

Approved minutes of the
**138th Annual Meeting of the
Dante Society of America**

Saturday, September 26, 2020, 11:45am-12:30pm CDT

Zoom meeting, hosted by Washington University in St. Louis

President's Welcome

President Alison Cornish convened the 138th annual meeting of the Dante Society of America at 11:45am. She thanked Treasurer Michael Sherberg for organizing and arranging financial support for the 2020 symposium “Dante, *Somma Luce*,” and then postponing and reorganizing it as an entirely virtual event over the past two days. She also thanked the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and Dean of Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis for their support.

Cornish also thanked members for continuing their membership in the Society, and highlighted the benefits of membership, which include:

- a subscription to *Dante Studies* in print and online
- a 50% discount on annual JSTOR JPass subscription for unaffiliated scholars
- opportunity to propose and present papers at sessions organized by the Dante Society at the annual meetings of the Renaissance Society of America, Modern Language Association, International Congress on Medieval Studies, and the Society's own initiatives, such as the Canto-per-Canto podcast series
- opportunity to vote in Council elections and annual meetings
- opportunity to serve on committees and participate in Society initiatives
- subscription to the Society's members-only email announcement list
- access to the members-only online membership directory

Cornish added thanks to those members who have generously made donations to the Society beyond their membership dues and to those who given their time to committee service and supporting Society initiatives.

Approval of Minutes from the 137th Annual Meeting

Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont reported that a quorum for conducting business at the meeting had been met. The Society's by-laws require attendance or representation by proxy of 25% of the total membership, which for 2020 included a total of 435 members across all categories, yielding a quorum threshold of 109 members.

During the 2020 ballot process, 9 members indicated that they planned to attend the Annual Meeting, while 92 indicated they would not, but would assign Secretary Dupont to serve as their proxy. Another 36 members indicated via a Google Form circulated separately that they would not attend the meeting, but assigned Secretary Dupont to serve as their proxy. Approximately three dozen members attended all or a portion of the Annual Meeting via Zoom.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont distributed copies of the draft minutes of the 137th annual meeting of the Society held on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at the University of Toronto. He invited those members present to review them. 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 presented a report on the status of the Society's finances.

The Society maintains an investment account with Vanguard. As of September 20, 2020, the total value of Vanguard investments stood at \$297,980, at net gain in value of \$25,075 or 9.2% with respect their value on April 28, 2019, prior to the 2019 Annual Meeting.

The Society maintains a business checking account with Bank of America for managing routine operational expenditures. As of September 20, 2020, the balance in the Bank of America account was \$36,469. For comparison the account balance on April 22, 2019 was \$27,256.

The combined value of the Vanguard and Bank of America accounts on September 20, 2020, was thus approximately \$334,449. By comparison, the total value of the Society's accounts reported at the 2019 Annual Meeting was \$307,236.

The Society has continued to receive healthy annual distributions from JSTOR, representing royalties earned from licensing revenues from back issues of *Dante Studies* available on the online journal platform. The Society has also continued to receive revenues from Johns Hopkins University Press, which has published *Dante Studies* since 2015. JHUP provides libraries and members of the Dante Society with online access to *Dante Studies* through its Project MUSE platform as well as in print. For the second year in a row, the combination of these revenues enabled Council to avoid withdrawing funds from the Vanguard investment account in order to supplement the Society's operating monies in the Bank of America business checking account.

For 2019, Sherberg reported total revenues of \$27,819, including income from JSTOR, JHUP, and donations. He reported total expenses of \$15,503, yielding a net gain of \$12,316.

For 2020, Sherberg proposed a budget of \$20,500, but expenses are projected to be lower as a result of the decision to host the 2020 annual conference as an entirely virtual event.

Audit Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont presented the report of the Audit Committee regarding its review of records for the 2018 and 2019 financial years. The 2019-2020 Audit Committee consisted of: Janet Smarr (chair), Susanna Barsella, Dabney Park, and Christian Dupont.

Dupont explained that the Audit Committee meeting has been customarily held in October, preceding the Fall Council meeting, but this past year it was decided to hold it in March, preceding the Spring Council meeting and what was to have been the customary Annual Membership Meeting immediately following.

