*Introduction:* In 1992, Alice and Doug moved to Paris, where they collaborated on several projects including *The Scarlet Cabinet.* During this time, Alice wrote many of her most widely praised works: *The Descent of Alette*, published initially in *The Scarlet Cabinet* in 1992 but separately in 1996 (one year before this interview occurred); *Close to me and Closer… (The Language of Heaven)* and *Désamère* in 1995; and *Mysteries of Small Houses,* which at the time of this interview was still a manuscript (it was published a year later, in 1998). Alice lived happily with Doug until his passing in 2000 due to prostate cancer.

**An Interview with Alice Notley**

by Judith Goldman

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In late September I called Alice Notley in her Paris apartment, requesting to do an interview by correspondence with her. We exchanged three letters each over the next two months. Our letters cover works produced by Notley in the 1990s, including *The Scarlet Cabinet* (with Douglas Oliver), *Close to me & Closer… (The Language of Heaven)* and *Désamère, The Descent of Alette,* and *Mysteries of Small Houses.* Each of these outstanding recent books tells a story (at times, more than one), forms a discrete relationship to narrativity, and develops its own music. The following text is composed of excerpts from our correspondence.

10/2/96

**Judith Goldman:** At your workshop at the Poetry Project last spring, you talked about voice, about saying I in a poem, using that I to shape the way you talk about yourself, and the way the I unifies the poem. You asked, at one point, “Is there an actual I who is exactly myself?” You also problematized narrative during the workshop, saying that narrative is an outside (false) structure that people use to jail their pasts. Do you see narrative as self-romanticizing – as though the I the story falls to becomes too large(?) or too idealized to be the “exactly [one]self”?

**Alice Notley:** In that workshop last May, I was presenting considerations and techniques associated with a manuscript I’d just finished called *Mysteries of Small Houses.* The project of *Mysteries* was to “re-center the “I.” I’d been writing narratives with fictional characters for a number of years and suddenly I saw “I” as a challenge and a mystery. I wanted to investigate the basic “I” (I mostly uncorrupted) as closely as possible. Basic I is terrifying of course. It really exists, but we seem to construct everything – our world, our social forms, our narratives, and our anti-narratives – in order to keep it hidden. I wanted to find “my self” – as the only self I could investigate – in the context of my past in order to determine its constancy, or lack of it, across the years. I thus had to re-see my life. I tried for a scary honesty; I wanted to be frightened by my own existence. Be as alive as I am and not be in other people’s ideas of life-shapes or other people’s theories about the non-existence of the self. Yes, I think narratives of the self are often self-romanticizing, but not because they make the I too large, rather because they make it too small and not precisely individual enough. I think each I is both huge and unique. As for voice, I probably talked about how the voice comes from the depths of the unique body and the unique self and each person’s voice – taking voice to be both sound and style – is different. For example, I can tell the difference between each person’s poems, no matter how imitative or downright bad they are, after a few sessions of an ongoing workshop. Why is that?

**JG:** Describing your own writing, you said, “I remember everything; it isn’t past, it’s wild,” and further stated that names tame things that shouldn’t be tamed. How do you free your writing from the construction of narration? Do you feel that you have to de-narrativize or unname certain memories as part of your poetic process? Do you ever find that words in and of themselves are conducive to narration and find it difficult to free them from coalescing into already recognizable forms? Does a poem represent a process of organizing the self?

**AN:** The quotation – “I remember everything; it isn’t past, it’s wild” – is from the first poem in *Mysteries of Small Houses.* It’s called “Would Want to Be in My Wildlife.” It’s kind of an introduction to the process of the book. That is, in order to write it I went into a sort of hypnotic trance, which really wasn’t very different from my normal writing state, though it felt new and exciting anyway. I think perhaps I went deeper into that state than usual, in order to remember things. But I find that there is a particular state to write from in which I am free from the constrictions of you mention, free from stories as I already know them and also free from my current tag words. In the case of *Mysteries* I tried to find my four-year-old self and to re-enter the house where I lived when I was four, because it seemed that when I was that age I was both most natural and most good. I identified essential self with that age – the problem then became, what was the purpose, if any, of my later experience? As you may have gathered, I’m always inventing a new way in to writing poetry. I suppose that’s how I manage to keep such things as shape and narrative and vocabulary fresh for myself. As for your final question in this sequence, I don’t try to organize my self so much as to find it over and over, though I often try to organize what I think about things.

