

Corso - The Last Beat

Directed and Written by Gustave Reininger

An Official Selection of the
2009 Taormina Film Fest
"Beyond the Mediterranean"

Screenings:
Palazzo dei Congressi
Sunday, June 14, at 6:00 p.m. – Sala A - First Public
Monday, June 15 at 9:00 p.m. – Sala B Second Public

Press Conference:
Palazzo dei Congressi
Monday, June 15
Time: TBA
Salatetta Verde (4th Floor)

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GREGORY CORSO

"... 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 an beautiful, Gregory Corso, the one and only Gregory, the Herald."

Jack Kerouac



"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

"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 - San Francisco**

"... the best film I have seen about a poet. Almost all the films I have seen in both genres lack edge, and a lot of them seem sanitized with ivory soap (an irony the Beats would have both appreciated and deplored). Reininger's film brings Corso to life in all his gritty, feisty brazen-

ness, as well as his hidden tender vulnerability. And it captures his humor, enormously! Humor is central to the Beats' ability to turn American values inside-out and upside-down... Corso" shows how a man overcomes every obstacle imaginable--poverty, no mother, prison, not even the ghost of a future--and becomes a great poet perhaps because of it, because of his ability to raise himself above it all, with a laugh and an endless flow of clever words. No one has ever really set this down in a book--despite the thousands of poet biographies that have been written—and surely no one before Reininger has ever done it in a film." **Gerald Nicosia, (Memory Babe) Jack Kerouac's biographer.**

"..This verite´ film follows Corso, who, by dint of his imagination, sense of absurdity and cunning, survived the mean streets of New York, the Tombs, Clinton State Prison, the Mob, heroin, and above all his own worst instincts, to make his way from the slums of Little Italy to cloud kissed Mount Parnassas – "the hangout of the immortal poets." In Gustave Reininger's astonishing film, Corso while "On the Road" in Europe, is reunited, not only with his long lost mother, but with Beauty, Love, and Truth -- gods so long denied him and yet never more fervently worshipped.
Deborah Baker – "A Blue Hand – the Beats in India"

"There's no simple generalization to make of Gregory's life or poetry... the extraordinary presence and authority he was fact of." **Robert Creely, Poet, Bollinger Prize and Pulitzer Prize Recipient**

"... serve(d) a three-year sentence for theft. It was then in prison that he read the classics — Dostoevsky, Stendhal, Shelley and Christopher Marlowe among others — but also became "educated in the ways of men at their worst and at their best... He was invited to Harvard... He met Ginsberg in a dyke bar in Greenwich Village, and the "Big Bang" of the Beats exploded."

New York Times

TAORMINA FILM FEST COMMENTS

The lasting influence of poet Gregory Corso on American Literature becomes a humorously dramatic narrative in director Gus Reininger's exceptional documentary, "Corso – The Last Beat." On-screen Narrator Ethan Hawke takes us on the final odyssey of Gregory Corso, the most colorful of the inner circle of "The Beats," poets and writers who included Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. During the Depression, the infant Corso was abandoned by his Italian mother. He grew up in foster homes and on the streets of New York's Little Italy and Greenwich Village. At 17, he was arrested for stealing a \$50 suit and thrown into prison, where he read books. Eventually he ended up at Harvard and met Allen Ginsberg in the Village, becoming a part of The Beats's big bang. Reininger succeeds in capturing the free spirit of this unique American poet as he travels to from Paris to Venice, Rome to the Acropolis, in search of his creative Muse. And, incredibly, the filmmaker makes a discovery that shakes the very foundations of Corso's later life. The film is an explosion of found images, a celebration of poetry like "Bomb", written in 1958, and the haunting "Sea Chanty". Among the many familiar faces that appear in the film are poet Allen Ginsberg and singer Patti Smith. Deborah Young.

"CORSO – THE LAST BEAT" synopsis

ETHAN HAWKE takes us on the last odyssey of **GREGORY CORSO** - the most colorful of the inner circle of "THE BEATS", who along with **KEROUAC**, **GINSBERG** and **BURROUGHS**, changed world culture and social history.

Corso, abandoned as an infant by his Italian mother during the Depression, grew up in foster homes, on the streets of Little Italy and Greenwich Village. Corso's father told him that his mother had returned to Italy, disgraced, an adulterer and a whore.

Corso, at 17, was thrown in maximum security Clinton State Prison for stealing a \$50 suit to go on a date. Protected by Mafia inmates, Corso read his way through her three-year sentence and ended up at Harvard, and eventually met Allen Ginsberg at a dyke bar in the Village, and was fused into the nucleus of "The Beats" big bang.

After Allen Ginsberg's death, Corso goes "On the Road" to rediscover his creative Muse. From Paris to Venice, Rome to Athens, Mount Parnassus to Jim Morrison's grave, Corso reflects on the early days of "Beats." In high humor he reveals how "The Beats" emerged in Europe, and paved the way for youth culture, the sexual revolution and even hip-hop.

Corso interrupts his tour to revisit Clinton State Prison and inspire young inmates. Returning to Italy, Corso muses on his lost mother, who he believes is dead and buried in Italy.

In a stunning discovery, filmmaker Gustave Reininger finds Corso's mother not dead in Italy, but alive in Trenton, N.J. Corso meets his mother on film and discovers she is the Muse he has been seeking. He also discovers that his mother left him to escape the violence and sexual abuse of his father, who lied saying she had returned to Italy.

Healing from a life of abandonment, emotional deprivation and abuse, Corso finishes his road trip on the Acropolis in Greece.

A revitalized Corso returns to Greenwich Village, only to discover he is dying. He faces his own death with pluck and humor, comforted by Ethan Hawke, **Patti Smith** and his newfound mother, Michelina.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

By Gustave Reininger

"Corso" started as a small videograph that I could use to sell a feature drama. Corso's story is nothing but drama – abandonment, life on the streets, prison, triumph. It was like visualizing a film about Villon, or Rimbaud and Verlaine, Poe, or Genet, the "poets maudits" – literature's bad boys. The videograph grew into a ten-year documentary.

With a narrative drama background – fiction - I'm used to everyone following a script I've written. Well, just try following a script with a poet, who calls himself "A Revolutionary of Spirit", wandering around Europe!

Everything that could go wrong, did so - fast. Allen Ginsberg died as soon as we started. Corso turned catatonic, silent before a running camera. Getting him out of New York and to Europe was the only hope. Pulling a crew together for an "on the road" shoot, which could go anywhere was a nightmare with sequels... But then, in Place de la Concorde, Piazza Navonna, Kolonakis, Corso would not shut up. Every place had a story: with Ginsberg, of Man Ray, Jean Genet, Miles Davis, Moravia, John Houston, Vittorio Gassman, girlfriend Jean Seaberg, Peggy Guggenheim, a countess here, a Duke there. A stunning realization dawned – "The Beat Imagination", indeed the whole American counter culture, was birthed and liberated in Europe by Corso, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac, before being brought back to waiting American middle class youth.

