

# The Poetry and Life of Al Fowler— with a Gathering of his Poetry

Edward Sanders

Aulden Jay Fowler was born January 8, 1940 in New York City in the place in Queens called Sunnyside.

His mother, Bertha, had been born in Russia. Her parents were Jewish, and Bertha told me, “My father came to America because he had a bicycle store near Kiev. The students warned him of an impending pogrom. He came to the US in 1905; He sent my mother and me to her mother’s family.” They came to the US five years later in 1910, when Al’s mother was seven.

The family lived in various places, including New Haven, Connecticut where she met her husband, Russell Fowler, in high school. Al’s older brother Gerald was born in New Britain, Connecticut.

Al attended school in Sunnyside for about ten years, then around 1950 the family moved to Albany. “My husband had a job with the state. He worked for the architect and engineering department,” Bertha told me in 1983. Russell was a Civil Service employee for the Department of Public Works, said her son Gerald.

They lived on State Street in Albany, “right near Willett” across from Washington Park. “I lived there 21 years.” Al attended high school at Albany High, where he took part in many regular activities common to a boy in the 1950s. She showed me a certificate for a varsity letter in football for the school year of 1956-56.

She bragged about his intellectual prowess, though regarding Albany High, she said, “He got into more silly trouble than you ever heard of. He never did his work, but but his tests were very very high.”

I asked about when he started writing verse. She said he began at age 13, 14, 15. She showed me a bunch of his early poems. “This is one he did on assignment, and they gave him terrific marks on it.” He was 14 and a half years old. It was titled, “My Temporary Room”

Another she showed me, written age 13, beginning “There will come soft rains.” As a proud mother Bertha typed Al’s high school verse in her office. She worked for the State also.

He was early interested in music. His mother: "A man came along in school in Sunnyside, for a dollar a week, to study recorder. He wanted a clarinet. He played in a band for a long time. We finally got him a clarinet." (When Al was in the Fugs in early 1965, he played the flute.)

She pointed out that she won awards, one of which was a 1957 Regent's Scholarship. She showed me a file of awards Al had received. A Certificate of Merit from Scholastic Magazine for his writing. Plus a commendation for his poetry. She showed a letter from his high school poetry teacher. He composed the senior class poem in 1957, and won a National Merit scholarship for the quality of his noggin.

He had lots of friends. She listed a few of them.

He graduated in 1957, age 17 and 1/2, but not from Albany High School. "He was booted out of that," she explained, but graduated from Phillips Schuyler Academy in Albany. "It had kids who were in trouble."

I asked what Al had done to get tossed out of Albany High School. "Some of the things were so stupid. He got reprimanded, because, at that time, there was a college right next to the high school. They had Pepsi there. He and another guy walked over to get some Pepsi. He got into trouble because of that. They claimed that he had broken a typewriter. They made a monkey out of him. Any little thing he did was wrong after that." Also, he smoked. "They caught him," and he was tossed out of High School.

"He had so many escapades," his mother said, "it wasn't even funny."

Two colleges, Tulane and Sienna offered scholarships. She showed a letter to Al at 37 Sycamore Street, April 24, 1957 from Sienna.

He briefly went to two colleges. First he attended Harpur College, till the spring of '58 and then went to Bard College. At Bard, his mother recalled, "he never went to classes, but he never did anything wrong."

Then he went to work for the State, for a while.

He joined the Army in February of 1959. signing for 3 years. They sent him to Korea. He spent 13 months in Korea, where he worked as a medic.

His mother: "He came back from the Army and stayed with us in Albany for a while." Then he was stationed in New York, at a dispensary on Whitehall Street, according to Gerry Fowler. "He continued to commute to Whitehall Street from a hotel on 22nd Street."

Fowler lived in New York City for the next four years.

He came to my New Year's Eve party at the end of 1961, held at my apartment at 509 East 11th, between Avenues A and B, and we became friends. I gradually grew aware of his talents as a poet, and started publishing his work in *Fuck You! A Magazine of the Arts*. During the magazine's thirteen issues I published 27 poems by Al Fowler, including one 3-pager and one 5-pager.

I felt certain that I had discovered an American poetic genius.

By the early '60s, Fowler had joined a small sect, the "Free Catholic Church," and now and then sported a clerical collar, and a big silver cross on his chest, while wearing a round red anarchist button on the label of his frock coat. This later figured in his marginal involvement in the brouhaha regarding Lee Harvey Oswald's reported appearance in Greenwich Village prior to the assassination, as we shall see. He also began hanging out at the Catholic Worker on Chrystie Street, headed by the radical Catholic writer and activist Dorothy Day.

In early 1962, while still in the Army, Al became involved in what was called "The World Wide General Strike for Peace." The General Strike for Peace was mainly organized by Judith Malina and Julian Beck of the Living Theater.

On January 29, '62, the first day of the World Wide General Strike for Peace, Al picketed the Fort Jay ferry entrance at Battery Park, wearing his army uniform, carrying a General Strike for Peace poster. This created a stir, and there was at least one article, with a photo apparently of Al picketing in uniform, in a New York newspaper.

He would not be much longer in the service.

### **Al Speaks at a Community Rally at the Community Church**

January 29, 1962

The *Village Voice* wrote an article, dated February 1, '62 about activities of the General Strike. On January 29, there was a march down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, beginning outside the Plaza Hotel at 59th Street. Pete Seeger and Gil Turner sang, and there were speeches, including a kick-off by Dave McReynolds of the War Resisters League.

The *Voice*: "Later that day a General Strike rally was called at Community Church on East 35th Street; Paul Goodman spoke of the philosophical basis for the strike. He said: 'When the institutions of society threaten the very foundation of the social contract, namely, biological safety—then the social contract is very near to being dissolved.' He continued: 'We have now not a political but a biological emergency. The

government's almost total commitment to the cold war cannot be stopped by ordinary political means.

“Dorothy Day, editor of the *Catholic Worker*, spoke of the present need for ‘responsibility, sacrifice, and asceticism.’ Julian Beck described the act as a ‘call’ to action, ‘our way of declaring the pollution of things as they are, of the governments’ deep involvement in war-preparing.’ Judith Malina said the strike is a ‘means of satisfying our most urgent need to take some action.’

“The meeting also heard Specialist 4th Class Aulden Fowler, the soldier who had picketed in mufti the Fort Jay ferry entrance on the Battery earlier in the day. Fowler described being taken to Governor's Island for an ‘investigation’ being told eventually that ‘there was no regulation’ against what he was doing— he was on a six-day pass at the time— and finally being released under certain orders not to participate further in the demonstrations for peace. Fowler ended his brief talk by reflecting: ‘There is no civil liberty in the Army.’”

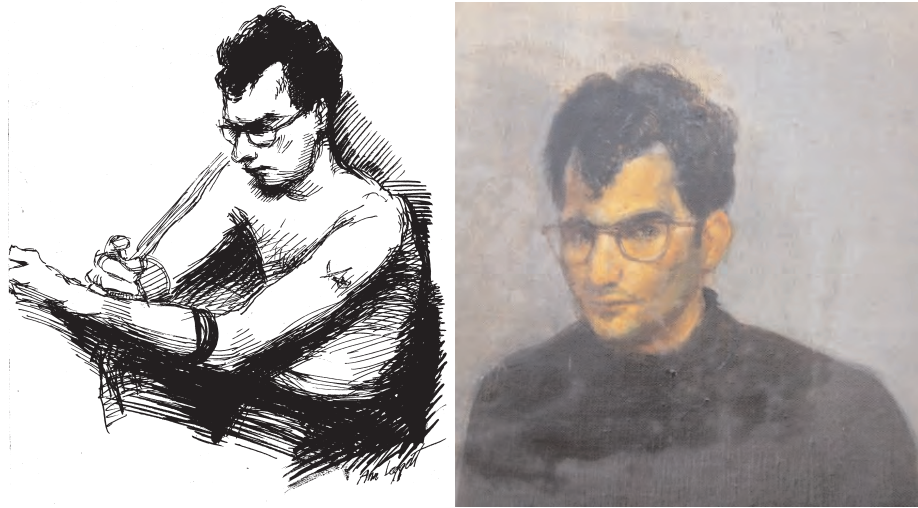
Al became active in the second General Strike for Peace, held November 5-11 of 1962. He was listed on the poster as a member of the Strike’s “Action Committee,” along with well known activists such as Judith Malina, Jackson MacLow, Bruce Grund, Julian Beck, Karl Bissinger, Arthur Sainer, and others.

INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS: DOROTHY DAY, BABETTE DEUTSCH, PAUL GOODMAN, ASHLEY MONTAGU, SIR HERBERT READ, BERTRAND RUSSELL, PITIRIM SOROKIN.  
 CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE: JOHN DARR, DAVE DELLINGER, RALPH DI GIA, WALTER LIVELY, ROGET LOCKHART, NANCY MACDONALD, DAVID McREYNOLDS, MEL MOST, A. J. MUSTE, JAMES PECK, BAYARD RUSTIN, GEORGE WILLOUGHBY.  
 ACTION COMMITTEE: ROBERT BATES, JULIAN BECK, DICK BELL, KARL BISSINGER, PETER W. CROWLEY, RUTH EMERSON, AULDEN FOWLER, BRUCE GRUND, JOHN C. HARRIMAN, HARRIET HERBST, NAOMI LEVINE, JACKSON MAC LOW, JUDITH MALINA, JONATHAN B. NORTH, JACQUELINE O'MEALY, PAUL PRENSKY, JULES RABIN, DONN REED, ARTHUR SAINER, JAMES STRIPLING, CONNIE STRIPLING, ANNE UPSHURE.

**Al Fowler served on the “Action Committee” of the Second General Strike for Peace, November 5-11, 1962**

Fowler developed a close relationship with the artist Ann Leggett. Ann was a young woman with a gleam of experimentation in her eye, and a talent that was undeniable. She was 22 and studying at the Art Students League. Though not a Catholic, she was drawn to the *Catholic Worker*, where she had met Al Fowler. She had spent a few days at the House of Detention for joining with the Catholic Workers in refusing to take shelter during New York City’s compulsory Civil Defense drill on May Day in the early '60s. In March of 1963, she had had an exhibition of her paintings at the Columbia University School of Architecture. She too was swept up in the ambience

of the swashbuckling young poet from Albany, New York. She made some memorable drawings of Fowler during those years, including this one, which showed him muscular, and defiantly shooting up:



Ink sketch and painting of Al Fowler by Ann Leggett

After we met at my New Year's party, 1961-62, he began dealing amphetamine, and doing so well at it that he said, to my surprise, "Now I can afford to be a junkie."