**JG:** Your newest published works, particularly *The Descent of Alette,* as well as *Désamère* and, *Close to me & Closer… (The Language of Heaven)* are very much concerned with storytelling. These are phenomenally intricate texts that, as you state in your preface to *Close to me,* “anyone can understand.” Did you specifically think of these books as a project of producing texts that anyone can understand? Or perhaps better said, who are or who aren’t these texts for? What is the poet’s (social/political) responsibility to articulate the memories of the self and the wilderness or presentness of the memories as represented by an I? How are the narratives that these recent works present different from narratives that you consider too structured, or, to put it bluntly, dead?

**AN:** I wrote *Alette* in particular for everyone, or at least for the sort of people who ride and take shelter in the New York City subways. I wrote *Close to me…* to demonstrate the aptness of the non-intellectual voice for speaking of profound things. I wrote *Désamère* as an eco-warning: I’m not afraid of the ecological cliché especially as the situation becomes more and more drastic. But I *always* want to write poems anyone can understand. And I have always wanted to. Even in my most “difficult” works I’ve always tried to include some more generally attractive aspects – a highly defined, seductive musical shape, or jokes, patter, color. I think that so-called popular poetry underestimates the verbal intelligence of so-called ordinary people, who in turn haven’t been properly taught poetry in school. Meanwhile so many people’s careers in the academy and in poetry seem to depend on their obfuscating poetry, making it seem as theoretical and intellectual as possible. The consequence is that ordinary people think they can’t understand poetry, and popular poetry talks down to them, these people who in bars, on streetcorners, and at kitchen tables conduct sophisticated verbal dealings daily, tell stories at least as well as any professor of literature, get at each other with words in the most subtle ways. My books are for anyone, anyone who feels like taking the chance and the time. Of course that still won’t be a lot of people. In relation to political/social responsibility in *Mysteries of Small Houses*: If I say that the self is wild and free and vast, is the real, but is only realized apart from the social and political restrictions we’re always laying on each other – the implications are obvious: Let’s get this dead weight off that smothers self-realization, catches us up in economic situations that are globally harmful to others and to the planet, enslaves us to one or another doctrine. As for how my narratives are different from “dead” ones: For one thing the music is different each time. When I invent a new music for my poem, I insure that I won’t tell a story I’ve already told or that I can predict. And then there’s the “matter” or subject of my books – it’s always something that makes me shaky and that I can’t deal with adequately. I won’t be able to cover it, I won’t be able to kill it.

**JG:** In your workshop, you also discussed language-based or text-based writing that uses words instead of ideas as “amusing,” but superficial. How/why did you stop writing language-based poetry (if that is how you would describe some of your earlier work)?

**AN:** I don’t think I’ve ever written language-based poetry as such. I’ve always had too much to say. Too much happens to me personally, and more, there’s what’s happening in the world… There’s too much to talk about, to deal with. I’m not interested in “language” when there’s so much danger in the air. I sometimes use “language” to help me get to what I want to say or to an area of feeling or responsibility. The words, coming both from my depths and from the outer world with its urgencies, help me locate my poem.

**JG:** On a more simple autobiographical note, do you consider yourself an expatriate? Is there a community of writers in Paris that you identify with? Do you ever feel nostalgic about or homesick for the States/New York City?

