

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DANTE SOCIETY OF AMERICA, 2014

Report of the President Albert Russell Ascoli, University of California, Berkeley

Introduction

When it first appeared in 1882, in the year following the founding of the DSA, the annual publication which would eventually give rise to the journal *Dante Studies* was entitled *The Annual Report of the Dante Society*. In 1955, recognizing in the title what was already a de facto practice in the publication, it was renamed *The Annual Report of the Dante Society, with Accompanying Papers*, a title it bore through 1965. As it gradually morphed into the academic journal we are now familiar with, the tail began to wag the dog, and it was again renamed, now as *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society of America* (1966-2013). With the 2014 issue that name will change to *Dante Studies*, while the Annual Report for 2014 will be published separately, and exclusively in electronic form. This change was first announced by President Nancy Vickers in the 2013 *Annual Report (Dante Studies, volume 131)* and it has been made to accommodate two new realities. First, and primarily, the capacity afforded by the digital revolution for both rapid dissemination and long-term storage (at minimal expense and with no environmental impact to speak of) led us to prefer on-line-only publication of the *Report*. Second, the Society's Council made the decision to move the journal's declared issue year to coincide with its year of publication, a decision that will first be implemented in 2015 with volume 133 (so that during calendar year 2015 two volumes will appear, "2014" and "2015"). Since the year reported in any Annual Report is the year predating that of its distribution (no report can be written until the year is concluded), the Council judged the separation of the "official" report from the journal to be necessary, rather than having the 2014 Annual Report appear in the 2015 *Dante Studies*. Hereafter, beginning with the Report for 2015, Annual Reports will appear in late summer or fall of the year following the year reported on, to give time for the Treasurer to prepare an accounting of the Society's finances for the year past and for the Audit Committee to review and approve that accounting. Finally, this *Annual Report* contains, exceptionally, the Treasurer's Report not only for 2014, but also for the prior year 2013, which would, under the old system, have appeared in the 2014 issue of *Dante Studies*. Future Annual Reports will, of course, contain only the Treasurer's Report for the same fiscal year that the Report as a whole treats.

Special Meeting of the Membership

A special meeting of the members of The Dante Society of America, Inc., was called to order by President Vickers on January 9, 2014 at 3:30 p.m. at The Burnham Room, Intercontinental Chicago, 505 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL for consideration of the proposal to adopt the By-Laws of the Society in the form enclosed with the notice of meeting ("New By-Laws") and to repeal all By-Laws previously adopted by the Society ("Old By-Laws") so that the New By-Laws would supersede the Old By-Laws and be the By-Laws of the Society effective immediately on adoption of the proposal. President Nancy Vickers announced that a quorum was present by virtue of the return of proxies: 194 proxies were required to conduct the business at hand (one half of the total membership) and 237 had been received. A motion to accept the New By-Laws as circulated to the membership was made and seconded. The votes authorized by the proxies and two votes of those present were tallied the total. 230 votes were cast of which 229

were in favor and 1 (one) was opposed. Nine colleagues were present by proxy but did not cast votes. The “New By-Laws” passed and went into effect. [They may now be consulted at the DSA website, under the heading “About the Society”]. There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 3:47 p.m.

The 132st Annual Meeting of the Membership

The 2014 Annual Meeting took place on Saturday, May 16, at the Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

President Nancy Vickers called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m., noting that a quorum had been met with 149 valid proxies and that there were approximately 30 members in attendance. She then introduced Park Ranger Garrett Cloer from the Site who offered additional welcoming remarks. The Minutes of the 131st Annual Meeting of the Membership, held on May 18, 2013, and the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Membership held on January 9, 2014 were read and approved unanimously.

President Vickers, in her role as Acting Treasurer, delivered the Treasurer’s Report. She began by noting that her report would be only preliminary given the extraordinary demands of the by-laws revision project and the membership and web communications management initiative to which she had been giving full attention over the past several months. She continued by reporting that she had requested and received from the Audit Committee an automatic extension to August 15, 2014, for preparing the Society’s federal and Commonwealth tax filings. [The final Treasurer’s Report, approved by the Audit Committee, can be seen below]. Prize committee member Vittorio Montemaggi reported on the winners of the Dante and Grandgent Prizes for 2013 (announced in *Dante Studies* 131 [2013]).

Nominating Committee chair Simone Marchesi presented the report on behalf of the Committee, whose members included Susanna Barsella and Brenda Schildgen. He announced that Deborah Parker (University of Virginia) and Justin Steinberg (University of Chicago) were elected to the Council for the three-year term of 2014-2017. President Vickers thanked retiring Council members Vittorio Montemaggi and Joseph Luzzi for their service. She then announced that at the meeting of the Council the day prior, Albert R. Ascoli had been elected President and Christian Y. Dupont had been elected Secretary (and appointed Librarian) by the Council, each for a three year term (2014-2017) in accordance with the By-Laws now in effect, while she herself had agreed to the President-elect’s request that she continue in the role of Treasurer until a successor could be identified and elected. The Council had then confirmed her nomination.

