

Binary bookstalls – between the 1 and the 0

Matt Lumby is a different kind of publisher, offering translations of some of Western cultures best-known and most notorious tomes into the language recognizable to digital machines; His two trilogies **Code Books** trilogies I & II, consist of endless pages of one's and zero's, the binary code by which silicon intelligence communicates. Why? Lumby explains here.

There is a scene in Stanley Kubrick's landmark film *The Shining* where Wendy Torrance, alarmed by her husband Jack's increasingly tenuous grip on reality, is confronted with the insane truth of the novel he has been writing for weeks in seclusion. On closer inspection of the several reams of type-written text, Wendy, to her bewilderment and dawning horror, discovers that each page consists of no more than the phrase 'All work and no play makes Jack



a dull boy', repeated over and over in a multitude of meticulously formatted paragraphs, verses and chapters. The same sense of dislocation and surrealism, when faced with the hard evidence of absurdity taken to its extreme, is evoked in the Code Books trilogies.

The first of Code Books comprises three iconic books of Western culture, *The Bible*, Cicero's *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, and Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, presented in austere white-bound volumes inlaid with silver foil-



blocked Roman letters. *De Finibus*, presciently delineating the ends of good and bad, sits squarely on its pedestal of reason between the polar opposites of *Mein Kampf* and *The Bible*. But on opening these ostensibly conventional books the reader is presented with nothing but page upon page of binary code: the entire content of each book has been converted to streams of ones and zeros, the language of digital machines. The initial translation from the Roman character set, the default of all text in the English language and the selection of the King James version of the New Testament only anchor the books firmly within the finely honed solipsism of Western culture. Binary code, the final layer of rendering, preserves all the information in a pristine system of two fundamental values. The books ultimately say nothing. They are an exercise in absurdity, in the painstaking reduction of iconic, emotionally charged, historically and culturally resonant texts to nothing more than streams of information. The form has been short-circuited, the book denuded, stripped of its purpose as a vessel for communication. Instead it becomes an object in itself, a doorstop perhaps, or a perverse anomaly to be placed amongst academic tomes on a library shelf, to shock and awe an unsuspecting browser.

The second trilogy is akin to an act of vandalism or a wild goose chase, a trail of clues which refer back to themselves and lead nowhere. *De Finibus*, sampled as the source of the typesetter's dummy text *Lorem Ipsum* (which is the title of each of the three books), finds itself chopped up and bastardised in the senseless babbling of randomised computer-generated output. Each of the three volumes – as the first trilogy, bound in white with silver foil-blocked Roman lettering – consists of randomly generated Latin text converted into binary code. Whereas the centre book of the trilogy appears as binary code, the flanking books are rendered as barcode and Braille: the former the ubiquitous icon of the commodity culture, a light-based reading system consisting of printed black and white bars; the latter a tactile reading system created for the absence of light. Both trilogies convey the language of the white heat of the modern age, of 1 and 0, positive and negative, on and off, black and white,

photos Matt Lumby



faith and reason, love and hate. As Wendy Torrance's discovery unearthed an insane system beneath a conventional veneer, so the Code Book trilogies convey the inanity underpinning those values which hold us in their thrall.

FURTHER

You ought to be able to find Matt's work at www.hardbody.org.uk