**AN:** People keep asking me the expatriate question. It always surprises me because of that word, which has daddy inside it and all sorts of loyalties and localisms. I don’t consider myself a patriot or an expatriate; I’m here, I’m staying, my French is still terrible. I’ve mostly been looking at the US from Paris, in that sudden new way available from being outside it, but I’d prefer to be looking at the world now. Though the US is where my professional life is and will be. But the world is effectively dropping more and more boundaries, becoming one thing. There isn’t a real community of writers here that I identify with. I identify with a national (American) and finally international community of writers that exists in the air, in books and magazines and letters; that’s been the case for a long time, since before I moved to Paris. I’m afraid I don’t miss New York much, I lived there too long, but I very much miss certain friends. What I do miss is the Southwest and Needles, the desert – very sharply sometimes. But the experience of being in another culture is continuously… pungent. I like Paris because of the French, the French working people, shop people, are smart and politically informed and witty and contrary to popular opinion, very nice. And then there are negative things to notice, the language to grapple with, another history – it’s something to do! In New York I’d gotten so I wasn’t sensitive to anything new there.

10/15/96

**JG:** In the next few questions, I want to concentrate on how you figure yourself as a feminist, and how you constitute your poetics as a woman (or how being a woman informs your poetics). How does mothering fit into your poetics? What about the poetics of everyday life?

**AN:** I’m not interested in a poetics of mothering or in mothering, nurturance, procreation, even creation *per se*. I’m interested in being the mother of my own children – whom I also see as my very close friends. I’m interested in the status of the mother in society, which I take to be pretty low, like that of the poet, since there’s no pay for it unless you do it for someone else’s kid. And I’m not interested in a poetics of everyday life – I really can’t stand the phrase. I used it in the title of an essay (“Notes on ‘The Poetry of Everyday Life’”) because I was assigned it, but the essay is about enlarging or even transcending our notions of what that is. I’m interested in a poetry that’s as inclusive as possible. And I found out very early in my career that much of my experience was excluded from poetry up to that time. For example, it’s astonishing to be trying to get on as a poet while bearing and rearing a child, realizing that there are only a handful of poems in the language that deal with your state of mind and urgencies. Sylvia Plath sometimes refers to being a mother and was one of the few examples available to me of a poet-mother. Her last poems though brilliant are sick. I have no idea why she’s an icon of feminism. She’s a dreadful example for any young mother who needs courage. Are we all supposed to kill ourselves and endanger the lives of our children? I felt as if I had to invent out of air a way of speaking of my experience as a mother: that was at first. Later I had to invent forms to contain my children’s voices since they were not where I was even while writing. I quite enjoyed the latter – inventing the poem “January” and those talky poems that took place at 101 St. Mark’s Place; but sometimes while I was writing the earlier work I felt quite desperate.

**JG:** How do you feel reading magazines with your work and work by your sons in them? What correspondences or lack thereof do you see between your work and their work?

**AN:** I’m pleased that my sons are both poets. Poetry is an honorable, exacting, necessary occupation. I can’t think of a better one. It isn’t surprising to me that someone might pick it up from his parents, or rather pick up insights into why it’s necessary and how it’s done. Because, of course, poetry isn’t about who’s the best poet. It’s about continuing the tradition of poetry, making sure its “services” – spiritual, intellectual – remain available to people. I read their poems to see what I can pick up from them. They’re more in touch with certain kinds of things – new sounds – than I am. I of course am wiser than them due to my great age.

**JG:** What about your relationship, as a woman writer, to male poets? (I guess also both contemporaries/poets in history.) Are there particular female poets in history who have greatly influenced you? What about contemporaries?

