

Dante Society Newsletter

Volume 13, Number 2

April 2007

Letter from the President

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The year 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who is known to all as one of the Brahmin Poets (popular author of poems such as *Evangeline* and *The Song of Hiawatha*), as a scholar of European languages and literatures, and above all, for the Dante Society, as a never forgotten translator of the *Divine Comedy*, which was the first by an American writer and which inaugurated a seemingly (and happily) never-ending series of translations.

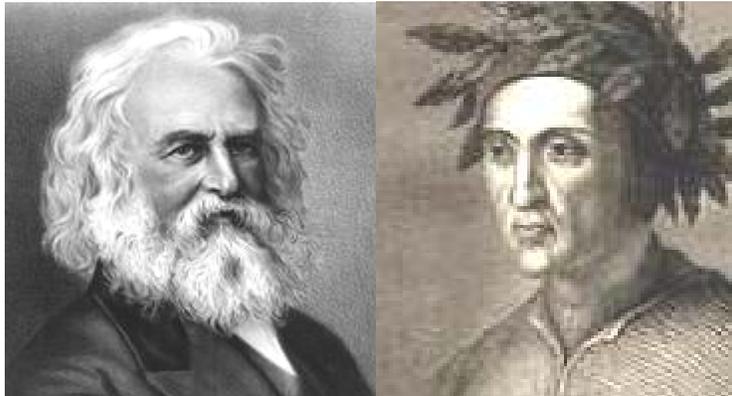
Our ties with Longfellow and his intellectual associates, who shared, among other things, an undeviating passion for Dante's poetry and thought, are physically signaled by a symbolic detail: over the last few years the Dante Society has held its annual meetings at the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site at 105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Above and beyond this physical sign of continuity, we have inherited from Longfellow and his direct interlocutors the conviction that Dante's poetry is important to the individual and to society, and that the need to broaden the reach of the DSA and enhance its membership is as compelling as ever. It is thanks to the efforts of Longfellow that the DSA became a literary society and a beacon on the horizon of America. We are proud, therefore, that the tradition established as recently as 2004 will continue. I am delighted (and grateful to the manager Jim Shea) that our meeting, scheduled to be held on Saturday, May 5, 2007, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. – the 125th of the Dante Society of America – will as in the past take place again this year at the Carriage House.

ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, May 5, 10:00 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.

As a way of marking our indebtedness to Longfellow's legacy, the Dante Society has decided to devote this year's meeting to the exploration of the vital link between Dante and Longfellow. With the help of Professor Lino Pertile of Harvard University, whom I wish to thank, I chose



and invited to speak at our meeting four distinguished scholars: Professor Wai Chee Dimock (Yale University), Professor Christoph Irmscher (Indiana University, Bloomington), Professor Kevin Van Anglen (Boston University), and Professor Kathleen Verduin (Hope College). Their presentations will follow a discussion of Society business (finances, membership, the Capital Campaign, future initiatives, prizes, etc.) and will be followed in turn by a reception which you are all invited to attend.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the public lecture at the next MLA convention in Chicago will be delivered by Professor Albert Russell Ascoli (University of California at Berkeley) and author of a forthcoming Dante book by Cambridge University Press. Professor Ascoli will speak on "The Language of the Author: *Paradiso* 26."

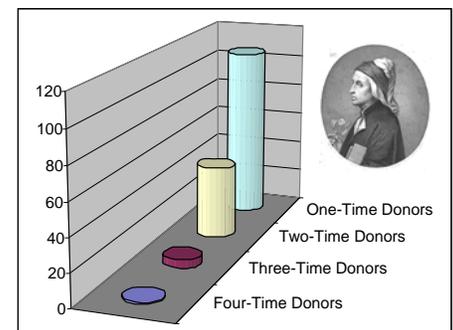
Enclosed you will find a ballot containing the slate of candidates for the Council of the Dante Society of America. The nominees are Susanna Barsella, Stanley Benfell, Gary Cestaro, and William Franke. Brief biographies of the four candidates are printed below. You will choose two new councilors to replace Professor Simon Gilson and Professor Jan Ziolkowski who are leaving the Council in May. Please mark the ballot and return it, together with the proxy statement, in time for the vote count on April 28.

Let me now turn to the most agreeable

task of thanksgiving. Thanks, first of all, to Jan and Simon, for their devoted service. And heartfelt thanks are due to the members of the Nominating Committee, Professor Peter Hawkins (Chair), Professor Teodolinda Barolini and Professor Jan Ziolkowski for their splendid work. The DSA is fortunate to have such an extraordinary group of members who give so unstintingly of themselves and their time and who recognize the imperative of continuing the tradition of service set up by Longfellow and of seeing to it that the Dante Society should prosper.

Finally, my thanks go to our Secretary-Treasurer Todd Boli, our continuing Council members, *Dante Studies* Editor-in-Chief Steven Botterill, Managing Editor Richard Lansing, and the other members of the Editorial Board, the prize Committee, the Auditing Committee, and the Capital Campaign Committee.

