

“It’s better to burn out than to fade away.”

(quote from the suicide note of Kurt Cobain)

NIRVANA



Their 1991 release of the album *Nevermind* topped the billboard charts and transformed the landscape of popular music, introducing “**grunge**” music. The media referred to Cobain as the spokesman of a generation.

An introverted troubled musician



Some difficult words:

a geek = a weirdo, **vigorously** = powerfully, **introverted** = shy, **alienation** = to become indifferent, **bipolar** = bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is a mental illness that brings severe high and low moods and changes in sleep, energy, thinking, and behaviour, **to alleviate** = to lighten, to ease

At the age of 14, his aunt handed him a guitar, and he taught himself how to play. As a kid, Kurt Cobain didn’t fit in anywhere. He wanted to fit in with the “geeks” but they were “not like normal geeks. They were too geeky. He finally made friends with a gay guy at his high school, and everyone started believing he was gay. He had an “I don’t care” attitude, and that followed him into the music business. Kurt dropped out of High School, and was living in and out of his friends’ houses, and eventually slept on the streets. To get into music, Kurt tried vigorously to form a band with friends. He soon met Krist Novoselic (bass and vocals) and together with Dave Grohl they formed Nirvana.

Kurt was constantly expressing himself, through his writing, painting, music, sound or simply his body. For him it came naturally, he needed to do it. On the one hand he wrote for himself, intimately and honestly, but on the other hand he made it public. He was an introverted guy but through his music he was able to reach millions of people. His music touched so many because it is raw, unfiltered and honest.

Kurt Cobain struggled throughout his life with alienation and loneliness. Though never publicly diagnosed with bipolar, his behaviour was consistent with typical experiences characteristic of this condition. He struggled with alcohol and heroin addiction, likely in an effort to alleviate his psychological suffering.

➤ **Watch this news fragment on his death.**

➤ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5hgwV90A0Q>

How did he kill himself? Summarize what happened

SONGS

One of the most famous songs by Nirvana is *Lithium*. This song is about how his mental illness (bipolar) makes him feel. Bipolar doesn't just make you feel depressed but it also makes you have severe mood swings and that's what he's describing. Lithium is the drug prescribed to people with this illness. *Lithium* was peaking the billboard charts in 1992. Cobain said this about the song: "People who are secluded for so long go insane, and as a last resort they often use religion to keep alive.

In the song, the guy has lost his girl and his friends and he's brooding. He has decided to find God before he kills himself.

to be secluded from = withdrawn from or involving little human or social activity

as a last resort = as a last choice; if everything else fails

to brood = to think for a long time about things that make you sad, worried, or angry

➤ Watch the music clip of LITHIUM and write down the missing words.

I'm so happy 'cause today

I've found my friends

They're in my head

I'm so , but that's okay, 'cause so are you

We broke our mirrors

..... morning is every day for all I care

And I'm not scared

Light my candles, in a daze

'Cause I've found

Hey, hey hey [x6]

Correct the mistakes.

I'm so lonely, but that's okay, I shaved my hair

And I'm not sad

And just maybe I'm to blame for all I know

But I'm not sure

I'm so drunk, I can't wait to meet you there

But I don't mind

I'm so horny, but that's okay

My will is good Hey, hey hey [x6]

[x2] I like it - I'm not gonna crack

I miss you - I'm not gonna crack

I love you - I'm not gonna crack

I killed you - I'm not gonna crack

I'm so happy 'cause today
I found my friends
They're in my head

to light my candles: candles are often used to assist contemplative meditation, as a means for relaxing and focusing attention

crack: a slang term for a psychological crisis.

Listen to the song **Something in the Way**

Delete the extra words.

Underneath the low bridge

The tarp has sprung a leak

And the poor animals I've trapped

(Have) all become my pets

And I'm living off of grass

And the drippings from the ceiling

It's okay to eat raw fish

'Cause they don't have any feelings



The "something in the way" was Kurt. He felt like he was just something in the way. The song is about being abandoned by those around.

'underneath the bridge' is a metaphor for isolation and loneliness. Teenagers sometimes feel like this, don't you think?

- Kurt Cobain belongs to **the 27 club**. This is a group of **artists who died tragically at the young age of 27**. They were some of the most talented minds of their generation, and in their short lives each made an enormous impact. Sadly, many led hard-partying lifestyles, abusing drugs and alcohol.

