

Dante Society Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 2

April 2011



A Letter from the President

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I begin my annual President's letter by extending heartfelt thanks for your generous response to our membership survey. As I write we have yet to reach the deadline and yet over forty percent of you have already replied. In addition, many of you offered detailed comments and suggestions. Such results would be the envy of any social scientist and will afford your Council a wealth of information as it moves toward its May deliberations. A preliminary look at the results is gratifying in both the appreciation expressed for the DSA and the thoughtful suggestions proffered. We recognize that we asked you to respond in detail, but given our current engagement in redefining and/or reaffirming the Society's priorities, we genuinely needed to know your views in some depth. When it convenes in the coming weeks, the Council will surely join me in taking inspiration from your commitment to the success of the DSA.

As you know, the Council meets twice each year, and I want to take a moment to report on the October meetings held in conjunction with the "Dante and the Greeks" conference at Dumbarton Oaks. Our deliberations centered on two related topics: first, the organization and reporting of our finances; second, the planning process now underway for over a year. Our Capital Campaign, albeit unfinished, effectively helped us move

from having about one hundred thousand dollars in the DSA coffers to having about two hundred thousand. We felt the time had come to split our single "endowment management account" into two: we would thus designate one account as a Council-segregated endowment (which we could then easily monitor both in terms of its growth and of our adherence to our own "spending rule") and the other as an operating account, with its attendant variations in cash flow. This should render our reporting even clearer and permit the membership to grasp where the Society stands financially as we return to fundraising. We then discussed our preliminary sense of our strengths and vulnerabilities, our priorities and needs, and approved the membership questionnaire drafted by Council Member Albert Ascoli. In our May sessions we hope to conclude our planning, to authorize the implementation of any necessary changes, and to re-energize our Campaign. We will report to you in the coming months on the results of the survey and on the Council's decisions.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Annual Meeting on May 21st at the Longfellow House in Cambridge.

I cannot close without again thanking Richard Lansing and his dedicated Editorial Board on accomplishing the extraordinary feat of bringing *Dante Studies* within one year of correcting its backlog. Onward! The journal is clearly among our highest priorities, and we take its timely publication most seriously.

With best wishes to all,

Nancy Vickers

Dante Prize, Grandgent Award

Members of the Society are urged to invite promising *dantisti* to compete for the Dante Prize (for undergraduates) and the Grandgent Award (for graduate students). Submissions must be sent as e-mail attachments to dsa@dantesociety.org no later than June 30. For eligibility, size limits, and complete guidelines, please visit www.dantesociety.org/prizes.html.

The Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Society will take place on Saturday, May 21, 2011, in the Carriage House of the Longfellow House – Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site (105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA 02138). The event will begin at 11 a.m., so as to enable out-of-town members to travel on the day itself.

After the business meeting Professor William P. Caferro (Department of History, Vanderbilt University) will present a lecture titled "Contextualizing Dante's Reading of Byzantium and Empire." Refreshments will be served thereafter.

Spring Election

Enclosed you will find a ballot of candidates prepared by the Nominating Committee according to our bylaws.

Please mark your ballot and seal it in the provided "Ballot Envelope." Also enclosed is a proxy for the Annual Meeting. Please return it, together with the ballot envelope, so that it arrives no later than Wednesday, May 18th.

Vincent Pollina has respectfully declined the nomination to a fourth term as Secretary-Treasurer but has agreed to serve until a successor is identified. The Nominating Committee (Rachel Jacoff, Dana Stewart, and Peter Hawkins [Chair]) has placed on this Spring's ballot the following nominees for membership on the Council:

Joseph Luzzi (Ph.D. Yale) is Associate Professor of Italian and Director of Italian Studies at Bard College. He previously taught at the University of Pennsylvania and has held fellowships at the National Humanities Center and the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale. In 2009 his book *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (Yale University Press, 2008), which features a section on Dante's influence in

ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, May 21, 11:00 a.m.

Carriage House, Longfellow Historic Site
105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA

The Longfellow House is a short walk from Harvard Square. Parking at the site is limited, but garages are available in Harvard Square.

