

# Man at Leisure

Alexander Trocchi



CALDER

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## *Preface*

**A**LTHOUGH 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 S. 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...

5

*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  
he was treated  
by more civilised persons who showed  
little interest  
in what they called (with an utter lack of  
sensitivity)  
“the source of infection”  
as though  
nothing else had been carried to him from the East  
on the wind of her body.

*Sad' Poems*

“He’s got one? A chimpanzee?  
Whatever for? To furnish his  
bestiary withal.”

*The Cock of the Walk*  
Marquis de Sade

Monasts  
do not have to be  
pederasts  
ruminations  
an accumulation  
of pasts  
and last week’s telecasts

Baron Lust’s last list  
cast  
doubt  
on the cost  
of toast  
on the coast  
of Cap d’Ail

Cops at the Cap  
clear cunts from the map  
and keep the Coast clear  
for arseholes on the mere.

*“Unless She Comes”*

Unless she comes  
will be no end to waiting  
and night extinguishes  
unless she comes

Unless she comes  
the cutting shutter falls  
in void unanswered calls  
unless she comes

Unless she comes  
my soul in grief collide  
a little death have died  
unless she comes

Unless she comes  
with dawn my heart will crack  
I'll know she won't be back  
& now will never come

*The Brown Land*

the brown land does not resent stone faces  
nor faces of flesh, the serape  
weaves broad time in many colours  
death in the brown tree—  
is a skull death? the murmur of bone?  
what prayer is answered by the gods at Yucatan?

centuries of rock, of brown women  
laugh white teeth at death  
in a brown land, children play  
at sun, dirty in marketplaces  
crunching sugar skulls.

the brown women have brown breasts and brown loins  
they mock death in brown wombs  
a new cell, *casamiento!* the brown land  
does not resent its brown women  
the brown women are water in a brown land.

and brown girls will be brown mothers  
with brown bellies more fruitful than brown land  
laugh at death, a red dance  
before our Virgin at Guadeloupe.  
eternity has been struck at Teotihuacan...

*Portrait*

as night fell  
sans paramour  
and spoordrawn into dance  
he came to the city  
city of obelisk  
and risk  
tambourine, turkspleasure  
swarthy muleteer  
the abominable Berthe  
*à plat ventre*  
(they say she will have none of any other position)

he drank  
vin blanc  
in the Café of the Two Hemispheres  
ignored  
the Sisters of Mercy  
the gentle supplication  
of the peanut vendor  
the vendor of lotteries  
and  
loth to offend her  
told  
the abominable Berthe  
a plain untruth  
about his condition

not held  
by the gay synopsis  
of murder  
the little red Calvary in the third column  
(the paper bored him  
humanists bred him

logic cured him)  
he ordered oysters  
—a broken acrobat, a strangled nude  
possibly one of the Merciful Sisters  
—and counted the shells

the café spread  
a helio lance  
in the hollow ingot  
of his isolation  
(the oysters were no consolation)  
truthfully  
he would have settled for something rather less than  
a woman of the Ptolemies.

*Poem*

Who will break a boy's cry over the city?  
suddenly,  
taken in the dim treachery of walls  
a hand all bone moving spiderpinkly  
at seek,  
setting feet stealthily in the ribs of the garden?

Who will cast a boy's flesh over the city?  
whitely,  
uttering deprecations  
a tongue, all stone, muttering  
at fall,  
like toppling brick in the ribs of the garden?

Who will shake a boy's hairs over the city?  
secretly,  
lipping black feathers, stir  
thighs alone, a cat obliquely  
at wait,  
the eyes of an owl in the ribs of the garden?

Who will pluck a boy's eyes over the city?  
dumbly,  
counting pale skulls  
who will atone in the graveyard  
at prayer,  
speak beads in the ribs of the garden?

Who will stab a boy's heart over the city?  
sadly,  
and cry with his own  
to be at one with his god  
at judgement,  
deals death in the ribs of the garden...?

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