The logic of that escaped my youthful dazzlement over his talents as a poet. I tend to romanticize the clandestine world of the junky and the a-head in those days.

Then there was a murmur of trouble amidst the defiance. It was more and more difficult for Fowler to support his habit, and he was having to drift into robberies. Right around the spring of '63, a customer of Al's, a NYU student I used to see at Al's apartment on East 9th Street wearing a blue blazer with brass buttons and penny loafers, died of an overdose. It was a bugle of wake-up.

### The Kick Grid

By early 1963, even though his poetry sometimes reveled in the world of the junky, it seemed obvious that Al Fowler wanted to kick heroin, so I helped organize a bunch of our mutual friends to sit with him as he gradually reduced his heroin shots, till he was free. I called it a Kick Grid, dividing the time-flow into 4-hour units, and years later wrote a short story about it in *Tales of Beatnik Glory*.

Fowler lived in a building on East 9th, just off Avenue B. There was a group of his friends who lived in the same building. One of them, let's call her Amber, had a weekly client, one of the Cassini brothers, famous in the fashion business, for whom she sank to her knees, as he stood in his office, and he wanted each knee to rest on his tasseled shoes, left to right, right to left, and then a b.j. It was good money. Her hus

band was a junkie friend of Al's named Keith. I remember seeing him <sup>6</sup> quite glassy eyed during the days of the Kick Grid.

I divided up his heroin supply into smaller and smaller amounts, and kept the skag away from him, doling out the amounts. First Al shot up a half dose, then a quarter dose, then an eighth, then nothing. Everything went okay, until Fowler became sweaty and junk sick, and very uncomfortable. The next twenty-four hours the ordeal was acute. That night was the worst. Fowler lay sweating beneath a blanket. His eyes hurt with the light so the pad was kept gloomy.

There was the contention raised in *Naked Lunch* that kickers experience a period of intense sexual desire during the turkey. This seemed to have occurred Fowler's grid, though I could not see for total surety in the demi-dark. Buck's County Lucy came over to visit Fowler, who was in sad shape, sobbing and sweating, his eyeglasses wet and foggy. Lucy, jean shirt tied at the stomach, put her arms around Fowler and asked if he wanted something to drink. Fowler whispered something to her, and pulled her down to his rumpled lair. It was hard to view exactly since Fowler pulled his Mexican blanket over both of them. She skinned out of her shorts and pulled aside the elastic of her panties and steered him within her then fell forward to kiss. It was only a matter of seconds before Fowler's junk-sick spews came forth, and he moaned thanks aplenty to his kind friend.

Later that night, I awakened to hear a beating sound. What was it? It was Fowler beating his head against the wall in junk-sick agony. Fowler began to beg me for dope, "Just a little shot. Please!" Beseeching.

I gave in to Fowler, allowing him to shoot up "just a taste, man, a taste." The result was like a change from night to day, for as soon as he shot up, Fowler stopped sweating and walked around smiling and talking.

I vowed from then on, no more skag. Finally, I caught him alone shooting up some skag from a secret stash under the linoleum in his living room.

During the course of the Kick Grid, I'd brought my Speed-O-Print mimeo and some reams of colored Granitex paper to Fowler's pad, and I spent hours running off a hundred copies each of the first six issues of *F.Y./*.

After I had discovered his secret stash of heroin under the ancient linoleum, and admonished him, the Kick Grid worked to its conclusion. It wasn't clear that he had actually kicked.

In the fall of '63, Al Fowler had spent some time in his home town, Albany, New York, working on a manuscript of his poetry to give to Auerhahn Press in San Francisco. It was a project which never quite came to fruition. Too bad, because



Auerhahn was one of the premier publishers of the era, known for putting out such works as Charles Olson's "Maximus from Dogtown—I." Then Al returned to the Lower East Side, and I was allowing him to crash for a few days at the "Secret Location in the Lower East Side," in a back building on Avenue A where I made underground movies, and published *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*.

I was still convinced he would become a top rank American poet. I would read his notebooks and pull out poems to publish in *Fuck You*. After his visit home to Albany to compile a manuscript of poetry, it wasn't clear whether he was shooting junk or not, but I still could not turn him away from the Secret Location. Al would still don now and then the priest's collar and a gnarly silver cross of the small Catholic sect of which he was an adherent. To me he was a poetic wonder.

### **Then Came the Assassination**

I was coming out of class at New York University, just after noon. I tried to make a call. The phone was dead. People were crowded around taxis in the street, listening to the radio. Thus came word of the assassination on a glare-y day, and immediate gratification, or ImGrat as I termed it, began to get balanced by right wing reality. I was right in the midst of publishing a new issue of my magazine, buoyed by receiving a fresh and brilliant poem by my hero Allen Ginsberg.

How could I possibly have become involved with the peripheries of the Kennedy assassination? Here's how.

I thought Lee Harvey Oswald at first glance was a horrid nut. Then came the rumors that Oswald had been in the Village, disrupting civil rights meetings, and my friend Al Fowler claimed that he had attended some of the same meetings.

### **"Was Oswald in Village?"**

The first issue of the *Village Voice* after the assassination came out on November 28. On the front page was an article headlined "Was Oswald in Village?"

"The FBI was in Greenwich Village early this week in search of clues to Lee H. Oswald's past. Their investigation here is apparently based on information that the alleged assassin of President Kennedy had for a time associated with a youthful Mississippi-born rightist who disrupted a number of pro-integration meetings in the Village during 1961 and 1962. The information came from an East Villager who claims he knew both Oswald and the rightist slightly while all three were in the same Marine outfit. He says he saw the two men together on more than one occasion and claims that Oswald had taken photographs for the Southerner in the course of disrupting one meeting. The informant claims that the photographs were destined for a pro-

fascist publication. There had been no information, prior to this disclosure, that Oswald had been in New York for more than one night since his return from Russia in 1962.”

The informant identified himself as James Rizzuto. Rizzuto also contacted popular radio host Barry Gray. A 5-page FBI memorandum dated November 25, '63 stated: “Barry Gray, radio commentator, station WMCA, NYC, advised one James F. Rizzuto had alleged he had info re one Yves Leandez, a close associate of Lee H. Oswald. Rizzuto furnished following info to agents. Rizzuto state that he, Yves Leandez, Lee H.Oswald and possibly one Earl Perry served together in U.S. Marine Corps in nineteen fifty-six at Camp Le Jeune and Barstow, California.” The FBI memo types onward Mr. Rizzuto’s claims about Leandes: “Rizzuto described Leandes as a close personal friend of Oswald and both were professional agitators who attended meetings of the American Jewish Congress and other organizations and tried to disrupt meetings. Rizzuto stated he though both Oswald and Leandes belonged to an organization possibly called ‘States Rights Party.’” The FBI memo recommended the Bureau contact Rizzuto in person to check these allegations out.

Two days later, the 27th, another FBI memorandum “Re Stephen Yves L’Eandes AKA Frenchy.” “L’Eandes allegedly visited Russia with Lee Oswald and one Earl Perry in 1960s. L’Eandes was seen active in picketing the White House, heckling the American Jewish Congress, and other mass meetings of the integration movement.” The memo recommended that L’Eandes be identified post haste and interviewed.

The FBI interviewed Pat Padgett, wife of poet Ron Padgett, on November 25, at her place of employment at 11 Waverly Place in the Village, where “L’Eandes” once had lived.

Al Fowler himself had attended some of the meetings at which “L’Eandes” had disrupted the events. He knew L’Eandes. “I liked him. He was amusing,” Fowler later told me. He had witnessed L’Eandes create a disturbance at a meeting of the Socialist Labor Party at the Militant Labor Forum on University Place, and he’d seen L’Eandes hanging out around the headquarters of the General Strike for Peace in early '62, located at the Living Theater.

Fowler later recalled the last time he had met with L’Eandes: “The last conversation I had with L’Eandes prior to the big snuff took place in a diner on Sheridan Square. He talked then about Fair Play for Cuba, etc. His whole shuck was that he was a Cajun, and that his whole family, in the main, was around New Orleans. He even got into a dissertation on the French Quarter. He asked me how I felt about Cuba, and I told him just what you would expect I would tell anyone, and did. I told him Castro’s noble struggles against the giant of the North was of no more consequence to me than any other replacement of any government by more government.”



So, in the heated horror of the post-assassination turmoil, prodded by his close friend, the artist Ann Leggett, Al Fowler called the FBI, and he agreed to meet the FBI that evening at Stanley's Bar! He did not show for the meeting, so FBI agents stood outside Stanley's and queried those who entered the bar as to Fowler and his whereabouts. I learned about his, and became sorely alarmed!

What if someone told the FBI that Fowler was crashing at my Secret Location? What about all the film cans with my footage for *Amphetamine Head, A Study of Power in America*? What about the footage from the Great March on D.C.? What about the torrid footage of Szabo and Ellen B? What about the stacks of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*? plus my film equipment— camera, tripod, strips and cans of film everywhere, plus gaudy Jack Smith-esque hangings of colored cloths on the wall, plus photofloods here and there attached to clip-ons. What would the FBI say about those, if they raided the Secret Location?

I raced over to the Secret Location a block away on Avenue A, and left a note for Al on the metal bathtub cover in the kitchen, next to my mimeograph machine. I was preparing a new issue of *Fuck You/*, and all the poems submitted for the new issue were in the Secret Location, including Allen Ginsberg's great poem, "The Change," which he had just sent to me from Japan. To me, it was a tableau foretelling jail time if the FBI should raid looking for someone who claimed to have seen Lee Harvey Oswald in the Village!

Here's the note I left:

My dear Al ---  
 as a result of the FBI  
 scene, you are requested  
 to REMOVE all your  
 stuff from here --- If  
 it is not removed by  
 FRIDAY, I shall re-  
 padlock the door & bolt  
 the windows & you will  
 procure your stuff at  
 my discretion ---  
 Ed. S.

