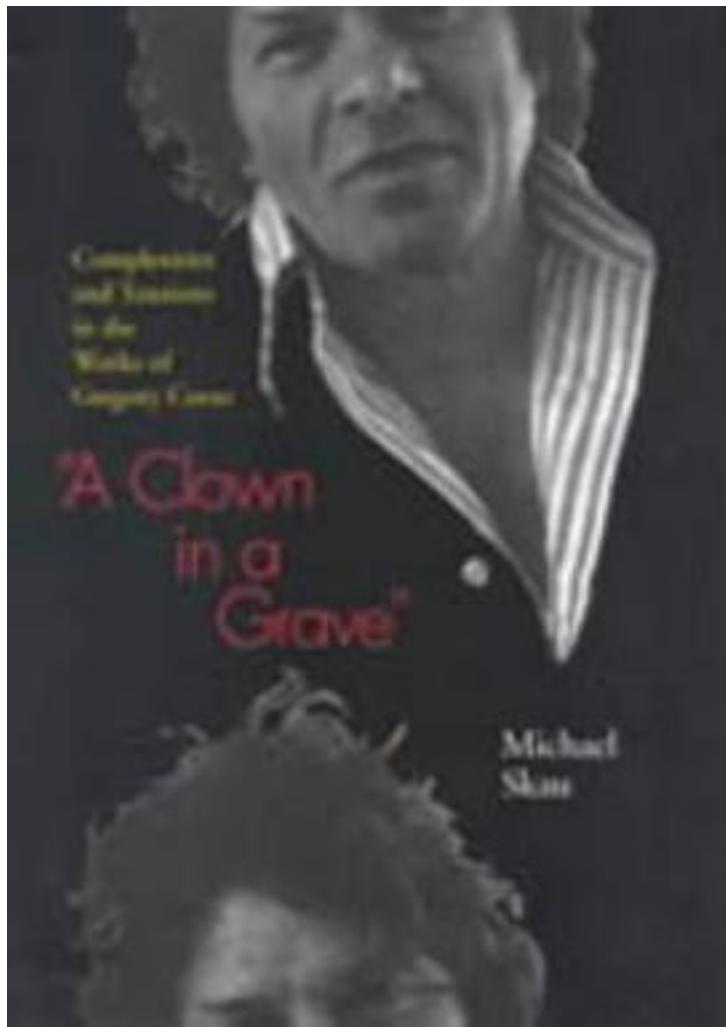


A Clown in a Grave



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著者:Professor Michael Skau

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Using a number of critical approaches, Michael Skau examines Gregory Corso's

complex imagination, his humor, and his poetic techniques in dealing with America, the Beat generation, and death. Skau covers the complete works of Corso, one of the four major Beat Generation writers (with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs) who attempted to provide an alternative to what they saw as the academic forms of literature dominating American writing through the 1940s and 1950s. The Beat option focused on ordinary people, spurning the cultural pretensions of the intelligentsia and using common language as well as the rhythms of actual speech. Corso, abandoned as a child by his mother, subjected to a variety of foster homes, and imprisoned as an adolescent, became an authentic voice of America's neglected streetwise youth. He embodies much of the tension, confusion, and rebellion that emerged in America after World War II and eventually crested in the 1960s. Corso emphasizes social issues, yet risks undermining this significance by using wit, wordplay, and humor. While conceding mortality, he is adamant in refusing to acknowledge death's power. Even as he rebels against conventional literature, he still is enchanted by classicism and romanticism, often borrowing their techniques and idioms. Skau examines these complexities and seeming contradictions throughout Corso's career, showing that Corso finds value in inconsistency and vacillation. For him, as illustrated in the poems "Hair" and "Marriage," contradiction and ambivalence suggest the foundations of freedom of imagination. In spite of Corso's significance as an American poet, Skau's is the first extensive study of his work, including his fiction. Skau also provides the first complete bibliography of Corso's published work in more than thirty years.

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