**AN:** I’ve had very good relationships with a lot of male writers; I’ve also had a problematic relationship with poetry’s politics, institutions, ideas as to what poetry should be, etc., due to being a woman. Both have always existed and simultaneously and have always intertwined. Ted [Berrigan]’s influence on me was profoundly benign and necessary. I’m not sure what poet I would be now if I hadn’t met him. When I first knew him he was a little skeptical about women poets. He wasn’t sure if he liked the poetry of the women poets he knew about as much as he liked the men’s poetry, partly because women were denied involvement in the parts of life that seemed to give poetry its edge. He quite quickly changed his tack though. It seems to me now that he recognized my talent before I did and fostered it as much as he could – to the extent of insisting we leave England in 1974, when he didn’t really want to, because he thought I needed to be around American poets and similarly insisting on leaving Chicago in 1975 to get me to New York and the poets there. I think he recognized before we did that Anne [Waldman], Bernadette [Mayer], Maureen [Owen], and others and I constituted a real generation of poets and a new kind of voice. Ted really cared about poetry. But I had consistent support from the very beginning of my poetry from men such as Bob Creeley, Anselm Hollo, Tom Clark, and Phil Whalen, and a little later Edwin Denby. I felt that Doug [Oliver] was seriously interested in my poetry from our first meeting in 1973. Likewise I don’t remember a lot of gender problems at The Poetry Project. In the years I lived in New York, the Project was most often run by a woman. It was a woman-friendly institution, though we fought a lot about everything, so we probably fought about gender too – it’s hard to remember. For me the gender problems arise when I’m not allowed to speak; men will dominate the room, the subject, the theory, the panel. They like to compete and only like to compete with each other. Women poets still, thus, get goddessed. Men lead movements and argue with each other over the present and future of poetry, insuring that they get more space in the so-called discourse. It’s like they’re still doing all the real thinking. We’re geniuses, they say, and then go back to arguing with each other. Somehow we don’t have any power, so we never get attacked. It’s also a fact that the ways in which poetry gets published, discussed, and accepted into the academy or whatever are ways invented by men: book publication, magazine and magazine formats, forums for discussion, standards of discussion, standards of publication, not to mention the whole idea of a literary movement, the academy, the avant-garde are all male forms. There’s a sort of male-ish bossiness and proprietorship that never quite gets shaken. And the notion that this is the only way, that it’s always been this way, that no one invented it.

**JG:** I just read *At Night the States* and was really amazed at how you achieved both a presentation of fragments – in their sharpness (an almost ‘indecent,’ insistent, implicit fragility) – and also a wholeness, a body going through time… I have been thinking a lot about elegies – in a way, I always trip over ideas about elegies and the “deadness” of figures when I write – maybe this is a kind of music for me? You’re imparting a kind of life after death – a very real one; your self as an intrusion upon coldness, dis-aliveness or pathetic reanimations were an amazing address/redress of elegy… Do you feel that this is akin to what you were doing in *Close to me,* with your father? I think that book is not as “ghost-oriented”…

**AN:** The short poems in *At Night the States* have always been difficult to read aloud, mostly because the audience doesn’t know how to take them. The audience can’t figure out whether to applaud or not. I find that interesting, thinking about it now. There may be some special value in poetry that the applause mechanism can’t intrude on. Anyway, in these poems, as is obvious, I was intent on going on, going through. I wrote them with no thought as to their qualities; I scarcely thought of them as poems. I looked at the folder of them about a year after I’d completed them and was struck by the fact that they *were* poems, that I didn’t know of any like them, and that they might possibly be of real use to someone else. Around that time I wrote the title poem, which is quite different, and then I had a book. Writing *Close to me* was very different; I’m not sure how the two compare. You see, I’ve been talking to my father for a long time now. He may be so alive to me that notions of elegy don’t relate to the writings he figures in. I began having dreams in the mid-‘80s in which he told me things that gave me instructions. Several of these dreams were involved in the inception of *Alette,* in which he is, of course, the owl. But when I began *Close to me,* I felt that he was talking to me. Period. Not dead, no elegy. I wanted to try to get close to death as a state, and he was my guide but he wasn’t dead, not the way Ted is dead in *At Night the States.*

