

The Making of a Book

by Elmer Adler

IF THE INDIVIDUAL designing the physical structure of a book could ignore all responsibilities other than the making of a beautiful volume, his task would be much simplified. In other fields there are examples of form with almost a total absence of substance. For instance, it is told that in the early days of the Mormon Church, the leaders, often for hours at a time, stood before their congregations making sounds and gesturing. They were making sounds, however, that resembled no words understood by the crowds. The orators were said to have "the gift of tongues," and although no one got any specific idea from what he heard, all the auditors were tremendously impressed and emotionally moved. Each of these demonstrations was a good example of perfected medium. The audience was so completely under the spell of form that it was not conscious of a lack of substance.

But the job of the bookmaker starts with substance; it is substance already created and which is to be put into a form available to many others. Furthermore, this form should appear to have been developed with little or no resistance, and to function with the highest degree of efficiency.

When a reader is made more conscious of

the form of the book than of its subject matter, the work of designing is badly done. The projector of such a book might have qualified on a Utah platform, but he is not likely to make any real contribution to the art of the book. The bookmaker's main tool, type, is a medium of expression and all the mediums have a common quality: the greater art exercised, the lesser realization of labor.

The telling orally of stories of adventure had gone on for thousands of years before symbols were developed to present the records in some visual or permanent manner. And it is important to remember that when man, in a comparatively recent time, devised symbols for the visual presentation of ideas, these symbols for the most part represented the sounds in which the ideas were originally expressed.

Even the nomenclature applied to the visual forms is adapted from the oral. We ask "what tongue" or "what language" does he use? There is no special word for the written language. We virtually call it symbolized sound. Almost all devices for the written or printed forms of expression are derived from the oral; commas, periods, paragraphs are simply degrees of pauses in imitation of vocal presentations. Not only is the vocal form of

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literature the original, but it also continues to be the most natural. Doubtless, most authors write by arranging words as they sound to the ear. The visual form adapts; it does not create.

With this knowledge of the background of physical form, the designer is prepared to consider the manuscript that is to become a printed book. A specific text to illustrate our points is comparatively easy to select. It is not so simple, however, to explain the reasoning that leads to the selection of type and of paper. To do this, there is required first a discussion of the origin and most successful use of available paper or type. *THE DOLPHIN*, in its first number and again in the one in which this article appears, has included articles on type, paper, margins, binding, etc.—all containing the kind of information that a book designer must have and use. Rather than attempt to repeat this information, we will refer to these fuller studies that are readily available. (Perhaps we should use the title "How to Make a Book with the Assistance of *THE DOLPHIN*.") Secondly, the special preferences of the designer guide his selection, and taste is always most difficult to analyze. Clear reason carries some distance, and thus far the path can be described.

While he is reading the manuscript, the book planner finds that his attention is often wandering from the text. The selection of type, the desirable paper, the binding, are constantly forcing themselves into his consciousness. And if this type, then, what size page on what paper? And how to be bound? For our experimental book, we might select one which Carl P. Rollins, in his article on American bookmaking (*THE DOLPHIN*, Number One), called "an outstanding book of the past few years." And there is another good reason for our selection of *Beowulf*—with this book we will not have to humor the idiosyncrasies of a living author. That will save considerable time and much diplomacy. Incidentally, it might be mentioned that not

even the name of our author is known, nor exactly when he lived. So the text alone suggests the form and handling.

THE ONLY ORIGINAL manuscript of *Beowulf* is deposited in the British Museum, and apparently was executed about the tenth century. It is part of a volume which obviously was designed to be a collection of Anglo-Saxon literature. Its date can be ascertained fairly accurately by the character of the manuscript hands, for there are more than one, on the vellum leaves. However, the language of the English text seems to date the tale several centuries earlier, and we now know that some of the characters were alive during the fifth century.

Consequently, we can conclude that this story began to be told shortly after the fifth century, and that, after it had been memorized and retold to succeeding generations, was put into some written form by the seventh century. Whereas it is not likely that many manuscripts were made of *Beowulf*, it is difficult to realize that it has been preserved in but a single copy. Slight indeed are the conscious ties that bind us to the past.

It must be taken for granted that the edition we are considering in the making belongs to the very limited and special group usually designated as *de luxe*. Only volumes that fit into this classification permit of the special design, craftsmanship, and attention to detail that our book requires.

When we have acquired an understanding of the manuscript, we must withhold decisions on details of production until the budget is worked out, and the budget is usually dependent upon a merchandising plan. The problem that the publisher faces is the three-headed one of production, distribution, and consumption. It is frequently computed by working backward and attempting first to measure the consumption; the number of copies that can be expected to sell at a certain price establishes the total budget for the

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publisher. For *Beowulf*, the number determined upon was nine hundred and fifty, and the price twenty-five dollars. It should be remembered that this was in November, 1929, and the depression had scarcely raised its head. Obviously, when figuring on a gross sale of over twenty-three thousand dollars, the publisher can make a sizable appropriation for production—especially when there is no royalty. So arrangements were completed with the artist and printer, and the job was formally entered as of December 27, 1929.

