

Dante Society Newsletter

Volume 14, Number 2

April 2008

Letter from the President

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I wish this year's letter could simply offer some general reflections on issues that directly concern the Dante Society of America and the vital signs of our discipline. No question, the critical-academic debates that nurture us transcend national boundaries. It is amazing how this our poet, though rooted in his native Florence, is the least provincial of figures and the most capable of drawing admirers from altogether different cultures. The mail has just delivered books on Dante from both Italy and the United States. The trend in the humanities is notoriously disturbing, yet the welcome publication of these books suggests that our poet continues to encourage our quest for self-understanding and shape our educational aims. In his address, "The Language of the Author: *Paradiso* 26," presented at the MLA meeting of last December in Chicago, Professor Albert Ascoli exemplified the power of Dante's vision.

However, as much as I would like to muse over questions of medieval esthetics, current critical methodologies, or the purposes of our profession, I feel compelled to inform the members of the Dante Society of America about the institutional crisis that has embroiled the prestigious *Società dantesca italiana*. The problems of our younger sister society are in no way ours, but its internal quarrels deeply affect the image of Dante scholarship all over the world and are bound to disorient academic and non academic readers of the poet.

These are the bare facts: on September 14, 2007 the Society's assembly met in its historic seat, the Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana in Florence to discuss its agenda of cultural initiatives, including the long-standing issues of the national edition of Dante's works and the Society's finances. The meeting was chaired by the distinguished and most honorable *dantista*, Emilio Pasquini from the University of Bologna, who had agreed to take over when Guglielmo Gorni, Professor of Romance Philology at "La Sapienza" in Rome, stepped down for serious health reasons. On that day marking the anniversary of Dante's death, no discussion took place; rather, the death knell of the Società was heard. The meeting was disrupted by what leading Italian newspapers called a *coup*: The Council and its President were driven out of office by an angry mob and a self-appointed group of new officers. At this point, legal

action is being taken. Pamphlets such as Enrico Malato's *In difesa della società dantesca* (2006) and Guglielmo Gorni's *La società dantesca italiana si difende da sé* (2007) address the crisis and highlight the messiness of the Società's management. I know I speak for our DSA in expressing the hope for a quick resolution and the wish that light be shed on this unhappy episode.

I am delighted to announce that our Nominating Committee – Teodolinda Barolini (Chair), Dana Stewart, and Jan Ziolkowski – has settled on Todd Boli, Martin Eisner, and Nancy Vickers as candidates for the two openings on the Council. The two will replace Olivia Holmes and Dana Stewart, who will retire from the Council after the May meeting. Vincent Pollina, in conformity with Society policy, will run unopposed for Secretary-Treasurer. The members of the Nominating Committee, and, during their longer tenure, Olivia and Dana have performed with great dedication and exceptional sense of service to the DSA. But a deeply felt "thank you" must be reserved to Todd Boli as he chooses to step down from the demands of the double office of Secretary-Treasurer. He has been simply outstanding in his administrative work and in his advisory assistance.

At our next meeting, scheduled for May 17, 2008, in the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site (105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA), Professor Joseph Luzzi of Bard College will speak on "*Poesis in Paradiso: Dante's Neologisms.*"

With best wishes,
Giuseppe Mazzotta

DSA's Library of Historic Books Finds New Home

Last year the Council of the Dante Society of America took an important step in requesting the transfer of the Society's library of historic books to the possession and care of the Longfellow National Historic Site. Though a uniquely valuable historical and scholarly resource, the books grew problematic as they lingered unused, exposed to the risk of damage or dispersal, and without a home of their own. The Society turned with its problem to Jim Shea, the manager of the Longfellow National Historic Site, and was delighted to learn that the Longfellow Site would eagerly receive the historic books, provide for their care, and finally make them accessible to scholars. Thanks to the generous response of

Mr. Shea and his staff, the books have at last bid farewell to precarious and ever changing venues and for the first time become available not only to scholars at large but to the Dante Society's own members.



Longfellow National Historic Site
manager Jim Shea

For the most part, the books (constituting about 115 titles or 140 volumes) were given or left to the Society by its members, and they tell in a significant way the story of the Society from its birth in the Longfellow House to its maturing into a modern learned organization.

In the collection are three copies of Edward Moore's edition of *Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri*, and all three sketch an arc of the DSA's story. One was the personal copy of Charles Eliot Norton, a founder of the Society and its third President. Another belonged to George Benson Weston, a student of Norton's and later professor at Harvard, Secretary of our Society, and "chairman" of the Society's competition for the Dante Prize. The third was a gift from Charles Hall Grandgent to his student, Albert Edmund Trombly, who would become professor at the University of Missouri, friend and biographer of Vachel Lindsay, and author of southeast-US regional poetry. Edward Moore, the volume's editor, was inducted as one of the DSA's first honorary members. The collection boasts many volumes by scholars who were honorary members of the Society – Johann Andreas Scartazzini, Alessandro D'Ancona, Francesco D'Ovidio, Paget Toynbee, Nicola Zingarelli, and Karl Vossler among them.

ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, May 17, 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.