10/10/96

**JG:** The way you define what being a poet does as a service really means a lot to me. I feel strongly that being a poet is political, that it fulfills an important subversive political function. Of course I’d like to see a changing social framework, and think I have seen experimental writing meet with somewhat more success in the world at large on its own terms and poets partially earn a living or get recognition by it. In general, when this happens, I characterize it not as an annexation (like a dilution), but a victory… This all relates to what you say in your talk, “The ‘Feminine’ Epic,” when you describe what led you to write *Alette.* How do you reconcile thinking about social problems systemically – like national culpability and “needing an epic” – but also as related to “godlike forces,” like accidents or problems in causality? Or that the repercussions of actions might exceed or defeat the intentions behind them? Is *Alette* a kind of purposive accident, a use of “godlike-forces” that make accidents, tripping up “human” (or nationalist) intentions? In “The ‘Feminine’ Epic,” you say you want to tell a “continuous story.” One reason I find this so important is because of the tradition of Romantic eclipse continues even now – as a lacuna where all the action happens, or at least, the *crisis* happens. We’re supposed to know it already; it’s in the social script, even though it’s semi-unsayable or sublime. The necessity of continuity means the story might not go as planned, i.e. pay attention! And that nothing is unspeakable.

**AN:** You seem to be proposing a difference between what can be understood through reason and what keeps happening without anyone’s foreseeing it, as if reason were the human-species quality and disruption or the unforeseen or the inspired, the godlike. I think that reason is also part of the godlike, that being able to see things whole and with detachment is as assuredly godlike as creating or initiating something unexpected. Life seems to be about the two together, in the sense that it couldn’t exist without both, would be stationary without disruption and chaotic without rational analysis, so they are both of god, whatever that is. My epic is an accident – as is everything else I write – in that it turned out entirely different from how I sort of foresaw it. I don’t plan on the accident – I don’t anticipate the surprises or I wouldn’t be surprised, I guess. I don’t try to trip up human intentions, I’m not interested in subversion: I’m very blatant.

**JG:** What I also like about “continuous story” is that you don’t say the whole story – as if it were something that could be exhausted or that you would want to finish and exhaust. That poetry is a place for story, against the other narratives of narrative works like novels, because of the epic form. *Alette* is set apart from the work of many contemporary writers who investigate an aesthetic of breakage and fragments. Do you feel that there is some contradiction in the singularity of continuity? Can a singular story be told or is the story of it, the narrativity of it, something that joins others to it, that binds them, as you say in giving “some of the guilt back to the national community”?

**AN:** Th singularity of continuity is entirely appropriate to the way I know and perceive. Mostly I wanted to see if I could tell that kind of story; I’m interested in trying out as many possibilities of poetry as possible and in being as skilled as I can be. Telling that kind of story seemed to be difficult, so I thought I’d better try it. Writing in fragments and with breakage seems to me to be easy, although sometimes I feel like doing that anyway. I don’t like to rule anything out. The measure of *Alette* isn’t based on the unification of a chorus; the two relevant pieces from *Beginning with a Stain* are, and some, maybe a lot, of *White Phosphorous* is, but *Alette* is in a virtually unified voice. It’s a woman’s epic because I wrote it and its protagonist is a woman; and of course a “singular story can be told” because I did so, though I propose it as a gift for anyone who wants it, who thinks it applies to them or simple would like to read it. I very much like the relation of protagonist and chorus, as in classical Greek drama and in oratorio, but I don’t believe we’re always in the chorus except in some impossible overview. This isn’t how a life works; anyone is singular and somewhat plural and at perhaps the most crucial moments is very very single.

**JG:** Does it seem like part of what you are doing is unifying voices whose growth was stunted and whose (voice)body was fragmented and scattered the moment it began to gain strength? What I’m interested in here is another political issue at stake in poetry that you discuss in your epic talk, which is not just the marginality of poetry of poets’ lives in American society, but also in choosing the identity of poet as a political issue, as an activism in itself, as united with and sharing common elements with other subversive/constructive activities. Do you see it as your service (“And what if I owe an epic?”) to bring out what might be private knowledge and force it into a public domain, as well as bringing out a part of communal knowledge that doesn’t surface very often, that is constantly being hidden? To force what are, in a way, new things into narrativity?

