

Draft Minutes (pending approval) of the

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

Sunday, May 16, 2021, 1:00pm-2:00pm 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**

President Alison Cornish convened the 139<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Dante Society of America at 1:05pm and welcomed those present via Zoom.

Cornish observed that this 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Dante's death has been and will continue to be a busy year for events celebrating and interrogating Dante. She also noted that the pandemic, apart from its many, far graver effects on the world, upset some of the Society's plans. Following is an abridged version of her remarks:

The Society had planned to hold its 2020 Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, last May, in conjunction with a symposium organized by Washington University professor and Society Treasurer, Michael Sherberg. Sherberg held out hope that he could host an in-person symposium last September, but the course of the pandemic necessitated moving to an online format. "Dante Somma Luce" was conducted via Zoom with sessions held on Friday, 25 September and Saturday, 26 September 2020. The 2020 Annual Meeting was held on that Saturday morning.

Minutes from all our recent Annual Meetings are available from our *dantesociety.org* website, under the heading of "Meetings and Events," and then "Past DSA Meetings and Events." As you will see in the minutes from our meeting last fall, I took some time in my welcoming remarks to review the many benefits of membership in our Society, which are listed under the "Membership and Benefits" heading on our website. Membership dues remain \$40 for college and university professors, \$30 for K-12 school teachers, and \$20 for students. Following our fall meeting, we launched a Twitter account to help promote our Society's activities and other Dante happenings around the world. In addition, we relaunched our members-only Facebook group as an additional membership benefit as a means for members to keep in closer contact online.

We are grateful for your support of the Society, and would like to emphasize that its mission is not to exclude, but to include. Quoting the statement on our website, our mission is to "to encourage the study and appreciation of the time, life, works, and cultural legacy of Dante Alighieri" and, I would add, to do so throughout the

world. At our recent annual conference, which concluded this past Thursday, May 13, we contemplated Dante in the Americas, thereby including, and indeed highlighting the non-anglophone reception and studies that have occurred and are ongoing in our hemisphere and on both of the continents called “America.”

As Christian Dupont, our indefatigable secretary and librarian, pointed out at the Council meeting yesterday, our society has become increasingly transnational—a far cry from the small, elite, New England gentlemen’s club in the shadow of Harvard University where it began—and part of the reason for that is the reach of what has become a cosmopolitan language.

Our members are not limited to New England, nor to the United States, nor even North America. And that is something, I think, worth celebrating with respect to our poet who was so averse to municipal, tribal, partisan, sectarian rivalries and hatreds, and maintained what might seem to some a wildly improbable universalist view of our common humanity.

Our mission is to open minds and doors to Dante, for free. This is the spirit of the Speakers’ Bureau, which may be found on the website under the “Education and Outreach.” Speakers’ Bureau participants are available to speak to groups of all kinds, including schools or reading group, free of charge, for the love of Dante that they are happy to share and transmit. This is also the spirit behind the “Canto per Canto: Conversations with Dante in Our Time” YouTube video series, which has been “crowd-sourced,” we might say from the talent of our members, but offered for free and in perpetuity to whomever might be interested or pointed there by a teacher or friend.

Registration for our recent online conference was free and open to the public. Session recordings will remain available on the conference site for three months, after which they will be transferred to the Dante Society’s YouTube channel, where proceedings of previous annual DSA conferences may be watched.

One of the silver linings of this horrific pandemic, as many have noted, is that we have had greater attendance at all our events, because everyone can tune in, from where there are, for free.

In the context of this great freedom, this great openness, this exponentially increased availability, I thank all of you for supporting the Society by being card-carrying members, by being active and vocal, by offering your talents and services, and by making financial contributions over and above our modest membership dues.

## **Approval of Minutes from the 138<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

Turning next to 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 2021 includes a total of 471 members across all categories, yielding a quorum threshold of 118 members.

During the 2021 ballot process, 9 members indicated that they planned to attend the Annual Meeting, while 22 indicated they would not, but would assign Secretary Dupont to serve as their proxy. Another 103 members indicated via a Google Form circulated separately that they would not attend the meeting, but assigned Secretary Dupont to serve as their proxy. A total of 22 members attended all or a portion of the Annual Meeting via Zoom. Thus, the number of members who attended the meeting (22) combined with those who assigned their proxies (125) totaled 140, thereby exceeding the quorum threshold.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont posted and distributed the draft minutes of the 138<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Society held online on Saturday, September 26, 2020. Dupont called for additions or corrections to the minutes. There being none, approval of the amended minutes was moved, seconded, and conferred unanimously.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Michael Sherberg presented a report on the status of the Society's finances.