After Gregory and I threw away the script, he interacted ferociously with the film. To revisit the zany years in Paris, Rome and Athens. To settle a grudge with Jim Morrison. To

savor a Bellini at Harry's bar. To gamble all night at the Venice Lido. To excoriate old friends, embrace others.

And when he revealed his excruciating pain about the mother who abandoned him, it led to the miracle of discovering and meeting her. Everything was open ended. A running discovery to the end.

I never knew what the film was "about" until Corso called one night, weeping, and said that he was dying of prostate cancer. He wanted me to come with the camera. He felt he had to face death as courageously as he had in his writing, otherwise it was all for naught. "I dared the Fates, now they are daring me." I brought the camera. And Gregory held up his end of the deal.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Gustave Reininger is the creator of the hit NBC TV drama series (and feature film), "*Crime Story*." Working with Michael Mann, Reininger crafted the 1960's period drama of the Chicago Mob and how they took Las Vegas. It discovered Dennis Farina and David Caruso and featured other prominent artists such as Julia Roberts, Madonna, Dennis Haysbert, Gary Sinise, Miles Davis, Dexter Gordon, Stanley Tucci and Kevin Spacey.

Mr. Reininger's professional life began in international investment banking for J.P. Morgan. While living in Paris, Reininger wrote and co-produced a French Language thriller starring Dennis Hopper, "*L'Ordre et la Securite ´ du Monde*." Returning to America, Reininger was a contributor to Michael Mann's "*Miami Vice*" and "*Robbery Homicide Division*." He has written for and co-produced with directors Sydney Pollack, Michael Apted, Penny Marshall, Paul Verhoeven and other notable filmmakers.

"*Corso – The Last Beat*," a longitudinal, ten year feature documentary is Reininger's feature directorial debut.

Reininger is preparing a dramatic feature of "*Corso...*" along with his other dramatic film and television commitments, including "*Promises to Keep*" a political thriller on the U.S. invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs.

With Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Thich Nhat Hanh, The Dalai Lama, Deepak Chopra and Sr. Helen Prejean, Reininger is finishing commitments to a feature, "*The Big Question*", which he co-wrote and co-directed.

Gustave Reininger was born in Kentucky, was schooled by Jesuits, and graduated from University of Chicago. After stints of living in Paris and London, he now resides in Los Angeles with his three children Olivia, Isabel and Haven.

Q & A with Director – Writer

Gustave Reininger

(Private focus group screenings for college and high school students are the source of these questions. Students posed them in the Q & A sessions after the private screenings. Many thanks to Doc Films and Cinema Studies Department at University of Chicago, University of Cincinnati DAAP Galleries, Columbia College (Chicago) and East Joliet Illinois High School.)

Q: Corso meeting his mother forms the dramatic centerpiece of the film. How did you find Corso's mother?

GR: The film shorthands an incredible story. After I hit the dead-end in Italy, realizing that Corso's mother probably didn't return to Italy, as his father claimed, I went right at it again in New York. I searched steamship records and found the boat – S. S. Italia – that Corso's mother Michelina and four sisters (and *their* mother) came over on. That led to nine months of searching church records, marriages, birth and death certificates, ancient phone books, census records, real estate mortgages, graveyards and funeral homes, and it all led to a big dead end. And I quit.

Then a cinematic miracle occurred. Outside my New York apartment, I bumped into an elderly Italian woman who I used to help grocery-shop during snowstorms. She asked how Corso was going. I explained the frustrated quest, and out of the blue, she said, 'Do you know what I do? I'm a bounty hunter for abandoned bank accounts.' She would locate heirs to money left in banks and get 50%. If no heirs, she would get 100%. "If Corso's mother did not go back to Italy, I can find her. Go sit in a bar." And in a half hour she came back and said, "No trace of the Mother, but I found the aunt." She had the final link, Aunt Marie, in the Pennsylvania Poconos.

I was naively about to speed up to the Poconos and announce that Gregory Corso was found! That they had an illustrious poet in their family! Then my attorney George Shean-shang stopped me dead in my tracks: He warned me of the possible traumatic impact learning of "The Secret" of Gregory "Nunzio" Corso would have on that family. George had me talk to a psychologist first about "family of origin" issues - people showing up on your doorstep, presenting "the Secret." The psychologist told me the first thing you do is to hand a piece of paper to them with all the information about "The Secret." In case they slam the door or shoot you or something radical, they still have the paper with the information.

I drove up to the Poconos and knocked on the Aunt's door. Her reaction was completely hysterical and insane at first, and then things quieted down. But during that encounter, they played it very close to the vest. They're Southern Italian, part Sicilian, and they would be suspicious of the Pope. The aunt opened up, but only after she inspected all the steamship records, their own marriage certificates, and all the information we compiled.

But they eventually put Corso's mother on the phone. And it was like a jolt of electricity.

She was alive!

And Margie (Michelina's American name) swore me to secrecy because she wanted to meet me first, before I spoke with Gregory. Omerta stuff.

(The whole story's in another piece on our web site www.corsothefilm.com)

Q. Did the Aunt tell you why Gregory's mother abandoned him?

GR. The Aunt told the story of Michelina her teenage sister, having been raped repeatedly by her teenage husband, and beaten so bad that her teeth were knocked out, and she was so black and blue in the face that she looked like a raccoon. The Allegretti sisters were horrified, and their boyfriends and husbands actually formed a posse to go kill Michelina's teenage husband and dump his body in the East River. Remember now, this is New York during the Depression. Italian justice. But an Irish cop, who knew the story, stopped them from murdering Corso's father. The cop and his precinct mates went and beat the daylight out of the husband.

So, my suspicion that something bad had happened to Gregory's mother was confirmed.

Aunt Marie gave me the directions to "Margie's" house. In Trenton, New Jersey!! I was speechless. She was here, in the United States, close to New York. Not Italy. So I drove back to New York; I'd clocked 300 miles that day. I picked up a set of fresh underwear and jammed off for Trenton, another 70 Miles to the South.

Q. Was "Margie" willing to go through with this? And did you meet Margie?

GR. The next morning. She was a refined, but uneducated, restaurant waitress all her life. She had been residing in Trenton, New Jersey, all along, a mere hour's drive from her son oblivious to any literary or popular culture. I don't think she had read many books in her life.

She worked her way up to run a restaurant in the New Jersey State Office Building, in Trenton, and married the cook. They had children and a long marriage. Her husband died not knowing of her first marriage, or Gregory. Margie's children had no idea. But the Allegretti sisters knew and they had kept Margie's secret hidden – omerta - even from their own children.

Q. How do you start a conversation like that? What were your or her first words?

GR. Even before a proper hello, she sat me down and in this Southern Italian way, said she wanted to look me in the eyes and asked... "Does he hate me? "Will he see me? "Will he forgive me?" I knew from that moment it was going to be all right in the end.

She wanted me to wait a day to allow her to gather her big Italian family together and tell them there was one more member of the family. So I went over to Princeton U. and read a book for a day. And then after their dinner, it was a go.

I drove back to Manhattan and told Gregory. No an easy thing to do.

Q. Corso had no idea?

None whatsoever. He didn't even know I was searching. He wanted it that way.

