

Classic Poetry Series

Gregory Corso
- poems -

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Gregory Corso(26 March 1930 – 17 January 2001)

Gregory Nunzio Corso was an American poet, youngest of the inner circle of Beat Generation writers (with [Jack Kerouac](http://www.poemhunter.com/jack-kerouac/), [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poemhunter.com/allen-ginsberg/), and William S. Burroughs). He was beloved by the other "Beats".

"<i>... a tough young kid from the Lower East Side who rose like an angel over the roof tops and sang Italian song as sweet as Caruso and Sinatra, but in words... Amazing and beautiful, Gregory Corso, the one and only Gregory, the Herald."</i> ~Jack Kerouac

<i>"Corso's a poet's Poet, a poet much superior to me. Pure velvet... whose wild fame's extended for decades around the world from France to China, World Poet."</i> ~Allen Ginsberg

"<i>Gregory's voice echoes through a precarious future.... His vitality and resilience always shine through, with a light this is more than human: the immortal light of his Muse... Gregory is indeed one of the Daddies". </i>~William S. Burroughs

Poetry

Corso's first volume of poetry *The Vestal Lady on Brattle* was published in 1955 (with the assistance of students at Harvard, where he had been auditing classes). Corso was the second of the Beats to be published (after only Kerouac's *The Town and the City*), despite being the youngest. His poems were first published in the *Harvard Advocate*. In 1958, Corso had an expanded collection of poems published as number 8 in the *City Lights Pocket Poets Series: Gasoline & The Vestal Lady on Brattle*. Of his many notable poems are: "Bomb" (a "concrete poem" formatted in typed paper slips of verse, arranged in the shape of a mushroom cloud), "Elegiac Feelings American" of the recently deceased Jack Kerouac, and "Marriage", a humorous meditation on the institution, perhaps his signature poem. And later in life, "The Whole Mess Almost".

In "Marriage" Corso tackles the possibilities of marriage. It was among his "title poems", with "Power", "Army" and others that explore a concept. "Should I get married?" (1), the speaker begins. Could marriage bring about the results that the speaker is looking for? Coming "home to her" (54) and sitting "by the fireplace and she in the kitchen/aproned young and lovely wanting my baby/ and

so happy about me she burns the roast beef" (55-57). Idealizing marriage and fatherhood initially, Corso's speaker embraces reality in the second half of the poem admitting, "No, I doubt I'd be that kind of father" (84). Recognizing that the act of marriage is in itself a form of imprisonment, "No, can't imagine myself married to that pleasant prison dream" (103), Corso's speaker acknowledges in the end that the possibility of marriage is not promising for him. Bruce Cook from the book *The Beat Generation* illuminates Corso's skill at juxtaposing humor and serious critical commentary, "Yet as funny and entertaining as all this certainly is, it is not merely that, for in its zany way 'Marriage' offers serious criticism of what is phony about a sacred American institution."

Corso's sometimes surreal word mash ups— "forked clarinets", "Flash Gordon soap", "werewolf bathtubs" —caught the attention of many.

It was "Bomb" and "Marriage" that caught the eye of a young Bob Dylan, still in Minnesota. "The Gregory Corso poem "Bomb" was more to the point and touched the spirit of the times better— a wasted world and totally mechanized— a lot of hustle and bustle— a lot of shelves to clean, boxes to stack. I wasn't going to pin my hopes on that." ~Bob Dylan, *Chronicles*

In contrast to Corso's use of marriage as a synecdoche for a Beat view of women, postmodern feminist poet Hedwig Gorski chronicles a night with Corso in her poem "Could not get Gregory Corso out of my Car" (1985, Austin, Texas) showing the womanizing typical for heterosexual Beat behavior. Gorski criticizes the Beat movement for tokenism towards women writers and their work, with very few exceptions, including Anne Waldman, and post-beats like Diane DiPrima and herself. Male domination and womanizing along with tokenism by its major homosexual members characterize the Beat Literary Movement. Beats scoffed at the Feminist Movement which offered liberalizing social and professional views of women and their works as did the Beat Movement for men, especially homosexuals. Corso however always defended women's role in the Beat Generation, often citing his lover Hope Savage as a primary influence on him and Allen Ginsberg.

Ted Morgan described Corso's place in the beat literary world: "If Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs were the Three Musketeers of the movement, Corso was their D'Artagnan, a sort of junior partner, accepted and appreciated, but with less than complete parity. He had not been in at the start, which was the alliance of the Columbia intellectuals with the Times Square hipsters. He was a recent adherent, although his credentials were impressive enough to gain him unrestricted admittance ..." It has taken 50 years and the death of the other Beats, for Corso to be fully appreciated as a poet of equal stature and

significance.

Early life

Born Nunzio Corso at St. Vincent's hospital (later called the Poets' hospital after [Dylan Thomas](http://www.poemhunter.com/dylan-thomas/) died there), Corso later selected the name "Gregory" as a confirmation name. Within Little Italy and its community he was "Nunzio", while he dealt with others as "Gregory". He often would use "Nunzio" as a short for "Annunziato", the announcing angel Gabriel, hence a poet. Corso identified with not only Gabriel but also the Greco Roman God Hermes, the divine messenger.

Corso's mother, Michelina Corso (born Colonna) was born in Miglianico, Abruzzo, Italy, and immigrated to the United States at the age of nine, with her mother and four other sisters. At 16, she married Sam Corso, a first generation Italian American, also teenage, and gave birth to Nunzio Corso the same year. They lived at the corner of Bleecker and MacDougal, the heart of Greenwich Village and upper Little Italy.

Childhood

Sometime in his first year, Corso's mother mysteriously abandoned him, leaving him at the New York Foundling Home, a branch of the Catholic Church Charities. Corso's father, Sam "Fortunato" Corso, a gruff garment center worker, found the infant and promptly put him in a foster home. Michelina came to New York but was threatened for her life by Sam. One of Michelina's sisters was married to a New Jersey mobster who offered to give Michelina her "vengeance," that is to kill Sam. Michelina declined and returned to Trenton without her child. Sam consistently told Corso that his mother had returned to Italy and deserted the family. He was also told that she was a prostitute and was "disgraziata" (disgraced) and forced into Italian exile. Sam told the young boy several times, "I should have flushed you down the toilet." It was 67 years until Corso learned the truth of his mother's disappearance.

Corso spent the next 11 years in foster care in at least five different homes. His father rarely visited him. When he did, Corso was often abused: "I'd spill jello and the foster home people would beat me. Then my father would visit and he'd beat me again— a double whammy." As a foster child, Corso was among thousands that the Church aided during the Depression, with the intention of reconstituting families as the economy picked up. Corso went to Catholic parochial schools, was an altar boy and a gifted student. His father, in order to avoid the military draft, brought Gregory home in 1941. Nevertheless, Sam

Corso was drafted and shipped overseas.

Corso, then alone, became a homeless child on the streets of Little Italy. For warmth he slept in subways in the winter, and then slept on rooftops during the summer. He continued to attend Catholic school, not telling authorities he was living on the streets. With "permission", he stole breakfast bread from Vesuvio Bakery, on Leroy Street in Little Italy. Street food stall merchants would give him food in exchange for running errands.

Adolescence

At age 13, Corso was asked to deliver a toaster to a neighbor. While he was running the errand, a passerby offered money for the toaster, and Corso sold it. He used the money to buy a tie and white shirt, and dressed up to see the film "The Song of Bernadette", about the mystical appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes. On returning from the movie, the police apprehended him. Corso claimed he was seeking a miracle, namely, to find his mother. Corso had a life long affection for saints and holy men: "They were my only heroes." Nonetheless, he was arrested for petty larceny and incarcerated in The Tombs, New York's infamous jail. Corso, even though only thirteen years old, was celled next to an adult criminally insane murderer who had stabbed his wife repeatedly with a screwdriver. The exposure left Corso traumatized. Neither Corso's stepmother nor his paternal grandmother would post his \$50 bond. With his own mother missing and unable to make bail, he remained in the Tombs.

Later, in 1944 during a New York blizzard, a fourteen-year-old freezing Corso broke into his tutor's office for warmth, and fell asleep on a desk. He slept through the blizzard and was arrested for breaking and entering and booked into the Tombs a second time, with adults. Terrified of other inmates, he was sent to the psychiatric ward of Bellevue Hospital Center and later released.

At age seventeen, on the eve of his eighteenth birthday, Corso broke into a tailor shop and stole an over-sized suit to dress for a date. Police records indicate he was arrested two blocks from the shop. He spent the night in the Tombs and was arraigned the next morning as an 18-year-old with prior offenses. No longer a "youthful offender", he was given a two to three years sentence to Clinton State Prison, in Dannemora, New York, on the Canadian border. It was New Jersey State's toughest prison, the site of the state's electric chair. Corso always has expressed a curious gratitude for Clinton making him a poet.

His second book of poems *Gasoline*, is dedicated to "the angels of Clinton Prison who, in my seventeenth year, handed me, from all the cells surrounding me,

books of illumination."

Interestingly, Clinton later became known as the "poets prison", as rap poets Tupak Shakur, Fifty Cent, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and others served time there.

Corso at Clinton Correctional

While being transported to Clinton, Corso, terrified of prison and the prospect of rape, concocted a story of why he was sent there. He told hardened Clinton inmates he and two friends had devised the wild plan of taking over New York City by means of walkie-talkies, projecting a series of improbable and complex robberies. Communicating by walkie-talkie, each of the three boys took up an assigned position— one inside the store to be robbed, one outside on the street to watch for the police and a third, Corso, the master-planner, in a small room nearby dictating the orders. According to Corso, he was in the small room giving the orders when the police came. In light of Corso's youth, his imaginative yarn earned him bemused attention at Clinton.

The Mafia wing of Clinton was under the direction of inmate Charles "Lucky" Luciano, Mafia Capo di Tutti Capos, the character on which Mario Puzo and Francis Coppola based "The Godfather". Richard Biello, a Capo, asked Corso who he was connected with, that is, what New York crime family did he come from, talking such big crimes as walkie talkie robberies... "I'm independent!", Corso shot back, hoping to keep his distance from the Mob inmates. A week later, in the prison showers, Corso was grabbed by a handful of inmates, and the 18-year-old was about to be raped. Biello happened in and commented, "Corso! You don't look so independent right now." Biello waved off the would-be rapists, afraid of Mafia reprisals.

Thus Corso fell under the protection of powerful Mafioso inmates, and became something of a mascot because he was the youngest inmate in the prison and he was entertaining. Corso would cook the steaks and veal brought from the outside by Mafia underlings in the "courts"— 55 gallon barrel barbecues and picnic tables— assigned to the influential prisoners. Clinton also had a ski run right in the middle of "the yards" and Corso learned to downhill ski and taught the Mafiosi. He entertained his mobster elders as a court jester, quick with ripostes and jokes. Corso would often cite the three propositions given him by a Mafia capo: "1) Don't serve time, let time serve you. 2) Don't take your shoes off because with a 2 -3 you're walking right out of here. 3) When you're in the yard talking to three guys, see four. See yourself. Dig yourself."