Although the pandemic played a role in altering the Committee's schedule, the main reason why the Committee met in March rather than October is that the simplification of the Society's finances that resulted from the completion of the migration of investments accounts permitted Treasurer Michael Sherberg to complete the preparation of the relevant financial documentation for the Committee's review earlier than in previous years, and, in fact, prior to the 2020 Spring Council meeting.

In past years, the Audit Committee was charged with reviewing the financial documentation from two years prior. For example, at the 2019 Annual Meeting, the Committee reported on its review of the 2017 fiscal year documentation (the Society's fiscal year corresponding to the calendar year). This past year, however, by delaying the Audit Committee meeting, the Committee was able to review financial documentation for fiscal year 2019 as well as fiscal year 2018.

Continuing this practice going forward will allow the Audit Committee to review the financial documentation for the immediately preceding year, with the obvious benefit of completing the audit closer in time to the fiscal year under review.

Following these explanations, Dupont read the brief report submitted by the 2019-2020 Audit Committee by chair Janet Smarr on March 30, 2020:

The Audit Committee of the Dante Society of America met by telephone conference on Friday, March 27, 2020 at 3:00 pm. EST. Present at the meeting were Michael Sherberg, Christian Dupont, Susanna Barsella, Dabney Park, and Janet L. Smarr (chair). The Committee received and reviewed the financial

documents and treasurer's report for both the years 2018 and 2019. The Committee requested and received some additional documentation regarding recipients of checks and tax documents, which were sent to the committee on March 30. The Audit Committee is satisfied that the books are in good order.

Dupont called for a motion to approve the 2018 and 2109 Audit Committee reports and the 2020 Treasurer's Report. A motion was made, seconded, and approved.

Secretary-Librarian's Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont explained because the Annual Meeting was being held in September instead of May, he could report on the final membership statistics for the current year, 2020. Although the Society's membership year coincides with calendar year, membership dues received after September 1 are reckoned for the next calendar year.

Based on the report received on September 4, 2020, from Johns Hopkins University Press, which provides the Society's membership management services as well as managing the production and distribution of *Dante Studies*, the final membership statistics for the 2020 membership year were as follows (comparison with 2019 membership statistics included in parentheses):

- Regular = 248 (2019: 250; -0.8%)
- Secondary Joint = 1 (2019: 2; -50.0%)
- Life = 85 (2019: 85; 0.0%)
- High School Teachers = 16 (2019: 14; +14.3%)
- Student = 61 (2019: 52; +17.3%)
- Honorary = 14 (2019: 11; +27.3%)
- Fellows = 5 (2019: 3; +66.7%)
- Institutional = 5 (2019: 5; 0.0%)

The 2020 statistics represent a total of 435 members, an overall increase of 13 members or 3.1% with respect to the 2019 membership year.

For 2020, the geographical distribution of members was as follows (comparisons with 2019 statistics included in parentheses):

- United States: 352 (2019: 348; +1.1%)
- Canada: 6 (2019: 8; -25.0%)
- Europe: 59 (2019: 49; +20.4%)
- Foreign/Other: 10 (2019: 13; -23.1%)

Dupont encouraged those in attendance to invite colleagues and students and friends to become members of the Dante Society in the coming year, the 700th anniversary Dante's death.

Dupont turned next to reporting on the election of several new honorary members and fellows of the Society that had been confirmed since the 2019 Annual Meeting.

Dupont explained that "honorary members" are defined in the Society's by-laws (Article III, Section 9) as follows:

"[honorary members] shall be persons distinguished for their interest in the Society's mission or who have rendered valuable services to the Society. Honorary Members shall be entitled to all the privileges of the Society, but, unless the Council determines otherwise, shall not be required to pay any dues. Any Member may, at any time or from time to time, propose candidates to the Council for consideration for honorary membership."

By tradition, honorary members have been international scholars who have distinguished themselves as leaders in the field of Dante Studies. The Society has 14 honorary members, including three who accepted their nominations since the 2019 Annual Meeting: Lucia Battaglia Ricci, Nick Havely, and Claudia Villa.

