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**Beat Poetry of the 1950s: Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso**

Bachelor thesis

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Jiří Flajšar, Ph.D.

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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## **Abstract**

In the bachelor thesis called "Beat Poetry of 1950s: Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso" I am dealing with the comparison of two prominent beat poets Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso. In the thesis I am concentrating on the specific features of both poets together with the examples and analysis of selected poems. In the conclusion I summarize and compare the style of both poets in the context of their influences on their writing and also their contribution to the American and the world literature.

Tato bakalářská práce nazvaná „Beatnická poezie 50. let 20. století: Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso“ se zabývá porovnáním dvou prominentních básníků beatnické generace, Jacka Kerouaca a Gregoryho Corsa. V práci se zaměřuji na specifické rysy tvorby obou básníků spojených s ukázkami a analýzou vybraných básní. V závěru je pak shrnuju a porovnávám styl básníků v kontextu vlivů na jejich tvorbu a také přínosu pro americkou i světovou literaturu.

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## 1. Introduction

The American poetry of 1950s was to a huge extent dominated by a group of writers without any special manifesto or program, but with common features. The major figures of the group were Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Gregory Corso. Jack Kerouac unofficially named the group “Beat Generation,” meaning worn-out, tired of the state of the society, and this is how they have been recognized since then.

Most of them did not agree with being pigeon-holed as “beatniks” but their poetry and prose is generally understood to be directed against the American establishment, taking as an example the American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau and his ideas of return and renewal of a positive relationship to the nature, or Walt Whitman with his bardic style of poetry and a love for mankind.

“Whitman opened up the line entirely, like he started thinking in kitchen speech terms. He began going back to an older oral bardic tradition as in the Bible, to biblical prose: biblical prosodic arrangements, including prose-poetry sentences, balanced phrases...”<sup>1</sup>

Formally they also came out of the American tradition of imagism and his representative Ezra Pound, or other modernist poets as William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore. The beatniks continued and develop the tradition of breaking up the old forms of the verse. The problem of the old forms was the strict meters they were using.

“And because it was so metronomic and so regular people stopped paying attention to what was being said and just got hypnotized by the rhythm, and pretty soon everything that was being said was the same.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews, 1958-1966*, ed. David Carter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 104.

The Beat Generation poets also followed the style of French surrealists, with whom they had in common the concept of spontaneous writing. All of the poets observed their minds and their thoughts and visions and they generally used the first thoughts or the natural flow of thoughts, without revising them.

“...surrealism was first considered to be irrational, until everybody realized that what really was irrational was a rearrangement of the actuality of mind consciousness into syntactical forms which didn't have anything to do with what was going on in the head! So finally the practical pragmatic, common-sense form of notation of thought, was the surrealistic one, because that's the way the mind works.”<sup>3</sup>

Their poetry was also based on the tradition of old English romantic writers as William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley or William Blake. The vision of Blake inspired whole Ginsberg's poetry.

One of the most characteristic features of the Beat Generation is the oral performances of their poetry, often accompanied with jazz music. It was often connected to exposure of their bodies to demonstrate the exposure of their souls.

This bachelor thesis is dealing with, except for Allen Ginsberg, two most prominent beat poets, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso and the comparison of the characteristic features of their poetry.

Both of the authors were very complex and contradictory personalities, which was projected in their poetry. They both had a positive relationship to the spiritual side of the art and both emerged from an old poetic tradition. Kerouac was more oriented to the eastern poetic tradition, whereas Corso was more oriented to the English romantic tradition. The poetry of both was influenced by other kinds of art as music, or visual art. They were both stressing the subconscious and the spontaneity of the writing, the novelty of prosody and language.

I will try to analyze their style with respect to the influence on the style, the language and motifs.

During the analysis I will concentrate on their statements about their poetry. My main sources will be their letters and interviews and not books of criticism. Since it is apparent that

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<sup>3</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 155.

the two poets did not agree with the most of the criticism that was written about their poetry, I considered it to more authentic to derive the analysis from their own comments.

## 2. Jack Kerouac

### 2.1 Biography of Jack Kerouac

Jean-Louis Kerouac (1922 – 1969) is one of the most famous Beat Generation writers and the author of the term itself, although he never identified with the “label” for him and his fellow writers.

He was born in Lowell, Massachusetts and then he went to Columbia University. He met the poet Allen Ginsberg and the novelist William S. Burroughs in New York City, where he moved after dropping Columbia University. After the World War II, where he joined the US Navy, he began backpacking across the United States. He followed Allen Ginsberg and another friend and writer, Neal Cassady, to San Francisco, where the real craze about the Beat Generation began.

During this period he started to be a well-known prose writer, recording his childhood memories in the novel *The Town and the City*, his journeys and experiences in his most famous and influential novel *On the Road*, as well as *The Subterraneans*, *The Dharma Bums* and *The Big Sur* to mention a few.

Although he grew up and remained as a catholic for the rest of his life, he started to interested and influenced by the eastern philosophy, in particular Zen Buddhism. As Allen Ginsberg recollects “...Kerouac was quite a great scholar on Buddhism and on Shakespeare. Kerouac would, especially in his later years read a lot of – well, he would read Kerouac and Shakespeare.”<sup>4</sup>

Generally, not much is known about his poetry, although he was probably the most influential poet of the generation. The reason is his approach to writing poetry as a prose and

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<sup>4</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 370.



vice versa. His set of rules called “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” is meant to be an advice on writing poetry and it made a great impact on Ginsberg’s typical spontaneous writing.

It was the curse of the generation to be beaten by drugs and alcohol and Kerouac was not an exception. He died in 1969 on internal hemorrhage caused by the alcoholism. He was dying quiet disappointed of the social situation, since it was

“...period of social violence calling everybody pigs, with self-righteousness and self-isolation which finally led to the election of Nixon. That gross element in the left repelled Kerouac who felt it was a betrayal of what he had prophesied. He prophesied a spiritual angelic generation that would ultimately take over with long hair and exquisite manners, you know “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.””<sup>5</sup>

## **2.2 Style of Jack Kerouac**

The exceptionality of Kerouac’s style can be divided into three areas: spontaneous writing, writing under the influence of blues and jazz music, particularly bebop, and the influence of the eastern philosophy and literature.

“Jack is the greatest craftsman writing today. He writes continuously, can write hundred words a minute [...] Jack’s style was discovered – arrived upon instinctively, not copied theoretical like from theology.”<sup>6</sup>

### **2.2.1 Spontaneous writing**

He was the first one among the Beatniks to introduce genuine extemporaneous writing, without revising and editing. He was famous for typing *On the Road* on a long scroll of paper, not on separate pages. In the same way he composed his poetry. As William Burroughs recollects:

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<sup>5</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 288.

<sup>6</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 5.

“It is very much, of course, in the tradition of Wolfe. The method of composition was very similar. It’s the flow and the writing at a great speed [...] sketching with words, and of the flow and using the first version – the first words that came.”<sup>7</sup>

His poetry was also often determined by the size of the paper, or notebook he was writing to. On that depended if he wrote long sentences, like French novelist, Marcel Proust, or just short images. This method inspired Ginsberg.

“...determined by the physical circumstances of writing [...] And I got that actually from Kerouac, who was that simple and straight about it. If he had a short notebook he wrote little ditties and if he had a long . . . a big typewriter page, he wrote big long sequences like Proust.”<sup>8</sup>

Considering the form and the writing method, he did not distinguish between writing prose and poetry.

“Kerouac realized a blurring of the line between poetic and prosaic was necessary for American (or any) literature striving for greatness; Shakespeare’s language ignores such boundaries. But if Shakespeare’s greatness is turning words into actions, Kerouac’s is in turning actions into words. [...] Its force is movement.”<sup>9</sup>

As many of his contemporaries, he did not approve of the strictly measured line. Using the meters, such as the most common iambic pentameter was unnatural for him. The key to poesy was the first thought and a power of the thought on the reader. Therefore, when he was to comment on who were the best world poets for him, apart from his fellow beatniks he mentioned such names as Spengler, German philosopher and essayist, whose *Decline of the West* ideologically influenced the Beat Generation, or Russian prose writer Dostoyevsky, or Spanish prose writer Cervantes.

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<sup>7</sup> Jack Kerouac et al., *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters*, ed. Bill Morgan et al. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 189.

<sup>8</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Sweney, “Old Angel Kerouac” in *Scattered Poems*, ed. Ann Charters ( Olomouc: Votobia, 1995), 166-167.

“The greatest French poet is Rabelais. The greatest Russian poet is Dostoevsky. The greatest Italian poet is Corso. The greatest German poet is probably Spengler for all I goddam know. The greatest Spanish poet is of course Cervantes. The greatest American poet is Kerouac. The greatest Israeli poet is Ginsberg. [...] The greatest Burroughsian poet is World.”<sup>10</sup>

He was very much influenced by the actual flow of speech, paying attention to pauses for breathing between utterances. As Ginsberg explains, it is the breath control that was a measure of the line for Kerouac, although he was not the first to come up with this idea.

“It’s developed, independently and theoretically, by Olson, I presume, from the early 40s, or earlier, out of Pound . . . but Kerouac’s most clear use of it, and most available use of it – Kerouac used it in such a way as it became immediately apparent in a way, a popular way [...] his is just simple common-sense practice [...] talk as you think. And talk as you talk, instead of talking as a literary person would be taught to talk if he went to Columbia.”<sup>11</sup>

### 2.2.2 Jazz

Since the development of the poetry was oriented to free, spontaneous, breath controlled writing, this style of Kerouac’s poetry went hand in hand with new styles of jazz that were becoming popular. Kerouac was fascinated by bebop, which arose in 1940s.

“... Kerouac had a lot of experience in Harlem in the early 40s. He witnessed the development of bebop with Esoteric records, with recording engineer Jerry Newman and Seymour Wyse [...] so Kerouac had a great immersion in black bop culture. He would listen to Bebop all the way, all night.”<sup>12</sup>

What is characteristic of his approach to writing is that he reflected the actual cultural development.

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<sup>10</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 377.

<sup>11</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 146.

<sup>12</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 508.

“Kerouac comes autonomously from sitting in the middle of Manhattan listening to the radio and picking up vibrations of a new breath, from the spades, and he does give credit there.”<sup>13</sup>

Bebop is mainly characterized, similarly to beat poetry readings, by fast tempo and the improvisation. Another thing that was special about bebop was that the style of playing was also determined by natural breathing and solos of different instruments then sounded like a conversation. This is the style Kerouac was trying for. He took the tempo, the intonation and the vocabulary he heard on the street and he tried to adapt it in his poetry. The leading representatives of bebop were jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, or jazz pianist Thelonious Monk.

“Kerouac learned his line from – directly from Charlie Parker and (Dizzy) Gillespie, and (Thelonious) Monk. He was listening in 43 to Symphony Sid and listening to “Night in Tunisia” and all the bird-flight-noted things which he then adapted to prose line.”<sup>14</sup>

Kerouac literally experienced what he was writing about, he was meeting the musicians, he was cooperating with them and the music of the period as well as the musical aspect of writing was natural for him. “...his approach was primarily oriented to Charlie Parker. He didn’t write about Charlie Parker, he participated in those situations...”<sup>15</sup>

As he was listening to these musicians he started to pay attention to their techniques and he developed his own prosody. In the introduction to his *Book of Blues* Kerouac describes that his poems are in the shape of small blues choruses because of the small size of the notebook he had. One thought or meaning of a word is not restricted by one chorus, but the meaning can be carried to another chorus.

