

Shakespeare's Sonnets by William Shakespeare
Cambridge, MA (?): George D. Sproul, 1901.
RARE RES PR2848.A2 L4 1901

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, publishers began to release books in limited editions with fine materials, special decorations, and lavish bindings. This practice developed in part as a reaction to new printing, binding, and papermaking technologies, which enabled books to be mass produced and priced within the reach of the middle class for the first time in history. Once a symbol of status and wealth, the average book became an everyday commodity, and publishers devised special editions in order to lure collectors and recover a sense of the book as a luxury object.

Early limited editions included copies printed on large or colored paper, copies with special illustrations, or copies in fine bindings. Like the earliest printed books, some limited editions were printed on vellum and illuminated by hand. George D. Sproul, one of the most prolific printers on vellum during this period, issued his vellum books as "St. Dunstan editions" with small press runs to create a sense of exclusivity. These volumes are part a luxury edition limited to eighteen copies, each hand-illuminated by the artist Nestore Leoni. The set belonged to John E. Berwind, a business magnate of the early twentieth century.

The two volumes were bound by the Trautz-Bauzonnet Bindery, one of several retrospective binders that thrived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Retrospective binders imitated earlier styles and created lavish bindings that both emulated and eclipsed their models. The Trautz-Bauzonnet company was formed through a partnership between A. Bauzonnet, a prominent gilder, and Georges Trautz, known for his mosaic bindings. Although created after the lifetimes of the two founders, the bindings of these two volumes feature the strengths of the Trautz-Bauzonnet company: intricate tooling and leather inlay. The front and back covers consist of a ground of green morocco with decorative gold tooling and inlays of red, white, and violet. In addition to the front and back covers and spines, the doublures (inside covers) of the books are also highly ornamented with inlaid leather and gold leaf. The volumes were issued in matching white silk moiré boxes with decorative metal clasps.

Resources:

Alston, R. C. *Books printed on vellum in the collections of the British Library*. London: British Library, 1996.

Benton, Megan. *Beauty and the Book: Fine Editions and Cultural Distinction in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, c2000.

Devauchelle, Roger. *La reliure en France, de ses origines à nos jours*. Paris, J. Rousseau-Girard, 1959-61.

The history of bookbinding, 525-1950 A.D.: an exhibition held at the Baltimore Museum of Art, November 12, 1957 to January 12, 1958. Baltimore, Md.: The Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1957.