

Assignment 2

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Archival Assignment: Description of an Early Modern Book

Twice during the quarter (see the course calendar), you will compose a 200-400 word description of an early modern book from UCD's Special Collections. Aside from being an exciting experience of touching and examining a very old object, this assignment invites you to feel like a Researcher with a capital 'R.' By helping to catalogue our Special Collections, you truly are providing the UCD research community with a service. You are therefore part of an ongoing collaborative process of archival discovery and research.

Detailed directions:

Select a **non-annotated** entry from the Google Doc entitled "Shields Library Special Collections: Early Modern List"

You don't have to select a literary text—follow your interests: music, history, science, visual art, agriculture, religion, etc. Search the Special Collections if you want to look beyond the list.

Go to the Special Collections Reading Room, sign in, and request your text. **Bring your laptop** or tablet (for note-taking and internet searching). **Plan to spend about an hour in the reading room**; sometimes it can take a little while for the librarians to locate your text, and sometimes you'll so enjoy pouring over the old document(s) that you won't believe how quickly time flies (I know of an undergraduate researcher who once accidentally spent three hours at Special Collections because she was so engrossed in her work).

Once you have the text in hand, describe it as thoroughly as you can, aiming to aid future researchers. What should someone who has never seen this text know about it? What is interesting, surprising, beautiful, or otherwise noteworthy about this item?

If you don't know where to begin, start with the basics and then try to discover and describe as much as you can:

- What are the book's approximate dimensions?
- How many pages long is it?
- When and where was it published?
- What is the binding like? What is it made of? Does the binding seem to be original, or is it newer?
- Does the text contain any illustrations? A decorative title page? A frontispiece?
- What signs of readerly usage (such as writing in the margins) can you detect?
- What author(s), genre(s), and language(s) are represented in this book?
- What is the handwriting or typeface like?
- What editorial paratexts (introduction, table of contents, index, preface, commentary, etc.) are included, if any?

- Who seems to be the intended audience?
- As far as you can tell, *how* was this book used, and *where*, and by *whom*, and to what *purpose*? Is it small enough to put in your pocket? A giant tome for a library? Is it for educational purposes? For pleasure? A religious or political tract?

As you find curious images or bits of Latin that you can't read, sleuth around Google and see what explanations you can uncover. **Organize your observations and discoveries into a couple of prose paragraphs** (with optional bullet points if you are listing contents), and feel free to conclude by mentioning unsolved mysteries of the text or by asking a question or two.

Example:

PR 2342 A5 1633

The Countess of Pembrokes Arcadia, written by Sir Philip Sidney

London : Printed for Simon Waterson and R. Young, anno 1633.

older binding (wood? and leather)

The highly decorative title page includes an illustration (woodcut? engraving?) of a scene: a castle or church in the background, a pig/boar in the foreground, approaching a rosebush adorned with the banner "Non tibi spero" ("Not for you do I breathe/exhale [this lovely scent]"), indicating that the book is not for a base audience (represented by the pig) but rather for an educated or noble audience of refined taste. A cursory Google search turns up some fascinating interpretations of what this image is supposed to mean AND of other works that have this or similar images (could be an interesting project to compare this image's use across different texts in the period).

Contents include:

- Letter from Sidney to his sister
- "To the reader..." by an H. S. (Who is that?)
- The text of *Arcadia*: the prose is in "regular" print, the verse/eclogues/poems are in "italics"
 - certain paragraphs have handwritten "x"s by them: signs of reading/use
- "Certaine sonnets written by Sir Philip Sidney: never before printed"
 - some of these are supposed to be set to certain tunes, like "Basciami vita mia" and "The Spanish Song Se tu sennora no dueles de mi"
- *The Defence of Poesie*
- *Astrophel and Stella*
- "Her most excellent Majestie, walking in the Wansted Garden..." (What is this??)

Archival Assignment Grading Rubric

Criterion	Description
Completeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 200-400 words long • Describes an item from the Google doc "Shields Library Special Collections: Early Modern List"

Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoroughly describes the book's appearance and contents • Accurately uses the vocabulary of the archive and the early modern book (<i>binding</i>, <i>frontispiece</i>, <i>miscellany</i>, etc) where appropriate
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The item being described had no prior annotation (making your research an authentically new contribution to our knowledge of UCD's collections) • Demonstrates effort to use additional sources of information/authority/expertise (internet, librarian, etc) to answer questions about the book • Asks interesting questions for future researchers to consider
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is formatted correctly (written as a prose paragraph with optional bullet points if listing contents) • Is posted to both the Google doc (under an appropriate genre designation) and to Smartsite Assignments • Is submitted on time • Is free (or almost entirely free) of mechanical errors, spelling mistakes, typos, etc.