“Kerouac on his own, in late forties and early fifties, from his own ear and from his own preoccupation with the changes of rhythm that were going on in Bebop music, was beginning to write long prose sentences, similar to Negro breathing and Negro rhythm in bop music as exemplified by Charlie Parker’s Bird-flight-noted runs of horn

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<sup>13</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 146.

<sup>15</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 276.

music. [...] and thus Kerouac arrived at this „spontaneous bop prosody,“ paying attention to the rhythm of what he was writing in his own athletic speech and to the breath-runs of it and to the lyrical quality of his own natural tongue. [...] Kerouac was struck by the lyrical rhythmical quality of the Denver provincial western-twang explanations...”<sup>16</sup>

Kerouac could benefit from the fact that he was very musical himself. John Cellon Holmes remembers:

“Although he played no instrument his scat-singing of a Miles Davis solo, for example, was entirely accurate [...] He always felt an affinity between his poetic method and the technique of jazz soloists, a link stated plainly in his notes for *Mexico City Blues*.”<sup>17</sup>

One of his poetical masterpieces, *Mexico City Blues*, is inspired by his experience with blues singers and the ability to sing it as well.

“Kerouac could improvise blues, which is *the* tradition, the great classic tradition. In that sense he was himself black. [...] So Kerouac spent a lot of time drinking in doorways with blues singers and was very close to the actuality of blues, universal blues, neither black nor white.”<sup>18</sup>

In the introduction to *Mexico City Blues*, he says: “I want to be considered a jazz poet blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam session on Sunday.”<sup>19</sup> He wanted the book to be understood as a blues improvisation.

“The full title of *Mexico City Blues* is *Mexico City Blues (in 242 choruses)*. Via the title, Kerouac instructs the reader not to regard the pieces individually. They are not named, but numbered, and since there is one poem to a page, the poem number echoes

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<sup>16</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 114-115.

<sup>17</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 242 – 243.

<sup>18</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 278.

<sup>19</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, ed. Marilène Phipps-Kettewell (New York: The Library of America, 2012), 1.

the page number and thus subverts consumes and subsumes the arbitrariness of the numerical sequence – highway mile makers have no individual importance, only as a whole in getting you from here to there or letting you know where you are if you stop.”<sup>20</sup>

Some of the poems not only have the jazz rhythm but also sound like a jazz musician scatting or imitating a musical instrument. “Mexico City Bop/ I got the huck pop/ I got the flooge mock/ I got the thiri chiribim/ bitchy bitchy bitchy/ batch batch/ Chippely bop/ Noise like that”<sup>21</sup>

He also dedicated the last choruses in *Mexico City Blues* to Charlie Parker and his death. Moreover, he is comparing him to Buddha, which is the biggest honor in Kerouac’s eyes. “Charlie Parker Looked like Buddha/ Charlie Parker, who recently died/ Laughing at a juggler on TV, after weeks of strain and sickness,/ was called the Perfect Musician.”<sup>22</sup> These are the last choruses and they perfectly summarize jazz and Buddhism motifs that are present in this collection of poems. “The expression that says “All is Well”/ – This was what Charlie Parker/ Said when he played, All is Well.”<sup>23</sup> Later he is mentioning the importance of Charlie Parker’s music, but also him being undervalued. “Musically as important as Beethoven,/ Yet not regarded as such at all,/ A genteel conductor of string/ orchestras”<sup>24</sup> Again he is making connection between Parker’s playing and the Buddhist concept of eternity. “...and Charlie Parker/ Whistling them on the brink of eternity”<sup>25</sup>

Not only he wrote about the American jazz scene and transferred jazz and blues rhythms to his poems, but he also cooperated with musicians and had the poetry readings accompanied by music. “So he wrote about the American jazz milieu. Very early, at a time when very few people were even paying attention to this music Kerouac made a little record with Zoot Sims and Al Cohn ...”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sweney, “Old Angel Kerouac,” 167.

<sup>21</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 170.

<sup>23</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 171.

<sup>25</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 276-277.

When he was writing about planned poetry readings for spring 1957, he disagreed with the idea of mixing the music and the reciting.

“... and I’m going to tell him definitely to play a number, let a poet read a poem, play a number, let a poet read a number, but NOT mix up jazz and poetry together like SQUARE OF SAN FRAN.”<sup>27</sup>

However, in 1958, during the recording with American jazz saxophonists Al Cohn and Zoot Sims the musicians were playing and Kerouac was reading simultaneously.

“That was the only recording of jazz and poetry that was original and recorded in the studio spontaneously. Kerouac would pronounce a little haiku like “The bottom of my shoes are wet from walking in the rain” and Al Cohn or Zoot Sims would take the rhythmic thing [...] So they would make rhythmic structures mirroring each other. Kerouac actually was a musician, or good enough to work with musicians. He had a sophistication, a prosody, a musical ear much greater than any of his critics were capable of . . .”<sup>28</sup>

### 2.2.3 Eastern literature

On the eastern literature influence, Kerouac writes to Allen Ginsberg in 1955:

“– How many times do I have to tell you that it’s a Buddhist, AN EASTERN FUTURE ahead – Greeks and poem styles are child’s play [...] study Sanskrit and start translating big Sutras never before translated and write poetry with Buddhist base. [...] better than that, even greater and deeper than Buddhism is Primitive Africa where old men when it’s time to die sit down and think themselves out to death, Pari Nirvana, they call it FACING THE WALL –”<sup>29</sup>

Unlike his predecessors, like modernist poet Ezra Pound, or Emily Dickinson and British romantic poet and painter William Blake, who took as an example Greek literature and based their language mainly on Greek expressions, motifs and images, Kerouac was the first to

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<sup>27</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 365.

<sup>28</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 276-277.

<sup>29</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 306.

introduce the Eastern literature style in American poetry. He studied old Buddhist sutras, *Diamond Sutra* in particular. The contribution of this form was, unlike the poetry based on Greek, over decorated and over complicated structure of the line and language, its simplicity and a thought expressed in a form of short statement.

“Get away from Pound. I dug him and he is deliberately Greek and fancy with his Oniothose Greek expressioni . . . balls. He and Hopkins suffer both from trying to show how fancy they are, and Yeats too . . . for poets I like Dickinson and Blake . . . but even they are ignorant because they simply don’t know that everything is empty in and out in ten thousand infinite directions of the undisturbed light.”<sup>30</sup>

For him, the poetry he wrote was on the first place a philosophy, the outcome of a deep meditation and insights into his mind. Instead of achieving perfection on the page, his aim was to capture the genuine instant thought from within.

“... insights that Kerouac had into spontaneous mind are also classical notions in Japanese, Chinese, and Tibetan poetry [...] they didn’t recognize Kerouac’s aesthetics of “First thought, best thought,” as relating to calligraphy, haiku, Tao, Tibetan mind forms, the whole teaching practice of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, in which seeing the mind is the guideline for wisdom. The discipline is in the *mind* first, not on the page revised over and over.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Zen Buddhism**

Throughout his life Kerouac remained a catholic, but he was fascinated by eastern philosophies, particularly Zen Buddhism, which was very popular in America. Zen Buddhism is an Indian Buddhism adapted in Japan and China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and its main philosophy was “... mind-control, its dispassionate rationality, its cheerful industry, not for profit but for service, its simple-hearted love for all animate life, its restraint of desire in all its subtil manifestations, its subjection of desire to wisdom and kindness, its practical and efficient rule

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<sup>30</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 306.

<sup>31</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 502 – 503.



of life, its patient acceptance of karma and reincarnation, and its actual blissful peace of Nirvana...”<sup>32</sup>

Kerouac applied this philosophy in the context of materialistic America of 1950s, with large divide between rich and poor. “...in March 1954, Jack moved back to his Mission Street hotel in San Francisco. There he composed *San Francisco Blues*, a downbeat sequence of poems about streetlife and winos, some of verses tinged with the first Buddhist phrases and ideas to enter Jack’s published writing.”<sup>33</sup>

In *San Francisco Blues* he is contrasting the militaristic ambitions of the countries like Japan that were the cradle of Zen Buddhism, and the pacifist tendencies of the philosophy. “Little anger Japan / Strides holding bombs / To blow the West / To Fukuyama’s / Shrouded Mountain Top / So the Lotus Bubble / Blossoms in Buddha’s / Temple Dharma Eye”<sup>34</sup>

Although he read *The Buddhist Bible*, a book with the most important Buddhist sutras with comments, all the time, he was not an expert in Buddhism and he never had any particular training in it.

His Buddhism, as well as the Buddhism applied in his poetry was intuitive and spontaneous. Locke McCorcle, a friend of a Buddhist poet and Kerouac’s friend Gary Snyder says: “He really had a Buddhist view of that – of equality of everybody. In a sense, though, I think he made up his Buddhism. I think the intuitions were right. He didn’t know a lot about it, didn’t have a lot of training in it.”<sup>35</sup>

He is writing about being inspired by the sutras in his letters. He discusses Dhyana, or meditation, which is one of the eight branches of yoga. “... let alone Dhyana, and that any man who does not, as you, practice Dhyana, is simply wandering in the dark. The mind has its own intrinsic brightness but it’s only revealable when you stop thinking and let the body melt away. [...] Read, as I am doing, the Diamond Sutra every day...”<sup>36</sup>

He is mentioning the state of “not thinking” in lots of his poems. He is pointing out that this state is the closest to step to reaching the Golden Eternity. In his “Poem” he is making a connection between the death and the state when you stop thinking. “because I

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<sup>32</sup> Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> Barry Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2012), 206.

<sup>36</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 308.

know what it's like to die,/ to cease mentating,/ one day I died..."<sup>37</sup> He continues to describe visions he had after "stooping smelling strapping flowers in the cosmos yard of my mother's cozy flower house"<sup>38</sup> which can be understood as taking some kind of narcotics and having hallucinations afterwards. He fainted and, as he is describing, he saw the God. "I was alone with God, who/ is God, who was Me, who was All"<sup>39</sup> This is the point that can be found in the Buddhist philosophy, that God is in fact present in everyone and everything and it creates one divine unity.

Again, in his "How to Meditate," where he describes the process of meditation, he is comparing the state of meditation to the drug use. "...instantaneous/ ecstasy like a shot of heroine or morphine/"<sup>40</sup> And again, the perfect state of mind is "blank, serene, thoughtless"<sup>41</sup> and it leads to the realization of what is the purpose of the meditation in Buddhism "with joy you realize for the first time/ "Thinking's just like not thinking -/ So I don't have to think/ any/ more""<sup>42</sup>

In his poem "Buddha" he is also mentioning the fact that Buddhism reminds him that thinking stopped because it was never present. Yet in the final lines "...how brittle/ the diamond, how quick returned thought, -/"<sup>43</sup> he is comparing the thought to a diamond, which is, interestingly, brittle as the thought itself. This poem is full of contrasts which, however, create a unity, because in Buddhism all is possible.

In Buddhism, Kerouac saw the solutions to the problems of the society. A poem called "Bowery Blues" is one of the most complex writings, because it combines his spiritual beliefs with the reality he saw in New York those days. In the opening lines, Kerouac prophesies that insight of him is a light that shines through the darkness of the image of unhappiness that he is about to describe. "For I/ Prophecy/ That the night/ Will be Bright/ With the gold/ Of old/ In the inn/ Within."<sup>44</sup> Then he is describing the Cooper Union Cafeteria and the sad destinies of

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<sup>37</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 428.

