

Critical edition assignment

Educational publishers often produce special editions of select texts that are designed to give students a rich understanding of the text. Often known as “critical” or “cultural” editions, these books contain an annotated work of literature as well as reproductions of cultural and historical documents to provide context, drafts and correspondence from the author or to the author, and notable works of criticism about the primary text. Designed as a sort of research tool box to help students develop their own critical approach to the text, these editions are valuable resources for any reader seeking to engage a text more deeply. Editors of these books do broad, thorough research in collecting documents to include, making careful, targeted choices that will be most beneficial to their target audience.

For this assignment, you will step into the role of editor and develop your own critical edition. Here are the steps you’ll go through.

1. Choose either one long poem or five related poems by the same poet from the provided list (below) as your primary texts.
2. Annotate your poems with footnotes. Look at footnotes in anthologies or critical editions for examples of footnotes, and consider what will be most effective for your audience.
3. Do archival research to find materials to include in your edition to provide context and insight for your primary texts. Look for drafts, correspondence, newspaper clippings, pamphlets—anything you feel will be relevant, interesting, and valuable for educating your audience. Be selective about what you choose to include; critical editions don’t reproduce an entire archive, just selected materials that will be most beneficial to a broad readership. Be sure to look into collections that are related to your author as well as your author’s own collections. Also, consider examining available first editions and proof copies that the library might have in the rare book collection; you might want to include images of original cover art, inscriptions, or corrections made by the author in the proofs.
4. Research secondary critical sources to include in your edition. You should include five articles and/or book chapters that represent scholarly, critical approaches to the primary texts. These articles should represent differing approaches to the text (for example, Marxist, feminist, New Historicist, eco-critical, etc). In published editions, these articles are usually reproduced in full. For the purposes of this assignment, you will instead include a citation, a short annotation (approximately 5 sentences), and an excerpt from the article that you find particularly poignant (at least a paragraph, up to a full page).
5. After compiling all of the components—annotated poems, archival research, secondary sources—you will write an introduction to your edition. Your introduction should be approximately 6-8 pages. In it, you will introduce your readers to the author (including biographical information), the texts (including literary significance and publication history), and the materials you include from your research. Your introduction should both prepare your reader to experience the text and establish a logic for why you included the materials you selected. What should a reader get out of your edition? Look at introductions to critical editions for examples, and we’ll

spend time in class discussing genre conventions and expectations for this kind of essay.

6. Finally, you'll include a bibliography of all of the sources you use and cite for the entire edition. Your bibliography should be in MLA format.

Please select an poet from this list for this assignment. These authors all have materials available at the Rose Library.

- Seamus Heaney
- Michael Longley
- Ciaran Carson
- Derek Mahon
- Medbh McGuckian
- Nuala ní Dhomhnaill
- Ted Hughes
- Lucille Clifton
- Carol Ann Duffy