

Gregory Corso:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Corso, Gregory1930-
Title:	Gregory Corso Collection
Dates:	1890-1978 (bulk 1950-1976)
Extent:	10 boxes (4.17 linear feet), 1 galley folder, 2 oversize folders, 4 cassette tapes
Abstract:	The collection consists of Corso's holograph and typescript poems, untitled works, essays, and reviews, working notebooks containing drafts of poems, prose works and sketches, and correspondence. Poems of particular interest include sections of <i>The Geometric Poem</i> , a proof copy of <i>Selected Poems</i> , and two versions of <i>Way-Out: A Poem in Discord</i> . Correspondence includes letters from Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, and Peter Orlovsky.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-00936
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research. Advance appointment required to use audio materials and to view items in the Art Collection.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases, 1964-1982 (R2079, R2209, R4193, R7954, R7998, R8225, R9722)
Processed by:	Chelsea S. Dinsmore, 2000
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Gregory Corso, 1930- , one of the original Beat poets, was born to Italian parents in Greenwich Village. His mother returned to Italy shortly after his birth, and he spent his first thirteen years living in various orphanages, foster homes, and reform schools. At thirteen he began living on the streets, sleeping in subway stations, and resorting to petty thievery to eat. At sixteen he participated in an organized robbery which netted \$21,000, was caught, and sentenced to three years in Clinton State Prison.

Corso used his time in prison to good advantage, reading the better part of the prison library and studying a 1905 English dictionary inherited from a fellow prisoner. It was in the prison library that he discovered Shelley and developed a life-long enthusiasm for the poet. It was during these years in prison that he began to write.

Released from prison in 1950, Corso met Allen Ginsberg in the Pony Stable, a Greenwich Village bar. Ginsberg took an interest in Corso's poetry and introduced him to Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. Over the next several years Corso eked out a living doing manual labor and other marginal jobs. During 1954-55 he sat in on classes at Harvard where his one-act farce *In This Hung-Up Age* was performed, and his first volume of poetry, *The Vestal Lady on Brattle and Other Poems* (1955), was privately published. In 1956 he moved to the West Coast following Ginsberg and Kerouac. He met Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg's publisher, who published a volume of Corso's poems, *Gasoline*, in 1958. Corso also joined Ginsberg in literary events where Ginsberg performed his long poem *Howl*. In 1957 he joined fellow Beats Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Peter Orlovsky on a trip to Tangier to visit William Burroughs.

Over the next five years Corso traveled throughout Europe, returning occasionally to the United States for poetry readings. He supported himself with royalty and advance checks and loans from friends. His anxious moments at the American Express offices, waiting for checks, provided material for his only novel, *American Express* (1961).

Since 1961 he has alternated residences between New York City and the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. During his stays in New York he has taught occasionally at the State University of New York, Buffalo.

Sources:

Dictionary of Literary Biography -- Volume 16: The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America. Ann Charters, Ed. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983).

Watson, Steven. *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995).

Scope and Contents

Holograph and typescript poems and working notebooks make up the bulk of the Gregory Corso Collection, 1890-1978 (bulk 1950-1976), supplemented by prose works and correspondence. The collection is organized into three series, arranged alphabetically by author or title and chronologically where possible: Series I. Works, 1950-1975 (8 boxes); Series II. Correspondence, 1954-1976 (1.5 boxes); and Series III. Third-party Works and Correspondence, 1890-1968 (.5 box). This collection was previously accessible through a card catalog, but has been re-cataloged as part of a retrospective conversion project.

The Works Series is divided into four subseries: A. Poetry, 1950-1975 (4 boxes); B. Other Works, 1952-1978, (1 box); C. Notebooks, 1957-1973 (3 boxes); and D. Personal Papers, 1964-1965 (1 folder). The poetry section contains hundreds of Corso's poems, many untitled and most undated. Of particular interest are sections of *The Geometric Poem*, a proof copy of *Selected Poems*, and two versions of *Way-Out: A Poem in Discord*. The other works section includes a quantity of fragments and untitled pieces of works, essays, and reviews in addition to partial versions and fragments of *The Computer and the Centaur* and *J.F.K.: A Little Verse Play*. The notebooks section contains 32 notebooks in which Corso wrote down thoughts and ideas. They contain numerous drafts of poems and prose works as well as ink and pencil sketches. The personal papers section has a few items including an address book and a tax statement. Titles and first lines of untitled poems, including those in the notebooks, are listed in the Index of Works at the end of this guide.

