

Approved minutes of the
**135th Annual Meeting of the
Dante Society of America**

Saturday, May 6, 2017, 9:00-10:00am
Gerlinger Alumni Lounge, University of Oregon

President's Welcome

President Albert Ascoli welcomed the membership and visitors to 135th Annual Meeting of the Dante Society of America and called the meeting to order at 9:04am.

Ascoli commented that this was the third meeting in a row held outside the Society's original home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the first to be held on the West Coast. A future annual meeting may be held in Toronto. Next year, the Society will renew its connections to its roots by meeting in Cambridge.

Ascoli expressed thanks to Gina Psaki and Warren Ginsberg of the University of Oregon for organizing the excellent conference on "Dante in Translation / Transition in Dante" in conjunction with the annual meeting.

Approval of Minutes from the 134th Annual Meeting

Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont reported that a quorum for conducting business at the meeting had been met with the submission of 122 valid proxies and 12 members in attendance.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont distributed copies of the draft minutes of the 134th annual meeting of the Society held on Saturday, April 23, 2016, at Brown University. He invited members present to review them. Dupont called for additions or corrections to the minutes. There being none, approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and conferred unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Dupont presented the Treasurer's report on behalf of Treasurer Michael Sherberg, who was not able to attend the meeting.

As of April 28, 2017, the combined Merrill Lynch Endowment Management Account (EMA) posted a net value of \$269,893. Its value at the end of April 2016 was \$253,825, representing a net gain of \$16,068. Of the current balance, \$23,228 was held in the cash/money market account, with the remainder of \$246,665 held in the investment account. Of the latter amount, Council has currently reserved \$215,000 as a "quasi-endowment."

Although the Society's assets have continued to grow as a consequence of growth in equities markets and efforts to manage expenses, Council has determined that Merrill-Lynch does not maximize the Society's investment potential. Following discussions over the last year, Council voted at its Fall 2016 meeting to transfer the Society's assets to a portfolio of no-load mutual funds managed by Vanguard. The treasurer is in the process of opening a Vanguard account.

During 2016, the Society received revenues totaling \$21,428. Of this amount \$4,623 came from JSTOR royalties and the remainder from membership dues and profit-sharing from our publisher Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP), with which we have been affiliated since 2014.

Our 2017 revenues are projected to be even stronger, with the royalties from JHUP's Project MUSE electronic journal publishing platform now being generated and credited to the Society. With the completion of the fiscal transition to JHUP still two years away, it will take some time to arrive at predictable revenue stream.

Gifts to the Society have also been strong this year, with nearly \$10,000 in donations received in the form of direct grants from private foundations and general member contributions.

Audit Committee Report

Dupont read the report of the Audit Committee submitted by Christopher Kleinhenz, chair, concerning the 2015 financial year:

The Audit Committee consisting of Guy Raffa, Janet Levarie Smarr, Christian Dupont, and Christopher Kleinhenz (Chair) met via conference call on Monday, October 3, 2016. and examined the 2015 year-end reports for the accounts of the Dante Society of America as submitted by EMA (Merrill Lynch Endowment Management Account). The Committee is pleased to report that the books are in order and that the financial health of the Society is sound.

The Committee would also like to note that the move to the Johns Hopkins University Press appears to have been a sound investment in terms of improving audit control (thanks to the improved financial management system in place), lowering publication expenses, increasing revenues, maintaining the Society's website, and providing enhanced membership services. All these promise to provide continuing benefits in the future.

We express our thanks to our Treasurer (for 2015), Nancy Vickers, and to our President, Albert Ascoli, for their invaluable contributions to the Society and for their expert husbanding of its finances.

Dupont noted that the report had been received and approved by Council via an email vote following discussion at its Fall 2017 meeting, held on November 6, 2016. Dupont called for a motion to approve the 2015 Audit Committee Report and Treasurer's Report. A motion was made, seconded, and approved.

Secretary-Librarian's Report

Dupont reported that as of April 14, 2017, the Society had 406 members eligible to vote, with a total membership comprised of 420 individual and 6 institutional members (the numbers in parentheses below indicate changes with respect to membership statistics reported at the 2016 Annual Meeting):

- Regular = 253 (-4 / -2%)
- Secondary Joint = 2 (-3 / -60%)
- Life (including former Sustaining Life) = 96 (+15 / +19%)*
- High School Teacher = 8 (new category)
- Student = 47 (+4 / +9%)
- Honorary = 11 (0 / 0)
- Fellows = 3 (0 / 0)
- Institutional = 6 (0 / 0)

* Adjusted figures

The current geographical distribution of members is as follows:

- United States: 352 (83%)
- Canada: 10 (2%)
- Europe: 55 (13%)
- Foreign/Other: 9 (2%)

Dupont encouraged members and prospective members to take advantage of the online membership registration and renewal options available on the Society's website.

