment is like living on a diet of sugar. It has the same effect on the soul and on the personality. There's nothing wrong with entertainment, but it's got to be balanced by meaning. Meaning is the real food. So where does our age find its meaning? Big Brother? XFactor? It's temporary escapism but you can't escape meaning. Ultimately that comes back to haunt you as a life not fully lived.

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Yes, poetry has a place in the modern world. It can address, or challenge, just about anything. It can be a simple love poem; it can be a rallying call for a deep reassessment of who you are; it can be a beautifully carved insult. It's deeply plural, radical and timeless. All of that is what makes it indispensable in this age, because where else are we going to find that? In our entertainment-based world, poetry is more important than ever, whether or not people turn to it.'

What do you think of science and literature education in the UK and elsewhere? There are a lot of wonderful people doing it but the system almost prevents them from doing anything

useful. As a society we need to choose whether we want a form of education that controls children, keeps them occupied and prepares them for the jobs that they mostly don't want to do. Or education that inspires them, helps them to be visionaries if they want to be and creates open, creative minds. And we need to stop being obsessed with measurement. The things that are most important are not measurable. Also, I do a lot of work in schools and find that children can be far more open than many adults are to poetry that's "difficult." Children tend to approach poetry more like music or a song lyric. These are not things that you merely decode: you enjoy them and you're moved by them.'

Is there a function for creativity and poetry in a world that doesn't appear to value or reward creative thinking? 'Whatever you do, if you don't engage with it creatively on some level, whether that's making a good chair or making a good poem, if there isn't a spark of creativity in the blood, it's dead. We face choices daily about creativity. It's easier, sometimes, to turn it off. Dull yourself to it. I meet people who insist they aren't creative then, in the second half of a workshop, loosen up and discover that they are. And it's not because I create their creativity: it's simply that one creates a context within which the creativity is recognised.'

Mario will be doing a poetry reading on Saturday 26th April, 7.30pm in Palmers Green (see What's On Section for further details)

Writing workshop day "New Beginnings" on Saturday 18th October 2008 at Salisbury House, Bury St. West, Edmonton N9 9LA from 1 - 6pm. £28, £24 (concs.) For further details or to book email: mmpetrucci@hotmail.com www.mariopetrucci.com

One of his latest projects is co-editorship and publication in a new local press called Perdika Press. www.perdikapress.com

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- Empowers learners to plan and achieve a happy and fulfilling personal and working life.

- Personalises learning in context to life & career aspirations
- Enhances emotional, social & team skills
- Develops enterprise skills & entrepreneurship
- Improves motivation and drive
- Develops interpersonal & communication skills
- Enables learners to make important life and career choices from a position of knowledge and strength.

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A self discovery programme supporting learners to know who they are and what they aspire to in life. It enables learners to take more responsibility.

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A career planning programme supporting learners to plan their education and work in context to their personal interests, aspirations and talents.

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A teamwork and social skills programme supporting learners to understand how to work with others in life and work situations.

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An enterprise programme that supports learners to understand how businesses work. Develops the concept of making a worthwhile contribution to the community.

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local profile

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the loop - enfield

this light shows

through you as dusk
where you turn
addressing
addressed
by our window
as though you wore
gauze of being here
more lightly when
i yearn through
you for light
beyond you yet
i learn the firmest

sight can hold onto
tonight is that
shaping &
shaped-by
almost-here
fern-coloured

dress
.....
so

will i
be not where i
am to go nor where i

was but all dark between
whose sum we are
as each t-

urns nightly
to other as rain
rinsing rain into an

wood where

each tree is
a sound soft-spoke
to unwheeled sky
perhaps

or passing
cloud – i would set

mind as
these trees: closeset &

filigree
like something once hubbed

& radial staked
out : taken root & grown past

its paring
having absorbed what heat

comes in to build a year-by-
year body

encompassing body: mind so
still in its s-

hell as to
be

detectable
barely till my

tomb stone
deep in upwards shadow

leaps upon
me like a child around my neck
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Mario Petrucci

APRIL 2008