

Dante Society Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 2

April 2009



A Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

My second term as President of the DSA is about to expire, which means that the Council installed at the Annual Meeting on May 16th will, in the weeks that follow, elect from its own number my successor. You certainly all know that it has been a privilege for me to serve this historic literary Society, and, like you, I look forward to the up-and-coming changing of the guard. As was the case in the symbolic rituals and ceremonies of succession in the Middle Ages, term limits represent the privileged time of transition and renewal, and thus they provide the opportunity to look back to the past and ahead to the future.

It is clear to all of us that Dante continues to be widely regarded as probably the greatest poet of the Western tradition and as one who has given a form or an imaginative constitution to the devastations of the "human" and to the longings of the mind and heart.

He has built a poetic dwelling-place which we, like our forebears and posterity, will inhabit. But calling this Florentine poet "Western" – beyond the fact of the accuracy of the definition – entails an act of demarcation, a sort of boundary, which is at odds with the poet's universality. Thus many of us in our work and vocation have been guided by the conviction that Dante ought to be read outside the traditional departments of Italian and that we should dispel the impression that his language and thought

are wrapped in pedantic air, remote from our common reality. Happily, we know that, thanks to the efforts of generations of scholars and teachers, this has happened. If anything, we have recently been led by the belief that Dante's appeal to philosophers, theologians, ethicists, historians, and so forth, foreshadows the necessary diffusion of the *Divine Comedy* across cultural boundaries all over the world.

No one can take credit for this newly emerging reality in Dante scholarship, but I am delighted to be able to mention some signs of the novelties. For instance, a "Casa di Dante in Latinoamérica" was founded in Salta, Argentina, with a 2005 gift of library materials from the DSA and from sustaining life member Robert Frank Pence. The Fourth Interdisciplinary Conference of the Nordic Dante Network will be held in Finland on August 20-22, 2009. Almost a year later, on August 15-20, 2010, a conference on "Dante in East Asia" will be held in Seoul, South Korea, on which occasion Dante's poetry and vision will be re-thought from new perspectives.

Without a doubt, this is an exciting time for Dante studies. I hasten to add my belief that the DSA, more than any other Dante association anywhere, has a key role to play in the interpretive debates that lie ahead. Yet to be able to turn into a veritable beacon for Dante readers all over the world, the DSA may need to envision some radical steps. We are fortunate and proud – let me say this clearly – to have been able to forge an indissoluble bond with the Longfellow House. But our inveterate American optimism also lets us dream a difficult and yet feasible dream, namely that of beginning to think of establishing a Dante House at some time in the future. A fund-raiser, therefore, ought to be launched with this distant and yet concrete objective in mind. I hope the future membership will realize this dream.

In closing, I want to thank all of our members for their support. Allow me also to thank by name three great-hearted colleagues who have done a superb job for the DSA: Richard Lansing, Todd Boli, and Vincent Pollina. It was an honor to have had you by my side.

Giuseppe Mazzotta

Dante Prize, Grandgent Award

As submissions to the current round of competitions begin to arrive, it is time again to urge members to encourage promising *dantisti* to compete. 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.

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 13th.

The Nominating Committee (Daniela Boccassini, Arielle Saiber [Chair], and Jan Ziolkowski) has placed on this Spring's ballot the following five nominees:

Albert Russell Ascoli (Ph.D., Cornell) has taught at Northwestern University and, since 1996, at the University of California at Berkeley, where he is Terrill Distinguished Professor of Italian Studies. He is the author of *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony* (Princeton, 1987), *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge, 2008), and *'A Local Habitation and a Name': Essays in the Historicity and Historiography of Italian Renaissance Literature* (forthcoming, Fordham). He co-edited with Victoria Kahn *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature* (Cornell, 1993); with Krystyna Von Henneberg *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Berg 2001); and *Italy in the Drama of Europe*, a special issue of *Renaissance Drama*, with Will West. He has

ANNUAL MEETING

**Saturday, May 16, 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.

received numerous fellowships and awards, most recently the Rome Prize of the American Academy in Rome.

Jason Houston (Ph.D., Yale) is Assistant Professor of Italian and Director of the Italian Program at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *Building a Monument to Dante: Boccaccio as Dantista*, (forthcoming, Toronto), and has published articles on the early manuscript tradition of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and on Boccaccio's and Petrarca's epistolary debate over Dante (*MLN*, forthcoming). He is currently revising an article on Boccaccio's *editio* of the *Vita Nova*, and is editing and co-translating *Shorter Latin Works of Giovanni Boccaccio* for the *I Tatti Renaissance Library*, for which he has received support from the NEH. He is a member of the *World of Dante* Web site advisory board, and is a book review editor for *The Medieval Review*.

Victoria Kirkham, who took her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins under Charles S. Singleton, is Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania. She has received fellowships from Harvard's I Tatti, the Newberry Library, the NEH, and the Fulbright and the Guggenheim Foundations. One of several books that she has authored on Boccaccio – *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Michigan, 2001) – won the MLA Scaglione Prize for best manuscript in Italian Studies. Her volume *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology* (Chicago, 2006) defines that poet in the tradition from Dante and Petrarch; for the same press she is co-editor of *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (forthcoming). Her essays on Dante have appeared in American and Italian journals; she is currently gathering them together, along with new material on the poet's reception 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 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). He has agreed to present his candidacy for a second term as Secretary-Treasurer of the DSA.

Justin Steinberg (Ph.D., Minnesota) is Associate Professor at the University of Chicago. He is a scholar of medieval Italian literature, with research interests in the early lyric, literary historiography, manuscript culture, and the intersection of literature and law. His first book, *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy* (Notre Dame 2007), won the MLA Scaglione Prize for best manuscript in Italian Studies. He has also published articles on the *Compiuta donzella*, on Dante's dreams, and on Petrarch's uncollected poems. His current book project, for which he was recently awarded a grant from the ACLS, is entitled "Law and Justice in Dante's *Commedia*."

The Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Society will take place on Saturday, May 16, 2009, in the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site (105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA 02138). This year's event will begin at 11 a.m., so as to enable out-of-town members to travel more easily on the day itself.

After the business meeting, President Mazzotta will chair a panel on *Future Directions in Dante Studies*. The participants are Heather Webb, Ohio State University ("Dante in His World [And in Ours]"); Filippo Naitana, Fairfield University ("Dante's Philology of the Future"); Susanna Barsella, Fordham University ("Angelology as the Key to Dante's Poetics"); Justin Steinberg, University of Chicago ("Dante and the Law").

Refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the program.

Council Members, 2008-09
Teodolinda Barolini, *ex officio*
Susanna Barsella
Daniela Boccassini
Todd Boli, Vice President
William Franke
Giuseppe Mazzotta, President
Vincent Pollina, Secretary-Treasurer
Arielle Saiber
Nancy Vickers

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Nominating Committee, 2008-09
Daniela Boccassini
Arielle Saiber, Chair
Jan Ziolkowski

Prize Committee, 2008-09
Susanna Barsella, Chair
William Franke

Auditing Committee, 2008-09
Todd Boli
Laurie Shepard, Chair



BALLOTS AND PROXIES

must reach P.O. Box 1558,
Arlington, MA 02474-0023, no later than
Wednesday, May 13.

Results will be announced on May 16 at the
Annual Meeting.

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