The Correspondence Series includes a few letters by Corso but is composed primarily of letters he received. Of particular note are letters from Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, New Directions (publishers), and Peter Orlovsky. Individual correspondents are listed in the Index of Correspondents at the end of this guide.

The Third-party Works and Correspondence Series is made up of a few works by other authors including a partial stage adaptation of Corso's *American Express* and two poems by Allen Ginsberg, and letters between friends and associates of Corso, many concerning Corso. There is also an 1890 letter from the Russian American National League to a Mrs. G.A. Frost. Individual correspondents are included in the Index of Correspondents.

Located elsewhere in the Ransom Center are 123 ink, crayon, and watercolor images created by Corso. A number of the pictures are in two sketchbooks and the subjects of the works include self portraits, landscapes, human figures, nature, animals, and street scenes. Most of the images in the drawings are abstract; some are illustrations for *Earth Egg*, a poem by Corso. Also located in the Art Collection are several caricatures of Corso and other Beat poets by several artists. There is also a proof sheet of Corso in twelve poses located in the Literary Files of the Photography Collection.

Other materials associated with Gregory Corso may be found in the following collections at the Ransom Center:

- Cassady, Neal
 - Ford, Charles Henri
 - *Genesis West*
 - Ginsberg, Allen
 - Lehmann, John
 - *New Departures*
 - Paterson Society
-

Index Terms

People

Burroughs, William S., 1914-

Ferlinghetti, Lawrence

Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-

Orlovsky, Peter, 1933-

Organizations

New Directions

Subjects

American poetry -- 20th century

Beat generation

Document Types

Galley proofs

Sound recordings

I. Works and Papers, 1950-1978

A. Poetry, 1950-1975

Unidentified poems **Box 1 Folder 1**

A **Folder 2**

America Rounding the Bend, 1965, typescript and copy with author revisions, 17pp. **Folder 3**

B **Folder 4**

Black Christmas, 1963, eight typescripts, some partial, 8pp. **Folder 5**

C **Folder 6**

D **Folder 7**

E **Folder 8**

F **Folder 9**

G-H **Folder 10**

The Geometric Poem, holograph, typescript, and copies of various sections with author revisions, 48pp. **Box 2 Folder 1**

Golem, two holograph versions on legal pads, includes a pen sketch, 39pp. **Folder 2**

Halloween, holograph and typescript versions with author revisions, 20pp. **Folder 3**

I-Im **Folder 4**

In-Iz **Folder 5**

J-L **Folder 6**

M **Folder 7**

N **Folder 8**

O	Folder 9
P	Box 3 Folder 1
Q-R	Folder 2
S	Folder 3
<i>Selected Poems</i> , 1962, typescript and proof copy, 91pp.	Folder 4
T-Tho	Folder 5
Thr-Tz	Folder 6
U-Wa	Folder 7
Various fragments, drafts, and untitled poems	Box 4 Folder 1
War-Babies War, 1965, holograph and typescript versions with author revisions, one in French, 49pp.	Folder 2
<i>Way-Out: A Poem in Discord</i> , 1956-1975, typescript and printed versions with revisions, 36pp.	Folder 3
We-Wh	Folder 4
Wi-Z	Folder 5
Window Reflections Real and Fanciful, holograph and typescript versions with author revisions, some fragments, 25pp.	Folder 6
B. Other Works, 1952-1978	
Unidentified pieces and fragments of prose	Box 4 Folder 7-9
Untitled works	Box 5 Folder 1
Untitled play	Folder 2
A-B	Folder 3
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<i>The Computer and the Centaur</i> , holograph, typescript and copies of sections and fragments, with author revisions, 99pp.	Folder 5
E-N	Folder 6
Fragment's of A Poet's Mind, typescript and copy with author revisions, 74pp.	Folder 7
J.F.K.: A Little Verse Play, holograph and typescript versions and fragments with author revisions, 51pp.	Folder 8
Notes on the beat generation, holograph and typescript notes and fragments with author revisions, 31pp.	Folder 9
O-Z	Folder 10
<i>The Other Side of April</i> , holograph and typescript fragments and pages with author revisions, 58pp.	Folder 11
C. Notebooks, 1957-1973	
Holograph drafts and sketches in coverless notebook, 1957, 173pp.	Box 6 Folder 1
Holograph drafts, sketches, and collages in spiral sketchbook, 1959, 77pp.	Folder 2
Holograph drafts and ink sketch in coverless notebook, 1959, 7pp.	Folder 3
Holograph drafts in spiral notebook, 1961-62, 56pp.	Folder 4
Holograph drafts in blue notebook, 1961, 88pp.	Folder 5
Holograph drafts and sketches in notebook, 1961, 77pp.	Folder 6
Holograph drafts in notebook, 1962, 95pp.	Folder 7

