

**“The Binding Practices of Civil War Readers”  
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This paper will explore the early modern practice of binding together pamphlets after purchase. Based on research that I have conducted at the Folger Shakespeare Library over a series of months, I will detail in my paper what types of printed materials mid-seventeenth-century English readers bound together, with what types of materials they were bound, and, most importantly, what this physical evidence can tell us about the practices of readers in the midst of and immediately after intense civil and political conflict. The paper will attempt to answer, at least provisionally, how the juxtapositions of texts and the physical features of the bindings themselves influenced the consumption of the “content” of these texts. What types of meanings did these bindings preclude, complicate or invite?

Thus far, my research has revealed readers that tend to bind texts together along thematic lines, often combining a series of texts on a particular political or religious issue, or prominent historical event. These thematic volumes tend to support other accounts of late seventeenth-century reading that emphasize the commonplacing techniques of these readers. However, in many cases, the mixture of texts seems much more heterogeneous. In a number of volumes, high political treatises sit alongside harsh polemic, the abstract and intellectual rubbing shoulders with the personal and the scurrilous. Similarly, the bindings themselves are various: some are elaborate and expensive, implying a commemorative or historical purpose to the volumes, while others are demonstrably cheaper and portable, implying a more active and ephemeral use. The volumes at times offer a glimpse into a far more complex, more protean early modern reader, one who seems to have had little problem reading rational political theory in support of or conflict with irrational invective; and who, in one instance, might use a pamphlet to create family history, and in another, use the same pamphlet to pass on recent news in a haphazard moment.