- If you had been a teenager in the 90's, would you have gone to a Nirvana concert? Why (not)? What other concerts would you have gone to?

LET'S TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE!

Back in 1992, Cobain contacted one of his longstanding idols, Burroughs, a writer and visual artist who was a major player of the Beat Generation. Cobain, desperate to form a collaboration, pitched an idea to Burroughs who duly replied by sending the Nirvana frontman a tape he recorded of himself reading a short story.

That story, which was originally published in his Exterminator collection way back in 1973, would be the kick starter to some of the most obscure work Cobain would ever make. Adding some guitar backing based on 'To Anacreon in Heaven' and 'Silent Night', the pair were able to birth the concept which is now known as The "Priest" They Called Him.

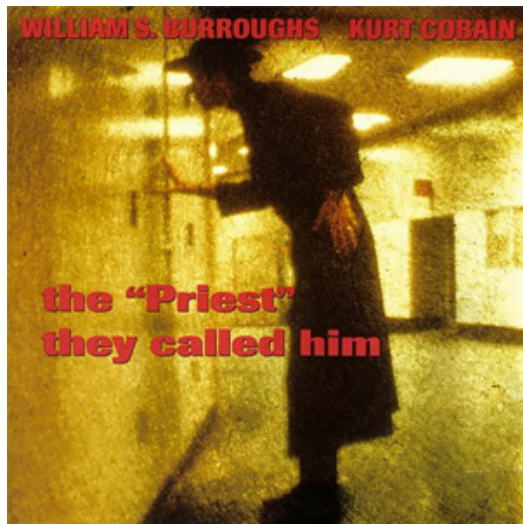
The work was put together without the pair ever physically meeting. However, as their long-distance friendship began to blossom, the duo were eventually able to arrange a suitable time to meet. A long-form dossier was recently published Burroughs official website. Described by multiple sources, Cobain and Burroughs finally got to hang out:

In October 1993 Cobain met in Burroughs in Lawrence, KS.

"During this first week of the tour, Alex MacLeod drove Kurt to Lawrence, Kansas, to meet William S. Burroughs. The previous year Kurt had produced a single with Burroughs titled The "Priest" They Called Him, on T/K Records, but they'd accomplished the recording by sending tapes back and forth. "Meeting William was a real big deal for him," MacLeod remembered.

"It was something he never thought would happen." They chatted for several hours, but Burroughs later claimed the subject of drugs didn't come up. As Kurt drove away, Burroughs remarked to his assistant. "There's something wrong with that boy; he frowns for no good reason."

Burroughs describes the meeting... "I waited and Kurt got out with another man. Cobain was very shy, very polite, and obviously enjoyed the fact that I wasn't awestruck at meeting him. There was something about him, fragile and engagingly lost. He smoked cigarettes but didn't drink. There were no drugs. I never showed him my gun collection." The two exchanged presents — Burroughs gave him a painting, while Cobain gave him a Leadbelly biography that he had signed. Kurt and music video director Kevin Kerslake originally wanted Burroughs to appear in the video for "In Bloom."



"Fight tuberculosis, folks"
Christmas Eve, an old junkie selling Christmas seals
On North Park Street
The "Priest" they called him
"Fight tuberculosis, folks"

People hurried by, gray shadows on a distant wall
It was getting late and no money to score
He turned into a side street and the lake wind hit him like a knife
Cab stop just ahead under a streetlight

Boy got out with a suitcase
Thin kid in prep school clothes
Familiar face, the Priest told himself
Watching from the doorway

"Reminds me of something a long time ago"
The boy, there, with his overcoat
Unbuttoned, reaching into his pants pocket for the cab fare
The cab drove away and turned the corner
The boy went inside a building

"Hmm, yes, maybe," the suitcase was there in the doorway
The boy nowhere in sight
Gone to get the keys, most likely, have to move fast
He picked up the suitcase and started for the corner
Made it, glanced down at the case
It didn't look like the case the boy had or any boy would have
The Priest couldn't put his finger on what was so old about the case
Old and dirty, poor quality leather and heavy
Better see what's inside

He turned into Lincoln Park
Found an empty place and opened the case
Two severed human legs that belonged to a young man
With dark skin, shiny black leg hairs
Glittered in the dim streetlight
The legs had been forced into the case
And he had to use his knee on the back of the case to shove them out
"Legs, yet," he said and walked quickly away with the case
Might bring a few dollars to score