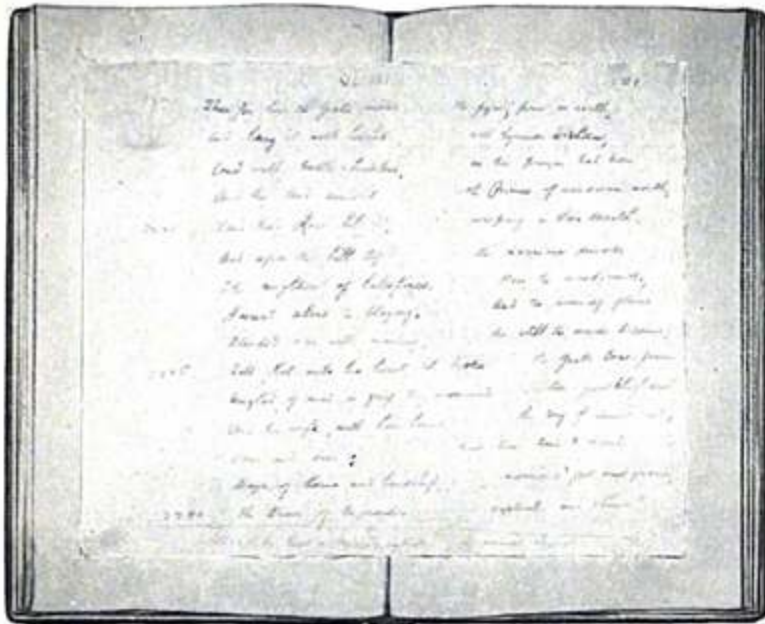
It is always difficult to say just what part of the plan of a book is the first to come into being. It is another application of the old question, "Which came first, the hen or the egg?" Paper, type, illustration, color—each must be considered separately and all must be considered together. As in building a house, often many sets of plans are discarded before the one is found which most acceptably combines all the desired elements.

In the consideration of type for our book, we might refer to David T. Pottinger in his article on "The Characteristics of a Good Book Type" (also in *THE DOLPHIN*, Number One). Pottinger asks, regarding the competent book designer, "Is he not likely to know by a sort of intuition just what types he wants to use without basing his choice upon any minute investigation?" "But," the writer amplifies, "intuition, or taste, or inspiration, it cannot be too often said, is disciplined intelligence."

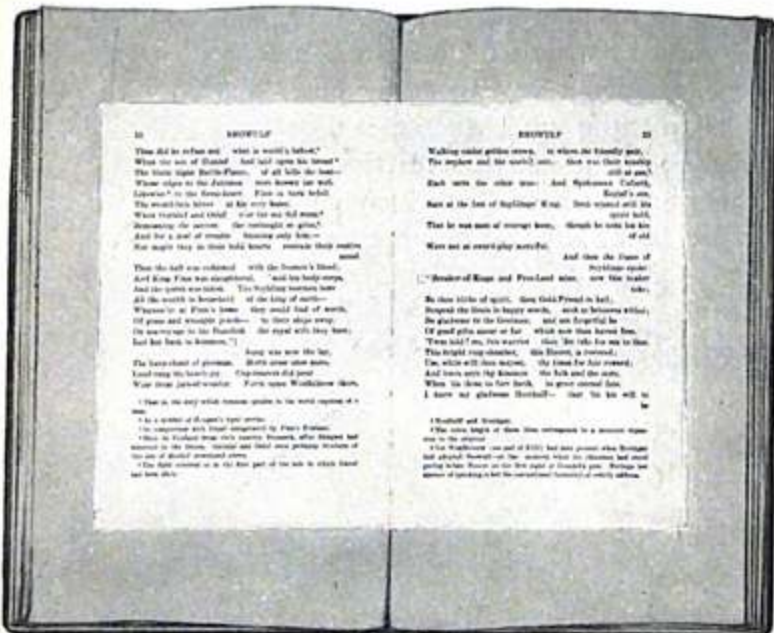
For use in this edition of *Beowulf* we did not consider the Early English text that appears in the original manuscript, but in preference selected the translation done by William Ellery Leonard. The Leonard arrangement is a chant of the Bard (or "Scop"), relating the adventures of the Danish heroes. But while Leonard goes some way to modernize the text, it is not made into colloquial English; it continues to have a middle-age flavor that obviously is more at home in a



1. Original manuscript.



2. Leonard manuscript.



3. Ordinary type setting.

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setting which suggests a manuscript hand of the Middle Ages.

With the Leonard arrangement, the amount of copy on each line was definitely determined, so the only decision was of type size which would assure the greatest readability. With the width of type mass established, it was a simple matter to determine the depth; again we refer to the first *DOLPHIN*, in this instance to the guidance of Alfred W. Pollard and his article on "Margins."