**AN:** Again, I don’t feel that I’m unifying voices; I’m more trying to represent them. You refer to “choosing the identity of poet as a political stance, as an activism in itself…” A couple of things there. I’m never quite sure that I chose the identity of poet, I feel more as if it chose me, or at least as if it gradually happened that I got co-opted by it. There was a point at which I found myself too fascinated by poetry to do anything else. I do think that it can be an activism and that it doesn’t have to have a political subject to be that. I think the poems I wrote in *When I Was Alive,* an out-of-print book consisting of imitations of dead male poets but coming out of the most in-between moments of a woman’s life, bespeaks as much activism as *White Phosphorous* does. What you stand for is often more important than what you struggle against. How to live as opposed to how to fight.

**JG:** As you say, “We live in that total international multicultural natureless world” but do we really live in it in terms of the command that you speak of? What I’m trying to get at, here, I guess, is change, and how poetry works as a force in the world to make change happen. Is it a matter of changing how things are represented or of changing the quality of life itself? I guess it’s possible to relate this to experimental poetry’s assuming more of the reader to begin with… as you said in letter #1, much popular poetry doesn’t assume enough intelligence.

**AN:** I think all poets- myself included – tend to exaggerate the evil they might do with their poems. All poetry is marginalized, not just experimental poems. I find it hard to imagine an international corporate poem, unless there came to be a market for such a poem, but there’s really no market for any poetry. Well I suppose there will be a multinational form of the *New Yorker* poem, maybe there already is. What I’m much more interested in is keeping up with the way the world is changing and both resisting its changes – since few of them seem positive right now – and, understanding that the young are necessarily embroiled in these changes, being exceedingly sympathetic to what’s going on. Poetry itself doesn’t make things happen, it’s more subtle than that. Poetry’s part of everything that’s happening culturally. It also sends itself into the future, when a certain poetry might be finally appreciated. But I think that rather than overtly change things it accompanies, comforts, gives courage, amuses, stimulates, etc. Partly *Alette* is that with which you compare your own experience. Poetry is poetry by being all of its selves though, even its doggerel self. I honestly don’t think of myself as an experimental poet, because I don’t think in such terms much, well I did say *New Yorker* poem. I write usually what it seems to me poetry needs next; I suppose that’s why all my works look different from each other and I suppose that’s what lands me in the experimental category.

**JG:** In your talk on the epic, when you discuss the “natureless world” in terms of *Désamère,* (“There’s no one to kill because the machine of natural obliteration can’t be stopped”), does that mean we have to work in a closed economy of social value towards representation? I’m asking you this because for a moment there you seemed to present a kind of closure that was pretty bleak… when in fact your recent work, take *Alette* for example, often seems to articulate its own world, its own power structures and environment – as good can happen in them, and as open: they are surreal, while referentially and politically engaged; they are symbolically and minutely concerned…

**AN:** Regarding “There’s no one to kill, etc.” and “natureless world,” and “do we work in a closed set and fight in a closed economy…” – that’s not even the point. The point is much worse, I fear. I wrote *Alette* before *Désamère,* [although *Alette* was published after *Désamère*], it’s not more recent. The question of the future of the planet explodes all theories of a suitable poetics, suitable representation and so on. That kind of discussion becomes irrelevant. I’m never going to support inept poetry, but frankly when I read the facts about global warming or overpopulation I really don’t care how one’s *supposed* to write the poem. If a whole world is being destroyed, I don’t think it matters as to whether it’s correct to “imagine” that destruction or to attack it from a vantage of realistic depiction and overt reaction. Either will do, as long as we’re talking about the problem.

**JG:** You ask, “Why did I want to write about a woman of action if women don’t act and if I don’t really approve of deeds?” You also talk about women’s deeds being “symbolic action.” But I think that a lot of what you are doing is making what is usually viewed as symbolic really literal, or active. In talking about poetry accomplishing spiritual/intellectual services or tasks, would you say that the task you set for yourself in *Alette* was to externalize dreams and not to take them as just dream language that symbolizes something in “real” life relationships, but other possible, forceful narratives that don’t stand in for something else, but are what they are?

