

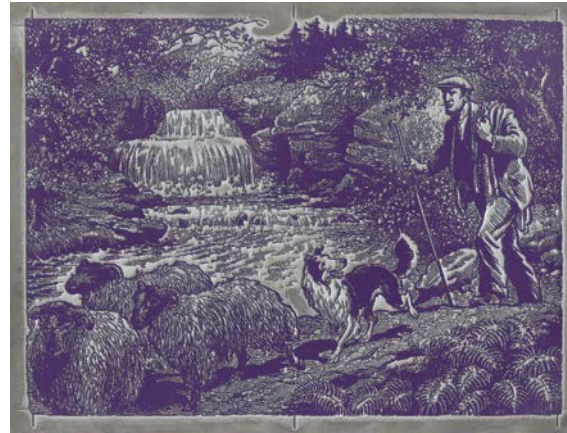
# Black Bob<sup>1</sup>

*It doesn't dictate or imply a pace, it has all sorts of paces, but it's also completely static...*

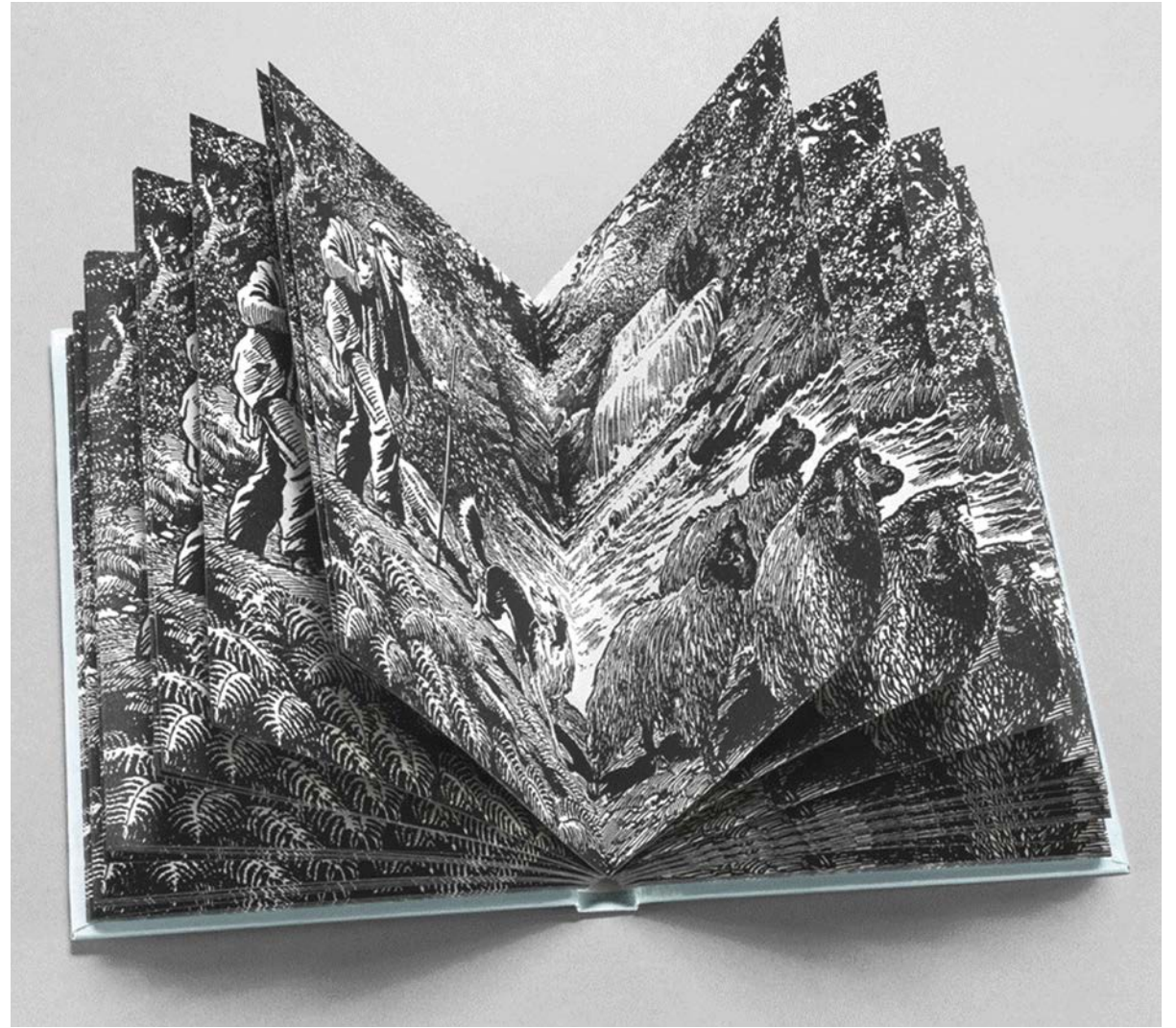
The completely white book, the monochrome or black book, silent and abstract, intends not the small scale reading of words, sentences and pages—the detail and accumulation of content—but a larger-scale, maybe distant reading.<sup>2</sup>