Nominating Committee Report

Arielle Saiber reported on behalf of nominating committee chair, Ronald Martinez, who was not able to attend the meeting. The other members of the committee were Saiber and Martin Eisner.

Saiber reported the outcome of the recent Council elections. Alison Cornish and William Caferro were elected by the general membership to serve three-year terms as Councilors, to fill vacancies that will be left by Justin Steinberg and Deborah Parker upon the completion of their terms at the close of the Annual Meeting. A total of 131 ballots were

cast from a total of 406 eligible voters for a 32% participation rate, slightly lower than last year's 36% participation rate.

Saiber also reported that Ascoli had been reelected by Council members to a second three-year term as President, and that Dupont had been reelected by Council members to a second three-year term as Secretary-Librarian. Dupont will launch an election among the new and continuing Council members during the following week to elect a Vice President for a one-year term.

Prize Committee Report

Francesca Southerden Prize Committee chair Kristina Olson presented a report on behalf of the Prize Committee, which also included Jessica Levenstein and Terry Quinn as members and Kristina Olson as chair.

Southerden reviewed the names of the 2016 prize winners, which had been announced in November via a posting to the Society's mailing list and on the Society's website:

- The Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay on Dante was awarded to Dale Lobo of the University of Notre Dame for his essay, "Reaching for the Pomo: Seeking the Fulfillment of Desire Within."
- The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for the best graduate student essay on Dante was awarded to Thomas Graff of the University of Notre Dame for his essay, "A Rhetoric of Suspension: Rethinking Salvation in Dante's *Commedia*."
- The first annual Robert M. Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to Barbara Rosenblit of the Felicia Penzell Weber High School in Atlanta, Georgia.

All those who submitted entries for the essay awards or were nominated for the Durling Prize were offered a complimentary year of membership in the Society.

Southerden closed her report with a call to those present to encourage submissions in all categories for the 2017 prize competitions. Entries for the essay award must be submitted by June 30. Nominations or self-nominations for the Durling Prize must be received by July 1, with application dossiers due by September. Prize guidelines and application details are available on the Society's website.

The syllabus that Barbara Rosenblit submitted with her Durling Prize dossier has been posted to the "Pedagogy" section of *Dante Notes* on the Society's website to provide an example for future nominees as well as to serve as a resource for teachers.

President's Report

Ascoli reported on a number of accomplishments from the past year as well as some ongoing projects. He noted that the past year had been a period of great transition for the Society and the world in general. The Society has been fulfilling its reinvigorated and expanded mission, as expressed in its updated bylaws.

For the second year in a row, the Society's annual journal, *Dante Studies*, has been issued in the same calendar year as its volume numbering. The 2016 issue is also the second to have been published by Johns Hopkins University Press and the second under the editorship of Justin Steinberg and his board of associate editors.

The Society has been posting pedagogical materials to support the teaching of Dante, especially at the secondary level. This has been result of a joint effort between Director of Education and Outreach Ronald Herzman and *Dante Notes* editor Simone Marchesi. *Dante Notes* now also includes a section titled "Student Encounters" that features a large selection of essays on Dante by secondary school students. The essays have been gathered and edited by Herzman in collaboration with educators Daniel Christian and William Stephany. Herzman and his colleagues have entered discussions with the editors of the Devers Series in Dante and Medieval Italian Literature published by the University of Notre Dame Press about producing a collection of essays on Dante by secondary school students.

This past year, the first annual Durling Prize was awarded to Barbara Rosenblit of the Weber School in Atlanta, Georgia. Established in 2016 in memory of Robert M. Durling, the award recognizes excellence in the teaching of Dante's life, time, and works by educators working in North American secondary schools. The inaugural year's competition yielded a number of well-qualified nominees, but all members of the Society are encouraged to reach out to assist with the nomination process in order to broaden our base of potential nominees.

The University of Oregon has generously agreed to videotape this year's annual conference. The recordings will be posted on the University of Oregon's website and linked from the Society's website.