Q. What do you remember most from their son – mother first meeting?

GR. Gregory was incredibly forgiving. After a life of such suffering all stemming from her abandonment, he seemed more concerned about her than himself. As she told *her* painful story, set in the great Depression, it was clear she didn't have many choices. The whole meeting had a spiritual fury about it that resolved into a very deep sound of joy, relief and peace. I certainly had never experienced anything like that.

Margie was poised in meeting Gregory, just like a woman who ran a restaurant, who could deal with whoever walked through the door. But she was scared stiff, and brave.

Q. Why hadn't she in 67 years tried to find her son?

GR. Margie, after having been beaten severely and raped repeatedly by her teenage husband, escaped to New Jersey, under the protection of her four sisters, their husbands and their mother. And they were all under the protection of some powerful New Jersey Southern Italians. They would have given her her vengeance if she wanted it. But she wasn't like that.

Once she stabilized, got a job and a place to live, Margie returned to her ex-husband's family home in New York City – with her brothers-in-law – to reclaim Gregory. The ex-husband refused to tell her where the child was. The ex-husband threatened her for her life. She was again terrified and re-traumatized.

As an immigrant in the Depression, Margie didn't even make it to high school. So she wasn't exactly equipped to conduct a missing child investigation. Plus, there were no Web sites for missing kids, no photos of missing children on paper milk cartons.

Margie told me she did make a desperate, heartsick attempt to find her son years later. After she was married and had kids. Alone, she took the train to Manhattan to the Hall of Records, and looked through telephone books of the five boroughs of New York City, and found a total of 26 pages of Corsos, one of the most common Italian names. She was looking for Nunzio Corso, not knowing that her son had taken his confirmation name, Gregory. The sands of hope had shifted and all was lost. For life, it seemed to her.

Q. What inspired you about Corso?

GR. Triumph. The ability to come back from the worst in life by not running away from the trauma, but transcending it through a pursuit of art and beauty, regardless of the cost. Abandonment, emotional deprivation, abuse – Corso fought these wounds all his life. Gerald Nicosia, Kerouac's biographer, who knew Corso, sums it up this way:

"Corso..." shows how a man overcomes every obstacle imaginable –poverty, no mother, prison, not even the ghost of a future – and becomes a great poet perhaps because of it, because of his ability to raise himself above it all...

The tribute scene at Shelley's grave, where Gregory burns Allen's photo says it all. They made it into literary, cultural and social history like Shelley. Revolutionaries of the Spirit.

Q. How did you come to know Corso, and come to direct this film?

GR. At a reading at New York's Whitney Museum, I suggested to Allen Ginsberg that there should be a feature film about the nucleus of the Beats. He suggested a film on Corso – "he's vastly underappreciated, unheralded." A friend, Peter Kirby, was doing a vanity video of Corso. I tagged along on a shoot and conceived of a much bigger film. Ginsberg then introduced me to Corso, who did not like the idea of anyone making a film about him. He tried to intimidate me, grilling me with literary questions: "What's the first book?" - "Gilgamesh — but it's written on tablets." Corso liked my answer. "Who's Gilgamesh's best friend?" - "Enkidu." Corso smiled. "What happens to their friendship?" - "A woman gets between them and screws everything up." Corso laughed hysterically and said maybe, just maybe, I could do a film about him... If I could tell him who said "You can't step in the same river twice." I had a Jesuit education, so that one was easy – Heraclitus.

Q. So you didn't set out to make a documentary?

GR. Hardly. In fact, coming from narrative fiction – television and movies – I was very frightened of making a documentary, particularly about a poet who calls himself a "Revolutionary of Spirit," and motors around on 30 milligrams of methadone a day.

"Corso" for me started as vehicle to sell a feature drama. Corso's story is nothing but drama – abandonment, life on the streets, prison, triumph. It was easy to visualizing a dramatic film about Corso – like Villon, or Rimbaud and Verlaine, Poe, or Genet, the "poets maudits" – literature's bad boys.

Then it grew into an eleven-year, longitudinal documentary.

Q. So are you going to make that dramatic film version of Corso's life.

GR. Yes, I own all the rights to Corso's life. We've got the drama script written and have Italian and French Co-Producers in discussions. I'm headed to the Taormina Film Festival and doing location scouts afterwards. Yes, it only took ten years. But so does a good wine.

Q. How did the film actor Ethan Hawke get involved? Is there any connection to his role in "Dead Poets Society?"

GR. No connection to "Dead Poets" other than both Ethan and Gregory loved Dead Poets.

First, Ethan is not merely a film actor. He has written two novels, ("The Hottest State" and "Ash Wednesday.") He is an Academy Award nominee for best screenplay ("Before Sunset.") He's directed two movies, ("Chelsea Walls" and "The Hottest State.") He directs stage plays. His stage acting is legendary. He does poetry readings. Right now he's going around the world – eight countries -- on the "Bridge Project" directed by Sam Mendes and produced by Kevin Spacey. They're doing Stoppard's adaptation of Chekov's "Cherry Orchard", and Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale." Ethan's got a lot more going on than just being a film actor.

Ethan knew Gregory. As Gregory was dying, there was a constant stream of visitors. Ethan got word and said he would like to visit. I had no idea that Gregory's poetry was so central to Ethan's sense of literature. Or getting laid, for that matter. That all just came out on camera. Ethan had memorized Corso's signature piece, "Marriage" when he was 16.

Then, seven years later, when I was nearing completion of the film, I asked Ethan if he'd do the on-screen narration. He was incredibly humble, saying that audiences often object to serious films where celebrities "parachute" in, *deus ex machina*. But Ethan came to see that his sickbed appearance to Gregory made his on-screen guiding all the more organic. He is kind of like Virgil, giving us a play-by-play of Dante's descent and ascent.

I think as a filmmaker Ethan liked the idea of a longitudinal documentary. He's already making this 11 year project with Richard Linklater following a kid from first grade to college freshman.

And try this weird coincidence: In "Before Sunset" which Ethan wrote, "Jesse" the writer he plays, is coming back to Paris, on a book tour 9 years after he first met Celine (Julie Delpy), who mysteriously appears in the back of a bookstore watching Jesse do his reading. This same exact thing happened in reality with Gregory and his lover, Hope Savage, with her appearing in the back of Shakespeare and Co. in Paris, while Gregory was reading. I'm glad I'm not superstitious.

Q. Did the shooting with Ethan go smoothly?

GR. He really is a consummate artist... However, we were all on the edge of our chairs. The shooting with Ethan was scheduled right when his wife and he were birthing their daughter. We cooled our heels. As soon as there was a delivery, ten fingers and toes, Ethan showed up on the set. If you look, you'll see he's wearing the white hospital wristband.

