

Draft minutes (pending approval) of

**141st Annual Meeting of the
Dante Society of America**

Sunday, May 6 2023, 12:00pm-1:30pm EDT (GMT -4)

Zoom meeting, hosted by Christian Dupont, Secretary-Librarian

(*meeting recording is publicly accessible via the Society's [YouTube channel](#)*)

President's Welcome and Report

President Alison Cornish convened the 141st annual meeting of the Dante Society of America at 12:04pm and welcomed those present via Zoom.

Following is an abridged version of Cornish's report:

This has been and will continue to be another busy year for events celebrating and interrogating the author around whom this Society was formed in 1881.

2023 Annual Symposium

On April 28, the Council of the Dante Society of America held its Spring meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, on the campus of Johns Hopkins University. The following day, Arielle Saiber, Charles S. Singleton Professor of Italian Studies, together with Virginia Jewiss and William Egginton, respectively the Associate Director and Director of JHU's Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, hosted our annual symposium on theme of "Dante's Cosmos" at the historic Evergreen Museum and Library. The symposium featured three creative and excellently executed undergraduate presentations, a magisterial keynote by our own council member Ted Cachey, and four papers presented by local JHU scholars and an Italian expert on astronomy.

2024 Annual Symposium

Plans are in the works for arranging next year's annual symposium in Lima, Peru, thanks to an invitation from Jorge Wiese, professor at the Universidad del Pacífico, who has faithfully attended our symposia for many years. With support from Donatella Stocchi-Perucchio of the University of Rochester, who will serve as a liaison to Council, Wiese will be proposing a series of events to be held in Lima in July, 2024.

Due to the later date and international location of next year's symposium, Council has decided to hold its Spring 2024 in conjunction with another conference where the DSA regularly sponsors sessions, namely the International Congress of

Medieval Congress, held annually in May on the campus Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

Dante Studies

The 2021 issue of *Dante Studies* was published in December 2022. Print copies were mailed to members whose dues were current in 2021. The 2022 issue is currently in proof with publication anticipated for June. Submissions are still being welcomed, and encouraged, for the 2023 issue.

Justin Steinberg, who has ably steered the journal as editor-in-chief since 2015, has promised to see the 2024 issue through to publication. I am very pleased to announce that Kristina Olson, Associate Professor of Italian at George Mason University and President of the American Boccaccio Association, has graciously accepted to serve as Justin's successor. Kristina is currently member of the editorial board of the journal and will become associate editor before assuming the role of editor-in-chief.

New Officer Roles and Appointments

At the Fall 2022 Council meeting, Council adopted an organizational plan that has involved the creation and reapportioning of roles and new appointments.

The plan was prompted by Christian Dupont's announcement that he wished to end his service as Secretary-Librarian upon the conclusion of his third three-year term at the end of this annual meeting. Christian has provided the Society with invaluable support since its affiliation with Johns Hopkins University Press as a client society in 2014, the same year that he was appointed as Associate University Librarian and Burns Librarian at Boston College. The extent of Christian's responsibilities grew as the Society expanded its operations during the presidencies of Nancy Vickers, Albert Ascoli, and my own—so much so that it became apparent that it would be difficult to find another volunteer to replace him. Fortunately, more than one emerged, permitting the possibility of reapportioning and reassigning those responsibilities.

As I announced earlier this month, Council has created a new non-voting officer role titled Director of Communication and appointed former Council member Danielle Callegari, Assistant Professor of Italian at Dartmouth College, to serve an initial three-year term, which she began doing at the start of this calendar year. In this newly-created role, Danielle will take charge of the Society's external communications via social media and share responsibilities for maintaining the Society's website and email communications with the Secretary.

Council has also appointed Julie van Peteghem, Associate Professor of Italian and Director of the Academic Center for Excellence in Research & Teaching at Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY), to serve a three-year term in the redefined voting officer role of Secretary, which she will begin at the conclusion of this annual meeting.

To support Julie's and Danielle's transitions to their new roles, and to consolidate the Society's paper and electronic records, Christian has agreed to accept an ad hoc non-voting appointment to serve as Archivist for the coming year.

Council has also acted to support the transition of the Education & Outreach Committee, formed in 2015, from a by-appointment to an ex-officio model, whereby all of the members serve by virtue of their leadership roles on other committees. In addition, Elizabeth Coggeshall has agreed to take over the role of Director of Education & Outreach from Ronald Herzman, who has in turn agreed to serve as chair of the Education & Outreach Committee, taking over from Barbara Rosenblit. As Director of Education & Outreach, Beth will continue to serve on Council as a non-voting member, following her terms as an elected, voting Councilor, and as the Society's Vice President this past year.

Website Update

One of the first projects in which Beth, Julie, and Danielle will collaborate, with input from other officers, councilors, and members, is a redesign of the Society's website. The redesign is being prompted by a mandatory upgrade to the underlying technology platform that Johns Hopkins University Press provides as part of its client society support package.