The buyer sniffed suspiciously
"Kind of a funny smell about it"
"It's just Mexican leather"
"Well, some joker didn't cure it"
The buyer looked at the case with cold disfavor
"Not even right sure he killed it, whatever it is
Three is the best I can do and it hurts
But since this is Christmas and you're the Priest"
He slipped three notes under the table into the Priest's dirty hand
The Priest faded into the street shadows, seedy and furtive
Three cents didn't buy a bag, nothing less than a nickel
Say, remember that old Addie croaker told me not to come back
Unless I paid him the three cents I owe him
Yeah, isn't that a fruit for ya, blow your stack about three lousy cents

The doctor was not pleased to see him
"Now, what do you want? I told you!"
The Priest laid three bills on the table
The doctor put the money in his pocket and started to scream
"I've had trouble! People have been around!
I may lose my license!"
The Priest just sat there
Eyes, old and heavy with years of junk, on the doctor's face
"I can't write you a prescription"
The doctor jerked open a drawer
And slid an ampule across the table
"That's all I have in the office!" The doctor stood up
"Take it and get out!" he screamed, hysterical
The Priest's expression did not change

The doctor added in quieter tones
"After all, I'm a professional man
And I shouldn't be bothered by people like you"
"Is that all you have for me? One lousy quarter G?
Couldn't you lend me a nickel?"
"Get out, get out, I'll call the police I tell you"
"All right, doctor, I'm going"

Of course it was cold and far walk to rooming house
A shabby street, room on the top floor
"These stairs," coughed the Priest
There pulling himself up along the bannister
He went into the bathroom
Yellow wall panels, toilet dripping
And got his works from under the washbasin
Wrapped in brown paper, back to his room
Get every drop in the dropper
He rolled up his sleeve
Then he heard a groan from next door
Room 18, the Mexican kid lived there
The Priest had passed him on the stairs
And saw the kid was hooked
But he never spoke because he didn't want any juvenile connections
Bad news in any language

The Priest had had enough bad news in his life
He heard the groan again, a groan he could feel

No mistaking that groan and what it meant
"Maybe he had an accident or something
In any case, I can't enjoy my priestly medications
With that sound coming through the wall"
Thin walls you understand

The Priest put down his dropper
Cold hall and knocked on the door of Room 18
"Quien es?"
"It's the Priest, kid, I live next door"
He could hear someone hobbling across the floor

A bolt slid, the boy stood there in his underwear shorts
Eyes black with pain, he started to fall
The Priest helped him over to the bed
"What's wrong, son?"
"It's my legs, señor, cramps
And now I am without medicine"

The Priest could see the cramps
Like knots of wood there in the young legs
Dark shiny black leg hairs
"A few years ago I damaged myself in a bicycle race
It was then that the cramps started"
And now he has the leg cramps back
With compound junk interest

The old Priest stood there, feeling the boy groan
He inclined his head as if in prayer, went back and got his dropper
"It's just a quarter G, kid"
"I do not require much, señor"

The boy was sleeping when the Priest left Room 18
He went back to his room and sat down on the bed
Then it hit him like heavy silent snow
All the gray junk yesterdays
He sat there, received the immaculate fix
And since he was himself a priest
There was no need to call one