Q. How about Patti Smith? How is she connected to Corso?

GR. "I wish to go up to old poet men and rip their tongues out," said Corso, referring to the older generation of poets – like Auden and Elliot – that put down "the Beats." Gregory said he saw Patti as a young poet who might rip *his* tongue out. Gregory said Patti, an upstart poet and performer, confronted him and challenged him at the entrance to the Chelsea Hotel. Here's her version:

"I first encountered Gregory long ago in front of the Chelsea Hotel. He lifted his overcoat and dropped his trousers, spewing Latin expletives. Seeing my astonished face, he laughed and said, "I'm not mooning you sweetheart, I'm mooning the world." I remember thinking, how fortunate for the world to be privy to the exposed rump of a true poet."

Patti shared a kind of dead-end kid, working class background. Just like Gregory, she took off for Paris as young woman, and there realized she was an artist and invented herself. Patti has a whole tribute to Gregory. A snippet satisfies:

"The boy drifted from foster home to reformatory to prison. He had little formal education, but his self-education was limitless. He embraced the Greeks and the Romantics, and the Beats embraced him, pressing laurel leaves upon his dark unruly curls. Knighted by Kerouac... he was their pride and joy and also their most provocative conscience."

I recommend reading her final goodbye...

"But before he ascends into some holy card glow, Gregory, being himself, lifts his overcoat drops his trousers, and as he exposes his poet's rump one last time, cries, "Hey man, kiss my daisy." He loves us. He loves us not. He loves us.

Q. What are Corso's connections to today's Slam Poetry and Spoken Word?

GR. In pre-Slam Poetry days, in the late 70's, the first World Poetry Bouts took place at Taos, New Mexico. Corso, with Ginsberg at this side, took on young Chicagoan Terry Jacobus in a raunchy poetic fist-a-cuff that helped poetry slam founder Marc Kelly Smith create the poetry slam, internationally.... In a nutshell: Academic readings were polite, Corso and Ginsberg were lively poetry entertainers who developed a new crowd who were anxious for live words to be thrown in their face as well as in their ears.

The spirit of Corso and the Beats as outsider artists resonates most with contemporary Slam poets. Like the Beats, who wrote about social ills, societal change, loving and hating life alike, the Slam poets have managed to create an arena not originally populated by the academic poets... Beat and Slam poets alike sought out, created and cultivated a community to exchange ideas and art that the general public as well as the academic originally attempted to curtail. Corso's orphaned, jailed background, his highly unique voice... his need to be heard; these all made him a perfect role model, initiator and animator for the Slammers.

Q. What are Corso's and "the Beats" connections to hip-hop and the African American rap scene.

GR. Rap and then hip-hop, in the infant stages, were defined by the emcees ability to set a stage. In the early '70s the emcees, rappers would play records, partially recite and sing into the mic and introduce the crowds. *Kool Herc* for example, that rap between songs often included poetry. So, like the Corso and the "Beats" moved poetry into the coffee houses, and into the parties, or the street (out of the safe, sterile class rooms), the young

rappers and hip hop heads moved poetry into the Urban, inner city jams. Again, the spirit is the same. Corso and Ginsberg's influence is heavy. And thematically Corso was cousins with *KRS-One* or *RUN DMC* where oppression and intolerance were what they combated. I can hear Corso's 'Bomb' being busted out by a smarter Eminem. Beat poetry, slam poetry, hip-hop... this ain't no tea party poetry.

Tupak Shakur and Rappers *Wu-Tang Clan's Ol' Dirty Bastard*, and *Durell Mohamed* sought Gregory out. They served time in Clinton State Prison. They saw a lot of themselves in Gregory.

Q. Your film could have easily turned into a parade of talking heads. But it's very dramatic. What was your narrative strategy in balancing the present and the past?

GR. No strategy, just necessity. First, I was determined to not have "talking heads" or exposition. Corso in person was fascinating, funny and sometimes overwhelming. I knew I could "hang" a film on him in *verite´* style, even though he was unpredictable, and I had no idea what I'd get.

Well there was just one strategic move: I was making the film for a younger generation that may not know so much about "the Beats." So I needed a quick historical exposition of who "the Beats " were to put Corso in context for younger people. So after the exposition, with Ginsberg's death, the film comes into present time. The only problem was that Corso became catatonic after Allen's death, silent before a running camera. Getting him out of New York and to Europe was the only hope. We pulled a guerilla crew together for an "on the road" shoot, which could go anywhere Corso wanted.

As for the switching past to present... Filming, I saw Corso pause and stare at things, I knew he was remembering something important. So editor Damien Leveck and I knew those moments would allow us to go back in time, through stock footage, and stills, meticulously researched and build a narrative.

Q. Obviously getting Corso to Europe worked. He sure perked up.

GR. We couldn't shut him up! In Place de la Concorde, Piazza Navonna, Kolonakis - every place had a story. With Ginsberg, Man Ray, Jean Genet, Miles Davis, Alberto Moravia, John Houston, Vittorio Gassman, girlfriend Jean Seaberg, Peggy Guggenheim, a countess here, a Duke there.

So doing *verite´* meant doggedly following Corso and coaxing him into emotionally charged environments, in hopes he'd self-disclose. That was the only narrative strategy.

Q. You say verite´. But the film has a strong narrative, almost a four-act structure.

GR. My background is television and film writing and naturally I thought in terms of story structure. I'm used to everyone following a script. It was terrifying to keep on following

and filming Corso, because I did not see a linear story, or any end in sight. Then Corso began to interact fiercely with the film, talking to it, taunting it. Using it as his final testament. I would put him in tough circumstances and his reactions would spur more opportunities. Like sitting out the flood in Venice, and bringing up the idea of finding his mother's grave. So then I find her alive and the story deepens. But it's real, not fiction. It's a tedious process of unearthing the real.

I never fully knew what the film was "about" narratively until Corso called one night, weeping, and said that he was dying. He wanted me to come with the camera. He felt he had to face death as courageously as he had in his writing, otherwise it was all for naught. "I dared the Fates, now they are daring me." I brought the camera. And Gregory held up his end of the deal.

So as we continued, thematics surfaced and a story emerged. And it was more about how at life's end we might be allowed to tie up loose ends, and settle accounts. But only if you look at it unflinchingly.

Q. The film has a kind of "Don't Look Back" feel. Was that an intentional aesthetic choice or was it more of an organic process?

GR. Obviously, (D.A.) Pennebaker's portrait of Bob Dylan is a seminal influence for everyone. But for all its impact, it's snap shots, not a narrative, a differential and not a calculus. But you get an intense sense of who Dylan might be, or whom he wanted you to think he was. And so, too, with Corso.

But I wanted to tell a bigger story, once I saw all the footage laid out, and his life played out: A story of what converges when we face our end. Self-assessment. Self-forgiveness. Acceptance. Gallows humor. And a whiff of relief and peace.

Q. How long did it take you to make the film?

GR. 11 years, off and on, start to finish. Obviously, I was doing other projects... In 1997 I knew Corso was old, Ginsberg was dying, and Burroughs was going to go next. So I was desperate to get footage of Corso before something happened to him. Acquisition was the priority. That continued on and off through the discovery of his mother, until 2001 when he died of prostate cancer. Then I went through all the audio and film. Only then did I do the research. And then there was too much material from too many media formats: super 16, beta, pal, camcorder, audio interviews *ad infinitum*. Our meager budget couldn't afford an Avid. It wasn't until Apple's Final Cut 2 came out that I could get all that material on one editing line. Then it was quick – only another year and a half! It's my first and last documentary. They're hard.