Enlightenment and Romantic literary self-representation, received the MLA's Scaglione Prize for Italian Studies and was named an Outstanding Academic Title by *Choice*. Luzzi's honors for work on Dante include a Yale College Teaching Prize and the DSA's Grandgent Award for best essay by a graduate student. His publications on Dante have appeared in academic and mainstream venues including *Dante Studies*, *Italica*, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, and *PMLA*. He has served on the Editorial Board of *Dante Studies* from 2008 to 2011.

Vittorio Montemaggi received his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, where he worked on Dante's theology with Denys Turner and Robin Kirkpatrick. In 2009 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Religion and Literature in the Department of Romance Languages, University of Notre Dame, with a concurrent appointment in the Department of Theology. His courses focus primarily on Dante and Primo Levi, with comparative readings from Augustine, Aquinas, Dostoevsky, and Shakespeare. His publications include essays on Dante's theology of language and on the theological significance in the *Commedia* of Ulysses, Ugolino, Gregory the Great, Piccarda, and Peter Damian. He is co-editor (with Matthew Treherne) of *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), and is currently working on two book-length projects: *Recognizing God: Reading Dante's Commedia as a Theological Poem and Literature, Truth and Friendship: Primo Levi's 'Il canto di Ulisse.'*

Mary Watt is Associate Professor of Italian; Chair of the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures; and Co-Director of the Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies at the University of Florida. She received her Ph.D. in 1998 from the University of Toronto with a dissertation on Dante. Her first book, *The Cross that Dante Bears*, was nominated for the Marraro Prize in 2006. Her recent publications include articles on the Dantesque landscape of Moravia's *La Ciociara* and on Tommaso Stigliani's use of the Dantesque in his baroque epic, *Il Mondo Nuovo*. Her current book project, *Prophecies of Paradise*, considers the influence of the *Commedia* on Christopher Columbus's perception of the cosmos and his interpretation of the "New World" discovery. She serves on the Executive Committee of the MLA Division on Medieval and Renaissance Italian Literature.

Heather Webb (Ph.D., Stanford) is Associate Professor of Italian at The Ohio State University. She is the author of *The Medieval Heart* (Yale University Press, 2010). Her research focuses on Dante, natural philosophy, and religious thought. She has published articles on Catherine of Siena's ideas of the heart, on typologies of tears in Dante and Catherine of Siena, on Giovanni da San Gimignano's discussion of the senses, and on the *rime petrose*. She is currently working on a book-length manuscript on medieval and contemporary definitions of the beginning and end of life. A project on Dante's Limbo in contemporary culture is in progress, as is a co-authored piece on Dante and theories of desire. She has served on the Editorial Board of *Dante Studies* from 2008 to 2011.

Longfellow Site Receives a New Name

On December 22, 2010, by Act of Congress, the Longfellow National Historic Site, administered by the National Park Service, received a new name. It will be known henceforth as the Longfellow House – Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site.

From July 1775 to April 1776, during the Siege of Boston, the dwelling served as headquarters for General George Washington. Having received the house as a wedding gift in 1843, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his wife Fanny acquired and prominently displayed there several artifacts pertaining to Washington, including a replica of the 1785 bust by Houdon. The ground-floor study where Longfellow's informal "Dante Club" gathered from 1865 to 1867, and where the Dante Society was founded in 1881, had once been the General's office.

Longfellow's descendants warmly supported the renaming of the Site in 2010.

Upon passage of the legislation, historian David McCullough – who had visited the house and archives while preparing the volume titled *1776* – issued the following statement: "The full historic importance of the grand old yellow clapboard house on Brattle Street, Cambridge, is conveyed at last by its new official name. It is a welcome change indeed, and entirely in the spirit of the worthy poet and the great general, and also, let's not forget, of Senator Ted Kennedy, who, with his abiding love of American history, did more than anyone to bring attention to and urgently needed government support for this prime national treasure."

Council Members, 2010-11

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Yale University
Victoria Kirkham
University of Pennsylvania
Ronald Martinez
Brown University
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Bryn Mawr College

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BALLOTS AND PROXIES

must reach P.O. Box 1558,
Arlington, MA 02474-0023, no later than
Wednesday, May 18.

Results will be announced on May 21 at the
Annual Meeting.

DANTE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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