"Combattere la tubercolosi, gente. "La vigilia di Natale, un vecchio drogato che vende foche di Natale in North Park Street. Il "prete", lo chiamavano. "Combattere la tubercolosi, gente. "
La gente si affrettava, ombre grigie su un muro lontano. Si stava facendo tardi e non c'erano soldi da guadagnare. Si e ' trasformato in una strada secondaria e il vento del Lago l'ha colpito come un coltello. Il taxi si ferma poco più avanti sotto un lampione.
Il ragazzo e ' uscito con una valigia. Un bambino magro in abiti da scuola privata, viso familiare, il prete si è detto, guardando dalla porta. "Mi ricorda qualcosa tanto tempo fa. "Il ragazzo, lì, con il cappotto sbottonato, si e ' infilato nella tasca dei pantaloni per il biglietto del taxi.
Il taxi se n'e ' andato e ha girato l'angolo. Il ragazzo e ' entrato in un edificio. "Hmm, sì, forse" - la valigia era lì sulla porta. Il ragazzo non si vede da nessuna parte. E ' andato a prendere le chiavi, molto probabilmente, deve muoversi in fretta. Ha preso la valigia e ha iniziato per l'angolo. Rendere. Ho dato un'occhiata al caso. Non sembrava il caso che avesse il ragazzo, o che avrebbe avuto un ragazzo. Il prete non riusciva a capire cosa fosse così ' Vecchio sul caso. Vecchia e sporca, pelle scadente e pesante. Meglio vedere cosa c'e ' dentro.
Si e ' trasformato in Lincoln Park, ha trovato un posto vuoto e ha aperto il caso. Due gambe umane mozzate che appartenevano a un giovane con la pelle scura. I capelli neri luccicanti delle gambe brillavano nel lampione. Le gambe erano state forzate nel caso e ha dovuto usare il ginocchio sul retro del caso per spingerle fuori. "Gambe, ancora", disse, E se ne andò velocemente con il caso.

Potrebbe portare qualche Dollaro da segnare. L'acquirente ha fiutato sospettosamente. "C'e' un odore strano. "E' solo pelle messicana. "Beh, qualche burlone non l'ha curata. "L'acquirente ha esaminato il caso con freddo disprezzo.

"Non sono nemmeno sicuro che l'abbia ucciso, qualunque cosa sia. Tre e ' il meglio che posso fare e fa male. Ma visto che questo e ' Natale e tu sei il prete. "ha infilato tre banconote sotto il tavolo nella mano sporca del Prete. Il prete e ' svanito nell'ombra della strada, squallido e furtivo. Tre centesimi non hanno comprato una borsa, niente di meno di un nichelino. Ricordati che la vecchia Addie croaker mi ha detto di non tornare a meno che non gli abbia pagato i tre centesimi che gli devo. Gia', non e ' un frutto per te, far saltare la pila a circa tre centesimi? Il dottore non era contento di vederlo.

"Ora, cosa vuoi? Te l'ho detto! "Il prete ha messo tre conti sul tavolo. Il dottore gli ha messo i soldi in tasca e ha iniziato a urlare. "Ho avuto dei problemi! C'e ' gente in giro! Potrei perdere la patente! "Il prete se ne stava seduto lì, con gli occhi vecchi e pesanti Con anni di robaccia, sulla faccia del dottore. "Non posso prescrivere una ricetta. "Il dottore ha aperto un cassetto e ha scivolato un'ampolla sul tavolo. "E' tutto quello che ho in ufficio! "Il dottore si alzò. "Prendilo e vattene! "urlava, isterico. L'espressione del prete non è cambiata.

Il dottore aggiunse in toni più silenziosi: "dopo tutto, sono un uomo professionista, e non dovrei essere disturbato da persone come te. "E' tutto quello che hai per me? Un misero quarto di Dollaro? Non potresti prestarmi un nichelino?? "Vattene, vattene, chiamo la polizia che ti dico. "Va bene, dottore, vado. "Naturalmente era freddo e lontano a piedi, Casa in camera, una strada squallida, stanza all'ultimo piano. "Queste scale," ha tossito il prete, tirandosi su lungo il bannister. E ' andato in bagno, pannelli gialli, WC gocciolante, e ha ottenuto le sue opere da sotto il lavandino. Avvolto in carta marrone, torna nella sua stanza, prendi ogni goccia nel contagocce.

Si e ' arrotolato la manica. Poi ha sentito un gemito dalla porta accanto, Stanza 18. Il ragazzo messicano viveva lì, il prete lo aveva passato sulle scale e ha visto che il ragazzo era agganciato, ma non ha mai parlato, perché non voleva nessun legame Giovanile, cattive notizie in nessuna lingua. Il prete aveva avuto abbastanza brutte notizie nella sua vita.

Ha sentito di nuovo il gemito, un gemito che sentiva, senza confondere quel gemito e cosa significasse. "Forse ha avuto un incidente o qualcosa del genere. In ogni caso, non posso godermi le mie medicine sacerdotali con quel suono che esce dal muro. "Pareti sottili che capisci. Il prete ha messo giù ' il suo contagocce, cold hall, e ha bussato alla porta della stanza 18.

"Quien es? "E' il Preista, ragazzo, vivo qui accanto. "Poteva sentire qualcuno che attraversava il pavimento.