From 1953 through 2014, an annual bibliography of American Dante Studies was published as an appendix to *Dante Studies*. Following extensive deliberations, Council determined that it would be most cost effective and beneficial to publish the bibliography online, especially if its search capabilities could be enhanced. Through an initiative spearheaded by Elisa Brilli, the Society has recently entered into negotiations with the Società Dantesca Italiana collaborate on contributions to the Bibliografia Dantesca Internazionale/International Dante Bibliography, which the Società Dantesca is in the process of updating with new technology. The plan is for members of the Dante Society

to prepare bibliographical entries for books, articles, and reviews pertaining Dante that are published in North America. The North American entries will be fully searchable through the BDI but will also be extracted as an annual bibliography and posted to the Dante Society website, thus continuing the Society's tradition of producing an Annual Dante Bibliography. To coordinate and support this work, Council has appointed a Bibliography Committee that will be chaired by Alison Cornish with Brilli, Dupont, and Danielle Callegari serving as members. Callegari edited the 2015 Annual Dante Bibliography and will continue to advise on the production of future annual bibliographies.

In order to promote this and other potential collaborations with the Società Dantesca Italiana, including the possibility of a conference commemorating the 700th anniversary of Dante's death in the 2021, Brilli has been appointed to the new role of liaison to the Società Dantesca.

Although the gradual process of becoming an affiliated society of Johns Hopkins University Press and migrating investment accounts has presented challenges to financial forecasting, the overall financial health of the Society is sound. Revenues have been strong, and several members decided to become life members in the past year before the life membership rate was increased on December 31. The recent increase in dues for regular members will also serve to increase revenues, yet it is more important than ever to for all members, including life members, to also make voluntary contributions on annual basis to sustain our expanding outreach efforts and fuel new initiatives. The more the Society is able to build up its endowment, the more resources its will have to work with.

Ascoli reported on some large gifts that the Society had received during the past year. The Maine Community Foundation, directed by Robert and Elizabeth Carroll, issued a grant of \$5,000 to the Society. Robert Carroll studied with renowned Dantist John Freccero at New York University, and has contributed to past fundraising campaigns that the Society has conducted, having been a member for many years. The Carroll's donation will be added to the Society's endowment fund.

Two contributions to the Durling Prize have brought its endowment closer to the targeted investment level of \$25,000. The Boston Foundation, at the direction of former Society president Nancy Vickers, made a \$3,000 grant. Nancy Vine Durling, widow of Robert Durling, gave an additional \$1,000. In the coming weeks, the Society will use these funds to launch a matching campaign to complete fundraising for the Durling Prize endowment.

Looking ahead to the future, Ascoli emphasized that the Society will continue its scholarly focus through its commitment to supporting *Dante Studies* and *Dante Notes*, and its collaboration with the Società Dantesca Italiana on the International Dante Bibliography. The Society will also pursue new education and outreach initiatives, such

as the formation of a “Dante on Call” bureau of speakers who are equipped and available to offer presentations on Dante in high school classrooms and to other groups. The aim is to become a resource for the public at large by drawing on the talents of members. The Society’s leadership will be looking for opportunities to collaborate with other organizations, particularly with regard to programming around the 2021 anniversary, but also for ways to carve out a niche of its own. Suggestions and ideas are always welcome, and may be brought to the attention of any Council member.

Ascoli concluded his report by thanking again professors Psaki and Warren for hosting the annual meeting and organizing the accompanying conference. He added thanks to the several sponsors of the conference. In addition, he thanked a number of individual Councilors and members of the Society for their service during the past year.

New Business

Ascoli opened the floor to questions and new business.

In response to a question about whether it was possible to give a gift membership in the Society, Dupont briefly explained the process and noted that detailed instructions are included in the “Membership and Benefits” section of the Society’s website.

A professor asked whether the “Students Encounters” section of *Dante Notes* might be expanded to include writing by undergraduate and even graduate students. Ascoli suggested talking with *Dante Notes* editor Simone Marchesi and Education and Outreach director Ronald Herzman about adding a new section or sections to *Dante Notes*.

Another professor remarked that he hoped that the Society’s website might encompass multimedia contributions. Ascoli responded by noting that Arielle Saiber and other Councilors and members have also been encouraging the Society to move in this direction. In order to do so, Dupont has noted that he will need assistance to enhance the website and to expand and better organize its offerings. Ascoli suggested that those interested in volunteering their time and talent should contact Dupont.

Adjournment

There being no further business or discussion, Ascoli adjourned the meeting at 10:03am. Following a short break, the annual conference on “Dante in Translation / Translation in Dante” resumed.

Respectfully submitted,

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