



Therefore, An Ogre

I



II



III



IV



V



VI



VII



VIII



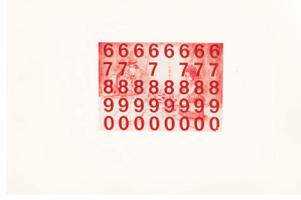
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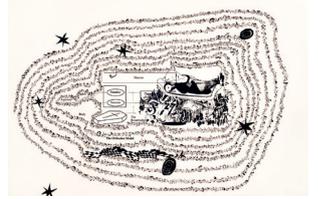
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XXX



THEREFORE, AN OGRE

Helen Marten

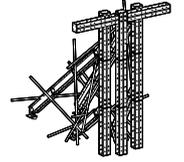
What does the ogre do deep in the mythological forest? Build machines to coerce love? Build houses with windows to watch as birds or sky laminate layers of transparent sequence, many specks moving continually one atop another? Does the ogre spit rubbled language into piles from which stripped sentences might be plucked to diagram the substance of trees and soil? Does the ogre produce techniques of domination for and against the material world? Does the ogre writhe in solitary damp, jagged as though infected with a psychoactive fungus? Does it tug the universe beyond it between horror and fascination, becoming with each clownish tyranny of judgement ever *more* ogre?

Perhaps the ogre is not so much the hideous protagonist of a fiction, but rather a strange and uncanny hybrid of the falsely liberating power of critical insight against the allure of myth. The ogre is an anti-hero of solitude – an extremely populous solitude – whose structural bigness might function like a giant breathing beaker in which coagulated energies reach the limits of their possible meaning, changing direction and sticking to one another with new clarity or focus. Perhaps the ogre sits with quaking rotten knees at its planked table, bucket of universal beer in one fist, torn limbs of some departed soul profound and singular in another. Perhaps all this foul consumption dictates that the dominant organ of the ogre is the stomach, a plumped richness of victims with all their boiling diversity. This stomach rattles with plans and phantasms, but is also a wider vessel for real lived encounters – the blistered beige-socked feet of the father, the half digested tuna fish sandwich of the daughter, the unuttered passion of the mother, her hand cream, a battery, the family dog.

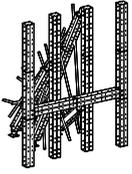
The ogre of course, is not a sensible object: it is an allegory, a cipher, an extension of symbols and irritations. The ogre devours living flesh. It consumes named people plucked out of the world and so with them, the intent of their speech sprung with socially flexible tendons, all these lumps threading through the intestine like a universal alphabet of possibility, a receptacle of hidden noise. And because of this, the ogre must be supposed to delight in language, the jangling flavours or durational artefacts of curtailed speech, of speech in progress – chewed up grammar. The ogre's body is one with its own rules, its own project; it is a mock body. Its signifying sound might be a cacophony, a sound not singular or transparent but rather folded from many amalgamated histories: the drone of punitive sadism. A story told with the voice of an ogre might be a ghost story, a dark knot of fluctuating fictions. It might also serve to suggest that the atomic structure of politics is simply sorcery and built from the same filthy allegorical fibres as the hairs on an ogre's hand.

Text is read everywhere. Crows on a telegraph wire forget their horizontals, their verticals. They dip with a weightlessness, flung out commas and exclamation marks as their dark bodies scorch script on a flattened sky. Any play they might be writing is not a subject in the barest sense but rather an assemblage of invention, fragile marks of destiny in the space between plot and blindness. Might the ogre too remain an account too deviant for true history? An ogre is a tale, a sloppy story spun for the anomalous, not a truth, but hypothetical narrative. Freedom is prosthetic, bare ribbons and shapeless shreds.

The ogre is contained within language. The word alone is a paradox of reversibility. Backwards it is “ergo” – *therefore, for that reason* – a little conjunctive train, pulling ideas between subject and structure, out into the space of defiance. The ogre mystery, then, is syntax deep, a sly demonstration of the punning games that can be played by a character who in living closest to an edge, occupies a space closest to magic. The irony is that mythological license alters its subjectivity in language. The word *therefore* propels a stern grammatical mathematics: this + this, so therefore that. “Therefore” is assertive. It is conclusive. The *ogre* and the *ergo* devour one another and dribble down the chin. The words twist with provisional heat, move back and forth within noise, are made real by the fictions pasted onto them: an ogre cleans its teeth or plants a seed; an ogre plucks a chicken or laments the moon – language makes myth and myth makes language.



