

Man at Leisure

Alexander Trocchi



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Preface

ALTHOUGH HE IS STILL LARGELY IGNORED by the staid organs of literary reference, as he was in his lifetime by most of the establishment of the day, Alexander Trocchi remains one of the most interesting, if controversial, writers of his time, still much read, and not only in the Scotland of his birth, where he is widely admired by younger writers. He is the British equivalent of the American beats, but the tradition to which he belongs is really more that of the “damned” French writers, from Baudelaire and Rimbaud to Céline and Genet. One could almost also mention Cocteau, who was responsible for introducing him to heroin, the cause of his eventual downfall and death. It was responsible for his short career as a novelist: after the Fifties he could only concentrate on shorter work, such as articles, stories, translations handed in a few pages at a time and, of course, poetry.

If this collection of his poems, republished after three and a half decades, seems to vary enormously in content, style and use of language, it is because they were written over a twenty-year period from his leaving Glasgow in 1951 up to first publication in 1972, when it was only by obtaining unauthorized entry to his flat and desk drawers that I got hold of the manuscript. The book had been contracted, but Trocchi kept on avoiding delivery on various pretexts. As a result I had to edit poems that the author had little looked at, and in some cases had to revise and finish them. Otherwise they would never have been published or perhaps would have been sold to another publisher, because Alex, always in desperate need of money, had no scruples about selling the same manuscript to as many different publishers as would sign contracts.

Abbreviations might have been extended, lines rewritten in other ways, orthography changed, had the author been willing to find the time to rework his poems in my presence, but he accepted the *fait accompli* with good grace. As I have said

elsewhere, heroin addiction might give its victim inspiring ideas, but it takes away the ability to concentrate on serious creative work. Nevertheless, this, Trocchi's only surviving collection of poems, although rough in many ways, is revealing about his background of literary knowledge, and often lyrical in its total lack of inhibition, anticipating the greater literary freedom that was already following the censorship trials of the Sixties, which included his own work.

This volume keeps the original introduction by William Burroughs, whom he met through me, an event that resulted in them becoming good friends. Perhaps some of Burroughs' influence can be detected in some of the later work, which is fragmented in ways that often resemble the writings of the early surrealists. This is very appropriate, because Trocchi's life was a surreal one, and the obvious genuine literary talent that went into his best work now seems certain to endure as a significant part of twentieth-century literature.

John Calder
April 2009

Introduction
"Alex Trocchi Cosmonaut of Inner Space"

IT WAS AT THE 1962 WRITER'S CONFERENCE in Edinburgh that I first heard Alex describe himself in these terms. He was standing in front of a large audience and said, after a pause in which he seemed to be at a loss for words:

"I am a cosmonaut of inner space."

Alex is a forceful and decisive public speaker and his pauses are worth waiting for. This conference, organized by John Calder, established the books that had grown out of the underground culture as literature and the writers of these books as important literary figures.

The poems in this book are reminiscent of John Donne and the metaphysical poets, and I had already described Alex as a modern metaphysical poet before I came across his poem to John Donne. Alex writes about spirit, flesh and death and the vision that comes through the flesh... "Somewhere between Nice and Monte Carlo and must depart soon in beds, fields, cinemas or pigsties centuries of rock laugh white teeth at death in a brown land children play dirty in marketplaces crunching sugar skulls cats laugh their pointed teeth from the wet streets a boy's cry over the city".

"My personal Ides," he said.

Wrote at night red ink on cheap paper

"I wonder when a woman will walk naked to me?"

Chalk marks on a wall in a black cave

Ob scene

Ab sent

Shut the lavatory door and lock it like he was hot see?

The Milky Way whips my sperm to the sky starship text book for today warm blood snake thrust pure salt visibility excellent on what fantastic world in the desert distances are not far not a whisper of a tent plague above the city and the weapons of war are perished. Fuck. Good luck.