The financial health of the Society remains strong. The value of the Society's investment account has grown by approximately \$100,000 since the account was moved from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard approximately four years ago.

The Society maintains an investment account with Vanguard. As of May 7, 2021, the total value of Vanguard investments stood at \$332,492.90, at net gain in value of \$34,512.90 or 11.6% with respect their value on September 20, 2020, immediately prior to last year's annual meeting.

The Society maintains a business checking account with Bank of America for managing routine operational expenditures. As of May 7, 2021, the balance in the Bank of America account was \$39,683.76. For comparison, the balance on September 20, 2020, was \$36,469.00.

The combined value of the Vanguard and Bank of America accounts on September 20, 2020, was thus approximately \$372,176.66. By comparison, the total value of the Society's accounts reported at the 2020 Annual Meeting was \$334,449.00.

For 2021, Sherberg had originally proposed a budget of \$21,550. Because expenses for the recently held 2021 annual conference shifted from travel to honoraria, at its meeting yesterday, Council approved an amended budget for 2021 totaling \$21,450. Sherberg will present a proposed budget for 2022 at the Fall 2021 Council meeting.

### **Audit Committee Report**

Secretary-Librarian Dupont read the report of the 2020-2021 Audit Committee submitted by chair Dabney Park on May 3, 2021:

The Audit Committee consisting of, Susanna Barsella, Jason Aleksander, Christian Dupont, and Dabney Park (Chair), with Michael Sherberg (Treasurer) attending, met via conference call on Friday, April 30, 2021 to examine the 2020 year-end reports for the accounts of the Dante Society of America as submitted by the Society's Treasurer, the Bank of America, and the Vanguard investment company. The Committee is pleased to report that the accounts are in good 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 continued to improve 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. The Committee suggested that the Society keep less than the current \$27,172.46 in the active checking account, and the Treasurer has agreed to look into transferring an appropriate sum to the Vanguard account.

In addition to fulfilling its charge to audit the financial statements and protocols of the Society, the Committee recognizes the need for the Society to periodically review the performance of its investments and its fundraising and stewardship activities. The Committee suggests that Council consider formally expanding its charge to include either or both of these roles or to establish one or more separate committees to perform these functions on a regular or ad hoc basis [note: an ad hoc investment committee was constituted a few years ago, resulting in the recommendation adopted by Council to shift investments from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard; Council has also at times organized formal fundraising campaigns].

Dupont called for a motion to approve the 2020 Audit Committee report and the 2021 Treasurer's Report. A motion was made, seconded, and approved.

## Secretary-Librarian's Report

The latest available monthly membership report with statistics for May 2021 shows that by comparison to the report given at the last Annual Meeting, in September 2020, which provided the final totals for the 2020 membership year, renewals and cumulative membership totals for the current membership year are considerably ahead in the major categories, particularly student memberships—an effect likely due, at least in part, to 2021 being the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Dante's death:

- Regular = 268 (2020: 248; +8.1%)
- Secondary Joint = 1 (2020: 1; 0.0%)
- Life = 84 (2020: 85; -1.2%)
- High School Teachers = 17 (2020: 16; +6.3%)
- Student = 78 (2020: 61; +27.9%)
- Honorary = 13 (2020: 13; 0.0%)
- Fellows = 5 (2020: 5; 0.0%)
- Institutional = 5 (2020: 5; 0.0%)

Thus far in 2021, the Society's total membership is 471, an overall increase of 37 members or 8.5% with respect to the final totals for the 2020 membership year. The current membership year will end on August 31, so it is likely that the final totals for 2021 will be still higher.

For 2021, the current geographical distribution of members is as follows (comparisons with 2020 statistics included in parentheses):

- United States: 384 (2020: 359; +6.7%)
- Canada: 7 (2020: 6; +16.7%)
- Europe: 69 (2020: 59; +16.9%)
- Foreign/Other: 11 (2020: 10; +10.0%)

Dupont commented that the increased foreign membership of the Society is due in part to the very graduate student societies in the UK and Ireland that have been organizing various online events during this anniversary year. He added that the Dante Society of America has in recent years become an increasing transnational organization, representing Dante scholars and readers of Dante in Anglophone regions across the globe.

