

Manifestation

Antonin Artaud in the middle of the night
last night, like every night, was rooting up
my garden. Breaking off fingernails,
fingertips pouring blood, as if to make a soup
for Don Juan in the tomb, dog-eagerly he scabbled
in the lilies of the valley. Whenever he found
the rhizomatous root cords he was after,
he'd haul them up, straining his skeleton: I could hear
the vertebrae cracking as his power and the flowers' resistance
bent him double, like the suitors at Ulysses' bow.
Sometimes an arm or hip would pop from its socket
but he scarcely stopped to replace them. He put the roots
over his shoulders, or if one snapped in half
would tie it around his waist or forehead,
fillet of victor or victim, penal or sexual bond,
who knew? He knew. He chewed
the wet mud, broken glass, brick fragments, pennies, old marbles,
centipedes and worms, as he tried to move his face
closer to his goal. The earwigs here for once,
as legend tells, did root in human ears.
The slugs decorated his limestone body with ageless tracts
of shining petroglyphs carved in a single night,
drawing their moist cool trails
medicinally across his anus, distended,
bleeding and on fire with his struggles. As always,
he knew without looking I was there
and said his say: that there's nothing you
(he meant me) don't desire to know but a root
is a root only while it remains underground,
the night troubled to be day turns into day and forgets.
In the morning I found the lilies of the valley
entirely undisturbed, and just beginning to bloom—
a flower I've loved since childhood,
when I would weed around it in my mother's garden
and live the day in its perfume, deep green and white—

and I was relatively content. But this is fiction.
In fact it was late autumn. In the morning I saw the lilies
nothing but brittle, tattered, colorless leaf scaffolding,
and I was relatively filled with hatred
for weather, season, and earth.

A. F. Moritz