In *Black Bob* the minimalist 'blank' book is redeployed, the commandeered subject matter repeated throughout, the dense black impression of letterpress line-block balanced almost equally with unprinted white stock.<sup>3</sup>

From the first to the last spread there is no change, and so this emphatic demonstration of direction—the page after page rightward movement of shepherd, dog, sheep, and the flow of the river—is identical to the narrative of a book with blank stock as its subject.<sup>4</sup>



Above: Zinc line-block.  
Below: Reading *Black Bob*, 1999.  
Right: *Black Bob*; Coracle, London, 1989.  
Opposite: Leaflet, 2005.



1. *Black Bob* 124pp, 174 x 115, letterpress on book wove, printed paper casebinding, 100 copies, Coracle, London, 1989; second edition 200 copies, Coracle, Ireland, 2008.

"*Black Bob* has its title printed onto the boards of the front cover, and printed in reverse on the back boards. Within, each printed endpaper repeats exactly, making the book two sequences running in opposite directions: 63 black-and-white images of three blackface sheep before a mountain stream move from back to front, and 63 images of Black Bob and his bearded shepherd on a stream's verge move from front to back. Each spread is 'identical'; the halved images join in transit to show a coherent, static, image assembled from two separate, contradictory flows." (Harry Gilonis: 'How to Read II', *Certain Trees: The Constructed Book, Poem and Object* 1964–2006, Saint-Yrieix-La-Perche, 2006)

"*Black Bob*, on the face of it, is an illustrated book whose single illustration is repeated throughout, from

opening to closing page. It runs over the whole construction of the book, the margins, the gutters, the endpapers, the cut edges of the leaves. Only the outer boards of the binding are exempt, serving at once as cover and title page. When the book is turned over, we find that the back cover is a mirror image of the front." (John Bevis, correspondence with CS, November 2013)

2. As for example in herman de vries' *wit* [white]: "The first version was published in 1962 and had an edition of 5. The second version was published by Hansjörg Mayer in Stuttgart in 1967 in an edition of 500. The front and back were printed as well as the first page where there was an introduction by the poet J. C. van Schagen. But the following 250 pages were blank. The title and the names of the author, editor and preface author have been printed in a white band that surrounds the book, which is completely white this time. On the inside of the band,

there are the words: in this book, where all contradictions have been *removed and the contents of which are suitable for everyone, where we have moved beyond all problems and where nothing is cut from reality or is unilateral, we can say that this is a positive contribution to the summary of the whole.*" ([hermandevries.org/publications\\_1960-1969.php](http://hermandevries.org/publications_1960-1969.php))

3. "The pastoral procession is shown heading left to right, the direction in which one turns the pages and, and yet the figures go nowhere. They are stuck among the repetitions, as somebody said, like a jammed gramophone record. However, the sound that emerges here is not a shriek or a judder or a hole in sound but a constant true note pitched in a natural key that has no need to expire. We have a transfixed moment among tumbling streams and ferny paths, heading expectantly across the page yet forever held in anticipation of what awaits. The event that both is and is not there is so totally obvious

that it seems like a wonder, tremulously maintained. It raises questions and at the same makes evident that the irrelevant questions are ones we have imported." (J. C. C. Mays, *Rare Sighting in the Haldon Hills*, Exeter 2009)

4. "Despite the insistence of the repeated image, of shepherd, dog, sheep and river, we suspect that it has not been chosen for its content, its message, or even as a signifier of its—perhaps nostalgic—found origin. More likely it is the uniform overall tone of the woodblock-like pen and ink drawing that makes it work in this context. The more we look at it the more it tends away from image and detail towards print and pattern, a record of the repeated impressions. The book becomes a mechanism for turning a figurative image into an abstraction, its narrative to a silence." (John Bevis, *ibid.*)