Some books are old: a first edition of Foscolo's English *Essays on Petrarch* (which includes Barbarina Brand's much admired translations of Petrarch's lyrics), an edition of Giovanni Mario Filelfo's *Vita Dantis Alighierii*, Maria Francesca Rossetti's *The Shadow of Dante*, Karl Witte's *Dante-Forschungen* and his edition of the *Vita Nuova*, and the two-volume reading of the *Purgatorio* by William Warren Vernon, another of the Society's earliest honorary members. Other books are more modern: the three essays called *Dante: Poet and Apostle* by Ernest Hatch Wilkins, the Dante Society's eighth President, and a first edition of Charles S. Singleton's *Essay on the Vita Nuova*.

Jim Shea has told us that the Longfellow National Historic Site will shelve the books where they can remain together in a dedicated place of their own. There can be no doubt that giving these mementos of the Dante Society's past to the Longfellow House greatly increases their value to the Society. In representing his organization, Mr. Shea has encouraged the Dante Society to consider the Longfellow National Historic Site to be its home. The Dante Society hopes that the gift of its historic books will, among other things, serve as an expression of gratitude for the hospitality which it has had the privilege of enjoying in recent years and of its confidence in a future that will bring many years of continued association and collaboration with the staff and management of the Longfellow National Historic Site.

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 14.

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

Todd Boli, an independent scholar living in Framingham, Mass., has been a member of the Society for twenty-four years. Since 2003, he has served as the Dante Society's Secretary-Treasurer and editor of the Society's Newsletter. He has also served on the Society's Prize Committee and Auditing

Committee. He has taught Italian at Columbia University, the University of Florida, Tufts University, and Regis College, and in the Newton (Mass.) Public Schools. A 1968 graduate of Harvard College, Prof. Boli received his doctorate in Italian from Columbia University in 1981. He has been a Fulbright Scholar and an Austin Oldrini Traveling Fellow. His publications include works on Boccaccio and Dante, he contributed articles to *The Dante Encyclopedia* (2000), and he regularly contributes public readings to Boston College's *Lectura Dantis* series.

Martin Eisner, currently an Assistant Professor at Duke University, holds his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Italian from Columbia University. He is working on two book projects. The first, tentatively entitled *Boccaccio and the Consolations of Philology: Codifying Dante, Petrarch, and Cavalcanti in the Chigi Codex*, analyzes Boccaccio as literary historian of vernacular poetry in what is now the Vatican's Chigi L V 176. His next book project, *Rematerializing Literary History: The Afterlives of Dante's 'Vita Nuova'*, continues to integrate philological materials into literary criticism, but takes a diachronic rather than synchronic approach in its analysis of the material tradition of Dante's first book, from its earliest manuscripts to the most recent editions and adaptations. Eisner is the author of several published and forthcoming articles on Petrarch and Boccaccio, including "Petrarch Reading Boccaccio: Revisiting the Genesis of the *Triumphs*" in *Petrarch and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, eds. T. Barolini and H. W. Storey (Brill, 2007). His other research interests include medieval lyric poetry, the European novella tradition, and material philology / textual theory / book history.

Vincent Pollina (Ph.D., Yale) is Associate Professor and Deputy Chair, Department of Romance Languages, Tufts University, where he teaches a two-semester course on the *Divine Comedy*. He is the author of *Si cum Marcabrus declina: Studies in the Poetics of the Troubadour Marcabru* (published in the series directed by Aurelio Roncaglia, University of Rome) and of a number of articles on medieval poetry. His *Melodic and Poetic Design in Troubadour Lyric* is currently in preparation. A recipient of grants from the Whiting Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, he chairs the Auditing Committee of the Dante Society of America, has served on the Executive Board of the Association Internationale d'Études Occitanes, and is current President of the Société Guilhem IX (the North American society for Occitan studies).

Nancy J. Vickers will complete in June her eleven-year tenure as President of Bryn Mawr College. Following in the footsteps of the previous great scholar of Dante and Petrarch who became a college President, Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Nancy Vickers has continued to devote herself to scholarship and to our Society throughout her illustrious administrative career, serving most recently as Chair of our Capital Campaign. She is known for groundbreaking essays, including "Re-membering Dante: Petrarch's 'Chiare, fresche et dolci acque'," *MLN*, 96 (1981), 1-11, "Seeing is Believing: Gregory, Trajan and Dante's Art," *Dante Studies*, 101 (1983), 67-85, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 265-79, and "'Vital Signs': Petrarch and Popular Culture," *Romanic Review*, 79 (1988), 184-95, as well as for being the "Romance" co-editor of many seminal volumes, including: *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; with M. Ferguson and M. Quilligan), *Medieval and Renaissance Representations: New Reflections*, a special issue of *Poetics Today*, 5 (1984; with S.G. Nichols), *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997; with J. Masten and P. Stallybrass), and *The Medusa Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003; with M. Garber). Vickers also edited the *Sposizione di Lodovico Castelvetro a XXIX Canti dell' Inferno dantesco* (on-line 1990) for the *Dartmouth Dante Project*.

Dante Prize, Grandgent Award

As submissions to the Dante Society's current round of competitions begin to arrive, it is time again to urge members to encourage promising *dantisti* to compete. That this year's speaker at our Annual Meeting was the 1997 winner of the Grandgent Award demonstrates how vitally, when they thrive, these competitions can serve our scholarly future.

Submissions must be sent as email attachments to 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.

BALLOTS AND PROXIES

must reach P.O. Box 711,
Framingham, MA 01701-0711, no later than
Wednesday, May 14.

Results will be announced on May 17 at the
Annual Meeting.

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