Interestingly, Corso was jailed in the very cell just months before vacated by

Charles "Lucky" Luciano. While imprisoned, Luciano had donated an extensive library to the prison. The cell was also equipped with a phone and self controlled lighting as Luciano was, from prison, cooperating with the U.S. Government's wartime effort, providing Mafia aid in policing the New York waterfront, and later helping in Naples, Italy through his control of the Camorra. In this special cell, Corso read after lights-out thanks to a light specially positioned for Luciano to work late. Corso was encouraged to read and study by his Cosa Nostra mentors, who recognized his genius.

There, Corso began writing poetry. He studied the Greek and Roman classics, and consumed encyclopedias and dictionaries. He credited the "Story of Civilization", Will and Ariel Durant's ground-breaking compendium of history and philosophy for his general education and philosophical sophistication.

Release and return to New York City

In 1951, twenty-one-year-old Gregory Corso worked in the garment center by day, and at night was a mascot yet again, this time at one of Greenwich Village's first Lesbian bars, the Pony Stable Inn. The women gave Corso a table at which he wrote poetry. One night a Columbia College student, Allen Ginsberg, happened into the Pony Stable and saw Corso... "he was good looking, and wondered if he was gay, or what." Corso, who was definitely not gay, was not uncomfortable with same sex come-ons after his time in prison, and thought he could score a beer off Ginsberg. He showed Ginsberg some of the poems he was writing, and some from prison, and Ginsberg immediately recognized Corso as "spiritually gifted". One poem described a woman who sunbathed in a window bay across the street from Corso's room on 12th Street. Astonishingly, the woman happened to be Ginsberg's erstwhile girl friend, with whom he lived in one of his rare forays into heterosexuality. Ginsberg invited Corso back to their apartment and asked the woman if she would satisfy Corso's sexual curiosity. She agreed, but Corso, still a virgin, got too nervous as she disrobed and he ran from the apartment, struggling with his pants. Ginsberg and Corso became fast friends. All his life, Ginsberg had a sexual attraction to Corso, which remained unrequited.

Corso joined the Beat circle and was adopted by its co-leaders, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, who saw in the young street-wise writer a potential for expressing the poetic insights of a generation wholly separate from those preceding it. At this time he developed a crude and fragmented mastery of Shelley, Marlowe, and Chatterton. Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" (1840), with its emphasis on the ability of genuine poetic impulse to stimulate "unapprehended combinations of thought" that led to the "moral improvement of

man", prompted Corso to develop a theory of poetry roughly consistent with that of the developing principles of the Beat poets. For Corso, poetry became a vehicle for change, a way to redirect the course of society by stimulating individual will. He referred to Shelley often as a "Revolutionary of Spirit", which he considered Ginsberg and himself to be.

Cambridge

In 1954, Corso moved to Cambridge, where several important poets, including Edward Marshall and John Wieners, were experimenting with the poetics of voice. The center for Corso's life there was not "the School of Boston", as these poets were called, but Harvard University's Widener Library, where he spent his days reading the great works of poetry and also auditing classes in the Greek and Roman Classics. Corso's appreciation of the classics had come from the Durants' books which he had read in prison. At Harvard he considered becoming a classics scholar. Corso, penniless, lived on a dorm room floor in Elliott house, welcomed by students Peter Sourian, John Sedgwick (brother of Edie), and Paul Grand. He would dress up for dinner and not be noticed. Members of the elite Porcellian Club reported Corso to the Harvard administration as an interloper. Dean [Archibald Macleish](http://www.poemhunter.com/archibald-macleish/) met with Corso intending to expel him, but Corso showed him his poems and MacLeish relented and allowed Corso to be a non-matriculating student— a poet in residence. Corso's first published poems appeared in the Harvard Advocate in 1954, and his play In This Hung-up Age—concerning a group of Americans who, after their bus breaks down midway across the continent, are trampled by buffalo— was performed by the esteemed Poets' Theater the following year, along with [T.S. Eliot's](http://www.poemhunter.com/thomas-stearns-eliot/) "Murder in the Cathedral".

Harvard and Radcliffe students, notably Grand, Sourian and Sedgewick, underwrote the printing expenses of Corso's first book, *The Vestal Lady on Brattle, and Other Poems*. The poems featured in the volume are usually considered apprentice works heavily indebted to Corso's reading. They are, however, unique in their innovative use of jazz rhythms— most notably in "Requiem for 'Bird' Parker, Musician", which many call the strongest poem in the book— cadences of spoken English, and hipster jargon. Corso once explained his use of rhythm and meter in an interview with Gavin Selerie for *Riverside Interviews*: "My music is built in— it's already natural. I don't play with the meter." In other words, Corso believes the meter must arise naturally from the poet's voice; it is never consciously chosen.

In a review of *The Vestal Lady on Brattle* for Poetry, Reuel Denney asked whether "a small group jargon" such as bop language would "sound interesting" to those who were not part of that culture. Corso, he concluded, "cannot balance the richness of the bebop group jargon... with the clarity he needs to make his work meaningful to a wider-than-clique audience." Ironically, within a few years, that "small group jargon", the Beat lingo, became a national idiom: featuring words such as "man", "cool", "dig", "chick", "hung up", etc.

Despite Corso's reliance on traditional forms and archaic diction, he remained a street-wise poet, described by Bruce Cook in *The Beat Generation* as "an urchin Shelley". Gaiser suggested that Corso adopted "the mask of the sophisticated child whose every display of mad spontaneity and bizarre perception is consciously and effectively designed"—as if he is in some way deceiving his audience. But the poems at their best are controlled by an authentic, distinctive, and enormously effective voice that can range from sentimental affection and pathos to exuberance and dadaist irreverence toward almost anything except poetry itself.

San Francisco, Howl and the Beat Phenomenon

Corso and Ginsberg decided to head to San Francisco, separately. Corso wound up temporarily in Los Angeles and worked at the L.A. Examiner news morgue. Ginsberg was delayed in Denver. They were drawn by reports of an iconoclast circle of poets, including Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen and Lew Welch. An older literary mentor, the socialist writer Kenneth Rexroth, lent his apartment as a Friday night literary salon (Ginsberg's mentor William Carlos Williams, an old friend of Rexroth's, had given him an introductory letter).

Wally Hedrick wanted to organize the famous Six Gallery reading, and Ginsberg wanted Rexroth to serve as master of ceremonies, in a sense to bridge generations. Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder read on October 7, 1955 before 100 people (including Kerouac, up from Mexico City). Lamantia read poems of his late friend John Hoffman. At his first public reading Ginsberg performed the just finished first part of "Howl". Gregory Corso arrived late the next day, missing the historical reading, at which he had been scheduled to read.

The Six Gallery was a success and the evening led to many more readings by the now locally famous Six Gallery poets. It was also a marker of the beginning of the West Coast Beat movement, since the 1956 publication of "Howl" (*City Lights*

Pocket Poets, no. 4) and its obscenity trial in 1957 brought it to nationwide attention.

Ginsberg and Corso hitchhiked from San Francisco, visiting Henry Miller in Big Sur, and stopped off in Los Angeles. As guests of Anais Nin and writer Lawrence Lipton, Corso and Ginsberg gave a reading to a gathering of LA literati. Ginsberg took the audience off-guard, by proclaiming himself and Corso as poets of absolute honesty, and they both proceeded to strip bare naked of clothes, shocking even the most avant-garde of the audience.

Corso and Ginsberg then hitchhiked to Mexico City to visit Kerouac who was holed up in a room above a whorehouse, writing a novel, "Tristessa". After a three-week stay in Mexico City, Ginsberg left, and Corso waited for a plane ticket. His lover, Hope Savage, convinced her father, mayor of Charleston, S.C., to send Corso a plane ticket to Washington, D.C. Corso had been invited by Library of Congress poet (precursor to U.S. Poet Laureate) [Randall Jarrell](http://www.poemhunter.com/randall-jarrell/) and his wife Mary, to live with them, and become Jarrell's poetic protege. Jarrell, unimpressed with the other Beats, found Corso's work to be original and believed he held great promise. Corso stayed with the Jarrells' for two months, enjoyed the first taste of family life ever. However Kerouac showed up and crashed at the Jarrells', often drunk and loud, and tempted Corso to carousing. Corso was disinvented by the Jarrells and returned to New York.

To Paris and the 'Beat Hotel'

In 1957, Allen Ginsberg voyaged with Peter Orlovsky to visit Williams S. Burroughs in Morocco. They were joined by Kerouac, who was researching the French origins of his family. Corso, already in Europe, joined them in Tangiers and as a group, they made an ill fated attempt to take Burroughs' fragmented writings and organize them into a text (which later would become "Naked Lunch"). Burroughs was strung out on heroin and became jealous of Ginsberg's unrequited attraction for Corso, who left Tangiers for Paris. In Paris, Corso introduced Ginsberg and Orlovsky to a Left Bank lodging house above a bar at 9 rue Gît-le-Coeur, that he named the Beat Hotel. They were soon joined by William Burroughs and others. It was a haven for young expatriate painters, writers and musicians. There, Ginsberg began his epic poem Kaddish, Corso composed his poems Bomb and Marriage, and Burroughs (with Brion Gysin's help) put together Naked Lunch from previous writings. This period was documented by the photographer Harold Chapman, who moved in at about the same time, and took pictures of the residents of the hotel until it closed in 1963.

Corso's Paris sojourn resulted in his third volume of Poetry, "The Happy Birthday of Death" (1960), "Minutes to Go" (1960, visual poetry deemed "cut ups") with William S. Burroughs, Sinclair Beiles, and Brion Gysin, "The American Express" (1961, an Olympia Press novel), and Long Live Man (1962, poetry). Corso fell out with his publisher of Gasoline, Lawrence Ferlinghetti of City Lights Bookstore, who objected to "Bomb", a position Ferlinghetti later ruded and for which he apologized. Corso's work found a strong reception at New Directions Publishing, founded by James Laughlin who heard of Corso through Harvard connections.

While in Europe Corso searched for his lover, Hope Savage, who had disappeared from New York, saying she was headed to Paris. He visited Rome and Greece, sold encyclopedias in Germany, hung out with jazz trumpeter Chet Baker in Amsterdam, and with Ginsberg set the staid Oxford Union in turmoil with his reading of "Bomb", which Oxford students mistakenly believed was pro-nuclear war (as had Ferlinghetti), while they and other campuses were engaged in "ban the bomb" demonstrations. A student threw a shoe at Corso, and both he and Ginsberg left before Ginsberg could read "Howl".

Corso returned to New York in 1958, amazed that he and his compatriots had become famous, or notorious, emerging literary figures.