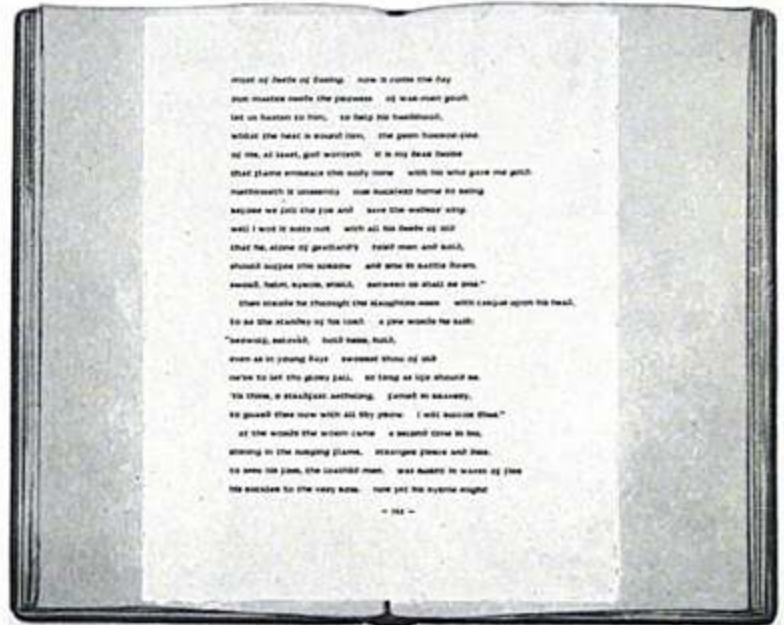
In the instance of *Beowulf*, we had determined upon hand or foundry type rather than either linotype or monotype for several reasons. The most important was that the plan to have rubricated initials and scroll designs required considerable special handling and the preparing of different forms for the press, which with linotype would become exceedingly difficult if not impossible, and with monotype would require much resetting by hand. However, the deciding factor was our discovery of the availability of a foundry type that seemed ideal for our purpose.

About the time the making of this special edition was contemplated, an artist named Hammer was working on designs for a semi-uncial type that had many of the characteristics of the letters in the original *Beowulf* manuscript. This type was cut by Paul Koch in the manner described by him in the first number of *THE DOLPHIN*. After a few trial lines had been set we could almost believe that the type had been especially made for this book. Enough type of twelve- and fourteen-point sizes was ordered to permit the setting of a dozen or more pages; then as each group was approved in the setting, wax mould plates were made. The type was then distributed and another set of pages completed. This operation was repeated until the one hundred and forty-six pages of text were plated.

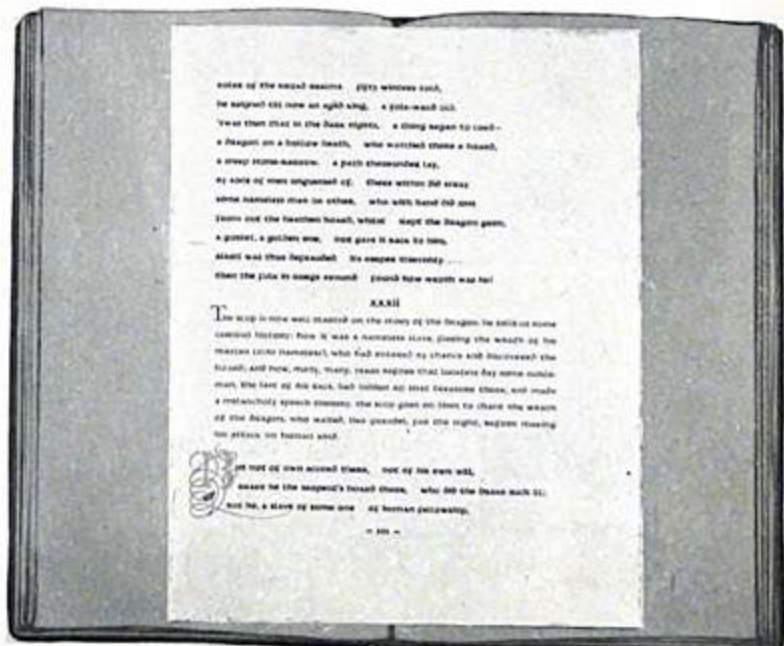
As far as the maker of books is concerned, there are only two kinds of artists. One of these believes that every part of a book should



4. Hammer type font.



5. Type page.



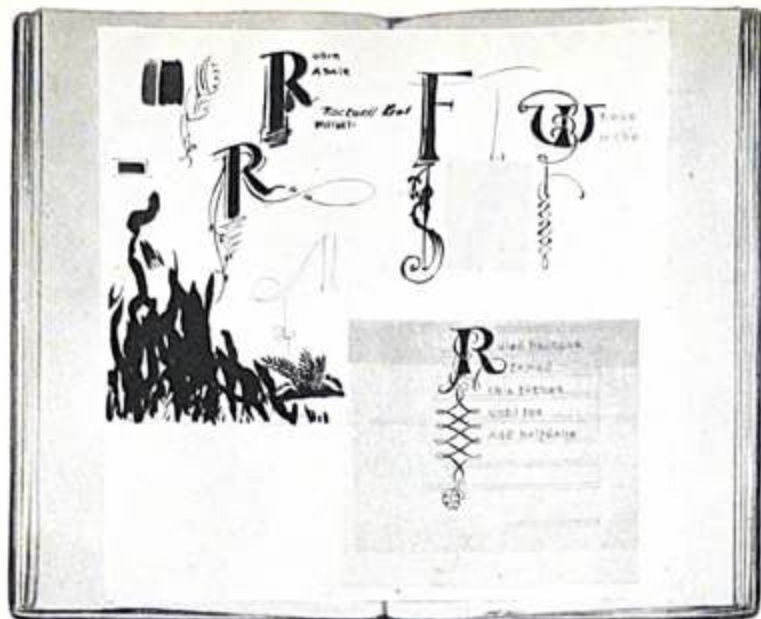
6. Page with initials and type.

