



## The Descent of Alette (Penguin Poets)

*Alice Notley*

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## **The Descent of Alette (Penguin Poets)** Alice Notley

Working in an avant-garde mode, Notley seeks epic stature literally and figuratively in this new collagelike work. Her underground world of subways and lost souls cannot escape comparison to Dante's Inferno but does have its own agenda, both feminist and personal. The multilayered depths are the first and last similarities between Dante and Notley. This epic is a story of transformation and travel, a journey of imagination that is firmly rooted in the reality of urban, modern living. War veterans, the mentally disturbed, homeless people--they are real witnesses and participants in our travel, and we deny or affirm their existence by passing or stopping for them when taking a train or bus. Notley uses this real experience to give strangers voice and to create exchanges so often feared in daily life. Using rhythmic units that resound like dialogue, Notley weaves a conversation of motion and mystery. Underlying Alette's heroic travel to confront the Tyrant who torments souls are keen observations about people and life struggles. Throughout this epic are brief and perceptive comments that restate universal truths and reinforce the urge toward all that is right.

Janet St. John

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