Return to New York - The "Beatniks"

In late 1958, Corso reunited with Ginsberg and Orlovsky. They were astonished that before they left for Europe they had sparked a social movement, which San Francisco columnist Herb Caen called, "Beat-nik", combining "beat" with the Russian "Sputnik", as if to suggest that the Beat writers were both "out there" and vaguely Communist.

San Francisco's obscenity trial of Lawrence Ferlinghetti for publishing Ginsberg's "Howl" had ended in an acquittal and the national notoriety made "The Beats" famous, adored and ridiculed.

Upon their return, Ginsberg, Corso, Kerouac and Burroughs were published in the venerable "Chicago Review" but before the volume was sold, University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins deemed it pornographic and had all copies confiscated. The Chicago editors promptly resigned and started an alternative literary magazine, "The Big Table". Ginsberg and Corso took a bus from New York for the "Big Table" launch, which again propelled them into the national spotlight. Studs Terkel's interview of the two was a madcap romp which set off a wave of publicity. Controversy followed them and they relished making the most of their outlaw and pariah image. Time and Life Magazine had a particular dislike of the

two, hurling invective and insult that Corso and Ginsberg hoped they could bootstrap into yet more publicity. The Beat Generation (so named by Kerouac) was galvanized and young people began dressing with berets, toreador pants, and beards and carrying bongos. Corso would quip that he never grew a beard, didn't own a beret, and couldn't fathom bongos.

Corso and Ginsberg traveled widely to college campuses, reading together. Ginsberg's "Howl" provided the serious fare and Corso's "Bomb" and "Marriage" provided the humor and bonhomie. New York's Beat scene erupted and spilled over to the burgeoning folk music craze in the Village, Corso's and Ginsberg's home ground. An early participant was a newly arrived Bob Dylan: "I came out of the wilderness and just fell in with the Beat scene, the Bohemian, the Be Bop crowd. It was all pretty connected". "It was Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti... I got in at the tail end of that and it was magic." ~Bob Dylan in America.

During the early 1960s Corso married Sally November, an English teacher who grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and attended Shaker High School, and graduated from the University of Michigan. At first, Corso mimicked "Marriage" and moved to Cleveland to work in Sally's father's florist shop. Then the couple lived in Manhattan and Sally was known to Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Larry Rivers and others in the beat circle at that time. The marriage, while a failure, did create a child, Miranda Corso. Corso did maintain contact with Sally and his daughter sporadically during his lifetime. Sally, who subsequently remarried, resides on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and has kept contact with one of the iconic females associated with the Beat movement, Hettie Jones.

Corso married two other times and had a son Nile, and daughter Cybelle and later a son Max. Throughout his life, Corso remained in touch with his children, and was fiercely protective of them, forbidding any access to journalists, writers and later his film biographer, Gustave Reininger.

As the Beats were supplanted in the 1960s by the Hippies and other youth movements, Corso experienced his own wilderness years. He struggled with alcohol and drugs. He later would comment that his addictions masked the pain of having been abandoned and emotionally deprived and abused. Poetry was his purest means of transcending his traumas but substance abuse threatened his poetic output. He lived in Rome for many years, and later married in Paris and taught in Greece, all the while traveling widely. He strangely remained close to the Catholic Church as critic and a loose identification as a lapsed Catholic. His collection, "Dear Fathers" was several letters commenting on needed reforms in the Vatican.

In 1969, Corso published a volume "Elegiac Feelings American", whose lead poem dedicated to the recently deceased Jack Kerouac is regarded by some critics as Corso's best poem. In 1981 he published poems mostly written while residing in Europe, titled "Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit".

In 1972, Rose Holton and her sister met Corso on the second day of their residence at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City:

"He sold us on the Chelsea and sold us on himself. Everything that life can throw at you was reflected in his very being. It was impossible for him to be boring. He was outrageous, always provocative, alternately full of indignation or humor, never censoring his words or behavior. But the main thing is that Gregory was authentic. He could play to the audience, but he was never a phony poseur. He was the real deal. He once explained the trajectory of creative achievement: "There is talent, there is genius, then there is the divine." Gregory inhabited the divine. "

Later Years

In later years, Corso disliked public appearances and became irritated with his own "Beat" celebrity. He never allowed a biographer to work in any "authorized" fashion, and only posthumously was a volume of letters published under the specious artifice of "An Accidental Autobiography". He did however agree to allow filmmaker Gustave Reininger to make a cinema verite documentary, Corso: The Last Beat, about him.

After Allen Ginsberg's death, Corso was depressed and despondent. Gustave Reininger convinced him to go "on the road" to Europe and retrace the early days of "the Beats" in Paris, Italy and Greece. While in Venice, Corso expressed on film his lifelong concerns about not having a mother, and living such an uprooted childhood. Corso became curious about where in Italy his mother, Michelina Colonna, might be buried. His father's family had always told him that his mother had returned to Italy, a disgraced woman, a whore. Filmmaker Gustave Reininger quietly launched a search for Corso's mother's Italian burial place. In an astonishing turn of events, Reininger found Corso's mother Michelina not dead, but alive; and not in Italy, but in Trenton, New Jersey. Corso was reunited with his mother on film. He discovered that she at age 17 had been almost fatally brutalized (all her front teeth punched out) and was sexually abused by her teenage husband, his father. On film, Michelina explained that at the height of the Depression, with no trade or job, she had no choice but to give her son to the care of Catholic Charities. After she had established a new life working in a restaurant in New Jersey, she had attempted to find him, to no avail. The father,

Sam Corso, had blocked even Catholic Charities from disclosing the boy's whereabouts. Living modestly, she lacked the means to hire a lawyer to find her son. She worked as a waitress in a sandwich shop in the New Jersey State Office building in Trenton. She eventually married the cook, Paul Davita, and started a new family. Her child Gregory remained a secret between Michelina and her mother and sisters, until Reininger found them.

Corso and his mother quickly developed a relationship which lasted until his death, which preceded hers. They both spent hours on the phone and the initial forgiveness displayed in the film became a living reality. Corso and Michelina loved to gamble and on several occasions took vacations to Atlantic City for black jack at the casinos. Corso always lost while Michelina fared better and would stake him with her winnings.

In Corso: The Last Beat, Corso claimed that he was healed in many ways by meeting his mother and saw his life coming full circle. He began to work productively on a new, long delayed volume of poetry, "The Golden Egg". Shortly thereafter, Corso discovered he had irreversible prostate cancer. He died of the disease in Minnesota on January 17, 2001. In the film, "Corso: The Last Beat" a dramatic scene was shot in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, at the grave of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Off camera, Corso showed Reininger a small patch of open ground and said that this is where he wished to be buried. He had always sought good company and felt he couldn't top [Shelley](http://www.poemhunter.com/percy-bysshe-shelley/) and [Keats](http://www.poemhunter.com/john-keats/). Reininger was discouraging as the Cemetery had been closed to newcomers since the mid-century. After Corso's death, a Roman friend Vittorio Terracini and Reininger lobbied the Roman authorities for special permission. Corso's ashes were deposited, just as he wanted, at the foot of the grave of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in the Cimitero Acattolico, the Protestant Cemetery, Rome. He wrote his own epitaph:

*Spirit
is Life
It flows thru
the death of me
endlessly
like a river
unafraid
of becoming
the sea*

Quotes

"... a tough young kid from the Lower East Side who rose like an angel over the roof tops and sang Italian song as sweet as Caruso and Sinatra, but in words... Amazing and beautiful, Gregory Corso, the one and only Gregory, the Herald." — Jack Kerouac – Introduction to Gasoline

"Corso's a poet's Poet, a poet much superior to me. Pure velvet... whose wild fame's extended for decades around the world from France to China, World Poet. — Allen Ginsberg "On Corso's Virtues"

"Gregory's voice echoes through a precarious future.... His vitality and resilience always shine through, with a light this is more than human: the immortal light of his Muse. ... Gregory is indeed one of the Daddies." — William S. Burroughs

"The most important of the beat poets... a really true poet with an original voice" — Nancy Peters, editor of City Lights

"Other than Mr. Corso, Gregory was all you ever needed to know. He defined the name by his every word or act. Always succinct, he never tried. Once he called you 'My Ira' or 'My Janine' or 'My Allen'. he was forever 'Your Gregory'." — Ira Cohen

"...It comes, I tell you, immense with gasolined rags and bits of wire and old bent nails, a dark arriviste, from a dark river within." — Gregory Corso, How Poetry Comes to Me (epigraph of Gasoline)

"They, that unnamed "they", they've knocked me down but I got up. I always get up-and I swear when I went down quite often I took the fall; nothing moves a mountain but itself. They, I've long ago named them me." — Gregory Corso

1959

Uncomprising year—I see no meaning to life.
Though this abled self is here nonetheless,
either in trade gold or grammaticness,
I drop the wheelwright's simple principle—
Why weave the garland? Why ring the bell?

Penurious butchery these notoriously human years,
these confident births these lucid deaths these years.
Dream's flesh blood reals down life's mystery—
there is no mystery.
Cold history knows no dynastic Atlantis.
The habitual myth has an eagerness to quit.

No meaning to life can be found in this holy language
nor beyond the lyrical fabricator's inescapable theme
be found the loathed find—there is nothing to find.

Multitudinous deathplot! O this poor synod—
Hopers and seekers paroling meaning to meaning,
annexing what might be meaningful, what might be meaningless.

Repeated nightmare, lachrymae lachrymae—
a fire behind a grotto, a thick fog, shredded masts,
the nets heaved—and the indescribable monster netted.
Who was it told that red flesh hose be still?
For one with smooth hands did with pincers
snip the snout—It died like a yawn.
And when the liver sack was yanked
I could not follow it to the pan.

I could not follow it to the pan—
I woke to the reality of cars; Oh
the dreadful privilege of that vision!
Not one antique faction remained;

Egypt, Rome, Greece,
and all such pedigree dreams fled.
Cars are real! Eternity is done.
The threat of Nothingness renews.

I touch the untouched.
I rank the rose militant.
Deny, I deny the tastes and habits of the age.
I am its punk debauché A fierce lampoon
seeking to inherit what is necessary to forfeit.

Lies! Lies! Lies! I lie, you lie, we all lie!
There is no us, there is no world, there is no universe,
there is no life, no death, no nothing—all is meaningless,
and this too is a lie—O damned 1959!
Must I dry my inspiration in this sad concept?
Delineate my entire stratagem?
Must I settle into phantomness
and not say I understand things better than God?

