

19 September 2012

To: The Executive Council and Delegate Assembly
Modern Language Association of America

2012 Annual Report of the Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare

1. The NVS Committee's Charge

The MLA's Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare has the following charge:

“The Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare sets policy and exercises broad control of the New Variorum Shakespeare project, under which New Variorum editions of Shakespeare's works are published by the association.”

2. Routine Business

Following a committee dinner on Thursday, 2 February 2012, the committee held a full-day meeting on Friday, 3 February at the MLA office. In attendance were Valerie Wayne (chair), Michael Best, Alexander C. Y. Huang, Richard A. J. Knowles (general ed.), Katherine A. Rowe, James R. Simon, Paul Werstine (general ed.), and W. B. Worthen. Staff members who attended the meeting were Kathleen Fitzpatrick (liaison), Anna S. A. Chang, Margit A. Longbrake, and James C. Hatch. Rosemary G. Feal visited the meeting after lunch. Julia Flanders attended the meeting as a consultant on the survey of NVS editors (see item 5, below) and on electronic resources that would be useful for volume editors.

The committee approved the agenda with the addition of and agenda item pertaining to discussion of the protocol (see item 3, below). It also approved minutes for the previous meeting, reviewed the committee chair's annual report to the Executive Council, and the list of New Variorum Editions of Shakespeare.

During its review of the sales report for NVS editions, the committee suggested ways to publicize the editions and gathered a list of Shakespeare associations around the world that might be used to publicize the series.

Other routine business included plans for organizing a convention session for the 2013 MLA convention and proposing names for replacing those cycling off the committee.

At the meeting, John Allen Quintus was appointed as an assistant editor on the edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*. In May 2012, following the posting of a notice inviting new NVS editors on the Web site SHAKSPER, three assistant editors were appointed on *Cymbeline*, M. G. Aune, Christopher P. Baker, and Gabriel Egan, and two assistant editors were appointed on *Twelfth Night*, Gayle Gaskill and Duncan Salkeld.

3. Implementation of the Protocol

As the 2011 chair indicated in his annual report, the most important achievement of the committee during that year was the approval of the “New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare Editorial Protocol.” This was an attempt to develop consistent procedures for the series identifying the responsibilities of volume editors, the general editors, and the NVS committee. It is now posted on the MLA Web site.

During the past year, the protocol was successfully implemented. Paul Werstine sent it out to all editors in an October 2011 e-mail as part of the annual call for reports on their volumes, and he attached it again in his message to editors in December 2011. In both instances he called on editors to read and abide by it. Werstine received replies from most of them and reported that the document already seems to have had a clarifying effect on volume editors. As the outgoing chair, I would encourage the committee to make continued use of the protocol and to enforce its provisions when necessary. See item 4, below.

4. NVS Progress Report and Systemic Problems

Before the meeting, the committee reviewed the progress report on editions in the series. During the meeting, Paul Werstine summarized that progress by identifying those editions that are in trouble and others that are progressing well. As a result of that review, the committee made several changes to the Assessment of the Status of Project Volumes. One edition, *Cymbeline*, was moved from category B (“likely to be submitted in the next decade”) to category C (“active but not likely to be completed in the next decade”). Three editions, *All’s Well That Ends Well*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Poems*, were moved from category C to category B. One edition, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, was moved from category C to category D (“status not entirely clear”).

Six general problems of the series were identified:

- a. There is a need for additional editors to support the work of first-rate editors who are already making good progress on their editions. The notice inviting new NVS editors has already produced results that begin to address this concern.
- b. Inadequate editors take up too much of the general editors’ time.
- c. There is a need to determine when an editor is unable to perform the required work and what should be done about nonperformance. Discussion explored how to terminate ineffective editors who do not follow the *NVS Handbook* or are otherwise unresponsive. The protocol is a means to alert editors to the consequences of their nonperformance.
- d. Documents for editions are often submitted to the general editors in nonstandard forms (i.e., in obsolete word processing programs) and are not available for storage in consistent ways.
- e. The relatively low prestige of editing makes it difficult to attract new, young editors to the series. The committee discussed the possibility of testing new editors’ effectiveness by requiring some work to be submitted as part of a review process before full appointment is confirmed. (The 2013 committee may want to consider whether to do so for the six assistant editors who were appointed this year.)

f. The costs of the series are high and production is time-consuming. It would also be preferable if the costs could be made more regular.

5. Recommendations Following a Survey of NVS Editors

Kathleen Fitzpatrick distributed the results of a 15-question survey that was issued to 20 NVS editors in late 2011 and early 2012. It focused on the use of computers in their work for the series.

The survey showed the advisability of a centralized back-up location for all editors' work.

Julia Flanders discussed the possibility of a user-friendly, Web-based authoring tool for parts of the edition, such as the textual notes, that have the most straightforward coding. It would enable automatic coding without editors having to learn or produce XML markup, could help prevent mistakes, would save on costs, and would permit automatic archiving of data on a server.

Possible funding sources for such a tool were discussed, and all agreed that it would be best to develop the tool with the particular needs of an NVS edition in mind. There was also discussion of finding someone with appropriate training and interest to serve as a liaison to editors and help them with such a tool and other technical issues on the edition.

6. New Variorum Shakespeare Digital Challenge

During the committee meeting, Kathleen Fitzpatrick proposed releasing the XML files and schema of *The Comedy of Errors* volume in order to invite creative uses of that information and give a cash prize for the winning program or platform. The committee unanimously approved a motion to do so, and in April 2012, the following message was posted on the MLA Web site.

New Variorum Shakespeare Digital Challenge

In conjunction with the publication of *The Comedy of Errors*, the MLA Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare is sponsoring a digital challenge to find the most creative uses of the XML files and schema for the volume. The MLA has released the data under a Creative Commons license and encourages scholars to submit innovative new means of displaying, representing, and exploring this data. The winner will receive \$500 and will be recognized at the 2013 MLA convention in Boston. URLs for all entries must be sent by e-mail to nvs@mla.org and must be received no later than Friday, 31 August 2012, at 11:59 p.m. EDT. Visit the New Variorum Shakespeare Digital Challenge page to learn more and download the files.

Two entries were received, and the committee is reviewing them.

7. Future Possibilities

Once again this year, the committee discussed the advantages of moving the edition to an online format. There was greater support for digitization this year than in the past, as well as more

pragmatic discussion of how this might be accomplished. The digital challenge, the authoring tool, and the enforcement of the protocol are all steps in that direction.

Expanding the global reach of the edition was another topic of discussion, especially in connection with translations of key lines. Expanding the reach of the edition's performance histories beyond English productions through the use of crowdsourcing was also suggested.

Another proposal was working with possible partners from other existing Shakespeare series.

8. Current Progress

The NVS committee was informed at its meeting early in 2011 that the Executive Council was conducting a strategic-planning exercise that effectively deferred any long-range planning for the series. At its meeting in 2012, that sense of suspension was lifted and members of the MLA staff, Julia Flanders, and committee members worked to identify specific problems and to offer proposals on how they might be addressed. Concerns about the series as a whole shifted from whether it should be digitized to how that might be accomplished in the context of reducing costs, developing technological resources, and finding additional partners. These issues generated innovative suggestions and received energetic attention from those around the table, particularly in response to the NVS Digital Challenge. There are many problems that the series still needs to confront, but the committee and the MLA staff seem ready to deal with them in new and productive ways.

I wish you all well as you continue with your work. Thank you for the privilege of serving as your chair in 2012 and as a member of the committee since 2008.

Respectfully,

Valerie Wayne
NVS Chair

Professor Emerita
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa