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Article: Repairing Modern First Edition Dust Jackets Without Fills or Inpainting: A Conservative Approach

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Repairing Modern First Edition Dust Jackets Without Fills or Inpainting: A Conservative Approach

INTRODUCTION

The modern first edition dust jacket—so often discarded in its day—has become the part of a book that holds the most historical and commercial value (Tanselle 1971, 2003). Despite this increase in the artifactual status of dust jackets, I have observed over the years extensive cosmetic restorations to them that do not honor their original integrity. So, when tasked with repairing a damaged dust jacket for E. E. Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922) from Harvard's Houghton Library for display and storage on its book thereafter, I saw an opportunity to investigate this unique category of paper object (fig. 1). In addition to exploring present attitudes about dust jacket restoration, I will describe stepwise nearly invisible repairs made using a lightweight kozo tissue precoated with Klucel G (hydroxypropylcellulose) adhesive and the rationale for leaving losses to be filled visually by a toned or printed secondary jacket placed underneath the original. The goal was to make the jacket appear as though it did not have losses from a short distance in an exhibition while avoiding invasive and time-consuming fills and leaving the jacket as it was found.

Leaving dust jackets wholly unrestored is the clear preference of experts who work with rare modern first editions. The curator of modern books and manuscripts at the Houghton Library tries to obtain books with jackets in good original condition but admitted that she is “not as picky as a private collector might be” (note 1). Similarly, the rare book market caters to discerning collectors who value jackets in their original state. For instance, Swann Auction Galleries highlighted a copy of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) in a recent sale as having a dust jacket that “a clumsy hand did not mar with an ill-advised repair.” Likewise, First and Fine UK advertised a first edition copy of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) with an original wrapper that “has NOT been restored in any

way.” And Peter Harrington Rare Books described their copy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as having “the first issue dust jacket, a stupendous example, untouched by restoration or repair.” These examples underscore the preference for unrestored jackets, and they all pertain to the most expensive books on the market, with finer condition copies of *The Great Gatsby* now exceeding \$300,000 (note 2).

AVOIDING REPAIR

Observing the rare book marketplace in person and online indicates that tattered and even partial dust jackets significantly enhance the interest and value of modern first editions. Many such jackets bear older tape repairs, often applied on the show side. Another informal survey of books offered by rare book sellers and auctioneers (notably Swann Auction Galleries) reveals a trend toward preserving such tape repairs rather than risking damage during removal, especially if the tape covers color printing.

Preserving an original dust jacket, regardless of condition, and keeping it on its book merely requires setting it into a common archival-quality protector made from 1.5 mil Mylar (clear polyester film) and acid-free white paper. Alternatively, because jackets in pieces may not stay in place inside a commercial protector, creative solutions like modifying an archival 2 mil polyethylene bag using an ultrasonic welder can secure the jacket pieces in the correct position on the book (fig. 2).

REPAIR

Since the brief for *The Enormous Room* jacket was to display it without a protector, some repair was necessary. Working as dryly as possible was important to maintain the jacket's original feel and appearance. Using a lightweight kozo tissue precoated with a nonaqueous adhesive such as Klucel G in ethanol can be an effective method (Pataki 2009) for subtle mending or lining without risking alterations to the paper's texture or dimensions (fig. 3). By contrast, bathing a dust jacket in water or using aqueous adhesives such as wheat

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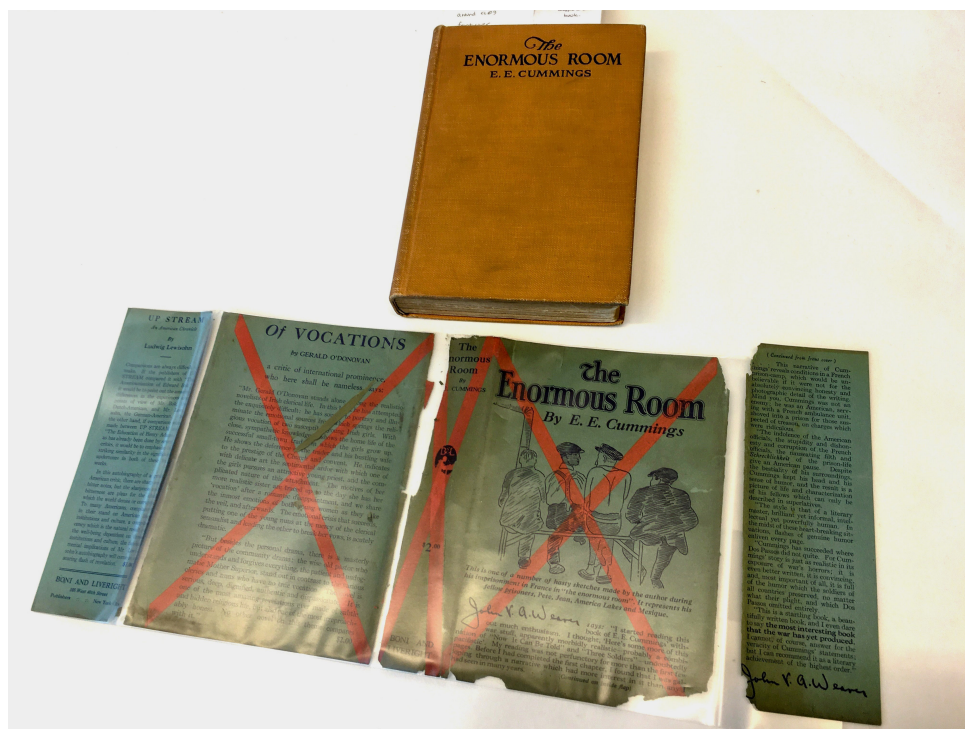