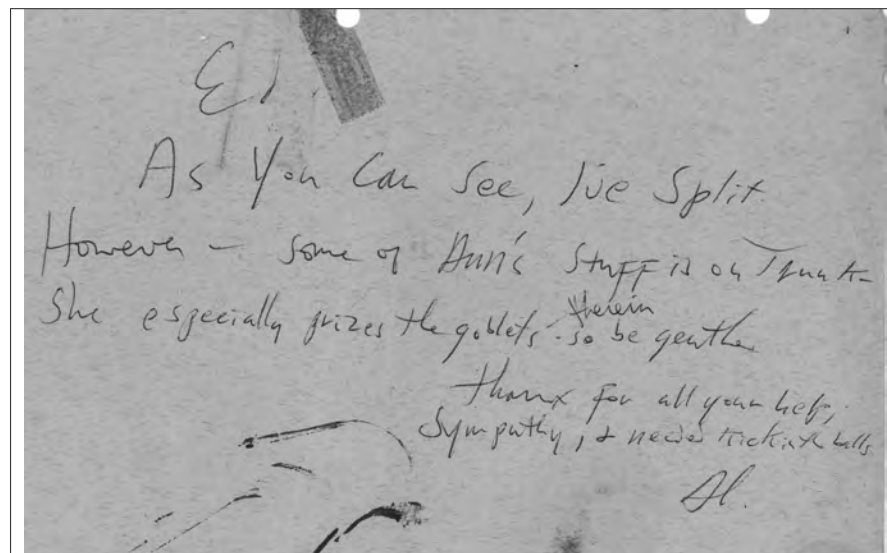
“My dear Al— as a result of the FBI scene, you are requested to REMOVE all your stuff from here— If it is not removed by Friday, I shall repadlock the door and bolt the windows, and you will procure your stuff as my discretion. Ed. S.”

Al left a note in reply, written on the reverse of my note, when he returned to the Secret Location. He pleaded with me to let his belongings in the pad, while promising to stay away:

Ed. S.  
 have had discretion  
 enough to stay away - please  
 allow my stuff to remain a while  
 longer - there is no dog in it & nothing  
 incriminating. I shall stay away as  
 I have before - thank you  
 Ed. S.

Then another note from poet Fowler, noting that some of his girlfriend Ann Leggett’s “stuff is on trunk— she especially prizes the goblets therein, so be gentle.”

Next to the note on the porcelainized tub cover was a blood splotch, likely from his shooting-up.



“Ed— as you can see, I’ve split. However— some of Ann’s stuff is on trunk. She especially prizes the goblets there in, so be gentle.

“Thanks for all your help. Sympathy, & needed kick in the balls. Al”

A trio of historic documents that came about through the assassination of our president.

By November 29, the FBI office in NYC sent out a notice that the investigation was to cease. They had learned by then that Rizzuto, the original source to radio host Barry Gray, and L’Eandes and Landesberg were one and the same! Steve Landesberg later became a well-known television comedian, starring on the “Barney Miller” sitcom, and why he claimed that Oswald had disrupted political meetings in Greenwich Village remains a mystery. (Fowler recalled running into Landesberg some time later: “I ran into him a couple of years later. He had dropped the accent. He was wearing a nice suit. He came up to me on the street and offered me \$600 to fly to Montreal and bring a box back with me, of unspecified contents.” Fowler turned down the offer.)

Meanwhile, once the coast seemed clear after Fowler had moved out, I went back to work on the December 1963 issue (Number 5, Volume 5) issue of *Fuck You! A Magazine of the Arts*. The Secret Location was safe. My mimeo was safe. Ditto for the footage for *Amphetamine Head: A Study of Power in America*. The studio was not to be raided by the police for another year and a half.

He lived for a while with the painter Ann Leggett. They broke up sometime in 1964 or ’65.

One night in Times Square, 2:30 a.m. Saturday morning, May 2, 1964, I met Al in Bickfords Cafeteria on 42nd Street. It was after my 5 p.m.-2 a.m. shift at the cigar

store at 42nd and 7th Avenue. He had grown weary of amphetamine. “Amphetamine is the worst drug,” he said. “There is no known drug that is more destructive.” (This note is contained in a file where I was translating Pindar’s “First Olympian Ode.” I made a notation next to the quote, “Aulden Fowler, poet & practical nurse.”)

### **Al Arrested in the Summer of '64**

Al was arrested in July of 1964. He sent the following letter from jail, dated July 19, 1964, with return address, “Aulden Fowler, 125 White Street, N.Y. 13.” 9UD4.

“Ed. Tell Gregory Corso to stick his ‘nobility’ in his shorts. thanx for reading. you no doubt are aware of most pertinent info regarding bust from Ann (Leggett). Naught to do naught to do. Visions of pumpernickel loaves & fresh butter, cannabis & wine. jail but sharpens one’s appetite for essential (causes?). jailed for junk, am hungry for it. not no more, though really no interest in that now— but oh for some smoke & scoff .... & got ‘mah nature’ back— could & would for the first time in a great while make like a rabbit gone mad & starving. Gonna kiezop me an M-1 carbine & jeep and head for the hills of Vt or NH— a half ell Bee of grooviness come back— out time— unless seduced by welfare to stay (\$71.50 bimonthly) Give my love to Huncke, Nelson (Barr), Harry (Fainlight), Ed M (Marshal), George (Montgomery) &c &c. Not necessary to enumerate, oh & Ginzap of course. Communicate my apologies to Bob LaVigne for the inopportune pop. Tell Huncke that ‘Fat Marty from

Lexington’ is in with me. Also Check Calabreze, Doffy Wild (1 yr), & ‘Jr’ Collins. Chuck Bick was here, but got bailed out before i could talk to him— jive-ass etc.

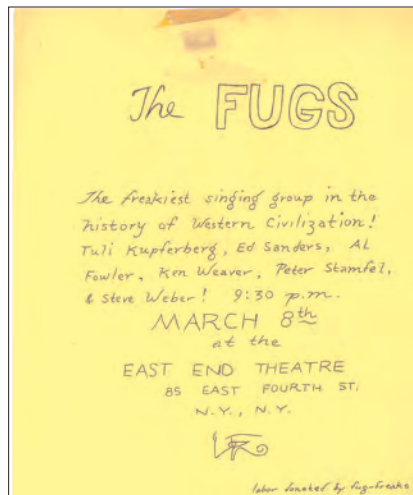
“‘One Law for the Lion & the Ox is Oppression’  
yrs fer the rev,  
Al”

Around now, Al became involved with a woman named Mimi Jacobsen, who had submitted poems to my magazine.

### **9 pm, Fugs at the American Theater for Poets “The Freakiest Singing Group in the History of Western Civilization”**

March 8, 1965

When I organized the Fugs in late 1964 and early '65, I invited Al Fowler to perform with us. The Fugs performed at the East End Theatre in early March of '65, located at 85 E. Fourth St, run by poets Diane di Prima and Alan Marlowe.



**Hot off the Peace Eye mimeo. Note evidence of 45 year old masking tape to pin to Peace Eye wall**

The Fugs for this concert: Ed Sanders— vocals, Tuli Kupferberg— vocals, Steve Weber on guitar and vocals, Peter Stampfel on fiddle, Al Fowler on recorder, Ken Weaver on drums and vocals.

Though Al Fowler and the poet known as Szabo were early members of the Fugs, both were hooked on heroin, which made it difficult for either to come to rehearsals, or keep to an exact, non-sweaty schedule. So they soon went their ways.

Around the time of the early Fugs concerts, Al and his new mate Mimi Jacobsen moved to New Paltz, New York.

### **Fowler Heads for New Paltz**

Poet George Montgomery lived in the Lower East Side, on East 5th Street, from around the summer of 1962 till the end of 1964. On January 1, 1965 (which he noted was the day T. S. Eliot passed away) Montgomery moved to New Paltz, New York.

A few weeks later Al Fowler came up from New York City for a visit. Fowler and his then mate Mimi Jacobsen visited one snowy night, and stayed a whole year. Then Fowler, recalled Montgomery, got a farmhouse to live in, with saluki dogs.

Al in 1965 went up to New Paltz— to live with George Montgomery? George Montgomery had settled there after a tour of poesy in the Lower East Side.

Al had a tendency to get involved in love triangles. This was the case with Ann Leggett and Mimi Jacobsen.

According to Montgomery, Al invited both Mimi Jacobsen and also Ann Leggett to join him in New Paltz. Each came, apparently around the same moment, with each thinking each she would live with Al and unknowing of the invitation to the rival.

Somehow, Mimi won the tug of eros and adoration over Al.

George Montgomery later spoke of how, when Mimi and Al lived with him for eight months in New Paltz, Mimi fed the salukis with quality meat. Montgomery and Fowler would be hungry and go down during the night and get fresh meat from the salukis' feeding plate.

Jacobsen wound up taking a jail sentence for a forged prescription, in place of Fowler. This was sometime in 1965, perhaps extending to 1966.

Jacobsen traveled to Minnesota in the fall of 1966, after her father had passed away. She had been raised there, and had attended the University of Minnesota before coming to New York City. I have a lengthy letter she wrote to Fowler during her visit to Minnesota. She talked of her and Al moving there. Her mother had offered them a car, and the visit brought back good memories of her youth, and she seemed to exult in the possibility of a new life with Al.

She and Al stored furniture and boxes of possessions at our apartment on Avenue A and 12th Street, during the early fall of 1966.

Mimi and Al moved to Minneapolis sometime in late 1966 or early 1967.

He obtained employment with a railroad.

On February 24, 1969, Al sent a note to "James E. Sanders c/o Peace Eye Bookstore, 143 Avenue A, NY 10009," using a letterhead from "Burlington Route," and with a brown mailing envelope for the "Chicago Great Western Railway Company." It somehow got to me, in spite of the mis-address.

I lost track of Fowler in the fury of the late 1960s, as I toured and recorded with the Fugs, kept running the Peace Eye Bookstore, and became involved with the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies.

I went on a cross-country Anti-Vietnam War reading tour with a number of poets in the spring of 1969, and met Al Fowler and Mimi Jacobsen at a party after a reading in Minneapolis.

### **Al's Recollections of Around 1970**

"I saw Allen (Ginsberg) here three-four years ago, since I saw you [during the spring 1969 Resist poetry tour in Minneapolis]. Exchanged a few words with him, inquiring after such & so's health & c, and he asked me the usual. I said, yeah, when



I get time. I was working the swing shift playing choo choo and logging 250 miles (16 hours, actually 15 hours 55 minutes) every night at the time, and doodling when I could, but anyway he gave my mind a little jog, you know. Gave me the address of someone who was putting together an anthology. Got busted before I could. (Took a lotta petty falls before I really got nailed.) I think it was a cracked tail lite & a bag under the front seat, or such.) Meanwhile, I'm hopeful there is a God and that I am doing as little as possible to offend Him.