Also by tradition, Council has nominated "fellows" as a class of honorary members who are distinguished by the impact of their creative endeavors on the interpretation and cultural reception of Dante. The Society has 5 fellows, including three who accepted their nominations since the 2019 Annual Meeting: Caroline Bergvall, Ron Jenkins, and Tom Philips.

Earlier this year, a new page was added to the Membership & Benefits section of the Society's website that lists honorary members and fellows separately from the annual listings of the Society's members, which otherwise continues to include our honorary members and fellows.

Nominating Committee Report

Secretary-Librarian Dupont reported on behalf of the 2019-2020 Nominating Committee, which was chaired by Martin Eisner, and included Kristina Olson and Eleonora Stoppino as members. On behalf of the Society's Council and membership, Dupont thanked Eisner, Olson, and Stoppino for the generous time and careful consideration they gave to fulfilling their Committee duties.

Dupont noted that because this annual meeting is being held in September rather than in the usual month of May due to the impact of the pandemic, he would continue his report in his capacity as the Society's Secretary by summarizing the results of the elections that

were held last spring and which were already been announced to the Society's membership.

The Council of the Dante Society normally includes six members who are elected to three-year terms, two each year to achieve a staggered rotation. In December 2019, the Nominating Committee posted an open call for nominations for candidates to fill two forthcoming vacancies on the Society's Council that would result from the expiration of incumbents' terms in May 2020. The two members of Council whose terms were due to expire were William Caferro and Alison Cornish.

A slate of four candidates was generated by nominations from the membership and the Committee's consideration in balancing rank, gender, and contributions to the field of Dante Studies. The candidates, in alphabetical order, were:

- Theodore J. Cachey Jr., Director of the Center for Italian Studies and of the Devers Program in Dante Studies at the University of Notre Dame
- Elizabeth Coggeshall, Assistant Professor of Italian in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at Florida State University
- Maggie Fritz-Morkin, Assistant Professor of Italian at UNC-Chapel Hill
- Julie Van Peteghem, Assistant Professor of Italian at Hunter College, CUNY

Electronic voting among current eligible members was conducted between March 24 and April 26, 2020. Immediately following the Spring 2020 Council meeting, which was held on May 2, the results of the election were announced to the membership: Theodore Cachey and Elizabeth Coggeshall were elected to 3-year terms that began immediately and will expire in May 2023.

During the Spring 2020 Council Meeting, Council held a ballot to elect a new president and consider the reappointment of the Secretary. Per the Society's by-laws (Article II Section 3):

“The Council shall appoint all officers of the Society. The Council shall appoint the President from its membership for a three-year term; the President may then be re-appointed for a second three-year term. The Council shall appoint the Vice President from its membership for a one-year term. The Council shall appoint the Secretary/Clerk and the Treasurer for a three-year term and such officers may be re-appointed for further three-year terms without limitation. The President, the Vice President, the Secretary/Clerk and the Treasurer shall all be voting, ex officio Councilors.”

As was announced to the membership along with the results of the Council, Alison Cornish was elected as President to serve a three-year year that began immediately and will expire in May 2023. Christian Dupont was also reappointed by Council to serve a

third three-year term. Treasurer Michael Sherberg is currently serving his second term, which will expire in May 2022.

Following the Spring 2020 Council meeting, the newly elected Council and appointed officers held a ballot to elect a Vice-President from among its membership. Olivia Holmes was duly elected to that office for the customary one-year term, which will expire in May 2021.

The composition of the 2020-2021 Nominating Committee will soon be confirmed. The Committee will be responsible for soliciting nominations and proposing a slate of candidates to fill the vacancies on Council that will be created by the expiration of the terms of Olivia Holmes and Peter Hawkins in May 2021. An online election will be conducted between late March and late April 2021, with the results announced at the 2021 Annual Meeting, which we will be hosted in person or online or perhaps in hybrid combination next May.

Prize Committee Report

Vice President Olivia Holmes reported on behalf of the 2019 Prize Committee, which consisted of Jessica Levenstein as chair, and William Stephany and herself as members.