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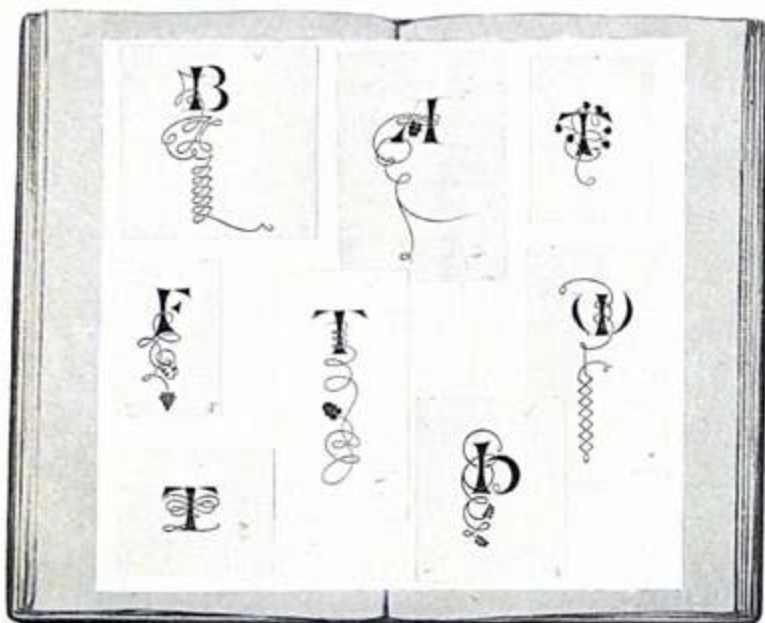
be subordinated to his art, and that he should be concerned not at all with the problems of production, and under no condition with the limitation of cost. The other realizes that his work must fit into a well-organized plan and that illustrations supplement the text rather than overpower it. It is amazing how infrequently does an artist understand the possibilities and limitations of the processes of manifolding or reproduction. A part of the training of every artist should be the mastery of one of the original mediums, and an understanding of them all. Then it would not be so difficult for him to comprehend the photomechanical processes that make possible a greater distribution of his work. It is the artist lacking such information who frequently is inflexible and unwilling to help face and solve the production problems. When it is possible to consider the inclusion of illustrations or designs done in an original medium, an astonishingly large selection is available. By "an original medium" is meant that the artist himself prepares the surface from which the printing is done. This surface can be either relief, intaglio, or planographic. Rather, it *must* be one of these surfaces, for we have only the three. If we were not fearful of overdoing references to *THE DOLPHIN*, we would suggest that you consult Harry A. Groesbeck, Jr.'s article, in Number One, and Warren Chappell's in this number, for unusually clear explanations of these surfaces. These descriptions are particularly helpful when one wishes to distinguish the photomechanical processes which are almost entirely derived from the original.

In *Beowulf*, the artist was responsible for the initials in addition to the full-page designs. Kent entered wholeheartedly into the plan of setting, and studied rubricated manuscripts to establish a historical background for the initials he designed for chapter openings. His studies for these letters were turned over to Juliet Koenig Smith for final execution. Then photomechanical plates were made

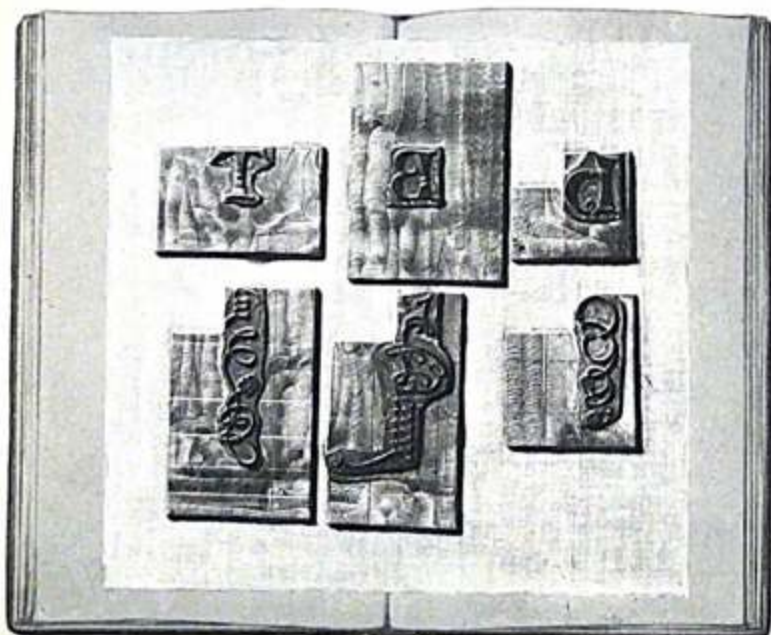
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7. Study for initials.