Fig. 1. First edition dust jacket and book for *The Enormous Room* (1922) by E. E. Cummings. Credit: AC9.C9125.922c (A) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

starch paste or methylcellulose may inadvertently change the jacket's surface finish or dimensions, impacting its original fit—a critical consideration for collectors, particularly with highly sought after jackets like the first edition of *The Great Gatsby*, known to have been trimmed slightly tall by the publisher (note 3).



Fig. 2. A 2-mil archival poly bag welded and trimmed into a more supportive jacket protector.



Fig. 3. The lining paper is a 2 gsm toned kozo tissue precoated with 5% Klucel G.

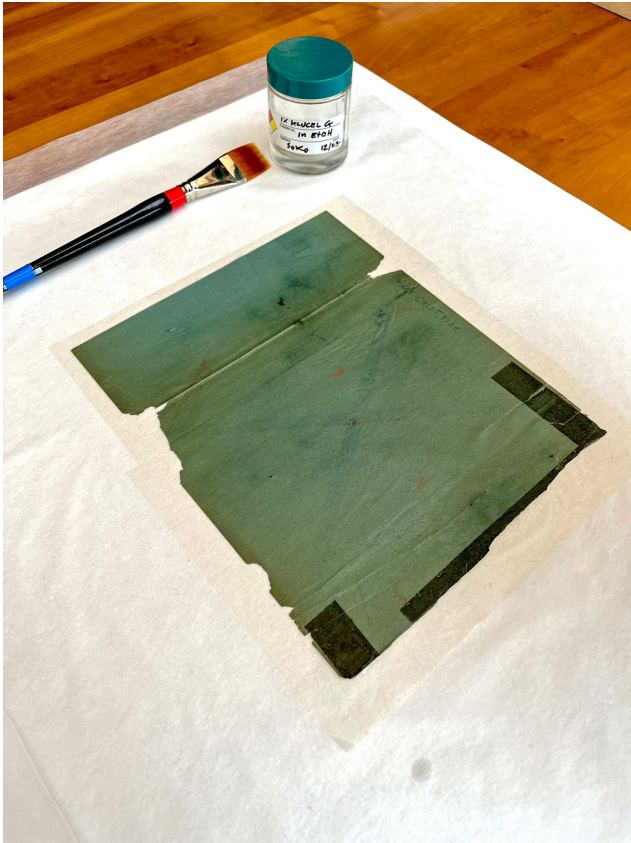


Fig. 4. Pieces of the dust jacket are held in place by a suction platen (hidden under Hollytex and thin blotter), making it easy to brush down the pre-coated tissue with 1% Klucel G in ethanol.

In the case of Houghton Library's copy of *The Enormous Room*, my initial attempts at local mending using 3.5 gsm toned kozo tissue strips pre-coated with 5% Klucel G caused damage due to the jacket's fragile state from age and tape stains. Given its condition, I cautiously undertook a more invasive approach and decided to line this jacket overall so that it would safely conform to its book. Starting by aligning the pieces of one-half of the jacket face down on smooth Hollytex over a thin blotter set on a flush-mounted bench suction platen, a 2 gsm toned kozo tissue pre-coated with 5% Klucel G was then brushed down onto the jacket with a flat synthetic brush repeatedly dipped into 1% Klucel G in ethanol as a reactivation solution (fig. 4).

Once dry, the lined half of the jacket was easily assembled with the remaining loose jacket pieces over the suction platen. A metal straight edge was placed along the bottom to ensure overall alignment. A second piece of pre-coated tissue was set down with an overlap that spanned the spine of the jacket to provide more reinforcement in this weak area. A third 8 × 10 inch sheet of tissue was butted to the second to complete the lining (fig. 5). Using a spatula, the dry, lined jacket was separated from the Hollytex, and loose bits of jacket were



Fig. 5. Brushing down the last piece of pre-coated tissue to complete the lining.

set back into place using tweezers and more 1% Klucel G. Any tissue that showed in areas of loss was carefully scraped away using a curved blade scalpel on a glass tabletop.