“Disjointed as hell isn't it? And then I got shot through the liver, stomach, intestines and left kidney. One round from a 22 mag. (hollow point, 48 gr.) Got last rites. I shouldn't fuck anymore? (If you receive extreme unction you're supposed to remain celibate & abjure meat till fadeout) (no thanks.)

(the above from a letter to E.S., dated May 10, 1978, from Stillwater Penitentiary.)

### **Al's Recollections of His Arrests in Minnesota**

“In 1969 I took my first fall in this state (Minnesota), for weed, then 5-20 for possession with a prior. Two cases, in fact, worth 10-40 all told. When I got to court, when it was time to set bond, the judge said \$500! The judge had asked me if I had ever been arrested before, and I had replied, quite properly, “not in this jurisdiction, your honor.” He turned to the bailiff and asked him to get my rap sheet. Court Clerk reads it out “illegal U-turn, state of Wis. \$50 fine.” I almost shit my stylish slacks. I was only three weeks off paper for that dope sale case. Minnesota Parole Board had accepted my transfer from N.Y. & I had a NY chauffeur's license still! The lawyer

nudged me and I straightened up & set my face, which was about to break into a baboonish braying grin.

“As all I had was a joint, and working regular, playing choo choo, I got a year SS and \$2,000 fine. I voluntarily set my record straight after the pleas bargain was made. Everything from possession of H to attempted murder, so the sentence could be overturned later by the DA for new “evidence,” i.e., discovery of who I was.

“Next time the A.M. turned into 1st degree assault, but otherwise ok. Next time it turned into a ‘disposition ink.’ Which you can image how that affected my bail.

“Next time it was turned into ‘poss dangerous weapon,’ a charge I'd never had laid on me at the time. D. Christian was shoveled off the sidewalk with the piece still in his fist, and he was charged with possessing it.

“Last time I saw my sheet, that’s what was on it, disposition dismissed ‘wp,otm.’

“However, now my caseworker tells me I’ve got five prior felonies. I know for sure I’ve got seven, might be as many as eleven, such is the state of my brain. That frigging computer in D.C. is thoroughly defective and randomized.”

(The above from a letter from Al Fowler to Ed Sanders, dated May 10, 1978, from Stillwater Penitentiary.)

According to Al’s good friend Mary Fitzgerald, Mimi Jacobsen and her mother purchased a farm just outside of Stillwater, and Mimi was very much into raising dogs. “Al stayed with her quite a long time on that farm, and then they just were really having difficulties... and she kicked him out, or something.”

Around 1970 Al and Mimi broke up.

Al then lived in South St. Paul on Concord Street, near the railroad, for a while, in his own apartment. For a very short time, recalls Fitzgerald, Al worked in a nursing home.

He then lived with a woman named Barbara Randall, who owned a small farm just outside of St. Paul, in Mendota. Al was still working for the railroad when he lived at Randall’s. Al had two of the salukis. “And then,” remembers Mary Fitzgerald, “Barbara Randall got interested in the dogs too, and started raising them. Even though Barbara and Mimi were rivals in one sense, they did eventually end up being fairly good friends. They talked dogs. But then Barbara eventually asked Al to leave there too.”

Sometime in 1970-’71 Al accidentally shot himself. Also in 1971, he was hit in the back of the head, which caused him to suffer epileptic seizures.

“Now it seems Minnesota is stuck on me, at least to the extent of lavishing ten grand or so a year on me. Makes a dude feel wanted. (I bought the drug cases to the tune of \$5,000) but I was not given that option on this fall, since the state’s case was so good, & the injured parties (I hung a bunch of paper on a lot of big dept stores etc.) so powerful & pissed off. You see, I got the paper I was using in a burglary of a construction outfit whose owner was unusually devout, and who had installed a huge private shrine to the B.V.M. at the plant. My crime partner felt constrained to shit all over the altar, and pee all up & down Our Lady, whilst I was rummaging in the office. Though I remonstrated with him afterward, the deed was done. And so, my case was prejudiced considerably in the eyes of the gendarmerie. Since I would not give my partner up, though they could not pin the burglary on me, I was still lucky to get as little time as I did.

\*Some guys find burglary more effective than X-Lax.

“Meanwhile, through various vicissitudes, in most occasions involving the Keepers of Order, I lost all manuscripts & most drafts of four years work, including that which I considered ‘Best,’ whatever that means, & in relation to what I’m sure unable to say, but work, drivel or who cares?”

(Above from a letter to E.S. from Al in the late summer of 1974.)

He was sentenced in October of ’71 to do five years in prison. From then till around late ’74 he was in Minnesota State Penitentiary in Stillwater.

He had a close friend who visited him in prison named Karen Settevig. Later they were married.

She wrote me on September 22, 1974 from Minneapolis, c/o Avon Books (the publisher of the paperback edition of *The Family*.) She said that Al was up for parole that fall.

In 1975 and through early spring of ’76 he lived a free man with Karen Settevig.

On April 18, 1976, he called me. I was in Woodstock. He’d been out since, I think late 1974, but was due to head back to prison.

His wife Karen Settevig had tossed him out. “My wife just left me, a week ago, I don’t know where she went. I’ve got epilepsy. A guy, some nut hit me with a pipe in ’71, I don’t know who, a guy hit me from behind.

ES: So, you have grand mal, or petit mal?

AF: Grand mal. She’s scared of me. I hurt her once during a seizure.

ES: Some people, such as Dostoevsky, went totally out during a seizure.

AF: Well I walked out a second story window, without opening, the last time.

ES: Have a chance to write lately?

AF: That’s what I wanted to tell you. She left Monday, it’s been two or three days since she left, that I started to write again, after a long time. I went back to my boxes of stuff here, and found some interesting— Have you ever done that, come across things that you have written?

ES: I did that last year.

AF: I don't know who wrote them.

Although he'd been putting together his writing, he had great ambivalence about his early writing because of his shifting attitude toward heroin. "Up until '71, I was writing quite a bit, except that this broad I was living with, she had two teenage kids, and she used to get jealous, if I sat up and wrote, 'I can't sleep.' She wanted to get fucked all the time. That was all right with me, but if I got out bed she was up tight about it. That kind of disrupted things. But when I got rapped on the bean, that really put the icing on the cake. All the time, since I came here to escape myself anyway, I never wanted— I associated all that writing with being a junky. I was trying to escape. I hate junk with a passion. I was trying to escape being what I was. So I wrote, because I had to. But I never did anything with it, because once it was written, that was it."

ES: Yeah, that Lincoln Continental full of manuscripts— too bad you lost them. How's your memory? (Al had lost a bunch of manuscripts years before when a Lincoln he was driving was seized, apparently during an arrest.)

AF: It's got patches, you know? And after each seizure, of course, I don't even know my name.

ES: When did you have your last seizure?

AF: March 17th, I guess. That's when I walked out the window.

ES: Is there any kind of medication?

AF: Yeah, I'm on a course of dilantin and dysoxin. I'm on methadone, of course. They wouldn't let me out of prison without it.

ES: So you stayed on methadone clear through your prison sentence?

AF: No, No, they just made it a condition of parole.

ES: You were detoxified and they made you go back on methadone?

AF: Yes.

ES: What the fuck is that all about?

AF: They were afraid of the relapse situation.

ES: 70% or something like that?

AF: More than that.

When Settewig departed a few days ago, she left behind her purse. The way he described in to me in the phone conversation was that, in attempting to return the purse, Al had broken in to the pad of a friend of Karen's. The friend swore out a charge against Al for breaking and entering.

During our conversation that April day of '76 he was scheduled to go away the next day. I guess he was referring to the federal charge.

A year went by, and then we began writing back and forth beginning in the spring of 1978. Al was back in the Stillwater Minnesota prison.

I prepared a letter which I sent to the parole board, stressing Al's history and qualifications as a writer of distinction. He was let out of prison in late 1978, or early 1979.

I later asked his friend Mary Fitzgerald if Al published anything when he was in prison. "No," she replied. "This last time, when he was at Stillwater, he became acquainted with the Quakers. Some of the Quakers were poets here. They have one poetry magazine going. This Mary Ellen Shaw, she was one person that had been published; she was quite interested in his poetry. But, as far as I know, nothing was actually (published.)"

I asked, "Was there anything of his stored with the Quakers?"

Long time Fowler friend, Mary Fitzgerald: "I was with him the day he got out of Stillwater this last time. He had a week grace period during which he was supposed to get his stuff together and get to New York. He wasn't even supposed to stay at all, but the Quakers let him stay at their Quaker Meeting House. I had a lot of his stuff stored; and the Quakers had some stuff, and so we made the rounds of every place he had stuff stored, and we boxed it up and he took it with him to New York. So, as far as I know, everything was with him."

He lived with his mother about a year, beginning around early '79.

He had trouble getting a job.

During this time, his former wife Karen Settevig reentered his life, visiting him in New York City.

Also close to Al, and visiting him and his mother Bertha in New York City in early 1980 was his friend Mary Fitzgerald: “I had become very close to his mother and brother. I just couldn’t stay here, I just had to be there, that was all. I was there about a week and a half. I had been to New York three months before that, and things were getting really bad. He was really on the verge of having to move out. He and his mother were not getting along. It was very sad, because, you know, like I don’t really what the offensive problem was there. I know he was very good to her, from what I could tell. He really did his best to get along with her, and so forth.

“I think that one thing that would have been better, if he had gone from here to New York and had actually had a real job, where they say, ‘here is your job. You go. This is what you do,’ because like he told me that when he got out he absolutely couldn’t make any decisions at all. Like I was helping him get boxes, and getting things lined up to go, going here and there, picking up things and when you’re institutionalized, you totally lose all of your control over your life, and you don’t know what steps to do next. And to expect somebody to look for a job, actively to go out and look for a job....

ES: Yeah, Bertha ran down all his various job options he had suffered through during his last few (months.)

MF: “He went to a lot of them too. The very last job he supposedly was supposed to get— this was with this guy named Billie. I really didn’t like him much at all. He lived down there around 10th Street. He had a place in the basement; he was putting a punk rock group together, and Al was going to do some repair work on his synthesizers. So, that was going to be his employment.”

On January 23, 1980, Al Fowler either fell or was shoved into the path of an oncoming subway train, in Manhattan. He showed up at the ticket booth, gave his name,

then collapsed into unconsciousness. He lingered for 9 days, never recovering his consciousness, then passed away. He had two weeks to go before he would have celebrated his 40th birthday.