8. Drawing for initials.



9. Plates for printing initials.

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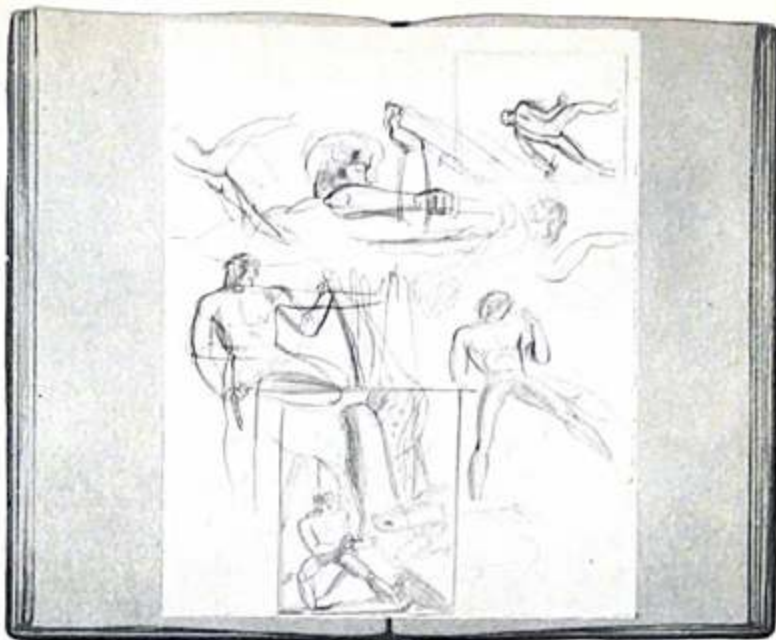
—a separate one on copper for each color to be printed.

It was necessary that the text of each page be set in advance, in order that the initial decorations might be designed to fit. In places the chapter openings are so near the bottom of the page that there is room for only a shortened decoration; each design, therefore, was made to fit to a proof of a text page.

Conversely to the difficulty in solving the problems raised by the artist who is not familiar with the different surfaces, is the greater ease in working with the artist who has mastered one or more of the original mediums and who consequently understands the others. Anyone who has had the opportunity to work with Rockwell Kent knows what an excellent representative he is of this latter group. Kent not only is an unusually imaginative artist, but, also, is able and willing to apply his well-stored, alert mind to any detail of any problem. A bookmaker is particularly fortunate when he has Rockwell Kent as a collaborator, providing, of course, that he is not, at that time, on one of his visits to Greenland.

For the illustrations we had the choice of either woodcut or lithographic medium, since Kent is completely at home with either. Any intaglio process would seem entirely out of keeping with the vigorous treatment that the tale demanded. By the time the format was established, Kent had chosen his medium, lithography, and had determined upon the character of the drawings. The first sketches were made in pencil; the finished drawings were then done at Ausable Forks with lithographic crayon on transfer paper. Kent brought these sheets down to New York, taking the greatest care to leave no finger marks, which would have shown on the transfer. The stone work was done at the studio of George Miller.

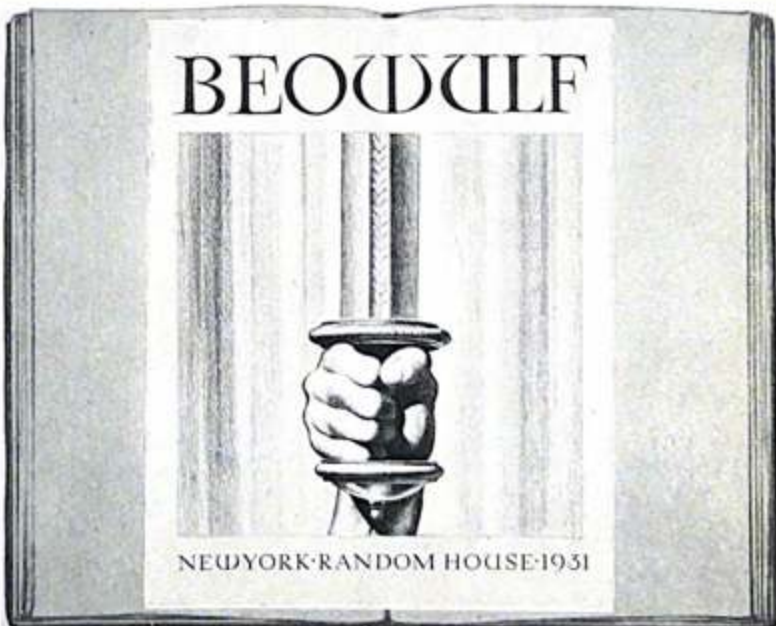
In the making of a *de luxe* book there is one element that is of an importance unequalled by a combination of all the others.