Holograph drafts and ink sketches in blue diary, 1962, 131pp.	Folder 8
Holograph drafts in black notebook, 1962, 76pp.	Folder 9
Holograph drafts in orange notebook, 1962, 67pp.	Box 7 Folder 1
Holograph drafts in lined tablet, 1962, 31pp.	Folder 2
Holograph drafts and ink sketches in notebook, 1962, 125pp.	Folder 3
Holograph drafts in small spiral notebook, 1963, 19pp.	Folder 4
Holograph drafts and ink drawings in spiral notebook, 1970-72, 114pp.	Folder 5
Holograph drafts in a notebook, 1972, 72pp.	Folder 6
Holograph drafts in spiral composition book, 1972, 34pp.	Folder 7
Holograph drafts and ink drawings in orange composition book, 1972, 79pp.	Folder 8
Holograph drafts in small spiral notebook, 1973, 67pp.	Folder 9
Holograph drafts in spiral notebook, 1973, 41pp.	Folder 10
Holograph drafts and sketches in notebook, n.d., 94pp.	Box 8 Folder 1
Holograph poem and letter drafts in small spiral notebook, n.d., 76pp.	Folder 2
Holograph drafts in spiral notebook, n.d., 58pp.	Folder 3
Holograph drafts and ink sketches in green notebook, n.d., 56pp.	Folder 4

Holograph drafts in spiral steno notebook, n.d., 29pp.	Folder 5
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Holograph drafts and ink sketch in small spiral notebook, n.d., 46pp.	Folder 7
Holograph drafts and ink sketches in blue notebook, n.d., 71pp.	Folder 8
Holograph drafts on notebook pages, n.d., 13pp.	Folder 9
Holograph drafts on writing pad and notepad pages, n.d., 56pp.	Folder 10
Holograph drafts and ink sketches on writing pad, n.d., 26pp.	Folder 11
Holograph drafts in notebook, n.d., 45pp.	Folder 12
D. Personal Papers, 1964-1965	
Address book, biographical sketch proof sheet, notes, and tax statement	Box 8 Folder 13

II. Correspondence, 1954-1976

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Unidentified; A-B	Box 9 Folder 2
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Corso, Sam, 1954-55	Folder 4
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Ferlinghetti, Lawrence, 1958-76	Folder 6
Ginsberg, Allen, 1957-67	Folder 7
H-M	Folder 8
Johnson, Kay, 1966	Folder 9
N-P	Folder 10
New Directions, 1959-66	Box 10 Folder 1
Orlovsky, Peter, 1958-76	Folder 2
Q-T	Folder 3
U-Z	Folder 4

III. Third-Party Works and Correspondence, 1890-1968

Works, A-Z

Creagh, Patrick, Empty Vessel? Looks Like It, 1966, typescript, 1p.

Box 10
Folder 5

Gardner, Isabella, Writing Poetry, n.d., typescript, 1p.

Ginsberg, Allen, Magic Psalm, n.d., and Reply, n.d., typescript with author revisions, 2pp, typescript with author revisions, 1p.

Pomeroy, Rachel, On Story's Bust of Mrs. Browning, n.d., holograph, 4pp.

Swedenborg, Emmanuel, The True Christian Religion, n.d., typescript, 1p.

Benjamin, Jerry, American Express: A Play in 3 Acts, n.d., unfinished typescript with author revisions, 44pp.

Folder
6

Correspondence, A-Z

Folder 7

Various envelopes and folders

Folder 8

Gregory Corso Collection--Index of Correspondents

Box and folder numbers are followed by a number in parentheses which indicates the number of items by that person. A single item is indicated where there is no number in parentheses following the box and folder number. Where there is correspondence from Gregory Corso, the number in parentheses is followed by the phrase "from Corso." So in the example: **Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-** --9.1 (2 from Corso), 9.7 (66), 10.7 there are 2 letters from Corso to Ginsberg in box 9, folder 1, 66 letters from Ginsberg in box 9, folder 7, and 1 letter from Ginsberg in box 10, folder 7.