Gregory Corso

America Politica Historia, In Spontaneity

O this political air so heavy with the bells
and motors of a slow night, and no place to rest
but rain to walk—How it rings the Washington streets!
The umbrella'd congressmen; the rapping tires
of big black cars, the shoulders of lobbyists
caught under canopies and in doorways,
and it rains, it will not let up,
and meanwhile lame futurists weep into Spengler's
prophecy, will the world be over before the races blend color?
All color must be one or let the world be done—
There'll be a chance, we'll all be orange!
I don't want to be orange!
Nothing about God's color to complain;
and there is a beauty in yellow, the old Lama
in his robe the color of Cathay;
in black a strong & vital beauty,
Thelonious Monk in his robe of Norman charcoal—
And if Western Civilization comes to an end
(though I doubt it, for the prophet has not
executed his prophecy) surely the Eastern child
will sit by a window, and wonder
the old statues, the ornamented doors;
the decorated banquet of the West—
Inflamed by futurists I too weep in rain at night
at the midnight of Western Civilization;
Dante's step into Hell will never be forgotten by Hell;
the Gods' adoption of Homer will never be forgotten by the Gods;
the books of France are on God's bookshelf;
no civil war will take place on the fields of God;
and I don't doubt the egg of the East its glory—
Yet it rains and the motors go
and continued when I slept by that wall in Washington
which separated the motors in the death-parlor
where Joe McCarthy lay, lean and stilled,
ten blocks from the Capitol—
I could never understand Uncle Sam
his red & white striped pants his funny whiskers his starry hat:
how surreal Yankee Doodle Dandy, goof!
American history has a way of making you feel

George Washington is still around, that is
when I think of Washington I do not think of Death—
Of all Presidents I have been under
Hoover is the most unreal
and FDR is the most President-looking
and Truman the most Jewish-looking
and Eisenhower the miscast of Time into Space—
Hoover is another America, Mr. 1930
and what must he be thinking now?
FDR was my youth, and how strange to still see
his wife around.
Truman is still in Presidential time.
I saw Eisenhower helicopter over Athens
and he looked at the Acropolis like only Zeus could.
OF THE PEOPLE is fortunate and select.
FOR THE PEOPLE has never happened in America or elsewhere.
BY THE PEOPLE is the sadness of America.
I am not politic.
I am not patriotic.
I am nationalistic!
I boast well the beauty of America to all the people in Europe.
In me they do not see their vision of America.
O whenever I pass an American Embassy I don't know what to feel!
Sometimes I want to rush in and scream: "I'm American!"
but instead go a few paces down to the American Bar
get drunk and cry: "I'm no American!"
The men of politics I love are but youth's fantasy:
The fine profile of Washington on coins stamps & tobacco wraps
The handsomeness and death-in-the-snow of Hamilton.
The eyeglasses shoe-buckles kites & keys of Ben Franklin.
The sweet melancholy of Lincoln.
The way I see Christ, as something romantic & unreal, is the way I see them.
An American is unique among peoples.
He looks and acts like a boyman.
He never looks cruel in uniform.
He is rednecked portly rich and jolly.
White-haired serious Harvard, kind and wry.
A convention man a family man a rotary man & practical joker.
He is moonfaced cunning well-meaning & righteously mean.
He is Madison Avenue, handsome, in-the-know, and superstitious.
He is odd, happy, quicker than light, shameless, and heroic
Great yawn of youth!

The young don't seem interested in politics anymore.
Politics has lost its romance!
The "bloody kitchen" has drowned!
And all that is left are those granite
façades of Pentagon, Justice, and Department—
Politicians do not know youth!
They depend on the old
and the old depend on them
and lo! this has given youth a chance
to think of heaven in their independence.
No need to give them liberty or freedom
where they're at—
When Stevenson in 1956 came to San Francisco
he campaigned in what he thought was an Italian section!
He spoke of Italy and Joe DiMaggio and spaghetti,
but all who were there, all for him,
were young beatniks! and when his car drove off
Ginsberg & I ran up to him and yelled:
"When are you going to free the poets from their attics!"
Great yawn of youth!
Mad beautiful oldyoung America has no candidate
the craziest wildest greatest country of them all!
and not one candidate—
Nixon arrives ever so temporal, self-made,
frontways sideways and backways,
could he be America's against? Detour to vehicle?
Mast to wind? Shore to sea? Death to life?
The last President?

Gregory Corso

Birthplace Revisited

I stand in the dark light in the dark
street

and look up at my window, I was
born there.

The lights are on; other people are
moving about.

I am with raincoat; cigarette in
mouth,

hat over eye, hand on gat.

I cross the street and enter the
building.

The garbage cans haven't stopped
smelling.

I walk up the first flight; Dirty Ears
aims a knife at me...

I pump him full of lost watches.

Gregory Corso

Bomb

Budger of history Brake of time You Bomb

Toy of universe Grandest of all snatched sky I cannot hate you

Do I hate the mischievous thunderbolt the jawbone of an ass

The bumpy club of One Million B.C. the mace the flail the axe

Catapult Da Vinci tomahawk Cochise flintlock Kidd dagger Rathbone

Ah and the sad desparate gun of Verlaine Pushkin Dillinger Bogart

And hath not St. Michael a burning sword St. George a lance David a sling

Bomb you are as cruel as man makes you and you're no crueller than cancer

All Man hates you they'd rather die by car-crash lightning drowning

Falling off a roof electric-chair heart-attack old age old age O Bomb

They'd rather die by anything but you Death's finger is free-lance

Not up to man whether you boom or not Death has long since distributed its

categorical blue I sing thee Bomb Death's extravagance Death's jubilee

Gem of Death's supremest blue The flyer will crash his death will differ

with the climbor who'll fall to die by cobra is not to die by bad pork

Some die by swamp some by sea and some by the bushy-haired man in the night

O there are deaths like witches of Arc Scarey deaths like Boris Karloff

No-feeling deaths like birth-death sadless deaths like old pain Bowery

Abandoned deaths like Capital Punishment stately deaths like senators

And unthinkable deaths like Harpo Marx girls on Vogue covers my own

I do not know just how horrible Bombdeath is I can only imagine

Yet no other death I know has so laughable a preview I scope

a city New York City streaming starkeyed subway shelter

Scores and scores A fumble of humanity High heels bend

Hats whelming away Youth forgetting their combs

Ladies not knowing what to do with their shopping bags

Unperturbed gum machines Yet dangerous 3rd rail

Ritz Brothers from the Bronx caught in the A train

The smiling Schenley poster will always smile

Impish death Satyr Bomb Bombdeath

Turtles exploding over Istanbul

The jaguar's flying foot

soon to sink in arctic snow

Penguins plunged against the Sphinx

The top of the Empire state

arrowed in a broccoli field in Sicily

Eiffel shaped like a C in Magnolia Gardens

St. Sophia peeling over Sudan

O athletic Death Sportive Bomb
the temples of ancient times
their grand ruin ceased
Electrons Protons Neutrons
gathering Hersperean hair
walking the dolorous gulf of Arcady
joining marble helmsmen
entering the final ampitheater
with a hymnodic feeling of all Troys
heralding cypressean torches
racing plumes and banners
and yet knowing Homer with a step of grace
Lo the visiting team of Present
the home team of Past
Lyre and tube together joined
Hark the hotdog soda olive grape
gala galaxy robed and uniformed
commissary O the happy stands
Ethereal root and cheer and boo
The billioned all-time attendance
The Zeusian pandemonium
Hermes racing Owens
The Spitball of Buddha
Christ striking out
Luther stealing third
Planeterium Death Hosannah Bomb
Gush the final rose O Spring Bomb
Come with thy gown of dynamite green
unmenace Nature's inviolate eye
Before you the wimpled Past
behind you the hallooing Future O Bomb
Bound in the grassy clarion air
like the fox of the tally-ho
thy field the universe thy hedge the geo
Leap Bomb bound Bomb frolic zig and zag
The stars a swarm of bees in thy binging bag
Stick angels on your jubilee feet
wheels of rainlight on your bunky seat
You are due and behold you are due
and the heavens are with you
hosanna incalcescent glorious liaison
BOMB O havoc antiphony molten cleft BOOM

Bomb mark infinity a sudden furnace
spread thy multitudinous encompassed Sweep
set forth awful agenda
Carrion stars charnel planets carcass elements
Corpse the universe tee-hee finger-in-the-mouth hop
over its long long dead Nor
From thy nimble matted spastic eye
exhaust deluges of celestial ghouls
From thy appellational womb
spew birth-gusts of of great worms
Rip open your belly Bomb
from your belly outflock vulturic salutations
Battle forth your spangled hyena finger stumps
along the brink of Paradise
O Bomb O final Pied Piper
both sun and firefly behind your shock waltz
God abandoned mock-nude
beneath His thin false-talc's apocalypse
He cannot hear thy flute's
happy-the-day profanations
He is spilled deaf into the Silencer's warty ear
His Kingdom an eternity of crude wax
Clogged clarions untrumpet Him
Sealed angels unsing Him
A thunderless God A dead God
O Bomb thy BOOM His tomb
That I lean forward on a desk of science
an astrologer dabbling in dragon prose
half-smart about wars bombs especially bombs
That I am unable to hate what is necessary to love
That I can't exist in a world that consents
a child in a park a man dying in an electric-chair
That I am able to laugh at all things
all that I know and do not know thus to conceal my pain
That I say I am a poet and therefore love all man
knowing my words to be the acquainted prophecy of all men
and my unwords no less an acquaintanceship
That I am manifold
a man pursuing the big lies of gold
or a poet roaming in bright ashes
or that which I imagine myself to be
a shark-toothed sleep a man-eater of dreams

I need not then be all-smart about bombs
Happily so for if I felt bombs were caterpillars
I'd doubt not they'd become butterflies

There is a hell for bombs

They're there I see them there

They sit in bits and sing songs

□ mostly German songs

And two very long American songs

and they wish there were more songs

especially Russian and Chinese songs

and some more very long American songs

Poor little Bomb that'll never be

an Eskimo song I love thee

I want to put a lollipop

in thy furcal mouth

A wig of Goldilocks on thy baldy bean

and have you skip with me Hansel and Gretel

along the Hollywoodian screen

O Bomb in which all lovely things

moral and physical anxiously participate

□ O fairylike plucked from the

grandest universe tree

O piece of heaven which gives

both mountain and anthill a sun

I am standing before your fantastic lily door

I bring you Midgardian roses Arcadian musk

Reputed cosmetics from the girls of heaven

Welcome me fear not thy opened door

nor thy cold ghost's grey memory

nor the pimps of indefinite weather

their cruel terrestrial thaw

Oppenheimer is seated

in the dark pocket of Light

Fermi is dry in Death's Mozambique

Einstein his mythmouth

a barnacled wreath on the moon-squid's head

Let me in Bomb rise from that pregnant-rat corner

nor fear the raised-broom nations of the world

O Bomb I love you

I want to kiss your clank eat your boom

You are a paean an acme of scream

a lyric hat of Mister Thunder

O resound thy tanky knees
BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM
BOOM ye skies and BOOM ye suns
BOOM BOOM ye moons ye stars BOOM
nights ye BOOM ye days ye BOOM
BOOM BOOM ye winds ye clouds ye rains
go BANG ye lakes ye oceans BING
Barracuda BOOM and cougar BOOM
Ubangi BOOM orangutang
BING BANG BONG BOOM bee bear baboon
ye BANG ye BONG ye BING
the tail the fin the wing
Yes Yes into our midst a bomb will fall
Flowers will leap in joy their roots aching
Fields will kneel proud beneath the halleluyahs of the wind
Pinkbombs will blossom Elkbombs will perk their ears
Ah many a bomb that day will awe the bird a gentle look
Yet not enough to say a bomb will fall
or even contend celestial fire goes out
Know that the earth will madonna the Bomb
that in the hearts of men to come more bombs will be born
magisterial bombs wrapped in ermine all beautiful
and they'll sit plunk on earth's grumpy empires
fierce with moustaches of gold

Gregory Corso

Destiny

They deliver the edicts of God

without delay

And are exempt from apprehension

from detention

And with their God-given

Pegasus, Caduceus, and Talaria

ferry like bolts of lightning

unhindered between the tribunals

of Space & Time

The Messenger-Spirit

in human flesh

is assigned a dependable,

self-reliant, versatile,

thoroughly poet existence

upon its sojourn in life

It does not knock

or ring the bell

or telephone

When the Messenger-Spirit

comes to your door

though locked

It'll enter like an electric midwife

and deliver the message

There is no tell

throughout the ages

that a Messenger-Spirit

ever stumbled into darkness

Gregory Corso

Dream of a Baseball Star

I dreamed Ted Williams
leaning at night
against the Eiffel Tower, weeping.