<sup>38</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 428.

<sup>39</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 428.

<sup>40</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 430.

<sup>41</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 430.

<sup>42</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 430.

<sup>43</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 432.

<sup>44</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 254.

the hopeless people who are present there. “Shin Mc Ontario with/ no money, no bets, no/ pawing his inside coat/ no hope of ever”<sup>45</sup> He is observing all the violence in the cafeteria. “As little sneery snirfling/ Porto Rican hero/ Ba t ts by booming/ His coat pocket/ Fisting to the Vicinity/ Where Mortuary/ Waits for a bait.”<sup>46</sup>

In this stanza we can also see how onomatopoeic Kerouac’s language is. Grouping words like “sneering sniffing” or “Bat t ts by booming,” the lines sound musical and dynamic. We can see his attempt to run away from the dissatisfaction and misery he saw in the world.

He seeks the help and refuge in Buddhism and in the enlightenment that Buddhism brings. “O have pity/ Bodhisattva/ Of Intellectual/ Ra Diance!”<sup>47</sup>

He continues to describe the unpleasant, absurd and contrasting scenes that he can observe in the Bowery Street like the bleak image of “Intent man with/ Broken back/ Balling his suitcase/ Down from Washington/ Building in the night/ Passing little scraggly/ Children with Ma’s/ Of mopey hope.”<sup>48</sup>

He is describing the poverty and misery of the people who do not have enough money for their basic needs. “Poor young husbandry/ With coat of tan/ Digging change in palms/ For bleaker coffees/ Than afternoon gloom”<sup>49</sup>

He can see no hope, but only the harsh reality that is irreversible. “O Bowery of Hopes!/ O absence!/ O blittering real/ Non staring redfaced/ Wild reality!”<sup>50</sup>

He does not like what he sees in the street and it hurts him, but he does not want to believe this is real and therefore it cannot hurt him. “The story of man/ Makes me sick/ Inside, outside,/ I don’t know why/ Something so conditional/ And all talk/ Should hurt me so.”<sup>51</sup>

Still he cannot take what he sees in the cafeteria. He is comparing the people to shadows, which might suggest that the people are not real for Kerouac, they are only images

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<sup>45</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 255.

<sup>46</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 256.

<sup>47</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 256.

<sup>48</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 256-257.

<sup>49</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 258.

<sup>51</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 260.

as well as the doom they live in. “And I see shadows/ Dancing into Doom/ In love, holding/  
Tight the lovely asses/ Of the little girls/ In love with sex”<sup>52</sup>

He seeks the refuge from these shadows in Sangsara, which is the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirths. The death and eventually the rebirth is the option of the escape. “I want to live/ I want to die/ I dont know/ Where tu turn/ in the Void”<sup>53</sup> “Then it’s goodbye/ Sangsara”<sup>54</sup> and later he mentions Samadhi, which is a deep, concentrated meditation. “And Samadhi/ Is better/ Than you think/ When it stars in/ Hitting your head”<sup>55</sup>

### 2.2.5 Haiku

Kerouac, unlike the generations of poets before, was writing without revising the poems. Therefore they might have seemed to be rather raw, but completely spontaneous and original. He wanted to capture the thought as it was, in the moment of creating it. This and his interest in the eastern literature was a fertile ground for haikus.

“. . . He was a perfect haiku man. Because it required two flashes with a gap in between, which the mind of the reader connects just as they were connected sequentially in the mind of the writer. So I think he broke the ground on that here in America.”<sup>56</sup>

Haikus are short Chinese poems, typically consisting of three lines with 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively. In haiku there is often a moment of epiphany, which is a new, enlightening realization.

“Kerouac’s poetry looks like the most “uncrafted stuff” in the world. He’s got a different idea of craft from most people who use the word craft. [...] his craft is spontaneity [...] instantaneous recall of the unconscious [...] prefect executive conjunction of archetypal memorial images articulating present observation of detail and childhood epiphany fact.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 260-261.

<sup>53</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 260.

<sup>54</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 260.

<sup>56</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 368.

<sup>57</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 248.

However, the epiphany and the meaning are hidden between the two images that the poet provides the reader with. It was Kerouac's brilliant imagination that allowed him to come up with two opposite images connected by one meaning. Allen Ginsberg says: "what Kerouac and I thought about haiku – two visual images, opposite poles, which are connected by a lightning in the mind [...] two disparate images, unconnected, which the mind connects."<sup>58</sup>

Like in the haiku: "The bottoms of my shoes/ are clean/ From walking in the rain."<sup>59</sup> the reader is making the connection between the rain and the clean shoes, probably coming to an idea of purifying effects of rain and expanding this image to other purifying situations in life.

The method of spontaneous composition is connected to the practice of Zen Buddhism and the fact that in Japanese calligraphic painting, people are literally able to capture one phrase in one image. "That method is related to other "classical" methods of art composition and meditation like Zen Buddhist calligraphic painting, haiku composition also a spontaneous art [...] People don't sit around revising haikus."<sup>60</sup>

Kerouac worked on the imagist American tradition, represented mainly by Ezra Pound. The imagists were, similarly to the Japanese haiku masters, capture one moment in one poem –image.

"There is no concrete picture in English, and poets could learn from Chinese to present image detail [...] the whole practice of imagism. [...] So what you are referring to is an *old* history in twentieth-century poetry. My own thing about two visual images is just from that tradition [...] what I'm trying to point out is that this tradition in American poetry in the 20th century is not something just discovered. It was done by Pound and Williams ..."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 248.

<sup>59</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 544.

<sup>60</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 252.

<sup>61</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 249.

Moreover, he was pointing out that you have to capture the image with the word in the very moment of experiencing it. Thinking about it later at home and revising it would not be genuine enough. Time of the composition is the most important part of writing haiku.

“And in the summertime you are supposed to say, “Ah, the firefly has just disappeared into the moon . . .” Make it up then and there. It’s got to come from the perception of the moment. You can’t go home the next day and send your friend the haiku and say “I thought of a funny one: the firefly just . . .” That wouldn’t be real. [...] Time of composition is the structure of the poem. That is the subject. What is going on in the mind during that moment is the subject. “Time is of the essence,” said Kerouac in a very great little essay on writing poetry one-page set of advice...”<sup>62</sup>

The fact that Kerouac’s writing was spontaneous and he usually did not spend much time revising what he had written before made him a perfect haiku writer in the eyes of his contemporaries. Gary Snyder is making a connection between Kerouac’s extemporaneous composition and Basho’s views on writing haiku. Basho was a famous Japanese haiku poet from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He was well known for claiming that one does not have to practice a lot to achieve a perfect haiku poem. In fact, you can do much better if you do it extemporaneously and instantly.

“Allen made a comment that Jack’s about the only one we knew who was able to spontaneously compose haiku that wasn’t boring without sitting on it for a long time. You know, in one of the Basho’s essays he says that for some reason the most practiced old-time haiku people can’t do as well as someone who’s just heard of the form for the first time and tries their hand at it. That that freshness and quickness is what makes it.”<sup>63</sup>

### **2.3 Drug abuse**

It is quite well-known that Jack Kerouac was addicted to alcohol and he was taking several types of drugs during his career. There are lots of controversial opinions on writing

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<sup>62</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 253.

<sup>63</sup> Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book*, 210.

under the influence of narcotics. One group of people says that the art is not real and it is only a hallucination and not real talent of the writers. It is typical for the Beat Generation to be labeled as a group of alcoholics or drug users, who did not respect the deep-rooted approach to writing. Using drugs for inspiration has been a common practice of writers of many different schools and from many different countries. The Beatniks were no exception. However, for Kerouac as a writer, the drugs were a way of letting the thoughts out without the restrictions of his critical self-perception. On one hand, he wanted to write as authentically as possible without revising what he wrote and on the other hand he had restraints to show the public the first draft of what he wrote. “For him, drugs weren’t a kick as the Beatnik stereotype would have it, but the means to get over the hill of self-critical censorship, to just let that flow of words out.”<sup>64</sup>

Lots of his contemporaries remember that he was, for instance, writing *Mexico City Blues* under the influence of marihuana.

Gregory Corso: “When we saw him writing MCB was the first time I saw him smoking pot.”<sup>65</sup>

Malcolm Cowley, the American writer and a critic says: “Jack “chipped” at morphine used that summer and under the influence of marijuana continued his experiments with poetry. The result was *Mexico City Blues*, regarded as his best set of poems. [...] Each chorus represented a single sitting. Every important aspect of Jack’s life to this point is contained in these sketch-works, if only as an echo, and Kerouac’s analogy with jazz is exact. Some of the choruses read like scat singing played back at slow speed, words “blown” for their musical values or their punning link to the subject matter that Kerouac had in mind.”<sup>66</sup>

He wanted the freedom of decision for every human being; he wanted a freedom of choice to take narcotics. In his poem “My Views on Religion” he is begging heaven to lift the Harrison Act, which was about regulating and taxing opiates, except for ones used in normal treatment. “– If the people want alcohol and dope/ let em have alcohol and dope and all/ the poison they can get if poison they want/”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sweney, “Old Angel Kerouac,” 171.

<sup>65</sup> Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book*, 190.

<sup>66</sup> Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book*, 189.

<sup>67</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 444.

## 2.4 The attitude to the politics

For the major part of his life, Kerouac did not want to be involved with politics or oppose the establishment. It was against his Buddhist conviction, which focused on spiritual values and the individual progress towards the enlightenment and rather than being engaged in the issues of earthly life. “The whole thrust of his work was towards individualism and freedom, the only thing is he very definitely took as stand on communist brainwashing.”<sup>68</sup> He did not want to be a supporter of any political party or a program. He had problems being named as a member of any political or antiestablishment movement. He objected to the fact that the Beat Generation was considered to have any specific program as well as he did not feel to be a supporter of any ideologies that were popular later, like hippies, who were considered to be patterned on the views of the Beat Generation.

Although he was left-wing oriented when he was younger, he was apolitical later. Considering Marxism, he found out there was a big clash between the lifestyle of his generation and the views he presented in his writing. “There were two aspects that Kerouac objected to. First the tendency among the Marxists to deplore our bohemianism as some sort of petit bourgeois angelism, archangelistic tendencies, and to deny the existence of God, to deny the existence of the great empty universal consciousness.”<sup>69</sup> He did not approve of the society being divided into classes, in his views prevailed the sense of individualism and spirituality.

“... Kerouac’s whole point was that “beat” went beyond the old Marxist ideological battle of class warfare and into some *practical* attitude of transcendence. [...] its *cleansing the doors of perception themselves*, in which case middle-class notions and ego notions and everything else gets cleansed, personal identity as well as national or class or race chauvinist identity as well.”<sup>70</sup>

Allen Ginsberg recalls that he was writing poetry and prose, which were reflecting the American reality without connecting it to any political views. His writing was based on the American tradition of the writers he admired.