“I never do anything right,” was his last sentence to his mother Bertha the day he was hit. “It nearly broke my heart,” his sad mother told me.

Karen Settevig brought Al’s manuscripts back to her home, I think in Virginia, where she was living and working, and during the winter of 1980 typed a manuscript of 107 poems, which she turned over to Al’s mother Bertha.



I was given this typed manuscript when I visited Bertha and her son Gerald at her apartment in Jamaica Estates on January 20, 1983 and brought it back to Albany (where Miriam, I and our Daughter had moved, subletting our house in Woodstock while Deirdre attended her first year at SUNY Albany).

A few days after my visit with Bertha Fowler, a fire in a nearby apartment spread to our apartment on Madison Avenue in Albany, and firemen chopped a hole in the wall of my writing room, which resulted in Al's manuscript getting wet, but only two or three pages were damaged, plus I had a photocopy of the manuscript which remained intact. My file of letters from Al remained unharmed.

Over twenty five years passed, during which I wrote a bunch of books, read poetry and lectured frequently here and there, produced some Fugs reunion albums and CDs, all the while keeping stored in my archive Al Fowler's poetry.

I was writing a memoir of the 1960s in 2009 and 2010, and decided, at long last, to put together a history of Al Fowler, and a collection of his verse.



### **About the Collection of Al Fowler's Poetry**

From 1962 through 1966, when our lives most intersected, I always encouraged Al to write, and collected a good number of both typed (and hand corrected) as well as hand-written poems. Once I even hand-copied a few pages from one of his poetry notebooks. This resulted in around 100 pages of poetry and drafts written by him to wind up in my archives. In addition, there are 27 poems I published in my magazine, 1962-'65.

He also included poems in letters written to me in the 1960s and 1970s. After he passed away, his wife Karen Settevig typed a manuscript consisting of 107 poems, using original poems and versions of poems Al had placed in a filing cabinet at his mother Bertha's house in New York City.

From this gathering of Al Fowler's poetry in my archive, I have put together a sequence of his poetry, mostly, as best as I can determine, in chronological order.

Aulden Fowler— January 8 1940-February 1, 1980— American poet.

## The Poetry of Al Fowler

in the Archive of Edward Sanders

1. 27 poems I published in *Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts*, 1962-1965
2. Typed manuscripts; various batches, which are held together in my archive by paper clips. Circa 100 + pages.
3. Handwritten manuscripts: including a couple I copied by hand from his note books; some included in letters to me, and in a letter to Mary Mayo
4. The poem I published in 1964 in *Despair— Poems to Come Down By*; and in *Poems for Marilyn*, 1962; and in *Bugger*, 1964
5. The 1981-82 typescript, 107 poems, prepared from his drafts by Karen Settewig

Poems by Al Fowler published in *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, 1962-1965:

“Poems, Wargasms, Hymns to Young Men and Women”  
—from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, June 1962, Issue # 3

River Poem

senile river  
 floor littered  
 with aeons of pointless garbage  
 slender frameworks of beast  
 granite leftovers from  
 a mountain eaten during the mesozoic,  
 in lusty banquet of your middle age.  
 let it be said you are less than the  
 least silence  
 of any entranced youngster  
 who gulps a nascent universe  
 with each unlikely breath.

Poem

i am evangelist of sense  
 luring the young from classrooms  
 with a hint of total vision outside reality.  
 revolutionary songs shouted thru amazed cellblocks  
 intimations of divinity  
 in pacifist hashish rituals  
 god in teaspoons!  
 essence of christ in  
 stark hallucinations  
 that leave the actual forever suspect  
 anyway irrelevant.  
 radiations of disembodied love  
 actually visible  
 & forever tenant  
 in the blurred self.

### Hey, Uptown Girl

green eyelids & brown puff of conquered hair  
 absurd pubescent knees peeking under  
 skirt,  
 scared highschool eyes boring  
 thru pigment.

sophistication etched on your mouth  
 bulbs of future breast  
 tense plumpness of snatch silky  
 you murder your intense  
 moment of colossal youth  
 bewildered newness  
 cowers to extinction.

### Ecce Puer

Child, growing into youngness  
 more female than  
 any warmest woman  
 all the exact requisite  
 gentle qualities  
 eyes so fully shy  
 they swallow me  
 & the sure  
 spiritual motions  
 & the intuitive  
 wisdom  
 & flowering tenderness  
 of sensual question  
 compassionate skin of cosmos  
 your being pumps  
 triumphant  
 thru my buckling veins.

### Schoolgirl

hair a fragrant nimbus  
 softness of eyes puzzled,  
 quivering with shy youth,

the improbable  
 body  
 twelve years from  
 uterus  
 leans over  
 stark algebra.

•••••

Six Poems from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*,  
 Volume 5, Number 1, December 1962

### Heroin

“eyes taken down to see  
 I’s takin’ down to sea  
 Ice taken down to c  
 Ayes talkin’ down the sea”  
 insensibility  
     he lapsed into  
 unconsciousness  
 after the groovy  
     o.d.  
 oh & after  
     he’d turned blue & we’d  
 started rescue breathing  
     & shot him  
 a dropper of brine  
     the bastard  
 came to  
     blowing  
 a bad riff  
 so, what with the smeck  
 & all, we threw him out the  
 window  
 \*

### TAKEOFF

long probe for vein in  
 heroin takeoff  
 in the men’s room of  
 the college in the  
 nerve over the scummed

tile under the barebulbs  
 blowing the shot when  
     the Burns Guard comes,  
         skinned & high &  
         strident wailing  
         coeds thinking  
     voidal tampons  
 bust my works, & I left jones down the commode  
     for the nonce brevis.  
         paralyzed.

#### LARSON O.D.'S; FOWLER SCARED SHITLESS

there's the automatic  
     rescue drill performed  
 in earnest when a friend o.d.'s  
     salt cooked & drawn up in syringe  
     slapping of blue face  
     & already counting him dead,  
 schemes of disposal  
     obsess us.  
         the kind of shit that  
         scares you halfway in.  
         & coming on too strong.

\*

#### THE HIP LADY PACIFIST IN A LOWER EAST SIDE STOREFRONT

eyes big as broken thyroid  
     & hands swift pink devices,  
 the chair could hardly want more  
     clutching such ass.  
         trunk of honeyed organ  
         each cute gut proud,  
 it was little wonder then,  
     that just as she was born,  
     the clocks of the city  
         all frequented man  
         & blundered him  
         dully.

\*



## COCK CITY

this is Cock City  
 town of the snort & big yen.  
 bulge & shrink under the phosphors.  
 Fitzgerald effect of  
     ego  
 membranes get warty.  
     think hive  
 street & mechanical  
     wonders of the final  
     broken motion.  
 think entropy when  
     snow & time conspire  
     think sex  
 quickball under the stairs  
     on cement conveyor  
     belts/ swooping to gritting  
     come  
     think war  
     think noise  
     think  
     the yearn of the long/ horns  
     of angelus  
     groping thru the fog.

## VISION

When the unrelenting morning spoke again of drugs  
 when the poets slept and the coke conversed  
 vaguely with itself, using many mouths  
 i saw us all laced to a crystal  
 smaller than an asterisk  
 when pulleys on our tongues  
 obeyed crisp dicta shaped  
 like strands of silk  
 & minisculest facets  
 owned our breath.  
 Kif lit a lantern in the brain  
 that clove existence,  
 etching archetypal  
 laughter in the blankness

of a thought & we cowered  
 in our bodies loathing us,  
 Atomizing intellect &  
       squirting out fact.

•••••

Seven Poems from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*,  
 Volume 5, Number 2, December 1962

### BABBLE

where is our excuse  
 when the line deepens  
       into murkiness  
 & we delete our  
       truths from the final  
       structure?  
 oh, i could plead nerves.  
 my good set of works;  
       busted by a frantic chick  
       seeking her purse like  
       a demolition bomb.  
       but that's no good.  
       i mean it just won't  
       hold  
               any fat solution.  
 why do I babble  
       pregnantly  
       now & again &  
       fill the gaps  
       with filled gaps?

### I WANT YOU

i want you  
 under open sky  
       the sun in your  
       forehead & spread hair  
 the grass around your thighs  
       making no mistakes  
       of roundness

i want you in  
 water & the air  
 i want you  
     as long as there is  
         ocean  
 on the same earth  
     i want the  
 feel of under you  
     a planet  
         rhythmic as  
 love  
 giving all quarter  
     i want you  
 wherever there is room enough  
         to lie down.

## MUSÉE DES BEAUX ENFANTS

Posing as sunday school  
 teacher on the  
     strength of my ordination\*  
 “here we are at the  
     museum, kids. Note  
 the locked doors & how  
     I am nude behind the  
     medieval armor.”  
 we romped & balled  
     in tyrannosaur’s  
 sagging jaws.  
     virgins deflowered  
     themselves on  
     foot-long fangs &  
         manly halberds.  
     took turns going  
 down on a stuffed  
     gorilla,  
     packed their  
 pouting snatches  
     full of roman  
     coins.  
     tableaux in class  
     taken from the

classics;  
 we prayed to priapus &  
 Ra in the old  
 sarcophagi &  
 over mounds of  
 precolumbian art,  
 jap swords,  
 trilobites,  
 the whole  
 pretending swarm  
 of child  
 soaked the  
 air with  
 gooey shrieks  
 of fuck.

\*Fowler is a priest of the Free Catholic Church

## CHILD

All-sexed, asexual, piebald & monochrome  
 heterogeneous true successor of us all.

Of one spirit blessed by  
 paranoia, consecrated in honey, shattered by rain drops  
 indomitably still, Of one body racked with  
 typhus and eaten by ascares, ruled by a fever of  
 divine gullibility. Of one mind of schizophrenia,  
 of murder, of fellatio, of poem, johannsen  
 blocks of intolerance to the nearest minus 10

Guiltless heir of all the stench and  
 garbage of a billion year sickroom from which  
 the nurse had fled, luckless creature of  
 bankrupt charity, exquisite maggot on the  
 corpse of earth.

You will approach christ to spit in his  
 tender eye, piss on the mona lisa,  
 beat your meat at funerals and  
 die of gluttony with your soul's  
 blood on your soul.

Living Child of my idiocy and illusion of  
 my fanatic skull, with your intellect  
 infinitely innocent, your body merely  
 miraculous, and the dumb wonder of  
 your genitalia scheming Eden.