Un bullone scivolato. Il ragazzo se ne stava lì ' in mutande, con gli occhi neri dal dolore. Ha iniziato a cadere. Il prete l'ha aiutato ad andare a letto. "Che succede, figliolo? "Sono le mie gambe, señor, crampi, e ora sono senza medicine. "Il prete poteva vedere i crampi, come i nodi di legno lì nelle gambe giovani, i capelli scuri lucenti delle gambe nere.

"Alcuni anni fa mi sono danneggiato in una corsa in bicicletta, è stato allora che i crampi hanno cominciato. "E ora ha i crampi alle gambe con l'interesse della spazzatura. Il vecchio prete se ne stava lì, a sentire il ragazzo gemere. Ha inclinato la testa come in preghiera, è tornato indietro e ha preso il suo contagocce. "E' solo un quarto di Dollaro, ragazzo. "Non ho bisogno di molto, señor. "

Il ragazzo stava dormendo quando il prete ha lasciato la stanza 18. E ' tornato in camera sua e si e' seduto sul letto. Poi l'ha colpito come neve silenziosa. Tutte le cianfrusaglie grigie di ieri. Si sedette lì e ricevette l'Immacolata correzione. E dato che era lui stesso un prete, non c'era bisogno di chiamarne uno.

SOME FACTS ABOUT WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS (Missouri, 1914, Kansas 1997)

1. He pulled a van Gogh of sorts.

Where the Dutch painter clipped part of his ear (or possibly the entire thing) and offered it to a prostitute, Burroughs opted to amputate the end joint of his left pinkie finger and presented it to a boyfriend he was obsessed with. He later commemorated this episode in his short story, "The Finger."

2. He co-wrote a novel with Jack Kerouac.

Burroughs befriended Jack Kerouac in New York City, where they worked together on the crime novel *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* (the pair wrote alternating chapters). Though completed in 1945, the book didn't see publication until 2008. Burroughs himself wasn't a huge fan of its literary merits, describing the novel as "not a very distinguished work."

3. He went one year without a bath.

As vividly related in his drug-addled classic *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs debauched himself into crippling dysfunction while holed up in a hotel in Tangier, Morocco. Except to answer the call of the needle, he "did absolutely nothing" and didn't change his clothes the entire time, let alone take a bath.

4. He killed his wife.

Though they never officially tied the knot, Burroughs lived with Joan Vollmer as his common-law wife. Together they had one son, Billy Burroughs. They also shared a substance abuse problem, and at a

booze-soaked 1951 party in Mexico City, they performed an extremely ill-advised “William Tell act.” This involved a gun-toting Burroughs trying to shoot a glass which Vollmer, rather injudiciously, had placed atop her head. Despite being only 9 feet away, he missed—low. After spending 13 days in jail, Burroughs was bailed out, and later fled the country. The Mexican court convicted him of manslaughter in absentia and sentenced him to two years. By staying away from Mexico, he avoided the sentence.

5. He disliked teaching.

As with many prominent writers, Burroughs was offered a job instructing others in his craft. But his pedagogic tenure at the City College of New York lasted all of one semester. Discouraged by what he regarded as a lack of student talent, he felt the gig was more of a hassle than it was worth. He subsequently turned down a well-paying position at the University of Buffalo and considered his teaching experience a “lesson in never again.”

6. He was involved with other musical projects.

Burroughs collaborated with Cobain but also with other musicians and bands. With R.E.M. for a new version of their song, “Star Me Kitten,” which appeared on the 1996 album *Songs in the Key of X: Music From and Inspired By the X-Files*. He also worked with Tom Waits and Robert Wilson on the opera *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets*, which premiered in 1990.

7. He was exorcised.

Still haunted decades later by Vollmer's death and the “Ugly Spirit” he felt had invaded him, Burroughs received an exorcism performed by a Sioux medicine man in 1992. The ceremony was attended by his beatnik friend, poet Allen Ginsberg.

Lou Reed, born March 2, 1942, first found prominence as a member of The Velvet Underground (1965-1973). TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD side was Reed's biggest hit.