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<sup>68</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 289

<sup>69</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 285

<sup>70</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 515



“Everybody was writing sort of rationalistic discourses putting down communism and very heavily political in a very negative way, in a very status quo way, and most of them were writing about manners, and good manners were Henry James and Jane Austen in those days. Whereas Kerouac was writing about the descents of angels in workman’s overalls, which was basically the really great American tradition from Thoreau through Whitman . . .”<sup>71</sup>

Kerouac felt that political scene was basically about the battle of lots of different beliefs and programs and the only thing he was dreaming about was a peace and freedom to every human being. The following line from his “My Views on Religion” where he is comparing himself to a dove, which is a symbol of peace, sums it all up: “I am not a Communist I’m a Dove”<sup>72</sup>

## 2.5 The criticism of his works

It often happens that the pioneers of one style are misunderstood and unappreciated by their contemporaries or the preceding generation of authors. It is even truer in case of such a contradictory personality as was Jack Kerouac. His style included so many until then uncommon elements that critics did not know how to approach it. One of his opponents was a poet and a critic Kenneth Rexroth. He was a representative of the San Francisco Renaissance, which was a group of avant-garde authors that emerged in 1947.

Rexroth did not consider Kerouac’s poetry to be authentic enough since his works included phenomena like life of black people and jazz that were not part of his culture and therefore Rexroth supposed he did not understand. In his article called *Discordant and Cool* Rexroth writes:

“Next he gave us his ideas about jazz and Negroes, two subjects about which he knew less than nothing; in fact he knew them in reverse. In this reader's opinion, his opinions about Negroes are shared only by members of the Ku Klux Klan. Jazz, he seems to believe, is

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<sup>71</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 279

<sup>72</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 433.

throbbing drums and screaming horns, pandemonium in the jungle night over a pot of missionary fricassee.”<sup>73</sup>

He also disagrees with his views on Buddhism found in his works and criticizes the drug abuse and the fact that he is writing about it. “Now, in this book of poems, he has turned to Buddhism and dope with similar results. [...] Mr. Kerouac's Buddha is a dime-store incense burner, glowing and glowering sinisterly in the dark corner of a Beatnik pad and just thrilling the wits out of bad little girls.”<sup>74</sup>

He is mentioning the misapprehension in his poem “Gatha”: “And nobody knows/ what to do/ with my woodshed/ blues. / Goodbye, Rexroth / until another time.”<sup>75</sup>

However, in most of the cases, the truth was that it was the critics who did not know anything about the themes he was writing about and they did not know anything about the Buddhist text he was inspired by.

“Kerouac wrote with great sophistication on Buddhism and the basic tenets of Buddhism being that existence in *Dukha*, or suffering – but most of his critics were not familiar with that. So when he cited, say, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* or *Diamond Sutra* or *Lankavatara Sutra*, probably many of his critics thought he was talking gibberish, without realizing he was citing very ancient and honorable texts.”<sup>76</sup>

The situation in the American literary scene and the way it perceived the Beatniks is summarized in the following Ginsberg’s statement:

“... our work was out in public and was heavily attacked, particularly Kerouac’s, by a sort of literary establishment that were pleased with the status quo in America many of whom actually were unconsciously involved with the CIA through the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which published *Encounter*, a “front” and a magazine which was being funded by the CIA. Kerouac’s completely unofficial version of America was very displeasing to them

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, “Discordant and Cool,” review of *Mexico City Blues*, by Jack Kerouac, *New York Times*, November 29, 1959, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/07/home/kerouac-mexico.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Rexroth, “Discordant and Cool.”

<sup>75</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 406.

<sup>76</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 274-275

and their immediate reaction was that it was some sort of cult of violence, exhibitionism rather than realizing it was a sincere heart-speech, a pacifist heart-speech really. So these attacks delayed the acceptance of both the mode of speech, that is the style of speech and the physiology, the rhythms of such a speech, as well as the general ideas and the intellectual background, which was Gnostic rather than rationalistic.”<sup>77</sup>

## 2.6 Kerouac’s views on the Beat Generation

As mentioned above, Kerouac did not want to label himself and his fellow writers as any kind of generation and did not want the generation to have ascribed any common features. “...Kerouac was *unnaming* generations saying it’s not a generation, it’s no “Lost Generation,” it’s just a beat generation. Everybody’s too beat to be a generation.”<sup>78</sup>

However, he accepted the fact that the literary criticism perceived them as a specific group of authors and was willing to explain his views on what the Beat Generation was. “Anyway I wrote the article they want, EXPLAINING THE BEAT GENERATION, all about or visions, yours, mine [...] I hope they publish the article, in it I show that “beat” is the Second Religiousness of Western Civilization as prophesized by Spengler.”<sup>79</sup> In one of his poems, “Gatha,” he is playing with the word “beat” and it gives the generation a religious nuance since the “beatitude” he is mentioning means supreme blessedness which is a term often found in the religious texts. “Humility/ is/ Beatitude/ THE BEATIFIC GENERATION”<sup>80</sup> Very interesting is also the fact he is mentioning “humility” and that by humility you can reach the beatitude, so he is pointing out that the generation is not a strong active protest against the establishment, but rather humble attempt to change the state of the world through some religion or spirituality.

When the American College Dictionary sent Kerouac their definition of the beat generation to approve, he sent them following definition:

“*beat generation*, members of the generation that came of age after World War II – Korean War who join in a relaxation of social and sexual tensions and espouse anti-regimentation,

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<sup>77</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 274-275

<sup>78</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 515

<sup>79</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 353.

<sup>80</sup> Kerouac, *Collected Poems*, 405.

mystic-disaffiliation and material-simplicity values, supposedly as a result of Cold War disillusionment. Coined by JK”<sup>81</sup>

## 2.7 The opinion of contemporaries on his poetry

Allen Ginsberg: “. . . The amazing thing, really, about Jack was that he really rose above . . . his parents, his own shyness or timidity, and really was like a universal mind when writing, taking it all in . . . negative capability, Keats – ability to hold a number of simultaneously dissimilar and contradictory ideas in his mind at the same time, without breaking down, or without exploding, or without having to choose, but representing them all in different dramatic form.”<sup>82</sup>

Gary Snyder: “. . . I gave a reading of it to the Berkeley Buddhist Church study group one Friday evening. [...] and said “Now these are interesting contemporary Buddhist poems.””<sup>83</sup>

Lawrence Ferlinghetti: “I didn’t use to think very highly of Jack’s poetry. I had the manuscript of *Mexico City Blues* and could have published it, but it just didn’t turn me on very much. I don’t know why. I wasn’t really tuned in to his voice enough. Now I can see it was all the same voice. I think he was a better novel writer than a poem writer. I’m putting it that way because it seems to me that the writing he did was all one, whether it was in the topography of poetry or in the topography of prose. It was the same kind of writing. If it were read aloud it sounded the same. It was a poetry and vice versa. Right there the line between poetry and prose broke down.”<sup>84</sup>

Gregory Corso: ““seriousness is only possible when there is humor; inseparable” [...] I say Jack has humor, of course, but he denies it; and I understand, I think, fully why; his ego is

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<sup>81</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 427.

<sup>82</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book*, 210.

<sup>84</sup> Gifford et al., *Jack’s Book*, 266.

such that, it is not that he sees the universe, it is the universe that sees him. When the universe fails to see Jack, then Jack will die; not when Jack dies, the universe dies.”<sup>85</sup>

## 2.8 Allen Ginsberg’s comments on his legacy

“Kerouac was extremely sophisticated, intelligent, and extremely learned and that he had a good grasp of ideas on wisdom practices. [...] So you could say on several levels in the psychedelic, ecological, the contemplative aesthetics, and the advanced, post-modern aesthetics the Beat generation early practices have developed and rightfully become much more understandable now.”<sup>86</sup>

“...he was introducing me to sound, to Parker. That was his main interest, then he was interested in the later developments. [...] changes that had been taking place in bop, and passing of these new musical techniques onto the white culture. People like Lennie Tristano and George Shearing picked them up and so Kerouac noted that and wrote about that.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gregory Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography: The Selected Letters*, ed. Bill Morgan (New York: New Directions, 2003), 153.

<sup>86</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 503.

<sup>87</sup> Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind*, 276.

### 3. Gregory Corso

#### 3.1 Biography of Gregory Corso

Gregory Corso was born in 1930 in New York to teenage parents. Since his parents were Italian, his mother soon moved to Italy. Since he knew she was a teenager, he did not blame her for abandoning him.

“[She] surely must have been a wild beautiful angel... I began to be all mother-conscious. Every poem I wrote had something to do with mother, even to this day, my poems always have traces of mother in them, a mother that I have never known.”<sup>88</sup>

With a short break when he was living with his father, Gregory lived in orphanages and foster homes. So from the early childhood he was leading a harsh life. After running away from home and spending some time in the streets of New York, he had to spend some time in reform school and in the mental asylum. This experience had a big influence on him.

“...screams, indescribable female screams, lone and painful so unimaginable coming from the woman’s ward across the hall [...] I had the feeling that nothing was happening to them, that they were all alone like me. And I came to know what human sorrow sounded like. [...] those children playing in the street, and that that sun, and those screams, all contained a whole [...] I would like to think it was there I became a poet.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 123.

<sup>89</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 125 – 126.

He was also imprisoned for thefts. However, this experience influenced him in a positive way. Since he was never formally educated and he left school very soon, in the prison he had the opportunity to discover and read the masterpieces of literature.

When he was released from the prison, he met Allen Ginsberg and they became friends. Corso became one of the lead figures of the Beat Generation. He wrote prose, for example *The American Express* (1961), theatre plays and criticism, but he is most famous for his poetry. His collections of poems include: *The Vestal Lady on Brattle and other poems* (1950), *Gasoline* (1958), *The Happy Birthday of Death* (1960), *Selected Poems* (1962), *Long Live Man* (1962), *Elegiac feelings American* (1970), *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit* (1981).

During his life he was very poor, but he travelled a lot. He travelled across the United States and he lived in many European countries as well. He relied on the financial support of his friend and acquaintances and lived rather bohemian life that included excessive consumption of alcohol and narcotics.

In 2001 Gregory Corso died of cancer. He is buried in Rome, near the grave of his beloved Percy Bysshe Shelley.

### 3.2 Influence

While at Clinton Prison, Corso had the opportunity to read world literary masterpieces and, apparently they had a big influence on him in terms of his beliefs as an author and style of writing. He called them “the books of illumination,” because he believed they brought light into his world then. “These books, which were to prove so vitally important to him, included *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Les Misérables*, *The Red and the Black*, works by Chatterton, Marlowe and Shelley, and the “1905 Standard Dictionary . . . with all the archaic and obsolete words.”<sup>90</sup>

In his poems we can find allusions to these books and their authors. For instance, in his “Sacré Coeur Café” he is mentioning the little Cosette from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. “...waiting for little Cosette – the size of eternity.”<sup>91</sup>

Not only we can find the allusions, he admitted that his style was to a large extent influenced by these authors, particularly the romantic authors.

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<sup>90</sup> Gregory Stephenson, *Exiled Angel: A Study of the Work of Gregory Corso* (London: Hearing Eye, 1989), 8.

<sup>91</sup> Gregory Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 66.

### 3.2.1 Romanticism

Romanticism was, apart from the others, a literary movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America and Europe. The English romantic authors like Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth, believed in spontaneous, inspired writing, the importance of imagination and visions when writing.