Dupont reported briefly on his activities over the past year to maintain the Society's website to ensure the currency of information about conferences and other initiatives organized by the Society. He also echoed Cornish's comments regarding the success of the Society's Twitter account, which has already attracted more than 470 followers since its creation last fall. Dupont concluded his report by noting that the recordings of the

2021 annual conference will be migrated in the coming weeks from the conference platform to the Society's YouTube channel so that they may be freely accessible to all, along with recordings of other conferences and events hosted by the Society.

### **Nominating Committee Report**

Kristina Olson presented the following report on behalf of the Nominating Committee as chair. The other members of this year's committee were Eleonora Stoppino and Guy Raffa.

Olson thanked her fellow committee members and members of the Society for nominating strong candidates for the two open positions on Council to be vacated by Peter Hawkins and Olivia Holmes at the conclusion of this Annual Meeting. I am also grateful to the four candidates who stood for election for the two vacating seats:

- Dennis Looney, Director of the Office of Programs and Director of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages at the Modern Language Association
- Donatella Stocchi-Perucchio, Associate Professor of Italian in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Rochester
- Jelena Todorović, Vilas Associate Professor of Italian in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Wisconsin
- Paola Ureni, Associate Professor of Italian at the City University of New York

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.

Olson announced that the Society's membership had elected Dennis Looney and Jelena Todorović as the new members of the Council. Both will serve three-year terms in keeping with the Society's bylaws.

A total 87 ballots were received, including one abstention, from a total eligible voting membership of 392, for a voting participation rate of 19.7%.

Secretary 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**

Vice President Olivia Holmes reported on behalf of the 2020 Prize Committee, which consisted of Francesco Ciabattini as chair, and William Stephany and herself as members.

Following the Fall 2020 Council Meeting, the prize winners in each category were announced in a message to the Society's mailing list and subsequently posted to the Society's website:

The Dante Prize for best undergraduate essay was awarded to Matthew Canonico of the University of Notre Dame for his fascinating mathematical essay "The Divine punto: From the Mirror Experiment to the Primo Mobile."

The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for best graduate student essay was presented to Natale Vacalebre of the University of Pennsylvania for his important study "Paradiso (e Purgatorio) riconquistati. Un incunabolo dantesco in America e il riscoperto autore delle sue chiose."

The Robert M. Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to Terry Quinn, of Saint Louis University High School in Saint Louis (MO). Quinn's more than 25-year commitment to teaching, to Dante's text, and to the culture of medieval Italy shined through his own statements, syllabi, and assignments, as well as his students' exceptionally high-quality work.

The Dante Prize carries a monetary award of \$500, the Grandgent Award \$750, and the Durling Prize \$1000.

Following the announcement of the prizes, the Prize Committee worked with Secretary-Librarian Dupont to prepare Mr. Quinn's syllabus for publication in the "Pedagogy" section of *Dante Notes* on the Society's website. Holmes expressed gratitude Barbara Rosenblit, chair of the Society's Education and Outreach Committee, for consulting with the Committee on the evaluation of nominees for the Durling Prize.

The 2021 Prize Committee will consist of Holmes as chair with William Stephany and Fabian Alfie as members. Holmes asked Society members to assist with the promotion of the annual prizes. The submission deadlines for the Dante Prize and Grandgent Award is June 30, and the nomination deadline for the Durling Prize is July 1.

### **President's Report**

Cornish echoed the call for submissions for the Society's several prizes and reaffirmed a warm welcome to newly elected Councilors, Dennis Looney and Jelena Todorovic. She also offered a fond farewell and gratitude to Peter Hawkins and Olivia Holmes for their service on Council.

Cornish concluded the meeting with a report on the Society's activities over the past year. Following is an abridged version of her remarks:

I would like to take a moment to remember Robert Hollander, whom we lost this year on April 20. A Princeton alumnus, he taught at Princeton for over forty years. He is remembered as a major voice in American Dante Studies, harkened even in Italy, as Giuseppe Ledda recently reminded us in a Dante workshop held by the Rome Global Gateway of the University of Notre Dame. In addition to his influential scholarship and teaching, Bob also pioneered projects in the Digital Humanities, including the Dartmouth Dante Project, which put online all the historical commentaries on the *Divine Comedy*, as well as some contemporary ones, including his own. The Princeton Dante Project that he founded features an annotated virtual edition of the *Divine Comedy*. He also founded the Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society, which eventually became *Dante Notes*. Bob served as President of the Dante Society of America from 1979 to 1985. We are currently working on ways that the Society might honor his legacy, both in the recent aftermath of his passing and in the years ahead.