In general, I do not consider lining a conservative approach, so in this sense the title of this article is misleading. However, I do feel this is a conservative repair technique in that the lining is very thin, applied without water, and visually discreet. The look and feel of *The Enormous Room* jacket is unchanged on the exterior, but it is slightly shinier on the book-facing side (fig. 6).

AVOIDING FILLS

Losses in older dust jackets are common, and filling these in a manner sympathetic to the original can be exceedingly time consuming. While lining a dust jacket with a similar paper that reinforces it and fills losses can be efficient, it often significantly alters the jacket's thickness and tactile qualities. Filling losses, especially with the intention to reconstruct missing text or design, further complicates this process. Modern first edition dust jackets, manufactured with machine-made paper by commercial printers, possess physical characteristics that



Fig. 6. An after-treatment image of the interior of the lined jacket. The lining is nearly transparent but also slightly shiny.

are difficult to imitate with the more artisanal techniques of conservation and restoration.

Moreover, according to Tanselle's 2003 survey, there is growing consensus among book historians and collectors that maintaining a historically correct jacket is crucial for preserving a book's bibliographic integrity. Although difficult to detect when the book and its jacket are both in good condition, this integrity becomes more apparent with jackets in poor condition, where visible losses and damage should correspond with the book's history, emphasizing their original association (fig. 7). For the conservator, avoiding fills can be both ethical and practical.



Fig. 7. Fading and wear show that this book and its jacket have had a long association.

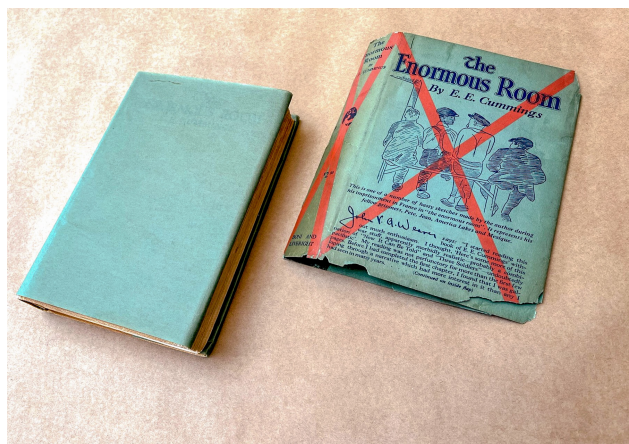


Fig. 8. The treated jacket with a toned Asian tissue “under jacket” intended to visually fill losses.

ALTERNATIVE FILLS

There are easy and reversible ways to make a dust jacket with losses appear more complete for display. For *The Enormous Room* jacket, the losses were at the edges and there was no significant text or design missing. Nonetheless, using a toned Asian paper “under jacket” (fig. 8) visually completed this graphically striking jacket so that its design rather than its condition was the initial impression in the exhibition *Sentences: Prison Writing Through the Ages*, held at Houghton Library during the summer of 2023 (fig. 9). The advantage of using an under jacket is that the dust jacket retains its authentic condition while appearing complete when viewed from a short distance on exhibit. Without an under jacket, its poor condition would be emphasized due to the contrasting binding color.

A printed under jacket may be an effective choice when displaying a dust jacket that is missing significant text and design. Here, the Internet can offer a multitude of solutions. Many modern first edition dust jackets are available as printed facsimiles from high-quality scans through Facsimile Dust Jackets LLC. These may be too “clean” compared to a damaged jacket placed overtop, so modification of some sort may be necessary. Another possibility is capturing an image of a relevant dust jacket, usually from a bookseller's listing. Often one can find a more complete jacket with similar toning or fading to download, resize, and print. The pixelation that will result from these small image files may even be an advantage in that they yield a blurry print and will be visually quieter compared to a real jacket (fig. 10).

