

THE BINDING OF KING LEAR

by Philip Smith



This is one of 279 copies of *King Lear* by William Shakespeare produced by the Ganymede Press Original Editions Limited in 1963. It was printed by the Oxford University Press in Fell Type on Crisbrook handmade paper, and illustrated with 16 original Lithographs by Oscar Kokoschka.

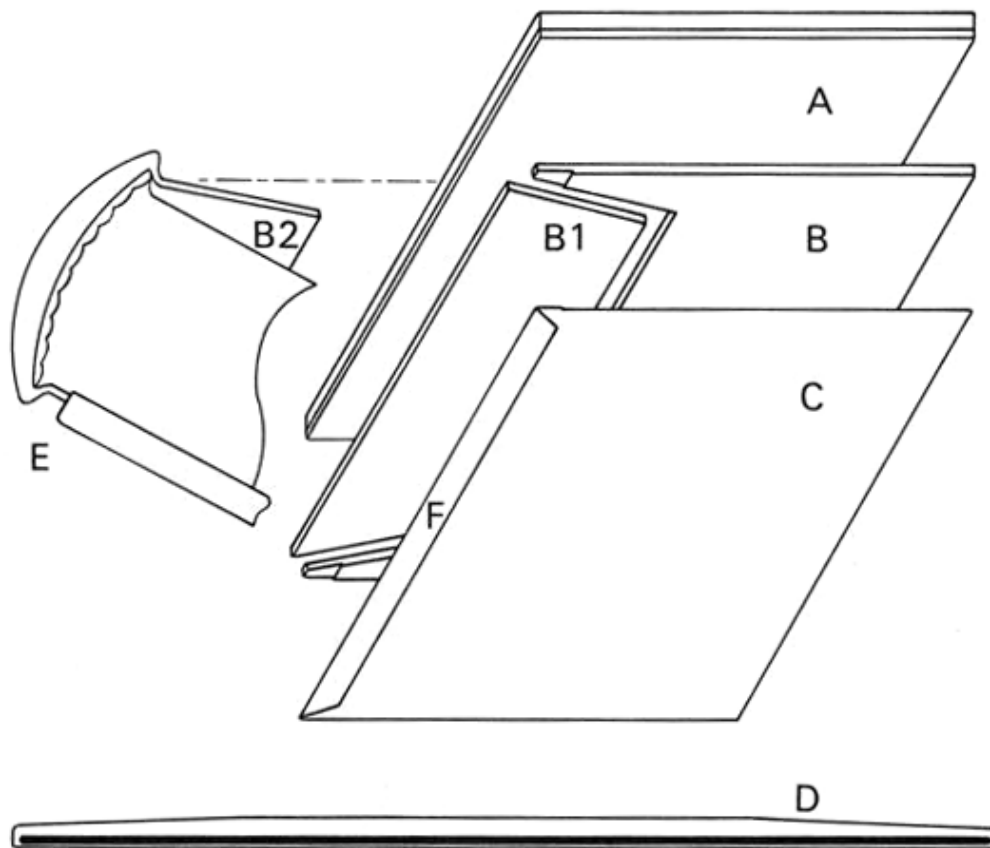
The book was published in an all-vellum casebinding. This was removed and the book stripped down, pressed and re-sewn on a complex of semi-recessed cords and doubled ½" tapes in the order c, t, c, t, c, each section being picked up with a linkstitch on the tape supports. The plates are swung on extension guards, and purple morocco joints are sewn in with the end sections of handmade oatmeal-coloured paper. A binder's colophon is printed on a white flyleaf.

Some of the deep deckle was trimmed to 'show'. The edges were gilded before gluing, rounding and backing with PVA adhesive. The spine was lined between the supports with fine handkerchief linen and two double tier endbands sewn in through the lining. A further lining of leather was glued to the spine and sanded level. A 2-on-3-off hollow of

Kraft paper was glued to this. The linen lining, feathered cords and tapes were glued down to the waste sheet.

The leather for covering the spine was made up from purple and dark brown morocco with feathered onlays of purple, brown, orange and other coloured fragments placed in position to receive the title stamping. The title is a hand drawn reduction of the board design letter forms which had been made into a plate with the author's name in letter spaced Univers type. A piece of gilder's tissue was torn and glued to the inside of the spine covering to give stability to the blocking area so that when the spine was covered the titling would not be distorted. After blocking and varnishing, the spine was covered and the leather brought over on to the waste sheet with the spine linings.

The caps were formed and, when dry, the leather joints glued to the inside of the spine linings and waste sheet, forming a tongue. This would later be trimmed to shape and inserted into a slot prepared in the back edge of the board (D on diagram). The boards were made up separately as follows: an outer laminate was made up of heavy 3mm millboard with 1mm board inside (A). A third



piece of 1 mm board was cut to shape as (B) and glued to (A) with the cut part B1 tipped in position. A manilla lining piece was edged with a pared leather turn-in at the back edge (F). This manilla board (C) was glued to (B) leaving (B1) free. The made up board was cushion bevelled 55mm in from head, tail and foreedge.

A set of large letter forms was designed to form the words *KING LEAR* and cut out of 2mm acrylic sheet; these were to be used as templates. A piece of orange-red morocco was cut out and pared off at the edges, pasted, and the board covered. The board strip (B1) was removed and the leather turned in to the slot (D) which was now completely edged with leather. Board strip (B1) was replaced in the slot temporarily. The plastic letter templates were then pressed deeply into the damp covering leather to leave impressions.

A piece of grey leather was thinned all over to 1mm thickness to act as a ground for the assembly of the image of Lear's head. Hundreds of pieces of feathered onlay were arranged like a palette of colours on white boards and the image of the face built up with reference to a colour sketch.

As work proceeded each piece of onlay was shaped further and laid flesh side down on to a surface covered with a mixture of Canadian wheatflour paste and PVA. The adhesive was transferred to the onlay pieces which were arranged in position with mounted needles. Periodically the leather was damped and pressed. When the image was completed the leather was left to dry out. The leather was then pared all over on the flesh side to equalize.

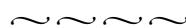
The skin was mounted lightly on to a sheet of thin blotting paper; the plastic template letters were drawn round in reverse on the blotting paper. The letter forms

were then cut out with bevelled edges through the blotting paper which was removed from the back of the leather. The pieces of leather were pasted up and inset into the impressions on the boards. Both back and front boards were treated in this way, pressed and allowed to dry out for two days to pull.

The inside of the board was lined with several layers of manilla and paper until it was seen to pull flat. The strip of card (B1) was removed and used as a template to cut the spine tongue to shape. The latter was then glued and inserted into the slot (D) in the board. The fitting, leaving a groove, is shown at (E).

The doublures were made from purple suede which was lined with handmade bank paper. The edge of the suede was bevelled to 6mm, the lining glued up and the doublure set down. The book was polished and pressed.

The design on the book represents Lear looking through the prison bars of his name.



NOTES:

When levelling (or building up) a spine I would no longer place a leather liner beneath a hollow in close contact with the sewing and section backs, because of migration of acid from the leather. The hollow back tube acts as a kind of airspace barrier preventing this migration. For similar reasons, Kraft paper would not now be used; acid-free handmade paper being preferred for constructing the hollow.

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