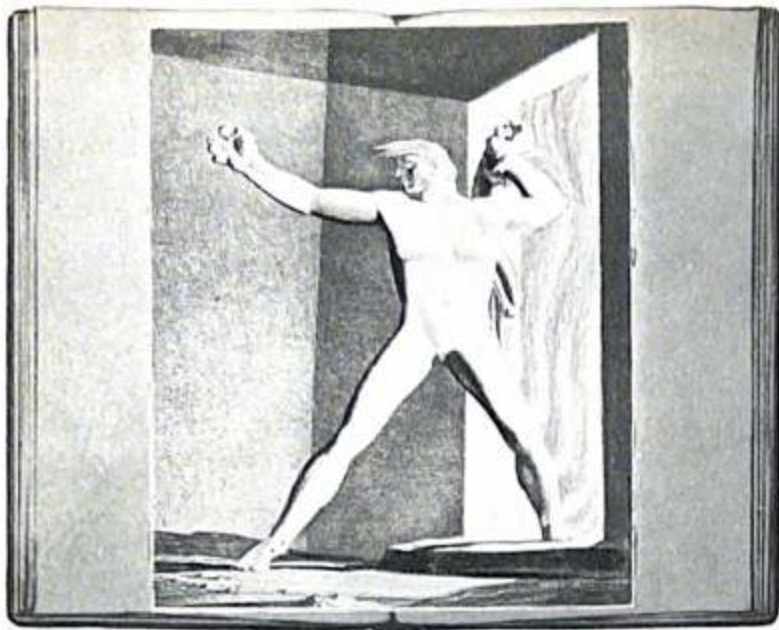
10. Study for lithograph.



11. Study for lithograph.



12. Study for title page.



13. *Lithograph.*



14. *Lithograph.*



15. *Finished title page.*

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For no matter how perfect a plan is devised, unless there is a well-organized and smoothly coördinated shop for carrying out every detail, the production is not likely to be of much significance. Type-setting and proofing, proof reading and corrections in the composing room, to be followed by the locking up of press forms and make-ready on the press—each part must be done with an interest and enthusiasm that may be perceived by the ultimate possessor of the book.

An important fundamental in good book-making which contributes very largely to its quality is the work in preparation for the press operation known as "make-ready." Many uninformed individuals believe that a type form is simply locked up in a chase, clamped into place on the press, and the printing begun. Granting that this is the procedure in ordinary printing, it is not the case with the kind of work we are now considering. The first sheets to come off the press in high-grade production are used simply as a guide to the pressman in his make-ready. He must examine each letter in every word to make sure of even ink distribution, so that the printed sheets will have a uniform tone. Sometimes a group of letters will seem to be "high" and get too much ink, another group may seem "low." Both must be overcome, for the printed sheet must not be "spotty."

Often the work of make-ready requires more time than the actual running of the sheets. Anyone can easily acquire the ability to recognize the presence or absence of make-ready in presswork. To assure the perfection of impression of each letter on paper, the type must be flawless. Certainly, the axiom "You can't make a queen's purse out of a sow's ear" is applicable to many parts of a good bookmaker's work.

The printer, like the publisher, frequently plans his work backward, and makes the first appropriation for the last job on the book—the binding. He must then apportion the type, composition, plates, paper, ink, and

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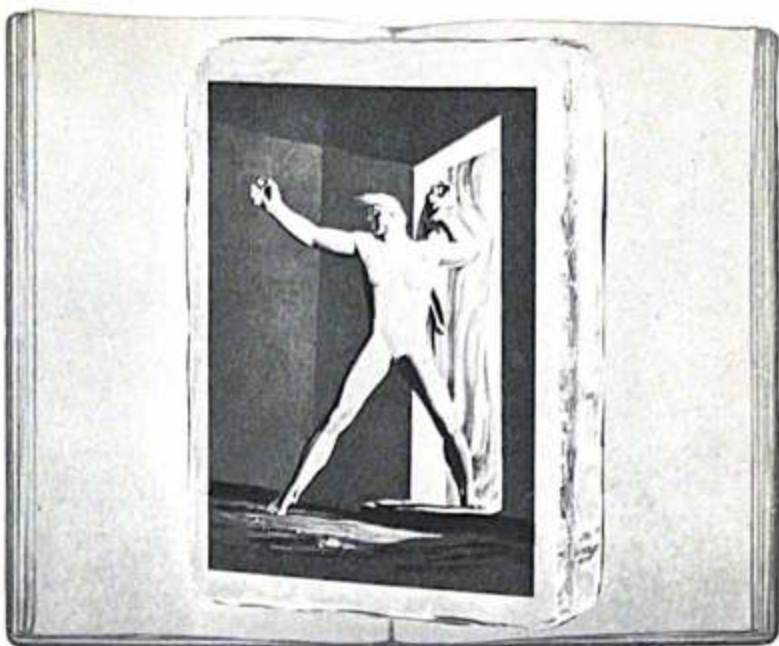
presswork. The arrangement with the artist is usually made by the publisher.

The cost of the type can be definitely ascertained. And the ink is not likely to vary much from the original estimate. Likewise, the cost of the paper is known in advance of the placing of the order. But it is with the composition and press that the ambitious bookmaker often goes over his head.