A river flows towards a destination that lies beyond the page, carrying away a lonely little boat or a couple of drifting ducks, whereas in the empty expanse of the silk, a few faint touches of ink hint that, somewhere above the invisible riverbank, a mountain must be hiding in the mist



As long as we can see the facts, you said, your eye frantic for touch, not a body of water
which is beautiful in itself, but still a source of satisfaction in the stress of the air.

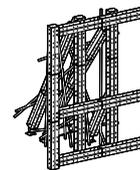
Curves to the Apple, Rosemarie Waldorp, 2006

II

Certain he's part of the olden timbers: watch out for the run o' the grain on him – look
how his ancient knars are salted and the wounds of the bitter sea on him.

The Anathemata, David Jones, 1952

III



I think mostly about clothes, sex, food, and seasonal variations. I have done so much to be ordinary and made a record of this: first I was born, next I was a child, then I learned things and did things and loved and those who loved me and often felt alone. My body was sometimes well, then sometimes unwell. I got nearer to death, as did you.

Garments Against Women, Anne Boyer, 2015

IV

A magnificent rodent with a potato in its mouth has scurried over my bed. Its tail brushed my cheek – I think this is what woke me. Now, alert to its presence, I am aware of another one, too.

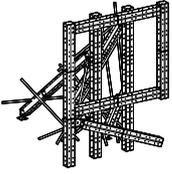
Two magnificent rodents.

They are incandescent, like flashes of experience. That's one thing of which I'm certain. Contact produces uncertainty.

But one should be aware that some people are delusional without being unhappy.

The book of a thousand eyes, Lyn Hejinian, 1996

V



As she uttered these words with one of her smart smiles the truth, or something that seemed very like it, struck her with such violence that she nearly fell out of the saddle

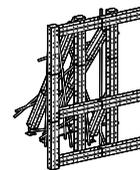
More Pricks Than Kicks, Samuel Beckett, 1934

VI

She walks through narrow streets; enters dilapidated buildings, talks with Government officials. Looks at a dozen or so men lined against a wall. They all think her mad, but very beautiful, untouchable except by those who say they have information.

Passages, Ann Quin, 1969

VII



The table, the plate, the hair at first, and here are the coins in the basket, this hat, his hand – clat and struck. Now you are saying I am old! – a train ride home, a day in the rain, horses across the wall in the huff of a field. Here are the blackberries we had for breakfast. Here is the burr of a bird. You see the floor, the wall, the basket beneath the mirror... And now the cut ribs in the green, let us imagine – a trembling in the hedge, a gruesome blue.

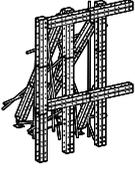
A German Picturesque, Jason Schwartz, 1998

VIII

Corpse B
They gave her hurried shoves this way
And that.
Her body shock-abbreviated
As a city cat.
She lay out listlessly like some small mug
Of beer gone flat.

The Book of Repulsive Women, Djuna Barnes, 1915

IX



Surely leagues unlike any other phantomweight that ever toppitt our timber maggies

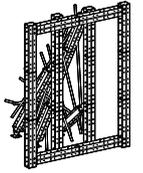
Finnegans Wake, James Joyce, 1939

X

No she says hoping to mean yes
three red squares on the bottom & three
on the top. And don't you dare
move it, practice rage in the ground
of playing up by spilling over.

Poems, J.H. Prynne, 1982

XI



To see a man roll himself up like a snowball, from base to beggary to right worshipful
and right honourable titles, unjustly to screw himself into honours and offices...
...He stooped, so did his courtiers; he turned his head, and so did his parasites.

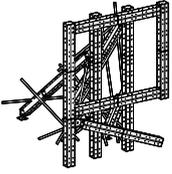
The Anatomy of Melancholy, Robert Burton, 1621

XII

Abide abide. Do you do nude. Can I touch your apparition, your attitude, multitude,
your eternally misunderstood solitude – do you do adulthood, husbandhood, motherhood
– listen: sap in the dogwood – not like blood, crude, flood, lassitude – I want you to come
unglued – clad in nothing but blood – in it – dripping wet – appearing always re-appearing

Fast, Jorie Graham, 2019

XIII



Focusing on basic essentials, she shows how a diet built on the “indispensables” – newsprint ash and algae – can change the body’s secret rhythms and bring us glowing health and boundless energy.

Mulligan Stew, Gilbert Sorrentino, 1979

XIV

What will you be when you grow up? A maniac. Ego pyro sexo mytho clepto mono?