“...always felt social civic something’s-wrong-with-our-system poetry was uninspired ... when Blake saw the cold woe in his chattered streets his vision was not a civic one but heaven directed sight, eyes of an angel spotlighting the Thames, and lo to the swan, he saw the swan.”<sup>92</sup>

These are the same elements that we can find in the writings of the Beat Generation authors. Gregory Corso was no exception. In one of Corso’s letters to Lawrence Ferlinghetti he writes:

“My only aim is now, and has always been, to revive that which was always alive. ROMANTICISM. Anything other than romanticism was always laughable.”<sup>93</sup>

Corso took from them the idea that a poet has to write naturally and the poems must go from his inside, the poems should reflect the poet and vice versa. The poet must not be ashamed of what he writes and what he is and must not be two-faced.

“Why are Shelley, Chatterton, Byron, Rimbaud, to name but a few so beautiful? [...] they and their works are one the same, the poet and his poems are a whole. [...] How can anyone truly be a poet who goes to the john with a clothespin on his nose?”<sup>94</sup>

One of his favorite authors and influences was John Keats, who also introduced the ideas of changing the old forms of poems as the language changes, which was one of the aims

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<sup>92</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 106.

<sup>93</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 165.

<sup>94</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 4.



of the modern American poets, including the Beat Generation poets. “Been reading much Keats lately, and was struck by: “We must inspect the lyre . . .” from a sonnet in which he says a new form of sonnet is needed to cope with the new sound of the English language. Keats inspired me to write, what I feel to be, one of my best efforts, *In a Grecian Garden*.”<sup>95</sup>

Later he is mentioning that “In a Grecian Garden” is a Shellean poem, because Shelley used to mention the lost childhood and youth a lot in his poetry. “It is my Shellyean poem. In poem I cry my loss of youth, youth that once gave me Greece.”<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, “Ode to a Coit Tower” is also inspired by Shelley and his “Ode to the West Wind.” He is alluding to it in the final section of the poem “Though the West Wind seemed to harbor there not one/ pure Shellyean dream of let’s say hay-”<sup>97</sup> Where the west wind is both an allusion to the poem and it carries the meaning of the inspiration that author needs.

About Shelley he admired the fact that he was looking for the solution to the everyday conditions in the inspiration and imagination. “Shelley is a good example of a poet who, conscious and heartfelt for social conditions remedied such dour by ethereal inspiration.”<sup>98</sup>

He took a lot of inspiration from Shelley, but he understood that he was living in a different time and different place and he could not write exactly as Shelley did because it would not be authentic. What he took from him though was the fact that the whole idea is important, not the form, or the image, or a measured line.

“... I am influenced by him; not his way or style of writing, I’m not influenced by that (I can think of nothing more embarrassingly absurd as an East Side Shelley, or like Ansen says, “a nigger-Shelley” only at times I imitate his inspired flow, when I intentionally feel like, because to me it’s not the line or the image that’s important, but the entire idea, if I have any setness in poetry it’s in forming and measuring an idea...”<sup>99</sup>

This is why he emphasized the idea over the line. The concept always preceded the form he gave it to it. “...line means nothing; you can write a million of them, but if you put them into

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<sup>95</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 91.

<sup>96</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 93.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory Corso, *Gasoline* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1958), 19.

<sup>98</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 106.

<sup>99</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 152.

an exact measured idea, it'll mean something; for were I to measure a line and put it into a measured idea.”<sup>100</sup>

In one of his letters to Isabela Gardner he says “...the only poetry worth anything is the inspired poetry. Yet this abandonment of iambic pentameter and embracing of the “measure” is something new, and good. Though, I myself, well aware of such technique, am bereft of it; I still write carelessly and spontaneously and with much inspiration; though I’ve learned through time how to measure an idea, and that’s all that is important to me; if music be in poetry, then let it be unheard music.”<sup>101</sup>

Corso was also inspired by William Wordsworth and his poems, where he is mentioning and recollecting his childhood memories and places or talks about the astral life, re-births of a man into this world. For instance, Corso’s “In the Fleeting Hand of Time” is inspired by Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.”

### 3.2.2 Surrealism

Surrealism is an artistic movement of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that emphasized the usage the subconscious and dreams in poetry and therefore supporting the inspired, visionary and spontaneous beat writing.

Surrealism in literature emerged from Dadaism, which rejected the standard writing techniques, emphasizing word play, child talk and automatic writing. The authors were often inventing words and the words, or whole poems, often did not have any meaning. One of the major representatives of this movement was Tristan Tzara, who was a friend of Gregory Corso and their talks inspired him. “In Paris I see often and have talks with Tristan Tzara; we play a mad surrealist pinball game.”<sup>102</sup>

In the beginning it is necessary to say that Gregory Corso did not agree with the classification of the members of Beat Generation as successors of Surrealists. When he wrote about being interviewed in France he wrote following:

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<sup>100</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 152.

<sup>101</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 134.

<sup>102</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 135.

“...they wanted to get me to say the Beat Generation is founded on surrealism, because where surrealism left off, the Beats executed. It was strange because all he wanted me to say was “hate” “against”, and I told him no, I think cops are a necessary evil; I don’t think surrealism has anything to do with Beat, surrealism was a social clique, keeping its surreal for themselves, not for the man who sells *poisson*, whereas the Beat claim that it is possible for any man to write a poem, even a great one at that, if he only “free” himself.”<sup>103</sup>

However, there are certain stylistic and language methods that can be based on the surrealist literary tradition.

Gregory Corso is said to have re-introduced surrealism to the American literature of 1950s and 1960. He rejected the idea of having any literary program or theory. He rejected any restrictions in poetry. “...poetry that sounds like poetry is bad poetry. Just like an actor who acts is a bad actor. Poet is soul, soul is alive, don’t restrict it in poetry-shape; if you wish to restrict it, restrict it in whale-shape.”<sup>104</sup>

He did not want to emphasize the form and he did not want to be a part of any literary movement. “...he had re-invented surrealism. Apart from his love for Chatterton and Shelley, Corso was completely uninterested in and unintimidated by poetic schools, theories, traditions or trends.”<sup>105</sup>

His poem called “Early Morning Writings,” which is “a sequence of ten short haiku-like poems [...] occurrences taking place between dawn and noon on a single morning”<sup>106</sup>; is a good example of surrealism in his writing. In these ten poems he is juxtaposing two seemingly unconnected images.

“The mother’s talk/ The child’s ear/ – the plans of a kingdom burn”<sup>107</sup>

“Two men look into each others eyes/ – one shoe missing”<sup>108</sup>

He is mixing these unlikely related images to point to “the improbable” or “marvelous” and draw the reader’s attention to the strange unity of the world. “...the

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<sup>103</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 228.

<sup>104</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 134.

<sup>105</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 44.

<sup>108</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 43.

ellipses...to bridge the gap between the two juxtaposed images and thus for a brief instant traverses the passage, glimpsing the super-real, the marvelous”<sup>109</sup> The influence of Surrealism is also reflected in Corso’s language.

### 3.3 Language and stylistics

The Surrealists literally played with the syntax and meaning of words and Gregory Corso, especially in his collection *Vestal Lady on Brattle*, also tried to enrich his language with uncommon combinations of words, often abstruse ones, or not commonly used like “reverberate the mammoth”, or “autochtonic” “scrimshaw the dabblings” which we can find in his “Into the Aperture of an Unlikely Archimage.” In this poem, as in many others in his collections of poems he is “dislocating syntax, creating incongruities, disjunctions, juxtapositions, making new words, inter-mixing abstruse and archaic words with colloquialisms and hip argot.”<sup>110</sup>

In the specific poem, “Into the Aperture of an Unlikely Archimage” Corso is making this grammatical and syntactical chaos to disrupt our perception of language and open the reader’s eyes to a new, unrestricted language and therefore he is reshaping his imagination. This is a “radical technique ... the destructing of grammatical elements in such a manner as to disrupt the inherent logic and order of language. By means of sudden shifts and breaks in sentence structure Corso creates a series of ... fragments that are linked in new coherence as images. The repetition ... in the text engenders a new structure of meanings ... achieved by poetic correspondences and associations.”<sup>111</sup>

Corso is suggesting that the language should be “a vehicle of exploration and discovery. As the title of the poem suggests, the aperture of passage that issues from the lower to the higher, from matter to spirit, from the realm of the actual to that of the True and Eternal...”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 37.

<sup>110</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 17.

In his “Cambridge, First Impressions” he says he would like to “gather enough dream/ to sneak out a back door.”<sup>113</sup> The back door can be understood as a door to the imagination, super-real, subconscious and in all the other poems he is suggesting that through these new possibilities of adapting the language, the reader could achieve the impossible or marvelous.

In an “Ode to Coit Tower,” which is stylistically “Corso’s most uncharacteristic poem, blending echoes of Whitman and Ginsberg, and of Wordsworth and Shelley, with the poet’s own wild imagery, his quirky syntax and diction,”<sup>114</sup> he is combining the old tradition of odes and diction of Whitman and Wordsworth with these surrealistic tendencies.

Gregory Corso often makes use of personification “A favorite doll/ knows the pain of a child’s farewell.”<sup>115</sup> It is not only the doll, but also a windmill, a yak, a puma, Kindness and many other animals or non-living items that become alive in Corso’s poems. He was also making allusions to mythologies, which he was interested in. For example, in “Amnesia in Memphis” he is alluding Egyptian mythology. “No more will the curvy Sphinx/ With beggy prophets their prophecies relate—/ The papyrus readers have seen the Falcon’s head/ Fall unto the Jackal’s plate.”<sup>116</sup>

He is not only alluding to mythology, but also to many artists as: a composer Bartok, an artist Van Gogh (“Greenwich Village Suicide”), a jazz musician Charlie Parker (Requiem for “Bird” Parker, Musician), an author Emily Dickinson (“An Old Man Said He Once Saw Emily Dickinson”) and many others.

“...these allusions serve to counterbalance the many agents of doom and ruin who populate the poems in this collection. The allusions also serve as a sort of invocatory litany or formula, as a connection to sources of renewal, energy and strength that can enable us to transcend this level of existence, the realm of brute matter, the fallen world of suffering and death.”<sup>117</sup>

These allusions create a unity between our world and the times of the artists. By writing about the artists or the allusions, he is pointing to parallel cases, combining their lives with the lives of the characters in the poems. For instance, in the poem “Greenwich Village Suicide” where the girl thinks of Van Gogh as she is falling dead “Van Gogh may be read as an allusion to a parallel case: the sensitive, gentle visionary and idealist who was “suicide by

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<sup>113</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 105.

<sup>114</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 23.

<sup>115</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 51.

<sup>116</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 28.