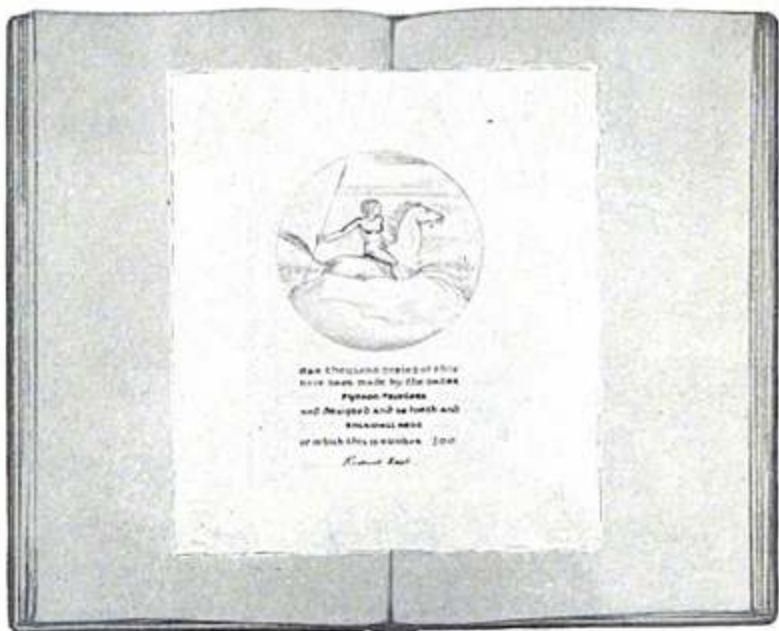
There is no study in connection with book-making more fascinating than paper. Those acquainted with the contributions of Messrs. Hunter, Tasker, and Fairbanks to this subject already have some inkling of its history and ramifications.

Frequently, the student of the art of the book discovers that characteristics, originally the result of imperfect production, in time become marks of distinction. For instance, the deckle edge on handmade paper was always fought against by the first papermakers. They made constant efforts to eliminate as much of the deckles as possible. In the course of time, however, this objectionable deckle has come to be accepted as a mark of distinction and one to be cultivated and imitated with machine-made papers.

When we came to the selection of paper for *Beowulf*, it had been decided first to have a wove rather than a laid paper, in order that the screen would not affect the lithographs. Likewise, the surface must have sufficient smoothness to assure satisfactory printing of the lithographs. Third, an antique rather than a white sheet was necessary to avoid the appearance of newness. Fourth, the paper must be of proper weight to give the desired bulk in one hundred and seventy-two pages. And of course, this paper must have a rag content in order to make reasonably sure the long life of a book into which so much labor and skill were to go. A sheet measuring 22 x 28 inches, embodying all the desired qualities, was produced by the Van Gelder Mill at Amsterdam, Netherlands. By making one cut in this sheet a signature of



16. Stone of Beowulf.



17. Study for colophon.



18. Finished colophon.

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two leaves, or four pages, was secured of the exact open book size. The entire volume was printed with only two pages on the press at one time. A sheet frequently went on the press six times, and in each case was fed by hand.

As the work progresses, little refinements and additions constantly suggest themselves, and it is exceedingly difficult to withstand the temptation to ignore production costs in an attempt to make the book as nearly perfect as possible.

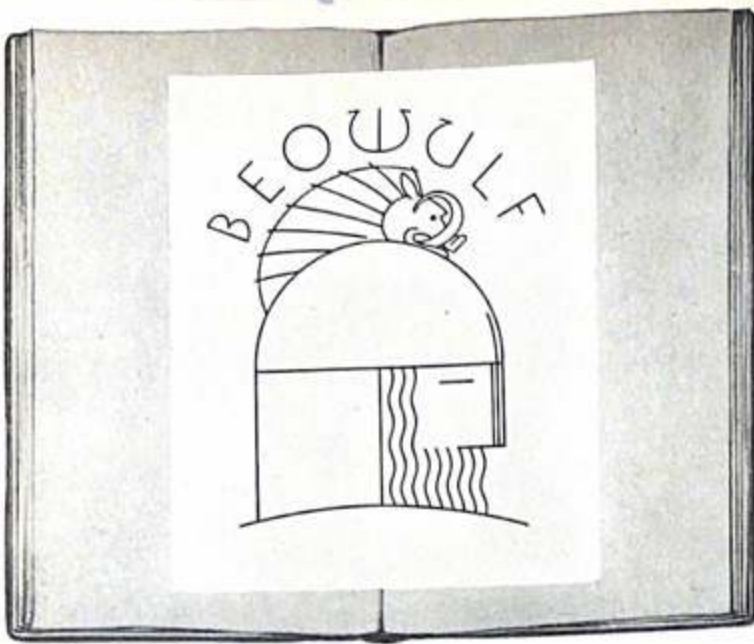
The folios for the first trial pages, set in Hammer arabic numerals, seemed a bit naked, and after an unsuccessful effort had been made to find some other design or ornament of the same color value, the experiment was tried of placing a letter *i* in a reclining position on either side.

Even when the text on the title page was drawn and photomechanical plates completed, a change had to be made before the printing could be done, for it was too late to imprint 1931, as drawn and plated, and the year had to be changed.

