

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"

"in heaven," "or nirvana," "or wherever," "in extinction—"
"The blessed selflessness" "They were wrong," "I am the same:"

"In time, headless self, &" "suffering" "I have never" "gone to
heaven" "Never died," "never changed" "The truth of us," "the real
truth of us," "is here" "in the darkness," "is my decapitation"
"History is eternity" "until this" "is righted—" "No wrong has"

"so long endured" "There can be no truth" "elsewhere," "until"
"this is changed" "The holy men," "the saints," "the wise men," "the
heroes," "the poets" "are ignorant," "are like" "simple drunks"

"I thought" "you would be" "intact here," "I said" "I thought"
"there was a place" "where everything was intact" "& this was that place"
"Perhaps you" "are intact somewhere," "but I am not," she said"
"Tell me" "what happened," "I said" "I'll try," she said"

"In the beginning" "of the world" "there was a whole" "edgeless
entity," "sea of dreaming," "of floating" "changeable shape"
"After a while" "was differ-" "entiation," "as if pieces of sea,"
"of water," "became fish" "As if air" "became birds—" "I can't remember"

"It keeps escaping me" "But the sexes came to be" "in pleasure," "in
glee" "There was much of" "what you'd call" "obscenity" "at the
beginning" "Much orgasmic" "sensation" "permeated" "the primal entity,"
"& when there came to be" "two human sexes," "that was a sharpening,"

"a clarifying" "of the pleasures" "of existing" "The edges" "of our
forms" "made us shiver & gasp—" "This sounds so" "vague, I guess"
"Then something happened" "to male—" "perhaps because he"
"didn't give birth" "He lost his" "connection" "to the beginning"

"of the world," "to freshness" "of sensation" "To sensation's"
"being soul" "Became a fetishist" "A thinker" "A war-maker" "& ruler"
"Made me dance naked alone" "before all men—" "any man—" "on a
stage, a" "spoilt stage" "Made lewdness" "lose its" "mutuality,"

"its holy aura" "The scales of" "a serpent" "were painted on" "my
body—" "I was stippled" "with diamond shapes" "And as I" "was thus
degraded—" "as all" "went astray—" "I was yet" "the only memory"
"or sign of" "the creation" "I was all there was" "of that" "And so

I endured" "that dance" "I danced" "& I danced" "Nothing" "but sex"
"My head gradually" "over ages" "disattached from" "my body" "as if
by the will" "of everyone" "My body" "still danced then—" "but my
head" "played audience" "to the achievements" "of males" "See it there?"

"She pointed suddenly" "A head sat" "several feet away from us" "with open eyes,"
"frozen eyes," "& fixed" "frozen smile" "Brown skin lifeless," "dark
hair wind-blown" "I learned to speak from" "my throat," "from darkness,"
"not from behind the eyes" "Made up stories to tell myself" "through

centuries" "Then one day" "I waked carrying" "my own head" "down through
darkness below the earth," "to this place" "And was forgotten,"
"mostly forgotten," "above the ground"

"We were silent" "a long moment" "of sadness" "Then I asked her,"
"How" "can you see?" "I see," she said," "with my voice," "as I talk"
"I see you" "as we converse" "But I see things" "within myself—" "
"pictures, & stories—" "that you might not see" "ordinarily" "I have the

power," "as I speak" "to enable you" "to see them too," "to forget that"
"I'm speaking them" "They take on" "their own life then," "before us,
around us" "I cease to speak" "as they exist:" "though they do" "soon
dissolve," "are never permanent" "For example," "I see this now" "I

see this whole scene:" "A little" "girl's father" "is a corpse in"
"a coffin" "He has swallowed" "a vial of chemicals" "so he will come"
"To life again" "as a ghoul," "a soulless ghoul" "As the voice spoke"
"I saw before me," "as if in a dream," "the open coffin," "in a house"

"The corpse was handsome," "sapphire-eyed" "Young" "& still alive"
"The vial made him live," "grow facial hair and fangs" "The little girl"
"was very young: five or six" ("The voice still rendered this") "& then"
"slightly older" ("The voice seemed" "to cease now") "She stands"

"In a forest," "looking" "like a girl from" "an antique greeting card,"
"Small mouth soft hair," "remote eyes" "conceived by art" "Something"
"she carries" "slowly comes" "into focus:" "a silvery broad axe"
"on a long" "wooden handle," "leaning" "upon her shoulder—" "But the

scene now" "dissolved," "the dream was over" "already" "The axe,"
"said the headless woman," "is real now" "& is nearby" "You have brought"
"new power here" "I have never before" "seen an object" "made real

this way" "But the axe" "must becomes" "a long cloth, I think," "to tie"
 "My head back on" "What about" "the ghoul?" I asked "Forget"
 "the ghoul for now" "We must tie my" "head back on" "But first" "I will
 tell you" "some more of what" "only a throat," "only a headless"
 "body knows" "Only your first" "mother knows"

[...]