New Service Opportunities and Awards

The Society depends upon and fosters a culture of volunteering. A lot of people do a lot of work for the Society without any remuneration. The Society does use some its funds to reimburse some (but not all) expenses incurred by its volunteers, to pay for certain commissioned works and services, and to honor individuals who have furthered the study, appreciation, and teaching of Dante through prizes and awards.

Inspired by the proposal of three graduate students about a year ago to start an official Graduate Student Group under the auspices of the Society, Council has been considering how to involve willing and eager graduate students more fully in the work and initiatives of the Society. We are presently inviting graduate students to collaborate in a number of ways under the mentorship of our councilors, committee chairs, and officers. Opportunities may include copy-

editing, in English or Italian, for *Dante Studies*, working with the editor of the on-line journal, *Dante Notes*, writing short biographies for our Honorary Members and Fellows to be posted on our website, assisting the Director of Communication with social media, collaborating with the Education & Outreach Committee, organizing events for and maintaining the Graduate Group, or compiling the annual American Dante Bibliography. Interested graduate students can write directly to the officer in charge of areas in which they would like to collaborate or to the President or the Secretary of the Society for more information.

To encourage and recognize volunteer service by students to the Society, Council has established a new category of “Presidential Service Awards,” drawing on generous funding provided during the last year by an anonymous donor. As President, with Council’s support, I am pleased to announce that the inaugural recipients are Mario Sassi of the University of Pennsylvania, Paolo Scartoni of Rutgers University, and Leonardo Chiarantini of the University of Michigan. Each will receive an award of \$1,000. Each will also present a “flash talk” about his doctoral research during the program to follow this annual meeting. Beginning in 2024, nominations will be solicited for students who have served the Society in some significant capacity. Details will be posted and circulated shortly.

Approval of Minutes from the 140th Annual Meeting

Proceeding with the business aspects of the meeting, Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont reported that the criteria for achieving a quorum been met. The Society’s by-laws require attendance or representation by proxy of 25% of the total membership, which thus far for 2023 includes a total of 374 members across all categories, yielding a quorum threshold of 94 members. A quorum is required to transact business requiring a vote, including the approval of minutes and reports.

Prior to the start of the meeting, a total of 103 members responded via a Google Form to indicate that they would not attend the meeting, but would assign Dupont to serve as their proxy, yielding a total of 103 proxies. The number of Zoom registrations for the meeting totaled 47, most of which were from current members of the Society. A total of 33 people joined the meeting. Thus, a quorum was expected and achieved, with 136 total meeting participants and proxies.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont posted and distributed the draft minutes of the 140th Annual Meeting of the Society, held online on Sunday, May 7, 2022. Dupont noted that during his review of the minutes prior to the meeting, he corrected a few minor typographical errors. Dupont called for further additions or corrections to the minutes. There being none, approval of the amended minutes was moved, seconded, and conferred unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the following version of the Treasurer's Report on behalf of Treasurer Michael Sherberg, which Sherberg presented at the Spring 2023 Council meeting, held on April 28, 2023.

As of April 21, 2023, the value of the Society's investment account with Vanguard stood at \$314,345.43, representing a slight loss with respect to the value of \$330,416.01 reported at the last Annual Meeting of the Society on May 6, 2022. The decrease reflects loss of value of major stock indices during the latter months of 2022 and early 2023.

The balance of the Society's Bank of America checking account stood at \$68,741.15 as of April 21, 2023. The balance included a gift of \$25,000 completing a total pledge of \$50,000 from an anonymous donor that was announced at the last Annual Meeting.

The combined value of the Vanguard and Bank of America accounts on April 21, 2023, was thus \$383,086.58. By comparison, the total value of the Society's accounts reported at the 2022 Annual Meeting was \$390,534.67.

Total revenues for calendar year 2022 were \$64,277 against expenses of \$14,452, resulting in a surplus of \$49,825. At the Spring 2023 Council meeting, Sherberg reviewed the 2023 budget, which had been approved at the Fall 2022 Council Meeting. The 2023 budget includes projected expenses totaling \$29,250, an increase of \$3,700, mainly due to the allocation of \$5,000 from the anonymous gift toward the support graduate student stipends and awards, and some downward adjustments to other budget lines.

Audit Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the following summary report of the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee, consisting of Jason Aleksander (Chair), Susanna Barsella, Dennis Looney, and Christian Dupont, met via conference call with Treasurer Michael Sherberg on March 30, 2023 to review the 2022 year-end reports prepared by the Treasurer along with statements from the Society's Vanguard investment and Bank of America checking accounts. Incoming Secretary Julie Van Peteghem also participated in the call as an observer. The Committee found the accounts in good order and the financial health of the Society to be sound. The Committee noted the opportunity that the officers of the Society would have to meet with the managerial staff of Johns Hopkins University Press in conjunction with the 2023 Annual Symposium to review and clarify elements of the Press's financial reporting to the Society.

Dupont made a motion to approve the 2022 Treasurer's Report and 2022 Audit Committee report. The motion was seconded and approved.

Secretary-Librarian's Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the following report concerning the Society's membership.