1. PHONETICS : Find the CORRESPONDING PAIRS

| | | | |
|-------|--------|------|------|
| crash | street | F.La | said |
| eat | bash | way | USA |

2. Now LISTEN to the first stanza of the song and FILL IN THE BLANKS with the words in activity 1

Holly came from Miami, _____
 Hitchhiked her way across the _____
 Plucked her eyebrows on the _____
 Shaved her legs and then he was a she - she _____
 Hey Babe, take a walk on the wild side, _____
 Said hey honey, take a walk on the wild side _____



3. Comprehension. This song is about transvestites who come to New York City and become prostitutes. Which words from this first stanza show Holly is a transvestite:

READ the title again and from the context guess its meaning :

- "Hey Babe, Take a walk on the wild side" is what the prostitutes say to potential customers.
- "Hey Babe, Take a walk on the wild side" is what the prostitutes say to say hello to theft customers.
- "Hey Babe, Take a walk on the wild side" is what the customers say to the prostitutes.

4. Each verse introduces a new character: Listen and circle the name you hear

Holly/ Little Joe / Jackie /Sugar Plum Fairy /Candy came from out on the island,
 In the backroom she was everybody's darling,
 But she never lost her head

Even when she was giving head - she said
Hey Babe, take a walk on the wild side,
Said hey babe, take a walk on the wild side.
And the coloured girls go, doo dodo

Holly/ Little Joe / Jackie /Sugar Plum Fairy /Candy never once gave it away,
Everybody had to pay and pay.
A hustle here and a hustle there
New York City is the place where they said:
Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side,
Said hey Joe, take a walk on the wild side.

Holly/ Little Joe / Jackie /Sugar Plum Fairy /Candy came and hit the streets
Looking for soul food and a place to eat
Went to the Apollo, you should have seen him go go go - they said:
Hey Sugar, take a walk on the wild side,
Said hey babe, take a walk on the wild side.

Holly/ Little Joe / Jackie /Sugar Plum Fairy /Candy is just...

Some lines have been changed in this last stanza: listen and highlight the correct lines

| | |
|--|---|
| Jackie is just rushing away | Jackie is just speeding away |
| Thought she was James Dean for a day | Thought she was James Brown for a day |
| Then I guess she had to crash | Then I guess she had to crash |
| Valium would have helped that bash - she said: | Aspirin would have helped that bash - she said: |

Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side,
Said hey honey, take a walk on the wild side.
Ant the colored girls go, doo do dooo

SOME GASOLINE by GREGORY CORSO

Gregory Nunzio Corso was born in New York's Greenwich Village on March 26, 1930, to teenage Italian parents. A year later, his mother moved back to Italy. After living in orphanages and foster homes, at age eleven Corso moved back in with his father, who had just remarried. After two years, however, he ran away; upon being caught he was placed in a boys' home for two years. He also spent several months in the New York City jail. He was returned to his father, but after running away again was sent to Bellevue Hospital for three months "for observation." At age sixteen, he began a three-year sentence at Clinton State Prison for another theft. While in prison, he read widely in the classics, including Fyodor Dostoevsky, Stendhal, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Chatterton, and Christopher Marlowe, as well as the dictionary; it was there that he also began writing poems.

In a Greenwich Village bar in 1950, the year of his release from prison, he met Allen Ginsberg, who introduced him to experimental poetry. In 1954, he moved to Boston, where again he devoted himself to the library, this time at Harvard University. His first published poems appeared in the Harvard Advocate that same year; and the publication of his first book, *The Vestal Lady on Brattle and Other Poems* (1955), was underwritten by Harvard and Radcliffe students. Corso worked at times as a laborer, a newspaper reporter for the Los Angeles Examiner, and a merchant seaman.

The following year he went to San Francisco, where he performed readings and interviews with Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and became known as one of the major figures of the Beat movement. From 1957 to 1958 Corso lived in Paris, where he wrote many of the poems that became his book *Gasoline*, which Lawrence Ferlinghetti / City Lights Books published in 1958.

He was married three times and had five children. Gregory Corso died on January 17, 2001, at the age of seventy.

For Miles

*Your sound is faultless
pure & round
holy
almost profound*

*Your sound is your sound
true & from within
a confession
soulful & lovely*

*Poet whose sound is played
lost or recorded
but heard
can you recall that 54 night at the Open Door
when you & bird
waited five in the morning some wondrous
yet unimaginable score?*

*Spir't
is Life
It flows thru
the death of me
endlessly
like a river
unafraid
of becoming
the sea*