Turning to *Dante Studies*, President Vickers announced that Richard Lansing would continue as Editor-in-Chief of the journal for volumes 131 (2013) and 132 (2014), to appear in calendar years 2014 and 2015 respectively, and would then be succeeded by Justin Steinberg. In addition, beginning with the 2015 volume the journal will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press, which will also host a newly designed website for the Society. She thanked Richard Lansing for his nearly 20 years of dedicated service to the Society as Secretary-Treasurer (from 1986-2002) and Editor-in-Chief of *Dante Studies* (since 2005). She remarked in particular how Lansing had restored the journal’s regular annual publication during his tenure.

President Vickers then introduced the annual program panel presentation on “Dante in the Classroom and the Community” and panelists Ronald Herzman (State University of New York College at Geneseo), William Stephany (University of Vermont, retired), Barbara Ellison Rosenblit (Weber School, Atlanta), and Terry Quinn (St. Louis University High School). The panel focused on how high school teachers have engaged their students and surrounding

communities in the study of Dante's works. The panel exemplified the newly invigorated commitment of the Society to "Education and Outreach" that will make the poet and his works more accessible to younger students.

At the conclusion of the panel presentation, President Vickers introduced Vice-President Albert Ascoli as the newly elected President of the Dante Society of America. Ascoli then spoke of Nancy Vickers' presidency, including the following remarks:

"It is an extraordinary feeling to stand here in Longfellow's house, assuming an office that Longfellow himself devised and held first. Solemn as that feeling is, it is, for me, a more personal and an equal honor to follow in the footsteps of Nancy Vickers, who has done nothing less than re-found this venerable Society, so that it may most effectively pursue its redefined mission of encouraging 'the study and appreciation of the time, life, works and cultural legacy of Dante Alighieri.' Despite the Dante Society's historical claims for our attention, Nancy had no reason to seek the honor of the presidency. She is a brilliant medieval and early modern interdisciplinary scholar, among whose interests Dante was one and not the least. She has been a department chair, a dean and, of course, president of Bryn Mawr College, and she brought all her experience and her knowledge and her charisma to bear on the problem of readying this little organization to carry on into the future, when she might well have chosen to rest on well-deserved laurels. In her two terms as president, she dramatically increased our endowment (though, for those of you who have checkbooks, work still remains to be done on that front!), introduced normal and responsible financial practices, and successfully carved out the revision of the Society's by-laws and its organization. The changes ... that she has set in motion will make an astonishing difference in our ability to honor Dante and to serve our membership."

The meeting adjourned at 12:45pm. A reception for speakers and Society members was held in the Longfellow House Garden.

The Meetings of the Council

The full Council met twice in 2014: first, on Friday, May 16, the day before the Annual Meeting, and second, on Friday, November 14, in Berkeley, California.

Spring Meeting:

In addition to the appointment of officers mentioned in the preceding account of the Annual Meeting, and the subsequent election by a vote taken electronically among Council members that resulted in Arielle Saiber being named Vice-President, the following items were discussed and agreed to:

- 1) the Council authorized President Vickers, President-Elect Ascoli and newly elected Secretary-Librarian Dupont to conclude negotiations with Johns Hopkins University Press;
- 2) the Council discussed and authorized the constitution of a new Education committee [subsequently changed to Education and Outreach], whose primary concern would be outreach to secondary school students and educators and to the general public. [Ronald Herzman was subsequently named chair of this committee with assent of the Council and it was agreed that he would regularly attend Council meetings to address these concerns].

3) the Council agreed to President-elect Ascoli's proposals, aimed at broadening participation in the Society's activities, that (a) the annual meeting for 2015 take place in a location other than Cambridge, though some future meetings might return to Cambridge, and that (b) it be paired with a small conference; the Council further allocated up to \$5000 in support of the proposed conference, expenses to be shared with the institutional host of the event;

4) in addition to the change of publishing venues, the Council agreed to a series of reforms concerning the organization of *Dante Studies*, including a rotating term-limited editorial board and a new advisory board.

