

Draft minutes (pending approval) of

**140th Annual Meeting of the
Dante Society of America**

Sunday, May 7 2022, 2:00pm-3:30pm 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 140th annual meeting of the Dante Society of America at 1:05pm and welcomed those present via Zoom.

Cornish observed that this 700th 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 and edited version of her remarks:

As many of you have experienced, the pandemic made us do things differently. And while much was lost—even without counting the enormous human cost in lives and livelihoods—finding ways of doing things differently was not bad. In particular the virtual format for this Annual Meeting of the Society has some distinct advantages as it enables pretty much all members to attend if they like. In the past the Annual Meeting was always held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, according to the by-laws, until they were changed by the voting members of the Society under the initiative and leadership of President Nancy Vickers.

In the past this business meeting for members happened the day after the Spring Council meeting and preceded a day of interventions from scholars on a theme. In 2020, *Dante somma luce*, the symposium we had planned to hold at Washington University in St. Louis, was forced online in September of that same year. The 2021 collaboration with Harvard University, *Tra liti sì lontani* meant to be a return to our Society's origins in Cambridge, as well as a look at Dante in the Americas, was held online in May.

In 2022, thanks to the initiative of our Vice President, Beth Coggeshall, our Dante show went to Sarasota Florida in March. The advantage of this venue and early date was to have our meetings included under the auspices of the New College Conference in Medieval and Renaissance Studies. We held our Spring Council meeting at that time.

I have recently been in conversation with Virginia Jewiss, author of a brand new, facing-page translation of Dante's *Vita nuova* and Associate Director of the

Alexander Grass Humanities Institute at Johns Hopkins about hosting the 2023 annual symposium in Baltimore. This is strongly supported also by the Director of the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, William Egginton and by our own fellow member and former Vice President of the Dante Society of America, Arielle Saiber, who will be joining the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures as Professor of Italian next fall.

I also want to announce a recent addition to our society of a graduate student group. This began on the initiative of Mario Sassi (University of Pennsylvania), Paolo Scartoni (Rutgers University) and Leonardo Chiarantini (University of Michigan). The group held an initial meeting this past February and had over 20 people in attendance. They have started an email group, and plan to organize some workshops and reading group. The motivation of this group is to create a cohort of young scholars working on Dante spread out among different institutions who often have few or no peers as direct interlocutors where they are. The virtual world opened by the pandemic helped them see this opportunity for drawing together.

The Society's Council has welcomed this new initiative. We see it as a way to get the next generation of scholars involved in our activities both to carry them on and to re-invigorate them with their fresh ideas and perspectives. We believe that this new graduate group will benefit not only students, who will have the opportunity to get to know each other and professors working in the field, but also professors who will have the opportunity to know and work with more graduate students than their home institutions can support. Council is currently investigating the possibility of internships and apprenticeships in the various areas of our activities, and models of compensation and support that might include reimbursement for travel for students presenting at any one of the many conferences with sessions and panels sponsored by the Dante Society of America. I would like to mention that such an initiative would be made possible by a very generous donation made to the Society at the close of 2021. In any case, the Society is looking forward to including and supporting this association of young scholars.

We are grateful for your support of this Society but would like to emphasize that our mission is not to exclude, but to include. To quote our website, this mission is to “to encourage the study and appreciation of the time, life, works, and cultural legacy of Dante Alighieri” and, I would add, *throughout the world*. This is a society not just for academics, and in that sense it is a rare public-facing institution that integrates a wide range of people around their love of a single author—one who merits, shall we say, all this attention. Our society has become

quite transnational—a far cry from the small, elite, New England gentlemen’s club in the shadow of Harvard University where it began.

We are joined here today by members and non-members (we call them “friends of Dante”), and all are welcome. But I want to thank specifically the “card-carrying” members for being active and vocal, for offering your talents and services, for staying faithful to our little Society and for making financial contributions over and above our modest membership dues.

Approval of Minutes from the 139th 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 2022 includes a total of 441 members across all categories, yielding a quorum threshold of 110 members. A quorum is required to transact business requiring a vote, including the approval of minutes and reports.

During the 2021 ballot process, 17 members indicated that they planned to attend the Annual Meeting, while 44 indicated they would not, but would assign Secretary Dupont to serve as their proxy. Another 35 members indicated via a Google Form circulated separately that they would not attend the meeting, but would assign Dupont to serve as their proxy, yielding a total of 79 proxies. The number of Zoom registrations for the Annual Meeting totaled 96, most of which were from current members of the Society. Thus, a quorum was expected and achieved, with 83 total meeting participants.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont posted and distributed the draft minutes of the 139th Annual Meeting of the Society, held online on Saturday, May 16, 2021. 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 provided the following version of the report which he presented at the Spring 2022 Council meeting, held on May 6, 2022.

As of February 27, 2021, the value of the Society’s investment account with Vanguard stood at \$330,416.01, representing a slight loss with respect the value of \$332,492.90 reported at the last Annual Meeting of the Society on May 7, 2021, when the endowment stood at \$332,492.90. The decrease reflects retreating values of major stock indexes since the beginning of 2022.