The latest available monthly membership report prepared by Johns Hopkins University Press, which included statistics for April 2023, shows that by comparison to the report given at the last Annual Meeting, in May 2022, membership renewals are behind last year in all categories, in particular students and secondary school teachers:

- Regular = 208 (2022: 242; -14.0%)
- Secondary Joint = 0 (2022: 3; -100.0%)
- Life = 82 (2022: 82; -0.0%)
- Secondary School Teachers = 17 (2022: 23; -26.1%)
- Student = 48 (2022: 74; -37.9%)
- Honorary = 9 (2022: 12; -25.0%)
- Fellows = 5 (2022: 5; 0.0%)
- Institutional = 5 (2022: 5; 0.0%)

Thus far in 2023, the Society's total membership is 374, an overall decrease of 72 members or 16.0% with respect to the total of 446 reported at the May 2022 Annual Meeting. The current membership year will end on August 31, so it is likely that the final totals for 2023 will increase slightly. Nevertheless, a significant decline in membership is expected, following a slight decline in 2022. Dupont speculated that the decline may be due in part to attrition of members who joined during or in anticipation of the 700th anniversary of Dante's death in 2021. The Society experienced a slight growth in membership in 2020 and more substantial growth in 2021.

For 2023, the current geographical distribution of members is as follows (comparisons with May 2022 statistics included in parentheses):

- United States: 302 (2022: 365; -17.3%)
- Canada: 8 (2022: 8; 0.0%)
- Europe: 54 (2022: 62; -12.9%)
- Foreign/Other: 10 (2022: 11; 0.0%)

The Society's Twitter account has 852 followers as of today, compared to approximately 769 at the time of the last annual meeting, an increase of 10.8%. The Society's members-only Facebook group currently has 74 members, compared to 57 at the time of the last annual meeting, an increase of 29.8%.

Nominating Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the following report on behalf of the Nominating Committee.

The members of the 2023 Nominating Committee were: Elizabeth Coggeshall (Chair, Florida State University), Mary Watt (University of Florida), and Laura Ingalinella (Wellesley College).

The four candidates who stood for election for the two seats to be vacated by outgoing Councilors Theodore Cachey and Elizabeth Coggeshall were:

- Francesco Ciabattini, Professor in Italian Literature at Georgetown University
- Jonathan Combs-Schilling, Associate Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature at The Ohio State University
- Sara Díaz, Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures and Director of Italian Language at Fairfield University
- Deborah Parker, Professor of Italian at the University of Virginia

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.

A total of 68 ballots were received from a total eligible voting membership of 369, for a voting participation rate of 18.4%.

Dupont announced that Francesco Ciabattini and Sara Díaz had been elected. Cornish congratulated them and thanked outgoing Councilors Cachey and Coggeshall for their service.

Dupont noted that Cornish's current term as President is also ending, and the first duty of the 2023-2024 Council will be to elect from its membership a President to serve a three-year term and a Vice-President to serve as one-year term. Per the Society's by-laws, Cornish is eligible to serve a second term if elected. Incoming Secretary Van Peteghem will conduct the balloting and will announce the results to the membership.

Prize Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont provided the following report on behalf of the Prize Committee.

The 2022 Prize Committee included William Stephany (Chair, University of Vermont, retired), Fabian Alfie (University of Arizona), and Paola Ureni (College of Staten Island and The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY)). Education and

Outreach Committee chair Ronald Herzman (State University of New York at Geneseo), assisted with the judging of the Durling Prize.

On October 4, 2022, the Prize Committee announced the winners of the three prizes sponsored by the Dante Society of America for the 2022 calendar year:

- The Dante Prize for best undergraduate essay was awarded to Alex TzeHan Foo (Columbia University) for his engagement with Classical and Medieval sources in “‘Come cera da suggello’: On the Metaphor of the Wax and the Seal in Dante’s *Commedia*”
- The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for best graduate student essay was presented to Giulia Maria Gliozzi Wilkins (University of Notre Dame) for her close philological analyses in “Osservazioni sulla misura in Dante: La *directio voluntatis* come sinonimo di rettitudine (solo) in quanto insieme di scelte moderate dalla *misura*.”
- The Robert M. Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to Michel de Konkoly Thege (Elisabeth Irwin High School, New York, NY) for his success at engaging students in moral reflection and ethical discussion through his effective use of dramatized readings from the *Divine Comedy* and thoughtfully guided questions.

The Dante Prize carries a monetary award of \$500, the Grandgent Award \$750, and the Durling Prize \$1,000.

The 2023 Prize Committee includes Paola Ureni (Chair, College of Staten Island and The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY)), Fabian Alfie (Chair, University of Arizona) and Grace Delmolino (University of California, Davis). The submission deadlines for the Dante Prize and Grandgent Award is June 30, 2023, and the nomination deadline for the Durling Prize is July 1, 2023.

Adjournment

Cornish adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:35pm. Cornish invited attendees to remain online for a program that included a reading by poet Lorna Goodison, newly elected Fellow of the Dante Society, and “flash talks” by DSA Graduate Student Group founders Mario Sassi, Paolo Scartoni, and Leonardo Chiarantini, on topics of their doctoral dissertation topics.

Respectfully submitted,

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