

### Assignment 3: Your book's early users

Due Sunday, April 6th, 7:00 pm; email to swerner@folger.edu  
worth 10% of your final grade

The purpose of this assignment is to explore how we can incorporate readers and reading practices into the ways we think about books and book history. It might be helpful to think of readers as falling into two categories: 1) the book's general audience and 2) individuals who held your book in their hands and read or otherwise used it. All of you will be working in the first category; only a few of you might have books that show signs of early readers engaging with it.

Your first concern will be exploring what sort of audience your book was intended for. In almost all cases, the publisher (and possibly the writer) would only bring this book into print if he or she thought people would buy it, and the book is designed to appeal to that audience. What can you deduce about that imagined audience from the book you have chosen? Information about this intended use can be found in how the book presents itself (e.g., format, typography), in any prefatory material that it might contain, and in the voice of the text itself. Further conjectures about the book's imagined audience and about the book's possible users can be made by thinking about other works that fall within your book's approximate genre; for example, if your book is a sermon, you might want to read about sermons in general in order to get a sense of how they were used. It might be helpful to consult the introduction to a modern scholarly edition of your work, if one exists, or to otherwise consult scholarship about the genre of your book.

For those you who have books that show evidence of early modern users (that is, people who owned or handled the book prior to 1700), you will want to speculate on those individuals' use of the book. Information about individuals who might have read or used your book can be found in material traces they have left in the book (e.g., marginalia, inscriptions, binding). These traces can help you speculate on how they were using your book. In some cases, you might know the name (or initials) of a specific person; in other cases the reader or user might be anonymous. If you know a name, you might be able to find out more information about that person by checking to see if they owned any other books in our collection; some of the former owners in our collection are prominent or are prolific collectors, but many are nearly entirely unknown. If you have reason to suspect that a former owner/reader might be prominent (e.g., their name pulls up other books in our collection, or their name can be found in our catalog with their birth and death dates), you might want to find out some more information about them by either looking in the DNB or in one of the relevant volumes of the DLB (via Gale's Literature Resource Center). If there is no evidence of any individuals in your book, then note that in your paper.

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As always, if you have any questions, please ask.