He was in uniform
and his bat lay at his feet
- knotted and twiggy.

'Randall Jarrell says you're a poet!' I cried.
'So do I! I say you're a poet!'

He picked up his bat with blown hands;
stood there astraddle as he would in the batter's box,
and laughed! flinging his schoolboy wrath
toward some invisible pitcher's mound
- waiting the pitch all the way from heaven.

It came; hundreds came! all afire!
He swung and swung and swung and connected not one
sinker curve hook or right-down-the middle.
A hundred strikes!
The umpire dressed in strange attire
thundered his judgment: YOU'RE OUT!
And the phantom crowd's horrific boo
dispersed the gargoyles from Notre Dame.

And I screamed in my dream:
God! throw thy merciful pitch!
Herald the crack of bats!
Hooray the sharp liner to left!
Yea the double, the triple!
Hosannah the home run!

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Gregory Corso

Elegiac Feelings American

1

How inseparable you and the America you saw yet was never
there to see; you and America, like the tree and the
ground, are one the same; yet how like a palm tree
in the state of Oregon. . . dead ere it blossomed,
like a snow polar loping the
Miami—

How so that which you were or hoped to be, and the
America not, the America you saw yet could
not see

So like yet unlike the ground from which you stemmed;
you stood upon America like a rootless

Hat-bottomed tree; to the squirrel there was no
divorcement in its hop of ground to its climb of
tree. . . until it saw no acorn fall, then it knew
there was no marriage between the two; how
fruitless, how useless, the sad unnaturalness
of nature; no wonder the dawn ceased being
a joy. . . for what good the earth and sun when
the tree in between is good for nothing. . . the
inseparable trinity, once dissevered, becomes a
cold fruitless meaningless thrice-marked
deathlie in its awful amputation. . . O butcher
the pork-chop is not the pig—The American
alien in America is a bitter truncation; and even
this elegy, dear Jack, shall have a butchered
tree, a tree beaten to a pulp, upon which it'll be
contained—no wonder no good news can be
written on such bad news—

How alien the natural home, aye, aye, how dies the tree when
the ground is foreign, cold, unfree—The winds
know not to blow the seed of the Redwood where
none before stood; no palm is blown to Oregon,
how wise the wind—Wise
too the senders of the prophet. . . knowing the
fertility of the designated spot where such meant
prophecy be announced and answerable—the
sower of wheat does not sow in the fields of cane;
for the sender of the voice did also send the ear.

And were little Liechtenstein, and not America, the
designation. . . surely then we'd the tongues of
Liechtenstein—

Was not so much our finding America as it was America finding
its voice in us; many spoke to America as though
America by land-right was theirs by law-right
legislatively acquired by materialistic coups of
wealth and inheritance; like the citizen of society
believes himself the owner of society, and what he
makes of himself he makes of America and thus when
he speaks of America he speaks of himself, and quite
often such a he is duly elected to represent what he
represents. . . an infernal ego of an America

Thus many a patriot speaks lovingly of himself when he speaks
of America, and not to appreciate him is not to
appreciate America, and vice-versa

The tongue of truth is the true tongue of America, and it could
not be found in the Daily Heralds since the voice
therein was a controlled voice, wickedly
opinionated, and directed at gullible

No wonder we found ourselves rootless. . . for we've become the
very roots themselves,—the lie can never take root
and there grow under a truth of sun and therefrom bear the fruit of truth

Alas, Jack, seems I cannot requiem thee without
requieming America, and that's one requiem

I shall not presume, for as long as I live there'll
be no requiems for me

For though the tree dies the tree is born anew, only until
the tree dies forever and never a tree born
anew. . . shall the ground die too

Yours the eyes that saw, the heart that felt, the voice that
sang and cried; and as long as America shall live, though
ye old Kerouac body hath died, yet shall you live. . .

for indeed ours was a time of prophecy without death
as a consequence. . . for indeed after us came the time
of assassins, and whotll doubt thy last words 'After
me. . . the deluge'

Ah, but were it a matter of seasons I'd not doubt the return of the
tree, for what good the ground upon which we stand
itself unable to stand—aye the tree will in seasonal
time fall, for it be nature's wont, thaPs why the

ground, the down, the slow yet sure decomposition,
until the very tree becomes the very ground where
once it stood; yet falls the ground. . . ah, then what?
unanswerable this be unto nature, for there is no
ground whereon to fall and land, no down, no up
even, directionless, and into what, if what,
composition goeth its decomposition?

We came to announce the human spirit in the name of
beauty and truth; and now this spirit cries out in nature's sake
the horrendous imbalance of all things natural. . .

elusive nature caught! like a bird in hand, harnessed
and engineered in the unevolutional ways of
experiment and technique

Yes though the tree has taken root in the ground the ground is
upturned and in this forced vomitage is spewn the
dire miasma of fossilific trees of death the
million-yearred pitch and grease of a dinosauric age
dead and gone how all brought to surface again and
made to roam the sky we breathe in stampedes of
pollution

What hope for the America so embodied in thee, O friend, when
the very same alcohol that disembodied your
brother redman of his America, disembodied
ye—A plot to grab their land, we know—yet what
plot to grab the ungrabbable land of one's spirit? Thy visionary America were
impossible to unvision—for when the shades of the
windows of the spirit are brought down, that which
was seen yet remains. . . the eyes of the spirit yet see
Aye the America so embodied in thee, so definitely rooted
therefrom, is the living embodiment of all
humanity, young and free

And though the great redemptive tree blooms, not yet full, not
yet entirely sure, there be the darksters, sad and
old, would like to have it fall; they hack and chop
and saw away. . . that nothing full and young and
free for sure be left to stand at all

Verily were such trees as youth be. . . were such be made to fall,
and never rise to fall again, then shall the ground
fall, and the deluge come and wash it asunder,
wholly all and forever, like a wind out of nowhere into nowhere

'How so like Clark Gable hands your hands. . .' (Mexico conversation 1956)—Hands so strong and Mexican sunned, busy about America, hands I knew would make it, would hold guard and caring

You were always talking about America, and America was always history to me, General Wolfe lying on the ground dying in his bright redcoat smattered by a bluecoat hanging in the classroom wall next to the father of our country whose heart area was painted in cloud. . . yes, ours was an American history, a history with a future, for sure;

How a Whitman we were always wanting, a hoping, an America, that America ever an America to be, never an America to sing about or to, but ever an America to sing hopefully for

All we had was past America, and ourselves, the now America, and O how we regarded that past! And O the big lie of that school classroom! The Revolutionary War. . . all we got was Washington, Revere, Henry, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Franklin. . . never Nat Bacon, Sam Adams, Paine. . . and what of liberty? was not to gain liberty that war, liberty they had, they were the freest peoples of their time; was not to lose that liberty was why they went to arms—yet, and yet, the season that blossomed us upon the scene was hardly free; be there liberty today? not to hear the redman, the blackman, the youngman tell—And in the beginning when liberty was all one could hear; wasn't much of it for the poor witches of Salem; and that great lauder of liberty, Franklin, paid 100 dollar bounty for each scalp of the wild children of natural free; Pitt Jr. obtained most of the city of brotherly love by so outrageous a deception as stymied the trusting heart of his red brother with tortuous mistrust; and how ignorant of liberty the wise Jefferson owning the black losers of liberty; for the declarers of independence to declare it only for part of the whole was to declare civil war Justice is all any man of liberty need hope for; and justice was a most important foundling thing; a diadem for

American life upon which the twinship of private
property and God could be established;
How suffered the poor native American the enforced
establishing of those two pillars of liberty!

From justice stems a variable God, from God stems a
dictated justice

'The ways of the Lord lead to liberty' sayeth St. Paul. . .
- yet a man need liberty, not God, to be able to follow
the ways of God

The justness of individual land right is not justifiable to those
to whom the land by right of first claim
collectively belonged;

He who sells mankind's land to a single man sells the
Brooklyn Bridge

The second greatest cause of human death. . . is the
acquiring of property

No American life is worth an acre of America. . . if No
Trespassing and guarding mastiffs can't tell you
shotguns will

So, sweet seeker, just what America sought you anyway? Know
that today there are millions of Americans
seeking America. . . know that even with all
those eye-expanding chemicals—only more of
what is not there do they see

Some find America in songs of clumping stone, some in
fogs of revolution

All find it in their hearts. . . and O how it tightens the heart
Not so much their being imprisoned in an old and unbearable
America. . . more the America imprisoned in
them—so wracks and darkens the spirit

An America unseen, dreamed, tremors uncertain, bums the
heart, sends bad vibes forth cosmic and otherwise

You could see the contempt in their young-sad eyes. . . and
meantime the jails are becoming barber shops, and
the army has always been

Yet unable they are to shave the hurricane from their eyes
Look unto Moses, no prophet ever reached the dreamed of
lands. . . ah but your eyes are dead. . . nor the

America beyond your last dreamed hill hovers
real

How alike our hearts and time and dying, how our America out
 there and in our hearts insatiable yet overHowing
 hallelujahs of poesy and hope
 How we knew to feel each dawn, to ooh and aah each golden
 sorrow and helplessness coast to coast in our
 search for whatever joy steadfast never there
 nowever grey
 Yea the America the America unstained and never revolutioned
 for liberty ever in us free, the America in
 us—unboundaried and unhistoried, we the
 America, we the fathers of that America, the
 America you Johnnyappleseeded, the America I
 heralded, an America not there, an
 America soon to be

