

Draft Minutes (pending approval) of the

**137<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Dante Society of America**

Saturday, May 4, 2019, 9:00-10:00am

Father Madden Hall in Carr Hall, Building #426  
University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto St. George Campus  
100 St. Joseph St., Toronto, Ontario

**President's Welcome**

President Albert Ascoli welcomed the membership and visitors to 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Dante Society of America and called the meeting to order at approximately 9:03am.

Noting that it was the first time the Society has held its annual meeting outside the United States, Ascoli expressed his warmest thanks to Elisa Brilli for organizing the conference to follow, and to her colleagues at the University of Toronto for graciously hosting the Society: Salvatore Bancheri, Chair of the Department of Italian Studies and Emilio Goggio Chair in Italian Studies, and Alessandro Ruggera, director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.

Ascoli noted that the conference was organized in conjunction with the International Seminar on Critical Approaches to Dante (ISCAD), a series of annual workshops on Dante held at the University of Toronto since 2015. An annual conference dedicated to Dante from a thematic perspective had long been missing from the academic scene in North America, and ISCAD was the first to fulfill it, along with the Dante Society of America, which began holding an annual conference the same year, and the Global Dante Project, a collaborative initiative between New York University and Columbia University, which has been presenting a series of conferences on Dante in anticipation of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's death in 2021.

**Approval of Minutes from the 136<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont reported that a quorum for conducting business at the meeting had been met with 13 members in attendance and the submission of 92 valid proxies through the Society's online voting system and 3 additional proxies communicated via email or in person to Dupont, representing a total of 108 votes out of a total of 392 current members, or 27.6% (25% is required for a quorum).

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont distributed copies of the draft minutes of the 136<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Society held on Saturday, May 5, 2018, at Boston College.

He invited those members present to review them. Dupont called for additions or corrections to the minutes, noting a correction himself (there were 88 life members not 101, for a total membership of 414 individual members instead of 427 members). Approval of the amended minutes was moved, seconded, and conferred unanimously.

### **Treasurer's Report**

On behalf of Treasurer Michael Sherberg, Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented a report on the status of the Society's finances.

Last year, Sherberg completed the transfer of the Society's investment accounts from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard. Since then, the Vanguard investments have added approximately \$20,000 in value, reflecting the general recovery in financial markets. As of April 28, 2019, the total value of the Vanguard investments stood at \$272,905.

The Society maintains a business checking account with Bank of America for managing routine operational expenditures. As of April 22, 2019, the balance in the Bank of America account was \$27,256.

The current combined value of the Vanguard and Bank of America accounts is thus approximately \$300,161. By comparison, the total value of the Society's accounts reported at the 2018 Annual Meeting was \$218,908.

The Society has been receiving healthy annual distributions from JSTOR, representing royalties earned from licensing revenues from back issues of *Dante Studies* available on the online journal platform. The Society also receives revenues from Johns Hopkins University Press, which has published *Dante Studies* since 2015. JHUP provides libraries and members of the Dante Society with online access to *Dante Studies* through its Project MUSE platform as well as in print. So long as revenues from both sources continue to maintain their current levels along with membership dues and donations, it should not be necessary to withdraw monies from the Society's long-term investments in order to sustain its annual budget, as had been a regular practice in the past. The long-time goal of the Society to fund its operations from operating revenues alone has at last been achieved.

In 2018, the Society budgeted \$21,140 for expenses, but expended only \$20,959. Revenues totaled \$25,074, yielding a net gain of \$4,115.

Dupont concluded the report by noting that Sherberg was re-appointed by Council at its meeting the day before to a new three-year term as Treasurer.

## **Audit Committee Report**

Secretary-Librarian Dupont read the report of the Audit Committee regarding its review of records for the 2017 financial year:

The Audit Committee consisting of Janet Levarie Smarr, Susanna Barsella, Christian Dupont, and Guy Raffa (Chair), together with two of the Society's officers—Michael Sherberg (Treasurer) and Albert Ascoli (President)—met via conference call on Friday, February 15, 2019, to examine the 2017 year-end reports for the accounts of the Dante Society of America as submitted by the Society's Treasurer and by Merrill Lynch, Vanguard, and Bank of America. The Committee is pleased to report that the books are in order and that the financial health of the Society is sound.

In 2017 the Society began transferring assets from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard and opened a business checking account with Bank of America, completing the transfer of funds in 2018. The Committee is pleased to note that this change has improved the efficiency and transparency of the Society's financial operations and—with lower fees and a wider range of funds—has enhanced the ability of the endowment to grow.

We express our thanks to the 2017 DSA officers—Albert Russell Ascoli, Kristina Olson, Michael Sherberg, and Christian Dupont—for their invaluable contributions to the Society and for their expert stewardship of its finances.

Dupont called for a motion to approve the 2017 Audit Committee Report and Treasurer's Report. A motion was made, seconded, and approved.