Q. Was Corso gay, straight, or somewhere in between?

GR. Straight. Very into women. A seductress to the bitter end. And even at 67, he was somehow a chick magnet, all throughout Europe. Me and the crew couldn't comprehend how he was pulling it off... His advice on women, "the world's most beautiful

women often starve for a good intelligent conversation, a good steak, and someone kind to touch them." That was his formula.... He had four children with four women, very nice and decent women. And he probably even had a fifth child. (That's as far as I can go on family.)

Ginsberg and Burroughs were definitely, irrevocably gay. Corso and Kerouac were the womanizers... At the end of the film with Corso on his sickbed, Margie, his newfound mother asks him, "How many women did you have in your life? Can you count them on your hands?" And Corso mutters, "no." "No wonder you're so tired now," Margie sighs.

Q. *Weren't Corso and Ginsberg lovers?*

GR. No again. In one of his last appearances with Allen Ginsberg on KCRW in Santa Monica, Ginsberg and Corso go back and forth about how Allen was always trying to seduce Gregory and it just never happened. A funny repartee. Corso: "You were always after my ass." Ginsberg: "Yes, and it was a pretty ass at that." So that's the truth, or the position they both took. Corso always teased Ginsberg: they met in a Dyke Bar, the Pony Stable Inn in Greenwich Village, why wouldn't people be suspicious they were involved with each other.

A virgin at 17, Gregory went to prison for three years in one of America's toughest State Prisons, Clinton State, and he left with his virginity intact. Front and back. So he had a matter-of-fact attitude to man-on-man sex. He did not suffer the foolishness of homophobia or those who suffer from it.

Q. *What about Corso and Jean Genet, the French Nobel Prize winner who started writing in Prison.*

GR. Jean Genet came on to him once and planted a kiss on Gregory who pulled him off and said, "We share prison in common, only that." Genet let him apartment sit, in exchange for a paint job. When he returned he found that Gregory had painted murals à la Rousseau: a jungle of monkeys, lions and falcons. So much for *that* love story rumor.

Corso's attitude towards gays is on display in his comments in Pere Lachaise cemetery at tomb of Oscar Wilde – the patron saint of gay artists. Corso empathized most with Wilde being broken by two years at hard labor in prison for homosexuality in Victorian England. Corso, having spent his late teens in prison, understood that sex was not the issue. Corso too was loved for what he created and sometimes tortured for who he was. Corso even rips Gide for being gay and torturing Oscar Wilde.

"And Andre Gide, that other faggot, says to him, "You once said Mr. Wilde that when you come back to Paris you will be one of the most famous men. And here was a man, who just came out of prison. Broken. And Andre Gide said that to him. Another fruit. How awful he was to Oscar. Very tragic. I love Oscar. Fuck Gide... Poets can be terrible to other poets."

Corso identified with Wilde, *as an imprisoned writer*. Check out this quote from Wilde about reading *his way* through prison.

In Prison, it had been entirely forgotten that I was a literary person, but when they saw that my play [Salome] was a success in Paris... they let me have all the books I wanted to read... After rejecting the Greek Philosophers and The Fathers of the Church, I suddenly thought of Dante. I read Dante everyday, in Italian... It was *Inferno* above all that I read; how could I help liking it?... Hell, we were in it – Hell that was prison!

And run that against Gregory's insight:

... I am unable to say anything real bad about prison. Sometimes Hell is a good place. Because it exists, so must its opposite, Heaven exist. And what was that Heaven? Poetry.

Q. Speaking of the French writer Andre Gide, what was Corso going on about?

GR. Gide's own gay self-loathing led to an attack on Wilde, denouncing him. He brought attention to Wilde who had just got out of Redding prison and was living out his days in Paris, at Hotel D'Alsace (now L'Hotel), anonymously as Sebastien Melmoth (as in St. Sebastien, martyred by a hail of Roman arrows)... In the end, Gide turned out to be a pedophile, as well as co-incidentally being gay. His self-loathing, as opposed to Wilde's acceptance of who he was, led Gide to explore the confessional style of writing, for which Gide won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1946. Many say he won it on the back of Oscar Wilde... That was Corso's beef about Gide... "Poets can be terrible to other poets." I often wondered who in his life he was really criticizing.

Q. You're pretty knowledgeable on this. Are you gay?

GR. Not yet. I sincerely doubt it. So what if I was?

Q. Wasn't Corso linked to a string of gorgeous women celebrities and actresses like Jean Seaberg and Peggy Guggenheim and other heiresses? Why didn't you explore Corso's romances or relationships and family?

GR. Corso insisted no family, kids or lovers, or... no film. It was his choice. He wanted the film to focus on his work, and a sense of him as an artist. "Poetry and the Poet are inseparable... I cannot talk about Poetry to you without talking about the poet. I, as poet, am the poetry I write."

Artists choose differently about how to expose their personal life. John Lennon and Yoko Ono seemed to invite us to bed. With Bob Dylan you have no idea whether he has a wife, or how many he's had. Corso wanted to show me Corso.

Q. What about Corso's drinking and drug use?

GR. What about it? Corso's attitude was: If you got to meet Hemingway or Fitzgerald, Poe would you ask them about their drinking? Or would absinthe abuse be the first thing you queried Verlaine or Rimbaud or Van Gogh about? Or Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin or Townes Van Zandt. No, you listen and look at to the work... Maybe you'd want to have a drink with them?

Corso used to joke about the “poet’s medicine cabinet.” But he was unflinchingly honest about it... Corso was introduced to drugs in Paris, in the Quartier Morrocan in 1958. It was exotic, fun and play. Then, no one really knew the dangers, of addiction and its long-term effects. In fact drugs were fashionable, with Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis and others. A deadly cool.

Q. Why didn’t you confront this in the film?

GR. Why should I? It’s everywhere. The scene after Allen’s death, walking in the Village, lost... Gregory mentions Kerouac and we see the hideous effects on him of alcohol: the grave. Gregory discusses losing his Spirit, and we see Gregory sitted in a bistro, slumped over. Boy that picture is worth a thousand verses that talking about drinking and drugs will never convey.

However, much of the film was about *Recovery*, but not necessarily from addiction, but from abandonment, emotional deprivation and abuse, the underlying causes of addiction.

Q. Didn’t drugs and booze cause a problem for you during the film?

GR. Not really. Corso was well behaved. To film in Europe, I had to pull strings to get take-out methadone, because we couldn’t shoot film and take him to a European clinic every day. I had to appeal to Gov. Mario Cuomo and John Cardinal O’Connor. Their intervention helped Gregory get into a very friendly clinic in the Village who gave him take-out to at least get to Europe. Then I had to find enlightened psychiatrists in Europe who would give Corso take out methadone. There are about three such enlightened doctors in all of Europe.

Listen, I’m touchy about this issue. We’ve almost all had friends, loved ones or family members in an addiction dilemma. I have had. Addiction is not a cause of moral condemnation. Though it may cause a lot of immorality. Maybe mistakes get you there, but once you’re there, it appears to be overpowering.

Corso once took my eyeglasses off my face (and I’m near legally blind from birth.) I couldn’t see anything. He handed me back my glasses. “See, you need the glasses, I need the Methadone. It ‘s physiological at this point. Not moral.”

Q. Well are there any anecdotes on the “Corso lite” side of this?

GR. Okay, if you really want an incident, and a hilarious one... Arriving in Pisa, late Friday afternoon, on a flight from New York, we needed to meet up with a research doctor at University of Pisa medical school to get “take-out” methadone. The plane was late and the doctor was gone for the weekend. Somehow, I convinced a janitor to open a locked closet and give us a shopping bag full of dainty little boxes of methadone pharmaceutical samples. “Delicata...” Gregory loved the politeness of it all being medical, pharmaceutical and not shameful.

Then weeks later, in Venice, Gregory needed a prescription refill on his takeout methadone. A terrified production assistant drove all night to the medical school in Pisa. When he got back, he had a two-liter used Evian bottle filled with methadone. Enough to kill an elephant! The clinic in Pisa had just put the empty Evian bottle up to the spigot! I wasn't going to give that two-liter full to Corso... We had to find little pharmaceutical bottles and boxes, and a cooking syringe to suck out the methadone and squirt it in dainty little bottles like we first got from the janitor in Pisa. I took the dainty boxes in a shopping bag to Corso's room, and he immediately knew I had tampered with his medication, and let me have it. But good. But hey, giving him the whole two-liter Evian bottle might have stopped the film. Dead.

Q. How did Corso come to be buried at the foot of the grave of Percy Shelley in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome?

GR. While we were shooting in the Protestant Cemetery, Corso pulled me over to the exact empty spot at the foot of Shelley's grave that he wanted. He'd had his eye on it for quite a number of years. Maybe he saw it as a way to complete the myth? I told him it would be impossible because the Cemetery was closed to new customers, and is owned by the Italian government. Nonetheless, I appealed to the graveyard authorities and they accepted a down payment on Corso's coveted spot. I have the receipt. However, I think the gravediggers took advantage of me. After Gregory passed, I was told the Cemetery was full, forever and ever. Later, friends of Corso, Vittorio Terracini and Bobby Yara, were able to convince the Italian Ministry of Culture. Who knows what *they* paid?

Q. Corso snipes at Oscar Wilde's grave, "He died fortified by the Sacraments of the Church. – they all go back to the church." Did Corso go back to the church?

GR. He did have the last sacraments. When he was sick, he pulled me aside, and said, "Okay, it's time. Go get a priest. I have to cover my bets." I looked at him astonished and he said, "Rimbaud, Wilde, and all the others did it. Why should I be different from my peers.?" Was he completing the poetic myth? Or truly worried about the after-life?

I went to Our Lady of Pompeii Church in Greenwich Village and found a native born Italian priest from the Scalabrinian order which ministers to immigrants. Corso liked that. He was anointed. I paid for a proper Italian funeral and a Requiem mass.

Q. What was the most significant situation you coaxed Corso into?

GR. Well obviously, meeting his mother. But I didn't have to coax him there.

Getting him to visit Clinton State Prison, where he spent three years, from 17 to 20, took a lot of coaxing. He was dread filled. The day before, he fell in the street in a New York snowstorm and sprained his arm. A bumpy small plane ride to Burlington had him wanting to turn back. Then once he saw the walls of Clinton Prison, he was fearless about resurrecting that painful time. He was back in prison, and in control this time, not helpless. It was like watching him wipe his bad memories clean, by coming back and being the cen-

ter of attention, the honored graduate... It was stunning for him because Clinton is no holiday. It was the site of New York's electric chair. It housed serial killers, cop killers, rapists, but also high profilers like the "Capo di Tutti Capos" Lucky Luciano, the father of modern organized crime. And Clinton was the residence of plenty of rappers: *Tupak Shakur*, *Wu-Tang Clan's Ol' Dirty Bastard*, and *Durell Mohamed*. And Corso. Lots of Mafia and lots of poets at Clinton...

In fact, we discovered that Gregory wasn't bullshitting about prison: We confirmed that he did get Paul "Lucky" Luciano's cell. Luciano donated the library that Gregory read, including the shelves made of Neapolitan oak. Dave Betillo, Luciano's capo who went to jail with him, was the "Big Mafioso – the guy who never talked" Gregory refers to, who counseled him, to read and got him a job in the Garment district after Gregory was released. Betillo was the "top Mafioso" who told Gregory three shots: 1) Don't serve time, let time serve you. 2) Keep your shoes on, you're walking right out of here, with a 2 -3 year sentence. And 3) the "third shot" – "Hey when you go out into the world and are talking to two people, make sure you see three. See yourself. Dig yourself."

Going back there to Clinton really shook Corso. He then began to share his secrets.

Q. Ginsberg was Jewish and Tibetan Buddhist, Kerouac was Catholic with strains of Zen Buddhism. Burroughs was just weird and into head-trips. What was Gregory's orientation?

GR. Corso he was always operating out of the Western Civilization context - the Judeo – Christian, Greco – Roman tradition.

Everywhere we went - from St. Francis' church in Fiesole to St. Germain de Pres – Corso stopped in Churches and was very touched, always. He was contemplative. He knew each church's history; who was buried in the floor here, or in the wall there. I asked how he knew so much about so many historic churches. "Sometimes you need some place to sit, be quiet, and take a nap," he said with a wink.

He challenged Ginsberg and Kerouac's Buddhist concepts. "*I am not God. God is me. I think my ego is me. But that's something I cooked up. It's not me.*" That's a "shot" as Corso like to call his zingers.

Also the Greek Myths and the Lives of the Saints were living archetypes for him. He absorbed them in the isolation of foster homes and in prison in an almost monastic way. And he applied them to street smarts: We once saw a three-card monte game on 9th Avenue, with a woman shilling for the hustler, in front of a big and angry crowd. Corso cracked: "Mars should never bring Venus down on to the fields of war." And suddenly all hell broke loose and the cheated were chasing the woman down the street. "The Gods are pissed off now," Corso muttered.

Q. Despite living longer and being just as talented, Corso is probably the least well known of the big Beat writers with Burroughs, Kerouac and Ginsberg. Why?

GR. Corso's less celebrated much because he was adverse to publicity. He just wanted

to be a poet and explore truth – “improve the moral faculties of mankind.” He was an introvert, and very shy actually, because of the abandonment, and emotional deprivation and abuse. He’d drink to compensate for his performance fears. Compare that to Ginsberg who knew the value of publicity and engineered it; Kerouac’s *On the Road* caught his entire generation’s attention by surprise; and Burroughs who was interesting because he was bizarre... Contextualize it this way: Kerouac got a football scholarship to Columbia; Ginsberg’s read English at Columbia; Burroughs went to Harvard. Gregory got his scholarship to Clinton State Prison and read his way through his sentence. To the other “Beat” writers he was the most revered and profound. They saw Gregory as the real thing: Both “beat,” as in worn down, and “beat,” as in angelic or beatitude.