<sup>117</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 13.

society” (as Artaud so aptly phrased it).<sup>118</sup> In this particular poem we can observe the “forces of sterility and death, in this instance as they are manifested in ordinary people, in society-at-large.”<sup>119</sup> We can see the indifference of the people who carry away her body and the store keeper who is only concerned about his business as well as there was always present the indifference to art and beauty represented by Bartok and Van Gogh in this poem. “We can deduce that such crass indifference to beauty and vision (Bartok, Van Gogh), to sensitivity and imagination was the true, ultimate cause of the girl’s suicide...”<sup>120</sup>

Another poem, “No Word” can be taken as his personal statement on how he writes poetry and how it should be written. “In the poem “No Word”, Corso declares his independence from the conventional uses and banal ends of language...”<sup>121</sup> In this poem he says “It is better a man a word elongate/ and eat up what another spake/”<sup>122</sup> and from this first line we can see atypical syntax of the sentence. He suggests, a man should “elongate” the words and so he should enrich the vocabulary. He should listen carefully what other people say and use the words. There is never enough words “For no man is word enough/ who complains, to boot/ the word he ate was tasteless tough”<sup>123</sup> In the next stanza he is suggesting that it is better if a person does not speak at all, than not to speak in a creative way and later he is mentioning himself as a poet and the restrictions that are placed on his language. It is better not to speak than to pay attention to them. “It is better man give up his diction/ become mouthless/ it is better/ that another man, myself,/ heed his restriction”<sup>124</sup> In the next stanza he says: “I know no word that is mine/ and I am tired of his/ It is better to sew his mouth/dynamite his ears hearless/ drown his vocabulary”<sup>125</sup> where he is suggesting that it is better to make it impossible to speak to all the poets whose diction he is tired of. He would destroy all the boring words in their vocabulary and make them unable to speak or hear because “It is better/ his eyes speak and listen as well as see”<sup>126</sup> and then he would pay attention to visual perceptions and visions, which makes one’s discourse richer.

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<sup>118</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 17.

<sup>119</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 16 – 17.

<sup>121</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 29.

<sup>122</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 47.

<sup>123</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 47.

<sup>124</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 47.

<sup>125</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 47.

<sup>126</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 47.

In his collections *Vestal Lady on Brattle* and *Gasoline Corso* did everything he is declaring in this poem. He played with the syntax, he invented words, he “elongated” them by combining them.

In his 1960 collection called *The Happy Birthday of Death*, he writes longer, reflective poems with “formal organization, reasoned argument and explicit formulation...”<sup>127</sup> However, his language is again based on associations, imagery, wordplay and syntactical changes.

“... less meditations or discourses upon their themes than they are imaginative explorations, proceeding by associative leaps and oblique correspondences, by expansions and fusions and transformations. These extended single-theme poetic statements are developed by means of a succession of images rather than a rational sequence of propositions...”<sup>128</sup>

Based on the unusual language he uses one would say that Corso assigned a great importance to picking the expressions he used. However, he says that worrying too much about the language would make him hesitate while composing a poem. “...Auden said he thought highly of my poetry but that I should not be “discouraged” from learning more of the language. I think I know what he means, but as it is I am getting too conscious of the language, and find myself hesitating in my “careless” “arrogant” choice of coinage.”<sup>129</sup>

He was very intelligent and well-read. He was a person of contradictions and it was apparent in his poems. He combined ancient mythology and ancient language with very modern expressions and techniques. He did not spend much time revising the poems and therefore he said about himself that his writings might have seemed primitive.

“I am Lower East Side, and I am Phrygia; it is my humor that allows the two to meet; my seriousness that keeps them apart. I think I tend to seem primitive because of the fat in my poetry; the pure flow alack revision, discipline, etc.”<sup>130</sup>

### 3.4 The conflict between a real and unreal world

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<sup>127</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 31.

<sup>128</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 144.

<sup>130</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 189.

The conflict between real and unreal world is one of the most frequent motifs in Corso's poems. "... the universal struggle of forces of spirit and matter, truth and falsehood, in which conflict poetry is a weapon in the arsenal of vision. The battle is waged at all levels, in the macrocosm of the world, and in the microcosm of each psyche, including, of course, that of the poet himself. This is Corso's grand theme, the essential context and argument of virtually all of his poems."<sup>131</sup>

Corso had a very vivid imagination and since childhood he experienced many strange visions.

"... Corso was subject on occasion to strange sensations and perceptions, walking visions and vivid dreams. [...] God among the clouds above the city, an apparition of a dying Indian mounted on a hoarse amid the city traffic, and another fiery lions surrounding him as he awoke at night on a rooftop. These revelations of an interior world, of an unknown reality, served to undermine for him the primacy of the material world, and to provide him with a source of psychic sustenance."<sup>132</sup>

He is striving for the "transformation of "the real world" into a realm of the mysterious, the magical and the marvelous"<sup>133</sup> not only by means of language, but also by inventing strange characters and situations.

"...bizarre characters such as the Vestal Lady, the fungi-man, King Crow, the talking mandrill and comedian-crab, and by animating grass as a lover and the sea as a conscious, articulate being. To the same end, Corso creates fantastic situations and events such as the marriage of a man to a sow, a corpse meditating in a morgue, the black-magical conjuring of a child in a vat, together with such phenomena as boxes of night and carpeted streets."<sup>134</sup>

In all of his poems, where the conflict between real and unreal world can be found, can also be found a belief that by means of lots of different ways of escaping to the unreal world we can win over the suffering we experience on earth. "*Gasoline* presents a myth or metaphysics of a fallen world, a debased state of existence... despite their preoccupation with suffering, persecution, alienation and death, these poems affirm man's potential victory over the external world."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 22.

<sup>132</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 7 – 8.

<sup>133</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 29.



A poem called “Puma in Chapultepec Zoo” is one of the poems, where a central motif is a motif of confinement. “...metaphors of the human predicament: the spirit caged in the material world, vision locked in the senses, beauty and grace held prisoner in a fallen world.”<sup>136</sup> The puma reminds Corso of his friend Ulanova, and Corso sees the hopelessness of their situations. He is trying to find the escape from the confinement of the real world in relying on imagination.

“Ode to Coit Tower” introduces the conflict of the poems in the book *Gasoline* “between imagination and the material world, between vision and the real.”<sup>137</sup> In the opening lines he is comparing the Coit Tower, which is a memorial in San Francisco, to the famous biblical Tower of Babel in contrast to the mortal people. He is implying the role of the tower as a symbol of everything divine and super terrestrial. “...jabbing your city’s much wrinkled sky you’d/ seem an absurd Babel squatting before mortal millions”<sup>138</sup> He is associating the tower with children and with poetry, and everything that has something to do with visions. He is making a connection between verses in poetry and the presents The Three wise men gave to Jesus. “...children of soda caps laying down their abundant blond/ verse on the gridiron of each other’s eucharistic feet like/ distant kings laying down treasures from camels.”<sup>139</sup> There is a contrast between the Coit Tower and the prison of Alcatraz. “... humankind’s aspiration toward beauty and vision is emblemized by Coit Tower, while all that confines, represses, restraints and oppresses that aspiration is emblemized by the island prison of Alcatraz.”<sup>140</sup>

The Alcatraz is pictured as a place of confinement not only of the men, but also of the dreams and visions. “Stocky Alcatraz weeping on Neptune’s table whose petrific/ bondage crushes the dreamless seaharp gasping for song/ O that that piece of sea fails to dream”<sup>141</sup>

He has a vision of Mercy being crucified, but still hoping for the freedom of mankind. “...Mercy lashed with cold nails against the/ wheatweather Western sky weeping I’m sure for humanity’s/ vast door to open...”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 23.

<sup>137</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 21.

<sup>138</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 17.

<sup>139</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 17.

<sup>140</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 21.

<sup>141</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 18.

Corso also thinks of the jail in Dannemora where he was imprisoned. “And I cried for Alcatraz there in your dumb hollows O tower/ clenching my Pan’s foot with vivid hoard of Dannemora.”<sup>143</sup> He thinks this experience and also the real world deprives us of our child like visions and imagination and also mourns “his own loss of vision and his consequent affliction by “reality’s worm”.”<sup>144</sup>

He is calling mythological warriors for help: “Queen Penthesileia and her tribe! [...] Thracian ships! Joyprints of pure air!”<sup>145</sup>

Then he is recalling how he came to San Francisco from Cambridge. He is describing what places he visited and everything he was imagining and dreaming about. “How happily mad I was O tower lying there amid gossipy/ green dreaming of Quetzalcoat/ as I arched my back like a rainbow over some imaginary gulph”<sup>146</sup>

In the state of madness and illusion he seeks the truth. “... illusion spoke Truth’s divine dialect”<sup>147</sup>

He can see two sources of solace: “heroes” and “saints” and “the knowledge that the physical world is written “Swindleresque ink”, that is disappearing ink.”<sup>148</sup>

He contradicts the earthly world to be real and he is not willing to pay attention to the earthly matters. As he writes in his letters: “So don’t just listen to what earth has to say, earth is jealous of heaven. Jealous because it knows it’s not even a star.”<sup>149</sup>

“Corso’s ode reverses the meaning of the imaginary, for the imagination is seen to be a mode of perceiving the Eternal, while what we consider to be reality, the world of senses, is seen to be imaginary...”<sup>150</sup>

In the poem “In the Fleeting Hand of Time” Corso is describing visions of his former life and pre-existence as the contrast to his life on the Earth after a re-birth. “The poem

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<sup>143</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 18.

<sup>144</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 21.

<sup>145</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 18.

<sup>146</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 19.

<sup>147</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 19.

<sup>148</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 22.

<sup>149</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 192.

<sup>150</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 22.

records the poet's experience of a state of pre-existence (including the memory of former incarnation) and his birth again on earth."<sup>151</sup>

This poem is inspired by Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from recollections of Early Childhood" however, Gregory Corso expresses his own concept of re-births and pre-existence.

"...resemblance to Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from recollections of Early Childhood" in its poetic treatment of the notion of pre-existence. The resemblance goes no further, though, than that of shared idea, and Corso's poem is no way imitative or derivative. The poem represents an important expression of Corso's personal cosmography and mythology... proposing not a systematic theology but an inspired poetic vision."<sup>152</sup>

Corso believed that by perceiving art one could forget about the misery of this world. When he was in Mexico and saw the poverty and harsh conditions he started to meditate about the purpose of poetry and art and he went to the gallery to perceive the beauty instead of the misery. "I ran from there questioning poetry, if people are like this, why poetry? When I see a man akin to animal in every form (toilet conditions here are frightful) I begin to wonder about the truth in poetry because all that I now see is truth, the poverty, the sorrow, the futility. But what poet wants that truth? Not I. So I ran to the museum and sat before Cézanne, Tamayo . . ." <sup>153</sup>

In "Botticelli's *Spring*" he is suggesting that the art has the power to change the real world and Botticelli not only has the power to paint on canvas, but transform the painting into the real world. "No sign of Spring! No Sign!/ Ah, Botticelli opens the door of his studio."<sup>154</sup> "magical property of art to affect the external world ... Botticelli causes spring to appear in the physical world by the act of painting it on canvas."<sup>155</sup>

There is also a theme of art changing the conditions of the world in a poem called "Uccello" which means a "bird" in Italian. In this poem "the poet praises the power of art to transfigure the disorder and even the violence and cruelty of life and to impose upon them, or discover in them, harmony, unity and beauty."<sup>156</sup> In the concluding verses we can see that the way the artist paints even seemingly cruel pictures may bring beauty and a sense into the

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<sup>151</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 25.

<sup>152</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 25.

<sup>153</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 15.

<sup>154</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 33

<sup>155</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 28.

<sup>156</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 28.

pictures as well as to the real world. “a silver man on a black horse with red standard and striped/ lance never to die but to be endless/ a golden prince of pictorial war”<sup>157</sup>

In the poem “Seaspin” he sees the escape from the dullness of the real world in the drowning in the sea.