## **Secretary-Librarian's Report**

Dupont reported that as of April 4, 2019, being the most recent membership received from Johns Hopkins University Press and coinciding with the end of the annual membership renewal cycle, the Society had a total membership comprising of 387 individual and 5 institutional members (the numbers in parentheses below indicate changes with respect to membership statistics from the end of Annual Meeting):

- Regular = 231 (-12 / %)
- Secondary Joint = 2 (-1 / -33.3%)
- Life = 86 (-2 / -%)\*
- High School Teacher = 12 (-4 / -33.3%)
- Student = 43 ( -7 / -18.6%)
- Honorary = 11 (0 / 0%)
- Fellows = 2 (0 / 0%)
- Institutional = 5 (0 / 0%)

These figures represent an overall decline of 27 members or 6.5% with respect to last year's totals at this time.

The current geographical distribution of members is as follows:

- United States: 326 (%)
- Canada: 8 (2%)
- Europe: 46 (12%)
- Foreign/Other: 12 (3%)

Dupont encouraged members and prospective members to take advantage of the online membership registration and renewal options available on the Society's website.

### **Nominating Committee Report**

Secretary-Librarian Dupont reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee, which was chaired by Martin Eisner, who regretted his absence due to a flight cancellation. The other members of the committee were Kristina Olson and Eleonora Stoppino.

Dupont expressed gratitude to the committee members and members of the Society for nominating strong candidates for the two open positions on Council to be vacated by Martin Eisner and Francesca Southerden at the conclusion of this Annual Meeting. He also thanked the four candidates who stood for election for the two vacating seats:

- Danielle Callegari, Lecturer in the Department of Italian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley
- Maggie Fritz-Morkin, Assistant Professor of Italian at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Warren Ginsberg, Philip H. Knight Professor of Humanities at the University of Oregon
- Anna Wainwright, Assistant Professor of Italian at the University of New Hampshire

Dupont noted that the slate of candidates was generated by members' nominations and the Committee's consideration in balancing rank, gender, and contributions to the field of Dante Studies.

Dupont announced that the Society's membership elected Professors Callegari and Ginsberg as the new members of the Council. Both will serve three-year terms in keeping with the Society's bylaws.

Dupont noted that the level of voter participation was slightly less than last year's, with 119 ballots cast and 5 abstentions from a total eligible voting membership of 392, for a

voter participation rate of 30.3%. Last year, 131 ballots were cast with 1 abstention from a total eligible voting membership of 407, yielding a voter participation rate of 32.2%.

Secretary-Librarian Dupont will initiate an election among the new and continuing Council members during the week following the Annual Meeting to elect a new Vice President for a one-year term from the eligible Council members, in keeping with the Society's bylaws.

### **Prize Committee Report**

The 2019 Prize Committee consisted of Jessica Levenstein as chair, Francesco Ciabattoni, and Olivia Holmes, who presented the Committee's report. Holmes thanked Levenstein for her excellent leadership of the committee.

Following the Fall 2018 Council Meeting, the prize winners in each category were announced in a message to the Society's mailing list and subsequently to the Society's website:

The Dante Prize was awarded to Asura Louise Osborne, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for her insightful essay, "Time and Movement in Dante's Comedy."

The Grandgent Award was presented jointly to Alyssa Granacki, Duke University, for her essay, "'Molti e molte': Gendering knowledge in Dante's *Convivio*," which offers a subtle and thought-provoking reading of this work; and Alice Martignoni, University of Toronto, for her submission, "'Quatuordecim valentissimi homini romani': Confronto tra il commento dantesco del Falso Boccaccio e *De civitate Dei* V, 18," which presents a sophisticated comparative analysis of these texts.

The third annual Durling Prize was awarded to Jacob Root, a teacher of literature and religion at Grace Church School, New York City, in recognition of his creative, innovative approach to teaching Dante, which enables his students to engage at a profound intellectual level with Dante's text, supporting their creativity and independence of thought.

Following the announcement of the prizes, the Prize Committee worked with Secretary-Librarian Dupont to prepare Mr. Root's teaching dossier, which included an annotated syllabus, for publication in the "Pedagogy" section of *Dante Notes* on the Society's website.

### **President's Report**

Ascoli observed that the past year has been another productive one characterized by innovation and consolidation.

Under the stewardship of Michael Sherberg, the Society has completed the complicated transition of moving its investment accounts from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard. The Society's finances are in very good order, which will enable it to realize its ambitious goals for the 2021 celebrations and various Education and Outreach programs. Nevertheless, it will be prudent to begin thinking ahead toward the next fundraising campaign.

Under the guidance of Elisa Brillì and Alison Cornish, the collaboration with the Società Dantesca Italiana on the maintenance of the Bibliografia Dantesca Internazionale/International Dante Bibliography has progressed and is now firmly established. Ascoli added that he looked forward to additional collaborations with the Società Dantesca Italiana and its president, Marcello Ciccuto, recognizing his presence at this annual meeting and conference.

The Society's online publications, both scholarly and pedagogical, continue to expand under the guidance of *Dante Notes* Editor Simone Marchesi and Director of Education and Outreach Ron Herzman.

