To start, one must respect the library as a metaphysical space. The best, creative research is not created by working project to project, forgetting the previous project as the next one arises. Rather, it begins by having an intrinsic literary penchant, which must be channeled to a focus when on occasion a paper is assigned. A month before this paper was assigned, I was wandering haphazardly through the stacks of Fondren when I stumbled upon the Song of Songs for the first time. Despite my Jewish heritage, I had never heard of the work. Flipping through the pages, I was amazed at how the Songs are considered a religious text without seemingly any explicit reference to anything theological or even moral in the traditional sense. The poetry was about the fruits of passionate experience, free of the Puritanism of intellect of so bound to interpretations of biblical texts. Though I didn’t check out the Songs at the time, I didn’t forget about them.

The Music History assignment consisted of an open ended topic relating to Renaissance music. Because in class we had focused solely on music composed for cathedrals, or in cathedrals, or for the Christian liturgy, I wanted to find a topic more offbeat than something related to classwork. I tried to investigate indigenous folk music and the music of groups outside the mainstream to see how related it was to what I’d encountered in class. Naturally, I thought of the Jews, specifically in the Italian ghettos surrounded by the lyrical tradition of Francesco Landini and Claudio Monteverdi, I myself being an Italian. While researching Jewish composers of the Renaissance in Fondren 464, my habitat of choice, I found that, lo and behold, this guy, Salamone Rossi, for some reason, had set the Song of Songs to polyphonic music in Montua, the city of the Gonzaga family, longtime employers of Monteverdi and Rossi, I later found.

The next step was getting material and compiling the bibliography with my friend Turabian at the first floor reference desk. I began by listening to a recording of Rossi’s Songs I
gathered from Fondren’s collection. I also compared his vocal works to recordings of his instrumental work, of which there seemed to be much more. Afterwards, being a longtime singer as well, I rented an mp3 recorder from the DMC to sing some of the Songs with friends and to listen objectively to how I naturally approached the music. I also played some of his violin sonatas, my major instrument in the Shepherd school, for the same purpose. It was this experiment that prompted me to think about the spiritual nature of music and wonder what connection these Songs have to Jewish mysticism and the psychology of a relationship with God. I was hooked by this point. I searched Fondren’s database for any book related to the psychology of mysticism, the Song of Songs of Solomon, and Salamone Rossi. I still had not found out why he had written the polyphonic Songs, why singing them is not a current religious practice in synagogues, and why Rossi seemed to have slipped through the cracks of Renaissance and Jewish music.

What I kept after this widdling process is essentially what found its way into my bibliography. I had to order the complete edition of Rossi’s music scores of the Songs to Fondren, but after they arrived, I happily searched for one to focus on and analyze as a part of my paper, which was appended using the Brown Fine Arts scanner on the third floor. The first floor scanner behind the copying machines is nicer and has better editing options with explicit instructions for Photoshop, but the editing makes the file too large to be sent via email to my Prof, the preferred method of handing in assignments for my professor and by the environment. After I had sorted through the information, I decided to consult with the Greeks to see if I was missing anything. When in doubt, check with the Greeks because through changes in history, they always seem to have a hand in what’s to come. In 464, I outlined my key points on the dry erase board and molded my thesis. Slowly, the paper came together while I also added some
tidbits I found relevant and interesting to complement the bulk of my paper, for instance the blurb on Harry Harlow’s studies on rhesus monkeys.

If I could explicitly summarize some strategies for research, after one is already committed to reading broadly and deeply, one must use a variety of sources. The prose of a book are so different from that of a journal article or even a thesis and one may find something specific in a journal article that is spread too thinly in a book. One must document sources as one goes along to save time finding what is useful and to give the reader the most information in case they are curious to learn more about a specific topic. Make an appendix of something, anything. This I mean as somewhat of an analogy. I’ve found that quotes or block quotes are a refreshing distraction from the monotony of one’s own prose in a research paper. Imagine an individual going to a restaurant to eat. Certainly they’re there for the quality of the food, but the atmosphere is also crucial to the experience. What pictures are on the wall? How is the place organized? Are there plastic chairs? A drive-through? One can immediately form categories or prototypes of a restaurant after minutes or even seconds of being in the place. Similarly, the reader will make conclusions about the paper before reading the bulk of the prose. The more varied the material included into the making and the content of the paper, the more opportunities the reader will have to become attached. I also chose a topic I was very excited about and tried to learn as much about that topic as possible in the most natural sense I could recreate. Writing a research paper is a bit like recreating a world. Just as a person will identify inconsistencies in a story, people can only realize the past if it is solidly and accurately presented. Finally, one must grow from their work. What I felt was the most valuable thing I learned form this paper was how our knowledge of history is not necessarily define by the conquerors, but by the art of ordinary people.
My experience would not have been possible had I not had access to Fondren’s resources and I hope this paper serves as a testament to my blessing in having a home in 464 amongst the silence of Chinese literature, to my freedom to wander through worlds I would otherwise have no way of accessing.