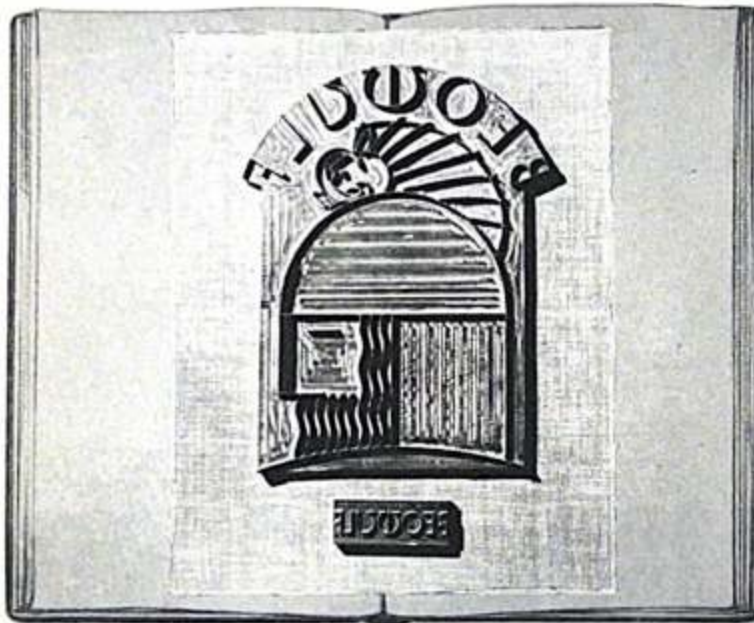
Let the reader be reminded that we are discussing the making of a special book, not the ordinary trade production. Consequently, we do not have the problem of display wrapper with the usual blurb. On *Beowulf* we placed a sheet of butcher paper which harmonized with the binding and carried no text except the title of the book reading up the backbone.

Again it must be pointed out, the completed volume must seem a natural setting for its contents. If the reader gets the impression of the quality of the epic from the appearance of the book, then at least that part of the task is done effectively.

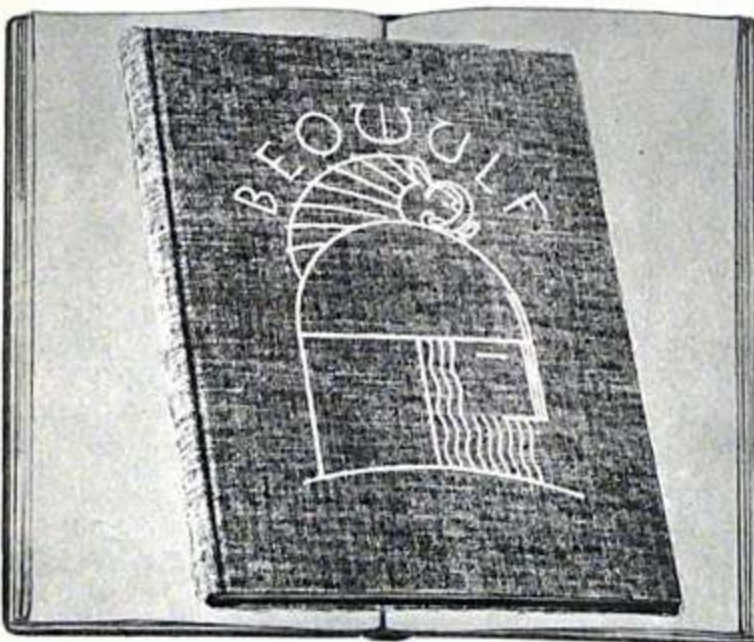
It should be noted also, that the publisher's optimistic estimate of 1929 could not possibly materialize in 1932, and an edition which was oversubscribed upon announcement became a depressed remainder in 1934. If we now are experiencing a revival, it will



19. Drawing for binding.



20. Binder's stamp.



21. Finished binding.

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be interesting to see this volume gradually advance as a barometer to measure the interest in the making of better books.

The subject of binding is much older than the printed book, beginning as it does with the supersedure by the codex of the scroll form of manuscript. The volumes devoted to the subject of binding fill many feet of bookshelves, and all any one of us can do in a few years is attempt to master the essentials of a good binding. For readers of this number of *THE DOLPHIN*, Edith Diehl has specially condensed the subject. To the planner of a special book there is the necessity of harmonizing the binding with the other units. The consideration of leather binding for *Beowulf* was dropped because of economic reasons. Sailcloth was an obvious suggestion but was decidedly too easily soiled, in addition to being difficult to handle. Eventually a homespun fabric with a virile quality was located. Kent's design for the binding was transferred to brass, and after several experiments was impressed on the fabric with white ink.

The history of the slipcase shows an origin similar to that of the deckle edge on pa-

per, where a liability has gradually become recognized as an asset. The slipcase was first introduced to protect weakened bindings, or to assure a support for books not able to stand on their own ends. Gradually, the slipcase began to be recognized as a container for a volume that had some special interest.

The shop records on the making of this book cover more than two years. The job, originally entered in December, 1929, at first was intended to be published the following fall. But as usual, one thing or another contrived to delay the work, although Kent had completed his lithographs and gone to Greenland long before the presswork on the text was started. This is the chronology of work on the book:

Job entered	December 27, 1929
Type ordered	April 2, 1930
Type arrived	May 22, 1930
Paper ordered	March 20, 1931, by cable
Paper arrived	May 15, 1931
Presswork started	June 11, 1931
	[altogether 168 relief press forms]
Presswork completed	January 22, 1932
Binding completed	January 29, 1932