Perhaps writers are actually *readers* from hidden books. These books are carefully concealed and surrounded by deadly snares. It is a dangerous expedition to find one of these books and bring back a few words. Genet said of a Catholic pederast who shall be nameless here “*Il n’a pas le courage d’être écrivain.*”

Alex has this courage so essential to a writer. He has been there and has read what he writes.

I remember reading *Cain’s Book* for the first time: the barge the dropper the heroin you can feel it or see it. He has been there and brought it back. Many writers when they start to write withdraw from the source of their writing, but Alex has not done this and if his life may have taken time from his work it gives back a rare vitality. The poems in this book are buoyant with that vitality and the hope which is so much a part of Alex’s personality. One always feels better after seeing Alex and that is indeed a precious gift, a quality that has brought to his door hundreds of young people over the years. Alex has been for them the focal point in the underground literary scene which he pioneered with *Cain’s Book*. He has come a long way since then. One hopes that his long boat will turn into a long book about that trip through inner and outer space.

William Burroughs
April 1972

Man at Leisure

Where to Begin

Where to begin
which sin
under what sun
what work begun
or play
the day
or night away?

Myrtle with the Light Blue Hair

I was like she was, hot, see?
 a fat, lovable little boy
 with an eye that peeped at her, what she
 showed the toad, & not coy...
 the slicks, flats, elastic tensions
 of her great, her imperial thighs,
 the torque of her hot delta which
 smoked a turkish cigarette
 for me to see that she
 was all lips and hips
 at the green pod she burgeoned downwards from
 like a butter bean.

then, her belly dangling
 like an egg on poach
 she scissored her legs cleverlie
 and spat out the roach,
 which... I raised to my lips

I was like she was and she at her ease
 & ripe was she
 as a thumbpress on a camembert cheese
 her chevron gamey-dark, like good game
 as she came on me
 & retrieved her cigarette,
 inhaled, & threw it away...
 collecting me to her like a windy skirt
 before she leaned against me, like a sea.

Bubonics

1

Poetry is a wordy suppuration
 often indelicate, like hate;
 which came into being after the Fall
 before which, all
 expression was written in hot flanks
 effectively. Thanks
 to that, there was no call
 for spiritual menstruation...

2

Literature is that body of doctrine
 whose carnality is metaphorical
 whose pretension is categorical
 and which, incidentally
 is worth bugger-all...

3

Love (what mothers call infatuation)
 is a cosmic vibration
 often immoderate
 like hate;
 it lives in the thighs
 is consummate
 in beds, fields, cinemas or pigsties
 according to mood, heat & uphertunicky...

The Water Spout

It is evening. The flat sea
 draws in its edges from the serrated coast.
 One's voice is lost, well-lost
 down here in the Midi
 hanging, a ridiculously silent cannon
 on a promontory
 somewhere between Nice and Monte Carlo.

Nothing but water from the waterspout.
 The glad brown bodies of the women gone
 to winter places, winter loves
 to crunch dry toasts, discuss
 winter situations. And I
 who arrived too late
 and must depart soon
 listen to the water from the waterspout
 somewhere between Nice and Monte Carlo.

Wind from the Bosphorus

Tzigane
 late of the Bosphorus
 come through the stink of many nations
 on a painted cart
 to water himself
 his brown-thighed woman
 brats
 his bowlegged knackery
 in the mauve bole of Paris.

in Greece
 he got one child and syphilis
 discreetly, of a blonde Roumanian tart
 who (torn in her shy soul)
 spent half her time being a refugee, the other
 half
 bucking for dear life
 under the swarthy weight of sailors.

a young man
 stalking a butterfly
 found a flare-red skirt, a high-cheeked
 gypsywoman
 and lay with her behind a bush in adultery
 caught
 still supine, the winds of the East
 and of Roumanian Anna

later
 he carried with him
 more than a gypsy's fading heat, but was not
 much concerned
 desire being international, of more significance
 than the incidental *cum multis aliis*
 he carried to the clinic
 where