

How did Perdika start up? What was the first book that came out? What's the story behind the name Perdika? What's been the best moment with the press?

Perdika was launched by Mario Petrucci, Nick Potamitis and Peter Brennan to provide an imprint sympathetic to poets who wanted to take the modernist project forward. We knew such poets existed, but many weren't getting an airing. That's not to say we were a mould ready to be filled: we're open to anyone who considers the language of poetry as much more than mere vehicle for content. The name of the press comes from the little fishing village on the island of Aegina where Nick and Peter discussed plans in 2000. Our first pamphlet was Petrucci's *Catullus* in 2006, which remains our very best seller.

One of our best moments was the reading at Trinity College in January 2008, attended by J.H.Prynne. He'd taught the Perdika poet Michael Grant (who later mentored Peter Brennan) during his early days at Cambridge. Also among the readers was Peter's former student Tom Jones, while the event was organised by Tom's own former student at St. Andrews, David Taylor. Thus five generations of teachers and students were present in the same room. Plus, the quality of attention in the packed-out room was second to none. They say good poetry readings generate pheromones: the levels that evening must have been stratospheric.

How is Perdika funded? Where/ how are books sold? How important are reviews to you?

Subscriptions, casual sales, fees from readings. That's about it, along with occasional donations. The website's useful, too, but isn't the universal saviour it's sometimes made out to be. For us, reviews are important in offering valuable feedback on the texts we've published. They also bring the press to people's notice, though very few sales result even from the most favourable write-ups. There seems to be a cognitive lacuna between a strong review and its reader reaching for the chequebook or PayPal link. This might have something to do with the effective branding of poetry (famous presses and semi-celebrity names) but it's an infuriating puzzle we've yet to solve.

What kind of work do you admire? What kind of poetry would you like to see less of? What style do you aim for in a Perdika book as a physical object?

Difficult to pin down! The editors' interests and enthusiasms range pretty widely, from, say, Emily Dickinson, Rilke and G.M. Hopkins, through Black Mountain, Jack Spicer and Frank O'Hara, to Wallace Stevens, R.S. Thomas and Roy Fisher. We tend to rate work that's linguistically adventurous without floating completely free from meaning, or emotion. We don't generally get much pleasure from poetry that allows its subject matter to overwhelm craftsmanship, or which seems to dismiss or ignore the immense range of possibilities uncovered by the great experimenters of the twentieth-century. There should be some sense of contemporary poetry as *modern*, after all. As for the physicality of the pamphlets themselves, it's absolutely central to our house style that holding and opening one of our editions should be a sensual experience almost as memorable as reading the text itself.

How do you find the poets you want to publish? What's the best way to submit to Perdika? Are there any poets you'd say you've 'discovered,' or feel particularly proud of your involvement with?

Initially, the poets we published were those we already knew and admired – we included ourselves in that mix – well, that was what we had to draw on at the time, while the press was getting set. More recently, we've been welcoming an ever more diverse range of talent, and are currently preparing a sequence by a major American poet. Poets who have read our pamphlets and believe that their work fits our project can send a sample. One of our most remarkable discoveries must be the astonishingly accomplished (and still very youthful) Tomas Weber (*The Small Stones*). We approached Tomas after Mario awarded him first prize in the Jersey poetry competition he was

running – Mario thought the winner’s son had arrived to accept the prize! The story illustrates how ‘accidental’, or incidental, such finds can be. We’re open to happy accidents.

What do you think of the current poetry scene? What do you think of the situation nowadays for publishers? What’s your take on e-books/ online chapbooks? How do you see Perdika developing in the future?

There’s a lot one might say, at length. In brief, the scene is very confused, in places entertainment-orientated, at times too predictable in praise of its existing celebrities, and with a growing tendency (as elsewhere in our culture) to privilege presentation over substance, or cadre over individual excellence. Poetry is gradually succumbing to the market and marketing, whose banal glare threatens to wither it. Poetry isn’t about the number of readers alone, but also the quality and depth of that readership. That said, there are nodes of excellence and potential if one searches carefully, and a great push towards poetry happening vitally outside the realm of academe...

The situation for publishers isn’t getting any easier. One does what one can (and must) to make sure that life keeps breaking through. Online literature can feel too virtual at times: we can’t be alone in finding it difficult to reflect on material that’s projected from a screen. One does wonder whether most e-books will go the way of the thousands of dead blogs littering cyberspace. Perdika’s future lies in trusting to the power of that deep and ever-shifting current of authenticity beneath the temporary ripples of favouritism and fad.

Are you involved in anything else apart from book publishing – magazines, e-books, workshops etc?

All the editors write. Peter teaches courses on the spiritual implications of literature, most recently at the City Lit college in Holborn. Nick teaches in Cambridge, and his first book-length collection is due shortly from Salt. Mario is well-known to the poetry scene and is up to his ears in new collections, eco-commissions, projects, scripts, workshops, schools work and a new baby!

The reading I attended had an intimate feel. Would you say that you’re working towards a Perdika community, rather than a wide-ranging press?

As we say, our author base has broadened recently; but any ‘community’ we might engender is founded primarily in our approach to language. The editorial side of things is centred on friendship and respect, for each other as well as our prospective authors. The ‘wide-ranging’ quality we seek is in our catholic sense of the modern. So, maybe there is – in a sense – a “Perdika community”; but, if so, it’s a loose association of individual readers and writers rather than a group with a programme to push.

How important is the classical element to Perdika’s work – is it something that’s going to be a continuous distinguishing feature of the press? Did you always intend to publish a significant amount of poetry in translation?

Translation was always going to be important to us, particularly beyond the usual suspects. So far, we’ve published about 50/50 translated and original work. The classical is one element – significant insofar as we love finding vital contemporary ‘takes’ on ancient authors. It’s also good to make available vibrant samples of important (but frequently neglected) poets such as Laforgue, Akhmatova and Apollinaire. A replenished familiarity with their writing may help shape the poetry of the future. Our overriding criterion – in translation too – is the quality of the *new* writing.

Is there anything else you’d like to share about Perdika and your experiences with it?

When people meet over language that nourishes and enriches, you tend to get frank dialogue rather than endless monologues. Engendering and sustaining those ongoing conversations is one of the most challenging and worthwhile aspects of running a poetry press.