Bound to Be Modern: Publishers’ Cloth Bindings and the Material Culture of the Book, 1840–1914

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Abstract
Bound to Be Modern is the most comprehensive study to date on the emergence and function of publishers’ cloth bindings. It brings together issues of aesthetics, technique, economy, and social change in order to explain why publishers in the 19th century began to have their books bound, and why decorated cloth bindings were so successful as the Western world transitioned into modernity.

This study traces the history of publishers’ bindings in a Swedish context—giving the first English-language account of the history of the Swedish 19th century book market—but also makes clear that edition binding was an international affair, with machines, designs, and ideas crossing borders as much as the literary works themselves did… (More)

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By the 1840s, however, cloth had become a widely accepted binding material, and case binding allowed binders to begin to use arming presses and later steam presses to emboss covers with engraved metal dies. Few books from the 1840s through 1880s were left undecorated; nearly all received some level of design consideration. At their simplest, cover designs were made up from routine borders and ornaments impressed in blind or gilt. More elaborate designs used dies created uniquely for a text in conjunction with stock borders and ornaments. The highest level of book design used overall designs created specifically for the book at hand. W. Haslam. "Full Salvation" as seen in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. London: Morgan and Scott, c. 1880.