The 2018 issue of *Dante Studies*, edited by Justin Steinberg, is forthcoming and promise to bring strong contributions to the field. It includes a new topical feature presented by a guest editor under the rubric "Forum." For this issue, Elisa Brillì has edited a Forum on "Dante and Biography."

The Prize Committee, formerly chaired by Francesca Southerden and now by Jessica Levenstein, has found outstanding recipients for the annual Dante Prize and Grandgent Award. The broad solicitation process on the one hand and the blind review process on the other has resulted in winners from institutions that have rarely if ever produced winners, including the University of Illinois and University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at secondary levels is now well established with its third annual recipient.

The Education and Outreach Committee has been especially active over the past year, focusing in particular on two initiatives. First, the Committee has taken preliminary steps toward bringing to reality the recently renamed "Dante Speakers' Bureau," formerly referred to by the preliminary names of "Dante on Call" or "Dante on Demand." The Committee has also nominated two candidates for Whiting Public Engagement Fellowships: Danielle Callegari for a seed grant to develop her proposal to establish and expand the Dante Speakers' Bureau, and Elizabeth Coggeshall for a full grant to migrate to a new platform and further develop the website *Dante Today: Citings and Sightings of Dante's Works in Contemporary Culture*, which she co-curates with its founder, Arielle Saiber.

Ascoli recognized the efforts of our liaisons to other scholarly societies who organized DSA-sponsored sessions at their annual conferences: Elizabeth Coggeshall, liaison to the Modern Languages Association; Jonathan Combs-Schilling, liaison to the Renaissance Society of America, a role now fulfilled by Aileen Feng; and Jason Aleksander, who has been organizing multiple DSA-sponsored sessions at the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo. Ascoli also recognized the valuable roles that Kristina Olson and Elisa Brilli have played, respectively, as the Society's liaisons to the American Boccaccio Association and Società Dantesca Italiana.

Ascoli reported on plans for the next two annual conferences, both of which promise to be exciting events in the run up to the great anniversary year of 2021 and in 2021 itself. The 2020 conference will be held at Washington University in St. Louis, hosted by Treasurer Michael Sherberg. It will be the first of the Society's annual conferences to include an open call for papers under the general theme "Dante, Somma Luce." Sherberg hopes the open call and central location will attract significant participation. The 2021 conference, tentatively titled "Dante in the Americas," will be held at the Society's historic home at Harvard University. A planning committee for this conference and other possible anniversary celebrations has been formed, including Vice-President Alison Cornish as chair, Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont, Council member Peter Hawkins, together with newly appointed assistant professor of Italian at Harvard Ambrogio Camozzi-Pistoja, and Harvard librarian for collections and digital scholarship Carol Chiodo.

The new Honors and Awards Committee, consisting of Christopher Kleinhenz as chair with Teodolinda Barolini and Warren Ginsberg as members, compiled a strong list of candidates for honorary members and fellows. At its meeting yesterday afternoon, Council elected one new honorary member and one new fellow, who will be contacted soon. The Committee also proposed a second recipient for the recently created DSA Distinguished Service Award. Council voted to present the award to Richard Lansing. Ascoli read the following citation, which he presented to Council meeting and afterwards to Lansing at the conference dinner:

It is my great honor and pleasure to speak to you briefly this evening about our friend and colleague Richard Lansing. Beginning last year, the Dante Society of America began to confer our own Distinguished Service Award, the "DSA squared," one might call it. The first recipient of this award, Christopher Kleinhenz, served as the first chair of new Honors and Awards Committee, which also included Teodolinda Barolini and Warren Ginsberg. They unanimously proposed, and the DSA Council unanimously confirmed, that a DSA-DSA be presented this year to Professor Emeritus Richard Lansing of Brandeis University—and Berkeley PhD!

Richard, as you all know, has served the Society in multiple capacities over the course of four decades. He was Secretary-Treasurer (when these two very demanding jobs, now separate, were one), for 16 years (from 1987-2002) and then Editor-in-Chief of *Dante Studies* for another 10 years, during which time he managed to bring the journal, which had fallen several issues behind, up to date thanks to his super-human efforts. It would not be wrong to say that Richard was the life blood of this organization, and that during his tenure with *Dante Studies* he brought our single most important activity back from the abyss.

I will not tire you out with a long list of Richard's other contributions to the field of Dante Studies. He is, as you know, a prize-winning translator, editor-in-chief of the excellent *Dante Encyclopedia*, and has been involved with many, many other activities that have put him at the very center of Dante Studies here and abroad.

Concluding his remarks, Ascoli again welcomed Danielle Callegari and Warren Ginsberg as new Councilors, noting that it would be his last year as President.

### **New Business**

Ascoli opened the floor to questions and new business. None were put forward.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business or discussion, Ascoli called for an motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made, second, and approved. The meeting adjourned at 9:40 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian Dupont  
Secretary/Clerk and Librarian  
The Dante Society of America