With best wishes,
Giuseppe Mazzotta



Repeat Giving Lifts Endowment

"Giving": it is, as Boccaccio reminds us, what "Dante" means. We see Dante's generosity in the *Convivio*, where his "ready liberality" moves him to share the knowledge he has gathered. We also see a corresponding generosity in the Dante Society's benefactors who not only once, but twice or more, have been moved to recognize the Society's evolving mission and international scope with their gifts. What is so remarkable is that our donors seem to come to their acts of sustained

generosity almost spontaneously. With only the occasional article in our Newsletter or letter from our Capital Campaign Committee to remind them, they repeatedly open their purse to contribute with, in Dante's phrase, a "free and unforced gesture."

Although repeat contributions extend from the modest to the sizable, they all impart momentum to campaign giving. As can be seen in the chart above, nearly half of all our contributors have given more than once. Indeed, over half of all the contributions received by the Capital Campaign have been preceded by previous donations. Clearly, our donors understand that it is through repeat giving that leadership can be exercised without regard to the size of the gift.

We are a small society with a large mission, one that is critical to the future of the humanities both here and abroad, and it is your generous giving that is helping to build an endowment sufficient to the Dante Society's growing needs. Please consider augmenting your already generous leadership by contributing again. With your sustained support, it will be possible to say of our members and contributors what Boccaccio said of Dante, that "he could have had no other name than 'Giving.'"

The Dante Society of America is a non-profit charitable organization, and *all gifts are fully tax deductible*. To contribute, please make your check payable to the Dante Society of America and mail it to the Dante Society of America, P.O. Box 711, Framingham, MA 01701-0711. If you have questions about the Campaign or would like to discuss a gift, please feel free to contact our Campaign Co-Chairs: Teodolinda Barolini (212-854-2308, tb27@columbia.edu), Joan Ferrante (212-854-6415, jmf2@columbia.edu), and Nancy Vickers (610-526-5156, nvickers@brynawr.edu). Our Co-Chairs match every gift by adding a fourth dollar for every three donated.

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

BALLOTS AND PROXIES

must reach P.O. Box 711,
Framingham, MA 01701-0711, no later than
Saturday, April 28.

Results will be announced at the meeting.

provided "Ballot Envelope." Also enclosed is a proxy for the Annual Meeting. Please return it together with the ballot envelope by April 28.

The Nominating Committee has placed on this spring's ballot the following four nominees for Council:

Susanna Barsella, Associate Professor of Italian at Fordham University (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins). Her main area of research is in Italian medieval literature and Renaissance Humanism, with a specific interest in the literature of early Italian Humanism. Her interests include philosophy of work, patristic and medieval theology, and history of art. She has publications on Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Michelangelo, contemporary Italian literature, and on the idea of work from antiquity to the Middle Ages. She is currently working on a book on art and work in early Humanism and on a project on Dante's angelology.

Stanley Benfell, an Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at Brigham Young University, received his Ph.D. from New York University. His research interests focus on the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and he has published studies on Italian and French Renaissance literature in addition to numerous papers on Dante. After a stint as department chair, he is currently nearing completion of a book-length study of Dante's use of the Bible. Most recently he has become interested in Dante's moral philosophy and theology, and he has written on Dante's relationship to Peter John Olivi and the Spiritual Franciscans and on Dante's views of avarice. He was a fellow in an NEH seminar on the seven deadly sins and was named BYU's Honors Professor of the Year for 2004.

Gary P. Cestaro is Associate Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and head of the Italian section at DePaul University in Chicago. He is also Director of DePaul's LGBTQ Studies Program. His scholarly interests include medieval and Renaissance Italian literature; ancient, medieval, and early modern constructions of same-sex desire; queer theory and gay male subjectivity. His 2003 book, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame University Press), takes a serious look at Dante's relation to Latin grammar and the new "mother tongue" Italian vernacular by exploring the cultural significance of the nursing mother in medieval discussions of language and selfhood. Inspired by Julia Kristeva's

meditations on the maternal semiotic, the book uncovers ancient and medieval discourses that assert the nursing body's essential role in the development of a mature linguistic self. In 2004, he published *Queer Italia* (Palgrave Macmillan), a collection of essays on same-sex desire in Italian literature and film, medieval to modern. His most recent work includes a forthcoming essay on constructions of male selfhood in the works of Pier Vittorio Tondelli and a study of pedagogy and pederasty in the grammar classroom from ancient times to Dante and into the Renaissance.

William Franke, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Italian, and Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University (Ph.D., Stanford). He has published on Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Yeats, Leopardi, Manzoni, Montale, Racine, Baudelaire, Celan, Jabès, and Stevens. *Dante's Interpretive Journey* appeared in 1996; his two-volume *On What Cannot Be Said* (2007) proposes a synoptic vision of the Western tradition of apophatic discourse from Plato to postmodernism; and his forthcoming *Poetry and Apocalypse* provides a theological reading of poetic language in the Christian epic tradition from Dante to James Joyce. He has recently been a resident at the Camargo Foundation and the Istituto Studi Ligure at Bogliasco as well as a visiting professor at the University of Salzburg.

Dante Prize, Grandgent Award

Do you know a promising *dantista*? The Dante Society of America annually offers the undergraduate Dante Prize of two hundred and fifty dollars and the graduate Charles Hall Grandgent Award of five hundred dollars, each for the best essay on a subject related to the life or works of Dante.

Submissions must be sent as email attachments to the Society at dsa@dantesociety.org no later than June 30. For eligibility, size limits, and complete guidelines, please see the "Prizes" page of the Society's Web site at www.dantesociety.org.

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