The balance of the Society's Bank of America checking account stood at \$60,482.66 as of February 27, 2022. The balance included a recent gift of \$25,000 from a total pledge of \$50,000 from an anonymous donor that is expected to be completed by the end of 2022. The gifted funds will be transferred to the Vanguard investment account.

The combined value of the Vanguard and Bank of America accounts on February 27, 2022, was thus \$390,534.67. By comparison, the total value of the Society's accounts reported at the 2021 Annual Meeting was \$334,449.00.

Total revenues for 2021 were \$20,987 against expenses of \$25,108, resulting in a deficit of \$4,121. At the Spring 2022 Council meeting, Sherberg presented a revised budget for 2022 that projected expenses totaling \$25,550.

Audit Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the following summary report of the 2020-2021 Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee, consisting of Dabney Park (Chair), Jason Aleksander, Dennis Looney, and Christian Dupont, met via conference call with Treasurer Michael Sherberg on February 28, 2022 to review the 2021 year-end reports prepared by the Treasurer along with statements from the Society's Vanguard investment and Bank of America checking accounts. The Committee found the accounts in good order and the financial health of the Society to be sound. The Committee recommended that the Treasurer provide Council with more details about donations received by the Society in future budget reports.

Dupont made a motion to approve the 2021 Treasurer's Report and 2021 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 2022, shows that by comparison to the report given at the last Annual Meeting, in May 2021, membership renewals are slightly behind last year in the main categories of regular and student members, but substantially ahead for secondary school teachers:

- Regular = 242 (2021: 268; -9.7%)
- Secondary Joint = 3 (2021: 1; 200.0%)

- Life = 82 (2021: 84; -2.4%)
- High School Teachers = 23 (2021: 17; +35.3%)
- Student = 74 (2021: 78; -5.1%)
- Honorary = 12 (2021: 13; -7.7%)
- Fellows = 5 (2021: 5; 0.0%)
- Institutional = 5 (2021: 5; 0.0%)

Thus far in 2021, the Society's total membership is 446, an overall decrease of 25 members or 5.3% with respect to the total of 471 reported at the May 2021 Annual Meeting. The current membership year will end on August 31, so it is likely that the final totals for 2022 will approach those from 2021.

For 2022, the current geographical distribution of members is as follows (comparisons with May 2021 statistics included in parentheses):

- United States: 365 (2021: 384; +4.9%)
- Canada: 8 (2021: 7; +14.3%)
- Europe: 62 (2021: 69; -10.1%)
- Foreign/Other: 11 (2021: 11; 0.0%)

The Society's Twitter account has 769 followers as of today, compared to approximately 470 at the time of the last annual meeting, and an increase of 63.6%. The Society's members-only Facebook group currently has 57 members.

Nominating Committee Report

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

The members of the 2022 Nominating Committee were: Guy Raffa (Chair, University of Texas at Austin), 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 Danielle Callegari and Warren Ginsberg were:

- Catherine Adoyo, Professorial Lecturer, Department of Romance, Germanic & Slavic Languages & Literatures at George Washington University
- Fabian Alfie, Professor of Italian at the University of Arizona
- Carol Chiodo, inaugural Librarian for Collections and Digital Scholarship at Harvard University
- Alessandro Vettori, Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

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 86 ballots were received from a total eligible voting membership of 392, for a voting participation rate of 19.7%.

Secretary Dupont announced that Catherine Adoyo and Alessandro Vettori had been elected. He and president Cornish congratulated them and thanked outgoing Councilors Callegari and Ginsberg for their service.

Prize Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont included in the advance agenda the following report on behalf of the Prize Committee.

The 2021 Prize Committee included Olivia Holmes (chair), William Stephany, and Fabian Alfie (University of Arizona). (2020-2022). Barbara Rosenblit (Weber School, retired), Education and Outreach Committee chair, assist with the judging of the Durling Prize.

On December 8, the Prize Committee announced the winners of the three prizes sponsored by the Dante Society of America for the 2021 calendar year:

- The Dante Prize for best undergraduate essay was awarded to Benjamin Connor (Brown University) for his insightful essay "Divine Economy: Usury and the Infinite in Dante."
- The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for best graduate student essay was presented to Caterina Nicodemo of the University of Chicago for her ground-breaking essay "Sull'episodio gerioneo: osservazioni e nuove proposte."
- The Robert M. Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to two recipients this year, whose applications showed very different approaches and strengths. Homer L. Twigg IV, of DeMatha Catholic High School in Hyattsville, MD, brings a very creative and effective approach to teaching Dante at an all-male high school by leveraging his background in technology and computer gaming, while Jennifer Wan, of Boston Trinity Academy, an ethnically diverse urban school, engages her students deeply around contemporary issues of social justice and personal empowerment.

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

The 2022 Prize Committee includes William Stephany as chair with and Fabian Alfie and Paola Ureni (Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY)) as members. The

submission deadlines for the Dante Prize and Grandgent Award is June 30, 2022, and the nomination deadline for the Durling Prize is July 1, 2022.

Adjournment

Cornish adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:29pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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