As convenient as the Internet can be for sourcing images of dust jackets, there can be copyright concerns. The copyright expert for the Harvard Library has summarized the issue by stating that legally, there is not a blanket rule for using images of dust jackets found on the web to serve as the source for cosmetic fills. While there is a strong presumption of fair use

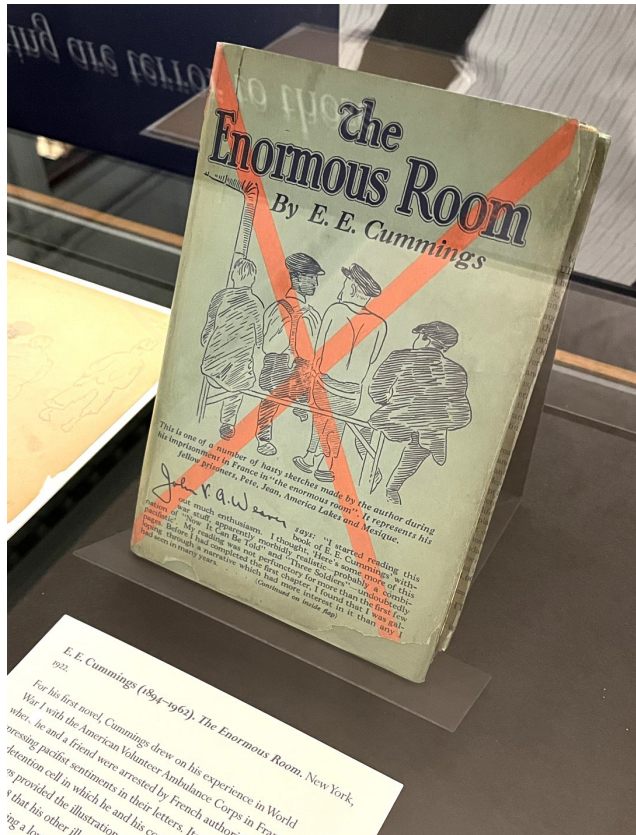


Fig. 9. *The Enormous Room* on display at Houghton Library in the summer of 2023. The under jacket disguises the losses, keeping attention on the cover design.

for cosmetic fills to repair dust jackets for nonprofit exhibition purposes, each fair use determination is fact specific to the work itself. Determining if the work is in the public domain and can be used for any purpose without permission is an important first step in minimizing the risk of copyright infringement (note 4).



Fig. 10. Detail of a printed under jacket made from an image found on the Internet. The pixelation from small image files such as this one is an advantage in that it creates visually quieter fills.

AVOIDING INPAINTING

Clearly, some stewards and sellers of rare books view an “unrestored” dust jacket as an important sign of that book’s authenticity and historical integrity. Of the various techniques that one might employ to improve the condition of a dust jacket, inpainting holds a special power to tamper with both. Perhaps it is simply too easy (and fun!) to do. Perhaps inpainting is a necessary sign in some book repair contexts that a treatment has taken place. Long ago and in a different setting, I observed cosmetic improvements being made on a rare jacket with felt-tip markers; the highest-quality watercolor paints would be no less destructive. In the end, inpainting (or retouching or coloring in) a dust jacket becomes a misrepresentation of its true condition and, in time, will negatively affect its appearance—and all other aspects of its value.

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NOTES

1. Leslie A. Morris, e-mail message to author, May 8, 2024.
2. “John Larson’s Specialist Picks,” Swann Auction Galleries, posted February 22, 2023, <https://www.swanngalleries.com/news/19th-20th-century-literature/2023/02/john-larsons-specialist-picks-five-to-watch-in-the-march-2-2023-sale/>; “Orwell, George (1945) ‘Animal Farm,’ UK True First Edition With the Original and Unrestored Dust Jacket,” First and Fine, accessed April 2024, <https://www.firstandfine.com/product/orwell-george-1945-animal-farm-uk-true-first-edition-with-the-original-and-unrestored-dust-jacket/>; New York International Antiquarian Book Fair (@nybookfair), “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” Instagram post, April 7, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/nybookfair/p/CcEs9KBseM7/>; “The Library of Dr. Rodney P. Swantko/Lot 15,” Sotheby’s, accessed July 2024, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2024/the-library-of-dr-rodney-p-swantko/fitzgerald-f-scott-the-great-gatsby-first-edition>.
3. “The Great Gatsby Dust Jacket,” *The Journal*, Peter Harrington, posted May 14, 2013, <https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/blog/the-great-gatsby-dust-jacket-one-of-the-most-enigmatic-in-modern-literature/>.
4. Kyle K. Courtney, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2024.

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SOURCES OF MATERIALS

NAJ Toned Tengucho by Hidaka Washi, 2.0 g/m² and 3.5 g/m² rolls

Hiromi Paper Inc.
9469 Jefferson Blvd. #117
Culver City, CA 90232
310-998-0098
<https://hiromipaper.com>

Klucel G (hydroxypropylcellulose), Archival polyethylene bags (2 mil)

TALAS
330 Morgan Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11211
212-219-0770
<https://www.talasonline.com>

Exact-fit clear polyester book covers with nonprinted paper backing

Brodart
500 Arch St.
Williamsport, PA 17701
888-283-6087
<https://www.shopbrodart.com>

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