Our Twitter handle, which we created only last fall (@TheDanteSociety), has been a hub of traffic, magisterially monitored and orchestrated by Council member and Dartmouth professor Danielle Callegari.

Tweeting was at a fever pitch on the 25th of March, declared by some authority or other to be “Dantedì”, or “Dante Day.” The Society marked the day with Italian colleagues in Italy, in particular the Opera di Santa Croce in Florence (the art-filled Church and monastery where Dante says he studied and which is now presided over on the front steps by a tall, brooding statue of him). With the Opera di Santa Croce and the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò we launched on Dantedì a social media “call to action” called #ReadMeDante, the idea being that people all over the world can contribute to it by making recordings (under 33 seconds) of lines from Dante’s poetry, in whichever language they prefer, thereby dramatizing the reach of his words, thanks to the magic and the work of translation, demonstrating that he has something to say to everyone everywhere and in every time.

Since our last meeting, the Society sponsored a panel on contemporary reception of the *Divine Comedy* for the Modern Language Association annual meeting in January. The panel featured a presentation by Simone Marchesi on political cartoons and another by David Bowie on Rachel Owen’s *Inferno* illustrations. The session was organized and chaired by Elizabeth Coggeshall. Aileen Feng organized five panel sessions on Dante’s legacies for the 2021 Renaissance Society of America annual meeting, held in April. Scholars presented research on Dante and measurement, Dante in Boccaccio, Dante in the Visual Arts, Dante in Renaissance Italian Literature, and Dante in European Politics and Religion. For the International Congress on Medieval Studies, normally hosted in Kalamazoo,



Michigan, Akash Kumar organized three panels on the thematics of bodies, senses, spaces, poetry, philosophy and history. All three were held on May 10, and all three of the preceding conferences were, of course, held online.

Finally, our own conference, long planned to honor this seventh centenary of Dante's death in collaboration with Harvard University, took place over ten days earlier this month. [Cornish then asked Peter Hawkins, a member of the planning committee, to give an overview the conference program, which is linked from the Society's website.]

We hope that the conference proceedings may furnish material for the 2021 issue of *Dante Studies*. Unfortunately, the publication schedule for the journal has been delayed by the pandemic. You should have received volume 137 (2019) earlier this year, or slightly later. Editor Justin Steinberg reports that the 2020 issue (volume 138) is complete, but still in the editing process; he hopes for it well appear this summer.

With strong contributions and an accelerated copy-editing process, we hope also hope that volume 139 (2021) will also be able to be completed during this calendar year for release early next year, catching us up as we go forward.

Remember that *Dante Studies* is always looking for good work to publish. It holds to the highest standards of double-blind peer review, thus providing an invaluable service of reading and critique even for those submissions that are not selected for a given issue.

Of course, *Dante Studies* is not our only venue of publication. *Dante Notes* is published online via our website, ably edited by Simone Marchesi and his editorial board. *Dante Notes* publishes shorter forms of engagement with Dante's texts. It also has a section titled "Student Encounters," which features responses to reading Dante from secondary school students and another titled "Pedagogy," which features course syllabi and lessons plans for teaching Dante, especially at the secondary level.

I am grateful to the editorial boards of both our publications for the long and hard work that they do not only to determine what should be published, but to advise and critique all the work that is submitted for review.

The video series "Canto per Canto: Conversations with Dante in our Time," produced in collaboration with New York University, is ongoing. All 100 cantos have been claimed. Around 70 episodes have aired; another 10 have been recorded, with remainder to be recorded and released over the course of the summer, every Monday and Wednesday, alternating among *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*,

and *Paradiso*. Soon we will post a list of all the conversations, in the order of the poem itself, not by the date in which they were aired, which will facilitate finding a particular canto or contributor, as well as following them alongside a sequential reading of the *Comedy*.

It is my intention to finish out the centennial year with a series of 20-minute conversations not tied to particular cantos, but to particular contemporary readerships—in different parts of the globe, among different demographics, for different reasons. If you belong to or know about a group studying Dante that goes beyond our shores or our ivory towers, please get in touch with me as I would be very interested in featuring them in the series.

### **New Business**

Following the conclusion of her remarks, Cornish opened the floor to questions and new business. None were put forward.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business or discussion, Cornish called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made, second, and approved. The meeting adjourned at 1:52pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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