"Lay his hear down" "for a moment," she said, "her voice trembling"
 "Lay it on" "the grass" "& wipe your hands clean there too—"
 "I did—" "Then let's sit" "for a minute" "enjoying this night"
 "before we change" "Change forever;" "We sat quietly" "a short while,"

"a mist" "about us now" "that softened" "her headlessness,"
 "obscured" "her body slightly," "hid the horror" "of her neck—"
 "I'm afraid," "she said," "to take my head back;" "Why?" I asked
 "I'm afraid" "I'll loose my power" "to speak from" "deep inside of me"

"Lose my power" "to make visions..." "But we must put it back on" "anyway"
 "How do we do it?" I asked "Please bring my head here" "I lifted it—"
 "It felt dry," "the face looked chalky" "Place it on my neck—"
 "I will hold" "very still—" "Now find the heart in" "the grass"

"I brought" "the heart close" "to the newly" "headed creature"
 "Smear blood from" "the heart" "on the line of" "separation"
 "I daubed" "a ring of sticky red" "all around" "her neck, like a
 necklace" "of liquid ruby" "Now find" "the axe," "the girl's axe—"

"Over there somewhere;" "Her voice issued now" "from a pale mouth"
 "though the lips" "didn't move yet" "I found" "& brought the axes"
 "Smear blood on" "the blade's edge," "she said" "Which I did"
 "The axe went limp" "became a white scarf" "Tie the scarf around"

"my wound" "When I had done so," "her face" "began to change"
 "Color" "poured into it:" "her skin was golden brown" "her eyes
 deep-set & brown," "tender" "beneath fierce eyebrows" "She was young"
 "Younger than I" "& yet she was, I felt" "truly" "our mother..."

"Wide nostrils, wide lips..." "She smiled at me" "warmly" "I'm not
 afraid" "anymore," she said "My voice has not lost" "its power"

Life, End of Christine Brooke-Rose

2006

The head top leans against the bathroom mirror so that the looking glass becomes a feeling glass. But what does it feel? This position is for body-balance during the brushing of teeth and the washing of face neck arms and torso. Below is for the biddy, and the feet, if sitting on a stool. But especially the torso. For in fact the teeth can also be brushed if the loins touch the washbasin however cold, or the hand grips the edge, on condition neither is wet.

And then the drying of the body-parts, one hand on the tall towel-radiator, the other on the lower part of the towel to dry the lower body. Dressing means sitting on the bed, entering pants, rising, legs in calf-love with the bedside, to slide the pants then trousers past the bottom before swiftly sitting again. The feet feel where the entrances are, whether of pants or slippers.

Standing, on its own, without support somewhere, causes a tidal wave of nothingness in the head and a limping rush to the nearest armchair or bed. That means that nothing, nothing at all, no action or gesture, can now be done with two hands, if standing. That's a lot of gestures to unlearn.

But one contact is enough for minimum stability, one touch anywhere, from headtop to hip to hand or even one fingernail on the wall as the blood pressure is measured first sitting then standing, orthostatic as they say, when the tension drops by several degrees in a few seconds. Or sometimes rises, for no reason unless euphoric, or falls systolically and rises diastolically or vice versa. It staggers and lurches, like the body unless contact is made through headtop hand finger thigh calf with the ground the earth the planet the galaxy the universe. But then the universal is what is wrong with humanity.

The tidal wave of nothingness is not vertigo, from the inner ear dipping like a builder's plumb rule, for which there is a cure with turning lights, undergone. It is at unlucky times a faintingness due to the latest change of pill prescribed by the cardio, cancelled by the doctor after heartbeat drop, represcribed by the cardio, recancelled by the doctor, the process repeated with three different pills until a pacemaker is put in.

Besides, many seek vertigo, addicts of all kinds including mountain climbers vertigo all that trouble for a moment of spurious hegemony above all that beauty and now, like everywhere over-populous, leaving their human garbage all the way up, all the way down.