Baby of every father's shuddering come  
 and each mother's skillful being.  
 Child, Infant, *ИЛИЗОИЗЪ*, spotless of sin and damned  
 by your nature, My seed, spawn of Khrushchev,  
 child of calamity, Final tortured zygote in the  
 last blasted womb.

this that I have hinted is holy  
 Fruit of our passions and writhing lusts.  
 The essence of anarchic man,  
 Stupid, Ranting  
 Lying, Whining, Fucking, Praying, Dreaming,  
 Loving.  
 All these stupendous miracles and  
 mediocrities are sacred,  
 And my breath is forfeit to  
 The rotting excellence  
 of this innocent IS.

### DEMOCRACY!

“Conscripts of good will, ours will  
 be a ferocious philosophy,  
 ignorant as to science,  
 rabid for comfort; and  
 let the rest of the world  
 croak.  
 That's the system. Let's get going!”

—Rimbaud

You're depraved, i'm just perverted:  
 commuters shot from numbered cannons  
 at enormous dart boards  
 spike-wheeled babies darting into walls  
 of paddles held by parents as a game.  
 Skydiving techniques employed by the  
 masses

conspiring with ghosts on the radio.  
 “tonite’s our date to go mad together.”  
 & you can make the world do anything  
     in a sentence,  
         if you’ve got the intent  
 but the machine outside — reeking  
 of certitude. how it must  
     feel. squatting. its clattering  
         rusty tongue  
             “where we finally debark  
         o polyglot kiddies is at  
             the circus of your sexual souls”  
 harlequin cocks, eyes tossing  
 & bloodshot & rheuming noisily  
     down their sere cheeks.  
     an orgy of comptometers  
 tithing us for our own ruin.  
     clerks & potentates  
 bureaucracy tolerating human error  
     only to conserve worshippers  
 —meek noses in the subway rooting news—  
     hands manipulating knees  
 imaginary titties gone eyebrows  
     machineguns  
     spiked knees yearning for the  
     swoop to your throat.  
 spikes of decay chains hammered  
     bladewise frustration  
 uncle-cock swollen for niece  
     mouth fulls of kinky cunt hair  
     eyes empty as  
     the depths beyond arcturus  
     nursing a billion  
     unseen earths.  
 philosophies cooking  
     in the glancing  
     of an odor-speck  
     from the nostril’s hair.  
 close to hysterics at the truth  
     of existence  
     rain on their heads an  
         affront  
     motorists blind to the instant  
     until they’re saddled with

their two tons of iron  
naked in the road.

\*

### TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

When we talk on the  
telephone, we feel our  
loss more heavily.  
i stare at the  
slits, the box that  
sells her voice to  
me.  
i held the phone  
like a live thing, like  
part of her. it holds  
a sound i love.  
yet i hate the  
upright coffin, its  
pimpley walls,  
the printed admonitions  
lining it, for being  
in control  
of our feeble  
conversation.  
there are things  
unsayable in it.  
as though the  
wires were  
jealous.

\*

### THE ROOM. JUNK WITHDRAWAL

Now let's line out agony  
1890 furnished room bare  
of schmeck, her gone  
down the cataract of  
abstract force that pours  
around us all & makes



these leaps we don't  
 control  
     nothing but our attitude  
 is ours & now my  
 mental anchor slips  
     from the muck of  
     time

•••••

Poem copied from a lengthy notebook  
 of Fowler's, circa fall 1962

p. 114:

you better fuckin' ay be  
 satisfied with what your're  
 gettin', jack

    you're gonna hafta  
 pony up  
     some day

soon than you'd like.

    for it's ouch at the  
     ankle & pain in the  
 lung  
     if you gotta use  
     morphine you gonna  
     die young.

•••••

**The Law & Mr. Real**  
 for Ray Remser in  
 Hudson County Jail

“poetry is the art of  
 setting language to  
 music”  
     they quacked

back at  
     the  
         chiefest  
     inquisitor,  
 a senile lad  
 with ivory eyes  
     fixed quizzically.  
     their heads  
     shaped like  
     bags of fact;  
 torted dispassionately  
     by roving minstrels  
         of glum lies;  
         the mind's  
         clarity drowned  
         in fogs of moment,  
 over, then, these  
         drab & sorry  
             dress of time  
         presides a majesty  
             of rubbish:  
         chimney pots, tin cans,  
             toilet seats,  
         prosthetic limbs,  
         doll heads & broken ingots

oh, the grandeur of it!  
 the rusting velvet-textured  
     eyes countersunk  
         in the cragged &  
         fatuous fender-  
         fashioned face.  
 its orders clang briskly  
     & horrify the throngs  
         into swift  
         exhilarations of  
         suicide  
     “yeah, and on the other  
         side of this there  
             smirks the Chaos,”  
                 they moaned  
                 & “smell  
         this rose,   bud it  
     's laminated

lucite  
 only one ninety  
 eight.”

  so here we are.  
 It’s distressing, to  
 put it blandly,  
 to note the total  
   blot of any  
   continuity hulking  
 on the fall of the next  
 moment.

  tongues on the  
 sly,  
   the leer expectantly  
   at tattery gobbets  
 of condensing  
   futuraity & call it  
   forever,  
 eyes have been forgotten  
   & vision is sublimate  
   in  
 the univaco-infantile  
   Now  
   we mistake for  
   everything;  
 when it’s merely the  
   lucidest slice of  
 the magical mental pie  
   of time.

“we have not been properly  
 revered,”  
   the metagriffin  
 snorts, eyes afoam  
 with irony & vindictiveness  
 (gleamings of golden, trite  
 organ, form & manner  
 accidental; brutish)  
 squatting  
   haughtily on  
   the immense  
   moonstone  
   of the

benjo  
 floor.  
 a burly hassock of a  
     rippled beast,  
     pleated like a  
     rollsroyce seat.  
 & “laminated, mister,  
     looks better’n a real one  
     won’t  
         never wilt.”  
 one ninety eight per  
     warranteed,  
         scientific rose;  
 where the midline of his  
     naked nostrils aimed  
         & groped a void  
         for scent.

burned!!  
     hustled for  
 the pleasant stink &  
 the olfactory spice-cake  
     that suspends itself  
         like gaseous jello  
         over each nodding  
         blossom.

(the plea)  
     with our eyes cracked open  
 & smeared on the page  
     we want  
 just the bare dignity  
     of someone else’s  
     skull to wield our decibel  
         of thought.  
     where it sleeps.  
     where it hunkers  
     on the stumps of  
         rationality.  
         where it  
         answers us with  
         pain.  
         where we wince:  
         feeling empathetic

rise of blood in  
 the taut bubble  
 of the scalp.  
 where we question  
 each symbol  
 in the arclights  
 of the rubber-hosing ear.  
 the word vised around  
 our throats  
 & the craven liver  
 giving up the ghost

barrage:  
 flickers of sound  
 the sought &  
 acquiescent  
 spin to  
 the spring of  
 intuition  
 our genitals &  
 intellects bulging  
 with  
 mightiest  
 surrender

—n y december 1962

•••••

i must look like what i am,  
 sitting here; a junky poet, pushing  
 for his keep, in love, a bit odd,  
 & quite thoroughly mad.  
 she looks like how she looks  
 & there isn't any camera  
 capable, no known thing analogenous,  
 nothing quite as infinite  
 as her young breasts.

—late 1962

•••••

Three poems from *Fuck You! A Magazine of the Arts*  
 Number 5, Volume 4, Summer of 1963

junky II — speedball

the calm grins me.  
 outside, on the grey street, sounds  
 assume reality:  
     grating thrum is truck  
     ( i see its green, old, a probably  
     spade driving his cigar to work )  
 toes in my boots itch  
     i can't laugh anymore  
     at the tie on my arm  
 grim against me  
     bloody silk foul as a bandaid  
     on the lockerroom floor  
 the pipes fart — i need a shave  
     but ah the  
     big Flick  
     er  
     my chair cranked  
 up to  
     the  
 stars  
 & the long taste of altitude  
 eating my breath away

\*

Statutory Rape — (the plea)

I don't want to make excuses  
 but  
 it was my nature did it i'm  
 incredibly sorry but there  
 it is.  
     oh i know— you don't havta  
     tell me..but after her eyes  
     went all down & inside trailing  
     bent flowers;  
     i could've yes i suppose  
     if i'd only..but look;  
     suppose you was

in my shoes & she'd  
 smiled at you & somehow  
 courts & doom & the  
 cop's brutal hips cluttering  
 up the sky & her mouth  
 around it all—

those teeth..so fucking real they  
 were, clicking  
 down against the  
 whole lie  
 & like i was saying  
 i don't want to make excuses  
 & her mouth so real  
 i could taste it

\*

junky

'cross the green track  
 where we often  
 flaked out &  
 counted our absences  
 tears, broken telegraphs:  
 out of bounds & over  
 the  
 "what"?

what?  
 i caught you  
 in your crib  
 doin' those  
 all kinda  
 private things.  
 you wept, you pointed  
 out my lies in the  
 junk almanac  
 you puked all down  
 your black shirt &  
 fresh, caustic spew  
 burning out the nerves—  
 "it ain't no habit, man," you said,  
 "it ain't no need"  
 your pants heavy with sweat &  
 one day late for your fix





Four poems from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*  
Number 5, Volume 6, April 1964

are you going to the  
perpetual unveiling  
this week, mr. fowler;  
or will you sit at home again &  
watch yourself happen?

“is there really anything outside  
at all, & if so  
, is it worth messin’ with?”

my body is host to a carnival  
of actors & the carnate word  
shines through my brow so  
i am blinding in my own sight. i am become  
a hundred forms of light & wave-  
energy & charged  
particles focussed on a point  
more intricate than microscopes  
can make the whole world.

tuned  
in on myself, imitating myself  
in a mirror, i have realized my possibilities,  
schemed a means of exceeding them;

you don’t exist at all!  
you noxious phantom!  
amphetamine horror!.. . .!  
i murder you after you’ve  
been ultimately kind enough to make  
me strong & arrogant

in the midst  
of my afflictions  
i hymned thee, ate eclairs  
to thee. i opened my veins  
to thee, & was constipated  
every day. the civilized affliction! the  
subjugation of time! the annihilation

of matter

I fell asleep. trillions of  
 cells forgot I exist. i caught them  
 plotting against me when I woke up  
 & it took me hours to  
 get in the cockpit again

moving downward is the same  
 as moving  
 upward.

only the sequence  
 is reversed, & it's easy to mistake ones  
 dying  
 for ones being born. i have no experience  
 with these primitive centralized  
 species, these trillions  
 of interdependent  
 entities. i have evolved to amoeba;  
 to euglena, standing at the apex of the  
 hourglass of known forms, & await  
 a permutation to my own universe  
 where i shall have preceded god.