Q. Many are surprised by the intensely personal nature of the film. Why do you think Corso gave you so much access to his personal life, especially the reunion with his mother and the scenes of him on his sick bed?

GR: Gregory never did an autobiography and he had undermined and defeated several biographers. (Kyle Roderick, notably.) He hated all the Beat mythology yet played it to his advantage. I think he wanted to use the film to reveal the person behind the myths, the poet. It’s an intensely personal film because he knew he was in his life’s “end-game.” And he used the film, rather than writing a memoir, to share his last perspectives on Gregory Corso. He began to engage and interact fiercely with the film. I’d put him in difficult circumstances like going back to prison. He’d take up the challenge, for himself.

Q. One of things that came to mind while watching the film is that Corso was not just the last of the New York Beats, but also the last poet with a certain type of cultural and social relevance. Writers of all stripes just don’t have the same impact they once did.

GR. Perhaps writers don’t have the same impact today because reading isn’t as important as it once was. Look at the books that helped define generations and attitudes, “Catcher in the Rye”, “To Kill a Mockingbird”, “Autobiography of Malcolm X”, “On the Road”, “Catch 22.” Where are the present day equivalents? We have enormous technological distractions – iPods, iPhones, widgets, wikis, twitter, which enhance the fundamental experience of human expression. But they often defeat it. “The Beats” believed poetry shouldn’t be in the head, but that it should be in the mouth, spoken to others. And that the interaction with the audience – like in theater – created the wholeness of the poetic experience. The Beats made poetry culturally relevant. They got it out of universities and put it in the streets and coffee houses, where they drew their influences. Ginsberg and Corso, who traveled together, doing readings, wrote of African Americans, Latinos, Jazz, Bebop, Vedic chants, Gregorian Rants. They were the first popular voices on the environment, on dignity for gays and lesbians, on the arms race, on the bomb. They were social activists with a spiritual, and they had a profound impact on American spirituality. A secular enlightenment, Kerouac envisioned. In a way, he was right. Lots of people now meditate, do yoga, protect the environment, and worship the Dalai Lama. Not back then. They were truly visionaries.

Q. How did your view of Corso change over the course of filming and editing?

GR. I knew Corso was a great poet at the onset. But when we hit the road for a while I thought Corso was one of the greatest con artists I had ever met. He boasted of great accomplishments, like reading Egyptian Hieroglyphics. And when I took him to the Louvre he translated Egyptian tomb writings. I was astonished... Traveling through the Veneto, he saw a castle and demanded that we stop and call the "Duke" from a gas station. We ended up at dinner for 50 at the Castle... On the road, throughout Europe, I started to realize what a remarkable life Corso had lived. And I discovered that Gregory never had a choice: Poetry was his only "shot" in life.

Q. *What about all the Corso and the "Beat" mythologies?*

GR. I really tracked down some outrageous legends surrounding Corso and burst a myth or two. Take his prison stint at 17: many literary histories say that Corso was the head of a "walkie-talkie gang" that staged a (then) hi-tech robbery of a Household Finance branch and got away with thousands in cash. Well, I discovered in his jail records that Corso went to prison for stealing a \$25 suit to go out on a date. A misdemeanor that got blown up into a felony. I confronted Corso with the contradiction. He laughed at the legend: On Corso's first day in maximum security Clinton State Prison he was asked by some would-be rapist inmates what he was doing time for. Terrified to say he was there for just stealing a suit, he made up the "walkie-talkie gang" on the spot just to sound tough. Otherwise, he would have ended up "butt bait" by the end of his first day. The Mafia inmates took a shine to his outrageousness and they protected him. They saw he was gifted and they made him read his way through prison. In fact, the prison library was donated by Paul "Lucky" Luciano. Hence a literary myth is birthed from a frightened teenager in a bad-ass prison.

Q. *Any great searing insights or realizations now that you are finished?*

GR. Yeah, but last question... "The Beats" were the first time that America listened to its youth. To the *spirit* of youth. Remember, adolescence did not exist at the turn of last century, except for the very fortunate. Teenagers were supposed to be little adults. Seen, not heard. Most children did not go to high school, much less college. Children were put to hard work early, in the family business or sold outright as "Lowell Mill Girls" - abusive textile mills in Lowell, Mass., Kerouac's hometown. Teenage boys were sent off to trench warfare in WWI, to their death by megalomaniac generals. The ceremony of innocence never happened... "The Beats" were the first time that America listened to its youth. To the *spirit* of youth. Now we can't shut them up. Today, the youth own the day, the culture, the technology and our admiration. "The Beats" deserve enormous honor and credit.

Q. *What essentially was the difference between the "Lost Generation", the "Beat Generation" and "Hippies" and Gen X, Y, Z?"*

GR. Is that question or a thesis? Remember "The Lost Generation" - Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the Roaring 20s? Why were they "lost?" Spiritually and psychologically, perhaps it was because of the massive shock from the death of 37,000,000 (million) combatants, 70,000,000 casualties, by modern weaponry used with antiquated warfare. It

wiped out an entire generation of young men in Europe. Every belief and value system was blown up with it.

The "Beat Generation" growing up in World War II, was in even more massive shock, from astronomical numbers of mechanized death. 125,000,000 (*millions*) war casualties. 200,000 dead with just two atomic bombs. 35,000 dead in Dresden in one bombing raid. 8 million in the Jewish and other Holocausts... and then without a deep breath, there was Korean War with over 2 million casualties. And by then these guys were draft bait. Those were their defining fears. The shadow of the Holocaust became the specter of nuclear holocaust. The Cold War. Ban the Bomb era. "Bomb," was one of Corso's masterpieces and he had shoes thrown at him at Oxford for using humor – "the Divine Butcher" – to attack the Bomb... These guys had the insight and guts to offer a new perspective. A secular, youth driven spirituality and they were ridiculed, but they hung in there... Corso sums it up to a Radio France reporter:

Radio France: Are you still a "Beatnik?"

Corso: "We never take the name Beatnik. The magazines gave us that appellation. After Sputnik. To make fun of us.

RF: And how did you call yourself?

Corso: Kerouac gave it the name "Beat Generation" "Beat" meant that after La Guerre Deux, a person was tired of all the bullshit already. They got out of society. They rebelled.

Watching Corso in Europe, a stunning realization dawned: "The Beat Imagination", indeed the American counter-culture, was birthed and liberated in Europe by Corso, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac, before being brought back to waiting American middle class youth. The "Howl" reading in San Francisco in 1956 was the ignition, and they took off for Europe while it burned – the Ferlinghetti obscenity trial, etc. They went to Europe to discover themselves as artists, like the American Impressionist painters, Isadora Duncan, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Gertrude Stein, James Baldwin, Man Ray, Richard Wright, The Gershwins, Aaron Copeland, Chet Baker, Miles Davis, Dexter Gordon, Bud Powell, Kenny Clark. They were escaping America's moralistic, judgmental and often unforgiving and intolerant society, not given much to human emotions. There they learned to take artistic risks that might end up in glorious mistakes, more often in extraordinary work.