The prophet affects the state, and the state affects the
 prophet—What happened to you, O friend,
 happened to America, and we know what
 happened to America—the stain. . . the stains,
 O and yet when it's asked of you 'What happened to him?' I say
 'What happened to America has happened
 him—the two were inseparable' Like the wind to the
 sky is the voice to the word....
 And now that voice is gone, and now the word is bone, and the
 America is going, the planet boned
 A man can have everything he desires in his home yet have
 nothing outside the door—for a feeling man, a poet
 man, such an outside serves only to make home a
 place in which to hang oneself
 And us ones, sweet friend, we've always brought America home
 with us—and never like dirty laundry, even with all
 the stains
 And through the front door, lovingly cushioned in our hearts;
 where we sat down and told it our dreams of beauty
 hopeful that it would leave our homes beautiful
 And what has happened to our dream of beauteous
 America, Jack?
 Did it look beautiful to you, did it sound so too, in its cold
 electric blue, that America that spewed and
 stenchd your home, your good brain, that unreal
 fake America, that caricature of America, that

plugged in a wall America. . . a gallon of desperate
whiskey a day it took ye to look that America in its
disembodied eye

And it saw you not, it never saw you, for what you saw was not
there, what you saw was Laugh-in, and all America
was in laughing, that America brought you in,
brought America in, all that out there brought in, all
that nowhere nothing in, no wonder you were
lonesome, died empty and sad and lonely, you the
real face and voice. . . caught before the fake face
and voice—and it became real and you fake,
O the awful fragility of things

'What happened to him?' 'What happened to you?' Death
happened him; a gypped life happened; a God gone
sick happened; a dream nightmared; a youth
armed; an army massacred; the father wants to eat
the son, the son feeds his stone, but the father no
get stoned

And you, Jack, poor Jack, watched your father die, your America
die, your God die, your body die, die die die; and
today fathers are watching their sons die, and their
sons are watching babies die, why? Why? How we
both asked WHY?

O the sad sad awfulness of it all

You but a mere decade of a Kerouac, but what a lifetime in that
dix Kerouac!

Nothing happened you that did not happen; nothing went
unfulfilled, you circ'd the circle full, and what's
happening to America is no longer happening
to you, for what happens to the consciousness of the land
happens to the voice of that consciousness and the voice has
died yet the land remains to forget what it has heard and the
word leaves no bone

And both word and land of flesh and earth
suffer the same sick the same death. . . and dies the voice before
the flesh, and the wind blows a dead silence over the dying
earth, and the earth will leave its bone, and nothing of wind will
roll the moan, but silence, silence, nor e'en that will
God's ear hear

Aye, what happened to you, dear friend, compassionate friend,
is what is happening to everyone and thing of
planet the clamorous sadly desperate planet now
one voice less. . . expendable as the wind. . . gone,
and who'll now blow away the awful miasma of
sick, sick and dying earthflesh-soul America

When you went on the road looking for America you found only
what you put there and a man seeking gold finds the
only America there is to find; and his investment
and a poet's investment. . . the same when comes
the crash, and it's crashing, yet the windows are
tight, are not for jumping; from
hell none e'er fell

4

In Hell angels sing too
And they sang to behold anew
Those who followed the first Christ-bearer
left hell and beheld a world new
yet with guns and Bibles came they
and soon their new settlement became old
and once again hell held quay
The ArcAngel Raphael was I to you
And I put the Cross of the Lord of Angels
upon you. . . there
on the eve of a new world to explore
And you were flashed upon the old and darkling day
a Beat Christ-boy. . . bearing the gentle roundness of things
insisting the soul was round not square
And soon. . . behind thee
there came a-following
the children of flowers

Gregory Corso

Gregory Corso

Budger of history Brake of time You Bomb
Toy of universe Grandest of all snatched sky I cannot hate you
Do I hate the mischievous thunderbolt the jawbone of an ass
The bumpy club of One Million B.C. the mace the flail the axe
Catapult Da Vinci tomahawk Cochise flintlock Kidd dagger Rathbone
Ah and the sad desparate gun of Verlaine Pushkin Dillinger Bogart
And hath not St. Michael a burning sword St. George a lance David a sling
Bomb you are as cruel as man makes you and you're no crueller than cancer
All Man hates you they'd rather die by car-crash lightning drowning
Falling off a roof electric-chair heart-attack old age old age O Bomb
They'd rather die by anything but you Death's finger is free-lance
Not up to man whether you boom or not Death has long since distributed its
categorical blue I sing thee Bomb Death's extravagance Death's jubilee
Gem of Death's supremest blue The flyer will crash his death will differ
with the climbor who'll fall to die by cobra is not to die by bad pork
Some die by swamp some by sea and some by the bushy-haired man in the
night

O there are deaths like witches of Arc Scarey deaths like Boris Karloff
No-feeling deaths like birth-death sadless deaths like old pain Bowery
Abandoned deaths like Capital Punishment stately deaths like senators
And unthinkable deaths like Harpo Marx girls on Vogue covers my own
I do not know just how horrible Bombdeath is I can only imagine
Yet no other death I know has so laughable a preview I scope
a city New York City streaming starkeyed subway shelter
Scores and scores A fumble of humanity High heels bend
Hats whelming away Youth forgetting their combs
Ladies not knowing what to do with their shopping bags
Unperturbed gum machines Yet dangerous 3rd rail
Ritz Brothers from the Bronx caught in the A train
The smiling Schenley poster will always smile
Impish death Satyr Bomb Bombdeath
Turtles exploding over Istanbul
The jaguar's flying foot
soon to sink in arctic snow
Penguins plunged against the Sphinx
The top of the Empire state
arrowed in a broccoli field in Sicily
Eiffel shaped like a C in Magnolia Gardens
St. Sophia peeling over Sudan

O athletic Death Sportive Bomb
the temples of ancient times
their grand ruin ceased
Electrons Protons Neutrons
gathering Hersperean hair
walking the dolorous gulf of Arcady
joining marble helmsmen
entering the final ampitheater
with a hymnody feeling of all Troys
heralding cypressean torches
racing plumes and banners
and yet knowing Homer with a step of grace
Lo the visiting team of Present
the home team of Past
Lyre and tube together joined
Hark the hotdog soda olive grape
gala galaxy robed and uniformed
commissary O the happy stands
Ethereal root and cheer and boo
The billioned all-time attendance
The Zeusian pandemonium
Hermes racing Owens
The Spitball of Buddha
Christ striking out
Luther stealing third
Planeterium Death Hosannah Bomb
Gush the final rose O Spring Bomb
Come with thy gown of dynamite green
unmenace Nature's inviolate eye
Before you the wimpled Past
behind you the hallooing Future O Bomb
Bound in the grassy clarion air
like the fox of the tally-ho
thy field the universe thy hedge the geo
Leap Bomb bound Bomb frolic zig and zag
The stars a swarm of bees in thy binging bag
Stick angels on your jubilee feet
wheels of rainlight on your bunky seat
You are due and behold you are due
and the heavens are with you
hosanna incalescent glorious liaison
BOMB O havoc antiphony molten cleft BOOM

Bomb mark infinity a sudden furnace
spread thy multitudinous encompassed Sweep
set forth awful agenda
Carrion stars charnel planets carcass elements
Corpse the universe tee-hee finger-in-the-mouth hop
over its long long dead Nor
From thy nimble matted spastic eye
exhaust deluges of celestial ghouls
From thy appellational womb
spew birth-gusts of of great worms
Rip open your belly Bomb
from your belly outflock vulturic salutations
Battle forth your spangled hyena finger stumps
along the brink of Paradise
O Bomb O final Pied Piper
both sun and firefly behind your shock waltz
God abandoned mock-nude
beneath His thin false-talc's apocalypse
He cannot hear thy flute's
happy-the-day profanations
He is spilled deaf into the Silencer's warty ear
His Kingdom an eternity of crude wax
Clogged clarions untrumpet Him
Sealed angels unsing Him
A thunderless God A dead God
O Bomb thy BOOM His tomb
That I lean forward on a desk of science
an astrologer dabbling in dragon prose
half-smart about wars bombs especially bombs
That I am unable to hate what is necessary to love
That I can't exist in a world that consents
a child in a park a man dying in an electric-chair
That I am able to laugh at all things
all that I know and do not know thus to conceal my pain
That I say I am a poet and therefore love all man
knowing my words to be the acquainted prophecy of all men
and my unwords no less an acquaintanceship
That I am manifold
a man pursuing the big lies of gold
or a poet roaming in bright ashes
or that which I imagine myself to be
a shark-toothed sleep a man-eater of dreams

I need not then be all-smart about bombs
Happily so for if I felt bombs were caterpillars
I'd doubt not they'd become butterflies
There is a hell for bombs
They're there I see them there
They sit in bits and sing songs
mostly German songs
And two very long American songs
and they wish there were more songs
especially Russian and Chinese songs
and some more very long American songs
Poor little Bomb that'll never be
an Eskimo song I love thee
I want to put a lollipop
in thy furcal mouth
A wig of Goldilocks on thy baldy bean
and have you skip with me Hansel and Gretel
along the Hollywoodian screen
O Bomb in which all lovely things
moral and physical anxiously participate
O fairylike plucked from the
grandest universe tree
O piece of heaven which gives
both mountain and anthill a sun
I am standing before your fantastic lily door
I bring you Midgardian roses Arcadian musk
Reputed cosmetics from the girls of heaven
Welcome me fear not thy opened door
nor thy cold ghost's grey memory
nor the pimps of indefinite weather
their cruel terrestrial thaw
Oppenheimer is seated
in the dark pocket of Light
Fermi is dry in Death's Mozambique
Einstein his mythmouth
a barnacled wreath on the moon-squid's head
Let me in Bomb rise from that pregnant-rat corner
nor fear the raised-broom nations of the world
O Bomb I love you
I want to kiss your clank eat your boom
You are a paeon an acme of scream
a lyric hat of Mister Thunder

O resound thy tanky knees
BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM
BOOM ye skies and BOOM ye suns
BOOM BOOM ye moons ye stars BOOM
nights ye BOOM ye days ye BOOM
BOOM BOOM ye winds ye clouds ye rains
go BANG ye lakes ye oceans BING
Barracuda BOOM and cougar BOOM
Ubangi BOOM orangutang
BING BANG BONG BOOM bee bear baboon
ye BANG ye BONG ye BING
the tail the fin the wing
Yes Yes into our midst a bomb will fall
Flowers will leap in joy their roots aching
Fields will kneel proud beneath the halleluyahs of the wind
Pinkbombs will blossom Elkbombs will perk their ears
Ah many a bomb that day will awe the bird a gentle look
Yet not enough to say a bomb will fall
or even contend celestial fire goes out
Know that the earth will madonna the Bomb
that in the hearts of men to come more bombs will be born
magisterial bombs wrapped in ermine all beautiful
and they'll sit plunk on earth's grumpy empires
fierce with moustaches of gold

Gregory Corso

Humanity

What simple profundities
What profound simplicities
To sit down among the trees
and breathe with them
in murmur brool and breeze —

And how can I trust them
who pollute the sky
with heavens
the below with hells

Well, humankind,
I'm part of you
and so my son

but neither of us
will believe
your big sad lie

Gregory Corso

I Am 25

With a love a madness for Shelley
Chatterton Rimbaud
and the needy-yap of my youth
has gone from ear to ear:

I HATE OLD POETMEN!