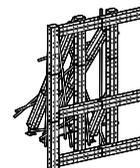
Amalgamemnon, Christine Brooke-Rose, 1984

XV





for that reason



We recently treated a small child who had drunk dry-cleaning fluid in a launderette. Apparently this liquid was left in a beaker on a low table so that customers could remove spots before general cleaning. The main supply was kept nearby in a lemonade bottle.

The British Medical Journal, 1973

XVI

Jottings of psychic numerical equations,
runes, superstitions, evasions,
invasion of the over-soul into a cup
too brittle, a jar too circumscribed
it is not on record exactly where and how she found the alabaster jar

Trilogy, H.D., 1944

XVII

The mirror which shows nobody's reflection after the house has long been left alone.
Fingernail filings which we leave behind across the long expanse of time and space.
The indecipherable dust. The changing figurations of a cloud. The momentary but
symmetrical rose.

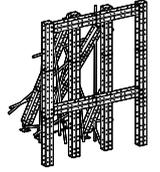
The Book of Sand, Jorge Luis Borges, 1975

XVIII

What is death to the tobacco mosaic virus, to lichen, to man? Can it be described
in all-inclusive yet intelligible terms? A corpse may cease to function normally – and yet,
as it is shoved into the ground or brilliantly incinerated, is it not crammed with living
cells whose persevering energy we choose to disregard?

My Brother Death, Cyrus Sulzberger, 1961

XIX



She walks for days around brown trails, threading sometimes under the low branches of bay and acacia. Bitter flowers will catch her eye: pink and thin honey-suckle or “mock orange”. They coat the branches like lace in the back of a mystical store.

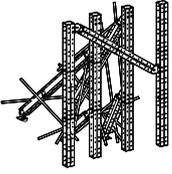
Night Philosophy, Fanny Howe, 2020

XX

Nothing is more fragile than the surface...When we say that sound becomes independent, we mean to say that it ceases to be a specific quality attached to bodies, a noise or a cry, and that it begins to designate qualities, manifest bodies and signify subjects or predicates.

The Logic of Sense, Gilles Deleuze, 1969

XXI



We can see the inner windows, fanned and nowhere repetitious, then funny hatted houses in the distance, while the encircling calm of blue doodled borders – squares, scrolls, circles, diamonds, dots checks, curls – drawn as if on the empty edge of the earth, keeps us lazily underneath the willow, by its water, the way the saucer which carries the pattern rests its cup.

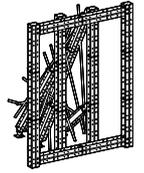
On Being Blue, A Philosophical Enquiry, William H. Gass, 1975

XXII

What precision of action
it had taken, for the bodies to hurtle through
the sky for so long without harming each other

Stag's Leap, Sharon Olds, 2012

XXIII



On how many bookstore shelves,
lovely, fanged teenagers,
red-eyed, smeared with blood

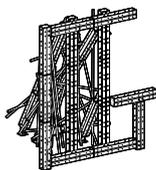
Just Saying, Rae Armantrout, 2013

XXIV

A venomous porridge unknown to toxicologists which will scald and viper through her
until her ears fall off like figs, her toes grow big and black as balloons, and steam comes
screaming out of her navel

Under Milkwood, Dylan Thomas, 1954

XXV



A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms, rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at the bus's hot hood.

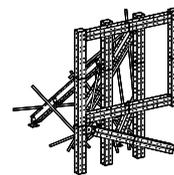
Geography III, Elizabeth Bishop, 1976

XXVI

This animal was brought forth on an island in the sea out of the slime. The sun was the animal's father, the sea its mother, and the slime its matter.

Angels and Saints, Eliot Weinberger, 2020

XXVII



There are all kinds of lines. Some lines are segments, or segmented; some lines get caught in a rut, or disappear into “black holes”; some are destructive, sketching death; and some lines are vital and creative.

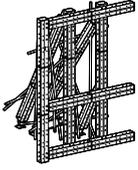
Two Regimes of Madness, Gilles Deleuze, 2003

XXVIII

A monkey with a dreadful past
and sprawling bigotry of mind
kept pinching all the cats behind
the scenery – it could not last

The Book of Repulsive Women, Djuna Barnes, 1915

XXIX



I could see my village held in the crook of the valley
along the dwindled stream; the children
were simmering down, getting into bed;
the men were reading them stories; kissing their heads.
And I felt love for my small and human life down there;
its tenderness.

Vertigo & Ghost, Fiona Benson, 2019

XXX

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