Ginsberg and Corso came back in 1958 to literary celebrity and this crazy "Beatnik" commercialization. To Maynard G. Krebs (1959) and the "Many Lives of Dobie Gillis."

My defining fears were the Cold War and Vietnam. But there were antidotes: Dylan, Hendrix, Lennon, Talking Heads, U2, etc. An explosion of creativity in all the arts, especially film, with Coppola, Scorsese, Cassavettes, and others.

What's your generation's defining fear ? 9/11? And the Iraqi war? Is your Cold War, the terrorist threats? You fill in the gaps for your generation. And where are your anti-dotes?

Where are the creative voices that lift you above being the most technological and most mechanized generation ever?

Q. Any other great "on the road" with Corso stories?

GR. Scores. I'll put the extras in a DVD.

The "Beats", Slam, Rap & Hip-Hop

In the late 50's, Corso and Ginsberg, moved poetry out of the classrooms and universities into the streets, the coffee houses, the concert halls, to the people, not just academics. In a nutshell: Academic readings were polite, Corso and Ginsberg were lively poetry entertainers who developed a new crowd who were anxious for live words to be thrown in their face as well as in their ears. "The Beat Generation" transformed America, and the world.

In the early 60's Beat Poetry moved into rock and roll, with Bob Dylan, and those that followed. Poetry became a vehicle and catalyst for world social and cultural change.

This face to face poetry, reading to people, morphed into Slam Poetry, Rap and Hip Hop.

In the late 70's, the first World Poetry Bouts took place at Taos, New Mexico. Corso, with Ginsberg at this side, took on young Chicagoan Terry Jacobus in a raunchy poetic fist-a-cuff that helped poetry slam founder Marc Kelly Smith create the poetry slam, internationally....

The spirit of Corso and the Beats as outsider artists resonates most with contemporary Slam poets. Like the Beats, who wrote about social ills, societal change, loving and hating life alike, the Slam poets have managed to create an arena not originally populated by the academic poets... Beat and Slam poets alike sought out, created and cultivated a community to exchange ideas and art that the general public as well as the academic originally attempted to curtail. Corso's orphaned, jailed background, his highly unique voice... his need to be heard; these all made him a perfect role model, initiator and animator for the Slammers.

Rap and then hip-hop, in the infant stages, were defined by the emcees ability to set a stage. In the early '70s the emcees, rappers would play records, partially recite and sing into the mic and introduce the crowds. Kool Herc for example, that rap between songs often included poetry. So, like the Corso and the "Beats" moved poetry into the coffee houses, and into the parties, or the street (out of the safe, sterile class rooms), the young rappers and hip hop heads moved poetry into the Urban, inner city jams. Again, the spirit is the same. Corso and Ginsberg's influence is heavy. And thematically Corso was cousins with KRS-One or RUN DMC where oppression and intolerance were what they combated. I can hear Corso's 'Bomb' being busted out by a smarter Eminem.

Beat poetry, slam poetry, hip-hop... this ain't no tea party poetry.

CREDITS

Gregory Corso
Ethan Hawke
Patti Smith
Alan Ginsberg

||

Directed and Written by Gustave Reininger

Produced by Gustave Reininger & Damien Leveck

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Venice Production Unit

Stephano Biscaro

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Michael Barnard

Greece Production Unit

Kostas Theologou – Production Manager

Pierre Camus – Sound

John Zervos

New York Production Unit

Brigid Bedard

Nathan Blair

MUSIC

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<http://www.corsothefilm.com>

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Patti Smith OFFICIAL WEB SITE

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Allen Ginsberg WIKIPEDIA

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Patti Smith

Remembering Gregory

Gregory Corso, the flower of the beat generation, is gone. He has been plucked to grace the Daddy garden and all in heaven are magnified and amused. I first encountered Gregory long ago in front of the Chelsea Hotel. He lifted his overcoat and dropped his trousers, spewing Latin expletives. Seeing my astonished face, he laughed and said, "I'm not mooning you sweetheart, I'm mooning the world." I remember thinking, how fortunate for the world to be privy to the exposed rump of a true poet.

And that he was. All who have stories, real or embellished, of Gregory's legendary mischief and chaotic indiscretions must also have stories of his beauty, his remorse, and his generosity. He took benevolent note of me in the early '70s, maybe because my living space was akin to his—piles of papers, books, old shoes, piss in cups—mortal disarray. We were disruptive partners in crime during particularly tedious poetry readings at St. Mark's. Though we were aptly scolded, Gregory counseled me to stick to my irreverent guns and demand more from those who sat before us calling themselves poets.

There was no doubt Gregory was a poet. Poetry was his ideology, and the poets his saints. He was called upon and he knew it. Perhaps his only dilemma was to sometimes ask, Why, why him? He was born in New York City on March 26, 1930. His young mother abandoned him. The boy drifted from foster home to reformatory to prison. He had little formal education, but his self-education was limitless. He embraced the Greeks and the Romantics, and the Beats embraced him, pressing laurel leaves upon his dark unruly curls. Knighted by Kerouac as Raphael Urso, he was their pride and joy and also their most provocative conscience.

He has left us two legacies: a body of work that will endure for its beauty, discipline, and influential energy, and his human qualities. He was part Pete Rose, part Percy Bysshe Shelley. He could be explosively rebellious, belligerent, and testing, yet in turn, boyishly pure, humble, and compassionate. He was always willing to say he was sorry, share his knowledge, and was open to learn. I remember watching him sit at Allen Ginsberg's bedside as he lay dying. "Allen is teaching me how to die," he said.

In early summer his friends were summoned to say goodbye to him. We sat by his bedside on Horatio Street in silence. The night was filled with strange correspondences. A daughter he had never known. A patron from far away. A young poet at his feet. On a muted screen, Robert Frank's *Pull My Daisy* randomly aired on public television—unaware of its mystical timing. Images of the Daddies, young and crazy, black and white. Snapshots of Allen taped to the wall. The modest room lorded over by Gregory's chair in all its shabby glory. So many dreams punctuated by cigarette burns. He was dying. We all said goodbye.

But Gregory, perhaps sensing the devotion surrounding him, became a participant in a true Catholic miracle. He rose up. He went into remission just long enough for us to hear his voice, his laughter, and a few welcomed obscenities. We were able to write poems for him, sing to him, watch football, and hear him recite Blake. He was here long enough to travel to Minneapolis, to bond with his daughter, to be a king among children,

to see another fall, another winter, and another century. Allen taught him how to die. Gregory reminded us how to live and cherish life before leaving us a second time.

At the end of his days, he still suffered a young poet's torment—the desire to achieve perfection. And in death, as in art, he shall. The fresh light pours. The boys from the road steer him on. But before he ascends into some holy card glow, Gregory, being himself, lifts his overcoat, drops his trousers, and as he exposes his poet's rump one last time, cries, "Hey man, kiss my daisy." Ahh Gregory, the years and petals fly.

He loved us. He loved us not. He loved us.