Especially old poetmen who retract
who consult other old poetmen
who speak their youth in whispers,
saying:--I did those then
but that was then
that was then--

O I would quiet old men
say to them:--I am your friend
what you once were, thru me
you'll be again--

Then at night in the confidence of their homes
rip out their apology-tongues
and steal their poems.

Gregory Corso

I Held A Shelley Manuscript

My hands did numb to beauty
as they reached into Death and tightened!

O sovereign was my touch
upon the tan-inks's fragile page!

Quickly, my eyes moved quickly,
sought for smell for dust for lace
for dry hair!

I would have taken the page
breathing in the crime!
For no evidence have I wrung from dreams--
yet what triumph is there in private credence?

Often, in some steep ancestral book,
when I find myself entangled with leopard-apples
and torched-skin mushrooms,
my cypressean skein outreaches the recorded age
and I, as though tipping a pitcher of milk,
pour secrecy upon the dying page.

Gregory Corso

Last Night I Drove A Car

Last night I drove a car
not knowing how to drive
not owning a car
I drove and knocked down
people I loved
...went 120 through one town.

I stopped at Hedgeville
and slept in the back seat
...excited about my new life.

Gregory Corso

Marriage

Should I get married? Should I be Good?
Astound the girl next door with my velvet suit and faustaus hood?
Don't take her to movies but to cemeteries
tell all about werewolf bathtubs and forked clarinets
then desire her and kiss her and all the preliminaries
and she going just so far and I understanding why
not getting angry saying You must feel! It's beautiful to feel!
Instead take her in my arms lean against an old crooked tombstone
and woo her the entire night the constellations in the sky-

When she introduces me to her parents
back straightened, hair finally combed, strangled by a tie,
should I sit knees together on their 3rd degree sofa
and not ask Where's the bathroom?
How else to feel other than I am,
often thinking Flash Gordon soap-
O how terrible it must be for a young man
seated before a family and the family thinking
We never saw him before! He wants our Mary Lou!
After tea and homemade cookies they ask What do you do for a living?
Should I tell them? Would they like me then?
Say All right get married, we're losing a daughter
but we're gaining a son-
And should I then ask Where's the bathroom?

O God, and the wedding! All her family and her friends
and only a handful of mine all scroungy and bearded
just waiting to get at the drinks and food-
And the priest! He looking at me if I masturbated
asking me Do you take this woman for your lawful wedded wife?
And I trembling what to say say Pie Glue!
I kiss the bride all those corny men slapping me on the back
She's all yours, boy! Ha-ha-ha!
And in their eyes you could see some obscene honeymoon going on-

then all that absurd rice and clanky cans and shoes
Niagara Falls! Hordes of us! Husbands! Wives! Flowers! Chocolates!
All streaming into cozy hotels
All going to do the same thing tonight

The indifferent clerk he knowing what was going to happen
The lobby zombies they knowing what
The whistling elevator man he knowing
The winking bellboy knowing
Everybody knowing! I'd be almost inclined not to do anything!
Stay up all night! Stare that hotel clerk in the eye!
Screaming: I deny honeymoon! I deny honeymoon!
running rampant into those almost climatic suites
yelling Radio belly! Cat shovel!
O I'd live in Niagara forever! in a dark cave beneath the Falls
I'd sit there the Mad Honeymooner devising ways to break marriages, a scourge
of bigamy a saint of divorce-

But I should get married I should be good
How nice it'd be to come home to her
and sit by the fireplace and she in the kitchen
aproned young and lovely wanting by baby
and so happy about me she burns the roast beef
and comes crying to me and I get up from my big papa chair
saying Christmas teeth! Radiant brains! Apple deaf!
God what a husband I'd make! Yes, I should get married!
So much to do! like sneaking into Mr Jones' house late at night
and cover his golf clubs with 1920 Norwegian books
Like hanging a picture of Rimbaud on the lawnmower
like pasting Tannu Tuva postage stamps all over the picket fence
like when Mrs Kindhead comes to collect for the Community Chest
grab her and tell her There are unfavorable omens in the sky!
And when the mayor comes to get my vote tell him
When are you going to stop people killing whales!
And when the milkman comes leave him a note in the bottle
Penguin dust, bring me penguin dust, I want penguin dust-

Yet if I should get married and it's Connecticut and snow
and she gives birth to a child and I am sleepless, worn,
up for nights, head bowed against a quiet window, the past behind me,
finding myself in the most common of situations a trembling man
knowledged with responsibility not twig-smear not Roman coin soup-
O what would that be like!
Surely I'd give it for a nipple a rubber Tacitus
For a rattle bag of broken Bach records
Tack Della Francesca all over its crib
Sew the Greek alphabet on its bib

And build for its playpen a roofless Parthenon

No, I doubt I'd be that kind of father
not rural not snow no quiet window
but hot smelly New York City
seven flights up, roaches and rats in the walls
a fat Reichian wife screeching over potatoes Get a job!
And five nose running brats in love with Batman
And the neighbors all toothless and dry haired
like those hag masses of the 18th century
all wanting to come in and watch TV
The landlord wants his rent
Grocery store Blue Cross Gas & Electric Knights of Columbus
Impossible to lie back and dream Telephone snow, ghost parking-
No! I should not get married and I should never get married!
But-imagine if I were to marry a beautiful sophisticated woman
tall and pale wearing an elegant black dress and long black gloves
holding a cigarette holder in one hand and highball in the other
and we lived high up a penthouse with a huge window
from which we could see all of New York and even farther on clearer days
No I can't imagine myself married to that pleasant prison dream-

O but what about love? I forget love
not that I am incapable of love
it's just that I see love as odd as wearing shoes-
I never wanted to marry a girl who was like my mother
And Ingrid Bergman was always impossible
And there maybe a girl now but she's already married
And I don't like men and-
but there's got to be somebody!
Because what if I'm 60 years old and not married,
all alone in furnished room with pee stains on my underwear
and everybody else is married! All in the universe married but me!

Ah, yet well I know that were a woman possible as I am possible
then marriage would be possible-
Like SHE in her lonely alien gaud waiting her Egyptian lover
so I wait-bereft of 2,000 years and the bath of life.

Gregory Corso

The American Way

1

I am a great American
I am almost nationalistic about it!
I love America like a madness!
But I am afraid to return to America
I'm even afraid to go into the American Express—

2

They are frankensteining Christ in America
in their Sunday campaigns
They are putting the fear of Christ in America
under their tents in their Sunday campaigns
They are driving old ladies mad with Christ in America
They are televising the gift of healing and the fear of hell
in America under their tents in their Sunday
campaigns
They are leaving their tents and are bringing their Christ
to the stadiums of America in their Sunday
campaigns
They are asking for a full house and all get out
for their Christ in the stadiums of America
They are getting them in their Sunday and Saturday
campaigns
They are asking them to come forward and fall on their
knees
because they are all guilty and they are coming
forward
in guilt and are falling on their knees weeping their
guilt
begging to be saved O Lord O Lord in their Monday
Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday
and Sunday campaigns

3

It is a time in which no man is extremely wondrous
It is a time in which rock stupidity
outsteps the 5th Column as the sole enemy in America
It is a time in which ignorance is a good Ameri-cun

ignorance is excused only where it is so
it is not so in America
Man is not guilty Christ is not to be feared
I am telling you the American Way is a hideous monster
eating Christ making Him into Oreos and Dr. Pepper
the sacrament of its foul mouth
I am telling you the devil is impersonating Christ in America
America's educators & preachers are the mental-dictators
of false intelligence they will not allow America
to be smart
they will only allow death to make America smart
Educators & communicators are the lackeys of the
American Way
They enslave the minds of the young
and the young are willing slaves (but not for long)
because who is to doubt the American Way
is not the way?

The duty of these educators is no different
than the duty of a factory foreman
Replica production make all the young think alike
dress alike believe alike do alike
Togetherness this is the American Way
The few great educators in America are weak & helpless
They abide and so uphold the American Way
Wars have seen such men they who despised things about them
but did nothing and they are the most dangerous
Dangerous because their intelligence is not denied
and so give faith to the young
who rightfully believe in their intelligence
Smoke this cigarette doctors smoke this cigarette
and doctors know
Educators know but they dare not speak their know
The victory that is man is made sad in this fix
Youth can only know the victory of being born
all else is stemmed until death be the final victory
and a merciful one at that
If America falls it will be the blame of its educators
preachers communicators alike
America today is America's greatest threat
We are old when we are young

America is always new the world is always new
The meaning of the world is birth not death
Growth gone in the wrong direction
The true direction grows ever young
In this direction what grows grows old
A strange mistake a strange and sad mistake
for it has grown into an old thing
while all else around it is new
Rockets will not make it any younger—
And what made America decide to grow?
I do not know I can only hold it to the strangeness in man
And America has grown into the American Way—
To be young is to be ever purposeful limitless
To grow is to know limit purposelessness
Each age is a new age
How outrageous it is that something old and sad
from the pre-age incorporates each new age—
Do I say the Declaration of Independence is old?
Yes I say what was good for 1789 is not good for 1960
It was right and new to say all men were created equal
because it was a light then
But today it is tragic to say it
today it should be fact—
Man has been on earth a long time
One would think with his mania for growth
he would, by now, have outgrown such things as
constitutions manifestos codes commandments
that he could well live in the world without them
and know instinctively how to live and be
—for what is being but the facility to love?

Was not that the true goal of growth, love?
Was not that Christ?
But man is strange and grows where he will
and chalks it all up to Fate whatever be—
America rings with such strangeness
It has grown into something strange and
the American is good example of this mad growth
The boy man big baby meat
as though the womb were turned backwards
giving birth to an old man

The victory that is man does not allow man
to top off his empirical achievement with death
The Aztecs did it by yanking out young hearts
at the height of their power
The Americans are doing it by feeding their young to the
Way
For it was not the Spaniard who killed the Aztec
but the Aztec who killed the Aztec
Rome is proof Greece is proof all history is proof
Victory does not allow degeneracy
It will not be the Communists will kill America
no but America itself—
The American Way that sad mad process
is not run by any one man or organization
It is a monster born of itself existing of its self
The men who are employed by this monster
are employed unknowingly
They reside in the higher echelons of intelligence
They are the educators the psychiatrists the ministers
the writers the politicians the communicators
the rich the entertainment world
And some follow and sing the Way because they sincerely
believe it to be good
And some believe it holy and become minutemen in it
Some are in it simply to be in
And most are in it for gold
They do not see the Way as monster
They see it as the 'Good Life'
What is the Way?
The Way was born out of the American Dream a
nightmare—
The state of Americans today compared to the Americans
of the 18th century proves the nightmare—
Not Franklin not Jefferson who speaks for America today
but strange red-necked men of industry
and the goofs of show business
Bizarre! Frightening! The Mickey Mouse sits on the throne
and Hollywood has a vast supply—
Could grammar school youth seriously look upon
a picture of George Washington and 'Herman Borst'
the famous night club comedian together at Valley
Forge?