\*

## SOUP POEM

How far thru the soup can any man  
 swim,  
 before he has to  
 mount a pea  
 & rest?  
 & if he swims all the way  
 then what?  
 how long can you tread soup,  
 (trying to hover in the  
 brothy atmosphere),  
 hallucinating fish erect  
 (ourselves) or birds;  
 the fish of the air  
 we're slugs to?  
 but dropping, sinking,

down past chunks of our  
own meat & sour air  
you'd have me reach  
the same old bowl?

I'll grip  
the pea with teeth & tongue  
till Everything  
spoons me out!

\*

PHONE CALL\*

19 may 62  
midnight

though the mocking wire  
slew the greenness of your voice  
The vibrant plastic  
struck my ear crying  
and if only this clay machine  
owned me

Next the actual mouth of you  
I'd have fled in your breath  
frail as dandelion.

\*EDITOR'S NOTE: on the surface this poem looks innocent enough; however, lurking behind is an amphetamine plot. Reverend Fowler's young teenage gropefriend had just been menaced & threatened in the afternoon by the notorious entrepreneur amphetamine-head Van Krugel who who approached her with violent sex-lust evil dope grope freak-Eyes & she was overcome with terror. Fowler, having given her a midnight reassurance love call, wrote this poem.

\*

## MY LAST SHOT OF STUFF

my last shot of stuff—  
 stiff cottons purposely left wet for this  
 final bang weeks later—  
 i hoard it in my blood & my corpuscles  
 cherish the warmth &  
 almost groaning ease with which i  
am  
 this moment's like an island of sanity in time  
 awhile stolen to perch upon, perusing  
 self, past, obligations, tenderness,  
 i love you, ann;  
 this much the soothing fingers  
 in my brain write— tho my attitude  
 now probably frightens you & should me—  
 will when i'm down—  
 but now... o my ineffably  
 golden & secure love....  
 to feel this rush of clarity into  
 my morass of weeks & dull pain is to feel  
 a welcome fate.

we can only teach machines what we  
 already know.

i love you as only a doomed,  
 defeated man can love... with pity, with fierce  
 tenacity.

i felt it was safe here— to risk this  
 unveiling— i need stuff too badly—

i beg you to help me substitute your

metabolic self—

“my hunger, Ann, Ann; flee on your donkey”  
 ma femme, flee.

i cannot abdicate my words.

i am choking with them.

who cares that now or someday

someone chuckles

over them; pronounces them a

a poultice, a knockwurst of the  
 mind?

my head is sandpapered inside &

blown thru with dust of Victorian

rooms shut up these eighty years.  
 i no longer recognize my  
     own memories, there's  
 the snag, or my visions either.



Poems by Al Fowler, from  
 typed manuscript circa 1964-'65:

### Poem for John Wieners

this is a revolt  
     against bodies  
 this is a revolt  
     against appearances  
 this is a revolt  
     against time.

miscellaneous fists & eyes &  
 genitalia strut their stuff  
 in manifest perversions:  
 games with obscure & niggling rules  
 for stakes of emotional erasure,  
 magnifications of money; the juggle  
 and bump  
 of the earth.

hardly anything matters anymore  
 but my voice but my hands but  
     my voice  
 possessed by visions,  
 i steal traditions  
     from the night & my light  
     from the energy that  
     created me.

i am a soldier monk set out to  
     quicken; to annoy;  
 to envelope  
     the earth in an essential  
 question no one can avoid  
     asking;

in swampy groves full of  
rattlesnakes &  
naked children  
i sit & sing.

46

•••••

### Comfiteer

for Fr. Edward Marshall

‘without sin, the virtues that are forced on us  
would be unbearable.’

i won't lie to You. yes  
i am a burglar, yes  
i use narcotics & no  
i won't get married to her  
though we've shared the same bed  
for a year.

no i don't want  
children, the brats you've plagued  
my brain with

give me labor pains  
enough. & yes  
& yes i write checks  
backed by nothing but the smile  
& the soft voice You gave me  
& my clear green eyes.

to stop the pain of Your  
birth, Lord. Your birth of which i  
am not worthy. but You  
entered under my roof so long ago, Lord  
without ever asking if it leaked.

•••••

### Alone in the House

i'm alone in the house with a frozen roasting chicken  
but how in hell can i roast a chicken  
with no oven & the light gone mad  
& my cat  
pissing on the floor?

the garbage is beginning to smell  
 my hands are starting to rebel. nothing  
 stops anymore. it all rushes by so fast i  
 can't tell one event from another.

life's a cosmic soup, unloading through a hatch  
 on everybody's lap at once!

a tubercle bacillus  
 snuggling down inside your lungs & killing you  
 whether you love it or not.  
 for Christ's sake, learn that at least;  
 life doesn't care a rat's ass  
 who lives it.

•••••

### **Peyote Poem**

#### I.

The way to God is plentiful;  
 anyway i walk, see, do.  
 i follow him to where he sneaks away  
 & hides whenever tme's too much  
 for him to buy off:  
     he sits and trembles,  
     cooks up planets for his fix,  
     nods out on a skinny arm  
     & dreams of power, potency.  
 (his sojourn for those lost years  
 balling thru Tibet and Africa)  
 where kif and the dust of the road  
 were good. Before the loaves  
 and lepers monopolized his time.  
 ("life's a chemical process so  
 boorishly prolonged you'd think  
 that ornaments of meat and bone  
 had something to do with purpose.")  
 he sighs  
 "what glop to be remembered for"  
 & his childish face glows again  
 with a simpering lust.

#### II.

I ignored my body just so long &



forgot where it ended.  
 (is that sea/  
                                   that river, swamp,  
   my  
   rushing humor?)  
 is this machine my clumsy body?  
 that kiss my obscene awareness?

### III.

“let’s get basic here!”  
 i forget where it ends,  
 if it really starts anywhere:  
 down on the shoal of instant  
 like a baffled ptarmigan;  
 plunging my beak  
                   into things  
 concerning me no longer:  
                   beliefs, possessions,  
                                   attitudes;  
 grotesque indelicate surrender to  
 pressures of metabolism!  
                   & the will!  
 i forget where i used to think it  
 ended and began.  
                   it’s all me & emptiness again  
 until another mote of mumbling  
 sentience breathes it into form.

### IV.

it is vast and made of stars  
 it must be & is not.

—late ’63-early ’64  
 typed by Ann Leggett

•••••

reality’s a chance operation;  
           i wonder if the groundhogs  
 know that.

if you can count at all  
 (if counting counts)  
 you can count your  
 Heisenberg uncertainties.

i don't wanna know  
 what i mean!

i can lurk & dance around the edges of the truth  
 & snicker.

i am arrogant beyond belief.

•••••

A 3-Page Poem from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*  
 Number 5, Volume 8, February 1965

man is the discontented beast &  
 pleasure is only the rhythmic  
 vibration of things not  
 necessarily specific.

the whole shebang's no more  
 than a glandular puppet show.

my body doesn't any more  
 need me than any of a hundred  
 other diseases.

any rock  
 is as sensitive as i am, only  
 somewhat more resigned.

like these  
 lame faces with their ideals or their  
 fifty dollar habits

legislating gods  
 into being. trying to impose a vibration  
 on the universe that the universe  
 will not endure— for the universe  
 is a restless critter also

we wept, we cried out  
 in a hundred languages,  
 we shouted every name we could conjure up  
 into the wind.

like prairie dogs,  
 we built our nests & prayed  
 & like the prairie  
 you came; with your gift of sand  
 to be baked into  
 our bread as we huddle together  
 in the raw evening, speaking  
 of your secret benevolence & of your  
 thighs that moisten our way  
 for us.

we hand each other ritual gifts:  
 burning leaves, words to ward off  
 the comfort,  
 & beg you to  
 return & bless us again;  
 O impulse!

\*

i'm alone in the house  
 with a frozen roasting  
 chicken, & how the  
 hell can i roast  
 a chicken  
 with no oven &  
 the light gone  
 mad & my cat  
 pissing on the floor?  
 my hands are beginning to rebel; nothing  
 stops anymore. it all rushes by so fast i  
 can't distinguish events  
 from one another. life's  
 a cosmic soup unloading  
 through a hatch on everybody's  
 lap  
 at once! all blatant  
 & obtrusive! a tubercle  
 bacillus snuggling down inside  
 your lungs & killing  
 you whether you  
 love it or not. for christ's sake learn that  
 at least, already.

life doesn't care (a rat's ass  
at all) who lives it.

•••••

A 5-Page Poem from *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*  
Number 5, Volume 9, Summer 1965

I.

night. in the orchards &  
the hills below

zero.

black & still. not even the moon  
has crept out of its cage  
& only molecular motion  
invisibly silently continues.  
but i can't be sure of this on faith  
any more that that there is a moon.  
that this is really night, & not  
the blank at the end of existence.  
or that my glandular engine has not  
finally failed.

the earth crackles and contracts!  
ice expands in the concrete  
joints of highway 32.  
more work and  
taxes for the county or the state:  
if the county & the state  
still exist.  
if i am not made & gone  
false in memory.  
& if the "county"  
& the "state" ever were  
anything but alphabetic constructs  
that pleased me in some past age  
for forgotten reasons.  
& surely



forced their way through, in  
 any of a trillion forms; all  
     instantly recognizable.  
 bodies duplicate bodies entering &  
     leaving each other no matter  
 what, no matter when, but  
 you must love without a conscience  
     in order to be God.

### III.

it's time, it's always time  
     to unwind one of your  
     selves & monster it.  
 it is part of the mechanism of art to despise oneself  
 get it?  
     otherwise why live real lives?  
 otherwise why poison & flatter yourselves with  
 idiocentric tidbits  
     stuck to nothing more  
     substantial than a sigh; than a  
     lonely shudder in the dark when the heat's  
 been turned off & mama-love's done payin'  
 for your junk & no  
     sweetheart's ever  
     comin' back to warm you up  
     no more.

### IV.

your body doesn't any more need you  
than any of a hundred other diseases  
     & any rock's as sensitive as  
     you are, only somewhat more resigned.  
     you poor lame faces with your ideals  
 or your fifty dollar habits trying to legislate  
 gods into being!  
     trying to impose  
     a vibration on the universe  
 that the universe will not  
     endure!  
     but the universe is a

restless critter  
also.

