

## ITMA and its Publisher

My name is Baron, Alexander or Al (but never Alex). I began writing poetry in October/November 1983 at the tender age of 27. I hadn't done much before. I don't write much nowadays either, due to work, depression, disillusion, other commitments and my (so far) futile attempts to publish my own (and some others') work.

I don't write exclusively poetry. I have broadened out and write or have written, song lyrics, complete songs, instrumental music, puzzles, conundrum riddles, a very few crosswords, jokes, some few essays and short stories. I've also got a two-thirds finished novel I haven't touched for 3½ years. When I started writing I had no real intentions of making a career or money out of it. On this score I haven't been disappointed. To date my written work has brought me one Irish £5 note, £100 from contributing for about six months to a national weekly (about a third of my typing costs), and £150 from two poetry competitions: first prize in the first competition I ever entered, joint second in the second, and zilch since.

Over the years I have met extremes of both apathy and kindness, of helpfulness and uselessness. Most of the help I have received has been from other writers in a similar position to myself. There seems to be a great camaraderie among us small press nobodies. I like to think I have helped others in my turn. The apathy, or rather the ignorance, has been from the "establishment". So-called "prestigious" magazines, extremely "busy" A&R men, record companies and publishers. I leave them, like the journalists, to their boozing, smoking and obnoxious lies. One book which I have found very useful is Peter Finch's How to Publish Your Poetry. One I have found a mine of disinformation is The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook: for example, it lists markets for poetry and for Christmas card verses. The fact is there are no markets for Christmas card verses (I have tried them all), and, for those of us who do not move in the right circles and drink with the right people, there are no markets for poetry either. The main literary journals are controlled by a small, self-perpetuating "elite", a self-appointed elite who publish each others' work, give each other favourable reviews and run at times dubious poetry competitions. It is all subsidised by the Arts Council.

One thing which has annoyed and frustrated me continually is the total ignorance of my original contributions. For example, I devised (quite by accident) two new metres for formal verse which I have made some attempts to establish. No one is interested. Likewise with my three original word-puzzles. Also I have developed an original style of verse which has gone totally unnoticed. I have no doubt other poets, writers, have the same problem.

Despairing of waiting to get discovered I decided to publish myself. It's been expensive, with virtually no return, well no return at all actually, and only my friends have admired it, but at least I'm now in the British Library and listed as an author

on the Whitakers Booklist.

Actually it wasn't my idea to publish my own material. Back in 1986 I sent two batches of poems to Jenny Chaplin of the Writers Rostrum, and before I knew it she'd printed a small booklet for me. When I realised how easy it was I jumped in at the deep-end. I will always be indebted to Jenny Chaplin, and to Andrew Savage who suggested I apply for an Arts Council grant, and to Peter Finch for publishing such an excellent book, and to Dermot Crossley for sending me that first fiver, even if I couldn't spend it. I hope one day someone will be able to say the same of me.

My advice to other writers and composers is don't wait to get discovered, do it yourself. You could be sending off manuscripts of poems, short stories, novels till the cows come home, and never get one read; that despite the sycophantic form rejection letter which will inevitably accompany it. If you believe in what you are doing, print it, publish it and market it yourself as best you can. It won't be cheap, it might get you nowhere, but at least you'll have tried.

ITMA - Titles to date:

A Purpose Strong and Bright ISBN 0 948447 05 2  
originally published by Writers Rostrum 1986, a few copies still available, distributed by ITMA.  
£1 (post free to ALP members)

We're Coming for your Telecom Shares: Poems that Bite Back  
ISBN 0 9512052 0 X  
originally published by me (as Barber Publications), distributed by ITMA - 50 or so copies still available  
£1.75 (post free to ALP members) 45 pages

Wrong Side of the River: Voices of Lewisham Poets  
ISBN 0 9512052 2 6  
41 poems by 5 Lewisham poets: published & distributed by ITMA - hundreds of copies available!  
£1.50 single copy, £1 each for ten or more, post free.

Forthcoming title, provisionally:

Viridian - poems and possibly some artwork, about 20 pages, due out October  
approx £1

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EDITORS' NOTE: Alexander mentions his 'two new metres for formal verse'. He also sends us details of the World Order of Narrative Poets (P.O.Box 174, Station A, Flushing, New York, 11358, U.S.A.) which is announcing its 8th annual NO FEE contest for outstanding poems in traditional and modern forms, postmark deadline, Dec. 15 1988. Categories include the ALFRED CORN AWARD for a poem in unrhymed Alcaic quatrains; AUSTIN DOBSON AWARD for a chant royal; ORBIS/RHYME REVIVAL AWARD for a Shakespearean sonnet in contemporary language; T.S.ELIOT AWARD for a pantoum, rhymed or unrhymed; etc., etc.