Old old and decadent gone the dignity
the American sun seems headed for the grave
O that youth might raise it anew!
The future depends solely on the young
The future is the property of the young
What the young know the future will know
What they are and do the future will be and do
What has been done must not be done again
Will the American Way allow this?

No.

I see in every American Express
and in every army center in Europe
I see the same face the same sound of voice
the same clothes the same walk
I see mothers & fathers no
difference among them
Replicas
They not only speak and walk and think alike
they have the same face!
What did this monstrous thing?
What regiments a people so?

How strange is nature's play on America
Surely were Lincoln alive today
he could never be voted President not with his
looks—
Indeed Americans are babies all in the embrace
of Mama Way
Did not Ike, when he visited the American Embassy in
Paris a year ago, say to the staff—'Everything is fine, just drink
Coca Cola, and everything will be all right.'
This is true, and is on record
Did not American advertising call for TOGETHERNESS?
not orgiasticly like today's call
nor as means to stem violence
This is true, and is on record.
Are not the army centers in Europe ghettos?
They are, and O how sad how lost!
The PX newsstands are filled with comic books
The army movies are always Doris Day
What makes a people huddle so?
Why can't they be universal?

Who has smelled them so?
This is serious! I do not mock or hate this
I can only sense some mad vast conspiracy!
Helplessness is all it is!
They are caught caught in the Way—
And those who seek to get out of the Way
can not
The Beats are good example of this
They forsake the Way's habits
and acquire for themselves their own habits
And they become as distinct and regimented and lost
as the main flow
because the Way has many outlets
like a snake of many tentacles—
There is no getting out of the Way
The only way out is the death of the Way
And what will kill the Way but a new consciousness
Something great and new and wonderful must happen
to free man from this beast
It is a beast we can not see or even understand
For it be the condition of our minds
God how close to science fiction it all seems!
As if some power from another planet
incorporated itself in the minds of us all
It could well be!
For as I live I swear America does not seem like America
to me

Americans are a great people
I ask for some great and wondrous event
that will free them from the Way
and make them a glorious purposeful people once
again
I do not know if that event is due deserved
or even possible
I can only hold that man is the victory of life
And I hold firm to American man

I see standing on the skin of the Way
America to be as proud and victorious as St.
Michael on the neck of the fallen Lucifer—

The Mad Yak

I am watching them churn the last milk they'll ever get from me.
They are waiting for me to die;
They want to make buttons out of my bones.
Where are my sisters and brothers?
That tall monk there, loading my uncle, he has a new cap.
And that idiot student of his--
I never saw that muffler before.
Poor uncle, he lets them load him.
How sad he is, how tired!
I wonder what they'll do with his bones?
And that beautiful tail!
How many shoelaces will they make of that!

Gregory Corso

The Whole Mess... Almost

I ran up six flights of stairs
to my small furnished room
opened the window
and began throwing out
those things most important in life

First to go, Truth, squealing like a fink:
'Don't! I'll tell awful things about you!'
'Oh yeah! Well, I've nothing to hide... OUT!'
Then went God, glowering & whimpering in amazement:
'It's not my fault! I'm not the cause of it all!' 'OUT!'
Then Love, cooing bribes: 'You'll never know impotency!
All the girls on Vogue covers, all yours!'
I pushed her fat ass out and screamed:
'You always end up a bummer!'
I picked up Faith Hope Charity
all three clinging together:
'Without us you'll surely die!'
'With you I'm going nuts! Goodbye!'

The Beauty... ah, Beauty--
As I led her to the window
I told her: 'You I loved the best in life
...but you're a killer; Beauty kills!'
Not really meaning to drop her
I immediately ran downstairs
getting there just in time to catch her
'You saved me!' she cried
I put her down and told her: 'Move on.'

Went back up those six flights
went to the money
there was no money to throw out.
The only thing left in the room was Death
hiding beneath the kitchen sink:
'I'm not real!' It cried
'I'm just a rumor spread by life...'
Laughing I threw it out, kitchen sink and all
and suddenly realized Humor

was all that was left--
All I could do with Humor was to say:
'Out the window with the window!'

Gregory Corso

To A Downfallen Rose

When I laid aside the verses of Mimnermus,
I lived a life of canned heat and raw hands,
alone, not far from my body did I wander,
walked with a hope of a sudden dreamy forest of gold.
O rose, downfallen, bend your huge vegetic back;
eye down the imposter sun...in winter dream
sulk your rosefamed head into the bile of golden giant,
ah, rose, augment the rose further still!
whence upon that self-created dive in Eden
you blossomed where the Watchmaker of Nothingness
 lulled,
your birth did cause bits of smashed night to pop,
causing my dreamy forest to unfold.
Yes, and the Watchmaker, his wheely-flesh
and jewelled-bones spoiled as he awoke,
and in the face of your Somethingness, he fled
waving oblivious monks in his unwinded hands.
The sun cannot see upheaved spatics, the tennis of Venus
and the court of Mars sing the big lie of the sun,
ah, faraway ball of fur, sponge up the elements;
make clear the trees and the mountains of the earth,
arise and turn away from the vast fixedness.

Rose! Rose! my tinhorned rose!
Rose is my visionic eyehand of all Mysticdom
Rose is my wise chair of bombed houses
Rose is my patient electric eyes, eyes, eyes, eyes,
Rose is my festive jowl,
Dali Lama Grand Vicar Glorious Caesar rose!

When I hear the rose scream
I gather all the failure experiments of an anatomical empire
and, with some chemical dream, discover
the hateful law of the earth and sun, and the screaming
 rose between.

Gregory Corso

Transformation & Escape

1

I reached heaven and it was syrupy.
It was oppressively sweet.
Croaking substances stuck to my knees.
Of all substances St. Michael was stickiest.
I grabbed him and pasted him on my head.
I found God a gigantic fly paper.
I stayed out of his way.
I walked where everything smelled of burnt chocolate.
Meanwhile St. Michael was busy with his sword
hacking away at my hair.
I found Dante standing naked in a blob of honey.
Bears were licking his thighs.
I snatched St. Michael's sword
and quartered myself in a great circular adhesive.
My torso fell upon an elastic equilibrium.
As though shot from a sling
my torso whizzed at God fly paper.
My legs sank into some unimaginable sog.
My head, though weighed with the weight of St. Michael,
did not fall.
Fine strands of multi-colored gum
suspended it there.
My spirit stopped by my snared torso.
I pulled! I yanked! Rolled it left to right!
It bruised! It softened! It could not free!
The struggle of an Eternity!
An Eternity of pulls! of yanks!
Went back to my head,
St. Michael had sucked dry my brainpan!
Skull!
My skull!
Only skull in heaven!
Went to my legs.
St. Peter was polishing his sandals with my knees!
I pounced upon him!
Pummeled his face in sugar in honey in marmalade!

Under each arm I fled with my legs!
The police of heaven were in hot pursuit!
I hid within the sop of St. Francis.
Gasping in the confectionery of his gentility
I wept, caressing my intimidated legs.

2

They caught me.
They took my legs away.
They sentenced me in the firmament of an ass.
The prison of an Eternity!
An Eternity of labor! of hee-haws!
Burdened with the soiled raiment of saints
I schemed escape.
Lugging ampullae its daily fill
I schemed escape.
I schemed climbing impossible mountains.
I schemed under the Virgin's whip.
I schemed to the sound of celestial joy.
I schemed to the sound of earth,
the wail of infants,
the groans of men,
the thud of coffins.
I schemed escape.
God was busy switching the spheres from hand to hand.
The time had come.
I cracked my jaws.
Broke my legs.
Sagged belly-flat on plow
on pitchfork
on scythe.
My spirit leaked from the wounds.
A whole spirit pooled.
I rose from the carcass of my torment.
I stood in the brink of heaven.
And I swear that Great Territory did quake
when I fell, free.

Gregory Corso

Writ On The Eve Of My 32nd Birthday

a slow thoughtful spontaneous poem

I am 32 years old
and finally I look my age, if not more.

Is it a good face what's no more a boy's face?
It seems fatter. And my hair,
it's stopped being curly. Is my nose big?
The lips are the same.
And the eyes, ah the eyes get better all the time.
32 and no wife, no baby; no baby hurts,
but there's lots of time.
I don't act silly any more.
And because of it I have to hear from so-called friends:
"You've changed. You used to be so crazy so great."
They are not comfortable with me when I'm serious.
Let them go to the Radio City Music Hall.
32; saw all of Europe, met millions of people;
was great for some, terrible for others.
I remember my 31st year when I cried:
"To think I may have to go another 31 years!"
I don't feel that way this birthday.
I feel I want to be wise with white hair in a tall library
in a deep chair by a fireplace.
Another year in which I stole nothing.
8 years now and haven't stole a thing!
I stopped stealing!
But I still lie at times,
and still am shameless yet ashamed when it comes
to asking for money.
32 years old and four hard real funny sad bad wonderful
books of poetry
—the world owes me a million dollars.
I think I had a pretty weird 32 years.
And it weren't up to me, none of it.
No choice of two roads; if there were,
I don't doubt I'd have chosen both.
I like to think chance had it I play the bell.

The clue, perhaps, is in my unabashed declaration:
"I'm good example there's such a thing as called soul."
I love poetry because it makes me love
and presents me life.
And of all the fires that die in me,
there's one burns like the sun;
it might not make day my personal life,
my association with people,
or my behavior toward society,
but it does tell me my soul has a shadow.

Gregory Corso

Writ On The Steps Of Puerto Rican Harlem

There's a truth limits man
A truth prevents his going any farther
The world is changing
The world knows it's changing
Heavy is the sorrow of the day
The old have the look of doom
The young mistake their fate in that look
That is truth
But it isn't all truth

Life has meaning
And I do not know the meaning
Even when I felt it were meaningless
I hoped and prayed and sought a meaning
It wasn't all frolic poesy
There were dues to pay
Summoning Death and God
I'd a wild dare to tackle Them
Death proved meaningless without Life
Yes the world is changing
But Death remains the same
It takes man away from Life
The only meaning he knows
And usually it is a sad business
This Death

I'd an innocence I'd a seriousness
I'd a humor save me from amateur philosophy
I am able to contradict my beliefs
I am able able
Because I want to know the meaning of everything
Yet sit I like a brokenness
Moaning: Oh what responsibility
I put on thee Gregory
Death and God
Hard hard it's hard

I learned life were no dream
I learned truth deceived
Man is not God
Life is a century
Death an instant

Gregory Corso