Fall Meeting

The following items were discussed and/or agreed to:

1) the Council met its fiduciary responsibility to the Society by reviewing and approving the 2015 fiscal year budget proposed by Acting Treasurer Vickers;

2) the Council discussed at length and in detail the plans for the design and structuring of a new website to be hosted by Johns Hopkins University Press;

3) the Council approved the nominations of six new associate editors of *Dante Studies* with staggered terms to begin working with Justin Steinberg as of January 1, 2015, with responsibility for *Dante Studies* issue 133 and following; in addition thanks were given to outgoing editorial board members Teodolinda Barolini, Theodore Cachey, and Giuseppe Mazzotta in recognition of long and outstanding service;

4) the Council elected three new Honorary Members, Prue Shaw, Ruedi Imbach, and Enrico Fenzi;

5) the Council agreed to abolish the "Winter Meeting" of the Society held in conjunction with the Modern Language Association annual conference, because participation in that meeting requires members both to pay dues to the MLA and to pay the conference registration fee; it was agreed that the Society would continue to sponsor sessions at the MLA conference as an affiliated member;

6) the Council approved the President's proposal to hold the 2015 annual meeting at the University of Chicago in conjunction with a conference on "Dante's Political Theology" to be organized by Justin Steinberg.

Financial Statements, 2013 and 2014 (Prepared by Treasurer Nancy Vickers)

Introduction

As we continued our transition toward more comprehensive, timely and internally coherent reporting, you may recall that our 2013 Annual Report included events from both 2012 and 2013. Given the timing of publication in relation to that of our audit, the only missing element was 2013's financial statement. We assured you (*Dante Studies* CXXXI, 2013, p.303) that the missing statement would appear in the 2014 Annual Report; it precedes the Audited Financial Statement for 2014 below. N.b., the slight difference in formatting between the two statements reflects a change in DSA financial reporting to conform more closely to the best practices of nonprofit organizations

Audited Fiscal-Year 2013

The combined Merrill Lynch Endowment Management Account began 2013 at \$223,281 and ended at \$260,932. Of that closing amount, the cash/operating sub-account totaled \$13,218 and

the investment/endowment sub-account totaled \$247,714. Our combined asset allocation was equities 50%; fixed income 43%; and cash 7%. Our investment/ endowment sub-account grew during 2013 from \$215,282 to \$247,714, an increase of 15%. Its closing asset allocation was equities 53%; fixed income 45%; cash 2%.

Revenue

From Quasi-Endowment	\$10,000*
Interest and Dividend Income	\$14,212
Dues	\$13,185
Gifts	\$8,000**
JSTOR Revenue Share	<u>\$4,417</u>
TOTAL	\$49,814

Expense

Clerical	\$4,148
Computing	\$167
Copying	\$1,296 [print, collate, staple, fold]
Fees	\$235
Meeting	\$5,865 [travel and entertainment]
Postage	\$1,412
Prizes	\$1,250
Publication	\$2,060 [<i>Dante Studies</i> #130]
Storage	\$1,619
Supplies	\$313
Telephone	\$267
Reinvest Interest & Dividends	<u>\$13,424</u>
TOTAL	\$32,056

Net Activity [revenue minus expense & reserve**] \$9,758

Audited Fiscal-Year 2014

The combined Merrill Lynch Endowment Management Account (EMA) began 2014 at \$260,932 and ended at \$251, 483. Of that closing amount, the cash/operating sub-account totaled \$16,102 and the investment/endowment sub-account, \$235,380. Our combined asset allocation was: equities 47%; fixed income 45%; and cash 8%.

For purposes of still greater transparency, we decided in 2014 to follow standard reporting practice and separate our detail of operating revenue and expense from our description of investment performance.

Operating

The cash/operating sub-account opened 2014 at \$13,218 and closed \$16,102.

Revenue

From Quasi-Endowment	\$10,000*
Dues	\$10,690
Gifts	\$1,000
JSTOR Revenue Share	\$4,514

Reserve from 2013	\$8,000**
TOTAL	\$34,204

Expense

Accounting	\$825
Computing/Web	\$10,337
Copy-Editing	\$960
Clerical	\$4,104
Fees	\$243
<i>Commonwealth of MA (\$93)</i>	
<i>Merrill Lynch (\$150)</i>	
Fundraising (Entertainment)	\$379
Meetings	\$12,236
<i>Venues, Dinners & Receptions (\$3,688)</i>	
<i>Travel (\$8,548)</i>	
Postage (includes box rentals)	\$1,357
Prizes	\$500
Returned check expense	\$50 (\$30 withdrawal; \$20 fee)
Storage	\$1,659
Supplies & Printing	\$606
Telephone	\$66
TOTAL	\$33,322

Net Activity (revenue minus expense) \$882

Investment/Endowment

The investment/endowment sub-account began 2014 at \$247,714; its close at \$235,380 represents a decline of 5%. This downward turn is attributable to a number of factors: 1) understanding that the Society's many major transitions (new officers, new press, accelerated publication schedule, redesigned web-site, programmatic innovation, etc.) would generate unusual, and somewhat unpredictable, levels of expense in the period 2014-2016, the Council voted to sell some fixed income holdings and transferred \$20,000 of the cash generated from that sale to the operating account (this figure was offset by \$21,709 of dividend/interest income, almost all of which was reinvested); and 2) our investment portfolio underperformed, losing 5.3% of its value.