“Transformation of the self and of the external world ... imaged as a drowning and a descent into the depths of the ocean where the solid body becomes fluid and graceful as the mind merges with the vast power and the abounding beauty of the sea.”<sup>158</sup>

In the poem “Amnesia in Memphis” there is also a motif of super-real represented by death and the existence somewhere between life and death, or between real and unreal world. The speaker “lives in a twilight state between life and death, perhaps a posthumous existence in his own dead body.”<sup>159</sup> The death might be redemption from the situation of the mankind. “The poem reinforces the volume’s theme of mankind’s state of “petrific bondage”<sup>160</sup> Corso did not have a negative relationship to the death itself therefore we might assume that he preferred the state of being dead, which meant to be in a super-real world, to life. After the experience of visions he had in Greece that helped him realize that death is in fact good he wrote to Allen Ginsberg: “... there that what we think is soul is in us is but death in us, lovely deaths but man destroys that loveliness by morbidity and foundations and institutions and churches to aid life unto death. [...] I did not need laughing gas pot lsd mescaline; it is not in drugs, it is in you, it’s there, waiting; and it’s not soul, it’s the lovely death in you...”<sup>161</sup>

He saw his poems and the writings of his fellow beatniks as something superterrestrial and therefore true. He said: “...everything but the BG stands amid the ordeals of lie. The BG is the happy birthday of death”<sup>162</sup>

The theme of escape (from syrupy heaven) is also present in “Transformation and Escape” In this case, the eternity is a “prison”, it is “An Eternity of labor” but “Like Blake,

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<sup>157</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 35.

<sup>158</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 29.

<sup>159</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 23.

<sup>160</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 23.

<sup>161</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 213.

<sup>162</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 193.

Corso champions the archetypal rebel over the divine tyrant.”<sup>163</sup> He writes: “I rose from the carcass of my torment.”<sup>164</sup>

Similar theme is present in “Paranoia in Crete” where the narrator – King Minos, son of Zeus and Europa chooses to reign in the kingdom of spirit as opposed to a real kingdom. “Corso’s king Minos has refused to serve a tyrannical god, has accepted the consequences of his act and has chosen to cultivate solitude and thus to reign in the one kingdom that cannot be usurped, that of the spirit.”<sup>165</sup>

In the opening line of one of his most famous poems called “Power” he says: “We are all the imitation of Power”<sup>166</sup> which can be understood “both in a Platonic sense, that we are each of us counterfeits of an essential and transcendent idea of Man; and ... we each choose to seek either mundane or transcendental power.”<sup>167</sup> He is proceeding from Plato’s philosophy that the real is often unrevealed and our lives are just shadows of the real ones. It is up to us if we seek the mundane or transcendental power. Everything physical is to be doubted and “You need Power to dispel light.”<sup>168</sup> In the next stanza he is suggesting that there is a greater reality than the one we can observe by our senses. “Since I observe memory and dream/ and not the images of the moment/ I am become more vivid and need not open the eye to see...”<sup>169</sup>

In the next stanza he is mentioning a baseball player Ted Williams, and comic-book heroes Captain Marvel and Buck Rogers.

“These figures represent to Corso embodiments of man’s heroic impulse, his aspiration to oppose the forces of evil and to exceed the limits of the physical world.”<sup>170</sup>

Later he continues with the statement “I contradict the real with the unreal”<sup>171</sup> which is summarizing all the ideas that can be found in Corso's poems. He is trying to escape the suffering that can be found in a real life to the transcendental one.

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<sup>163</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 40.

<sup>164</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 40.

<sup>166</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 75.

<sup>167</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 32.

<sup>168</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 75.

<sup>169</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 75.

<sup>170</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 32.

<sup>171</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 75.

“This brief statement expresses in essence the guiding principle of all of Corso’s work: his rejection of the tyranny of the real and his assertion of freedom from limitation, from causality, from “impossibility”.”<sup>172</sup>

“The poet is, in Corso’s view, a prophet of the Ideal, the Transcendental; he is a plenipotentiary of the Eternal, an “ambassador of Power”.”<sup>173</sup> The poet is the most powerful one, since his power is the power of transcendental, eternal. “I storm a career of love for myself/ I am powerful humancy in search of compassion/ My Power craves love Beware my Power!”<sup>174</sup>

Later he says that he, as a poet needs to explain the “failures of God” he says “It is not God that has made Power unbearable it is Love/ Love of Influence Industry Firearms Protection”<sup>175</sup> but he concludes that “This has never been my love/ Thank God my Power”<sup>176</sup>

He continues to explain what Power is and that he accepts on the power of life. He condemns only the power of Death. “The inauguration of Death is an absurd Power/ Life is supreme Power”<sup>177</sup> Power is everything; it is present in every single item in the world to those who want to see it. It is essential to poetry. “The world is power/ Being afraid is power/ What is poetry when there is no Power/ Poetry is powerless when there is no Power”<sup>178</sup>

Since he is the poet, he has the right to bring the power of the childhood, of the imagination to the people who have forgotten about it. “Beautiful people I remember your power”<sup>179</sup> He says he is writing this poem in the playground where this idea of new meaning of power came to his mind. He is recalling his childhood friends and he is thinking if they lost their power of childhood imagination now that they are working in factories and leading adult lives. “And I wonder myself now powerless/ Staggering back to the feeble boys of my youth/ Are they now lesser men in the factories of universe”<sup>180</sup>In the environment of the playground,

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<sup>172</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 32-33.

<sup>173</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 33.

<sup>174</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 76.

<sup>175</sup> HB Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 76.

<sup>176</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 76.

<sup>177</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 77.

<sup>178</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 77.

<sup>179</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 78.

<sup>180</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 78.

Corso himself feels powerless to the world of children and their imagination. “How powerless I am in playgrounds/ Swings like witches woosh about me”<sup>181</sup>

Whenever he is composing poems, he feels his power. “Whenever I play the fiery lyre with cold-fingered minstrelty/ A luscious Power gives me a heavened consequence good as sunlight –”<sup>182</sup>

Except of the vision, his power is also found in a humor. “That hand-grenade humor dropped down the hatch/ Of an armoured suit my proposed bit come doomsday Power!”<sup>183</sup>

In the ending stanzas he proclaims “The child of Power is laughter! [...] That drops my woe and all woe to the floor/ Like a shot spy.”<sup>184</sup>

### 3.5 Children in Corso's works

A form of escape from this world is also the opportunity to be a part of the world of children and their imagination. Therefore Corso often writes his poems from the point of view of children.

“... the perspective of a child (or of a childlike person) to point up the debasement and depravity of the world are central elements in Corso’s work. The reader is reminded, in this regard, of Christ’s admonition: “Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven”. The innocent spirit of Corso’s work also recalls a line from the poetry of Robert Burns: “A chield’s among ye takin’ notes / And faith, he’ll prent it.””<sup>185</sup>

Child perspective is present in “nursery rhyme meters, motifs and allusions, as in the poems “Song” “The Sausages”, “A Pastoral Fetish” and others.”<sup>186</sup> For example, the metre in the poem “Song” sounds like a nursery rhyme and the language is rather simple and childish

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<sup>181</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 79.

<sup>182</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 80.

<sup>183</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 80.

<sup>184</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 80.

<sup>185</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 15.

<sup>186</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 14.

too: “Oh dear! Oh, me! Oh, my!/ I married the pig’s daughter!/ I married the pig’s daughter!”<sup>187</sup>

In the poem “This Was My Meal” in the sequence of surreal images he “celebrates the imagination in its purest and most potent form, as it is exercised by children”<sup>188</sup> since he is writing from rather naïve perspective. “I turned to my father/ and he ate my birthday/ I drank my milk and saw trees outrun themselves/valleys outdo themselves/and no mountain stood a chance of not walking”<sup>189</sup>

Poem “Don’t Shoot the Warthog” begins “A child came to me/ swinging an ocean on a stick/He told me his sister was dead/ I pulled down his pants/ and gave him a kick.”<sup>190</sup> The meter again reminds us of a nursery rhyme meter as well as the simple language and surreal image. The poem carries a “...motif of predatory devouring and destruction of innocence and beauty...”<sup>191</sup> where “...a child personifying Beauty, is abused and devoured in a cannibal frenzy. It is appropriate that the child is first seen “swinging an ocean on a stick”, for this type of exercise of the impossible, the fabulous, is entirely in keeping with the poet’s essential surrealist aesthetic.”<sup>192</sup>

Another symbol of new life, beauty and new vision is not necessarily a child, but a young girl or woman. “The spirit of abiding vitality, of renewal and vision is frequently imaged by Corso as a young girl or a young woman.”<sup>193</sup> It is in poems such as “The Sacré Coeur Café” where the young girl is Cosette from *Les Misérables*, “Written in Nostalgia for Paris” where he contrast the “street full of raiders” with a youth of the “lovely girlchild” that has to be protected and in “Spring’s Melodious Herald” where he is mentioning “Lovely lady with your kind guitar/ twanging away at some great occasion for tender lambs”<sup>194</sup>

To sum up, children in Gregory Corso's work have one major purpose: “He would restore to us ingenuous eye of childhood, open us to the unfixed multi-verse of potentialities

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<sup>187</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 71.

<sup>188</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 25.

<sup>189</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 71.

<sup>190</sup> Corso, *Gasoline*, 41.

<sup>191</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 25.

<sup>192</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 25.

<sup>193</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 39.

<sup>194</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 74.



that constitute the life of the imagination that we might “gather enough dream / to sneak out a back door”.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.6 Corso's attitude to politics and establishment

Gregory Corso was not one of the poets engaged in the politics. His work was not aimed to be a protest or a fight for some concrete political or social views. In his opinion, the poet should write about and record the situation without any complaints. In his poetry Corso was looking for the alternatives for the one who is not happy with the political or social situation. His poetry therefore should reveal a world completely different to the earthly one and if capture the real situation, then it is better to do it “dadaistically”. He said “ ... perfect history, perfect because it is done, no matter what anyone does or says, it is done, history, finished; the new American poet accepts this, and so with no actual complaint records it, and records it dadaistically almost.”<sup>196</sup>

He was aware of the fact that the American poets were writing about the establishment and they demanded an improvement, but in their case it was impossible. “In America, yes, much civil social there, and poets are writing verses for its betterment, but they do it not as a duty but as a vast earthly joke, because these American poets lack remedy;”<sup>197</sup>

He was convinced that good poetry should not involve politics, unless it is treated with exaggeration. “...politics and betterment of earthly conditions is death to poetry, unless these newspaper subjects be treated with light, love and laughter, like Allen’s *Howl* and my *Bomb*.”<sup>198</sup>

For him, the politics was too petty to be a poetry subject. After writing “Bomb” he explains it to Lawrence Ferlinghetti: “...stop accusing me of politics. Politics is just a toy in the great use of things.”<sup>199</sup>

When he was writing about it to an American poet Paul Blackburn, he explained the exaggeration and parody he put into this poem. He did not intent to write a poem full of hatred. It is a way of alluding Tolstoy’s theory of nonviolence.

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<sup>195</sup> Stephenson, *Exiled Angel*, 14.

<sup>196</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 107.

<sup>197</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 107.

<sup>198</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 107.

<sup>199</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 159.