Following the Fall 2019 Council Meeting, the prize winners in each category were announced in a message to the Society's mailing list and subsequently posted to the Society's website:

The Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay was awarded to Lee Morrison, Florida State University, for his astute essay, “In pro del mondo che mal vive’: Dante and the Crusade for Peace.”

The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for graduate students was presented to Mariagrazia De Luca, University of California, Berkeley, for her important study, “From Forced Readers to Freedom Writers: Responding to Dante in Postcolonial Somalia” which breaks new ground in understanding Dante's cross-cultural impact.

The fourth annual Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to John Hoarty, of Saint Ignatius College Prep in Chicago. The students in Mr. Hoarty's Advanced Placement English class situate Dante's work within the driving question of the course, “what is it to be human?” Mr. Hoarty's students dig deep into Dante's text as they consider their experience as readers.

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

Following the announcement of the prizes, the Prize Committee worked with Secretary-Librarian Dupont to prepare Mr. Hoarty's syllabus and unit plan for teaching *Inferno* for publication in the "Pedagogy" section of *Dante Notes* on the Society's website. Holmes expressed gratitude Barbara Rosenblit, chair of the Society's Education and Outreach Committee, for consulting with the Committee on the evaluation of nominees for the Durling Prize.

The 2020 Prize Committee, which consists of Francesco Ciabattini as chair and Olivia Holmes and William Stephany as members, is presently completing the judging of this year's prize submissions. As in previous years, the Committee plans to announce the winners following the Fall Council meeting of the Society.

President's Report

Cornish remarked that 2020 had been a year like no other due to the impacts of the global pandemic. Among impacts it led to the initial postponement of the 2020 annual symposium and the eventual decision to present it in an entirely virtual format. The virtual format had the advantage of allowing a greater number and range of people to attend.

A call for proposals for the 2021 conference has recently gone out. The conference will be hosted by Harvard University on May 6-8, 2021. To commemorate the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, we thought it appropriate to return to the Society's origins at Harvard. It is possible, of course, that the conference will need to be held virtually instead of as in-person or hybrid event. The program will explore Dante's reception not only in North America but also Central and South America. Confirmed keynotes to date include Matthew Pearl, a Harvard alumnus and author of *The Dante Club*, and Alberto Manguel, Argentine-Canadian author, translator, and editor and a former Director of the National Library of Argentina. The conference organizing committee is being led by Carol Chiodo and Ambrogio Camozzi-Pistoja, of Harvard University, and includes Peter Hawkins, Christian Dupont, and Alison Cornish.

The Society recently launched "Canto per Canto," a collaborative initiative between New York University's Department of Italian Studies and Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò and the Dante Society of America. The aim is to produce podcast conversations about all 100 cantos of the *Divine Comedy*, to be completed within the seventh centenary of Dante's death in 2021. Additional information may be found on the Society's website under "Education and Outreach."

Cornish welcomed new Councilors, Theodore Cachey and Elizabeth Coggeshall. She also recognized Olivia Holmes's election by Council as the Society's Vice President for 2020-2021.

The 2019 issue of *Dante Studies* (vol. 137) will shortly be going to press, with apologies for the delay due to the pandemic and other factors. Cornish thanked editor Justin Steinberg and editorial board members Elisa Brilli, Ronald Martinez, Paolo Nasti, Kristina Olson, Gary Cestaro, and David Lummus, as well as editorial assistant Cosette Bruhns. The issue features a “forum” on Dante and Pedagogy, edited by Kristina Olson, with contributions from Gary Cestaro, Federica Coluzzi, Claudio Giunta, Peter Hawkins, Akash Kumar, Franziska Meier, and Vittorio Montemaggio. It also includes essay by Richard Gibson, James Goldstein, Enrico Fenzi, and Luna Sarti on topics ranging from Beatrice and Virgil to Dante’s politics, “the backdoor of Hell” and the water cycle in the *Commedia*. It also the first-ever *lectura dantis* to be published in the journal, on Paradiso 29.