- Agenzia Letteraria--10.7
- Allen, Donald M. (Donald Macomber), 1926- --9.2 (2)
- Ansen, Alan--9.2 (2)
- Appes, -, Miss--9.1 (from Corso)
- Arizona State University--9.1 (2 from Corso)
- Art Voices--9.2
- Authors Take Sides on Vietnam--9.2
- Baraka, Imamu Amiri, 1934- --9.2 (3)
- Barker, George, 1913- --10.7
- Basic Books--9.2 (3)
- Berger, Art--9.2
- Berman, Ronald--9.2 (2)
- Bidderman, Peggy--9.1
- Blackburn, Paul, 1925- --9.2
- Bremser, Ray--9.2
- Burke, Richard A.--9.2
- Burroughs, William S., 1914- --9.2 (3), 10.7
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- Carroll, Paul, 1927- --9.3 (2)
- České Budejovice (Czech Republic)--9.3
- City Lights Books--10.7
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- Contemporary Authors--9.3
- *El Corno Emplumado*--9.3
- Corso, Joe--9.3
- Corso, Sally--9.1 (from Corso)
- Corso, Sam--9.4 (3)
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- Davisson, Elsie--9.3
- Dilia, Prague--9.3 (3)
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- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence--9.6 (28)
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- Pivano Fernanda--9.10 (5)
- *Poetry*--9.10

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- Roditi, Edouard--10.3 (7)
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- State University of New York--10.3 (4)
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- Truszkowska, Teresa--10.3
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- "American poetry has not a frog to lean upon..."--6.1
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- "When I was young I rather wished I was a poet..."--4.4
- "When I'm alone I smile to lie..."--4.4
- "When in doubt be serious accuse men of dying..."--4.4
- "When Paris to me was but a dream..."--4.4
- "When pinball machines first appeared..."--4.4

- "When the unitauric compound of god and man..."--4.4
- "Where are we going? they ask..."--4.4
- Where the Freedom has Stopped--4.4
- "Where once children played..."--6.5
- "While all night roofing it beneath the Charleston stars..."--4.4
- "While marksmen curse their guns..."--4.4
- "While the act is unfolding a movie is made..."--4.4
- While Waiting in a French Banque--4.4
- While Watching Gemini Take-off on T.V.--4.4
- While Watching the G.O.P. '64 Convention--4.4
- "The white arm of a woman levels the plaque..."--4.4
- "Who ate at the table of slow kings..."--4.4
- "Who sees himself in the sun..."--4.4
- "Who'll give out the right items..."--7.9
- "Whose past is measured by the common calendar..."--4.4
- "Why America, do you treat God..."--4.4
- "Why are some women so damned phoney!..."--7.3
- Why Are You No Longer Catholic--6.1
- Why Not--6.3
- "Will you ever dream of Demeter..."--8.2
- Window Reflections Real and Fanciful--4.6
- Wish--4.5
- "With ink y air..."--4.5
- Withdrawal--4.5
- The Wlamcaptor--4.5, 6.5
- Wlamcaptor Deathrym--4.5
- Words from a Sex Unit--4.5
- The Work is Undone--6.6
- "The world I see endears me wild apparel..."--4.5
- "Would I cry..."--8.1
- Writ When a Lady Complained all Her Prayers Went Unanswered--4.5
- Writ When I Found Out His Was an Unmarked Grave--4.5
- Writings--4.5
- Written on a Train to London--4.5
- Written Upon Hearing of the Death of Randall Jarrell--4.5
- Written When a Sad Young Girl Spoke of Her Shock Treatment at the Age of 15--4.5
- "Yanked breathless-blue out of a teenagers womb..."--4.5
- "Ye Alps audacious, thro' the heavens that rise..."--6.4
- Ye Olde Poem--4.5
- A Year--6.9
- The Year 2462--4.5
- "You cry my brother more saddened than I..."--4.5
- "You know there are those..."--4.5
- "Zeus was born in a cone..."--4.5
- Zizi's Lament--6.1