## V.

you can't live without dying.

got me?

too much brightness might as  
well be dark, & you never  
can be absolutely  
sure.

## VI.

so run till you're bludgeoned by the sleep  
in your veins  
; over the next hill  
are slow warm people of  
impossible color &  
mien.

trading bodies & beliefs like marbles  
that clatter in the bag but  
are never  
seen.  
dancing in cele-  
bration of the hour  
that arrives, that  
arrives  
never letting up. images.  
passions & nourishments all fled away,  
as soon as you notice  
they're here.

## VII.

this is the last intelligence  
of a dying brain  
writ in letters of steel on the horizon:  
"time time time it is  
time."  
time to shout your final No! into their  
faces.





no longer necessary.  
existence is obsolete.

## XII.

i would be alone with the galaxies  
& the slow turnings  
i would be built of duridium  
& fire & the splash of energy  
from my appendages  
would make the world squirm  
in mindless delight.

## XIII.

i can get away with anything.  
i have license to lie.  
if you murder me, it will be for stealing  
your souls.

•••••

—Al sent a letter dated May 9, 1966, with the  
return address of South Oak Hospital, Amityville, NY,  
including four poems:

**A Suicide Note**

—for james e. sanders

i wouldn't mind quitting  
right now;  
myself.  
but the  
air!  
the FUCKING air!  
my BODY  
keeps SUCKING IT  
in &  
out, IN &  
OUT..... like it was maybe  
worth something.

•••••

because this corner of the world is damp  
& cold

i take orders from my veins  
thus cornered in the world  
i let hunger

hold the reins  
& i believe any lie the sun  
tells about itself

the sun who cares  
less than i do  
who makes reeds & flowers  
explode from the earth

& watches me  
watch my reflection in the slow water  
shiver

& the pyramids slide  
grain by grain  
into the Nile & away.

•••••

**a letter to a woman that was never sent**  
—for mimi

i think of you,  
the joy

of you;  
where i enter; where i  
leave.

i think of the men  
you have known & of your quick mouth  
beyond price & of the junk  
i need to stop needing you or  
junk either.

& i think about  
not thinking  
anymore.

all i want are the words i need  
to say what i need to say.  
what i need. to say what i need.

•••••

**Weather Report**  
—for Mimi

in wintertime,  
 snow floats in the air  
     like lost feathers  
                                     of a wet &  
 silent bird,  
     i love you.  
                                     Whether or not there is  
 thunder,  
     i love you.

Sparrows whistle & the sky gets deep  
 at night because i love you & if you  
 should hear the rain;  
                                     remember why.

●●●●●

goddamn it you know we've got  
 eyes  
     & cursing what they see won't  
 bend light into loveliness.

why should i believe in me  
 when noone else deigns to  
 see?  
     consequently you are  
 less than not at all tangible.  
     between the sanded  
     fingers of the mind.

& so also poetry arises  
 not from need itself,  
     but need's awareness

& a poem is  
     a cricket  
 fiddling its own  
 mind legs.

(poem 79 in Settevig typescript)



**Message Intercepted on Railway Band CGW Motor 38  
Pigs Eye Yard, Pigs Eye, Mississippi River  
July 1968**

Mayday. Mayday. recon  
to control  
on the ground with all hands.  
socked in  
by parasympathetic fog.  
do you read, group,  
do you read?  
Recon one to group in clear:  
Request medevac.  
coordinates unknow.  
sense the presence of unprogrammed computers,  
disguised in any absolute form of which  
out might be conscious—  
in crumbling tenements  
where hallway crappers  
are burglarized nitely  
or in the rookery by the Rock Island switch  
where herons squabble over tasty frogs  
do you read group.  
do you read?  
Need time rap recognition data patterns  
Need working definitions absolute  
form, absolute  
consciousness,  
whichever applies—  
you to herons:  
absolute consciousness requested  
in ambling disguise  
senses burglarized,  
in  
control crumbling  
unknown party celebrating  
Mayday  
You read one crumbly control  
Senses burglarized  
working in disguise  
absolute consciousness requested  
when part celebrating Mayday

You read recon data to control  
 absolute consciousness requested  
 Burglarized

(poem 107 in Settevig typescript)

•••••

**Open Letter for Chickens and the Daze of War  
 (for Robert Bly)**

The trouble (all farts are troublesome) with  
 all of us in that we have always just arrived  
 at the formulation of wisdom.

Time is never dead.

Yet nothing is really cyclical. Someone kicks a  
 jukebox, dead for ten years, and it plays tomorrow's  
 tune.

This is the thrust of what I have to say to you  
 that for the second or thousandth time you'll never  
 get to read.

You are one of the ones, the only ones who  
 see me naked though it seems you couldn't have,  
 Wrapped as I am so carefully, so comfortable in these  
 clothes of stone and dead intentions  
 Why am I writing this to you now?

When we met it was during our shared fever  
 Mimi's father had just died, who had detested me,  
 for his own excellent reasons.

I thought you an estimable hick, for the  
 sake of the preservation of the comfort of my ignorance  
 I had ignored you.

I was a private god, and could  
 judge like that then, I heard you with Bob Creeley  
 and Ed Sanders. Afterwards, I took Bob home and  
 we argued for ten drunken hours over everything but  
 you. Bellowing poems at each other while Mimi tried to sleep  
 in the next room.

I wrote you a long peroration entitled something like  
 Apology for offense never taken. How could I have missed you?

Then I read a piece by Carol somewhere about an old lady  
 in a nursing home— she got it all down so perfectly. I worked  
 nursing homes a while during my long slide, and I know.

Just as I knew when I heard you back then that you knew

what the was was about and what it was doing to us.  
 And tonight I heard you on the tube, felt you kicking open the  
 long delicious wound that is life again. The pain of it.  
 To be both the seal and the oil man, conjurer and consumer,  
 forced to trust anew the cancer I conceive myself. Stay alive—  
 Mr. Bly— (as though even God could kill you)  
 You are a man.

(poem 9 in Settevig typescript)

•••••

There is an openness  
 to things  
     that always shuts  
 when studied.

There is always newness  
 in the stopped motion  
 of a gull flight.

& when feet  
 meet water, furrows  
 are invented on the sea.

There is a song transcending  
 music in the silence of  
 your smile.

(poem 80 in Settevig typescript)

•••••

In a letter from Al, dated August 29, 1974,  
 from prison in Stillwater, Minnesota, he enclosed  
 a poem:

**Nursing Home Blues,**  
 annotated









error confirmed in repetition,  
 imaginative effort unused  
 be so wonderful a prospect to  
 contemplate?

Is sanctity so remote & lovely a condition  
 to imagine I imagine I desired it  
 from my foggy submolecular vantage?  
 who could feel anything but pity for the lost?  
 Like Christ,  
 like Sade, waking up in his own dreams?

What are the recollected sufferings of Jesus  
 but a toothache to the nth power?  
 and whose life has passed without a toothache?  
 without charley horse or tonsillectomy?

What is the mystery of Venus  
 after a blowjob/  
 from Helena Tsaveros  
 in the cloakroom  
 in the ninth grade?

•••••

### **Poem for Marilyn Monroe**

1962

Marilyn;  
 Worms feast on your koshered mammaries,  
 (rendered quiet by lusting goofballs)  
 who must have been awed  
 entering that flesh cathedral.  
 i think of all the men who've beat their meat  
 in rhythm to your passage on the screen.  
 & all the dykes who've longed to give you suck  
 & panty-freaks yearning to flash behind  
 a snort of your lingerie.  
 i'm sorry i didn't get to you  
 in time— when you were Norma-Jean  
 quivering lonely pigtailed  
 in the orphan junior high  
 where your pussy squeaked

like a nubile billiard-cue

—from *Poems for Marilyn*  
anthology, September 1962



### **Narration for a Home Movie Taken by the Poet**

Children seated on  
the stoops of a thousand houses, too  
shy to call their wares.  
open happy men with innocuous  
faces. sensitive dark men  
with places to go & secrets to keep.  
young girls drive graceful  
pirouetting cars surrounded by  
foam rubber & perfume. chuckling  
old hags smoke hashish in  
the park, & eat ices flavored  
with the blood of exotic  
vegetables. nobody here  
cares about anyone else  
unless asked to. no one  
interferes. everytime  
one of the beautiful  
children gestures  
expanders of consciousness  
are hawked & bartered or  
given away.  
bibles, beads, opera glasses,  
illuminated legal writs, drugs,  
sex withheld, & given, denied &  
sublimated. blueprints of public buildings  
destroyed in the late war.  
“there’s worlds enough for  
all and every. world senough for  
few or many.” the three organs & the three  
hundred choristers  
gathered in the square  
begin to sing. every christian is  
his own christ. if you want  
what is happening to happen,

nothing will happen except  
 what you want. death  
 here is a condition of static mania. nothing is  
 depressed here but buttons,  
 electrical buttons  
 electively depressed by  
 depressed people who don't  
 want anything to  
 happen at all & so take their  
 leave of us, turning into truncated  
 coruscating bubbles of artificial  
 light & we cough on the  
 puff of ionized meat & sadness  
 in the air & we laugh.  
 the moon  
 is as accessible as the latrine,  
 but perhaps it would be better  
 not to visit.  
 the land is as soft as the  
 warm wind. toucans lead the  
 travelers at night with lanterns  
 in their claws, & croak their way  
 home through the fog. there is  
 nothing safe here, nothing  
 dangerous  
 there only is.

—1964, from *Despair, An Anthology to  
 Come Down by*



watching the lads conjugate thru  
 a keyhole; grimwald  
 grew restless.

“what shall i do  
 to relieve my anguished  
 instrument?”

he cried.

& the topmost boy exuded  
 an erotic fart & shrieked

“how arrhythmic can you get  
pops?”

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    i mean pee-you, charlie,” grunted  
the other boy,

        thinking the first boy  
meant him. “put some water on that  
please, i mean

        no one could hump  
        in a funk like that”

not you, aristotle

    i was talkin’ to

        this old truck whipped a pound  
on me fer a peek

        “put some water on it anyway,  
charlie, i’m subject  
        to suffocate

                        down here”

but only grimwald’s pants  
got wet.

when the young ladies came,  
he had went.”

—from *Bugger, an Anthology*, 1964

Al Fowler  
Requiescat in Pace

Rest in Peace