Dante Notes editor Simone Marchesi has observed that three of the four “Student Encounter” essays published thus far in 2020 reflect themes of social justice and inclusivity. Marchesi has also announced the establishment of an annual award recognizing an outstanding contributor to “Student Encounters” in memory of Giuseppe Lo Manto (1950-2020), known to all simply as “Pippo,” an inspiring high-school teacher from Sicily who founded the annual Settimana di Studi Danteschi. Award recipients receive a complimentary year of membership in Society sponsored by an anonymous member. The inaugural recipient is Sean McAneny (SUNY College at Geneseo), who wrote an essay titled “*Paradiso* as a Guide to Social Distancing.”

Cornish reported on the conference sessions that the Society’s liaisons to allied associations organized during the past year. Modern Language Association liaison Elizabeth Coggeshall organized two sessions for the MLA annual meeting, which was held in Seattle from January 9-12, 2020. The first session was titled: “Dante: Human and Non-Human,” and the second “Perspectives on Gender in Dante’s Works.” Each session included four papers. Aileen Feng organized four sessions for the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, which was to have been held in Philadelphia from April 2-4, 2020. The meeting was unfortunately canceled in late March due to the pandemic, but organizers will attempt to offer the same sessions at the 2021 annual meeting, which is scheduled to be held next April in Dublin, Ireland. Similarly, Akash Kumar had organized three sessions for the International Congress on Medieval Studies, held each year in early May at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The 2020 Congress was canceled, but organizers will attempt to offer the same sessions at the 2021 Congress.

Cornish next reported on the Society’s Education and Outreach efforts. Director of Education and Outreach Ronald Herzman was reappointed to a three-year term. Barbara Rosenblit, the inaugural Robert M. Durling Prize winner and member of the Education and Outreach Committee since 2019, will inherit responsibilities for chairing the Committee from Herzman in 2021; Herzman will continue his appointment as Director

through 2022. Other members of the Committee include William Stephany, Nicole Pagano, and Danielle Callegari. Callegari has recently launched a Twitter account for the Society (@TheDanteSociety), and has been maintaining it with regular posts about the Society's activities and other Dante-related programs of interest.

Earlier in the year, the Committee posted the promised Dante Speakers' Bureau directory to the Society's website. It currently includes names and biographical statements for 19 trained, academically qualified speakers who are willing and available to volunteer their time and energies to promoting the study and appreciation of Dante Alighieri by offering talks and presentations to the general public and in pre-collegiate classrooms. Although the concept was to provide speakers for in-person presentations, the pandemic may provide even more opportunities for virtual events.

Since 2017, the Dante Society has been partnering with the Società Dantesca Italiana on the maintenance of the *Bibliografia Dantesca Internazionale/International Dante Bibliography*. Graduate students working under the direction of the Society's Bibliographer, Elisa Brilli, and in consultation with the Society's Bibliography Committee, prepare entries for translations, books, articles, dissertations, and reviews published in North America. These entries are then extracted from the BDI and published on the Society's website to continue to the tradition of the annual American Dante Bibliography. Prof. Brilli has procured funding support from the University of Toronto for the current graduate student assistant, Eva Plesnik, to supplement the stipend that was approved this past year by the Society's Council to provide regular support for this initiative.

The establishment of the partnership with the Società Dantesca Italiana, the Dante Speakers' Bureau, and indeed the Education and Outreach Committee and Director's seat on Council, and the Robert M. Durling Prize for teaching Dante at the secondary level were established by Past President Albert Ascoli, whom Cornish thanked for his many years of service to the Society and also for the support, recognition, and encouragement that she has received from him personally.

Cornish remarked that Ascoli also established the Distinguished Service Award in 2018 to recognize excellence in service on behalf of the Dante Society of America and the field of Dante Studies in North America over the course of a career, such as sustained activity in the area of committee work, editorial work, bibliographical work, conference organizing, the promotion of Dante, outreach. It was established as a "rare distinction, conferred by the Society to an individual after the maturation of their career, and not offered annually" as a matter of course. The award was intended specifically "to recognize the tireless efforts of those individuals who have served as leaders without holding the highest leadership position of the Society." Nevertheless, she noted that this year's nominee was an exception in that and many other respects.

