



Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist

Kirby Olson PhD

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Gregory Corso is the most intensely spiritual of the Beat generation poets and still by far the least explored. The virtue of Kirby Olson's *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist* is that it is the first book to place all of Corso's work in a philosophical perspective, concentrating on Corso as a poet torn between a static Catholic Thomist viewpoint and that of a progressive surrealist.

While Corso is a subject of great controversy—his work often being seen as nihilistic and wildly comic—Olson argues that Corso's poetry, in fact, maintains an insistent theme of doubt and faith with regard to his early Catholicism. Although many critics have attempted to read his poetry, and some have done so brilliantly, Olson—in his approach and focus—is the first to attempt to give a holistic understanding of the oeuvre as essentially one not of entertainment or hilarity but of a deep spiritual and philosophical quest by an important and profound mind.

In nine chapters, Olson addresses Corso from a broad philosophical perspective and shows how Corso takes on particular philosophical issues and contributes to new understandings. Corso's concerns, like his influence, extend beyond the Beat generation as he speaks about concerns that have troubled thinkers from the beginning of the Western tradition, and his answers offer provocative new openings for thought.

Corso may very well be the most important Catholic poet in the American literary canon, a visionary like Burroughs and Ginsberg, whose work illuminated a generation. Written in a lively and engaging style, *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist* seeks to keep Corso's memory alive and at last delve fully into Corso's poetry.

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