The Council has discussed investment performance and agreed to evaluate alternative investment scenarios. A subcommittee has been appointed to advise the Council.

* A "quasi-endowment" is a fully Board (or in our case, Council) controlled endowment. As per Council vote, up to \$10,000 (5% of the \$200,000 currently designated as endowment) can be "taken down" to support the annual operating budget.

** The \$8000 in gifts in 2013 constituted a donor-designated reserve fund to support our 2014-2015 website redesign.

Fulfilling Our Mission

Introduction

The sub-headings below represent four important ways in which the Society fulfills its renewed and amplified mission, namely “the encouragement of the study and appreciation of the time, life, works and cultural legacy of Dante Alighieri (By-Laws, Article I.2)

Education and Outreach

The sponsorship, described above, of a panel discussion dedicated to “Dante in the Classroom and in the Community” at the Annual Meeting, represented the Society’s (re-)newed commitment to the nurturing interest in Dante outside the strict confines of the academy. The commitment was then concretized with the appointment of Ronald Herzman—who has long experience in directing NEH seminars devoted to supporting the interest of High School teachers in Dante, as well as having worked at the NEH himself—to lead a new Education and Outreach Committee.

Dante Studies

The 2013 issue of *Dante Studies with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* (number 131) appeared in the summer of 2014, in accordance with the annual schedule then currently in effect.

Undergraduate and Graduate Prizes

In November of this year, the 2014 Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay was awarded to Christian Coppa (University of Notre Dame) for his essay: “From the ‘selva oscura’ to the ‘divina foresta’: Sylvan Symbols in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.” No Charles Hall Grandgent Prize was awarded this year. Prize Committee members Ronald Herzman, Dennis Looney (Chair), and Vittorio Montemaggi judged the essays.

Lectures and Panels

Modern Language Association

Members of the Dante Society attending the 2014 MLA Convention met in Chicago on January 9 to hear Professor Dennis Looney (University of Pittsburgh) speak on “Poetics of Lynching, Fugitives from Racism: Dante, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren.”

Kalamazoo

The Society sponsored three sessions at the 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 8-11, 2014. The sessions were arranged by Professor Alison Cornish (University of Michigan).

Dante I: The Polis: Dabney Park, Florida International University, Presiding; Alfred R. Crudale, Univ. of Rhode Island, “Ciaccio, Sordello, Justinian, and the Question of Citizenship in the *Divine Comedy*”; Inga Pierson, Stanford University, “Piccarda’s Weakness: Freedom, Force, and Femininity in Dante’s *Paradiso*”; Marco Prina, Univ. of California–Berkeley, “Dante, Brunetto, and the Problem of Reading: A New Interpretation of *Inferno XV*”; Sean Morgan, Univ. of California–San Diego, “The *Divine Comedy* as ‘Training for Death’”

Dante II: Reception, Transmission, and Context: Nicolino Applauso, Loyola Univ. Maryland, presiding; Maria Rita Traina, Univ. degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”, Some

Aspects of the So-called Cino da Pistoia's Sonnets against the *Comedy*"; Janet F. van der Meulen, Vrije Univ. Amsterdam, "Dante across the Alps: A French Response (1319) to *Paradiso XXX*"; Anthony Nussmeier, Pennsylvania State Univ., "*Forma Tractatus* and *Forma Tractandi* in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*"; Dabney Park, Florida International Univ., "Dante on the Poverty of Christ and the Apostles"

Dante III: Critique, Vituperium, Satire, and Invective: Regina Psaki, Univ. of Oregon, presiding; Nicolino Applauso, Loyola Univ. Maryland, "Saint Peter and the Pope on the Dung Seat: Satire, Prophecy, and Reprehension in *Paradiso 27*"; Franco Suitner, Univ. degli Studi di Roma Tre, "L'ontoso metro dei dannati di Dante: *Inferno VII*"; Maria Luisa Ardizzone, New York Univ., "Dante's Critique of Wealth and Materialism: A Rereading of *Convivio 4*"; Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja, Univ. of Cambridge, *Inferno XIX*. The Technical Predicaments of Satire

Conclusion

2014 saw the adoption of new by-laws, the implementation of new fiscal practices, the making of a strong commitment to expand the "education and outreach" activities of the Society, and the initiation of a shift in the publisher of *Dante Studies* from Fordham University Press to Johns Hopkins University Press. JHUP will also host a new, multi-functional website. In future I will be reporting on additional changes that have followed from these dramatic first steps, including on-line voting, new practices for member giving in support of the Society's activities, the first annual DSA conference, and so on. I hope that you will join me, the other officers, and the Council in celebrating this renewal, updating, and expansion of the Society's mission.