**AN:** I think dreams are partly a way of thinking and that the figures and actions in dreams tend to be symbols, but of much more than relationships. They can stand for qualities, abstractions, hard-to-define ideas the way that gods and goddesses and their actions do in myths. But they’re hard to pin down so also, as you say, they are what they are, and sometimes they are, I think, only being a story, as if to amuse the dreamer. People like to be told mythical stories because there’s both a story and all that resonance.

**JG:** Could you talk a little bit about your trance technique poetics, and finding your one I? I only know about your process from the workshop tapes and what you told me in letter #1… I think people might be really interested in this, and how it relates to the techniques of H.D., Robert Duncan, even Rimbaud… and the hypnogogic. How do you define trance writing in terms of poetics? What does this have to do with writing a feminine epic and making the heroine put what is underground on the surface and fight it out there? How does the epic connect with what might be considered its opposite, your personal autobiographical work? If the autobiographical poems are different than that, how are they different? (A difference in uncovering the musics?)

**AN:** I don’t think I used the trance technique exactly when I was writing *Alette.* For that work I would use dreams I’d had at night or would try to fall asleep briefly during the day or simply close my eyes and try to see something. Follow a change of imagery. If I was using dreams, I would try to choose details quickly or make the decision to use the material at all quickly – I was trying to be as automatic as possible. I didn’t use those techniques for *Close to me* and *Désamère*: with the former I didn’t have to do anything special for my father’s voice to start speaking in my mind; for the third section of the latter I concentrated on images gathering under my eyelids – aren’t such images called eidetic? – and forming their own plots. I discovered a different sort of technique in the process of writing *Mysteries of Small Houses,* a sort of deep relaxation which made my limbs tingle and was very pleasant. I discovered, from doing some reading, I was probably practicing a mild form of self-hypnosis, so I began to employ a few of the certified self-hypnosis techniques, concentrating on a landscape, making my arm heavy, counting backwards and so on. In terms of poetics, I guess I’d say that this process is not very different from the one I ordinarily associate with writing poetry. You go into a sort of trance to write; you shut out much of the world so that only the poem is transpiring and if you’re getting materials from your environment it’s only transpiring in terms of your poem. As far as *Alette* and what’s underground coming to the surface, I was interested first of all in the liberation of people from the dreary exigencies of “charted” unnatural tyrannized lives, by throwing open the possibility of psychological liberation – this can’t be the only way humans have lived, so much is repressed – not desires, but all sorts of possibilities and potentials. I don’t know how the epic books and the autobiographical book connect, except that the latter also contains story elements and also creates a background for the writing of the other kind of work, a naturalistic parallel.

**JG:** I also really value what you said in your first letter to me about doctrinaireness: “finding some reflection of it [in poems] of what they’ve [people in the academy] been taught to think or its lack.” Are there other poets in particular whose terms create helpful different frameworks for you to talk about poetic/social issues, that you think work around, through, or with dominant ideas about deconstruction/post-modernity that are so doctrinaire?

**AN:** At the moment I work most in conjunction with Doug. We’re interest in the same kinds of forms and share many of the same concerns, but speak so differently from each other, being American and English, that we’re enriched by the different textures of our languages. And also the differing textures of the ways in which we think. I also always want to know what people like Ron Padgett, Lorenzo Thomas, Anne Waldman, Anselm Hollo, etc. think about things. I continue to be interested in the work of Leslie Scalapino, Eileen Myles, Joanne Kyger, Lyn Hejinian. I want to know how mature minds are dealing with what’s going on in the world. And I’m waiting to see what the very young will come up with in terms of forms and techniques. Anselm and Edmund are both quite interesting at the moment. As is Alicia Wing, say. I also feel as if I’m picking up on some things that Ted was doing at the end of his life that have sort of lain dominant since his death. I think that there’s been a death of intelligent commentary on his work and that his later work has been ignored – but that’s good for me, I can steal from it with no one watching.