



Background of The Morgan Library & Museum's Printed Books and Bindings Collection

Diversity and quality have been hallmarks of this collection, with works spanning Western book production from the earliest printed ephemera to important first editions from the twentieth century. The Morgan Library & Museum's holdings encompass a large number of high points in the history of printing, often exemplified by a lone surviving copy or one that is perfect in every way. Areas of exceptional strength include incunables, early children's books, fine bindings, and illustrated books.

The collection's strong base derives from the major acquisitions of Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), who sought to establish in the United States a library worthy of the great European collections. It is rich in special and unique copies, first editions of classical authors, and works of notable printers, such as Jenson and Caxton. Among the highlights are three Gutenberg Bibles; a strong collection of works by Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, works by William Morris, Edgar Allan Poe, John Ruskin, and Mark Twain; and classic early children's books. The Carter Burden Collection of American Literature, a major 1998 gift, strengthens the Morgan's twentieth-century holdings with such authors as Ted Hughes, Vladimir Nabokov, Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, and Tennessee Williams.

There are many beautiful and important bindings in the Morgan, but the bindings collection comprises about a thousand volumes acquired primarily to document the development of bookbinding. It is among the finest collections of bindings in this hemisphere, equally strong in quantity and quality. Areas of particular distinction are English, French, and Italian bindings of the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries.