

Special Collections, Day 1

When we arrive at Special Collections, the librarian will talk to us briefly about the 1596 text of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and about rare books from the early modern period. Over the course of our visit, you will each have a chance to look closely at *The Faerie Queene* and examine the stanza about which you wrote (as well as other aspects of the book).

With the rest of your time, please rotate through the five stations and get a sense for the different kinds of books and objects that were available around the time that Spenser published the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene*. Use the following questions as a guide to take general notes about the objects you see. Then, select one text—you can pair up with one of your peers, or work in a group of three—and study it in detail; answer as many of the questions¹ below as you can, and ask me or the librarian if you get stuck or want more information. **PLEASE KEEP YOUR NOTES: you will need to turn them in with mini-paper 3 or 4.**

- What is this document? Is it big, small, bound, loose? How would you describe it to someone who has never seen it before? What is the binding made of? Does it show signs of repair or replacement? Does the binding match the paper inside?
- What is the full title? What kinds of information does it contain? How is the information presented? Does it contain more than one text, bound together? Does it have tables, charts, maps, illustrations, written narratives, etc? Does it have introductions, dedications, appendices or any other *paratextual* material?
 - How or why might the contents and layout of the book influence the way we read it? (for example, if there's a dedication, what does the author or book maker gain by including it? If there are three texts bound together, why those three, and not others, do you think? etc.)
- For whom was it intended? For what purposes was it intended? How can you tell (what clues on or in the object lead you to your answers)?
 - Are there traces of actual use (writing in the margin, writing on the front or back pages, worn or torn pages, etc.)? What do these traces tell us about how and by whom the artifact was used?
- By whom was it written? On what forms or notions of authority does the information in the book depend? How does the narrator or author *know* the information he or she transmits? What claims to authority does the narrator or author make? Where was it published and by whom? Where was it sold?
- What cultural attitudes about romance or religion might this document reveal?
- What makes this document special and interesting? What is this document's story?

Finally, write at least 5 of your own questions. Think about what attracts your attention about the document and what you want to know more about. Ask questions as though you were going to write a research paper about this document. No question, at this stage, is too small—you never know when looking up a printer's name or a historical event, etc. will lead you to an interesting discovery about the document in question.

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¹ These questions are adapted from Claire Goldstein's handout "Special Collections Research Project."