

As an undergraduate at Cambridge University, where I chaired the Poetry Society, co-edited *Perfect Bound* magazine (with Peter Robinson) and received the 1978 Chancellor's Medal for poetry, it was said of me by one of my peers that I wanted "to be a poet". If it was a harsh judgement, it was also a fair one and it contributed eventually to my relinquishing that ambition for the best part of 20 years – decades during which a number of my then and now friends became poets indeed.

When at length I returned to poetry, it was the game of it that drew me. I don't write poems with a prime intention of imparting information or opinion: I write journalism for that. If any clear message is conveyed, it comes almost as a by-product of my game with language. Ambiguities are the thing – and the unexpected perspectives that may arise when two or more disparate ideas or images are brought together. Often this involves some degree of collage: in the case of my poem 'Aldgate East', in *Notre Dame Review*, a few brief quotations from elsewhere are brought into an observation and meditation on one of the many development sites in modern London. In my collection *The Book of Isaac*, some sonnets from which appeared in an earlier issue of the *Review*, the technique was more involved, more technical and extended over a lengthy series on the subject of Russian revolutionaries among my ancestors. But whichever set of rules I adopt or invent, I play the game for the fun of it, for the exercise, as a way of questioning both myself and the world around me, as a way of thinking; if it reaches any further audience, that is a bonus – a very welcome bonus, but a bonus nonetheless.