

Repairing modern first edition dust jackets without fills or inpainting: a conservative approach
Christopher Sokolowski

The Problem

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. Despite this increase in their artifactual status, I have observed extensive cosmetic restorations to valuable dust jackets over the years that don't suit their rarity and importance.

But don't take my word for it. Below are some thoughts from high-profile sellers in the rare book marketplace; it seems that restoration and possibly even conservation is not desirable.

Sale 2366 - Lot 177
Price Realized: \$ 8,750
 Estimate: \$ 6,000 - \$ 9,000
 QUEEN, ELLERY. The French Powder Mystery. 8vo, publisher's red cloth stamped in black.

Even acknowledging the dust jacket faults, this title stands as an honest copy and notable in that the wrapper is known to exist only in facsimile or lesser original fragments.

but for front flap, \$2.00 price intact, internally clean and unmarked. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1930

credit: Swann Auction Galleries

Lot 233: Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, first edition, in the rare dust jacket, entirely unrestored, London, 1923. Estimate \$13,000 to \$20,000.

...a clumsy hand did not mar it with an ill-advised repair.

The jacket designs from Vanessa Bell for many of Woolf's books are inseparable from the contents within. This copy retains all their collaborative ideas in that a clumsy hand did not mar it with an ill-advised repair. This one, within and without, shines.

Credit: Swann Auction Galleries 2023

ORWELL, GEORGE (1945) 'ANIMAL FARM', UK TRUE FIRST EDITION WITH THE ORIGINAL AND UNRESTORED DUST JACKET

The dust jacket is the original first issue wrapper and has NOT been restored in any way.

credit: First and Fine UK

J.R.R. Tolkien | 'The Hobbit, or 'There and Back Again', London, 1937, first edition, dust-jacket

...unrestored price-clipped dust-jacket with loss at upper margin of front cover and head of spine and extremities browned.

credit: Sotheby's

F. Scott Fitzgerald | The Great Gatsby, 1925

A first edition, first printing, first state of the text, in the first issue dust jacket, a stupendous example, untouched by restoration or repair.

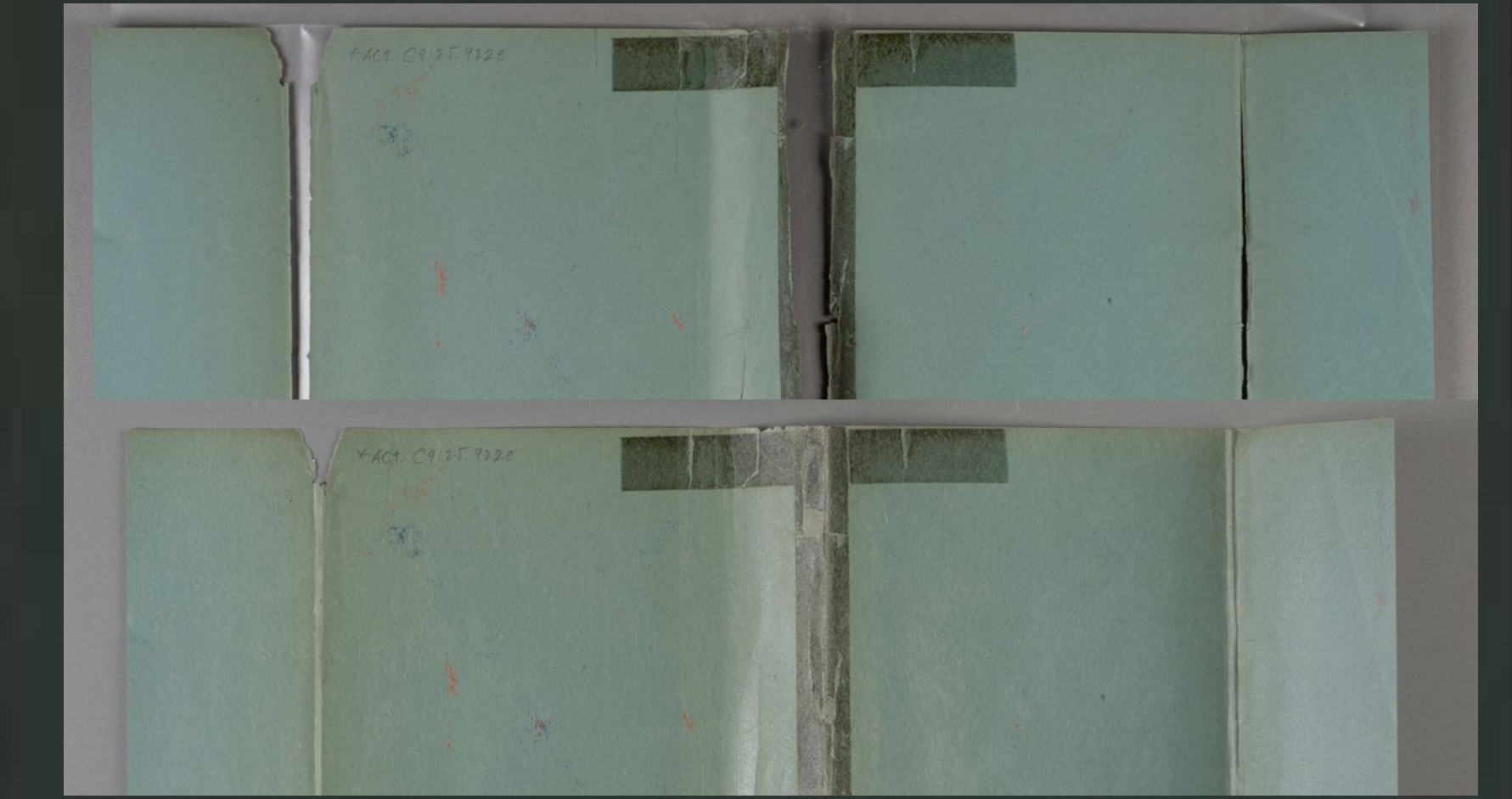
credit: Peter Harrington Rare Books

Conservation treatment may devalue rare dust jackets; restoration almost certainly does.