Cornish proceeded to offer the following tribute:

The recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Service Award of the Dante Society of America (the DSA/DSA) is someone who served as Secretary and Treasurer during and after her term as President of the Society. Wearing all hats at once, and rolling up her sleeves, brings to mind an image of her licking stamps and affixing them to envelopes.

Yet she had previously served as President of Bryn Mawr College for more than ten years. Prior to her retirement in 2008, she increased undergraduate applications by 40%, completed fundraising campaign that tripled the goal of the previous campaign, and nearly doubled the College's endowment. She was much beloved by students who referred to her as "Nancy J."

Post-retirement, she turned her energies to aiding The Dante Society of America.

It is really thanks to Nancy J. Vickers, Professor of French, Italian and Comparative Literature and President Emerita of Bryn Mawr College (1997-2008), that the Dante Society of America was brought into the new millennium. She had the vision to embark on several crucial initiatives, notably:

- the modernization of the operations of the Society (for example, the separation of offices of Secretary and Treasurer),
- the greater and more active involvement of the Council in the Society's affairs,
- and negotiations with the Johns Hopkins University Press that led to the Press becoming the new publisher of *Dante Studies* as well as provider membership and website management services in August 2014.

Nancy served as President of the Dante Society of America (2009-2014), Acting Secretary-Treasurer (2012-2014), and Treasurer (2014-2016). Yet well before that, in 2001, she began a daunting task, the capital campaign for which she served a co-chair with Joan Ferrante and then-President Teodolinda Barolini. This effort to increase the size of the Society's endowment and invested funds led to the doubling of its value by the end of Nancy's presidency in 2014.

Another initiative that Nancy pursued during her term as President was to move the Society from its historically "local" identity to embrace both national and international opportunities. However, to accomplish this task it was necessary to rewrite the Society's by-laws so that the Society could, if desired, hold its principal office and annual meetings outside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The updated by-laws were approved in January 2014 at a special membership meeting.

In addition to her time and energy, Nancy has given generously from her personal resources, making substantial charitable contributions to the Society through the Boston Foundation. In 2017 and subsequent years, she directed gifts to the Society through the foundation to help establish an endowment for the Robert M. Durling Prize.

Although excellence in the teaching of Dante and Dante-related publications are considered only contributory factors toward this award rather than its main distinction, it is worth acknowledging that Nancy's scholarly activity has spanned both Italy and France, from the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the modern period, and to interactions between literature and technology, including film, television, and music videos. Among her well-known essays on Dante and Petrarch are "Dante in the Video Decade"; "Seeing is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante's Art"; "Widowed Words: Dante, Petrarch, and the Metaphors of Mourning"; "Re-membling Dante: Petrarch's '*Chiare, fresche et dolci acque*'"; "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme"; "Vital Signs: Petrarch and Popular Culture"; and "The Body Re-membered: Petrarchan Lyric and the Strategies of Description."

As our colleague Christopher Kleinhenz, the first recipient of this Distinguished Service Award and chair of the newly formed Honors and Awards Committee charged with proposing honorees, put it in the citation he prepared on behalf of the Committee: "Nancy Vickers, has been described as a 'Renaissance Woman,' but in our Dantean context, we would prefer to call her a consummate 'medieval woman' with distinctly modern attitudes. For more than forty years, Nancy has distinguished herself as a scholar, teacher, and administrator in many outstanding ways and for many different institutions and organizations. We are pleased to honor her today with the Distinguished Service Award of the Dante Society of America for her many and diverse contributions on behalf of our Society's namesake, Dante Alighieri, the Florentine Poet whose achievements we continue to honor in 2020, some seven hundred years since his death in 1321."

Cornish asked Secretary Dupont to present Vickers with a virtual look at the framed award certificate that will be sent to her. Vickers graciously accepted the award to the sound of much virtual applause.

New Business

Cornish opened the floor to questions and new business. None were put forward.

Adjournment

There being no further business or discussion, Cornish called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made, second, and approved. The meeting adjourned at 12:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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