„ I wrote a long poem about A-Bomb about how I would like to put a lollipop in its furcal mouth, a wig of goldilocks on its baldy bean, and about how everybody wants to die of cancer old age electric chairs but not by bomb, and about how I want to eat the bombs boom, etc. all very much against bomb, but in right way, I feel. One must not hate, for that which one hates is apt to destroy.”<sup>200</sup>

In another letter to Lawrence Ferlinghetti he is explaining one line from the poem with a similar meaning as mentioned above. ““pregnant rat in a corner before the raised broom nations of the world,” meaning that in order to out step the bomb or anything that is capable of destruction and everything is capable of destruction you must present that rat not a broom but a velvet cushion.”<sup>201</sup>

In a letter to his friend Isabela Gardner Corso is explaining that the content of the poem is humanity and love. “its content is one of love, love for life, love for man”<sup>202</sup> He is completely free from the feelings of being hurt and it would be humiliating for him to complain in his poetry. In his opinion, this would degrade his poems. “I have not once brought the muse down so low as to weep against the “hurt” caused me. There hasn’t been any hurt; it has all been perfect.”<sup>203</sup>

Most of the contemporaries and the public did not understand the content of “Bomb.” Moreover, Ferlinghetti thought it was a fascist poem. Jack Kerouac wrote in his letters: “(Because I don’t really agree with „Bomb“ world-apocalypse is good, I believe in people saying it won’t happen at all because we’ve evolved now and become smart human race. I hope).”<sup>204</sup>

When Corso was publicly reading this poem in London, the people did not like it, because they did not see the exaggeration it was written with and the humanistic message. “...they threw [a] shoe at me for reading crazy *Bomb* poem I wrote – all about the Bomb being lonely and sad because everybody wants to die by cars lightning drowning electric chairs, but not by *Bomb*. A parody really, but they couldn’t get it...”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 104.

<sup>201</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 137.

<sup>202</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 133.

<sup>203</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 133.

<sup>204</sup> Kerouac et al., *The Letters*, 415.

<sup>205</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 105.

Corso was very happy with this poem and he was proud of it. He explains how it came to his mind: “Summer, on drugs, H and O, in this here room (in Paris), with great global weeps about life I suddenly woke up to, and thus *Bomb*.”<sup>206</sup>

While writing it, he could not figure the best ending. “Really great poem – best I’ve ever done. I had difficulty with ending – didn’t know whether to end on hopeful note or funny note or bitter note. I decided upon the last, alas.”<sup>207</sup> The poem really ends bitterly: “that in the hearts of men to come more bombs will be born”<sup>208</sup>

### 3.7 Corso's views on the Beat Generation

Even nowadays, it is a very common opinion that the writings of beatniks are full of politics and pessimism. Interestingly, the authors themselves did not perceive it that way and it was insulting for them. The Beat Generation and its writer were not black and white. They, and especially Corso, were contradictory. Contradictory in their poetry, in their opinions, in what they thought and what they actually did and they were progressing in their craft. When Gregory Corso was explaining to a critic, poet and a teacher Willard Maas and his students what the Beat Generation was he said following: “...the Beat Generation is insulted when linked to doom, thoughts of doom, fear of doom, anger of doom. The Beat Generation is because truth rests on the contradictory rattans of the soul. The BG is very logical. To be logical is to be contradictory. Contradiction is the basis of logic. [...] The poet’s trek is to go beyond the obvious. [...] infinity is a dog sitting at its own feet. [...] Nothing means noting. [...] only the wonders of sunset means anything.”<sup>209</sup>

When Corso read Life article about the Beat Generation, he was shocked as well. He could not find any similarity to what they were writing about and what the opinion of the journalist was.

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<sup>206</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 181.

<sup>207</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 111.

<sup>208</sup> Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*

<sup>209</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 193.

“I read the article and asked myself what has night-horns sun-flies tons of dried fire to do with this big dark article? Here is no poetry, here is Stalin Trotsky politics, a no-politics politics; I read the article and I didn’t know the Ginsberg and the Kerouac he was writing about, mostly the Ginsberg who he set up as a raving intentional system breaker, how he must despise Allen!”<sup>210</sup>

Contradictory to the “gloomy” image in the newspapers and magazines, when Corso was interviewed he revealed that the basic principle of their poetry was love. “Was interviewed here by newspaper on BG. I told them the only answer to everything was love.”<sup>211</sup>

This is how he explained the meaning of being a “hipster” in that period. He explained that the beliefs of the majority of the writers were based on Buddhist beliefs and if not Buddhist, then definitely spiritual and unconventional.

“The actual meaning of “hip” [...] it meant, awareness; that almost Nirvana state of KNOWING; and most of these young kids I knew at time, who at time Kerouac branded as Beat; were young men from colleges, who abandoned all conformity, and took to their soul selves and tried to live in what they considered TAO.”<sup>212</sup>

Gregory Corso was rather disgusted by the fabricated theories about the Beat Generation and he considered it to be unworthy of the poetry. “...this “beat generation” nonsense lessens the poetic intent, no wonder the academy poets keep aloft. Poetry is not for public humor make-fun-of-kicks, ridiculous, the whole thing, sardine salesmen.”<sup>213</sup>

Gregory Corso was a controversial figure of the Beat Generation, but the truth is he remained misinterpreted during his life and maybe even after his death. He never identified himself with the “Corso” the critics were writing about nor did he identify with his fame and the confusion it brought to his life. His attitude can be summed up in the following statement: “I like writing poems but I don’t like the people who hover over it, the feeling I get when I

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<sup>210</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 227.

<sup>211</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 113.

<sup>212</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 132.

<sup>213</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 109.

write is my joy not this aftermath, who is this Beatnik Corso they write about? I don't know him."<sup>214</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Although these two men were friends and fellow writers, they disagreed with each other in many aspects. In the beginning, Corso did not agree with the concept of spontaneous writing meaning take note of the first thought and leave it like that without revising. He said about Kerouac and his style of writing: "Kerouac impressed me and befogged me. It's all right for prose, but not poesy. I told Kerouac that the last time I saw him. [...] No, poetry needs time and time and time."<sup>215</sup>

Corso assumed that re-writing is essential and in his correspondence we find a lot of passages about how he wrote specific poems and how he edited them and doubted their quality. In case of "Power" he came to a conclusion that not all the poems will carry the original meaning and intended message after re-working them.

"Rewriting, I find, is most [of] the pleasure of writing. In the case of *Power* there was no pleasure, no ease thus a bad reworking of the poem ensued . . . but how to rewrite such poem as *Power*? I thought this: *Power* is not a poem, or it is but use it as a prose piece, a paramyth, or what have you. Call a work prose and surely no one would be apt to question one sentence of the work."<sup>216</sup>

After a few years of writing, he came to a conclusion that there is no right way in poetry. "...there can't be right and wrong way with poetry, so in other words I don't know what I'm talking about..."<sup>217</sup> In those times; there is much less criticism of his works and works of Kerouac in his letters. In his later poems he stopped revising so much, however, we may conclude that the spontaneity of writing and "first thought best thought" concept was Kerouac's domain.

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<sup>214</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 212.

<sup>215</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 25.

<sup>217</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 107.

As we already know, Jack Kerouac was a passionate Buddhist and he was inspired by the philosophy, the concept of Nirvana, and the theory that nothing is real in this world and there is another “state of consciousness” where one can escape. The motif of escape is something that these two poets had in common. Corso had the concept of “Swindlersque ink” from the “Ode to a Coit Tower.” He was escaping to different surreal worlds and Kerouac was escaping to the state of meditation and Buddhism should have helped him to overcome the difficulties of life. In one letter to Allen Ginsberg, Corso says that Jack and Buddhists are right.

“I’ll tell you, they’re right about living a clown in a circus of power, that’s Nirvana, the ability to step out of a small magic box, and lo, into the arena, for all to see, and laugh; that’s what Jack’s actually looking for, humor. In humor all is answerable; of course laughing gas, what else? Happy, clowny, deep. And I full well understand the “disappearance”, its sensation and reason; Swindlersque Ink has finally been seen by you; before you just liked it and thought it a mad image and coinage of words, with the sound of word sense; the tie between Swindlersque Ink and eradication – of course it means “universe disappearance.”<sup>218</sup>

However, Corso did not fully agree with Jack's Buddhist belief and he thought he is relying on it too much, as a man and as an author. He thought Buddhism cannot answer his questions or anyone’s questions about life and writing therefore Kerouac’s effort for Nirvana was irrelevant to him.

“And besides you angels are too New York and life and worry or no and drinkers, eaters, livers, girl mad man, to ever see Nirvana. What right have you to see it? Especially Jack, just because he asks to see it? Just because he believes? He’ll never see that kind of Nirvana, nobody will. But of course everybody can just simply by creating Nirvana; just like Beauty. Beauty never was, Beauty is created.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 147.

<sup>219</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 155.

We may conclude that the two poets agreed on the motif of escape from this world, but each of them did it by other means. Kerouac relied on Buddhism and Corso made up his own imaginary surreal situations, used the allusions to the mythology, or other artists.

Regarding their attitude to the political situation, Jack Kerouac tended to be apolitical in most of his writings, Corso mentioned the global, or the American political situations in several poems, like, for instance, "Power," but it represented his pacifist views.

Considering the language and prosody, both of them were trying for novelty and did not want to restrict the form of the poem, however they were both influenced by specific genres. Kerouac also relied on the language of sutras or other eastern poetical forms as well as blues and jazz rhythms, whereas Corso was inspired by the romantic poetic tradition, old lyrical forms such as odes, but also simple meter of nursery rhymes.

Unlike Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso did not found his prosody on jazz rhythms. He wrote about jazz, but he did not want to be recognized as a writer inspired by the Afro-American jazz culture and ghetto life. Jack Kerouac felt to be a part of the culture, but Gregory Corso was only observing it. The following citation from his letter also serves additional evidence that later he did not revise his poems.

"...he branded me a "bopster." Ha! How wrong is he! I hate bopsters and all its meaning. I thought it was an unfair review because he was mistaken – the only truth in review was that I spend no time overtime on my poems. I agree, but I wish it that way. There's something unfair about re-working poetry: Poetry is poetry. I only wrote about jazz as an observer and a product."<sup>220</sup>

To sum up, what these two personalities of Beat Generation had in common was the method of spontaneous writing, even though Kerouac was basically a founder of the tradition and Corso developed it during the years.

The other common feature of their poetry was the motif of escape to some kind of other reality. They both brought novelty in the language, either by inventing new words or using onomatopoeias, introducing new beliefs and philosophies.

The biggest difference was the source of inspiration and therefore the different approaches to the composition.

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<sup>220</sup> Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 14.

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## Czech Résumé

Ve své bakalářské práci se zabývám porovnáním dvou výrazných beatnických básníků, Jacka Kerouaca a Gregoryho Corsa.

Snažím se shrnout specifika tvorby obou básníků, jejich styl v kontextu vlivu jiných žánrů a období, či jiných typů umění, jako je například hudba, nebo výtvarné umění. U Jacka Kerouaca to byla především americká jazzová scéna a zen buddhismus, u Gregoryho Corsa je patrný vliv anglických romantických básníků a francouzských surrealistů.

Také se zaměřuji na novátorství, které přinesli do americké i světové poezie, a to je především u obou spontánní psaní a jejich postoj k němu.

V kapitolách zaměřených na jednotlivé prvky tvorby analyzuji více, či méně podrobně básně obsahující daný prvek.

V závěru pak porovnávám styl těchto básníků. Mezi nejvýraznější společný prvek tvorby obou dvou patří motiv úniku z pozemského světa a metoda spontánního psaní. Za nejvýraznější rozdíl považuji jejich postoj k používání jazzové/bluesové rytmiky při kompozici a také reflektování vlivů různých literatur v jejich dílech.