Possible Solutions

Should repair be truly necessary, it seems that working as dry as possible preserves the freshness and feel of the jacket best. Using a lightweight kozo tissue pre-coated with a non-aqueous adhesive such as Klucel G (hydroxypropylcellulose) in ethanol can be an effective system with which to make subtle repairs.

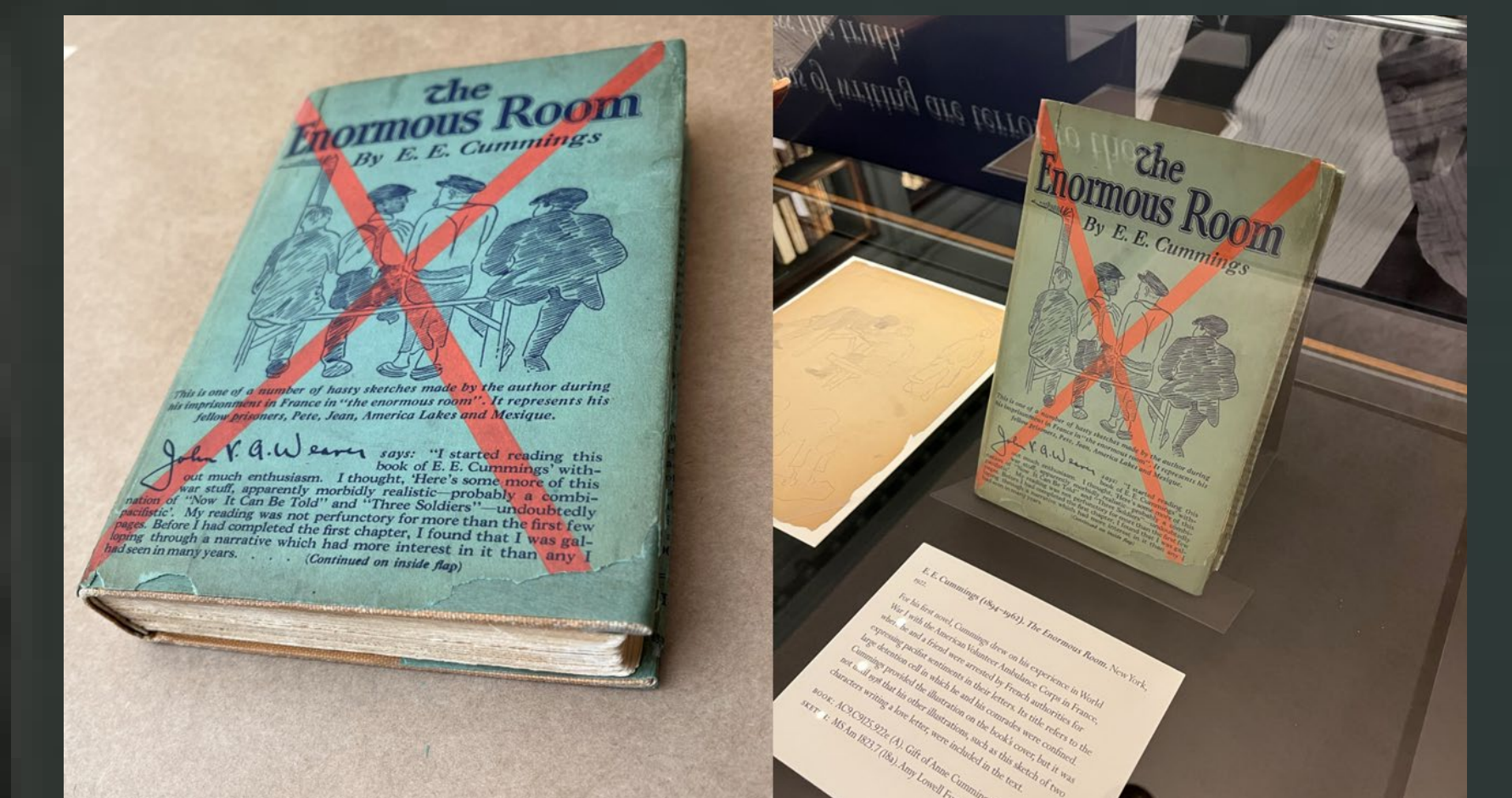


Before treatment (detail, top), and after treatment (detail, bottom), April 2023. This dust jacket was lined overall with a 2-gram kozo tissue pre-coated with 5% Klucel G and reactivated with 1% Klucel G in ethanol during lining. *The Enormous Room* by E.E. Cummings (1922) Houghton Lib. GEN AC9 C9125 922a

2 g/m² NAJ Toned Tenguchu by Hidaka Washi pre-coated with 5% Klucel G

Scan QR code below for our five-page handout on making and using pre-coated Asian tissues for mending and lining.

Leaving losses to be filled visually by a toned or printed “under jacket” placed inside the original jacket is both easy and reversible. The advantage of this approach for institutions is that the dust jacket retains its authentic condition while appearing complete when viewed from a short distance on exhibit. A dust jacket in poor condition can easily be made to look better or its poor condition can be emphasized, depending on the needs of curatorial interpretation.



Repaired dust jacket with toned tissue “under jacket” directs attention to cover design rather than jacket condition.



Christopher Sokolowski
Paper Conservator for Special Collections
Weissman Preservation Center
christopher_sokolowski@harvard.edu

