

Epigram Engraved on the Collar of a Dog
Which I Gave to His Royal Highness
Alexander Pope

1736

I am his highness's dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?

The Descent of Alette
Alice Notley

1992

"I saw on awakening," "what I had not" "seen before:" "at the meadow's edge" "etched into the grass" "fine white lines which formed" "a large curving shape" "I stepped closer" "to see the shape:" "it was a coiled snake—" "head erect," "tongue extended," "itself thin & long"

"& snakelike," "a snake from" "within snake's mouth" "I knelt to" "examine" "the nature of" "the etched lines," "when a powerful" "gust of wind" "rushed through me" "& stayed blowing" "a gale" "where I knelt" "It grew stronger" "& more howling" "I fell over" "& thought I

saw" "my head," "my own head," "having been blown" "off my body" "rolling" "on the grass" "But I also knew" "I was still intact" "Then" "the wind subsided" "& I saw" "sitting near me," "on a log," "a headless body," "in a light dress, the" "bloody neck" "black & deep"

"I didn't" "want to look" "but" "of course I had to:" "this headless" "woman" "was a living personage," "whose hands moved slightly," "whose feet shifted" "As I looked at her" "I was filled with" "an oceanic" "sorrow," "staring at her gruesome neck," "its black well" "I knew she was"

"The one I sought," "our mother," "first woman" "I gripped the earth with" "My hands" "to stay composed" "And then I heard a voice," "a woman's voice," "a rich and changing voice—" "capable of both" "high & low tones—" "begin to speak:" "...finally arrived" "You are very" "very late"

"I've been waiting—" "We've been waiting..." "I realised" "that the voice" "issued from the throat" "of this headless" "body"

"I'm late," "am I?" I said" "What *time*" "is it here," "that I" "can be late?" "It is," she said," "the long moment" "after my" "decapitation" "It is a kind of" "forever:" "nearly since" "the world began" "The holy men," "the wise men," "are frivolous" "& cruel"

"They have invented" "eternities" "but left me here" "for one—" "They call their visions" "transcendent" "Call me" "accounted for"